

SASSAFRAS CANNON

Two-act civil war black comedy

by Timothy Starnes

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Cast of Characters

- Lucian Bloodworth: The head of the Bloodworth household. A real chucklehead, but albeit an efficient business manager. He is highly concerned for the family, but never shows it. He loves his wife, but her life disinterests him, causing him to give Menthe a majority of his attention.
- Constance Bloodworth: Chic and inebriated. She loves her husband, but does not know how to show it. Dressed like a male impostor.
- Anson Bloodworth: Silent, brooding and depressive. The product of overbearing parents and a Butler with a machiavellian complex.
- Orpheus: The dark-tempered head butler of the Bloodworth household. There is something "off" about him. The cells of his body respire evil. Dressed in typical butler attire.
- Menthe: The "apprentice" to Lucian, in charge of managing the Bloodworth's Indochinese plantations. He dresses similar to Lucian in an attempt to "be like" him. Flamboyant, dramatic and boyish.

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Cast of Characters (cont'd)

- Hughe Verdigris: The leader of the Transcendentalist Union, suited to the T. Stealthy and gives off the air of "Professor."
- Jefferson Davis: President of the confederacy, albeit a little off his rocker. He has grown tired and weary, and now through a mixture of stress and desperation, believes that he is a woman.
- The Housestaff: The chattering staff of the Bloodworth household. Oddly, they are much more chipper than one would expect.
- The Investors: The odd faceless investors in from Indochina. (Doubled roles)
- Ryland: Director of the production. He is the single tie between the universe of the play and the real one. He's in above his head.
- The Interrupting Agent: (Played by an INVESTOR for part of a scene) Here to ruin things for everyone. Typical government.

ACT I

Note: This play has been written in a way optimized for proscenium seating, utilizing a 'reverse follies' technique, in which actors enter and exit via the audience aisles. The script is written following this formula.

The set: A desk in the middle of the performance space is necessary, desk chair included. Other furniture is entirely optional.

Scene 1

ORPHEUS enters, polishing his pistol, walking silently through the audience and onto the set. He carries a newspaper under his arm. He snaps his fingers. An immense clatter from offstage. THE HOUSESTAFF rush in, in a militaristic-style formation, brandishing feather dusters, bottles of wine, cleaning products, etc. They descend upon the set.

THE HOUSESTAFF (TOGETHER):

1864. April. A morning of utterly no consequence. New York. United States of America, or, well, at least half of it. Good enough.

ORPHEUS:

Before we begin with this travesty, we have a few pointers for you, tonight's unruly crowd. We would know. We've been watching you. Some of you that we find more attractive than others, we'll be watching after the show, too.

ORPHEUS walks to the desk and files his pistol away, then pours a glass of brandy and drinks it quickly.

ORPHEUS:

This stageshow is plot heavy. Please pay attention. We do know that some of you have had drinks to get through this (*he puts the glass down and straightens it up to ensure nobody notices*) but we have to have a little order. Drunk audience members will be brought onstage and made to dance, smoke cheap cigarettes and do their best impersonations of characters in the show.

ORPHEUS walks over to a member of the HOUSESTAFF and takes their duster. He dusts over what they were dusting, then gives it back to them.

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ORPHEUS:

Do not get up during the performance. We do promise that your bladder won't pop like a balloon. However, if it does, our insurance does not cover audience members and it will all be on you. We also will not call the ambulance until after intermission. If you wish to scream, we'll use it as sound effects or to drown out the angry outbursts of the rioting audience.

ORPHEUS straightens his tie and leans against the desk, looking the audience over.

ORPHEUS:

Do not ask "what in the hell is wrong with the person who wrote this?" out loud during the middle of the show. Especially do not ask "what institution is he in?"

ORPHEUS sits on the desk.

ORPHEUS:

If the script content offends you, please do send your complaints to the writer. They will be quickly inserted into the next show, if they make sense in the context or not. If you actively seek to be offended, go to a school board meeting instead.

ORPHEUS gets up and stands near the first row of audience members and extracts his pistol again.

ORPHEUS:

If you would like to question the director as to his choices of material, don't. He knows much more on the topic than you ever will. Now, we will begin the show because we don't get paid overtime.

ORPHEUS snaps his fingers again and THE HOUSESTAFF stop immediately, looking at ORPHEUS.

ORPHEUS:

Good morning, staff. It will have to be quick this morning. The upstairs is beginning to rouse a little earlier than expected. (*He snaps his fingers.*) Pronto!

THE HOUSESTAFF resume cleaning, albeit a bit faster. ORPHEUS files his pistol away. He opens the newspaper.

ORPHEUS:

The war between the states continues. People grow increasingly restless. No end in sight. Figures. President Jefferson of the confederacy, gone. Vanished.

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He closes the newspaper as LUCIAN enters.

ORPHEUS:

Ah, good morning, sir. You look tepid, as par usual.

He walks to LUCIAN and follows him closely down to the desk, LUCIAN sits, taking the paper offered to him by ORPHEUS.

LUCIAN:

Summary, Orpheus?

ORPHEUS:

Nothing worth mention, sir.

LUCIAN:

Not a surprise. Years after we're gone it's still going to print nothing worth reading. A waste of ink.

ORPHEUS chuckles to himself and takes his place, standing diligently by the desk.

ORPHEUS:

I think you need not worry about things like that, sir. Now that you have breakfasted, shall we start the list of things to accomplish for the day?

LUCIAN:

If we must.

ORPHEUS:

Very well, then. Staff, if you will.

ORPHEUS snaps his fingers.

THE HOUSESTAFF(TOGETHER):

You decided you want to start a war, Mr. Lincoln, you'd better finish it. We really don't have time for this. We have an addiction to sweet, sweet, addictive candies that we need to fill, and you're getting in the way. Figure out if you want to win or lose and get it over with. We can't have our fix until it's over.

Orpheus begins ushering THE HOUSESTAFF out using the newspaper in his hands. LUCIAN gets a look of panic on his face as he quickly pours another drink of brandy into the glass from the desk and downs it at once.

LUCIAN:

Oh, please don't tell me that the servants are having my very-same phantasms.

ORPHEUS:

No they aren't, sir. They're housestaff. They aren't allowed to have the same things that you do. That simply isn't something that happens this day in age. The stage day, that is, sir. They aren't of our, (*he pauses*) your, high social status, sir. You may be a lord in the homecountry, but the title still applies, in concept, here.

LUCIAN:

The social justice bloggers aren't going to like that, Orpheus. It's going to hurt our ticket sales.

ORPHEUS:

I think you needn't worry about that, sir. They will inevitably be dealt with. I can promise you that. As a matter of fact, shall we call out the definitive judge on this matter?

ORPHEUS loudly snaps his fingers, sending one of THE HOUSEMAIDS rushing back onstage.

HOUSE SERVANT:

You summoned, sir?

ORPHEUS snarls, looking at THE HOUSEMAID.

ORPHEUS:

No I didn't, you stupid girl! Move along! I'm sure you have a fireplace to sweep-out or some duties to avoid. You are to not be seen or heard!

HOUSE SERVANT:

No, we really haven't set up that precedent, sir, seeing as what we just did and all. I think that was a little less than unnoticeable.

ORPHEUS:

We're talking back now? If you remember, my girl, I am the definitive head of this household. (*He pauses, being caught up in his words, then motions to LUCIAN.*) Other than the head of the house himself, of course. I will be deducting a full dollar from your month's wages.

HOUSE SERVANT:

That's the full wage!

ORPHEUS snaps again, ignoring THE HOUSEMAID. Another HOUSEMAID enters the room.

ORPHEUS:

Make that two dollars. You owe the estate now. You two are dismissed.

HOUSE SERVANTS:

You're firing us now!?

ORPHEUS:

You wish. You're dismissed to go perform your duties for the day. (*He ushers them out of the room*) I bid you both a good morning.

ORPHEUS returns to where LUCIAN is sitting, taking the position to his side once again.

ORPHEUS:

Decent help, sir. It's impossible to get nowadays. Their communication skills are just nonexistent.

RYLAND comes onstage, gripping his copy of the script.

RYLAND:

You called for me?

ORPHEUS:

Yes, we, (*he pauses*) I, did. (*He looks to the audience*) See what I mean? Impossible to find good help. (*He looks to RYLAND*) Mr. Ryland, as director of this production, you can surely answer our questions, correct?

RYLAND:

Yes, I suppose. If you had questions you should have worked them out with myself and the creative team during rehearsals and not (*he grits his teeth, looking at the audience*) during the god-forsaken production. What in the hell is wrong with you people?

ORPHEUS:

Your directing.

RYLAND:

Will you please shut up!? You aren't helping our-

ORPHEUS:

Our.

RYLAND:

Your - critical reception, here.

ORPHEUS:

That is yet another problem. This theatrical revue is supposed to bolster the reputation of the Bloodworth family. It seems to be lacking in that aspect.

RYLAND holds his script up animatedly.

RYLAND:

Stick to the script and we won't have that problem.

ORPHEUS:

The question is regarding the... Thing - we just saw. Did the maids actually see one of the, per say, illusions, that my employer endures daily?

RYLAND:

No, they did not. It was a part of the exposition, in order to explain the story. This isn't the most linear of stories, you know. They were used as illustration.

ORPHEUS:

(He looks to LUCIAN.) See, sir, you needn't worry. The insanity is yours alone. Does that ease your concerns?

LUCIAN:

No, I do believe that it makes it worse.

ORPHEUS:

Your services are no longer needed here, Ryland. Feel free to exit the stage. We will continue now.

RYLAND:

You're firing me?

LUCIAN:

Do we really have to deal with this again? Is this how we continue to go through so many members of house staff, Orpheus?

ORPHEUS:

I assure you sir, it isn't the reason. Please, allow me to remedy the situation. *(He turns to RYLAND once again.)* No, you are free to continue directing the spectacle as you wish.

RYLAND:

Perfect. Alright. *(He looks offstage, making a summoning motion with his hands)* Housestaff, resume the action! Let's get this show moving, we're behind on time!

RYLAND is surprised by the HOUSESTAFF each member carrying a telegraph envelope, each kicking him in

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the rear, sending him offstage. The HOUSESTAFF rush over to the desk, surrounding LUCIAN and ORPHEUS, relaxing leisurely on every available surface. ORPHEUS gives LUCIAN the newspaper he is carrying. He collects the envelopes from the HOUSESTAFF members.

LUCIAN:

The war seems like it's not about to take a break anytime soon, Orpheus. I don't know what we're going to do. We're going to run out of money, eventually. Sooner, rather than later.

THE HOUSESTAFF sigh. One of them lights an opium cigarette from the box on the desk and puts it in LUCIAN's mouth.

LUCIAN:

Do we really have to keep them here? (*He points to the HOUSESTAFF around him.*) They don't exactly make this very easy, and airing these sorts of facts to the house staff can start a rebellion.

ORPHEUS:

Yes, sir. We do. They're a very important part of the show's introduction, as Mr. Ryland has informed us. They are simply part of the spectacle, in their own abstract way, when in the reality of our universe they cannot perceive what we are saying. They are elements of the art. Object d'art, if I may say so. The sooner we get this dialogue out of the way, the sooner we can get rid of them. (*He quickly looks at THE HOUSESTAFF*) No, you're not being fired.

LUCIAN:

If we can't boot-up the factories again and get the products shipped out, I have a feeling financial concerns are going to be the least of our primary ones. The factories are locked up tighter than the wife's motherly love.

Everyone pauses. The room goes dim.

ORPHEUS:

You pay peanuts, you get the circus clowns.

Everyone resumes and the lighting returns.

ORPHEUS:

I don't believe it is that bad, yet, sir. If it was that bad I assure you I would have fled your service by now. I fear that shipments are the main problem, sir. The railroad looks worse than steel spaghetti in the Confederate territories.

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LUCIAN:

It's all giving me heartburn, alright.

LUCIAN throws the cigarette onto the floor and stomps it, then feels his face.

ORPHEUS:

In any case, your aim to reopen the company's doors is a move of much courage, sir.

LUCIAN:

My entire life is an act of courage, Orpheus. Getting out of bed should win me military honors.

THE HOUSESTAFF laugh collectively. ORPHEUS glares them down. They settle.

ORPHEUS:

Sir, problems aside for now, the first thing on the agenda this morning is to examine the status of the company plantations in Indochina. Menthe has arrived back aboard a steamship this morning. He should be ready for your meeting as soon as he finishes settling in. His reports were telegraphed in this morning. (*ORPHEUS silently hands LUCIAN the stack of telegram envelopes, tucking the last one into his blazer while LUCIAN is not paying attention.*) If you would like my expert opinion, I'd just wait and hear it from the whore's mouth.

LUCIAN:

Excuse me, Orpheus?

ORPHEUS:

The horse's mouth, sir. An idiom. From the source. I will leave you to your work, sir. I shall fetch Menthe and bring him in for your meeting (*He straightens his necktie*) and granted, do anything else that needs (*he coughs*) doing. I shall redirect the servants to another wing. It would not be... Sensible, yes, sensible for them to hear your... (*He examines the desktop, where he finds a box of candies. He lifts the lid, examines the contents and then closes it.*) business. (*He exits, snapping his fingers at the HOUSESTAFF. THE HOUSESTAFF come to attention, exiting quickly in a flock.*)

Scene 2

MENTHE (OFFSTAGE):

Damn it, I'm not ready, I'm not ready! I can't go out there yet! Look at me, just look at me! Does it look like I'm ready to go out there?

ORPHEUS (OFFSTAGE):

It looks like you're ready to go stand on a street corner, to be quite honest.

MENTHE (OFFSTAGE):

You'd better mean standing on the corner to catch a coach somewhere.

ORPHEUS (OFFSTAGE):

You're going to catch something dressed like that, alright.

MENTHE, with a housecoat lazily draped around himself, is pushed onstage by ORPHEUS.

ORPHEUS (OFFSTAGE):

Get out there and entertain them! This is the theatre. Knowing these people, it should be easy enough! Look for the critics, get at them first.

MENTHE turns to defend himself, looking offstage, to where he was pushed from by ORPHEUS.

MENTHE:

When I took this job I was told that my only job was to entertain father and that it came with a blank family-expenses checkbook!

ORPHEUS (OFFSTAGE):

You won't see another day if you don't get moving. If this show closes tonight you'd better get used to being dressed like that on street corners because you are going to be o-u-t out! Go!

MENTHE:

What are you talking about, out? I'm already out! You're the one who spends your time in closets all day, damn butler!

ORPHEUS extends his hand from offstage, gently poking MENTHE in the stomach with his pistol.

ORPHEUS (OFFSTAGE):

Work.

MENTHE spins on his heels to face the audience. ORPHEUS retracts.

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MENTHE:

Well, well, looks like we've got a decent crowd out here tonight... How're we all doing? Good? *(He looks at the crowd, who probably won't respond. He lets the silence sink in for a moment.)* Good... *(He waves at someone in the crowd)* It's been a while since I've last seen you! How are you? I didn't think we'd be seeing you tonight, what, with that nasty case you had and all. *(He strikes a sensual pose.)* Did you order that bum cream you told me about? You know, the one from the strange, probably non-pharmacologically credited apothecary in Indochina. *(He moves to another spot to stand.)* We'll talk about it later, come to my dressing room. *(He winks and then waves to another person in the audience.)* My dear! Look at you! *(He shades his eyes with his hand.)* I mean, really! *(He pauses.)* Look at you... Modern medicine is so... So... Amazing, isn't it? A completely new face. As if the original *(He pauses.)* wasn't beautiful! *(He turns and whispers at one side of the audience)* Find out who the surgeon was. That man is a breathing malpractice. I don't even want him looking at me. And if you're in the audience, invest in the show and I won't repeat that again!

RYLAND (OFFSTAGE):

Menthe! Please, please, please pay attention! I can feel the lawyers coming down on us already! *(He reaches from offstage, waving his marked-up script booklet.)* The script, the damned script! Use it!

MENTHE:

Right, the script! I've never been good at following instructions. It's always lead to *(He looks to LUCIAN.)* - punishment.

ORPHEUS extends his hand from behind the curtain again, showing MENTHE his pistol. MENTHE looks at it and sighs. ORPHEUS retracts.

MENTHE:

I know, I know! Get off my back! *(He glances to Lucian)* Well, other than you, sir.

LUCIAN continues to sip on his brandy and coughs dryly. MENTHE extracts his copy of the script from his pilfered housecoat and looks it over for a moment. He looks back to the audience for a moment, grinning.

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THE HOUSESTAFF file in, military style, behind MENTHE. MENTHE and THE HOUSESTAFF make their way to LUCIAN. THE HOUSESTAFF act as if they're cleaning but are truly listening in as MENTHE sits on the desk where LUCIAN is sitting. He files his script booklet away.

LUCIAN:

I see that our plantations in Indochina are performing above-expectations this quarter. Any reason for that, Menthe?

MENTHE sheds his pilfered housecoat, dropping it on the floor.

MENTHE:

It's a bit hotter than usual.

ORPHEUS (OFFSTAGE):

I'll open some windows, sir.

MENTHE:

The crops are taking up to an accelerated growth pattern. Something the horticulturalists call global warming. All the coal ash in the ether or something. Who knows. The external investors in Indochina are liking the results. We have quite a number of potential stock buyers practically lined up out the door to get their hands, or, wallets, on stocks. A few of them have already thrown into the pot!

LUCIAN opens another telegraph envelope and begins reading the letter. He makes a shocked, concerned look and sinks back in his chair.

MENTHE:

Sir, I do hope that this little spell your having is over me and not-

LUCIAN:

Why did you not tell me that they are coming, until now?

MENTHE:

I was just about to say-

LUCIAN:

There's no need to now, it's right here in black and blue! An entire lot of investors are due over. This letter isn't going to be the only thing that is black and blue, if you keep at it.

MENTHE:

Fresh off the boat! They are expecting some sort of reception, and then they'll put their money into the company. I figured you would be happy! We need this money! I need this money, my wardrobe hasn't been updated since last week! I know we're supposed to be making sacrifices, but, what is next, warm champagne!?

LUCIAN puts his head down on the desk, gripping his brandy glass.

MENTHE:

You do realize, sir, that if the investors put more of their money in, it'll be enough to reopen the factories, right? The railroad here in the Union is in alright enough shape to hit at least most of the northern territories. (*He looks himself over.*) Speaking of shape, what do you think of me? I've tried the opium and gin diet. I can't tell if it's the haze in my vision or I really did lose a few pounds. Anytime I look in the mirror it's like being in a fun house, I'm all wrapped-in on myself.

LUCIAN bangs his head on the desk a few times.

LUCIAN:

Yes, Menthe, I do realize that. That does eliminate some of our problems, but not the whole of them. Half of the market is still cut off.

MENTHE:

(*He examines his fingernails*) That's how I feel when I'm in Indochina away from you, emaciated.

LUCIAN:

Estranged?

MENTHE:

At any rate - (*he opens the box of candy on the desk and examines the contents*) I'm glad to be back home. I was starting to miss the luxuries. Including these - (*he pops a candy into his mouth.*) Sugar, cocoa, and high-grade cocaine, you've found the formula for heaven, sir, aside from yourself. Everybody's hooked on it. It's a shame you can't get it all shipped out everywhere, though. I hear people are getting pretty antsy. Hell hath no fury like a chocoholic scorned.

THE HOUSESTAFF create a "V" formation in front of the desk, wielding their cleaning utensils.

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MENTHE:

Let's face it, sir. Those people will pay just about anything to get at a box of your treats. (*He extracts a pair of pliers from his pocket.*) We can use that to our advantage and get filthier rich.

THE HOUSEMAID from the bottom of the "V" formation madly rushes toward MENTHE, sitting on the desk. MENTHE leans in, taking a pair of pliers from his pocket and reaching into the HOUSEMAID's mouth, rearing back, pulling, as she screams.

MENTHE:

You know, it could be said that we started the war, after all. We both know what was on that supply ship to Sumter. (*He pulls more with the pliers. Screaming.*) Luckily, that sounds so strange that I think it won't even be considered a (*he pokes more, looking confused*) conspiracy theory!

He yanks one final time, pulling back a coin in the pliers then looks to LUCIAN.

MENTHE:

Well, as long as we start getting some of the stuff shipped out, we'll be rolling in the (*he inspects the coin and wipes it on LUCIAN before pocketing it*) money. Oh, by the way, you're probably expecting the investment check, right? Well...

MENTHE hands the pliers to THE HOUSEMAID.

LUCIAN:

That had better mean that the mail is running late.

MENTHE:

Now, don't be mad when I say it! I had to do it!

LUCIAN:

It had better be the breathing kind of "had to" and not the "I spent a night out too late yesterday and need an extra breakfast martini to get on my feet" had to.

MENTHE:

I may, maybe, you know, have put the investment funds into assorted railroad companies to, you know, open up the lines again?

LUCIAN:

How many?

MENTHE:

Three.

LUCIAN:

Not drinks, boy! Railroads! How many companies did you put money into!?

MENTHE:

Maybe about fifty?

LUCIAN grabs MENTHE's necktie.

LUCIAN:

You've turned my investments into a jigsaw puzzle, you half-wit!

One of THE HOUSEMAIDS quickly pours a drink into LUCIAN's brandy glass and hands it to MENTHE. He holds it up to LUCIAN.

MENTHE:

(*choked*) I told you to not get mad! Use the rest of the family money to re-open the factories. With all the money put in, the railroads are going to have no problem fixing those lines up! If the railroads are running you shouldn't have a problem!

LUCIAN:

Not me, you. If this fails, you're going to be on missing posters.

ORPHEUS (OFFSTAGE):

Shall I find the best discount-rate printing presses, sir?

LUCIAN:

I will not use what remains of the family's stash. You will find a way to fix this.

THE HOUSEMAIDS rush away, lining the audience exit row. CONSTANCE enters, standing at the top, looking at LUCIAN and MENTHE with a look that could commit genocide.

CONSTANCE:

Darling, there you are! With the apprentice, no less. Where is the butler? Menthe, darling, you shouldn't spend too much of your time around my husband. He hasn't enough dynamite in his head to blow his nose or pop his ears. I wouldn't want him to rob you of that.

ORPHEUS (OFFSTAGE):

Wouldn't be the first thing he robbed from him.

MENTHE:

Ryland!

LUCIAN releases MENTHE. LUCIAN, CONSTANCE and THE HOUSEMAIDS pause. RYLAND rushes onstage, gripping his script booklet.

MENTHE:

I thought I was to be the love interest?

RYLAND:

This is a contemporary work. There are two, supposedly, but if you want my opinion, there is only one. The other is only implied for the sake of comedy.

MENTHE:

And what is that supposed to mean? The one had better be me, or there is going to be an embargo and it isn't going to be chocolate!

RYLAND:

(He pauses) Exactly my point. You are to compete with Constance. It's part of the comedic effect, as I said. If you would read your copy of the *(he slaps his hand against his script booklet angrily)* script, you would know this! Sounds like there is more paper and ink being wasted here than just on your paycheck. At any rate, the show is attempting to appeal to all types.

ORPHEUS enters, carrying a tea tray, moves to the desk and puts it down, then snaps his fingers. LUCIAN, MENTHE AND CONSTANCE return to normal. RYLAND and THE HOUSEMAIDS quickly exit, pushing past CONSTANCE. LUCIAN bangs his head back onto the desktop.

MENTHE:

You all are getting paid for this?

ORPHEUS extracts a check from his blazer and shows it to the audience with a grin. He puts it away again. MENTHE turns to him.

MENTHE:

Orpheus, do you know something about this paycheck business?

ORPHEUS:

It's the first word I've heard of it. I will look into it immediately.

ORPHEUS:

Shall I begin the necessary preparations for a gathering this evening, sir?

LUCIAN:

I suppose it's a good idea, Orpheus. I don't see too many ways out of it other than death.

ORPHEUS:

Well, sir, you should never plan to live to the next day, that's just poor planning. (*He extracts and begins polishing his pistol.*) Luckily, you have staff to manage those sorts of things for you. I shall begin with the preparations immediately.

ORPHEUS moves toward the audience, speaking an aside to them.

ORPHEUS:

If I can't up and conjure up a fix for this one, it'll be swelter guaranteed. Without an innumerable fortune to plunder away from, it'll be back to the streets from which I came. Back to eating women of the night in Nashville for lunch and boarding in dank attics of barrooms. (*ORPHEUS shudders*)

ORPHEUS takes the box of chocolates from the desk and moves back to his spot. He plucks a candy from the box, looking at the piece of candy in his fingers.

ORPHEUS:

Not even to mention a strung-up American population with cocaine and cocoa on it's breath along with blood and desperation on it's fingers. A very nasty mix. Like a drug tasting gathering for starved cannibal bushmen outfitted with knives. All I must do (*ORPHEUS pops a candy into his mouth.*) is to simply take my bite from the apple of fortune. One belonging to a certain...

ORPHEUS looks to LUCIAN and moves by the desk.

ORPHEUS:

Worry not, sir, those investors will be clambering to get to you.

ORPHEUS takes another candy from the box and then puts it down, after this he then moves to exit the stage, standing at the opening of the exit. He pops the candy into his mouth.

MENTHE AND CONSTANCE:

They'd better not!

ORPHEUS exits.

MENTHE:

I hate to depart so sweetly, sir, but if I'm supposed to get the company back afloat all on my lonesome...
(*He hikes his trouser leg and makes a face at Lucian, hoping for a response. CONSTANCE stares him down.*) I'll bring you everything I'll need you to sign, later.

MENTHE moves up the audience aisle and exits.

Scene 3

CONSTANCE:

Freshen this up, won't you, my dear?

THE HOUSESERVANT walks over to the desk and looks at what is remaining in the glass. He downs it, then acts as if he's going to vomit. LUCIAN playfully pulls a top hat out from the desk and puts it on, then picks up a cane from underneath the desk and entertains himself mindlessly.

LUCIAN:

Dear, must you drink so much? If you have it all I'm not going to have any left.

CONSTANCE moves over and grabs LUCIAN's necktie, leaning in to get a good look at his face. He uses his cane to try to keep her back.

CONSTANCE:

You listen here, you slimy-

LUCIAN (INTERJECTING):

I believe wet is a better term, for the amount of that brandy I've had.

CONSTANCE leans in further, getting angrier. MENTHE walks in. THE HOUSESERVANT puts the glass down and exits.

MENTHE:

Oh my lord!

LUCIAN:

Yes, dear?

MENTHE:

Not you lord, him lord! (*He points to the ceiling*)

LUCIAN:

Can't you see that I'm-

CONSTANCE:

We're-

LUCIAN:

busy!? Is that not obvious enough?

CONSTANCE:

I suppose not.

LUCIAN:

This isn't exactly the best time. If you could back up and walk out, that would be quite dandy of you.

MENTHE:

If I knew something was happening, I wouldn't have come in (*he pauses*)- but, sir, oh, you should have seen me! I was on fire!

CONSTANCE:

You're on fire, alright.

MENTHE:

We're going to be absolutely rolling in money by the time I'm finished, you won't believe the scheme! The wheels of my brain were spinning so fast that they spit sparks!

MENTHE gingerly takes the cane from LUCIAN's hands. CONSTANCE attempts to fall into LUCIAN's arms but he holds her back still.

LUCIAN:

More sparks than usual, I suppose?

MENTHE:

No, sir, not one of our five-alarm suit-off fires. Having said that, not only are you the major shareholder in a variety of multiple small-scale railroad companies, but still the chairholder of your own company while selling nearly all of the stock in it!

MENTHE spins the cane and lifts the top hat off of LUCIAN's head. He puts it on, stumbling around the room as he attempts to imitate LUCIAN.

MENTHE:

How, exactly? Now that's one secret that I can't give away. (*He extracts a stock certificate and shows it to LUCIAN, then the audience.*) They had no idea what they were buying! False stocks into the company!

MENTHE stands on the desk, pointing his cane at the audience.

MENTHE:

Who is the pseudo-industrial venture capitalist paternalistic patriarch now!? By the time the real investors get here, the stock price will be sky high for the few minority shares left and we'll take all of the kickback! It is a seamless situation!

LUCIAN:

It's still problematic to me. Fix what you've royally destroyed.

MENTHE jumps down from the desk. ORPHEUS enters and stands by the entrance.

ORPHEUS:

You all have a visitor. It seems to be the son.

MENTHE:

Do not worry, sir, I am going to absolutely solve everything and save this family.

ORPHEUS:

Corporation.

MENTHE:

Bloodworth Corporation.

CONSTANCE:

The Bloodworth family, you mean.

MENTHE sits on the desk. ANSON enters.

LUCIAN:

Son! Finally back from school? How was it? Wait. (*He pours and takes a drink of brandy.*) Now tell me. Come talk to papa. (*He pets his lap.*)

ANSON:

No thank you, father. I think enough people have been there for today. I've been in the west wing. In my room and in the library. The poets section.

(CONTINUED)

LUCIAN:

Really now, my boy? I have been giving mother checks to pay for your "private boarding school specializing in the arts" for quite some time now. I think it would be best if you told me that you've taken up the subject of disappearing and reappearing magic, along with the art of deception, now.

CONSTANCE takes up a worried look and rushes to ANSON, wrapping an arm around him.

ANSON:

Actually, father, it's a liberal arts degree. I'm not old enough to go to college yet, though.

LUCIAN:

Might as well be magic, then.

CONSTANCE:

Now don't you go getting on his case, dear. This is the first time you've seen him in forever!

LUCIAN:

Oh, don't you start with me! The last time you've actually seen him was-

ANSON:

Never.

LUCIAN:

All you see is a blurry outline.

CONSTANCE:

I can identify him. You know, the size of a taller-than-average child's coffin, hair that looks like soft-blond swirly things.

LUCIAN:

You thought the scullery maid was him. 'Remember that?

CONSTANCE:

Yes, but, darling, don't you remember the write-up in the newspaper?

MENTHE begins stuffing his mouth with chocolates from the box on the desk. ORPHEUS takes his place by the desk.

LUCIAN:

I can't forget it, sadly. The picture of you sitting with her, drinking tea, all with the caption "Lady Bloodworth dines with scullery maid, showing extreme tolerance for those less fortunate." That isn't exactly

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

LUCIAN: (cont'd)
the type of image we need while in the middle of a war,
dear.

ANSON:
I've been "gone" for three months and you choose to
fight right now?

CONSTANCE covers ANSON's ears with her hands.

CONSTANCE:
Of course not, son. Your mother and I, aren't fighting!
We don't fight, we simply have, spars with our words.

MENTHE:
(With his mouth full) and bloody ones at that.

CONSTANCE:
At the end of the day, son, I love your father.

*MENTHE chokes and LUCIAN picks up his brandy
glass, having ORPHEUS fill it, then he downs it
quickly.*

ANSON:
As much as you love cabernet?

CONSTANCE:
That is a loaded question, and I won't have it.

LUCIAN:
But she will drink it, son.

ANSON:
I've had enough of this. I'm going to sit with the
uncle.

*ANSON generally ignores everyone and exits, not
paying much mind. ORPHEUS follows behind him.*

CONSTANCE:
Great going, dear. You've scared the boy away!

LUCIAN:
I believe that you did that on your own, dearest. But,
so be it. Aren't all children has age that way?

*LUCIAN stands and takes CONSTANCE's arm. They
start toward the exit together. MENTHE follows
closely behind, trying to get onto LUCIAN's other
arm. As they near the exit, CONSTANCE stops and
turns to MENTHE.*

CONSTANCE:

Listen to me, you little harlot without a massage parlor, if you lay your hands on my husband, they'll be finding pieces of you in California!

MENTHE:

Do you hear how she's talking to me?

LUCIAN:

No, I'm sticking to the script. I'm not giving up my possible future tony award for this.

They all exit.

Scene 4

DAVIS will need to enter and lie face-down on the floor in front of the desk before the lights reopen.

ORPHEUS and LUCIAN enter.

LUCIAN:

Orpheus, m'man, what is that woman doing lying on the floor of my parlor? They don't look like Constance... It's what time, eleven?

ORPHEUS:

It seems to be so, sir. Eleven in the morning.

LUCIAN:

Well, it's the right time for her to be like this, at least.

ORPHEUS:

Shall we turn the person in question over and see the truth of her identity, sir?

LUCIAN:

No! What an absolutely miserable idea! Horrible! At least at this point she'll only be able to identify the catalog number of the rug fabric and not me! She's like Pandora's box! Don't turn her over and shake her! Who knows what could spill out!

ORPHEUS:

At this point, sir, probably whatever she's eaten and the most of the liquor cabinet. Please excuse me, sir.

He approaches DAVIS, still lying face-down on the carpet. He pokes at the body with his foot.

(CONTINUED)

ORPHEUS:

I fear that this may not be a lady at all, sir. Stone cold, they are. Not an ounce of the spunk of life. She's... Or he's... dusted over with cocaine though. Looks like they rolled in it. Like a dog. A bit--

LUCIAN (INTERJECTING):

I told you, that's not Constance! I know her backside well enough!

ORPHEUS:

Some people would say that you know the backside of Menthe more, sir.

LUCIAN:

Oh, do be quiet and get me a brandy! This is all too much for me! I need some lubricant.

ORPHEUS:

Again, with the backside, sir.

ORPHEUS carefully steps over the body, his rear pointing toward LUCIAN and the audience -

LUCIAN:

Make sure to fill it, butler!

ORPHEUS turns his rear to the opposite side, pointing offstage. He fills the brandy glass and hands it to LUCIAN.

LUCIAN:

I'm so tired of this. I'm positively going to throw myself off the upstairs balcony before the wife does.

ORPHEUS:

Allow me to go find a shovel or something, sir... We have to get her out of the house before someone sees her, or him, and reports... it... to the police.

ORPHEUS snaps his fingers, sending a HOUSESERVANT rushing in with a broom. He joins LUCIAN and ORPHEUS. ORPHEUS examines the broom.

ORPHEUS:

We're going to need a bigger utensil.

ORPHEUS immediately gives the broom back and sends him away. He snaps his fingers again. RYLAND enters, carrying a shovel. He joins ORPHEUS and LUCIAN.

ORPHEUS:

Ah, perhaps your directorial skills aren't so bad after all. (*He takes the shovel*) Also, please disconnect the in-home telegraph line. We can't have people summoning help. You are dismissed.

RYLAND moves offstage.

ORPHEUS:

Just a moment, sir. Allow me to roll the body over. We must get an identity on them.

ORPHEUS moves to DAVIS, standing over him, and gives him a prod in the rear with the shovel. DAVIS screams. LUCIAN quickly downs the entire contents of his brandy glass, then screams.

DAVIS:

Good lord, Bloodworth! You have a top-notch selection of staff. A little hasty, though. (*He rolls over, looking at ORPHEUS*) You haven't even served dinner yet! How dare you treat a lady like that! I'll excuse you, though.

LUCIAN:

Orpheus, m'man, he's calling himself a woman.

ORPHEUS:

I can hear that, sir. I believe, in my estimates, it would be some sort of stress disorder. Being on the losing side of a war does tend to do that, you know.

A HOUSEMAID quickly and silently enters, brandishing a feather duster and begins dusting the room.

DAVIS:

Mrs. Davis. Mrs. Jefferson. Davis. It's a pleasure to meet you. (*He offers a hand to LUCIAN from the floor.*)

ORPHEUS:

My assumption is hysteria.

LUCIAN:

Try the shovel again.

ORPHEUS:

I believe I'll refrain from such activity, sir. (*strained*) As difficult as that is.

ORPHEUS puts the shovel down and helps DAVIS up. He then pours LUCIAN a brandy and gives it to him. He picks the shovel back up.

DAVIS:

I'm here to visit with your wife, my dear Lucian. It has been quite a while since I have seen her in person, with the account of the war and all. How I do relish her letters, though! They always come blotchy and smell like extra-dry white. I suppose that's the fault of the drunks in the postal service.

LUCIAN:

Do you have any idea what he's talking about, Orpheus?

ORPHEUS:

Not in the slightest. I believe I will take my leave now, sir. I will fetch the wife to take care of our... Guest.

ORPHEUS snaps his fingers, causing the maid to rush ahead of him, up the audience aisle. She stops about halfway.

THE HOUSEMAID:

Mr. Orpheus, what are you doing with that shovel?

ORPHEUS:

Nothing you mind, my dear girl.

ORPHEUS brandishes the shovel and moves forward. THE HOUSEMAID breaks into a run out the exit doors. ORPHEUS follows, moving at his normal pace. Once he exits there is a clatter and a scream.

CONSTANCE enters, trailed by THE HOUSESTAFF, minus the one that just exited. Once THE HOUSESTAFF reach the bottom of the stage they take to lounging about the set.

CONSTANCE:

Mrs. Davis, what a pleasure to see you here! You didn't notify me that you were coming! That could be considered rude, you know!

DAVIS:

So is not offering your guest a drink!

CONSTANCE:

You look like you've helped yourself to something, alright. *(She wipes a finger on DAVIS and tastes it)* You must tell me what pharmacy you get your cocaine, dear. That's high-grade, there! *(She looks at LUCIAN, holding his brandy)* Give that to me, dear. You don't need so much of that! *(She takes the glass and gives it to DAVIS.)* There.

DAVIS:

Thank you, darling. That is considerably better.

CONSTANCE and DAVIS hug. LUCIAN takes a seat at the desk.

LUCIAN:

Women. I'll never understand them.

MENTHE (OFFSTAGE):

I think I've solved the problem, sir!

LUCIAN:

Men either.

CONSTANCE:

What brings you here, Mrs. Davis?

DAVIS:

Ah, that's an easy one to answer, my dear. The war was simply getting to me, and I was seeking vacation. Not to mention, there isn't a box of the Bloothworth's prized candies anywhere, so, I decided to pay a visit to the source to procure some! And of course, to visit with the family. Why your candies are so good that they make my mouth numb.

CONSTANCE:

Well, surely we can fix this problem. Orpheus! Butler! Bring Mrs. Davis a box from the pantry, won't you?

ORPHEUS enters, carrying a large box of chocolates.

CONSTANCE:

Mrs. Davis, won't you stay for a while? Tonight is the grand factory re-opening gala and we'd love to have you here for it.

DAVIS:

You and your husband are both just so sweet that I fear I'll develop cavities and you'll have to pull the teeth from my head!

LUCIAN:

We've already had that part of the show.

DAVIS:

Of course I will stay!

CONSTANCE:

Beautiful news! Now, getting back on track, dear, give me the son's next boarding school check. He needs it for... Books, yes, books.

(CONTINUED)

LUCIAN:
No.

CONSTANCE:
At any rate (*she stares LUCIAN down*) Mrs. Davis, let us retire to the other parlor rather than sitting and listening to this drabble. We need to go upstairs and prepare for tonight! We are going to be the two most beautiful women there!

LUCIAN:
That isn't saying very much.

CONSTANCE:
I heard that. (*She quickly turns to LUCIAN*) Too bad that foot you're sticking in your mouth isn't Menthe's, dear!

CONSTANCE takes DAVIS by the hand and leads him offstage. THE HOUSESTAFF follow.

LUCIAN:
Orpheus, isn't it clear that Mrs. Davis is actually Mr. Jefferson Davis? As in president of the Confederacy, Jefferson Davis?

ORPHEUS:
To those that are somewhat sober, sir. Yes. As much brandy you've had today, I fear that it will only be a short time before you begin thinking that he is indeed a lady. By the way, sir (*He removes his pistol and begins polishing it with his now bloody handkerchief*) on the way here from the kitchens I encountered Mr. Hughe Verdigris, the uncle as you all call him, and was informed by him that he wishes to speak with you. He waits outside for your call.

LUCIAN:
Come in!

Scene 5

HUGHE enters. ORPHEUS exits, staring HUGHE down as he walks out.

HUGHE:
Good morning, Lucian. The gardens are particularly blooming this time of year. Have you been out there? You know, it's a perfect escape from the wife. With her being allergic to life, and all.

(CONTINUED)