

DELIVERY
by Greg Vovos
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CHARACTERS:

LUCY: A strong and assured free Black woman in her forties who's committed to helping runaway slaves find freedom.

ANNA: A fugitive slave in her twenties who is tired and worn from her trip north. She's pregnant and holding out hope that her husband will find her.

BOUNTY HUNTER: A white man who makes his living hunting down slaves and returning them to their "masters."

SETTING:

The cellar of St. John's Episcopal Church, also known as Station Hope. Located in Cleveland, Ohio, about a mile south of Lake Erie, it is one of the last stops on the Underground Railroad before fugitive slaves make their way to freedom in Canada.

Time is 1853, when the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 gives slave owners and their bounty hunters the power to look anywhere for their "property" and requires that all citizens, regardless of their beliefs, aid in the retrieval of these poor souls.

SYNOPSIS:

A free Black woman tries to help a runaway slave complete her journey to freedom, but danger lurks and Anna must decide if freedom is worth leaving behind her husband.

NOTE: This play was written for Cleveland Public Theatre and the Friends of St. John's for the 2014 Station Hope celebration.

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DELIVERY

Lights up on a dark, cold basement where secrets hide beneath the dirt. Pallets are stacked against the back wall, except for one that lies cock-eyed in the center of the floor, an old tarp next to it.

ANNA, a fugitive slave in her twenties, sits on this lonely pallet. Her body stiff, tight, arms wrapped around her pregnant belly. If she were a praying woman, surely she would be doing so now, but instead...

...she wrings the red bonnet in her hands as if she were hoping to birth a miracle.

FOOTSTEPS.

Rushing in is LUCY, a strong, sure, Black woman in her forties. When Lucy enters, the room comes to life by her force alone.

LUCY

It's time, child. We have to leave.

Anna shakes her head.

The signal come from the lake. The Lord ready to deliver you to freedom.

ANNA

Ain't going nowhere without Samuel.

LUCY

I understand you want to be with your husband, but we can't wait no longer.

ANNA

I'm not going to some foreign place without him. I'm going to wait--

LUCY

Boat leaves tonight. And it going to leave with you on it.

Anna MOANS, grabs her belly.

See that? That your child preparing to come into the world. And when that baby come, I want it to be on free soil. You understand what that means, to be born free?

Anna says nothing. Lucy kneels beside her.

I know you scared. But the Lord protect you. He brought you this far and he going to lead you to Canaan. You understand me?

ANNA
Ain't no Lord.

LUCY
What did you say?

ANNA
I said there ain't no Lord.

LUCY
'Course there's a Lord. How you think you get this far?

ANNA
If'n there was a Lord, my Samuel be with me right now. If'n there was a Lord, I wouldn't have to hold this baby in 'til I reach free soil. If'n there was a Lord, we be free no matter where we lay our heads and mine be right next to my husband's!

LUCY
Child, you have to trust me. You have to trust God. He deliver you.

ANNA
I don't trust God for nothing.

Lucy SLAPS Anna cross the face.

LUCY
You don't talk about the Lord like that. Not in front of me. Now the time come to leave. You stop worrying about your husband and concentrate on your baby. Your baby needs you to be strong.

ANNA
My baby need a father! When I last see him in Oberlin, he say we meet at Station Hope. So that's what we do.

A TOWER BELL RINGS in the distance. They turn to the sound, frozen.

LUCY
Oh, Lord, they's here. The bounty hunters are in the area.

ANNA

I told you there ain't no Lord. Not for us.

LUCY

Give me your bonnet.

ANNA

What?

LUCY

Give me your bonnet and your dress. We gon' change clothes and then I'll go draw their attention, lead them deep into the woods. And when I do, you follow that North Star to the lake, you get on that boat, and you get yourself to freedom.

ANNA

I ain't going nowheres without my husband.

LUCY

When you going to realize that your husband dead? or captured?

ANNA

What?

LUCY

It been three weeks, child. Three weeks and I ain't heard nothing from no one about him. Now I got friends all over the line and ain't no one report about him to me.

Anna grabs her belly. She's in pain.

I'm sorry to have to tell you that, but you have to hold it together for your child until you get North. Give me the bonnet. Come on now.

Anna holds onto the bonnet like she's clutching at life itself.

ANNA

No. My mama give me this when I five years old. Only thing of her I got. She give it to me 'fore we go up on the platform when the man win her in the bidding. I's holding onto this as they dragged her away from me. She crying, pleading, begging the man to buy me too. But the man don't care. He just take my mama away. I never forget her reaching for me. I tries to go to her, but the mens just kick me away with them heavy boots they got. All I had to hold onto was this. That the last I seen of my mama. From then

on, for years, I's all alone, got no one to love me...not until my Samuel. And now you tell me he gone AND you want me to give up my mama's bonnet. No, ma'am. I ain't do that. And your Lord can't make me.

LUCY

Child, you don't have a choice. You have to do this.

ANNA

Why I have to?? All my life I have to do everything.

LUCY

For your child! And yourself. Else the man come in here, rip your baby right from you and you end up just like your mama, and your baby just like you.

ANNA

Maybe it best if my baby not be born. Maybe our lives ain't worth it. The way we treated like dogs.

LUCY

You ain't no dog! And I ain't gon' let happen to you what happened to Petunia.

ANNA

Who Petunia?

LUCY

Petunia was a beautiful young creature, much like yourself. Petunia would bring a child into the world, take it to the breast, fill it with life and love, and then...here he come to snatch it away and sell it. This go on and on, one sweet child after another, each time Petunia losing `nother part of her soul, just peeling away layer by layer. Finally, her heart extinguish, smothered, like when you throw dirt on a fire. Now, ain't but two ways a person can go when they reach that point -- either they go silent altogether or they decide to fight. Petunia was thinking about this when the Lord put His hand on her and made up her mind: she was pregnant again. And this time -- this time wasn't nobody taking her baby. Petunia run -- she fast, strong girl and she run for herself, her baby, and every colored person she ever meet -- and those she ain't. She run! Only she don't know the way. She know she supposed to follow the North Star, but it's cloudy that night, and she can't see her north from her south, and she run herself right into a bounty hunter. And this bounty hunter sprung from the loins of the devil hisself. He take her back and "master" decide he gon' teach her a lesson. He call together all the hands and beat her until she can't scream and lash her until her back shone like the burning sun. And just to make sure we understand, he

commence to kicking her all over, kicking her like a dog -- only she wasn't no dog. Petunia lost the baby. Her last baby. And the Lord wept. He sent a storm down that didn't let up for seven days. The Lord wept! Not just for the brutality -- though you can bet that didn't put a shine on his countenance -- He wept because that child never got to walk His Earth. He had a plan for that child. He has a plan for us all -- for you, your baby, for me. He love us. And one day we gon' be free and leave a mark on this world that'll outlast any scar on our backs, that will outlast them all. But you got to be strong. You got to be strong now and you got to trust the Lord. Now give me your bonnet.

Anna stares at her. Frightened. Clutching her belly. Lucy steps closer...

I'm not going to lose any more babies.

ANNA

You Petunia, ain't you?

LUCY

Come on now, girl. Get a move on.

Lucy and Anna exchange dresses. Then Anna takes off her bonnet and gently places it on Lucy's head.

ANNA

What if he catch you?

Lucy brandishes a long blade knife.

LUCY

He gon' pray he didn't. See, I can kill him out there in them woods and ain't no one ever know the truth. But I can't do that here at the Station, can't be shining a light on what happening here, otherwise a lot of souls gon' suffer. Now we go.

Offstage...FOOTSTEPS...

Lucy turns to sound. She goes still, alert like an animal in the woods.

ANNA

What's that?

LUCY

Quiet now.

MAN'S VOICE (*offstage*)

I know you're here. I followed your bonnet all the way from Oberlin.

ANNA

Oh, Lord.

LUCY

Hide yourself behind that pallet. Not a sound, you hear me? Not a word.

ANNA

But what if he--

LUCY

Hide yourself!

Anna goes behind the pallets and Lucy throws a tarp over her.

Lucy positions herself not in a manner to fight, but to be taken.

The BOUNTY HUNTER enters. His gun drawn. He's wild from the wilderness, a bit rabid, drunk even, be it from drink or power.

He stops and looks at Lucy. Smiles. He's a smarmy fellow. He gets close to her, pulls a poster from his pocket.

He inspects it and her closely. Is this the right runaway? Then...

BOUNTY HUNTER

Thought you'd be younger based on what it says here in your advertisement, Anna Watkins. But then, I s'pose your journey has taken its toll.

The Bounty Hunter circles her.

I saw your bonnet cross that river to Ripley, but then I lost you, the handiwork of that Protestant preacher no doubt. I almost gives up on you in Sardinia, but when I was in Oberlin chasing that other dog, I seen that bonnet of yours dancing in the trees. And so, I had renewed hope. You crafty to be sure, but your brain ain't exactly fully developed, now is it? None of your kinds is. You all dogs, am I right?

No response.

Am I right?

LUCY

We're not dogs. We're people.

The Bounty Hunter laughs. He gets behind her, and runs his hands over Lucy's body.

BOUNTY HUNTER

This just for my own protection. You understand, don't you, dog?

Lucy closes her eyes, summoning all her strength to remain calm. The Bounty Hunter produces the knife she had hidden.

And look what we have here.

The Bounty Hunter spins her around to face her.

I should cut you right now, but then I won't get nothing for you dead. Already lost me a fortune when that dog got away from me in Oberlin, so I suppose God be on your side right now. But I'll have to bind you.

The Bounty Hunter pulls out some rope/chains to bind her hands. He looks her in the eyes, studies her, and then...suddenly doubtful...

You don't look much pregnant. According to your advertisement, you supposed to be with child.

LUCY

Lost my baby. She come too soon. Bury her in a corn field.

Bounty Hunter pauses, thrown. He studies her a moment, then he pockets the knife and the rope.

BOUNTY HUNTER

I s'pose I don't need to bind you. But don't try to run unless you're looking to run right to your maker. Understand, girl?

Lucy nods.

Let's go then.

The Bounty Hunter urges her forward toward the exit.

A STIFLED GRUNT is heard from the pallets. Bounty Hunter freezes, gripping Lucy. Lucy tries to continue out, but...

BOUNTY HUNTER

Stay!

The Bounty Hunter moves to the pallet, rips off the tarp.

Lord. What do we have here?

The Bounty Hunter takes the poster from his pocket, studies it, and compares it to both women.

(To Anna) YOU Anna Watkins, not this old--

Anna staggers over to Lucy and collapses in her arms.

ANNA

-- SHE COMING, LUCY!! MY BABY COMING!!!

Lucy lowers Anna gently to the ground to help her with her delivery.

LUCY

I help you, girl. The Lord will deliver you.

The Bounty Hunter aims the gun at Lucy who is kneeling near Anna.

BOUNTY HUNTER

You get away from that slave 'fore I have to kill you.

LUCY

You can't kill me. I'm free.

BOUNTY HUNTER

The Fugitive Slave Law give me the right to do whatever I please to retrieve this here property!

LUCY

(To Anna) Breathe, child. Breathe. The Lord deliver you.

BOUNTY HUNTER

You hear what I'm saying to you??

LUCY
Breathe!

ANNA
Something not right, Lucy. Something--

BOUNTY HUNTER
You hear me, dog?!?

LUCY
WE NOT DOGS! We living souls walking God's earth. And no threat of prison or death going to change any of that. I do the will of God, not man. God wants me to deliver this child. And God's will be done.

The Bounty Hunter puts the gun against Lucy's head.

BOUNTY HUNTER
Well, I hope you're willing to die.

Anna's moans get stronger.

LUCY
Ain't nobody gon' live forever. And if you kill me, this baby will learn that I was ready to die for her freedom -- PUSH, GIRL! She will understand that there's a price for liberty and that there was colored folk come before her willing to pay it -- PUSH, GIRL, PUSH! And when the day comes that she's free -- and that day will come -- she will raise up those who come after her, because of the strength and hope that she will have -- PUSH! But you, what you gon' have after you stain the House of the Lord with my blood? or this baby's? or her mama's? How the Lord going to greet you then when your hour of judgment comes, I wonder. I guess you be the only one who find out for sure. (*Looks down at the baby*) Oh, Lord...

Anna looks down at her baby.

ANNA
Why she look like that? Oh, Lord, why my baby...

Hard to tell now if Anna's cries are from pain or agony.

LUCY
The Lord deliver you. And this baby. I pray on it, child. You will be delivered.

BOUNTY HUNTER
That child's head is...

ANNA
MY BABY GON' DIE! SHE GON' DIE!! SHE AIN'T BREATHING, IS SHE?!?

LUCY
Girl, you got to stop screaming so's I can...

The Bounty Hunter pulls out the knife he confiscated from Lucy.

ANNA
(*Seeing the knife*) LORD HAVE MERCY!

BOUNTY HUNTER
You making things worse. You kill that baby if you keep tugging like that.

The Bounty Hunter drops to his knees, shoving Lucy away.

Damn cord wrapped around that poor child's neck.

The Bounty Hunter reaches down, cuts the cord, and carefully unwinds it from the baby's neck.

The Baby SCREAMS. The scream of life.

The Bounty Hunter stands. Anna clutches the baby to her chest.

Now that child free.

The Two Women stare at him, amazed and in disbelief.

LUCY
You called her a child...So we born children but grow into dogs? That how it works?

Bounty Hunter rips the bonnet off Lucy, wipes the knife clean with it.

BOUNTY HUNTER
Her master going to be none-too-pleased when he learns that this all that remains of this girl. Too bad she had to have such a bad end of it.

Bounty Hunter returns the knife to Lucy, who looks at him, confused. Then he offers...

I'm...My wife...she...she lose...a baby. She lose an angel, just before I left...I...

He looks as if he wants to say more but he can't. He goes to the exit, then stops, looking out..

It's a dirty business, this peculiar institution. A dirty business indeed.

The Bounty Hunter exits without another word. The Two Women stare out after him, still shocked.

LUCY
Lord have mercy.

ANNA
This child blessed. The Lord bless this child.

LUCY
That he does. That he does.

ANNA
I can't believe how courageous you was. When he had that pistol to your head, you wasn't even scared.

LUCY
Scared? Child, I was terrified. I soiled my drawers right through your dress.

The Women laugh. Lucy touches the baby.

She is beautiful. What you going to name her?

ANNA
I name her Hope.

Anna and Lucy smile.

LUCY
(*To the baby*) Hope, we going to get you and your mama to freedom.

Lucy takes Anna's hand as lights fade to black.

END OF PLAY