

In Splendid Error

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(In Order of Appearance)

THE REVEREND LOGUEN
 JOSHUA
 ANNA DOUGLASS
 LEWIS DOUGLASS
 GEORGE CHATHAM
 THEODORE TILTON
 FREDERICK DOUGLASS
 JOHN BROWN
 ANNIE DOUGLASS
 SHIELDS GREEN
 COLONEL HUGH FORBES
 SANBORN

ACT ONE

(SCENE *the parlor of Frederick Douglass's house in Rochester, New York.*)

TIME: *a late afternoon in the spring of 1859, two years before the Civil War.*

The parlor is a large, "company" room on the first floor of the Douglasses' modest residence. Furnished in a manner far from lavish—or even necessarily stylish for the period—it nevertheless suffices as a comfortable sitting room for the Douglass family and an orderly, dignified reception room for their guests.

In the center of the left wall is the customary fireplace. Up left, at an angle, are large French doors leading into the dining-room, and through the curtained glass may be seen the end of the dining table, a few chairs, sideboard, etc. A low settee squats against the wall up center, to the right of which is a large archway opening onto the front hall. The "front door" of the house is off right of the hallway, while a flight of stairs can be plainly seen rising to the left. There is a window in the hallway wall, and down right is a door opening onto a small library or study.

Left center is a horsehair sofa. To right and left of the sofa are partly upholstered parlor chairs. At far left is another, next to a small table.

At rise, the REVEREND LOGUEN and JOSHUA are discovered. The REVEREND, who sits at the table far right, is dressed soberly in dark suit with clerical collar. He is a Negro, slight of frame and advanced in years. Yet there is perennial youth about him in his sharp, distinct speech and quick, virile mind. His hat is on the table beside him, and with spectacles on he is making entries in a small notebook as he questions JOSHUA, who sits to his left.

JOSHUA is a young Negro dressed in ill-fitting but clean clothes. He is obviously a little out of place in these surroundings, but endeavors to respond with dignity to LOGUEN's queries)

LOGUEN (*writing*) Haynes . . . Point, . . . Maryland . . . Tell me, where is that near?

JOSHUA Uh, it's near Washington Town, suh. 'Bout five mile down the "Tomic River on the east'n sho'.

LOGUEN I see. And are all three of you from there?

JOSHUA Uh, yes suh. We all belongs to d' same massuh.

LOGUEN (*chiding gently*) That's true, very true, Joshua, but a different master than you refer to. Now that you've made your escape you must realize that you never belonged to the man who held you in bondage. Regardless of what they taught you to think, we are all the children of God the father, and equal in His sight. Now . . . You and your companions escaped from Haynes Point, and hiding by day, picked your Way to New York where you contacted our agents, is that right?

JOSHUA Uh, yes suh. Ol' Miz Ossning, white lady who talk real funny, she giv' us dese clothes and gits us a ride on a big ol' furniture wagon comin' up dis way, an' she tell d' man to put us off in Rochester. Den we s'pose to ax 'round fo' a man name a Douglass. Frederick Douglass.

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LOGUEN I see. And when did you arrive?
 JOSHUA Jus' now, suh. Little befo' you come.

(ANNA DOUGLASS *enters from the dining-room. She is a Negro woman of forty, of medium height and build, and though not handsome, she nevertheless radiates the beauty of warmth of heart. Overshadowed outwardly by her husband's fame, she concentrates on being a good wife and mother and manages the household and occasional business with assurance and dispatch. ANNA has an apron on over her print dress and holds a cooking spoon in her hand*)

ANNA My goodness, Rev'n Loguen, you two still in here talkin'? Let the poor man eat—the other two's nearly finished and the food's gettin' cold!

LOGUEN Eh? Oh, I've about got it all now, it's all right, Mrs. Douglass. Uh—one thing, Joshua, before you join the others. Joshua, from now on, no matter what happens, you are never to reveal to anyone again the names of the people who helped you get away. I want you to explain that to the others, do you understand?

JOSHUA Uh, yes suh, I unnerstan'. I tell 'em.

LOGUEN All right. Now there's a man standing by over at the blacksmith's shop with a rig, ready to take you on to where you'll catch a boat for Canada. You'll be safe there. You'll be among friends, men and women like yourselves who've made their way to freedom, following the northern star. I congratulate you, Joshua, and welcome you to the fraternity of free men.

JOSHUA (*nodding*) Yes suh. Thank you, suh.

LOGUEN (*starting again*) And when you get to the settlement in Canada, Joshua, I want you to—

ANNA (*impatiently*) Rev'n Loguen, if you don't shut your mouth and let this poor man come on in here an' get his supper, you better!

LOGUEN Oh—I'm sorry, Anna. It was just that—

ANNA Come on, Joshua. Your plate's all ready for you. If you need anything, you jus' call me, now, hear?

JOSHUA Yes ma'am. Thank you, ma'am. (*he goes out left*)

ANNA (*turns to LOGUEN*) I declare, Rev'n Loguen, I don't know what in the world I'm

gonna do with you. You know them poor boys is got to get to the boat landin' by six o'clock. Fred's gone down there hisself to make the arrangements and he says have 'em there on time, 'cause the boat don't wait!

LOGUEN I know, I know, Anna. (*proudly*) Do you know how many we've taken care of already this year, Anna? Thirty-three! Thirty-three free souls passing through our little station on the Underground Railroad.

ANNA Yes, but if you keep on holdin' 'em up to pass the time of day, there's gonna be somebody up here lookin' for 'em 'fore they gets their souls free. (*JOSHUA reappears at the door up left*) Why, Joshua. You want me for something?

JOSHUA (*somewhat sheepish*) Uh, no ma'am. It's jus' dat I—I forgit somethin'.

LOGUEN Yes? What is it, son?

JOSHUA Well . . . Dis Miz Oss—I mean, dis ol' white lady, she . . . she gimme what y' call a message. I'se s'pose to tell Mr. Douglass, but I . . . I forgit.

ANNA Well, that's not so terrible, Joshua, you can tell us. It'll be all right.

JOSHUA (*considers, then*) Yes, ma'am. Thank you, ma'am. Well, . . . dis lady, she say for to tell Mr. Douglass dat dere's a new shipment comin' through mos' any day now. One what's wuth a lots a money. She say for to be on the lookout for it, an' to han'le with care. Dat's it. Dem's d' words she spoke to me, tol' me to use 'em too. "A new shipment . . . han'le with care."

LOGUEN (*echoes*) Handle with care . . .

JOSHUA An' now—now kin I go an' eat, ma'am? I feels a whole lots better, now dat I 'members!

ANNA Yes, Joshua, you go right ahead. You did a fine job.

JOSHUA (*grins*) Thank you, ma'am. Thank you. (*he exits*)

ANNA (*soberly*) What you make of it, Rev'n?

LOGUEN I don't know . . . I don't know.

ANNA Sounds to me like somebody awful important. Somebody we have to be extra careful to keep secret about.

LOGUEN Yes, that's logical. But who?

ANNA I may be wrong, but seems to me, couldn't be nobody else . . . but him! (*her eyes shine strangely*)

LOGUEN Who? (looks at her, then comprehends) But—it's too dangerous! He'll never make it. Why, they'd pick him off in an instant—you know what a price there is on his head!

ANNA I know, I know. But he'll get through. Don't know how he does it, but he'll get through.

LOGUEN God help him . . . ! Well, I suppose I'd better go back and get those boys started if they're going to make that boat. (starts for the dining-room)

ANNA (heading him off) Hmmp! Now you're hurryin', jus' when Joshua's sittin' down to eat. I declare, Rev'n, sometimes I think if you wasn't a man of the cloth—

LOGUEN (laughs) Now, now, Anna. Give me another sixty years and I promise you, I'll reform! Well, I'll go down to the corner and signal Jim to bring up the rig so we won't lose any time. As soon as Joshua's finished, have them come right out and join me.

ANNA All right, Rev'n. I'll do that.

(REVEREND LOGUEN goes up to the hallway as ANNA sighs, smooths her apron and starts for the kitchen. As LOGUEN passes the window he halts, glances out and whirls around)

LOGUEN Quick! Anna! Tell them out the back way!

ANNA What is it, Rev'n—?

LOGUEN Somebody's coming up the walk! Lewis and two white men—quickly, now! We've got to get them out. Here, Joshua—! (he and ANNA hurry off left)

ANNA (off) Wait, I'll get that door for you . . . ! (from off left comes the sound of the front door opening and closing. Then LEWIS is heard calling)

LEWIS (off) Mother! Oh, Mother! (LEWIS enters, a tall, pleasant-faced Negro youth, ushering in two distinguished-looking white gentlemen: GEORGE CHATHAM and THEODORE TILTON)

LEWIS Come right in, please. Let me take your hats. (he does so and places them upon the clothes tree as the gentlemen stand poised in the archway, glancing over the room. CHATHAM is the larger and older of the two. With balding head and large, greying sideburns, his stout form suggests a successful, comfortable businessman just past middle age. TILTON is small, wiry, with sharp quick eyes behind his spectacles, and is perhaps in

his middle forties. Both are well-dressed and obviously men of importance in their fields) Won't you both be seated? I hope it will not be long before my father arrives.

CHATHAM Thank you, thank you very much, Lewis. We'll be quite comfortable, I'm sure.

LEWIS (bows and goes out through the dining-room, calling) Mother! Oh, Mother! I've brought guests . . .

CHATHAM (sitting) Well-mannered lad, isn't he?

TILTON (has been absorbed in gazing around) What? Oh—oh, yes. Very.

CHATHAM Cigar?

TILTON Well, if you think it . . .

CHATHAM Of course, of course. I've been here many times before, the lady of the house won't mind in the least. Here, try this if you will. Havana. Delux. Imported, mind you, none of these home-grown imitations.

TILTON Why, thank you.

CHATHAM (smiling) Of course, it is still probably not so fancy as those you're accustomed to in your editorial board sessions in New York, but . . . (he breaks off with a little light laughter)

TILTON Oh, come now, come now, Mr. Chatham. Despite the fact that you practically dragged me here by the scuff of my neck, you don't have to flatter me.

CHATHAM (smiling, as he extends a match) And if I had to I would have gotten ten strong men to help me, too! Ah—here.

TILTON Thank you. (he draws upon the cigar, considering) Ah . . . excellent. I must be sure to recommend these to my editors. (CHATHAM nods in deference. TILTON again appraises his surroundings) So this is his house . . . I've never been in the home of a . . . (choosing his words carefully) . . . of a man of color before. I must say I'm impressed.

CHATHAM (nods) And a warmer and more friendly household you'll not find in all of Rochester.

TILTON Yes, I gather you're all rather proud of him here.

CHATHAM But of course! Any city would do well to have a man of such prominence as Frederick Douglass choose to live within its bounds. And to think of it, Mr. Tilton. A scant twenty years ago this man was a slave—a chattel, a "thing." A piece of property forced

with lash and chain to grovel under the tyranny of his "masters"! Oh, it just goes to show you, sir, that—

TILTON (smiling) I take it also, Mr. Chatham, that you are an abolitionist.

CHATHAM (emphatically) That I am, sir, and proud of it!

TILTON (calmly) Well spoken, sir. I like a man who speaks the courage of his convictions. It makes it so much easier to classify him, then.

CHATHAM (alert) Why, sir, what do you mean by that?

TILTON (urbanely) Oh, don't misunderstand me, my dear Chatham, I have nothing against the abolitionists. Quite the contrary, I am opposed to slavery, in principle. What I mean is that in New York, a man who declares himself an abolitionist *per se* is sure not to be a very popular figure.

CHATHAM Popular?

TILTON Why, yes. There have been cases where men have been stoned in the streets if they so much as spoke a disparaging word over a glass of beer in the corner saloon against the slave system. Why I believe William Lloyd Garrison himself, the "High Priest of Abolition" as it were, has sometimes been forced to close his meetings and flee for his very life before the onslaught of armed ruffians.

CHATHAM Yes, that is true. I have heard many such accounts, of *New York* and other places.

TILTON Well, practically each time your own Douglass speaks, outside of a few chosen localities that know him well, he does so at constant risk of personal assault.

CHATHAM That cannot be denied. It is one of the reasons we admire him so. He has been shot at, stabbed and bludgeoned half to death, but he goes on.

TILTON Well, you can hardly blame one then, can you, for being rather wary of . . .

CHATHAM (frowns) Mr. Tilton, since when have we become so debased, so unmanly that we allow fear of a little retribution to abridge our sacred right of free speech and conviction?

TILTON Well, now, I—

CHATHAM And especially, sir, if you will permit me, in terms of the press, with its responsibility for fearless . . .

TILTON (hastily) Yes, yes—let me hasten to apologize, my dear Mr. Chatham, if I have offended through the slightest reflection upon the abolitionists. It merely seems to me at this time rather more wise to devote oneself a little less obtrusively to one's ideals. After all, you must admit there are great numbers of good people who intensely hate slavery who are not numbered among the ranks of the abolitionists *per se*.

CHATHAM True, still—

TILTON Well, in any event, it should be interesting after all to meet the celebrated Frederick Douglass: escaped slave, abolitionist orator, and self-made genius. (this last with a trace of amused scorn)

CHATHAM (retaliates) Yes, it should be. It isn't every day I'd go out of my way to bring even the noted editor of one of *New York's* most influential newspapers to meet a man like Douglass.

TILTON (smiles icily) Again, you do me more than honor.

CHATHAM It's a pity you must rush on so. On Friday nights, you see, we have a series of public lectures in Corinthian Hall. Douglass is a frequent figure on that rostrum and he is scheduled again for tomorrow. Couldn't you possibly—?

TILTON You tempt me, my dear Chatham, really you do. But I have pressing appointments in the City, and by the way, what time is it getting to be? (he reaches for his watch)

CHATHAM Oh, never fear, Mr. Tilton, there is ample time, ample. (starts for the window) I'm sure if Mr. Douglass knew we were coming he . . . (he breaks off as ANNA enters from the dining-room) Well, Mrs. Douglass!

ANNA How d' do, Mr. Chatham! It's so nice to see you again. (she curtsies)

CHATHAM (with a little bow) The pleasure is all mine. Mrs. Douglass, I have the honor to present Mr. Theodore Tilton of *New York City*, editor and publisher of the *New York Independent*. Mr. Tilton, Mrs. Douglass.

TILTON It is my very great pleasure. (he bows stiffly in reply to her curtsy)

ANNA We're happy to have you, Mr. Tilton. Are you enjoyin' our little city?

TILTON Oh, very much, very much indeed! It's always a pleasure to visit Rochester. And this time I told my friend Mr. Chatham here I

should never forgive him if he didn't bring me around to meet your husband.

ANNA That's very kind of you. Gentlemen . . . ? (she motions and they sit, after her) I understand you went by the office?

CHATHAM Yes. Young Lewis told us Mr. Douglass had gone to the Post Office. I should have remembered that Thursday is publication day . . .

ANNA Oh, that's all right. I guess you supply paper to so many big publications you just couldn't expect to remember 'bout all the little ones like us.

CHATHAM Oh, quite the contrary, Mrs. Douglass. I have no client I think more highly of than "The North Star."

ANNA Now, just for that you'll have to stop and have supper with us. Both of you. (TILTON looks distressed)

CHATHAM Thank you so much, Mrs. Douglass, but I'm afraid my Ellen has already prepared. Else we surely would take you up on your generosity. (to TILTON) Mrs. Douglass has the reputation of spreading one of the finest tables in Rochester.

TILTON (weakly) Yes, I'm sure.

ANNA (flattered) Well, at least let me get you a cup of tea while you're waitin'. No, now you just make yourself t' home.

CHATHAM All right, Mrs. Douglass. I know there's no use trying to get around you.

(From off in the hallway a door opens and closes. ANNA, who has started for the kitchen, stops and turns)

ANNA Why, I b'lieve that's Mr. Douglass now. (calls) Fred? That you, Fred?

DOUGLASS (off) Yes, Anna.

ANNA (coming to the archway) You got company.

DOUGLASS Well, now. (FREDERICK DOUGLASS enters, a bundle of papers under his arm. He is a tall, broad, compelling figure of a man, forty-two years of age. His face, of magnificent bone structure, would be a sculptor's delight with the high cheekbones, the strong broad nose, the proud flare of the nostrils. His eyes, brown, deep-set, peer intently from beneath the ridge of his prominent brow, and the straight grim line of the mouth seems on the verge at any moment of an awesome pronouncement. A long mane of crinkly black hair sweeps back from his stern forehead, and, to-

gether with heavy moustache and beard, lends a strikingly distinguished, leonine air. His large frame, bolt erect, is dressed conservatively in a suit of black broadcloth, with embroidered waistcoat and gold watch fob. His is an impression of challenge, achievement, dignity, together with strength, quiet but omnipresent. DOUGLASS pauses in the archway, then depositing his bundle on the small table nearby, he strides forward to CHATHAM, hand extended) George Chatham! Well, this is quite an unexpected pleasure.

CHATHAM (beaming) So it is, so it is!

DOUGLASS (his voice is sonorous; he speaks with cultured ease) And is this a business visit? Am I more than two years behind in my account.

CHATHAM Well, if that were so, I should hardly have come myself. I should rather have had my creditors, to collect my debts from you! (they both laugh heartily) Frederick—Frederick, I wish to present Mr. Theodore Tilton of New York City. Mr. Tilton is the editor and publisher of the *New York Independent*, and I wanted him to make your acquaintance while he is in the city. Mr. Tilton, Mr. Douglass.

TILTON (again bowing stiffly) It is my very great pleasure . . .

DOUGLASS Not at all, the honor is mine, Mr. Tilton. (he goes to TILTON hand extended. TILTON shakes hands uncomfortably) Will you be long in Rochester?

TILTON No, I'm afraid I must return to the City tonight.

DOUGLASS That's too bad. Anna, have you asked our guests to stay for supper?

CHATHAM Yes, she has, Frederick, but I'm afraid Mrs. Chatham has already prepared.

ANNA I was just goin' to make some tea—
TILTON Pray don't, Mrs. Douglass. You see, we really don't have much more time to stay, I'm afraid.

DOUGLASS Oh? Well, another time perhaps. Meantime, please be seated again. I refuse to let you leave at once.

ANNA Oh, uh—Fred . . . ? 'Scuse me, but did you get them letters off in the mail while you was out? Three letters, goin' to Canada . . . ? (she looks at him with meaning)

DOUGLASS Oh . . . ! Yes, my dear. They're safely in the mail and on the way.

ANNA (smiles) I'm glad. 'Scuse me. (she gives a little curtsy and goes out via the dining room)

DOUGLASS (turns back to his guests) Now, then . . .

CHATHAM Oh, er—will you have a cigar, Frederick? I have some special—

DOUGLASS No thank you, George. I've never been able to develop the habit personally, but by all means . . . (indicates for them to continue. They settle themselves. After a pause) Tell me, Mr. Tilton. What is the talk in New York these days?

TILTON Oh, the same as here, I would suppose. Stocks and bonds . . . the railroads . . . migration west . . . Kansas . . . the Indians . . .

DOUGLASS Ah, Kansas! So they speak of Kansas, do they?

TILTON Oh, yes. It is much in the conversation round about.

DOUGLASS And what do they say of Kansas, Mr. Tilton?

TILTON Well, they discuss its impending admission into the Union. It seems certain by now that it comes as a free state, though there is much bitterness on both sides. And there's a great deal of pro and con about this fellow Brown . . .

CHATHAM You mean Captain John Brown?

TILTON Yes, yes, I do believe he calls himself by some military title or other. Personally, I will be very happy to see Kansas enter our fold, so to speak, instead of the South's. But I can't very well agree with the way in which it was won.

DOUGLASS Oh? And why?

TILTON Well, I'm thoroughly against slavery, *per se*, you understand—you'll find our paper has stood out staunchly on that matter. But I think old Brown has done more to hinder the cause of the slaves, with his self-appointed crusade to keep Kansas free, than all the splendid work of the past several decades by persons like yourself to advance things.

DOUGLASS Has he now?

TILTON Why, of course! Good God, for him and his lawless band to call men out from their cabins in the dead of night, and without note or warning, judge or jury run them through with sabres! Why, it's ghastly even to contemplate.

CHATHAM But, sir, you overlook that it was the partisans of slavery that first made war in Kansas, burning farmhouses and towns, assassinating and driving out those who dared

voice opinion that Kansas should be kept free. It was these murderers—known to all—that Captain Brown avenged himself upon.

TILTON Yes, but—

CHATHAM And then, when the slave state of Missouri sent an armed militia across the border into Kansas, who but old Ossawatimie Brown with a comparative handful of men—

TILTON Oh, there is no doubt as to their bravery—or even foolhardiness, if you will allow—but to seize the lawful prerogative of the federal government, whose authority it is to protect these territories, is a very dangerous and outlandish course of action!

DOUGLASS (has picked up a copy of his paper, reads) “. . . still today, and with no help from the federal government, Kansas stands at the gateway to statehood as a free territory. Is there any denying it would not have been so except for old John Brown?”

TILTON Then you give your endorsement to such guerilla tactics?

DOUGLASS I have never particularly enjoyed the prospect of human beings wantonly killing one another. But from what I have gathered, there was left no choice in Kansas. It was either be driven out at gunpoint, or face those guns and fight. And that I think John Brown has done most admirably.

TILTON (frowns—considering) Hmm . . . Well, actually, Mr. Douglass, the conflict in Kansas has proved little point with respect to abolishing slavery. Rather, keeping the system from spreading—Free Soil, as they call it—was the actual issue there. For all his reckless bravado, old Brown liberated not a single slave.

CHATHAM Ah, but to prevent the spread of the system across a single mile of border is a noble service indeed!

DOUGLASS Quite so, George, but more than that: Free Soil and freedom for slaves must be regarded as coats of the same cloth. The one will never be secure without the other.

TILTON Why, how do you mean?

DOUGLASS (smiles—pointedly) I mean, sir, that those who seek only to exclude slavery from the territories—for their own political or business interests—without concerning themselves about abolishing the system altogether, are merely evading the ultimate issue. Slavery is like a spawning cancer; unless it is cured at

its core, then despite all precaution it will eventually infect the whole organism. It must be stamped out entirely, not merely prevented from reaching other parts of the body.

TILTON Ah—but we are dealing here with semi-sovereign States, not hospital patients. Unlike a physician, we have no license to delve into the internal affairs of the South.

DOUGLASS Human slavery cannot be considered a purely internal affair of the South, Mr. Tilton. Especially when it seeks with guns and powder to extend the system further.

TILTON I feel quite confident the federal government is capable of preserving law and order in any such eventuality.

CHATHAM The government! A government rife from top to bottom with Southerners?

TILTON (*protests*) President Buchanon is not a Southerner—

CHATHAM Buchanon—hah! A northern man with Southern principles who bends over backwards to concede every fantastic demand of the hot-heads from Dixie! Or take Congress—frightened into hasty compromise every time the “Gentleman” from Carolina or Georgia or Mississippi bellows threats and abuse at his Northern colleagues! Or must I even mention the Supreme Court, its blasphemous Dred Scott decision still fresh upon the page? And you speak to me of the government, sir! Why, if I had my way, I’d line ‘em all up at my saw-mill, start up that blade and hold a Bastille Day such as the French never dreamed of . . . !

DOUGLASS (*amused*) Careful, now, George. You’ll have poor Mr. Tilton thinking Rochester’s a nest of fiery revolutionists.

TILTON Well, at least there’s an election next year. You may then express your opinions of your government under the protective mantle of party politics—without being liable to arrest for sedition.

CHATHAM Hah—if I did adequately express my opinions I should still be arrested. For use in public of profane and obscene language!

TILTON (*wryly*) A great loss to the cause of abolition that would be. (*turning to DOUGLASS*) Seriously, though, I do believe the continued existence of slavery is fast becoming the prime political issue of the day.

DOUGLASS Quite so, quite so! Why, take even last year’s Senatorial campaign, the wide-spread debates out in Illinois between Senator

Stephen Douglass and this other fellow, Lincoln—

CHATHAM (*interrupts*) But Lincoln was defeated!—a paltry, small-town, hay-seed lawyer with more audacity than ability. Think no more of him. He’s politically, uh—*passé*.

DOUGLASS Nonetheless, George, the issue there was plain: the enslavement of human beings and all the evils it gives rise to must either be sanctioned nationally, or it must be abolished. Try as it may, the nation cannot much longer avoid decision on the matter. I believe the outcome of the election *will* depend upon this one burning issue.

TILTON (*craftily*) And perhaps the outcome of the nation too, eh? However, I can only reiterate that drastic measures—such as old Brown’s—can at best only aggravate the situation.

CHATHAM (*protesting*) But slavery, sir, is an outrageously drastic condition. And when other means have failed, drastic conditions call for drastic measures!

TILTON (*tolerantly*) Now, my dear Chatham, I have heard of many instances where masters are voluntarily freeing their Negroes. And of others who provide in their wills for manumission upon their deaths.

CHATHAM Whose deaths? The master’s?—or the slave’s! Ha!

DOUGLASS (*calmly*) May I point out to you, sir, that my own freedom was not given to me: I had to take it. And if you were a slave, Mr. Tilton, knowing full well that you of right ought to be free, would you be content to wait until your master died to walk on your own two feet?

CHATHAM Ha! I for one would help him along a little.

TILTON (*ignoring this—to DOUGLASS*) But can you not see that to press for all-out abolition at a time like this can but only further alienate the South? Why already they have threatened an ultimatum in the elections next year: unless a man friendly to them and their policies continues to sit in the White House they may bolt the Union! And you know we can never permit such a split.

CHATHAM Quite so, but—

TILTON (*exasperated*) Well, think of it, man! It would mean war, actual all-out fighting, one section of the citizenry against another, with

muskets and sabres and cannon. Why it would be disastrous, catastrophic!

CHATHAM Certainly—disastrous to the slaveholders, catastrophic to slavery!

TILTON (*turning to DOUGLASS*) Surely, Mr. Douglass—notwithstanding the great multitude of wrongs committed against your enslaved people, the cardinal crime of bondage itself—still, surely you must see that if war comes between the States, not only will your people not benefit, but the nation as a whole stands in imminent peril of perishing!

DOUGLASS (*quietly*) Mr. Tilton, if I spoke to you as a slave, I would say: “No matter, let it perish.” As a being denied of all human dignity, reduced to the level of the beasts of the field, it would be of no consequence to me whether this ethereal idea known as a government survived or disintegrated. I would have nothing to lose, quite possibly everything to gain. If I spoke to you as a free man and a citizen. I would say: “War is destructive, cruel, barbaric. It must be avoided—if possible.” But wrongs will have their righting, debts will have their due. And if in the last resort it should come to war, then we must make intelligent use of it, once involved to destroy the malignant growths, to set right the festering wrongs, and to eliminate for all time this present grounds for complaint.

CHATHAM Hear, hear! (*he thumps the arm of his chair vigorously*)

TILTON (*with a smile*) I see you drive a hard bargain.

DOUGLASS No more than the slaveholders, sir.

TILTON (*slowly*) Mr. Douglass . . . though I cannot say that I altogether agree with you, nonetheless I can recognize a forceful sincerity when I see one. Will you permit me, sir, to make a note or two of this for publication? (*he takes out pad and pencil*)

DOUGLASS (*spreading his hands*) If my humble words—

TILTON Oh no, no modesty here. I am sure our readers will be as interested as I in giving your arguments careful thought. (*he busies himself with making notes. CHATHAM flashes a congratulatory smile at DOUGLASS and is about to speak when from off in the hallway the front door knocker is heard*)

DOUGLASS (*starting for the door*) Will you

excuse me . . .

LEWIS (*appears, coming from the rear of the house*) I’ll get it!

DOUGLASS All right, Lewis.

CHATHAM I’ve tried to interest Mr. Tilton in hearing you speak sometime, Frederick. But unfortunately, he’s a rather busy man, and . . .

TILTON (*looks up*) I mean to correct that fault, Mr. Chatham, as soon as possible. When will you be in our city again, Mr. Douglass?

DOUGLASS New York? Oh, I couldn’t say. I’ve been trying to confine myself as much as possible to the paper lately, and I—

TILTON (*reaching inside his coat*) If you will permit me, here is my card. Please do me the honor of stopping with me when next you’re in the City.

DOUGLASS (*taking the card*) Why, that’s kind of you, Mr. Tilton. (*LEWIS appears at the archway*)

LEWIS Excuse me, father. There’s a Mr. Nelson Hawkins here to see you.

DOUGLASS (*puzzled*) Hawkins? Nelson Hawkins?

LEWIS Yes sir—he . . . Well, I mean—(*he seems to be suppressing some excitement*)—he just got in from out of town, and he—Shall I ask him to wait in your study?

CHATHAM (*rising*) Oh, by no means, Frederick, please don’t neglect your guest on our account. We have to be going now, anyway. That is, if Mr. Tilton—

TILTON (*still writing*) Yes, yes. I’m nearly ready. Just one minute . . .

DOUGLASS (*to LEWIS*) Ask him to step into the study for a moment, Lewis. I’ll be right with him.

LEWIS Yes sir! (*he goes off*)

CHATHAM Well, Frederick, it’s been much too long since I’ve seen you.

DOUGLASS Yes, it has. You must have dinner with us again very soon, George. We’ve missed you.

CHATHAM I mean to take you up on that. In the meantime, the wife and I will be at the lecture tomorrow night, as usual.

DOUGLASS Good. I’ll be looking for you. (*to TILTON, who has put away his notebook and risen*) And so you’re leaving us tonight, Mr. Tilton?

TILTON Yes, I must. Though I’d very much

like to be at the Hall tomorrow. What is your subject?

DOUGLASS I'm speaking on "The Philosophy of Reforms."

TILTON Oh, I would very mightily like to hear that!

DOUGLASS Then perhaps you would care to take along a copy of "The North Star" to glance at in your free time. (*he secures a copy*) My remarks will be merely an expansion of this week's editorial.

TILTON (*accepting it*) Thank you, sir, you are most kind. Our office subscribes to your paper, but it is not every week that I get to read it first hand.

DOUGLASS Well, I shall have to remedy that by placing you personally on our subscription lists.

TILTON Excellent! But you must bill me for it.

DOUGLASS (*nods in deference*) You may send us your check if you wish.

CHATHAM And now, we really must be going, or my Ellen will be furious.

(*They go out via the hallway, ad libbing amenities, the murmur of their voices continuing in the background. After a pause, the door down right opens and LEWIS appears. Making sure the others are out of sight, he turns smiling and holds open the door*)

LEWIS Please step in here now, Mr. Hawkins. Oh, let me get your bag. (*HAWKINS enters. He is a lean sinewy man of over fifty. His flowing hair and ragged beard are streaked with grey, and his steel-grey eyes bore with deep, lively penetration. Dressed in plain woolen, cowhide boots, and carrying a well-worn leather strap bag, he presents a figure of indomitable energy and determination*)

HAWKINS (*crossing to a chair*) Oh, no thank you, Lewis. I can manage all right for an old man, don't you think? (*he grins at LEWIS with a twinkle in his eye and lays down his bag by the chair*) Well, Lewis, you've grown—haven't you—since I was here last. Getting to be quite a young man. How old are you now?

LEWIS Seventeen, sir.

HAWKINS Seventeen! Why, that's hard to believe. (*his eyes twinkle*) And I suppose you cut quite a figure with the young ladies now, do you?

LEWIS (*blushes*) Why, no sir, I—

HAWKINS Oh, come now! I'll wager you've already picked out your young lady-fair.

LEWIS Well, not exactly, sir.

HAWKINS Not exactly? Ha, then *she* has picked you out!

LEWIS Well—I do like a certain girl, but . . . It's just that—well, girls can act pretty silly sometimes. You just don't know what they're thinking or what they're going to do next. Sometimes they say no when they mean yes and yes when they mean no. I can't understand them at all!

HAWKINS Well, well. This sounds pretty serious, Lewis. Tell me. Is she pretty?

LEWIS Oh, yes! She's very pretty, I think.

(*pause*) She . . . she's the minister's daughter.

HAWKINS I see. And is she religious?

LEWIS Well, rather, I suppose. (*an after-thought*) She's the minister's daughter, you understand.

HAWKINS Ah, yes! That does make a difference.

LEWIS I walked home with her from church last Sunday. I couldn't think of anything much to say, so we started out talking about the weather. And when we got to her house we were still talking about the weather. Six blocks about the weather!

HAWKINS My, that certainly is a lot of weather!

LEWIS (*miserably*) I just don't understand them, that's all.

HAWKINS Well, Lewis, if you ever arrive at the point where you think you do, come and tell me, will you? I've had two wives and eleven children, and if God has ever seen fit to distribute understanding of women, then I must have been behind the barn door when He passed it out!

LEWIS (*grins*) Yes sir. (*DOUGLASS re-enters from the front, glancing hastily at his watch*)

DOUGLASS And now, Mr. Hawkins . . . (*pause. HAWKINS turns toward him expectantly, but does not speak*) Mr. Hawkins? . . . (*he stares questioningly at HAWKINS while LEWIS watches eagerly*)

HAWKINS (*an amused twinkle in his eye*) Hello, Frederick Douglass!

DOUGLASS (*slowly recognition—and joy—come into DOUGLASS' face*) Why . . . bless my soul, it's Captain Brown! (*he rushes to him*) John!

John! (*BROWN laughs and they embrace in delight and exits towards the kitchen*) But that beard!—you were always clean-shaven. And these clothes! Why, if it hadn't been for your voice I never would have—!

BROWN (*laughs loudly*) You're looking well, Frederick!

DOUGLASS Why, so are you, only—Well, come and sit down, John. How did you ever manage to get through? Why, there's an alarm out for you in seven states!

BROWN (*laughs*) Oh, I have means, Frederick. I have means.

DOUGLASS Oh, I must tell Anna. (*calls*) Anna! Anna, guess who's here! (*ANNA rushes in from the kitchen followed by LEWIS*)

ANNA Lewis just told me! Welcome, Captain Brown! Welcome!

BROWN Thank you, thank you, Anna. My, but you're the picture of health and brightness! You've got a wonderful wife here, Frederick. A fine woman!

ANNA Oh, go on with that kind of foolishness, John Brown!

BROWN Oh, yes, yes! God has been bountiful to you both. How are all the children?

ANNA They're all very well, thank you.

BROWN Good, good.

DOUGLASS And how's your family, John?

BROWN (*his smile fading*) Oh . . . well. Well.

For the most part, that is. These past few years have been hard on us, Frederick. Kansas . . . the price was very dear.

DOUGLASS (*concerned*) Sit down, John. Tell us about it.

BROWN (*sitting*) Thank you. I am a little tired.

ANNA And you must be hungry too, poor man. Supper's nearly ready, but now that you're here I'll have to get up somethin' special for dessert. A pie, maybe. Sweet potato still your favorite?

BROWN It certainly is!

ANNA All right. Now you just make yourself t' home. Lewis! Come on and set the table for me, son.

LEWIS (*reluctantly*) Aw . . . (*glances at his father, then rises quickly and follows ANNA out*)

DOUGLASS John, we've had no word of you for months. We didn't know if you were alive or dead.

BROWN (*smiling*) Oh, I'm still above ground,

Douglass. It will take more than a few cowardly ruffians in the Territories to put John Brown in his grave. And a lot more to keep him there! (*sobers*) They did get one of my sons, though. My Frederick.

DOUGLASS Oh, no . . . !

BROWN Yes. They shot him down one night, not far from Ossawatimie. Owen, too—the big one. But Owen still lives. Back on the farm at North Elba, Mary's nursing him back to health. He's . . . paralyzed. The waist down.

DOUGLASS (*softly*) My God! And you, John are you well?

BROWN Oh, yes. I've been a little tired, but I'm gathering strength to go on with the work.

DOUGLASS To go on? But John, Kansas is won! Surely now you can rest. You've done what no other man has been able to do: you've stopped the slave power dead in its tracks!

BROWN Not quite, Douglass, not quite. Try as we might, the Free Soil constitution adopted in Kansas says nothing about the emancipation of slaves. It offers sanctuary to not a blessed black soul. I must get back to my true work: to free enslaved black folk, and not further waste my energies and resources on political patridges like Kansas. That is why I am here.

DOUGLASS Yes?

BROWN I shall want you to put me up for a time, Frederick. Several weeks, a month perhaps.

DOUGLASS You know, John, that my house is always yours.

BROWN Good. I know I could count on you. I will pay for my accommodation. Oh, no—no, I insist! I will not stay with you unless I can contribute my fair share to the household expenses. What shall it be?

DOUGLASS Now, now, John—

BROWN Come, come, Douglass! We must be practical.

DOUGLASS Well, all right. Shall we say—three dollars a week for room and board. No, not a penny more! You are my guest.

BROWN All right, settled then. (*he withdraws a purse and hands to DOUGLASS three dollars in silver coin*) For the first week.

DOUGLASS You are now a member of the Douglass household, in good financial standing.

BROWN Fine! And one other thing, Frederick. While I am here I wish to be known in public only as "Nelson Hawkins." I want John Brown to be thought still in the Territories. Though Kansas is won, still there's a price on my head some enterprising young scamp might be ambitious to collect.

DOUGLASS Ha! I shall turn you in at once! *(they laugh)* As you wish, John. I shall inform the entire household at supper.

(The outside door opens and a child's voice cries, "Momma! Momma! We're back!") DOUGLASS smiles and looks up expectantly. In runs ANNIE DOUGLASS, a vivacious little six-year-old, followed by SHEILDS GREEN, a stockily-built Negro with a bundle of papers under his arm

ANNIE *(sees her father and runs to him)* Oh, Poppa! Guess what I've been doing! Me and Shields. I helped Shields take out the papers!

DOUGLASS *(lifts her in his arms)* You did? Well now, aren't you Poppa's big, big girl!

ANNIE Yes, I am! *(she gives him a hug, then giggles)* Oh, Poppa, your whiskers. They tickle! *(she squirms around in his arms and for the first time sees BROWN across from them. She abruptly stops her laughter and her eyes grow big with wonder)*

DOUGLASS *(setting her down)* John, this is the light of my life, my little Annie.

BROWN Well, she's quite a young lady now, isn't she!

DOUGLASS Annie, this is Mr.—Mr. Hawkins. Say how-do-you-do like Poppa's big girl.

ANNIE *(steps forward timidly and gives a little curtsy)* How de do? *(then rushes back into her father's arms)*

BROWN And how-do-you-do to you, little lady!

DOUGLASS Mr. Hawkins is going to stay with us for a while, Annie. Is that all right with you?

ANNIE *(considers—suspiciously)* Doesn't he have a house of his own?

BROWN Yes, I have, Annie. But it's a long way off.

ANNIE *(bolder now)* Do you have a little girl?

BROWN Why, yes—in fact one of my girls has the same name as you. Annie. Only she's a big girl now.

ANNIE Bigger than me?

BROWN *(smiles)* Yes, a little. But you'll soon

be grown up and married too. You just wait and see!

DOUGLASS Hold on there! Don't go marrying off my baby so soon.

ANNIE *(her timidness dispelling, she leaves her father's arms and moves toward the stranger)* You got whiskers, just like my Poppa. Do they tickle too? *(DOUGLASS laughs and winks at SHEILDS, who stands in the background, watching the proceedings with a wide grin)*

BROWN Well, I don't know. Do they? *(he bends down and juts out his chin. ANNIE reaches out and tugs gently at his beard)* Uh-uh, careful! *(they laugh as ANNIE jumps back, startled)*

DOUGLASS Well, how about it, Annie? Has he passed the test? May he stay, or shall we turn him out!

ANNIE *(considers this idea for a moment—then joyously)* No, no! He can stay! He can stay!

DOUGLASS Good! It's all settled.

BROWN *(with a little bow)* Much obliged to you, ma'am! *(ANNA enters from off left)*

ANNA I thought I heard another woman in here!

ANNIE *(running to her)* Oh, Momma, Momma! I helped Shields with the papers! I helped with the papers!

ANNA You did, sweetie? Well, that's nice. And did you meet our guest?

ANNIE Oh, yes! He's got a little girl too, with the same name as me, and his whiskers tickle just like Poppa's.

DOUGLASS A dubious compliment!

ANNA All right, dear. Suppose you run on upstairs now and get yourself ready for supper. Make sure you hang up your coat.

ANNIE All right, Momma. *(she curtsies to BROWN)* 'Scuse me, please. I have to go now. *(she runs over to SHEILDS)* Can I help you again sometime, Shields?

SHEILDS Yes, honey. Anytime you want.

ANNIE *(as she runs off and up the stairs)*

Gee, Momma, I'm so hungry I could eat a whole hippopotamus!

DOUGLASS *(to BROWN)* Now you see where all our money goes. To buy her hippopotami! *(BROWN laughs. ANNA returns to her kitchen, and SHEILDS GREEN starts to follow)*

DOUGLASS Oh, Shields! Come, I want you to meet our guest, er—Nelson Hawkins. *(to BROWN)* This is Shields Green, sometimes known as "the Emperor."

BROWN *(extending his hand)* The Emperor? Am I in the presence of royalty here? Glad to know you, Mr. Green. *(he shakes hands vigorously)*

SHEILDS Glad to know you, suh.

DOUGLASS Royalty in a sense. Because of his great strength, Shields' master nicknamed him "The Emperor"—used to point him out to his guests, laugh and make fun of him. Now it's Shields' turn to laugh. Not agreeing to be whipped one day, he left his master with a wrenched arm, three loose teeth and a dislocated collar bone.

BROWN Well, well! Now that's an odd going-away present. And you reside here in Rochester now, I take it?

SHEILDS Yes suh.

DOUGLASS Shields has made his home with us since his escape.

BROWN Good! We'll be seeing a lot of each other then, Mr. Green. I have an idea you may fit into our scheme quite handily, too, if you've a mind to. I shall need a number of men like you—strong, courageous, unafraid.

DOUGLASS Tell us, what is this scheme of yours? *(he motions them toward seats)*

BROWN All right. Now is as good a time as any. *(he reaches for his bag, and withdraws a large rolled parchment)* All the while I was in Kansas, Douglass, I have been thinking, planning, praying over this thing. Kansas was but an interlude, an opening skirmish. It has given me a hard core of trusted men, baptized in fire and blood, who will follow me anywhere. And now . . . now the time has come to carry the war into Africa itself, into the very heart of the Southland. *(unrolling the parchment, he lays it over the table down right)* Here. Will you be so good as to hold one edge for me, Mr. Green?

SHEILDS Yes suh. I got it, suh.

BROWN Now. If you will look carefully, Douglass—and you too, Mr. Green—here we have a map of the States from New Hampshire to Florida, and Maryland to Missouri. Now: here are the Allegheny Mountains sweeping from the North clear through to Alabama. Do they portend anything to you, eh?

DOUGLASS I don't quite know what you mean. They form more or less a natural chain from North to South, but—

BROWN Exactly! These mountains are the basis of my plan. Douglass, I believe, these

ranges to be God-given, placed there from the beginning of time by some divine pre-arrangement for but a single purpose. . . the emancipation of the slaves. *(he pauses, eyes shining)*

DOUGLASS Go on. Explain.

BROWN Look here, at the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. These ranges are full of natural forts, where one man for defense would be the equal to a hundred for attack. Now, I know these mountains well. My plan, then, is to take a force of men into the Virginia hills. There I will post them in squads of fives along a line of twenty-five miles. Now, when these are properly schooled and drilled in the arts of mountain warfare, it will then be possible to steal down to the plantations and run off slaves in large numbers. Think of it, Douglass! Think of the consternation among the Virginia slavemasters when they see their slaves disappearing into the hills!

DOUGLASS *(weighing it all)* Yes . . . yes, I can imagine.

BROWN Not only for the good of delivering these people from their bondage, you understand—though that is of course the paramount end. But the prospect of valuable property which is disappearing in the middle of the night—ah! Here Douglass, we attack the slave system at its core, and that is its pocketbook! *(springing up)* Oh, Douglass, you and I know that eloquent appeals to men's emotions, their reasons, their sense of justice and fair play have little effect if the evil you would have them discard is the means of their bread and syrup. They may turn a deaf ear to God himself, but once you remove the monetary profit their vices, take away the means by which they gain their filthy dollars, they will desert it as if in fear of plague and seek other means more economically secure to furnish their tables.

DOUGLASS *(has been listening carefully)* Yes . . . yes, there is much truth in what you say. But—suppose you succeed in running off a few slaves. What is to prevent them from merely selling their slaves further South?

BROWN Ah! That in itself would be a show of weakness. Besides, we would follow them up. Virginia would be only the beginning.

DOUGLASS But they would employ bloodhounds to hunt you out in the mountains.

BROWN That they might attempt, but we would whip them—and when we have whipped

the squad, they would be careful how they pursued again.

DOUGLASS And the slaves themselves? What would become of them once you had liberated them from their bonds?

BROWN We would retain the brave and the strong in the mountains, and send the rest north into Canada by way of the Underground Railroad. You're a part of that operation, Douglass, and I'm counting on you for suggestions along that line.

DOUGLASS I see. But won't it take years to free any appreciable number of slaves this way?

BROWN Indeed not! Each month our line of fortresses will extend further South—Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi . . . To the Delta itself. (*he points them out on the map, which SHEILDS now holds, gazing in wonder*) The slaves will free themselves!

DOUGLASS And those you retain in the mountains. How do you propose to support this growing band of troops?

BROWN We shall subsist upon the enemy, of course! Slavery is a state of war, Douglass, and I believe the slave has a right to anything necessary to obtain his freedom.

DOUGLASS (*thoughtfully*) Now, if you were surrounded, cut off . . . If it's war, then you must not underestimate the enemy.

BROWN True, that's true, but I doubt that we could ever be surprised in the mountains so that we would not be able to cut our way out.

DOUGLASS Perhaps . . . Still, if the worst were to come?

BROWN (*impatiently*) Then let it come! At least we will have been doing something. Action . . . action is the basis of reform, and long ago, Douglass, I promised my God I had no better use for the means, the energies and the life He gave me than to lay them down in the cause of the slaves. (*turns to SHEILDS*) Mr. Green You've been silent. Let us hear from you.

SHEILDS (*admiration in his voice*) You're Cap'n John Brown, ain't you?

BROWN (*with an amused glance at DOUGLASS*) Why, yes—yes I am, Mr. Green.

SHEILDS Jus' call me Shields.

BROWN All right. Shields.

SHEILDS I'm not a what-you-call eddicated man, suh. Mr. Douglass here's jus' now learnin' me readin' and writin'. I ain't much to offer,

I knows, but when you gits ready to sen' them mens into the mountains, please let me know. I'd powerful like to be one of 'em, Cap'n Brown.

BROWN And so you shall, Shields, so you shall! (*he strides to SHEILDS and shakes hands vigorously. To DOUGLASS*) There, you see? My first recruit! I'll have to write Forbes about this. Oh, I haven't told you about Forbes, have I.

DOUGLASS Forbes?

BROWN Yes. Colonel Hugh Forbes. By an extraordinary stroke of good fortune, Douglass, I've met a certain Englishman, a military man who has engaged in several of the revolutionary movements of Europe. I've verified that he fought with old Garibaldi himself. I've engaged this man as drillmaster for my troops.

DOUGLASS Drillmaster?

BROWN Yes. I have induced Colonel Forbes to join me and supervise the proper training of a fighting force. I consider it very fortunate that I could persuade him.

DOUGLASS Where is he now?

BROWN In New York, writing a Military Manual for the use of our troops.

DOUGLASS Why, it all sounds so incredible! An English drillmaster and a military manual . . . ! I know your accomplishments, John. You were successful in Kansas by personally leading a small band of men. But now all this talk of a drillmaster and a special manual—

BROWN But you fail to realize the scope of the mission, Douglass! This is to be no minor skirmish, this is war and war demands extensive preparation, you can see how important it is to make allowances now for whatever might arise in the future. Douglass . . . (*intensely*) Douglass, I've spent years perfecting this plan in detail. I've tested my methods under fire. Believe me I know whereof I speak!

DOUGLASS (*slowly*) Yes, in the past you've proved that beyond all question, John.

BROWN Oh, Douglass! Douglass! (*he grasps DOUGLASS by the shoulders*) I knew I could count on you! It's coming . . . I can feel that it's coming! As Moses led the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage to the land of Canaan, so shall we lead the children of Africa from Southern bondage to the land of Canada. It is God's will! Together—together we will free the slaves!

(*He stands with arms outstretched toward DOUGLASS and SHEILDS as the curtain falls*)

ACT TWO

Scene One

(*TIME Several months later. Noon.*)

At rise, ANNA DOUGLASS is discovered tidying up in the hallway. She comes down into the parlor for a quick look around, then starts to leave, when she spies a hat resting on a chair. She picks it up and examines it; it is of curious military design. She glances ominously toward the closed study door then drops the hat back onto the chair in disgust.

Off right the front door opens and LEWIS enters, whistling gaily)

LEWIS Hello, Mother.

ANNA Oh, that you, son? You're home early. I ain't fixed dinner yet.

LEWIS Oh, that's all right. There was nothing going on at the office anyway. Where's Dad?

ANNA (*indicates the study*) In there. That man is here again.

LEWIS What man?

ANNA That soldier man. You know, Captain Brown's friend. Colonel somebody.

LEWIS Oh, you mean Colonel Forbes.

ANNA That's the one. He's in there with Fred.

LEWIS What's he want this time?

ANNA I don't know, but I'll bet it's money. Fred's keepin' the old man's funds for him and he has to handle his business when he's gone.

LEWIS But Captain Brown's not ready to move yet. He's still out raising funds. Doesn't seem right to be paying Colonel Forbes for doing nothing.

ANNA That's what I been tellin' Fred! But he says the old man insists. Says he'll need Forbes and he'll be ready pretty soon now.

LEWIS I hope he knows what he's doing.

ANNA So do I, Lewis. Every time Fred talks to him he just says, "God'll take care of everything." 'S if God ain't got enough to do already. (*the front door slams and ANNIE runs in, shrieking*)

ANNIE Momma! Momma!

ANNA My gracious! What's the matter, baby?

ANNIE Quick, Momma, I have to hide!

ANNA Hide from what, Annie?

ANNIE From Bobby and Henry. They're after me!

ANNA Bobby and Henry? What are they after you about?

ANNIE We was playin' slavery, an' I'm the slave. Only I ran away! (*LEWIS grimaces and shakes his head, exiting towards the kitchen*)

ANNA Oh . . . Well, you better get away quick then, 'fore you get caught. That'd be just terrible, wouldn't it?

ANNIE No, it won't be so bad. Jackie's playin' Mr. Hawkins and he always helps me get free again.

ANNA Oh, I see. Well, your poppa's got company in the liberry and I hate to turn you out. But you better go back outside and play. (*she guides Annie toward the hallway*)

ANNIE All right, Momma. But if they catch me, they're gonna sell me off to the highest bidder!

ANNA Oh? Well, if that happens, I'll come out an' see if I can't buy you back with some gingerbread and cookies. Run on, now. (*ANNIE starts out but then, glancing out the hallway window, she squeals and comes running back*)

ANNIE Momma, Momma! They saw me! I have to get away! I have to get away! (*she dashes off towards the kitchen*)

ANNA (*following*) Lawd-a-mussy! I don't know what I'm gonna do with you . . . (*as they leave the study door opens and DOUGLASS enters, followed by COLONEL HUGH FORBES. FORBES is a tall, once-handsome man in his thirties with a harried, hungry look about his eyes*)

DOUGLASS (*is frowning*) . . . I'm very sorry, Mr. Forbes, but that is the state of affairs and I don't see that there's anything more to say. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have quite a bit of work to do.

FORBES Now, just a minute, just a minute here! Am I to understand, then, that you refuse to discharge these obligations?

DOUGLASS (*displeased*) I am under no obligation to you whatsoever, sir.

FORBES Well, perhaps not you personally, Mr. Douglass, but you *are* acting for Brown. And I tell you that he is behind on my salary. Again! Now really, old chap, just how much do

you fellows expect me to put up with? I have tried to be patient, man, but even my endurance has its obvious limitations. Why, so far I think I have been rather agreeable about this whole thing, and—

DOUGLASS (*smouldering*) Oh, you have, have you? And I suppose you were just being agreeable when you wrote this letter to George Chatham demanding by return mail a check for fifty dollars! Mr. Chatham is not responsible for your salary, Mr. Forbes. Nor am I. From here on you will have to make your arrangements personally through Captain Brown, or not at all. Now again, I am asking that you excuse me. I have more important matters to attend to. (LEWIS appears at the dining-room door and stands listening)

FORBES Important matters! What is more important than my salary? Really, Mr. Douglass, I am amazed at your apparent lack of understanding. Can you possibly fail to appreciate that I am in a rather unique position here? That a word from me in the proper ears could spell the end of this whole scheme? The end of Brown and you and all the rest?

DOUGLASS So now it's out! At last!

FORBES (*daring*) Yes, at last, if you couldn't get it before! Where do you think you'd be, any of you, if it weren't for me? Why, this whole thing constitutes in essence a conspiracy—a conspiracy against the peace of Virginia and a plot against the government. All I'd have to do would be to go to Washington and seek the proper authorities, and it would be a bad day for you, sir!

DOUGLASS (*flaring*) Bad day for me indeed! Mr. Forbes, if you think you're going to blackmail me—or John Brown either, for that matter—you've got quite a surprise coming. I'll not give you another cent of his money. You may go where you like and tell whom you please, but you'll not intimidate me one whit! Now, I'll thank you to leave my house.

FORBES (*placatingly*) Now, now—there's no need for haste. You needn't upset yourself so, Mr. Douglass. I—

DOUGLASS We will speak no more about it, sir!

FORBES Take until tomorrow to think it over. After all, only two hundred dollars.

DOUGLASS Take your hat and get out. Before I feel compelled to assist you—

FORBES (*indignant*) Now, really, I—! (*he draws himself up with arrogant dignity*) Very well. You force me to take action. I have tried to reason with you, but I should have known that that is impossible. And I am not in the habit of being insulted by . . . By . . . (DOUGLASS removes his spectacles, calmly. FORBES turns and beats a hasty exit)

LEWIS (*steps into the room*) We can stop him! I'll catch him before he gets around the corner—!

DOUGLASS No, Lewis, let him go! I must reach the old man at once—I want you to go to the telegraph office and get off a message. Here, take this down. (*he looks around for paper and pencil, but LEWIS withdraws his own*) To Nelson Hawkins, Esquire. Care of Gerrit Smith, 17 East Locust Street, Peterboro, New York . . .

LEWIS I've got it. Go on.

DOUGLASS "Return at once. A wolf has upset the pail."

(*Curtain*)

Scene Two

(*A few nights later.*)

Gathered in the room are DOUGLASS, BROWN, CHATHAM, LOGUEN, SHIELDS, and another gentleman to be identified as SANBORN. They appear to have been having a conference, but now they have paused and are finishing up refreshments of cake and coffee. LEWIS is circulating with a plate of cake slices, but everyone seems to have had enough. ANNA has the coffee service and pours another cup for one or two of the guests. Several light up cigars or pipes, and the room begins to take on the air of a political caucus. At length, SANBORN puts down his cup and calls the meeting to order. He is a mild, cultured gentleman with a Boston accent)

SANBORN Gentlemen. Gentlemen. It's getting very late. Shall we get on with our business? (*there are ad libs of "Yes. Quite so. By all means"*) All right. (*he turns to BROWN who sits near the fireplace facing the others, as if in a witness chair*) Captain Brown, we have all listened earnestly to your arguments in favor of continuing with your plan. I think I can

greatly admire your spirit and have implicit faith in your capabilities. We have supported you before, and are most anxious to do so again, in order to advance the day of freedom for our enslaved brethren. However—and here I speak not only for myself but also the committee I represent—however, we cannot afford to ignore this new and most distressing development. A trust *was* misplaced. The man *has* gone to the authorities—Senator Seward himself telegraphed me in Boston and asked me to get to you right away. He is trying to keep it quiet, but still for all we know, right now we may be under the watchful eye of federal agents merely awaiting the opportune moment to pounce! Under these circumstances it seems that your plan is doomed to failure if you insist upon pursuing it now. You have convinced us in the past that you are worth supporting. We have subscribed funds and promised supplies and arms and ammunition. We do not withdraw them now! All we ask is what is to prevent you from postponing this venture until there can be more certainty of success? (*there are ad libs of disagreement from the others*)

BROWN Mr. Sanborn, I do not concede that now is a less favorable time than in some distant future. We can do it still! We must not be made timid by the first dark shadow that falls across our path. A swift blow, a swift blow now, gentlemen, before they get a chance to believe the scoundrel—! (SANBORN frowns and shakes his head firmly)

CHATHAM But why not, Sanborn, why not? If we could get things rolling now, catch them off their guard—!

SANBORN You mean let them catch us off our guard! And remember—they've got Forbes with them, now. He knows the whole plan in detail.

BROWN If you will only leave that matter to me—I have those who can be put on his trail. Forbes will get what traitors deserve! (*there is a disapproving murmur*)

SANBORN That is simply impossible, Brown. In the face of what has happened, it's sheer madness!

LOGUEN Careful . . . Careful, Captain.

CHATHAM Well, John, I'm not so sure that that's at all advisable . . .

SANBORN You should never have taken the man into your confidence.

DOUGLASS Well, I think we've *all* been fools not to have seen through his game from the very first. But still, Frank, it seems so . . . tragic to have to postpone the entire operation now.

CHATHAM Of course! What's the matter with Gerrit and Higginson and the others on the committee, Sanborn? Are they getting cold feet because of a handful of stupid men in Washington, or have they been this timid from the very first—

SANBORN Now, now, Chatham, there's no need to go too far over the matter. From the first we've had to consider that we could all be prosecuted for conspiring to violate the Fugitive Slave Law and a score of other such measures. But we all take our chances in this work and regard it as our Christian duty, and I'm sure none of us regrets a single action or dollar spent up to now.

CHATHAM Well, good. Who was it said: "We must all hang together, or most assuredly we shall all hang separately." (*there is a little light laughter*)

LOGUEN (*with a frown*) Well, gentlemen, it is all very well to joke about it, but I for one am behind Captain Brown one hundred percent. I protest against any postponement. If the thing is postponed now, it is postponed forever—because Forbes can do as much evil next year as this. I believe we have gone too far to turn back now!

BROWN (*encouraged*) Aye, Reverend Loguen! And I tell you, sirs, that I can do it. I have the means and I will not lose a single day now. I tell you we can be freeing slaves a week from tonight in Virginia.

CHATHAM What? So soon?

BROWN Absolutely, sir! (*rises*) There is no need for delay. I would have been in Virginia now were not Harriet Tubman lying ill in Canada. But she can send me others who know the "Railroad's" route as well as she. I and my men will free the slaves, and her's will lead them out.

CHATHAM But with so small a band? I thought you needed scores—

BROWN General Tubman will dispatch a good-sized force to me as soon as I have need of them. And when the first blow is struck the slaves will rise throughout the countryside. Men from the free states will come down and join. An army will form, consolidate and

march Southward. Oh, I tell you, sir, it can be done and I can do it now! (he pauses, trembling with the emotion of it, and all eyes turn toward SANBORN. SANBORN meets BROWN's gaze gravely, then slowly and firmly shakes his head. There is a pause as the others register their disappointment) But my men will fall away . . . Everything that I have been building in my lifetime will come down to nothing, nothing . . . (he sinks to his chair) You don't know what you're doing . . . You just don't know . . .

SANBORN We know how disappointed you are, Captain Brown, and we regret it exceedingly believe me. But we cannot listen further. Our hearts are still with you, but I believe it is pretty well decided. (turns toward DOUGLASS) Frederick . . . ?

DOUGLASS I . . . No. No, Frank, I have nothing further to add to what I've already said.

SANBORN All right. Captain Brown, this is what you must do. You must stay low, let time pass. The alarm will die down, the suspicions. Then you will return and strike, and we shall be behind you. In the meantime, tell us no more of your plans. We still trust you with our money, but we can aid you no further for now. Go back to Kansas and wait. Time must pass. (there is silence. BROWN's eyes are smouldering but he does not speak. SANBORN rises, signifying that the conference is at an end, and the others follow suit. SANBORN turns to DOUGLASS) We must thank you, Frederick, for receiving us so graciously on such short notice.

DOUGLASS That's quite all right, Frank. I'm only sorry that I can't put you all up for the night.

CHATHAM Oh, we have plenty of room at our place. I'll take good care of him.

SANBORN That's very kind of you, George.

DOUGLASS (one last try) Stop by tomorrow, unless you have to hurry back.

SANBORN (smiles and shakes his head) I'm afraid I'm catching the early Boston train. So I'll say goodbye now. Until the next time. (he grasps DOUGLASS' hand, then turns to leave. He stops, seeing BROWN still sitting brooding by the fireplace, but BROWN abruptly turns away, refusing to say goodbye, and SANBORN continues out via the hallway. CHATHAM follows. LOGUEN puts a sympathetic hand on BROWN's shoulder before passing on. DOUGLASS accompanies them

all to the door as SHEILDS stands looking after, flashing hostile eyes at the departing guests. ANNA and LEWIS reappear and gather up the cups and saucers. They exit. SHEILDS seats himself dejectedly by the table and gazes with sympathy at BROWN, who continues to sit in defeated silence, solemnly regarding the fire. Presently DOUGLASS returns. He pauses near the archway, then comes slowly down and sits, drawing his chair nearer the fire. For a moment he does not speak)

DOUGLASS (quietly) I'm sorry, John.

BROWN (stirs and smiles weakly) It's all right, Frederick. You told me how it would be.

DOUGLASS Perhaps it is better to wait.

BROWN (sighs)

There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which, taken at the flood, leads on . . .

I am at my tide, Frederick. Despite what they say, I cannot turn back now.

DOUGLASS You don't mean that. Another year, a few months perhaps—

BROWN (shakes his head) I cannot delay further.

DOUGLASS Surely you can't mean that you're going on with it now.

BROWN It will be now or never.

DOUGLASS (alarmed) Has all this tonight meant nothing to you?

BROWN Oh yes, yes. It has meant a great deal. They have failed me at the first small sign of difficulty. I cannot afford to leave them that opportunity again—I will proceed without them. It means altering my plans somewhat, but I have already prepared for that. You see, Frederick, I leave nothing to chance.

DOUGLASS (sympathetically) You're tired, disappointed . . .

BROWN For twenty years this plan to free slaves has held me like a passion. It will be desperate, perhaps, but it will be holy. For I was created to be the deliverer of slaves, and the time is now.

DOUGLASS (goes to him) Come up to bed, and we will speak more of it tomorrow.

BROWN No, my friend. There is no time to waste in sleeping now.

DOUGLASS Now, really, John, you're taking this too far. After a good night's rest things will look different in the morning.

BROWN Morning must find me on my way.

I am leaving tonight. (SHEILDS, sitting silently on the other side of the room, sits up at this, and listens intently)

DOUGLASS Leaving? But what can you do now, alone?

BROWN I still have my band, Frederick. I must get them word immediately—listen to this: (he takes out a telegraph sheet and reads) "The coal banks are open. Old miners will come at once." Ha! They'll know what I mean. And where.

DOUGLASS But what about arms, supplies—?

BROWN I already have enough cached away in a warehouse in Pennsylvania with which to begin. Once we reach Virginia, we'll live off the land. As for arms, there will be all we can use just waiting for us at Harper's Ferry. Once there, we can begin our operations without want of—

DOUGLASS Just a minute! Did you say . . . Harper's Ferry?

BROWN Yes.

DOUGLASS There is a United States Government Arsenal at Harper's Ferry.

BROWN Of course! That is what I mean. We shall seize it first. With its store of weapons and supplies we can arm our forces as they expand, equip Harriet Tubman's men as they come, supply the slaves for miles around.

DOUGLASS Brown! What are you thinking of?

BROWN (speaking fervently now) Can't you see it, Frederick? The word traveling from lip to lip . . . the slaves rallying to the call . . . the mountain passes sealed with bullets . . . liberty spreading southward like a trail of fire! . . .

DOUGLASS John!

BROWN The nation roused—

DOUGLASS Do you know what you're saying?

BROWN The chains dropping—

DOUGLASS It's mad. It's madness, I tell you!

BROWN Free men rising from the muck of enslavement!—

DOUGLASS (shouts) John!! Listen to me. You cannot do it!

BROWN (slowly realizing what DOUGLASS is saying) What? . . .

DOUGLASS It is impossible, insane! You must not even think of it.

BROWN You're . . . going to fail me, then? You too, Douglass? I'm counting on you to

help me, Frederick, are you going back on me too?

DOUGLASS (taking him by the arm) Sit down. Sit down, John. (they sit) Do you believe I'm your friend? That I want to do what's right?

BROWN I believe you, Frederick.

DOUGLASS Then listen to me. I have helped you as much as I could. I intend to help you further, when the right time comes, in your great slave-freeing raids. But what you are saying now is wholly different.

BROWN Wherein is it different? This is greater, that's all, greater. We shall free more slaves and free them faster.

DOUGLASS But don't you realize what you'd be doing? You can't attack Harper's Ferry. You'd be attacking the United States Government. It would be treason!

BROWN (eyes flashing) Treason! Government! Laws! Blast them all to hell! I answer you back, Douglass. I answer you back with humans and right! I answer you back there is a higher law than all!

DOUGLASS John, you're living on earth—you're dealing with men.

BROWN (defiantly) I deal with God!

DOUGLASS Oh, I see! You deal with God. And is it God who counsels you to rash, inopportune action? Is it God who calls you to dash away your talents and your usefulness in a single ill-considered stroke? And what of the slaves themselves—you want to help them, you say. Why then do you think of doing the very thing that will harm them most? Why bring the nation's anger on them? You may defy the federal government, but they cannot.

BROWN But we will rouse the nation behind them! It needs rousing. It's cursed. It's dying. It needs to be startled into action.

DOUGLASS Oh, can't you see, John? By running off slaves from Southern plantations, you attack the slave system without endangering retaliation by the whole nation. Aye! There will be many who will approve and come rallying to your support. But if you start by attacking Harper's Ferry your blow is not at slavery itself. Your blow is against the whole nation, and will bring down on your head—and the slaves—the panic and condemnation of thousands whose sentiment would otherwise be with you.

BROWN I cannot concern myself with public

opinion just now. Action! Action is the only means to reform. You know that, Douglass . . . you've said it yourself.

DOUGLASS Yes, John, yes—but must we have action, any action, at so great a price? Tell me. Tell me, John: is there ever any justification for such unprovoked violence, even in pursuit of a righteous cause?

BROWN Yes! Yes, by God, I believe there is. If we cannot persuade the nation with words to purge itself of this curse, then we must do so with weapons. This is war, I tell you, and in war there must often be sacrifices made to expediency.

DOUGLASS Be careful, John! Think now of what you say. Some day *you* may be sacrificed to *their* expediency.

BROWN I am thinking. And I am unafraid. In God's good time, as we sweep Southward those of good faith will see their trust was not misplaced.

DOUGLASS You'll never get South, John! Not if you insist upon starting at Harper's Ferry. I know the area—it's like a steel trap. Once in you'll never get out alive. They'll surround you, hem you in!

BROWN (*defiantly*) They surrounded me in Kansas! They never took me there!

DOUGLASS They'll hurl all their military might against you!

BROWN We'll cut our way through! We'll take prisoners and hold them as hostages.

DOUGLASS Virginia will blow you and your hostages to hell rather than let you hold the arsenal for an hour!

BROWN I'm not afraid of death! Is that why it's insane, Frederick? Because we may spill a little blood?

DOUGLASS We're talking about freeing slaves, John! Not throwing lives away in a hopeless insurrection!—

BROWN But this is the way to free slaves—all of them, not just a few! (*intensely, with great passion*) It must be by blood! The moral suasion of Moses and Aaron was in vain, even with the abetment of the locusts and the boils. Not till the shedding of the blood of the first born of Egypt was there release for Israel. Through blood out of bondage, Douglass! Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins—

DOUGLASS John! Do you think you are God?

BROWN (*stops, momentarily stunned*) God?

. . . God is different things to different men, Frederick. To some He is a separate entity, dispensing wrath or reward from philanthropic heights. To some He is watchdog conscience, gnawing at the marrow. To me . . . God is simply the perception and the performance of right. And so I am a little bit of God. Or trying to be.

DOUGLASS (*starts to speak, then sighs*) I cannot argue with you further, John Brown. I see I cannot hope to change your mind.

BROWN Then you're coming with me, Frederick?

DOUGLASS I cannot.

SHEILDS (*interrupting from the background*) Wait for me, Cap'n Brown! I'm goin' up to get a few things.

DOUGLASS (*turning*) What? Sheilds . . . ?

SHEILDS Yes, Mistuh Douglass. I believe I'll go wid de ole man. (*he turns and goes upstairs*)

BROWN Come with us, Frederick. I need you.

DOUGLASS I cannot.

BROWN Douglass! I will defend you with my life.

DOUGLASS John—

BROWN I want you for a special purpose. When I strike the bees will begin to swarm and I shall need you to help me hive them.

DOUGLASS You have changed your plan. I cannot go with you now.

BROWN Will you fail me then? Will you fail your people? (*suddenly smoldering*) Or are you so far removed from slavery that you no longer care!

DOUGLASS (*taken by surprise*) What—?

BROWN (*tauntingly*) Have you carried the scars upon your back into high places so long that you have forgotten the sting of the whip and the lash?

DOUGLASS John, that's not being fair! Don't—

BROWN (*like a whip*) Or are you afraid to face a gun? (*DOUGLASS gasps as if struck. Then, catching himself, he grasps the back of a chair for support*)

DOUGLASS (*slowly*) I have never really questioned it before, John. If it would do good . . . if it would do good, this moment I would die, I swear it, John! But I cannot cast away that which I know I can do for that which I

know I cannot do. I have no right to do that. I should rather fail you, John, than feel within myself that I have failed my people. For them . . . I believe it is my duty to live, and to fight in ways that I know can succeed. (*BROWN stares at DOUGLASS for a moment, then turns and starts for the stairway. Reaching it, he pauses and turns to DOUGLASS*)

BROWN I shall miss you, Frederick.

(*Curtain*)

Scene Three

(*A few weeks later. Early morning.*)

Except for a faint glow from the fireplace, the room is in darkness. Breaking the stillness rudely is the sound of someone knocking at the door, excitedly. There is a pause, and the knocking resumes, louder than before. A pause, then again. This time a light appears from the top of the stairway, and ANNA's voice is heard calling: "Yes, just a minute! Just a minute!" Then LEWIS is heard saying, "I'll go down, Mother, you stay up here."

LEWIS *appears descending the stairway with a candle, a pair of trousers pulled on hastily over the bottom of his nightshirt. He goes off to the door*

LEWIS (*as he unbolts the door*) All right, just a minute. (*the door opens*) Yes?

VOICE (*off*) Are you Lewis Douglass?

LEWIS Yes.

VOICE Fred Douglass's boy?

LEWIS Yes, I am.

VOICE Then this here telegram must be for you.

LEWIS Telegram? For me? (*ANNA appears on the stairway with a light. She descends halfway, peering toward the door. She is in nightgown with a shawl thrown over her shoulders and her hair hangs down in a braid.*)

VOICE That's right. Telegraph operator asked me to drop it by to you right away. Urgent.

LEWIS Why, thanks. Thanks very much, Mister—?

VOICE Oh, that's all right. You don't need to know my name, it's better that way. You just get to what that wire says.

LEWIS Hey, wait! Wait a minute, mister.

VOICE (*farther away*) Good night!

ANNA Lewis! What is it, son?

LEWIS (*closes the door and returns*) It's a wire, Mother. It's addressed to "B. F. Blackall, Esq."

ANNA That's Mister Blackall, the telegraph operator.

LEWIS (*opens it hastily and reads*) "Tell Lewis, my oldest son, to secure all important papers in my high desk at once." That's all it says. Not even signed.

ANNA It don't have to be, you know it's from Fred.

LEWIS Gee, Mother, do you think he's in trouble?

ANNA I don't know, son. But I been on pins and needles for the past two days now. The high desk, did he say?

LEWIS Yes, Mother.

ANNA Then he must mean those letters and papers he been keepin' for Captain Brown. Come on, son. (*she heads for the study*)

LEWIS Oh!—but the high desk is locked. And Poppa always keeps the key with him.

ANNA (*turning*) Then look in the kitchen and get a knife or something. Lewis, hurry!

LEWIS All right. (*he goes*)

(*From the stairway comes a small voice crying, "Mom-ma . . .?" ANNA looks up and sees little ANNIE's face peering from between the banisters*)

ANNA Annie! What you doin' out of bed?

ANNIE (*affecting baby talk*) Big noise wake me up. Peoples talkin' and bangin' on doors.

ANNA Now you know you ain't supposed to be gettin' up out of your bed in the middle of the night, even if the Walls of Jericho is tumblin' down! And you with such a cold.

ANNIE But I'm scared, Mom-ma . . .

ANNA Not half as scared as you're gonna be if you don't put your little behin' back in that bed! (*ANNIE begins to cry. ANNA goes to her*) Now, now there, baby. That's no way to do. There ain't nothin' to be afraid of. (*takes her in her arms*) Hush, now, everything's gonna be all right.

LEWIS (*re-enters with a chisel*) This ought to get it open, Mother!

ANNA All right, Lewis. You go ahead. You know what to take out?

LEWIS Yes. Yes, I know. (*he goes into the study*)

ANNIE Mom-ma, where's Poppa?

ANNA Poppa's in Pennsylvania, honey, tendin' to some business.

ANNIE When's he comin' home? I miss him.

ANNA I know you do, darlin'. So do I. He'll be home soon, though. Maybe tomorrow or the next day.

ANNIE Is Sheilds comin' back with him?

ANNA (*quietly*) I don't know, honey.

ANNIE Mister Hawkins?

ANNA No... No, I don't think so, baby. You come on here, now, 'n let me tuck you back in like a nice little lady, 'fore you catch your death of—(ANNIE sneezes) There! You see? (*she rises and starts upstairs with ANNIE in her arms*) Now you just come on and go right back to sleep. There's nothin' for you to be afraid of, an' nobody's gonna wake you up again... (*her voice trails off as they move from sight*)

(*Knocking begins at the door again. LEWIS comes out of the study, startled, a bunch of papers in his hands. The knocking repeats. After a hasty look around, LEWIS stuffs the papers into his waist, arranges his nightshirt over them, and starts for the hallway. Remembering the library door, he dashes back to close it, then on to the front*)

LEWIS (*breathlessly*) Who is it?

CHATHAM (*off*) It's George Chatham, Lewis.

LEWIS (*relieved*) Oh! (*he opens the door*) Come in, Mr. Chatham, you gave me quite a start.

CHATHAM (*enters, removing his hat*) Thank you, my boy. Now, where's Frederick?

LEWIS Oh, he's not here. He's away on a trip to Pennsylvania.

CHATHAM I know, Lewis, but he's due back tonight, isn't he? Have you had no word from him?

LEWIS Well, yes. But he didn't say when he was coming. Just told me to take care of a little business for him, that's all.

CHATHAM But I just left Reverend Loguen. He said he was looking for Frederick tonight. I even went down to meet the train, but he wasn't on it.

LEWIS Well, I'm sorry, sir. Is something the matter?

CHATHAM Yes, by God, there's a great deal the matter! This attack on Harper's Ferry has stirred up a regular hornet's nest. I've got to see your father to find out what's going on.

ANNA (*appears at the head of the stairs*) Lewis? Who is it?

CHATHAM (*turns*) It's George Chatham, Mrs. Douglass.

ANNA (*descending quickly*) Oh, Mr. Chatham. What is it!

CHATHAM Oh no, don't become unduly alarmed. I bear no bad tidings. I just came here looking for Frederick.

ANNA He's on his way home?

CHATHAM Why, yes, didn't you know? Loguen had a telegram from Philadelphia. He should have arrived on the twelve-forty. Perhaps he'll be in on the three-oh-two.

ANNA Oh, Well, I'm so glad. I been near 'bout worried to death, wonderin' where he was and what's goin' on.

CHATHAM You're not the only one, Mrs. Douglass. This thing has set everybody back on their heels.

LEWIS Uh—'scuse me. (*he heads for the study*)

ANNA Go 'head, son... Well, what do you think, Mr. Chatham. Have they got much of a chance?

CHATHAM I'm afraid it looks bad, pretty bad right now, Mrs. Douglass. So far the Captain's still managed to hold the Arsenal with his little band. But Buchanan's ordered in government troops, you know.

ANNA Aw-aww...!

CHATHAM They've got the place surrounded. It'll take a miracle to get them out now. (*shakes his head in grudging admiration*) Oh, that Brown, that Captain Brown! Even if he fails, you've got to give it to him. We told him no, but he went right ahead anyhow. And the sheer nerve of it all—Harper's Ferry! Well, God help him. (*LEWIS returns from the library with a sheaf of letters and papers*)

LEWIS Here, Mother. What shall I... (*conscious of CHATHAM'S presence*)

ANNA (*distressed*) Oh, I don't know, Lewis, I—Out in the woodshed! Hide them under the eaves!

LEWIS Good! (*he dashes out*)

ANNA (*impatient for something to do*) I... I think I'll go on back and fix up a little somethin' to eat. I know Fred'll be near 'bout starved when he gets off the train. Sit down, Mr. Chatham, and make yourself 't home.

CHATHAM No, thank you, Mrs. Douglass.

I'm going to run on back to the telegraph office to catch the latest news. Then I'll meet the train and look for Frederick.

ANNA All right, but at least you ought to stop and take a cup of tea. It's gettin' pretty chilly out, and you know you're gettin' too old to be chasin' aroun' in the middle of the night like some young buck.

CHATHAM Thank you, Mrs. Douglass. But if I were a young buck I'd be out chasing around for different reasons than I am now! (*from off right the front door is heard to open. CHATHAM and ANNA move to the archway*)

ANNA Fred! (*DOUGLASS enters, carrying a traveling bag. He removes his hat as ANNA runs to greet him*)

DOUGLASS (*surprised*) Anna, my dear. What are you doing up so late? And George!

CHATHAM Hello, Frederick, I'm so glad you're back. What happened?—I met the train, you weren't on it.

DOUGLASS No, I got off in the freight yard and walked home, as I often do.

CHATHAM No matter, as long as you're here. Frederick—this Harper's Ferry business. Did you know about this?

DOUGLASS Yes, Yes, I knew.

CHATHAM But Frederick! This wasn't the plan. And even if it were, I thought we'd decided—

DOUGLASS You're perfectly right, George. I tried to talk him out of it, but to no avail. I even went down to Pennsylvania, caught up with John in an abandoned stone quarry near Chambersburg. We argued on and on. But the old man was like steel...!

CHATHAM So you couldn't stop him, eh? Oh, that's just like him—stubborn as an old mule. A magnificent old mule! Tell me, Frederick. How much longer do you think he can hold out?

DOUGLASS (*looks at them both quickly—they haven't heard*) The arsenal fell an hour ago. It's all over now.

CHATHAM What!

DOUGLASS Yes. The Army troops, under a Colonel Robert E. Lee, they stormed the place. John and his men fought bravely, but it fell.

CHATHAM Frederick! And the Captain?

DOUGLASS They took John alive, though they say he's badly wounded. One or two escaped but the others are all killed or captured.

ANNA Have mercy...! And Sheilds? How 'bout Sheilds, did you hear—?

DOUGLASS Yes, Anna, they have him too. According to reports, Sheilds was on the outside when they surrounded the place. He could have gotten away! Instead he slipped back in, said he had to go back to the old man.

ANNA (*turns away*) Poor Sheilds...

CHATHAM Well, that's that. So it's all over.

ANNA Oh, Fred—what will they do with them now?

DOUGLASS It doesn't take much to imagine. If they're lucky, they'll get a trial first. And that's where you can help, George, if you will.

CHATHAM (*eagerly*) Yes?

DOUGLASS We may have a slight chance of saving them if we act right away.

CHATHAM All right, Frederick. You just point the way.

DOUGLASS Good. Now first we have to contact Sanborn and Gerrit Smith and Higginson and the others. We'll have to hire a lawyer, the most brilliant legal mind we can obtain.

CHATHAM (*beginning to make notes*) All right. Just give me a list and I'll get off wires at once. (*from off in the hallway comes a banging at the door and a voice crying: "Douglass! Douglass!"*)

DOUGLASS (*looking up*) What's that? (*ANNA scurries to the door and opens it*)

ANNA (*off*) Why, Rev'n Loguen!

DOUGLASS (*as LOGUEN enters*) Loguen! What's all the excitement?

LOGUEN (*breathing heavily*) I've... I've just heard—

DOUGLASS About John and the arsenal? Yes. We're just mapping plans for their defense. In the next few days we have to rally support from all quarters, perhaps even go to Virginia ourselves, and—

LOGUEN Virginia! In the next few days you'll be as far away from Virginia or Rochester as the fastest ship can sail!

ANNA What!

DOUGLASS What does this mean?

LOGUEN It means you've got to get away, Douglass. At once! They're after you.

DOUGLASS Who?

LOGUEN Federal agents!

CHATHAM But what for?

LOGUEN They found papers in Brown's knapsack, some of them letters from Douglass. They've issued a warrant for his arrest!

CHATHAM But Frederick wasn't there! They can't—

LOGUEN They *have* I tell you. Listen, Douglass. I've just come from Selden's house, the Lieutenant Governor of the state.

DOUGLASS Yes?

LOGUEN Selden summoned me half an hour ago to tell me the Governor's office had just received requisition from the Governor of Virginia for "the deliverance up of one Frederick Douglass," charging him with "murder, robbery, and inciting servile insurrection." And two United States Marshals—with no less than President Buchanan's authorization—have been secretly dispatched from Buffalo and should arrive here before dawn.

ANNA Tonight!!

LOGUEN That's right!

DOUGLASS Well, I expected they might send someone here. But so soon! (to ANNA) Did you get my message? Did you see to the papers?

ANNA Lewis is takin' care of them right now.

DOUGLASS Good. Well, let them come. (he turns back to CHATHAM and his notebook)

ANNA (goes to him) Fred, Fred, listen. If they're after you you've got to get away!

LOGUEN Don't you understand, Douglass? You can't stay here.

DOUGLASS (smiles) But I wasn't at Harper's Ferry. And now that my papers are secure—

LOGUEN And you actually think they'll stop to consider that? Listen—Selden has instructions from Albany. He will have to surrender you if they find you here.

DOUGLASS But we must help John and Shields and the others—

LOGUEN Right now you have to help yourself! Or you'll be in the same jailhouse they're in.

CHATHAM But Frederick wasn't involved in this thing, Loguen. Why should he—

LOGUEN (exasperated) That's not the point, George! Just once let them get their hands on him. Just once let them get him down to Virginia—

CHATHAM (to DOUGLASS) But you can prove, can't you, that—

LOGUEN What do you think he can prove at the end of a rope! (CHATHAM halts) Listen, now. I have Jim Mason standing by down at the

smithy's shop with his team and rig. With a little luck he can get you over the border by sunrise. You'll be safe in Canada for a few days, and by then we can arrange for your passage to England.

DOUGLASS To England!

LOGUEN Yes, Douglass, yes! Once they find out you're in Canada, don't think for one minute they won't try to bring you back.

DOUGLASS You're right, of course, Loguen. But . . . (he looks with concern towards ANNA)

ANNA You go 'head, Fred, don't you worry none about us.

CHATHAM I'll look out for them, Frederick. They'll be safe, believe me.

(LEWIS has returned quietly and stands in the background, his joy at seeing his father back giving way to bewilderment as he catches on to what is being said)

DOUGLASS (with a wry smile) And so this time you've come for me, eh Loguen? . . . And Jim, Jim Mason's standing by again with his rig, for me . . . Well, I've been a fugitive before . . . hunted, running like a beast . . . pursued by human hounds.

LOGUEN (nods) I know the feeling well, Douglass. Now—(indicates that it is time to go)

DOUGLASS (shrugging him off—bitterly) Then tell me, Loguen—how long this night? How long this dark, dark night when no man walks in freedom, without fear, in this cradle of democracy, no man who's black? How will it happen, what will we have to do? Nat Turner tried it with guns, and he failed. Dred Scott went to the high courts, and they hurled him back into slavery. Old John said it must be by blood, and tonight he lies wounded in a Virginia prison. When will it end, Loguen—how long this night?

LOGUEN (slowly) Douglass, this I believe as surely as God gives me breath to speak it: no man lives in safety so long as his brother is in fear. Once arouse consciousness of that, and there will be those living and those dead, there will be guns and blood and the high courts too. But it will come. I may not be here to see it, Douglass, but it will come.

DOUGLASS How often do I wonder. (he turns to go, sees LEWIS)

LEWIS Poppa!

DOUGLASS (reaching toward him) Hello, son-

LEWIS You're going away?

DOUGLASS You'll have to take care of the family for me, Lewis. You're the man of the house, now.

LEWIS (chooking up) Poppa, I—!

DOUGLASS Now, now, son. In front of your mother?

LOGUEN I hate to rush you, Douglass, but—(from the stairway comes ANNIE's voice, asking, "Poppa?")

DOUGLASS (looking up) Yes, Annie, darling! (ANNIE races down the stairs and leaps into DOUGLASS' arms)

ANNIE Oh, Poppa! You're back, you're back.

ANNA (aware of the time) All right, now, baby. It's back to bed for you, before you catch any more cold.

DOUGLASS (concerned) What? Has she been sick?

ANNA Only a little cold, Fred. Here, Annie. Let's go back upstairs.

ANNIE (hugging DOUGLASS more tightly) I don't wanna! I wanna see Poppa some more!

ANNA Now, Annie. That's no way for a little lady to act. You'll see Poppa again—(she stops) Again . . . Come on, honey. Kiss Poppa goodnight.

ANNIE (kissing him) Goodnight, Poppa. See you in the morning.

DOUGLASS Yes . . . Yes, dear. In the morning. (he lets her down)

LEWIS (sensing the situation) Here, Mother, I'll take her up.

ANNA Thank you, Lewis. (ANNIE sneezes) Be sure and tuck her in tight, now.

LEWIS I will. (he turns to his father) Poppa, I—(DOUGLASS indicates for him not to say more in front of ANNIE. LEWIS turns and goes upstairs with ANNIE)

ANNIE (as she goes off) Goodnight, Poppa. Goodnight, Momma.

DOUGLASS (watching her) Goodnight, dear . . .!

ANNA (goes to him) Fred!—

DOUGLASS Now I'll be all right, Anna. Take care of yourself.

ANNA (her arms around him) Oh, Fred! Be careful!

DOUGLASS I'll send you word as soon as I can. Maybe I won't have to go very far or stay very long. Maybe—

LOGUEN (he and CHATHAM are in the hallway) Douglass—! Time grows short.

DOUGLASS Yes, Loguen, I'm ready. (he starts for the door. ANNA runs to him again and they embrace. He breaks away quickly and goes out, giving a last glance up the stairway. CHATHAM precedes him, carrying DOUGLASS' bag)

LOGUEN (to ANNA as he follows) If anyone comes . . .

ANNA (nods her head) I know. I know what to say. (he exits, and the door is heard to close. ANNA stands at the window for a moment, fighting back the tears. Then she comes slowly back into the room. She goes quickly to the lamps and blows them out, leaving herself just a candle. Then she pauses, looking into the fireplace. Taking up a poker, she stirs the dying embers and sings softly to herself)

Didn't it rain, children . . .

Rain, oh my Lord . . .

Didn't it . . . ?

Didn't it . . . ?

Didn't it—

Oh, my Lord, didn't it rain . . .

(There is a sharp rap at the door. ANNA looks up, frightened. The knock sounds again, crisply. ANNA goes to the archway and looks toward the front door. The knocking sounds again, louder and more insistent. ANNA lifts her head, draws her shawl about her shoulders, and strides bravely towards the door with her candle, as the curtain falls)

ACT THREE

(TIME Six months later. Early evening.)

LEWIS is seated at the table at right, going over a ledger book with pen and ink. There is a stack of "North Stars" on a chair nearby. From off right, at the front door, ANNA is heard talking with a caller)

ANNA (off) All right. Thank you, thank you very much. I hope you enjoy it. Goodbye . . . (the door closes and ANNA enters. She sighs happily) Well, that's another one. Here Lewis, put this with the rest. (she gives him a bill and some change)

LEWIS Fine! Say, we could use you at the office. You're getting to be our star salesman.

ANNA (*smiles*) My, the word certainly got around in a hurry. I don't know how many times today I've answered that door to folks wantin' their copy.

LEWIS Same way at the office. Guess they really missed it while Pa was gone.

ANNA That's what everybody says. But there's a lot of people comin' by who never took it before. (*proudly*) I sold nine new subscriptions today.

LEWIS That's fine! Well, I'm certainly glad we're back in business again. Though I still can't get over them calling off that investigation all of a sudden.

ANNA Well, what with the election campaign comin' up, there wasn't much else they could do. By the way, them folks out in Chicago. Them Republicans. Have they nominated anybody yet?

LEWIS Last I heard this afternoon, Senator Seward of Massachusetts was still leading on the second ballot. But Abraham Lincoln of Illinois was coming up strong.

ANNA (*frowns*) Poor Mr. Seward certainly has worked hard for it. Well, soon's you find out you better go in there and tell your father. That's all he's been studyin' 'bout all day.

LEWIS But isn't that newspaper man still in there?

ANNA Mr. Tilton? Yes, son. Seems he came all the way up here from New York to get Fred to write some articles for his paper.

LEWIS Oh?

ANNA Yes, and then—(*she breaks off as the study door opens and DOUGLASS enters, frowning*)

DOUGLASS (*searching about among papers, books, etc.*) Anna, what did you do with that little book I use for keeping names and addresses in? I can't find it anywhere.

ANNA Well, I don't know, Fred. I haven't bothered it. Lewis, you know what he's talkin' about?

LEWIS Why, no. No, Pa, I haven't seen it.

DOUGLASS (*annoyed*) Well, somebody must have moved it! I always keep it in the lower right hand drawer of my high desk, and now it's not there. Anna, are you sure . . . ?

ANNA (*calmly*) Now, Fred, you don't have to holler like that at me! . . .

DOUGLASS What? Oh—oh, I'm sorry, I . . .

ANNA When did you have it last, do you remember? Have you looked in all the drawers?

Try all your pockets? How 'bout upstairs? Here, let me go see—(*she starts for the stairway, but halts as DOUGLASS feels his pockets and withdraws a small book*)

DOUGLASS (*slowly raising his eyes*) I'm . . . sorry, Anna.

ANNA That's all right, Fred. (*pause*) Now don't stay 'way from your guest.

DOUGLASS Huh? Oh, yes. Yes . . . (*he goes back into the study, closing the door*)

ANNA (*shakes her head*) Lawd-a-mussy!

LEWIS Mother, what's wrong? Do you think he's sick?

ANNA Well, Fred ain't really sick, not like you usually think of somebody being sick.

LEWIS Then what is it?

ANNA I don't know just how to explain it, son. But there's somethin' pressin' on his mind. Somethin' heavy. Yes, I guess Fred is sick, Lewis. Sick somewhere in his soul. He's not the same since he's been back.

LEWIS Mother, do you think maybe it's because . . . because of Annie?

ANNA (*softly*) That may be part of it, son. Fred loved that child more than anything else in the world, and when she died—especially with him away in Europe—I . . . I guess a part of him died, too. I know it's the same way with me.

LEWIS (*comfortingly*) Mother . . . Do you think maybe if I talked to him . . .

ANNA No, Lewis. Leave him alone. When he's ready to talk about it, he will. (*the door knocker sounds*) Lord-a-mussy! I been answerin' that door all day.

LEWIS You sit right down now, I'll get it. Probably another one of those subscribers. (*he goes to the door*)

ANNA All right, Lewis. If you need me I'll be back in the kitchen. (*she straightens up the newspapers and goes out left. The study door opens and DOUGLASS appears, ushering out THEODORE TILTON*)

DOUGLASS . . . and believe me, Mr. Tilton, it is with great reluctance that I must turn you down.

TILTON (*somewhat in annoyance*) Yes, and it is with great reluctance that I must leave without getting what I came for. (*stops and turns*) You know, Douglass, the first time we met I was impressed, greatly impressed. Completely aside from considerations of race, I thought: "Here is a man of whom the whole

nation should be proud!" And now I find you here, twiddling your thumbs, as it were, sulking in the wake of your exile because of this Harper's Ferry business—

DOUGLASS Mr. Tilton, it is well known that I was not present at Harper's Ferry. Perhaps I should have been, but the fact of it is I had no part in the matter.

TILTON But do you deny you had dealings with John Brown? I was at the trial, I saw the letters and documents, I—

DOUGLASS (*electrified*) You were at the trial?!!

TILTON Why, yes. I covered the sessions personally for my paper . . .

DOUGLASS Then you saw John Brown before—before . . .

TILTON Yes, Mr. Douglass. I was there.

DOUGLASS Tell me . . . Tell me, Mr. Tilton. I . . . (*he indicates a chair. TILTON sits*)

TILTON (*solemnly*) The old man was quite a brave soul. His conduct and deportment during the trial were commendable—even the prosecution had the greatest respect for him, you could tell . . . Of course, they did rush things a bit. Brown's wounds hadn't healed before they dragged him into court . . . But his mind was clear and his tongue quite sharp. When the counsel they appointed to him tried to introduce a plea of insanity, he rejected it himself, told the court in booming tones that he considered it a "miserable artifice and pretext," and he viewed such a motion with contempt . . . And then, after the verdict, when they asked him if he had anything to say . . . he rose erect, though it must have pained him terribly to do so . . . and he said—

DOUGLASS (*staring into space*) ". . . had I so interfered in behalf of the rich, the powerful, the so-called great . . . every man in this Court would have deemed it an act worthy of reward. To have interfered in behalf of His despised poor, I did no wrong, but right."

TILTON (*nods his head*) It was . . . well, little short of magnificent.

DOUGLASS (*whispers*) John! . . .

TILTON I tried to get to see him afterwards. But they kept him under heavy guard, barred all visitors except his wife. . . .

DOUGLASS Mary . . . Poor Mary.

TILTON President Buchanan ordered a detachment of federal troops in to guard the

town, three hundred strong, under Colonel Robert E. Lee—he's quite famous now, you know, they say he'll be made a general for sure. All Charlestown became an armed camp . . . the army troops, State Militia with cannon, volunteers, even fresh-faced cadets from Virginia Military Institute. Ha!—every so often some young fool would cry out, shoot at a branch in the dark, and the whole lot of them would scurry around in the night like terrified idiots!

DOUGLASS And . . . then?

TILTON (*starts to speak, then rises, shaking his head*) I cannot talk about it. I'd never seen a hanging before, and I hope to God I shall never see one again. (*turns*) But you, Douglass . . .

DOUGLASS Don't . . . don't. (*to himself*) I know the old man was wrong, but I should have gone with him anyway . . . Shields! Did you see Shields Green? The Negro they called the Emperor?

TILTON No. I did not stay for the other trials. But, of course, you know . . .

DOUGLASS (*turns away*) Yes, I know.

TILTON When I learned you were back from England, it excited me! Here is a man so brave, that even with the shadow of a congressional investigation stalking him, he comes home to continue the fight—I must have articles, a whole series of writings from this man for my paper, I said! And then your letter, turning me down . . .

DOUGLASS You give me more credit than I am due, Mr. Tilton. I came home at this time only because of death in the family.

TILTON Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. But still, why not back to the struggle?

DOUGLASS (*evasively*) I . . . need time to think, I—If I could have brought my family to England I might have stayed there. . . . Slavery . . . this whole situation, Mr. Tilton . . . Frankly, I'm beginning to think it's . . . hopeless.

TILTON (*stunned*) Hopeless . . . ? Hopeless . . . ? (*begins with sadness and builds toward anger*) So . . . The great Frederick Douglass creeps home, tail between his legs? The man who argued so bravely that the philosophy of reforms lies in earnest struggle is tired of struggling himself. "If there is no struggle, there is no progress," he says. "Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet depreciate agitation, are men who want crops without

plowing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning . . . the ocean without the roar of its many waters." And now this sterling writer, this august philosopher declares the situation hopeless. He writes words of fiery revolution to others, and after he persuades them *he* sinks to the ground, exhausted and faint!

DOUGLASS (*stiffly*) So . . . you read my paper?

TILTON Every issue you sent me! And I must say I was taken in like a perfect fool. Even started echoing your sentiments on the editorial pages of my own paper, causing me to lose circulation by the thousand and forcing me into debt to raise funds for its continued existence. Hah! And now I find my inspiration, my dauntless messiah has lost his faith. Behold . . . ! He heals the blind, and when they see enough to follow him, lo! the man is blind himself!

DOUGLASS (*calling a halt*) Mr. Tilton! (*turns away*)

TILTON (*emotion subsiding*) No matter, no matter! . . . The newly enlightened will carry aloft the brazier even if it does burn the hands a bit. As a matter of fact, I shall be surprised when I reach New York if my plant is still standing.

DOUGLASS Why so?

TILTON (*smiles*) Oh, I'm quite the radical abolitionist these days, you should see! I've passionately eulogized John Brown, attacked the federal government as a pro-slavery bunch of horse-thieves, and called President Buchanan a pig-headed ass in inch-high headlines on the front page! Oh, you should see the stack of law-suits filed against me.

DOUGLASS You are either very brave or very foolish.

TILTON Who cares—I've been having fun! (*impishly*) And besides, I'm right. Why, have you ever taken a close look at a picture of Buchanan's face? . . . But I see you are in no mood for jest. Well, can't say I haven't tried. No harsh feelings, I hope?

DOUGLASS No. No, of course not. (*there is a knock at the door. Presently ANNA appears going to answer it*)

TILTON I'll be going now. Got to get back down and start beating the drums for the election campaign. If you should change your mind,

and decide to help me make a little music, don't hesitate to join the band, eh?

DOUGLASS If I should, I'll let you know—

TILTON No—no, no promises now one way or the other. If you come to the point where you must, you will. (*ANNA comes on with GEORGE*)

CHATHAM Well . . . Chatham!

CHATHAM (*carries an odd-shaped bundle which he leaves in the hallway*) Mr. Tilton! Why, I didn't know you were in town. Hello, Frederick.

DOUGLASS Hello, George.

TILTON I didn't expect to be, but I ran up on a little editorial business. How's Ellen and the girls?

CHATHAM Oh, fine, just fine. You're not leaving, are you? I just—

TILTON Yes, I'm afraid I must. My mission was fruitless and I must go on back. What's the latest on the convention, have you heard?

CHATHAM Yes, they've just finished the second ballot and are getting ready for a third. Our man Seward's still leading. Perhaps he'll take it on the next ballot.

ANNA And how about Lincoln? I thought he was pressin' pretty hard.

CHATHAM Oh, I wouldn't give him a second thought. He's gained a few votes, true, but they'd never be so stupid as to nominate such an idiot!

TILTON Well, Lincoln might not be as bad as we expect. He has already distinguished himself in debate with Stephen Douglas, and as for the "rump" candidate, Breckinridge, I don't think we'll have to worry much about him. So pluck up, George!

CHATHAM Well, if they do nominate Lincoln, I shall have the greatest difficulty in resigning myself to the necessity of supporting him, hayseeds and all. Why the man's simply impossible! "Honest Abe" they call him. Sounds like a used carriage dealer.

TILTON Now, now, George. Just because the man is not of solid New England Abolitionist stock is no reason to give him up for lost. He may prove his worth, in time.

CHATHAM (*hands together*) Let us pray . . .

TILTON (*laughs*) On that, I'll take my leave! Goodbye, Chatham. (*bows*) Mrs. Douglass. (*to*

DOUGLASS, *who starts to see him out*) No, that's all right, I can find my way to the door. And Douglass! . . . (*extends his hand—sincerely*) I'm leaving my first drummer's chair open. Just in

case . . . (*with a wave of the hand he is off, escorted to the door by ANNA*)

CHATHAM (*smiling*) What's all this, Frederick? Are you going in for musicianship these days?

DOUGLASS No . . . No, George. I'm afraid I'd play out of tune. Now, what have you come to see me about?

CHATHAM Well, two things, really. The first I think you already have some idea of.

DOUGLASS (*turning away*) Yes. Yes, I know.

CHATHAM Then what is it, Frederick? Yesterday at your office I asked you to join with us in our rally tonight at Corinthian Hall. But tonight I hear you have tendered your regrets. Is this true, Frederick?

DOUGLASS Yes. It's true.

CHATHAM But Frederick! Why are you refusing us now, when we need you most? We haven't had so good a chance in years to upset the slave-holders' stranglehold on the Presidency. We have to stir up all the support we can get.

DOUGLASS I know all that, George, you don't have to—

CHATHAM Then you'll do it, Frederick? The whole town will be so glad to see you. You know, you've become quite a celebrity since you've been gone.

DOUGLASS Oh. And why?

CHATHAM Why? Why, you ask! Why, because l'affaire John Brown has captured the hearts and imaginations of the whole North! It's fired the flame of liberty and turned many a pussyfooting ne'er-do-well into an ardent Abolitionist! John Brown's gallows has become a cross. And all Rochester is proud to know that you helped him, that you believed in him when other less hardy souls failed him. That you had to flee the screaming, anguished wrath of the Virginia slavers because of your part in the undertaking.

DOUGLASS (*stricken*) Is that what people think?!!

CHATHAM Why, you're a hero, man! Rochester's own representative in John Brown's great venture.

DOUGLASS George . . . ! George . . . (*suddenly*) I cannot speak for you tonight. That's all.

CHATHAM But Frederick. I told the Rally Committee I'd come here personally, and—

DOUGLASS (*curtly*) You should have consulted me before making any such promise.

CHATHAM (*at first, taken aback. Then, challenging*) Frederick . . . what's wrong.

DOUGLASS Wrong? Why—I'm tired . . . I haven't been feeling too well, lately. Yes, I've been ill.

CHATHAM Frederick . . . we've been friends for a long time. Ever since you first came to Rochester and started your paper.

DOUGLASS Please! Please, George, I'd be the first to admit that I owe you a great deal, but don't try to use that to force me to do something I am not agreed to doing.

CHATHAM That's not it at all, Frederick! I meant that I had come to believe the two of us could sit down and talk openly and fairly with each other. But it is hardly honorable of you, is it, to hide behind such a paltry excuse? You, who have braved storms and mobs and defied death itself in bringing your message to the people?

DOUGLASS (*turns to him*) George, I cannot speak for you. I can no longer stand upon a platform and address an audience as I have in the past.

CHATHAM Why, Douglass, you're one of the ablest public speakers I've ever known.

DOUGLASS Able or not, I am not worthy.

CHATHAM Not worthy? Why, who—if not you, of all people—who can lay claim to greater right?

DOUGLASS I have forfeited my right! I have failed to live up to the confidence placed in me.

CHATHAM Douglass! . . . You're talking in riddles!

(*DOUGLASS turns despairingly, and starts into his study. His hand freezes on the doorknob, then, resignedly, he closes the door and turns again to face CHATHAM*)

DOUGLASS George . . . you mentioned that the people of Rochester think of me as a hero, their own representative in John's great venture. You know as well as I do that it isn't true.

CHATHAM Frederick, I have always known you to be a man of the highest dedication to the cause of liberty, and—

DOUGLASS We're not talking about past reputation, George, and we cannot base supposed fact upon such schoolboy idealism as

dedication to a cause! The question is: was I or was I not an accomplice of John Brown in his raid on Harper's Ferry on October 16, 1859?

CHATHAM Listen, Frederick, I—

DOUGLASS Why, you have me sailing under false colors, cloaked by the public imagination in a role of glory that is as false to me as if I played Romeo upon the stage. (turns) Shall I tell you the truth of the matter? Shall I—

CHATHAM But Frederick, I don't see—

DOUGLASS Well, I'll tell you whether you want to hear it or not! (he wheels about and paces, the Prosecuting Attorney, his own conscience on trial) George, that night after you and Sanborn and the others left, John told me he was going on with it, that he was going to start at Harper's Ferry. I argued against it, but in vain. When he implored me to go with him, I told him I thought it was more important for me to speak and to write, to stay alive for my people, than to take the chance of dying with him at Harper's Ferry. And so I let him go, alone—except for Shields Green . . . But George . . . I have discovered that it is possible for a man to make a right decision, and then be tormented in spirit the rest of his life because he did not make the wrong one. There are times when the soul's need to unite with men in splendid error tangles agonizingly with cold wisdom and judgement . . . Then in London, when the news came . . . how brave the old man was . . . how steadfastly he refused to name or implicate anyone . . . how he died upon the gallows, it came to me in a rush that John, in his way, had succeeded! In splendid error he had startled the sleeping conscience of the nation and struck a blow for freedom that proves stronger every hour. And now you come to me and ask me to play the hero. To accept the plaudits of the crowd for my "gallant alliance" with a man who was wrong in life, but in death has scored a victory—a victory you propose me to take the bows for.

CHATHAM Frederick, you must hear me—

DOUGLASS Don't you see, George, that I cannot do it! John believed in his mission and however wrong he was he gave his life for it. But what have I done, except talk about it—I who have been a slave!

CHATHAM (rising) Frederick, you're torturing yourself! Don't—

DOUGLASS I will not go on masquerading as

a crusader, a leader of my people, a brave warrior for human rights!

CHATHAM Will you stop a moment and listen!

DOUGLASS You are in the presence of a fraud! I resumed publishing my paper because I must feed my family, but do not believe that I can stand on a platform and look an audience in the eyes with this burning inside me: "Are you afraid to face a gun?!"

CHATHAM (takes DOUGLASS forcibly by the arm—shouts) Frederick, I demand that you be quiet! (DOUGLASS grasps the back of a chair, his energy spent. CHATHAM speaks gently) That's it. Listen. There is a second reason I came to see you tonight, Frederick. It is to fulfill a request.

DOUGLASS (wearily, as in delirium) Request . . . request . . . what kind of request?

CHATHAM (as he secures his package from the hallway) Early this winter I made a trip to North Elba. There, by a great boulder in which he himself once carved the letters "J. B." is where they buried Captain Brown. I talked to his widow, Mary, a proud, fierce-eyed woman whose composure made me half ashamed of my tears. When she learned I was from Rochester, she gave me something to give to you, Frederick. (he takes the package to the sofa) I told her you were in England, but she smiled and said you would be back. You had a job to do, she said, and she knew you would be back to finish it. (he undoes the canvas and withdraws a tarnished old musket and a torn, bespattered American flag) She asked me to give these to you personally, Frederick. That John wanted you to have them. (he carries the musket to DOUGLASS, who slowly reaches out for it, then suddenly cringes, folding his hands)

DOUGLASS His . . . musket?

CHATHAM Yes . . . (he takes the musket back to the sofa and lays it down, carefully. Then picks up the flag and drapes it over the musket) And the flag he carried with him to Harper's Ferry . . . (fumbles in his waistcoat) He gave her a message for you, there in the prison, while he was waiting. (withdraws a folded piece of paper) Here.

DOUGLASS (takes it slowly, and reads; barely audible) "Tell Douglass I know I have not failed because he lives. Follow your own star, and someday unfurl my flag in the land of the free." (he bows his head, his shoulders shaking

In Splendid Error

silently. Then slowly, haltingly, he makes his way toward the sofa. Dimly, from a distance, comes the sound of the booming of a drum. CHATHAM goes to the hallway window and looks out. He turns and watches DOUGLASS, who, having reached the sofa, bends over to touch the flag and musket)

CHATHAM (softly) It's nearly time for the rally, Frederick. They are marching from the square. (comes to him) Come, Frederick. Will you join us?

DOUGLASS (quiet now. When he speaks his voice is steady) You go on ahead, George. I'll be along in a moment.

CHATHAM (understandingly) All right. All right.

DOUGLASS But . . . I must tell them the truth. I did not go with John.

CHATHAM (nods admiringly) You tell them, Frederick. You tell them what you must. (he goes to the hallway just as LEWIS comes rushing in from outside, where there is excitement in the air. The drum-beats are nearer and there are voices)

LEWIS (joyously) They're coming! They're coming! It's a torchlight parade!

CHATHAM Well, let's see it, son! Let's see it!

LEWIS And the convention's decided. The candidate is chosen!

CHATHAM (stops) What! Who is it, Lewis?

LEWIS Lincoln!

CHATHAM (astonished—roars like a wounded bull) Lincoln?! We cry out for a leader, a savior, a knight in shining armor! And who do they offer us? Barrabas! (ANNA comes quickly down the stairs)

ANNA Lord-a-mussy! What's goin' on out here!

CHATHAM It's a torch-light parade, Mrs. Douglass. Come! (he guides ANNA and LEWIS out, then stops and turns for a moment, puffing his cheeks indignantly) Lincoln! . . . (he stomps out)

(DOUGLASS stands gazing down at the flag and musket. Outside the excitement has increased, and now a bright flicker of orange and yellow light dances in from the street, bathing the hallway with bobbing shafts of light. The booming drum is very near now, and amid the accompanying babble a voice cries, "There's Fred Douglass's house!" Another takes it up: "Yeah, where is he?" And another: "We want Douglass!" And now the others join in, shouting: "We want Douglass! We want Douglass!" DOUGLASS stirs and turns his head to listen. ANNA rushes back into the room excitedly)

ANNA Fred! Where are you, Fred! They callin' for you! For you, Fred! (she pauses upstage, arm extended) Well, come on! They callin' for you!

DOUGLASS (lifts his hand) I'm coming, Anna. (ANNA goes back off. A fife and drum corps has approached and now swings into "Battle Hymn of the Republic," and the voices take it up, singing: "John Brown's body lies a-mould'ring in the grave . . ." DOUGLASS picks up the flag. He folds it. He holds it against his breast for a moment. Then laying it over his arm, he draws himself to full height and strides manfully off to the door, as the curtain falls)