

[DISC 1] ACT I**[1] Prelude****[2] Scene 1: A Sneeze**

Backstage at Ford's Theater

EMERSON (*studying his lines, rehearsing a sneeze*)

Ah ahhh ahhhhh...

(brightly)

Aha!

And they call me Addlepate!

Who counts the lines missing in action
when a legend reclaims the stage?

My gathering sneeze
will take the audience by storm
and save my name.

[3] Arts of Theater

— *Aria* —

(pompously)

Are not the arts of theater
like the arts of war?

Each company musters its troops
and parades them in sabers and plumes
to the music of fifes and clarions.
Their lines are drawn up and fired,
and others as hotly returned.
Drawn up and fired, and hotly returned!
(reflects, warming to his theme)

Now, here's the mysterious part:

suppose a dramatic persona shoots,
or stabs another persona dead,

do soldiers rush the stage
and apprehend the villain?

Why no! It's just a play.

Well, so it is in war.

A brother runs his brother through,
and yet commits no murder.

The part he plays is part
of one tremendous drama

directed from the wings.

(remembering that he's soon to go on)

Good Lord, what time is it?

*(checks his pocket watch with some alarm,
then summons up his courage)*

Now's the time,

Ned Emerson,

prepare to act!

(resumes rehearsing his sneeze)

Ah ahhh ahhhhh... aah

BOOTH (*approaching Emerson from behind,
interrupts him*)

Hear what that scoundrel did?

EMERSON (*taken aback, offended, not yet
recognizing Booth*)

Scoundrel? Pardon?

I never forget a face,
but your name for the moment...

BOOTH (*taking Emerson's cane, bending it
over his shoulders*)

That low scoundrel Lincoln!

He sauntered through our smoldering

Richmond,

and marched his muddy boots

into the President's mansion.

He sits himself down in the "cheer,"

as he says it, of Jefferson Davis,

and leaning back to tell a smutty joke,

he squirts his tobacco juice over an heirloom
carpet—

(incensed)

A vulgar man, a buffoon, a baboon liberator king
not fit to shine the boots

(shouting, cracks Emerson's cane)

of President Davis!

(regaining his composure, coolly)

Your cane, sir.

(hands cane to Emerson and strolls away)

EMERSON (*in belated recognition*)

Wilkes Booth!?

(aggrieved, exits with broken cane)

Say, what about my limp?

[4] Scene 2: Harry Hawk's Substitute

Backstage

HAWK (*drinking but not drunk, reading from
a letter*)

"We regret to inform you..."

(reflecting)

"regret," that I am dead,

(reading)

"that your conscripted substitute, Mark Hazard,

holding the rank of corporal at the time..."

(reflecting)

"corporal," yes, still corporeal,

(reading)

"his remains were insufficient..."

(reflecting)

but I remain to gather you up

and carry you to my grave.

(reading)

"Having located no next of kin..."

(pockets his empty bottle)

I've been looking all week for you, Mark,

in this dream.

It's night out and chilly

where I come to,

and overcast with stars.

[5] Walking a Corduroy Road

— *Aria* —

I'm walking a corduroy road.

The moon is cut in two.

A whole blue field is falling,

thickly and quietly,

like melting snow.

I can hear hogs snorting,

fighting over something.

It smells of chloroform.

Here's where I find you, Mark,

so cold and chattering,

in a shallow rifle pit.

I dress you in boiled blue linen,

fasten your cross-belt and tourniquet.

I dust off your forage cap,

your overcoat, and your knapsack

full of traps. But when I kneel

to pull your knee boots on,
I find you've sent out roots.
Your uniform is hanging
from a blasted possum oak.
The trunk is gouged
and powder burned
and slick with sap.
Some limbs are yanked away.
Their sockets are bubbling.
But I can feel along
where the limbs were.
The air is still warm
and slender to the touch.
Higher up
a bobolink sits burbling,
pouring out
its little jug of song.
My throat is sore.
I take a drink.
Now nothing else
will ever quench my thirst.
(He inspects his bottle, which is still empty.)

MATHEWS *(coming up without being noticed,
noticing Hawk's condition)*

Hello, Harry. You're in good spirits.
What's that you're spiriting away?

HAWK *(straightening his costume)*
Some business of mine.

MATHEWS
Another part?

HAWK
I'm not playing, Jack. This is real.

MATHEWS
Real? Well, it can't be as real as all that.

HAWK
My substitute is dead,
It says here he died for me
short of Petersburg.

MATHEWS
We're men of acting, Harry.
We make the stage our world.
We act for others;
let them act for us.
(Hawk exits.)
(Booth enters across the stage.)

MATHEWS *(spots Booth)*
But look, isn't that Wilkes Booth,
disguised as a tragedian?
(Hawk waves dismissively, and exits.)

[6] **Scene 3: Mathews and Booth**

Backstage
*(Booth sees Mathews and approaches,
smiling.)*

MATHEWS *(extending his hand)*
Wilkes! Still roaring? How's your throat?

BOOTH *(shaking hands)*
My voice is fine tonight.
Besides, my lines are few.
(retrieves a letter from his pocket)

I have a letter for you.
Good Friday news that has not come to pass.
Will you deliver it?
I won't trust it to the Federal mail.

MATHEWS *(takes the letter and reads from
the envelope)*
From J. Booth to John Coyle, editor,
The National Intelligencer.
Marked Urgent.
Coyle? Are you joking?
*(Mathews holds the letter out for Booth to take
back, which he doesn't.)*

BOOTH *(changing the subject)*
I understand your bumpkin emperor
will attend the play tonight
without his tipsy centurion.
I saw the Grants this afternoon
evacuating Washington, in terror,
I suspect, of Mary Lincoln's scenes.

MATHEWS *(smiling)*
Yes, she is theatrical,
but she lacks your legendary gymnastics.

BOOTH
Only a swoon is required.

MATHEWS *(dropping his smile, shakes the
letter at him)*
Booth, what happens here?

BOOTH *(departing without taking it)*
Deliver the letter!
(Booth exits.)

MATHEWS *(looking after Booth, at the letter,
then at the stage)*

[7] **What Happens Here?**

— Aria —
What happens here?

Here where I live out my lives,
a villain clad in irony,
a snake that never leaves its lair
or sheds its coat of mirrors.
Each night I spend a life,
forging my schemes
among sultans and hasbeens,
starlets and octoroons.
Hundreds of women
have eluded my clutches.
I have cursed my last curse
hundreds of times.
I have hissed and been hissed
in house after house.
I have stolen and squandered
fortune after fortune.
(looks at the letter)
Now enters Booth,
who hands me a letter.
Am I directed
to conspire against our Caesar?
Will I be held responsible?
Is he mad enough to act?
Were his last reviews that bad?
What happens here,
where everything,
where nothing ever happens?
(He pockets the letter and exits.)

Scene 4

*In the theater audience; some seated, some
arriving engage in conversation.*

A MAN *(responding to a question)*
No, just the President.

A SECOND MAN

Well, God bless U.S. Grant anyhow!

A WOMAN

The President? We see him everyday.
But Laura Keene!

A SECOND WOMAN (*pointing*)

That's Eleanor!

Three years of table rapping,
and she's let her Chester go.

A THIRD WOMAN (*to her woman friend*)

The children won't go near him,
the way he eats. I won't neither.

(*turning to an amputee, whose crutches have fallen*)

Excuse me, are these your crutches?

THE VETERAN AMPUTEE

Wal, I'm agonter see Linkern
and I'm agonter sleep,
lessen they's music.

A SECOND VETERAN (*indignantly*)

They lettin' collurds in now?

A FREEDMAN

Father Abraham's gonna be right up there.
We'll see him, and he'll see us.

A BUSINESSMAN (*putting his overcoat on seats*)

Pardon me, are these seats reserved?

A WOMAN (*handing him his overcoat*)

First come, mister, first serve!

A NURSE (*wiping herself*)

Filthy pestilential streets!

[8] **Chorus of Women**

We met at the depot at dawn,
when they rang out name after name
of the wounded, the missing, and dead—
Chestnutt and Evans and Green.
Sometimes at H, sometimes at M or Y
a gasp or a groan would strike
somebody in homespun or bombazine.
She'd sink out of sight, leaving a hole behind.
We'd drop down around where she lay,
but we never could reach her in time:
her mouth would be working that terrible
name—
sometimes at H, sometimes at M or Y.

[9] **Chorus of Amputees**

We laid down our arms, our kneecaps and rifle
butts;
we emptied our barrel chests when that
weren't enough.
The newspapers speak of a final disarmament.
How come, when we already laid down our
arms?
We wagered our lives to crush the rebellion,
but we never intended to set no one free.
They tol' us to seize any runaway contraban',
but how can you emancipate three-fifths of
a man?
They's somethin' like me, three-fifths of a man.

[10] **Chorus of Freedmen**

We walked on over, walked on over, we walked
on over by ourself;
confiscated contraband can't walk on over by
itself.

We laid down they hoes and children, we done
let their people go;
we abandoned Mississippi, we invaded Ohio.
You was fightin' with your black hand bound
and tied behind your back,
You was fightin' without knowin' what idea to
attack.
We picked up your Enfield rifle, we strapped on
your haversack,
Ever since we walked on over, three-fifths from
one nothin' lacks.

[11] **Chorus of Nurses**

Rend your garments, ladies, but rend not your
hearts.
When the wounded are hauled in, shattered
and glazed,
strip them and wipe them and burn their
clothes
that the surgeons can rend their tattered
members.
Bind up their remnants with blood-vessel silk,
then bandage their wounds but guard against
feeling
and prophylac daily your heart if you care
to survive. Rend all that you see from your
minds,
dear ladies, rend everything saving your hearts.

[12] **Chorus of Businessmen**

The war was kind to us; we made a killing.
You'll light your oil lamps with kerosene.
Start eating from a can; you'll find it filling.
We fortify our work with backs of green.
You'll drink from Mrs. Borden's powdered cow.

Please take our catalogue—it's so appealing.
But let's get back to work, the time is now.
There's money to be made. We know, we made
a killing.

[13] **Scene 5: Drinking Song**

Backstage rehearsal

(*Enter Emerson, Hawk, Mathews, and Booth,
who observes from a distance.*)

HAWK

Hey men!

Let's run through the wine-cellar scene.
Last night it went so badly
even the audience noticed.
Ned, know where we are?

EMERSON (*thinking, then brightly*)
Ford's Theater!

MATHEWS (*laughs*)
Tonight will be unforgettable!

HAWK (*impatiently to Emerson*)
The scene, Lord Dundreary, the scene!

EMERSON (*frantically searching his script*)
My mistake, fellow thespians.
(*finding his place, composing himself*)
Ahem! The wine-cellar scene,
Lord Dundreary's ancestral cellar,
Dundreary manor, somewheres deep
in Southron Englan'.
(*All quickly take their roles and places.*)

HAWK (*in role as Asa, addressing Emerson/
Dundreary*)
Wal, Lord Dundreary,

this fix we're in needs fixin'!
I reckon by now Mary's got
that legalistic rascal Coyle
absolutely histered.
We'll get him singin',
then we'll poach his keys.

MATHEWS (*as Coyle*)
And this will be my wine-cellar!
A drink, boys, to my nameless forebears,
may they wrestle in peace with yours.

ASA (*glass in hand*)
Some sherry cobbler?

COYLE
I'll try a shot of your flintlock whiskey.
Guaranteed to kill at forty paces!

ASA (*servicing him whiskey*)
I warrant it'll hit the spot.
Let's have a song!

COYLE
We'll drink to This, we'll drink to That,
we'll drink to And The Other,
and after that we'll drain a glass
to the Vanquished and Evictor.

ASA AND LORD DUNDREARY (*furtively
searching Coyle's pockets*)
And after we purloin his keys,
we'll find out who gets licked here.

— Chorus —

COYLE
Well we'll drink to This, we'll drink to That,
we'll drink to And The Other;

and after that we'll drain a glass
to the Vanquished and Evictor.

ASA and LORD DUNDREARY
Well we'll drink to This, we'll drink to That,
we'll drink to Auntie Other;
and after we purloin her keys,
we'll find out who gets licked here.

BOOTH
Look away, look away,
if you can.

COYLE
We'll drink to This, we'll drink to That, ...

ASA and LORD DUNDREARY
We'll drink to This, we'll drink to That, ...

BOOTH
Will old times ever be forgot? ...

MIXED AUDIENCE CHORUS (*drowning each
other out*)

We met at the depot at dawn,
The war was kind to us;
we made a killing.
You'll light your oil lamps with kerosene.
Rend your garments,
but rend not your hearts.
But how can you emancipate
three-fifths of a man?
You was fightin' with your
black hand bound and tied
behind your back.
(*The drinking group jostles and scuffles, a bit
too roughly and loudly, talking and shouting
over each other.*)

LAURA KEENE (*storming backstage*)
Peace!
(*The men scramble to their feet.*)

[14] **Laura Keene**

If you will work for Laura Keene again,
I will have peace.
What in tarnation has gotten into you?
Don't you realize the war is over?
Our President and our First Lady
are coming tonight to watch us play,
and we are here as actors
to help them let their troubles go—
and that means each of you
who means to stay.
(*Ominously she surveys her cast. From the
orchestra pit come strains of "Hail to the
Chief."*)
Listen, the President's anthem.
Make yourselves ready, men, to entertain.

Scene 6

Onstage

LAURA KEENE (*comes onstage applauding
and turns to the Lincolns, who take their bows
and their seats*)
We're awfully pleased to welcome you,
Mrs. Lincoln, and you, Mr. President,
here at Ford's Theater,
to our peacetime comedy,
"Our American Cousin,"
(*exuberantly*)
performed by our traveling company
upwards of one thousand nights.

I think you'll recognize our story:
a certain backwoods bumpkin,
honest Asa, travels east to reunite
two severed branches of a family.
Why, he even marries Mary,
as played by me.
(*curtseys to audience*)
SOME AUDIENCE MEMBERS
Hurrah Miss Keene!
(*While Keene and the audience blow kisses
to each other, Mary and Abraham Lincoln
exchange words.*)

MARY LINCOLN (*furiously*)
Even marries Mary!
The impudence of that coquette!

ABRAHAM LINCOLN (*wearily, patiently*)
Mary, Mary, keep your peace,
for Willie's sake, Mother.
Remember, tonight we mean
to leave the world behind.

LAURA KEENE (*resuming*)
Tonight will be my final performance
upon this Capitol stage.
I hope you enjoy it.
Tonight we grant you general leeway.
Please put yourselves at ease.

[15] **Emancipate your Sorrows**

— Aria —

Emancipate your sorrows, losses,
apprehensions;
for this balconied space of an hour
set them free.

The North and South will pass away,
forgiven and forgotten,
and rise again from a single bed
with all their living and their dead united.
(mysteriously)
How long since we've fallen asleep together?
Maybe we'll never remember.
There must have been years of tossing
and turning against each other.
We were trying to wake each other
from the same nightmare;
We were trying to bury ourselves
under the same cover,
till one day it dawned on us
who had fought the night away:
we could be happy tending a nation,
we could be busy watching a play.
And now, Mary and Abraham Lincoln,
and you, dear members of our audience,
we invite you to forget awhile,
everything that's come and gone,
till your memories come back to you refreshed.
*(The audience applauds Miss Keene, who bows
and exits; and they applaud the Lincolns, who
acknowledge them, and then settle themselves
down for the play.)*

ACT II

[16] Scene 1: Father and Daughter

Drawing room, Dundreary Manor

(Mary enters, carrying her dairy account book.)

MARY *(ordering)*
Fourteen Jersey yearlings,
fourteen cowbells,
one evaporator drum...

LORD DUNDREARY
Oh, there you are my dear.
I have something for you.
Something important, perhaps.

MARY
How marvelous, Father!
What is it?

LORD DUNDREARY *(distracted, gazing off)*
What is what my pet?

MARY *(a bit exasperated)*
This thing you have for me!

LORD DUNDREARY
I really couldn't say!
Perhaps you might give me a clue.

MARY
Very well, Father.
Isn't it something new?

LORD DUNDREARY
Why yes, I believe it is!

MARY
And small?

LORD DUNDREARY *(pondering the clues)*
Something small,
something small and new.

MARY
Well then, what is it?

LORD DUNDREARY *(stalling for time)*
What is it? Exactly! What is it?
I think I may hazard a guess.
Is it a...?
*(his hesitation becomes the start of a violent
sneeze)*

ah, ahhh, ahhhh...?

MARY
Bless you, Father!

LORD DUNDREARY
Botheration, Mary!
You spoiled my beautiful sneeze.
I caught the awful thing last night
in that confounded draft.
My doctor gave me something for it:
a little medicinal draught.

MARY
A draught for the cold
that you caught in the draft.
Why Father, you've almost enough
for a game of draughts.
But we're not making any headway.

LORD DUNDREARY
That's because my head is in the way.
But let me see. Let's try a riddle!
What is it gives a cold in the head,
and cures a cold,

and pays the doctor's bill,
and makes a...?

MARY *(prompting him)*
and makes a ho...?

LORD DUNDREARY
and makes a who?

MARY
and makes a ho...

LORD DUNDREARY
and makes a garden hoe.

MARY
and makes a home gar...

LORD DUNDREARY *(getting frustrated)*
and makes a home gar...

MARY
and makes a home gar...

LORD DUNDREARY *(brightening)*
And takes home a garfish?

MARY *(a bit less patient)*
A home guard, Father!
And makes a home guard look for...
substitutes!
What gives a cold
and cures a cold,
and pays the doctor's bill,
and makes a home guard look
for substitutes?
It couldn't be the "draft" now, could it?

[17] **I Feel a Draft**

Don't you know
Mr. Lincoln suspended the draft?
(*Everyone looks toward his box and applauds.*)

LINCOLN (*standing and clapping with the audience*)

Thank you, yes thank you, thank you all.
And thank you boys! Here's to you!
(*to himself*)

I feel a draft. It cuts right through.
I can't get warm. Where's my coat?
(*He fetches it from a coat rack.*)

MARY LINCOLN (*watching him*)
He looks so frail! He can't eat.
Not while his boys lie outside.

LORD DUNDREARY (*fishing around in his pockets*)
Mary, I've got it,
the draft of a letter!

MARY
The draft of a letter?

LORD DUNDREARY (*still fishing*)
A letter from Hillynois,
that's in the Reunited States.

AUDIENCE (*laughter and cheers*)
Hooray for the Reunited States!

LORD DUNDREARY (*still fishing*)
It made a hilly noise when I opened it.
That's where I got the draft in my head
that made me misremember it.
(*catching and pulling it out of one of his pockets*)

Here it is, my dear.
(*handing her the letter*)

MARY (*taking and opening it*)
Goodness, it looks like a henhouse floor!
(*Lady Mountchessington, about to enter, ducks behind a screen and listens eagerly.*)

[18] **Asa's Letter**

— Aria —
(*reads haltingly*)

"To you,
Lord Beauregard Dundreary,
and, if I may be so bold to spell,
to my dear Angly cousin, Mary,
of whom I have heard tell."
Why, the poor madman! He thinks we're
related!

"I bet you never give a thought
of readin' anythin' from me,
the last of themerican Dundrearies!
But. Every since I was knee-high
to the cornstalks that grows
most evrywheres in Hillynois
I have dreamed of visitin' with
yur Angleland and meetin'
my onliest Angly kinfolks,
which, my dear Beauregard
and Mary, is you."

(*spoken*)
Angling for an invitation?
(*reads*)

"Wal, to pop the bobwhite quail
that's flown the bush,
it jussu happens, there's this

ainshyunt busyness
atouchin' the Dundreary clan
that somewhat nearly
calls upon yurs truley
to come acrossing,
where I beg you to receive,
fer no more, I imagine,
then a month er two,
yur longlast American cuzzin
and yur frend in deed,
Asa Dundreary,
railroad magnet."
Asa Dundreary!
Why, he must be the orphan
Uncle Ebenezer took in!
(*turning the paper over, and upside down*)
Papa, what does he mean
by this ancient business?
(*Lady Mountchessington exits.*)

LORD DUNDREARY
I'm afraid I've no idea!
(*aside*)
and I'm afraid I do!
When my elder brother left for America,
a quarter century ago,
he never gave up his claim
to Dundreary manor.
And now I fear, after all these years,
his adopted heir, this Asa,
is coming to claim his inheritance.
(*A knock, which startles Emerson into forgetting his lines. Another knock.*)

MARY (*as Keene, fiercely prompting Emerson*)
Perhaps...

LORD DUNDREARY (*flustered*)
Perhaps...

MARY (*as Keene, while the knocking continues*)
Perhaps that's...

LORD DUNDREARY (*struggling to remember*)
Perhaps that's him now, Mary.

MARY (*in character, but also as Keene, glaring at Emerson*)
I'll go and see.
(*goes to the door and opens it*)
Oh it's you, Coyle.

COYLE (*enters, bows*)
That's Mister Coyle, Miss Mary,
Solicitor at Law.

MARY
Now coiled low.
I'll leave you, Father.
(*She exits.*)

LORD DUNDREARY
Very well, my dear.
(*turning to Coyle, sternly*)
Mister Coyle, I must insist
you treat my daughter with the respect
which to a Dundreary is due.

COYLE (*villainously*)
I shall, your Lordship, oh I shall.
May I have a word with you?
(*secretively*)
It's a delicate matter that
intimately concerns us three.

LORD DUNDREARY (*looking around him, confused*)

Us three? Coyle,
are you quite well?

COYLE

Shall we continue
in the library?

LORD DUNDREARY

Oh very well, Coyle,
follow me.

COYLE (*bowing*)

For the moment, milord,
for the moment.

(*He follows Lord Dundreary out the door.*)

[19] **Scene 2: A Moneyed Man**

Drawing room, Dundreary Manor

(*A near-sighted, unbespectacled Gussy enters reading, holding her novel rather close to her face. An animated Lady Mountchessington enters, and flurries across to her.*)

LADY MOUNTCHESSINGTON

Oh Gussy, I've just received
the most auspicious piece of news!
Our hosts expect a lengthy visit
from their long lost American cousin—
a boundlessly wealthy,
eminently eligible
railroad magnet.

GUSSY (*clutching her novel to her bosom*)

An American Dundreary? How utterly romantic!
A solitary spirit in his corn-skin cap

tracking game and bifurcating rails!

LADY MOUNTCHESSINGTON

Gussy, isn't that "splitting rails"?

GUSSY (*with a wave of her hand*)

Bifurcating, splitting . . . in any event,
that unsullied heart makes certain
there's enough to go around.

LADY MOUNTCHESSINGTON

I'm sure he has a heart of gold.

GUSSY (*sighing*)

Oh, ma, I'm so tired
of admiring things I hate.
Money's so... it's so... material!

LADY MOUNTCHESSINGTON

Material? Why, Gussy,
money's the least material
thing in the world!

— *Aria* —

A moneyed man is trim.
His pockets do not bulge.
He is light-hearted.

The more he has
the less of it is there.

A moneyed man's sublime,
his holdings are immense.
There are dizzying vaults
and breathtaking prospects
in his speculative stare.

A moneyed man's an artist;
he inspires confidence.
He wraps you up
in his imagination

until your dreams are his.

Nothing, in sum,
could be more romantic,
nothing less material
than an authentic,
an ethereal,
a really moneyed man.
Gussy, attend our American.
Study his interests, his habits,
his disarming attempts at speech.
Remind him, dearest, of home,
and you'll accompany him there.

GUSSY

Yes, ma.

(*brightening*)

I'm already fluent in American.

(*waxing romantic*)

Money may be material,
but for surely
it isn't confining.
It sets the spirit loose
like an unbridled pig in a pasture.
America is growing like a wind,
already outgrowing tomorrow.
Who better to see it,
who better to seize the potato
than that farsighted dreamer,
that windfall prophet,
surveying the future
from his buffalo pony.

— *Duet* —

GUSSY and LADY MOUNTCHESSINGTON

A moneyed man is trim.
His pockets do not bulge.

He is light-hearted.

The more he has
the less of it is there.
A moneyed man's an artist;
he inspires confidence.
He wraps you up
in his imagination
until your dreams are his.
Nothing, in sum,
could be more romantic,
nothing less material
than an authentic,
an ethereal,
a really moneyed man.

LADY MOUNTCHESSINGTON

Then see you turn your reading to account!

[20] **Scene 3: Introductions**

Drawing room, Dundreary Manor

BINNY (*enters, closing the door quickly behind him*)

Pahrdon me, my Lady,
but there's ah houtdoorsman
waiting in the hall, who rhudely maintains
he's Lord Dundreary's cousin!

LADY MOUNTCHESSINGTON (*animated*)

Oh, show him in at once, Binny!
(*Resigned, he bows and turns toward the door, which flies open before he reaches it. Asa enters smiling.*)

BINNY (*recovering his bearing*)

Ahem. Ahem!
May I announce Mihsteh...

ASA
That's Cousin!

BINNY
Cousin Ahssa

ASA
That's "A-sa"
with an elongated A.
Don't let yer tongue go slock.

BINNY (*thoroughly discombobulated*)
A-sa Dundreary of Hillynoise.
(*exits*)

LADY MOUNTCHESSINGTON (*proffering her hand*)

May I introduce myself?
I am Lady Mountchessington,
your family's most highly valued friend,
and this is my only daughter,
Augusta, heiress to the name
Mountchessington, but you
may call her Gussy.
(*turning to Gussy*)
Now Gussy,
present Cousin Dundreary your hand.

GUSSY (*extending her hand, speaking in broken American*)
Oh ma, I was a-fixin' to!

LADY MOUNTCHESSINGTON
My daughter is devoted
to your fabulously rich
American tongue.

ASA (*shaking instead of kissing her hand*)
Pleased to meet you!

GUSSY (*curtseying*)
Howdy do, I'm sure.
How dreamy and romantic
your life must be, Cousin Asa,
what with herding possum
by the moonlight and all, I reckon?

[21] Possum Herding

ASA (*trying not to laugh*)
Yes'm, possum herdin', yes'm.
I guess there's nothin'
quite like possum herdin'.
Which puts me in mind
of a story, as Mr. Lincoln says.
(*laughter from the audience and the President's box*)

— Aria —

One howlin' night,
with the stars stamped asunder,
and yonder moon a-danglin' by its tail,
I was droopin' kinda low myself,
a-shooin' this devious herd o' possum
through the Cumbersome Gap.
(*illustrates in pantomime, then continues*)
Now if'n you know anythin' at all
'bout the Cumbersome Gap, you know
how powerful wearisome it can be.
Wal, by and by, mesmerized
by the ceaseless patterin' o' their paws
and the listless swishin' o' their tails,
I commenced to dreamin'...
but no sooner had my chin
touched my collar button
than that entire herd
o' double-dealin' marsupials

hit the ground with a thump,
like wet snow off a dead branch.
Which startles me awake.
So I decides to interrogate
the possum chief: "Wal now,
jist whadaya think yer doin'?"
I asks. Whereupon he whispers,
confidential-like, "We're playin' possum."
"Playin' possum? Wal," I says to him,
"let's see you try your paws at playin' dead!"
an' I plugged him in the head.
After that command performance,
you never saw a swifter possum herd!
(*Asa puts his hands on his hips and roars with laughter. Gussy looks horrified and backs away, but Lady Mountchessington blocks her retreat. She pushes Gussy back toward Asa. The three continue in pantomime, with Asa showing the Mountchessingtons how to "shoo possum."*)

[22] Lincoln

AUDIENCE (*in stitches*)
Possum herdin'!
Ah ha ha ha.
Never hearda sucha thin'!
Ah ha ha ha.

LINCOLN (*his laughter rising up out of the audience's*)
Oh ho ho ho, oh mercy,
oh ho ho ho, oh mercy me.
Oh ho ho ho, oh mercy,
oh ho ho ho, oh mercy me.
Mercy, where's my hankerchief?
Don't know when I laughed so hard.

That possum Hawk, he ain't half tall enough,
but he's sure common enough for me.
Fact is, I'm hard to look at, difficult to see.

— Aria —

Flatboat feet, mail-order legs,
arms that dangle, like the Original Gorilla.
Honest Ape, the Missing Link,
oh yes, they like to blacken me,
make me hard to look at, difficult to see.
But I'm stuck with a pair of popcorn ears,
holler cheeks, a burrowing mole
Matt Brady couldn't chase away.
I put on hairs to hide my face away,
make it less hard to look at, difficult to see.
To look at me, it must be hard to figure
how I'll make it through another day,
but all in all, I've got a hardy constitution,
a hardy U. S. Constitution,
hardy saving that peculiar institution,
lodged securely there in the foundation,
taking root and growing in native soil
that all these years has clouded my gray eyes.
Our founding fathers hushed those shameful
words,
"slavery" and "slave," making the thing
that's so hard to look at, difficult to see.
But like any affliction, a canker or a vine,
if you don't destroy it, it spreads and overgrows,
and cracks your house in two, and then
you can see no other way. The vine
must be removed. To save the life
of the nation, the branch must be cut free,
free to live and let live in one nation
of common-looking men and women,
hard to look at, difficult to see.



SURRAT.



BOOTH.



HAROLD.

War Department, Washington, April 20, 1865,



\$100,000 REWARD!

THE MURDERER

Of our late beloved President, Abraham Lincoln,

IS STILL AT LARGE.

\$50,000 REWARD

[DISC 2]

[1] **Scene 4: In the Library**

Dundreary Manor

(Lord Dundreary sits at his desk, buried in legal documents and bills. Coyle, dipping into his voluminous valise, inundates him with more and more bills.)

COYLE

... and in arrears to Doctor Phlegm for fifty two pints of medicinal bitters...

LORD DUNDREARY *(exasperated, breaking in)*

Confound it, Coyle!

What do I pay you for if not to dispense with these infernal tradesmen?

Have you made out a total?

COYLE *(opening an account book and consulting it)*

Yes, milord.

It comes to four thousand eight hundred and sixty pounds, nine shillings and sixpence.

LORD DUNDREARY

Sixpence?

COYLE *(shutting the account book)*

Nine shillings and sixpence, four thousand eight hundred and sixty pounds.

LORD DUNDREARY

Zounds! Is there no mistake?

COYLE

I'm afraid there's no mistake.

LORD DUNDREARY

Very well, Coyle, very well.

(scribbling with a quill)

We must make ends meet.

I hereby grant you power to mortgage the estate.

COYLE

Milord, I regret to say,

Dundreary Manor is...

entirely encumbered.

LORD DUNDREARY *(shocked)*

Encumbered!

COYLE

Mortgaged to my father.

LORD DUNDREARY *(uncomprehending)*

Your father? My father's agent?

COYLE *(reverently)*

Your father's industrious agent, my father, Litigius Coyle, who rescued the manor from ruin.

LORD DUNDREARY

But, is there no release?

COYLE

(His hand involuntarily grasps his breast pocket.)

No release, milord.

LORD DUNDREARY

Good Lord! What's to be done?

COYLE (*delicately*)
I do see one solution.

LORD DUNDREARY (*impatient*)
Well?

COYLE
Marry your daughter to the mortgagee.

LORD DUNDREARY (*dumbfounded*)
You mean... to you?

COYLE
I am prepared to clear your debts
and settle your estate, the day
Miss Dundreary becomes Lady Coyle.

LORD DUNDREARY (*awestruck*)
Lady Coyle?

COYLE (*proceeding quickly*)
Naturally, as her father,
you would retain all appearances,
that is, appurtenances, proper to
your supernumerary role
of aging patriarch.

LORD DUNDREARY (*waving a fistful of
papers*)
You insolent scoundrel!

COYLE (*bowing*)
Yes, your lordship.
I'll wait just outside
while you consider
my humble proposition.
(*Coyle leaves Lord Dundreary sitting, head in
hands.*)

[2] Two Letters

— *Duet* —

COYLE (*pausing at the door, patting his breast
pocket*)

A letter lies in readiness,
sequestered like a surprise witness,
lurking in a pocket at my breast,
a certified release,
with power to undo deeds,
reverse events,
restore to rightful places.
But never will it see
the light of day,
and never will it be
called to testify.

BOOTH (*in the wings*)
A letter lies in readiness,
sequestered like a surprise witness,
lurking in a pocket at your breast,
a certified release,
with power to undo deeds,
reverse events,
restore to rightful places,
whenever it shall see
the light of day,
whenever it shall be
called to testify.

COYLE and BOOTH
The slave shall play the master!
(*Coyle exits and Booth vanishes.*)

[3] Scene 5: Musical Chairs

Drawing room, Dundreary Manor

(*Asa enters from outside through French
doors with Lady Mountchessington and Gussy
clutching either arm.*)

ASA (*looking around the empty room*)
Wonder if we're early?

LADY MOUNTCHESSINGTON (*joyful*)
On the contrary, they're too late!
(*Through the library door, Coyle struts in,
followed by a crestfallen Lord Dundreary.
Spotting Asa, Coyle resumes his subservient
posture and drops meekly behind Lord
Dundreary. Asa strides over, with the
Mountchessingtons in tow.*)

ASA
Beaugard Dundreary!

LORD DUNDREARY (*scrutinizing his American
garb*)
Can you be Ebenezer's Asa?

ASA (*extending his hand*)
I reckon I can!

LORD DUNDREARY (*in some confusion,
clasping Asa's hand*)
Welcome to Dundreary... That is to say,
may I present Solicitor Coyle?

ASA (*aside*)
What a contwistification!

COYLE
Your servant, sir.
(*bows deeply*)

May I inquire,
what brings you to Dundreary Manor?

ASA (*instantly sniffing out his villainy*)
You may.
(*Asa turns, his back to Coyle, toward Mary,
who enters in work clothes. When she sees the
guest, she wipes her hands, removes her dairy
apron, and crosses the room smiling.*)

LADY MOUNTCHESSINGTON (*to Asa*)
Poor child! Raised without a mother,
all leathery and lathered from her dairy.
I don't think she knows she's a woman.

ASA (*admiringly, without looking away from
Mary*)
A hard-working, self-reliant woman!

LORD DUNDREARY (*taking Mary's hands,
introduces her, with undue emotion*)
Mister Dundreary,
this is my daughter, Mary,
who knows how much I love her.

MARY (*aside*)
What's the matter with father?

COYLE (*ravenously*)
How delicious to behold my,
(*remembering himself*)
my client's daughter!

MARY (*sidesteps Coyle and extends her hand
to Asa*)
Cousin Asa? What a pleasure!
What brings you to England?

ASA (*enchanted*)

To look at you, Miss Dundreary,
I honestly can't remember.

LORD DUNDREARY (*repositioning Coyle before Mary*)

Now Mary, Solicitor Coyle
merits your consideration.

MARY (*alarmed, aside to Lord Dundreary*)

Father, what's the matter?

ASA (*retaking his position*)

I wonder, might I visit your dairy?

MARY (*smiling indulgently*)

Have you any experience in animal husbandry?

ASA

No ma'am, I have not.
I never husbanded anythin'.

LADY MOUNTCHESSINGTON (*aside to Gussy*)

Gussy, don't lose him!

BINNY (*entering, grandly*)

Ladies and gentlemen,
dinner awaits.

(*The guests in line behind him, Binny leads the way into the dining room to a large table, laden with covered dishes.*)

LADY MOUNTCHESSINGTON (*to Binny*)

Binny, you nincompoop,
the American sits between us!

BINNY (*to Lady Mountchessington*)

Yes, your Ladyship.

(*to Asa*)

You're between these ladies.

ASA (*sternly, to Binny*)

I'm alongside Miss Mary.
(*aside to Coyle*)

You're in the wrong seat.

COYLE (*to Asa*)

You're in the wrong estate!

MARY (*to Gussy*)

Gussy, will you trade places?

GUSSY (*politely, to Mary*)

I'm going to be sick!

ASA

I'm gonna marry Mary!

MARY

I've got to talk to father!

COYLE

I'm going to be a Lord!

LORD DUNDREARY

I'm going to lose my daughter!

LADY MOUNTCHESSINGTON

I'm going to be rich!

GUSSY

I'm going to be sick!

(*Binny returns with another chair and, with help, sets another place at the table.*)

(*Guests seat themselves; hovering staff, helped by Binny, uncovers the platters.*)

GUESTS and BINNY (*relieved*)

Ah!

AMPUTEE IN AUDIENCE (*apparently just waking up*)

Will you look at all that food!

AMPUTEE (*persisting*)

You reckon that there's play food?

NURSE (*next to him*)

I think we'd best sit quietly,
and watch them eat.

AMPUTEE

Like we ain't even here?

Wal, I ain't agonna sit fer that!

I'm agoin'!

(*He staggers up on his crutches, forcing his row to stand.*)

AUDIENCE MEMBERS

Down in front!

Keep your seat!

(*Curtain on the onstage play, followed by curtain for opera intermission.*)

ACT III

[4] Scene 1: In the Dairy

(*Mary's modern dairy—engines and cowbells clanking. Twilight. Mary is showing Asa around, and overseeing her dairymaids. She's bustling; he's flagging.*)

MARY

Our milk cows are Channel Island Jerseys.

Jerseys yield milk rich in butterfat.

Why they even look creamy!

(*She looks around, then turns to a dairymaid.*)

Elsie, don't tell me the herd's still browsing clover!

The night's at hand. Round up our capital!
(*continuing*)

... we heat and press our curd for cheese.

The whey we save for livestock.

Saturdays we churn butter.

ASA (*feebly*)

Mary, please! I'm evaporating!

MARY (*concerned*)

Would you like a cup of milk?

ASA (*taking her hand and sitting, exasperated*)

No no, Mary, not a drop.

Can't we just sit awhile?

MARY (*sitting down*)

Come now, Cousin Asa,

your mind's not on milk.

Suppose you tell me why you've come.

It wasn't simply for a visit,

and it surely wasn't to learn the dairy trade.

(*prompting*)

You wrote about some "ancient business"?

[5] Ancient Business

ASA (*hedging*)

Wal now, Mary, as to why I've come...

I'd better backtrack a bit.

Before I could cipher

my ma took milk sick

from a snake-rooted cow.

Pa never got over it,

and he followed her down.

Wal now, your uncle Ebenezer,

he always doted on my ma,
and he took me in.
He had no son. I had no kin.
Wal, one lowdown Febyuware
dear Ebenezer
meets up with a winter ague.
He was shivery one minute
and wringing wet the next.
"Asa, my boy,"
and painful slow he sez it,
"Asa, my boy,"
I kin hear him still!
"This leetle sheet a paper," he sez,
tugging this parchment foolscrap
from under his bearskin bedding,
"This leetle sheet..."
Mary, do you mind
if I light up a ceegar?
This story's so all-fired gloomy
I reckon I'd lose my way to the end
without a light.
(She nods; he strikes a match and lights up.)
"When I pass," whistles Ebenezer,
with a voice no loudern a dove's,
"this leetle sheet a paper
will make you the present
of all my Hillynoise rail estate,
and all my Angly holdings,
specially Dundreary Manor and Dairy,
which by rights belongs to me"

MARY *(standing, surprised and angry)*
So, if I understand you aright,
You've come to claim possession.

ASA *(anxious to calm her)*
Hold on now, Mary,
the old feller ain't done fer yet!
*(coaxing Mary down beside him again, and
resuming his comfortable gait)*
Wal now,
with a dreadful heave he props hisself,
"My boy," he sez, "my boy—
for you been my boy—forgive me,
but I just kaint do it, I kaint.
My onliest brother, Beauregard,
and his leetle daughter, Mary,
they be my rightful heirs.
The railroad's yours, my boy,
but Angly and Hillynoisy,
let all the rest be theirs!"
The dairy's yers, Mary,
and Dundreary's Lord of the Manor,
and a rich man besides!
(hand at his breast, working up his courage)

Wal now, Mary,
now that I've passed on
that ancient bizness a mine,
there's somethin' worryin' my breast,
MARY *(thrilled with the ancient news,
interrupting)*
Still Lord of the Manor?
With money to clear his debts?
(rushing off)
Oh Asa, I must find papa!

ASA *(lighting Ebenezer's will with his cigar and
watching it burn, pleased with himself)*
Wal now, I reckon that's about
the richest ceegar I ever did smoke!

[6] **Mary and Abraham**

LINCOLN *(absorbed, to himself)*
Bluegray smoke and ashes...
(aloud)
Mary, I've been thinking.
We've had a hard time of it
since we came out to Washington.
Now this pestilent war is over,
I'm near done for.

MARY LINCOLN
Abraham, don't say such things!

LINCOLN
Well, Mary, if saying made it so...
But anyhow I've been thinking.
After my second term,
I'd like to take up the Law again,
back in Springfield maybe,
or Chicago.
Maybe I'll start shaving.
Mary, what do you say?

MARY LINCOLN
I say we need a holiday!

LINCOLN *(fired up)*
A holiday? Say!
You know, Mary,
we've got some money put by.
Before we settle down for good,
let's jest run off to California!
What would you think about that?
(Leaning toward her, he takes her hand.)

MARY LINCOLN *(delighted, glancing over her
shoulder at Miss Harris and Major Rathbone)*
Now, Abraham,
what will Miss Harris think
with you hanging onto me so?

LINCOLN *(also exuberant)*
Why, they're in love,
they won't think anything!
(looking out over the audience)
Say Mary, isn't that General Burnside?
Back there, with the brushfire whiskers?
(peering, they lean forward)

[7] **Sic Semper Booth**

BOOTH *(manic, rehearsing outside the
Presidential box)*
Sic semper... sic semper...
sic semper... Booth!
Fired with drink,
bursting with flame,
catching, leaping,
spreading my name—
John Wilkes Booth forever!
I will strike boldly
from the shadows
without warning
from close behind—
one glorious act
never to be forgotten.
Sic semper Booth,
beloved assassin!
Thus William Tell
waxing his bow,
thus Brutus

polishing his blade,
thus Booth forever
hoisting his Derringer
dethrones a Pretender
and erects his name.
Sic semper Booth,
the last Shakespearean.
My brother, Edwin,
Prince Hamlet of Boston,
and Junius, my father,
poor Richard the Dead,
will be peeling on posters
forgotten and faded
while I, John Wilkes,
will still be resounding
in lessons and legends
louder forever and ever
sic semper sic semper...
Tonight I retire from the stage
and enter History!

VETERAN 1 (*watching Asa smoking*)
Don't that ceegar smell fine!
Say friend, hows about a smoke?

VETERAN 2
Hush! That ain't for real.
He's jest pretending!

VETERAN 1
Wal, it shore smells real to me!

VETERAN 2, with OTHERS
Hush! Hush!

[8] **Scene 2: Assassination**
Dundreary Manor

(*Lady Mountchessington and Gussy, hunting for Asa. Lady Mountchessington sets her sights on him, and alerts her daughter.*)

LADY MOUNTCHESSINGTON
Ah, Mister Dundreary,
we were just speculating
on your skills as a marksman.

ASA (*looking at the President's box*)
Wal, I guess it's like most things:
just keep that bullion sun outta your eyes,
judge your distance and fire.

GUSSY
Oh Mister Dundreary,
you hit the cowseye!
Farsighted souls
don't set their sights on bullion.

LADY MOUNTCHESSINGTON (*taking him cordially yet firmly by the arm, motions Gussy to his other side*)
Truly, my dear Asa,
we care only for your billions—
I mean your brilliance.

ASA (*pausing, eyes them closely*)
But... what if my sunbeams
turned out to be pyrites?

LADY MOUNTCHESSINGTON (*somewhat confused, but enthusiastic*)
Pyrites? Why,
I suppose there's no harm
in gathering a few pyrites

that drop into your lap
from Heaven!

ASA
Pyrites is fool's gold, ladies,
I'm penniless!
But I'm sure you both agree,
that's no impediment
to affectatious souls like us.
To tell the truth, ladies,
I'm bilin' over with affectations,
and I'm ready to pour 'em all over you,
like applesauce over roast pork!
(*turning to Gussy, unsure how to react*)

LADY MOUNTCHESSINGTON (*horrified, retrieves her daughter*)
Augusta, to your room!

GUSSY
But ma, maybe I am affectatious
like he says.
(*runs off weeping*)

LADY MOUNTCHESSINGTON (*sternly*)
Mister Dundreary,
it is becoming increasingly clear
that you are woefully illiterate
in the manners of Christian society.
(*parades off*)

ASA (*exultant*)
Wal now, Lady Treasure-chest
I guess I found your hymnal page,
you sock-dologizing ole man-trap!
(*Audience laughter and applause*)

AUDIENCE MEMBER 1
Ho ho, sock-dologizing!
I don't get it.
(*A dull sound and smoke issue from the President's box.*)

BOOTH (*lowering himself carefully onstage, catches his foot on the U.S. flag; landing awkwardly, curses aside*)
Damned flag spoiled my leap!
(*limping to center stage, he strikes a heroic pose, swaying, dagger aloft*)
Sic semper tyrannis!
(*scattered laughter and applause*)

AUDIENCE MEMBER 2
Seek who? Look sharp, Asa!

AUDIENCE MEMBER 1
What's so blamed funny?

AUDIENCE MEMBER 3 to MEMBER 4
Say, that's John Wilkes Booth!
Who's he supposed to be?

ASA (*alone onstage behind Booth, ad libbing*)
Wal now, I, uh, I, reckon that's...
(*Hearing him, Booth whirls around, nearly collapsing.*)

ASA (*recognizing him, blurts in disbelief*)
John!?
(*Booth slashes at him menacingly. Hawk first stares, then turns tail and runs offstage right, followed by Booth. The stage is empty. The audience is silent. The theater orchestra strikes up a faltering patriotic tune. The opera audience lights come on.*)

AUDIENCE MEMBER 1 (*finally standing up*)
Say, what's goin' on here?
(*More scattered laughter, applause*)

AUDIENCE MEMBERS 3 and 4 (*convulsing with laughter*)
Hoho hoho!

AUDIENCE MEMBER 3
Down in front!

AUDIENCE MEMBER 4
It's just a gag!

LAURA KEENE (*striding onstage, arms aloft*)
Ladies and gentlemen...
(*Audience disquiet builds.*)

EMERSON (*rushing onstage, aside*)
Miss Keene, you're losing me!
(*in character of Dundreary*)
Now look what you've done, my pet,
you've spoiled my magnificent sneeze!

MISS HARRIS
Miss Keene, bring water!

LAURA KEENE
What's happening? What happened?

EMERSON (*as Dundreary, persisting, oblivious*)
Ah ahhh ahhhhhh...

MISS HARRIS
It's the President!
He's been shot!
(*Gasps and groans from the audience. Dundreary stops suddenly mid-sneeze, deflates, and exits bewildered.*)

LAURA KEENE (*turns back to the crowd, resolutely*)
Ladies, gentlemen,
please keep your seats!
All will be well, I assure you,
(*faltering*)
All will be...
(*She rushes offstage.*)

— *Audience Chorus* —
(*standing, panicked, some taking the stage, along with confused and frightened cast members; A = all; J = justice; M = mercy*)

AUDIENCE A
Shot? What? The President shot?

AUDIENCE J
Ahhh! Shoot! Shoot! Ahhh shoot!

WOMAN
Mercy oh mercy! Mercy!

AUDIENCE M
Merciful Jesus, mercy!

MAN
Stop that man! It's Booth!

AUDIENCE A
Booth Booth Booth!

ANOTHER MAN
They're lettin' 'im git away!
He's one a them! Them actors!

AUDIENCE J
Let's burn the theater! Burn it!

AUDIENCE M
Mercy oh mercy!
Deliver us from this place!

ANOTHER WOMAN
Somebody's fainted! Bring water!

ANOTHER MAN
Over here! Another's down here!

MISS HARRIS
Is there a surgeon among you?

AUDIENCE A
Surgeon! A surgeon!
Save him, Jesus! Save him!

MAN
Outta my way, cripple!

AMPUTEE
Where in Hell's my leg!?

ANOTHER MAN
Faster, you sons a bitches!

DOCTOR LEALE
I'm a surgeon, you idiot!
Let me through!

ANOTHER MAN
Me first, cudjoe!

FREEDMAN (*striking a threatening pose*)
Wal, come on then!

AUDIENCE M
No oh no! We're not no enemies!

WOMAN
Julia! Where's my Julia!?

ANOTHER MAN
For God's sake, take care!
There's children underfoot!

AUDIENCE M
Mercy, oh mercy!
Merciful Jesus!

AUDIENCE J
Justice! Git justice fer em all!

AUDIENCES J and M
Mercy, oh mercy!
Justice for them all!

[9] Scene 3: The Presidential Box

MARY LINCOLN (*kneels over Lincoln*)
And am I to give him?
And now, my God am I,
to give my husband?
What will become,
oh what on earth will,
Miss Harris, I say,
What will Miss,
Harris think of me—
remember, darling?
hanging on, to you so?
What, will Miss Harris?
—all the while we're
holding on, to each other,
by our hands—
and you reply having,
caught my high spirits,
she won't, you say,
she won't think anything,
anything about it, and am I,

I ask, to give him up,
to this, awful place,
this awful, this awful place—?

AUDIENCE

Clear the way!

Make way for the doctor!

He's an Army surgeon.

Let him pass.

DOCTOR LEALE (*forcing his way, in civilian clothes, kneels beside Lincoln, addressing Mary Lincoln*)

Missus Lincoln,

I'm Doctor Leale.

MARY LINCOLN (*lapsing back into her chair, but without acknowledging him*)

If only, I hadn't brought him
to this awful place, this awful—

I am in need,

of a mourning bonnet,

which must be exceedingly plain,

and genteel, an impeccable,

black straw,

trimmed with the finest

jet black English crepe,

white and black crepe flowers,

irreproachably plain, yet rich,

a black velvet headdress,

twisted as you did the crimson,

silk velvet strings, to fall behind,

trimmed with heartsease,

heartsease before and behind,

DOCTOR LEALE (*kneeling before the rocker, checking Lincoln's wrist for a pulse, and listening to his chest*)

No pulse, almost no pulse;

some breathing, labored breathing.

MARY LINCOLN (*continuing without pause or response*)

I implore you, exercise your taste,

to the utmost! A coronet wreath,

with simple black crepe myrtle,

a purple silk velvet headdress

of the exact shade, of the flowers,

a bow also on the purple, with a loop,

bows and loops, in front and back,

without they are of the best,

I cannot endure them!

I will require ruche flutings

of Mechlin lace,

the very finest and blackest and lightest,

long crepe veil,

a shimmering black silk mesh—

folded 'round for summer—

the weather, of a sudden,

is so beautiful, the wonder is,

we cannot feel well—

DOCTOR LEALE (*turning to those in the Statebox*)

Men, help me lay him out,

lay him flat out on the floor.

MARY LINCOLN

I await your reply, darling,

have I mentioned,

our Willie, lives, he,

comes to me every night he,

hovers at the foot of my bed,

he will know you, now,

and we will feast ourselves

on communion,

converged at a sensitive table,

draped in light black silk,

when the chill wind blowing

the thin veil back

flares our guttering candle.

AUDIENCE

It's Mary! Laura Keene!

Clear the way for Miss Keene!

DOCTOR LEALE (*to the crowd*)

I need more light, and water!

Who's got a pocket knife?

(*An audience member hands him a knife.*)

LAURA KEENE (*ushered in, carrying a pitcher of water*)

Doctor, here's some water.

May I hold his head?

DOCTOR LEALE (*to her, abstracted*)

What? Very well.

Wash his temples.

LAURA KEENE (*kneeling down, cradling his head in her lap*)

Jesus, pour down your pity!

(*begins to wash him*)

MARY LINCOLN (*crossing over, stands over her*)

It's Mary, isn't it?

And even marries Mary,

instead of me?

DOCTOR LEALE (*threading the fingers of both hands slowly back through Lincoln's hair*)

I've found a head wound!

LAURA KEENE (*shaken, looking up*)

I'm Laura Keene.

You have mistaken me.

MARY LINCOLN (*triumphant*)

Oh I don't believe so,

I know you,

I should have known, you

are an actress, you never

marry, you never settle down,

you joke, you are intemperate,

you pretend you live

in this awful place,

this awful, place!

DOCTOR LEALE (*regaining his presence of mind*)

The passageway's clear,

smooth and clear.

I can pass my little finger through.

He's breathing steadily.

I have his pulse.

The blood must not congeal.

LAURA KEENE

Will he live?

DOCTOR LEALE (*looking off, struggling for self-control*)

His wound is mortal.

There's nothing left for me to—

It's just impossible—

It is impossible for him to recover.

MARY LINCOLN
Where's my veil!
I will not leave this box
without my veil.

DOCTOR LEALE
He must be moved.
He's not safe in this place.
Break off that door for a cot.
We'll take him to Petersen House.
And keep these women away!

LAURA KEENE (*rising, aghast*)
My God, I'm drenched in his blood!

[10] **Scene 4: Hawk's Second Chance**
The stage; the house

(Audience members quiet and comfort each other. Soldiers are seen questioning them, and looking for evidence. Hawk wanders backstage in a daze.)

HAWK
My chance has come and gone—
I stood alone, in character.
There was a burst of laughter,
a puff of smoke.
A villain entered off cue.
"Stop him!" they shouted, like it was real.
He held a knife, but he was reeling.
I might've knocked him down,
or blocked his way,
or even just glared at him.
I had a chance of thwarting him,
the best chance in the house,
my second chance to redeem myself.

What have I done, Mark?
I meant to take your part.
Now I am condemned to play myself,
a prisoner of the stage, a made-up thing
of greaspaint and spirit gum,
a heroic buckskin
who stares down the footlights,
and winds up on a nail and soapy rag.

[11] **Burning Letter**

MATHEWS (*pacing backstage, unseen by Hawk, agitated*)
What's happening here? What happened?
I'm supposed to be foiled by now.
Wasn't that Booth, in the President's box?
Tumbling onstage, waving that dagger of his?
Who called for a shot, and a dagger?
Was the President part of the gag?
Was the President—?
The house went mad—
No, I won't believe it!
But something really happened.
Somebody put on a play.
And did I... take a part?
What was it Booth handed me?
What did I take from his hands?
(pulls the letter out, tears it open, and scans it in disbelief)

— Duet —

MATHEWS and BOOTH
"To my Countrymen, who have outlived their
Country—
Our Nation was founded for the white man,
not the black, and I for one...

But that tyrant Emancipator,
who devours the young...
Something decisive and great must be
performed...
I bless the entire world,
but I am bound, too like MacBeth,
to the crosssties of my Destiny.
'Bearlike I must fight the course...'...
Signed..."

MATHEWS (*crushing the letter in his hands*)
Liar, reciter, pretender, imposter,
hashish eater,... actor!
Did you think yourself a man of consequence
because you'd mouthed the lines of
Shakespeare's kings?
The crowds were awestruck, and you believed
them!
And who am I? Your breathless messenger?
I should have known! I knew you!
But I pocketed your letter, and now...
(looking around furtively, clutching the letter)
Take care, Jack!
They're looking for actors out there.
If they find you with this,
they'll lynch you on the spot.
Get rid of it, drop it, burn it!
Whatever you do, you'll carry it to your grave.
(Unsure what to do, Mathews catches Hawk's attention. Mathews hastily tries to hide the letter, but Hawk restrains him.)

HAWK
Say Jack, what's that you're spiriting away?

MATHEWS
A letter. It's... private.

HAWK
Anybody dead inside it?

MATHEWS
Inside, and at the borders.

HAWK
The damning document?
The villain's tragic oversight?
Then it's a property of the stage.
The curtain's down.
You're still in costume.
Let it burn away forever.
Act like nothing ever happened,
that nothing ever does.

MATHEWS
Let it burn?

HAWK
Away forever.

MATHEWS
Like it never happened?

HAWK
Nothing ever does.
(Mathews lights the paper. As it burns away, Hawk pulls out a whiskey flask, and hands it to Mathews.)
A drink to the lot of us!

MATHEWS (*hesitating, then drinking*)
To the awful lot of us!
(Two soldiers appear. One pokes the ashes, the other confiscates the flask. The two pairs eye each other suspiciously.)

SOLDIERS

You're actors, ain't you?
(*They nod in unison.*)
We'll have a word with you.
We'd like to question you
as to your whereabouts,
and your associations.
We've got our orders.
We don't want no trouble.
Come along now, boys.
Come along.

— *Duet* —

MATHEWS and HAWK
You've got the wrong man!
We didn't do it!
We didn't do a thing.
If only we'd done something.
We acted like always,
like nothing ever happens.
Remand us to our custody.
You won't regret it.
We'll keep an eye on us.
We'll never get away.
We may not be red-handed,
but we're guilty—we know it—of something,
of everything we did not do.

SOLDIERS (*long-suffering*)
OK boys, OK now.
Thanks fer the little show,
but it's time to come along.
(*Hawk and Mathews are led away.*)

[12] **Scene 5: Blood Stains**

On the stage, Laura Keene
(*Distractedly, Laura Keene enters backstage*)

— *Aria* —

Quick, somebody, quick,
before it soaks, before it spreads!
It's oozed out on my moiré silk,
and spattered up my underskirts.
It's in my hair, and on my hands.
I open Monday in Cincinnati.
I've got to scrub it, flush it out.
It's in my nose, and in my eyes.
I'll never get it out of my sight.
Somebody quick get me a cake
of Windsor soap and cold salt water.
Everything I touch is splotched.
(*succeeding with effort in recollecting herself*)
All through these fratricidal years
I've kept our theater alive.
I saw to everything—
the playwrights, plays, and playbills,
the patented effects;
the litigations, the bookings;
the piecemeal arrivals
of tableaux, costumes, actors,
my beloved Chickering upright.
But I couldn't keep the bloodshed out;
I couldn't keep the war from breaking in.
Should I have lowered and hushed our curtains,
and waited for the fury to play itself out?
Tonight was a good and a festive Friday.
The people paraded in
to laugh away at a harmless comedy
and to swell our patriotic chorus.

Was I wrong, all these years,
to hold open our doors?
Was I wrong to believe
that art brings peace?
(*As the aria subsides, a shadowy figure*
appears behind Laura Keene.)

[13] **Apparition**

LINCOLN (*interrupting her*)
Pardon me, Miss Keene.

LAURA KEENE (*startled, frightened*)
Who is it? Who are you?

LINCOLN
I hate to disturb you.
I was wondering,
when will the play
pick up again?
I wouldn't ask,
but I'm kind of tired.
I feel awful short-winded
for a tall man.
Isn't it near through?

LAURA KEENE (*suspecting who it is*)
The play is over,
for tonight at least.
Something horrible happened.
Somebody shot somebody.

LINCOLN
That's terrible.
It always is.
I always hated violence.
I never owned a gun.
So there's no concert?

No "Honor to our Soldiers"?

LAURA KEENE
I'm afraid, Mister,
the orchestra's disbanded.

LINCOLN
I can't carry a tune two
feet before I spill it,
but I love to hear
them that can.
I love to laugh out loud.
My jaw-bones ached today
to bust out laughing.
Old Dundreary,
he tickles me.
He acts just like
he's fighting bees.
(*He laughs.*)
My favorite play
of all's Macbeth.
I think it's wonderful.
"Duncan is in his grave.
After life's fitful fever
he sleeps well. Treason
has done his worst.
Nor steel, nor poison,
malice domestic,
foreign levy, nothing,
can touch him further."
That's about it, I think.

LAURA KEENE
That's the way I remember it.
(*pauses*)
Oh Mister President,
don't you really know what happened?

(Keene waits for an answer, which never comes. Finally, the audience is heard, as though in response.)

[14] **Final Chorus**

AUDIENCE

Funny, how hard it is to remember,
to piece it all together,
to pick up the threads and thrums
of what happened,
what shreds and ravelings
might someday save us.
There was a passing blur,
a churning, a blotch.
Already it runs together.
Blood will have blood for blood
until every drop drawn with a lash
shall be paid with another drawn with a gun.
For Hispaniola, Jamestown, Charleston,
Harper's Ferry for Manassas,
Shiloh, Malvern Hill, Antietam,
Marye's Heights, Chancellorsville,
for Gettysburg, for Little Round Top,
Fort Wagner, for Chickamauga,

Chattanooga, Spotsylvania,
Libbey Prison for Atlanta,
Petersburg for Appomatox,
Ford's Theater for blood for blood...
E pluribus pluribus pluribus—
already it runs together.
It was good and dark, a bean-pod burst.
It tasted funny, but it was food.

THE END

This libretto is dedicated to the memory of Jim Oliensis (1922–2001).

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TRACISILIS

Eric Sawyer's music is frequently performed on both coasts of the United States, including New York City's Weill Recital Hall and Merkin Concert Hall, and at the Tanglewood Music Center, as well as in England, France, Germany, and most recently in Romania and Bulgaria. Recent performances include works on programs by the Brentano String Quartet, San Jose Chamber Orchestra, Ensemble Phoenix, Radius Ensemble, Laurel Trio, Now and Then Chamber Players, Aurelius Ensemble, Opera Longy, Ives Quartet, Arden Quartet, Lighthouse Chamber Players, Earplay, and Empyrean. He completed a residency at the Center for New Music and Acoustic Technologies at University of California, Berkeley, resulting in the premiere of *Itasca* for voices and live electronics, in collaboration with John Shoptaw and choreographer Wendy Woodson.

Sawyer has received the Joseph H. Bearns Prize in Music, a First Music commission from the New York Youth Symphony, awards from the Tanglewood Music Center and the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and has held fellowships from the MacDowell Colony and Harvard University. He appears frequently as a solo and chamber pianist, recently on programs by Empyrean, Lighthouse Chamber Players, and Composers in Red Sneakers, and is the founding director of the critically acclaimed contemporary ensemble Longitude. Following four years as Chair of Composition and Theory at the Longy School of Music, Sawyer joined the composition faculty of Amherst College in the fall of 2002. Previously, he has taught composition and theory at the University of California, Santa Cruz, Wellesley College, and MIT. Sawyer received his undergraduate musical training at Harvard College, and completed his graduate studies at Columbia University and the University of California, Davis. His teach-