

Adrift:
petites histoires/ little stories
for children and lovers and renegades
of the american revolution

Joanna Donehower

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ABSTRACT

Adrift: petites histoires/ little stories for children and lovers and renegades of the american revolution

Joanna Donehower

Adrift: petites histoires/ little stories for children and lovers and renegades of the american revolution— a five-act play with a dramaturgical excursus— explores the relation between text and counter-text, and the intersection of identity, history, myth, and spatial perception in performance. The dramaturgical excursus maps the wor(l)ds of play which shape the playtext, serving as an intertext and counter-text to *Adrift*, and engaging the discourses (spatial, historical, bodily, and linguistic) which orbit and construct it.

In *Adrift*, six actors play multiple parts, attempting to make sense of themselves and each other as they traverse a desert landscape in search of adventure, drama, utopia, and home. Disparate scenes and characters perform in a shared theatrical space: a sandbox serves as playground, desert, utopia, and hieroglyph to each character who wanders into it. *Adrift* introduces outcasts, runaways, and actors— in alternating states of exodus, exile, and odyssey— converging upon the metonymic and mythic American cities of Paris, El Dorado, and Washington, D.C.

The play employs fragmentary collage structure, while subverting the genre of historical re-enactment. *Adrift* shifts back and forth in narrative time, space, and memory as identities and scenes shift, and as stories clash, intersect, or correspond to one another. Lacunae and aporiae haunt the wanderers' versions of their past, present, and future selves and histories; to fill in the gaps, characters suture personal narrative to myth in the reconstruction of the self.

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Adrift:

petites histoires/ little stories
for children and lovers and renegades
of the american revolution

CHARACTERS:

DE LANDA (a girl child)

COLUMBIA / LITTLE GIRL

PEERPOINT L'ÉBOUEUR (EBU) OF PARIS, TEXAS / BERBER OF PRE-COLUMBIA / THE
GONDOLIER

MARTELLE LAVIDANGEUREUSE (VIDE) OF PARIS, TEXAS

RÉMY OF EL DORADO / ARCHITECT / CONCERNED CITIZEN 1 / RAGPICKER

REYES OF EL DORADO / CONCERNED CITIZEN 2 / LINCOLN'S GHOST / BOOTH'S DAEMON
TINKER

BIDDLE-BARROW

LITTLE BOY

Plus CHORAL PARTS:

PANGAEA (voiced by VIDE only in **Talk Story**.)

THE CHORUS OF CONCERNED CITIZENS AND LAMPLIGHTERS

THE SCHOOL OF EXPLORERS

THE COLUMN OF YANKEE SCRIBBLERS

THE GOSSIP OF KEENING BELLES

THE RE-ENACTORS OF *OUR AMERICAN COUSIN*

THE TRAIN OF CAPITALIST ENGINEERS AND BOXCARS

THE SEVENTH CAVALRY OF HORSEKILLERS

THE CHORUS OF LOST LITTLE GIRLS AND BOYS

* / indicates character doubling and tripling.

SCENE BREAKDOWN

Preamble

Characters:

Chorus of Concerned Citizens

PART I. The Old World

Talk Story.

Location: The Cradle of Pre-Columbia

Characters:

The Berber of Pre-Columbia

De Landa

Chorus of Concerned Citizens and Lamplighters

miniature play: the myth of columbia.

location: the maze of water

characters:

architect

gondolier

pangaea

columbia

little girl

A Lost Girl on Troubled Waters.

Location: A Pre-Columbian Sinkhole

Characters:

De Landa

Two Concerned Citizens

Chorus of Lamplighters

The Plunge.

Location: The Sea

Characters:

De Landa

Columbia (in voice)

The School of Explorers:

Hakluyt

Raleigh

Smith

Rolfe

Locke

Columbus

Marquette et Jolliet

Champlain

De Gama

Lewis and Clarke

Little Girl

PART II. A New World

The Memory House.

Location: A Sandbox in Paris, Texas

Characters:

Tinker (or Tink, an orphan player)

Biddle-Barrow (or Biddle, another orphan player)

Little Girl

Little Boy

miniature play: the awful event.

location: the sandbox of history

characters:

tinker

biddle-barrow

itty-bitty play: an awful event.

location: a sandcastle

characters:

tinker

biddle-barrow

little girl

little boy

Books.

Location: The Desert

Characters:

De Landa

Columbia

De Landa Writes in Her Diary.

Location: The Desert

Characters:

De Landa

Little Boy

Adrift in the Desert of History.

Location: On the Outskirts of Paris, Texas.

Characters:

Martelle Lavidangeureuse (Vide, tout court)

Peerpoint L'Éboueur (Ebu, tout court)

Little Girl

Urban-Suburban Development Incorporated: The Myth of El Dorado.

Location: A Desert Outside El Dorado

Characters:

Rémy (a fugitive entrepreneur)

Reyes (a refugee con-artist)

Little Boy

Little Girl

De Landa, Discoverer or Destroyer of Worlds

Location: A Crater in the Desert

Characters:

De Landa (a salvage pilgrim)

Pangaea (a savage, or a dinosaur continent, composed of all concerned citizens, rebels and renegades, and entrepreneurs)

Ebu

PART III. Ground Zero

Ants and Actors.

Location: A Sandbox in Paris, Texas

Characters:

Tinker

Biddle

Awful Event.

Location: Outside the Theatre, in the Capital City inside the Sack

Characters:

The Column of Yankee Scribblers:

Messenger from the Secretary of War

Cobbler

Columnist from *The New York Post*

Editorialist from *The New York Post*

Contributing Editor from *The New York Post*

The Gossip of Keening Belles

De Landa

Reconstruction of the Crime (or Closing Night of *Our American Cousin*).

Location: Backstage at Ford's Theatre, Reconstructed inside the Sack

Characters:

The Re-Enactors of *Our American Cousin*:

Inspector-Director

Souffler

The Pit Orchestra

Johnny Reb (De Landa)

The Presidential Person (Deputy Davis)

Madame Muzzy (Mrs. Mountchessington or Mrs. M.)

Miss Trueman (Augusta)

Harry Hawk (Asa Trenchard)

Little Girl

The Bait and Switch: The Other Sack.

Location: The Desert Outside Paris, Texas

Characters:

Vide

Ebu

De Landa's Diary and Map

PART IV. The Lay of the Land

On the Outside: Stray Marks.

Location: On the Edge of El Dorado, Texas

Characters:

Rémy

Reyes

Meet the Desperate Rebel and Others Like Him!

Location: Later on in the Presidential Box inside the Sack

Characters:

Ragpicker

Girl (De Landa)

Lincoln's Ghost / Booth's Daemon

Little Boy

A Coronation.

Location: Outside of El Dorado, Texas.

Characters:

Rémy

Reyes

Total Exsanguination.

Location: A Sandbox in Paris, Texas

Characters:

Tinker (as Hangman)

Biddle-Barrow (as Confessor)

Little Girl

Little Boy

The Great Cat Massacre.

Location: On the Edge of Paris / El Dorado, Texas

Characters:

Ebu

Vide

Rémy

Reyes

Reconstruction.

Location: Inside the Sack.

Characters:

De Landa

Chorus of Capitalist Engineers and Boxcars:

Engineer

Caboose

The Seventh Cavalry of Horsekillers and Custer's Column

The Elkhorn Scrapers Warrior Society

Letter Home.

Location: Paris, Texas

Characters:

Vide

Ebu

PART V. The Newest World, The Last Chapter, or The Canon of Laughter

Staking a Claim.

Location: A Sandbox in Paris, Texas

Characters:

Biddle-Barrow

Tinker

Ebu

De Landa

Vide (in voice only)

Little Boy

Columbia

EPILOGUE: Words on a Page, or an Echo on the Wind.

Location: Everywhere and Nowhere

Characters:

The Chorus of Lost Little Girls and Boys

The Chorus of Concerned Citizens and Lamplighters

PREAMBLE

[CHORUS OF CONCERNED CITIZENS

We make the map of Pre-Columbia
An Ancient Kingdom
A Maze of Water
Moss and Rocks and Stinkweed.
A Sinkhole of Song and Story.

The Oldest World!
The Darkest Corner in the Age of Discovery!
Savagery and Barbary abound!
Confusion and chaos and nothingness
Are everywhere and nowhere.

Kings and Queens
Subjects and Servants
Ships and Sailors
Come and Conquer Elsewhere.
Bringing Light by the Sea
And by the Book.

Truth, Time, History, Reality,
Revolution, Evolution, the Spirit of the Age.
It shines everywhere else.

But in the Kingdom of Pre-Columbia,
Here it is all stories,
Little stories and white lies
Make-believes and fanciful dreams.
Just talking story.

All they do is talk story, those
Toothless men and withered women.
Boys and girls don't ask questions
But suckle upon old lies.

The Oldest Capital
Built upon lies and artificial light
Lies upon lies upon lies.
And water.
Water water everywhere,
A city upon a swamp!

Here is the little girl—

[A lantern flicks on in the darkness. DE LANDA calls out the places of the New World.]

An Explorer in her Own Right,
Destined to make a Name for Herself
To make History, like her Father
But more like her Mother,
The Daughter of the Berber
An Aged Head of State
And a Savage Stone-Skipper.

He keeps her in the dark,
Just like her mother
Locked in the maze
Of watery lies
And won't release her.]

PART I: THE OLD WORLD

Talk Story.

Location: The Cradle of Pre-Columbia

Characters:

The Berber of Pre-Columbia

De Landa

Chorus of Concerned Citizens and Lamplighters

[In the dark centre of the Capital City upon the Swamp. The smell of old wood, the feel of firelight warmth, theatrical magic, and swamp water. A candlelit scene behind a bed sheet, held at all four corners by the CHORUS OF CONCERNED CITIZENS. The makeshift scrim ripples with westerly wind from an open window or from the excited breaths of those behind talking story. The shadows of DE LANDA (so tiny) and the BERBER (so tall and skinny). It is time for bed.]

BERBER

Long about the way, long long long ago, there was a little baby girl—

[The BERBER takes one long lean finger and strokes his sharp black chin, leans ever-closer to the little girl behind the sheet.]

DE LANDA

How old?

BERBER

Too young to remember, De Landa. She lived on a pond filled with islands, in a maze of water with a dark and shrivelled miserly old architect, who called himself her father.

DE LANDA

Was he her father?

BERBER

What do you think?

DE LANDA

No, he wasn't.

BERBER

No, no, he was not, though he said he was.

DE LANDA

Who was her real father—

BERBER

I'm getting to it if you'll—

DE LANDA

What was her name?

BERBER

Who?

DE LANDA

The little girl.

BERBER

Columbia.

DE LANDA

Columbia? Why Columbia?

BERBER

Do you want to tell your own bedtime story, put yourself to sleep?

DE LANDA

I won't interrupt.

BERBER

This dark and shrivelled miserly old architect with crooked hat, crooked nails, crooked fingers, crooked hands, and an even more crooked smile, held his daughter like a prisoner in the maze, protected from the outsiders—few could get in, no one could get out, unless they knew the waterways. And no one did. No one knew the way out. Of that, he was certain.

DE LANDA

But somebody knew how to get out, didn't they? Somebody else knows the way, don't they? Or how will the little girl escape?

BERBER

You're sure she wants to escape?

DE LANDA

Maybe...

BERBER

Maybe she will—

DE LANDA

She will.

BERBER

Maybe she won't. Only the dark and shrivelled old man had the map to those waterways, could locate the anabranches, gullies, streams, tributaries, and deltas leading to the ocean. And only one map existed. All the ways to get in or out were on this map that he kept beneath his pillow at night, for safe-keeping. Not even his wife was allowed to look at the map. The Architect kept the secret passages to himself that way.

DE LANDA

What did the map look like?

BERBER

A labyrinth.

[The outline of the map flickers in shadow, line by line on the sheet, diamond-shaped, a labyrinth, as the Berber says. THE ARCHITECT and THE GONDOLIER, COLUMBIA and PANGAEA appear in the following interlude as toy ships and beacons (respectively) in the night on the maze of waterways.]

miniature play: the myth of columbia.

location: the maze of water

characters:

architect

gondolier

pangaea

columbia

little girl

ARCHITECT

Columbia! Come to my bedside! Wife! Come and tell me a story, a bedtime story.

Weave a tale, sing a song, what you will. Gondolier! Gondolier, fetch my wife.

DE LANDA

What was she called?

BERBER

He called her Pangaea.

BERBER

Long long ago, he had snuck his bride Pangaea in with a blindfold, in the cover of night, stolen away from her people, where she was a storyteller, a weaver of tales and a lovely singer.

DE LANDA

And did they miss her, do you think?

BERBER

Yes. Yes, they did, but that is a sad sad story—

[BERBER (as GONDOLIER) sings the traditional folksong "The Gypsy Rover":]

GONDOLIER

Ah-dee-doo-ah-dee-doo-dah-day

Ah-dee-doo-ah-dee-day-dee

He whistled and he sang 'til the green woods rang

And he won the heart of a lady.

[A teeny tiny bark makes its way through the maze, navigating the proper channels.]

GONDOLIER

*A gypsy rover came over the hill
into the valley so shady.
He whistled and he sang 'til the green woods rang
and he won the heart of a lady.*

*She left her father's castle gate.
She left her own true lover.
She left her servants and her estate
to follow her gypsy rover.*

PANGAEA

Gondolier!

GONDOLIER

Yes, Pangaea!

BERBER

[To DE LANDA]. Look! It's the gondolier who ferries the Architect from islet to islet. The gondolier, though an excellent paddler, had never left the islands in all his life, for he was there even before the old crooked architect took possession and made the maze around him. He was ignorant of his life before, and the stories he heard each night from Pangaea made the story and stuff of his life.

DE LANDA

What was his name?

BERBER

No one bothered to give him one. Just the gondolier, and that's all.

DE LANDA

How sad.

BERBER

Pangaea talked to the gondolier in the intervals between her island and the Berber's bed.

PANGAEA

He keeps constant watch. Keeps me on my own little island in the maze, in a cage, like a mocking bird or lark or song sparrow, away from my daughter.

[The bark stops at the Architect's bed. The maze disappears.]

ARCHITECT

Pangaea! One story. One bedtime story!

PANGAEA

What shall I tell? A tale of ladies and crickets and songbirds, locked up, drawn up in sacks, keys thrown away? A tale of confinement, tight spaces and Chinese boxes, jailers and prisoners, dogs and cats in chains, beaten by masters?

ARCHITECT

Bluebeard! My favourite. Bluebeard is the story I want to hear tonight.

PANGAEA

Where is my daughter? I won't talk story unless she's here to listen.

ARCHITECT

Daughter! Daughter!

[Another light illuminates behind the sheet.]

COLUMBIA

Here Mummy, at the foot of the bed.

BERBER

And so she began the tale, as she often did, for the Architect, with the little girl at his feet. And it began—like always—with: Long about the way there was, and soon it was—

PANGAEA

Bluebeard's wicked wives couldn't stifle their natural curiosity, and took the egg with them when they opened the forbidden closet, the enchanted white egg he bid them carry as proof of their obedience. Once inside the locked room the wife found the chopped up bits of other wicked wives gone before her, all the wives who'd disobeyed old Bluebeard, and she clean dropped the egg from her hand, just like every other wife, into the bloody mess, and found it forever stained, herself doomed to their fate. On the shell, a bright red bloody spot that wouldn't come out, no matter how hard she scrubbed. And Bluebeard would return home each night to find his wife scrubbing at that egg and then Bluebeard took her back to the closet, and lopped off her head and arms, just like the others. Hack through her gut with a cleaver, her blood flying onto his gnashing teeth and—

ARCHITECT

[Sighs and whispers, then sawing logs.]

COLUMBIA

He's asleep /

DE LANDA

/ Is the Architect asleep? Or is he just dead?

BERBER

[Whispering.] Just like every other night, the old man would fall right to sleep, long before the ending, a crooked smile upon his face every time.

PANGAEA

He's dreaming of well-behaved wives. Columbia, the end is for your ears alone. It involves a great escape. The last wife was cunning.

[Two beacons and a lone ship begin the journey out of the maze of water, and the maze fades into nothing. The boat and beacons are all alone in a massive expanse.]

PANGAEA

Bluebeard returned home, to his wife, as he always did every other night, to see the egg, to see the proof his wicked wife had disobeyed. To see the egg with the bloody spot and raise his voice and hand to destroy her. But when he got home that night, it was all doors and windows open, closet door swung wide, egg long gone, and wife long gone with it.

COLUMBIA

She disappeared? Ran away? Mummy, where did she go?

PANGAEA

Home.

DE LANDA

But how, Daddy? How did she do it?

BERBER

Magic.

DE LANDA

Magic?

PANGAEA

Listen, daughter.

DE LANDA

—Yes?

COLUMBIA

—Yes?

PANGAEA

Reach your teeny tiny hand beneath your father's tired head, carefully so as not to wake him and pull out the map, and I'll tell you how Bluebeard's wife found her way out.

[The shadow of a little girl takes hold of the map, and unfurls it upon the sheet.]

BERBER

And night after night, Columbia's mother would unroll the wrinkled paper with the maze upon it, and work her way toward its end, a great escape from the maze of water.

PANGAEA

[The light moves through the maze, skilfully.] Bluebeard's wife took the egg with her in her pocket, opened the closet door and went all the way in, waded into the blood and bits of other wives and kept going past where all other wives had gone. When she found herself stuck and with no way out, she found a new way or went back the way she came. Winding curves and hairpin turns, under walls and doorjams and bars. She wove her way home.

DE LANDA

And did Pangaea and the little girl find their way out?

BERBER

Yes.

DE LANDA

Did they dash out the Architect's brains as he slept? Did they swim away, through the channels and find the ocean?

BERBER

Pangaea wove in the winding curves and turns, the waterways and rivulets leading away, just for the little girl, but also for the Gondolier, who was floating outside, listening to the story.

DE LANDA

And did he rescue her?

BERBER

They rescued each other, Pangaea, the little girl, and the gondolier.

DE LANDA

And did they leave the Architect behind and go home?

BERBER

Only for that hour, De Landa. For the hour of story when the Architect slept soundly, the girl, the gondolier, and Pangaea were home.

DE LANDA

And that's it?

BERBER

She has an hour of home, every night.

DE LANDA

But he wasn't her real father! Not at all!

BERBER

But why should it matter, if he loved her like a real one? [*He snuffs one lantern.*]

DE LANDA

And the gondolier?

BERBER

He loved Columbia like his daughter always. [*He snuffs a second.*]

DE LANDA

And he was happy to stay in one place, where he couldn't be the daddy, or the husband, and Pangaea was happy to stay in her cage, where she had to be the wife, and the Architect had his way?

BERBER

Not for that hour, every night, at bedtime.

DE LANDA

I hate that ending.

BERBER

De Landa, it's late—

DE LANDA

I hate it!

BERBER

The citizens are tired of talking story to put you to sleep. [*He snuffs the third.*] Good night, De Landa. It's late for little girls. Time for little girls to go to bed and—if it's what they want— to dream a different ending.

DE LANDA

[*Whispering in the dark.*] Am I the little girl, Daddy? Am I the little girl in that story?

BERBER

[*Sighs and whispers and logs being sawed.*]

[*Deep in the darkness, a light illuminates in front of the sheet on a LITTLE GIRL reading a map, an Atlas of the New World.*]

CHORUS (Concerned Citizen 1)

De Landa! Bed now!

[*She extinguishes the light.*]

A Lost Girl on Troubled Waters.

Location: A Pre-Columbian Sinkhole

Characters:

De Landa

Two Concerned Citizens

Chorus of Lamplighters

[A hot humid sticky Pre-Columbian sinkhole at night, pitch black. A flashlight or lantern flicks on, carried by a young girl.]

[CHORUS OF CONCERNED CITIZENS:

Like Mother, like daughter

De Landa's mother went

When she was but a baby

Curious to see what was beyond the swamp

Tired of lies and falsehoods and water.

She went to find *terra firma*,

To make her own ending,

Left the girl behind, groping in the dark.

Never to be seen again.

She is seeking

A new story!

A true story!

A happy ending!

A life adrift.

Sailing across troubled terrain.

To somewhere

Foreign and familiar

On the edge of great change.

A New World is a hop

A skip

A jump

A heartbeat away!]

[DE LANDA is standing on a rock on the edge of the swamp, preparing her next move. DE LANDA hops, timidly at first, from rock to rock, bringing light to each island she lands on, discovering and naming them as she goes. She skips the rocks in the swamp, starting small before making giant leaps to places she's never been before.]

DE LANDA

New England, New Spain, New France, ...

CONCERNED CITIZEN 1

De Landa! The Rocks! What are you doing out on the Rocks?!

DE LANDA

New York, New Jersey, New Delhi, New Guinea....

CONCERNED CITIZEN 1

Be careful out there on the Rocks.

[CONCERNED CITIZEN 2 enters unluckily, whistling a verse of "The Gypsy Rover."]

CONCERNED CITIZEN 2

I heard you shrieking. What's all the fuss here?

CONCERNED CITIZEN 1

De Landa's out on the Swamp again.

CONCERNED CITIZEN 2

Skipping the Rocks?

DE LANDA

[DE LANDA bounds, with more distance and height this time.] New Zealand...New Brunswick....

CONCERNED CITIZEN 2

Again? De Landa, what would your father say right now? What would the Berber of Pre-Columbia say, De Landa? If he could see you right now, De Landa. De Landa, you will slip! The Rocks! Remember your mother, De Landa!

CONCERNED CITIZEN 1

You will slip, De Landa, if you're not careful. Just like your mother.

CONCERNED CITIZEN 2

Just like her.

[DE LANDA pauses. Looks out to the voices on the shore.]

DE LANDA

So what. *[DE LANDA bounds, with more distance and height this time, a fugitive hurling herself into exile.]* New Orleans...New Mexico....

[A splash, the sound of water into water. DE LANDA misses her mark, slips beneath the swamp water and the light disappears.]

CONCERNED CITIZEN 1

Just like your Mother, De Landa.

CONCERNED CITIZEN 2

Just like her! Never listens. She never listened either.

CONCERNED CITIZEN 1

Not to you. Do something!

CONCERNED CITIZEN 2

Don't look at me. I don't skip. Someone should stay on shore.

CONCERNED CITIZEN 1

I don't swim and if she slips—

CONCERNED CITIZEN 2

Should we call for help? Get the Berber?

CONCERNED CITIZEN 1

What will he do if he hears we let his lonely daughter disappear, just like her mother?

CONCERNED CITIZEN 2

You saw her first. You saw her first!

CONCERNED CITIZEN 1

I am trying to stop her!

CONCERNED CITIZEN 2

The Berber doesn't care about trying. He only cares if you do or not.

CONCERNED CITIZEN 1

What will he do to us do you think? *[Beat.]*

CONCERNED CITIZENS 1 & 2

[Together.] Come back to shore, De Landa!

CONCERNED CITIZEN 1

Listen. You hear that?

CONCERNED CITIZEN 2

Nothing.

CONCERNED CITIZEN 1

I lost her.

CONCERNED CITIZEN 2

Where is she?

CONCERNED CITIZEN 1

She's gone quiet all of a sudden.

CONCERNED CITIZEN 2

She was on New Mexico, last I heard.

[Bubbles erupting on the surface of the Swamp...]

CONCERNED CITIZEN 1

She slipped. Oh, she slipped she slipped she slipped—

CONCERNED CITIZEN 2

Where? I didn't see it. You should go in after. I would.

CONCERNED CITIZEN 1

I don't swim—

CONCERNED CITIZEN 2

You'll learn the second you hit the swamp. It comes naturally, like dancing or reading.

CONCERNED CITIZEN 1

I don't know how to read.

CONCERNED CITIZEN 1

Go on. Dive in after, and I'll explain it all to the Berber.

CONCERNED CITIZEN 1

I don't—

CONCERNED CITIZEN 2

Help! Somebody help! Reyes disappeared with the Berber's daughter. They ran away together. Reyes and De Landa! I tried to stop them I did, but they wouldn't listen.
Help!

[The bobbing of tens or hundreds or thousands of lamplights, one per concerned citizen arriving from all four corners surrounding the edges of the swamp and forming a diamond.]

[CHORUS of CONCERNED LAMPLIGHTERS:

Where did they go?

I don't know exactly!

The dastard!

He took little De Landa?

Which way?

Spread out!

Divide up!

A Search Party!

In every direction!

North

[CHORUS of CONCERNED LAMPLIGHTERS *cont.*:]

Northeast
Northwest
East
West
Southeast
Southwest

Uh—

Oh.

Uhhhhhh
Ohhhhhhhhh.]

[As the lamplights expand in the flat plane of the Capital, an earthquake, and the birth of the sublime in the slip of tectonic plates. The swamp water recedes and reveals DE LANDA and the carcasses of ships, wrecked years ago, in a gaping maw. Followed, as is often the case with earthquakes, by a tsunami. DE LANDA sinks deeper beneath the scum.]

The Plunge.

Location: The Sea

Characters:

De Landa

Columbia (in voice)

The School of Explorers:

Hakluyt

Raleigh

Smith

Rolfe

Locke

Columbus

Marquette et Jolliet

Champlain

De Gama

Lewis and Clarke

Little Girl

[An underwater tempest, sheets of paper, maps, atlases, coordinates swirl, a whirlpool of white. Bubbles blowing and popping, blowing and popping. THE SCHOOL OF EXPLORERS (a chorus of Men of Discovery) swims in on a cardinal ocean tide, a confluence and convergence zone for all deep-sea currents, swarming in around a floundering DE LANDA. DE LANDA's voice bubbles up from the bottom of the ocean in a long paper trail.]

HAKLUYT

What is it?

RALEIGH

Land! An island! Straight ahead!

DE LANDA

[A bubble "Uh-Oh" floats up from DE LANDA's mouth. DE LANDA tries to catch it but it gets away and is popped by the School.]

[The SCHOOL swarms around DE LANDA, hungry after so long at sea and no sight of land or lady.]

MARQUETTE ET JOLLIET

Lachine?

DE GAMA

Brasilia!

COLUMBUS

Cayos Cochinos!

[A bubble escapes DE LANDA's lips and is devoured by the School: Columbia?]

SMITH

How does she taste?

[The SCHOOL circles, tasting, snatching, waiting for, commenting, hanging on De Landa's words.]

RALEIGH

[Tasting or reading De Landa.] Like Columbia!

LEWIS

Like ambrosia. Or or or...

COLUMBUS

Oro?

CLARKE

No— the fountain of youth.

DE LANDA

[Bubble: Where?]

RALEIGH

A speaker of English who's still got her maidenhead!

SMITH

She's unlike any savage I've ever encountered.

COLUMBIA

[*A feminine voice at the bottom of the ocean.*] Discover me, De Landa!

SMITH

Do you hear that, boys? She's calling to us! She wants us to discover her!

DE LANDA

[*A torrent of word bubbles float up: I am drowning!*]

[*Even more delicious words float up for the feasting school.*]

RALEIGH

[*Reading De Landa.*] She also says, I am drowning. [*Commenting.*] She is so beautiful.

LEWIS AND CLARKE

Dying beauty is sad, but beautiful to watch as it does.

CHAMPLAIN

Naïve.

MARQUETTE ET JOLLIET

Une sauvagesse noble.

COLUMBIA

Discover me, De Landa!

DE LANDA

[*A delicious word bubble containing: I want something new...I don't believe in stories anymore. The life of a discoverer—there's something. Something...*].

RALEIGH

[*Reading De Landa*] *I want something new ...I don't believe in stories anymore. The life of a discoverer—there's something. Something...* [*His own comment.*] The life of a discoverer is something big and bold and badass.

SMITH

She wants it bad, boys. She's more than ripe.

HAKLUYT

Untamed.

ROLFE

Never conquered.

LOCKE

Never possessed.

LEWIS AND CLARKE

Never mined.

DE LANDA

[Something real.]

RALEIGH

[*Reading.*] *Something real.*

SMITH

Oh I would kill for a taste of something so real.

DE LANDA

[*Bubbles:* History. I want history.]

RALEIGH

[*Reading De Landa.*] History. She wants history.

SMITH

I'm just the man to give it to her!

COLUMBIA

Sip De Landa! Sip seawater and discover me!

[*The flicker of a LITTLE GIRL at the bottom of the ocean, beckoning.*]

HAKLUYT

Drink up, boys! Columbia is calling!

[DE LANDA opens her mouth.... A huge gulp as DE LANDA swallows the sea.]

RALEIGH

Uh-oh.

[DE LANDA reaches her hand out to touch COLUMBIA.]

DE LANDA

Columbia!

[But COLUMBIA is nowhere to be found and DE LANDA grabs a handful of dust instead.]

PART II. A New World

The Memory House.

Location: A Sandbox in Paris, Texas

Characters:

Tinker (or Tink, an orphan player)

Biddle-Barrow (or Biddle, another orphan player)

Little Girl

Little Boy

[In the sandbox, spread out, is a collection of curios, what-nots, knick-knacks, miniature objects, doll furniture, doll parts, baby teeth, paper shreds, dried flowers, black crape, bits of lace. Next to all these little things, a sack— empty. But nothing is as it seems in Paris, Texas. All these little things are big things. What seems empty might have life left in it yet.]

BIDDLE

[Making a props list.] A small, yellowed envelope. And a card with the arms of the State of Virginia. Teeny tiny miniature, representing Morning, Noon, and Night, and look! A picture, with a tear in the corner, of a man, and on the back, scrawled in pencil, the name of Booth. John Wilkes. A white kid glove, only one. And a bit of— what would you say this should be, Tinker?

TINK

A top hat, Biddle-Barrow, a high silk top hat.

BIDDLE

A top hat. A silver bullet— flat from being shot out of a pistol. A camp knife— sharp, in the Rio Grande fashion, horn handle, and “America” cut deep into the bone of it. Is that it?

TINK

I’ve a whistle, a pencil, a velvet-cased compass.

BIDDLE

And a red-leather pocket diary, and on the inside, mountains, and compartments for postage and rail tickets, and portrait miniatures from fans, ladies, actresses—

TINK

Which ladies?

BIDDLE

Whichever ones you like to put in there. Doesn't say which ones. [*Continuing.*] A shred of black lace and a bit of crape. Here. Take these. And a boot spur. Give me those bits of skull. That lock of hair that looks like a rope there. The derringer pistol. The hat. The flatted out bit of metal, and the thirteen teeny weeny little ragdolls.

TINK

You want the dolls?

BIDDLE

Yes. Give me those. I will play with those I think.

TINK

Will you?

BIDDLE

I know what to do with those.

TINK

Oh. And the rest?

BIDDLE

You can keep the rest.

TINK

What will I do with these?

BIDDLE

Make a play. You can make a life of those things.

TINK

I don't know.

BIDDLE

You'll find something to play with them, won't you?

TINK

I always do.

BIDDLE

I'm starting by building a scaffold.

TINK

I'm starting by building the universe.

BIDDLE

Oh. Can I help?

[As they begin to build the universe, a LITTLE GIRL climbs out of the empty sack and disappears into the desert. Then—just when you thought it was completely empty— a LITTLE BOY emerges, in pursuit of a LITTLE GIRL.]

miniature play: the awful event.

location: the sandbox of history

characters:

tinker (tink)

biddle-barrow (biddle)

[TINKER sweeps in to clear away the footprints and traces, patty-caking a perfectly flat surface for the construction of a sand castle, which she continues to build, throughout the ensuing action that goes on around her. BIDDLE plays a chain of Awful Events around the building of TINKER's tiny Sandcastle. BIDDLE's events need not be "emblematic" of the year of their occurrence, nor "representational" in play, but it might help. Their cause-and-effect relationship ought to be clear, however, even if the cause is momentum (e.g., a chain of dominoes or house of cards or). In any case, each spectacle should get smaller and smaller, subtler and subtler, until the event is nearly imperceptible as an event, even. And then comes the last event, a grand coup de théâtre.]

TINK

Long about the way, long long long ago, things done got smaller. The universe.

[She draws a diamond shape in the sand, the outline of the foundations of her castle.]

BIDDLE

The Big Bang!

TINK

The world.

BIDDLE

.1492!

TINK

The East.

BIDDLE

1776!

TINK

The North.

BIDDLE

1861!

TINK

The South

BIDDLE

1865!

TINK

The West.

BIDDLE

1890!

TINK

Mummies and daddies, brothers and sisters. All history.

[She then takes another handful from the hole and lets it spill out through her fingers, grain by grain.]

BIDDLE

[Announcing the next scene, in which they will both play.] Paris, Texas.

itty-bitty play: an awful event.

location: a sandcastle

characters:

tinker

biddle-barrow

little girl

little boy

[A castle stands in the sand, guarded by a protector, TINK. A LITTLE GIRL, unseen by TINK and BIDDLE watches the scene.]

TINK

Long about the way all things done got smaller.

[She blows a palm full of dust.]

BIDDLE

[Entering.] When I come into a place—

TINK

Wait. *[She brushes his footprints from the sand creating a nice flat surface, again.]*
Now.

BIDDLE

[He exits and re-enters at warp speed, bowling her over, and spraying sand about.]
When-I-come-into-a-place, there is a great hush—

TINK

[She lands atop the castle.] My eye, Biddle-Barrow. There is sand in my eye.

BIDDLE

Let me see, Tinker. *[He checks.]* I can't see anything.

TINK

Nor I.

BIDDLE

Does it sting Tinker?

TINK

A bit. [*Noticing the crumbled castle upon which she sits.*] You killed it, Biddle!

BIDDLE

If you had moved aside—

TINK

You killed it. With your entrance. Killed it.

BIDDLE

[*Checking her eye again.*] It's not dead. Blink once or twice.

TINK

[*Blinking erratically.*] Killed it killed it killed it.

BIDDLE

There's a flicker of life. It's watering now. See? No harm done.

TINK

[*Rising to her feet to assess the damage.*] Too grand, Biddle-Barrow. Much too grand.

BIDDLE

You left your behind in the sand, Tinker.

TINK

Oh Biddle-Barrow. You've destroyed the universe, the world, all history, and all possibility. In one quick clumsy step.

BIDDLE

You're too much Tinker. I can rebuild it for you. Look—

TINK

Don't make less of my castle, Biddle-Barrow.

BIDDLE

How could I? Your bum ain't left anything but behind!

TINK

I mean only—I mean to say—. That castle, Biddle-Barrow, housed thousands no — hundreds at the very least.

BIDDLE

Your sandcastle.

TINK

Yes.

BIDDLE

Housed millions?

TINK

Something like, or more even. That castle, Biddle. Built grain by grain, of billions smaller than me. That castle was something, Biddle. Something smaller and greater.

BIDDLE

Could anything be greater than you?

TINK

You're mocking because you feel guilty for destroying the universe.

BIDDLE

No. I'm mocking because you make a mountain of an anthill and a crater of a bum hole.

TINK

And you made an apocalypse with an entrance, Biddle-Barrow. Too too grand. Killed it killed it killed it.

[A darkness brought about by sadness or stratus clouds. A drop or two of water falls into the sand.]

BIDDLE

Are you crying, Tinker?

TINK

No. *[But she might be.]*

[Lightning and finally— real rain.]

TINK

Uh – oh.

BIDDLE

Tink! It's raining! It's raining, and hard! It hasn't rained in Paris, Texas in a long time.

TINK

No.

BIDDLE

Your sand castle is flooding.

TINK

I know.

BIDDLE

Do you want to save it?

TINK

No. I want to watch it wash away.

[TINK and BIDDLE watch, transfixed, as the ruined sandcastle crumbles, grain by grain throughout the next scene. The LITTLE GIRL on the edge of the sandbox wanders away. A LITTLE BOY arrives at the sandbox and watches TINK and BIDDLE watching the crumble for a second or two, then heads after the LITTLE GIRL.]

Books.

Location: The Desert

Characters:

De Landa

Columbia

[A hard rain. COLUMBIA, a little girl, sits aboard a bark of well-worn books of history, mythology, science, floating upon white crests of paper page waves. A Robinson Crusoe of sorts, she raises the bed sheet like a sail behind her. Standing in a puddle, beside the makeshift skiff, is DE LANDA, just a bit younger, not by much, than COLUMBIA.]

DE LANDA

Columbia?

COLUMBIA

Yeah?

DE LANDA

De Landa.

COLUMBIA

I know who you are.

DE LANDA

You do?

COLUMBIA

Yep.

DE LANDA

How is that— how is that?

COLUMBIA

I do read, you know.

DE LANDA

You do?

COLUMBIA

Don't you?

DE LANDA

Sometimes. And, you read, about me?

COLUMBIA

Unh-hunh.

DE LANDA

Wow. I mean— wow. That's something. I didn't think my skipping would make much news, but—

COLUMBIA

I don't know anything about that. I've seen you—

DE LANDA

You have?

COLUMBIA

I've seen your name before. In print. De Landa. [*She tosses a book or an Atlas or a map, by Diego De Landa.*]

DE LANDA

Oh. That's not— De Landa *is* my name, though, I don't—. [*COLUMBIA is stacking up her books.*] What is that you're doing out here in the rain?

COLUMBIA

Building a boat, a sailboat.

DE LANDA

Where are you sailing.

COLUMBIA

Home.

DE LANDA

But you are home.

COLUMBIA

No. My real home. Where I'm from.

DE LANDA

The desert.

COLUMBIA

No that's a lie your daddy told you. That's what daddies do best. Lie. I was born on an island in the maze of water guarded by the Architect— my father.

[*Beat.*]

DE LANDA

Who told you that?

COLUMBIA

The man who pretends he is my real father says the opposite, so I know he's lying.

DE LANDA

The gondolier?

COLUMBIA

That's him. But I call him Pops.

DE LANDA

My daddy. My daddy told me all about you, Columbia. And about Pangaea. You have a happier ending than you think, Columbia. You just don't know who your real parents are but I do. Your real daddy is the Gondolier, I'm sure of it! The Architect is just a crooked old schemer.

COLUMBIA

When we went, the Architect, my real daddy, who having never cried before, wept every tear he'd ever held in in his life, day and night, for a week, and flooded the city with his tears, tears that rolled from his eyes like waterfalls, into all the houses in the labyrinth, seeping into all the doorways, flooding basements and climbing up over mouths and noses and drowning the town. A wave of sadness that washed his daughter and her mother even further away, with the gondolier. With Pops. That's the story of my parents, De Landa. Nine months on the waves, up and down, on a less-than-seaworthy boat – holes rotted out wood, crashing up over the edges and getting in our ears. Even mine, and I wasn't even born.

DE LANDA

But you were with your mother at least.

COLUMBIA

She drowned in the Berber's tears, spilt in the millions after he discovered us missing.

DE LANDA

But you survived!

COLUMBIA

In the first ending, I drank seawater because there was no milk, and forgot all about the maze of water, all about my real daddy the Architect in the floodplains, who had climbed up high onto his rooftop to escape the water he'd cried out. I forgot about my mummy, who let the foreign gondolier into her heart, told him of the map she'd discovered under her husband's pillow, and told him how to navigate the waterways as he paddled her to and fro from the Berber's island to her own. I forgot the woman who died on the high and low seas, and even started to believe the gondolier's lies. In the first ending, the girl believed she was his daughter, for real real, that she was born in this dried out no good sinkhole, just another little girl like any other. But the real end of the story is, one day, after ten long years without a drop of rain, it starts to pour, because her daddy, who she'd forgotten all about, is crying again, remembering his losses, and needs her now. And as the rain drops fall, the girl starts to remember where she came from, starts to remember her real daddy, her real history, her real past, and a little girl who is looking for her happens to arrive, and so she escapes, on a boat.

DE LANDA

How will you get there?

COLUMBIA

He is making a trail of tears, the Architect. The rain drops hit the dust and leave a trail, telling me where to go.

DE LANDA

You're running away from the gondolier.

COLUMBIA

There are a lot of things I'll miss about him, but that's not important.

DE LANDA

It is important, Columbia. What you have here, a home and a real daddy who loves you, it is important.

COLUMBIA

I have to go somewhere. Somewhere else. I don't belong here. It's raining. My daddy is crying, calling me home. It hasn't rained like this in as long as I can remember. Daddy, my real daddy is alive, not dead. And he wants me to come home.

[The sandcastle is in ruins, the rainfall pitters out, and COLUMBIA evaporates into the great wide open.]

DE LANDA

Columbia? Columbia!

[There are traces, channels in the sand where the rain fell, a line stretching on for a while, a few puddles here and there, perhaps. The sun burns through the clouds. TINK and BIDDLE cede the sandbox to DE LANDA's story for a time.]

De Landa Writes in Her Diary.

Location: The Desert

Characters:

De Landa

Little Boy

[DE LANDA walks along a line in the sand in an expansive desert. She is carrying a large knapsack filled with everything a pilgrim might need on the path to some grand site, or an explorer might use by which to locate him/herself and discover new peoples and languages and territories, including a large book with a burnt cover, dog-eared pages, and water stains. She pulls out a gallon of water and drinks the entire contents. She drops the gallon jug, which floats upward, defying gravity.]

DE LANDA

I started by jogging the edges. Just tracing the perimeter. No one knew it was my pulse testing the edges of the swamp. It took months before I had the guts to skip from rock to rock. But I did. I was doing something new each bound with each slip finding a new step with each fall because my heart was in the jumping of stones. While they watched me get smaller and smaller and farther and farther from shore my heart was getting bigger. I could grow my heart in secret. It would only take one beat. Just one and the Capital would disappear. My heart was in the spaces of air the gaps of air when I flew between but none of the Pre-Columbians knew that.

I have seen things you would never even think existed the things I've seen they would shock even you the information I've discovered it would— let's just put it this way: it would topple everything you thought you knew about well everything. You could, you could keep up with the questions that get nowhere and the verses committed to memory thinking, hey this is all there is. You could. But, it would be all lies. What's the biggest little lie you ever told? Or, better even, the biggest lie you ever discovered? Would you even know it if you heard it? Oh that's just too good not to write down. In pencil at least.

[She opens the book to the natural crease that is also the dedicatory preface.]

DE LANDA

Dearest...Dad comma...I am writing to you from....from....*[She's not sure, exactly, so she leaves a blank space and keeps on keeping on.]* I'm sorry for the bad handwriting, but I've only just learned.... By the bye....You...were...wrong. Not everything has been discovered already. I found Columbia. She's here. She's not here anymore. She was here all along, with the gondolier, living happily ever after.

[She erases it, writes something else for a moment, scribbling furiously. She replaces the book in the sack, begins to walk along the line in the sand.]

Not everything has been discovered already. I found Columbia. It only took one beat. A beat and a slip into the Swamp. The Pre-Columbians could never have imagined that was all it took to get out of the dark. My footing was sure. My pulse thumped. Daddy wasn't watching. The Berber wasn't watching. "Come back to shore now, De Landa, was all the Pre-Columbians could think to say. Before you fall. It's slippery, De Landa. Don't you fall too, De Landa, not like your mother. And then the Slip. A beat and a slip between The Capital and somewhere yet unexplored. Somewhere between the Sea, the slippery slopes, and the great wide open I found Columbia. The day the Berber's daughter disappeared I found myself in the brilliant sun. Free to explore. Tripping along a dry gulch in the sand. Thirsty. So so thirsty.

[She reaches into the pack and pulls out another jug of water. She drinks the entire gallon. She drops it. It floats up. An animal yowls in the distance, halfway between a cry, a wail, a meow, "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," "Dixie," "John Brown's Body," and "La Marseillaise."]

DE LANDA

Did you hear that? *[She writes that question down.]*

[The revolutionary beast moans again.]

DE LANDA

[She pulls out a map of the New World, unfurling it onto the sand.] All that in the middle of nowhere yet, between the Slippery Rocks, the Sea, and the Great Wide Open? Sand, sun, a dry gulch in the sand, leading to somewhere or something or someone. The Architect? Columbia? Or...it sounds more like an animal or a beast moaning, or a cat? And music. In a major key, and a minor key? And all at once.

[She writes down the all empirically relevant data, then returns to the map.]

DE LANDA

I am...here. Or...here! Or... I don't know where I am, yet.

[She doesn't write that down, but shuts the book for a moment, dusts herself off and heads toward the cacophony, map in hand. Along the same trail, a LITTLE BOY enters, following the line in the sand, but in the opposite direction.]

Adrift in the Desert of History.

Location: On the Outskirts of Paris, Texas.

Characters:

Martelle Lavidangeureuse (Vide, tout court)

Peerpoint L'Éboueur (Ebu, tout court)

Little Girl

[VIDE enters followed by EBU—his head hanging always toward the sand in search of their shared past—carrying a large empty sack behind, humming “John Brown’s Body,” and drawing a line in the dust which covers their tracks and leaves a trail. Their skin is dusted with something like lye.]

EBU

[Scouring the dust for Lenin, Booth, Lincoln, Lafayette, John Brown.] People who write history are easily forgotten. People who make history live on after they die. That is the heart and soul of the Cause, Vide. Our Cause. Don’t never forget it.

VIDE

How could I? It’s impossible to forget the Cause. Not the way we practice it. Make your mark on the body politic, not in some book. Sign your name in blood on the way out of a place, and make your own ink as you come into it!

[Beat.]

EBU

Scribblers of history are always waiting for a thing to happen, and makers and shakers are always making a thing happen. A scribbler is lonely and boring, more like a bookworm than flesh and blood and backbone. And that’s the stuff, the drama of history.

VIDE

Flesh and blood and bone. *[She finds a bone stuck in the sand.]* Did you kill this one?

EBU

I wish! Before our time. Booth, I think. But that’s a good sign! Means we’re on the edge of the Capital. Be on the lookout for bits of Lincoln’s skull, now you done found Booth.

VIDE

Booth.

EBU

John.

VIDE

The Baptist.

EBU

Wilkes.

VIDE

There've been so many over the years. It's hard to keep track.

EBU

John Wilkes Booth, Vide. Our playwright, Vide. The one we killed the Berber of Paris for, Vide, and in the exact same way. The Great Tragedian of Ford's Theatre.

VIDE

Wounded Knee, you mean.

EBU

Ford's Theatre, Vide.

VIDE

There've been so many re-enactments. Was it a good show?

EBU

Vide. *Our American Cousin*, Booth, who shot off the Top Hat, dove off the balcony, tangled spurs with Old Glory.

VIDE

I remember. The stage directions called for all-out pandemonium. Blood, a simpering old man-trap, and a tottering top hat. Totter totter totter like a spinning top.

EBU

That's the play. And that's his shank. See the crooked bit, where he broke his ankle on the tragic fall. Or, could be his neck from the big drop and sudden stop. Or his backbone. [*He examines the bone.*] It's Booth's, whatever it is.

VIDE

[*She holds the bone up to her own arm, or shank or neck or....*] An inch of hide and flesh makes them different, Ebu. [*She slips a bit of Booth into the sack, in with the evidence of historical exploits abroad.*] Just an inch of meat is all the difference between this thing and that.

EBU

That's why we collect and recollect and re-enact. To bring ourselves, and our audiences that much closer to history. Living breathing history.

VIDE

When we get back to Paris, Ebu, do you think we'll get a hero's welcome, curtain calls and bouquets. A ticker tape parade, and banners and slogans to run through.

EBU

If they recognize Martelle Lavidangeureuse.

VIDE

[*Titillated.*] Again!

EBU

Martelle Lavidangeureuse.

VIDE

Again!

EBU

Martelle Lavidangeureuse!

VIDE

Attention Paris, Texas! We are back! Peerpoint L'Eboueur and Martelle Lavidangeureuse the Renegade Re-Enactors of Paris are heading home!

EBU

And we brung home all the heads of state, all the terrible tyrants and the red right hands o' the dead rebels for all of Paris to see. Watch for us in a Capital City near you and then wait for the heads to roll out to the suburbs!

VIDE

Better and bloodier than John Wilkes Booth at Ford's Theatre and Brutus at the Theatre Pompeii.

EBU

More treacherous than the Roughriders in Santiago.

VIDE

More mutinous than Villa and Huerta in New Spain. More savage than Crazy Horse's scalpers at Custer's Last Stand.

EBU

More revolutionary than the Tea Partiers in Phoenix, the Minutemen of Tucson, or the Militias of Michigan!

VIDE

All hail the Injuns and the Renegades!

[EBU pulls a skull out the sack and puppets the jaw into a smile.]

EBU

"Sic Simperin' Tyrannis," Paris, Texas. *Le jour de gloire est arrivé!*

[Beat.]

VIDE

Ebu.

EBU

Yep.

VIDE

Does anyone speak French in Paris anymore?

EBU

Doubt it. Why? Why are you asking about the French?

VIDE

Oughtn't we choose different names, then? They won't mean as much, if the Parisians have forgotten their French.

EBU

Our names hold a mystery now that can only work to our advantage when no one remembers what they mean, because you can be sure they will have forgotten their French. We can relearn 'em *our* French. The real French.

VIDE

The real French! [*Beat.*] Did you know the feet bones of wanderers...the bones of saints' feet is worn round with walking....like marbles.

EBU

I got a sack full of holies to prove it.

VIDE

Renegades in exile, wandering out here on the outskirts of the Capital, tiptoeing into the cities with one purpose: to do godliness among men.

EBU

And this is all what's remaining of them. Just these little round bits.

VIDE

You imagine that's how my feet look inside by now? Like a clutch of marbles?

EBU

Well, you ain't no saint.

(VIDE takes the feet bones, rolls them around in her hand like marbles or dice.)

VIDE

An actress is exactly like a saint, Ebu.

EBU

In what way?

VIDE

She can throw the holiest of men into the most passionate thralls of ecstasy, brains and bones bumping one another in a tizzy. He would die for her, kill for her, wander the desert at pain of death just to catch her eye and have her catch his. [*A wink at a man who would die, kill, go out into the desert and has.*]

EBU

An actress, yerself included and in particular, ain't no martyr. She lives and dies for pleasure. And, in the end, she's worth more in the flesh than in bones. [*He swoops in for a kiss.*]

VIDE

[*She dodges.*] Have I changed much, since we left Paris?

EBU

You look different now.

VIDE

Prettier?

EBU

Paler. Older. After seven years. Don't you see, Vide? We'll be returning to Paris with our own history, and giving to the Parisians the evidence of all of our victories abroad, to put up on the wall, or in a museum, in a glass case. We'll be sharing every true story, telling them where they come from, and what we done for 'em with what's in this sack. And they'll love us for it.

[*Beat.*]

VIDE

We'll have to share the credit?

EBU

Vide. Don't you want to go home? I mean, don't you wanna settle down, just you and me and all of Paris, for a while?

VIDE

I could use a break, I suppose, from the Cause. I *love* happy endings. Even more than bloody beginnings.

EBU

I've missed Paris, Texas. I admit that now.

VIDE

You can't admit that on the road, or you might forget your lines one night and not know where you are, and then you go off-book because in your mind you're dreaming of home—

EBU

We got our start there. It was only a one-off, and not much of a crowd, but what a performance. Where Martelle Lavidangeureuse first made her name mean something! Men shake in their boots, when they hear the name Martelle Lavidangeureuse.

VIDE

And women swoon and grannies drop their thimbles when they hear Peerpoint L'Éboueur!

EBU

And sometimes their lacies. [*VIDE doesn't find this funny.*] A lovely singer, long lean gams, and a brilliant shot. That's Martelle Lavidangeureuse.

VIDE

A red right hand, an unquenchable thirst for blood, and the sharpest plotter there ever was, Peerpoint L'Eboueur.

EBU

Martelle Lavidangeureuse.

VIDE

Again.

EBU

Martelle Lavidangeureuse and Peerpoint L'Éboueur! The Renegade Re-Enactors of the Cause. Attention Paris, Texas! We are coming home! Peerpont L'Eboueur and Martelle Lavidangeureuse are—

[A LITTLE GIRL appears on the horizon in VIDE's line of vision as a character from her own personal history.]

VIDE

Uh-oh.

EBU

What now, Vide.

VIDE

Nothing. Nothing much.

[Beat.]

EBU

We are on the edge of our triumphant return. I bet there are monuments. We changed their lives nine years ago. And for the better.

VIDE

And what happened afterwards—

EBU

WE ARE ON THE EDGE OF MAKING HISTORY. And you want to spoil it with “nothing much”?

VIDE

Do you think people will remember a lost child?

EBU

I know they won't. If you find yourself in a jam, slapped with questions about it, what do you do? What's our credo, our motto, or doxa?

VIDE

Self-preservation.

EBU

Don't use big words, Vide. People don't get it when you use big words. Remember the mess in El Dorado? You made a lot of mistakes!

VIDE

Me? How should I know what they would make of "infidelity" in El Dorado, Ebu?

EBU

But we know how ugly it got, Vide, and how the flock turned once all the women went astray and slept with their husbands' brothers, best friends, uncles, fathers, the homeless even! And the talk of iconoclasts? I mean, London lost their heads. And I escaped by a nose.

VIDE

Just a word and I destroyed the entire city. Just one word!

EBU

You're awful proud of your mistakes. Kill, Vide. Kill was the word. Short and sweet and discrete, in the case of the children, in the case that anyone asks about them, which won't happen because no one'll ask about them.

VIDE

I am remembering how awful, how sloppy it was the first time you lopped off a head of state.

EBU

Well, maybe if you'd done come in on cue.

VIDE

What if the Stray found her way home too, just like us?

EBU

You caught and killed the Stray, Vide, you caught and killed the Stray in Paris, hacked her into bits and buried her deep where no one'll dare look for her.

VIDE

Oui.

EBU

Or so you said, so you've been bragging for nine long years. Since we freed the Parisians from "Liberté, égalité, fraternité" and gave 'em Liberty and Justice for All! You have been saying ever since you done it.

VIDE

Oui. So I said.

EBU

Vide!

VIDE

For the last few years, I — I—I—

EBU

Vide!

VIDE

The Stray is back, Ebu.

EBU

How?

VIDE

I let her go. I put her in the sack, alive, with the Berber's head, without you knowing. And I let her out outside the city limits.

EBU

Why?

VIDE

I couldn't ...a child? A little girl, Ebu?

EBU

A stray! You mean...You didn't —

VIDE

I couldn't!

EBU

But you did...thousands of times, all those traitors!

VIDE

But not her, I couldn't do it, Ebu!

EBU

You *lied*! You lied about burying the Stray?!

VIDE

I can't help it, Ebu. I'm an actress, not a saint!

EBU

Has she been following the trail ever since we fled Paris?

VIDE

Peut-être. Bien possible. Yes.

EBU

John Brown's Bloody Body, Vide! What's the one bloody standard we fly high?

VIDE

Flesh, blood, and bone. Catch and kill—

EBU

Not catch-and-release! She tried to sabotage the plot! She tried to turn the littlest boys and girls against us for setting them free nine years ago!

VIDE

I had forgotten about the orphans....

EBU

They wasn't ours, Vide. Not our flesh and blood and bone.

VIDE

Though they kept telling us they were, pleading with us.

EBU

They couldn't be trusted. That's just what the Stray had been saying to us all along. We had to...For a short time we had no one else to...and the misbehaving well...and you can't be sure if they'd been swept up by the Stray's lies...if they were acting on her behalf you know...who could be sure...if they were tainted...if the Stray'd got to 'em first...they might have killed, Vide, even you...before you've settled down...it's just...it's hard to keep track and....

[Beat.]

EBU

How long since you seen her?

VIDE

Yesterday. Yesterday afternoon. She was pussyfootin' around thereabouts. And...

EBU

What if she's already back in Paris? Imagine if the Stray wins the sympathy of the Parisians. A mangy stray, straggling in from nowhere, babbling on in a forgotten language about old massacres and poor poor orphans, the weak and whiny litter. We kept to the Cause, Vide. We killed the Berber in the theatre, just like John Wilkes Booth (Lenin preserve his body). His blood's on our hands, and ours alone, and we can be proud of it. The aftermath, the rest...weren't our fault. We had to, because of that mangy Stray.

VIDE

I saw her on the horizon, just behind us. And she, I think she's very very close to us now, because I am feeling sad, and I'm remembering all the orphans. The cheek holes, and the skins of all of the ankle biters like Remy what's-his-face hung up on the clothesline to dry, next to his mother and father.

EBU

I'll kill that Stray. I am sick of life on the lam, Vide. I want to go back to Paris, Texas and make history. I will have my triumphant return, Vide. I won't let you spoil it for us. I won't let you forget the Cause. When I come into a place, a great hush comes over all. Men shake in their boots, ladies swoon, grannies lose their thimbles, and oftener their lacies, and that mangy Stray loses her head. *The Great Cat Massacre* is the next engagement. And it will be a one-off.

[The desert sun goes down and a red moon rises. EBU goes on the hunt.]

VIDE

Ebu. Do you see that? Way up there. The moon. It's bleeding. Ebu?

Urban-Suburban Development Incorporated: The Myth of El Dorado.

Location: A Desert Outside El Dorado

Characters:

Rémy (a fugitive entrepreneur)

Reyes (a refugee con-artist)

Little Boy

Little Girl

[A blood red moon. RÉMY is coiled about himself like a boa constrictor in a top hat (or maybe just business casual), ill-suited to the desert night and shivering hissing in the cold. REYES, crumpled top hat with the top punched out (maybe there's a rolodex strapped to his hat band, a big black and white fluttering flower), approaches on foot, sopping wet, worse for wear. Older. Paler. REYES pokes the snake.]

RÉMY

—*Bon sang! Casse-toi! Etc. pantoufle!*

REYES

—*¡El Chupacabra! ¡Dios mio! ¡Puag!*

[The former strangers recover themselves, and English.]

REYES

I thought you were a rattler.

RÉMY

You roam the desert, poking poisonous snakes?

REYES

Nah. But man, this desert is full of bloodsuckers. Pulled a brown recluse off the back of my neck only two seconds—

RÉMY

What languages are you fluent in?

REYES

[Considering for a moment, counting on his fingers.] Californian.

RÉMY

And that's all?

REYES

Yep.

RÉMY

Good. Name. Name name name. Who are you, where are you from, what's your business—

REYES

I just wanna pass, *cabrón*.

RÉMY

Everyone who passes pays for it eventually.

REYES

I just wanna get out of California, is my point.

RÉMY

Leave California? Why would anyone want to leave? California is a wonderful place to be somebody.

REYES

Am I still in California?

RÉMY

Still are still am. Still a wonderful place to be somebody.

REYES

No. No it's not. Not anymore.

RÉMY

Nonsense. Allow me to present my card.

[He produces a business card a bit worse for wear.]

REYES

Rémy.

RÉMY

That's me. The rest the rest.

REYES

Urban-Suburban Oasis Develo—Develop-mentincmentinc—

RÉMY

Urban-Suburban Oasis Development Incorporated. El Dorado. You mussed it with water...or is that sweat. I haven't got another one you know, you can't keep it.

REYES

EL Dorado. El Dorado. In California.

RÉMY

Is there another one?

[*Beat.*]

REYES

Impossible.

RÉMY

Anything is possible.

REYES

Not in El Dorado.

RÉMY

Really?

REYES

You're claiming my hometown. El Dorado. As your own.

RÉMY

The one and only.

REYES

[He pulls a matted card from his sopping coat pocket or from his hat band.] My...This was my card.

RÉMY

It's all wet.

REYES

I swam.

RÉMY

From El Dorado.

REYES

From El Dorado. *[Unwadding the card.]* You can't read it anymore, but I'll give you the gist: Reyes: Viking Excursions, Pleasure Cruises, and Carriers International, El Dorado.

RÉMY

You were in tourism.

REYES

And shipping.

RÉMY

Where is your boat?

REYES

I told you I swam.

[Beat.]

REYES

You don't know about the pandemic, do you.

RÉMY

Of course I do.

REYES

Well.

RÉMY

What do you know about it?

REYES

Almost everything.

RÉMY

Almost.

REYES

Yes.

RÉMY

Well. Like?

REYES

Well. It starts with the nerves.

REMY

No.

REYES

Yes.

RÉMY

Yes. I was testing you. What comes after the nerves?

REYES

Easy. The shakes. The shakes at the sound of a female voice or a face or a certain smell from childhood. And then your skin prickles all over.

RÉMY

Yes. Continue.

REYES

And then and then I— Uh-oh. [*He begins to studder, uncontrollably.*] I-I-I-I—

RÉMY

What's wrong with you? Stop that.

REYES

[*He can't st-st-st-st-op.*] I-I-I-I—

[*RÉMY throttles him round the throat and shakes him out of it.*]

REYES

Fuck, *cabrón*. What the hell?

RÉMY

You got stuck on some bit in your story.

REYES

What part?

RÉMY

You were describing the smells of childhood. It's all I could do to get you to move forward.

REYES

I don't know what came over me.

RÉMY

Go on, the shakes, the shakes.

REYES

It starts with the nervous shakes, and then your skin pricks up, goose pimples all over...

RÉMY

And then.

REYES

And then, but you know this already.

RÉMY

Of course, but you describe it with such detail.

REYES

Well, then your joints develop a rhythm all their own. Flailing around this way or that, drawing you farther and farther away from your own senses, and without any control of your own. Arms and legs and neck possessed, head and chin drawn forward like you are tethered and being drug, your eyeballs bumping up on your brain round and round like a tilt-a-whirl. And your brain just can't understand the commotion. Then. When you least expect it. Every goddam dam busts open and— Total Exsanguination.

RÉMY

Total exsanguination. Imagine that...All of El Dorado is infected?

REYES

All of California.

RÉMY

You don't say. There's no one left?

REYES

It happened to my father, my brother, and every single one of my uncles. Are you calling me a liar?

RÉMY

No it's clear you've suffered terribly. But it's so awful. It sounds made up.

REYES

It's a bloodbath. But that's California for you. There was a wave of destruction. When I was young, 23 or thereabouts. A flood.

RÉMY

But you survived?

REYES

My wife.

RÉMY

Your wife?

REYES

She was taller than me. Solid. The one constant in my life.

RÉMY

Never, never had a wife.

REYES

[*Not listening.*] Climbed up on her shoulders, kept my nose and mouth above water. She was faithful, you know. An anchor.

RÉMY

I wish I'd had one.

REYES

There were lots of girls when I left El Dorado. Tons and tons of them. And no disapproving dads or scolding mothers. Just girls, cut loose, running all around.

RÉMY

Why would anyone leave El Dorado?

REYES

There were lots of girls, cut loose, running all around, and with no one to watch them. [*Beat.*] But that's California for you.

RÉMY

So California.

REYES

There is the universe on the edge of something super...super...huge. Like...cataclysmic, even. And I realized right then and there: fortune has something else in store for me.

RÉMY

And you were consumed by a desire to run?

REYES

Yes. Yes, that's exactly it.

RÉMY

I know that feeling.

REYES

The women and children had been doling out allowances to those with first names only for years, and without our knowledge, financing an entire underground responsible for the Total Exsanguination. But I caught on to them, before the rest of the El Dorados. I still wanted to set fires and kiss women and rape them a bit and buy a car, a house, a home, starve a cat half to death and find a new solid, sturdier ball-and-chain and break up with the surviving girlfriend, and all at the same time. Do that? In the middle of a floodplain? Where's the challenge in that?

[A LITTLE BOY is following a line in the sand, on the horizon.]

RÉMY

Any children?

REYES

None that I know of. [*He laughs.*]

RÉMY

Why is that funny?

REYES

If I waste time explaining it, it won't be funny anymore.

RÉMY

Oh.

REYES

Right. So, I left El Dorado. And here I am. [*Beat.*]

RÉMY

Well, you can't stay in Paris— or, El Dorado if you are going to have a career.

REYES

Those poor saps, back there. But that's California for you.

RÉMY

Real stupid saps. So California. [*Beat.*] I haven't seen it with my own eyes, of course.

REYES

¡Bastardo! You lie, El Chupacabra!

RÉMY

Come again?

[REYES moves as if to strike, but instead rifles through RÉMY's pockets, tickling him until he squeals. REYES pulls out the crinkled business card. He holds it hostage.]

REYES

Where do you come from for real real?

RÉMY

I beg you to refer to the card. It's all on the card.

REYES

You're a fake Rémy. [*He prepares to dismember the card into teeny tiny fragments.*]

RÉMY

It's all on the up-and-up I swear. Rémy: Urban-Suburban—

REYES

Oasis Development Incorporated. El Dorado. Right, I could read that part.

RÉMY

Everything on the card is true. I swear! Or it will be true anyway, and real soon.

REYES

Where are you from, Rémy, or I'll rip it a new one.

RÉMY

Please. Everything! Everything I have is on that card.

REYES

Where are you from, *cabrón*?

RÉMY

Paris. But I am really, heart of hearts, from El Dorado. I will be from El Dorado. I've made it my life's ambition to be from El Dorado.

REYES

Is that right?

RÉMY

I'm planning something big. Something real big. I could use someone like you, in Paris, Reyes. Someone exactly and identically like you.

REYES

Me?

RÉMY

As a partner.

REYES

A partner.

RÉMY

A real Californian, born and bred. What if I told you you could be the King of El Dorado?

REYES

I'm not going back to that sinkhole, *cabrón*.

RÉMY

Who said anything about going back? What if, now listen closely...What if you could be the King of El Dorado in Paris, Texas?

REYES

Get out of here. Paris? What's in Paris, Texas at all like El Dorado?

RÉMY

Nothing.

REYES

Nothing?

RÉMY

No pandemic, no El Dorados, no more treading water. Wouldn't you like to have some place to call your own when this is all over? Picture it. Paris, Texas.

REYES

I'm getting there.

RÉMY

Just over the horizon is wasteland. Crumbling walls, dry fountains, piles and piles and piles of bones. A vast open expansespansespansespanspanse. Echoes. Dust. Everywhere and nowhere. What is this place? What happened here?

REYES

You're from Paris, you tell me.

RÉMY

Use your imagination, Reyes! A crater. A hole. No. Maybe. It had a purpose. A coliseum or a reservoir or a paddling pool or something else entirely. Whatever it was, it's a sandbox now. Can you hear the orphans laughing?

REYES

I can, almost.

RÉMY

Listen harder.

[He listens, harder this time. Is that the sound of orphans laughing? A LITTLE GIRL is following a line in the sand on the horizon.]

REYES

It's not half-bad. I think I could turn it around. I could definitely turn it around.

RÉMY

Could you?

REYES

Fuck yes, cabrón.

RÉMY

What do you hear?

REYES

I hear a Grey Goose vodka tonic on the rocks with a twist.

RÉMY

What's that sound like?

REYES

Clink clink clink, three cubes of ice cycling round the glass, Rémy. Or a Walker Gold, if you prefer. The puff and heft of a thick cigar, a line here and there, and some credit cards. Numbers and tap tap tap against the counter tap tap tap. Just a credit card, just a big line or two right about now would be divine.

RÉMY

Fuck yes. And a touch, just one caress. Oh, Reyes, what I wouldn't give for just one grope right about now. It's all I want in the world. El Dorado. What do you see in the new El Dorado?

REYES

I look out there and I see paved sidewalks, topiaries, pristine pools with toxic levels of chlorine, shuttered windows, children, and electrified fences— everywhere.

RÉMY

Where?

REYES

Right behind me. [*He opens his eyes and points toward the horizon.*] Or more like right in front of us, just behind you there.

RÉMY

Just over the horizon. Paris is just waiting for us to find her, just waiting right there for us to give her a purpose, a shape, a direction. To bring El Dorado to her. But we have to forget her first. Forget her, forget her in California, and remember El Dorado in Texas.

REYES

Wild. That's a wild wild idea, *cabrón*. I can't believe I never thought of it before. [Beat.] Wild.

RÉMY

Totally, a wild fucking fortune in a fucking desert.

RÉMY and REYES

[*Ensemble, juntos, together.*] Fuck yes.

[RÉMY and REYES begin a handshake and get stuck there. It becomes a staring contest, each relishing the brokering of the deal, each unwilling to blink first, even as the winds pick up, blowing sand in their eyes. The sun is on the rise. They start to sink into the settling sand, and get all the way up to their knees, neither one relinquishing his grip on the other, pursing their lips to keep the dust out, shutting their eyes. Uh-oh. A dust storm.]

De Landa, Discoverer or Destroyer of Worlds

Location: A Crater in the Desert

Characters:

De Landa (a salvage pilgrim)

Pangaea (a savage, or a dinosaur continent, composed of all concerned citizens, rebels and renegades, and entrepreneurs)

Ebu

[PANGAEA, a statufied monster is planted in the dust. DE LANDA explores the crater with her voice from an unseen vantage point.]

DE LANDA

[Echoing throughout.] Hey! Hello down there.

[PANGAEA's eyes slit open and all at once, shift right, together, then left, together, and locate DE LANDA on the edge. PANGAEA tries to stand, but cannot move a muscle, as its limbs are fused.]

DE LANDA

You there! Down in the dust. You! Am I glad to see you!

[PANGAEA works to unfuse its lips and reply. They refuse to comply.]

Can you tell me I wonder can you tell me? Is this the—it's upside down. Are you thirsty? I have water. Stay right there. Don't move a muscle. I am coming down there, just so you won't be surprised, I am headed your way.

[DE LANDA enters the crater, cautiously, recording all, with a keen eye and a gallon of water.]

DE LANDA

Did you know about the trail? Just a line in the dust drawn out to the horizon. Is it the Trail of Tears? Where does it lead? How did you land way out here? Did you roll your way here, with the desert winds? Picked up and dropped in cyclone or? That dust storm was something awful. How do you stand the heat and the wind, plunked down in the dust like that? The nomadic life, it's no paradise, you know. It's no kind of life, really. The air. It's very thin. Dry too.

[She plunks down next to PANGAEA and opens the jug. She offers it a swig.]

DE LANDA

No? I'm parched. I am always thirsty. Constantly thirsty. It's the one constant on the road. Thirst. And boredom. No one to talk to. To highlight the points of interest. You're the first. It's just this map and then you have to wander around out here and hope you hit a landmark and then you think you see something, something real and big on the horizon, but it's just a mirage of something long gone. As soon as you get it within reach, the thing you thought you were looking at, that was moving right in front of you, or calling your name even, crumbles into dust. And it's nothing. I get there too late. An hour or two ago, I'd nearly given up, said to myself, "De Landa, everything's been discovered already. Time to pack it up. Pack it on up and head home. Daddy, you were right!" You don't know how to do that, do you? To get back to Pre-Columbia? [Beat.] No, I didn't think you did. I don't want to go home, anyway. I want to find something new first. So what's so special about this sinkhole? Was it a coliseum or a reservoir or a hot spring or something else entirely? Whatever it was, it's a sandbox now.

PANGAEA

[All mouths gasp open in a tear. Wheezing and croaking dust.]

AOOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAAAAOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAA.

DE LANDA

There we are. I thought a cat had your tongue or something.

PANGAEA

OOOOOO—

DE LANDA

O. Oh. O.

[DE LANDA deciphers Pangaëa's oratory, as Raleigh taught her.]

PANGAEA

OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO.

[DE LANDA turns just in time to see EBU.]

DE LANDA

Uh-Oh.

EBU

Vide! The Stray! Here she is, that feral moggy. She thought she'd escaped but I got her cornered.

[In a disturbingly violent struggle, EBU grabs the little girl DE LANDA as she kicks and screams and scratches, and grabs onto the dinosaur continent. PANGAEA opens its arms to her, and holds on, but EBU is too strong for old arms and limbs. Still his one red right hand is not enough, so he lets go of his own Sack of History and he rips DE LANDA from her most recent discovery.]

[EBU sacks the Stray, and stops to rest in the wind, then picks up (by mistake or coincidence) DE LANDA's sack, containing the letter to her father. The dust storm returns, wiping out the circles in the sand, covering over the Sack of History containing DE LANDA (and the collective weight of history). PANGAEA experiences continental drift in the absence of DE LANDA.]

PART III. Ground Zero

Ants and Actors.

Location: A Depression in a Sandbox in Paris, Texas

Characters:

Tinker

Biddle

TINK

I stayed up all night guarding the universe from ruin. And the sand crept in everywhere but I weathered it all, puckered my lips and shut my eyes fast, but the dust kept pelting my skin and I heard the truth of this place. The sand and the wind together last night they clamoured in my ears and mouth and nose and eyes, galled me with all the great moments past, right here, Biddle-Barrow.

BIDDLE

In a sandbox.

TINK

Especially in a sandbox.

BIDDLE

And?

TINK

Well...It's not the kind of story we play, Biddle. It's— it's confused. It might be sad, but I don't know for sure. It might be funny but I can't tell that either. There's violence. Lots of it. Lots of twists and turns and peaks and valleys. Several places but they look exactly alike. I don't know if it can ever be told.

BIDDLE

If it's the truth, it's got to be told, Tinker.

TINK

I don't think you'll like your part, Biddle.

BIDDLE

How will I know if I never try it?

TINK

And, the last bit. I don't think you'll like the last bit. There are hundreds of characters. I told you it doesn't make any sense.

BIDDLE

Try.

TINK

You won't use it against me later? Trample me to death with another entrance if you decide it's dumb?

BIDDLE

Never.

TINK

Well, Biddle-Barrow. The truth of it is—

BIDDLE

Yes—go on.

TINK

Don't rush me Biddle-Barrow. It took a long time for the sand to settle. A second for you to destroy it. It'll take a long time to put the parts together. This sandbox is teeming with stories. Lost empires. Final showdowns. Tragic last stands.

BIDDLE

Princes, warriors, knights.

TINKER

And a little girl, Biddle. There was a little girl in the sand. I heard her.

BIDDLE

In this handful of dust, Tinker?

TINK

Buried deep down. And revolutionaries, murderers, patriots, thieves, capitalists, rapists, copycats, monsters, traitors, fathers, mothers, husbands, wives. And twins. Two brothers.

BIDDLE

Brothers?

TINK

You borrow this stage for just a moment from the hordes of teeny tiny ants come before you.

BIDDLE

Ants?

TINK

Ants.

BIDDLE

I don't like ants.

TINK

"Actors" then. Actors making subtle entrances and exits.

BIDDLE

Men of action.

TINK

And more, Biddle. Boys do more than just that. Give yourself a bit of credit. I've seen you play a lot of other roles. And well too.

BIDDLE

It sounds fantastic.

TINKER

No, it's very very real, Biddle, very very real. Real real.

BIDDLE

I am sorry for destroying the universe Tinker. I'll build another one!

TINK

What's done is done.

BIDDLE

Still, I'm sorry.

[Beat.]

TINK

No. No matter. It's just a sandbox. Just a sandbox. And that's all.

BIDDLE

Tinker.

TINK

Yes, Biddle-Barrow.

BIDDLE

You're sitting on something.

TINK

The ground, Biddle-Barrow.

BIDDLE

No, I mean, there's something sticking out, from your bum.

TINKER

Crass, Biddle-Barrow.

[He starts to dig furiously in the sand around her. She topples over as he pulls an enormous sack from out of the ground.]

TINK

What is it, Biddle-Barrow?

BIDDLE

Should we open it? What all is in there, do you think?

[From the sack there are several voices, but no movement: Hey! Let me out! Sic Semper Tyrannis! Meeeeooooow! Fore-score and seven years ago...Duncan is in his grave. Who here does not know Pescara? Who am I touching? It's Long Turd and White Man Runs Him! Someone whistling "Dixie." A verse or two of "La Marseillaise," particularly sanglant. Et tu, Brute? A Southerner is a scavenger, a parasite, and a contagion.]

[DE LANDA discovers herself inside the Sack of History and all its subsequent re-enactments, collected and recollected. It looks a lot like a theatre in there.]

Awful Event.

Location: Outside the Theatre, in the Capital City inside the Sack

Characters:

The Column of Yankee Scribblers:

Messenger from the Secretary of War

Cobbler

Columnist from *The New York Times*

Editorialist from *The New York Times*

Contributing Editor from *The New York Times*

The Gossip of Keening Belles

De Landa

[Outside Ford's Theatre, in the City of Washington, shortly after THE AWFUL EVENT. The MESSENGER from the SECRETARY OF WAR pounds thrice upon the boards to test their soundness, and indicates the weak spots upon which the COBBLER must focus his hammer. The COLUMNIST, pursued by the EDITORIALIST, goes about the work of pounding out the day's headlines, providing a eulogy for the closure of an American theatre. The COBBLER goes about pounding nails into loose boards, covering all the cracks in the floor, every open and drafty window draped in black mourning crape.]

COLUMNIST

AWFUL EVENT.

President Lincoln

Shot by an

Assassin.

**The Deed Done at Ford's
Theatre Last Night.**

THE ACT OF A DESPERATE REBEL

**The President Still Alive at
Last Accounts**

COLUMNIST (*cont.*)

**No Hopes Entertained of His
Recovery**

**Attempted Assassination of
Secretary Seward.**

DETAILS OF THE DREADFUL TRAGEDY¹

[Enter CONTRIBUTING EDITOR with a message for the COLUMNIST's eyes only.]

COLUMNIST

**IMPORTANT UPDATE! ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT LINCOLN. SHOT AT THE
THEATRE LAST EVENING. PLUS, SECRETARY SEWARD DAGGERED IN HIS BED.**

[A funeral dirge, a murder of crows—no it's a gossip of keening women—lands,
gathers, and feeds off the carrion flesh of a morose moment. But then—]

COLUMNIST

ESCAPE OF ALLEGED ASSASSIN, J. Wilkes Booth, the ACTOR.

[A communal swoon for the actor, John Wilkes Booth. Not dead? Where is he?
Will he be performing in another show? I saw his Phidias two years ago. He's
exotic, isn't he. A desperado, a Romeo, a great tragedian! From a window yet to
be boarded up, the head of the Editorialist, spotting his readership at the base of
Ford's. But the gaggle disperses in bunches throughout the EDITORIALIST's
column— they like gossip, but not this vitriolic. Yes, they've had enough of that.]

¹ Courtesy of the "Awful Event" in *The New York Times* (15 April 1865).

EDITORIALIST

Meet the Desperate Rebel and Others Like Him! A Southerner is a scavenger, a parasite, and a contagion, whose sole industry is the magnification and amplification of minor slights and dustups. An ant, collecting grains of salt and sand and making mountains out of hills, craters out of potholes. Where there are ways in, entrances, nooks and crannies, tunnels, they find them. Where there are ways out, exits, they know well and scurry. The Southern cause is always there under the floorboards, in the traproom, waiting to spring or be sprung. Seek and you shall find! You will find them lurking in the darker recesses, secret passages, and shady spaces which harbour nightcrawlers and skeleton keys and *banditi* and fugitives and ragpickers, among others. Ever opportunistic and adept and finding and occupying negative space, one might even find them sprouting between cracks in the sidewalk at the slightest ray of light and drop of rain. Pokeweed, poison sumac, honeysuckle, pigweed, stinking sweetly.

COLUMNIST

INTENSE EXCITEMENT IN WASHINGTON. Plus, The Scene at the Deathbed of President Lincoln. Mary Todd said to be clothed in mourning, her heart a chamber of death, a wife veiled – in tears.

MESSENGER from the SECRETARY OF WAR

Following the Awful Event of April 14, 1865, Ford's Theatre is now officially CLOSED, by order of the secretary of war. Save for a one-off performance, for federal eyes only, a reconstruction of the Southern Crime to be performed tonight at 8 pm sharp. No stragglers, and NO LATE SEATING. No sitting of any kind! No disruptions, no entr'actes, no spontaneous applause. All will go off, exactly as it went off on the awful evening of that awful day in that awful April in our nation's capital. The Discovery of the Truth depends upon the accurate play of events.

[The last nail in the coffin of the American Theatre sounds and echoes. The women have abandoned the American Theatre in the Capital. All save one— DE LANDA.]

DE LANDA

[To the MESSENGER.] I would like a ticket to the re-enactment of the Awful Event please.

MESSENGER from THE SECRETARY OF WAR

You're sure you want to attend? It's a rather bloody affair. A rather long one, too. At times, it can get repetitive.

DE LANDA

But it's an accurate portrayal, of the history, just as it was? It's the real thing?

MESSENGER from the SECRETARY OF WAR
It's the realest, sharpest plot ever staged. Everything in it is true.

DE LANDA
But is it dangerous?

MESSENGER from the SECRETARY OF WAR
What do you mean?

DE LANDA
Is it dangerous, I mean. To be in the audience.

MESSENGER from the SECRETARY OF WAR
Oh, there is no audience, girl.

DE LANDA
No audience?

MESSENGER from the SECRETARY OF WAR
At Ford's Theatre in the Capital City, one *lives history*.

DE LANDA
You *make* history!

MESSENGER from the SECRETARY OF WAR
We *re-enact* history, as it once was, just that way. We only perform the cold hard truth.

DE LANDA
That's even better, I think, because I am writing a book about that very subject, though I seem to have lost it—

MESSENGER from the SECRETARY OF WAR
You're willing to live history, to discover it and perform it, just as it was?

DE LANDA
Yes.

MESSENGER from the SECRETARY OF WAR
To perform your part—whatever it might be— and be true to character, as set out by Order of the Secretary of War, and not to stray from the script? Even if it gets messy?

DE LANDA
Yes.

MESSENGER from the SECRETARY OF WAR
Or depressing?

DE LANDA
Absolutely.

MESSENGER from the SECRETARY OF WAR
Or stale?

DE LANDA
Well—

MESSENGER from the SECRETARY OF WAR
Well, welcome to the Theatre of History, little girl. I hope you enjoy the show.

[Curtains, or is it just the sack, open wide, revealing the interior of a museum theatre.]

Reconstruction of the Crime (or Closing Night of *Our American Cousin*).

Location: Backstage at Ford's Theatre, Reconstructed inside the Sack

Characters:

The Re-Enactors of *Our American Cousin*²:

Inspector-Director

Souffleur

The Pit Orchestra

Johnny Reb (De Landa)

The Presidential Person (Deputy Davis)

Madame Muzzy (Mrs. Mountchessington or Mrs. M.)

Miss Trueman (Augusta)

Harry Hawk (Asa Trenchard)

Little Girl

[THE PIT ORCHESTRA finishes humming the closing bars of "Hail to the Chief," the song which interrupted Lord Dundreary's telling Laura Keane why a dog wags its tail, when President Lincoln entered the Presidential Box. The onstage players [MRS. M., ASA, AUGUSTA] are in their places, unseen, because we are watching the house and the backstage spaces.]

INSPECTOR-DIRECTOR

Do not stand, or move from your post unless called upon to do so. Do not eat or drink or take any kind of photographs during the performance – the flash resembles gunfire, and there will be only one shot allowed on this particular evening. Let's begin.

Souffleur!

SOUFFLEUR

"People sometimes look a great way off" —

MRS. MOUNTCHESSINGTON

"People sometimes look a great way off, for that which is near at hand."

INSPECTOR-DIRECTOR

Can we take it back once more, to "People sometimes look a great way off."

MRS. M.

Of course. "People sometimes look a great way off, for that which is near at hand."

² All quoted dialogue comes from the 1869 edition of Tom Taylor's *Our American Cousin* (Act III, sc. 2).

SOUFFLEUR

"You don't mean, Miss Gusta."

ASA

Yes yes I know. "You don't mean, Miss Gusta. Now, don't look at me in that way. I can't stand it, if you do, I'll bust." [*To the Inspector up in the Presidential Box.*] That's. That's exactly what I said to her.

INSPECTOR-DIRECTOR

Continue.

MRS. M

"Oh, if you only knew how refreshing this ingenuousness of yours is to an old woman of the world like me."

INSPECTOR-DIRECTOR

HOLD! Yes yes yes. And did anyone laugh at this point?

MRS. M.

A few, but Harry has the punch line.

INSPECTOR-DIRECTOR

There was a pause in action, then, at that point?

MRS. M.

I suppose. But not for very long.

INSPECTOR-DIRECTOR

If you were to put a time on it.

MRS. M.

2 seconds maybe.

INSPECTOR-DIRECTOR

Noted. A 2-second delay on "an old woman of the world like me." From where you left off, Madame Muzzy.

SOUFFLEUR

"Be you an old woman of the world?"

MRS. M.

"Yes, sir."

AUGUSTA

"Oh yes."

ASA

"Well I don't doubt it in the least. [*Aside.*] This gal and the old woman are trying to get me on a string. [*Aloud.*] Wal, then, if a roughspun fellow like me was to come forward as a suitor for your daughter's hand, you wouldn't treat me as some folks do, when they find out I wasn't heir to the fortune."

MRS. M.

"Not heir to the fortune, Mr. Trenchard?"

ASA

"Oh, no."

AUGUSTA

"What, no fortune?"

ASA

"Nary red, it all comes to their barkin' up the wrong tree about the old man's property."

MRS. M.

"Which he left to you."

ASA

"Oh, no."

INSPECTOR-DIRECTOR

How are we on time, Deputy Davis?

PRESIDENTIAL PERSON

30 seconds, give or take, until Booth's entrance into the box.

INSPECTOR-DIRECTOR

30 seconds til the President is shot. Souffleur.

SOUFFLEUR

yes

INSPECTOR-DIRECTOR

Souffleur?

SOUFFLEUR

YES!

INSPECTOR-DIRECTOR

You must speak up. Move us along to the next laugh line.

SOUFFLEUR

[To Asa] "YOU BOTH LOOK TICKLED TO DEATH."

ASA

Yes. "You both look tickled to death. Now, some gals, and mothers would go away from a fellow when they found that out, but you don't valley fortune, Miss Gusty?"

MRS. M.

[*Aside, to AUGUSTA.*] "My love, you had better go."

ASA

"You crave affection, you do. Now I've no fortune, but I'm filling over with affections which I'm ready to pour out all over you like apple sass, over roast pork."

INSPECTOR-DIRECTOR

That is the filthiest thing I've heard yet—

MRS. M.

"Mr. Trenchard, you will please recollect you are addressing my daughter, and in my presence."

INSPECTOR-DIRECTOR

And mine!

ASA

"Yes, I'm offering her my heart and hand just as she wants them with nothing in 'em."

MRS. M.

"Augusta, dear, to your room."

AUGUSTA

"Yes, ma, the nasty beast." [*Exit R., but entering our scene.*]

MRS. M.

"I am aware, Mr. Trenchard, you are not used to the manners of good society, and that, alone, will excuse the impertinence of which you have been guilty."

ASA

"Don't know the manners of good society, eh? Well, I guess I know enough to turn you inside out, old gal--you sockdologizing old man-trap."

INSPECTOR-DIRECTOR

Hold!

ASA

"Wal, now, when I think what I've thrown away in hard cash to-day I'm apt to call myself some awful hard names, 400,000 dollars is a big pile for a man to light his cigar with."

INSPECTOR-DIRECTOR

Hold!

ASA

"If that gal had only given me herself in exchange, it wouldn't have been a bad bargain. But I dare no more ask that gal to be my wife, than I dare ask Queen Victoria to dance a Cape Cod reel."

[FLORENCE leaves our scene and enters the unseen onstage action.]

INSPECTOR-DIRECTOR

Hold, I said.

FLORENCE

[Unseen but onstage.] "What do you mean by doing all these dreadful things?"

INSPECTOR-DIRECTOR

Stop! Johnny!

DE LANDA

Yes Inspector-Director.

INSPECTOR-DIRECTOR

You missed your cue.

DE LANDA

I — do you want me to actually pull the trigger?

INSPECTOR-DIRECTOR

It wouldn't be a re-enactment otherwise.

DE LANDA

Ok.

INSPECTOR-DIRECTOR

Well then. Let's get on with it. [*To the actors.*] I'd like to go back to the moment in the Presidential Box. The "sockdologizing old man trap."

[The scene shifts. What was unseen is now visible to the naked eye. What was visible is now heard. We see three sides of the Presidential Box—inside it, outside it, and what was visible from the Box—the stage.]

INSPECTOR-DIRECTOR

[*Now unseen.*] Johnny, are you ready outside the door?

DE LANDA

[*From behind the door.*] Yes, I've got my eye to the peephole.

INSPECTOR-DIRECTOR

Thank you, Johnny. Wait behind the door, and then, creep slowly, with stealth, up the stairs, exactly as Booth did on the evening of April 14th.

DE LANDA

Sure thing.

PRESIDENTIAL PERSON

Is it known if President Lincoln found the sockdologizing old man trap line amusing?

MRS. M

[*Onstage.*] Is it important?

INSPECTOR-DIRECTOR

It's important to know whether his head was tilted back in a guffaw when he was shot. The angle, Madame, it's all about the angle of entry.

PRESIDENTIAL PERSON

Indeed.

INSPECTOR-DIRECTOR

Deputy Davis! What did First Lady Lincoln say in her testimony to you about Lincoln's reaction to the line just before the moment of his death?

PRESIDENTIAL PERSON

[*Checking the record.*] We arrived a bit late, after the first act, and went up the back stairsthen into the Presidential Box, lovely so lovely the decorations and the portrait of George Washington was such a lovely addition....and the Turkish carpets were so rich...and— heard fireworks outside or onstage and I stood to get a better luck....the President shot, Sergeant Rathbone sliced through the wrist, and Clara screaming and trembling at my skirts. No, she only recounts her own experience of the event, Inspector-Director.

INSPECTOR-DIRECTOR

Well, perhaps we can try it both ways then. Presidential Person? Davis! Are you ready?

PRESIDENTIAL PERSON

Yes sir, seated and ready for impact.

INSPECTOR-DIRECTOR

Johnny?

DE LANDA

Sir. I'm still behind the peephole.

INSPECTOR-DIRECTOR

Very good. Asa— please go back to just before the “sockdologizing old man trap” bit.

[*DE LANDA begins the slow creep toward the PRESIDENTIAL PERSON, the largest gun ever held by a little girl trembling in her fingers.*]

ASA

“Don't know the manners of good society, eh? Well, I guess I know enough to turn you inside out, old gal--you sockdologizing old man-trap.”

PRESIDENTIAL PERSON

Har har har har ha—

INSPECTOR-DIRECTOR

Johnny!

[DE LANDA fires for real real, making the largest bang ever heard before in the theatre. The PRESIDENTIAL PERSON slumps in his chair.]

DE LANDA

[Still holding the smoking gun and whispering the line.] "Sic semper tyrannis..."

[Outside of the sack, in the desert, a LITTLE GIRL is running for her life. Then, as soon as she appeared, she is gone.]

The Bait and Switch: The Other Sack.

Location: The Desert Outside Paris, Texas

Characters:

Vide

Ebu

De Landa's Diary and Map

[Enter EBU, with the sack in hand, dragging in a line through the sand. VIDE is where he left her.]

VIDE

I am remembering the orphans afterward. I think those little boys just wanted a mummy and daddy, Ebu. They seemed like a perfect following after we done decapitated the Berber, caught the Stray after she betrayed us. I think they wanted someone to teach them how to act, how to invent, and how to kill. Isn't that what anyone wants?

EBU

It's time Vide. You can watch me do it or you can do it yourself. But she's in here, waiting for you if you want to finish what we started. *[VIDE hesitates.]* We have history to make! Grand Acts! Starting now. Here she is. In the sack. You can make your mark on history or you can die off in the desert, a nobody, and everyone will disremember you. And your flesh and your blood and your bones won't mean nothing to nobody, not even me.

VIDE

Nothing?

EBU

Nothing.

[VIDE hesitates. EBU pulls out a derringer pistol, the same used to kill Lincoln, perhaps, and hands it to her. She approaches the sack, tosses it open, and aims—]

VIDE

But she ain't in the sack. Ebu, none of it, is in the sack.

EBU

Nonsense, Vide I caught her myself. Stop stalling and get back to the killing. I'm waiting. Paris is waiting. History is waiting—

VIDE

[*She pulls out a book.*] Ebu. What's this?

EBU

A book. What else do you think it might be?

VIDE

A book?

EBU

Are we in it? Martelle Lavidangeureuse. Peerpoint L'Eboueur. Known to some as Ebu and Vide.

VIDE

[*She flips through in search of their names.*] Oh, Ebu. No. No mention of us at all. Only. Only mention of the tyrants we done in. Chapter One...Daddies, berbers, old crooked architects. And it's all wrote down here by a little girl. She's all over the pages, talking about the real world, and— the Revolution! Ebu, she is claiming, here on page six, our Cause as her own....

EBU

And taking all the credit?

[*Beat.*]

VIDE

Do you think it's the Stray?

EBU

What's the name of the scribbler?

VIDE

De Landa the girl is called.

EBU

What was the Stray's name?

VIDE

I don't remember, Ebu. We've been calling her the Stray so long I thought that was her name.

[EBU digs into the sack once more and pulls out a map.]

EBU

[Unrolling it on the sand.] The Stray is crafty. She may have dozens of names, who can be sure? But she's only got one life. One body. And it's flesh and blood and bone. And look at this map, Vide. Who's walking round in the desert with map of the Capital all laid out in grand avenues to rival Rome, numbered and lettered streets, quaint overlooks like Versailles. Everything laid out as it once was under the Berber. Who else, Vide?

VIDE

I don't know. Who?

EBU

The Stray, Vide.

VIDE

The Stray! Trying to steal our glory. Stealing the sack from us, from all the Parisians, really, and trying to ride into the Capital and take all the credit. I'll show her, Ebu. Gimme a match and we'll see who takes the credit for the Berber.

EBU

No, Vide. We gotta kill her in the flesh and blood and bone if we want to take the credit. Killing her in print is for sissies and little boys. We're Ebu and Vide, the Renegade Re-enactors of Paris, Texas. We live and write history by the knife, or the gun, or the guillotine. No piece of paper can undo what we done.

[A flicker of a map on the horizon, or is it the body of a girl?]

VIDE

Shh. Someone's coming.

PART IV. The Lay of the Land

On the Outside: Stray Marks.

Location: On the Edge of El Dorado, Texas

Characters:

Rémy

Reyes

[Another kind of body politic takes the space formerly occupied by the dinosaur continent, PANGAEA. RÉMY and REYES, caught in a handshake that looks like a death grip, face-à-face. RÉMY catches a glimpse of REYES' wrist.]

RÉMY

How did that happen?

REYES

What.

RÉMY

That mark.

REYES

Which one?

RÉMY

On your forearm.

REYES

You mean on your forearm. Like claw marks or fingernails.

RÉMY

No, I don't have a scar like that.

REYES

[Offering a proposal.] Rémy and Reyes: Kings of the Urban-Suburban Oasis. Kings of California!

RÉMY

Just one small change. Just a small one.

REYES

What is that?

RÉMY

The name.

REYES

The name?

RÉMY

Something more authentic. More original. More California.

REYES

More California?

REMY

Try this on. Wait for it. The Reyes Brothers.

REYES

Kings of California...Incorporated!

RÉMY

Genius. [*RÉMY takes REYES' hat with his free hand and crowns himself.*] Well Reyes.

REYES

Yes Reyes. [*Reyes takes back the hat and re-crowns himself.*]

RÉMY

[*RÉMY pulls a crumpled hat out of his pocket and crowns himself himself.*] I look forward to working with you, *mon frère*.

REYES

Should we rest for a minute or two? We've been at it for hours.

RÉMY

Tired of bargaining already?

REYES

I'm not tired. But you looked like you could use a break.

RÉMY

Did I?

REYES

Yes. You looked like you were straining.

RÉMY

Fine.

REYES

Fine. Release on three. One. Two. Three—

[RÉMY holds past three, twists REYES' arm in a Californian Burn, then releases REYES with a chuckle. REYES rubs his tender forearm.]

RÉMY

Told you there was a mark.

REYES

Real professional, partner.

RÉMY

We're brothers, Reyes. Prefer a Wet Willy?

REYES

I hate Wetness. Of all kinds. I—I—I—

RÉMY

Not again, Reyes. *[He clunks him on the head. REYES continues to stutter.]*

Meet the Desperate Rebel and Others Like Him!

Location: Later on in the Presidential Box inside the Sack

Characters:

Ragpicker

Girl (De Landa)

Lincoln's Ghost / Booth's Daemon

Little Boy

[It looks a good deal like 1893 in the Run-Down, but Ultimately Authentic Replica of The Presidential Box at Ford's Theatre, draped in stars and stripes. Behind the flag, behind the door, a girl (DE LANDA) and a RAGPICKER are peeking through the peephole carved into the wood of the door by John Wilkes Booth in 1865. From inside the box, whispers of the song "Dixie" (as if chimed by a music box) playing for someone who can hear the tune for what it is, or once was. "Dixie" finds a little girl. Or she finds it.]

RAGPICKER

[From the other side of the door.] A bit of cloth, or a piece or two of a rocker, if there are any left. Maybe a scrap of yellow wallpaper, but get the pieces stained brown like with old blood because they are worth twice as much, even if it's just cricket juice, or tobaccer or rust or what have you. Take what you can carry, whatever ain't nailed down.

DE LANDA

But if there's someone in there. Something or someone. Singing or whistling a tune. We could come back later.

RAGPICKER

It'll all be gone by then, girl. All the bits of bone and lace and wool, all the Presidential relics will have been taken by other little children. No bits of Honest Abe or the desperate rebel Booth left. And who will be whining when there's no molasses for the biscuits, no ham in the collards, when there's no salt in the larder, no shortening for the bread? Now. You best go in now.

DE LANDA

Or you could go in, daddy, scare off whoever is in there, and I'll follow, behind you, and with the sack.

RAGPICKER

Can't fit, can't fit through that itty bitty peephole, little girl, carved there into the wood by the desperate rebel hisself. Sides if there is someone in there carrying on or carrying a tune or what have you, then, if he sees a full grown man in there monkeying around, he's more likely take a shot at him than at an itty bitty little girl. Men don't fire at little girls, least not intentionally. Ain't that the truth.

DE LANDA

I guess but—.

RAGPICKER

So. There's no body in there, girl, no how, whistling "Dixie." No one dares whistle "Dixie" these days. The theatre's closed, doors is shut, building's condemned. For near 30 years now. Ever since "THE AWFUL EVENT."

DE LANDA

[*Beat.*] But I hear like the sound of "Dixie" coming from out of the box.

RAGPICKER

It's the wind whispering in the flies, through the cracks in the boards.

DE LANDA

Or it's the ghosts, the ghosts of old Abe Lincoln and the great tragedian John Wilkes Booth.

[*RAGPICKER shoves DE LANDA through the itty bitty hole in the Presidential box, and pushes an empty sack in behind her.*]

RAGPICKER

Well? What all is in there, girl?

DE LANDA

Nothing.

RAGPICKER

[*Placing his head and eyeball to the peephole.*] What you mean by nothing?

DE LANDA

I mean there ain't a thing in here looks like anything you or I might recognize as a relic. No traces of what went on or off. No bits of skull. No bullet, hand-made, from a Derringer pistol stuck into the wallpaper. No wallpaper even, it's scraped off in thin strips.

RAGPICKER

By other little ones with nimble fingers got here before you, that's the truth of it,
the long and the short—

DE LANDA

It's picked clean. But "Dixie," don't you hear it?

RAGPICKER

No.

DE LANDA

It's getting louder. Closer.

RAGPICKER

Get out of there. Come back in through the other side of the hole, girl.

DE LANDA

But I can hear them loud and clear. I hear a concert.

[DE LANDA pulls and Old Glory parts, revealing a rude mechanical upon a revolving platform. A man caught in the paroxysm of radical schizophrenia, the Southern menace, a Divided Man with a Revolutionary Platform, but also a man with a top hat containing a derringer pistol, standing on a compass spinning for true North, but finding South more often than not.]

DE LANDA

Uh-oh.

LINCOLN'S GHOST

[Speaking a delightfully morose poem of his own design.]

"I hear the lone survivors tell
How nought from death could save,
Till every sound appears a knell,
And every spot a grave.

I range the fields with pensive tread,
And pace the hollow rooms;
And feel (companions of the dead)
I'm living in the tombs."³

³ Borrowed from "My Childhood – Home I See Again: First Canto" (Lincoln 4).

[The platform revolves, and BOOTH'S DAEMON appears.]

BOOTH'S DAEMON

[Speaking text from his diary.] "This country is not what it was. This forced union is not what I have loved. I struck boldly and not as the papers say."⁴ [To the GIRL.] "Once upon a time there was a sculptor named Pygmalion. This sculptor fell in love with his statue; here is a story everyone believes because it is false."⁵ Once upon a time there was a tragic actor named John Wilkes Booth who fell in love with Johnny Reb, with Phidias, with Brutus, and with Pescara the Apostate. Here is a story no one believes because it is true.

[Applause from DE LANDA.]

BOOTH'S DAEMON

The Marble Heart, or Les filles du marbre as they called it in Paris. A Melodrama in 5 Acts. Phidias the sculptor falls in love with the marble women he creates, the women he brings to life with his own sweat and sinew. At the end of the play, the sculptor goes mad and dies. Here is a story no one believes because it is true.⁶ When one lives for the theatre, dies in the theatre, believes heart and soul in the last *coup de théâtre*, his every role finds a place in the afterlife of his soul. A man will forever be everything he is from his last great act to his last gasp of breath.

On opening night at Ford's Theatre in the District of Columbia, off-stage and in the privacy of my dressing room, I receive a carte-de-visite from none other than Abraham Lincoln. An avid theatre goer, an admiring fan. Written in wide, sprawling characters: the President wishes to meet Phidias in the flesh. But I, the sculptor's impersonator, simply remove my stage makeup and decline the invitation.

[The dialogue of history turns toward LINCOLN'S GHOST.
He recites a bit from his favourite play, from memory.]

LINCOLN'S GHOST

"Duncan is in his grave.
After life's fitful fever he sleeps well;
Treason has done its worst; not steel nor poison,
Malice domestic, foreign levy, nothing
Can touch him further."⁷

[A demi-turn as he removes the top hat and revolves into...]

⁴ Stolen from Booth's diary, published May 22, 1867, in the *New York Times* as "The Diary of John Wilkes Booth.; An Officially Certified Copy."

⁵ Translated from Act I, sc. 6, *Les filles du marbre: drame en cinq actes* (1853), Barrière and Thiboust 43.

⁶ *Les filles du marbre: drame en cinq actes* (1853).

⁷ From Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, Act III, sc. 2.

BOOTH'S DAEMON

I have his hands and his voice and his charisma, all the papers agree.

DE LANDA

Whose?

BOOTH'S DAEMON

The father Junius Brutus has given his gift to each of his sons, Edwin and John Wilkes. In Boston, Philadelphia, New Orleans, Cincinnati, the Capital they have long loved the Booths.

DE LANDA

Are you really the Southern actor Booth? Are you "the Desperate Rebel"?

BOOTH'S DAEMON

Oh, I have not been upon a battlefield, but I have seen the destruction, as a peregrinating player, I have seen the Yankee performances in the South. There is the theatre of war and there is the theatre, and I will make the former into the latter. Or the latter into the former. "Good Friday, *Ti amo*, April 13th, the Ides."⁸ Come look through the barrel and see what I see. Save the Southern Cause and look. How he holds your future in verses crammed and hid beneath his hat.

[Coming full circle as he pulls the pistol out of his hat, dons the top hat again, and points the Derringer at his chin, and revolves into...]

LINCOLN'S GHOST

"I hear the lone survivors tell
How nought from death could save,
Till every sound appears a knell,
And every spot a grave."

BOOTH'S DAEMON

[The barrel is pointed at DE LANDA.] See what I see.

DE LANDA

I'm trying. Please, Mr. Booth. Don't shoot.

⁸ Stolen from Booth's diary, published in "The Diary of John Wilkes Booth; An Officially Certified Copy," 22 May 1867.

BOOTH'S DAEMON

It's too late for mercy. A thousand bones in the trenches of Antietam. Thousands of weeping widows, clutching kerchiefs and daguerreotypes. Come look in the peephole at what has been done, the unchronicled Yankee performances. Look through and see what I see, from North to South, the death train rattles through, driven by men in top hats with carpet bags, all straight and sour faces, fine upstanding characters in black and white. Watch – it stops at cities draped in mourning crape along the way, stealing away the weeping widows, once crying for husbands, brothers, fathers lost, now shed their tears for the man who murdered them. The Southern shame. Look away, look away, look away, Dixieland.

[Revolving into LINCOLN'S GHOST.]

LINCOLN'S GHOST

"I range the fields with pensive tread,
And pace the hollow rooms;
And feel (companions of the dead)
I'm living in the tombs."

BOOTH'S DAEMON

You bleed, you bled your blood. Your loss you lost, you lose. You cannot grieve in an hour of Celebration, of Illumination! Light the lights! Strike up the band! Candles in every window, dripping the bloody wax of victory. Hail the Conquering Hero! Sing it out at full voice.

(The mechanism sticks, halfway between North and South. LINCOLN and BOOTH, together, LINCOLN is holding gun on BOOTH, or BOOTH on LINCOLN, and it must go off.)

LINCOLN'S GHOST/BOOTH'S DAEMON

[Alternating lines and personae in the singing of "Dixie."]

*I wish I was in the land of cotton, old times there are not forgotten,
Look away, look away, look away, Dixie Land.
In Dixie Land where I was born, early on a frosty morning
Look away, look away, look away, Dixie Land
Then I wish I was in Dixie, hooray! Hooray!
In Dixie Land I'll take my stand to live and die in Dixie
Away, away, away down South in Dixie
Away, away, away down South in Dixie!*

BOOTH'S DAEMON

Meet the Desperate Rebel—

LINCOLN'S GHOST

— and others like him! A Southerner is a scavenger, a parasite, and a contagion—

[*LINCOLN'S GHOST grabs hold of the girl.*]

BOOTH

[*As PESCARA.*] "What is it I behold? Don't look upon me as if you had never beheld my face. I am Pescara— you have not to learn what Count Pescara is."⁹

DE LANDA

Sit me down, I am begging you.

LINCOLN'S GHOST

Declare your confederate sympathies. Mary Surrat, did you or did you not conspire, with the rebel Booth, the German Azerodt, the alias Payne to murder in cold blood our Presidential Person?

DE LANDA

No!

BOOTH'S DAEMON

[*As PESCARA.*] "Whoever wronged me that did not perish? I had come to greet you, and as I passed, the rascal rabble talked of some wild dotard vow, some grey-beard's folly. I seized a wretch that dared to slander you, and dashed him to the earth for the vile falsehood."¹⁰ [*As BOOTH.*] Look through the peephole, the peephole of history, and what do you see? A theatre, shut up, boarded up, the actors, giving a last show, a Northern reconstruction of actual events, for an assembly of constables, red white and yankee blue, a final hurrah for Ms. Laura Keane, the thousandth and first up to the "sockdologizing old man trap" when the Desperate Rebel makes her entrance and—
BANG!

[*The toppling of the head of state, the execution of the desperate rebel, achieved in a single schizophrenic suicidal bang. BOOTH'S DAEMON / LINCOLN'S GHOST slumps over and continues to spin. The lid falls on the Music Box.*]

[*Outside the sack, in the desert, a LITTLE BOY is running for his life.*]

⁹ Sheil 10; Act I, sc. 3 of *The Apostate* (1817).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

A Coronation.

Location: Outside of El Dorado, Texas.

Characters:

Rémy

Reyes

REYES

I-I-I-I. [*RÉMY delivers one last big fisted clunk to the head.*] I'm sorry. I was remembering El Dorado.

RÉMY

Well, remember it somewhere else, Reyes. You can remember it in Paris. [*Beat.*] Can I tell you a thing?

REYES

Depends.

RÉMY

On.

REYES

Whether it's you telling me a thing to do, or telling me of a thing.

RÉMY

It's just a secret of mine. Brothers should always share secrets.

REYES

If it brings us closer, I'm all ears.

RÉMY

I used to hang cats.

REYES

You don't say.

RÉMY

Check out the scar [*He proudly proffers his forearm, this time, now they are brothers.*]

REYES

Wow. By what method?

RÉMY

By the neck, by the fur, by the leg, whatever I could grab hold of.

REYES

All good ways, that's for sure.

RÉMY

Or sometimes I'd roast them over a spit, or pull at their hair to hear them yowl, or shave them like monks and then hang them for crimes against the state, because if you burn them, it's a crime against God. Or was it the other way round?

REYES

Did you ever try drowning kittens/

RÉMY

I never thought of that.

REYES

Cats hate water you know. Hate it.

RÉMY

I had no idea. But, and I think this makes up for the oversight, once I put them in a basket and strung them up on a flagpole and fired at them until every last one and fallen down splat on the sidewalk.

REYES

Why?

RÉMY

For high treason.

REYES

Genius. Was it legal?

RÉMY

All on the up-and-up. Fair trials. Every one had a long, legal, fair trial in Paris, Texas. Everyone agreed the sentencing was just.

REYES

They didn't protest? No letters of complaint, or angry voicemails?

RÉMY

A few. Not enough to matter. A few there, mostly from owners and petshops, saying "I'LL FUCKING KILL YOU YOU SON OF A FUCKING BITCH YOU— cat owners have filthy mouths you know—FUCKING SON OF A BITCH FOR KILLING MY FUCKING CAT YOU FUCKER." But other than that, we all felt justice prevailed.

REYES

We?

RÉMY

I had a bit of a following.

REYES

Did you? It's a far cry from nowadays.

RÉMY

I liked hanging cats. At least it had meaning. Nowadays, you have to kill people to kill people. Have to.

REYES

That's not as much fun. It's nothing new after all. I-I-I-I

RÉMY

[*Conking REYES on the head, once more.*] Killing people is still a good thing, Reyes, even though it's been done before. We'll be perfecting it. Stop thinking about El Dorado. You'll spoil it before we even have a chance to get there. [*RÉMY extends his hand. REYES leaves him hanging.*] Shall we proceed?

REYES

No. Killing people. I'm certain if people heard about something like that we'd get all sorts of letters. Phone calls too, probably. Faxes. Endless coversheets I'm sure.

RÉMY

There's no service now. No postal delivery. What's the risk?

REYES

They'd find other ways of letting us know it was frowned upon. They always do.

[Beat.]

RÉMY

People are resourceful. Look at the two of us.

REYES

We make do.

RÉMY

We do. [Beat.] I miss the cats. I do. It pains me to say it, but I'd give anything for a little fur to singe right now.

REYES

What are you always telling me, Reyes?

RÉMY

Don't look back, Reyes.

REYES

Right. Don't look back, Reyes. There's no sense looking back. I never look behind me, and—and this is important—I never cry anymore. Keep your eyes always to the front of your head, even when your mind wanders or the tongue trips up. Like you've got blinders on. Keep your chin drawn forward, power through. And if you get stuck, a brother will be there to push you.

RÉMY

I wish I had your resolve, Reyes. You say you *never* cry anymore?

REYES

Not since.

RÉMY

That's big for a man from El Dorado. Who lived through Total Exsanguination of every one of his brothers, uncles, even his father! Say. Maybe you could walk behind, Reyes, and then when I get the inkling to about-face, I'll see a friendly face instead. The face of a brother, and not the mangy cats and I won't be encouraged to chase delusions.

REYES

Then what'll I look at, Reyes, without the horizon, the future and El Dorado to look forward to?

RÉMY

Why, me, Reyes. Your brother. Or at least the back of me. You'll be able to look over my shoulder the whole way to El Dorado.

REYES

Then, you'll get there first.

RÉMY

Yes. I'll be the one who discovers El Dorado in Paris, Texas, and you'll be the one who makes El Dorado in Paris, Texas.

REYES

No.

RÉMY

No?

REYES

No I don't think I'd like that. Being behind. How about tops and bottoms.

RÉMY

What's that?

REYES

I'll stand on your shoulders and that way we'll both reach El Dorado at the same exact moment, and we can both discover it, together. Plus, that way we can both see where it is we're going and we're likely to see it earlier.

RÉMY

Two sets of eyes are better than one.

REYES

And brothers should support one another, Reyes.

RÉMY

And their biggest, wildest dreams. No matter what. *[REYES climbs atop RÉMY, and together, they head and feet toward El Dorado, the one in Paris, Texas.]*

REYES

Not too fast, Rémy. A little to the left. No, the right, the right.

RÉMY

Do you want to be the feet? Mine are blistering.

REYES

No, Reyes. Just remember El Dorado and that'll keep you going.

[A scaffold is being set up, and the sound of hammering and nails, and maybe, just maybe a song somewhere (in tone, if not melody) between "La Marseillaise," "Dixie," "John Brown's Body," and "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." A celebratory, nationalistic, yet revolutionary dirge, for kazoo.]

REYES

Do you hear that?

RÉMY

I hear something, but it's not something I want to walk toward, as it were. I-I-I—

REYES

Oh, Reyes. Now's no time to get stuck in Paris. We're on the edge of it...of something big. A cataclysm. And then, there it is! El Dorado.

RÉMY

Already?

REYES

[He jumps off of RÉMY's shoulders to get a closer look.] It's exactly the same as you described it. I'd recognize it anywhere. There.

RÉMY

Where?

REYES

There! There, where they're hanging all the little traitors, in preparation for our arrival! Holy fuck Reyes! We're here! El Dorado. Holy fuck! Attention Paris, Texas! El Dorado, Texas! The Kings of California are here to give you a future!

[RÉMY and REYES crouch down, top hat by top hat, in the sand to await the Total Exsanguination that will bring about the conditions for the construction of the Empire of El Dorado. They are welcome to watch over the next scene, if they can stand to look. The hammering continues just over the horizon.]

Total Exsanguination.

Location: A Sandbox in Paris, Texas

Characters:

Tinker (as Hangman)
Biddle-Barrow (as Confessor)
Little Girl
Little Boy

[A blood red moon rises. A scaffold cum puppet theatre cum itty bitty dollhouse. A song perfectly set to the scenario, somewhere (in tone, if not melody) between "La Marseillaise," "Dixie," "John Brown's Body," and "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." A celebratory, nationalistic, yet revolutionary dirge. TINK and BIDDLE behind the makeshift gallows and stage. Thirteen teeny tiny ragdolls float around the scaffold like wind chimes, manipulated from on high so high by the High Hangman and the Higher Confessor (TINK's right hand and BIDDLE's left, respectively.)]

TINK

What follows a discovery, my dear High Confessor?

BIDDLE

An Awful Event, High Hangman.

TINK

And what comes after that, High Confessor?

BIDDLE

A coronation, my high High Hangman.

TINK

And what follows a coronation, High Confessor?

BIDDLE

An assassination, my highest High Hangman.

TINK

What follows an assassination, High Confessor?

EBU

Why an execution, High Hangman.

TINK

And who is first to go, High Confessor?

EBU

All the boys with no last names, first.

TINK

One by one. All the boys with no last names and by their own accord too. Step up, come forward as I call out the names. Émile, Antoine, Alain, Toni, Rémy, Pierre, Jean-François, Jean-François, Jean-François (JF tout court), Jean-Jacques, Charles, Benoît, and Jean-François. Why, bad bad boys? Why did you do it? Why?

[*Silence.*]

High Confessor, if you will, the names of the dearly departed dead men, aloud, but solemn also.

BIDDLE

[*There is a solemn mourning tone after each dead family name.*] Émile Legrand. [*Bong.*]

TINK

Legrand? Really? Dead and gone?

BIDDLE

Émile Legrand, dead and dead. [*Bong.*] Antoine Boulanger. [*Bong.*] Alain Marseille. [*Bong.*] Toni Légglise. [*Bong.*] Rémy Leroy. [*Bong.*] Pierre Lefèbvre. [*Bong.*] Jean-François Leblanc. [*Bong.*] Jean-François Lerouge. [*Bong.*] Jean-François Lebleu (JF tout court). [*Bong.*] Jean-Jacques Corbeau. [*Bong.*] Charles Lambert. [*Bong.*] Benoît Laforge. [*Bong.*] Et Jean-François Rousseau. [*Bong.*] And and and a dead man without a name [*Bong-dee-bong-dee bong.*]

TINK

Sans nom? A sans nom on your list of dead daddies? I've only got 13 bad bad boys accused, 13 bad bad boys to hang, but 14 dead dead daddies?

BIDDLE

Perhaps one of the bad bad boys has more than one dead dead daddy? [*Checks his list, mentally.*] I've 14 dead dead daddies.

TINK

And you're sure he was a daddy, not just tossed in the pit by mistake, with the rest?

BIDDLE

I'm never 100 percent sure of anything.

TINK

Did you add a dead body to the count by mistake?

BIDDLE

How's that?

TINK

Did you count one corpse twice over, I bet.

BIDDLE

No, no. They are all dead. All accounted for.

TINK

Then there is one bad bad boy missing. One dead daddy corpse without a bad boy name to match. Who here knows the name of the dead man sans nom? Who among you knows who he is, who killed him.

[*The wheel of justice, or its red right hand comes screeching to a halt.*]

BIDDLE

One more ungrateful ingrate, out there, on the lam. Has to be. There can be *no mistaking the body count.*

TINK

Who is it you suspect?

BIDDLE

Perhaps, a foundling who infiltrated the playgroups of the littlest boys of Paris, one who blends in, but is not one of you. Convinced you to kill to cover up a foul fiendish act and get away with it!

TINK

One who charmed all the Little Boys and taught them to hate their real daddies?

BIDDLE

It seems likely. Well, bad bad little boys? Do any of you know the little -ittle itty bitty name which means treason? Who started it, little little boys?

[*Silence. Flaccid ragdolls.*]

BIDDLE

[*A new tac.*] You poor poor boys, once 13 of our finest and fairest— most suggestible— blond-headed and blue-eyed baby boys and father's sons, persuaded and pressed to decapitate their ever-loving daddies and Paris' city fathers and sever themselves from their second names and inheritances! And for what cause and purpose?

[*Wind chimes.*]

BIDDLE

Oh these wayward wayward misled boys. In parlours across the Capital, convinced they were doing right, these 13 little bitty boys committed foul foul acts upon their darling darling daddies.

TINK

Took axes to the finest stray neck hairs at dinnertime, carved the heads clean off, and left their senseless bodies sitting at the head of the table before uneaten ham hocks—

BIDDLE

—prepared perfectly by their ever-loving mummies!

TINK

How to deal with these bad bad boys, left their mummies widows, sisters sans daddies, too, themselves sans noms et sans, well, everything?

BIDDLE

Nôtre Père has ordered the death of all bad bad boys.

TINK

Nôtre Père!

BIDDLE

Nôtre Père! Nôtre Père have mercy on these wittle itty bitty souls.

TINK

A wise and winning warrant. A noble and knowing notice.

BIDDLE

Shall we get on with it?

TINK

[*Now, the ceremony falls into the hands of the High Hangman.*] Goodbye Émile.
[*Bong.*] Goodbye Pierre. [*Bong.*] Goodbye –

RAGGEDY ANDY (puppeted by BIDDLE)

It was the little girl. The little girl did it!

BIDDLE

What little girl?

[*Silence, wind chimes.*]

TINK

We know all about the girl, little boys, there's no sense keeping her a secret.

BIDDLE

Do we?

TINK

Of course we do. [*To all the Raggedy Andys.*] Will you let her get off scot-free? Is that justice on the playground these days, little boys? Taking a time-out for a no good little itty bitty girl?

[Silence. The little ragdolls start to sway a bit in the wind, wind chimes.]

BIDDLE

What if one – just one of you said one itty-bitty little girly name—that’s all it would take to save your little itty bitty neck. No matter which little girl name, just so long as there is one.

TINK

It gives us little or no satisfaction to execute 13 little boys today, but what are we to do? Nôtre Père is watching, keeping track, keeping count. All the little living and dead bodies, itty bitty boys.

BIDDLE

He’s watching and counting. And if we don’t hang you it’ll be our necks. The names must match the bodies, the bodies the names.

TINK

Somebody’s gotta hang.

BIDDLE

Just one. Emile? Antoine?

TINK

Or maybe there is no girl, little boys.

BIDDLE

He made it up?

TINK

Didn’t you, boy, there is no little girl.

BIDDLE

You were just looking to save your own skin.

TINK

If there’s no little girl, then there’s no little boy who will live today. No one will trade a filthy little name for their own? It makes me sad to have to hang 13 little boys, but as you express no remorse for your crimes—

BIDDLE

And by your silence are claiming total responsibility—

TINK

There is nothing left to wait for.

BIDDLE

Goodbye 13 bad bad little boys

RAGGEDY ANDY (puppeted by TINK)

I know her name. A little girl name.

TINK

You do?

BIDDLE

What is her name? Who will be saved today, who will live and who will die?

RAGGEDY ANDYS

[One after the other, squealing.]

—Marianne!

—Aurélie!

—Madeleine!

—No, it was Clémentine.

—No no, my sister – Martelle!

—My mummy – Marie

—My big sister – Josée.

—That ankle-biter Anne-Quitterie!

—His sister Josephine!

—Your mummy Louise!

—My girlfriend Françoise!

—My barren aunty, Agnes!

—My kitty cat, Pussy LaGrise

BIDDLE

Slower, boys, slower! *[Trying to remember them all.]* You said Marie, Josephine, Martelle, who else?

TINK

Little boys, good good little boys. One name trades for another – brings us the bodies of your foul-fleshed sisters, the bones of your murderous mothers, the skins of your conniving kitties, and Nôtre Père will grant you mercy.

BIDDLE

Oh mercy, mercy mercy mercy mercy mercy! [*To the boys.*] Oh good little boys, good good little boys. Come and give them all to me! [*He reels the 13 Little Boys up up and away, clutches them to his chest.*]

TINK

13 little boys, saved.

BIDDLE

Cut loose, and running all around!

TINK

A good day.

BIDDLE

All in all. Bad bad bad girls to be rounded up and hung out to dry like dirty laundry. [*TINK and BIDDLE close up the scaffold. Wind up all the loose strings.*] Let it be known that any bad bad bad little girls who set foot in Paris, Texas will be executed, for crimes against their daddies, and against their brothers and husbands, too.

TINK/BIDDLE (ensemble)

An excellent day.

[*Laughter, light and childlike from the edge of the sandbox, from beneath it, and inside it.*]

[*Outside the sandbox, a LITTLE GIRL and a LITTLE BOY run into one another. A big crash of little limbs.*]

The Great Cat Massacre.

Location: On the Edge of Paris / El Dorado, Texas

Characters:

Ebu

Vide

Rémy

Reyes

[Midnight on the Edge of El Dorado / Noon on the Edge of Paris, Texas. A full white moon looms overhead.]

EBU

Welcome, Reyes.

VIDE

Yes, welcome, Reyes.

RÉMY

Who are you? Your card your card your card—

VIDE

Card?

REYES

Identification. A slip of paper that tells us your past, your present, your future, where your loyalties lie.

EBU

Oh, my card! *[He hands over the map of Paris, Texas.]*

RÉMY

[REMY inspects the map, which matches exactly his imagining of El Dorado in Paris, Texas.] They're our subjects, Reyes. El Dorados. I would know my subjects anywhere.

VIDE

Oh we are, your highnesses. We are your most lowly and humble subjects, loyal Parisians—

EBU

Loyal El Dorados, she means.

VIDE

Loyal El Dorados, yes, as it were, through and through.

EBU

We are players, is all, and we'd like to perform a play, in your honour—

VIDE

We would?

EBU

Yes, we would be celebrating your coronation, your ever fallutin' highnesses.

RÉMY

I don't know—I-I-I

REYES

Reyes. A show to mark a special occasion like this? Fuck yes.

EBU

Then the show must go on!

VIDE

Which one, Ebu, is it, we'll be playing to *mark* these particular...occasions?

EBU

What else, but *The Great Cat Massacre!* The Fifth and Final Act!

RÉMY

Ooh! I know that one, Reyes. It's delightful.

VIDE

It's the sharpest plot ever staged.

EBU

Shall we begin the play?

[*VIDE and EBU exit, and re-enter at warp speed.*]

EBU

"When I come into a place a great hush comes over all. Men shake in their boots, grannies lose their thimbles, ladies swoon and Peerpoint L'Éboueur arrives to collect the trash."

VIDE

"The dregs of society, the putrescence, the rag-and-bone man comes to scrape excrement from the streets, to clean the city of all its nasty feline filth. To do in those who tried to do him in. And to do those wouldn't do him before."

EBU

"To lay waste to the wasteful! Citoyen Peerpoint L'Éboueur will plunk them in the dirt, ass upward, light a fuse in their bum and watch them blow to dust. Oh they will pay when things get smaller, they will pay!" [*Breaking, but only for a moment, skipping forward in plot and action.*] What best follows a coronation, Vide?

VIDE

An execution, Ebu.

RÉMY

Oh, I think you'll enjoy this part, Reyes.

[*The moon becomes a blood red sun announcing high noon in an instant. Even EBU and VIDE are caught off-guard.*]

REYES:

Is it midday already? Reyes! Look! The sun is out.

RÉMY:

It's only an illusion, Reyes. They've sped up time, but only in the play. So it's high noon.

VIDE (as BAILIFF)

Silence! When the Judge enters, a hush must fall upon the crowd. And upon the Crown.

REYES

You allow the El Dorados to backtalk the king that way?

RÉMY

Oh, only in the play. But not for real real.

[*EBU enters as JUDGE and EXECUTIONER.*]

VIDE (as BAILIFF)

“The Trial of Mademoiselle Pussy LaGrise, also known as the Stray on the Lam, born the feral moggy of the Fatcat of Paris, Texas and his unfortunate domestic long-hair Martelle LaChartreuse. It is *le quatorze juillet, midi*. That’s High Noon for those sans French. We haven’t lost it yet, have we, Biddle-Barrow? I said, for those sans French. We haven’t lost it yet, have we, Peerpoint? I said, we haven’t lost the French yet, have we Peerpoint? He’s preparing.

REYES

I hope they’ve lost the French, brother Reyes.

RÉMY

It’s only a play, Reyes. And it’s a funny one.

VIDE (as BAILIFF)

In any case, it’s important to know the time, wherever you find yourself. It is *midi, le quatorze juillet*. The day of the Stray’s Birth and appropriately—the Day selected for her Last Lying Breath. Location: *Ruelle du désir*. A Call to Order. The right and fair and honourable Judge Peerpoint L’Éboueur presiding. When he comes in, a great Hush shall fall upon the crowd.

[*LAGRISE – aka VIDE- assumes the feminine pose of submission, or the feline pose of prostration and climbs inside DE LANDA’s sack.*]

EBU (JUDGE and EXECUTIONER and PEERPOINT L’ÉBOUEUR)

Order! Order within and without of course! I will have order when I come into a room! Mademoiselle Pussy LaGrise, you stand accused.

REYES

Where is Pussy LaGrise?

RÉMY

She's meant to be in the sack, there.

VIDE (as LAGRISE)

The charge is false!

EBU (JUDGE and EXECUTIONER and PEERPOINT L'ÉBOUEUR)

Silence! I've yet to accuse you!

RÉMY

Get on with it, then!

REYES

Are you meant to take part?

RÉMY

I'm heckling. The audience has the power in the play – we're meant to heckle.

REYES

Oh. You're sure about that?

[*Beat.*]

VIDE (as LAGRISE)

Get on with it then!

EBU (as JUDGE and EXECUTIONER and PEERPOINT L'ÉBOUEUR)

You witness her lack of respect for the new authority, the Saboteur of Paris, Texas, one Citoyen Peerpoint L'Éboueur.

REYES

[*To RÉMY.*] That is trouble.

EBU(as JUDGE and EXECUTIONER and PEERPOINT L'ÉBOUEUR)

Pussy LaGrise. You stand accused. Your crime: high treason.

VIDE (as LAGRISE)

Is that all?

EBU (as JUDGE and EXECUTIONER and PEERPOINT L'ÉBOUEUR)

I'm not finished. High treason /

VIDE (as LAGRISE)

And low. Don't forget the low treason.

REYES

I wouldn't mind seeing some of the low treason right about now. Come outta the sack!

BIDDLE (as JUDGE and EXECUTIONER and PEERPOINT L'ÉBOUEUR)

Fair enough. High *and* low treason, gluttony, excess—

VIDE (as LAGRISE)

And public urination!

EBU (as JUDGE and EXECUTIONER and PEERPOINT L'ÉBOUEUR)

No no no no no. This is not that kind of show, Pussy. Have some respect for the court, and for yourself.

VIDE (as LAGRISE)

Then I rescind and redact and renounce the charge. Pussy LaGrise NEVER pissed in the public eye.

EBU (as JUDGE and EXECUTIONER and PEERPOINT L'ÉBOUEUR)

Pussy LaGrise. You stand accused of said crimes against the loyal domestics, the Republic of course, and so on and so forth, refusing to perform the duties of mouser, meowing forlornly over the Berber's corpse rather than chirping sweetly at *liberté* and *égalité*, and for complete and utter *disrégard* for pedigree, upon which a Republic—any republic—depends. For these feral crimes against the best of the worst of the bourgeoisie—so shall you hang— by the scruff—until you are dead. After which you shall be shot down for good measure, drawn and quartered just to make sure, burned in a bonfire to excoriate the mange, and finally your ashes scattered outside the city limits to reassure the bourgeoisie that the Stray is gone, gone, gone, gone away but for good this time. Never to return. Mademoiselle LaGrise, have you anything to say for yourself?

VIDE (as LAGRISE)

Meeeeeeooooowwwwww.

EBU (as JUDGE and EXECUTIONER and PEERPOINT L'ÉBOUEUR)

Very well—

VIDE (as LAGRISE)

And! HISSSSSSSS. There's life in me yet Peerpoint L'Éboueur. [*She scratches at the air.*]

RÉMY

Don't forget the whipping!

REYES

Or the skinning!

EBU (as JUDGE and EXECUTIONER and PEERPOINT L'ÉBOUEUR)

Ah! I forgot the whipping. And the skinning.

VIDE (as LAGRISE)

Meowwwwwwww.

[*EBU pulls a cat-o-nine tails from the sand and begins to hit, starting lightly with neuf.*]

EBU (as JUDGE and EXECUTIONER and PEERPOINT L'ÉBOUEUR)

[*With an echo from RÉMY and REYES.*] Neuf, huit, sept...

[*TINK mews like a minette.*]

EBU (as JUDGE and EXECUTIONER and PEERPOINT L'ÉBOUEUR)

Six, cinq, quatre...

TINK (as LAGRISE)

Meowwww!

EBU ET AL

Trois, deux, unnnnnnhhhhhhhh.

[Laughter from the royal spectators, followed by applause, followed by....uh-oh. VIDE jumps out of the sack, but not for a bow or curtsy or curtain call of any kind. But for a new beginning.]

EBU

Your time is up, Rémy and Reyes! Pretenders to the Throne of Paris, Texas, what do you have to say for yourselves?

RÉMY

I-I-I-

REYES

I-I-I

EBU

[Clunking each on the head, one fist per capita.] What say you!

RÉMY and REYES

Uh – oh.

[EBU, as per the routine, lops off the heads of the new state. EBU stuffs them in the sack as VIDE opens the pages of the diary, in search of her name.]

VIDE

Ebu. We aren't here, Ebu. Even after. *[She wanders toward the spectacle in the sandbox in Paris, Texas, the diary and map in hand.]*

EBU

But we're on the edge of history, Vide. *[An echo, or the words themselves, it's difficult to tell.]* Attention Paris, Texas! The Kings of El Dorado are dead, their heads are in the sack, and all of the Parisians are cut loose. Peerpoint L'Éboueur and Martelle Lavidangeureuse, the Renegade Re-Enactors of Paris, Texas are coming home!

[An earthquake caused by laughter, with an epicentre in the sandbox.]

Reconstruction.

Location: Inside the Sack.

Characters:

De Landa

Chorus of Capitalist Engineers and Boxcars:

Engineer

Caboose

The Seventh Cavalry of Horsekillers:

Sergeant

Corporal

Scout

Farrier

Musicians (2)

DE LANDA

[*In voice only.*] Please, I've had enough of history. It's all death, destruction, nothingness in here. They've all gone silent in here. So so long ago. They stopped talking to me. They stopped singing Dixie. Just stopped. In the old days, they would if they thought to, they would bury the corpse, with a little bell inside, and within reach, just in case. And then, if the body came back to life, like say it was only a momentary lapse, or a freeze, or a spell of imperceptibly shallow breathing, well. There was hope for her. For the dead body inside the coffin, six feet under the earth.

[*DE LANDA is discovered as the curtains part, a giant body (sans head) which serves as the ground for the ensuing action. THE TRAIN OF CAPITALIST ENGINEERS AND BOXCARS chugs in, top to bottom, moving down her body, carrying bodies in sacks and coffins. In their wake, on the map, on DE LANDA, they leave footprints, deep grooves, graves, rail ties at odd angles, as they chug on through, full steam. The land parched, burned, broken, in ashes, covered in rubble. The train speeds its way to victory across the map, in tracks of black smoke drawn high and low that don't evaporate, but hang in the flies.*]

ENGINEER

There is a constant, all-consuming threat, breeding in the Southern swamps.

BOXCARS

Industry! Machinery! Modernity! [*A repeated refrain, like the Little Engine that Could and Can and Already Has.*]

CABOOSE

The Trinity!

DE LANDA

Am I dead? Am I dead out there? Is that what people have been saying? I don't feel dead. I don't feel dead at all. How do you know if you're alive or dead in the desert? If you're just imagining things or if you're seeing them with your own eyes. How do you know for sure?

ENGINEER

Down there is a breeding ground of corrupt invertebrates, spineless cephalopods, wriggling in dirt and awaiting the fall of a fresh corpse on which to gorge themselves. Better to dry out the puddle before the eggs hatch—

BOXCARS

Industry!

ENGINEER

Wipe out the larvae before they metamorphose—

BOXCARS

Machinery!

ENGINEER

Destroy all succour and sustenance and drive the maggots to eat one another.

BOXCARS

Modernity!

CABOOSE

The Trinity! The March of Progress can have no stragglers!

[From DE LANDA's stage-left flank, enter the SEVENTH CAVALRY OF HORSEKILLERS, East to West.]

ENGINEER

[A human voice mimicking a train whistle.] WOODOOT! WOODOOOOT!

SERGEANT

Whooooahhhh!

SEVENTH CAVALRY

Whooooaahhhhhh!

[The TRAIN screeches to a halt just before DE LANDA's mid-section. The CAVALRY stops before her navel (or a sinkhole).]

SCOUT

[Whispering.] Mounted Indians were here. And recently. Don't you smell the savagery?

FARRIER

Where? Where are they?

SERGEANT

Rifles at the ready! Be ready to stand off the pack of yelling savages till morning. Do you hear the chanting?

BOXCARS

[Whispering.] Industry! Machinery! Modernity!

CABOOSE

[Whispering.] The Trinity!

ENGINEER

[Putting on the brakes.] Shhhhh.

CABOOSE

What's that in our path? I can't see? Is it masked robbers? Jesse James? Billy the Kid?

BOXCARS

Again?

ENGINEER

Worse.

BOXCARS

Southerners?

ENGINEER

Worse.

BOXCARS

Savages?!

ENGINEER

Shhhhhh. It's savages.

CABOOSE

Call the Cavalry!

ENGINEER

Shhh.

CABOOSE

Call the Cavalry.

BOXCARS

[*Whispering.*] Industry! Machinery! Modernity!

CABOOSE

[*Whispering.*] The Trinity!

[*On the other side of the navel.*]

CORPORAL

Whose side are they on? Are they the Crows who are with us, or the Sioux and
Cheyenne, who are steadfast against us?

SCOUT

We ought to send a smoke signal. A column of smoke in shape of a question mark. And
await some response.

MUSICIANS

Stop and light a fire now?

FARRIER

The horses are skittish!

SERGEANT

There's no time for that. They are certainly on the side of Crazy Horse and Long Turd—

CORPORAL

Long Turd?

SCOUT

Holy man to Crazy Horse. [*Throughout his list of names, laughter grows among the CAVALRY.*] Afraid of Eagles, Tall White Man, Well Knowing One, Eats from the Hand, Noisy Walking, Sitting Bull, American Horse, American Man, Don't Amount to Anything, Kills the Married, Little Prick, Mary Crawler or She Walks with Her Shawl, Big Crow, Black White Man, Little White Man, Big Head Kate, Ass Hole, Did Not Go Home, the Twelve Sharpshooters and The Elkhorn Scrapers Warriors Society.

CORPORAL

Preposterous. The savages have no society, no organization.

DE LANDA

Hello! Hey you! I hear you out there! I am under here — I've been under here! The whole time. But no one thought to look. And here I am. Listen! Do you hear me? [*To TINK and BIDDLE.*] A man put me in here I don't know how long ago. Do you know him? Be careful of him if he's still alive and kicking. He'll be looking for me. He thought I didn't see him, I bet, but I remember a face. I always remember a face. I was talking to a savage, out in the desert, and he sacked me.

FARRIER

I hear them!

MUSICIANS

They make the hairs on our necks stand on end!

SERGEANT

You've a flair for the dramatic. Who is that on the bluff? What do you see?

DE LANDA

[*Outside the sack.*] I found myself inside of a sack, with with with— lots and lots of sand and dust and then, in the middle of it all, a theatre.

SCOUT

Masses of horses and men.

FARRIER

I don't see them.

SERGEANT

Well there's the problem with the aborigines.

SCOUT

Aborigines?

CORPORAL

Persons of little worth found cumbering the soil of a newly discovered territory.

SCOUT

"Persons of little worth found cumbering the soil of a newly discovered territory."

FARRIER

Where?

CORPORAL

They soon cease to cumber, they fertilize. [*Beat.*] It's a joke.¹¹

SCOUT

And what's the punch line?

CORPORAL

That they cease to cumber and fertilize.

SERGEANT

Are you telling jokes, at a time like this, Corporal?

CORPORAL

No, Sergeant. I'm giving a report on the Indian enemy.

SERGEANT

That's too bad. I love jokes!

¹¹ From Ambrose Bierce's definition in *The Devil's Dictionary* (7).

MUSICIANS

Do you?

DE LANDA

All of a sudden, there was the laugh line — Asa Trenchard called the old Mrs. Mountchessington a sockdologizing old man trap.

SCOUT

I don't see why that is funny.

DE LANDA

And there I am, and I've got my eye to the peephole. And I see, I see the man, or the impersonator of the man, in the top hat. The man I'm supposed to kill. And I've got him in my sight.

SERGEANT

How is an aboriginal like an insect?

SCOUT

He ought to be swatted.

MUSICIANS

He has six legs and flies and can survive an apocalypse that wipes out all others.

CORPORAL

He's a parasite. Or she.

SERGEANT

Like noseums, you don't ever see em til it's too late.

DE LANDA

And, because that's what the director ordered me to do, I cocked the pistol.

ALL

Har har har har har.

SCOUT

It is funnier, when the Sergeant makes jokes, than when the Corporal does.

DE LANDA

And Asa said—

SCOUT

“You don’t ever see em til it’s too late.”

ALL

Har har har har har har.

DE LANDA

And I took aim. And fired— BANG!

CABOOSE

Did you hear that? Gunshots!

DE LANDA

And then it was gunshot after gunshot, going off in every hand, aimed at every head, and then—

SERGEANT

Fire at will, boys!

DE LANDA

Then, as soon as they’d started up, they went quiet. Silent. No more gunshots. Nothing. Nothing. I couldn’t decide what was worse. That bloody murder before, or nothing. I tried to hear them again. But it was all black, inside the sack. Dark. Cold, not like a desert at all. Lonely. For ages and ages and ages, and I thought I was dead. It’s easy to believe when no one talks to you for so long, when you’ve no one to talk to, for so long. I thought, De Landa, this is what it is to be a dead body, tied up inside a sack with bits of dust. A real dead body. For real real. Buried alive.

ENGINEER

WOOOOOOOOT! WOOOOOT! Where are the Cavalry?

[The CAVALRY enters DE LANDA’S navel, but the TRAIN is stuck in its tracks.]

DE LANDA

But you discovered the sack, with me inside! And here I am. With two perfect strangers, out in the middle of the desert.

[DE LANDA is helped out of the sack. An earthquake down below as the ground leaves the feet of the TRAIN and SEVENTH CAVALRY.]

ALL LEFT STANDING

Uh-ohhhhhhhhh.

[And they all fall down.]

Letter Home.

Location: Paris, Texas.

Characters:

Vide

Ebu

VIDE

[*Reading.*] She started by jogging the edges of the swamp. Just tracing the perimeter. No one knew it was her pulse testing the boundaries. It took months before she had the guts to skip from rock to rock. But she did. She was doing something new each bound with each slip finding a new step with each fall because her heart was in the jumping of stones. [*She lays the map out on the sand.*]

[*Enter EBU, with two heads.*]

EBU

Vide.

VIDE

Vide is gone. She deserted me. Us. I saw it with my own two eyes, I saw her already in Paris. They are already there, Martelle Lavidangeureuse and Peerpoint L'Éboueur. I saw them. And they aren't—they aren't ours. Not our flesh and blood and bone.

EBU

I'm still here, Peerpoint L'Éboueur is still me and mine and Paris is still ours. Just you, me and Paris, Vide—

VIDE

[*As DE LANDA to the BERBER.*] While you watched me getting smaller and smaller and farther and farther from shore my heart was getting bigger. I could grow my heart in secret. It would only take one beat. Just one and the Capitol would disappear. My heart was in the spaces of air the gaps of air when I flew between but no one knew that. Could ever have imagined.

EBU

Vide, what part are you playing at?

VIDE

The careful carefree savage stone-skipper. My footing is sure. My pulse is thumping. The Berber is watching.

EBU

Let's go home. Now, take my hand and—

VIDE

He is yelling for me, listen. Come back to the shore now, is all he can think to say. Before you fall. It's slippery out there.

EBU

Vide, let's go home. Give me the Stray's book. Give it here, Vide.

VIDE

[*Clutching the book to her chest.*] No, not Vide. Vide and Ebu are gone, I told you. It's the Stray now. She wants me to join her Cause. The Stray, she is telling me to keep moving, she says, don't avoid the breeze or the heat. It's got all you've been missing. The whole world is out there, she says.

EBU

The Stray is a liar. Don't believe her. She wants you dead, Vide. She always has, always will, for what you, for what we done in Paris, Texas.

VIDE

No. She tells only the truth of things. Find the great wide open, she says, and let the boy play the end from now on. The past can catch you when you least expect her. When you're not expecting her, at the sight of something familiar or strange, and you will cry when you don't expect it like when looking at a bit of cloth or a lock of hair or a picture of a person and not know why. When you're carrying that with you you can't escape it. So it's best to leave it all behind— no things to look at and get hung up on. She is coming. She is telling me to leave this place, to follow her. She is saying, let him alone, let him stay scared and go. He lies. That's harsh but it's true. She wants to go away. She doesn't want a thing to do with Paris or Ebu or Vide.

EBU

Vide—

VIDE

Call me The Stray.

EBU

I won't, not never. You will miss me, Vide. You will miss me, out on the lam. You don't know anything about a life on the lam without me.

VIDE

There's no telling how it might end for her. It's all blank pages at the end.

EBU

Exactly.

VIDE

I am De Landa the Stray, Destroyer of Worlds.

[Vide goes on the lam. EBU enters Paris on his own to play the end.]

PART V. The Newest World, The Last Chapter, or The Canon of Laughter

Staking a Claim.

Location: A Sandbox in Paris, Texas

Characters:

Biddle-Barrow

Tinker

Ebu

De Landa

Vide (in voice only)

Little Boy

Columbia

BIDDLE

[Enter BIDDLE, dragging a large sack behind, leaving a trail.] When I come into a place a great hush comes over all. Men shake in their boots, grannies lose their thimbles, ladies swoon—

TINK

Ladies swoon?

BIDDLE

Ladies swoon...Ladies faint...Ladies weep?

TINK

Ladies weep, yes.

BIDDLE

Ladies flee.

TINK

That's even better.

BIDDLE

When I come into a place, there is a great hush come over all.

TINK

...

BIDDLE

Men shake in their boots, grannies lose their thimbles, ladies...

TINK

Flee.

BIDDLE

Yes, ladies flee. And Citoyen Peerpoint L'Éboueur arrives to collect the trash.

TINK

The dregs of society, the putrescence, the rag-and-bone man comes to scrape excrement from the streets, to clean the city of all its nasty feline filth. To do in those who tried to do him in. And to do those wouldn't do him before.

BIDDLE

Tink.

TINK

TO LAY WASTE TO THE WASTEFUL!

BIDDLE

Tinker. My soliloquy. Those aren't your lines.

TINK

Citoyen Peerpoint L'Éboueur will plunk them in the dirt, ass upward, light a fuse in their bum and watch them blow to dust. Oh they will pay when things get smaller. They will pay—

BIDDLE

Martelle Lavidangeureuse!

TINK

Yes, Peerpoint L'Éboueur.

BIDDLE

Get off the stage.

TINK

Martelle Lavidangereuse never abandons her man. Never, Ebu. She will stand by him, or lie next to him in the dirt, whichever comes her way.

BIDDLE

There are some things a man must do that you must not be privy to.

TINK

Such as.

BIDDLE

Certain things.

TINK

I've seen it all, Biddle-Barrow. I've seen it all before. I've played all the parts before, yours even, and for real real.

BIDDLE

You never played this part on the stage.

TINK

I've played every part there is!

BIDDLE

You couldn't have. I invented this part for myself.

TINK

I didn't know that was allowed!

BIDDLE

Of course it is. Who says otherwise? Watch how it's done, Tinker, watch and learn.

[TINK hovers at the edge of the box and watches. BIDDLE assumes his role as EBU reaches the edge.]

BIDDLE

Oh what has become of my love Martelle, my one true and honest love Martelle Lavidangeureuse?

TINK

[*From off.*] She is right here.

BIDDLE

No she is not! She is gone, gone, gone away. Run off with a mangy Tomcat. Oh infidelity!

TINK

Infidelity? Is that the line? I don't like it.

BIDDLE

Well it wasn't written to please you.

[EBU enters Paris, Texas and the sandbox.]

EBU

What have you got there, little boy.

BIDDLE

Nothing.

EBU

What you've got is mine, little boy. What's yer name?

BIDDLE

Peerpoint. Peerpoint L'Éboueur.

EBU

Is that right?

BIDDLE

Yes.

EBU

Well, Peerpoint. When I come into a place men shake in their boots, grannies lose their thimbles, ladies swoon, and little boys give back what ain't theirs to begin with.

BIDDLE

Tink!

EBU

The ladies are fled, long gone already, now the real Peerpoint L'Éboueur is arrived.

[EBU takes the sack, and opens it wide, but it's filled with sand. Only sand.]

EBU

Wha'd you do with the insides of this here sack, Peerpoint. Where'd it go?

BIDDLE

We let it out, Tink and me.

EBU

The entire history of Martelle Lavidangeureuse and Peerpoint L'Éboueur and the entire future of Paris, Texas was in that sack. But you know that don't you, Peerpoint. *[He grabs BIDDLE by the scruff.]* There was a little girl in that sack. Not just any little girl. The Stray! Or don't you know about the Stray? You think you know how to play me. Do you know how she played us all? How she'll play you? Oh, lil' Peerpoint, you are already in your grave if you believe the Stray's lies. *[He holds the severed heads of RÉMY and REYES up in evidence.]* They were taken in by her, these boys, and now they just dead. Dead and dead. Cuz of a mangy Stray.

BIDDLE

You mean De Landa.

EBU

She goes by many names, the Stray. De Landa! De Landa!

[VIDE hears her new name being called and approaches the edge of the sandbox, just out of view. From the other side of the sandbox, DE LANDA.]

EBU

[Seeing DE LANDA.] There she is. The Stray comes when you call her, now that is a rarity. De Landa, I've been looking for you. Come on, De Landa. Get in the sack, and I'll take you home. I'll take you to your real home, De Landa.

DE LANDA

[To EBU.] I know your face. / I never forget a face.

VIDE

[Echoing DE LANDA.] / I know your face. I never forget a face.

EBU

[Turning toward a familiar voice.] I know that voice.

DE LANDA

I want to go / home.

VIDE

[Echoing DE LANDA.] I want to go / home.

EBU

[To DE LANDA.] Martelle? Martelle? [To BIDDLE.] Don't you hear her? Martelle, can you hear me? We are home, Paris, Texas, Vide. Just you, me, and all Paris. [Beat.] Vide, you don't look like yourself.

[TINK makes her way to the edge of the sandbox.]

DE LANDA

Who are you / talking to?

VIDE

/ Who are you talking to?

EBU

[To DE LANDA.] Martelle Lavidangeureuse! [He awaits her request for an encore, but DE LANDA and VIDE are silent. But then—]

BIDDLE

Martelle Lavidangeureuse!

EBU

Martelle Lavidangeureuse!

BIDDLE

Martelle Lavidangeureuse!

EBU

SHHH! What are you doing that for?

BIDDLE

It's her cue to come in.

[They all wait in silence.]

EBU

Don't you know your own name, Martelle? Don't you recognize Peerpoint L'Éboueur? Oh what has become of my love Martelle, my one true and honest love Martelle Lavidangeureuse?

TINK (as VIDE)

[From off, way off.] Again!

EBU

Martelle? Martelle Lavidangeureuse!

TINK (as VIDE)

[From off.] Again!

EBU AND BIDDLE

Martelle Lavidangeureuse!

[EBU exits the sandbox and runs toward the echoes of "again" of "Martelle Lavidangeureuse."]

[TINK enters, upon his exit, across from DE LANDA and VIDE.]

VIDE

[VIDE is pulled into the sandbox by a familiar face.] It's. I know your face. /

TINK

/ I know your face.

[From way out in the desert, EBU calls out his last line: Oh Infidelity! Then, the sound of a gunshot— BANG! All actors turn toward the shot. A LITTLE BOY cries: Sic Semper Tyrannis. A LITTLE GIRL laughs and claps and laughs some more.]

[VIDE evaporates into the great wide open. DE LANDA starts to run— again.]

BIDDLE

De Landa, wait! Don't run back there.

TINK

It's all death and destruction out there.

[On the horizon, a LITTLE BOY carrying a large, heavy sack, and drawing a line in the sand, leaving a trail.]

BIDDLE AND TINK

Stay. Stay with us. Stay.

[It starts to rain, pitter patter.]

TINK

Biddle! It's raining!

BIDDLE

[To DE LANDA.] It's alright now, De Landa! It's raining De Landa!

[A torrential downpour in the desert.]

[The map reappears, with thousands of navigating ships making their way through the channels. DE LANDA returns. COLUMBIA is revealed. DE LANDA sees what she never saw before and what was there all the time.]

COLUMBIA

Welcome home, De Landa
To the Oldest World
The City Upon the Swamp

Here it is all stories,
Little stories and white lies
Just talking story.

Welcome home.
Welcome home.
Welcome home.

EPILOGUE: Words on a page, or an echo on the wind.

Location: Everywhere and Nowhere

Characters:

The Chorus of Lost Little Girls and Boys

The Chorus of Concerned Citizens and Lamplighters

[Enter all LOST LITTLE GIRLS AND BOYS for the end.]

DE LANDA

Long about the way things done got smaller. Smaller and smaller. Invisible some of them. The bigger a thing was the smaller it got. This is a long time ago, this was all a long time ago. There was a little girl who wanted to keep them from blowing away. And as her home dissolved one grain at a time and the winds dismembered the mortar and blew all the dandelion fuzz out into the desert riding on dust she caught a few in her hand. There were more little things, more invisible things, more specks of dust taking up more room, and she had nowhere left to put them, no way of carrying them around with her, they were bigger than her hands. So she buried them deep down, in the ground. All these little things, these things of the utmost importance that used to talk always through parts around her. They would chatter, at all hours, saying the nastiest filthiest most awful things. Sometimes. And sometimes the sweetest, most loving things, too. Sometimes, even, they were funny, those things. Sometimes she missed them. Sometimes she hated them and thought it was good she had buried them deep so she wouldn't have to listen. So she could sleep an hour or two without hearing them.

Sometimes she would stay up all night, wishing for strong winds. Let the sand creep in everywhere and weather it all. Pucker her lips and shut her eyes fast, but the dust kept pelting her skin and then—. She would remember things she had never seen. The sand and the wind together clamoured in her ears and mouth and nose and eyes, galled her with all the moments past. Lost empires, final showdown, tragic last stands. Revolutions, murders, atrocities on all sides. But sometimes these little things tickled her throat, her belly, if she let them all in, and she would shake with laughter, and the laughter became tears. And the dust became dust again. And she would fall asleep right there, in the sand, in the great wide open. And find herself home, in the maze of water.

[CHORUS OF CONCERNED CITIZENS AND LAMPLIGHTERS:

Welcome home.

Welcome home.

Welcome home.]

The Dramaturgical Excursus

of

Adrift:
petites histoires/ little stories
for children and lovers and renegades
of the american revolution

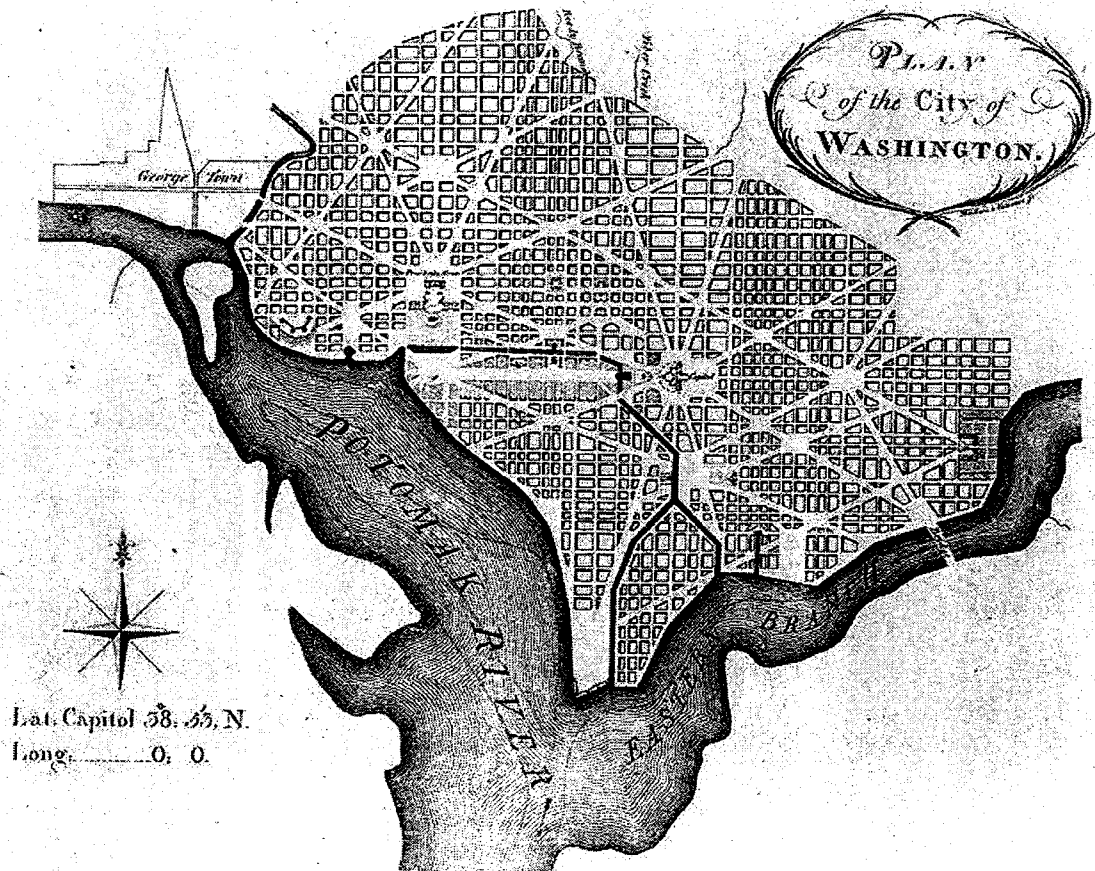


Figure 1. Andrew Ellicot, "Plan of the City of Washington," Boston, 1792; 22 Dec. 2003; *American Memory Map Collections*, Library of Congress, Web, 9 Dec. 2010.

An Impersonation of the City of Washington (see fig. 1) by Way of Ford's Theatre
and a Companion Traveler to a Play.

I have called what follows both a dramaturgical excursus and a process-driven peregrination. The excursus serves as an inter-text and counter-text to *Adrift: petites histories / little stories for children and lovers and renegades of the american revolution*, orbiting around the processes of writing, reading, revising, and performing the text and contexts of the play itself. Drawing in part on the plays and dramaturgical theory of Elinor Fuchs, D.J. Hopkins, and Suzan-Lori Parks, this project maps the wor(l)ds of play which give shape to and complicate the playtext and its contexts of production. This dramaturgical mapping project both diverges from and points toward the preliminary playtext which served as its point of origin, ambling through its labyrinthine contents and contexts. I developed the tertiary text—the thesis play in its current form— by fusing the preliminary play draft with the excursus.

COMPASS POINTS

Or how to orient oneself in the Capital City

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THE PERIMETER OR OUTSIDE THE SACK

Danger! / Cuidado! / Attenzione!

a triangular signpost

(Behind the Velvet Rope, a Cabinet of Curiosities, a glass case housing globe miniatures, other worlds, round enticements, lush and abundant and pocket-sized. Here, a vaudeville. On the other side of this world, in a similar situation, a tragedy or an adventure. De Landa is skipping stones on a swamp.)

DOCENT (The Concerned Citizen of *Adrift*): Before you is the history of the universe, condensed.

VELVET ROPE: Ripe, round globes, glistening orbs just out of reach.

DOCENT: Each enclosed world holds an era long past, a freeze frame just before the cataclysm, a splinter of primitive life before the evolutionary shift which brought us to the here and now. Before the irrevocable, irreversible, unrepeatable, inconceivable and essential change for the better in the nature of things became our present.

SECURITY GUARD (Another Concerned Citizen of *Adrift*): The worlds are stuck, for your safety and security, right here and now, behind glass, behind the velvet rope, behind me—

VELVET ROPE: One thick hard heavy brick wall of a man, a Security Guard!

SECURITY GUARD: The Security Guard.

VELVET ROPE: He's the only one between smooth silky me and all those rich planets of possibility.

SECURITY GUARD: Not even the Docent has access.

VELVET ROPE: Though he's tried to slither under—

SECURITY GUARD: Impossible—

DOCENT: I never—

VELVET ROPE: Or was it step over? I like it both ways—

SECURITY GUARD: Not on my watch!

(The Security Guard and the Docent straddle the Velvet Rope, big Manly stances.)

VELVET ROPE: Oh, there's plenty of velvety rope to go round and round and round—.

SECURITY GUARD: I got my eye on you, Docent.

(An alarm sounds as you skirt around the Velvet Rope and approach the case.)

VELVET ROPE: ¡Cuidado! Attenzione! Danger! Attention!

SECURITY GUARD: You best stand clear.

DOCENT: For once, I agree with the Security Guard. You'll get lost in there, even if you think you've found solid ground you'll soon find yourself sunk—.

VELVET ROPE: In quicksand!

SECURITY GUARD: You got no idea what you're stepping into—

DOCENT: Paralyzing cold, two-dimensional figures, civil war, the cool collected weight of history bearing down on—

VELVET ROPE: *(Overlapping.)* Romantic wilds, an angry rabble, cottonmouths, swamps, savages, sweet magnolias and bleeding hearts!

DOCENT: —bearing down on—

SECURITY GUARD: Or a shootout at a saloon, six-guns set ablaze with the sweet stench of retribution, angry fathers spanking children, and electrified picket fences, everywhere.

(You press your nose up to the glass.)

VELVET ROPE: *(Louder this time, a repeated refrain.)* ¡Cuidado! Attenzione! Danger! Attention!

SECURITY GUARD: As the Security Guard, it's my duty to stop you.

VELVET ROPE: ¡Cuidado! Attenzione! Danger! Attention! Achtung!

DOCENT: Step back! Step back!

(A big bang as you crash through the glass and into the orbit of other worlds.)

SECURITY GUARD: Dammit! Another goner.

DOCENT: History repeats itself in cycles. I've been saying it, over and over—

VELVET ROPE: The poor lost soul, never seen again.

(As De Landa swallows the ocean, you land in the swamp. She plunges into an underwater tempest, sheets of paper, maps, atlases, coordinates swirl, a whirlpool of white. Bubbles blowing and popping, blowing and popping. The School of Explorers swims in on a cardinal ocean tide, a confluence and convergence zone for all deep-sea currents, swarming in around a floundering De Landa. De Landa's voice bubbles up from the bottom of the ocean.)

RALEIGH: Land! An island! Straight ahead!

DE LANDA: *(A bubble "Where" floats up from De Landa's mouth. De Landa tries to catch it but it gets away and is popped by the School.)*

... but you were falling, poor lost soul. There you are! Look down.

First and Fleeting Impressions of the Capital City, a Troubled Terrain, with Footnotes

The Geographer: The City of Washington is a peninsula formed by the Potomac and Anacostia rivers, ceded to the federal government by the states of Maryland and Virginia.¹

First Lady: The President's House —a castle— is in a beautiful situation in front of which is the Potomac with a view of Alexandria. This place is known by the name of the city, and the name is all that you can call so. A new country, with houses scattered over a space of ten miles, and trees and stumps in plenty.²

Fondling Father: I know her as an Indian swamp in the wilderness³—

First Lady: Romantic but wild!

English Novelist: Spacious avenues that begin in nothing and lead nowhere; streets a mile long that want only houses, roads and inhabitants; public buildings that need but a public to be complete.⁴

Fondling Father: With a fashion sense tending toward monarchy and away from republican simplicity.

The Jaded Schoolgirl: Speaking of Washington makes me think that I ought to wash my hands.⁵

The Seasoned Historian: Well, the city was not built as a residential polis, but rather as a seasonal and centralized site for federal governance, only to be visited during the more pleasant times of year.⁶

The Schoolgirl: On field trips in spring!

The Seasoned Historian: Theirs was a dank and rheumy winter.

The Disillusioned First Lady: You could have been an English novelist.

The Seasoned Historian: I prefer not to invent or glamorize. I prefer just to tell things as they are. Or were. And theirs was a dank and rheumy winter.

The Disillusioned First Lady: It was. The Capital is the very dirtiest hole I ever saw for a place of any trade, or respectability of inhabitants. A quagmire after every rain. It is habitable only by

¹ Cooke 6-7.

² Adams 257.

³ Jefferson *qtd. in* Cooke 7.

⁴ Dickens *qtd. in* Cooke 7.

⁵ Kate Lapham *qtd. in* Clarke 189.

⁶ Cooke *passim*.

fires in every part, thirteen of which we are obliged to keep daily, or sleep in wet and damp places.⁷ In summer—

The Seasoned Historian: The summer was one of infernal heat, malaria and yellow fever. The only permanent residents were servants, labourers, merchants, and the remnants of the thirty Indian tribes not yet extinct, those familiar with and amenable to the harsh conditions which kept the three branches of government away the rest of the year, when they took off briskly for their home towns and their families.

City Father: And you with them?

The Seasoned Historian: I have been to Washington many times. Many many times. Too numerous to count.

City Father: But you prefer Boston, New York, Chicago, even.

The Seasoned Historian: Anyone would, particularly in the summer.

City Father: They name streets after anybody there willy-nilly. Animals, the Irish, even scribblers of penny dreadfuls. Chaos. The city of Washington is free of the perplexing inheritance of disorder that plagues the mean Boston streets of Cow Lane, Hog Alley, Paddy's Alley, and Black Horse Lane. As all are aware, it was the hand of the incomparable Washington that directed the impeccable organization of the city. It is navigable by both native and visitor, with inviting paved avenues and tree-lined vistas.⁸ Streets named for founding fathers, American heroes, justices, public servants—

Deaf Abolitionist: Washington? Hoist your skirt, climb a stile or two and slush through the bogs. That is the Capital City.⁹

⁷ Adams 256-259.

⁸ Justice Hagner *passim*.

⁹ Harriet Martineau qtd. in Cooke 7.

ORDERED STATES: Boundaries and Blueprints

— 0 —

Today, there is only one man whose job it is to keep track of the milestones, the boundary markers placed by Philadelphia freedman surveyor Benjamin Banneker and his work crew in 1792 around the 40-mile diamond that distinguishes the District of Columbia from Virginia, Maryland, and the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers. Over the years, a few have disappeared, ended up in backyards, covered in concrete when the Anacostia Highway was put in, sunk when the Potomac swells with rain. But of those that remain, this one man must make sure none goes missing, gets repositioned, lost, bulldozed, buried during other construction projects. It takes him 3 or 4 days to complete the task, depending on winds, weather, and the dull ache in his hip that flares up when the temperatures dip below 38 degrees. Each day, he traces the perimeter of the city on foot and rights those tipped on end by mischievous teens or careening cars, placing a tick on his clipboard at each stone to mark his progress.

Today, Lincoln is seated in the shadow of the marble bust of George Washington, on the diamond-shaped landscaped lawn his cousin cuts twice a week, in front of the Masonic Memorial in Alexandria, eating a ham biscuit and sipping a cherry coke. He's now allowed in to use the toilet, and the security guards on the ground floor are black, but his father was always telling him about the meetings that went on in there the first night of the month, in the teens and twenties when the observation tower was lit and the housewives sheets disappeared a few hours from the linen chest. For all the mystery and Hollywood hype now surrounding the Masonic Order, its complex ciphers,

and its authentic replica of the Arc of the Covenant, revealed in 30-second intervals via mechanically drawn velvet curtains to bored preteens and their parent-chaperones, the clandestine ceremonies at the Memorial were common knowledge to the blacks who weren't privy to other secrets. *Just cause it ain't been set down in some book somewhere don't mean it ain't been remembered.* He licks the salt from his fingers, folds the wax paper from his lunch and tucks it in his pocket. He picks up his clipboard and trudges north, up the marble stairs of the Memorial toward the bathroom.

He passes by the row of glassed-in dioramas skirting the edge of the grand oriental carpet from the Mount Vernon estate, cordoned off with velvet rope. George Washington cutting down a cherry tree with a toothpick axe, or crossing the Delaware through two-inch waves. Past the miniature train set and perfectly timed calliope loop, the Technicolor blowups of brown-skinned burn victims and Shriners in fezzes, the talking animatronic statue of George. The Great Tall Cedar purchased George from the Smithsonian's Darwin exhibit when they were looking to upgrade and willing to sell Charles at a discount. With the wig and coattails, it's a decent exchange. Lincoln presses the button underneath George's seat, one of the on-the-job amusements he still takes pleasure in. George stands, awkwardly, unsure whether to extend knees or hips first. From a not quite erect position, he begins to recite the articles from the Constitution, while Charles continues to mouth words from the *Origin of Species*. No one bothered to adapt the robot's movements to fit his new role. Lincoln feels Rovy the Elevator Op's eyes on him until he swings open the men's room door. He pauses in the doorframe, waves to Rovy, who cracks a gap-toothed grin, winks, and wipes his

sweaty hands on his shirtfront. He goes back to straightening the plume in George/Charles' tricorn hat. Lincoln lets the door flap behind him.

The stones themselves are the oldest federal monuments. The first, the south corner stone, was laid at Jones Point on April 15th, 1791, under Banneker's watchful eye. The men cleared twenty feet of land on all sides of each boundary, setting a uniquely marked stone at every mile interval, the inscription visible only to those standing within the city limits. To those outside the city, they look just like rocks.

He washes his hands in the industrial sink, and heads out the northwest passage under the spread eagle cornice, toward Shuter's Hill, just above the Memorial on the map. Past a fenced-in set of rectangular holes in the red Virginia clay, dug by the city's archaeologists looking for the foundations of the Delaney mansion. Instead, they found a fan belt from an extinct 1973 Dodge Dart and the buttons, pins, needles, oyster shells, and pig's teeth of the slave quarters and laundry.

Up the odd terraces in the hill, over what were once the bastions of Fort Ellsworth, named after the Union general cut down as he stripped a rebel banner from an Alexandria hotel's flagpole. The boundary stone is in view. Just outside the enclosed tennis courts of the Colonial Village condo complex. SW2. It's still there. Lincoln scratches an X on his clipboard and moves on.

An Insider's Guide to the City of Washington¹⁰

You are here. But you wish to get to Ford's Theatre. It could not be easier. The plan of the city was devised by Andrew Ellicott and the Frenchman Charles Pierre L'Enfant in 1792, after the site was selected and all decided that Virginia and Maryland would give up territory to the federal government. Major Ellicott was commissioned to lay out the new city, and he arrived in February with his assistant, Benjamin Banneker, a well-respected surveyor and astronomer. On President Washington's cue, enter a Frenchman with a penchant for regal flourishes and infantile tantrums, or so said the city fathers. Pierre Charles L'Enfant, here to tear the others' plans to shreds and Louis Quatorze the project! L'Enfant drew up a Cartesian blueprint for the City of Washington in the spitting image of Versailles (with different aspirations for its heads of state, one assumes).

Grandiose diagonal avenues to rival Rome. A gridiron of long streets predicting a future of microchip circuitry, punctuated by traffic circles and roundabouts providing outlooks and gathering spots and points for the placement of cannons in three directions! Ground zero is the US Capitol, from which the four quadrants radiate along the four compass directions, which, as you know, are Norwest, Southwest, Northeast, and Southeast, and you can easily position yourself without a compass in the Capital City by taking into consideration the clearly numbered streets, which run north to south, and count upward east to west, or west to east from the Capital Building, depending on the quadrant in which you find yourself, of course, but all in all, you go up

¹⁰ Following the guidelines from Hagner 237-260.

as the Capital recedes and down as it enlarges. That much goes without saying. But say, however, that you are presently standing on 9th Street and wish to travel to 10th Street, between E and F Streets, where they are dissected by Pennsylvania Avenue? (If you know to what spot I'm referring, then you are a quick study and will soon find yourself where you want to be.) In that case, you must call upon the ABCs (save the ambiguous J, which could be easily mistaken for an I) to locate yourself, as these are the clever characters which are used to designate the east-west running streets. (I, Q, and U streets are alternately called Eye, Que/Cue/or Queue, and You and Ewe Streets, so as not to confuse them.) Keep in mind that 44 of the lettered streets are also dignified by the names of the builders of the nation and city, presenting a continual reminder to old and young of the history of the country— 19 Presidents, 4 Vice-Presidents, 3 Justices Supreme Court (United States), 4 Signers Declaration of Independence, 14 Eminent Citizens and Revolutionary Worthies, of which there is further division— 10 are of three syllables, 26 are of 2 syllables, and 8 are of one syllable; thus, following this quick mnemonic device, L Street North is also Lincoln Street, and L Street South is Lafayette Street, for the French general who aided and abetted the cause of American Liberty; however, once the single letters have been exhausted, as they are in the denser, high-traffic northern quadrants of the city, two syllable names in alphabetical order are used; thus, Calvert Street NW, clearly, then, is the third street of the second alphabet, according to the rules of nomenclature devised by the Founding Father and his beloved *Enfant*. The alphabetic rubric continues in the northern corners of Washington, where three-syllable Brandywine Street NW marks the second street in the third alphabet.

When one comes across the botanical nomenclature of Aspen, Butternut, and Cedar (all in alphabetical order, regardless of the number of syllables), you are advised to slow your pace before you arrive at the Eastern border with Maryland, which is not worth the walk, let me assure you. You are advised to keep within the Beltway, but enough of that. But say you come across “Virginia” criss-crossing your numbered and deciduous street corner somewhere in the Northwest quadrant of the diamond. DO NOT LOSE YOUR HEAD. You are not far gone or lost. You must always also take into account, when trying to find yourself on the map, that 1) the avenues run on the diagonal, and that they too – like the sylvanian system plotting out far north and deep south in the NW quadrant— are exempt from syllabic ordering, as are any streets happening to fall between lettered streets and followed by the epithet place or way, and that 2) quite simply, these diagonal avenues correlate with the names of states in the Union, listed in alphabetical order. Do not fret. Pennsylvania Avenue is a mere 6 blocks away.

Now look up and here you are. Ford’s Theatre.

Dramatis Personae of *The Awful Event*, Ford's Theatre, April 14th, 1865. ¹¹

Abraham Lincoln as.....The Founding Father and The First Dead Man

Mary 1 as.....The Weeping Widow and The First Lady

Major Henry Rathbone as..... The Understudy, The Secondary Survivor, and A Most Reliable
Witness

Clara Harris as.....The Fiancée, A Witness, and The Damsel in Bloody Distress

John F. Parker as.....The Guard and The First Drunkard

Charles Forbes as.....The Attendant and The Second Drunkard

John T. Ford as..... .The Artistic Director and the Namesake

Tom Taylor as.....The Absent, Second-Rate Playwright

Laura Keene as.....Florence Trenchard (in her last performance)

Harry Hawks as.....Asa Trenchard, The Comedian, and The Cue

John Wilkes Booth as.....The Actor, Desperate Rebel, Brutus, Marc Antony, and The
Second Dead Man

Dr. Charles A. Leal as.....The First Responder and The Audience Member Who Laughs Too
Loudly

Dr. Samuel Mudd as.....A Southern Sympathizer

John H. Surratt as.....The Eyeball of President Jeff Davis

Mary 2 as.....The Southern Belle, The Hostess, and The First Dead Lady

Edman Spangler as.....The Starry-Eyed Stagehand, Booth's Valet, and Another Dead
Man

Lewis Payne as.....Lewis Powell, The Reverend, The Catholic, The Would-Be Assassin,
and A Dead Man

George A. Azerodt as.....A German and A Dead Man

¹¹ Names of players brought to you by: "Ford's Theatre Virtual Tour." *Ford's Theatre National Historic Site, n.d.* Web. 3 November 2009.

David Herold as.....Booth's Compass and A Dead Man

William Seward as..... The Governor of New York and the Almost Dead Man

General Ulysses S. Grant as..... The Great Warrior - *absent* (Part to be played by the understudy
Major Henry Rathbone.)

General William T. Sherman as Executioner – *absent* (Part to be played by understudy Capt.
Christian Rath beginning July 7, 1865.)

A Eulogy for an American Theatre by the Architect and a Goon

a remnant from *Adrift*

REMY:

Just over the horizon is a wasteland. Crumbling walls, dry fountains, piles and piles and piles of bones. A vast open expansepansepanse. Echoes. Dust. Everywhere and nowhere. What is this place? What happened here?

REYES:

You're from Paris, you tell me.

REMY:

Use your imagination Reyes! A crater. A hole. No. Maybe. It had a purpose. A coliseum or a reservoir or a paddling pool or something else entirely. Whatever it was, it's a sandbox now. Can you hear the orphans laughing?

REYES:

I can, almost.

REMY:

Listen harder.

(He listens, harder this time. A big bang is heard off, followed by a line in Latin.)

It looks and feels like a Monday, darkday in the theatre, the only day off for actors. The footlights below, gaslights above, ripped out for illuminations of other places and faces, for use in other performances of *Our American Cousin*, *The Octoroon*, *Under the Gaslight*, *The Apostate*. In Philadelphia, Chicago, New York, Boston, where theatre thrives, peals of laughter and violent claps erupt onto the sidewalk following weekend matinees. But here in the capital, the final blow has struck the living arts. On this spring afternoon, both inside and out, silence, save for the weeping flies splashing tears into rheumy puddles on the floor. The epitaph outside Ford's ought to have read: **American Theatre is Dead.**

American Theatre died in the early morning hours of Saturday, April 15th, 1865, as Mary Todd, a devout Lincoln lover, expelled one last sob over her husband and handed his shoes off to the boarder at Peterson House, whose room had been soiled with Presidential blood and Yankee tears.¹² The dingy, four-postered bed was much too short to accommodate the 6-foot-4 head of state, minus the iconic silk top hat, but Dr. Leale improvised and laid the Presidential frame out diagonally across the mattress, parallel to Pennsylvania Avenue, faintly visible out the porthole-sized window.

The final act at Ford's had turned stuffy noses hard, as the Victors remembered and reinvigorated their distrust of foreign languages, Catholics, and the theatre itself, let alone the soft-minded Southern actors, who had plotted a conspiracy, taken an oath of allegiance to Jeff Davis, and toppled the head of state in the heart of the freshly re-United States. This could not have happened in a theatre in Boston, or New York, or Philadelphia. Doggedly Protestant. Solidly Yankee ground. But here, in the City of Washington, cornered by degenerate, slippery, and wily rebels to the North, and by brown, pestilent rivers filled with cottonmouths to the South, there could be no firm footing, even for the Yankee soldier who had kept the rebels out

¹² Schneider *passim*.

of the Capital for all four years of war. The swamp-like nature of the rebels came boiling up to the surface here at every opportunity, was endemic to the region. A geyser under the seat of Old Glory. Plug one leak, another spouts up in its place.

Meet the Desperate Rebel, and others like him. A Southerner is a scavenger, a parasite, and a contagion, whose sole industry is the magnification and amplification of minor slights and dustups. An ant, collecting grains of salt and sand and making mountains out of hills, craters out of potholes. Where there are ways in, entrances, nooks and crannies, tunnels, they find them. Where there are ways out, exits, they know well and scurry.

You will find them lurking in the darker recesses, secret passages, and shady spaces which harbour nightcrawlers and skeleton keys and *banditi* and fugitives and ragpickers, among others. Ever opportunistic and adept at finding and occupying negative space, one might even find them sprouting between cracks in the sidewalk at the slightest ray of light and drop of rain. Pokeweed, poison sumac, honeysuckle, pigweed, stinking sweetly.

A constant, all-consuming threat, breeding in the Virginia muck. The theatre in the Capital was one more cesspool in a city set upon a swamp, a breeding ground for the hatching of corrupt invertebrates, spineless cephalopods wriggling in Southern dirt and awaiting the fall of a fresh Northern corpse on which to gorge themselves. Better to dry out the puddle before the eggs hatch, wipe out the larvae before they metamorphose, destroy all succour and sustenance and drive the maggots to eat one another.

In 1866, theatre owner and proprietor John T. Ford sold the site to the government and removed the posts which supported the dress and family circles, the proscenium, and stripped the insides bare of anything which might have identified the building's former life as a theatre.¹³ Souvenir hunters helped erase the traces of what had once occurred there, sending nimble-

¹³ Olszewski 61.

fingering children in through the broken windows to pick at the yellowing wallpaper in the Presidential Box, in search of a blood-spattered relic or two to bring home. The seats resurfaced in government offices, under the supervisor at Culpeper National Cemetery in Culpeper, Virginia, for one.¹⁴ Ford rebuilt his name in Baltimore—where Booth got his first decent review— with these recycled materials, and in 1871, Ford’s Grand Opera House opened in another mid-Atlantic city. On the marquis, better taste in plays and greater pathos. An incentive moment that would have rivalled any Greek tragedy, had the audiences in Maryland known the origin of the columns girding the stage, or the difference between a Wagner opera and a Tom Taylor melodrama. But enough of ignorance in Baltimore.

THE AWFUL EVENT.

(Laughter throughout at an overwritten quip and quibble.)

(Bang! A shot in the dark.)

BRUTUS: *(Alone.) Sic semper tyrannis!*

The awful event. The young surgeon just out of medical school had been chuckling as the young Asa Trenchard called the conniving Mrs. Mountchessington a “sockdologizing old man-trap” for the thousandth time in *Our American Cousin*. He swooped into the Presidential Box by the back stairwell, bolted through the open door, and plunged his finger into the hole behind Lincoln’s right eye socket to retrieve the assassin’s bullet. Removing nothing but a bloody index finger, he pointed in the direction of Booth’s exit by the stage door, indicating the bloody cause he could not remedy. The night American Theatre died, the President died as well, both deaths caused by John Wilkes Booth. One of them unintentional.

After the building had been gutted, its sterility certified by the Surgeon General, the Army Medical Museum was raised in its footprint, where it stood until 1887, when a new

¹⁴ Olszewski 63.

location was found to house Booth's vertebrae, fragments of Lincoln's skull, Robert Hooke's first microscope, and other relics and grotesqueries of nature . Six years after becoming just another government office, the morbid nature of the site resurfaced when a 40-foot section of the original facade collapsed from the third floor, hurling men, desks, and heavy file cases into the cellar, killing 11 government employees and injuring 65 others.¹⁵ Ford's Theatre reappeared under yet another name— the Lincoln Museum, and its upper floors enlisted the rank and file recruiting station during World War I. Now it exists under its original name, Ford now dead some 114 years, the Friends of Ford's Theatre felt it their duty to restore the 144 year-old crypt, revive an American Theatre dead for over a century and a half with another dead name.

¹⁵ Olszewski 61-65.

INSIDE THE SACK: Museum Pieces and an Ossuary

April 22, 1663, Leeches in Vinegar. Bluish Mold on Leather; April 29th. A Mine of Diamonds in Flint. Spider with Six Eyes; May 6th, Female and Male Gnats; May 20th Head of Ant. Fly like a Gnat. Point of a Needle; May 27th, Pores in petrified wood. Male Gnat; June 10th, Sage-Leaves appearing not to have cavities; July 8th, Edge of a Razor. Five Taffeta Ribbons. Millipede; July 16th, Fine Lawn. Gilt edge of Venice Paper; August 5th, Honeycomb Sea-weed. Teeth of a Snail. Plant growing on Rose-Leaves.

- Robert Hooke, *Micrographia: or, some Physiological descriptions of Minute Bodies Made by Magnifying Glasses, with Observations and Inquiries There Upon* (1665) (qtd. in Stewart 40).

April 7th. Everything is lost in Richmond, even our archives. Blue black is our horizon...I hear horrid reports about Richmond. It is said that all below Ninth Street to the Rocketts has been burned by the rabble, who mobbed the town. The Yankee performances have not been chronicled[...] 'Now we belong to negroes and Yankees!' Buck said.

- Mary Boykin Miller Chesnut (*A Diary from Dixie* 377).

(A bone poking out of the sand of Adrift.)

VIDE: *An inch of hide and flesh makes them different, Ebu. Just an inch of meat is all there is between this thing and that.*

(VIDE drops her wrist bone into the sand behind her.)

The Cabinet of Curiosities
or
Memento Mori

On the mantel-piece of Mary
Surratt lies
The evidence:
A small, yellowed envelope
containing
Two photographs,
One General Beauregard,
One Jefferson Davis and
A card with the arms of the State
of Virginia,
Two Confederate flags
emblazoned,
"Thus it will ever be with
Tyrants,
Virginia the Mighty, *Sic Semper
Tyrannis.*"
A small, framed, colored
Lithograph representing
Morning, Noon, and Night,
A tear in the corner
Behind which is concealed
The likeness of John Wilkes,
And on the back,
Scrawled in pencil,
The name of Booth.¹⁶

Behind the model facade of
Mary Surratt's Boarding House,
(Relocated to Tenth,
Between E and F Streets above
Pennsylvania Avenue)
On the first floor,
Beneath Ford's Theatre,
Newly remodelled,
A bar of pine,
A music stand and door wedge
leading To a peep hole,
Carved into the door:
"One Country, One Destiny,"
Stitched into a Brooks Brothers
wool Greatcoat
Haut de gamme, beneath a
Spread eagle,
Torn in two
By the assassin's spur,
Also enclosed, along with
White kid gloves, a high silk hat,
and a
Silver bullet, flat, from a pistol,
A Derringer of Philadelphia!
Rio Grande Camp Knife, horn-
handled,
"America,"
Cut into the bone.

Black lace and crepe veil the City,
The fugitive in shadows,
Black felt slouch hat,
Black wool frock coat and pants,
Knee-high black leather riding
boots,
Spurs.
A whistle, a pencil, and a
Red velvet-cased compass,
Embossed with "JWB."
The point, an eagle,
Flies due South, toward
Port Royal, Virginia.
Red leather pocket diary,
1864,
On the frontispiece,
Mountains, and inside
Compartments for
Postage and rail tickets;
Containing portrait miniatures
from
Fans, ladies, actresses,
Four cartes-de-visite.
On the pages, a year out of date,
Slanted letters in pencil,
In Booth's left hand.

¹⁶ "Testimony Relating to Mrs. Mary E. Surratt" n.p.

The Peephole of History
Or
A Miniature Almanac¹⁷
Or
Metonymy Magnificarum

From the beginning, the miniature book speaks of infinite time, of the time of labor, lost in its multiplicity, and of the time of the world, collapsed within a minimum of physical space...Thus the book encapsulates the details of everyday life, fitting life inside the body rather than the body inside the expansive temporality of life...The miniature book speaks from the convention of print, but, just as importantly, from the invention of the microscope, the mechanical eye that can detect significance in a world the human eye is blind to (Stewart 39-40).

¹⁷ The miniature book, as Stewart expands, contains: "the days of the month, days of the week, a calendar, the sun's rising and setting times, the moon's rising and setting times, the full sea at Boston, advice on 'Right Marriage,' 'Qualities of a Friend,' and "Popularity,' a 'List of Courts in the New England States,' the 'Rates of Postage,' 'The times of holding the Yearly Meetings of Friends in the Continent of America,' a 'Money Table,' 'A Table Shewing the Number of Days from Any Day of One Month to the Same Day in Any Other Month,' a 'Table of interest, per day, at 6% on any number of dollars from one to Twelve Thousand,' and 'A List of the Post Towns, on the main road from Brewster, Maine to St. Mary's, Georgia' (40).

Private Collections

Every house is clothed in mourning and every heart has its chamber of death.
—Anne M. Ferris, April 16th (*The Civil War Diaries of Anna M. Ferris* 260).

When cleaning the closets, I found a paper dated April 16th, 1861; part of the heading was, —“War Begun; The Bombardment of Fort Sumter; 75, 000 Militia Called For,” &c. I put it with proud and pleased feelings, beside one dated April 4th, 1865, and headed, “Grant! Richmond! Victory!” and another, April 10th, “Surrender of Lee and his Whole Army.” Little did I think that the 15th would come draped in mourning, announcing the death of our beloved President.
— Phebe M. Irish, Fourth month 15th (*Diary and Letters of Phebe M. Irish* 212).

April 22d. This yellow Confederate quire of paper, my journal, blotted by entries, has been buried three days with the silver sugar-dish, teapot, milk-jug, and a few spoons and forks that follow my fortunes as I wander. With these valuables is Hood’s silver cup, which was partly crushed when he was wounded at Chickamauga...Colonel Cadwallader Jones came with a despatch, a sealed secret despatch. It was for General Chesnut. I opened it. Lincoln, old Abe Lincoln, has been killed, murdered, and Seward wounded! [...] The death of Lincoln I call a warning to tyrants. He will not be the last President put to death in the capital, though he is the first...Buck never submits to be bored.
— Mary Boykin Chesnut (*A Diary from Dixie* 380).

**the arts of letter writing and journaling in *Adrift*
(with an epistle by De Landa)**

(DE LANDA sits under a square bed sheet with a large book with a burnt cover, dog-eared pages, and water stains. She opens the sopping sticky pages of the book to the natural crease that is also the dedicatory preface.)

I started by jogging the edges of the swamp. Just tracing the perimeter.

No one knew it was my pulse testing the boundaries. It took months before I had the guts to skip from rock to rock. But I did. I was doing something new each bound with each slip finding a new step with each fall because my heart was in the jumping of stones. While they watched me get smaller and smaller and farther and farther from shore my heart was getting bigger. I could grow my heart in secret. It would only take one beat. Just one and the Capital would disappear. My heart was in the spaces of air the gaps of air when I flew between but none of the Columbians knew that. Could ever have imagined. Wringing hands and twisting lips nervous smiles they called out "how wonderfully shallow your skips are!" "Just like hers!" "How dainty and careful and perfect your reflexes, little De Landa. You are *exactly like your mother, exactly like.*" "A Portuguese eyebrow!" "An Indian nose!" "A black eye!" So much of these small small likenesses they made. Just like you, in every detail. The careful carefree savage stone-skipper. My footing was sure. My pulse thumped. Daddy wasn't watching. The Berber wasn't

watching. Come back to the shore now, De Landa, was all the
Columbians could think to say. Before you fall. It's slippery, De Landa.
Don't you fall too De Landa, not like your mother. And then the Slip. A
beat and a slip between The Capital and somewhere yet unexplored.
Somewhere between the Sea, the slippery slopes, and the great wide
open. *(In pencil, she writes.)* Dearest...Dad comma....You... were...
wrong. Not everything has been discovered already. *(She laughs.)*

AWFUL EVENT.

President
Lincoln
Shot by an
Assassin.

The Deed Done at Ford's Theatre Last Night.

THE ACT OF A DESPERATE REBEL

The President Still Alive at Last Accounts

No Hopes Entertained of His Recovery

Attempted Assassination of Secretary Seward.

DETAILS OF THE DREADFUL TRAGEDY

Figure 2. Details of Lincoln's Assassination, copied from the newspaper; "AWFUL EVENT," *New York Times* (1857-1922) 15 Apr. 1865, ProQuest Historical Newspapers *The New York Times* (1851-2006), ProQuest, Web; 12 May 2010.

DIARY OF JOHN WILKES BOOTH.

An Officially Certified Copy

By direction of President Johnson the following documents have just been published

EXECUTIVE MANSION,
WASHINGTON, D.C., MAY 9, 1867.

[Copy.] The Secretary of War will please furnish the President with a certified copy of the "Diary" found upon the body of J. Wilkes Booth, together with a succinct statement of all the facts connected with its capture and its possession [by the War Department.]

(Signed,)

ANDREW JOHNSON
WAR DEPARTMENT,
WASHINGTON CITY, MAY 14, 1867

SIR: I have the honor to submit herewith a copy of the entries contained in the memorandum-book found on the person of J. WILKES BOOTH at the time of his capture, certified by Gen. HOLT, Judge Advocate-General, who has possession of the book, together with his report in relation thereto. The memorandum-book was first seen by me about the 26th day of April, 1865, shortly after BOOTH's capture, and a few hours before his remains reached Washington. It was brought to my house by Provost-Marshal BAKER and another person, who was, I think, Lieut.-Col. CONGER. The book was then examined by me in presences of Gen. ECKERT, Assistant Secretary of War, and was found to contain

only the entries certified by Gen. HOLT, also some photographs of females. Immediately preceding the entries some pages appeared to have been cut out, but there was nothing indicating what had been written thereon, or whether anything had been written, no when or by whom they had been cut out. Immediately after careful examination of the book and its contents, it was placed in the hands of Gen. ECKERT in the same condition as when I first saw it, to be delivered to the Judge Advocate-General, in whose possession after its delivery to him by Gen. ECKERT, I am informed and believe, it has continued until the present time. The last time I saw the book was some time last Winter. It was then before the Judiciary Committee of the House of Representatives, and was in all respects in exactly the same condition as when I saw it first, without any change or alteration, so far as I could discover, in its contents.

Gen. ECKERT reported to me that upon receiving the memorandum-book from me he sealed it up and locked it up in his safe, and it continued in his possession until he delivered it to the Judge Advocate-General, and that it was then in the same condition as when it was brought to my house by BAKER.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,
EDWIN M. STANTON, Secretary of War
To the President.

The following is a copy of the writing, which was in pencil, found in the diary taken from J. WILKES BOOTH:

[Official copy.] J. HOLT,
Judge Advocate-General
"Ti Amo," April 13, 14, Friday, the Ides.—
Until to-day nothing was ever thought of

sacrificing to our country's wrongs. For six months we had worked to capture. But our cause being almost lost, something decisive and great must be done. But its failure was owing to others, who did not strike for their country with a heart.

I struck boldly, and not as the papers say. I walked with a firm step through a thousand of his friends, and was stopped, but pushed in. A Colonel was at his side, I shouted "*Sic Semper*" before I fired; in jumping broke my leg. I passed all his pickets, rode sixty miles that night with the bone of my leg tearing the flesh at every jump. I can never repent it, though we hated to kill. Our country owed all her troubles to him and God simply made me the instrument of his punishment.

The country is not, April, 1865, what it is was [sic.] This forced union is not what I have loved. I care not what becomes of me; I have no desire to outlive my country. This night, "Before the deed," I wrote a long article, and left it for one of the editors of the *National Intelligencer*, in which I fully set forth our reasons for our proceedings. He, or the Government——.

Figure 3. A portion of J. Wilkes Booth's diary (edited) was published in the *New York Times* on May 22, 1867. There were pieces and pages torn out or gone missing, according to the column, but the editors did publish Booth's last known letter—a thank you note to one Dr. Richard Seward. For the full article, see "DIARY OF JOHN WILKES BOOTH: An Officially Certified Copy."

Parallel / Lives / Childsplay / Eterniday

April 24th—

Outside the Capital, on the lam and with little hope at life, John Wilkes Booth thought he would try one last time to see himself as he'd once appeared. In the bubbling brown brackish of the Potomac he started to see himself greasy, green, and dirty. Mrs. Trenchard laughing at his cobbler-eating, tobaccer-chewing ways, troubling the water in ripples around his once delicate chin. The Southern shame burned in the scar across his chest, left there during the war— in a stage fight mishap—by Romeo's horn-handled dagger.

Poison sumac sickly sweet. He rolled up the woollen cuff of his trousers, and picked a burr out of the fuzz on his leg with filth-caked fingernails and tossed it into the river. A sculpon nibbled, but disappointed, flitted back to the river bottom. The air condensing on his neck, dribbling down into the dingy cotton collar of his shirt, the fugitive reached into his pocket and pawed his almanac with damp, clumsy fingers. The Appalachian Mountains, embossed on the red leather carrying case. Inside, *cartes-de-visite* of old sweethearts, and a train ticket stub from Dakota, Minnesota, where in his youth, he'd ridden the logs down the Mississippi, poached many and dodged a few bullets along the way. His fingers stumbled over the highest peak in the leather and he lost the trail. He removed the hand from the safety of the pocket and pulled a charcoal pencil from his coat. That might have been his story once or another man's, he wasn't sure anymore. He was always taking others' trials on as his own. This present mess,

however, belonged to him alone, and he longed to record it. Pollywog, water moccasin, box turtle. Muses in the Potomac sludge that passed for water.

It was the stink that disrupted purer thoughts. Thoughts of liberation and Southern Independence replaced by a case of gangrene at Andersonville prison, where Booth had longed to perform, but never had. He remembered a phantom odour, green and sickly, feet and hands stinking of sulphur, dead cattle, and rotten milk.

He turned his intentions toward what he could write in his own hand. The point of his charcoal pencil crumbled under the pressure of his normally thin and delicate now thick and swollen fingers, which were struggling to enter his thoughts in script on the tiny pages of his almanac. There was something about this place that made it difficult to write well, to express himself in a way people could understand. And at what should have been his most prolific moment. Here on the muddy banks of the Potomac, he was caught up in the cobwebs of the past. Conflicts, entanglements, slights that had burned out everywhere else but here.

THE APOSTATE.

(Enter Moors, Spaniards, guards, monks, and the Cadi.)

PESCARA: What is it I behold? Don't look upon me as if you had never beheld my face. I am Pescara— you have not to learn what Count Pescara is. Whoever wronged me that did not perish? I had come to greet you, and as I passed, the rascal rabble talked of some wild dotard vow, some grey-beard's folly. I seized a wretch that dared to slander you, and dashed him to the earth for the vile falsehood. I marvel at your wrath- what is my crime?¹⁸

¹⁸ Booth played Pescara in Richard Sheil's *The Apostate* (1817); see Sheil 1.3 for the complete monologue. According to Samples 234, Booth performed the role at Ford's Theatre on March 18, 1865, less than one month before the "Awful Event."

April 14th —

...

He hadn't recognized himself in a long while. Not since he'd stepped off the train in Montreal, sipping sack and spirits in a yellow foxskin cap. Sleighing with the Theatre Royal's players, assuming all of the parts in parlour performances of *Merchant*, crafting the sharpest play in America on Northern soil.

No, he hadn't felt himself since that sticky August night in Richmond at Jeff Davis' house when he'd tossed his legs over the shaker chair, squirted a plug out onto the Persian carpet, and declared his intentions to kill all Lincoln lovers.

His trunk had been lost in transit on the return from Montreal, and it hadn't arrived to meet him in Washington. Here he was without the tools of his trade: his wool cloak, his jodhpurs, stage swords, and manuscripts. Here he was in the Capital, in borrowed spurs, slouch felt hat, and a friend's riding boots, one size too large.

Surrounded. Dixie swirling about Northern mouths as if it belonged there. Something inside him burst as he stood outside the White House, as the Goon ministered to his flock gathered below on Pennsylvania Avenue. *I wish I could burn every house to the ground. I feel like mounting my horse and tearing up and down the streets, waving a Rebel flag in each hand, till I have driven the poor animal to death.*¹⁹

His friends had looked at their feet, then. Their good boy Johnny had surely cracked his melon.

PESCARA: *(With feeling.) Within thy heart I plant a serpent, and, as it stings think Pescara's answer.*²⁰

¹⁹ Booth's friend and former confidant Jesse W. Weik reporting (qtd. in Samples 179)

²⁰ Consult Sheil 3.1.

April 24th—

...

The man spat out a puddle of brown chaw, staining the red Virginia clay beyond his dead foot, wiped the spittle with his sleeve cuff, and picked a whisker rubbing itself red against his shirt collar. Not gangrene. He didn't know the smell and wouldn't. He'd broken his leg at the ankle when his bootspur stuck in Old Glory on the way out of the Box. And he'd dragged that leg at an angle beside him all the way from Ford's to a farmhouse in Port Royal, to the cabin by the river bank. Faint, deep humming over the gurgling of the river. The Yankee tune *All is Quiet Along the Potomac* in dreary intervals. The sound soothed, then startled the Stranger when he realized it was coming from his own throat.

He gripped the pencil with a firm hand, a stronger intention, and the humming ceased.

The smell of iron, of blood clotted in wool of his trousers, the bone protruding through the thick white flesh of his calf that caught him as he wrote, cramming his characters side-by-side in a slanted left hand. And he was surprised at the warmth of his wording, as a man about to die used his last moments to express gratitude to a complete stranger, a confederate who'd refused him aid. He wrote not his own epic saga of Southern defiance, not a last will and testament, not a love letter to a grieving Southern belle, but a thank you note.

Dear Sir,

Forgive me, but I have some little pride. I hate to blame you for your want of hospitality: you know your own affairs. I was sick and tired, with a broken leg, in need of medical advice. I would not have turned a dog from my door in such a condition. However, you were kind enough to give me something to eat, for which I not only thank you, but on account of the reluctant manner in which it was bestowed, I feel bound to pay for it. It is not the substance, but the manner in which kindness is extended, that makes one happy in the acceptance thereof. The sauce in meat is ceremony; meeting were bare without it. Be kind enough to accept the enclosed five dollars —

He crossed out the number, fiddled his last five dollars between his fingers, added two, and then subtracted four and a half. Best to save a bit, in case he did survive the afternoon, in case he might pass another stranger who might pay him some true kindness, so, in the end, the letter read:

Be kind enough to accept the enclosed two dollars and a half (though hard to spare) for what we have received.

Yours respectfully,

Stranger.

April 24th, 1865²¹

He folded the letter in quarters and rolled it around the money before handing the bundle to the black man, whose riverside cabin he'd been squatting in for the last two nights, to deliver to the kind Sir of address.

...

²¹ A letter from Booth to Dr. Richard H. Stewart, Virginia, April 4th, 1865 (qtd. in Samples 3).

April 26th—

EPILOGUE.

(A cabin in a thicket of woods.)

CHORUS:

*When Johnny comes marching home again,
Hurrah! Hurrah!
We'll give him a hearty welcome then
Hurrah! Hurrah!
The men will cheer and the boys will shout
The ladies they will all turn out
And we'll all feel gay,
When Johnny comes marching home.*

*The old church bell will peal with joy
Hurrah! Hurrah!
To welcome home our darling boy
Hurrah! Hurrah!
The village lads and lassies say
With roses they will strew the way,
And we'll all feel gay
When Johnny comes marching home.²²*

(Enter Company L, Sixteenth New York Cavalry on horseback.)

BOOTH: Oh, Captain. There is a man here who wants to surrender awful bad.

(Bang! A single shot to the neck.)

²² Lyrics from "When Johnny Comes Marching Home Again," a popular Civil War ballad, as recorded by Andrews 168.

April 14th

It is difficult to see a comedy at Ford's Theatre in the City of Washington. Even one-hundred forty-four years after the Awful Event was reported in *The New York Times*.

Bits of skull and a hand-made bullet from a Derringer pistol. The crooked backbone of the degenerate, a segment of sacral vertebrae. Leaking mustard plasters. Black funereal crepe and the first lady's moth-eaten overcoat. A nest of yellow wallpaper, torn off by greedy green fingers. A small pillow with a water stain. A rusty towel. A lock of graying hair. A curling playbill and a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles, repaired with a piece of string. Yellowed news clippings announcing the peace at Appomattox.

No one had noticed the hole in the door, bored by a sharp instrument, just large enough for a man's eye, until it was too late. The theatre's owner Ford and his nephew would say the dead man hadn't been the one who'd carved the peephole in the door to the Presidential Box, but that it had been done, officially, by the guards so as to keep watch over the contents without opening the door. Presidential privacy had to be protected, but that night they forgot to protect his person. On rise, it was just like any other night at the theatre, except that there were more eyes on the balcony than the stage.

FLORENCE: Who do you think has been here? What does the postman bring?

*DUNDREARY: Well, sometimes he brings a bag with a lock on it, sometimes newspapers, and sometimes letters, I suppothe.*²³

²³ The dialogue comes from Act I, sc. 1 of Tom Taylor's *Our American Cousin: A Drama in Three Acts* (1869).

After the cataclysmic events of April 14, 1865, the hole was credited to John Wilkes Booth. He had shaved it into the birch in the week preceding the assassination, a scrape or two each night of Tom Taylor's eccentric comedy *Our American Cousin*, until he'd made a perfectly round opening.

FLORENCE: Why papa, it's a letter from dear brother Ned. He writes from Brattleboro, Vermont. [Reading written letter.]

"Quite well, just come in from a shooting excursion, with a party of Crows, splendid fellows, six feet high."

*DUNDREARY: Birds six feet high, what tremendous animals they must be.*²⁴

The man in the stairwell, the great tragedian, winced when the first wave of laughter hit him on his way up to the box. It was not a sound he relished, on or off-stage. But tonight, he would use it to his advantage. Turn laughter on its head. One stair at a time, he waded through the storm.

FLORENCE: [Reading the letter.] "Bye-the-bye, I have lately come quite hap-hazard upon the other branch of our family, which emigrated to America at the Restoration. They are now thriving in this State, and discovering our relationship, they received me most hospitably."

SIR EDWARD: An American branch of the family.

MRS. MOUNTCHESSINGTON: Oh, how interesting!

AUGUSTA: How delightfully romantic! I can imagine the wild young hunter. An Apollo of the prairie.

FLORENCE: An Apollo of the prairie; yes, with a strong nasal twang, and a decided taste for tobacco and cobblers.

²⁴ *Our American Cousin: A Drama in Three Acts* 1.1.

SIR EDWARD: Florence, you forget that he is a Trenchard, and no true Trenchard would have a liking for cobblers or low people of that kind.

*FLORENCE: I hate him, whatever he is, coming here to rob poor cousin Mary of her grandmother's guineas.*²⁵

A comedy of manners to match the mirth and merrymaking in the Capital. One final event to close the festive week of banner-waving, Dixie-playing, and candle-lighting. Along Pennsylvania Avenue, inch by inch of burning beef-tallow peeking from up over the sills of inns and rooming houses on the way to Ford's Theatre. A reminder of his recent triumph. Whispers over Asa's soliloquy as the President and his entourage took their seats. Now, settled on the rocking chair set in the box for just this occasion, he watched the country bumpkin make a fool of himself and chuckled, shared a wink and nudge with the lady on his arm. *Our American Cousin* had been billed as Laura Keene's one-thousandth and final performance. Not to be missed.

*ASA: Wal, now I am alone, I can look about me and indulge the enquiring spirit of an American citizen. What an everlasting lot of things and fixins there is to be sure. [Opens table draw.] Here's a place will hold my plunder beautifully. [Sees bottle.] Hallo, what's this? Something good to drink. [Smells bottle.] It smells awful bad. [Reads label.] Golden Fluid, one application turns the hair a beautiful brown, several will turn the hair a lustrous black. Well, if they keep on it may turn a pea green. I reckon this has been left here by some fellow who is ashamed of the natural color of his top knot.*²⁶

The man behind the door seethed, the sallow apples of his cheeks the shade of a pink lady. The son of Junius Brutus seized an opportunity. To sever the head from the snake and let the rest wriggle. He waited for the ideal moment, when the soft flesh would be exposed, the northern weakness for the southern character revealed, and the

²⁵ *Our American Cousin: A Drama in Three Acts* 1.1.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 1.2.

cover of laughter would muffle his deed. Heads tilted back, throats exposed, tongues lank and lolling, empty notes ringing out from rows upon rows of windpipes below.

Through the hole in the door, the son of of Junius Brutus, of Baltimore, of the South looked in as if on a dollhouse miniature. A quaint drawing room scene in a domestic comedy in which he had no place or part. Two couples, fingers intertwined, wedding bands nestled together, peering down on the embarrassing antics of poor relations in *Our American Cousin*.

...

Put your eye up to the window of the dollhouse and what do you see? Inside, a tiny chamber, draped fabrics, rich velvet, blood red, lily white, royal blue. Maroon paper, Turkish carpets, yellow satin, Nottingham lace. Privacy protected. A cushioned rocker, a tufted sofa. And a family gathered in the parlour. Father's father's portrait over the mantle whispers an inside joke. *How is a Southerner like a fence post? Ha ha ha*, says Father, top hat resting on his knee. *Tee hee hee*, says Mother. The children, of course, go whimble whimble whimble, whispering and giggling, tickling one another, inside the chamber. Tee hee tee hee. *Ha ha ha*. The laughter spreads to every room until the house begins to shake at its foundations, the chandeliers trembling and swaying from the ceiling. Bits of plaster dust powdering Mother's part.

...

If anyone had looked through the peephole that night, they would have witnessed a scene that was playing out all across Washington, on the cue of a desperate rebel. A tragedy surpassing the overwrought melodrama onstage. A subterfuge carried out in private boxes and bedrooms across the city. A plot to murder the whole cabinet and leave the nation paralyzed and helpless, groping in thick darkness. To leave every house clothed in mourning, every heart a chamber of death!

Booth had rigged an apotheosis in among the flies and stale comedy, a bit of machinery to delight the masses. But the other scene was sloppier than the first. Elsewhere, the assassin Payne bungled the job. Impersonating an apothecary, he mounted the stairs with a prescription for the governor of New York in the sickbed. On his way to the chamber, he was surprised by the lively son of the almost dead man. He wet his knife with the son, then bounded to the bed and sunk his dagger into the sick man's throat and face, delivering the medicine directly. And yet, while one man lay in a state of syncope, the other merely got sicker. The columnists and reviewers, union footsoldiers in print and pride, declared it a cowardly act.

THE AWFUL EVENT.

The roof caved in, says the little boy to the little girl as she approaches the pile of Lincoln logs lying in the sand, next to the boy's large, careless footprints. The little girl starts to cry. I didn't do it, says the little boy. The little girl is sobbing, sinking to the sand on her knobby knees. I didn't do it, says the little boy, a little louder this time. Her stomach is heaving as she collects the logs, one by one, and cups them in her hands. The little girl stands, doesn't bother wiping the dirt off her legs, and cries over the ruins of her little cabin. I didn't do it, says the little boy, I didn't do it. But she knew it was him.

April 26th

The new President ordered the publication of the dead man's diaries, an almanac of the year of 1864. A year out of date and print. Before the white hanky flew over Appomattox. Before the fall of Richmond, Selma, Mobile and later Montgomery, before the illumination of Washington with candles, and flags, and before the President claimed Dixie as a national anthem. When he was still the Goon to most, the Emancipator for few, the Communitarian to fewer, and long long long before his Apotheosis in Stephen Downey's 1867 *The Play of Destiny as Played by the Actors from*

*the Kingdom of the Dead in the Theatre of the Universe.*²⁷ He was stuck in the pages of 1864, a radical frozen in time and circumstance, doomed to play out the War of Southern Independence in perpetuity, always aiming for the Yankee suits and men in top hats, symbols of northern aggression. Where the soldiers at Antietam had buried one corpse, he saw twenty fallen brethren. When a New Yorker extended his right hand to shake, he saw a pistol. Where others saw cause for celebration, he found cause for revenge.

He was notoriously sloppy with the details. With names, faces, dates, what have you. His diary is full of errors, mistaken identities. This much is clear in his letters to his accounts manager; he was always a month behind if not more. A letter dated December 10th ought to have been January 10th. The year of 1864 was in fact 1865.

An inborn Southern disease, this lack of attention to dates, brought on by the similarity of seasons, the swamp air, all the intoxicating aromas of Southernness. Sweet boxwood and magnolia blooming at all times. Sweat, soaked into the threads of every new garment, in every tobacco leaf hung from the barn rafters. Cotton fuzz swirling about smokehouse ham hocks. Black earthy odours, melancholy hymns sung in fluid, inchoate syllables. Puffs of smoke rising lazily from clay bowl or corn cob pipes.

One year is like the next, one day like the next, and on and on like that, with no mind to days, dates, times, numbers, schedules, itineraries of any kind. They all bleed together as the Southern clocks spin meaninglessly, backwards into and out of an always soft noon. But what a difference a year makes! In 1864, the Southerners were found

²⁷ Irelan 52.

cumbering their lands. After April 1865, they ceased to cumber and began to fertilize.

But that is an old joke.

May 4th

The memorandum book was discovered on the dead man eleven days after his death, along with some photographs of his girlfriends, actresses with whom he'd had on and offstage romances. The daughter of a prominent abolitionist was among the *cartes-de-visite*.

He possessed an inexplicable allure, his fellow actors would reminisce, in the weeks and months and years after the awful event. Dark, exotic features and a way of projecting his voice through his windpipe that, had he lived another decade, would have ruined his vocal chords and left him mute. In hotels, parlours, drawing rooms, he found throngs of ladies, ready to receive his *carte-de-visite*, enthralled by his macabre monologues. His nemesis, too, had a darkness in him, expressed in the sparse, melancholy verses of his private journals. But Booth had no access to these papers, and refused to see any obvious parallel between the man of the stage and the man in the box. The dead man had a morose, poetic sensibility. More akin to Booth than either would ever know.

*I hear the lone survivors tell
How nought from death could save,
Till every sound appears a knell,
And every spot a grave.*

*I range the fields with pensive tread,
And pace the hollow rooms;
And feel (companions of the dead)
I'm living in the tombs.²⁸*

²⁸ Lincoln 4.

The tour had begun to take its toll on his body. Long and lean, now sunk and withered, green and sallow. Twenty days and ten cities: Baltimore, Harrisburg, Philadelphia, New York, Albany, Buffalo, Columbus, Indianapolis, Chicago, and Springfield. The ladies once clamouring to see him had started to gossip under their breath, how his makeup rubbed off when they brushed their lips across his cheek. Wax, it felt like candle wax, beef tallow, spoiled. He had lost his lustre.

...

The girl peered into the black box and recoiled at the ghastly sight. But she had to look. The right eye was sinking into the skull, and the odours of vagrancy wafting from his wool greatcoat. He hardly resembled the man in the daguerreotype she'd purchased that morning in front of the train station. She reached her hand into the box, felt along the crape lining. A small, wilting daisy, tucked in with the body by some lady in Indianapolis or Columbus. She cupped the flower in her palm. It was missing a few petals, but no matter. A train whistle hooted as she closed her right fist around the memento. She took one last look over her shoulder at the stick figure lying in the box. Held her elbow out to the porter who was reaching up to help her down from the boxcar. Plunged into the soft dirt along the train tracks. Her pulse was thumping in her wrist. She didn't dare open her hand until she got home, but she could still feel the flower inside. The girl ran south along the tracks, giggling.

...

There is a machine called a penny press that flattens out the head and tail of the coin, stretches it into an oval, and presses a fresh image into the copper. A wilderness scene, a tower, a castle. In New York City, you place your penny in the slot, followed by a quarter, turn the hand crank at your waist, and watch the gears grind inside the Plexiglas. After 15 seconds or so, your penny is spat out into a little metal cup at your knee. And there is the new, shinier picture of the Empire State Building, written over Lincoln's profile or that of an Indian chief, depending on the year. And on the back, which used to be the tails side, if you hold it up close to your eye, you can still see the traces of the Memorial on the penny, the Doric columns and porticos stretched, slanted, distorted by the gears of the machine. A souvenir.

...

*Get ready for the Jubilee,
Hurrah! Hurrah!
We'll give the hero three times three,
Hurrah! Hurrah!
The laurel wreath is ready now
To place upon his loyal brow
And we'll all feel gay
When Johnny comes marching home.²⁹*

— Unknown Soldier

...

²⁹ Andrews 168.

Neither Here Nor There: Rites of Passage and *Coups de théâtre*

A Detour

(Enter the Stray, or a girl, with this or an improvised monologue, and a sack of bullets or sand or arrowheads or something else entirely.)

Long about the way things done got smaller. Smaller and smaller. Invisible some of 'em. Fathers. Mothers, too. It was orphans left, running about, this way and that. No one to clean up messes or dry tears. My home dissolved one grain at a time and the winds dismembered the skin and all the dandelion fuzz out into the desert riding on dust. The bigger a thing was to someone, the smaller it got. I tried to collect some of them before they blew away, like the rest. I kept them. *(She indicates the sack.)* There were more little things, more invisible things, more specks of dust taking up more room, and I had nowhere left to put them. So I buried them deep down, and when that didn't work I tried to outrun them. The specks of dust. But I found myself in a desert. I couldn't escape. They used to say, those boys they used to say, when they walked into my body, they used to talk always through parts around me. They would chatter. But they've gone quiet. They don't talk to me. Only to each other. I scared them away, even the good ones. Because all the little things got bigger, and I with 'em. My pores got larger, there were more gaps of air and water, less me more wind and dust and ants. I stopped making sense. I would skip from place to face, face to face, nowhere to nonsense, swamp to desert, slippery rock to Montana.

(Beat.)

Why avoid the breeze or the heat? It's got all you've been missing. It's got the whole world in a handful of sand. I should open the sack. Open the sack and let everything out into the desert. Let it blow away. Blow everywhere. I don't wanna be just one no more. I wanna be great wide open. I'll let the Littlest Boys play the end from now on. Let them stand against my great wide open.

(She opens the sack. Dust breeds and confusion is stirred up everywhere.)

A Theatrical Manifesto of Wandering Desires...

Where to start...

Like Benjamin Banneker, who laid the first boundary marker of Washington, D.C., I fixed the position of my first stone by lying on my back to find a starting point, plotting six stars as they crossed this spot at a particular time of night. And found myself in the margins of a play.

One enters the world of a play as one enters alien territory inhabited by and known only to its aboriginals. As actors, directors, readers, designers, we place our feet in those of a playwright (dead, absent, living, no matter), step into the crowded intersection of past productions, and stand there, waiting for critics in Dodge Darts to mow us over or give us a lift. I suggest that hit-and-run theatre or gas guzzler theatre or what Mac Wellman calls "geezer theatre" is broke. Hitchhiker theatre, now that could be the start of something. But I digress.... We should keep walking in most cases. Through the intersection. Past the man or woman (who is not a stranger, usually) offering us a free ride and a lollipop. Jaywalk more efficiently and effectively to avoid vehicular homicide and road rage, or even better, dig a hole or stretch a footbridge under or over to avoid automobiles all-together. Perhaps my metaphor is exhausting itself. Perhaps I should just keep walking.

Wander through the words on the page and wander into the wor(l)ds of the characters, past performances, present reproductions, other places and faces. Playmaking is a process which extends beyond the individual writing of text, beyond the mounting and blocking of scenes. In the desire to play the modern individual, both

Caesar and Brutus, modern architect or salvage slave, we often tear down a playwright's ego or build it back up in a production, according to history's recognition or misrecognition or disavowal or overestimation or misrepresentation or what have you of the unified body of work. This is not interesting or good theatre, as it has very little to do with history, theatre, or the repetitive, cyclical structure of theatrical process.

To the theatre artist, there are no "unstageable" or impossible plays, only less than enthralling attempts. Keep it interesting. If you must, get the text up on its feet and then cut it off at the ankles. All of this can be good theatre. It can also be dumb theatre. It depends. On what?

Blocking is both the choreography of movement and text and *strategic opacity*.

Stay off the pavement, particularly sidewalks. Find footpaths, carve trails and paths of destruction where you find no clear way for your feet. Block the easy routes, reroute via overpasses, underpasses, send yourself on detours, and orbit the perimeter in order to get at the heart of the play, which is rarely (if ever) at the centre. Skirt the surface to dig deeper, but get off the main arterials. You don't need to pretend they aren't there; you don't need to destroy them either; consciously and conscientiously avoid the routes you don't take.

Make up and play with absence, errors, gaps, mistakes.

No direct routes! No straight lines. No non-stop flights, but flights of fancy welcome. Embrace delays, pit stops, breakdowns. An occasional speed bump. Occasionally, we find ourselves careening out of control, moving toward an end that is actually a crash wall. Take pleasure in the spectacle, the occasional tourist gawkspot,

interrupting, erupting as we make a steady climb to the top of the mount, the views from the side of the face, from beneath it, even, are as stunning as the panoramic vista from the top. Never an unobstructed thoroughway. There is a big bang or a flat tire, accelerations and short stops on a surprise entrance or exit. The inconveniences and annoyances of travel are those the itinerant theatre artist seeks out and exploits. Play with excess. See where it takes you.

Theatre is a series of intersecting and parallel events, not a one-of, hermetically sealed, black box production.

As audience and performer, we approach a space in which worlds and words are interchangeable, constructing and deconstructing one another. We walk together toward the theatre, converge from all points of origin, upon a single point, a point unified in time and space by our very presence, where we will be diverted, turned around, confused. It is not an escape from the "real world" but a performance of and in a playworld, which shapes the possibilities of the world beyond it. We are distracted from the march of "real" time, the laws of order which govern outside the theatre, but that does not imply that we are lawless, ungoverned, unreal; rather, time is measured otherwise. In words, over seconds. In gestures, bolts of cloth, drops of blood, fragments of bone. Artifacts. Gravity may not operate here, but perhaps all lefts are rights, a sitting duck is a monarch, an actor is an ant.

Where there are audiences, there are actors, or the world's a stage.

Itinerant performers, comedians, actors in touring troupes, circus acts, vaudevilles, on the regional theatre circuit. Traveling between New York, Chicago,

Baltimore, D.C., Louisville, Cincinnati, Saint Louis, Miami, Portland, Montreal. Actors play in lines traversing the country, one city to the next. Place your finger on a fixed point— a black dot, a city, or a red circle or star or an audience. Trace any colored line on the paper, in any direction, north, south, east, west, or in between. An actor's lifeline and livelihood. So many lines of business in the map, footpaths, connecting audiences who can now say, oh, I have seen Edwin Booth's Hamlet, with my own eyes, or, Keene's Florence, Wilkes Booth's Shylock or Richard or even his Pescara in *The Apostate*. All eyes stake a claim on the nomad, but they can't claim every performance. They do not travel well. The body of the actor moves through the text in time and space, through memories personal and public with precision. Over and over, night after night, in rep. On both closing night and on a red-hat matinee on a Wednesday afternoon.

Cut your map into a circle, place it on a turntable, and spin, letting the needle hit the grooves on the page. Hear Edwin Booth's Hamlet from St. Louis to Cincinnati, or on an outer groove, on another revolution— Baltimore to DC, say—listen to a passage from *Richard III* delivered by Junius Brutus or John Wilkes himself. The words spoken from city to city by players tell of what is to come and what has come before. They reveal the past, give shape to the present, produce the utopias or dystopias of possibility, traveling in lines from city to city.

A good play asks a question. What question does a good play ask?

—The Stray

AWFUL EVENT.

—

A Shot in the Dark.

—

The Deed Done at the Theatre Last Night.

—

THE ACT OF A DESPERATE REBEL

—

Still Alive at Last Accounts

—

No Hopes Entertained of Her Recovery

—

Attempted Assassination Unsuccessful

—

DETAILS OF THE DREADFUL TRAGEDY

Everywhere and Nowhere— The Parisians Peerpoint
L'Éboueur and Martelle Lavidangereuse have been

performing in a popular vaudeville, with one-ofs in cities and towns across the country. They are traveling players in a company led by the Architect, a Carney cum actor-manager who arranges gigs, writes scripts, directs, and often performs in their scenarios. They are very good at what they do, but they knew they could be better. Set themselves apart.

One night, they rebelled against the Architect. Improvised. And caused a reaction never before seen in the theatre. An uproar in the audience, whose expectations were overturned. Cut off at the knees, more like. Ebu and Vide were hooked on it, on what they were able to stir in the audience. The Architect, of course, was furious that the scenario he had carefully and cleverly plotted had been so severely maimed. Pulled in so different a direction. He threatened Ebu and Vide with cuts, of lines and of lives. And so their little girl entered his plot.

Ebu and Vide, in retribution, murdered the Architect – onstage. The crowd screamed for it, died for it. The frenzy, the confusion, the lust!

Each night they selected a new face from the audience, someone no one would miss, to play the third part. Ebu and Vide sent their young daughter to scout out the next victim during the show, anyone who couldn't afford the ticket. She would invite him in to see the show for free with her. Then she would lead the mark into the theatre, to his death. A ragpicker, a haberdasher, a leper, a blind beggar. None who would be missed. Until one night.

The little girl had met a little boy during her days alone in town. She had pretended to be an orphan. He had pretended to be an orphan. They were both excellent pretenders. They had become friends, or pretended to become friends. They had befriended another little boy. Killed him. Befriended a little girl. Killed her. Tit for tat, back and forth. The little girl

and little boy would kill the friends they made while their parents were killing, or watching the killing in the theatre, respectively. It wasn't long before those in the audience returned to empty homes and wondered what had become of their children. Eventually, it came back that all the missing children had gone that way between the hours of 7 and 9 pm. That they were sons and daughters of those in attendance at the theatre. Ebu and Vide had no idea that behind the scenes their daughter and her pretending friend were killing sons and daughters. One night the little boy and little girl met a friend they wanted to keep alive. The little girl told her about her parents' work with the homeless. But she ran to mummy and daddy in the audience, let them know the game. Ebu and Vide copped to killing the vagabonds, but not the children. Oh, not the children.

No one believed them. In a public spectacle unmatched by any of their own, witnessed by the pretending little girl, the pretending little boy, and a crowd thirsty for blood, they met their end on the scaffold, for the murder of the kiddies. (The vagabonds could never be accounted for, and charges were never filed.)

The little girl, once pretending to be an orphan, now is an orphan. The little boy is now an outlaw and a runaway, but to the little girl, he is an orphan still. She doesn't know any different. They leave town, promising to return, to take vengeance on the town (and the stray) who executed (so so wrongly) her parents.

WANTED

The little girl was born in the theatre. It is all she knows. She knows death and sex as a spectacle. Life as a tragedy. Pride as a fatal flaw. A skull is that of a clown from childhood. A gun must go off. Secrets build suspense and authority. Everyone and everything is a possible actor or prop in a plot or play. Small things always mean something larger, refer to something else. Beyond her. What one

pretends becomes real, as in the case of her own orphan status.

Bang!

The little boy was born in Paris, Texas. A different kind of playground. In Paris, a skull is a skull, but the little boy sees a thousand skulls in one. A gun must be a six-shooter. But he prefers to use his hands. He likes the little girl, her way of seeing things, of taking pieces of things and making them mean something bigger than anyone in Paris could ever imagine. He likes that what she pretends becomes real. Wonders if what he pretends will ever become real. It scares him. Entices him. He pretends a lot of things. His mother is a bad bad woman. His father is gone, a cowboy or an outlaw on the run.

Together, they make small things into something big. They make sand castles in the desert where they sit, in no man's land, waiting for the time to enact their revenge. Collecting sand, objects blown out into the dunes with the desert winds. Bringing them into their pretend plots. Filling in the empty hours of their time in the desert, away from Paris, Texas. It is all rehearsal for when the pretending becomes real. Each thing that blows in becomes something integral to their play. Nothing is an accident. It all means something. Whatever, whoever happens on their scene must be integrated into the plot. Travelers, vagabonds, thieves, developers, the childhood friend who brought her parents down. Or someone who looks just like her.

On the other side of the world, there is a girl who believes her father is a liar, that there is something beyond the swamp where she was born. Her father thinks he knows everything, but he has never left the swamp. He was always telling her stories, fables, fictions. She prefers histories. Real places. Real people. She is not an orphan, but her mother is gone or dead. And she blames her father, who is always warning her against acting like her mother. Mummy was always trying to leave the swamp, to see and experience foreign places. Foreign faces. One night, the little girl makes believe a reality on

the swamp, slips in while pretending to travel, and finds herself in an ocean of navigators and explorers (whom she knows through her voracious appetite for books) who direct her to land at the bottom of the ocean. She finds a desert under the ocean. A desert which contains the truths that her father kept from her, the secret codes and histories and characters that he himself didn't know. She records them, all the truths of the desert, compares them to the lies her father told. She loves to compare, to prove her father wrong. To make larger things small so she can understand them, keep them with her, remember them, take them with her to those who might benefit. Small bits of truth which might be recorded, transported over distances, to other misled children, children without mothers, or with big, bad fathers. Save the children!

SEEN AND HEARD

Absent fathers have been seen and heard, floating around the desert because they have no place to go. They hover around others, playing fathers, but they are not real fathers. Beware! They are just ghosts of fathers. Be on the lookout for dead characters.

UNWANTED AND WANTING

REYES: A fabulist and a father. From El Dorado. Looking for a new beginning after the exsanguinations of his home town. Fucked up the first time. This time, will build a flood wall. Has a men only clause.

REMY: An architect and a damn good father. From Paris. Looking for a fresh start in Paris. Fucked up the first time around. This time, will electrify the picket fence. Wants a partner.

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