



Nancy
Hanks
Lincoln
Public
Library

THE WASHINGTON
YEARS

A New Play About Abraham Lincoln

BY

NAT SHERMAN

Copyright 1947 by Nat Sherman

THE PLAY CLUB, INC.
ELIZABETHTOWN, PA.

Represented exclusively by:

THE CONTINENTAL PRESS
HARRISBURG, PENNSYLVANIA

CHARACTERS

(In The Order of Appearance)

JOHN HAY

JOEL STARBUCK

MRS. LINCOLN

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

TAD LINCOLN

WILLIE LINCOLN

BOB LINCOLN

EDWIN M. STANTON

GENERAL GEORGE B. McCLELLAN

SENATOR BENJAMIN FRANKLIN WADE

SENATOR ZACHARIAH CHANDLER

MRS. ELLEN McCLELLAN

GENERAL WILLIAM F. SMITH

FERNANDO WOOD

HORATIO SEYMOUR

GENERAL PHILIP KEARNEY

GENERAL JOE HOOKER

HORACE GREELEY

CONGRESSMAN KELLY

CROWD OF ELECTION NIGHT SERENADERS

973.7463

H32h55w

THE WASHINGTON YEARS

ACT ONE

SCENE I

SCENE: The President's office in the White House. The room is fairly large, with tall windows in the Center opening out on to a balcony. In front of the windows there is a large armchair in which the President usually sits at a table for his writing. A tall desk with many pigeonholes stands nearby. There is a white marble fireplace with brass andirons and a high brass fender. Above the fireplace hangs a picture of Andrew Jackson. A few chairs, a hair covered sofa and a small table used as a desk, are part of the furniture. There are doors Upper Right and Lower Left, the former the entrance, the latter leading into the Cabinet Room.

TIME: It is late afternoon. Midsummer of 1861.

AT RISE: There is no one in the room. In a moment JOHN HAY, the President's secretary, a good-looking, clever young man of 22, enters. He is followed by JOEL STARBUCK, a middle-aged interior decorator.

STARBUCK (Looking about, at the worn carpet and plain furniture): So this is the President's office. (Shaking his head) It's as rundown as the rest of the White House. (He tests one of the chairs at the desk by bending it backward. It squeaks) Furniture's too old and rickety even to vener-

ate. (*He makes a note of this in his memo book.*)

HAY: Mr. Lincoln doesn't mind.

STARBUCK: But Mrs. Lincoln does. What's more, she wants the entire mansion renovated.

HAY: The President wants this room undisturbed.

STARBUCK: Look, Mr. Hay: The carpets and matting in every part of the building to which the public has access, are thick-stained with tobacco juice. The walls are stained, too, as high as a man can comfortably spit.

HAY: I know, but——

STARBUCK: That's why Mrs. Lincoln ordered the floor covering taken up and burned, and all the walls repapered. When that's done, and Mrs. Lincoln insists on the most expensive decorations—(*He refers to his memo book*) White lace curtains imported from Switzerland, draperies trimmed with gold fringe and tassel work, gilt moldings—(*He closes his book*)—this room will look queer if it's left as it is.

HAY: Mr. Starbuck, my instructions are to see that the President has at least one room in which to work without interruption. He has a war on his hands, you know.

STARBUCK: Still, Mrs. Lincoln wants me to include this room in my total estimate. So I'd better take the measurements I need. (*With a yardstick he begins to measure distances, from the center of the room to the door, etc. For a moment he stops*) If I thought the President or Mrs. Lincoln would listen——

HAY: Yes?

STARBUCK: I'd advise them against the entire renovation.

HAY (*Surprised*): Coming from you, that's interesting. Why?

STARBUCK: I don't believe they're going to be in the White House long enough to enjoy it.

HAY: What!

STARBUCK: Lee's army is only a two day's march from here. He'll take the Capitol whenever it suits him. And he'll take the war off Mr. Lincoln's hands shortly thereafter.

HAY: Is that your opinion as a military expert?

STARBUCK: I'm only an interior decorator, Mr. Hay.

HAY: And you think the South is sure to win?

STARBUCK: Think? Tell me. What's Mr. Lincoln got? An Army? You can't call that mob of ninety-day volunteers

an Army. Generals? How can a senile duffer like Scott, and a fifth-rater like McDowell, hold off Lee, Stonewall Jackson, Albert Sidney Johnston and Beauregard? The South is cocky because it has the most brilliant generals of our age, and not a single opponent worthy of the name.

HAY: I'll admit you put your finger on Mr. Lincoln's biggest headache. He gets no sleep these nights wondering what to use for generals.

STARBUCK: And that head start the South has in arms and equipment is no help for his insomnia either. (*He starts to measure one of the walls, but stops midway*) How angry was the President when he learned it was all an inside job?

HAY: Inside job?

STARBUCK: You don't think Jeff Davis was Secretary of War under that milksop Pierce for nothing? Or Floyd under that bladder-case Buchanan? Who do you suppose moved our arsenals down South? And our guns, cannon and navy yards? And scattered our ships to the ends of the earth so they couldn't be of use to us until it was too late?

HAY: You mean, they did that deliberately all these years?

STARBUCK: Of course. They saw the war coming and prepared for it. Why man, they've got billions to defend in negro slavery. Why wouldn't they steal all the guns?

HAY (*After a moment*): You sound as if you approved.

STARBUCK: I don't. My business, cottons and textiles, takes me down South frequently. I'm just telling you what every Southerner thinks was very clever and boasts about. (*MRS. LINCOLN enters. She is considerably agitated as she sweeps into the room with a letter in her hand and goes directly to HAY.*)

MRS. LINCOLN: Mr. Hay—Mr. Hay. Where is the President? Where are the children?

HAY: Mr. Lincoln took them with him to the War Department. He went to see if there was any news. They'll all be right back. Is anything wrong?

MRS. LINCOLN: This awful letter! How can I have the author of it arrested? (*She gives it to HAY and as he reads it she becomes aware of MR. STARBUCK*) Oh, Mr. Starbuck. Forgive me for being so absorbed. Did you take all the measurements?

STARBUCK: Yes, Madame. And I'll have the estimates

for you tomorrow.

MRS. LINCOLN: Good. Until tomorrow, then?

STARBUCK: Until tomorrow. (*He starts out. To HAY*)
Goodbye, Mr. Hay.

HAY: Goodbye. (*STARBUCK exits. As MRS. LINCOLN turns to him*) This letter is anonymous, Mrs. Lincoln. Threats of kidnapping and assassination usually are. Please don't read them.

MRS. LINCOLN: Don't be a fool! How else will I know what I have to meet? (*She takes the letter from him and starts out. As she reaches the door, the PRESIDENT enters. Seeing him without her boys she becomes fearful*)
Father! Where are the children? Tad and Willie?

THE PRESIDENT: Now, now, mother. I left them playing on the lawn with Bob. There's no reason for you to be disturbed about them.

MRS. LINCOLN: There is, father. This terrible letter
Read it. Read it at once.

THE PRESIDENT (*Putting an arm around her shoulder, he takes her back into the room and scans the letter at the same time*): Mother, I must forbid you to read such stuff. As long as we're in the White House I dare say we'll get a lot of scurrilous letters. Let's not give them a second thought. (*He throws the letter in the grate. To HAY*) John, will you tell Tad, Willie and Bob, their mother wishes them to come here?

HAY: Yes, Mr. Lincoln. (*He exits.*)

THE PRESIDENT: I am reminded of a funny story, in which——

MRS. LINCOLN: I am in no mood for a funny story. Did you make arrangements for a guard of soldiers to protect us?

THE PRESIDENT: Not yet, mother. I've been busy with many things of greater importance.

MRS. LINCOLN: Greater importance? Than the life of the President? Of the Commander-in-Chief, against whom there have been repeated threats?

THE PRESIDENT: But the only effective way to avoid all risks is to shut myself up in an iron box, where I could not possibly perform the duties of President. No, mother. In a country like this, where our habits are simple and democratic, assassination is always possible, and will come

if my enemies are determined upon it. (*There is a moment of silence*) I would not like to face sudden death. I believe I am a good deal of a coward physically. And yet—I'm quite indifferent to my own protection.

MRS. LINCOLN: Indifferent! Again that reaction. (*With intensity*) You do not know what it is to live in constant dread of some fearful tragedy! I can tolerate your indifference to what you eat, and when, though your irregularity makes orderly housekeeping impossible. I can put up with your "mighty indifference" to clothes, though you resemble some backwoods tourist who has blundered into the White House rather than the President of the United States.

THE PRESIDENT (*Protesting the exaggeration*): Mary.

MRS. LINCOLN (*Disregarding him*): But where the lives of our children are at stake, for these threats are also against them, I shall see to it myself that guards are posted immediately. (*As she starts out she hears the sound of her children, TAD and WILLIE, laughing and shouting as they come running into the room, with their elder brother BOB following quietly behind them. The two boys are lively youngsters. TAD is nine years old, a forward, self-willed brat, often impudent, and given to asking impertinent questions. WILLIE, eleven years old, is more thoughtful and imaginative, and is idolized by his parents. BOB seventeen years old, is fairly delicate. He seems to follow in "the dainty footsteps of the TODDS rather than the huge ones of the LINCOLNS."*)

TAD (*Breaking away from his brother to sing at his father*):

"Old Abe Lincoln,
A rail-splitter was he——

WILLIE: Stop it, Tad. Stop it.

TAD (*Paying no attention and rushing to finish the next two lines before he's stopped*):

"And that's the way
He'll split the Con-feder-a-cy."

WILLIE (*Putting his hand over TAD'S mouth*): Don't you sing that any more. It's disrespectful to pa. Promise you won't sing it again.

THE PRESIDENT: Don't shut him up, Willie.

WILLIE (*Disregarding his father*): Promise. (*He removes his hand.*)

TAD: I won't promise. Everybody knows pa used to split rails. (THE PRESIDENT *laughs heartily*) Can't I sing it, pa? Can't I?

MRS. LINCOLN: No, Tad. I never want to hear you sing that again.

TAD: Aw, ma.

MRS. LINCOLN: Never!

TAD: Why do they call pa, Mr. President? They don't call you Mrs. President.

MRS. LINCOLN: Don't ask so many questions, Tad. Ever since we came to the White House there's no end to your questions.

TAD (*Disobeying his mother*): How did you get to be President, Pa?

MRS. LINCOLN: Tad!

THE PRESIDENT: Let him ask, mother. He's not the only one who wonders how a nonentity like me ever got to be President.

TAD (*Jumping at the chance to continue with his questions*): Will I ever get to be President, pa? Will I?

THE PRESIDENT (*Smiling and nodding*): I don't see why not, son. All you need is your mother's skillful help. That's all I needed.

WILLIE: Pa . . .

THE PRESIDENT: Anything bothering you, Willie?

WILLIE: A little girl came to play with us on the lawn, and she says Jeff Davis is President, not you.

THE PRESIDENT: She believes that, does she?

WILLIE: And she said they moved the White House to Richmond, pa. But how could they move it when it's here and we're in it?

THE PRESIDENT (*Smiling*): That's quite a big question, son, and it calls for a long answer. Suppose you save it until supper, and then we'll undertake to answer it for you, so that you can hold your own with the little girl. (*To his wife*) Isn't it time for the children to make ready for supper, mother?

MRS. LINCOLN: Indeed it is. Come boys.

TAD: Aw, pa.

THE PRESIDENT: Run along now. I'll be with you shortly. (*The BOYS exit with their MOTHER following. But at the door she turns as she hears BOB address his*

father.)

BOB: Dad . . .

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, Bob?

BOB: I've been thinking.

THE PRESIDENT: What about, son?

BOB: That I ought to postpone going to college.

MRS. LINCOLN (*Sharply*): Postpone college?

THE PRESIDENT (*Kindly*): Why, son?

BOB: It's dull, dad.

THE PRESIDENT (*Hiding his amusement*): Harvard, dull?

BOB: I mean, compared to all that goes on here in Washington and in the White House. I mean, why can't I work here just like Johnny Hay does? We're very good friends. And I could learn ever so much more in four years in the White House than in any old college.

MRS. LINCOLN: But that's ridiculous, Robert (*To her husband*) It's because the Harvard swells make fun of him.

BOB (*Protesting*): No, mother.

MRS. LINCOLN (*Disregarding him*): They've nicknamed him the Prince of Rails, and do everything they can to make him feel out of place, there, just because he's the President's son.

BOB: It's not that at all, mother. The Capitol is much more exciting than college.

THE PRESIDENT (*Highly amused*): The Prince of Rails? (MRS. LINCOLN *nods*) That's not bad. Not bad at all.

MRS. LINCOLN: Father!

THE PRESIDENT (*Serious again*): Bob, after supper tonight, you and I will take a stroll around the Capitol. Perhaps we can get a better perspective on the comparative values of Harvard and Washington.

BOB: All right, dad. (*He exits.*)

MRS. LINCOLN (*After watching him out, turns to her husband*): On the values of a formal education I might have some contribution, father.

THE PRESIDENT: I'm certain you have, mother. And should I fail to reconcile him to Harvard, rest assured I shall appeal to you for assistance. (*Satisfied, she nods, turns and starts out. HAY enters.*)

HAY: Mrs. Lincoln—(*She stops*) Senator Wade just told

me that the appropriation of twenty thousand dollars for the renovation of the White House was passed.

MRS. LINCOLN (*With a smile*): That is gratifying news. Thank you, Mr. Hay. (*She exits. HAY approaches THE PRESIDENT.*)

HAY: That was a nice gesture of Wade and the radicals on the Appropriations Committee.

THE PRESIDENT: Was it? Their motive is pretty obvious.

HAY (*After a moment's thought*): I'm afraid I've missed it, Mr. Lincoln.

THE PRESIDENT: I believe they hope to ingratiate themselves with Mrs. Lincoln. She would then try to get me to take the actions they are clamoring for: a Proclamation freeing the slaves immediately, and an order to General McDowell forcing him to take the offensive and move at once against the Confederate Army.

HAY: I see. Thank you, sir.

THE PRESIDENT: I am as anxious as they are to free the slaves. (*He has spoken with deep feeling as though he were on the defensive, which he is*) I've even drawn up a Proclamation of Emancipation which I carry around with me. (*He takes it out of his coat pocket and looks at it. Then he puts it down*) But I do not feel that public opinion is quite ready for it, particularly in the Border States.

HAY: Does Mrs. Lincoln agree with the radicals as to its timeliness?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes. She does. It must be that I'm slow, John. Much too slow and weak for radicals like Wade, Chandler, Stanton, Chase. And completely lacking in every quality of leadership, they say. Their hostility, their contempt for my weakness and inability is no longer disguised.

HAY: They will change, Mr. Lincoln. Events have not yet proved them to be right and you wrong.

THE PRESIDENT (*In a black mood of melancholy and self doubt*): In the meantime, I feel dismally alone. And inadequate! That feeling of inadequacy has haunted me all of my life. I keep thinking I'm bound to make a fool of myself in this post—for the whole world to see! Why did I ever think I was justified in running for President?

HAY: But Mr. Lincoln——

THE PRESIDENT: No, John. There's no justification

for thinking I'm a match for this job. No man ever assumed the Presidency with as little experience in public life to guide him as I had. All other Presidents had gained some prominence as statesmen, soldiers, or at least vote-getters, before receiving the nomination to the highest office. Not I. Yet I face the greatest task, and the most terrible responsibilities of them all. (MR. STANTON, *the Secretary of War*, enters waving a telegram. He is impressive looking with a great beard and square spectacles. Also he is a domineering, quick tempered, cross-grained individual who is easily aroused to blustering, sneering and raging at everyone, including the President.)

STANTON: Mr. President! I have good news, Mr. President. Our first military victories—under General McClellan.

THE PRESIDENT: McClellan? Where?

STANTON: In West Virginia. (He hands THE PRESIDENT the telegram.)

THE PRESIDENT (After reading it): Amazing! How do you account for it, Mr. Stanton?

STANTON: Why—why—McClellan is a capable general.

THE PRESIDENT: Evidently. But what army, what body of troops is he in command of?

STANTON: All I've been able to learn is that McClellan, without a staff, working day and night, had organized his own troops, in Ohio.

THE PRESIDENT: Excellent. Indeed, remarkable! But did you, as the Secretary of War, give him permission to move, or order him into action?

STANTON: No, Mr. President. He received no permission or orders from anyone. The movements he initiated were entirely on his own responsibility, and of his own volition.

THE PRESIDENT: Mr. Stanton, you cannot know how happy this makes me. From all indications, McClellan is the type of general I've prayed for. You and I must make his acquaintance at the first opportunity.

STANTON: And General McDowell?

THE PRESIDENT: What about McDowell?

STANTON: Will you now order him to attack? For he will not advance of his own initiative.

THE PRESIDENT: McDowell's army is not yet prepared to attack. He has begged me for more time.

STANTON (With deep indignation. His tone carries a

command): Surely you will *not* grant it.

THE PRESIDENT (*Resenting his tone*): I have no alternative, Mr. Stanton.

STANTON (*He makes a sharp, half-turn away in disgust, but turns right back*): Mr. President, McClellan's army was even less prepared, and he scored victories. Is not his example the one to follow?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes. But it does not seem wise to impose such an order on a commanding general who assures me he needs more time.

STANTON (*Losing all patience*): But he has had more than enough time! With McClellan advancing in the west and McDowell in the east, we would be striking on two fronts at the same time. Nothing could then stop us from sweeping on to Richmond and stamping out the rebellion for good and all.

THE PRESIDENT: I would be entirely in favor of the move, Mr. Stanton—if General McDowell were ready.

STANTON (*Trembling with emotion, his tone rises to a threat*): Mr. President. By such hesitancy on this issue, and on the emancipation of the slaves, you are bringing discredit not only upon yourself but upon your entire Administration! The War Department is swamped with letters demanding action. So is every Congressman. If you will not listen to us, you must be responsive to the voice of the people. For when the news of McClellan's victories reaches them, and you are still indecisive with McDowell, I warn you that you will be swept from office!

THE PRESIDENT (*Undisturbed by the threat, he paces the room in deep thought*): Perhaps McClellan's advance in the west does call for a corresponding move in the east. (*Strongly*) I have my doubts, Mr. Stanton! But I shall override them. Issue such an order to General McDowell. I will sign it.

STANTON: Thank you, Mr. President. (*As he starts out*)

CURTAIN

ACT I

SCENE 2

The room is the same as Scene 1. Although the entire White House has been renovated, the President's Office remained "undisturbed".

AT RISE: *It is early morning, about 9 a.m., weeks later. JOHN HAY is working at the desk opening the President's mail. MRS. LINCOLN enters carrying a cup of coffee.*

HAY (*Looking up—in a subdued tone*): Good morning, Mrs. Lincoln.

MRS. LINCOLN: Good morning, Mr. Hay. (*She puts the cup down on the desk, then takes a few steps toward the Cabinet Room*) Is the President still with his Cabinet?

HAY: Yes, Mrs. Lincoln.

MRS. LINCOLN: Could you interrupt them—just to give him some coffee? He had no time for breakfast when they summoned him to the Cabinet Room at five o'clock in the morning.

HAY: I'm afraid the President would resent the interruption.

MRS. LINCOLN: Are you sure?

HAY: Mrs. Lincoln—the latest news is very bad. We've lost the Battle of Bull Run. General McDowell is in full retreat.

MRS. LINCOLN: Full retreat? (*With deep alarm*) It doesn't seem possible! How authentic is this news?

HAY: It was confirmed by a dispatch from McDowell himself, in which he calls on General Scott to save the Capital.

MRS. LINCOLN (*Contemptuously*): Scott! How can old Scott save anything!

HAY: No one thinks he can. That's why the President sent for General McClellan. And the Cabinet is discussing the advisability of turning over command of the entire Army to him.

MRS. LINCOLN: I see. (*For a moment she looks in the direction of the Cabinet Room. HAY resumes opening the mail. MRS. LINCOLN turns to him*) Mr. Hay . .

HAY: Yes, Mrs. Lincoln?

MRS. LINCOLN: The bills for the renovation of the Executive Mansion—have they come?

HAY: Yes, Mrs. Lincoln. (*He indicates a batch of them on the desk*) And they exceed the congressional appropriation.

MRS. LINCOLN (*Apologetically*): I've been extravagant, I know. But I felt I had to be to maintain the dignity of the White House.

HAY: There is a bill of some seven thousand dollars for which payment is being demanded of the President. Mr. Lincoln asked me about it this morning. But we had no time to discuss it.

MRS. LINCOLN (*Angrily*): Why must they bother the President with such matters? Surely the Commissioner of Public Buildings will pay it.

HAY: Only if he has the President's approval, Mrs. Lincoln. (*The door of the Cabinet Room opens and THE PRESIDENT enters.*)

THE PRESIDENT: John, General McClellan is due here in a few minutes. Would you see to it that the guards let him through without delay?

HAY: Yes, Mr. Lincoln.

THE PRESIDENT: Then bring him up the moment he arrives. (*HAY nods and exits*) (*THE PRESIDENT stands about lost in deep thought.*)

MRS. LINCOLN: Is your Cabinet meeting over, Abr'am?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, Mary. (*With a deep sigh*) But I did not win one of them to agree with the decision I feel I must make. And it's such a weighty decision! Our cause, our lives, everything may depend upon it.

MRS. LINCOLN: This coffee is still hot, Abr'am. I brought it in the event you could find no time for breakfast.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Mary. (*He takes the cup and drinks. When he finishes, he puts the cup down*

on the desk, and as he does so, sees the bills HAY showed to MRS. LINCOLN) Mary, I am asked to approve a bill—for furnishings to this mansion, that is thousands of dollars in excess of the Congressional appropriation.

MRS. LINCOLN (*Hastily*): But it's quite common to exceed the appropriation in such matters.

THE PRESIDENT: Is it? I find it distressing, Mary. I cannot begin to tell you how deeply.

MRS. LINCOLN: But—you will approve it?

THE PRESIDENT (*Sharply*): No. It can never have my approval! I'll pay it out of my own pocket first.

MRS. LINCOLN: But Abr'am—

THE PRESIDENT: Good Lord, Mary! It would stink in the nostrils of the American people to have it said that the President approved a bill over-running an appropriation of twenty thousand dollars for flub dubs for this damned old house, when our soldiers can't have enough blankets or medicines. (*A pause. LINCOLN, in his agitation, paces the room for a moment*) I've been overwhelmed with other matters of terribly vital importance and urgency. I couldn't possibly attend to everything. But I expected that you, Mary, had the good judgment not to subject me to anything so scandalous.

MRS. LINCOLN (*Flaring up*): It is not my fault that the President who preceded us was a bachelor, and did nothing to prevent this house from getting so run down!

THE PRESIDENT: But these bills, Mary—(*He takes them up and reads, his voice trembling with indignation*) One Grand Carpet—two thousand five hundred dollars. One Elegant Carpet—ten thousand dollars. Why that's a monstrous extravagance! And I dare say, irresponsible!

MRS. LINCOLN: Abr'am!

THE PRESIDENT (*Backing down a bit*): I'm sorry I said that, Mary. But I still feel it's all wrong to spend one cent at a time like this! The house is furnished well enough, better than any one we ever lived in.

MRS. LINCOLN (*Snapping at him*): That is no basis of comparison at all! (*She speaks with passion*) Nor, absorbed as you are, do you know anything of the bitter savage criticism I have endured from the moment of our arrival in Washington. When we lived here simply and unpretentiously, people ridiculed me for not knowing how to keep

up the social dignity of my position. Well, I mean never to give my critics an opportunity to say that again!

THE PRESIDENT (*With vast impatience*): Critics? What critics?

MRS. LINCOLN (*Stung by the tone of his voice*): Society! The social set here in the Capitol hates this Administration violently, and vents its hatred upon both of us. It has singled me out for its especial target. Even those women who condescend to call upon me to exchange social courtesies, do so only to gather ammunition with which to attack me. They come not as guests but as critics, for they are bent on my social ruin. But I will fight them, inch by inch and move by move, with your cooperation or without! (*And turning from him she walks out of the room.*)

THE PRESIDENT: Mary—Mary—(*But she does not heed his call. He throws the bills down on the desk singly*) Damn! Double damn! (*HAY enters with GENERAL McCLELLAN, a vigorous, self-confident, youthful man not quite thirty-five. There is a dramatic quality about him. His figure is a sturdy one with a well-modeled head on a body as muscular as a prize fighter's.*)

HAY (*Announcing him*): General McClellan. (*As McCLELLAN steps forward, LINCOLN goes to him and offers his hand.*)

THE PRESIDENT: Welcome to Washington, General.

McCLELLAN (*Shaking the PRESIDENT'S hand*): Thank you, Mr. President.

HAY: Mr. President . . .

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, Mr. Hay?

HAY: Senator Wade and Senator Chandler have just arrived from the battlefield. They've come straight to the White House to tell you what they saw at first hand.

THE PRESIDENT (*Eagerly*): Show them right in, Mr. Hay. I believe General McClellan will also find their testimony invaluable.

HAY: Very good, sir.

McCLELLAN (*As HAY goes to the door to admit the two men*): I would be grateful indeed, Mr. President, for the privilege of standing by and listening.

THE PRESIDENT: You shall have that privilege, General. (*As HAY opens the door, the two SENATORS enter. BENJAMIN FRANKLIN WADE is fifty-one years*

old. Rather short, deep-chested and defiant-looking, he is unafraid, sharp-tongued and frequently sarcastic. ZACHARIAH CHANDLER, his colleague, is a tall, grim, powerful and relentless official. THE PRESIDENT steps forward to welcome them) Come in, gentlemen.

WADE: Thank you, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: May I present General McClellan? (*To McCLELLAN*) This is Senator Ben Wade and Senator Zach Chandler.

McCLELLAN: How do you do?

WADE: How do you do? (*They shake hands.*)

CHANDLER (*As McCLELLAN shakes hands with him*): I'm honored, General.

McCLELLAN: Thank you, Senator.

THE PRESIDENT (*Indicating the lounge*): Won't you gentlemen be seated?

WADE: Thank you, Mr. President. (*They all seat themselves.*)

CHANDLER: Mr. President, we have personal news we feel we must share with you. A mutual friend, Colonel Edward Bailey, was killed in action at the head of his brigade.

THE PRESIDENT (*Stunned*): Ed Bailey! Ed—(*Deeply affected, he rises. With bowed head and tears rolling down his cheeks, he turns and moves to the window where he stands for a moment with his back to the men. With his handkerchief he dries his eyes, then turns back*) Forgive me, but Colonel Bailey was one of my dearest friends, a man I loved as affectionately as a brother. (*The PRESIDENT sits down again*) Gentlemen, the disaster we suffered at Bull Run has caused me indescribable agony and bewilderment. Yesterday, at three o'clock in the afternoon, McDowell thought he had the battle won. An hour later, his army was going to pieces. How—(*His voice breaks*) How did it happen?

WADE (*His tone is sharp with anger*): The blundering incompetence of General Patterson was to blame! If he had smashed at Johnston's Army in the Shenandoah Valley, as he was ordered, Johnston's fresh regiments couldn't have marched in and started the panic.

CHANDLER (*With deep contempt for the troops he refers to*): Mr. President, the ninety-day volunteers were to

blame.

THE PRESIDENT: How, Senator?

CHANDLER (*Scornfully*): They were thinking only of getting home. Two of their regiments, claiming their time of service was over, marched off the field of battle even as the cannons began to roar.

THE PRESIDENT: Incredible!

WADE (*Hotly*): But I would blame General McDowell for that!—for not moving into action sooner. At least before the time of expiration of their ninety-day enlistment.

CHANDLER (*As THE PRESIDENT looks in his direction*): The regulars were also to blame—for driving their caissons at top speed through the regimental ranks when heading to the rear for ammunition.

THE PRESIDENT (*In a despairing tone*): Was it that which caused them to become panic-stricken? Were the troops that green?

CHANDLER: Yes, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: I had my doubts about their readiness for battle when we ordered McDowell to advance. If we are to be honest with ourselves we will have to admit the blame is ours.

WADE (*Strongly*): No, Mr. President. No one is to blame as much as the officers! I saw many of them desert their commands. (*With deep sarcasm*) They were among the first to run to save their necks.

THE PRESIDENT: Good Lord, Senator! Are you saying that the officers were that green, too?

WADE: I am telling you only what I saw.

THE PRESIDENT: It seems that we have undertaken to fight a war without men who know how.

CHANDLER: What do you intend to do, Mr. President?

THE PRESIDENT: Do?

WADE: The newspapers are already clamoring for an end to the war.

CHANDLER (*Supplementing the statement of his colleague*): To let the South do as it pleases about slavery, since you have no Army to compel them to do otherwise.

THE PRESIDENT (*Bitterly*): I have seen the newspapers. They maintain I would be justified in stopping the war. (*With sarcasm*) That I could even do so honorably, in view of our disastrous unpreparedness. (*Raising his voice*

in anger) Do they think I need only an alibi to abandon the cause I hold dearer than life? Or that I would turn tail because the obstacles before us seem insurmountable?

WADE: Then you——?

THE PRESIDENT: We've made a false start. But we have discovered it at the very beginning. (*With great determination*) It remains only to start afresh!

WADE (*Moved to great admiration*): It was good to hear you say that, Mr. President!

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you. (*To both senators*) Gentlemen, your report was most illuminating. You will oblige me by going directly to General Scott's headquarters with your information. (*The two Senators rise to go.*)

WADE: We will report there immediately.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, gentlemen. (*He sees them to the door. Saying, "Goodbye" to McClellan, they exit. THE PRESIDENT returns to McCLELLAN*)

General McClellan, the country has no army that is trained and ready for fighting. But it has manpower and resources with which to build one. In the present, unfavorable circumstances, would you be willing to assume the task?

McCLELLAN (*Without a moment's hesitation*): I believe I would, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: I should be perfectly satisfied, if I thought that this tremendous increase of responsibility would not embarrass you.

McCLELLAN: It would not in the slightest. (*The Secretary of War, STANTON, enters hurriedly.*)

STANTON (*With intense anxiety*): Mr. President, I must see you at once!

THE PRESIDENT (*A glance at STANTON and he recognizes the urgency*): Very well. By the way, have you two gentlemen met?

STANTON: We have. General McClellan was good enough to report to me at the War Department on his arrival. We would have come together to see you, had I not been detained.

THE PRESIDENT (*To McCLELLAN*): General, would you kindly wait in the Cabinet Room? (*McCLELLAN nods and THE PRESIDENT sees him to the door*) The task I mentioned—I'd be grateful if you gave it a bit more thought. (*McCLELLAN nods and exits.*)

STANTON: The members of the Cabinet have asked me to make one last plea against your appointing McClellan to the Supreme Command.

THE PRESIDENT (*With infinite weariness*): Mr. Stanton, we discussed that at great length. But if you will advance one new reason——

STANTON: The man is young. Not quite thirty-five. That's *too* young for so important a post.

THE PRESIDENT: But he was not too young to win victories. That is what the country must have, a general who can win victories. I will take full responsibility for his age.

STANTON: And his party affiliations and political beliefs?

THE PRESIDENT: Completely irrelevant.

STANTON (*Raising his voice*): But the man's views are pro-slavery! He is an advocate of state's rights. Do you dare entrust the Supreme Command to a Democrat?

THE PRESIDENT: Dare? You ask whether I dare trust a Democrat? Mr. Stanton *you*—are a Democrat. Yet I appointed you to serve as Secretary of War.

STANTON: We are not opposed to McClellan's *serving* the country. That's not the issue at all! Use him. Use his remarkable abilities. But do not appoint him to the Supreme Command.

THE PRESIDENT (*Losing his temper*): Why, in Heaven's name, not?

STANTON (*At the top of his voice*): Because the General who conquers the South and smashes the rebellion will have the disposal of the next Presidency!

THE PRESIDENT: So that's it. And out in the open, at last. Mr. Stanton, I will not risk the life of our country for all the future presidencies to the end of time. If McClellan does conquer, I say he deserves to have the disposal of the Presidency. And if he wanted it for himself I would cheerfully step aside to let him take my place.

STANTON (*With sarcasm*): What you have said may sound noble. But it is not at all realistic or far-sighted. You are *needlessly* endangering the party which raised you to power. But it is impossible to make you see that! (*Angrily he turns and goes out.* THE PRESIDENT *watches him leave, then goes to the door of the Cabinet Room, opens it and calls out.*)

THE PRESIDENT: General McClellan. (McCLELLAN comes in) My mind is made up. I've decided to commission you General-in-Chief of the Union Armies.

McCLELLAN: Thank you, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: The nation will look to you as the Saviour of our country.

McCLELLAN: I shall try to be worthy. Mr. President, I promise to crush the rebellion in one well-prepared, swift campaign.

THE PRESIDENT: May God grant you victory!

CURTAIN

ACT ONE

SCENE 3

SCENE: *A room at GENERAL McCLELLAN'S headquarters in Washington. It is a medium-sized room, sparsely furnished. In the Center there is a table and chairs. Against the Right wall, a couch. In the Left wall there is a window. The entrance door is at the back, Center. There is another door lower Right. It is late in the day, about eight months after SCENE 2.*

AT RISE: THE PRESIDENT *is seated at the table reading a newspaper.* SENATOR WADE *is standing at the window looking out.* SENATOR CHANDLER *is seated on the couch looking at SENATOR WADE.*

CHANDLER (*To WADE*): Any sign of McClellan yet?

WADE (*Turning*): No. And I don't believe he'll come at all now.

THE PRESIDENT (*Looking up*): Need I remind you that this is his headquarters? He'll come.

CHANDLER (*After looking at his watch*): But we've been waiting more than two full hours!

WADE (*Approaching THE PRESIDENT*): He knows we're here as a Congressional Committee, and with you. What else can this delay mean but that he's showing his contempt for all of us?

THE PRESIDENT: Wade, you remind me of a funny story, of a man who——

WADE (*Angrily*): Stories! Stories! For months the country has been clamoring for action from you or McClellan. Every newspaper in the land criticizes you severely for your do-nothing policy, for indecision which they attribute

to incompetence, and all you do is tell stories. Mr. President, you would tell stories if you were only a mile from hell.

THE PRESIDENT (*With quiet pointedness*): Well, Wade, a mile is almost exactly the distance from here to the Capitol! (WADE, *finding THE PRESIDENT incorrigible, turns and goes to the window again.*)

CHANDLER (*Rising*): Mr. President, the only story we are interested in is why McClellan, who has been in command for eight months, hasn't fought a single battle.

THE PRESIDENT: I promise you will get that story, Senator, before we leave.

WADE (*At the window*): But when will that be? There's still no sign of him. (*Suddenly*) I'll be damned if I'll wait here another minute!

CHANDLER: That's how I feel. We can command McClellan's appearance before our Congressional Committee, as we planned.

THE PRESIDENT (*Rising as CHANDLER moves to join WADE*): Gentlemen, this is no time to stand on dignity. I will wait. I would even hold McClellan's horse if he would bring us victory.

WADE: But such conduct on his part makes me sure he will not be the one to bring us victory!

CHANDLER (*Coming directly to the point*): Mr. President, it is the opinion of our Committee that General McClellan does *not want* to fight the war.

THE PRESIDENT: Tell me what your Committee thinks he does want.

CHANDLER: A negotiated peace.

WADE (*Sarcastically*): A gentleman's peace with the South. With slavery.

THE PRESIDENT: I am not at all convinced of that.

WADE: No? Who are his friends? With whom does he dine? With whom is he seen? Only the enemies of the Administration! Only the peace-at-any-price boys. Copperheads like Fernando Wood. Big money men like Belmont and Aspenwall, men who care nothing for our country or the great national idea, the Union, for which it stands.

THE PRESIDENT: Thus far I have found in General McClellan's inaction only hesitation. That may be natural rather than political.

WADE: Hesitation. (*He speaks with passion*) But if he were intoxicated with this Union, loved it for its message of freedom, were determined to crush all its foes as a holy duty, he would have a fire in his breast that would burn out hesitation! The man is wrong politically. How can you have faith in him militarily? (*The door opens and McCLELLAN enters. With him is MRS. McCLELLAN, a charming and vivacious young woman who adores her husband.*)

McCLELLAN: Mr. President—Senators. I hope I haven't kept you waiting.

WADE (*Refusing to conceal his irritation*): But you have, General. For hours.

CHANDLER (*Equally indignant*): And the President, too.

MRS. McCLELLAN (*Quickly coming to her husband's defense*): Mr. Lincoln, the fault is not my husband's. Please forgive him.

McCLELLAN: Nell, dearest.

MRS. McCLELLAN: But George, darling. I think the President and these Senators should know how the simplest luncheon is turned into a reception in your honor, how men of influence and power use every occasion to pay you homage. (*To THE PRESIDENT, exploiting all the charm she possesses*) That is why, Mr. President, he couldn't get away in time for his appointment with you. They simply didn't let him go. And I kept assuring him you, and the Senators, wouldn't mind.

WADE: But this is war time, Mrs. McClellan. Does that take second place in your estimation?

MRS. McCLELLAN (*Sweetly*): Would you deny us the sudden acclaim that has come to my husband? Can you know what it means to a woman to see the man she loves hailed as the greatest general since Napoleon?

McCLELLAN: Nell, please.

MRS. McCLELLAN: It was the deepest thrill of my life, Senator Wade. And for it I would risk the disfavor of any man on earth. (*She turns to her husband*) I must go now, George. (*To THE PRESIDENT and THE SENATORS*) Will you excuse me? (*As they nod, she exits, with her husband seeing her to the door.*)

McCLELLAN (*Returning to the Center of the room*): Won't you gentlemen be seated? (*THE PRESIDENT*

seats himself. The others remain standing.)

THE PRESIDENT: General McClellan, Senator Wade and Senator Chandler informed me that they were about to demand your appearance for examination by the Congressional Committee on the conduct of the War. As I thought the same purpose could be accomplished in the more friendly atmosphere of your headquarters, I persuaded them to come here instead.

McCLELLAN: Thank you, Mr. President. (*To CHANDLER*) Just what is it your Committee wishes to know?

CHANDLER (*Simply*): Your plans, General.

WADE (*With biting sarcasm*): An explanation of your masterly inactivity.

CHANDLER: Your Army is now the largest and finest this country, or the world, has yet seen. It outnumbers the nearest enemy force at Manassas by at least three to one. Why, after months of training and drilling, do you still refuse to launch a single attack?

McCLELLAN: Surely, you are aware that any Army on the offensive needs more and better training than an Army on the defensive. Besides, a new attack, if made too soon after the first defeat would, if unsuccessful, be certainly followed by the capture of Washington, a disaster that could prove fatal to our country. Until my Army is in such condition as to make success certain, it would be unpardonable folly to attack.

WADE: General McClellan, we've given consideration to all the factors you mentioned. Yet every military expert we consult advises us that a new attack is long overdue.

CHANDLER: Two plans of military campaigns were submitted to you by the War Department. You rejected both.

McCLELLAN: Am I expected to take seriously the plans of the gigantic intellects of the War Department, or its anonymous military experts?

CHANDLER (*Stung into belligerence*): Very well, then, what are *your* plans, if you have any?

McCLELLAN: Of course I have plans! But I am unwilling to disclose them. I hold to the belief that in military matters the fewer persons who know of them, the better.

THE PRESIDENT: Come, General. You are talking to men in the Government.

McCLELLAN: But it is unreasonable to expect me to take

all official Washington into my confidence.

CHANDLER (*With exasperation*): After all these months, to be told that we are still to be kept in total darkness!

THE PRESIDENT: General McClellan, I regret that I must order you to tell me what your plans are.

McCLELLAN (*Losing control of himself for a moment*): You, order me— (*Swiftly changing his tone*) Very well, Mr. President. But the responsibility will be solely yours. (*To WADE and CHANDLER*) My plan is to attack at the first possible moment I can do so successfully. But I cannot tell you when that will be, for it depends on circumstances beyond my control.

WADE: Please be specific. What circumstances?

McCLELLAN: The condition of the roads. The continuous rains we have had makes them impassable for Army trains and artillery.

CHANDLER: Then you are now waiting merely for favorable weather?

McCLELLAN: No-o. Not that alone.

WADE (*With insistence*): What else?

McCLELLAN: There are only two bridges across the Potomac to Washington. More are necessary. My plans call for their being built.

CHANDLER (*With deep skepticism*): More bridges?

McCLELLAN (*Resenting his tone*): Military strategy requires that a commander safeguard any retreating movement he might be forced to make!

WADE (*With exasperation. To CHANDLER and THE PRESIDENT*): More delay. Endless delay!

CHANDLER: General McClellan, if I understand you correctly, *before* you strike at the enemy, you want to be sure of plenty of bridges over which you can run in case they strike back?

WADE (*With a snort*): Or in case you get scared!

McCLELLAN (*Flaring up*): I don't know why I should be compelled to discuss military strategy with politicians. (*To THE PRESIDENT*) How am I explain the most elementary matters? That just as lines of communication and supply are necessary there must also be available lines of retreat.

WADE: Lines of retreat (*With a shout*) Let our enemies worry about lines of retreat, and ours will take care of themselves! (*Turning to LINCOLN*) Mr. President, we

ignorant politicians are not too dumb to recognize evasion when we see it. There isn't one definite statement in all that General McClellan has told us, or intends to tell us. Further questioning would be a waste of time. (*He starts for the door, but stops to hear what his colleague is saying to THE PRESIDENT.*)

CHANDLER: I don't know much about military strategy, or the art of locomotion backwards. But it seems to me that his failure to attack is nothing more than infernal, unmitigated cowardice! (*He, too, starts out.*)

THE PRESIDENT: But Senator Chandler, Senator——
(CHANDLER, *without heeding THE PRESIDENT, exits.*)

WADE (*Merely turning his head*): You appointed him, Mr. President. He's your responsibility. (*And he exits.*)

McCLELLAN (*As THE PRESIDENT turns to him*): I should have known better than to expect even common courtesy from radicals.

THE PRESIDENT (*With restrained temper*): It was the radicals who voted the Appropriations which gave your Army bread, beef, arms and artillery on a colossal scale. They cannot be blamed for thinking the time has come for action.

McCLELLAN (*Sharply*): But they can be blamed for meddling in military matters about which they know nothing! And I resent having them remark upon my work as "masterly inactivity."

THE PRESIDENT: It would be far better if you gave them no cause for such remarks! (*After a moment*) Frankly, General, I am greatly disturbed by the present state of affairs. With the tremendous cost of war mounting every day, the country is fast sliding towards bankruptcy. That is why delay is so maddening! Then, too, England and France have recognized the Confederacy as a belligerent power. The threat of war with these countries is therefore immediate. But you, General McClellan, can change all that; with one battle, with one victory, which would redeem the cowardly shame of Bull Run, and set the nation right in the eyes of the world.

McCLELLAN: But if I fail, and my Army is defeated, it would mean the end of our nation. No, Mr. President, I cannot afford to fail. I hesitate because the risks are too great.

THE PRESIDENT: I see . . . I can understand hesitation, General! Believe me! I, who have never yet taken a single important step, or a great risk, without suffering horrible doubts and fears, and experiencing a splitting torment that almost drives me crazy. Yes, somehow, and with such anguish, I have never failed to take the action I thought necessary. (*With finality*) I must have that battle, General. And I alone will assume all the risks, no matter how great.

McCLELLAN (*In a conciliatory tone*): You shall have that battle, Mr. President. But in due time.

THE PRESIDENT: When?

McCLELLAN: When I feel certain that my Army is well-organized and strong enough to win. Meanwhile you must have confidence in me.

THE PRESIDENT (*Slowly shaking his head*): I once had unbounded confidence in you. Now I must insist that you make a definite commitment on the time and place you will attack.

McCLELLAN (*Belligerently*): No, Mr. President! For that would be inviting the same disaster that befell General McDowell. I shall speak bluntly. I attribute the defeat at Bull Run to you, your Cabinet advisors and to the radicals who forced McDowell into action prematurely. (*Raising his voice*) I will not make the same mistake! Nor will I tolerate any interference from politicians. If you, Mr. President, are still not strong enough to resist their pressure, I am.

THE PRESIDENT: Whether or not I am strong enough to resist them will not be revealed in this instance, General. For I am now in full agreement with them on the necessity for immediate action. But a simpler issue will be tested, and that is whether or not you will obey an order of your Commander-in-Chief. (*Taking a written order from his pocket*) I have prepared such an order, fixing the day when the Army will advance, and seize and occupy Manassas Junction. (*He hands it to him*) You, General McClellan, will execute this order! (*Quietly*) Good day. (THE PRESIDENT *exits*. For a moment McCLELLAN looks at the order, then at the door through which THE PRESIDENT took his leave. With sudden defiance, and with vigorous gestures, he tears the order into pieces. As he starts out of the room—

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

SCENE I

SCENE: *Again THE PRESIDENT'S office. It is mid-afternoon, several months later than the preceding scene.*

AT RISE: JOHN HAY is at the desk making entries in the diary he keeps. The diary is a small black book which he can easily slip into his inside jacket pocket. After few moments THE PRESIDENT enters. In his hands he holds an open newspaper, and as he looks at it his face is all smiles.

THE PRESIDENT: John—Look, John. (HAY quickly hides the diary in his pocket. THE PRESIDENT has caught the movement out of the corner of his eye, but acts as though he hadn't) The latest cartoon, of me, and in my judgment, the funniest. (He gives the paper to HAY who looks at the picture and smiles.)

HAY: Yes, it's the funniest of all I've seen, too.

THE PRESIDENT: I thought it would amuse you.

HAY: Very much, sir.

THE PRESIDENT: These crayon sharpshooters never miss when they aim their fun at my latitude and longitude. (As HAY returns the paper to him) Oh, but there's more than the cartoon. There's a footnote in which this genius of nonsense really lets himself go. Listen. (He reads) "Mr. Lincoln stands 6 feet 2 in his socks, which he changes once every two months. (HAY smiles) His anatomy is composed mostly of bones, and when walking, resembles the offspring of a happy marriage between a derrick and a windmill. (He looks up and laughs. HAY laughs, too. THE PRESIDENT continues) His hands and feet are plenty large enough, but in society he has the air of having too many of them." (This strikes deeper and he laughs more heartily) Now there's a man I envy.

HAY: The cartoonist? Why, sir?

THE PRESIDENT: Why, for his humorous talent.

HAY: I see.

THE PRESIDENT: John, I'd give anything I possess, including the Presidency, for such a happy faculty.

HAY: Would you, really, sir?

THE PRESIDENT: Without a moment's hesitation. (*He sighs deeply*) Ah, well. (*He sits down at the desk*) John . .

HAY: Yes, Mr. Lincoln?

THE PRESIDENT: That diary you're keeping. You don't have to hide it from *me*.

HAY (*Feigning innocence*): Diary?

THE PRESIDENT: It seems that every time I enter this room I catch you concealing it.

HAY (*Stammering in embarrassment*): I—I——

THE PRESIDENT: Now I have no more objection to your writing anything in criticism of me than I have to any newspaperman doing the same.

HAY (*Relieved*): Thank you, Mr. Lincoln.

THE PRESIDENT (*Getting down to business*): Has there been any word from McClellan?

HAY: Nothing new, sir. He's still besieging Yorktown, for the twenty-third day.

THE PRESIDENT: The twenty-third day!

HAY: Stanton says he's afraid either to fight or to run.

THE PRESIDENT: It's gall bitter to think how the rebels, with eleven thousand men, bar the way to Richmond to McClellan with fifty-eight thousand. By the way, was Stanton here?

HAY: Yes. He came to see you about a letter that Mrs. Lincoln wrote to Fernando Wood.

THE PRESIDENT: To Fernando Wood? That's ridiculous. Why would Mrs. Lincoln have anything to do with the most notorious copperhead in the country?

HAY: I asked Stanton that. But he says that's what he wants to ask Mrs. Lincoln, if you will permit him. He was quite disturbed. He couldn't wait, but he's coming back. (*TAD comes running in.*)

TAD: Pa, ma wants you to come right away to Willie's room. Willie's awful sick, Pa. Ma says to tell you the special doctor just came.

THE PRESIDENT: Special doctor? (*To HAY*) Do you know anything about a special doctor?

HAY: Mrs. Lincoln was worried when Willie became feverish. Though Dr. Stone assured her it was only a cold, she insisted on sending for a specialist.

THE PRESIDENT (*Rising*): Come, son. (*Together they exit. HAY follows to close the door after them. Then he returns to the desk, takes out his diary and starts to make several entries. After a few moments there is a vigorous knocking on the door.*)

HAY (*Calling out*): Come in. (*The door opens and SENATOR WADE comes bursting in.*)

WADE: Where's Mr. Lincoln? I must see the President immediately. I have astounding news, Mr. Hay! Of McClellan at Yorktown.

HAY: The President has just been called to the sick bed of his son, Willie.

WADE: Get him. If he can leave for even a few minutes, get him.

HAY: I'll tell him, but you may have to wait.

WADE: All right. But tell him. (*HAY exits. WADE paces the room excitedly. In a moment HAY returns with THE PRESIDENT. Without waiting to be asked, WADE announces his news with the effect of dropping a bomb-shell*)

Mr. President, Yorktown has been evacuated by the rebels!

THE PRESIDENT (*Incredulous*): Evacuated?

WADE: Yes, Mr. President. For weeks McClellan has been besieging Yorktown. He had his troops throw up entrenchments, build batteries, install big guns, gigantic works! Anything but fight. (*With a sneer*) And when he was all set to blow the enemy off the map, he found there was nobody there. The rebels had waited until he finished building his elaborate batteries—then they drew off.

THE PRESIDENT (*With consternation*): Without a fight or defense of any kind? What can it mean, Senator?

WADE: It can mean only that McClellan is a traitor!

THE PRESIDENT: Traitor?

WADE: Yorktown is the story of Manassas all over again. There, too, and in violation of your order, he delayed for months. But when he was ready to move, the enemy evacuated the place. I say, *once* a blunder, possibly. But the same mistake repeated can be nothing less than treason.

THE PRESIDENT: It's bewildering. Frankly, I don't know what to make of it.

WADE (*Exasperated by THE PRESIDENT'S reaction*):
Good God!

THE PRESIDENT: What would you suggest I do?

WADE (*Almost shouting*): Remove him!

THE PRESIDENT: Whom would you have me put in his place?

WADE (*With infinite impatience*): Anybody, anybody!

THE PRESIDENT (*Getting angry*): Wade, anybody may do for you. I must have somebody.

WADE (*Toning down*): Well—there's Burnside, Buell, Sumner——

THE PRESIDENT: For your information, I offered the command to General Burnside. But he wouldn't take it saying there's no man who can do as much with the Army as McClellan.

WADE (*Raising his voice again*): But the whole point is that McClellan is doing nothing with the Army. And you, Mr. President, are doing even less! (*As THE PRESIDENT remains silent*) Is it any wonder that the newspapers hammer away at the "central imbecility" at Washington, claiming there's not a spark of leadership in you, your Cabinet or the Republican Party?

THE PRESIDENT: If McClellan is guilty of treason, as you are certain he is, I must not only remove him, I must have him shot.

WADE (*With a challenge*): Well?

THE PRESIDENT: My patience is exhausted by his failure to anticipate the withdrawal of the Confederates. But treason—In my mind that is still an open question.

WADE: Open? After Manassas and Yorktown?

THE PRESIDENT: After Manassas and Yorktown.

WADE: Didn't Stanton show you a document filled with detailed statements that McClellan, in 1860, was initiated by Jeff Davis into the Knights of the Golden Circle, a secret society favoring secession? That Davis still held power over McClellan and that McClellan would feel bound by his oath to the Knights?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, he did show me such a document. But even Stanton admitted that it was based on rumors and not trustworthy. Wade, if you want General McClellan removed, you have only to bring me one proved fact of his treason, and I promise you his head. But I am not going to

act on what seems to me the most unfounded gossip. (*As WADE angrily turns to leave, STANTON enters. In his hand he holds an envelope.*)

STANTON (*To WADE who is nearest the entrance*): Did you tell the President about Yorktown?

WADE: Of course.

STANTON: Mr. President, there is a spy among us. Someone notified the rebels of the exact time McClellan would move against Manassas and against Yorktown.

THE PRESIDENT: A spy among us? I doubt it Mr. Stanton.

STANTON: The perfect timing of their evacuations couldn't have been a coincidence on both occasions!

THE PRESIDENT: Whom do you suspect?

STANTON: Mrs. Lincoln.

THE PRESIDENT: Mrs. Li—what did you say?

STANTON: Your wife, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT (*Grimly, suppressing his anger*): Your proof, Mr. Stanton.

STANTON: Her connections with Fernando Wood. And through him with the rebels.

THE PRESIDENT (*Vehemently*): Wood? Mrs. Lincoln and Wood? There can be no possible connection!

STANTON: Then this letter needs an explanation. (*He takes a letter out of the envelope in his hand and offers it to THE PRESIDENT.*)

THE PRESIDENT (*After reading and returning it*): You shall have that explanation from Mrs. Lincoln herself. (*Quickly he goes out to get her.*)

HAY: May I see the letter, Mr. Stanton? (*STANTON passes it to him. HAY runs through it quickly and returns it*) But this is only a formal invitation to one of Mrs. Lincoln's receptions in the White House.

STANTON (*With anger*): You are naive, Mr. Hay!

WADE (*Unable to believe his ears*): An invitation to the White House to Fernando Wood, the only open friend of Jeff Davis in Congress! Is there no limit to the madness of the Lincolns? (*THE PRESIDENT returns with MRS. LINCOLN.*)

MRS. LINCOLN (*Confronting STANTON*): The President has told me that you are in possession of my letter to Mr. Wood. (*As STANTON exhibits it she angrily brushes*

it aside) I do not deny I wrote it. But your suspicion that I am a spy for the rebels is exasperating beyond measure! How could you make so stupid a deduction?

STANTON (*Heatedly*): In my position I would suspect the President himself if he had anything to do with Fernando Wood.

MRS. LINCOLN (*With contempt*): In your position. Mr. Stanton, you are drunk with authority! (*She turns to THE PRESIDENT*) I warned you that the post of Secretary of War was too big for this little man. (*To STANTON*) As for the letter, I deny that it is anything more than a formal invitation to an opponent of the President.

STANTON (*Still smarting from her insults*): It is not the letter alone. Many accusations against your loyalty have been made to me.

MRS. LINCOLN: Accusations!

STANTON: You have sisters in the South who are active Confederates. You have two brothers, David and Alexander Todd, who are officers in the Rebel Army. One does not have to be drunk with authority to suspect that your sympathies are also with the South; and that you are acting as a spy, communicating the military secrets you learn from the President to Fernando Wood, and through him to your Confederate brothers.

WADE: Mr. President, reports of her treason have been persistent enough to cause my Committee to schedule a secret session to consider them!

MRS. LINCOLN: Are you men bereft of common sense? Why should I sympathize with the rebels? Or spy for them? Are they not against me and mine? They would hang my husband within an hour if it were in their power, and gibbet me with him. (*As they are not sufficiently impressed, she directs her next remarks first to STANTON, then to WADE*) Why should it be unknown to you and your informants that I have been intensely loyal to the Union cause ever since I was capable of thinking? Ask the President whether in the eighteen years of our marriage I ever expressed the slightest sympathy with what the South stands for.

STANTON: One of your brothers is notorious for treating Yankee prisoners with extreme brutality. Did you so much as raise your voice in protest?

MRS. LINCOLN: One of my brothers was killed in action. Three days ago I heard of his death. Why do you think I am not in mourning? (*As STANTON is silent, THE PRESIDENT deeply moved, steps toward her.*)

THE PRESIDENT: Mary. I knew a week ago, but hesitated to tell you for fear the news would be too painful.

MRS. LINCOLN: You need not have hesitated, Abram. It is but natural that I should feel for one so closely related to me, but not in the way you suppose. (*With intensity*) My brother made his choice long ago when he decided to fight against the Union and against you, and through you, against me. Since he chose to be our deadly enemy I see no reason why I should mourn his death. (*She turns and faces STANTON.*)

STANTON (*After a moment's reflection in which he finds her explanation not only convincing but overwhelming*): I have nothing more to say. I'm sorry. But I feel I was justified in my suspicions aroused by your letter to Wood, (*To THE PRESIDENT*) and McClellan's being outwitted twice in the same way. (*He exits quickly. WADE, after hesitating a moment, follows after STANTON. HAY, thinking it tactful to leave the LINCOLNS alone, withdraws.*)

THE PRESIDENT (*Studying the floor for a moment, then looking up*): Mary, you did not explain your letter to Fernando Wood.

MRS. LINCOLN: What is there to explain?

THE PRESIDENT (*With bitterness*): Why a woman of your sagacity would have anything to do with so disreputable a man.

MRS. LINCOLN (*Bristling*): Do you, too, suspect or believe——?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't know what to suspect or believe!

MRS. LINCOLN: Very well. Then you shall know! Wood and the financiers around him have great power and influence. When I saw that his chain of newspapers never failed to attack your conduct of the war while at the same time they idolized McClellan, I was determined to reverse that. To win Wood away from McClellan and to your support, I *had* to cultivate his friendship.

THE PRESIDENT: Friendship? With a man like Wood?

MRS. LINCOLN: I was desperate. I saw how your failure to free the slaves and your attitude towards McClellan lost you the support of the people, and split the Republican Party wide open. You've made it possible for any rival candidate to defeat your re-election!

THE PRESIDENT: Mary, I am not interested in my re-election, or the possibilities of any rival candidate!

MRS. LINCOLN: But I am! We worked together for the Presidency, and achieved that pinnacle of worldly success, only to find it rotten with pain and fear and hatred. Nevertheless, I am not willing to leave it while the record you have established is one of complete failure. (THE PRESIDENT *remains silent*) I will be sociable to Wood until after the election. Then, if we remain in the White House, I will drop him and let him know quite plainly why. He is an unprincipled scoundrel, and I don't mind whatever double-dealing is necessary.

THE PRESIDENT (*With anguish*): But I do mind! Such duplicity is not only obnoxious, it would drive me mad. Mary, you must give me the peace of mind I need to meet the problems of this war, in my own way and as best I can.

MRS. LINCOLN (*Disregarding his plea*): Your major problem is McClellan. Remove him and you will prevent Wood from using him to betray the North.

THE PRESIDENT (*With mounting anger*): How can Wood use him to betray the North? How can you *know* McClellan would permit himself to be used that way? You, Wade, Stanton, everyone around me wants McClellan removed. But no one furnishes evidence to justify such removal. And God help me, I cannot act without such evidence! (TAD *comes running in.*)

TAD: Ma, pa. The special doctor wants you. He said Willie's fever is typhoid, Ma. What's typhoid?

MRS. LINCOLN (*Startled, she looks at THE PRESIDENT*): Typhoid?

TAD: That's what he said Willie's got, Ma. I heard him. Is it bad, Ma? Is it?

MRS. LINCOLN: We'll see, Tad. We'll see. (*Taking him by the hand, she hurries out. For a moment THE PRESIDENT is uncertain what to do. Then, with a quick step, he follows his wife.*)

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

SCENE 2

SCENE: *A room at McCLELLAN'S field headquarters before Richmond. The room is the same as that in ACT ONE, SCENE 3. It is about two months after the preceding scene.*

AT RISE: *The room is empty. After a moment, GENERAL WILLIAM P. SMITH, a member of McCLELLAN'S staff, an efficient young man in his thirties, appears at the door with two men, FERNANDO WOOD and HORATIO SEYMOUR. WOOD is a handsome man, tall, spare, clean-shaven and elegantly tailored. SEYMOUR is an influential politician, elderly yet vigorous and forceful.*

SMITH: Will you step in here, gentlemen?

WOOD (*As he and SEYMOUR enter*): Thank you, General Smith.

SMITH: You've come at a most inopportune time. General McClellan can't possibly see any one on civilian business.

WOOD: He'll see *us*, General. I'm quite sure.

SMITH: He's tired and weary after the fighting we've been through. Lee struck with terrific force and gave us no rest for days.

WOOD (*Raising his voice*): Will you be good enough to tell him that *Fernando Wood* is here? With Mr. Horatio Seymour!

SMITH (*Realizing further appeal would be useless*): Very well. (*As he is about to exit, GENERAL PHILIP KEARNY and GENERAL JOE HOOKER storm in. KEARNY is middle-aged and of medium height. His beard is clipped to a point, and his kepi is slanted in the French manner. His look of lean distinction is enhanced by an empty coat sleeve for he had lost an arm in the Mexican War. HOOKER is a superb military figure, with blue eyes shining in his florid, handsome face.*)

KEARNY (*With fury*): Where's McClellan? What's this order to retreat when we've finally got Lee on the run?

HOOKER: He sent a similar order to me, and I demand an explanation!

SMITH: McClellan's in the field. He signed both orders before he went out.

KEARNY (*Raging*): Is he mad? To order a retreat when we can advance and take Richmond? You're his aide. Didn't you get my report and give it to him?

SMITH: Yes, I did.

KEARNY: But I told him Lee's forces were exhausted. That he gambled everything he had at Malvern Hill and lost!

SMITH: With an opponent as brilliant and resourceful as Lee, how can you be certain he gambled everything?

KEARNY: Man, I saw it with my own eyes!

HOOKER: Both of us saw it.

KEARNY: Lee attacked our fortified positions again and again and again. But we held. And our cannon mowed down every regiment he sent against us.

SMITH: If we move out of our fortified positions to pursue Lee, he might turn and counter-attack.

KEARNY: With what? His losses were so staggering he can't possibly counter-attack. I tell you, nothing can stop us from taking Richmond—except McClellan's order to retreat!

SMITH: I'm going to him now. What message do you want me to give him?

KEARNY: That he's got to change that order.

HOOKER: And issue a new one, to attack and destroy Lee! (*As SMITH starts out, KEARNY, after exchanging glances with HOOKER, calls out.*)

KEARNY: Wait, we'll go with you. (*SMITH waits; then they all exit.*)

WOOD (*With awe*): Did you hear that? Ordering a retreat when he can destroy Lee and take Richmond?

SEYMOUR (*Also deeply impressed*): Ye-es.

WOOD: After this I'll never have any doubts about McClellan. He is precisely the man for our purpose.

SEYMOUR (*After a moment*): Wood, I'm worried.

WOOD: What about?

SEYMOUR: We shouldn't have come here at this time.

WOOD: Why not?

SEYMOUR: What if the President learns of our visit? That we came to talk politics to a commander in the field who should have been busy only with military matters.

WOOD: The President is grief-stricken over the death of his son, Willie, which affected him so deeply it has taken his mind off the war completely.

SEYMOUR: Yes, but for how long?

WOOD (*With a shrug of his shoulders*): Suppose he does hear of it. He can't do a thing to us. The rest is McClellan's lookout.

SEYMOUR (*Angrily*): Damn you, Wood, you're a short-sighted, greedy, save-your-own-skin politician!

WOOD (*Quick to take offense*): Now hold on a mo——

SEYMOUR: If McClellan is precisely the man we need, we must not expose him to criticism and danger unnecessarily.

WOOD: But McClellan doesn't think it at all dangerous.

SEYMOUR: No?

WOOD: No. When I was here two weeks ago, he had me stay for several days. True, I painted his prospects in the brightest of colors. I carried him to the political mountain top, showed him the promised Land of the presidential nomination in '64— (*His voice has risen in a crescendo of suspense.*)

SEYMOUR (*Eagerly*): Yes?

WOOD: And he was willing to think it over.

SEYMOUR (*Showing disappointment*): You told me that much before. (*He paces the floor*) I wish this suspense were over. I'd like to know if he has decided to accept the nomination, and is ready to listen to the condition that goes with it.

WOOD: So would I. (*As he moves toward the window*
GENERAL McCLELLAN *enters. He looks very tired, yet the relief that comes with a deeply satisfying victory, makes him cheerful.*)

McCLELLAN: Ah, Mr. Wood. And Mr. Seymour. It's good to see you again. (*They all shake hands.*)

WOOD: How are you, General?

McCLELLAN: Exhausted, but feeling fine, now that we've stopped Lee. Won't you be seated? (*They all take seats.*)

SEYMOUR: I was afraid we had chosen the worst possible

time to call upon you. That is, for a political decision of the greatest importance.

McCLELLAN: Not at all, for I had already made that decision. There remains only to hear what pledges you will exact of me.

WOOD: We'll come to that directly, General. But I promised Mr. Seymour, who represents the decisive group in the Democratic Party, that he would hear from you, personally, what your position is in regard to slavery and the war.

McCLELLAN (*With a nod to WOOD and turning to SEYMOUR*): I am a conservative in politics, Mr. Seymour, and opposed to the abolition of slavery. In my opinion, an Emancipation Proclamation such as the President would like to issue, is too revolutionary, for it means the overthrow of our institutions and the confiscation of private property.

WOOD (*To SEYMOUR*): I believe the General has said as much openly to the President.

McCLELLAN: Yes, and threatened to resign if he frees the slaves by proclamation.

SEYMOUR (*After nodding with satisfaction*): And the war?

McCLELLAN: It is my view that the war should be waged only as a defense of the Union. I am against turning it into a crusade for anti-slavery, or any other cause which Northern fanatics would impose upon our Southern brethren by force of arms, rather than by peaceful, constitutional methods.

SEYMOUR (*Leaning back*): That tells me all I need to know.

WOOD (*To McCLELLAN*): You have asked what pledges we will exact.

McCLELLAN: Yes.

WOOD: There is only one. Agree to that, and the presidential nomination is yours.

McCLELLAN: Name it, Mr. Wood.

WOOD (*With careful emphasis*): That you will not crush Lee completely; that you will bring about a military stalemate, instead. (*There is a heavy silence.*)

SEYMOUR (*To WOOD*): Hadn't you better make perfectly clear what we mean by a military stalemate?

WOOD: Yes, of course. (*To McCLELLAN*) Specifically,

we have in mind that you will not take the offensive so long as you remain in command of the Union Armies. If ordered by the President, your Commander-in-Chief, to do so, you will delay the execution of such an order as long as possible. (*Softly*) As you have done for the past fifteen months.

SEYMOUR: If the President and his Administration won't compromise, if they insist that the war go on though our countrymen destroy each other, let it be with indecisive battles to the exhaustion of both sides.

WOOD: Given a prolonged stalemate we are confident we can overthrow the Lincoln Administration.

SEYMOUR: Or get the people of the country to force the President to stop the war. And negotiate a peace that will not only preserve the union, but retain slavery and the friendship of the South. (McCLELLAN *rises and walks about in deep thought. Anxiously* WOOD and SEYMOUR *follow him with their eyes. Finally, McCLELLAN stops in front of them.*)

McCLELLAN: In the west, a new commander seems to be coming to the fore. A man named Grant. Taking the offensive he has scored victories and made popular the slogan of "Unconditional Surrender."

SEYMOUR (*Quickly*): We are aware of that.

WOOD: Acutely.

SEYMOUR: Grant is a menace to our plans, and we are prepared to deal with him in effective fashion.

WOOD: In all our newspapers we are playing up the tremendous cost of Grant's victories. The man is a drunken butcher, and has given the country the biggest casualty lists in its history.

SEYMOUR: It will be our policy to minimize his victories, exaggerate his losses, and ridicule his slogan of "Unconditional Surrender."

McCLELLAN: I see that we understand each other fully. Gentlemen, I pledge that I will carry on the war in the manner you have described.

WOOD (*Eagerly*): Then it's a deal!

SEYMOUR: Here is my hand on it.

WOOD: And mine. (*As they shake hands, SMITH enters*) Shall we say goodbye now, General (McCLELLAN *nods.*)

SEYMOUR: Goodbye then, and good luck on the battle—

field.

McCLELLAN: Goodbye, and thank you both. (*He sees them to the door and they leave. Then he turns to SMITH who looks troubled and impatient*) What is it, Bill?

SMITH: Kearny and Hooker. They're not satisfied with the way you put them off.

McCLELLAN: Kearny and Hooker.

SMITH: They'll cause trouble, Mac. They threatened to take the matter to Wade and Stanton—even to the President.

McCLELLAN (*Losing his temper*): Wade—Stanton—the President. I'm sick to death of hearing their names!

SMITH: Mac!

McCLELLAN: And the day is not far off when I shall no longer be accountable to men who are vastly my inferior, socially and intellectually.

SMITH (*Waiting for him to calm down*): Just what does that mean, Mac?

McCLELLAN (*After a moment's reflection*): I made a deal with Wood and Seymour—for the presidential nomination.

SMITH (*Visibly shocked into protest*): No. Two weeks ago, after Wood left, you said you had dismissed his proposition from your mind.

McCLELLAN: I thought the conditions he would impose would be too harsh. They weren't.

SMITH: We've been close and confidential friends for years, Mac. May I presume upon that friendship to ask one question?

McCLELLAN: Don't talk nonsense, Bill. Ask anything you like.

SMITH: What were the conditions?

McCLELLAN: That I am not to crush Lee completely; that I am to bring about a military stalemate.

SMITH (*Astounded*): Stalemate! And you agreed to that?

McCLELLAN: It's what I always intended! My one concern is the Union. By stopping Lee I save the Union, without at the same time giving the country to the radical abolitionists.

SMITH: Mac, you're too tired to realize what you're saying, what you've agreed to!

McCLELLAN (*Getting angry*): I realize very well what

I agreed to!

SMITH: No, you don't! You've been under terrific strain, else the enormity of this deal would be clear to you. (McCLELLAN turns his back on SMITH muttering the word "enormity" as if it were ridiculous) If anyone hears of it, if it should ever reach your wife——

McCLELLAN (*Spinning round to face SMITH*): I mean to tell her.

SMITH: For God's sake, Mac, you'll lose her! I know how much you love her; how deeply she loves you. But this deal you've made will destroy her—and you!

McCLELLAN: You're mad.

SMITH: Am I?

McCLELLAN: Yes, mad!

SMITH (*As McCLELLAN turns away again*): Then let a madman remind you that it was the President who entrusted you with the Supreme Command. You are under oath to obey his orders. But because you imagine him to be your inferior, you feel free to forget your oath and trust. Well, you're not. And this deal you made with Wood is the most criminal betrayal of that trust!

McCLELLAN (*Sharply, while turning*): That's enough!

SMITH: Very well. I shall apply immediately for a transfer to another army. I want no part of your deal! (*Abruptly he turns and walks out on McCLELLAN. Taken aback, McCLELLAN moves to the door and looks out after SMITH. For a moment he stands there, then returns to the room.*)

McCLELLAN: The fool! The damned young fool!

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

SCENE 3

SCENE: *Again THE PRESIDENT'S office. It is early morning, about one week after the preceding scene.*

AT RISE: THE PRESIDENT *is half sitting on the desk on which there is a lot of mail opened and unopened. He holds a letter in each hand, reading one and glancing at the other to compare their contents. HAY is seated at the desk, his eyes fixed on THE PRESIDENT'S face.*

THE PRESIDENT (*With bitterness*): These letters from all over the nation tell the same story; of our men at Malvern Hill, of their superb valor and endurance, of beating the enemy, under Lee, and then sent shrinking back into retreat. (*He puts the letters down*) And they want to know why. Why? (*With grim determination*) Well, McClellan shall answer that before the morning's over.

HAY: Mr. Lincoln—you were up all night. You've had no sleep for two days now. Can't I persuade you to rest a while? At least until McClellan, or Kearny and Hooker arrive.

THE PRESIDENT (*With weariness*): The war—the death of my son, permit of no rest.

HAY: If only you'd try, sir. If you'd lie down and——

THE PRESIDENT: I can't rest, John. The moment I close my eyes I see Willie. Every brain path leads to him, and to Mrs. Lincoln, whom I have been unable to console. (*With bitter self-reproach*) If ever a man failed his son and his wife in their hour of need, if ever a man failed in high office and low——

HAY (*Seeing MRS. LINCOLN enter*): Mr. Lincoln—your wife. (*As THE PRESIDENT turns, MRS. LINCOLN dressed in heavy mourning, reaches his side.*)

MRS. LINCOLN (*Her lips quivering as she tries to avoid*

tears): Father—Father, I couldn't bear to be alone this morning. Please let me stay here with you. Please!

THE PRESIDENT (*Swallowing hard to keep his own tears back*): Mother—why, of course, Mother. And glad to have you. I felt so desolate I was going to beg you to come and stay with me.

MRS. LINCOLN: If I'm in the way of any business, I—I could stand off by the window, unobtrusively. (*She moves to the window to demonstrate.*)

THE PRESIDENT (*Going to her side*): You'd not be in the way at all. Not the least bit. (*He puts his arm around her to comfort her*) John and I were just talking about General McClellan. I sent for him and he's to be here this morning. Until then—(*TAD comes running in with a small sword in his hand.*)

TAD: Pa, I found Willie's sword in the Green Room. Can I keep it, Pa?

MRS. LINCOLN (*Suddenly hysterical, her voice rising to a scream*): Get out! Get out, Tad! Take that sword out of this room! (*TAD, startled by his mother's outburst, stands rooted to the spot, looking helplessly at his father*) Take it out I say! Out!

THE PRESIDENT: Mother—Mother——

MRS. LINCOLN: Take him out of my sight with that. Take him out! (*Quickly THE PRESIDENT leads TAD out of the room. MRS. LINCOLN bursts into tears. In a moment THE PRESIDENT returns. HAY, who has moved to the door, lets THE PRESIDENT pass and discreetly exits.*)

THE PRESIDENT (*After a few moments*): Mother—try to control yourself. Tad's only a child and doesn't understand these things.

MRS. LINCOLN: It's like a knife in me to see anything that belonged to Willie. (*Again the tears come and are seemingly beyond her control.*)

THE PRESIDENT: Mother—Mother—(*But she does not respond. In despair he takes her by the arm and guides her to the window. With a solemn gesture he points to a building in the distance*) Mother, do you see that large white building on the hill yonder? (*Swallowing hard*) It's—it's the insane asylum. You must control your grief, Mother, or it will drive you mad, and we may have to send you there.

MRS. LINCOLN: I can't help it, Father. Oh, why am I singled out for such suffering? Wasn't the death of one son enough? Why did Willie, too, have to be taken from us?

THE PRESIDENT (*Himself on the verge of breaking down*): Mother—Mother——

MRS. LINCOLN (*Crying out*): I can't endure the death of my loved ones! I can't any more. (*Suddenly, as if with terrible foresight*) If I should lose Tad or Robert, or you, Abram, it would drive me mad. It would! I couldn't retain my sanity then. Nor would I want to. (*Slowly she moves to the door*) I—I'll go to my room—now (*She exits*) (*As THE PRESIDENT watches her leave, tears come to his eyes. Then he turns to the window and his tightly clenched hands behind his back reveal how great are his own efforts to control his emotions*) (*After a few moments, HAY enters.*)

HAY (*Softly*): Mr. Lincoln——

THE PRESIDENT (*Without turning*): Yes?

HAY: Senator Wade is here, with General Kearny and General Hooker. He says they can all come back later, if you prefer that.

THE PRESIDENT: What do my preferences matter, John? We have a war to win. I'll see them now. (*HAY nods, goes to the door and admits the three men*) (*THE PRESIDENT steps forward to greet them as pleasantly as he can*) Hello, Kearny—Hooker. Glad to see you both again.

KEARNY: Good morning, Mr. President.

HOOKER: Good morning.

THE PRESIDENT (*With a nod to WADE*): Won't you all be seated?

KEARNY: Thank you, Mr. President. (*He and HOOKER take seats. WADE remains standing.*)

WADE: Mr. President, you have asked for proof of McClellan's treason.

THE PRESIDENT: Proof, yes.

WADE: In my opinion his order to retreat after our victory at Malvern Hill is such proof. For nothing but foul play could have lost us the fruits of that victory. And I've brought General Kearny and General Hooker to verify that.

THE PRESIDENT (*To KEARNY and HOOKER*): I

have had nights of agony pondering that retreat. I would be very grateful if you would tell me what your reactions were.

KEARNY: Mr. President, when I received the order I protested against it to McClellan himself. We had Lee on the run. We had only to follow up and take Richmond.

THE PRESIDENT: How then do you account for McClellan's action?

KEARNY (*Vehemently*): There was no justification for it. None whatever! Mr. President, I am an old soldier. In my time I've fought on many a battlefield and under many commanders. And in full view of all the responsibility of such a statement, I say to you that McClellan's order could only be prompted by cowardice or treason! (*After a moment of reflection* THE PRESIDENT turns to HOOKER.)

THE PRESIDENT: Did you, too, General, register your protest with McClellan?

HOOKER: Yes, Mr. President. I had seen the terrific punishment Lee had taken, and how weak his forces had become. I stressed this weakened condition to McClellan and urged him to press Lee into Richmond without waiting. I even offered to handle the advance and lead the attack.

THE PRESIDENT: And what did McClellan say to that?

HOOKER: He said he would think it over.

THE PRESIDENT: Did he?

HOOKER: Yes. Two hours later he ordered me to get ready to attack the next day at one o'clock. But before that hour his order to retreat countermanded his first order.

THE PRESIDENT: And do you, too, believe it was treason on McClellan's part?

HOOKER: Without the slightest doubt.

THE PRESIDENT: Tell me, General: Was any staff meeting held by McClellan to decide whether to retreat or fight on to Richmond?

HOOKER: Yes, there was a staff meeting.

THE PRESIDENT: What was the outcome of it?

HOOKER: Some of the generals were for fighting on. Others for retreat.

THE PRESIDENT: It would seem to me that such a division of opinion creates some doubt as to whether McClellan's order was treasonous.

WADE (*With fury*): There are generals on McClellan's staff who are as guilty of treason as he is. I would court-martial every one of them who was for retreat!

THE PRESIDENT: And I would need to be sure that so drastic a step is warranted. (*Angrily WADE turns away*) (HAY enters.)

HAY: Mr. President, General McClellan has arrived.

THE PRESIDENT (*To KEARNY and HOOKER*): Is there anything more you can tell me? (KEARNY *shakes his head*) Hooker?

HOOKER: No, Mr. President. I don't think there is anything else.

THE PRESIDENT: Then, would you gentlemen be good enough to wait in the Cabinet Room? (KEARNY and HOOKER *nod, and as the dissatisfied WADE leads the way, they follow*) (THE PRESIDENT *turns to HAY*) Show him in, John. (HAY *opens the door and admits McCLELLAN. HAY withdraws.*) Come in, General McClellan.

McCLELLAN: Thank you, Mr. President. (*As he comes forward, THE PRESIDENT indicates a chair and he takes it*) I was sorry to hear about the death of your son. (THE PRESIDENT *acknowledges this with a nod*) I had had the opportunity of making his acquaintance when I first came to Washington. He was a son to be proud of.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes . . . It was hard—hard to lose him. (*Tears come to THE PRESIDENT'S eyes. Quickly he dries them*) I take it, General, you reported to Mr. Stanton at the War Department?

McCLELLAN: I did. (*With a sigh*) And I regret to say that he, like Wade and Chandler, no longer bothers to conceal his hatred for me.

THE PRESIDENT: We were all stunned by your retreat after Malvern Hill.

McCLELLAN: Stunned?

THE PRESIDENT: We felt that had you advanced instead, to smash Lee and take Richmond, you could have ended the war.

McCLELLAN: That is pure speculation.

THE PRESIDENT (*With deepest intensity*): I tell you, frankly, that when I heard of your failure to follow up your victory, I was as inconsolable as I could be and live.

McCLELLAN (*Flaring up*): That is a wholly unwarranted reaction!

THE PRESIDENT (*Grimly*): Is it?

McCLELLAN: My men fought magnificently, and stopped the fiercest attack Lee launched against us. That, Mr. President, is something to be proud of! I'll admit the losses on both sides were frightful. But we preserved our honor. No one need be ashamed of the Army of the Potomac.

THE PRESIDENT: The role of the army is not in question. Only your order to those magnificent soldiers to retreat. You were in sight of Richmond and complete victory. What stopped you? In Heaven's name! What stopped you?

McCLELLAN: (*Shouting down* THE PRESIDENT): Good sense! Sound military strategy. And I will not be bullied or badgered by you or your Administration! I am told the preparations I made and the tactics I used were brilliant; that no other general could have stopped Lee so completely and saved the North as I did.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, you've saved the North—for more war, more suffering, more bloodshed. It is not enough to have saved the North. No, General. Not when you could have destroyed the South at the same time!

McCLELLAN (*Sharply*): That is a matter of opinion sir!

THE PRESIDENT (*Sharply*): Indeed it is! And in the minds of many, your retreat was either an act of cowardice or treason.

McCLELLAN (*Springing to his feet*): Treason! No man can couple the word "treason" with my name and not be fully accountable for it. Mr. President, I demand proof of my guilt or an instant retraction.

THE PRESIDENT (*Backtracking*): I said it was a matter of opinion. Stanton, Wade, Chandler, many believe that.

McCLELLAN: I am not concerned about the others. But I insist on knowing if that is what *you think*.

THE PRESIDENT (*Goaded into the admission*): Yes! I, too, think that! Though I have no proof other than my feeling that your decision to retreat was all wrong. (*There is a momentary silence.*)

McCLELLAN (*Pacing the side of the room*): No proof—no proof. Worse yet, no understanding of my actions, now

or heretofore. My decision to retreat—(*Crying out*) Do you imagine I made it lightly, without anguish of mind? A staff, divided in its counsel, shifted all responsibility to me in the midst of a titanic battle. Great God! Have you no conception of the emotional strain I was under? (*He waits—gets no response from THE PRESIDENT—then continues*) Again and over again, I weighed the wisdom of my next move. It was almost impossible to make a decision! A renewal of the battle might have given Lee, the master strategist, a last chance to snatch victory out of failure. One battle lost at this time and all would have been lost. (*With a wide sweep of his arm*) Lee's army could then have marched as it pleased on Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia or New York. For nowhere east of the Alleghenies was there another force able to resist him. Was it treason to feel that the salvation of the country demanded the utmost prudence on my part.

THE PRESIDENT: If I could believe you. If I——

McCLELLAN: You must believe me! You would, if Stanton had not turned you against me. Here in Washington, far removed from the smoke of battle, your Secretary of War has the effrontery to charge that *I* am politically ambitious, that politics colors all *my* actions, as they do his.

THE PRESIDENT: Is he far wrong?

McCLELLAN: He is all wrong! If I had been the ambitious plotter he thinks I am, I would long ago have marched my Army to Washington and forcibly ousted this Administration, as many have urged me to do. And as it is still within my power to do.

THE PRESIDENT: You wish me to believe—that you have no political ambitions?

McCLELLAN: None whatever! I am exclusively a military man, and always have been. Yet it is charged that for political reasons I delayed military movements, that I showed a traitorous friendliness to the South, that I do not wish the war to come to a speedy end. These are lies, Mr. President. All unfounded, vicious lies.

THE PRESIDENT: Lies?

McCLELLAN (*As THE PRESIDENT looks directly at him*): I swear to you that I have no political ambitions of any kind!

THE PRESIDENT (*Slowly—after a moment of deep*

agitation): I believe I have done you a grave injustice—I—
I've been overwhelmed with grief at the death of my son.
It has prevented me from seeing things clearly. Forgive me.
(*Groping for his chair, THE PRESIDENT sits down, his head bowed low. McCLELLAN sighs with relief. As he does so, a queer smile makes its way across his face, a smile of half satisfaction over his successful deception of THE PRESIDENT.*)

CURTAIN

ACT THREE

SCENE 1

SCENE: *The President's office. Four months later. It is the afternoon of November 3, 1862, the day following the Congressional elections.*

AT RISE: THE PRESIDENT *is seated on the sofa with TAD on his lap and JOHN HAY at his right. He is reading aloud from the works of his favorite humorist, ARTEMUS WARD.*

THE PRESIDENT: "At the time Chris arrove on these shores—I allood to Chris Columbus—the savajis wuz virtoos and happy. They were innocent of—"

TAD: Pa——

THE PRESIDENT (*Looking up*): Yes, Tad?

TAD: What's "Virtoos"?

THE PRESIDENT (*Smiling*): Virtuous. Good and kind, son. Helping people in need, the way your mother does when she spends all her time visiting the hospitals and caring for the sick and wounded soldiers.

TAD: Ma sent a lot of fruit and wine to the hospitals this morning, pa. A whole wagon full!

THE PRESIDENT: I know, son. And she's made quite a number of "Whole wagon full" donations. (*He looks at the book to resume reading.*)

TAD: Pa, I'm hungry.

THE PRESIDENT: Are you? (*He looks at his watch*) Why, you must be. And Artemus Ward won't satisfy that. But your mother ought to be back by this time. Run along and see. I'm sure she'll have something nice left for you. (*TAD jumps off his father's lap and runs out, leaving the door open*) (*As THE PRESIDENT glances at the page he was reading, he smiles, then looks up at HAY who had risen and gone to the desk.*)

HAY (*Taking up a sheaf of telegrams*): All the election returns have come in, Mr. Lincoln. Will you look at them now?

THE PRESIDENT (*Shaking his head*): Don't remind me of the elections, John. Let me read you this last paragraph instead.

HAY: I'd be happy to listen, Mr. Lincoln. (*He returns to his seat on the sofa*) (*Neither he nor THE PRESIDENT is aware that two men enter the room and stand in the rear listening. The men are HORACE GREELEY, the famous anti-slavery editor of the New York Tribune, and CONGRESSMAN KELLY of Pittsburg, a friend of LINCOLN'S.*)

THE PRESIDENT (*With obvious relish of every word he quotes*): Ward has said that "the savajus wus virtoos and happy the time Chris Columbus arrove on these shores." Because—(*He reads*) "They were innocent of rum, draw-poker, fugitive slaves, secession, and sinfulness gin'rally." (*THE PRESIDENT smiles broadly*) "They didn't discuss the slavery question continuously, if at all. They had no Congress, no politicians, no Copperheads, no grafting contractors, no food hoarders and speculators, no faro banks, Associated Press, delirium tremens, or other metropolitan refinements. They—"

GREELEY (*Angrily*): Mr. President!

THE PRESIDENT (*Startles, looks around*): Greeley! Why! it's my good friend, Horace Greeley. (*He rises to greet him*) And Congressman Kelly! Come in, gentlemen. Come in.

GREELEY (*Disregarding THE PRESIDENT'S outstretched hand*): Mr. President, I am shocked! That you can be so light-minded as to read this sort of nonsense while outside your very windows a line of ambulances stretching as far as the eye can see, are carrying thousands of wounded from the battlefield at Antietam.

KELLY (*As THE PRESIDENT looks to him for sympathy or understanding*): Mr. President, I, too, am amazed that you can indulge in such levity at this time!

THE PRESIDENT (*Utterly miserable as he violently pitches the book on the sofa and turns to his visitors*): How can I help seeing what goes on outside my windows? My God, Greeley, don't you see that if I could not get a momentary respite from the crushing burden I am constantly carrying, my heart would break? (*To KELLY*) If I didn't laugh I would have to cry! (*He turns his back on them*)

and moves to the window. GREELEY and KELLY look at each other and shake their heads) (Quickly getting control of himself, THE PRESIDENT turns to face them) (At this moment MRS. LINCOLN enters the room unnoticed by all except HAY. She remains standing at the rear merely looking on and listening) (To GREELEY) The Congressional elections—you've come to discuss the results with me?

GREELEY: The results? Aren't they clear enough? We've been defeated in every state in the Union. Even in Springfield, your own home town, Mr. President! No, it's not the results I've come to discuss, but what you intend to do about them.

THE PRESIDENT (*Turning to KELLY*): But Kelly, you weren't defeated. Surely——

KELLY (*Sharply*): No thanks to you, Mr. Lincoln! I escaped defeat because I made the sole issue of my election campaign the removal of McClellan.

GREELEY: And Horatio Seymour, who ran on an anti-Lincoln, peace platform was elected Governor of New York. (*With impatience*) There can be no doubt that the elections were an overwhelming repudiation of you, Mr. President, not of our party, for placing the Army in the hands of our political enemies. (THE PRESIDENT moves to a chair and sits down.)

KELLY (*After a moment*): Will you tell us what you intend to do now?

GREELEY (*As THE PRESIDENT remains silent*): Do you still have faith in McClellan?

THE PRESIDENT: All the military men I have consulted assure me that he possesses a very high order of military talent. (*With anguish*) Who am I to say they are all mistaken? (*A pause*) When Lee struck again with terrific force, at Antietam, only McClellan's remarkable skill as a defensive general saved us.

GREELEY: But Lee then retreated with a greatly reduced army. Why didn't McClellan take the offensive and attack him?

THE PRESIDENT (*Slowly*): He said he thought an attack was not certain of success. (GREELEY and KELLY exchange knowing glances) And until he was certain——

KELLY (*Angrily*): Mr. President, do you expect us to be

content with that?

THE PRESIDENT: No. I do not. Taking the risk upon myself, I preemptorily ordered him to pursue and capture Lee's Army.

GREELEY (*With sarcasm*): McClellan is as likely to capture the man in the moon as any part of Lee's Army.

THE PRESIDENT (*Resenting the sarcasm*): Nevertheless, he has moved into action! (*After a moment*) Also, I have set a final test of McClellan. If he permits Lee once again to cross the Blue Ridge Mountains and place himself between Richmond and the Army of the Potomac, I will remove him from command. Does that satisfy you?

GREELEY: No, Mr. President. Nothing short of an immediate dismissal will satisfy me. And if you care at all for our continued friendship, and the support of my newspaper, you will not postpone McClellan's removal for another minute.

KELLY: I feel the same way, Mr. President!

THE PRESIDENT (*Shaking his head*): I regret that I cannot oblige you, much as I value your friendship.

GREELEY (*Sharply*): That is final?

KELLY (*Impatiently, before THE PRESIDENT can answer GREELEY*): Greeley, we are wasting time here. Mr. Lincoln is incapable of decisive action! And has been since the day he entered the White House.

THE PRESIDENT (*Wincing*): Kelly . . .

KELLY (*Continuing to GREELEY*): Either that, or it means little to him that the nation is filled with disgust and despair over his conduct of the war!

GREELEY (*For a moment he looks at THE PRESIDENT but THE PRESIDENT is silent*) (*To KELLY*): Yes, I believe you're right. It pains, it grieves me to think of it, for it is said that but for my support at the Republican Convention, Mr. Lincoln would not have been nominated. I see now that was a mistake, the biggest mistake of my life! (*As THE PRESIDENT still remains si'ent, he exits abruptly. KELLY, after a final glance at THE PRESIDENT, and getting no response, follows after GREELEY. THE PRESIDENT looks forlorn. He feels abandoned by all the world. For a moment MRS. LINCOLN stands watching him, then moves to his side and puts her arm around his shoulder. As THE PRESIDENT looks up into*

her face, HAY discreetly withdraws, closing the door behind him.)

THE PRESIDENT (*With infinite sadness*): I've lost a great and good friend in Greeley.

MRS. LINCOLN (*Consoling him*): It's not fatal, Abram. It's not fatal.

THE PRESIDENT: This morning, the Cabinet met, discussed the election results and gave me their ultimatum.

MRS. LINCOLN (*Frightened*): Ultimatum?

THE PRESIDENT: Either McClellan goes or they go.

MRS. LINCOLN (*With dismay*): The entire Cabinet?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, Mary. All of them regard the results as a disaster of the first magnitude, for which I alone am responsible.

MRS. LINCOLN: But a Cabinet rebellion is unheard of. They will never carry out their threat. Not the entire Cabinet.

THE PRESIDENT (*Bitterly*): They will. If you had heard the unanimity with which they expressed the same view that Greeley holds, you'd have no doubt about it. (*Crying out*) Mary, is it my destiny to go down in history as the most ignominious failure ever to have sat in the President's chair?

MRS. LINCOLN (*Quickly, for she has been deeply moved by his agonized outcry*): No! Oh, no, Abram! The Almighty has given you a wonderful brain and the heart of a saint. He could not have intended it for the destiny of failure!

THE PRESIDENT: But Mary——

MRS. LINCOLN: And Greeley is wrong! The elections were not a repudiation of you at all. No president since Washington has won the hearts of the people as you have. The masses everywhere trust and love you. They know the devil has no bribe big enough, and no temptation of gold or place or power which can seduce the honest heart and brain of Abraham Lincoln.

THE PRESIDENT (*With deep gratitude for restoring his faith in himself*): Mary!

MRS. LINCOLN: But they do want a change in your military policy. I believe they do want you to show them you are capable of action. (*As he looks into her eyes questioningly*) And if you ask me with whom you can re-

place McClellan——

THE PRESIDENT (*Eagerly*): Yes, Mary?

MRS. LINCOLN: I say try one general after another. Hooker, Meade, Grant—anyone with ability. Until, God willing, you shall find the right man! (*Impulsively, THE PRESIDENT takes her hand and kisses it. She puts her face down on his head.*)

THE PRESIDENT (*After a few moments*): Mary, I even had thoughts of resigning.

MARY: Resigning? No President ever—Oh, Abram, you didn't!

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, Mary. With this newly elected Congress obviously hostile to me and my Administration, I did not see how I could get them to vote the appropriations and other necessary measures to carry on the war. Nor do I see that now. But I shall fight for every measure nevertheless and go down fighting, if need be. (*HAY enters.*)

HAY: Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, John?

HAY: Mr. Stanton wishes to see you. He brings very important news from the battlefield!

THE PRESIDENT: Show him in, John. (*HAY opens the door and STANTON enters.*)

STANTON (*Waving a telegram*): Mr. President, this dispatch just came. General Lee has brought his army through the passes of the Blue Ridge Mountains and occupied Culpeper Court House. (*With especial significance*) He is now between the Army of the Potomac and Richmond!

THE PRESIDENT (*Exchanging glances with MRS. LINCOLN*): I said I would remove McClellan if he permitted that to happen.

MRS. LINCOLN (*Hopefully*): Yes, you did, Abram.

THE PRESIDENT (*To STANTON*): Mr. Stanton, you will at once prepare an order relieving General McClellan from command of the Army of the Potomac!

STANTON (*Almost stunned by the surprise of THE PRESIDENT'S quick decision. He had come prepared to argue once again for McCLELLAN'S removal*): An order—relieving McClellan——!

THE PRESIDENT: General Burnside will take his place.

STANTON (*Ecstatically*): Bra—vo, Mr. President! Bra—vo!

But didn't Burnside prefer not to take the command?

THE PRESIDENT (*Emphatically*): Yes, but he will obey orders, and I am issuing such orders to him.

STANTON: I'll admit Burnside has energy as well as caution, and the Army should be safe in his hands. Still, in my opinion——

THE PRESIDENT: Yes?

STANTON: General Hooker should be the man.

THE PRESIDENT: If Burnside fails us, Hooker *will* be the man.

STANTON: Then I am content. Now we can hope to finish the war "sometime within the present century", as the sceptics might say. (THE PRESIDENT *laughs*—MRS. LINCOLN *too, looks happy*) I'll attend to the orders immediately, Mr. President. (*As* THE PRESIDENT *nods, he starts out.*)

THE PRESIDENT (*Calling to him*): Oh, Mr. Stanton. (*At the door* STANTON *turns*) One thing more. (THE PRESIDENT *goes to the window*) From this window, seeing the ambulances with their loads of wounded, I have come to feel that the extent of our losses warrants drastic action of some kind.

STANTON (*Quickly*): What do you propose?

THE PRESIDENT: I believe the idea of the emancipation of the slaves, as a military necessity, is timely.

STANTON (*Overjoyed*): Indeed it is, Mr. President!

THE PRESIDENT: I always thought the time for acting on it would come. I think that time is now. (*Taking a document from his coat pocket*) This is the Emancipation Proclamation I drew up long ago.

STANTON (*Eagerly*): It needs only your signature.

THE PRESIDENT: Your pen, Mr. Stanton. (STANTON *quickly gives him his pen.*)

STANTON (*As* THE PRESIDENT *signs it*): It is a mighty act, Mr. President. Wrong in its delay, but grand and sublime for all that! (*Finished, THE PRESIDENT gives him the signed document. He looks at it with reverence, then at* THE PRESIDENT) The world has waited for this proclamation. It will be historic. And it will make its author immortal!

CURTAIN

ACT THREE

SCENE 2

SCENE: THE PRESIDENT'S office, about two years later. It is a mid-summer afternoon.

AT RISE: JOHN HAY is seated at the desk, still making entries in his diary. After a moment, BOB LINCOLN enters.

BOB: Johnny!

HAY (*Turning*): Well, if it isn't the Prince of Rails! (*As he rises, BOB reaches him and they shake hands warmly.*)

BOB: How are you, Johnny?

HAY (*With mock pomposity*): A little worn after my four years in the White House. But ready for a second term. How are you, Bob?

BOB: Fine, Johnny. And glad no end that college is over just when the Presidential campaign is starting. Now, maybe I can be of some help to my father.

HAY (*Lightly*): There go McClellan's chances.

BOB: Seriously, Johnny. What are McClellan's chances? I've heard that he has some powerful forces behind him.

HAY: Seriously, Bob, your question should be what are your father's chances, now that almost all of his friends and political supporters have deserted him.

BOB (*Aghast*): Deserted Abraham Lincoln? Why?

HAY: They blame him for everything; Burnside's blunder, Hooker's collapse, Meade's mistakes after Gettysburg, and now——

BOB: Now? What now?

HAY: The failure of Grant's spring campaign to take Richmond.

BOB: Oh.

HAY: This is the fourth year of the war, and all we've got to show for it, to a war-weary nation, is a military stalemate. Unless we can break that before November, McClellan and his Peace-at-any-price Democrats will run away with the elections (*BOB utters a long-drawn out*

whistle. MRS. LINCOLN *enters the room.*)

BOB: I'm beginning to see. But Johnny, if the politicians blame my father for everything, why did they re-nominate him?

MRS. LINCOLN: The politicians, Robert, did not nominate him. The politicians bolted the Republican Party and formed a new one, with a nonentity like John Charles Fremont, as its presidential candidate.

BOB: So that's the third party I've been reading about.

MRS. LINCOLN: Yes, Robert. And other Republican leaders, like Horace Greeley, Senator Wade and Henry Davis, have issued a manifesto that may bring about the formation of a fourth party.

BOB: Fourth party? What chance would that have, Mother?

MRS. LINCOLN: Not the slightest. But it could easily throw the election to McClellan.

BOB: Gosh! If that's the situation, I don't see how father can win.

MRS. LINCOLN (*Troubled*): Neither do I, Robert. Neither do I.

TAD (*Running in*): Robert aren't you coming yet? You promised you'd take me riding.

BOB: Did I?

TAD: Sure you did. Ma, make Robert keep his promise. Please! Make him, ma.

MRS. LINCOLN (*Kindly*): Robert.

BOB (*Mildly protesting*): So much happens while I'm away at college. I feel I can never catch up.

MRS. LINCOLN (*Smiling*): You will, dear. In good time.

BOB: Well—all right (*To TAD*) Come along. (*As the two exit*) See you later, Johnny. (*HAY nods.*)

MRS. LINCOLN: Where is the President, John?

HAY: Inspecting the hospitals, Mrs. Lincoln.

MRS. LINCOLN: The hospitals? Oh, John, you should have told me before he left. I would have kept him from going.

HAY: I tried that myself—without success. He refuses to spare himself even the most gruesome sights.

MRS. LINCOLN: But his health won't permit it. It almost deprives me of my wits to see how weak he has become. (*She begins to pace the room, but stops after a few steps*) Mr. Lincoln is one of those sensitive, human spirits, spun so finely that the war, with its bloodshed and chaos,

slowly wears away their very life threads. Every piece of bad news undermines his strength. And the thought that popular government might be defeated, that democracy might "perish from the earth," wears him pitilessly.

HAY: I know, Mrs. Lincoln. (*THE PRESIDENT enters. His step is slow and heavy. His head is bowed. He is sad and terribly gloomy. Quickly, MRS. LINCOLN goes to him.*)

MRS. LINCOLN (*Anxiously*): Father, you're not looking well. Are you ill?

THE PRESIDENT: No, Mary. Only sick at heart. (*As he moves to a chair and sinks into it, HAY tactfully withdraws*) So sick, Mary, I must be the most miserable man living.

MRS. LINCOLN (*With a gasp*): Abram.

THE PRESIDENT (*With intensity*): If what I feel were distributed to the whole human race there wouldn't be one cheerful face left on earth.

MRS. LINCOLN: What is it, Abram? What have you seen that affected you so?

THE PRESIDENT: The hospitals, Mary. All of Washington has become one immense hospital. And still the wounded keep pouring in by the thousands. And they're so crowded proper care of them is impossible. (*Crying out*) Mary, many of the amputations have to be done over again! and many have suffered so much they've gone crazy with pain. Everward has in it men who have lost their minds! (*MRS. LINCOLN puts her arms tightly around her husband, as much to sustain herself as him, so deeply has she been moved by his agony*) (*With head bowed in misery, THE PRESIDENT continues*) Almost four years and no end in sight. I want to go down on my knees and cry out to God that the country cannot endure this bloodshed and suffering much longer. (*Tears come into MRS. LINCOLN'S eyes. As she sobs, she dries them*) (*Slowly, THE PRESIDENT looks up at her.*)

MRS. LINCOLN: Abram.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, Mary.

MRS. LINCOLN: It is said that General Grant is to blame; that he has no regard for human life, that his losses in the Battles of the Wilderness and Cold Harbor were appalling. Are you—are you thinking of replacing

him?

THE PRESIDENT: No, Mary.

MRS. LINCOLN: He has not brought you victory.

THE PRESIDENT: But Grant fights! Continuously, and always on the offensive. Naturally, there are great losses, losses which haunt and torture me. But Grant, the hammer, Grant, the relentless, I will stand by though it tears me asunder! (MRS. LINCOLN *nods understandingly*) (*There is a momentary silence*) (HAY *enters.*)

HAY: Mr. Lincoln . . .

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, John.

HAY: General McClellan has come to——

THE PRESIDENT (*Surprised*): McClellan!

HAY: He insists he has an appointment with you.

THE PRESIDENT: I made no appointment with McClellan. What makes him insist I did?

HAY: He says Montgomery Blair arranged it with you.

THE PRESIDENT (*Shaking his head*): When Blair asked whether I thought I could defeat McClellan in the election, I said I did not. Thereupon Blair suggested I could eliminate McClellan as a political rival merely by restoring him to his military command . . .

MRS. LINCOLN: What did you say to that, Abram?

THE PRESIDENT: I said nothing in approval or disapproval and thought the matter ended there. (*To HAY*) However, since McClellan is here, I'll listen to what he wants to say. (HAY *nods and goes out.*)

MRS. LINCOLN (*As he turns to her*): Do you wish to see him alone, Abram?

THE PRESIDENT: I think *he* would prefer that.

MRS. LINCOLN: I'm sure he would. My criticism of his actions and of his bargain with Fernando Wood, was not mild.

THE PRESIDENT: We still have no evidence of that bargain, Mary. Only rumors.

MRS. LINCOLN: If I had not terminated all contact with Wood in deference to your wishes, I am sure I would have ferreted out the kind of evidence that would have satisfied even you. (*She starts out. At the door, she turns*) Abram—about General Grant.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, Mary?

MRS. LINCOLN: I believe your faith in him is wholly

admirable. And not misplaced.

THE PRESIDENT (*Happily*): Do you, Mary? (*She nods*) It's good to hear you say that. (*She smiles and exits*) (THE PRESIDENT *moves toward the window. A moment later, HAY admits GENERAL McCLELLAN*) (McCLELLAN *enters, but waits near the door for some sign of welcome. HAY withdraws*) Come in, General. Come in.

McCLELLAN: Thank you. (*As THE PRESIDENT indicates a seat*) There seems to be some question of my appointment with you.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes. But now that you're here, it doesn't matter.

McCLELLAN (*With offended pride*): When Montgomery Blair, a member of your Cabinet, and one of your political advisers, assured me he discussed the purpose of my visit with you, and that you were ready to see me, it is humiliating to find I am intruding upon you.

THE PRESIDENT: It's no intrusion, I assure you. But for the sake of the record, my discussion with Blair did not include an appointment with you.

McCLELLAN (*With irritation*): I hardly know how to begin now. Your Mr. Blair——

THE PRESIDENT: Not *my* Mr. Blair. He is quite a free agent.

McCLELLAN (*Accepting the correction*): Blair wrote to Barlow, one of my managers, that if I would reject the Presidential nomination and withdraw from politics, he had no doubt you would restore my command of the Army.

THE PRESIDENT: You will pardon me, General, if I feel that any statement you make, without visible proof, is open to question.

McCLELLAN (*Taking a letter from his pocket*): Yes, I am prepared for that. (*He offers the letter to THE PRESIDENT, who takes it, reads it and returns it.*)

THE PRESIDENT (*Positively*): Blair had no authorization to make any such proposal.

McCLELLAN: Very well. (*He takes a second letter from his pocket*) May I read from another of Blair's letters?

THE PRESIDENT: If you wish to.

McCLELLAN: Analyzing your chances of re-election he wrote—(*He reads*) "After the disastrous defeat in the '62 elections, Mr. Lincoln has come to be regarded as the Jonah

of the Ship of State and of the Republican Party. To throw him over-board, a third Party has been formed, and a fourth is well under way. Only with another candidate, *any other candidate—*” (*He looks up*) The emphasis is Blair’s. (*He continues reading*) “can the Republican leaders even hope to make a fight of it, for they regard Lincoln as already defeated.” (*Again he looks up*) Do you doubt the veracity of these statements?

THE PRESIDENT: No. I am aware of the feeling of the Republican leaders. (*Sadly, lowering his head*) It is true they regard me as the Jonah of our party. (*Looking up*) Defeat in the field, or a stalemate, makes everything I do seem wrong. But once Grant breaks the stalemate——

McCLELLAN (*Sharply*): Grant? No one believes in Grant any more. Even his soldiers have no faith in him.

THE PRESIDENT: That is not true!

McCLELLAN (*Raising his voice*): Must I point to the 109th Illinois Regiment, which had so many desertions and indulged in such fraternization with the Confederates that Grant was forced to disarm the men and send them home in disgrace?

THE PRESIDENT (*Weakly*): He said nothing of this in his reports to me.

McCLELLAN (*With deepest contempt*): Grant! A primitive, bull-headed soldier, who knows nothing of the art of warfare! The only victories he won were by sheer, overwhelming numbers. By cold, brutal, mass sacrifices of his men! And against lesser generals at that. But when he faced a strategist like Lee, at Cold Harbor, his performance was disastrous. Cold Harbor. (*He shudders at the thought*) Fredericksburg, under Burnside, was the worst blunder and the most stupidly planned battle of the war, until Grant surpassed it at Cold Harbor! (*Confronting THE PRESIDENT directly*) Mr. President, the Union has never been in such grave danger as it is at this moment. Grant will not and cannot save it. But you and I can.

THE PRESIDENT: You—and I?

McCLELLAN: I fought and stopped Lee at Malvern Hill and Antietam. I *know how* to defeat him. Restore command of the Army to me and I will smash Lee and finish the war before Christmas. (*Slowly, deliberately, THE PRESIDENT begins to shake his head*) No?

THE PRESIDENT: No.

McCLELLAN: My popularity has not diminished. If anything, the contrast between my methods and the pathetic failure of all the generals who succeeded me, has increased it tremendously.

THE PRESIDENT: Perhaps.

McCLELLAN: But my withdrawal would make your reelection a certainty.

THE PRESIDENT: The temptation is great, General. Almost beyond resistance. For I have seen the vengeful, inhuman Reconstruction program Congress intends to impose upon the South when the war is won, a program without a trace of moderation or generosity to the vanquished. It is to defeat that kind of reconstruction that I would want a second term.

McCLELLAN: I am offering it to you.

THE PRESIDENT (*After a moment's thought*): You seem to have no doubt of your own victory.

McCLELLAN: None whatever!

THE PRESIDENT: Then why this proposal? As President you will also be Commander-in-Chief of the Army. You could dismiss Grant instantly.

McCLELLAN: Can it be that you know so little of the camp of your opponents?

THE PRESIDENT: Possibly. I am certain I do not know *you* at all.

McCLELLAN: It is agony for me to explain! (*In desperation*) How can I make you understand? (*A moment's pause*) Because of the protracted war, the Copperheads and defeatists in the Democratic Party have grown to decisive influence. In the convention which nominated me, it was the Copperheads who wrote the platform calling for the immediate cessation of hostilities and a negotiated peace. Lord, when I think of all the traitorous elements I am surrounded by and perforce connected with, I can't face myself or my loved ones! (*He turns away.*)

THE PRESIDENT: I was under the impression that *you* were for a negotiated peace.

McCLELLAN (*Turning back*): Two, three years ago, yes. I thought it wisdom to save the South from the vast destruction of war, so we could have a strong, united country when differences were settled. Oh, I knew my position would be

regarded as suspicious. But I felt it to be a greater patriotism nevertheless.

THE PRESIDENT: And now?

McCLELLAN: The war has gone too far. There's no turning back. It must be fought to a decision.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

McCLELLAN: But that is what the Copperheads are determined to prevent at all costs!

THE PRESIDENT: I know.

McCLELLAN: Two months ago I learned of their plans for an armed uprising.

THE PRESIDENT: Armed uprising?

McCLELLAN: A time was fixed for the immediate seizure of the Federal Government and all state governments by force.

THE PRESIDENT: Who stopped them?

McCLELLAN: I.

THE PRESIDENT: You?

McCLELLAN: I, and conservative elements like myself.

THE PRESIDENT: How?

McCLELLAN: By convincing them that the use of force to overthrow you and your administration was unnecessary. That it could be done at the polls, with more certainty and no risk.

THE PRESIDENT: You were so sure of my defeat?

McCLELLAN: The military stalemate, and the three-way split in your party was all we needed as arguments.

THE PRESIDENT: I see.

McCLELLAN (*With intensity*): But do you? When I'm elected I will not be permitted to fight Lee, and carry on the war until the Union is restored.

THE PRESIDENT: No?

McCLELLAN: I would be dependent upon a Copperhead Congress and state authorities who have no sympathies with my policies.

THE PRESIDENT: I hadn't thought of that.

McCLELLAN: Nor did you think of the significance of Senator George Pendleton as Vice-President on my ticket.

THE PRESIDENT: Pendleton?

McCLELLAN: The Senator is a man the Copperheads can rely on. And should I fail them, my life would be snuffed out like that—(*He snaps his fingers*)—so Pendleton could take office.

THE PRESIDENT (*Incredibly*): You believe they would—?

McCLELLAN (*After a moment*): I know they would!

THE PRESIDENT (*After a moment*): Astounding!

McCLELLAN: But I do not fear death, Mr. Lincoln. Only frustration. That is why I have come to propose—no, to plead for the restoration of my command.

THE PRESIDENT: And the removal of Grant?

McCLELLAN: For incompetence, yes.

THE PRESIDENT (*Slowly shaking his head*): I have not yet lost confidence in Grant, though his failures and losses have disturbed me. Grant is a symbol of our goal, the unconditional surrender of slavery. I believe the people have faith in him.

McCLELLAN (*With sarcasm*): The people who repudiated you in the Congressional elections?

THE PRESIDENT: The people who have learned that slavery must be wiped out no matter what the cost or how long it takes! And I have faith in you, in the honest impulses, in the patriotism which brought you here.

McCLELLAN (*Almost shouting*): You think I would simply step aside?

THE PRESIDENT: What alternative would a patriot have who finds himself among traitors?

McCLELLAN: But to withdraw in your favor means Grant remains in command.

THE PRESIDENT: Well?

McCLELLAN (*Violently*): Don't you see that in my judgment Grant is the worst catastrophe that can happen to our country?

THE PRESIDENT: I repeat. What is your alternative?

McCLELLAN (*Fiercely*): To resist the Copperheads in my own party. That way I have a fighting chance. Slim and desperate as it may be, I prefer it to Grant. (*There is a long pause.*)

THE PRESIDENT (*Slowly*): You at the head of the Army or you at the head of the nation.

McCLELLAN: Yes.

THE PRESIDENT (*In torture*): Of all the difficult decisions I have had to make in these four dreadful years, this is the most agonizing!

McCLELLAN: I offer you the easiest way out.

THE PRESIDENT (*Miserably*): Easiest?

McCLELLAN: Surely you don't want the added humiliation of defeat at the polls.

THE PRESIDENT (*There is agony in his voice*): I don't know what to say.

McCLELLAN: But I must have an answer.

THE PRESIDENT (*Snapping at him*): I will let you know when I reach a decision!

McCLELLAN (*Angrily*): Very well. I've done all I could. I warn you—for whatever disaster befalls our country, the responsibility will be yours and yours alone!

THE PRESIDENT (*Bitterly*): Yes, mine alone.

McCLELLAN: Good day! (THE PRESIDENT *does not respond. McCLELLAN exits*) (*For a moment THE PRESIDENT stands with head bowed low. Then he raises his head and looks up in prayer.*)

THE PRESIDENT (*In anguish*): Lord God Almighty! Give to a poor, distraught, benighted soul a beacon light, a guiding hand to show him out of his dark way on earth. (*Slowly the Curtain Descends*) Help him to know what to do in his hour of distress, as Thou didst know to do in Thy hour!

CURTAIN

ACT THREE

SCENE 3

SCENE: *The Portico of the White House outside the window of the President's Office. It is November 8, 1864.*

AT RISE: *A laughing jostling Crowd of serenaders has gathered on the White House grounds directly below the portico, to cheer THE PRESIDENT, who has just been re-elected, and to call for a speech. Out of the mumble of sounds, low voices on the right are heard clearly.*

1ST VOICE (*Right*): Sure I had my money on Old Abe. But when I saw New Jersey, Delaware and Kentucky go to McClellan, I got pretty shaky.

2ND VOICE (*Right*): You didn't have to. All the other states went to Lincoln.

1ST VOICE (*Right*): But by margins so narrow the suspense was killing. I'll never bet on another election as long as I live!

2ND VOICE (*Right*): If that's how you felt with only one hundred dollars at stake, can you imagine what the President went through? (*Voices on the Left are clearly audible.*)

1ST VOICE (*Left*): "The war is a failure," they said, "Let's negotiate peace," they said. And while they were saying it, Grant and Sherman and Sheridan turned in one whopping victory after another. Man! Did those Peace Democrats look silly! (*There is a burst of laughter from those around the speaker.*)

2ND VOICE (*Left*) (*Answering the first*): There were some damned silly-looking Republicans, too, for a while.

1ST VOICE (*Left*): Like who?

2ND VOICE (*Left*): Like Fremont with his Third Party, and Greeley with his Fourth, which they dropped like hot potatoes when they heard of Grant's victories. (*Two men come on to join the crowd.*)

1ST MAN (*To his companion*): And did you hear Lincoln's

answer to the old preacher who opposed his nomination because he had not crushed the rebellion in four years?

2ND MAN: No. What did Lincoln say?

1ST MAN: He merely pointed out that the Lord had not crushed the Devil in a much longer time. (*The 2ND MAN laughs uproariously, and as he looks up he sees the windows fronting on the portico open, and THE PRESIDENT steps forth. Immediately voices are heard.*)

VOICES: The President!

There's the President!

It's Abe Lincoln himself!

The President! (*The Crowd applauds heartily.*)

A VOICE (*Shouting*): Three cheers for Abe Lincoln! (*Instantly the Crowd responds with three rousing cheers. Then——*)

VOICES (*Shouting*): Speech! Speech! Hurray for Abe Lincoln! Give us a speech, Mr. Lincoln. Speech, Mr. President! (*And there are more cheers. THE PRESIDENT steps forward and raises his hand to get silence. The cheering dies down.*)

THE PRESIDENT: Friends and fellow citizens. (*He holds up a telegram*) I have just received a wire from General Grant. I would like to share its contents with you.

VOICES: Read it, Mr. President! What does General Grant say? Read it to us!

THE PRESIDENT: General Grant, as many of you know, is a man of few words. (*He glances at the wire*) He says simply—"this election counts for more than a great battle won." (*THE CROWD greets this with applause and cheers after which THE PRESIDENT continues*) I wish merely to enlarge upon General Grant's statement. For I am not only in full agreement with it, I am deeply impressed with the vast importance and significance of this event. (*A pause*) In the history of mankind this election is unique. It is the first time that a people in possession of universal suffrage has been called to decide for or against the continuation of a long and painful war. Never in any other land had a people, in the waste and anguish of war, voted Yes or No, freely and without hindrance, whether that war should go on. (*A pause*) When I think of the sacrifices of life yet to be offered, and the hearts and homes yet to be made desolate before this war is over, my heart is like lead within me, and

I feel at times like hiding in deep darkness. But tonight my feeling is one of elation. Not on account of my personal victory. It is no pleasure to me to triumph over any one. (*With fervor*) But because the people have pronounced by a majority that through hardship and defeat and financial difficulty, though its land be covered with hospitals and its cities filled with bankrupts, though every family weep for its sons, this great war to save our Union and wipe out slavery, shall be steadily fought to the end. (*Applause*) Such was the magnificent decision of a great people. It is a decision for which, I am confident, succeeding millions of free, happy people the world over will rise up and call us blessed. (*Applause*) For had our people shrunk, or even faltered, had they refused the necessary sacrifices or accepted the evil compromise of a peace with slavery, the cause of liberty would have received a heavy, perhaps a deadly wound. Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all our wealth is consumed, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said 3,000 years ago, so still might it be said, "The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether." And now—with malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we have begun, to do all which may achieve a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations. (*THE CROWD greets the close of the speech with a storm of applause. Then it breaks into song—"The Battle Cry of Freedom", the number of singing voices increasing with each word*)

The Union Forever
Hurrah, Boys, Hurrah,
Down with the Traitor
And up with the Star.
We will rally round the flag, boys,
We'll rally once again,
Shouting the Battle Cry of Freedom.

CURTAIN

PRODUCTION NOTES

The Play Club takes special pride in presenting this play to its members PRIOR to its Broadway production.

This is the script exactly as it will be played professionally in the legitimate theatre. Many schools, colleges, and Little Theatres will do it exactly as indicated. However, it is suggested that groups with limited technical facilities make use of the following information regarding the sets. The play will not lose any of its dramatic power or effect.

The President's office may be played with a simple interior set. Or it may be played before a dark cyclorama, with suggestive set-pieces such as war maps etc.

General McClellan's headquarters may be a simple set resembling a tent. Or it may be played on a completely blacked-out stage—except for lights concentrated on the action zones.

The last Scene, The Portico of the White House, also may be played on a completely dark stage. The balcony on which the President appears and makes his speech can be any high object upon which the President may stand. The only lights on stage should be an overhead spot concentrated on the President.



Nancy
Hanks
Lincoln
Public
Library