

**A LIFE UNFINISHED**  
*(a drama in two acts.)*

CHARACTERS

ABIGAIL “NABBY” ADAMS SMITH- wife, mother and noble woman. Forty-six.

DOCTOR JOHN WARREN- family friend. Surgeon. Fifty-six.

ABIGAIL ADAMS- mother of “NABBY.” Sixty-six.

JOHN ADAMS- father of “NABBY.” 2<sup>nd</sup> President of the United States. Seventy-six.

CAROLINE SMITH- daughter of NABBY and WILLIAM SMITH. Sixteen.

WILLIAM STEPHENS SMITH- husband of “NABBY” ADAMS SMITH. Fifty-six.

*Setting: The action of the play takes place in Peacefield, the well-appointed home and farm of John and Abigail Adams. October 11, 1811- August 10, 1813.*

Words appearing in ***bold italics*** are taken from letters of the time.

ACT ONE

i.

*(Light rises on the second-floor bedroom of NABBY ADAMS in the family home of John and Abigail Adams. A modest bedroom: bed, dresser with mirror, small table, and a chair. Nothing ostentatious. NABBY stands at the edge of the elevated platform, in her undergarments, her right arm raised. With her left hand, she examines her right breast. She stops, crosses to the small table, sits and begins writing, speaking as she does so.)*

NABBY

***Last year...about May 1810 I first perceived a hardness in my right Breast just above the nipple which occasioned me an uneasy sensation, like a burning some times an itching & at time a deep darting pain through the Breast, but without any discolouration at all. it has continued to Contract and the Breast has become much smaller than it was. the tumor appears now about the size of a Cap, and does not appear to adhere but it be loose..."***

*(NABBY stops writing and turns, staring out, a worried, pained expression on her face. Light slowly fades on her.)*

ACT ONE

*ii.*

*(Tight spot rises on DOCTOR JOHN WARREN, down, in the Long Room on the first floor of the Adams's home. He begins speaking as light slowly rises, revealing a beautifully furnished and artfully decorated room, with all the finer things in life. JOHN and ABIGAIL are seated, listening intently, as DOCTOR WARREN continues.)*

DOCTOR WARREN

None of this is new. Even our treatments do not differ vastly from the removal of these types of tumors in times past.

ABIGAIL

Surely medicine has taken great leaps, progress has been made in all aspects of life.

DOCTOR WARREN

The body is fickle, Abigail, acts out on its own despite whatever measures we have gained in science and medicine. Remember your Hippocrates. He used the words carcinos and carcinoma to describe tumors such as Nabby's.

JOHN

Words used to describe a crab, which is what he believed these tumors to resemble.

DOCTOR WARREN

Precisely, John.

JOHN

If I am correct, the first documented cases go back to ancient Egypt.

DOCTOR WARREN

Yes, and since these tumors could not be detected then until they reached an advanced state of growth and were visible to the eye on the outside of the body, when they were removed, it was often too late.

*(ABIGAIL starts, catching her breath.)*

ABIGAIL

Are you suggesting there is no hope?

DOCTOR WARREN

On the contrary, Abigail. These tumors created much fascination in ancient times, enough so that their growth and removal were documented. And it is with much gratitude I salute our forebears for their insight. For we now detect these tumors, see and feel them at earlier stages and their removal can prolong the life of those inflicted. In that way we have made great progress.

JOHN

Is there no other way, Doctor Warren...Has Doctor Rush given no alternative?

DOCTOR WARREN

From Nabby's own account *of the moving state of the tumor*, Doctor Rush feels *it is now in a proper situation for the operation*. He advises *no application or internal medicines for her relief*.

ABIGAIL

Can the growth of these tumors be stalled or halted?

DOCTOR WARREN

According to Doctor Rush, and I am in full accordance with his decision, *Should she waits 'till it supperates, or even inflames much, it may be too late*. It has been a year since the discovery of her tumor, so tomorrow, as planned, I shall arrive, and we shall rid her of this cancer, let her resume duties of wife and mother out from under the undue strain of these tumors.

*(JOHN is obviously agitated, frightened and fights to get his words out, breathing heavily between words as he searches for what he wants to say.)*

JOHN

What will she...what is to be...I haven't had the intrepidity to ask before, for perhaps I am, after all, a coward. But how much pain...how much suffering will she endure?

DOCTOR WARREN

I don't want to minimize what she will go through, but let me reassure you that *The pain of the operation is much less than her fears represent*...and yours...in the face of the alternative.

ABIGAIL

The cut will be deep. Will change and scar her forever. In body and mind.

*(DOCTOR WARREN speaks, as light begins to very slowly fade. JOHN and ABIGAIL look worriedly at each other.)*

DOCTOR WARREN

I repeat again—*let there be no delay in flying to the knife. Her time of life—calls for expedition in this business, for tumors such as hers tend much more rapidly to cancers after 45*. And she is now 46.

*(light out.)*

ACT ONE

iii.

*(Light rises on the bedroom of NABBY. She continues to write.)*

NABBY

*I applied to a Physician and he recommended me to apply a Plaister of the cicuta... I have also taken a considerable of cicuta in Pills, but I thought they produced a heaviness in my head...I have consulted several Physicians upon the Subject they have all advised me not to make any outward application to it... Still I am uneasy upon the Subject—*

*(NABBY winces slightly, and reaches with her left hand to examine her right breast. She stops, sighs and continues writing.)*

*-for I think I observe it becoming harder and a little redness at times on the skin...*

*(CAROLINE enters the room. She is quiet, downcast. When CAROLINE enters, NABBY quickly puts her writing in the drawer of the writing table and turns to her daughter.)*

NABBY

I have not seen much of you these past days.

CAROLINE

There's been much to prepare for the events of today.

*(CAROLINE turns from her mother, wanting to avoid her mother's eyes at every turn. CAROLINE speaks, low.)*

I've come...to plait your hair.

NABBY

*(smiling, rising from the table and crossing to the chair before the mirror and dresser. CAROLINE picks up a hair brush, as NABBY speaks.)*

How nice. This will allow us a chance to talk, to spend time together.

*(CAROLINE begins brushing NABBY'S long, red hair. She brushes absently, trying to find a point on which to fix her gaze. After a few moments of awkward silence, NABBY again speaks.)*

NABBY

You must not fear me.

CAROLINE

It's not you I fear.

*(an uncomfortable pause. CAROLINE turns away. NABBY speaks.)*

NABBY

Nothing has changed. I am the mother you have always known. I am not this disease.

*(CAROLINE remains silent. NABBY speaks softly.)*

We must be open and honest with each other, Caroline, today more than ever.

CAROLINE

*(directly, but quietly.)*

Are you going to die?

NABBY

Though I have been informed that death is unlikely in cases such as mine, it is a distinct possibility we must face.

CAROLINE

How can I face losing my mother?

NABBY

And how can I face the fear of leaving the daughter I love so much? But the reality is, if I do not undergo this operation, I most certainly will die. This is now in the hands of God and we must accept His decision, though we may never know His reason.

CAROLINE

Why is our supposed all-forgiving God so cruel?

NABBY

*(a mother's gentle sternness.)*

I understand your fear and anger, but I cannot listen to you blaspheme, Caroline. It is unbecoming to your station in this life.

CAROLINE

My station in life has little to do with my feelings.

NABBY

Our stations are granted us by Him in His infinite wisdom.

CAROLINE

Where is the wisdom in His usurping us from the station in which He deemed we belong, by allowing this curse upon you?

NABBY

I have never heard you speak in such a manner before, Caroline.

CAROLINE

I was not before in the predicament of the possibility of losing my mother.

NABBY

I hope this is not disdain for your religious upbringing nor rebellion, but fear and nothing more. You must not let this fear and worry cloud your judgement or undermine your faith, for it is that faith upon which the rest of our lives depend.

CAROLINE

Why must faith be blind?

NABBY

It is not blind. We are surrounded of proof of His existence. His gifts are in everything we do, everything we have, and everything we are. And will be.

CAROLINE

Including that scourge in your breast? Is that too a gift?

*(ABIGAIL slowly weighs CAROLINE'S words before she speaks.)*

NABBY

We have raised you to be independent, to be sovereign to who you are, but, as women, we must accept the fact that life is different for us.

CAROLINE

*(an exasperated chuckle as if her mother does not understand her.)*

I have been educated in the differences between men and women, Mother.

NABBY

But perhaps do not fully understand the implications of what it is to be a woman.

CAROLINE

Having been since the day of my birth, I think it safe to say I understand the implications all too well and the patriarchal despotism that Grandmother has tried so hard if not to abolish, then to lessen by degrees.

NABBY

*(smiling, somewhat amused and impressed by her daughter's grandiose ideas.)*

I am glad to see you have inherited your grandmother's social spirit of reform, and your grandfather's verbosity. But I am not talking of the social aspect of being a woman, but the physical. The special place women hold in this society, throughout the history of the world even.

CAROLINE

I am not interested in the history of the world. I am only interested in the passing of today, when we shall know how our lives may be forever changed.

*(CAROLINE'S words hang in the air as ABIGAIL enters the bedroom.)*

ABIGAIL

Am I interrupting?

NABBY

No, Mother.

*(ABIGAIL crosses to CAROLINE.)*

ABIGAIL

May I, Caroline?

*(CAROLINE steps to the side as ABIGAIL begins plaiting NABBY'S hair, slowly, tenderly, as if each strand of hair is something to be cherished.)*

NABBY

With all the fuss, all the attention being paid me, one might think it were my wedding day and not...

*(silence falls. After a moment, ABIGAIL speaks.)*

ABIGAIL

It has been some time since I plaited your hair, Nabby. And yours, Caroline.

*(turning to her granddaughter.)*

But you wear yours so differently now. I suppose every generation must have her own style.

CAROLINE

The order of progress and change.

NABBY

*(detached, her mind not fully on the conversation.)*

Progress and change. Yes. We must accept progress and change. In all aspects of our lives.

ABIGAIL

Are you prepared, Nabby, in body, mind, and spirit?

NABBY

If it is the only solution and both Doctors Rush and Warren, estimable men whose opinions I trust implicitly, tell me my only chance for survival is to have these tumors removed, then yes, Mother, I am ready for whatever may come my way. Caroline and I were speaking of just that before you entered.

ABIGAIL

Are you frightened?

NABBY

Not of death.

CAROLINE

Pain?

NABBY

Pain can be endured. My fear is for the motherless children I may leave behind. The things I will never watch them do...

*(NABBY turns to Caroline.)*

Watch *you* do. You are sixteen, Caroline, so wise, wiser than I have ever been, but still so young. And I may never get to see you grow to full womanhood.

*(CAROLINE turns away, distressed. NABBY continues.)*

I must be ready, morning will soon pass. Doctor Warren will be arriving. Will you see to the dress, Caroline?

*(CAROLINE nods and exits.)*

ABIGAIL

We are all so concerned with our own feelings, how the outcome of this operation will affect us as individuals, never asking, beyond the common courtesy of how you are feeling...we never ask what you think...of this affliction, these tumors in your breast.

NABBY

I try not to let it overshadow my life, the life I knew before, and hope to have again.

ABIGAIL

We are the cowards.

*(CAROLINE enters with NABBY'S plainly modest gown.)*

NABBY

I simply...accept it.

CAROLINE

As a woman?

NABBY

Yes, Caroline, as a woman. For this disease is ours.

CAROLINE

*(sardonically.)*

A gift?

NABBY

No, but perhaps payment in kind for the gift of being a woman.

*(ABIGAIL and CAROLINE begin to dress NABBY.)*

CAROLINE

Are you speaking again of the "special place" of women?

ABIGAIL

Special in what regard?

CAROLINE

Mother was saying, and I refuted her claim, that women have a special place in society.

ABIGAIL

Why do you disagree?

CAROLINE

You must as well, Grandmother. All your talk of equality in schooling and politics for women...

ABIGAIL

To create equality that women may gain employment to sustain themselves and their families financially should the need arise, but that can only come about by having access to the benefits of education, just as a man does. Yes, I vehemently believe that women are at a disadvantage in that regard.

CAROLINE

I have been educated and I feel no more liberation than before.

NABBY

Education, Caroline, is a tool, an asset, and you mustn't wield it as a weapon. Victories must be fought for.

CAROLINE

Hard won?

NABBY

For the most part, yes.

CAROLINE

What good is an education when we don't have to right to stand up and use it fully?

NABBY

Progress is not dictated by mere desire.

CAROLINE

I don't understand you, Mother. You talk of a woman's place, of gifts and honor, yet you suffer from a disease only women can suffer from. What do men suffer?

ABIGAIL

*(lightly, teasing.)*

The indignity of running the world.

CAROLINE

And where is the honor in our second-class citizenship?

NABBY

Men may have the advantages and social power, and you are right, Caroline, your grandmother has fought for legislation that would grant women equal standing.

CAROLINE

With little success.

NABBY

*(to CAROLINE.)*

But she fought none the less. A fight I was too meek to join.

*(with circumspect, turning to ABIGAIL.)*

I know my silence and reticence have sometimes vexed you Mother...

ABIGAIL

No, Nabby, I believe we fight in our own ways, some quietly, some, like me, not so...everything you've done you have done quietly and gracefully in support of your own ideals, whereas I...

*(grinning, to CAROLINE.)*

Your grandfather was not always happy with some of my viewpoints or in the ways I expressed myself. He admires reticence...

*(back to NABBY.)*

...which is why he admires you so, whereas I admire...

CAROLINE

Rectitude.

ABIGAIL

I hope we all admire that as upstanding Christians. It is what we must strive for in thought and deed. What I admire most is honesty, that we come about our ideas and opinions through honest, and thoughtful ideals, and so, Caroline, you may disagree with your mother but do not deny her wisdom and what she has to teach you, as only a mother can.

NABBY

There is one thing, Caroline, that God has bestowed upon us, upon women, that is truly ours.

CAROLINE

*(sarcastically.)*

And what is that? A happy marriage? To find a husband and make a home?

NABBY

Don't underestimate the virtues of a happy marriage, for an unhappy one is a burden that can make the day an eternity, and the night a prison. But what I am talking about is the fact that we can bring life.

CAROLINE

Not without the aid of men...yet again. Are we, as women, never to accomplish that which is truly our own?

NABBY

That is precisely what I am talking about. A man may help create life, but only a woman can bring it.

ABIGAIL

And only women can nurture that life, give it sustenance so that it may grow and thrive.

CAROLINE

*(to NABBY, somewhat harshly.)*

And that sustenance comes from our breasts. So, here you are, Mother, this day, going to lose the source of life's nourishment, does that make you less of a woman?

ABIGAIL

*(admonishing.)*

Caroline, apologize to your mother for your tone.

NABBY

No, Mother, let her speak plainly.

*(to CAROLINE.)*

My child-bearing years are done and my breasts no longer serve the purpose of sustaining life. I may be suffering, my breast may be diseased, a disease that tortures me deep inside, but the disease can and will be cut out. What cannot be cut out is the gift of being a woman. Nothing will ever change that. I have brought you, have given you life and nourishment, have given you my body and soul, as God intended. A gift you must cherish, Caroline, in all its glories.

CAROLINE

As well as its setbacks?

NABBY

Of which there are and will be many.

ABIGAIL

Unfortunately, another burden of being a woman.

NABBY

And though my body has turned against me, an infliction only a woman can suffer, I also got to give the gift only a woman can give.

ABIGAIL

And now I am watching the life I brought into this world, about to endure her greatest challenge.

NABBY

No. My greatest challenge has always been keeping my children safe, as you have always kept me safe.

ABIGAIL

But I cannot help you now.

*(ABIGAIL turns away from NABBY, who is now fully dressed.)*

CAROLINE

You look as if you are on your way to church.

NABBY

If I am to meet my maker, I want to go purely. If I am to enter the world of the Lord, then I bring no trappings from this world.

CAROLINE

*(quietly pleading.)*

Please don't leave me, Mother...

*(NABBY reaches out and takes CAROLINE'S hand. ABIGAIL speaks, trying to sound composed, to NABBY.)*

ABIGAIL

Will you eat something...Nabby? You haven't since yesterday.

*(NABBY puts her other hand on ABIGAIL'S cheek.)*

NABBY

No, Mother. I could not. But I thank you both. For everything good in this life.

ABIGAIL

We must hope for the best.

CAROLINE

*(removing her hand from NABBY'S.)*

But prepare for the worst...

*(turning to ABIGAIL.)*

...as you and Grandfather always say.

*(NABBY, CAROLINE and ABIGAIL stand, looking at each other, silent, afraid, as light slowly fades.)*

ACT ONE

*iv.*

*(Light rises on the Long Room. WILLIAM is standing down, looking out. JOHN enters, somewhat surprised, taken-aback to see WILLIAM. There is a terse cordiality between them.)*

JOHN

William.

WILLIAM

John.

JOHN

I have not yet been up to see Nabby this morning. How is she?

WILLIAM

One never knows what she is really thinking or feeling, sometimes to the point of being disconcerting.

JOHN

Unlike me, she does not feel the need to expound on every thought as it enters her head and spout it unfiltered so that the words hang in the air, mocking.

WILLIAM

*(slyly.)*

I did not think you ever regretted a word or phrase you so unthinkingly uttered, in neither professional nor personal life.

JOHN

I was not and am not seeking an analysis of my person, I will leave that to the historians, playwrights, and authors of sordid literature to do with me what they will. For I shall be far removed from their vitriol.

WILLIAM

I should think a man of your character would expect praise not poison pens.

JOHN

My character is not on trial today. I was merely asking about my daughter's mental state.

WILLIAM

Stoic as ever. She was with Caroline and Abigail. I thought to leave them be.

JOHN

*(acerbically.)*

While you collect your own thoughts, leaving them to wallow.

WILLIAM

*(disregarding the remark.)*

This will prove to be a trying day.

JOHN

That fact has already been proven.

WILLIAM

Must we add to it with caustic barbs and barely concealed disdain?

JOHN

*(acquiescing to WILLIAM'S point, he adopts a softer tone.)*

Have you had breakfast?

WILLIAM

What I could. Have you taken anything? I haven't seen you about.

JOHN

I was out walking in the fields. Usually this crisp October air fills me with comfort, breathing deeply, clearing the lungs. Today, no such solace was to be had.

WILLIAM

Solace may come after Doctor Warren has completed this operation.

JOHN

Depending on the unthinkable outcome none of us wants to admit may be.

WILLIAM

I am confident in Doctor Warren. Doctor Rush gives him high praise indeed in matters such as these.

JOHN

Doctor Warren is a fine and a skilled physician, like his brother Joseph before him, may he rest in peace.

*(JOHN glances at the portrait above the mantle.)*

WILLIAM

Then why such unease?

JOHN

*(with vehemence.)*

Because I am her father, dammit...

WILLIAM

And I her husband.

JOHN

Not the husband one had hoped for.

WILLIAM

I don't think now is the time...

JOHN

What better time for honesty than when life hangs in the balance.

WILLIAM

*(wanting to placate JOHN'S rising animosity.)*

I understand, tensions are high, anxiety at its peak...

JOHN

Condescension can never be condoned.

WILLIAM

*(becoming defensive.)*

Civility then? Perhaps we should conduct ourselves with more decorum, if not for the sake of societal norms then for the inhabitants of this house, each of whom is also suffering. Or is your suffering all that matters?

JOHN

How dare you, Sir, be so insolent as to impugn my feelings toward my daughter on this, the most trying day of her, and dare I say, all our lives.

WILLIAM

My intention, *Sir*, was not to impugn your feelings, as you have tried to my reputation in the eyes of the public and in the eyes of my wife. With little success I might add.

JOHN

Do not falsely overestimate your wife's feelings toward you. Your reputation is only important to me insofar as how it affects my daughter. Your scandals have put undue strain on her and this family.

WILLIAM

May I remind you, you are not above your own scandals.

JOHN

Political propaganda and innuendos during a hard-fought campaign can hardly be construed as scandals. And may I remind you, that you are in my house.

*(a pause. Cold, hard. When WILLIAM speaks, it is with no bitterness or condescension.)*

WILLIAM

How have we come to this, John?

JOHN

Because time shows a friend's true face.

WILLIAM

Bad business dealings do not brand a man a villain. Had I succeeded, would you think kindlier of me, as you once had?

JOHN

Kindly? How could I respect a man who has neglected the one tenet of being a husband and father?

WILLIAM

And what is that?

JOHN

To provide for and protect his family.

WILLIAM

When have I not provided for my family?

JOHN

You dragged my Nabby down to poverty and humiliation with that unholy and highly illegal expedition, which you raised private funds to support.

WILLIAM

Had that expedition liberated Venezuela from Spain, I would have been hailed a hero.

JOHN

Heroes do not seek profit in the spoils. In the end it did not succeed and in the eyes of God, you have failed as husband and father.

WILLIAM

And where were the eyes of God when those ships were captured, those men brutally and savagely butchered?

JOHN

My family has suffered enough of your misfortunes.

WILLIAM

A large part of your family is my family, or have you forgotten? And it was my son who was in prison, in a foreign jail, waiting to be beheaded before he escaped. And you have the audacity to suggest that I somehow wanted that, that I was somehow the orchestrator of that...

JOHN

It was your plan, and you lied under oath, a complete and utter breach of the Neutrality Act of 1794...

WILLIAM

I told the truth.

JOHN

Then turned tail and like a coward, placed the onus of your failings on Jefferson and Madison. Ungentlemanly at best and immoral at worst.

WILLIAM

But not illegal. Besides, Jefferson and Madison, despite their outcries and protestations, were not innocent parties in that affair, and I was acquitted of all charges.

JOHN

Acquittal is not the same as innocence.

WILLIAM

You charge me with being uncouth, immoral...yet you stand here dredging up accusations against me that our legal system has already acquitted me of on the day my wife...

JOHN

A wife who has been forced to live ignominiously under your veil of corruption...

WILLIAM

*(ignoring this.)*

On the day my wife...

JOHN

My daughter...

WILLIAM

Waits upstairs for a life-altering, life-threatening operation. You, yourself, have said you have not been up to see her. If that is not *uncouth*...perhaps are you the coward, cannot face the truth of what she is about to undergo and so must hide behind transgressions of the past.

JOHN

I fully understand what she is about to undergo and do not wish her to see my fear and trepidation around this business. My daughter could die...a parent should not lose a child, any child, as I have already.

WILLIAM

As have I...or have you forgotten our Thomas...a year old...

JOHN

How could I forget an angel? I just cannot bear the loss of another after so many losses.

WILLIAM

Then how can you attack me, on this of all days?

*(silence. WILLIAM continues, beseeching.)*

We were friends, John, worked closely together in Paris, London...I met Nabby there, with your blessing...

JOHN

The past is inconsequential. All that matters now is the present and the immediate future when this is over and done with.

WILLIAM

You, Sir, seem to confuse selfishness for suffering. Or has age just clouded your judgement? You are not the only one in pain.

JOHN

My age has nothing to do with the life you have given her. Brought her to this.

WILLIAM

My actions have nothing to do with her current physical state...if you want to place blame, place it on your almighty God. A God you hold in such high esteem.

JOHN

God cannot be blamed for your indolence and carelessness, always seeking the easy route to comfort instead of giving in to hard and *honest* work, and that is why, should she not survive, Nabby has requested that care of Caroline be granted to Abigail and me.

*(ABIGAIL enters, angry, but keeping her voice quiet.)*

ABIGAIL

What is this? Raised voices, anger.

JOHN

Merely rancor over...

*(turning to WILLIAM, smugly.)*

...what was it William...*past transgressions?*

*(JOHN and WILLIAM turn away from ABIGAIL, who continues her admonishment.)*

ABIGAIL

Rancor and perceived wounds of the past must be put aside. We have no time for personal squabbles or shouted invectives. There is illness in this house, and we mustn't let that illness infect us. We must have peace.

WILLIAM

I am sorry Abigail.

ABIGAIL

This waiting for Doctor Warren to arrive has put us all on edge, as if our nerves are exposed, every word a dagger, every move and every gesture an assault, as we give in to our baser inclinations, placing blame, trying to make sense of that which cannot be made sense of. But we must do better, for the sake of Nabby, who has proven the strongest of us all.

WILLIAM

You are right, Abigail, I must go to her, offer her whatever solace I can.

*(WILLIAM exits. JOHN turns to ABIGAIL sheepishly.)*

JOHN

I lashed out at William. Why, Abigail, can I not hold my tongue?

ABIGAIL

Because you are as obnoxious as your reputation and must always have the last word.

JOHN

I insinuated that he was to blame for Nabby's condition.

ABIGAIL

You did more than insinuate.

JOHN

You heard?

ABIGAIL

I believe they heard you in Boston. No mind, John, we are all seeking answers, reasons why.

JOHN

Will any of our questions ever be answered?

ABIGAIL

Who can say, John. Perhaps there are no answers.

JOHN

Should we stop questioning, then?

ABIGAIL

Never, John. If we stop questioning, we stop searching.

JOHN

And if we stop searching?

*(JOHN and ABIGAIL smile at each other as light fades on Long Room.)*

ACT ONE

v.

*(Light rises on NABBY'S bedroom. WILLIAM enters.)*

NABBY

You and Father have had another row.

WILLIAM

He is a man of strong conviction.

NABBY

*(lightly.)*

Pig-headed is also a term befitting his tirades. I have heard mother say so often enough.

*(WILLIAM smiles. NABBY continues.)*

Have you had breakfast? You sometimes become short when you haven't eaten.

WILLIAM

I have, but you haven't eaten anything since yesterday morning.

NABBY

I cannot. My nerves, too, are raw.

*(an uncomfortable silence. NABBY continues.)*

The success of this operation must be depended upon. I have brought enough pain to all of you.

WILLIAM

It is neither your duty nor obligation to comfort us.

NABBY

Then why does everyone go silent when I enter a room? My own daughter would not catch my eye. My father has been avoiding me, has not yet been to see me this morning. The feeling of being shunned is palpable, an indiscernible current in the air.

WILLIAM

We are not shunning you, we are afraid of possibly saying the wrong thing...

NABBY

What could you possibly say that could make this any worse than it is? It is the silence around it which makes this unbearable. This has always been a family of strong ideas and stated opinions.

WILLIAM

We only wish to keep the peace.

NABBY

That is not what I heard from downstairs. If the anger I heard from that room is proof, then you have failed if your mission is to keep the peace. But I cast no aspersions. I leave such calumnies and slights to the politicians and those far more advanced in the game of verbal sparring than I am. But...I am ill. I have cancer in my breast, and I accept my fate, whatever that fate may be, but I need to know that there is strength behind me. Without that, I don't know that I can get through this.

WILLIAM

We have been thoughtless and insensitive.

NABBY

I feel I shoulder the responsibility of easing the burden of the well, the healthy. And today, I don't know that I can shoulder that.

WILLIAM

It is our turn to be strong and we shall stand with you.

NABBY

If I die, then you will be left in pain, while I will be well out of it. That I cannot alter or apologize for, yet I am made to feel I must apologize for it...

WILLIAM

*(going to NABBY.)*

Nabby...

NABBY

*(turning away.)*

No, let me speak. Once you are marked, branded a victim of this cancer, these tumors dictate all else. I feel I am no longer a wife, mother, daughter...but a burden, bringing fear and dread. I see the looks, I hear the voices...the whispers and the shouts. There is apprehension, nervousness, anger...

WILLIAM

Nabby, please, I must ask something.

NABBY

Questions require answers. And answers are not always what one wants to hear.

WILLIAM

Do you blame me...for your...for this...

NABBY

Cancer. You can say it, William. Shying away from the word does not purge the body of the disease, yet everyone seems so afraid of uttering that one word. At least in my presence.

WILLIAM

Do you think that I, in some way, brought this...cancer...on, through my dealings, my missteps?

NABBY

Nobody knows for sure how closely related the mind and body are, how one may adversely affect the other...but no, I believe my illness is my own, my body, and nothing I have been through or endured through your troubles, the trials, the shame, are responsible for it.

WILLIAM

Shame? So, you still rebuke me. For how long am I expected to supplicate for forgiveness, kowtow, humble, and debase myself to regain your favor?

NABBY

You have been imprudent, careless and it would be remiss of me to state otherwise. But I do not place blame. It is far too late for that.

WILLIAM

The why did you marry me?

NABBY

For love. Long before those other traits were made aware to me. In London, all those years ago, I saw a man so charming and accomplished.

WILLIAM

Do you still love me?

NABBY

Are you seeking comfort in the chance that if I die, a favorable answer will ease your conscience?

WILLIAM

My conscience needs no easing.

NABBY

Do you not take responsibility then for your misguided decisions?

WILLIAM

I take responsibility for choosing risks, but I do not, cannot, and will not accept responsibility for the outcome of those risks. Risks that were taken that may have been of great benefit to my family had the outcome been different.

NABBY

You think it a benefit my son was jailed and tortured? That we have suffered degradation and public castigation in wake of your professional suicide?

WILLIAM

You sound so like your father at times.

NABBY

I am not my father; my mind is my own.

WILLIAM

So it is simply your position, your social standing that matters to you?

NABBY

To my children.

WILLIAM

And me? Is there any of that concern left for me?

NABBY

I have often been unhappy with you.

WILLIAM

Yet you remained my wife.

NABBY

Divorce carries the weight of social stigma, a public stigma that may have affected my children's prospects. But truth be told, William, for it may be our last chance at truth, my mother and I discussed the possibility of such an act. And should I die, I request care of Caroline be granted to my parents.

WILLIAM

So that is true. Your father said as much. Do you really hate me so?

NABBY

No. No, William, I could never hate you...but I cannot place trust in you that you will see to Caroline's moral being in continuing her religious upbringing. I witnessed her questioning and moral dilemma this morning as she brushed out my hair.

WILLIAM

Is it simply her “*moral being*” you are concerned with?

NABBY

There is also your seeming inability to earn a stable living, to bring a child up in security...

WILLIAM

So, I have failed you at every turn?

NABBY

There is no failure in the children I have borne.

WILLIAM

Look what we have become. Arguing, slinging arrows on the day we are to face our greatest crisis, when we should come together.

NABBY

You sound fearful, William. But I do not know for certain if it is fear of the unknown outcome of this operation or fear of my harsh judgement of you.

WILLIAM

Perhaps both, but you still have not answered my question.

NABBY

Which question, there are so many.

WILLIAM

Do you still love me?

NABBY

An unhappy marriage cannot be saved by crisis, no matter how great the crisis.

*(CAROLINE enters, worried, anxious.)*

CAROLINE

I am sorry Mother, Father...Doctor Warren has arrived.

*(NABBY and WILLIAM start, looking at each other and reach for each other's hand as light fades.)*

ACT ONE

vi.

*(Light rises on the Long Room. ABIGAIL is seated, head turned away from her husband, eyes downcast. JOHN is at the mantle of the fireplace, right, his back to Abigail. JOHN speaks, as he studies a portrait of Joseph Warren hanging above the mantle. JOHN gingerly reaches out to touch the canvas of the portrait as he speaks.)*

JOHN

When a person dies before his time, all that is remembered are the final moments. The unfinished life is never examined beyond the last remaining days.

ABIGAIL

We must stop speaking of death, when the outcome is not yet known.

*(JOHN turns to ABIGAIL.)*

JOHN

I have known since young manhood what I wanted to do...nay...was destined to do. For I did not choose it, it chose me. If I die today, at my advanced age, I have accomplished what I set out to do. Whatever they may say about me, whatever praise or condemnation may follow me through the years of this life and beyond is of no consequence. All I can say is that I've done my best, as husband, father, statesman.

ABIGAIL

*(smirking.)*

Statesman? Don't underestimate, you were President after all.

JOHN

*(smiling.)*

Glorified congressman. I was hardly Presidential in physical stature, quiet manner, nor popular deed.

ABIGAIL

Your modesty is misplaced. Your many accomplishments over these past years, resounding successes.

JOHN

*(chuckling softly.)*

You can hardly be relied upon in that estimation. You are too close to the subject himself and your judgement is tainted...

ABIGAIL

Blinded perhaps, for there is nothing tainted about my feelings for you, John. Even after all these years.

JOHN

Joyous ones I hope.

ABIGAIL

Not all the years joyous, but every moment fulfilling.

JOHN

When I need you most, you are always there.

*(ABIGAIL rises and moves to JOHN.)*

ABIGAIL

Not "there," John. Here, by your side. Where I will always be. And today we shall need each other. So much more than ever before.

JOHN

What has it all been for? The fighting, the sacrifices, the great loss of life over all these years?

ABIGAIL

A better world.

JOHN

But is it a better world, or do we simply tell ourselves that to convince ourselves that our reasonings and actions were the right ones?

ABIGAIL

"Are" the right ones. You have no need of justifying any of your decisions, John, for it is a better world.

JOHN

Better for whom?

ABIGAIL

You are morose, understandably so given the facts of the day, but the world is a better place for all of us. Our sons and daughters, their sons and daughters.

JOHN

And what of our daughter, Abigail? Our Nabby. My Nabby. Though she is no longer a child, a father, a parent should not have to face...

*(JOHN turns away, but quickly recomposes himself.)*

Is it a better world for her? Will she live to accomplish what she was put here to do?

ABIGAIL

It is in each of us to deal with the lot provided us by God Almighty.

JOHN

Are we doing the right thing?

ABIGAIL

If we don't, she will die.

JOHN

And if she dies because of it?

ABIGAIL

That is out of our hands and her suffering will end.

JOHN

I feel as if we are talking of putting down a dog. Parents are not supposed to put down their children, yet that's what it feels like. There is a special bond between a parent and the first born...son or daughter, a child is supposed to outlive the parent.

ABIGAIL

In a perfect world, John...but you know as well as I, that we do not live in a perfect world.

JOHN

*(bitterly.)*

Merely a better one?

*(ABIGAIL does not answer. JOHN continues.)*

Then I ask again, what has it all been for? Is better all we can ever hope for? Is better ever good enough?

*(WILLIAM enters. JOHN and ABIGAIL go silent as they turn to him.)*

WILLIAM

They need you upstairs, Abigail, John. They are ready.

*(JOHN and ABIGAIL clasp hands, tightly. ABIGAIL speaks.)*

ABIGAIL

We are doing the right thing.

JOHN

How are we ever to know for sure?

ABIGAIL

Past and future are out of our control. All we can be sure of is the moment.

JOHN

And when the moment passes?

ABIGAIL

That is God's will, and answers and reasons will become clear when He deems us to know.

JOHN

Then I pray to Him now.

ABIGAIL

Our prayers *will* see us through, of that I am certain. We must go.

JOHN

I will follow momentarily.

*(ABIGAIL and WILLIAM exit. JOHN pours himself a brandy from the decanter on a side table, raises a silent toast to the portrait above the mantle and quickly drinks, emptying the glass in one swallow, as light fades on the Long Room.)*

ACT ONE

vii.

*(The red glow of a coal stove can be seen in NABBY'S bedroom. As it becomes brighter, light rises on DOCTOR WARREN and NABBY in the bedroom. NABBY is seated in the chair, which now faces out. Far down, a small table on which are the medical instruments to be used during the surgery, along with some towels and a wash basin. DOCTOR WARREN speaks.)*

DOCTOR WARREN

There will be no surprises, Nabby. I will talk you through the entire procedure as it moves along.

*(ABIGAIL, CAROLINE and WILLIAM enter, as DOCTOR WARREN continues.)*

There will be no cut without your knowledge. There will be pain, perhaps great, perhaps not, but I will work as expediently as possible to minimize that pain. Do you understand?

NABBY

Yes, Doctor Warren.

DOCTOR WARREN

Then we shall begin.

*(NABBY reaches out her hand, to CAROLINE.)*

NABBY

Caroline...my daughter.

*(CAROLINE stands, transfixed, her eyes wide, darting about the room in fear. ABIGAIL goes to NABBY and takes her hand.)*

ABIGAIL

What can we do, Doctor Warren?

*(DOCTOR WARREN picks up a thick, heavy, iron spatula from the table. He holds it out. WILLIAM moves to take it.)*

DOCTOR WARREN

Be sure the coals remain hot. Place this iron so that it is heated to the highest temperature possible.

WILLIAM

*(moving to the coal stove.)*

What is this to be used for?

DOCTOR WARREN

To cauterize the incisions as I cut away at the tumors.

*(WILLIAM places the spatula in the coal stove. DOCTOR WARREN continues.)*

John...Abigail?

ABIGAIL

*(trying to keep her voice on an even keel, choking back tears.)*

He'll be...he'll be along directly.

DOCTOR WARREN

*(crossing to NABBY and patting her hand gently.)*

Nabby, we must strap you down now. You must try to remain as still as possible. The sooner we can get through this, the less pain you will feel.

*(NABBY nods her head in accord, a dazed look on her face. DOCTOR WARREN puts his hands on NABBY'S shoulders and gives her a slight push. The chair she is sitting in is now reclined so NABBY is lying almost flat out. DOCTOR WARREN continues.)*

Abigail, summon the courage and strength of a mother, and remember, this is all for the best.

*(ABIGAIL and DOCTOR WARREN reach under the seat of the chair and pull out attached, leather straps which they cross over NABBY'S abdomen and left arm, her right arm remaining free. They then attach additional straps over her legs, pulling them taut. JOHN enters.)*

JOHN

By God, what savagery is this?

*(when the straps are secured, DOCTOR WARREN turns to JOHN.)*

DOCTOR WARREN

John, no father should see his daughter in this state, but I assure you, her modesty will be protected.

*(turning to ABIGAIL, then CAROLINE.)*

Abigail, Caroline, we must expose the diseased breast.

*(DOCTOR WARREN crosses down to the table, reaching for a long stick with a razor attached at one end. He also reaches for a long, multi-pronged fork, as ABIGAIL and CAROLINE unbutton NABBY'S dress, pulling it off the right shoulder. DOCTOR WARREN crosses to the chair and straddles NABBY'S legs, his back to the audience as light fades. Only the glow from the coal stove can be seen.)*

ACT ONE

viii.

*(Low light rises down, at the edge of the raised platform that is NABBY'S bedroom. The rest of the room, including the chair NABBY is strapped to, remains in darkness, but for the red glow of the coal stove. DOCTOR WARREN steps out of the shadows down to the medical table at the edge of the platform. He speaks.)*

DOCTOR WARREN

What you will witness may appear barbaric. You mustn't react, mustn't upset the patient, who will undoubtedly cry out in pain.

*(ABIGAIL steps out of the shadows and joins DOCTOR WARREN downstage.)*

ABIGAIL

We understand, Doctor Warren. And will obey.

*(JOHN steps out of the shadows and joins them.)*

JOHN

Is there nothing we can give her for the pain?

DOCTOR WARREN

No, John, our remedies for pain are ineffectual and may actually do more harm and it is best to proceed quickly to reduce that pain so recovery can begin.

*(DOCTOR WARREN holds up the tools of the operation, as a bright spot comes up on NABBY, standing up, by the chair. She remains silent, motionless, her left arm pressed tightly to her side.)*

Please raise and pull the patient's right arm, up over her head and behind to raise the breast. Hold that position.

*(as DOCTOR WAREEN speaks, NABBY slowly raises her right arm, bringing it up and behind her head, thrusting her chest forward. WILLIAM and CAROLINE step down to the edge of the platform. DOCTOR WARREN continues, mimicking what he is describing.)*

DOCTOR WARREN

Nabby, you will feel a pinch as I insert the prongs into the breast tissue to raise it from the chest cavity.

*(NABBY visibly winces, clutching her fists as DOCTOR WARREN thrusts the fork forward and slowly lifts it as he reaches out with the razor. CAROLINE gasps loudly. DOCTOR WARREN turns to her, admonishing, still holding the fork in place, as NABBY trembles.)*

Please, we must have silence...Nabby, you must try to remain still.

*(DOCTOR WARREN again turns out, razor at the ready. He speaks quietly.)*

I will make the initial incision, Nabby. Cutting around the base of the breast.

*(DOCTOR WARREN moves the razor in a slow, circular motion below the height of the fork. NABBY grunts loudly between clenched teeth. ABIGAIL turns away, JOHN and WILLIAM look on horrified, CAROLINE buries her face in her father's chest.)*

NABBY

I will not cry out...he may cut my flesh, but I will not cry out...

*(as DOCTOR WARREN continues his "cut," NABBY speaks frantically, her voice breaking with pain. She recites the Lord's Prayer, quickly, repeatedly as the cutting continues, each recitation more frantic as she stands immobile.)*

Our Father  
Who art in heaven  
Hallowed be thy name  
Thy kingdom come  
They will be done  
On earth as it is I heaven

Our Father  
Who art in heaven  
Hallowed be thy name  
Thy kingdom come  
They will be done  
On earth as it is I heaven

Our Father  
Who art in heaven  
Hallowed be thy name  
Thy kingdom come  
They will be done  
On earth as it is I heaven

DOCTOR WARREN

*(slowly lifting the fork.)*

I will now remove the breast tissue.

NABBY

*(continuing her prayer through the agony.)*

And forgive us our debts  
As we forgive our debtors  
For Thine is the kingdom  
The power and the glory  
Forever

*(her voice becoming louder, more strained, as she twists her body.)*

Amen...

DOCTOR WARREN

Be still, Nabby.

NABBY

*(louder still.)*

Amen...

DOCTOR WARREN

You must remain still...

NABBY

*(a scream that only she can here.)*

Amen...

*(NABBY stands, panting as DOCTOR WARREN turns away and places the razor and fork on the table. NABBY continues in anguish.)*

NABBY

I will not cry out...I must not... One pain is lessened by another's anguish. My pain cannot be lessened, I will not bring more anguish than I already have...

*(DOCTOR WARREN turns to WILLIAM.)*

DOCTOR WARREN

The iron.

*(WILLIAM, pulled from his reverie, crosses to the coal stove. Wrapping a towel around the handle of the spatula, WILLIAM carries it to DOCTOR WARREN, who takes it. He speaks.)*

Nabby, I am going to close the outer edge of the incision, to better concentrate on the tumors themselves. You will feel great heat...

*(DOCTOR WARREN lowers the spatula as if pressing it against NABBY'S breast. ABIGAIL, JOHN, and CAROLINE look away, a range of emotions playing along their faces. WILLIAM stands, silently, waiting to be handed the spatula to replace it on the burning coals.)*

NABBY

*(her body tightening against the pain, but she does not cry out. She speaks through deep breaths, trying to remain upright though suffering.)*

A wretched soul, bruised with adversity,  
We bid be quiet when we hear it cry;  
But were we burdened with like weight of pain,  
As much or more we should ourselves complain.

*(DOCTOR WARREN continues cauterizing the edge of the wound while NABBY continues speaking, as CAROLINE runs from the room.)*

Caroline, my dear Caroline...I will not leave you...

*(DOCTOR WARREN lifts the spatula, NABBY groans, but does not cry out. ABIGAIL starts.)*

ABIGAIL

Dear God.

DOCTOR WARREN

William, remove this to the coals.

*(JOHN turns to ABIGAIL, as WILLIAM takes the spatula to the coal stove.)*

JOHN

Perhaps you should go, Abigail, see to Caroline.

*(ABIGAIL looks from DOCTOR WARREN to JOHN.)*

ABIGAIL

A mother's place is by her daughter through her daughter's darkest time.

*(DOCTOR WARREN picks up the fork and the razor and turns out.)*

DOCTOR WARREN

You are going to feel some pulling, Nabby, as I cut these tumors from you. You must remain still...

*(DOCTOR WARREN reaches out with the medical instruments. NABBY goes rigid, standing straight and still, her eyes squeezed shut, her left fist pressed firmly against her thigh, her right arm still stretched over her head and behind. NABBY grimaces, but she makes no outward sound as DOCTOR WARREN manipulates the tools, prodding with the fork, cutting with the razor, turning to the wash basin as if depositing bits of cancerous flesh from the fork. NABBY moans, low then goes silent. JOHN and ABIGAIL turn away. WILLIAM is frozen, eyes wide. The stage goes black but for the glow of the coal stove and the spot on NABBY, changing, becoming somewhat hazy, unnatural, creating a dream-like atmosphere. NABBY'S arms are now free to move. She appears happy, relaxed. When she speaks, her voice is lilting, a high, girlish pitch. She smiles.)*

NABBY

*(looking off, gaily speaking to an unseen person in her mind's eye.)*

Father never liked you Royall, was not going to let you have my hand. I don't think I ever told you, when Mother wrote him about us, his reaction was far from cordial or courteous.

*(low, hazy spots rise on JOHN and ABIGAIL, who smile back at NABBY.)*

JOHN

***I confess I dont like the Subject at all. . . . My Child is a Model, as you represent her and as I know her...***

ABIGAIL

I have never suggested otherwise against our daughter's virtues, I was merely relaying an honest account that Mr. Tyler has been rather ***negligent in persueing his buisness in the way of his profession; and dissipated two or 3 years of his Life and too much of his fortune for to reflect upon with pleasure.***

JOHN

And you think this a suitable match for our daughter?

ABIGAIL

He has since reformed and on his way to success: ***he cannot fail making a distinguished figure in his profession if he steadily persues it.*** I insinuated nothing more.

JOHN

*She is not to be the Prize, I hope of any, even reformed Rake. . . .*

ABIGAIL

Nobody is offering her up as a prize.

NABBY

*(laughing, speaking, playfully looking from JOHN to ABIGAIL.)*

You mustn't worry about me, Father, but I fear this trip to Paris and London will be of more advantage to Mother than benefit to me, for I think Mother was more captured by Mr. Tyler's charms than I...

ABIGAIL

*(blushing, but indignant.)*

Why...to even propose such nonsense.

NABBY

I was simply in love with being in love. I made no promises and acted in no manner to lead him to think anything more was to be expected.

ABIGAIL

*(clicking her tongue.)*

Nabby...a young girl of seventeen should have more of a *want of sensibility*...

*(JOHN turns to ABIGAIL, lightly admonishing her.)*

JOHN

***In the Name of all that is tender, Madame, dont criticise Your Daughter for those qualities which are her greatest Glory her Reserve, and her Prudence, for she has plainly stated she has made no untoward advances or promises, which I am amazed to hear you call Want of Sensibility. The more Silent She is in Company, the better for me in exact Proportion and I would have this observed as a Rule by the Mother as well as the Daughter.***

ABIGAIL

*(somewhat vexed, but keeping her voice even.)*

My lack of silence, John, is only so you may, from time to time, hear a voice other than your own.

*(spot comes up on WILLIAM, who smiles at NABBY, who returns his not so subtle gaze. ABIGAIL slyly turns to JOHN, smiling.)*

ABIGAIL

And William Stephens Smith, John? You approve?

JOHN

*(proudly.)*

A fine man, upstanding, a solid future...

*(becoming agitated, speaking harshly, trying to keep his composure.)*

...unlike that puffed up, flamboyantly dressed buffoon who acts as lawyer and statesman yet dabbles in the undignified, so-called *art* of writing for the stage.

ABIGAIL

*(facetiously.)*

But you have never met Royall Tyler, how do you know so much about him?

JOHN

I still have friends, keep my ear to the ground as it were.

ABIGAIL

And you will accept their accounts over my own?

JOHN

A mother cannot be trusted in knowing what is best when it comes to a suitor for a daughter than does a father. We see with different eyes. William Smith will bring her honor and respect, of that I am sure.

*(spot fades on WILLIAM.)*

ABIGAIL

Hope for the best, John.

*(spot fades on ABIGAIL.)*

JOHN

But prepare for the worst.

*(spot fades on JOHN. NABBY stands, confused, lost, as light rises on the down edge of her bedroom. DOCTOR WARREN stands with medical equipment, the fork and the*

*razor. He speaks, as spot on NABBY resumes its previous brightness. NABBY presses her left arm to her side and raises her right arm above her head and back.)*

DOCTOR WARREN

The iron.

*(WILLIAM crosses to the coal stove. DOCTOR WARREN puts the equipment on the table. WILLIAM brings the iron to DOCTOR WARREN, who slowly lowers it as NABBY lets out an internal rasping cry that never escapes her lips. She grimaces as her body shudders, stifling a scream so that it becomes a long, low, guttural wail that comes from deep inside, the sound of the deepest anguish suppressed. When she speaks, her voice is tremulous, resigned, full of torment. Her breathing becomes short, strained breaths, as if gasping for air.)*

NABBY

Weary with toil,  
I haste me to my bed  
The dear repose for limbs with travel tired;

ABIGAIL

Doctor Warren...what is happening...

*(NABBY'S breathing becomes more strained as her body convulses, until her breathing becomes more regular, her voice becoming stronger by degrees.)*

NABBY

But then begins a journey in my head

DOCTOR WARREN

Convulsions, she must be kept still...

NABBY

To work my mind, when body's work's expir'd:

JOHN

In God's name, help her, Doctor Warren.

NABBY

For then my thoughts-from far where I abide

DOCTOR WARREN

*(forceful, but measured.)*

Hold her still, she must remain immobile...

NABBY

Intend a zealous pilgrimage to thee,

JOHN

*(becoming frantic.)*

Nabby...Nabby...please...

NABBY

*(slowly lowering her right arm.)*

And keep my drooping eyelids open wide.

DOCTOR WARREN

Her spasms are subsiding...

NABBY

*(smiling, peaceful.)*

For thee, and for myself no quiet find.

*(spot goes out on NABBY.)*

DOCTOR WARREN

We must hurry...she may lose consciousness.

*(stage goes black, but for the glow of the coal stove, which very, very slowly dims until the glow is gone.)*

*END ACT ONE*

ACT TWO

i.

*(Light comes up on CAROLINE sitting in the Long Room. She is still, a blank look on her face. WILLIAM enters. He crosses to the brandy, pours himself a small shot, quickly drains the glass, pours another and drains that, as CAROLINE watches silently. WILLIAM turns to her.)*

WILLIAM

Caroline.

CAROLINE

*(happy to see WILLIAM, but anxious over what to her is the unknown outcome of the surgery, CAROLINE'S voice trembles.)*

Papa...

WILLIAM

*(smiling, going to her, teasing.)*

It has been a long while since I heard you call me Papa...I miss it, I've become so accustomed to your grown-up use of "Father." I missed my little girl.

CAROLINE

Mother?

WILLIAM

Doctor Warren is...

CAROLINE

She's not...

*(CAROLINE stands trembling, the words won't come. WILLIAM pulls her close as he realizes what she has been thinking.)*

WILLIAM

No, no...it is over, and she is resting.

CAROLINE

When shall I be allowed to go to her?

WILLIAM

Not soon, I think. She will need time for sleep.

*(WILLIAM turns away, as JOHN and ABIGAIL enter. They are ashen, silent. ABIGAIL sits, JOHN takes his position in front of the mantle looking at the portrait of Joseph Warren. WILLIAM crosses and pours another brandy. CAROLINE stands, watching them. After a moment of heavy silence, JOHN speaks.)*

JOHN

*(turning to WILLIAM.)*

A man who drinks alone is in danger of being thought a drunkard. I'll join you and save your reputation.

*(JOHN crosses as WILLIAM fills a second glass. JOHN stops, placing his hand on ABIGAIL'S shoulder.)*

And you, Abigail?

ABIGAIL

*(not looking up, her pained expression not changing. She speaks. A mere whisper.)*

No, John. Nothing.

*(JOHN takes the glass from WILLIAM and sips. There is a strained silence. Nobody moves or speaks for some time. After an uncomfortable stretch, JOHN speaks.)*

JOHN

Twenty-five minutes.

*(they all turn to JOHN, who continues.)*

Twenty-five minutes of the most barbaric...gut-wrenching...

*(ABIGAIL stands, speaking directly, interrupting JOHN.)*

ABIGAIL

John...

*(ABIGAIL nods, to CAROLINE.)*

JOHN

*(looking to CAROLINE, stammering.)*

I...I...

*(sighing, composing his thoughts.)*

How insensitive of me. Caroline, do forgive me.

CAROLINE

Mother always tells me to speak my mind, as you have always spoken yours. I am no longer a child and must start behaving as a young woman experiencing all of life's setbacks.

ABIGAIL

Do not dwell on the negative, you misunderstood our words, Caroline, there is much happiness.

CAROLINE

There was no happiness today or for well over a year. Longer even.

*(this slight does not go unnoticed by WILLIAM.)*

WILLIAM

Then it best, I think, to concentrate on the good times, the happy times.

CAROLINE

Perhaps, but the bad seems to outweigh the good. Are happy times as memorable as the sad?

ABIGAIL

Of course they are, more so.

CAROLINE

Why then do good and happy times not have the ability to change us, as the bad do of shaping our futures?

ABIGAIL

The good times create memories that get us through.

CAROLINE

Is getting through enough?

WILLIAM

Getting through is what keeps us going. Your mother got through, so she can spend time here with you, and us.

ABIGAIL

Getting through proves what is really important.

CAROLINE

But I could not get through. Could not stay with her...

WILLIAM

Of that I am glad, no child should witness...

CAROLINE

*(not listening, turning to ABIGAIL.)*

If what you say is true, Grandmother, that getting through shows us what is really important...what does that say about me, about what's important, when I could not *get through* for my own mother? Does that then not mean my mother is not important enough? Have I failed as a daughter?

WILLIAM

No, Caroline.

CAROLINE

But you stayed. You all stayed.

WILLIAM

Not seeing you upset is much consolation to your mother, I am sure.

CAROLINE

I am too old to be told a parent's comforting lie.

WILLIAM

She would not want you to feel this way.

CAROLINE

Do not deign to dispute or belittle my feelings over my mistakes.

ABIGAIL

Nobody is disputing your feelings.

WILLIAM

Mistakes will be made in this life, Caroline. We can apologize for some, try to rectify others, but they remain, and we face them.

CAROLINE

Then I will face mine and say that I am sorry.

JOHN

My dear child, what could you possibly have to be sorry about?

CAROLINE

She needed me, and I could not stay, could not take her hand. After all she has done for us, I could not give her that much.

WILLIAM

There is no shame in action based on emotion.

*(WILLIAM turns and refills his glass.)*

ABIGAIL

The worst is over. We all deal with our courage in different ways.

CAROLNE

I ran from the room like a frightened child. That can hardly be construed as courage.

JOHN

Courage is not always standing up in the face of adversity or facing a bullet in war. We have all shown our fears in this matter, have all turned away from aspects of it, from the truth of it...but now the time for true courage is near. She will need great care, as she begins to heal.

CAROLINE

I will do all I can...

ABIGAIL

You will do what you can, of that we have no doubt, but you have other responsibilities, you must return to school before long. Nabby shall remain here...

WILLIAM

My duties require I return to New York.

ABIGAIL

Yes, understandable, but you also must understand that Nabby cannot, must not, be moved, perhaps for quite some time.

WILLIAM

Ah yes, the Adams's wishes far outweigh the needs of others.

ABIGAIL

We are only looking at the practical.

JOHN

She has been through a dreadful ordeal, far more dreadful than what we witnessed. I will never erase those images from my mind, but *she* must carry the scars and the memory of that pain, not us.

CAROLINE

*(sharply.)*

Please stop bickering.

*(they are stopped by CAROLINE'S words. She continues, calmly.)*

We must not fight amongst ourselves, not now, not anymore.

*(after a moment, JOHN speaks, he is confounded, shaking his head.)*

JOHN

How is it she never cried out? What must have been going through her head?

WILLIAM

I have seen men in battle, cry out for far less.

ABIGAIL

The will to survive is strong, stronger than any of us can imagine, and may never know unless we, ourselves, are faced with the choices of life or death.

JOHN

A choice only the young can make. At 76 years of age, the inevitability of death is sometimes more comforting than the thought of continuing on.

*(DOCTOR WARREN enters. JOHN pours a brandy and hands it to DOCTOR WARREN, as all watch, waiting. DOCTOR WARREN sips, then speaks.)*

DCOTOR WARREN

As we have witnessed in this, our own lifetimes, medicine and how we practice it continues to grow and change. New discoveries made, new techniques tried on a daily basis. It is these new discoveries and trials that lead us down new scientific paths. And with these new discoveries, patients face longer lives and less suffering, and I am sure that as we progress, our experiments on ways to reduce the pain of these operations will be successful, and medicines developed that will promote quicker recoveries from these procedures. Unfortunately for Nabby, that day has not yet arrived, but fortunately, as I was reiterating yesterday, we know more today than in previous generations, and future generations will know even more, until perhaps, these cancers can be eradicated. That is not to say, Nabby's recovery will be slow. The incisions must be kept clean, her dressing changed at regular intervals, as her comfort allows. There will be much scarring and the burns to the flesh will make her quite immovable for weeks, perhaps months,

DOCTOR WARREN (*cont.*)

yet. Watching for infection is what we must be vigilant about. She has experienced great physical trauma, but the body is resilient. She will heal and recover from this.

JOHN

How is it she did not cry out?

DOCTOR WARREN

The mind, John, is as resilient as the body. We are, none of us in this room, nor the people we know, murderers. So how is it that a man, when he becomes a soldier, can fire and take the life of another when in his everyday routine, the thought would be as abhorrent and repugnant as killing his own child? He must see the world from two vantage points, must separate himself from the man he is to the duty at hand. And I believe it is the same with the patient undergoing as extensive an operation as Nabby has just undergone. The patient knows that in order to survive, she must endure the torture, but the woman cannot, and like the man from the soldier, must separate herself from the patient. Nabby, for all intents and purposes, was not in that room today. Of course, this is all theory, the mysteries of the mind are far more complicated than the facts of the body. She made a choice, she separated herself from the patient and looked through a window in her mind's eye, saw the other side, and chose not to pass through to that side but to remain here.

WILLIAM

(*a derisive chortle as he speaks indignantly.*)

Come now Doctor Warren, that is the sort of babble one spouts to appease the feeble minded. She did not cry out because she did not wish us to suffer.

JOHN

Us suffer? *She* has suffered.

WILLIAM

(*turning, reeling.*)

You only ever listen to yourself. Nabby told me, upstairs, just before you arrived Doctor Warren, that she felt she was supporting us, that she was ashamed of bringing this pain upon us all and wished to shield us from it.

JOHN

She had no such responsibility.

WILLIAM

Did you ask her? Have you asked her anything about her feelings?

ABIGAIL

That is all we have been concerned with.

WILLIAM

Yes, Abigail, you perhaps, and Caroline, but you yourself John, admitted, in this very room just a short time ago, that you could not face her.

JOHN

I was merely saying...

WILLIAM

Don't. Don't excuse yourself from the shame I share with you. Maybe suffering is borne better by women...maybe men do not have the capacity for such deep feeling. Perhaps a mother's bond, a bond the father does not share, is strongest, but you and I both know, John, we were avoiding her because of how her state made us feel, and she was well aware of that.

ABIGAIL

*(speaking calmly, her words measured, appeasing.)*

We have spent the morning at each other, accusing, blaming, but now the fear and tensions have ended and we must admit our shortcomings, all our shortcomings, and perhaps we may never forgive others for what we perceive as slights or wrongdoings, so be it, but as Caroline so wisely said, we must not fight among ourselves, not anymore. If nothing else, today proved that all this fighting and holding onto resentments achieves nothing in the end. Our Nabby has survived not only the tumors, this cancer, but has come through the operation with the utmost success...

*(DOCTOR WARREN turns away, a worried expression on his face. ABIGAIL continues.)*

So please, let us concentrate on that, and look forward, not behind, for the past is past, let us leave it where it belongs.

JOHN

Thankfully, more reasonable heads than mine, or yours, William, prevail. Perhaps women have not only the capacity for deeper feeling but for more rationale.

*(turning to CAROLINE.)*

I am glad to see, Caroline, the fine, and thoughtful, young woman you have become.

*(a nod to WILLIAM, not so much an apology as simple acknowledgment.)*

William...

WILLIAM

*(raising his glass to JOHN, a courtesy, not acquiescence.)*

John.

DOCTOR WARREN

If I may, though I not be family...

JOHN

The Warren family will always be considered family under this roof. Please, Doctor Warren, you have our undivided attention.

DOCTOR WARREN

*(slightly bowing to the assembled group.)*

Thank you, John, you know how I feel about all of you.

*(he sips before speaking, as JOHN comes to take his glass refilling it as DOCTOR WARREN speaks.)*

All of us in this room, with the exception of you, dear Caroline, because the events I speak of were before you were born...but we have all witnessed the horror of war, and, despite the reasons for that war, we held strong, came together, fought together in the face of great suffering and uncertainty. And had that war failed, John, you, William, Thomas, James, Ben...and so many other brave men and women would have been hanged for treason. But the outcome, whatever it may have been, for we never could have foretold what fortune had in store for us, proved that it is worth fighting for our ideals, and I witnessed fraternity and the ability to put all differences aside for one common cause, to celebrate the life that could be, not accepting the status quo. And instead of seeing my dear friends and colleagues dangling from trees in warning, the colonists came together, personal discrepancies of no matter, and a great victory was ours. I witnessed that again today, under this roof, up in that room...three generations of a family stood together and fought a war, and we have scored a victory.

ABIGAIL

You truly believe the operation was successful?

DOCTOR WARREN

We shall leave it for time to tell.

*(JOHN starts at this, but does not speak, as DOCTOR WARREN turns away. ABIGAIL continues.)*

ABIGAIL

*(ecstatic.)*

This operation has been a *furnace of affliction...what a blessing it is to have extirpated so terrible an enemy.*

CAROLINE

Let us hope we can learn to hold onto that blessing.

ABIGAIL

I don't believe any of us will ever forget...

CAROLINE

But we do forget. As Doctor Warren pointed out, fraternity and camaraderie got you through the war...

JOHN

A great and singular victory.

CAROLINE

But I have not witnessed much of that solidarity. I live in the world of the ordinary, with no great earth-shattering event to shape my life.

JOHN

An ordinary life is comfortable and that is what we fought so hard to bring about, that we may all live in ordinary comfort.

CAROLINE

An ordinary life is also filled with bitterness and unkind actions.

WILLIAM

You have a harsh opinion of the world.

CAROLINE

If the truth is harsh, then yes, I do.

ABIGAIL

Today was harsh, and cruel...

CAROLINE

This is not about today. I merely speak from my own perception.

WILLIAM

A girl of sixteen should not harbor such a dark view...

CAROLINE

What else have I seen?

*(WILLIAM feels the admonishment and turns to refill his glass.)*

ABIGAIL

Has life been so cruel?

CAROLINE

Cruel is far too strong a word, Grandmother, but life is not kind, as you well know.

DOCTOR WARREN

We forget, it has taken us a lifetime to witness what you witnessed today, Caroline.

CAROLINE

And in my lifetime, I have witnessed petty aggravations and personal grievances that underlie that which people say makes them happy. I do not understand it.

JOHN

I have listened, with dismay, Caroline, at this bleak portrait you paint of humanity, and I feel it more than mere cynicism that drives your views.

CAROLINE

Let us call it experience.

WILLIAM

Your experiences before today have been confined to school and church.

CAROLINE

*(very pointed, direct.)*

And courtrooms and newspapers. Or have you forgotten, Father...

WILLIAM

Back to "Father," my little girl is gone again.

CAROLINE

Not gone, growing up. As is the natural order of things.

ABIGAIL

We spoke of the natural order of change, Caroline, upstairs before the operation, and the acceptance of those changes.

CAROLINE

Yes, and I believe our views converge, Grandmother. But I am speaking of that which does not change.

DCOTOR WARREN

As you have seen today, Caroline, life is precarious, changes in many ways, every moment of every day.

CAROLINE

It is true, Father, most of my experiences have been confined to school and church, but those places are not immune to malicious gossip and cruel intentions, and the ladies who attend church in praise of an all forgiving God, are just as facetious and harsh in their judgements of others as are the men I hear loitering on street corners or in the back rooms of shops. Disdain and unkind words and deeds for nothing more than spite, simply because a neighbor may not have as much money as another, others too much, a disagreement over where to build a fence, or how society should be run, the second-class citizenship of women and those still enslaved. There is none of the camaraderie you speak of Doctor Warren. The world itself is cruel, for proof of that you simply have to look upstairs, at that woman, my mother, lying there in pain. And because the world is cruel, I will, I am sure, witness war in my lifetime, for men, in their quest for power, can somehow look beyond the horror that will be left in the wake of war, to the control to be gained. And when that time comes, I am sure I will see the fraternity you allude to, but I also know that fraternity will dissipate, fade as the memory of war or whatever tragic event might occur, is nothing more than pages in a history book, and life will resume its ordinary, unkind, course. Why is it great and tragic events pull us together, but the ordinary rips us apart?

*(they all turn from CAROLINE, embarrassed, unable to answer. JOHN speaks.)*

JOHN

There is much we can learn from the young.

WILLIAM

Perhaps it is they who will make this world tolerable for everyone, but there is one thing you are wrong about, Caroline.

CAROLINE

And what is that?

WILLIAM

War is not always about power.

CAROLINE

Is it not?

WILLIAM

No. The last war was about freedom, independence...

CAROLINE

Independence from whom, what?

WILLIAM

Tyranny.

CAROLINE

And tyranny is nothing more than power lorded over the oppressed. If there was no power, there would be no need of a war for independence. I don't know, Father, whether men and women are equally capable of deeper feeling or not, but men are solely responsible for war.

ABIGAIL

Congratulations, Caroline, I commend you.

CAROLINE

I have done nothing to deserve either congratulations, or praise.

ABIGAIL

You have stood up and used your education to its fullest, not wielding it as a weapon, but brandishing it as a flag of victory. Your mother will be proud.

JOHN

Like mother, like daughter, like granddaughter. You, Caroline, may wave the flag of victory, but I humbly wave the white flag of defeat, for I cannot stand up to three such strong-willed females under one roof and survive. That is a war I could never win.

ABIGAIL

A keen and wise observation, John.

CAROLINE

Doctor Warren.

DOCTOR WARREN

Yes, Caroline.

CAROLINE

When shall I be allowed to see Mother?

DOCTOR WARREN

I see no reason why you should not. Speak softly to her, let her hear your soothing voice, but do not expect responses or coherent thought should she speak. Hold her hand, for I believe the presence of those she loves will help her convalesce that much sooner.

ABIGAIL

Do you wish company, Caroline?

CAROLINE

Yes, Grandmother.

*(CAROLINE turns to WILLIAM, who is refilling his glass with brandy.)*

Father? Will you join us?

WILLIAM

Yes.

*(emptying the glass in one, quick swallow.)*

Yes, Caroline, I will.

*(ABIGAIL, CAROLINE and WILLIAM exit as light very dimly rises on NABBY'S bedroom. NABBY is now lying in the bed, blood-stained bandages covering her exposed shoulder and breast. There is much groaning, low, a quiet rumble, light spasms. In the Long Room, DOCTOR WARREN saunters to the portrait hanging over the mantle, he speaks.)*

DOCTOR WARREN

You pay me great tribute, John. Hanging my brother's portrait over the mantle, the place of honor in your home, humbles me whenever I see it.

JOHN

A very fine man who never got to live his life to its natural end.

DOCTOR WARREN

But what a life he lived. And Copley did him justice, leaving the portrait unfinished.

JOHN

To illustrate and celebrate the unfinished life, he said.

DOCTOR WARREN

A reflection of what was, and not what might have been.

JOHN

Caroline is young, Doctor Warren, doesn't fully understand the reasons behind war...

DOCTOR WARREN

*(turning to JOHN.)*

Do any of us really understand the connotations and repercussions of war?

JOHN

Only after the fact, in the wake of the sacrifices brave and great men, like your brother, must make.

DOCTOR WARREN

*(woefully, turning to the portrait.)*

The ultimate sacrifice.

*(after a moment, he turns to JOHN, pulling himself from his reverie.)*

And yes, Caroline is young, tentatively stepping into the adult world with fear and bravado. Were we not just as bitter and confused at her age, lashing out at what we saw as wrongs? And who can hold her culpable, after what she witnessed today? But they, the young, have the content of their bitterness, beginning to put into action all they have amassed in knowledge and limited experience, a rite of passage, as it were.

JOHN

*(smiling.)*

Should we warn Caroline that, despite her efforts to understand the world, she will never truly make sense of it?

*(ABIGAIL, CAROLINE and WILLIAM enter NABBY'S room. As JOHN and DOCTOR WARREN speak in the Long Room below, ABIGAIL pulls the chair close to the bed. CAROLINE sits and takes her mother's hand.)*

DOCTOR WARREN

No. She must, like we have had to, discover the uncertainty of it on her own.

*(DOCTOR WARREN falls silent. JOHN keenly observes him before speaking.)*

JOHN

What is it, Doctor Warren? What is it you are not saying?

DOCTOR WARREN

Is it that obvious?

JOHN

Dark secrets always reveal themselves in expressions, movements, spoken asides. "We shall leave it for time to tell," you said when Abigail spoke of the success of the operation. You don't feel it was as successful as you let on.

DOCTOR WARREN

No, John, I do not. The tumors were far more extensive than I, or Doctor Rush, first presumed. Extending up under the arm and continuing toward the back...infecting more than the breast tissue.

JOHN

But you did remove them?

DOCTOR WARREN

What I could, as much of the diseased tissue as I could see.

JOHN

Then why such unease?

DOCTOR WARREN

Because we still don't know enough and the tumors, John...I did what I could.

JOHN

Dammit, Doctor Warren, is she cured or is she not?

DOCTOR WARREN

*(hesitating momentarily, then speaking plainly.)*

I do not believe she is, but I do no more than guess, assume, for we simply do not know enough of these carcinomas of the body, don't understand how they grow. Our ignorance is the only fact we can rely on.

JOHN

*Facts are stubborn things;*

NABBY

*(lost in delirium.)*

When spring comes...

JOHN

*...and whatever may be our wishes,*

NABBY

And new life begins...

JOHN

*...our inclinations, or the dictates of our passions,*

NABBY

...this old life will be a memory.

*(distraught, ABIGAIL exits.)*

JOHN

...cannot alter the state of facts.

NABBY

But, first, we must get through winter.

CAROLINE

*(speaking softly.)*

The worst is over, Mother.

DOCTOR WARREN

I am sorry, John.

CAROLINE

The worst is over.

*(WILLIAM puts his hand on CAROLINE'S shoulder as light fades on NABBY'S bedroom.)*

DOCTOR WARREN

I wish I could say something more definite, could find words...

JOHN

Words may momentarily placate, Doctor Warren, but they do not work, not really.

DOCTOR WARREN

If we only had another way of seeing, of understanding.

JOHN

Is there any hope?

DOCTOR WARREN

I...the tumors, they...cancer appeared to be spread throughout her body.

*(ABIGAIL enters the Long Room.)*

JOHN

Please, do not tell Abigail, not just yet.

ABIGAIL

Tell me what?

*(JOHN and DOCTOR WARREN, turn to her, surprised by her presence. After a few stuttered attempts, JOHN speaks plainly.)*

JOHN

Nabby, Abigail...

*(ABIGAIL sinks into a chair, wounded, knowing what is being left unsaid. She begins to weep, as light fades.)*

ACT TWO

ii.

*(Light rises on the Long Room. ABIGAIL hurries in, carrying a letter. She calls out, frantically.)*

ABIGAIL

John...John...

*(JOHN enters the Long Rom, concerned.)*

JOHN

What is it? What has happened?

ABIGAIL

*(holding out the letter with trembling fingers.)*

It's...it's from William.

*(tight spot comes up on WILLIAM, standing in a downstage corner of the raised platform. He speaks as JOHN takes the letter from ABIGAIL and reads silently as WILLIAM speaks.)*

WILLIAM

Shortly after arriving home in New York, Nabby began experiencing pain in her abdomen, and along her spine. An initial consultation with a local physician resulted in a diagnosis of rheumatism. But that proved false shortly thereafter as tumors again began forming, not only noticeable to the touch as had previously been the case, but were also discernible to the eye as they began appearing on the skin, along the scars...

*(WILLIAM continues speaking, and JOHN silently reading as dim light rises on NABBY'S bed. NABBY enters dressed in a plain dressing-gown. NABBY coughs uncontrollably, her body wracked with painful spasms. NABBY is being helped into bed by CAROLINE, who exits when NABBY is settled in her bed.)*

By late spring her health worsened as the pain increased. During the past months, Nabby has suffered the most excruciating headaches in addition to her other ills. It is quite obvious the

WILLIAM (*cont.*)

cancer has, indeed, returned, and doctors here, in New York, have acquiesced. She will begin the journey to you soon hereafter, attended by our own, our son, John. The three-hundred-mile journey will be painful, but it her wish *to die in her father's house, to spend her state of convalescence within the vortex of your kindness and assiduities than elsewhere*. I will join her there as soon as I am able, as duty calls me to Washington to attend to urgent business regarding this recent conflict in which we again find ourselves, a young nation, protecting our sovereignty from hostile forces. I must wait until that time when Congress adjourns...

*(JOHN stops reading, stunned, shocked as light fades on WILLIAM. JOHN turns to BIGAIL, full of anger.)*

JOHN

He abandons her, leaving her on her own as this unspeakable disease returns to continue haunting us.

ABIGAIL

She is with family, her son...

JOHN

Performing what is a husband's duty. That long, arduous journey, over open roads, being jostled...no, Abigail, this time I will not forgive.

ABIGAIL

Forgiveness is the mightiest sword, John.

JOHN

A sword has only one purpose, to be used to protect and defend oneself.

ABIGAIL

He has written he will join us as soon as he is able.

JOHN

*(fighting between anger and sorrow.)*

Hiding behind the call of duty. Doing all he can to win a seat in Congress, while his wife...Does he forget what it was like, upstairs in that room, a year and a half ago? Does he forget the horror of what we saw, with our very eyes, and not gleaned from second hand reporting? Can he dismiss the distinct smell of burning flesh as each puff of smoke rose from the drying blood of our daughter's flesh as she was brutally cauterized with no remedy to dull the pain? How is it he can look the other way when what we have been through together has lead us to this recurrence of her malady? What cowardice is his...

*(ABIGAIL speaks sternly, more out of fear than reprobation.)*

ABIGAIL

Fear and cowardice are not the same things, and perhaps he is doing what he feels he must, to quell his own fear and anger, until that time when his presence can and will make a difference. Not everyone has your resolve of personal strength, John, and all men cannot be judged by your high standards.

JOHN

You defend his actions against our Nabby?

ABIGAIL

*(her own anger rising.)*

Only in the context of protecting you from this anger, expending undue energy and thought on that which cannot help the situation.

*(tearful, soothing.)*

Our daughter is coming home, and we should be concentrating on the implications therein, so enough about him, John, I beg you.

*(JOHN stands, turning from ABIGAIL, looking out as he speaks.)*

JOHN

O that my grief were throughly weighed, and my calamity laid in the balances together! For now it would be heavier than the sand of the sea: therefore my words are swallowed up. For the arrows of the Almighty *are* within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit: the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me.

*(JOHN turns to ABIGAIL.)*

It is as if we exist in the Book of Job. The time has come Abigail, we must now, in the truest sense of the words, prepare for the worst.

*(light fades on Long Room.)*

ACT TWO

iii.

*(In the darkness, NABBY cries out in pain, screaming. When light rises on the bedroom, NABBY is lying in bed, her body convulsing. When her pain subsides, she lies panting, groaning. JOHN enters with a bowl of water and some clean towels. His sleeves are rolled up. He places the bowl on the small table, wets a towel, wrings it out, crosses and sits beside NABBY'S bed. She wheezes, her breathing raspy. JOHN carefully wipes NABBY'S forehead, her cheeks. He lovingly bathes her arms and hands as he speaks.)*

JOHN

You are and have always been the shining light in my life. My first born and the most gracious and wonderful daughter a father could hope for. No child has ever brought more joy to a parent than you have brought to me and this house, truly making it a home.

*(when NABBY speaks, it is weak and strained.)*

NABBY

Father...

JOHN

Do not speak.

NABBY

I accept what God has given, am reconciled to my fate.

JOHN

We must hope for the best.

*(JOHN rises, crosses to the bowl and speaks as he wets and wrings out the towel, trying to keep his tears from spilling over and his voice even, as NABBY lets out a stifled scream.)*

The enemy has never been out there, of that we have always been mistaken, for the enemy is within ourselves, in our hatred for one another, in our treatment of our fellow man, and in our bodies, as our bodies turn against us, through age and disease. And you, my dear Nabby, are the brave one who so gallantly fought every war this world has brought to your door. Stood with

JOHN (*cont.*)

dignity and honor in the shadow of disgrace, eloquently, with poise and civility. Never lashing out at the injustice of it all. And now this final war, the war with your body. Though it be a different sort of war, nobody comes back from any war the way they went in, and I will never be the same without you, when this war is finally at its end.

NABBY

In the end, it is God who decides. Not Doctor Warren. Not you, not me...

*(JOHN turns to her.)*

JOHN

Nabby. if there was something, anything I could do to change this or take it away...

NABBY

We may fight against it, but only God chooses who lives and who dies.

*(through clenched teeth and shallow breath.)*

I have only one wish, Father.

JOHN

If it is in my power.

NABBY

I wish to see the garden.

JOHN

Nabby, the strain of the effort would be too much.

NABBY

Please. Spring brings new life, and summer, like a mother, nourishes and sustains that life. I wish to see the sun, smell the fresh summer air. Let me look at the life I am surely leaving.

JOHN

But the pain. I will not, cannot, inflict that upon you.

NABBY

The pain of not again seeing the beauty that is life is far more wretched than the smell of death that fills this room.

*(beseeching through tears and pain.)*

Please.

*(JOHN crosses to the bed and tries to raise NABBY. She cries out in pain, a gut-wrenching cry, as light fades on bedroom.)*

ACT TWO

iv.

*(Spot comes up full on NABBY, lying still in her bed. ABIGAIL sits beside her on the edge of the bed, and slowly crosses NABBY'S arms over her chest as light very slowly rises on the Long Room. When it is up full in the Long Room, CAROLINE enters, followed by WILLIAM. DOCOTR WARREN enters next, followed by JOHN. Nobody speaks for quite some time. ABIGAIL sits on the edge of the bed, clutching her hands to her heart, rocking back in forth in anguish as she speaks.)*

ABIGAIL

***The wound which has lacerated my Bosom cannot be healed. The broken Heart may be bound up; and religion teach submission and Silence, even under the anguish of the Heart, but it can not cure it. The unbidden sigh will rise. And the bitter tear flow long after the Tomb is closed.***

*(after another moment of silence, ABIGAIL stands, kisses NABBY'S forehead and exits as light fades on the bedroom. In the Long Room, JOHN speaks.)*

JOHN

I suppose we will spend what remains of our own lives wondering if we did the right thing in allowing that operation.

*(hastily turning to DCOTOR WARREN.)*

That is, by no means, Doctor Warren, meant as a slight against your talents or a disparagement of the validity of your profession.

DOCTOR WARREN

No offense taken, John, or even considered. Doctors, too, wonder whether or not we prolong the life or the suffering.

CAROLINE

*(as ABIGAIL enters.)*

Can such suffering be considered a life? Was that last year of her life worth it?

DOCTOR WARREN

To her or to us?

WILLIAM

Her suffering is at an end, and in time, I believe, we shall all heal.

ABIGAIL

*To me the loss is irreparable.* And I don't know, Caroline, if she thought the pain worth the extra time on earth or not.

JOHN

To be with her family, she would have, and did, endure that which must be endured. Must these cancers always be a death sentence, Doctor Warren?

DOCTOR WARREN

Not necessarily.

JOHN

Dependent upon what?

DOCTOR WARREN

The stage at which these tumors are discovered, usually by the individual herself.

CAROLINE

Will I suffer the same fate? Are, or can, these tumors be passed down from one generation to another?

DOCTOR WARREN

None of us can say, Caroline. It is possible, but not guaranteed. Many women go through life never experiencing these sorts of tumors or cancers, your grandmother is an example of that.

WILLIAM

Yet her mother is an example that many women do.

DOCTOR WARREN

Let us hope with less and less frequency as time goes on. A discovery tomorrow could change the way we see disease, treat it. Science and medicine never stop evolving, there are no answers and what we know today will, thankfully, be useless tomorrow.

WILLIAM

Your theories and explanations are neither comforting nor convincing.

DOCTOR WARREN

I never claim them to be truth.

## JOHN

Truth be damned. What have any of us in this room ever achieved? The greatest feats in the world? From the outside looking in, yes. We have accomplished that which no people have ever done, we have broken away from the mother country and survived to create a new country, redefine democracy, to change the social fabric of the world. We have amassed wealth and fame and infamy...we have been praised, bullied and pitied, but we triumphed. Yet, we find ourselves in the midst of another war, so close on the heels on what should have been the last on this, the land of the free. You are right Caroline, the world is cruel, and you have now seen war in your lifetime and probably not your last, perhaps not even my last... We have created a system of justice that is fair and right, yet we are condemned by our own triumphs. We have written great documents, signed legislature to seal our future and our fate.

*(becoming more worked up.)*

Despite it all, we could not save the life of one woman. All our supposed knowledge and great accomplishments mean nothing in the end. Not to Nabby, who simply talked of the garden growing, and new life...still clinging to what remained of hers. Hers, a life unfinished. None of the rest mattered to her. All she desired was to see the sun, smell the fresh, summer air. Perhaps that is the most important achievement. Perhaps that is what truth is, despite our personal desires and selfish gains. Perhaps that is what her death should symbolize. Perhaps...

*(his voice breaking, all his passion subsiding, JOHN speaks quietly.)*

Perhaps that is what we should strive for in the eyes of God.

## ABIGAIL

***Bitter is the loss of a sweet Infant but now much more increased are the pangs which rent the heart of a Mother, when called to part with the Head of a family, in the midst of her Days, and usefulness...Endorsed by a thousand strong ties...***

*(going to JOHN.)*

But it wasn't her mother, it was you John, with our Nabby at the end. Every day you were at her side, bathing and feeding her...whereas I could not bring myself to enter the room, did not have the fortitude or strength of resolve to see her like that...

*(crossing to CAROLINE, taking her hands.)*

You spoke of feeling a failure as a daughter, I feel I have failed as a mother.

*(to WILLIAM.)*

Deeper feeling William, is shared by both men and women.

*(crossing to JOHN.)*

ABIGAIL (*cont.*)

You gave her the comfort to let go. Perhaps there is no greater gift than bringing life, but easing that life out of such pain is the only comfort we can provide those suffering or take for ourselves.

JOHN

There is no comfort in a father watching his child slip away.

ABIGAIL

And a mother, John?

JOHN

You have nothing to reproach yourself with, Abigail, Nabby could not have known a kinder or gentler mother, nor you, Caroline, so loving and devoted a daughter.

WILLIAM

And me, John? Have you no comforting words of wisdom for a husband?

JOHN

I wish you no ill will, but as your duties will surely be calling you back to Washington, I think it best, if Caroline remains with us.

WILLIAM

You ask as if it were a favor, but the deed has already been done.

JOHN

It was Nabby's wish...

WILLIAM

No, I will not have this conversation. From this day forward, you will not goad me into defending myself. Ever again.

JOHN

Nor do I desire to. I only wish...

WILLIAM

What?

JOHN

*(smiling, offering his hand to WILLIAM.)*

I only wish...Nabby could be here to witness one more of our arguments, and to admonish us both, not sure on whom to place the blame.

WILLIAM

I have never sought to fight with you, John, I tried time and again to...

JOHN

Of that there is no doubt, but a gentleman would concede, as I do here. You are always welcome in this house.

*(WILLIAM takes JOHN's hand, warmly.)*

WILLIAM

Thank you, John.

ABIGAIL

There is and will be, much to do.

DOCTOR WARREN

I will leave you and make the necessary arrangements, sign the proper documents.

JOHN

Thank you, Doctor Warren. I will never forget what you have done for us and will forever be in your debt.

*(JOHN and DOCTOR WARREN embrace. DOCTOR WARREN bows and nods to everyone and exits.)*

ABIGAIL

We must, Caroline, choose what gown to...

*(ABIGAIL stops. CAROLINE continues, trying to smile through tears.)*

CAROLINE

Yes, Grandmother, we will dress her in her finest silk.

*(ABIGAIL smiles wanly and sits. CAROLINE sits beside her, taking ABIGAIL'S hand.)*

ABIGAIL

There will be many people through the parlor, we will be sure to make Nabby proud.

*(the room falls silent as light slowly fades.)*

ACT TWO

v.

*(Light rises on NABBY'S bedroom. JOHN sits on the edge of the bed, clutching a robe of NABBY'S. After a moment, he places the robe on the bed and crosses to the writing table, as light dimly rises on a coffin in the Long Room. JOHN begins writing while remaining standing.)*

My Dear Jefferson,

It is with the utmost pain and heavy heart that I write to inform you that ***Your friend, my only daughter, expired, yesterday morning*** the 9<sup>th</sup> day of August in the year of our Lord, 1813... ***in the 49th year of her age, 46 of which she was the healthiest and firmest of us all: since which, she has been a monument to suffering and to patience.***

*(JOHN stops writing and stands, his head down. He weeps as light fades on NABBY'S bedroom but remains on the coffin. Stage goes black.)*

END OF PLAY