

MY BROTHER'S SECRET KEEPER

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SYNOPSIS

The dysfunctional dynamics of the "First Family of the American stage" are examined in this historical drama. Before he became infamous for killing the President, John Wilkes was a struggling actor, desperate for the approval of his celebrated brothers: actor Edwin and producer Junius Jr. The three brothers performed only once on the same stage in an ill-fated charity performance of Shakespeare's Julius Caesar. The sibling rivalries, petty jealousies, and long-held resentments simmer below the surface as we watch the events play out in the lead up to one of the most horrible acts of American history.

LOG LINE

As the events leading to John Wilkes Booth's decision to assassinate President Lincoln unfold, the complex family dynamics that play out between the competitive Booth brothers leave us with the same questions that puzzle historians: why'd he do it- and did his brothers know?

CHARACTERS

JUNIUS BOOTH JR (JUNE)	Eldest son of Junius Brutus Booth
EDWIN BOOTH	Middle son of Junius Brutus Booth
JOHN WILKES BOOTH (JOHNNY)	Youngest son of Junius Brutus Booth
ASIA BOOTH	Daughter of Junius Brutus Booth

SETTINGS

New York City.

Fall of 1864 to Spring of 1865.

LOCATIONS/SET REQUIREMENTS

Scene One- Rehearsal Hall. Table & chairs.	Scene Four- Rehearsal Hall, Set up for <u>Julius Caesar</u> . Chairs & columns.
Scene Two- John Wilkes' Dressing Room. Desk with mirror, chair, steamer trunk.	Scene Five- Edwin's Dressing Room. Desk with mirror, chair, steamer trunk.
Scene Three- Rehearsal Hall, Set up for <u>Julius Caesar</u> . Chairs & columns.	Scene Six- Edwin's NY Townhome. Queen Anne armchair, side table.

SCENE ONE

(September 1864. Lights up on a dingy rehearsal hall attached to a theater. A rickety-looking table and a few chairs anchor one corner. Playbills and posters advertising various touring productions paper the walls. A bottle of brandy and some glasses sit on a tray on a little buffet against the back wall. JUNIUS BOOTH JR (JUNE) enters carrying several old volumes of Shakespeare and a bundle of letters. He sets the books on the floor and the letters on the table. He fumbles through the letters, looking for a particular one and setting it on the top. He second guesses that choice, tucking the offending letter in his jacket pocket. He exits out the door. A few moments later, he re-enters with JOHN WILKES (JOHNNY) fast on his heels.)

JOHNNY

You said we were meeting at 3 and here it is a quarter to four. I've got better things to do than sit around waiting on you and Edwin all day. You think I don't?

JUNE

Now, I didn't say that. Nobody's saying that. I got caught up at the bank.

JOHNNY

You could have sent a messenger. One of them darkie stagehands you've got all over the place.

JUNE

It didn't hurt you to cool your heels. *(Meaningfully)* You made your way to the tavern easily enough.

JOHNNY

I was at the Tavern talking up this project! You can't have enough word of mouth early for something like this. It's going to be huge. The Brothers' Booth, onstage together for the first time in history, for one week only!

JUNE

Yes. *(Pours a drink of the brandy for himself. He does not offer to pour for his brother)* I brought some of Father's prompt books. We can narrow down what we want to do from there.

JOHNNY

(Going to the books, picking them up with surprising tenderness) Really? I can't believe Mama let you take them from the house?

JUNE

She was so thrilled at the prospect of all of us working together... I think she would have parted with Father's cloak and crown if I'd asked!

JOHNNY

Higher praise for this project we could not hope to achieve! *(He flips through one of the books)* "Now is the winter of our discontent..." No, no. Not this one. No one else could play Richard like Father... We shouldn't attempt that one.

JUNE

Hmmm.

JOHNNY

You disagree? You think audiences would accept someone other than the great Junius Brutus Booth taking on the tormented, bunch-backed toad?

JUNE

It's remained a solid money-maker in rep over the years. What can I say? People love a tortured villain.

JOHNNY

Which of us would be Richard?

JUNE

(Avoiding answering directly)

You think we should draw lots for it? Seems the most equitable way to decide.

JOHNNY

Come now, June. You've never taken a part this size.

JUNE

So that leaves you or Edwin then?

JOHNNY

Either of our names on the top billing would draw a crowd...

JUNE

(Teasing, puncturing his brother's puffed vanity)

Oh? You think "J B Wilkes" will bring the same level of attention as the great Edwin Booth?

JOHNNY

I'm just as big a draw! Didn't I play to a standing house two months ago?

JUNE

Charleston? That was Charleston or... Memphis?

JOHNNY

It was Atlanta!

JUNE

Oh, of course...

JOHNNY

And I'd be an even bigger draw if I could go by my full name rather than this ridiculous moniker. J B Wilkes. You and Edwin have no right to make me go by that name. Everyone knows I'm a Booth! I'm father re-incarnate! Everyone says so!

JUNE

So they do.

JOHNNY

You ass. Pour me a drink.

JUNE

Pour it yourself, Johnny. I'm not your valet.

JOHNNY

(Pouring a healthy drink of brandy)

Where the hell is he? Got a lot of nerve to keep us both waiting like this-

JUNE

(Changing the subject)

Heard from Asia lately?

JOHNNY

Had a letter from her a few days ago. She thought she might make it into town, if Mama can spare her.

JUNE

Hmm. *(He pulls the letter he stowed away earlier from his front pocket and sets it on the table in front of JOHNNY)* Mama wrote me. She asks about you. Asks about you and that actress from the Marshall Theatre.

JOHNNY

Laticia? What about her?

JUNE

There was talk. She might have gotten in a bad way because of you.

JOHNNY

Wasn't me. Might have been any number of men. *(He laughs)* Actresses!

JUNE

Well, Mama was worried about it.

JOHNNY

She needn't be.

JUNE

All right.

JOHNNY

Why shouldn't I have my fun? No need to settle down now!

JUNE

You'll have your fun at the end of some father's knife.

JOHNNY

Actresses don't have fathers with knives. That's why they're actresses in the first place.

JUNE

Don't let Edwin hear you say that. His darling Mary started as an actress.

JOHNNY

Ah! So she did. *(JOHNNY downs the last of the brandy, picking up another prompt book and opening to a random passage)* "If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?" *(He tosses it back on the table, disgusted)* This piece of drivel. Worse than that pseudo-Roman dreck! You weren't seriously suggesting Merchant for this project, were you?

JUNE

It was on the table for consideration. Edwin is very fond of playing Shylock.

JOHNNY

He would be.

(EDWIN BOOTH sweeps into the room, tossing off his coat and grabbing JUNE in a tight embrace, which JUNE returns.)

EDWIN

June! So sorry I'm late! I came straight from the station and—*(He spots JOHNNY and nods to him)* Oh, hello Johnny— Good to see you *(JOHNNY raises his brandy glass in a silent salute to his brother)* So... what did I miss?

JUNE

Johnny doesn't want to do Merchant.

EDWIN

What? Why not?

JOHNNY

I don't think it's a good fit for us—there's only one decent part and it's that Jew.

JUNE

There are several good roles in that play. You're being absurd.

EDWIN

Bassiano is a good part too. He's the romantic lead... we could ask Laticia to come from the Marshall to play Portia opposite you? *(JUNE shakes his head at EDWIN in a warning manner and JOHNNY laughs.)*

JOHNNY

From what I hear, by the time we're taking the stage we'd have to alter Portia's costume for Laticia to fit in it.

JUNE

You're an unrepentant ass.

JOHNNY

(Ignoring him, pouring more brandy)

We need to pick one of the tragedies. It's what Father would want. The public expects us to do a tragedy!

JUNE

He's got a point there.

JOHNNY

When I was in Atlanta last month—

EDWIN

(Talking over JOHNNY)

I understand the need to fulfill public expectation but I think... the general mood of the country right now is looking for something more uplifting, more reaffirming. We're in a fragile state in our Union— this conflict is seeming to drag on with no end—

JUNE

Edwin, please don't start—

EDWIN

(Talking over JUNE)

—and we have a responsibility as citizens and artists to speak to that fragility! To do our part to lift the country from a malaise!

JOHNNY

We'd be better off doing something that the public will actually enjoy. And they want a tragedy.

JUNE

The last thing we need is a repeat of that disastrous Othello.

JOHNNY

What do you mean by that?

JUNE

Johnny...

EDWIN

You were completely unprepared to play the Moor. Father's good name was all that kept you from being excoriated in the papers.

JUNE

It wasn't as bad as all that, but I think you might be better suited to romantic roles. You were wonderful as Romeo.

EDWIN

When you weren't missing entrances because you were wrapped in Lady Capulet's tender embrace.

JOHNNY

(Ignoring EDWIN)

I'm happy to play Romeo again. But the audiences in New York are demanding. They won't be satisfied with traditional rendition- and besides, the upcoming election gives us a perfect opportunity-

EDWIN

Why do you need to bring that up?

JOHNNY

Because it's disgraceful that the current vulgar occupant of the White House is putting himself forward for re-election. Has he no sense of decency?

EDWIN

A sense of decency and honor is what propels him to move forward. It's those secessionists that have caused the turmoil, not Lincoln.

JUNE

(Flipping through the prompt books)

What about Caesar?

EDWIN

That's a bit on-the-nose, June.

JUNE

Is it?

JOHNNY

No, that's a stroke of genius. Julius Caesar is the perfect choice.

JUNE

I've always enjoyed it. Father was brilliant in it.

JOHNNY

No, don't you see? It's the ideal choice for this moment. The country needs to see stories of the common man over-throwing the tyrants! The tyranny of an unjust ruler and the courage men needed to bring him down!

EDWIN

That's not the message of Caesar.

JOHNNY

Isn't it?

EDWIN

No. I don't think that's the best choice. *(Scrambling through the prompt books)* Did we look at Lear?

JUNE

I'm fine with Caesar. I think it would be a good seller.

(EDWIN tries to make eye contact with JUNE, who is purposefully avoiding him. JOHNNY has taken the Caesar prompt book and is flipping through it excitedly.)

EDWIN

You really think it's the best option? I'd even be willing to give Othello another go if it meant-

JUNE

I think it's got the best range of parts to match...
(Meaningfully) the needs of our talent.

EDWIN

Fine. We will do a week-long run of Julius Caesar. Proceeds to benefit the construction of a statue of William Shakespeare in Central Park.

JOHNNY

After a cut to us, right?

EDWIN

No. It's a benefit performance.

JUNE

We'll have to cover the cost of the management first.

EDWIN

I know we discussed that, June, but I think it would appear more authentic as a true act of generosity if the **entire** event was charitable.

JUNE

Who is going to cover the cost of the stage hands? Ticket takers? These folks don't work for free. Am I supposed to just absorb that cost?

EDWIN

We will discuss it later.

JUNE

(Visibly upset)

Yes, we will.

JOHNNY

You'd have to be blind not to see the similarities between this time and Caesar's.

EDWIN

Don't be absurd, Johnny. That's a foolish and dangerous way to think.

JUNE

You don't have to be an ass. Johnny's entitled to an opinion just like anyone else.

EDWIN

Those types of ideas are dangerous! You might get away with those statements in Baltimore, but here in New York, this is a Union-supporting house.

JOHNNY

The Southern states are fighting for the freedom to manage their affairs as they see fit. Lincoln has no right—the North has no claim to tell another sovereign state how to create laws for their people! It's the basis of this grave injustice.

EDWIN

The grave injustice is the disgusting blight of slavery. THAT is the only injustice I will speak of.

(JOHNNY scoffs, going to pour more brandy. JUNE stops him, taking the bottle)

JUNE

We've been here before... Johnny, stop. We don't need to retread this ground. The entire country has been ripped apart for three years. Let's not add to the casualties by ruining our family connection too. All right? *(EDWIN nods but JOHNNY refuses to acknowledge anything)* I will have duplicates of Father's Caesar prompt book created for us. Edwin, I assume you'll want to take Marc Antony?

EDWIN

That sounds fine.

JOHNNY

No, wait, I want Marc Antony.

EDWIN

You? That's quite a large role. Are you sure you're up to the task?

JOHNNY

You've already played Marc Antony before. Let someone else have a crack at it. *(To JUNE)* I told you, didn't I say this is exactly what he would do? Keep the choicest parts for himself! Why do we even bother-

JUNE

Edwin, would you consider being one of the other conspirators? Brutus or Cassius maybe?

EDWIN

Et tu, Junius?

JUNE

Now, now, don't get upset. That's not what I meant. It's just... Johnny has a point. *(EDWIN scoffs and JUNE tries a different tactic.)* Besides, Marc Antony is the youngest of the plotters. It makes the most sense that the role should go to the youngest brother.

EDWIN

I do feel a certain affinity to Brutus' moral dilemma. If I'm not Marc Antony, I wouldn't mind playing Bru-

JOHNNY

Great! That settles things nicely!

JUNE

(Flipping through the prompt book)

Well that leaves Cassius for me then.

EDWIN

A nice sized role! And a good bit of swordplay, that'll be a nice change, won't it?

JUNE

I suppose.

EDWIN

Johnny, are you absolutely sure... Remember Othello-

JUNE

I'm sure he can handle it. Rehearsals can begin on Tuesday. Does that work for both of you?

JOHNNY

Perfectly.

EDWIN

Yes.

JUNE

Excellent. *(The silence hangs heavily and EDWIN grabs his coat and exits)* Thank you for your time, my dear brothers. Meeting adjourned.

(Lights fade on JOHNNY grinning triumphantly.)

END OF SCENE

SCENE TWO

(October 1864. Thursday afternoon. Lights up on John Wilkes' dressing room. It is a tidy space, a small table and chair and an open steamer trunk with various costume pieces is visible. A makeup case with pots of different colored foundations are lined up on the table. A bottle of wine and two glasses are also on the table. ASIA BOOTH comes into the room with a vase of flowers and a picnic basket lunch. She sets them down on the chair and proceeds to close up the makeup and return it to the makeup case to make room on the table for the flowers. She hums to herself, happily. From offstage, we hear JUNE shout "Where do you want this damn thing, Asia?" and he enters, straining under the weight of another steamer trunk.)

ASIA

Just set it down in here. Shhh! I want it to be a surprise for him!

JUNE

She sent them all?

ASIA

No, that's only half of them- Mother wouldn't part with everything but he's going to be so excited to see what she sent. *(ASIA kneels and opens the trunk, pulling out a rich velvet doublet, adorned with gold braided trim.)* Look! His Othello costume! Can you believe it?

JUNE

My God... I haven't seen that in... twenty years. *(He gently takes the garment from ASIA as if it is a religious relic. She watches, smiling, as he holds it.)* It still- is it my imagination or does it-?

ASIA

Yes. I think it still smells of him. I suppose the cigar and greasepaint was just his version of cologne?

JUNE

Why did Mother suddenly decide to part with them after all these years?

ASIA

I'm not sure. She just asked me to bring them to Johnny to "lift his spirits."

JUNE

That's what she said?

ASIA

Yes. *(Pause)* How have things been going? Rehearsals, I mean?

JUNE

Oh, fine. Fine.

ASIA

Edwin and Johnny are getting along?

JUNE

I said things were fine, Asia. I didn't say miraculous.

ASIA

I didn't think this was such a grand idea from the start- you know how Edwin bullies him.

JUNE

Plenty of blame to go around. Johnny can give as good as he gets.

(JUNE places the Othello doublet back in the trunk, taking a moment to let his hands draw across the other items.)

ASIA

How are you? You look tired.

JUNE

That trunk was heavy. *(Pause)* How long are you in town?

ASIA

A few days. Clark is traveling for business for a month and I don't like being at the farm alone. I'll visit with you boys and then go back to Mother and Rosalie for a little while. Clark doesn't mind.

JUNE

Is he good to you?

ASIA

(Laughing)

Of course he is! Sweet June, are you always the protective big brother, worried about me?

JUNE

You seem happy, but it never hurts to ask.

ASIA

I promise. He's good to me. *(JUNE regards her, then shuts the lid on the steamer trunk.)* I'm so excited to see Caesar!

JUNE

Oh yes. Our epic charity performance.

ASIA

You're not excited about it?

JUNE

It's costing me a fortune. Edwin keeps adding people to the cast, asking for more soldiers or footmen or whatever you will. And every warm body that comes on stage doesn't come for free. Plus the cost of printing playbills and signs-

ASIA

But surely you'll make it back ten times over?

JUNE

He wants every penny to go to this Shakespeare statue. He says it was Mary's wish...

ASIA

(Genuinely moved)

Oh... of course. That makes sense.

JUNE

Do you think Clark would mind- I mean, if you could stay another week or two? Help with rehearsals? Maybe help keep tabs on Johnny?

ASIA

I don't know, June-

JUNE

I could really use the extra hands.

ASIA

He won't like it.

JUNE

What are you talking about? He'll be thrilled you're here.

ASIA

Not Johnny- Edwin. He'll think it's improper for me to be staying here in town for so long... alone.

JUNE

I'll handle Edwin. We'll look into getting you a room at a nice ladies boarding house. I'll talk to some of the actresses and see where they stay.

ASIA

I can't very well stay with a lot of unwed actresses! You know that. It wouldn't be- people would talk.

JUNE

How about staying with Edwin, then? He's got that big townhouse... you'd have to hire a carriage to get to the theater but I can help with that.

ASIA

(Teasing him)

You must truly need my help, if you're offering to pay for my carriage ride every day!

JUNE

I think it would be good for all of us. You have a... humanizing impact.

ASIA

That's kind of you to say. I'll think about it.

JUNE

That's all I ask.

(JOHNNY enters in an elated mood, slamming a prop sword belt and toga cloak into the open steamer trunk.)

JOHNNY

Just... Hot Damn!

ASIA

What's happened?

JOHNNY

Hello sweet sister! *(He wraps her in an enthusiastic embrace, lifting her and spinning around.)* Finished another flawless run!

ASIA

Oh! It went that well? Johnny put me down, please!

JOHNNY

We're going to have a sold-out house for sure. It's the best I've ever been! Tell her, June!

JUNE

I don't know that I'd use the word "flawless"

ASIA

(Overlapping, shooting JUNE a warning glance)

I'm so glad to hear it! Oh, I'm so thrilled to hear it!

JOHNNY

(Pouring a glass of wine)

Celebrate with me, Asia.

JUNE

It's not even 1 o'clock.

JOHNNY

Don't be a stick-in-the-mud!

ASIA

It's all right- I brought lunch and a little something else...

(She gestures to the steamer trunk)

JOHNNY

Is that-? Oh Asia! Did you really bring them?

ASIA

Surprise! Mother sent them along to lift your spirits!

(JOHNNY throws open the trunk, greedily pawing through the items out and clutching them to his chest.)

JOHNNY

This is incredible- look at this, just look at these, June! Can you believe it? She's letting me use them? Have them?

ASIA

Well... I don't know her mind exactly, but she wanted you to have them for right now, to wear in Caesar if you wanted-- if Edwin is all right with it, of course.

JOHNNY

Why should he have the final say?

JUNE

Now, Johnny-

JOHNNY

She gave them to ME, June.

JUNE

I know. It's a nice gesture. But in this show, there isn't much need for fancy doublets or richly embroidered breeches, is there?

ASIA

Perhaps on a future project, then? If Caesar goes well, this could be a wonderful start to your career!

JOHNNY

My career is well underway. I'm not at the start of it!

ASIA

(Taken aback at his anger)

Of- of course. That's not what I meant.

JUNE

Don't get upset now. Listen, Asia's going to stay and help with the run of the show.

ASIA

I might be, nothing's set in stone.

JOHNNY

(Overlapping)

Well, that's fine! It's a real family affair now! *(He finishes the glass of wine, still clutching the doublet like a security blanket.)* Sit, sit. I never get to visit with you.

JUNE

If you'll excuse me, I'm going to go check in with Edwin. I'm sure he'll have notes from today's rehearsal to pass along.

JOHNNY

Pass them straight past me, would you, June?

JUNE

How could he give you notes? With that "flawless" performance, what could he possibly want to change? *(JUNE exits, chuckling.)*

(ASIA goes back to the steamer trunk, carefully folding some of the items that JOHNNY carelessly tossed aside when he was rifling through it earlier and replacing them tenderly inside the trunk.)

JOHNNY

How are you? How's Mother?

ASIA

She's worried. She asked me to come up... to check in on you.

JOHNNY

She's worried? Why?

ASIA

Your last letter was... troubling. You seemed unsettled. Mother mentioned-

JOHNNY

(Overlapping)

I'm fine. I'm having a wonderful time in New York with Edwin and Junius. She doesn't need to worry.

ASIA

You met with some men from Richmond?

JOHNNY
(*Sharply*)

Did she tell you that? What did she say?

ASIA

Just that you met with some men from Richmond. Some... important men?

JOHNNY

Damn it! I told her not to say anything!

ASIA

So it's true then. They asked you to help them and you said yes?

JOHNNY

It's nothing to do with you, Asia.

ASIA

Think about what you're getting into! What if Edwin finds out? What if you get caught?

JOHNNY

I'm going to be a hero! A modern-day Marc Antony!

ASIA

What if something happens? You'll be arrested or... or killed! You have to consider the consequences of your actions.

JOHNNY

This is the time for men of courage to stand up and be counted! I can't sit idly by—I saw John Brown hanged for his inciting slaves to rebellion and I'll see Lincoln brought down too. All these meddling abolitionists, ignoring the will of the people! You'll see—

ASIA

(*Overlapping*)

I don't see. I don't see anything except you risking your life for a cause that doesn't affect us! Do you want the Booth name

forever associated with some... kidnapping plot? Some hare-brained scheme that's bound to fail?

JOHNNY

I'm surprised to hear you come down so hard on the side of tyranny! It's cowardly, Asia. And besides, if this plan works the way it should, we could bring an end to the fighting. Let everyone go home and go about living their lives the way they see fit. It could end the war! How could I refuse an opportunity like this?

ASIA

That's all well and good, but we don't have to get involved ourselves! Mother is worried sick. She's not sleeping or eating- at first, all she could talk about is this silly charity performance you three have cooked up and now she's worried sick you're going to do something foolish.

JOHNNY

She shouldn't have said anything to you about it.

ASIA

How could she not tell me? She adores you- you're as close to Father as she can get now and she's frantic at the thought of you being in danger. She sent some of his costume pieces out of the blue. Why do you think she had me bring them to you? (*JOHNNY shrugs*) I think she did that to remind you of who you really are! I don't know what these Confederates have offered you, but it can't be worth more than the price of your Mother's peace of mind.

JOHNNY

(Long pause)

All right. Fine. I won't mention it to her anymore. You can tell her I've changed my mind.

ASIA

Have you?

JOHNNY

You can tell her I've changed my mind. That's all I want to tell her. To keep her from worrying. All right?

ASIA

I suppose that will have to do. *(Slight pause)* How are the rehearsals for Caesar going?

JOHNNY

Oh, better now that you're going to be here.

ASIA

Now, I haven't said I'm staying for sure yet.

JOHNNY

(Grinning, handing her a glass of wine)

You can't fool me. You can't tear yourself away now that you're here. Tell that husband of yours that your "family duty" compels you to stay!

ASIA

Clark is gone until Christmas.

JOHNNY

So you have no excuse! Stay, Asia. Please? For me? Won't you stay?

(ASIA takes a sip of wine, suppressing a smile. She never could resist his charming energy, and he knows it.)

ASIA

Is Edwin being kind to you?

JOHNNY

No, not particularly. But June usually sticks up for me when things get too bad. Are you bringing Mother and Rosalie to the performance?

ASIA

It might be too much of a crowd for Rosalie. But I know Mother wants to come. I'll make arrangements for the neighbors to stay with Rosalie so she doesn't have to make the trip.

JOHNNY

(Idley, drinking wine)

Why haven't you found a home for Rosalie? I think she'd be happier with other people in her... condition.

ASIA

John Wilkes. You know we can't afford that. Besides, Mother wouldn't dream of having her sent off to live in one of those depressing hospitals. Although... I don't deny that Mother could use help with her.

JOHNNY

When my reward comes in, that's what I want to do. Build a better house in the city for Mother and get someone to take care of Rosalie.

ASIA

(Changing the subject)

You know Edwin asked if he could use Father's Richard cloak again last week. He came out to the farm to ask her in person.

JOHNNY

What did she say?

ASIA

She made some excuse. She wants you to have them.

JOHNNY

Good.

ASIA

Oooh was he mad! You should have seen him stomp back out to the carriage, half-dragging little Edwina behind him.

JOHNNY

I'd have paid good money to see that.

(They both enjoy a chuckle at EDWIN's expense.)

ASIA

Johnny, please promise me you'll think about what I said. About the reputation of the family, all that.

JOHNNY

You worry too much. It's under control.

ASIA

Try to get along with Edwin. I know he's difficult, but think of all he's lost... think of what it was like, being on the road with Father while he was... how he was.

JOHNNY

How could I not think of that? I would have given my left LEG to accompany Father! Tour the country, see him perform, learn from the best Shakespearean actor to grace a stage since Burbage!

ASIA

You were only eight years old. Much too young to manage Father.

JOHNNY

I could have done it. *(He pours more wine, sullen and petulant.)*
I would have done it happily and I wouldn't have abandoned Father to die alone in some horrible hotel in Cincinnati.

ASIA

Johnny... That wasn't Edwin's fault.

JOHNNY

Wasn't it?

ASIA

No!

JOHNNY

Whose fault was it, then?

ASIA

I don't know-- but Edwin cared for Father for 8 years, day in and day out. He couldn't be expected to do that for the rest of his life.

JOHNNY

Of course! The great Edwin Booth needed to make his own way! Make a name for himself! Until he found it was too difficult and then he was only too happy to fall back on Father's connections!

ASIA

Hush, Johnny. Someone will hear you shouting.

JOHNNY

I don't care! Let them hear me! Edwin never cared for anything but his own career. Look at this production! Did you know he's not even letting a portion of the proceeds come back to me or June? He's making June pay stage hands out of his own pocket!

ASIA

It's just because he thinks this is performance is for Mary. He loved her with all his heart. You have to feel your heart sink when you think of how he grieved when she passed. She spent her days saving him from himself, but when she died I thought he would weep or drink himself to death.

JOHNNY

(Pouring more wine for them both)

I saw enough at the funeral. What a display.

ASIA

(Taking both glasses from him)

Don't be cruel. You've never loved like that.

JOHNNY

Neither have you, sister dear.

ASIA

(Standing, insulted)

Would it kill you to give him an ounce of sympathy? What would it hurt you?

JOHNNY

Why should I? He's never afforded me that same sympathy. The way he speaks to me at rehearsal, you'd think I was some supernumerary who didn't know the first thing about Shakespeare.

ASIA

You and your pride!

JOHNNY

Well? Why shouldn't I be proud? Why shouldn't I want more than to be Edwin Booth's younger brother? I'm better than him, Asia. You know I am. June knows it, Mother knows it. Edwin himself knows it. Why else would he force me to only tour in Southern states? He's threatened by me, by my abilities! So he keeps New York, Boston, Washington to himself and what do I get? Atlanta? Richmond, Charleston? Third-rate backwaters that earn a fraction of the ticket sales. But he doesn't want to "dilute the Booth name" by having us both in the same region! And he maintains all the contacts with Father's friends, refuses to introduce me, makes me beg for bit parts while he takes the choicest roles for himself! I want more than that, Asia! I want more than to tread the boards, die, and be forgotten!

(During this monologue, EDWIN comes into the dressing room carrying a stack of leaflets. JOHNNY finishes his rant and turns, noticing his brother in the doorway.)

ASIA

Edwin! Oh Edwin, it's so good to see you! *(She goes to him and he warmly embraces her, but with a little less enthusiasm than JOHNNY did. He sets the stack of papers down on the table, glaring at JOHNNY.)*

EDWIN

Asia! Hello dear- I beg your pardon, I need to speak to John. Did you hear the news? Alice McVickers has fallen ill with fever. She won't make the journey for Portia. I don't know who else is local that will know the part well enough to step in. Do you know of anyone?

JOHNNY

No one suitable that would come for no money.

EDWIN

I'll find somebody. Plenty of young actresses that are eager to have a chance to share the stage with us. (To ASIA) How's Mother?

ASIA

She's doing well. She's hoping to come for the performance next week.

EDWIN

Lovely! I'll make sure there is a private box for you both.

(There is a long pause as EDWIN debates opening up an argument. ASIA rummages through the picnic basket, pulling out bread and a small knife. She prepares a small plate for JOHNNY during the following exchange.)

JOHNNY

Is that all? Are we running the show again today?

EDWIN

No, not officially. Although if you wanted to run your lines with the script manager I certainly wouldn't stop you.

JOHNNY

I know my lines, damn it!

EDWIN

Of course.

JOHNNY

Don't do that.

EDWIN

I'm not doing anything, Johnny.

ASIA

(Changing the subject, handing the plate to JOHNNY)
Edwin, Mother sent along some letters for you and Edwina. She asked me to give them to you.

EDWIN

Another letter? She must have a lot on her mind. *(He gestures to the steamer trunk)* What's all this?

ASIA

Oh, Mother wanted Johnny to have some of Father's pieces here. She asked me to bring them. Edwin, would you like something to eat?

(EDWIN shakes his head no.)

EDWIN

I'm surprised to hear that she was so eager. She seemed to feel strongly that she couldn't part with them last month.

JOHNNY

She truly believes in my abilities. It's a lovely gesture.

ASIA

I think so. Don't you, Edwin?

EDWIN

There's nothing like a mother's support! *(He starts to exit then stops)* Make sure you check with the script manager for your line notes from today. I've given June his notes already.

JOHNNY

Fine. (*EDWIN goes to exit again but JOHNNY stops him*) Wait, Edwin! I wanted to talk to you about my costume in the final act. I think I should have a cloak and a laurel crown.

EDWIN

Talk to the costume mistress. She might have something suitable she could—

JOHNNY

I planned on wearing Father's. The Richard the III cloak.
(*JOHNNY takes a defiant bite from the buttered bread.*)

EDWIN

(*Slight pause*)

Did you now?

ASIA

Mother said she thought it would be a lovely tribute.

EDWIN

I'm sure she did.

JOHNNY

Well? What's the problem?

EDWIN

There's no problem.

JOHNNY

So it's settled then.

EDWIN

No. I just don't think that Marc Antony needs a costume change then. Or at all. No one else changes. It would be distracting to the audience.

JOHNNY

(Laughing harshly)

You don't even pretend to mask your jealousy- not even a slight attempt!

EDWIN

I don't know what you mean.

JOHNNY

You're pathetic! You can't bear the thought that people might compare me with Father if they see me onstage in his costumes!

EDWIN

(Explosively)

You have no idea what he was like! You ride his coattails and his bask in his famous name but you have no concept-- have you ever- Asia, have you ever told him?-- Before Mother forced him to go out on tour with me as his constant companion, he was an angry, furious brute! You have no idea of the god you idolize! How could you? She made sure you could only see him as this towering Colossus! You didn't have to change his bedding when he was sick on himself and too drunk to notice! You didn't have to cajole your own father into finishing the act when he was upset because he missed a line or the audience didn't applaud where he expected them to! You didn't spend night after night standing in the darkened wings of theaters holding a bottle of brandy to ration out JUST enough so he would keep performing so we would receive our pay from the manager for completing the show! He was a pitiful creature, Johnny! Pitiful.

JOHNNY

Don't you dare tell those awful stories about him! He was a great man-- a tortured artist, perhaps, but he was a genius!

ASIA

Please stop at this! Father's legacy is complicated, Johnny... You were so young... But I don't wish to remember the bad times, please don't say any more, Edwin.

EDWIN

It's the only choice I have. I don't have a wellspring of pleasant recollections.

JOHNNY

I would have cared for him! I would have made sure he had what he needed. I certainly wouldn't have abandoned him like you did when you decided to chase your own fame!

EDWIN

You haven't the slightest idea what you're talking about.

JOHNNY

I would have given anything to be with Father- you weren't man enough to polish his boots!

(EDWIN turns to leave and JOHNNY chases him down, striking him in the back. Both men engage in the conflict, although JOHNNY is the more-direct aggressor.)

ASIA

Stop it! Stop it both of you! Now that's enough!

(EDWIN backs down, allowing a opening for JOHNNY to land one good punch which knocks him off balance. ASIA screams, grabbing his arm to prevent him from striking EDWIN again.)

JOHNNY

I'm wearing that cloak. Do you hear me? *(EDWIN doesn't answer)* I said, I'm wearing Father's cloak!

ASIA

He heard you. It's fine. *(To EDWIN)* It's just a costume, it's fine.

EDWIN

No.

JOHNNY

I wear the cloak or I walk.

EDWIN
(Overlapping)

Go then!

ASIA
(Overlapping)

Edwin! No!

JOHNNY

Fine.

(JOHNNY grabs his prop sword and prompt book from his dressing table, pausing for a moment as if he expects EDWIN to speak to him. EDWIN says nothing. ASIA doesn't look at either of her brothers. JOHNNY exits, slamming the door as he goes. The sound of the door slam is reminiscent of a gunshot. Lights fade.)

END OF SCENE

SCENE THREE

(Lights up on the rehearsal hall from Scene One, only this time it is outfitted for a rehearsal of Julius Caesar. A 'Roman' style chair, a few assorted columns with fabric draped between them to create entrances. JUNE is in his Cassius costume, an ill-fitting toga and cloak. JOHNNY, also in a toga and laurel crown, is laying on the floor of the room, propping his feet up in one of the Roman-style chairs and singing loudly. He is well into the first verse of "Jump, Jim Crow" enjoying the sound of his voice echoing around the empty rehearsal hall.)

JOHNNY

(Singing)

"Weel about and turn about and do his so,
Eb'ry time I weel about I jump Jim Crow!
I went down to the river, I didn't mean to stay;
But deer I see so many gals, I couldn't get away."

JUNE

Johnny- do you mind? *(Gestures to his feet in the chair)* I'm trying to straighten up.

JOHNNY

You don't have stagehands to do that?

JUNE

Trying to keep costs down. Now, do you mind.

JOHNNY

Sorry June. Here, let me help.

(JOHNNY jumps up and proceeds to move the furniture roughly off to the side. JUNE protests as JOHNNY nearly knocks over one of the columns or a plant)

JUNE

Christ, Johnny! Be careful with that!

JOHNNY

Apologies! Just trying to help.

JUNE

How about you stay out of the way, hm? That's a way you can be helpful.

JOHNNY

As you wish. *(Pause, watching JUNE finish cleaning up)* The show is excellent, June. Don't be nervous. It's going to make a killing.

JUNE

I'm not nervous about that.

JOHNNY

Well then what's the matter? You seem upset.

JUNE

You and Edwin have been at each other's throats for a week. It's just a lot to listen to for six hours a day.

JOHNNY

You needn't worry. Pretty soon he'll be eating his words.

JUNE

What do you mean?

JOHNNY

He'll see that he was wrong about me, he was wrong about his precious Lincoln and- well, he'll just see. About everything.

JUNE

Why do you say that? Tell me!

JOHNNY

It's none of your business.

JUNE

If you've done something that will damage our family's reputation then it damn well is my business.

JOHNNY

Come now, Junius. Buck up. Let's go get a drink?

JUNE

No, not until you tell me- Johnny, look at me and be serious for a moment. What have you done?

JOHNNY

I... I can't tell you. But just know that I have an opportunity to link the Booth name with something truly great! I'm seizing my moment in history!

JUNE

What on earth are you talking about? You can't be thinking of joining up with the army? Enlisting for the Confederacy?!

JOHNNY

No, not fighting in the army. Not in the traditional sense, anyway. But waging a war- don't you understand what I'm talking about? I know deep in my soul that I will save our country from this tyrant! He's going to declare himself king, you mark my words, if he's re-elected that's precisely what he'll do.

JUNE

Lincoln's not going to declare himself King, that's nonsense.

JOHNNY

It's that kind of dangerous complacency in the face of this creeping dictatorship that will bring us to ruin!

JUNE

Who are you parroting? You sound like you're playing a role in one of those awful melodramas.

JOHNNY

Don't mock me! The folks I am working with- the opportunity I've been handed- I will be the protector of freedom and independence! I know that's my destiny! Mine alone!

JUNE

(Looking at him in utter disbelief and horror)

You're talking about... what? Being some kind of spy? This is insane. Complete lunacy.

JOHNNY

(Cutting him off)

Won't you come with me?

JUNE

What?!

JOHNNY

Come with me. Meet the men I'm working with, these few... these happy few. *(He grins at his bad Shakespeare joke. JUNE does not respond)* Listen to what they have to say. They are persuasive. But it's because you know in your heart that they're right. This whole war, it's a senseless inversion of the proper order. I'm just trying to set the world upright again. It's an ideal plan—no one is going to get hurt, not even Lincoln! I promise!

JUNE

I don't— Johnny, whatever you are talking about with... whomever you're speaking with. What you're discussing, it's treason. If you are caught, you'll certainly be hanged.

JOHNNY

How could it end like that? The Confederates have promised that if the exchange of prisoners for President Lincoln goes smoothly, we will have secured passage to Richmond and then we can go where ever we like within the Confederacy! We'll be heroes, June! Bigger than Robert E. Lee and Jefferson Davis combined! Come on! Come with me!

JUNE

I can't. It's just too big a risk to take. Don't tell me any more, I don't wish to know.

JOHNNY

(Disappointed and hurt)

I see.

(A long silence hangs between them. JUNE is bewildered and JOHNNY is sullen)

JUNE

You've committed to this? There's nothing I can say to convince you to change your mind?

JOHNNY

This is what I was born to do. I am answering this call to arms, you see? Finally, I know what I was meant to do! I thought you of all people would understand-

JUNE

(Overlapping)

Why do you think this is what you were meant to do? You are a Booth! Your skills are on stage, not leading some revolutionary uprising. Please!

JOHNNY

You're not listening to me- and if you think you can control me or make me back down, you're sorely mistaken!

JUNE

I'm not trying to control you, I'm trying to get you to come to your senses. If you do this and you fail, as you most likely will *(JOHNNY starts to argue but JUNE explodes with intense emotion.)* No don't you interrupt me! This will have disastrous results for us all! Your vainglorious planning will come to nothing and you will be forever known as the fool who tried to kidnap Lincoln! Our family will be laughingstocks or labeled as traitors along with you. It's horribly selfish!

(ASIA enters, having heard JUNE shouting.)

ASIA

June? Is everything all right?

JOHNNY

Everything's fine. June's just upset with me.

JUNE

Does Asia know about all of this too?

ASIA

About what?

JOHNNY

She knows I've been in business talks, yes. About the oil speculation? *(He looks meaningfully at ASIA, who glances between her brothers, trying to glean how much JUNE knows)* I told you about that, remember?

ASIA

Johnny...

JUNE

Oil speculation?

JOHNNY

She advised against it, of course. Cautious as always!

ASIA

I don't-

JUNE

(Furiously)

You two must think I'm an utter fool! A complete rube!

ASIA

Johnny, I don't want to be a part of this deception... please! Tell the truth!

JOHNNY

I am telling the truth!

JUNE

Well? Are you giving up this insanity?

JOHNNY

No.

JUNE
(Despairingly)

Johnny...

JOHNNY

Are you going to tell Edwin?

JUNE
You can't expect me to keep this secret. Don't ask that of me.

ASIA
Let's just calm down for a moment, think this through-

JOHNNY
(Overlapping)
Don't tell him anything! I haven't technically told you, so there's nothing to tell is there? You don't have to say anything to him at all!

JUNE
He's probably guessed as much already. Hell, you brag about your "special knowledge" of rebel military strategy to every stagehand in the company when you get a few drinks in you. You think it's going to be that surprising to anyone that you're a rebel spy?

ASIA
Perhaps there's no need to say anything to Edwin if Johnny promises not to meet with them any more during the run of Caesar? Is that a fair compromise?

JUNE
Asia!

JOHNNY

(Through clenched teeth, fighting back tears.)

I need to have something of my own, something I made! You don't- you couldn't possibly understand what it's like, the way everyone treats me! Like I haven't done anything on my own in my whole life! This is my chance to strike out and- be a man on my own! Now you and Edwin are going to take that away from me too?

JUNE

No one thinks you're not your own man, Johnny.

JOHNNY

You all look down on me. Don't pretend that you don't!

ASIA

We love you! We only want what's best for you, all of us.

JOHNNY

You don't know what's best for me!

JUNE

So this is your plan? To take our entire family down because of your bruised ego?

JOHNNY

Father would understand.

JUNE

(Rolling his eyes)

I'm sure he would. But he'd still call you a fool.

ASIA

Father wouldn't want you to do something that would tarnish his legacy. He worked his entire life to build the reputation he had- and it's a legacy that we all continue to benefit from to this day.

JOHNNY

But haven't you ever wanted to be part of something great Asia? To feel that you could change the course of history? I know you have! *(She turns away from him and he appeals to JUNE)* Junius, listen to me- when you were out west everything you put your hand to turned to gold! How could you leave all that to come back here and be Edwin's second-in-command?

JUNE

It was a hard life out west. Not everything turned to gold. You only know part of the story and you're romanticizing.

JOHNNY

Life needs more romance, Junius. Your life in particular. C'mon you can't tell me this doesn't spark a little something in you? Where's your sense of adventure? Justice? Family loyalty, at least? *(Long pause as JUNE doesn't answer)* Are you going to tell Edwin?

(JUNE looks at ASIA. She avoids his eye, suddenly focusing her attention on straightening the flowers in the vase on the dressing table.)

JUNE

I... I don't know.

JOHNNY

Can you at least wait until after Caesar opens? I can't bear to work with him so closely while he harangues me every moment of the day.

ASIA

(Overly-enthusiastic)

Yes! That's a good idea. I think it will make things plesanter for all of us.

JUNE

I just can't believe you're so committed to this course of action. It's... it's mad.

JOHNNY
(Grinning)

It may be. It may be mad indeed. But though this be madness, I believe there's method in it.

JUNE

Don't, Johnny.

JOHNNY

Oh? No one but Edwin can quote the doomed Dane?

JUNE

That's not what I meant. And anyway that's Polonius's line.
(Resigned) This is utter foolishness. It can't end any way other than disaster. I just hope you don't wind up dead at the end of all this.

ASIA

Please don't even say such things!

JUNE

We're all thinking it. Those of us that aren't mad.

JOHNNY

Don't be absurd! You're worried over a whole lot of nothing. These men are professionals and I'm... well, I'm me. *(He laughs loudly, a manic energy taking over.)* Sic Semper Tyrannis! Sic Semper Tyrannis! C'mon, June! Come with me! Say you'll come with me!

JUNE

I don't want to come with you. I don't want to be involved in any plots- But I- I won't say anything to Edwin. For the time being, anyway. All right?

JOHNNY

Oh June! You always were my favorite brother!

(He laughs, hugging JUNE tightly. JUNE looks at ASIA and she shakes her head sadly as the lights fade.)

END OF SCENE

SCENE FOUR

(November, 1864. The rehearsal hall set for Julius Caesar rehearsal, a bucket with various sword props lies tipped over at center. JUNE comes on, carrying a second chair. He spends a few moments fussing over the placement before turning his attention to the bucket of swords. He is kneeling, cleaning them up when EDWIN enters.)

EDWIN

Do we have the set of smaller daggers yet?

JUNE

These will do for today.

EDWIN

It's ridiculous, June! We can't assassinate Caesar with a set of kitchen knives and a dull bayonet.

JUNE

I promise the real daggers will be here by final dress. These will do for today.

EDWIN

Is Johnny here yet?

JUNE

He isn't. Doubt he's coming. Or if he does come, doubt he's sober enough to rehearse.

EDWIN

Do you have a plan to replace him?

JUNE

I didn't think that was in my realm of expertise. Paying for everything, sure enough, but replacing my itinerant brother?

EDWIN

He'll be back. His ego just got a little bruised is all. This damn costume business is a hill he's decided he's going to die on. He'll come back.

JUNE

If you say so.

(JUNE proceeds to set up the space for rehearsal. EDWIN watches but doesn't offer to help.)

EDWIN

What did he say to you?

JUNE

He didn't say anything about that. Asia told me you two had words. Something about a cloak?

EDWIN

More than a cloak. He struck me! He's too volatile. I don't trust being on stage with him.

JUNE

Perhaps it's for the best that he quit, then.

EDWIN

Makes all those "The Brothers Booth On Stage Together- One Week Only" prints seem like false advertising. Do we have time to have them reprinted?

JUNE

Not before Friday.

EDWIN

Do you think you could learn Marc Antony?

JUNE

Who would play Cassius then?

EDWIN

Surely that would be an easier part to fill? Someone waiting in the wings for their chance?

JUNE

I don't want to learn a new part. *(Pause)* I want you to apologize to Johnny.

EDWIN

Surely you can't mean that. He attacked me, Junius! He's... he's unstable! Paranoid! You should have heard him, making all these wild accusations, that I'm jealous of him! One of the Negro stage hands told me he drew a pistol on him because he wouldn't take his hat off in his presence! He's... unhinged.

JUNE

All the more reason you need to apologize. We need to keep him close, keep him under our watchful gaze. Help him to curb these attitudes that he is prone to indulging. Dangerous fantasies about government conspiracies...

EDWIN

Dangerous fantasies?

JUNE

He believes- at least he seems to believe that if Lincoln is re-elected that he will declare himself King of America. He has aligned himself with this group of lunatic extremists. I think he's taken on some kind of... position... with them.

EDWIN

Position?

JUNE

I don't know the details. *(Carefully)* Mother mentioned that he came home a few months ago very... keyed up was the phrase that she used. He told her that he needed to ship a trunk of his belongings to Canada "for safe-keeping" and that he wanted to put some of Father's costume pieces in the trunk. She dissuaded him from that course of action but still... It's odd, isn't it?

EDWIN

Yes. Have you spoken with Johnny about it?

JUNE

Not in so many words. I don't really know what to say to him. Anything I say might set him off. He's--

EDWIN

I know! It's like I said. He's volatile. He needs to go out West. Get away from all the constant war talk. Get out from under my shadow.

JUNE

(Slightly annoyed)

We all could use a break from that position.

(EDWIN is about to reply when ASIA comes into the rehearsal hall, looking harried and disheveled.)

EDWIN

Good Lord! Asia, what are you doing here?

ASIA

Looking for Johnny- is he here? They haven't seen him at the hotel in three days. I need to find him!

JUNE

What's happened?

ASIA

He-- *(She glances at EDWIN, unsure if she wants to speak in front of him)* I don't know this for sure, but I think he might be going to meet with some... unsavory friends.

EDWIN

What on earth do you mean by unsavory friends? Speak plainly!

ASIA

I don't know who they are, Edwin! He doesn't tell me names or specific details.

EDWIN

Has Johnny gotten involved in some kind of rebel plot? That idiot! That damn fool! He will be the ruin of this family!

JUNE

Calm down. It's not illegal to speak with people from the South. You don't even know for sure that's what's happening.

EDWIN

Of course that's what's happening! He's allowed himself to get caught up with some romantic notion of being a "Hero to the Cause!" Who knows what he's agreed to or what they've promised him in return! He's a damn fool who is being manipulated by these dangerous lunatics.

JUNE

(Hastily, glancing to ASIA for confirmation)

Mother spoke to me about it some weeks ago, Edwin. It looks to be a group that wants to stage anti-Union demonstrations in New York. Nothing serious. That's probably what he's meeting with them about. I'm sure it's nothing.

EDWIN

No! We can't afford an association with secessionists. We are publicly in support of the Union! Think of the headlines in the papers if this got out: "Political differences rip Booth family apart at the seams!"

ASIA

He is under so much stress, Edwin. He is... he's vulnerable. He's been ill, he's susceptible to suggestions, to... falling in with false friends...

EDWIN

Asia, you will tell me everything that he's said to you on this matter. Leave nothing out!

ASIA

There's really nothing to tell. He's said that he's found a company that he wants to invest in-- oil, I believe? And he is leaving for a few months after the performance of Caesar. He claims that these meetings he's been going to are in regards to that investment scheme. Maybe the men in the company just happen to be from Southern states?

EDWIN

Well, that's open falsehood. Johnny lost his shirt on that Petrolia venture last year. Almost one hundred and twenty dollars. He hasn't got two nickels to rub together, much less investment capital for some new company. So tell me the truth! Who is he meeting with? What are their names? You must tell me!

ASIA

(Laughing nervously)

What makes you think he'd tell me something like that?

EDWIN

Is this funny? We are trying to salvage our family's reputation! After that ridiculous scandal with Adelaide claiming Mother wasn't married to Father when any of us were born-

JUNE

(Overlapping)

Well, they weren't.

EDWIN

-- And now that we've finally gotten that under control and settled, legally speaking, he comes up with this.

JUNE

Let's be rational about this, Edwin. Every reliable source says that the war will be over within the year. The Confederate resources are strained to their limits. Johnny will be able to focus on something else. Something more productive. Maybe we should let him travel west? It might be a good distraction for him after all.

ASIA

Mother would never agree to that. She wants him close to home.

JUNE

Then you need to talk to her and convince her that it's what's best for Johnny... for his health and well-being. She'll listen to you.

EDWIN

We need to find him and get him back in line. June, send some of the stagehands to check the taverns. Asia, go back to the hotel and wait to see if he comes there. Where was this meeting supposed to be happening?

ASIA

The restaurant at the National Hotel. He's met with them there before.

EDWIN

Fine. Junius, you and I will go there and see if we can catch him before he goes into this meeting. At all costs, we must not allow the press or the police to get a hold of him first. Who knows what he would say? One off-hand remark to the wrong person, he'll get in a scuffle or shoot his mouth off and end up in jail!

JUNE

If we can find him, you have to bury the hatchet with all this, Edwin. You have to let him come back to the show wearing whatever cloak or crown he wants. You have to stop berating him in front of the other actors. He's no threat to you! Promise me you'll do this.

EDWIN

That's ridiculous.

ASIA

It's not, Edwin. He just wants your approval.

EDWIN

He doesn't need my approval. He's looking to make a name for himself.

ASIA

Try to see the world through his eyes for once! He's lived his entire life in Father's shadow and now he's desperately trying to make a name for himself. But you just-

EDWIN

What more could I do? I've given him opportunities to prove himself and he always comes up short.

ASIA

That isn't true! You limit him. (*EDWIN scoffs at her*) You do! And you too, Junius. You both don't think he's capable of performing to the standard Father set forth. But he's never been given a decent chance. He feels that injustice, deeply.

EDWIN

Am I to be my brother's keeper after being my father's? No thank you. I categorically decline.

JUNE

(*Evenly*)

Asia, there's more to it than that. Johnny doesn't ingratiate himself well to an audience. He comes off as... pompous. So it's amusing for them to see that type of personality fail.

ASIA

I'm telling you both that this desire he has, to be valued and, and recognized for his accomplishments, that stems from you both not treating him like he's on equal footing. So all this nonsense about wanting to side with the Rebels or looking for a way to make a name for himself, it's just another version of that same impulse. Don't you see?

EDWIN

No, I don't see. And I'm tired of you and Mother making excuses for him. You've done it his entire life and now look where we are.

JUNE

We need to go if we're going to make it to the National before evening. If we find him, we will bring him to his room at the boarding house and meet back with you there. All right?

ASIA

Don't hurt him.

EDWIN

I'm not an animal, Asia. There's no need for such melodrama. Go to the boarding house and wait for us there. If Johnny comes, keep him there. Understand?

ASIA

Yes.

EDWIN

Good. Let's go, June. Hopefully we can get this mess sorted out without having to get anyone else involved.

(They exit. Lights fade.)

END OF SCENE

SCENE FIVE

(March 1865. Several months after Scene Four. Lights up on EDWIN BOOTH's dressing room at the Winter Garden Theatre. The room is warm and well-appointed. Cushioned chairs and drapes. It is a comfortable, lived-in space. EDWIN has just concluded his 90th consecutive performance of Hamlet to thunderous applause we can hear. JOHNNY is sitting in one of the chairs with his feet on EDWIN's dressing table. An almost-full bottle of brandy and two glasses are on the table as well. He waits with his hat over his face, pretending to be asleep. EDWIN comes into the room in his Hamlet costume and stops when he sees JOHNNY in his chair.)

JOHNNY

Hey there, big brother.

EDWIN

How did you get back here? What do you want?

JOHNNY

You haven't seen me in 3 months and that's the way you welcome home the prodigal brother?

EDWIN

What do you want, Johnny?

JOHNNY

I came to offer my congratulations on your achievement. It's monumental, really it is! 90 straight performances of the doomed Dane. It's in all the papers, it's all anyone can talk about. 10 more and you will hold the world record for consecutive shows. You must be just printing money in the ticket office.

EDWIN

So save your congratulations until ten days from now.

(EDWIN glares at JOHNNY until he takes his feet off the dressing table and vacates the chair. EDWIN sits down and begins to take off his "Hamlet" garb.)

JOHNNY

Do you think you'll make it to the coveted 100 performances?

EDWIN

That's the plan. Or die valiantly in the attempt.

JOHNNY

The reviews have been excellent. I know you're pleased.

(JOHNNY pours himself a healthy glassful of brandy. He splashes a perfunctory amount in EDWIN's glass.)

EDWIN

What do you need, Johnny? Money?

JOHNNY

I've got money. I don't want yours.

EDWIN

What have you been doing with yourself? Mother says she hasn't heard from you after we finished Caesar. Last we heard, you were heading back to Charleston for another tour below the Mason-Dixon line.

JOHNNY

I was there for a moment or two. But I missed the hustle of the big city. And of course, your brotherly affection, care, and concern.

EDWIN

I have done nothing but support you, Johnny. *(JOHNNY drinks and refills his glass.)* We all have. Junius, Mother, Asia... We all want you to be successful.

JOHNNY

Pardon my disbelief at the sincerity of your support. And yet, if the great "Master of the American Stage" says so, I suppose I must acquiesce to your claim.

EDWIN

You shouldn't drink any more.

JOHNNY

Don't tell me what to do.

EDWIN

Fine. *(He takes off the Hamlet cloak and hangs it up in his steamer trunk. JOHNNY glares at him, waiting for him to speak. EDWIN puts on his dressing gown and ties it, picking up his brandy glass and sipping from it, calmly regarding his brother.)*
You heard Asia and Clark's joyful news, I suppose?

JOHNNY

No.

EDWIN

Hm. That's surprising- she didn't write you? Send a telegram?

JOHNNY

I've been travelling a good deal. Probably it'll catch up with me here while I'm in town. I gather she's expecting?

EDWIN

She's due in the fall.

JOHNNY

Well... good for her. I suppose that means we're saddled with her idiot husband for good now?

EDWIN

Indeed. But I think Asia will be a good mother. She's wonderful with Edwina and-

JOHNNY

(Irritated with the pretense of small talk)

You don't have the right to keep me from performing in New York or Washington if I want to.

EDWIN

(Taken aback momentarily, but speaking evenly and without anger.)

Of course... Who said I was trying to keep you from performing where ever you wanted to perform? All we asked was that you continue to use the stage name "J. B. Wilkes." Mother even agreed that was preferable-

JOHNNY

(Overlapping)

That's insulting! Why should I?

EDWIN

-It's just until you've gotten some solid years under your belt. Now, Caesar was a good start but it was very rocky during rehearsals and-

JOHNNY

I'm not going to continue to use some ginned-up stage name! You've no right to make me do that!

EDWIN

Johnny, our family's livelihood is built on a foundation of sand. Right now, the Booth name is one of... quality and respect. But that fact comes with a great responsibility to protect and preserve it at all costs. I take that responsibility seriously. Do you? *(JOHNNY scoffs and EDWIN talks over him)* I paid off Adelaide and her horrible, loud-mouthed son about Father's... indiscretions in London. I kept the sordid details of Father's death out of the papers- and paid handsomely for the privilege!

JOHNNY

What does any of that have to do with me?

EDWIN

All we have is our name! Your drunken shenanigans and erratic behaviors have earned you an unsavory reputation. Bar fights and carousing like some circus roustabout! So... until you prove

yourself worthy, you don't get the right to call yourself a Booth on stage.

JOHNNY

And just who is the arbiter of my worthiness? You? June and Asia?

EDWIN

I suppose. And Mother agrees with me, as much as it pains her to say it.

JOHNNY

And what if I refuse? What if I perform as John Wilkes Booth, son of Junius Brutus Booth?

EDWIN

I doubt you will have much luck finding a venue that will let you perform under that moniker. At least, not until the other theater managers hear from me or June.

JOHNNY

You've blacklisted me? You bastard!

EDWIN

In the literal sense, I suppose that's true. (*JOHNNY fumes, pouring another glass of brandy, possibly finishing the bottle.*) Have you considered going abroad? Maybe to London for a year or two?

JOHNNY

Why would I want to do that?

EDWIN

You might find audiences in Europe to be a little more... intrigued? By the novelty of an American performer of Shakespeare?

JOHNNY

I'm not interested in travelling right now. And anyways, how could I leave when the Confederacy is so close to a turning point?

EDWIN

(Exasperated)

Please don't start all that nonsense.

JOHNNY

You don't know! You don't know the truth because you only read those Union rags put out by bootlicking Lincolmites! I have it on excellent authority that Confederate forces are launching a definitive campaign, aimed at bringing Grant's army to its knees.

EDWIN

You're completely delusional. The Confederacy is lost- the war is all but over- but I don't want to argue with you about this anymore. We agreed we weren't going to talk politics, remember?

JOHNNY

(Sarcastically)

Oh, I remember. I'm just expected to keep my mouth shut if I disagree with you! No one is allowed to have a differing opinion from the de facto head of the family! God forbid!

EDWIN

I truly don't want to argue with you. We will never see eye to eye on this but... you're my brother. I want to do right by you.

JOHNNY

Then let me perform under my given name! Give me a chance to prove myself!

(EDWIN stares at JOHNNY for a very long time. JOHNNY sways slightly, catching himself on the edge of the dressing table to steady himself. EDWIN has a moment of recognition, seeing the specter of their father in JOHNNY's behavior.)

EDWIN

It's not a good time for it right now, Johnny. Trust me please. Maybe next year we could go on tour? Just the two of us? Try out some smaller houses in the Midwest or up the Mississippi together, and see how things are received. How does that sound?

JOHNNY

That sounds like contemptible compromise. Not interested.
(EDWIN sighs, turning to his dressing table and starting to remove his stage makeup.)

EDWIN

I can't give you what you are asking for right now. Try to understand.

JOHNNY

I have big plans for myself, for my future.

EDWIN

I'm sure you do.
(JOHNNY grabs EDWIN roughly by the shoulder and turns him around to face him.)

JOHNNY

I don't have to stand for this! There are people who value me, you know? Important people!

EDWIN

(Bemused)

I don't doubt it.

JOHNNY

Wipe that simpering smirk off your face. It's true! I'm highly sought after. My skills, and my... expertise!

EDWIN

In what, exactly?

JOHNNY

As a leader! My ability to motivate men, to follow through and lead! That's what. My passionate commitment to the Cause!

EDWIN

The "cause?" Oh good Lord, what have you done now?

JOHNNY

Wouldn't you like to know? *(He rummages around in the dressing table or the steamer trunk, looking for another bottle of liquor. EDWIN grabs him roughly by the shoulders)*

EDWIN

I'm not bailing you out of another mess! That nonsense before we opened Caesar, meeting with those men! I told you then I won't let you bring scandal down on this family!

JOHNNY

You threw me out of your house, calling me a "rank secessionist" when I had a fever and could barely walk! I've suffered under your hand but no more!

EDWIN

Get yourself under control- no one has made you suffer. You know as well as I that you created a horrible scene at my house, in full view of guests. That's why I made you leave. Your... vocal Southern sympathies notwithstanding, on the particular instance in question, you made a drunken fool of yourself in front of outsiders.

JOHNNY

You and June think you're better than me. Asia's told me the things you've said, after Caesar.

EDWIN

You are being a child!

JOHNNY

No, I'm finally seeing where I stand with you. I'm finally seeing my place in this family. And I don't like it.

EDWIN

Your place in this family is the same as it always has been, Johnny. Nothing has changed. You are and remain a Booth. On equal footing with all of us. *(EDWIN softens, going to his brother)* I don't want our political differences to drive us further apart. This war will end and we will still be family. Nothing can change that, do you hear me? *(No response from JOHNNY)* Do you need help getting back to your hotel? Do you want me to hire you a carriage?

JOHNNY

No. I can make it myself.

EDWIN

All right.

(Silence hangs between them. JOHNNY considers saying more, maybe even starting to speak. EDWIN watches expectantly and finally JOHNNY grabs his hat to leave.)

JOHNNY

(Quoting Shakespeare ominously)

"And why would Caesar be a tyrant then? Poor man, I know he would not be a wolf, but that he sees the Romans are but sheep."

EDWIN

Why are you quoting Julius Caesar at me?

JOHNNY

I am a Booth! I am a Booth! I am a modern-day Brutus, you see if I'm not.

EDWIN

A modern-day Brutus? What on earth are you talking about?

JOHNNY

Best wishes on the rest of the run of Hamlet, brother Edwin.

EDWIN

What does that mean? Johnny? John!

*(JOHNNY drunkenly exits out of the dressing room, leaving
EDWIN alone as the lights fade.)*

END OF SCENE

SCENE SIX

(May, 1865. Lights up on the sitting room of EDWIN BOOTH's New York townhome. A very frail, weakened JUNE is seated in a chair, his feet up on an ottoman. A few newspapers litter the floor by his chair. ASIA, now visibly pregnant, enters with a blanket and a tray with tea for him. They don't speak. She puts the tray down on a small table next to his chair and proceeds to wrap the blanket around his legs. She fusses with tucking it underneath his feet and he bristles at her.)

JUNE

That's enough, Asia. I'm not an invalid.

ASIA

No one said you were. The doctor said you needed to rest. Your lungs are still weakened.

JUNE

Three weeks in a sweltering jail cell, being interrogated for hours at a time? My lungs are hardly the only thing that suffered. It was hell on earth.

ASIA

I know June. I'm sorry for- *(She stops abruptly)* It's just so humiliating. Everyone in town still avoids even looking me in the eye when I do the shopping or take Edwina on a walk.

JUNE

(Bitterly)

I wish I'd had something more to tell them.

ASIA

I've brought you some tea.

JUNE

Thank you. Is Edwin coming home tonight?

ASIA

He didn't say when he left this morning. Another meeting with the owner of the Winter Garden, trying to decide what to do... He's afraid of the public outcry if he were to try and perform but- With what Johnny's done... He's so broken over this.

JUNE

We all are.

ASIA

(Picking up the newspapers)

You shouldn't read these. It's not good for you.

JUNE

I need to know.

ASIA

What good will it do? What's done is done. We will have to face the consequences as they come. Our family name, forever linked to...

(She can't bring herself to say the words. She gathers up the papers and sees a playbill among them. She hastily tries to hide it while JUNE sighs and gathers his strength to stand.)

JUNE

Wait, what's that? *(She reluctantly hands him the playbill.)* Our American Cousin? Oh. Oh God. Why- why do you have this?

ASIA

People bring them and stick them through the letter slot. Dozens a day. I do my best to gather them before Edwin sees. It upsets him so dreadfully.

JUNE

Hm.

ASIA

I'm worried about him, June.

JUNE

I'm more concerned with you. Have you heard from Clark?

ASIA

No. After he was released, he was so furious with me. It's been two weeks and nothing. No letters or... I'm afraid he's going to ask me for a divorce.

JUNE

Oh Asia. I'm so sorry. *(Pause)* I never cared for him.

ASIA

Don't, June.

JUNE

It's true! He's a simpering coward and I tried- we all tried to welcome him and he just never showed himself to be a man of true... quality.

ASIA

He is still my husband, the father of my child! I don't know what I will do if-

JUNE

We will look after you and the baby. You don't need to concern yourself.

ASIA

I suppose there's not much point in being concerned about a divorce scandal now, anyway.

JUNE

Has Edwin spoken to you about his thoughts? Plans for moving forward?

ASIA

He doesn't say much. *(Pause)* I think he's drinking heavily again.

JUNE

It's as bad as after Mary?

ASIA

Easily. Worse, perhaps? At least after Mary he could throw himself into his work as a distraction. Now-

(Before JUNE can respond, EDWIN enters wearing a somber black overcoat and top hat. ASIA rushes to hug him fiercely, relieved to see him.)

EDWIN

Goodness, Asia! There, there... Please don't give over to hysterics, my dear.

ASIA

I'm sorry... I'm very emotional these days.

EDWIN

Of course. It's the way with women in your condition- to say nothing of the current... unique situation.

ASIA

Have they said when we can have his body? Mother was asking.

EDWIN

It will be awhile before they will speak of that, I'm sure. His co-conspirators haven't even stood trial yet.

ASIA

Is it likely that we- that they won't let the family have his body to bury?

EDWIN

I have no idea, Asia. It's fairly low on my list of concerns.

ASIA

But Mother-

JUNE

Tell Mother to worry about something else. There's plenty more to fret about besides what happens to his body.

EDWIN

How are you feeling June?

JUNE

Better. Still weak. Walking and going up stairs is tiring still.

EDWIN

I'm sorry.

JUNE

Yes. Well. We couldn't all have powerful friends to protect us.

EDWIN

What exactly do you mean by that?

ASIA

Junius, please-

JUNE

You know what I mean. While Asia is held in custody and publicly shamed and her husband and I are treated like common criminals for weeks, subjected to horrible conditions, where are you? Living here in your town home, treated like a visiting dignitary whose prestige makes him untouchable!

(JUNE has overexerted himself and ASIA rushes to his side, making him sit back down in the armchair. He is short of breath and weak. EDWIN watches him blankly.)

EDWIN

I don't know what to tell you. The investigators found letters between you and Johnny that seemed... knowledgeable. They could find no such evidence in my personal effects. No such sympathies. My position was clear.

ASIA

Are you suggesting that June or I knew more than we told the police?

EDWIN

I'm not suggesting that. I'm saying it outright. I think both of you knew what Johnny was really planning to do and you deliberately kept the true details from me.

JUNE

That's outrageous!

EDWIN

Is it? What did he tell you he was planning? I know he talked to you about it during our preparations for Caesar. He must have had something in motion, perhaps he mentioned it to you in passing? Is that what happened?

JUNE

Edwin, you have to believe me. I never thought that he was capable- that he had the means to make good on any idle threat.

ASIA

No of course not! None of us did.

EDWIN

Did he tell you he was going to shoot Lincoln?

JUNE

It- he never used that specific phrase. Not with me.

EDWIN

Well then, did he indicate he had knowledge of a plot? Kidnapping or otherwise?

JUNE

I don't have to defend myself to you. I answered questions for weeks! They let me go!

ASIA

Edwin, please! We've all been through so much. Can't we just believe one another? June says he didn't have any knowledge of Johnny's plan. And he didn't!

EDWIN

So what about you? You and Johnny were so close. He told you everything, ever since we were all children he confided in you. I know he told you he was meeting with Confederates, even when you pretended to think it was about some oil speculation. I know you didn't truly think that, so what did he tell you?

ASIA

I don't have to explain my actions to you! I loved him! He was my baby brother and I hated seeing him so unhappy! All he ever wanted was to be recognized as a success by the rest of the family. Why couldn't you give him that?

EDWIN

Are you trying to lay Johnny's actions at my feet? Do you hear this nonsense?

JUNE

Is it nonsense? I see some truth in it. It's not as simple and straightforward, perhaps but-

EDWIN

No! If anything, you and Asia allowed this insanity to fester, unchecked, because you didn't come forward with what you knew!

JUNE

What would you have me do? Turn in my own brother for treason?

ASIA

Don't pretend you would have done that, Edwin. Even you can't be that heartless.

EDWIN

Look at what we've lost, Asia! We can barely show our faces in public without risking injury! Strangers that used to

congratulate me on Hamlet now spit at my feet and call me a traitor!

JUNE

You should go abroad.

ASIA

I think we should all go away, at least until the autumn.

EDWIN

This all could have been prevented, June. If you had just told me what was really going on, we could have stopped him.

JUNE

I don't think that's true. I'm tired. I'm going to bed.

(JUNE stands, making his way to exit. ASIA crosses to help him if he needs her but he waves her away)

EDWIN

Admit it! Just admit what your pandering to him has cost our family! Why won't you say those words?

JUNE

If I admit that, will you admit that you share some of the blame? That perhaps if you had shown him more kindness or support he wouldn't have needed to look for validation in the arms of rebel assassins?

ASIA

I wish you would both stop trying to look for blame! The only one who holds any blame for what happened in Johnny himself. He was a grown man who made a terrible decision. It's unfortunate that his choices brought our whole family so low... but there it is. I don't know about the two of you, but I intend to go back upstate to see about Mother and poor Rosalie.

JUNE

You shouldn't be making travel plans in your condition.

EDWIN

I don't see how you two are taking things so cavalierly. Our livelihood is destroyed. The Booth name is worthless now. How can you be so calm?

JUNE

We'll bounce back. After Father's first marriage became public knowledge he still performed to sold-out houses-

EDWIN

This isn't infidelity or bigamy, Junius! Our brother murdered the President of the United States in cold blood in front of hundreds of witnesses! He killed a man who was beloved for preserving the Union! Shot him for no damn reason!

JUNE

What do you want me to say? He killed an innocent man. But he died himself.

ASIA

I think what June is trying to say is that we can't- that arguing amongst ourselves about what we could have done to prevent it from happening seems... fruitless at this point.

JUNE

She's right.

(There is a long pause as EDWIN struggles with what he is about to say.)

EDWIN

Get out of my house. Both of you.

ASIA

What? Why?

JUNE

My doctor says I'm too weak to travel.

EDWIN

I don't care. Pack your things and leave.

ASIA

Why are you being so cruel? And who will look after Edwina?

EDWIN

I'll hire someone. I don't want her to be poisoned by your version of what has transpired. This family is broken. Irrevocably broken.

JUNE

You think history will be any kinder to you than us? You think you can earn the affection of the public back by breaking with the family? Good luck to you! Those playbills shoved through your mailslot should tell you how well that'll turn out!

ASIA

Think of Mother- this will kill her! We need to support each other, now more than ever. Please, Edwin. Don't do this.

EDWIN

We have nothing more to discuss, Asia. Go with June. The two of you kept things from me- you made me an accomplice to this nightmare! And you allowed him to ruin us all!

ASIA

We were trying to do what was best for our brother!

EDWIN

No, Asia. It's finished. You made your choice.

ASIA

So did you. You saw all the same things we did, you heard him spouting these radical notions just as much as we did! What did you say to stop him?

EDWIN

I spoke against his beliefs every time! I threw him out of my house because of the things he was saying. You cannot lay this

at my feet, Asia. You both stood by and said nothing when you heard him- or perhaps you agreed with him when you were out of my hearing?

JUNE

That's preposterous!

ASIA

Neither one of us had the same passion for arguing as you and Johnny did, but we never agreed with what he was saying!

EDWIN

Then your silence was interpreted as support. At least he knew where I stood.

ASIA

You can absolve yourself in your own mind. You were always so good at ignoring unpleasant truths when it suited you. You treated him horribly his whole life.

EDWIN

I didn't tell him to shoot the President to make up for feeling like a failure!

JUNE

Search your own heart, Edwin. You know you saw the same signs in our brother that we did, and you chose to hope he would eventually see the error of his ways! We are all equally at fault-

EDWIN

That man is no brother of mine.

JUNE

You can deny it if you like. It won't change anything.

ASIA

Please, Edwin. Let's move forward together from this tragedy. All of us. As a family.

EDWIN

We aren't a family anymore. I need you both to leave.

ASIA

(She turns away from EDWIN, furious at his cruelty.)

June, do you think you could ride in a carriage to Mother's?

JUNE

I- I suppose I'll have to try. Edwin, your mind is made up in this matter?

EDWIN

You had every opportunity to stop him, Junius. Why didn't you stop him?

JUNE

There's no point in looking for answers in the past. I can only live forward.

EDWIN

How fortunate for you. Go then, live forward and acquit yourself of culpability! May God have mercy on you both.

ASIA

On us all, Edwin.

(ASIA helps JUNE to exit. Lights fade as EDWIN sinks into the chair, head in his hands.)

END OF PLAY