

GRAY CHAMPIONS

SCRIPT EXCERPTS

LAUNCHING A GREAT AWAKENING

DATE: JUNE, 1733

Age of Thomas: 80

Age of ALEXANDER and ELIZA: 60

Age of MARGARET: 40

Age of JOHN STOCKWOOD, and his bride SARAH: 20

ALEXANDER

Mrs. Stockwood, where, if you please, has John gone?

ELIZA

With the young Miss Sarah Green, to Germantown, for a church gathering of some kind.

ALEXANDER

When was this?

ELIZA

(softly) Yesterday.

ALEXANDER

What?!

ELIZA

I know, they are not married, but she is our son's beloved, and, lately, his betrothed.

ALEXANDER

I will not hear of any plans about marriage, not until after John returns from England, with his education.

ELIZA

You are too harsh with your son. He is young, and in love, and full of such boundless passion. And yesterday, like today, was such a good and bright day.

ALEXANDER

Bright, yes. Good, I think not. I just came from town, where I witnessed a young preacher with a large crowd, proclaiming God in everything and everywhere, up each staircase and down every cellar. He found God in places you and I have never bothered to look.

ELIZA

In a church?

ALEXANDER

So one would think, but no. That young zealot started at the commons, and soon moved through the town, gathering worshippers. You would be apt to think him a madman just broke from his chains, a large mob at his heels, singing all the way through the streets, he with his hands extended, his head thrown back, and his eyes up to heaven, attended with so much disorder that his followers looked more like a company of Bacchanalians after a mad frolic, than sober Christians who had been worshipping God.

ELIZA

My sister is arriving today with my father, from Williamsburg. I hope no one blocks their carriage.

(SARAH and JOHN enter, excitedly.)

JOHN

Mother, father, the fervor is striking our town like a flash of lightning upon our hearts. It is wonderful to see the change. A New Jerusalem has begun to come down from heaven. All the world is growing religious.

ALEXANDER

(with disgust) It is impossible to relate the convulsions into which we could be thrown.

JOHN

O may our land be free from every accursed thing and be purged from all its sins! May we be truly a holy people, and all our towns places of righteousness!

ELIZA

(gesturing towards Sarah) John, if you will...

SARAH

My new mother, my new father. O what a lovely day this is.

ALEXANDER

What is meant by those words, "new mother, new father"?

JOHN

Sarah and I felt such a rapture on this morning, that we asked to be, and were, bonded in marriage.

ELIZA

This is true?

SARAH

True as my love for your son.

ALEXANDER

Where, and by whose hand, did this occur?

JOHN

By the preacher, in the commons.

SARAH

In a wonderful place, full of wonderful people.

ALEXANDER

Not including Mrs. Stockwood and myself.

JOHN

We knew you would not approve.

HEADING TOWARD CIVIL WAR

DATE: JULY, 1850

Age of ALDON AND ELLA: 85

Age of MARGARET: 65

Age of JOHN STOCKWOOD III, and his wife SARAH: 45

Age of TOM: 25

SARAH

Abolition is more John's interest than mine. Two years ago, in '48, I was at Seneca Falls, and I now speak loudly of women's rights.

MARGARET

Where did you and John meet?

SARAH

Along the canal in New York. The burntover district, where we together became Transcendentalist. Newly married, I went with John to the commune at Brook Farm.

ELLA

(chuckling) Frogpondium. John's exploded scheme for beginning the life of Paradise anew

SARAH

(chuckling) At Brook Farm, John's hair was parted in the middle and falling upon his shoulders. He and the other men were clad in garments such as no human being ever wore before.

ELLA

A simmering metamorphosis.

SARAH

Where we lost the world but began to find ourselves. We were lonely, but full of piety, with a profound sense of the dignity and worth of our souls. We repelled influence, and shunned general society, yet I, as a young woman, also felt a strange disappointment.

(JOHN returns, with a large pistol, unseen by the three women.)

One query I have is how John speaks ill only of slavery, and not of a woman's circumstance. Even so, our women's movement is growing strong.

JOHN

(threatening, playfully) Denounce men's cruelty to women, to which every female heart must revolt.

(JOHN aims the pistol at the three women.)

We live in an age of romance

SARAH

Where some men are better at poetry than at making love.
(SARAH and ELLA laugh. MARGARET looks sternly at JOHN.)

MARGARET

That is *my* pistol.

JOHN

It fell out of your bag.

MARGARET

'Twas made in the forges of Richmond, recently given to my father by Robert E. Lee. It's a gift, from my father to yours.

ELLA

Alden, look. **(ELLA gently shakes ALDEN'S arm.)** Margaret brought you a gift.
(ALDEN rousts briefly, then closes his eyes again.)

JOHN

Quite an unusual gift, for a Southern to give a Northerner. Of what use should we make of it?

(JOHN aims the pistol around the room.)

To catch your wayward slaves?

ELLA

John!

(JOHN aims the pistol arounds the room, and mocks firing it.)

JOHN

Southrons come in only two sorts. The *fire-eaters*. And the timid, imitative, tame, driveling, appeasing *traitors*.

(MARGARET puts down her pencil and paper.)

MARGARET

You were born with a knife in your brain. Quiet this talk of war, even in jest. Like you, we have fanatics in the South. But there are others in Richmond who, like me, seek to the middle course, to adopt such measures of conciliation as would harmonize conflicting interests.

JOHN

If there is to be war, no mortal can stay it. War shatters everything flimsy and shifty, sets aside all false issues. Let it search, let it grind, let it overturn. Sarah, what say we lay waste to the whole South, and punish it to its innermost recesses?

MARGARET

All society is formed upon the principle of mutual concession, politeness, comity, and courtesy. Life itself is but a compromise.

JOHN

Compromise! Compromise! Why, I am sick at the very idea.

MARGARET

One trembles to think of that mysterious thing in your soul, the vindictiveness with which you could carry on your wars, and the misery and desolation that could follow in their train.

JOHN

A half-slave union is a covenant with death, an agreement with hell.

MARGARET

Why be so harsh and uncompromising?

JOHN

As harsh as truth, and as uncompromising as justice. To wake up a nation slumbering in the lap of moral death.

SARAH

John is right. Important principles may and must be inflexible.

MARGARET

There are those, in Richmond, who would demand secession.

SARAH

And how should Philadelphia answer?

MARGARET

Say, "Wayward sisters, depart in peace."

JOHN

I prefer to wield the trump of God. Instruments of war are not selected for their harmlessness.

REACTING TO HIROSHIMA

DATE: AUGUST, 1945

Age of MARGE: 85

Age of JOHN STOCKWOOD III, and his wife SARAH: 65

Age of TONY: 45

Age of ALEC and ELINOR: 25

(JOHN and ALAN enter. JOHN is holding a newspaper.)

SARAH

Hi, John.

(SARAH notices JOHN's look of concern, mirrored by ALAN.)

ELLIE

What's wrong?

ALAN

We dropped an A-bomb on Hiroshima.

(ALAN shows the others a newspaper.)

MARGE

Dear God.

TONY

The buck stopped there.

JOHN

Alan, read them what President Truman said.

ALAN

(reading) "The world will note that the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, a military base."

TONY

A military base? Play on with the violins.

(TONY mimics a violinist.)

ALAN

(reading) "We wished in this first attack to avoid, insofar as possible, the killing of civilians."

MARGE

(in shock) What a wreck of all my beliefs in civilization. I had thought the worst had become impossible. But no. *(fighting back tears)* The tide that bore us along has taken us to this as its grand Niagara.

SARAH

If bad men can be got rid of only by killing them, then the killing had to be done. There had to be some dying before the wrongs of this war can be thoroughly righted.

TONY

On the razor-edge of danger.

ALAN

(reading) "That attack is only a warning of things to come."

(ALAN puts down the newspaper. MARGE picks up her book and pen and starts writing.)

JOHN

The Almighty God gave us stout hearts and strong arms with which we struck mighty blows for freedom and truth. Once war was forced upon us, there was no other alternative than to apply every available means to bring it to a swift end. War's very object is victory, and in war there is no substitute for victory. There has never been, there never can be, successful compromise between good and evil. Only total victory can reward the champions of tolerance, and decency, and freedom, and faith.

TONY

That is pure fanaticism, pure delusion, like the Crusades.

MARGE

What about the peace?

ALAN

We'll win that too. America is now the world's paramount power.

TONY

Superman and his superpower nation. So what else are we gonna do to Japan?

JOHN

Provide a Christian occupation, bringing the Japanese people the solace and hope and faith of Christian morals.

MARGE

Confirm thy soul in self-control.

TONY

This could unleash a spirit of rising brutality.

SARAH

There is but one side to a moral question, Tony. Which side do you take?

TONY

What is moral is what you feel good after, and what is immoral is what you feel bad after. Which makes me ask. Alan, was this the big secret was you were working on?

ALAN

(to **JOHN**) Can I tell him?

JOHN

Yes, Tony, it was. I was involved, too. It was called the Manhattan Project.

ALAN

Our scientists worked on it for two years, not knowing whether what they were creating would destroy the world or save it. Questions began to be raised, by some in Congress, over the legitimacy of expenditures, and father was well aware that massive unexplained sums and secret presidential decisions could have led to investigations that would have crippled the war effort.

ELLEN

We won the war with science.

TONY

While leaving it to others to build up, little by little, bit by bit, the precious thing you smashed to atoms.

ALAN

Now I wish we could find a technology of human behavior.

JOHN

We must strive, always, for perfection, as we examine this A-bomb in terms of a new relationship with the universe. We can gain lasting peace only if we proceed with the understanding, the confidence, and the courage which flow from conviction. God has given to our country a faith which has become the hope of all peoples in an anguished world.

TONY

Everything depends on the uses to which it's put.

JOHN

In this most worldly of worlds, the greatest guide of all is moral principle, and some principles are paramount. Always, duty, honor, country. Always, blood, and sweat, and tears, as we seek the way and the light and the truth. Always in our ears ring the ominous words of Plato, that wisest of all philosophers, "Only the dead have seen the end of war."

TONY

Translation?

JOHN

I cannot, with candor, tell you that all is well with the world. The difficulty is not in bearing our ills, but in knowing what ills are necessary. I must return to Washington.
(**JOHN exits.**)

TONY

I must return to another planet.

Isn't he glowing and beautiful like fire? **SARAH**

One of the World War II wise men. **ELLIE**

I don't grow wise. I grow careful. **TONY**

REMEMBERING A RECENT CRISIS

DATE: SEPTEMBER, 2040

Age of JOHN STOCKWOOD IV, and his wife SARAH: 95

Age of TODD: 75

Age of ALEC and ELINOR: 55

Age of MARISSA: 35

TODD

Where to start?

MARISSA

How about at the beginning?

TODD

I wasn't alive then, but not a problem, everybody knows how the story started. Their parents won a big scary war and decided to celebrate by having kids. A lot of kids. So many, so fast, that pretty soon some magazine called it the Great American Boom.

MARISSA

Hence their name.

TODD

Boom boom boom, kid kid kid. And those soldier-hero dadies and rosey-the-riveter momsies were damned if they were gonna raise their little boom-boom kids to follow a guy like Hitler or Stalin. They called it "feeding on demand." Baby cries, baby gets fed. Baby cries, baby gets fed. Kid sniffles, kid gets a hug. Teenybop whines, teenybop gets away with murder. Worked like a charm. Momsy-dadsy did everything for 'em, lunch buckets, mop buckets, work duty house duty, office duty kitchen duty, duty duty and more duty duty, while the little "Leave it to Beaver" kept playin' away.

MARISSA

I've seen those old TV shows.

TODD

Then came the sixties. And hippies. Who reinvented music, pot, flowers, peace, love, long hair, and sex, in no particular order, usually all at once, but sex was their main thing, first, last, and always. You woulda thought no other generation in history had ever had sex, except maybe by accident, and probably only once, just to beget whoever had to get begatted to create all of *them*. And, damn them, those boom-boomers came along right between the pill and AIDS.

MARISSA

Lucky them.

TODD

Yeah, every way but one. Vietnam. For once they little boom-boomer yelled and didn't get his way. That's when things turned ugly. Hippies became yippies, full of moral reasons to have their days of rage, and the crime rate, well, let's say it wasn't all peace and love any more. Especially toward momsy-dadsy, who cut outta there and went to Sun City. It was around then that I had the copious good luck to get born.

MARISSA

Funny time.

TODD

For them maybe, but not for anybody conceived in the mud at Woodstock, or in the treetops during that San Francisco Summer of Love. They made us the nasty little children of the evil-child movie era. Check out *Rosemary's Baby*. We were evil even as fetuses. Then the country checked outta Vietnam, the Beatles sang "Let it be," and those grown up fed-on-demand babies morphed into deeply spiritual people, who thought they could close their eyes and hum their way to heaven. Communes, born-again, bran-eaters, fire-eaters, whatever-eaters, soon they got a little tired of that game and became yuppies, young upwardly-mobile professionals, a.k.a. home-buyers, wine-tasters, and money-mongers.

MARISSA

Happens to others too, doesn't it?

TODD

Maybe, but name me one generation that ever tried to syrup their lives full of so much *meaning*. It's as though some great deity, force of nature, or ancestral legend had entrusted them, the boom-boom kids, to fix all civilization for all time, to re-invent everything that had anything to do with life, as though nobody else had ever lived it before.

MARISSA

Call it progress.

TODD

Or something. Sure, they invented the salad bar, but who got fat? Sure, they invented 'choice,' but who got rich? Whatever they did, they acted like they were doing it absolutely perfectly, when in fact they were creating giant messes that everybody else could see, but not them.

MARISSA

Aren't you being a little harsh?

TODD

Me? Harsh? What about them? What about their gender gaps, and their culture wars, and their red zones and blue zones, and their talking heads, no, make that their screaming heads? Talk the talk, rant the rant, scream the scream.

MARISSA

Sounds like you know how to rant, too.

MARISSA

Were they hippies?

ALEC

Long hair? Oh yeah. They used to admit it, they went over the top. I've seen the photos.

MARISSA

Were they big culture warriors?

ALEC

Oh, they argued with people a lot, but I never minded it all that much.

MARISSA

So you got along with them OK?

ALEC

Sure did.

MARISSA

They say, no parents ever got along better with their kids than all the Johns and Sarahs.

TODD

Which made totally zero sense. Look at their first two presidents, and how they treated you. First, you had a president who couldn't behave who told you to behave, then you had a president who wasn't smart tryin' to tell you to be smart.

MARISSA

(chuckling) Compared to you, they *did* behave, and *were* smart.
(The door opens, and JOHN enters, pushing a walker. SARAH enters, in a wheelchair that is pushed by ELINOR.)

ELINOR

Dad, mom, look who's here?

MARISSA

Hello.

TODD

Hello.

SARAH

(from chorus of "Hello, Goodbye")
HELLO HELLO. I DON'T KNOW WHY YOU SAY GOODBYE, I SAY...

JOHN

(interrupting) Hello.

SARAH

(from "Hello I Love You")

HELLO, I LOVE YOU
WON'T YOU TELL ME YOUR NAME?

MARISSA

Marissa. *(to ELINOR)* Does she do that a lot?

ELINOR

All the time. She still knows all the songs she knew as a teenager.

ALEC

It's the only part of her brain that still works.

ELINOR

You should have heard her yesterday.

(ALEC tries to shush ELINOR, belatedly.)

SARAH

(from "Yesterday," starting with the second word)

ALL MY TROUBLES SEEMED SO FAR AWAY
NOW IT LOOKS AS THOUGH THEY'RE HERE TO...

JOHN

(interrupting) What day is today?

ELINOR

Thursday.