

1865

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a play

by  
Michael Perlmutter



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1719 N. 6th St  
Port Hueneme, CA 93041  
805-469-2897  
[lmjdj@msn.com](mailto:lmjdj@msn.com)  
[www.DirectingHamlet.com](http://www.DirectingHamlet.com)

CHARACTERS  
(in order of appearance)

JENNA LaFLEUR	.....	a stock company actress for Ford's Theatre in her early/mid thirties
SUZANNE HATTERSON	.....	a stock company actress for Ford's Theatre in her late fifties
CAPTAIN DONNESSEY	.....	a Captain of the Union army in his twenties
JACOB RITTER	.....	a stagehand for Ford's Theatre in his late twenties/early thirties
CYNTHIA LEWIS	.....	a stock company actress for Ford's Theatre in her mid teens/approaching twenty
FRANK MATTHEWS	.....	a stock company actor for Ford's Theatre in his mid forties/early fifties
MARTIN OSBOURNE	.....	a stock company actor for Ford's Theatre in his mid forties to mid fifties
PETER DANIELS	.....	a stock company actor for Ford's Theatre in his early/mid thirties
NED SPRANG	.....	a stagehand for Ford's Theatre in his mid thirties/early forties

SETTING

Ford's Theatre, Washington D.C.

TIME

April 14, 1865. Good Friday

*ACT I*

Scene 1 April 14, 1865 11:45 pm.

Scene 2 April 15, 1865 1:30 am

*ACT II*

Scene 3 April 15, 1865 3:20 am

Scene 4 April 15, 1865 7:10 am

Scene 5 Epilogue

*"The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,  
But in ourselves, that we are underlings."*

*—William Shakespeare  
[Julius Caesar; Act 1, sc2]*

2)

The following story though based on true events is fictitious.  
All characters appearing in this work are fictitious.  
Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

**A NOTE ON THE DIALOGUE:**

1. A slash “ / “ indicates the character with the next line of dialogue begins his or her speech (overlapping dialogue).
2. Dialogue in brackets “ [ ] ” is unspoken, although the character is thinking it.  
*(please note these passages will also be highlighted in grey in this script)*
3. Dialogue in parenthesis “ ( ) ” is spoken aloud but is an aside.  
*(also note that these passages are NOT highlighted and SHOULD BE read aloud)*
4. Grammatical errors; sentences beginning in lower case; or UPPER CASE; used in place of common punctuation (even a few misspellings), were, indeed, intended.

ACT I

(At rise:

The curtain is already up as the audience enters. The stage is that of a traditional theatre circa 1860. The space itself is high enough to allow scenery to be flown in from above. A set of painted Parlor room backdrops hang, as if floating in the air, six to eight feet above the floor, offering a clear view to the backstage brick wall. A stage door can be found up right. The stage left and right wing curtains have been torn and various props, furniture and tables are strewn about what is left of the stage. Footlights lay broken, while others cast an ominous light across the floor boards. Flags that once adorned the far left box droop, wilted, torn and frail, over the stage. A copy of the famous unfinished portrait of President George Washington hangs between the flags in silent witness to the pandemonium that has preceded this hour.

JENNA LaFLEUR, an actress in her early/mid-thirties enters stage from the wings and surveys the broken carnage before her. She looks out into the audience; we can see the overturned and broken seats here through her eyes. Lost in thought she looks up into the far left box and watches as her mind replays the moments from earlier this night. Her attention drifts from the now broken railing hanging over the far left box seats—to center stage—to the orchestra then back out the wings and off through the now locked stage door. She wipes a tear from her cheek as she looks back out into the audience.)

JENNA

[damn ... What a waste ... How terribly sad.]

(JENNA reaches into her purse to find a cigarette. She looks from side to side to see if anyone else is there. She stoops down to a foot lamp but just before she lights up:)

Hello?

Hello?

May we go home yet?

(Again, no reply. JENNA shrugs and lights up. She surveys the stage again; she exhales, looking out again, lost in thought and silence. After a timely pause:)

SUZANNE (offstage)

Miss La Fleur?

(JENNA quickly extinguishes the cigarette, carefully so as to save its remnants for later, as SUZANNE HATTERSON, a matronly woman in her spry fifties enters from the right wings.)

SUZANNE

(Entering; There is a hint of a British accent to her speech:)  
It wasn't my aim to startle you, child. / Should you be—

JENNA

[You caught me] tidying up.  
(She drops the butt in her purse.)

SUZANNE

Let the men [do that].  
(As she too surveys the chaos:)  
Has there been any news?

(JENNA shakes her head: no.)

SUZANNE

[Just as well.] I should believe we're safer here than anywhere else tonight.

JENNA

I'd prefer the safety of my own bed.

SUZANNE

Then you might'n have left when you had the opportunity. When we all [did].  
(Moves to an overturned sofa)  
Oblige me with this, would you, please?

JENNA

I thought you said to leave the tidying to the men.

SUZANNE

Cleaning, [yes]. I had inclination to sit down.

JENNA

(As they aright the sofa:)  
Where was this ... ?

SUZANNE

From the box. They sailed it over to make room in the midst of all the calamity.

(Once set right SUZANNE sits on one end, leaving ample room for JENNA who remains standing looking out.)

SUZANNE

For the love of Mike, dear, please, he [Lincoln] was in the rocker not this; rest your feet.

JENNA

(Looking out toward the lobby:)

No, I thought ... I saw [something]—I thought. Hello? Hello!?

SUZANNE

Hello!?

JENNA

Hello!!

SUZANNE

Hello!

(At the back of the audience one of the lobby doors open up. Looking toward the doorway all that can be seen is the silhouette of a soldier [CAPTAIN DONNESSEY—A bit young for an officer but these are desperate times after all], encased in the fire light of the lobby.)

CAPTAIN DONNESSEY

You—Ladies? Yes?

SUZANNE

Good evening to you, private.

CAPTAIN DONNESSEY

Captain.

SUZANNE

[Our] apologies.

JENNA

Any word?

CAPTAIN DONNESSEY

On?

JENNA

(*Isn't it obvious?*)

...When we might expect an escort out of here?

SUZANNE

The President; any word on the President?

CAPTAIN DONNESSEY

No changes to report. They've set him up across the street. Doctors are seeing to him over there.

SUZANNE

And your orders, Captain?

CAPTAIN DONNESSEY

[We're] stationed here, Ma'am. Holding down the theatre.

SUZANNE

Alone?

CAPTAIN DONNESSEY

[(there're three of us here; but why would you want to know?)] No, Ma'am.

(Acknowledging Jenna:)

Miss.

SUZANNE

"No one in"; "no one out"?

CAPTAIN DONNESSEY

Basically: yes, Ma'am.

(His attention is diverted off to someone else in the lobby.)

Yes, Sir, be right there sir.

(The door closes. The women are left again to fend for themselves. Pause.)

SUZANNE

Might reconsider lifting your legs.

JENNA

(Taking a seat after all:)

All I meant was to change out of my costume.

SUZANNE

I moved as quickly as I could fashion myself ... just .. not brisk enough

(JENNA says nothing. SUZANNE softly closes her eyes. Silence fills the room more than any words could.)

JENNA

Mrs. Hatterson? [What are you doing?]

SUZANNE

(Unflinching, eyes still closed.)

Praying, child. Times like these call for [prayer].

JENNA

Indeed, well ...this is what comes from presenting a play on Good Friday. Mock God and he'll mock you back.

SUZANNE

(Still in prayer:)

(He doesn't move in that spirit.)

JENNA

Mhmmm.

(Pause.)

SUZANNE

(Amen.)

JENNA

Amen.

SUZANNE

Continue your cigarette.

JENNA

...pardon?

SUZANNE

God told me. You need to settle your nerves?: carry on.

JENNA

"God" told you?

SUZANNE

[Forgive me for my subtle attempt at humor.] You think I haven't kept a watch on you girls? I'm aware of those of you who smoke and which of you ... well— smoking would be considered the lesser sin if you gather [what I'm saying] ...

JENNA

Later perhaps.



SUZANNE

You should refrain, my dear: nasty habit—smells terrible and all the money goes to support the South. And the men ... well ...

(Slight pause.)

JENNA

They're saying it was Mr. Wilkes Booth.

SUZANNE

They do say that, yes.

JENNA

Did you see him?

SUZANNE

O, I had just exited, I'm afraid, my back was to it all, I was staring at nothing but the fly ropes. By the time I'd turned around all manner were clamoring to get on. Half the audience. Doctors. Looters. I do believe I saw one young man steal away with the cushions from the rocking chair he was [sitting in when *it* happened]; it's hardly right. But there again, I have no reason to presume anyone who said it was Mr. Booth was lying over what they saw. You fancy the man?

I've seen him cast an eye you as well.

JENNA

Yes, well ... you may keep those ideas to yourself, thank you.

SUZANNE

You have anyone out there waiting for you? Someone you're / worried about?

JENNA

No, sorry; You—your husband, of course?

SUZANNE

I expect he's fast asleep by now. He won't stir till the sun peaks. Military canons couldn't wake him.

JENNA

You're not bothered for his safety?

SUZANNE

... I should be, shouldn't I?

JENNA

And and you have a son, if I recall ...

SUZANNE

California; followed the gold. You never asked of my family before. In fact, I can't recall us ever sharing anything more than pleasantries before this night.

JENNA

... I'm sorry. I mean no—...

SUZANNE

Do you know where he was off to next? Mr. Booth?

JENNA

I don't ... keep company with Wilkes Booth.

SUZANNE

He was here earlier today; he wasn't calling?

JENNA

Collecting his mail, I would gather: the Fords let him use the address here. I have *nothing* to—I don't know where you've gotten / your notions ...

SUZANNE

Don't misunderstand me: he's a right looking man. If I were of your age, I wouldn't be shy to admit it. I mean nothing by it.

(JENNA is at a loss for what to say.)

SUZANNE

Before this night, of course.

JENNA

... Mrs. Hatterson ...

SUZANNE

Whatever has transpired in the past between the two of you: might be best not mention.

JENNA

...There is nothing there to speak of.

SUZANNE

Good, we'll just leave it lie there then.

(JACOB RITTER and CYNTHIA LEWIS enter from the wings. JACOB, is a stagehand in his mid-thirties and CYNTHIA a young actress, barely old enough to be holding down a job. The two are foolish enough to think

that they have been successful at keeping their affair a secret. JACOB tries the back wall door, only to find it chained shut from the outside, he continues downstage, on a mission:)

JACOB

How in the love of God do you get out of this place?

SUZANNE

[Excuse me?] Are you addressing us?

CYNTHIA

Mrs. Hatterson. Miss LaFleur.

JACOB

[Are] all the exits blocked?

FRANK

(Entering after them, FRANK, an actor, forty-fifty )

Dislodged you two out of the costume room finally, did they?

(JACOB says nothing; but clearly looks to FRANK, noting his own arrival at their heels. There is an awkward silence.)

CYNTHIA

Mr. Ritter here was gentleman enough to wake me.

JACOB

Is there a way—

SUZANNE

There are no passages out, my dears; they've bolted us in for the night. "No one in / no one out."

JACOB

(Moves out to the edge of the stage.)

Not a chance of it.

FRANK

I knew I shoulda called on that last hand.

SUZANNE

For our own good, they would have us convinced. It would seem we are a threat to the nation.

JENNA

Please, be still.

CYNTHIA

I ... must go home. My parents ...

SUZANNE

I'm afraid your parents will have to wait, my dear.

(JACOB hops off stage into the audience and heads toward the lobby.)

SUZANNE

It won't do you any good [Mr.— .. what is his name?].

JENNA

We've already petitioned.

(But JACOB ignores them and pulls open the door only to be blocked by CAPTAIN DONNESSEY.)

CAPTAIN DONNESSEY

Back in, Sir.

JACOB

(Attempting instead to move past him:)

Step aside, please.

CAPTAIN DONNESSEY

Stand down.

JACOB

I'm going home.

CAPTAIN DONNESSEY

Not on my watch.

JACOB

I'm not asking.

(And with that JACOB is marched back into the theatre at rifle point by CAPTAIN DONNESSEY.)

CAPTAIN DONNESSEY

(Hollering back to the lobby:)

I've got this.

CAPTAIN DONNESSEY (Continued:)

(To the group inside:)

Is this here everyone?

FRANK

... There are two more men upstairs. We were ... [in the middle of a card game.]

CAPTAIN DONNESSEY

Get them down here. Stay away from windows. I advise you stay together in here.

JENNA

What is happening out there?

CAPTAIN DONNESSEY

[Nothing to be concerned with]: a few gathering ... Civilians .. Soldiers—nothing to be— ... Has everyone here made your statements?

JACOB

[State—?: Yeah], I'll make a statement. It was John Wilkes Booth. I saw him—now can I go home?

CAPTAIN DONNESSEY

Our orders are to keep you here.

FRANK

You said the design was to escort us across the street for inquiry and then let us go.

CAPTAIN DONNESSEY

Designs change.  
We don't need another incident.

FRANK

Incident?

CYNTHIA

Did something happen—someone get hurt?

SUZANNE

Other than the President, of course?

CAPTAIN DONNESSEY

And they're being attended to. [For the] time being I suggest you all stay here: in this room.

FRANK

That your polite way of saying that's an order? ...—I'll go assemble [the others] ...

CAPTAIN DONNESSEY

If you would.

(To JACOB as FRANK exits:)

You don't want to push your way out there, sir, it isn't safe.

JACOB

I've done nothing wrong. / We've—

CAPTAIN DONNESSEY

Then let's just keep it that way. Agreed?

(He backs himself out into the lobby.)

(Pause. JACOB, from the aisle, stares out at the group onstage, who in turn stare back.)

SUZANNE

I believe they have us outnumbered.

JACOB

"Bully."

CYNTHIA

(Offering him to sit next to her on some of the strewn furniture as JACOB travels back down the aisle to the stage.)

Jake—Mr. Ritter.

JENNA

Oh, now, there's no need for pretense.

SUZANNE

Ohhh but there is: Keeping up appearances is the first step to correcting behavior.

(JACOB chooses not to respond. He reaches the stage's apron and hops up onto stage without using the stairs. He looks around, choosing for the moment not to sit at all.)

SUZANNE

Could you procure yourself a broom?

JACOB

I'm on my own time now, Mrs. Happerson, not the company's.

SUZANNE

Hatterson.

JACOB

That's what I said.

SUZANNE

Then your P's should be pronounced "tuh".

(A beat.)

JACOB

I'll find a broom.

SUZANNE

(To Cynthia:)

How many years on you?

Certainly old enough to know better. He's not even an actor; he's a stagehand.

CYNTHIA

I'm afraid I [haven't the faintest idea] what you're talking about.

SUZANNE

Appearances, honey. I'm addressing your reputation.

(As JACOB returns with a broom.)

Over there: the broken glass.

(Pause: the women say nothing as JACOB sweeps up what debris he finds. FRANK, PETER and MARTIN enter from the wings. PETER, is an actor in his late twenties/mid-thirties. MARTIN a character actor in his fifties. As opposed to the previous young couple, these two do not seem in any way romantically involved. Though MARTIN's orientation may be in question, in 1865, it was never discussed openly.)

CYNTHIA

My father's going to be worried sick.

MARTIN

What's this about none of us being released?

JACOB

(yyyup)

MARTIN

Then it's true?

SUZANNE

The President is still alive, thank you very much [for your concern] and we are safer here than anywhere else tonight; am I the only one interested in what is actually occurring here this evening?

MARTIN

Where's Mr. Maddox?

SUZANNE

Whom?

MARTIN

The ... stage manager.

FRANK

Long gone.

MARTIN

I have a wife and children, if you please?

FRANK

We know. We know.

MARTIN

The little one's still teething.

FRANK

We know; we all know.

SUZANNE

Nobody else cares about history?

MARTIN

(Continuing his conversation with Frank:)

My apologies that you have no one but I do and I have need to get to them.

FRANK

Why; are you paying them by the hour?

MARTIN

I happen to care about my family, thank you very much, and for their well-being.

JENNA

Then you should have left before, along with the others. We all / should ha—



MARTIN

Forgive me if I was packing my belongings. Lord knows when they'll ever let any of us back in here again.

JACOB

No looting. No souvenirs.

(MARTIN eyes Cynthia in response to the same thought:  
"who's taking souvenirs?"—meaning Cynthia herself.)

FRANK

(To Martin:)

You were throwing papers along with the rest of us.

SUZANNE

("Throwing papers"?)

PETER

Where is Mr. Maddox? And that boy, Peanut? and uh Mr. Sprang, I think his name was.

JACOB

Sprang was there with you?

JENNA

(for Suzanne's benefit as asking:)

You were all playing cards?

FRANK

You need five for a decent table. Six to keep it interesting.

SUZANNE

The gentlemen you speak of never returned, I'm afraid.

PETER

Why not? Did they / let 'em—

JACOB

They let him go?

JENNA

They aren't speaking [on it].

SUZANNE

They were undoubtedly involved in the *incident* the Soldier was alluding to.

JACOB

Ahh.

MARTIN

What *incident*, (“other than”)?

SUZANNE

Someone was presumably hurt; they're not saying who, they're not saying what.

PETER

Peanut got himself kicked in the head when Wilkes jumped his horse getting away. Took it hard.

JENNA

So, you saw things; you saw it was Booth.

PETER

I ... didn't see anything. It's what I was told. Peanut was holding Wilke's horse at the backstage door there. He said Mr. Booth grabbed the reigns and kicked him away without so much as a word.

CYNTHIA

Then that must be it then. They were talking about Mr. Peanut.

JACOB

(Peanut's just what he's called. He's not a "mister"; he's just a kid.)

FRANK

No, I imagine the bluecoat was talking about something else. Peanut was playing cards with us up in the dressing room; he held a hand fine. Played better than ...  
(Indicates Martin)

JENNA

Never the less, it seems after the men and the boy were taken across for questioning—Something ensued and ... here we are.

MARTIN

For how long?

JENNA

(Shrugs.)

(I just wanted to feel the comfort of my own clothes.)

CYNTHIA

Yes. Exactly the same. Then I fell asleep.