

# Listen for the Light

By Kara Lee Corthron

Contact:  
Beth Bickers  
Agency for the Performing Arts  
135 W 50th Street, 17th Floor  
New York, NY 10020  
212-621-3098  
[bbickers@apa-agency.com](mailto:bbickers@apa-agency.com)

Kara Lee Corthron  
646-209-4943  
[karalee77@gmail.com](mailto:karalee77@gmail.com)  
[www.karaleecorthron.com](http://www.karaleecorthron.com)

**Characters:**

**ELI** - late 30s/early 40s, African-American male; fastidious, brooding and so intelligent he has to hide it. This actor will also play the following roles:

- **HYRUM** - a white man, JOSEPH's brother (scenes 5 and 9)
- **BONNET 2** – a white woman and one of JOSEPH's wives (scenes 6, 12, and 16).

**LULA** - 17 year-old young white woman. Precocious, rough around the edges, under educated and strong-willed; speaks without thinking.

This actor will also play the following roles:

- **MAN** – a well-off white man and slave holder (scene 3)
- **CLERK** – a white man working in a general store (scene 8)
- **CRONY** – another white man (scene 9)
- **EMMA** – a white woman and Joseph's first wife, severe and at the end of her patience (scene 18)

**JOSEPH** - late 30s, white male. VERY charismatic and rather handsome. A rock star of his time. This actor will also play the following roles:

- **MAN 2** - a black slave (scene 3 and 8)
- **BONNET 1** - a white woman and one of JOSEPH's wives (scenes 6, 12, and 16).
- **PA** – LULA's father (scene 13)

**VOICES 1, 2, and 3** – In scenes 16, 18, and 19 offstage voices of men will be needed.

**Setting:**

The small Mormon enclave of Nauvoo, Illinois

**Time:**

Late spring - early summer, 1844

**The Set:**

Should be simple. Any set pieces should be easy to move. The look should be blank, but the kind of blank that invites imagination, like a canvas. Any pieces, including props, should be simple and preferably wooden. In the subtlest way, it should be clear that this is a world that lives somewhere between the first and second industrial revolutions.

A screen on the back wall will be used for projections of the larger / imagined world. Some of these are indicated in the script and others may be created at the discretion of the director and designers. My fantasy is that the images will appear as a kind of black and white / gray-scale animation similar to the style of cartoonist, Thomas Ott.

**Costumes:**

Again, the choices need to be simple as actors will have to play multiple roles in quick succession.

## SCENE ONE

ELI sits alone on a stool whittling something small.

ELI

Good is good.  
Bad is bad.  
Can't get simpler than that.

Six years old.  
Curls, plaits  
Dimples (I bet)  
Smiles.

This is for you.  
I think her name will be  
May.  
Prettiest month a the year.

Just saw you.  
Your face.  
Not your real face.  
Not your six-years-old face.  
Little you.  
Little face.  
In my arms.  
Lyin' still.

There is no way back.  
But  
if I could . . . ?  
I'd go way back.  
Way way *way* back.  
There was a before.  
A happy time.  
A way back, before happy time.

Six years old  
Almost  
Seven years old.  
Seven is alotta years.

(He looks at his creation.)

My hands.  
I use 'em.  
I am tryin' to use 'em.  
To do good.

My hands  
 My body  
 What's left of my mind?  
 I'll use it all to please **Him**.

Do you know if it's working?

(He pauses, waiting for an answer. On the screen on the back wall, an image of a little girl playing with dolls appears. She giggles and this makes ELI smile. She hangs out there as ELI continues talking. After a moment, he resumes whittling.)

Despite everything  
 I know you're in the best place.  
 Where you are, you don't have  
 To figure out why the law  
 Doesn't seem to match up with what's  
 Right.

There  
 Good is good  
 Bad is bad  
 And – well I don't know what happens with the in-between up there.  
 You'd have to explain that to me.

(He has to stop working because of pain in his hands.)

My hands  
 Are all messed up tonight  
 But I'm glad of it.  
 Building benches  
 Fixing up the walls  
 Making the temple sturdy enough  
 To withstand a hundred years of attacks  
 From the nonbelievers.  
 My hands  
 Did that. *Do* that.  
 All to please **Him**.

Doesn't matter to some.  
 To some. I am nothing.  
 A workhorse, at best.  
 Illinois has never  
 Ever been a slave state.  
 But some folks wanna change that.  
 To go backwards.  
 Some from the Church.  
 This Church

The reason I'm alive.

I'm not going back.  
I'll die first.

I'm not scared to die.  
I welcome it.  
So I can be with you.

Birthday coming up.  
Number 7.  
That's a beautiful number.

I'll pray.  
I'll always pray.  
But it might not be enough.

## SCENE TWO

Lights up on ELI leading LULA into his home. He shows her around.

ELI

Latrine is just through there. I'll nail up a bit of cloth to give you some privacy. You'll sleep in the loft upstairs and I'll bunk down here. If you get chilly at night, you're welcome to throw another coal in the stove, but just one. If one doesn't make you feel warmer, ask me and I'll stoke the fire for you. We aren't in the position to waste coal. If you feel inspired to pull your own weight while you're staying here—and this would be most appreciated—your duties will include cooking meals, sweeping, and cleaning the latrine.

LULA

Sweepin'? You makin' a joke?

ELI

I'm not at liberty to pressure you into anything, but I know the pain of idleness. I wouldn't wish that burden on anyone.

Actually I *don't* know the pain of idleness. But I can imagine it is unbearable indeed.

(Awkward silence.)

ELI

I don't think anything else needs explaining so . . .

(ELI sits at the workbench and starts working on the unfinished chair he's building from raw wood.)

LULA

It ain't right. I shouldn't be here. Stayin' with . . . you. It just ain't right.

ELI

Not up to me.

LULA

I don't understand why I have to be here at all.

ELI

I think you know the reason for that, miss. Let's not be histrionic, OK?

(LULA eyes ELI suspiciously.)

LULA

You got some big words comin' outta you for a —

(She hesitates.)

ELI

Say the word, Miss Lula.

LULA

I don't mean nothin' by it. I just never heard a nigger sayin' no words like that before. It sounds queer. Like a Injun speakin' German or sump'm.

ELI

You ever met any besides me?

LULA

Any what?

ELI

(Gives her a look: You *know* what.)

(LULA thinks.)

LULA

We had a pickaninny once. She washed our clothes and hollered at me to keep quiet alla time. She called me Miss Chatterbox. But she's gone now. Never heard her throw out no fancy words.

ELI

She mighta said some behind your back.

LULA

No she wadn't like that. She was good to Ma and Pa.

ELI

Best money can buy?

(Beat.)

LULA

I need to check sump'm real quick.

(LULA heads for the door, but ELI beats her there and stands in front of it.)

ELI

You're not to go out. Not unless he tells you to.  
What do you need?

(LULA sits down, pissed.)

LULA

I *don't* need no babysitter. I ain't no kid! I'm grown.



ELI  
I'm not your babysitter.

LULA  
Then what are you?

ELI  
You read, Miss Lula?

LULA  
That don't have nothin' to do with nothin'!

(ELI sighs. He goes to the bookshelf and pulls down a book. It is *The Pickwick Papers*. He hands the book to LULA.)

ELI  
Try this. You work on Dickens, I'll work on this chair. All right?

(ELI doesn't wait for an answer and returns to his workbench.  
LULA looks at the book.)

LULA  
(Slowly begins reading, struggling:) The first ray of light which illu— illu-  
meeenes the gloom, and con-vertsss into a dazzzzzeling brill-ee-ancy that obs—?  
Obs—? Ob-scar-i—

ELI  
Um. Can you read it with your mind's voice please?

LULA  
No. I get confused when I do that.

ELI  
The more you practice, the better you'll get.

(LULA stares at the book. It is clear that she is *really* reading hard,  
but it's not working. She throws the book on the floor.)

Why did you do that?

LULA  
I hate it. It has too many words.

ELI  
You have a problem with words?

LULA  
I do when they're writ down.

ELI

History could not be recorded if it wasn't written down. If we couldn't read history, we wouldn't know – *anything*. We would know nothing of the Trojan War, the ancient Egyptians, the lost tribes of—

LULA

*Boredom?* I hate books. They're so long and the person that wrote 'em just did it to feel all fancy and special and to show off alla the stupid words he knows how to spell and then you read it and that's it. Maybe you remember one or two things, but all the rest a that garbage is forgot! I have an idea: instead a writin' a book, why don't Mr. Brilliant Author Man just tell everyone he knows the one or two things that count and have them spread the word. Be a lot better, ya ask me.

(ELI stares at LULA.)

ELI

You hate all books.

LULA

Even the ones that ain't been writ yet!

ELI

You hate the *Book of Mormon*?

(Beat.)

*Doctrine and Covenants*?

(Beat.)

The bible?

Your words are blasphemous, Miss Lula.

LULA

You tricked me!

ELI

Take them back.

LULA

You can't tell me what to do. I outrank you just by bein' white.

ELI

I *can* tell the Prophet. Who do you think he'll believe? Me? Or a brat who thinks she knows more than he does?

(LULA becomes frightened. ELI waits.)

LULA

Heavenly Father, please forgive me. I do not hate *The Book of Mormon*, the *D&C*, or The bible, dear Lord.

ELI

Good.

LULA

I just hate every other book. *All* of 'em. I pray that you someday invent sump'm that'll take the place a books altogether. Sump'm that'll shove stories up in our faces, pickin' out the excitin' parts for us so we don't have to waste no more time imagin' what these stupid authors want us to see.

A-men.

ELI

Your anger is misguided.

LULA

Why ain't *you* angry?

ELI

I have nothing to be angry about.

LULA

Yuh-huh! You just said I'm bein' a brat! I'm messin' up your quiet, buildin' time and you prob'ly got relatives that're still slaves. The ones that ain't dead yet.

(ELI stops and stares straight ahead.)

Plus there are some people in the church that don't want you or any others like you in it. I know that for a fact. That's alotta stuff. That's alotta stuff to be angry about.

ELI

It isn't any of your business.

LULA

Say "ain't." It's faster.

ELI

(Dry:) I will not say "ain't."

LULA

I don't know, Eli. You don't yell or nothin'. But I gotta feelin' you're kinda angry. I might even say *very* angry.

ELI

No.

I maintain a clear head and an open heart. This keeps me calm. This keeps me content. This renews my faith everyday.

(Light pause.)

LULA

Does He talk to you?

ELI

I have patience and I listen. He will. The light of lights is never too far away.

LULA

They say He be talkin' alla time. But you won't hear nothin' lessin' you listen.

ELI

That's what you're here to do, isn't it?  
Lucky you.

LULA

I ain't lucky.

(LULA looks around.)

My fingers be itchin.'

ELI

Dry skin. There's some hog fat in the cupboard.

LULA

Not like that.

Don't you ever be dyin' to do the sump'm you love the most, but you can't do it so your fingers start to itch?

(ELI doesn't respond.)

Happens to me alla the time.

(Beat.)

Don't you wanna know what my fingers be itchin' to do?

ELI

Perhaps if you'd put the endless energy you seem to have for talking into *prayer*, you wouldn't be here at all.

LULA

How you know I ain't tried that?

(ELI says nothing.)

I won't bother you no more.

(They are quiet for a few moments. The silence is excruciating for LULA. Then:)

I like to shoot. There. Since you didn't care to ask me I'm tellin' ya. I like to hunt and when there's nothin' to hunt, I like to shoot tree branches, apples, anything. 'Specially sump'm small and far off. So if you want me to help out? Maybe I'll do some huntin' for ya. I'd just need my Flintlock back.

ELI

Understandably, the Prophet does not want you to have access to a weapon while you and God are considering his proposal of marriage.

LULA

I'd just shoot it off in the yard! Not in here.

ELI

You'll get it back when he says you can get it back.

(LULA pouts angrily.)

LULA

It ain't fair.

ELI

(Sharp:) Adjust.

(Beat.)

LULA

You're grouchy.

(ELI says nothing.)

I think all men are grouchy. I think that must be part of bein' a man.

ELI

(Sighs:) How you learn to shoot?

LULA

Self taught. My brother helped too. Ma says I'm embarassin.' Pa thinks I was meant to be a boy, but 'cuz Ma didn't drink enough cow's milk when she had me in 'er gut, I came out a girl by mistake.

(ELI stares at LULA.)

ELI

So if ladies drank more cow's milk, there'd be more boys runnin' around?

LULA

Ask Pa. Don't ask me.

ELI

(Seriously thinking about this:) I don't think that's right.

LULA

You got a wife? Kids? Never see you with no one.

ELI

That's a personal question.

LULA

Yeah but we're gettin' to know each other so it don't matter none.

ELI

I don't answer personal questions.

LULA

How'd you meet the Prophet? That personal, too?

ELI

He saved me. I was a drowning man and the Prophet taught me to swim.  
That's a metaphor.

LULA

That like a *pinafore*?

ELI

Prophet knew I was lost. He found me.

LULA

(Excited / fast:) Did he show you a sign or sump'm? Did you see them gold plates? Did the Angel Moroni appear to you guys? Did the sky open up? Do you get them revelations now? How often? How many? What are they like? Do you feel reg'lar or crazy when it's happenin'? Is it like bein' asleep or awake? Are you havin' one now?? Am I in it? Do you know the future? Are we really in the Last Days? How many days do we got left? Do you know what the Celestial Kingdom looks like? Are we gonna have to—

ELI

(Sharp:) Miss Lula!

I don't mean to be unkind in any way, but you need to understand something: the reason you are here is because the Prophet trusts me to watch you and

prevent you from escaping. I am not your confidant. I am not your Mammy. I'm a guard. Think of me as a centurion. Do you know what a centurion is?

LULA

Sump'm scary?

ELI

That's right.

(Blatantly imitating her accent:) Sump'm scary.

If at any point you decide you want to find a way out of here, I will have to stop you and it will be unpleasant for both of us. So I think it would be best to end this attempt at getting to know each other right now. There is simply no point.

(Long silence. ELI returns to his work angrily. LULA carefully picks up the book and stares at it hard, trying her best to read to herself. She may mouth a few words silently, slowly to herself. After awhile, ELI cools down and puts the finishing touches on the chair. It is an excellent piece of craftsmanship. He is pleased. LULA looks up and regards the chair with awe. Then she looks at ELI.)

LULA

(Comforting:) You shouldn't feel bad. It ain't your fault. God might not talk to darkies.

(ELI glares at LULA.)

**SCENE THREE**

ELI is outdoors fixing a door. A MAN approaches.

MAN

Whatchu doin' there?

(ELI turns, suspicious.)

ELI

Didn't like the way the old door was closin' so I took it off the frame to fix it.  
Ended up makin' a new one.

(MAN inspects the door, getting a little too close to ELI's personal space.)

MAN

That's some fine work there.

ELI

Thank you.

MAN

You get any help with that or you do it all on your own?

ELI

My own.

MAN

Impressive.

(ELI continues working.)

You one of the Mormons?

ELI

I am.

MAN

How's that working out for you?

ELI

Sir?

MAN

(Slowly:) How do you like being a nigger Mormon?

(ELI backs away.)



ELI

(Through a clenched jaw:) I like it fine.

(MAN 2 approaches.)

MAN 2

Picked up the packages for ya, suh. Wadn't no problem.

MAN

Good.

(To ELI:) This here's my nigger, Thomas. Been with me since he was eight or nine. Ain't that right, Thomas?

MAN 2

Thass right, suh.

MAN

(To ELI:) And what might be your name?

ELI

(With as much restraint as possible:) I don't have much on this earth, but this measly three and a half acres belongs to me and I would like to know what you are doing standing on it.

(Silence. MAN 2 becomes frightened.)

MAN

Let me tell you something. We are not even two hundred miles from *my* acreage just outside St. Louis and if we were there right now, I could cut off your babymaker this second and your arrogance would not give you the least bit of comfort.

ELI

I'll remember never to stop by your acreage for a social call.

(ELI picks up an ax: a warning.)

Have a nice day, mister. Enjoy the rest of your stay in the great state of Illinois.

(MAN smiles.)

MAN

Shame. Could've used a carpenter of your talents.

(MAN starts to walk off. MAN 2 stares at ELI in wonderment. ELI stares back at MAN 2; a connection. Nervously, MAN 2 puts his hand out as if to shake ELI's hand. ELI takes it. MAN 2 starts to say something, but)

MAN

Thomas? Don't upset me.

(MAN 2 sadly releases ELI's hand and follows his master offstage.)

**SCENE FOUR**

(LULA sits in the cellar. It is quiet. Except for the wind.)

LULA

(Eyes closed:) I grip my Flintlock.  
I go from half-cock to full-cock.  
Like that.  
I feel . . . the trigger.  
There it is.  
I feel metal.  
I feel wood.  
I feel cold and hot.  
Smooth.

(LULA breathes.)

Gunpowder is ready.  
Flint is ready.  
And there *you* are.  
I can see you.  
In my mind.  
Hello, Mr. Buck.  
I've been waitin' for you.  
Your big black eyes.  
Your muscular brown thighs.  
Your fluffy white tail.  
Your thick antlers like the branches of a fuzzy tree.  
Oh.  
You're so still. What?  
Afraid to move? Don't be.  
I dare ya.

(LULA breathes.)

I wait.  
I feel . . . the trigger.  
I feel metal.  
I feel wood.  
I feel cold and hot . . .

(On the screen, there is an image of a large, beautiful buck. The imaginary buck moves.)

BLAM! / (Simultaneously is the thunderous sound of a rifle discharge.)

(LULA laughs and opens her eyes; she's missed the imaginary buck. The image of the buck darts off into the forest.)

Where ya goin'?

Hey! Where d'ya think you're runnin' off to? You're lucky I missed! Only 'cuz you ain't real! If I really had you in muh sight, you'd be venison on a plate, ya dumb sonuva—

(A loud boom from above. Like someone stomping hard on the floor. This snaps LULA back to reality. The image on the screen disappears.)

I'm sorry, dear God, but I *hate* prayer. It's so stupid and lonely and borin'.

(LULA looks around. There is a light knock at the door.)

Yes?

JOSEPH

(Through the door:) Are you praying?

LULA

Yes.

JOSEPH

(Through the door:) Are you listening?

LULA

Yes.

JOSEPH

(Through the door:) What have you learned?

LULA

Nothin'.

(Silence.)

JOSEPH

(Through the door:) If you have faith, He'll speak. Keep listening.

LULA

But? What if - what if he don't wanna speak to me?

(Silence. After a long moment, JOSEPH opens the door and enters.)

JOSEPH

You told me that if *He* wanted you to be my next wife, that *He* would tell you. I believe you're right. But now you say He doesn't want to talk to you. What reason have you given Him to turn His back on you?

LULA

It's hard Proph—

Call me Joseph. JOSEPH

That feels funny. LULA

Only at first. JOSEPH

(Beat.)

How long have I been here? LULA

About two weeks now. Does it matter? JOSEPH

I just - I wonder if there should be some kinda deadline? What if I'm here two *months* and I still feel . . . nothin'? Will I have to stay here forever? LULA

(JOSEPH thinks about this.)

No. But you have to give yourself a chance before you start thinking about quitting. Don't you think? JOSEPH

It's tirin'. LULA

We *all* get tired, Lula. JOSEPH

What about poor ol' Eli? LULA

He's not so old. JOSEPH

Well he acts like he's about a hundred an two! He's all serious an grouchy. I know he don't want a kid stayin' in his house forever. That don't seem right. LULA

I think you're wrong about that. JOSEPH

I don't mean to complain. LULA

I'm scared is all.

JOSEPH

Of what?

LULA

(Ashamed:) You.

(Beat.)

What if I ain't ever meant to see or hear . . . Him? What will ya do ta me?

(JOSEPH laughs nervously.)

JOSEPH

I'm not going to hurt you. Do I seem *that* bad?

(LULA shakes her head no, but she's clearly uncertain about this.)

I don't want you to be scared. I just think you deserve to witness a miracle. They happen all the time. You might not believe me, but I used to walk on crutches as a little boy. I had a bone disease that crippled me and nearly killed me. I went to sleep one night and thought I dreamt of heavenly bodies singing to me and the light of lights embracing my entire being. I awoke. And it was no dream. I put my right leg on the rickety floor and stood. I needed my crutches no more.

LULA

You mighta just gotten better. Maybe you were just stronger than you thought and you beat the illness.

JOSEPH

You think I coulda done that without God's help?

(LULA shrugs.)

No. I'd be dead now if it wasn't for Him. I know it.

He is real, Lula.

LULA

How do *I* know that?

JOSEPH

Faith.

No matter how much we practice faith in all we do, we will never be experts. Faith is an ongoing struggle.

LULA

Faith. Yes. OK.

JOSEPH

Stay here. Another hour. Then you can come up and have your supper.

(JOSEPH exits. LULA tries to pray, sincerely.)

LULA

Please, please tell me what I should do?

(Whisper:) Please, please . . . don't make me marry him. In all honesty, Lord, bein' completely honest an everything? I have thought about it and I would not mind kissin' the Prophet. Just for a few seconds, or hours, because he is your gift to the world and – well – he is very nice to look at. But I don't wanna *marry* him. I can't.

Ma said that childbirth is the worst pain the body can know and that all girls have to suffer through it or else they ain't livin' up to their purpose. Why would you want all girls to feel the worst pain the body can know? Sometimes they die doin' it. It's wrong of me to fear death, but I do. I don't wanna die. I wanna live forever. Or if not forever, maybe just eight or nine hundred years. There's so much to do and see on earth. *Your* earth. If you didn't want us to like it so much, you shouldna made it so in-er-estin'. I wanna go out into the wilderness and kill buffalo and trade beads with Injuns and swim in dangerous rivers. I wanna see Chinamen in person and drink tea with their ladies in them silk robes and chopsticks in their hair. We heard about 'em from Miss Emma—she went to some big fair over in New York City when she was young and saw some. But I want to see 'em for myself. And more stuff, too. And once I'm over there in those other countries, I can hunt crazy animals like monkeys and giraffes and tigers and them big, nasty fat things with horns. **Unicorns!** *All* of 'em.

(Sweet:) Lord, you created so many wonderful creatures for me to kill! You gotta gimme the chance!

Then one day if I finally, finally get tired . . .

(Sighs:) Some borin' author with glasses and too much time on his hands will write all about muh grand adventures and I'll be famous. Just like Columbus or Marco Polo.

(Proud:) Or Davy Crockett even.

Yeah. That could be me.

Please.

I wanna be special.

Please.

Don't let me be like all the others.

I will never wear a bonnet.



**SCENE FIVE**

JOSEPH sits alone in his office preparing for a service. JOSEPH's brother, HYRUM enters.

JOSEPH

Hyrum. What brings you down here?

(HYRUM just stares at him.)

What's wrong?

HYRUM

Read.

(HYRUM hands JOSEPH a newspaper. JOSEPH reads and blanches.)

JOSEPH

How can he say these things?

Abominations and *whoredoms*? This isn't Sodom! This is our community! My *family*!

HYRUM

That's not how the public will see it.

JOSEPH

But he's wrong! We aren't an abomination! This is what God wants. It's holy. It's the way life is supposed to be.

HYRUM

Why are you telling me?

JOSEPH

Because it's true!

HYRUM

I am not your enemy.

JOSEPH

William Law. You know this is his idea of revenge. Jackass! Always makin' eyes at MY wife.

HYRUM

You have 43 wives.

JOSEPH

It's the principal!

HYRUM

And I don't think your jealousy will do anything to resolve this crisis.

(JOSEPH examines the paper.)

JOSEPH

They'll never leave us alone.

HYRUM

They?

JOSEPH

Everybody who isn't us, is "they." Are we that different from other faiths? Aside from being better? I have seen some bizarre behavior coming from the Shakers, the Baptists and those Methodists, but nobody seems to look at them with the contempt they got reserved for us!

HYRUM

Prophet? All due respect, you need to move on this problem. Now. It's a public relations disaster. Last thing we need.

JOSEPH

Burn the papers. Burn the printin' press. If we can't change their minds, we can stop 'em from spreadin' lies.

HYRUM

You can't destroy a printin' press. That's a federal offense.

JOSEPH

United States of America doesn't rule me. With her petty laws. *Nobody* rules Joseph Smith, Jr. They wanna come punish me for . . . polygamy? Let 'em come. Let 'em see what happens when they enter *my* realm.

HYRUM

All right then. I'll gather some men. And we'll get to work.

(As HYRUM leaves.)

JOSEPH

It's a sad thing. President Tyler and all his little men. They can't stand what we do. Because they're jealous. They can't admit that if any one of 'em was me, they'd do the exact same thing.

**SCENE SIX**

LULA looks around. She's bored. She makes sure ELI isn't anywhere nearby then she picks up a broom and starts sweeping. Without knocking, BONNET 1 and BONNET 2 enter the room. The Bonnets are two of JOSEPH's wives. LULA screams.

LULA  
What're you doin' in here?

BONNET 1  
Don't you question me, girl! I got every right!

BONNET 2  
Every right!

BONNET 1  
Come 'ere.

LULA  
What for?

BONNET 1  
Enough with the sass! Get over here!

(LULA goes over to BONNET 1, who then inspects her hip/pelvic region.)

Um hm. Just as I thought.

BONNET 2  
What? Whatcha thought?

BONNET 1  
Don't be a fool!

BONNET 2  
Aw come on! Tell me!

BONNET 1  
Look at her! She's primed, plump and ready to breed!

BONNET 2  
Ohhhhhh. Now I see it!

LULA  
I am not!

BONNET 2

Y'are too! How long you been bleedin'?

BONNET 1

Hush with that filthy talk!

LULA

Why you here botherin' me?

BONNET 1

We are here, young lady, to talk some sense into your silly head before you make the biggest, dumbest mistake of your whole life. When the Prophet chooses you, it is

BONNET 1 / BONNET 2

An honor.

BONNET 1

When he chose me, I couldn't contain my excitement. And when I bore my first child for him, I praised *Him* for blessing me and I did it each and every time after!

BONNET 2

Me too!

BONNET 1

It is not up to us to question Joseph's wisdom. It is not our place.

LULA

I'm not! But why can't God tell me *and* Joseph if I'm really s'poseta marry him?

BONNET 1

Just who do you think you are?

LULA

Lucy Miller.

BONNET 1 / BONNET 2

A nobody.

BONNET 1

A foolish child with a bad attitude

BONNET 2

And a crooked nose!

BONNET 1

That's not necessary.

BONNET 2

But it's true. Look at it!

(BONNET 1 smacks BONNET 2 lightly and she shuts up.)

BONNET 1

Time to stop playin' this silly game.  
Tell the Prophet what he's been waitin' to hear.

LULA

Why should I listen to you?

BONNET 2

Because you don't deserve to sit on your behind all day long when you could be washin' dozens a dirty diapers 'stead a me!

(BONNET 1 puts a hand on BONNET 2.)

BONNET 1

It's time. It's that simple.

(LULA takes a cigarette perhaps from behind her ear and lights it with a match. The Bonnets gasp.)

BONNET 2

Ooooh she's smokin' just like a prostitute.

BONNET 1

Or a man.

LULA

I do believe the Prophet still runs things around here. He is the only one I will take orders from.

BONNET 1

You make me sick.

BONNET 2

I'm 'bout to puke all over this here floor.

BONNET 1

(Looks LULA dead in the eye:) HE sees everything. He knows the wicked things you do. He knows the ugly thoughts you hide in your mind. He knows when He's bein' used in vain.

(LULA looks around nervously.)

You know what you have to do.  
If you want to avoid damnation.

Don't make me come back here.  
I won't be as sweet if I have to return.

(They exit. LULA trembles so much she has to put her cigarette out.)

## SCENE SEVEN

ELI is alone. He kneels. Waiting. He closes his eyes. He waits. He breathes. He breathes. He breathes. This goes on for quite a while. As ELI breathes, there is a noticeable breeze. Gently, as if from miles away in the distance, the sound of delicate waves from the river can be heard. The sound gradually grows and grows and then the sound of the water becomes stormy, the clatter of rain. ELI's breath quickens. Then there is the sound of a very little girl giggling so hard it sounds like she's being tickled. Both sounds grow and grow and become deafening. ELI's eyes snap open. And then there is complete silence. Complete. The silence continues for several, lonely seconds. Then:

ELI

One revelation. *One*.  
That is all I'm asking for.

Begging for.

(He waits. Nothing comes.)

My faith is unbreakable.  
But lately  
It's begun to bend.

(He waits some more. He gives up. He pulls out a large piece that he's been working on for a while. It is mostly covered with a cloth so it remains mysterious.)

This is what you don't understand  
No comfort.  
In the master's house, fear is a part of life  
The same way coffee is for others.  
There is no way to ever feel safe.  
Every moment is about survival  
And plotting  
And praying  
And screaming in your mind.  
But never on the outside  
There is no comfort.  
Not now.  
Not seven years after.  
Not ever.  
How could there be?

I want to *PUSH* him.  
To push us all.  
This is the answer I need.  
This is what I can't figure on my own.  
The How.

How do the other abolitionists do it?  
Whatever they're doing—  
I must do the opposite  
Because they are failing.  
Not working fast enough.  
I will never feel comfort  
As long as bondage is a reality  
For anyone.  
It has to stop.  
If not now, when?  
If not me, who?

(A startling realization.)

Could this be the reason I was spared?



**SCENE EIGHT**

ELI steps into the general store. He looks for something that will help him. A dictionary perhaps?

CLERK

Hello, Eli. How are you today?

ELI

Well. Yourself?

(ELI looks over the shelves.)

CLERK

Can't complain. Though I wouldn't mind some warmer weather. Other than that . . .

(CLERK watches ELI.)

Anything I can help you with? Need some fresh cut lumber? Save you some time.

(ELI politely shakes his head "no.")

Tools? Got a new ripsaw in just the other day.

ELI

No thank you.

(ELI keeps looking.)

CLERK

Well. All right. You let me know if you need my assistance.

(ELI nods. Then he sees a dictionary and leafs through it. MAN 2 enters. He moves like someone who is always being watched. ELI notices him.)

ELI

I met you. The other day. You were in my yard.

(MAN 2 stops moving, a little scared.)

MAN 2

Yes. That was me.

(MAN 2 looks around nervously.)

Where is he?  
ELI

Across the street.  
MAN 2

He leaves you to do his errands alone?  
ELI

Sometime. It's a privilege. He say.  
MAN 2

(Curt:) Hey boy? You need somethin'? You with someone?  
CLERK

Thank you, suh. I'm just gatherin' some items for my man. He outside.  
MAN 2

(CLERK nods but watches MAN 2 and ELI suspiciously. MAN 2 searches for things from his list. ELI watches him for a moment.)

Excuse me? Mr. Logan?  
ELI

Yes Eli?  
CLERK

I changed my mind. I think I would like a bit of that fresh lumber you have.  
ELI

Ah. Figured you couldn't resist. Buildin' man like yourself. How much you want?  
CLERK

Three slabs?  
ELI

Be right back with 'em.  
CLERK

(CLERK exits and ELI races over to MAN 2.)

You need to run.  
ELI

Run?  
MAN 2

ELI

Get away from him! He gives you this “privilege” and you need to take advantage of it.

MAN 2

I can’t do that.

ELI

This is your life!

MAN 2

Hazel run off. When they caught her, he cut off her foot. Did it hisself. Did it slow, too. Seem like he enjoyed it. I don’t wanna give him that kinda pleasure.

(Beat as MAN 2 continues shopping.)

ELI

I was like you. I wasn’t born a free man.

(MAN 2 stops and stares at ELI.)

I took my freedom and you need to take yours.

Just today I came in here cuz I am determined to write the most articulate anti-slavery petition the United States Government has ever seen. I don’t know how to get in touch with him, but I bet you Frederick Douglass would be willing to get on board. And others. This is an *evil*. We can’t tolerate it another day. It starts with normal people like us. You gotta take the first jump, Thomas.

That your birth name?

MAN 2

No.

ELI

What’s your name, friend?

MAN 2

Please? Just let me be.

(CLERK enters with the wood and freezes when he sees ELI talking to MAN 2.)

CLERK

(Icy:) Here’s the wood you asked for.

(ELI breaks away from MAN 2 to grab it.)

ELI

Thank you kindly, Mr. Logan.

You ready to pay up now? CLERK

I actually haven't finished— ELI

I think you should pay up now. CLERK

(ELI senses the change in the CLERK's tone and hands him some money. He turns to MAN 2 who looks away in shame and puts his items on the counter to pay. ELI is disappointed.)

You know where to find me. ELI  
If you find yourself feeling . . . privileged.

(ELI exits.)



**SCENE TEN**

JOSEPH enters. ELI is asleep. It is nearing dawn. He stands over ELI watching him until ELI starts awake. ELI lights a candle.

ELI

Everything all right?

(JOSEPH shakes his head.)

What's happened?

JOSEPH

It's possible that we just waged war.

ELI

How?

JOSEPH

There were some unfortunate activities in town. Destruction. It is far too easy to destroy things, Eli. It should be more difficult.

(ELI is afraid, but tries to remain calm.)

ELI

Can you tell me exactly what happened, sir?

JOSEPH

I wanted William Law's printing press destroyed so he couldn't tell the whole state of Illinois our business. Our *private* business. But the whole . . . building and those adjacent to it – all went up in flames. That was never my intention. I didn't want to hurt anyone.

ELI

Was anyone killed?

JOSEPH

(Shock:) Of course not!  
I don't think.

ELI

You need to leave Nauvoo before first light. What do you need us to do while you're gone? How should we handle the authorities?

JOSEPH

You can't do anything. No one'll listen to you.

ELI

I can help! I am one of your Seventy Apostles! That means something.

(JOSEPH nods absently.)

Where is the girl?  
JOSEPH

What?  
ELI

Lula. She upstairs?  
JOSEPH

Sleepin'. Why?  
ELI

(JOSEPH heads toward LULA's loft.)

What – may I ask – what are you doing?

JOSEPH  
Eli. This may be my only chance. I'd like to spend a little time with my betrothed if you don't mind.

(ELI is incredulous.)

You have a problem with this?

(ELI can't hide his disapproval.)

ELI  
Doesn't matter if I do. You are the prophet.

(A moment.)

JOSEPH  
I'm not a stupid man. I know what it looks like to someone like you. But I ask you to think about it and really, *truly* think about it. Consuming alcoholic beverages is a sin and the sin punishes you long before God can: you act like a fool, everything in your belly comes back out again, and the morning sunlight itself feels like a knife in the eye.  
True sin is pain.  
True sin is pain.  
True sin is. *Pain*.  
Hear me good, Eli:  
If loving more than one woman was a true sin in His eyes . . . why ever would He make it feel . . . so . . . good?

(ELI is scandalized.)

ELI

To test us.

(JOSEPH stares at ELI.)

It – uh – it wouldn't be much of a temptation to resist if fornication were unpleasant. Sir.

(Beat.)

That's just my opinion.

JOSEPH

That's an opinion that will leave you a very unsatisfied man.

(JOSEPH pushes past ELI.)

ELI

You haven't even married her yet.

(JOSEPH turns to ELI.)

JOSEPH

Are you judging me?

(ELI says nothing.)

I know she's not exactly enthusiastic, but if I explain the situation, she'll understand why her future husband desperately needs her attention tonight.

(ELI now blocks JOSEPH from the loft.)

ELI

I think planning your escape is far more urgent than indulging in – pre-marital relations.

JOSEPH

Did I ask to hear what you think?

ELI

What about all the ones you're already married to? They wouldn't do tonight?

JOSEPH

What about 'em?

ELI

You wouldn't want her first experience with the matrimonial bed to be one of terror. You wake her up out of sleep with no warning? That's just what she'll feel.



(JOSEPH stares at ELI a long time.)

JOSEPH

You are a smart one, Eli.  
You have my respect.  
You have my ear.  
You just be certain that you are protectin' her for the right reasons.

ELI

Sir?

JOSEPH

(Mocking:) "Sir?" That's what I said.  
Don't let me find out that you've become attached to her in an  
Unnatural way.

ELI

That is the furthest thing from my mind.

JOSEPH

It better stay that way.

ELI

Please focus on the issue at hand. Don't you have any advice for me? I don't  
want harm to come our people.

JOSEPH

Yeah. Well. Tomorrow—after I'm gone—you go down to the temple, lock every  
door and window. Board up the largest ones. If you need help, ask my brother.  
You do that and protect Lula. That's all.

ELI

Fine.

(Beat.)

(Carefully:) It is possible that this moment of chaos is a hidden blessing. Maybe  
this is the time to increase our abolitionist efforts. Team up with other—

JOSEPH

I know it's important to you, but I don't agree that this is the best time.

ELI

Well? You wouldn't have to do anything. I'm composing a petition and if you  
could just listen to what I have so far and tell me if—

(JOSEPH lays on the floor.)

Wait. Take my cot!

JOSEPH

No. This is fine.

(ELI covers JOSEPH with a blanket.)

Just a small rest. Just to get my mind workin' again.

ELI

Maybe? I'll just read the first bit or so.

(ELI rushes to find his petition.)

(Reading:) To the Congress of the United States,  
I am but one man in our great country full of men. I am a Negro man living in  
the free state of Illinois and I write to you today because I am troubled.

JOSEPH

Nicely written.

ELI

Just a bit more.

I am troubled by the words that President Jefferson penned in our Declaration of Independence: *We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.* How can all men be equal when some are treated as chattel? How can those men possibly pursue happiness? Are we less than men?

JOSEPH

Eli. You have a way with words. But I'm going to tell you something for your own good: it's a lost cause. You might get your letter to them, but they'll put it in a stack of hundreds of such letters, never to be read.

(JOSEPH yawns exaggeratedly.)

Best just to focus on your own pursuit of happiness.  
I hope it is abolished someday, though. I truly do.  
Such a nice thought.

(JOSEPH begins to snore. ELI looks at his letter. He crumples it and tosses it aside. Then he feels bad about it and closes his eyes and waits and waits. He finally gives up.)

ELI

Lost cause.

## SCENE ELEVEN

The following morning. LULA is alone outside. She places a dirty, worn-out stuffed animal that perhaps she made herself, on the ground and then walks a good distance away from it. She aims her rifle at the animal.

LULA

I hear ya roarin'. You don't scare me, ya giant African tiger. Or Chinese tiger. Whatever ya are. You're in America now. Time for Prairie Justice.

(She prepares to take the shot as JOSEPH approaches.)

JOSEPH

Why do you have that?

LULA

Eli said I could. Only he took the bullets away. Not as fun without the risk a death, but he said it might be good for me to practice. Just in case. He won't tell me why.

JOSEPH

Looks like it's gonna be a beautiful day. Summer's finally making herself known. Heard the birds chirping long before dawn.

LULA

Me too! I saw a woodpecker! 'Least I *think* it was a woodpecker. It was lil'. An it was peckin'.

(JOSEPH smiles. LULA puts down her gun.)

You wanna take it from me?

JOSEPH

Unless you're plannin' to beat me to death with it, I'm going to assume I'm safe.

(Beat.)

Have you prayed yet today?

LULA

(Tensing:) Yes, Prophet.

JOSEPH

You really can call me Joseph. It won't feel so strange after a while.

(LULA nods.)

JOSEPH

Do you enjoy prayer?

LULA

Yes.

JOSEPH

Is that the truth or what you think you're supposed to say to me?

LULA

What I think I'm supposed to say to you.

JOSEPH

Try the other one.

LULA

I don't like it. Not at all. I haven't heard a thing from Him. I feel like I'm only doing it 'cuz you're makin' me. Which is prob'ly the only reason I've ever done it: somebody made me. Thing is? I actually thought – I thought I was gonna see a vision or sump'm. 'Cuz you chose me. I thought I'd understand what gets you so excited. I don't feel nothin', Joseph.

(He stares at her.)

I'm sorry. I'm so ashamed. But I don't feel nothin'.

(Long pause.)

JOSEPH

Do you want to feel Him?

LULA

Yeah. I think I do.

JOSEPH

Good.

(JOSEPH looks up into the sky.)

Promise me you'll keep praying.

LULA

Yes, Joseph.

JOSEPH

Pack your things, Lula. Time for you to go home.

(LULA stares at him.)

LULA

You want me to leave?

JOSEPH

You've been praying for quite some time now. And you've received no answers. I am not sure what to make of this. If I misinterpreted God's instructions to me, I am sorry. If I didn't and you are meant to marry me, I imagine it will happen one day. But not today.

LULA

Did I do sump'm wrong?

JOSEPH

I'll tell you a secret: the mistakes have all been mine.

(He smiles sadly. LULA goes inside the house. JOSEPH picks up her rifle and examines it. He aims it at a tree for a few seconds before lowering it.)

It's all right, Miss Blue Jay. If you ever see me with a gun in my hand, I promise it won't be intended for you. You're safe.

(LULA returns with a small sack. ELI appears.)

ELI

I can give you a ride in my wagon.

LULA

No. I'd rather walk.

ELI

Walk? That could take all day long. I'll have you there in hardly no time.

LULA

Thank you. I'd rather walk. Goodbye, Eli.

ELI

So long, Miss Lula. Keep out of trouble.

(LULA regards ELI sadly. He may share her gaze, but only momentarily. JOSEPH hands her the rifle.)

LULA

Bye then.

(She exits. Both men watch her go. ELI starts to follow, but JOSEPH stops him.)

JOSEPH

No. The quiet will do her good.

(JOSEPH turns to ELI. He puts out his hand to him.)

JOSEPH

You've been a loyal friend. I shall never forget it.  
I'll see you in Zion.

ELI

God willing.

(ELI takes JOSEPH's hand.)

JOSEPH

This isn't the end of our story.

ELI

Can't be.

JOSEPH

You have so much more to teach me.

(A moment. ELI releases JOSEPH's hand. JOSEPH exits. ELI stands alone. He trembles. He slowly closes his eyes. He waits. He waits. He waits. Lights shift. The sound of waves rises again and then the clatter of rain. And so does the sound of the little girl giggling. The giggling grows and grows. But suddenly it shifts to the sounds of gasping for air and then screaming and crying. And then just the sound of the waves. ELI's eyes snap open. Silence. He picks up a table he's been working on and smashes it to bits, beating it with his fists until his hands are raw and bloody. He weeps violently.)

**SCENE TWELVE**

LULA is out on the road alone. She quietly gets her Flintlock, aims, and fires. She misses her target.

LULA

Damn.  
Go on. Run rabbit run.  
I ain't even that hungry.

(She puts the gun down and starts rolling herself a cigarette. The BONNETS appear, scaring the crap out of LULA once again.)

Why you keep sneakin' up on me?

BONNET 1

Where do you think you're goin' to?

LULA

Ain't your business, but I'm goin' home.

BONNET 1 / BONNET 2

Home?

LULA

That's what I said.

BONNET 1

You done run off?

BONNET 2

Oh you in some trouble now, girl!

BONNET 1

Do you know what happens to runaways?

BONNET 2

Tell her! She don't know.

BONNET 1

Runaways get beat.

BONNET 2

With a switch!

BONNET 1

A switch broke off from a tree!

BONNET 2

Yeah birch or elm or oak or—

BONNET 1

(To BONNET 2:) She knows what a tree is.

(Back to LULA:) And guess who picks out the switch?

(Pause.)

Go ahead. Guess.

LULA

You?

BONNET 1

No of course not! Prophet picks the switch. *I* do the beatin'. An I'm good.

BONNET 2

She's the best. She even beat me once.

BONNET 1

She had it comin'.

BONNET 2

She's right. I did!

BONNET 1

Looks like we got us a gift to deliver to Joseph.

LULA

He told me to go home! His choice.

(Beat.)

BONNET 1

That don't sound like a choice he'd make.

BONNET 2

She's lyin'! Ain't she?

LULA

I ain't lyin'! He told me to go back home.

BONNET 1

I don't believe you!

BONNET 2

I don't either. You're a connivin' somebody.



BONNET 1

Once he gets his mind set on something, he follows through.

(LULA lifts her gun in a non-threatening manner.)

LULA

He gave this back to me today. Because he sent me home. That should be enough proof for you.

(Silence.)

BONNET 1

Put that down please.

(LULA does.)

Get 'er feet!

LULA / BONNET 2

*What?!*

BONNET 1

Do it! I'll get her by the arms.

(BONNET 1 tries to grab LULA.)

LULA

No!

BONNET 2

I don't feel right about this

BONNET 1

I don't care!

LULA

Let go a me!

BONNET 2

Not right at all.

(They scuffle. BONNET 2 doesn't know what to do.)

BONNET 1

Go on! Get her feet!

BONNET 2

Have you gone crazy?

Do it!  
BONNET 1

WHY?  
LULA

BONNET 1  
Because! Because I can't! I can't do it no more! He wants another one and he keeps lookin' at me an I don't want him lookin' at me. I already gave him four. I can't do it. I'm so tired. My body is tired. You gotta come! It's gotta be you! I can't I can't I can't!

(BONNET 1 breaks into sobs. LULA and BONNET 2 watch her. LULA starts to touch BONNET 1, but BONNET 2 stops her. They let her cry for a few moments.)

What's your name?  
LULA

(Sniffling:) Lucinda.  
BONNET 1

That's pretty.  
LULA

I'm Flora.  
BONNET 2

(Slight pause.)

(Annoyed:) My name's pretty, too.

LULA  
Miss Lucinda? I think you should tell the Prophet – Joseph . . . No.

BONNET 1  
No?

LULA  
When he looks at you or calls you to him? Tell him no. You're not a breedin' machine. You need a rest.

BONNET 2  
You don't say no to the Prophet. Nobody says no to him.

BONNET 1  
(To LULA:) Can't tell if you're stupid or brave.

LULA

What's the worst thing he's ever done to ya? You're the one that does the beatin'.

BONNET 1

He can be cold.

LULA

Let him be.

(Beat.)

BONNET 1

I apologize for tryin' to drag you off by force. Wasn't very ladylike.

LULA

You don't have to always be a lady, though. That's boring.

BONNET 1

Don't be ridiculous.

BONNET 2

Can we go? I'm cold.

(BONNET 1 nods.)

BONNET 1

I hope you take care of yourself, Lula.

You have the kind of personality that might lead you to great things  
Or it'll get ya killed.

**SCENE THIRTEEN**

LULA outside her house.

LULA

Prophet sent me back. Said I didn't have to stay no more.

(No response.)

He just told me to keep on prayin' and not to worry about it.

(No response.)

Honest! He wadn't even mad at me! He was bein' nice an he made me leave. I swear I didn't do nothin' wrong.

(Door slams in LULA's face.)

Hey! HEY!

(LULA bangs on the door. Kicks it.)

It is *cold* out here! Even a stray dog you'd bring in to keep from freezin'!

(Someone throws some blankets down from a window.)

No! NO! Uh-uh!

Lil' pig, lil' pig, let me in!

If you don't, I'll huff an I'll puff an I'll blow your dumb house in!

I will, too! I will scream like I'm bein' scalped. One. Two . . .

(Door opens and PA opens the door. LULA backs away, afraid.)

LULA

Pa. I thought you was at the mill.

PA

Didn't your mama tell you to git?

LULA

But? It's cold.

PA

Prophet chose you. Onliest reason he'da sent you back is cuz he figured out you're a damn nuisance.

LULA

No I'm not.

PA  
Come closer an say that.

(Beat.)

You got yourself some blankets. Go set up camp. Tomorra you will go back to him and beg for forgiveness.

LULA  
But I didn't do nothin'.

(PA hits LULA, knocking her backwards.)

PA  
Say it again.

(LULA regains her footing.)

LULA  
It's the truth.  
I didn't no nothin' wrong.

(PA grabs her and shoves her face into the ground, keeping his hands around her neck.)

PA  
You have brought me nothin' but shame since the day you were born. Shoulda sent you away!

LULA  
Pa?

PA  
How dare you speak?

(LULA struggles to breathe.)

LULA  
Papa? I'm sorry.

(PA lets her go. She collapses, choking breath back into her body.)

PA  
Why do you make me do these things?

(Silence.)

You go and beg for forgiveness and you will be welcome back into my home.  
Anytime you like.

(He turns to go inside.)

LULA

How? How did I shame you the day I was born? I was just a baby.

PA

You wouldn't stop your fussin'. You cried on your way out and kept cryin' through the night into the next day, into the next night. I knew then you'd be nothin' but trouble. I knew you weren't gonna be right.

(He goes inside, slamming the door behind him. LULA recovers, gathers her things, and walks off to find a camping spot. She sets up camp, bundling herself up as much as possible to fight off the cold. She builds a fire. She falls asleep and the fire burns out. Later a sound wakes her and she looks around. She hears another sound, breathing. She feels around in the dark for her Flintlock.)

LULA

Somebody there?

(She reaches into her bag for a matchstick. She lights it and gasps. On the scrim behind we see that LULA is surrounded by a family of wolves. LULA carefully lays down the lit match into her fire pit to reignite her fire.)

(Whispers:) Don't scream, Lula Bell. Just be still. Just be still.

(She shakes violently and the more she tries to control her shaking, the worse it gets. She attempts to aim her gun.)

Y'all are so close.

(The wolves continue to stare at her.)

What do you want?

Do you like . . . people?

(The wolves just stare.)

Thing is? Just – the – only thing is? I ain't never killed nothin' before. I mean, I shot at lotsa things, but I got terrible aim. I never – made nothin' die.

(She starts to cry.)

LULA

I hate bein' scared. God? Forgive me for bein' a coward. I'm scared alla time. I wanna be brave. Not like this.

(LULA tries to control her crying. She attempts to sing "My Pretty Jane (The Bloom is on the Rye)". The wolves stare. She keeps singing. One by one, they join her, howling. It may sound silly and awful, but to LULA, it's the best song she's ever heard. She realizes she's not in danger.)

Damn. Wish ya'll were my family.

(She lays down, more relaxed now. The wolves protect her as she sleeps. One by one, they leave. The last one licks her face and whispers in her ear:)

WOLF

If you don't come with me this instant, you'll surely freeze to death, Miss Lula.

LULA

(Coming out of a gentle sleep:) What's that, puppy?

(LULA awakens to ELI shaking her.)

ELI

If you don't come with me this instant, you'll surely freeze to death, Miss Lula.

(LULA struggles to fully wake and get to her feet. ELI helps her to his wagon.)

LULA

How did you know—

ELI

I just had a bad feeling is all. Are you all right?

LULA

I think so. My neck hurts.

ELI

We'll be back soon. I'll get a fire goin'.

LULA

Prophet'll be mad. He told me to go home.

ELI

Well . . .

Until your folks treat you with some decency, my home is your home. If you want it to be.

(LULA nods. She examines the ground.)

ELI

Come on.

LULA

Eli? You see that?

(LULA points down to the ground. ELI follows her gaze.)

ELI

Looks like some tracks. Could be a bobcat.

LULA

Or a wolf.

ELI

Doubtful. Come on.

(ELI leads the way. LULA smiles to herself.)



**SCENE FOURTEEN**

(Back at ELI's. ELI turns on the stove. He moves the cot near it for LULA.)

ELI

This won't be as comfortable as the loft, but we need to get you warmed up.

LULA

You're nice to me.

ELI

This is how normal people treat others. You hungry?

LULA

A little bit.

(ELI places a pot on the stove to heat.)

ELI

I have some stew left from earlier. Should still be edible.

LULA

Thank you.

ELI

You're welcome.

(He stirs the pot. Then sits for a moment.)

LULA

How come you weren't sleepin'?

ELI

Don't always sleep so well at night. If I get a few hours here and there. That's good enough for me.

(After a few moments, ELI pours the stew into a bowl and gives it to LULA. As she eats, he feels her forehead.)

ELI

Can't believe your folks left you out there like that. Children are given to the wrong people. Open your mouth, please.

(LULA opens her mouth.)

Wider.

(LULA opens her mouth wider. ELI looks inside.)

ELI

That's enough.

(She closes her mouth.)

Lucky. Looks like you're well enough for now. But you coulda caught your death sleepin' out there. June night air is nothin' to play with.

(They are quiet. LULA continues eating. He frowns at her.)

You fall or somethin'?

(LULA realizes he's referring to her face, which probably has at least one fresh bruise.)

LULA

Um. Yeah. I fell.

You'd be a good father. Better'n mine. You think you'll ever have kids?

(ELI stares at LULA for a moment.)

ELI

I had a little girl. She died. I'd rather not talk about it.

LULA

Damnation.

I'm sorry, Eli. I had no idea.

ELI

I'd rather not talk about it.

(Beat.)

I'm going to lie down now. Try to catch my few hours while I can feel 'em closin' in on me.

Good night, Miss Lula.

LULA

You don't have to say "Miss" to me.

ELI

That's not up to you. It's in my bones. I wouldn't be able to stop if I tried.

LULA

Goodnight. Mr. Eli.

(ELI freezes. Then:)

ELI

Nice gesture. But let's not pretend. Things are the way they are. We didn't create them: they just are.

(ELI extinguishes the lantern. He exits. LULA lies down on ELI's cot. She stares at the ceiling. Insomnia. She turns over and over on the cot for a while, but she can't sleep. She takes a small candle and quietly gets up and looks for the book she was reading earlier, *The Pickwick Papers*. She brings it back to the cot and silently reads it to herself while moving her lips to form the words. Quiet. Darkness on stage. Total silence. That kind of middle-of-the-night, eerie stillness. For some time. Then – the whole house begins to shake. LULA's candle goes out. It seems as though a major earthquake has seized the house. LULA jumps up.)

LULA

Eli? *ELI!*

(She jumps up and starts to run up to the loft, but then suddenly, every window, door, crack in the house walls are filled with a blinding, golden light, almost as bright and warm as the sun!)

No. NO!  
WHAT IS HAPPENING?!

(Then the quaking stops and gentle music, like a lullaby can be heard. LULA looks around, still frightened. The door to the outside opens slowly, all by itself sending more light into the room. A mist floats in toward LULA.)

Am I dead?

(LULA is entangled in the mist. This makes her smile for a moment, but then she realizes she's being pulled outside against her will.)

No. I'm not ready. Please. Please! ELI!? Help me!

(LULA tries to grab onto to anything to resist the pull, but it is of no use: LULA is swiftly pulled outside, screaming and the door slams behind her. In an instant all is still and dark on stage again. In the next moment, her voice calling "Eli" is heard, muffled and distorted and morphs into a *different* young woman's voice gasping for air and she cries: "Eli!" ELI snaps awake, breathless. He looks around. All is silent.)

**SCENE FIFTEEN**

ELI awakens. Looks around the space, but can't find LULA. Even her bedding is gone.

ELI

Lula?

(He looks all over. He opens the door to the cellar.)

Lula!

(Nothing. In a panic, he puts on his coat and shoes as LULA enters from outside. She is in a happy daze. He turns and sees her.)

What were you doing out there?

(LULA unravels her nightgown to reveal eggs which gently roll across the floor.)

LULA

Want some breakfast?

(ELI eyes her suspiciously. He feels her head to see if she's feverish.)

I'm not sick, Eli. I am healthy. I will make us some eggs.

(She begins to cook the eggs.)

ELI

How long were you outside? Where's your coat?

LULA

Not too long. Hard to tell.

(They are quiet for a few moments. LULA smiles to herself.)

He came to me last night. HIM. He spoke to *me*. Little ol' me.

ELI

A revelation?

LULA

I can't think of anything else it coulda possibly been. So? Yeah. I had me a real-live revelation.

(Silence as LULA prepares their food and they eat.)

ELI

What did He tell you?

LULA

It's not quite like that. It's not exactly . . . words. It's more like feelings. And sounds. There was a light so bright that swept me up and took me away and I thought for sure I was dyin' at first. But when I was out there—out in this whole other dimension with Him—I could HEAR the light. An that was nothin' like seein' it. It didn't burn or hurt or scare me. It's almost like music. But it ain't music. I don't think I know a word for what it is. Don't know if there IS a word for what it is.

ELI

But didn't He give you a message?

LULA

Said I should marry Joseph.  
Said it's safer that way.  
Nothin' like it in the world.  
Prob'ly never happen to me again.

ELI

I wish I coulda heard it.

LULA

You will.

ELI

You omipotent now?

LULA

What's that mean?

ELI

(Sighs:) All knowing.

LULA

No. Uh-uh. But I know that for a fact.

(LULA clears their plates.)

ELI

Thank you for breakfast.

LULA

All you done for me? I'd say that's the least I could do.

(LULA sits and works on a sewing project.)

ELI  
Since when do you like to sew?

(LULA shrugs.)

LULA  
It's all right.

ELI  
You seem so much older today.

LULA  
Thank you.

ELI  
That's not necessarily a good thing.

LULA  
It's not?

ELI  
Not if it means losin' your personality.

LULA  
You sayin' you like my personality?

ELI  
Don't be cute.

(He picks up some tools and wood.)

Gonna work outside. Holler if you need something.

LULA  
I will.

(ELI head for the door when LULA stops him.)

Oh Eli!

(He turns around and she places the sewing project on her head. It is a bonnet.)

Have to tie it off yet, but -- what d'ya think?

(ELI stares at her dumbfounded. JOSEPH enters.)

LULA  
Proph-Joseph!

(LULA runs to hug him. JOSEPH seems shellshocked.)

What are you doing here? ELI

I couldn't do it. JOSEPH

Do what? LULA

They will kill you. ELI

What?! LULA

Let them. JOSEPH

Please tell me what's goin' on. LULA

The Prophet is in serious danger. He was to leave. And yet here he is. ELI

I tried. All I saw. All I felt. JOSEPH  
 Darkness.  
 Aloneness.  
 And what if my enemies came for you?

(To LULA:) Or you?

How could I call myself a man if I let that happen?  
 I asked Him the same question.  
 Nothing.  
 Just silence.  
 And darkness.

Better to come back.

Better to die fighting. ELI

(Repeats:) Better to die fighting. JOSEPH

(A little nervous laughter:) Besides. A good martyr story never hurts a religion.

LULA

You're not gonna die. You're not.  
I had a revelation last night.

(JOSEPH glances at her as if seeing her for the first time today.)

JOSEPH

Didn't I send you home?

LULA

Yes but I came back and He spoke to me last night. *He* spoke to me.

(JOSEPH stares at her in disbelief.)

JOSEPH

Really?

LULA

Yes! I'm s'poseta marry you! Just like you said in the first place! You were right.

(JOSEPH slowly smiles.)

JOSEPH

He really spoke to you, huh?

LULA

It was like nothin' else. It was the best feelin' I ever had.

JOSEPH

This warms my heart. I knew if you kept prayin' and believin' that you'd get your miracle.

LULA

When should we get married, Joseph?

(JOSEPH and ELI exchange looks.)

JOSEPH

I'd say - today. Might as well get right to it.

ELI

(To himself:) Better to die fighting.

(ELI takes a deep breath, gathering his courage.)

Things are gonna be changing around here swiftly. I know you think it's a lost cause, but it *is* time to step up our fight for abolition.



Now? JOSEPH

Might as well get right to it. ELI

All right. And you propose? JOSEPH

A safe haven. A meeting place. I can be in charge of it. To convene with other local leaders. ELI

We have to start somewhere.  
And who would suspect the Mormon Temple of Nauvoo?

Do it. JOSEPH

(ELI rushes to find ink and paper and writes some things down.)

Why are you in trouble, Joseph? LULA

They don't understand us, Lula. JOSEPH

That's just because we're a peculiar people. ELI

Yes. Anything the tiniest bit "peculiar" scares the britches offa some. We aren't even that peculiar. JOSEPH

But why now? LULA

Go get yourself cleaned up and dressed nice. You be at my home by half past two. All right? JOSEPH

All right. LULA

(LULA exits.)

ELI

Maybe this has all been a blessing. Maybe the time for us to pull up stakes and move on has come.

But this time, no runnin' for cover like cowards.

We can fight the whole way there.

Fight for freedom

Fight for the right to live peacefully

Fight for God's one true church.

Yes.

I think this was what was meant to happen all along.

JOSEPH

I wish I had your faith.

(ELI turns to JOSEPH.)

Don't look at me like that.

I'm not perfect, Eli.

ELI

Nobody's perfect.

But He listens to you and He speaks to you.

JOSEPH

Sure.

**SCENE SIXTEEN**

LULA stands alone, trying to look as nice as possible. BONNET 1 appears and helps her get ready.

BONNET 1

Inhale.

(LULA does and BONNET 1 tightens her sash a bit too tight. LULA gasps and coughs in surprise.)

I didn't tell ya to exhale.

BONNET 2

Only so much we can do with the hair.

BONNET 1

I think she looks nice.

BONNET 2

She looks passable.

BONNET 1

I admit I am surprised.  
Wasn't sure I'd see you again  
After you told me he let you go free.

LULA

I wasn't sure either.  
But - things change.  
It's all right. This is the way it's supposed to be.

BONNET 1

Yes.  
I suppose it is.

(She touches LULA gently.)

I only wish it weren't.

(BONNET 1 exits.)

LULA

Now it's like she's upset cuz I'm going through it with it when she was the one ready to drag me off to him by my toenails!

BONNET 2

Don't pay her no mind. She doesn't know what she wants half the time anyway. You're doing the right thing. Really.

BONNET 2

It's best just to go along with what he wants.  
Makes it easier in the end.  
Good luck.

(BONNET 2 exits. LULA prays.)

LULA

This IS the right thing. Innit?

(A pulsing light appears and a strange hum that seems to hit a fever pitch, but then ceases into silence. The light disappears. LULA remains listening for a few moments. Then she responds to something she's heard.)

Oh.

Huh.

(JOSEPH enters and LULA quickly rises.)

JOSEPH

Don't you look lovely? Prettiest bride I've ever had.

(JOSEPH glances at the door anxiously.)

LULA

Is everything all right?

JOSEPH

Oh of course of course. Nothing to fear.

(ELI enters.)

ELI

Prophet

JOSEPH

Good you're here. Let's get this done.

LULA

Are we in a hurry?

JOSEPH

Sort of.

ELI

Are you sure I should be the one—

JOSEPH

You are the perfect person, Eli. I wouldn't have it any other way.  
So let's uh—

ELI

Yes, sir.

I'd like to begin by turning to Romans, Chapter 12.

“Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor—“

(There is a loud pounding at the door. ELI stops. LULA turns toward the door, but JOSEPH clutches her hand tightly.)

JOSEPH

Can we move this along?

(ELI keeps talking as the pounding becomes more insistent.)

ELI

Do you vow to love one another through the rockiest of tempests, the darkest of valleys, the coldest of—

JOSEPH

YES!

LULA

Me too!

(Sound of the door bursting open. They all freeze and turn out toward the audience.)

VOICE 1

Joseph Smith, Jr.?

JOSEPH

Yes?

VOICE 1

You are under arrest for the crimes of Treason, Suppression of the Freedom of the Press, Destruction of Property—

LULA

No!

JOSEPH

Why don't you tell me the real reason you're here? You know it doesn't have a thing to do with treason or anything else you said.

VOICE 1

Do you intend to come peaceably or do you need to be subdued?

(JOSEPH grabs LULA and kisses her. He raises his hands in defense.)

JOSEPH

Thank you, Eli.

VOICE 1

Move.

(JOSEPH reacts as if being pushed and exits. Silence.)

LULA

We can't let this happen.

ELI

What can we do?

LULA

I think we should follow 'em. Go bust 'im out.

ELI

You think like a crazy person.

LULA

Why? You scared?

(At that second, all the lights go out. Darkness. There are strange, muffled sounds. LULA stumbles around in the dark. Finally she manages to find a match and light a candle.)

Good Lord! How did that happen? Were the windas open? Did the wind blow all the lights—

(LULA realizes she is alone.)

Eli? Where are you?

(The door is open. But no one is there.)

ELI?

(She looks up toward the heavens.)

WHAT ARE YOU DOIN' TO US??!!!

**SCENE SEVENTEEN**

Alone in his jail cell.

JOSEPH

I wait.  
I wait.  
I keep. On. Waiting.  
You're not there.  
Have you ever been?

Let's say in one hand I hold a seed  
For each time I've been wrong.  
In my other, I hold a seed  
For each time I've been right.  
Which hand could cultivate a garden?  
Which a forest?

I've always tried to do right by my people.  
No matter what the critics say.  
And you have me sit here now  
Trapped  
Locked away  
Powerless?  
Are they safe?  
Are the children being kidnapped?  
The girls being raped?  
Dear God, what have they done to deserve this?

If you intend to punish me, then by all means  
PUNISH ME.  
Don't do these  
Punitive acts.  
Bring my fate  
And leave everyone else in peace.

Can you do that?  
*Will* you do that?

(JOSEPH waits.)

Who knows?  
You won't speak to me.  
You'll speak to that lil girl, though, right?  
'Course. She's young and pure and I'm . . .

Have I been wrong?  
All this time?

(He waits. He breathes. Silence.)

Would you forgive me if I was?

(He waits. He breathes. A long, empty silence.)

I have always wanted to know why some of us are burdened  
With these . . . hungers.  
Why?

(He waits. No answer.)

Why is it so important for me  
To be loved by everyone?  
What possible reason could you have had for saddling an illiterate farm boy  
With that caliber of need?

(JOSEPH closes his eyes and breathes.)

Listen.  
I need to just  
Listen.

(JOSEPH takes a deep breath and he listens for quite some time.  
He begins to cry.)

It's all my fault.  
Mine.  
I take responsibility.  
I take it. I take it.  
I. Take.  
It.

Please  
Let me take their pain, too.



**SCENE EIGHTEEN**

JOSEPH is still in his cell. EMMA enters. She is played by the same actress, who plays LULA except now she has straight black hair pulled back in a neat bun, seems far older, severe, and businesslike.

JOSEPH  
Emma!

EMMA  
Spoke to your brother just now.

JOSEPH  
You saw him first?

EMMA  
He is considering sacrificing himself for you.

JOSEPH  
He is?

EMMA  
Are you going to allow it?

(Little pause.)

JOSEPH  
Feel like I haven't seen your face in years.

EMMA  
Are you going to allow it?

JOSEPH  
No.  
Are you all right, my love?

EMMA  
I haven't been your love since about 1834, Joseph. Nor do I wish to be.

JOSEPH  
You don't mean that.

EMMA  
You took another one just before the law caught ya.  
You think I don't know your lies as well as I know your made-up scripture?

(EMMA reaches way under her skirts and pulls out two Pepper-box revolvers from LULA. She reluctantly hands them to JOSEPH.)

EMMA

She wanted me to give you those. The newest one. What is she, twelve?

JOSEPH

(Ashamed:) Seventeen.

EMMA

Right.

JOSEPH

(Genuine:) I'm sorry.

(EMMA stares at him for several moments without saying a word.)

Emma?

EMMA

I do not believe you are fit to lead your people any longer.  
You should graciously step down as church president.  
They will forgive you, Joseph.  
(Bitter:) Everyone always does.

(She turns to leave.)

JOSEPH

Emma Smith! The first time I saw you? It was on your daddy's farm and he forbade me to even *think* about you, but I couldn't help it. I thought another angel had landed on earth. You were so beautiful you didn't seem real to me.

EMMA

Then why?

(A moment.)

JOSEPH

(Whispers:) Something's wrong with me.  
I almost wonder if I have some kind of affliction.

EMMA

Thought it was God's will.

JOSEPH

It is. My illness is God's will.

EMMA

I see. So it's an affliction. Not your fault. Of course.

JOSEPH

I am NOT saying that!

EMMA

Mine? You've always blamed me for the twins.

JOSEPH

Emma don't.

EMMA

I did everything I could to save our babies—

(JOSEPH suddenly embraces her and she allows this.)

JOSEPH

Shh! Please don't talk about it. I don't blame you. I've never blamed you. If anyone is to blame . . . ? I always thought perhaps God was punishing me for my wickedness.

(EMMA realizes she's in JOSEPH's arms and tries to back away. He grabs her gently.)

I love you Emma.  
I have always loved you.  
Best.

(At the word "best," EMMA pulls away violently and heads for the door.)

JOSEPH

*Wait!*

EMMA

There's nothing here I need to wait for.

JOSEPH

I am still your husband! I deserve some respect.

EMMA

There is a mob outside. Can you see it from your window? It is a formidable mob. Looks like half of Hancock County is out there, lusting for your blood.

JOSEPH

You want to make me feel worse?

EMMA

It's all over Joseph. We've come all this way just for it to end like this. I've wasted so much time. Wasted my life. No more.

Farewell.

(EMMA exits. JOSEPH is stunned into silence. He runs to the door and tries to open it, but it is locked tight. He punches it, kicks it, pounds on it, trying to get free.)

VOICE 2

(From outside the door:) Stop with all the noise!

JOSEPH

What difference does it make? What difference does anything make?

VOICE 2

(From outside the door:) There's a big difference between you bein' safe in my attic and bein' down at the jailhouse like any other criminal. Don't test my good will, God boy!

(JOSEPH laughs.)

JOSEPH

I'm no . . . "God boy!" I am the Prophet! I was sent here to do HIS work! He chose me! I am here to deliver the message. I'm—

(He collapses out of breath.)

(Struggling:) I'm the one.  
Mighty and strong.

**SCENE NINETEEN****A Darkened Room.**

ELI is alone, blindfolded, and hands bound. VOICE 3 comes from somewhere unseen.

VOICE 3

You been lucky.  
Lucky lucky lucky lucky lucky.  
Up to now.  
Troublemaker.  
Not no more.  
Not today.  
Not with your protector locked up.

ELI

What do you want?

VOICE 3

Shut up.

ELI

Kill me?

VOICE 3

I told you to shut your mouth.

(Beat.)

(Lights up on JOSEPH in his cell. This is now a split scene. JOSEPH hears a sound and awakens from his sleep.)

JOSEPH

Someone there?

VOICE 3

Now. If you behave yourself and keep quiet, you won't get hurt. Much. This is what's gonna happen. You an me are gonna go for a ride. We're gonna meet up with my associate and from there—as long as you *behave*—I'll remove the blindfold and maybe give ya a lil sump'm to munch on.

ELI

You want to . . . take me?

JOSEPH

Emma?

VOICE 3

Warned you about speakin'. Didn't I?

(JOSEPH bangs the wall at the same moment that the VOICE 3 “strikes” ELI. There is a sharp sound. ELI’s head shoots backward.)

JOSEPH

Who is out there?

VOICE 3

Goddamn Joe Smith. Treatin’ you like you matter. Thinks he’s the damn King a England the way he acts.

(A bright, bright Light begins to illuminate the space. Distorted footsteps resembling the sound of thunder can be heard outside JOSEPH’s cell. He grabs one of his revolvers from under his mattress and waits.)

No more! This land is gonna be taken back by real, true, God-lovin’ folks. No more trash. No more heretics!

(The Light gets steadily brighter.)

If we gotta burn down every last shack in Nauvoo to run these pigs out, we’ll do it. But you gettin’ shipped off before any a that happens. See? Lucky again.

(Now the Light is brighter than anything we’ve seen before. The VOICE fades into music, BEAUTIFUL yet eerie music. Simultaneously, the door flies open to the cell and there is a stylized exchange of gunfire between JOSEPH and his tormentors. But the sound somehow co-mingles with the music instead of disrupting it. Smoke fills the space. The screen in the back is awash in an abstract of fast moving, beautiful bright colors. ELI’s hands come unbound. He removes the blindfold and can’t believe his eyes or his ears.)

ELI

You’re here?

JOSEPH

My God.

(ELI listens. It is a miracle. He may weep quietly. It is too much.)

ELI

But I don’t deserve it.

(The sound all goes out at once—for just a moment—and then it returns. The smoke clears and JOSEPH is a bloody mess.)

JOSEPH

I see.

(JOSEPH vanishes. He's dead. Lights out on the cell.)

ELI

Thank.  
You.

(The light gradually fades back to what it was before as does everything else.)

VOICE 3

How the Hell'd you get free?

ELI

God. God did it.

VOICE 3

Don't you try to make a fool outta me!

(ELI, realizing he's free, starts to leave the room.)

Don't you dare!

ELI

(Hardly listening:) He forgives me.  
I didn't even ask.  
He just went ahead and did it.  
Nothing you do can hurt me.  
Not now.

VOICE 3

We'll see about that.

(VOICE can't move his legs!)

My legs.  
What's happened to my legs?  
If you did some kinda devilment or magic on me, you better undo it if you know what's good for ya.

ELI

I don't know a thing about magic.  
But I do believe that miracles happen.  
Maybe you just have to wait for yours.

(ELI exits.)

## VOICE 3

What am I s'poseta do? Just sit here all damn day and night? Can you at least tell someone I'm here?

Darky?

*Boy?*

Don't have any common decency?

(A long silence. Then the sounds of keening, weeping as the light changes.)



**SCENE TWENTY**

The sound of weeping still seems to linger in the air, but as a distant echo. ELI somehow learns of JOSEPH's fate and we should see the moment this registers in his mind. He is devastated.

He walks toward the horizon in a strange daze. He chooses a spot and plants himself.

He waits.

He waits.

He waits.

ELI

It's time. It. Must. Be.

(He waits. Nothing happens. He waits for a long time. Then he lies on the ground and falls asleep. The sky gradually darkens. Then it gradually lightens again. ELI awakens slowly, realizing he's slept outside all night. He looks around in confusion.)

I don't understand you.

You take him and not ALL OF US?

How could this not be the End? How can you allow the days to go on?

(The sun comes up. The day is going on.)

I am ready.

Why aren't you?

**SCENE TWENTY-ONE**

Days later. ELI works feverishly on his secret piece. LULA enters. She is carrying her bonnet.

You're here! LULA

I live here. ELI

But? I came here! I looked for you! What happened? LULA

(ELI says nothing.)

Did somebody . . . hurt you? LULA

(ELI turns to her.)

He spoke to me. ELI

He did? LULA

He did. ELI  
He spoke to me and I felt lighter than I've ever felt.  
And then the Prophet was murdered.

I don't know what the point was.  
I don't know why God waited so long.  
It feels useless now.

It's not useless. It's never useless. LULA

I thought these were the last days. ELI

They are. LULA

No they aren't. ELI  
The Prophet was killed as if he was any other man. Nobody's safe.

LULA  
No. I reckon not.

(Beat. ELI works on the sculpture.)

That's beautiful. Who's it for?

ELI  
What do you want?

(LULA is startled.)

LULA  
Well I'm sorry for *botherin'* you, but I was worried! I wanted to see if you were still alive!

ELI  
I am.

LULA  
Good.

(Beat.)

ELI  
Thank you. I appreciate your concern.  
It's been a hard time for everyone.

LULA  
You gonna stay here?

ELI  
No.  
We're not wanted here. I'm not wanted anywhere.  
Heading north. Canada.

LULA  
Do you think I could go with you?

ELI  
That would be dangerous for both of us.  
When I grow attached to a living being. That being is snatched away. Violently.  
I'm not a good man for you to know.

LULA  
That ain't true.

ELI  
We are not friends. We can't be.

(Beat.)

LULA

You loved your wife sump'm fierce, huh?

ELI

I loved her desperately. Monstrously. I still do.  
Don't ever love like this.

Go back to your family. They'll take you in.

LULA

I can't go back there.  
Brigham'll take me.  
He said he'll take some a Prophet's wives. Me included.

ELI

Brigham?

LULA

I know he's kinda funny lookin' an' fat, but maybe it won't be so bad. Maybe that's what God had in mind all along.

ELI

No it wasn't.

LULA

No. It wadn't.

(A moment.)

What was your wife like?

ELI

(As he works on sculpture:) Beautiful and as bright as the North Star. We both taught at a free school in Maryland. We got lost on our way to the shore. She wanted to see the ocean and I wanted to give her that. Found by the wrong people. Sold back into bondage. She was eight months pregnant at the time. We were sold to a farmer in Ohio as a set which was lucky, if you want to call it that. But we were kept apart. Had me workin' at a plantation a mile away when Lucy was born. I'd sneak out every night to see 'em both for a few precious hours, but that was it. Beatings were worth it. Worth every second I had with her tiny face. I found a way out. A raft got left behind in the stable. We got all the way down to the river and got on. Lucy was almost nine months old by then. We didn't plan on the storm. Agnes couldn't swim. I couldn't hold them both.

**\*\*On the screen in the back, a film begins with what might be a rudimentary drawing of the river as the sound of the river played previously rises. This is a short film: The Meeting of Eli & Joseph. ELI and LULA face out while the film plays. On screen:**

ELI comes up from the water. He is breathless, suffocating, gagging for air. He collapses on the ground, holding a bundle. His clothes are all ravaged, destroyed by his journey. He stays on the ground for quite awhile. After several endless moments, he slowly looks up, realizing something. Something awful. He looks back at the water. He looks at the bundle in his hands. He kisses it and lays it down on the ground lovingly. He reaches inside his shirt. There is a small bag tied to his neck with rope. He struggles to get it open. JOSEPH appears in a special light and approaches ELI. ELI finds a hunting knife in his bag and stares at it carefully for a moment, when JOSEPH gently touches his hand. ELI violently jumps.

JOSEPH

Pilgrim. You've come a long distance.

(ELI realizes that JOSEPH poses no threat.)

ELI

I have.

(A blessed silence passes between them.)

You here to turn me in? Reward money?

JOSEPH

Certainly not. I'm God's Prophet on Earth. He speaks to me. He has no kind words for slave holders.

(ELI is intrigued.)

ELI

How do you know you're a prophet?

JOSEPH

I just do.

Come with me. I'll get you food. A place to lay your head.

ELI

No.

JOSEPH

You don't have people here. I'd know them if you did.

ELI

I have no one. Sir.

JOSEPH

You're educated. That's courageous.  
Would you believe I was nearly 22 years old before I could write a sentence on my own? I couldn't use the color of my skin as an excuse for my ignorance. Just savage poverty.

I want you to come with me. I want you to be a part of my church. God's one true church. Our meeting tonight was meant to be.

ELI

Forgive me. But . . . I can't—

(ELI begins to weep uncontrollably despite his best efforts not to. JOSEPH touches him gently.)

JOSEPH

You've lost family along the way.

(ELI shakes. It is true.)

Come into the river with me, my friend.

(JOSEPH takes ELI's hand, pulling him toward the river.)

ELI

If I go back in there, I'm stayin' put.

(JOSEPH stops. ELI holds the knife to his own throat and mimes what he intends to do as he speaks.)

I was never good at hunting. But they say you go in and pull it down. Hard and fast.

I tried to drown. I wanted my muscles to just stop working. But they wouldn't. They kept going though my mind was screaming for them to freeze up and die.

JOSEPH

This isn't what you want.

ELI

Please excuse my disrespect, but you don't know a thing about me or what I want.

JOSEPH

I'll tell you what *I* want.

JOSEPH

I want to baptize you. The time is now.

And we'll baptize the ones you lost.  
We'll baptize them so that you will see them the moment you stop  
breathing. But you can't choose that moment.

(Intense:) Join me.  
Join us.

(ELI is terrified.)

What is your name, friend?

ELI

Eli.

JOSEPH

God has touched you, Eli. You may only feel the strong pull of the devil  
right now, but I know of what I speak.

Come. With. Me.

(JOSEPH reaches out his hand firmly to ELI and he slowly  
takes it. They walk hand-in-hand to the river's edge.)

ELI

What is – your name?

JOSEPH

Joseph Smith.

(JOSEPH stares at ELI, whispers something to him and then  
dunks him in the water. JOSEPH brings him back up and  
they stare at each other for several breathless moments.  
Then:)

Welcome. Happy re-birthday!

(JOSEPH smiles.)

Now. Give me the names of your dead.

ELI

Agnes Bennett. Lucy Bennett.

JOSEPH

On behalf of Agnes and Lucy Bennett, I baptize you Eli in the name of the father, of the son, and of the Holy Ghost.

(He dunks ELI beneath the water again. He brings him back up.)

They're saved. And so are you.  
You don't believe me.

ELI

I trust no man.

JOSEPH

Trust God. If I give you nothing else in this life, I want to give you hope.

ELI

Mr. Smith? There is a light that surrounds you. It's brighter than anything I've ever seen.

JOSEPH

It's your light, Eli.  
I'm only reflecting it back at you.

(ELI breathes. JOSEPH breathes. They stare at each other.  
The film fades out.)

LULA

You almost killed yourself.

(ELI says nothing.)

I'm glad you didn't.

ELI

Kind of you.

LULA

(Carefully) Did you know that — that my real name is Lucy?

ELI

Yes. I thought it might be a sign of something. But sometimes a coincidence is just a coincidence.

LULA

Or a reminder.

ELI

You do remind of her a little bit. She had a devilish smile like yours.



(LULA smiles. ELI finishes the sculpture. It is a miniature ornate temple with doors and windows that can be opened. LULA carefully opens one and the image is of a man holding a baby.)

LULA  
Wow. Imagine if that was the *real* temple.

ELI  
Maybe someday.

LULA  
You're an artist.

(ELI has never thought about this word—artist—in relation to himself. He nods nonetheless.)

LULA  
That baby? Is that her?

ELI  
Yes. Was to be a gift for Joseph.

LULA  
Why would you wanna give this away? This is sump'm for you to keep.

ELI  
What good is a life if you have no one to give gifts to?

(LULA says nothing.)

Thought it might make him happy.  
And . . . ? Lucy woulda been seven. This July. Seven is a holy number.  
Deserves to be celebrated.

(Silence.)

You want it?

LULA  
*Me?* I don't deserve this.

ELI  
One day you will.

LULA  
No. You keep it.  
If we meet again? An you still want it to be somebody's gift? Then I'll take it.  
Promise.

(A moment. LULA touches the sculpture delicately, in awe. ELI watches her.)

ELI  
Anybody ever teach you how to whittle?

LULA  
No.

ELI  
Wanna learn?

(LULA nods. ELI gets a small piece of raw wood and hands her a knife.)

First you wanna shave off all the jagged bits. Anything that might get in your way.

(He shows her how and she tries to imitate him.)

Careful now. Go with the grain and away from your body.

LULA  
Ain't it easier to pull it towards me?

ELI  
Yeah if you like blood.

(She's a bit clumsy with the knife, but trying to be careful.)

LULA  
Is this right?

ELI  
Pretty close. Hold it as steady as you can.  
Next you want to prepare it for shaping.

(He helps her.)

What you wanna make?

LULA  
I don't know. Maybe a temple like you did?

ELI  
You gotta crawl before you can fly.

Can't think a nothin'.  
LULA

A doll?  
ELI

I'm too grown up for that.  
LULA

If you weren't all grown up, would you want one?  
ELI

This silly.  
LULA

(ELI eyes her carefully.)

Anyone ever give you a doll before?  
ELI

(LULA shrugs, like she doesn't care. Then she shakes her head "no." ELI finds the doll he was making in the first scene and hands it to her.)

Every year, I make one for Lucy for her birthday. I like to imagine her older now, with plaits and scrapes on her knee, sittin' out in the yard playin' with her little collection. You take it. I bet she'd want her namesake to have it.

(LULA is touched. It's a beautiful, simple little doll.)

(Quietly:) Thank you.  
LULA

You are welcome.  
ELI

(A moment. ELI shies away from the tenderness of it.)

(Referring to her wood:) Wanna learn a detailing trick? It's not too hard.

(LULA gazes at her doll, sadly.)

ELI  
LULA  
Eli? I'm prob'bly - I think I'm gonna haveta leave soon. For good.

I know.  
ELI

LULA

You sure I can't come with you? Just for a little while?

ELI

Nothin' on earth lasts forever. My advice: Do what you're told for now and when it's time for you to do your own thing? You'll know.

LULA

How?

ELI

I think it's like havin' a rotten tooth. You can only take the pain so long before you have to rip it out.

You're gonna be all right.

LULA

Brigham's like a rotten tooth?

ELI

In more ways than you'd think. Let me see.

(LULA holds up her work. She's getting somewhere. He helps her.)

I don't know what I'm gonna do, either. But I can't give up. If I haven't given up after everything I already been through, why should I now? I'm a believer. I don't know why these aren't the last days that Prophet told us they were. I don't know why someone like him is gunned down like a rabid dog and others just go on about their evil ways with no disruption. But I can't waste any more time. People are working up north. In Nova Scotia and Ontario. I'm going to fight. I'm going to fight on the side of God. Because good is good. Goodness has to win eventually. Otherwise, what's the point?

(LULA picks up a stray piece of wood. She quickly carves something into it. She gets a bottle of ink and brushes it into the wood. She shows it to ELI.)

LULA

It has to dry. But you keep this.

ELI

Your name.

LULA

When you get to Canada. Maybe you can find me.

ELI

Miss Lula—

LULA

I might go there myself when things calm down. I don't know.

Just say that it's possible. That miracles happen and that we'll always be friends. Because we *are* friends no matter what you think. Say that's it's possible and that someday, we might be able to find each other again.

ELI

It is possible. Miracles do happen.

(LULA smiles, relieved. They go back to whittling.)

LULA

I brought you a gun to keep.

ELI

Don't want a damn gun.

LULA

Protection.

ELI

No. Thank you. I'm not one for accepting gifts and I definitely don't accept guns.

LULA

You are one stubborn SOB.

ELI

Language.

LULA

I only said the letters.

ELI

That's bad enough.

(Beat.)

LULA

Our revelations? They were real, right? I know they were. But? I want to make sure.

ELI

I know they were. Gotta hold onto your faith. It's what keeps us going.

LULA

Yeah. Faith. I can hold onto that.

(Suddenly there is a loud pounding at the door. They freeze. LULA knows who it is.)

I— LULA

I know. ELI

(LULA runs into ELI's arms and gives him a huge hug. He hugs her back. She grabs her doll and her project.)

Goodbye. LULA

You take care of yourself, Lucy Miller. ELI

(More pounding. LULA looks as if her world is ending.)

What's gonna happen to me? LULA

Just remember. ELI

What? LULA

Miracles. ELI

(LULA manages a smile.)

Miracles. LULA

(LULA leaves. ELI looks at the slab of wood she left her name on. He begins to clean up LULA's bedding, but then decides to leave it. He moves his sculpture to a position next to her bedding. Then he notices his crumpled up petition still on the floor where he threw it earlier. He picks it up and smooths it out. He takes a deep breath and grabs his ink and a fresh sheet of paper. A small light starts to come from the miniature temple and it grows and grows and grows, emanating from the screen and then the whole theatre. ELI closes his eyes, embracing it.)

**END OF PLAY**