

YORK

By

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Production History

***York* premiered at Spokane Civic Theatre's Firth J. Chew Studio Theatre on April 29, 2005, directed by Susan Hardie and performed by David Casteal.**

(At rise: A make-shift tavern/livery stable in St. Louis, *circa* 1811, where Abolitionists and Freedmen gather. There is a hand-painted sign that says “YORK TONITE.” A drummed heartbeat in the darkness slowly builds in tempo. Lights up on YORK, eyes closed, drumming. As the heartbeat nears a fevered pitch, his eyes snap open.)

YORK

[1] My heart tole me somethin' was wrong. Poundin' so hard, woke me up. Near five years ago - summer a '05. Only there's a foot a snow an' flakes comin' down big 's flapjacks. And we're all buried in it 'round the camp pit, with a fire tha's dead out. Except Pryor, who's sittin' 'neath a tree on guard duty, rifle 'cross his lap- froze up. I'm thinkin' the Captain 'ill give him the lash for sure, if he ain't dead already. I climb outa my bag. It's a mean snow. *Summer* snow, Rocky Mountain kind. I go on over to Pryor, kinda protected under this tree. His face's all glazed over. I shake him, an' it sounds like fine China breakin' into pieces. Take my knife and go to chipping the ice away around his eyes an' mouth, 'til I hear this small sound inside him. Like it's coming from down aroun' his knees. He's in there, barely. I straighten him up an' lean him 'gainst a tree, dig around and find the axe an' flint. Cut underbrush 'neath every limb I can find. Then I clear out the pit an' flint it up and pretty soon it's roarin' good. Then I hurry an' cut a coupla strong yokes and drive 'em in on each side a the fire pit, find a limb and tie Pryor to it and lift him up on the yokes over the fire. So I can turn him some, thaw him out. 'Tween turns I dig up Captain Clark and Cap Lewis an' the others, an' stack 'em up next to the pit. I'm dusting the Captain off 'cause I figure he'll be next, bein' I'm responsible for him, when Pryor starts a hollerin' like a banshee. So I know he's done. I'm liftin' him off to get the Captain situated on the spit when there's a hellish roar and this she bear comes a bustin' outa the

trees, headin' straight for Captain Clark. Now, this ain' no regular bear. Make a Kentuck black bear look like a house cat. Well, she sees me an' pulls up sudden like, not three feet away. Standin' on her haunches, 8-10 feet high, teeth long as icicles. An' as she's a ponderin' this black creature, one hand brings my knife up through her middle an' the other reaches in an' yanks her heart out an' shows it to her – still beatin'. That old sow she just nods - almost smiles - an' drops like an oak. Shakes the ground so hard the Captain falls off the spit an' thrashes around in the fire, 'fore I drag him out.

(YORK spots an unseen CAPTAIN CLARK as he enters the tavern/livery.)

YORK

(Seeing CLARK.)

Speak a the devil.

(Returning to his story.)

His hair's a bit singed, but he's fine. I 'member Captain laying there, steam comin' off, staring up at me – lookin' one part mad, the other right grateful-like.

(YORK acknowledges the unseen CLARK again.)

You 'member that Captain? Gentlemen, Captain William Clark, a the Lewis an' Clark Expedition. Yessuh. Now that ain' the look I'm talkin' about.

(Mimicking CLARK's arms-folded military stance.)

Tha' your "bes' come with me or else" look. Don' believe I will, Captain. Maybe you'd like ta tell these fellas one a your own stories 'bout the expedition an' all. Fine by me.

(YORK exits the tavern/livery stable for another time and place, glancing back at CLARK as he leaves.)

YORK

[2] I am called York. My Fa was called York 'fore I was born. After that he was called Old York. Fa said he landed in Yorktown and was sold there. An' thought maybe tha's why.

(YORK is now a child, and continues to transform as his life unfolds – *he is always in the present.*)

Billy, his Fa, Massa Clark, bought Fa on the block. My Ma was from over the Waller plantation. She and Fa jumped the broomstick. After I was born the Wallers sold her. Billy's Fa said they needed the money. None a us saw her again. Aunt Sass tole me once she could see 'er in my eyes. Fa went on an' married Rose, an' they had other chillin. She was never my Ma.

When I was four, Fa an' Aunt Sass walked me on up to the big house to play with Billy. He was six. We went swimming an' had some buttermilk mos' all summer. Then this one day Massa Clark says I's Billy's companion now. Mos' after that I stay at the Cook's place, off the big house. 'Cassionally I'll go down an' stay with Fa an' Rose in slave row, out by the fields. I ask Aunt Sass what's a companion, and she say it's my ticket outa the fields. Tha' I's a house nigger now, and it don' get no better 'n tha'.

Billy an' me play all over the place.

(Suddenly YORK dives for cover, firing a rifle.)

Kew. Aaagh!

(HE falls dead. HE then springs back up, whooping and hollering.)

Billy always scalps me back 'cause I kilt and scalped all his soldiers when they was asleep. He loves ta watch me die. We do lotsa diffen' things. Arm wrestle, go fishin'–

(As in a peeing contest.)

- see who can shoot the furthest in the snow. Then we'll fin' Miz Rulla, the cook, an' get some biscuits an' jam. She acks like we robbin' her, but I don't think she min'. She keeps an eye out on me. Don't see Fa much. Some. He runs the stable mos'ly.

(African drumming slowly fades in, far off. This is *Denabo*, a traditional baby-naming rhythm from Guinea.)

One night I'm stayin' with them down in the row, I wake up an' Fa's gone. When he come back I can see him in the moonlight – puttin' somthin' under the bed. It's a drum. Nex' time I can, I follow him out. He goes off into the woods. I stop at the edge. Can't go on, can't go back. I jus' listen, 'til the moon shows up and shooes me home.

(Picks up a drum.)

I ask Fa what's under the bed, and he say everybody he ever know'd before he got ta this place. He lets me hold it, feel it. Says it's jus' like his Fa's. Says there was a time I was with him an' ma in the woods – when I was a baby. Tha' I can go back 'gain when I'm ready. When he say I'm ready.

(The drumming fades out; YORK drums crudely on the drum.)

Now tha' Billy started schoolin' I'm with Rulla in the kitchen mos' the time. Massa Clark say Rulla can make dirt taste good. I'm her taster. Ain' hard. Mostly she jus' lets me snitch. This one time a visit'r come into the kitchen, has me taste the dinner Rulla's makin', all worried like. Stands around watchin' after I et, so's he knows if I turn sickly. Says if I know if somebody peed in the soup kettle. I can tell Miz Rulla's riled up. After a coupla minutes just standin' there I drop down, like with Billy.

(Plays dead, then recovers and drums ineptly on anything he can.)

Massa 'bout sold me off, tha's wha' Rulla say. Fa whupped me. Billy said he wish he'd been there. Fact is, you can only have so much fun roun' Rulla.

This one day she come in the kitchen like she's on fire and stops me like tha'–

(YORK abruptly stops drumming.)

- say she'd seen niggers' fingers layin' on the groun' for less. Ask me if I wanna walk 'round this way.

(Holds up his hands, palms U.S., with fingers retracted like they've been cut off. As

RULLA:)

Chile, you gotta be usin' your hands, you bes' be pattin' juba. Like this.

(YORK pats juba as RULLA, rapidly clapping his hands, striking his hands on knees, shoulders, etc. in a rhythmic pattern. HE finishes patting as RULLA.)

Says my turn now.

(YORK makes clumsy effort, as himself.)

After tha' we pat juba mos' every day.

(HE pats more adeptly, and finishes patting as well as he did as RULLA.)

Miz Rulla cook even better 'n she pat juba. Pork ribs. Biscuits. Sweet potato pie. Massa's guests'll be walkin' right in the kitchen lookin' fer the recipe. She'll say *pinch a this, none a that*. Rulla ain' about tellin' ya. Ya just have ta watch her. Tha's wha' I do. I'm her taster, an' her watcher.

I'm better 'memberin' what Rulla throws in the kettle than I am with my numbers. When Billy gets home from schoolin', he plays teacher in our fort out back. I do passable, long as there's enough fingers and toes an' the four marks from where the dog bit me tha' time. Tha's my twenty fours – almos' as many as the letters in Billy's speller. He say if he was to practice

enough, he could put down just about anything that might come outa a mouth. ‘Cept maybe a sound that weren’t a word at all, like [*grunting* sound] maybe. Billy shows me how his name looks. I say what “York” look like? He come back from school with it writ on a paper. We put it on his chalkboard. First him, then me. Y-O-R-K. York. Today I’s at the fort waitin’ when Massa show up holdin’ Billy off the ground by his one ear, his speller in the other. Say Billy won’ be a spellin’ with me no more. An’ tha’ it’d be bes’ if I was to call him Massa Billy.

(YORK looks up, then quickly down, and nods.)

Yessuh. Massa Billy.

(Reacts.)

Mas-ter Billy.

(To himself, quietly.)

Tha’s wha’ I said. After that it’s “Billy” when we’re alone, an’ the res’ it’s “Massa Billy.” Then there come a time he say maybe it’s “Massa Billy” all the time. I am called York. Y-O-R-K. York.

[3] I’m ‘leven when the Clarks leave Caroline County, Virginia for Kentucky. ‘Course they take all a us with ‘em. Not easy ta up an’ move a plantation. Miz Rulla has me help with the cookin’ on the trail. Massa Billy, he gets ta hunt along the way. I’m learnin’ to clean squirrel, rabbit, turkey, deer. Has me clean his rifle, too. We settle in Kentucky along the Ohio River. Ole Massa calls it Mulberry Hill. Huh, Rulla calls it the middle a nowhere. There’s a lot a Virginia in Mulberry Hill. Cotton, tobacco. The big house an’ slave row ain’ as fancy. Lot more dust. Plenty a Injuns. Jus’ as soon burn ya out as look at ya. Ole Massa shows me how to handle a rifle, jus’ in case. Asks me if I could kill one if I had to. Yessuh, reckon I could if he’s a comin’ at me, tryin’ ta take our land. The Missus has new clothes made for Massa Billy. Say

he's a gentleman now. Gives me mos' a his old ones. Start callin' me his man servant. Have me watch my posture. How I talk – speak. Say I'm ta start calling him "Massa Clark" now. I'll lay out his clothes, help him dress, mind his horse, order things up for him. People lookin' at me kinda different. Polite-like. Rulla say, *says*, I's a high-flyin' nigger now. I even hafta tell her a thing or two. Her eyes 'bout split me in half, but she do it. I ain't a harmin' you, Miz Rulla.

[4] Now tha' Massa's nineteen he's in the army, fighting Indians up an' down the Ohio. Good enough at it, before long he's a lieutenant. Got his own rifle company. I generally stay back at Mulberry Hill and work the big house, eat my share a the food, an' his. Ole Massa has me doin' what he'll call errands. Tha's how I run across Molly. She works the big house over the Rollins plantation three, four miles down river. I done some tomcattin', but Molly. She's different. Hands like goose down. Aft'r a few months, we're tryin' to get it figured out.

When Massa gets home on leave, I tell him about her. Us. Tha' we'd like to marry. An' can maybe the Clarks buy her up, so's we can live here. He smiles some. Asks me what's wrong with the gals around here. He talks to Ole Massa 'bout it all. Says tha' even if it'd work, there's no room at the big house. Molly'd hafta work the fields.

Massa mighta thought I had it too good, 'cause he's starts taking me out with him. Oh, I don' do no fightin', or wear a uniform. Got a horse. World looks a whole lot different from a horse. I help with the meals – one eye on the kettle, other on the tree line.

There's always new soldiers comin' an' goin' in the company. At supper somebody calls out *who made this?* Pretty soon here he comes again – *No, who made this?* Massa, he throws a thumb my way, and this Ensign go *Boy, this is the best grub I've had since Virginia.* Asks me how come my prairie chicken tastes like grain-fed banty? Oh, pinch a this, none a that. The right wood, some sweetgrass tucked here an' there. Ensign Lewis, that's his name. He wakes up

askin' 'bout supper. Massa says soldiers ought not be worrin' about their belly in the middle of Indian country. Should be thinkin' 'bout keepin' their hair. Ensign Lewis likes Massa. Says he knows soldierin'.

[5] Massa left the army ta get back ta the family business. Not goin' all that good from what I can tell. I see Molly when I can. Don' think Massa likes workin' Mulberry Hill. Itchy mos' the time. Ensign Lewis'll write him now and then from back Virginia way. Only he's a Captain now, an' works for President Jefferson in Washington City. Yeah, President Jefferson. Kinda like his man servant, only he's white an' called a *secertary*. Every now and then, we go back over Cumberland Gap ta visit Massa's family, see Captain Lewis. This time Massa says he's dining with Captain Lewis an' the President, and tha' I'm the cook – no, he say *chef*. A carriage picks me up, an' a high-yella woman named Sally takes me to market. One a the President's servants. Says he's partial to seafood, so I settle on Rulla's gumbo. She's passed, but I can still taste her gumbo. We get some shrimp, clams, scallops, cod, - eel. Pinch a this, none a that. Sally says she heard the President licked his bowl.

(YORK begins exercising, starting with sit ups. His efforts are labored, but he steadily improves and rounds into shape.)

Near as I can tell, that's how I ended up here. Massa gets this letter from Captain Lewis. Wants to know if Massa'll go with him. Head up a expedition for the President. To the Northwest - Louisiana Territory. Up the Mississippi, on up some other rivers way ta the other side, an' on back down. Another ocean even. Find a way to get there and back. Massa, he's all stirred up. Says it'll take two years. Says Captain Lewis an' the President wan' me to go - ta cook some. Tha' Molly'll have to wait. I can see he's dead set. Shows me this map. I can't figure it. Looks like nothin' but space is all.

It's months getting' ready. See Molly few more times. Seems like maybe we oughta do somethin' She says I better come back. Give me this.

(YORK indicates a kerchief.)

Massa an' me head out on down the Ohio. Captain Lewis catches up with us at Louisville. He's got this boat, fifty maybe sixty feet long. Keelboat. Says takes twenty men to move it up river, 'less there's wind to fill the sail. There's a couple big, wide canoes made. Pirogues. They go hirin' along the Ohio, on up the Mississippi, all the way past St. Louis. Swear in over forty men. Tell 'em you're workin' for the 'Nited States now. Get themselves an interpreter, for some a the Indians up river. Guess we're gonna try talkin' to them. Massa and Captain Lewis have us gettin' in what they call condition. All day long, some days. Talk about how the men 're soldiers now. Privates, sergeants, like that. Me, I'm just me. Massa says I gotta do the same as the others anyway, an' that I'll be with Sgt. Floyd's squad. Says we gotta be ready to swim up the Missouri if we have to.

(HE stops exercising.)

[6] That's where we're goin'. Up the *Mizzurah*, *Miz-e-ry*. Anyway, that's it there, 'cross the Mississip'. You can see where it comes in, muddy an' all. This's Camp Wood. We're laid up here 'til spring. Not much to do. Exercise. Pack, unpack, re-pack. Target practice. Sometimes ya jus' sit and watch the water go by. I can see why there might be an ocean at the end of it on down there. Makes you wonder where it all comes from. Guess we'll find out. Captain Lewis says there's mountains up there taller 'n clouds. So high it rains an' snows an' a river comes right out a the ground.

In the evening there's meetings. Usually 'round when the Captains hand out a whiskey to the soldiers. Yeah, Massa's called Captain now, seein' how he an' Captain Lewis are both in charge. Anyway, they all get a ration a whiskey.

(Indicating.)

'Bout this much, a gill. Sometime Massa'll give me his share. It helps you sleep on a cold night. Coupla times I get my own when I'm top marksman for the day. Tonight the last men 're sworn in. Then Massa calls me up next to him.

(YORK, as CLARK; he stands erect, a definite military bearing.)

I will say this once. You've all met York. He is mine. My servant. And you'll treat him that way. Like you're dealing with me. He is not your servant, or your enemy. If there are any problems – there will be no problems.

(YORK as himself, again.)

Nobody says nothin'. Mos' everybody in Sgt. Floyd's squad call me York. Others jus' say nigger. The problem is where ya look. With Massa an' his family - maybe three, four folks at a time - you can pretty much keep it right.

(YORK looks down.)

But when you're 'round forty men. I tried doin' like I always do, 'til I run into a cross beam, opened up my head. Now I look up, kinda *out*. Sgt. Floyd says look where I havta look so I don' kill myself, or who gonna cook for the squad.

[7] There's plenty ta look at, now that we're headed up river. You could use three, four more eyes jus' ta keep up. But there ain' time workin' the keelboat. First thing I learned - you gonna go discoverin', do it downriver. On four hours, off one. If you're not rowin', you're polin', when the water's too shallow. An' there's us'llly somebody up front, on the bow line.

'Bout three days out we come on these shallows. Private Newman say why don't I take the front on the bow line, seein' I'm the strongest a the bunch. Felt good. 'Til Sgt. Floyd ask me at supper if I seen any snakes yet? Says he talked to Newman, put an end to that. Tole' him I appreciated it. Sgt. Floyd, he's a decent man.

Wasn't too long, word gets out our squad's got the best mess. Oh, we'll have elk, deer, bear like the res', but I'll dress it up some. Wild onion, sage, some greens. Throw in a little catfish, too. Captain Lewis takes me aroun' to show the others. Nuthin' fancy. Mos'ly big chunks a meat over a fire. Burn some a the red out. Rowin' and polin' thirty miles a day, ya need eight, nine pounds a meat jus' ta keep up. Sometime, we give it to 'em on a stick, with a handful a salt.

[8] Need so much meat we spend mos' our time out huntin'. It's easier now. We come up on this draw, there they are. Maybe a hundred. I seen hides before, but never a real one. Buffalo. The meat's good an' tender. Strange beast. Head twice 's big as their back end. Like the Creator ran outa ideas half way. The easy part is a buffalo don' spook like a elk or deer. You can pretty much get right up on 'em. The hard part, they're tough to kill.

(Indicating.)

Hide this thick. You get 'em right behind the ear, they'll drop like that. Rest a the herd 'ill just keep on grazin'. Hit 'em near anywhere else, it's a long day. They'll gather 'round the wounded one, off they go. Chase 'em for hours. When you finally run 'em into the ground, you might be a mile from camp. Happened today. Private Newman said a gust came up. Said he got sand in his eyes jus' when he was set ta shoot. Took us all afternoon. We're sitting around the fire after supper having our drink, he says it again, about the sand. I could see some lookin' at each other. Sgt. Floyd say *Newman, you was born with sand in your eyes*. We all get ta laughin' an' –

(YORK falls backwards, reacting to sand being thrown in his eyes. He regains his feet, and one eye remains shut through much of the following.)

Hey Wha'!

(YORK groans.)

Wha' you – wha's he doin'?!

(To unseen NEWMAN.)

We was *all* laughin' Newman! I can laugh – you got no right throwin' sand aroun'! Not my idea a fun! This look like fun?!!

(YORK is being restrained; when released he walks upstage, and paces furiously.)

I'll be fine. Lemme be! Said lemme be!! Peckerwood.

(Regaining his composure.)

[9] Massa says Newman tole him it was a joke. Huh. Leas' he moved him to Sgt. Ordway's squad. My left eye's swoll shut for days. Captain Lewis' doctoring' it. He's taking care a Sgt. Floyd, too. Nothin' happened. One day he's fine, next he's poorly. Captain Lewis can't figure it.

Funny thing about the Captain. Gener'lly, he ain' aroun' the men much. You'll see him mos' 'long the shore. Got his walkin' stick, a sack, his big ol' black dog, Seaman. Collectin' specimens - plants, rocks, animals. At night he's off with his contraptions, measurin' the stars, markin' his charts. Figurin' where we are. Sgt. Pryor always tells him *we're right here, Captain*. If it's cloudy, seem like he don' know wha' ta do with hisself. I think maybe that's why Massa's here - ta deal with the rest a us.

But if somebody's sick or hurt, Captain Lewis' right there. Trouble is, with Sgt. Floyd he don' know what to do. He's tried a coupla potions. Nothin'. I'm around 'cause Sarge has me

help out callin' beats for the keelboat. For rowin' an' polin'. He might do a five count, maybe a seven count, dependin' on the current. So's we keep together.

(YORK counts cadence.)

One-two-three-four/five-six-seven. When he took sick, asked if I'd do it, with my voice 'an all. Massa said I could. One-two-three-four/five-six-seven. Sarge lay in the bottom a the boat an' kept an eye on me that first day. Don' have to do it all the time. Jus' when they get off some. One-two-three-four/five-six-seven. Reminds me a harvest – singing ta keep time. I'll walk down from the big house just ta hear 'em. They might be out pickin' cotton, or in the barn shuckin' corn.

(YORK sings a slave song.)

We all workin' in the rows, Lord
'Fore the sun is on our face
Pickin' all that grows, Lord
'Til night, she find this place

After all the crops 're in
Leaves 're dryin' in the shed
Cotton's in the gin, Lord
We climb into our bed.

Sarge sleeps mos' the time now. River feels like molasses. Takes 'bout all we got jus' to keep her nose straight. I set aside the numbers an' foun' some words. Seem like I saw Sarge smile.

(YORK sings the river song.)

We gon' row on through the sweat
Pull until we shiver
Can't stop a movin' yet, Lord
Gotta get beyon' this river.

O'er the mountains to the sea
An' there'n back again
Just lookin' to be free, Lord
An' for the journey's end.

An' for the journey's end.

Sgt. Floyd passed this mornin'. Tole Massa he'd like to be buried up on tha' bluff. Tole me to dig deep, so's the wolves don' get him. Private Gass is takin' his place.

[10] As we move up river things keep changin'. It's hot. Hot, hot. No 'mount of shade 'll make it go away. Leas' there's fruit now, along the shore. Blackberries, grapes, wild plums. An' Indians. First one we see, everybody grabs his rifle. Get all het up. He's standin' on the bank eatin' a plum. Massa calls out to him, and lifts up the flag and waves it all 'round. He spits the seed in the water, and walks on up a draw. Come to find out, he's an *Oto*.

The Captains meet up with the Otos, but not much happens. There 're only a couple hundred of them. They say mos' 've been killed off by the sickness. Even so, everybody's jumpy, that's what Sgt. Gass calls it. There 're more of them than us. Captain Lewis's in his uniform 'an all, an' gives this speech about how we've been sent by the Great White Chief, from the seventeen nations of America. They hand out some flags, buttons, mirrors – give a couple a chiefs medals with President Jefferson's picture on one side. Don' look like him. I'm mainly 'round the keelboat an' pirogues, standin' guard. A couple Otos come down and stare 'an go on back up.

Upriver we run 'cross the *Yanktons*. More of them than the Otos. Could prob'ly kill us all if they have a min'. Captain Lewis gives his talk, and this trader translates. Their chiefs 're all dressed up like somethin' from a book, or maybe a dream. The Captains hand out some more stuff and then we all sit aroun' an' they make us a feast – dog. Sgt. Pryor keeps askin' the translator if it's wolf, but it keeps comin' back dog. Pryor keeps insistin' he's eatin' wolf, bu' he throws up dog. Seaman growled all through supper.

(Through the following YORK takes off his shirt.)

The Chiefs ask the Captains for guns, an' powder an' ball. Captains tell 'em they'll come in time, but now we gotta go on upriver and fin' a way to the great water. Heard Massa tell Captain Lewis later there ain' gonna be no guns. Massa has me stand aroun' some with my shirt off. Lets 'em touch me. Mos' just stood there, 'fraid-like. One of 'em rubbed on me a little.

Now, the *Lakota* are somethin' different. Massa says there must be two thousan', you count up all the lodges. Captain Lewis does the us'al speechifyin' an' hands out his medals and geegaws to the Chiefs. They don' seem to understand a word. If they do, they don' much like it. We smile some, they smile some, an' 'fore you know there's grumblin', an' the next thing they're lined up 'long the bank with their bows an' a few rifles, an' we're mos' out in the middle a the river at battle stations. Captain Lewis's about to light the cannon on the bow. I'm standin' by the Captain and he says for me ta go like this –

(YORK raises his fists menacingly, and hoots and hollers. Indian singing and drumming fades in.)

Tha' was it. It calms down. One Chief raises his hand, then another. Then we're eatin' an' drinkin' with 'em, 'an tonight they dance for us. I'm mos'ly down at the keelboat, but hearin' it remin's me some of a the woods back in Caroline County. They get grumpy one more time 'fore we left, but they let us on through.

(Singing and drumming fades out. YORK puts shirt back on.)

[11] There's frost in the mornin' now, shirtsleeves by mid-day. The trees are turnin'. The land. Looks like at the beginning, like in the Bible. Feels like tha' grace the preachers talk about. Massa an' Captain Lewis are talkin' more an' more about winter. How we gotta make it up aroun' the *Mandans* before the snows. First there's the *Ricarees*. Massa an' Captain Lewis wan' me to be there when we meet 'em. Seems like more we get upriver, the more interested

they are in me. Massa says tha' it's a help. 'N fact, he says he's gonna innerduce me to the Ricarees different, like they captured me. That maybe if I ack like it, they'll leave us be. I say what you mean? He says just ack like you was a caught animal, an' how they are.

(YORK suddenly bounds around, grunting and bellowing ferociously. This grows in intensity until he stops abruptly. Silence.)

Captains say that mighta been a little more than they was lookin' for. Tha' it was supposta be a joke. Didn't feel like one. Ricarees don' think so. Think they're gonna be my supper. One chief off'rs me three of his wives. Together. I think the Captains know how I feel.

[12] I come back this afternoon from huntin', start on supper. Private Newman's tied to this tree, a kerchief in his mouth. He don' look so good. Seems the Captains 're tryin' him for what they call mutiny. They're overseein' the evidence an' nine a the men, headed up by Sgt. Ordway, 'll decide if he's guilty. Captain Lewis reads this charge from a paper: *Private Newman uttered repeated expressions of a highly criminal and mutinous nature about Captain William Clark and Captain Meriwether Lewis.*

Differen' ones start swearin' to what they heard. About *me*. How Private Newman's sayin' around how Massa was wrong in bringin' me. An' Captain Lewis too. Tha' I'm gettin' special treatment. Three, four 've got lashes, I ain' got one. Tha' no nigger should have a rifle. Or call him names. An' tha' I'm poisonin' 'em all with my niggerfood. That they should tie my hands an' feet, throw me in the river, see if I can make St. Louis. Newman says he jus' sayin' what everybody else is thinkin'. Never thought he'd have to listen to a nigger, or look at one all day long.

Massa's red as a beet. The nine of 'em go off under tha' cottonwood over there an' smoke an' talk awhile. Pretty soon they're back an' Sgt. Ordway says Private Newman's guilty.

Newman calls ‘em a bunch a hens. Seventy-five lashes tomorrow noon, an’ he’s out a the Corp. Be sent down river firs’ chance.

(Sound of a man being whipped, with muted cries.)

Don’t see why he jus’ didn’t keep his mouth shut. Stupid. Can’ say I wouldn’ take a turn on the whip. Massa-thank you. *It’s got nothing to do with you, York. Nothing.* Yessuh, Massa he sure good at soldierin’.

(YORK is upset.)

[13] Seems though everybody keepin’ ta themselves these days. River’s pushin’ back hard. We’ve seen the first snow. We’re tired and ready to sleep. Got this feelin’ in my throat I can’ figure, like I swallowed a prickly pear. Wonder if maybe it’s what killed Sgt. Floyd. Not feelin’ poorly, jus’ differen’.

There’s Mandan all along the river now, both sides. The Captains set us up on the North side, ‘cross from one a the villages. There’s a good stand of timber to build the winter fort, an’ the river out front for protection. It’s not the Mandans got us worried. It’s the Lakota, maybe the *Blackfeet*. Kinda like to see these Blackfeet. It takes a month to build it. I ain’ much with an axe, so I mos’ly hunt an’ cook.

(MANDAN singing and drumming fades in.)

The village ‘cross the river has us over regular. There’s food an’ games an’ dancing. Talkin’s hard. Lotta pointin’, drawin’ pictures on the groun’, more pointin’. Some traders ‘re around. They’ll interpret for the Captains. We’re mos’ly on our own. Me an’ Massa hunt with Chief *Sheheke*. He likes me. Calls me *York-a*. A trader tole Massa the Chief thinks I’m Big Medicine.

(YORK shrugs.)

Tonight the Mandans dance for us. Sheheke points for me ta join in. Massa wants tha' I should.

(YORK is dancing now.)

I dance on down the river. Pas' St. Louis, on up the Ohio. Grab me Molly an' we swim back here, build a hut on the South bank.

(YORK stops dancing, and the singing and drumming fade out.)

The Captains spend mos' a the winter writing 'fficial stuff for President Jefferson. Gonna send it back down in Spring, with the keelboat an' some a the men. Sheheke 's helpin' Massa draw a map of what's upriver. Pryor does a letter for me to Molly. Guess she'll get somebody to tell her about it. I got a buffalo hide to send on down for her.

Mainly I think 'bout what's up there. The water that makes the great noise, the white bear, stony mountains. Places where only Indians been, or nobody. I ain' afraid. Ya wonder an' all.

(Indicating his throat.)

Only I can' figure this.

We're waitin' for the snow ta melt an' the river ta thaw. Sheheke asks Massa if I could stay on with him in the village a while. He just kinda looks away and nods. We hunt an' send meat back across to the fort. I stay with Sheheke an' his family.

(MANDAN singing and drumming; YORK picks up an Indian drum & stick.)

He give me this.

(YORK drums with the stick, in sync with the Mandan drumming.)

A white trader married to a Mandan says this is a song of welcoming. For me. I feel it running through me. There's other songs. About warriors. The Sundance. One for the buffalo. The story of the Mandan downriver, and their journey to this place. I hear another sound.

(YORK has set the stick down and strikes the drum with his hand. The MANDAN singing and drumming stops. Silence, as YORK takes in the reaction of the MANDAN. HE strikes the drum again. More silence.)

Inside me.

(YORK strikes the drum a third time.)

In my bones.

(African drumming fades up and YORK picks up the beat. This is *Soliwoulen*, meaning Red Panther, a traditional fetish rhythm of the Malinke people. The sound is distinctly African.)

I'm with Fa, and my mother. I can feel the warmth of the fire. There's a circle like this one, with many voices. Surrounded by trees. My mother sways and sings with the others. A song I do not understand. Only the drum talk speaks to me. I tell Sheheke about this, the drum under Fa's bed.

(Drawing the shape of the drum on the ground.)

What it looks like. Its shape, feel, sound. He smiles. The next morning he takes me across the river and we find the Cottonwood. We fell this tree, and bring its heart back to the village.

Together we carve it up, hollow it out. Polish it with stones. Sheheke kills the antelope. We work its hide, then weave the tethers, tie it off.

(YORK reveals the African drum he and Sheheke have made. As Sheheke:)

This is for York-a drum talk. Thank you Sheheke. Thank you.

(YORK drums the beginning rhythms of *Sak Paka Sét*, which in Creole means “That Which Cannot Be Done.” This is an original rhythm played in the spirit of traditional West African DJembe. His drumming is increasingly intense and complex. After some headway, he stops drumming. The Mandan singing and drumming is back, and continues softly underneath.)

Our last night in the village Sheheke asks me about the tribes downriver, that live with the white man. About their life. I have the trader tell him he must ask the Captains about this. That I am not the one to say. This is true. It feels like a lie.

(Mandan singing and drumming fades out.)

[14] There is a trader living in the fort with us. Toussaint Charbonneau. He has two wives with him. One’s a slave Massa calls Janey. She was stole from the *Snake* Indians by the *Hidasta*. Charbonneau bought her from them. Captain Lewis is mos’ly with her now. It’s her first chile, an’ it don’ seem ta wanna come out. When he can’t, he has me stay with her.

(A conversation with the unseen Sacagawea.)

Captain - Lewis - is - asleep.

(YORK mimes sleeping, and sees she understands.)

You’re - Janey. I am -

(Confused, shaking his head “no.”)

No? Not Janey? I’m sor – what?

(Listens.)

Massa calls you Janey. Massa is my . . . owner.

- Captain Lewis, no. Captain Lewis, Captain Clark. Massa the other Captain.

(Waves off miming sleeping.)

No, no - the other one.

(Stands erect, military-like, imitating Captain Clark, then smiles.)

Yes. Captain - Clark.

(Listens.)

No – Janey. *Sa-*

(Attempting to repeat name.)

Sac-

(Starts again, repeating what he hears.)

Sa-cah-

(Again.)

Sa-cah-ga-we-ah. Sacagawea. Sacagawea. No Janey. Sacagawea. See why he calls you Janey.

Sacagawea. Me? My name? I am called York.

(YORK shakes off SACAGAWEA's reaction to his name.)

No. York.

(A flicker of doubt.)

York.

[15] It's a boy. Charbonneau calls him Jean Baptiste. Sacagawea says he's Pompy. I think tha's Snake. Something about his hair. He's got this head of hair.

We leave soon. The river's breaking up. You can hear the ice at night, grinding. It jams, then busts loose. The keelboat took off downriver with Captain Lewis's spec'mens, the maps, Newman. My letter for Molly, the buffalo hide.

(To the unseen CAPTAIN CLARK, with his drum in hand.)

Yessir. They're all ready. Sacagawea an' Pompy, too.

(Indicating the drum.)

It's mine. Sheheke helped me.

(YORK shows the underside of the drum to Captain Clark, filled with moccasins, a hat, personal effects, etc.; CLARK is stalemated.)

I keep my things in it. Thank you, Massa. I was wonderin' ... With the men now, sir. I'm wonderin' if I could call you "Captain" now. Like the others, an' Captain Lewis. Seein's how you're both Captains, sir.

(Responding, as CLARK leaves.)

Thank you, Captain. I appreciate it. Seem like I oughta still be able to see Billy in the Captain somewhere. But he's gone.

[16] It's good to have the river under us again. We've got six canoes and two pirogues.

There's thirty-three of us, with Sacagawea an' Pompoy. Captain Clark says we paddle 'til we run out a river. Then we'll get horses from the Snake to get over the mountains. Gotta find them first. Guess Sacagawea'll help with tha'. Cap Lewis still sticks to shore mos' a the time. I join him when I can. Everybody's in good spirits.

(YORK is paddling.)

The river's smooth an' quiet, the plains green, sun warm. Spring calves all around – deer, elk, buffalo. It's like we're passin' right through heaven. Make thirty miles on a good day. You can feel the land start ta squeeze the river a little more, as we climb. Hafta keep our back in it, each stroke long and deep. One, then another. Lotta talk about horses. How many we need. What the Snake 've got. The bes' kind. How mares 're easier. Reubin wan's a paint, Winsor a sorrel.

That all stops when we see this white bear come boundin' down the bank an' scoop up an elk calf like it was a rabbit. Carry it off in its teeth. Cap Lewis says he'd rather fight two Indians

than one of them bear. Yessir, it's bear talk after that. I stick some with Cap Lewis. You can walk ten miles, not say a word. Fine by me.

River's down in a canyon now. Cliffs all 'round. Captain an' me come up on this point, and they 'bout knock us flat. *That's them, York. The Rocky Mountains.* That snow!?! Captain says he can' find the words. He's sittin' over there trying to write it out.

(Perhaps feeling his throat.)

Say this, they can make a body wanna cry. An' we're goin' over them. You do that, you done something.

Seeing 'em, I got a better idea what this 's all about. Guess I need to know what's over there. Don' know why. Don't care. Jus seems like it might be a whole lot better than what's on this side.

[17] (YORK is paddling again.)

The river's more res'less now, one rapid after another. Some days we only see the sun for a few hours, 'cause a the walls an' all. Almos' like we're bein' watched. Faces comin' right outa the cliffs. Like maybe they calling out to you. *You ain' goin' up there!* Oh, yes I am. Man, Reubin – to your left! Left, man, left. Quick. More, more. Other side.

(Calls out.)

Oh, yes I am!

(To REUBIN.)

Right, right, right! Yes, yes. Push it, push it! Clear. Right, right, right, right – left! Good, good! Level it out. Reubin, stay right, we're left. Level it! Rocks! *Eeeeh!* Right, right, right!!! *Ooohhh!* Mercy.

(YORK lays his paddle across his knees.)

Never talked to a white man like that. Thought he might crack me one with his paddle. He jus' looks back an' half smiles. Like we did all right.

[18] Takes a month to get around the Falls. Five in all. River's all crimped up, this ragin' white beast. Luggin' everything we got through rattlesnake and prickly pear. The Rockies look like you could touch 'em. Snow up there, in July.

(YORK drums idly on anything nearby, picking up *Sak Paka Sét* where he left off.)

Pryor says we get to the top, stand on our tip-toes, we'll see the Pacific. Ain' there yet.

(Drumming stops.)

[19] Now that' we're back on the river, don' seem like no time before we're where the Missouri starts up. Three rivers come together here. Cap Lewis says we're three thousand miles from St. Louis. We're all tired. Water's shallow. Game's hard to find. Captain Clark's sick. We're restin' up again – for the last piece over the mountains. The Captains been takin' turns goin' out lookin' for the Snake. Gotta be close. Sacagawea recognizes this place as where she was stole. The Captains decide to go up the river on the right. They name it Jefferson's River. Sacagawea shakes her head when they tell us this. Her husband translates. She says you don't give somethin' a name, you learn it. Says this river is *Sond-do-wha Bank-we* – Cut Fish Place. Says she's even learned my name – *Doo-quey-na Na-do-wa*, Raven's Son. *Doo-quey-na Na-do-wa*.

Cap Lewis went on over the top a the mountain with three or four a the men. They're back with some Snake. They've been telling them about Sacagawea, and me. The Snake wanna see us. Captain says no Columbia yet, on the other side – jus' more mountains. Lots of 'em – far as you can see. We get horses, or turn back.

The Snake help us move our camp on over the top. We leave the canoes behind, and everything we don't need. Captain Clark has men walk all around me and Sacagawea and Pompy. Like they're protecting us. Wants me to be Big Medicine.

(Indicating drum.)

Use this, get us horses. The Snake gather 'round.

(YORK has his drum. He intersperses his remarks with drumming, speaking with confidence and warmth. This drum rhythm is *Sunu*, a traditional Mali rhythm historically used for weddings and gatherings.)

I am *Doo-quey-na Na-do-wa*, Raven's Son. We have traveled far – up the rivers and over the mountains. We go on to the great water.

(Glancing at CLARK and other men.)

And I am a silly man, yes?! I need horses. Many horses! I will trade with you, make big promises. Do not question *Doo-quey-na Na-do-wa*. Do not fight me. I am Raven's Son.

(Now talking to the Snake, *and* the Captains and Corp.)

And no one – none of you – will ever call me nigger. None of you – ever again!

(YORK indicates he's finished.)

We get twenty nine horses. It's not jus' me. We feed 'em and promise 'em guns from the White traders to come. It helps that one of the chiefs is Sacagawea's brother. She saw the birthmark on his shoulder.

[20] The Captains are right about the horses. There's hundreds of miles of mountains. We trade for fresh ones with the *Salish*. They're friendly, and don't bother me. It snowed two inches the other day, and its only September. Everybody's tired an' crabby. There's no game. We're on our third horse, name a Sally. Pryor says tastes better than dog.

[21] We move fast now, down hill, and come out on the flats an' the *Nez Perce*. They say this river connects us to the Columbia. Don' start off too good. Firs' one touches me –

(YORK pulls a knife.)

Now why'd I go do that?

(YORK rubs his own skin intensely.)

This is me. See! Me. All me.

The Nez Perce call me *Tse-mook-tse-mook-To-to-kean*. Sacagawea thinks it means Black Indian. *Tse-mook-tse-mook-To-to-kean*.

We stay long enough to rest, fill our bellies with roots and dried fish, an' make the canoes we need. The Captains brand the horses, so we can get them on the way back. Two Nez Perce chiefs come along to guide us.

(YORK is lying down.)

They sleep on each side of me at night, and touch me when they think I'm not awake. Rub my arms. Feel my head.

(YORK growls, gently.)

That usually does it. They want my power. I like dark moonless nights the best. The stars move slowly across the sky. Everything is black.

[22] We race down the rivers now. The Clearwater, Snake, Columbia. Pryor says it's like a horse smelling the barn. There are tribes along the way, both sides, *Wanapum*, *Yakima*, *Umatilla*. We walk around some falls, some we go right on through. We ain' gonna sink, not now.

There's talk about the river's end, and the ocean. Ships. The Captains say there might be ships. The water slows, turns salty. I'm with Sacagawea, Pompy, an' Captain Clark. He says if

there's a ship, it could take us home. No one's tole us this. It has ta be a trade ship from the 'Nited States. I never been on one. Fa has. To Yorktown. From . . .? I know it. He talked of it . . .

The ocean pushes back. We paddle harder, then stop. Leave our canoes on a point, walk up the hill. The Pacific. The Pacific! Some sing an' dance. There's nothing left to drink. Some pick berries, or look for ships. Pryor wan's me ta play.

(YORK drums *Sak Paka Sét*, amidst shouts of joy.)

Aaaahhh!!! I want to eat an elk. Touch Molly. Sleep for days. Dive into the ocean. Swim to, swim to, to - *Senegambia*. Yes, *Senegambia*.

(YORK has stopped drumming.)

[23] Fort Clatsup. We had it up by Christmas. It rains every day. Rain, rain, rain. There is no ship. We're here 'til spring, when we can head back. We hunt, make moccasins for the trip home. Mos'ly we wait.

We start on the North bank of the river. Too wet, no meat.

(Calling out his "vote.")

Hey! I say we go across, to the South bank. So does Sacagawea – and Pompy.

(Explaining.)

He pointed!

You either dream or worry. Can' find the inbetween. Lotta talk about money. What the soldiers 'll get paid when we get back. Maybe some land, too. Pryor says I should get somethin'. The Captains haven't said. I guess I done as much as the next. Maybe I'll have enough, get both me an' Molly free. Heard there's some freed Blacks 'round St. Louis. We

could go there. Ah, don' even know she's still in'ersted. Make my way back four thousand miles, might hear she's Mrs. Molly so-and-so.

Pryor says ya gotta believe. Might do jus' as well headin' up the coast, or down. Set up on my own. Pryor, you ever think 'bout tha'? He 'bout choked on his jerky. *Sure I think about it – don' go sayin' it out loud. You're talkin' runaway. You're talkin' desertion.* Never catch me. *They can kill ya for that.* They can kill ya quick, or kill ya slow.

[24] It's sunny today. I'm collectin' spec'mins with Cap Lewis. Ask him wha' he thinks 'bout when we get back. Wha' Captain Clark'll do with me. Says he don' know. *Don' do anything foolish. I'll talk to the Captain, see what he has in mind.* Wan's me to be patient. Don' go rilin' things. Says for a fact President Jefferson don' like slav'ry. Tha' it's gonna end, when conditions is right. Talkin' 'bout what he calls the *ec'nomics* of it all. Openin' up the country out here could change things. *Be patient, York. Nothing foolish.*

[25] Now tha' we're on the way back, things're better. No time to think or fret. Walk or paddle all day, dog tired at night. Oh, still lotta talk 'bout money. White men sure love ta talk 'bout money. Black men might too, if we ever had any. How much I deserve, how much I'll get, how I'm gonna spend it, how I'm gonna save it. Whose gonna bury it, whose gonna put it in a bank. Crim'ny, Ruben so busy calculatin' walks right into a rock cracks his big toe. I'm not talkin' 'bout it to Captain Clark. Be patient.

We get back over the top a the mountains, our canoes are still where we hid them. Helps knowin' it's downhill 'gain. We move right along. Only trouble's when Captain Lewis an' a couple a the men come across some Blackfeet, an' he has ta kill one to get away. Then he's out huntin' with Cruzette an' gets shot – right here.

(Indicating rear end.)

Can' sit down. Got two holes where the ball went clear through. Not funny, leas' when he's around. Says Cruzette took him for an elk. Cruzette says he knows a elk when he sees one. Captain Clark and I fix him up, change his dressin', private-like. I don' say a word. Think about maybe like I'm polishin' a boot.

Cap Lewis can sit an' all by the time we get back to the Mandans. Walks kinda careful. Tells Sheheke it's a bunion. Sheheke's comin' on back down with us. Goin' to Washington City ta see President Jefferson. We leave Sacagawea an' Pompy an' Charboneau off with the Mandans. Good bye, Sacagawea. Thank you. *Good bye, Doo-quey-na Na-do-wa.* Captains have us stop an' pay our respects to Sgt. Floyd.

Farther down we get, the more boats an' people. They're all along the Mississippi now. There's cheerin', an' whiskey an' rum. This one fella singing a song goin' 'round St. Louis 'bout how we all died. Last fifty miles one celebration after 'nother. A Black man come up to me. Never seen him before – tears in his eyes.

(Indicating throat.)

Got that prickly pear right here. Seems like we jus' 'bout float inta St. Louis over the water. Captains put on their bes' dress, swords an' all. Big crowd yellin' an' clappin'. Have us salute as we climb out on the dock.

(YORK hesitates, then salutes.)

[26] St. Louis' bigger than I remember. Captain says we'll be here a while, 'fore we head to Mulberry Hill. He's got ceremonies an' reports an' business to tend ta. Don' like the idea of me takin' a pass an' goin' on ahead. Pryor helps me send a letter over ta Molly 'bout bein' safe an' comin' home.

We're all famous now. Even me. Tellin' stories aroun' town, in the taverns an' such. Give us all the food an' drink we can swallow. Some'll pay jus' to have us aroun' their place, draw a crowd. Oh, I get plenty a looks walkin' aroun', an' they took my knife away.

(YORK crosses near the make-shift tavern/livery stable; the "YORK TONITE" sign is once again visible.)

I been goin' regular to this livery where Freedman an' Abolitionists gather for a drink or two. You gotta know where it is, an' how to get there. Some place. Everybody sittin' side by side. Laughin' together. They wanna hear 'bout the West an' wha' I done. How I survived. I tell 'em stories about the grizzly, the Falls, the Rocky Mountains. They us'llly pass the hat when I'm done. 'Til Captain finds out, an' says he better not catch me roun' here no more.

(YORK leaves the make-shift tavern/livery stable area.)

A letter come back tha' Molly's still waitin'. Leas' he says we can get married no time, once we're home. After tha', he an' I are goin' on ta Virginia an' Washington City. Cap Lewis already headed out with Sheheke ta see the President. We're suppose ta catch up with him there. St. Louis might be jus' fine for me an' Molly.

[27] Oh, she looks good. Real good. The wedding's at Mulberry Hill, at the big house. Fa and Rose are here. Must be fifty a us from here an' the Rollins. The Captain says a few words, an' there's a roast pig for later.

(YORK, beaming as he takes his vows.)

I solemnly swear
Tha' I take Molly
Ta be my wife
'Til death or distance do we part.

(YORK jumps backwards, "over a broomstick.")

I jumped the broomstick higher than Molly. Says she's fine with me bein' boss an' all. We stay on down at slave row a few days 'til she has to get back over to the Rollins place. I go to an' fro after tha', in the evenin'.

[28] Captain, I was wonderin' 'bout Molly an' me. Wants me to call him Massa now. Says he talked to Rollins an' he can' buy her. Man won' be reas'nable, wan's too much. How much - maybe I could come up with it. Says he done his bes', an' tha's the end of it. An' we're leavin' for Virginia tomorra.

Wha' if I get some pay from the gov'ment, like the res'? For the expedition. Pryor says I might. Yessuh, I was lucky, bu' I worked hard bein' lucky. I know. Pryor prob'ly like bein' President. Cap Lewis'll do wha's right. What I get, I'll give to get Molly free - an' maybe me if there's some left over.

You could give me my papers. Then I'd work an' buy Molly. The docks in St. Louis. Tell stories, too. People'll pay to hear about you an' Cap Lewis - wha' ya done. Don' worry me none - I can sneak 'round to see her. I'll take my chances. Wouldn' have to, if you'd buy her up. I'm not talkin' 'bout other slaves! Talkin' 'bout my wife. He walked right out a the room. I can' see where Captain Lewis done a thing.

(African drumming fades in softly - *Kuku*, a traditional West African rhythm. YORK has his drum.)

These woods. Seems like the trees gather 'round, lean in ta hear the stories. I show this to Fa and the others. Tell 'em 'bout Sheheke an' the Mandans, an' the drumtalk in my bones. They tell me about their villages - in Senegambia, Mali, Gana. The place of my grandparents. Fa's name in Senegambia - *Wadaba*, Panther. Tha' he and my Ma were from different places, so

there was no naming time for me when I was born. Jus' danger 'an' confusion. I tell them I found my name. *Doo-quey-na Na-do-wa*, Raven's Son.

(YORK then drums *Fara Banka*, a traditional Mali rhythm, played as a rite of passage.)

I leave my drum with Fa. Captain won't let me bring it along. Captain Lewis writes that when we get ta Washington City, there'll be a dinner with the President, an' I'm to chef again. Maybe Cap Lewis has a plan.

[29] After the Rockies, goin' over Cumberland Gap to Virginia ain' much. We stay awhile in Caroline County, visitin'. It's months 'fore we get to Washington City. We miss the big celebration for the expedition. Seems Congress already set the pay an' all for the expedition. Wasn' even on the list. Like I was never there. See Captain Lewis, he says we'll all be back together in St. Louis. He's gonna be the Governor of Louisiana Territory, an' Captain Clark Superintendent of Indian Affairs. In St. Louis.

Captain Lewis talkin', he's lookin' all aroun' me. You can see he's not feelin' right with it all.

[30] Captain gets me new clothes, boots, an' a hat for dinner at the White House. Says cost him twenty dollars. Sally says the President wan's somethin' wild, like wha' we ate 'long the trail. We get some venison, an' other fixin's, an' I spend the day in the kitchen. Come afternoon I ask her if I could see him, check about dinner. She takes me on up to his readin' room.

Mister President. Yessuh, York, sir. It has been, sir. Near three years. Yessuh, quite a time. I though' you might wanna know 'bout dinner. We got venison stew, biscuits, greens. An' sweet potato pie. It's pretty close. There's no fresh sage, but pretty close. Thank you, sir.

Mister President, I'm wonderin' if you'd tell Captain Clark ta let me go. Set me free. He won' do it. An' I thought maybe ... See, you got him goin' back to St. Louis, an' Molly's in

Louisville so we won't – Molly, yes, my wife. Her owner's in – No, he didn' promise. Captain Lewis said I should wait 'til we get back an' - Captain Clark ain' gonna do it! An' now St. Louis. You *could* if you had a min'. If you tole him, he'd do it. Then, you, you got your own slaves. I got no pay, no land, no journal to write ta make me rich. I got me, an' a wife tha's gonna be somewhere else.

(YORK turns to go, then stops.)

Sally had nuthin' to do with this. Fella out front showin' people 'round. Talkin' 'bout how you wrote this declaration an' all. Shame on you, Mr. President. Shame on you.

I tole 'em in the kitchen not to eat the venison stew. Might find it on the salty side.

(YORK returns to the make-shift tavern/livery stable, with "YORK TONITE" sign. He has his drum, and drum rhythms punctuate the following, to the end of the play.)

[31] So, here we are 'gain. Good to be back. Don' think Superintendent Clark knows I'm in town. Reckon he'll find out soon enough. St. Louis ain' that big. My pass is only good along the river, so he might figure you're harborin' a runaway. So, all a you here free? More 'an I can say. Any you white men here still own one a us? Good. Don' talk ta no white man still own a slave. Got nuthin' ta tell me, I got nothin' to say.

Got some new stories – more adventures with Lewis an' Clark. Let's see now. Some a you mighta been 'round couple years ago when we get back from Washington City, Superintendent an' me. I tell him, lemme stay at Mulberry Hill, work the home place, be near Molly. What I do in St. Louis, bu' clean boots, empty chamberpots. Superintendent say this where I belong. Huh! What I end up doin' - cleanin' boots, emptyin' chamberpots. Then he finds me in here las' year. R'member, I'm tellin' my grizzly story. Follows me outside beats me

silly. Calls me sulky an' all. Yeah, you know – you saw it! Think he figured I'd hit back an' he'd be rid a me – sell me off then an' there.

Suppose Governor Lewis felt good 'bout talkin' him inta hirin' me out for a year to Louisville, 'stead a sellin' me. That's where I been. Governor said leas' you'll be near Molly. Prob'ly thought tha' squared us up. He had his own problems, I guess. But Superintendent Clark, he gets the las' laugh. Finds him the meanest, ugliest Massa in Louisville. Been a whole year with an animal don't know but three words – *nigger do this*. Seein' Molly once a week all there was keep a man sane. Then one night she's gone. Took down river ta Nachez. Sold on the block. 'Til death or distance do us part.

Now I'm back. What he gonna do with me now. He too busy superintendin'. Huh! Can' even get Sheheke back up ta his people – takes three years. Firs' time, sends Pryor up there with a handful a men. Ricarees laughed 'em back down the river. Takes Governor Lewis an army to get him up to the Mandans. Wouldn' even let me near Sheheke while he's here.

(YORK, to an unseen CLARK.)

Well, Billy. Come on in. Jus' got here. Got my papers – can' read 'em, but there they are.

(Tosses them on the floor.)

Sorry to hear 'bout Cap Lewis. He was a better man than you. I r'member him bes' leanin' back against tha' rock, tryin' ta write about those mountains.

Oh, I'm goin'. Not with you. We can talk 'bout it here, or outside - *jus' the two a us*. Suit yourself.

(YORK begins the final African drum rhythm, an improvisational rhythm that is interspersed with the dialogue.)

Have a seat. Fa say in his village, when it comes time to start a journey, the elders'll play to feed the spirit, give it strength. Purpose.

You're not my Massa now Billy. I'm free. I declare myself free. On my way back, stopped off to say goodbye to Fa an' Rose. Asked if they'd come along. Said no. Enough for them to get to the woods when they can. Not me.

Got thirty dollars here for tha' canoe a yours down at the dock. I won' steal it.

(Tosses money on floor.)

Goin' up river Billy, where I belong. You can say wha' you like 'bout me - bu' lemme be. Gonna stop off an' tell Sheheke the truth – what I didn' tell him before, what you wouldn' let him see. Tha' when you're done with 'em, they'll be gone. Or jus' like us. I can' fix it, and I won' live with it no more.

(Drumming stops.)

Goin' up river, Billy. It's the only way. Up river.

(YORK is gone.)

END OF PLAY

(Through 5/6/06, Rev.)