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## The Characters

*(And where they appear)*

JERRY (ACT A, B), young, gorgeous guy from rural Illinois. The kind of guy who wears long johns under a plaid shirt. Jerry projects the image of a good ole boy from farm country, but there's something a little too meticulous about the way he's put together, something effeminate: He appears to have actual human feeling, a genuine no no.

ANTON (ACT A, C), the mother-fuckin' wolf. Anton is so smooth, cigarettes smoke him to look cool. I don't really know what that means, but maybe it helps. Anton is on the wrong side of 40, has never settled down with anyone or anything, and leads a fabulous life. Always impeccably dressed.

ESMERELDA (ACT A), a larger than life woman, Esmerelda is black and Cubana. She is one of those women adventurous young girls aspire to be. She does not care what others say or think. She has done it all, and anything she hasn't done yet, there is no doubt she'll get to. Esmerelda wears wild outfits that say Kate Hepburn meets Amelia Earhart: riding jodhpurs & thigh-high boots; safari gear; sharp tweed suits.

TOM (ACTS A, B, C), Menard County's conservative District Attorney, former Congressman, and Jerry's father. Tom believes his home is under attack by radicals and he will do anything to protect the lifestyle of rural Illinois. Tom is a legend in repose, having been instrumental in the recovery of Republican power in Illinois in the post-Daley years. He hasn't done much lately.

REGINA (ACTS B, C), a State Senator from the Chicago area, Regina is a lawyer and a Republican. She is a true believer in the roots of the Republican party, essentially a libertarian. Regina radiates authority, genius, and ambition. She is simultaneously a good person, a true patriot and hungry for power.

HARMONY (ACTS B, C), a schoolteacher in Menard County, Harmony is a left-wing liberal with extremely progressive politics and lifestyle. She has kept this secret for most of her life in Menard County because she knows people would not appreciate it. Sadly, she is now in the spotlight and cannot hide any longer.

LLOYD (ACTS B, C), a political operative from Washington, Lloyd is the kind of guy who knows where the bodies are buried. He's a string-puller and a dealmaker. He oozes charm, even when he's being an asshole. He seems perpetually amused.

TINA (ACT B, C), Regina's legislative aide. An up-and-coming operative in the party, Tina believes Regina is a rising star and she intends to hitch her wagon to that star.

MOM (ACT A), a woman in her early 50s dying of something. She is sweet and manipulative as hell. She should be played by a younger actress (likely around 40) made up to look old and sick.

JUDGE (ACT B), a rural judge. Tries to be fair, but can't help but generally side with the prosecution.

BAILIFF (ACT B), a young court worker. Has a casual relationship with the judge.

PRINCIPAL (ACT B), an officious man, the principal of Menard Elementary.

VIOLET (ACT B), a precocious little girl who is creepily articulate and manipulative.

TIMMY (ACT B), a tremendously dumb child.

DANCER & DANCER 2 (ACT A), drunk people at a costume party.

SPARKY (ACT C), a cub reporter, very excitable.

WALTER (ACT C), a very experienced reporter. A bit of a prick.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN (ACTS A, B, C), the dead president. Over the course of the play, Lincoln should be played by every cast member regardless of sex or race. It is left to the production to determine who should play him at any given moment. Sometimes, several Abes appear on stage at once. All of the actors should chip in to play Abe at those moments. All that is necessary to represent Abe is the beard and stovepipe hat.

## The Cast

The play is written for seven actors with multiple casting. This is essential to several comedic effects. If for some reason a production is swimming in money, these parts should not be individually cast. Here are the parts played by each of the seven:

*Actor 1:*

TOM  
WALTER  
ABE

*Actor 2:*

ANTON  
JUDGE  
ABE

*Actor 3:*

JERRY  
BAILIFF  
SPARKY  
THOMAS JEFFERSON  
ABE

*Actor 4:*

LLOYD  
PRINCIPAL  
TIMMY  
ABE

*Actress 1:*

ESMERELDA  
REGINA  
ABE

*Actress 2:*

MOM  
HARMONY  
ABE

*Actress 3:*

TINA  
VIOLET  
GEORGE WASHINGTON  
ABE

## The Setting

The action of the play takes place around Menard County, Illinois, with a few scenes elsewhere. The main settings are:

A Cornfield—Out in the middle of nowhere, there is tall corn as far as the eye can see.

A Dance Floor—A clear stage for dancing.

Humble Pie—A modest pie shop in Menard County.

Courtroom C—A courtroom in the Menard County Court House.

Outside the Courtroom—A mostly empty stage in front of a grand pair of double doors marked “Courtroom C.”

The offices of Senator Regina Lincoln—An office in Springfield, about an hour outside of Menard County.

## Production Notes

This is a comedy that occasionally turns very serious. Do not play the serious parts for laughs (like the death of Tom). Do not gloss over the comedy. Or, go ahead and do either AT YOUR PERIL! The play works best when kept at a frenetic, almost chaotic pace. This will be challenging. It is possible to do. Pick the moments you will dwell on with care.

Finally, in smaller houses, feel free to play with how the audience chooses the acts. If you can count hands and you'd like to, feel free to nix the representative stuff and have the actors count hands (the actors will have to improv lines surrounding hand-voting; you have permission to do so).

## Acknowledgments

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Originally produced by San Francisco Playhouse  
Bill English, Artistic Director/Susi Damilano, Producing Director  
San Francisco, California

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Jim Kleinmann, Artistic Director, San Francisco, California

## Acknowledgments (continued)

*Abraham Lincoln's Big, Gay Dance Party* had its World Premiere on December 13, 2008 at San Francisco Playhouse, San Francisco, California, directed by Chris Smith. The cast was as follows:

TOM and WALTER . . . . . Joe Kady  
REGINA and ESMERELDA . . . . . Velina Brown  
ANTON and JUDGE . . . . . Mark Anderson Phillips  
LLOYD, PRINCIPAL and TIMMY . . . . Brian Degan Scott  
TINA and VIOLET . . . . . Sarah Mitchell  
HARMONY and MOM . . . . . Lorraine Olsen  
JERRY and SPARKY . . . . . Michael Phillis

*Abraham Lincoln's Big, Gay Dance Party* had its Off Broadway premiere on August 11, 2010 at the Acorn Theater, New York, New York, directed by Chris Smith. The cast was as follows:

TOM and WALTER . . . . . Robert Hogan  
REGINA and ESMERELDA . . . . . Stephanie Pope Caffey  
ANTON and JUDGE . . . . . Arnie Burton  
LLOYD, PRINCIPAL and TIMMY . . . . . Ted Koch  
TINA and VIOLET . . . . . Lisa Birnbaum  
HARMONY and MOM . . . . . Pippa Pearthree  
JERRY and SPARKY . . . . . Ben Roberts

# ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S BIG, GAY DANCE PARTY

by Aaron Loeb

## Prologue

*(An empty stage. HARMONY stands center stage and addresses the house. A CROWD of parents watch.)*

**HARMONY.** Good evening, parents and friends of Menard Elementary! I'm Harmony Green and tonight, my fourth graders are proud to present to you this brand new Christmas pageant, written this year to help us all learn more about Menard County's favorite son, Abraham Lincoln. But before we begin, a few announcements. Please make sure your cell phones are off and do take note of the emergency exits. Now, please sit back and join me in cheering on your sons and daughters in...*"Santa Receives a Presidential Pardon!"*

*(HARMONY sits, claps. CROWD joins in. Enter GEORGE WASHINGTON and THOMAS JEFFERSON as played by nine-year-olds. Well, adult actors pretending to be nine-year-olds.)*

**GEORGE WASHINGTON.** I am George Washington. I was the first president and I cannot tell a lie: I love Christmas! Look! It is my friend, Thomas Jefferson!

*(Applause from the CROWD.)*

**THOMAS JEFFERSON.** Hello, George Washington! I am Thomas Jefferson!

**GEORGE WASHINGTON.** Merry Christmas, Thomas Jefferson! Are you going to receive any special presents this Christmas?

**THOMAS JEFFERSON.** No! I am on Santa's naughty list. Because even though I wrote the Declaration of Independence, saying all men are created equal, I continued to own slaves. Slavery is naughty.

*(Mumbling from the CROWD.)*

**GEORGE WASHINGTON.** Uh-oh! I also own slaves. Maybe we should get Abraham Lincoln to free our slaves, and then we can get Christmas presents from Santa!

*(Enter ABRAHAM LINCOLN.)*

**ABRAHAM LINCOLN.** Hello, George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. I am Abraham Lincoln. What seems to be the problem?

**THOMAS & GEORGE.** We both violate the principles of democracy, Abraham Lincoln!

**ABRAHAM LINCOLN.** Then I can help you, because I am America's greatest president. Why, before I freed the slaves, I lived right here in Menard County!

*(The CROWD now applauds and hoots.)*

When I moved to Springfield to become a lawyer, I was very close with my friend, Joshua Speed. Very very close. We even shared a bed!

*(From the CROWD, someone says, "What?")*

**THOMAS.** Better be careful! I shared my bed with Sally Hemings and it got me right on the naughty list!

*(From the CROWD, someone says, "Inappropriate!")*

**ABRAHAM LINCOLN.** No, there's nothing naughty about my love for Joshua. It's a natural and beautiful thing. We were in love, just like your mommy and daddy, and we would have gotten married to each other if...married to each other if the world were tolerant...

*(The CROWD starts booing at "gotten married" and soon drowns out the kids. ALL look at the CROWD, booing louder. They bow and run off stage. HARMONY stands up.)*

**HARMONY.** If everyone could please take your seats! Please! The children have practiced so hard—

*(She is drowned out by boos. Perhaps there are rotten tomatoes. Shouts of "Get out of our town!" and "I'm calling the Sheriff!" and "I wish I had my gun!" are heard. HARMONY rushes off stage. The CROWD keeps booing, but as they do, they put on stovepipe hats and beards. On cue, music strikes up and seven ABEs dance onto stage... They do an elaborate chorus-style dance number taken straight from the pages of the Broadway's greatest musicals, culminating in a final pose that makes liberal use of jazz hands. When ABE speaks below, his lines are spoken by many or all of the ABEs on stage.)*

**ABE.** How's everybody feeling tonight? Come on people. I saved the freaking Union. I merit some excitement. Let's try that again. I ask how you're feeling, and you say "Feelin' good, Abe!" Okay? Can the American people still do that much together? How's everybody feeling tonight?!

*(After the reply:)*

Great! Great. If only you weren't lying through your teeth.

You're not feelin' good. You're pissed off! At the people who aren't like you and who believe the wrong things. What could be more American than that? Being pissed off at other people for their stupid ideas.

Take Miss Harmony Green's Christmas Pageant as an example. Where the young man dressed like me talked about my special friendship with Joshua? Well, it's got the good people of my old home town so agitated, they've put that little school teacher on trial for telling her kids I was a...fancy gentleman. Some folks are calling it the trial of the century. Just think of it—folks up in arms about the identity of a man dead 150 years.

Y'know, the funny thing about being a ghost is you realize no one had any idea who you were when you were alive. Maybe you didn't even know yourself. Was I a liberator? A tyrant? An ambitious man? A conservative? A liberal? Was I...gay? One thing is certain. I was totally gay.

*(ABEs start arguing with each other.)*

No, I wasn't!

Yes, I was.

How could you say such a thing?

"I never swallowed" is no defense, okay?

That's disgusting!

Quiet! All of you! we've come here tonight to show you the Trial of the Century and the people who made it happen.

*(The actors playing the introduced parts pull down their beards and remove their hats to introduce themselves.)*

**TOM.** Tom Hauser, the prosecutor. I'll do what's right!

**REGINA.** Regina Lincoln, the defense attorney. I'll fight for you!

**ANTON.** Anton Renault, the reporter from the big city. Pulitzer!

**ABE.** As this is still a Republic, the question is, whose story do you want to see first? Through a completely fair and democratic process, we will pick a representative from the audience to decide.

*(ABE picks a random person – this presumes the audience has rows and seat numbers like A16, or G24. The letters stated should be the range of rows. If the house is not full, the goal should be to pack the lower rows and leave entire rows empty to avoid picking empty seats in this process. If this method is impractical, audience members should leave ticket stubs in a big bowl at the start of the show and a ticket stub should be picked from the bowl—jump straight to "Let it therefore be known." This is least preferable as it will be assumed to be faked. This must not be faked.)*

**ABE.** Excuse me. Can you please pick a letter between A and [X]?

And you there. Can you please pick a number between 1 and [Y]?

Let it therefore be known, our representative, by random selection, is in seat [Letter] [Number]! Please rise! [Letter] [Number]!

*(If the seat selected is empty and there are no occupied seats to the right of it, the selection wraps around to the beginning of the next row.)*

Congratulations, Madam/Mister Representative! What is your name? Sir/Madam, you have the distinct honor of deciding for us whose story we will see first! Everyone please feel free to lobby your representative during intermission as he/she will pick the next act as well. Now, Mister/Madam Representative,

Your choices are:

**TOM.** Tom Hauser. I'll do what's right!

**REGINA.** Regina Lincoln. I'll fight for you!

**ANTON.** Anton Renault. Pulitzer!

*(The representative selects.)*

**ABE.** Very well! Our representative has selected, and [The character with the most votes] is first. Now, are you ready? I said, are you ready?! Then let's begin...Abraham Lincoln's big, gay dance party!

*(BLACKOUT.)*

*End of Prologue*

## ACT A: A HOUSE DIVIDED

### Scene 1

*(An empty stage, a pool of light. In the middle of the light stands ABE. He is wearing roller skates and cut-off jean shorts.)*

**ABE.** “A house divided against itself cannot stand.” I believe this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved—I do not expect the house to fall—but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing, or all the other.”

*(ABE pulls out a whistle and blows one good, long toot. A disco ball drops down and awesome, kick-ass dance music floods the stage. ABE continues to blow the whistle to the rhythm of the music, roller skating around and off.)*

*(Enter ESMERELDA and ANTON, dancing. It does not matter what sort of dance, exactly. But the following things matter: the dance should be social, impressive, fast and energetic—likely candidates include swing, samba, and salsa; together, they look spectacular. They are clearly used to dancing together.)*

*(As they dance, they shout over the music.)*

**ANTON.** Going to Illinois!

**ESMERELDA.** Why?!

**ANTON.** Land of Lincoln!

**ESMERELDA.** What?!

**ANTON.** It’s the Land of Lincoln!

**ESMERELDA.** So what?!

**ANTON.** I thought you said “What?!?”

**ESMERELDA.** When?!

**ANTON.** When I said “going to Illinois”!

**ESMERELDA.** I said “Why!” I know what Illinois is!

**ANTON.** Trial of the century!

**ESMERELDA.** What is?!

**ANTON.** Why we’re going to Illinois!

**ESMERELDA.** Funny. You just said “we.”

**ANTON.** I need a photographer. It’s the trial of the century!

**ESMERELDA.** I shoot fashion, not trials!

**ANTON.** I need a photographer!

**ESMERELDA.** You need a stringer from some local paper. A stringer named "Zeke." With bad teeth and a mullet. You do not need Esmerelda Diaz!

*(The music fades out. ESMERELDA and ANTON applaud politely. He bows to her. She curtseys.)*

Besides, I do not like Chicago. It is too cold and the people smell like pork sausage and beer.

**ANTON.** We're not going to Chicago. We're going to Menard County.

**ESMERELDA.** Is that a suburb of Chicago?

**ANTON.** Sure. If you're okay with a three hour commute.

**ESMERELDA.** You want me to go to the middle of nowhere?

**ANTON.** Want is too faint a word. Need. Require.

*(She begins to walk away. He catches her hand and pulls her back to him with a spin and a dip.)*

**ESMERELDA.** Why?

**ANTON.** The editors want a human interest piece. Pretty pictures of people in fly-over country. Simple people. People who say "ain't" and are being neither ironic nor black.

**ESMERELDA.** You are offensive. And you are up to something. You never care what the editors want. I see straight into your weasel's heart.

**ANTON.** The byline will be "Anton Renault with photo essay by Esmerelda Diaz."

**ESMERELDA.** You said "photo essay"?

**ANTON.** I did. And so did the editors.

**ESMERELDA.** Ah, Anton, you magnificent man-whore. You have me. I will go!

*(She kisses him on both cheeks.)*

And what is this trial?

*(Pause.)*

**ANTON.** I thought you were kidding. It's on TV every five minutes on 200 channels.

**ESMERELDA.** ¡Nada!

**ANTON.** Where have you been?

**ESMERELDA.** I have been dancing! Come! Tell me all about it. We go to Illinois!

*(She grabs ANTON and they begin to dance again.)*

*(BLACKOUT.)*

### *End of Scene*

### **Scene 2**

*(The inside of Humble Pie pie shop. A lunch counter, several counter-top displays of pies, fresh made. Upstage, two very large bay windows showing us the sleepy streets of a small Illinois town. It is morning.)*

*(JERRY is working behind the counter, his arm in a sling. Perhaps there is some country music playing faintly from a radio in stark contrast to the dance music. Enter ANTON and ESMERELDA. They look around the shop like anthropologists.)*

**ANTON.** Fantastic.

**ESMERELDA.** Spectacular.

**ANTON.** Get me pictures.

*(JERRY looks up from behind the counter, waves.)*

**JERRY.** Hey.

*(Pause. ANTON and ESMERELDA eye him hungrily.)*

**ANTON.** Fantastic!

**ESMERELDA.** Spectacular!

*(They race each other to the counter.)*

**ANTON & ESMERELDA.** Hello.

**JERRY.** Hey. Can I help you all with somethin'?

**ANTON.** Yes. Absolutely.

**JERRY.** What can I get for you?

**ESMERELDA.** What are you prepared to give?

**JERRY.** I...uh—

**ANTON.** —A funny name, "Humble Pie." It implies low quality, doesn't it? The word, "humble."

**JERRY.** It's good to be humble.

**ESMERELDA.** No, it isn't! Mice are humble. Are you a mouse? Or are you a lion?! I could tame you.

**JERRY.** I reckon I don't have any idea what you're talking about, ma'am.

**ESMERELDA.** Ah! Do not call me "ma'am" ever again. *¡Nunca!* That felt as though I underwent menopause in one split second.

**JERRY.** You all must be here for the trial. You sure ain't from around here.

**ANTON.** You said "ain't." God bless you, boy. You and your humble pie.

*(Pause.)*

**JERRY.** I gotta say...you two make me feel like you're tellin' some kinda joke that I ain't in on exactly. Couldja stop it?

**ANTON.** Yes. I could.

**ESMERELDA.** I could not. I have no patience for the tedium of being ordinary.

**JERRY.** Well, that's just—

**ANTON.** —So, is it humble pie?

*(JERRY gets a slice of pie and puts it in front of ANTON, a difficult thing with his arm in a sling.)*

**JERRY.** You tell me.

**ANTON.** What happened to your arm?

**JERRY.** I fell. Go on and try it.

*(ANTON tries it. Beat. He voraciously consumes the pie. JERRY smiles. During this:)*

**ESMERELDA.** What is your name? Do you have one?

**JERRY.** Gerald. Jerry. Everyone calls me Jerry. I don't know why I said—

**ESMERELDA.** —Gerald... I am new in town. Tonight, you may escort me to a restaurant—

**ANTON.** —This is fantastic. Best pie I've had all week.

**ESMERELDA.** *(To ANTON:)* I was here first.

**ANTON.** Jerry, I'm Anton Renault. This is Esmerelda Diaz.

**JERRY.** Pleased to meet you both.

*(Pause.)*

ANTON. You've never heard of us?

JERRY. Should I have?

ESMERELDA. I'm kind of a big deal.

ANTON. I won the Pulitzer two years ago for my articles on immigration?

JERRY. Oh. Well...congratulations! Pie's on me. For winning the Pulitzer.

ANTON. Jerry, you sweet thing.

ESMERELDA. I resume. Will you accompany me tonight?

*(She gets very close to him.)*

JERRY. I'm awful flattered, ma...uh...miss? I just can't. Uh...wow. That's... Gosh. You're awfully close.

ANTON. Ignore Mrs. Lovett here. She's hoping you'll serve her a meat pie.

JERRY. Lovett? I thought your name was Diaz.

ESMERELDA. *(To ANTON, triumphant:)* You see? He's not on your team.

ANTON. Patience. You're right, Jerry. We are here for the—

ESMERELDA. —Why can you not accompany me this evening, Gerald? Does your life have...entanglements? Is there another woman in your life? Because you enjoy the company of women?

JERRY. Yeah! Yeah. Definitely. That's why. I have a girlfriend up in Canada.

*(ANTON looks very smug. ESMERELDA instantly stops even looking at JERRY, much less flirting.)*

ESMERELDA. He's all yours.

*(She walks away.)*

JERRY. No, really...I know how that sounds, but... Why is she walking away?

ANTON. She's uncouth, Jerry. Cruel. Her soul is a mousetrap.

JERRY. Her name is Tiffany.

ESMERELDA. You could not even concoct a probable name?

ANTON. Try some of Jerry's pie, darling. It's simply magnificent.

ESMERELDA. I do not eat the pie of liars!

**JERRY.** Hey! I...you can't just walk into my shop and call me a liar.

**ESMERELDA.** How do we even know it *is* your shop?

**JERRY.** I—what?!

**ANTON.** Um, pardon. If I might break into this *recherché* dyad... where may one go dancing around here?

**JERRY.** We don't really have any dancing here. It's a dry county, and without any bars, well, who's gonna have a dance floor?

**ESMERELDA.** No bars?! Impossible! There is some sort of constitutional something about that. Liar!

**JERRY.** Hey! Stop callin' me a liar! It's true!

**ESMERELDA.** Perhaps it is. But there is no Tiffany in Canada.

**JERRY.** Prove it...ma'am!

**ANTON.** Oh dear.

**ESMERELDA.** Oh, you poor, innocent child. You dare to provoke Esmerelda Diaz? I have made presidents and sultans cry, burnt their houses to the ground around them and now you, Gerald the pie boy, want to stare into these eyes? Very well. I will prove it.

**JERRY.** Did she just threaten to burn my house down?

**ANTON.** No... She just promised to.

*(Enter TOM on cell phone. When done, he snaps it closed.)*

**TOM.** Hey, son.

**JERRY.** Oh, hey. Gimme just a...

*(JERRY goes to the kitchen. TOM pulls out a bottle of pills, pops one. He notices ANTON looking at him.)*

**TOM.** For my ticker.

**ANTON.** Congressman...

**TOM.** No one calls me that anymore. Not for years. It's just "Tom" these days. You here covering the trial?

**ANTON.** Yes, sir. Anton Renault—

**TOM.** —Well, well, well. Nice of *The New York Times* to send someone of your stature all the way out to Podunk.

**ANTON.** I can't tell you how thrilled I am to meet you. I wonder if I might—

**TOM.** —write another elitist hatchet job about small town America? I've read your work, Mr. Renault.

**ANTON.** You think I'm elitist? *Moi?! Quel dommage!*

**TOM.** I'm not really givin' interviews right now. Just come to pick up lunch from my boy.

*(JERRY comes back from the kitchen with a paper bag, puts it in front of TOM.)*

**ANTON.** Your...Jerry is your son?

**TOM.** Has been as long as I've known him.

*(TOM laughs at his own joke. ANTON laughs along. TOM suddenly gets very serious, stops laughing.)*

Okay. You want a story? How's about you go dig into those protesters out in front of the courthouse. Radical homosexuals—men in wedding dresses—bused in from Chicago, wavin' signs, shoutin' at people? They attacked my son. Broke his arm. How about you go ask them—

**JERRY.** —Dad...

**ANTON.** I am shocked. I really can't imagine anyone wanting to attack Jerry...violently.

*(TOM looks confused by this. ESMERELDA breaks in.)*

**ESMERELDA.** You must be very proud of Gerald. Everything he's built here.

**TOM.** Sure am. You know what, little darlin', I don't think we were introduced.

**ESMERELDA.** You don't know me?

**TOM.** No, ma'am. But I sure would like to.

**JERRY.** Dad, this is—

**ESMERELDA.** —I'm Tiffany! Gerald's girlfriend from Canada! *¡Papi!*

*(ESMERELDA hugs TOM. TOM tries not to look shocked. JERRY and ANTON both look like they've just swallowed a bug.)*

I came as fast as I could when Gerald told me he was attacked by those mean old homosexuals.

*(Pause. The others look at JERRY, who stares, stunned.)*

**TOM.** Well, I...my word. He's talked an awful lot about you.

**ESMERELDA.** Why doesn't he know me, Gerald? You never showed him my picture? He probably started to doubt that I even exist. Are you ashamed of me? Is it because I'm—

**JERRY.** —old! Older than me. That’s what it was, Dad. I was worried you’d think she was too old for me. On account of she’s really old. Ollllllld. That’s why. Dad. This is Tiffany. Tiffany. This is my dad.

**ANTON.** (*Eating pie:*) Fantastic!

**TOM.** I gotta say, this is just...well, my word. Why didn’t you call and tell us, Jerry?

**JERRY.** I...uh... We were gonna surprise you all tonight.

**ESMERELDA.** Surprise!

(*Everyone laughs. JERRY joins, uncomfortably.*)

**TOM.** Well, you just stay right here. Mrs. Hauser is out in the car. Just came by to pick up her lunch... She’s gonna be... My word.

(*TOM exits.*)

**JERRY.** Help me make the table. You two just put me in a lousy spot.

(*JERRY begins to make the table.*)

**ANTON.** Then why did you play along, dear boy?

**JERRY.** What was I gonna do, huh?

**ANTON.** I suppose you could have lead with the truth.

**JERRY.** Well, see...I’m kinda ashamed to admit it, but...see...the truth is...there is no Tiffany.

(*ANTON puts his hand to his heart and gasps in horror.*)

**ESMERELDA.** Ha!

**JERRY.** Happy now? I admit it.

**ESMERELDA.** This changes nothing, you called me...old. Your suffering has only just begun.

**JERRY.** Could you please just try to act like this is real? Please. They don’t know. And I can’t tell them.

(*A car pulls up outside. JERRY panics.*)

I gotta go help—We met online. And we... Just... Pretend you like me, Miss Diaz. Please don’t burn my house down.

(*JERRY runs out of the store. Beat. ESMERELDA laughs.*)

**ESMERELDA.** I had no idea Illinois would be such a hoot.

**ANTON.** This is truly depraved of you, darling. Beyond the pale. In fact, it’s beyond any pale you’ve ever gone beyond before. You have crossed the Rubicon of pales.

**ESMERELDA.** Are those fancy ways of saying you wish you had thought of it first?

**ANTON.** No. You really do need to be careful here. I came here with a plan, and I don't want you to ruin it.

**ESMERELDA.** Oh? A plan?! For what?

**ANTON.** Revenge. I intend to destroy Tom Hauser. Bump-buh-buh...

**ESMERELDA.** How wonderful! I must help you! Between the hors d'oeuvre of pickled pig snout and the jell-o course, I will unveil my true identity—

**ANTON.** —Please don't do that.

**ESMERELDA.** I cannot wait to see his mother's face when I tell her. She must be a shrew to put up with a husband like that. They both deserve—oh.

*(Enter MOM, TOM, and JERRY. We see them first through the plate glass windows. MOM walks with canes. She wears a wig that sits oddly on her head, one meant to look "right" for her age, streaked with grey but obviously a wig. She has no eyebrows, so has drawn them on too thickly. She is well dressed, but clearly frail. She wears an eyepatch. TOM and JERRY dote after her, and clearly worry. ANTON and ESMERELDA watch her entrance in stunned silence, ESMERELDA looking guilty.)*

**MOM.** Where's my girl. Tiffany? Well, look at you. You're from Canada, sweetie?

**ESMERELDA.** By way of Cuba.

**MOM.** How exotic! Well, it's real nice to meet you, Tiffany. And I'm so happy you finally came to visit. And who's this?

**TOM.** This is Anton Renault. Real big deal reporter from New York.

**ANTON.** A pleasure to meet you, ma'am. Actually, I was wondering if I could all ask all of you a few questions—that is if you don't have something you want to say first... Tiffany?

**ESMERELDA.** No. No.

**TOM.** What'd you have in mind, Mr. Renault?

**ANTON.** How about a family interview?

**JERRY.** I don't think—

**TOM.** —That'd be fine, Anton. We're an open book.

*(ANTON puts down a recorder. Starts it.)*

**ANTON.** Obviously, this has been a difficult time for your family. I wonder if you wanted to talk about the attack on Jerry.

**JERRY.** Uh...not a lot to tell.

**TOM.** Go ahead, son. People should know what they did to you.

**JERRY.** I was, uh, getting out of my car—

**MOM.** —He'd just got back from seeing Tiffany here, up in Canada.

*(ANTON, ESMERELDA, and JERRY all share a look, JERRY begging them with his eyes not to bust him. Beat.)*

**ESMERELDA.** We played hockey and...sold beaver pelts. As we do. In Canada.

**JERRY.** And anyway, these protesters attacked me.

**TOM.** It was one big reminder just how important this trial is.

**ANTON.** How so? Why is this trial important?

**TOM.** You tell me, Mr. Renault. You came all the way from New York City to cover it. Must be a pretty big deal, right?

**ANTON.** Well, I suppose my readers wonder if you aren't drawing a very dangerous line in the sand. Do not talk about homosexuality or go to jail. Is that your intention with this trial, Mr. Hauser?

**TOM.** No. Don't talk to fourth graders about sex without parental consent. She had those kids joking around about Jefferson sleeping with his slaves. Lincoln having gay sex. Nine-year-olds, Mr. Renault.

*(Beat. ANTON sits back and says nothing.)*

**MOM.** Hey, I'm hungry! Jerry? You serving lunch, or are we just gonna gab?

**TOM.** You heard the lady. Let's get the grub, boys. I gotta get to court. Hey, you know what, Mr. Renault? Jerry here should take you around town. Show you the real Illinois for your story.

*(Exit TOM, ANTON, and JERRY.)*

**MOM.** You'll have to excuse me while the rest of you eat. Jerry's gonna give me a bowl of goop. They had to take out such a large part of my stomach, it's all I can eat these days.

**ESMERELDA.** What...exactly...

**MOM.** Oh, don't worry about me, dear. Let's talk about Jerry. He lets you call him Gerald, huh?

**ESMERELDA.** Of course. I find the name Jerry to be vulgar.

**MOM.** You really are a firecracker, aren't ya? Come here, sweetie.

(ESMERELDA *sits next to MOM.*)

I don't have a lot of time left. I know that's surprising. I look the very picture of health. I want to do the chicken dance!

**ESMERELDA.** Sorry...the what? Perhaps it's my English—

**MOM.** —Oh, just something we do at weddings. So, when is Jerry going to make an honest woman out of you?

**ESMERELDA.** Somewhere in his grave, Lorca laughs.

**MOM.** I just think, "no time like the present!" You two have been dating for three years now and well, boys and girls get married, dear. Maybe you could just give him a little shove in the right direction?

**ESMERELDA.** We have not discussed—

**MOM.** —Tiffany...I know we just met, and I know there's probably... well, we probably don't have a thing in common. But my son is a very sweet boy. And I...I don't know what he'll do when I'm gone. He will inherit plenty of money, dear. And you and I both know he *needs* to be married. Please. Let me dance the chicken dance.

(*NOISE from the kitchen.*)

**TOM.** (*Offstage:*) Who's hungry?

**MOM.** Okay, here they come. Let's have lunch.

(*MOM gives ESMERELDA a little kiss on her cheek. ESMERELDA sits, mortified. As the lights fade, ANTON, TOM, and JERRY return with lunch.*)

### *End of Scene*

## **Scene 4**

(*A cornfield. Everywhere, corn. ANTON and JERRY push their way through to a clearing.*)

**JERRY.** Here.

**ANTON.** Here?

**JERRY.** Yup.

**ANTON.** A cornfield. Déjà vu.

**JERRY.** My dad asked me to show you the real Illinois. This is it.

(*Pause. ANTON looks around. As he speaks, he starts getting very close to JERRY.*)

**ANTON.** How...isolated. Now, why would you take me some place so private, so—

*(Suddenly, ANTON swats at his neck and then freaks out, swatting at bugs. JERRY steps away.)*

Jesus! The mosquitoes are as big as houses.

**JERRY.** Shhh...

**ANTON.** What? Why? Is somebody coming?

*(Beat. ANTON is still. Silence.)*

I don't hear anything.

**JERRY.** That's right. No cars. No people screaming at each other. No gunshots.

**ANTON.** That's what you think of the city? Constant screaming and gunfire.

**JERRY.** Now, look up.

*(They look up. JERRY smiles. The sky is filled with stars.)*

**JERRY.** I read one time that in the city, you can't see the stars.

**ANTON.** Of course we can see the stars. We have rooftop cafés where we sit out until the small hours, drinking wine and reading poetry while we gaze up at the stars.

**JERRY.** Really?

**ANTON.** No. We usually stay at home and watch reality television. But we could, Jerry. We have that option.

**JERRY.** And would they look like this?

*(They both stare. ANTON shakes his head. JERRY looks to ANTON as he says the following. By the end, they are looking into each others' eyes. It's totally romantic.)*

You got light pollution in the city. Learned that in school: "Light pollution." I always liked that. Makes me think you've got big smoke stacks on factories billowing with light.

**ANTON.** *(Slowly, looking into JERRY's eyes:)* No. Just carcinogens. This is nice, but I have seen stars before.

*(Beat. ANTON leans in to kiss JERRY. JERRY pulls away.)*

**JERRY.** What are you doing?!

**ANTON.** Well, I was hoping I might get you out of your clothes and do any number of obscene things to you—and have them done in return.

**JERRY.** Oh.

**ANTON.** But I see now that you're a touch conflicted for Plan A, so it's Plan B: talking about our feelings. Always good in a pinch.

**JERRY.** It's not that I... You're a reporter. Why'd you even come to Menard County, anyway? If you're such a big deal, this can't be the most, y'know, plum assignment.

**ANTON.** I think the more interesting question here, Jerry, is why do you stay?

**JERRY.** I have roots here. My family settled this land. I belong—

**ANTON.** (*Gentle tweaking that gets out of hand:*) —Oh, come on now. Two minutes after I met your father he was telling me about the “radical homosexual agenda.” There's no happy life in Hicksville, Jerry.

(*Beat, JERRY chuckles, shakes his head.*)

**JERRY.** You know, I bet there's lots of folks back where you come from who think it's real funny to call my town “Hicksberg” or whatever, but it doesn't really impress me much. Now, I came out here because I thought this might be something you'd like to see, and—

**ANTON.** —You thought you might like to go for ten minutes without having to masquerade for mammy and pappy and the rest of the cast of Hee Haw—

(*JERRY laughs again, shocked at the vitriol.*)

**JERRY.** —You really are a son of a bitch, you know that? We're just people. Just people tryin' to live our lives. And my *mother* and my *father* are every bit as good as you. What happened to you that you're so—

**ANTON.** —Nothing happened to *me*. That's the way it works. It happens to other people. I just had to watch.

**JERRY.** I don't even know what you're talking about.

**ANTON.** (*Calm at first, building:*) Everyone died, Jerry.

(*Beat.*)

When I was your age, there was a plague. And everyone I loved, died. It was relentless. It was...merciless. How I got through healthy, alive, I'll never know. A world that was once filled with light—so much light it drowned out the stars...and then everyone... I had roots once. I did. They blew away. And back then, when I'd get home from the hospital, with its god damned revolving door that kept rotating my friends in, and never out, I'd turn on the television like any normal American, looking for, you know, escape. And I'd see

you good salt-of-the earth people from rustic America saying this was God's punishment. People like... Goddamnit.

**JERRY.** What?

**ANTON.** People like your father. Congressman Tom Hauser. One of those "optimistic" Reagan Republicans. He was everywhere back then, on TV, one of the only people in government willing to talk about what was happening. "This so-called crisis," he'd say. Do you even know why he left DC?

**JERRY.** My mom got sick—

**ANTON.** —"To spend more time with my family"? No, Jerry. Your father was once the GOP's heavy-weight-champion gay-baiter. He spent his time in Congress outing people. Lobbyists. Donors. Eventually, he went too far. Went after loyal Republicans and got run out of town. But the damage was done. At the one moment in history we most needed people in Washington who could stand up, demand funding, help—anything—and he sent everyone scurrying into the closet. Your father has destroyed countless lives! And he's trying to do it again!

*(Pause. ANTON stunned by his own intensity, JERRY still.)*

Listen, I didn't... You need to know—

**JERRY.** —What was your plan? Lead me out here, mess around, then write your flowery story about the poor pie boy and his evil father? That's just one of the many charming damned anecdotes you'll put in your big scoop—the one that destroys Tom Hauser and wins you another well-deserved Pulitzer. God, how could I have been so stupid?!

**ANTON.** *(Lying:)* No. I had no such plan—

**JERRY.** —I just wanted to talk to somebody! Damn it! Idiot!

*(JERRY starts to exit. ANTON catches him.)*

**JERRY.** Let go of me!

**ANTON.** Your father would deserve that, but I don't want to do that to you, okay? I just want to save you. When I see you, pretending—

**JERRY.** —Where do you get off, mister? I'm not the one who needs saving. I know plenty of guys like you. You think your way is the only way. Well, I agree with my dad. I'm all for this trial. I mean, I'm sorry you're so...wounded—

**ANTON.** —I'm not wounded. I'm angry. There is a huge difference.

**JERRY.** Whatever you want to call it. I want you to stop lookin' at me like my life is some kind of tragedy. It disgusts me that someone as...poisonous as you could imagine you have any right to pity me. Now get your hands off of me.

*(Pause.)*

**ANTON.** Okay. You're right. I came here to hurt your father. But—

**JERRY.** —Come on. I'm taking you back to your hotel. And then I want you to get the hell out of my town—

**ANTON.** —What really happened to your arm?

*(JERRY stops.)*

**JERRY.** Like you care. It's none of your business, so stop asking.

**ANTON.** It wasn't the protestors.

*(JERRY starts to leave. ANTON blurts out:)*

I'll make you a deal! I keep everything I know about you, your father, your family, off-the-record. Unless you say I can, I write nothing. And in return, you give me your story. The real one.

**JERRY.** Why would you do that? What's in it for you?

**ANTON.** The truth, Jerry. The same thing that's in it for you.

**JERRY.** Why should I believe you?

**ANTON.** Because I already know enough to humiliate your whole family, and you know it. Take this deal, and you can keep it all out of the papers.

*(Pause. JERRY eyes ANTON suspiciously, but nods. In the following, JERRY slowly un-tenses.)*

**ANTON.** Now...for starters... Where have you met plenty of guys like me?

**JERRY.** I...uh... God...

**ANTON.** It's okay.

**JERRY.** Clubs. I go to clubs.

**ANTON.** In Springfield?

**JERRY.** No. No way. Somebody might find out. I go up to Chicago or over to St. Louis. I never tell anybody my name, even a fake name. When I get back, I spend two hours cleanin' out the car, makin' sure I didn't drop anything, a matchbook, a wrapper, any sign of where I've been.

**ANTON.** And your arm?

*(Pause.)*

**JERRY.** Some guy. Took me back to his hotel room. He had, uh, asked me for a drink, and while I was turned away, he pulls out his phone and starts, you know, starts takin' pictures of me. And I was... I wasn't wearing anything and I put my hand in front of my face. Told him to stop. He just kept takin' pictures and he was pushing my hand down and sayin', "Pretty boy like you. I wanna put you on my wall." But I wouldn't move my hand, so he punched me. Just like that. Hard as hammers.

**ANTON.** Oh, my god. What did you do?

**JERRY.** What would you do?

**ANTON.** Me? I...I don't know. I guess I'd roll in a ball and shout for help?

Oh, you poor thing, but you were too afraid to call for help because you thought someone would find out. Did you just let him beat you up?

**JERRY.** I fell on something when he clocked me, felt the arm break, and there was this little voice in the back of my head, said "if you die here, this is how mom finds out." And next thing I know, I was all over him. I just kept hittin' him and hittin' him. I heard his nose pop like a light bulb, but I just kept on doin' it. He started beggin' me to stop and I wanted... I wanted so much to hurt him. I wanted to take away everything he ever loved, wanted to throw him out a window into the night. But I couldn't, you know? Instead I...I started crying. Can you believe that? This guy tried to kill me, and I start bawling like some kinda sissy. What kinda man cries in a fist fight?!

**ANTON.** The good kind.

**JERRY.** I ran out of the room, blubbering like a little girl.

*(Pause.)*

The hardest part was cleanin' out my car with a broken arm. I kept accidentally hitting my arm on things and it was like I was gonna die. When I got home, I told my dad it was the protesters. And I know... He was gonna drop this trial, and then I told him that, and I know... I know it's all my fault, okay? I know that, and I don't... I didn't know what to do! He wanted to know what happened and I just, I freaked out, and I told him something I knew he'd believe and it made all this happen, but I didn't know what to do!

*(ANTON grabs JERRY and hugs him.)*

I was so scared, Anton. I was so scared.

*(They pull apart and stare at each other. Beat.)*

**ANTON.** Come on. I'm taking you dancing.

**JERRY.** What? Where?! I can't—

**ANTON.** —Of course you can. You and I have a lot of bad stuff to dance out, okay? Let's have a party. At the pie shop. Music... A few drinks...

**JERRY.** That's illegal! You can't have drinkin'—

**ANTON.** —Then we'll make it a costume party. If the coppers come, they'll never make out our faces. And if they try to arrest us, we'll riot! It'll be Stonewall in the Sticks.

**JERRY.** What's a Stonewall?

**ANTON.** Are you...? Okay. Seriously? It's... Actually, you know what? It doesn't matter. Dance with me, Jerry.

*(Pause.)*

**JERRY.** This is crazy!

**ANTON.** But you'll do it?

**JERRY.** I can't believe I'm sayin' this, but okay! Let's do it!

*(ANTON grabs JERRY and leans in to kiss him. JERRY looks worried at first, but then leans in too. ANTON pulls away.)*

**ANTON.** Oh my god! This is the plot of Footloose!

**JERRY.** What?

**ANTON.** And I'm Kevin Bacon! I've always wanted to be Kevin Bacon! Oh...but that makes you that poor girl who looks like Darryl Hannah but never had a career afterwards. Sorry. Come on. Tomorrow night, we are going to have the biggest dance party this town has ever seen!

*(ANTON and JERRY hold hands and begin to exit.)*

**JERRY.** Who's Kevin Bacon? Nah, I'm kidding.

*(BLACKOUT.)*

*End of Scene*

## Scene 5

*(The pie shop with sheets covering the windows. There is dance music and booze at the counter. The tables are pushed to the side and as many people as can be mustered are onstage, dancing, all of them dressed as Abraham Lincoln. This includes ESMERELDA,*

JERRY, and ANTON. *ESMERELDA changes the music and grabs JERRY to dance.*)

**ESMERELDA.** Now, we dance the Rumba! When you hold me in your arms, Gerald, you hold all of Cuba. When you dance this dance, you move with the rhythm of generations. You know that I cannot marry you, boy.

**JERRY.** I didn't ask.

**ESMERELDA.** Your mother expects a dancing with the chickens.

**JERRY.** I know. Maybe I should just...leave. Anton says—

**ESMERELDA.** —Ah, yes. You know, boy, Anton is wonderful. Glamorous. But do not let him make you into an exile. For twenty years, I have wandered, able to go anywhere I might like, but never home. Castro, el bastardo, he loved me, but now wants me dead.

**JERRY.** Wait. You slept with Fidel Castro?

**ESMERELDA.** Who has not? I mean to say that I have beheld a thousand wonders. But no sands are as warm, no fruit as sweet, no dance so true as those of my Cuba. And though staying would have meant my death, my life without her will always have less meaning. Do you understand?

*(ANTON changes the music.)*

**ESMERELDA.** *(Reacting to music change:)* What is it?!

**ANTON.** May I have this dance?

**ESMERELDA.** I cannot dance with you right now! I am giving the boy a life lesson—

**ANTON.** —With him. May I have this dance with *him*?

**ESMERELDA.** Very well. Perhaps there is a man somewhere in this backwater who can handle Esmerelda Diaz!

*(Pointing to one of the ABES:)*

You!

*(The ABE runs off. ESMERELDA chases. ANTON and JERRY dance. JERRY leads.)*

**JERRY.** Thank you.

**ANTON.** For the dance? It's my pleasure. I go a bit mad if I can't—

**JERRY.** —For this. For the party. My gut is in knots, but...this feels good.

**ANTON.** You know what would feel better?

**JERRY.** What?

*(ANTON kisses JERRY. JERRY reciprocates. Just then, the door flies open. Enter TOM, dragging something heavy, wrapped in black garbage bags. He looks stunned to find people inside the shop. He is disheveled. He stares at the dancers, confused.)*

**TOM.** What...?! I don't... This can't... There are so many of you!

*(ALL stop dancing, stare. TOM snaps out of it.)*

**TOM.** This is private property! How'd you get in here?!

*(ALL stare, afraid to move. JERRY hides behind ANTON.)*

I demand answers! Right now! Who are you?!

*(ANTON steps forward.)*

**ANTON.** I, sir, am Abraham Lincoln!

**TOM.** What? No... No, you're not! Who are you really?!

**ANTON.** I said, I am Abraham Lincoln!

**TOM.** *(Leaning in:)* What are you doing here, sir?

*(A DANCER steps forward, drunk.)*

**DANCER.** He ain't Abraham Lincoln! I'm Abraham Lincoln!

**TOM.** Stop it! I'm gonna... Tell me who you are or I'm calling the police!

*(DANCER 2 steps forward.)*

**DANCER 2.** They're both lying. I'm Abraham Lincoln!

*(ESMERELDA steps forward proudly.)*

**ESMERELDA.** ¡No! ¡Yo soy Abraham Lincoln!

**TOM.** Okay, that's it! You're all going to jail!

*(JERRY steps forward.)*

**JERRY.** I'm...

**TOM.** I know. You're Abraham Lincoln! Everybody's Abraham Lincoln!

*(Pause. JERRY pulls off his beard. Pause. TOM looks at JERRY, absolutely motionless.)*

**JERRY.** I'm sorry you had to find out like this, but I'm...there is no Tiffany. This lady here is really named Esmerelda, not Tiffany.

**ESMERELDA.** ¡Hola!

*(Pause. TOM is starts rooting around in his pockets.)*

**JERRY.** Dad... See, the reason there's no Tiffany is...I'm—

*(TOM pulls a gun out of his pocket. Everyone gasps. ESMERELDA jumps in front of ANTON and JERRY.)*

**TOM.** What? No. No, don't worry about this. Where are my pills? Where...

*(TOM puts the gun on a table. He starts going through his pockets, muttering, then gives up his search and walks to JERRY. He staggers. Indicating Jerry's arm:)*

He did this to you, but, see, he was trying to get to me...

*(TOM starts breathing hard.)*

**JERRY.** Dad, it wasn't the protesters—Dad? Are you okay?

**TOM.** I'm fine. I'm okay.

*(TOM falls to the floor. JERRY is at his side.)*

**JERRY.** Water! Someone get him some water!

*(ANTON leaps over the counter and gets a glass of water.)*

Dad! Where are your pills? Dad!

**TOM.** I don't know... It's... You're gonna find out something I did. Tell your mother I didn't mean... Please don't hate me.

**JERRY.** I don't — Whatever it is, it doesn't matter. Someone call an ambulance!

*(ESMERELDA, DANCER 1 run out. ANTON runs to TOM's side and leans down with the water. TOM, panting, grabs ANTON's lapel, pulls him close. ANTON tries to pull away. TOM holds him close. This should be increasing in chaos and noise:)*

**DANCER 2.** What's going on?

**TOM.** —Mr. President... Sir...

Is this... is this what it was

like for you, when you...

I'm afraid. Were you afraid?

I'm so afraid, Mr. President.

***Did you regret anything?***

I have so many regrets.

Please, you have to tell me.

I need to know.

**JERRY.** It's okay. Quiet, now.

**ANTON.** Let go of me!

**DANCER 2.** Is he okay?

**JERRY.** Save your strength, Dad.

**ANTON.** I...let go...

**JERRY.** It's gonna be okay, Dad.

**ANTON.** *(Bursting through the noise. ALL go silent at "YES!")* —YES! I regretted that I would never see Joshua again. Do you understand? That I would never again hold his hand. And I thought that if only

I had lived long enough there could have come a day when I might stand atop the dome of the capitol and scream out his name. But I doubted that day would ever come, for me or for any man, that he might scream the name of the man he loves from the dome of anything. Even the dome of heaven. I wondered whether this was a secret I would need to keep from God himself. And then I regretted that I could ever so doubt God as to wonder that. But most of all, I regretted that he was not there. Because I loved him, Tom. I loved him.

*(TOM sobs. ANTON's face drops at this reaction.)*

**TOM.** Oh... I've done such terrible things. I thought I was doing what you would want and I was... I thought... I'm sorry, Mr. President. Abe. Please forgive me. Can you ever forgive me?

*(ANTON and JERRY look at each other. ANTON looks at TOM. Beat. ANTON smoothes back TOM's hair, gently.)*

**ANTON.** I...I forgive you, Tom.

*(TOM starts hyperventilating.)*

**JERRY.** Get a doctor!

*(TOM whispers something to JERRY as lights fade.)*

**End of Act A**

## Intro to ACT II

*(After the first Act—whatever it may be—and the ensuing intermission, ABEs come out to address the audience so they may pick the next Act.)*

**ABE.** Alright, everybody. It's time for our Representative to decide whose story you'll see next. Mister/Madam Representative? How do you choose?

*(Only the remaining two speak:)*

[ACT A:] Anton Renault. Pulitzer!

[ACT B:] Tom Hauser. I'll do what's right!

[ACT C:] Regina Lincoln. I'll fight for you!

*(The Representative chooses.)*

Let's turn the clock back and see the events again through the eyes of [the winning character's name].

*(BLACKOUT or a smooth transition if possible.)*

## ACT B: LIBERTY

### Scene 1

*(Empty stage. A ballroom in Menard County hosting a Republican Party fundraiser. Black ties, fancy dresses. Streamers and lots of red elephants. People are dancing, formally, gliding across the floor in a waltz or a foxtrot. Two ABEs waltz on together and look out to the audience.)*

**ABE 1.** "The world has never had a good definition of the word liberty. And the American people, just now, are much in want of one. We all declare *for* liberty; but in using the same word we do not all mean the same thing.

**ABE 2.** "For some the word liberty may mean for each man to do as he pleases with himself, and the product of his labor;

**ABE 1.** "While with others the same word may mean for some men to do as they please with other men, and the product of other men's labor.

**ABE 2.** "Here are two, not only different, but incompatible things called by the same name,

**ABE 1 & 2.** "Liberty."

*(They dance off. Partygoers dance on, including JERRY. Everyone waltzing, gliding, a beautiful display of charm and class. TOM and REGINA, dressed to the nines, dance on. They dance for a moment, REGINA trying to smile at the people dancing or walking by. "Tom," the passersby say, or, to REGINA, "Senator Lincoln." Finally, REGINA speaks, massively irritated, as though she's been keeping this in:)*

**REGINA.** You said you'd stump for me, Tom. You told me it would be the joy of your life to see me elected Governor of Illinois. "Like my own daughter..." Your words—

**TOM.** —Reggie, come on. Keep your voice down. You're acting like a child.

*(As REGINA says her next line, TOM stops dancing, leading her downstage where they can speak privately.)*

**REGINA.** What's going on? Lloyd is here from D.C.? Lloyd?! You have some terrifying old pirate lady collecting campaign contributions—

**TOM.** —That's my wife.

**REGINA.** Oh... She looks good.

*(Awkward pause.)*

I know I owe everything to you, Tom, but...don't run against me.

**TOM.** I'm not going to... You're not going to run. Reggie, I have a second chance—a chance I never thought I'd get—

**REGINA.** —You will lose! The farmers are dying, Tom. This state turns bluer every day. This trial—people won't vote for a hard-right cultural—

**TOM.** —Regina, stop it. I taught you better than this. I'm the candidate. That's how this thing of ours works. You've just gotta accept it and help me win.

*(Beat. REGINA stares at him, then walks off without a word. TOM watches her go. Enter LLOYD.)*

**LLOYD.** Not a raging success, I take it?

**TOM.** No, Lloyd. She thinks the trial will drag me down.

**LLOYD.** Hey, exactly what I've been telling you. The trial's outlived its usefulness. It's got the base all fired up, sure, but independents don't want to see that sweet little teacher in jail. Now, get up there and tell the people you're dropping the case because you are a wise and just man. A merciful man. Show them you're... Leaderistical.

**TOM.** Really. You're goin' with leaderistical.

**LLOYD.** We're Republicans, Tom. The English language works for us. Now get up there and knock 'em dead.

*(TOM pops a pill, washes it down. He walks to a dais and clinks a glass. JERRY and MOM stand behind him. When the crowd shouts, JERRY shouts with gusto, really into it.)*

**TOM.** Good evening, everyone!

*(Applause from the crowd.)*

Thank you! Thank you! Thank you to my lovely wife, and our son, Jerry, the Menard County Lincoln-Reagan Dinner steering committee. Ya know, twenty-five years ago, when I first ran for Congress, I got to campaign in this State with a fella we call...

**CROWD.** The Gipper!

**TOM.** I feel like the Gip's smilin' down on us here tonight. Don't you? And there's another great man whose spirit is with us tonight. President Abraham Lincoln. He knows we're fighting for him. As you all know, we were about to begin the trial of Harmony Green...

*(From the crowd, ABE has emerged, bathed in a golden light. He is looking at TOM.)*

**ABE.** Look at their faces, Tom. Secretly, they wonder if I really was a homosexual. Their children tell them I was. Because that's what their teacher told them. Only you can defend my honor. Only yooooooooooooo.

*(Pause. The crowd murmurs, confused. TOM snaps out of it. During the following, LLOYD watches TOM deviate from script with increasing alarm.)*

**TOM.** You know, I bet a lot of you have heard the liberal media calling me all kindsa nasty names. You know what that means, don't you? It means we've got 'em running scared! They know we're onto their plan to take over our schools. To change our history. They think if they get nasty enough, we'll give up. Any of you feel like giving up?

**CROWD.** No!

**TOM.** Giving in?

**CROWD.** No!

**TOM.** Me neither! I will prosecute Harmony Green to the fullest extent of the law. And next year, if you will have me, it is my honor to announce, with humility and prayer for success, that I will seek—

*(LLOYD is now freaked out, trying to figure out how to stop this. A sudden idea.)*

**LLOYD.** —U-S-A! U-S-A!

**CROWD.** U-S-A!!! U-S-A!!!

*(TOM is confused, but joins in. He sees LLOYD drawing a finger across his throat. TOM nods, reluctantly.)*

**TOM.** Thank you, everyone! Thank you Menard County! Thank you!

*(TOM steps off the podium to LLOYD. They speak in hushed tones so as not to be overheard. As they speak, dancers construct the courthouse behind them. JERRY watches the conversation from the distance.)*

**LLOYD.** Have you lost your mind? If you make Harmony Green the centerpiece of our campaign, we are dead meat in November.

*(JERRY comes over to the two of them. Both TOM and LLOYD light up, all smiles.)*

**JERRY.** That was a great speech, Dad!

**LLOYD.** Wasn't it? We'll give them dirty homos the what for! Hey, a big speech like that's gotta help you out with the ladies, right, killer?

**JERRY.** I have a girlfriend. Her name is Tiffany. We're in love.

**TOM.** *(To JERRY:)* Why don't you get Mom home, kiddo? She's gotta be exhausted.

*(JERRY hugs TOM impulsively. Exits.)*

**JERRY.** Dropping this case betrays everything I've ever stood for.

**LLOYD.** How do you not get this? The gays are useful, Tom. But only as long as people think they're creepy old men who want to get married to fourteen-year-old-boys dressed in assless chaps for easy access. They're useful as long as you don't turn them into the blacks. As soon as you beat them up, or turn water hoses on them, or put them in jail for talking about being gay, they go from a great wedge issue to a political anchor... Didn't you learn your lesson twenty years ago—

**TOM.** —That has nothing to do with this.

**LLOYD.** Of course it does! I said, "He's the minority whip, Tom! Reagan's best friend. Keep your mouth shut. Use it when you need it!"

**TOM.** He was sleeping with a page! We're supposed to be the decent—

**LLOYD.** —Everybody in Washington is sleeping with a page! And what were the wages of decency, Tom? Exile in bumfuck. Just like I

told you. But that's the past, okay? You can make a new future in this party. Or I can get on the first flight to D.C. I've been dyin' for a good plate of Pad Thai. Your call.

**TOM.** Okay, Lloyd. Okay. I'll drop it.

**LLOYD.** (*Sardonic:*) Praise Jesus, Hallelujah, he has seen the light.

**TOM.** But I have to make my opening statement, first. I owe it to the people of this town. To my son. They won't understand—

**LLOYD.** —Fine! You go play gentleman lawyer. And when you're through, we announce your candidacy the right way. On a battleship. Or an oil rig.

**TOM.** You better win this for me. Make it worth it.

(*LLOYD nods, then exits, talking into his cell.*)

**LLOYD.** Yeah. Listen, I need you to do something for me...

(*TOM watches him go. The Courtroom set is finished. Dancers exit. TOM is alone. Enter JUDGE, who goes to his chair. TOM checks his watch. Enter BAILIFF, on a cell phone.*)

**ALL.** (*To HOUSE:*) The People of Illinois versus Harmony Green, Defendant.

**BAILIFF.** (*Closing his cell:*) Rogers is out as defense counsel, your honor. Miss Green has a fancy Chicago lawyer come to town to defend her.

**JUDGE & TOM.** Who?!

(*Enter REGINA and HARMONY.*)

**REGINA.** State Senator Regina Lincoln appearing on behalf of the defendant.

**TOM.** I object, your honor.

**REGINA.** On what grounds, counsel?

**TOM.** That the jury won't pay any attention to me. They'll be too enchanted with your beauty, Senator Lincoln.

(*TOM takes her hand and kisses it.*)

**REGINA.** (*Quietly:*) You left me no choice, Tom.

**TOM.** (*Quietly:*) This kind of stunt... This is beneath you, Reggie.

(*JUDGE bangs his gavel.*)

**JUDGE.** Ronny, go get the jury. We got ourselves a trial! District Attorney Hauser will begin.

*(As TOM speaks, the cornfield appears. The scene seamlessly bleeds into the following scene perhaps with only a light change.)*

**TOM.** Ladies and gentlemen of the jury... We kinda had a deal, didn't we? They get the cities; we get the country. Live and let live, right? Not good enough anymore for Harmony Green. She stands here accused of distributing harmful material to minors. I know, fancy legal talk, but what does it mean? It means she gathered up a group of our children. Nine-year-olds. And she told them President Abraham Lincoln routinely engaged...in homosexual acts. Her attorney will tell you this case is about academics. Free speech. Uh uh. Don't you believe it.

### *End of Scene*

### **Scene 2**

*(A cornfield. Night. TOM stands with a handgun. Three ABE LINCOLNs sit on the edge of the stage. Each has a bottle or a tin can on top of his stovepipe hat. TOM aims his gun at the three LINCOLNs and shoots. The bottle on one of the ABE hats either explodes or goes flying off. TOM lowers the gun. He gets out his cell phone. He lowers it. He puts away his cell phone. He shoots again at the three LINCOLNs. Another bottle goes flying. TOM cradles the gun in his palm for a moment. Another ABE appears from within the corn, behind TOM. TOM knows he's there without looking.)*

**TOM.** Lloyd's wrong, sir. I can't drop this.

**ABE.** You know, my law partner, Herndon, he used to say that I was the most ambitious man in the world. Why do you suppose he used to say that?

**TOM.** I don't know, sir.

**ABE.** Because I was! I wanted to win, Tom. I wanted power. Because I knew I would make good and proper use of it. There is nothing wrong with that. After all, if Providence has any plan for these United States, surely it is this: may the best man win.

**TOM.** You told me to defend your honor—

**ABE.** —I did, Tom. But what did I mean by it? Visions of dead presidents are a tricky thing. Where can you defend my honor best? In a courtroom? Or in the governor's mansion? Illinois needs you just now, Tom. The country needs you. Drop the case.

*(Beat. TOM dials. ABE nods at him as he speaks:)*

**TOM.** (*Into phone:*) Hello? May I please speak to Senator Lincoln? Tom Hauser.

(*He looks at ABE. Beat.*)

I'm on hold.

**ABE.** Muzak?

**TOM.** (*Shaking his head:*) Barbara Streisand.

(*Beat. ABE tries to remain quiet. Can't help himself.*)

**ABE.** Put it on speaker. Put it on speaker!

(*ABE gets very close to TOM trying to listen in. Suddenly, someone's on the line. As TOM speaks, ABE disappears.*)

**TOM.** Yes? Regina? Tom. I'm offering your client a plea. Three years probation and she surrenders her license for life. Yes. And maybe... when this is over, you might come out to the farm for some cobbler. Bury the hatchet? Okay. Goodnight, Reggie.

(*He hangs up.*)

It's done, sir. Sir?

(*A loud rustling is heard in the corn.*)

Is that you? Hello?

(*JERRY comes stumbling into the clearing, cradling his arm, some blood on his forehead.*)

**JERRY.** Dad! I heard you out here. I don't want mom to see me like this. Can you... Dad... I think I need a doctor.

(*TOM examines JERRY, touching his arm. JERRY winces.*)

**TOM.** Who did this to you?! Jerry? What happened?

(*JERRY looks up at TOM. Beat.*)

**JERRY.** I, uh, was getting out of my car and I...slipped and—

**TOM.** —Do not lie to me, son.

**JERRY.** Don't be mad.

**TOM.** Stop worrying about that. Just tell me the truth.

**JERRY.** It was... It was the protesters, Dad. They said, "Tell Tom we said hi." I got beaten up by...by a bunch of sissies!

(*JERRY cries into TOM's shoulder. Beat. TOM looks helpless, horrified.*)

**TOM.** Jerry... Shhh... Are you sure they said that?

(JERRY *nods, weakly, terrified.*)

**JERRY.** It was my fault—

**TOM.** —Shhh...save your strength, Jerry. Come on. Let's get you to the hospital.

(TOM *lifts JERRY to help him off stage. As he does, the courtroom appears behind them and the scene blends into the following scene.*)

### *End of Scene*

### **Scene 3**

(*The Courtroom. JUDGE, TOM, REGINA, HARMONY are in their places. TOM is still holding JERRY downstage.*)

**ALL.** The People of Illinois versus Harmony Green. Day two.

(JERRY *begins to exit, eyes locked with TOM.*)

**REGINA.** Your honor, if we may approach the bench, I believe the District Attorney has something he wants to tell you.

(JERRY *exits. Pause.*)

**TOM.** (*Still looking where JERRY was:*) No, I don't.

(*Beat.*)

**REGINA.** Yes, you do.

**TOM.** (*Looking into court for the first time:*) No, I don't. The prosecution would like to call its first witness.

**REGINA.** He doesn't want to call a witness.

**JUDGE & TOM.** What?

**REGINA.** Your honor, I really insist—If we might just approach...

**TOM.** I'm not approaching anything. The deal is off. Do whatever you feel you must. I will do what's right, which means prosecuting that woman. Understand?! The State demands it be allowed to call a witness!

**JUDGE.** You don't demand anything! I'm the State in this courtroom.

(*Enter BAILIFF with a glass of water for the JUDGE.*)

**BAILIFF.** Actually, sir, he represents the State in this courtroom.

**JUDGE.** I know that! It's a figure a'speech. If he was the King of Spain, I woulda said, "I'm the King of Spain in this courtroom."

**BAILIFF.** Well, that doesn't make any sense.

(*JUDGE bangs his gavel at BAILIFF.*)

**TOM.** Your honor, the People call Menard Elementary Principal Horace Meyers.

(*ALL turn to HOUSE. As they speak, PRINCIPAL appears in the witness chair. There should be a microphone in front of the witness stand. Sometimes a witness leans in to especially accent something. The words echo. The JURY is the HOUSE.*)

**ALL.** The prosecution's first witness.

(*TOM stands up, walks to the box.*)

**TOM.** Tell us: What happened at your school on December 22nd last year?

**PRINCIPAL.** I had put Miss Green in charge of the annual Christmas pageant. She suggested some changes since a few of our students are not Christians and don't celebrate Christmas.

**TOM.** Can you give us an example?

**PRINCIPAL.** The Blacks. They aren't Christian.

(*Pause. TOM stares at him.*)

The Black family. They don't celebrate Christmas. Because they're Jews. Not because they're black. They're not black, actually. That's just their name. The black Jews. Sorry, no. The jew Blacks. Jewish... Boy, this is coming out wrong. There's a Jewish family in town called the Blacks. Can I start over?

**TOM.** I meant an example of the changes to the script she suggested.

**PRINCIPAL.** Oh, right. Christmas with the presidents. A pageant of our former leaders meeting with Santa Claus. It was quite cute, actually. Santa—

**TOM.** —I see. And what actually happened?

**PRINCIPAL.** The children performed a script that I had not approved. It was horrifyingly lurid and...lascivious. Voluptuousness abounded!

**TOM.** (*To PRINCIPAL:*) Mr. Meyers, what happened to Miss Green after the pageant?

**PRINCIPAL.** She was fired. I, uh, actually, I fired her. For providing her class with sexual material.

(*TOM looks to the jury knowingly. He walks back to his seat. He nods to PRINCIPAL.*)

**TOM.** Thank you. No further questions for this witness.

(REGINA rises.)

**REGINA.** Wasn't Miss Green your best teacher?

**PRINCIPAL.** Yes.

**REGINA.** Were it up to you, you would have just given her a warning. True?

(Beat.)

**PRINCIPAL.** True.

**REGINA.** You told Miss Green that a group of concerned citizens threatened to shut down the school if you didn't fire her, isn't that right?

**PRINCIPAL.** It is.

**REGINA.** Is the leader of the group in this courtroom?

**PRINCIPAL.** Uh... Yes.

**REGINA.** Could you point him or her out for me?

**PRINCIPAL.** (Pointing at TOM:) That's him! District Attorney Tom Hauser!

(Gasps. Calamity. TOM watches all this in horror: Someone runs across stage yelling, waving a flag. Someone else begins firing six-guns in the air. People break chairs over each others' heads. The BAILIFF shoots down a whole bottle of whiskey. PRINCIPAL disappears and will re-emerge as TIMMY, mid testimony. JUDGE bangs his gavel over and over.)

**JUDGE.** ORDER! ORDER! I WILL HAVE ORDER! ORDER! I WILL HAVE—

(The Calamity ends sharply. ALL turn to HOUSE.)

**ALL.** (To HOUSE:) The children testify!

**TOM.** Timmy, do you remember rehearsals? What did Miss Green tell you?

**TIMMY.** She said I was playing Abraham Lincoln.

**TOM.** That's right. And what did she tell you about him?

**TIMMY.** She said he was real tall.

**TOM.** Timmy, it's very important you remember now... What did you say when you were on stage in the pageant?

**TIMMY.** I said all kindsa stuff. I said I freed the slaves, and I used to sleep with other fellas, and my butt itched 'cause I had to wear tights. Did President Lincoln wear tights?

**TOM.** Timmy...backing up. You said you sleep with other fellas?

**TIMMY.** Heck, no, mister! I ain't no queer!

**TOM.** Who told you President Lincoln slept with other fellas?

**TIMMY.** I dunno.

**TOM.** Miss Green told you, didn't she?

**REGINA.** Objection your honor. Leading.

**TOM.** Withdrawn. In your deposition, you told me—

**TIMMY.** —What's a deposition?

**TOM.** Who told you that?

**TIMMY.** Can I get a drink of water?

**TOM.** Please answer the question first. Who told you?!

**TIMMY.** My butt itches.

**TOM.** Answer the question, Timmy! I demand you answer right now! Where did you hear that lie?! WHERE!?

*(Everyone stares at TOM. Beat. TIMMY bursts into tears, really loud sobbing.)*

**REGINA.** Your honor, please let the record show that District Attorney Hauser has made a nine-year-old cry.

**TOM.** I have no further questions for this witness.

*(The actor playing TIMMY disappears. VIOLET appears, a very proper little girl who seems exceedingly proud of herself.)*

**VIOLET.** Of course I can recall what she said to us. Mother says it was a scandal. A scandal! She gave us a whole new script and told us to ignore the one we were supposed to do.

**TOM.** That's very good, Violet. And did you keep a copy of the script?

**VIOLET.** No, sir. She made us all give them back, which struck me as clear evidence of a guilty conscience—

**REGINA.** Your honor!

**JUDGE.** The jury will ignore the witness' last comment.

**TOM.** After she gave you the script, what did she say next?

**VIOLET.** She told us that this year in the Christmas Pageant, we were going to tell the truth about President Lincoln and his relationship with Joshua Speed.

**TOM.** And what did Miss Green say was the truth about the President's relationship with Joshua Speed?

**VIOLET.** That the President used to do it to him...in his mouth.

*(Again, TOM watches utter pandemonium in the courthouse. If possible, three chickens run across the stage, someone pours a gallon of milk on himself, and the BAILIFF produces a flamenco guitar, plays three bars, then smashes it.)*

**JUDGE.** ORDER! ORDER!!! I DEMAND ORDER!!!

*(ALL stop precisely and snap back to their places.)*

**TOM.** Did Miss Green say anything else?

**VIOLET.** Oh, my, yes. She said that she sometimes wonders if Lincoln weren't such a great president because he was gay.

**TOM.** That...what?! Can you repeat that?! I must be hearing things!

**VIOLET.** No, you heard what I said perfectly well. She said that he was our greatest war-time President, and our most merciful. That he even forgave the rebels. And maybe that was because he was used to feeling like someone on the outside.

**TOM.** Violet, do you think being merciful is good or bad?

**VIOLET.** Oh, it's definitely good. Our Lord was merciful.

**TOM.** So, when you heard Miss Green tell you that perhaps President Lincoln was merciful because he was homosexual, what'd you think?

**VIOLET.** I thought homosexuals must be better people than not-homosexuals. And I started to think, deep down in my secret heart, "I hope someday...when I grow up... that I'll be a homosexual!"

**TOM.** *(To JURY:)* Bingo! Sounds like moral corruption to me.

*(BLACKOUT.)*

*End of Scene*

#### Scene 4

*(The Cornfield. TOM stands in the clearing, pistol in hand, drinking a beer. He looks out into the field. LLOYD makes his way through the field to TOM. ABE is watching.)*

**TOM.** —I will not plead this out, Lloyd. They attacked my son—

**LLOYD.** —I'm not asking you to plead it out! I mean, I should be wringing your neck right now. You said you'd drop it. But things have changed. We're gonna use this case to end Regina's career. See, people don't give a shit about some teacher saying Lincoln liked the occasional log in his cabin. Your mistake was making this a trial about what Harmony Green *did*. We have to make this a trial about who Harmony Green *is*.

**TOM.** I don't understand.

*(LLOYD produces and drops the folder on the ground. Dryly:)*

**LLOYD.** Oh, no. I appear to have dropped a folder with Senator Lincoln's confidential work product, including incredibly embarrassing details about her client. I hope no one in the prosecutor's office finds it.

**TOM.** This is corrupt...

**LLOYD.** You're running for Governor! Of Illinois! Now listen to me. You're gonna use this file. This file turns around the mess you've made. And if you don't... Good luck tomorrow, Tom.

*(Exit LLOYD. Pause. TOM looks at the folder. He is stunned. He does not move.)*

**ABE.** Don't do it, Tom. That would be dishonest. Very dishonest. Tom. Listen to me. Being Governor isn't worth it. Do not... Thomas Bartholomew Hauser, do not touch that folder. Don't you do it...

*(TOM bends over and picks up the folder.)*

Oh, Tom.

*(BLACKOUT.)*

### *End of Scene*

### **Scene 5**

*(The Courtroom. TOM, REGINA, BAILIFF, JUDGE are in their seats. HARMONY is sitting in the witness stand. ALL look out to the audience.)*

**ALL.** The testimony of Harmony Green.

**HARMONY.** Of course I didn't talk in any detail about Lincoln's sexuality. I don't know who told Violet to say that. I wrote a line in the script about Lincoln's love for Joshua Speed, which is well documented. That's all. I try to expose my kids to the world of possibili-

ties. To help them question the low assumptions of prejudice. Don't we want our kids to approach life with an open mind?

**REGINA.** Thank you. You're clearly an excellent teacher. Your witness.

*(TOM sits at his table for a while. Dramatic pause. He opens the folder and reads something. In this exchange, both TOM and HARMONY try to win the jury over with humor.)*

**TOM.** Lincoln shared beds with other men. That's your supposed documentation of his homosexuality, isn't it? There wasn't a lotta central heating back in the 1850s, was there? Didn't men share beds for warmth?

**HARMONY.** He and Joshua slept together year round. Even in the Illinois summer. Have you been outside today? There wasn't a lot of air conditioning in the 1850s, Mr. Hauser. Why would they do that? They had a spare bed.

**TOM.** Maybe the spare bed was in a hot part of the building? Maybe there were fleas? Maybe...it was lumpy. Who knows? That's your proof?

**HARMONY.** There were also letters. To Joshua. They were very intimate—

**TOM.** —Like, “thanks for having sex with me,” intimate?

**HARMONY.** No. They weren't explicitly—

**TOM.** —Was Abraham Lincoln married to Mary Todd Lincoln?

**HARMONY.** Yes, of course.

**TOM.** Did they have four sons?

**HARMONY.** Yes.

*(TOM makes a “weighing two things” gesture.)*

**TOM.** Hmm. Wrote personal letters and shared a bed with a friend. Married a woman, sired four kids. Miss Green, based on such flimsy evidence, what kind of person would conclude that Abraham Lincoln was gay?

**REGINA.** Objection. Calls for speculation.

**TOM.** Withdrawn. Let me clarify. Miss Green, are you a homosexual?

**REGINA.** *(Jumping up:)* YOUR HONOR!!!

**JUDGE.** SIT DOWN! That's a completely legitimate question. Overruled.

(HARMONY locks eyes with REGINA. Beat. Deadly serious:)

**HARMONY.** Why do you ask?

**TOM.** Isn't it true that you have lived with a woman...Cheryl Tepi-do... for nearly thirty years?

**HARMONY.** Yes, that's true.

**TOM.** And isn't it true that you and she share a sexual relationship?

**HARMONY.** We share a bed. I write her intimate letters. Based on such flimsy evidence, Mr. Hauser, what kind of person would conclude that I'm gay?

**TOM.** Your honor. Please direct the witness—

**JUDGE.** —Answer the question, Miss Green.

**TOM.** Are you a homosexual, Miss Green? A lesbian?

**HARMONY.** Yes.

**TOM.** And the truth is, you justified telling your class Lincoln was gay because you wanted them to be like you. Isn't that right?

**HARMONY.** No. That's—

**TOM.** —The man who freed the slaves and saved the Union was a homosexual. And therefore, America is a gay nation! That's what you believe?

**HARMONY.** No. But it's nothing but bigotry to deny gay Americans—

**TOM.** (*Baiting a trap:*) —You think we're pretty dumb. With our silly superstitious beliefs and our backwards refusal to accept your lifestyle choice.

**HARMONY.** It's not a choice!

**TOM.** (*Springing the trap:*) Oh, but I say it is. I say it is and it's my right to tell my son—it is our right to tell our children that it's a choice. That it's a sin, if we want. And you can't stand it, can you?

**HARMONY.** I never said that, Mr. Hauser! I never—

**TOM.** —You can't accept that we disagree with you! And since you've failed to win us over, well, why not just teach our kids that their parents' beliefs are wrong. Was that your plan?

**HARMONY.** Of course not!

**REGINA.** Your honor—

**TOM.** —What other lies have you been telling our kids? For thirty years, we have put our trust, our children, in your hands, and you've betrayed us all! Now we demand the truth! Why did you do it?! Why did you tell them these lies?! What else have you told them? The truth, Miss Green! The truth!

**REGINA.** Your honor! He's arguing with the witness! This is outrageous!

(*JUDGE raises his hand.*)

**HARMONY.** I already told you:

**REGINA.** I demand you stop this!

**JUDGE.** Counselor, reign it in.

**HARMONY.** Nothing! This was—I—

**REGINA.** Your honor!

**HARMONY.** I came here on a mission! To educate. To make the world better. But it keeps getting worse and worse. The week before the pageant, a boy in my class came to me and whispered that he likes poetry. But don't tell anyone. He likes poetry! And he was afraid if anyone found out he'd get beaten every day for the rest of his life for being gay. And I just knew... I had to stand up. Finally. Did it never occur to you, Mr. Hauser, that the children are watching you? That they are learning from you that there can be nothing worse in this world than being gay? You've become so defensive, so angry—

**TOM.** —And did it ever occur to you, Ms. Green, that maybe he didn't want you tell anyone he likes poetry because his friends might think poetry is stupid? That they'd all think he was a square? No! Of course not! Because you're so obsessed with your agenda—

**REGINA.** —Your honor! Counsel is testifying!—

**TOM.** —What can you tell us about this mission of yours?

**HARMONY.** I don't... What?!

(*REGINA leaps up, pounding the table.*)

**TOM.** —You just said you came here on a mission. To convert our kids! Who's behind it? Where are your leaders? Who runs the gay conspiracy? I demand names! Phone numbers! WHO DO YOU WORK FOR?!

**REGINA.** Your honor! I object!

**HARMONY.** I'm not! I am not!

**REGINA.** That is NOT. WHAT. SHE. SAID!

**J.** Counselor. / **H.** Leaders?!

**REGINA.** He is badgering—

**JUDGE.** Counselor! MR. HAUSER!

**HARMONY.** I used to work for the children, Mr. Hauser! You got me fired.

*(Pause. Everyone is stunned at TOM's outburst.)*

**REGINA.** Your honor, I demand that entire exchange be stricken.

**JUDGE.** So ordered. The jury will ignore those last comments from the witness and from the district attorney. Mr. Hauser, I'm fining you 1,000 bucks for contempt of court.

**TOM.** What?! Your honor! Didn't you hear that? She admitted it! There is a gay conspiracy. She just said so. She's in on it!

**JUDGE.** Tom! She's just a lady with some funny ideas. Now, sit down.

*(TOM, stunned, walks back to his table, sits.)*

Do you have any further questions for this witness?

*(Pause.)*

Any further questions?

**TOM.** What? Oh...no, your honor.

**REGINA.** Your honor, may I have a moment to confer with my client outside?

**JUDGE.** That's probably a good idea, Senator.

*(REGINA and HARMONY rush out. Enter ABE, who tips his hat to them as they pass. ABE sits next to TOM.)*

**ABE.** I heard what she said, Tom. Pretty damning stuff.

**TOM.** What's the matter with them? She admitted everything!

**ABE.** They've all gone gay, Tom! You're the last one left.

**TOM.** That's impossible!

**ABE.** Just look at them, the way they're all staring at you. Like they pity you. Like they think they're better than you.

**TOM.** You're right.

**ABE.** Oh no, look out! Here comes Regina and that woman. Look how they're walking! Gay!

*(Enter REGINA and HARMONY, arm in arm. REGINA is wearing a flannel shirt. She's smoking a cigarette. She smacks HARMONY on the ass as they sit.)*

**REGINA.** *(Butch voice:)* Sorry about the delay, bud. I just needed some alone time with the little lady, if you know what I mean.

**JUDGE.** Do you two ladies want to call any further witnesses? Because I am just pooped! Anybody else feel like a daiquiri?!

**ABE.** Gay!

**BAILIFF.** Oh, count me in, sweetie!

**ABE. GAY!**

**JUDGE.** Would the sailors on the jury like to join us for a little after-trial aperitif? Talk about twelve angry, angry men.

**BAILIFF.** Anchors away, boys!

**ABE. GAY! GAY! GAY!** They're all—

**TOM.** (*Jumping up:*) —GAY!

(*ALL snap back to normal. REGINA has removed her flannel.*)

**JUDGE.** (*Back to normal:*) Sorry?

**TOM.** What?

**JUDGE.** Why did you just yell “Gay?”

**TOM.** (*Trembling:*) I didn't.

**JUDGE.** You did.

(*TOM sits down. Pause. He stares into space.*)

**JUDGE.** Does the defense wish to call any further witnesses?

**REGINA.** Yes, your honor. The defense calls District Attorney Tom Hauser.

**JUDGE.** I don't see how that's possible, Senator Lincoln...

**REGINA.** Mr. Hauser was the head of the community group demanding my client's firing. He's a key witness.

**JUDGE.** If the prosecution does not object? Mr. Hauser? Tom?

**TOM.** (*Barely there:*) No, your honor. No objection.

**JUDGE.** Well, then, we stand adjourned until tomorrow's testimony.

(*JUDGE bangs his gavel. TOM runs out of the court.*)

(*BLACKOUT.*)

### *End of Scene*

## **Scene 6**

(*The cornfield. Night. TOM is in his suit, staggeringly drunk. There is a mound of empties next to him. ENTER LLOYD, who is actually a bit panicked.*)

**LLOYD.** Tom! Tom! You cannot testify tomorrow! Regina's turned the tables! I just hauled ass from her office in Springfield. I've been calling you for half an hour! Why didn't you answer?

**TOM.** No phone.

**LLOYD.** No phone?! Why not?!

**TOM.** Shot it.

*(TOM waves his gun at LLOYD. One of the ABEs displays TOM's cell phone with a bullet hole in it.)*

**LLOYD.** Woah! Easy there, champ. Wanna put that gun down?

*(TOM drunkenly holsters his gun. It takes multiple attempts.)*

**LLOYD.** You're drunk.

**TOM.** You're sober.

**LLOYD.** Tom, maybe you should let me take you inside.

**TOM.** I know what you're up to. You and Regina. She called to gloat. Said she was sending you. And here you are. I can still win this case, you know! The decent people are on my side. The decent American people are decent. And American. And on my side. They are... People.

**LLOYD.** Who cares about the trial, Tom? Regina didn't send me! She is going to pull us both down. This is bad, Tom! If you testify tomorrow, it'll ruin us both! Let me make you a cup of coffee—

*(LLOYD grabs TOM. TOM shoves him away.)*

**TOM.** —Get your hands off me, you homosexual!

**LLOYD.** What?!

**TOM.** I know what you are. You're behind this. You're behind everything. You brought Regina Lincoln to town, that lesbian, and you picked that fairy judge and all those pansy jurors. You're the one! You're the king of the gays!

**LLOYD.** You really need to sober up, and we need to—

*(LLOYD tries to grab TOM again. TOM shoves him, hard.)*

**TOM.** —Don't touch me! Faggot! Don't you touch me!

*(Beat.)*

**LLOYD.** Look, Tom. We can either do this the easy way or the hard way.

**TOM.** That's what you like. The hard way. Right in your pooper. Homo.

LLOYD. I swear to God. Shut up.

TOM. Or what? You gonna punch me with that limp wrist? Or you gonna run away and cry like a sissy. That what you are? Are you a little sissy girly sissy boy?

LLOYD. No, that's your son.

*(Pause.)*

TOM. What did you say?

LLOYD. You heard me.

TOM. Tell him to be quiet...

THREE LINCOLNS. He wouldn't listen, Tom.

LLOYD. You've probably wondered why Jerry constantly sneaks out of town. Now you know. He's been getting his knob polished by hair dressers.

TOM. No, he hasn't!

LLOYD. And you know as well as I do that this is the kind of thing that's gonna come out—pun very intentional. But I can make it go away if you just come inside and let me explain—

TOM. —My son is not gay!!!

*(TOM draws his gun and fires. Pause. LLOYD and TOM stare at each other.)*

LLOYD. You could have shot me! You crazy bastard!

TOM. How'd you know he was constantly leaving town?

LLOYD. What?

TOM. He leaves town to see his girlfriend. But I never told you that.

LLOYD. A hunch, Tom.

TOM. How did you know?

*(Beat. TOM levels the gun at LLOYD.)*

—Tell me!

LLOYD. First things first Tom, I'm the only thing standing between your son and an indictment for attempted murder, so you wanna point that gun somewhere else?

*(TOM lowers the gun.)*

I've known about Jerry's little secret for months—came up when we started looking at you for Governor. When you refused to drop the

case, I knew I was going to need something to keep you in line. So I sent a guy to pick Jerry up at a gay bar, take some—

*(TOM raises the gun again and fires twice. LLOYD falls down. TOM walks over to the body.)*

**TOM.** You never should have touched my son, Lloyd.

*(The THREE LINCOLNS stare at the body in horror and slowly back away from TOM.)*

**THREE LINCOLNS.** *(Whispered:)* Murderer. Murderer. Murderer.

**TOM.** I didn't mean to... I can fix this, sir. I can hide the body in Jerry's shop until we figure out what to do. Help me figure out what—don't leave me! Sir? Sir! I need you now! SIR?!

*(As TOM pleads, they leave him. TOM looks at the body, the gun. He makes a decision, bending down, he drags off the body as the lights fade.)*

*(BLACKOUT.)*

***End of ACT B***

## ACT C: BETTER ANGELS

### Scene 1

*(An office in Springfield: computers, stacks of paper, law books, etc. TINA sits down at her desk outside a door marked "State Senator Lincoln." ABE, dressed as a delivery guy is leaving a package with TINA. As she signs for it, ABE speaks to us.)*

**ABE.** "We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battle-field, and patriot grave, to every living heart and hearth-stone, all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature."

*(The door opens. Out walks REGINA, a woman exuding power, confidence, charisma. ABE tips his hat to her and exits. REGINA walks over to TINA's desk. TINA jumps up.)*

**TINA.** This is a terrible mistake, ma'am.

**REGINA.** No, Tina. We're already strong in Chicago, Kankakee, the Quad Cities. But in this part here, what I like to call "the entire rest of the state," people have no idea who I am. We are going to Tom's event tonight and I am getting him out on the stump for me.

**TINA.** Okay. If that's really what you want, better get your dancin' shoes—

**REGINA.** —No! I already told you, I look ridiculous—

**TINA.** —Ma'am, last time I checked, if you're going to get a single Republican vote for Governor of "the entire rest of the state," you must learn to love three things: guns, ethanol, and, most importantly, you *will* master country line dance.

**REGINA.** But I love guns! I shot a hobo this morning. I drink a quart of ethanol every night! Two out of three should count.

**TINA.** The voters want to see a stiff torso, loose legs, and your hands on your belt buckle like a good, chaste Republican woman.

*(REGINA sighs and complies.)*

**TINA.** Are you ready to line dance?

**REGINA.** Uh... Yeah, if I—

**TINA.** —I said, are you ready to line dance?!

**REGINA.** Yes, ma'am!

**TINA.** Do you love Brookes & Dunne!?

**REGINA.** I love Brookes & Dunne!

**TINA.** Do you have any idea who Brookes & Dunne are?!

**REGINA.** Play the damn music already!

*(TINA presses the button on a boom box on her desk. A panel in the set opens, revealing a country band of ABEs. They play a real shit-kickin' song, what will sound to most as "hoe down" music. TINA walks to stand next to REGINA. Over the music, she shouts:)*

**TINA.** Okay now, one time for free. One, two, three, four, ONE!

*(TINA starts to step through an elaborate line dance, like you might see at any honkey tonk in America. REGINA watches her at first, then gives in and tries to follow. She can't, so she takes off her high-heeled shoes, and redoubles her efforts. TINA and she begin to dance well, in unison.)*

**REGINA.** I'm doing it!

**TINA.** Yee-haw!

*(The music ends and they laugh. The band bows. TINA turns off the boom box. The band disappears.)*

**TINA.** Regina Lincoln, a regular country gal.

**REGINA.** I may challenge Tom to a dance-off.

**TINA.** Don't do this, ma'am. Menard County is flooded with reporters covering his crazy-ass trial. He's the ultimate symbol of backwards cultural conservatives—you can't get near him without getting tarred with the same brush. We're the limited government people, remember?

**REGINA.** Tom is my best and oldest friend in politics. End of discussion.

**TINA.** Fine. Tom's assistant left a message with Pam at the front desk. They want you to meet with one of their staffers before the event...

*(TINA hands the message to REGINA. REGINA squints at it.)*

**REGINA.** I can't for the life of me read that woman's handwriting. She really does drink a quart of ethanol every night.

*(TINA makes a 'glug glug glug' gesture. She and REGINA laugh. TINA takes the message back but doesn't look at it yet.)*

**TINA.** We keep her around for her baked goods, ma'am. Her cheese-cake is like licking the face of God...

(REGINA laughs as TINA looks at the message. TINA slowly lowers it.)

**REGINA.** What is it?

**TINA.** It says "Meet Hauser Staffer... Lloyd Chambers."

(REGINA's eyes go wide.)

This has to be a coincidence. The GOP has three dozen Bushes. Why not two guys named Lloyd Chambers?

**REGINA.** It's not a coincidence. Lloyd was on Tom's staff with me in the 80s.

**TINA.** But why would Tom's people called the RNC's point man on gubernatorial elections a staffer?

**REGINA.** Son of a bitch. Tom is running against me. And he didn't have the decency to call me and tell me himself.

**TINA.** It's okay! We knew we'd have to beat somebody in the primary. Why not a silverback like Hauser? It'll give us credibility. Electability.

**REGINA.** I just don't get it. Tom's a leper with the party hacks. Why would the RNC send Lloyd Chambers to help him?

**TINA.** Uh, 'cause he's on Fox News every half hour talking about the trial?

**REGINA.** That's it. You're right. He's already a household name in this State and with all the press he's getting...he'll crush me in the primary.

**TINA.** Thinking of sitting this one out?

**REGINA.** I don't run from a fight. What am I, a Democrat? Now, shut up and let me think... He's too conservative to win the general election. He has to see that.

(Pause.)

I have to go down to Menard County tonight and give Tom a choice. Campaign for me or get the hell out of my way.

**TINA.** I love it when you go all Sigourney Weaver in *Aliens*.

**REGINA.** If he really wants to use this trial to shove me aside and launch his campaign... Well, two can play that game. If Tom won't listen to reason, I'm going to offer Ms. Harmony Green my services as her defense attorney and steal his headlines. It'll be the trial of the century.

(BLACKOUT.)

*End of Scene*

**Scene 2**

*(Outside the courtroom. This is a mostly empty space, save two heavy wooden doors with the words "Courtroom C" written above them. Enter HARMONY, REGINA, TINA.)*

**HARMONY.** I can't thank you enough for taking my case, Senator Lincoln.

**REGINA.** Don't you worry about a thing, Miss Green. Defeat is not a word in my vocabulary.

**TINA.** It's true. Lady's a total bad ass.

**REGINA.** Remember, our strategy hangs on public opinion, so the first thing we have to do is get you in front of the press. Ready?

*(Enter SPARKY MCGEE wearing a fedora with a press card.)*

**SPARKY.** Golly! It's State Senator Lincoln! Miss Green! Are you lobbying Senator Lincoln for help?

**HARMONY.** I—

**REGINA.** —I'm here to represent the rights of Harmony Green, of everyone in Illinois, against the overreaching authority of the State.

**SPARKY.** Wow! That's a big story!

**REGINA.** If only there were a reporter around.

**SPARKY.** Well, gee, ma'am. I'm a reporter! I'm Sparky McGee! From the *Menard County Register*! Would it be okay if I asked you two some questions?

**HARMONY.** I—

**REGINA.** We'd love that, Sparky!

**SPARKY.** *(In one breath:)* Okay, lessee. Oh, I've got one. Senator, given that most people in your party have been subjecting themselves to elaborate peregrinations to avoid taking a position on this trial, one presumes your presence here is an indication that you see some political advantage in opposing Tom Hauser publically. Are you running for Governor?

**REGINA.** I... Ha! Great question, Sparky. My friend, Tom Hauser, is using this trial to bring Big Government into our classrooms. We need less government, not more—

**SPARKY.** —Gosh, Senator, sorry to interrupt, and maybe I just didn't hear you right, but it sure sounded to me like you didn't answer my question.

**REGINA.** Wow, look at the time. The trial's about to begin. Wanna picture?

*(Flashbulbs start popping like mad. REGINA smiles.)*

Okay...let's get in there.

*(REGINA and HARMONY walk into court.)*

**SPARKY.** *(To TINA:)* Gosh, that was exciting! Hey, know what I'm gonna call this now? The Trial of the Century!

**TINA.** I'd say "Trial of the Millennium."

**SPARKY.** No need to get grandiose, lady.

*(SPARKY rushes off. LLOYD comes to stand next to TINA. They both look through the doors, watching. Each eyes the other. Both like what they see.)*

**LLOYD.** Hi.

**TINA.** Hiya.

*(LLOYD steps closer to TINA, then even closer.)*

**LLOYD.** What brings you here?

**TINA.** I work for the defense attorney? I'm kind of her right hand. I've helped her plan out her whole strategy. How we're going to beat that blowhard Tom Hauser—or should I say Mussolini?

*(LLOYD laughs.)*

I'm Tina, by the way.

**LLOYD.** Lloyd Chambers. Benito's campaign manager. Good to meet you.

*(He extends his hand. Beat. TINA shakes his hand.)*

**TINA.** Okay... Well, if you need me, I'll be over here shotgunning Xanax.

**LLOYD.** No need to be embarrassed, Paula.

**TINA.** Uh, actually, my name is—

**LLOYD.** —Don't interrupt. I'd like to change your life. Does that sound good to you? Yeah? Pretty clever trying to steal Tom's press. But if Regina persists in running for Governor once this trial is over, I'll have little choice but to end her career...and, gosh, yours too, Paula. You have a simple choice. Go down with her or save yourself. Look...she's a black Republican. How high can you two climb? Here's my card. I want you to get Regina out of the race. Barring that, keep me...informed. Do everything I ask, you get a policy posi-

tion on the next presidential campaign. Pretty good, right? Go on. Take it.

*(He holds out the card. Beat. TINA takes it.)*

Good choice. Text me anything useful.

*(From the courtroom, REGINA and TOM enter. HARMONY enters, trailing REGINA.)*

**TOM.** After all I've done for you, this is the lowest, vilest sort of—what were you thinking, Reggie? How could you?

**REGINA.** No, Tom. How could *you?! We've been working on this for years but overnight you've let Lloyd convince you to break every promise you ever made me? Have you forgotten that he's a lying manipulator!*

**TINA.** Ma'am—

**REGINA.** —That's why you fired him back then, remember? Now, I can't make you live up to your own ideals. But I will use this trial to prove that I am the best candidate this party has seen in twenty years.

**LLOYD.** Oh, I wouldn't be so sure of that, kiddo. That pesky liberal voting record of yours...

*(Beat. REGINA turns to see LLOYD.)*

**REGINA.** Lloyd! Great to see you again. And look! You're not drowning a kitten. Rehab worked!

**LLOYD.** I wouldn't count on using this trial for much of anything, Reggie.

**TOM.** My office is discussing a very lenient plea offer for your client.

**HARMONY.** Really?!

**LLOYD.** *(To REGINA:)* Why the long face? Your client goes free! That's why took her case, isn't it?

**TOM.** I'll call your office tonight, Senator.

*(Exit TOM, LLOYD.)*

**HARMONY.** *(To REGINA:)* It's good news, right?

**REGINA.** *(To HARMONY:)* Yeah... It's great.

*End of Scene*

**Scene 3**

*(The office in Springfield. REGINA and TINA pace. HARMONY stares at the phone. Pause.)*

**REGINA.** Why have opening arguments and then offer a plea? It doesn't make any sense. This trial isn't good for anybody if it's over.

**HARMONY.** It's good for me. It's good for me!

**REGINA.** *(Ignoring her.)* Unless... Tom doesn't want to drop it. Lloyd's pressuring him. I can work with this. Did Lloyd say anything to you while I was in court?

**TINA.** To me? You're asking me?

**REGINA.** Who else would I be asking? Harmony, am I talking to you?

**HARMONY.** Why start now?

*(The phone rings. TINA snaps it up.)*

**TINA.** State Senator Regina Lincoln's office.

**REGINA.** Tom. Uh huh. This is definite? Okay, I'll discuss it with my client.

*(She laughs.)*

I'd really like that. Thank you. We'll let you know in the morning.

*(REGINA hangs up the phone.)*

Three years probation and you surrender your teaching credentials.

**HARMONY.** Teaching is...everything to me.

*(REGINA thinks for a moment. Then, surrender.)*

**REGINA.** It's a gift. We should take it.

**HARMONY.** Okay. Can I... I need a night.

**REGINA.** Of course. Call me if you have any questions.

*(HARMONY Exits. Beat.)*

**REGINA.** This isn't over. Lloyd Chambers does not beat me! If I can just—

**TINA.** —Ma'am. The trial was a total Hail Mary to get ourselves on the map. And it's over. He has the party, the money, the name recognition. He will beat us. Even in Chicago.

**REGINA.** That doesn't—

**TINA.** —You will embarrass yourself! And it's my job to keep you from embarrassing yourself, Senator. Regina... I believe in the

dream as much as anyone. More. The first black woman to be elected governor of any state in the Union. And the best. Man or woman. Black or white. But now is the time for a different “first”: You have to give up. You *will* be governor, ma’am. Just not today. Ma’am?

**REGINA.** Okay, Tina. Okay.

**TINA.** (*Relief:*) Oh, thank God.

**REGINA.** What’s that supposed to mean?

(BLACKOUT.)

### *End of Scene*

### **Scene 4**

(*In front of the courtroom. Enter SPARKY.*)

**SPARKY.** (*To House:*) Day two! And the trial of the century turns ugly!

(*As he speaks, enter ABES, dancing on and off. They start building towers of newspapers and magazines with REGINA, TOM, and HARMONY’s pictures on them.*)

**SPARKY.** Sparky McGee with this exclusive! As if the shocking arrival of rising Republican star Regina Lincoln on the scene weren’t enough, the new day brings shocking developments—

(*Enter WALTER. He has two cell phones, a Blackberry, and a Bluetooth earpiece. He looks SPARKY in the eye while talking into his Bluetooth.*)

**WALTER.** —There’s no WiFi in this shithole so you’re going to have to type this up for me.

**SPARKY.** Sorry, what?

**WALTER.** Not you, Hayseed. (*To phone:*) No, I’m talking to some redneck from Mayberry. Okay, ready? Walter Kopaczeczek, politics-unhinged.com, reporting on the Trial of the Century from backwoods, Mississippi.

**SPARKY.** You’re in Illinois.

**WALTER.** How can you tell? No, not you. I’m talking to Opie. Okay, keep going. The mighty Lincoln scares Hauser to plea bargain. The trial is over—

**SPARKY.** —Exclusive news! From Sparky McGee! Last night, this reporter has learned, D.A. Hauser’s son was attacked—

**WALTER.** —Wait. Hold on. What was that?

**SPARKY.** Just a little something we rednecks like to call news, Mr. Kopaczeck.

**WALTER.** Huh. That's funny. Hey, when do you go to press?

**SPARKY.** 2:00 a.m.

**WALTER.** Tough break. Hey, don't let me interrupt.

*(As SPARKY speaks, WALTER repeats everything he says quietly into his Bluetooth.)*

**SPARKY.** Uh...okay... The plea bargain is dead! Last night, D.A. Hauser's son was savagely beaten by protesters. According to sources close to the District Attorney, he will rescind the offer this morning.

**WALTER.** Great scoop, kid. Wait a minute! Look over there! Old man Johnson's barn is on fire!

**SPARKY.** *(Looking off:)* Oh, no! Not again!

*(WALTER shoves SPARKY off the stage. He falls into what sounds like a bed of glass and metal.)*

AHHH!! My hands. I needed those!

*(Courtroom doors fly open. REGINA, TINA, HARMONY enter.)*

**HARMONY.** You said it was a definite plea offer!

**REGINA.** Well, clearly I was wrong, Harmony. It happens.

**WALTER.** Senator Lincoln said of the events, "clearly I was wrong. It happens."

*(Flashbulbs catch REGINA and HARMONY looking upset. Beat.)*

**REGINA.** Walter Kopaczeck?! What are you doing here? Where's Sparky?

**WALTER.** Print is dead, Senator.

*(Enter TINA, pulling REGINA away from WALTER.)*

**TINA.** *(Showing her phone:)* "Clearly I was wrong? It happens?" Were you hit on the head, ma'am?

**REGINA.** *(Quietly, To TINA:)* Tom didn't drop the case, Tina. He's a live wire in there because his son was attacked. The press is going to turn on him and overnight I'll be the reasonable alternative.

**TINA.** Fine. But if we're going to run in four years, you stay on message.

**REGINA.** We're not running in four years, Tina. We're running now!

**TINA.** Wait! Shouldn't we discuss this first?

**REGINA.** Nothing to discuss. Watch this.

*(REGINA steels herself. To WALTER:)*

Walter, I have a brief statement—

**WALTER.** —Senator, is this trial your way of indicating that you are pro-gay?

**REGINA.** I'm not sure I even know what that means, Walter.

**WALTER.** Are you pro-gay-marriage? Pro-gay-adoption? Pro-gay-anti-discrimination...or anti-discrimination-pro-gay...anti?

**REGINA.** This trial has nothing to do with gay rights.

**WALTER.** Everyone-else-on-the-planet-says-it-does. Thoughts?

**REGINA.** I'm not pro-gay-marriage, if that's the question. I'm not pro-straight marriage, either. I mean, all marriage should be illegal. Wow, was that the wrong word. It should be extra-legal. I mean the state shouldn't be involved. In either case. Gay or not. Taxes bad! Support the troops!

*(REGINA goes back to TINA, awkwardly. ABEs dance by with papers, Regina's picture, "MOST HATED WOMAN IN ILLINOIS?" )*

**TINA.** Hey, your name recognition is up! That's good, right?

**WALTER.** Senator, a quick follow-up: Are you saying that your close friend, Tom Hauser, loves taxes and hates the troops?

**REGINA.** A nice try, Walter, but I won't be attacking Tom.

**WALTER.** Regina Lincoln pledges she will never go on the attack.

**REGINA.** I made no such pledge!

**WALTER.** Senator Lincoln shocked her supporters today by withdrawing her pledge not to attack Tom Hauser, made...uh...twenty-six seconds earlier. This stunning reversal fast on the heels of—

*(A fanfare strikes up, drowning out WALTER. ABEs rush in, excited. Searchlights hit an entrance, as though someone is about to enter. A red carpet rolls across stage.)*

**REGINA.** Oh, no. Now what?

**WALTER.** My God! It's—

**ABES.** *(Angelic chorus:)* —Anton Renault!

**WALTER.** —from *The*—

**ABES.** (*Angelic chorus:*) —*New York Times!*

**WALTER.** —the paper of—

**ABES.** (*Angelic chorus:*) —record!

(*Enter ANTON in a long, purple cape, sunglasses and a golden cane. He walks down the red carpet to where WALTER is standing. He lowers his sunglasses a hair.*)

**WALTER.** I've read your pieces on immigration over and over. You're—

**ANTON.** —Shhh... You're in my spot.

(*ANTON makes a "shoo" gesture. WALTER nods, walks to edge of stage.*)

Little further.

(*WALTER hurls himself offstage. Shattering glass. ANTON snaps. Lights change. Everything goes silent. A microphone appears in front of him. He throws the cape off his back with a flourish. He leans into the microphone, clears his throat and begins.*)

**ANTON.** There is hope everywhere, if you know where to look. The way the sun rises over the prairie here in Illinois. The way laughter sounds on Sunday mornings. And the way justice flows, like the cool waters of an eternal spring, from the words of Regina Lincoln. A State Senator from Illinois, Lincoln has arisen from the burning hulk of ignominy that is today's Republican Party. In one hand she bears the sword of truth, in the other, the shield of dignity. She is saving us from ourselves.

**REGINA.** I am.

(*ANTON looks to REGINA. He takes off his sunglasses.*)

**ANTON.** Stick with me, darling. I'll make you a star.

(*REGINA jumps onto a stack of papers. ABES give her a sword and shield made of newspapers and magazines. She strikes a pose. Flashbulbs.*)

Of course, the most interesting stars are the ones that fall.

**REGINA.** Wait, what?

(*ANTON puts back on his sunglasses.*)

(*BLACKOUT.*)

*End of Scene*

**Scene 5**

*(A cornfield. Night. REGINA, TINA, and HARMONY enter.)*

**REGINA.** Seriously? We couldn't just meet at my office? A coffee shop?

**TINA.** He said "somewhere private." Besides, if you're going to be Governor, you better get comfortable walking around in cornfields.

**REGINA.** I'm getting mud on my Manolos.

**TINA.** You really are a woman of the people, ma'am.

**REGINA.** Hello! HELLO!

**TINA.** Ma'am! Please! It's a secret meeting. Let me.

*(TINA puts her hands to her mouth and makes a long and utterly ridiculous fake bird call. This continues for a while until she looks at REGINA who is staring at her like she's a total asshole. She stops and looks embarrassed. Pause. She looks like she's about to explain. REGINA furrows her brow and TINA shuts her mouth. Enter ANTON.)*

**ANTON.** Ladies. Nice bird call.

**TINA.** *(As in "told you so":)* Thank you!

**ANTON.** Are you getting on the stand tomorrow, Ms. Green? I mean, if I were you...yikes! All that incredibly damning testimony from those kids.

**REGINA.** What are you fishing for? Why did you ask us here?

**ANTON.** Anything you haven't told your lawyer, Harmony? Anything at all?

*(Pause.)*

**REGINA.** What's he talking about?

**HARMONY.** I have no idea. Let's leave. Now.

**ANTON.** Did you tell her about Cheryl?

*(ANTON holds up a folder. HARMONY glares at him.)*

**HARMONY.** We've kept it secret for 30 years. She's my lover.

*(TINA barks with laughter. EVERYONE looks at her.)*

**TINA.** What? We're totally fucked. It's funny.

**REGINA.** How could you hide this from me?! Oh, God! Do you have any idea what this is going to do to me?

**HARMONY.** I think you just answered your own question, Senator. I know what I am to you. You care more about your press clippings than my case. Well I am truly sorry my life has ruined your career plans, Senator. But look on the bright side. You can run for Governor again in four years. I'd offer you my vote, but I'll be in prison!

(HARMONY storms off.)

**ANTON.** Awkward!

**REGINA.** Tina, how could you have missed this?!

**TINA.** I'm a professional political operative, not a freaking Private Investigator!

**ANTON.** In her defense, I'm a Pulitzer-winning investigative reporter.

**REGINA.** If Renault has it, we can bet Tom has it, too!

**ANTON.** Tom doesn't know. And he's not getting the story from me. I won't print this.

(Pause. REGINA looks at ANTON.)

**REGINA.** Then...why are you telling me?

**ANTON.** Oh, I thought you might like to introduce it into evidence.

(TINA laughs.)

**TINA.** Um, when your client is on trial for teaching kids to be gay, you don't tell everyone that she's a clam digger.

**ANTON.** Classy. If you're hoping to use this trial to win an election, you might.

**TINA.** That's totally our strategy. How did you know that? I'm thinking of a number between one and—

**ANTON.** Seven.

**TINA.** (Hiding behind REGINA:) He's a witch!

**ANTON.** The way I see it, you introduce the fact that Harmony is gay on direct. On cross, he'll be all over her, fangs, frothing mouth, snarling at her, howling. Like Bill O'Reilly getting blown by the Statue of Liberty.

**TINA.** Nice.

**ANTON.** I know, right? "Today on the Factor, Lady Liberty's gonna take it. She's gonna take it all."

(TINA and ANTON giggle at this, childish. REGINA clears her throat, looks around, mortified.)

**ANTON.** Sorry. Point is, the jury won't be able to ignore it. And neither will the press.

**REGINA.** It bolsters his theory of the crime—

**ANTON.** —It turns this into the story you need. What are you doing out there, Senator? He's saying it's a trial about our kids and America and you're hitting back with...free speech? Uch. That is so 90s. You need to make this about bigotry, pure and simple. You have to be a crusader for equality. The press will eat you up with a spoon.

**TINA.** It's not enough. He'll still have the base.

**ANTON.** For now. But they'll turn on him when you introduce the next bit of evidence.

**REGINA.** And what's that?

**ANTON.** Tom's son is gay.

**TINA.** Woah! Hello!

**REGINA.** How could you possibly know that?

**ANTON.** I have a hot date with Jerry Hauser in, uh, thirty minutes? Trust me.

**TINA.** Senator, this is, not to put too fine a point on it, AWWWWE-SOME.

**REGINA.** (*Angry:*) It's not only irrelevant, it's—

**TINA.** —Irrelevant? (*Privately:*) The press will go bananas. This is—  
(REGINA takes the folder from ANTON. Gives it to TINA.)

**REGINA.** —Tina. Study this. I want a full report in the morning before trial. Now, get out of here.

**TINA.** Fine.

(TINA begins to rush off stage. She stops, turns to ANTON:)

Name three things that make me—

**ANTON.** (*Actor may improve three different items:*) Space mountain, Tip O'Neill and Mayonnaise.

**TINA.** (*Shuddering:*) Boogly.

(TINA exits.)

**REGINA.** You never tell another soul what you just told me about Jerry. How dare you—

**ANTON.** —Oh, please, Senator. Don't go whoring yourself out for a few points in the polls and come to me claiming you're a virgin.

**REGINA.** I've known that kid since he was four. He doesn't deserve to have someone like you offering his private secrets for—

**ANTON.** —If you'd had a chance to stop George Wallace from becoming a governor... Am I gonna do whatever I can to keep a vile homophobe from running one of the largest states in the Union? You betcha, Senator. Besides, it's not like I'm telling you his son kills and eats babies. If being gay is such a black mark against him in this charming little burg, he can move away to, you know, someplace where they've discovered fire. The wheel, maybe.

**REGINA.** Tom Hauser isn't George Wallace, and he does not deserve—

**ANTON.** —to you, maybe not. But he is just as dangerous to me as Wallace was to your parents.

**REGINA.** That's just...talking to you people is exhausting.

**ANTON.** You people?!

**REGINA.** You...“gay is the new black” people. Let's get real, Anton. You boys live in the richest cities in the world—scratch that, the richest neighborhoods in the richest cities. And yet, when someone hurts your feelings, you beautiful men with your awesome hair and expensive clothes and perfect teeth start talking like you're sharecroppers from Mississippi. You have no idea how ridiculous—

**ANTON.** —Listen to yourself. It's like Lincoln telling Frederick Douglas, “well, *you're* free. What's the big deal?” Have you noticed your client doesn't live in a big city? Think her life is just peachy? But, of course, you have to pretend like everything's fine for her, don't you? Because if you mention the words “gay rights” in public, you risk offending the virulent homophobes in the black community—

**REGINA.** —First off. Jackass. My district's 90% white and 80% Republican. I don't spend a lot of time pandering to black voters. But maybe the reason the black community isn't jumping up and down over gay rights is because we're tired of being lectured and called “virulent homophobes” by a bunch of incredibly privileged white boys—

**ANTON.** —My parents, those lovely people, kicked me out of their house when I was 15, so I'll thank you—

**REGINA.** —Really? Perfect! So, when you were out on the streets, broke as a joke, trying to get work, did you say, “By the way, before you hire me, it's important that you know: I'm gay.” Or did you keep it secret? What's it like to have that option? We have to stare prejudice square in the eye every day—

**ANTON.** —A minute ago, you demanded that I never tell another living soul about Jerry Hauser. Now, why was that? Because you know, though you have constructed for yourself this magnificent fantasy in which the closet is a palace of privilege, you know that we have suffered as terribly as anyone. We've been beaten, ripped apart from our families... And Tom Hauser has spent his entire career fighting to keep it that way. You know, Senator, somewhere in you, though you cannot bear to look at it or admit it, that your friend is evil.

**REGINA.** He's wrong, Anton. But being wrong isn't evil. It's just... human.

**ANTON.** If he had a file like the one I gave you, he'd use it against you in a heartbeat.

**REGINA.** Tom would never do that. He's fired people for...less.

*(REGINA has an idea.)*

**ANTON.** I get that he's your friend, mentor, whatever. But you know what he's become. I'm just trying to help you.

**REGINA.** You know what? You already have. I'm gonna win this trial. Thank you.

*(She exits, getting out her cell phone. ANTON, confused, watches her go. He gets out his cell, starts to exit.)*

**ANTON.** Jerry, ya old so-and-so. I'm being folksy. Fine. Where should we meet?

*(ANTON exits. Offstage, we hear TINA approaching. Enter TINA. She has the file from earlier. She looks around furtively. Enter LLOYD. She holds up the file.)*

**TINA.** A policy job. Washington. I want your word.

**LLOYD.** Well, that all depends—

**TINA.** —Your word. And I want an office. With an assistant. And he'd better be hot. Like, male-stripper hot, not nerdy college Republican hot.

*(Pause. LLOYD nods. TINA holds out the folder. LLOYD takes it. He starts to read it. He laughs, looks up at TINA.)*

**LLOYD.** I was wrong about you, kid. You've got a future in this business.

*(BLACKOUT.)*

*End of Scene*

Scene 6

*(In front of the courtroom. The doors fly open. Enter REGINA, HARMONY, TINA. HARMONY is in a panic.)*

**HARMONY.** —That was horrible! How did he know?! You told me it wasn't going to—

**REGINA.** —Calm down, Harmony—

**HARMONY.** —I'm going to jail! You said he didn't—

**REGINA.** —You're not going to jail. I won't let that happen. I will get to the bottom of this. I promise you.

*(REGINA looks at TINA. TINA looks away. TINA gets a call and is happy for the distraction. Enter ANTON, SPARKY, and WALTER. SPARKY is on crutches. WALTER's head is bandaged. ANTON watches, amused.)*

**SPARKY & WALTER.** Senator Lincoln! Did you know your client is gay? What do you do now?

**TINA.** *(Holding out her phone:)* Ma'am. This is a rep from the camera crews out front. The judge has locked them out and they all want interviews. Right now. All we have to do is step outside the courthouse and your face will be on 200 channels around the country!

*(REGINA looks at HARMONY, who is dejected. She takes the phone from TINA, snaps it shut.)*

**REGINA.** Come on, Harmony. We'll be on TV when we win.

**WALTER.** Senator! Do you really have no comment at all?

**REGINA.** No, but my client may.

*(REGINA pushes HARMONY forward. Beat.)*

**HARMONY.** "Those who deny freedom to others, deserve it not for themselves; and, under a just God, cannot long retain it."

**REGINA.** President Abraham Lincoln.

**TINA.** Our second gay president.

*(Everyone looks at TINA.)*

Buchanan. Total nancy.

**REGINA.** Now, if you'll excuse us, we have to get back in there. I intend to call my next witness: District Attorney Thomas Hauser.

*(Beat.)*

**SPARKY & WALTER.** Senator! SENATOR!

**THIS PLAY IS  
NOT OVER!**

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