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Battle Hymn

by Jim Leonard

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



**SAMUEL
FRENCH**

FOUNDED 1830

NEW YORK HOLLYWOOD LONDON TORONTO

SAMUELFRENCH.COM

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BATTLE HYMN was first produced by Circle X Theatre (Tim Wright, Artistic Director) at [Inside] the Ford Theatre in Los Angeles on January 17, 2009. The performance was directed by John Langs, with sets and lighting by Brian Sidney Bembridge, costumes by Dianne K. Graebner, sound by Cricket S. Myers, properties by Ali Hisserich, makeup and hair by Emily McDonald, scenic painting by Jen Kays and Lauren Horowitz, and an original score by Michael Levine. The production stage manager was Kathleen Ressegger, assisted by Cate Cundiff, and the play featured projections by Jason H. Thompson, assisted by Matthew Melinger. The play was produced by Tim Wright and Jennifer A. Skinner. Associate producers were Camille Schenkkan and Jen Kays. The cast was as follows:

MARTHA Suzy Jane Hunt
MAN ONE: HENRY, CONDUCTOR, FARMER, REB, CALF,
VIRGIN MARY, STEWARDESS, HANK Bill Heck
MAN TWO: AMBROSE, SOLDIER #1, GUARD, MOTHER COW,
KLINGGINHOFFER, MARK, FLOWER, DOCTOR . . . William Salyers
MAN THREE: WILLARD, DANTE, COW, SOLDIER #2, LANFORD,
PSYCHIATRIC AIDE, BARKER, BETTY Robert Manning, Jr.
MAN FOUR: PRIMBODY, SGT. MCMURPHY, ONE-LEGGED OFFICER,
SLAVE, NURSE SINGER, SADIE, ADMINISTRATOR,
SUNSHINE John Short

CHARACTERS

This play is performed by one woman and four men.

MARTHA –16

MAN ONE plays: HENRY, CONDUCTOR, FARMER, REB, CALF, VIRGIN MARY, STEWARDESS, HANK

MAN TWO plays: AMBROSE, SOLDIER #1, GUARD, MOTHER COW, KLING-GINHOFFER, MARK, FLOWER, DOCTOR

MAN THREE plays: WILLARD, DANTE, COW, SOLDIER #2, LANFORD, PSYCHIATRIC AIDE, BARKER, BETTY

MAN FOUR plays: MR. PRIMBODY, SGT. MCMURPHY, ONE-LEGGED OFFICER, SLAVE, NURSE SINGER, SADIE, ADMINISTRATOR, SUNSHINE

SETTING

A raked, wooden stage. A raised platform or “bridge” upstage would be nice. We need to be able to project images on the upstage wall. Furniture is brought on when needed, but should be bare-bones. A huge, battle-worn American flag might serve as the curtain.

COSTUMES

The men require numerous changes, many of which have to be quick changes. Perhaps the “key” to realizing these costumes is the cows. When Man Three plays a Cow in the first act, he should have some white make-up around one eye, and be dressed in dark, raggedy clothing, with an old cow bell around his neck. Mother Cow should be dressed in a brown and white cow-patterned, long skirt, a brown blouse, and a bonnet with cow-pattern. She wears cow bell. Her Calf should be dressed in cow-patterned overalls that match his mother, and he, too, has a cow bell. All the cows are bare-footed. Keep it simple, iconic.

A NOTE ABOUT LANGUAGE

The playwright has chosen his curse words with care; however, if producers finds the play too racy, they may substitute less racy language where appropriate. Caution: this does not mean producers have permission to cut the “gay” out of this play.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Battle Hymn was developed with steadfast support from the New Harmony Project. The play then received a development workshop from the University of Evansville Theatre Department, produced by John David Lutz and directed by Scott R. Lank; they put my play on its feet, and helped me discover the arc of the story. Circle X Theatre gave the script a rehearsed reading in Los Angeles, under the direction of John Langs. Circle X encouraged me to continue writing, thinking, trying, failing, flailing, and discovering the characters and story arcs throughout the brilliant madness of rehearsals and well into our award-winning run. I could not have created *Battle Hymn* without them.

— *Jim Leonard*

*For Linda, the love of my life,
and mother to our beautiful sons, Abel and Grayston.*

ACT ONE: THIS WORLD

(Music. A dreamy, strange waltz. MARTHA enters to find FOUR MEN onstage, dressed in the uniform of their local militia, circa 1861 – A bright maroon coat with a high collar, a sash, possibly a scabbard. Note: the uniform isn't ridiculous, it's just trying a little too hard. The men face upstage with their backs to the audience.)

(MARTHA “wolf” whistles at HENRY when she sees him. He turns to her and bows deeply. He's proud of himself.)

HENRY. Good evening, Miss Martha.

MARTHA. Why, good heavens, Henry! You look so –

HENRY. *(pleased)* I do, don't I?

MARTHA. You are really –

HENRY. I know it – I really am.

MARTHA. You are just –

HENRY. You don't have to tell me – I know! The Ladies Auxillary sewed uniforms for all the boys in the Home Militia, but I have to admit mine fits me.

MARTHA. It really does.

HENRY. We elected officers and everything. Plus, we named ourselves. We voted. Unanimous and democratic. We're called the Brave Sons of Kentucky.

(beat)

I like your dress.

(Beat. They've run out of conversation.)

MARTHA. The music's sure pretty.

HENRY. You want to dance.

MARTHA. *(pleased)* I'd be honored to, Henry.

HENRY. Not with me. I don't know how.

MARTHA. You can do it. Just take my hand.

HENRY. Well. OK.

MARTHA. Put that hand on my waist.

(He does.)

And get a feeling for the music.

HENRY. *(in time to the music)* Feel –

MARTHA. Feel –

HENRY. Feel –

MARTHA. Go.

(They dance. A little hesitant at first, but in a heart-breaking, innocent, earnest way. Within moments, they're actually waltzing together in a rudimentary, romantic fashion.)

(As they dance, the OTHER MILITIA MEMBERS begin dancing, too; only they have imaginary partners.

MARTHA *is the only girl in the world. After fifteen or twenty seconds of waltzing, MARTHA spins away from HENRY and into a special.)*

MARTHA. *(to the theatre)* I fell for Henry Tall the first time I laid eyes on him.

(The WALTZING MEN may continue behind her, but in relief/silhouette now...stylized. Focus is all on her.)

It was the first day of school, and I was sitting off by myself on the rope swing at recess, when Henry comes striding right over, points, and, says, “Hey.” Just like that –

(HENRY, indeed, walks up and says:)

HENRY. Hey. You want a push?

MARTHA. Well, I looked in his blue, blue, blue eyes and I felt like the whole sky was opening. As if gravity had no hold on me whatsoever. Then I felt his finger tips brush against my bottom...

(HENRY mimes pulling her back and letting go. She 'swings' gloriously.)

HENRY. Wanna go higher?

MARTHA. Yes!

HENRY. Higher?

MARTHA. Way higher!

(HENRY pushes as if he's running under the mimed 'swing,' then rejoins the stylized waltz of his fellow militia men.)

(to the theatre)

I can still feel the wind on my face and the sky flying up and out between my legs. I clearly remember saying to myself, "Tomorrow I ain't gonna wear any underwear."

(then)

I spent the rest of my life trying to making Henry Tall like me. I never told him, of course, but I used to write poems to that boy, which I cried over, and secretly burned. When I took a bath, I pretended he was the soap and I was the wash cloth. My hands were his hands whenever I touched me, and Lord knows I touched myself all the time.

(MARTHA looks at HENRY, feeling too many feelings:)

Now he's joined up to fight in a stupid ole war, and I'm so tore up I could spit rusty nails. But at least Henry's asked me to dance.

(HENRY holds out his hand in mid-turn and twirls her into the waltz. They dance beautifully now, as the other MEN dance/filter off stage. MARTHA and HENRY end up in a striking pose, just as the song ends.)

(She pushes him.)

You out and out fibbed to me, Henry! You do too know how to dance!

HENRY. I don't! I really don't! I swear I never danced once in my life till just now.

MARTHA. I'll be dogged.

HENRY. We make pretty good partners, huh?

MARTHA. Hey, Henry?

HENRY. Yeah?

MARTHA. You want to walk me home?

HENRY. Sure.

(She takes his arm; they cross; a full moon fills the sky.)

MARTHA. Time goes so fast. I just can't believe you're leaving tomorrow.

HENRY. It's really too bad you're a girl. I wish you had the opportunity to come along with us. We are gonna march ourselves to victory!

MARTHA. I may never see you again.

HENRY. Oh, Lord love a goose, Martha, don't talk like that!

MARTHA. You'll write to me, won't you?

HENRY. I don't expect I'll have much time for correspondence, what with all the battles and everything.

MARTHA. I'm gonna wait for you, Henry. I miss you already.

HENRY. Gosh, I wish you were a boy. Wait'll you see us all snapping in out of attention –

MARTHA. Henry?

HENRY. Yeah?

MARTHA. You have my permission to kiss me if you'd like.

HENRY. What do you mean?

MARTHA. *(almost welling with tears)* I've just liked you so much for so long...what if you get wounded? Or worse?

HENRY. Shoot, I'll be home before harvest time.

MARTHA. You just come back in one piece, you hear?

(She kisses his cheek. Beat. They hesitate, then kiss on the lips. They stop for a moment, and now he takes her in his arms, and they kiss with passion. Then...)

Henry?

HENRY. *(nervous)* Yeah? What? Did I do something wrong?

MARTHA. No! No, I just...

HENRY. Because I never...you know –

MARTHA. I never neither.

HENRY. *(relieved)* Really?

MARTHA. You truly are something all gussied up like that.

HENRY. I hate to brag on myself, but I do feel sharp as a stick.

MARTHA. *(level)* Take it off.

(Sound of distant drums begins in the background.)

HENRY. What do you mean?

(MARTHA begins undoing his buttons.)

Lord love a goose.

MARTHA. Promise you'll never forget me.

HENRY. I won't.

MARTHA. You better not, Henry.

HENRY. Oh, boy...oh, God...

(She pulls him upstage, kisses him passionately, and the drums grow much louder, building to a cannon-like clap.)

(Special on REVEREND AMBROSE WATERS praying on his knees, downstage. He's wearing a long nightshirt, a robe, and slippers. He has a hint of a well-bred Eastern accent. SERVANTS have brought on a long, elegant breakfast table. WILLARD, a black man, is his butler. WILLARD is lit in silhouette until he speaks.)

AMBROSE. Oh, God – dear, dear God – my life has been wrecked upon the rocky shoals! Sixteen long years I have labored here, Lord. Sixteen long years I have preached your holy word to these backwater heathens. And what do I have to show for it? I have found hell and it's name is Kentucky! I matriculated Harvard at the top of my class. I could have gone to India.

WILLARD. India, Reverend?

(AMBROSE rises from his knees, and "enters" the scene.)

AMBROSE. India! Asia! The Orient, yes! But, no, Willard – no, no, no, no! I chose to evangelize this miscreant, tobacco stained land. Oh, I had dreams when I came

here. Visions, I tell you! A shining congregation in the midst this tree-shrouded dungeon. A beacon of civilized humanity to light the way West! And what is my reward for my life's work to be? Fully half my congregation has gone to war, Willard! My deacons forsake me. My Choir Master has taken up arms against my Sunday School teacher, whom he claims is a Yankee. They are fist fighting and dueling each other in the church yard. Have I taught these people nothing? I tell you, the devil has afflicted this country with war fever, Willard – the hoary finger of Satan himself is poised upon the trigger!

WILLARD. You'll feel better when you eat some eggs, Reverend.

AMBROSE. I don't deserve to be fed, I deserve to be flogged! How could I be so blind?

(**MARTHA** enters.)

MARTHA. Good morning.

AMBROSE. Good morning.

WILLARD. Good morning.

MARTHA. Good morning.

AMBROSE. (*They do this every morning.*) Romans! Chapter three, verse twenty-three!

MARTHA. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

AMBROSE. Did you sleep well? I'm starving.

WILLARD. Eggs, Miss Martha?

MARTHA. My stomach's in more of a dry toast formation, thank you, Willard.

AMBROSE. Your mother, God rest her soul, she used to say that a good hearty breakfast is the key to a productive day.

(*a quick prayer:*)

God bless these scrambled eggs to our bodies, and us to the use of the Savior.

AMBROSE & WILLARD & MARTHA. Amen.

MARTHA. Willard, I need to speak to my father privately.

WILLARD. I'll see to the kitchen.

(He exits.)

AMBROSE. Good man, that boy. We're lucky to have him.

MARTHA. Pa, I want to get married. To Henry.

AMBROSE. Henry the Tall boy?

MARTHA. I know you don't like him because he's a Baptist and we're Episcopalians, but –

AMBROSE. Denomination has nothing to do with it, Martha. I'm ecumenical at core. If and when this dreadful Rebellion is settled, and if and when Henry returns, then we can revisit the idea of my only child betrothing herself to an uneducated farmer who speaks in tongues and handles snakes.

MARTHA. I'm having his baby.

AMBROSE. Oh, sweet God.

MARTHA. What with you being a minister, Pa, maybe you could help me and Henry get married, even though we're not in the same exact...state. Can somebody marry somebody who's not in the same place? I know! What if we write him a letter and do it by post? Then I'll put a ring on and he'll put a ring on, and then we'll be legal. In the eyes of the Lord, I mean. Cause that's real important to me.

(AMBROSE picks up a small silver bell from the table and rings it.)

(MARTHA continues on in a rush of emotion:)

MARTHA. *(cont.)* Henry loves me. I love him. I love you. And the more I think about being a mama, the more overjoyed I get. I just feel so different. So older. So, I don't know...*life!* I don't even mind up-chucking, Pa. I've got a whole nother person inside me. I'm two people at once. I'm having a baby. We're having a baby.

AMBROSE. You have ruined both of our lives. Do you comprehend that?

WILLARD. (*enters*) You rang?

AMBROSE. Willard. Please pack my daughter's belongings immediately.

WILLARD. Is Miss Martha going somewhere?

AMBROSE. (*sharp*) Do as I say, Willard. Thank you.

(**WILLARD** *exits.*)

I came out West to evangelize the heathens, and they have evangelized you.

MARTHA. Pa, I don't want to leave you.

AMBROSE. You will take the first train to Philadelphia. I will wire my sister. You will remain in her care until after this...bastard is born. You will then give the child away to an appropriate Christian institution.

(*then*)

I trust you understand the utmost discretion is an absolute necessity.

MARTHA. I trust you understand that I hate you completely.

AMBROSE. Martha, a girl in your condition is much like a horse without legs. You are mired and crippled in sin!

MARTHA. I want to keep my baby.

AMBROSE. What you want and what you do will not remain synonymous, Martha! What does God say about harlotry? Hebrews. Chapter 13. Verse 4.

MARTHA. I'm not a harlot – I'm your daughter.

AMBROSE. How will God judge you? Where will God judge you? Do you think you can escape His wrath? Hebrews 13:4. What does the Bible say?

MARTHA. I don't care what it says!

(*He slaps her hard across the face. Then says softly:*)

AMBROSE. "Whores and adulterers will be judged in hell." Good bye, Martha.

(*A screaming train whistle as the lights change. The*

CONDUCTOR *is played by the same actor who played HENRY.*)

CONDUCTOR. All aboard!

(Music...

(The MEN strike the table. The chairs become seats on the train.)

(Lights rise on MARTHA with a carpet bag. The faint sound of rails clickety-clacking below us wouldn't hurt a thing. MARTHA stands in front of two sleeping men: MR. PRIMBODY; and DANTE, who is played the same actor who played WILLARD.)

MARTHA. Excuse me. Sir? 'scuse me, please.

(PRIMBODY awakes. He's a backwoods Southern dandy.)

MR. PRIMBODY. What? What? What? What?

MARTHA. I believe you're in my seat, sir.

MR. PRIMBODY. Oh, me, oh, my. As the French say, pardon me. Might I be of help with your luggage?

MARTHA. Why, thank you.

MR. PRIMBODY. Percival D. Primbody at your service. Is it Madam or Miss? No, no, don't tell me. Allow me to hazard a guess. You're uhhh...sixteen years old. You stand about five foot _____ *(insert MARTHA's height)* inches. And I'd put you in the neighborhood of, oh my... _____ *(insert MARTHA's weight)* ...give or take breakfast.

MARTHA. *(impressed)* Oh, my gosh, Mr. Primbody, how in the world do you know all that?

MR. PRIMBODY. It's a God-given gift. I used to deal in humanity. Wholesale. Until inflationary tendencies combined with an unsavory political climate to wash the bottom right out the tub. But I'm still a fair judge of flesh.

(The CONDUCTOR passes through their car. He has a punch to process the ticket stubs.)

CONDUCTOR. Tickets, please! Tickets! Cincinnati, Columbus, Wheeling, Washington, Baltimore, all points between!

(PRIMBODY nudges DANTE.)

MR. PRIMBODY. Dante? Dante? Dante – come to!

DANTE. (*slowly waking*) What, what, what, what?

MARTHA. Does this train go all the way to Philadelphia?

CONDUCTOR. You'll need to change locomotives in the Capitol, Miss.

(DANTE sort of yawns, smacks his lips, and growls all at once, staring at MARTHA.)

CONDUCTOR. Tickets, please.

MR. PRIMBODY. Isn't that a fine-how-do-you-do? It so happens that Dante and me are going to the Capitol, too.

MARTHA. Really?

MR. PRIMBODY. Ain't this a hoot?

DANTE. Mmmm, either I'm dreaming or you cut a right handsome figure of a lady.

MARTHA. How long does it take to get to Washington?

CONDUCTOR. Five days.

MR. PRIMBODY. Five days. You, me, and Dante. Like three Musketeers.

(The CONDUCTOR exits, calling:)

CONDUCTOR. Tickets, please, tickets!

(PRIMBODY has pulled out a bottle of whiskey.)

MR. PRIMBODY. Would you care for a sip, Miss?

MARTHA. No, thank you.

MR. PRIMBODY. It's good Kentucky bourbon. Smooth as the butt of a babe. Guaranteed.

MARTHA. Five days?

MR. PRIMBODY. Oh, time flies like a bird when you have pleasant company.

(sings:)

"I been drinking on the railroad – "

MR. PRIMBODY & DANTE. " – all the live long day!"

DANTE. (*softly, a rhythmic insert*) Boomba – boomba – boomba –

MR. PRIMBODY & DANTE. “I been drinking on the railroad,
just to chug the time away!”

*(Etc., as the train goes into a tunnel, overpowering their
voices, as the lights fade a bit. The train whistle echos
and becomes music...)*

(Time, of course, passes...)

*(A starry night on the railroad. MARTHA has the flask
now. She's more than a little “lit up” herself.)*

MR. PRIMBODY. To Henry Tall!

DANTE. Henry! God love him!

MARTHA. Oh, he has the bluest blue eyes and the winningest smile! I wish you all could meet. I know you'd both like him.

(She sighs, looks out the window.)

Ohhhhhhh, lookit out there...! Look at those hills in the starlight. Have you ever seen anything so beautiful in all your life?

DANTE. Not with its clothes on.

(PRIMBODY hits DANTE with his hat.)

MR. PRIMBODY. Knock it off, Dante, you stupid, ignorant wop. That's no way to talk to a lady.

DANTE. It ain't me, it's the liquor. Apologies, Miss.

MARTHA. Oh, I been around crass talk before.

(looks out the window again:)

I just can't get over how big this country is.

DANTE. Ohio's a fine state.

MR. PRIMBODY. This ain't Ohio, you ningkinpoop. Hell, we passed Wheeling an hour ago.

DANTE. Primbody and me once retrieved some, uh...contraband from just up outside Cincinnati. I was duly impressed with the land and her people. Good folk, the Buckeyes.

MARTHA. You two hunt down runaway slaves?

DANTE. On occasion. Uh huh.

MARTHA. But...you're a...Negro.

DANTE. (*a simple fact*) No, I'm not.

MARTHA. You're not?

MR. PRIMBODY. Dante's Eye-talian.

MARTHA. Eye-talian.

MR. PRIMBODY. A dark skinned, swarthy Eye-talian.

MARTHA. I'll be darn. I surely didn't mean no offense, Mr. Dante, it's just you're so dang...tan.

DANTE. Uh huh.

MARTHA. Henry says we ought to ship all the darkies back to Africa and give 'em their own country, but Willard, our house nigro – he's a real good butler – Willard says he don't want to go to Africa.

(*in confidence*)

I taught that big buck to read and write a little even though folks say that's liable to make him uppity. I'm just a freethinker, I reckon. I sorta reckon I might be a suffragist too. Pa says ladies got no place in politics – but this is one thing I really love about travelling – I never knew I had so dang many opinions, and then all a sudden I hear myself palavering with you two, and I think, good golly, well that ain't so dumb.

(*They stare at her.*)

I'm sorry. I'm hogging the bottle up, ain't I?

MR. PRIMBODY. No, no, you keep it, by all means.

DANTE. I've got to see a man about a horse, Miss. Excuse me.

MARTHA. What? Oh, I'm sorry. Go right ahead. Please.

(**DANTE** *exits.*)

MR. PRIMBODY. Man's got no more couth than a barnyard dog.

MARTHA. Can I tell you something? I know Dante's your friend and everything, but I don't appreciate the way he stares at me. Is it warm in here?

MR. PRIMBODY. Welp, I surely could do with a gulp of fresh air. Miss Martha, would you care to step out to the caboose with me?

MARTHA. I believe I would, Mister Primbody, thank you.

MR. PRIMBODY. Don't forget your handbag now.

(She stands, a little unsteady...)

Watch your step, Miss Martha. Even a wee sip of bourbon makes the world just a liiiiiiittle bit wopper-jawed.

(They either exit and re-enter, or simply cross. Music informs the scene as the sky fills with stars. They are outdoors on the caboose. There's no need to change the set or add a rail or anything like that.)

MARTHA. Ohhhhhh! Dear Lord...! Look at all those stars! You know when Jonah was spit out from the belly of the beast and surrounded by darkness and water, he looked up at the sky, and said, "See the stars, how lofty they are. Is not God still in the height of heaven?"

MR. PRIMBODY. Is that Scripture, Miss Martha?

MARTHA. Oh, I can talk bible for miles, Mr. Primbody. Everyday, that's how we start the day back in Kentucky. Go ahead, choose a verse. Call out a chapter and turn me loose on it. I bet I can spit it right back at you.

(DANTE walks up behind them, looking ominous in his long coat and derby style hat.)

DANTE. Miss Martha. Primbody and me have hit on a long patch of mighty bad luck. So give us your purse and jump off the train.

MARTHA. You're pulling my leg.

(PRIMBODY aims a rather imposing pistol at her.)

MR. PRIMBODY. We never josh about robbery.

MARTHA. I can't jump. I'm pregnant. I might lose the baby.

MR. PRIMBODY. I'd hate to have to shoot you. You travel three or four days with somebody, they get to be family almost.

DANTE. A good Christian girl like you's packing a papoose?

MARTHA. You don't want to damn yourselves, do you? The bible makes no bones when it comes to killing.

DANTE. *(having second thoughts)* Maybe we ought to just tie her up, Percy.

MR. PRIMBODY. Now what kind of sense does that make?! What's gonna happen if somebody finds her out here all trussed up like a Christmas turkey, huh?? Honest to Christ, Dante, sometimes I don't know why I partner with you!

DANTE. Can't we at least take her a duds off and take turns with her?

MR. PRIMBODY. No! We're not playing hootchie-cootchie, you dumb shit ignorant greasy wop!

DANTE. Come on, Percy – just one quick poke! Don't you wanta peek at them titties?

MR. PRIMBODY. *(considers)* Well. OK. But I poke first.

(MARTHA hits PRIMBODY over the head with the whiskey bottle. It breaks; his knees buckle. She grabs his pistol, and brandishes it at DANTE.)

DANTE. This whole scheme was his idea, see? Primbody's bad to the core! I tried to talk him out of it, but I ain't got no say-so with Primbody. Please, God, don't yank the trigger.

MARTHA. You ain't fit to walk the earth, Dante.

DANTE. You're not gonna shoot me. You wouldn't know how.

(She shoots him. BOOM! The shot echoes like doom itself. DANTE falls.)

(MARTHA looks up at the heavens in the flickering, fading light:)

MARTHA. Nobody's going to heaven now.

(Thunder/cannon sound. The MEN strike the "train" chairs as the track sounds turn into weird telegraphic tapping.)

(Tight light on HENRY in a proper blue Union uniform. He faces downstage. He is somehow formal and vulnerable in the same breath.)

HENRY. “My dearest Martha. Stop. I don’t rightly know if this wire will find you or not. Stop. I send you this message as a matter of honor because I have met somebody else. Stop. I met another person I’m sweet on. Stop. I hope you do not despise me. Stop. I hope that we can still be good...pals, like before. Stop. Our regiment is bivouacked ten miles outside Washington, but so far I have not seen a single Rebel. Stop. I hope that will change real soon. Stop. My deepest respects to you and the Reverend. Stop. Your friend from home, Henry Tall. Stop.”

(Thunder. Lightning. An eerie, eerie wind.)

(Lights rise on MR. PRIMBODY in the storm. PRIMBODY’s head is wrapped in a bloody bandage. He turns his face heavenward:)

MR. PRIMBODY. Rain!! Rain!! Go ahead, spit on me! Drown me! Wash me away! I don’t care! What do I have to live for? Treat me like a bug you big fat bastard clouds! Rain on me! Rain!

(Lightning and thunder. MARTHA enters dressed in Dante’s long coat and derby hat with her hair tucked up under. She looks a lot like a man.)

MR. PRIMBODY. *(cont.)* Here I am! Go ahead! Strike me down, Jesus! Come on! I dares you! Don’t be a pussy!

MARTHA. Mister Primbody, quit taking the lord’s name in vain. I know we’re in a pickle, but –

MR. PRIMBODY. A pickle? A pickle?? I loved that swarthy Eye-talian like a brother and now he is dead. That’s not a pickle – that’s emptiness. Loneliness. Solitude.

(then)

Good God, you look so much like him in that get-up, I’d just like to haul off and hug you close to me.

MARTHA. I’m in this disguise cause the law’s on my tail, not to tickle your fancy.

MR. PRIMBODY. Emptiness! Loneliness! Solitude! I never had any family. No younguns. Nobody but Dante. It sorta warms up my insides to call you my own.

MARTHA. If I can just get to D.C. and go to the War Department, surely they'll know where Henry is. That's a good plan, don't you think?

MR. PRIMBODY. You'll need to bribe 'em. And last time I checked Dante's pockets, he was clean outa coinage.

(MARTHA might try to hand him the pistol, which is in DANTE's coat pocket.)

MARTHA. Then go rob somebody.

MR. PRIMBODY. I don't have the constitution for it. Not no more. After Dante bought a one-way ticket to the pearly gates and I woke up with my head bashed in, I promised my maker I'd change my stripes, boy. From this time forth I'm giving up back-stabbing, stealing, cheating, whiskey, card tricks, and sex outsides the bonds of matrimony.

(Thunder cracks.)

Excepting in cases of exceptional need, of course. Yessir! I feel as if God has looked down upon me and given me a chance at screwing my life up all over again. Tragedy has made of me a better individual. That Roman did not die in vain!

(A bell rings, like a church bell crossed with a cow bell. It rings three times. Lights change. The rain has stopped. rays of sunlight shine through the clouds. The sky is blood-red with wispy clouds in it.)

(We hear a cow bell off-stage. A threadbare refugee FARMER enters, with a rope in his hand, that stretches off-stage. The FARMER says from the depths of his soul:)

FARMER. Repent. Repent.

COW. *(offstage)* Moo. Moo.

FARMER. Repent.

(His COW enters with a frayed old rope around its neck. The COW is played by the same actor who played DANTE. He's dressed in tattered clothes, bare-footed, with a cow bell around his neck, and white make-up around

one eye. Nothing else is needed to tell us who he is. Note: the COW should be played as a pure and simple, long-suffering cow, without any hint of attitude.)

(MR. PRIMBODY is immediately taken with the bovine, and can't keep his eyes off of it.)

COW. Moo.

FARMER. Repent.

MARTHA. Could I possibly beg some milk from you?

FARMER. Repent I say.

MARTHA. I could repent a lot faster with food on my stomach.

FARMER. You Yankees or Rebels?

MR. PRIMBODY. Which side are you on?

FARMER. This war is evil. I'm taking my worldly possessions and leaving this country.

COW. Moo. Moo.

MARTHA. Where you gonna go?

FARMER. I'm gonna keep hiking straight down this highway until I find God, and when I do, I'm gonna give Him an earful. I never seen so much evil as waits up the road. Turn around. Head the other direction, boys. Run! There's terrible fighting up there.

MR. PRIMBODY. That sure is a fine looking bovine.

FARMER. I'd give you some milk, but I don't have a bucket.

MR. PRIMBODY. That's mighty white of you.

MARTHA. We been traipsing for days without sight of nothing but burned down houses and fields picked bare as the heart of a sinner.

COW. Moo.

FARMER. The end of the world is at hand.

COW. Moo.

MR. PRIMBODY. Hey, Farmer? Wait up.

MARTHA. Mister Primbody?

MR. PRIMBODY. I got a notion to traipse up the Jesus Road with him.

MARTHA. But what about me?

FARMER. Confess your sins, pilgrim, and come along with us.

MARTHA. I can't. I've gotta find Henry. I know he'll want to do the right thing by me.

MR. PRIMBODY. Oh, Christ on crutch – you don't even know which side he's a fighting fer.

MARTHA. He's for the Union. I think. 'Cept that don't make sense since Kentucky's a slave state and sorta for the South.

MR. PRIMBODY. Kentucky's confused.

FARMER. Repent I say.

COW. Moo.

FARMER. I say turn your tail to evil and run.

COW. Moo. Moo.

(The FARMER and his COW start off.)

MR. PRIMBODY. I'm gonna follow that cow clean to God.
Good bye, son. Good luck with the baby.

FARMER. Repent.

COW. Moo.

MR. PRIMBODY. *(trying the word on for size)* Repent!

COW. *(not so great)* Moo.

MR. PRIMBODY. Repent!

COW. *(better...)* Moo.

FARMER. For the reckoning time is at hand.

COW. Moo.

MR. PRIMBODY. Repent!

COW. Moo.

MR. PRIMBODY. *(exiting)* Repent! Repent!

COW. Moo. Moo.

(MARTHA is all alone. A bell rings four times, and with each ring the stage changes in definite beats. One ring: blackout. Two rings: instant stars. Three rings: side light. Four rings: tight light on MARTHA's face only,

all the other lights are gone. Dante's derby hat is off. Her hair looks a little wild. She talks without a great deal of outward emotion. Standing upright...somewhat detached, as if reporting/recalling:)

MARTHA. *(to the theatre)* I am asleep now. I dream of my mother. I am told that she died giving birth to my life. And I am afraid that the cry of newborn will herald my death, and the same thing will happen to me.

(then)

In my dream I am in a large house. I look for my mother. I open a closet. A body falls from it. I study it closely. I feel the flesh of its hand in my own. This is not my mother. This is a child with hair like my own. I see welts rising like the stripes of a flag on her back where her father's belt meted out discipline. This child is marked by the gospel. John 14:6. I am the way and the truth and the light, saith the Lord. And no one shall come to the father, except by me. Blood. Water. Trees. Grass. Houses. Colors. Blue. Yellow. Purple. Red. All these things live in my dream. I do not understand them. And when I awake, I forget these things. Now.

(Thunder and cannons echo, lights flicker as the screaming whistle of the bombardment brings us to a battlefield encampment. The shelling continues, not constant but methodical, as:)

(Lights rise on TWO UNION SOLDIERS. SOLDIER #2 is played by a black man in white face – the same actor who played Willard, Dante, and the Cow. It is winter. It's cold. The SOLDIERS are sorely afraid. Snow is falling, or the image of snow falling is projected on the upstage wall. Note: nothing is needed to tell us where we are except for the soldiers, the sound-scape, the lights, and good acting.)

SOLDIER #1. I thought you said the durn Rebs never shelled us at night. I thought you swore they were low on supplies and out of ammunition.

SOLDIER #2. Aw, they just want to dog us, that's all. Keep us awake at night. Keep us off balance.

SOLDIER #1. I never thought I'd say this, but I miss Fort Wayne.

(Another whistling shell explodes. SOLDIER #2 has a metal box of matches.)

My damned ear drums're like to explode. Jesus, Jeb, what are you doing?

SOLDIER #2. I'm freezing. I'm starting a fire.

(A campfire glows – either shining up from a trap, or lit from above. They crouch close and warm their hands.)

SOLDIER #1. I heard the dangdest durn thing in the world today.

SOLDIER #2. What's that?

SOLDIER #1. The Quartermaster told me that somebody told him that old Uncle Abe took complete leave of his senses.

SOLDIER #2. Abe Lincoln?

SOLDIER #1. He told me Abe went plumb crazy and freed all the niggers.

SOLDIER #2. When?

SOLDIER #1. Yesterday. New Years. Said just like that, he proclaimed 'em free. Now you're slaves. Now you ain't. Poof. Free.

SOLDIER #2. Aw, that's just one of those addle-brained rumors the Rebs like to spread. Lincoln'd never do something as dumb as that.

SOLDIER #1. Jeb, I don't mind a fair and square fight, and I'm all for saving the Union, whatever that means – but I'm not gonna get my butt shot at for no pickaninnies. If it comes to that – Fort Wayne, I'm home.

(MARTHA enters, dressed in a standard issue blue Union uniform. Her clothes cover her growing pregnancy. She doesn't lower her voice to play a "man," she just changes her attitude a little. MARTHA/MARTIN is holding a half-eaten corn cob.)

Hey, Martin.

MARTHA/MARTIN. Hey, fellas.

SOLDIER #2. Martin, you eat more than any damn soldier I ever saw.

(She crosses to their fire.)

SOLDIER #1. What're you gnawing on now?

MARTHA/MARTIN. Corn cob.

SOLDIER #2. Are you putting weight on?

MARTHA/MARTIN. I don't know. Why? You want to make something of it?

SOLDIER #2. No. No.

SOLDIER #1. The rest of the boys just get reedier, littler all the time, Martin, but you just get fatter. Can you explain to me why that is?

MARTHA/MARTIN. Nope.

(MARTHA/MARTIN takes a bite of corn as another Union Man enters. SERGEANT MCMURPHY is died-in-the-wool Irish, with a brogue, and an effortless sense of authority.)

SOLDIER #1. Hey, Sarge. What's doing?

MCMURPHY. We're under strict orders tonight for no campfires, lads. Straight from the General himself. McClellan might have the bloody "slows", but he doesn't intend to give our position away.

SOLDIER #2. But it's cold, Sergeant.

MCMURPHY. Ladies, we're just born to suffer. That's all there is to it.

SOLDIER #1. Well, shit.

SOLDIER #2. I'll stamp it out.

SOLDIER #1. Don't stamp on it. Piss on it.

(The two SOLDIERS turn their backs to us to "piss out" the fire. MARTHA/MARTIN continues to gnaw at his/her food.)

SOLDIER #2. Hey, Martin?

MARTHA/MARTIN. Yeah?

SOLDIER #2. Don't you want to piss on it?

MARTHA/MARTIN. Not now. I'm eating.

SOLDIER #1. (*over his shoulder*) I heard somebody robbed the supply tent last night.

MCMURPHY. You don't say?

SOLDIER #1. (*pulling his fly up*) Pilfered a side of cured bacon, yep. That's what I heard.

MCMURPHY. You wouldn't happen to know something about that now, Martin?

MARTHA/MARTIN. If I knew who took it, I'd find him and eat it.

SOLDIER #2. I believe you would, Martin. I believe you would.

MCMURPHY. Martin, my boy, you're on picket duty tonight. The rest of you lads better hit the hay.

(Fog begins rolling in. A whistling shell falls in the distance.)

SOLDIER #1. I can't sleep when they're shelling like this.

MCMURPHY. Word has it there'll be some hard fighting come morn. Rest while you can, lads. Sleep while you're able.

SOLDIER #2. Good night, Sarge.

SOLDIER #1. Night, Martin.

MARTHA/MARTIN. Good night, fellahs.

SOLDIER #1. Night, Sarge.

(SOLDIERS exit. Whistling shells falling closer now.)

MCMURPHY. Sweet dreams to you, lads. Keep your eyes open, Martin, and God save the Union...whatever that means.

(MCMURPHY exits. MARTHA/MARTIN is alone on stage with her rifle. A shell falls much closer. Explosion. Lights are changing. Sounds of ominous buzzing and music, like haywire crickets. More fog. Rebel yells. Battle sounds. Horses. Possible projections of Civil War battlefield photographs as Martha sinks to her knees, and covers her ears. War sounds/music build to a distinct crescendo... then:)

(Immediate tight light on MARTHA. All sounds disappear except for music.)

MARTHA. Bodies. Bodies everywhere around me. I can't find the earth for the bodies upon it. I am crawling on bodies; running atop of bodies. Blood soaks the ground. I run and I run. I trip and I fall and I think for a moment I've died. I feel myself rising like a bird above the fields of battle, and everywhere I can see blood. The landscape is nothing but bodies and more bodies piled like stove wood clean up to the heavens. I fly past the hospital tent. Arms and legs sawn clean and tossed off like kindling. More arms and legs have littered the earth now than stars in the sky, and still, I continue to fly. I can't feel my legs. I can't find enough breath to sustain me. I think that I hear myself screaming. Crying. I feel my baby. Kicking. And turning. I feel it gripping my heart with its fist, and I know that it wants to be born! I can't have a baby in a world like this!

(then)

My blood is its air now; my womb is its earth. I have a planet that spins in my body. A planet with perfect little fingers and toes and cheeks twice as soft as a warm autumn rain. I close my eyes and I feel the universe calming within me. I breathe. And I pray. And finally, finally...the contractions stop.

(The sound of a screeching hawk. Lights change.)

(A ONE-LEGGED OFFICER enters on crutches. A uniformed soldier is nearby.)

ONE-LEGGED OFFICER. Where the hell do you think you're running to, boy?

MARTHA/MARTIN. I want to go home.

ONE-LEGGED OFFICER. Get back to your outfit.

MARTHA/MARTIN. No.

ONE-LEGGED OFFICER. Look, son, I'm not gonna tell you again. Now get the hell back to the fight.

MARTHA/MARTIN. I don't care what happens. I'm not going back.

ONE-LEGGED OFFICER. Boy, do you know what they do to deserters? They hang 'em by the neck, and leave em to rot to rancid meat in the sun. Is that what you want?

MARTHA/MARTIN. I don't care.

ONE-LEGGED OFFICER. Corporal, get over here.

GUARD. Yes, sir?

ONE-LEGGED OFFICER. Place this boy under arrest.

GUARD. Yes, sir.

ONE-LEGGED OFFICER. What's your name, boy?

MARTHA/MARTIN. I don't know.

ONE-LEGGED OFFICER. Tell me your name.

MARTHA/MARTIN. I don't know.

ONE-LEGGED OFFICER. Hang him in the morning.

GUARD. Yes, sir.

(The ONE-LEGGED OFFICER exits. The GUARD places manacles on MARTHA/MARTIN.)

(Sound of chains. Lights rise on the stockade. TWO UNION SOLDIERS are in leg irons. HENRY and LANFORD, who happens to be a black man.)

HENRY. *(moaning)* Water...water...

LANFORD. Please...we need water.

GUARD. Aw, quit your damn bellering, would you?

(meaning MARTHA)

I got some fresh meat for you, boys.

LANFORD. Water, please.

GUARD. I thought I told you to shut the hell up. You're all gonna hang first thing in the morning. I bet you'll live through the night without a little sip of wa-wa to go sleepy by. You yellow-bellied, nigger-loving turncoats.

(The GUARD kicks LANFORD, and then exits.)

LANFORD. Ahh!

HENRY. Oh, Lord love a goose.

MARTHA. (*realizing, as if in a dream*) Henry?

HENRY. Lanford, are you alright?

MARTHA. Henry, is that you?

HENRY. Who the hell are you, Mister?

MARTHA. You're Henry Tall. Henry, from Look Out, Kentucky.

LANFORD. Hey, buddy, get your hands off him.

MARTHA. Henry, it's me, Henry. Martha! It's me! I can't believe I found you! What are you doing down here?

HENRY. I'm a prisoner, Martha. How in God's name did you? – What are you doing all dressed up like? – Lord love a goose, Martha! Look at you!

LANFORD. Martha, are you a girl?

HENRY. Lanford, I'd like you to meet, Martha. Martha, this is Lanford. The best friend I ever made.

MARTHA. Henry, why are they hanging you?

HENRY. I turned tail and run, Martha. I don't have the first ounce of bravery in me.

LANFORD. There's all kinds of bravery, Henry. You're brave in other ways.

HENRY. Thank you, Lanford.

MARTHA. Henry, I got some big news for you.

HENRY. Martha, did you get my wire?

MARTHA. Did you get my letters? I wrote you a million times over.

HENRY. No, I sure didn't.

MARTHA. Henry: I'm having a baby. Your baby. Our baby. We're having a youngster. And I mean I'm gonna be having it soon. You remember that time by the river that night? You told me you cared for me, Henry – remember? Well, that night is about bear fruit in a real big way.

HENRY. Martha?

MARTHA. I feel like I got my voice back. Like I've been locked in this mute kind of cage for so long without you to talk to.

HENRY. Martha?

MARTHA. Oh, Henry, I'm so glad I've found you. Tell me everything's gonna be alright. Even if we die in the morning, just tell me you love me.

HENRY. I'm already took, Martha.

MARTHA. What do you mean?

HENRY. I fibbed to you, Martha. I'm not in the stockade for running from Rebels. I got put here for telling the truth as I see it.

MARTHA. What do you mean?

HENRY. I mean that Lanford and me are kind of a couple.

MARTHA. A couple what, Henry?

LANFORD. Martha, we're two individuals in love.

(HENRY takes LANFORD's hand. Note: neither HENRY or LANFORD is "fey" in the least.)

HENRY. I told my Captain about us; he didn't take the news too well at all. But Lanford has taught me that people are people. No matter what sort and what color. Do you know that he went to Harvard? That ought to give you some indication of how smart he is. The very first freed-man to graduate, Martha. He went to the same school your pa did. I tell you, sometimes the world is too small.

LANFORD. Love is a transcendent thing, Martha.

HENRY. But most folks don't see it that way.

(MARTHA stares at them.)

MARTHA. *(to the theatre)* I can't wait to hang.

(Blackout. A bell rings four times – like a church bell. Wind blows. Night birds call to each other, and this sound is something like music. LANFORD speaks to the theatre, lit by a special:)

LANFORD. Martha is asleep now. So I will speak for her. She dreams about Henry. She thinks: I wrote poems for that boy. She thinks: I did his homework. She thinks,

I agreed with him even when he said stupid things. I took all my clothes off. I gave him my body. I left home to find him. I murdered to find him. And he is in love with another. My baby's father is in love with a man. Who is black. And all of us are destined to die.

(Lights rise...the shadows of bars crisscross the floor. We are in the stockade at night. In the dim light we see that HENRY is wearing a dress over his uniform.)

MARTHA. Henry? Can I ask you something? Why are you wearing a dress?

HENRY. Because it's yours. Because I found it in your knapsack while you cried in your sleep. Because you wore it on the night we made love. I wanted to touch you, but I was afraid you might waken. So I held it to my cheek...and then it was on me.

MARTHA. Henry, you do me love, don't you?! Oh, God, I knew so. I felt it was true.

HENRY. This material is so soft.

MARTHA. It's calico.

HENRY. It's just the best stuff I ever felt.

LANFORD. Henry?

HENRY. Yes, Lanford?

LANFORD. I have a plan to escape. Martha, you need to pretend you're a girl.

MARTHA. Lanford –

HENRY. I love this plan.

MARTHA. You haven't even heard it yet.

LANFORD. I want you to scream like a helpless female until the guard hears you.

HENRY. I love this plan.

LANFORD. He won't expect to find a woman in the stockade –

HENRY. – And I can pretend that I'm you! Is that right? Is that the plan, Lanford? I knew it. I told you he's smart.

LANFORD. While you use your womanly wiles to distract the guard, Henry and I will subdue him.

HENRY. Because he'll think I'm you! It's a brilliant plan, Lanford.

MARTHA. If he thinks you're me, then what good is me using my wiles gonna do?

HENRY. If anyone's going to be taken undue advantage of, Martha, I'd rather it be me than you. Society may brand me a pervert for liking Lanford and sharing the love which dare not speak its name, but I want our kid to grow up in a better world. I don't think that's too much to ask. I want a world where justice and-and-and freedom, and dare I say chivalry? –

LANFORD. Sure.

HENRY. – where these things are more than ineffectual noises men make while they wave swords at each other because politicians told them to. Be he a boy or be he a girl, I want our kid to be proud of his Pa. And if I have to wear a dress to accomplish that, Martha, then, by God, just pass out the bonnets.

(HENRY puts a bonnet on.)

(MARTHA looks at HENRY and screams.)

GUARD. *(offstage)* Hey, pipe down down there!

(The GUARD enters jangling his big ring of keys.)

What the sam hill's going on down here? Huh? What is that ruckus? Who is that?

(MARTHA takes her Union soldier's cap off.)

MARTHA. Me, sir.

(The GUARD takes a closer look at MARTHA.)

GUARD. Good lord...you're a girl. You know the rules, missy. No whores allowed in the stockade, gosh durnit. They'll have my stripes for this.

(HENRY steps forward in his bonnet. He does not act like a "girl" in the least; if anything, his dress and bonnet have made him into more of a chivalrous man.)

HENRY. Unhand her this instant. If you have a bone to pick, pick it with me.

GUARD. How many painted ladies are in here? This ain't a stockade, it's a house of ill repute. Who'dja bribe? How'd you hussies get in here?

HENRY. Um. We came in the night.

GUARD. Oh, I bet you did. I got a mighty, mighty sociable friend in my trousers. Why don't you drop to your knees and strike up a quick conversation?

(HENRY reluctantly kneels in front of the GUARD. LANFORD creeps up behind the GUARD. Wraps a chain around his neck, and starts to strangle him.)

Mercy!

LANFORD. Keys, Henry. Take his gun, Martha.

(They gets the keys and the gun.)

MARTHA. Don't kill him.

LANFORD. Why not?

MARTHA. 'Cause I've seen enough killing, that's why.

(LANFORD stops choking the GUARD, who sinks to his knees, coughing and gasping. As they unlock their irons, the GUARD wraps his arms around MARTHA's legs.)

GUARD. Bless you, boy. Bless you. Tu clementiam invetius semper habem!

HENRY. Good lord, he's talking in tongues.

LANFORD. That's not the Holy Ghost, Henry, it's Latin.

GUARD. My name is Horace Eugenie. I used to teach sweet, little, soap-smelling, apple-cheeked younguns in a white one-room school house in Lima, Ohio, which though, sadly, not the home of the lima bean is my hearth and home. Ask anybody who hails from Lima. I'm a kind person. But this war has turned my heart into an ugly, little walnut. Bless you, boy. Thank you for saving my bacon.

(He proclaims:)

Tu clementiam inventius semper habem!

MARTHA. What in tarnation does that even mean?

GUARD. May You Live As Long As Life Is Worth Living!

LANFORD. Martha, let's go.

HENRY. The sun's almost up. We better make tracks before they come to hang us.

(As they exit, the GUARD proclaims in a language of his own twisted invention:)

GUARD. Tu clementiam inventius semper habem!

(Music changes. Lights change.)

(A bright shaft of light shines down on MARTHA, LANFORD, and HENRY in his dress and bonnet. Flower petals don't drift from the heavens, but it feels like they could.)

LANFORD. Free at last! Freedom at last! Thank the Transcendental Power, we are free at last!

HENRY. Where to now, Lanford?

LANFORD. West, Henry. Westward to wilderness, fecundity, and fields as lush as the dreams of a farm boy.

HENRY. *(looking downstage)* There's a whole lotta country out there.

LANFORD. If we push far enough West, we'll come to country where there is no more country. Then we can found our own country.

HENRY. We'll find it and found it.

(HENRY and LANFORD are about to kiss.)

MARTHA. Okay. Look, fellahs, I just want a safe place to have my little baby.

HENRY. Our baby, Martha. Yours, mine, and Lanford's. We're like two Josephs and a Mary.

MARTHA. I can't set up housekeeping with two husbands, Henry, especially when my husbands only want to have, you know, relations with each other.

HENRY. Once we start our own country, them kinda things won't matter a'tall. You can have as many husbands as you feel like having.

LANFORD. Yes sir, we're freedom bound now!

(Whereupon, a tattered, barefoot SLAVE enters. He is a white man in black face. He carries the body of his master on his back. His master is a life-sized dummy dressed in a Rebel Colonel's uniform with a bloody bandage around his head. Blood from the dummy forms a huge stain on the SLAVE's threadbare back.)

LANFORD. Hold on a second, brother. Who's that you're lugging around on your back?

SLAVE. My Master. Da Colonel. He's been gutshot. I gots to carry him home, to da home-place – to mistress and chil'en and chittlens and cotton!

LANFORD. You've been emancipated, friend. Our people are free now. You don't have to do this.

SLAVE. Let me tell you something, boy. I'm a happy slave. Personally, I find it's a privilege to be owned by somebody. Now dat is commitment, boy. Dat humbles marriage. I'm his for life. Are you free?

LANFORD. Yes.

SLAVE. I feel sorry for you. I don't needs to fret about nothing. Food, shelter, love – I don't fret it. When it's slave-making time, da Master, he picks out a woman, we breed, and dat's dat. I'm happy to serve him. I'm free in ways you can't even imagine.

LANFORD. What's your name?

SLAVE. Frank White.

LANFORD. Frank, I think you've got some issues.

SLAVE. You wasting my time.

(The SLAVE starts to exit.)

HENRY. Frank?

SLAVE. *(turns on a dime)* Yes, Ma'am...Mister Boss...person.

HENRY. Frank, Lanford and I are in love. Now I'm white and he's black, but we see beyond race and gender. So why don't heave ho that burden and come along with us? We're heading out West, Frank, to start a new country.

SLAVE. What'ch'all think I am – stupid? I gots to get da Colonel back to da home-place.

MARTHA. The Colonel's dead, Frank.

SLAVE. What do you mean?

MARTHA. I mean he's done bled clean to death. All over you, looks like.

(The SLAVE turns in a circle, trying to see the man on his back.)

SLAVE. He's dead?

LANFORD. Um-hum.

SLAVE. (*wary*) You sure about dat?

MARTHA. Um-hum.

(The SLAVE looks at her hard. Then puts the Colonel dummy down.)

SLAVE. Let me just see if his ticker's still beating.

(He puts his ear the Colonel's heart.)

SLAVE. Aw, lawrd. Lawdy, lawdy, lawdy.

(The SLAVE makes a sound that's something like a moan and a mournful screan mixed together. Then he pulls out a knife and stabs his master's heart.)

MARTHA. Frank, for pity's sake.

(The SLAVE stabs the dummy again and again. He rips its guts open and starts yanking feathers and stuffing and red ribbons from its insides. He absolutely desecrates the body. Furious, frantic, as if in a fit. Feathers drift through the air. He cuts its arms and legs off.)

HENRY. I can totally identify with that feeling.

SLAVE. (*stops, turns, level*) Don't you presume to know how I feel. You don't have a clue about me.

(The SLAVE goes back to wailing away at the dummy.)

HENRY. Frank, I know the whole slavery thing was no picnic. I get that. I do. But you've got a find a healthier place to put all this anger. Otherwise, it's gonna destroy you.

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