

# **A LITTLE LOWER THAN THE ANGELS**

A Drama in Two Acts

by

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(A LITTLE LOWER THAN THE ANGELS)

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### CAST OF CHARACTERS

AUCTIONEER (voice).....	Doubled with off stage actor
ADAM JEFFERSON.....	21, a Virginia born slave
JOHN RUTLEDGE.....	33, Southern planter & businessman
CHARLES RUTLEDGE.....	23, John's younger brother
CONSTANCE CLARKE.....	23, a teacher & fiancée of Charles
SOPHIA.....	18, a South Carolina born slave
THOMAS CLARKE.....	44, a businessman, Constance's father
MARIA PIRES.....	30, a Cape Verdean sail maker

### The Setting

Area set to include the sitting room of a well-to-do Newport merchant, a sail loft, a small bedroom, an auction block, a cliff overlooking the Atlantic Ocean, an office on the waterfront, the after-deck of a sloop, and a dueling site.

### The Time

1803-1804—Newport, RI, at sea, and Charleston, SC.

### Playwright's Notes

The characters and events occurring in this play are totally fictional; however, the major role that the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations played in the American Slave Trade between 1725 and 1807 is a historical fact. During the period, the infamous trade triangle of Newport distilled rum for African slaves for West Indies molasses and sugar was a vital component of Newport's economy. The "Guinea" trade as it was called was practiced during the Colonial period and after the Revolution, resulting in the enslavement of 106,000 Africans; the Revolutionary War ended the trade temporarily, but after the war, the trade was revived not only in Newport, but also in Bristol, Warren, Portsmouth, and Providence. As pointed out by scholar Jay Coughtry, in *The Notorious Triangle*, the "'American slave trade' might better be termed the 'Rhode Island slave trade'." This play is a dramatization of how that trade might have influenced the lives of a handful early American patriots and their "property."

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ACT I, SCENE I

SCENE: A SPOT LIGHT COMES UP SLOWLY on ADAM JEFFERSON, 21, an African-American slave, who is standing on an auction block downstage center. As the white hot spot intensifies on Adam, we hear a voice.

VOICE (off)

O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens. <sup>3</sup> When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; <sup>4</sup> What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? <sup>5</sup> For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour.

(ADAM is ruggedly handsome, muscular and stripped to the waist. In spite of the circumstances, he shows a strong resolve and quiet dignity. He was born into slavery in Virginia and has come to expect the worst. He has a rebellious streak, which is why he is being sold, and his back shows the scars of many beatings. He stands motionless under the spot, awaiting his fate.)

AUCTIONEER (off)

Gentlemen, please, surely you can do better than that. What we have here is a prime specimen, young and strong. Good teeth, strong bones, trained to respect the whip. Take a look for yourself. This African is a number one slave—20 years old, strong as a bull, obedient and well on his way to becoming skilled blacksmith. Now do I hear 400?

Four hundred! VOICE (off)

I have 400. Do I hear 450? AUCTIONEER (off)

Four-fifty. VOICE (off)

Four-fifty! Do I hear 500? AUCTIONEER (off)

Five hundred! VOICE (off)

Six! VOICE (off)

AUCTIONEER (off)  
Six hundred! Gentlemen, please. Don't make me beg. Six hundred is a steal for a specimen like this. If only used for breeding stock, he is worth twice that. This one speaks English as well as you or me, if you can get him to speak at all. Virginia born is he. Do I hear seven?

Seven! VOICE (off)

Seven-fifty. VOICE (off)

Eight hundred! VOICE (off)

Eight-fifty! VOICE (off)

(There is a moment of silence. The man looks out into the audience as if they are the bidders.)

AUCTIONEER  
Don't quit on me now gentlemen. This slave can do the work of two men for the next 15—maybe 20 years. You will not find a slave of this quality anywhere between Newport and Havana. Do I hear 900?

Nine hundred. VOICE (off)

I have 900! Do I hear a thousand?  
AUCTIONEER (off)

Twelve hundred dollars!  
JOHN (off)

AUCTIONEER (off)  
Mercy, gentleman! Is that the best you can do? Twelve hundred dollars. That is a steal. Do I hear twelve-fifty? (Silence.) Very well, then. Twelve hundred—going once, going twice . . . and sold to Mr. John Rutledge for twelve hundred dollars. Thank you, sir.

(JOHN RUTLEDGE, 33, a Southern planter and businessman enters with his younger brother, CHARLES, 23. Both are wearing white linen suits; John is carrying a walking stick. They approach Adam to examine him; John pokes him with the stick here and there and looks in his mouth to examine his teeth. Charles seems uncomfortable with the whole affair although he goes along with it. Adam tolerates this abuse, but he clearly doesn't like it.)

JOHN  
The auctioneer was right; this Negro would have been a steal at *twice* the price. Look at that chest and those arms—good breeding stock indeed, this one. Team him up with a good strong woman, and you will get ten slaves for the price of one. (To the auctioneer.) What's this one called?

I be Adam.  
ADAM

JOHN (to Adam)  
Very good. (A beat.) Adam—go to that man over there; he will feed you and give you water. You want food—water?

ADAM  
Not eat for two days.

JOHN  
Go with that man; he will take care of you.

(ADAM exits.)

CHARLES  
John, you do not have the need of any more slaves.

JOHN

He is not for me, Charles. Your future father-in-law needs a good man for his stable—a blacksmith. You are to take him on to Newport.

CHARLES

John, slaves can no longer be brought into Rhode Island; the law forbids it. Nor is the child of a slave anymore born into slavery.

JOHN

Charles, these laws are meaningless. They do nothing more than appease the collective conscience of the abolitionists, who have no idea of what to do with Negroes once they are free.

CHARLES

I cannot deny there is some truth in that; however, there are laws that not only restrict the slave trade, but also expressly prohibit importation of slaves into Rhode Island.

JOHN

Charles, in spite of these laws, the trade remains a most profitable enterprise, and Thomas Clarke has assured me that I can transfer property of this sort without interference. If anyone bothers to inquire, which is very doubtful, tell him Adam is an indentured servant.

CHARLES

Of course, a servant. (A beat.) So, I am to transport this—servant to Newport?

JOHN

Along with the rest of Mr. Clarke's property. (A beat.) Hate to let that one go actually. Could use him here.

CHARLES

For what?

JOHN

I have acquired land, more land. Not in the low country for rice—higher ground, inland, for cotton. It is cotton that will make the South king. With the cotton gin here and the Yankee mills, we can expand our market to the whole of New England and ultimately abroad. And with you settling in Newport—

CHARLES

What makes you think I will settle in Newport?

JOHN

Why I cannot image you will be leaving your future wife any time soon, and I know for a fact that she would not fit into our more genteel Southern society.

CHARLES

Constance is a very adaptable and capable woman. She can fit in wherever she pleases.

JOHN

That is exactly my point: that she would not be *pleased* to adapt to our way of life.

CHARLES

Our ways are different; that is all. There is nothing left for me here in any case. It was always my intention to concentrate my business interest in New England.

JOHN

Because Father left all his property to me?

CHARLES

That is your birthright.

JOHN

But father did provide for your education . . .

CHARLES

So I could make my own way in the world.

JOHN

And you have! A degree from Harvard College. And—and this family alliance with Clarke's of Newport. Well, you have succeeded beyond even my greatest expectations. And was I not responsible for your introduction Constance?

CHARLES

You were responsible for my introduction to her father.

JOHN

You would not have even known she existed had it not been for my business relationship with her father.

CHARLES

I would have found Constance if she were on the far side of the world. How very little you know of true love, Brother.

JOHN

You needn't cast a shadow on my marriage, Charles.

CHARLES

That was not my intent. (A beat.) Dare I inquire of Charlotte's whereabouts?

JOHN

I would not advise it.

CHARLES

Where is she?

JOHN

Atlanta. But my wife's whereabouts is no concern of yours.

CHARLES

What is it this time, John—drink or something worse?

JOHN

Charles, let us just celebrate your good fortune . . . not . . . dwell on the unfortunate consequences of my union with Charlotte.

CHARLES

Brother, because she has not given you an heir is no reason to treat her so appallingly. And perhaps her inability to conceive is not her fault alone.

JOHN

That is not your affair! What matter is it to you how I treat her? If I have no heir, all the Rutledge holdings will someday be yours. That is in father's will, and I cannot change it.

CHARLES

But you would no doubt like to.

JOHN

Don't be difficult, little brother. For it is through my artifice that your success now *seems* assured.

CHARLES

John, you must understand that prior to my engagement—in fact, before I even met her, I had already established a foundation on which to build my own career. You would be mistaken to assume that the Clarke fortune is a factor in my love for Constance.

JOHN

Even so, you cannot deny that this alliance is a great convenience and a great boon to our mutual business interests.

CHARLES

It is not a marriage of convenience, John, but one of deep and abiding love. I would love this woman if even she were a pauper.

JOHN

Then thank God she is not for you too would be pauper in due course; for from what I can surmise, you could not live without her.

CHARLES

I am not ashamed to admit it. In any case, if I can add your damned Rutledge cotton to the Clarke shipping list, it will only serve to secure my future and that of my wife to be!

JOHN

You needn't be angry with me. I wish nothing but the best for you and your bride.

CHARLES

Only because my success will ensure yours as well.

JOHN

How can you be so cynical when I have arranged for such a special wedding gift for you and Constance?

CHARLES

What is this special wedding gift?

JOHN

You shall see in good time. (A beat.) Now, I have crops to harvest and you must catch the next high tide or be delayed another day from seeing your beloved.

CHARLES

You are right, Brother. I must get underway.

(They shake hands a little awkwardly and John starts off.)

JOHN (turning back)

I have new business with Thomas Clarke; I want to approach him about the use of the Slater Mill for my cotton. But I will refrain from mentioning your use of his daughter.

CHARLES

Do not make me strike you, Brother. Another remark like that and I will miss the tide just to give you a good beating.

JOHN

Charles, when did you ever beat me at anything?

CHARLES

Brother, you are ten years my senior, and were of much larger stature in my youth. Now we are more evenly matched.

JOHN

You will always wish it were so, Brother. But we both know better. Even so, I wish you well on your voyage home. Good day, sir.

(LIGHTS COME DOWN SLOWLY as CHARLES watches his brother walk away. He shakes his head in anger, and then turns away.)

ACT I, SCENE II

SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP on CONSTANCE CLARKE, 23, in the living room of a colonial Newport home a week later. She is attractive and bright, a schoolteacher, and from one of Newport's wealthiest and most respected families. She is pacing about anxiously, waiting for Charles; she is made up and dressed in the fashion of the period. Upon hearing a KNOCK ON THE DOOR, she rushes to open it and is disappointed.

Oh, Father . . . come in.

CONSTANCE

(THOMAS CLARKE, 55, ENTERS. He is a wealthy and highly respected Newport merchant and community leader. He is on the board of Trinity Church and a Revolutionary War hero. He is an entrepreneur and has established a far-reaching business empire, which stretches from the west coast of Africa to Europe and the West Indies.)

You need not be so enthusiastic, Constance.

THOMAS (entering)

I am sorry, Father, it's just that I was expecting—

CONSTANCE

Someone else?

THOMAS

Charles.

CONSTANCE

THOMAS

I am well aware of that, and he will be here within the hour. The *Providence* just made Brenton Point and will be dockside momentarily.

CONSTANCE

Father, I hope you do not think that I am in need of a chaperone to reacquaint myself with my husband to be.

THOMAS

No, in fact I have made arrangements to dine out this evening. That is not why I have come.

CONSTANCE (after a moment)

Very well. Why did you come?

THOMAS

It is about—this wedding gift from John Rutledge.

CONSTANCE

We have not yet received a gift from John.

THOMAS

Indeed, you have. The—gift was delivered to my office this very afternoon.

CONSTNACE

Yes . . . and?

THOMAS

Did you know about it?

CONSTANCE

Charles wrote me that a gift was coming.

THOMAS

But not what?

CONSTANCE

No.

THOMAS

Did Charles know?

CONSTANCE

Only that a gift was coming. It was to be a surprise.

THOMAS

That it is, my dear. *That* it is.

CONSTANCE

A surprise. (A beat.) Well—those are invariably the best gifts of all.

THOMAS

One would like to think that.

CONSTANCE

But that is not the case in this instance?

THOMAS

I suppose that is a matter of opinion.

CONSTANCE

Then perhaps you should let me form my own.

THOMAS

You have always been free to do that, Constance, and whoa be it to those who would keep you from it.

CONSTANCE

Did you bring the gift home, or do I have to venture to the wharf to retrieve it?

THOMAS

The—gift—is in my carriage.

CONSTANCE

Shall I get it?

THOMAS

No, please—sit. I will see to it.

(Thomas goes to the door, opens it, and motions to someone. Then he turns back to Constance, forces a smile and holds the door open. SOPHIA, 18, a Negro slave from South Carolina ENTERS. She is bright and confident; she has learned how to adapt and how to best survive. She has a firm grasp on the English language, having been raised in the household of the Rutledge plantation. Constance stands, looks at her, assuming the worst—that she has been given a slave as a wedding present—and then falls back in her chair.)

CONSTANCE

Father, please tell me that what I am thinking cannot be true.

THOMAS

Constance, if you are thinking that this Negro is given to you as a wedding gift, then I cannot in truth tell you anything different. Although for legal purposes, I think it best that she be referred to as an indentured servant.

(Thomas takes a document from his coat.)

THOMAS

This is a deed.

CONSTANCE (shaken)

This cannot be.

THOMAS (checking the document)

Until your wedding, it will be Charles who actually owns her. After that, perhaps joint ownership can be legally obtained if that is what you desire.

CONSTANCE (standing)

It is most certainly *not* what I desire. I will not have a slave in my house.

THOMAS

This is my house, Constance.

CONSTANCE

And I have run it since Mother died!

THOMAS

When your house is complete, you can take her there and do with her what you will. It is not my concern.

CONSTANCE

I will not have a slave in my house!

THOMAS

You made that point previously. And I was quite certain that those are the exact sentiments you would express, however, it is not my role any longer to advise you of such difficult matters.

CONSTANCE

I seek no advice. All I request is that, if need be, this woman can be housed under your roof until such time that her position . . . can be clarified.

THOMAS

She may, of course, be housed in the garret with the household staff until such time that—you and Charles decide what is to become of her. Now, I must take my leave. Charles will be her straight away, and I . . . don't want to get in the way of your reunion. (A beat.) Shall I take the girl?

CONSTANCE  
No, she can stay.

THOMAS (to Sophia)  
You cannot escape from here. You are on an island.

CONSTANCE  
You will not be mistreated here.

THOMAS  
She was not mistreated on the way here, but I understand she tried twice to escape.

SOPHIA  
Three times. (A beat. Then to Constance.) I will not run away, ma'am.

CONSTANCE  
Do I have your word?

SOPHIA  
Yes, ma'am. You have my word.

THOMAS  
I must go.

CONSTANCE  
Good evening, Father.

THOMAS (exiting)  
Good evening, Constance.

CONSTANCE (turning to Sophia)  
Please, sit.

SOPHIA  
Oh, no ma'am, can't sit if you're standin'.

CONSTANCE  
You can in this house. Please, sit. (A beat.) I shall sit too.

(They both sit.)

CONSTANCE (continuing)  
Well . . . do you know where you are?

SOPHIA  
I know the name of where I am—Newport in the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations—but jist zakly where that is, I don't rightly know.

CONSTANCE

It is hundreds of miles north of South Carolina—where you came from.

SOPHIA

Charleston.

CONSTANCE

Yes—Charleston. Do you know why you are here?

SOPHIA

`Cuse me for saying so, ma'am, but I don't worry much 'bout "why". I jist do what's expected of me. Less trouble that way.

CONSTANCE

My god! (A beat.) You know, here in New England, the institution of slavery is—

SOPHIA

Is what, ma'am?

CONSTANCE

Is—practiced to a—lesser extend than in the South.

SOPHIA

I see, ma'am—"a lesser extent."

CONSTANCE

Do you know what that means?

SOPHIA (thinks, then pointedly)

Do you?

CONSTANCE (after a moment)

You are very bright, but you must know that.

SOPHIA

Does that surprise you?

CONSTANCE

No. It does not. I teach in a school for Negro children; given an equal opportunity for learning, I have found that there is no difference in the learning capacity of Negro children and the children of European descent. (A beat.) I suppose what I was trying to tell you is that in New England we have—far fewer people in positions of subservience than in South Carolina.

SOPHIA

Why is that, ma'am?

CONSTANCE (thinks, then)

Well, I suppose it is because—we have less of a need for—laborers.

SOPHIA

I see, but, on my trip here, all the people I saw working the fields were dark skinned

CONSTANCE

In any case, you will not be a slave in any house of mine.

SOPHIA

Do you have a house, ma'am?

CONSTANCE

No, but I will within the year—after I marry. This house belongs to my father, Thomas Clarke, the man that brought you here.

SOPHIA

He is—very kind.

CONSTANCE

Yes, he is. And a pillar of the community. For a wedding gift, he is building a house for my future husband and me.

SOPHIA

I am a wedding gift too, that right? From Massa John?

CONSTANCE

What is your name?

SOPHIA

Sophia.

CONSTANCE

Sophia, I am Constance Elizabeth Clarke, and I will not accept another human being as a gift. I do not want you to think of yourself as—my property.

SOPHIA

Then will I be the property of your husband?

CONSTANCE

That may have to be the case until this affair is settled. Now, I must receive my fiancée and I am sure you want to freshen up after your trip. There is a guest room through that door; you will find everything you need. I will speak with Charles when he arrives and then call for you.

SOPHIA

Thank you, ma'am.

CONSTANCE

Please don't call me that; you are not a child.

SOPHIA

All right—Miss Constance. I will wait for you to call.

(SOPHIA exits. Constance begins pacing. She goes to the window, pulls back the curtain and peers out. Finally, she sits down on the edge of the couch and picks up a copy of the *Newport Mercury*.)

CHARLES (off)

Constance. Constance!

(Constance jumps off the couch and rushes to the door as Charles begins pounding. She flings the door open and CHARLES ENTERS. They embrace and kiss passionately like the lovers they are.)

CHARLES

Constance. My beautiful Constance. How I have missed you.

CONSTANCE

And I you.

CHARLES

Oh my sweetness, I have ached for your touch.

CONSTANCE

As have I ached for yours.

CHARLES

I must have you—here—now. Is your father about?

CONSTANCE

No, I made him promise to give us a few hours, but—Charles . . .

(He picks her up and heads for the door leading to her bedroom.)

CHARLES

No protests, my love, I have been without you too long.

CONSTANCE

Charles, wait. There is something we have to discuss.

We can have a discussion later.

CHARLES

This is a matter of great urgency.

CONSTANCE

So is this!

CHARLES (kisses her)

Charles, no! Put me down.

CONSTANCE  
(He puts her down on the couch.)

Very well, my dear, if you have a matter of greater urgency than my desire for you, then I must accommodate you for a moment—but *only* for a moment.

CHARLES

Would you care for some spirits?

CONSTANCE (fixing her dress, etc.)

You know what I'd care for.

CHARLES

Charles, please.

CONSTANCE

No spirits. Just get on with it.

CHARLES

I think you should have some spirits.

CONSTANCE (pouring him a drink)

My god you are beautiful, Constance. And what I ever did to deserve your love I do not know. Just one more kiss—before you go on.

CHARLES (staring at her)

(They kiss again; Constance is on the very edge of giving in as Charles maneuvers her to a reclining position on the couch. THERE IS A KNOCKING ON AN INTERIOR DOOR. Constance jumps us, again fixing her dress.)

Who is that?

CHARLES

Yes?

CONSTANCE

(SOPHIA ENTERS.)

CONSTANCE

Oh, Sophia . . .

SOPHIA

I have finished unpacking, Miss Constance. I was wonderin' if you might need help with something else.

CHARLES (from the couch)

Who is Sophia?

CONSTANCE

Sophia is our wedding gift from your brother. *She* is what I wanted to talk to you about.

CHARLES (rises and sees her)

Sophia? Sophia!

SOPHIA

Hello, Massa Charles.

CHARLES

Little Sophia?

CONSTANCE

You know this woman?

SOPHIA

We both grewed some, Massa Charles.

CONSTANCE

You know her!

CHARLES (hugging her)

Sophia! (A beat.) How are you?

SOPHIA

Much better now that I seen you.

CONSTANCE

Do not ignore me, Charles.

CHARLES (to Sophia)

Your family—are they—still . . . close by?

SOPHIA

No, after the accident that took your folks . . . everybody went somewheres else.

CHARLES

I am sorry for that, Sophia.

CONSTANCE

What does she mean—"went somewhere else?"

SOPHIA

After you leave for schoolin'—you never come back.

CHARLES

After the accident, there was nothing left for me down there.

SOPHIA

I never forget those days.

CHARLES

I guess I did. (A beat.) I am sorry.

SOPHIA

No fault of yours, Massa Charles. You young and—

CHARLES

Foolish. Now I am older—but probably no less foolish. I should have been there.

CONSTANCE

Sophia, since my fiancée is ignoring me, would you please tell me what you two are talking about?

SOPHIA

Old times, Miss Constance. Old times when Massa Charles and me was children.

CONSTANCE

Charles?

CHARLES

Sophia's family worked in the main house—cooking, cleaning, mending; her father was the gardener. Mattie, Sophia's mother, had as much to do with my upbringing as my own mother. She told us stories, and on days when she was working, she would have me read stories to Sophia. I was only ten; Sophia was five, but I kept it up until I left for college.

SOPHIA

I jist becoming a woman then.

CHARLES

The accident happened my first year at Harvard, and I never went back until I started working for your father.

SOPHIA

It was Massa Charles taught me to read. Taught me lots of other things too.

CHARLES (to Sophia)

Did I ever get a beating for that!

CONSTANCE

Well, maybe I should leave you two alone to catch up?

CHARLES

Sophia, I feel terrible about what happened; maybe if I'd been there—

SOPHIA

You couldn't of done nothin'. Massa John always did what he wanted.

CONSTANCE

What did he do?

CHARLES

He sold off Sophia's family.

CONSTANCE

Good Lord! Sold them off . . .

SOPHIA

You own me now, Massa Charles. You and Miss Constance.

CONSTANCE

We will never *own* you, Sophia.

CHARLES

No, not in a philosophical sense, but in a very real legal sense, we do or will jointly when we marry.

CONSTANCE

Charles, we have to return her.

CHARLES

To what? She would be much worse off there.

CONSTANCE

Then we will free her.

CHARLES

Of course, when it is most advantageous to do so.

CONSTANCE

Advantageous to whom?

Sophia.

CHARLES

CONSTANCE  
How can keeping her in bondage a second longer be of any advantage to her?

CHARLES  
Sophia, would you excuse us?

SOPHIA  
Yes, Massa Charles. I very tired. Won't be botherin' you and Miss Constance again. I know you gots lots to catch up on.

CHARLES  
Thank you, Sophia.

CONSTANCE  
Have you had something to eat?

SOPHIA  
I fine, Miss. I jist retire for the evening now. Good night.

CONSTANCE  
Good night.  
(SOPHIA EXITS. Charles crosses to Constance and takes her in his arms. She breaks away.)

CONSTANCE  
I am in no mood for that now.

CHARLES  
Constance, you are not going to let a—Sophia come between us.

CONSTANCE  
A slave? Were you going to say, "a slave?" (He doesn't answer.) I think Charles that perhaps I do not know you as well as I thought.

CHARLES  
Constance, I did not return to Charleston after my education because I chose not to participate in that way of life.

CONSTANCE  
And yet you still find yourself a slave owner.

CHARLES  
Through no fault of mine! And is this household not run with indentured servants? Tell me, Constance; is there such a great difference?

CONSTANCE

Let me enlighten you about the practice of slavery in Rhode Island. A child can no longer be born into bondage in this state, nor is it legal for the slave trade to be carried on by ships from any of Rhode Island's ports.

CHARLES

But is it not illegal to *own* slaves. And while these laws address the *institution* of slavery, they do little to limit the practice of it. Even the post-nati manumission acts require the children of slaves to remain in servitude until they reach majority.

CONSTANCE

The laws are not yet perfect, but they are a beginning. This matter is greatly complicated by the fact that slaves are considered property, and if—

CHARLES

Constance, can you not put this issue aside for a few hours? I beg you.

CONSTANCE

It will not go away of its own accord, Charles.

CHARLES (takes her hand)

I know that, Darling, so why can we not address it just as well in a few hours or on another day? Do you not long for me as much as I long for you?

CONSTANCE (weakening)

Charles, I have missed you desperately. You must know that from my letters.

CHARLES (kisses her tenderly)

I do know that, Love. Will you not allow me to take away some of your longing without any further delay?

CONSTANCE

Charles, it very important that you understand where I stand . . .

CHARLES (kisses her more passionately)

Tomorrow you can tell me where you stand. Tonight I only desire that we lie down together side by side. Agreed?

CONSTANCE

Yes, my love. Agreed.

(They kiss passionately as the LIGHTS COME DOWN TO END THE SCENE.)

ACT I, SCENE III

SCENE: LIGHTS COMES UP on THOMAS CLARKE working in an office overlooking the docks in Newport. After a moment, there is a KNOCK at the door. Thomas looks up as CHARLES enters.

Ah, Charles, come in, come in, my boy.

THOMAS

Thank you, Sir.

CHARLES

Good to have you home.

THOMAS

It is most gratifying to be back, Sir.

CHARLES

I trust that everything went well with your reunion with my daughter.

THOMAS

Yes, I am pleased to report that it was a success. Thank you, Sir. Things did not go quite as smoothly as I had anticipated . . .

CHARLES

Because of the girl?

THOMAS

Yes sir. Sophia's arrival did provoke some concern on Constance's part.

CHARLES

Well, in any case, I know she is well satisfied to have you back home.

THOMAS

I certainly hope that is the case.

CHARLES

THOMAS

I have just now completed my review of the accounts for this voyage, and I am pleased to say that it was a great success for me as well as my investors—thanks to you. Had you not be willing to complete the voyage from Barbados, things might have turned out quite differently. I thank you.

CHARLES

The loss of Captain Ambrose had to have been quite a startling blow.

THOMAS

These things are quiet common in the trade. Nasty business. And I will see to it personally that his family is well provided for.

CHARLES

I have no reason to doubt that you will do what is right by his family. What was it exactly that . . . took Captain Ambrose?

THOMAS

The fever—Malaria. He contracted it . . . in the tropics—and never quite recovered. You know how it goes down there.

CHARLES

Yes sir, I'm well aware of the perils of the tropics. (A few beats.) I just was not—

THOMAS

Was not what, Son?

CHARLES

Aware of what—region of the tropics Captain Ambrose contracted the disease. I'm assuming it was in the West Indies.

THOMAS

May I speak frankly, Son?

CHARLES

Of course. I would expect nothing less of you.

THOMAS

Would it be a problem for you if—say the disease had been contracted further east?

CHARLES

How far east?

THOMAS

I think we both know how far. (Silence.) Surely, Charles, having been raised a Southern gentleman; this will not present a problem for you?

CHARLES (after a moment)

No, Sir, of course not, but I fear that my relationship with Constance could come under close scrutiny if she—

THOMAS

Constance knows very little of my business affairs. My investors and I finance her school for Negro children, and that gives her time for little else. My participation in the trade, along with that of my investors, is not something that we desire to come under public or private scrutiny. And this—African trade is not by any means the only commerce I conduct.

CHARLES

But it is the most profitable.

THOMAS

As any Southern gentleman would well know. Is that not the case? Or did I misread you?

CHARLES

I do not know what you read, Sir, but that is indeed the case.

THOMAS

Excellent. (A beat.) And did you not return from Charleston with property for me?

CHARLES

I did. (A beat.) He is just outside.

THOMAS

Call him.

CHARLES (going to door)

Adam!

(ADAM enters.)

THOMAS

Come over here.

CHARLES

Adam, this is—

ADAM

Massa Thomas. I knows all about him already; his people tell me last night. He a good man, I been told.

CHARLES

He is a good man.

Adam a good man too.

ADAM

Which Adam?

THOMAS

From the Bible—the first man.

ADAM

Indeed, he was a good man. As I have no doubt you will be as well.

THOMAS

You will not be mistreated here, Adam.

CHARLES

And you will have a great deal more freedom here than you had in South Carolina. There are no overseers in my stables.

THOMAS

I was lived in Virginia; jst got sold down to South Carolina.

ADAM

No one will be—standing over you every minute of the day. You will do your work at the stables, and then you will be free to do as you please—within reason. For obvious reasons, we must maintain some—night patrols. (A beat.) What do you know about horses, Adam?

THOMAS

I know the rear end of one when I sees it.

ADAM

Charles, did he just—

THOMAS

Adam, let me take you down to the stables now. Sidney will show you the shop and tell you what is expected of you.

CHARLES

And introduce him to that girl of yours.

THOMAS

Sophia?

CHARLES

Indeed. Good stock—the two of them.

THOMAS

CHARLES

Come with me, Adam.

ADAM

Yes sir, ain't got nothin' planned jist now anyway.

THOMAS

Take some time off, Charles. You well deserve it. We can catch up on business affairs in a few days. If I start taking all your time, I will have to bear the wrath of my daughter. We shall just let the winds of Fate determine the time and place of our next business venture.

(LIGHTS COME DOWN SLOWLY as CHARLES and ADAM exit.)

ACT I, SCENE IV

SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP on SOPHIA and ADAM a week later. They are in the sitting room of Thomas Clarke's home. Sophia is carrying a shopping basket under one arm.

ADAM

Miss Sophia, I was by told Massa Charles to escort you to wherever it is you needs to go. And that's what I intends to do.

SOPHIA

What if I needs to go do my private business?

ADAM

Then I be goin' right along with you. That foe sure.

SOPHIA

You most surely won't! (A beat.) Now let me check my list.

ADAM

What's that?

SOPHIA

A list of things Miss Constance needs from the market.

ADAM (pointing to list)

What's that right there?

SOPHIA

Oil.

ADAM

Oil?

SOPHIA

Whale oil for the lamps. We gotta have some light in the house at night. (A beat.) You don't read, do you Adam?

ADAM

No one never taught me. I can make my mark though. (A beat.) Where'd you learn; slaves ain't sposed to read—against the law.

SOPHIA

Massa Charles teach me—back in Charleston when we was both jist children. Taught me rithmetic too. Got a awful beatin' for it, he did.

ADAM

Who from?

SOPHIA

Massa John—big brother. You right; Massa John didn't much cotton to the idea of slaves readin', no sir.

ADAM

Maybe . . . sometime you could teach . . . me

SOPHIA

Teach you to read?

ADAM

Wouldn't do no harm.

SOPHIA

Adam, I'd be most happy to teach you to read.

ADAM

Good. I thank you for that. Maybe we can start tomorrow. Right now though, I gotta gits you to the market.

SOPHIA

You don't gots to git me there.

ADAM

Massa Charles, said!

SOPHIA

You always do what your Massa says?

ADAM

Most surely do.

SOPHIA

You don't! If you did, you wouldn't have . . . all those scars on your back.

ADAM

Oh, so you been lookin' at Adam's back.

SOPHIA

I saw you down at the stables; I wasn't lookin'. You weren't hiding anythin' either—no shirt on. Beatin' on that anvil with a big hammer. What a sight that was.

ADAM

Got nothin' to hide. In fact—got nothin' at all. Neither does you.

SOPHIA

Oh, I got plenty—plenty—

ADAM

Plenty of nothin'!

SOPHIA

You don't know what I got.

ADAM

I knows one thing you got.

SOPHIA

What's that?

ADAM

Oh, I think you knows what I'm talkin' bout.

SOPHIA

Why Adam—what's your family name, Adam? I don't even know.

ADAM

Jefferson. Least that the name we took. Belonged to Massa Jefferson in Virginia.

SOPHIA

You not talkin' 'bout Thomas Jefferson?

ADAM

Most surely am.

SOPHIA

You was owned by the President of the United States?

ADAM

Most surely was.

SOPHIA (thinks, then)

Well . . . Massa Charles' father, John Rutledge, Senior—he signed the Declaration of Independence, he did.

ADAM

Massa Jefferson done went and wrote it!

SOPHIA

Ain't that somethin'? We both been owned by some of the finest men in the entire country. (A beat.) Adam, how come Massa Jefferson sell you off like that?

ADAM

Massa Jefferson never would of sold me off; he went off to be President. Foreman sold me; said I be a troublemaker. Massa Jefferson never knew nothin' 'bout it.

SOPHIA

Or maybe he gots more important things on his mind now?

ADAM

Not to me, he don't.

SOPHIA

Well, in any case Adam Jefferson, I jist wants you to know this one thing—

ADAM

'Fore you start scoldin' me, why don't you ask me what I was talkin' 'bout before?

SOPHIA

All right, Adam Jefferson, I will. What is the one thing I got that you know I got?

ADAM

My—heartfelt affection.

SOPHIA (surprised and flattered)

Oh, why—I had—no idea 'bout that. I hadn't done nothin'—I

ADAM

You didn't havta do nothin'. Jist—bein' there was nuff.

SOPHIA

Bein' where?

ADAM

The stables!

SOPHIA

I declare—

ADAM

And why in the world you think I be over here every spare minute I got? You thinks I *really* likes to go to *market*? Market ain't no place foe a man to be goin'.

SOPHIA

Oh . . .

ADAM

And, if I not mistaken, you spendin' a whole lot more time down at the stables that you really needs to.

SOPHIA

What do you mean by that Adam Jefferson?

ADAM

What do you mean by bein' down there all the time?

SOPHIA

I there to tend to Miss Constance's mare; she sends me down with carrots and sugar.

ADAM

Sugar? You feedin' that sorry nag sugar that could better be used to make rum! You most surely are headed for trouble, girl.

SOPHIA

Rum?

ADAM

Girl. You been livin' in a cave? What you think they do with that sugar and molasses comes up on Massa Tom's ships?

SOPHIA

Don't know; ain't none of my affair.

ADAM

Guinea rum! They makes the rum here that gets traded for slaves in Africa.

SOPHIA

Adam, you takin' nonsense now. These people treat us good; they not slavers. We practically free here.

ADAM

Yeah, we free all right—free to do what we gotta do. You do good, boy, you get treated jist fine. You do bad, you get punished. Jist like you treat a dog. You rise up and bite your master, they take an shoot you. No different here than down there; they just don't like to see it that way. Calls us servants instead of slaves—ain't no difference that I can see.

SOPHIA

But they gonna free us; Miss Constance said so.

ADAM (bitterly)

Only one-way we ever gonna be free.

SOPHIA

Adam, don't talk like that. I gotta get free. I gotta . . .

ADAM

I sorry, Miss Sophia. I jist gots so much anger inside of me sometimes . . . jist wants to choke the first white man I sees.

SOPHIA (touches his face)

I know you do; but it is better here, Adam. At least—

ADAM (taking her hand)

'least what?

SOPHIA

Least we can see each other if we have a notion.

ADAM

That mean you wants to?

SOPHIA

It might . . . jist don't be gittin' any ideas.

ADAM

Well, I wants to see you; wants to see you all the time, Miss Sophia. Sometimes I feel like I'm gonna bust if I can't just take you in my arms . . .

SOPHIA

Why don't you then? Don't wanna see you bust.

(He takes her in his arms tentatively and then he kisses her very tenderly, as if it is his first time. As they embrace, the door opens and CHARLES and CONSTANCE ENTER. Adam and Sophia break away.)

CONSTANCE

Oh . . . Sophia.

CHARLES

Adam . . . you were to take Sophia to market.

ADAM  
Yes sir, Mr. Charles. We headed there right now. We jist—

SOPHIA  
Gittiin' better acquainted.

CHARLES  
I can see that you are.

SOPHIA (starting out)  
We goin' right now, Miss Constance.

(They start out.)

CONSTANCE  
Sophia?

SOPHIA (stopping)  
Yes ma'am.

CONSTANCE  
You forgot your shopping basket.

SOPHIA (getting the basket)  
Yes ma'am. Thank you ma'am.

(SOPHIA and ADAM EXIT.)

CHARLES  
Well, I suppose we shall have to keep a tighter reign on those two.

CONSTANCE  
Why?

CHARLES  
Is the reason not obvious?

CONSTANCE  
What?

CHARLES  
The way they looked at each other. The fact that they were—embracing when we walked in.

CONSTANCE  
Charles—are you afraid that they might do as we have done?

Well—I . . .

CHARLES

Would you deny them love?

CONSTANCE

Perhaps what we witnessed between them is something other than love?

CHARLES

What if it is?

CONSTANCE

Constance!

CHARLES

Would you deny them a simple pleasure, when they have so little of it anywhere else?

CONSTANCE

Constance, there are—responsibilities that come with such pleasures.

CHARLES

I am well aware of that.

CONSTANCE

But they have not the means to fulfill such responsibilities.

CHARLES

And where can the reason for that be placed?

CONSTANCE

Constance, my love, you lack a fundamental understanding of the African character.

CHARLES

They were both born in the Colonies, Charles. They are as American as either of us, so why do you insist on calling them Africans?

CONSTANCE

Whatever they are called is beside the point. The fact remains that you have no conception of their makeup.

CHARLES

Then enlighten me, please.

CONSTANCE

Africans—Negroes—do not have the—same capacity to care for themselves as civilized people.

CHARLES

CONSTANCE (thinks, then)

I see. But—didn't you tell me that you were practically raised by a Negro woman because of your mother's poor health.

CHARLES

That is true. I was, but that is different.

CONSTANCE

So, this Negro woman who raised you had the capacity to take care of you, and in all probability your mother, but not herself. Is that correct?

CHARLES

Yes. No. No! She could care for herself and me within the narrow limits of a—very stable physical environment.

CONSTANCE

Such as a plantation?

CHARLES

Yes, because there was a place for her there.

CONSTANCE

Of course there was—for as long as she knew her place. And God help her if she did not! Is that not the way it was on the plantation?

CHARLES

Constance, I pray you will not let the practice of slavery drive a wedge between us. I chose to pursue an education in New England to distance myself from that way of life. What I found, however, is that I simply exchanged the Southern variety of slavery for that which is practiced in the enlightened North. And if the truth be known, the difference in principle is insignificant. "Let he who is without guilt cast the first stone." I believe is how the scripture states it. In any case, it was never my intention to hold people in bondage, here or in Charleston.

CONSTANCE

And yet Sophia is your property, is she not?

CHARLES

And does Adam not belong to your father?

CONSTANCE

If I can get Father to free Adam, will you release Sophia?

CHARLES

Release her to what?

CONSTANCE

Should that not be for her to decide?

CHARLES

Constance, even if Negroes are free, they are not—

CONSTANCE

White?

CHARLES

Like us. And I do not know if there is a place for free Africans here or anywhere else in New England. As her—owner, I am responsible for Sophia's welfare.

CONSTANCE

You think she is incapable of caring for herself?

CHARLES

It would be—very difficult.

CONSTANCE

Charles, Sophia is an expert seamstress; she could work at a shop.

CHARLES

What shop in Newport is going to take in a Negro? What shop in Newport is going to pay a Negro a wage?

CONSTANCE

Then I will find work for her on the waterfront; surely a seamstress could be of great value to a sail-maker.

CHARLES

Constance, Sophia's welfare is my responsibility. And she was sent here to be of service to you.

CONSTANCE

I am not in need of her service. Charles, she has a right to live her own life. You must let her go.

CHARLES

For better or for worse?

CONSTANCE

An interesting choice of words, Charles.

CHARLES

Show me that she can meet her own needs, and I will free her.

CONSTANCE

I have your word.

CHARLES

Constance, you have my everything. You know that.

CONSTANCE

Sometimes I wonder.

CHARLES

Ease your mind of that burden; you have no reason to wonder about my devotion to you. It is unmitigated.

CONSTANCE (thinks, then)

It is just that I know so little of your business affairs; you work for my father, but insofar as business is concerned, you tell me nothing; you treat me as he does, as if I were a child—as if I have not the intellect to comprehend the world of commerce. Like you, Charles, I have an education and an inquisitive mind.

CHARLES

I know that, Constance. And of course you could comprehend business; there is no mystery about it. But I would much prefer to talk with you about affairs of the heart rather than those of commerce.

CONSTANCE

Are affairs of the heart so unrelentingly interesting to you?

CHARLES

Are they not to you?

CONSTANCE

I think perhaps it is something other than the heart that commands such unbridled enthusiasm on both our parts.

CHARLES

Pray it will always remain so, my love.

CONSTANCE

I do, Charles. I pray it will remain so for all human beings who are caught up in the fire of passion's grip.

CHARLES

Sophia and Adam?

CONSTANCE (kissing him)

Us. Now—come with me lest this smoldering fire consumes us both.

(They EXIT to her room as the LIGHTS  
COME DOWN SLOWLY to end the scene.)

ACT I, SCENE V

SCENE: LIGHTS COMES UP a week later on MARIA PIRES, 30, a woman of color from the Cape Verdes. She's makes sails in a loft owned by her husband, who is off on a whaling voyage. There are piles of "canvas" laying about the dimly lit room. She HEARS someone outside.

Who's there?

MARIA

(CONSTANCE and SOPHIA ENTER.)

Mrs. Pires?

CONSTANCE

I am Maria Pires. Yes—

MARIA

We came from the wharf—

CONSTANCE

That is the only way to get here; what do you want. I am busy.

MARIA

I am Constance Clarke; you have made many sails for my father's schooners and barks.

CONSTANCE

Thomas Clarke is your father?

MARIA

Yes.

CONSTANCE

Is he not satisfied with my work? MARIA

He is very satisfied; he has no complaints. CONSTANCE

Who is that? MARIA

This is Sophia; she is why I am here. CONSTANCE

I do not know her. MARIA

She is an excellent seamstress; she needs work, and Captain Almy told me you needed help here. CONSTANCE

Can you sew heavy canvass? MARIA

I don't know. SOPHIA

She is very gifted. CONSTANCE

Let me see your hands. MARIA

(Sophia hold our her hands for Maria to examine.)

You have done plenty hard work with these hands. CONSTANCE

Yes— SOPHIA

You read? MARIA

Yes ma'am. SOPHIA

Measure? Know your numbers? MARIA

Yes ma'am.

SOPHIA

No call me, Ma'am. I same color as you. You call me Maria.

MARIA

(Sophia nods.)

I pay you one dollar for every day.

MARIA

That is only six dollars a week.

CONSTANCE

Seven—work every day. No time for rest like God; God got no need for money. Maria need plenty—never enough. Work ten hours everyday, Sunday too.

MARIA

Ten hours!

CONSTANCE

If I make sails good, you pay me more?

SOPHIA

You make them good—we see.

MARIA

When can she start?

CONSTANCE

(Maria takes Sophia by the hand.)

Come. I show you how.

MARIA

Right now?

CONSTANCE

Captain Almy right. Maria need help. You want job too.

MARIA

No, I am a teacher. I do not desire more work than that.

CONSTANCE

Then you go. Much sails to make and not time enough. Husband bastard off whaling! Leave me here with his work and mine. Men no damn good . . . 'cept for one thing.

MARIA

CONSTANCE

Adam will pick you up, Sophia. Thank you for your kindness, Mrs.—

MARIA

Maria! This not kindness; this business.

CONSTANCE

Yes, Maria. Thank you.

(She exits. As Maria goes to show Sophia the ropes, the LIGHTS COME DOWN SLOWLY TO END THE SCENE.)

ACT I, SCENE VI

SCENE: LIGHTS COMES UP on CHARLES and THOMAS in Clarke's office a few weeks later. Thomas is going through an account book while Charles sits across from him. After a moment, Thomas looks up and closes the book.

THOMAS

So, young man, I think it is high time we put you back to work.

CHARLES

I have no objection to such a course of action as that. I am ready.

THOMAS

Well rested, are you?

CHARLES

Yes sir.

THOMAS

Yearning for your mistress?

CHARLES

Sir?

THOMAS

The sea?

CHARLES

Of course—the sea.

THOMAS

Did you think I was speaking of something else?

CHARLES

No sir, I was—yes, I suppose I did for a moment.

THOMAS

We are both men of the world, Charles; I would not find it unobjectionable if you were to seek sanctuary in the company of someone—

CHARLES

I can assure you, Sir, that I have no intention of finding comfort other than with Constance from now to perpetuity.

THOMAS

That is a long time, Charles. (A beat.) In any case, I can surmise from such a statement of fact that the—comfort—you find in my daughter's arms is sufficient to meet all of your needs, for companionship and such.

CHARLES

That would not be an inaccurate assessment.

THOMAS

Excellent! And I can tell from her cheerful demeanor when you are about that her needs are being satisfied as well. (Goes for a decanter of liquor.) I think we should drink to it.

(He pours and hands Charles a glass.)

THOMAS

To—the fulfillment of our mutual needs.

CHARLES

Here. Here.

(They drink. Charles takes a gulp and then chokes.)

THOMAS

Guinea rum, Son. Be careful.

CHARLES

Powerful stuff.

THOMAS

Which is why it is so desired in the trade. (He pours Charles another.) Now—down to business.

(Thomas crosses to a chart of the Atlantic Ocean on the wall. He points to the chart as he continues.)

THOMAS

Have you ever made a crossing, Charles?

CHARLES

No sir. But as you well know, I have been sailing between the West Indies and Charleston since I was 14 and between Newport and Charleston for the past five years in your employ.

THOMAS

But you are not afraid of a run across the Atlantic?

CHARLES

I respect the sea, Sir; I do not fear it.

THOMAS

Good. It is my intention to involve you more directly in my African trade . . . if you have no objection, of course.

CHARLES

My only—reluctance would be that my wedding would be delayed.

THOMAS

I have taken that into consideration, Charles. The date you set is eight months away. That gives you more than enough time to complete this enterprise, and I think it important that you familiarize more intimately with my—our—trade in Africa before you join the family.

CHARLES

Very well, Sir. What is the nature of your trade in Africa?

THOMAS

It is not just my trade, Charles, it is an enterprise that involves well nigh all the mercantile families of this city, if not the state. Let me assure you that the investors, who shall remain unnamed at this point, are the cream of Newport society and bear names you would undoubtedly recognize.

CHARLES

Why should the investors remain unnamed?

THOMAS

It is a common practice.

CHARLES

But it has nothing to do with the nature of the trade?

THOMAS

Have I made a statement that would lead you to believe that?

CHARLES

Should I inquire further about the nature of your African trade?

THOMAS

Rum! Guinea rum, much like what you are drinking presently is traded on the West African coast for a number of—products that may or may not find their way back to New England.

CHARLES

Products such as . . .

THOMAS

Palm oil, ivory, various African trinkets and tribal implements that are valued by collectors.

CHARLES

So I would be returning to Newport or Boston from Africa.

THOMAS

You know better than that, Charles.

CHARLES

I know too then that I would be trading for more than African ivory and palm oil. Sir, you must understand that although I am from Charleston, my southern roots do not run nearly so deep as those of my brother.

THOMAS

And what you must understand, Charles is that everything you see out that window—that which belongs to me and that which belongs to the other mercantile families of Newport was built on this trade. And let me assure you that my future as well as yours depends to a large extent on this trade.

CHARLES

Constance knows nothing of this trade?

THOMAS

As I told you before, she must never know.

CHARLES

Surely there is another enterprise by which you can satisfy the growth expectations of your investors' capital.

THOMAS

And mine as well. But in answer to your question: there is no other trade that even approaches the profitability of the African trade. The South is planting more and more land in cotton; Northern states are passing post-nati manumission acts. The demand for labor is growing in the South along with the size of the fields planted in cotton. Prices are at an all-time high. We must take advantage of this market while it is there.

CHARLES

I do not know that I can do this, Sir.

THOMAS

This is business, Charles. Nothing more and nothing less. It is no different that hauling lumber.

CHARLES

It is a matter of trust; I do not wish to deceive Constance.

THOMAS

Charles, listen to me. I will not accept a negative response from you on this matter. The house I am building for you and Constance is being constructed on the African trade. Constance's life of privilege is built on that trade—

CHARLES

But she is unaware of that!

THOMAS

That is as it should be.

CHARLES

What you are asking for me to do is to dishonor her?

THOMAS

Have you not already dishonored her, Charles?

CHARLES

Sir?

THOMAS

Have I not turned a blind eye to the intimacy that you and my daughter have shared for sometime now?

CHARLES

I was not aware that . . .

THOMAS

I knew the nature of your relationship with Constance? (A beat) Why would I choose to spend the night in an inn when I knew you were calling on Constance if I had not known you were engaged in an intimate relationship with my daughter?

CHARLES

I know not.

THOMAS

For freely giving my daughter to you, do you not feel in the least bit obliged to return this small favor?

CHARLES

Ah . . . only now I see how business is conducted outside the theoretical realm of academia.

THOMAS

You will not even command *The Rising Sun*; you will serve as First Mate, who has taken ill. On this voyage, I only desire that you learn the trade. On subsequent voyages, you will have command of your own ship.

CHARLES

When do we sail?

THOMAS

As soon as I acquire another 50 hogshead rum for trading purposes—with 32 distilleries on this island, probably within the week. I will send my man, Adam, with you.

CHARLES

Is he not working out in the stables?

THOMAS

Adam is a fine worker; I hate to lose him, however I think you will find him to be of more use to you than he will be to me here.

CHARLES

He has in him a—rebellious streak.

THOMAS

It will be quelled before he embarks.

CHARLES

Not with the whip.

THOMAS

I have never raised a hand to harm one of my slaves.

CHARLES

I am gratified to hear it. (A beat.) Have you ever lifted a finger to truly help one?

THOMAS

Empty words coming from a Southern gentleman, Charles.

CHARLES

Of course, you are right. I offer my apology if I have offended you, Sir.

THOMAS

None taken.

CHARLES

Have you told Constance about this?

THOMAS  
It is not my place to bring her such bad tidings.

CHARLES  
You left that pleasure to me?

THOMAS  
Yes, that among others.

CHARLES  
Then I must be on my way, Sir.

THOMAS  
God be with you.

CHARLES (exiting)  
As he is with you, Sir.

(BLACKOUT to end the scene.)

ACT I, SCENE VII

SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP on SOPHIA, ADAM, CONSTANCE, and CHARLES later that afternoon. Constance is spreading a quilt on the ground on a cliff overlooking a wide expanse of the Atlantic Ocean. Sophia and Adam are giving her a hand as Charles stands by holding a picnic basket. When the quilt is spread out and the corner anchored, Constance kneels down.

CONSTANCE

Sweetheart, come sit here and hand me the basket. Sophia, you and Adam sit with us—there.

SOPHIA

Ma'am?

CHARLES (not sure about this)

Constance . . .

CONSTANCE

Come now, sit, both of you.

ADAM

Massa Charles . . . ?

CONSTANCE

And I would prefer that neither of you to use the term master ever again. Charles is not your master. Nor am I Sophia's. Do you understand that?

SOPHIA

Yes, Miss Constance.

CONSTANCE

And if you insist on calling me, Miss Constance, I shall call you Miss Sophia.

ADAM

What do I call—

CONSTANCE

Charles?

ADAM

Yes . . .

CONSTANCE

Call him what I call him.

ADAM

No, ma'am! Ain't calling him "Sweetheart."

CHARLES

Call me—Mr. Charles. And I will call you—Mr. Adam? How does that suit you?

ADAM (lifting his head)

"Mr. Adam." I likes that. I likes that jist fine. "Mr. Adam."

CONSTANCE (offering food)

Mr. Adam, won't you and your lady join us here on the quilt for a bite to eat?

(They're not sure about this; this is crossing a new boundary. After a moment, Adam takes Sophia's hand and they step onto the quilt.)

ADAM

Thank you, Miss Constance, I think we would like to very much to join you for a bite—if Mr. Charles has no objection.

CHARLES

No, Mr. Adam, I have no objection. Please—join us.

CONSTANCE (passing food)

Is this not just grand—thank you God, for this one blissful moment in this beautiful place with these good people.

ADAM

Amen to that.

CONSTANCE

Charles, did I tell you that Sophia is teaching Adam to read?

CHARLES (not sure this is a good thing)  
Is that so?

ADAM  
Yes sir. I can reads entire paragraphs without stopping.

SOPHIA  
He learn quick, Mr. Charles. Won't be long 'fore he reading' whole books.

ADAM  
My mind thirsty for words and ideas same as my body is for water come plantin' time. I findin' ideas grow jist like a cotton plant—shootin' right up through the earth.

CHARLES  
Which is exactly why you were not taught to read in Virginia.

CONSTANCE  
Charles, why don't you ask Mr. Adam to read for us?

CHARLES  
Of course. Mr. Adam . . .

ADAM  
Yes, Mr. Charles.

CHARLES  
Would you be kind enough to favor these ladies and me with a recitation?

ADAM  
I don't know about that, but I would be most happily to reads to you from a book.

CHARLES  
Please.

(Constance hands Adam a book.)

ADAM (reading)  
We—we holds—

SOPHIA  
Hold.

ADAM  
We hold these truths to be self—evident.

SOPHIA  
Very good.

CHARLES  
Constance . . .

CONSTANCE  
Just listen.

ADAM  
. . . that all men are created equal, that they are—en—dow—ed—endowed by—by—God  
—with certain un—alienable—Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit  
of Happiness.

(Sophia kisses him on the cheek.)

CONSTANCE  
That was jist fine, Mr. Adam! Jist fine.

CHARLES  
You read very well, Mr. Adam. Very well indeed.

ADAM  
You knows, Mr. Charles, sometimes I can read the words if I sounds them out, but then  
I don't know zakly what they means.

CHARLES  
Sometime I don't know either.

ADAM (holding up the book)  
What these words mean, Mr. Charles?

CHARLES (after a moment)  
What those words mean, what they *really* mean, is that if you want to know what is  
truly in a man's heart, you must look at what he does rather than at what he says.

ADAM  
I thought so.

CHARLES  
I am very sorry.

ADAM  
Wish everybody was.

SOPHIA  
Well, jist look at all that ocean out there.

ADAM  
How far across is it, Miss Constance?

CONSTANCE

Charles knows more of the sea than do I. How far is it across, Charles?

CHARLES

Depends on where you want to go. Great Britain is about 2,000 miles; your homeland is 1,000 miles further.

ADAM

Virginia my homeland.

CHARLES

Please accept my apology. The West Coast of African is approximately 3,000 miles from here.

SOPHIA

There talk of sending freed slaves back to Africa. That right, Mr. Charles?

ADAM

Neither of us ever been in Africa. I born in Virginia, Sophia in South Carolina. What we have to return to in Africa?

CHARLES

I—don't know.

CONSTANCE

There *is* talk of sending freed slaves back to Africa. Even the abolitionists speak of it.

ADAM

If we be free, why not we be free to stay here?

CHARLES

Because we do not have any idea of what to do with you. Neither the abolitionists, nor the government, nor the slaveholders have any idea of where freed Negroes will fit into society. That is the truth of the matter. But you need not worry about being sent to Africa. If there is no money to be made in sending you back, you will remain in this country.

ADAM

That be good. When I free—I wants to find my own happiness and life and liberty.

CHARLES

So do we all.

CONSTANCE

Charles, are you not finding your happiness in what you're doing? (Silence.) Charles?

CHARLES  
I have a business obligation to fulfill, Constance, one that will take me away from you for a while.

CONSTANCE  
You are going away?

CHARLES  
Yes.

CONSTANCE  
When?

CHARLES  
Soon. Probably within the week.

(Sophia stands and pulls Adam up.)

SOPHIA  
We must go. Thank you, Miss Constance, Mr. Charles.

(They EXIT.)

CONSTANCE  
Charles, where are you going?

CHARLES  
Africa.

CONSTANCE  
Africa?

CHARLES  
Yes. I need to learn the African trade.

CONSTANCE  
You have never been before.

CHARLES  
That is why I am going.

CONSTANCE  
Father is sending you?

CHARLES  
It is my job, Constance. It is the life I—we have chosen. We knew there would be separations.

CONSTANCE

What about our wedding?

CHARLES

If all goes well, I'll be back in seven months—nothing will have to change.

CONSTANCE

Have you *ever* been on a sea voyage when everything went well?

CHARLES

Admittedly, there are uncertainties that cannot be predicted.

CONSTANCE

The fever! Small pox! Storms! I might never see you again.

CHARLES

I will return to you, Constance. We will marry as soon as I get home, whenever that is.

CONSTANCE

You told me you were only going to be involved in the coastal trade.

CHARLES

I know that, but . . . circumstances dictate that I make this voyage.

CONSTANCE

What circumstances?

CHARLES

The First Mate on *The Rising Sun* has fallen ill; your father has asked to take his place.

CONSTANCE

And you said you would?

CHARLES

Constance, I—owe your father my allegiance.

CONSTANCE

Do you not owe your allegiance to me as well?

CHARLES

Of course, I do, but it is through my allegiance to your father that I can make myself worthy enough to even offer myself to you.

CONSTANCE

I expect nothing more from you than your love, Charles. I can manage quite well without the finery that money provides if I am loved.

CHARLES

But my love for you requires me to offer you much more.

CONSTANCE

So—to give me more than I even desire, you will abandon me for as long as seven months, a year perhaps?

CHARLES

Abandon is a strong word, Constance.

CONSTANCE

Is love not a stronger one?

CHARLES

Constance . . . my love for you exceeds all else on this planet. You must know and believe that.

CONSTANCE

What I know is that to truly know what is in a man's heart, you must look at what he does, rather than what he says.

CHARLES

Constance . . .

CONSTANCE

Is that not what you told Adam?

CHARLES

It is a bad omen to depart on such an ill wind.

CONSTANCE

Then I beg you not go.

CHARLES

Constance, I must go—for reasons that are inexplicable and at the same time compelling. Forgive me.

CONSTANCE

It is for God to forgive, Charles. He brought us together, and it is you who chooses to break us apart. For that, I cannot forgive you.

CHARLES

I shall come back to you, Constance. You have my word.

CONSTANCE

Fare thee well then Charles. I wish you a fair wind and following seas.

(She gathers up the quilt and begins to walk away as the LIGHT COME DOWN SLOWLY TO END ACT I.)

A LITTLE LOWER THAN THE ANGELS

by

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ACT II, SCENE I

SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP ON MARIA and SOPHIA in the sail-loft. Both are sewing at separate ends of a large white sail.

MARIA

Sophia, you good worker, learn fast. I make you into good sail maker.

SOPHIA

Same as making dress, only bigger.

MARIA

Much bigger—less you got giant womens in the South.

SOPHIA

No, not this big. Some got big *heads* though.

MARIA

You like it here, okay?

SOPHIA

In Newport?

MARIA

My shop? You like being maker of sails?

SOPHIA

I like it fine; first time I ever paid for working. I feel rich already.

MARIA

You keep working good, I give you more money.

More? SOPHIA

I no slave master. MARIA

How much more? SOPHIA

Just more. What you need money for anyway? Miss Constance, Mr. Clarke not take good care of you—give you roof overhead, plenty to eat? MARIA

When I free, I got to make my own way though. Need money for family too. SOPHIA

What family you got? MARIA

Maybe I got family in Charleston still. Wants to make them free too. SOPHIA

What 'bout, Mr. Adam? MARIA

What 'bout him? SOPHIA

Don't know. MARIA

Then you tend your sail; I tend mine. Mr. Adam my business. SOPHIA

Think he a little sweet on you? MARIA

Never mind what I thinks. SOPHIA

Maybe Sophia little sweet on him? MARIA

Maybe so. Don't matter now anyway; he gone. Went off with Mr. Charles on *Rising Sun*. SOPHIA

*Rising Sun*? He go on that devil ship? MARIA

SOPHIA  
That right. What wrong with that?

MARIA  
*Rising Sun* a slaver, bound for Africa.

SOPHIA  
No! Mr. Charles on board; he no take Africans for slaves; he be freein' Sophia.

MARIA  
You know what you know; I know what I know.

SOPHIA  
Mr. Charles . . . he *never* take Adam with him on slaver; Adam . . .

CONSTANCE (off)  
Mrs. Pires . . . Mrs. Pires.

MARIA  
Maria! Come in.

(CONSTANCE enters.)

CONSTANCE  
Please excuse this intrusion, but—I have news for Sophia that just could not wait.

MARIA  
You tell her news if she keep working.

CONSTANCE  
Thank you.

MARIA  
I have to keep working too, many sails to make, not time enough. Husband gone off whaling—leave all work to me. Men no damn good—'cept for one thing.

CONSTANCE  
Yes, you mentioned that. I'm sorry.

MARIA  
So . . . what news you got?

CONSTANCE  
It is for Sophia.

MARIA  
Know who! Want to know what.

CONSTANCE (takes out paper)  
Sophia, you are free; before Charles left, he set you free. I have the papers.

MARIA  
You free to stay right there and make sails; that how free you are.

SOPHIA  
Free?

CONSTANCE  
As a bird.

MARIA  
Jailbird maybe.

CONSTANCE  
Is it not wonderful?

SOPHIA  
Don't know. Don't now how supposed to feel to be free.

CONSTANCE  
I had no doubt that he would set you free eventually, but—

SOPHIA  
Maybe he jist did it so you be less angry with him for going.

CONSTANCE  
I do not care; the important thing is that he did it!

SOPHIA  
So now, all the money I make for me?

CONSTANCE  
Yes, of course.

SOPHIA  
And I can spend it however I want.

CONSTANCE  
We'll be happy to provide you with some guidance on—investing it, to make it grow.

MARIA  
Oh yeah, invest in *Rising Sun*; make much monies.

CONSTANCE  
*Rising Sun*?

SOPHIA

I jist tell her Adam and Mr. Charles ship out for Africa.

(Sophia turns away.)

CONSTANCE

Sophia . . . is something wrong?

SOPHIA (to Maria)

Tell Miss Constance what you told me.

MARIA

Don't pay me no mind; I jist hear things.

CONSTANCE

What—kinds of things?

MARIA

Don't bother yourself with what I hear, Miss Constance. I will give Sophia the rest of the day off; she should get to enjoy her freedom on this one day. You two go now; I finish up here.

SOPHIA (breaking)

No, you gots to tell her; if it be true—maybe she can do something to stop it.

CONSTANCE

Mrs. Pires . . .

MARIA

*Rising Sun* in African trade; that all I know.

CONSTANCE

That is true; she is taking rum to trade for palm oil and ivory.

MARIA

Who tell you that?

CONSTANCE

My father—and Charles.

MARIA

What need palm oil and ivory for? Got more than enough whale oil and ivory in New Bedford and Nantucket. Much closer. African trade not for those things.

CONSTANCE

What are you saying, Mrs. Pires?

MARIA

I say you go to shipping office—look at manifest of *Rising Sun* to find out about African trade. That all I'm sayin'.

CONSTANCE

Very well, I shall do just that. Miss Sophia . . .

SOPHIA

I gots to work, Miss Constance. Now that I free, I gots to work even harder.

CONSTANCE

Very well. I will see you at home this evening.

SOPHIA

Yes ma'am.

CONSTANCE

Yes what?

SOPHIA

Miss Constance.

CONSTANCE

All right. I will see you at home this evening, Miss Sophia. (A beat.) Good day, Mrs. Pires.

MARIA

Maria!

(LIGHTS COME DOWN SLOWLY to end the scene as CONSTANCE EXITS.)

ACT II, SCENE II

SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP on THOMAS in his office overlooking the wharf later the same day. He is working at his desk when CONSTANCE enters unannounced. He closes an account book and gets up.

THOMAS

Constance, what an unexpected pleasure.

CONSTANCE

Perhaps not, Father.

THOMAS

Did you tell Sophia her good news?

CONSTANCE

Yes, I did. I just came from there. And while I was delivering Sophia's good news, I fear I may have come upon some bad.

THOMAS

Is that so?

CONSTANCE

Father, I'll get right to the point.

THOMAS

You ordinarily do.

CONSTANCE

What exactly is the nature of your African trade?

THOMAS

Rum. Guinea rum they call it—distilled right here on the island. Most of it in Newport. You can find plenty of it in any alehouse.

CONSTANCE

I prefer not to frequent the alehouses, Father.

THOMAS

Of course not. The rum that is not consumed locally is exported.

CONSTANCE

I know what you export; what I want to know is—what you import.

THOMAS

Various items that can be made to be of use to someone else—palm oil, ivory, African implements and art objects for collectors. Many things.

CONSTANCE

But are your ships not routed through the West Indies on their voyage home.

THOMAS

This is no secret about it; that is where I buy sugar and molasses for the local distilleries to make rum.

CONSTANCE

May I see the manifest for this voyage of *The Rising Sun*?

THOMAS

It wouldn't make any sense to you—

CONSTANCE

Is it not written in English?

THOMAS

What I mean—is that everything that goes on the ship would not necessarily have meaning to you, or that the presence of some items are likely to be misinterpreted.

CONSTANCE

Does that mean I cannot see the manifest?

THOMAS

I don't see how seeing the manifest would prove to be of any practical value.

CONSTANCE

Father, look me in the eye and swear to me on your honor as a gentleman that you did not send Charles on a slaver.

THOMAS

Constance, you have since birth, reaped the rewards of my business affairs without knowledge of what exactly they involved. I see no reason for that to change.

CONSTANCE

Then it is true?

THOMAS

Believe what you will. But know too that our life—your life—has been built on that trade. And this family is not the only prominent family on this island to reap the reward of the African trade.

CONSTANCE

It is incomprehensible and inexcusable to me that you would involve Charles in this sordid business.

THOMAS

You will both get used to the comforts it provides. Indeed, you already are.

CONSTANCE (thinks, then)

No. No! I can live without such comforts. I can live without status. I can even live without love if it has to come to that. But I cannot live without honor. And I see that was mistaken to think that that was the case with you.

THOMAS (as Constance exits)

Constance . . . wait. (She stops.) Where are you going?

CONSTANCE

To find other accommodations for Miss Sophia and me.

THOMAS

Your house is finished; you can go there.

CONSTANCE

No. It is tainted. We'll go elsewhere.

THOMAS

You are being ridiculous.

CONSTANCE

Have I not always taken that path in your eyes?

THOMAS

Constance, women need not concern themselves with these matters. Profit cannot be made on conscience; it is made on a good business sense.

CONSTANCE

Goodbye, Father.

THOMAS

Constance! (She keeps going.) Charles will set you straight when he returns. Until then I want you in that house!

(LIGHTS COME DOWN as she turns and storms out.)

ACT II, SCENE III

SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP on CHARLES and ADAM a week or so later on the after deck of the sloop *Rising Sun*. Charles has the watch; Adam is at the helm. It is night; stars shine overhead, and in the moonless night, the scene is lighted in an almost eerie blue light.

ADAM  
Still headin' east, Mr. Charles.

CHARLES  
What makes you think that?

ADAM  
Sun rise in the east, Mr. Charles. Set in the west. Not hard to figure out which we goin'.

CHARLES  
We are heading east. East-southeast.

ADAM (after a moment)  
West Indies pretty much due south of Newport, Mr. Charles? That not right?

CHARLES  
That is correct, Mr. Adam.

ADAM  
So . . . where we be goin', headin' east like this?

CHARLES  
Africa.

ADAM  
Africa?

CHARLES  
I think you were aware of it.

ADAM  
I figured it; I saw them chains and such below. But I not *knowed* it until now.

CHARLES

I am very sorry it has come to this.

ADAM

We all sorry, Mr. Charles. For one thing or another.

CHARLES

This is not what I would have chosen to do; this is, in fact, the very thing I wanted to avoid doing.

ADAM

We all gots to make choices everyday, Mr. Charles. Course you gots to make a lot more of them than I do—cause you makin' most of my choices for me. Relieves me of that burden; yes it does.

CHARLES

Sometimes, however, it *appears* as if you have no choice at all.

ADAM

Oh, I know what you means there all right.

CHARLES

Constance's father put me in a very difficult position, a position in which I had to make a choice I did not wish to make.

ADAM

Did same thing to me! Said to me: "Adam, I sending you on a voyage with Mr. Charles. You look after him," he says. "And when he gets back home, I make you a free man."

CHARLES

He didn't tell you anything about—the voyage? Where we were going? What we would be trading for?

ADAM

No, but I knowed what was about though. Everyone know he runs slavers to Africa, so I know he asking me to help you make slaves of black people—steal them from homes and take them across the sea to sell. I no want to be no part of it, but Mr. Clarke know I loves Sophia, know I want to marry her; so if I free and she free, then we can marry. So he know I do what he say. What choice I got, Mr. Adam, but to make you my new best friend?

CHARLES

That is very much like the choice he gave me.

ADAM

But you and Miss Constance already be free.

CHARLES

Yes . . . maybe *too* free.

ADAM (understands the sexual innuendo)

Oh . . . that Mr. Clarke, he sure know how to get what he want.

CHARLES

He does indeed. (A beat.) So . . . new best friend, I vow to get you back safe to your Sophia.

ADAM

And I will get you back to Miss Constance. We be like brothers now.

CHARLES

Yes, like brothers, and *all* you have to do is get me back; you will not have to help—in this other business.

ADAM

I hope that be true; I most surely do. It break my heart to hurt my others brothers.

CHARLES (looks up)

Starting to blow—may have to shorten sail.

ADAM

Whatever you say, Mr. Charles.

(LIGHTS FADE TO END THE SCENE.)

ACT II, SCENE IV

SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP on SOPHIA and CONSTANCE in a small bedroom a few days later. Constance is seated at a dressing table, writing a letter; Sophia is changing for bed and washing up from a pan and pitcher of water on a dresser. There is a double bed in the room where they both sleep.

CONSTANCE

I don't know exactly how it the mail system works, Sophia. It's a little like putting a message in a bottle, but correspondence does by the grace of God somehow get through. In any case, it takes weeks for letters to be exchanged in either direction.

SOPHIA

You still angry with Mr. Charles, Miss Constance?

CONSTANCE

No, I cannot remain long angry at Charles. He has a good heart, and in my heart I know that he will do what is right.

SOPHIA

How will he know?

CONSTANCE

Everyone knows what is right.

SOPHIA

Then why so many choose to do wrong?

CONSTANCE

I don't know, Sophia. Maybe it is our nature. Certainly it is not what God planned for us. In any case, I cannot seem to stop loving Charles, no matter how angry I get at him.

SOPHIA

Hard to stay mad at man you love; love make you blind to faults.

CONSTANCE

Sophia, do you feel that way about Adam?

SOPHIA

Yes, I do , but . . . I don't know that I got a right to be feelin' that way or not.

CONSTANCE

Love is God' greatest gift. It is perfectly natural to fall in love, Sophia.

SOPHIA

I know that, but Adam a good man, a trusting man, and he not even want to—take me 'fore we're married. But . . . maybe I not be good enough for him.

CONSTANCE

Of course you are!

SOPHIA

You don't understand, Miss Constance—I—spoilt.

CONSTANCE

Spoiled?

SOPHIA

That right.

CONSTANCE

You have—been with a man?

SOPHIA

Yes, Miss Sophia. I even has a baby—almost five years old now.

CONSTANCE

Five? You must have been a child yourself . . . where is this child?

SOPHIA

Charleston. That's why I got to get some monies; I want to buy my son out of slavery to have him with me and Adam. But don't know if Adam want us.

CONSTANCE

Where is the father?

SOPHIA

He gone!

CONSTANCE

Gone? Where?

SOPHIA

Just gone? Don't know where too.

He was sold?  
CONSTANCE

Don't know . . . but he gone.  
SOPHIA

Mr. Adam doesn't know about this?  
CONSTANCE

I not know how to tell him; afraid he leave me.  
SOPHIA

CONSTANCE (thinks)  
He won't leave you, Miss Sophia. He will not. But you must write him; you must tell him. I will write Charles; I will tell him to pick up your son in Charleston; no matter what he has to pay. We will get him for you. I promise you that.

SOPHIA  
Thank you, Miss Constance. You truly kind to me, and I have nothing to give you in return.

CONSTANCE  
You give me your friendship, Miss Sophia. That is enough.

SOPHIA  
I wish I had more to give.

CONSTANCE  
Maybe . . . you can—give me some . . . information. (A few beats.) Is it true that Maria Pires is a midwife?

SOPHIA  
She say so. But—I don't need midwife; me and Adam never—

CONSTANCE  
Not for you.

SOPHIA  
Oh . . .

CONSTANCE  
Tell me, Sophia, when . . . before you had your child . . . how long before did you know that you were—carrying a child? How soon did you know after—you had relations?

SOPHIA  
I think I know almost immediately—like a day or two after. I felt—different inside. Then the blood didn't come, and my bosom was tender. I knew for sure then, but even 'fore

that, I knew I was changed. SOPHIA (continuing)

Did you feel—any sickness? CONSTANCE

Every morning! Yes, I did. Sick every mornin' for some time. SOPHIA

Oh god! CONSTANCE (after a moment)

Miss Constance . . . you not . . . SOPHIA

I'm afraid I am. CONSTANCE (nodding)

You need see doctor to be sure. SOPHIA

Did you see a doctor? CONSTANCE

No. Midwife. But you . . . white. SOPHIA

This must be our secret, Sophia. CONSTANCE

Miss Constance, Mr. Charles not comin' home for seven maybe eight months. People gonna know. No secret for very long. SOPHIA

Still, I don't want you to tell anyone yet. I—have to think. CONSTANCE

You *way* past the point of thinkin', Miss Constance. You best write Mr. Charles and tell'em to get back here for a wedding. SOPHIA

No! Charles mustn't know. CONSTANCE

He gots to know! SOPHIA

CONSTANCE

No! He must do what he has to do without knowing about me.

SOPHIA

But Miss Constance he responsible.

CONSTANCE

Not any more so than am I. (Starts to break.) Promise me you will not tell him. Or Adam. Promise!

SOPHIA

If that what you want.

CONSTANCE (breaking)

It is. (A few beats.) Oh, god, Sophia, what have I done?

(They embrace.)

SOPHIA

You just done what people in love do; nothin' wrong in that. Don't be 'fraid, Miss Constance. Miss Sophia here to take care of you.

(Constance begins to weep as the LIGHTS  
DOWN TO END THE SCENE.)

ACT II, SCENE V

SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP on ADAM on the after deck of a sloop. The sloop is anchored off the Guinea coast of Africa. He is reading a letter.

SOPHIA (off)

My Dear Man,

Hope you doing fine on this voyage. By now I know you on a slaver bound for Africa, and I not too happy 'bout that. Probably not nearly so unhappy as you are though. I know how you must hates it; hates the men making you do what you have to do to your own kind. But you gots to do it, just this one time. You gots to do it for me and for you and for Miss Constance.

She say Mr. Charles do the right thing; I don't know what that be; maybe he don't know either, but he gonna know. Miss Constance say so; she tell him 'bout Charlotte Amalie. That free port now; no more tradin' slaves there; King of Denmark say so. Quakers there to send slaves back to Africa 'fore they get sold. Moses sends slaves home; jist like in the Bible, but Moses Brown from Providence do it this time, deliver the people from slavery.

Adam, I want you come home to me. Mr. Charles done make me a free woman; I free right now; free as a bird. Worked harder than ever now though. Being free no picnic. Gots to get monies to buy someone—my—son in Charleston. That right. I got son. I tell you all 'bout it when you come home. Should of told you sooner, but didn't know how. Sorry for that. Anyway, he live with us when we married. That why you got to come home; don't be doin' somethin' stupid gonna git you in trouble. You swallow your pride if you have too for a little longer. When you get home, you be free to. Then we can be family; be Yankees and build a life away from what we had down there. I already a plenty good sail-maker. Just miss you that all.

I missin' you most terribly. I wants to take you to my bed as my husband and not let you go. You hear Adam. I wants you home. And you gots to know I love you no matter what happens or has happened. If you was to have had a girl in Virginia, that okay. That before you know me.

Oil burnin' down now, so I gots to go. Busy day tomorrow. Much sails to make and not time enough.

Love you, Adam. Loves you with everything I got.

Your Sophia.

(Adam smiles, shakes his head, maybe wipes away a tear, folds the letters and slips it in his pocket as CHARLES ENTERS from "below.")

CHARLES

All is quiet.

ADAM

You sure, Mr. Charles? Could of swore I heard some weeping comin' from down there.

CHARLES

All is *secure*.

ADAM

Yes sir, I understand now—all chains holdin' fast. Ain't no hint or chance of rebellion. Everybody tied down real good.

CHARLES

Readin' Sophia's letter again.

ADAM

That right. Got the whole thing memorized by now.

CHARLES

We will be leaving in a few days; we send mail back on the Avenger, which is Boston bound. If you want to write Sophia—

ADAM

Would you help me, Mr. Charles? I reads pretty good, but I needs a lots of work with my writin'.

CHARLES

Of course, I'll help you Mr. Adam. Give me a moment to find paper and a writin' instrument.

(He starts "below.")

ADAM

Wouldn't hurt to have some ah that Guinea rum too, Mr. Charles. No sir, wouldn't hurt none at all.

CHARLES (exiting)

If we have not yet traded it all, I will see what I can do.

ADAM (composing aloud)  
Dear Miss Sophia—Dear Sophia—Sophia Dear?

(Charles returns with paper, pen, ink, a bottle of rum and two mugs.)

ADAM  
Now, we can gets down to business.

CHARLES  
First a drink.

ADAM  
That *is* the business.

(Charles pours and passes a mug to Adam. Then he finds a place to sit to compose Adam's letter.)

CHARLES  
You tell me what to write, and I'll write it.

ADAM  
'zakly like I tells you.

CHARLES  
You have my word.

ADAM  
Dear . . .

CHARLES  
Sophia.

ADAM  
*Miss* Sophia.

CHARLES  
Dear Miss Sophia.

(Charles drinks the rum as Adam composes and Charles writes.)

ADAM  
Mr. Charles and me is makin' out jist fine here in Africa. We `bout got us a boatload of Africans, and we be gittin' underway soon for Havana in the West Indies to sell'em. That right. Me and Mr. Charles, slaver traders now. Mr. Charles, Captain of slave ship, and I

ADAM (continuing)

be his best boy. Mr. Charles Captain now 'cause other captain went and got hisself drowned in the river. Saw it with my own eyes.

We was in the small boat, bringin' back some Africans we traded some Guinea rum for, and where the mouth of the river runs into the sea, it gits plenty rough and captain fall right in without no help from anybody. Now Adam's thinkin' maybe I ought to do somethin' fore he get pulled under by the current, but then I decides that God must of planned for captain to fall in. And if God planned captain to fall in, Adam got no authority to mess up God's plan, so me and those other Africans, we just watch him go away. Pulled further and further away until couldn't see him no more. Then he be gone. Gone to the fishes, I thinks. I come back and tell Mr. Charles he be captain. God's will. That how Mr. Charles become captain of boat. Up to him to git us to West Indies now. He in charge; what happens to all of us now in *his* hands. Me and all these African depending on him.

Also, I got to tell you. I ain't never had no girl 'fore you. You Adam's first love, and my only love. First time I saw you I knew you the girl for Adam; you make my heart beat mighty fast; still I respect you. That why I not want to take you till we be man and wife. I want you plenty bad now though. Gittin' damn tired of lookin' at Mr. Charles all the time. Boat too small a place for this many peoples.

We supposed to go to Havana, but I done told Mr. Charles 'bout Charlotte Amalie, don't think he knowed 'bout it, unlesin' Miss Constance told him. And I don't know 'bout that cause Mr. Charles don't care to share her letters with Adam. I gots to show him your letters to make sure I'm reading'em right.

I gots to go now, Miss Sophia. Gots some rum to drink 'fore it vaporate in this African heat—or until someone else (looks at Charles) drinks it. Anyway, you wait right there for me. I be back as soon as Mr. Charles get me there. I'm missin' you somethin' terrible, and I loves you more than I know how to say it. You jist wait. I be there soon.

Your man,

Adam

Give my regards to Miss Constance, and tell her I'm taking care of Charles jist fine.

CHARLES

That's a fine letter, Mr. Adam.

ADAM

Can I sees it, Mr. Charles.

CHARLES (hands him the letter)

Mr. Adam . . . if I had fallen in the river, would you have tried to pull *me* out?

ADAM

Have to. We best friends. That not so?

CHARLES

I mean, if you weren't under this—obligation to get me home?

ADAM

Oh . . . I sees what you means. (A few beats.) I guess I have to figure then if I could git back to Miss Sophia by myself.

(Charles nods. There is a moment of silence that is shattered when a CRY IS HEARD FROM BELOW. They continue to sit in silence and drink rum. The CRIES continue periodically.)

CHARLES

Mr. Adam, do you think it is God's plan that those Africans below should be made into slaves?

ADAM

Don't matter what I thinks, Mr. Adams. What you think?

CHARLES

I try not to think about it at all.

ADAM

Miss Sophia tell me you do the right think; she say you man with honor, not only wear face of honor like others white mens who has slaves.

CHARLES (distantly)

No, I have no honor left; I relinquished it the first time I stood by and watched my brother beat a slave in a cotton field. I fled my home because I had not honor enough to stand up for what is right, and now . . . look at me . . . (Adam looks away.) Look at me! (Adam stares at him with fire in his eyes. Another CRY COMES FROM BELOW.) When I see your back, I cannot help but wonder how many of those scars I put there. (A beat.) I know you hate me, Adam . . . and I can find no fault in your doing so.

ADAM

That the rum talkin', Mr. Charles.

CHARLES

Rum or not—it is God's truth. (A beat.) And you—all of you have no reason not to hate me—us—all of us. We say you are an inferior race, knowing all the while it is not so. God made us all equal; it is only by virtue of our power that we make and keep you unequal. We deny you education; we feed you only that which we won't eat; we house you in shacks and work you like beasts of the field until you have neither the energy nor

CHARLES (continuing)

the will to rebel. We deny you the opportunity to be equal, and then tell ourselves that you could not survive without us, when, in fact, we, especially those in the South, could not survive without you. (A few beats.) You could kill me, Adam. There are nearly 100 of you onboard and six of us. You could take over this ship at any time.

ADAM

You right `bout that.

CHARLES

Why don't you?

ADAM

Not God's plan.

CHARLES

What is?

ADAM

Don't know yet. Gots to wait and see.

(LIGHTS FADE SLOWLY TO END THE SCENE.)

ACT II, SCENE VI

SCENE: LIGHTS COMES UP CONSTANCE a few weeks later in the small room she shares with Sophia. She is standing at a mirror, trying to see how much her pregnancy is showing. She is something like five months pregnant now, and it shows. After a moment, SOPHIA enters.

Oh, Sophia, I'm glad your have returned.

CONSTANCE

Constance, someone is here to see you.

SOPHIA

(They have become close friends and have dropped the "Miss" when addressing one another.)

Here? Who is it?

CONSTANCE

(THOMAS enters. Constance attempts to hide her abdomen.)

Father!

CONSTANCE

Hello, Constance.

THOMAS

Sophia! What is going on?

CONSTANCE

I've come to take you home.

THOMAS

Thank you, but my home is presently in this sail loft with Sophia.

CONSTANCE

THOMAS

You both—occupy this single room?

CONSTANCE

Mrs. Pires has been kind enough to let it to us at a very reasonable rate until we can find more suitable accommodations. We are really quite comfortable.

THOMAS

Constance, no body in this city is going to let you accommodations under the—circumstances.

CONSTANCE

What—circumstances?

THOMAS

You know very well what circumstances.

CONSTANCE

Sophia?

THOMAS

I had to tell him, Constance; you not doing so good. Need to see real doctor.

CONSTANCE

You promised!

SOPHIA

You done same if I sick, Constance. I know you would. I don't care where we live, but you need to see doctor. Listen to father now. He talkin' good sense.

CONSTANCE

I'm not sick! I'm simply—

THOMAS

Carrying a child—my grandchild, and I want to see that you have the best care available on this island. Constance, you must come home.

CONSTANCE

We will find our own home, Father.

THOMAS

Not in this town, you won't. (A beat.) Constance, you are with child; you are unmarried; you are living with—a Negro, a former slave. Who is going to have a place for you?

SOPHIA

He right, Constance. I try find us place all over this town; nobody else have place for us.

CONSTANCE

Did you go to the Quaker Meeting?

SOPHIA

They not let me in. I free to be outside, but not inside. But they tell Friends inside we need place to stay, but nobody have a place for us. Same thing at other churches.

THOMAS

I have a place for you—both of you.

CONSTANCE

Father, when will Charles be home?

THOMAS

Not soon enough to prevent a scandal. (A beat.) If I had known about this—I never would have sent him away.

CONSTANCE

Really?

THOMAS

Of course. I wouldn't have—allowed you to be put in this position.

CONSTANCE

Not even to protect your investment.

THOMAS

Constance, please . . .

CONSTANCE

Please what, Father?

THOMAS

Don't hold me to such a high standard.

CONSTANCE

I did not set the standard; it was set by the church and the framers of the Constitution.

THOMAS

I am not the only man in this city that professes to occupy the moral high ground, but, who, as a matter of self-preservation, has to conduct business on a lower level.

CONSTANCE

I am well aware of that, Father, but then I do not carry the name of any of those other merchants or investors. I carry your name.

THOMAS

Constance, what must I do to bring you home?

CONSTANCE

You know very well what you must do.

(He shakes his head as Constance goes to Sophia and put an arm around her.)

CONSTANCE

Can you not make a profit by trading something other than God's children?

THOMAS

Constance, how can you condemn me for trading slaves when the abolitionists only desire to free them to sooth their moral outrage. They care noting for these Negroes has individuals; they are nothing more than symbols of repression.

CONSTANCE

These things take time, Father.

THOMAS

No, Constance, they take strength and will, which is what you have in excess; God only know where you got it, certainly not from me. You have the strength to treat Sophia as a sister, to treat her as you moral and social equal. Few others are willing to take such a risk.

CONSTANCE

It is not so hard to discern right from wrong, Father?

THOMAS

Not to discern it, only to practice it. Come home, Constance—both of you.

CONSTANCE

Will give up the slave trade if we come home?

THOMAS

Constance, it is a tangled web of commerce and politics that I find myself caught up in.

CONSTANCE

That is my condition.

THOMAS

So be it. I know your position is morally right; even so, I cannot—and I am sorry to admit this to you Sophia—admit that I truly believe that Africans are our equals. I hope someday I am proven wrong . . . in any case, because I know God has blessed you with good sense and good will, I will withdraw all of my assets from the slave trade and will disentangle myself from this triangle of human misery that I have for too long been a part of.

CONSTANCE

I have your word as a gentleman.

THOMAS

No, you have my word as a your father. That is of far more value.

CONSTANCE

Then we shall come home.

SOPHIA

I got job as sail maker, Mr. Thomas. I can pay rent.

CONSTANCE

No, Sophia, you are family. You do not have to pay.

THOMAS

Constance, when God made this world, he did not create it for one as good as you.

CONSTANCE

Father, it is not God's world that is lacking in goodness, it is yours.

SOPHIA

I'll pack our things.

THOMAS

I'll send my carriage.

SOPHIA

Constance, we going home!

(LIGHTS COME DOWN TO END THE SCENE.)

ACT II, SCENE VII

SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP CHARLES and ADAM on the after deck of *Rising Sun*. Charles is on the helm; Adam is standing nearby; he cracks a coconut with a machete, opens it, drinks the milk and then splits the shell and begins to dig the pulp from the shell.

ADAM

You want meat from coconut, Mr. Charles.

CHARLES

No, thank you, Mr. Adam.

ADAM

You very quiet tonight, Mr. Charles.

CHARLES

That is true. There is much on my mind.

ADAM

I look at chart; we gittin' close now.

CHARLES

You have become a good sailor, Mr. Adam. You learn very quickly.

ADAM

When sea not angry; this not bad place to be 'cept for what we doin' here.

CHARLES

I guess that is what occupies my mind and holds my tongue silent.

ADAM

Adam thought that it. Almost time you have to decide what path to take.

CHARLES

We'll make landfall tomorrow . . .

ADAM

Anguilla.

CHARLES

Like I said—you learn fast.

ADAM

Alter course to port to make Saint Thomas . . .

CHARLES

Or continue west to make Havana in a few days.

ADAM

You know, Mr. Charles—I been thinkin' too.

CHARLES

I pray that your thoughts are less troubled than are mine, Mr. Adam.

ADAM

I think that be so. I havin' *good* thoughts . . . most of the time.

CHARLES

Would you mind sharing them with me, Mr. Adam?

ADAM

Not at all, Mr. Charles. (A beat.) What I been thinkin'—is that when we git back Newport and I be free—I thought that—maybe I could go to sea with you again, maybe be on crew of sloop you be captain of. What you think of that?

CHARLES

Mr. Adams, I am honored that I have gained some measure of your trust, and I would consider a privilege to go to sea with you. However, if I get back to Newport, you will either hate me—or I in all likelihood will probably never be in a position to command a ship again. (A few beats.) Do you understand?

(Adam slams the machete into the coconut shell, splitting it in half.)

ADAM

Adam know you do what you have to do; same true for Adam. Hard for both of us.

CHARLES

You have to understand that I have—obligations to many people, not the least of which if Constance's father.

ADAM

Adam under no obligation any more; could git free in these islands and have Miss Sophia come find me; she have money and free. She go wherever she want.

CHARLES

That is true.

ADAM

You know where it say in the Bible that—man jist a little lower than the angels?

CHARLES

Yes, and that he is crowned with a crown of glory and honor. Constance has read that passage to me many times.

ADAM

You think that be true?

CHARLES

Not for me.

ADAM

How 'bout those peoples we got below?

CHARLES

I think, in God's eyes, they are much closer to the angels that are we.

ADAM

In God's eyes . . . ?

CHARLES

Yes . . . in God's eyes.

ADAM (waving the machete)

You do one thing for Adam, Mr. Charles, 'fore we make huge mistake, 'fore you throw way Miss Constance and I maybe throws my own life away.

CHARLES

What would you have me do, Mr. Adam?

ADAM

You go below and look at those peoples; take a lamp and look into their eyes, Mr. Charles. Then you decide how close to the angels you wanna be. You decide then who it is you gots this obligation to. You do that for Mr. Adam.

CHARLES

All right. I will do that.

ADAM

Right now you do it! I take the helm.

CHARLES

Aye, Mr. Adam. I am steering due west.

I knows which way you steering!

ADAM

(Adam relieves him of the helm; Charles starts below and then stops and looks up.)

Those peoples only wants what we all wants.

ADAM (continuing)

(Charles nods and then goes "below" as Adam remains at the helm. Adam looks up studying the stars, feeling the fresh breeze on his face, and takes a huge breath of the night air. In a moment, low at first, a chant of FREEDOM starts from below and builds. It grows louder and louder—FREEDOM, FREEDOM, FREEDOM, FREEDOM and it continues as Charles emerges from below. He is shaken.)

Wind is shifting.

ADAM

Aye, wind is shifting.

CHARLES

Which way it blow, Mr. Charles—Havana or Charlotte Amalie?

ADAM

(BLACKOUT TO END THE SCENE.)

ACT II, SCENE VIII

SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP on CONSTANCE and SOPHIA in the sitting room of her father's house. Both are seated beside an oil lamp, reading separate letters.

CONSTANCE  
Your child will be with you soon, Sophia.

SOPHIA  
God willin'. (A beat.) Yours too.

CONSTANCE  
Not too soon, I hope. (A beat.) It is going to be close.

SOPHIA  
You never tell, Mr. Charles 'bout baby.

CONSTANCE  
No.

SOPHIA  
He gonna be surprised sure enough.

CONSTANCE  
Yes, I should imagine so.

SOPHIA  
But *good* surprise.

CONSTANCE  
I hope so.

SOPHIA  
Adam say he learn to be a good sailor from Mr. Charles; can be partner with him some day. Mr. Charles make him Captain. And we all be friends.

CONSTANCE  
We are friends now, Sophia. You are my dearest friend.

SOPHIA (breaking)  
And we stay friends, no matter what?

CONSTANCE  
Yes, no matter what. (A break.) Sophia . . . what is it?

SOPHIA  
Maybe . . . I not such good friend after all.

CONSTANCE  
Sophia—don't be ridiculous, you are like a sister to me.

SOPHIA  
Not very good one.

CONSTANCE  
Sophia—I have never had a better friend. Is something wrong?

SOPHIA  
Maybe—maybe it not good idea for Mr. Charles to get my boy.

CONSTANCE  
What?

SOPHIA  
He maybe not even remember me now; maybe he like it in South Carolina, like his other  
momma and not want to go way.

CONSTANCE  
He cannot stay there, Sophia. You know what will happen to him.

SOPHIA  
I not want to make any trouble for Mr. Charles.

CONSTANCE  
You didn't make this trouble.

SOPHIA  
Afraid for Adam too. Afraid of what he do.

CONSTANCE  
Mr. Adam will not do anything. Has he not agreed to raise your son as his own along  
with whatever other children you may be blessed with?

SOPHIA  
Yes, he say that.



ACT II, SCENE IX  
SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP on JOHN  
RUTLEDGE in his shipping office in  
Charleston, SC. He is shuffling through some  
papers when CHARLES and ADAM ENTER.

JOHN

Brother Charles, what an altogether not unexpected surprise. Have your boy wait outside.

CHARLES (to Adam)

He is not my "boy", Brother. He is my friend.

JOHN

I know what he is, and I would prefer not to have him in my office. We have business to discuss.

CHARLES (to Adam)

I will take care of this, Mr. Adam. Wait for me.

ADAM

I be right here if you be needin' me.

CHARLES

I will be fine. He is by older brother, but he is no longer my "big" brother. I can take care of this matter.

(ADAM exits.)

JOHN

I caught wind of your coming, Charles, but didn't know quite what to make of your misadventure in the Indies. What in god's name happened?

CHARLES

I turned over the Africans to the Quakers in Charlotte Amalie.

JOHN

So . . . it is true.

CHARLES

It is.

Voluntarily? You—did this voluntarily?

JOHN

That is correct, sir.

CHARLES

And being of sound mind and so forth?

JOHN

I knew exactly what I was doing.

CHARLES

My god, they got to you, did they not?

JOHN

They?

CHARLES

JOHN

Quakers. Yankees. Constance. I don't know. I hope you are aware that you have put me and a number of Mr. Clarke's other investors in a very difficult position, both legally and financially.

CHARLES

Or you can look at it another way. Legally, and *morally*, which I realize you care little about, I took it upon myself to prevent you from engaging in the illegal practice of slave trading. I think that perhaps I am owed a debt of gratitude.

JOHN

I think not, Charles. Gratitude is cheap; investing in a ship in the African trade is very costly. And it is clear, that you took it upon yourself to deprive a number of honest men a fair return on their investment.

CHARLES

Honest men?

JOHN

More so that a renegade Captain who relinquishes his cargo and then uses his brother's good name to obtain credit to buy sugar and molasses so he won't return home completely empty handed.

CHARLES

I intend to make good on my obligations, Brother.

JOHN

Using what for capital?

CHARLES

My name is not altogether without merit; I think I have retained my honor even if I have disappointed a few investors.

JOHN

You know nothing of honor; was it honor that motivated you to surrender another man's property?

CHARLES

As a matter of fact, it was.

JOHN

Was it honor that drove you to use my name and that of John Clarke to secure credit to buy sugar and molasses?

CHARLES

No, that was a necessity. And in time, I assure you, tha you shall have your money. (A beat.) But that is not what I am doing here. As I am sure that you are aware, I came for something else.

JOHN

Of course, Brother, this is a social call. Let us retire to the pub and talk of old times. Let us talk of those times when every one of God's creatures knew its rightful place in the great chain of being. Let us depart.

CHARLES

Not yet, Brother. I will only raise my glass with you after you have relinquished Sophia's son.

JOHN

Of course, Sophia's son. I had correspondence from your—betrothed—that it was her desire, as well as yours, although you were not there to express it, that the child be returned to his mother.

CHARLES

That is our wish.

JOHN

From what I read, it appears that your Constance and the slave girl are growing very close. Imagine that . . .

CHARLES

Sophia is free, and you need not be concerned with their friendship. It is not your affair. About the boy?

JOHN

Ah, yes, the boy . . .

CHARLES

Is there a problem, John? I will do whatever it takes to acquire him.

JOHN

Is that a threat, Charles, or an offer to purchase my property?

CHARLES

John, I am no longer a child you can torment, and I have neither the stomach nor the patience for one of your games. I want to go home. Where is the boy?

JOHN

I have sent for him; he will be here soon enough.

CHARLES

What must I do to secure the child's freedom?

JOHN

Nothing.

CHARLES

I know you better than that, John.

JOHN

Honestly, you need not do anything. The child is proving to be something of an inconvenience at best, and at worst, a liability.

CHARLES

I know not what artifice you are employing, but I will require a document from you before I leave granting the child his freedom.

JOHN (holding up a paper)

Done. (A beats.) There is just . . . one thing.

CHARLES

Of course . . . one thing.

JOHN

In light of your recent sojourn in Africa and the kinship you obviously feel with your African brethren, you might be disappointed to learn that this child is not . . . entirely of African decent.

CHARLES

Go on . . .

JOHN

I don't think I have to explain it to you—Brother, as you well know, it is a planter's prerogative to use his property in any way that he sees fit.

CHARLES

My god, John, tell me you did not—

JOHN

She was my property; Charlotte had run off to Atlanta and I was probably a little drunk, maybe not, on the first occasion. In any case, she was mine to do with as I pleased.

CHARLES

She was a child!

JOHN

No! Had she not been a woman, she would not have conceived a child.

CHARLES

This child is your son?

JOHN

And your nephew, but he is not in my mind a suitable heir to the Rutledge holdings of 5,000 acres of land, some 300 slaves, and a shipping concern. You are next in line, Charles, or would you prefer I will it to my bastard son?

CHARLES

It is inconceivable to me that you forced yourself on a child.

JOHN

And it is inconceivable to me that you could give away another man's property.

CHARLES

You are a disgrace.

JOHN

Me! How dare you call *me* a disgrace!

CHARLES

I put that label on you and every other slave owner north or south who has ever taken a Negro woman by virtue of his power over her. You take Negro women, little more than children, at will and then you place your lust and depravity on the shoulders of Negro men, who, in your minds conspire to desire white women. Where is there honor in such twisted logic and criminal behavior? You are not only a disgrace to yourself and our family but to the human race?

JOHN

How dare you talk to me of disgrace when as we speak you betrothed is out of shame sequestered in her home in Newport pregnant with your child?

CHARLES (stunned)

What?

JOHN (loving it)

You did not know? (A beat.) Everyone from Boston to Barbados knows—knows the shame you have brought on the Clarke name in Newport and the Rutledge in Charleston.

CHARLES

This cannot be.

JOHN

If that is the case, Brother, then your betrothed has obviously enjoyed the favors of another man, or men, in your absence.

CHARLES

Hold your tongue, Brother, or I will rip it from your mouth.

(ADAM bursts into the room.)

ADAM

Mr. Charles—Sophia's boy here. (He glares at John.) He be white!

(Adam starts for John; John takes a pistol from his desk just as Charles reaches Adam and restrains him.)

CHARLES

Adam, no! He'll kill you!

ADAM

You take Miss Sophia?

CHARLES

Adam—ADAM! Let me take care of this. He has insulted me and he has insulted Constance to say nothing of what he has done to Sophia.

ADAM

He gots to pay!

JOHN

If you don't want him dead, get him out of here.

CHARLES

We are going, but first let me have my say. You have insulted me, Brother. You have insulted my fiancée. You have questioned my honor, and you have disgraced the family name.

JOHN

And what are you going to do about it?

CHARLES

You leave me no choice but to demand that we settle our differences on a field of honor.

JOHN

You—you are challenged me to a duel?

CHARLES

Have you not the courage to face me now that I am your equal in stature?

JOHN

Pistols make up for a lack of stature, Brother.

CHARLES

Then let it be pistols.

JOHN

Twenty paces?

(Charles nods. The number of paces will depend upon the size of the production space. At 20 paces, each actor takes 10 steps away from the other, etc.)

JOHN

Agreed then. Sunrise tomorrow.

CHARLES

Sunrise it is.

JOHN

You had best enjoy it, Brother, for it will be the last one your eyes shall ever see.

(BLACKOUT TO END THE SCENE.)

ACT II, SCENE X

SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP on JOHN RUTLEDGE, CHARLES and ADAM in an "open field" at sunrise the next day. John and Charles are standing back to back and both are holding a pistol. Adam is close to Charles.

ADAM

You shoot to kill, Mr. Charles. You don't kill him—neither one of us leave this place alive.

CHARLES

I know what I must do.

ADAM

Miss Constance be waitin' for you. Miss Sophia waitin' for me. You aim good, shoot first.

CHARLES

Move away, Adam and count.

(Adam moves upstage and begins to count paces as the brothers start to pace.)

ADAM

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten.

(Both men turn and fire. BLACKOUT.)

ACT II, SCENE XI

SCENE: LIGHTS COMES UP on SOPHIA, THOMAS and MARIA in the Clarke home in Newport a week or so later. They are all dressed in mourning clothes, and Sophia is rocking an infant in a crib.

SOPHIA

There, there, baby. Don't you cry now. Miss Sophia takin' good care of you. No need to fret none at all. And your papa be here any minute now. He be here with my boy. You and him be best friends like I was with your momma. Adam be here too. We all be lookin' after you. No need for you to fret now.

THOMAS

You can go, Mrs. Pires. There is nothing more for you to do here.

(Thomas goes over and takes the baby so Sophia can say goodbye to Maria.)

MARIA

I thought maybe I could . . . help . . . explain—

THOMAS

The is no explanation—children die for the sins of their fathers. That is all. The fault is mine, not yours. You and Dr. Coddington did all that was humanly possible.

MARIA (goes to Sophia)

Sophia, you take time off; settle things here. You excellent sail-maker still. With me you make much monies for your family.

SOPHIA

Thank you—thank you for job and for taking me and Miss Constance in when . . .

THOMAS

You need not go into that, but, yes, thank you, Mrs.Pires for your support of Constance and . . . Sophia when when . . .

MARIA

You need not go into that. (A beat.) Good-bye, Sophia. You come back when you ready; I keep job for you. Give job to man Adam too if he not want to go sailin' off to ends of earth lookin' for whatever mens lookin' for when they go sailin' off.

(As Maria EXITS, CHARLES and ADAM ENTER.  
Maria lets them enter, then EXITS.)

ADAM

Miss Sophia!

SOPHIA

Oh, Mr. Adam! You back at last—at long last.

ADAM (as they embrace)

And I gots your boy right too; Mr. Charles havta shoot his brother to get him, but he here. Right out there in the carriage sound asleep. He done wore out, but he remember you all right. I tells him all 'bout you every day. He remember you foe sure.

SOPHIA (starting for the door)

My baby. My baby.

THOMAS (looking in the crib)

Sophia, wait, please! (She stops. Then to Charles.) Charles, this little angel is your daughter.

CHARLES

I—I have a daughter?

THOMAS

A beautiful little girl.

CHARLES (looks, then)

A daughter. . . where is Constance?

(Thomas can't answer; he looks away and then to Sophia)

CHARLES (looking to Sophia)

Sophia?

SOPHIA (approaching him)

She gone, Mr. Charles.

CHARLES

Gone?

Gone to God.

SOPHIA

What?

CHARLES

God take her away.

SOPHIA

No. That cannot be. No! (A beat.) Thomas--?

CHARLES

She had a bad time of it, Charles—she hemorrhaged. She left us a few hours ago. We did everything we could but . . .

THOMAS

No. No! NO!

CHARLES

She in a better place now, Mr. Charles.

SOPHIA

Tell me this is not so. I—I did everything right; I did everything God asked of me.

CHARLES (falling to his knees)

And God give you a beautiful child.

SOPHIA

In place of Constance?

CHARLES

You come now; you come say good-bye to Miss Constance; she waiting for you. I promise her you say good-bye. (A beat.) She be free now, like we all be free. Ain't that so, Mr. Thomas?

SOPHIA (helping him get up)

I do not know, Sophia. I do not know.

THOMAS (distraught)

Well, I know I be free. I gots my son and my man. And here we all together, all of us, jist like Miss Constance always tellin' me we be, like family. Mr. Adam here and our beautiful child. I free. Mr. Adam free. Moses delivering those Africans to freedom. We all free, same as Miss Constance. Ain't that so, Mr. Adam?

SOPHIA

Don't know foe sure, Miss Sophia; mostly it true I think, but . . . in my heart—I not sure any of us truly free—'till we *all* be free.

ADAM

(They both move close to Charles; Sophia takes his arm. Thomas joins them as they stand together as a family.)

SOPHIA

Come on now, Mr. Charles. You go in there and say good-bye to Constance. (A beat.) Then we gots much work to do.

(They stand in a pristine white light for a moment as we HEAR A VOICE.)

CONSTANCE (off)

O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens. <sup>3</sup> When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; <sup>4</sup> What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? <sup>5</sup> For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. <sup>6</sup>

(LIGHTS COME DOWN SLOWLY TO END THE PLAY.)

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