
Written by Sara Kumar

FREDERICK

I have seen so much suffering, Mr. Stevens.

I have seen so much pain, Mr. Stevens.

And you laid down your words. And I appreciate that. I really do.

I have to go to Greeneville, to visit my son.

He's working to defend da town centa ova there.

I hope Tennessee doesn't fall.

THADDEUS

I've got a meeting with the President

to discuss the Amendment on Slavery. I want to know what you need.

*(Mr. Charles Sumner speaks with assuredness
of the need to end slavery.)*

CHARLES

I don't want to seek peace, Frederick. It's on his mind.

We need to wrap this up, and move on the Amendment on Slavery.

THADDEUS

I didn't say that. Now, I think peace is worth a look at.

FREDERICK

My two sons, Lewis and Clark,
are fighting with the Massachusetts regiments,
and Frederick is recruiting in Mississippi.

I need Lewis off the line,
so I came to ask Mr. President
if he can move to Tennessee. And he did it.
He'll listen to what you say, on what you bring to 'em.

THADDEUS

I hope Lewis is doin fine.

FREDERICK

I don't wanna say, but he'll be fine. Jus can't fight now.

CHARLES

We'll need your support, Frederick.
The convention will be coming up, and I'm worried.
I'd jus as soon pick you,
but he'll do something profound in his mind, like pick a Democrat.

FREDERICK

Who he have in mind?

*(Lights up at da home in Greeneville.
Eliza walks to the window, and sees the sunrise.)*

CHARLES

He's sending out ole Andy Johnson with bells and whistles, as they say.
He's not sending the right message we need, on the Amendment on Slavery.
He's not.

FREDERICK

I don't know that man.

THADDEUS

He's supporting the Union, and that's somethin we need to look at.
We need to win the election. And it's not a sure deal, even with the South out.

CHARLES

He's got a point. He's in Tennessee. When you go –

FREDERICK

Now, I can't go to meet ole Andy Johnson. I gotta meet ma son, Lewis.
I need to make sure he's doing well.

CHARLES

What was it that you need, Frederick?

FREDERICK

I need equal pay for negro soldiers.

THADDEUS

That's the right way, Frederick. We'll work on that first.
He'll support me. We need to send you to talk, Frederick.
You know that's what I feel about it. I'm sorry if ya -

FREDERICK

No, I didn't say anything. I'll support him.
I'll support Abe. I don't have, no other way.

THADDEUS

He's got a lot on his plate.

FREDERICK

I talked to him, Mr. Stevens. Mr. Sumner, I talked to 'em.
I'll support Congress, if it's Republican.
There's a power in Congress. I don't know how to explain it.
But it's working. Don't falter, not now. He'll listen.
He's thinking. He's always thinking.
And I think too. I want to say, that's what we need.
Equal pay.

THADDEUS

The President's cabinet, has never been a unit. He listens to every dadgum person there is. But he got a mind, workin through it. What else ya need, Frederick?

FREDERICK

Uniforms. Same as the others.

We need uniforms, same as everyone else if we fightin.

CHARLES

What you have now, Frederick?

FREDERICK

We don't have em. We got called in, and dey gave us guns.

CHARLES

Now, you can't be sayin true.

FREDERICK

Dadgum truth, Charles. I need equal pay, and I need uniforms.

THADDEUS

I can't believe we never talked before, Frederick.

We need to meet again. When you come back?

FREDERICK

Dis where I need to be. I need to be in the country's Capitol,
speaking my mind,
like I went to London. They welcomed me there.

CHARLES

We'll get there, Great Speaker, we'll get there.

FREDERICK

The President and Mr. Stanton want me to recruit another regiment.
Now how can I do that without what I need?

THADDEUS

I work a speech up den. I work a speech up.
We should be paid alike, clothed alike, armed alike...

CHARLES

You went into the bull ring, Mr. Douglass. Rehearse your plan of persuasion.

FREDERICK

I intend to, Mr. Sumner.

*(Eliza sits back down at her desk and puts her head down for awhile, on a cushion,
until it's time for breakfast.)*

FREDERICK

Not a word comes to us from the war department assuring the rebel chief that inquisition will be made for innocent blood. Not a word, did I hear, when Black soldiers fought like heroes to plant the star-spangled banner, on the blazing parapets of Fort Wagner, and then were captured and sold into slavery again. The same silence, when our men were brave at Murfreesboro, Milliken's Bend, and Vicksburg. Oh, wait a little longer, they told me, the best way to have justice done to your people is to get them into the army as fast as you can. Well no more, I can't no more. We need equal pay and uniforms, like everyone else.

CHARLES

If Jefferson Davis imprisons colored soldiers, then the United States should retaliate in kind on Confederate prisoners. Put that in der.

THADDEUS

Jus like dat?

CHARLES

Jus da same.

(Charles and Frederick look ova a papa dat Thaddeus holds gently in his hand. Eliza walks back to her chair and sits down with the blanket over her whole body, to keep warm, even in August.)

FREDERICK

And when Black soldiers perform uncommon service on the battlefield, they should be rewarded the same as White soldiers.

THADDEUS

I'll think through it. Write your thoughts down, and we'll work it through the House.

FREDERICK

I think and I hope the President is ready to do the least harm and the most good.

*(They see what dey need to wait for is love, and dey wait before Frederick walks a bit stageleft. It wasn't easy for Thaddeus to walk with a cane.
Frederick loosens his neck tie and comes back again.)*

FREDERICK

How do I reach ya, Mr. Stevens? How do I? I've never been to the White House before.

THADDEUS

I'll write it down how ya reach me. Don't go. Jus wait. I'll write it down for ya.

CHARLES

You ever been to the inaugural dance, Mr. Douglass?

FREDERICK

I need to talk to ma wife, bout that one.

CHARLES (*earnestly*)

You do that, Mr. Douglass. We need to win.

(And Douglass writes down his telegraph contact on a papa.

The lighting indicates a change 'o seasons.

Eliza wakes up and puts a sweater awn.

The month is April. The year is 1864.

Eliza waits fer Mary to come in with breakfast at her desk.

*Elijah stands on a tree stump and looks down. Ketch walks onstage,
and hears crying. He motions for Elijah to come down.)*

End of Act 1, Scene 3.