

ABRAHAM and MARY

A Dramatic Character Study of the Lincolns

By
Bo Metzler



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Written by

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Abraham and Mary was originally presented on February 8 & 9, 1971, at E. Turner Stump Theatre at Kent State University, Kent, Ohio, as an Independent Study Project under the supervision of Dr. William Zucchero. It was produced and directed by Bo Metzler and Catherine Wasson.

CAST

ABRAHAM.....Bo Metzler
MARY.....Catherine Wasson

VOICES

Bill Applebaum Ronald J. Rand
Richard M. Bunts Neal Roberts
Kirk Heaton Kathy Stefano
Arpina Markarian Deb Sweat
Michael O'Brien

CREW

Susan S. B. Brown.....Makeup
Duane E. Reed.....Costumes
Kenneth Barnett.....Lighting Design/ Stage Manager
Jeff Ward.....Properties
Jim Mayo.....Lighting Control
Ronald Rand.....Slides
Deb Sweat.....Sound

ACT ONE

1840 -1860

ACT TWO

1860 – 1865

Abraham and Mary

There are only two characters in the play: Abraham Lincoln and Mary Todd Lincoln, although some background voices are used for incidental characters. Slides with pictures and dates aid in the setting and re-setting of time and place as the play spans twenty-four years—the entire length of the relationship between Abraham and Mary.

The open stage setting is very simple, composed of two separate yet unified areas. Abraham's area covers the Stage Right half of the stage. There is a large desk-table littered with books, papers, newspapers, and a quill pen. A few feet to its left (Right of Center) is a rocking chair. There is a special area for Abraham located Down Right with a lectern within easy reach. Mary's area covers the Stage Left half of the stage and contains a straight-back chair (Left of Center), a small end table and a sofa (further Left). Mary also has a special area located Down Left.

The only entrance is located Center stage just above and between the two areas. Located above the entrance is a projection screen for slide projections.

Abraham and Mary

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PROLOGUE

(Music and Lights fade up on Abraham standing in his special Down Right area. He is dressed in shirt sleeves with vest unbuttoned and no tie. At this point in time he has no beard.)

Voice of Mary. Abraham Lincoln: Born on February 12, 1809, Hardin County, Kentucky. Raised poor, read feverishly, had little schooling. His mother, Nancy Hanks, died when Abraham was nine years old.

Voice of Abraham. I met a woman ridin' horseback once and stopped to let her pass. She stopped too, and lookin' at me intently, said, "I do believe you are the ugliest man I ever saw!" Said I, "Madam, you are probably right, but I can't help it." "No," she said, "you can't help it, but you might stay at home."

(Lights come up on Mary standing alone in her special Down Left area. She is dressed in a simple dress with a hoop skirt.)

Voice of Abraham. Mary Todd: Born on December 13, 1818, Lexington, Kentucky. Raised upper class, read a great deal, was educated in the best of schools. The Todds were a very large and influential family.

Voice of Mary. I'll admit he's not the prettiest man in the world, but he could make a fine president.

(They freeze as Lights dim out. Music continues under transition.)

ACT I

SCENE 1

SLIDE: 1840: Springfield, Illinois

*(Slide goes out as Lights come up on Mary in her special
Down*

Left area. Music fades out.)

Mary. I have given more than one moment's thought to the possibility, and I have decided that I shall become Mrs. Abraham Lincoln. I ask for no congratulations nor condolences. He is coming to call this evening and he will humbly ask my hand in marriage. After I have displayed the proper amount of surprise and confusion, I shall quietly answer "yes."

*(Lights remain on Mary as Light comes up on Abraham in
his Special Down Right. area.)*

Abraham. Of all of my friends, you are the best, Joshua Speed. I have spoken my heart to you many times, and that is why I have asked you to take this letter to her. I have stated my case, which she must understand. Now you tell me that you refuse my wish . . . how can I make you see?

Mary. I have carefully examined the qualifications of all of my suitors, including Mr. Douglas, and those of Mr. Lincoln seem far superior. He is a man of the mind. He is congenial and he is amiable. I love Mr. Lincoln and would prefer him to a man who had all the houses and gold in the world. Abraham Lincoln is my choice!

Abraham. How can I be calm until I have this thing settled? Can't you see that I am desperate? I wish only to make Mary happy. I wish it with all my heart. But I fear that no matter what I do I will fail in that effort.

Mary. Elizabeth, you are my sister, please trust me. I am not rushing blindly into anything! This is not the result of any

childish infatuation. I simply feel that of all the men I know, his is the life and destiny I want most to share.

Abraham. So you think I have finally lost my head, gone crazy. Well, maybe you're right. All I know is that I'm at the end of my rope; I must have done with this arrangement; I must let go and drop. Where I will fall I don't know; whether I will survive or not I don't know either. But this I do know: I can't go through with it . . . I must have my release!

Mary. I shall be Mrs. Lincoln!

Abraham. There shall be no wedding! I will go and talk to Mary myself . . . and then I'm going away.

(Lights dim out.)

SCENE 2

(Lights come up on Abraham sitting in place on the stage.)

Abraham. Mother . . . I know you are with me . . . I am very deeply troubled, mother . . . You told me once that no matter where I was, if I ever needed help, you'd be there . . . I need your help now, mother . . . I am confused . . . I don't know what I'm about or where I'm goin', while everyone else seems to know and is sure. If my destiny is certain, I confess I don't know it . . . and may never know it, or truly understand it.

(Lights come up on Mary seated on her sofa.)

Abraham. There is a woman, Mary Todd, whom I have left. She seems to care for me very much, yet I am not certain as to the extent. Nor am I certain of my feelin's for her. We have talked of marriage, yet I feel I can never be satisfied with anyone who would be blockhead enough to have me. I am now the most miserable man living. If what I feel were equally distributed to the whole human family, there could not be one cheerful face on earth. Whether I shall ever be better, I cannot tell. There is one still unhappy, and I have made her

so. That still kills my soul. I cannot wish to be happy . . . while she is otherwise.

(Lights dim out. Music covers transition.)

SCENE 3

(Mary is seated as before when Lights come up. In the Blackout

Abraham has added frock coat and stovepipe. He appears in upstage center entrance, and stands for a moment. Finally Mary feels his presence and almost without looking says . . .)

Mary. I'm glad to see you again, Mr. Lincoln.

Abraham. Thank you. You may wonder as to the reason for my comin'.

Mary. You are always welcome.

Abraham. After my behavior at our last meetin' I have not been fit company for myself.

Mary. You have been ill. We were informed and have been concerned. But you are well again and will resume your work with the legislature . . . or perhaps you have larger plans?

Abraham. I have no plans that are definite. Mary . . . I'm sorry

Mary. *(Cutting in.)* I was blinded by my own self-confidence. I loved you and believed I could make you love me. I was determined that you should become a leader of men. But you don't wish that. I knew you had strength, but I didn't believe you would use that strength to avoid your own destiny.

Abraham. It is true. You once had faith in me that I was far from deservin'. I wish now to strive to deserve it. I believed our ways were separate and could never be otherwise. But now I believe our destinies are together. I love you Mary, and I wish to ask you again to be my wife. I was unsure of my direction before, but now I have come to the

conclusion that the way I must go, is the way you have always wanted me to go.

Mary. And you will promise that you will never again fail or turn away?

Abraham. I promise. I shall devote my life to tryin' to do what is right . . . and God give me the power to see what is right.

Mary. Very well then, I shall be your wife. I shall fight by your side till death do us part. Abraham, I love you very much. I shall die loving you.

Abraham. *(After a moment of looking at each other.)*
Could I call you Molly?

Mary. Molly? . . . You mean a nickname?

Abraham. Yes.

Mary. I have never had a nickname. But why should you want to?

Abraham. Well, I knew another girl by the name of Mary . . . few years ago in New Salem. I didn't come off too well in that . . . and the name Mary is still a little . . . painful.

Mary. Then call me Molly, by all means!

Abraham. Thank you. *(Pause.)* May I have a cup of coffee now, Molly?

(Blackout.)

In the blackout Abraham and Mary move to center stage into a brief wedding pose. They are silhouetted by the Slide.)

SLIDE: Marriage: November 4th, 1842

SCENE 4

(Slide goes out. As Lights come up Abraham removes his coat and sits in his rocker. Mary moves to the sofa.)

Abraham. Molly, why were Joshua Speed and I so frightened at the prospect of marriage? For a year and a half we wrote each other tryin' to answer each other's anxieties and misgivin's.

Mary. And do you still have misgivings?

Abraham. Well, not exactly 'misgivin's', but, I did write a letter to a lawyer friend, name of Sam Marshall, and in it I said: "Nothin' new here except my marriage, which to me is a matter of profound wonder!" It wasn't until I'd mailed that old letter that I realized how fast and irrevocably I had committed myself.

Mary. You committed yourself even faster and more irrevocably than you know.

Abraham. How do you mean, Molly?

Mary. Abraham . . . I'm with child.

Abraham. (*Jumping up.*) Are you sure? My, that was fast, wasn't it?

Mary. Instantaneous would be a better word. (*She looks at him.*) Why Abraham, you're blushing! I didn't know you could!

Abraham. And after I promised you a carefree year.

Mary. Oh, I couldn't be more free from care. Married less than two months, and already with tangible proof that my husband loves me.

(Lights dim down. Abraham and Mary are frozen in dim light and

silhouetted by Slide.)

SLIDE: First son: August 1, 1843

SCENE 5

(Slide goes out as Lights resume to full.)

Abraham. Well we've got one thing to be thankful for anyway. Your sister says the baby doesn't look a bit like me!

Mary. Would you like to name your first son Thomas, after your father?

Abraham. No.

Mary. Then we'll name him Robert, after mine.

Abraham. Look Mary, I promised Speed . . . my first son would be named Joshua . . . after him.

Mary. Joshua indeed! Let Speed sire his own sons.

Abraham. But Molly . . .

Mary. Say no more. My mind is made up. His name shall be Robert Lincoln.

(Abraham moves to his desk. Mary moves D.L.)

Mary. Is it true the things I've heard about your partnership, Abraham?

Abraham. Your cousin Logan wanted his son David in the firm. He thought there wasn't room for the three of us. So, I suddenly needed a new partner.

Mary. But I don't understand. You went and found the least likely man in Springfield . . . in all of Illinois, who could possibly have anything to offer you!

Abraham. Billy has a great deal to offer me.

Mary. What, for instance? . . . What prestige has he?

Abraham. Billy is a hard worker. He's agreed to release me from all of the routine drudgery.

Mary. With all of the men you could have had, why did you choose to cut your own stature?

Abraham. My stature, such as it may be, comes out of myself, and will be determined by how I practice law; it will not come from my partner. I've been the junior partner for eight years. Now I'm the senior partner. Billy is just the kind of junior partner I want.

Mary. But why him? He moves in one of the lowest levels of Springfield society. Our two families can never become intimate.

Abraham. Why not Mary? I came from a much humbler background. If I'm good enough to have married into bluegrass royalty, why aren't the Herndons good enough for us?

Mary. You think I'm a snob, but it's not that. I just feel that your position will be damaged. Why did you take him?

Abraham. Why did you take me Molly?

Mary. You were the best.

Abraham. So is Billy; give him a chance.

Mary. (*After a pause.*) Certainly you'll only offer him a third.

Abraham. I've already offered him half . . .

Mary. Half ! . . . ?

Abraham. If I put Billy on the short end, he'll resent me and the arrangement just as I resented the arrangement with your cousin Logan. What I don't like for myself, I can't impose on any other man.

Mary. Half your income! . . . After all your years of preparation! . . . and for a drunken partner.

Abraham. (*Rising.*) You must let me choose my law partner Mary. That is one part of my life in which I must make the decisions. Marriage doesn't give you that right!

Mary. Apparently not. I am to be ambitious for you, counsel you in certain fields, while being ignorant in others. Just how do I determine the boundaries of where I belong in your life?

Abraham. You are my full and equal partner in everythin'. I have always respected your judgment. But this is one thing in which you must abide with me.

(Lights dim down. They both exit in dim light, Abraham carrying hat & coat. Music covers transition.)