

BILLY AND GEORGE
By Daryl Lee Harris and Ken Jones
Story By Ken Jones

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BILLY AND GEORGE**By Daryl Lee Harris and Ken Jones****Story By Ken Jones**

SYNOPSIS: George Washington and his closest companion and enslaved person, William “Billy” Lee, prepare for the crossing while discussing, arguing, and challenging the concepts of freedom, war, intimacy and ultimately, love. *BILLY AND GEORGE* takes place on December 25, 1776, just hours before General George Washington and the Continental Army cross the Delaware River to defeat the Hessian soldiers at Trenton, New Jersey. The turning point of the American Revolutionary War.

DURATION: 90 minutes.

TIME: 1776.

PLACE: George's private bedroom at the Keith House.

CAST OF CHARACTERS*(2 males)*

WILLIAM "BILLY" LEE (m).....26 years old, from Fairfax County Virginia, an enslaved person and manservant to George Washington.

GEORGE WASHINGTON (m).....44 years old, from Fairfax County Virginia, the Commander in Chief of the Continental Army.

SETTING

George's private bedroom at the Keith House, also known as Washington's Headquarters or Headquarters Farm, a house in Upper Makefield Township, Bucks County in Pennsylvania. It serves as the headquarters for George Washington.

The room is part of the aging house—once a place of peace, it is now a place of war. The Continental Army has claimed this house as a temporary command headquarters.

The room contains a bed and several tables. Upon one of these tables are the personal belongings of Washington. Books, maps, and a group of pewter mugs cover the table from one end to the other. In the center of the room is another table with a small mirror, wash basin and water pitcher, and a hairbrush. A wooden hutch is upstage against the wall holding trays of food and a pot of coffee. Chairs are scattered around the room as though there had been a meeting that had recently ended.

Behind the table is a general's uniform hung on a garment rack. This blue wool coat has a buff wool rise-and-fall collar, buff cuffs and lapels, and buff lining; there is a row of yellow metal buttons on each lapel, as well as on each cuff. The waistcoat and breeches are matching buff wool, with gilt buttons. There is a black tricorne hat trimmed in gold. Another rack holds the uniform of Billy Lee. It is a very formal blue wool coat, a vest with a red sash. There is a tricorne style hat.

The action of the play occurs on Christmas Day, December 25, 1776 across the Delaware River from Trenton, New Jersey, just hours before General George Washington and the Continental Army make the crossing to defeat the Hessian soldiers. The turning point of the American Revolutionary War.

PRODUCTION NOTES

FACT: William "Billy" Lee was owned by George Washington.

FACT: Officers in the American Army stated that, besides Martha Washington, Billy was George's closest and most trusted companion.

FACT: Billy served as a military attaché, servant and bodyguard for George Washington.

FACT: George spoke and wrote about his admiration and love for Billy Lee.

FACT: After a horseback riding accident, Billy was badly injured and unable to walk. Washington enlisted the aid of engineers to construct metal leg braces for Billy's legs, so that Billy could join Washington in New York City during his Presidency.

FACT: Billy's image was included in the background of several portraits of George Washington.

FACT: Upon his death, Washington owned 317 slaves at his Mount Vernon plantation. Only one, Billy Lee, was freed in George's last Will and Testament.

FACT: At Mt. Vernon, the final resting places of Billy and George are within fifty feet of each. George lies in a marble tomb, while Billy lies in an unmarked grave.

FACT: Private conversations occurred between George Washington and Billy Lee, of which, there is no official record.

PRODUCTION HISTORY

Billy and George received a staged reading in the New York Theatre District, 250 W. 54th Street, Studio 1103, New York, New York, produced by Rewls Productions.

Billy and George premiere in the Washington, DC region at the Avant Bard Theatre in 2023. It was directed by DeMone Seraphin. Raquis Petree portrayed Billy and John Stange was George.

AWARDS AND HONORS PRE-PUBLICATION

- Nominated for the *Pulitzer Prize in Drama*, 2024.
- New York City Play Reading Festival, Winner: Best Full-Length Drama, 2025.
- *Helen Hayes Award* recommended, 2023.
- Winner of the *Ink and Cinema Diversity Award*, 2023.
- Winner of the *Ink and Cinema True Story Award*, 2023.
- *Oxford Script Award*, 2024.

**ADDITIONAL NOTES ON COSTUMES AND PROPS
CAN BE FOUND AT THE END OF THE SCRIPT.**

AT START: OPENING LIGHTS UP.

A bed sits in the middle of a simple room. The room contains a table and chairs, a vanity, a side table with a pitcher of water and wash basin, and a wooden hutch.

A man is in the bed, stirring throughout the opening. Beside him on the floor, another person is curled up on a cloth mat.

Somewhere on, above, or about the playing area, images of history begin to flash, one after the other. These images start with the most current, going backward in time. These are graphic images of the faces and souls churned up, brutalized, mistreated, and forgotten. From the Modern 21st century to 20th century to the 19th century into the 18th century, funneling down to this day December 25, 1776.

Music of the day resonates in a soundscape adding power to the images. The music becomes more disjointed and integrated with music of the past as the images guide us backward from what we know as “now” to what we do not know as “then.”

The images are GEORGE'S nightmare.

The room takes on a fiery glow as GEORGE WASHINGTON (44) tosses in his bed. There are sounds of horses galloping. Soldiers yelling and screaming in battle turn into a steady hum.

A fife and drum melody builds with the roar of the screams. GEORGE, trapped by his blanket, struggles to get free. The sounds of the chaos suddenly stop. The room is lit dimly by the last traces of winter daylight pouring in through the window. Still caught in the nightmare...

GEORGE: *(Yelling out.) Help! (Gasping for air.) Help me!*

BILLY LEE (26), Washington's valet and enslaved person, rises from a tattered blanket on the floor.

GEORGE: *(CONT'D.) Help! Please! Help!*

BILLY: All right. All right. All right.

BILLY tries to calm GEORGE.

GEORGE: Help! Help!

BILLY: All right. All right.

BILLY climbs onto the bed and holds GEORGE in his arms.

GEORGE: Help me! Help!

BILLY: (*Hugging him tightly.*) Calm! Calm!

GEORGE: Please. Help.

BILLY: Clam down. Calm. Calm. Breathe. Breathe. (*Rocking him.*)
Breathe. Breathe. That's it. Breathe.

GEORGE catches his breath and finally finds peace.

BILLY: (*CONT'D.*) Can't sleep?

BILLY is wearing a long cotton nightshirt over his pair of linen trousers and stockings.

GEORGE: (*Confused.*) Oh, God!

BILLY: Bad dreams?

GEORGE: Yes?

BILLY: I once had bad dreams but not anymore.

GEORGE: Good for you!

BILLY: You know, Mister George, those nightmares of yours don't seem to be getting any better.

GEORGE: It is fine!

GEORGE grimaces in pain

BILLY: What was it this time? Is it your mouth? Your teeth?

GEORGE: Yes. (*Pause.*) No. Well, it's many things.

BILLY: The infection will continue.

GEORGE: It will fade.

BILLY: And your breathing? At night, it seems so labored.

GEORGE: Just the weight of the world pushing on my chest.

BILLY: Should I call the doctor?

GEORGE: So he can bleed me dry? No!

BILLY: Perhaps a bloodletting is needed. To purge the bad.

GEORGE: I'd rather walk straight into the enemy's bayonet. It would be a quicker end than what our doctors would have me do.

BILLY: You never sleep well.

GEORGE: I don't need to discuss this.

BILLY: You do. Otherwise, these dreams will return.

GEORGE: Please.

BILLY: Did you see dead soldiers again?

GEORGE: No.

BILLY: The flashes of the cannon?

GEORGE: No.

BILLY: Something new?

GEORGE: Yes. (*Pause.*) In my dream I saw a room. In the middle of this room sat a bed. My bed. Maybe my bed, maybe not... The bed was surrounded by people. Sobbing. Some were sobbing but some were not. A man was stretched out on the bed. (*He pauses.*) I think I was the man. Suddenly, they grasped my hands and pulled my arms. Stretching each way. Pulling me apart. I should have felt the pain, but I felt nothing. No warmth. No touch. No contact. No hope. Just the pull. Just the tugging from both sides. (*Grabs his head with both hands.*) Oh, my head is splitting!

BILLY crosses to GEORGE and retrieves a chamber pot from underneath the bed. He carries it to the upstage side of the bed.

BILLY: Cuts right through to your soul, doesn't it?

GEORGE: It is nothing.

BILLY: You should clear your mind.

GEORGE: Yes.

BILLY: Try not to think of anything.

GEORGE: I have tried.

BILLY: No luck?

GEORGE: I am fine.

BILLY helps GEORGE sit up and swing his body sideways, legs hanging over the upstage side of the bed. GEORGE is wearing a long cotton nightshirt over his pair of linen trousers and stockings.

BILLY: Here. (*Handing him the chamber pot.*) It's clean. I emptied it in the night.

GEORGE stands, back facing the audience, and urinates into the pot. BILLY, dutifully, holds the pot while GEORGE relieves himself.

GEORGE: How long have I been asleep? Twenty minutes? Half an hour?

BILLY: Well, you've actually been sleeping for three hours.

GEORGE: Three hours?

BILLY: You fell asleep at noon. You needed your rest. It's going to be a very long night and most definitely a violent morning.

GEORGE: The harder the conflict, the greater the triumph.

BILLY closes the lid to the pot, carries it away and sets it near the door.

BILLY: There is some news. One of your officers has been captured by the British.

GEORGE: Which one?

BILLY: Charles Lee.

GEORGE: Oh, thank God. Lesser of all evils. (*Pause.*) When?

BILLY: Five days ago.

GEORGE: Where? How?

BILLY: He was at a tavern. They surrounded him.

GEORGE: Surrounded him?

BILLY: (*Sarcastically.*) Three British soldiers. Not easy for such a small group of men to surround a tavern.

GEORGE: Good Lord. It was that easy?

BILLY: "Suspiciously" easy.

GEORGE: Why would you say that?

BILLY: Because it's most likely true. If General Charles Lee were to broker a peace, he might be looked at as a hero by many. You know he's never been happy with your appointment as commander of the army. He has always wanted your job.

GEORGE: With a settled peace, then my job wouldn't exist.

BILLY: But someone... loyal to the crown... might be appointed to watch over a defeated group of colonies.

GEORGE: I see your logic.

BILLY: Watch yourself, General. Charles Lee thinks he could do a better job.

GEORGE: Perhaps he could.

BILLY: With his respect for no one? With his tyrannical mindset of a British general? With a lack of morality? Without love for the people?

GEORGE: You do hate him. Still, he's no longer your owner.

BILLY: You mean my master!

GEORGE: Yes. (*Silence.*) Billy, I need rum.

BILLY: No doubt. The way you were stirring during your nap made it very clear that your mind was not at ease.

GEORGE: An understatement of the greatest magnitude! Now rum! And keep it coming.

BILLY: Sorry, Mister George. No rum.

GEORGE: My Lord! That cannot be true?!

BILLY: You're not having rum today.

GEORGE: Well, not only has Congress denied us clothing, ammunition and food, but also the only substance that can kill the taste of our loss? By God, they cannot expect us to continue without rum.

BILLY: I did not say the boys are without rum. I just said that you're not having it today.

BILLY crosses to a cabinet and retrieves a square crystal decanter.

GEORGE: What is it?

BILLY: Madeira!

GEORGE: No!

BILLY: Yes!

GEORGE: But how? I haven't tasted Madeira since we marched out of Boston.

BILLY: Compliments of Mr. McConkey.

GEORGE: Well, the gentleman is a saint, and a hero to our cause.

BILLY pours GEORGE a small glass.

BILLY: Here's to your success.

GEORGE takes the glass and downs it in one long swallow.

GEORGE: *(Eyes closed.)* Perfect. Another.

BILLY pours the drink again.

BILLY: Slowly. Or you'll choke.

GEORGE: One more for the cold evening ahead.

BILLY: I don't know.

GEORGE: I do. Pour.

BILLY pours more into the glass. GEORGE slowly sips this last one.

BILLY: General Lee. His capture.

GEORGE: At least if the British had to capture somebody, it wasn't Mercer or Greene or Knox or Sullivan.

BILLY: True.

GEORGE: It is absolutely necessary... for me to have persons that can think for themselves, as well as execute orders.

BILLY: In my mind, they captured the perfect person. And I hope they keep him.

GEORGE: Thank goodness that he did not know of our plans. The crossing.

BILLY: True. If anyone would trade information to save their own skin. It would be him.

GEORGE: Be careful, Billy. Speak not evil of the absent, for it is unjust. He's still a general of the Continental Army. He deserves some respect. Does he not?

BILLY: He does not.

GEORGE: My God, you do speak without fear.

BILLY: You taught me that honesty is always the best policy.

GEORGE: So I did. And now I must suffer for it.

BILLY: Poor, poor, Mister George.

GEORGE: Thank you for your hollow sympathies.

BILLY: One more thing. Rumor has it that he was writing a letter to General Gates when captured.

GEORGE: A letter?

BILLY: Yes. Complaining about you and your leadership.

GEORGE: Of course...

BILLY: The British have already posted a copy of the letter around New York to humiliate you.

GEORGE: Humiliation is a coat well tailored to my frame. And I must continue to wear it well. *(Pause.)* Lee's capture makes our cause look more foolish than ever.

BILLY: He alone looks foolish. Not the cause.

GEORGE: You're right. If the cause is advanced, indifferent is it to me where or in what quarter it happens. *(Pause.)* His capture does, however, leave me with little leadership.

BILLY: The taking of General Lee has not diminished your leadership council by one ounce.

GEORGE: I am afraid that the men... the few brave patriots we have left... will see this as another reason to throw down their arms and return to their homes.

BILLY moves to the bed and starts to straighten the sheets and blankets. GEORGE collapses into a chair.

BILLY: That is a fear you do not need to have. The men who are freezing their asses off right now. Waiting to board the boats. They will stay, because they fight for you and only you. So there is no need to be afraid.

GEORGE: I am afraid! I am always afraid!

BILLY: Fear will save your life someday!

GEORGE: Fear continues to force me to run... retreat.

BILLY: Is running so bad?

GEORGE: Yes, running is bad.

BILLY: It has kept you... the army alive. One day, you may need to run again.

GEORGE: Good leaders don't run.

BILLY: Good leaders run first. That's why they're good.

GEORGE: I have run away every chance I have gotten.

BILLY: That's not true, Mister George.

GEORGE: It is true.

BILLY: If you can escape, then it is a necessity.

GEORGE: You don't know what you're saying.

BILLY: Oh, yes, I do. To be afraid is to be human.

GEORGE: Real men despise battle but will never run from it.

BILLY: Then you should have sacrificed the entire army on the hills of Brooklyn Heights? Forced them to die on the fields of Harlem? Trapped them in the woods of New Jersey, so you could prove that you're a real man?

GEORGE: Of course not! That's why we are here. Up to our balls in ice! Sitting across the river from an enemy who has hunkered down in warm houses.

BILLY: We should not look back unless it is to derive useful lessons from past errors, and for the purpose of profiting by dearly bought experience. You are here now. We are here now. The future nation is here now. And the now is what we must live inside of... the now is our warm house.

GEORGE: We began a contest for liberty ill provided with the means for the war, relying on our patriotism to supply the deficiency. We expected to encounter many wants and distresses... we must bear the present evils and fortitude. *(Pause.)* I would rather not write yet another letter to Congress telling them of my losses. I would rather not make my troops slip away in the darkness. Do you understand? I am scared to pick up that pen and detail another list of my failings. And I am most afraid to look in the eyes of the poor souls who have entrusted their lives into my hands...

BILLY: I don't want to hear this!

GEORGE: Why not? Because from now on you will be as scared as I am?

BILLY: Then surrender.

GEORGE: *(Furious.)* Never say that! Not if you care about your life.

BILLY: Then continue to fight. And if necessary, continue to run. Run until they are so exhausted that they cannot continue the chase.

GEORGE: Yes.

BILLY: Beat them by surviving. Battles to win are not the fight for cities, but instead the fight for cornfields.

GEORGE: The turning points of lives are not the great moments. The real crises are often concealed in occurrences so trivial in appearance that they pass unobserved.

BILLY: So we'll cross an insignificant river with a forgettable array of fighting men, and hopefully pass unobserved as we head down the road to strike the Hessians.

GEORGE: That easy?

BILLY: That easy!

GEORGE: I suppose we will never be able to understand one another. Maybe that's good. If we understood, then what we saw might frighten us. (*He pauses.*) Dear Billy, I hope we make it through this war together.

GEORGE sits silently for a moment.

GEORGE: (*CONT'D.*) Wait, who brought the news of Lee's capture?

BILLY: General Sullivan.

GEORGE: Yes!

BILLY: Along with two thousand men.

GEORGE: Wonderful!

BILLY: And we're ready. The troops will move out at 4:30?

GEORGE: What?

BILLY: If the weather permits.

GEORGE: No matter what! Weather permitting or not!

GEORGE rises and moves to the door.

BILLY: Where are you going?

GEORGE: Outside.

BILLY: It's snowing.

GEORGE: Damn!

BILLY: It could make the crossing more difficult.

GEORGE: Exactly. But who in their right mind would attempt it?

BILLY: Ah, yes. Surprise.

GEORGE: We can only hope.

BILLY: I think the storm will continue.

GEORGE: The storm will always continue.

BILLY: I think we are getting the worst of it now. Tomorrow morning the ground will be covered.

GEORGE: They could have the draw on us.

BILLY: The winds will blow the clouds past them hours before we see light.

GEORGE: Surprise. It's our only chance.

BILLY: That and the fact that our men are fighting for their lives.

GEORGE: The need to survive is there. I wish I had it.

BILLY: You do.

GEORGE: I do not know. I just don't know.

BILLY crosses to a cupboard and fetches a tray with bread and cheese and a bowl of cold soup.

BILLY: You need to eat.

GEORGE: (*Sits up.*) What? No. I'm not hungry.

BILLY: You will need your strength. It will be a very long night.

GEORGE: No.

BILLY: Your health is my responsibility. I need you to eat.

GEORGE: Like the executioner offering me a last meal?

BILLY: You must live through this war, because without you, to these other men, I am just a slave in a fancy uniform. They look at me, and they wonder how it is? Why it is that I am so close to you? They see me grooming your horse, carrying your supplies, and that's fine. That is what I am supposed to do as your slave. After all, that is why these colonies invest so much of its soul into the horror of slavery...

GEORGE: You are impertinent!

BILLY: ...To do the work that they do not want to do. At the only price they're willing to pay, which is "free." (*Taking a deep breath.*) These men are not blind! Not completely! They see me with you day and night. They see me waiting on you hand and foot. That's my job... my God-decreed duty, my lot in life. But many of them see beyond your beckoning, and their hateful gazes cut through it all. Your love for me, and even more inconceivably, your respect for me transcend the lowliness of my station. A station that is a separate, but far from equal station, to which the Laws of Nature and of God entitle me. They can see that there is much more than a man and his slave, his chattel. And for that alone, they would have me hanged in a

heartbeat. "Treason! How dare this malignant monkey capture the heart of our general!" So yes, my dear Mister George, you must live through this war and we must win it. Otherwise, I'll be hanged from a tree for just being here.

Silence. GEORGE looks at the tray of food.

GEORGE: Potato soup? Again?

BILLY: I guarantee that by this time tomorrow you'll be dining on some horrible sauerkraut and sausage dish at the Hessian command post.

GEORGE: My dear, Billy. You are truly an optimist.

BILLY: If I were a true optimist, I would have imagined something beyond that horrible German food.

GEORGE: Point well taken.

BILLY hands GEORGE a folded piece of paper.

BILLY: Here is the report from General Greene.

GEORGE: Thank you.

GEORGE reads the message.

BILLY: *(He pauses.)* What are you smiling about?

GEORGE: This says that we have not lost any men during the night. No one has deserted.

BILLY: They want to stay. They want to fight.

GEORGE: Yes.

BILLY: They want to win for once.

GEORGE crosses to the table and sits. He lifts a paper and reads.

GEORGE: What is this?

BILLY: I thought you might be amused. Mr. Honeyman brought this back from the British.

GEORGE: Mr. Honeyman was here?

BILLY: Briefly. You were asleep.

GEORGE: And you did not think the visit of our most trusted spy carried enough importance to wake me?

BILLY: No.

GEORGE: My God, Billy. You are like a scolding headmaster.

BILLY: Yes. Yes, I am.

GEORGE: Well, did Mr. Honeyman bring us news?

BILLY: Only what we already know.

GEORGE: And what is that?

BILLY picks at the tray of food. Taking a few pieces of cheese and bread for himself.

BILLY: That the Hessians, when at home in Germany, make a great deal of Christmas, and no doubt they will drink a great deal of beer and have a dance tonight. They will be sleeping late tomorrow morning.

GEORGE: Mr. Honeyman confirmed this?

BILLY: He said that the party has already begun.

GEORGE: That is good news.

BILLY: So now you have the report?

GEORGE: Yes, so?

BILLY: So you have the report and you're rested. Rested because I chose not to wake you.

GEORGE: Yes.

BILLY: Thank you, Billy.

GEORGE: Yes. Thank you, Billy.

BILLY: Words I love to hear.

GEORGE: You do love a good "I told you so."

BILLY: It brightens my day.

GEORGE picks up a newspaper from the table.

GEORGE: So what is this paper?

BILLY: It's a bounty on your head.

GEORGE: A bounty?

BILLY: As I read it, quite sizable.

GEORGE: (*Reading the paper.*) "For the soldier who succeeds in killing or capturing General George Washington, he will be given a special accommodation, a promotion, five hundred pounds sterling, and a hundred acres of land in the newly conquered America."

BILLY: Why not make him King?

GEORGE: For that, I would surrender myself today!

BILLY: A new king would make no difference.

GEORGE: Words to remember, if we ever win this bloody war. Ah, there is more. (*Continues reading.*) "The soldier who accomplishes this act will receive an officer's commission, and, if by chance, an officer makes the capture, then that officer will receive the Title of Knighthood."

BILLY: Well, you seem to be very popular.

GEORGE: So it seems. (*Pause.*) I should write to the British and thank them for this humorous article.

BILLY: You should. Then they would get a taste of who the real Mister George is.

GEORGE: And who is the real 'Mister George', as you say?

BILLY: A mystery, to be sure. The truth lies in the fact that no one will ever know you.

GEORGE: I suppose that comes with the position. So many claim that they know me as a friend. That's the way it is with leaders. Then after death, everyone who knew a leader will imagine they had been that poor soul's one true friend. When in actuality, this man had no friends. No close ties. No one to really mourn him.

BILLY: Whose fault is that?

GEORGE: Well, I have comfort in the fact that at least one person really knows me. See me as I am. You.

BILLY: Yes.

GEORGE: Almost to my detriment.

BILLY: I do know the secrets.

GEORGE: Yes. You do.

BILLY: Is that why you keep me so close?

GEORGE smiles and walks away. He crosses to the desk and removes a piece of paper and a pen. He moves to the table to write his letter.

BILLY: (*CONT'D.*) I see. You're going to ignore me.

GEORGE: I am going to try.

BILLY: What? A letter to your wife?

GEORGE: Yes.

BILLY: You certainly write to her often enough.

GEORGE: She worries.

Writing the letter.

GEORGE: (CONT'D.) "Dearest..."

BILLY puts ideas into GEORGE'S thoughts as he writes.

BILLY: "...Martha. I hope your health has improved..."

GEORGE: "...since I wrote to you last. I have not..."

BILLY: "...heard from Congress since November..."

GEORGE: "Their neglect, I fear, shows a lack of trust."

BILLY: Why don't we mention your cough?

GEORGE: Good idea. (*Writing.*) "My cough is healing nicely."

BILLY: "I have blacked out several times..."

GEORGE: "...while sitting in my room" ...wait, no, I do not want to write that!

He scratches out the line.

BILLY: Why not?

GEORGE: She will worry.

BILLY: She already worries. You said so yourself.

GEORGE: Yes. (*Gathers his thoughts.*) "My cough has healed nicely. It gives me no problems."

BILLY: Lying to your own wife!

GEORGE: "Yesterday I set forth a plan that will have either a positive outcome for our cause or result in a..."

BILLY: "...hanging."

GEORGE: No. "Result in a stalemate for this rising nation." (*He pauses.*) "The men who have remained with us are courageous men. I almost..."

BILLY: "...wish I did not have to send them to their deaths."

GEORGE hits the table with his fists in anger.

GEORGE: No! (*He pauses.*) "I am grateful for their undying loyalty..."

BILLY: "...men so young should not have to suffer a violent death."

GEORGE is confused, but continues writing.

GEORGE: "I was going to walk through the camp and speak to the men face to face, but..."

Pause.

BILLY: Why didn't you?

GEORGE: I...I...

BILLY: Just walk among them. No words are needed.

GEORGE goes back to writing his letter.

GEORGE: "I retain an unalterable affection for you, which neither time or distance can change, my best love to Jack and Nelly, regard for the rest of the family concludes me with the utmost truth & sincerity. And Dear Martha, without you it is most definitely a sorrowful Christmas Day. Yours entirely. George."

GEORGE puts his head down on the table. BILLY retrieves a small book wrapped in cloth from his rucksack.

BILLY: Mr. George, there is one story about Little Billy that I never told you.

GEORGE'S head is still resting on his arms.

GEORGE: There could not possibly be one more tale of the adventures of young Billy that I have not heard, over and over again, during these many years that we have been together.

BILLY: Ha! But yes, Little Billy has many more tales, and even more secrets.

GEORGE: Hmmmmm, I see. Now I'm interested. Then yes, please, do tell. Do reveal this mysterious untold story.

BILLY: Years ago my great grandmother, a woman they called Auntie Dinah, was the mammy for the sickly daughter of her master. Because she needed very special constant care, and because the mistress was so busy with running the household and attending to her other seven children, the child spent most of her time with Auntie Dinah.

In her own special way, the child grew to love her Auntie, and naturally, despite the circumstances, Auntie Dinah loved the child. Each had a special place in the other's heart. Because the child was sickly, Auntie Dinah would be with her when the school master came to the home to give her private lessons.

Dinah always listened attentively, and in fact, helped the little girl to study. Through these secret study sessions, Auntie Dinah learned to read. The sessions were secret, of course...

GEORGE: ...of course...

BILLY: ...because it is forbidden for slaves to be taught to read.

GEORGE: I, myself, do not agree with that concept.

BILLY: After all, who knows what seeds of freedom reading and knowledge might plant in the heads of these captives.

GEORGE: Yes, Billy, your thoughts have always been very clear.

BILLY: The two would spend time with the lessons first, but their most joyous times together were spent reading the Bible. Reading the Bible was especially forbidden for fear that enslaved folks would learn that they were not being preached the total truth when it came to scriptures about slavery. Sadly, the little girl died far too early. But before she died, she, secretly, gave her Auntie Dinah the little Bible that they had shared so happily. My great grandmother kept that little Bible close to her heart

GEORGE: Your Auntie Dinah must have been very bold. A brave woman.

BILLY: *(Continuing without pause.)* On her own deathbed, my great grandmother gave the cherished Bible to her only daughter, and then she to her daughter, my mother. Each one passing on the skill of reading.

GEORGE: And I taught you to read. Did I not?

BILLY: You did.

GEORGE: Against the laws of the land, I wanted you to know the pleasure of words.

BILLY: And that's why, Mister George, I want to give you a Christmas gift.

GEORGE: Billy! There is no need for that. You do not have the means to purchase gifts.

BILLY: Didn't purchase it. Got it handed down.

BILLY places the tattered calico-wrapped Bible on the table.

BILLY: (CONT'D.) This is that Bible. Not only has it opened the door to heaven and eternal life, but on one occasion it saved my life here on earth. See this tiny hole?

GEORGE: Yes.

BILLY: Once, when one of Master Lee's sons was doing target practice in the back of the house, he did not realize that I was playing in the yard just beyond the fence. Not being a very good shot, he missed the target. Hit me. Actually, hit the Bible that I was carrying in my breast pocket. I was far enough away that the little book provided just enough protection between the bullet and my heart.

BILLY presents the Bible to GEORGE.

BILLY: (CONT'D.) Today is a very special Christmas Day. It might very well be the last one that either of us sees. This Bible has brought both life and a freedom, of sorts, to me. I would be honored if you would accept it as my Christmas gift to you. I believe that if you take it into battle with us, that we will not be defeated. A merry and victorious Christmas to you, my dear Mister George.

GEORGE: Billy, I could not possibly take this.

BILLY: But you must, for both of us.

GEORGE: Thank you.

GEORGE accepts the Bible from BILLY. He takes BILLY'S hands into his and warmly shakes them.

GEORGE: (CONT'D.) Billy, the Christmas spirit is still upon us. Because I have a gift for you as well.

BILLY: For me.

GEORGE: Yes. As you've said so eloquently, today might be our last. So I had a special gift made for you and you alone.

BILLY: I've never received a gift...

GEORGE: Then there are many years to make up for.

GEORGE excitedly moves to a wardrobe chest. He struggles to open it, but finally does. He removes a long wooden box.

GEORGE: (CONT'D.) I was prompted to have it engraved in New York, and barely had it retrieved before the British army drove us off the island.

BILLY: I don't deserve a gift.

GEORGE: On that point, Billy, you are incorrect. You most definitely deserve a gift. Especially this gift... and especially hours before we face the enemy.

GEORGE presents BILLY with the wooden box. BILLY takes the box and gently sets it on the table. GEORGE hovers over BILLY'S shoulder as BILLY opens the box and removes a silver-barreled, Maplewood stock pistol. SILENCE.

GEORGE: (CONT'D.) Well, don't you like it?

BILLY: A pistol?

GEORGE: Yes. Silver plated.

BILLY: A pistol?

GEORGE: Yes! The stock is made of a red maple from our home at Mount Vernon.

BILLY: But I cannot have a weapon.

GEORGE: Yes, you may. Look at the engraving.

BILLY: "To William Lee. A most trusted companion."

GEORGE: And so you have been, Billy. You are my most trusted companion.

BILLY: This is mine?

GEORGE: Yes. And hopefully it will protect you as much as this Bible will protect me.

BILLY: But the others will see a slave with a gun.

GEORGE: (*Angry.*) The others will see a soldier with a weapon. You have already been by my side in battle after battle. You have given all you have without any protection of your own. Now you will be able to defend yourself.

BILLY: The law says that I cannot own this.

GEORGE: But I say that you can. And in this state of War, I am the law.

BILLY: So you see me as a soldier?

GEORGE: Of course.

BILLY goes over the pistol slowly, studying every inch of the weapon.

BILLY: It's beautiful.

BILLY handles the gun.

GEORGE: (*Nervously.*) Be careful with that. It is loaded.

BILLY: Loaded?

GEORGE: If it were not, then it wouldn't be of much use. And I feel that tomorrow morning you're most definitely going to need it.

BILLY: Yes.

GEORGE: Then you are pleased?

BILLY: Yes, Mister George. Very pleased.

GEORGE: Merry Christmas, Billy.

BILLY: Merry Christmas, Mister George.

GEORGE takes a pocket watch from the table.

GEORGE: It's almost time.

BILLY: It will go as planned.

GEORGE: Your positive spirit is your gift.

BILLY: Let's go through it one more time.

GEORGE begins to pace.

BILLY: (*CONT'D.*) Part one.

GEORGE: We initiate three crossings at three different points in the river.

BILLY: You and the troops?

GEORGE: Are the largest contingent. We'll lead the attack on Trenton.

BILLY: The second column?

GEORGE: Yes. The second column will cross at Dunk's Ferry and create a diversion to the south.

BILLY: The third?

GEORGE: A third column will cross at Trenton Ferry. They are to hold the bridge across the creek and will prevent the enemy's escape.

BILLY: The boats?

GEORGE: The Marblehead Regiment will ferry the army across the river.

BILLY: What happens if all the columns cannot make the crossing because of the ice in the river?

GEORGE: That will not happen.

BILLY: But if it does?

GEORGE: It will not!

BILLY: The river is almost choked with ice.

GEORGE: I will get across the river, if I have to jump from ice chunk to ice chunk, doing it!

BILLY: All right. You are stubborn enough to make it across. What happens if you lead the only men who make it to the other side.

GEORGE: I will attack anyway. I have no other options.

BILLY: One column against the Hessians?

GEORGE: Yes.

BILLY: One column of untrained, backwoods boys against the most experienced European mercenary fighting machine in the world?

GEORGE: They won't expect it. And that's how we win.

BILLY: What if they do expect it? What if they have been informed of your plan?

GEORGE: Then we'll fail, but we'll fail while fighting.

Silence.

BILLY: Who is in charge of crossing?

GEORGE: I have given the charge of the crossing to Knox.

BILLY: Good choice.

GEORGE: (*Sarcastically.*) I'm glad that you approve.

BILLY: You're across the river... what then?

GEORGE: My Virginia troops form a sentry line around the landing area in New Jersey, with strict instructions that no one is to pass through.

BILLY: Civilians?

GEORGE: Anyone we come upon will be held in custody until the battle is complete. We cannot have the Hessians being warned.

BILLY: It's dark. No moon. You might come upon your own men. Is there a password?

GEORGE: Yes. Good. We'll need to create a password.

BILLY: What about "Victory or Death?"

GEORGE: Straightforward.

BILLY: Perhaps if the men repeat that enough, they will come to believe it.

GEORGE: Excellent idea.

BILLY: Now, you're in New Jersey. What's next?

GEORGE: Take the river road to Trenton.

BILLY: Should you all move together? What happens if there is an ambush?

GEORGE: Good point. We'll split up. I'll send Sullivan and his men along the river road. And I will accompany General Greene and his men on Pennington Road, which runs parallel a few miles inland from the river.

BILLY: Then the first one there should attack. To maintain the surprise.

GEORGE: No, Billy. One column cannot do it alone. Surprise or not, we must be coordinated. General Greene will attack Trenton from the north, while John Sullivan attacks from the west.

BILLY: Yes, Mister George.

GEORGE: General Knox will place cannons at the bridge to the south.

BILLY: And if you do surprise them.

GEORGE: They will be recovering from their drunken Christmas celebration...

BILLY: Musket fire can sober a man very quickly. Especially, a Hessian. So if you do surprise them, and by a miracle, win this battle. What happens next?

GEORGE: We go back to our boats and cross back here... and safely put the river between us and, what will soon be, a very embarrassed and very angry British army who had their hired mercenaries crushed.

BILLY: And so it shall be.

GEORGE turns to BILLY and gently takes BILLY'S face into his hands.

GEORGE: And so it shall be.

Silence. GEORGE winces in pain. The pain in his jaw almost brings him to his knees. BILLY sets the pistol back in the box and helps GEORGE to a chair.

BILLY: What is it?

GEORGE: My mouth.

BILLY: Your teeth.

GEORGE: The wire-springs have rubbed my cheeks raw.

BILLY: Then take them out.

GEORGE: And look like a man forty years my senior? Lose the respect of the men?

BILLY: Your mouth bleeds all day. The infection will kill you one day.

GEORGE: I need laudanum.

BILLY: I don't think that's a good idea.

GEORGE: That's not a request but an order. Laudanum! Now!

BILLY: I worry that your senses will be dulled.

GEORGE: Worry is the interest paid by those who borrow trouble.

BILLY: In a short time, we will begin the crossing.

GEORGE: All the more reason. I can barely lift my head. The pain is excruciating. *(Pause.)* Billy, I'm begging.

BILLY crosses to a side hutch and slowly removes a small bottle from a wooden case. He crosses back to the table with the bottle of laudanum. Taking a small saucer, he places it before GEORGE, and then he pours out a small amount of liquid.

BILLY: Just a little.

GEORGE slowly rolls his finger in the opioid mixture. He gently reaches into his mouth, rubbing his gums.

BILLY: (CONT'D.) Too much, Mister George. No more.

He repeats this several times. Leaning back and closing his eyes, he waits for the effects. Suddenly, his body shudders and he takes a few quick gasps of air, until he can finally take a full, deep, and slow breath. His demeanor calms. BILLY picks up an ivory handle hairbrush from the wardrobe. Slowly begins to brush GEORGE'S hair. Long, slow, gentle strokes.

GEORGE: A story, Billy.

BILLY: My stories annoy and bore you.

GEORGE: Less boring, and more mind-numbing. And that is what I need right now.

BILLY: I reckon I could fetch to mind some kind of tale for you. Hear that? The wind's a whippin' through the raised knees of the cypress trees... speakin' to the listener with a hollow voice. A peculiar voice. Sweet and true. Listen.

GEORGE closes his eyes. BILLY gently brushes GEORGE'S long, brownish-gray hair.

BILLY: (CONT'D.) The swamp's a callin'! Can you hear it? Sweet and dour. Kind and cruel. Sweepin' over the trees heavy like a fog but lighter than a mist. Callin' with the howl of a wounded animal. Listen. (Pause.) The lights and noises grow with the darkness. The stars reach down and touch the earth on the same spot. Peculiar as it may seem... the light always falls far to the east upon the shores of the river. The flame is lit, and the spirits dance. The evil rises up through the waters. Churning them brown. Foaming at the shores. Curious. (Smiling.) And they call on the children of the swamp—to dance! Many do. Peculiar as it may seem. They dance with hoot owls on their shoulders. (Pause.) So this is the story of Billy Lee.

GEORGE: You do love to tell your own story.

BILLY: Storyteller gets preference of what story to tell!

GEORGE: Then, "Billy Lee," it is. That most remarkable boy!

BILLY: Now, Billy was a boy with a gift for the remarkable, or at least that's what everyone says about him. "Lord, that boy has a gift for the remarkable."

BILLY puts the hairbrush down and ties off a ponytail in GEORGE'S hair.

BILLY: (CONT'D.) This boy had the power of friendship and healing all rolled into one. He had the magic spell that centuries of religious men have sought, the power of hope. This beautiful boy wrapped everyone up in his tiny, homespun cocoon of life, and transformed them from cynical, jealous savages into beautifully free and happy souls.

BILLY pulls GEORGE'S nightshirt from over his head. GEORGE is bare-chested and wearing only his short breeches and stockings.

BILLY: (CONT'D.) How did this one boy get to be so powerful, you might ask? He was born to live. Granted, we're all destined to live, but Billy was doing it now. Billy was living while everyone else was just holding off the dying. Now there was no doubt that Billy would die one day, but, remarkably, he didn't worry none about that. He spent his entire day, every day, living. He lived every minute of his pre-destined existence.

He takes a cloth and dips it into the washbasin. BILLY, standing behind GEORGE, begins to gently wash the general. GEORGE sits with his arms out as BILLY rubs the cloth slowly over his shoulders, back and chest.

BILLY: (CONT'D.) Now, Billy laughed and cried every day to make sure he knew how it felt to do both. He climbed trees when the branches bent themselves close enough to the ground.

He continues to bathe GEORGE.

BILLY: (CONT'D.) He even tried to get ole George Washington to do it. To climb that tree. But for some reason, that man wouldn't even try.

GEORGE: That is why ole George Washington is a wise man. There is no need to fall out of a tree and break his "old" neck.

BILLY: Hush now. This is my story! Already enough stories about you. This is mine.

BILLY wraps his arms around GEORGE to wash his chest and abdomen.

BILLY: (CONT'D.) Now, Billy smelled flowers and animals and people and dirt and mud... didn't make no matter. If there was a chance to smell it, to experience it, Billy did. He smiled at everyone he saw and shouted big "hellos" to those who turned their heads away too soon.

BILLY raises GEORGE'S arms to wash them.

BILLY: (CONT'D.) And Billy loved ole George Washington. And he loved Billy.

GEORGE opens his eyes and looks over his shoulder at BILLY.

BILLY: (CONT'D.) What? That ain't true? George Washington didn't love Billy?

GEORGE: No. It is true. Old George Washington loved Billy.

BILLY: (Smiling.) Billy was the best livin' person that anyone ever knew, and seeing him, reminded everyone that life was a gift. A gift to love and cherish. A remarkable thing just like Billy was. (Silence.)

GEORGE sees a tattered page on the table.

GEORGE: What is this?

BILLY: Nothing!

BILLY grabs the page.

GEORGE: Well, your reaction speaks differently.

BILLY: It's mine.

GEORGE: Yours?

BILLY: Yes.

GEORGE: A secret?

BILLY: No. Not exactly.

GEORGE: May I see it?

BILLY: I'd rather you not.

GEORGE: But now you've piqued my curiosity.

BILLY: Please. It's nothing.

GEORGE: Did you write it?

BILLY: Yes.

GEORGE: Wonderful. You've been practicing your phrasing? Good for you. Let me have it

BILLY: It's private.

GEORGE: Should I be worried?

BILLY: No. Just my thoughts.

GEORGE: But what is yours is mine.

BILLY: Even my thoughts?

GEORGE: Just hand me the paper.

BILLY reluctantly hands GEORGE the page.

BILLY: It means nothing to you.

GEORGE reads it aloud.

GEORGE: Pay attention to the delusion. That the delusion is the most inevitable intellectual state of all.

Now unavoidable is just the thing,
To get me wondering if the delusion is inescapable.
I saw the foggy dissembling of my people destroyed,

How I mourned the illusion.
An illusion is blurry. An illusion is fuzzy, an illusion is dazed.
The story sings like a history

A story is lily-livered, a story is cowardly,
A story is weak.
How happy are inevitable fantasies!

Down, down, down into the darkness of the imagined,
Gently they go—the destined, the enslaved, the fatal.
I cannot help but stop and look at the foggy dream.

Down, down, down into the darkness of the mind,
Gently it goes—the sickly, the cloudy, the misty.
When I think of the dream, I see a history.

"Scream", said the dream,
And "scream", then "scream" again.

GEORGE finishes reading BILLY'S poem.

BILLY: It's nothing.

GEORGE: And you feel this? Are this?

BILLY: Yes.

GEORGE: I don't know what to say.

BILLY: Say nothing. Not everything has to be discussed.

GEORGE: But you're in pain? Fear?

BILLY: May I have it back?

GEORGE hands BILLY the paper.

GEORGE: Certainly.

BILLY folds it and puts it into his pocket.

BILLY: Now it can be forgotten.

Silence.

GEORGE: You didn't have to come along, Billy. It was your choice.

You could have stayed in Virginia on the farm.

BILLY: Oh, that's right. I'm going to let you go it alone.

GEORGE: Go it alone? I'm going nowhere.

BILLY: Well, if you're going nowhere, then you sure have one long trip ahead of you.

GEORGE: I'm heading towards something, but I don't know what.

BILLY: No one does. Don't know where this battle is going to take you.

How this crossing is going to go? How the fighting is going to turn out? But if anyone knows the dance of war, then it's you.

GEORGE: Sadly, that dance is driven by the music of the dying. The bass of the canons and the treble of the screams. I hope I know all the steps... in the right order.

BILLY: Of course, you know how to dance, you just don't feel much like doing it right now! But you will.

GEORGE: I have never enjoyed the fight.

BILLY: You speak of something you have no control over.

GEORGE: If we desire to avoid insult, we must be able to repel it. If we desire to secure peace, one of the most powerful instruments of our rising prosperity, it must be known, that we are at all times ready for war.

GEORGE stands and moves to the bed. BILLY retrieves a clean shirt from the armoire.

BILLY: The time is right to trap the British devils.

GEORGE: So you say.

BILLY hands the clean shirt to GEORGE. GEORGE pulls the shirt over his head.

BILLY: When shall we dance? Tonight! We'll play on their insecurities, stringing them along. Skimming over the ice in the river.

GEORGE: I doubt that the New England boys will think it is skimming over the ice. More like struggling through the ice.

BILLY: Still my story... and in my telling of the story... the glorious army will skim over the ice.

GEORGE: I do prefer your story to the truth.

BILLY: Exactly.

BILLY removes his shirt and crosses to the same washbasin as before. He pours more water from the pitcher into the basin. He takes the cloth and starts to wash his body as well.

GEORGE: The night will fall soon, and we'll start loading the men into the boats. I hope the lads were able to get some sleep.

BILLY: Eagles need their sleep. The owls just need their coffee.

GEORGE: And although it is as watered down as muck, I will have a coffee.

GEORGE rises from sitting on the bed and makes his way to the tray with the metal coffee pot. He pours himself a cup.

GEORGE: (CONT'D.) Billy, would you like a cup?

BILLY: (Hesitantly.) You pour the coffee for me?

GEORGE: Yes. Seems simple enough.

BILLY: All right.

GEORGE pours another cup and carries it to BILLY.

BILLY: (CONT'D.) Thank you, General.

GEORGE: General!? I don't believe I have ever heard you so formal when we're behind closed doors.

BILLY: You fetchin' something for me demands a special salutation.

GEORGE: I see.

BILLY sips the coffee.

BILLY: Oh my, that is terrible.

GEORGE: Like drinking the water in that washbasin.

BILLY: True.

They both are standing together with their coffees.

GEORGE: (Toasting.) Here's to a successful night.

BILLY: And for tomorrow... a successful morning.

GEORGE: To victory!

BILLY: To victory... or death!

They tap their cups together and drink. Both are disgusted by the taste.

BILLY: (CONT'D.) If I soaked my shoe in boiling water, I think it would taste better.

GEORGE: Truer words were never spoken.

GEORGE sets his cup down.

GEORGE: (CONT'D.) Here give me that rag.

GEORGE takes the washcloth from BILLY and wrings it out in the basin. He pours clean water over the rag.

BILLY: What?

GEORGE: I'll get your back.

BILLY: Huh?

GEORGE: I'll wash your back for you.

BILLY: But Mister George...

GEORGE takes the cloth and slowly washes BILLY'S back.

BILLY: You're tired.

GEORGE: And so are you.

BILLY: True. The days seem so dreary. And our night's sleep is filled with dreams.

GEORGE: No peace.

GEORGE dips the cloth towel into the water and continues to wash BILLY'S back.

BILLY: I had a dream last night where I flew through the night. It seemed so real. The wind was cold on my limbs as I flew through the sky. By twisting my hand, I could change my position, and by twisting my foot, I could change my speed. I was free. Below the clouds, cities appeared, first as tiny specks of light, then as silhouetted shadows. I would raise my index finger and that motion would send me diving towards the first town I approached. Warm

air streamed along my body as I pierced through the clouds. The numbness caused by the cold began to subside, and once again, I felt my whole form, my entire body. Flying low in the dream, I sped towards the city.

Beat. GEORGE continues to wash BILLY'S back.

The buildings were intact but unoccupied. Where had the specks of light come from, I asked myself? Where were the people? It's then I saw that the town was just empty shacks and cabins, because in the distance, the people, my people were all in the field working.

Beat.

I tried to hold back the tears as I watched the sun rise, but the redness of the sun always made me cry. Yellow suns were never in my dreams only red suns. Blood red suns. The day had begun. Another day. Another day followed by another night. And then I woke up, beside you, on the floor.

GEORGE: Your dream seems peaceful compared to mine.

BILLY: I suppose.

GEORGE: In my dream I was trapped.

BILLY: So was I.

GEORGE: But you flew like a bird in your dream. I was caught in a glass bubble.

BILLY: Break the glass and you're free. But I could fly like a hawk for days, and yet, wherever I land... I'm still in a cage. *(Pause.)* I should not have told you. It was my secret.

GEORGE hands BILLY a towel to dry off. GEORGE falls into his chair.

GEORGE: Anything will give up its secrets if you love it enough. Not only have I found that when I talk to the little flower or to the little peanut, they will give up their secrets, but I have found that when I silently commune with people, they give up their secrets also, if you love them enough.

BILLY puts on his shirt.

GEORGE: Your secrets are freed by my love for you. I would never hold you to any punishment for sharing your thoughts.

BILLY prepares GEORGE'S uniform by laying it out and brushing it down.

BILLY: Is that true? Really true?

GEORGE: I hope I shall possess firmness and virtue enough to maintain what I consider the most enviable of all titles, the character of an honest man.

BILLY: You express your love for me.

GEORGE: I do.

BILLY: So you say. But yet you possess me.

GEORGE: As I do my family. My children. My wife.

BILLY: But is it the same?

GEORGE: You are impertinent.

BILLY: Well, if I am, then it is no one's fault but your own. I could have remained a simple house servant or a field Negro. But you educated me. Taught me to read. You insisted that I stand up for myself when in discussions with you. You designed me, built me to be your companion. And now I do as I was empowered to do... I talk back with impertinence, because that is what you like? Is it not?

GEORGE: I've been thinking... all that's happened. In the past. Many things I feel badly about.

BILLY: Are you apologizing?

GEORGE: I'm just saying that I knew we were lost. I knew the whole time that we were developing how this relationship should evolve. We just didn't know how to deal with each other.

BILLY carries the uniform vest to GEORGE. GEORGE stands and allows BILLY to dress him.

BILLY: I knew it. I knew it wasn't an apology.

GEORGE: Apology for what? There is no apology if society and its rules have preordained the situation.

BILLY: I can't. Our lives are shaped by the events that occur. To state this quote which, I have heard you say many times in many instances... "it is much easier to prevent an enemy from posting themselves than it is to dislodge them after they have got possession."

BILLY retrieves the sash that goes around GEORGE'S waist. He begins to wrap it around GEORGE. BILLY knots the sash.

GEORGE: So your implication is that we are enemies?

BILLY: And what is the contrast? Friends? Are we friends?

GEORGE: In this moment, yes. We're here now. For this instant, we are indeed friends.

BILLY: And yet, with a knock at the door, I am immediately your servant, your slave. No. I will not allow you this moment so that you can feel great about yourself?

GEORGE: I will feel "great" about myself whether you forgive me or not.

BILLY: If I had my way—*(Pause.)*

GEORGE: Finish the sentence. If you had your way, then what?

BILLY: You would love for me to offer a violent response. Possibly a blaspheme. Take the pressure off your overwrought conscience. Allow you a window to maintain your reputation as the Commander in Chief of all!

GEORGE: Reputation aligns with a person for a long time.

BILLY: Do you spend your life thinking you know what's good for everyone else, when you're really doing it for yourself?

GEORGE: I have lived by a simple motto that "one should make sure you are doing what God wants you to do, and then do it with all your strength."

BILLY: And I live by the motto, "be courteous to all, but intimate with few, and let those few be well tried before you give them your confidence."

GEORGE: Billy, in all our years, have I not maintained your confidence? Your secrets that you have shared of your challenges and your possibilities. Your fears of just existing. Your ideas of wanting so much more. Your desire of going outside. Seeing other places and other people. Drinking all you can. And eating all you can. Your secret desire of having the opportunity to be in safety as well as danger.

BILLY: But do you not share my confidences because of a love for me, or is it because of the knowledge that my confidences are actually owned by you?

GEORGE: How many times must I show you my will and testament?
Your freedom is yours upon my death!

BILLY: Well, at least I have something to look forward to in my old age.

GEORGE: Must all roads lead to the same spot?

BILLY: Are we not in a war for liberty?

GEORGE: We are.

BILLY: True liberty?

GEORGE: Yes.

BILLY: A right to speak out against wrong.

GEORGE: If freedom of speech is taken away, then dumb and silent we may be led, like sheep to the slaughter.

BILLY: And you would hear what is being said?

GEORGE: Don't I now? Torturous as it may be.

BILLY: The time is near at hand which must determine whether Americans are to be free men or slaves. *(Silence.)*

GEORGE: *(Trying to remain calm.)* Liberty, when it begins to take root, is a plant of rapid growth.

BILLY: Yes. And Liberty does not only belong to one color of skin or one class of man.

GEORGE: If all goes well, then we might have a chance.

BILLY: It will go well.

GEORGE: If God has not given up on our cause.

BILLY: God has always been on your side.

GEORGE: Our side.

BILLY: Your side. My side has seen little mercy from God.

GEORGE: Blasphemy.

BILLY: Truth. In my eyes, you are the only gods we see. Not only did you create me, but you created your God. You teach us that God created man in His own image, yet you have created God in your image, and to your convenience. You tell us that we should obey our master because he said so, conveniently forgetting the rest of that teaching that says, "masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him."

Pause.

You created a God who is at your beck and call and works to your benefit, who dictates you to enslave another group of people, so that you can be free. So yes, I'm lost, disadvantaged, because you and your people are all about creating the world to your order, and to your needs! Freedom. Ha!

GEORGE: I will not have you blaming God for all the bad things that happen... that happen to you.

BILLY: But you do want me to give God all the credit for everything good that happens.

GEORGE: God loves you, Billy. Read the Bible. Read all the stories. All the stories I've saved of good...

BILLY: ...And bad.

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BILLY AND GEORGE

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