THE LIGHT IN WASHINGTON

A Christmas Play for Voices

by
Mitchell Santine Gould

Performance Script
Draft of October 2026

CHARACTERS

FREDDIE (6): The narrator (to be voiced by an adult or teen actor). Observant, stubborn, matter-of-fact, carrying the sharp indignation and unvarnished sensory world of a boy on a mission.

FRED VAUGHAN (30s): Freddie's father. Strained, feverish, torn between domestic duty and an unbearable ghost; shifting from nervous calculation to broken clarity.

FRANCES VAUGHAN (20s–30s): Freddie's mother. Weary, sharp-eyed, anchored to the hearth and her sick infant.

WALT WHITMAN (49): The Great and Good Friend. Broad, weathered, gravelly-voiced; hospital tenderness overlaid with street philosopher irony.

PETE DOYLE (20s): Horsecar conductor. Easy, rhythmic, cheerful Rebel drawl; unbothered working-class authority.

DEPOT CLERK (50s): Harried, flat, mechanical.

OFFICER ENOCH (40s): Washington municipal patrolman. Loud, blustering, suspicious.

ZEKE (OFF-MIC): Horsecar relief driver / hostler.

NOTES FOR PERFORMANCE

- Speeches are numbered straight through the script, so a director can call out a speech by number ("from 47").
- Sound cues are numbered separately (FX 1, FX 2…), set in capitals, and underlined. The companion Sound Cue Sheet gives each cue in full, with what comes just before it.
- FREDDIE (NARR) marks Freddie's narration, as opposed to his lines in the scene. If budget allows, use a separate, closer narration mic.
- (UNDER) means the sound continues quietly beneath the dialogue until the next cue replaces it.
- No speech runs over onto a new page. Print on one side only and leave the pages unstapled, so pages can be slid aside silently.

ACT I: THE PARLOR (BROOKLYN)

FX 1: DOOR OPENS ON SQUEALING HINGES; CLOSES SOFTLY. MANTEL CLOCK TICKS; FAINT SNORE FROM THE NEXT ROOM (UNDER).

1 **FREDDIE:** *(stage whisper)* Ma?

FX 2: CLOCK TICKING ALONE.

2 **FREDDIE (NARR):** No "I'm here, Love." No whimper from Little Fool. No cough. She's taken the needy, whimpering rascal to the doctor, then. But there is another sound… a faint snore.

FX 3: STOCKINGED FEET ON BARE FLOORBOARDS.

3 **FREDDIE:** *(whispering to himself)* Put your books down, Freddie—gently. Tiptoe past the tanning balm, Freddie—quietly.

4 **FREDDIE (NARR):** Well, that’s what Ma calls it—it smells nothing like leather dressing to me. But I can’t—not without at least stopping to look. It’s not even as tall as I am, on a tabletop mussed with some dry red needles. For a moment, its sad little crimson paper stars and strings of popcorn and cranberries give me over to the ruby-red stars and gleaming beads at Macy’s glorious store. Everybody knows about his stars. It’s because his hand is painted with a red star, like the red harp on Da’s hand.

5 **FREDDIE:** *(whispering to himself)* Nudge the door open, Freddie—softly. Sneak a peek—sneakily.

FX 4: BEDROOM DOOR HINGE: A FAINT SCRAPE.

6 **FREDDIE (NARR):** The bedroom is scented with bay rum and peppermint, odors which always make Ma frown and look away. There’s a carpetbag on the floor, half-stuffed with clothes, but still pried open like a mouth at the dentist’s. And there is Da, sprawled across the counterpane, a giant, a rag doll. Drops of drool sparkle on his proud copper muttonchops like gems; drops from his eyes are leaving tracks across his pale cheeks. Da’s fist is closed around some treasure. But all I can see is the dangling gold chain.

FX 5: A MAN’S HEAVY, DRUNKEN SLEEP-BREATHING (UNDER).

7 **FREDDIE (NARR):** Sometimes I don’t know Da. But all the time, all day and each night and every week, I need to know. This need of all times makes me dare to take his great hand, to try and discover his treasure. When he sleeps like this, it’s a hard sleep. He might not ever know.

8 **FREDDIE:** *(whispering to himself)* Uncurl his fingers, Freddie—cautiously.

9 **FREDDIE (NARR):** Da doesn’t move much as I pry his fist open—slowly. The locket’s filigree catches the lamplight in fine gold swirls. What is this? What is this?

FX 6: LOCKET CLICKS OPEN.

10 **FREDDIE (NARR):** There is the face that always turns up when Da is deep in his book. It’s a fierce face with dark whiskers and a cocked tarpaulin hat. The Great and Good Friend of Olden Times. The One Who Sees Everything, Loves Everyone, and Gives So Freely. Da’s Secret Not to Be Named around Ma. The Comrade I Must Meet Someday.

FX 7: BEDDING RUSTLES; BED ROPES GROAN.

11 **FREDDIE (NARR):** The little cameo holds me fast; more than when I've seen the picture in Da's book. I meet the Comrade's gaze and can't pull away. So I don't notice that Da is watching me from under his droopy eyelids, as if he's a mile away, with some sort of little smile on his lips. But once he sees I've got the secret locket, there's a jolt. His eyes fly open. The green lanterns shine on me. My heart leaps in my throat with terror. I can feel my face pleading with his face to not darken and storm and rage.

12 **FRED VAUGHAN:** *(whisper thick with liquor and sleep, surprisingly gentle)* That's the Comrade You Must Meet, Love.

13 **FREDDIE (NARR):** I turn the locket over in my palm. The back isn't solid gold—it's glass. Trapped behind the crystal is a little swirl of silver hair, laced through with dark strands. Plaited into a tiny basket, like a hummingbird's nest.

14 **FRED VAUGHAN:** His beard is very white and bountiful now, you know, Son.

15 **FREDDIE (NARR):** White and bountiful. My thumb trembles on the rim of the gold case. And there is the dark, fierce sailor in the picture—before the frost came for his hair. And now: white and bountiful. The one who gives so freely. And my Da knows him! Da has had St. Nick’s true face locked up in his pocket all along.

16 **FREDDIE:** *(breathless, tugging his father’s sleeve)* Ask him if I’m on the “Account of Good Children.”

FX 8: LOCKET CLICKS SHUT.

17 **FRED VAUGHAN:** *(sniffs, blinks hard; a wet, raspy belch)*

18 **FREDDIE (NARR):** He slips it down deep into his waistcoat pocket, over his heart, until the chain vanishes beneath his lapel. And his great hand reaches my cheek like the soft caress of a wing. He looks right into my eyes. Outside our front window the street is already turning dark. A horsecar rattles somewhere far off, and a wagon rolls by. But the haze is gone from Da’s eyes. Now, he’s got that look which means he wants something. Sometimes it means there will be pie. Sometimes it means there will be trouble.

FX 9: KNEES CRACK; BOOTS SCRAPE AS FRED CROUCHES.

19 **FRED VAUGHAN:** *(low, urgent)* Freddie. Listen to me now. With both ears. Your mother's going to be back soon. Let's work in harness, you and I. You know how your mother is about the cars. You know how she is about… about spending our lucre, and winter travel, and me going off.

20 **FREDDIE:** *(quietly)* I know.

21 **FRED VAUGHAN:** Well, Sonny, I'm taking the cars south to Washington on lodge business. She'll set her face like a flint. She'll say it's foolishness. She'll say the capital is full of fever and mud and soldiers, and there's other Brothers who can take the funds.

22 **FREDDIE:** So you won't go?

23 **FRED VAUGHAN:** She’ll try to keep me from it—unless you make it your idea. When she walks in with little Frank, I’ll tell her the Lodge has called on me for our errand in Washington. Before she can open her mouth to say No, that’s when you strike. You don’t ask—you plead. Tell her you’ve never seen the great marbled Capitol where Mr. Lincoln walked. Tell her you want to ride the mighty Vulcan into Baltimore. You tug on her apron, Freddie. You make your eyes round and big as saucers, as you do when you want a penny for ginger beer. And twist your lip, too—like this.

24 **FREDDIE:** *(a tiny yelp as Da pinches his lip)*

25 **FRED VAUGHAN:** *(dead serious, gripping Freddie’s wool sleeves)* You hold fast to her skirts, Son. You tell her: “Let me go with Da, Ma. Let me keep him company on the cars. I’ll look after him, Ma. I promise I’ll see he comes right back home to you.”

26 **FREDDIE:** *(boldly)* The Great and Good Friend will be there!

27 **FRED VAUGHAN:** *(breath catching; suddenly far away)* Tell her you’ll look after me. You say that, Freddie, and she won’t say No. She can’t.

FX 10: DOORKNOB RATTLES; DOOR GROANS OPEN. BABY'S CROUPY COUGH AND WHIMPER (BABY UNDER).

28 **FREDDIE (NARR):** The whimpering is the first thing coming into our parlor—and now our home, wouldn't you know it, is complete again. Little Fool doesn't even cry like a normal babe. Da gets to his feet, faster and better than I expected. He wipes his eyes on his sleeve and combs his muttonchops with his fingers, quick as a cat. We hurry into the parlor.

FX 11: QUICK FOOTSTEPS; HORSEHAIR DIVAN GROANS.

29 **FRED VAUGHAN:** *(smooth, sweet, seeking pardon)* At last, you're home, Mavourneen—my darling. Tell me what the doctor said.

30 **FRANCES:** *(exhausted, tugging at her bonnet strings)* The croup is widespread in the city. Most of it's mild. Frank's is mild. Dr. Vanderburgh isn't worried for him. He gave me a tincture of paregoric. And he says the baby needs mutton broth.

FX 12: RUSTLE OF CALICO.

31 **FRED VAUGHAN:** *(mutters softly into the flannel baby wrap)* Slán a bheidh sé. He'll be well, so. The congestion hasn't taken hold, then.

32 **FRANCES:** *(voice hardening)* What are you dressed up for, Fred?

33 **FRED VAUGHAN:** *(solemn, practiced dignity)* Lodge business, Frances. Fortitude Lodge called an emergency sitting before noon. The brethren have tasked me with an errand of mercy. Relief drafts and certificates for the destitute widows and the maimed soldiers down in Washington. I'm to convey them south on the evening cars.

FX 13: PAUSE. CLOCK: TICK… TICK… TICK.

34 **FREDDIE (NARR):** Ma looks at Da. Da looks at Ma. And I wait for him to look at me—to start me up—but it's like the clock stopped ticking. So I must start up myself—at once.

FX 14: KNEES THUD ON CARPET.

35 **FREDDIE:** *(sobbing, wailing into the rafters)* Oh, Ma—Ma, please don't say No! It's not fair! Da says I may go with him on the cars! Let me ride the mighty Vulcan into Baltimore! Let me see the great marbled Capitol where Father Abraham walked!

36 **FRANCES:** *(startled)* Hush, child! The capital is no place for a boy in winter. It's full of mud and fevers and broken men—

37 **FREDDIE:** I’ll be—good—Ma! Please—Mother, please let me—me go. I will be ever so good. I will help him with the poor widows!

38 **FRED VAUGHAN:** The Masons will look after him—and after us. It’s charity work, Fan. Where’s the harm?

39 **FRANCES:** *(slow, bitter chill)* Washington is a long way, Fred. A great many hotels; a great many bars in them.

40 **FRED VAUGHAN:** It’s the widows’ business, Fan!

41 **FREDDIE:** *(clutching her knees)* I swear on the Bible! I won’t ask for a single sugar plum! And I’ll look after Da! I’ll hold his hand tight at every crossing, and I’ll bring him home to you!

FX 15: CLOCK TICKS. BABY COOS.

42 **FREDDIE (NARR):** I’ll bring him home to you. With those words, we fall into a hush. Am I supposed to start up, all over again, now? Beside the stove, Da raises little Frank high against his shoulder, looking straight across the parlor. He’s watching Ma. Then my mother buttons my shirt to the chin, and looks into my eyes. Swimming beneath her tears, the indigo is deeper than I’ve ever seen it. It rattles me.

FRANCES: *(voice breaking, whispering)* You hold Daddy’s hand every minute, and you bring him home to me. Promise.

ACT II: THE TRANSIT & ARRIVAL (WASHINGTON DEPOT TO 15TH STREET)

FX 16: CROSSFADE FROM PARLOR: DEAFENING SHRIEK OF BRAKES AND STEAM. HISS, GRINDING WHEELS, ECHOING TRAIN SHED (UNDER).

44 **FREDDIE (NARR):** *(over the steam)* The train has the last word: a shriek of steam that makes my teeth rattle. It makes Da clench my hand so hard that the wool bites into my knuckles. He leads me down iron steps to hop onto the platform, where we dodge men’s frantic boots, the sweeping hems of ladies’ heavy cloaks, and everyone’s swinging satchels and carpetbags. The engine is still panting like a hard-ridden horse, dripping grease and coughing hot cinders.

FX 17: FOOT STRIKES A TIN SPITTOON: CLANG.

45 **FRED VAUGHAN:** *(sharp, jittery breath)* Mind your footing, dammit, Freddie. Keep your eyeballs peeled!

46 **FREDDIE (NARR):** He ushers me through heavy wooden doors into a waiting hall. It’s not fancy like the hotel lobbies in New York. It smells of wet wool, stale tobacco, and sweating passengers.

FX 18: WAITING HALL: STOVE CRACKLES; DIP-PEN SCRATCHES; STAMP: THUD-THUD-THUD (UNDER).

47 **FRED VAUGHAN:** Beg pardon, sir. The Treasury Building. Can we hail a cab here, or is there a public conveyance?

48 **DEPOT CLERK:** *(raspy, bored, pen never stopping)* Hacks'll rob you blind five ways to Sunday, mister. Step right out on C Street, or down to the corner of New Jersey. Take the horsecar. Green light on the dasher. It runs straight down the Avenue and drops you at the Treasury portico for five cents. Car's likely waiting right now.

49 **FRED VAUGHAN:** Come, b'hoy.

FX 19: DOORS SWING OPEN: WIND HOWLS. DISTANT SHOUTS; WAGONS ON FROZEN RUTS; HORSECAR BELL: CLANG-CLANG.

50 **FREDDIE (NARR):** *(gagging against his muffler)* The double doors swing open. Washington City night hits us like an icy bucket of water, black as ink. I gag against my muffler. Rotten cabbage and dead-fish stink—river sewage, clinging to the cold like grease. Before us, rising up over the rooftops like an enormous, frozen cardboard cut-out, looms the grand Capitol dome.

51 **FRED VAUGHAN:** *(hissing urgently)* Hurry, Love.

FX 20: BOOTS CRUNCH ON FROZEN RUTS. HORSES SNORT; HARNESS JINGLES.

52 **FREDDIE (NARR):** Sitting on rails right in the middle of the street, there's our car. A lantern perches on its roof, a deep-green glow in the gloom. And there, waiting for the command to draw it, is a pair of great Morgans. They stamp their hooves. And there, leaning against the rear brake handle, stands a young Irishman. He wears a coarse blue overcoat, and a visored cap pulled down to his brows. Indeed, he looks as though he could be Da's half-brother—or at least, a cousin.

FX 21: BOOTS SKID ON A BRASS STEP.

53 **PETE:** *(cheerful, lazy Rebel drawl)* Easy does it there, captain. Up you go before the draft takes you.

54 **FRED VAUGHAN:** *(breathless)* West to the Treasury?

55 **PETE:** Straight down the Avenue, sir. Fifteenth Street. End of the run for this car.

FX 22: SCRIP RUSTLES; TICKET PUNCH: SNAP-SNAP.

56 **PETE:** Find yerselves a seat near the stove. We'll have you at Fifteenth before yer toes go stiff.

FX 23: PETE WHISTLES A JAUNTY SCRAP OF TUNE. CAR DOOR RATTLES SHUT. INSIDE: PASSENGERS MURMUR, FEET IN STRAW, STOVE RUMBLES (UNDER).

57 **FREDDIE (NARR):** Da lets me lead us into the horsecar. So now I'm a little tugboat, pulling a great schooner behind me down the central aisle. We crunch along a bed of oat straw that keeps our feet from freezing to the floorboards. On either side, the plush velvet benches are crammed with ladies and gentlemen. The ruby-glass lamp hanging just above our heads spills rouge onto everybody's faces. Across from Da, two soldiers murmur together, their brass buttons glowing like hot coals in the red lamplight.

FX 24: BELL: CLANG-CLANG. WHIP CRACK; DRIVER'S WHISTLE; CHAINS JERK TAUT. TIMBERS GROAN; WHEELS BEGIN CLACK-CLACK (UNDER).

58 **FREDDIE (NARR):** Our ruby box of light rolls away from the dark shadow of the Capitol and out down the Avenue, into the freezing Washington City night…

ACT III: THE TURNAROUND AT 15TH STREET

FX 25: WHEELS SCREECH ON THE CURVE; HANDBRAKE RATCHETS; CAR SHUDDERS TO A HALT.

FX 26: BELL: CLANG-CLANG-CLANG.

59 **PETE:** *(from the platform)* Laaaaaaah-sssssssssst stop—alllllllllll oooot! Fifteenth—and the Trea-zhuhrrrr-eeee!

FX 27: CAR DOOR SLIDES OPEN: RIVER WIND; DISTANT HUM OF THE CITY (UNDER).

60 **FRED VAUGHAN:** *(breathless, terrified)* Stick by me, Freddie.

61 **FREDDIE (NARR):** We shuffle down the straw-strewn aisle behind a stout lady with a market basket. Out on the rear platform, there is the jolly conductor. He’s leaning over the brass rail, calling through the drifting snowflakes:

62 **PETE:** *(calling into the darkness)* Ho there, Comrade!

63 **FREDDIE (NARR):** I freeze at the top of the iron steps. Comrade? Really? Comrade? Of course I must know who that is! Is he The Great and Good Friend of Olden Times? The Comrade I Must Meet—Right Now? I train my eyes into the aurora of snow-streaked light on the Treasury steps.

64 **WALT:** *(off-mic, a deep, gritty boom)* Pete, dear son! A bitter night to hold those reins!

65 **FREDDIE (NARR):** He wears an immense overcoat of rough grey wool. A wide-brimmed felt hat is tipped back on his head. But there—there—is his face. And it's HIS face. There's the snow-white beard, clear down his breast. There's the same strange pearly eyes. They twinkle even in the frozen night, laughing in the cold.

66 **FREDDIE:** *(screaming into the wind)* Santa!

67 **FRED VAUGHAN:** *(off-mic, a terrified lunge)* Freddie—No!

FX 28: SMALL BOOTS RUNNING THROUGH SLUSH.

68 **FREDDIE (NARR):** Before Da can close his fingers, I'm flying. Churning through the slush. Skidding over the black ice on the cold, hard flagstones. I don't hear him; I don't look back. I'm running straight into the aurora.

69 **WALT:** *(booming, rich amusement)* Well, hullo! And who have we got here, charging the battlements?

FX 29: HEAVY WOOL COAT RUSTLES AROUND THE BOY.

70 **FREDDIE:** *(breathless)* Santa. I knew you were real. I knew it.

71 **WALT:** *(a rolling, gritty chuckle)* Did you now, General? And what name do they call the bold soldier who storms the Treasury gate by night?

72 **FREDDIE:** *(stage whisper, shy)* Freddie.

FX 30: WIND CUTS OUT. SILENCE BUT FOR THE HISS OF A GAS LAMP.

73 **WALT:** *(a stunned whisper)* ...Freddie.

74 **FREDDIE (NARR):** *(hushed)* The chuckle stops. His grey eyebrows draw together. The word drifts between us, like another snowflake. Slowly, carefully, his hand comes up to cup my chin, tilting my face up to his. His gaze narrows, tracing my forehead, the curve of my jaw, the shape of my mouth. Drinking me in.

FX 31: TRACE-CHAINS RATTLE ON COBBLES; A HORSE STOMPS, SKIDS, AND SNORTS.

75 **ZEKE:** *(off-mic)* Easy, Baron! Back ’er round, Missy!

76 **FREDDIE (NARR):** Behind us, a hostler with a tin lantern leads the two steaming Morgans, tossing their blindered heads, alongside the car, to hitch them up our end for the return trip.

77 **PETE:** *(bright and easy)* Mind the near bay, Zeke. He threw a shoe turning off Twelfth. I'll take the whiffletree so he don't skin his hocks!

FX 32: BOOTS DROP INTO SLUSH; FOOTSTEPS HURRY AWAY.

78 **FREDDIE (NARR):** Pete's back is turned away from us now, fretting over the traces, chains, and bits. Santa doesn't hear them. He doesn't even seem to feel my mittens clinging to his coat. His broad breast rises in a slow, jagged breath. Slowly, his gaze leaves me. He looks past my cap. Out into the dark, across the frozen ruts and through the drifting snow. Toward the horsecar. There, motionless in the shadow of the carriage, stands Da.

79 **FREDDIE:** *(tugging his sleeve)* Santa? Am I in the Account of Good Children? Did you bring a present for me?

80 **WALT:** *(a deep, ragged shudder)* I'm not a spirit, darling. I keep no accounts. I think all this wickedness is just a dark night, waiting for a lamp. And there may be an ocean of it. But something is flowing over it.

81 **FREDDIE (NARR):** None of this makes sense. It’s pretty. It’s poetry that cheats me of my reward. It’s not fair!

82 **FREDDIE:** *(angry, demanding)* Where’s my present, Santa? Did you leave it in the sleigh?

83 **WALT:** *(soft, intense murmur)* No. It’s here, boy. I urge you to see it. Years ago, before you were even a thought in the dark, I held the dearest thing in the world in my hands. And when the time came, I opened my fingers and let it go.

FX 33: WOOL RUBBING ON WOOL, IN SLOW CIRCLES.

84 **FREDDIE (NARR):** He rubs my chest with a circular motion. Is he trying to rub some sense into me?

85 **WALT:** I gave it up so you could have it, Little Fred.

86 **FREDDIE (NARR):** *(throat tightening)* I start to cry. That ocean of dark he spoke of must be swallowing me.

87 **FREDDIE:** *(to Walt, a choking whisper)* Liar! I have nothing. Just look at me. Nothing!

88 **FREDDIE:** *(a wild, screeching wail of childhood heartbreak)*

89 **WALT:** *(commanding, desperate, rising over the crying)* See it, Freddie! See it! It’s beating in his chest this very minute. The light is in him. Look at your father, dammit! Look at the love!

90 **FREDDIE (NARR):** He’s angry with me! My eyes, flooded now, blur the street lamps into greasy amber smears. And the dark smears together, too—coming for me, coming with shoulders and boots. A tall, stiff coat. Brass buttons catching the rays like angry eyes. A heavy wooden club swinging at its side.

91 **OFFICER ENOCH:** *(barks, booming and harsh)* Good God, man! What the devil are you doing to this poor boy?

92 **FRED VAUGHAN:** *(off-mic, a thin, pathetic whimper)* Officer, please, wait—

93 **FREDDIE (NARR):** It doesn’t sound very brave to me.

FX 34: SCRAMBLE OF BOOTS; FREDDIE THUDS INTO SLUSH.

94 **FREDDIE (NARR):** Santa leaps to his feet, leaving me to spill hard onto the icy flagstones.

95 **FREDDIE:** *(screaming from the slush)* He’s not the real Santa!

96 **OFFICER ENOCH:** *(shouting, stepping in)* You, sir! Off with the false face! Now!

97 **WALT:** *(voice deep, thick, shaken to the core)* I can’t do it, officer. This is the only face I have.

FX 35: WOOL RUSTLES; A SCUFFLE; A HARD, SUDDEN YANK.

98 **WALT:** *(a deep, hollow groan)* Uhhhh—

FX 36: SILENCE BUT FOR WALT’S RAGGED BREATHING.

99 **OFFICER ENOCH:** *(stuttering, utterly baffled)* What…?

100 **FREDDIE (NARR):** The officer steps back. He’s looking at his empty gloved hands.

101 **WALT:** *(coughs; then an odd, wheezing chuckle)* Think about it, friend. Don’t we all wear false faces?

102 **FREDDIE (NARR):** He wipes away the tears with his sleeve. But he isn’t looking at the copper. He’s looking at Da.

103 **PETE:** *(off-mic, running in)* Say, officer! Officer, Jesus Mary Joseph—hold up!

FX 37: BOOTS SPRINTING THROUGH SLUSH; TICKET PUNCH JINGLES.

104 **PETE:** Whoa, stand down now, Enoch. Why, man—you know Mr. Whitman! He works over at the Attorney General’s. He wouldn’t harm a fly, let alone a stray brat.

105 **OFFICER ENOCH:** Had the boy screaming bloody murder, Doyle! Sounds like an abduction to me!

106 **PETE:** That’s just because the lad slipped on the ice. Didn’t you, sonny?

FX 38: GLOVES BRUSH SLUSH FROM A WOOL COAT.

107 **PETE:** *(continuing, brisk and matter-of-fact)* Just a fright. It’s all right, Enoch. Go on along now. The line’s backing up behind me.

108 **OFFICER ENOCH:** *(grumbling under his breath)* Loitering... whole lot of ’em...

FX 39: HEAVY BOOTS STOMP AWAY.

109 **PETE:** *(tender, low; never notices Fred)* You all right, Walt? What are you doing out here in the dark anyway? It’s near freezing.

110 **WALT:** *(cracked voice, swallowing his tears)* Just watching the cars, sweetheart.

111 **FREDDIE (NARR):** His eyes never leave Da. “Walt” lets Peter lead him slowly out of the yellow halo of the Treasury lamps. And just before they are swallowed by the winter dark, there’s one last look.

FX 40: DISTANT WIND DOWN THE AVENUE.

112 **FREDDIE (NARR):** Da doesn’t move until they go dark. He climbs up the iron steps, to haul me up onto the platform. He brings me into the warm interior of the horsecar, dropping onto the shabby velvet bench. He’s got no question about this “Walt.” He really doesn’t want to hear anything about it. He just pulls off his glove and presses his icy bare hand around my wet cheek, his breath coming in ragged, shallow gasps. It gives me a toothache. But somehow I can’t push it away.

113 **FRED VAUGHAN:** *(a broken, desperate whisper)* Freddie. Look at me.

FX 41: TRACES GROAN; HORSES DIG IN; CAR LURCHES FORWARD.

114 **FRED VAUGHAN:** When we get home, we are going to tell your mother the truth. No stories about widows, about the Lodge.

115 **FREDDIE:** *(timid, shivering)* Da?

116 **FRED VAUGHAN:** *(hard as an iron spike)* No more tales. We tell her we came to Washington for nothing. We tell her we found an old man who has nothing for us. And we are never, ever coming back.

FX 42: WHEELS SHRIEK ACROSS THE SWITCH; HOOVES SETTLE INTO A STEADY TROT (UNDER).

117 **FREDDIE (NARR):** The horsecar lurches over the crossover switch, swinging away from the White House. We're headed east toward the midnight train. Outside, the flurries begin to pick up, flecking against the panes.

Da wraps his greatcoat around me, pulling me tight against his ribs. Beneath his waistcoat, I can feel it—thumping something terrible. The gift which "Walt" swore was mine.

FX 43: RAILS: CLACK-CLACK; HORSES SNORT (UNDER).

118 **FREDDIE (NARR):** I tuck my chin into my collar and stare down at my empty lap. My mittens are soaked with Washington City slush, black and gritty at the cuffs. Well, now. I didn’t get a wooden horse with real hair. I came all this way just to carry home a father who’s about to break in two.

“Look at the love,” the Comrade commanded me. Every time it echoes, I ask myself what it must mean. I don’t know any kind of love that hurts like an aching tooth and leaves a boy with nothing in his pockets.

All I know is that Da’s hand is resting over mine in the dark, like holding a plank in the ocean.

And he never lets go.

FX 44: TROT AND RAILS FADE UNDER THE WIND… TO SILENCE.

END OF PLAY