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To Whom the Glory

Anne Frances Holloway

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

English

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for the Degree of Master of Arts at
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ABSTRACT

To Whom the Glory

Anne Frances Holloway

To Whom the Glory is a two-act play set in the Virginia jail cell of John Brown after his failed raid on the Harpers Ferry armoury in 1859. Brown shared his cell with one of the other raiders, Aaron Stevens. Brown was 59, and Stevens was 28. This play suggests what could have happened in that cell. The theme of the play is that belief in God does not absolve the individual from responsibility for his or her actions, and the central action revolves around the relationship between Stevens, who blames Brown for his current situation, and Brown, who attributes his actions to the will of God.

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FOREWORD

During the night of October 16, 1859, abolitionist John Brown led a small group of men on a raid of the federal armoury at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. He firmly believed that he was an instrument of God, and that his action would start a movement that would lead to the freedom of all Southern slaves. He had dedicated the last few years of his life to this cause, and had spent little time with his wife and younger children. The raid was a failure as the men were quickly surrounded by angry citizens, local militia and federal troops. After the raid Brown shared a cell with one of the other raiders, Aaron Stevens. This historical circumstance provided an interesting starting point for a play.

How would the relationship between these two develop in this small space of time and place? This cell is the last home either of them will know, and both have only a few months to live. Here we have two men who have been brought to this place by their belief in social justice and the immorality of slavery. Both are injured. Both face the same fate. But there the similarities end.

Brown, at fifty-nine, was a thin, white-haired old man, prone to ill-health and aged beyond his years. Stevens was a dark-haired, tall, muscular young man of twenty-eight. Christianity had always been central to Brown's life but Stevens had rejected Christianity. Stevens was in the same room, confronting Brown daily with the fact that the raid was an utter failure because of Brown's misjudgement and lack of action. Instead of leading his army triumphantly through the South to achieve his glory, Brown had become a captive, just like the slaves he hoped to free. His guerilla army was decimated. Of the twenty-one men that took part in the raid with him, only six escaped. Ten of his men died in the raid,

including two of Brown's sons, Watson and Oliver. Watson was twenty-four and left a wife and baby behind. Oliver was twenty and had been married only eighteen months. Dauphin and William Thompson, brothers of Brown's son-in-law, were also dead, as were Leary, a mulatto who had left his wife and child to join Brown, and Newby, an ex-slave who had hoped to liberate his wife and children from a Virginia plantation. In the weeks spent at the Kennedy farm hideout before the attack on Harpers Ferry, Stevens had time to form friendships with these men, and with Brown's daughter, Annie. Now Stevens and the other captured raiders are in a Virginia prison awaiting trial. Brown no longer has an army to command, and he will never achieve his dream of triumphantly leading the slaves of the South to freedom.

Brown became a legend, with books, poems and songs written about him. Stevens was quickly forgotten. In my play Brown seeks the glory and wants to be remembered. Stevens takes the nobler course. He wants to be forgotten in order to free Annie emotionally so that she can love someone else. To whom the glory?

Though many of the events referred to in this play did take place, and the characters were real people, it must be remembered that this is a work of fiction and the depiction of these characters is the result of the author's imagination. But to do justice to real people, it is important to base the fiction on reality and stay within the realms of plausibility. The famous (or infamous) John Brown is usually portrayed as a strong, stubborn man, unwavering in his belief that he was doing the right thing, but there is evidence in the reminiscences of his children suggesting that underneath this stern, masculine veneer there was a gentler, more feminine side of him which rarely surfaced.

We all know men, and women too, who see expression of emotion as a weakness, and in the period that John Brown lived this was even more so. Yet what evidence is there to show that these men with stiff upper lips did not feel the same emotions as men at the end of the twentieth-century? What was different, however, was the nature of the society these people were nurtured in. It was a society in which masculinity prevailed and femininity in men was seen as weakness. Most of the biographies, plays, poems and songs about John Brown have been written by men and tend to emphasise his masculine strengths and faults. I suggest another side to him: one that becomes tormented by doubts about his past actions. Little has been written about the forgotten Stevens. He was a trained soldier. He was also literate, musical and, as his letters show, articulate. The history books tell of no love relationship between Annie and Stevens, but, living as they were for several weeks in the same house, such a relationship could have developed. Brown's wife, Mary, did indeed visit her husband just before his execution even though he had told her not to. She knew the gentler side of Brown that many others failed to see. What would they have talked about during this last visit? It was Mary's last chance to reveal her true feelings about her husband and what he had done. Perhaps she revealed more than sympathy and grief for her condemned husband. George Hoyt's role as a defence lawyer in the trial was, as far as I could ascertain, minor and ineffective. In this fictional account he represents all those who loved and admired Brown, and did not see, or did not want to see his faults. Avis the jailor was a kind man, who treated his prisoners well. As I could find no history for him apart from this, I gave him one.

As most people will realise, the music is not my own. "The Lonesome Road" is a traditional song, "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" is an old spiritual, and "Jeannie with the Light Brown Hair" was written by Stephen Foster in 1854.

CHARACTERS AND SET

Aaron Stevens **A large, muscular man, in his late twenties, who has an explosive temper. Though he is in poor shape because of his wounds, he still exudes great physicality.**

John Brown **At fifty-nine, he is an old man with white hair who moves slowly and with pain. His head is bandaged. Yet he is still domineering, and expresses himself as forcibly as his injuries permit. He tries to hide his emotions when talking of his wife and daughter, but is passionate when he speaks of God. He has a pocket watch which he consults frequently.**

Annie Brown **Brown's daughter. She is sixteen, with long dark hair. Her appearances are as if in the imagination of Stevens and Brown.**

Mary Brown **John Brown's wife, a woman in her fifties.**

Avis **The jailor, an Irishman in his late fifties.**

George Hoyt **A young lawyer.**

The setting is a jail cell in Charlestown, Virginia in 1859. The furniture consists of two cot beds, a table, two chairs and a small wood stove. High up on the wall is a small window. As the play progresses, a pile of newspapers accumulates under Stevens' bed, which is near the door. A wooden cross hangs above Brown's bed on the other side of the room. The table and chairs are on the same side as Brown's bed. Brown's Bible, pens, papers and an ink-pot are on the table. It should appear that the only exit is the door, but concealed access is needed for Annie to appear in the imagination of Brown and Stevens.

ACT I

Scene 1

The stage is in darkness. The murmur of male voices is heard, then the sound of someone thumping his fist on a table.

BROWN: *(Taped, offstage)* Remember the words of Joshua, men. "Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified. Do not be discouraged, for the Lord will be with you wherever you go." This raid will give us the arms we need. The town and armoury. They're poorly guarded. We have a detailed plan of Harpers Ferry. We can't fail. Then the slaves throughout Virginia will rise up against their masters and run to join us in our free state in the mountains. As the news spreads throughout the South, more and more men will be inspired by our success and they too will rise up against this evil. This is the work of the Lord. With His help we'll vanquish slavery from this continent. God is with us and we shall prevail.

A single shot is heard, then the sound of a crowd in the streets and more gunfire builds up and dies down. After a few moments a crowd is heard again, as if in a courtroom, which is silenced by the sound of a gavel on a desk. The slamming of a door follows. After a few moments silence, the lights come up slowly to reveal STEVENS, BROWN

and ANNIE, who is holding a basket of laundry. Her hair is neatly braided. BROWN is sitting at the desk writing. STEVENS is standing looking at ANNIE. Only STEVENS sees her.

STEVENS: Can I help you with that basket, Annie?

ANNIE: You could carry it as far as the door for me, Mr. Stevens.

STEVENS: I'd rather you called me by my first name.

ANNIE: You'd best not come outside. You might be seen.

STEVENS: Can't you stay and talk a little longer?

ANNIE: Father said not to speak to the men hidden here any more than I have to.

BROWN slams his fist on the table. ANNIE exits.

BROWN: Just a week until my trial.

STEVENS: *(Looking after ANNIE)* If only we'd stayed at the hideout longer . . .

BROWN: They're rushing this through to be sure there's no time to prepare our case.

STEVENS: What case? We were charged yesterday with the murder of four whites and one Negro, of conspiring with slaves to rebel, and of treason against the state of Virginia. That mob outside the courthouse think all that's needed is a rope and a tree. Such men will be our jury.

BROWN: There's no time to lose. I must plan my defence.

As STEVENS speaks he unbuttons his shirt to reveal bandages.

STEVENS: Then there's the two men Judge Parker's appointed to defend us, when you insisted you wanted no counsel. A Virginia lawyer and the mayor of Harpers Ferry.

STEVENS touches his wounds gently, and winces.

BROWN: Painful still?

STEVENS: Yes.

BROWN: My supporters won't let me down. They'll send a good lawyer. We won't need Parker's men.

STEVENS: I'd like to think we'd have an abolitionist defending us, at least. Not that it'll do much good in this part of the country.

STEVENS buttons up his shirt again. AVIS enters and hands a letter to BROWN.

AVIS: A letter for you, Captain Brown.

BROWN: Thank you, Mr. Avis.

As AVIS exits BROWN reads the letter and frowns.

STEVENS: Something wrong?

BROWN: No.

BROWN puts the letter in the pocket of the coat hanging by his bed. He looks at his watch, sits down at the table and starts to write.

STEVENS: We're like mules roped together on a mountain path. When the leader stumbles, those following are all pulled down with him. If you hang, there's no hope for the rest of us.

BROWN: We must trust that the Lord will see us through this, Aaron.

STEVENS: How can you sit there so calmly? Knowing that the next journey you take could be to the gallows. But then, you haven't been in this situation before. I have.

BROWN stops writing and looks up.

BROWN: When?

STEVENS: When I was in the army. I assaulted a senior officer, and was sentenced to hang.

BROWN: I expect you had a good reason for doing that.

STEVENS: Yeah. There was a good reason. I was drunk.

BROWN: You'd given up hope then, and yet God rescued you.

STEVENS: No. President Pierce did. My sentence was changed to three years hard labour. I already know how it feels to imagine the noose tightening around my neck.

STEVENS turns away and does not see BROWN put his hand up to his neck for a moment.

BROWN: It's best not to talk about it.

STEVENS: The hours pass too slowly. The days pass too fast. You try to forget that there isn't much time left, and think of nothing else. Sleep's the only refuge, yet when it comes it's filled with nightmares. You pace and pace from wall to wall, mile upon mile. The walls close in, squeeze your lungs so you gasp for breath. You want to die now, and you want to live until the last possible minute. The mind goes round and round, an endless loop of "what if", "why didn't I", "why was I so foolish as to. . ."

BROWN: You . . . you shouldn't let your thoughts dwell on such things.

BROWN starts writing again.

STEVENS: You try to fill your mind with gentle memories . . .

ANNIE appears. Only STEVENS sees her.

STEVENS: Are you happy here, Annie?

ANNIE: I like it well enough. Now. But when Father said I was to come down to Virginia to look after my brothers and all you other men he has hiding out in this old farmhouse, I didn't want to come.

STEVENS: You were scared of what might happen?

ANNIE: Up north on the farm we have friends around us who support Father's fight against slavery. But down here . . . I heard Ma say some of the southern slaveowners'd shoot an abolitionist soon as they'd shoot a squirrel. She didn't want me to come. It's hard for her to run the farm

on her own and look after the children. My little brother's eleven and my sister's only four. But Father insisted. Said he needed a woman in the house to help convince the neighbours he's just a cattle trader.

STEVENS: And so you came. And you're not scared any more?

ANNIE: Some of the men. I don't like the way they look at me sometimes. Makes me feel uncomfortable. But you're different . . . I've talked too long.

ANNIE starts to leave.

STEVENS: Don't go yet . . .

ANNIE exits as AVIS enters.

AVIS: The lawyer you were expecting has arrived, Captain Brown.

BROWN: Send him in right away.

AVIS exits, shows HOYT in, then exits again.

HOYT: George G. Hoyt. Member of the Massachusetts bar. Such an honour to be asked to assist in your defence, Captain Brown. I heard you speak in Concord.

BROWN: Why weren't you here sooner? I needed you here yesterday.

HOYT: I came as quickly as I could.

STEVENS: We'll probably all hang for this, anyway, so what difference does a day make?

HOYT: You must be Mr. Stevens. I'd heard you were being held in the same cell as the Captain.

STEVENS: Is anyone else with you?

HOYT: No.

STEVENS: *(To BROWN)* Is this fresh-faced lawyer the man you were pinning your hopes on? No offence, Mr. Hoyt. But you're extremely young. How well do you know the laws of Virginia?

HOYT: Well, there's not been much time, but I—

BROWN stands up and gestures to HOYT to sit at the table.

BROWN: Sit down, Mr. Hoyt, and let's get started.

HOYT sits at the table and takes some papers and a pen from his briefcase.

BROWN: Write down all I say. "We allowed the train that arrived at the station to go through. I myself assured the passengers of their perfect safety." Get that conductor's name, and the names of all the passengers.

HOYT: How—

BROWN: Next. "We released several of our prisoners." Get their names. "We treated all our prisoners with kindness and humanity." Come along, Mr. Hoyt. Write it down. Next. "Our orders, from the first, were that no unarmed person should be injured, under any circumstances whatever." Prove that by questioning our prisoners.

STEVENS: *(To BROWN)* It would be easier for Mr. Hoyt to understand if you started at the beginning.

BROWN: Very well. Three years ago—

STEVENS: Not that far back! This is no time for your rambling. I'll tell him. The Captain decided it was time to make our move. The men were getting restless after so many weeks in hiding and he felt we had enough men and guns to go ahead. We entered the town after midnight, overcame the watchman at the gate, pried it open with a crowbar, and both the armoury and the arsenal were ours. It was all so easy. Then the first shot was fired. At the relief watchman when he came on duty.

BROWN: It was only a flesh wound.

STEVENS: We took some hostages—

BROWN: Now the streets were full of men brought out by the gunfire. Armed with rifles. Axes. Anything they could lay their hands on. Some fled with their families up the mountainside as the rumour spread that hundreds of Negroes and abolitionists had invaded their town. Twenty-two of us, and they thought we were a thousand!

STEVENS: But the Captain here let the train that came into the station go on.

BROWN: That was part of the plan. To spread the word further, so that others would come and join us.

STEVENS: We sure were joined by others. Militiamen poured into the town all morning. That's how we came to be trapped in the engine house with our hostages. Was that part of your plan, too, Captain Brown?

BROWN: No. I—

STEVENS: We could have pulled it off. There was plenty of time to take the guns and make a run for it. Plenty of opportunity. But you delayed and delayed and delayed. So long it seemed you wanted to be captured.

BROWN: I'm tired now, Mr. Hoyt. I need to rest. You have the information you need to find good witnesses. You may leave.

STEVENS: *(To BROWN)* You're dismissing him now?

BROWN: *(To HOYT)* Come back tomorrow.

STEVENS: How can he even begin to prepare a defence with so little information and a handful of "witnesses" who'll testify against us! You're crazy!

HOYT: If you don't mind my saying so, Captain Brown, I think that—

BROWN: Tomorrow.

HOYT: But there's one more thing I must tell you. It's news you'll be glad to hear.

BROWN: Tell me quickly.

HOYT: *(Quietly)* I was sent here to defend you. But there's another reason too. I'm to see if there's a way to storm this jail and free you. *(To STEVENS)* I'm afraid you may have to stay behind to help Captain Brown escape. But your trial won't start until the new year. Maybe later on—

STEVENS: You needn't sweeten the pill with lies. I know there'll be no plan to rescue me. I've no Northern admirers with money in their pockets.

BROWN: I'll have no part in any such scheme. I've given my word to Mr. Avis that I'll not try to escape, and I intend to keep it.

HOYT: But—

BROWN: Write to the people who employed you on my behalf, and tell them that John Brown will not be rescued.

HOYT: Why—

STEVENS: Give up, Mr. Hoyt. Once his mind's made up, he'll not change it. Captain Brown's a very stubborn man.

HOYT: (*To BROWN*) Is that really what you want me to tell them?

BROWN: I must be allowed to die, if necessary, for a cause I believe in. It's God's will. Goodbye Mr. Hoyt.

HOYT exits. The lights fade.

Scene 2

BROWN is reading a letter. STEVENS is standing down stage left.

ANNIE: *(Offstage left)* Is that you, Aaron?

STEVENS: Come over by the window. The moon's so bright, I might be seen if I come out on the stoop.

ANNIE appears, her hair loose. She is wearing a thin black shawl on her shoulders. They talk stage left as if on either side of a window. Only STEVENS sees ANNIE.

ANNIE: This is my favourite time. I love sitting out here in the evening. Listening to the quiet sounds of the night. The wind in the popple trees. An owl hooting in the woods. Can you smell the roses over there on the fence?

STEVENS: Not from here. I plan to buy my own farm some day. Somewhere in New England, maybe. Raise sheep and cattle. Sell them to the big cities. I want children too. My wife and I, we'll sit out on the porch on a summer's evening like this and listen to the singing of the cicadas. My boy'll fall asleep on my knee as we watch the moon rise from behind the mountain.

ANNIE: That's your dream?

STEVENS: It is.

ANNIE: Ma and Father. That was their dream too. They had the farm with sheep and cattle. They'd sit out on the porch on a summer's evening and look at the moon. But Father abandoned that dream for another.

BROWN: Hoyt wants to use madness as my defence.

ANNIE does not react to BROWN.

ANNIE: Some of the newspapers. They say he's mad. Do you think he is?

BROWN: I said Hoyt wants to use madness as my defence.

STEVENS: *(To BROWN)* That might not be too hard to prove. I only wish the rest of us could show we caught your madness. Then we too would have a chance of living.

BROWN: I'll not go along with it.

STEVENS: Why not? Why do you want to die?

BROWN: If my execution is God's way of abolishing slavery, then so be it.

STEVENS: How can it do that?

BROWN: It'll spur the North to take on the South.

ANNIE: He's not afraid to die for what he believes in. Sometimes I think that's what he wants.

STEVENS: You think the hanging of the great Captain Brown'll anger the abolitionists so much they'll rush headlong into war?

BROWN: I do.

STEVENS: You sure have a high opinion of your reputation. Wouldn't you rather ask your God to spare you for other work?

BROWN: No.

STEVENS: Let no man pray that John Brown be spared!

ANNIE: Following Father's dream may be the end of yours.

STEVENS: Your trial's already started. I'll be waiting weeks, months even. They're probably hoping I'll die of my wounds and save them the trouble. Ten, twenty, fifty years from now, who'll remember the name of Aaron Stevens? Who'll write books, sing songs, erect monuments to me? To you the glory, Captain Brown, not to me. Not to the other men who like me lie on their cots every night staring at the ceiling.

ANNIE: Whatever happens, I'll not forget you and your gentle ways.

ANNIE exits.

STEVENS: Maybe it's better to be forgotten. Grief becomes a millstone that hangs about the neck of those who mourn too long.

BROWN: You talk as if the sentence is already fixed. You must have faith—

STEVENS: Faith in what? That a jury of Virginians'll suddenly see that we're right, and they're wrong? That ours is a noble cause, and because of it we should live? Hoping for that is madness indeed.

BROWN: "Seek the Lord while he may be found. Call on him while he is near."

STEVENS: No one calls me mad. I wish they would.

BROWN: You'd choose living a lie over dying for what you believe in?

STEVENS: I'm twenty-eight. Not half-way through my life. Yes. I had dreams of living to see all slaves free. I was willing to join the fight for that. But I had other dreams, too. When a man reaches thirty, it's time to settle down. Find a gentle, loving wife. Someone like . . . someone like your daughter Annie.

BROWN: Annie will make someone a good wife, someday.

STEVENS: She will.

BROWN: And she'll be able to tell her children proudly that their grandfather, Captain John Brown, was the man who started the war against slavery.

STEVENS: Will she remember me?

BROWN: I'm sure she'll not forget any of my brave men.

STEVENS: It's best that Annie forget.

BROWN: What do you mean by that?

STEVENS: She's too young to live in the past. She must put all this behind her, and move on.

STEVENS picks up a newspaper from the table and starts to read it. BROWN starts writing.

STEVENS: Maybe Hoyt is on the right track. It says here "Captain Brown's son Frederick was known to have fits of madness." That true?

BROWN: He was afflicted with fierce, blinding headaches. They left him wild and easily excited. He was sick, but he wasn't mad.

STEVENS: And your eldest son?

BROWN: John?

STEVENS: Yes. It talks here of his behaviour after the incident in Kansas, at Pottawatomie Creek, a few years ago.

BROWN: The troubles there, you mean.

STEVENS: The Kansas papers used a stronger word. Massacre. Didn't John show signs of madness then?

BROWN: They kept him in prison for months even though he was nowhere near the creek that night. He . . . he became . . . very upset.

STEVENS: Troubles rather than massacre. Upset rather than insane. Word for word. Such manipulation of language soothes the troubled mind.

BROWN: It's not manipulation, it's the truth.

STEVENS: No. I think the truth is much, much, uglier.

STEVENS starts to read the newspaper again. BROWN gets the letter from his coat pocket. STEVENS looks up briefly and sees BROWN put the letter under his pillow.

BROWN: Why do you keep reading those newspapers, over and over and over again?

STEVENS: To reassure myself that you and I are martyrs, and not misguided fools. Here. Listen to this. "Captain Brown was engaged in no vile, base, sordid, malicious or selfish enterprise. His aims and ends were

lofty, noble, generous, benevolent, humane and Godlike." Your friend Langston wrote that in *The Cleveland Plain Dealer*.

BROWN: I hoped he'd join us on the raid.

STEVENS: And why didn't he? Because he could see the plan was doomed to failure? Well he was right and we were wrong. That makes you and me fools as well as martyrs.

BROWN: A man who fights on God's side is never a fool.

STEVENS: Not even if he manages to capture a federal armoury with a handful of men, then doesn't pull out when he has the chance?

BROWN: It was God's will that—

STEVENS: I'm sick to death of your constant braying about God's will! It was your incompetence that killed our men! Do you really believe it was God's will Newby should die in a gutter, his black ears cut off as souvenirs, his body slobbered over by pigs? He'd come to fight with you in the hopes of freeing his wife and children. Was it God's will that the crowd jeer and fire bullets into Leeman and Thompson's bodies long after they were dead? These men. They believed in you! Trusted your judgement!

STEVENS picks up the rest of the newspapers from under his bed, and throws them down.

STEVENS: Here. Read all about it. About what you did to these people. Because you did it, not your God!

BROWN: I didn't kill them. They were killed by the enemy. By men who see Negroes as little more than animals, and treat them accordingly. Do you think I don't care about what happened to our men? But there's a dignity in their deaths that the desecration of these men's bodies can't erase, because they died doing God's work. And if we and the other captured men hang, then it's God's will and for God's glory.

STEVENS: Just tell me one thing. Why didn't you lead us out of Harpers Ferry when we had the chance?

BROWN: I was waiting on the Lord.

STEVENS: But he didn't come through, did he! God directs you in everything, but at the key moment, he clams right up!

BROWN: He has other plans. That's why He's brought us here.

STEVENS: So, tell me. Has he given you any indication as to what those plans might be? I mean, it would be real nice to know what's going to happen.

BROWN: He'll show us in his own time.

STEVENS: Well, I'd rather know now. So how about asking him for me. While you're at it, ask him if he could send us a more experienced lawyer. Move over to under the window where he can hear you better. You don't want to? Then I'll ask him myself.

STEVENS walks towards the window.

STEVENS: Hey, God! It's me. Aaron Stevens. Down here in Charlestown. The Captain here tells me you speak to him all the time. Tell him what to do. Well, now I want to ask you a few questions.

BROWN: Aaron!

STEVENS: Why am I here? Why did you let me follow this crazy old man. He is crazy, isn't he? And another thing. If we're fighting the slaveholders in your name, why for Christ's sake didn't you show us a little more support!

BROWN: "God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows."

STEVENS: And so I'll go to Hell. But what about you? How do you plan to explain, when you're standing in front of St. Peter at the gates of Heaven, why the first man to die in this great scheme of yours to liberate the slaves was an innocent bystander? A black innocent bystander. Satan must have loved that one. I can hear him laughing now. Was that God playing a joke on you? Trying to make you worried that you might not make it through those pearly gates after all?

BROWN: Such talk is blasphemous.

STEVENS: Only for those who believe in God. Oh, I thought I knew who God was. But I lost my faith on the battlefields of the war with Mexico, watching good men on both sides die. Fighting over what? Not to

free the oppressed. Not to make men equal. But for land. Man self-destructs through his own will, and your God has no part in it.

BROWN: You don't believe in a higher power?

STEVENS: I didn't say that. The Indians. They believe in a Great Spirit. Perhaps there is something out there we can't understand. Indifferent though. It's man's arrogance that makes him think a caring God exists.

BROWN: But many Indians have been converted. They learned of God's love through the Bible.

STEVENS: I met an old Cherokee chief a few years ago. Seems some missionary had read Matthew's gospel to him. "It seems a good book," the chief said. "Strange that the white people aren't better after having it so long."

BROWN: God's love for man is so great that he let his son die for us.

STEVENS: That was nearly two thousand years ago, and where's Christianity today? It's in the South, quoting the Old Testament to show that God meant Negroes to be slaves. It's in the North saying slavery's wrong but Negroes are still inferior. How many Northerners would welcome a Negro to sit at their table? How many more are subscribing to this plan to send them back to Africa, not because the freed slaves want to go there, but to be rid of them? Well, if being a Christian means being associated with such hypocrisy, I don't want any part of it.

STEVENS reads from the newspaper.

STEVENS: "Captain Brown's only hope of escaping the gallows is a plea of insanity." You want to die. You have a reason why. But I have a reason to live. If you won't take it, then I will. Call in the jailor. Call the doctor. Call the lawyer. I, Aaron Dwight Stevens, wish to be declared insane!

STEVENS tips over the table, and BROWN scrambles to pick up his papers. STEVENS grabs a handful of papers, and, crouching down, starts growling and pretending to eat them.

STEVENS: Your words are too hard to digest. I'll have to burn them.

STEVENS goes over to the stove. BROWN follows him.

BROWN: No! My letters!

STEVENS opens the stove door and is about to throw the papers in. BROWN puts his hand on STEVENS arm.

BROWN: Don't do it, Aaron. Don't destroy them. Please. I may not have time to write many more.

STEVENS hesitates for a moment, then closes the stove door, hands the papers to BROWN, and walks towards his bed.

STEVENS: You really thought I was going to burn them, didn't you? But what would have been the point? It's not you I'd have to convince of my madness.

BROWN: Don't you ever come near my possessions again!

As STEVENS watches him, BROWN fumbles in his coat pocket, finds a piece of chalk there, and draws a line down the middle of the stage so that the table and chairs are on his side of the line.

STEVENS: My chair please.

BROWN passes one of the chairs to STEVENS.

STEVENS sits down on it. BROWN picks up his papers and starts to sort them out on the table.

STEVENS: What about the table?

BROWN: What about it?

STEVENS: I'm entitled to half.

BROWN looks at him for a moment, then drags the table so that it is half-way over the line.

STEVENS: The chalk please.

BROWN hesitates, then hands him the chalk. STEVENS carefully moves the papers over and draws a line down the middle of the table. He hands the chalk back to BROWN and goes back to his chair. Then he gets up, fetches the newspapers from under his bed, and puts them on the table. He picks up the newspaper he was reading before and sits down again on his chair. BROWN tidies his papers, then

*starts to write. STEVENS watches him for a moment, then
throws the paper down on the floor, and goes over to his
bed. The lights fade.*

Scene 3

STEVENS is standing stage left looking at ANNIE who is holding a bunch of roses. He takes her other hand.

ANNIE: Father's sending me home in a few days. He says I won't be needed any more. You'll all be leaving soon.

STEVENS: These past few weeks . . . the time we've had together . . . I don't think I could have stayed cooped up like this otherwise. When I saw you outside, I'd stand by the window where I couldn't be seen, watching you. Wishing I were free to go with you down through the meadow and feel the sun on my face. Sit in the shade of the trees by the river. I don't want you to leave, and yet you must. It's not safe for you to stay.

ANNIE: It's not my safety that I fear for. What will Father lead you into?

STEVENS: Shall I write to you, if I can?

ANNIE: I'd like that.

STEVENS lets go of ANNIE'S hand and starts to run his hand through her hair.

STEVENS: When this is all over, Annie—

ANNIE: When this is all over, you and my brothers and my father may all be dead. Then all Ma and I'll be left with is your gravestones and our memories.

ANNIE turns away and starts to leave, plucking a few petals off the roses and letting them drop to the ground.

STEVENS: No! That's not how I want it to end . . .

ANNIE remains standing stage left with her back to STEVENS as AVIS enters, carrying a plate of food. AVIS does not see ANNIE, and she does not react to AVIS.

STEVENS: *(To AVIS)* Do you think I can eat at a time like this, while the old man's in court? Take it away.

AVIS starts to leave.

STEVENS: No. Please stay.

STEVENS gestures towards one of the chairs. AVIS puts the plate on the table and sits down.

STEVENS: When will we know?

AVIS: Tomorrow, maybe.

STEVENS: Then you don't think it'll take too long to reach a verdict. No doubt he's turned the jury against him with his long-winded speeches. "Let's hang him," Judge Parker'll say. "Let's hang him so we don't have to listen to his ranting any longer."

ANNIE slowly plucks more petals from the roses and lets them drop onto the floor when she speaks.

ANNIE: Some of the men. I heard them mocking Father.

AVIS: You don't seem to have much respect for the Captain.

STEVENS: Captain. How he loves that title. He thinks it makes him so important. But what's he ever been captain of? Not a unit of the Army of the United States of America, but of a little rag-tag bunch of men he managed to persuade to follow his dream. And now he doesn't even have that.

ANNIE: I don't like to hear them mock him. He's stern. Stubborn too. But it's compassion for the slaves and love for God that drives him on.

AVIS: And it's his fault you're here now?

STEVENS: The raid failed because of him.

AVIS: And did he force you to go with him?

STEVENS: No.

AVIS: Then why did you go?

ANNIE: Will you go along with his plan even if you think it's too dangerous?

STEVENS: I thought we could pull it off.

AVIS: So you went of your own free will.

STEVENS: Free will's not something the Captain believes in. For him providence rules our destiny both here and in the afterlife. Man has no power of self-determination.

AVIS: Then that's a point on which he and I must disagree. We always have choices.

STEVENS: What choices do I have now? To lie down or stand up? To read or sleep? To talk or to remain silent?

ANNIE: Would you speak up against him?

AVIS: You can choose to blame Captain Brown for everything and rage against him. Or you can treat him more gently. Consider how he feels. He has enough anguish of his own. Why add yours to his?

STEVENS: If he has anguish, he fails to show it.

As she speaks, ANNIE kneels down and spreads her shawl on the floor. She arranges the roses on the shawl as if putting them on a gravestone.

ANNIE: My brother Frederick. He died out in Kansas. He was walking down the road to visit a friend one morning when he was shot down in cold blood by a proslavery man.

AVIS: We all have doubts, hear seductive whispers.

ANNIE: The letter that Father wrote afterwards was long, but his report of Frederick's death was just a line or two.

AVIS: "What if I'm wrong? Supposing God doesn't exist?"

ANNIE: "Is that all?" I asked Ma. "Is that all my brother meant to him?"

AVIS: We can listen to that voice, go along with what the devil says, or turn away.

ANNIE: I put my trust in the Lord, but sometimes He seems to ask too much of me.

As AVIS and STEVENS speak, ANNIE gathers up the petals and roses and in the shawl and stands up. She remains with her back to AVIS and STEVENS.

STEVENS: You believe in God, Jesus, the devil?

AVIS: That I do.

STEVENS: Being a jailor isn't a very Christian occupation.

AVIS: On the contrary. It's a continual opportunity to help those in need.

STEVENS: You're Irish. You must be Catholic.

AVIS: I was brought up Protestant. Church of Ireland.

STEVENS: You sure don't act like a jailor. The ones I've known cared more for their pay than their prisoners. You sound more like a minister.

AVIS: My father was a man of the cloth.

STEVENS sits down.

STEVENS: Brown's so passionately convinced that God directs his every move. I admire his courage, and curse his stubbornness as he rejects all efforts to keep him from the gallows. It's hard to stop the anger from welling up inside, and in this small space, who else can I attack? Not you. That'd be biting the hand that feeds me.

AVIS: I've been in prison more than once, myself.

STEVENS: When?

AVIS: After . . . when I first came, I took the first job I found, working on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. Building the line into Harpers Ferry. I was in with a rough bunch: We spent most of our pay on liquor. Many's the night I spent in jail, raving drunk and ready to kill anyone who came near. It . . . it was a bad time for me.

ANNIE turns to STEVENS. AVIS seems lost in his own thoughts as ANNIE and STEVENS speak.

ANNIE: Aaron? Why are you sitting here alone in the dark?

STEVENS: I didn't want you to see me like this.

ANNIE: Do you want me to go away?

STEVENS: No.

ANNIE: You've been drinking.

STEVENS: Yes.

ANNIE: Why?

STEVENS: To give me courage.

ANNIE: I've seen the guns and pikes stored in the root cellar. I'm afraid of what my father's planning.

STEVENS: Has he told you of his scheme?

ANNIE: No.

STEVENS: It's best you don't know.

ANNIE: That's what my father said. I heard you arguing with my brothers. I thought Oliver and Watson were your friends.

STEVENS: They are.

ANNIE: Is it that they agree with my father's scheme and you don't?

STEVENS: No, that's not it.

ANNIE: Who does my father plan to attack?

STEVENS: I can't tell you.

ANNIE: You're the only one who's a trained soldier. You'll bring them back safely, won't you?

STEVENS: I hear your father calling you. You'd best go. I don't want him to find me here like this.

ANNIE exits.

AVIS: You say the raid failed because of Brown. Do you think it could have succeeded?

STEVENS: If we'd made our escape as soon as we'd captured the armoury... but he waited too long, and then we were forced to take cover in the engine house.

AVIS: And when you saw you were about to be surrounded, why didn't you run while you still had a chance?

STEVENS: Loyalty maybe. A vague hope we'd all get out together. The worst part was the next night when we were still holed up in that engine house with our hostages. Waiting in the dark. Wondering when and if the old man would make a move. Knowing it was hopeless. Listening to the rain drumming on the roof and the creak of his boots as he

walked up and down. Hearing the chokes and sobs of Oliver and Watson as they lay on the dirt floor. Wishing I could do something for them. Hoping they'd die soon. Every now and then the old man'd say to one of them, "Are you still there, son?" The only words of comfort he could offer.

AVIS: And now you wait again.

STEVENS: Tell me honestly, do you think the Captain'll hang?

AVIS: I do.

STEVENS: Then there's no hope for me. Last night. The dream came back. The last walk.

AVIS: You've had it before?

STEVENS: When I was in the army I nearly killed an officer.

AVIS: Sure I know about that. Your army record. We have it here.

STEVENS: You aren't afraid to be alone in a room with a murderer?

AVIS: I can always call for help.

STEVENS: And help will come. But not for me. No matter how loud I call.

AVIS: Tell me about the dream.

STEVENS: I hear the crowd. The hangman stands there with the hood. Beckoning. I try to walk. But my legs. They're numb. I have to be carried up the steps. As they hold me up to put the noose around my neck my bowels, my bladder, give way and I die a stinking mess for all to see.

AVIS: It's a common dream for condemned men.

STEVENS: I don't want to die a coward. I don't want to swing before a gawking mob. The morning's entertainment for the people of this town. If I must die, let me die with dignity.

AVIS: Sometimes inner strength comes when we least expect it.

STEVENS: What time is it?

AVIS: About eleven o'clock.

STEVENS: Tell me about yourself. What brought you to Virginia?

AVIS: The dream of a new and better life. Isn't that what brings most men across the water?

STEVENS: You have a wife?

AVIS: I did.

STEVENS: She died?

AVIS: On the boat. Cholera.

STEVENS: You have children?

AVIS: They also died at sea. We were becalmed for a fortnight and ran low on water. The sickness swept through the boat. They had to throw the bodies overboard.

STEVENS: No dignity.

AVIS: No dignity.

STEVENS: Was one of your children a boy?

AVIS: Yes. He was just seven years old.

STEVENS: So your dreams, too, were shattered.

AVIS: They were.

STEVENS: But you had a chance to rebuild your life.

AVIS: That was a choice I nearly didn't make.

STEVENS: What do you mean?

AVIS: I landed in Virginia not knowing what I was doing or where I was going. I had no job. I didn't look for one. Soon my money was all gone. I found myself in Harpers Ferry, standing on the bluff where the Shenandoah and the Potomac meet. I looked down at the racing water. Two more steps and it would all be over. The pain gone.

STEVENS: But you didn't jump.

AVIS: I felt a hand on my arm. Heard a voice. "I haven't finished with you yet." I stepped back and looked around. There was no one there. Then I knew there was a God. He'd been there all the time. But I'd been too busy indulging in despair to hear Him. He helped me work my misery through. Led me through the anger and the drinking. showed me that healing lies in helping others, that touching lives is what living's all about.

STEVENS: What makes you think that?

AVIS: Because there's no satisfaction in giving only to yourself. But you've already discovered that.

STEVENS: I have?

AVIS: You've given up your liberty, maybe your life, for an ideal.

STEVENS *walks towards the window and looks up.*

STEVENS: You been outside today?

AVIS: Briefly.

STEVENS: The sky's so blue. Is it cold?

AVIS: It is. The wind's coming from the north.

STEVENS: I don't like to be indoors. I need space around me. It was a long, hot summer and we had to spend it indoors. I remember one day especially. I was standing beside the upstairs window, watching Brown's daughter Annie hang out the clothes to dry behind the house. It was windy. Her hair was blowing around her face and she kept pushing it aside. The wind plucked a shirt right off the line so she had to chase after it. I wanted more than anything to run after her, grab her hand and run in the wind for ever.

AVIS: What did you do all day?

STEVENS: Read. Played checkers. In the evenings, when it was cool enough to keep the windows closed, I'd play my banjo and we'd sing. I wish I had one now to help pass the time.

AVIS: I'll see what I can do.

STEVENS: The old man. He pored over those maps of his. Drew up long, elaborate plans. Wrote to men he thought were coming who hadn't showed up. Wrote to his friends in the north, asking for the money

and guns they'd promised. Now his supporters are running scared because Brown left that carpet bag of their letters at the hideout, and some of them have even been printed in the newspapers for all to see.

AVIS: Maybe he expected to go back there.

STEVENS: He wasn't usually so careless.

HOYT *and* BROWN *enter*.

HOYT: Guilty as charged.

STEVENS: That means . . .

BROWN: Yes. December 2.

STEVENS: So soon . . .

The lights fade.

Scene 4

STEVENS is playing a banjo quietly on his side of the chalk line. BROWN is asleep. STEVENS starts to sing softly.

STEVENS: Look down, look down that lonesome road,
Hang down your head and cry,
The best of friends must part some time,
Then why not you and I.
(Speaking quietly) Only three more days till you swing, Captain
Brown. Three more days.

BROWN awakes with a start, and looks around him confusedly.

BROWN: I thought . . . I was dreaming I was with my wife. She was waiting at the door as I came back from the barn. I was carrying an egg. It was warm in my hand. It was all so clear.

ANNIE appears as BROWN speaks. STEVENS does not see her.

BROWN: Annie was in my dream, too. She was running through the long grass of the hay field towards me. Her hair loose and blowing about her face. She was calling out, trying to tell me something, but her voice was carried away by the wind.

STEVENS: (To BROWN) When did you last collect an egg from that barn? Six months ago? Two years? Six years?

BROWN: God called me elsewhere. Just as it's written in Isaiah. "I heard the voice of the Lord saying, whom shall I send, and who will go for us." Then, like Isaiah, I answered Him. "Here I am. Send me."

STEVENS: And so you abandoned your wife and family.

BROWN: I did not abandon them!

ANNIE: (To BROWN) Leaving me and Ma to run the farm. Look after the little ones.

BROWN: (To STEVENS) I sent money.

ANNIE: Sometimes we have to beg food from the neighbours.

BROWN: My work kept me in Kansas, but I still went back east to see them when I could.

STEVENS: How often?

ANNIE: You've been gone six months. How long are you staying this time. Father? Just a week? Can't you see? Ma's worn out. We need you here!

BROWN: (To ANNIE) How dare you question me like this!

ANNIE exits.

BROWN: (Looking after ANNIE) Mary understood. She always believed in me, supported my work!

STEVENS: Are you sure of that?

BROWN: (To STEVENS) What right do you have to question my wife's loyalty!

STEVENS: I couldn't, wouldn't leave my wife like that.

BROWN: I did as God commanded me.

STEVENS: And here we sit, waiting on God's next move. Wood tokens in his great game of checkers, soon to be plucked off the board by the hangman's noose. Can you honestly tell me that death doesn't frighten you?

BROWN: The Lord also said to Jeremiah, "Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you."

STEVENS: A quote from the Bible is not an answer.

BROWN: The answers are all there, if you'd only take the time to look.

STEVENS: You say God directs you in everything.

BROWN: He does.

STEVENS: And leads you, the obedient ass, to the scaffold.

BROWN: You see me as nothing but a foolish old man, don't you? I'll walk to that scaffold holding my head high, proud of what I'm doing for the sake of others, knowing that God will support me in my hour of need. But what about you? Who'll support you if you, too, have to make the same walk?

STEVENS: I don't . . . no one.

STEVENS *picks up the Bible and leafs through it.*

STEVENS: Is it better to die through the hands of others, or by one's own hand?

BROWN: Taking one's own life is a mortal sin.

STEVENS *puts the Bible down.*

STEVENS: You hear God's voice directing you.

BROWN: If you would only open your heart to the Lord, you too would hear Him.

STEVENS: And then you do as he commands.

BROWN: We are His servants.

STEVENS: Abraham was prepared to kill Isaac because of God's command. Tell me, would you kill me if God asked you?

BROWN: I—

STEVENS: Abraham. He was like you. God told him to kill his own son.

BROWN: I didn't kill my sons.

STEVENS: So he carried the knife and fire up the mountain to the stone that was the altar. His trusting son behind him. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar. God stopped Abraham just in time, but he didn't stop you before your sons died.

BROWN: I did not kill them!

STEVENS: Watson and Oliver lay bleeding at your feet like sacrificial lambs. Oliver in so much pain he begged you to shoot him. What did God say then? "Well done, my good and faithful servant"?

BROWN: He . . . I . . .

STEVENS: Those many weeks shut up in the Kennedy farmhouse. We had time for long, long talks, Oliver, and Watson, and I. Your sons. They were my friends.

BROWN: They died for a cause they believed in heart and soul. They had the courage of their convictions.

STEVENS: Courage? Or fear?

BROWN: Fear? They knew no fear!

STEVENS: Do you really believe that men who die slowly in such pain that they weep and cry out loud die with courage? No. They die with hearts full of dread. Fear of still greater pain. Fear of how long it'll last. No man truly dies with courage.

BROWN: My sons were afraid of nothing. You insult them with such talk.

STEVENS: When we learned of your plans, the audacity of them, we all knew that in a few days time we might not be alive. Your sons were afraid of you, weren't they. Grown men, yet when you stared them down, the old childhood fear came back.

BROWN: That's not true! They had respect for me, for what I was doing. Not fear.

STEVENS: Don't you ever have doubts? Are you sure you didn't misinterpret a message from your God? Do you really believe that he'll use your execution to bring about the abolition of slavery in this country?

BROWN: I know that if we die with dignity our martyrdom will be the spark to light the fire.

STEVENS: You said we. You know then that I'll hang too.

BROWN: "Therefore thus saith the Lord God. My fury shall be poured out upon this place, and it shall burn, and not be quenched."

STEVENS: I'll not live long enough to see the battle won.

BROWN: But it will be won, Aaron.

STEVENS: If I'll not see it, if I'm condemned to die, why should I wait? You couldn't bring yourself to kill your own son. But what about me? Would you kill me if I asked you?

BROWN: No. I could never do that.

STEVENS: But I want to die. Now. I'm in pain. You've seen the holes the bullets made in my body. What'll we use? No knife like Abraham's here. No gun like the one Oliver begged you to use. I have it.

STEVENS starts to unthread one of his bootlaces as he speaks.

STEVENS: I'm going to die, if not of my wounds then by the rope.

STEVENS walks towards Brown.

STEVENS: Kill me now. Show me some mercy.

BROWN: You stay on your side of the line.

STEVENS crosses the line and holds out the bootlace to

BROWN.

STEVENS: Take it! Take it and strangle me while you still have the strength. I want you to kill me.

BROWN: No! No! I . . . It's against God's law.

STEVENS *grabs BROWN'S throat.*

STEVENS: Abraham was prepared to kill Isaac. Wasn't that against God's law?

BROWN: (*Frightened now*) It was God speaking.

STEVENS *tightens his hold on BROWN'S throat.*

BROWN *starts to choke.*

STEVENS: (*Shouting*) And I am not God! I am not God, and neither are you!
And soon we will both be dead!

STEVENS *releases BROWN, and looks bewilderedly at him for a moment, then walks over to his bed, sits down, and puts his head in his hands. The lights fade.*

Act II

Scene 1

STEVENS is standing, looking up at the window. BROWN is sitting at the table, pen in hand, staring into space. He checks his watch, starts to write, and scratches out what he has just written. Then he gets up, checks under his pillow, goes back to the table, and sits down again. STEVENS turns to BROWN.

STEVENS: Will you sit still for five minutes! You're as jumpy as a June bug.
What's gotten into you?

BROWN: I didn't sleep well last night.

BROWN starts writing again.

STEVENS: The sound of your pen scratching is driving me crazy. Couldn't you read your Bible instead?

BROWN: From now until the midday meal, I write letters. You must know my routine by now.

STEVENS: A time for prayer, a time for letters, a time for food, a time to fart and a time to shit. You go from hour to hour looking at your watch, making sure you're on schedule. But what about the days?

BROWN: The days?

STEVENS: I still don't even know the date of my trial, but if I knew when I was going to die, I'd be looking at the days, not the hours. I'd put check marks on the wall. Erase one every night at midnight. Watch each check mark disappear until only one remains. That one I'd leave behind. A small mark of my existence.

BROWN: God's loving kindness follows you all the days of your life.

STEVENS: You never give up, do you?

STEVENS picks up a newspaper from his side of the table.

BROWN starts to write again, deliberately making the pen

scratch louder. STEVENS throws the newspaper he is

holding onto BROWN'S side of the floor, and picks up

another one from the table. BROWN picks up the

newspaper on the floor and puts in on STEVENS' half of

the table. STEVENS rustles his newspaper excessively as

he looks for the page he wants. BROWN stops writing.

BROWN: What about the ones that are against us?

STEVENS looks at him questioningly.

BROWN: The newspaper reports.

STEVENS: They're full of exaggeration and lies.

BROWN: You want to believe all that's printed in the ones that are on our side, but how can you be sure they're not lying and exaggerating too?

BROWN picks up his Bible.

BROWN: Forget those papers. The events recorded there fill the minds of their readers for a day, then they're gone, replaced by new events the next day, and the next day, and the next. But the news of the Bible doesn't change, and it's always good news.

STEVENS: Give up! You'll not see me opening that book again.

STEVENS starts to read the newspaper again. BROWN puts the Bible down, and starts to write again. STEVENS throws his newspaper down on the ground on his side of the line.

STEVENS: Who are you writing to?

BROWN: My family.

ANNIE appears on STEVENS' side of the room. Both men see her, but neither is aware that the other one sees her.

STEVENS: Dear Annie.

BROWN: *(Agitated)* Why do you say that?

STEVENS: I was just thinking about her. It sure beats thinking of the future.

ANNIE: *(To STEVENS)* I know you're not a believer. But I can still pray for you.

STEVENS: Those soft brown eyes.

BROWN: She has her mother's eyes.

ANNIE: I'll not forget you and your gentle ways.

STEVENS: And do Annie's gentle ways come from her mother too?

BROWN: Mary was always a kind and loving wife. Why do you keep talking about Annie?

STEVENS: And did you love her back?

BROWN: As best I could.

STEVENS: (*Angrily*) For me love's just a dream, and that's all it'll ever be.

STEVENS turns his back on ANNIE who slowly circles around and crosses the chalk line to BROWN's side.

STEVENS: (To BROWN) How did you show your love?

BROWN: My family knows I love them.

ANNIE: You never told us.

STEVENS: Do you truly love them?

BROWN: Yes, but I had to leave.

ANNIE: You chose to leave.

STEVENS: Do you truly love anyone, except yourself and God? And which of these comes first?

BROWN: God of course.

STEVENS: How you love to see the reports of large meetings of your followers in Boston and New York. To read that such well-respected men as Emerson and Thoreau have given speeches praising you. You think Virginia will be filled with remorse for hanging so great a man, and that the whole world will be in mourning. To God the glory? No.

You want the Negroes of America to cry out, "Glory be to our saviour, Captain John Brown."

BROWN: That's not true!

ANNIE: You're famous now. But what has your fame done to your family?

STEVENS Is your wife coming to see you one last time?

BROWN: No.

STEVENS: Why not?

BROWN: Mary has her reasons for not coming.

STEVENS: Maybe she's searching out another husband. One that can provide for the here and now.

BROWN: How dare you! How dare you speak in such a way about my wife!

STEVENS: I shouldn't have said that. You have so little time left now . . .

ANNIE: So little time to show her that you care. So little time to discover if she still cares for you.

BROWN: We all have to die sometime, and we don't set the day. God does.

STEVENS: God! God! God! That's all I hear from you. At least when you're gone, I won't have to listen to your preaching.

STEVENS picks up the newspaper from the floor, sits down and starts to read it.

BROWN: Mary wanted to come. She was on her way. But I sent word to her that she should go back home.

ANNIE: Thy will be done. For ever and ever. Amen.

ANNIE exits.

STEVENS: You told her not to come?

BROWN: I thought it was best.

STEVENS: You know, you're a very strange old man. That letter under your pillow. Is it from your wife?

BROWN: No.

STEVENS: From Annie?

BROWN: No.

STEVENS: John?

BROWN: No.

STEVENS: Then who is it from?

BROWN: That's none of your business.

STEVENS: I'll find out anyway.

BROWN: How?

STEVENS quickly moves towards BROWN'S bed.

STEVENS: Like this!

BROWN stands up swiftly, knocking over his chair in his haste, but he is not quick enough to stop STEVENS from getting the letter.

BROWN: Give that back to me! You have no right to read that.

STEVENS: No right. Just an irresistible desire to know.

STEVENS looks at the signature.

STEVENS: Well, well, well.

BROWN: She's . . . an acquaintance.

STEVENS: One of your supporters?

BROWN: No.

STEVENS: Mrs. Mahala Doyle. Doyle. The man that was murdered in Kansas, along with his sons . . .

BROWN lunges forward, but fails to get the letter from

STEVENS who starts to read it.

STEVENS: "To John Brown. Sir."

BROWN: Give that back to me!

STEVENS: "Though vengeance is not mine I confess—"

BROWN: It's a private matter.

STEVENS: "I feel gratified to hear that you were stopped in your fiendish career at Harpers Ferry. With the loss of your two sons, you can now appreciate my distress in Kansas, when you entered my house at midnight, dragged my husband and two boys outside, and in cold blood murdered them. My only remaining son is now grown up and is very desirous to be at Charlestown on the day of your execution. You can't say you done it to free slaves. We had none, and never expected to own one. They say you are a God-fearing man, but if this is where your Christian thinking leads you, I and my children will have no part of it."

BROWN: The town of Lawrence had been attacked. Stores looted. Houses burned. Something had to be done.

STEVENS: Lawrence was attacked by Missouri border ruffians. The men you hacked to death with broadswords weren't responsible for that.

BROWN: I didn't kill anyone.

STEVENS: No. You just gave the orders.

BROWN: Their death was to be a warning to others who wanted slavery.

STEVENS: How do you justify such action? Did you see yourself as the avenging angel of God?

BROWN: I don't want to hear any more! Give me back my letter.

BROWN grabs the letter from STEVENS, tears it to pieces, and then throws it in the stove.

STEVENS: It wasn't you that caused those men to die at Pottawatomie. It was God. It wasn't you that caused our men to die at Harpers Ferry, and the rest of us to be trapped. It was God.

STEVENS picks up the Bible.

STEVENS: Instead of taking responsibility for your actions, you just bury them between the black covers of this book.

BROWN: Put that back. You don't know—

STEVENS throws the Bible on the floor, and it lands under the table.

BROWN: No! My Bible!

BROWN *kneels down to pick it up, checks it carefully and then looks up at STEVENS.*

BROWN: Can't you see? I have nothing else left to defend myself with.

Lights fade.

Scene 2

It is early morning. The newspapers are under STEVENS' bed. BROWN is asleep at the table. STEVENS is sitting on his bed playing "I dream of Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair" on the banjo, humming the melody. BROWN wakes up with a start, moving the table slightly as he does so.

STEVENS stops playing.

STEVENS: (To BROWN) Have you been sitting at that table all night?

BROWN: It was after midnight. I couldn't sleep. I wanted to write one last letter to my wife.

STEVENS: (Gently) Knowing this is your last day, that tomorrow . . . I'd find it hard to—

BROWN: You started talking in your sleep.

STEVENS: I did?

BROWN: You and Annie . . . My dear, sweet Annie. How wrong I was about you. How blind to what was going on.

STEVENS: What are you talking about?

BROWN: You seduced my daughter.

STEVENS: It's not true!

BROWN: I heard what you said in your sleep. I wrote it down. I have the evidence.

BROWN seizes a piece of paper from his desk.

BROWN: "Over here in the long grass. Where no one can see."

STEVENS: I—

BROWN: "Lie down beside me. Let me love you."

STEVENS: But—

BROWN: "Don't leave me yet, Annie. I want more." You can't deny it.
I knew you were godless, but I thought you were still a man of
principle—

STEVENS: I never—

*BROWN puts the paper down, looks around the room, then
seizes the cross from the wall, and holds it threateningly.*

BROWN: How dare you! How dare you defile my child.

STEVENS: You're wrong. I—

BROWN: You raped my daughter.

STEVENS: I would never harm Annie.

BROWN: Who'll marry her now? What if she's carrying your child?

STEVENS: I loved her, but—

BROWN: You told her you loved her? I suppose you told her that you'd go
back and marry her, too. Confusing her with your charming lies—

STEVENS: (*To BROWN*) Will you listen to me! Nothing happened between us.

AVIS enters.

AVIS: Your wife's here, Captain Brown.

BROWN: I told her not to come.

MARY enters carrying a basket. BROWN puts back the cross which then hangs crookedly. BROWN goes to embrace MARY, then stops, and looks anxiously at STEVENS and then at MARY.

BROWN: Annie's not with you?

MARY: No. She wanted to come, but someone had to stay and look after the children.

BROWN embraces MARY who then walks towards STEVENS and shakes his hand.

MARY: You must be Mr. Stevens. My husband told me in his letters about your military skills and your devotion to the cause. And Annie tells me that you were very kind to her.

STEVENS: She's well, I hope.

MARY: *(Hesitating)* As well as can be expected. In the circumstances.

BROWN: What circumstances? Why shouldn't she be well?

MARY: We were all brought low when we heard the sentence, John.

AVIS: *(To STEVENS)* Come with me. They need some time alone.

STEVENS and AVIS exit.

MARY: *(Trying to hold back tears)* My poor John. I should have come sooner. You look so weak and tired. Why wouldn't you let me help you face this?

BROWN: I feared for your safety. We've entered the nest and the hornets are swarming.

MARY: It seems they're swarming all over the country, from what I've heard.

BROWN: And knowing the danger, you still came.

MARY: I wanted to be with you one last time.

BROWN: I didn't want you to see me here. . . like this. See how it upset it makes you.

MARY: Annie sends her love and prays for you every day. As do the other children.

BROWN: Annie isn't well?

MARY: She's very tired. But that's only to be expected.

BROWN: It's as I feared.

MARY: She'll be better once . . . once it's over.

BROWN: She's not . . .

MARY: Not what?

BROWN: Not . . . changed in any way. Since I sent her home.

MARY: We're all changed, John. But God will see us through.

BROWN: What did she say about Aaron Stevens?

MARY: That he seemed lonely. Though she didn't say as much, I think she was in love with him, poor child. Much good that'll do her now.

BROWN: He's a godless man, Mary.

MARY: I'll pray for him.

BROWN: I don't think I can any more.

MARY gives BROWN the basket.

MARY: I brought you some things from the farm for your . . . for your supper tonight.

BROWN looks in the basket.

BROWN: You brought me eggs.

BROWN takes one out and holds it in his hand for a moment, then places it carefully back in the basket.

MARY: And apples too.

BROWN: How will you manage when I'm gone?

MARY: People who admire you are beginning to send me money. Small sums.

BROWN: I want to be buried on our farm. On the hillside looking out over the mountains.

MARY: Governor Wise has granted me permission to take your . . . take you home to your final resting place.

BROWN: And Watson and Oliver?

MARY: I'll try to take them north too. The newspapers say you scarcely heeded the cries of your dying sons.

BROWN: You can't believe everything you read.

MARY: Where's the man I married who loved his children so dearly that he sat up night after night praying for them, nursing them, when they were sick? Did you bring them through their childhood illnesses for this?

BROWN: I grieve for them daily, Mary.

MARY: I need to see it! The robin whose nest is robbed by the crow shows more emotion than you do over our sons.

BROWN: We must overcome our grief so that it doesn't overcome us.

MARY: Can't we share it? It'd ease my grief to talk a little about our boys, and how they died.

BROWN: Some things are best left unsaid.

MARY: Ever since Pottawatomie, I've found it harder to see God's hand in what you do. The way the men died there. Does God look down and smile on such brutality?

BROWN: We had—

MARY: Did all the men go willingly with you then?

BROWN: They knew—

MARY: And to Harpers Ferry?

BROWN: There were some against it at first. But . . . in the end, they all came with me.

MARY: Why did our boys have to die this way? Is this really what God wanted of you? Of us?

BROWN: You're questioning God's will?

MARY: No. I'm asking if this is God's will.

BROWN: Don't think that I don't mourn for my children. That I don't know how much of the burden's fallen on your shoulders. But we must stay strong, Mary.

MARY: My dream was that one day, when the battle was won, you'd all come home to stay.

BROWN: The battle will be won.

MARY: But such a price to pay.

BROWN: We're the spark, Mary. The wind from the North will rage through the South and that spark will generate a firestorm. When the day comes that slavery is abolished for ever, then, then you'll be able to rejoice.

MARY: And to celebrate I'll walk over to sit beside the graves of my husband and children, and hear only the slow drum beat of my heart. I'll not be there tomorrow.

BROWN: That's best.

MARY: That'd be more than I could bear.

BROWN: Mary . . . I need to know . . . I have to know that you still believe in me.

MARY: Forgive me, John. I came here to comfort, not to question. Though we've seen little of each other these last few years, and terrible things have happened . . . I came here to tell you that I still love you, John. Nothing can change that.

MARY embraces BROWN.

BROWN: But do you still believe—

MARY: I still believe, John. In spite of everything, I've not lost my faith.

MARY walks towards the door.

MARY: *(Calling out)* Mr. Avis!

AVIS opens the door.

MARY: *(To AVIS)* I'm ready to leave now.

MARY returns to BROWN, and embraces him again.

MARY: May God be with you.

BROWN: And also with you.

As BROWN watches MARY walk towards the door,

ANNIE appears behind him. He does not notice her until she speaks.

BROWN: I have fought a good fight, Mary. I have finished my course. I have kept the faith.

MARY exits.

BROWN: How will you remember me, Mary?

ANNIE: She'll remember that even at the very end, you couldn't tell her the truth about Oliver and Watson.

BROWN: I . . . it would have pained her too much to hear just how they died.

ANNIE: Not how they died, but why.

BROWN: I don't want to think about that.

ANNIE: They didn't want to go. They thought your plan foolhardy.

BROWN: No! No!

ANNIE: Bound to fail.

BROWN: Mary must never know. The men that were there that night. They're all dead or in this prison.

ANNIE: I was downstairs in the kitchen when you had the meeting in the upstairs room, but I could hear the shouting back and forth.

BROWN: You heard what we were saying.

ANNIE: My brothers said they wanted none of it. But you ordered them to go and they obeyed.

BROWN: You know . . .

ANNIE: The next morning you said you'd not be needing me any more, and sent me home.

BROWN: When Mary asked me if all the men went willingly . . . she knew that Oliver and Watson . . .

ANNIE starts to leave.

BROWN: Don't go Annie. Don't leave me.

ANNIE: Goodbye Father.

BROWN: I don't want to be alone. Come back. My little girl.

ANNIE: Goodbye Father.

BROWN: I need to know how you'll remember me.

ANNIE: We'll remember that you led my brothers to their deaths.

ANNIE exits.

BROWN: Come back, Annie.

BROWN picks up the Bible and clutches it to him. He walks around in a distracted fashion.

BROWN: Come back, Annie. My little girl. Tell me you still believe in me.

BROWN sits down at the table and picks up the Bible.

BROWN: Haven't prayed today. Must pray.

BROWN kneels down.

BROWN: Our Father, which art in Heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

BROWN stands up, knocking over the chair.

BROWN: Everything I did. It was all for the glory of God. Doesn't anyone believe in me? Mary. She knows about Oliver and Watson. Avis!
Avis!

AVIS enters.

BROWN: My wife. She's gone?

AVIS: Yes. Shall I send someone after her?

BROWN: I . . . no. I . . . I would have liked her to stay a little longer. Where's Aaron? You took him away. You were afraid of what I'd do to him.

AVIS: That's not why.

BROWN: You were afraid I'd kill him.

AVIS: I took him away because your wife was here. I thought you needed some time alone together.

BROWN: I wanted to kill him.

AVIS: I know.

BROWN: He told you?

AVIS: He was very upset about your accusation.

BROWN: He told you? How could he add to her shame that way!

AVIS: He says it's not true, and I believe him. I find Aaron Stevens to be a very honest man.

BROWN: But he was talking in his sleep. I heard his words.

AVIS: Dreams aren't always based on reality.

BROWN: He was the only good soldier I had at Harpers Ferry.

BROWN walks over towards the window.

BROWN: It's starting to snow. Angel feathers falling from the sky. Will there be angels to help me up the steps of the scaffold, Avis? Will you be with me?

AVIS: If you wish.

BROWN: I feel so achingly weary. Like an old mule that wants to obey, but can carry its load no further. I mustn't fail them now. These people I'd hoped to save.

AVIS: Why do you want to die?

BROWN: Aaron asked me that same question. I thought you'd realise why. The whole world will be watching. It'll do more for the abolitionist cause than if I live.

AVIS: Are you sure that's the case?

BROWN: It's what Beecher said in his sermon the other day. Aaron showed me the report in the paper.

AVIS: Let me ask you the question again. Why do you want to die?

BROWN: You know the truth, don't you. You can see what it is that's driven me all my life. Almost before I see it myself.

AVIS: You see it now?

BROWN: Yes.

AVIS: So let me ask you for a third time. Why do you want to die?

BROWN: To be a hero. That's not the same as dying a martyr is it? Martyrdom is selfless, generous. Martyrs are moved by love for others to pay the ultimate price.

AVIS: And heroes?

BROWN: They're driven by a different force.

AVIS: And were you driven by that different force?

BROWN: I was.

AVIS: Why?

BROWN: I wanted to submit my life to God's work, not for God's sake, but for my own. It was ambition that drove me, not submission. Can God forgive so great a sin?

AVIS: Ask him.

BROWN: Will you pray with me? Help me meet God with humility. I want to die in peace.

AVIS: I'll pray with you, and He will bring you peace.

*BROWN kneels down and starts to cry. AVIS kneels down beside BROWN, and puts his arm round his shoulders.
The lights fade.*

Scene 3

BROWN is standing by the table. He looks at his watch, then gathers most of his papers up. He hesitates a moment, then walks over to the stove and throws the papers into it. We hear the sound of soldiers marching in the street. BROWN looks up towards the window. AVIS ushers STEVENS in, then exits.

BROWN: I owe you an apology. My accusations. Forgive me, Aaron.

STEVENS: Living in the confines of these walls. It plays tricks on our reason.

BROWN: What was it you said? That I bury responsibility for my actions between the black covers of the Bible. You're right. I used it as a shield to cover my faults, instead of a support. When people pointed accusing fingers at me, I pointed my finger up to God. "He's the one," I said. "He's the one that makes me do these things." I see now that your accusations were well justified. I must take responsibility for my actions, not use God as an excuse.

STEVENS: Something's happened to you! These last few days I saw your hand shaking as you wrote. But now, in your final hour, you're calm.

BROWN: Avis helped me ask God's forgiveness and find my inner peace.

STEVENS: He's a good man. I shouldn't have blamed you for what's happening to me. It was my choice to join you, and my choice to go to Harpers Ferry. I need your forgiveness too, for all my mocking of your faith.

BROWN: Try to believe, Aaron.

BROWN *holds out the Bible.*

BROWN: You'll find comfort in it yet. .

STEVENS *takes the Bible.*

STEVENS: I haven't even been to trial, but I'm so afraid of dying.

BROWN: What is it about death that frightens you?

STEVENS: The nothingness.

BROWN: Are you sure it's not the uncertainty?

STEVENS: What makes you think God does exist?

BROWN: I don't think. I know.

STEVENS: I'd like to have the comfort that belief would bring.

BROWN: There's still time. But you can't hear God clearly when your thoughts are full of rage and fear. You have to let go of your mind, and listen with your soul. I know that now. Last night. I truly heard the voice of God. Talk with Avis. He'll help you.

STEVENS: I will.

BROWN: What I heard you say in your sleep . . .

STEVENS: Believe me, it was nothing but a dream.

BROWN: Do you truly love my daughter?

STEVENS: Yes.

BROWN: Why did she keep this from me?

STEVENS: Because I never told her.

BROWN: Because of me?

STEVENS: I had nothing to offer her except myself, and I knew there was a good chance I'd not survive the raid. If we'd succeeded, then I would have asked if she could love me.

BROWN: Would you like me to write and tell her, now, before they come for me?

STEVENS: Do you think I haven't thought of that myself? At night, when you were asleep, I'd creep over to your desk and start a letter. Dear Annie. Dearest Annie. My dearest Annie . . . but after a line or two I'd toss the paper in the stove.

BROWN: You don't want her to know?

STEVENS: If she doesn't love me, then she'd feel sorry for me, and I can't bear pity.

BROWN: And if she does love you?

STEVENS: Knowing I loved her back would only add to her grief.

BROWN: I would have been against it.

STEVENS: I know. You'd only give your daughter to a Christian.

BROWN: Mary thinks Annie loves you.

STEVENS: She does?

BROWN: Yes.

STEVENS: That's something I can cherish now. But I'll still not tell her.

BROWN: I don't understand.

STEVENS: Telling her would give me the hope that when I die, someone will be mourning for me. But I can't do that to her. I've not had my trial yet, but I know the verdict. In a few month's I'll be dead and that'll be the end of it. For me. But Annie might spend the rest of her life looking back at what might have been. I love her too much to let that happen. I must be forgotten so she can find her happiness and love another man.

BROWN: When Mary came, I didn't tell her how I've loved her all these years.

STEVENS: Then write and tell her now. She needs to look back at her life knowing that.

BROWN: Will you play me one last song as I write? Play me that old Negro spiritual I like so much.

STEVENS picks up his banjo and sings softly as BROWN writes.

STEVENS: Swing low, sweet chariot, comin' for to carry me home,
Swing low, sweet chariot, comin' for to carry me home.
Looked over Jordan, what did I see?
Comin' for to carry me home?
A band of angels comin' after me,
Comin' for to carry me home.

AVIS enters.

BROWN: Now?

AVIS: Yes.

BROWN folds the letter and hands it to AVIS.

BROWN: One last letter. For my wife.

BROWN takes the cross from the wall.

BROWN: I'm ready.

BROWN walks over to STEVENS and they embrace.

BROWN picks up a piece of folded paper from the table and gives it to STEVENS.

BROWN: Read the paper after I'm gone, then give it to Avis when he returns. In a year, maybe two, the world will see that we were right.

STEVENS: Good bye Captain.

BROWN: God be with you, Aaron. *(To AVIS)* May I speak to the other prisoners before I leave?

AVIS: There's only time for a few words.

AVIS and BROWN exit.

BROWN: *(Off-stage)* Copeland. Green. Coppoc. I know you'll stand up like men, and not betray your friends. God bless you, and may we all meet in Heaven!

As the lights fade STEVENS unfolds the paper BROWN gave him.

Scene 4

AVIS and HOYT enter. HOYT looks pale and distraught.

STEVENS: *(To HOYT)* The first time you've seen a man hanged? Sit down before you fall down.

HOYT sits.

HOYT: I've never seen such a crowd. All the way out of the town. Militiamen everywhere. No chance he could be rescued.

STEVENS: If the governor himself had said he could go free, I doubt he would've accepted.

HOYT: I stood near the foot of the platform. It seemed only right to be there. Stand where he could see me. Show that I still supported him and all he stood for.

STEVENS: And did he look your way?

HOYT: No.

STEVENS: *(To AVIS)* Were you with him at the end?

AVIS: I was. He'd asked that I be the one to put the hood over his head and the rope around his neck. He stood there without a tremor of fear. Then the hangman cut the rope that held the trap door, and it was over. As I stepped down from the platform there was a man staring up at the Captain's body with such a look of malicious glee in his eye.

STEVENS: Did you know him?

AVIS: No. But a man I knew who was standing nearby told me the man's an actor. He'd seen him in a play down in Washington. John Wilkes Booth. I've never heard of him. But then I never get to the theatre.

STEVENS: Nor I. Nor ever will, now. You've treated us with such kindness here, yet you represent the government of Virginia, and all it stands for. Whose side are you on?

AVIS: Garrison's. His way is the right way. To use political means to help the oppressed. Not violence.

STEVENS: Yet you were the one to put the noose around Brown's neck.

AVIS: If I hadn't done it, then someone else less sympathetic would have taken my place.

STEVENS hands AVIS the paper given to him by Brown.

AVIS: What's this?

STEVENS: The paper he gave me just before he left.

AVIS unfolds it.

AVIS: "I, John Brown, am now quite certain that the crimes of this guilty land will never be purged away, but with blood."

STEVENS: Maybe he's right and Garrison's wrong. Perhaps war is the only way to free the slaves. North against South.

AVIS: The whole country will be torn apart. Families divided. Homes destroyed.

STEVENS: It's a war I'll not be here to fight.

HOYT: But you haven't—

STEVENS: You know and I know they'll hang me too. The report of my death'll be buried somewhere in the middle of the newspaper, and forgotten the next day. But Brown's soul goes marching on. His name will appear in history books, just as he'd hoped. The only permanence I'll have on earth'll be the name inscribed on my tombstone, and the wind and rain'll see to it that even that'll disappear with time. But it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter at all.

AVIS: I must go to the other prisoners. They're waiting to hear about the Captain too.

AVIS exits.

HOYT: Is there anything else I can do for you?

STEVENS takes the newspapers from under his bed.

STEVENS: Take these with you. I've no further use for them now.

HOYT takes the newspapers, and turns to leave.

STEVENS: If you had been a more experienced lawyer . . .

HOYT turns round reluctantly.

STEVENS: If you had been a more experienced lawyer, it wouldn't have made any difference to the final verdict.

STEVENS holds his hand out to HOYT who quickly puts the newspapers down on the table, takes STEVENS' hand, then gives STEVENS a brief hug.

HOYT: I won't forget you, Mr. Stevens, and the cause you've fought for.

HOYT looks at his watch, and picks up the newspapers.

HOYT: I must go. I'm taking tonight's train to Philadelphia.

STEVENS: Keep up the fight, Mr. Hoyt.

HOYT: I will.

HOYT exits. STEVENS picks up his banjo, sits down on the bed, and starts to play and sing.

STEVENS: I dream of Annie with the light brown hair,
Borne, like a vapour, on the summer air.
I see her tripping where the bright streams play,
Happy as the daisies that dance on her way.

ANNIE appears, holding a bunch of roses. STEVENS puts the banjo aside, and stretches out on the bed.

STEVENS: I still have time to dream. Come, Annie. Lie down beside me. Then
when I'm gone I'll let you go to love another.

ANNIE: I'll stay in your dreams, Aaron, and bring fresh roses every day.

ANNIE walks towards STEVENS as the lights fade.

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