

## Lincoln's Dream

By Jeff James

*(There is a bed on one side of the very dimly lit stage. In this bed is ABRAHAM LINCOLN, dressed in nightclothes and sleeping. His body is still and straight as a board until a spotlight shines upon where he sleeps, after which he moves and lies more naturally. At first, he sleeps quietly, but after a few seconds he begins moaning and thrashing. A short moment later he wakes up and sits up suddenly, and the stage is more brightly lit, with no spotlight. He looks around for a few seconds before speaking.)*

LINCOLN

*(Checking the bed)*

Mary? Where are you, Mary? *(Pause)* How did I get home? I don't remember the trip...

*(He gets up and walks a few feet from the bed, then stops. Quietly we hear the sound of weeping, but it seems to come from everywhere all at once.)*

LINCOLN

Hello? Who's there? What's going on?

*(Lincoln walks into the dark upstage and tries unseen doors, but does not find the source of the weeping.)*

LINCOLN

I don't understand. This can't be happening.

*(The weeping seems to resolve itself from coming from the stage left side. Lincoln watches in growing horror as a rolling table with a body on it is pushed out. The body's face is covered. The table is surrounded with people. There are two women dressed completely in black wearing veils and two soldiers wearing the uniforms of the union and carrying bayonets.)*

LINCOLN

Mary? *(Neither of the women responds.)* Whose body is that? Who has died?

*(One of the guards reaches over and pulls the cloth from the face of the body, revealing a man wearing a goatee who looks exactly like LINCOLN.)*

MOURNER

It is the president. *(Pause)* Killed by an assassin.

LINCOLN

NO! That's not possible! This can't be real... This is just a dream. *(Pause)* I've had this dream before. I remember now. I told Mary about it.

*(The body dressed as Lincoln sits up suddenly. This is THE ACTOR. When he gets off the table, the mourners wheel it offstage. The two guards stay behind.)*

THE ACTOR

You think this is a dream, do you?

LINCOLN

*(Stares at the actor for a few seconds)*

Who are you?

THE ACTOR

Well, I'm you, of course. But then again, I'm just a simple actor, playing you. I hope you don't mind. *(Pause)* I'm going to put on a show for you.

LINCOLN

There's no use. I'm about to wake up. This is where I woke up before.

THE ACTOR

This particular dream is considerably longer.

LINCOLN

How would you know anything about that?

THE ACTOR

Mr. Lincoln, I know a great many things. This is your dream, isn't it?

LINCOLN

Yes. It is a dream. *(Pause)* I seem to remember watching a show recently... it was something funny, I believe. Is this going to be a comedy?

## THE ACTOR

Well, comedy is relative, your honor. I will do my best to entertain you.  
(*To one of the guards.*) Paine, go get me my cloak, would you? (*To the other guard*) And Herold, please bring Mr. President a chair to sit in. I want him to be comfortable.

*(The guards walk offstage and come back with these things. The cloak should give the impression of a Shakespearian king, or at least what an actor in the 1800s might consider appropriate for such a role. The Actor continues to wear the Lincoln goatee. Mr. Lincoln sits on a chair that the Guard brings out, with his back to the audience.)*

## THE ACTOR

Now, Mr. President, you may be familiar with this one.

*(Lincoln shifts uncomfortably and takes a peek backwards, but says nothing.)*

## THE ACTOR

"Prithee, see there! behold! look! lo! how say you?-- Why, what care I? If thou canst nod, speak too--"

## LINCOLN

What play is this?

THE ACTOR

It's part of a play by Shakespeare. Now, if you don't mind. "If charnel-houses and our graves must send those that we bury back, our monuments shall be the maws of kites."

LINCOLN

This doesn't sound like a comedy.

THE ACTOR

Well, let's just say that the comedy in this piece is a little more ironic. Look, I'll skip ahead to the good part-- "Blood hath been shed ere now, i'th'olden time, ere human statute purged the gentle weal--"

LINCOLN

Are you trying to say something political with this piece?

THE ACTOR

Well, your honor, I am trying to say something.... You'll understand if you'll just let me finish. "--ay, and since too, murders have been perform'd too terrible for the ear: the time has been, that, when the brains were out, the man would die--"

LINCOLN

*(Cuts him off)*

I have had enough. Either perform something more entertaining or go away. If this is my dream, I don't have to watch anything I don't want to.

THE ACTOR

Of course, your honor. Perhaps I could do something from *Richard the Third*? I'm familiar with the part. "Is there a murderer here? No;-yes, I am--"

LINCOLN

NO! I don't want to hear anything more about murders!.

THE ACTOR

How about something from *Our American Cousin*?

LINCOLN

*(Gasps, shaken)*

No, I don't want to hear that play, either!

THE ACTOR

Why not, your honor? It's a comedy, I promise. Was very popular in its time...

LINCOLN

Absolutely not! This dream is going to end right now!

*(Lincoln squints his eyes and appears to be making some kind of effort to wake up. When nothing happens, Lincoln opens his eyes and The Actor shakes his head in bemusement.)*

THE ACTOR

I'm afraid you can't do anything about that, Your honor. Besides, I have something else I want to show you. *(To guard)* Bring in the folder.

*(One of the guards leaves the stage and brings back a large envelope that is very clearly marked "assassination".)*

LINCOLN

NO! Not those!

THE ACTOR

Surely you've heard these letters before?

LINCOLN

I do not want to hear them again!

THE ACTOR

Well, I'm going to read them anyway. *(He pulls a letter out of the envelope.)* Here, this is a good one. "God damn your god damned old Hellfired god damned soul to Hell." Very threatening sounding, if I do say so myself. Probably the type who would never actually do anything about it, so I wouldn't worry.

LINCOLN

You will stop this torment right now! *(To Himself)* Why can't I wake up? I want to wake up!

THE ACTOR

So stubborn, Mr. President. *(Pulls out another letter)* Here, we've got another one. "Our country owed all of our trouble to him, and God simply made me his punishment."

LINCOLN

That doesn't sound like a threat... it sounds more like... recollection...

THE ACTOR

That's because it was written after the fact...

*(He removes the Lincoln beard and puts on a mustache which gives him the appearance of John Wilkes Booth.)*

LINCOLN

YOU! I've seen your face before! You're one of the Booths! What have you done? *(Pause)* Guards! Arrest this man!

THE ACTOR

All of the guards here are my men, Mr. President. I'm afraid that you won't have any luck with them.

LINCOLN

Why is this happening to me?! Nothing makes sense!

THE ACTOR

It's because you're already dead, Mr. President. *(Pause)* Feel the back of your head.

*(Lincoln reaches around and tentatively touches the back of his head. His hand returns bloody.)*

LINCOLN

This-- this is all just a dream! None of this is true! None of it! None!

*(Something seems to snap and Lincoln's movements become strange and jerky, and without apparent reason. They build to a furious pace as he talks.)*

LINCOLN

*(Monotone, distant)*

Mary? Where are you, Mary? "No man has the authority to give up rebellion for any other man." None! None of this is real! "I abstain from reading the reports of attacks upon myself." Who has died? Who has died? Died? Died? Died! "We shall sooner have the fowl by hatching the egg than by smashing it!" *(Blood begins shooting in violent spurts from the back of Lincoln's head, very artificially.)* Smash! Smash! Smash! Mary! Mary, smash, died, smash, DIED--

*(The Actor reaches and gives one of Lincoln's ears a firm twist, and Lincoln makes an inhuman gurgling noise before slumping in his chair as if asleep. The Actor sighs and removes his cape, handing it to one of the guards.)*

THE ACTOR

*(Facing the audience)*

Can you make a note of that, Barry? He can't quite handle the last bit. I'm not sure if it's a bug or if the sensitivity arrays aren't calibrated well enough. *(To the guards)* Can you get him back onto the bed?

GUARD

*(Lifting Lincoln's body.)*

What was that he was quoting?

THE ACTOR

I think it was from one of his last speeches. *(Pause)* I think I saw little things in his behavior that seemed to come pretty naturally from the state of mind that Lincoln was probably in during his last days. *(To the unseen Barry.)* How do the printouts look?

*(The actor presses his hand to his ear and listens to an unheard response for several seconds while nodding his head. The guards have moved Lincoln's motionless body into the bed after wiping the blood from the back of his head. One guard walks offstage and returns with a mop for the blood onstage.)*

THE ACTOR

Do you need any more time to make those adjustments? Okay, I think we'll be ready to go again in a minute. *(To guard)* Have you got all that blood up? *(The guard nods yes. To Barry.)* I'll give you a go when I'm ready.

*(The actor and the guards walk offstage left. After a few seconds, the lights return to the dim setting from the start. Where the spotlight appeared the first time, blackout.)*

THE END