

BEFORE LESBIANS

A full-length play

by

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CHARACTER LIST

JAMES: Male, Caucasian, early 20's. Upper middle class. Works for the government.

CHARLOTTE: Female, Caucasian, early 20's. Upper middle class.

HENRY: Male, Caucasian, mid-20's. Middle class. Interest in personal accounting business.

VIVIAN: Female, Caucasian, mid-20's. Middle class. Bookworm.

LOCATION: Shippensburg, Pennsylvania area, 1861-1865

* Gettysburg is pronounced Gett-ihs-burg by people local to the area.

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE

This play was inspired by an article called "The Female World of Love and Ritual" from a Queer History class that I took at Oberlin College in the 1990's. The magic of letter writing during the 1800's to maintain such close relationships between women fascinated me and is integral to how women were able to carry on affairs with each other. In the 1800's, women often had romantic friendships with other women prior to marriage that they were expected to drop once they got married. Therefore, very close relationships with other women were not seen as threatening until women became more economically independent, as a result of the Civil War. The term "lesbian" was not invented until the late 1800's, along with Boston marriage who were women in long term live-in relationships with each other, economically independent of men. Women were assumed to be asexual creatures in the mid-late 1800's, only having sex for the purpose of procreation. It was also assumed that women did not have sexual relationships with other women, even in Boston marriages later in the century. However, it is simultaneously safe to assume that this is untrue and that society did not want to acknowledge such behaviors. The Civil War was a turning point for women who wanted to enter the medical field. Already led by Elizabeth Blackwell, the first female physician in the United States in 1849, medical efforts during the Civil War were often led by women like Clara Barton, who founded the Red Cross, and Dorothea Dix, who was in charge of the Army Nursing Corps.

Act I
Scene I

SETTING: Shippensburg City Hall. July,
1861.

AT RISE: JAMES and CHARLOTTE sit on a
bench. JAMES is wearing a
soldier's uniform. CHARLOTTE is in
a white dress.

JAMES

I hope you know this isn't how I wanted to do this.

CHARLOTTE

Of course, darling, I know that.

JAMES

We were going to have a grand wedding with all of our
family and friends at the church.

CHARLOTTE

I understand how important our country is to you.

JAMES

To us. You're being so brave, my dear.

CHARLOTTE

I know that I am not the only one.

(Enter VIVIAN and HENRY,
similarly dressed in soldier
and wedding attire. HENRY
looks around)

HENRY

I assume this is where we get married before we run off to
war?

JAMES

(glumly)

It is.

HENRY

(puts his hand out)

Mr. Pritchard. Fourth infantry Pennsylvania.

JAMES

(shaking his hand)

Mr. Cardinal. Twenty second infantry Pennsylvania. My soon-to-be-wife, Miss Davis.

HENRY

Oh, yes! And mine, Miss Bloom.

(VIVIAN shakes hands with
JAMES and CHARLOTTE)

VIVIAN

Very nice to meet you.

CHARLOTTE

And you.

(VIVIAN and HENRY sit on the
bench opposite them)

HENRY

A long wait you've had?

JAMES

Nearly three hours.

HENRY

Oh, good! It is shorter than Newville.

JAMES

Did you come all the way here from Newville to get married?
That's so far!

HENRY

It has taken most of the day to find a place to get married. The lines were too long in Newville so we went to Greenspring and then Oakville but the lines were enormous. And Oakville isn't very big! This seems to be the shortest line yet. I suppose this is what happens when the President calls up more volunteers.

JAMES

I suppose it is. But I doubt they'll need anymore after this. When do you leave?

HENRY

Tomorrow morning.

CHARLOTTE

Oh, my!

HENRY

Yes. You can see our urgency.

JAMES

Of course. Perhaps...

(HE thinks, then gets up)

Excuse me a moment.

(JAMES exits SR)

HENRY

Are you feeling warm, darling?

VIVIAN

I'm all right.

HENRY

This uniform is very warm. I don't think it's made for such hot weather.

(to CHARLOTTE)

So, you two live here?

CHARLOTTE

Yes, not far. I've never been to Newville before. Is it more of a city than this is?

VIVIAN

Hardly.

HENRY

We like quieter towns.

CHARLOTTE

More rural.

VIVIAN

Yes.

(awkward beat)

CHARLOTTE

The war can't last much longer, can it?

HENRY

What?

CHARLOTTE

I'm sorry, I...

(Re-enter JAMES)

JAMES

It's all settled.

CHARLOTTE

What is?

JAMES

I have arranged for my dear cousin...

(HE gestures to HENRY)

...to marry his fiancée at the same time as we get married.
And there are only two couples in front of us.

HENRY

Oh, how wonderful! Miss Bloom, did you hear that?

VIVIAN

That's terribly kind of you.

JAMES

It's such a small thing to give as a wedding present to a fellow soldier and his bride on his way to war. And you've traveled so far.

HENRY

Thank you. Cousin.

(THEY both giggle)

CHARLOTTE

Perhaps we can celebrate afterwards together with a dinner at our house before you head home. We're just on the outskirts of town but it will put you on the right road for your return.

VIVIAN

Oh, that's a delightful idea. What do you think, Mr. Pritchard? It will make it more festive.

HENRY

I don't know. We really ought to get back home. I have to leave early tomorrow.

VIVIAN

But, dear...

JAMES

What if we do an early dinner so you are able to get back home and have a good night's rest?

(aside to HENRY)

Wouldn't want to steal your wedding night away.

(THEY laugh and clap each other on the back)

HENRY

Good man. All right, we'll stay for a quick dinner. Thank you.

(VIVIAN is simultaneously relieved and irritated)

So, do you have any news about where you will be traveling?

JAMES

I don't. But I hope it's to South Carolina.

HENRY

Oh, South Carolina! It is despicable what they are doing to President Lincoln there!

JAMES

Absolutely deplorable!

(VIVIAN looks impatient with their conversation)

VIVIAN

(to CHARLOTTE)

I wonder if there is somewhere here I can freshen up. I feel sure that my hair is a wreck after being in the carriage for so long.

CHARLOTTE

(to VIVIAN)

Let's go see.

(THEY exit to a spotlight.
The men continue talking
animatedly in dimmer light.
VIVIAN sits on a pouffe and
starts fussing with her hair)

CHARLOTTE

(taking out a hairbrush)

Don't tell Mr. Cardinal. I don't want him to think I'm vain
but I brought a brush, just in case.

VIVIAN

A very good idea.

CHARLOTTE

May I?

VIVIAN

Thank you.

(CHARLOTTE sets to work on
VIVIAN's hair)

I see my fiance has found his match for his patriotic duty
in your fiance.

CHARLOTTE

Oh, yes. He's a very passionate person when it comes to
civic duty. It's part of what I love about him.

(VIVIAN starts to weep.

CHARLOTTE notices)

Oh, no! Don't cry. What is the matter?

VIVIAN

I'm so sorry. I don't know what's come over me.

CHARLOTTE

Are you nervous about the wedding?

VIVIAN

No, not that. It's just...I've been waiting to get married to
Mr. Pritchard for so long. We had just settled down and
were starting to plan the wedding when Mr. Pritchard
decided he needed to go fight.

CHARLOTTE

Oh, I'm so sorry.

VIVIAN

It's not your fault. I can't believe I started crying in front of you. We've only just met. You must think I'm a mess.

CHARLOTTE

Not at all. I feel like I'm getting cheated out of a real wedding, too.

VIVIAN

(turning around, exclaiming
in relief)

Yes! Exactly!

CHARLOTTE

You know, Mr. Cardinal works for the town magistrate so we're here at City Hall all the time. It doesn't feel very special to get married at his place of work.

VIVIAN

Oh, yes. I could understand that. We weren't going to have a very big wedding. Just at the chapel in town and a little party at the house afterwards.

(CHARLOTTE returns to fixing
VIVIAN's hair)

Still...wedding days are supposed to be full of love and mystery and hidden smiles and dancing. We are supposed to be surrounded by family and friends. Not...this.

(SHE realizes SHE may have
offended CHARLOTTE)

Oh, I'm sorry. It's not that you're not a perfectly nice person...

CHARLOTTE

(laughing)

I understood what you meant.

VIVIAN

It's just all happening so fast because of the enlistment.

CHARLOTTE

I took no offense. None of our family can even be here, either. They're all busy, even though some of them are in town.

VIVIAN

I've had these thoughts of a perfect wedding for so long. Probably too many books.

CHARLOTTE

(smiling)

No, I think you have some wonderfully romantic ideas for what a wedding should be like.

(beat)

I take a little solace in the fact that Mr. Cardinal is promising another wedding after he returns.

VIVIAN

Oh, that is nice. Mr. Pritchard hasn't said that. I suspect he'll just want to get on with his business and having a family.

CHARLOTTE

There. Your hair looks lovely.

VIVIAN

(checking a hand mirror)

Oh, thank you so much. It looks beautiful. Now I just need to clean up my face from all the crying. It's truly embarrassing.

(SHE blots at her eyes with a handkerchief. As SHE puts away her handkerchief, SHE pulls out a veil)

I brought a veil with me. It was my sister's. Would you like to wear it, as a thank you for being so kind to us?

CHARLOTTE

That's thoughtful. I have my own veil, though. Could you put it on me, though, so it sits right?

VIVIAN

Of course.

(The women put the veils on each other)

CHARLOTTE

(as they both look in the mirror)

Well, I think we look lovely.

VIVIAN

We do. Nervous?

CHARLOTTE

Oh, yes. I wish my mother was still alive. She could always calm me down. You?

VIVIAN

Yes. Very nervous. More than I realized. I hope he won't be able to tell.

(THEY return to the main
room, out of the spotlight,
and rejoin the men)

HENRY

Oh, darling. How charming you look!

(HE kisses VIVIAN's cheek)

Miss Bloom, I have had the most marvelous idea.

(VIVIAN braces herself)

Mr. Cardinal has just been telling me that Miss Davis is intending to try to volunteer with one of the army hospitals.

VIVIAN

What?

CHARLOTTE

I'll be married now so I think I will be allowed.

JAMES

(teasing)

Though she's not at all plain-looking.

(changing tone)

Can you believe they require the nurses to be plain-looking?

VIVIAN

And over 30, as I understand it.

HENRY

Well, perhaps they can make exceptions for the two of you if you go together.

(VIVIAN glares at HIM)

Clearly, neither of you are plain-looking or over 30 but together...

(HE looks at JAMES for assistance)

JAMES

We were thinking it might seem less threatening to have two married women going together. Like escorts for each other.

CHARLOTTE

That might work.

VIVIAN

Mr. Pritchard, I was going to send packages to the Sanitary Commission in Pittsburgh. And I have my books.

HENRY

Miss Bloom is rather addicted to her books.

CHARLOTTE

Why, that's wonderful! I haven't read as much as I should since I was in school. I'm sure my teachers would scold me.

HENRY

But, even with your books, darling, I still feel terrible about leaving you in a new place. This would be a way for you to get out and use your talents.

VIVIAN

I don't want to impose.

CHARLOTTE

On the contrary, I would welcome the company. Perhaps you could bring me up to date with my reading. We have a guest room that you could stay in for several days at a time. It's no imposition, truly.

VIVIAN

That's quite kind...but it is far. Half a day's ride.

CHARLOTTE

I understand. I'm sure there are some groups doing similar work in your area, anyway.

VIVIAN

Actually...our town hasn't really mobilized like that yet. I just heard about the call for packages for the Sanitary Commission in the newspaper.

CHARLOTTE

Oh. Well, you can think about it and send me a letter.

VIVIAN

Thank you. I may decide to return. You are very generous.

JAMES

This was a truly fortuitous meeting. Do you realize that we will always have the same anniversary now?

HENRY

So we will.

(HE puts an arm around
VIVIAN)

What do you say we four make a pact? We will meet back here in a year to celebrate our first anniversary?

JAMES

That sounds wonderful!

CHARLOTTE

Of course!

(Lights change. Both couples stand up solemnly next to each other. THEY mime getting married. All four cross themselves. Each couple kisses. END SCENE)

Interval 1

SETTING: Spotlights on CHARLOTTE and VIVIAN.

AT RISE: CHARLOTTE is holding a letter while VIVIAN recites its contents.

VIVIAN

Monday, July 29, 1861

Dear Mrs. Cardinal. I hope you don't mind that I am writing. I have finally finished unpacking the last trunk and placed things around the house as I think Mr. Pritchard would want them. But now I feel the waiting beginning. The house is so quiet without Mr. Pritchard here, I sometimes can't bear it. My sister was supposed to move here, too, but she has changed her arrival date for another month from now. I wondered if I could take you up on your offer to see about volunteering a few days at the hospital near you. It might help me keep busy. It seems so odd to ask you for this as we are nearly strangers but you are the only friend I've made so far. I hope you understand. Sincerely, Mrs. Pritchard.

(CHARLOTTE puts away the letter as VIVIAN takes a letter out of her pocket and opens it. CHARLOTTE recites)

CHARLOTTE

August 8, 1861

Dear Mrs. Pritchard. I am so glad you have written. Since Mr. Cardinal left, it seems that so many of the men in Shippensburg have left, too. The streets seem vacant. The war feels like it has finally come here. I have not gone to try to volunteer yet but I would love to have you visit and we can go together. When should I expect you? Sincerely, Mrs. Cardinal.

(Spotlights fade. END INTERVAL)

Act I
Scene 2

SETTING: Mid-August, 1861. CHARLOTTE and JAMES' parlor. It looks well taken care of. There are several sofas and chairs. There is a window at the back of the stage, possibly two and the front door.

AT RISE: VIVIAN sits alone. CHARLOTTE enters from the front door.

VIVIAN

Good day!

CHARLOTTE

Mrs. Pritchard! Did you arrive early? I'm so sorry. Have you been waiting long?

VIVIAN

Not at all.

(CHARLOTTE takes off her hat and gloves)

CHARLOTTE

Well, you can have some lunch with me then.

VIVIAN

Were you at the hospital?

CHARLOTTE

No, but I heard this morning that they have a lot of volunteers and not a lot of need for them.

VIVIAN

(crushed)

Oh.

CHARLOTTE

I'll just let Delia know about lunch.

(SHE exits for a few moments and then returns)

There we are. We'll have sandwiches soon enough.

VIVIAN

How long have you had her?

CHARLOTTE

Delia? She and Ben came to our family when I was still a baby and then they came with me to Mr. Cardinal's home when I moved. Why?

VIVIAN

Very strong minded. And chatty.

CHARLOTTE

(laughing)

Oh, yes.

VIVIAN

It's kind of remarkable. She told me she would fight in the war if she could.

CHARLOTTE

I'm sure she would. And I would fear for her enemies on the other side.

VIVIAN

Really?

CHARLOTTE

She believes in this war. She was very supportive of Mr. Cardinal going off to fight, even though it meant he was leaving me. Her son even tried to enlist but they wouldn't take him.

VIVIAN

Oh, yes. I've seen many disappointed Negro men who tried to enlist.

CHARLOTTE

You have some who work for you as well?

VIVIAN

No. We just have one Irishman that Mr. Pritchard hired. He doesn't particularly trust Negroes.

CHARLOTTE

(awkward pause)

Oh. I see.

VIVIAN

Please don't mistake my husband's point of view for mine.

CHARLOTTE

(somewhat hesitantly)

What is yours then?

VIVIAN

I have no problem with Negroes. And if they want to fight in this war alongside our Union soldiers, all the better.

(awkward beat)

Politics is probably not where we should have started.

CHARLOTTE

Perhaps not.

(SHE looks at VIVIAN)

So. How have you been since Mr. Pritchard has gone away?

VIVIAN

Not very good.

CHARLOTTE

Lonely?

VIVIAN

I try to keep busy. I read. But outside of the house, there just doesn't seem to be much to do. I was really hoping we could volunteer...

CHARLOTTE

Well, we can visit, anyway, can't we? Get to know each other? Perhaps it is better that they don't need help. It means there are not so many injuries.

VIVIAN

But is there more death?

CHARLOTTE

(puts a hand over VIVIAN's)

You can't think like that. Mr. Pritchard will come back.

VIVIAN

I know. You're right.

(SHE gets up and walks away
from CHARLOTTE)

But I have to find something to do.

CHARLOTTE

What would you do if he was home?

VIVIAN

We would be building a life together. He was going to open a business in town as an accountant. We were going to start a family.

CHARLOTTE

And what were you going to do while he was being an accountant and before you became a mother?

VIVIAN

Settle down into my marriage.

CHARLOTTE

Hmm. You know what? Let's throw a function.

VIVIAN

What kind of function?

CHARLOTTE

We can do an auction to raise money for the war. People can donate items and we will auction them off. We'll donate the money to the troops. I'm sure I know someone who could help us...

VIVIAN

Well, I can see if we have some old things to donate. And I might be able to knit some blankets.

CHARLOTTE

You could organize a group in Newville and I could organize a group in Shippensburg. I think we have some boxes of things we can look through in the attic. I truly have no idea what's in there. It will be like a little adventure.

VIVIAN

You are just full of energy, aren't you? I can see why Mr. Cardinal married you. You're so cheerful.

CHARLOTTE

(laughing)

That's a kind thing to say.

(SHE goes to the window)

Do you know if the post arrived today? I was hoping I might get a letter from him.

VIVIAN

It hasn't arrived since I've been here.

CHARLOTTE

I suppose it's still a little early.

VIVIAN

I watch the mail in the same way. I haven't heard from Mr. Pritchard yet but I don't think he's much of a writer.

(beat)

Mr. Cardinal being gone didn't seem to bother you until just now.

CHARLOTTE

It bothers me awfully. Sometimes I can't sleep at night because I'm so worried. But I can't stay depressed all the time. I have to keep going. It's what he's doing; it's what he would want me to do. And it's much easier with you here.

(VIVIAN becomes embarrassed)

No, it's true! The women that are left here are very...dedicated to their mourning. And not even for husbands that are dead! Just for husbands that have left!

VIVIAN

Maybe they're in mourning for lives they thought they would live.

CHARLOTTE

(startled)

That's very insightful.

(beat)

Remind me how long you and Mr. Pritchard had been planning to get married?

VIVIAN

Four years. He didn't want to marry me without having a house for us. But he was also saving up so he could start the new business so everything took a long time.

CHARLOTTE

And you waited.

VIVIAN

We still courted but we were promised and people knew it. But it was quite a while. I was lucky that my brother-in-law supported me.

CHARLOTTE

Mr. Pritchard is lucky to have someone so strong in you.

VIVIAN

I don't know that I am as strong as I appear. I worry all the time. What if I can't have children by the time he comes back? What if he can't have children when he gets back? What if he doesn't want me after all his time away?

CHARLOTTE

These are things that gnaw at all of us that are left behind. I assure you, you are not alone in these thoughts.

VIVIAN

I'm sorry. I'm afraid my propriety has fallen away. We barely know each other.

CHARLOTTE

No.

(SHE takes her hand)

We are friends. Please feel that you can trust me.

(Intense beat as THEY look at each other)

VIVIAN

I do.

CHARLOTTE

Good.

(THEY gaze at each other for a moment and then CHARLOTTE breaks it and drops VIVIAN's hand)

I can't imagine what might be keeping lunch. Let me go check.

(SHE exits quickly with VIVIAN looking after her curiously. Beat. END SCENE)

Act I
Scene 3

SETTING: The same. Later that afternoon.

AT RISE: There are boxes on the floor.
CHARLOTTE and VIVIAN are sorting
through them.

VIVIAN

My goodness, Mr. Cardinal's parents kept everything! Look
at this!

(SHE pulls out a white wig)

CHARLOTTE

(laughing and taking it)

Oh, yes. That was his father's. He was a judge.

(SHE puts it on)

What do you think? Do you think I could be a judge, too?

VIVIAN

(giggling)

You look like those women in European novels.

CHARLOTTE

Oh, no. I'm much more serious. I'm a judge. Is his gavel in
there as well?

(VIVIAN searches and finds
it. SHE hands it to CHARLOTTE
who bangs the gavel on the
top of a box)

Quiet, quiet. Court is in session. Judge Charlotte Cardinal
presiding.

VIVIAN

(laughing)

Wouldn't that be funny? To have women in the courtroom?
Wouldn't that be wonderful?

CHARLOTTE

(still in judge mode)

Silence! Who speaks before this Judge?

VIVIAN

(playing along)

It is I, Vivian Pritchard.

CHARLOTTE

(as judge)

And how do you plead, Vivian?

VIVIAN

(innocently)

I've done nothing, your Honor.

CHARLOTTE

(as judge)

Are you lying to the court then?

VIVIAN

(innocently)

I would never lie to the court.

CHARLOTTE

(peers at her for a long
time)

I believe that you are guilty! A lifetime sentence!

VIVIAN

(pretending to faint, she
overdramatically falls back
on the sofa)

Nooooo!

(THEY giggle uncontrollably)

Oh! I haven't laughed like this since I was a child.

CHARLOTTE

I haven't put a wig like that on since I was a child. My
father had one as well and Delia caught me wearing it.

(Instinctively, SHE takes it
off)

VIVIAN

Oh, it feels so good to laugh from my gut. Really
uncontrollably.

CHARLOTTE

It seemed so natural when you did.

VIVIAN

Mr. Pritchard doesn't make me laugh in the same way.

CHARLOTTE

(laughing)

Perhaps Mr. Pritchard doesn't know you as well as you think.

VIVIAN

Perhaps he doesn't.

(Awkward silence. CHARLOTTE puts the wig and gavel back into the box)

CHARLOTTE

Well. Clearly, we can't auction that off.

VIVIAN

No.

CHARLOTTE

(as they resume looking through boxes)

So what did you laugh about so much as a child?

VIVIAN

I didn't say so much.

(SHE pulls out an item from the box, holds it for CHARLOTTE, who shakes her head. VIVIAN puts it back)

I mostly had fun at my sister's expense. She and I didn't always get along. I'm afraid I was rather mean to her.

CHARLOTTE

I don't believe that for a minute.

(SHE holds something up. VIVIAN shakes her head)

VIVIAN

No, it's true. Sometimes, we played hide and seek and I would just climb a tree and read a book to get away from her. One time, it took her two hours to find me.

CHARLOTTE

(impressed)

You know how to climb a tree?

VIVIAN

I learned how so I could get away from my sister when she was annoying me.

CHARLOTTE

Very resourceful. I had no such luck with my brothers. They never tried to teach me anything.

(CHARLOTTE peeks in another box)

There are some books in here and a candelabra. This stuff isn't going to sell at auction. We need big things. Like paintings and statues. Isn't that what people buy at auctions?

VIVIAN

I don't know. I've never put together a fundraiser.

CHARLOTTE

What? Never?

VIVIAN

My mother was not...interested...in doing that kind of work.

CHARLOTTE

Oh. What kind of work was she interested in?

VIVIAN

(awkward beat)

She just had a lot of responsibilities in the house. We didn't have a Delia and a Ben to help out all the time.

CHARLOTTE

Oh.

VIVIAN

(awkward beat)

It seems that you have done the fundraisers before, though.

CHARLOTTE

Yes, I used to do them all the time with my mother and aunt. We did all kinds: auctions, dinners, dances, theater...oh!

(picks up the wig again)

Perhaps we need to do some theater instead and forget the auction. Do you like theater?

VIVIAN

I adore theater.

CHARLOTTE

Good! Then you need to try it on!

(SHE puts the wig on VIVIAN)

Oh, yes. It looks much better on you, Mr. Shakespeare.

VIVIAN

It's awfully heavy, isn't it?

CHARLOTTE

(as Juliet)

Oh, Romeo! Oh, Romeo! Where forth art thou, oh, Romeo?

VIVIAN

(in a male voice)

I am here!

(THEY burst into giggles and fall into each other on the sofa. THEY lie there, catching their breaths. As their panting from laughter quiets, they become aware of each other's breath next to them. Beat as THEY look at each other)

Your eyes are sparkling.

CHARLOTTE

This is the happiest I have been in weeks.

VIVIAN

Me, too.

(beat)

Shall we see what is in the rest of the boxes or continue playing with the wig?

CHARLOTTE

I think both!

(THEY giggle as THEY sit up.
END SCENE)

Interval 2

SETTING: Spotlights on CHARLOTTE and VIVIAN.

AT RISE: VIVIAN is holding a letter while CHARLOTTE starts speaking its contents.

CHARLOTTE

August 27, 1861.

Dear Mrs. Pritchard. I'm glad I have all of our tasks for the fundraiser to keep me busy because the moment you left, the joy just seemed to go out of the house. I miss our laughter together and our talks. Your trip was too short. I have checked with the church and they are willing to donate their space for the fundraiser. We need to settle on a date. Maybe the week of October 27th? If you're able to make another trip before then, I think we could manage to do it. Sincerely, Mrs. Cardinal.

(VIVIAN puts away the letter and CHARLOTTE takes one out from her pocket. VIVIAN starts speaking its contents)

VIVIAN

Thursday, September 5, 1861

Dear Mrs. Cardinal. I am already missing our time together as well. The hours tick by here at the house. I had a letter waiting for me from Mr. Pritchard when I got back but it didn't say much. He is well but not in combat yet. This isn't how I envisioned spending my life. Mrs. Cardinal, I feel I can tell you so many things. You are easy to talk to. You made me feel immediately welcome. I cannot tell you how grateful I am for your friendship. When I got back to Newville, I tried to find others to help with our cause but it was much more difficult to be enthusiastic without you beside me. I will try to find things to donate or I will make things. The week of October 27th should be fine. I will try to get back in two weeks. I miss the sparkle in your eyes. Sincerely, Mrs. Pritchard.

(CHARLOTTE puts away her letter. END INTERVAL)

Act I
Scene 4

SETTING: CHARLOTTE's parlor. Daytime.
September, 1861.

AT RISE: CHARLOTTE is pacing, stopping to
look out the window every now and
again. SHE finally sees something
out the window and runs to the
front door.

CHARLOTTE

Mrs. Pritchard!

VIVIAN (OS)

Mrs. Cardinal! Have you been waiting at the front door all
day?

CHARLOTTE

Just for the last two hours or so. I've been so eager to
see you again!

(Enter VIVIAN. CHARLOTTE and
VIVIAN clasp hands)

VIVIAN

I'm surprised how much I've missed you.

CHARLOTTE

Me, too.

(calls OS out the door)

Good afternoon, Patrick! You can take Mrs. Pritchard's
things to the guest room. The same one she stayed in last
time. And Delia will have some food for you. Your room is
also ready.

(CHARLOTTE closes the door)

CHARLOTTE

He seems a sweet man.

VIVIAN

He is but so quiet, he makes for poor company. I always
thought the Irish were much more talkative.

CHARLOTTE

Most of them around here are. Maybe he's just shy.

(SHE guides her to the sofa)

So tell me about Mr. Pritchard's letter. What did it say?
He was in a battle?

VIVIAN

(taking it out of her
handbag)

Yes. He says "I wanted to let you know that I have entered
my first battle. It was not as bad as I thought but I have
some not very severe flesh wounds to show for it. Please do
not be concerned..."

CHARLOTTE

Do not be concerned?

VIVIAN

"...though I know you'll worry, anyway. You must understand
that we have fine medical care here and I'll be able to be
in the next battle right away. I hope you are well."

CHARLOTTE

Why would he send you a letter like that if he doesn't want
you to worry? It's thoughtless! It's inconsiderate! Of
course, you're going to worry! But won't you worry more now
because you know?

VIVIAN

Yes! And the worst part...a flesh wound? Where is the wound?
He doesn't say. But it also just sounds...worse...something
about the word "flesh".

CHARLOTTE

(slight laughter)

I suppose.

VIVIAN

He could really die out there, Mrs. Cardinal.

CHARLOTTE

Mrs. Pritchard...

VIVIAN

He kept telling me that those were such terrible thoughts...

CHARLOTTE

They are...

VIVIAN

But now...it seems very real!

CHARLOTTE

Mrs. Pritchard, you need to keep hope. They're counting on us for hope. Did you write back?

VIVIAN

No. I couldn't.

CHARLOTTE

You have to write back. Right away. Here.
(SHE gets some paper and an
ink blot)
Write to him. He needs you.

VIVIAN

I've just gotten here!

CHARLOTTE

Mrs. Pritchard, if you were out in battle...

VIVIAN

If I was out in battle?

CHARLOTTE

If I was out in battle, I would want to receive letters all the time. Encouraging letters filled with love and concern, even if it broke my heart to hear the concern. It would make me feel better. It would make me want to fight harder to get home to that person.

VIVIAN

I have no idea what to say. What would you say to Mr. Cardinal?

CHARLOTTE

That I loved him and I believed in him. That I wanted him to come home safely soon.

VIVIAN

(gazes at her)

You have got to be the most genuine person I have ever met.

CHARLOTTE

What?

VIVIAN

You tell your husband everything you feel?

CHARLOTTE

No, not everything. I wouldn't tell him how terrified I was.

VIVIAN

But do you normally?

CHARLOTTE

(beat)

We talk, yes. But, no, I don't tell him everything.

VIVIAN

It sounds like you've been together a while to be able to distinguish when to tell him things and when not to.

CHARLOTTE

A year and a half.

VIVIAN

So how do you know...?

CHARLOTTE

(hesitates)

Promise not to laugh?

VIVIAN

I promise.

CHARLOTTE

I read Arthur's Home Magazine.

(VIVIAN suppresses a laugh)

You said you wouldn't laugh!

VIVIAN

I know. I'm sorry. You just didn't strike me as an Arthur's Home Magazine kind of person.

CHARLOTTE

What kind of person is that?

VIVIAN

(slightly embarrassed)

Well, the kind who...I mean, it's rather domestic.

CHARLOTTE

Well, I have to learn how to be domestic somehow. My mother isn't here anymore! And Mr. Cardinal isn't even here! And they have good tips in there about things just like this. Like writing to your husband when he's recovering from being in a battle.

VIVIAN

(slightly sarcastically,
slightly teasing)

Well, if Arthur's Home Magazine has told me to do it...

(picks up the quill, dips and
pauses for a long time)

No, I still can't think of anything.

CHARLOTTE

(teasing)

Surely, you could start with "Dear Mr. Pritchard".

(VIVIAN writes)

VIVIAN

How about..."I got your letter and I hope you are healing"?

CHARLOTTE

That would be fine.

(VIVIAN writes)

VIVIAN

I don't know what to write next. I'm afraid I'll say something wrong.

CHARLOTTE

Talk about things from around here that might be of interest. Well, things from home. I know that you know how to write letters. You write wonderful letters to me all the time.

VIVIAN

(as she writes)

That's different.

CHARLOTTE

Because I haven't gotten hurt in a battle?

VIVIAN

(as she writes)

No. Well, yes. But, no. I don't think I could bear it if you were hurt in a battle.

(SHE stops writing and thinks)

I can't imagine...

(beat)

I can't imagine you in battle so it doesn't matter.

(SHE returns to writing)

CHARLOTTE

You don't ever wonder what it's like? To be down there, in the camps? Fighting for your country?

VIVIAN

No. But I can tell you and Delia have talked about it a lot.

CHARLOTTE

We have. But I talked to my brothers as well.

VIVIAN

Are they fighting, too?

CHARLOTTE

Yes. All three of them.

VIVIAN

(looking up)

Oh, Mrs. Cardinal. I'm sorry.

CHARLOTTE

I should write to them, as well. One of them doesn't even have a wife to write to him.

(SHE takes a page and gets another quill. THEY quietly write their letters. VIVIAN re-reads what she has written, crumples it up and throws it on the floor)

What happened?

VIVIAN

It was terrible. It didn't make sense.

CHARLOTTE

You have to write something. Even if it's short. The magazine says the first letter back when someone's been in battle is critical. They need to know you hear them. Our job right now is to keep their spirits up.

VIVIAN

I don't care what Arthur's Home says!

CHARLOTTE

Godey's Lady's Book says it, too! Is that better?

VIVIAN

Not at all!

CHARLOTTE

(beat and then calmly)

Pretend you're writing to me. What would you say?

(VIVIAN tries to write again.
CHARLOTTE writes again.
Silence for a few minutes as
they write.)

VIVIAN

(finally)

There.

CHARLOTTE

Great. I'll get you an envelope.

VIVIAN

Do...do you want to hear it?

CHARLOTTE

(as she gets an envelope)

I would love to.

VIVIAN

(nervously)

Dear...Henry...

(SHE looks up at CHARLOTTE
who smiles brightly)

My heart broke when I heard that you had been hurt.

(SHE looks down at the paper.
SHE becomes more emotional as
SHE goes on)

I cannot imagine what it would be like to lose you. I know I must be brave for you so you can be brave but all I think about is how lost I would be without you. We have barely had time to get to know each other. Please do not leave me now. Love, Vivian.

(VIVIAN is weeping. CHARLOTTE
is startled and hurries to
get her a handkerchief)

CHARLOTTE

You see? I knew you could do it. He will love it.

VIVIAN

It is not brave.

CHARLOTTE

It's all right. You said how you felt.

VIVIAN

Because I thought about how I would write to you.

CHARLOTTE

Well, I would love a letter like that.

VIVIAN

(wiping her eyes)

You would?

CHARLOTTE

Absolutely. Especially if it was from you.

(SHE wipes away a tear of
VIVIAN's. VIVIAN catches her
hand and puts it up to her
cheek)

VIVIAN

I...you are very dear to me...

CHARLOTTE

(confused)

You are dear to me as well.

VIVIAN

(dropping CHARLOTTE's hand)

Do you ever think that women understand each other in ways men can't?

CHARLOTTE

Yes.

VIVIAN

It is like that all the time with you.

CHARLOTTE

(blushing)

You know, Mrs. Pritchard, I think we were intended to find each other when we did.

VIVIAN

You do? Why?

CHARLOTTE

I haven't figured it out yet. I think we are meant to know each other for a long time.

VIVIAN

I hope we do.

(Long silence as they gaze at each other. There is somehow a wordless recognition that something has shifted)

What do we do now?

CHARLOTTE

I guess we go to the post office to mail the letters.

VIVIAN

Right. The letters. We'll go to the post office.

(THEY continue to stare at each other. END SCENE)

Act I
Scene 5

SETTING: Parlor. That evening.

AT RISE: VIVIAN is knitting. CHARLOTTE is reading aloud from a book. They are sitting next to each other on the same sofa.

CHARLOTTE

"...When the sailors saw the crash on the sea, they were frightened and knew the end was near. The dark waters swirled around them. Donovan hid in his cabin and prayed..."

VIVIAN

He's going to pray in the middle of this?

CHARLOTTE

Well, he hasn't struck me as a particularly practical fellow.

VIVIAN

You'd think he'd be working on finding help, though. Some kind of boat or I don't know. Call for help. Run up the flag.

CHARLOTTE

Maybe you should write the next book.

VIVIAN

I'm no writer. I just get impatient with characters that don't make good choices.

CHARLOTTE

Perhaps he thought God would help.

VIVIAN

(sniffs)

God.

CHARLOTTE

Mrs. Pritchard. Do you not believe in God?

VIVIAN

Let's talk of things that are cheerful, Mrs. Cardinal. I don't want to fight with you.

CHARLOTTE

What makes you think we would fight about it?

VIVIAN

I'm rather used to being attacked for my position on this.

CHARLOTTE

Well, I would like to hear it. I know you're well-read. And I won't attack you.

VIVIAN

(looks at her sideways and
then puts down her knitting
for a moment)

Fine. I think that there couldn't possibly be a God who would allow such horrible things to happen in this world. That would lead our men into battle. That would cause the Confederates to try to secede from the Union in such selfish ways. There just couldn't be a God that would allow these things.

(SHE picks up her knitting
again)

CHARLOTTE

I see. And Jesus? Do you believe in him?

VIVIAN

Must we do this, Mrs. Cardinal?

CHARLOTTE

I'm rather fascinated. I've never met an atheist before.

VIVIAN

No, I do not believe he existed. And I don't know if I would call myself an atheist.

CHARLOTTE

Did you believe in God before the war?

VIVIAN

No. I've seen too much death and too much illness..

CHARLOTTE

(alarmed but gently)

Oh, Mrs. Pritchard. I had no idea. I'm so sorry.

VIVIAN

You don't need to be sorry.

CHARLOTTE

(beat)

Was it...someone close?

VIVIAN

(stops knitting but does not
look up)

My youngest sister. She was born, lived her life in illness and died young. Every day was painful for her. She couldn't walk for years because she didn't know how to learn. She didn't talk until she was five. She never read. She was a skinny little thing with no appetite and always pale, no matter how much sunlight she got. She never got to enjoy the things we did. She was bullied by the other children in town whenever they saw her; my other sister and I were tortured at school about her. My mother defended her and I watched her die every day, doing it. When my youngest sister died, my mother never recovered. She died two years after her.

CHARLOTTE

(breathing out)

Oh, Mrs. Pritchard. How terrible.

VIVIAN

My mother almost died in childbirth with me. In fact, she survived three childbirths. But the death of her youngest, after so much illness, was too much.

CHARLOTTE

I'm so sorry.

VIVIAN

(beat)

We don't talk about it in our family anymore. My sister's name was Emily.

CHARLOTTE

That's a beautiful name.

VIVIAN

I've told Mr. Pritchard I would want to name our daughter Emily, if we were to have one.

CHARLOTTE

What a lovely tribute to her memory that would be.

VIVIAN

(finally looking at
CHARLOTTE)

He doesn't know why. He just thinks I like the name.

CHARLOTTE

(beat)

Does he know how you feel about God?

VIVIAN

It doesn't matter. I go to church with him and pretend to pray because it's important to him.

CHARLOTTE

(beat)

I used to pretend to pray.

VIVIAN

Used to?

CHARLOTTE

When I was growing up, I never really understood prayer, even though I went to Sunday School. God always sounded too angry to be real. Why would I pray to a God who was looking to punish all the time? My father did plenty of that already. Delia tried to talk to me about her God but I didn't understand it, either. I knew that I would get in trouble if I didn't go to church. So I just went and pretended and thought about other things.

VIVIAN

What did you think about instead?

CHARLOTTE

I thought about what I would do when I got home. Or about how mean my brothers had been to me that day.

(VIVIAN smiles)

Sometimes I would just daydream. Church is a surprisingly good place to daydream.

VIVIAN

It is.

(SHE starts to knit again and
then stops)

Wait, you said you used to pretend to pray.

CHARLOTTE

A few years ago, there was a wonderful singer who joined the church choir. She had the most extraordinary voice. It was like all the songs in the world had been written for her. And suddenly, the way she sang them, they started making sense.

VIVIAN

(doubtful)

That's what made you start believing in God?

CHARLOTTE

That's what made me start listening. And paying attention. And, Mrs. Pritchard, when she sang, her whole body...

(CHARLOTTE stands up)

...her whole body would shake like this...

(CHARLOTTE shakes her body
with jubilation)

...and she looked so joyful...it made me want to be that joyful. And it made it seem like God could be joyful.

(SHE sits down)

And I thought "Well, if that's what it's like to experience God, I should try to do that."

VIVIAN

Have you? Experienced God like that, I mean?

CHARLOTTE

(sadly)

No. But I was a lot more hopeful after that. And something about that decision made me believe. If God could make her shake with such joy, there had to be a God. It sounds like heresy to say it but I've always thought maybe those reverends got it wrong all these years. I mean, if God grew the plants and the trees and the Earth, how could He be so terrible?

VIVIAN

(beat)

Did you ever talk to the singer?

CHARLOTTE

Oh, no. I couldn't do that. She was...I mean, she was older and I was...and she was very beautiful and I was...not...

VIVIAN

Mrs. Cardinal, you are beautiful.

CHARLOTTE

She was...a different kind of beautiful. And sophisticated. If we were all still in England, she'd be having tea with the King and Queen.

VIVIAN

Well, they are certainly no Gods.

CHARLOTTE

Of course not but...this woman...her name was Miss Franklin...there was just something that flowed out of her. Some kind of energy. It was like God spoke right through her.

(beat)

I know that's hard to understand if you don't believe in God but it's how I felt.

VIVIAN

What did she look like?

CHARLOTTE

Oh, she had long brown hair that she always had up in a swirl on her head. And I think her eyes were blue. It was hard to tell from where we sat in the church since we were pretty far back. Her mouth was gorgeous. Oval when she sang. I saw her outside of the church once when she was leaving. She looked like she had soft skin. Translucent. Maybe that's why it seemed like the light came out of her. At the end of all of her songs, though, my heart was pounding so loudly. I thought she would hear it clear at the other end of the church.

VIVIAN

(softly)

I can understand why you began to believe in a joyful God.

CHARLOTTE

(surprised)

You do?

VIVIAN

If she were my God, I would believe in her. Nothing has ever made me feel like that.

CHARLOTTE

Yes.

(An intense moment as they think. CHARLOTTE looks up at VIVIAN. Quietly)

Mrs. Pritchard?

VIVIAN

(not meeting her eyes)

Yes?

CHARLOTTE

Sometimes my heart pounds like that at the strangest times and I don't know what to do. And then I wonder if God is trying to talk to me.

VIVIAN

What would God be trying to say?

(CHARLOTTE takes VIVIAN's hand and presses it over CHARLOTTE's heart. VIVIAN and CHARLOTTE's eyes lock. Both of their breaths become fast. Their heads bend toward each other but they do not touch aside from the hand over the heart. CHARLOTTE closes her eyes. Whispering)

It's beating so fast.

(CHARLOTTE nods)

CHARLOTTE

Is yours?

(VIVIAN takes CHARLOTTE's hand and presses it on her heart)

It is.

VIVIAN

(breathlessly)

This is...

CHARLOTTE

(breathlessly)

...I know.

(CHARLOTTE gently touches
VIVIAN's cheek. VIVIAN's body
responds as though
electrified)

VIVIAN

Oh!

CHARLOTTE

(withdrawing her hand)

Are you all right?

VIVIAN

(whispering)

Again. Please. Again.

(CHARLOTTE slowly touches
VIVIAN's cheek. VIVIAN's body
vibrates as CHARLOTTE's hand
slowly explores her face and
her neck. VIVIAN finally
catches CHARLOTTE's hand.
THEY breathe heavily for a
moment. Then VIVIAN reaches
out and touches CHARLOTTE's
face gently. She caresses her
cheeks and neck. CHARLOTTE
can barely contain herself.
Whispering)

Do you think this is what it feels like with God?

CHARLOTTE

(hardly able to speak)

Yes.

VIVIAN

(continuing to explore
CHARLOTTE's face with her
hands)

Your heart is still pounding. I can feel it.

CHARLOTTE

It is. Mrs. Pritchard...my skin is prickling...

VIVIAN

It's so smooth. Oh, Mrs. Cardinal...I...

(SHE suddenly stops herself.
HER hands drop. SHE realizes
what has happened)

Oh, my...

CHARLOTTE

Mrs. Pritchard?

VIVIAN

What did you do?

CHARLOTTE

What do you mean?

VIVIAN

I have to go to bed. I think I must not be well.

(SHE hurries out of the room.
CHARLOTTE is distraught. END
SCENE.)

Act I
Scene 6

SETTING: The guest room that VIVIAN is staying in. There is a bed, a vanity, a sofa, and a chair. A few minutes later.

AT RISE: VIVIAN enters from USC door, clearly upset. SHE cannot find something comfortable to do with her body and, eventually, sits at the vanity and starts taking down her hair. There is a knock. VIVIAN freezes.

VIVIAN

Who is it?

CHARLOTTE (OS)

(whispering loudly)

Mrs. Pritchard, it's me. Please let me in.

VIVIAN

I really must get to sleep.

CHARLOTTE (OS)

I want to make sure you are all right.

VIVIAN

I just need to sleep. I think it's just been a long day.

CHARLOTTE (OS)

Mrs. Pritchard. Please open the door.

(VIVIAN is torn but decides to open the door. CHARLOTTE reacts to seeing her hair down)

You have lovely hair.

VIVIAN

You can see that I am fine.

CHARLOTTE

(closing the door behind her)

I didn't mean to scare you. I didn't know someone else could feel that with me.

VIVIAN

Mrs. Cardinal...

CHARLOTTE

Please...call me Charlotte.

VIVIAN

Charlotte. I don't think that was God.

CHARLOTTE

You're just saying that because you don't believe in it.

VIVIAN

You said that your God is supposed to be joyful.

CHARLOTTE

(takes a step towards her)

Did you not feel joyful?

VIVIAN

(confused)

Yes, but I also...Mrs...Charlotte, we're not...that wasn't right.

CHARLOTTE

(also confused now)

It felt right, though. Even more than when I was in church. Didn't it feel right?

VIVIAN

Yes, but...

CHARLOTTE

So...?

VIVIAN

Isn't God supposed to be in Heaven?

CHARLOTTE

Maybe God visits. Maybe I can hear God through you. And maybe, for the first time, you can hear God through me.

VIVIAN

I didn't hear anything, Charlotte. I just felt...

(SHE cuts herself off)

CHARLOTTE

Happy?

VIVIAN

Boiling. Like I was steaming through my whole body. Did you put a hex on me?

CHARLOTTE

Mrs. Pritchard!

VIVIAN

I just can't imagine how we...!

CHARLOTTE

You can't possibly believe in hexes!

VIVIAN

I don't know! I don't know what I believe! I think I must be going mad!

CHARLOTTE

You're not going mad!

VIVIAN

Charlotte, I'm married! We're married! Girlish things are for before marriage!

CHARLOTTE

Well, I never had girlish things before marriage!

(VIVIAN is silent)

What? You did?

VIVIAN

It was four years that I was waiting! Mr. Pritchard wanted to make sure that I was prepared.

CHARLOTTE

He knew?

VIVIAN

Yes, of course. He introduced us.

(CHARLOTTE steps away from
VIVIAN)

But it was never like...we just spent time together.

CHARLOTTE

What do you mean, spent time?

VIVIAN

Charlotte...do you really want to hear about this?

CHARLOTTE

(considers)

Yes.

VIVIAN

Her name was Miss Kemp.

CHARLOTTE

And...how long were you...how do you even say it?

VIVIAN

Miss Kemp and I were friends for about six months. We attended a book club together but I don't think she liked it. I tried my hand at hunting with her which I didn't particularly like. Mr. Pritchard was disappointed when I told him I wasn't going to spend time with her anymore.

CHARLOTTE

Was she...very beautiful?

VIVIAN

Yes. Red curls. Green eyes. It was difficult to walk down the street with her and not feel everyone watching her. And I think...the fact that she was spending time with me when she was so beautiful made me feel special. And she was rich beyond my imagination which she never let me forget. She'd buy me things a lot.

CHARLOTTE

Did you ever...touch?

VIVIAN

(long pause)

We did. But Miss Kemp was not...I never felt...like I did..

(SHE looks at CHARLOTTE)

I mean, I have never felt the way that I just did with you.

CHARLOTTE

Me neither.

(beat)

How strange that Mr. Pritchard wanted you to spend time with her.

VIVIAN

It was a very long wait for him. I think he felt badly. And he knew many of his friends' wives who had done similar things prior to their marriage and I guess they said that it was a wonderful experience. I didn't think so.

CHARLOTTE

(beat)

I'm so confused, Mrs. Pritchard... Am I another Miss Kemp?

VIVIAN

What? No!

CHARLOTTE

Because you're waiting for him again...

VIVIAN

No, Charlotte! I'm just as confused as you are. I don't know what that was. I've never felt anything so...

(SHE searches for a word)

...intense as I did...with you.

CHARLOTTE

Powerful.

VIVIAN

(as she is talking, the two
end up closer to each other)

It was like every part of my body was waking up for the first time and stretching. It was like I was being born and it was all because of you.

(THEY are a breath away from
each other)

How did you do that?

CHARLOTTE

(breathlessly)

Me? I didn't do... I think I...didn't...think...

(THEY are looking into each
other's eyes, not touching,
breath getting faster)

Mrs. Pritchard...

VIVIAN

Vivian...

CHARLOTTE

Vivian...I have done nothing to you.

VIVIAN

You have done everything to me. It feels that I am going to explode.

CHARLOTTE

Do you want me to leave?

VIVIAN

Yes. No. I don't think...I don't truly think you put a hex on me. Or did anything maliciously.

CHARLOTTE

I would never.

(VIVIAN lightly starts to run
her hands up and down
CHARLOTTE's arms)

There's a light in your eyes that wasn't there before.

VIVIAN

Sparkling?

CHARLOTTE

No...something else...fiery...

(SHE shivers)

VIVIAN

Are you cold?

CHARLOTTE

Not...cold.

VIVIAN

(looking at her face)

No, your cheeks are flushed. Come sit.

(SHE leads her to the sofa)

Would you like some water?

CHARLOTTE

No, I'm all right. I just...I just want to be near you.

(VIVIAN sits next to her.

Awkward silence)

What do you do at night when you're at home by yourself?

VIVIAN

Read mostly. What do you do?

CHARLOTTE

Nothing. Nighttime is when I am the loneliest. Delia and Ben have gone home. I am by myself.

(SHE slowly rests her head on VIVIAN's shoulder as she speaks)

I prefer to have someone to talk to. It's part of why I'm so glad you're here.

VIVIAN

Me too.

(Beat as VIVIAN becomes aware of CHARLOTTE's breath on her neck. SHE reaches for CHARLOTTE's hands and starts playing with them. Beat)

CHARLOTTE

Something is aching.

VIVIAN

Everything is aching...

CHARLOTTE

(sitting up and looking at VIVIAN)

Does it hurt?

VIVIAN

No. Sort of. I just...why can't I talk suddenly?

CHARLOTTE

I want to help you feel better.

VIVIAN

(long pause. Quietly)

Touch me.

(CHARLOTTE plays gently with VIVIAN's wrists and slowly, intimately, works her way up her arms. Both are breathing heavily. The moment that

CHARLOTTE touches VIVIAN's neck, VIVIAN lets out a moan which startles them both)

CHARLOTTE

Vivian?

VIVIAN

(grabbing CHARLOTTE around her back and pulling her in)

Charlotte!

CHARLOTTE

Oh, Vivian!

(THEY are tight within each other's grasp now, heaving, not knowing what to do next)

VIVIAN

There's tingling and aching.

CHARLOTTE

I know. I can feel it! It's almost unbearable! I want...

(SHE looks at VIVIAN's mouth and then traces it with her finger)

You have the most beautiful, soft lips.

(Very softly, very slowly, VIVIAN brings her lips to CHARLOTTE's lips. It becomes increasingly passionate. Moans are emitted from both women. Lights slowly fade to BLACK. END SCENE)

Act I
Scene 7

SETTING: Parlor. The next morning.

AT RISE: CHARLOTTE is sitting on the sofa, drinking tea and reading. VIVIAN enters, hesitantly.

VIVIAN
Oh, you've finished with breakfast...

CHARLOTTE
Oh, good morning. I'm just having tea. You can have your breakfast in here, if you like. That table seems too long without more people at it.

VIVIAN
I'm sorry I was late. I had been thinking...

CHARLOTTE
Yes?

VIVIAN
Never mind.

CHARLOTTE
Have a seat.
(beat as VIVIAN sits)
How did you sleep?

VIVIAN
Surprisingly well.

CHARLOTTE
Me, too.
(awkward pause)
Well, let me get your breakfast. Delia went to town but she left it on a tray...

VIVIAN
Oh, that's very kind...

(CHARLOTTE exits. VIVIAN fidgets, stands, and walks around. CHARLOTTE returns with the tray of food)

CHARLOTTE

Here we are.

VIVIAN

Oh, this looks delicious. Thank you.

(THEY sit. VIVIAN takes a
bite)

Hmm, very good.

CHARLOTTE

(quietly)

I thought about you all night.

VIVIAN

Me, too.

CHARLOTTE

I was thinking that we could pack a picnic lunch today and go out to the lake.

VIVIAN

You have a lake?

CHARLOTTE

Out here, in the country, yes. Not in town. There are ducks and there's shade. You could bring a book, if you want to. There are trees you can climb. Maybe you could teach me.

VIVIAN

I doubt I could climb a tree now.

CHARLOTTE

Well, then, we can just be on the ground. No one goes there. It's on an abandoned estate.

VIVIAN

That sounds sort of spooky.

CHARLOTTE

You think so? I've never thought of it that way. But maybe you have to see it. I think you'd really like it.

VIVIAN

Maybe. Are we going to continue working on the fundraiser later?

CHARLOTTE

The...? Yes, of course. I just thought...

VIVIAN

I was thinking that maybe...maybe I should leave. I packed my suitcase.

CHARLOTTE

(startled)

What? Why?

VIVIAN

(lowering her voice)

Charlotte, I am married now.

CHARLOTTE

(lowering her voice)

I know. I was at the wedding.

VIVIAN

(voice still lowered)

So it doesn't seem...natural...

CHARLOTTE

Of course not. I think this is God.

VIVIAN

You think...?

CHARLOTTE

Vivian, I don't want to make you uncomfortable. I don't want to confuse you. Or myself. Last night was...the most complete I have ever felt. It was like finding a lost puzzle piece of myself. Do you know what I mean?

VIVIAN

(sighs heavily, knows exactly
what she means and hates it)

Those things that we said. They were true.

CHARLOTTE

And did you ever say those kinds of things or feel those things with Miss Kemp?

VIVIAN

What? No, of course not. That was...I never felt like that with anyone...not even...

(SHE stops abruptly)

But what would Mr. Pritchard say? What would Mr. Cardinal say?

CHARLOTTE

What would they say?

VIVIAN

You know women aren't supposed to...

(SHE lowers her voice)

...be together like that. Not once we're married.

CHARLOTTE

I never felt like that with Mr. Cardinal. I mean, we...

(SHE looks away)

...We were only together a few times as husband and wife before he left...

VIVIAN

Yes, we were just the once.

CHARLOTTE

(looks back at her)

It certainly didn't feel like that. Did it?

VIVIAN

No.

CHARLOTTE

I'm sure it's not the same. Women can't be together like husband and wife. This is about God.

VIVIAN

(hushed)

But...we were together like...

CHARLOTTE

Did you...did you do those things with Mr. Pritchard?

VIVIAN

No...well, I mean, some of them...but...

CHARLOTTE

For me, it was just the...

(SHE looks around and then points to her lips)

...part.

VIVIAN

Charlotte...

CHARLOTTE

(catches her hands and holds them)

Did you tingle all night?

(beat)

Because every time I woke up and thought about it, I tingled. I loved that feeling again.

VIVIAN

Charlotte. I don't think this is about God.

CHARLOTTE

What do you think it is?

VIVIAN

I think...I think it's about...us. You and me.

(CHARLOTTE takes that in)

And I don't know what to think about that.

CHARLOTTE

(starting to drop VIVIAN's hands)

That's just because you don't believe in God...

VIVIAN

(taking her hands back)

No, no, it's not. It's because I...

(SHE struggles for a moment)

...I believe in you...

CHARLOTTE

What do you mean, you believe in me?

VIVIAN

(struggling)

I've read books, Charlotte...no...that's not right...

(CHARLOTTE is perplexed)

All right, here's what it is.

(VIVIAN looks directly into CHARLOTTE's eyes)

My stomach gets jittery and my heart races every time I'm going to see you, even if you've left the room for just a

moment. Sometimes I even lose my breath completely when you appear.

(CHARLOTTE smiles)

Being near you is intoxicating and I feel that I cannot ever have enough. And I worry about what that means.

(CHARLOTTE listens and is very still)

I've read these books, Charlotte, about men who have these primal needs, these attractions that they can't control. I've never had that. Until...until now. Until you.

(Quietly)

Last night, the kinds of things we did, how we were...I know that it's not natural and I'm frightened because I know how I feel... I know...I this is not simply a primal need, Charlotte...it's a desire. Like a man desires a woman.

(Silence)

Charlotte...?

CHARLOTTE

So, you think you desire me like...a man and woman desire each other? More than girlish things...?

VIVIAN

(increasingly nervous)

Please don't hate me.

CHARLOTTE

You think this is human desire? And not from God? Even though it is so powerful?

(VIVIAN nods nervously. Beat as CHARLOTTE thinks. Then SHE looks at VIVIAN)

It is true that I love talking with you and I miss you when you're gone.

(VIVIAN nods)

It is true that I have more fun with you than anyone else.

(VIVIAN nods)

And then when we touch each other...

(THEY both look down at their hands that are holding each other. CHARLOTTE looks back up)

But is that human desire?

VIVIAN

I think it is. What do you think?

CHARLOTTE

(beat)

I think it doesn't matter. I think, if it means that I still want to spend time with you and you still want to spend time with me, it doesn't matter what we each call it.

VIVIAN

(somewhat disappointed but
also relieved)

So you don't hate me?

CHARLOTTE

Of all things, Vivian, I could not hate you. That is not an emotion, divine or otherwise, that I would have for you.

VIVIAN

Oh, good. I'm so...I was so worried.

(SHE drops CHARLOTTE's hands
and looks at her food)

My goodness, I'm hungry!

(SHE starts to eat)

CHARLOTTE

Tell me more about these books that you've read.

VIVIAN

Well, surely, you've read some of them, too. Shakespeare is full of them. There's always a man who is described as having these urgent desires and attractions to women. Like Claudius in "Hamlet" who has the affair with his sister-in-law, the queen.

CHARLOTTE

He was the villain, though, wasn't he? I don't want to be a villain.

VIVIAN

There are all kinds of characters.

CHARLOTTE

Maybe I should borrow some books from you. I think I might learn some things.

VIVIAN

Maybe we can bring them to the picnic.

CHARLOTTE

(eyes lighting up)

You want to go on the picnic to the lake?

VIVIAN

It sounds like it would be cozy.

CHARLOTTE

I think you'll love it, Vivian. I'll go see about getting food packed up for us.

VIVIAN

That sounds lovely.

(END SCENE)

Interval 3

SETTING: Spotlights on VIVIAN and CHARLOTTE.

AT RISE: CHARLOTTE stands, reading a letter to herself. VIVIAN recites it aloud.

VIVIAN

Thursday, October 5, 1861

Dear Charlotte. I have just arrived home and my head is swirling from our visit. It was only a week but it seemed so much longer. Everything here looks strange and drab and depressing. There was no mail waiting for me from Mr. Pritchard when I arrived. I look around for you now. Twice tonight, I thought of something I wanted to share with you and you were not sitting next to me. Oh, Charlotte, what have we done? Entwining ourselves in each other's minds so deeply already. Can it really be that we only met three months ago? It feels like you have been here forever. I will see you soon. Yours, Vivian.

(CHARLOTTE puts the letter away and then starts speaking her next letter as VIVIAN takes it out.)

CHARLOTTE

October 14, 1861.

Dear Vivian. I was so pleased to receive your letter. I am trying to occupy my mind with reading the books you left me. I decided to start with "Pride and Prejudice". These sisters are fascinating. I have found some more furniture for the fundraiser, a lovely chaise and an ottoman. Time can't go fast enough for your return. Yours truly, Charlotte.

(VIVIAN puts the letter away as CHARLOTTE takes one out)

VIVIAN

Wednesday, October 23, 1861.

Dear Charlotte. I am so sorry to have to write this letter. As it turns out, my sister, Miss Bloom, will be arriving here in two days for a visit. I cannot bring her with me. Are you able to manage the fundraiser without me?

CHARLOTTE

(astonished)

What?

VIVIAN

I'm terribly sorry to do this to you. Perhaps some of your friends can help. The timing is so awkward for Miss Bloom's arrival but it will be a relief to have her around. I'm so glad you are enjoying "Pride and Prejudice". That is one of my favorite books...

(CHARLOTTE balls up the letter in anger and VIVIAN abruptly stops talking. VIVIAN opens a letter)

CHARLOTTE

October 30, 1861.

Dear Vivian. The fundraiser went on. We did quite well without you and raised a respectable amount to send to the Sanitary Commission for our troops. I hope you are having a good time with your sister. Yours, Charlotte.

(VIVIAN opens another letter)

November 15, 1861.

Dear Vivian. I have been very busy at the hospital and haven't had time to write. I do as much as I can to help there but it never seems like enough. The good news is they just started paying the nurses a small stipend which will certainly help with expenses without Mr. Cardinal being here. I haven't heard from you in two weeks. Have your letters been getting lost or have you just been busy with your sister? Yours truly, Charlotte.

(VIVIAN puts away the letter.

SHE takes out another.

Urgently)

December 8, 1861.

Dear Vivian. It has been more than six weeks since I have heard from you. Perhaps you have forgotten about me completely. It has been so long since we saw each other in September, it feels like a dream from another lifetime. Did it truly happen? Maybe it didn't. But when I close my eyes at night, I can still sometimes feel what I felt. I know I couldn't have imagined that, too. I know that I'm not that creative. Yours truly, Charlotte.

(VIVIAN covers her face with her hands. Then SHE puts away

the letter, takes out
another)

December 20th, 1861

Dear Mrs. Pritchard. I received a Christmas letter from Mr. Cardinal today. His battalion has been in several battles. They are getting short on food and enough of the soldiers were injured or killed that they are smaller now. I'm learning a lot about different methods of medicine at the hospital and the doctors are treating me with a great deal of respect. They have said they think I'm a natural. I have finished "Pride and Prejudice" and "Jane Eyre" and I am now reading "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn". I had so hoped to be able to discuss these with you. I hope you are all right and that you have a good Christmas. Sincerely,
Mrs. Cardinal.

(VIVIAN looks worried as SHE
puts away the letter.
CHARLOTTE takes out a letter
as VIVIAN recites)

VIVIAN

Monday, December 30, 1861

Dear Charlotte. I apologize for the delay in responding to you. I should have been in touch before Christmas. Things have been very busy with Miss Bloom here. Your letter sounded so sad; I am concerned about you. I have convinced Miss Bloom to stay behind with Patrick and I will drive myself to see you the week of January 13th, so I can explain things. Perhaps Delia and Ben will need a few days off as well while I'm there. I hope you are able to enjoy the New Year. Yours, Vivian.

(Lights fade down as VIVIAN
puts the letter in the
envelope. END INTERVAL)

Act I
Scene 8

SETTING: Evening at CHARLOTTE's house. Mid-January, 1862. Several pieces of furniture or artwork are missing.

AT RISE: CHARLOTTE and VIVIAN are sitting on the sofa.

CHARLOTTE

(beat)

So.

VIVIAN

So.

CHARLOTTE

(awkward beat)

How is Miss Bloom's visit, other than long?

VIVIAN

Yes, well...quite long. She is still trying to decide if she is moving back so she is often visiting her in-laws. I encouraged her to take this week to stay with them as a trial.

CHARLOTTE

I see.

VIVIAN

But I think she's lonely, too.

CHARLOTTE

I can understand that.

VIVIAN

(awkward beat)

How's the work at the hospital been?

CHARLOTTE

Terrible. I mean, what I see is terrible.

(VIVIAN waits for her to continue but CHARLOTTE doesn't)

VIVIAN

What do you see?

CHARLOTTE

Soldiers coming back having parts of their bodies that need to be taken off or their skin is rotting to the bone from disease.

VIVIAN

Goodness! I had no idea!

CHARLOTTE

Some of them just die right in front of me because their wounds are too much.

VIVIAN

Oh, Charlotte. How difficult that must be for you!

CHARLOTTE

I'm fine with it.

(under her breath)

Now.

VIVIAN

Oh! I can't imagine being around people that are that ill all the time.

CHARLOTTE

(suddenly defensive)

They're very brave, good men!

VIVIAN

(surprised)

I know that...I just meant...

CHARLOTTE

The things these men have seen...the things they tell me...they're very brave!

VIVIAN

I'm not arguing with you about that, Charlotte.

(long, awkward beat)

So. Have you heard from Mr. Cardinal?

CHARLOTTE

No. Not since Christmas. I don't even know how he spent it. I always ask the men at the hospital if they've seen my

husband. Each one looks at me with sad eyes and says no, like they know he has a death sentence.

VIVIAN

Our Christmas was sad for us, too. Miss Bloom and I worked with a bunch of women in town to send Christmas packages to the Sanitary Commission but that's it.

CHARLOTTE

So she's met the women in your town and she's only been there a few months. Have you...have you been making friends, too?

VIVIAN

Yes, I've finally made a little headway. The librarian, Miss Boyer, and I became friendly, mostly because I am there so much. And a few of the neighbors. One of them finally explained to me that everyone had been pretty suspicious about our move since Mr. Pritchard left so quickly. They didn't know what he was "dumping" on them.

CHARLOTTE

Dumping?

VIVIAN

I didn't say that it was a good explanation.

(beat)

I started doing some gardening with one of them back in the fall. Did I tell you that?

CHARLOTTE

(almost sharply)

No, you haven't told me much of anything.

VIVIAN

(quickly remembering)

Oh, yes. Well, with food getting scarce, my neighbor, Miss Markle, and I thought we would try to grow our own vegetables for the spring.

(awkward silence)

I'm not sure if it will work.

CHARLOTTE

I'm glad you're meeting people.

VIVIAN

Are you?

CHARLOTTE

Of course. You've got your sister and your neighbors and your librarian. You're not lonely. That's good. I don't want you to be lonely.

(SHE gets up abruptly)

Do you want some tea?

VIVIAN

(quickly standing and putting
a hand on her arm)

I am still lonely. And I haven't forgotten about you, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE

Then why haven't you written? Why haven't come back? We were going to do the fundraiser together. I had to do it without you.

VIVIAN

I know, I'm sorry...

CHARLOTTE

And we were going to volunteer together and...you said you would write once a week...

VIVIAN

I know...

CHARLOTTE

Are Miss Boyer and Miss Markle...pretty?

VIVIAN

Are they...?

(suddenly gets her meaning)

Oh, Charlotte! Miss Boyer has to be a hundred and eighty years old and Miss Markle is...

(VIVIAN searches for a word.

CHARLOTTE waits anxiously)

...it's not that she's ugly but she's married...

CHARLOTTE

I'm married.

VIVIAN

(getting frustrated)

...I don't feel the same way about her as I do you.

(CHARLOTTE considers this)
You were jealous?

CHARLOTTE
You're gardening and going to the library and suddenly not writing to me...I thought...maybe...I mean, it would be far more convenient, wouldn't it? Just like Miss Kemp?

VIVIAN
(takes a deep breath)
Charlotte. You need to understand. It was a lot...in September...it was a lot. And this is nothing...nothing...like Miss Kemp. You have to remember, I don't see her anymore. I didn't want to. But September...it was a lot.

CHARLOTTE
It was a lot for me, too.

VIVIAN
I had to...I had to spend a lot of time thinking about things.

CHARLOTTE
By yourself?

VIVIAN
Yes.
(beat)
I didn't mean to hurt you.

(SHE tries to put her arm around CHARLOTTE who pulls away)

CHARLOTTE
What did you figure out?

VIVIAN
Charlotte.
(VIVIAN touches her hair)
I sat there for so long, trying to convince myself that I could live apart from you. That my mind didn't want to talk to you all the time. That my body didn't want...
(SHE touches CHARLOTTE'S cheek)
...to touch yours. But it was no use. I couldn't sleep. I've dropped dress sizes three times. Charlotte, all I want is

for you and me to find somewhere to hide away from the rest of the world.

CHARLOTTE

So we can be together?

VIVIAN

So we can be together.

(VIVIAN kisses CHARLOTTE's hand)

I know it's just a dream. But it should be easy to send the servants away for our visits...

CHARLOTTE

Delia will eventually suspect something.

VIVIAN

It seems doubtful that she would suspect this, though.

(VIVIAN kisses CHARLOTTE's neck and pulls her to the sofa)

Do you know what I dreamed of doing while I was at home?

CHARLOTTE

(as VIVIAN goes to the curtains and closes them)

What?

VIVIAN

(returning to the sofa)

Being able to touch you here on the sofa, without anyone around.

(SHE runs her hands across CHARLOTTE's chest. CHARLOTTE moans and grabs VIVIAN around her back. Their faces are up against one another. Breathing hard)

I missed you so much.

CHARLOTTE

(Breathing heavily)

I missed you, too. Please don't leave me again like that.

VIVIAN

I won't. I never will.

(Their touching continues
sensually into a blackout.
END SCENE)

Act I
Scene 9

SETTING: The guest bedroom. July, 1862.

AT RISE: VIVIAN is sitting at the vanity in a dressing gown while CHARLOTTE, also in a dressing gown, brushes VIVIAN's hair. They make eye contact throughout the scene in the mirror when they are not facing each other.

VIVIAN

I'm sorry the tomatoes that I brought weren't better. I guess Miss Markle and I aren't quite skilled at vegetable gardening.

CHARLOTTE

I thought they were delicious.

VIVIAN

You're being kind.

CHARLOTTE

I was being honest.

(beat as SHE brushes VIVIAN's hair)

VIVIAN

It's so much quieter here than at home.

CHARLOTTE

Well, we don't have three soldiers here taking up space and making noise. Doesn't it make you nervous to be there with three strange men?

VIVIAN

They're all injured. What could they possibly do? It's like the men at your hospital. And my sister swears she'll take them back into her house just as soon as she has space. She comes over every day and takes care of them, anyway.

CHARLOTTE

And who is taking care of them while you are away?

VIVIAN

Some of her friends.

CHARLOTTE

And they'll watch the post for you, as well?

VIVIAN

Oh, the post. Henry has been writing so much! Who knew the war would bring out the writer in him? I cannot bring myself to write nearly as much as he does. Perhaps he is just bored.

CHARLOTTE

I'm certain he is not bored. He just misses you. They are fighting for our country. We need to support them.

VIVIAN

I support them. There are three of them living in my house! Isn't that supporting them?

CHARLOTTE

Yes, that's not what I...

VIVIAN

I just can't write letters to him all the time. It's hard enough finding time to write letters to you.

(beat as they look at each other in the mirror)

The only thing good about this war is being able to see you.

CHARLOTTE

(beat and then brushing VIVIAN's hair again)

Your hair. Is so soft. I always forget how soft it is.

(CHARLOTTE brushes the hair over one of VIVIAN's breasts. VIVIAN closes her eyes and gasps a little. CHARLOTTE sits down in the chair next to VIVIAN. VIVIAN opens her eyes. The two stare at each other as CHARLOTTE gently and seductively brushes VIVIAN's hair over each breast, causing her to occasionally gasp again. Softly)

There. That's one hundred.

VIVIAN
(trying to catch her breath)

Thank you.

CHARLOTTE
I love when I can make you gasp like that. Sometimes you're so quiet.

VIVIAN
I don't want people to hear us.

CHARLOTTE
No one is here.

VIVIAN
I know. But still...
(SHE reaches up and unpins CHARLOTTE's hair. This is very intimate as THEY are facing each other. VIVIAN shakes CHARLOTTE's hair out.)
My turn to make you gasp.

(VIVIAN stands behind CHARLOTTE and starts brushing her hair. A quiet moment)

CHARLOTTE
Do you know I sometimes think the most hateful things?

VIVIAN
Are you trying to work against the mood?

CHARLOTTE
No, I'm sorry. I just had this thought and it was so hateful.

VIVIAN
I'm sure you're imagining that it was hateful. What was it?

CHARLOTTE
I thought, wouldn't it be great if the war never ended and they never came home? Or if they just never came home? And then I wouldn't have to leave my work and have a family.

VIVIAN

You don't want a family?

CHARLOTTE

I'm just having such a good time with my work and with you; I don't want to stop.

VIVIAN

I can't imagine not having a family; I've always seen myself as a mother.

CHARLOTTE

I think I only did before...before you. But now. I don't know, I see so many other possibilities. I don't have to be a part of that life. I don't have to have children. I don't have to have a husband.

VIVIAN

Why, Charlotte!

CHARLOTTE

No, I mean, I understand that I have to have a husband because I am already married but...if he didn't come back...I wouldn't have to re-marry. I've figured out how to earn money, albeit somewhat small. I could probably learn to take care of myself. But, more importantly, I would already have the person I was truly destined to be with at my side. You.

(beat)

That's a hateful thing to think about my own husband.

VIVIAN

It was a beautiful thing to say about me. But you have to remember, you're not having these thoughts because you actually want them to die. Or for the war to continue. So it's not truly hateful.

CHARLOTTE

I'm pretty sure James would disagree.

VIVIAN

(stops brushing)

There are many things that James would disagree with, I think.

(SHE seductively runs a finger down CHARLOTTE's neck)

and on to her back. CHARLOTTE
jumps)
Very sensitive today.

CHARLOTTE
I've missed you so much.

VIVIAN
(sitting on the ground, in
front of her)
Tell me what you missed.

CHARLOTTE
I miss our talks. I miss how much I can tell you about what
goes on inside my head.

(VIVIAN rubs CHARLOTTE's
knee)
I miss our long walks together.
(SHE looks at VIVIAN's hand
on her knee. It is clearly
starting to affect her)
I miss your touch. I miss that we can touch.

VIVIAN
Do you miss it when I touch you here?
(SHE slides her hand up
CHARLOTTE's leg. CHARLOTTE
gasps and holds on to the
vanity. VIVIAN giggles at
CHARLOTTE's gasp.)
I got you to gasp.

CHARLOTTE
Yes.

VIVIAN
You...tried to distract me...
(VIVIAN kisses CHARLOTTE in
various places)
...with such serious talk...
(VIVIAN kisses CHARLOTTE
somewhere that makes her gasp
again. VIVIAN smiles at her
before CHARLOTTE pulls her
into a passionate kiss. They
part. Whispering)

There is so much freedom here. I can be who I want to be with you.

CHARLOTTE

(caressing her face)

Who you are is beautiful.

VIVIAN

(puts her head in CHARLOTTE's lap)

When I was little, I never dreamed that a world could exist where I would be so happy.

(CHARLOTTE strokes her hair)

I sometimes still wonder if I'm asleep and I'll wake up and there won't even be a war. I'll just still be waiting to get married.

CHARLOTTE

Oh, Vivian.

(SHE thinks)

You know, I don't even know how to be married.

(beat as they both think about this)

Isn't that a funny thought? We've been married for exactly a year and we've spent more time with each other than with our husbands.

VIVIAN

That is funny.

(beat. Slightly bitterly)

I can't believe neither one of them even remembered to send a card. Or mention it in their letters.

CHARLOTTE

It doesn't matter. We will celebrate.

(SHE kisses VIVIAN)

Happy Anniversary.

VIVIAN

Happy Anniversary.

(THEY kiss again. END ACT.)

ACT II
INTERVAL 4

SETTING: Spotlights on VIVIAN and CHARLOTTE.

AT RISE: CHARLOTTE and VIVIAN have stacks of letters. Throughout the scene, they walk back and forth across the stage, reading them simultaneously and tossing them in the air when they are done as indicated per stage direction. Some lines are individualized.

VIVIAN

Wednesday, August 13, 1862. My darling Charlotte..

CHARLOTTE

August 27, 1862. Dearest Vivian.

VIVIAN

(simultaneously with
CHARLOTTE)

Being apart from you is so difficult. I think my students don't understand a single thing I said today. You see, I am suffering from missing you and my mind wandered too much during the lesson.

CHARLOTTE

(simultaneously with VIVIAN)

The only thing that keeps me occupied is my work at the hospital. When I am not at the hospital, I lie about, dreaming of our next visit. When will that be?

(THEY both throw their
letters in the air and open
new ones)

VIVIAN

Thursday, October 14, 1862. My sweet Charlotte..

CHARLOTTE

October 16, 1862. Dear Vivian.

(THEY both stop walking)

VIVIAN AND CHARLOTTE

The Confederates invaded Chambersburg. Are you all right?

(THEY continue walking again)

VIVIAN

Is it true that the Confederates destroyed railroad property? What barbarians!

CHARLOTTE

You must stay home for a while, Vivian. The roads are not safe for you to visit.

(THEY throw the letters in the air and open new ones)

December 11, 1862. Dearest Vivian.

VIVIAN

Friday, December 19, 1862. My darling Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE

I have taken your advice and asked some of the doctors to tutor me so that I might improve my skills. I am worried that I will not be able to keep paying Delia and Ben with my low wages. Our savings are disappearing so quickly and the stipend I receive is not much.

VIVIAN

I look forward to spending Christmas with you this year and having you meet my sister.

(THEY throw their letters in the air. THEY both open new letters)

CHARLOTTE

January 12, 1863...

(SHE throws the letter in the air)

VIVIAN

(hands CHARLOTTE a book)

I've just finished reading George Eliot's "The Mill on the Floss". I think you will love it!

(CHARLOTTE and VIVIAN open new letters)

CHARLOTTE

February 11, 1863.

(CHARLOTTE throws the letter
in the air and opens a new
one)

VIVIAN

Sunday, March 22, 1863.

(VIVIAN throws the letter in
the air and opens a new one)

CHARLOTTE

(hands VIVIAN a book)

"Uncle Tom's Cabin" was wonderful! I can't wait to talk
with you about it!

(CHARLOTTE throws the letter
in the air and opens a new
one)

VIVIAN

I am pleased to hear that the vegetable plants I planted
are doing so well. We can eat them together when I visit.

(VIVIAN throws the letter in
the air. The lines with dates
start coming faster.
CHARLOTTE and VIVIAN open new
letters)

CHARLOTTE

April 17, 1863...

(CHARLOTTE throws her letter
and opens a new one)

VIVIAN

Friday, May 22, 1863...

(VIVIAN throws her letter and
opens a new one)

CHARLOTTE

June 15, 1863...

(CHARLOTTE throws her letter.
CHARLOTTE opens a new letter
and both women stop walking,
very serious. Spotlights on
each)

VIVIAN

Monday, July 6, 1863

My darling Charlotte. Charlotte, oh, Charlotte! The Confederates came through here the past several days on their way to Gettysburg! My sister and I are all right. I was hiding at her house as we had received word that they were coming. They went through other people's houses, torched some of our buildings and took many of our supplies. Miss Markle is missing. I hope they didn't go through Shippensburg. Please write back soon to let me know you are safe. I want more than ever to see you for our anniversary now. Yours always, Vivian.

(CHARLOTTE sadly, carefully
closes the letter as VIVIAN
opens a letter)

CHARLOTTE

July 14, 1863

Dear Vivian. The Confederates did come through here for three horrible days. None of it compares to Gettysburg. Our hospital is full. It is over now. Yours, Charlotte.

(CHARLOTTE exits her
spotlight. VIVIAN looks for
more pages of the letter and
then looks up, realizing
something is wrong. Lights
down on her. END INTERVAL)

Act II
Scene 1

SETTING: Charlotte's parlor. Several days later. Eve more furniture may be missing. It does not look as elegant. Daytime. July, 1863.

AT RISE: CHARLOTTE is reading. The sound of a carriage pulling up. CHARLOTTE reaches for a rifle from under the sofa and goes to see who is out the window. Relieved, SHE goes to the front door and opens it.

CHARLOTTE
I can't believe you came here! What are you thinking? The roads are incredibly dangerous right now! Get inside!

VIVIAN
(entering)
It's all right. Patrick drove. I had to see you. I had to make sure you were all right.
(They embrace. SHE sees the gun in CHARLOTTE's hand)
I see.

CHARLOTTE
I got it off a dead soldier.

VIVIAN
Do you know how to fire it?

CHARLOTTE
I'm sure I could figure it out. Or the soldiers at the hospital could tell me.

VIVIAN
Oh, Charlotte. What happened?

CHARLOTTE
I told you. The Confederates were here for three days. They camped out. There was even shooting in the town.

VIVIAN
Your letter didn't sound like you.

CHARLOTTE

I barely had time to write.

VIVIAN

Why?

(silence)

I thought you'd be at the hospital. I expected I would just wait with Ben and Delia but I didn't even see them outside.

(CHARLOTTE cringes)

What? Something with Ben and Delia? Where are they? Are they all right?

CHARLOTTE

When the Confederates came through...some of them went looking for dark-skinned servants.

VIVIAN

Oh, no...

CHARLOTTE

They found Delia and Ben and whipped Delia until she couldn't walk. Ben...

(SHE looks away)

VIVIAN

They killed him?

CHARLOTTE

They took him. I don't know if he is dead. I have been taking care of Delia, though she hates that I am...

VIVIAN

Of course you would!

CHARLOTTE

I've insisted that she stay here.

VIVIAN

Of course.

CHARLOTTE

And...I got the gun to protect us from any further harm.

VIVIAN

Why did you not tell me any of this in your letter?

CHARLOTTE

I've had to cook for us and set up a room for her...

VIVIAN

Do you know how to cook?

CHARLOTTE

A little. Enough. But Delia needs a lot of care right now. She's frightened and upset about Ben and she's in pain. I've hardly left the house. My neighbor's little boy has been running errands for me into town, even getting medical supplies from the hospital for Delia. That was when we were allowed back into town.

VIVIAN

Oh, Charlotte... Did they come in the house to find her?

CHARLOTTE

I'm not sure. I didn't see anything missing from our pantry or the house. They took supplies from stores in town. They even went into the hospital. The hospital! Can you believe it? Where the soldiers are already lying there dying!

VIVIAN

Were you there? Was anyone hurt?

CHARLOTTE

Other Union soldiers came through and beat them back but then they fell. It's just...it's been terrible. I don't know who is hurt there now.

VIVIAN

How awful! Well, I'm glad you're all right, at least.

CHARLOTTE

Yes.

VIVIAN

Patrick and I will stay for a few weeks and help you with Delia and make sure there are enough supplies.

CHARLOTTE

Oh. You don't need to.

VIVIAN

I know I don't need to, Charlotte. I want to help. Delia has always been kind to me and I know that this must be very stressful for you.

CHARLOTTE

Yes...

VIVIAN

What is it?

CHARLOTTE

Did they ever find Miss Markle?

VIVIAN

(bowing her head)

Yes. They found her.

CHARLOTTE

(realizing)

Oh. Oh, Vivian...I'm so sorry.

(SHE hugs her)

VIVIAN

(tearing up)

Someone will have to tell her husband. How do you...how do you tell a husband that is fighting in the war that his wife...? Who has to write that letter?

CHARLOTTE

I don't know.

VIVIAN

Doesn't he have to know there's no one to come home to?

CHARLOTTE

It's hard to know if that's the right thing to send.

VIVIAN

I assume you haven't told James about...?

CHARLOTTE

Of course not. And you didn't tell Henry...?

VIVIAN

No.

CHARLOTTE

This war wasn't supposed to go on this long. It was just supposed to be one big battle and then be over. It was never supposed to come here like this.

VIVIAN

(beat)

We will have to reinforce the doors. And cover the windows.

CHARLOTTE

With what?

VIVIAN

Boards. Wood. Patrick knows how to cook so that will help. And we'll have to go to the hospital tomorrow and get some soldiers to teach us how to properly use that gun. Maybe we'll find a second one. We should think about places that we can hide if they come through again. No matter where we are.

CHARLOTTE

What will you tell your sister?

VIVIAN

I'll tell her I'll be back in a few weeks.

CHARLOTTE

I can't believe you came all this way just to check on me.

VIVIAN

Why not? You would do the same, wouldn't you?

CHARLOTTE

Yes.

VIVIAN

Let's go find some wood boards and get them up before sunset. I don't trust those Confederates.

(END SCENE)

Act II
Scene 2

SETTING: There is complete darkness. That night.

AT RISE: In the dark, sounds of upset moans and crying.

CHARLOTTE
(unseen, moaning)

No! No! No!

(SHE suddenly starts screaming. VIVIAN enters from a door, in her dressing gown and hurries to a bed where CHARLOTTE is thrashing around. Lights come up to dim)

VIVIAN
Charlotte! Charlotte! You're having a nightmare! Wake up! Wake up!

(SHE puts her arms around her and CHARLOTTE tries to break free but wakes up)

You're all right, you're all right. It was just a dream. Shhhh! It was just a dream.

(CHARLOTTE is sobbing)

I know. I know.

CHARLOTTE
(still sobbing)

No, you don't...

VIVIAN
What did you dream about?

CHARLOTTE
I can't...I can't tell you.

VIVIAN
I thought you could tell me anything.

CHARLOTTE
(still crying)

Not this. Not this, Vivian. It's too horrible.

VIVIAN

Here, let me get you some water.

(SHE goes to a basin and
pours a cup of water from a
pitcher. SHE offers it to
CHARLOTTE who drinks it)

Good. Do you feel better?

(CHARLOTTE doesn't answer)

Charlotte, it was just a dream. It wasn't even real.

(long beat. VIVIAN has a
realization that it was real)

Oh. It was? Did you dream about something real? Charlotte,
you have to tell me!

CHARLOTTE

No! You'll hate me!

VIVIAN

Charlotte, I could never hate you! You're a wonderful, kind
person. I love you.

CHARLOTTE

You won't.

VIVIAN

Charlotte...what happened?

(beat)

Is this about Delia?

(CHARLOTTE shakes her head)

So then what's it about?

CHARLOTTE

When the...Confederates came...I was at the hospital. I hid
with the other volunteers. The Union soldiers told us to
stay down. One man was watching out the window.

(SHE starts crying again as
SHE speaks)

The Confederates were rounding up women from the town...

VIVIAN

Oh, no.

CHARLOTTE

...and taking them behind houses to...

(SHE cannot speak. VIVIAN is
upset)

We waited for hours at the hospital, hoping we would be safe. One of my patients, Sergeant Hicks, tried to talk me into staying so I wouldn't walk home in the dark. But there were a few of us walking in the same direction. We figured we would be all right. It seemed like things were quiet.

(Long pause as VIVIAN braces
herself and CHARLOTTE gathers
strength to speak again)

It was...we were not ten minutes from the house. There were just two of us left, walking. Three Confederates came out of nowhere and pulled us apart from each other.

VIVIAN

Oh, Charlotte...

CHARLOTTE

I could hear the other woman screaming and I couldn't help her. They were such barbarians!

(starting to sob)

It was so painful! He was enormous and mean. He didn't have God in him, Vivian! He was just terrible! He slapped me. I tried...I tried to stab him with a stick but it was too little. It just seemed to goad him on. I thought I was going to die.

VIVIAN

Oh, Charlotte...

CHARLOTTE

And, now, when I try to sleep, I can still hear the terrible noises he made, the grunting and the disgusting smell... I got sick while he was...

(SHE gestures)

VIVIAN

Charlotte, why didn't you tell me any of this?

CHARLOTTE

How could I? I was too ashamed. I can't even imagine what you must think of me now.

VIVIAN

You...did nothing wrong. I think you are smart and brave and I still love you.

(CHARLOTTE looks at VIVIAN and starts to sob. SHE falls into her lap. VIVIAN holds her)

CHARLOTTE

I don't know how.

VIVIAN

Why wouldn't I? You're still Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE

I don't feel like Charlotte. I feel disgusting. When he was done...when I got home...I scrubbed myself raw...I keep scrubbing myself even now...to try to get it off of me...to get him off of me... That wasn't God he put in me. That was something else. And I don't think I'm me anymore.

VIVIAN

You are. Believe me.

(beat)

You've been having nightmares about everything?

CHARLOTTE

All the time. If I sleep.

VIVIAN

Would you like me to bring you some warm milk? It might help you relax.

CHARLOTTE

No. I can't relax.

VIVIAN

(smoothing her hair)

Did...did you tell Delia?

CHARLOTTE

No. She knows that something happened because I was crying when I got home. But then there was so much going on with her...

VIVIAN

Right...

CHARLOTTE

And now she's asleep half the time, anyway. I wouldn't want to tell her. She's already suffered so much. She's like a second mother to me. It would just crush her.

VIVIAN

Then you must talk with me about it.

(CHARLOTTE considers this)

You must trust me.

(beat)

Remember, I have endured some pretty dreadful secrets of my own.

(CHARLOTTE nods. Very gently)

Is this the real reason you haven't been out of the house?

CHARLOTTE

I can't bear to face the other woman. I don't know what happened afterwards. I don't know how long I was out there. But I can't face her or Sergeant Hicks. I should have listened to him.

VIVIAN

Well, he may be our best option for teaching us about the rifle, don't you think?

(beat)

Oh, my, Charlotte...was it...was it his rifle? The Confederate who...?

CHARLOTTE

What?

VIVIAN

Did you...?

CHARLOTTE

Oh, no...I didn't get the chance. Believe me, I wish I could have.

(sadly)

You see? That is something I never would have said before. That I would want to kill them myself for having done such a horrific act.

VIVIAN

It's all right. It's understandable. I would do it in a heartbeat if I ever met him.

CHARLOTTE

You would?

VIVIAN

He hurt you, Charlotte! I couldn't be there to protect you!

CHARLOTTE

But there was no way...

VIVIAN

But that's why we need to know how to use that rifle. To protect ourselves.

CHARLOTTE

Ourselves? Vivian, you're going home in a couple weeks.

VIVIAN

(beat)

Not this time. This time I'm staying. I will take care of you. Patrick will take care of Delia. And we will get through the rest of this war together.

CHARLOTTE

Are you sure?

VIVIAN

(kisses the top of her head)

Very sure.

CHARLOTTE

But your home and your sister...your books...you don't have your books.

VIVIAN

(strokes her hair)

I have you. That's all that I need.

CHARLOTTE

(getting sleepy and closing her eyes)

All right. I'm glad you're staying.

VIVIAN

(realizes CHARLOTTE is falling asleep)

Me, too.

(SHE peeks at CHARLOTTE who has fallen asleep. SHE slowly starts to move out from under CHARLOTTE's head)

CHARLOTTE
(startling awake)

What is it?

VIVIAN
Nothing. Go back to sleep. I'm going to go back to my room.

CHARLOTTE
Will you...stay with me?

VIVIAN
In the bed?

CHARLOTTE
Please, Vivian. Please stay with me.

VIVIAN
(this is clearly new)
Oh...of course.

(VIVIAN closes the door. The lights get dim to shadows as VIVIAN climbs back into bed with CHARLOTTE)

CHARLOTTE
Are you all right?

VIVIAN
Yes. I've just...I'm not used to sleeping on this side of the bed...

CHARLOTTE
Oh. Did you want to switch?

VIVIAN
It's all right.

(THEY settle down, curled up together.)

CHARLOTTE
This feels so nice.

VIVIAN
It does.

CHARLOTTE
Goodnight, Vivian.

VIVIAN
Goodnight, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE
Vivian?

VIVIAN
Yes?

CHARLOTTE
Do you...know any songs?

VIVIAN
What do you mean? Like lullabies?

CHARLOTTE
Yes.

VIVIAN
Of course. I'm not much of a singer, though.

CHARLOTTE
I won't mind.

VIVIAN
(singing softly)
Gentle waves upon the deep,
Murmur soft when thou dost sleep,
Little birds upon the tree,
Sing their sweetest songs for thee,
their sweetest songs for thee.
Cooling gales with voices low,
In the tree tops gently blow,
When thou dost in slumbers lie,
All things love thee, so do I,
When thou dost in slumbers lie,
All things love thee, so do I,
All things love thee,

All things love thee,
All things love thee, so do I.¹
(CHARLOTTE has fallen asleep)
Goodnight, Charlotte.

(END SCENE)

¹ "All Things Love Thee So Do I" (1833) Composed by Charles Edward Horn,
1786-1849

Act II
Scene 3

SETTING: Parlor. The windows have been boarded up. Breakables are missing. There are few furniture pieces left, giving the room a depressing feeling. It is August, 1864.

AT RISE: Enter VIVIAN and CHARLOTTE from the kitchen, having just returned from town. Their clothes look ragged. They both pick up rifles from near the doors.

VIVIAN

You check the bedrooms, I'll check the dining room and the pantry.

(THEY nod and exit in opposite directions. Several beats. THEY return. VIVIAN is also carrying a bowl)

Delia's talking with Patrick out back. Everything seems all right.

CHARLOTTE

The bedrooms and hall are fine.

(THEY replace the rifles strategically near doors. Noticing the bowl)

What's that?

VIVIAN

Delia picked them today. Strawberries.

CHARLOTTE

Strawberries! I haven't had strawberries in so long!

(THEY both taste the strawberries. VIVIAN giggles at CHARLOTTE, who is making a mess)

What?

VIVIAN

(reaching over to wipe her lips)

You have some...here...

(CHARLOTTE licks her fingers)

CHARLOTTE

(eating another)

I think it tastes better on your fingers.

VIVIAN

I'm so glad they grew.

CHARLOTTE

Me, too. They're very good.

VIVIAN

(sitting down)

I'm exhausted.

CHARLOTTE

Did Delia say if the post had arrived?

VIVIAN

There was nothing. Just the newspaper.

(SHE opens it and scans the
headlines)

Some battles in Virginia...here's the dead list.

(CHARLOTTE peers over her
shoulder)

Do you see anyone you know?

CHARLOTTE

(pointing)

Oh, these are the Joyce brothers from the Ohio 7th infantry
that came through the hospital last year after Gettysburg!
Theo Joyce had to have one of his arms amputated.

VIVIAN

I'm so sorry, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE

I will have to see if we have contact information for their
families so I can send a condolence note.

VIVIAN

That's such a kind thought.

CHARLOTTE

(sighing and turning away
from the paper)

Did you see Lieutenant Finnegan today? He's been making so much progress with his walking.

VIVIAN

(admiring)

You really do enjoy it, don't you?

CHARLOTTE

I like when my patients make progress. And it is easier to focus on those things than on news of the dead.

(SHE takes a book out of her
bag)

Look what I got from Dr. Zimmerman today. A real medical book. I can learn about procedures. Even things like working with women's medicine, not just for soldiers. He's been very impressed with how I've been helping in some of the surgeries. He said I might be better than some men who are doctors already.

VIVIAN

Charlotte! That's so exciting! You can be the next Elizabeth Blackwell!

CHARLOTTE

I wish I could afford to be. I would love to go to the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania. Maybe we can just sell our houses and move to Philadelphia. Wouldn't that be incredible? To be among all those women learning to be doctors? And you could teach at elementary schools there or even universities. Oh, students there would learn so much from you! But...that might be too much to ask of you to move so far from your sister and it might still be too expensive. I may just need to be a medical assistant. Still, Dr. Zimmerman said that...

(SHE looks up at VIVIAN, who
appears lost in thought)

Vivian? What's wrong?

VIVIAN

I'm sorry. You want to move to Philadelphia. I was listening.

CHARLOTTE

No, you weren't. What's wrong?

VIVIAN

(sighing)

Timothy Hutchins came to say goodbye to me today.

CHARLOTTE

Oh, dear. I'm so sorry.

VIVIAN

I spend all this time teaching these children and then they go off to fight in the war and get killed.

CHARLOTTE

Hopefully, Timothy will have learned something from you that will help him stay alive. You're always telling me how the best lessons are learned from history. Was he any good at history?

VIVIAN

Yes. But I don't see how that will help him in more practical situations on the battlefield.

CHARLOTTE

(putting her arms around
VIVIAN)

I think you sometimes underestimate the value of your teaching.

VIVIAN

Maybe. I appreciate that you're trying to make me feel better.

(beat. Sighing)

The fighting has to end sometime, doesn't it?

(SHE looks at the paper
again)

They have another call for packages to the Sanitary Commission. I wish we had enough to send one but I know we don't.

CHARLOTTE

We're barely scraping through on the money we get from the hospital and school. We can't send away what little we have.

(beat)

I realize how ungenerous that sounds...

VIVIAN

It doesn't. I understand.

(lowering her voice)

If we weren't in the middle of a war, I would be inclined to relieve Patrick of his post. It's hardly like we need him. He worked for Henry. But now that Delia's better...

CHARLOTTE

No, it wouldn't be right. We must carry him through the war.

VIVIAN

I know.

CHARLOTTE

Can I ask you something?

VIVIAN

What?

CHARLOTTE

I thought I saw you in the hospital chapel this afternoon, praying.

VIVIAN

I helped Admiral Harris go there a few weeks ago and...I don't know...I felt compelled to pray.

CHARLOTTE

What compelled you?

VIVIAN

(beat)

The chapel there is very different than our church. There's no one around really. I mean, there's no service. Candles and prayer books but...it felt very different. Warmer, somehow. No one's making me do it.

CHARLOTTE

I like that chapel, too, but...I haven't wanted to pray since...

(SHE trails off but they both understand)

What...do you pray about?

(awkward beat)

Oh, I'm sorry, that is...you don't have to tell me...

VIVIAN

No, no. I prayed for my students, for Timothy and...I...I prayed for you. For your healing. For an end to us living in fear.

CHARLOTTE

(touched)

Oh, Vivian... Having had you here all year has been incredibly healing. You do know that, don't you?

VIVIAN

I know that it has been a comfort but your nightmares still come and I wish I could stop those.

CHARLOTTE

I'm sorry they keep you up.

VIVIAN

(sitting next to her again)

It's not that, Charlotte. I love you. I want your dreams to be peaceful again. I think...I think I went into the chapel...looking for some kind of peace that I could bring to you.

CHARLOTTE

Do you think God can bring us peace?

VIVIAN

So many of the soldiers in that hospital think God steered us into the war, I would hope that God would bring us peace, too. If God is truly that powerful.

CHARLOTTE

I've seen how powerful God is...

(SHE kisses her)

VIVIAN

(smiling)

Yes, I suppose there is that. And, by the way, I have no objection to trying to move to Philadelphia if you want to apply to that school. I think that would be exciting.

CHARLOTTE

Really?

(There is a sudden sound of tin cans clattering outside. Both women jump up. VIVIAN indicates to CHARLOTTE to get her rifle. VIVIAN gets hers. Both women turn their rifles on the front door. They carefully approach the door. VIVIAN cracks the door open.)

VIVIAN

(whispering)

Looks like a lone soldier. The wire tripped him.

CHARLOTTE

(whispering)

Is he Confederate or Union?

VIVIAN

(looking again. Whispering)

I can't tell. The shadows are...

JAMES (OS)

Charlotte!

(VIVIAN and CHARLOTTE freeze and then look at each other)

CHARLOTTE

Is that...James?

(THEY open the door and exit. Beat. VIVIAN and CHARLOTTE return with JAMES between them who falls through the door, wounded, and exhausted. VIVIAN closes the door. THEY put their rifles down)

JAMES

(as CHARLOTTE cradles him)

Charlotte, is that you? Did I make it?

CHARLOTTE

(crying)

Shhh. Yes, you made it. How did you make it? What happened? Why are you alone?

JAMES

Big battle. Virginia.

CHARLOTTE

You came all the way from Virginia on foot?

VIVIAN

He's bleeding.

(JAMES peers around)

JAMES

Who's that?

CHARLOTTE

James, that's Viv...Mrs. Pritchard. Remember? She and her husband got married at the court building at the same time that we did.

JAMES

(incredulously)

You are still here?

(VIVIAN and CHARLOTTE
exchange uncomfortable looks)

CHARLOTTE

We have become friends. She has been staying here to help...

JAMES

(to CHARLOTTE)

Let me look at you.

(HE takes her in)

Bless me. The war has not changed you a bit. You look the same as ever.

(CHARLOTTE and VIVIAN each
react to this)

VIVIAN

We should get him to the sofa.

(CHARLOTTE and VIVIAN drag
JAMES to the sofa)

JAMES

(as VIVIAN puts his feet up
on the sofa)

So nice of you to come by.

(HE passes out. CHARLOTTE and
VIVIAN look at each other)

CHARLOTTE

(takes his pulse)

He's just passed out from the pain and exhaustion. All
right. We will need warm water and lots of rags. Get
Patrick to help us bring him to the bedroom. Have Delia
bring the leftover bandages and other medical supplies from
her room.

VIVIAN

Charlotte...

CHARLOTTE

Just do it.

(VIVIAN exits. CHARLOTTE
looks down at JAMES and
touches his cheek. END SCENE)

Act II
Scene 4

SETTING: CHARLOTTE's room. It is dim. Later that night.

AT RISE: JAMES is lying in the bed. CHARLOTTE is tending to him. There is a knock on the door. CHARLOTTE quietly goes to open it. It is VIVIAN. CHARLOTTE steps out into the hall and closes the door behind her. Lights up on the hall.

VIVIAN

How is he?

CHARLOTTE

Sleeping. I got him to eat some food. He said it was the best food he had ever tasted.

VIVIAN

So he's home for good now?

CHARLOTTE

Yes. He will receive a formal discharge.

VIVIAN

Oh, good.

(beat)

Would you like to eat?

CHARLOTTE

Henry will be home soon, too, I'm sure.

VIVIAN

This war is still going. I don't have any reason to think he's on his way home. And I'm not there, even if he arrives.

CHARLOTTE

Did you...did you want to go wait for him?

VIVIAN

Why? Do you want me to leave?

CHARLOTTE

What? No. I just...

VIVIAN

Because he's back now so...

CHARLOTTE

Yes, but...no, Vivian...

VIVIAN

(quietly)

I don't see how we can continue as we have been.

(Long silence)

CHARLOTTE

James isn't well yet. We don't know what anything will be like.

VIVIAN

Yes, we do. He will want his wife to be his wife.

CHARLOTTE

(pulling her DS away from the door, lowering her voice)

I have been his wife this whole time. This is...

(awkward beat)

VIVIAN

Yes?

CHARLOTTE

He doesn't have to know, Vivian. He wouldn't even understand.

VIVIAN

(looks at her doubtfully)

So I am to be your mistress?

CHARLOTTE

(laughing)

Well, that's a funny thought, isn't it?

(SHE realizes VIVIAN isn't laughing)

You do realize how ridiculous that sounds, don't you?

VIVIAN

Why?

CHARLOTTE

(whispering)

Women don't have mistresses. If they are going to have affairs, they are the mistresses.

VIVIAN

(whispering)

So then you would be my mistress as well?

CHARLOTTE

(getting impatient)

Nothing has changed, Vivian!

VIVIAN

(hushed but vehement)

Everything has changed! Your husband has returned from war! He thinks you are the same person he left three years ago!

(CHARLOTTE looks down)

And you're not! You're better! You're stronger! You've suffered things he knows nothing about!

(CHARLOTTE shushes her and moves her further DS)

You've learned skills he couldn't imagine! You just dressed all of his wounds without a second thought! Does he know that? No! He was unconscious! And when he wakes up, are you going to tell him it was you or the doctor?

CHARLOTTE

I don't know. And would you please keep your voice down? Why are you so upset?

VIVIAN

(lowering her voice)

Because you aren't seeing things how they are!

CHARLOTTE

What am I not seeing?

VIVIAN

Are you going to tell him why you're having nightmares?

CHARLOTTE

I don't...I haven't had a chance to think at all since he got home! I've just been taking care of him...

VIVIAN

You're right. I'm sorry.

(awkward pause)

I made dinner. I was thinking we could eat and read some more of "A Tale of Two Cities".

CHARLOTTE

I might just eat and then go to bed. I don't want to leave him alone for too long.

VIVIAN

Oh. Right. Of course.

JAMES

(waking up)

Charlotte? Charlotte?

VIVIAN

I will see you at dinner.

CHARLOTTE

Vivian...

(VIVIAN exits. CHARLOTTE opens the door to the bedroom)

Yes, darling? I'm just outside. Do you need something?

JAMES

I just didn't know where you were.

CHARLOTTE

Are you having pain?

JAMES

My leg and hip...

CHARLOTTE

Yes, you were cut and then you were walking all this way on them. They're infected. I'm going to see if I can get some medicine for them at the hospital tomorrow where I've been working.

JAMES

Can't you just send for the doctor?

CHARLOTTE

(beat)

Go to sleep, James. Things will be better after you get rest.

(SHE exits into the hall. SHE leans on the closed door and starts crying. END SCENE)

Act II
Scene 5

SETTING: Parlor. Evening. January, 1865.

AT RISE: VIVIAN is sitting alone, reading the newspaper. Enter CHARLOTTE, assisting JAMES who is also using a cane.

CHARLOTTE

Mrs. Pritchard, look who is practicing walking...

(VIVIAN turns around and jumps up to help)

VIVIAN

How wonderful!

JAMES

(shakes VIVIAN off)

I don't need your help. I'm doing fine.

(CHARLOTTE assists JAMES to the sofa)

Well, you'd never know that I walked as many miles as I did from that walk from the bedroom but it's a start, I suppose.

(HE picks up the newspaper)

Ah, the paper. I didn't realize we were getting this. No one has brought me one.

VIVIAN

I was actually...

JAMES

(ignoring her, he turns the pages)

How are the troops doing?

(Frustrated, VIVIAN looks at CHARLOTTE who sits in another chair)

VIVIAN

Excuse me, Mr. Cardinal, I was reading that.

JAMES

(looking over the paper at
her)

I haven't been able to read a paper in months. I'm sure
you'll permit me the pleasure of catching up on what I've
missed.

(beat)

I'll return it to you when I'm done.

(HE returns to the paper.
VIVIAN, still frustrated,
sits down opposite CHARLOTTE.
Awkward silence)

VIVIAN

(to CHARLOTTE)

I asked my sister to send extra seeds for us to plant when
the winter thaws.

CHARLOTTE

Oh, good! I wonder how we could plant an apple tree. I've
always wanted to have an apple tree.

JAMES

(coming out from the
newspaper)

What is this?

CHARLOTTE

Mrs. Pritchard's planning what to plant in the fruit and
vegetable garden for the spring.

JAMES

In our fruit and vegetable garden?

VIVIAN

The one at this house, yes.

JAMES

(HE puts the paper down)

You know, we haven't had many chances to talk since I've
been shut up in my room, convalescing. Just exactly how
long have you been here?

CHARLOTTE

Mr. Cardinal, be polite.

VIVIAN

A year and a half.

JAMES

A year and...! Mrs. Cardinal, she's been here for a year and a half?

CHARLOTTE

Yes. I told you that back when you first arrived home. You don't remember?

VIVIAN

Mr. Cardinal, food was short. I had seeds. We all needed to eat. And that, eventually, included you.

JAMES

What about your home?

(There is uncomfortable
silence)

VIVIAN

(beat)

I live here. I teach at the school in town.

JAMES

Has...has your husband...died?

CHARLOTTE

Mr. Cardinal!

VIVIAN

Mr. Pritchard is still fighting. I received a post from him three days ago. He knows that I have moved here for the time being.

JAMES

(honestly interested)

Where is he?

VIVIAN

He said he was in Kentucky.

JAMES

He's with Grant?

VIVIAN

He has not said.

JAMES

He's lucky if he is. His men are doing much better than ours were. It's just because Lincoln likes him better. He sends him more provisions.

VIVIAN

As I understand it, your troops suffered because of McClellan. It's not Burnside's fault.

CHARLOTTE

Mrs. Pritchard!

JAMES

Well, you weren't out there, were you? McClellan knew what he was doing. He wouldn't lead us into a battle that we weren't ready for.

VIVIAN

When you're in battle, you need to coordinate with the people on your side! No one had any idea where to send provisions!

JAMES

Who told you that?

VIVIAN

It was all over the newspapers when President Lincoln replaced him!

CHARLOTTE

Mrs. Pritchard, please!

JAMES

(Long pause)

Mrs. Cardinal? What happened to the windows?

CHARLOTTE

We had to board them up.

JAMES

Why?

(The women carefully exchange glances)

CHARLOTTE

The Confederates came through Shippensburg a few times.

(Long silence as JAMES
considers this)

JAMES

They came here?

(CHARLOTTE nods)

But they didn't do anything, did they?

(HE looks around)

There are things missing. My mother's end table...paintings...

CHARLOTTE

Oh, yes, we held some auctions to raise money for the war.
I thought it would be all right to sell some of those
things off. I hope you don't mind.

JAMES

You are such a kind-hearted person.

CHARLOTTE

I just wanted to help with the war effort.

JAMES

My sweet Mrs. Cardinal. Well, it was a good thought to put
up boards. Those monsters will take anything.

CHARLOTTE

It was Mrs. Pritchard's idea.

JAMES

I see. And where did you learn to do such things?

VIVIAN

Books.

JAMES

Ah, yes. You said you were a teacher.

VIVIAN

Yes.

JAMES

I'm afraid I wasn't a very good student.

VIVIAN

Oh, no?

JAMES

No. A little more of a troublemaker. But I think the teachers liked me, anyway.

VIVIAN

I believe my troublemakers imagine the same thing.

(JAMES and VIVIAN consider
each other)

Mrs. Cardinal, I saw Dr. Zimmerman in town today and he asked when you might be returning to work at the hospital. He says they are sorely missing your skills.

JAMES

What skills? She is a volunteer.

VIVIAN

She is a paid worker who is very skilled. She has even been studying with the doctors.

CHARLOTTE

Mrs. Pritchard...

JAMES

Mrs. Cardinal, you never mentioned you were studying.

VIVIAN

They need you back quite urgently.

CHARLOTTE

I don't know when I'll be able to go back. Or if I'll be able to go back.

VIVIAN

If?

JAMES

How many troops are at the hospital?

CHARLOTTE

We have 75 beds. They're always filled and then there are many makeshift beds we've had to create when it gets tight which...is often.

JAMES

I didn't realize you'd been there so much.

CHARLOTTE

Yes. Every day.

JAMES

Every day? And are there many volunteers?

VIVIAN

No medical assistant as naturally skilled as Mrs. Cardinal in the area.

CHARLOTTE

Mrs. Pritchard...

VIVIAN

It's true! You have a gift. You should have heard Dr. Zimmerman go on and on about you! You have to go back!

CHARLOTTE

Not now.

JAMES

Mrs. Cardinal. Do you know what we had out on the battlefield for medical care? Nothing. There was talk of some woman who came out to battlefields to help...

VIVIAN

Clara Barton! Yes, we've read about her! She sounds remarkable!

JAMES

Really? Well, where was she when I was left out on the field to die?

CHARLOTTE

Mr. Cardinal...

JAMES

They left me to die! After all I did!
(silence as HE collects himself)

All I'm saying, Mrs. Cardinal, is that if we had had good medical care where I was stationed, if ambulances had come to collect us, if I had received care in a timely manner, I might not need to learn to walk again.

(beat)

You should go help those soldiers.

CHARLOTTE

I can't leave you by yourself. You're only just now re-training your body to learn to walk again...

JAMES

Delia and Patrick are here during the day. They can help me.

CHARLOTTE

No!

VIVIAN

Mrs. Cardinal, there's no one to help with some of the surgeries that you were learning...

CHARLOTTE

Mrs. Pritchard, you're not listening!

VIVIAN

Mrs. Cardinal!

CHARLOTTE

I said I can't go back right now.

VIVIAN

But Mr. Cardinal said that...

CHARLOTTE

(suddenly)

I'm going to have a baby!

(CHARLOTTE claps a hand over her mouth)

JAMES

(overjoyed)

What? Mrs. Cardinal...is this true?

(CHARLOTTE runs out of the room. END SCENE)

Act II
Scene 6

SETTING: CHARLOTTE and JAMES' bedroom. A few minutes later.

AT RISE: CHARLOTTE is crying on the bed. There is a knock on the door. CHARLOTTE doesn't reply. VIVIAN enters.

VIVIAN

(softly)

Charlotte? May I come in?

CHARLOTTE

What are you doing here? Did you just leave him out there in the parlor?

VIVIAN

I convinced him that I should check on you. And he has the newspaper to keep him busy.

CHARLOTTE

But he can't walk by himself...

VIVIAN

We will hear him if he needs help.

CHARLOTTE

He's ecstatic, isn't he?

VIVIAN

What red-blooded American man wouldn't be ecstatic to hear that his wife is pregnant with their first child?

CHARLOTTE

I didn't want to tell you that way. Or him. Vivian. There was only one time when... I feel so terrible. He kept reaching for me at night and I would pretend that I was sleeping, most of the time, hoping that he would leave me alone. Once, just once, I let him. I didn't want him to bust the stitches on his legs. And, after...he fell asleep...I just cried... I wanted you to be with me, holding me. I wanted your arms around me. And now...

(SHE gestures to her belly.
VIVIAN stares. CHARLOTTE
wipes her tears away)

All he's been talking about since he's gotten better is
having children.

(VIVIAN is silent)

Vivian?

VIVIAN

Charlotte, perhaps it is time that I leave.

CHARLOTTE

What? You can't leave! How will I...Vivian...

VIVIAN

You have a marriage. You're going to have a baby and become
a family. And Mr. Cardinal clearly doesn't want me here...

CHARLOTTE

I want you here! I don't...

(SHE tries maintain control
of her emotions)

These past few months, as I've been taking care of him,
he's just been like every other patient at the hospital. I
haven't...felt...like I used to...

VIVIAN

What do you mean?

CHARLOTTE

I don't think I love him anymore.

VIVIAN

(long beat and then)

I'm sure that's just because you need to get used to each
other again. You need to get to know each other. My being
here doesn't help that.

CHARLOTTE

I don't want to get to know him! I don't want to have this
baby! I just want you! I...

(SHE trails off)

Vivian, I love you.

(VIVIAN takes a sharp breath
in and tears come to her
eyes)

What?

VIVIAN

You've...never said that before.

CHARLOTTE

I always thought it was God.

VIVIAN

And now?

CHARLOTTE

I don't know what I believe about God anymore. God wasn't there that night for me. God didn't protect Mr. Cardinal in the battle...

VIVIAN

He's alive...

CHARLOTTE

Well, I wish he weren't!

(SHE claps her hand over her mouth)

I didn't mean that.

VIVIAN

I know you didn't.

CHARLOTTE

Vivian, what's happening to me? Do you know how many wives are sitting at home, praying for my good fortune? And what am I doing? Wanting to desperately leave him? Not wanting to start a family with him? I must be off in the head!

VIVIAN

You're not off in the head.

CHARLOTTE

Well, I'm not right in it, either.

(VIVIAN puts her arms around her)

I don't feel well so much of the time and the idea of a future with him and as a mother...

(SHE shudders)

God gave me a child when I didn't want one...

VIVIAN

Perhaps it is that you are overblessed.

CHARLOTTE

What does that mean? Is that even a real word?

VIVIAN

You have too many blessings. You have a husband and a to-be child and a passion for medicine...

CHARLOTTE

...And you...

VIVIAN

(beat. Gently)

Something has to go.

CHARLOTTE

Vivian, I can't go back to being his wife.

VIVIAN

Then what are you going to do with the child? A child needs a stable home. He can provide that. It is the natural order.

CHARLOTTE

(starting to tear up)

Please, Vivian...don't...

VIVIAN

It's true for both of us, Charlotte. It always was. Our jobs were to stay home and wait for them to return so we could have families with them when the war was over. Who knew that we would find so much in each other? We've been living in a wonderful fantasy world and now it is time that we awaken to our realities.

(Long silence. They hug)

CHARLOTTE

(starting to cry)

I can't imagine not seeing you every day. And not having the life we've had. Or talking about the life we want to have together in Philadelphia.

VIVIAN

(also crying)

I know. How did we build all of this without imagining the end?

CHARLOTTE

We hoped it never would end.

(beat as THEY cry silently on
each other's shoulders.
VIVIAN kisses CHARLOTTE. SHE
tries to say something but
can't. Slowly, SHE stands and
exits. END SCENE)

INTERVAL 5

SETTING: Spotlights on VIVIAN and CHARLOTTE.

AT RISE: CHARLOTTE and VIVIAN have stacks of letters. Throughout the scene, they walk back and forth across the stage.

CHARLOTTE

February 1, 1865. Dearest Vivian...

VIVIAN

Saturday, February 18, 1865. Dear Charlotte...

CHARLOTTE

My heart has broken since you have left. I cannot find joy in anything. I miss your daily companionship. The baby is growing inside me and all I feel is resentment towards it.

(SHE throws the letter up in the air)

VIVIAN

I cried when I received your letter to hear about your pain. It was not my intention to make you unhappy by leaving but rather to support your family. Being apart from you has also been difficult for me. I have tried to throw myself into my teaching...

(SHE throws the letter up in the air. THEY both open new letters)

CHARLOTTE

March 5, 1865. My darling Vivian...

VIVIAN

Wednesday, March 22, 1865. Dearest Charlotte...

CHARLOTTE

I wish I didn't have to have this child. I know you would have made a different choice if the baby wasn't coming, if it was only Mr. Cardinal. I think you would have fought for us more. I respect that you value family but I don't know

if these are the right choices for this one. I keep thinking of Philadelphia and what we would have had there.

VIVIAN

Your letters are so worrisome. You sound lonely and angry. Oh, Charlotte, we need to be strong for your child! I know it does not seem like the best choice but the baby will be cared for and receive a good education with Mr. Cardinal. Please do not be angry with me.

(THEY throw the letters up in the air and open new ones)

CHARLOTTE AND VIVIAN

(they stop walking, simultaneously)

April 15, 1865. President Lincoln's been killed!

(beat as THEY look at each other)

CHARLOTTE

(looking back at her letter)

Did you hear what happened in Appomattox?

VIVIAN

(looking at her letter)

Maybe the war is ending!

(THEY throw the letters into the air and VIVIAN takes out a new one)

VIVIAN

Sunday, June 22, 1865. My dear Charlotte. How are you feeling? I hope these late stages of the pregnancy are not too difficult for you. I am writing to share the news with you that Henry has died of dysentery in Tennessee. I am surprised to find that I am relieved not to be waiting for him for the first time in my adult life. There is a great freedom in it which mutes my sadness. The house stinks of black dye from the cloth we are using to cover things. Once the appropriate time has passed, I feel I could, perhaps, move back to Shippensburg and live closer to you. It might not be for a few...

(Enter JAMES who interrupts VIVIAN by handing her a small piece of paper. Slowly, SHE opens it)

JAMES

To Mrs. Pritchard. STOP. Mrs. Cardinal has passed away. STOP. James Cardinal. STOP.

(JAMES exits. VIVIAN lets both letters flutter to the ground)

VIVIAN

Charlotte..

(SHE sinks into a chair, in shock. CHARLOTTE carefully and lovingly assists her in putting on a long black mourning veil. THEY do not look at each other. CHARLOTTE silently hands her a book wrapped in brown paper and string. VIVIAN unwraps it. It is "Pride and Prejudice". SHE looks for an accompanying note and, eventually, finds one inside the book)

CHARLOTTE

June 22, 1865.

Dear Vivian. I am having the mid-wife write this note for me. She has promised to keep our confidence. I have given birth to a son named Abraham but I am now very ill. I can tell this fever will take me.

(VIVIAN reacts)

I want you to know, in case I don't see you, that if I had had a daughter, I would have named her Emily. I wanted you to know that I never forgot. And I didn't know if you would have the opportunity to be a mother yourself. I hope you do when Henry returns.

(VIVIAN starts crying)

You have been my dearest companion, my fiercest confidante and the person to whom I can always turn. Vivian, I truly love you with a passion unsurpassed by any other that I have experienced in my short life. I only wish that we

lived in circumstances where our dreams were real. But, as it is, my own life has choked the very freedom that I had found with you and I am relieved to be departing it. If God exists, Vivian, I will find a way to come and visit you always and let you know. I love you deeply. Love,
Charlotte.

(VIVIAN puts the book away,
lights a votive candle and
carries it to the chair. SHE
slowly gets to her knees next
to the chair in a praying
position)

VIVIAN

I can't...I don't know what to say to you.

(beat)

Charlotte? Are you there?

(CHARLOTTE moves a little)

I hardly know who I am talking to now. Are you with God?

(beat)

Oh, Charlotte. I thought I would know what to say when I came here.

(beat)

You were right. If James had not come back, if you had not had Abraham, I don't think I would have felt the need to return to the lives we had before the war. I've never had a happier time in my life than when I was with you,
Charlotte.

(SHE starts crying)

I miss you so terribly. I cannot imagine not hearing your laugh again, not feeling your arms around me, not reading with you...

(SHE trails off and then
takes out the letter from her
pocket)

I have read your last letter many, many times, Charlotte. I came here today...to speak with you...

(beat)

You are so brave, Charlotte. I marvel at how you could leap with such courage into the next world, knowing so fiercely what you wanted and that you could not have it here.

(SHE weeps a little)

We could not have it. You have left me behind, though...

(SHE stops herself)

I am not angry with you; but I miss you. This time without you is only an echo of what we would have had.

(SHE steadies herself)

You have asked that I not remain angry with God, that I understand God's decision to take you.

(SHE sobs)

And if it brings you relief, Charlotte, than I understand.

(With great difficulty)

If you are with God, I need you to pass on this message... God...I forgive you.

(SHE might sob again. Long
beat as SHE recovers from
this)

I have this hope, Charlotte...an unusual one but one that brings me comfort...I hope that our souls may be reunited when I get there...wherever there may be. Because, I know, in my heart, we were meant to be together for longer than this.

(SHE thinks)

Amen.

(SHE cries. FADE TO BLACK.
END PLAY)