

JAKE HEGGIE

GENE SCHEER

# INTELLIGENCE

Janai Brugger  
Jamie Barton  
J'Nai Bridges



Houston  
Grand  
Opera

Houston Grand Opera  
Kwamé Ryan,  
Conductor



Left to right:  
Michael Mayes (Travis Briggs)  
Caitlin Lynch (Callie Van Lew)  
Janai Brugger (Mary Jane Bowser)  
J'Nai Bridges (Lucinda)  
Jamie Barton (Elizabeth Van Lew)



# CONTENTS

Credits	<b>5</b>
Cast	<b>7</b>
Track Listings	<b>8</b>
Houston Grand Opera	<b>11</b>
Houston Grand Opera Orchestra	<b>14</b>
Composer's Biography	<b>16</b>
Librettist's Biography	<b>17</b>
A Note from Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer	<b>19</b>
Synopsis	<b>26</b>
Libretto	<b>30</b>
Acknowledgments	<b>69</b>





*J'Nai Bridges as Lucinda.*



# INTELLIGENCE

An Opera in Two Acts

Music by Jake Heggie | Libretto by Gene Scheer

Conceived by Jake Heggie, Gene Scheer, and Jawole Willa Jo Zollar

Commissioned by Houston Grand Opera

World premiere production in collaboration with Urban Bush Women

## **Houston Grand Opera Orchestra**

**Kwamé Ryan**, Conductor

**Jawole Willa Jo Zollar**,  
Director & Choreographer

**Mimi Lien**, Set Designer

**Carlos J. Soto**, Original Costume Designer

**Clair Hummel**, Costume Realizer/  
Designer of Dancer Costumes

**John Torres**, Lighting Designer

**Wendall K. Harrington**, Projection Designer

**Rasean Davonté Johnson**,  
Co-Designer of Projections

**Eduardo Hawkins**, Sound Effects Designer

**Colter Schoenfish**, Associate Director

**Vincent Thomas**, Associate Choreographer

**Luke Fedell**, Fight Director

**Skye Bronfenbrenner**, Intimacy Director

**Jeremy Johnson**, Dramaturg

**Jim Johnson**, English Diction Coach

**Kirill Kuzmin**, Musical Preparation

**Michelle Papenfuss**, Musical Preparation

**Peter Pasztor**, Musical Preparation

**Marco Rizzello**, Musical Preparation

**Annie Wheeler**, Stage Manager

*The commission of Intelligence was made possible by Sara and Bill Morgan.*

*Houston Grand Opera thanks the supporters who made this recording possible: Nabors Industries and Robert A. Ellis.*



*The Urban Bush Women dancers, referred to by Jawole Willa Jo Zollar as the Is-Was-Will.*





# CAST

**Mary Jane Bowser**  
**Elizabeth Van Lew**  
**Lucinda**  
**Callie Van Lew**  
**Travis Briggs**  
**Henry**  
**Wilson**

Janai Brugger  
Jamie Barton  
J’Nai Bridges  
Caitlin Lynch  
Michael Mayes  
Nicholas Newton  
Joshua Blue

# URBAN BUSH WOMEN DANCERS

Courtney J. Cook  
Loren Davidson  
Kentoria Earle  
Roobi Gaskins  
Symara Johnson  
Bianca Leticia Medina  
Love Muwwakkil  
Mikaila Ware



# INTELLIGENCE

## CD 1 || ACT ONE

1	Scene 1: The Van Lew Mansion	12:09
2	Help me!	10:17
3	Round and Round	4:22
4	Intelligence	5:33
5	Mary Jane Aria: Just one step	5:16
6	Scene 2: The Confederate White House	7:37
7	Pantomime	2:51
8	Scene 3: What did I marry into?	4:55
9	Elizabeth Aria: Look me in the eye	4:07
10	Scene 4: In Town	9:13
11	Scene 5: The Journal	2:42
12	Wilson Aria: Why risk everything for this?	3:13
13	Ensemble: What's gonna happen now?	4:34
14	Scene 6: Fire!	4:15



# INTELLIGENCE

## CD 2 || ACT TWO

1	Scene 1: What is in the ashes?	3:50
2	Scene 2: Surviving is all I've ever known	4:01
3	Callie/Travis Duet: Traitors	2:22
4	Scene 3: It cannot be true	5:05
5	Ancestral Dance	6:11
6	Scene 4: Midnight outside the Van Lew Mansion	10:23
7	"None so wronged as Mary Jane"	2:59
8	Duet: Chained to you forever	4:47
9	Scene 5: In Elizabeth's Rooms	2:36
10	The Slave Auction	3:24
11	My momma's eyes	8:57

*Total run time: 135:39*









# HOUSTON GRAND OPERA

**Khori Dastoor**, General Director and CEO

*Margaret Alkek Williams Chair*

**Patrick Summers**, Artistic and Music Director

*Sarah and Ernest Butler Chair*

Houston Grand Opera (HGO) is one of the most innovative, most highly acclaimed opera companies in the United States. Khori Dastoor assumed leadership as the company's fourth General Director in 2021. Jake Heggie, Gene Scheer, and Jawole Willa Jo Zollar's company-commissioned opera *Intelligence* made its world premiere in 2023, marking a significant milestone in the company's artistic legacy, which dates to 1955. Additional recent achievements include the groundbreaking 2022 original production of *The Wreckers* by Dame Ethel Smyth, the first staging of this lost masterpiece by a major American opera company; and the 2021 world premiere of Joel Thompson and Andrea Davis Pinkney's *The Snowy Day*.

HGO stands as a leader in the operatic world, having been the only American finalist for Opera Company of the Year in the 2019 International Opera Awards—and one of only two U.S. companies to receive this nomination twice. Committed to advancing the art form, serving the Houston community, and shaping the future of opera, HGO has commissioned and produced 76 world premieres as of 2025. The company is also a trailblazer in nurturing the next generation of artists and



administrators through its acclaimed training programs. HGO has toured extensively and has won a Tony, two Grammy awards, and three Emmy awards. It is the only opera company to win all three honors.

Deeply rooted in Houston, HGO enriches both local and national culture through diverse performances, dynamic community events, and impactful education projects designed to reach the broadest audience. Its pioneering Community & Learning Initiative has set a standard for other arts organizations. HGO breaks down financial barriers to the art form through discounted tickets, subsidized student performances, and free productions.







*Conductor Kwamé Ryan leading the  
HGO Orchestra for Intelligence.*



# HOUSTON GRAND OPERA **ORCHESTRA**

## **VIOLIN**

Denise Tarrant\*, Concertmaster

*Sarah and Ernest Butler Concertmaster Chair*

Chloe Kim\*,

Assistant Concertmaster

Natalie Gaynor\*,

Principal Second Violin

Carrie Kauk\*,

Assistant Principal Second Violin

Miriam Belyatsky\*

Hae-a Lee Barnes\*

Chavdar Parashkevov\*

Anabel Ramirez\*

Mary Reed\*

Erica Robinson\*

Linda Sanders\*

Oleg Sulyga\*

Sylvia VerMeulen\*

Melissa Williams\*

Zubaida Azezi

Andres Gonzalez

Kana Kimura

Mila Neal

Jacob Schafer

Rachel Shepard

Hannah Watson

Emily Zelaya

## **VIOLA**

Eliseo Rene Salazar\*, Principal

Lorento Golofeev\*,

Assistant Principal

Gayle Garcia-Shepard\*

Erika C. Lawson\*

Suzanne LeFevre\*

Sarah Mason

Matthew Weathers

Sergein Yap

## **CELLO**

Barrett Sills\*, Principal

Erika Johnson\*,

Assistant Principal

Wendy Smith-Butler\*

David Dietz

Shino Hayashi

Kristiana Ignatjeva

**DOUBLE BASS**

Dennis Whittaker\*, Principal  
Erik Gronfor\*,  
Assistant Principal  
Carla Clark\*  
Hunter Capoccioni

**FLUTE**

Henry Williford\*, Principal  
Tyler Martin\*

**OBOE**

Elizabeth Priestly Siffert\*, Principal  
Mayu Isom\*

**CLARINET**

Rebecca Tobin, Acting Principal  
Justin Best

**BASSOON**

Amanda Swain\*, Principal  
Micah Doherty

**FRENCH HORN**

Sarah Cranston\*, Principal  
Kimberly Penrod Minson\*

**TRUMPET**

Tetsuya Lawson\*, Principal  
Randal Adams\*

**TROMBONE**

Thomas Hultén\*, Principal  
Ben Osborne

**TIMPANI**

Alison Chang\*, Principal

**PERCUSSION**

Richard Brown\*, Principal  
Christina Carroll  
Craig Hauschildt  
Karen Slotter  
Joshua Vonderheide

**PIANO**

Kirill Kuzmin

*\* HGO Orchestra core musician*





## JAKE HEGGIE

American composer Jake Heggie is best known for *Dead Man Walking* (2000), the most widely performed new opera of the last 25 years, with a libretto by Terrence McNally, and his critically acclaimed operas *Intelligence* (2023), *It's a Wonderful Life* (2016), *Moby-Dick* (2010), and *Three Decembers* (2008), all with libretti by Gene Scheer. In addition to 10 full-length operas

and numerous one-acts, Heggie has composed more than 300 art songs, as well as concerti, chamber music, choral, and orchestral works. His compositions have been performed on five continents, and he regularly collaborates with some of the world's most beloved artists as both composer and pianist. Hailed by the *Wall Street Journal* as "arguably the world's most popular 21st-century opera and art song composer," Heggie actively seeks out projects that invite a wide range of perspectives and possibilities. Recent examples include *Before It All Goes Dark*, a chamber opera based on a *Chicago Tribune* story about the unknowing heir monodrama featuring countertenor Key'mon Murrah portraying Earth in a toxic relationship with humanity. *Songs for Murdered Sisters*, Heggie's song cycle with Margaret Atwood, was created in response to the global epidemic of gender-based violence and nominated for Classical Album of the Year at the Juno

Awards. Heggie has longstanding creative partnerships with mezzos Frederica von Stade, Joyce DiDonato, Susan Graham, Sasha Cooke, and Jamie Barton, whose all-Heggie disc *Unexpected Shadows* earned a Grammy nomination for Best Classical Solo Vocal Album. His nine-city recital tour with Barton showcased *What I Miss the Most*, a song cycle with new texts by important voices including DiDonato, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Sister Helen Prejean, Kathleen Kelly, and Patti LuPone. The proud recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship, Heggie is a frequent guest artist at universities and conservatories. He was named *Musical America's* 2025 Composer of the Year, and his induction into the OPERA America Hall of Fame the same year recognized his long-standing commitment to strengthening the art form and the field. Heggie lives in San Francisco with his husband Curt Branom.

[www.jakeheggie.com](http://www.jakeheggie.com).



## **GENE SCHEER**

Gene Scheer is a frequent collaborator with composer Jake Heggie, with four of their works making their world premieres at HGO: *Intelligence* (2023), *It's a Wonderful Life* (2016), *Three Decembers*, which starred Frederica von Stade (2008); and the song cycle *Pieces of 9/11* (2011). The two also collaborated on the critically acclaimed 2010 Dallas Opera world

premiere *Moby-Dick*, starring Ben Heppner as Captain Ahab; the lyric drama *To Hell and Back* (Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra), which featured Patti LuPone; and *Camille Claudel: Into the Fire*, a song cycle premiered by Joyce DiDonato and the Alexander String Quartet. Scheer worked as librettist with Tobias Picker on *An American Tragedy*, which premiered at the Metropolitan Opera. Other collaborations include the lyrics for Wynton Marsalis's "It Never Goes Away," featured in *Congo Square*, and the Grammy-nominated oratorio *August 4, 1964*, written with composer Steven Stucky. In partnership with composer Joby Talbot, Scheer has written two operas for the Dallas Opera: *Everest* and *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*. For the Santa Fe Opera, he wrote *Cold Mountain* with Jennifer Higdon, which won the International Opera Award for Best World Premiere. The Metropolitan Opera presented *Moby-Dick* in a new production in March 2025.

The same month, Scheer's new song cycle with Rachel Portman, *Another Eve*, premiered at Konzerthaus Dortmund with Joyce DiDonato. *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*, an opera with music by Mason Bates, opened the Metropolitan Opera's 2025-26 season.



# A NOTE FROM JAKE HEGGIE AND GENE SCHEER

*Intelligence* explores the riveting and little-known story of two heroic women spies in Richmond, Virginia during the American Civil War: Elizabeth Van Lew, a white woman of privilege; and Mary Jane Bowser, a Black woman born into slavery in the Van Lew household.

Historical clues suggest that Mary Jane may have been a spy for Elizabeth in the Confederate White House. As an enslaved woman, she would have been virtually unnoticed, allowing her to access highly sensitive information and relay it to Elizabeth. Records confirm that Elizabeth sent vital intelligence to the North. The discoveries made by her network of spies contributed to several significant Union victories. Ulysses S. Grant even credited Elizabeth with providing “the most critical

actionable intelligence” he received from Richmond during the war.

The idea for *Intelligence* came to us during a concert event at the Smithsonian Institution in 2015. A docent told us he had the perfect story for our next opera and directed us to an op-ed in the *New York Times*: “A Black Spy in the Confederate White House” (Lois Leveen, June 21, 2012). We were floored. Both of us knew we had found our next opera.

The story is replete with the high-stakes emotional drama that is essential for opera. We felt music and possibility bubbling in every corner. It is an





*Librettist Gene Scheer (second from left) and director/choreographer Jawole Willa Jo Zollar (second from right) at a community conversation about Intelligence at Houston's Buffalo Soldiers National Museum.*





epic, almost mythological story, timeless and timely, as it confronts big issues we still struggle with today. And while the story invites conversation about a range of subjects, from race relations to who has the right to tell the story, *Intelligence* is not a white story or a Black story: it is an American story, based on our troubled shared history.

After doing additional research and talking to several noted historians, we became determined to find a way to adapt Elizabeth and Mary Jane's journey for the operatic stage. Houston Grand Opera generously gave us this rare and special opportunity.

We conceived the opera with director/choreographer Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, and the original production featured eight brilliant dancers from her groundbreaking company Urban Bush Women, alongside a starry cast of

seven singers. So much of Elizabeth and Mary Jane's story is unknown—they were spies after all—and the dance and movement became as essential to the storytelling as the words and music. We found this collaboration incredibly energizing, challenging, and inspiring.

Some background: Elizabeth Van Lew was a white woman from a wealthy and influential Richmond family. Her father amassed his fortune in the hardware business, and while her family owned enslaved people and supported the Confederacy, Elizabeth became a committed abolitionist. She attributed her convictions to two pivotal experiences: her time at school in Philadelphia, and when she witnessed the horror of a slave auction in Richmond, where a mother was sold away from her child.

Elizabeth outwardly professed support for the Southern cause while secretly establishing a spy



*Kwamé Ryan (conductor), Jake Heggie (composer),  
John Torres (lighting designer), Janai Brugger  
(Mary Jane Bowser), and Jawole Willa Jo Zollar  
(director/choreographer) take a bow.*









ring that maintained constant communication with the Union army. However, the most crucial intelligence she obtained indicates that she somehow infiltrated the Confederate White House. This strengthens the theory that Mary Jane's covert efforts played the most critical role.

Mary Jane was born into slavery in the Van Lew family and demonstrated extraordinary intellectual acumen as a child. She was three years old when Elizabeth's father died in the early 1840s. Based on historical records, it is clear there was an unusual bond between these two women. Mary Jane was baptized and later married in the White Episcopal Church in Richmond. When she was 10 years old, Elizabeth sent her to be educated in the North. At 15 years old, Elizabeth arranged for Mary Jane to travel to Liberia. After four unhappy years in Africa, Mary Jane crossed the ocean

to return to the Van Lew household, just a few months before the war began.

Elizabeth and Mary Jane used their virtual invisibility as women to their advantage as spies. Nobody would think that Mary Jane was as smart as she was, or that she possessed a photographic memory as well as the ability to remember entire conversations she overheard. The opera follows the thrilling and dangerous actions both women took. If they had been uncovered, it would surely have meant torture and death.

As the opera unfolds, the gripping story of political and military intrigue becomes woven together with a very personal journey of discovery. For as Mary Jane goes about unearthing the secrets of the Confederacy, she also starts to uncover secrets of her own past. Secrets that Elizabeth was determined



to keep hidden. Baptized in the white church. Married in the white church. Historians have told us there is only one explanation: they must have been half-sisters. But beyond this, could Mary Jane have been the child of the mother who was sold at the slave auction Elizabeth described? The dates line up.

*Intelligence* features seven characters, five of whom were based on real people. In addition to Elizabeth and Mary Jane, we meet Elizabeth's sister-in-law Callie (renamed to avoid confusion, as her actual name was also Elizabeth), Mary Jane's husband Wilson Bowser, and Henry, the butler at the Confederate White House. Two characters were invented for the story: Travis, a Confederate soldier who suspects Elizabeth is a spy; and Lucinda, a magical character with an inexplicable bond to Mary Jane. As the secrets surrounding Mary Jane begin to unravel, Lucinda's true character is slowly revealed. ■



# SYNOPSIS

**Setting:** *Richmond, Virginia 1865.*

*The U.S. Civil War.*

## ACT I

Mary Jane Bowser, a woman born into slavery to the wealthy Van Lew family in Richmond, is hanging laundry on the Van Lew plantation when she is approached by a woman named Lucinda, whom she has never met but who seems to know a lot about Mary Jane. Lucinda questions Mary Jane's close relationship with Elizabeth Van Lew, the daughter of the deceased family patriarch. Mary Jane defends Elizabeth, saying she took care of her after her mother died in childbirth. We learn that Mary Jane had been baptized and married in Richmond's church for white families, and that she was sent to the North for school to learn to read and write. As Lucinda slips away, a man runs to Mary Jane begging for help to escape to the

North. Elizabeth enters and berates him for implying that she is sympathetic to the Union. She also recognizes the man: she knows he is Travis Briggs, a Confederate Home Guard, who was trying to entrap Elizabeth and Mary Jane. Elizabeth's sister-in-law Callie arrives and vouches for Elizabeth's loyalty to the Confederacy. She, too, is suspicious of Elizabeth's Northern sympathies, but she is more concerned with protecting her family name.

When Travis and Callie depart, Elizabeth and Mary Jane drop the charade and focus on the task at hand: they have two Union soldiers hiding in the house, and they need Mary Jane's husband Wilson to help them escape to the North. Elizabeth then tells Mary Jane that their secret plan can finally be put into motion: Mary Jane will be loaned out to the Confederate White House in Richmond. She will spy for the Union, sending intelligence from Jefferson



Davis's study to the North through Elizabeth's spy ring. At the seamstress shop, Mary Jane delivers a dress with Confederate secrets sewn into the hem. Travis approaches her, increasingly suspicious of her and Elizabeth; he nearly assaults her before he is interrupted by the Davises' butler, Henry, who is looking for Mary Jane to bring her back to the Davis house.

Wilson tells Elizabeth that, as he was delivering the message from the dress to the Union line, he learned that only one of the two Union soldiers made it back safely; the Confederate Home Guard must have captured one of the escaped Yankee prisoners. As Elizabeth worries about the captured soldier and about Callie and Travis's increasing suspicions, she asks Wilson to bury her journal: they cannot risk anyone finding the cipher to their messages to the Union. Travis interrogates the captured Yankee but kills him when nothing is revealed.

Lucinda mysteriously reappears, observing both the burying of the soldier and the burying of the journal. At the Davis house, Mary Jane has uncovered intelligence that needs to get to the North as quickly as possible: she does not have time to sew it into a dress to deliver later. She sets fire to the building as a distraction, encouraging Henry to run to the Van Lew house where Elizabeth can help him get to the North. As the fire grows, Mary Jane sees Lucinda consumed in the flames.

## **ACT II**

Mary Jane returns to the room where she started the fire, looking for signs of Lucinda: nobody else saw Lucinda in the fire. Back at the Van Lew house, Callie tries yet again to entrap Elizabeth. She pretends to be more concerned about her family's welfare in the war, asking Elizabeth to help them escape to the North. Elizabeth refuses to take the bait.

Elizabeth meets Mary Jane at the seamstress shop, thinking Mary Jane has found some new intelligence. Instead, Mary Jane asks about Lucinda. Insisting that no one was in the fire, Elizabeth reluctantly asks the troubled Mary Jane for more help: since Callie has been suspiciously watching her, Elizabeth needs Mary Jane to retrieve the buried journal. Mary Jane agrees, but then asks about her mother: what was her name? How old was she when she died?

When Elizabeth leaves, Mary Jane falls into a mysterious existence as spirits and ancestors dance around her. She sees Lucinda. Mary Jane asks her how old she was when she died, and Lucinda echoes Elizabeth's answer about Mary Jane's mother.

Travis finds Wilson digging up the buried journal and knocks him unconscious. When

Mary Jane arrives, Travis confronts her about the secrets, stories, and cipher: he reads a story from Elizabeth's journal that departs from Mary Jane's knowledge of her mother's death in childbirth, instead saying that Mary Jane was two years old when the Van Lews took her mother to the auction block. As Travis moves to assault Mary Jane, Henry appears, and the men fight; Travis is killed.

Callie comes across Travis's body. She plans to turn Elizabeth in and destroy her family name. Elizabeth watches from a distance, a gun in hand, prepared to do the worst to protect herself and the spy ring. But as Callie realizes that destroying Elizabeth's reputation would include her and her children, she focuses on her own self-preservation: Callie buries Travis's body herself to keep the truth from being discovered.



Elizabeth tells Mary Jane what she saw Callie do. But Mary Jane is no longer concerned with the secrets of the war and the spy ring. She is concerned with the secrets Elizabeth has been

keeping from her. As she confronts Elizabeth and learns the truth about what happened to her mother, Mary Jane decides to leave Richmond behind her and tell her story. The whole story.



# LIBRETTO

## ACT ONE

### **1** Scene One: The Van Lew Mansion in Richmond

*In the back yard of the Van Lew Mansion, sheets hang from a clothesline. Shadows seem to move among them. MARY JANE, a young Black woman, enters with a laundry basket.*

#### **MARY JANE**

Halfway 'cross the ocean, oh how the winds do blow. Whose arms were holding me then?

Whose arms would not let me go? Oh, have mercy. Oh Lord, have mercy upon my soul.

*Surrounded by the shattering sounds of the Civil War, MARY JANE remains focused on her work, unfazed by the chaos around her. In silhouette, figures flee, some falling under fire, while two manage to rise and escape. Behind the sheets, shadows flicker and weave, their movements tense and frantic. Among them, the shadow of a little girl stretches out in despair, only to be engulfed by the press of other shadows.*

*LUCINDA steps out from behind the hanging sheets and startles MARY JANE, who drops all the laundry.*

#### **LUCINDA**

Laundry ain't gonna fold itself, Mary Jane.

#### **MARY JANE**

Ah! Don't sneak up on a person like that!

#### **LUCINDA**

Didn't sneak.

#### **MARY JANE**

Did, too.

#### **LUCINDA**

I can't help if you don't see what's right in front of you.

#### **MARY JANE**

And that is...what?

#### **LUCINDA**

Laundry.

#### **MARY JANE**

You're pretty good at watching other people work, aren't you?

*MARY JANE begins to pick up the laundry. LUCINDA notices a silk scarf and grabs it.*

#### **LUCINDA**

Ooooo! That silk is gonna look good in your quilt, Mary Jane!

*She lets the silk flutter and swirl.*

#### **MARY JANE**

You know about my quilt? And you know my name?

#### **LUCINDA**

I hear things.

#### **MARY JANE**

Do you?

#### **LUCINDA**

Been working over yonder.

#### **MARY JANE**

Yonder? What's your name?

#### **LUCINDA**

Lucinda.

#### **MARY JANE**

Hm. Well, tell me how you know so much about me, Miss Lucinda-Who-Hears-Things from over yonder!

#### **LUCINDA**

Patches of wool and cotton ... and now this silk! Nice stitching, girl! White women make those tiny stitches, like little links of chain.



**MARY JANE**

I think they sew the way they dance. Just keep counting to three over and over and over again!

**LUCINDA**

One, two, three – one, two, three – one, two, three – again, again, again!

**MARY JANE & LUCINDA**

No, I do not like their little, tiny stitches.

**MARY JANE**

Who's got the time? Mine are big and twist round like question marks. It's like the needle is leading my fingers. Or some voice is...

**MARY JANE & LUCINDA**

...singing, whispering, telling me where I need to go. How to piece it together. Which scraps of fabric to sew.

**MARY JANE**

Which pieces of cloth will tell the story.  
My story. Our story. The story of what came before.  
Though I don't know where I come from  
And I don't know where I'll go.  
I know there will be more to sew into my story. Our story.  
I know.  
There's a pull in my heart all the words I have learned can't describe.  
But I know there are roads I am destined to walk, mountains to climb.  
I know someday this world's gonna break apart.  
And then I will be the one to decide where I'll go,  
Where I'll walk on my own.  
One step at a time.  
I know – I know – I know, Lucinda.

**MARY JANE & LUCINDA**

Though I don't know where I come from,  
And I don't know where I'll go.  
Still, I know there will be more to sew into my story. Our story.

**MARY JANE**

So much more than I could ever know.

*LUCINDA rips the silk scarf in half.*

**MARY JANE**

Ah! Are you crazy? That belongs to Miss Elizabeth!

**LUCINDA**

She's gonna be mad at you? I don't think so.

**MARY JANE**

Someone's gonna get in big trouble and it ain't gonna be me!

**LUCINDA**

Miss Elizabeth doesn't get mad at you.

**MARY JANE**

She's been good to me, that's all. Took me in when I was a baby.

**LUCINDA**

"Took you in?" Heard you were baptized in her own church.

**MARY JANE**

That's right. (*Suspicious*)

**LUCINDA**

Her *white* church?

**MARY JANE**

She kept me safe. Saw I was smart. Sent me to school...

**MARY JANE & LUCINDA**

...up North to learn to read and write.

**MARY JANE**

Who you been talking to?

**LUCINDA**

People.

**MARY JANE**

She always welcomed me home. Did "people" tell you that?

**LUCINDA**

Mary Jane, you must have angels watching over you.

**MARY JANE**

Angels? I don't know.

*They fold laundry together and sing.*

**MARY JANE & LUCINDA**

Halfway 'cross the ocean, oh how the winds do blow.

Whose arms were holding me then?

Whose arms would not let me/you go?

Oh, have mercy. Oh Lord, have mercy upon my soul.

**LUCINDA**

Now don't you worry about this silk. With this war going on three years, Miss Elizabeth's got bigger things on her mind. But, you best be extra careful.

**MARY JANE**

Of what?

**LUCINDA**

Him.

*TRAVIS BRIGGS runs on pretending to be a Northern sympathizer looking for help. He is trying to entrap and incriminate Elizabeth Van Lew.*

**2 TRAVIS**

Help me! Help me!

**MARY JANE**

What's wrong?

**TRAVIS**

Go get Miss Van Lew! Quick! She can help me like she helped the others.

*LUCINDA slips away into the shadows.*

**MARY JANE**

Others?...What?...Lucinda?

**TRAVIS** *(TRAVIS' s anger slips out. Menacing.)*

Just do what I tell you. I've heard about you.

*(He slips back into character)* If I get up North, I mean to stay there. Miss Van Lew can get me there! Ain't that right?

I heard she's...

*ELIZABETH storms on, having overheard TRAVIS.*

**ELIZABETH**

What? You "heard she's" what?

**TRAVIS**

Miss Van Lew, I need your help to get north!

**ELIZABETH**

You want help from the "crazy lady" up on the hill? Hm?

The "shadow" of Grace Street up on the hill?

The "treasonous snake." You've made a mistake.

Bad timing. She's not available today.

*(TRAVIS starts to speak.)* Stop! Why are you here?

Because I gave some Yankee prisoners some food?

I'm a good Christian woman with plenty to lose!

A good Southern woman and I'm not in the mood.

Bad timing for you. Perhaps you'd best be on your way.

**TRAVIS**

Please help me!

**ELIZABETH**

Up on this hill, I can see forever.

On this hill, I see it all.

Look where I live, the finest house in Richmond.

If the South falls, my house falls, I fall, you fall,

It all comes falling down!

My daddy built this big house up on the hill.

One of the richest men in the South, up on this hill.

Raised me to love my family and home.

God rest his soul.

What you've been told is a lie.

But you know all about lies, don't you?

**TRAVIS**

What?

**ELIZABETH**

Up on this hill, I can see forever. And I see what's in front of me now!



I see you hopin' that I'll say somethin' foolish.  
Well, here is what I have to say:  
I know your kin and I know your kind.  
I know why you're here and what you have in mind.  
I know you're Home Guard. I know your name.  
Oh Mary Jane, meet Mr. Travis Briggs.

**TRAVIS**

You know me?

**ELIZABETH**

Travis, you damn fool, I know you, your grandmother, most of your cousins.

**TRAVIS**

Just doing my job, Miss Van Lew. There was a prison break.  
Fifty filthy Yankees on the run.

**ELIZABETH**

I heard it was a hundred and three.

**TRAVIS**

We shot fifty. Only fifty-three to go.

**ELIZABETH** (*very sweetly*)

Mary Jane, fetch our friend Mr. Travis some tea.

*MARY JANE goes into the house.*

**TRAVIS**

Mind if I look around?

*CALLIE VAN LEW enters.*

**CALLIE**

No need for that, Travis.

**TRAVIS**

Miss Callie! What are you doing here?

**ELIZABETH**

My brother's wife knows you, too? Oh my, oh my...

**CALLIE**

I'm living here with Elizabeth while John's off fighting for the cause.

**ELIZABETH**

Travis, you gotta lot to learn about goin' under cover. Get a disguise or something!

**CALLIE**

You leave him be, Elizabeth. Travis, you know me.

You know my family.

My husband John had to leave us to go off for the fighting.

I'm stayin' here 'til he returns.

Here, 'til he comes home to us. 'Til we hold him in our arms again.

Here at home, 'til he walks through that door victorious!

I'll be here.

I grant you, my sister-in-law Miss Elizabeth Van Lew, is an acquired taste.

But she is loyal to the cause. In this house – this family, our family, my children – we are loyal.

Faithful as the sun.

**TRAVIS**

You're the heart and soul of the South, Miss Callie.

**CALLIE**

How is your family, Travis? It's been too long.

**TRAVIS**

Guess you never heard. My brother was a scout.

**CALLIE**

I remember your brother.

**TRAVIS**

Captured at Shiloh. Tortured by the Yankees and shot dead like a dog.

He didn't talk. He didn't tell. Now every last Yankee can burn in Hell.

Nothing is the same. Nothing will ever be the same.

**CALLIE**

Travis, I'm so sorry!

**ELIZABETH**

How awful for your family.

*The two RUNAWAY SOLDIERS we saw earlier in shadow have*

*been hiding in the Van Lew Mansion. They watch TRAVIS from a window. MARY JANE enters just as one aims a rifle at him.*

**MARY JANE** *(Assertively)*

Put down that gun, you fool! He's Home Guard. Pull the trigger and it's over.

**MARY JANE**

One shot. Just one shot. And it's all gone.

**TRAVIS**

One shot. Just one shot. And he was gone.

**CALLIE**

Travis, your brother!

**MARY JANE**

Miss Van Lew didn't get you out of prison just to get us all killed.

**CALLIE**

We grew up together.

**MARY JANE**

Think of all the others! Your Northern soldier brothers.

**TRAVIS**

He didn't talk. He didn't tell.

**MARY JANE**

All our connections and spies, codes, maps and allies.

**MARY JANE, TRAVIS, CALLIE, ELIZABETH**

One shot. One gun shot. And it's all gone!

**TRAVIS**

Nothing will ever be the same.

*The soldier lowers the rifle. MARY JANE gets the two men back into hiding. The focus goes back entirely to the yard.*

**3 CALLIE**

I remember your brother. When we were little, he'd sit us on his horse and ride us round and round the lake. Remember? Round and round.

**TRAVIS**

Yeah, I remember. Round and round.

**ELIZABETH**

No one knows how it feels when it's someone else's brother, Someone else's son...

**CALLIE**

Someone else's husband...

**ELIZABETH & CALLIE**

Someone else's heart...

**TRAVIS**

No one knows.

**ELIZABETH**

...torn apart.

*MARY JANE steps into the yard with the glass of tea for TRAVIS. LUCINDA stops her.*

**LUCINDA**

They talk a lot about their pain, but never give a thought to ours.

**MARY JANE**

Miss Elizabeth does.

**LUCINDA**

Really? Then how come we're the ones hangin' laundry, workin' fields and servin' tea?

**ELIZABETH, LUCINDA, TRAVIS**

No one knows how it feels...

**CALLIE, ELIZABETH, TRAVIS**

...when it's someone else's brother. Someone else's son.

**MARY JANE, LUCINDA**

...when it's someone else's sister or brother. Someone else's daughter.

**ELIZABETH, TRAVIS**

Someone else's father...

**CALLIE**

...husband...



**MARY JANE, LUCINDA**

...mother...

**MARY JANE, CALLIE, ELIZABETH, LUCINDA, TRAVIS**

Someone else's heart...

**ELIZABETH, LUCINDA**

...torn apart.

**TRAVIS**

Sometimes my heart burns with a fire...

**CALLIE, LUCINDA, TRAVIS**

...a rage no one else can feel.

**MARY JANE, ELIZABETH**

Sometimes the pain just goes on and on...

**CALLIE, LUCINDA, TRAVIS**

...round and round...

**MARY JANE, CALLIE, ELIZABETH, LUCINDA, TRAVIS**

...round and round...And on and on like a wheel.

And the truest song of loss

no one else can intone.

The truest song of loss

is the one you sing

all alone.

*MARY JANE brings the glass of tea to TRAVIS. LUCINDA slips away.*

**CALLIE** *(trying to lighten the mood and move on)*

How 'bout I walk you down the hill, Travis? We can catch up on everything.

**TRAVIS**

I'd like that, Miss Callie.

*CALLIE hissing aside to ELIZABETH.*

**CALLIE**

You and I will talk later.

**ELIZABETH**

Won't that be fun! Thanks for stoppin' by, Travis.

Don't be a stranger, ya hear?

**TRAVIS**

Don't you worry, Miss Elizabeth, I'll be back. *(politely menacing)*  
Wanna make sure you're safe and sound.

*CALLIE and TRAVIS start to leave.*

**ELIZABETH**

Don't forget about the disguise!

*CALLIE and TRAVIS exit.*

*(with gritted teeth)* Bless their hearts.

*Once the coast is clear, ELIZABETH and MARY JANE exhale deeply in relief. With the tension lifted, they feel free to speak openly and without restraint.*

**4 MARY JANE**

Those Yankee fools pulled out a gun! They were gonna shoot the Home Guard!

**ELIZABETH**

Idiots! Thank God you were there to stop 'em. Now we've got Travis sneakin' round with Callie, and they're both askin' questions.

**MARY JANE**

Oh, my husband will be comin' from your farm any day with his wagon to get those Yankees all the way up...

**MARY JANE & ELIZABETH**

...to the Union line.

**ELIZABETH**

Your husband is a good man. We can trust him.

**MARY JANE**

Be good to see my Wilson.

**ELIZABETH**

Mary Jane...

**MARY JANE**

With you keeping him away on your farm, doesn't feel much like we're married.

**ELIZABETH**

Mary Jane, listen...

**MARY JANE**

But, when we're together doesn't feel much like it then, either.

**ELIZABETH**

Mary Jane, listen to me! You won't be here to see Wilson.

**MARY JANE**

I won't?

*ELIZABETH takes a letter out of a pocket.*

**ELIZABETH**

I've had a letter from President Davis's wife. Read this.

*She hands the letter to MARY JANE. MARY JANE reads.  
MARY JANE can hardly contain her excitement.*

Your idea. My plan.

**MARY JANE**

It's gonna work?

**ELIZABETH**

It's gonna work!

**MARY JANE**

It's gonna work!

**ELIZABETH**

I'm loaning you out to serve at the house down the hill.  
At the Confederate White House down the hill. They're  
expecting you today.

**MARY JANE**

So, we really found a way...

**ELIZABETH**

I found a way...

**ELIZABETH & MARY JANE**

...into the belly of the beast.

**ELIZABETH**

Are you ready to be my spy?

**MARY JANE**

It's what I wanted.

**ELIZABETH**

Are you ready to be my...

**ELIZABETH & MARY JANE**

...eyes and ears at the center of it all.

**ELIZABETH**

It's brilliant, Mary Jane. Three long years we've been fighting on  
the edge of this war.

**ELIZABETH & MARY JANE**

Now we're goin' in where women haven't gone before.

**ELIZABETH**

But a single misstep...

**MARY JANE**

...will mean torture...

**ELIZABETH & MARY JANE**

...and death.

**ELIZABETH**

Yes.

**MARY JANE**

I was born for this!

**ELIZABETH**

You know what to do.

**MARY JANE**

I hang a red cloth on the line when I discover...

**ELIZABETH & MARY JANE**

...intelligence.

**ELIZABETH**

Listen to every word...

**MARY JANE**

...and read every letter and map I can find ...



**ELIZABETH**

You'll be my eyes and ears.

**MARY JANE**

...for intelligence.

**ELIZABETH**

After three long years.

**MARY JANE**

Intelligence!

**ELIZABETH**

Just hang a red cloth on the line, I'll be ready to go.

Oh, but in that house,

Mary Jane, you must be nothing but a slave, you know.

**MARY JANE**

I know the world, Miss Elizabeth. And the world never lets me forget my place. In the world I don't really have a name or face. Just my race.

**ELIZABETH**

I know your name. I see your face. Just be invisible so that no one knows you're there.

**MARY JANE**

I can be invisible.

**ELIZABETH**

No one will notice you.

**MARY JANE**

I'll be a shadow on the wall.

**ELIZABETH**

Listening.

**MARY JANE**

But beware...

**ELIZABETH**

Take care.

**MARY JANE**

...because the girl they don't notice standing there has intelligence.

**ELIZABETH**

It won't be much longer.

**MARY JANE**

It's time to risk everything.

**ELIZABETH & MARY JANE**

Oh, together we can find a way to make the suff'ring end. But for now, we will play the game with intelligence. And the game begins now. Just one step. One step more.

**5** *MARY JANE steps out of the house. ELIZABETH closes the door and the house fades. MARY JANE makes her way down the hill.*

**MARY JANE** *(She hesitates.)*

I don't know where I come from...and I don't know where I'll go. Just one step. *(She freezes.)* One step more.

*(frustrated)* Come on, Mary Jane. This was my idea so why won't my feet move, suddenly? I've walked through many doors before. And I always found my way back home. Off to school up North, then 'cross the ocean to Africa and back. Oh, how the winds do blow.

*MARY JANE hovers as SHADOWS move. It is as though unseen forces – her spirit guides – are leading her along.*

Now, my feet won't move.

Now, something's changed.

What lies behind the door ahead?

Beatings? Whips? And chains?

Now, fear is stoppin' my feet.

Fire's pumpin' through my veins.

Fire's gonna get me through that door.

Nothin' is ever gonna be the same.

For now, I'll be invisible to them.

They cannot conceive

That a "slave girl" could have intelligence

And be watching, listening, reading, rememb'ring...

Guess what, y'all? That "girl" is me.

Now, I am movin' again.  
And I'm on my way.  
One step. Then another.  
Nothing is ever gonna be the same.

I was born for this.

*MARY JANE walks into the Confederate White House.  
The day ends – the spirits dance.*

## **6 Scene Two: Inside the Confederate White House**

*It is the next morning. MARY JANE sneaks into the bedroom next to Jefferson Davis's study. She means to go to his desk, but a baby starts to cry from a crib at the end of the bed. She picks him up to quiet him.*

### **MARY JANE**

Hush now, little one. I'm not s'posed to be here. Hush now!  
Hush now, don't give me away.

*The baby calms down. HENRY enters unseen, carrying firewood.*

*She sets the baby back into the crib.*

### **MARY JANE**

Whose arms were holding me then? Whose arms would not let...

**HENRY** *(Henry speaks and startles her.)*  
That's real pretty.

### **MARY JANE**

Don't sneak up like that!

### **HENRY**

Barely heard you say a word since you got here. Now you're singin' to the baby.

**MARY JANE** *(lying)*  
I was told to check in on him.

### **HENRY**

Where's Nanny?

### **MARY JANE**

With Mister Jeff Junior. He's...runnin' a fever.

### **HENRY**

Is he now?

*(MARY JANE singing to the baby.)* That is real pretty. Like you.

*MARY JANE trying to ignore the remark.*

Nothin'? Miss Mary Jane, I just said that you're pretty.

*No response.*

Still nothin'? Bet you don't ignore your mamma when she tells you you're pretty.

### **MARY JANE**

My mamma died givin' birth to me.

### **HENRY**

Sorry.

### **MARY JANE**

Never knew my daddy.

*HENRY goes into the adjacent room to put the wood into the fireplace. MARY JANE follows.*

### **MARY JANE**

Oooo! Lots of books in here!

### **HENRY**

'Course there are. This is President Davis's private library.

### **MARY JANE**

Oh, my oh my...

### **HENRY**

That one's the Bible. I can read it to you.

### **MARY JANE**

You can read?

### **HENRY**

Some.

**MARY JANE**

Wish I could.

**HENRY** (*suggestively*)

I can teach you.

**MARY JANE** (*deflecting*)

Say that's a nice picture. (*picks up a map*)

**HENRY**

That's a map. Tells you where you're goin'.

**MARY JANE**

We both know we're not goin' anywhere.

*A pause.*

**HENRY**

One of these days, I'll head up to safety. One of these days, I'll make my way North. One of these days.

**MARY JANE** (*reading papers on the desk*)

"Jackson in Fredericksburg..."

**HENRY**

What was that?

**MARY JANE**

Could you really teach me to read?

**HENRY** (*suggestively*)

Later tonight.

**MARY JANE**

"Later tonight." Really? Sounds like you've got other things on your mind, Mr. Henry. I'm a married woman. Bet you can't really read a word at all.

**HENRY**

Sure I can! Open it up and point to any passage.

*MARY JANE opens the Bible and points to a page.*

*HENRY can't really read, but he has memorized certain passages.*

"We must not become weary of doing good, for one of these days we'll reap us a harvest, if we do not give up."

*MARY JANE secretly reading and memorizing papers and maps on the desk.*

**MARY JANE**

"Two divisions on the Chestnut Road...Three hundred horses...moving from Tennessee to Durham...on their way out..."

**HENRY**

"I'm not giving up. No. Gonna find a way out of this ol' mess of a world."

*HENRY starts to close the Bible.*

**MARY JANE**

Read me some more?

*She opens the Bible and points to another passage.*

**HENRY**

"While we can, we must try to do good and be good to others. Especially those who believe we will find a way."

**MARY JANE**

"281 artillery...north of Atlanta...already on the way..."

**HENRY**

"If we take a stand, we can make a plan. I'm not giving up. Don't you ever give up for together we can find a way..."

**MARY JANE**

Already time to hang a red cloth on the line. They're already on the way.

**HENRY**

"...out of this ol' mess..."

**MARY JANE** (*to HENRY*)

"This ol' mess?"

**HENRY**

"We will find a way out of this ol' mess of a world."

*HENRY puts the Bible away.*



*Nicholas Newton as Henry and  
Janai Brugger as Mary Jane Bowser.*



**MARY JANE**

Is that really in the Bible?

**HENRY**

It ought to be. Now, how 'bout you tell me why you're really here in the President's study?

**MARY JANE**

I told you. Mr. Jeff Junior...

**HENRY**

Mr. Jeff Junior is fine. He's out playing in the yard. No fever. You best be extra careful, Miss Mary Jane. They find you up here and...let's just say I wouldn't want to be you.

*VARINA DAVIS (a dancer), wife of the President, enters the bedroom next to the study. MARY JANE is in a panic. HENRY gestures for her to remain calm. VARINA picks up the baby. HENRY walks in.*

**HENRY**

Mrs. Davis, the fire is ready, ma'am.

*MARY JANE steps into the bedroom. VARINA is surprised she is there.*

**HENRY**

Sorry, ma'am. I hurt my arm and Miss Mary Jane helped me carry the wood. Anything else, ma'am?

*VARINA indicates he may leave but gestures for MARY JANE to stay.*

**HENRY** *(quietly to MARY JANE)*

I'll see you later.

*HENRY exits.*

**7 Pantomime**

*VARINA gently places the baby back in the crib and gestures for MARY JANE to unfasten the back of her dress. Standing before a mirror, she steps out of the gown and points to a new party dress. MARY JANE assists her in putting it on, following VARINA's directions on where to pin it. Once dressed, VARINA changes out of*

*the gown, retrieves the baby, and exits.*

*(explosions and gunfire in the distance)*

*After VARINA departs, MARY JANE approaches the mirror and gazes at her reflection, studying her face intently. Her eyes then shift to VARINA's clothes, lingering as she examines them thoughtfully.*

**MARY JANE**

Weigh the cotton.

What does it cost to make such things?

How much gold? How much silver?

How much blood, pain,  
and brutality? Beautiful

linen and velvet

Scarves, dresses and silk brocade.

Beautiful. All so beautiful.

Threaded with flesh and blood and bone

And despair.

**8** And secrets...

**Scene Three: The Van Lew House and the Confederate White House**

*An idea strikes MARY JANE. As she pins the dress, she plans to sew the secret intelligence she has uncovered into the hem. While she works meticulously, ELIZABETH and CALLIE are seen at the Van Lew house.*

**CALLIE**

What did I marry into?

**MARY JANE**

...sewn into the hem!

**ELIZABETH**

Money. You like the money. You like the big house.  
You like the name.

**CALLIE**

Your daddy would be so ashamed.

**ELIZABETH**

Don't you speak of my daddy...

**CALLIE**

He was a good Southern man. You freed so many slaves after he died. Against his wishes. Now these rumors about helping Yankees escape.

**MARY JANE**

"Two divisions on the Chestnut Road..."

**ELIZABETH**

I loved my daddy, Callie.

**CALLIE**

He would never abide such weakness...

**ELIZABETH**

Weakness?

**CALLIE**

...and scandal. You living alone, never married. A spinster!

**ELIZABETH**

How dare you presume to speak for my father!

**MARY JANE**

"...moving from Tennessee...Jackson in Fredericksburg... already on the way..."

**CALLIE**

You bring such shame to his memory.

**ELIZABETH**

Stop right there, Callie. I loved my daddy.

**CALLIE**

You love the easy life he left you. The house, the farm, all built and run by the slaves you're so soft on now. Especially that Mary Jane...

**ELIZABETH**

She was orphaned...

**CALLIE**

...orphaned at birth. John told me.

**MARY JANE**

Weigh the cotton.

**CALLIE**

God has a way of taking those who aren't up to life's struggles. It was God's plan.

**MARY JANE**

Hang a red cloth on the line.

*MARY JANE finds a red cloth, then bundles up the dress and exits. The focus is now entirely the Van Lew house.*

**ELIZABETH**

Let's talk about something else, shall we?

**CALLIE**

OK. How about this: Travis is upstairs. I let him in to look around.

**ELIZABETH**

I've got nothing to hide. Do you?

**CALLIE**

What do you mean? What do you mean, Elizabeth?

*WILSON enters.*

**WILSON**

Miss Elizabeth, is Mary Jane about?

**CALLIE** (*viciously*)

Don't you speak until you're spoken to, boy.

**WILSON**

Sorry, ma'am.

**ELIZABETH**

What is it, Wilson?

**WILSON**

Got some potatoes and radishes from the farm outside in the wagon, ma'am.



*Caitlin Lynch as Callie Van Lew and Jamie Barton as Elizabeth Van Lew.*



**ELIZABETH**

Lovely. There's a couple of bundles for you to take back to the farm. You know where I keep 'em.

*This is code to tell WILSON about the two Yankee escapees.*

**WILSON**

Yes, ma'am. Like always.

**ELIZABETH**

Mary Jane is working for the President and his wife for a spell.

**CALLIE**

What?

**WILSON**

Thank you, ma'am.

*WILSON exits as TRAVIS enters.*

**ELIZABETH**

Welcome back, Travis. Lucky me. All these surprise visits. There's a hornet's nest in the attic. Hope you didn't get stung.

**TRAVIS**

Nothin' funny about this, Miss Van Lew.

**ELIZABETH**

Nothin' funny 'bout the two of you.

**CALLIE**

What?

**TRAVIS**

Miss Van Lew...

*ELIZABETH distracts CALLIE & TRAVIS while WILSON gets the two YANKEES out.*

**ELIZABETH**

Come on and look me in the eye. Long talks. Longer walks. Sneakin' 'round all over town. Makin' plans and

fakin' plans to be together. When you were kids, your brother took you round and round. Is that what's goin' on now?

You takin' Callie round and round and round and round and round? Look me in the eye.

**CALLIE & TRAVIS**

You are crazy.

**ELIZABETH**

Am I? Crazy Miss Elizabeth, up on the hill. Tell me, Travis, you find anything up on this hill?

**TRAVIS**

Nothing yet.

**ELIZABETH**

Not true! You found my brother's wife! Don't be shocked. You both know how people talk. Is that what you are hiding? Is that what this is really all about?

**CALLIE & TRAVIS**

She's crazy!

**ELIZABETH**

Look me in the eye!

**9** *CALLIE & TRAVIS leave.*

How much longer will it last? Will it never never end? This anger. Disgust. This hatred. I never knew I could hate like this. Hate this ignorance. This cruelty. And how alone I feel.

If you could look me in the eye now, Daddy. Twenty years after you died. Would you even recognize me now, Daddy? The girl who long ago sat on your lap in this chair and fell asleep listening to her father softly sing. While all around us such an evil thing was happening. I didn't know. But you did. What did you do, Daddy?

*As ELIZABETH sings, a shadowy memory unfolds – a slave auction her father took her to as a child comes to life.*

What happened to your little girl, you wonder. I woke up and opened my eyes. I saw the truth of what was going on all around me. I had to get up and do something. I couldn't sleep anymore.

Now wide awake, a question remains about our Mary Jane. A question only you can answer. What did you do? Was it you? Can it be true? Look me in the eye!

*The shadowy memory of the slave auction fades.*

I will always love you. But, I never knew I could hate like this.

*In the distance, ELIZABETH sees the red cloth indicating MARY JANE has new information. She exits.*

#### **10 Scene Four: In Town, Outside the Seamstress Shop**

*LUCINDA's voice is heard offstage as MARY JANE enters the Seamstress Shop with Varina's dress – to leave it there for Elizabeth. LUCINDA enters singing as she waits for MARY JANE.*

#### **LUCINDA**

Halfway 'cross the ocean  
Oh how the winds do blow  
Whose arms are holding you now?  
Whose arms will not let you go?  
I'll sing 'til somebody hears me.  
I'll sing 'til somebody knows. Oh Lord, have mercy upon my soul.

*MARY JANE leaves the Seamstress Shop.*

#### **MARY JANE**

Lucinda?

#### **LUCINDA**

Mary Jane! What you doin' at the seamstress? Finding fabric for your quilt?

#### **MARY JANE**

No. Just leaving something for Miss Elizabeth.

#### **LUCINDA**

I thought you were working for the Davis family now?

#### **MARY JANE**

How do you know so much about what I do?  
Who are you?

*TRAVIS enters and thinks MARY JANE is addressing him. LUCINDA slips away.*

#### **TRAVIS**

Just a loyal soldier takin' in a dirty Yankee for some questions.

*Just behind TRAVIS is another CONFEDERATE SOLDIER leading a UNION SOLDIER in chains, beaten and bloody. It is one of the soldiers Mary Jane and Elizabeth helped to escape – the one who was about to shoot Travis in the yard earlier. MARY JANE and the PRISONER recognize each other in a moment fraught with tension. A moment TRAVIS takes in.*

#### **MARY JANE**

Mister Travis, sir, I should get back to Mrs. Davis...

#### **TRAVIS**

Hold on now. You can spare a minute for me.

*TRAVIS indicates for the other SOLDIER to take the PRISONER away.*

Such a pretty girl. You been with Miss Elizabeth almost your whole life long. Lots of rumors about what's goin' on in that great big house. Now you got something you wanna tell me?

#### **MARY JANE**

I should go, sir...

#### **TRAVIS**

Such a pretty girl. Bet she told you she freed you. I looked it up. No paperwork. You sure she isn't keepin' things from you? Maybe you got something to tell me? – Such a pretty girl. Would you even put up a fight?



Would anybody notice if you slipped from sight?  
They'd think you ran away. Think that you vanished.  
Never believe that anything bad had happened. What a  
shame. What a shame if anything should happen to such  
a pretty face. To such a pretty little woman.

*HENRY enters unobserved.*

All you gotta do is tell me what's going on in that great  
big house on the hill. Or maybe that Yankee will. Why  
you gotta make this so hard?

Pretty little Mary Jane. Such a pretty girl. Such a pretty  
face. Such a pretty name. Such a pretty girl...

**HENRY**

'Scuse me, sir.

**TRAVIS** (*violently angry*)

Who the hell are you, boy?

**HENRY**

Henry, sir. President Davis's butler.

**TRAVIS**

And?

**HENRY**

Don't mean no harm, sir. Mrs. Davis sent me out to look  
for Miss Mary Jane. She is needed at the house, sir.

**MARY JANE**

Great big party tonight, Mr. Travis.

**HENRY**

House full of guests. Still lots to do.

**MARY JANE**

Maybe even General Lee...

**TRAVIS**

All right. All right. Just remember. I know where to find  
you, pretty little Mary Jane.

*TRAVIS slowly makes his way off, whistling. MARY JANE  
nearly collapses. HENRY catches her.*

**HENRY**

You all right, Miss Mary Jane?

**MARY JANE**

I'll be all right. He cornered me. You saved me,  
Mr. Henry. Thank you for saving me.

**HENRY**

I think I might do anything for you. How can I have  
fallen so hard, so fast for you? And I hope you feel it,  
too? You're married, I know, but it's true. One of these  
days, I'll run away north. And I want you to run with me,  
too. I want you safe with me. And together, we will find  
our way out of this ol' mess of a world.

**MARY JANE**

We'd better get back.

*They leave.*

## **II Scene Five: Outside the Van Lew Mansion**

*It is evening. ELIZABETH walks into the yard. WILSON is  
hiding and calls out to her.*

**WILSON**

Miss Van Lew!

**ELIZABETH** (*startled*)

Who's there?

**WILSON**

Wilson!

**ELIZABETH**

Wilson?

**WILSON**

Need to speak to you right away!

**ELIZABETH**

Wait by the oak tree.

*Calling out to Callie, who is inside*

I'm going out for some firewood, Callie! We'll stoke it

good for the night!  
Wilson?

**WILSON**

Over here!

**ELIZABETH**

What's wrong?

**WILSON**

One of the Yankees made it past the Union line, but the other was captured by the Home Guard.

**ELIZABETH**

You're sure?

**WILSON**

I rowed down the river to the Union line, like always.

**ELIZABETH**

Like you've done a million times.

**WILSON**

To leave the message by the maple tree...

**ELIZABETH**

The message Mary Jane sewed in that dress for me.

**WILSON**

...like always.

**ELIZABETH**

Like always.

**WILSON**

But a Union officer said to tell you that only the one fellow made it through.

**ELIZABETH**

Was the other killed?

**WILSON**

Don't know, but Miss Van Lew, both of those Yankees know all about Mary Jane and you. What if he talked and they're on the way to take everybody in the house away. What do we do?

Miss Van Lew?

*ELIZABETH takes her journal out of a pocket.*

**ELIZABETH**

This is what they're looking for. My journal.

**WILSON**

We should burn it.

**ELIZABETH**

We can't. Too much information we need is in it. The code. The cypher for our messages to the Union. I have to hide it somewhere.

**WILSON**

But if that Yankee talks, you'll both be killed!

**ELIZABETH**

Tortured and killed. All of us. Nothing we can do, Wilson. But I can't keep this on me, or in the house. Wait here.

*She runs off.*

**12 WILSON**

Why risk everything for this? I say burn it, leave it in the ashes.

Mary Jane, what do you want me to do?

Mary Jane, what do you want from me now?

I'm asking, but there isn't any need, I know.

It's as clear as the moon in the sky.

It's as clear as you not really loving me the way I love you.

Mary Jane, why risk everything for this?

Because I know with all my heart it's exactly what you want me to do.

Mary Jane, of course it's what I'll do.

Like always, I will do this for you.

*ELIZABETH returns with a shovel and a wooden box.*

**ELIZABETH**

Bury my journal at the base of this tree. Tell Mary Jane if something happens to me.

*As WILSON digs the hole, ELIZABETH carefully seals the journal inside a box. In the background, silhouetted against*

*the scene, MARY JANE and HENRY serve at a dinner party. Simultaneously, lights rise on TRAVIS and the captured YANKEE, where TRAVIS, gun in hand, forces the prisoner to dig his own grave.*

**13 TRAVIS**

Got something you wanna tell me? Got something you wanna say?  
All right then, keep on digging. I ain't in a hurry anyway.

**ELIZABETH, WILSON & TRAVIS**

What's gonna happen now?  
Will the real story ever be told?  
Will the truth I carry be buried here forever?  
How will it all unfold?

*CALLIE silently exits the house, unnoticed by ELIZABETH and WILSON. LUCINDA emerges, visible solely to MARY JANE.*

**LUCINDA**

Oh! Oh! Oh!

**CALLIE, ELIZABETH, WILSON, TRAVIS**

Oh! What's gonna happen now?  
So much more work needs to be done.  
Will the truth I carry be buried here forever?  
How will the bloody battle ever be won?

*A loud gunshot rings out as TRAVIS shoots the SOLDIER, who collapses into the grave. At the exact same moment, ELIZABETH releases the box containing her journal, letting it fall into the hole WILSON has dug.*

**LUCINDA**

There are no words to describe what I've seen and heard.  
I just know it sounded like this:

**LUCINDA, CALLIE, ELIZABETH, WILSON, TRAVIS**

Oh! Oh! Oh!

**LUCINDA**

Oh, the shackles, whips and beatings. There are no words.  
I just know it sounded like this:

**LUCINDA, CALLIE, ELIZABETH, WILSON, TRAVIS**

Oh! Oh! Oh!

**LUCINDA**

And the children in chains. There are no words.  
I just know it sounded like this:

**LUCINDA, CALLIE, ELIZABETH, WILSON, TRAVIS**

Oh! Oh! Oh! Will the real story ever be told?

**LUCINDA**

I will never forget.

**LUCINDA**

Who am I?  
She who cannot be explained.  
She who will always remain.  
The truth you carry that refuses to stay buried.  
The voice of all your shame.  
Oh! I am the bones of truth.  
What cannot be contained or consumed.  
Not by lies, by ice, not by time,  
Not by fire.  
Oh! Oh! Oh!  
No, I will never, never forget.

**14 Scene Six: The Confederate White House**

*It is very late and the house is dark. MARY JANE finds HENRY asleep in a corner of the kitchen, close to a fireplace glowing with embers.*

**MARY JANE**

Henry! Henry, get up!

**HENRY**

What's wrong? What's the matter?

**MARY JANE**

You said you wanna go north?

**HENRY**

Said I'm workin' on it.



**MARY JANE**

Well, I got it figured out.

**HENRY**

I'm all ears.

**MARY JANE**

Get your things quick. You're leavin' now!

**HENRY**

What? With you?

**MARY JANE**

No. On your own

**HENRY**

That isn't what I had planned, Mary Jane.

*MARY JANE grabs a paper and pencil and quickly writes a note.*

**HENRY**

Mary Jane? You can write?

**MARY JANE**

And read. And do math. And remember everything I see and hear.

Overheard something tonight and I gotta get the word out right away.

**HENRY**

Who are you?

*LUCINDA emerges from the shadows.*

**LUCINDA**

She who cannot be explained. She who will always remain.

**MARY JANE**

Your ticket to freedom. But I need your help.

**LUCINDA**

The truth you carry.

**HENRY**

What can I do?

**MARY JANE**

I told you about Miss Elizabeth?

**HENRY**

Big house up on the hill?

**MARY JANE**

Yes! Take this note to her and her only.

**LUCINDA**

The voice of all...

**HENRY**

I don't know.

**MARY JANE**

She will hide you and get you on your way.

**HENRY**

I don't know! I don't know! Mary Jane!

**MARY JANE**

Trust me! Do you trust me, Henry?

**LUCINDA**

...of all your shame.

**HENRY**

Don't know why, but I do.

**MARY JANE**

Take this and run now, Henry.

*HENRY takes the note and starts to go.*

**HENRY**

Come with me!

**MARY JANE**

I can't.

**HENRY**

Someone will see me!

**MARY JANE**

They'll be lookin' somewhere else.

*MARY JANE grabs a burning log from the fireplace*

*and sets some curtains on fire. The fire spreads.*

**HENRY**

Mary Jane! Come with me!

**MARY JANE**

Run, Henry! Run! Run! Now!

*HENRY runs. MARY JANE runs to tell everyone there's a fire. LUCINDA steps into the middle of the flames unharmed.*

**LUCINDA**

Oh! I am the bones of truth. What cannot be contained or consumed. Not by lies, not by ice, not by time.

*CAST and DANCERS enter.*

**ALL**

Oh! Oh! Oh!

**LUCINDA**

And the flames shot up! And the town came out, crying:

**ALL**

Fire! Fire! Fire! Fire! Fire!...

**LUCINDA**

And I said: Burn! Burn! Burn! Burn! Burn!

**ELIZABETH & LUCINDA**

Mary Jane! Mary Jane, can you see me over here?  
Over here!

*MARY JANE sees LUCINDA engulfed in flames.*

**MARY JANE**

Miss Elizabeth!

**ELIZABETH**

Mary Jane! We have to go!

**MARY JANE**

Lucinda's in the fire! We have to save her!

**ELIZABETH**

Who?

**MARY JANE**

Lucinda!

**ELIZABETH**

Mary Jane, no one's there! No one's there!

**LUCINDA**

Mary Jane! Mary Jane! I'm here! I'm here!

**MARY JANE**

Don't you hear her voice? Listen!

**ELIZABETH**

No one is there!

**LUCINDA & MARY JANE**

"I'll sing 'til somebody hears me. I'll sing 'til somebody knows."

**ELIZABETH**

We have to get out of here, Mary Jane!

**CALLIE, WILSON, TRAVIS, HENRY**

What's gonna happen now?

**MARY JANE**

Oh, Lucinda! We have to save her now!

*The flames leap and the dancers swirl.*

**ELIZABETH**

Mary Jane, we have to go now!

**LUCINDA**

Mary Jane, the time is now!

**ALL**

Now! Now! Now!

*Jamie Barton as Elizabeth Van Lew and  
Janai Brugger as Mary Jane Bowser.*





## ACT TWO

### **1 Scene One: The Confederate White House**

*MARY JANE is in the place where she saw LUCINDA engulfed by flames. The room is damaged but not destroyed. She searches for clues as she cleans up. LUCINDA appears but is invisible to MARY JANE.*

#### **LUCINDA**

What is in the ashes?  
They don't want you to ask.  
They don't want you to know.  
Oh, oh, the flames shot up and the town came out  
And together they put the fire out.  
In the end, the damage was small.  
Mary Jane looks round for clues  
For proof of what she saw.  
But finds nothing, nothing at all.

#### **MARY JANE**

I know what I saw. Lucinda was there.  
Standing in the fire, calling my name!

#### **LUCINDA**

Mary Jane! Mary Jane! Can you see me? I'm over here!

**MARY JANE** *(as though hearing a ghost)*  
Lucinda! She was there!

On fire, but not burning. She was...

#### **LUCINDA**

Mary Jane, I'm over here!

#### **MARY JANE**

But nobody else saw anything. And now she is nowhere at all.

#### **MARY JANE & LUCINDA**

It cannot be true.  
And yet, I/you feel it inside.

#### **LUCINDA**

*We feel before we know.*

#### **MARY JANE**

Oh Lord, have mercy...

#### **LUCINDA**

My story. Our story.  
The shadows are moving. You touch your heart.  
*LUCINDA and MARY JANE touch their hearts.*  
Something is there, though it cannot be true.

#### **MARY JANE & LUCINDA**

Oh no, how could it be?  
And yet ...

#### **LUCINDA**

...you know...

#### **MARY JANE**

...I know there's something more.

#### **LUCINDA**

...there's something more than what you've been told.  
*MARY JANE finds a red cloth to hang on the line and runs out.*

### **2 Scene Two: In the Van Lew Mansion**

*CALLIE is trying to trick ELIZABETH into confiding in her. TRAVIS is hidden and listening.*

#### **CALLIE**

Surviving is all I've ever known, Elizabeth.

#### **ELIZABETH**

Bless your heart.

#### **CALLIE** *(angrily)*

My family didn't have slaves! Didn't know a single person who owned one 'til I met John and you.

Let the North take 'em all!  
You think I care? I just want it to be over. Want them to leave us alone.  
Let me raise my children! Wake up each morning with

John there beside me, here in our home.  
Let the sun shine! Let the rain fall!  
Let the crops grow. Let it be over!  
Let us grow old together. Like the old sturdy oak out  
back... Bending but not breaking. Just like you,  
dear sister.

**ELIZABETH** (*incredulous*)  
My goodness.

**CALLIE**  
We both know we are losing the war.

**ELIZABETH**  
It can't go on much longer.

**CALLIE**  
I am just so tired of the fighting.

**ELIZABETH**  
We all are, Callie.

**CALLIE**  
You are smart to be on the right side.

**ELIZABETH**  
Beg your pardon?

**CALLIE**  
Richmond is surrounded by Yankees. I swear they know  
every time we move our troops.

**ELIZABETH**  
Yes, I've heard that, too.

**CALLIE** (*a little too eager*)  
You must hear all sorts of things. All the people you  
know. What are they saying?

**ELIZABETH**  
Did I tell you how much I love the drawings your little  
ones made for me?

**CALLIE**  
What?

**ELIZABETH**  
Your children?

**CALLIE**  
What about them?

**ELIZABETH**  
How are they gettin' on at your momma's place?  
It's been so long since I've seen them.

**CALLIE**  
They love their Auntie Elizabeth.

**ELIZABETH**  
I love them, too.

**CALLIE**  
Won't you tell me how I can protect them? I am not  
what you think I am. I'm just a loving mother fighting  
to save my children! Won't you tell me how? How I can  
help you?

*ELIZABETH sees the red cloth MARY JANE has hung on  
the line.*

**ELIZABETH**  
I'm going into town. You comin' along?

**CALLIE**  
No, I'll stay right here.

**ELIZABETH**  
All right, then. I'll see the two of you later.

**CALLIE**  
What?

**ELIZABETH** (*loudly so that TRAVIS can hear*)  
Bye for now!

*ELIZABETH leaves. TRAVIS steps out from hiding.*

**CALLIE**  
She won't bite. The bitch won't bite.

**3 TRAVIS**  
I'll get my boys and tear this place apart.

**CALLIE**

You won't find anything.

**TRAVIS**

We'll see.

**CALLIE**

She's too smart.

**TRAVIS**

There's a traitor gettin' secrets to the Yankees. I *feel* it...  
no, I *know* it's her.

**CALLIE**

I feel it, too. Saw her last night by the old oak. Just before  
the fire down the hill. Close to midnight.

**TRAVIS**

Midnight.

**CALLIE**

There were voices.

**TRAVIS**

Voices.

**CALLIE**

Whispering...

**TRAVIS**

Whispering.

**CALLIE & TRAVIS**

...in the shadows.  
There are traitors all around us.  
The walls are closing in.

**TRAVIS**

We've been betrayed...

**CALLIE**

...and played for fools

**CALLIE & TRAVIS**

...by one of my/your own kin.  
She's the one sending secrets to the North.

Elizabeth is the spy!

I know it. I feel it.

Though I don't know how she's done it. Or why. We must  
trap her, catch her, destroy her, force her to tell us her  
secrets and plans.

**CALLIE**

Who else is involved?

**TRAVIS**

They're all gonna die.

**CALLIE & TRAVIS**

Today it comes to an end.

**CALLIE**

Why would she do it?

**TRAVIS**

There must have been a price...

**CALLIE & TRAVIS**

...to sell us out this way.

**TRAVIS**

For my brother...

**CALLIE**

...my children...

**CALLIE & TRAVIS**

...and all of the others,  
the traitors will be destroyed.  
And it all comes to an end today!

#### **4 Scene Three: Outside the Seamstress Shop**

*MARY JANE exits the shop as ELIZABETH enters.*

**ELIZABETH** (*eagerly*)

Mary Jane! I saw the red cloth on the line! Did you find  
some new intelligence?

**MARY JANE** (*haunted – distraught*)

Questions. I needed to see you. I'm all mixed up. I...I...I...  
I...I...



**ELIZABETH**

Mary Jane! Calm down. Are you all right?

**MARY JANE**

I'm not sure.

**ELIZABETH**

Do they suspect you? Do they know about Henry?

**MARY JANE**

I don't think so.

**ELIZABETH**

He's hiding in the woods near the house. Wilson took your message right away. That was good work, Mary Jane.

**MARY JANE**

I...I...

**ELIZABETH**

Richmond is surrounded. We are close now!

**MARY JANE**

I...I...

**ELIZABETH**

What's the matter, Mary Jane?

**MARY JANE**

Lucinda... the fire...

**ELIZABETH**

Mary Jane, there was nobody there.

**MARY JANE**

I know she was there.

**ELIZABETH**

It's impossible...

**MARY JANE**

I feel it! I know it!

**ELIZABETH**

Perhaps I've expected too much of you. It's more than you can handle.

**MARY JANE**

No, it isn't that...

**ELIZABETH**

But you are seeing things. Hearing things.

**MARY JANE**

I know what I saw!

**ELIZABETH**

You should come home.

**MARY JANE**

I can't go back now! Not when we are so close!

**ELIZABETH**

Yes, we are close!

**MARY JANE**

And I'm right where we need me to be.

**ELIZABETH**

You've been so brave. Are you all right?

**MARY JANE**

Yes, I'm all right now.

**ELIZABETH**

That's my girl. My brave girl. *(a little reluctantly)*  
I need your help tonight.

**MARY JANE** *(solid)*

Tell me.

**ELIZABETH**

I had to bury my journal in a box beneath the old oak tree.

**MARY JANE**

Out back.

**ELIZABETH**

Wilson helped me. But Callie must have heard us.

**MARY JANE**

That's not good.



*J'Nai Bridges as Lucinda and Janai  
Brugger as Mary Jane Bowser, with  
the Urban Bush Women*









**ELIZABETH**

She's been watchin' me like a hawk. Tryin' to trick me.

**MARY JANE**

She does that.

**ELIZABETH**

So tonight when the moon goes full, I'll distract her while you find a way to get out there, dig it up and hide it somewhere safe.

**MARY JANE**

I know just what to do.

**ELIZABETH**

I'll keep Callie occupied.

**MARY JANE** *(suddenly very agitated)*

Miss Elizabeth! How old was my mother when she died?

**ELIZABETH**

What? Where's this coming from?

**MARY JANE**

My mother! Please just tell me.

**ELIZABETH**

I've told you many times before.

**MARY JANE**

Tell me again.

**ELIZABETH**

About 19 years old, I guess.

**MARY JANE**

What was her name?

**ELIZABETH**

I don't remember.

**MARY JANE**

Really?

**ELIZABETH**

She died giving birth to you.

**MARY JANE**

It's my fault.

**ELIZABETH**

It's just what happened. So tonight?

**MARY JANE**

When the moon goes full. I'll be there.

**ELIZABETH**

Be careful, Mary Jane.

*ELIZABETH leaves.*

**MARY JANE**

It cannot be true, and yet, whose arms were holding me then? Whose arms will not let me go?

## **5 Ancestral Dance**

*Time seems to stand still as MARY JANE steps into another world. Is it real, or is she imagining it? Slowly, spirits and ancestors begin to materialize. She instinctively joins their movement, as though the dance has always been a part of her. As the dance continues MARY JANE and LUCINDA sing.*

**MARY JANE**

Lucinda! You're alive!

**LUCINDA**

Mary Jane, I'm always here for you.

**MARY JANE**

But the fire. You were burning!

**LUCINDA**

Mary Jane, I'll always be here for you.

**MARY JANE**

How old are you, Lucinda?

**LUCINDA**

'Bout 19 years old, I guess.

*LUCINDA takes MARY JANE by the hand and they join the dance. LUCINDA and the ancestors disappear as*

*MARY JANE collapses to the ground.*

*MARY JANE wakes up wondering if she's imagined everything. In the sky, she sees the full moon emerging. She runs off.*

*The scene changes to the old oak tree in the Van Lew backyard.*

## **6 Scene Four: Outside the Van Lew Mansion**

*WILSON is digging up the journal at the base of the oak tree when TRAVIS appears. A struggle breaks out as TRAVIS wrests the journal from WILSON, knocking him unconscious in the process. TRAVIS begins flipping through the journal. MARY JANE then enters, heading straight for the hole in the ground – but the journal is gone. Just as she stands there, confused, TRAVIS enters, whistling. MARY JANE freezes, unsure of what to do next.*

### **TRAVIS**

*Pretty little Mary Jane. (He shows her Elizabeth's journal.) This what you are looking for? (He flips through the journal.) My, my, my... would ya look at this! Pages of names, the key to a code. Stories. Lots of fascinating stories. Here. Read this one to me.*

### **MARY JANE**

*I can't read, Mr. Travis.*

### **TRAVIS** *(TRAVIS laughs, then explodes)*

*I said READ! Tell you what, I won't beat you too bad if you read Mr. Travis a story. Read! (He holds the journal open for her)*

### **MARY JANE** *(hesitantly)*

*"Oh, Army of the North, how glorious will be your welcome for all the colored children who we have so deeply wronged. None so wronged as...Mary Jane..."*

*She pushes the book away and tries to run. TRAVIS grabs her.*

### **TRAVIS**

*Ain't that sweet? That's you, little girl! (TRAVIS reads what MARY JANE does not want to hear.) "None so wronged as Mary Jane. She was just two years old when we took her and her momma to the auction block..."*

### **MARY JANE** *(struggling to grab the journal)*

*No. Stop.*

### **TRAVIS**

*What's the matter? Miss Elizabeth never told you that part? (TRAVIS starts to molest her.)*

### **MARY JANE** *(struggling and terribly frightened)*

*Mister Travis, no! No!*

### **TRAVIS**

*You are a little fighter, ain't ya? Come on now, Mary Jane, let's find out what happens next in your story!*

*TRAVIS assaults MARY JANE, intending to rape her. HENRY steps out of the shadows and attacks TRAVIS. MARY JANE hits TRAVIS with the shovel. Then HENRY hits TRAVIS. He falls to the ground gasping and dies.*

### **HENRY**

*What's gonna happen now?*

### **MARY JANE**

*You gotta run!*

### **HENRY**

*We gotta run.*

### **MARY JANE** *(determined)*

*No! I'll take care of this.*

*She picks up the shovel.*

*He takes the shovel from her. She starts to dig with her hands.*

### **HENRY**

*Come away with me, Mary Jane. I want you to see what I look like*

*Michael Mayes as Travis Briggs and  
Janai Brugger as Mary Jane Bowser*





When I'm a free man.  
When I can go anywhere, say what I feel,  
And all I can do is show you the kindness you deserve.

*WILSON starts to come to and overhears HENRY. MARY JANE and HENRY aren't aware he is there. WILSON is awake.*

You don't love your husband.  
Not enough to stay.  
It's just a matter of time  
'Til you walk away.  
You told me when you're in his arms  
You're lost and don't know why.  
You told me something's missing.  
No North Star in his eye.

These bones we're putting in the ground  
Are the seeds of nightmares yet to come.  
I know it. You know it, too, Mary Jane!  
We gotta run...now!

**WILSON**

Mary Jane! Mary Jane! Mary Jane!

**MARY JANE**

Wilson? Wilson! Wilson, what happened?

**WILSON**

Mr. Travis found me digging up the journal. Knocked me out cold.

**MARY JANE**

You all right?

**WILSON**

*(He sees TRAVIS lying dead on the ground.)* He's dead?

**MARY JANE**

Yes.

**WILSON**

What I just heard, maybe I wish I was dead, too.

**MARY JANE**

Wilson, I'm sorry.

**WILSON**

I know you don't love me, Mary Jane.

**MARY JANE** *(MARY JANE tends to WILSON)*

Yes, I do, Wilson.

**WILSON**

Not the way I love you. I love you so much it hurts.  
Tell me, do you love this man?

**MARY JANE**

No, I don't.

**HENRY**

How 'bout we all go north? Why don't we all run away now?

**WILSON**

You really don't understand her, do you?

She's not going anywhere.

She's gonna stay right here and fight to the bitter end.

You may think you're in love with her, but you don't understand her.

Not the way I do.

Mary Jane, what do you need me to do now?

**MARY JANE**

Could you...?

**WILSON**

Get him on over to the Union line, like always?

**MARY JANE**

Like you've done a million times.

**WILSON**

Got a boat tied up at the river right now.

**MARY JANE**

Then go! Run!

**HENRY**

Mary Jane. Please.

**WILSON**

Get a move on!

**MARY JANE**

Go! Run with Wilson, Henry. You're almost a free man now.

**WILSON**

C'mon now, we got our work to do. She's got hers. Be careful, Mary Jane. I'll get him to safety, then get back to the farm and wait for word from you or Miss Elizabeth.

**WILSON & MARY JANE**

Like always.

**WILSON**

I will do this for you.

**HENRY**

Goodbye, Miss Mary Jane.

**MARY JANE**

Go. Now. Hurry!

**7** *WILSON and HENRY run off. MARY JANE picks up the shovel to continue digging, then puts it down and picks up the journal. She opens it and reads to herself. ELIZABETH runs on and sees TRAVIS's body and the partially dug grave.*

**ELIZABETH**

Mary Jane? Dear God, what happened?  
Is that Travis? Never mind. You'll explain to me later.  
Where's the shovel? We gotta get this man into the ground.

*ELIZABETH finds the shovel and starts to dig.*

**MARY JANE**

"None so wronged as Mary Jane."

**ELIZABETH**

What did you say?

**MARY JANE**

"She was just two years old when we took her and her mamma to the auction block."

**ELIZABETH**

Mary Jane...

**MARY JANE**

No! You lied all these years! My mamma!

**ELIZABETH**

Mary Jane, keep your voice down!

*CALLIE calls out from the house.*

**CALLIE**

Who's there? Elizabeth? Is that you? Is someone there?

*ELIZABETH grabs Travis's pistol and pushes MARY JANE toward the house.*

**ELIZABETH**

Get back in the house now! We'll meet in my rooms later.

*MARY JANE runs into the shadows. ELIZABETH hides behind the tree and raises the pistol as CALLIE enters. CALLIE stumbles onto TRAVIS's half buried body and screams. ELIZABETH prepares to shoot.*

**CALLIE**

Ah! Travis! Who did this? Elizabeth! I'll destroy her! I will make sure they all know that she's a traitor and a murderer! Her family name will be destroyed forever!  
... Our name. My children. John. Me.

**8** *If I do this thing, I'll be chained to you forever.*

*Chained to you. Forever chained to you.*

*If I do this thing, I'll be chained to you forever.*

*Chained to you. Forever to you.*

*Chained to shame.*

*Chained to scandal.*

To this man.  
To this moment.  
Forever.  
This story.  
Forever more.

*ELIZABETH holds the pistol close.*

**ELIZABETH**

If I do this thing, I'll be chained to you forever.  
Chained to you. Forever chained to you.  
If I do this thing, I'll be chained to you forever.  
Chained to you. Forever to you.

**CALLIE** *(starts digging)*

So goodbye, Travis.  
I have to survive, Travis.

**ELIZABETH**

What's gonna happen now?  
How will the story unfold now?

**CALLIE**

So, here's what will happen now.  
I'll move with my family back home.  
And the truth I carry will stay forever buried.  
And it will never ever be told.

**ELIZABETH**

If I do this thing, I'll be chained to you forever.  
Chained to you. Forever chained to you.  
If I do this thing, I'll be chained to you forever.  
Chained to you. Forever to you.

**CALLIE**

No more shame.  
No more scandal. Just a mound of dirt at the base  
of an old oak, that bends  
but will never be broken.

*CALLIE rolls Travis into the grave.*

Goodbye, Travis.

*CALLIE buries Travis. ELIZABETH lowers the pistol  
and leaves.*

**9 Scene Five: Elizabeth's Rooms in the Van Lew Mansion**

*MARY JANE is anxiously waiting for Elizabeth.  
ELIZABETH enters, still holding the pistol.*

**MARY JANE**

I didn't hear a shot. What happened?

**ELIZABETH**

Travis is buried, forgotten.

**MARY JANE**

What?

**ELIZABETH**

And Callie's moving back home to live with her  
momma.

**MARY JANE**

That makes no sense! None of this night makes any  
sense.

**ELIZABETH**

You're a mess. Here. Pick something in this trunk to  
wear.

*ELIZABETH starts to sort through clothes in a trunk.*

**MARY JANE**

What are you doing?

**ELIZABETH**

I think this will fit.

**MARY JANE**

Stop it.

**ELIZABETH**

Or this.

**MARY JANE**

Stop it! Stop it!



**ELIZABETH**

Maybe this?

**MARY JANE**

Stop! Stop! Are you insane?

*MARY JANE throws some of the clothes on the floor.*

**ELIZABETH**

How 'bout this?

**MARY JANE**

How 'bout the truth? Now!

**ELIZABETH**

The truth is you don't want to throw that shirt on the floor.

**MARY JANE**

You're crazy.

**ELIZABETH**

Or anything else in this trunk.

**MARY JANE**

You're crazy. And heartless and cruel and a liar! Why should I care about this shirt? Or this dress? Or this quilt?

*(She throws the clothes all over the room in a rage.)*

**ELIZABETH**

Because everything in that trunk was made by your momma.

**MARY JANE**

My momma? Tell me.

*A long pause.*

**ELIZABETH**

Your momma was a seamstress enslaved to this family. Her name was Lucinda.

*LUCINDA steps out of the shadows.*

**MARY JANE**

Lucinda...

**LUCINDA**

I'll sing 'til somebody hears me. I'll sing 'til somebody knows. Have mercy...

**MARY JANE**

You told me she died giving birth to me. But you lied.

**ELIZABETH**

Yes. I lied.

**MARY JANE**

Why did you lie to me?

**LUCINDA**

Oh, how the winds do blow.

**10 ELIZABETH**

After you were born, my momma and daddy were fighting all the time. She didn't like the way he treated you different. Even had you baptized in the white church. Momma was angry, 'specially angry at Lucinda.

**LUCINDA**

Whose arms were holding you then?

**ELIZABETH**

And then one day, one awful day, he took us three: Lucinda, you and me down the hill.

**MARY JANE**

To the auction block?

*The slave auction emerges, and we see the events of that day.*

**LUCINDA**

Whose arms would not let you go?

**ELIZABETH**

I...I had never seen or imagined such a place.

**LUCINDA**

Mary Jane, Momma's here. Always here.

**ELIZABETH**

Cruelty! Horror! Why would my daddy who I worshipped ever take us here?

**LUCINDA**

Mary Jane, Momma's here. I will never let you go.

**MARY JANE**

My momma must have been so scared!

**ELIZABETH**

Lucinda held you on her hip like she always did.

**LUCINDA**

I held you on my hip like I always did.

**ELIZABETH**

Daddy made me tear you from her arms...

**LUCINDA**

Miss Elizabeth tore you from my arms...

**ELIZABETH & LUCINDA**

...to sell the mother, not the child.

Oh! You screamed and cried and tried to reach her/me.

**MARY JANE**

Momma! Oh, Momma!

**LUCINDA**

Give my baby back to me! Give her back! – give her back!  
– give her back! – give her back to me, Miss Elizabeth!

**ELIZABETH**

"Give her back to me, Miss Elizabeth!" She begged me.

*LUCINDA's plea becomes louder.*

She cried to me.

*LUCINDA's plea becomes a cry.*

What could I do but hang on to you as she struggled and fought to break free.

**MARY JANE**

Why? Why?

**ELIZABETH**

"Why, Daddy?" I asked, "Why, Daddy?" And then, she broke away!

**LUCINDA**

Give her back!

**ELIZABETH**

A big man grabbed her. Struck her in the head.  
Threw her to the ground.

**MARY JANE**

Did you go to her? Try to help her?

**ELIAZABETH**

She was dead.

*A stunning silence. Then a baby's cry is heard.*

**MARY JANE**

You did nothing? No one did anything?

**ELIZABETH**

I looked at my daddy. He had nothing to say.  
Then I looked at Lucinda as they dragged her away.

*LUCINDA exits. The Slave Auction fades. The crying dies away.*

**11 MARY JANE** *(after a long silence)*

Baptized in your white church. Why?

Married in your white church. Why?

Your daddy took us down the hill to sell my momma, not me. Why?

**ELIZABETH**

I don't know.

**MARY JANE**

Yes, you do. There is no other explanation.

**ELIZABETH**

I don't know.

**MARY JANE**

You do!

**ELIZABETH**

I can't know for certain.

**MARY JANE**

We are sisters?

**ELIZABETH**

I don't know!

**MARY JANE**

Sisters. But not family.

**ELIZABETH**

I don't know who we are.

**MARY JANE**

I know who I am, Elizabeth. Who are you?  
You are the one who let me wake every morning  
believing my life had ended my momma's.  
I thought this house was the harbor, not the storm.

No more!

Twenty years of silence. Twenty years of lies.  
Twenty years denying the sound of her cries.  
Torn from her baby. Murdered in front of your eyes.  
I thought this house was the harbor, not the storm.  
  
But through my momma's eyes, I can see the truth.  
Through my momma's eyes, I see it all clearly.  
I'm not on this earth to cover up your shame.  
Through my momma's eyes, I see a road ahead of me  
Where my story can be told, and nothing will ever be the  
same.

**ELIZABETH**

Think of all the good we've done, Mary Jane.  
Come home to me. It's time to come home.

**MARY JANE**

No more. No more!

You don't get to write my story anymore.  
Tell me where to go or what to do.  
When to look down. When to look away.  
This was never really my home at all.  
All our "good work,"  
all your words cannot rewrite or erase  
Your betrayal.

**ELIZABETH**

The war is almost over. The battle nearly won.

**MARY JANE**

No more. No more!

The battle for what's true is much bigger than this war.

There's a thunder in my heart, pounding:  
"No more! No more! No more!"  
And there's an open door to see the world  
Through my momma's eyes.

**ELIZABETH**

Come home, Mary Jane.

**MARY JANE**

This is *your* home. Not mine.

**ELIZABETH** (*Is she singing to Mary Jane or herself?*)

You'll be alone forever.

**MARY JANE**

I am not alone.

**ELIZABETH**

You'll be alone forever!

*LUCINDA and the SPIRITS enter.*

**MARY JANE**

You don't see them. But I do.  
A family big and beautiful as the sky.

**LUCINDA**

Mary Jane, take the things I sewed and



make a new quilt.

*As LUCINDA sings, MARY JANE gathers up the clothes from the floor and the trunk, and hands them to the SPIRITS.*

And with clothes from the children torn from their mothers on the African shores, the American shores and the auction blocks, you will piece it together – a quilt so vast we will see it from heaven and know that we are not forgotten. You are here to tell the story. The whole story.

*MARY JANE reaches into the trunk and a massive quilt unfurls like a kite. It rises from the stage and with a theatrical flourish, sweeps up to become an enormous canopy. It seems to extend into infinity.*

### **MARY JANE & LUCINDA**

Step by step

Piece by piece

Side by side

One step more...

*Under the beautiful, heartbreaking quilt, the SPIRITS dance to the percussive music of the Ancestral Dance, as LUCINDA and MARY JANE – mother and daughter – sing and dance together.*

*Janai Brugger (back) as Mary Jane Bowser  
with Urban Bush Women dancers.*



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