

ABIGAIL

OR



THE GOLD MEDAL

A Play by Patrick Young
With Music by Bob Ashley

The Press on

ABIGAIL, or THE GOLD MEDAL

"A folk melodrama that really happened." By Patrick Young, with music by Bob Ashley. Produced by the Lighthouse Festival Theatre, Port Dover, Ontario, June 19-July 7, 1990. Directed by Simon Johnston, with set and costume design by Roderick Hillier, musical direction by Bob Ashley, lighting design by Al Anderson, and stage management by Judy Uwiera. Starring Jennette White, with Reg Dreger, Larry Jannison, Mark Latter, Andrew Lewarne, Victoria Shaffelburg, and Pete Windrem.

A fascinating portrait of the woman behind the legend. Although the famous rescue remains the central focus of the play, it is Abigail herself who is at the very heart of the story, [which is] as much a love story as an historical adventure.... Jennette White is simply stunning in the title role.... An imaginative set ... an effective soundscape ... It's an experience not to be missed.

— *Simcoe Reformer*

There's a genuineness — particularly in the title performance — and a noticeable ensemble commitment that makes *Abigail, or The Gold Medal* a thoughtful and commendable opener to the Lighthouse Festival Theatre's 10th season ... directed by ... Simon Johnston in epic terms, with choral speaking, a chanted refrain, [and] dramatic background music, on a hilly stage with sails, rigging, and a mast that collapses during a storm.... Author Young's play is heroic stuff ... at its best [in] stylized ensemble scenes of derring-do....

— *Hamilton Spectator*

One of the most effective moments comes when Reg Dreger, as Abigail's husband Jeremiah, wrestles with the idea of moving his family to Long Point.... Such emotion is far more compelling than any battle with a body of water.

— *London Free Press*

Ambitious theatre.... This is a play which forces you to pay attention.

— *Six Nations Tekawennake*

Abigail, or The Gold Medal ... focusses on the selfless devotion of a woman to her husband and family ... a role brilliantly brought to life by Jennette White.... Subtlety and depth.... The script is very strong, with well placed bits of humour to lighten the at times heavy melodrama.... Gripping storm.... The final scene and Abigail's soliloquy are enough to move even the coldest-hearted cynic.

— *Port Dover Maple Leaf*

Bravo to the Lighthouse Festival Theatre!

— *Brantford Expositor*

ABIGAIL

or

The Gold Medal

"a folk melodrama that really happened"

by

PATRICK YOUNG

with music by

BOB ASHLEY

Fourth (Production) Draft, June-July 1990
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ABIGAIL, or THE GOLD MEDAL

THE PLAY WAS COMMISSIONED

by the Lighthouse Festival Theatre, Port Dover, Ontario, under the Artistic Direction of Simon Johnston, with additional support from the Playwright-in-Residence and Playwright Recommendor Programmes of the Ontario Arts Council. A workshop of the script and music, produced in Toronto by LFT with the same personnel as the eventual production, was sponsored by the Laidlaw, McLean, and Charles H. Ivey Foundations.

THE FIRST PRODUCTION OPENED

at the Lighthouse Festival Theatre in Port Dover on the 20th of June, 1990. Simon Johnston directed, with set and costume designs by Roderick Hillier, music direction by Bob Ashley, lighting design by Al Anderson, stage management by Judy Uwiera, and the following cast:

ABIGAIL.....Jennette White

JEREMIAH; and ENSEMBLE.....Reg Dreger

OLIVER; plus REV. MORRISON, OLD-TIMER,
CAPTAIN HACKETT, CAPTAIN DAVIS, REPORTER 1,
JUDGE HALL, and ENSEMBLE.....Andrew Lewarne

MARGARET; plus RECITALIST, JERRY SAWYERS,
BUFFALO LADY, MRS. FILLMORE, and ENSEMBLE....Victoria Shaffelburg

EDWARD; plus DEWITT, CIRCUS OWNER, R. JOHNSON,
DOC COUSINS, NEW YORK READER, REPORTER 2,
MAYOR OF BUFFALO, CUSTOMS OFFICER, and ENSEMBLE.....Pete Windrem

CAPTAIN DORR; plus PROMOTER, ANDREW, WILLIAM, SAILOR 1,
MISTER JONES, DAGUERREAN ARTIST, and ENSEMBLE.....Mark Latter

ISAAC; plus JOHN BACKUS, S. B. COOK, SAILOR 2,
CHIPS CHAMBERS, EDITOR, PRESIDENT FILLMORE,
MR. FERRIS, REPORTER 3, and ENSEMBLE.....Larry Jannison

ADDITIONAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CERTAIN PASSAGES

have been freely adapted from material written or dictated between 1833 and 1928 by: S. B. Code, Captain E. P. Dorr, Captain Henry Hackett, R. Johnson, Amanda T. Jones, Susannah Moodie, Rev. John Morrison, William Pope, Abigail Becker Rohrer, Margaret Wheeler, John Greenleaf Whittier, and various unknown newspaper contributors and sailing men.

SPECIAL THANKS

For research guidance and materials: Dick Goodlett, Michael Howell, Dave Stone, Peter Ramsay, and Stuart Wingrove; the staffs of the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library, the Eva Brook Donly Museum, the Marine Museum of the Great Lakes, the Metropolitan Toronto Reference Library, the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, and the Public Archives of Ontario; and especially Harry B. Barrett, William Yeager, and the Norfolk Historical Society.

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For musical advice and assistance: Shelley Hanson and Lewis Mele.

The writers gratefully acknowledge
the contributions of them all.

*

DISCLAIMER

Although nothing in this play substantially contradicts the known facts, those remain few and far between, and any attempt to interpret them is necessarily an exercise in speculation. *Abigail, or The Gold Medal* therefore remains a work of fiction. The characters and their actions are the creations of the playwright's imagination, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

*

THE SETTING

The play spans the time period from Spring, 1852, to Spring, 1863, with a single glimpse forward to the turn of the century. Its events take place in the old Norfolk County (Ontario), on Long Point, in Buffalo, and on Lake Erie itself.

The basic practical setting requirements are fluid, open space; some rustic furniture – a table, benches that might double as cots, a rocking chair, a hearth, a doorframe – that can be rearranged by the cast as necessary; and sensitive lighting. Many properties are mentioned; a few can be mimed. There is an additional need in Act II to suggest the wheel, the mast, and the tom sails of the Conductor; the rolling seas of Lake Erie also need to be presented either through pantomime or by some device. Beyond that, whether a single governing image or a shifting series of images is used, the visuals should be archetypal and poetic – freeing rather than restricting the emotional and physical action.

THE CHARACTERS

The Becker Family:

(ages given indicate the span during which the character appears)

- ABIGAIL: A simple woman whose goal is to get her defeated husband to believe once again in a dream. While she trusts her emotional and practical instincts, her estimate of her own worth is based on her awareness that she is neither pretty nor clever, her unquestioning conviction that a wife's status in marriage must be completely subordinate, and her awe of her husband. Even at the end, she is not as aware of her own value as those around her – but she has come a long way. Ages 21-32.
- JEREMIAH: A man very much of his time, struggling to head his family responsibly despite his strong sense of failure. Only slowly and with difficulty does he learn to give full credit to his young wife's astonishing resources – and even then this suspension of disbelief remains vulnerable. Ages 41-51.
- EDWARD: The loyal eldest stepson, only a year younger than Abigail. Ages 20-22.
- WILLIAM: The second stepson and the family bully, resentful of both his stepmother and the closeness between Edward and Oliver. Age 16.
- OLIVER: The slightly precocious third stepson, only member of the family with enough schooling to read adequately, who grows up to be a teacher. Ages 13-23.
- MARGARET: The second youngest stepchild, she adores her stepmother and tries to help beyond her years. (As an older woman, the real

Margaret dictated a brief biographical sketch which provides the basis of some of her monologues.) Ages 11-22.

ISAAC: The youngest stepchild, ages 7-9.

DEWITT: Abigail's own firstborn. Ages 3-13.

ANDREW : Abigail's own second son. Ages less than 1-11. Subsequent children, collectively referred to as "the littl'uns," are mentioned and understood, but do not appear.

The Others:

(in order of their first appearance)

JOHN BACKUS: Current owner of the Backus (or Backhouse) Grist Mill, founded by his great grandfather in 1798.

PROMOTER: A specialist in Victorian hard sell.

CIRCUS OWNER: Forceful purveyor of late 19th-century variety entertainments.

RECITALIST: An anti-annexationist performing in defence of Confederation. British. (The poem is a late one by Susannah Moodie.)

REV. MORRISON: Tweedy and sentimental, a rector perfectly at home at I.O.D.E. meetings and ladies' teas. He uses the royal/editorial "we."

R. JOHNSON: A young farmhand or fisherman.

CAPTAIN DORR: Raised in Boston, the real Dorr was a cabin boy by the age of ten, and the youngest captain on the eastern seaboard by the age of 20. At 21 he moved to Buffalo and sailed the lakes until his early 30s, when he joined the marine insurance business. Already one of Buffalo's most prominent businessmen and philanthropists when he enters the play, he was known for his boundless, ebullient, and sometimes irritating energy. He was almost single-handedly responsible for making Abigail famous.

S. B. COOK: Lighthouse-keeper an Long Point for 35 years, he speaks from the point of view of his retirement in 1928.

OLD-TIMER: A well-seasoned sailing man.

SAILOR 1: Perkins, surviving crew-member from the wreck of the *Arkansas*.

SAILOR 2: A second survivor from the *Arkansas*, badly frost-bitten.

CAP'N HACKETT: Henry Hackett, Captain of the *Conductor* — a nice-looking man in his twenties, possessed, like many other lake captains of

the time, of a little education and class.

- MISTER JONES: John Jones, the mate of the *Conductor*.
- JERRY SAWYERS: Jeremiah Sawyers, cabin boy of the *Conductor*.
- DOC COUSINS: James J. Cousins, Seaman and Cook on the *Conductor*.
- CHIPS CHAMBERS: John Chambers, Ship's Carpenter and able-bodied Seaman.
- CREW-MEMBER: One or more of Jerome Andrews, John McAuley, or George Nicodemus – the remaining Seamen of the *Conductor*.
- CAPTAIN DAVIS: A some-time colleague and old friend of Captain Dorr's.
- EDITOR: Harried helmsman of the *Buffalo Commercial Advertiser*.
- N. Y. READER: Middle-aged and prosperously middle class; a home-owner.
- BUFFALO LADY: An extremely clever early advocate of women's rights. (Her prototype disavowed any connection while managing very politely to decimate the entire male establishment of Buffalo.)
- REPORTERS 1-2: The mid-19th-century equivalent of tabloid journalists but with less shame.
- JUDGE HALL,
MAYOR OF BUFFALO,
(FORMER) PRESIDENT FILLMORE,
MRS. FILLMORE: The most prominent guests at the Buffalo reception.
- MR. FERRIS: Francis Ferris, a cagey farmer getting rid of the unwanted portion of his newly acquired land.
- CUSTOMS OFFICER: Self-important veteran of the War of 1812.
- DAGUERREAN ARTIST: A bit of a fusspot, attempting to pioneer a new art among the country Philistines with whom he grew up.
- REPORTER 3: A small town journalist doing his job.

The play was written to be possible with a minimum cast of two women and four men; however in that case JEREMIAH must play additional roles, and some other reshuffling is also necessary. A cast larger than eight is not recommended.

THE MUSIC

The romantic score is an integral part of the play. It provides soundscape, underscoring, and atmosphere throughout, assists in scene transitions, and supports the many passages of choral speaking and the occasional snatch of song. Most but not all music cues are noted in the text. Remarkably sensitive computerization enables the score to be played by a single trained sound technician.

A demonstration CD is available directly from the Composer or the Playwright: bashley67@gmail.com or pyoung1003@rogers.com .

THE TEXT

The text that follows is that of the first production. Stage directions – with one or two exceptions used by permission – are those of the writers. Choral sections marked "ENSEMBLE" (as opposed to "UNISON" or "SOLO VOICE") have been left undifferentiated for smooth reading, and in the belief that the director will wish to divide and assign them to his/her own satisfaction. Spoken verse and sung lyrics are distinguished from the rest of the text by appearing in bold type.

For copies of the text or rights enquiries contact:

Playwrights Guild of Canada,
orders@playwrightsguild.ca
401 Richmond Street West, Suite 350
Toronto, Ontario
M5V 3A8
Telephone: 416-703-0201

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A NOTE ON DIALECT

Speech for uneducated characters carefully follows the pronunciation and expressions recorded on the north shore of Lake Erie by nineteenth-century diarists. The area was 'settled' largely by "late Loyalists" from Ohio and Pennsylvania – the same stock that migrated to the Mississippi Valley and the American West – and to this day, its native speech sounds a little more like the American Mid-West than other areas of Ontario.

Table of Contents

ACT ONE

<u>Scene 1:</u> The Backus Mill, December 1862	1
<u>Scene 2:</u> Abigail at the Turn of the Century	2
<u>Scene 3:</u> The Becker Farm, North Walsingham, Christmas 1862	5
<u>Scene 4:</u> The Lore of Long Point	13
<u>Scene 5:</u> Uncle John Becker's Farm, Port Rowan, Spring 1852	16
<u>Scene 6:</u> The First Spring and Summer on Long Point, 1852	24
<u>Scene 7:</u> The <i>Arkansas</i> , November 15th 1852	42
<u>Scene 8:</u> The Survey, March 1853	48
<u>Scene 9:</u> The Eve of the Wreck, November 24th 1854	51

ACT TWO

<u>Scene 10:</u> The <i>Conductor</i> , November 25th 1854	55
<u>Scene 11:</u> Dawn in the Cabin, November 25th 1854	61
<u>Scene 12:</u> The Rescue and After, November 1854	65
<u>Scene 13:</u> Recognition and Awards, December 1854 to May 1857	74
<u>Scene 14:</u> The Becker Farm, Christmas 1862 (Revisited)	93
<u>Scene 15:</u> The Death of Jeremiah, New Year's Day 1863	94
<u>Scene 16:</u> The Wake, March 1863	98
APPENDIX: Map of Walsingham, Charlotteville & Long Point.....	101

— ACT I —

Scene One

Darkness. Music. A special rises gradually to silhouette ABIGAIL BECKER, 31, in a simple dress and warm shawl. On her breast is The Gold Medal. With dignity but great reluctance, she unpins it slowly and holds it out to us. Enter JOHN BACKUS.

JOHN BACKUS: The Backus Mill, December, 1862.

(Music fades as lights open to: a general store-type counter with several bags of supplies on it)

Mrs. Becker, I couldn't possibly take that.

ABIGAIL: Please.

JOHN BACKUS: Have you not got anything else at all that ... ?

ABIGAIL: It ain't enough? It don't cover the — ?

JOHN BACKUS: No, no, no! You misunderstand! The flour, the sugar, the corn meal, the dry goods, they can't add up to more than about five dollars, but this medal, well, the gold alone is worth much more than that. Besides, I — I know what it is! I know how much it means to you! Hasn't your husband got anything that ... ?

ABIGAIL: My husband don't know I'm here.

JOHN BACKUS: Oh. I see.

ABIGAIL: The cows both got theirselves kilt. The chickens ain't layin'. An' the wheat this year were almighty full o' rust. Please take it, Mr. Backus — my chirren got to eat.

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

JOHN BACKUS: Take credit. I insist.

ABIGAIL: I cannot be beholden to no man when I got somethin' to give.

JOHN BACKUS: You won't be "beholden!" The New Year, God willing, will be a little kinder to you and Jeremy and then you will pay what is due. Now please. Put that away.

ABIGAIL: I want you to take it.

JOHN BACKUS: Please.

(Pause. Then ABIGAIL gives in and puts it away)

ABIGAIL: DeWitt.

(Enter DEWITT, 13)

The wagon.

(DEWITT takes the goods from the counter and goes. After a suffering look at JOHN BACKUS, so does ABIGAIL)

JOHN BACKUS: Dear Lord, what if she gives it to somebody else?
(beat) Mrs. Becker! Mrs. Becker!?

Exit JOHN BACKUS after her; the counter disappears. Quick cross-fade to ...

Scene Two

A series of specials. The clamour of hard sell speeches to the audience, punctuated by musical stings.

PROMOTER: Anyone would welcome even a glimpse of Abigail Becker, and many would go miles to shake her hand. It was therefore a happy conception on the part of Mr. Falls – of Northway, Anderson and

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

Falls, Simcoe – to begin this new year, 1897, by tendering a public reception to the noble lady. We have arranged for an increased staff of employees to accommodate the crowds certain to attend.

It's going to be the greatest sale of reliable goods ever held in Western Ontario! –

Window Shades, Curtain Poles, and Table Covers, all at sale prices; *500 pairs Corsets at 29¢ to \$1.25 the pair; Ladies Underwear at a cost that barely covers the material; Men's flannelette Night Shirts, assorted sizes, each 48¢; ...

CIRCUS OWNER: *(overlapping from *)* Despite the claims of Barnum and Bailey, we sincerely believe our Exhibition to be the Greatest Show on Earth. Your appearance, Mrs. Becker, would enhance it all the more. We are therefore prepared to offer you five dollars a day plus expenses, and a journey home once every two years. You would naturally assume a commanding position on our bill: immediately following "The Incredible Tightrope-walking Mule," and preceding the world-renowned "Miss Biffin, Portrait Artist With No Arms." * Anticipating a favourable reply at your earliest possible convenience, we remain ...

RECITALIST: *(overlapping from *)*
Canada – the blest, the free!
With prophetic glance, I see
Shall plead the rights of man, and claim
For humble worth, an honest name;
Shall show the peasant-born can be,
When called to action, great and free! –
Like fire, within the flint concealed,
By stern necessity revealed,
Kindles to life the stupid sod:
Image of perfect man – and God!

(THE OTHERS give way to REV. MORRISON)

REV. MORRISON: Rev. John Morrison here. It was Tuesday, June 14th, 1904: a hazy summer morning, the air fragrant with wild-flowers as we swung along on our trusty wheel (faithful companion in many a

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

pleasant excursion). Southward ho! on the centre road of Walsingham, now east on the seventh concession over sand hills and sandier hollows, and suddenly before us is the dream of many days: the home of Abigail Becker – standing conveniently back from the road on the north side, an unpretentious one-and-a-half storey frame house with a one-storey kitchen projecting to the east.

(Soft music begins. The farmhouse interior is filling in behind him)

Entering by the gate, we pass through an old-fashioned garden in which in luxuriant profusion are growing the flowers common in the days of our boyhood. Within the house we find an old wooden dash-churn, plain furniture, a capacious rocking chair (hand made, splendid relic of a generation dead and gone!), low ceilings, and in cages on the wall a pair of Japanese sparrows and a parakeet. From the front door, a fine view is had of our Canadian landscape, tree-dotted and forest-backed, while from the rear windows the outlook is over the fields and deep ravines which, like huge gashes, cut across the farm.

Now there comes in from the garden a tall, robust woman; –

(Enter ABIGAIL)

– and we stand face to face with one whose shoulders are yet unbent and dark hair only lightly threaded with silver, and whose face reflects the purity of soul possessed by the truly great.

ABIGAIL: *(to the audience)* I only done my duty. Any other woulda done the same. I never wanted that my name should be honoured this way in the world, but ... *(a little shrug)* it got out.

REV. MORRISON: Only when begged to see it does this truly modest woman bring forth and show her solid Gold Medal. And afterwards, as we once more mount our trusty wheel, we feel that an added tang of moral iron

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

has been put into our blood....

*Enter DEWITT and ANDREW, 11, as we
cross-fade to ...*

Scene Three

REV. MORRISON: The Becker farm, Christmas, 1862.

*A few days later. Music out. As
REV. MORRISON exits to become
OLIVER, the scene comes to life
around ABIGAIL, who is
supervising: DEWITT and ANDREW
scurry to get the table set.
CHARLES, NEHEMIAH, JANE and
DELILAH are outside (off) playing
in the snow, and baby SAMUEL may
be asleep in a cradle to one side.*

ABIGAIL: Andrew, I swear sometimes y're cross-eyed, boy:
how many times do I hafta tell ya the forks go on
the left?

(Business between THE BOYS)

Come on, now. We want this all nice before yer
father gits back from Uncle John's.

ANDREW: Somebody's comin', Ma.

ABIGAIL: Oh no, not yer father! We're not ready yet!

DEWITT: It's Ollie! (out the window) Hey, Ollie!

*(Enter OLIVER, 23, well bundled up, with
parcels. Clamorous greetings from THE BOYS)*

OLIVER: This is for you. And this is for you -

ABIGAIL: Put them away till arter yer dinner!

ANDREW: Aw - !

OLIVER: I guess the littl'uns can wait for theirs; the

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

four o' them got the biggest snowman goin' out there you ever saw. And this (*to ABIGAIL*) is for you.

ABIGAIL: Ya shouldn't have. (*embraces him*) Lord ha' mercy, boy, I never thought ta see you! How on earth didja git here?

OLIVER: Walked.

ABIGAIL: All the way from Port Rowan?! Ya must be half froze!

OLIVER: Three quarters.

ABIGAIL: Well, git over here by the stove and thaw yerself a little. Boys, set an extra place on that table!

(*THEY do*)

Lor', if we'd knowed, you coulda got a ride up with yer father in the wagon; he went ta see Uncle John and Aunt Margaret, but he'll be back any time now.

OLIVER: I've walked a lot further and survived it. Did me good to get out from behind my schoolhouse desk.

ABIGAIL: Makes me so proud ta have a stepson a teacher. An' me that never cracked any but the Good Book in my life, 'n then I just looks at the pitchers! You two boys, ya see what a little learnin' can do for ya?

OLIVER: You know, they're buildin' a school here now, at long last. You could go, Andrew; you both could.

ANDREW: I'm too old to start school.

ABIGAIL: He calculates he don't need it, on account of he wants to farm. Oh my lord, who's turnin' the spit?! You boys - !

(*Exit ABIGAIL on the run*)

OLIVER: You know, you two, just 'cause you spent all those years on the Island and then homesteadin'

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

up here t' North Walsingham doesn't mean you have to go without schoolin' the rest o' your lives. If you went, you wouldn't be the only ones startin' at your age.

DEWITT: The littl'uns 'll like it, I guess.

ANDREW: Calculate as how DeWitt 'n me wouldn't even fit behind one o' them pint-size desks!

DEWITT: Yeah! Besides ... we're needed.

OLIVER: It's been a bad fall, hasn't it.

(ANDREW and DEWITT are silent)

I wanted to send a little home, but a teacher's pay -

(Enter MARGARET, 22, from outside, a little breathless, with a large, heavy sack)

MARGARET: Merry Christmas!

OTHERS: Maggie!!!

(Embraces and greetings all around)

MARGARET: Oh, Lord, I miss y'all so much! Ollie, I never thought ta see you!

OLIVER: Nor me you!

MARGARET: I gave the Wheelers their dinner early. Old Mary don't really know what day it is anyway, and Henry knew I wanted to get here, so he didn't mind. He sent some - Lord, look at this table!

OLIVER: Mother, doin' herself proud again.

MARGARET: DeWitt, where'd all this come from?

(No answer)

DeWitt? Ollie, I lugged thirty pounds o' taters from the Wheelers but it don't look like anybody even needs 'em. Andrew, how did she - ?

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

ANDREW: Think I'll see if Ma needs a hand.

(Exit ANDREW. DEWITT resorts to studying a flyspeck)

OLIVER: It's been that bad?

MARGARET: Oh, Ollie, you got no idea. They didn't know sometimes where their next meal was comin' from. Father's been that down I was afraid to think of him goin' out with a rifle.

OLIVER: Lord ha' mercy.

MARGARET: Mother didn't want me goin' out to work, but I — well, I had to. But look at this, it's wonderful! I just don't understand how she —

(Enter ABIGAIL with two large jars)

ABIGAIL: Maggie! So ya made it arter all! Now this is for Henry 'n the girls — punkin sace; don't you forget ta take it back with ya, mind! — an' this is some o' my chicken soup fer Old Mary. It goes down easy an' fortifies the blood. She's still poorly, I guess?

MARGARET: No better. She don't know where she is half the time 'n she keeps callin' me Jane.

ABIGAIL: Poor man: his wife last winter 'n now his ma. You tell him from me —

MARGARET: Mother, how can you spare these? You got nine mouths to feed right here at home, and another on the way. Henry Wheeler may have crosses to bear, but he's a rich man.

ABIGAIL: Bein' rich don't give him any less need for kindness than any other human bein'. We got lots o' these.

MARGARET: You do?! Well —

(Sound of a horse-drawn wagon outside. Enter ANDREW and runs to the window)

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

ANDREW: He's here! He's here!

ABIGAIL: Oh, Lord, there's yer father! Maggie, help me get the bird on the table! I want everythin' perfect when he comes in – to surprise him, like.

(ABIGAIL and MARGARET hurry to the kitchen)

OLIVER: What's the mystery, you two? How did she get all the food?

(ANDREW begins to mime the medal but is restrained by DEWITT)

DEWITT: You promised, same as me!

(Enter JEREMIAH, 51)

JEREMIAH: Oliver. The littl'uns told me you were here. How are ya, son?

OLIVER: Well, Pa. You?

JEREMIAH: I been better. Pity we can't offer ya a merrier Christmas, but we'll make of it what we can. *(calling to the next room)* Abbie? Margaret loved the little rug y' made 'er: she says it'll be perfect by the hearth. And John was right taken with yer muffler – though I don't guess he'll be gettin' out much this winter, the cold bothers him so.

ABIGAIL: *(off)* What's that?

JEREMIAH: The cold bothers him! *(to OLIVER)* Truth is, he's gettin' old. Seventy-one this year – my own brother. Durned hard to credit, it is. *(to the next room)* They sent packages fer the littl'uns, 'n some foo –

(Enter ABIGAIL, bursting with pride, and MARGARET, with the rest of the dinner)

OLIVER: Oh, what a beautiful bird!

DEWITT: Look at that!

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

JEREMIAH: Lord ha' mercy! Where'd all this come from?
Oliver - ?

(OLIVER shakes his head)

Maggie. It's from the Wheelers, ain't it. I swear
I'll tan yer hide, girl: we'll never be able to
pay them -

MARGARET: Weren't my doin'. *(looks to ABIGAIL)*

JEREMIAH: Abbie? - !

ABIGAIL: It's a surprise fer you, ya big ungrateful
wretch. 'N there's more in the pantry where that
come from. Merry Christmas.

*(ABIGAIL kisses JEREMIAH's cheek, but to her
surprise he refuses to respond)*

(changing the subject quickly) Ain't it grand
that Ollie 'n Maggie could get here? We'll have
to say a little prayer for Edward 'n William 'n
their families; I wisht Isaac coulda come, but
it's so far.... Now you set right down 'n start
the carvin' while I call the littl'uns. *(starts
for the door)*

JEREMIAH: Abbie!

(ABIGAIL stops)

How? How didja do this?

(No answer)

Abbie?

(No answer)

You sold somethin', didn't ya. What didja sell?
Is it my plow that's gone? Is it yer trunk that
the sailors give ya? What?

ABIGAIL: Jeremy, please.

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

JEREMIAH: I want to know what you sold, woman! Y've gone behind my back 'n I want to know what you done!

OLIVER: Father –

JEREMIAH: Stay outa this, Oliver: the runnin' o' my house ain't yer concern no more. *(to ABIGAIL)* I'm waitin'.

(No answer)

TELL ME!!!

ABIGAIL: I give nothin' that weren't mine t' give, Jeremy. An' I give it fer you 'n the chirren. Now, please, the dinner's goin' to get all ...

(JEREMIAH is staring at her chest. ABIGAIL notices and attempts to cover the spot with her hand)

JEREMIAH: Yer medal. Where's yer medal, Abbie?

(No answer. Pause)

(sinking into a chair) Dear God, woman, what have you done?

ABIGAIL: I – I give it to John Backus. Just fer safekeepin', he said; he don't mean to keep it – we can get it back just as soon as ...

(JEREMIAH buries his face in his hands)

MARGARET: *(disbelieving)* You sold your medal?!

ABIGAIL: He tried to make me take credit, but I wouldn't have it – not when I had somethin' t' give.

OLIVER: I should have noticed right away. You always wear it on special occasions – I should have seen.

ABIGAIL: It give us our Christmas, an' a lot else besides. And next year, if we get ahead a little, we – we ...

(THE OTHERS are silent)

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

Our chirren got to eat!

(JEREMIAH rises, goes to the door and starts putting on his coat)

Where you goin'? ... Where you goin', Jeremy?!

ANDREW: Dinner's on the table, Pa.

MARGARET: You can't go off now, it's Christmas.

JEREMIAH: DeWitt.

DEWITT: Yeah, Pa?

JEREMIAH: Help me dig my traps out o' th' barn.

ABIGAIL: Jeremy, no! There's no need! With the weavin' an' the sewin' I'm bound to have enough for another cow by spring. An' the crops can't go bad like that two years in a row.

JEREMIAH: An' what about yer medal?

(No answer)

Git outa my road, woman.

ABIGAIL: *(not moving)* Please.

JEREMIAH: I'm gonna do what I can do, what I shoulda been doin' all along. Now git outa my road.

ABIGAIL: *(doing so)* But where? Where you gonna go?

JEREMIAH: Where we'd maybe be better off if I'd stayed -

ABIGAIL: No!

JEREMIAH: - Long Point!

Exit JEREMIAH, leaving THE FAMILY in shock. Jagged music in the quick cross-fade to ...

Scene Four

Choral speaking with musical support.

UNISON: **Long Point! –**

SOLO VOICE: A long, low island stretching out some twenty miles from the Norfolk County shore ...

UNISON: **Long Point! –**

SOLO VOICE: Separated from the mainland by a narrow strait known as "The Cut" ...

UNISON: **Long Point! –**

SOLO VOICE: Its impenetrable marshes thick with stunted cedars and wild grape; its shifting snows and sandhills sculpted by the famous, fickle winds of Lake Erie....

ENSEMBLE: **The wind, the wind, where Erie plunged
Blew, blew, sou'west from land to land;
The wandering schooner dipped and plunged –
Long Point was close at hand.**

**Long Point – a swampy island slant,
Where busy in their grassy homes,
Woodcock and snipe the hollows haunt,
And musk-rat build their domes.**

**Where gulls and eagles rest at need,
Where either side, by lake or sound,
Kingfishers, cranes, and divers feed,
And mallard ducks abound.**

**The lowering night shut out the sight:
Careened the vessel, pitched, and veered;
Raved, raved the wind with main and might;
The sunken reef she neared....**

*(A special on R. JOHNSON, a young fellow.
The farmhouse interior is cleared; the music changes)*

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

R. JOHNSON: I was at Long Point fishin' in the early part o' November, 1833, when The Cut or channel washed through the Point from the Lake into the Bay. The day before the storm it was as fine as ya ever could wish. But durin' the night, the wind from the south-south-east began to blow, gradually hauled round to the south-south-west and west, and then, boy, it did blow! – I never seen it blow any harder. There were no waves: the water just rose up and was carried over the point and made a cut right through. Then once the wind dropped, back it all came again like a tidal wave and made the channel even deeper. And in the mornin', Long Point was an island!

Put me in mind of Pharoah and his chariots; I just clung to my little scrub oak and wondered if that was how Moses felt watchin' God destroy the Egyptian host....

UNISON: *(singing)* **We leaves Detroit behind us,
We sets our canvas tight;
The tug slows down and casts us off,
Old Erie heaves in sight!**

**So we watch our tiller closer,
We keeps our sheet ropes clear;
There's no sich thing as stiddy wind
Along Lake Erie here!...**

CAPTAIN DORR: At the eastern extremity of the island rises the tall tower of a lighthouse, the keeper of which is now its solitary inhabitant....

S. B. COOK: The Long Point region has always been known as a dangerous place for mariners. Cook – S. B. Cook.

(The underscoring shifts again)

In the old days before my time as keeper, seventy-five or eighty boats of all kinds would gather for shelter in the Bay: stern-wheelers, side-wheelers, and sailing vessels, with two and three masts and even four. But some of them didn't make it. The old bones of many a wreck are scattered all about the Point, most of them now covered by sand....

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

OLD-TIMER: Near The Cut when it was there, there was thirty-odd I know of over the years. And altogether on Long Point? Oh, somethin' over a hundred and sixty - ! On record, that is....

S. B. COOK: In a terrible storm on December 7th, 1909, the ferry Bessemer went down with all thirty-two men. One of the bodies did turn up on the end of the Point - but not until October of the following year....

SOLO VOICE: The same night took the freighter Clarion; one of her life-boats was found adrift.

(The music starts to build)

It contained nine frozen men sheeted with ice....

ANOTHER: In 1868 the Jennie P. King drove hard aground under full sail. One man survived....

ANOTHER: In 1851 there was the Henry Clay;...

ANOTHER: In the 1840s, the Britannia under Captain Fletcher -

ANOTHER: The Shamrock out of Cleveland -

ANOTHER: The steam barge Empire -

ANOTHER: The schooner Stampede -

UNISON: *(singing)* **Around the beach the seagulls scream;
Their dismal notes prolong.
They're chanting forth a requiem,
A saddened funeral song.**

**They skim along the waters blue
And then aloft they soar
In memory of the sailing men
Lost off the Long Point shore....**

CAPTAIN DORR: The strong lake winds now blow unchecked over the sand hills where once stood the board shanty of Abigail Becker. But there are many who remember...

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

*(THE ENSEMBLE clears for the next scene as
ABIGAIL enters and music fades)*

UNISON: *(singing)* **In memory of the sailing men
Lost off the Long Point shore....**

ABIGAIL: *(with the same hindsight as in Scene Two)* Way
back when we was first married, we had no farm of
our own an' had t' live with my brother-in-law at
Port Rowan. But my husband, "Trapper Becker," was
away much of the time on the island, so I says to
him "I may as well go too and not live here and
you away so much." That was how I came t' be on
Long Point....

*Bright music, as we cross-fade
rapidly to ...*

Scene Five

SOLO VOICE: Uncle John's farm near Port Rowan, Spring, 1852.

*The SPEAKER takes his/her place as
one of the children. Exterior;
kids playing. ABIGAIL is 21,
JEREMIAH 41, OLIVER 13, MARGARET
11, ISAAC 7, DEWITT going on 3,
ANDREW a babe in ABIGAIL's arms.
EDWARD, 20, and WILLIAM, 16, are
elsewhere.*

ABIGAIL: Oh my lord, it's him. Chirren! It's yer father!
Yer father's comin'!

DEWITT: Daddy! Daddy! Daddy!

*(ISAAC, OLIVER, and MARGARET also greet him
excitedly ad lib; ABIGAIL stands back with
ANDREW in her arms. Music fades)*

JEREMIAH: *(checking on baby)* 'N how's this young scalawag?
Andrew, I swear, every time I look at ya you've
growed another inch!

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

ABIGAIL: More like two.

(JEREMIAH embraces ABIGAIL)

Jeremiah Becker, you smell like a goat.

JEREMIAH: Ya say that every time, Abbie.

ABIGAIL: It's every time true.

JEREMIAH: I reckon there's enough to lug seven miles either way without troublin' with extra clothes.

ABIGAIL: Shouldn't be no luggin': these ones 'd walk by theirselves.

JEREMIAH: Fine welcome she gives me. I hope my chirren 'r glad ta see me, at least.

(THEY are)

(pulling a small fur from his pack) Maggie, I brought this fer you.

MARGARET: Oh, Pa! He's beautiful!

ISAAC: Let me see! I wanna see!

JEREMIAH: He's a mink. They told me he were too small ta give a decent price fer, so I told 'em where they could put their prices. *(beat)* But I didn't tell 'em too loud. Where's Edward 'n William?

ABIGAIL: Out t' the fields with their uncle, seedin'. Where Ollie should be, too, 'cept he says he's got too much "schoolwork" t' do.

JEREMIAH: You'll go blind, boy. Too much readin' ain't healthy fer a man.

OLIVER: Too much might be better'n none at all.

JEREMIAH: *(mock outrage)* Dagnabbit, Abbie, don't you teach these kids no respect while I'm gone?

ABIGAIL: *(teasing back)* Hard enough sometimes remindin' 'em who you are! No cheek, now, Ollie: yer father

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

gets here rarely enough. How long this time?

JEREMIAH: Oh... well... I calculate as I c'n stay till mornin'.

ABIGAIL: *(beat)* Y're leavin' tomorrow?

JEREMIAH: The ducks're comin' in thick n' fast, Abbie. They ain't waitin' 'round fer me.

(Pause)

ABIGAIL: Chirren, into th' house, please. We won't be long. Maggie, take Andrew, and Ollie, you check the stew. *(gives the baby to MARGARET)*

OLIVER: What do I know about stew?

ABIGAIL: Then you take Andrew 'n Maggie'll check the stew: yer sister's only got two hands.

OLIVER: Aw - ! What about Aunt Margaret?

ABIGAIL: Aunt Margaret's plantin' her garden 'n I guess you know what she'll say if her stew sticks t' the pot with allayas lollygaggin' around! Now git on with ya.

MARGARET: *(after giving the baby to a disgusted OLIVER)*
DeWitt! Come on.

*(Exit OLIVER, MARGARET, ISAAC, and DEWITT.
Pause)*

JEREMIAH: We could talk by the fire. I swear the wind got into my bones worse walkin' up from Port Rowan than in all those weeks on the island. Mebbe I'm gettin' old.

ABIGAIL: Forty-one ain't old.

JEREMIAH: From a girl just had her twenty-first birthday, I guess that's a compliment. Tell it t' my bones.
(starts for the house) Come on, woman.

ABIGAIL: Yer sister-in-law might come in.

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

JEREMIAH: Oh. (*turning back*) So what's on yer mind that ya don't want Margaret t' hear it? Eh?

(*No answer*)

Come on, out with it.

ABIGAIL: Jeremy ... we ...

JEREMIAH: Yes?

ABIGAIL: ... We need a place of our own.

(*JEREMIAH reacts*)

It's been three years. Three years under John's roof, raisin' John's crops, sharin' Margaret's kitchen and Margaret's stew, tendin' a corner in Margaret's garden –

JEREMIAH: So that's it: y're fightin' with yer sister-in-law.

ABIGAIL: No! –

JEREMIAH: I swear, put two women in a kitchen, an' –

ABIGAIL: She don't say nothin' – not in front of John. He practically raised ya: he ain't gonna turn us out.

JEREMIAH: What, then?

ABIGAIL: It jest ain't right, Jeremy. You 'n me been married three 'n a half years now, an' in all that time, I ain't never had a chance to make you ... a home. I want t' make you a home.

JEREMIAH: An' where d'ya think we're gonna get one from? You know the prices I get in Port Rowan, Abbie. Every hour I got is spent either on my traplines or goin' back an' forth t' Port, and t' here, an' t' the Island. Ain't no way in a month o' Sundays we got the ready cash t' rent nor buy. If it wasn't fer my brother, we'd be in the road.

ABIGAIL: Thought prices was due t' rise.

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

JEREMIAH: They're more than due, woman, but that don't mean it's gonna happen!

ABIGAIL: But if they did? An' if there was a way t' git more t' sell in less time?

JEREMIAH: More t' sell in less time?! Lord ha' mercy, I'm only human!

ABIGAIL: When y' go back t' the island tomorrow ...

JEREMIAH: Yes?

ABIGAIL: *(swallowing her fear)* ... I want t' come with you.

JEREMIAH: What?!

ABIGAIL: Me ... an' the chirren. I want us all t' come with you.

JEREMIAH: Abbie, what's got inta you? It's the prime season o' th' year. What work would I get done with this whole brood hangin' round my neck?

ABIGAIL: Not to visit. To stay. *(beat)* To live there.

JEREMIAH: Live there?! On Long Point? There ain't even a house!

ABIGAIL: Ain't you got line shanties?

JEREMIAH: No! An' that's final. Ain't nobody "lives" on Long Point.

ABIGAIL: Harry Clark.

JEREMIAH: Well I reckon that's different: Harry has to keep the lighthouse.

ABIGAIL: 'N Mary 'n the chirren help him do it.

JEREMIAH: Is that what yer thinkin'! Dear God, Abbie, what help is a woman gonna be with traplines 'n fishnets?

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

ABIGAIL: There's no need to take the name of the Lord –

JEREMIAH: Long Point is no place for a woman! Let alone kids. 'N where in tarnation y' got such an idea is beyond me. Now come in 'n get yer husband his supper. *(starts to leave)*

ABIGAIL: *(with quiet determination)* I'd have the fire goin' 'n yer supper ready every night when ya got home. I'd keep yer clothes clean 'n mended. I'd plant a proper garden t' grow yer punkins 'n greens –

JEREMIAH: *(who has turned back in spite of himself)* No garden, woman. There's nothin' but sandhills.

ABIGAIL: Mary Clark has a garden.

JEREMIAH: That's fifteen mile further out at the Bluffs, where there's timber n' topsoil.

ABIGAIL: No topsoil by yer cabin?

JEREMIAH: Nah. Courtwright Ridge, maybe.

ABIGAIL: Then I'll go t' Courtwright Ridge.

JEREMIAH: It's three mile 'n some across the marsh!

ABIGAIL: I'll go.

JEREMIAH: Abbie, Abbie, y're not makin' sense. Now slow down 'n think fer a minute. Long Point is a dangerous place. No school. No neighbours. What about the kids?

ABIGAIL: The Clark kids is thrivin'.

JEREMIAH: Well, none o' them's drownded – yet!

ABIGAIL: The boys could help with yer traplines –

JEREMIAH: The boys 're helpin' John. That's what pays our keep.

ABIGAIL: Wouldn't need no keep! They'd be helpin' their father, like – like they should be – like they do

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

in other families.

JEREMIAH: *(quietly)* We're not other families, Abbie. Other families still got their farms.

ABIGAIL: How we ever gonna get another one if we jest keep on like we are now?

(Pause)

JEREMIAH: *(grim)* Who said I'd ever want another one?

ABIGAIL: *(disbelieving)* What? What should a man do but farm?

JEREMIAH: He should do what he can – what he's half-ways decent at. The only thing I'm good for on a farm is t' ruin it.

ABIGAIL: That ain't so! –

JEREMIAH: I learnt my lesson the last time. Break yer back 'n break yer pocket 'n then break yer heart – that's what a farm'll do fer ya!

ABIGAIL: It weren't yer fault! There was the rust, 'n the English takin' back their Corn Laws, 'n the Furnace closin' down at Normandale. An' on top o' that, y' had Mary Ann ailin' on 'n on –

JEREMIAH: Shut yer mouth, woman!!

(Pause. The following is softly underscored)

ABIGAIL: *(a quiet new angle)* Jeremy ... I seen yer face last year when yer nephew Henry showed ya round his new acres. I seen it when ya had t' tell the census-taker ya was a "common labourer" 'cause ya had no land o' yer own. I seen! Y're a farmer, Jeremy; I know ya are.

(Pause. Silence from JEREMIAH)

When you came t' ask Pa fer my hand in marriage, y'd lost yer farm an' y'd lost yer wife, but ya had five chirren t' take care of, some of 'em near the same age as me. Now we got two more of

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

our own. An' I ... (*shyly*) I reckon we ain't quittin' yet. If ya won't try fer yerself, think o' them. Think o' the chirren.

JEREMIAH: What the chirren would want in a place like Long Point is beyond me.

ABIGAIL: Mebbe their Pa?

(*Pause*)

JEREMIAH: Well ... if y're so set on it, ... all right -

ABIGAIL: (*springing up*) Jeremy! -

JEREMIAH: - But! Be it on your head, woman. If it don't work out, if anythin' goes wrong, anythin' at all, you'll be back here so fast ya won't know what hit ya. You and them kids.

ABIGAIL: It'll work out.

JEREMIAH: Ya think so?

ABIGAIL: It'll work out. I'll make it work out.

(*Exit JEREMIAH. Music fades. Lights focus on ABIGAIL, who talks to the audience, now again with the hindsight of the young widow*)

He came t' me the summer I was seventeen. Us Jacksons 'd just moved ta Turkey Point - a cabin in the pines on the road from St. Williams? An' then one mornin', right past the door comes ... this man. He were tall - taller 'n me, even - an' strong. An' on his shoulders, alongside of his gun, he seemed t' be carryin' all the burdens o' the world. Every time he come around our place it was all I could do not t' stare.

Yes. He was older. More 'n twice my age. But I was fully growed all right, an' I knowed how boys my own age felt around me. They used to say I had "nice eyes" - ! That's the kind o' thing a boy says to a girl when he's embarrassed 'bout the rest of her. Even when the bee is over an' the fiddles has started up an' the rest o' the

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

neighbourhood is out on the floor, stompin' away an' raisin' the dust – well, if the boys' heads don't come past yer shoulder, don't go lookin' t' wear out yer shoes.

Pa never said nothin' to me. Just one mornin', I'm sittin' strainin' the lye at the cabin door an' there he is suddenly, standin' over me, an' I thought I would die.

I knowed all about 'im by that time, ya see: the farm gone, the wife dyin', the five motherless chirren. An' I thought, "Somebody got t' give this man back what he's lost. Somebody got t' give it all back to 'im."

So when he came t' me that mornin', strainin' lye by the cabin door, an' he stood there above me an' looked down, an' I looked up an' up and inta that face – that face that looks like it were carved from warm stone – I knew I wasn't rich like Mary Ann. An' I knew I wasn't clever, an' had nothin' t' give 'im. But a man can't live without a wife.

So still, still – I couldn't help myself – I thought, "Please, Lord, please: let it be me."

Lights open up and music swells as the JEREMIAH of her memory approaches; the almost disbelieving ABIGAIL takes his hand, and together they run over the hills – or something to that effect. Perhaps even a kiss. Then S. B. COOK enters to introduce us to ...

Scene Six

Music fades to underscore as ABIGAIL and JEREMIAH make their exit and COOK talks to the audience. Moments later, lights begin to rise on Long Point.

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

S. B. COOK: It was in June of 1897 that I, with my wife and family and our household goods, boarded a tug at Port Dover for the crossing to Long Point – where I was to assume my new duties as keeper of the light.

We had a small scow in tow, carrying Lulu Belle, our cow. I might say here that the cow afterwards became very lonely, and whenever a tug lay in the Bay at Long Point, she would run along the shore bellowing at it most plaintively. She would also answer the fog alarm in the middle of the night, no doubt hoping it was a large male of her own species. Eventually she reached the point of total dejection, and hung herself.

We arrived at Long Point late in the afternoon. Our oldest boys, 7 and 9, helped to carry our household effects over the deep sand to the house, swearing up and down that they would not have come had they known what was in store....

(Music up as EDWARD, WILLIAM, OLIVER, and MARGARET tear over the dunes or carry objects from the boat. En route to the cabin, a couple of days after Scene Five. ISAAC and DEWITT have arrived ahead and are understood to be playing out of sight already. Now JEREMIAH enters with ABIGAIL – ANDREW in her arms – as music fades under, and THE CHILDREN focus on his guided tour)

JEREMIAH: Yep, that's Rice Bay. An' this channel we just come down from Rice Bay, well, everybody seems to call that "Jeremy's Crick" – reckon I don't need to tell yas why.

ABIGAIL: Hark t' that: yer father's famous. (shading her eyes suddenly and calling off) Isaac! Don't you let DeWitt eat that sand! Ya mind? Lor', what next?

JEREMIAH: An' all this to th' north-east here, that's the Big Marsh: The Gravel Beds, the Sunk Marsh, the Deep Pond, an' way out beyond there ya can just see Pottohawk Point, on the west end o' that

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

island, like. That's Ryerson's Island.

EDWARD: Looks different from this side.

OLIVER: Ryerson: he's the man's gettin' the schools goin' all over Upper Canada.

JEREMIAH: If you say so, Oliver, if you say so.

ABIGAIL: Methodist, natcherly. None o' yer Baptist ignoramuses.

JEREMIAH: *(laughing)* Watch yer mouth, woman!

EDWARD: It's huge!

MARGARET: I never seen so much swamp in my life.

JEREMIAH: T'ain't swamp, it's marsh.

MARGARET: Whatever. Won't we all get sick t' die from the vapours?

ABIGAIL: Yer pa look sick to you?

MARGARET: No.

ABIGAIL: Then I calculate you'll live. *(calling off)* Isaac, he's doin' it again! ... That's better!

WILLIAM: Ain't no fit place fer nothin' but injuns, from what I can see.

EDWARD: No injuns livin' here, William.

WILLIAM: Then I reckon they's smarter 'n we are.

(Music out. ABIGAIL and JEREMIAH exchange a glance of alarm; then JEREMIAH tackles his son. If WILLIAM can be swayed, then he might succeed in persuading himself)

JEREMIAH: It's our chance at some ready cash, William. They're startin' to buy. The towns are gettin' bigger, people in 'em gettin' richer – down to Toronto 'n Hamilton 'n over t' Buffalo. 'N they're buyin' ducks 'n fish 'n furs 'n the way I

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

see it, they're gonna buy more - 'n when they finish the railroad, they're gonna buy more 'n that. Good times comin'.

(WILLIAM looks disgusted)

Turkey Point, Big Crick, even Sturgeon Bay, every Tom, Dick 'n Harry's out there with traps 'n guns 'n fishin' poles, fightin' for the few critters that's left. But not here, not on Big Marsh - not yet - on account of they think it's too far. But t'ain't too far if ya live here! There's ducks by the thousands, boy, muskrat everywhere y' look, whitefish so thick y' can durn near walk on th' water....

WILLIAM: I ain't no muskrat an' I ain't no duck. An' I sure as tarnation ain't no whitefish.

OLIVER: That's funny: ya look like one.

(OLIVER dodges the blow before WILLIAM can land it; they chase each other off)

WILLIAM: *(exiting)* You! - little! --- bookworm!

(Another look between JEREMIAH and ABIGAIL)

JEREMIAH: I spose y're gonna want t' see the shanty.

ABIGAIL: The house, Jeremy. It's gonna be the "house."

MARGARET: I'll come with ya.

ABIGAIL: Good. Looks like I'm gonna need all the help I can git.

(JEREMIAH reacts)

An' bring yer little brother before Isaac lets him swallow half the beach. Isaac!

MARGARET: *(calling off)* Isaac!!!

(Exit MARGARET on the run. ABIGAIL shakes her head)

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

JEREMIAH: Edward, you wanta start unloadin' the boat? We got a job o' work ahead of us.

EDWARD: Sure, Pa.

JEREMIAH: *(to ABIGAIL)* Well ... Don't say I didn't warn ya.

(Exit ABIGAIL and JEREMIAH towards the "house." EDWARD talks to the audience)

EDWARD: Ya never git tired o' gazin' at the ducks. There's swans an' geese an' other birds too, but when the ducks come in t' feed on the wild rice, they come by the thousands an' they blacken the water as they settle down. Clouds on clouds o' them flyin' past ya so it seems like the air is made of wings 'n thunder!

First time Ollie an' me tried duck huntin' on our own, we went with one rickety skiff, an' we had to pull her into shore every half hour t' turn the water out – nothin' t' bail with! The weather was calm an' the ducks was almighty shy of us, an' after a whole afternoon of rowin' around, we came back with only three! Pa did laugh!

What ya do is, ya see, ya go out with two boats 'r more, an' ya dresses 'em out with bull rushes 'n wild rice 'n whatnot so they looks like a lump o' marsh – the ducks don't know the difference, anyway – an' if y're real cautious, sometimes ya can float right into the middle o' the flock before they see what's up. Ya can bag 'em by the hundreds that way – hundreds, all in one afternoon.

(Enter MARGARET to join him)

Out here, we spend a powerful lot o' afternoons like that.

MARGARET: Mornin's too.

EDWARD: Ain't like it use to be, though – or so the old-timers say. *(beat)* Ya know, it's almost a pity....

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

MARGARET: Weren't you gonna git that boat unloaded?

EDWARD: I'm goin', I'm goin'!

MARGARET: Well don't hurry or nothin', Eddie!

(Exit EDWARD)

(to the audience) One time, just after we moved t' the Point, father an' two o' the boys took the sail boat and went over t' Port Rowan to obtain provisions. There was a heavy storm came up and they could not get away for a number o' days. I never knew Mother t' get so uneasy as at this time: she feared they had sunk t' the bottom o' the bay. There was a row-boat in the water about half a mile out in the marsh, an' she said, "I will wade out and get that boat." This she did, an' got the boat, an' tied it t' the landin' - intendin' the next mornin' t' row t' Port Rowan, a distance o' seven miles -

ABIGAIL: *(off)* Maggie!

MARGARET: But fortunately, just as the sun was settin', we seen 'em comin'.

ABIGAIL: *(off)* Maggie?

MARGARET: Yes, Mother?

ABIGAIL: *(off)* Look what I got!

(Music, as ABIGAIL enters dragging a large bale which is dripping wet)

MARGARET: What is it?

ABIGAIL: What is it? It's wool! A whole bale o' wool! It's gonna make us all clothes fer the winter!

MARGARET: Puh! Ain't nothin' smells like wet wool.

ABIGAIL: Ain't nothin' weighs like wet wool, neither! You get the mendin' finished?

MARGARET: Yes.

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

ABIGAIL: An' where's Andrew?

MARGARET: Ollie's got him over t' th' sand hills. DeWitt, too.

ABIGAIL: Oh, Lor', they're probly makin' mud pies again. Well, as long as they're not drowned.

MARGARET: Where didja find this?

ABIGAIL: Came over a little dune 'bout half a mile from here 'n there it was, tangled up in the rushes!

MARGARET: Reckon it's from the Henry Clay?

ABIGAIL: Reckon it is. Weren't no other wreck full o' wool in the last year. We had some of it in Port Rowan – remember? – but I never thought t' see any out here.

MARGARET: Nobody else t' pick it up, I guess.

ABIGAIL: An' ya know what else I found?

MARGARET: What?

ABIGAIL: There's a hollow, like, with a few bushes 'n green things springin' up 'n no more sand than what's blowed onto it. I scraped back the sand an' there's topsoil! Real topsoil! A few inches of it at least – I calculate mebbe it were the bottom of a bog once 'r somethin'.

MARGARET: A garden!

ABIGAIL: Yes, Maggie, a garden! I even brought seed 'n all – yer father thought I were two bricks short of a load, but I brought it! We gotta get started first thing tomorrow.

MARGARET: Punkins 'n taters 'n peas 'n cabbage – ! Punkins 'n taters 'n peas 'n cabbage! Punkins 'n taters 'n peas 'n cabbage – !!!

ABIGAIL: Yes! And tonight arter supper we'll git out the spinnin' wheel! Now help me git this bale inta

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

the house....

(Exit ABIGAIL and MARGARET with the bale. Nightfall. Music. Enter WILLIAM with a bundle, EDWARD and OLIVER following in some puzzlement)

WILLIAM: Come on!

EDWARD: What are we skulkin' around out here for?

WILLIAM: 'Cause I want to get outa sight o' the house.

OLIVER: Alright. They can't see us now. What?

WILLIAM: *(beat)* Haven't you got books 'r somethin' ya wanna play with, Ollie?

OLIVER: No. What you got in that bundle?

WILLIAM: Mind yer own business.

(Pause. They look at each other)

EDWARD: Out with it, William. What's on yer mind?

WILLIAM: I'm cuttin' out.

OLIVER: What? Whaddaya mean?

EDWARD: Shush, Ollie! *(to WILLIAM)* Whaddaya mean?

WILLIAM: I mean I'm leavin' here. Gettin' off Long Point.

EDWARD: What?!

WILLIAM: They had no right t' drag us out here. I've had it. I'm goin'.

OLIVER: Y're leavin'?

WILLIAM: Clean yer ears, Ollie! That's what I said, I'm leavin'.

OLIVER: Well ... what're you plannin' to do?

WILLIAM: Farmer'n DeBlaquière's lookin' fer men. I heard

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

it when Pa 'n me was in Port Rowan last.

OLIVER: So?

WILLIAM: So I'm gonna work for 'em, frogface.

OLIVER: I thought you said they was lookin' fer men.

(OLIVER dodges before WILLIAM can land the blow)

WILLIAM: I'm sixteen 'n fully growed, 'n I can pull my weight with any man – which is more'n you can say.

EDWARD: What makes ya think they'll take ya?

WILLIAM: They're takin anybody that walks, Eddie. They're sellin' so much timber they can't cut it fast enough – even got their own railroad into the mill.

OLIVER: With wooden rails!

WILLIAM: It's still a railroad, bookworm. An' they're payin' good money, which is more 'n anybody 'll ever see out here. *(beat)* This ain't gonna work, ya know. You seen the prices Pa gets in Port Rowan. It ain't gonna work.

EDWARD: Willie, y're only sixteen: that's too young t' be leavin' home.

WILLIAM: Don't gimme that, Edward; this ain't my home. A one room shanty on an overgrewed sand bar?

EDWARD: It's where your family is!

WILLIAM: This ain't my family, neither.

OLIVER: What?! Whose is it, then?

WILLIAM: Yours, maybe, not mine. I ain't had a family since Ma died.

EDWARD: Ever occur t' you that might be yer fault?

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

WILLIAM: Don't matter whose fault it is, I'm goin'. An' I'm goin' tonight.

EDWARD: Willie, you ain't even given this place a chance! The timber industry ain't runnin' away: put it off for a couple o' years.

WILLIAM: Eddie, if I hafta climb one more sandhill 'r shoot at one more duck, I'm gonna kill somebody. I'm goin' now.

EDWARD: You can't!

WILLIAM: I can!

EDWARD: I forbid it!

WILLIAM: Who do you think you are? Pa?

EDWARD: I'm yer big brother an' I'm tellin' you ya can't go!

WILLIAM: I didn't ask you out here for no "opinion" 'r "permission" 'r whatever the hell you think y're givin' me, Eddie: I ast you t' see if you'd come too!!!

EDWARD: *(beat)* What?

WILLIAM: We could go together. Cousin Henry'll board us - he lives right at Rowan Mills an' he's got the room. You could get a job at the Mill same as me. Our own ready cash - t' do with what we want. Think about it.

(No answer)

Come with me. It'd be great.

(No answer)

OLIVER: *(scared)* You ain't gonna go, are ya, Eddie?

(No answer)

If you go too, it'll be just me an' Maggie left out here. Isaac's too little t' be any use.

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

(No answer)

They need us here, Eddie.

EDWARD: Yeah. They do.

WILLIAM: So — ?

EDWARD: So ... I ain't comin'. Leastways, not yet.

WILLIAM: Chickenshit. Chickenshit, chickenshit, chickenshit.

EDWARD: Call me what ya like. I ain't the one that's runnin' away.

WILLIAM: *(picks up his bundle and heads for the top of a dune)* Y're gonna be sorry, Eddie.

(Underscoring begins)

This place is gonna eat you up, an' I won't care — 'cause I'm gonna be livin' high off the hog with the timbermen.

(No answer)

The hell with ya!

(Exit WILLIAM. OLIVER and EDWARD look at each other)

OLIVER: How's he gonna get across The Cut?

EDWARD: Keeper at the lightship'll row 'm.

OLIVER: If he's sober!

EDWARD: If he ain't now, he will be in the morning.
(beat) What're we gonna tell Pa?

OLIVER: What're we gonna tell Mother? *(beat)* You think he's right, Eddie? About Long Point?

EDWARD: I don't know. I don't know.

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

(As lights change for the following day, enter JEREMIAH abruptly to confront ABIGAIL, with MARGARET trailing after in tears. Music out)

JEREMIAH: Whaddaya mean, 'the boy's gone'?!

ABIGAIL: He's just ... gone, Jeremy. Last night, the boys said. T' th' timbermen.

JEREMIAH: An' this is the first you heard of it?

(ABIGAIL nods)

Damn! *(beat)* I'm goin' after 'im!

EDWARD: Ain't no use in that, Pa. He won't come back 'less ya hauls 'im.

JEREMIAH: Then mebbe that's what I'll do!

ABIGAIL: The boy is sixteen, Jeremy. I reckon he knows where he wants t' be.

EDWARD: There ain't nothin' t' be done, Pa. William's gone. 'N that's all there is to it.

(Pause. JEREMIAH in a paroxysm of frustration)

JEREMIAH: Damn!!! I told you they wouldn't want t' live here. I told you, woman!

OLIVER: The rest of us ain't goin' nowhere.

JEREMIAH: Fat lot o' use that is, when the only one o' ya that's worth a pinch o' coonshit might as well be t' other side o' th' moon! Who's gonna make up fer that, I wonder? *(beat)* Eh?!

(Exit JEREMIAH; music as THE OTHERS stare at each other helplessly. Cross-fade to CAPTAIN DORR. During the following, THE FAMILY departs in various directions)

CAPTAIN DORR: The Bay City Journal contains a few additional particulars. "Our informant says," it avows,

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

"that he has frequently seen Mrs. Becker, when her husband was short of help, assist him in hauling his net and securing the fish: she entering the water waist deep, and bringing to shore, with a gaff-hook, sturgeons of an enormous size, while her husband managed the net." Undoubtedly she also assisted him in preparing his skins, and on the occasional trapping excursion...

(Lights rise as ABIGAIL enters with MARGARET, carrying a hoe; the music brightens and fades to underscore)

MARGARET: Mother! Look! The first punkin! *(bends to admire it)* It's so little an' green. *(checks the other "plants")* Look, here's another one!

ABIGAIL: My land, I never seen that yesterday.

MARGARET: Mebbe it weren't here yesterday.

ABIGAIL: Well, if we get at these weeds, mebbe we can keep 'em comin'. Lord knows we need 'em bad enough. *(starts to hoe)*

JEREMIAH: *(off)* Abbie!

ABIGAIL: That's yer Pa. What's he doin' back at this hour?

JEREMIAH: *(off)* Abbie!!!

ABIGAIL: Here! In the garden!

(Music out as she sees them coming)

Oh Lord ha' mercy! *(drops the hoe and goes to meet them half way)*

(Enter JEREMIAH and OLIVER in a rush, carrying EDWARD on a makeshift stretcher. They set him down carefully; EDWARD screams with every jolt)

Dear Lord, what happened?

MARGARET: Eddie!

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

JEREMIAH: His leg's broke – broke bad.

ABIGAIL: How?!

JEREMIAH: |He had a load o' gear gettin' outa the boat –
|

OLIVER: | (*overlapping*) He shouldn't of tried to lift that
much by hisself; I tol' him I'd be |there in a
sec' –

JEREMIAH: |– an' he steps on the gunnel an' the load went
this way an' he went the other – down between the
boat an' the jetty –

OLIVER: |– (*overlapping*) an' another swell come in an' –
an' – an' –

JEREMIAH: |An' the boat smashed him hard – up against the
post, like. Twice.

ABIGAIL: He musta been tryin' t' do Willie's share too.
Oh, you foolish boy, is that what you were tryin'
t' do?

EDWARD: (*through his teeth*) Somebody got to.

OLIVER: I tol' ya t' wait fer me, ya stupid – !

ABIGAIL: That's enough, Oliver.

OLIVER: Durn near got hisself kilt.

ABIGAIL: I need a knife.

(*JEREMIAH hands her his knife; ABIGAIL slits
EDWARD's pant-leg up to the hip; EDWARD
screams*)

Oh, dear Lord, there's bone stickin' out. An'
he's bleedin' like a stuck pig. Edward –

(*No answer*)

I think he's fainted. Edward boy, can ya hear me?

EDWARD: Yeah. Oh God, it hurts!

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

ABIGAIL: I know! I know! We'll take care of ya, don't you worry! *(to JEREMIAH)* We gotta get him to a doctor.

JEREMIAH: The nearest doctor's Simcoe.

ABIGAIL: Then that's where we gotta go.

OLIVER: You'd kill him!

JEREMIAH: Simcoe's thirty mile an' more, Abbie.

ABIGAIL: It's a bad break, real bad – he needs a doctor!

JEREMIAH: We'd be all day an' all night gettin' him there an' he'd bleed t' death – if we didn't kill him gettin' him in an' out o' the boats an' wagons an' joltin him over the roads on the' way! At the best he'd lose his leg. We ain't got time t' get t' no doctor!

ABIGAIL: Who ... Who's goin' t' set it, then?

(Pause)

JEREMIAH: Well I don't ... I ain't never ...

ABIGAIL: Nor me.

(Silence: a dreadful realization for both of them. Then EDWARD groans)

Lord, help me. *(beat)* Maggie, get inta th' house an' get the fire up an' water heatin' – lots of it.

(Exit MARGARET on the run)

Ollie, I needs four sticks – straight an' clean, with the bark off 'em – half as big as yer wrist 'r more, an' mebbe three foot long.

(OLIVER runs)

(calling after him) An' when you got those, look for poke root: we gotta keep the fever down.

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

JEREMIAH: What fever?

ABIGAIL: There's gonna be fever, Jeremy. There's gonna be a powerful lot o' fever. *(looking at EDWARD)* For once I wisht we had some brandy. *(beat)* Here: help me git him into the house.

(EDWARD screams as they lift the litter)

Easy!

JEREMIAH: *(to EDWARD)* Y're gonna be all right, boy! Everything'll be jest fine. Don't you worry....

(Exit ABIGAIL and JEREMIAH, carrying EDWARD, towards the house. Cross-fade, as the sound of storm wind and waves begins rising slowly. Enter S. B. COOK)

S. B. COOK: In my thirty-one years on Long Point, I have recorded an average wind velocity of as much as sixty-two and a half miles per hour for thirty-five consecutive hours. If you don't believe that is some wind, I wish you could try walking from our home to the lighthouse in the teeth of such a gale. One must hang tight to the rail or surely be blown away.

Often the water goes clear over the top of the elevated walk, the woodpile may change places or float away altogether – or the chicken coop, a landmark for years, may be torn off its foundations, carrying with it the entire flock of poultry. There's no telling what the Lake is going to re-arrange....

(Wind and waves peak and decline as lights cross-fade again. Exit S. B. COOK. Morning. JEREMIAH carries EDWARD out and places him in the rocking chair, his splinted leg propped on a bench; ABIGAIL arranges a blanket over it. Then she offers EDWARD a bowl and spoon)

EDWARD: What is it?

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

ABIGAIL: Wild Turkey soup. Goes down easy an' fortifies the blood.

(EDWARD takes it and eats listlessly)

Air's so fresh arter that storm. Thought you'd like a breath: you ain't been out in weeks.

EDWARD: Yeah. *(pause)* How much longer d'ya reckon it'll be b'fore ... ?

ABIGAIL: I don't know. The fever took so long to break ... but th' infection's gone now. You'll soon be on the mend.

(EDWARD eats. JEREMIAH motions ABIGAIL out of his earshot)

JEREMIAH: It's healin' so slow.

ABIGAIL: Yes.

JEREMIAH: An' it's healin' crooked an' shorter than the other.

ABIGAIL: *(beat)* Yes. I ... did all I knew how ta, Jeremy.

JEREMIAH: *(he hasn't fully faced it until now)* That's my son. My eldest son. *(beat)* An' he's goin' t' be a cripple.

(JEREMIAH crosses away. Enter MARGARET suddenly over a dune, hoe in hand, tears streaming down her face)

ABIGAIL: Lord ha' mercy, child, what ails ya?

EDWARD: What's wrong?

MARGARET: The storm the storm ...

ABIGAIL: Get hold o' yourself. What's happened? It ain't a snake bite, is it? Maggie, darlin', tell me.

MARGARET: I went to tend the garden an' - an' - an' -

ABIGAIL: Yes?

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

MARGARET: It ain't there!

ABIGAIL: What?!

MARGARET: The storm – the high water – it's all washed away!

ABIGAIL: Everything?

MARGARET: *(nodding and sobbing)* Them punkins was just about as big as my head, and startin' t' turn yeller, an' now – they're every one of 'em gone! An' the peas – an' the rest o' th' cabbage –

EDWARD: Even the taters?

MARGARET: I don't know!!!

ABIGAIL: Hush, child, hush. *(embracing her)* T'ain't the end o' th' world, now.

MARGARET: But it's too late to plant any more!

ABIGAIL: Well, yes, it is, but –

(Over MARGARET's shoulder, ABIGAIL connects with JEREMIAH)

– we'll manage somehow. We'll ... make do.

(MARGARET quiets down some)

There now. *(calling off)* Ollie, you in there?

OLIVER: *(off)* Yeah!

ABIGAIL: Put a kettle on 'n fix yer sister some tea! *(to MARGARET)* There ya go. That's better. Now you go in t' yer brother an' he'll get you a nice cup o' tea.

(Exit MARGARET. With a glance at JEREMIAH, ABIGAIL starts to leave)

JEREMIAH: Where you goin'?

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

ABIGAIL: Ta see if the lake left us any taters!

(Exit ABIGAIL. Music. Lights fade to focus on JEREMIAH, as the set is adjusted around EDWARD to reveal the cabin interior)

JEREMIAH: *(to the audience)* I was just turnin' twenty when I found Mary Ann. An' Mary Ann an me, well ... we found our farm together. *(beat)* I cleared the land an' finished the log cabin just in time for Edward t' be born. An' things went well fer a while: William, then Oliver, fine new frame house, four cows, a team o' horses – thought we was fixed fer life.

But by the time Maggie arrived, well, I reckoned I'd jest hit a lean spell. I'd solt off the first parcel, but I could wrap my mind around that – 185 acres was too much for one man anyway. But things didn't get no better, ya see. I made a deal to sell the rest. Fer several years, we stayed on but lived mostly off the payments. An' the cows went, too. The horses. The equipment....

It was bearin' Isaac that killed her. Oh she ... drug on another couple years after him, but she never really recovered. Died the year the Furnace closed, age thirty-three. *(beat)* I was always glad she weren't alive t' see the end o' that farm.

Those winters on Long Point I used ta ask myself, "Could I ever put them through all that again? " ... Could I?

Music. Exit JEREMIAH. EDWARD goes to sleep as we make the transition to ...

Scene Seven

November 15, 1852 – 3 months later: the Long Point cabin, interior. The dead of night, with only a glow from the fire. Music

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

gives way to a severe storm howling outside. ABIGAIL on the edge of one bunk, EDWARD and OLIVER asleep in a second, MARGARET in a third. A particularly violent gust, and something bumps against the side of the cabin.

MARGARET: *(startled awake)* What was that?

ABIGAIL: Prob'ly a busted tree branch. Wind's so strong, if it weren't for them sandhills, I calculate we'd all be in the middle o' Big Marsh by now. Go back t' sleep.

MARGARET: I can't sleep with that storm.

ABIGAIL: Well try.

MARGARET: You ain't sleepin'.

ABIGAIL: No.

MARGARET: How come?

ABIGAIL: Storm like this an' yer father not t' home. Silly, I know, but ...

MARGARET: He'll be snugged down in Port Rowan.

ABIGAIL: I guess.

MARGARET: The boys is fine.

ABIGAIL: They been restless, too. I been watchin'. It's the littl'uns don't mind it — sleep like the dead through anythin'. You lay back now, try t' doze.

MARGARET: *(after doing so)* There'll be a powerful lot o' ships in the Bay tonight.

ABIGAIL: I reckon. There's allus some tries t' make one last run before freeze-up. *(beat)* I hope that idjit at the lightship is sober fer once.

MARGARET: Me too. It's no night to be on the open water.

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

(ABIGAIL stands suddenly)

What?

ABIGAIL: Shhh. I heard somethin'.

(Pause. Suddenly the door flies open with a roar of wind and flurry of snow. ABIGAIL lets out a cry and MARGARET screams; EDWARD and OLIVER start awake. Enter SAILOR 1, collapsing through the doorway)

SAILOR 1: Thank God. Oh thank God.

EDWARD: |Who're you?

OLIVER: |Where'd you come from?

MARGARET: |What in the world - ?

SAILOR 1: Perkins ... the Arkansas ... we ran aground at the Cut....

OLIVER: You got off a wreck?!

(SAILOR nods)

ABIGAIL: Ollie, build that fire up. Maggie, git a candle out o' the tin box so we can give the man some light.

(OLIVER springs to the fire, ABIGAIL is getting the soup pot onto its hook, but MARGARET hesitates)

Come on. It ain't every day we get a shipwrecked sailor that's still breathin'!

(MARGARET gets a candle)

There - soup's on: ya can warm yer blood in a minute. Git over here by the fire, now, ya must be half froze.

SAILOR 1: Thanks, Missus. You don't know how glad ...

EDWARD: What happened?

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

SAILOR 1: Us and the New Haven, both carryin' railroad iron. Storm came up an' we tried fer The Cut, but ... ya couldn't see nothin' out there! Straight into the bar!

EDWARD: Wait a minute. Two ships went down?

SAILOR 1: *(nodding)* No boats, no men ashore – she musta lost all hands.... There was no light, damn it! There was no goddamn light at The Cut!

(A look between MARGARET and ABIGAIL)

Sorry fer the language, Missus.

OLIVER: You were durn lucky t' find this place.

SAILOR 1: Didn't know it was here – we was tryin' fer the other light.

MARGARET: The other light?! That's fifteen mile further out t' the point!

SAILOR 1: It was all we could think t' do. There weren't nobody home at The Cut. No keeper, no wood t' burn, nothin' t' eat – !

OLIVER: Gone t' the mainland fer the winter already.

EDWARD: The idjit!

SAILOR 1: Well he's been the death of many a good man to-night. If I ever find that feller –

ABIGAIL: Mr. Perkins! Was there any others with ya?

SAILOR 1: Five.... We made it ashore in the yawl, before –

ABIGAIL: Where are they now, then?

SAILOR 1: Three right behind me. But the other two ... didn't make it this far. We –

(Door flies open again. Enter SAILOR 2, worse off than the first)

SAILOR 2: Oh – ! Oh my Lord – !

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

ABIGAIL: Here! Lean on me! Over here by the fire....
That's right. Soup, Maggie!

(MARGARET pours two bowls)

There now, that better? And here y'are: wild turkey soup – goes down easy and fortifies the blood.

BOTH SAILORS: Thankyou.

ABIGAIL: *(to SAILOR 1)* Now! Ya say there's two that fell behind?

SAILOR 1: They just couldn't walk no more.... We tried to keep 'em goin' –

SAILOR 2: Even tried to carry 'em, but ...

ABIGAIL: Boys, git yer coats on. There's a chance those men is still alive.

(They leap to do so, EDWARD on crutches – which we are seeing now for the first time. ABIGAIL starts gathering coats and blankets)

Maggie, the big flask – would ya git some soup in it, please?

(MARGARET does)

(to the SAILORS) How far back didja lose 'em?

SAILOR 1: A mile – maybe two.

EDWARD: Sounds like Sturgeon Bay.

ABIGAIL: Think we can count on you boys t' find the lost sheep?

OLIVER: Sure, we'll get them! Won't we, Eddie!

ABIGAIL: Good boys. Jest pray the poor fellas is still breathin' when ya git there. Watch yer footin' in that dark, mind – we don't want no more busted limbs!

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

(ABIGAIL has tied the soup into her bundle, which she gives to OLIVER)

I put some corn bread in here, too – and there'll be hot food waitin' when ya get back.

SAILOR 2: Missus, yer boy's lame.

SAILOR 1: He shouldn't oughta go out in that blast, should he?

ABIGAIL: Edward does alright.

OLIVER: You ain't seen him go on them crutches! He's fast, ain'tcha, Eddie?

EDWARD: Dern right. Put feet on 'em fer the sand, ya see? I jest been waitin' fer some snow t' try 'em out on!

SAILOR 1: Ya may see more 'n ya bargained fer.

ABIGAIL: Those men could be dyin' while ya wag yer jaws! Go on. *(beat)* An' God go with ya.

(Exit EDWARD and OLIVER. SAILOR 2 collapses; MARGARET runs to him with a cry)

ABIGAIL: *(checking him)* Fainted. He's frost-bit too, Maggie. Git some snow t' melt fer cold water.

(Exit MARGARET, putting a coat on)

You'll be alright, Mister. Y're gonna be jest fine.

SAILOR 1: This cabin was an almighty welcome sight, I'll tell ya. I never thought t' see nobody livin' out here.

ABIGAIL: We're the only ones.

SAILOR 1: How do ya manage – with a family an' all in a place like this?

ABIGAIL: *(beat)* It ain't so bad.

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

*(Re-enter MARGARET to talk to the audience
as the scene is cleared. Music underscores)*

MARGARET: The boys found the other two sailors about a mile and a half away. They were still breathin', an' after eatin' some o' Mother's warm food and wrappin' up in the coats and blankets, they were able t' get t' the house. There was other occasions before we moved t' Long Point, she kept a child from drownin' in a well, and a man from a similar fate at Nanticoke by throwin' him a plank and holdin' him up until assistance came.

Father, well, sometimes he didn't know what to make of her! ...

Cross-fade to ...

Scene Eight

*Early March, 1853 – not quite four
months later. Enter JEREMIAH in a
rush, as music fades.*

JEREMIAH: Maggie! Where's yer mother?

MARGARET: Inside. What is it, Pa?

*(JEREMIAH storms on without answering – to
re-enter in a moment by the door of the
house)*

(to the audience) It was near the end o' that first winter that we heard about the survey.

(MARGARET follows her father)

JEREMIAH: *(at last he has the ammunition he's been looking for)* Abbie!

ABIGAIL: *(busy at the hearth)* Yes?

JEREMIAH: They're sellin' the island!

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

ABIGAIL: What?!

JEREMIAH: There's a survey crew on the ice at Little Rice Bay takin' measurements. They're studyin' how to divide up Long Point fer sale!

ABIGAIL: Who ... how ... ?

JEREMIAH: The crew says they're workin' fer a feller name o' James Black, an' he's got orders from the gov'mint to survey the whole o' the island - every inch of it - so it can be solt off to whoever wants it, piece by piece.

ABIGAIL: Includin' this? What we live on?

JEREMIAH: Includin' this.

ABIGAIL: I thought it were crown land!

JEREMIAH: Well it is - 'cept fer the little bits Harry Clark an' Doctor Ryerson own.

ABIGAIL: But don't that mean it belongs to th' Queen?

JEREMIAH: Reckon it does. Reckon it's her that's sellin' it.

ABIGAIL: *(beat)* She mighta tolt us.

JEREMIAH: *(reacts)* We're only squatters, Abbie: ain't nobody owes us nothin'. Besides, it ain't just her: it's her and the gov'mint.

ABIGAIL: The gov'mint. *(beat)* Well, the gov'mint gives land patents, don't it? Weren't most o' this country settled by squatters? An' they laid a claim an' the gov'mint give 'em a patent!

JEREMIAH: That was thirty year ago an' more; things is different now, woman!

ABIGAIL: Then ... *(with a glance at the dumbstruck MARGARET)* We'll have to buy it.

JEREMIAH: Buy it?!

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

ABIGAIL: They can't be plannin' to charge no fortune fer a bunch o' sandhills, Jeremy.

JEREMIAH: Buy the whole of Long Point?

ABIGAIL: No, o' course not! Jest this bit we're on.

JEREMIAH: An' what good would that do us?

ABIGAIL: Well, we'd own it then. It'd be ours!

JEREMIAH: You still don't get it, do ya, woman. We could buy a few acres, sure – if we ever got the money, an' there ain't no sign o' that yet. But all them other thousands of acres 'd belong to somebody else. Do ya not see what that means?

ABIGAIL: No.

JEREMIAH: Means if ya set foot outside yer own yard y're a trespasser. Means if ya take a duck 'r a fish 'r a muskrat anywhere but on yer own property y're a poacher. Means it's over, Abbie. *(beat)* Means it's done.

(A moment of shocked silence. Then MARGARET starts to cry)

ABIGAIL: *(going to her)* Hush, child. They can't get far this year with spring break-up comin'. Can they, Jeremy? An' the gov'mint don't do nothin' fast – I calculate we got some time yet. Couple more winters? Longer, mebbe.

(SHE glances again, unsure, at JEREMIAH – who maintains a stony silence)

Don't you fret, Maggie, darlin': we ain't goin' no place. Not yet....

Bleak music. Outside, enter EDWARD, now 22, OLIVER, now 15, and ISAAC, now 9, and glumly begin passing bales towards the boat, as the lights cross-fade to ...

Scene Nine

A year and a half later. ABIGAIL, now 23, JEREMIAH, now 43, and MARGARET, just turned 14, soberly join THE OTHERS in their chain, which is loading the boat with bales of fur for the fall run to Port Rowan. Weather is cloudy; a chill wind is starting to blow.

JEREMIAH: One more bale o' muskrat. *(passes it on)*

OLIVER: *(stowing it in the boat)* That's her.

ABIGAIL: That all the duck there is?

JEREMIAH: It is this time. *(beat)* I wisht the rest o' yas was comin' with me.

(It is a challenge aimed at provoking response. THE OTHERS glance at each other but remain silent; though mindful of the cost to themselves and their father, they have clearly aligned themselves with ABIGAIL on this ongoing issue. JEREMIAH abandons the attempt, determining instead to isolate the source of the opposition)

MARGARET: *(to the audience)* November 24th, 1854.

JEREMIAH: *(with a glance at ABIGAIL)* Better git in some firewood, boys – it's gettin' chilly.

OLIVER: Sure, Pa.

EDWARD: Have a good trip.

ISAAC: Have a good trip!

(Exit EDWARD, OLIVER, and ISAAC)

MARGARET: Reckon you'll be long this time?

JEREMIAH: A few days.

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

MARGARET: Well ... have a good trip, Pa.

(Exit MARGARET, as the music fades. Awkward silence)

ABIGAIL: It don't look very full somehow.

JEREMIAH: That's 'cause there ain't as much in it. The higher the prices git, the steeper the competition: Sturgeon Bay's durn near trapped out, we got these big comp'nies comin' in now -

ABIGAIL: Leastways we're together.

(JEREMIAH reacts)

(escaping) Well, good luck in Port Rowan -

JEREMIAH: Where you goin'?!

ABIGAIL: T' check my turkey pen.

JEREMIAH: I want ya t' go back - before this winter hits! I want you an' the kids back on th' mainland where it's safe an' warm, an' where I know fer sure you'll have somethin' to eat -

ABIGAIL: They ain't finished the survey yet.

JEREMIAH: But they might this winter. They will if the ice stays long enough.

ABIGAIL: *(they've had this conversation before)* Go back to livin' off John an' Margaret, an' leave you out here t' struggle on alone, ya mean. That what you want?

JEREMIAH: T'ain't what I want! It's what I can't do nothin' about. Sooner or later a man - or a woman - has got ta see the writin' on the wall.

ABIGAIL: Thought you knew I couldn't read.

JEREMIAH: Abbie - !

ABIGAIL: *(tiredly)* I don't know, y're prob'ly right. I'm sure ya are, Jeremy. But it's still the only

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

chance we got. *(beat)* Time enough t' go, I reckon, when they come t' throw us out.

(With a gesture of sheer frustration, exit JEREMIAH. A musical bridge: ABIGAIL watches him start down the creek in his skiff)

(calling after him) There'll be turkey stew on the hearth when ya git home!

(No answer. And now he's gone)

(to herself) Two years. Two an' a half years....

(Music fades)

(now to the audience) The best of all them birds we git here is the turkeys – the wild turkeys. Can't get nowheres near 'em t' hunt, o' course, so ya build a pen. Ol' logs 'r boards, mebbe three foot high 'n eight 'r ten foot acrost, with gaps between, an' roofed over like, so they can't fly out. An' on one side ya digs a hole underneath, jest big enough fer them to git in. Then ya scatter corn all around, 'n some inside, 'n some through the tunnel, 'n ya goes well away. An' sooner 'r later them turkeys come a-peckin' 'n a-peckin, an' they peck theirselves right into the pen.

They can't help it: ya put the thing they want in front o' them an' they go fer it, no matter what. They don't look right nor left, they don't stop t' think o' the cost, an' before they knows it, there they are – trapped. Penned in where they won't never see the world outside again. Helpless.

(beat) So the next day ya come back, ya rings their necks 'n plucks their feathers, an' ya got a heap o' dead turkeys an' fine dinners fer yer chirren.

They're too stupid, y' see. They keep tryin' to git out the gaps, between the logs like, but they don't never think o' usin' the tunnel they come in by. They're too dumb, poor critters. *(beat)*

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

Too stupid an' stubborn t' jest turn around an'
go back the way they came....

*(The wind gusts. ABIGAIL shivers and
tightens her shawl, checking the sky)*

(calling off) DeWitt! Andrew! ... *(sees them come
over a dune – ages 5 and 3 now – with ISAAC)*
Isaac, git yer little brothers inside an' put
another layer o' clothes on 'em. You get a coat
on too, or y'll catch yer death o' cold out here:
it's gettin' chilly. *(watches them move towards
the house and checks the sky again)* An' mind ya
don't stray too far when ya come back out again:
I don't like the look o' that sky!

*But ABIGAIL herself makes no move
to go; she is standing lost in
thought as music swells to replace
the wind, and the lights fade
slowly to black.*

– INTERMISSION –

- ACT II -

Scene Ten

Music; THREE SAILORS enter in half light and begin transforming the set to establish the ship.

3 SAILORS: *(singing)* **We leaves Detroit behind us, _
We sets our canvas tight; _
The tug slows down and casts us off, _
Old Erie heaves in sight!**

(THE REST OF THE SAILORS join them)

ALL: **So we watch our tiller closer, _
We keeps our sheet ropes clear; _
There's no sich thing as stiddy wind _
Along Lake Erie here....**

(TWO OF THEM begin a different tune)

2 SAILORS: **A strong sou'wester's blowin', Bill!
Hark! don't ye hear it roar now?**

ALL: **Lord help 'em, how I pities them
_ Unhappy folks on shore now!...**

(A moment's pause and then, with a thundering crash, lights, sound, and action take us aboard the Conductor in the small hours of November 25th, 1854. Howling wind, roaring waves, flying spray, blinding snow. MISTER JONES — the mate — and CHIPS CHAMBERS struggle with the wheel. CAP'N HACKETT, a nice-looking young man in his 20s, braces himself nearby. Cook DOC COUSINS and ship's boy JERRY SAWYERS are working the sheets. Also visible may be one or more of seamen JEROME ANDREWS, JOHN MCAULEY and GEORGE NICODEMUS)

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

MISTER JONES: *(over the wind)* We can hardly keep the helm now, Cap'n. It's blowin' scissors an' thumbscrews!

CAP'N HACKETT: We'll have to try to beat around Long Point and ride it out in the lee!

MISTER JONES: What?

CAP'N HACKETT: I said make for Long Point Bay, Mister Jones!

MISTER JONES: I'm not sure where we are now, sir!

CAP'N HACKETT: *(not hearing)* What?

MISTER JONES: *(giving up)* I'll try!

CAP'N HACKETT: *(to the audience)* Captain Henry Hackett. On the morning of November 24th, 1854, I put out from Amherstberg with seven other men and ten thousand bushels of corn, bound for Toronto by the Welland Canal. The wind blew fresh from the South-West all day, a heavy sea running meantime; by evening it was a perfect hurricane, and around midnight it started to snow. The decks and sheets were icing up fast –

(A sea breaks over the decks. When everyone has recovered)

Jerry Sawyers!

JERRY SAWYERS: *(crossing to him)* Cap'n Hackett?

CAP'N HACKETT: Get your butt aloft and keep an eye peeled for the light!

JERRY SAWYERS: What?

CAP'N HACKETT: The light at the end of Long Point! It should be coming up dead ahead!

JERRY SAWYERS: I can't see my hand in front o' my face, sir!

CAP'N HACKETT: Well, you've got to try, boy! *(catching him as he goes)* And when you get up there, bend yourself to that spreader and don't let go!

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

JERRY SAWYERS: Aye-aye, sir! (*climbs aloft*)

CAP'N HACKETT: (*to the audience*) The boat was a three-masted topsail schooner owned by John McLeod, Esquire. Her name was —

MISTER JONES: Hold fast!

(A giant sea hits. The wheel is torn from the hands of MISTER JONES and CHIPS CHAMBERS, who go flying into the scuppers, and are barely held on board by CAP'N HACKETT and DOC COUSINS. Amid frantic attempts to regain the wheel, a muffled explosion)

CAP'N HACKETT: (*to the audience*) She was called the Conductor!

DOC COUSINS: (*scrambling to report*) Cook stove went with that one, sir! Blew to kingdom come, an' took most o' the galley with her! We're takin' on water below decks!

CHIP CHAMBERS: That last sea got the yawl-boat, sir!

MISTER JONES: Tops'l sheets've been carried away, too!

CAP'N HACKETT: Lord have mercy! (*calling aloft*) Boy! What news?

JERRY SAWYERS: (*aloft*) Nothin' yet, sir! Can't see nothin' at all, sir!

CAP'N HACKETT: Damn!

DOC COUSINS: Should we douse more sail, sir?

CAP'N HACKETT: We're only carrying the tops'ls, Cousins; if you want to make the rope, go ahead!

MISTER JONES: Hold fast!

(Another huge sea. As they recover)

JERRY SAWYERS: (*aloft*) A light! A light off the port beam!

CAP'N HACKETT: The port beam?!

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

MISTER JONES: That's gotta be it! — the light at the Point.

JERRY SAWYERS: (*aloft*) It'll soon be the port quarter: we're leavin' it behind fast.

CAP'N HACKETT: How far, boy?

JERRY SAWYERS: (*aloft*) Two miles, maybe? Three? I've lost it now, sir: can't see through this spondrift!

CAP'N HACKETT: (*to MISTER JONES*) We've passed it already! We're there! (*to the CREW*) She's nearly in the clear, boys!!!

ALL: HOORAY!!!

CAP'N HACKETT: (*an order to all*) Prepare to haul up jibs and come about into Long Point Bay!

THE CREW: Aye-aye, sir! (*they start for their positions*)

(*The roar of surf is heard*)

JERRY SAWYERS: (*aloft*) Captain!!! Breakers ahead — off the port bow!!

CAP'N HACKETT: Breakers?!?

MISTER JONES: What in tarnation — ?

CAP'N HACKETT: Did you say "breakers," boy?

JERRY SAWYERS: Miles o' them, sir! Comin' up fast!

CHIP CHAMBERS: Lord preserve us.

CAP'N HACKETT: There's no bar out here! What th — ?

MISTER JONES: Cap'n Hackett! What if we're twenty miles off course, sir? What if that wasn't the tip o' the Point at all?

CAP'N HACKETT: What — ?!?

MISTER JONES: What if that was the floating light at the Cut, sir?

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

(THE OTHERS begin, but the ship is hit by a howling gust of wind)

CHIP CHAMBERS: We're heeling over!

(There is a thundering rumble from below and the ship wallows even further to one side)

**The lowering night
shut out the sight:
Careened the vessel,
pitched and veered;
Raved, raved the wind
with main and might;
The sunken reef she neared!**

DOC COUSINS: There goes the cargo!

(The deck is awash; the jibs are luffing; they then begin to strain under the force of wind from the wrong side. The ship is completely out of control)

MISTER JONES: We're in irons!!!

JERRY SAWYERS: She's slipping astern!

MISTER JONES: Blow sheets!

(THE CREW tries but it's too late)

CAP'N HACKETT: Heads up!!!

(The mast snaps and falls. A terrible thud, a lurch, the sound of splitting timbers, and THE MEN scream, as the schooner is carried backwards over the first bar to slam into the second. Freeze)

ABIGAIL: **She pounded over, lurched and sank,
Between two sand-bars settling fast;
Her leaky hull the water drank ...
And she had sailed her last.**

SAILORS: *(breaking the freeze and singing through the transition to the next scene)*

**Around the beach the seagulls scream;
Their dismal notes prolong.
They're chanting forth a requiem,
A saddened funeral song.**

**They skim along the waters blue,
And then aloft they soar –
In memory of the sailing men**

Lost off the Long Point shore ...

Slow cross-fade to ...

Scene Eleven

The Long Point cabin, interior, just before dawn. Outside, howling wind and, at a little distance, pounding surf. MARGARET asleep in one bunk, EDWARD and OLIVER in another, ISAAC and the "littl'uns" in a third. As first light begins to glow dully, ABIGAIL, well wrapped up, is striking a flint to light the fire. MARGARET wakes.

MARGARET: I'll do that, Mother.

ABIGAIL: Then mind ya wrap up well first: it's frosty in here. I'm goin' fer water.

(Exit ABIGAIL with a bucket, struggling with the door in the wind. MARGARET throws off the covers and wraps herself quickly in a shawl before hopping to the fireplace. Shaking hands interfere with handling the flint)

OLIVER: *(from his bed)* Wouldja git the durn fire lit? We're freezin' t' death.

MARGARET: Thought you were still asleep.

OLIVER: I was. Your teeth 're chatterin' so loud ya woke me up!

MARGARET: Time you was up anyway. *(succeeding at last)* There! *(nurtures the flames)*

OLIVER: Still snowin' out?

MARGARET: Reckon it is. An' blowin' somethin' powerful.

OLIVER: That I know. Durn wind goin' like a banshee all

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

night I hardly slept a wink.

MARGARET: Mother near had t' wreck the hinges just t' git out the door. *(beat)* Come on, git up, Ollie. We need more wood.

OLIVER: Wood?!

MARGARET: Yes, wood!

OLIVER: Whoever informed you, miss, that I would even consider such a thing as t' git up out of a warm bed and sally forth into the veritable teeth of a blizzard such as this, merely fer the purpose of haulin' back a few sticks o' wood, was clearly out of their mind.

MARGARET: Ollie - !

OLIVER: Call me when it's over! *(throws himself under the covers and pulls them over his head)*

EDWARD: *(waking)* Hey! Watch it!

OLIVER: *(under the covers)* Watch it yerself!

(A shoving match under the blankets)

MARGARET: Stop it, you boys!

(Suddenly OLIVER, propelled by EDWARD, comes flying out from under the covers and onto the cold floor. Hopping and shrieking, he tries to climb back in, but EDWARD has tucked all blankets firmly around himself to keep OLIVER out)

OLIVER:_ Eddie - ! No fair!

ISAAC: *(rousing sleepily)* What's goin' on?

MARGARET: Now y're wakin' the littl'uns!

OLIVER: Good! They can git the wood! Hey, come on, Eddie, lemme in there!

(No answer)

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

I'll pummel you!

(A pillow fight starts; ISAAC joins of course, and eventually even MARGARET. Re-enter ABIGAIL suddenly in a blast of wind and snow, spilling half her water)

ABIGAIL: Chirren! Chirren, stop that! Now!!!

(THEY do)

There is a vessel aground about a mile up the beach. I heard her sails crack when I was gettin' the water.

(THE OTHERS react)

Edward, you go and see if we can help them.

EDWARD: A vessel? What type?

ABIGAIL: Schooner? Barquentine? — she's so damaged I can't see fer sure. There may be men on 'er.

EDWARD: They'd be froze stiff.

OLIVER: Or drowneded.

ABIGAIL: Maybe not all o' them. Maybe not yet. Go on, hurry.

(EDWARD leaps to put on outer clothes)

OLIVER: Can I go too?

ABIGAIL: Git on with ya, then.

(OLIVER leaps too)

Mind ya stay in the lee o' the sandhills till ya see the tip o' the mast; otherwise there'll be more than sailors froze.

ISAAC: Me too! I wanna go!

ABIGAIL: No, ya'd only slow them down, Isaac. You stay

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

right here an' get yer breakfast over with.
Littl'uns too.

ISAAC: Aw — !

ABIGAIL: Shush! Fill the kettle please, Maggie, an' git it
on that fire.

MARGARET: Why can't I go with the boys?

*(For answer ABIGAIL puts the kettle into her
hand. MARGARET fills it grudgingly as
ABIGAIL goes for cornbread, etc. EDWARD and
OLIVER, dressed, bodycheck each other
towards the door)*

EDWARD: Come on, Ollie.

OLIVER: Hark t' this one: "Gimp" t' the rescue!

EDWARD: Watch yer mouth, bookworm, 'r there'll be two of
us on crutches!

ABIGAIL: There could be men on that vessel!!! What's
keepin' ya?!!

*(Exit EDWARD and OLIVER in a cowed hurry. A
moment while ABIGAIL regrets her outburst)*

Help me please, Maggie. Help me hurry. I'm sure
there's men on that ship.

*(ABIGAIL and MARGARET return hastily to
breakfast chores; then MARGARET breaks away
to talk to the audience and lights fade on
the scene)*

MARGARET: When the boys came back, they said that from the
top o' the sandhills they could see eight men in
a sufferin' condition clingin' to the rigging.
The schooner was about two hundred yards out, and
the breakers were heavy; but with Father away, we
had no boat. Mother jest said, "Well they must be
saved." She told me t' keep the fire high an' the
littl'uns out of the way. Then she said t' the
boys, "We'll go down on the beach at once and see
if they will come ashore."

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

When the sailors seen her comin' over the hill,
they give a cheer!

*Lights, wind, and music begin to
rise on ...*

Scene Twelve

*Through the darkness three half-
dead men – more if available –
become visible amid the broken
spars and torn sails of the
Conductor: CAP'N HACKETT, MISTER
JONES, and CHIPS CHAMBERS.*

ENSEMBLE: **Into the rigging, quick as thought,
Captain and sailors all had sprung;
Clambered for life, some vantage caught,
And there all night they'd swung.**

**And it was cold – oh, it was cold!
The pinching cold was like a vise;
Spoondrift came freezing – fold on fold
It coated them with ice....**

ABIGAIL: *(stepping into the light)* Me an' the boys built a
big fire on the beach an' put water t' heat fer
makin' tea. I then called out t' the men, but
they could not hear me over the wind an' the
waves....

*(Suddenly we are there, and the full power
of the musical storm surrounds us. The
beach. Rolling billows divide ABIGAIL and
EDWARD from the marooned SAILORS. MARGARET
narrates and may also join the action if
necessary: much of it is played out in
pantomime)*

Come! Come on! ... Jump! Swim! I'll save you!

UNISON: **And oh, the gale! the rout and roar!
The blinding drift, the mounting wave;
Two hundred yards from wreck to shore;**

Eight human lives to save!

ABIGAIL: Have courage! Jump!

ENSEMBLE: **And it was twelve, and one, and two,
And it was three o'clock and more;**

MARGARET: **She called: -**

ABIGAIL: **Come on! there's naught to do,
But leap and swim ashore!**

(to the audience) I then went down t' the edge o' the breakers an' showed the crew where pieces o' the wreck were comin' on shore. If a piece of wood could get past the terrible undertow, then there was hope fer a man - and I would be there t' pull them out.

(to EDWARD) Can't they hear me? See?! Come!!

MISTER JONES: Can you make out what she's sayin'?

CAP'N HACKETT: No! She's jumping around, pointing at things, shouting at us - !

CHIP CHAMBERS: I can't hold on much longer. Why don't they jest bring a skiff?

MISTER JONES: Skiff'd be smashed t' pieces in these rollers, man!

CAP'N HACKETT: Dear Lord, look: she's wading into the water!

MISTER JONES: The woman's crazy! She'll get took by the undertow!

CHIP CHAMBERS: She'll freeze!

ABIGAIL: I waded out inta the breakers and signalled them t' jump in an' swim and I would help them.

MARGARET: She beckoned for them t' come ashore.

ENSEMBLE: **Blew, blew the gale; they did not hear;
She waded in the shallow sea;
She waved her hands, made signals clear: -**

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

ABIGAIL: **Swim! swim, and trust to me!**

CAP'N HACKETT: *(to the audience)* At last I understood her!

My men —

ENSEMBLE: **— the captain cried —**

CAP'N HACKETT: **— I'll try!**

**The woman's judgement may be right;
For sink or swim, eight men must die
If here we swing tonight!**

If I live, follow me; If I drown ... each of you
must do as he chooses.

MISTER JONES: No, Cap'n!

MARGARET: With a great effort he got off his stiffly frozen
overcoat an' his shoes —

UNISON: **Far out he marked the gathering surge;
Across the bar he watched it pour; —**

MARGARET: — and plunged into the water!

UNISON: **— Let go! — and on its topmost verge,
Came riding in to shore.**

ABIGAIL: The current swept him out in the lake —

MARGARET: It carried him down the beach quite a distance.
He was becomin' exhausted —

ABIGAIL: — then the tide carried him in like a heavy log.

MARGARET: Mother waded in and caught him by the hand.

ABIGAIL: When I brought him out he could not speak. So I
rolled him on the beach until he came to; then I
dragged him t' the fire —

MARGARET: — and gave him some hot tea! As soon as she'd
restored the captain, she started beckonin' for
the rest t' come.

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

ABIGAIL: Come! Come on!

MARGARET: The mate was the second t' make the attempt.

(The music begins a new phase)

Edward wanted t' help, and he tried t' go in t'
Mother's assistance....

ENSEMBLE: **Her crippled step-son now comes down.
To mother's help he wants to go.
And heeding not his mother's frown,
He tries what he can do.**

EDWARD: I'll go to meet him in the wave!

ABIGAIL: Keep back!

ENSEMBLE: - she bade.

ABIGAIL: **What strength have you?
I'll only have you both to save,
And work to pull you through!**

ENSEMBLE: **But out he went; in failing light,
Battled the waves to take their prey.
Still, mate and cripple sank from sight
And, clinching, rolled away!**

EDWARD: I caught holt of him, but the undertow swept us
off our feet -

MARGARET: So she had t' get them both out o' the water!

ENSEMBLE: **She sought them near, she sought them far.
Beneath the swell she gripped them tight;
With both together up the bar
She staggered into sight!**

MISTER JONES: The woman had the strength of a giantess!

UNISON: **Beside the fire her burdens fell:
She paused the cheering draught to pour,
Then waved her hands: -**

ABIGAIL: **All's well, all's well!
Come on! Swim! Swim ashore!**

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

(After CHIPS CHAMBERS, THE ENSEMBLE takes turns becoming the remaining four SAILORS. The music changes again)

MARGARET: The others came now at last – one at a time. Each half-frozen man she clutched, and through the terrible breakers dragged ashore. Some were nearly perished and had t' be tugged helplessly t' the fire, remainin' unconscious for some time before they could take their tea. Then she took off her shawl and shoes and put them on the men, one at a time, until she got them t' the house – where I and my younger brothers had a good fire up in the large old-fashion' fireplace. Barefooted she toiled on, her clothes frozen like iron upon her....

ENSEMBLE: **Down came the night, but far and bright,
Despite the wind and flying foam,
The bonfire flamed to give them light
To Trapper Becker's home.**

**And still the gale went shrieking on,
And still the wrecking fury grew;
And still the woman, worn and wan,
Those gates of death went through!**

MARGARET: Till night she toiled, and rescued seven!

CAP'N HACKETT: **Oh, safety after wreck is sweet!
And sweet is rest in hut or hall;
One story life and death repeat:
God's mercy over all.**

*(Pause. Most are now around the hearth.
Silence at last and a change in gears)*

MARGARET: It were so strange to see them all standin' round the fire in our cabin, dryin' their clothes – an' their paper money.

ABIGAIL: But the other poor fellow –

MARGARET: Doc Cousins, the cook.

ABIGAIL: – had t' remain another long night in the

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

riggin'.

DOC COUSINS: I don't know if I could tell ya how it felt – t' see my seven mates saved in turn an' not be able t' go after 'em. But I couldn't swim. I managed somehow t' lash myself t' the spar so the waves wouldn't get me if I passed out. An' the last thing I seen before the blackness came was the woman – still pacin' back 'n forth, back n' forth, waitin' for me in front o' that fire.

MARGARET: Mother called the men early in the mornin'. The sea had gone down somewhat; so they made a raft out o' the boards that were about, and put out t' the wreck – where they found there was evidences of life in him still. He was brought t' the house, and Mother put his frozen limbs in cold water t' draw out the frost.

(COUSINS has now been taken to join the rest)

ABIGAIL: He had t' stay several weeks with us before he was able t' get around.

MARGARET: They all sat by the fire dryin' themselves when the captain said:

CAP'N HACKETT: Mrs. Becker, you have done a great day's work. If it hadn't been for you, we would all 've been lost – and reaping our just reward, for there was not one of us fit to die!

(ALL laugh. Music. Cross-fade to ... several days later. ABIGAIL busy at the fire, with MARGARET, CAP'N HACKETT, MISTER JONES, and DOC COUSINS – at least – visible, plus a large number of other SAILORS who are understood to be out front)

ABIGAIL: Ready in a minute, allayas. Maggie, didja get Mr. Jones his punkin sace?

MARGARET: I did.

(JEREMIAH has entered and is picking his way a little awestruck through the SAILORS, as

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

music fades)

MISTER JONES: Right here, Missus. Thankyou.

ABIGAIL: *(to MARGARET)* Would ya check fer more cornbread, then? We're runnin' —

JEREMIAH: Abbie.

(ABIGAIL whirls round; MARGARET races to him)

MARGARET: Pa!!!

ABIGAIL: Lord ha' mercy, you startled me!

JEREMIAH: *(coping with MARGARET's hug)* There, there, girl. Abbie, I heard! Are you all right?!

ABIGAIL: Jest a sec' — I don't want this stew t' burn.

JEREMIAH: *(looking round in amazement)* One, two, three, four, five, six ...

ABIGAIL: *(having lifted the stewpot off the hob)* There now! Everybody, this is my husband, Mr. Jeremiah Becker.

DOC COUSINS: Pleased ta meet ya. Yer wife is some woman.

CAP'N HACKETT: Much obliged for your hospitality, sir.

ABIGAIL: That's Captain Hackett, Doc Cousins — Oh, I'll take ya round to all of 'em later. How are ya? Was it a good trip?

JEREMIAH: Abbie — Excuse us *(taking her aside)* — they tol' me there was eight sailors rescued from the Conductor.

ABIGAIL: Yes.

JEREMIAH: I count fifteen in here.

ABIGAIL: Well, some of 'em's out gettin' wood for me.

JEREMIAH: You mean there's more?!

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

ABIGAIL: There was another two wrecks.

JEREMIAH: Lord ha' mercy, woman! Three shiploads full o' sailors?!?

ABIGAIL: Yes.

JEREMIAH: An' you rescued them all!?!

ABIGAIL: No, no, these others got ashore theirselves; I'm just feedin' 'em. Mr. Cousins, the stew is ready. Nice 'n hot – just what ya need. *(taking him some)* There ya go.

DOC COUSINS: Thankyou, Missus.

ABIGAIL: *(to JEREMIAH as she crosses to fill another bowl)* I hope you brought lots o' flour – we're almost out. An' corn meal. An' I'm fresh outa turkeys, too. Must be the weather: there ain't been a one in the trap fer days.

JEREMIAH: How long ...

ABIGAIL: *(halting)* How long what?

JEREMIAH: How long – uh – ?! *(gesturing to the sailors)*

ABIGAIL: They stayin'? *(amazed he would need to ask)* Well ... till they're well enough to go. *(delivers the next bowl)*

MARGARET: *(returning)* There weren't no more corn bread, Mother.

ABIGAIL: I was afraid o' that.

JEREMIAH: Abbie – the boys'd be out with – ?

ABIGAIL: The rest o' the sailors, yes. And Isaac's got the littl'uns.

JEREMIAH: You reckon you could spare Edward an' Oliver till tomorrow?

ABIGAIL: Why?

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

JEREMIAH: Well, it looks like I got t' go back t' the mainland.

ABIGAIL: Again?! Why?!

JEREMIAH: T' get more food, woman! Why d' ya think?!

(Exit JEREMIAH. Music; THE SAILORS prepare to go, as MARGARET talks to the audience)

MARGARET: They stayed a week. When it came time for them to go, we found the men from the Conductor had left their coats an' shoes on the wreck. So we gave 'em ours, an' off they went t' Port Rowan.

MISTER JONES: *(to ABIGAIL)* I'd like ya t' have this, Missus. It's my sea chest, 'n jest about all I got t' give ya – not much fer savin' my life.

ABIGAIL: Oh no, Mr. Jones, I –

MISTER JONES: Please. Fer good luck. I been wrecked three times, an' each time the durn thing has followed me ashore in one piece. Take it.

CAP'N HACKETT: Thankyou again, Mrs. Becker.

DOC COUSINS: We'll never forget what you done for us.

CAP'N HACKETT: Billows may tumble, –

2ND SAILOR: Winds may roar,

TWO OTHERS: Strong hands the wrecked from death may snatch,

ALL SAILORS: But never, never, nevermore
This deed shall mortal match!

ALL: Good-bye! Thankyou! *(etc. ad lib)*

(Music, as the SAILORS exit and ABIGAIL returns to the house)

MARGARET: Although it's never been mentioned, the fact is that Mother could not swim.

Cross-fade to ...

Scene Thirteen

December, 1854 – a day or so later. MARGARET outside the Long Point cabin. The music gives way to sleighbells, approaching in the distance.

MARGARET: Mother!

ABIGAIL: *(off)* Yes?

MARGARET: There's a sleigh comin' across the ice. With two men in it.

(Enter ABIGAIL from inside, pulling her shawl around her. DEWITT, 5, peers from behind her skirts)

ABIGAIL: What could they want?

MARGARET: I don't know. They're gentlemen. Look at their coats.

(to the audience) It was a visit that was goin' t' change our lives. But we didn't know that then.

(The sleigh is heard arriving. Enter CAPTAIN DORR, an ebullient 37 at this point, with CAPTAIN DAVIS)

CAPTAIN DORR: Mrs. Becker?

ABIGAIL: Yes – ?

CAPTAIN DORR: We found her, Davis! *(to ABIGAIL)* Dorr, of Buffalo. Captain Dorr. That's E. P. Dorr, for Ebenezer Pearson – Marine Inspector for the Mutual Insurance Company. I'm honoured, ma'am, to make your acquaintance!

(He shoves out a hand, which ABIGAIL slowly

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

responds to)

And this is Captain Davis.

ABIGAIL: Sir.

CAPTAIN DAVIS: Delighted, Mrs. Becker.

CAPTAIN DORR: May we come in?

ABIGAIL: It ... it ain't much of a place fer gentlemen, but y're welcome to it, natcherly.

CAPTAIN DORR: Thankyou!

ABIGAIL: I just have to tell ya, sir: we ain't lookin' t' buy no insurance.

CAPTAIN DORR: *(laughing)* That's not the purpose of our visit, Ma'am! In fact if it were, it should be we who were looking to buy from you! Eh, Davis?

CAPTAIN DAVIS: *(also laughing)* Too true, Dorr, too true.

ABIGAIL: *(completely baffled)* Well ... come in.

(They move inside. DEWITT flees to a corner, from which he stares, pop-eyed)

DeWitt, git on outa there. They're just gentlemen – they ain't gonna hurt ya.

(DEWITT refuses)

CAPTAIN DORR: *(to the audience)* I was at Port Rowan to visit a vessel we insured that had been wrecked the same night further up the island. Her Captain, Davis, an old friend of mine, told me the story of Mrs. Becker's noble work. So I hired a sleigh and we drove over; I saw the spars of the Conductor just sticking above the frozen snow and ice....

ABIGAIL: Please, sit down, sirs. Maggie, some tea fer the gentlemen.

(MARGARET pours them tea)

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

CAPTAIN DORR: *(to the audience)* And I passed some time in her home.

ABIGAIL: DeWitt, don't be a ninny.

(DEWITT comes out with extreme reluctance)

CAPTAIN DORR: Your boy is, ah – your boy is shy.

ABIGAIL: He ain't used t' people in fine clothes.

(Pause)

CAPTAIN DORR: Mrs. Becker, won't you please be seated yourself?

ABIGAIL: Oh no, that wouldn't be – I'll stand, thankyou, sir.

(Pause)

CAPTAIN DORR: *(indicating her bare feet)* Forgive me, ma'am, but do you not fear the frostbite?

ABIGAIL: It's ... nothin'. There's others must go further than we.

CAPTAIN DORR: *(to the audience)* I could not forbear expressing my great admiration for her noble deeds.

(to ABIGAIL) Mrs. Becker, both my present business and my former occupation as a Lake Captain ensure that the object always nearest my heart is to lessen the dangers of the deep and improve the lot of the common seaman. In one night's work, Ma'am, you have made more of a contribution to that cause than I could have hoped to see in a lifetime! Alone, in the midst of a raging storm, and with no man to aid you? It is the stuff of epic poetry – of legend!

ABIGAIL: *(unable to wrap her mind around that)* Well, I don't know.... I don't know as I done more 'n I ought to – nor more 'n I'd do again.

CAPTAIN DORR: *(to the audience)* It was remarkable! The woman was completely insensible of having done anything out of the ordinary!

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

(to ABIGAIL) Name your heart's innermost desire, and I shall do all in my power to ensure that it becomes yours!

CAPTAIN DAVIS: I cannot thank you enough, Mrs. Becker, for your kindness to my crew as well.

ABIGAIL: (blankly to DAVIS) They had no place else t' go.

CAPTAIN DORR: I can't bear it, Davis! (standing suddenly) Permit me to measure your feet!

ABIGAIL: (beat) Pardon?

CAPTAIN DORR: Your feet, Ma'am. And those of your children. Permit me to measure them.

ABIGAIL: I ... The boys is with Jeremy ...

(Before ABIGAIL can say anything further, CAPTAIN DORR, with DAVIS assisting, swoops in to measure her foot, or to trace it on paper, and then does the same to MARGARET. BOTH endure it with silent amazement)

CAPTAIN DAVIS: (to DEWITT) Your turn, you young scalawag.

(DEWITT resists at first, then giggles uproariously, but is cut short by a look from ABIGAIL)

DEWITT: It tickles!

CAPTAIN DORR: Mrs. Becker, it has been a great pleasure. You will hear from me again!

CAPTAIN DAVIS: Delighted to have made your acquaintance, Ma'am. Thankyou for the tea.

ABIGAIL: Sirs.

(DORR and DAVIS move outside)

CAPTAIN DORR: Remarkable! Astonishing! (halting abruptly) Dash it, Davis, I don't know the woman's name!

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

CAPTAIN DAVIS: Becker, wasn't it?

CAPTAIN DORR: No, no, her Christian name. I can't give this to the Buffalo papers without her Christian name!

CAPTAIN DAVIS: I think I heard someone say "Maggie."

CAPTAIN DORR: Maggie is short for Margaret — Mrs. Margaret Becker: that's it, of course!

CAPTAIN DAVIS: (*moving again*) And her husband was — ?

CAPTAIN DORR: I think she said "Johnny," didn't she? ...

(*THEY are gone*)

ABIGAIL: (*still looking after them*) Them two got the money t' visit a doctor, wouldn't ya say, Maggie?

MARGARET: (*the same*) Reckon they do.

ABIGAIL: (*beat*) Let's hope they go before it gets any worse.

(*ABIGAIL and MARGARET exit into the house. Music as we cross-fade to ... Buffalo. A special on CAPTAIN DORR*)

CAPTAIN DORR: The Buffalo Commercial Advertiser, February 28th, 1855: A NOBLE DEED. — During the night of November 25th last, in a thick snow storm, the Canadian schooner Conductor struck on the bar outside of Long Point Cut, driving the crew to the rigging for their lives. In the morning at daylight, they were discovered clinging to the wreck by MRS. MARGARET BECKER, * a Trapper's wife, the sole inhabitant on that end of the island....

EDITOR: (*overlapping from **) The whole story, from beginning to end, is an honour to human nature, and stamps this woman, MRS. MARGARET BECKER, * as one of the heroines of the Grace Darling school!
...

N.Y. READER: (*overlapping from **) The facts as they were being read, created no little excitement around our

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

hearthstone. "God bless and preserve the noble MARGARET BECKER!" * came forth from the lips of our little circle....

BUFFALO LADY: *(overlapping from *)* History will be searched in vain for an instance of more heroic, fearless, and successful effort in the cause of humanity than that of this MARGARET BECKER!

(Enter REPORTER 1. Lights rise also across the stage on ABIGAIL. The REPORTERS' lines are more or less continuous despite her interjections)

REPORTER 1: Our readers deserve to have the full facts of this remarkable case put before them. Swimming under water which the Captain said no living man could ever have got through alive, MRS. MARGARET BECKER -

ABIGAIL:_ Excuse me -

REPORTER 1: - found each sailor as he sank to the bottom, and, carrying him in her strong arms three fathoms below the surface, -

ABIGAIL: Excuse me?

REPORTER 1: - actually walked the bed of the lake-bottom back up the reef to take him to her fire! ...

ABIGAIL: My Christian name is Abigail. An' I don't even -

(But HE has faded out and REPORTER 2 has taken over)

REPORTER 2: The Express has obtained information that in a fierce November gale in 1853, -

ABIGAIL: Fifty-four!

REPORTER 2: - the American schooner Conductor -

ABIGAIL: It was Canadian.

REPORTER 2: - was wrecked on Long Point, Lake Erie. MARGARET BAKER -

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

ABIGAIL: My name is Abigail! – Abigail Becker!

REPORTER 2: MARGARET BAKER, the young daughter of the lighthouse keeper, –

(ABIGAIL reacts)

– discovered the vessel pounding to pieces on the shoal, and without assistance launched a boat, pulled through the breakers, and rescued the entire crew!

ABIGAIL: What – ???

REPORTER 2: The feat was remarkable for the skill and strength as well as the rare courage displayed by this devoted girl....

(REPORTER 2 fades out. JEREMIAH is revealed near ABIGAIL, working on a hide)

ABIGAIL: Jeremy.

JEREMIAH: Uh-huh.

ABIGAIL: Ya know them newspapers Ollie brought back from Port Rowan an' read t' me?

JEREMIAH: Uh-huh.

ABIGAIL: Well ... they're tellin' stories about me over t' Buffalo, an' half of 'em is fibs.

JEREMIAH: Yep.

ABIGAIL: Thought newspapers was s'posed t' inform the public.

JEREMIAH: Reckon they are.

ABIGAIL: But they ain't even got my name right, let alone much else. They're callin' you "Johnny"!

JEREMIAH: I know.

ABIGAIL: Well – ?

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

JEREMIAH: Abbie, I calculate they don't much care what they say, so long as they're makin' money. An' right now, fact is they're makin' money offa you. (*gets ready to go but turns back*) Don't trouble yerself about it, woman: they ain't worth it. You ... uh (*a loaded question*) ... comin' t' bed soon?

ABIGAIL: (*preoccupied*) I guess.

(*Hiding his disappointment, JEREMIAH exits.
Lights up once more across the stage*)

BUFFALO LADY: Mr. Editor: In the last few numbers of your paper you mention increasingly fantastic deeds apparently committed by a MARGARET BAKER, said to have been brought to the attention of the public by Captain Dorr of this city. I desire to know, and will you pardon the inquiry, whether the person intended to be mentioned is the MRS. BECKER, the trapper's wife, -

ABIGAIL: Well that's more like it.

BUFFALO LADY: who in the absence of her husband, on the night of the 25th November, -

ABIGAIL: Yes -

BUFFALO LADY: - and in the midst of a severe snow storm, saved the lives of the captain and crew of the schooner Conductor, wrecked at Long Point Cut.

ABIGAIL: Yes.

BUFFALO LADY: If it be the same, I protest as one of her sex, that what she has done - nay, her very name! - should not at this early day be lost from memory!

EDITOR: Our lady correspondent - ahem! - is perfectly correct. The name is BECKER; -

ABIGAIL: Thankyou, Missus, whoever y'are.

EDITOR: - MARGARET BECKER.

(*ABIGAIL reacts. Exit ABIGAIL*)

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

Buffalo, May 10th, 1855: TESTIMONIAL TO MARGARET BAKER — uh — BECKER. Captain Dorr has now been instrumental in donating a handsome Family Bible, along with made-to-measure boots and shoes for the entire family. Meanwhile, the Canadians in Parliament have awarded the heroine £50 —

N. Y. READER: Fifty pounds?!

BUFFALO LADY: As opposed to a bible and some boots?!

EDITOR: Uh — yes.

N. Y. READER: Ahem! Clearly Buffalo must either make a like demonstration or relinquish her status as "Queen City of the Lakes!"

BUFFALO LADY: If the commercial men and mariners do not make some adequate testimonial to Mrs. Becker, I trust her own sex here, in some suitable manner, will!

EDITOR: Er — Perhaps Captain Dorr would be willing to continue his good work?

(BUFFALO LADY and NEW YORK READER give way to CAPTAIN DORR)

CAPTAIN DORR: I invited her to Buffalo. Her stepdaughter had a swelling on her knee; she came and stayed at my house and her girl was put into the hospital and cured. I went to Mr. Hodges, who kept the American Hotel....

EDITOR: Monday, August 13: MRS. MARGARET BA — uh, BECKER. We are rejoiced to learn that the time has at last come for the people of Buffalo to manifest their sense of the merits of this noble woman. This evening at half past seven, in the public parlor at the American Hotel, a reception for Mrs. Becker will be held at which all may gather to do her homage.

(Lights begin to open up: the RECEPTION GUESTS are gathering. Background music)

Subscriptions will be duly noted. The ladies have

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

... entered warmly into this subject, and the occasion, suggestive as it is of elevated emotions, is likely to call together the beauty and fashion of the city....

CAPTAIN DORR: I went among the people; I told her story, and many prominent citizens attended....

(ABIGAIL, intimidated, is close by CAPTAIN DORR; THE OTHERS are waiting to be introduced. A sizeable further group we cannot see is understood to be out front)

Mrs. Becker, may I present His Honour, Judge Hall?

JUDGE HALL: Charmed, Madam.

ABIGAIL: Sir.

CAPTAIN DORR: The Honorable Alvin Conkling, Mayor of Buffalo -

MAYOR: It is the greatest of pleasures to have you here at last, Mrs. Becker.

ABIGAIL: Thanks.

CAPTAIN DORR: Former President Millard Fillmore -

FILLMORE: Mrs. Becker.

ABIGAIL: *(freezes; then under her breath to DORR)* Did you say "President"?

CAPTAIN DORR: Yes.

ABIGAIL: Of the United States?!

CAPTAIN DORR: Yes.

ABIGAIL: Lord ha' mercy.

(SHE attempts a curtsy, to FILLMORE's well-hidden amusement)

CAPTAIN DORR: And Mrs. Fillmore.

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

ABIGAIL: *(grabbing her hand)* Oh thank goodness: I thought he was gonna say the Queen!

(MRS. FILLMORE laughs delightedly and says something gracious; THE OTHER GUESTS are chattering ad lib)

CAPTAIN DORR: Ladies and Gentlemen – Ladies and Gentlemen, I have an announcement to make! I am pleased to inform you that a sum has been pledged to aid this woman and to do her honour which I count worthy the heroism which she displayed, and commensurate with the appreciation which our Buffalo citizens always bestow on genuine worth. It totals more than a thousand dollars!

ABIGAIL: My land!

THE OTHERS: *(applauding)* Speech! Speech!

(Though it is the last thing she wants, CAPTAIN DORR leaves ABIGAIL alone on the floor. The applause dies down slowly)

ABIGAIL: As the Captain will tell ya, I don't know much about makin' no speeches. I just ... tries t' take care o' my husband, an' my family.

(Applause)

So the first thing I got t' say is, I don't know how t' thank ya for what you done. So much money I never thought t' see in my whole life!

(More applause. Pause)

An' the second thing I got t' say is ... *(beat)*
My name is Abigail.

(A stunned silence. Music; the reception fades, to be replaced by ...)

MARGARET: I see from the papers it is stated she received \$1000. If any such sum was raised she never got it. The Buffalo merchants and sailors did make up a sum o' money, \$550, and –

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

ABIGAIL: Margaret! \$550 is still a powerful sum o' money. Don't you go lookin' a gift horse in the mouth.

MARGARET: Well somebody got to – you never do.

ABIGAIL: I reckon there's a heap o' things a person can do with \$550....

*(Exit MARGARET. Music. Cross-fade to ...
May, 1857: lot 16 in the Seventh Concession,
Walsingham Township. Tree-dappled sunlight;
birds twittering. ABIGAIL, now 26, is gazing
enraptured over the little ravines. After a
moment JEREMIAH, now 46, enters with FRANCIS
FERRIS, who hangs back hopefully to let them
talk)*

JEREMIAH: *(quietly)* He does say there's ten good acres t'other side o' th' crick. We'd have t' build some bridges.

ABIGAIL: An' there's space fer one good field near the house, here.

JEREMIAH: *(chuckling)* The house – !

ABIGAIL: I can see the house! Frame, storey-an-a-half, with the kitchen goin' off t' the east there, like, an' real bedrooms upstairs – one for the chirren an' one for us.

JEREMIAH: Abbie –

*(MR. FERRIS starts to whistle; a look from
JEREMIAH cuts him short)*

ABIGAIL: An' the chickens'n geese'd run right here; the garden in behind. An' the barn over there, I reckon, just this side o' that gulley!

JEREMIAH: The whole place is gullies.

ABIGAIL: Yeah, ain't it beautiful? So green!

JEREMIAH: Ya like it, I guess.

ABIGAIL: I guess.

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

JEREMIAH: Well try to keep a bit of a lid on it with Mr. Ferris watchin' – you'll be drivin' the price up.

MR. FERRIS: Talk of a sawmill goin' in up the crick. Ya could sell the water privileges.

JEREMIAH: That so? (*attention back to ABIGAIL*)

ABIGAIL: That mean you're thinkin' about it?

JEREMIAH: Well ... I'm thinkin'.

ABIGAIL: (*disappointed*) Oh.

JEREMIAH: You know how I feel, woman. It's your money.

ABIGAIL: What's mine is yours. What else should I do with it but buy us a farm – the thing we've wanted all this time?

JEREMIAH: You've wanted.

ABIGAIL: And you! Ya just wouldn't let yerself 'cause ya didn't think it was inside yer reach. Well now it is, Jeremy. Now it is!

MR. FERRIS: Any o' yer chirren school age?

JEREMIAH: Mebbe.

MR. FERRIS: Well that might be a bit of a problem. Ain't none yet.

JEREMIAH: Uh-huh. (*back to ABIGAIL*) T'ain't just that, Abbie, it's –

MR. FERRIS: Ain't no churches, neither, but the Methodist circuit-rider comes by. Name o' Holtby.

JEREMIAH: (*to ABIGAIL*) It's hard to talk!

ABIGAIL: (*to FERRIS*) He's my cousin's father-in-law.

MR. FERRIS: Oh. Ya don't say.

ABIGAIL: (*back to JEREMIAH*) Married people got t' be

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

partners, Jeremy. -

(Soft underscoring begins)

Ya each do what ya can. You woulda helped those sailors too, if you'da been there. An' then all this money an' fuss woulda come to you instead -

JEREMIAH: I doubt.

ABIGAIL: An' we'da been standin' right here an' talkin' 'bout buyin' the same as we are now. It's you as much as me. More maybe.

(JEREMIAH's face goes dark. Sensing tension, MR. FERRIS tries to find another object to focus on)

It's time to forget, Jeremy. Nigh on ten years since -

JEREMIAH: It don't profit a man nothin', Abbie, t' forget how he fails.

(Pause. JEREMIAH makes a sudden decision to try it on for size)

Mr. Ferris!

(Music out)

MR. FERRIS: Yeah.

JEREMIAH: A thousand bucks is a lot fer fifty acres undeveloped.

MR. FERRIS: Valuable land. Timber companies'll have it if you won't.

JEREMIAH: They wouldn't like them gullies any better than I do.

MR. FERRIS: But they'd love that crick!

(No answer)

Nine fifty?

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

JEREMIAH: You'd consider half fer a down payment?

MR. FERRIS: *(actually pleasantly surprised)* Well, I dunno ...

JEREMIAH: We got a house an' livestock t' think of, too.

MR. FERRIS: Well, I s'pose we could manage somethin'.

JEREMIAH: And the rest on a mortgage?

MR. FERRIS: I reckon.

JEREMIAH: Nine hundred.

MR. FERRIS: Well, now, only t'other day Farmer'n deBlaquière was over hintin' around about twelve hundred fer it.

JEREMIAH: An' so was my grandmother! Nine twenty-five?

MR. FERRIS: Deal! *(holds out a hand)*

(JEREMIAH stares at it but makes no move to take it. FERRIS is puzzled. ABIGAIL can barely keep from nudging JEREMIAH)

ABIGAIL: *(urgent whisper)* Jeremy - !

JEREMIAH: *(to FERRIS)* I'll ... have to think on it. *(tears himself away)*

ABIGAIL: Jeremy - !

JEREMIAH: I said I'll have to think on it! Don't be after me, woman!!

(Exit JEREMIAH)

ABIGAIL: He ... He'll ... Don't sell yet, Mr. Ferris. *(going)* Not yet!

(Exit ABIGAIL after JEREMIAH. Cross-fade, with music, from a very nonplussed MR. FERRIS to the re-entrance of CAPTAIN DORR)

CAPTAIN DORR: Now about the same time, there was one further

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

pretty incident connected with this story. A little belatedly, the Life Saving Benevolent Association of New York came across the newspaper articles and decided to award her their best medal. The medal was sent to me to give her, and I was asked to get a receipt. Unable to go up to Canada myself at the time, I had to entrust it to an old army man – the Customs Officer at Port Rowan. Of course, he promptly discovered that Mrs. Becker couldn't write! So he took her to a daguerrean artist....

CUSTOMS OFF.: Well, here we are!

(The CUSTOMS OFFICER, very self-important, ushers ABIGAIL and JEREMIAH into the studio, MARGARET, now 16, and OLIVER, now 18, in tow. They inspect everything with great curiosity)

CAPTAIN DORR: I had a fine stone engraving made from the result, and the original I sent to the Association as their receipt!

(HE joins the scene as the DAGUERREAN ARTIST)

Delighted to have you at my establishment, Mrs. Becker. If you'll just step this way –

CUSTOMS OFF.: You brought the bible?

ABIGAIL: Yes – *(fishing a huge bible from a bag)* Captain Dorr's.

CUSTOMS OFF.: Good! We'll need you swearin' on it in the pitcher.

DAG. ARTIST: That would be gauche. Very gauche. The mere presence of the bible should surely be enough as a symbol of veracity.

CUSTOMS OFF.: Cap'n Dorr needs proof that she's got the thing! Oh – here it is, by the way, Mrs. Becker.

(The CUSTOMS OFFICER pops the medal in a small black case into ABIGAIL's hand. Music

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

begins quietly)

(to the DAGUERREAN ARTIST) Now! How you gonna set this up?

DAG. ARTIST: Elegantly, of course — like a typical carte-de-visite. The chair will go here, the side table with the bible upon it here —

(ABIGAIL has stepped forward into better light and opened the case. She is speechless. The music swells. One by one MARGARET, OLIVER and JEREMIAH move in to peer from behind her, awestruck, as the discussion of THE OTHER TWO fades into the background)

CUSTOMS OFF.: That ain't gonna do it. The bible should be open in her lap an' her hand on it!

DAG. ARTIST: The medal will be in her hand. Do you want a daguerrotype, or a juggling act? ...

(By now all focus is on the FAMILY GROUP; after a moment, music fades to underscore)

MARGARET: Oh, Mother, it's beautiful!

OLIVER: Yeah. Pure gold — !

MARGARET: An' look: there's you an' the boys on the beach, waitin' by the fire fer the sailors t' come —

OLIVER: An' the breakers —

MARGARET: An' the ship out beyond —

OLIVER: An' Pa, look: the house.

JEREMIAH: What's on the other side?

ABIGAIL: *(turns it over and reacts)* Writin' — !

JEREMIAH: What's it say? Ollie, tell her what it says.

MARGARET: *(drily)* An' whose name is on it — !

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

JEREMIAH: Shush!

OLIVER: *(as he reads, he revises the inscription to reveal the name last)* "Presented in May, 1857, for extraordinary resolution, humanity, and courage, in rescuing from impending death the crew of the schooner Conductor, lost at Long Point, Lake Erie, Canada West, November 1854, ... to Abigail ... Becker."

(Silence. Then JEREMIAH's arm goes around ABIGAIL, and she turns in to him and clings. He clings back. MARGARET and OLIVER hold back a grin at each other)

DAG. ARTIST: Ahem! Mrs. Becker?

(Music out. ABIGAIL and JEREMIAH disengage)

If you wouldn't mind taking a seat here, I think we're ready for you.

ABIGAIL: *(whispering to JEREMIAH as they cross, hand in hand)* Got somethin' t' tell ya. Been so long since the last, I waited till I was sure. But I am now. I'm sure.

(ABIGAIL sits, and JEREMIAH leans in to her)

I'm gonna have another baby.

JEREMIAH: *(also whispering)* Abbie! -

DAG. ARTIST: Mr. Becker, you're in the frame!

(JEREMIAH jumps back)

Thankyou! Now, we want the case open and the medal showing clearly. Hold it out to the camera please, Mrs. Becker. No, the left hand. That's it. Now try leaning your right elbow on the bible.

CUSTOMS OFF.: Huh!

DAG. ARTIST: No, not like that, just relaxed. That's better. Lovely! *(to the CUSTOMS OFFICER)* Satisfied, Sir?

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

CUSTOMS OFF.: You sure ya got enough flash powder in that –

*(HE is stopped by a glare from the
DAGUERREAN ARTIST)*

I s'pose.

(The ARTIST proceeds)

OLIVER: You look like a fine lady, Mother.

MARGARET: Very fine!

ABIGAIL: Oh, git on with ya.

DAG. ARTIST: Perfectly still, please, Mrs. Becker!

JEREMIAH: Mrs. Becker?

ABIGAIL: *(perfectly still)* Yes, Mr. Becker?

DAG. ARTIST: Now watch the birdie, Ma'am....

JEREMIAH: I was wondrin' if you'd like to buy a farm?

ABIGAIL: *(not still at all)* Jeremy! –

DAG. ARTIST: The birdie, Mrs. Becker!?!

*(Instant recomposure. FLASH! The scene
freezes, then music resumes as MARGARET
steps forward)*

MARGARET: And that's how we moved – just as Long Point finally went on the auction block. But it didn't sell, not by a long sight. Because the "Panic of '57" had struck, and suddenly the boom was over and things was tough. We managed, though –

(Music out)

Until Christmas, 1862....

Scene Fourteen

JEREMIAH: Yer medal. Where's yer medal, Abbie?

No answer from ABIGAIL. Breaking the freeze, JEREMIAH goes to the door and starts putting on his coat. A replay of the end of Scene Three (probably without any need for the set).

ABIGAIL: Where you goin'?

ANDREW: Dinner's on the table, Pa.

MARGARET: You can't go off now, it's Christmas.

JEREMIAH: DeWitt.

DEWITT: Yeah, Pa?

JEREMIAH: Help me dig my traps out o' th' barn.

ABIGAIL: Jeremy, no! There's no need! With the weavin' an' the sewin' I'm bound to have enough for another cow by spring. An' the crops can't go bad like that two years in a row.

JEREMIAH: An' what about yer medal?

(No answer)

Git outa my road, woman.

ABIGAIL: *(not moving)* Please.

JEREMIAH: I'm gonna do what I can do, what I shoulda been doin' all along. Now git outa my road.

ABIGAIL: *(doing so)* But where? Where you gonna go?

JEREMIAH: Where we'd maybe be better off if I'd stayed —

ABIGAIL: No!

JEREMIAH: — Long Point!

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

(JEREMIAH goes out the door and "around the house." After one shocked instant, ABIGAIL grabs a shawl and runs after him. A bitter wind is whistling outside)

ABIGAIL: Jeremy! Please!

JEREMIAH: Abbie ... *(his temper subsiding, he turns back)*
When we had nowhere of our own, it was you that come t' the Island an' kept us afloat. An' when that door was slammed in our faces, it was you that found a way out an' got us this place. An' half the time, instead o' helpin' ya, I stood in yer way.

ABIGAIL: No.

JEREMIAH: I did! I did. *(with genuine warmth)* Guess I got more 'n I bargained fer when I married you.
(beat) Well it's my turn this time, woman. My turn. This farm ain't gonna slip through my fingers ... an' John Backus ain't keepin' your medal! *(going)*

ABIGAIL: I'm afraid!

JEREMIAH: Abbie, fer goodness' sake! *(grins)* It's only Long Point.

The same jagged music as before, in the quick fade to ...

Scene Fifteen

Again, choral speaking with musical support. But this time the danger is palpable.

UNISON: **Long Point! —**

SOLO VOICE: It was not duck he was after now, for the fall was long gone;

UNISON: **Long Point! —**

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

SOLO VOICE: And it was not deer, for by that time there were no more than a handful left on the Island.

UNISON: **Long Point! —**

SOLO VOICE: It was muskrat, and, if he could find it, mink:

SOLO VOICE: Furs with their sleek winter coats grown in;

SOLO VOICE: Furs for the plump, comfortable women in the rich Upper Canadian towns....

JEREMIAH: I knew I was gonna to have a tough time of it, too — much tougher than when I lived there, 'cause the huntin' and trappin' had gone on fer too long, an' the stock was thinnin' badly — trapped out. But it were my only option. So I took it.

SOLO VOICE: We'll never know how well he was doing or how close he was coming to his goal, because on New Year's Day he was interrupted by ...

UNISON: **Lake Erie....**

(Once more, with a crash, the din of a musical storm explodes over the stage. Lightning flashes; thunder rumbles; breakers roll. In one corner, as the following proceeds, we gradually become aware of ABIGAIL, knitting restlessly by the fire)

ENSEMBLE: **The Lake, the Lake, where Erie plunged
Did rage and roar at break of day;
The water stretched its fingers t'ward
Its home in Long Point Bay.**

**The wind, the wind came scudding through
The dark'ning clouds, intent to kill;
It added all its forces to
Lake Erie's thwarted will; —**

**For where The Cut once opened up
A highway, where the water passed,
The silt had deepened layer on layer —
The channel choked at last.**

In rage the breakers climbed the shore,
In rage the waters mounted high,
And high and ever higher still
Beneath the churning sky.

They claimed the dunes, they claimed the marsh,
Nor tree nor bush their force could stay;
And where they rolled, across their path
One man stood in the way: -

(A special strikes JEREMIAH)

One man who heard the awesome roar,
One man who looked up to behold
A wall of water, tumbling fast,
And black and bitter cold!

*(ABIGAIL rises suddenly from her chair by
the fire, letting her knitting drop to the
floor)*

MARGARET: *(from wherever she is)* Mother, what is it?

ABIGAIL: I -

MARGARET: Mother?

*(JEREMIAH, with the aid of THE ENSEMBLE,
suggests much of the following through
pantomime)*

SOLO VOICE: His heart seized by icy fingers, Jeremiah
abandoned his traps and sprinted over the marshes
for his line shanty on Sturgeon Bay.

SOLO VOICE: He barred the door, braced the roof, and prayed.
But as he got up off his knees, the bar at the
door gave way; -

SOLO VOICE: The door itself burst in and was torn from its
hinges; -

SOLO VOICE: Board by board now, the water began to pry away
the walls.

SOLO VOICE: But the frame of the shack was holding.

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

SOLO VOICE: He grabbed the little trunk that held his belongings –

SOLO VOICE: And scrambled for the roof.

ENSEMBLE: **And there he perched above the surge,
And there he perched and held his knees;
Till perching, holding, sodden still,
His skin began to freeze.**

(ABIGAIL falls to her knees)

MARGARET: Mother?!

ENSEMBLE: **The ice, the ice crept all around,
It coated him in every part;
It wrapped him layer on layer, and then
It tried to reach his heart.**

**And still the wind kept howling on,
And still the water sought the sky;
And Jeremiah Becker knew
His time had come to die.**

(ABIGAIL has begun, softly, to keen)

MARGARET: Mother – ! Tell me!

SOLO VOICE: There was only one hope left:

SOLO VOICE: Three miles away, protected by the sandhills,
standing well above the marsh, –

SOLO VOICE: Its great stone fireplace waiting to warm him, –

SOLO VOICE: Was the house he had shared with his family so
many years before.

SOLO VOICE: If he could make it.

JEREMIAH: If!!

ENSEMBLE: **Beneath the ice he gathered strength;
He thought of her he dared not fail,
Cracked through! and called out one sweet name –
The name of –**

JEREMIAH: **Abigail!!**

ABIGAIL: Jeremy!

ENSEMBLE: **Then out he leapt from off the roof,
And down he plunged beneath the foam;
And gasping, choking in the wave,
Struck out towards his home....**

*(JEREMIAH disappears beneath the billows.
Sound fades slowly, the billows recede, the
lights change)*

REPORTER 3: Norfolk Reformer, January 14, 1863: SUPPOSED TO BE DROWNED. Jeremiah Becker, a former resident of Port Rowan, and a former trapper, is reported to have been practising his old craft in the Sturgeon Bay vicinity of Long Point when the severe weather struck at New Year's. Persons who crossed over for the purpose of finding out his destiny say he must have perished....

SOLO/OLIVER: Not until the snow melted nearly three months later was his frozen body found.

SOLO/MARGARET: He had made it two thirds of the way. He was about a mile from the family cabin, sitting on a log.

Sombre music, and a slow cross-fade to ...

Scene Sixteen

Singing in procession, THE ENSEMBLE bears in a simple bier that is understood to hold JEREMIAH's body.

UNISON: **Around the beach the seagulls scream;
Their dismal notes prolong.
They're chanting forth a requiem,
A saddened funeral song.**

**They skim along the waters blue
And then aloft they soar —
In memory of the sailing men
Lost off the Long Point shore....**

*(THEY lay the bier before ABIGAIL, and
withdraw)*

Lost off the Long Point shore....

(The music fades; now SHE is alone)

ABIGAIL:

Oh, Jeremy. Whadja have t' go an' do that fer? When I could save so many others, why wouldn't ya let me save you? ... Funny.... Three months is a long time. The chirren took on somethin' fierce at first, but ... they're gonna be all right now.

Edward wrote from Michigan. Him an' Hester has had a third — a boy! Ain't that lovely? An' Ollie got a raise — a little one, but he sends a bit home now, an' it helps. An' ya know somethin' else? I think our Maggie likes that Henry Wheeler. I do! He's a fine man, Jeremy, an' I do believe he's startin' t' like her back. Well, natcherly. Our Maggie married — what next?

Oh! Ha! I broke my arm! Yes! — you woulda laughed! It was those durn chickens. I was up in the mow huntin' eggs — they do git into the dangedest places — an' I turned around sudden like, an' before I knew it, I was flyin'! Like a bird! Never thought t' see that — You woulda been fit t' be tied! Fine now though, see? *(waggles her arm for him)* Set it myself. *(suddenly the full significance of that almost hits her — and then she continues)* Sometimes though, I swear, I'd give the other one fer a wild turkey. Funny....

Soon we got t' dig the taters, plant the corn, seed the wheat. Ain't had them oxen yoked up yet, though — now why didn't you never show me how t' do that? *(beat)* I'm thinkin' I'll get some flowers in this year — right in the yard, like, in front: lily-o'-the-valley, bluebells, bachelor buttons, bouncin' Bet. Wouldn't that be nice?

Abigail, or The Gold Medal

You'd like it. (*retaining control is becoming harder*) You wouldn't say nothin', but you would.

An' ... the baby's comin' fine. Hardly shows yet, she's so small, but she's kickin'! Yes, I think it's a girl this time. Gonna call her "Mary" – ya like that? Only thing is, she – you – won't never ... she won't never get – t' meet ya!

(*It has caught up with her. A moment passes before SHE can go on*)

(*anger now at last, for the first time*) We didn't lose the farm, Jeremy! We didn't lose the farm! It were a hard winter, but I got the new cow, I'm pretty near caught up on the payments, an' in two-three years, with the boys helpin', a little bit at a time, we'll register the deed. Only it'll be in my name now, an' not yours – 'cause "a widda can own property," they say. Well I'd just as soon I didn't qualify!

But ... there ya go.

(*Soft underscoring begins*)

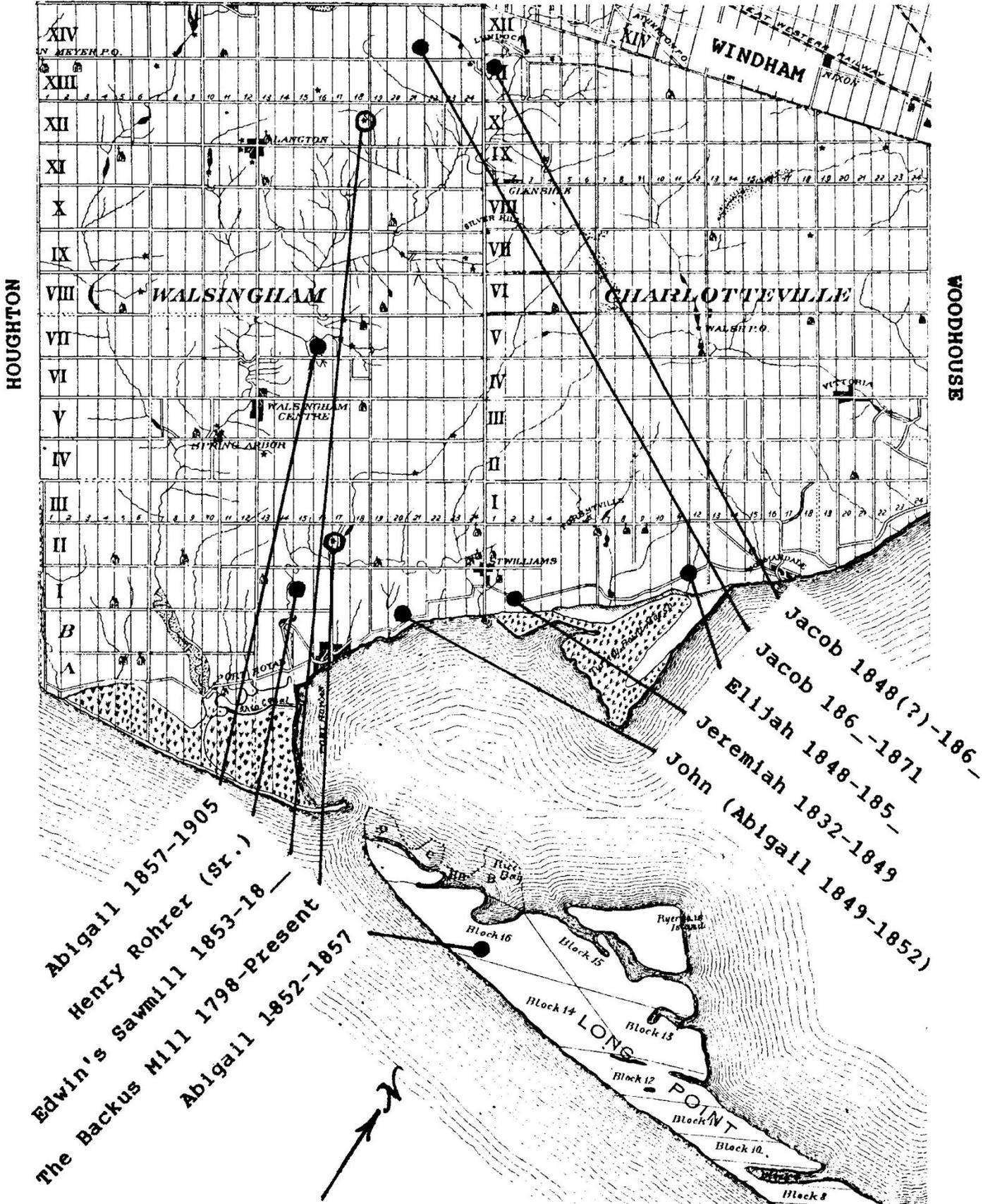
And look. (*loosens her cape or shawl*) Look, Jeremy....

*SHE is wearing The Gold Medal.
Gently, SHE unpins it and holds it
out to him – as the music swells,
and the lights fade slowly to
black.*

- **FINIS** -

MIDDLETON

TOWNSEND -->



WALSINGHAM, CHARLOTTEVILLE, AND LONG POINT AS OF 1877

(Note that Long Point lacks any geographical detail)



Jennette White as Abigail