

**ARMIES OF THE POTOMAC**

by

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## ARMIES OF THE POTOMAC

### TIME

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

### CHARACTERS

There are 16 speaking roles, plus 9 non-speaking roles, all of which can be played by a cast of 12 (See "Doubling" below).

#### White Males (9 characters played by 7 actors)

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

ROBERT LINCOLN (24) his elder surviving son

TAD LINCOLN (14) his younger surviving son

NOAH WADE (30s-40s) the president's chief of staff

LUCIUS REXROTH (30s-40s) a political pundit

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

SEN. ZEBULON HARKNESS (40s-50s) a Lincoln ally and friend

DETECTIVE SERGEANT CLEMENT OTT (30s-40s) a state police officer

RANDALL TARR (30s-40s) a citizen and a disabled veteran

#### White Females (3 characters played by 2 actors)

MARY TODD LINCOLN (49) the First Lady

ADA SAMS (late 20s) a "straw pollster" and political consultant

MRS. PERCY (40s-50s) a midwife

#### Black Males (3 characters played by 2 actors)

CAPTAIN LUTHER JOHNSTONE (20s) Pres. Lincoln's aide, Sallie's husband and father of her children

ISOM BOOKER (30s-40s) a former slave and servant to Governor Blake

REV. EZEKIEL BARNES (30s-40s) a Lincoln ally and minister

Black Female (1 character)

SALLIE JOHNSTONE (20s) a former slave, wife of Luther and mother of two

Non-speaking Roles

TALL MAN (20s-40s) a male listener, white

HUSBAND (30s) a male listener, white

SINGLE MAN (30s-50s) a male listener, white

STREET URCHIN a boy, white

WIFE (30s) a female listener, white

SINGLE WHITE WOMAN (30s) a female listener in a crowd, white

DEMOCRATIC DIGNITARIES, male and female, white

SINGLE BLACK WOMAN (30s-50s) a freed woman, black

SOLDIER (30s-40s) a bodyguard, black

Doubling

Each of the following role combinations may be played by a single actor:

- \* Abraham Lincoln / Tall man
- \* Lucius Rexroth / Husband
- \* Gov. Shelby "Bull-Roader" Blake / Single Man
- \* Robert Lincoln / Randall Tarr
- \* Isom Booker / Rev. Ezekiel Barnes
- \* Noah Wade / Clement Ott / Soldier
- \* Mary Lincoln / Wife
- \* Ada Sams / Mrs. Percy / Single White Woman
- \* Sallie Johnstone / Single Black Woman
- \* Tad Lincoln / Short Man / Street Urchin

**ARMIES OF THE POTOMAC**

Act I, Scene 1

*White House grounds, June 1867, night. MARY TODD LINCOLN enters. Her voluminous and boldly colored dress is excessively adorned with lace and ribbon trim that seems to encase her in a rigid formality. ABRAHAM LINCOLN sits in an arm chair in a position reminiscent of the familiar pose of the Daniel Chester French statue.*

MARY

Mr. Lincoln, is that you? No, no, don't get up. I don't wish to disturb you. I've only come out for a breath of air to clear my head. I find myself in particular need of relief tonight. Not that you would understand. You're oblivious to displays of social ineptitude. I'm referring to that awful Julia Grant, of course. I don't care if her husband is a military genius, that's no excuse for her atrocious behavior at dinner. One would've thought she was announcing the general's triumphant entry into Olympus the way she served up his battlefield accomplishments like a sorbet between courses. The woman has no sense of decorum. Anyway, she needn't have bothered. You're the true War Hero. I've always thought that. You can retire with more honor than any battle veteran.

LINCOLN

*(Rising to join her.)*

Ah, Molly, I wish the night air brought me ease. But the truth is, the honor of a soldier in the field is undeniable, whereas that of his commander in chief is ever subject to challenge.

MARY

It will soon be over. Once you follow General Washington's example into retirement, you can escape your persecutors.

LINCOLN

But not my failures. I fear they will last forever.

MARY

Hush, you're too modest. That is your most appealing weakness, but a weakness nonetheless. You underestimate your legacy, which comes under greater attack the longer you remain in office. You might think of schemers like Grant as nothing more than insects flitting about your head, but even lowly moths can destroy the finest merino eventually.

LINCOLN

I respect General Grant's motives.

MARY

Well, you shouldn't...*Écoutez*. Just listen to me: I'm telling you that humbleness can get itself elected, but history is not so easily seduced. That's why I prefer to cement your accomplishments with a suitable monument. General Washington's can serve as a scale model.

LINCOLN

I have all the obelisk you need abed, Molly.

MARY

Why is bawdiness the only immodesty you can muster?

LINCOLN

It's better received; your smile confirms it.

MARY

And you wonder why your reputé is so important to me. Is it not patriotic to want heroes for your country? Well then, the fact that my husband is the only exception to the moral and intellectual Tom Thumbs in this desolate swamp we call our nation's capital is no grounds for a charge of bias. I am simply pointing out the obvious.

LINCOLN

And I love you for it.

MARY

*Merci*. I arrived at that opinion all by myself. Lord knows that you have a most curious laziness when it comes to defending yourself against your supposed friends. I sometimes wonder whether you simply don't care about your stature or if by not responding to your detractors you hope to raise them up to be worthy adversaries.

LINCOLN

I never heard of a bear-baiter who died of old age. I have learned to give my opponents plenty of space.

MARY

I swear, Mr. Lincoln, you are a most frustrating politician. You take your friends and your enemies for granted. Where does that leave me and the boys? Yes, I know you love us, that is beyond dispute. What I don't know is how a politician can play politics with family. When the newspapers ridicule my wardrobe, as if it were unimportant for the wife of a head of state to look the part, you remain silent. And when the Democrats question my household budget, as if it were a frivolity to lay out in your office a floor-cloth that doesn't bear the 30-year-old bootprints of Andrew Jackson, you shush me and hide the expenditures elsewhere. I sometimes think your love is no more than a suit of clothes to you--to be worn rumpled and short at the cuffs when only a little bit of attention now and then would keep it elegant.

LINCOLN

Racing silks can't make a thoroughbred out of plow horse.

MARY

I'm sorry you see it that way. I have tried to make my public actions a benefit to you. On its editorial page, *The Independent* calls me "First Lady," but the name does little to convey my multiple responsibilities. Not only am I counselor, guardian, and ambassador at large, I also am hostess, manager, and nanny-in-waiting. It is quite wearing, I'll have you know. At times I think I could not be more tired if I were one of those eight-armed Hindu goddesses.

LINCOLN

It pains me to see you suffer under the national eye.

MARY

Please don't take my admonishments as complaint. You know how completely I supported you when we left Springfield. No, I would not have it otherwise: I will be First Lady to the last.

LINCOLN

And a paragon for presidents' wives forever.

MARY

You flatter me, Mr. Lincoln, but I will not tell you to stop. ...Look. Mars has risen. You can see it there, above the stables. How funny that the ancients thought to name another world for the god of war when he is so at home on this one. I don't think I shall ever be rid of the memories of war. Even now, more than two years after Appomattox, when the wind blows across the Potomac, I hear muffled curses and the clink of metal gear. I smell campfires. I imagine they are out there still, an army of spirit soldiers waiting patiently for those who sacrificed them to be drafted into similar service. It is thus for all the dead...So many dead. I sometimes think that their ghosts must be so numerous by now as to crowd the living into the streets. Mother--dead. Father--dead. My dear sister Elizabeth, our sons Eddie and Willie--all dead. And then you yourself nearly killed by an assassin!

*LINCOLN guides MARY to the bench  
and sits with her protectively.*

LINCOLN

Don't trouble yourself about that host of memories, Molly, those legions are unarmed. Here, sit with me.

MARY

It is not acceptable, death. And yet we encourage and condone it. We are trained to do so. And what grooms us most for the loss of life? Love. Love does not negate death; love empowers it. Without love, death would simply be the final boardinghouse.

LINCOLN

We trade gains and losses every day in this life. And the end is certain: Loss is the last thing we shall know. We resist the truth, of course, for as long as we can, clinging to the precipice as death dislodges our fingers one by one.

MARY

I realize that, but it will come as no surprise, Mr. Lincoln, to hear that the attempt on your life forced me finally to admit that love's invoice cannot be ignored. Forget nosegays, forget party gowns, forget infatuation. One might as well wear black everyday in recognition of the inescapable truth that without death we would place no value at all on love.

LINCOLN

Or duty. Molly, I must confess that the incident at Ford's Theatre has forced me to look at my circumstances in a different light. The good fortune that redirected Booth's bullet and saved me has led me to wonder what to make of my extended life.

MARY

You might simply relish it in serene retreat.

LINCOLN

That's tempting. And yet I suspect that my lucky reprieve carries an obligation. That I'm meant to use my gift of extra time to test myself in some unforeseen way. And so I try to imagine what new orders await me.

MARY

--Oh, no, please...

LINCOLN

Enough for now. You're shivering, Molly. Let's retire.

MARY

There, it's out--you agree with me. You will retire.

LINCOLN

You know my meaning, and you know I am unenthusiastic about a third term. We won't settle that tonight.

MARY

Then I will sit here in protest of your cruel procrastination.

LINCOLN

*(Sighs affectionately.)*

Of course. Let me get something to keep you warm.

*LINCOLN exits. After a moment  
NOAH WADE appears opposite.*

NOAH  
*(Speaking to someone O.S.)*  
 I was right, Robert, she's out here.

*ROBERT LINCOLN enters; NOAH exits.*

ROBERT  
 Tell me it isn't true. Tell me you haven't pressured Father to give up his office.

MARY  
 Me? Powerful enough to order the President around? I had no idea you held me in such high regard. *Je suis flatté.*

ROBERT  
 My mother--ever the innocent.

MARY  
 My firstborn--ever the cynic. Before the cord was cut, you were voicing your outrage over my perceived betrayal.

ROBERT  
 And neither one of us has let up since. You by nature and me by necessity.

MARY  
 Have you seen Tad? He's eager to show you his new toy.

ROBERT  
 Don't change the subject. We're talking about the welfare of the nation, which is in need of another four years of Lincoln.

MARY  
 Then why don't you run? You seem to have the vigor for it.

ROBERT  
 Why do you mock me, Mother?

MARY  
 Because against a bombardment of appeals for compassion, you are an ironclad. Anyway, he says he hasn't made up his mind. So you are still free to argue against his best interests.

ROBERT  
 His best interests are the same as the country's.

MARY  
 He saved the Union, what more do people want of him?

ROBERT  
 The job is not done.



MARY

Then let someone else do it. For your information, the public are not in agreement about the value of your father's continued service.

ROBERT

He will do what he wants, and damn the public.

MARY

Surely you're not accusing your father of arrogance?

*LINCOLN enters, hearing this.*

LINCOLN

No matter if you do, Robert, for I consider myself to be above such a petty conceit.

ROBERT

Father, I would never...

MARY

Nonsense. You were just about to.

LINCOLN

To what?

MARY

Question your nerve for refusing a third national campaign.

LINCOLN

Go ahead then. Tell me what you think, Robert. I would be crackbrained to disvalue your counsel.

ROBERT

I...I was dismayed. I am dismayed to hear that you're not sure you'll run for re-election again.

LINCOLN

Well, it's true that this job is perfectly fulfilling. Every man knows how to do it better than I, and therefore, it is impossible for me not to live up to their expectations. But many days I weary of entertaining the masses with my incompetence. Then I wonder if it's time for me to step aside and let them outgovern me.

ROBERT

There is still much good you can do from here.

LINCOLN

With a constant horde of aggrieved citizens at the door, maybe the best thing to do from here is leave.

ROBERT

But at least you're protected here. Your enemies won't rest until they crush you. Ford's Theatre was but a rehearsal.

MARY

Robert!

*LINCOLN sits to comfort her.*

MARY (CONT'D)

What a wretched thing to say! Oh!

LINCOLN

That's enough, Robert.

*ROBERT, ignoring her distress, kneels beside his father.*

ROBERT

Mother, you must convince him that he has a further obligation. Unlike Cincinnatus, he can't quit after re-establishing the Republic's supremacy. He must continue as president. The country is still broken.

*MARY rises abruptly.*

MARY

This is too much! Comparing your father to a dictator.

ROBERT

You know that's not what I meant.

MARY

I know that what you meant is to be mean. I am used to public attacks, but I cannot bear a son's disloyalty.

*LINCOLN rises as MARY exits, sniffing. They watch her go.*

ROBERT

Father, you must continue. Too many people depend on you.

LINCOLN

I'm reminded of a ferryman who was asked to pole his craft across the river at the end of a full day's work...

ROBERT

Oh, God...

*ROBERT slumps on the chair.*

LINCOLN

...At first the ferryman refused, but as more travelers appeared and the line of people demanding passage grew, he allowed himself to be persuaded to make one more crossing. Unfortunately the extra-large crowd of passengers, combined with his fatigue, caused the ferryman to misapply his pole to a rock, which pitched the entire boat into deadly rapids, where all were lost. Robert, I have to question whether I have the strength to wrestle this ship of state on one last trip.

ROBERT

Of course you do. The Cabinet will assist you. Let me help!

LINCOLN

Your offer is most appreciated. As is your assessment of the nation's peril. I promise to weigh it in my final decision.

*ROBERT throws up his hands.*

LINCOLN (CONT'D)

And with that vague promise your humble servant must withdraw to attend to the injured bystander. Please excuse me.

*NOAH enters, watching LINCOLN exit opposite before advancing.*

NOAH

How goes it, Robert?

ROBERT

I don't suppose you can persuade my father not to retire.

NOAH

Lord knows I've tried. His retirement means my own.

ROBERT

Perhaps you'd consider working for me.

NOAH

Do I sense a condition in that proposal?

ROBERT

Well, my clients--good businessmen all--tell me they can't expand in the South without industrial transportation. Government must invest in the railroads.

NOAH

Your clients can't get the states to put up the money?

ROBERT

The states are broke. And my clients don't believe the federal government is prepared to help them out.

NOAH

Your father is convinced that we must first guarantee unencumbered labor. Without it, the plantation system will prevail no matter how many miles of track are laid.

ROBERT

And you support that policy?

NOAH

I'm paid to defer to the President's judgment.

ROBERT

That explains why you encourage my father's rustic morality tales. I had to sit through another just now.

NOAH

*(Chuckles.)*

Unfortunately, people love his bunkum. If anything, I wish he told fables about talking animals, but that's not his style.

ROBERT

You should be ashamed to advocate such crass manipulation.

NOAH

Ah, shame is one thing I'm not paid for...Look, Robert, there may be a way to influence your father in your favor. You know the value he places on public opinion.

ROBERT

He told me once that a jackass won't go but where it's headed.

NOAH

Then suppose we show him that standing for another term is his only course of action? Would that convince him?

ROBERT

It may. But where's the evidence?

NOAH

I know someone skilled at gathering opinions like straws in the wind. For a price, she can quantify public sentiment in ways that fortify our case.

ROBERT

Let's engage her then. The more we delay, the more time my mother has to sway my father's mind.

*Lights down on ROBERT and NOAH.*

ACT 1, SCENE 2

*LUCIUS REXROTH steps into a spotlight.*

*TALL MAN, SINGLE MAN, WHITE SINGLE WOMAN, and SHORT MAN stand to the side, reacting favorably to what they hear. During the speech, RANDALL TARR joins the listeners and SHORT MAN exits.*

LUCIUS

Good evening, this is Lucius Rexroth, speaking to you in the prison cell we call America. It's no lockup of brick and iron. No cramped jailhouse, no squalid bastille. On the contrary, the view on all sides is breathtaking...

*(Reverently intones.)*

"I love thy rocks and rills, Thy woods and templed hills,  
My heart with rapture thrills, Thy name I love..."

And yet...and yet, we cannot celebrate the natural beauties of our hard-won land. That's because we no longer possess that one jewel that allows us to enjoy all others. And that stolen treasure, my friends, is liberty. For, despite the sacrifices of our founding fathers, despite our near-century as a self-ruled republic, we are now under the yoke of a brutal pharaoh.

Is that too-harsh an assessment? Look truth in the eye, Southerners: One man has billeted his soldiers where you live. One man has assumed veto power over your states' constitutions and judicial appointments. One man has demanded that you swear allegiance to him before you can cast a ballot. One man has yanked the long-established protection of *habeas corpus* from you as if it were a ball of yarn to tease a cat.

Let's be honest. What would you call the man whose armies savagely separated two generations of valiant Southern defenders from their arms and legs? I call that man The Great E-limb-inator. What do you call the man whose occupying forces systematically strip upstanding property owners of their holdings? The Great Emasculator. What do you call the man whose unstable and corrupted mind is on display with his every abrupt utterance? The Great Ejaculator.

*(A double take, then with feigned offense.)*

Oh, please. If that meaning came to mind, then you are the perfect vassal for our Republican Caesar, easily distractible and basely entertained. I fear for you, my fellow Americans, I really do. Despite all evidence to the contrary, you are willing to allow King Lincoln to hold America by the throat for the satisfaction of his authoritarian lust.

Do you believe he doesn't seek a third term? Oh, of course that's not what he says. He is a slippery devil. A linguistic contortionist, the Great Equivocator, who allows you the self-delusion that he will one day take your captive civil rights from storage and return them to you in good condition.

(MORE)

LUCIUS (CONT'D)

*(As if quoting.)*

Then the lion shall lie down with the lamb, and they shall sup together on Boston baked beans and South Carolina Johnny Cake....Really...

*(Putting his wrists together as if accepting handcuffs.)*

This is Lucius Rexroth, truth-monger, speaking to you in chains, bound but unbowed in the stockade known as the Benighted States of America.

*Lights down on LUCIUS and listeners.*

ACT I, SCENE 3

*Lights up on the president's office antechamber. TAD LINCOLN is on a settee, playing deftly 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

*(Splitting his attention.)*

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 his 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?

GOV. BLAKE

Uh...yes. Killed it myself.

LINCOLN

May I see it?

*BLAKE complies with pride.*

GOV. BLAKE

Thing was damn near six foot long. Before I swung my axe, that is. Afterward, it was four and two.

LINCOLN

What a magnificent specimen. Reminds me of my Kentucky days. We boys used to wake snakes in the spring, when they were sluggish. Oh, it was great fun to uncover a den of them. Dozens packed together like worms in dog crap. It was a test of grit to see if you could pull one out by the tail, and before the thing could double up and bite--swing it around your head...

*(Miming the action.)*

...then snap it like a bullwhip...CRAACK!...and break its neck like cheap twine!

*(Beat, admiring the hat.)*

Oh, yes, we were jackleg ruffians in those days.

*Suddenly LINCOLN hands the hat to LUTHER, who sets it on the sideboard with a slight smile.*

LINCOLN (CONT'D)

So, Governor Blake, what can I do for you?

*BLAKE hesitates, torn between making an issue of the hat and pressing his case.*

LINCOLN (CONT'D)

Something to help you improve the lives of your negro nationals, perhaps?

GOV. BLAKE

Their lives already been improved to the point of uselessness. Walk any street in the South and you'll see nothing but idle and insolent negroes, drunker'n fruit wasps and twice as ornery. Tell one of 'em to call you Sir and he'll laugh in your face. Tell a pack of 'em to move along and you better be armed. Meantime, when we do get cotton planted, it rots in the field 'cause there's no one to pick it.

LINCOLN

No one can compel a man to take a job he does not freely choose.

GOV. BLAKE

We're not talking about men...  
*(Beat, glancing at LUTHER.)*  
 ...we're talking about negroes.

LINCOLN

To the law they are one in the same. I thought we settled that.

GOV. BLAKE

All we settled was that you Yankees had more cannon.

LINCOLN

Which is still true, and which therefore lends a certain authority to the federal government's position about what constitutes a man, don't you agree?

GOV. BLAKE

I agree to the fact, but not the principle.

LINCOLN

At present, the one is as good as the other.

*BLAKE is too furious to speak.*

LINCOLN (CONT'D)

Forgive me, Governor. I've forgotten my manners. You look parched. Let me offer you a drink. Whiskey?

*BLAKE nods.*

LINCOLN (CONT'D)

Capt. Johnstone, would you be so kind as to order up a whiskey for our guest?

*LUTHER exits and LINCOLN motions  
 BLAKE to the chair opposite.*

LINCOLN (CONT'D)

Please, Governor, sit...I understand that your son fell in battle. I offer my sympathy.

GOV. BLAKE

Manassas Junction in '62. He was...just seventeen.

LINCOLN

I'm sorry. I know how hard it is to mourn a child. It is the worst part of war.

GOV. BLAKE

The worst part of your war.

LINCOLN

Ours--we both embraced it with equal fervor.

GOV. BLAKE

And yet who suffered it more? Who housed it? While you Yankees slept unmolested in your beds, we used ours for barricades. I think it must be far easier to keep your fervor up under clean sheets.

LINCOLN

I can imagine what you lost.

GOV. BLAKE

Imagining loss is not the same as living it. At the point of a bayonet, my wife tore up her skirts to bandage Yankee wounds. My granny watched 'em burn the house of her birth to the ground. A man whose boot is on another man's throat may imagine what the other man feels, but make-believe humiliation and rage are nothing like the real thing, I can assure you.

LINCOLN

I would like to step off. I am a highly reluctant occupier.

GOV. BLAKE

Well, your troops are unaware of your reluctance. They show no hesitation to interfere in our affairs without provocation. Just last week I heard that one of your officers arrested a store owner for exercising his God-given right to decide who he will and will not serve, and struck the poor man repeatedly.

LINCOLN

Governor, if you have evidence that any Union soldier has abused a civilian, I will have him court-martialed. Meanwhile I expect the Freedmen's Bureau to promote just and orderly relations among citizens and for the military to keep the peace.

GOV. BLAKE

If you want peace, then do something about those damn blacks!

*LUTHER returns to offer BLAKE a glass of whiskey on a tray.*

*BLAKE glares at him before taking the glass. LUTHER stands at ease near the sideboard. LINCOLN writes intermittently on a sheet of paper during the following...*

LINCOLN

Governor, I know that you and your people have suffered immensely. The tragic examples of your own family have been repeated hundreds of thousands of times across the South. The loss of land and the destruction of property has robbed your state of wealth and the means to rebuild it. Your administration is hampered by inflation and reduced revenue.

GOV. BLAKE

Those are damned good points, sir.

*He drinks.*

LINCOLN

Yes, you need prosperity and you need it quickly, along with your state's return to the Union.

GOV. BLAKE

And how are we to become prosperous when my planters are helpless to bring in a crop without their accustomed supply of labor? You're the one who stole that labor force. Make the negroes work.

LINCOLN

I can't force a man to sign a labor contract. That is the antithesis of free labor.

GOV. BLAKE

Your notion of free labor will ruin the South forever.

LINCOLN

Nonsense. You must simply reach new accommodations with your citizenry, starting with the chance for every man to own land.

GOV. BLAKE

The land is already owned. There is no more to be had.

LINCOLN

Now, Governor, we both know that to be untrue. Military surveys show an ample supply of abandoned acreage--in your state and throughout the South.

GOV. BLAKE

You make it sound as though Southern landowners just walked off to a life of debauchery instead of to the grave.

LINCOLN

We must deal with the situation we have, Governor. Among other things, that means finding ways to make every citizen productive.

GOV. BLAKE

Well, you won't do that by giving blacks their own property and permission to be idle on it. God made the negroes shiftless and put us here to rule over 'em. If we can't use the lash, we must use the law. My legislature does whatever I want. We'll require blacks to contract for work and jail 'em if they don't fulfill the terms.

LINCOLN

Freedmen's Bureau courts have stricken down such Black Codes everywhere else. They'll do the same to yours.

GOV. BLAKE

See here, Lincoln, you have no right!

LINCOLN

Oh, but I do. It's called the 14th Amendment to the Constitution, which says that I can forbid you to impose a disguised form of black servitude and gives me the power to make it stick.

GOV. BLAKE

Do that, Lincoln, and you'll have another fight on your hands.

LINCOLN

Blake, I knew a farmer once who was the victim of a bear that preyed upon his livestock. At first the farmer tried to accommodate the marauder. He set out guard dogs, but the bear killed 'em. He built a barn, but the bear broke in. That bear's intransigence finally convinced the farmer that he must drop all other activities to hunt down and destroy his nemesis. It was difficult, but once he killed that beast, he quickly made up his losses. You don't worry me, Blake. In '65, I killed a bear. Do you think I'll hesitate to swat a fly that's come to shit on my knee?

GOV. BLAKE

I'll not be treated this way--

LINCOLN

--You'll be treated according to the law.

GOV. BLAKE

Here's what I think of your law.

*BLAKE spits into the drink he's been given. Glaring, he slams the glass down on the desk.*

*LINCOLN finishes what he's writing with a flourish.*

LINCOLN

Captain Johnstone.

*LUTHER approaches the desk.*

LINCOLN (CONT'D)

Governor, I have just signed an executive order commanding Captain Johnstone to garrison a company in your state capital to ensure that you follow the law. As long as you satisfy him that you intend to fulfill your duty to protect all your citizens, as Congress has decreed, you will remain in office to the completion of your term. If, however, you do not, Captain Johnstone will declare martial law and detain you as an insurrectionist. So you must be nice to Captain Johnstone.

*LINCOLN hands LUTHER the order.  
BLAKE moves as if to protest,  
but LINCOLN cuts him off.*

LINCOLN (CONT'D)

Captain, please show the governor to the exit. Once outside, under God's blue sky, if the governor asks you politely, you may return his hat. But if our hot-headed friend is rude to you, you may exercise the authority I have given you to pitch your tents on his state capitol grounds using his hat as your banner.

*LINCOLN offers his hand.*

LINCOLN (CONT'D)

Good day, Governor. I hope to have you back in the Union soon.

*BLAKE hesitates, then, ignoring the proffered hand, follows LUTHER, who has picked up BLAKE's hat. BLAKE reaches for it, but LUTHER uses the hat like a cape, and a matador's sweeping motion, directs the angry BLAKE like a bull over the threshold, following him out. LINCOLN turns back to his desk. After a moment, NOAH opens the door and sticks his head in.*

NOAH

Do you have a moment, Mr. President? There's someone I'd like you to meet.

LINCOLN

Please, Noah. Come in.

*LINCOLN sits to receive NOAH and the demurely dressed ADA SAMS.*

LINCOLN (CONT'D)

Who's this you've brought me?

NOAH

Miss Ada Sams, Mr. President.

ADA

Oh, Mr. President, I'm so honored to meet you, ever since I heard your Cooper Institute speech. I was just a girl--my father took me. You were magnificent! So powerful. So august!

LINCOLN

How kind of you to say. I'm more November now. I hope you're not disappointed.

ADA

I am so honored...

NOAH

I've hired her to advise us.

LINCOLN

Splendid. A politician without advice is a sorry figure, like a yo-yo without a string. Tell me, Miss Sams, what kind of counsel do you retail?

ADA

I measure people's attitudes by means of informal votes.

NOAH

What the papers call "straw votes." I thought they would be useful to you as a gauge of public opinion.

LINCOLN

My, my. So young to be grasping at straws.

ADA

My father got me started, working for New York Republicans.

LINCOLN

I've heard that a show of hands draws newspapermen with their tongues out. It seems reporters like numbers almost as much as liquor.

ADA

Oh! Can you say that about reporters, Mr. President?

LINCOLN

Ha! Don't worry, there are none present--we wear garlic against 'em. Now, what wisdom have you winnowed?

*ADA, flustered, rummages among her papers.*

ADA

Well...my brother serves in the Pennsylvania militia... and I accompanied him the last time he mustered. I questioned the men about you...they were most...willing to opine...

*ADA clumsily extracts the sheet she's looking for.*

ADA

...here it is: By a tally of 87 to 53, the soldiers present thought you would appear more trustworthy with a mustache.

LINCOLN

I tried a pie sweep once--it made me sneeze, which mis-punctuated my oratory.

ADA

Well--to put it another way--six in 10 of the soldiers said they lack faith in you, Mr. President.

LINCOLN

At least it wasn't three in five--that would be discouraging.

ADA

Fifty-four percent preferred Democrats to Republicans.

LINCOLN

After the year I've had I totally agree with them.

ADA

And they were almost unanimous against black suffrage.

NOAH

Which bodes ill for a Constitutional amendment to that effect.

LINCOLN

And yet, Noah, while in our youth the idea of blacks voting was inconceivable, today it is a prospect real enough that majorities oppose it. From obliviousness to animosity in less than two generations. That's progress!

NOAH

Nevertheless, ignoring the issue would probably be wiser than joking about it.

LINCOLN

On the contrary, what thing better to make light of than a heavy burden?

NOAH

Mr. President, please, consider this seriously.



LINCOLN

Of course, Noah. As the man said after he was thrown by a horse, splitting his head, "I am open-minded about your choice of treatment, doctor."

ADA

My techniques can help you determine what support for your actions and policies exists among selected groups.

NOAH

And by feeding the straw results to the penny press, we can influence public opinion at large.

ADA

Besides, wouldn't knowing public sentiment help you act on it?

LINCOLN

I should think that would be obvious--see a brickbat, duck.

ADA

Mr. President, I'm sure you can imagine that the results of straw polls can vary, depending on whose ballots are counted. For example, if I were to place a poll book in a Springfield tavern, your popularity would be quite high.

LINCOLN

Oh, yes, drunkards love me. As do lunatics. You should sample members of the Illinois legislature.

NOAH

The important thing is to better understand the electorate's point of view so that you might guide it.

ADA

I could run some more test polls, Mr. President. To give you a better idea of the information they can provide.

LINCOLN

Alright. Go to the taverns, and gather the sober guidance of the masses.

NOAH

You won't regret this, Mr. President.

*NOAH leads ADA out.*

LINCOLN

Just bear in mind, Noah: The way before us has more damn crossroads than an Arab souk. Don't ask only what the people think of me. Also ask them what they think of themselves.

*Lights down on LINCOLN's office.  
Lights follow WADE and ADA into  
the office antechamber, where  
ROBERT alone is waiting.*

ADA

Mr. Lincoln, it was a lifelong ambition to meet your father. I feel blessed.

ROBERT

I'm happy for you.

*After this, the two men mostly  
ignore ADA, who seems content  
with her invisibility.*

ROBERT (CONT'D)

How'd it go?

NOAH

The president has agreed to allow Miss Sams to cast her straws to the wind and divine the public mood.

ROBERT

I just hope it's not too late. Two years ago, he could have been Sovereign for Life. Since then, he's squandered all that good will by treating his former enemies as if they were reasonable men. He keeps trying to find common ground with people whose only desire is to destroy him completely.

NOAH

Abraham Lincoln has made a successful career out of being underestimated.

ROBERT

I would call his faith in his countrymen childlike if I hadn't seen how he can flay a man with an argument if he puts his mind to it.

NOAH

Why the indecision, do you think?

ROBERT

My mother says he's too tired, but that's not it. Abraham Lincoln considers fatigue to be a moral failing. No, her selfishness is the only thing that derails him. Here in Washington, her vainglory draws reproach, which she imagines will disappear when she leaves to become Empress of Springfield.

NOAH

Robert, I hope you appreciate the task ahead of us. Convincing the President to commit to a third term will be difficult, what with the daily pounding he's getting for his Reconstruction policies, which make him a despot to the Democrats and a weakling to the Radicals. As a result, the people have come to believe that the mastermind of the war is the idiot of the peace. We need to make our man a hero again.

ROBERT

And you have every right to be worried. The landslide of '64 will not repeat itself. We can't conquer Atlanta twice.

*(To ADA.)*

Miss Sams, the President would benefit from the public's view of several vital economic issues. Let's see what opinions your straw polls might pursue, shall we?

*Lights down on the antechamber as they exit.*

ACT 1, SCENE 4

*Lights up on SALLIE JOHNSTONE's and CAPT. LUTHER JOHNSTONE's quarters. After a moment, SALLIE rises, listening. Then she throws on a robe, lights a candle, and pushes past a curtain separating their sleeping area from the children's cot and straw mattress, both apparently occupied by sleeping children. She checks them one by one, weeping softly. Hearing this, LUTHER pushes up on one elbow.*

LUTHER

Sallie, where you at? Sallie?

*SALLIE wipes her eyes, hurries back through the curtain.*

SALLIE

Just looking on the children.

LUTHER

Lord, they quiet for once. Leave 'em be.

*LUTHER rolls over away from her. SALLIE perches on a chair, hugging herself. After a moment, LUTHER turns and notices her.*

LUTHER (CONT'D)

What now? Come to bed...You crying?

*SALLIE shakes her head, turning away from him.*

LUTHER (CONT'D)

Yes, you are. You crying. What in hell--?

SALLIE

I don't like it here. Why'd you get yourself a southern reassignment?

LUTHER

Aw...

SALLIE

Folks are bitter. It's like the war ain't over in their hearts.

LUTHER

Don't pay them no mind. They can't harm an officer's wife.

SALLIE

What about the children? I don't like raising 'em amid such hate.

LUTHER

Don't matter. This assignment won't last long, I reckon, and we can move back north.

SALLIE

I'm scared, Luther.

*LUTHER sighs and moves to her, pulling her gently from the chair to his side.*

LUTHER

Course you scared. You strong though. Me and you been scared together so long we know nothing going to break us.

SALLIE

I take in all the washing I can; we need the money. But the tired-er I get, the scared-er I am.

LUTHER

Pray with me, Sallie. God'll bring rest and peace and restore your strength.

SALLIE

I wish I had your faith, Luther. Sometimes I look at our hardship and believe we just slipped God's mind.

LUTHER

Sugar, you wrong. Think of the sparrow in the Bible: "And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father knowing."

SALLIE

What good does that do the sparrow? He going to get stepped on. That don't make no sense.

LUTHER

We all fall to ground sooner or later--"unto dust shalt thou return." What's important is that God's hand guides even the fallen sparrow. Sparrow still sing the Lord's praise his whole life long. That's the sense of it.

SALLIE

Luther, 'member how them battlefields looked coming south, so still and empty. A whole lot of men fell on them pastures and in them woods. Fell like sparrows. Seems that the sense of everything is death.

LUTHER

That's enough, Sallie. You know that's not how God works.

SALLIE

How He works? He don't pay us no mind--

LUTHER

--You forgetting them two children in there. They both damn near died while you was birthing them. Who you think saved their lives?

SALLIE

Why didn't he spare me the pain while He was at it? Nothing good comes without its own sorrow. Even them two children. Much as I love them, I got to wonder did I do them wrong by bringing them into this painful world.

LUTHER

Enough! The Bible makes two promises--that we going to suffer here on Earth and that if our faith be strong we going to get salvation after. Nobody suffers better than us negroes. But the greater our suffering, the greater our salvation. That's not death; that's hope. The wonder of children ain't how much pain they bring. It's how much pain they make up for. A suffering people need more children, not less. Now snuff that candle and come to bed.

*LUTHER throws himself back on the bed and pulls up the blanket. SALLIE instead returns to the children's side of the curtain.*

*She sits on the edge of the cot and struggles to weep in silence. Lights down on SALLIE.*

ACT 1, SCENE 5

*Lights up on BLAKE's office. BLAKE is working at his desk, wearing a different hat, when ISOM BOOKER enters with a tray.*

ISOM

Your coffee, sir.

GOV. BLAKE

Put it on the table, Isom.

ISOM

Yessir.

*ISOM sets down the tray, waits, fidgeting, his eyes on BLAKE.*

GOV. BLAKE

*(Without looking up.)*

You can go.

*(Noticing ISOM has not moved.)*

What is it, Isom?

ISOM

I got to see to my sister. She sick.

GOV. BLAKE

Sorry to hear that. Your sister in Randolph?

ISOM

Yessir.

GOV. BLAKE

Too bad. I'll write you a pass.

*(As he writes a note.)*

Hope it's nothing too serious.

ISOM

Nosir. I be gone four, maybe five days.

*BLAKE holds out the folded note without looking up, but ISOM makes no move to take it. BLAKE shakes it as if get his attention, before noticing.*

GOV. BLAKE

What?

ISOM

You forget I don't need no pass, sir.

GOV. BLAKE

No, of course you don't. You're free to come and go as you please. I just thought, you know, as a precaution. Not everyone between here and Randolph is as enlightened as I am.

ISOM

That be all, sir?

GOV. BLAKE

Tell me something, Isom.

ISOM

Yessir.

GOV. BLAKE

You ever miss the old days?

ISOM

Slavery time? Nosir.

GOV. BLAKE

Not the bad things, the good things.

ISOM

Weren't no good things.

GOV. BLAKE

Come on, you belonged to Colonel McCrea. I know him to be a kind and generous man. He raised you, treated you well.

ISOM

Treat a dog good as you want, he still a dog.

GOV. BLAKE

My God, McCrea fed and clothed you, protected you and your kin from birth like you were his family.

ISOM

We buy our own food now, take care of our ownself.

GOV. BLAKE

Yeah, well, I can't see that you're better off for it.

ISOM

No, I 'spect you can't. One more difference between us, I reckon...I done all my duties, Governor. I be going now.

*BLAKE dismisses him with a perfunctory wave. ISOM opens the door and turns back.*

ISOM (CONT'D)

Sir, lady here to see you.

GOV. BLAKE

Send her in. And give my regards to your sister, Isom. Hope she's better soon.

*ISOM nods, exits. BLAKE rises and removes his hat when ADA enters. In a bolder dress, she is all business now.*

GOV. BLAKE

Miz...Sams, isn't it?

ADA

Yes, Governor. So good of you to see me.

GOV. BLAKE

*(Ushering her to a chair.)*

Well, when I got your note I could hardly resist. You have a way with words:

*(Quoting from memory.)*

"I have information that could present a political advantage if handled properly." That got my attention. Political advantage is breakfast grits to a man like me--it stimulates a good sitdown.

ADA

That is why I prefer to deal with a man like you--you know what passes for government these days.

GOV. BLAKE

I like the way you put that. I'm going to enjoy this little chat, whatever its subject...And what is that?

ADA

I'm an opinionologist. I calculate the popular mind.

GOV. BLAKE

*(Moving in on her.)*

Amazing. How does that work?

ADA

Very simply. I ask men questions. They are eager to expound. A gentleman and a yokel may have different vocabularies, but they place the same high value on their personal opinions, such as the worthiness of politicians.

GOV. BLAKE

Wonderful. But you must be aware that I suffer no shortage of votes. I'm a favorite son, and the voters are in the habit of gift wrapping the statehouse for me every term, where I enjoy unchecked and unexamined power.

(MORE)



GOV. BLAKE (CONT'D)

Yes, Missy, when it comes to winning elections, I'm a regular stud bull. Know what they call me around here? On account of my superior election-winning ways?

*(Taking an object from his desk.)*

They call me Bull-Roarer.

*BLAKE swings a flat piece of wood tied to a cord in a wide horizontal circle over his head. It makes a deep thrumming sound, which he accompanies with a series of enthusiastic rebel yells as he advances. Instead of being intimidated, ADA laughs until BLAKE runs out of steam.*

ADA

How appropriate, Governor. I wouldn't be surprised to hear you roar from both ends.

*BLAKE is taken aback for a moment before he laughs heartily, returning to his desk.*

GOV. BLAKE

Miss Sams, your sauciness is most appealing. You have won my admiration.

ADA

*(Taking a packet from her bag.)*

I'd rather win your business. The more you echo voters' desires, the more they will favor you. That is the service that President Lincoln has engaged me to render. He understands that the most popular whore is not the prettiest or most wanton--it's the one who's most agreeable. And the more newspapers report voter sentiment in your favor, the more unconquerable you will appear to be.

GOV. BLAKE

You have a delicious way with words. However, I thought I made it clear--unlike Lincoln, I have a monopoly on governance here. Your services--as I understand them--are not needed.

ADA

Suit yourself.

*(Stuffing her papers back in the bag, rising to leave.)*

Well. Looks like I'll make my next appointment after all. I'm meeting Billy Rufus. I believe you know him.

GOV. BLAKE

What do you want with Rufus?

ADA

To make him the next governor of this state.

GOV. BLAKE

Whoa, Missy. You don't want to work for Billy Rufus. That pustule-shanked whoreson idiot would steal his granny's last tooth.

ADA

Which makes him an ideal candidate, if you ask me.

GOV. BLAKE

Aw, do what you want. I ain't afraid of Billy Rufus.

ADA

But you must be aware that in rural areas, the name Rufus comes up favorably more often than yours.

GOV. BLAKE

So what? Let Rufus have the hicks. All I need are the city and town folk.

ADA

Where he is merely twice as popular as you.

GOV. BLAKE

Nonsense. I outgun Rufus on all counts.

ADA

And depending on how I phrase my questions and who I ask, I can create the impression that Rufus...

*(She mimes twisting a gun  
barrel into a knot around her  
neck.)*

...would make a Sherman necktie out of every gun you own.

*BLAKE sits, weakly. Her next  
words deflate him further.*

ADA (CONT'D)

You know I'm right, Governor. It's the Negro Problem. Every black face reminds the good ol' boys you rely on that you're powerless to put the negroes in their place. The blacks won't work and they won't leave and every day they become a little more comfortable with their liberties. The servant who let me in. I watched him announce me. He looked you in the eye. How long has that been going on? Next he'll call you Shelby, and you'll be grateful that he only borrows your carriage and team and not your virgin daughter.

GOV. BLAKE

Once the South was a blessed land. Now God's got some explaining to do. During the war we shot deserters. When did God go ay-doubleyoo-oh-el?

ADA

Gettysburg, Vicksburg--take your pick. In any event, unless you find a way back into the Lord's good graces, you'll be turned out like a three-legged mule next election.

GOV. BLAKE

Okay, let's say you're right. Maybe you also noticed that nigger officer whose troops are camped on the front lawn?

ADA

The one displaying your copperhead hatband on his tentpole like a scalp?

GOV. BLAKE

You know about that?

ADA

Everyone knows you returned from Washington bare-headed. It's one of the reasons the public have such a low view of you at the moment. Nothing undermines confidence in a gambler more than the loss of his clothing.

GOV. BLAKE

That bastard Lincoln sent the nigger captain down here to sit on me. How'm I supposed to get the vote I'm accustomed to if I can't regulate negroes and force them to serve their betters?

ADA

Governor, you are like a man whose orchard was hit by a hard freeze. You can throw out your crop, or you can make applejack. Which is it going to be?

GOV. BLAKE

Well, I am a man who enjoys a good alcoholic beverage, especially one of a long series. So explain to me how would you make something tasty out of this mess.

ADA

I figure that measuring a thing is the first step to warping it to your wishes. What do you think of the size of the black population in this state?

GOV. BLAKE

Free negroes are the curse of the South. I'd rather see as few of them as possible.

ADA

Well, then you won't like hearing that the birth rate for blacks is a third higher than for whites.

GOV. BLAKE

Not surprised--horizontal refreshments is all the entertainment they can afford.

ADA

Then how would you like to raise the white birth rate?

GOV. BLAKE

Hah, I'd do it all by myself if I could.

ADA

Perhaps you can--figuratively speaking. One reason for the lower white birth rate is that white women have more abortions than black women.

GOV. BLAKE

That ain't right, but what can I do about it?

ADA

You've boasted that you run the legislature.

GOV. BLAKE

Like a team of oxen.

ADA

So maybe what you do is get the legislature to outlaw abortion. Make it a tough law. You want to get enough attention to scare law-abiding whites off the procedure.

GOV. BLAKE

Then what? There will always be women who abort their pregnancies no matter what anyone says or does.

ADA

You still win. Because of cost, black women always end up with amateur abortionists and riskier procedures. Result is, black women are four times as likely to die from an abortion. So the effect of your new law will be to raise the white birth rate and the black mortality rate at the same time.

GOV. BLAKE

Hmm...I ain't opposed to that. But how do I keep Lincoln's nose out of my business? He's not going to be happy to think that I'm picking on negroes.

ADA

What can he say? How can he object to your saving babies' lives? You'll come across as a champion of the weak and defenseless, and look a damn sight better than Billy Rufus because of it. And don't forget the bigger picture.

GOV. BLAKE

Which is?

ADA

You must do whatever it takes--and say whatever is necessary--to get this state back in the Union.

(MORE)

ADA (CONT'D)

Then, should you seek national office, you'll have an issue of national appeal. Last time I looked, babies were neither blue nor gray.

GOV. BLAKE

What makes you think Lincoln's vincible?

ADA

Fortunately, you don't have to fool some of the people all of the time, or all of the people some of the time. You just have to fool pluralities in a few key states every four years.

GOV. BLAKE

Such cynicism, I love it dearly. And I'm curious, Miss Sams. Besides money, what is your motive in all this?

ADA

A woman has few outlets for her ambition, Governor, but I've discovered that the ring in the bull's nose is more powerful than the bull.

GOV. BLAKE

Let me say that I am perfectly willing to be led if the destination is to my liking. You say Abraham Lincoln has hired you. How does one purchase your undiluted loyalty?

ADA

Ordinarily that is a certainty known only in retrospect. However, I'm willing to tell you that my brother was a victim of Union troops. I hold Lincoln personally responsible, and any man who might bring him down a worthy confederate. I would help such a man with inside information.

GOV. BLAKE

My, my, Miss Sams, you are the most devious person I have ever had the pleasure of allying myself with.

ADA

That's why you won't hesitate to pay my invoice, even though the size of it is going to move you to a sitdown all by itself.

*Lights down on BLAKE's office.*

ACT I, SCENE 6

*BLAKE steps into the light. To the side in a secondary light, RANDALL, carrying a bible, and a HUSBAND and WIFE stand, listening. During his remarks, MRS. PERCY enters and stands near the other listeners.*

GOV. BLAKE

Today I am announcing to the world that we in this state have turned away from savage darkness into the light of our Creator's absolute love. Henceforth, within our borders, we will do everything in our power to put an end to the barbaric disregard for our most vulnerable form of human life, the little baby huddled inside his mother's womb.

The bill I've just signed--the Hidden Child Defense Act--will save thousands of lives each year, preserving those helpless darlings whose existence before birth would otherwise be cruelly ended. Some say that this historic step is beyond the jurisdiction of state government, but I'm with those who believe the opposite, as I think all true Christians must be.

From now on, my administration will deal harshly with the medical mercenaries who prey upon the fertile women of our state. No more will we allow them to use women's emotional flaws and fears to overwhelm hallowed maternal love in a criminal conspiracy to slay the innocent.

And so, with the stroke of my pen, we say to abortionists and their would-be collaborators: "Be gone, you agents of Satan! Be gone! We revere life absolutely above all else!"...My friends, thank you for your support in this divine mission. May God bless you, and bless our most righteous state.

*Lights down on BLAKE.*

ACT I, SCENE 7

*Lights up on the door to MRS. PERCY's lodging. SALLIE approaches furtively, then she knocks. After a moment, PERCY opens the door partway.*

SALLIE

Is you Mrs. Percy?

*PERCY looks her over, appraising her carefully. Then she steps back, opening the door for SALLIE to enter, then leading her into the parlor.*

MRS. PERCY

I don't do charity work.

SALLIE

I can pay.

MRS. PERCY

And you will, up front. I get nine, ten women a month, every month, and all of them pays first.

*(Indicating a chair.)*

When was the last time you "been sick"?

SALLIE

Week of Juneteenth or so.

MRS. PERCY

About 10, 12 weeks then. Does your man know?

*SALLIE shakes her head.*

MRS. PERCY (CONT'D)

Why not?

SALLIE

He...don't understand.

MRS. PERCY

Understand what--cause and effect?

SALLIE

I got two children already--one of each. I love those sweet babies, I truly, truly do, but they came hard. The last one 'most killed me. I can't no more. I just can't.

MRS. PERCY

You sure you want this? I can't have you changing your mind. Your man finds out he might say you crossed God's will.

SALLIE

The two children I got need me. I can't believe God wants them motherless.

MRS. PERCY

Well, God's a man too, ain't he...Who sent you?

SALLIE

White lady I do laundry for. She...she said to come here, ask for you by the name Percy.

MRS. PERCY

You'll not speak that name again. I require obscurity. That and ten dollars. You got ten dollars?

*SALLIE produces the money, which PERCY pockets.*

MRS. PERCY

What you tried so far?

SALLIE

Pennyroyal.

MRS. PERCY

When you take the herb?

SALLIE

Month back. I...felt bad. Some blood, but nothing else.

MRS. PERCY

Next step is I got to use a tool, you know that, don't you?

*SALLIE nods.*

MRS. PERCY (CONT'D)

All right, then. Some other things you got to know. I tell you now 'cause I learned the girls don't listen so good afterward. I know what I'm doing, but that don't mean it won't hurt. Before you go, I'll give you some Gerhardt's pills--they work good on pain. A little blood is normal, don't worry about it. You're going to cramp, that's normal too. That's why you're going to be in bed for a few days. Tell your man it's only your monthly flow--damn fool won't think nothing of it. You got all that?

*SALLIE nods.*

MRS. PERCY (CONT'D)

OK, here's the important part: You leave here, me and you done with each other. You got too much pain, you stay away, you hear? You got too much blood, you take it somewhere else. You got fever, shakes, delirium--no matter what--you put every thought of me out of your head, understand?

*SALLIE nods vigorously.*

MRS. PERCY (CONT'D)

Swear it.

SALLIE

*(Crosses her heart.)*

May Jesus strike me dead.

MRS. PERCY

And if He don't, I sure as hell will. OK, then. Let's get on with it.

*PERCY helps SALLIE to her feet, and leads her off. Lights down on the parlor.*



## ACT I, SCENE 8

*Lights up on SALLIE and LUTHER's bedroom, where she is folding laundry. Suddenly she doubles over in pain. LUTHER, in street clothes, enters and rushes to her.*

LUTHER

Sallie, what is it?

*SALLIE is unable to talk. LUTHER cannot comfort her.*

LUTHER (CONT'D)

Sallie, tell me! What ails you?

*LUTHER's hand comes away from SALLIE's leg covered in blood.*

LUTHER (CONT'D)

Oh, God, Sallie!

*LUTHER gathers SALLIE up, and heads for the apartment door.*

LUTHER (CONT'D)

Dear Lord, don't let nothing happen to my Sallie! You can't let nothing happen. I won't let you. Please hear me! Please...

*Lights down on the bedroom.*

## ACT I, SCENE 9

*A White House sitting room. A dress is draped over the back of an arm chair; a sewing kit rests on the seat. TAD works at a table with paper and pen. ROBERT enters.*

ROBERT

Hello, Tad...Or do you still prefer "good day?"

TAD

Good day.

*TAD continues writing.*

ROBERT

You know, it would be better to assume modern English than Mother's old French.

(MORE)

ROBERT (CONT'D)

(Reading over Tad's shoulder.)

*L'extension des droits des femmes est le principe de base de tout progrès social.* "The extension of women's rights is the basic principle of all social progress." I see the old lady is corrupting your principles even as she retards your education.

TAD

Don't call her that.

ROBERT

Are you aware she wants to take you back to Springfield, where French is an unknown tongue. How will that make you feel?

TAD

*Mystérieux.*

ROBERT

You've spent half your life in this mansion, Thomas. Servants always at the ready with any food or comfort you desire. It would be hard to give that up, I imagine.

TAD

Strangers blundering into my room. Armed soldiers scaring playmates away and listening to me piss.

ROBERT

Father has done much good work from this house.

TAD

You want something from him again, don't you. Railroads? He doesn't like train peddlers. He says there are more vermin hiding in railbeds than in a roadhouse mattress.

ROBERT

I want Abraham Lincoln to be recognized as the greatest statesman who ever lived. All he needs for that to happen is to finish reassembling the United States. I want to help him.

TAD

You must want something from me then.

ROBERT

Your encouragement. Four more years and you're on your own. Meantime, this is the perfect place to enjoy a childhood. Tell Father you like it here.

TAD

Even if I agreed with you, it wouldn't matter. He only listens to Mother.

ROBERT

Whom history will remember as a peevish old biddy.

*MARY enters.*

MARY  
*(Ironically.)*  
 Robert, what a pleasure to see you.

ROBERT  
 And you. Unfortunately I must leave for a meeting with your husband.

MARY  
 Please don't abuse him with your demands.

ROBERT  
 I would not usurp you in that regard, Mother.

*ROBERT exits. MARY clears the armchair, sits with a sigh, and resumes sewing brocade onto her evening dress.*

MARY  
 OK...Now, Thomas, where were we?

TAD  
*(Reading.)*  
*Une position d'éminence...rend...une grande personne plus grande...et une petite personne...moins.*

MARY  
 Which is?

TAD  
 A position of eminence--I don't know that word.

MARY  
 Distinction, prominence.

TAD  
 A position of distinction makes a large person more large and a small person less--small?

MARY  
 Remember what I said about being too literal in your translation. Your father is tall, but his labors have cost him weight. What else can grande mean?

TAD  
 ...Great?

MARY  
 So a position of distinction, such as the presidency, makes a small man, such as James Buchanan, lesser still. And a great man, such as your father...

TAD

Greater...Mother, is that the same for personal secretaries to the President? I miss the two Johns.

MARY

As do I. Misterys Nicolay and Hay were able public servants. But that doesn't mean that their successor--

TAD

--I don't like Mr. Wade.

MARY

...Oh?

TAD

When he speaks, even a greeting, you can see him thinking about his words.

MARY

Well, don't hold that against him. Thoughtless speech can be very damaging, don't you agree?

TAD

It's more revealing, though, I bet.

ACT I, SCENE 10

*Lights up on LINCOLN's office.  
The president sits at his desk.  
Opposite him NOAH stands and  
SEN. ZEBULON HARKNESS sits.*

LINCOLN

The Southern states are testing us, Senator. At every turn, their governments buck and delay, hoping to rally the public to as little change as possible.

SEN. HARKNESS

The longer you wait, Mr. President, the greater the chance those goddamn rebels will reconstruct what they had before the war.

LINCOLN

The planters are trying to make wages do the work of chains.

SEN. HARKNESS

Which is why you've got to press for fair state laws. Then use the army to make them stick.

LINCOLN

Ever try to move a mule that don't want to, Senator? From the front you get bit, and from the rear you get kicked. Either way, you're beat bloody while the mule don't budge. No, force just turns dead weight into cussed resistance.

(MORE)

LINCOLN (CONT'D)

Your only hope is to wait him out--an empty belly is the only thing that makes a mule reasonable.

SEN. HARKNESS

Forget mules, Mr. President. You broke Johnny Reb's ass already. Quit thinking you can reason with him. Those states that need new constitutions--it's time for an ultimatum. Those officials that ain't sworn for the Union yet--it's time to ride 'em hard. It's what your constituents want.

NOAH

Miss Sams may be able to confirm that, Mr. President. She's here with some interesting findings.

SEN. HARKNESS

Who?

LINCOLN

Ada Sams prospects for attitudes, Zeb, the way you might use a dowsing rod to find water, though you might not be able to drink it. Yes, let's hear her out.

*NOAH exits. LINCOLN slumps.*

SEN. HARKNESS

Abe, now is not the time to waver. Despite all they lost, including the weapon of secession, Southerners like Shelby Blake still don't consider themselves disarmed.

LINCOLN

Blake's a crafty one, all right. He represents the most dangerous elements of the South--the planters who gambled their neighbors' lives on a war as unwise as it was unjust.

SEN. HARKNESS

Then you've got to help me take him on--now. If I go down in the next election, others will go with me, and the Republican party will be fatally damaged.

LINCOLN

I don't know, Zeb. The unrelenting weight of this office is a locomotive, and I'm a worn track with uncertain prospects.

SEN. HARKNESS

Nonsense! You have an entire government under you. Let us bear you up.

LINCOLN

With all due respect, Senator, no amount of ballast can save a rail that's about to break.

SEN. HARKNESS

This is not like you, Abraham.

LINCOLN

Yes, I've changed. The hot breath of an assassin's pistol on your cheek has a way of making you question whether you shouldn't be somewhere else, doing some other thing.

*LINCOLN draws himself up as NOAH enters with ADA and ROBERT.*

LINCOLN (CONT'D)

Miss Sams, how good to see you again...Robert. You know Senator Harkness, I'm sure.

*HARKNESS takes their hands, and ADA curtseys.*

NOAH

Miss Sams has been busy. She's found the voters growing ever more fond of you, Mr. President.

LINCOLN

The way affection grows for a man on his death bed, no doubt.

ROBERT

Nonsense. If we consider what public expectations she's discovered, I think you'll see plenty of reasons for optimism.

SEN. HARKNESS

That's what I want to hear. We have hung our hats on the complete restoration of a single constitutional government into every corner of the land. The pain of war will not go away until Reconstruction is accomplished.

ROBERT

Nor will we enjoy new prosperity everywhere. The collapse of the cotton market has exposed the South's appalling lack of industry. That is where the growth must be to enrich us all.

NOAH

So let's see what the citizenry has to say, shall we?

*ADA withdraws a sheaf of papers from her bag.*

ADA

When asked what need is greatest for economic development in the South, people most often cited improved transportation.

ROBERT

Which is an argument for increased government spending on railroads and other public works.

ADA

The second most popular answer was a growing labor force.

ROBERT

To come from easing restrictions on the immigration of people who choose to work.

ADA

And on the question of debt relief for bankrupt landholders, there is strong opposition.

ROBERT

That is to be expected. Investors cannot commit capital to new enterprises without guarantees that loans will be repaid.

LINCOLN

I can guess where you got your questions, Miss Sams, but did Robert's dinner table also serve up your answers? I must say that what all these aids to business require is political stability. And that depends on the establishment of honest government that guarantees the rights and safety of all citizens. That is why our foremost need is the to remake the corrupt city halls and statehouses of our wayward states.

ROBERT

But which comes first? Growing affluence is more likely to engender civil peace than continued deprivation.

LINCOLN

Except that honest men come cheaply. They must only be protected and they will without excessive reward build the kind of communities where businesses flourish.

SEN. HARKNESS

I agree with you in the abstract, Mr. President. But in this I fear that you put too much faith in reason. While you're reasoning with voters, a swarm of rabble-rousers like Shelby Blake are lighting their shoes on fire.

*ADA perks up at Blake's name.*

NOAH

You refer to the anti-abortion law he just signed? He clearly hopes it will define him as a defender of the weak.

SEN. HARKNESS

And note how skillfully Governor Blake has controlled the debate from the start with his terminology. Every mention of the Hidden Child Defense Act reinforces the message that Blake is a foursquare hero for advancing it, when in fact, he is an unscrupulous, grandstanding knave.

NOAH

Who by his bold legislative action has acquired national attention and the political power that comes with it.

SEN. HARKNESS

Just the sort of maneuver that can undermine your efforts to put our recent war to rest at last, Mr. President.

LINCOLN

Our path grows more torturous by the day. We are as much in search of the right message as well as the right course. I have an aide stationed in Blake's back yard. I'm expecting a report about the governor's activities from him shortly.

NOAH

Excuse me, sir, you received a telegram today. Captain Johnstone's wife is ill, and he begs your pardon.

LINCOLN

Nothing serious, I hope.

NOAH

A miscarriage was indicated.

LINCOLN

I'm sorry to hear that. Please send my condolences, and assure the Captain that his report can wait.

ROBERT

In the meantime, I hope you won't dismiss my recommendations, Father.

LINCOLN

Not at all, Robert, but perhaps Miss Sams can enlighten us with further inquiries.

*Lights down on LINCOLN's office.*

ACT I, SCENE 11

*Lights up on BLAKE's office.  
LUCIUS sits in a padded chair  
with a drink. BLAKE joins him.*

LUCIUS

I've got to hand it to you, Shelby. Your Hidden Child Defense Act is pure genius. How did you conceive of it, if you don't mind my play on words?

GOV. BLAKE

Intelligence, sir, both native and hired. I found a political adviser who's as immoral as I am. She's my spy in Lincoln's office, and I signed her to a long-term contract.

LUCIUS

Her? You dog. I hope she sealed the deal with sweet lagniappe.



GOV. BLAKE

Well, that would be wrong, wouldn't it?

*They laugh coarsely, in  
ritualistic mutual pretense.  
LUCIUS raises his drink.*

LUCIUS

For your potency, I salute you, ol' Bull, a true visionary and son of the South.

*They touch glasses. BLAKE sits.  
ISOM enters with an envelope.  
For a moment their eyes lock.*

ISOM

Telegram, Governor.

GOV. BLAKE

Leave it on my desk, Isom.

ISOM

Yessir.

*ISOM does so and exits.*

GOV. BLAKE

Did you see that?

LUCIUS

See what?

GOV. BLAKE

The way that darkie looked at me?

LUCIUS

You mean you can see their eyes now when you give them orders? Yeah, I've noticed--it's like that everywhere now. I wouldn't read too much into it, though. They're just feeling their feed, pretending to be in charge of themselves, when in fact, the only thing they ever going to control is their bowels.

GOV. BLAKE

You don't think it's anything to worry about then?

LUTHER

Reprisals? That what you're afraid of?

GOV. BLAKE

You did see the armed nigger captain in my front yard.

LUCIUS

Sure, but that don't alarm me none. All this emancipation talk is purest fantasy.

(MORE)

LUCIUS (CONT'D)

A nigger's nothing but a nigger--that's why the South shall rise on their black backs again, once we get them used to following orders for money. Very little money.

GOV. BLAKE

Tell me, Lucius, how has my Act been received?

LUCIUS

Best of both worlds--your fellow Democrats praise your courageous defense of God's weakest creatures, while Republicans deride your overreaching fist--all the time secretly wishing they'd thought of it themselves.

GOV. BLAKE

And what of Rufus? How did he take the news?

LUCIUS

I hear he spent two days cursing your maternal ancestor...A toast. To your enemies' apoplexy.

*They drink.*

LUCIUS (CONT'D)

And may your name stick in Rufus's craw like dry grits...I'm curious, Shelby. Now that you have wrested the advantage from Rufus, how will you sustain it? How can you possibly top the Hidden Child Defense Act?

GOV. BLAKE

Easy--by enforcing it.

LUCIUS

Wait...I just assumed...you mean you're not just posturing with this law?

GOV. BLAKE

Not at all, Lucius. Passing the Act was simply the first step in becoming an unassailable champion of the people, the little people.

LUCIUS

You're really going to prosecute someone?

GOV. BLAKE

I have feelers out as we speak, looking for the perfect test case.

LUCIUS

You know you don't have to actually throw an abortionist in jail to be perceived as the patron saint of fetuses. Just threatening to will put the fear of God and governor into every medic and midwife in the state.

GOV. BLAKE

Maybe you're right, Lucius, but I aim for more than re-election to the statehouse...I aspire to dynasty.

LUCIUS

*(A guffaw.)*

You are a rogue, Shelby, a genuine bluetick mountebank and, by God, I love you for it. That's why you're so intent on getting your nose back under the Union tent. I salute you, sir.

*BLAKE notices the message on his desk and picks it up.*

GOV. BLAKE

By the way, Lucius, I've been enjoying your speechifying on my behalf. Any politician would kill for an ally such as you.

LUCIUS

And you, Bull, are the easiest politician in the world to back--brutally honest and honestly brutal. Why, I was thinking of you as I worked on my next piece for the paper--

*BLAKE reads the note with growing excitement...*

GOV. BLAKE

--No. Oh, no. I don't believe it--oh, this is rich.

*BLAKE goes to the door.*

GOV. BLAKE (CONT'D)

Isom! Isom, send in Detective Sergeant Ott.

LUCIUS

What?

GOV. BLAKE

My test case--courtesy of my informer, Miss Sams. And I couldn't have asked for a bigger fool to come down on with both boots.

LUCIUS

Now this should be interesting.

GOV. BLAKE

You are so right, my friend. Something to rant about for weeks.

*OTT enters in street clothes.  
BLAKE hands him the note, which  
OTT scans.*

GOV. BLAKE

Sergeant, I want you to take care of this as we discussed.

OTT  
Governor, are you sure?

GOV. BLAKE  
Of course, you damn fool.

OTT  
It seems...personal.

*BLAKE swings the bull-roarer in small vertical circles.*

GOV. BLAKE  
What it seems is principled. What it does is kill three birds with one stone.

*(Shouting over the roar.)*  
Hell, I'm about to bring down a whole goddamn flock of birds.

*Lights down on BLAKE's office as the bull-roarer subsides.*

ACT I, SCENE 12

*Lights up on SALLIE in hospital bed, LUTHER, out of uniform, hovering.*

LUTHER  
Sugar, nurse say you going to be all right...Say you got nothing to worry about.  
Yes, the child is gone, but let's be happy you OK...Let's think about that and praise the Lord for not taking you too...Sallie, think of the children we got. They strong and...and the Lord saved you again. Saved you for a purpose...That's the way He reveals His will as we need to know it...We can try for another...Once you get well, we can have another child...And another after that. This won't stop us from having the family God wants us to have.

*SALLIE is distraught and curls up defensively. OTT enters.*

OTT  
Are you Mr. Johnstone?

LUTHER  
Yessir. Sallie's going to be all right, ain't she?

OTT  
She suffered a serious injury.

LUTHER  
But you fixed her...

OTT

*(Beat, realizing that LUTHER  
mistakes him for a doctor.)*

It's...too soon to tell. We're going to have to watch her closely for quite a while.

LUTHER

I'll take care of her. Whatever she needs. Folks from the church will help. Neighbors too. We'll take care of her good.

*SALLIE rolls away from Luther.*

LUTHER (CONT'D)

When can I take Sallie home?

OTT

That's hard to say. She's weak and...there are complications.

LUTHER

Uh, Doctor, sir...

OTT

Yes?

LUTHER

How long...I mean, when do you think we might try for another child, you know, a child to replace the one she lost.

OTT

You don't know, do you...I thought you knew. I assumed you consented.

LUTHER

Consented what?

OTT

Well, you realize what her injury was.

LUTHER

Her womb...it started bleeding.

OTT

Yes, because it was punctured.

LUTHER

How...how that happen?

OTT

An abortionist's curette, Mr. Johnstone. Sallie had an abortion.

*The news staggers LUTHER. He  
whirls on SALLIE.*

LUTHER  
What you done? How could you? Our little baby!

*OTT puts himself between them.*

OTT  
Easy, Mr. Johnstone.

LUTHER  
Why didn't you say nothing? I woulda helped you, Sallie. You ain't alone.

*OTT gently forces LUTHER back.*

OTT  
Mr. Johnstone, please. Let me handle this.

LUTHER  
You shouldn't'a done this on your own, Sallie!

*OTT pushes LUTHER back harder.*

OTT  
That's enough. Quiet down.

*LUTHER stops resisting.*

LUTHER  
This talk ain't over.

OTT  
No, it's not.

LUTHER  
I ain't done.

OTT  
Neither am I, and neither is the state.

*OTT produces handcuffs.*

OTT (CONT'D)  
Sallie Johnstone. I'm placing you under arrest for conspiracy to commit criminal homicide and for murder in the first degree.

LUTHER  
No!

*OTT handcuffs SALLIE by the wrist to the bed frame.*

LUTHER (CONT'D)  
Take off them shackles!

OTT  
I can't.

LUTHER  
Let her go--now!

*LUTHER makes a threatening advance, and OTT shows his handgun under his jacket.*

LUTHER (CONT'D)  
She be a free woman. Freed by order of the president of the United States--or ain't you heard?

OTT  
I told you--she's under arrest.

LUTHER  
You ain't no doctor. Who are you?

OTT  
Detective Sergeant Clement Ott.

LUTHER  
That ain't no regular police.

OTT  
That's correct. I'm state police, here on the direct orders of the governor.

LUTHER  
Blake!

OTT  
Governor Blake considers my investigation of your wife's crime to be top priority.

LUTHER  
'Course he do.

OTT  
Do you understand the charges against you, Sallie Johnstone?

SALLIE  
No.

LUTHER  
I do. I know Blake, what kind of man he is, what kind of man he ain't. Let her go!

OTT  
If you're going to interfere with my official business, I'll arrest you for obstruction.

LUTHER

This is between my wife and me. This ain't no crime.

OTT

Oh, it most definitely is. Two crimes actually--state statutes 21-33-08 and 21-33-17.

LUTHER

Ain't never heard of 'em.

OTT

The first is simple murder. The second is a new category of homicide conspiracy. It covers making plans and taking steps to assist in the killing of a child by hiring an abortionist.

*SALLIE begins to weep.*

OTT (CONT'D)

We call this type of murder feticide.

LUTHER

Feti-what?

OTT

Killing of a fetus, an unborn child. A girl, in this case. Did you know it was a daughter you killed, Sallie?

*SALLIE sobs.*

LUTHER

Damn you, Ott! Leave her be!

OTT

Well, that's up to the Almighty, ain't it? I'm here as an agent of earthly justice.

LUTHER

Sallie done wrong, but it weren't murder.

OTT

The law disagrees, and we'll prove it in court.

*LUTHER sits with a moan.*

OTT (CONT'D)

'Course you can help yourself, Sallie...You can help yourself by helping me...Do you want to help yourself, Sallie?

LUTHER

What you want?

OTT

I want to talk to your wife alone.



LUTHER

Uh-uh.

OTT

Mr. Johnstone, there are two very large police officers outside that door. A word from me and they'll escort you to jail, and I can't guarantee you'll arrive there in your present, very healthy condition.

LUTHER

Sallie, you scream if he touches you.

*With a nasty look, LUTHER exits.*

OTT

Your husband is a volatile character, Mrs. Johnstone. I'm surprised the Army trusts him with a gun.

SALLIE

What you talking about--help myself?

OTT

Before others get involved, you and I have the chance to reach an agreement.

SALLIE

Why won't you just leave me alone?

OTT

I'd like to, I really would. But my orders won't permit it.

SALLIE

What kind of law won't allow me my own business?

OTT

Sallie, we can't just let people kill other people.

SALLIE

What makes you think I done that?

OTT

The evidence is plain, starting with the damage to your uterus.

*(Beat, misreading Sallie's  
reaction as ignorance.)*

Your womb.

SALLIE

I don't like talking to you about stuff like that.

OTT

You might want to reconsider. If it was up to me, I'd arrest your abortionist, not you. I...I know the reasons behind this kind of recklessness.

(MORE)

OTT (CONT'D)

This is your best chance to address my doubts. When you see me next, I'll be a merciless official of the state.

SALLIE

I got nothing to say to you.

OTT

I see. You'd have me follow orders then.

*(Checks the handcuffs,  
preparing to leave.)*

Well, maybe you need more time to think. And while you're thinking, be aware: In determining the charges against you, the government can describe you as victim or murderess. What's more, it can charge your husband as a co-conspirator...a partner in the crime.

SALLIE

He didn't do nothing. I saved my own life for my family's.

OTT

Says who? Judges and juries have a natural dislike of abortionists. Proving that's what you are--and what Luther might appear to have helped you become--will be less a matter of evidence than simple name-calling. Once the jury hears you two labelled baby-killers, maximum sentences are practically guaranteed...So think about the trade you made, Sallie. Think about the life you got in exchange for the one you destroyed...Good day.

*Lights down on hospital room.*

*End of ACT I.*

ACT II, SCENE 1

*Lights up on LUCIUS. To the side in a secondary light, SINGLE MAN sits in a straight-backed chair, listening. After a moment RANDALL TARR enters, awkwardly on his wooden leg. He and stands behind SINGLE MAN, listening, occasionally playing with his bible's placeholder ribbon.*

LUCIUS

Good evening, this is Lucius Rexroth, speaking for everything good and decent in this great land of ours. My fellow Americans, our way of life is a beacon for those who can barely breathe beneath Godless governments. Our enemies, driven by an agony of envy for the fruits of our moral stewardship, strive to destroy our social masterpiece.

(MORE)

## LUCIUS (CONT'D)

That is why, as always, we find the ethical underpinnings of our society under attack. A particularly pernicious movement is afoot, a movement led by criminally amoral abortionists who have put themselves above God's law. Thank God we now have an avenger. By enacting the Hidden Child Defense Act, Governor Shelby Blake has announced that he will battle all those whose corrupted code allows them to destroy the yet-to-be-born.

The logical consistency behind the Hidden Child Defense Act is unassailable: If a woman is considered a murderer when she pays an assassin to kill her lover, then it follows that she also is a murderer when she pays a cutthroat to kill the budding child in her womb. This means that for the first time, society will hold to account abortionists and those who think to keep their hands clean by merely paying for the evil deed.

Today I have learned the name of the misguided soul who is the first to test our determination under this new law. There are three astonishing facts about this craven killer. First, Sallie Johnstone has two living offspring. Imagine: A mother who could kill her own child! Second, she is a freed woman. Imagine: A former slave who could deny her unborn child independence! Third, she is married to a man who has sworn to follow President Lincoln's orders. Imagine: The wife of a federal agent thumbing her nose at our state's laws!

For her feticide, Governor Shelby Blake will see to it that Sallie Johnstone will be incarcerated for a long time. Some might assume that this is proof that imprisonment is a natural condition for the African race. But I will not stoop to such calumny. No, I merely lament a former slave's loss of her "moral drinking gourd." And if Sallie Johnstone's error serves as a deterrent for other women who might follow the underground abortion railroad, then she deserves our thanks. Because, in truth, the moral failing of her feeble soul reminds the rest of us that, no matter how we rationalize them, our sins are a denial of our fundamental purpose as God's obedient children.

This is Lucius Rexroth, speaking for the utterly powerless in the limbo of pre-birth. May God bless you, my listeners, as you contemplate this truth: When individuals lack the courage to follow God's will, the law must force them.

*Lights out on LUCIUS.*

ACT II, SCENE 2

*Lights up on MARY and LINCOLN,  
dressed for the outdoors.*

MARY

*Quelle belle soirée.*

LINCOLN

A bit chilly. Would you like another wrap?

MARY

No, the lap robe will be enough. The night air refreshes me.

*LINCOLN guides MARY to the carriage. As he settles the robe around her and takes his seat...*

LINCOLN

Where shall we go, Molly?

MARY

Someplace near water. I wish us to be distracted from your dreary profession.

LINCOLN

*(To an unseen driver.)*

Lieutenant Collins, Buzzard Point, if you will.

MARY

Oh, that will take our minds off the carrion-eaters of Capitol Hill.

LINCOLN

Remind me to issue a proclamation changing that peninsula's unfortunate appellation.

MARY

Would that you could so easily remake the members of Congress. You might fashion a more congenial body.

LINCOLN

Molly, you mustn't be so hard on our legislators. They have their separate rationales--they must dance to many tunes.

MARY

That explains why they resemble marionettes so.

LINCOLN

Yes, I suppose they do.

MARY

I don't know why you work so hard to readmit the Confederate states. You'd think the Congress as it's presently configured would be adversary enough without enlarging it.

LINCOLN

Governance is like farming. The more acres you plant, the more weevils, thrips, and nematodes you must suffer.

MARY

Thrips and Nematode--aren't they the senators from New Jersey?

LINCOLN

*(Laughing heartily.)*

By God, Molly, I think you're right. Senator Nematode of New Jersey. Wait 'til Seward hears--he'll bust his buttons.

MARY

Just don't quote me. I don't want it known that I have anything less than the highest regard for New Jersey. I have heard enough from the Gotham papers--

LINCOLN

*(To the driver.)*

--Collins! Not tenth--take another street.

*(To MARY.)*

I'm sorry. He's newly assigned, but he should've been told.

MARY

It's all right. *N'inquiétez pas*. I'm fine.

LINCOLN

I'll speak to his superior officer.

MARY

No, don't. Please. I'm being unreasonable.

LINCOLN

Nonsense, your desire to avoid Tenth Street is perfectly understandable.

MARY

Thank you for indulging my foolish superstition.

LINCOLN

You know, I have several times ridden past Ford's. It's perfectly safe with a phalanx of bodyguards such as we have at the moment.

MARY

Perhaps someday. Although I can't forget how much we once enjoyed the theatre together.

LINCOLN

You know, Thrrips and Nematode also sound like barristers. Which reminds me that Dickens is visiting us from England. We missed him in '42, you recall. Wouldn't you like to hear if his opinion of Americans has changed for the better since his first tour?

MARY

I'd be surprised if it has, seeing as we've been so vigorously killing each other in the interim...So much has changed. So much destroyed. I must constantly ride herd on my memories to keep them from rising up, talons bared.

(MORE)

MARY (CONT'D)

No, I don't think I shall ever again feel secure enough to daydream, to simply sit and let my thoughts wander without fear they will treacherously abuse me.

LINCOLN

"When I was a child...I thought as a child"...It has been long since we put away childish things, Molly. The best we can do now is try to make the world safe for the childishness of future generations.

MARY

Even as the threats against them increase. Tell me, Mr. Lincoln, with all the hazard and disease in the natural world, why is it that we must keep inventing ways to imperil children?

LINCOLN

To what do you refer?

MARY

Governor Blake's new law.

LINCOLN

Ah yes, his law against abortion. You can't accuse Shelby Blake of timidity.

MARY

What do you think of it?

LINCOLN

Blake is a man of thoroughly suspect motives. I wouldn't vouch even for why he eats or sleeps.

MARY

Forget about Blake. Where do you come down on his law?

LINCOLN

It's a difficult subject to have a single opinion about. To rip a child from the womb, not to give it life like Caesar but to snatch its life away--that's a ghastly business...

*LINCOLN pauses long enough for  
MARY to prompt him.*

MARY

...And yet?

LINCOLN

And yet I wonder what a great fear it must be to bring a woman to such an act of desperation.

MARY

Most likely there are fears of many kinds.

LINCOLN

Indeed.

MARY

*(Beat, then recklessly.)*

I never told you how frightened I was when Robert quickened.

LINCOLN

Molly, no. You never showed anything but the greatest resolve.

MARY

It was a pretense that took all of my energy to maintain. Some days my anxiety was so fierce that I thought I might shatter like vibrating crystal. Would I have the strength to deliver this unknown child? Would he be sound? Would he love me? What would he think of my character? Sometimes the tension of my contending terrors grew so great that I wished his pregnancy had never happened. I imagined that I might painlessly bring this...this terrible pending uncertainty to an end by erasing it and restoring my previous peace of mind.

LINCOLN

But you didn't, Molly. You remained steadfast and courageous.

MARY

It is not noble to stay a course merely because you fear the alternative more.

LINCOLN

But that is often how battles are won.

MARY

And so it was with my internal struggle--I did nothing to stop my pregnancy for no other reason than doing nothing is what indecision leads to.

LINCOLN

But everything turned out well, that's all that matters.

MARY

Do you think so? Do you think Robert turned out well?

LINCOLN

Oh, most assuredly. Look at him--a successful attorney on the verge of marriage to a wonderful young woman whom we both love. How could you ask if Robert turned out OK?

MARY

You don't know how Robert resents me. If you heard the way he speaks to me when you're not around, as if I were a common beggar, you would realize what a grudge he bears me.

LINCOLN

What? Why? Why would Robert hold any ill-will toward you, his mother?

MARY

He knows. Somehow he knows that while he was still in my womb, that once, in a moment of despair, I thought about aborting him. He knows, I'm sure of it, not in his mind, but in his bones, that I once fleetingly rejected him. He knows somehow and that's why he opposes me, and always will.

LINCOLN

Oh, Molly, that's not right. I'll speak to him.

MARY

No, don't. Please. I couldn't stand it if his attitude toward me were to sully his relationship with you. He admires you immensely, and I would not endanger that.

LINCOLN

I won't have Robert disrespecting you.

MARY

Talking to him would only make it worse. My momentary betrayal --in a sense it's his birthright.

LINCOLN

I'm sorry. It must be such an onus...Do you...did you feel the same about the other boys?

MARY

No, oh no! I love them all, including Robert! Please don't think I've been a feckless and unfit mother.

LINCOLN

But I don't, of course, I don't.

MARY

It was just that one moment of fragility.

LINCOLN

Of course. Don't give it another thought. Please. Robert can be difficult, I admit, but that's his fault, not yours.

*(Abruptly.)*

Well, here we are. The buzzards await a presidential review. Would you like to walk with me?

MARY

Yes, I think so.

*They disembark the carriage,  
LINCOLN assisting MARY with a  
hand and small encouragements.  
They stroll, then...*



MARY (CONT'D)

A few moments ago you asked about the boys, meaning more than Tad. Do you think of Willie and Eddie often?

LINCOLN

I thought I would, and did at first. After they died, I imagined them at every turn. The way they ran and giggled-- they were right hellions.

MARY

You did not discourage them, Mr. Lincoln.

LINCOLN

And should I? The age passes so quickly, why contest it?

MARY

The only contesting that went on was in your face as you wrestled with a smile when you knew a reprimand was in order.

LINCOLN

That is true.

MARY

*(Laughing.)*

Do you remember when the boys made a sled of a rocking chair and had their pet goats pull them through the East Room during the spring reception? I think some of the gentlemen screamed louder than the ladies.

LINCOLN

*(Joining her laughter.)*

Nanko and Nannie weren't the only old goats in the room that day.

MARY

I can understand how the affairs of state push Eddie and Willie from your mind. I would rather hear pontificating cabinet secretaries than recall the boys' sweet voices. But a woman doesn't have the luxury of such useless diversions.

LINCOLN

I thought that nothing would dislodge the melodies of their voices from my mind, least of all talk of tariffs and farm output. But my dreary profession, as you put it, consumes my waking thoughts. I hope you don't think the less of me for it.

MARY

I won't if you grant that my duty preoccupies me differently. Motherhood trumps all other claims on a woman's attention. No other experience so creates a woman as does giving birth.

LINCOLN

A powerful event for me too, but in a different way.

*(In a Shakespearean tone.)*

"Thus witnessing childbirth does make cowards of us all."

MARY

*(A derisive laugh.)*

If only observing birth were required for any man who wishes to spout an opinion about how delicate we women are, who must be protected from ourselves.

LINCOLN

Which, if I'm not mistaken, is one of Blake's arguments for his anti-abortion law. A belief I do not support, you can be sure.

MARY

Yes, as politicians go, you are enlightened, although I have not heard you call for women's suffrage.

LINCOLN

Nothing would advance civilization more than the female vote--which is reason enough for men to fight it to the death. I am not opposed to it, but the country is not ready.

MARY

Don't leaders lead? Make the country ready. Doesn't Blake lead by making abortion illegal?

LINCOLN

That may depend, as I said, on the reasons behind his action.

MARY

Just beware that he might lead you to the need to take a position on his cause. Then where would you be?

LINCOLN

Seeking your guidance, as always. And what do you advise?

MARY

That you apply your own morality to your policy.

LINCOLN

The danger is that might take me to a stand that is not in the nation's best interest.

MARY

But how else can you know the worth of laws? Think of Edward. Think of William. Which is worse, do you believe--to die at their tender ages or never to have been born?

LINCOLN

I believe that the brief three years of joy and sorrow that Edward knew was of incomparable value to him.

(MORE)

LINCOLN (CONT'D)

He was far better off living his short life and losing it than never having known any of its delights.

MARY

Then how can you not say that Blake is right to prohibit abortion?

LINCOLN

Perhaps he is. But I must look at the question in different ways. Euclid the Greek taught us that a single point has no dimensions, and as such, one might say, it has no reality. Blake's point that abortion is a violation of God's will is a simple statement that defies the many dimensions of women's desperation. I must consider those as well.

MARY

Consider them, by all means, but it will all come back to this truth about motherhood: To be a vessel by which God brings new life into the world is a great honor that must not be defiled.

LINCOLN

Molly, you have a strange way of distracting us from the cares and woes of duty. Before we return to the carriage, let's just ponder the comparative simplicity of the stars, shall we?

MARY

*Je t'aime, simplement.*

*Lights down on MARY and LINCOLN as they gaze upward together.*

ACT II, SCENE 3

*Lights up on SALLIE, cuffed to her hospital bed, clearly weak. After a moment, OTT enters. SALLIE gasps, as if he were an apparition that she expected.*

OTT

My apologies, Mrs. Johnstone. I didn't mean to startle you.

*SALLIE shrinks from him.*

OTT (CONT'D)

You're looking mighty peaked. Still weak? That's not good. Pain too, from the looks of it...Where's your husband?

SALLIE

He at home with the children.

OTT

Well, I can't say that I'm sorry to have missed him. You and I have some work to do and I daresay his presence would be a hindrance.

SALLIE

Work?

OTT

Yes, you see, Mrs. Johnstone, I am bound by state law to investigate your case, beginning with asking you some questions, no matter how distasteful they might be.

SALLIE

I said I ain't talking to you.

OTT

Others might, however.

SALLIE

What you mean?

OTT

Tell me, Mrs. Johnstone, who was the father of that unfortunate girl, the one you killed?

SALLIE

What?!

OTT

Who did you cheat of his God-given offspring?

SALLIE

I didn't cheat nobody.

OTT

How many guys have you given the works to?

SALLIE

What? None.

OTT

Come on, Sallie, how many times did you give a man a belly-ride who wasn't your husband?

SALLIE

Luther's the only one, I swear...

OTT

Is that what others would say...

SALLIE

Who tell a lie like that?

OTT  
You deny it then?

SALLIE  
Of course!

OTT  
You'd help yourself to tell the truth.

SALLIE  
I done told you the truth!

OTT  
Well, you're not very believable. In my experience, women who did what you did are usually fancy girls too.

SALLIE  
I ain't no prostitute!

LUTHER (O.S.)  
...That state police in there?...My wife in there with that police! Let me in! I got a right to go in there!

*OTT speaks to the unseen guard.*

OTT  
It's OK, Sanders, take his saber and let him in.

*LUTHER enters in uniform,  
unarmed, but agitated.*

LUTHER  
What you doing here?

OTT  
Investigating a crime.

LUTHER  
We ain't helping you.

OTT  
Actually that's just what your wife and I were discussing.

LUTHER  
Sallie...?

SALLIE  
I didn't say nothing.

OTT  
You might change your mind, if you knew the facts. As I said, the case against you is strong.

(MORE)

OTT (CONT'D)

Class 3 felony murder--you're looking at six to twelve years in prison and a fine of one thousand to ten thousand dollars...I think the difference between you getting a sentence on the high side and on the low is your cooperation.

SALLIE

How I do that?

LUTHER

Don't talk, Sallie!

*LUTHER steps forward aggressively. OTT turns on him with another set of handcuffs.*

OTT

Mr. Johnstone, I threw you out before and I'll do it again. Now I'm willing to let you in on this conversation because I think you can help Sallie understand the full implications.

*(Turning to SALLIE.)*

By that, I mean consequences. Bad things that can happen.

SALLIE

I know consequences. Being black ain't nothing but.

OTT

Good.

*(Brandishing the cuffs.)*

Come to your senses, Luther. You could help me persuade Sallie to do the sensible thing. You can stay, but you'll have to sit in that chair, wearing these.

*LUTHER sits, glowering. OTT cuffs his arm to the chair rest.*

OTT (CONT'D)

Nice and cozy...Now where were we? Oh yes, twelve years and ten thousand dollars. Thing is, you likely don't have either to spare. Certainly not the money, and maybe not even the time. You see, Luther, Sallie's injuries are more serious than she's letting on. The damage the abortionist did is difficult to repair. She's in pain. Isn't that right, Sallie?

LUTHER

That right, sugar?

*SALLIE turns away.*

OTT

I'm afraid things don't look too good for you, Sallie. The doctors are afraid the bleeding will recommence, which means you're going to--

LUTHER

--No!

*SALLIE looks terror-struck.*

OTT

Sallie, I'd hate to have you die with your daughter's death on your conscience.

LUTHER

No! Sallie!

OTT

The thing about abortion, it's a crime whose only payoff is regret. Sallie, you regret your bloody hands, and your bloody womb. Luther, you regret the loss of your child. And I regret having to threaten you both. We can't undo the crime, of course, but maybe we can fashion a little justice out of its remains. That might bring some relief to the sadness we all feel...You'd like some relief, wouldn't you, Sallie? 'Cause you don't look so good.

LUTHER

You lucky I can't reach you now.

OTT

Yes, I'm sure.

SALLIE

What you mean, relief?

OTT

Well, it would be best to have you in a court of law, giving your testimony against the abortionist in person. But if you're unavailable, due to stubbornness, the court will accept a deathbed confession.

*SALLIE shrinks into herself.*

OTT (CONT'D)

So you'd rather die in sin then confess your to killing your child.

LUTHER

Oh, God, Sallie. What you done to yourself?

OTT

Tell you what. There may be a way out of this. I'd like to help you find it.

LUTHER

You ain't our friend. Don't try to sound like it.

OTT

Let me ask you something, Luther. Don't you wonder how lucky Sallie is to be in this hospital, having doctors and nurses waiting on her. Can you pay for all this?

LUTHER

I'll pay.

OTT

How? I'd be surprised if either one of you has any excess funds, or...

*(Indicating SALLIE.)*

...maybe not even much time remaining here on Earth...What you don't realize, Luther, is that you have an anonymous benefactor.

*(To SALLIE.)*

That's someone who doesn't want it known--

SALLIE

--I know that word. Quit treating me like I'm stupid.

OTT

Forgive me. Anyway, your benefactor paid for your emergency treatment.

LUTHER

Who?

OTT

Can't say, although I can tell you what he expects in exchange for your cooperation in the investigation.

LUTHER

What's that?

OTT

Like I said, a confession. An admission of guilt and a key piece of information. See, the one thing I don't have, Sallie, is the name of your abortionist. Preventing charges against your husband begins with that name.

SALLIE

I can't help you.

OTT

You know you're running out of time, Sallie. But you still have a choice. Oh, yes. I've been assured that with continued hospital care, you might live. But if you're discharged too soon, say for lack of funds, your condition will likely prove fatal...Your benefactor has limited patience. If your reciprocity is not forthcoming, he'll turn off the money, and you can leave an enormous debt to your widower...Come on, Sallie. It's simple, isn't it?

(MORE)



OTT (CONT'D)

Tell me what I need to know and if you live, after maybe only a few years you'll return to your children while they're still young. Refuse, and you can say goodbye to them forever. That name makes all the difference.

SALLIE

...She made me swear.

OTT

A female abortionist--now there's an unnatural callousness that's hard to figure. Who?

SALLIE

She said she'd hurt my family.

LUTHER

That goddamn bitch!

OTT

She can't very well do that if I take her into custody. Her name--let's have it.

LUTHER

Tell him, Sallie!

SALLIE

...She goes by the name Mrs. Percy.

OTT

*(Writing in his notebook.)*

Where can I find her?

SALLIE

Foster Street. Brick building next to the hardware store.

*OTT tears the sheet from his notebook and hands it through the door to an unseen guard.*

LUTHER

Why, Sallie? Why you'd do this to us?

OTT

I'm curious too, Sallie. Why'd you kill your baby as if it were nothing more than a tumor to be cut out?

SALLIE

Didn't have no choice.

LUTHER

'Course you did.

OTT

I agree. Beautiful family, loving husband. How could you not choose to bring another child into such a life?

SALLIE

You got no idea.

OTT

That's why I'm asking.

SALLIE

You say if I live you going to lock me up. That will be terrible. I know that. I can accept that. But whatever I got wrong inside would surely have been twice deadly. Ain't it better to lose just one life than two?

LUTHER

You never told me you was afraid.

SALLIE

I tried, Luther. You wouldn't hear of it.

OTT

A common malady among men, I believe. As is not caring enough about you to prevent the pregnancy in the first place.

LUTHER

That ain't true. It's not.

*OTT unlocks SALLIE's cuffs.*

SALLIE

You letting me go?

OTT

Hardly. Taking you to jail.

*OTT cuffs SALLIE's wrists.*

SALLIE

But I gave you the name.

OTT

And you confessed to a crime, for which you'll be punished.

*OTT pulls SALLIE to her feet.*

LUTHER

You lied! You said if she talked, she could stay here.

OTT

She's coming with me instead. Orders of the governor.

LUTHER

But she too sick. Leave here, she'll die. You said so yourself.

OTT

I may have overstated the severity of her condition. She's strong enough to leave.

LUTHER

*(Lunging against his cuffs.)*

You bastard!

OTT

Save your curses for when you get the bill for everything they did to save Sallie's life.

LUTHER

You said someone was paying for all of this.

OTT

Was paying. Now that I have Sallie's "dying declaration," there's no need to waste any more of the benefactor's money.

LUTHER

Goddamn you!

*OTT leads SALLIE to the door.*

OTT

I'll send Sanders in to return your sword and let you go, but watch your mouth, Luther. Sanders won't take no sass from a colored boy.

*LUTHER and SALLIE exit. LUTHER fumes as lights go down on the hospital room.*

ACT II, SCENE 4

*Lights up on BLAKE's office. ADA stands looking out the window. She turns as BLAKE enters wearing a different hat, which he removes when he greets her.*

GOV. BLAKE

Miss Sams, welcome! So your bogus polls have Lincoln and the Republicans all trussed up with indecision.

ADA

For the moment. While Lincoln's advisers bandy talk of policy, you understand that rage, fear, and righteousness can turn more heads than tariffs and turnpikes.

GOV. BLAKE

And by the time they figure out what platform to run on, I'll be across the finish line. I must declare, you are a political mastermind.

ADA

I knew you'd come to such an obvious conclusion.

GOV. BLAKE

I am a man who admits his mistakes, few that I have.

*LUTHER, still in uniform, enters in a rush, unsheathing his saber and holding it at his side.*

LUTHER

Blake, you son of a bitch!

*BLAKE looks up and calmly reaches for his hat, seating it firmly on his head before answering. ADA moves behind his desk for protection.*

GOV. BLAKE

Why, Captain Johnstone, what a pleasant interruption.

LUTHER

I ought to run you through, you bastard!

GOV. BLAKE

Wouldn't that would be a breach of your commission? Me--an unarmed man and a government official, to boot.

*LUTHER advances warily, saber at the ready.*

LUTHER

You ain't worthy of being called a man.

GOV. BLAKE

Look, I know why you're here. Your wife has broken the law and must answer for it.

LUTHER

You had her arrested because of me.

GOV. BLAKE

The orders came from the Attorney General, whose office is constitutionally protected from political influence. That's how it works.

LUTHER

I know that lie. It won't save you.

GOV. BLAKE

This whole affair is out of my hands.

LUTHER

I told your police Sallie done sinned, but she don't deserve jail for it.

GOV. BLAKE

The law says otherwise.

LUTHER

Your law.

ADA

No, Captain, the people's law. They demanded it and Governor Blake is their servant.

LUTHER

I know that lie, too!

GOV. BLAKE

Captain, I am not your enemy. We had our differences in the past, but I think we've come to an accommodation. You have your job as the president has decreed, and I have my responsibility to the people of this state.

LUTHER

Keep lying to me and you'll be lying in your grave. You went through Sallie to get back at me.

ADA

It was a coincidence, Captain. When the governor heard that your wife was in custody and bleeding to death, he sent word to the hospital to care for her at his expense.

GOV. BLAKE

Considering your wife's injury, I believe my intervention saved her life. I was trying to make amends to you--for our misunderstanding.

LUTHER

You don't give a damn about Sallie. You needed to get the name of who done the abortion. You stopped paying when you got it. You want to make amends, let Sallie go.

*BLAKE carefully removes his hat.*

GOV. BLAKE

I will see to it, I swear.

*LUTHER pauses, evaluating this statement and gesture. Then he slowly sheathes his saber.*

LUTHER

I won't take your word. Until Sallie is free, you won't leave this building without a detail of my men.

GOV. BLAKE

I'm sure we can work something out.

LUTHER

After I get Sallie home.

*Glaring at BLAKE, LUTHER exits.*

GOV. BLAKE

Fucking nigger!

*BLAKE crams his hat back on his head, rushes to the door, and...*

GOV. BLAKE (CONT'D)

Isom! Goddamn it, Isom, get in here!

*(Turning back to ADA.)*

That's it for Captain Johnstone, I guarantee.

*(Turning to the door again.)*

Isom!

*(Stalking back into the room.)*

Jesus, held hostage by a nigger. This can't get out. It'll ruin me.

ADA

Are you kidding? Governor, this whole series of events--the law, the arrest, this brutal attack. It just keeps getting better and better for you.

GOV. BLAKE

How you figure?

ADA

Don't you see?

*(As if quoting headlines.)*

"Governor fights off cutthroat." "Governor stares down would-be assassin." "Governor defends constitution against sword-wielding anarchist."

GOV. BLAKE

You're amazing.

ADA

I'm just getting started. We'll want to make sure people connect this to the Hidden Child Defense Act. It's further evidence of your belief--your courageous belief--in the right to life of those unborn.

GOV. BLAKE

A goddamn Titan of Bravery. I like that.

ADA

I'll bet that straw votes will show a new burst of support for your intrepid stand within days.

GOV. BLAKE

You're the miller's beautiful daughter, spinning straw into gold.

*ISOM appears in the doorway.*

ISOM

Yessir. You called.

GOV. BLAKE

Who let that fucking nigger captain in here?

ISOM

I...I thought he was allowed--

GOV. BLAKE

--Don't look at me like that!

*BLAKE rushes ISOM and forces him to his knees.*

GOV. BLAKE (CONT'D)

Don't even look at me at all, goddamn you!

ADA

Governor, this isn't necessary--

GOV. BLAKE

Oh, yes, it is. By God, it's more necessary than ever.

ADA

Please. Let him up.

*ADA tugs gently on BLAKE's sleeve. BLAKE slowly relinquishes his grip.*

ADA

Get up, Isom.

*ISOM rises, eyes averted.*

GOV. BLAKE

Goddamn nigger. Don't you ever look at me again.

*(Making a show of composing himself.)*

Now, get me the Attorney General. I want that nigger captain arrested.

ISOM  
Nossir.

GOV. BLAKE  
What?

ISOM  
(*Eye to eye, louder.*)  
You going to have to fetch the Attorney General yourself.

GOV. BLAKE  
What'd you think you're doing?

ISOM  
Telling you, one free man to another, that your money don't bind me. I got the right to choose my master, as long as he deserve it. You don't, so I be leaving.

GOV. BLAKE  
God damn you!

*BLAKE raises his hand to strike the unflinching ISOM, but ADA stops him.*

ADA  
Isom, go.

*ISOM exits.*

GOV. BLAKE  
I'll have him arrested too, and beaten.

ADA  
No, you won't, Governor. Let him go. There's no advantage in it. Your political future is worth more than one uppity negro.

GOV. BLAKE  
I swear, the future won't have no uppity negroes at all.

ADA  
Are you ready to make that happen?

GOV. BLAKE  
I been ready all my life.

ADA  
Then I suggest confronting your foremost antagonist head on.

GOV. BLAKE  
Who--Lincoln? How?



ADA

I'll claim that the public demand a debate between the two most prominent federal and state figures. I'll reinforce his prejudices of you and goad him into a rash attack that will play to your strengths. Think you can handle him in a verbal wrestling match?

GOV. BLAKE

Can a scarecrow ride a bull, Missy? I'll toss him like straw.

*Lights down on BLAKE and ADA.*

ACT II, SCENE 5

*Lights up on SALLIE's jail cell.  
She sits up when REV. BARNES  
enters.*

REV. BARNES

Don't be alarmed. I'm a friend.

SALLIE

I don't know you.

REV. BARNES

Reverend Ezekiel Barnes of the Free African Diasporic Church.

*BARNES extends his hand through  
the bars, but Sallie is unmoved.*

SALLIE

What you want?

REV. BARNES

A few words, that's all.

SALLIE

Unless they about my family or getting me out of here, I ain't interested.

REV. BARNES

You're bitter and discouraged. I understand.

SALLIE

That's good. I feel better now I know what's ailing me. Who sent you?

REV. BARNES

A friend of your husband's.

SALLIE

Where Luther at?

REV. BARNES

In another jail, I'm sorry to say.

SALLIE

What for?

REV. BARNES

Defending you. Not wisely, I'm afraid. He threatened Governor Shelby Blake.

SALLIE

Oh...no...

REV. BARNES

Listen, Sallie, you must have faith--

SALLIE

--Why? Why must I have faith, Reverend? The reason I went to that Mrs. Percy was because faith failed me.

REV. BARNES

But a time of greatest despair is exactly when we must draw upon the only strength that can never be taken away, the belief in a God who will not desert us. I'm sorry that your private tragedy has become a public calamity. But don't let that hide the fact that God's peace is always within reach. You can always be forgiven.

SALLIE

I'd rather be given than forgiven. Given the health to have another child. Given a merciful God. Given a different skin so I wouldn't be in this place.

REV. BARNES

No one is without torment. We are all encaged by sin.

SALLIE

Only some of us is inside the cage and some out...Reverend, I don't mean no disrespect, but your being black is the only way we the same.

REV. BARNES

Of course, I don't know what it was like to be in your position. But I came to let you know that you are not alone in your time of need.

SALLIE

Now that's a comfort. My husband hates me and I ain't going to see my children for years, but you coming to damn my soul makes up for that.

REV. BARNES

What makes you think I'm damning you?

SALLIE

I never heard a preacher speak but it weren't about damnation.

REV. BARNES

Sallie, I am not God's district attorney.

SALLIE

You have no idea how I came to choose one unhappiness over another. I'm only sorry for being locked up. The best I can say is that I feel guilty about not feeling guilty.

*SALLIE can't look at him.*

SALLIE (CONT'D)

I wonder where she at.

REV. BARNES

Who?

SALLIE

That one...who woulda been my daughter.

REV. BARNES

What do you think?

SALLIE

Maybe...maybe she be born to somebody else instead. Somebody who can care for her.

REV. BARNES

I don't know...

SALLIE

She could still have a life then. She deserves that--it weren't her fault. Surely God will give her another chance.

REV. BARNES

That's a pretty thought.

SALLIE

I ain't saying that just for myself.

REV. BARNES

Sallie, I believe that an all-knowing Divinity comprehends the nature of the impossible dilemma you faced. When you acted to survive, you did so in the belief that your living children came first. Whether that absolves you, time will tell.

SALLIE

Meantime I got living reasons to do good.

REV. BARNES

Let that be our starting point then, when we resume our conversation.

*BARNES prepares to leave.*

SALLIE  
Will you look in on my little ones? They be at my neighbors'.

REV. BARNES  
Of course. Is there something you'd like me to tell them?

SALLIE  
Tell them they my treasures.

REV. BARNES  
You can be sure I will.

SALLIE  
And Reverend.

REV. BARNES  
Yes?

SALLIE  
You want to pray for me, go ahead.

REV. BARNES  
Then you do have faith.

SALLIE  
No, I just heard that prayers also bring good luck to people who don't believe in them.

REV. BARNES  
There's your merciful God, Sallie.

*BARNES exits. Lights down on SALLIE.*

ACT II, SCENE 6

*Lights up on stage with chairs.  
LINCOLN, ROBERT, and NOAH enter.*

NOAH  
I still don't think this is a good idea.

LINCOLN  
Explaining myself to the people? It's the president's number one responsibility, no matter how painful to speaker and listener both.

NOAH  
But sharing the stage with a firebrand and unrepentant rebel?

LINCOLN

I might not like Blake or what he stands for, but his popularity is reason enough to address him head on.

NOAH

His popularity is exactly why you shouldn't stand next to him. He's wrapped in impregnable celebrity.

LINCOLN

Are you saying that I have no counter appeal, Noah? I thought I was paying you a toady's wage.

ROBERT

Noah's saying, be careful--Blake's manipulative.

LINCOLN

The words of a demagogue are like flatulence, expressing little nuance but capable of moving a crowd to action.

*ADA enters, wearing a plain dress, paper in hand.*

NOAH

Do not disdain him, sir. He can be dangerous.

LINCOLN

Miss Sams, are you here to castigate me as well?

NOAH

I just wish you'd taken our advice to prepare yourself.

LINCOLN

I rehearse speeches in my head, which I have filled with rocks, in the manner of Demosthenes, to improve my thinking.

ROBERT

Perhaps you have room for some straw poll intelligence.

LINCOLN

Mrs. Lincoln, who is like a Hindu goddess, would agree that one can't be over-armed when heading into battle. Yes, let's hear from Miss Sams.

ADA

*(Consulting notes.)*

The epithet most commonly associated with Governor Blake is "blowhard."

NOAH

Once he starts pontificating, Blake's impossible to stop. Interrupt him, if necessary. Don't let him go on.

LINCOLN

I'll throw him off the topic like a bronco with a burr in his bunghole.

ADA

The people I talked to are equally distrustful of Mr. Rexroth.

NOAH

Lucius is moderator in name only. He's cast his lot with Blake and will do anything to advance him. Don't let the two of them unite against you.

LINCOLN

I'll be like a tourniquet betwixt Eng and Chang.

ADA

And finally: The subject of abortion is becoming an issue of widening import with voters.

ROBERT

Blake is riding the matter hard, but there's no way for you to benefit from it. Taking a position for or against him will only strengthen his image as a baby-saving hero. Another reason to push the conversation to economic investment.

*LUCIUS and BLAKE enter opposite.*

LINCOLN

Look, my unconquerable adversary and his archangel have arrived.

*LINCOLN goes to meet them and they exchange handshakes. BLAKE and ADA exchange a private look.*

NOAH

Poor saphead. He thinks his thoughtful, finely tuned arguments will win the day. As if people cared about his brand of poppycock.

*ADA, and NOAH exit. LINCOLN and BLAKE step behind their respective lecterns. LUCIUS stands in front of the chair to address the audience. To the side, a secondary light comes up on a plain wooden table.*

LUCIUS

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. This is Lucius Rexroth, welcoming you tonight to the first of what I hope will be a series of interviews leading us to the Great Decision of '68-- who shall restore our country to peace and happiness?

(MORE)

## LUCIUS (CONT'D)

Tonight's confrontation features, of course, the outgoing incumbent president, Republican Abraham Lincoln, who took the nation through the greatest upheaval since its founding roughly fourscore and ten years ago. Two-thirds of a million lives were lost in the Great Conflagration, and untold suffering was afflicted on us all...

Representing the Democratic point of view, is Governor Shelby Blake. Governor Blake has led his state's rise from the ashes of war to a rebuilt sense of purpose and prosperity. The Governor is a veteran of the recent conflict, who lost his eldest child in battle. He is the creator of the popular new Hidden Child Defense Act...Ladies and gentlemen, join me in greeting our guests.

*LUCIUS exhorts the audience to applaud, then sits.*

## LUCIUS (CONT'D)

The rules of this evening's discussion are simple: I shall bring questions to the floor and impartially regulate the ensuing discussion to ensure relevancy and decorum.

## GOV. BLAKE

If you succeed in that, it will be a watershed moment in politics.

## LINCOLN

For which the water shed shall be tears of joy.

*Lights dim on LINCOLN, LUCIUS, and BLAKE, as they mime a spirited conversation. Lights up on ROBERT and TAD at the edge of the stage.*

## TAD

I don't understand why Father wants this quarrel. He's not going to change Governor Blake's mind about anything.

## ROBERT

That's not the point. The point is to mesmerize listeners through the sheer brilliance of his harangue.

## TAD

Many people like Father's speeches. The papers print them.

## ROBERT

Newspapers deal in words and profit most when wholesalers like our father provide them for free.

## TAD

I don't ever see your words in print, so maybe father's are not so much free as priceless.

ROBERT

I ply my words for private consumption. That's the difference between businessmen and politicians, which is to say, the difference between those who build and those who merely blither.

TAD

You sound like you believe the papers would do better to report what you say. Is a law school education so fancy?

ROBERT

I'm as naturally eloquent as you are impudent. Now hush.

*Lights down on ROBERT, who playfully pushes TAD offstage. Lights up on LINCOLN, LUCIUS, and BLAKE. Throughout the following, LINCOLN remains composed, while BLAKE becomes increasingly agitated.*

LUCIUS

...Mr. Lincoln, why are you blocking the readmission of Governor Blake's state into the Union?

LINCOLN

Congress has set the requirements.

LUCIUS

And we have met them. We have written and approved a new state constitution. We have ratified the constitutional amendment outlawing unpaid labor. What more do you want?

LINCOLN

I believe Congress is considering further mandates.

GOV. BLAKE

Look, Mr. President, the South has been more than willing to cooperate with Reconstruction. We don't deny responsibility for the strife of the past seven years, and we will certainly do what is necessary to heal the wounds of our bitter discord. We have accepted blacks into our society. We will repay our debts. We will abide by the dictates of Congress as they apply. But where will it end? Each time we fulfill current federal edicts, the Congress sets new ones. You claim that you fought to preserve the Union, yet it seems as though you would erect barriers to shut us out forever.

LINCOLN

That is not my intent. I believe that just a hen lays more eggs inside a sheltering coop than out, a state becomes a more productive society within the protective arms of a Union. Unfortunately, some Congressmen's notion of federalism has run afoul of their ignorance of poultry.



LUCIUS

Governor, make your case for readmission. Why is your state worthy?

GOV. BLAKE

Well, Lucius, not only have we taken the steps asked of us so far with regard to the negro race, we have extended the boundaries of freedom in a significant new direction.

LUCIUS

You're referring to the Hidden Child Defense Act.

GOV. BLAKE

Certainly. Several states outlaw abortion. We are the only one to punish all who deny the fetus's inviolable claim to life.

LUCIUS

How about that, Mr. President? You've made a name for yourself by proclaiming the humanity of the blacks. Wouldn't Governor Blake's state statute serve as a ideal model for a national law establishing the human rights of the pre-emergent child?

LINCOLN

I think we have our hands full with the challenge of securing the rights of the living.

GOV. BLAKE

But the unborn are living human beings. The Bible declares it.

LINCOLN

They are potential human beings, unlike the women who bear them and have their reasons for abortion. How can the needs of a potential individual take precedence over the needs of someone who exists in the here and now?

GOV. BLAKE

But which is autonomous and which is without power? You would turn your back on the helpless in favor of the irresponsible.

LINCOLN

A pregnant woman can be subject to the pressure of circumstances beyond her control.

*RANDALL enters to the side and sits, setting down his bible. He listens, drinking from a flask.*

GOV. BLAKE

An unborn child is an innocent! Surely you must acknowledge that.

LINCOLN

I know innocents. I sent many to their deaths during the war. Who were more innocent than the Ohio farm boy marching off to battle, thinking of it as a kind of squirrel hunt until he came face to face with the son of an Alabama blacksmith who had previously done violence only to a glowing horseshoe?

LUCIUS

That's not the same. A soldier has a duty to serve.

LINCOLN

A soldier is not merely a nail to the hammer of government policy. A soldier is a citizen who can affect that policy.

LUCIUS

All the more reason to stand up for the fetus who has no other advocate. What would those aborted babes say about their untimely eviction from the world?

LINCOLN

Whatever, I doubt we could understand it. What could a fetus know of a thwarted life? Alien sensation, unknown arts, unexperienced emotion? Again, how can this unrealized potential creature trump the actual concerns of a troubled adult female?

GOV. BLAKE

But the violence of abortion--how can you countenance that? It is gruesome!

LINCOLN

Oh, don't speak to me of gruesomeness. I have seen men take up arms and as a result legs, jawbones, and pieces of skull with brain matter still attached. I have heard grown men weeping for the *coup de grâce* as you might beg for air under a bell jar. No, I have seen the most appalling gruesomeness, dipped my fingers in its blood. There is no abortion so gruesome as war.

LUCIUS

Nor, apparently, is there a man as heartless as a politician with no direct stake in the matter.

GOV. BLAKE

Well, that's not entirely true.

LUCIUS

*(Feigned ignorance.)*

Pray, what do you mean?

GOV. BLAKE

Less than a month after I signed the Hidden Child Defense Act into law, a woman named Sallie Johnstone purchased an abortion.

(MORE)

GOV. BLAKE (CONT'D)

The abortionist, who operates under the pseudonym Mrs. Percy, remains at large, but the state police have taken Mrs. Johnstone into custody.

*RANDALL starts at this news.*

LINCOLN

Governor Blake knows that Sallie is the wife of Luther Johnstone, a captain in the Army of the Potomac and my former personal aide.

GOV. BLAKE

Who, after being reassigned to my state, forced his way into my office and threatened me at sword point!

LUCIUS

Mr. President, an independent observer might conclude that your lack of enthusiasm for the Hidden Child Defense Act is based on your lack of enthusiasm for the prosecution of Captain and Mrs. Johnstone.

LINCOLN

Before we reach that conclusion, let me disclose that earlier this year I ordered Captain Johnstone to monitor Governor Blake's administration of the Civil Rights Act. That same independent observer might suspect that political retaliation is the motive behind this abortion arrest.

GOV. BLAKE

See here, Lincoln, how can you presume to your office when you are obviously bereft of the strength of character that leadership requires? You promised malice toward none, and yet you persecute your political opposition. You promised charity for all, and yet the only ones who profit from your Reconstruction policies are the Northern elites who wish to rob the South of the economic growth that reunification would bring. Now you tell us that a babe in the womb is worthless if its mother wishes it so. Have you no morals?

LUCIUS

What say you, Mr. President?

LINCOLN

Let's assume there is a God--

GOV. BLAKE

--assume?! Look around you at this magnificent world. What more evidence of the Divine do you want?

LINCOLN

A logical fallacy. You say the world could not exist unless there were a greater power to create it, therefore there is a God--that is begging the question.

GOV. BLAKE

To assert that what is self-evident needs proof--oh, you are too perverse.

LUCIUS

Now, Governor, let's hear him out. He is a man venturing out onto spring ice with a lullaby instead of a good, stout rope.

LINCOLN

I imagine that a Supreme Being would be moved to see how his precious toys perform of their own free will. "Here you are," He might say, "These are the world's cruel realities. Show Me what you will do about them." How else could He test to see who was worthy of eternal life?

GOV. BLAKE

How indeed!

LINCOLN

In such a Creation, you would assume that the highest purpose of man were to glorify God by maximizing good and minimizing evil. But how easy is it to tell good and evil apart?

GOV. BLAKE

Don't be a fool. We have His Commandments.

LINCOLN

One of which--"Thou shalt not kill"--we Americans violated several hundred thousand times in the last decade alone, and each time in justifiable self-defense. God or no--divine guidance or not--we are on our own to interpret moral differences. Individuals are responsible for their own personal ethics, but self-government is the tool that free people use to find their collective way as a society.

LUCIUS

Come, Lincoln, what is your point?

GOV. BLAKE

Apparently that he believes he is God's emissary. That his presence will make the Christian Trinity a Quaternity. What arrogance!

LINCOLN

Quite the contrary. I am merely a man whom circumstances have placed at the historical point where a mass of conflicting interests collide. I'm reminded of a story--

GOV. BLAKE

--Oh, Christ. Another one of Lincoln's interminable tales.

LINCOLN

It is only interminable if you interrupt.

LUCIUS

Then make it snappy.

LINCOLN

Once there were three steamboat captains running a particularly hazardous stretch of the Mississippi. The first, a brash man convinced of his infallible authority, headed into the main current and pushed his boilers to the point of explosion, which destroyed his boat and its contents entirely.

The second captain, a religious man convinced of his own piety, steered a straight course and trusted to God to guide him through. His boat hit a hidden snag, which disemboweled it and sent all to the river bottom.

The third captain, knowing that the river was an ever-changing adversary, consulted with local rivermen and his pilot, who advised him on the latest obstacles. Using this intelligence, he carefully maneuvered his boat successfully through to port. Many of those he delivered to safety considered his skill and wisdom a manifestation of divine favor.

Gentlemen, partly due to sound advice and partly the result of luck, I have been for the past seven years in a position to navigate through the shoals and snags of politics and safely deliver my passengers, crew, and cargo. Through it all, I've hoped that I was on God's side.

LUCIUS

Forget riverboats. We're talking about babies. Where does your supposed insight lead you on the question of abortion?

LINCOLN

To avoid a brash decree, to eschew a pious abdication of responsibility, and to steer a course that reflects the combined wisdom of all segments of society, knowing that some will be disappointed. That is, I believe, what the Almighty intends, and I'm determined to call upon all earthly evidence to reach a conclusion that advances civilization's need to provide for more people today than it did yesterday.

GOV. BLAKE

That's a fine ambition, Lincoln. But I think you'll find that your God-fearing constituents have little patience for your waffling equivocation.

LUCIUS

And there you have it, folks. It's up to you to decide. Two views of righteousness--one founded on God's will, the other on man's expediency. Which will win your blessing? Gentlemen, we have run out of time. Thank you for participating in this event. Good night.

*LUCIUS brings LINCOLN and BLAKE together to shake hands, which they do with dignity and contempt, respectively. They exit to opposite sides, as LUCIUS takes center stage.*

LUCIUS

Now I'd like to take a few moments to leave you with some thoughts about the conflict of morality you've just witnessed. We've heard from politicians on both sides of the abortion issue--for and against, wrong versus right. Regardless of how you personally feel about the taking of an blameless unborn human life, you must admit where the Almighty stands. As Psalm 139 says:

*(Quoting piously.)*

"O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me...For thou hast covered me in my mother's womb...Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee?...I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies. Search me, O God, and know my heart...lead me in the way everlasting."

*(End quote.)*

That way is clear. Let's see who has the courage to follow. This is Lucius Rexroth, speaking to God's new Chosen People in the land He is remaking in rectitude, the Rewrought States of America.

*Lights out on LUCIUS. RANDALL pulls on his flask before getting laboriously to his feet. Lights out on RANDALL.*

ACT II, SCENE 7

*Lights up on LINCOLN, NOAH, and ADA in the president's office, the president at his desk. ADA, once again in a drab dress, hands him a report.*

ADA

Here are the results of my latest straw polls, Mr. President.

LINCOLN

You may summarize them, Miss Sams.

ADA

It's the border states.

LINCOLN

Please be more precise. After readmitting Governor Blake's state to the Union last month, our borders look like Mrs. Costa's linguine.

ADA

The states between Kansas and Maryland that voted for you in '64. People in every one of the five rate someone else more highly than you in terms of leadership.

LINCOLN

Oh? And who might that be?

ADA

Shelby Blake. These past few weeks his name has gained prominence everywhere I've asked.

LINCOLN

Just as the Mississippi delta gains ground by the accumulation of mud, trash, and the contents of my cousin's bowels.

NOAH

The more Governor Blake has traveled to speak, the more approval he's received from the public. You don't think that his state's readmission was the capper for him, do you?

ADA

People seem quite taken with him, Mr. President.

LINCOLN

Isn't it interesting how Governor Blake's fortunes began to improve about the time you arrived here, Miss Sams.

NOAH

Don't blame her. You have disregarded a substantial amount of my advice. If you hadn't disagreed with me so much--about your shabby appearance, your reckless extemporaneity, your appalling posture--you wouldn't have to worry about the border states. Or the readmitted states, for that matter.

LINCOLN

Another thing we seem to disagree about, Miss Sams, is deceit.

ADA

Mr. President, you might not like my straw reports, but--

LINCOLN

--The other day I heard from a man who had made your acquaintance--Luther Johnstone. Do you recognize the name?

ADA

...I don't recall...

LINCOLN

In Shelby Blake's office, waving a sword about and threatening the governor--I'd think an introduction like that would stick in your memory.

ADA

...Oh, yes...Him.

LINCOLN

Don't get me wrong, Miss Sams, I do admire your business sense, maximizing your profit by selling munitions to combatants on both sides. But I can't condone tactics that play me for a fool. Do you have anything you'd like to say before I dismiss you?

*Exposed, ADA drops her pretense of subservience.*

ADA

The war made you, Mr. Lincoln, even as it unmade the rest of us. My brother died of a federal bullet on the battlefields of Manhattan. He was an innocent victim of the draft riots, that cataclysmic series of events whose passions you unleashed but did not control. Your continued failure to do so shows that you are obsolete. You take words at face value, rather than as tools to manipulate people's impulses. Despite the resounding clamor of raw public feeling, you still think you can knit this nation back together with talk. But words by themselves can no longer direct events. The old politician who relies on reason will yield to the new politician who can drive men's emotions like cattle. You're not that modern kind of man. In fact, you will be the first to succumb to him.

LINCOLN

Goodbye, Miss Sams. Give my regards to the governor.

*ADA pauses at the door.*

ADA

Cheer up, Noah. Whether Ozymandias stands or falls, you and I will find a growing market for our services.

*ADA exits.*

LINCOLN

And you, Mr. Wade, what do you have to say for yourself?

NOAH

What's the harm, sir, if the information she gave us was sound?

LINCOLN

Does it occur to you that it isn't what she gave us as what she took from us that mattered?

NOAH

Of course, Mr. President, I understand.

*(Turns to go.)*

I'll be packed and gone by the end of the day.



LINCOLN

Why? I'm not discharging you.

NOAH

No?

LINCOLN

I knew a man back in Illinois who took his drinking water from a stream running through his property. He reached it by way of a parlous, rocky path that was the favorite sunning spot of a timber rattler eight feet long. I asked him why he didn't pull out the rocks and replace them with a sturdy wooden stair, but he said he was too lazy. Then I asked why he didn't at least kill the rattler so as to make the trip safer. Well, he says to me, I would, except I depend on that ol' snake in the grass to remind me to watch my step.

NOAH

I get your point, Mr. President.

*NOAH turns to exit, stopping when he hears LINCOLN.*

LINCOLN

Oh, and by the way, Noah--now that I know your game, there's no need to be so obsequious.

*NOAH nods. As he exits, SEN. HARKNESS and REV. BARNES enter.*

LINCOLN

Zeb. Reverend Barnes. You are like whiskey and water to a battle-weary general. Can I offer you the same?

REV. BARNES

I'll take the latter only, Mr. President.

*LINCOLN pours a glass of each for the pair, and delivers them to the seated BARNES and the standing HARKNESS.*

LINCOLN

Then I'll double the former for our secular friend. Please make yourselves comfortable.

*(As he hands Barnes his glass.)*

And Reverend, please accept my gratitude for your recent visits to the Johnstones on my behalf.

*BARNES nods.*

SEN. HARKNESS

Mr. President, thank you for seeing us.

LINCOLN

Any time, Zeb, you know that. What's on your mind?

SEN. HARKNESS

You, damn your eyes. Are you just going to sit here while Blake's supporters blow their noses on your good name?

LINCOLN

If it makes them less snotty, why not?

SEN. HARKNESS

The '68 campaign, such as it is, is going all to hell, Abe, and you're the only man can stop it.

LINCOLN

Would it help if I say I ain't running?

SEN. HARKNESS

Well, if you won't fight for your legacy, at least fight for the party. You can still influence the platform to make it easier for your Republican successor.

LINCOLN

Good Lord! Do you aspire to this office, Zebulon? I love you too much to wish on you the kind of cruel and unusual punishment that is the presidency of the United States, but if that's what you desire, I'll endorse you.

SEN. HARKNESS

No, I'm too old.

REV. BARNES

*(Chuckling.)*

Not too smart--just too old.

SEN. HARKNESS

Every day is an ordeal, what with the sheer number of people lining up outside my office. They all want something--the veterans their old jobs, the war widows their pension checks, the slaveholders their compensation, the blacks their teachers, the railway men their rights of way. And if all that's not enough, the women are yelling that as long as we're handing out ballots to black men, why don't we print some for them too?

LINCOLN

Ah, the Petitioners Throng--I know them, Zeb. They've been at the door since my first nomination. Trouble is, with all the states, I get 28 beggars for every one of yours.

SEN. HARKNESS

Then let's not make it worse for the next man, Abe. You've got do something about Blake, now, before he builds an insurmountable advantage with his anti-abortion crusade.

REV. BARNES

Perhaps Blake is in the right on that issue. You know, there are good reasons to oppose abortion, starting with Jesus's words: "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God." That's a clear indication of His embrace of the innocent.

LINCOLN

Didn't the Lord also say: "Behold, I will punish them: the young men shall die by the sword; their sons and their daughters shall die by famine." That's some embrace.

REV. BARNES

Well, now you've hit on a major peculiarity of the Good Book: It's the result of many scribes over many years. And although God inspired those various accounts, the fallible humans who put pen to papyrus surely introduced some inconsistencies and contradictions.

LINCOLN

So how do we know what guidance to take from it? It seems that all manner of blackguards can choose what parts of the Bible suit them, like lowlifes picking through a boardinghouse casserole.

REV. BARNES

And that is the other peculiarity, Mr. President--although the source of the Bible's wisdom is divine, its interpretation and application are human. That, I think, was the genius of its garbled text, challenging humanity to prove themselves by what they derive from it.

LINCOLN

Remember I once told you, Reverend, that I based my religion on my conscience.

REV. BARNES

You said when you do bad, you feel bad.

LINCOLN

Now I've learned that it's possible to feel bad when doing good and vice versa.

REV. BARNES

I know you and trust you.

LINCOLN

You may be mistaken. I feel like Evil and Virtue have both approached my sentry post, and I've forgot the password.

REV. BARNES

Still, I trust you, sir. You're not a praying man, but you sift through other people's prayers looking for a way out of the darkness.

SEN. HARKNESS

But that's not Blake. He does nothing without a political calculation, including this abortion thing.

LINCOLN

Aye, Blake is like a con man who pulls a rabbit from his hat, gulling his audience while confederates pick their pockets.

SEN. HARKNESS

Which is why we need your help defeating him.

REV. BARNES

The Senator believes that the nation is at a crossroads and Shelby Blake has fiddled with the signpost. I tend to agree.

LINCOLN

How would you undercut him?

SEN. HARKNESS

By announcing your support for making his Hidden Child Defense Act the law of the entire Union.

LINCOLN

Wouldn't that reinforce his position by acknowledging its moral superiority?

SEN. HARKNESS

Not at all. You'd be forcing him to share it. The reason Blake is gaining such a following is that he's the sole claimant to the high ground of righteousness on this subject. Agree with him and you nullify the exclusivity that gives him power.

LINCOLN

Something tells me that there's good reason to reach some other accommodation with abortion than complete prohibition.

SEN. HARKNESS

And what might that be? After all, we're talking about little babies here.

LINCOLN

But they're not the only ones with claims on our mercy. There's women like Sallie Johnstone, the wife of my former aide, and her husband, Luther. Not to mention the midwife, Percy. Don't we have to weigh their entitlements too?

REV. BARNES

It may surprise you to hear me say this, but I agree that the morality of abortion is not as clear-cut as either side says.

SEN. HARKNESS

Bah! This is why I drink. You are too fond of conundrums.

*HARKNESS rises to refill his glass. LINCOLN idly picks up a bar magnet from his desk.*

LINCOLN

This magnet of Tad's. If you severed it, you wouldn't separate the north half from the south. Each piece would generate its opposite and you'd end up with twice the antagonizing forces you started with. Whichever side of abortion I come down on, my stand will immediately generate vehement opposition.

REV. BARNES

That's the nut. The common man can walk away from such unresolvable problems. A president don't have that amenity.

LINCOLN

Nor does your Bible save me. The Constitution is my Scripture.

REV. BARNES

And in a sense, the Constitution poses the same problem as Scripture does--what is its true meaning? I don't have the answer. But maybe ambiguity is genius. We've amended the Constitution many times, trying to define how we want it to have influence over our laws and over our lives. Maybe that was the founders' intent--after all, how can you have a government of the people unless they keep their hands in it.

SEN. HARKNESS

All I can say is: If you're going to argue for killing a helpless unborn baby, Abe, you better have a damn good justification for it! I for one wouldn't relish the task of defending an abortionist's work against the popular mind.

LINCOLN

And that is the fundamental disadvantage of this office. The popular mind is mule-ish in its fickleness, coming out as strong for gee as for haw. I'm glad to hear that you have no presidential ambitions, Zeb, because you'd make a lousy mule driver.

*Lights down on LINCOLN, HARKNESS, and BARNES.*

ACT II, SCENE 8

*Lights up on BLAKE standing behind a podium. ADA, formally dressed, is among the white DEMOCRATIC DIGNITARIES behind him. As he speaks, ADA leads the applause.*

GOV. BLAKE

My fellow Democrats, I stand before you, a man humbled in the extreme, to announce that I am placing myself in contention for the office of President of the United States. One year ago I was an unknown governor of an exiled state. Now we have been reabsorbed into the Union, and I have agreed to pursue its highest political office, evidence of how one's fortunes can improve in this great land. But the opposite is true as well, and for each lucky one such as I, who sees his prospects rise, there are a score of the less fortunate who must weather a precipitous fall. It is to those people that I dedicate myself, and God willing, my administration. Their need gives us the chance to redefine our national character.

For we are being tested, my friends. The recent war was a horror--I know that, as many of you do, from personal experience. The Lincoln administration has overseen a drastic rise in the needy. The damaged veteran. The abandoned widow and her children. The unemployed and the unemployable. But the ruinous carnage of the war and its aftermath will be nothing compared to the national Armageddon that is sure to come if we neglect the one group whose dire, overlooked vulnerability threatens to drag this entire nation into Godless degradation. I'm referring, of course, to the frailest Americans, the unborn, whose very existence is under attack from those who have betrayed God's loving covenant.

The heartless abortionists and their wicked patrons are a curse upon our land. If we don't stop them, as certain as the rising sun, God's vengeance will rain down upon all our heads--the baby killers with their bloody curettes and catheters as well as those who employed their services and who defended them.

I pledge to you that I will accept the sacred mission of heading off this moral catastrophe and restoring our damaged nation to God's grace. Because unless we can achieve this goal, we are not worthy of success in any other endeavor. You have my solemn word that I will not waver in this holy charge. And with God's love and your zeal, I will not fail.

*ADA and the DIGNITARIES lead a  
wild and vocal ovation.*

GOV. BLAKE

I will not fail...I will not fail...May God bless us and show us the Way.

*Lights down on BLAKE.*

## ACT II, SCENE 9

*Lights up on street. STREET URCHIN points out MRS. PERCY's door to RANDALL, who gives him a coin. URCHIN exits. After a moment, PERCY enters opposite and hurries to her door, where RANDALL, a pistol hidden in his waistband, intercepts her.*

RANDALL

Mrs. Percy?

MRS. PERCY

Who are you?

RANDALL

You is Mrs. Percy, ain't you?

MRS. PERCY

I don't know her. What do you want?

RANDALL

Let's go inside and I'll tell you.

*RANDALL pushes PERCY through the doorway and into a small room cluttered with a transient's belongings and a cot.*

RANDALL (CONT'D)

Sit.

MRS. PERCY

Look, I don't know your Mrs. Percy and I don't have any money. You're welcome to look. It won't take long. Then you can go.

RANDALL

Sit.

*She does, warily. RANDALL paws through her property.*

MRS. PERCY

...Tell me what this woman looks like. I might know where you can find her.

*RANDALL picks up a cloth satchel and digs through it.*

MRS. PERCY (CONT'D)

...I think I heard the name mentioned at Brook's Tavern on Adler Street the other day. You should try there.

*RANDALL extracts a curette from the satchel and holds it up.*

RANDALL

Lookie here.

MRS. PERCY

I don't know what that is. The bag was here in the room when I checked in. It must belong to--

RANDALL

Mrs. Percy. The abortionist.

MRS. PERCY

...I...I don't do that...If you need someone for that, you should ask at Brook's.

RANDALL

No, I'm at the right place. I need you.

MRS. PERCY

Well, I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask you to leave. My landlady forbids--

*RANDALL pushes her violently back on the cot.*

RANDALL

Stay put. We're going to talk.

MRS. PERCY

Who are you?

RANDALL

Randall Tarr. Company L, Thirty-Fifth Regiment, Massachusetts Volunteers. Wagoner in the war. Currently unemployed.

MRS. PERCY

What do you want?

RANDALL

What do you know of the war, Mrs. Percy?

MRS. PERCY

I told you: That's not my name.

*RANDALL waves the curette in PERCY's face as he paces.*

RANDALL

Mrs. Percy?



MRS. PERCY  
*(Beat, terrified, nodding.)*

Yes.

*RANDALL withdraws the curette,  
 but gestures with it at times.*

RANDALL  
 The war, Mrs. Percy.

MRS. PERCY  
 I lost a brother and an uncle. Knew some others who went off to it, and saw some come back.

RANDALL  
 I came back. Well, most of me did.

*RANDALL flashes his prothesis.*

MRS. PERCY  
 I'm sorry, truly.

RANDALL  
 I accept that you are, Mrs. Percy, and I will credit your account some for that kind sentiment. Now, to proceed with my tale: I came back from the war by way of the Wilderness campaign, where my leg and I parted ways. I was, as I've said, a wagoner, and while that may sound like a comfortable position compared to infantryman, it is no church social. Supply lines are an army's main weakness, and therefore, a target of great importance to the enemy. It was while we was bringing ammunition up to the front that a minié ball shattered my ankle. I was lucky. There was a surgeon on hand, who took advantage of my distracting misery to saw through my leg bone.

*(Beat, looking intently.)*  
 Do you believe that the Lord makes deals?

*PERCY is frozen, too fearful to  
 speak or move.*

RANDALL (CONT'D)  
 I'll allow you to think about it. In the meantime, let me tell you that although it felt like hell to have the doctor sawing away on me, it was later, in the field hospital when the fever set, that I near became a dead man. For 40 days I burned in my own internal wilderness, which put me in a begging mood. And so I implored the Almighty to spare me, and promised Him anything to justify my continued existence...Which is why I'm here. The Lord has shown me the ultimate mercy and I am in His eternal debt.

MRS. PERCY

Let us pray then, and thank the Lord for your salvation.  
There's a church down the street.

RANDALL

See, Mrs. Percy, you do believe in bargaining.

MRS. PERCY

Oh, no. Please--

RANDALL

So let us weigh the evidence, shall we, and see where the balance point is.

MRS. PERCY

You're scaring me, mister.

RANDALL

No more than I was scared, I'm sure. Lying on a Army cot in a field hospital. The stink of my rotting stump and the pain combining to bring me a vision of God's intent. The sicker I got, the clearer I saw my sins, and the plainer appeared my path to resurrection. When the surgeon cut me a second time, to remove my gangrenous stump, and I watched him toss it into a pit like slops to a hog, I learned what my side of the bargain would entail. I was told--God told me--that I must become a soldier in His army, to rid the world of a great evil. And so it was revealed to me. I am ordered to save the unborn by sending abortionists to Judgment Day.

MRS. PERCY

No. Please. I beg you.

RANDALL

Tell me, Mrs. Percy, how many of God's unborn treasures have you murdered?

MRS. PERCY

I am no murderer.

RANDALL

How many?

MRS. PERCY

I...I don't know.

RANDALL

More than the child of Mrs. Johnstone?  
(Pulling her head back by the  
hair to look at her face.)

Tell me!

MRS. PERCY

...Yes.

Dozens?

RANDALL

MRS. PERCY

I forget.

RANDALL

Come now, Mrs. Percy, give me a number.

MRS. PERCY

I don't know, I tell you.

RANDALL

Five?

MRS. PERCY

Yes, five.

RANDALL

Ten?

MRS. PERCY

Or ten. Yes, yes, ten, no more.

RANDALL

*(Releasing her head roughly.)*

So your soul is stained with the blood of ten God-blessed human children...You have ten human murders on the debit side of your God-given soul. And what evidence, pray tell, can you present to counterbalance the evil you have done?

MRS. PERCY

I was just...helping those poor women.

RANDALL

Helping?! How can abetting sin possibly help anyone?

MRS. PERCY

They were in despair.

RANDALL

What despair is so great as to excuse the taking of such innocent life?

MRS. PERCY

Some of the women were sick. Or weakened. Mrs. Johnstone herself would have faced certain death if she hadn't aborted. Other women came to me the victims of the most unspeakable assaults. They would not bring forth a child they couldn't protect from abuse. Nor could they give birth to the offspring forced upon them by their oppressors. And then there was those too poor to feed another mouth.

RANDALL

Money is no excuse for sin!

MRS. PERCY

When there is no money, there's no food and no lodging. Who can bear to watch a child starve?

RANDALL

Don't confuse the issue, Mrs. Percy. I ask myself: How could a woman blessed with motherhood destroy her own child? And how could someone assist that mother's vile rejection of God's gift? How could you, Mrs. Percy, wrench an unborn child prematurely from its hateful mother's womb, and throw it into a waste pit like it was nothing more than a useless leg?

MRS. PERCY

I repent! I will sin no more!

RANDALL

Yes, you're right about that--you will sin no more.

MRS. PERCY

Please!

RANDALL

Almighty Father, I accept the task that You have given me.

MRS. PERCY

God, no!

*PERCY shrinks from him, huddling to protect herself.*

RANDALL

The ten you murdered in the womb were children of God, as sure as if they had known air.

*(Quoting from memory.)*

*Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee...*

You are in league with the false god Moloch, and I cannot allow you to sacrifice to this evil deity even one more unborn child.

*(Quoting.)*

*Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord...Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed, for in the image of God made he man...*

Sinner, I am an agent of God's justice, come to usher you to your reckoning.

*(Quoting.)*

*If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and...if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life...*

*RANDALL quickly pulls the pistol from his waistband and fires point blank at PERCY as the lights go out on the scene.*

ACT II, SCENE 10

*Lights up on LINCOLN and MARY on the White House grounds. She goes to the bench and sits.*

MARY

All right, Mr. Lincoln, what is this "matter of grave import" and how does its existence make today different from any other in the past 10 years?

*LINCOLN paces. After a moment, he leaps into the topic.*

LINCOLN

I have decided to run for another term of office.

MARY

I can't that say I did not expect this announcement. But I must protest: There are others who can take up the task.

LINCOLN

Putting all at risk. I fear that Blake and Rexroth, if given the White House, would defy the Radicals. Together they would rush to confrontation and unravel this delicate re-Union.

MARY

My opinion remains unchanged: You've sacrificed enough. Let someone else take up the nation's burden. You don't have to.

LINCOLN

Mary, there was a man in Springfield--this was before we were married--and one day his neighbor's house caught fire with the neighbor's wife and child inside. The man knew he had two choices: To run for help, or to enter the conflagration alone and attempt to save his neighbor's family. In an instant the man chose the rescue attempt. Acting quickly he was able to lead the woman and child to safety, but the house was lost. When the neighbor returned, he of course thanked the man profusely.

In time the neighbor took steps to rebuild, and was astonished when the man joined him in the task. The neighbor tried to dissuade the man, saying that his valiant act was more than enough of a contribution. But the man said, "Friend, my actions, which had the happy outcome of preserving your loved ones, also caused your home's destruction. Therefore, the ledger is not in balance. No, I do not have to help you reconstruct, but yes, I must.

MARY

...That is all very fine, but I'm not sure I can bear another four-year sentence within these walls.

LINCOLN

Nor I. But I've invested so much in this republic and its future that I cannot stand by and let thieves, hotheads, and charlatans scavenge it.

MARY

Or an overindulgent wife dissuade you.

LINCOLN

I have a duty.

MARY

I'm sick of your duty, which seems to be much harder on me than you.

LINCOLN

You are as much a patriot as I, Molly.

MARY

And as much a fool, apparently...Robert will be pleased.

LINCOLN

I doubt it. Investors are never pleased--enriched maybe, but never sated. Robert will have to learn that the government's ability to force his priorities is limited.

MARY

*(Beat, a deep breath.)*

Mr. Lincoln, I told you before that I am dedicated to you at all cost. Do your duty, and I will survive.

*LINCOLN sits beside her and  
kisses her cheek.*

LINCOLN

Another thing...

MARY

*Naturellement.* With you, there is always another thing.

LINCOLN

Sallie Johnston's conviction was not federal, but it occurred before Blake's state was readmitted. Therefore, I believe I have the authority to pardon her, and I will.

MARY

But she is guilty of abortion! Sentenced to 10 years one of Blake's penitentiaries. How do you rationalize erasing her punishment?

LINCOLN

I've thought about it a great deal, and looked at it more than one way. I find no justification for punishing a woman for refusing to become an unwilling mother.

MARY

Abraham, you would condemn babies to death before they breathe!

LINCOLN

I know the consequences of my reasoning. But ask yourself: Do you want to give the government such power that it can reach inside your body and dictate the use of it? We just fought a great and bloody war to confirm that the government should not use its might to enable bondage.

MARY

We're not talking about slavery, which is lifelong absolute servitude, and which few men still publicly support. We are talking about interfering with God's will that pregnancy proceed to childbirth. We should do everything possible to facilitate that, not prevent it.

LINCOLN

But if the government dictates childbirth, is it not intruding into a citizen's most personal affairs, that is, the use of her organs? Suppose medicine allowed the transfer of a lung or kidney from a healthy donor to someone in need of one of those vitals. Would you allow the law to require you to give up a part of your body against your will? Do you really want to give the government that kind of power?

MARY

You ordered hundreds of thousands of men into service during the war. Tell me that is not the equivalent of dictating the use of their entire bodies.

LINCOLN

The Constitution gives government the right to raise an army for a limited purpose. In '63 Congress reacted to the emergency and gave me the compulsory draft. None of those men was conscripted forever. It was not intended as a permanent, irreversible condition.

MARY

And some deserted, for which the government had them hanged. Is that not the ultimate permanent and irreversible condition?

LINCOLN

They committed a grievous crime in a time of national crisis.

MARY

And what crime has the unborn child committed that it should receive a death penalty?

(MORE)

MARY (CONT'D)

If there is a crime at all, it would seem that the government has more justification to punish the reluctant mother.

LINCOLN

I don't believe the government has cause to make that determination, but I realize that I will have to make my case. And I'm afraid that's reason enough for me to face the people one more time and ask for their approval. If the government is forbidden to abuse a man for the color of his skin, it should not be allowed to abuse a woman for the contents of hers.

MARY

But, Abraham, birth is not abuse!

LINCOLN

It is when it is mandated against a woman's wishes. How can I order a woman to produce a child that was forced upon her? How can I apply the power of government to extend her misery or, like Sallie, to risk her life? That seems to me monstrously inhumane.

MARY

There must be an alternate then. A fetus deserves to live.

LINCOLN

It also deserves to be wanted, as we both wanted each of our sons--that is the dilemma. I expect we will hear many ideas on this matter in coming months, which I will encourage. Ordinarily one looks for the solution that promises the greatest good. But in this case, the job will be to find the option that causes the least wretchedness.

MARY

All the time I've known you, Abraham, I have admired your intellect, which has seen you through tough times and voracious opposition. Now, however, I believe you're venturing into sophistry, and it does not become you.

LINCOLN

Forgive me. Abortion is a difficult question. I am doing my best.

MARY

Then don't hide behind mere words and definitions.

LINCOLN

Whatever a president's position, he must be prepared to defend it before the people and rally their support. I've been advised to make my appeal strictly on emotions, but with an issue as contentious as abortion, that would surely leave us at permanent loggerheads, risking more violence. No, I must present the logic of my proposition irrefutably, and what else do I have to reason with except the language?



MARY

Indeed, you have the word of God.

LINCOLN

And what is God's word on the matter? The assassin who took the life of Sallie's abortionist wrote on the wall with her blood ...*by man shall his blood be shed...* You know that passage as well as I.

MARY

Genesis 9:6.

LINCOLN

And as definitive as that statement appears to be, to apply it on behalf of an unwanted child in the womb is dubious.

MARY

I am comfortable with that interpretation.

LINCOLN

But I don't have the luxury of that comfort. As much as I would like to place the matter entirely on the Almighty's shoulders, I have the responsibility to respect a variety of honest viewpoints, including those I might not choose for myself or for my loved ones.

MARY

It seems to me that when you are doomed to criticism no matter what you decide, you might as well opt for life.

LINCOLN

Which I intend to do. And since there is no position that resolves the competing demands of both woman and fetus, I find myself on the side of the one who is my current constituent.

MARY

That is presumptuous in the extreme. If women could vote, you couldn't do this. They would not let you.

LINCOLN

You can't be sure of that unless you prevented desperate women from voting in favor of those who agreed with you. Whatever the electorate's composition, there would not be unanimous agreement that abortion is an issue that justifies giving the government dictatorial power to prohibit it.

MARY

You didn't have unanimity when you proclaimed the end of negro slavery.

LINCOLN

True, but maybe if whites could have imagined changing places with black slaves, there would've been much greater opposition to that injustice from the beginning.

(MORE)

## LINCOLN (CONT'D)

Likewise, if men were the ones to gestate, I am sure they would see abortion in a new light.

## MARY

Why entertain that fantasy when we can't even persuade men to use a French letter to prevent unwanted pregnancy?

## LINCOLN

You're right, that's why I've concluded it's wrong to treat an involuntarily pregnant woman as if she were a brood mare in my stable. The consequences of that unfortunate state should not fall on women alone. And it is only fair that I present my argument to the jury in the polling booth. I am not empowered to make up God's mind. I can only make up my own and urge the people to follow.

## MARY

I'm sorry that you've made that decision...It will not be an easy road, *mon très cher amour*, but I can see that you are resolute.

## LINCOLN

I'll need your help, Molly. I didn't arrive where I am today on the slavery question without a torturous struggle of mind. I will not be able to pardon women in the states as I pardoned Sallie. And the murder of her midwife will bring us new and uncertain threats to social stability.

## MARY

My fear is that the brutality of warfare, which we have waged over continental geography, will not be any less for being fought over the terrain of women's anatomy.

## LINCOLN

Alas, Blake has forced this issue, and I must deal with it.

## MARY

And I pray that God will not judge you harshly. I know that a great multitude of our fellow citizens will.

## LINCOLN

All the more reason to stand ground, Molly. You desire to preserve my reputation; I desire to salvage it. You cite the country's reunion as my great success, but that is only part of my estate. In presiding over a great bloodletting I also bequeath the unhappy precedent that warfare is a legitimate means of resolving a political impasse. I can't accept that.

## MARY

The obvious evils of civil war should be enough to prevent its recurrence.

LINCOLN

You know there are many other ways that men make war. Women like Sallie Johnstone and her midwife could attest to that.

MARY

Now you're talking about taking on more than the armies of greed, mendacity, and hatred, which war against each other as well. Righteousness is single-minded and therefore a more formidable lobby.

LINCOLN

Which can't be allowed to prevail by circular argument, however well-meaning. Darwin the scientist says that species advance by passing along their most advantageous traits to their offspring. I believe that a society that encourages free and competitive debate similarly improves its ideas and its ideals over time.

MARY

But isn't Darwin's evolution a haphazard, insentient affair?

LINCOLN

Yes, and the wonder of human motivation is that it is amenable to conscious change. The plight of women like Sallie has presented me with a dilemma that dares reason and good will to resolve. Yet I must try, despite an implacable opposition. I have always believed in the power of rational thought, even though it failed us in '61. This issue of coerced motherhood begs for an attempt to rationally negotiate a peaceful compromise between extreme factions. If I can help the people find a balance point between the competing rights to happiness of each unfortunate woman and her unwelcome fetus, it will demonstrate that civil discourse yields a more generous future than bloody rancor. I would have that be my legacy.

MARY

A noble vision, Mr. Lincoln, finely beribboned with *naïveté*....Well, if you're right in your admirable delusion, then the divine glories of the afterlife will pale in comparison to those of your perfectly imagined man-made republic.

*Lights out on LINCOLN and MARY.*

ACT II, SCENE 11

*An empty street. Contesting for space on a wall are posters of GOV. BLAKE and LINCOLN with the messages: "For President/Abraham Lincoln" and "Elect Shelby Blake/President for ALL." After a moment, RANDALL enters as if on an errand.*

*The sight of the posters stops him. Without bothering to look about to see if anyone is watching, RANDALL violently tears LINCOLN's poster from the wall and rips it to pieces, which he scatters. Then he exits, still agitated. After a moment, SINGLE WOMAN enters with a shopping basket. She picks up a poster scrap to examine it just as LINCOLN, in his top hat and dress coat, and TAD enter on a leisurely stroll, followed by the SOLDIER on duty as a bodyguard. SINGLE WOMAN hurriedly gathers up the bigger scraps as they approach.*

TAD

Father, look.

*TAD proudly demonstrates what he can do with his yo-yo.*

TAD (CONT'D)

It's called "walking the dog."

LINCOLN

Bravo! What a magnificent trick, and so much less messy than the real thing.

TAD

Captain Johnstone taught me.

LINCOLN

He is a man of many talents.

*SINGLE WOMAN hides the scraps and nods to LINCOLN, who tips his top hat to her. After they pass, SINGLE WOMAN quickly exits. SOLDIER takes a protective position while LINCOLN and TAD idle.*

TAD

*(Continuing to play.)*

Why did you let them put the captain in prison?

LINCOLN

Well, he menaced a man with a sword. We can't have that.

TAD

But you let his wife out. And the man he menaced deserved it-- everyone says so.

LINCOLN

A president often has to ignore what everyone says, at least if he wants to fulfill his oath of office and avoid setting examples that will come back to haunt him. On the one hand, I needed to release Mrs. Johnstone to show that government's reach must have a limit. And on the other hand, I needed to lock up her husband to discourage attacks on other government officials, at least one of whom you and your mother adore.

TAD

Who's that?

LINCOLN

Why, me, of course.

TAD

Oh...yeah...Father, will there be another war?

LINCOLN

Only if we cowardly shirk the peace. Only then.

TAD

How long will you be president?

LINCOLN

As long as I can perform the duties and the people will have me.

TAD

But from everything I can see, aside from the parties, it's an awful job.

LINCOLN

That is it, my boy. Sometimes so awful that I would willingly switch places with poor Mr. Johnstone, if he would consent.

TAD

I'm going to be a lawyer, like you and Robert.

LINCOLN

The law is a noble calling. A lawyer can do a lot of good without being overburdened by society's gratitude.

TAD

Would you like me to teach you to walk the dog?

LINCOLN

I would be most grateful if you would, Thomas. An honest man who don't know a few tricks is defenseless against dishonesty.

*LINCOLN and TAD exit, followed  
by the SOLDIER. Go to black.*

**THE END**