

Hard To Be Won

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A new musical  
Book and lyrics by Selah DeGering  
Score by Amy Loertscher

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A new musical  
8 women, 7 men, 1 boy

SAMPLE

## Cast of Characters

Elizabeth Keckly	A mixed race woman.
Rose	Late teens/early twenties. Apprentice to Elizabeth. African American.
George	10. A white boy with curly hair. Double cast with Willie.
Older George	16. A white boy with curly hair.
Abraham Lincoln	A middle-aged white man.
Mary Lincoln	A middle-aged white woman.
Willie Lincoln	10. Abraham and Mary Lincoln's son. Double cast with George.
White Ensemble	3 women, 3 men. Caucasian. Used to play bit parts. (Bookeep, Anne, Master Garland, Mistress Garland)
Black Ensemble	3 women, 3 men. African-American. Used to play bit parts. (James, St. Louis residents, Freedmen)

In front of a bookshop on a busy street in Washington D.C., 1868. The window advertises in big letters, “LINCOLN WHITE HOUSE TELL-ALL! BEHIND THE SCENES BY ELIZABETH KECKLEY”, behind which is a large display of books. Passersby look at the sky and wince as it begins to rain. Many cover their heads with newspapers or pull out umbrellas.

ELIZABETH

I just can't believe it.

A disgruntled WHITE MAN struggling to open his umbrella stops.

WHITE MAN

Do yourself a favor and spare the read.

ELIZABETH

Excuse me?

The man opens the bookshop door. ELIZABETH sees he has a book.

ELIZABETH

What are you doing with that?

WHITE MAN

Better return it than give it to you.

ELIZABETH

You didn't like it?

WHITE MAN

Why do you care?

ELIZABETH

I wrote it.

WHITE MAN

My review.

He throws the book at ELIZABETH's feet and spits on it before he exits. Thunder and lightning. Pouring rain. ELIZABETH picks up the book. Enter BOOKKEEP, from the door of the shop. He takes down the signs. The book display is empty.

ELIZABETH

What are you doing?

BOOKEEP

Publisher's pulled it.

ELIZABETH

What? Why? No, stop-

Enter WHITE WOMAN. BLACK WOMAN, BLACK MAN, and WHITE MAN are pedestrians on the street.

BOOKEEP

I'm sorry, Mrs. Keckly. It's over.

A vicious crack of thunder. BOOKEEP exits into the shop, shutting the door in ELIZABETH's face.

*Because of You:*

*Elizabeth is confronted by white passerby, condemning her for her book. Elizabeth protests that she is a free woman; has she not the right to use her voice?*

As *Because of You* crescendos, the ensemble points accusatory fingers at ELIZABETH. The music cuts out with a school bell tolling. All the ensemble members sit and raise their hands in the same moment. ELIZABETH is a teacher, a professor at the UNIVERSITY OF OHIO. She sighs in exasperation.

ELIZABETH

Y'all got me rambling again. Congratulations, school is out.

Elizabeth erases the book display sign leaving only her name; the display is now revealed to be a chalkboard. ELIZABETH writes "DRESSMAKING 101" on the board, and erases "ELIZABETH." In its place, she writes "PROFESSOR."

ELIZABETH

Doesn't that look good? Professor. Professuh Keckly. What my daddy wouldn't have done to have a title like that in his day. He died a slave, buried in an unmarked grave, or perhaps not buried at all. Mother, too, a slave. My son, bless his soul, dumped in a hole someplace, died fighting to free his brothers. And me, well. If Professor gets me anything, let's hope it's a tombstone. Daddy was a good man, a hard worker. A poet in his own right, you know, he could read, and pen a letter. My mother, too. Those were star-crossed lovers if I ever met 'em. Sold apart, never again to see one another in the flesh. When I was a girl, he wrote me something once, it said...it said, "Tell my Little Lizzy to be a good girl, and to learn her book." He wrote. "and not to think that because I am bound so far that God's not able to open the way." ...He died before that way came to pass. Before our good Moses brought down those commandments of Emancipation from that great Capitol Hill. What a man he was, that Abraham Lincoln. Don't tell anybody, but I knew him well. That man... I'm a Professor, and he's six feet under. It's funny how life goes on after the world ends.

ELIZABETH sits on her desk, suddenly realizing how vulnerable she's become. She composes herself.

ELIZABETH

Well, I guess most of y'all have made yourselves comfortable, huh? End of the day, young people with nothing to do? I don't believe it. Daddy said to learn my book, and I wrote one. It's banned. Banned-banned, like "it's out of print and they burned all the copies" banned. Most of them.

ELIZABETH winks.

ELIZABETH

It's a pretty good read, I mean, if you've got the time... Or, since we're here... I hate to talk about myself, but y'all wanna hear the story?

ELIZABETH waits for applause.

ELIZABETH

Sorry, I can't tell. Is that a yes?

ELIZABETH waits for louder applause.

ELIZABETH

Alright, alright, I'll tell you! It's a little slow to start, but it gets better, I promise.

*In That Day:*

*A White Ensemble enters to bring the stage into a new time, the 1840s, singing and dancing about how beautiful Antebellum America is. A Black Ensemble enters to add detail, including the slave trade and persecution even in their most sacred of spaces. The two ensembles convene over their differing perspectives, echoing one another in struggle over very different problems. For the White Ensemble, the Civil War and their rights being challenged by the government. The Black Ensemble shares similar feelings but with richer, older tones about their own freedom and personhood.*

The ENSEMBLE exits, leaving ELIZABETH alone.

ELIZABETH

Welcome to Virginia, somewhere in the 1840s, about. I came upon this Earth free in God-like thought, but fettered in action. A slave. I belonged to a lawyer and his proud and noble family. My sewing kept them alive.

GEORGE (offstage)

Mama!

ELIZABETH

And my little Georgie kept me at the Lord's door.

Enter GEORGE, who runs into ELIZABETH's arms.

ELIZABETH

What's wrong?

MASTER GARLAND

Lizzy!

ELIZABETH

What did you say?

Enter MASTER GARLAND

ELIZABETH

Yes, sir?

MASTER GARLAND

Unhand that child at once.

ELIZABETH

What for?

MASTER GARLAND

A lesson in respect.

ELIZABETH

He'll apologize straightaway. Humbly.

GEORGE pouts. ELIZABETH spansks him.

GEORGE

I'm sorry, sir.

MASTER GARLAND

He disrespected my son.

ELIZABETH

How?

MASTER GARLAND

He disrespected me.



ELIZABETH

Hugh is no Master, sir.

MASTER GARLAND wrenches GEORGE from  
ELIZABETH.

ELIZABETH

You'd act on his word alone?

MASTER GARLAND

You callin' Hugh a liar?

ELIZABETH

No, sir.

MASTER GARLAND raises his hand.  
ELIZABETH flinches a little.

MASTER GARLAND

That's what I thought.

GEORGE

I didn't mean it, please-

ELIZABETH

It's alright, baby.

GEORGE

Mama!

Exit MASTER GARLAND and GEORGE.  
ELIZABETH looks away.

MISTRESS GARLAND

Lizzy!

Enter MISTRESS GARLAND.

ELIZABETH

Yes, ma'am?

MISTRESS GARLAND talks in an animated fashion, but no sound comes out; ELIZABETH talks over her to the audience.

ELIZABETH

(to the audience) I had worked for many women of a certain kind and Mistress Garland was little different. All that was ever required of me, really, was to smile falsely and nod, and appear to take on with great seriousness and gravity the anxieties that weighed the delicate shoulders of The White Lady. Fail to do so, and-

MISTRESS GARLAND gives ELIZABETH a purse.

MISTRESS GARLAND

Don't dawdle now, either. Tonight, I said, the club is tonight. If you disappoint me, Lizzy, I swear-

ELIZABETH

I won't.

MISTRESS GARLAND takes a breath, clutching ELIZABETH as a grounding point. She speaks softly.

MISTRESS GARLAND

You're right. You're right. I should...I should sit down. I mean it, though, Lizzy. Oh, dear...

MISTRESS GARLAND bites her glove. ELIZABETH pries herself out of MISTRESS GARLAND's hands with a grimace and ventures into St. Louis, where the ENSEMBLES mill intermixed.

ELIZABETH

(to the audience) And then there was the Other World, what appeared to me like a pocket of paradise. In St. Louis, there were colored people- free people, who looked and thought like me. It was bold of me to seek to own anything at that time, but at that time...I wanted to swallow St. Louis whole.

*Free Blacks of St. Louis:  
Elizabeth enters St. Louis, a town largely composed  
of free black people with their own businesses and  
livelihoods. Everyone is happy and pursuing  
success; Elizabeth is both flattered and  
flabbergasted that she fits in with them. This is what  
her life could look like- what she will do everything  
in her power to achieve. Enter James, suave and  
romantic. He offers her a flower.*

JAMES

Go on, take it.

ELIZABETH

That's very kind, but I can't pay.

JAMES

That purse full of rocks?

ELIZABETH

No, my mistress sent me to buy some things, and-

JAMES

A gift.

ELIZABETH

Oh.

ELIZABETH takes the rose.

ELIZABETH

(to the audience) I had never met such a man.

JAMES

You've got that green about you.

ELIZABETH

Green?

JAMES

Like a spring day. Can I show you around?

ELIZABETH

(to the audience) He was persistent. He chased me for years, and I took a fancy to him for it.

JAMES

Let me give you the tour.

ELIZABETH

(to the audience) He was handsome and he knew it. Charming, and he knew it.

JAMES

Come on, I'll show you the ropes.

ELIZABETH

I can find my own way. (to the audience) And he knew it. But not all was as it seemed. As you can guess, he was a liar, a cheat, and all around a rotten, evil man.

JAMES ensnares ELIZABETH, their dancing now a difficult, staggering thing. He's kissing her, grabbing her; ELIZABETH is not enjoying herself.

ELIZABETH

And you know what?

ELIZABETH slams her foot on his. JAMES yowls.

ELIZABETH

He wasn't much of a dancer. Or a husband, for that matter.

JAMES stumbles, exiting.

JAMES

Ain't seen the last of me, woman!

ELIZABETH

Ain't smelled the last of you, either!

ELIZABETH wafts the stench of alcohol out of her face. She shudders.

ELIZABETH

After I handled the “husband,” I had yet another man in my life to take care of. –Not like that. My son. A teenager, now, and not so quick to grab at my skirts for comfort as he was to scowl upon my face.

Enter OLDER GEORGE. The ENSEMBLE  
continues milling about.

OLDER GEORGE

Why are we dawdling out here?

ELIZABETH

Georgie-

OLDER GEORGE

Stop calling me that.

ELIZABETH

Mr. Whittaker should meet us here soon.

OLDER GEORGE

Have me followin’ you like a mule on a lead.

ELIZABETH

Some might take that lead and string you up by it.

OLDER GEORGE

I’m smarter than that.

ELIZABETH

Smart enough to act right, or enough not to get caught?

OLDER GEORGE

Ain’t followin’ nobody.

ELIZABETH

Won’t be kept by nobody either. A free man, George Keckly.

OLDER GEORGE

Kirkland.

ELIZABETH

Excuse me?

OLDER GEORGE

I go by my white name.

ELIZABETH

Half white.

OLDER GEORGE

Half free.

ELIZABETH

Half black.

OLDER GEORGE

I should've been born free. I have free blood in me, I should be free.

ELIZABETH

Stick with me and you will. (to the audience) Like it or not, he was still a boy deep down. Rowdy and restless with a bleeding heart.

GEORGE flips a coin.

ELIZABETH

One silver piece was all it would take for us to board a ferry and cross the river. A hundred silver pieces would purchase our freedom papers and a ferry. Lucky for me, George had enough sense to know that.

OLDER GEORGE

How many we got?

ELIZABETH

Not enough. Mistress Garland says if we get six testaments to our good character, she'll let us work to raise it.

OLDER GEORGE

And work here, too? My grandchildren will be dead before we make, what? A thousand dollars?

ELIZABETH

Thirteen hundred. And no, not here. In the city. New York.

GEORGE drops his disinterested facade.

OLDER GEORGE

New York City?

ELIZABETH

If we get six testaments signed.

OLDER GEORGE

How many we got of them?

ELIZABETH hides a grin.

ELIZABETH

Here, I'll check. One...here, hold this.

ELIZABETH rummages through her bag. She hands GEORGE a paper. She counts them theatrically.

ELIZABETH

One, two, three, four...

OLDER GEORGE

Oh my Lord.

ELIZABETH

We got five, baby.

GEORGE looks through them incredulously. He looks at his mother.

OLDER GEORGE

That's...that's one more.

ELIZABETH

You'll get a job, ride the train, meet city girls-

OLDER GEORGE cringes.

OLDER GEORGE

Ugh, Ma, no-

ELIZABETH

A free man, George...Kirkland, if that's what you choose.

OLDER GEORGE hugs his mother desperately.

ELIZABETH is shocked; she doesn't know what to do with her hands. Before she can respond, GEORGE lets her go. He straightens himself out and composes himself.

OLDER GEORGE

We can't do no thousand dollars- thirteen hundred, whatever -but we can do this. One more.

WHITE MAN, Mr. Whittaker, enters.

WHITE MAN

Sorry for the wait, the missus had a screw loose.

ELIZABETH

I understand.

WHITE MAN

You have that pledge-testament thing? The paper?

ELIZABETH

Yes, sir. Thank you so much.

ELIZABETH fishes for the last paper out of her bag. WHITE MAN purses his lips. Flustered, ELIZABETH looks faster. GEORGE flips through the papers he has and comes up with a blank one.

OLDER GEORGE

Mama.