

1865
a play in two acts
by
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BRIEF SYNOPSIS:

1865 is a two act historical drama. 1 set (utilizing the theatre as a theatre), 3f, 6m

Jenna LaFluer, a company actress, steps out onto the stage, surveying the wreckage that was Ford's Theatre shortly following the assassination attempt of Abraham Lincoln on April 14th, 1865, to sneak a cigarette. She and seven other performers and stagehands have been temporarily trapped inside the locked down theatre as a growing mob congregates outside the building to await the fate of the President and the nation. The ongoing interviews of those who claimed to have witnessed the evening's attack have been postponed due to the increasing danger from the assembled swarm. In order to ensure their protection, the actors and crew are all quickly sequestered to the stage itself.

Relationships strain as the evening wanes on. The crowds outside begin demanding justice from those responsible, shooting at the building and smashing windows in an attempt to flush out the conspirators and vent their anger while a small faction of Union soldiers hold down their ground. The chant of "Burn it down!" raises the stakes higher, taking a further toll on those embedded inside.

In order to survive will this ragtag group need to give up one of their own to satisfy the mob and earn back their own freedom? 1865 is as relevant and true today in the wake of 9/11 and LA riots (1965 and 1992) as it was when our nation first lost its innocence.

CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

JENNA LaFLUER	.....	a stock company actress for Ford's Theatre in her early/mid thirties
SUZANNE HATTERSON	.....	a stock company actress for Ford's Theatre in her late fifties
CAPTAIN DONNESSEY	.....	a Captain of the Union army in his late twenties/early thirties
JACOB RITTER	.....	a stagehand for Ford's Theatre in his late twenties
CYNTHIA LEWIS	.....	a stock company actress for Ford's Theatre in her late teens/approaching twenty
FRANK MATTHEWS	.....	a stock company actor for Ford's Theatre in his mid forties/early fifties
MARTIN OSBOURNE	.....	a stock company actor for Ford's Theatre in his mid forties to mid fifties
PETER DANIELS	.....	a stock company actor for Ford's Theatre in his late early/mid thirties
NED SPRANG	.....	a stagehand for Ford's Theatre in his mid/late thirties

SETTING

Ford's Theatre, Washington D.C.

TIME

April 14, 1865.

Good Friday

ACT I

Scene 1	April 14, 1865	11:45 pm.
Scene 2	April 15, 1865	1:30 am

ACT II

Scene 1	April 15, 1865	3:20 am
Scene 2	April 15, 1865	7:10 am
Scene 3	Epilogue	

"America will never be destroyed from the outside. If we falter and lose our freedoms, it will be because we destroyed ourselves."

— Abraham Lincoln

The following story though based on true events is fictitious. All characters appearing in this work are fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead is purely coincidental.

ACT I

(At rise:

The curtain is already up as the audience enters. The stage is that of a traditional theatre circa 1860. The space itself is high enough to allow scenery to be flown in from above. A set of painted Parlor room backdrops hang, as if floating in the air, six to eight feet above the floor, offering a clear view to the backstage brick wall. A stage door can be found up right. The stage left and right wing curtains have been torn and various props, furniture and tables are strewn about what is left of the stage. Footlights lay broken, while others cast an ominous light across the floor boards. Flags that once adorned the far left box droop, wilted, torn and frail, over the stage. A copy of the famous unfinished portrait of President George Washington hangs between the flags in silent witness to the pandemonium that has preceded this hour.

JENNA LaFLEUR, an actress in her early/mid thirties enters stage from the wings and surveys the broken carnage before her. She looks out into the audience, we can see the overturned and broken seats here through her eyes. Lost in thought she looks up into the far left box and watches as her mind replays the moments from earlier this night. Her attention drifts from the now broken railing hanging over the far left box seats--to center stage-- to the orchestra then back out the wings and off through the now locked stage door. She wipes a tear from her cheek as she looks back out into the audience.

JENNA

What a waste.

(JENNA reaches into her purse to find a cigarette. She looks from side to side to see if anyone else is there. She stoops down to a foot lamp but just before she lights up:)

JENNA

Hello?

(No reply.)

Hello?

(No reply.)

Can we go home yet?

(Again no reply. JENNA shrugs and lights up. She surveys the stage again; she repeats the only words that come to mind:)

What a waste.

SUZANNE (offstage)

Miss La Fleur?

(JENNA quickly extinguishes the cigarette, but carefully so as to save its remnants for later as SUZANNE HATTERSON, a matronly woman in her spry fifties enters from the right wings.)

SUZANNE

(Entering; There is a hint of a British accent to her speech:)

You're best off not being alo--Is that a cigarette you're holding?

JENNA

Tidying up.

(She drops the butt in her purse.)

SUZANNE

Let the men do that. How long've you been out here?

JENNA

Does it matter?

SUZANNE

(Thinks on it a moment:)

No. No, I guess it doesn't. Have you heard anything?

(JENNA shakes her head: no.)

SUZANNE

It's just as well. We're safer here than anywhere else tonight, I should guess.

JENNA

I'd feel safer in my own bed.

SUZANNE

Then you should have left when you had the chance.

(Moves to an overturned sofa)

Help me with this, will you?

JENNA

I thought you said to leave the tidying up to the men.

SUZANNE

Cleaning, yes. I had in mind to sit down.

(The two women aright the sofa. SUZANNE sits on one end, leaving ample room for JENNA who remains standing looking out.)

SUZANNE

For the love of Mike, dear, please, have a seat.

JENNA

(Looking out toward the lobby:)

I saw something--I thought. Hello? Hello!?

SUZANNE

Hello!?

JENNA

Hello!!

SUZANNE

Hello!

(At the back of the audience one of the lobby doors open up. Looking toward the doorway all that can be seen is the silhouette of a soldier [CAPTAIN DONNESSEY], encased in the fire light of the lobby.)

CAPTAIN DONNESSEY

You--Ladies? Yes?

SUZANNE

Good evening, private.

CAPTAIN DONNESSEY

Captain.

SUZANNE

My apologies.

JENNA

Any word?

CAPTAIN DONNESSEY

On?

JENNA

(Isn't it obvious:)

. . . When we'll get out of here?

SUZANNE

The President. Any word on the President?

CAPTAIN DONNESSEY

No news as yet. They've set him up across the street. Doctor's are seeing to him over there.

SUZANNE

And your orders Captain?

CAPTAIN DONNESSEY

We're stationed here, Ma'am. Holding down the theatre.
(Acknowledging Jenna:)

Miss.

SUZANNE

No one in; no one out?

CAPTAIN DONNESSEY

Basically. Yes, Ma'am.

(His attention is diverted off to someone else in the lobby.)

Yes, Sir.

(The door closes. The women are left again to fend for themselves. Pause.)

SUZANNE

Might as well have that seat.

JENNA

All because I wanted to change out of my costume.

SUZANNE

Me? I'm just too slow.

(JENNA takes a seat beside SUZANNE. SUZANNE sits quietly still. JENNA says nothing. She fidgets and sighs none of which affect SUZANNE's stance at all. The pause continues.)

JENNA

What are you doing?

SUZANNE

(Unflinching, eyes still closed.)

Praying, child. Times like these call for prayer.

JENNA

Yes, well, that's what we get for doing a play on Good Friday. Mock God and he'll mock you back.

SUZANNE

(Still in prayer:)

He doesn't work like that.

JENNA

Mhmmm.

(Pause.)

SUZANNE

Amen.

JENNA

Amen.

SUZANNE

Have your cigarette.

JENNA

Excuse me?

SUZANNE

God told me. You need to relax.

JENNA

"God" told you?

SUZANNE

(It was) a joke. You think I haven't watched you girls? I know which ones of you smoke and which of you . . . well--smoking's the lesser sin if you get my meaning.

JENNA

Maybe later.

SUZANNE

You should give it up, you know. Nasty habit. It smells terrible. And the men . . . well . . .

JENNA

Were you there? Did you see it happen?

SUZANNE

Almost. I was over there by the fly ropes. I had just made my exit when I heard someone hit the stage. He was gone before I turned around.

JENNA

Mr. Hawk was alone onstage then.

SUZANNE

From what I gather. Then everyone was on the stage. Half the audience. Doctors. Looters. All clamoring to get to the President's box. I saw one young man steal away the cushions from the rocking chair Lincoln was sitting in when he was shot. It's not right.

JENNA

So what does this mean then?

SUZANNE

Are we back at war?

JENNA

Are we?

SUZANNE

Like I said, we're safer in here than out there right now. No one out; No one in.

(JENNA, still fidgeting, rises and begins to move around.)

SUZANNE

You have someone out there waiting for you?

JENNA

No. You?

SUZANNE

No. My husband should be fast asleep by now. He won't be awake till the sun shines. Military canons couldn't stir him.

JENNA

Aren't you worried for his safety?

SUZANNE

You're right: I should be, shouldn't I?

JENNA

And your children?

SUZANNE

California. Heard there was gold.

(No reply.)

You never asked me about my children before. You never asked me much of anything before tonight.

JENNA

It beats the silence.

SUZANNE

Curious way of putting it.

(Slight pause.)

JENNA

They say it was Wilkes Booth.

SUZANNE

They do say that, yes.

JENNA

But you didn't see him.

SUZANNE

And I have no reason to believe anyone was lying when they said they did.

JENNA

Well, I choose not to believe it.

SUZANNE

So I gathered. You fancy Mr. Booth?

(No reply.)

I've seen him watching you too.

(No reply.)

I see a lot of things.

JENNA

Yes, well . . . you can keep those ideas to yourself, thank you.

SUZANNE

Do you know where he went?

JENNA

Who?

SUZANNE

Wilkes Booth.

JENNA

I don't keep company with Wilkes Booth.

SUZANNE

He was here earlier today.

JENNA

Collecting his mail. The Fords let him use the address here.

SUZANNE

Don't get me wrong: he's a good looking man. If I were your age, I wouldn't be shy to admit it.

JENNA

Mrs. Hatterson.

SUZANNE

Before tonight, of course.

JENNA

Mrs. Hatterson . . .

SUZANNE

Whatever's happened in the past between you two: best you not mention it.

JENNA

There's nothing to tell.

SUZANNE

Good. We'll just leave it at that.

(JACOB RITTER and CYNTHIA LEWIS enter from the wings. JACOB, is a stagehand in his mid thirties and CYNTHIA a young actress, barely old enough to be holding down a job. Their attraction to each other is warily apparent although they themselves are acutely unaware the rest of the world can see through their lackluster efforts of keeping their affair a secret.)

JACOB

How in the love of God do you get out of this place?

SUZANNE

Excuse me? Are you addressing us?

CYNTHIA

Mrs. Hatterson. Miss LaFleur.

JACOB

Are all the exits blocked?

FRANK

(entering after them, FRANK, an actor, forty-fifty)

Kicked you two out of the costume room finally, did they?

(JACOB says nothing; but clearly looks to FRANK, noting his own arrival at their heels. There is an awkward silence.)

CYNTHIA

Mr. Ritter was kind enough to wake me.

JACOB

Is there a way--

SUZANNE

There is no passage out, my dears. They've locked us in for the night.

JACOB

(Moves out top the edge of the stage.)

Not a chance of it.

FRANK

I knew I shoulda called on that last hand.

SUZANNE

For our own good, I'm afraid. We are a threat to the nation.

JENNA

Please.

CYNTHIA

But I have to go home. My parents . . .

SUZANNE

I'm afraid your parents will have to wait.

(JACOB hops off stage into the audience and heads off to the lobby.)

SUZANNE

It won't do you any good, sir.

JENNA

We tried.

(But JACOB ignores them and pulls open the door only to be blocked by CAPTAIN DONNESSEY.)

CAPTAIN DONNESSEY

Back in, Sir.

JACOB

(Attempting instead to move past him:)

Sorry.

CAPTAIN DONNESSEY

(Holding firm:)

I'm sorry.

JACOB

I'm going home.

CAPTAIN DONNESSEY

I'm afraid you're not.

JACOB

Try to stop me.

(And with that JACOB is marched back into the theatre at rifle point by CAPTAIN DONNESSEY.)

CAPTAIN DONNESSEY

(Hollering back to the lobby:)

I've got this.

(To the group inside:)

Is this everyone?

FRANK

. . . There are two more men upstairs.