

**A FIELD OF GLORY**  
**A New Play by Sharon Talbot**

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## **A FIELD OF GLORY**

**Inspired by real people and events.**

### **SYNOPSIS**

**The play is set during the American Civil War and concerns a Mississippi mother talking with her son, a Confederate soldier, just returned from the front about his experiences. About a third of the way through the play the reader/audience knows (or thinks they know) how it will end but the playwright cleverly diverts the dialogue into a discussion of the morality and economics of slavery and the politics and cost of the war. This is so well done that the denouement is a shock.**

**The play runs for 75 minutes with no interval and with only 2 actors so it will challenge the best players.**

### **CAST:**

#### **ROSALIA**

A tall Southern woman in her forties, sparkling, lovely, intelligent, possessed of a wicked sense of humor, ahead of her time. She must be able to carry a tune and move well enough to dance the Virginia Reel.

#### **JOHN**

ROSALIA'S son, 18, taller than she, handsome, gentle, uncynical, full of fun, a thinker with a sense of humor like his mother; a Confederate soldier. Though very much the boy, he has dignity and maturity beyond his years. He must be able to carry a tune and move well enough to dance the Virginia Reel.

Both are articulate and eloquent. They have a powerful relationship and love each other dearly.

### **TIME:**

A beautiful day in April, 1862. Early morning to sunset.

### **PLACE:**

A plantation flower garden at the bottom of a small grassy hill, Palmetto Place, Mississippi. The last three steps of an outdoor stairway can barely be seen upstage left behind the foliage. Flowers grow in abundance on either side of a flagstone path which divides the space. Downstage right, a flattened patch of dead rose bushes and weeds. Upstage right, a decorative garden bench. Upstage left, a decorative garden chair. Upstage center, a table that

holds pots, etc. Flowers everywhere. Throughout the play, breezes blow, birds sing, insects buzz.

**Performed without intermission. Running time 75 minutes. Two characters, one set.**

## A FIELD OF GLORY

*ROSALIA gardens for the sheer joy of growing things. She finds serenity and freedom among the plants, working out her thoughts by talking to herself and to her flowers. She's not crazy, just sociable.*

Morning, 8AM.

**(offstage; a huge crash of garden tools falling, a silence, a scream) God dammit!!!**

**ROSALIA drags heavy gardening tools down the stairs, perturbed, swearing under her breath. Supplies hanging around her neck and on her arms clink and clatter with every move. She wears gardening clothes of the period over which is an apron with enormous pockets that hold all manner of necessities and amenities for the day, including a scissors, an ivy clipper, a bulb planter, ointment, gardening gloves, a flask of bourbon, and Major Hudson's letter. The bib of the apron has an inside pocket that can be accessed from the top. Stuck through the bib of the apron is a needle and thread. She carries a bowl of unshelled peas on top of which sit a trowel and a metal cup, a container for the pea husks, a delicate wooden fan rake, a cast iron hoe, a cast iron shovel, a straw basket and a canvas bag containing a metal kit of hominy for her lunch. Over her shoulder, like a handbag, hangs a container of bat guano fertilizer on a string. She also carries a watering can full of water. Around her throat is a piece of muslin to catch sweat. She wears a broad-brimmed straw hat with the ribbons dangling down.**

**ROSLIA slams the watering can down on a table upstage center, stops dead and hollers out front, over the fields.**

ROSALIA

Abraham? Hoo hoo! (no answer) Oh, I forgot.

**ROSALIA slams down the two bowls for the unshelled peas, runs upstage right, calls out again,**

ROSALIA

Abraham?? Hoo Hooooo!!?? (no answer) Oh, well, never mind.

**ROSLIA comes back to stage center, still dragging the shovel and hoe, out of breath, surveys her garden then, during the monologue, deposits everything around the stage appropriately.**

ROSALIA

(with curtsies) Good morning! Good morning! Good morning! I have missed you so. I haven't been myself since I was last down here, when was it, two whole weeks ago. I have neglected you. I'm so sorry. Y'all look like hell. (to a stand of sunflowers) Hello, sunflowers. How've you been? It's so good to be back in my Garden of Eden. (to a box of tulips) Hello tulips. You're none the worse for wear. I feel so much better down here with y'all. Free, free, free!! Can you believe it, my lovelies? Eight AM on an April morning and sweltering already? (she whips off her sun bonnet, fans herself, plops down on the garden chair) Whoo! How the sun do burn! Come on, freckles!

(she pulls a silver flask from her pocket). No, you may not have some of this. You know damn well this is not water. (takes a sip)

Well yes, we have had crazy weather. It snowed in January as you recall but still did not get cold enough to slaughter pork. Those little piggies got a reprieve. And I actually saw white hyacinths in bloom over there (stands, walks to hyacinths stage left) -- yes, I see you -- and now you are very leggy -- and we had vegetables up at Christmas. Lovely Providence must be favoring the poor soldiers. Thank you. (toasts the sky, sips) Now, I'm going to clean up this dead patch here and put in new rose bushes, so watch out. (she plucks a caterpillar from a sunflower stalk) What the Hell are you? You gonna eat up my sunflowers, Mr. Caterpillar? Well, all right. There. (puts caterpillar back on stalk.) I'm done with killing. How about you?

(she pulls up a dead rose branch) Ouch! Damn thorn. Ow! Ow! Ow! (hollers, throws a little girl tantrum, hops around in pain, hollering upstage right) Abraham! I need the ointment . . . (puts the injured thumb in her mouth, gets instant relief, relishes it for a moment, removes it from her mouth, considers) See, I have always said, spit works best. (hollers upstage right) Never mind, Abraham. Oh, I forgot, Abraham's working in the barn this morning. (hollers upstage left) Never mind, Abraham. (she puts on gardening gloves; surveys the garden) Yes, he is a very good worker. No. He is not a Darkie. He is a Negro. Nee (points to her knee) – grow (points up). That is Spanish for black. Actually, I call him my gentle brown gentleman. And Lucy is my gentle brown lady. Hell, she's so sweet and much smarter than all the neighbors. (JOHN enters quietly from stage left; watches her with amusement) I don't care if everyone thinks I'm crazy --

JOHN

Mama.

**ROSALIA whips around and stares.**

JOHN

I wanted to surprise you.

**JOHN stands upstage center, smiling, hat in hand. A breeze passes through. He's in his Confederate uniform, dusty and tired, a light smear of dirt on his face. He has a slight limp which disappears very soon after his arrival. He's cheerful and outgoing, very glad to be home, and full of the excitement and glory of battle.**

JOHN

Still talking to yourself, I see.

**ROSALIA believes she's seeing things.**

ROSALIA

(can barely speak, in a whisper) John --

JOHN

Major Hudson gave us a few days' leave. I jumped on the train from Corinth.

**JOHN starts towards her. ROSALIA holds up her hand. He stops.**

ROSALIA

Every night I dream I hear your voice. I turn around and there you are, but then you vanish and I cry my eyes out. (He takes a step towards her) Stay right there. (She waves her hand to see if he'll disappear, musters a smile and tests him to be sure he's real) How are you?

JOHN

Fine.

ROSALIA

Good. (sweetly) How's the war?

JOHN

Well . . . fine . . .

ROSALIA

Good. What brings you here today?

JOHN

-- um, I miss you and Papa . . . um . . . I'm starving for your homemade biscuits --

ROSALIA

-- starving!!! It is you! (She throws herself into his arms.) I missed you so much, I thought I would die! Every night I prayed you were safe out there, then your letter would come, I'd be fine for a few days then I'd fall apart. I've been horrible to your father, I've been awful to the children, I've had the blackest of moods wandering through the house, talking to myself even worse than out here.

JOHN

(holds her) It's all right. I'm here.

ROSALIA

I thought I was stronger.

JOHN

Don't worry, Ma. It's nice to see you be real for a change.

ROSALIA

(reels back, looks at at him) What?

JOHN

(a quick save) It's nice to see you, really.

ROSALIA

Oooooh. Look at you, so handsome in your uniform. (she fusses with his uniform jacket to make sure he's real)

JOHN

Nary a scratch on me, Ma. (limps back a step, pounds his chest)

ROSALIA

You're limping.

JOHN

Yes, ma'am. I tripped and scraped my knee on the road to the house.

ROSALIA

Six months at war and you're wounded in the driveway?

JOHN

Running to see you, Mama.

**ROSALIA giggles, sways, starting to pass out. JOHN grabs her, walks her to the bench.**

JOHN

So, you are surprised!

ROSALIA

Surprised??? My heart stopped! Thank you for writing me every single week. Your letters saved me.

JOHN

I'd write you every single day but people keep shooting at me. (she clings to him as if he might disappear) Thank God I'm home. I love this garden. Weren't there roses over there?

ROSALIA

There were. I'm putting in a new crop. The garden will look just as it did when you played here as a child. (takes a deep breath, recovers) I got so dizzy.

JOHN

How's Papa?

ROSALIA

Papa? Papa's coming home from Memphis this evening. He'll be flabbergasted. (indicates a scratch on the back of his hand) You said "Nary a scratch on me, Ma." Is this a painting of a scratch?

JOHN

Oh, I forgot.

ROSALIA

(staring at it) Why, it's a gash.

JOHN

Oh, yes . . . well I'm going to sit with you all day and let you take care of me.

ROSALIA

And I won't get a thing done down here and I don't care. Would you like some water or something to eat?

JOHN

Water, please.

**ROSALIA takes off the gardening gloves, flutters around him delightedly like a maternal butterfly.**

ROSALIA

(overjoyed; realizing yes, he's real) Water! He wants water!! I'll get it.

**ROSALIA pours water from the watering can into a small metal cup, humming a happy little tune; hands it to him.**

JOHN

Amazing. Everything is the same. How's my baby sister?

ROSALIA

Little Belle turned twelve while you were away. Watch out. She'll wrap you around her little finger.

JOHN

Just like her mama does.

**JOHN starts to take the cup of water but she holds on to it, helps him drink as if he were a child.**

ROSALIA

There. And Waller's almost as tall as you are. Anna will enter sixth level this spring. Little Travis is the great popular thing with the young ladies. Tommie and Willie are driving Papa crazy for a wagon and a horse like Uncle Bob's --

JOHN

You said that in your letters.

ROSALIA

I did? Oh. Now, let me see that knee.

JOHN

(warningly) No spit, Ma.

ROSALIA

Of course not!

**She rolls up his pant leg. She dips the corner of her apron into JOHN's water and daubs the scrape during the scene.**

JOHN

Is Papa well?

ROSALIA



Well? Your papa has made a splendid crop of everything this year. I felt really proud when I saw our own beef cut out and hung in the smokehouse.

JOHN

You are making a start once more!

ROSALIA

We are in recovery at last! Not to mention that Papa has become so industrious he's taken up knitting --

JOHN

-- knitting???

ROSALIA

-- knitting. (she dries the scrape with another part of the apron) Carries it around with him. He just finished Waller and himself a pair of gloves knit on a bone. (finds ointment in her pocket) Oh, here's the ointment. I had it all along. Now hold on, this might sting just a touch (she dabs ointment on the knee) --

JOHN

-- (screaming) aaaaaaaagh!!

**Barreling right along, she takes the piece of muslin from around her neck and carefully bandages JOHN's knee during the following.**

ROSALIA

-- oh, hush. (rattling off her accomplishments) Anyway, I have what I consider better frying sized chickens than the Irbys do over there and any quantity of eggs. I sometimes send off ten dozen at a time to Como for which I get 20 cents and 32½ cents for butter. I've been whipping up butter like mad for --

JOHN

(bursts out laughing) You haven't changed a bit!

ROSALIA

Neither have you! You never let me finish a --

JOHN

-- by the way, how's my --

ROSALIA

-- crop. Fine. Your crop is fine. By my steelyard weights you made 200 bales of cotton --

JOHN

-- whoo! --

ROSALIA

-- not that it matters with that goddamn cotton blockade --

JOHN

(delighted) Ma! You're swearing!

ROSALIA

When I packed you off to Bowling Green in October, I took it up for my health. (she takes the piece of muslin from her throat and wraps his knee)

JOHN

(laughing) Well aren't you charming.

ROSALIA

Yes, I am.

**JOHN carefully rolls down his pant leg.**

ROSALIA

Anyway, those fools think they're going to starve us out with their Anaconda Plan, but they won't. (a pause for effect) John. (a pause for effect) Mexico.

JOHN

What?

ROSALIA

Our neighbors are selling their cotton on the sly to --

JOHN

(roars) -- Mexicans?

ROSALIA

Now, now, sit down! (JOHN sits, fast, like a little boy obeying) You listen to me. A good many here will be compelled to sell their cotton at the local market for 8 cents a bale just to pay their taxes. No profit. (stands, paces in back of the bench) Now, Papa refuses to sell at the local market and he refuses to sell south of the border. (pointedly, JOHN'S ear) But I believe you will be able to dispose of your crop on good terms down there. Be glad for (with Spanish accent ) Mehico.

JOHN

The war will end soon and things will be the way they were.

**JOHN raises the arm with the hand gash and scratches the back of his neck.**

ROSALIA

(sneaks around the back of the bench) By the way, Margaret did get married and Jane's little daughter is three weeks old.

**ROSALIA sneaks a dab of ointment on the hand gash.**

JOHN

-- aaaaaaagh!! (he leaps up and wraps his kerchief around the wound) Ma, you could give a guy a warning --

ROSALIA

-- oh, I almost forgot, (ROSALIA finds a letter in her apron pocket) I received a very wonderful letter from your very wonderful Major Alfred Hudson which I consider very . . . wonderful. He says (puts letter back in her pocket) – I have it memorized --

JOHN

Aw, Ma –

ROSALIA

(recites from memory) -- “Dear Mrs. Taylor, My warmest greetings, and so on. I have always found your son prompt, active, intelligent, and zealous, a good boy and an excellent soldier.” What a compliment from such a man.

JOHN

(embarrassed) He’s just a regular fellow –

ROSALIA

-- of the greatest wealth and the highest ranking, who has left family and everything else for his country’s good --

JOHN

-- Ma, we all did that. I killed a Yankee!

ROSALIA

Wonderful! When!

JOHN

A few weeks back. A couple of them charged us and, boom! Dead!

ROSALIA

That wasn’t in your letters!!

JOHN

Has to be told in person, Ma.

ROSALIA

Oh my God, I am so proud of you! What did he look like?

JOHN

He looked like a regular fellow except for the bullet hole in his forehead.

ROSALIA

Right between the eyes! What a shot!

JOHN

Yes, ma’am! I’m surprised I hit him at all with that broken-down flintlock they gave me. And with ammunition that’s nothing more than powder, a round ball, and three buckshot rolled up in cartridge paper. They call that a bullet!

ROSALIA

I call it a firecracker!

JOHN

No, Ma, they do the job if they hit right. The thing we have to watch for are these big, huge minnie balls the Feds shoot at us that tear up a fellow bad. If you get hit in the arm or leg all they can do is whack it off.

ROSALIA

That wasn't in your letters, either!

JOHN

You know what's funny? Everything we have, actually, is worn out.

ROSALIA

Worn out? (she sees a rip in his jacket) You're right! Oh, my goodness! Look at this rip in your jacket. Where have my tax dollars been going? You should have the best of everything.

**ROSALIA pulls the threaded needle out of the bib of her apron, starts to mend the rip in the shoulder seam, right on him.**

JOHN

But we don't. Some of the guns are hunting rifles. The cannons fire well enough but only have a range of 400 feet. The servicemen wear pieces of uniforms mixed with their own clothes. Some infantry go barefoot –

JOHN AND ROSALIA TOGETHER

(JOHN as a statement; ROSALIA as a question) -- no shoes --

ROSALIA

--my God. We could raise money here --

JOHN

-- Ma, there are hundreds of them –

ROSALIA

Oh, dear.

JOHN

Yes. I'm lucky to be in the artillery. Shoes, better food, tents that don't leak much. Anyhow, this fellow I shot was kinda young, had on a new-looking uniform, guess he hadn't been in it for long (shrugs). Judging by the gloss on his outfit, he must have been some father's darling. Actually, I felt kind of bad.

ROSALIA

Don't! They're heathens God has put in our way to test us. You did a fine thing. (finishing up stitching)

JOHN

(beat) Ma he looked like me.

ROSALIA

(beat) Remember Coralee Squire? (takes basket over to trellis stage left; pulls dead leaves off the plants) I believe she has taken a fancy to you, chatters about you all the time.

JOHN

Coralee from church?

ROSALIA

(darlingly) Uh huuuh.

The one with the huge mole? (points to the edge of his lip)

ROSALIA

(darlingly) Uh huuuh.

JOHN

Mama, my God.

ROSALIA

(smiling understandingly) From an excellent family, wealthy planters. Don't be put off by appearances.

JOHN

(he crosses to join her) When she talks, she brays, and when she laughs, she snorts. And if you kissed her, you'd smash into that thing (touches his lip on the word "thing").

ROSALIA

(hands him basket; he holds it as she puts in dead leaves) Think about it.

JOHN

If I think about anyone, it's Anne Barclay.

ROSALIA

Anne Barclay? They are newcomers.

JOHN

She's kind and lovely, Mama --

ROSALIA

-- I will not have it --

JOHN

-- just like you.

ROSALIA

John, you rascal.

JOHN

(wanders stage R, speaks from the heart with wonderment) You know what's amazing? The friendships. They rise up and end so fast. Then if you just wait a bit, they rise up again somewhere else. You're never really alone . . . what day is this?

ROSALIA

Wednesday, April 9th.

JOHN

Right. Anyway, this past Saturday night over at Fraley Field in Tennessee, we all had the feeling a great battle was coming. We gathered in a large tent and one of the boys struck up a song and we all joined in. We sang songs of home and days gone by. Our last song was 'Brave Boys are They.' We sang all seven verses! (bursts into song, loudly; ROSALIA joins where noted)

Heavily falls the rain,  
Wild are the breezes tonight,  
But 'neath the roof, the hours as they fly,  
Are happy and calm and bright –

ROSALIA

-- I remember that –

**JOHN sings on right over her without missing a beat.**

JOHN

Gathering round our fireside,  
(ROSALIA joins in)  
Tho' it be summer time,  
We sit and talk of brothers abroad  
Forgetting the midnight chime.  
Brave boys are they!  
Gone at their country's call;  
And yet, and yet, we cannot forget  
That many brave boys must fall.

ROSALIA

I love --

**JOHN launches directly into the second verse alone.**

JOHN

Under the homestead roof,  
Nestled so cozy and --

ROSALIA

-- I do remember that song, all seven verses. Now, if you're going to sing my ear off at least come here and help me.

**ROSALIA tends the trellis and parts of the garden. JOHN helps etc., when requested.**

JOHN

The singing ended, and without a word, we all turned and went back to our tents. Our group never met again. Isn't that strange? I didn't want it to stop. What a wonderful night. (no response, he turns to her)

ROSALIA

(suddenly aware of the silence, turns to him) This little garden is the only thing of beauty I have left. I got to keep hold of it. (goes back to trellis)

JOHN

I understand. (JOHN helps her here and there) You know there was a fellow, Henry, in the tent with us that night. He's a private in the 6th Arkansas. They were to the side of us the next day. Henry was always writing things down and when we were singing, I think he was writing about us.

ROSALIA

Why, I believe you'll be part of history.

JOHN

Henry Morton Stanley. Funny name.

ROSALIA

So, it's not all bad out there –

JOHN

Well, you read my letters. We camp where they tell us. Sometimes we forage for fuel or food, but mostly everyone gets packets from home and the settlers bring us home cooking.

ROSALIA

God bless them.

JOHN

And the sutlers --

ROSALIA

-- sutlers? What are sutlers?

JOHN

Camp followers with goods for sale who overcharge us for razor blades, belt buckles, coffee, sugar --

ROSALIA

Well, God bless them, too.

JOHN

The boys are high-spirited and sentimental, I'll say that for them. And for the most part moral. Some of them play banjo or fiddle. Once in awhile we get rations with maggots in them – a couple of us ate a few –

ROSALIA

Oh!! John!!!

JOHN

-- Ma, they weren't bad, actually, kind of reminded me of grits, you know, all tiny and white – (ROSALIA laughs, squeals) but anyway, we bowl with cannon balls at ten-pins, write diaries and generally act like boys on a picnic -- whenever the Yankees let us –

ROSALIA

-- those Satans --

JOHN

-- so, some days are boring, some are fun, some days we run around trying not to get shot.

ROSALIA

Shot!

JOHN

I'm mostly over to the side with the reserve artillery, anyway --

ROSALIA

-- the Pettus Flying Artillery –

JOHN

Yes!

ROSALIA

-- named after our very own Governor, John J. Pettus, Democrat! (quotes Pettus, declaims:) "I am Mississippian to the Core. My ancestors are buried upon her hillsides. I am, and have been and ever expect to be within her borders. Whatever may happen, I am with her, heart and soul."

JOHN

So you do read my letters!

ROSALIA

Yes, I do!

JOHN

Do you know some of our infantrymen have never fired a gun?

ROSALIA

What?

JOHN

And some of the regiments have never had a battle drill? But guess what? My unit is pronounced by Major Hudson to be the best drilled and most effective in the Confederate Service.

ROSALIA

I am very, very proud.



JOHN

I have been homesick. Can't show it though. Bad for the men.

ROSALIA

(grabs watering can, goes down to water the tulips) Of course.

JOHN

And the packages you sent? Especially the soap!!

ROSALIA

-- not to mention socks, candy, writing paper, cotton shirts, pencils – thank you so much, Mama --

JOHN

-- but there's nothing like soap when you live in mud!

ROSALIA

Well, your brother's itching to join up, mud or not. They have a company at the academy, "The Young Mississippi Devils". (sprinkles fertilizer)

JOHN

Waller's only 16.

ROSALIA

He's coming of age. Unfortunately.

JOHN

It'll be over by then.

ROSALIA

How do you know that?

JOHN

Because we're winning, silly. Don't you read the papers?

ROSALIA

Hand me that trowel. (he does; she works on the tulips) All I know is we've lost so much in Kentucky because of that idiot, Johnston.

JOHN

He's not an idiot. Last October when I enlisted at Bowling Green he was the commander. He kept the Federals out of there from October until we left in February.

ROSALIA

Then he lost Fort Henry and Fort Donelson and fell all the way back to Corinth. You know how close Corinth is to this very garden?

JOHN

Ma, in March, when we merged with troops from Mississippi, Alabama and Florida we became the Army of the Mississippi and President Davis gave Johnston command of the whole thing.

ROSALIA

I don't care! They should just get rid of him!

JOHN

Well, he was killed on Sunday.

ROSALIA

My God.

**JOHN now begins to tell his war stories with enjoyment, relish, skill, and good humor. He shows off for his mother shamelessly, with glee. He's euphoric -- full of himself and the glory of war. He bounces up and down and across and around the stage with exuberance, enacting friends, soldiers and generals, demonstrating troop movements, battles, stands, and the complexities and wonder of firing a cannon. He is a master storyteller, a Civil War sportscaster. He recovers quickly from sadness or sentiment and can turn on a dime emotionally. His energy is boundless. ROSALIA is both dazzled and appalled by what she hears. These descriptions should be lifelike and natural but choreographed.**

JOHN

Ma, he was a great soldier. Last Sunday at noon, he led a huge attack against the Yankees and we overran their camps. He was a wild man, way out in front of us, yelling and screaming and rallying the troops up and down the line for two hours. Then he took a bullet behind the knee. He bled to death pretty quick. They pulled his body off the field and wrapped it up so no one would know. But we knew. Everybody cried their eyes out.

ROSALIA

I take back what I said.

JOHN

He rode right past me. I could see the sweat on his forehead. It was such a day, Mama. I felt glorious!

ROSALIA

(delighted) Glorious?

JOHN

Yes ma'am. (the most wonderful thing in the world) See, the night before the battle, Saturday, our spies reported that --

ROSALIA

(in wonderment and delight, like a child, overlapping speeches) -- Spies? You have spies???

JOHN

Yes, ma'am.

**ROSALIA squeals with delight at the adventure of it all.**

JOHN

(spells it out for her) -- our spies reported that Sherman was camped on the east side of Fraley Field in the woods, so Johnston figured Union reinforcements were coming down the Tennessee River to the Pittsburgh Landing! He figured they would arrive by Monday, so he decided to attack on Sunday! Sherman would be caught with his pants down!

ROSALIA

(delighted) That's wonderfully sneaky.

JOHN

Oh, yes. So last Saturday night after the singing – remember? I told you about the singing?

ROSALIA

Yes, indeed --

**JOHN begins reenacting the battle around ROSALIA; ROSALIA participates. She is a soldier, too. JOHN now outlines the battle on the floor with the handle of the rake, then uses the rake like a rifle.**

JOHN

-- after the singing when it was really dark, Johnston had us steal over to our battle positions (he carefully draws the troop movements as he speaks) on the west side of Fraley field and sleep there, hidden. Early Sunday morning before the sun was up they told us (a loud, drawn-out whisper) “geeet reeedyyy”. The Federals came into the field from the East. Little did they know that the huge and powerful Army of the Mississippi – us -- was waiting just out of sight on the West! When they were halfway across, boom! (He pops up in front of his mother and fires the rake. ROSALIA jumps back, totally caught up in the game. She is a soldier, too.) We stood and opened fire! Boy, were they surprised! They retreated. We all advanced and exchanged fire again and they ran away again. (holds up fingers) Two retreats, Ma.

ROSALIA

Marvelous.

JOHN

(flailing his arms wildly; ROSALIA jumps back with glee.) Then suddenly, there were explosions all around me and the air was filled with flying things that ripped through the trees. Robert Terry was next to me. “Those are bullets!” he whispered.

ROSALIA

Bullets?

JOHN

“Yup, I said, ‘That they are!’” Then I ducked, naturally.

ROSALIA

(ducks with him) Naturally.

JOHN

By now the sun was up, so we could see better. (they rise, heads together) Ma! There were millions of ‘em!

ROSALIA

(very impressed) Millions?

JOHN

Well (beat) a lot. (JOHN again draws the battle movements on the floor, then uses the rake as a gun.) We advanced again! Breckenridge came up from the left and Swett’s artillery joined us on the right! The Federals fired and we kept on coming. They kept on firing. We kept on coming. They kept on –

ROSALIA

-- I see that –

JOHN

-- so then Johnston ordered two more groups of cannon to join. Now, altogether, the whole Army of the Mississippi mounted one massive, huge charge. (He runs downstage.) We came at them so fast and so hard they couldn’t even shoot the horses. They just ran and their commanding officer was killed. Peabody, they said he was --

ROSALIA

-- Peabody? Isn’t he the --

JOHN AND ROSALIA

-- top Colonel from the North!! Yes!!

JOHN

Now our corps was ordered to push the cannons to the right. See --

**JOHN now becomes the teacher, stops to explain things slowly to ROSALIA as if she were five years old.**

-- my cannon doesn’t use horses so we have to push that cannon around ourselves. Try doing that all morning! (demonstrates) We roll into position. Load up and get ready. Command hollers, “fire”! We dive away to right and left! (he dives to the ground, covers his head; ROSLIA jumps out of the way) Boom! The cannon recoils and a white stream of smoke shoots from the muzzle. In the distance, a few seconds later, (listens for the crash) crash!! (jumps to his feet) An iron ball lands on the Yankees! Whoopee!! (bounces around in glee)

ROSALIA

That wasn’t in your letters.

JOHN

Has to be told in person, Ma. We step forward again, lay hold of the handspike and the spokes, and run the gun back into position. We load up again. (an afterthought) That’s dangerous, by the way --

ROSALIA

-- oh, my --

**Now his demonstrations again become very slow and specific for the five-year-old, with accompanying sounds.**

JOHN

-- yeah. I wear this extra thick leather glove that's just for my thumb. I stick my thumb over the hole the fuse goes into. Smash! This is to make everything airtight. Carter and Robert swab the bore with a plunger dipped in water, squish! squish! so we can put out any burning ashes --

ROSALIA

-- burning ashes --

JOHN

-- Carter loads the powder for the next round and (demonstrates) rams it down the bore to make sure it goes all the way to the bottom, foomph!! Now -- (pauses for dramatic effect) if a spark ignites the charge too soon, the explosion will take his arm off. So he's very very careful. (softly, ramming it down the bore carefully like the instructions say, whispers) foomph, foomph. I thread in the fuse and Robert puts the ball into the bore. Then, (lighting the fuse) psssss, (hollering) Fire! Boom! (listens) Crash! Whoopee!

ROSALIA

(imitates him; by now she's using the trowel as a pistol) Whoopee!

JOHN

Then from somewhere in front of us where the Feds are, boom! A cannon fires. (ROSALIA joins him to watch the approaching cannon ball.) Above us a round cloud jumps into view, snowy white, with that familiar fluttering sound (makes that familiar fluttering sound, starting softly, growing louder), crack! A chunk of earth sails into the air and spatters us with dirt! Pow!! (throws himself to the side, looks back up at her for her reaction; she stands, horrified.)

ROSALIA

That wasn't in your letters, either!

JOHN

You think they're not going to shoot back??

ROSALIA

(horrified) Shoot back? I thought you were way over to the side with the reserve artillery--

JOHN

(back up on his feet) Don't worry, Ma, the Feds don't aim so good. Sometimes they lean to the left, sometimes to the right. We take bets.

ROSALIA

(horrified) Bets? John, that's not funny!

JOHN

(lays it out for her carefully) Don't worry, Ma, they can't shoot straight!. (back to bouncing around) Then we outgunned them! By ten o'clock on Sunday morning we smashed 'em down. (He jumps up on the garden fence. They broke for the rear and retreated all the way back to a little church in

the distance. There was fighting over there, but we kept going east towards the Tennessee river and we captured their camps! All in three hours! It wasn't even lunchtime! See what I mean? We're winning!

ROSALIA

(joyously, as if to celebrate) Would you like a Sarsaparilla?

JOHN

(a sudden realization) Papa wouldn't force me to marry Coralee, would he?

ROSALIA

(stops in her tracks) Oh my God, no. Now right back in there the azaleas have to be trimmed a bit, if you would. Thank you. (JOHN complies; she heads for the dead rose patch, chops at the brambles with a hoe through the following.) No. No one would force you. These are modern times. People marry whomever they wish.

JOHN

I wish for Anne.

ROSALIA

(disconcerted) Oh. Does she feel the same?

JOHN

Yes ma'am.

ROSALIA

Well, all right.

JOHN

You know how Papa is when he gets a notion --

ROSALIA

-- Papa has to be handled --

JOHN

Bull. He just doesn't like me.

ROSALIA

When I first put you in his arms all red and squalling, with your little head all bald and pointy, he was so happy he wept. When I packed you off in October, Abraham found him in the barn, crying his eyes out. And that pair of gloves you got at Christmas, he knit those for you. I think he must like you a little.

JOHN

Well, I love him but it's not easy.

ROSALIA

Well, Papa's head is in the clouds. He always felt bad he never went further in school so he reads -- prolifically -- day and night. Taught himself accounting and agriculture, economics. He's brilliant

with buying and selling land. That's how he's done so well for us. Doesn't show his feelings – don't know why, he lives a life of the mind. I was stunned when he took up knitting.

JOHN

Wish he'd take up being neighborly to me.

ROSALIA

I think he fools with that yarn so he won't think about you in battle.

JOHN

(touched) Oh. (stands) Look what one of the boys showed me. (does a dance step, sings a matching tune)

ROSALIA

The Virginia Reel! I taught you that!

JOHN

Come on!

ROSALIA

(coily, she puts the hoe down, prepping herself to dance while protesting) I couldn't possibly! I haven't danced for so long, I'm all left feet!

JOHN

I've haven't danced at all, so watch out.

**She joins him and they dance throughout the next section singing la la la's of Turkey in the Straw where possible.**

ROSALIA

John, I want you to know that all us ladies here in the neighborhood – John, you dance very well --

JOHN

-- all the better to please the ladies with --

ROSALIA

-- oh, you will. Anyway, we women are busily employed making socks and bandages for you soldiers.

JOHN

-- oh, goody!

ROSALIA

-- the Sewing Society gave a splendid dinner at Christmas at Como –

JOHN

-- yes, you wrote me, to get the old gentlemen to give you their cotton –

ROSALIA

-- for the bandages! They have bales of it just sitting there! But they smelt a rat and stayed home --

JOHN

-- so you were foiled! Bet if you made bullets they'd shower you with donations!

ROSALIA

You're certainly in good spirits! Doesn't all this fighting and dodging bullets bother you?

JOHN

No ma'am. It's my job.

ROSALIA

Oh.

**Abruptly, ROSALIA stops the dancing.**

ROSALIA

What do you mean "they couldn't even shoot the horses"?

JOHN

The horses that pull the cannons. (she looks at him quizzically) Enemy infantry kill them to prevent the cannons from withdrawing fast. It's an old trick.

ROSALIA

They slaughter those beautiful animals?

JOHN

(chuckling) They slaughter us, Ma, what's the difference, and we do it to them.

ROSALIA

(dismayed, confused) Oh . . . well, that's your job --

JOHN

(tops her) That's war.

ROSALIA

That's amazing. You kill that Northern colonel, Peabody, then y'all just go off somewhere and take a nap??

JOHN

Yes, actually, in their camps. By then it was noon. Fast, huh.

ROSALIA

Uh huh.

JOHN

But suddenly, they attacked from Jones Field with cannon so we hightailed it out of there, fast. But guess what we'd already grabbed? Booty!! Candles, soap, Jefferson boots, winter overcoats (ROSALIA interjects "Whew!", JOHN rolls on) Enfield rifles, gold and silver trophies, (ROSALIA



interjects “Wooo!”; JOHN rolls on) sacks of bacon and hardtack, sweet potatoes, chickens, molasses --

ROSALIA

Sit down and eat this right now. (she hands him a metal container of food)

JOHN

(he snatches it from her hands.) Oh, goody.

**Before she can even hand him the spoon he starts eating with his hands; she sticks the spoon in his face. He grabs it, eats hungrily throughout, almost ignoring her.**

ROSALIA

It was supposed to be my lunch --

JOHN

(speaking with his mouth full) You know, Lincoln’s not a bad man, just has the wrong notions.

ROSALIA

(startled) He wants our land. We grow it, we harvest it, he steals it, the North gets richer.

JOHN

Not a bad idea about the slaves though. (ROSALIA chokes at the thought.) Ma, hominy with salt pork and butter! This is better than what the settlers give us!

ROSALIA

I should hope so.

JOHN

(continuing to shovel it down, looking out across the field) When I was growing up, I watched the slaves here, and their children. They have nothing.

ROSALIA

Nothing? First, John, I call them workers, not slaves. Second, we clothe and feed them. They get meat once a day and plenty of molasses for breakfast and milk for dinner. There’s game everywhere and they can keep whatever they shoot. For God’s sake, they’ve all made themselves coonskin hats for winter! Third, there’s a decent roof over their heads. And, last, when they marry, I give them all a very nice supper. I don’t call that nothing.

JOHN

Pay ‘em.

ROSALIA

What??

JOHN

(still eating) Can’t call ‘em workers if you don’t pay ‘em or if you don’t pay ‘em, free ‘em.

ROSALIA

How would we keep all this land harvested? We'd be finished without them. That's what Lincoln wants. For our economy to collapse.

JOHN

(nails her) See? They're very valuable.

ROSALIA

Bull. They're pawns to him! Look out there! Cotton, corn, wheat, oats, rye, sweet peas, fat red tomatoes! Sitting on what?? 2,000 acres of land, that's what! He doesn't give a damn about about the slaves. That's what he wants! And, by the way, do you see one chimney sending up black smoke?

JOHN

Well . . . no.

ROSALIA

They produce things and make money and don't give a hoot if the air stinks. We are stewards of the air and the land and the wildlife. He wants to bring us to our knees so he can profit by forcing together two societies that do not fit and never will.

JOHN

(JOHN scrapes the bottom of his tin loudly with the spoon) Mmph.

ROSALIA

We also hold to a certain fineness of behavior.

JOHN

(talking with his mouth full) We do have better manners. (gobbles down the last of the food, noisily) But we have slaves.

ROSALIA

So do they.

JOHN

(chokes) Oh. Didn't know that.

ROSALIA

John, think, they'll blow down here like a cold wind and all of our children will grow up to be Republicans. (takes away empty food container)

JOHN

Mmm. So, (regains his enthusiasm) anyway, there we are on the run from that nice Union camp with all that food. We were bushed. Then out of nowhere came a reserve corps and they took over, thank God. The Federals were pushed back to Jones field again.

ROSALIA

Well, I should think so! Now, I'm resting a spell, thank God, then we'll dig up that old rose patch. (sits)

JOHN

Anyway, my group joined that attack, but we weren't getting anywhere. Suddenly, Breckinridge's men refused to fight any more. And I don't blame them, Ma. They were so tired.

ROSALIA

(with sympathy) I'll bet.

JOHN

(pointedly; joins her on bench) That's when Johnston came barreling through like I told you. He organized everyone and gave us all hope and led the attack himself. And you know how that ended.

ROSALIA

I apologize so much –

JOHN

It's all right, Ma. He knew the risks.

ROSALIA

John, it's not that I'm against what you say, and you know Katie, my laundress, she's now on the free list to work for anybody and earn her own money, and I will surely grant that to all of them as soon as they're eligible, but for now, I cannot afford to house them and feed them and pay them.

JOHN

Why not?

ROSALIA

Everything we make off the land goes straight back into the land. There's not much left to live on. We can't sell the cotton because we're --

JOHN

-- blocked from our customers, I know that, Ma –

ROSALIA

-- well think. We eat well off those fields, but our income? Nothing. But we survive (a beat, darlingly) Ask me why.

JOHN

(imitating her darlingly) Why?

ROSALIA

Because of my thrifty Scots upbringing, that's why.

JOHN

(enjoying her, bowing while seated) Indeed. (gently) Ma, forget I said anything. Still --

ROSALIA

-- what?

JOHN

A bunch of us were talking about this last week. Once we win, the borders will have to be made safe, day and night by some kind of . . . enclosure.

ROSALIA

Enclosure?

JOHN

Second, we'd have to get supplies and materials we used to get from the North from . . . maybe . . . Europe or something. Third, there'd have to be a paid militia -- a huge expenditure of men and money -- to guard the borders forever.

ROSALIA

You're joking.

JOHN

No ma'am. (pulls a tin of little white mints from his pocket, takes one, offers tin to her)

ROSALIA

John, I have always respected your -- oh!!! (looking at mints, recoils)

JOHN

Mints, Ma.

ROSALIA

Mints??? Oh. They're so tiny and white. Like maggots. Thank you, no. John, I have always respected your . . . innovative . . . ideas. Like the time we fit your pony with silver horseshoes so she'd be more comfortable . . . until they crumbled off. But never mind. That was a kind and good idea. But this is outlandish. (JOHN shrugs genially with the confidence of a man who knows he's right) How do you come up with such notions?

JOHN

I told you, we sit around and write letters and talk and think! I can think, you know!

ROSALIA

I know.

JOHN

I'm going to be a lawyer!

ROSALIA

I know! (resumes garden work). So, you want to build a huge fence around the entire Confederacy --

JOHN

-- not a fence, a wall --

ROSALIA

-- a huge wall around the entire Confederacy --

