

RISING

by Carolyn Nur Wistrand

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RISING

A Dramatic Full-Length Play

by Carolyn Nur Wistrand

SYNOPSIS: An African American school teacher is recruited by Abolitionists to go behind the Confederate line to teach recently freed Gullah women, who are designated contraband by the Union, while an Irish girl is sentenced to ten years in a Baltimore penitentiary for carrying a Black man's child. Based on real historical events that occurred during the Civil War, this is the story of two women, Black and White, facing life threatening encounters on the eve of President Lincoln drafting the Emancipation Proclamation. *Winner of the Mario-Fratti-Fred Newman National Political Play Contest, Castillo Theatre, New York City.*

DURATION: 90 minutes.

TIME: American Civil War: August 11, 1862 – January 1, 1863.

SETTING: Baltimore, Maryland and St. Helena Island, South Carolina.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(6-7 females, 4-6 males)

- CHARLOTTE FORTEN (f) A highly educated, free woman of color. Northern school teacher in her early twenties. *(221 lines)*
- BRIGID TALLY (f) A poor Irish immigrant in her late teens who carries the unborn child of Fletcher Walker. *(60 lines)*
- AMARETTA (f) A wise Gullah woman, with knowledge of roots and herbs for medicinal purposes, recently freed from enslavement by the Union army. *(129 lines)*
- MERCY (f) A tender-hearted Gullah woman, recently freed from enslavement by the Union army. *(69 lines)*
- REENA (f) A Gullah teenager, half-sister of Jude, recently freed from enslavement by the Union army. *(74 lines)*

ZULEE (f).....	A young Gullah woman with a severed hand recently freed from enslavement by the Union army, suffering from mild hysteria. <i>(63 lines)</i>
FLETCHER WALKER (m).....	A free man of color who works as a carpenter and caulker, devoted to Brigid Tally. <i>(48 lines)</i>
DR. GORDON (m)	A Quaker abolitionist and doctor. <i>(126 lines)</i>
MR. VERNER (m).....	An abolitionist lawyer tasked by the U.S. government with overseeing the freed Gullah men and women on St. Helena Island, South Carolina. <i>(73 lines)</i>
CARPER (m)	A prison guard and patroller who brutally enforces miscegenation laws and slave codes. <i>(73 lines)</i>
JUDE FRIPP (m)	A wounded Confederate soldier, son of the former owner of Fripp Plantation. <i>(37 lines)</i>
PATROLLER (m).....	An armed man who enforces slave codes. <i>(3 lines)</i>
INMATE (f).....	An African American woman imprisoned in a Baltimore penitentiary. <i>(5 lines)</i>

CASTING NOTE

The following roles may be double cast:

- Patroller and Jude Fripp (White male)
- Mr. Verner and Dr. Gordon (White male)
- Inmate and Mercy (Black female)

SETTING

- A tenement on the wharf. Baltimore, Maryland
- Union Educational Commission Office. Baltimore, Maryland
- Brigid's Cell. Women's Penitentiary. Baltimore, Maryland
- Parlor. Fripp Plantation. St. Helena Island, South Carolina
- Charlotte's bedroom. Fripp Plantation. St. Helena Island, South Carolina
- Dr. Gordon's Residence, Baltimore, Maryland
- Praise House, St. Helena Island, South Carolina

COSTUMES

Costumes should reflect garments of the American Civil War era and the social status of the characters.

CHARLOTTE FORTEN – commands a schoolteacher's authority in an 1860's Victorian dark floor-length dress adorned with a crisp high collar, bow, and hair held in a tight bun. In the last scene, Charlotte appears in a crisp white floor-length Victorian dress.

AMARETTA, MERCY, REENA, and ZULEE – tattered long peasant skirts, tops, and aprons. The hair of all Gullah women needs to be covered in head wraps. In Scenes 19 and 21 the Gullah women appear in simple, white peasant style "freedom dresses" in accordance with the period style of the 1860s.

BRIGID TALLY – a shabby night gown in the first scene and a ragged prison dress with buttons for the duration of the play.

DR. GORDON and MR. VERNER – dressed in long black frock coats, black trousers, and white shirts with waistcoats, braces, and cravats.

CARPER and PATROLLER – rugged long-sleeved shirts, vests, trousers, and knee-high boots.

JUDE FRIPP – a Confederate infantry soldier's uniform.

FLETCHER WALKER – work trousers and a worn shirt until he enters the prison attired in a minister's long black frock coat, white collar, shirt, black trousers, and glasses.

INMATE – worn prison dress.

SET/STAGING

Staging the play should be done with clear flowing scene changes without big elaborate theatrical mechanics allowing the audience to focus on the storytelling within the play. A series of platforms and risers or a unit set will seamlessly move the action between Baltimore, Maryland and St. Helena Island, South Carolina. A small cot on a platform or riser can represent Fletcher's one room tenement and Charlotte's bedroom in the Fripp plantation by changing the quilt on the bed. The parlor in the Fripp plantation is prominent in numerous scenes and requires a table for the school lessons that is strong enough to hold Jude and Reena in Scene 8. Brigid's prison cell must evoke the cruelty of her circumstance.

LIGHTS AND SOUNDS

Lighting needs to be able to transform the scenes, which occur both in the middle of the night and in the afternoon. If incorporated, musical transitions should build dramatic tension.

SPIRITUALS

The Gullah Women and Charlotte Forten need to be able to carry a tune and perform the spirituals in a spirit of celebration. The Spirituals are from the first published songbook of African American music collected by Northern abolitionists William Allen, Charles Ware, and Lucy Garrison (1862-1865) during the Union occupation of the Sea Islands on St. Helena Island, South Carolina.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

As the actors and production team dive into rehearsal of this drama it is important to understand the historical context within the play. The play covers the five-month period leading up to President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, and culminates as a moment of celebration in the last scene, as the Gullah women prepare to hear the official announcement. Discussions topics, such as, the period of 1861-1863, the Union occupation of the South Carolina Sea Islands, being allowed to learn to read and write for the first time, and miscegenation laws are key to the empowerment of the production team, performers, and its audiences. In casting the play, it is a requirement for the cast to represent Americans, both Black and White, discovering the cost of freedom during the Civil War. It is important for the actors to experience each moment and listen to each other inhabiting the characters while telling this fascinating story.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In November of 1861, the Union Navy captured Port Royal and the Sea Islands of South Carolina. Southern White planters fled to Charleston leaving over 10,000 enslaved Africans (known as the Gullah) behind. In 1862, the United States government recruited forty-two Abolitionists to relocate to the Sea Islands, among them was one young highly educated African American woman, Charlotte Forten. At the same time, Maryland, a slave state, brutally enforced miscegenation laws, mandating any White woman carrying a Black man's child to serve ten years in the Women's Penitentiary. On January 1, 1863, the Gullah people of St. Helena Island were among the first African Americans in the South to hear the Emancipation Proclamation.

PROPS

- handcuffs
- kerosene lamp
- cloth bag filled with clothes.
- gun
- bound manuscript
- writing Pen
- plate of food
- set of prison keys on a ring
- train tickets
- money
- tin box
- school books
- cup of sugar
- teaspoons
- cloth Napkins
- paper for writing
- basket filled with roots, palmetto leaves, and soot.
- cloth rags
- medicine vials
- doctor's medical bag
- towel
- lancet
- bleeding bowl
- wooden stethoscope
- towel
- man's nightshirt
- fanner basket
- bucket of water
- fresh eggs
- bottle of turpentine
- bottle of whiskey
- ankle shackles
- bullet
- rope
- stick
- poker for fireplace

- bag of silver coins
- carving knife
- large boxes of rations
- sheet of stamps
- lemons
- pitcher of Water
- drinking glasses
- envelope and letter
- bottle of quinine
- tainted powder
- doll wrapped in blanket to represent newborn baby.
- reading glasses

DO NOT COPY

SCENE 1

SETTING: 12:30 A.M. August 11, 1862. Baltimore, Maryland. A tenement on the wharf.

AT START: Darkness. Sounds of the heavy clanking from men's boots walking up a wooden plank.

CARPER: Shoot the lock.

Gunshot. Moonlight streams into the sparse room. A startled Black man, FLETCHER, and a White woman, BRIGID, rise from a narrow bed as CARPER and a young PATROLLER barge in.

CARPER: Move up off that bed. And get some light going.

Terrified, BRIGID, in a worn nightgown, crosses to the small table and lights the kerosene lamp.

FLETCHER: Please, boss, she is not well.

CARPER: Shut up and get your pants on. You too, get dressed. Where are your papers?

FLETCHER: Under there.

CARPER: Pull them out.

FLETCHER pulls a tin box from underneath the bed.

PATROLLER: *(Throwing clothes out of bag.)* Looks like they got some bags packed.

CARPER: You going somewhere?

FLETCHER: She is going, Captain. First thing in the morning, she will be gone.

CARPER: Where were you planning to go?

BRIGID: Michigan.

CARPER: What were you planning to do there?

BRIGID: *(In an Irish dialect.)* Please, could I sit down?

CARPER: Stand where you are! *(To FLETCHER.)* Hand over them papers.

FLETCHER: (*Handing CARPER the papers.*) They are all there.

CARPER: I asked what you were planning to do in Michigan.

BRIGID: Going to me family.

CARPER: Papers say you are Fletcher Walker, a free man, that right?

FLETCHER: Yes, sir.

CARPER: Caulker by trade. Work out here on the wharf?

FLETCHER: Been out here twenty-three years.

CARPER: Did I ask how long you been out here?

FLETCHER: No, sir.

CARPER: Think these papers give you the right to lay up here with a White woman?

FLETCHER: No, sir.

CARPER: (*To FLETCHER.*) That bed worth your freedom? (*Turning to BRIGID.*) What family you got in Michigan?

BRIGID: Me sister.

CARPER: You lying.

BRIGID: It's the God's truth.

CARPER: All your people is right here in Baltimore. Know just who you are. You're old man Tally's girl—Brigid.

BRIGID: That be so, but me sister is over there.

CARPER: What sister?

BRIGID: Aileen. Ask me pa—he'd be telling you.

CARPER slaps BRIGID on both sides of her face.

CARPER: That's for the two lies you just told. Your old man's the one gave you up!

FLETCHER: Easy, Captain she is with child...

BRIGID: Fletcher!

PATROLLER: Here's two train tickets.

CARPER: Read that schedule.

PATROLLER: (*Reads from the schedule.*) "August 11th. 5:20 A.M. Baltimore to Boston."

CARPER: Tear them up. That's what I don't understand: You was a free man. This dirty Irish slut just cost you that. Hold that light up to her stomach. (*To BRIGID.*) You see this fist?

BRIGID: I see it.

CARPER: Going straight for your belly, another lie come out of your mouth. You understand me?

BRIGID: Yes.

CARPER: You pregnant?

BRIGID: Yes.

CARPER: How far along?

BRIGID: Five months.

CARPER: Is it his child? Look at this fist before you answer.

BRIGID: (*Holding back tears.*) Please don't touch me.

CARPER: (*To FLETCHER.*) You want to see another day of freedom?

FLETCHER: Yes, sir.

CARPER: (*Taking out a gun.*) Is that your child she's carrying?

FLETCHER: Please—put that down—yes, it's mine!

CARPER: Is he telling the truth? You carrying his child?

BRIGID: Yes.

CARPER: Tie her up.

PATROLLER handcuffs BRIGID.

CARPER: Brigid Tally, you are under arrest for consenting to fornicate with a Negro man, Fletcher Walker, and by your own admission, allowing him to impregnate you with his bastard. You are looking at ten years in the penitentiary.

BRIGID: (*Sobbing.*) Going in the morning. Never coming back!

FLETCHER: Wait! She not a strong woman. Penitentiary will kill her. Give you everything I have. Look. (*Grabs tin box.*) Three hundred and thirty-two dollars, good money. (*Hands money to CARPER.*) Work for you, no charge. Have mercy on her.

CARPER: (*Pocketing money.*) You willing to sign your papers over?

FLETCHER: What are you saying?

CARPER: Do you think because Maryland is in the Union that changes the law? This is still a slave state.

FLETCHER: I ain't no slave, Captain.

CARPER: Boy, when he gets done with you tonight, you'll wish you was.

BRIGID: Fletcher!

CARPER: (*Shoving BRIGID out of the room.*) Move.

CARPER and BRIGID exit. PATROLLER points gun at FLETCHER as the lights fade.

SCENE 2

SETTING: *A month later, September 1862. Union Educational Commission Office, Baltimore, Maryland.*

AT START: *CHARLOTTE FORTEN, a refined woman of color, in her early twenties, sits in the Union Educational Commission Office. MR. VERNER, a businessman and abolitionist, stands hovering over her with a bound manuscript in his hand. Lights come up in the middle of their conversation.*

MR. VERNER: And you are willing to swear that you are the sole author of this story?

CHARLOTTE: I am.

MR. VERNER: You were born free?

CHARLOTTE: Yes.

MR. VERNER: Here in Baltimore?

CHARLOTTE: I have my papers if you need to see them.

MR. VERNER: They were verified when you made your application.

You do realize the position is only for one year?

CHARLOTTE: Yes, Dr. Gordon said that during my examination.

MR. VERNER: I was hoping he could get away from the prison this afternoon. How long have you been teaching?

CHARLOTTE: Five years.

MR. VERNER: *(Reading from the letter attached to the manuscript.)*

Reverend Carter's letter states your students are capable of reading and signing any document put before them.

CHARLOTTE: Reading and writing are tools that shape character.

MR. VERNER: You were raised at the Negro Industrial School?

CHARLOTTE: My mother cooked there... Reverend Carter has allowed me to stay on since she passed.

MR. VERNER: He shaped an aspiring writer and teacher?

CHARLOTTE: This is my first attempt at writing—I think of it as self-improvement.

MR. VERNER: Is this story referring to what happened to that Negro man and Irish girl out on the wharf last month?

CHARLOTTE: I used their circumstance as a premise.

MR. VERNER: Quite frankly, I was shocked when they put it in the papers. What prompted you to write this?

CHARLOTTE: I know him.

MR. VERNER: The Negro man?

CHARLOTTE: Yes.

MR. VERNER: May I ask how?

CHARLOTTE: He came every Thursday evening for the night class. Our best reader.

MR. VERNER: But no deacon in the church.

CHARLOTTE: Pardon?

MR. VERNER: He was not a man of faith. I have that from the best Negro preachers in the city.

CHARLOTTE: I pray that isn't true.

MR. VERNER: I'm afraid it is. When he surfaces, I don't see how we can protect him.

CHARLOTTE: You say that in good conscience?

MR. VERNER: Miss Forten—or would you prefer Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE: Please, Charlotte.

MR. VERNER: The whole incident is sordid, Charlotte. It does not evoke pathos in the reader.

CHARLOTTE: Forgive me, Mr. Verner, but my pen is the only sword I can fight with.

MR. VERNER: Then write to gain sympathy. My point being we are sending young men into war. Here your words do harm to this man.

CHARLOTTE: In what manner, sir?

MR. VERNER: Someone in this city is hiding him. The article in the paper and now this story. If it were to be circulated, the patrollers would search every abolitionist in Baltimore, not to mention destroying our press.

CHARLOTTE: But he is a good man and she may die in that prison...

MR. VERNER: My God, your race is about to be freed—after three hundred years—it would seem that would be the only story you would want to write. Their only hope is to be forgotten.

CHARLOTTE: Please give it to me.

MR. VERNER hands CHARLOTTE the manuscript. CHARLOTTE unfastens the pages.

MR. VERNER: I don't mean to upset you.

CHARLOTTE: (*Tearing up the pages.*) No—it was... only a private reflection.

MR. VERNER: I would be glad to read something else.

CHARLOTTE: (*Collecting herself.*) The teaching position in South Carolina is why I am here, Mr. Verner.

MR. VERNER: Dr. Gordon pled your case before the Quaker Society last night. How long do you need to get your affairs in order?

CHARLOTTE: A week—ten days at the most.

MR. VERNER: No personal attachments?

CHARLOTTE: None.

MR. VERNER: You have no hesitation about going behind Confederate lines?

CHARLOTTE: Oh no, Mr. Verner. When we first heard the Union had taken Beaufort and thousands of slaves were left on those Sea Islands, I prayed that Mr. Lincoln would not abandon them. The hour is upon me.

MR. VERNER: Last night I accepted the position as superintendent of Fripp plantation on St. Helena Island. Two million dollars of long staple cotton must be shipped North before winter. Ten thousand abandoned slaves—two thousand Union soldiers—but only forty-two missionaries to accomplish this mission.

CHARLOTTE: With one loaf of bread Christ fed the multitude.

MR. VERNER: Indeed. There was a long discussion about the suitability of your accompanying me to Port Royal. My only hesitation was the poor judgment you showed in penning that narrative. (*Beat.*) Your duties will include teaching a night class and some light housekeeping.

CHARLOTTE: I'm approved?

MR. VERNER: We will join the Boston delegation in three days.

CHARLOTTE: Three days?

MR. VERNER: Boston is wide awake on the subject. I will arrange for your transportation this afternoon. The government will pay transportation, lodging, and food. The Quaker Society here in Baltimore is funding an allowance of \$23.00 a month.

CHARLOTTE: I need to catch my breath.

MR. VERNER: Be sure of this... the war is raging down there.

CHARLOTTE: If soldiers can carry guns into battle, then surely I can bring schoolbooks.

MR. VERNER: You must prove they can learn to read and write.

Sound of a light rain shower.

CHARLOTTE: Of course they can learn to read and write.

MR. VERNER: *(Taking papers from jacket.)* Then it only needs your signature.

CHARLOTTE signs the document. The sound of rain continues as lights cross fade.

SCENE 3

SETTING: *Same afternoon. Brigid's Cell. Women's Penitentiary. Baltimore, Maryland.*

AT START: *Sounds of the rain continue. BRIGID stands facing out, a Black female inmate, sits in the next cell with a plate of food.*

INMATE: *(Singing.)*

*"Ole Satan is a busy ole man, He roll stones in my way
Mass' Jesus is my bosom friend, He roll 'em out o' my way
O come-e go with me, O come-e' go with me
O come-e go with me, a-walking in the heaven I roam"*

BRIGID: *(Talking through the bars.)* They're not going to let me keep it.

INMATE: *(Eating.)* Go on. Eat it. When that guard comes back around keep your head down. Don't say nothing.

BRIGID: Can't get it down.

INMATE: *(Dipping bread in gravy.)* Come in here and relieve himself you got one crumb on that plate. I seen him do it.

BRIGID: He's the one arrested me.

Sound from CARPER approaching.

INMATE: Him and that patroller brought half the women in here.

BRIGID: Lord, I wish I was dead.

INMATE: (*Wiping face with skirt.*) Be steady, you are carrying God's gift.

SCENE 4

SETTING: *October 27, 1862, evening. Parlor, Fripp Seaside Plantation, St. Helena Island, South Carolina.*

AT START: *Soft sounds from the Atlantic Ocean fill the dimly lit plantation parlor. French doors USC lead out to the veranda that faces the ocean. The parlor now serves as a schoolroom. A teakettle and cooking pot hang in the fireplace to the side. Chairs surround the table. Picture cards, a bible, books, pencils, slates, rulers, large map, teapot, cups, napkins, sugar bowl, and fruit bowl are on the oak table.*

CHARLOTTE sits at the table writing by a kerosene lamp. MERCY and AMARETTA enter from the offstage kitchen. MERCY, an attractive cook and midwife, has a natural kindness in her soft speech. AMARETTA, a spirited field and root woman, has more than a few memories of not holding her tongue.

MERCY: We are here for our lesson, Miss Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE: Come in.

MERCY and AMARETTA cross into the parlor as CHARLOTTE rises, holding the journal.

CHARLOTTE: How are you this evening?

AMARETTA: Stirring.

MERCY: Spared.

MERCY and AMARETTA cross to the oak table and take seats.

AMARETTA: This sugar?

CHARLOTTE: Yes, Colonel Higginson brought it over from the camp.

MERCY: Sugar in October... Uhum.

AMARETTA: Christmas since we saw that.

CHARLOTTE: Is Reena coming?

AMARETTA: Out by the marsh. Girl strains me.

MERCY: You write in all them pages?

CHARLOTTE: Just my thoughts.

MERCY: Why do you do that?

CHARLOTTE: (*Passing out books.*) So, I can remember the day.

AMARETTA: Too many bad thoughts up here.

CHARLOTTE: What about your good thoughts?

AMARETTA: Maybe I can catch one.

CHARLOTTE: I hope so. Let's begin. Please open your books to Lesson 2.

CHARLOTTE, AMARETTA, and MERCY open primer books.

CHARLOTTE: What do you see in the picture?

AMARETTA: Dog. Looks like he is running.

CHARLOTTE: Let's pronounce the words underneath the picture.

The lesson is conducted in rapid pronunciation as CHARLOTTE pronounces the words. MERCY and AMARETTA repeat the words.

CHARLOTTE, MERCY, and AMARETTA: (*In unison.*)

"Dog—the—ran. . ."

CHARLOTTE: Mercy.

MERCY: "Dog..."

CHARLOTTE: "The..."

MERCY: "The..."

CHARLOTTE: "Ran."

MERCY: "Ran."

CHARLOTTE: Good. Amaretta.

AMARETTA: "Dog...the..."

CHARLOTTE: "Ran."

AMARETTA: "Ran."

CHARLOTTE: Very good. Let's look at the first line again. Remember there are twenty-six letters in the English alphabet and to make the first and last words we must use the letters "a," "o," "n," "d," "g," "r."

MERCY: Letters be sound.

CHARLOTTE: Absolutely. Let's review the sounds of each letter on the second line.

CHARLOTTE, MERCY, and AMARETTA: (*In unison.*) "A—o—n—d—g—r."

CHARLOTTE: Excellent. Close your books. Now, let's repeat the first line with the three cards. "Dog the ran."

AMARETTA and MERCY: "Dog the ran."

AMARETTA: Don't sound right.

CHARLOTTE: Exactly. But if we place "the" first, we will form a sentence. (*Placing "the" card first.*) "The dog ran." (*Scrambling cards.*) Now you try it.

AMARETTA: (*Placing "the" card first.*) "The dog ran."

MERCY: (*Holding up card.*) I like the picture.

CHARLOTTE: That picture represents a noun.

MERCY: Look like a dog.

CHARLOTTE: A noun is a person, place, or thing.

AMARETTA: All that?

CHARLOTTE: Every person is a noun and every place is a noun. This is St. Helena Island. An island is a noun, because we have given the island a name, St. Helena, it is a proper noun.

AMARETTA: A name proper?

CHARLOTTE: Yes, if I were to say "woman" that would be a noun, but if I were to say, "Amaretta," that would be a proper noun, because I have stated your name.

MERCY: Which card says proper?

CHARLOTTE: The cards are pictures of nouns. The word "proper" is an adjective.

AMARETTA: You say proper noun.

CHARLOTTE: Proper is an adjective because it tells us something about a noun. A woman is a noun but an adjective tells us more about her. Is she nice? Is she happy?

AMARETTA: Got mean women around here.

MERCY: Mind you.

CHARLOTTE: What about your names, did you practice your penmanship?

AMARETTA: (*Pulling scrap of paper from apron.*) Been trying to make my name sensible.

CHARLOTTE: May I see it? (*AMARETTA hands CHARLOTTE the paper.*) This is a very strong "A."

AMARETTA: Three "A's" on my name.

CHARLOTTE: Indeed.

MERCY: What is your title, Miss Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE: My first name is Charlotte, and my last name is Forten.

MERCY: Forten your title.

CHARLOTTE: Legally, it is very important that everyone have a first and last name.

AMARETTA: Don't have a mind to carry no title.

CHARLOTTE: But you are going to need one.

AMARETTA: Massa and Missus just sit down to supper when the big gun shoot break at Bay Point. Jump up and leave the whole table. We run in the marsh and hide. Massa yell, "They coming! Get in the boat before they send you to Cuba!" Nobody moved. Soon as the smoke settle Yankees all over this place. Call for everybody to come in the yard. Soldiers line us up. "All you from Fripp plantation over here. Coffin plantation over there. Anybody belongs to Eden get on the side." Massa says we his at sunrise—in the evening Union boy say we contraband. A soldier brings Massa Fripp's book to the Captain. Everybody looks to see what he does now. I told that Captain, "don't give me no title say Fripp when Jordan roll!"

MERCY: Shout it out in the Praise House, sister!

AMARETTA and MERCY: (*Falling into the song.*)

"My brother sitting on the tree of life

And he heard when Jordan roll

Roll, Jordan, Roll, Jordan, Roll, Jordan, roll!

O march the angel march, O march the angel march

O my soul arise in Heaven, Lord

Forty yards when Jordan roll."ⁱⁱ

AMARETTA: (*Fanning herself.*) You make me sensible of the holy book?

CHARLOTTE: Absolutely.

MERCY: My man the best carpenter around here before he went off with the volunteers. We are going to marry when he gets a pass. How does Mercy Carpenter sound?

AMARETTA: Put a knife in your back Cousin Thursday hear it.

MERCY: He ain't coming here.

AMARETTA: The brother is coming. Soon as Edisto Island free he is coming. When Cousin Thursday comes around—marry him.

MERCY: I ain't got time to hear it.

AMARETTA: We be in that field—back broke planting these rows with our men at Hilton Head.

CHARLOTTE: Does it help, the Union paying you wages?

AMARETTA: Ain't seen any yet. Need to be planting our own patch... corn and slip potatoes. Food for the winter has got to get in the ground now. Captain promise cloth, molasses, coffee... shoes. It is coming up on winter.

MERCY: Is we contraband or is we free?

CHARLOTTE: That is why we are fighting this war. You are going to be paid for your tasks as soon as Mr. Verner ships that cotton North.

AMARETTA: Need to bring us some cloth, molasses, bacon—something. Massa Fripp give out cloth at spring and Christmas. Union boys been here since last winter—ain't got nothing since they come.

REENA enters with a fanner basket on her head and a bucket of fresh water in her hand from the kitchen.

AMARETTA: Mind now, mind before I knock you! You bring salt marsh in here! Knock you hard!

REENA: Don't be mannish. (*Setting bucket by fireplace.*) Got you fresh eggs, Miss Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE: Thank you, Reena. Please put them in the bowl. Did you work on your penmanship?

REENA: Yes, Miss.

REENA takes eggs from the basket on her head and places them in the bowl on the table as JUDE FRIPP, a young White man, appears on the veranda catching REENA'S eye.

CHARLOTTE: We are going to practice writing sentences. We'll use the cards to help us.

REENA: (*Gazing at JUDE.*) Can't stay long.

CHARLOTTE: Is something wrong?

REENA: Here is my name. (*Pulls paper from head wrap and reads.*) "Reena Fripp."

AMARETTA: Massa made you fat as his pig.

REENA: You alone in here?

CHARLOTTE: Yes. Mr. Verner left for Beaufort this afternoon.

REENA: I see them loading down on Land's End.

CHARLOTTE: They should be back tomorrow. (*Turns as JUDE limps from view.*) Sweet Jesus. There is someone out there.

REENA: He is gone now.

CHARLOTTE: Did you see him?

REENA: A soldier—passed him coming in.

CHARLOTTE: (*Moving towards the French doors.*) That boy was limping.

REENA: Nothing wrong with him.

CHARLOTTE: Are you sure?

REENA: He is a soldier. I seen him.

CHARLOTTE: He looked wounded. There could be a rebel around here.

REENA: No rebels came here.

CHARLOTTE: That's not true, there have been four sightings—we should get word to Colonel Higginson.

MERCY crosses to the fireplace, where the kettle hangs.

REENA: Captain will shoot him!

CHARLOTTE: He would not shoot one of his own men.

REENA: Shoot him he leaves camp. Told that boy, "Get back to camp before Captain shoot you!" Run down the road... dog come up and bit him.

CHARLOTTE: A dog?

REENA: Plenty of blood hounds by the marsh.

MERCY brings a kettle to the table and prepares tea.

CHARLOTTE: We must notify Colonel Higginson tonight.

REENA: It was no blood hound.

CHARLOTTE: Then what are you saying?

REENA: He fell, that's all.

AMARETTA: That girl strains me.

CHARLOTTE: What are you hiding?

REENA: Give him my word I don't tell.

CHARLOTTE: Tell me the truth right now!

REENA: He had been drinking whiskey.

CHARLOTTE: I see.

AMARETTA: Come in here and spoil the lesson. Knock you dead!

CHARLOTTE: We'll continue on Thursday.

MERCY: Need to rest these bones before the day is clean.

AMARETTA: Got to be in the field early.

CHARLOTTE: Take some sugar. Here, use these napkins.

AMARETTA and MERCY place teaspoons of sugar in napkins.

AMARETTA: Sun rise sweet on my first two rows.

REENA: (*Sucking sugar.*) Sleep here—make you safe, Miss.

MERCY: Mind you do. Night, Miss Charlotte.

MERCY exits.

CHARLOTTE: Good night, Mercy, Amaretta.

AMARETTA: Night, Miss.

AMARETTA exits.

REENA: (*Lying on the floor.*) Pine smells sweet by the fire. You ain't gonna tell Captain, are you?

CHARLOTTE: No—since you gave that boy your word, but you must stop lying. Our soldiers need to be sober to win this war.

REENA: I tell you.

CHARLOTTE: That will be my prayer tonight.

CHARLOTTE crosses to her room with the kerosene lamp and enters. JUDE reappears at the French doors. REENA crosses to the French doors, stealthily opens them and exits. ZULEE, a young Gullah woman with a severed right hand enters from the kitchen. ZULEE looks around the room, crosses to a hidden passageway that leads into CHARLOTTE'S bedroom and crawls inside.

SCENE 5

SETTING: *CHARLOTTE'S bedroom at Fripp's Plantation.*

AT START: *CHARLOTTE pulls back the coverlet and climbs into bed as ZULEE, who suffers from emotional hysteria, opens the hidden passage door and comes into the room on her left hand and knees. The door closes behind her, making a slight noise.*

ZULEE: Teacher. I come for my lesson.

CHARLOTTE: What?

ZULEE: My lesson.

CHARLOTTE: The lesson is over tonight. How did you get in here?

ZULEE: Rain brought me.

CHARLOTTE: *(Calling to REENA.)* Reena please come in here! *(To ZULEE.)* Never enter my room without permission.

ZULEE: Listen to them trees behind the rain. Zulee coming down.

CHARLOTTE: Who are you?

ZULEE: I hid in Pharaoh's tomb when Madame Eve left the garden.

CHARLOTTE: I have no idea what you are talking about.

ZULEE: She put Moses in the basket!

CHARLOTTE: Leave this room.

ZULEE: The queen of Egypt found that baby boy.

CHARLOTTE: Did you hear what I just said?

ZULEE: Madame Eve brought all this trouble. I gotta get her off my hand!

ZULEE runs out of the room.

SCENE 6

SETTING: *October 27, 1862. Brigid's Cell, Women's Penitentiary, Baltimore, Maryland.*

AT START: *BRIGID and DR. GORDON are in the cell. DR. GORDON stands at the table and takes out a lancet, bleeding bowl, and long wooden stethoscope.*

DR. GORDON: When was your last monthly?

BRIGID: February.

DR. GORDON: That would put you at seven months.

BRIGID: I'm thinking that be right. We had tickets to Boston on the eleventh of August.

DR. GORDON: It is the twenty-seventh of October.

BRIGID: More than three months? You're the first doctor to come.

DR. GORDON: Antietam was a massacre. Soldiers are dying in every hospital in the city.

BRIGID: And women still giving birth. They shouldn't be keeping me here in this godforsaken place.

DR. GORDON: It is a cruel law, Miss Tally, I am sorry.

BRIGID: Tally—hardly remember that name.

DR. GORDON: How did you get these bruises on your neck?

BRIGID: That filthy bastard could tell you. He has had his paws on every woman in this prison.

DR. GORDON: Your feet and hands are swollen. Is this another bruise?

BRIGID: There was a woman in that cell last night. Tied me hands to the bars, said—watch and get ready.

DR. GORDON: The guard?

BRIGID: Carper!

DR. GORDON: Not so loud.

BRIGID: Dropped his pants... took her against these bars. She cried out like death coming now.

DR. GORDON: I need to examine you. Are you comfortable to unbutton your dress?

BRIGID: Don't know where he took her. *(Unbuttoning dress.)* They'll be coming to steal the child.

DR. GORDON examines BRIGID with a rod-shaped stethoscope.

DR. GORDON: Take a deep breath.

BRIGID takes a deep breath.

DR. GORDON: Let it out.

BRIGID: (*Exhaling.*) In the middle of the night.

DR. GORDON: Take another one.

BRIGID takes another deep breath.

DR. GORDON: Let it out.

BRIGID: (*Exhaling.*) That's how they do it.

DR. GORDON: One more.

BRIGID takes another deep breath.

DR. GORDON: Let it out. Good.

BRIGID: (*Exhaling.*) While you be sleeping. Just come and rip your child from you.

DR. GORDON puts stethoscope on the table and opens the lancet.

DR. GORDON: I need to bleed you.

BRIGID: Oh my Lord, no.

DR. GORDON: We have to bring down the swelling.

BRIGID: I'm a Catholic girl. You could tell them, doctor. Send me to the Sisters of Mercy. Let the sisters take the child.

DR. GORDON: You need to calm down.

BRIGID: Me father slapped me to the floor. Carper yells dirty Irish slut. It's a bad way to be carrying a child. Fletcher is the only man I laid down with... I swear on Mary, Holy Mother of God. I want to die.

DR. GORDON: Carper!

CARPER: Need something, doctor?

DR. GORDON: I have to bleed this woman. Could you bring a bowl for the blood?

CARPER: Gonna take a few minutes.

DR. GORDON: That's fine.

Sound of CARPER walking down steps.

DR. GORDON: You can button your dress. He's not dead.

BRIGID: What?

DR. GORDON: (*Motioning with his fingers.*) Not so loud.

BRIGID: Fletcher?

DR. GORDON: He is not dead.

BRIGID: Are you sure?

DR. GORDON: Yes.

BRIGID: (*Making the sign of the cross.*) Where is he?

DR. GORDON: In a safe place.

BRIGID: You swear it?

DR. GORDON: Trust God. A preacher will come for the child when it is your time.

BRIGID: No.

DR. GORDON: We have made arrangements.

BRIGID: To take me child?

DR. GORDON: I say this once: "Reverend Peter." Plant his name in your mind.

BRIGID: You won't be with me?

DR. GORDON: God owns tomorrow.

BRIGID: Child's the only thing stops me from finding a rope to hang from. God forgive me.

DR. GORDON: Why should God forgive you for loving your own?

BRIGID: That's what I keep asking me self. Boys out there dying for all the hate in this democracy—me locked up for too much love in me heart. What country did I come to live in?

DR. GORDON: One we are still making.

Sound of CARPER returning

DR. GORDON: (*Raising his voice and tapping her forearm.*) Calm down. This vein looks good.

CARPER: (*Unlocking the cell.*) She give you any trouble in here, you let me know. (*Handing DR. GORDON the bowl.*) I was the one brought her in.

DR. GORDON: Pardon me?

CARPER: You should have seen this dirty Irish slut... laying up in that bed, doctor. Shit that's in this city.

DR. GORDON: Is there another woman to examine?

CARPER: She's the only one.

DR. GORDON: (*Sharpening lancet.*) Has Reverend Peter been here to pray with the colored women?

CARPER: I ain't ever seen him. I stay away from all them preachers—get 'em in, get 'em out.

DR. GORDON: I will try to make arrangements for him to take the child.

CARPER: Just let Warden Edwards know which one is coming. And make sure he knows to go to the back gate after midnight. Warden don't allow them Black preachers taking babies out of here in daylight.

BRIGID: I want me child to go to the Sisters of Mercy!

CARPER: They don't take Black bastards. How much longer you got in here?

DR. GORDON: An hour—to collect the blood.

CARPER: Nothing I want to watch. Be back around.

CARPER Exits.

DR. GORDON: We need to open this vein.

DR. GORDON opens a vein in BRIGID'S forearm with the lancet. He ties off the area with a tourniquet and cuts into the vein.

DR. GORDON: Keep the tourniquet tight as I collect the blood. Are you all right?

BRIGID: You got good hands... they keeping me steady.

BRIGID and DR. GORDON fade from view.

SCENE 7

SETTING: Same evening. 11 P.M. Fripp Plantation.

AT START: A loud crash as JUDE FRIPP, ravaged from three days in the marsh, opens French doors and falls into the parlor with REENA right behind him.

REENA: You got to stay out there, Jude!

JUDE: (*Grasping table.*) Won't stop bleeding.

REENA: I'm going for Amaretta.

JUDE: Stay right here.

REENA: You gonna die!

CHARLOTTE: (*Entering from bedroom.*) Reena!

REENA: He been shot!

CHARLOTTE: Who?

REENA: Jude bleeding bad. (*Running out.*) I am going out back to get Amaretta!

JUDE: (*Gasping.*) You the teacher?

CHARLOTTE: I am.

JUDE: (*Looking at the books on table.*) Reena said you read books.

CHARLOTTE: I do.

JUDE: What day is it?

CHARLOTTE: Thursday.

JUDE: The date! Give me the date!

CHARLOTTE: October 27th, 1862.

JUDE: (*Counting backwards on his fingers.*) I know the year. Twenty-seven, twenty-six, twenty-five...

CHARLOTTE: Three.

JUDE: (*Struggling to remain conscious.*) Some whiskey in that pantry. Go get it.

CHARLOTTE: How do you know what's in that pantry?

JUDE: (*Gasping.*) Whose bed you think you sleeping in? This is my Pa's house.

CHARLOTTE: It was you out there.

JUDE: (*Losing consciousness.*) Go get me that whiskey...

JUDE collapses on the floor. CHARLOTTE rushes to the fireplace, grabs poker, stares at JUDE face down. AMARETTA and REENA rush in.

REENA: What you do?

CHARLOTTE: He just passed out!

AMARETTA: Look at the blood on this floor. Uh hum. Call Mercy come on with my basket.

REENA runs out.

AMARETTA: Jude. You hear me?

JUDE: Uh...

AMARETTA: Need to lift him up on this table. Is you afraid to touch him?

CHARLOTTE: I don't know.

AMARETTA: Gonna need your hands.

CHARLOTTE kneels beside JUDE.

AMARETTA: We got to raise you, boy. Get up under his neck. All right. Push up under his arms. Ready?

AMARETTA and CHARLOTTE raise JUDE to the edge of the table as REENA and MERCY enter.

REENA: Jude!

AMARETTA: Get over here!

AMARETTA, CHARLOTTE, REENA, and MERCY lift JUDE onto the table.

AMARETTA: (To MERCY.) Boil that water. Put this red oak in there.

MERCY crosses to fireplace and shaves bark into the water.

REENA: You gonna bleed him?

AMARETTA: *(Taking palmetto leaves, roots, and soot from basket.)*
Get me some salt and whiskey out the pantry.

REENA runs out

CHARLOTTE: There is an army doctor at the camp.

AMARETTA: What he gonna do? Cut that leg off.

MERCY: Amaretta got the knowledge to save it.

AMARETTA: Lord willing.

CHARLOTTE: How can I help?

AMARETTA: Get them boots off him.

CHARLOTTE removes JUDE'S boots.

JUDE: *(Groaning.)* Uh.

AMARETTA: *(Shoving a stick in his mouth.)* Bite down, boy. Come on. Hard. Take them pants off him.

CHARLOTTE unbuttons JUDE'S pants. REENA reenters with whiskey and salt.

AMARETTA: Get them eggs out this bowl. Strip him down.

REENA and CHARLOTTE remove JUDE'S pants. MERCY brings the boiling kettle to the table.

AMARETTA: Pour it in. Soak up them palmetto. Put the light close to me now.

AMARETTA and MERCY clean the leg with warm palmetto leaves from the bowl.

CHARLOTTE: *(Holding up lamp.)* How is this?

AMARETTA: Good. *(To REENA.)* Wipe down my knife with that turpentine.

REENA takes bottle of turpentine from basket.

MERCY: There is too much blood around here.

AMARETTA: When they shoot him?

REENA: (*Wiping knife.*) Been down by the marsh three days.

AMARETTA: You been hiding him three days? Knock you dead.

MERCY: Here. Right up to the skin.

AMARETTA: I see it. Give me that knife.

REENA: (*Handing her the knife.*) Just come up here tonight.

AMARETTA: Hold him down! Keep that light steady now.

MERCY and REENA hold JUDE down as AMARETTA pours turpentine directly into the gaping wound. JUDE goes into convulsions.

REENA: Can't see it.

AMARETTA: Close your eyes!

MERCY: Let the Lord speak.

AMARETTA cuts down into the leg and picks out the bullet.

JUDE: Ah.

AMARETTA: There it is. (*Taking stick out of JUDE'S mouth.*) Give him some of that whiskey.

AMARETTA places the bullet in her apron. REENA mixes root water and whiskey in a teacup and forces JUDE to drink. Skillfully, AMARETTA and MERCY pack the leg with soot, salt, and palmetto leaves.

REENA: Are you going to sew him?

MERCY: (*Packing the wound.*) Keep it open.

AMARETTA: Bring up the puss. (*Feeling JUDE'S pulse.*) Feel that.

MERCY feels JUDE'S pulse.

AMARETTA: What you say?

MERCY: He is losing too much blood.

AMARETTA: We got to sit him up.

REENA: How are you going to do that?

CHARLOTTE: We can't lift him off this table.

AMARETTA: (To REENA.) Get up there!

REENA climbs on the table

AMARETTA: (To CHARLOTTE .) Fetch me that rope.

MERCY: (To REENA.) You got to hold him up.

REENA: How I'm going to?

AMARETTA: Turn around! Put your back right up on him. Keep those legs straight now.

REENA turns her back to JUDE, sits with her legs straight out on the table. CHARLOTTE brings AMARETTA the rope. AMARETTA places it in REENA'S lap.

AMARETTA: Need your hands, Miss.

AMARETTA, REENA, and CHARLOTTE gently lift JUDE to an upright position. JUDE'S back touches REENA'S back.

AMARETTA: Watch that neck.

CHARLOTTE holds JUDE. AMARETTA and MERCY tie rope across REENA and JUDE. REENA and JUDE sit tightly bound back-to-back on the table.

MERCY: (To REENA.) You brought him to us, sister—now you the only thing keeping him from the grave.

REENA: How long you keep me tied up?

MERCY: All night unless the Lord calls him home.

REENA: Oh my God.

MERCY: I am going to be right here with you, baby.

REENA: Can't be tied up 'til morning!

MERCY: Be steady now.

AMARETTA: Give her some whiskey.

MERCY: (*Giving whiskey to REENA.*)

*"O me no weary yet, O me no weary yet
I have a witness in my heart, 'O me no weary yet
Since I been in the field to fight, since I been in the field to fight
I have a witness in my heart, 'O me no weary yet."*ⁱⁱⁱ

SCENE 8

SETTING: August 11, 1862, middle of the night. Dr. Gordon's Residence, Baltimore, Maryland.

AT START: FLETCHER, soaking wet, knocks four times on the door and falls back into the shadows. DR. GORDON crosses to the entrance. FLETCHER reappears.

DR. GORDON: Who is it?

FLETCHER: Peter.

DR. GORDON opens the door.

FLETCHER: I shot a patroller.

DR. GORDON: When?

FLETCHER: Just now! Two of them busted in. Shot the lock right off my door. We was asleep.

DR. GORDON: The woman was there?

FLETCHER: Yes.

DR. GORDON: My God, man you're sopping wet.

DR. GORDON crosses to an offstage room. FLETCHER follows him and speaks through the door.

FLETCHER: They took her. Said she's getting ten years... tied her up and took her out—the other patroller stood there pointing his gun like a devil... went crazy... I don't know how I grabbed it.

DR. GORDON: Is he dead?

FLETCHER: No—shot him in the arm. He fell down and I hit him over the head with the gun. He just lay there—and then I hit him again.

DR. GORDON: Where is the gun?

FLETCHER: Ran out—raging so hard I was ready to kill anybody come up on me.... got near the end of the docks and jumped in the bay with the gun—it's gone.

DR. GORDON: Where are your papers?

FLETCHER: The one that arrested Brigid took them.

DR. GORDON: Your money?

FLETCHER: He got that too.

DR. GORDON: The train tickets?

FLETCHER: The patroller tore them up.

DR. GORDON: (*Sighing.*) This is bad.

DR. GORDON crosses to the offstage room. FLETCHER follows him and speaks through the door.

FLETCHER: Went by the school yesterday after you bought the tickets. Charlotte warned me. Wouldn't listen to her.

SCENE 9

SETTING: Flashback. 4 P.M. the previous day Dr. Gordon's Residence, Baltimore, Maryland.

AT START: CHARLOTTE appears near the table.

CHARLOTTE: Did you get the tickets?

FLETCHER: Yeah, I got them.

CHARLOTTE: Has the girl been here to see Dr. Gordon?

FLETCHER: We ain't had time yet.

CHARLOTTE: She needs to see the doctor.

FLETCHER: I told her already. The train leaves 5:20 in the morning.

CHARLOTTE: Make sure she goes alone.

FLETCHER: I don't know about that.

CHARLOTTE: If she can carry fish up and down East Baltimore, she can make it to the station.

FLETCHER: Then how is she going to lift them bags?

CHARLOTTE: Leave them. Give her the ticket and tell her to be at the station by five. Don't talk to her, don't sit near her, and don't look at her until your feet touch Boston.

FLETCHER: Her old man thinks she left yesterday. He beats her bad.

CHARLOTTE: I suppose he does. Where is she going to stay tonight?

FLETCHER: There ain't no other way.

CHARLOTTE: I pray you are not serious.

FLETCHER: It's just one night.

CHARLOTTE: You can't have her sleep in your bed!

CHARLOTTE fades.

SCENE 10

SETTING: August 11, 1862, middle of the night. Dr. Gordon's Residence, Baltimore, Maryland.

AT START: DR. GORDON reenters with towel and nightshirt.

DR. GORDON: (*Handing towel to FLETCHER.*) You'll have to stay here until I can make arrangements.

FLETCHER: (*Drying off.*) What about Brigid?

DR. GORDON: That is going to be difficult. Get those clothes off.

FLETCHER: That devil almost hit her in the stomach. She ain't gonna hold up!

DR. GORDON: I am not the Savior, Walker.

FLETCHER: But you can get in.

DR. GORDON: Not for a few months—you have to let the Lord work in this.

FLETCHER: I ain't no praying man.

DR. GORDON: The Women's penitentiary is your worst fear. Don't make light of it.

FLETCHER: Never look to the Lord for nothing.

DR. GORDON: (*Handing FLETCHER the night shirt.*) But He is with you.

FLETCHER: How can you say that? Look at this trouble I'm carrying. Now it is in your house.

DR. GORDON: All I see is Peter.

FLETCHER: And he denied Christ three times.

DR. GORDON: But went on to build His church.

FLETCHER: This thing came up on me before I could grasp the implications. Can't leave Baltimore—not with Brigid in that prison...

DR. GORDON: You need to rest.

FLETCHER: Freedom and love belong together—can't be whole without them.

DR. GORDON: You are safe tonight.

FLETCHER: Ain't no man safe in this country!

DR. GORDON: You are right—we are all shaking.

FLETCHER: Brigid and I should have been on that train!

DR. GORDON: Walker—our battle tonight is to get up tomorrow. There is a bed in the examination room—come.

FLETCHER and DR. GORDON walk out of the room.

SCENE 11

SETTING: *Rainstorm. Early hours of October 28, 1862. Fripp plantation.*

AT START: *REENA and JUDE remain bound on the table. AMARETTA sits in a chair by the fireplace. MERCY lays on the floor dozing. CHARLOTTE paces the room.*

AMARETTA:

"Rain fall and wet Becca Lawton

Oh...Rain fall and wet Becca Lawton.

Oh! Brother cry holy.

Been back holy, I must come slowly;

Oh Brother cry holy.

Do Becca Lawton, come to me yonder

Do Becca Lawton come to me yonder.

I must come slowly,

Oh Brother cry holy... "viv

JUDE: Who is singing that?

AMARETTA: (*Addressing MERCY.*) Mercy.

AMARETTA and MERCY rise, cross to JUDE and examine his leg

JUDE: How long have I been here?

AMARETTA: Most of the night.

JUDE: Uh. My back feels like it's broke. Why do you got me tied up?

AMARETTA: Stop the blood.

JUDE: You get the bullet?

AMARETTA: Um hum.

AMARETTA takes bullet from apron.

JUDE: Bring that over here. (*Staring at bullet in AMARETTA'S hand.*)

Damn. Shot me in the marsh before I made the landing. Got the whole east end barricaded. Show that to pa.

REENA: (*In pain.*) Ahh...

JUDE: That you, Reena?

REENA: (*Whining.*) Can't sit here no more.

JUDE: Take this damn rope off me!

AMARETTA and MERCY untie JUDE and REENA

AMARETTA: Why did you come back?

JUDE: Eden the devil. (*Stretching arms as rope unfastens.*) Give me that bullet.

AMARETTA: He the one that sent you?

JUDE: (*Puts bullet in shirt pocket.*) Wasn't Pa. Eden been drunk since he left here. Been crying about all that gold and silver out in his barn... was a fool to hear him. Union sons of bitches tore them floorboards up... wasn't even a silver dollar. Give me some sour whiskey.

AMARETTA: See you can stand first.

MERCY: Come down easy now.

REENA and JUDE come off the table.

REENA: Can't feel these legs!

AMARETTA: Walk it out.

REENA stretches her legs on the side of the table. JUDE grasps the table taking small steps.

JUDE: *(In pain.)* Got to get out of here.

REENA: To be where?

JUDE: Boat's down by the Coosaw.

AMARETTA: Leg ain't strong enough to get to no river.

JUDE: I'll make it. Where's my pants?

MERCY: *(Hands him the ragged pants.)* They blood soaked.

JUDE: *(Trying to put pants on.)* Won't find me in this rain. Uh... need some help here.

AMARETTA and MERCY assist JUDE.

AMARETTA: Lift that up easy.

JUDE: Damn that burns. Get them boots.

MERCY hands JUDE boots.

CHARLOTTE: You're going to let him go?

MERCY: How is we gonna stop him?

REENA: Union boys will kill him if he stays here.

CHARLOTTE: Amaretta?

AMARETTA: Have to see if God will save him...

CHARLOTTE: I won't be a part of this!

JUDE: *(Losing strength.)* No, you want your boys to come in here and shoot me. That's what you are waiting to see.

CHARLOTTE: My work has nothing to do with you.

JUDE: *(Fighting dizziness.)* You got a smart lip, school teacher. Pa knew you was helping slaves learn to read in his parlor, he'd tear that dress off and whip you bare breasted. *(Pushes books on floor.)*

CHARLOTTE: *(Retrieving books from the floor, hands one to REENA.)* Open your book, Reena.

REENA: *(Hesitating to open the book.)* Just let him go...

CHARLOTTE: (*Thrusting the book at REENA.*) Open your book to page 7.

JUDE: (*Hands still on table. To CHARLOTTE.*) It's against the law what you doing.

CHARLOTTE: (*Reading.*) LESSON 3. "pen"... "letter"... "lady"

JUDE: (*To REENA.*) Get that out of your hand.

Defiantly, REENA puts book behind her back.

JUDE: (*Clutching table to keep steady.*) Now you been warned.

CHARLOTTE: Page 7. Look at the words—"pen" ... "letter" ... "lady"

JUDE: Bitch I said to put it down.

REENA: You ain't the master of my mind! (*Reading.*) Lesson 3. "The lady." "A pen." "The lady has a pen." "The lady writes a letter with her pen." (*To JUDE.*) Reena writes her name with a pen!

JUDE: (*Threatening.*) I got something for you.

AMARETTA: Light coming, Jude.

MERCY: Better catch the last of that shadow.

JUDE: (*Frustrated.*) You all need to teach this Yankee schoolteacher what we do to slaves with books in their hands.

REENA: Just go on!

JUDE: (*Mustering strength. To REENA.*) Shut up. (*To CHARLOTTE.*) There's a howling African out in them swamps. When she turns up—you look at that stub that used to be a hand because it is never going to turn no page in no damn schoolbook.

AMARETTA: (*Opening the French doors.*) Alright now.

JUDE: (*Limping towards the French doors.*) Soon as we win this war—you better be gone, teacher.

JUDE exits. ZULEE opens the hidden passageway, crawls out and sits in the middle of the floor.

ZULEE: (*Talking to no one.*) Sheba queen of Egypt. She dark as me.

MERCY: Lord, you been in there the whole time?

ZULEE: I smell her coming with that frankincense and myrrh.

CHARLOTTE: How do you know those words?

REENA: She thief Missus B. Fripp's bible. That why Massa Fripp chopped off her hand.

AMARETTA: (*To REENA.*) Hush now! Zulee! (*Clapping.*) How long you been hiding in there?

ZULEE: She riding out the marsh on the back of a crocodile.

AMARETTA: You follow Jude?

Thunder erupts from rainstorm.

ZULEE: What the Lord saying? Shhh! Listen! Stay away from Madame Eve! She bring all the trouble.

AMARETTA: Talk sensible now.

ZULEE: One box of dead meat going to the grave!

ZULEE runs out the kitchen door.

CHARLOTTE: Should we go after her?

REENA: She too wild.

MERCY: Lord leading Zulee.

AMARETTA: Girl had power in her hands same as Titty Becca—she the oldest African around here.

MERCY: Made the finest sweet grass bowls on this island.

AMARETTA: Take cow bone and palmetto leaf-sew a diamondback rattlesnake.

MERCY: Put a memory you never seen in a fanner basket.

AMARETTA: African stories in them fingers. Look like she stand in the wilderness 'til she dead.

CHARLOTTE: They cut off her hand because she told stories?

AMARETTA: Winter before you come—one night all them Fripp buckras sit around this table to pray. Missus B. Fripp-open her bible... page after page... ripped out... her daddy give her that bible. Massa Fripp brought up his driver—told him to go down to the quarters and bring him the hand that tore them pages out Missus B. Fripp's bible. Carried Zulee up here holding them bible pages... put her hand down on this table... Massa Fripp got him a big carving knife... took three of them buckras to keep that girl steady... cut the thumb off... then the fingers... nothing but the blood of Zulee in this oak now.

Sound of heavy rainstorm. AMARETTA crosses to the chair, sits, gazes at the fire. MERCY stirs the fire with the poker. CHARLOTTE places her hands on the oak table. REENA opens the schoolbook in her hand.

REENA: *(Turning the page.)* Lesson 4. "sister"... "book"... "brother."
"Sister reads a book to brother." *(Closes the book.)* Jude and me
grow up same as brother and sister.

MERCY: He in the wilderness now.

AMARETTA: Let the Lord decide—'cause that leg ain't gonna carry
him to no Coosaw River.

SCENE 12

SETTING: *August 11, 1862. Dr. Gordon's Residence, Baltimore, Maryland.*

AT START: *The sound of footsteps, then four knocks. DR. GORDON appears. CHARLOTTE rushes in.*

CHARLOTTE: The police just came by the school looking for Fletcher.
He shot a patroller last night...

DR. GORDON: Please, sit down.

CHARLOTTE: I'm too nervous... they took the woman to the
penitentiary. He might be dead!

DR. GORDON: He is safe.

CHARLOTTE: Do you know that?

DR. GORDON: If the patrollers had Fletcher, they wouldn't be looking
for him.

CHARLOTTE: What if they come here?

DR. GORDON: No one is coming here. There are only twelve doctors
in the city.

CHARLOTTE: And if it becomes public that Fletcher is my brother?

DR. GORDON: It won't—my faith is in the code as should be yours.

CHARLOTTE: Reverend Carter said you're the only White man we
can trust.

DR. GORDON: He may already be in Boston.

CHARLOTTE: Do you swear it?

DR. GORDON: Trust me when I tell you he is safe. Can you do that?

CHARLOTTE: I'm listening.

DR. GORDON: We knew this could happen when we bought the tickets.

CHARLOTTE: I told him not to put that woman in his bed!

DR. GORDON: The second plan is already in motion. You must prepare for your part.

CHARLOTTE: It is so much deceit to carry... what if my application is denied?

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ⁱ Song 77, "COME GO WITH ME" Allen, Ware, Garrison, eds. Slave Songs of the United States. New York: A. Simpson & Co., 1867.

ⁱⁱ Song 1, "ROLL, JORDAN, ROLL" Allen, Ware, Garrison, eds. Slave Songs of the United States. New York: A. Simpson & Co., 1867.

ⁱⁱⁱ Song 16, "NOT WEARY YET" Allen, Ware, Garrison, eds. Slave Songs of the United States. New York: A. Simpson & Co., 1867.

^{iv} Song 29, "RAIN FALL and WET BECCA LAWTON" Allen, Ware, Garrison, eds. Slave Songs of the United States. New York: A. Simpson & Co., 1867.