

RACHEL

The book says she had many children with Jefferson.

PATSY

Says who? "Dusky Sally" was a lucrative story that sold newspapers. So *all* of Sally's children must be Jeffersons!

MARY

Visitors to Monticello said the house slaves looked just like your father.

PATSY

The silver lining in my unfortunate marriage is that I lived with my father most of my life. So I can truthfully say that my father did not have a concubine.

RACHEL

What did he say when you asked him about Sally?

PATSY

*(Beat.)*

Asked him?

RACHEL

He didn't deny it, did he?

MARY

The newspapers were full of it. What did he say?  
*(PATSY does not respond.)*

RACHEL

Maybe he really loved her.

PATSY

No! I was his whole world.

ABIGAIL

The greatest sages in America have debunked this story for 200 years.

DOLLEY

They all agreed that it was a "moral impossibility."

JACKIE

That was before we had scientific proof.

*(We hear a low recording of the beginning of the Charlottesville protests.)*

PATSY

My father was too good for this world and generous to a fault.

MARY

So generous that his slaves were sold to pay his exorbitant debts.

PATSY

I admit that my father had to have the best of everything, and he died broke. I suffered more than anyone for that!

JACKIE

No one suffered more than the humans he sold.

PATSY

He freed them!

*(Beat)*

JACKIE

Who?

PATSY

*Some* of them.

MARY

You said he was broke.

PATSY

He was!

JACKIE

Then why did he free them?

PATSY

Well...he was partial to them...

MARY

Why did Thomas Jefferson free a handful of slaves—

JACKIE

All named Hemings?

PATSY

My father, naturally, was loathe...to...to...

MARY

Sell his wife's own sister.

RACHEL

Sister?

*(Beat.)*

JACKIE

Well, go on, Patsy. There's irrefutable evidence that—

PATSY

*(Admitting.)*

Sally was my mother's half-sister.

RACHEL

... Sally is your aunt?

PATSY

Yes, but that has nothing to do with my father.

MARY

*(Referring to the book.)*

He freed Sally's three sons. Why?

*(Beat.)*

PATSY

Uh...well....they were his wife's half nephews. You see?

JACKIE

It strains credulity, Patsy.

PATSY

He made me promise not to sell Sally and her children. But he never told me why. And I never asked.

**ACT I SCENE v**

**August 12, 2017**

*(They are interrupted by a cacophony of tweet sounds. They watch the violent footage from Charlottesville, Virginia.)*

REPORTER V/O

Thousands of people have descended on Charlottesville to either protest or participate in a “Unite the Right” rally convened by white nationalists. They oppose a plan to remove Confederate statues of Robert E. Lee—

V/O CHANTS

Blood and Soil. Blood and Soil.

Black Lives Matter. Black Lives Matter.

Jews will not replace us.

No fascists! No Trump.

Whose streets? Our streets.

*(Tweet. DOLLEY crosses to computer.)*

DOLLEY

“Very fine people on both sides.”

*(Sudden quiet. The Door suddenly opens, light pours out. Pause.)*

ABIGAIL

What in the world....?!

*(PATSY assumes this is her summons and she must leave. She walks slowly toward The Door.)*

DOLLEY

Patsy?

RACHEL

What's this/ about?!

ABIGAIL

Patsy, what are you doing?

MARY

Don't stop her.

DOLLEY

But... but she's...

MARY

It's the right thing.

*(Just as PATSY nears The Door, VARINA enters and PATSY, surprised, retreats. The Door closes. VARINA has great authority, assesses the room, and stops in front of MARY. The Ladies are speechless. Beat.)*

Madam?

VARINA

I have never had the honor, Mrs. Lincoln. Even though we held the same position. At the same time.

MARY

... Varina Davis... What? No!

VARINA

Mrs. Jefferson Davis, First Lady of the Confederacy.

*(Curtseys. She's full "Gone with the Wind.")*

Mrs. Madison, how do you do? Mrs. Kennedy. Mrs. Adams, what an honor—

MARY

No, no...If she is here then...then the danger to our country is—

VARINA

I'm surprised I didn't arrive earlier. The Union is showing signs of wear and chaos. People think they can topple monuments to the heroes of the Confederacy.

ABIGAIL

Chaos, indeed! You're not a daughter or a wife.

VARINA

I beg your pardon. My husband, Jefferson Davis, was president during the War of Northern Yankee Aggression.

MARY

War of Northern Yankee—How dare you?! It was the Slaveholder's Rebellion!

VARINA

And whom do I have the pleasure?

RACHEL

Mrs. Andrew Jackson.

VARINA

My husband was a great admirer of the General.

RACHEL

I'm tickled!

VARINA

Isn't it wonderful? The people are rising up. As Thomas Jefferson once said: "Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God."

PATSY

You know my father's work! It's so refreshing to hear someone speak fondly of him. Someone who understands his greatness.

VARINA

Why, you must be...

PATSY

Patsy. Sole surviving child of Mr. Jefferson.

MARY

Patsy, don't listen to her!

VARINA

Patsy! I am delighted. We'll be good friends. These are trying times, but you must be proud. Charlottesville, your hometown, is the new Lexington and Concord.

ABIGAIL

Lexington–

JACKIE

and Concord?!

VARINA

The shots heard round the world signal a new era of freedom!

MARY

Why are you here?! You can't be here! The threat is far more severe than I ever imagined.

VARINA

Patsy, I aim to protect you. And your father's reputation. I only hope I'm not too late. The polls show that Mr. Jefferson is currently best known as a rapist.

PATSY

Dear God!

VARINA

And a pedophile.

PATSY

That is an outrage!

VARINA

But with the proper version of the truth, we can reclaim his legacy.

PATSY

Yes. The writer of the Declaration of Ind–

VARINA

I am referring to the *other* legacy...Defender of property rights and small government. Proud Southerner. Slaveowner.

JACKIE

What?!

PATSY

Well, uh, no, he opposed slavery. He said it was evil.

VARINA

Patsy, you can be at your ease with me. Whatever do you have to be ashamed of?

MARY

I can't...I won't believe this...Maybe I *am* insane!

VARINA

Had your father lived, don't you think he would have been a staunch Confederate?

PATSY

I wouldn't dare venture to guess—

ABIGAIL

How are you here?!

DOLLEY

Mary warned us!

VARINA

Imagine his outrage if the government tried to seize his property or free his slaves.

PATSY

We just don't like to speak of such things here—

VARINA

It's much better to state the facts, then you can control the narrative. The voices for Sally's people are growing louder. They're hawking Monticello as a prime location to "bear witness" to the evils of a slave labor camp. It's no longer Jefferson's pastoral Monticello. It's "Sally Hemings- we're not covering up-Jefferson's secret family-Monticello."

PATSY

Covering up? What rubbish!

JACKIE

Patsy, you just admitted—

PATSY

I admitted nothing!

RACHEL

You just said that Sally is your kin—

PATSY

No!

ABIGAIL

Patsy, you're lying.

VARINA

We can't let your father be tarnished like this. We need to vindicate him and the chivalrous Southern way of life. We need a campaign to show his best side.

PATSY

But I worked my whole life—and I'm still working— to defend his reputation—

MARY

You lied for 200 years!

VARINA

Why, you are the very best defender of Dixie that the Old Dominion ever spawned. But it's time to say it unapologetically: Jefferson was a proud son of the South.

PATSY

Yes!

VARINA

He was good to Sally and her kin.

PATSY

He was!

VARINA

There was never a better cared for bunch of servants. Best food, best jobs, they resided right there at Monticello.

MARY

Are you hearing this?!

ABIGAIL

A slave at Monticello is still a slave.

VARINA

And they were happy.

JACKIE

Happy?!

PATSY

It's true!

MARY

We have to do something. She's got to go.

DOLLEY

I—I— have no words.

MARY

This is the worst Lost Cause, racist, revisionist, contemptuous--

VARINA

There. No more hiding. Your father was the best master in all of Virginia. We're not saying that some masters weren't cruel. But that was not the norm. Your father *cared* for his servants. Can you imagine the suffering of an *unprotected* colored woman? It's unthinkable.

PATSY

Unspeakable.

VARINA

"I have never been able to conceive how any rational being could propose happiness to himself from the exercise of power over others."

PATSY

Who said that?

VARINA

Thomas Jefferson! Now is that the voice of a tyrant? A Simon Legree?

PATSY

Heaven forbid!

MARY

I refuse to take a morality lesson from the wife of Jefferson Davis!

VARINA

Before we've finished, Patsy, Sally Hemings will be erased from the textbooks of America's children. And your dear father's reputation, restored.