

# Excerpt terms and conditions



This excerpt is available to assist you in the play selection process.

You may view, print and download any of our excerpts for perusal purposes.

Excerpts are not intended for performance, classroom or other academic use. In any of these cases you will need to purchase playbooks via our website or by phone, fax or mail.

A short excerpt is not always indicative of the entire work, and we strongly suggest reading the whole play before planning a production or ordering a cast quantity.

*Dramatic Publishing*

**Nominated for the Pulitzer Prize in Drama**

# **The Heavens Are Hung in Black**



**Drama by James Still**

**Still has a way of weaving  
epic history with the  
everyday moment.”**

**(DC Theatre Scene)**

**“Suspenseful, chilling, honest,  
and thought-provoking.”**

**(Indianapolis City Finder)**

**The Heavens Are Hung in Black – Drama.** By James Still. Cast: 10 to 18m., 2 to 3w., 2 boys, extras as desired. Focusing on the theatricality and humanity of Lincoln's second year in the White House (1862), *The Heavens Are Hung in Black* is a fevered, emotional epic about a U.S. president who read the Book of Job and the plays of Shakespeare, had the saddest face ever painted, openly wept in public, and led this country in a war that we're still fighting today. We see everything through Lincoln's eyes and his haunted dreams: his treatment by his friends and enemies; his relationship with his troubled wife; their grief over the death of their young son; and Lincoln's moving and very public agony over the bloody losses of a war that seems to have no end. Commissioned by and premiered at Ford's Theatre in Washington, D.C., "Still's Lincoln is a man at the end of his rope. A man any blue collar worker can relate to." (*Indianapolis City Finder*) Unit set. Approximate running time: 2 hours, 15 minutes. Code: HC2.

Cover: Ford's Theatre, Washington, D.C., commission and world premiere production, with David Selby as Abraham Lincoln and Robin Moseley as Mary Todd Lincoln. Photo: T. Charles Erickson. Cover design: Susan Carle.

ISBN 10: 1-58342-768-6  
ISBN 13: 978-1-58342-768-2



9 781583 427682 >

[www.dramaticpublishing.com](http://www.dramaticpublishing.com)



*Dramatic Publishing*

311 Washington Street,  
Woodstock, Illinois 60098  
Phone: 800-448-7469  
815-338-7170



Printed on recycled paper

© The Dramatic Publishing Company

# **The Heavens Are Hung in Black**

By  
JAMES STILL



**Dramatic Publishing**

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

\*\*\* NOTICE \*\*\*

The amateur and stock acting rights to this work are controlled exclusively by THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY without whose permission in writing no performance of it may be given. Royalty must be paid every time a play is performed whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. A play is performed any time it is acted before an audience. Current royalty rates, applications and restrictions may be found at our website: [www.dramaticpublishing.com](http://www.dramaticpublishing.com), or we may be contacted by mail at: DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, 311 Washington St., Woodstock IL 60098.

COPYRIGHT LAW GIVES THE AUTHOR OR THE AUTHOR'S AGENT THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO MAKE COPIES. This law provides authors with a fair return for their creative efforts. Authors earn their living from the royalties they receive from book sales and from the performance of their work. Conscientious observance of copyright law is not only ethical, it encourages authors to continue their creative work. This work is fully protected by copyright. No alterations, deletions or substitutions may be made in the work without the prior written consent of the publisher. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, videotape, film, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. It may not be performed either by professionals or amateurs without payment of royalty. All rights, including, but not limited to, the professional, motion picture, radio, television, videotape, foreign language, tabloid, recitation, lecturing, publication and reading, are reserved.

For performance of any songs, music and recordings mentioned in this play which are in copyright, the permission of the copyright owners must be obtained or other songs and recordings in the public domain substituted.

©MMXII by  
JAMES STILL

Printed in the United States of America  
*All Rights Reserved*  
(THE HEAVENS ARE HUNG IN BLACK)

For inquiries concerning all other rights, contact:  
Creative Artists Agency, 162 Fifth Ave., 6th floor,  
New York NY 10010 • Phone: (212) 277-9000

ISBN: 978-1-58342-768-2

## IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

All producers of the play must give credit to the author of the play in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and in all instances in which the title of the play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the play and/or a production. The name of the author must also appear on a separate line, on which no other name appears, immediately following the title and must appear in size of type not less than fifty percent (50%) the size of the title type. Biographical information on the author, if included in the playbook, may be used in all programs. *In all programs this notice must appear:*

“Produced by special arrangement with  
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY of Woodstock, Illinois”

In addition, all producers of the play must include the following acknowledgment on the title page of all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and on all advertising and promotional materials:

“Commissioned and originally produced by Ford’s Theatre, Washington, D.C., Paul R. Tetreault, director, with funds provided by BAE Systems, Verizon, BP America, Visa Inc., National Endowment for the Arts and the D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities. Commissioned in celebration of the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commemoration and the reopening of Ford’s Theatre in February 2009.

*Sleep hath its own world,  
A boundary between the things misnamed  
Death and existence: Sleep hath its own world,  
And a wide realm of wild reality,  
And dreams in their development have breath,  
And tears, and tortures, and the touch of joy;  
They leave a weight upon our waking thoughts,  
They take a weight from off waking toils,  
They do divide our being; they become  
A portion of ourselves as of our time,  
And look like heralds of eternity;  
They pass like spirits of the past—they speak  
Like sibyls of the future; they have power—  
The tyranny of pleasure and of pain;  
They make us what we were not—what they will,  
And shake us with the vision that's gone by,  
The dread of vanished shadows.*

— Lord Byron, from *The Dream* (I)

“The realist’s ruthless searching gives the necessary facts. Yet the realist is ill-advised to scorn the idealist’s sensitivity to those soul qualities of Lincoln which documentary facts alone may not disclose.”

— Benjamin P. Thomas, *A Portrait for Posterity: Lincoln and His Biographers* (1947)

*The Heavens Are Hung in Black* was commissioned and premiered at Ford's Theatre, Washington, D.C., on February 8, 2009. The artistic team was Stephen Rayne, director; Takeshi Kata, scenic design; Wade Laboissonniere, costume design; Pat Collins, lighting design; Ryan Rumery, sound design and original music; Clint Allen, video design; Cookie Jordan, wig and makeup design; Jim Carnahan, C.S.A. and Stephen Kopel, New York Casting. Brandon Prendergast was the production stage manager and Kate Kilbane was the assistant stage manager.

The Cast (in order of appearance) was:

David Selby (Abraham Lincoln)  
Benjamin Cook (Tad Lincoln)  
Jonathan Fielding (John Hay)  
Scott Westerman (Ward Lamon, Billy Brown)  
David Emerson Toney (Butler, Dred Scott, Old Black Soldier,  
Uncle Tom)  
Michael Goodwin (Walt Whitman)  
Steven Carpenter (Union Major, Exeter)  
Norman Aronovic (John Brown, Canterbury)  
Robin Moseley (Mary Todd Lincoln)  
Hugh Nees (Edwin Stanton, Stephen Douglas)  
Edward James Hyland (William Seward, Jefferson Davis)  
Beth Hylton (Mrs. Winston, Young Woman)  
Chaney Tullos (Thomas Haley, Bedford)  
Benjamin Schiffbauer (Young Soldier)  
James Chatham (Willie Lincoln, Newsboy)  
Michael Kramer (Edwin Booth)  
Jonathan Watkins (Soldier, Bates)  
Understudies: Michael Bannigan, James Denvil,  
Jefferson A. Russell, Kimberly Schraf



In a revised script, *The Heavens Are Hung in Black* was produced at the Indiana Repertory Theatre (Janet Allen, artistic director, Steven Stolen, managing director) in Indianapolis, Ind., on October 9, 2009. The artistic team was Peter Amster, director; Russell Metheny, scenic design; Tracy Dorman, costume design; Lap Chi Chu, lighting design; Victoria Delorio, composer and sound design; Richard J Roberts, dramaturg; Claire Simon Casting, Chicago Casting. Nathan Garrison was the stage manager.

The Cast (in order of appearance) was:

Nicholas Hormann (Abraham Lincoln)

Anthony Prostyakov (Tad Lincoln)

Jason Bradley (John Hay)

Adam Crowe (Ward Hill Lamon)

David Alan Anderson (Servant, Dred Scott, Old Soldier,  
Uncle Tom)

Ryan Artzberger (Walt Whitman)

Martin Yurek (Union Officer, Edwin Booth)

Robert Neal (John Brown, Billy Brown)

Mary Beth Fisher (Mary Todd Lincoln)

Robert Elliott (Edwin Stanton, Stephen Douglas)

Patrick Clear (William Seward, Jefferson Davis)

Diane Kondrat (Mrs. Winston, Young Woman)

Nick Abeel (Thomas Haley)

Gus Leagre (Willie Lincoln, Newsboy)

The Ensemble (Soldiers and Actors)

## NOTES ON RESEARCH:

While I'm not certain it can be verified, several sources claim Abraham Lincoln to be the most written-about American of all time and second only to Jesus as the most written-about person throughout all of history. Having fallen (willingly) down into the rabbit hole of research in the pursuit of all things Lincoln, I can only say there is no shortage of information available to anyone who wants to learn almost anything about Mr. Lincoln. As in all research, there are parts of his story disputed by some and argued by many. The goal of my play is not to join or challenge any one group of believers (romantics, cynics and everyone in between) but to suggest my own version of Lincoln based on all that I've read and researched. A note I made to myself in 2006 about this project: "Goal: not to write a play about history, but a play that takes place in the past and has relevance for the present." That thought scribbled down to myself was something I returned to again and again.

On to the delicate subject of research and scholarship. I have tried to be very careful about how my research has influenced *The Heavens Are Hung in Black*, knowing that I am standing on the very scholarly and thoughtful shoulders of great historians and writers who have staked years and careers on their meticulously noted and footnoted books about Mr. Lincoln. I stand in awe of all of them and offer my congratulations and thanks. What I ultimately chose to write about and the ways I wrote about it have been choices genuinely driven by personal interests; I acknowledge also that I intuitively decided what to both explore further and also to avoid. For example, I have consciously chosen not to read some of the most famous recent books about Lincoln (Doris Kearns Goodwin's prize-winning *Team of Rivals* being an obvious omission) because, frankly, I feared I would unconsciously steal from such a book. Chalk that up to my own weakness as a writer, but I have too much respect

for other writers to risk something so unconscionable even if it were unconsciously committed. Also, it must be noted: plays are different than books. Dramatic action is different from narrative.

Anything that is directly quoted in the play is from documents in the public domain—music/lyrics, war reports, personal letters, poetry, writings by Lincoln himself. I can't thank enough, the various libraries and their special collections and librarians who have assisted me both in person and online.

*The Heavens Are Hung in Black*, as ambitious as it sets out to be, necessarily leaves out much of the story, some of the complexity, and an even bigger parade of colorful characters. It would require a cast of 100 actors to capture the people surrounding Lincoln in Washington from 1860-1865. For this reason, I have taken some dramatic liberties with timelines and characters who may be standing in for one, two or even three other characters in terms of function in Lincoln's daily life. Two examples: Walt Whitman didn't arrive in Washington until later in 1862 and I have him in the play throughout all of 1862. Another example is that John Hay was one of two and sometimes three personal secretaries that worked for Lincoln (John Nicolay and William Stoddard being the most documented). I chose John Hay because I felt personally that it was his relationship with Lincoln that was most indicative of what I was trying to write about. He seemed to draw Lincoln out the most, he was the youngest and seemed most like a son to Lincoln, and he had a particular knack for language.

Much has been written about Lincoln's ability to tell a story, spin a yarn, and make a point through metaphor. It is a trait that might be difficult to fathom through a contemporary lens. Was he processing on his feet and buying himself time, was he deflecting, was he proving his points in a roundabout way, was he using humor to disarm the listener rather than get lost in conflict? Surely

Lincoln used this personal technique for all of these reasons all of the time. And I also take him at his word: he told funny and strange stories because he had to, he needed the relief from unrelentingly difficult times and the way he naturally internalized that agony. Finally, I'm of the opinion that it is impossible for anyone to write the definitive story about Lincoln, impossible for anyone to have the last word. In that spirit, *The Heavens Are Hung in Black* is a play both modest and ambitious in its approach to exploring about eight months in the life of Abraham Lincoln. I have no idea what Mr. Lincoln might have made of what I'm writing but I do know that he's been a strange and funny guest in my heart. He hasn't made me feel more presidential, but he has made me feel more human.

— James Still, 2009

# The Heavens Are Hung in Black

## CHARACTERS

(Note: in the original production the play was performed with a cast of 17 actors; subsequent productions have been performed with a minimum cast of 14 actors.)

- Abraham Lincoln . . . . . president of the United States  
Tad Lincoln . . . . . Lincoln's 9-year-old son  
John Hay . . . . . Lincoln's personal secretary  
Ward Hill Lamon . . . . . U.S. Marshall of the  
District of Columbia  
Black Servant . . . . . in the White House  
Walt Whitman . . . . . an American poet  
Union Officer  
John Brown . . . . . a ghost, the abolitionist  
Mary Todd Lincoln . . . . . Lincoln's wife  
Soldiers . . . . . Union and Confederate  
Edwin Stanton . . . . . Secretary of War  
William Seward . . . . . Secretary of State  
Mrs. Winston . . . . . mother of a Confederate soldier  
Thomas Haley . . . . . a young Union soldier  
Jefferson Davis . . . . . president of the Confederate States  
of America  
Willie Lincoln . . . . . a ghost, Lincoln's 11-year-old son  
Stephen Douglas . . . . . a ghost, the senator from Illinois

Dred Scott. . . . . a ghost, a slave who sued for his freedom  
Edwin Booth . . . . . an American actor  
Actors and Staff . . . . . Edwin Booth's company rehearsing  
*Henry V*  
Cleaning Man . . . . . an African-American man  
Old Black Soldier . . . . . the oldest soldier in the Union  
Billy Brown . . . . . a man from Springfield, Illinois  
Newsboy . . . . . a young boy who looks like Willie Lincoln  
Young Woman . . . . . an orphan  
Uncle Tom . . . . . the character from the novel  
*Uncle Tom's Cabin*  
21<sup>st</sup>-Century Man . . . . . an African-American man  
from the future

# ACT ONE

IN DARKNESS:

*THE SOUND OF KNOCKING ON A DOOR. Loud but far away, strange, another world.*

*THEN A SINGLE LIGHT ON A BLACK STOVEPIPE HAT, upside down, papers and memorabilia crammed inside, overflowing, spilling out.*

*Gas fixtures begin to glow. A fire suddenly burns in a fireplace.*

*In shadowy near-darkness, a tall man stands at a window looking out, his back to us. His silhouette tells us all we need to know: it's LINCOLN.*

*We're inside the White House—the president's second-story office.*

*Early spring, 1862. Evening.*

*The stovepipe hat sits on a big walnut table in the middle of the room.*

*An old mahogany desk with pigeonholes stuffed with papers is shoved against a wall. There are two much-used sofas, several wooden chairs.*

*Folios of maps lean against the walls and behind the sofas. More maps cover the dark green walls. Books litter the floor. Newspapers are stacked on tables around the office. Two large wicker baskets are filled with debris.*

*The scene suggests motion, energy, process...anything but “presidential.”*

*SOUND: DISTANT ARTILLERY.*

*ADD: DRUMS PLAYING FARAWAY.*

*ADD: TAP-TAP-TAPPING OF A TELEGRAPH.*

*ADD: DOOR KNOCKING.*

*LINCOLN turns and we see his face for he first time. He looks older than his fifty-three years and seems to look right at us. One other thing: tears are streaming down his face. He looks out at us, crying, studying us. It is intimate, public—and unnerving. He shakes it off and goes to his desk, tries to throw himself into the work at hand.*

*ALL THE SOUNDS GET LOUDER AND LOUDER AND LOUDER until a CHILD’S VOICE interrupts:)*

*TAD (offstage). Papa! Papa!*

*(LINCOLN wipes away tears as*

*Nine-year-old TAD LINCOLN gallops into the room, out of breath, dragging a dirty old rag doll by one arm.)*



TAD (*cont'd*). Papa! Papa!

*(TAD is all unfocused energy, knocking into anything in his way, a thunderbolt on two unstoppable legs.)*

*(LINCOLN's face brightens like a light turning on, years melting into tenderness.)*

LINCOLN. Well, well, friend, what can I do for you?

*(TAD runs around and around the desk, his father playfully chasing after him, both laughing. TAD suddenly turns and runs right into LINCOLN's arms, hugging his father tight.)*

LINCOLN (*cont'd*). My blessed, blessed fellow.

*(LINCOLN doesn't want to let go but TAD won't have any of it, wiggles free and salutes.)*

TAD. NOT a fellow—

LINCOLN. No?

TAD. Lieutenant!

LINCOLN (*saluting*). Young SIR!

TAD. I'm THIRD Lieutenant! (*He holds up his rag doll.*)

LINCOLN. Ah! I see you found your soldier boy.

TAD. Jack is my PRISONER.

LINCOLN. What are the charges?

TAD. Jack is bad. Jack is arrested for sleeping on duty.

Jack must be shot! DEAD! (*To Jack the Doll.*) Prepare to die!

LINCOLN. You'd have a man shot for sleeping on duty?

*(TAD nods vigorously.)*

LINCOLN *(cont'd., playing along, grave)*. No, sir, won't do it, can't allow it. This soldier boy deserves another chance. *(He reaches inside the overturned stovepipe hat.)* Let me check here in my office, yes, yes—ah! *(He magically pulls a small scrap of paper out of the hat, "reads":)* "Jack the Doll is to be pardoned. A. Lincoln."

*(TAD studies the pardon as if reading it, then impulsively wads up the paper and pops it in his mouth.)*

TAD *(to Jack, chewing vigorously)*. Prepare to DIE, DIE, DIE!!!

LINCOLN. How about tomorrow you and I ride the horses down Pennsylvania Avenue?

TAD. Yes! *(He throws himself into his father's lap, hugs him around the neck. Then change-up:)* Not Willie.

LINCOLN. No. Not Willie. Willie's gone.

TAD. No, Papa. Willie is in heaven. *(Repeating what he's heard.)* He was too good for this world.

*(TAD pulls free and suddenly runs across the room, knocking over whatever's in his path, dragging poor Jack with him.)*

*(At the door, TAD runs hard right into JOHN HAY, dropping Jack. HAY picks up the doll which TAD grabs ferociously—)*

TAD (*cont'd*). MINE!!! (*He gives JOHN HAY a good kick in the shin and races out.*)

(*JOHN HAY. Twenty-four years old, handsome, stylishly dressed. Not a huge fan of children. Especially TAD.*)

JOHN HAY. Shall I go after him, Mr. President?

LINCOLN. You'd never catch him.

JOHN HAY (*politic*). The boy certainly has—*elan*.

LINCOLN (*proud*). You mean he's all cannons and fireworks.

JOHN HAY (*not exactly*). Yes...cannons and fireworks—yes, sir.

LINCOLN. Mrs. Lincoln had desired a girl. But it was Tad who came into the world squirming like a tadpole. I reckon he's not afraid of anything. Least of all, me!

JOHN HAY. No, he adores *you*.

LINCOLN. My own father was a miracle of meanness. Let him run free. I reckon there's enough time for Tad to learn his letters and numbers, enough time to get pokey like the rest of us.

JOHN HAY. Not likely. Yesterday he drove a team of goats through the East Room—riding behind them on a kitchen chair.

LINCOLN (*laughing*). I-jings! I wish I'd seen that. Where did he get the goats?

JOHN HAY. I couldn't say, sir. But I fear the kitchen staff is bent on revenge.

LINCOLN. Then two bits to none this week's menu features a worn-out goat or two.

JOHN HAY. You found the report from the congressional committee.

LINCOLN. I reckon they've heard of my sleep troubles. *(He drops the voluminous report on the table with a thud.)* Why can't Congress occasionally exhibit a grain of common sense? If I send a man to buy me a horse I expect him to tell me its POINTS—not how many HAIRS there are in its tail. Well. One war at a time. *(Beat.)* I'll make one last try at reading this sleep tonic then make another trip over to the War Department to see what we hear from our young Napoleon.

JOHN HAY. General McClellan is our best hope?

*(LINCOLN focuses on the report, doesn't answer. HAY tries again, places newspapers on LINCOLN's desk.)*

JOHN HAY *(cont'd)*. With the orders not to publish anything related to army movements—the newspapers have been rather stale. *(Driving.)* The public is on tiptoe to learn any news.

LINCOLN. So is the president.

JOHN HAY *(pressing)*. Horace Greeley thinks we've lost our chance at taking Richmond. He's on about Emancipation again.

LINCOLN *(vague)*. Well, if the end brings me out right, what's said against me won't amount to anything. And if it brings me out wrong, ten thousand angels swearing I'm right won't make any difference anyway. *(He knows what HAY is after, throws him a bone.)* There could be a surprise in the works, John. That's all I'll say.

JOHN HAY. So it's finished then?

LINCOLN. Finished?

JOHN HAY. Your—appointment—with Mrs. Lincoln—and her guests.

LINCOLN. Oh I suspect they'll carry on for many more strikes of the clock. Charlatans have great stamina.

JOHN HAY. Sir?

LINCOLN. Mrs. Lincoln's guests. Downstairs in the Red Room. They claim to be conversing with spirits. Every scritch-scratch and tap-tap-tap of the table is meant to be a message from the dead.

JOHN HAY. You seem skeptical.

LINCOLN. Callin' a dog's tail a leg doesn't make it a leg. No, John, the seance wasn't finished—but I was.

JOHN HAY. No visitation from any spirits then, nothing from the beyond?

LINCOLN. Not even a single babel of incoherence as far as I could tell. Oh, someone coughed once and the entire mess of them mistook it for a visit from Lord Byron. It's queer with those types: they're interested in what you have to say only if you're dead. The entire exhibition made me want to hang myself so I took leave before I expired and became a visiting spirit myself. (*HAY laughs.*) I find the theatre far more entertaining than the occult—even though the two somehow hide behind the same family tree. Do spirits have hearty lungs?

JOHN HAY. Sir?

LINCOLN. Earlier, downstairs, I sat in the dark, holding Mrs. Lincoln's hand, thinking that perhaps the spirits couldn't be heard over the drums, the artillery, the War Department's telegraph tap-tap-tapping in my head. I wonder.

JOHN HAY. Yes?

LINCOLN. No. The only sounds I heard in said seance were the charlatans counting their money under the table. Mrs. Lincoln seems determined to make them the richest folk in Washington City. "*Fair is foul and foul is fair.*"

JOHN HAY (*with care*). Mrs. Lincoln...?

LINCOLN. She remains. (*Off HAY's look.*) It appears to give her comfort. One of the few things.

JOHN HAY. Yes, sir.

(*LINCOLN crosses to the windows.*)

LINCOLN. "*Fair is foul and foul is fair  
Hover through the fog and filthy air...*"

JOHN HAY. A fire broke out this morning on the corner of the Avenue and 7th. It's been burning most of the day. Six stores and a hotel. (*Unyielding, LINCOLN stares out the windows.*) Was there opportunity to review papers sent over by the War Department? (*Pressing, carefully.*) I had left the courts-martial on your desk, for signature. Yesterday.

LINCOLN. The whole planet's on fire.

(*HAY waits for LINCOLN, then pushes ahead, presents papers to LINCOLN with ritual and efficiency.*)

JOHN HAY. Papers and treaty signed at Paola, Kansas, with united tribes of the Kaskaskia, Peoria and Piankashaw Indians. (*LINCOLN ignores him.*) A letter to Queen Isabelle congratulating Spain on the birth of the prince. A letter of sympathy to Queen Victoria on the death of her husband, Prince Albert—

LINCOLN. I'll write that one in my own hand.

JOHN HAY. Vice President Hamlin requests that his nephew be given military appointment.

LINCOLN. Forward that one to Stanton.

JOHN HAY (*pressing again*). Secretary Stanton also requires your signatures on the courts-martial. He asked about them today, again.

LINCOLN. I pardoned Jack.

JOHN HAY. Jack?

LINCOLN. Tad's doll. Jack. I pardoned him.

JOHN HAY. Was that necessary, sir?

LINCOLN. Tad had sentenced him to death for sleeping on the job. (*Musing.*) I envy anyone their sleep—no matter \*\* how it comes to them.

WARD LAMON (*offstage, overlapping*). \*\* Four hundred twenty-three, four hundred twenty-four—

LINCOLN. Death may be the surest sleep of all.

WARD LAMON (*offstage*). Four hundred twenty-five—

JOHN HAY. Or the least interrupted.

*(WARD HILL LAMON barges into the room, counting each step as he moves toward LINCOLN. He's in his late thirties. Big, tall, loud, something from the Wild West. He wears two revolvers, a Bowie knife and brass knuckles.)*

WARD LAMON.

Four hundred  
twenty-six, four  
hundred twenty-  
SEVEN!

LINCOLN (*to HAY*).

Apparently the marshal  
has finally learned  
how to count.

*(LINCOLN enjoys his old friend's theatrics. There's an easy sense of history between them.)*

WARD LAMON. Happy to see me?

LINCOLN. Pleased as a pup with two tails. How are you?

WARD LAMON. Tolerably well.

LINCOLN. That reminds me of a story about a man back in—

WARD LAMON. Now don't get me turned around, Abe. I am making a point.

*(LAMON goes to the windows, peeking out. HAY exits with a stack of papers.)*

WARD LAMON *(cont'd)*. It's four hundred twenty-seven steps from the rickety gates of this old house, across the yard, through the front door, up the steps, down the hall, into this room and to this very spot where I stand now—a few feet from the president.

LINCOLN. There you go experimentin' with the truth again.

WARD LAMON. Anyone can walk in here, Abe! Anyone, anytime. Four hundred and twenty-seven steps is the only thing separating you from an unhappy rebel lookin' to make you buzzard bait.

LINCOLN. Go away, Marshall.

WARD LAMON *(playing his trump card)*. I have reports that you were knocking around the streets after dark again. Alone.

LINCOLN. I wasn't alone. I was carrying a cane. *(Accusing him.)* Mrs. Lincoln has a notion in her head that I shall be assassinated, so to please her I take a cane



whenever I go to the War Department—when I don't forget it.

*(LAMON doesn't see the humor.)*

*HAY reenters with more papers and reports, prioritizing piles on the president's desk.)*

LINCOLN *(cont'd)*. Walking alone at night is the only time I get peace and quiet.

WARD LAMON. There will be plenty of that when this is all over and we're all back in Springfield.

LINCOLN. Previously you've told me not to show myself in crowds. Now you're telling me not to show myself when there ARE no crowds. Which is it, Counselor?

*(LAMON silently makes it clear he'd like to be alone with LINCOLN. HAY waits for a signal from LINCOLN.)*

LINCOLN *(cont'd)*. He can stay. Young John is the keeper of my conscience.

WARD LAMON. You could be in danger, Abe.

LINCOLN *(to HAY)*. This boy is a monomaniac on the subject of my safety. Obviously he wants me to sit on his lap all the live-long day.

WARD LAMON.  
Why do you have to  
be so bone-  
headed??

LINCOLN.  
  
Will you ever  
forgive me for  
draggin' you to

this stinkin'  
swamp they call  
Washington City?

WARD LAMON. Hell no!

LINCOLN. From the upstairs windows, even through a looking glass, we can't see the busy wilderness of Springfield from here—no matter how much we miss it.

WARD LAMON. Abe—

*(KNOCKING SOUND, only LINCOLN hears it.)*

LINCOLN. When we first moved here a thousand years ago—whenever I felt like lettin' off an Illinois yell, I'd sneak up to the highest window in the house...but all I could see was the Confederate flags flying over Alexandria. *(Beat.)* All of my sons were born in Springfield.

*(MORE KNOCKING.)*

LINCOLN *(cont'd)*. John?

JOHN HAY. Sir?

LINCOLN. The door!

JOHN HAY *(confused)*. Sir?

LINCOLN *(to LAMON)*. Mrs. Lincoln finds it unbecoming for the president to answer his own door.

*(MORE LOUD KNOCKING. LINCOLN looks at HAY who exits, completely baffled.)*

LINCOLN *(cont'd)*. This city taunts me. Not the people—the city. The dome of the Capitol—at night it looks like

a skeleton, all bones in the moonlight, forever unfinished. The Treasury, the Post Office, the Department of Interior...unfinished. (*At window.*) Worst of all is the monument to Washington himself. We say his name in awe but there it sits, an unfinished pile of rocks... Everything is unfinished here. Folks thought this war would amount to nothing more than a skirmish, two weeks and it would all be over. (*Shrugs.*) I'm afraid it only gets harder drawing this sled uphill.

*(Truth:)*

LINCOLN (*cont'd*). But of course today is Thursday.

*(HAY reenters, caught in the silence.)*

JOHN HAY (*off LINCOLN's look*). There's no one there, sir.

LINCOLN. When you have a restless bear on your hands, Hill, and he wants to run away—better let him.

WARD LAMON. They shoot bears, Abe. (*He exits.*)

*(HAY stands at the ready with papers and folders, waiting for any opening.)*

LINCOLN (*amused*). Come on then, son. Let's have it.

*(HAY is relieved to finally place the courts-martial in front of LINCOLN.)*

LINCOLN (*cont'd*). No, no, not those. Those! My love letters.