

A HOUSE DIVIDED

a play in four acts

by Sterling Cullipher

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A House Divided

Cast of Characters:

Preacher Mordecai
Jack Fairlace
Eliza Fairlace
The Kentucky Legislator
The Engineer
The Beggar

Abraham Lincoln
Mary Lincoln
Tad Lincoln
Secretary John Hay
Nurse Pomroy

The Sioux
Citizen

Secretary Edwin Stanton
Secretary William Seward
Ward Lamon
Secretary Salmon Chase
Chief of Staff Halleck

Paperboy

Doctor
Patient
Unnamed Nurse

Ghost of Henry David Thoreau
Walt Whitman
Ralph Waldo Emerson

Conspirator
Southern Conspirator
Company K Guard
Captain Derickson

Act I Scene I: *A long line outside the president's office in the White House in June of 1863. Petitioners wait to see Abraham Lincoln, whose morning duties routinely include indulging the complaints, advice, and requests of citizens.*

Mordecai: Whether the Puritan wears his hat, or not, I shall donate alms of the spirit within it, and dip his sponge in merciful water.

Eliza: (Aside to Jack) Novelty then Blasphemy. The ape's stovepipe hat atop a cross he doesn't carry?

Jack: Quiet, dear. (He shushes her.) Indulge mob whims, or lose our disguise.

Mordecai: Never before has one man stepped back from so far in the future. We should all be so obsessed with this notion of liberation. Is it not true that mine own emancipation hinges on that of my brother? The president has echoed the gallows of Osawatomie John Brown, and tempered it with the power of government for the people. On that of my brother and, forgive me, the sisters. Enslaving the woman enslaves the miracle of life. (He bows to Eliza.)

Eliza: (Furious) The sacred womb, profaned by this man and this house.

Jack: (Aside to Eliza, intermittent with more shushes) Please be quiet, dear. (To Mordecai) My wife is moved by the collective consciousness, which is expressed in our hero. But this in fact is our second day here. Yesterday, the president made for the telegraph office. And then, we understand from the street, he was off to Soldiers' Home. There are so many of us in line, and my wife cringes for her moment.

Mordecai: St. Francis required his privacy. Flesh and blood breathes by a moment's calm reflection. He is human, after all. Though his legislation gives skeleton to the spirit.

Eliza: So we may not see him today, either?

The Beggar: Perhaps, there are too many of us.

The Engineer: Only the persistent survive. And he must see my blueprints. It's a secret, but I will give you a hint. A navy of belligerent dolphins.

The Kentucky Legislator: It's worth an appointment. My son needs a federal appointment. Which job I shall not say. But my son is not a fighter. Guns, a uniform, will kill him. The president loves old Kentucky. I'm sure he'll be expecting me.

Eliza: (Aside) Soldiers' Home. Where does such a grotesque name come from? And how does the president appropriate it for his own afternoons? Where does the soldier live, but

in the horror of his own mind and the heart of his sad mother. (She sobs.) That is the soldier's home.

The Beggar: Waiting overwhelms the lady. Have my handkerchief, mam. (He offers a dirty handkerchief from his vest pocket, which she ignores.)

Jack: She smells the heat, the hospital, and the black powder all together. (He consoles her with a token hug, and gives his own handkerchief.)

The Engineer: She must persevere. We must all deal with the heat, and find ways to win the War Between the States. (He gestures with his hand in a swooping motion. Others in the long line clap and cheer mildly. There is barely a discernible groan.)

The Kentucky Legislator: Dolphins as torpedoes, you say? But the president has already denied the use of Burmese Elephants.

The Beggar: Tactfully. I believe he said, "It would take two, to take one's mess wagon."

The Engineer: Linguistically, as well, I believe it was, "It would take two, to haul one's mess." I assure you both, and swear by my degree, that I have the logistics covered. My plan is a natural. I'm surprised the Dixies haven't thought of it themselves. They have a mind for it. Remember the *Merrimac*.

The Kentucky Legislator: That is all we have to do, thank heavens. She lies at the bottom of the bay. Remember the *Monitor*. Or these very walls, prestigious as they are, would be under siege of my cousins, the damned mongrel Southern race. There is a window, you see, in the oval office, which sits in plain view and 200 yards from the Potomac. Stanton was mad, they say, and called for bars in every pane.

Mordecai: Remember? I would not forget what are liberty's signs. I would not forget, that on the lady's smile, to see the blush cheeks. That in the sun's rise, to see the golden fuse. No, sir. It is impossible to forget what the nerve does see.

I know it.

The villains built their villain ship, the Colossus of Hampton Roads, resurrected from the salt and the mud of a wooden death, with its heart entire plated in two inches of Richmond iron. 80 tons per gun, and 20 guns to our one, and floating yet down the Elizabeth.

And McClellan calls for horses.

They gave her Commodore Buchanan, the Father of Annapolis, who embarked for his own child's blood. Slow and sluggish, yet none in the leviathan's path, yet creating a broad wake in the new flood.

And McClellan, where the champagne and caviar.

Broadside the beast! called the blockade. Our *Congress* had no effect. Our *Cumberland* went down with her captain. As an American don't you see it? Stand here on the shores of Ragged Island, and Old Point Comfort, and hear the hidden gray artillery sing "old

times there ... not forgotten". For the *Merrimac* grabbed our defense in the mighty jowls of its iron bow, the impaling beak sword, and slung *Congress* about. No mercy upon General Washington, who very well lay in the clutches.

Don't you see it? A mechanical arm that could kill us all.

And McClellan says, "I need a hot air balloon, and a better map."

And the tragedy beyond known history, we look to study who has us seized, who has us rebelling in the streets of Baltimore against ourselves, pitching our own in the Ohio River deep, the chaos spread like plague in the Irish boroughs of New York. Who has us? Who is the enemy around our breath, we look, and she has no face.

Sunday came the next day.

And McClellan wants two extra blankets for each of the extra 20,000 men on order.

Sunday came, with resolve upon the enemy and quickness upon the waves. It just wasn't its own resolve. It was your resolve, mam, and your resolve, sir. It was my resolve and yours, and Washington's revisited. The noble ideas that wrote civilization did not, and cannot, sink. The southern spirit may not therefore have it in the end. Because we are here.

And the president tells McClellan, "You would not fight, general, with all the horses in Arabia."

(Silence. Each of the four men has refocused their attention on Eliza, who has stopped her sobbing and stands with a weathered, patient face.)

Act I Scene II: *The telegraph office, across from the White House, in the War Department building. Secretary of State Seward and Secretary of War Stanton discuss impending military possibilities in Mississippi and a likely invasion of Washington.*

Seward: Grant fell off his horse. Shall we blame the horse?

Stanton: We shall blame the dry river for the lack of rain, if it serves Sam Grant. Let us blame ourselves. If I were in Vicksburg, bring me the bottle, too. Victory may require more excuses than lives.

Seward: I trust the Mississippi will be ours. So you are wrong. War is won between battles. Sam has the graceless gnash of Illinois men. You know the type (he points across the street). He has the frontier in him, and wins the pot because of underestimation. I hope they never learn his name.

Stanton: So I am right, although you omit our agreement.

Seward: You are wrong on the first point, which I've made clear. And you are right on the second point, which is that Sam finds his way into Cabinet meetings, and neither of us knows a valid reason why. I chalk it to our limitations. You to Grant's.

Stanton: Secretary, I want news. How can you be so rational? Syllogisms, upside down and in reverse, they are what is wrong with the Union. If a war on philosophical terms, I would have conceded to Senator Davis at the outset. Against my better judgment, I have played for the team. I give Grant my endorsement, despite all the brass. Despite Sherman, even, who's as loyal as a bloodhound. Despite Old Brains. I thought this man Grant was a fighter. But my reputation in this town is getting bloodied.

Seward: Now, I see it's Old Brains Halleck you trust. Is it keeping you awake, telling Old Brains who is boss? (He laughs, studying Stanton, who paces.) Good for you, sticking your neck out. For good or for bad, that is what we have to do, and none of the senator-soldier hirelings you reference worry over that kind of responsibility. Lee is the best. And no one hired him. He is employed by a ghost entity. He is unemployed.

Stanton: Damn Lee. We are talking about John C. Pemberton. We are talking about eggs in the roost and Pemberton? We are talking about a Pennsylvania man, after all. What should be the task to flush out the coward in a Pennsylvania man? Not Lee. Not Jackson, damn his holy lemons. One of our own should not take three months. Not Pemberton.

Seward: You hear the doubts in your impatience? The bluff in your pride? I propose that we sit here and that we wait. And we trust that you don't become Pemberton, for you say he is a fraud, and that Pemberton doesn't become us, for you say "too late," he's the paper soldier who paces the telegraph office floor when he could be quelling. Do you mean to damn us, or damn the traitor we have nobly resisted within our same character? God cannot be for and against Pennsylvania at the same time. Both sides of your dilemma may be, and one must be, wrong.

Stanton: Rhetoric will not win the war. Logic will not win it. The stump will surely lose it. I am talking about battlefields, and the charge, and uniforms worn by ordinary masses of thoughtless mobs. But I will wait, concluding that I am but one, a person. Where is the note? Are our lines all cut?

Seward: You know as well as I the general's own dispatch. "The enemy are now undoubtedly in our grasp. Vicksburg can only be a question of time."

Stanton: It's been a month.

Seward: Blame the horse. Let us always blame the horse, from now until armistice.

Enter Henry "Old Brains" Halleck, followed by Tad Lincoln

Seward: This man brings good news. All we have is what we already know.

Stanton: Taddie will suffice. He's the best news I've seen this week. (Tad, straddling a broom horse, runs a circle around Stanton, temporarily oblivious to the compliment.)

Halleck: A messenger has just informed me: the staff at Willard's has made publicity of the bets on the table, that they shall be serving Bobby Lee's men for July 4 dinner.

Seward: They'll be easy prey, then. We'll just poison the whiskey.

Halleck: I don't think they'd have it.

Stanton: Of course not. Lee, gray old fox, would not allow his boys the drink.

Halleck: I'm speaking of the staff at Willard's, Mr. Secretary. I really don't think they'd mind. (Still admiring and smiling at Tad, Stanton shifts back into his gloomy mode, angry now at Halleck's tone.)

Seward: Young Taddie, what a fine general you'll make.

Stanton: He rides like a Frenchman fleeing Moscow.

Halleck: Gentlemen, what has arrived from Hooker? Has he remembered his Fightin' nickname? Has he recovered his faith?

Stanton: Heaven forbid he paints another of "Lee's masterpieces" for him. Tell the president that nothing has arrived from any successful general.

Halleck: The president didn't ask.

Exit Halleck

Seward: I'm glad you two stand on such common ground.

Stanton: With Halleck? Whatever could that mean, Governor?

Seward: Your disdain, professional that is, for Hooker.

Stanton: I abhor the general like I abhor most every other incompetent. With Old Brains, it is personal. Hooker won't write to him, and that is all. You think Halleck has opinion enough to know how Hooker should move? No, Old Brains gets a personal rub, and he won't let it go.

Seward: On behalf of the Cabinet, I appreciate your sacrificial humility. But you know he's a soldier of the field, at heart. (He grins.)

Stanton: Had he known the field, he wouldn't be here. (He laughs.) Where is Hooker? (He looks to the telegraph.) Philadelphia? Does he not know his capital?

Seward: He knows there are more patriots there than here. But a few less “hookers”. And less mosquitoes.

Stanton: Let’s ask the boy. (Aside to Seward) He may be as psychic as the missus, if not as committed.

(Silence. Stanton has finally ceased his constant pacing and fidgeting movements. A look of shame calms his face. Tad has climbed onto and off again the office sofa with his broom horse, mixing indistinctly a general’s voice as well as the horse’s.)

Stanton: No call for that, Governor. I’m sorry as hell. Come here Taddy. (The boy heeds, quietly, then quickly squirms away and resumes playing.)
If I could grieve.

I must not have the heart of Mary Lincoln.

I think history will have to reconsider her.

We now are much too cruel for sympathy. We’ll dress her up in hysterics as we amputate the world around her.

I don’t know that she was born too early. Or too late.

But she deserves a better fate than our time.

After all, it has produced me.

All of us have taken our grieving hearts and locked them away like treasury notes, for safety, and hope they will be safe upon our return to the regular life.

I hope that mine will be.

(He beckons to the heavens in an awkward, emotional gesture.)

James, it has been a year nearly and I remember you yet. I can still focus on one solitary life.

I can still grieve, I think, and so shall Mrs. Lincoln, however she wishes.

I am sorry, Governor.

Seward: Sustained. Unless by some violent impulse, you once again object. Brandy and cigars. Cigars and brandy and freemen, Edwin. Just think of it.

Stanton: Taddy, son, we need you.

Tad: Bwead and mowasses by daw campire. Bwead and mowasses. Da’s all daw soldar weally wants. I’m goin to wite a letta to my muver.

Stanton and Seward: Yes, indeed.

Stanton: Yes, indeed, Taddy. What rank are you today?

Tad: I am a pwivate genewal by daw campire. Hush, puppies. Hush.

Stanton: Very well, Private Taddy, sir. Secretary Seward and myself request your seasoned judgment on matters of the butternut. (He ushers the boy over to a map on the

far wall, as Seward focuses for his own amusement.) Bobby Lee is heading this way. He has given them all the slip again, and this time is poking around too close to home. But our Calvary is as inept as our reconnaissance. This could be trouble enough, and the Brits could be coming again. Do you understand the magnitude of the situation?

Tad: Bwead and mowasses.

Seward: The secretary and I have a little wager. Settle it for us, Private General.

Stanton: Where is Bobby Lee headed?

(The boy points two inches into the Atlantic.)

Stanton: A naval expedition, you say, private. It's been done before, and I'd like to see them try, but not by Lee.

Seward: I believe he's telling us the power of the British Cabinet has turned again in favor of cotton. Are they coming again? We'll wire the French.

Tad: No! No Bwedish! No Fwrench!

Stanton: Let the private think, Mr. Secretary. We'll turn our eyes, Taddy, and you point. I'll turn around and see just where it is to set up a defense. We'll crush the King of Spades, yet. All we need is a good plan and a little necessity. (He turns away, and Seward dims his eyes from across the office.) Tell us, private.

Tad: Heeaa! (He points.)

Seward: (To Stanton, who turns) Where?

Stanton: Pennsylvania, all right. But not Philadelphia. The private is pointing to the name of Gettysburg.

Seward: Sound the alarm.

Stanton: He has an officer's commission indeed.

Act I Scene III: *Mary Lincoln is alone in the upstairs bedroom at the Soldier's Home, contemplating loyalty, the many deaths brought to her by the war, as well as the unrelated deaths of two of her four sons. Compounding the grief is her financial irresponsibility. She lies in bed.*

Mary: I married out of my class. The engagement was opposed by the Todd clan. I have loyally, though privately, since claimed a name with no middle. I am Mary Lincoln, First Lady, without the Kentucky Todd to pull me apart, or to unite my husband's dying country.

The ironies are endless, and write such a history that I can now look back upon my wretched sacrifice of existence, dead, and read it five score hence: Kentucky, slave state of the North, non-committal, Land of Lincoln, Refuge of Traitors. He has his Emancipation, but what has the Todd to inform the papers? What have I, to take me from them?

I married out of my class; I married the president.

My sisters did not mid-wife my first born.

My brother Sam, dead in Place of Peace, Mississippi.

My brother Alexander, dead in Baton Rouge.

Confederates, did you know? Every abolitionist in Massachusetts does.

I told the Reverend Minor, "They wanted to kill my husband. Do not pray."

No wife grieves when their husband's assassin has lye about.

No first lady cries when the rebel shouts, "My death in vain!"

In Springfield, upon his election, Father called me.

And I hesitate to dwell in it, but perhaps I am resigned, and can too clearly see that as well, as history already written. I trust not the psychic, believe me, but I am.

He said, "See me twice in the mirror?"

There are no illusions shared, and I did see him, twice.

His first image was of the man, president elect, rail-splitter, honest to a fault, no beard.

The second?

Who should know by now, by this troubled summer?

And I knew then.

The second stood as we both looked, no trick of the mirror, which had no such resolve as the phony spiritualists we'd later find haunting the White House.

The second image stood over my husband's shoulder, less handsome in his pale distance.

But oh how the grotesque can strike the mystic chords of consequence.

"What does it mean, Mother?"

And I knew then.

I tried the mirror, and lent my best perspective.

I was myself, once festive, once seen.

"Try again," I said. Next time he turned his head.

We saw the same, with the ghost behind him also turned.

The same man stood behind my husband, and this one I could not love.

But I knew him.

Paler. Yet a shadow down his jaw. And wisdom now a curse, but wiser. Four years so, and re-elected.

"What does it mean, Mother?"

I told him about a hurricane, and South Carolina at sea.

Young Madison and the Fathers had only begun,

The vision of freedom, of rights, half won.

That the ship has gone under. The debt must be paid.

By a lost ship of gold.
By flesh to compensate this man for another.
This man for another
This man for another
This man for another
“In your second term, Father,” I said, “your flesh for the ages.”
His the last in the flesh trade
For a cheap Southern gold.

Enter Nurse Pomroy

Nurse: (Aside) Mrs. Lincoln airs politics in private. While the rest have not the choice. From one sickbed to another I travel, and refuse to lie down with her. I can listen to her, and do my job. Which does not happen in the hospital. Those still standing must straighten yet. We who live the aftermath of Chancellorsville, soldier by soldier, cease to dream. There are no nightmares left un-lived, but for the hypochondriac when she seeks them.

(To Mary) The day has dawned many hours. I'm here to show you, Madam First Lady.

Mary: (Not noticing her nurse) The walls have a sound?
I hear my dear William,
Taken by Washington fever, but he's found the Soldier's Home,
And now just convalesces like the boys next door.

Nurse: I believe that could be. As just a nurse, tis not my duty, nor skill,
To see with only mine eyes.

Mary: (Still not recognizing her nurse) I see water underground!
(Rising up in her bed) My dear Eddie, who should have been the last when the first.
I made a deal, that upon his death, I had lost what I could take.
Now he knows, and knows eternal
I staked his life to give, if another's life left to raise.
I would take him back, and he has come to ask
Or my bargain soured his taste to live.
You are my favorite, Eddie.
Ask. (She pauses and sits higher.)
Ask, so the question can forgive your wretched mother.

Nurse: (Aside) No answer begs patience. I fear Mrs. Lincoln will wait on a broken clock.

Mary: (Disappointed and coming to her senses) Not another bargain will I accept.
Eddie knows, just as Father and his Cabinet.
I have overspent.

Nurse: Madam First Lady. Shall I attend you today?

Mary: It is your job. But who sent you, Rebecca?

I am well, if not this great sickness around me. I must be the only healthy person north of the Rapidan. I shall attend you instead, graciously, as a first rate host, if not a first lady. Let me tell you of Tom Thumb. (She trails off.)

Nurse: I saw the circus show, Mrs. Lincoln. It was indeed the greatest. (She has reached the bed, and allows Mary to lie down as a measure of calming down.) You are too great the host to entertain me.

Mary: You saw the show dear, but I behind the scenes. The show goes on, they say, and then it goes off.

I never have wished to marry Senator Douglas.

Did you know, when at first in Springfield at the age of 22,

A suitor called from Missouri, a lawyer

And grandson of Patrick Henry.

That was all to test a real love, and to find a poet.

I never have wished him to have won.

But on days when I have been forced to put on face, like that dreadful day last February, I wish Mr. Lincoln and I could together raise a country lawyer's family.

Please don't cheer me. I know you are my favorite, but please don't cheer me.

Nurse: No. Of course not.

May I sit?

(She sits in a chair across the room without permission from Mary.)

The curtains.

The satin is handsome.

Mary: French Satin Delaine.

Nurse: A wonderful touch.

You must see twice the colors in a sunset.

Mary: To be truthful, my greatest antagonists solicit my counsel.

In quiet letters. Mr. Stoddard bought me a letter last week.

It was from Mrs. Palmerston, inquiring of my Dorflinger glassware.

I flattered her with a reply.

The English shouldn't indulge such luxuries nowadays, however, what with all their cotton burning in Mississippi wharves.

That's a secret, dear.

Nurse: Oh, yes mam.

Mary: We must think of the reputation of others. I can afford to forgive.

Nurse: It is already forgotten, Madam First Lady.

Mary: As a matter for the record, I was born to shop.
I was raised to fancy, but I've paid my dues, so to speak.
When I was but a child in Lexington, Elizabeth Humphries and I were a precocious pair.
But young women, but girls we were, were not allowed the dash of hoops in their skirts.
Dear, you can guess. I've always thought of myself as a doll.
Don't you?

Nurse: Of you?

Mary: No, dear. Of you. Of yourself.
Elizabeth and I got Old Mammy Sally to pick of the willows.
We took up the switches and sewed them into this (pauses to laugh and gesture her hands outward) this monstrous bulge about our Sunday dresses.
My stepmother thought us both crazy, I suppose.
She would not let us flounce about in such a getup.
I've always been inclined to show.
Why look at my cheeks. (She preens.)

Nurse: Wines revere the hue.

Mary: I will have to tell you more of Elizabeth Humphries.
We were not always true sparrows.

Nurse: I don't.
A doll's beauty so venerated, not something the self can do
A doll solitary cannot face the admirer
That would a lullaby soothe
I don't fancy myself of wood
For no soldier tires his heart for my dress
Except of their wound.

Mary: Nonsense, I attest.

Nurse: You've the president, and the gaze of the world.
I'm too plain to call upon
Except when morphine plagues the sane.

Mary: Perspective is a long quest.
I don't believe you and you'd best not believe yourself.
We shall visit town, today, right now.
And tease the company of soldiers
All to behest
Especially one for your hand

Out of a crowd charms can sway.

Nurse: (Aside, while Mary cheers and warms to the challenge, getting out of bed.)

She is sound for I am dull.

Empathy remedies another from the lull.

Act I Scene IV: *A posted sentry is on guard outside the Soldier's Home. He wishes for action to liven up his job, but not the kind of action anticipated in the coming months on northern battlefields.*

Company K Guard: Long live the king. Who goes there?

An aisle of bushes, say you.

A trace of wind brings friend, no foes.

Long live the king. Who goes there?

Echoes artillery, off the perimeter

Skirmishers with token shrapnel for show.

Long live the king. Who goes there?

Were it Hamlet's father's ghost, I'd sing

Now close up the walls of our American ring.

Long live the king. Who goes there?

Enter Captain Derickson

Derickson: Private!

Company K Guard: Who goes there?

Derickson: The ruin of this nation, if I disguised so choose.

Now open your eyes, your charge has news.

Company K Guard: Charge! Captain Derickson, sir?

Derickson: (Aside) The world needs ditch diggers, too.

Ten Yankees hirelings, they say, worth one reb and his shovel

Twenty-one of this lad, take no reb for the trouble.

(To Guard) Mrs. Lincoln is going to town.

Company K Guard: I'll watch with my life that along these long hedges

No sniper nor bee shall encroach

The president's wife no treachery shall tread.

Derickson: She has Calvary on guard.

Watch the house instead.

Exit Captain, after trading salutes. Enter Conspirator

Company K Guard: Long live the king. Who goes there?
Might the enemy emerge from within
I have my back to the battle, but my brain on evil.
For they say the city of Washington is built on Babylon's sand
and traitors stand in every shadow.
Who goes there!

Conspirator: Brethren. Long live the king.
(Aside) It's just a code, by the way, and hardly a secret at that.
It's nothing to do with a code of honor, I have learned.
And battle the teacher.
Long live the despotic tyrant, who makes a vice of the Constitution, more like it.
But this I can't utter, in freedom's own land, nor can I amend its parts. (He emerges from
behind a rose bush. To Guard)
Brethren. I am blue. Long live the king.
No less than you, I am tense for the nation.

Company K Guard: Yours is blue. Theirs is gray.
Both share red.
Are they near? How soon before Billy knows the rebel yell firsthand?

Conspirator: A hundred entire regiments know the siren already.
I personally couldn't give it. But on the southern shore of Richmond, I heard it seven
days.
Loudest on the last, quenching the sound of city bells that disappeared.
I heard it again. Next time, and the last, from Stonewall's men.

Company K Guard: It must be really loud. I need to prepare. How does it sound?

Conspirator: I don't know that it does. It feels, probes, and grabs. It touches you all
around.
All Billy's will it soon encounter. But I've come in peace, to tell you. It will be heard in
the gut of our families' homes.
We've created a monster, first fighting in defense, now the north will be their own.
Everywhere. The South are soon here. And then they will be everywhere.

Company K Guard: Repeat the password, coward! I will shoot an unarmed man. (He
draws his rifle.)
I think my duty above any future certain.
Repeat the password, my job over your life.

Conspirator: Long live the king. Long live the king.
But even you can see, royalty and a president are not the same thing.

Look closer as well, with both eyes again, an unarmed man I am not.
I still have one, and that in a sling.

Company K Guard: (He lowers his rifle and steps closer to see the conspirator.)
Let me be brave. I will try now. I will trust.
Too many soldiers fire to kill the fear in themselves.

Conspirator: I have said it so, myself.
There are soldiers, and souls to be saved.
What is a nation without people, structured by and for those people.
You and I might save them both with one quiet turn,
no powder burned.
Long live the king. I have a plan.

Act 11

Act II Scene I: *In the president's office Lincoln entertains the latest of a constant stream of citizen callers, who stand before his desk. Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase sits also on a couch against the wall, behind the guests, while Secretary John Hay moves in and out of the room, or otherwise stands in the doorway. Lincoln sits behind his desk, often scribbling notes. The first caller is heckled by Chase, who, the caller notices, is the same man on the one dollar bill.*

Citizen: What the soldier, Mr. President, needs is personal. He needs his own calling. Guns don't make a soldier. We all know that. Marching won't do it. I, you should know, was in Mexico, and thought myself a strolling grandparent of the park marching into Montezuma. Hunger. That tries to make the soldier, but it makes him weak. Distractions of forage subtract from the killing. Stray turkeys are not the enemy.

Chase: We are very busy, sir. And we've heard this prelude before. Twice today, in fact, and a long-standing tab for which a federal reserve could lose track.

Citizen: I appreciate your patience. I'm sure, however, that you have plenty. Or at least have shown it. I cannot help but notice, yours the most valuable face. I wonder that I take a picture. And paste. Would you the same in haste for dough?

Hay: (Aside, from the doorway) I wonder if virtues can be spent. This room is soon bust, if so, and all in it. If not, only, there is hope.
This man told me he had a point. I don't ask what. In conference, the president always tells me not to interrogate.

Chase: What we don't need is debate. What is your brilliant suggestion?

Citizen: Motive. Our men have no motive. They lackluster about, trading sides in their heart. Mercenaries they are, without the money. They've been told so many things to fight

for: honor, country, slave, and in the end they've the insight to know what they win they give back.

Chase: The president would like to know what motivates them all, and why you insist to stall this magic remedy one moment more.

Citizen: Surely the president, sir, (avoiding any sideways glance at Chase the entire conversation) acknowledges that war means fighting. And fighting means killing.

Hay: (Aside) We really should reconsider the power of the people. This fraud steals from the south, this their Calvary axiom. That is all we don't want to do. When I grow up and run the White House, we take down the "open for business" sign.

Chase: We entertain your advice now, sir, or there is the door!

Lincoln: It is quite all right. Wisdom is nothing more than mistakes and age. We've plenty of the first. This man is our compliment. A sage all can be, when met with the ear of our soul.

Citizen: And this is why I've come. Because fair trial with the rail-splitter is so freely won. What a square jaw. Double chins several centuries hence shall sport that beard to feign such grasp of military law.

Lincoln: (Scribbling, and smirking just detectably at Chase, who hardly enjoys the humor) The short and simple annals of the poor. I've spoken before of equality. That if I were an orchid, I'd seed beside the weed. Hybrids take water, just two parts more.

Chase: (Aside) If the president were any more humble, he'd turn into a marble floor mat. I seek this office in '64, and would put these sour peasants under my thumb.

Citizen: I'll shall worry you no more. Here is my solution.

Chase: We'll be the judge.

Citizen: What the soldier, Mr. President, needs is personal. And what he needs is war. The problem so far is civilization. Farmboys of Iowa and clerk's sons from Maine. Most all of them signed their name to fulfill a foreign request. They are too tame to conquer heathen rebels, nine feet tall and headquartered in caves. The enemy fight because we are down there, true, but simply it's in a beast's nature a countryman to rue. A real test of the green Yank would be withhold his pay, and commission a bounty, I'd say ten dollars per, for each ear of a Johnny brought back from the fray. Our boys need the knowledge of hate, and they'll learn it double-time, each knife, and each lobe that they take. I did it to a Mexican, evidence thus of the war we did win. What do you think? Do you need another general to muster in?

Chase: (Aside) Withhold the pay, yes. A quartermaster's stockpile of mangy ears? I'll let my boss say.

Lincoln: Hay, who's next? Direct this man back to the Huns.

Citizen: (Being led away by Hay) You've poker written all over your face. What am I to think?

Lincoln: If you come back tomorrow, I will listen again. Next time, however, advise if rebels were our friends.

We are not down there. All of us are here, and no soldier anywhere ventures as far to fear.

I supported the war in Mexico, indeed. When I was a Whig. None is left. I would have followed Henry Clay to Patagonia.

Citizen: (Under his own will, as he walks through the door) I've never been listened to like that. He does so well at nothing.

Exit Citizen

Hay: (Lincoln stands, Chase sits, as a Sioux Indian is led into the room. Ward Lamon, Lincoln's personal bodyguard, follows after, sitting in a Victorian chair beside Chase's couch.) From Minnesota, sir. I'm not sure the name, but he knows his English when it comes to his tribe. He knows we call him Sioux. He brings the frontier in gifts.

Lincoln: If only my staff spoke a different language. We would get along splendid. (He takes a fur as gift.)

Hay: He has brought a powder horn, as well, and jewelry I'm quite convinced is fashioned entirely of porcupine claws, and teeth. And quills.

Chase: The frontier indeed. Is the pox come wrapped with a bow?

Lincoln: Stay and translate, young Hay. You're from Illinois, after all.

Hay: He has uttered profound grunts while chanting in the hall. He wishes not to take the Great Father's time. He believes you to be your own council, which makes you greater than the greatest Sioux. (Aside to Lincoln) Tycoon, he knows your Cabinet are twits, and white generals charge from the rear. (To All) He comes in gratitude.

Lincoln: If only true. My prints lead strictly from the house afire.

Sioux Indian: Pardon. (He uses both hands in an expounding gesture, separating from before his belly until his arms are bent at his sides.) Pardon.

Chase: (Aside) A man of God am I. Pardon I did not conceive to give, for neither in my belief would He. This man sews red with rape. And was on a list of 303 to be hanged, but which the president reduced to a mere 38. Law is justice only, in a court of the righteous,

and my sentence places the faulty plank beneath this longhair, not to bargain with a criminal race. Why does our man Lincoln insist justice on every part? He insists leniency on enemy's arrows, aimed straight to his heart. The pages of his law book flutter in wind. It shall be closed in '64, when I decide less arbitrary fate. Close the contents, and use God within. God was created for law. And then justice, which two gods cannot share.

Hay: He wants to say a prayer.

Chase: What in the prayer shall he ask?

Hay: I believe that in Sioux terms, the answer on earth has found him. Of asking he is spent. In this chant we'll only listen. And inhale some smoke, in case there's a vision.

Chase: A freed slave knows modern prayer. Only upon that condition fairs our war. Once done, I see, another western oblivion in store. Return this native with two more English words: Manifest Destiny!

Exit Chase. Lincoln, Hay, and Lamon listen as the Sioux prays. The prayer ends indistinctly, with none sure what to do next.

Hay: (Clears his throat) The Great Father is very touched.

Lincoln: I have always entertained the hyperbole of the term. But the moment let's go of the extra. I'm now just a pilgrim. Thank him, Hay, for the first genuine moment I have had this month.

Sioux: Iron. Horse. Run. Buffalo.

Hay: Thucydides meets Frances Parkman? I'm not sure, Mr. President. His enunciation does not stumble. I get the rumble of two quadrupeds. But the iron must be red euphemism.

Lincoln: Yes, Hay. Let me try. (To the Sioux) Earth. Big. Round. Ball.

Hay: (Aside) Humored so, is the tycoon, when he humors multitudes in this room. He talks often of trivial things, like rain on dirt, even sashes of a flouter's skirt. One squeaks of his honor, against ten who shout not
Two feel his shackle of influence, against mobs on parade
"Let the imbecile rot!" they promenade.
I testify, from near four years now: his is not the greatest heart, he has brain cramps and the hypos, but somehow
put the lesser two together and sum up the exceeding part.
This Sioux savage did not vote, and those who did dissented
Sixty forty our country chose against
Mas' Lincoln and slaves coming with him.
What transpires in this room! What farce I hide away!
And quote our most notable, that after Fredericksburg,

"What will the country say?"

Lincoln: Me. Ride. Big River. Longest. Snake. Big. Round. Ball.

Hay: Have you met Dr. Livingstone? I presume not.
He's found an African snake, all the way at its lost beginning,
the deepest, darkest lake.

Lincoln: Un-American rumor, Hay, not even in print. And, anyhow, he's Indian.

Sioux: Stop Iron Horse. Buffalo Run Stop.

Hay: I'm not a liaison today. Mother tongue of Peoria is not Sioux, nor at Brown.
These sounds are like candy. Too much gives me a headache.

Lamon: The train. He hates trains. And any westerner knows this office will hear it again.
The lanes the trains take restrict buffalo on the range. Our guest wants but this one man,
the enemy of most white men, to put a halt to western progress. Abe has to live in this
country, you know.

Lincoln: (To the Sioux) I hate trains too. But I didn't arrive here in a dress. I'm not so
hated to travel that inconspicuous.

*A scream and accompanying disturbance of people erupt in the hallway. Lamon stands,
and Lincoln nods for him to investigate the problem, and to leave the Sioux, who Lincoln
correctly believes is not a threat. Hay follows Lamon.*

Sioux: (Handing a picture recently taken of himself to Lincoln) Magic. Box. Thief. Soul.

Lincoln: (Taking picture) Very Dignified. It favors. (Turning to the portrait behind his
desk) You know our man Colonel Jackson? Old Hickory? A Great Father. (He points for
emphasis) Great Father. Spirit. Eternal. Wind.

Sioux: Black Hawk War.

Lincoln: That was his war, indeed, among many. I fought, as they say. And many the
mosquito did I kill, and much blood was shed. Got some onions and some Iowa for my
service. No Indians, though. I was just serving my country. I do believe Secretary Chase
wrong, but must admit I have not given the matter of tribes sufficient attention.
What shall I do?

(The Sioux does not respond, but appears to be comprehending.)

Lincoln: The Democrat Jackson, under whom I did serve, was a strange and exotic soup.
He told his Chief Justice, "Precedents your court writes amount to coupe.
Enforce them yourself." Well, give me Marshall and he'll take lame Taney.

For we two presidents say the same, but see contrary truth.
As a favor for not arresting me, I let the judge go free,
so why not Dred Scott, too?
What of the Sioux Constitution?
If you'd John C. Calhoun among your midst, don't you expel him by the will of the most?
Old Hickory, and Webster, and I on this agree.
Show them the wrong, take their robes, but renew them after penance?
When it's paid.
You don't pay the criminal upon the return.
Then I shall not, but return they must.
Now they get nothing, for any freed slave.

Enter Hay

Hay: A woman down the line, sir. Heat stroke hysterics.
Lamon had some lemonade fetched. And it's best she and her party, a nervous man,
are considered a risk. For security, they are now escorted away.

Lincoln: Her security or mine? Just an upset damsel, harmless to be sure.

Hay: And your stature only a knee more than county commissioner.

Lincoln: Hay, I wonder if our guest knows who I am. He protests the train, but adores the engineer.

Tell him the story. Let him hear of my work in '57, that big snake Mississippi.
I litigated and won, for the bridge and the train, said go west to the nation, and won
claims for his killer.

I didn't know it then. Tell him I am sorry. But there's less money in the river.
Tell him.

The great divide over the horizon isn't red from white.

My pants have pockets.

I understand that these people had no disease before we came.

They had no obscenity.

No prisons. But no banks, not even a wheel.

The difference between us is not color.

Simply, they are and we will be.

Everything beyond the horizon is all that we see. Tell him I apologize.

I did it for the money.

Hay: And the glory, Tycoon. You relinquish it back in glory.

That's something a red man wouldn't understand, even in his own language.

Lincoln: (Sighs and frowns. Aside) What a long summer this becomes. How
misunderstood could one person be?

I am like a star in the brightest sky. I've my own beacon twinkle.

But if I vanish, none had distinguished me.

Necessity begs I find the banished couple.

(To All) I require a brief lunch. If he pleases, make this guest at home.

Exit Lincoln

Act II Scene II: *After having been led away from the White House by Lamon, and then guards, Eliza and Jack Fairlace walk down Pennsylvania Avenue, trying to conceal and talk through their emotions. The Beggar follows, on the excuse he had no legitimate reason to see the president, as does Mordecai White, who is genuinely concerned over the couple's mysterious distress. The walking is often halted by outbursts from Eliza.*

Eliza: This man claims he can heal me, Jack. Get him away.
The other means well. Go away, both of you.

The Beggar: I couldn't stomach myself. I could not walk down this street and whistle.
There's no going on until you jump this wall.
What ails you, mam, and tell me, or I follow, how to staunch your tears?

Jack: As my wife has said, not for strangers' ears.
We fear a nightmare curse two graveyards deep.
Let her weep.
These tears soak a sadness only natural.
Ask your own soul the Lord will keep.

Mordecai: I am ordained. The seminary knows prayer is a circle. What's said to this man,
if he does, proves love is universal.
It follows, as we, and you'll see us again.

The Beggar: Please! That is almost my name. If not our burdens we can trade, at least I
do offer.
The President, when I seek him, buys me food. I'll give you peace now, in exchange.
I am a poor man in this bustling city, scratching a living as an overzealous follower. (He
holds out his hat. Jack and Mordecai both put money in.)
Thank you kind sirs. I am glad there's a war. Call me Please or call me The Beggar, or I
will call you. I could live forever! Mam. (He bows.)

Exit The Beggar

Eliza: I did not want, nor ask for, his attention. Now the fool has stolen mine.

Jack: Your disdain he doesn't need. He's plenty from others.
Working folks feed him, and again we're at the end of a long line. Just, let it pass.

Mordecai: My good book is open. Listen to a Psalms. Your grief lurches in a valley.
But it says to walk on. Avoid temptation and avoid weakness, which is hatred when
worst, intolerance everyday. What are you tempted of, in such a weary state?

Jack: As my wife has said, not for strangers' ears.
Men of the cloth are no exception, judging, casting demons to and from,
The Psalms offer comfort.
Forgive the moment, but you offer none.

Eliza: Spare the man, husband. He means well. Of Hell's fury he follows in warning.
My mourning, this moment, infinite, is as hot and dark.
He does not know. (Lashing out at Mordecai) Revelation arrived this month!
Let me weep in my dungeon.

Jack: Please, sir. As we begged The Beggar.

Mordecai: I am not an exorcist. Black magic cures the symptoms, not the disease.
The hand of fellowship extends half the way.
Given this poor woman's impression of fate
I won't stay.
Unlike The Beggar, I demand nothing.
Nothing, like the other side of fleshly bliss,
Which, I have just come to understand, accompanies me, the born-again atheist.

Exit Mordecai

Act II Scene III: *Nurse Pomroy and Mary Lincoln arrive in a crowded hospital ward in Washington. Mrs. Lincoln wants the attention of the soldiers, for Nurse Pomroy's part, but simply to feel needed and sympathetic. The nurse plays along, before realizing the selfishness of the trip, so that Mary can pass the time in a "helpful" way. Mary, struck between temptation of adolescent match-making and giving authentic medical aid, is disappointed by her reception, especially from a doctor.*

Mary: Rebecca, do you know what men want?

Nurse: A long list, always longer than they're apt to speak.

Mary: Absolutely wrong, dear nurse.
They want not to speak, but short verse.
The list can be summed up so: honor, food, and secrets.
They want to live with a pride as full as a round belly, for show,
a conscience, however, kept to a boil, simmering with discretions,
which their neighbor doesn't know.
Put a medal in a sandwich, snuck under the table

Then a man has been wooed, pardon the grin,
And the woman most able

Nurse: (Noticing, while listening, that a wounded soldier stares at them both)
Do you hear us?

Convalescent: Better, if you come closer.

Mary: Closeness is not allowed. We speak like hens under the crow, rooster.
Would you really like to know?

Convalescent: It's been since March, since I heard a sweet voice.
For a few days, I feared I had heard my last.
And now.

Nurse: Might you need a drink of water? (Starts to retrieve a pitcher. Then stops)

Mary: And now, he can dream again. He has fallen off to sleep again.
A woman lends her lullaby tenor over the cadence of artillery.
Their tremors can be held, by us!

Nurse: (Aside) We should not have come.
See how open these beds. Inside each an entire home shattered.
Brothers, fathers, sons, husbands,
Stench. This the hardest part, especially in early summer.
Let a live man smell his corpse, and lose his dignity.

Mary: (Going down the aisle to pass out bouquets and cookies) Small tokens. Small
tokens.
Who might need a letter penned?
I've brought official stationary.

Nurse: (Aside) Occupational hazard. Saw off the arm, write a letter.
Hear the confessions, as a farce priest,
sworn to know the object of sin is me
That my name carved in a tree.
a tired old bitty. It's embarrassing.
Had many of them not a life to have yet.
We should not have come.
Is it fair to say Mrs. Lincoln is the worst of best intentions?

Doctor: (To on-duty nurse) Options we've none. Only life or death.

Mary: (Pleading with the doctor not to operate on a patient with gangrene) Whole is well
enough.
He's escaped, as designed, as born. You've hacked enough thicket with this ax.

He (pauses) he just needs (pauses) love medicine.
Treat him, as a doctor! Leave his form.

Patient: (Wearily, in a fever) On to Richmond. Ring the bells. On to Richmond.

Nurse and Mary: Decorate his loyal chest.

Patient: On to Richmond. Hack the fortress of the Virginia swamp. Find Richmond.

Mary: He gives orders, very astute. He takes them, too. Discipline and valor. Do not mutilate his chance to execute a march on the bad people.

Doctor: He's mad. Delirious. What kind of insanity obeys death's orders, which this march surely will be.

Mary: I say he's lucid. And just strong enough to say so.

They listen.

Patient: Down the Shenandoah. Up the James.
Richmond is the mission. The mission is not submission, unless my commander's sword to give.
I capitulate. On no uncertain terms, I have earned the right to superior medical care.
The better hospital is in Richmond.

Doctor: (Deciding not to operate) We'll send his coffin there. Very well, Mrs. Lincoln.

Exit Doctor. Enter Walt Whitman

Mary: Film now over this boy's eyes. Lucid in oblivion. Strong enough, alas, to kill himself. Why can't a nurse wish?
(Shouting) Does everyone here spite a good wish?

Whitman: (Aside, reciting from his own "Song of Myself") Agonies are one of my changes of garments, I do not ask the wounded person how he feels, I myself become the wounded person. My hurts turn livid upon me as I lean on a cane and observe.
(To Mrs. Lincoln) You must learn to be anonymous, quiet all thoughts. I notice the black veil. How long does grief last? Until the veil is gone.

Mary: I have been accused of being a Southern spy!

Whitman: How much longer before anonymous quiet?

Mary: My dead sons!

Whitman: Remember the anonymous? Whose Edward? Whose William?

Nurse: (Soothing Mary with Whitman) Whose mother they had, then still, you are not lost. They are not orphans.

Mary: The Cabinet want to strangle Father!

Whitman: Remove the veil. Then re-tell the tale. It cannot be told, woe in fate, until you make the past go away. It's gone. Take off the veil. Then you can sit and tell me silence.

Nurse: (Aside) She loves the poet, but will not hand him the black mask. Her truth is nowhere hid like a winsome sonnet's. She loves the poet, but has too many wishes, which her spirit wills, and ours not, yet unbroken. The poet and I, nurses both, see all the same horror, but don't care.

Mary: Bruise colored clouds. And a migraine, dear Rebecca, in the thunder. (She lies in an abandoned bed, securing the veil across her face.)