

*John Beechard and Mr. Lincoln:
A Michigan Story*

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Schools and community organizations in Michigan are freely granted
use of this script for classroom, school and community performance.

This work of fiction is based on actual historical incidents.

Characters

John Beechard, Eldest son of the Beechard family, 13 years old at the beginning of the play (19 by the end), very against slavery.

Historical Note: Mr. John Beechard from Kalamazoo Michigan fought at the Battle of Gettysburg as part of the 6th Michigan Cavalry, under Colonel George Gray of Grand Rapids.

Father (James Beechard), Patriarch of the Beechard family, is against slavery, but does not support going to war

Mother (Anne Beechard), Matriarch of the Beechard family, she is more supportive of the war, but does not speak out

Elizabeth Beechard, Eldest sister of the Beechard family, she often argues with her older brother John, she is 11 when the play begins

Henry Smith, Witness present at Lincoln's Michigan speech in Kalamazoo

Abraham Lincoln, politician and eventual president of the United States

Abigail Barry, A new girl at John and Elizabeth's school

Army Recruiter, A gentleman from Lansing recruiting people for the Union Army

Augustus Sackett, member of the Michigan 6th Cavalry, Company A

Small Roles:

Hattie Smith, wife of Henry Smith

Judge Wells, Republican state official and Circuit Court Judge

Crowd Member 1, a person attending the political rally in City Park, today known as Bronson Park

Crowd Member 2, a person also attending the political rally in City Park, listens to Lincoln's speech

Settings

Act I

Village Park now known as Bronson Park, Kalamazoo, MI (August 1856)

Act II

Scene 1 The Beechard family home, Kalamazoo, MI nearly 4 years later (May, 1860)

Scene 2 The Beechard family home, 2 years later (September, 1862)

Act III

Scene 1 The Beechard Family home reading a letter from John written in Grand Rapids, MI (December 1862)

Scene 2 The Beechard family home, reading a letter from John written in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, 1 year later (July 1863)

Scene 3 The Beechard Family Home (November, 1863)

John Beechard and Mr. Lincoln: A Michigan Story

Act I

Village Park, now known as Bronson Park, the New England style commons area of the city of Kalamazoo, Michigan. The park is dotted with trees, and a crisscrossing path in the center. Surrounding the park are several mid-1800's buildings. The year is 1856, and a political rally is being held in the park to support Republican presidential candidate John C. Fremont. The park is bustling with people, sounds of bystander talking, as well as four speaker stands throughout the park operating simultaneously. As the play begins marching band music can be heard as the curtain opens.

One speaker stand is visible on stage, but is currently empty. A dense crowd is gathered near the stand, but many bystanders are not paying attention. As the music stops The Beechard family enters: Father, Mother, John (13 years old), and Elizabeth (11 years old).

Mother. My, weren't the bands just wonderful? Eight bands, I've never seen so many together!

Elizabeth. (*Enthusiastically*) I liked the singers!

Mother. That was the glee club Elizabeth. Stay close now.

Elizabeth. Well I want to be in a glee club someday!

John. I think you would need to be able to sing well to join a group like that sister.

Elizabeth. (*Eyes narrowing as she looks at her brother with an expression a mix of annoyance and anger*) Oh be quiet Jonathan! Mother says I have a beautiful voice!

John. (*A grin growing across his face*) Exactly, a voice only a mother could love!

Elizabeth. (*To John*) You mudsill¹!

John. (*Back at Elizabeth*) Namby-pamby²!

Father. Be nice to your sister, John. I am sure the glee club would be lucky to have you some day Elizabeth, this way. (*Father leads the family closer to the speaker stand across the stage*)

John. What are we doing now Father?

Father. We are going to listen to some men speak; it is why all of this is going on after all.

Elizabeth. But why do we have to stay if the music is done father? Hearing a bunch of men talk does not sound very fun to me.

Father. Fun or not, it is important. There is a lot going on in our country, there is a much bigger world out there than just what goes on here in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

Crowd Member. (*To another crowd member*) These Republicans really mean business!

¹ **Mudsill:** an 1800's insult meaning a disreputable low-life, Elizabeth's nickname for John.

² **Namby-pamby:** an 1800's insult meaning a person who is sickly, sentimental, saccharin.

John. *(To Father)* Everyone keeps saying the word “republican” father. What are they talking about?

Father. Well, John, what is the big issue you always hear people like the Reverend Smith talking about?

John. Slavery, of course; Reverend Smith says it goes on down South and it’s immoral.

Father. Well the Republicans are a new political party, created just down the road in Jackson to fight against slavery. This whole event is to promote their first ever nominee for president, a man named Mr. John Fremont.

Elizabeth. I don’t understand why there’s such uproar about slavery. Why don’t they just make it illegal?

John. *(Annoyed at his sister’s lack of knowledge)* Don’t you think they would if they could? Don’t you know anything Namby-pamby!?

Mother. John, do not speak to your sister that way!

Father. Yes John; and I’m sure there is a great deal you don’t understand about the issue as well. In fact, it’s so complicated that even our greatest leaders cannot agree about what to do. Unlike you children, I have been to the South. Everything people do and have down there revolves around slavery. I don’t think they know what to do without it. But the real issue is the territories!

John. Like Kansas?

Father. Yes John, like Kansas. The question is should slavery be allowed there like it was in Missouri?

John. Doesn’t the North have more people father? Couldn’t we just make them stop?

Father. Now John, Southerners are still Americans. What kind of freedom would that be if one part of the country told the other what to do?

John. But they tell the slaves what to do. How is that freedom?

Father. You’re right, son. But like I said, it is complicated. Now where do we want to listen, looks like there are four speaker stands to choose from.

John. *(Pointing to the speaker stand on stage)* Father, this one seems a little less crowded. Can we stay here?

Father. I was hoping to hear Zachariah Chandler, but he is speaking across the park and I see no way of getting there. I do not even know who is speaking here!

Mother. Oh this speaker stand is fine, dear.
(Enter Henry and Hattie Smith.)

Henry Smith. Hello there! Settling on the least crowded stand are you sir?

Father. *(Shaking the gentleman's hand)* I'm James Beechard.

Henry Smith. Henry Smith. Pleased to meet you James. This is my wife Hattie.

Father. This is my wife Anne, and our children John and Elizabeth. *(Each child steps up and greets Mr. Smith with a bow or a curtsy)*

Hattie. What a lovely family you have!

Father. We were thinking about trying another stand. Do you know who is speaking here sir?

Henry Smith. I hear some fellow named Lincoln out of Illinois is speaking here.

Father. Never heard of him

Henry Smith. Perhaps you've heard of Judge Wells; that's who's introducing him up there.

Father. Indeed I have heard of Judge Wells. Come on children; let's hear what this Mr. Lincoln has to say.

(The Beechards and the Smiths make their way as close to the podium as they can get. The crowd is thick, but many on the outskirts are still not paying attention to the podium.)

Judge Wells. *(Speaking from the podium)* Now please, give a warm Michigan welcome to Mr. Abraham Lincoln.

(Enter Lincoln, who joins Wells at the podium of the speaker stand and shakes his hand. Exit Wells. Lincoln is tall, and dressed in a black suit, black bow tie, and black top hat. There is a small amount of applause from those paying attention. As he begins speaking he holds his collar.)

Elizabeth. I like his hat!

John. Yes, but what does he have to say?

Lincoln. Fellow countrymen: Under the Constitution of the U.S. another Presidential contest approaches us. All over this land the people are assembling to consider the proper course to be adopted by them. One of the first considerations is to learn what the people differ about. If we **ascertain**³ what we differ about, we shall be better able to decide. The question of slavery, at the present day, should be not only the greatest question, but very nearly the sole question. And the question is simply this: Shall slavery be spread into the new **territories**⁴, or not?

(As Lincoln speaks, more of the crowd begins to pay attention to his speaker stand. He begins to have the audience's full attention.)

³ **Ascertain:** to find out definitely, to make sure or certain

⁴ **New Territories:** In 1856 most of the land west of states like Missouri and Iowa were territories and not yet states. Territories could apply for statehood after meeting certain population levels and other criteria.

Henry Smith. A bold man this Mr. Lincoln to speak so plainly.

Lincoln. As an illustration of the **principle**⁵, let us look at how slaves are **admitted**⁶ into the territories. I speak first of Kansas, how will that territory operate? Can men vote truly? We will suppose that there are ten men who go into Kansas to settle. Nine of these are opposed to slavery. One has ten slaves. The slaveholder is a good man in other respects; he is a good neighbor and being a wealthy man, he is enabled to do the others many neighborly kindnesses. They like the man, though they don't like the system by which he holds his fellow-men in **bondage**⁷. These ten men, of whom I was speaking, live together three or four years. They intermarry; their family ties are strengthened. And who wonders that in time, the people learn to look upon slavery with **complacency**⁸?

John. Father, what does he mean by complacency?

Father. It means you may not agree with something, but you do nothing about it. Listen!

Lincoln. This is the way in which slavery is planted, and gains so firm a foothold.
(*After a pause*) I suppose that this crowd is opposed to the admission of slavery into Kansas?

(*The crowd roars their agreement, John Beechard among them. They are very much against slavery spreading to territories like Kansas.*)

Lincoln. By the **Nebraska bill**⁹ a door has been opened for the spread of slavery in the Territories. You who hate slavery and love freedom, why not, as **Fillmore and Buchanan**¹⁰ are on the same ground, vote for Fremont? Why not vote for the man who takes your side of the question? 'Well,' says the Buchanan man, 'it is none of our business.' But is it not our business? There are several reasons why I think it is our business. But let us see how it is.

By our Constitution we are represented in Congress in **proportion**¹¹ to numbers, and in counting the numbers that give us our representatives, three slaves are counted as two people. The state of Maine has six representatives in the **lower house of Congress**¹². In strength South Carolina is equal to her. But stop! Maine has twice as many white people, and 32,000 to boot! And is that fair?

Now, one man in South Carolina is the same as two men here. Maine should have twice as many men in Congress as South Carolina. It is a fact that any man in South Carolina has more influence and power in Congress today than any two now before me. The same thing is true of all slave states, though it may not be in the same proportion. It is a truth that cannot be denied, that in all the free states no white man is the equal of the white man of the slave States.

⁵ **Principle:** a basic or underlying truth

⁶ **Admitted:** to allow to enter

⁷ **Bondage:** being enslaved, force to work against your will and without freedom

⁸ **Complacency:** a calm or satisfied feeling with one's self

⁹ **The Nebraska Bill:** reference to the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which opened up new land in the west for Slavery through popular sovereignty, which allowed settlers in each territory decide if they would be free or slave, however, this practice often led to armed conflict between northern and southern settlers in the territories.

¹⁰ **Millard Fillmore and James Buchanan:** The two men running for President against John C. Fremont. Fillmore was a former president, running for the Know-Nothing Party, while Buchanan was running for the Democratic Party.

¹¹ **Proportion:** set with the same or constant ratio

¹² **Lower House of Congress:** The U.S. House of Representatives

John. Is that true father? Does a man in South Carolina really count as two men here?

Father. Yes it is John. It was a compromise made when the founding fathers created the constitution.

John. But how can you count a person as two-thirds of a person, especially if slaves can't vote?

Father. I guess our founding fathers left it up to us to figure the question of slavery.

Lincoln. And here let me say, that in intellectual and physical structure, our Southern **brethren**¹³ do not differ from us. They are, like us, subject to passions, and it is only their odious institution of slavery, that makes the breach between us.

We are a great empire. We are eighty years old. We stand at once the wonder and admiration of the whole world, and we must enquire what it is that has given us much **prosperity**,¹⁴ and we shall understand that to give up that one thing, would be to give up all future prosperity. This cause is that every man can make himself.

We believe that it is right that slavery should not be **tolerated**¹⁵ in the new territories, yet we cannot support this doctrine, except in one part of the country. Slavery is looked upon by men in the light of dollars and cents. The estimated worth of the slaves at the South is **one billion dollars**¹⁶, and in a very few years, if the **institution**¹⁷ shall be admitted into the territories, they will have increased fifty per cent in value.

(There are gasps from the crowd.)

John. Father I did not know that so much money existed.

Father. It doesn't son, at least not printed money; but that is how much slavery is worth to people in the south. It might not seem like it at farms like ours, but our northern states have quite a bit of wealth as well, it's just not tied to slavery.

Lincoln. This government is sought to be put on a new track. Slavery is to be made a ruling element in our government. The question can be avoided in but two ways. By the one, we must admit, and allow slavery to triumph, or, by the other, we must triumph over the **black demon**.¹⁸ We have chosen the latter manner. If you of the North wish to get rid of this question, you must decide between these two ways – **submit**¹⁹ and vote for Buchanan, submit and vote that slavery is a just and good thing and immediately get rid of the question; or unite with us, and help us to triumph. We would all like to have the question done away with, but we cannot submit.

John. What does he mean father, submit to what?

¹³ **Brethren:** formal word for brother

¹⁴ **Prosperity:** Success and good fortune.

¹⁵ **Tolerated:** To allow something to happen without trying to stop it.

¹⁶ **One Billion Dollars** = \$1,000,000,000

¹⁷ **Institution:** An established custom, practice, or law.

¹⁸ **Black Demon:** institution of slavery.

¹⁹ **Submit:** to give in or give up a choice.

Father. He says that if we allow slavery into the territories then we are allowing slavery to take over the country. He is saying we must make a stand against slavery now.

Lincoln. They tell us that the Union is in danger.

Crowd. *(With much displeasure)* No!

Lincoln. Who will divide it? Is it those who make the charge? Are they themselves the persons who wish to see this result?

My Democratic friends, come forward. Throw off these things, and come to the rescue of this great principle of equality. Don't interfere with anything in the Constitution. That must be maintained, for it is the only safeguard of our **liberties**.²⁰ And not to Democrats alone do I make this appeal, but to all who love these great and true principles. Come, and keep coming! Strike, and strike again! Vote for Fremont, and vote against the extension of slavery into the territories! *(Great cheering)* As sure as God lives, the victory shall be yours.

(The crowd erupts in cheers for Lincoln)

John. *(As the crowd continues to cheer)* Maybe he should run for president father!

Father. I don't know if the country is ready for the likes of Abraham Lincoln son. Though I must admit, he knows how to get a crowd going!

Henry Smith. How about that, and we almost passed up this stand. That's gotta be the best speech of the day! Why, I bet they could hear these cheers all the way back in Illinois if the wind were right!

(The cheering continues as the curtain closes, and slowly fades away. End Act I)

²⁰ **Liberties:** freedoms

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As Act II begins the curtain opens to show the interior of the first floor of the Beechard's farmhouse. At stage right is the living room; there is a fireplace, two chairs, a couch, a desk, and stairs in the background that lead to the second level. At stage left is the kitchen and dining room, with a wood burning stove, a window that looks out over the barn, and a dining room table. Over four years have passed since the day in Village Park (Bronson Park). John is now 17 years old and Elizabeth is 15. The family is eating supper together at the dining room table, but for several moments no one is speaking. Father, Mother, and Elizabeth are eating contently, but John appears anxious for something.

Act II Part One

John. Will you look at it now father?

Father. I told you John, after supper I will take a look.

John. But father, we must be the last people in Michigan to know what's going on!

Elizabeth. It's a newspaper Jonathan; it's not likely to change.

(John gives Elizabeth a squint-eyed look in annoyance)

John. But we finally have a chance to replace that no-good President Buchanan! After what he did with Kansas²¹ he should be hung for treason!

Mother. Now John, he is still our president, even if you disagree with what he has done you should not say such things.

John. He's been in office almost four years now and I think you would be hard pressed to find anyone who does agree with him on much.

Father. That's probably true, but it's a discussion that can wait until after dinner. *(Father pauses for a moment to put the issue to rest)* Elizabeth, how was your day at school, any improvement in arithmetic?

Elizabeth. Arithmetic? *(She hesitates)* Arithmetic is coming along great father. But I still don't understand why this is so important, I mean you didn't go to a high school father, why do we have to?

Father. Because we want better for you two Elizabeth; we have a good life here, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't try to provide better for our children. A lot of people are against that school, we've fought hard to get it built. So you would do well not to take your studies lightly!

Elizabeth. Well I am doing well in reading and writing, teacher says I am one of the best writers in our class!

²¹ Buchanan supported a pro-slavery constitution in Kansas, making it a slave state, despite the fact that most settlers in Kansas were not slavery supporters.

Mother. Yes, and we are very proud of your writing dear, but we want you to do well in all areas of school.

Father. I hope you both know how important education is. If we have taught you anything growing up I hope you know that. The new high school is very rare here in Michigan, most children in this state do not get to attend school past common school,²² so I hope you know how lucky you are.

Elizabeth. I know father. Say mother, what is this peculiar vegetable called again?

Mother. It is called celery, dear. That Mr. Taylor grows it, quite different isn't it? (*Elizabeth smiles*) But don't try to change the subject dear.

Elizabeth. (*Her expression returning to a frown*) I promise to get my marks up in arithmetic, I just don't get it sometimes; I would rather be writing. But at least I didn't spend all day drooling over the new girl at school! (*Elizabeth glares over at John, happy to deflect attention away from her*)

Mother. (*To John, not Elizabeth*) Oh, there is a new girl at school? Who is she John?

John. No one! (*Looking at Elizabeth he says in a whisper*) Namby-pamby!

Elizabeth. Don't be shy Mudsill. (*Her voice deepening to mimic Johns*) Oh, can I carry those books for you miss? Lovely day out isn't it? Gosh, I think you're pretty?

John. I never said that!

Elizabeth. Well you might as well have, it was all over your face. Her name is Abigail Barry, and her father works for the railroad.

Father. Ah, yes, Mr. Barry. I met him last week, seems to think he can help us ship some of the crop at a better price. We may be working with him quite a bit.

John. (*Trying to hide a smile*) Really?

Elizabeth. (*With a laugh in her voice*) I think you just made his day father.

John. (*In a low voice, almost whispering*) Shut up Namby-pamby!

Father. Well if you are all finished I thought I would check the newspaper, children help clean up please.

John. Yes, finally!

²² **Common School** – Name for elementary school during the time period of the play. The high school in Kalamazoo (Union High School) was one of the first secondary schools in Michigan, build in 1858.

(As father leaves the table and retrieves the paper from a small table near the door, mother, John, and Elizabeth begin clearing the table. Once the table is cleared Mother and Elizabeth begin cleaning dishes in the kitchen while John goes and sits in a chair to listen to the news.)

Father. *(As he reads the paper father periodically makes sounds of agreement or understanding)*
Hmm, interesting; huh, what do you know?

John. Well?!

Father. It seems that Mr. Lincoln is to be the unanimous nominee for the Republicans this election.

John. Really, but I thought Michigan's delegates wanted Mr. Seward, of New York?

Father. They did, but it says here in order to unify the party behind Mr. Lincoln, our own Michigan state senator, Austin Blair, proclaimed a motion at the Republican convention in Chicago to make Lincoln the unanimous choice.

John. Well that's good isn't it father? I mean, you like Mr. Lincoln, right?

Father. Actually son, I prefer Mr. Seward. I fear Mr. Lincoln may be too radical for the country right now.

John. But isn't that what this country needs, someone who can change things?

Father. Well, son, not everyone wants change. Our brothers in the south certainly don't want to be forced into change.

John. But can't they see that slavery is wrong father?

Father. You would think so son, but always remember that not everyone has had the advantages you have had. Most people in the south have never known a world without slavery; change can be a scary thing. What if we were told we could no longer be farmers?

John. *(With a smile)* That wouldn't be too bad, farming is hard work!

Father. But what would we do? How would we put food on the table? Our whole lives would change; we would have to change everything about the way we live. That is what the southerners are facing if a Republican is elected into office.

John. Well since Mr. Lincoln is the nominee, will you vote for him?

Father. Well I certainly wouldn't vote for Mr. Buchanan, I don't even think his own party wants him anymore. Imagine that, an incumbent president thrown out by his own party!

John. Well I am glad Mr. Lincoln is the nominee, he'll get things done. Remember when we heard him speak father?

(Mother and Elizabeth join Father and John in the living room. Mother begins to knit and Elizabeth joins the conversation)

Elizabeth. (*With a smile*) I remember! That was so boring!

John. You just wanted to be in the glee club, sometimes I wish they had recruited you right then and taken you off our hands. If only your singing voice didn't sound like a dying frog!

Elizabeth. Ha, ha! Real funny Mudsill, you know your hair looked quite silly today, combed as if you were a grown-up or something. It looked ridiculous, and I am sure that Abigail girl noticed!

John. (*Sarcastically*) That really hurts Namby-pamby. I don't know where you got the idea that I was interested in the new girl!

Father. If you two are done bickering there is more to read here. There is a quote here from Mr. Blair.

'Michigan, from first to last, has cast her vote for the great Statesman of New York [Seward]. She has nothing to take back. She has not sent me forward to worship the rising sun, but she has put me forward to say that, at your behest here to-day, she lays down her first, best loved candidate to take up yours, with some beating of the heart, with some quivering in the veins... We martial now behind in the grand column which shall go out to battle for Lincoln.'

Elizabeth. What does he mean by 'worship the rising sun'?

Father. Well what do you think it means John?

John. I think he means that Mr. Lincoln is the candidate rising in popularity, and that he is not switching Michigan's votes just to follow the crowd, or the popular position.

Father. Something like that, a very good speaker that Mr. Blair.

John. James Wilkinson at school said that Blair will be the next governor of Michigan.

Father. That is quite possible; he has grown quite popular here. He was there at the founding of the Republican Party over in Jackson. They are quite proud of that fact in Jackson, none more so than Austin Blair.

John. So the Michigan delegation is behind Lincoln now. Does that mean Lincoln will be the next president?

Father. It is very likely; the Democrats have split between North and South. Northern democrats are putting Stephen A. Douglas on the ballot, while the Southern Democrats are putting John C. Breckinridge on the ballot. Even if they weren't splitting the democratic vote they might have a hard time beating the Republicans, but the way it stands Mr. Lincoln can win the presidency without getting one single vote in the South.

Elizabeth. But that doesn't make any sense father. Our teacher has been teaching us about democracy. Aren't all of the people supposed to have a say in who runs things?

Father. Of course, Elizabeth, but with so many immigrants moving into northern states like New York, there are just much more people in northern states. The majority is in the free north and in a democracy the majority rules.

John. Yeah, well it doesn't help the southerner's cause that they only count a lot of their population as two-thirds of a person.

Elizabeth. What? Now you've lost me.

John. Don't you remember when we saw Lincoln speak? I thought it was crazy too, when he described how the south determines how many congressman they get. Which is also how the number of votes for president a state gets is determined. But it is true, when the founding fathers wrote the constitution the northerners had to compromise with the southerners about how to count slaves. And they settled on counting three-fifths of the slave population when determining representation. I guess Lincoln was rounding his numbers when he said three slaves count as two people.

Elizabeth. Well that is ridiculous. How can one person be three-fifths of a person, even if they are a slave?

Father. I don't think anyone liked that part of the Constitution too much, but it's what needed to be done to make this country whole.

John. But they left so much unfixed, like a mess for future Americans to clean up.

Father. Ah, but that is what is great about America son, we have the ability to change. Each generation can shape the government that is right for the times. We were the first country to do that, and now countries all over the world are following our lead!

Mother. I think that is enough politics for one night dear. Besides, I think some homework is in order. Don't you have some arithmetic to work on Elizabeth?

John. *(With a laugh in his voice)* Yeah those problems aren't going to solve themselves Namby-pamby!

Elizabeth. Whatever, Mudsill!

Mother. I really had hoped you two would grow out of name calling like that.

Elizabeth. I can't help it mother, Mudsill is how I know him.

John. Likewise, Namby-pamby.

Act II Part Two

Act II part two begins with John and Abigail walking together upstage. They are walking in Village Park. It is two years since the Beechards learned that Lincoln would be the nominee, much has happened elsewhere in the country, but so far Kalamazoo has been relatively untouched, but all that is about to change.

(John and Abigail enter from stage left. They walk toward a bench located upstage right and sit together)

Abigail. Isn't Village Park beautiful, John? Even after all the times we've walked together through this park in the last 2 years, I still love it as much as the first time you walked me home. Do you remember that, When we first met?

John. Of course, at the Union School. I think I was smitten with you from the start.

Abigail. I remember how cute I thought you were, even though your hair looked a little silly that day.

John. What was wrong with my hair?

Abigail. Oh, nothing. It was just that it looked like you were trying seem older than you were. Old man hair is what I called it.

John. Did my sister tell you to say that?

Abigail. *(Confused)* Huh? Why would you say that?

John. I don't know, never mind. *(Changing the subject)* So it sounds like things are going pretty well for your family.

Abigail. Yeah, father said he might even be able to get you a job after school with the railroad.

John. That would be great, although I would feel bad about leaving all that farming work to my father.

Abigail. He can hire help when he needs it. You've got to think about your future.

John. It is hard to with so much uncertainty right now. Even college seems less important with the war going on.

Abigail. Oh not the war again!

John. Well with everything that is happening, I can't see how we can stay out of it. We can't just let the Union fall apart.

Abigail. You know I don't agree with secession; but how is it our job here in Michigan to set 'em straight? Your father agrees with me on this.

(A man in a suit passing out leaflets enters stage left and approaches John and Abigail)

Recruiter. Hello there! Aren't you two a fine young couple! Say, could you spare a moment of your time?

Abigail. Well, I'm not sure if...

John. Sure, how can we help you sir? (*John stands up to shake the man's hand*)

Recruiter. Did you hear the big news from Washington?

John. No, sir, what news?

Recruiter. Mr. Lincoln freed the slaves yesterday, signed an emancipation proclamation! All slaves in rebel states at least.

John. (*Excited*) Really! I knew that Lincoln would get things done!

Recruiter. That's not all. I am in town for the day from Lansing to hand-deliver a message to the local government and newspapers from Governor Blair himself.

John. Governor Blair, what about?

Recruiter. Well about the war of course. President Lincoln has called on all loyal states to send troops to Washington to fight in the war against the southern rebels.

John. And Blair is answering the call!

Recruiter. You bet! Your country needs you son. Will you answer the call, or let the forces of slavery and evil tear apart our great nation?

John pauses, and looks back at Abigail. The lights on stage left dim, while the lights on stage right and the Beechard house brighten. Father enters stage right while John, Abigail, and the recruiter exit stage left.

Father. Well, the crops are coming along just fine Anne. This should be a good year for the Beechards!

Mother. (*Not sounding very happy*) That's wonderful dear. It is good to hear some good news.

Father. You're worried about the war, don't be dear. That silly confrontation can't touch us up here. Those Southerners had a few victories early on, but I am sure it is only a matter of time; I mean our northern soldiers are so much better equipped.

Mother. You don't know that for sure. Jonathan is at just the right age to be drafted! What if Governor Blair calls for one?

Father. Now dear, let's not worry ourselves about things we can't control. For now the crops are good, and John is more concerned with Miss Abigail than Mr. Lincoln's little war.

Mother. Well I certainly hope so. Oh, Mr. Barry stopped by today. He left some papers for you to sign from the railroad company.

(Mother picks up a stack of papers and hands them to father. Mother exits stage left, father sits at the living room desk. A few moments pass before John enters stage right)

John. Good day Father.

Father. Hello, John. Thank you for finishing your chores before going out today.

John. *(Nervously)* Of course Father.

(Father puts his papers aside, sensing John's unease.)

Father. Is something bothering you son?

John. Well... *(John paces back and forth)* President Lincoln freed the slaves yesterday, Father... and I joined the Union Army.

Father. *(Stunned)* You what?!

John. I joined the army. There was a man in town from Lansing. President Lincoln has called on Northern governors to raise troops for the Union.

Father. The Union, bah; since when do we call our country the "Union"; are we changing our name because a bunch of Southerners want to cause trouble?

John. Father, if the southerners have their way there won't be an America as we know it.

Father. No son, America will be just as you know it. Have you ever been to the South? How many Southerners have you even met?

John. Well I have met plenty of free blacks and runaway slaves Father.

Father. It's not our fight John!

John. You would have Michigan do nothing while the rest of the country tears itself apart.

Father. Look, John, I don't like slavery, I think it is evil and cannot stand. But I also believe that the South will come to the same conclusion eventually. Why should we force them to destroy their only means of making a living?

John. *(His voice rising)* Father President Lincoln didn't force the South to do anything, he even said he just wanted to stop the spread of slavery, not abolish it! Besides the South fired first! Don't you remember that speech he gave here in Kalamazoo? He asked if we would look upon slavery with complacency.

(Enter Mother from stage left, she stands and listens.)

Father. Of course, but I hope you aren't accusing me of that.

John. With all due respect Father, that is exactly what you are doing! If you stand by and do nothing, even if you disagree with an issue, that is complacency. That is what you told me!

(Father lowers his head)

Mother. *(Almost whispering)* Jonathan, you could die!

John. Aren't some principles worth dying for mother?

(The three are silent for a few moments, father stands and exits stage right, and mother exits stage left)

John. I can't believe he is upset. I thought he would be proud.

(John sits alone for a few moments. Enter Elizabeth)

Elizabeth. *(In a serious tone)* Hey mudsill.

John. Namby-pamby.

Elizabeth. I ran into Abigail on my way home today.

John. So I am sure you have heard. What did she say?

Elizabeth. Well she wasn't too happy about it, why didn't you discuss it with her before you just signed up?

John. Well it wouldn't have changed my decision. What kind of a hypocrite would I be if I spoke so highly of Mr. Lincoln all this time and then didn't answer his call to fight?

Elizabeth. Yeah, but you could have at least talked to her, not make her feel so unimportant.

John. I guess I got caught up in the moment.

Elizabeth. You fool. *(She pauses, with concern in her voice)* Are you really going to go to war?

John. If I didn't know better I'd say you're going to miss me namby-pamby. *(Elizabeth turns her back to John and begins to weep, John stands and walks over to her)* Look Elizabeth, I'll be fine *(he turns her shoulders and gives her a hug).*

Elizabeth. *(Sobbing)* You don't know that. The papers show bodies all over the battlefields!

John. Well you will just have to pray for me then; but I think you know it's the right thing to do. I'll write you every day if it will make you feel better.

Elizabeth. Promise?

(The lights dim, and the curtain closes. End part one of Act III.)

In Act III the stage is divided into two sections. Stage right is the living room of the Beechards house, just as in Act II. But upstage left changes to the settings that John travels to throughout Act III. Act III part one finds John writing a letter from Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Act III Part One

Mother, Father, Elizabeth, and Abigail are gathered in the living room on stage right reading letters from John. On stage left John sits inside a small military tent. As the family reads John's letter he is shown writing that same letter in his tent.

It is night at the Beechard house and a fire burns in the fireplace. Abigail and Elizabeth are sitting on the couch, while Mother and Father each occupy a chair. Elizabeth holds a sealed envelope containing the letter in her hand.

Abigail. Now you haven't read this yet Elizabeth?

Elizabeth. No, I wanted us all to hear the news together. Besides, he can't have reached any real danger yet, training up in Grand Rapids.

Father. Thank the lord for that, let's hear what he is up to, open it Elizabeth. *(Elizabeth opens the envelope and unfolds the letter)* Wow, still has the handwriting of a mudsill.

Mother. Never mind that Elizabeth, get on with it.

Elizabeth. Dear Elizabeth, I know I said I would write you every day, but things are a lot busier here than I thought they would be. I am now officially part of the 6th Michigan Cavalry, under Colonel George Gray of Grand Rapids. On the way we will meet with two other Michigan Cavalry regiments. Together, the Colonel tells us, we will form what's to be called the Michigan Brigade, led by a General named George Custer. We leave tomorrow to begin our march to Washington D.C. even though we don't have many supplies yet the Colonel tells us that we'll be getting supplies on the way. We will also be joining up with some other Michigan Cavalry regiments along the way. I have met many new friends here in Grand Rapids, especially Augustus Sackett. Augustus is from Assyria, and like me there aren't many people from his home town here with him. Things are going well so far, I am eager to get to the task at hand. Please give my love to Mother, Father, and Abigail, and also please try not to be such a *(Elizabeth pauses for moment, deciding whether to read the next word)* Namby-pamby. Sincerely, John Beechard, December, 10, 1862.

Mother. It sounds like he is doing well.

Father. Yes, but leaving without supplies, I just hope these Union folks have their act together. I think President Lincoln is running out of Generals to fire!

(The stage lights on the living room dim and the lights on the tent brighten. John is sitting inside the tent writing the letter that Elizabeth just read. Enter Augustus Sackett.)

Augustus. Come on Beechard, we're moving out. Colonel says we need to leave soon if we want to meet up with the 4th and 5th Cavalries out of Detroit.

John. Oh, right, thanks Sack, I just need to finish this letter. (*Begins writing again, saying the words out loud as he writes them, pausing between each word*) ... and-try-not-to-be-such-a-nam-bee-pam-bee!

Exit John and Augustus Stage left.

The curtain closes. End Act III part one.

Act III Part Two

Act III part two begins John learning that a battle is beginning in the town of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. John and Augustus are marching together up-center stage. The stage lights are off except for a spotlight on them.

Augustus. Hey Beechard, you know where we're headed?

John. Somewhere in Pennsylvania; I guess the Confederates are actually thinking of invading the North!

Augustus. What a mess. Do you ever think we should just let 'em alone?

John. No, I wish they would see some reason. Why did you join the army if you didn't believe in the cause?

Augustus. Oh I believe in the cause, it's just when's it all gonna end. Everyone kept sayin how much more advanced we were here in the North, yet this General Lee keeps winning victories.

John. We've been winning victories out west.

Augustus. Yeah, but you and I ain't fightin' out west, are we? Speakin' of reasons, why'd you join up?

John. You really want to know?

Augustus. Sure. Why, is it some big secret?

John. No, it's just that I had been following Mr. Lincoln for a long time. Did I ever tell you I heard him speak in person, in Michigan?

Augustus. You might have mentioned it once or twice.

John. Well ever since then I have admired him. He managed to put the debate over slavery in simple terms, he didn't mince words, and he didn't try to please everybody. He spoke plainly and truly in my opinion.

Augustus. Yeah, but what's that got to do with you joining the army?

John. Well, ever since I heard that speech I was always talking about Mr. Lincoln and how great he is. He talked about saying what you mean, and not standing around doing nothing when you know something is wrong. Do you know what the word complacency means?

Augustus. Does that have to do with going to the toilet?

John. Ha, no. It's what we've been doing in the North for the longest time, both our lifetimes at least. We all know slavery is wrong. We all know that the South is happy to keep it going till eternity, and yet we did nothing about it, until Mr. Lincoln came along at least. I never cared much about politics, or what went on in the rest of the country until I heard Mr. Abraham Lincoln speak that day.

Augustus. Geez, perhaps you should buy him flowers or something. You don't even speak of that Abigail so highly!

John. Well I asked if you really wanted to know.

A Soldier. (*Yelling from offstage*) The confederates just attacked some Union soldiers at Gettysburg!

John. Well Sack, I guess we are going to Gettysburg.

The two march off stage left. As they exit, the stage lights go up and the Beechard family, and Abigail, sit waiting to read another letter from John. It is late July of 1863, and the letter is dated July 4th, 1863.

Mother. Finally, another letter; How long has it been since the last one?

Abigail. At least two months, I was beginning to worry too, especially after news of Gettysburg.

Father. Well at least we know he made it through that horrible battle.

Elizabeth. Well, are we ready for me to open it? (*The other three nod in agreement. Elizabeth opens the letter and begins to read*)

Dear Elizabeth,

I hope this letter finds you, Father, Mother, and Abigail doing well. The same cannot be said of my regiment and me. I am alive, but wounded. A great battle has just taken place that ended only yesterday. This has been the first chance I have had to write in several weeks as we have been busy pursuing the enemy. The confederates actually invaded the north, can you believe it! That General Lee is one audacious man; he forced our Army of the Potomac to engage him here in Pennsylvania, near a small town by the name of Gettysburg. The cavalry fought east of the town, where Colonel Gray and General Custer led us to victory, costly though it was.

No doubt by the time this reaches you, news of the battle will have already reached Kalamazoo. The battle is won, and the enemy flees back to the south. It is supposed have been the deciding battle. I hope that it is, because it was more horrible than I can describe, even compared to other battles we have seen. Men of both sides lay dead by the pile, my own friend Augustus was wounded just yesterday. He was shot in the stomach. I was lucky, I was wounded in the leg, if I am lucky I will keep the leg, but many men here have lost legs or arms where they have been shot. There are so many wounded. The doctors tell me that with my wounds I will no longer be able to fight, which should be good news but it doesn't feel like good news. I fear that I

am not the man that left Kalamazoo ten months ago; I realize now what a child I was. So sure that I was right, that the cause was just. I still believe that, but the price is so much higher than I had imagined. I feel guilty about leaving my fellow soldiers. Please say a prayer that my friend Augustus makes it through.

Sincerely, John Beechard July 4, 1863.

Abigail. (*Crying*) So he has been injured? But how badly? He didn't say how badly?

Father. Better his leg than the stomach like his friend. I'm afraid our prayers may be too late for his friend Augustus.

Mother. At least he is coming home. Injured or not, he'll be out of danger now.

Close curtain. End Act III part two

Act III Part Three

As the curtain opens the Beechard family is walking about the house cleaning up after breakfast. It is a Saturday morning in November, 1863. The door opens stage right, a limping John walks through using one crutch.

Mother. Jonathan! (*John limps toward his mother and gives her a hug, wincing at pain in his leg, Father and Elizabeth gather near them.*) Are you hurt, how badly?

John. Not too bad, mom; but bad enough that I'm not much good fighting anymore. Doctor says I'll never get rid of this limp, though.

Father. Well we're just glad you are O.K. son. Come sit down, you must be tired.

John. Actually I have been sitting for 5 days straight, but it will be nice to sit in our house again. For a while there I wasn't sure I would ever make it back. Have you seen much of Abigail?

Mother. Oh, of course. She comes over every day to hear if there is news about you. Would you like something to drink dear?

(John nods his head in approval. Mother and Father leave the room, Mother to get John some water, and Father to fetch something else)

Elizabeth. So, how do you feel?

John. I feel different, that's the only way I can describe it.

Elizabeth. You seem different, like less of a mudsill.

(John smiles at the reference.)

John. You still seem as namby-pamby like as ever.

Elizabeth. You just can't say anything nice can you? Besides, I only said less like a mudsill, still more mudsill than most! (*Elizabeth smiles, and pauses for a moment. Then, in a more serious tone*) What was it like?

John. It was hard, but at least I always felt like I was on the right side. (*He pauses*) Do you remember my friend Augustus from my letters?

Elizabeth. Of course. How is he?

John. He didn't make it, died of **gangrene**²³ in the medical tent.

Elizabeth. Oh I am so sorry. You must have seen a lot of that?

John. Yeah, I did.

Father returns, in his hand he has a newspaper.

Father. I saved this for you John. I thought you might want to read it. (*He hands John the paper*) It's an article about the dedication of the Gettysburg battle site as a national cemetery. Lincoln gave a speech there. Read it, I think it's meant for men like you and your friend Augustus.

John begins to read the address, as he does Lincoln appears stage left at a speaker stand, addressing the audience. As John reads the address, Lincoln speaks.

Lincoln. Four score and seven years ago²⁴ our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure.²⁵ We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate – we can not consecrate²⁶ – we can not hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us -- that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion -- that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain -- that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom -- and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish²⁷ from the earth.

(Lights dim as curtain closes)

The End

²³ **Gangrene:** the decay living tissue caused by lack of blood flow.

²⁴ **Four Score and Seven Years** = 87 years

²⁵ **Endure:** to last for a period of time.

²⁶ **Consecrate:** to devote or dedicate to a purpose in a very sincere manner.

²⁷ **Perish:** to become destroyed, to die.