

FIGHT LIKE A GIRL

A Play By:

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Lisa Dellagiarino Feriend, Helen Dooley,
Colette Freedman, Niki Hatzidis, Emmy
Kreilkamp, Taylor Leigh Lamb, AJ Layague,
Emy McGuire, Elizabeth Nafula, Amanda
O'Donnell, Kelsey Rain, Kathy Rucker,
Lisa Saleh, Roslyn Schwartz, Ashley Singer

SAMPLE SCRIPT

the
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HOUSE

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Fight Like A Girl. A Play by Jill Abbinanti-Burke, Tamadhur Al-Aqeel, Lisa Dellagiarino Feriend, Helen Dooley, Colette Freedman, Niki Hatzidis, Emmy Kreilkamp, Taylor Leigh Lamb, AJ Layague, Emy McGuire, Elizabeth Nafula, Amanda O'Donnell, Kelsey Rain, Kathy Rucker, Lisa Saleh, Roslyn Schwartz, Ashley Singer

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ABOUT the SHOW

Fight Like a Girl is a bold and theatrical mosaic of monologues that brings to life the voices of women across time, culture, and circumstance. From scientists and soldiers to poets, pirates, and politicians, each character shares a moment of fierce clarity—when they stood up, spoke out, and refused to be forgotten. These are not quiet biographies; they are urgent, electric moments of truth told in the first person. Whether it's Marie Curie demanding recognition, Amelia Earhart chasing the sky, or Ida B. Wells typing against a mob's threats, each woman claims her space in history—and reclaims it onstage.

The play doesn't ask actors to impersonate—it invites them to embody. Casting is flexible and transformative, allowing a small ensemble or a large cast to channel dozens of lived experiences with theatrical imagination and emotional truth. At its heart, *Fight Like a Girl* is not just a retelling of the past but a rallying cry for the future. It's a celebration of brilliance and bravery, a reminder of how much women have fought for—and how much there is still to do. These are the stories we inherited. Now they must be told.

A NOTE ON CASTING

Fight Like a Girl is a celebration of historical truth, theatrical imagination, and radical empathy. The characters portrayed in this piece are real people—visionaries, artists, rebels, revolutionaries, mothers, leaders. Their stories emerge from specific cultural, racial, gendered, and historical contexts. These identities are vital to the material, not to be replicated exactly, but to be honored with precision, respect, and curiosity.

This play is not intended to be performed through impersonation or mimicry. The goal is not to imitate the real women, but to inhabit their ideas, language, urgency, and emotional truth. An actor's job here is to walk in another's history—not to present stereotype, but to illuminate humanity. The work is to perform specificity while embodying universality.

Casting can and should be flexible. In this piece, transformation is not just theatrical—it is thematic. We are watching bodies shift, speak, and stand in for one another as a collective act of reclamation.

In casting this piece, prioritize vocal and emotional range, intellectual rigor, and a commitment to authenticity over surface resemblance. These monologues demand a diversity of tone—wit, gravitas, lyricism, fire. Seek actors who can listen as deeply as they speak, who can carry both the intimacy of confession and the urgency of call-to-action.

Fight Like a Girl is a political and poetic act. It reminds us that we are all shaped by, and capable of, history. Our job as theatre makers is to expand empathy. The more we challenge fixed ideas of who is allowed to embody power, pain, and possibility—the closer we come to justice.

Let the strongest actor speak the story, and let the truth transcend the body.

CHARACTERS

(In order of appearance)

26 Characters + 8 Bonus Characters

ADA LOVELACE

Age: Mid 20s

Ethnicity: White English

Significance: The world's first computer programmer; foresaw the potential of computing beyond mathematics in the 1800s.

JANE AUSTEN

Age: Early 30s

Ethnicity: White English

Significance: Groundbreaking novelist who illuminated the interior lives of women through wit, social satire, and romance; her work remains foundational to English literature.

AMELIA EARHART

Age: Late 30s

Ethnicity: White American

Significance: Aviation pioneer and the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean; disappeared attempting to circumnavigate the globe.

FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE

Age: 40s

Ethnicity: White British

Significance: Founder of modern nursing; revolutionized battlefield medicine and healthcare reform.

JANE GOODALL

Age: 30s

Ethnicity: White British

Significance: World-renowned primatologist who redefined humanity's understanding of chimpanzees and conservation ethics.

WANGARI MAATHAI

Age: 50s

Ethnicity: Black Kenyan

Significance: Environmentalist and founder of the Green Belt Movement; first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize.

MARY KOM

Age: Early 30s

Ethnicity: Indian (*from Manipur, Northeast India*)

Significance: Champion boxer and mother of four; broke barriers in male-dominated sports and represented India globally.

MARIE CURIE

Age: Mid 40s

Ethnicity: Polish-born French

Significance: The only person to win Nobel Prizes in two scientific fields (*Physics and Chemistry*); discovered radium and polonium.

XIAN ZHANG

Age: 30s

Ethnicity: Chinese

Significance: Acclaimed orchestra conductor; broke barriers for Asian women in classical music leadership.

IDA B. WELLS

Age: 30s

Ethnicity: Black American

Significance: Journalist and civil rights leader who exposed lynching in America and co-founded the NAACP.

MURASAKI SHIKIBU

Age: 30s

Ethnicity: Japanese

Significance: Author of *The Tale of Genji*, considered the world's first novel; court poet who chronicled Heian life.

BILLIE HOLIDAY

Age: 30s

Ethnicity: Black American

Significance: Jazz legend whose haunting rendition of "Strange Fruit" made her an early voice against racial violence.

MARIA TALLCHIEF

Age: Late 20s

Ethnicity: Osage Nation (*Indigenous American*)

Significance: America's first major prima ballerina; redefined ballet and Indigenous visibility in the arts.

JOSEPHINE BAKER

Age: 30s

Ethnicity: Black American-French

Significance: Dancer, singer, and WWII spy; symbol of Black elegance and resistance across continents.

PHOOLAN DEVI

Age: Late 20s

Ethnicity: Indian (*lower caste, Bundelkhand region*)

Significance: Known as the "Bandit Queen," she survived abuse, led a rebellion, and was later elected to Indian Parliament.

ROSALIND FRANKLIN

Age: Early 30s

Ethnicity: White Jewish English

Significance: X-ray crystallographer whose work was central to the discovery of DNA's double helix; long uncredited in her lifetime.

BARBARA MCCLINTOCK

Age: 80s

Ethnicity: White American

Significance: Nobel Prize-winning geneticist who discovered "jumping genes"; worked in isolation, defying academic dismissal.

ANGELA DAVIS

Age: 30s

Ethnicity: Black American

Significance: Activist, scholar, and icon of the Black Power movement; symbol of resistance against racism and carceral injustice.

CATHERINE THE GREAT

Age: Early 30s

Ethnicity: German-born Russian

Significance: Empress of Russia who modernized the empire; took the throne through political savvy and personal power.

CLEOPATRA

Age: Late 30s

Ethnicity: Greek Egyptian (*Ptolemaic dynasty*)

Significance: Last pharaoh of ancient Egypt; strategist, linguist, and leader who defied Roman conquest.

GRACE O'MALLEY

Age: 40s

Ethnicity: White Irish

Significance: Pirate queen and clan leader who defied British imperial control in 16th-century Ireland.

OLYMPE DE GOUGES

Age: 40s

Ethnicity: White French

Significance: Enlightenment writer and early feminist who wrote the "Declaration of the Rights of Woman"; executed during the French Revolution.

ELIZABETH I

Age: 60s

Ethnicity: White English

Significance: The “Virgin Queen” who ushered in the English Renaissance and led England through religious and political storms.

SYLVIA EARLE

Age: Late 50s

Ethnicity: White American

Significance: Legendary marine biologist, oceanographer, and conservationist; a powerful advocate for protecting Earth’s oceans.

YOKO ONO

Age: 30s–40s

Ethnicity: Japanese

Significance: Avant-garde artist and activist; misunderstood muse who challenged patriarchy through radical art and peace activism.

JILL TARTER

Age: 60s

Ethnicity: White American

Significance: SETI scientist searching for extraterrestrial intelligence; advocate for women in STEM and cosmic humility.

BONUS MONOLOGUES**ANNE LISTER**

Age: 40s

Ethnicity: White British

Significance: Landowner, diarist, and lesbian icon of the 19th century; lived boldly and documented her love and life in code.

NELLIE BLY

Age: Late 20s

Ethnicity: White American

Significance: Pioneering investigative journalist; exposed the conditions of women in asylums and raced around the world in 72 days.

VIRGINIA WOOLF

Age: Early 50s

Ethnicity: White English

Significance: Iconic modernist writer and feminist thinker; her essays and novels challenged the patriarchal canon.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

Age: 50s

Ethnicity: White American

Significance: First Lady of the United States; human rights champion and drafter of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

HEDY LAMARR

Age: Late 30s

Ethnicity: White Austrian Jewish

Significance: Hollywood actress and inventor; co-created technology foundational to modern Wi-Fi and Bluetooth.

HYPATIA

Age: 40s

Ethnicity: Egyptian Greek

Significance: Philosopher, mathematician, and astronomer in ancient Alexandria; murdered for her ideas by a Christian mob.

KATE SHEPPARD

Age: 40s

Ethnicity: White New Zealander

Significance: Led the women’s suffrage movement in New Zealand—making it the first self-governing country to give women the right to vote.

NANCY WAKE

Age: 30s

Ethnicity: White New Zealander-Australian

Significance: WWII resistance fighter known as “The White Mouse”; feared and hunted by the Nazis.

Note: This show can be done with as few or as many actors as you see fit.

Fight Like A Girl is a series of monologues by many different authors. In order to protect the writings contained within, this free sample provides the FIRST page of each character's monologue. As a general note, each monologue runs 2-3 pages per character.

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ACT ONE

THE SPARK

(In the darkness a low, atmospheric drone begins beneath—barely audible at first. Something between breath and hum. Not music. A pulse. The feeling of something stirring. It grows almost imperceptibly, like flint sparking stone. Lights rise slowly on a bare stage. One by one, members of the ensemble enter. Each carries a symbolic item: a quill, a crown, a stethoscope, boxing gloves, a book, a piece of thread, a scroll. They spread across the space in silence.

No one speaks. A beat of stillness. Then—ignition.)

ENSEMBLE

(in overlapping and rotating voices)

There's always a moment.
A flicker.
A feeling in your chest like somethings about to start-
Not outside you,
But in you.
Sometimes it begins with a no.
No, I won't stay quiet.
No, I won't sit down.
No, I won't shrink to fit your comfort.
Other times, it's a yes.
Yes I see it differently.
Yes, I want more.
Yes, I will step forward-even if no one's done it before.
It doesn't start with applause.
It starts with doubt.
With fear.
With a question that won't leave you alone.
Can I do this?
Should I speak?
What if I fail?
And then-
Sometimes quietly,
Sometimes like a scream-
It comes.
The spark.

(A low mechanical ticking begins—elegant, metronomic. The ensemble slowly dissolves into the shadows, leaving behind their symbolic objects: boxing gloves, a nurse’s lamp, a feather quill.

A soft amber light spills across the stage from stage right. Slowly, a wooden writing table glides into view, illuminated as if by gaslight.

Above the stage, projection begins: a parchment scroll unfurls in slow motion, revealing mathematical diagrams—complex formulas, early computing designs, and a sketched silhouette of Charles Babbage’s Analytical Engine. 1842 London, England: The Mind of Ada Lovelace. The projections pulse gently in rhythm with the ticking.

One figure remains onstage. ADA LOVELACE—dressed in a Victorian riding jacket, her fingers faintly stained with ink—approaches the table. She moves with quiet certainty. She runs her hands over blueprints and handwritten notes, as if searching for a rhythm she already knows. She picks up a scroll—left behind by another woman—and places it beside her sketches. A brass compass clicks open in her hand.)

ADA LOVELACE

"THE FIRST ALGORITHM, UNCREDITED"

ADA

I see it.
Now, I know you think it's madness—
that a machine could do more than crunch numbers.
But - I swear to you-

(She walks to the table, lays her hand gently on a sketch.)

This—Analytical Engine,
that Mr. Babbage has designed—
he sees only a calculator.
A clever abacus.
But I see music and color and language
translated into patterns
It's like poetry-
My father, the great Lord Byron.
The poet - the storm.
They called him mad, brilliant—
untamable.
He took one look at me when I was born—
a daughter—
and he left.
Divorced my mother and disappeared into myth.

(her tone sharpens—cutting through memory)

He wanted a son.
Not a girl.
Not me.

(A breath. She composes herself.)

My mother...
She tried to scrub the Byron out of me.
Refused to let a single line of his poetry in the house.
She said, "Emotion is the enemy.
Let mathematics steady you."
She called it my treatment.
My cure.
As if numbers could tame the storm I inherited.

(A beat. She lets that truth sit before lifting it.)

ADA (CONT'D)

But what she never understood—
what neither of them understood—
is that poetry and math...
are the same.
Both a language.
Both chase beauty in precision.
Both ask the impossible question:
“What is truth?”

(She looks up. The flame flickers in her eyes.)

And the truth is
I see it-
a machine
that can write poetry.
Store it.
Carry it.

(she begins to pace—her thoughts racing now, chasing the vision)

One day—
not now, no—
but one day...
People will walk with machines in their pockets.
Tiny, glowing minds.
They'll speak to them.
And these machines—
they'll reply.

(A beat. She smiles, teasing.)

They'll argue with them.
Imagine with them.

(a whisper, conspiratorial)

They'll fall in love through them.
And yes, there will be danger.
Every new power comes with shadow.
But we can shape it.
Give it something beautiful to carry forward.

(She stops. Breathes. Places her hand on her notes.)

ADA (CONT'D)

I know they laugh at me—
Say I'm an unserious woman
writing fanciful delusions
in the margins
of a man's machine.
But I keep writing.
Because I believe this is the beginning of something vast.

(she leans forward, eyes burning with quiet fire)

And someone—
a girl, perhaps—
will look back
and see my name.
Not in the shadows.
But at the root.
Ada Lovelace
And I will say – who's laughing now?

(As ADA finishes her monologue, she places her notes carefully into a leather-bound folio. The ticking of ADA'S machine slows... morphs into the soft scratching of a quill. ADA rises and crosses the stage, passing a folded letter on the corner of a desk. She hesitates. Then places her hand gently on it.

She picks it up, reads a line silently, folds it again and sets it on the writing desk. A fresh inkwell waits beside it. She exits into the dark.

A projection begins to fade in—ADA'S schematics give way to handwritten script, and a single line slowly writes itself across the backdrop like ink spilling on parchment: 1802 Hampshire, England: The Heart of Jane Austen

A door creaks open. Enter JANE AUSTEN, dressed simply, slippers quiet on the floor. She pauses, sees the letter. Picks it up. Smiles, softly. Then sits. Takes out her own quill. Begins to write.)

JANE AUSTEN

"INK STAINED"

JANE

Dearest Cass,
I've pictured my wedding more often than I should admit.
More clearly.
More soberly, then ever.

Mrs. Harris Biggs-Wither.
Can you even say it without wincing?

He proposed.
And I said yes.

(Beat. She fingers the fabric of her dress.)

A brussel's lace gown. Over white satin.
An organdie veil.
Cornflowers, lilacs.
You'd be there beside me, of course.
Mother glowing. Father proud.
Roasted mallard. Fritters.
And cake.
We'd string garlands from these rafters—hang them ourselves like we did when we were girls, remember?

(A sudden pause. The fantasy falters.)

And then—what?
I move to Manydown Estate.
I write in secret, if at all.

(She touches the fabric again. Sharply.)

He doesn't know, Cassandra.
Not about the writing.
Not about the novels – not Elizabeth, or Marianne, or Emma waiting in the margins.
What happens when he does?

(Beat. The room stills.)

It would be a strange thing,
To have my books amputated of their authorship.

(a crescendo—emotional)

JANE (CONT'D)

What if he reads them,
And sees nothing – no wit.
What if he reads them
and sees me - sees too much-
Sees...the grandeur and design of the feminine world?
What if he doesn't want me to be known – not proper for a wife.
Wife - a beautiful word that now feels poison-tipped.

I have not given much thought to the after,
But now that is all I can see.

My books, abandoned.
My ambition, folded - packed away with the bridal veil.
My entire world of wonderings and creation left behind
for a plain young man

(A moment of fragile stillness. Then:)

I must tell him no.

Better, infinitely better,
to mourn a wedding
than mourn a life.

(She smiles. Light, but certain.)

Love—if she's to come—
must find me in flight on the wings of my words
Not perched in a parlor, reading over roast duck.

Harris Biggs-Wither will recover.
My novels will endure-
And let Elizabeth Bennet wear my wedding dress.

I'll wear the ink stains of my stories.

(As JANE finishes her monologue, she seals her letter and places it gently atop a stack of books and exits. The scratching of the quill slows... shifts... becomes the faint sound of wind—high, cold, carrying altitude.

The parchment projection fades. Replacing it: a sepia-toned sky, clouds sweeping rapidly beneath the silhouette of a twin-engine Lockheed Electra. Below, a hand-drawn flight map overlays the sky. Coordinates shift. A red dotted line traces its path west. 1937. Newfoundland, Canada: The Sky Beckons AMELIA EARHART.)

(Stage right, a soft blue wash begins to rise. A small leather travel bag glides in under light. A flying jacket rests on the chair. A pair of goggles glints in the amber light.

Enter AMELIA EARHART. She steps into the light with calm determination. She carries a folded flight chart and a scarf looped over one shoulder. She kneels to the bag, quietly packing: gloves. The scarf. A compass. Then pauses. Looks up—toward the horizon only she can see. She places the map on the table. Breathes.)

AMELIA EARHART

"I CAN MAKE IT"

AMELIA

I asked you once—
"Do you think I can make it?"
I mean, what a question!
It just—slipped out.
I never ask that. Never.
But that day, before I left Newfoundland for Londonderry-
I looked you in the eye and said it.
"Do you think I can make it?"
Because I needed to hear it to believe it.

(beat)

When I was a small, my Mama wouldn't let us ride the roller coaster at the county fair.
So, naturally I built one in the backyard – for me and my sister.
Damn near killed us.

Anyway, wintertime came so we went sledding every chance we got,
That was until I was nearly crushed under the Smiths' wagon.
Now, it wasn't Mr. Smith's fault.
We knew folks took their horses by that hill,
But it was the only hill steep enough to get any real speed.
I was halfway down, flying headfirst when I saw it-

(beat)

A Clydesdale. Massive.
I see his hooves.
and I see the space between them.
And I think:
"I can make it."
And I did.
That moment—that split-second calculation
with my life hanging in the balance—
It taught me everything I know about flying.

(a shift)

I've thought a lot about that moment.
You remember the Air Derby in '29?
Santa Monica to Cleveland – of course you do.
They told us we had to bring men along-like chaperones.

AMELIA (CONT'D)

There was nothing like it-
All women,
All engines roaring-
All competitors.
But, we were sisters in the air.
Then Marvel crashed over Arizona.
And we cried - God, we cried.
Some folks...men...wanted to call off the race.
But we stood firm.
We said flying was how we'd honor her.
And so, we flew.

I remember the Rockies came up out of nowhere—
like God himself placed them there
'cause he thought the land needed a little embellishment.
I looked at those peaks,
looked at my little plane,
and thought:
"I can make it."

(Pause. Thoughtful.)

All of us women are made of something different-
Something strong.
I believe that - I do.
And that's what I told the ladies of the Ninety-Nines.
We're built of something different.
Better, maybe.
And sometimes—
we need someone else to say it aloud.
To remind us.
Now, I know the papers like to talk about me.
Call me "the first."
"The only."
But who would I be without Neta teaching me?
Without Pancho?
Without Gladys pushing me to go higher, farther, faster?
I didn't get here alone.
You see –
When a great adventure is offered you—
you don't refuse it.

(Quiet. Honest.)

Life is an adventure.

AMELIA (CONT'D)

Terrifying.
Tragic, sometimes.
But beautiful, too.

I used to say to my sister
“I want to see the whole world one day.”
And this...this moment right now -
This is my chance to do it.
So, I'm asking you again, just this one last time—
Do you think I can make it?

(She holds the moment. The wind begins to fade. A final, single low hum of a propeller sputters out. The air is still.)

AMELIA gently places her goggles or scarf on the edge of a small table, then walks slowly offstage. As she exits, the lighting cools to a muted steel blue and flickering gold. Shadows stretch long across the stage floor—narrow and hallway-like.

A soft, rhythmic footfall begins—like a nurse's shoes in a quiet hospital corridor. Then a faint heartbeat pulses once. A small table is wheeled into a dim pool of light. A taxidermied owl rests on it beside a modest oil lamp. Projection: 1855 Scutari Barrack Hospital – The Crimean War FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE enters from the shadows. In her hand: a medal. A soft cloth. She moves slowly—deliberate, composed. She pauses beside the owl.)

FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE

"THE EYES OF A BABY OWL"

FLORENCE

I had an owl once. A friend.

She had fallen from her nest when she was no bigger than a tangerine—
just outside the Acropolis.

A pack of schoolboys found her first.
They found it to their amusement to torment the poor creature and-
I found it to mine to bribe them to mercy.
The little owl became mine.

(Beat. She glances down at the medal.)

Now bear with me, as I imagine that this is not an ordinary acceptance speech for an
Order of Merit.

This all happened long before the Crimean War.
Before I opened my nursing school.
Before I published my book.
And long before I stand here today as the first of my sex to receive the Order of Merit.

The owl - I named her Athena.
She rode in a pouch I sewed by hand.
Perched at my side while I worked.

The faces of the dying do not illuminate for much.
But for her—they lit up like lamps.

Here was a bird, all white down and mottled coloring, peeking from a pouch around my
waist with the eyes of an innocent.

She watched with eyes too large for a world this cruel.

(quieter)

Shakespeare writes of death like a lover.
Emily Dickinson like a waiting coachman.
But as I've seen it—death lives in the silence between breaths.
In the fevered eyes of a boy who's already been forgotten.
In the trembling hands that reach for water and find none.

(Beat. Suddenly sharp.)

FLORENCE (CONT'D)

Every soldier believes it will be war that kills them.
But most die from filth, and even more from doubt.
At Scutari Barrack Hospital—the floor was covered with straw.
Not beds.
Not blankets.
Straw—to soak the blood from those whom everyone had already decide would die.

Their perfume was rot.
Their music, whimpers.

(voice breaking)

You cannot call yourself a nation-
if you wash your hands of your soldiers' deaths-before you've even washed your hands.

We went to work.
We opened windows.
We cleaned patients
We scrubbed what the army would not.
We made the barracks too clean for death to linger.
Athena watched from my pocket.
And when her spirit returned to the Parthenon—
I kept her.
Taxidermied.
Bright-eyed.
Watchful.
What better guardian than the goddess of wisdom and war?

(Beat. The emotion simmers down.)

They called me the Lady with the Lamp.
But they didn't see the hammer in my other hand—
for when the medicine was locked away.
We were nurses, yes—but also soldiers.
And if death returned, we made sure he knew he wasn't welcome.

(softening)

Still—this is not to say I never failed.
There were boys I couldn't save.
And sometimes I still feel...unfinished.
Because death will always grow in blood-soaked straw
But he also grows
in doubt.
In silence.

FLORENCE (CONT'D)

We must look at him
not as fate—
but as a trespasser who is no more welcome in a place of healing than rats beneath the
floorboards.

We must then look upon him from the eyes of a baby owl,
Wise.
Gentle.
And with the courage to face him
Without fear.
And without apology.

(She exits slowly, holding Athena close to her chest. The golden light fades, leaving a brief, soft dusk. A distant forest hum begins—gentle insects, birdsong, wind through trees. There's the faintest "hoo" of an owl, which echoes and becomes something new: The call of a chimpanzee.)

A projection appears faintly across the back scrim like field notes or a journal entry. In scrawled handwriting, Projection: 1968 Gombe Stream National Park, Tanzania: A Promise to David. A spotlight opens on a small wooden stool and low desk covered in weathered notebooks, a pair of binoculars, and a plush stuffed chimpanzee—faded with age. A young chimp's vocalization plays—high-pitched and quick—then fades.

JANE GOODALL enters, a small field bag over her shoulder. She moves with quiet purpose, carefully setting her bag down. She lifts a worn notebook. Opens it. She takes a breath, and without looking up yet, she speaks softly.)

JANE GOODALL

"A PROMISE TO DAVID"

JANE

I thought we'd have more time.
Just... one more morning with him. One more glance through the underbrush.

(she presses the leaf between her palms)

He was the first to trust me, you know.
David Greybeard.

They said I was too soft giving you a name instead of a number.
They said that made me sentimental. Unscientific.
But you—had a name long before I did.
I saw it in the way you peeled fruit for a younger male.
In the way you looked at me—really looked.

(beat)

They told me to observe. Record. Stay at a distance.
But I sat. And waited. And named.
David. Flo. Fifi. Goliath.
Because I knew you were not specimens.
You're individuals. With joy. With grief. With memory.

(Beat. Softly.)

Today, I watched them grieve him.
His brother pacing. Flo, silent and still.
I don't know how to write that in a field notebook.
I don't know how to tell the world what I see without breaking.

(she stands, walks slowly to Jubilee)

You'd be proud, Jubilee.
The little chimp that started it all.
When Father gave you to me instead of a teddy bear, Mother's friends were horrified.
"They'll give her nightmares," they said.
But they didn't.
They gave me a calling.

(beat)

JANE (CONT'D)

And now—David is gone.
The first to welcome me.
The one who reached out his hand and said, “You belong.”

(beat)

This has never been about degrees. Or lectures.
It was always this: the silence. The waiting. The rustling leaves.
The moment the wild world lets you in.

(Beat. Eyes firm, brighter now.)

So I'll keep going.
I'll keep naming. Watching. Waiting.
Because the only thing scarier than taking a risk—
Is not taking one.

(looks up)

Rest easy, David.
I'll keep my promise.
And I'll tell the world over;
when we fail the wild, we fail ourselves.

(JANE GOODALL exits quietly, placing Jubilee (the stuffed chimpanzee) gently on her desk. The stage dims to a wash of deep green and rust tones. The ambient sound of jungle birds softens into the wind through trees. The light grows warmer, the air drier. A projection appears slowly: 1970 Ithi, Kenya: The Roots of Resistance.

A single shaft of sunlight breaks through, like it's piercing a forest canopy. A mound of rich, red soil is lit up downstage. WANGARI MAATHAI enters, carrying a simple sapling wrapped in burlap. She kneels beside the soil, setting the sapling down. She brushes her hands against the dirt and closes her eyes, feeling the ground.)

WANGARI MAATHAI

"THE NEXT SEED"

WANGARI

They say the petition has enough signatures. That if I say yes, they'll start the campaign by morning.

(Beat. She runs her thumb along the edge of the petition.)

I never thought it would come to this. Parliament. Me.

I've always been connected to the soil.

At birth, my mother gave me the land before she gave me milk—chewed greens from our fields and placed the juice in my mouth. Before I could walk, I was fed by the earth.

(beat)

My hands have never left it.

But now they want those hands raised—to be sworn in.

And I ask myself: will they listen to a woman with dirt under her fingernails?

(beat)

When I returned to Kenya after university, I barely recognized her.

We were free from Britain, yes—but the land? She was stripped bare. Forests cleared.

Rivers polluted. The red soil I loved so much turned dry, cracked, bleeding.

I didn't plan to start a movement.

I just saw rural women struggling. No firewood. No clean water. No food from their own fields.

So I asked a simple question:

Why not plant trees?

And with that, the Green Belt Movement began. One tree, one woman, one solution at a time.

Anybody can dig a hole. Water a seed. Watch it grow.

That's what I taught. That's what we did—together.

But that wasn't what the government wanted.

When we protested a skyscraper in Uhuru Park, they sent Parliament after me.

Accused me of embarrassing them. Of being too loud. Too educated.

Said I was "too strong. Too successful. Too hard to control."

(beat)

WANGARI (CONT'D)

Even my husband left me. The press had a field day.

But I didn't back down.

Even when they arrested me. Even when they sent cops to surround my house.

Even when I had to travel with wigs, switching cars like I was running from war.

(Softly.)

Because I was.

They called me fearless.

But I'm not fearless.

I'm persistent.

And now?

Now they're asking me to run for office.

To stop planting seeds in the soil and start planting them in the law.

To give our country something it's never had before:

a woman in power who owes nothing to men but everything to the land.

(She holds the petition to her chest. Breathes.)

I never asked for this.

But the soil—she needs a voice.

And the women—I promised them.

I said: if I can, we can.

(Beat. She folds the petition slowly, like a seed packet.)

Alright.

Let's plant the next tree.

I'll run.

And if we win—

may our first law be to restore the earth.

(She exits. The sound of birdsong fades. We hear a boxing bell ring. Then the distant sound of rope hitting pavement emerges—jump rope slaps. The lighting shifts from earthy golds and greens to a stark, overhead white ring light. A square of light begins to form center stage. Projection: Imphal, Indian 2002: Scary Mary. MARY KOM enters upstage left in boxing trunks and gloves. She paces the edge of the ring light, bouncing lightly on her feet, shaking out her wrists. She steps into the square. Her voice cuts in—sharp and grounded.)

MARY KOM

“SCARY MARY”

ROUND ONE: THE FIRST FIGHT

MARY

This?
Not even close.

Not my scariest match.
Not my worst.
And my worst? Still better than no match.

Better than eight hours in isolation in Kagathei—
Except for the buffaloes.
The goats.
The pigs.
Better than slash-and-burn farming in the jhum fields.
Hot sun. Fire. Ash.

(inhales deeply)

Ginger. Turmeric.

What smells delicious in food...
doesn't smell right when it's burning in the dirt.

Eight-year-old Mangte Mary—wielding a machete.
Now that was a match.

(A bell dings. MARY paces. Gloves on. She tightens them.)

ROUND TWO: THE RING IS REAL

Scary Mary.
That's what the newspapers called me.
Right around the third championship.
No—fourth.

Honestly, I stopped counting.

Lucky eight.
(jabs with each word)
Lucky, lucky, lucky.

Harness. Find the anger.

MARY (CONT'D)

That split decision in Incheon?
Feel it, Mary.

Risa mahasusa garnuhos.
Risa.

It wasn't the worst loss—
But it bruised something deeper.

My pride.
My body.
My belief.

They say opponents can smell the fear in your sweat.

(she lifts her arm, sniffs)
No fear here.

(A bell. Beat. She crouches, rises slowly.)

ROUND THREE: THE BODY BREAKS

Already a world champion as a teen.
But no one tells you how hard it is to stay on top.

To keep the lights on.
To keep the cheers coming.

All those faces that look like mine—
My mother's.
My village's.
Every girl in Kagathei who watched on TV
with her own dream.

And then the bronze at the Olympics—
It wasn't the crowd that made me cry.
It was what my father said.

(she softens)

Mangte Tonpa Kom.
The big, strong wrestler.

He never wanted me to box.
"Why boxing, Mary? There are safer sports."

MARY (CONT'D)

But that night—
he said nothing.
He just cried.

Can you imagine?
My father.
Crying.

That was the first time he saw me
as more than a daughter.
He saw me as a fighter.

(Bell. Louder. MARY pulls herself upright, fierce now.)

ROUND FOUR: THE LEGACY

Seven.
Seven World Championships.

And now?

Eight.
Not just a record. A monument.

To her—
That girl with the machete, cutting through turmeric smoke.
To him—
The father who cried.

To every girl who walks into a ring
and doesn't know she's history in the making.

Sometimes I wish I could rest.
Just for a while.
But I don't know what that looks like.

So no—
My muscles won't retire.
Not yet.

Eight is the promise.
Eight is the proof.
Eight is the punchline.

(She lifts her hands. Breathes.)

MARY (CONT'D)

Coach—mouthguard, please.

Scary Mary.

Eight-time world champion.

This?

This one's for her.

(MARY puts her mouth guard in, taps her gloves together. We hear a bell, and she comes downstage bobbing and weaving and we hear a crowd roar and the lights fade. We hear punches landing and it transitions to a faint ticking—measured, clinical. The sound of breath stabilizing. An X-ray-like glow illuminates the backdrop. Slowly, the projection fades in: 1911 Stockholm, Sweeden: Nobel Prize Ceremony. MARIE CURIE steps into the light, she has note cards with her, she is studying them. She paces-takes a deep breath – then...)

MARIE CURIE

“RECOGNITION AT LAST”

MARIE

Thank you to the Nobel Foundation for this honor.
It is one of the great privileges of my life to be the first person ever awarded two Nobel Prizes.
And receiving the second one today...is just as overwhelming as the first.

(to someone offstage, offhandedly)

What's that?
Almost time?
All right, I'll be here.
I'm just practicing.

(She looks back at the paper. Repeats softly)

Where was I – ahh-just as overwhelming as the first...

(A deep breath. Calming. Then—)

It's a good speech.
Grateful. Humble.
Nothing in it they can get offended by.

(Beat. Then, fire behind the calm.)

Although...
I would love to see their faces if I...

(she smiles saying what she is really thinking)

Thank you for my two Nobel Prizes—and I must say your unique ability to insult a woman while honoring her is as extraordinary as splitting an atom and giving credit to the man who stood nearby and watched.

Thank you for nominating my husband and Henri Becquerel for my work in 1903.

Yes-yes-yes—Pierre helped. But Heri?

That was demeaning – and you knew it.

Thank you for making sure I understood that I was only being recognized because I was married to a man brave enough to refuse credit for his wife's work.

(She swallows. Voice softens, briefly—breaking, just slightly.)

My father would have been proud.

MARIE (CONT'D)

A teacher. A scientist.

He was the first to say I had a mind made for this work. Even though I was a girl—and that, supposedly, I was a waste of his time. I'm sure it was a comfort to you that I was too grief-stricken with his passing to come to Sweden—to look you in the eye and show you that I knew.

(Voice settles into precision again. Sharper.)

But—

With father gone.

Pierre gone.

And now being awarded the Nobel Prize in Chemistry.

The first person—man or woman—
to win *two* Nobel Prizes.

I couldn't wait to come to Stockholm to accept this award...In person.

(beat)

So, thank you...

for finding yet another way to insult me.

Urging me—a second time to stay home.

What did you call it? An inconvenience?

Paul Langevin.

A married man.

Yes—thank you for reminding me that when a woman and a married man have an affair, only the woman is punished. Even though my personal life has nothing to do with my scientific accomplishments.

But here's the thing:

I've had to sit and listen to my own research presented by male colleagues in rooms where women aren't even allowed to speak. I am tired of not being allowed to own my work.

(A sudden drop in energy. Cold, controlled.)

I gave the first lecture at the Sorbonne only because my husband was dead. People lined up not to hear my thoughts—but to see if the little widow would break before the end of class.

Oh—they were disappointed.

(A long beat. She steadies her breath.)

MARIE (CONT'D)

As a woman in a man's profession, I learned long ago how to keep emotion out of my voice and off of my face. So, if you came here looking for shame, for apology— I'm sorry to inform you...you'll find none.

(she turns briefly toward the wings)

Yes, I'm still here.

It's time?

Great.

Good.

Yes-yes-yes, it's short.

Just a quick note of thanks.

(She takes a final breath. Gathering herself.)

You're going to be fine, Marie.

Your sister is here.

Your daughter is here.

You are not alone.

You are like polonium.

Like radium.

A new element.

They don't understand women like you yet.

(beat)

But they will.

(She nods once. Then—quiet steel.)

They're ready for me?

I doubt it.

(She gathers her papers and heads off stage. A sharp beam of white light slices across the space like a lab spotlight fading into a clean, modern glow. The walls behind her transform—into sheet music. Curved lines of staff notation shimmer in the air like constellations. A music stand rolls silently into place. The ticking of a soft metronome. Projection: 1994 Beijing, China: Central Conservatory of Music. From the wing, XIAN ZHANG enters in partial concert attire, a baton in one hand, her other gripping a folded score. She steps quickly, almost nervously, to the center of the space, illuminated now by clean, bright overhead lights—reminiscent of a concert hall just before curtain. She halts as she hears the sound of an orchestra tuning.)

(A voice calls from offstage—slightly muffled, but clear.)

VOICE (OFFSTAGE)

Zhang Xian! They're ready for you in the pit!

(She freezes. A long pause. The music stand looms. The score trembles slightly in her hand.)

XIAN ZHANG

"FIND YOUR TEMPO"

XIAN

Absolutely.

(she turns to the audience)

I said it just like that.

"Yes, I can conduct The Marriage of Figaro tonight."

(beat)

Tonight.

(deep breath)

That was the right answer... wasn't it?

I mean—I'm still a student. At the conservatory.

She said, "Yes, Xian, I know. I'm your professor."

And then she handed me her baton.

(Looks at it. Realizes she's holding it.)

Right. Yes. I am holding it.

I have been preparing my whole life.

Twenty years. Etudes, sonatas, endless hours.

We practice until our nerves are steel.

Our fingers, our hands, our spine.

Steel.

Then why am I shaking?

(Beat. Then a small smile.)

Mozart.

That's my tempo.

When I was 11, my teacher asked me to sightread K. 576.

I did. She said, "How long have you been practicing?"

I said, "I'm just reading it."

She tested me with more pieces. And then she said—

"You sightread like you've practiced three months."

(beat)

XIAN (CONT'D)

Then she said: "What a shame.
Your hands are too small. You'll never be a pianist."

(Sharp breath. Recalibrates.)

Well, Miss—
Tonight these hands will conduct.

Symphonies. Concertos. Opera.
Carmen. Aida. Butterfly.
The great women of the opera?
Dead. Dead. Dead.

(beat)

But not me. Not yet.

Another breath. Find the tempo.
Presto. Fast two. Pianissimo. Not rushed.
Don't rush the scherzo.
He told me that. The Maestro.
Wait—no. That's me now.

Maestra.

(Takes a tiny peek through curtain.)

Make eye contact with every musician.
Not friends.
They are the palette.
You are the brush.
You see the score—in color.
You paint the sound.

Mahler was a marathon.
Mozart is a dance.

(Beat. Deep breath. Calm.)

Coraggio, Maestra.
Have courage.

(One final nod. She steps forward into the light – taps her baton and the sound of the orchestra begins as lights fade. The stage goes momentarily dark. A deep red glow begins to rise. Sound builds: layered clacks of typewriter keys, overlapping until it becomes almost percussive. Echoes of newspaper headlines swirl faintly in the background. Projection: 1892 Memphis, “Mob Violence in Memphis. One desk onstage. Atop it: a vintage typewriter, papers scattered, a worn leather satchel. A single spotlight snaps down center as IDA B. WELLS steps into the light. She wears a cotton blouse. Sleeves rolled. Her breath sharp, eyes darting toward the imagined sound of murmuring voices outside the window. : “Liar! Trouble-maker! Burn her down!” She pulls a page from the typewriter. Holds it. Crumples it. Then—)

IDA B. WELLS

"THE FIRE THEY LIT"

IDA

(quiet, to herself)

They're out there again.

(She freezes, fists clenched. A beat.)

You need to leave. Go now. Disappear before they make good on their threats. Me? If I run—who tells the truth? (Beat. Then—defiantly.) I have no choice but to stay-stay and write.

(she begins typing again)

To whom it may concern—

(She stops. Rips the page from the typewriter. Crumples it. Tosses it.)
Too polite.

(Slams her fists into the desk. Begins again.)

What I need to say is "Stop killing us. Signed—The truth."

(IDA rips the paper from the typewriter and slaps it down. She paces.)

This is my home. And I've sat here and watched three of my friends lynched. Their only crime? Some whites couldn't withstand the competition.

(Beat. Swallows hard.)

I saw their bodies. My stomach folded in on itself. So, I wrote what no one else would. Exposed it like it was an overstayed potato salad at a church picnic.

Next day-I stepped outside—and the press building was on fire. Not just a warning. A declaration. They wanted silence.
But I saw it for what it was: a war.

(Ida holds up a paper and swings it toward an imaginary mob.)

So, this—this is my sword.

(Ida paces. Her eyes dart to the window. She hears murmuring. A shadow flickers across the stage.)

IDA (CONT'D)

You think I don't hear them? Calling my name like a curse. But I'm not cursed. I am chosen.

They say lynched men are criminals. Show me the crime. No one hangs a man for stealing. They hang him for succeeding while Black.

My hands are shaking.
Not from being scared, or worried, or fear.
No – it's from the weight of being the first.
To speak.
To shout.

To write loud enough that they'd try to burn my words. But they forgot one thing:
You can burn paper. But not the truth.

(Beat. The voices grow louder. She begins to pack her papers.)

Fine. I'll go to Chicago. Not to hide. But to print louder. To speak bolder. They think they're chasing me out. But they're just fueling my fire.

So go on. Light your matches. I lit a fire of my own.

(Lights snap to black. A single bell rings out—clear and ancient. Then: silence.)

A soft golden glow begins to rise like morning light behind a silk screen. A Japanese koto note shimmers in the air. From stage right, a figure steps into the light: quiet, composed, deliberate. She carries a journal and ink brush, her movements full of restraint and grace. She pauses at a writing desk. Behind her, the following projection: 1000AD Heian Court, Japan: The Brush of Murasaki Shikibu.)

MURASAKI SHIKIBU

"THE FIRST TALE"

MURASAKI

They say I must not sign my name.
That brilliance belongs to the men.
But this scroll—
this story—
it is mine.

When my brother studied the Chinese classics,
I sat outside the door, memorizing what he forgot.
Father would sigh, "What a pity she's not a boy."

Then the whispers came:
"She'll come to no good."

So, he sent my brother to study—
and me... to court.
Where beauty speaks louder than thought.

(she picks up the scroll gently)

But I do think.
And I write.
Here, I am not a lady-in-waiting.
I am a storm.
I am the author.

(She unties the ribbon. Holds it for a moment.)

I will call it The Tale of Genji.
Let them read it.
Let them feel every longing, every loss.
Let them not know—until it's too late—
that a woman made this.

(reads softly from a journal)

takenoko gohan...
medaka hatching...
the world in a grain.

(beat)

MURASAKI (CONT'D)

They want me quiet. Invisible.
But I have tasted silence.
And I refuse another bite.

(she ties the scroll again—firmly now)

I leave you now—
to go to the road we all must go.

But if I had a choice?

(she looks out—steadfast)

I would take the other.

(As MURASAKI'S final lines settle, she gently closes her journal and stands. She crosses to a low pedestal or stack of manuscripts, placing her brush and journal atop it like an offering. A wash of moonlight softens into shadow. A wind of paper rustling whispers through the air. A flute note dissolves into the opening crackle of a vinyl record. Projections 1939 Harlem, New York City. A spotlight flickers on stage left, illuminating a standing microphone.

From the shadows, BILLIE HOLIDAY emerges in a satin gown, holding a gardenia. She pauses at the edge of the light, looking out—unsure if she'll walk forward or turn back. The silence is heavy. She looks at the mic. Looks at the audience. And says—quietly, but with all the bite she can muster.)

BILLIE HOLIDAY

"I'M FEELING IT NOW"

BILLIE

I don't think I'll sing that song tonight.
Folks'll be disappointed, I know.
They've been asking for weeks.
But they'll just have to keep asking.

It ain't the feds,
or the raids,
or the threats,
or the damn wire taps.
Frankly, I'd sing it with twenty of them in the front row—just waitin' to cut me off.
Don't care.
I don't sing Strange Fruit for them.
And I don't stop singing it for them, either.
I sing if for me.
I just gotta feel it.

I've been this way a long time.
I was thirteen and I decided—I wouldn't do anything unless I meant it.
Every move I've made—
Every song. Every man. Every mistake.
Was mine.
Not my mama's. Not my manager's. Not my man's.
Mine.

I've made choices others wouldn't.
Like joining Artie Shaw's band in '37.
Sixteen white men on a bandstand—and me.
Black. Female. Loud as hell.
Never been done before.

We got into scrapes. Especially down South.
They didn't want me on stage.
Didn't want to serve me.
Wanted to send me through the back door.

But when I sang?
They shut up.

No one ever could deny my voice.

BILLIE (CONT'D)

You know, I can't read music.
But give me a tune I can feel?

It sings through me.
And I never sing it the same way twice.
It changes. With the day. The air. The ache.

Sometimes, I feel too much.
There are songs that live too close to the nerve.
Strange Fruit is one of them.
Sometimes it's protest. Sometimes a prayer. Sometimes a scream.
The feds hate it.
I wish I didn't have to sing it either.
I'd rather live in a world where it didn't ring true.
Where no one needed to hear it.
Where it didn't hurt so damn much.

If they want me to stop singing it—
Maybe they should build a world where it don't make sense nomore.

(Pause. She softens.)

You know what?

(smiles slightly)
I think I will sing it tonight.

Oh-yeah. I'm feeling it now.

(Lights slowly fade to a dusky violet wash. The echo of "Strange Fruit" dissolves into the distance. A single spotlight remains center—empty for a beat—then from this silence, a new rhythm rises: soft pointe shoe shuffles.)

CHILD'S VOICE

I want to be a dancer but, they say Osage girls don't do that."

(The percussive brush-slide-snap of ballet slippers on marley. A stark white bar of light slices across the upstage wall like a horizontal mirror line. Above, a projection appears: 1944 New York City: Dance Studio. A single ballet barre is revealed in silhouette. MARIA TALLCHIEF steps into the light—alone. In warm-up clothes, her posture taut with precision. She places one hand gently on the barre. Breathes.)

MARIA TALLCHIEF

"NOT TALLCHIEVA"

MARIA

Battenment tendu.
Slide. Point. Slide. Close.
En croix.
Front. Side. Back. Side

It's the most basic thing we do.

Until it's Balanchine saying: "That's all you need to know."
Suddenly it's not basic.
It's everything.

Let me start over.

Mary Ellen Moyan.
Matinee - evening performance –
Now-late night rehearsal.
And she's still-
Electric.
Graceful.
Perfect.

Her feet were sculpted for this.
Her tendus could make marble weep.
And me?

(Beat. She begins to move again, slowly.)

I've been watching her for weeks.
Obsessed, honestly.
Not just with her dancing,
But with how she always seems to belong.
And her discipline-

(BALANCHINE'S voice interrupts, precise)
"Maria, Chin up."

(MARIA begins doing relevés with her head held proudly)

Balanchine.
The genius. The architect. The ear that listens with his whole body.

MARIA (CONT'D)

He sees everything.
Even me –
a half Indian girl who could pass for Russian.

And maybe it's foolish,
But when he speaks to me-
When he corrects me-
I want to believe it's because he sees something worth fixing.

(BALANCHINE'S voice interrupts, precise.)
"Maria, will you please learn the pas de trois? You will dance second lead."

(MARIA stumbles.)
Second lead?
Next to her?

(BALANCHINE'S voice interrupts, precise.)
"Let's see those tendus – again."

(She obeys. She drills-harder this time.)

Tendu front. Execute. Repeat
Side. Side. Observe. Compare.
Her feet. Extension.
My feet. Embarrassing.
Back. Back. Back – again!
Her line – flawless.
My form – my doubt.
Why would he ask me?

(BALANCHINE'S voice interrupts, precise.)
"Maria, dear, if you could only learn to do the battenment tendu properly, you wouldn't have to learn anything else."

(She pauses. Stillness. She lets the words hit.)

It's always the tendu.
The thing you're supposed to master
before you learn anything else.
And suddenly
I'm ten again in Mr. Belcher's studio.
Starting over.
Before that-
Mrs. Sabin - the only teacher on the reservation.
Pushing me en pointe before my feet had bones strong enough to carry me.
Past pain-

MARIA (CONT'D)

Past limits I didn't yet know how to name.
And I said nothing.
Because I wanted to dance.
Because I thought silence was strength.
Because I am still the little Osage girl
hiding from her father's drunken yelling.
Hiding from white men who murdered for oil.
Hiding from the weight of my mother's high hopes –
From my own body that never felt enough.
From the mirrored walls of a Russian ballet studio.

And now
They tell me to change my name.
To become Tallchieva
Elegant.
Acceptable.
Erased
But I am not a shadow of a Russian ballerina.
I am not a name re-written for your comfort.
I am not Tallchieva.
I am Maria Tallcheif.

And this name-
This body-
Has made it
All
The
Way
Here.

(She rises. Goes back to the barre. Begins her tendu again. Each motion slow, deliberate, definant.)

Criticism doesn't break me.
It reveals me.
And this time-
When I slide my foot across the floor.
I don't do it to be her.
I do it
to be seen.

(MARIA TALLCHIEF finishes her monologue. She rises slowly from the barre, her movements graceful but grounded—each gesture reverberating with earned pride. She crosses downstage center. A single spotlight follows. MARIA lifts her chin, breathes deeply, and speaks one final line—quiet but razor-sharp.)

MARIA (CONT'D)

I do it to be seen.

(The soft “shhh” of paper being turned—thousands of pages flipping. A low rumble builds beneath it—a storm of voices, women whispering names, unfinished sentences, footnotes rising to the surface.

A slow, golden glow begins to rise—like dawn breaking over an archive. One by one, ENSEMBLE members step into the light. They speak—not in unison—but like a rhythm passed between them. Braided. Propelled. Alive.)

ENSEMBLE

We were never the footnotes.
Never the sidenotes.
Never the smudged names at the bottom of the page.
We were the ink.
The parchment.
The pulse of the pen.
The first breath of rebellion.
The second wind in a marathon.
The spark that remembered how to burn.
Legacy?
Then say her name.
All of them.
The ones who signed in secret.
who coded their truths in diaries,
who stitched their wisdom into seams,
who sang in back rooms,
who taught it with bare hands.
We are not done.
We are not quiet.
We are not going away.
This is not the end of Act One.
This is the moment we reload.

(Blackout. Projection: Intermission.)

INTERMISSION

ACT TWO

REBELS, SCIENCE, SILENCE & LEGACY

(Lights dim completely. Silence. A beat. Then... a crackling vinyl record hiss fills the space—soft at first, then clearer. A single overhead spotlight rises on an old phonograph upstage. It spins. The sound of a sultry jazz trumpet curls in. Behind it, the projection fades in: 1939 Paris, France. Below the projection, a dressing table slowly rolls into the center spotlight. It glows from within—soft, golden light surrounding a mirror. A banana skirt hangs from the side of the table. JOSEPHINE BAKER enters slowly, in a silk robe. She pauses at the mirror, fingers hovering just above the banana skirt. She lets them fall. Her eyes rise—direct to the audience.)

JOSEPHINE BAKER

“A GODDESS IN EXILE”

JOSEPHINE

I thought about wearing something cotton.
Something simple.
Something “respectable.”
But respectability never made history.
And it sure as hell never protected me.

So tonight, I’ll give them a costume they’ll never forget.
They told me not to.
Said it was too much.
Too wild.
Said, “You’ll never be taken seriously again.”
That’s fine if being taken seriously means being invisible?

(Stares at herself in the mirror. Touches the necklace. Let’s it fall.)

You see, St. Louis said I was too poor.
Harlem said I was too much.
America said, “Tone it down.”
But Paris?
Paris said, “Dance.”

Even in bananas.
Especially in bananas.

JOSEPHINE (CONT'D)

And so, I dance.
Dance because it's my passport.
Dance because it's my only way out.
Dance because it's the way to their hearts.

I was born in America but France gives me something America never did.
Respect.

(she smooths the banana skirt around her waist)

Every step I've taken—
every hip sway, every spin, every note I sang in heels too tight and skin too dark—
is my resistance.

They try to make me a joke.
But I will make myself impossible to forget.

(She strikes a pose. Then stares out, dead-on.)

You see a woman wrapped in bananas.
But let me tell you what's really coming onstage tonight:
Not a dancer.
Not a distraction.
Not a joke.

Tonight, I am a revolution
A whisper of jazz and a roar of defiance.
A goddess in exile.

(She breathes. Beat.)

And this time?
I'm not just dancing.
I'm rewriting the whole damn rhythm.

(JOSEPHINE exits with fierce grace. Her final pose lingers in silhouette. The lights dim, and the jazz fades. A field of sunflowers slowly rises in projection—pale and wind-blown. Their petals flicker in the light like small flames. Projection: 1996 New Delhi, India: The Bandit Queen Take an Oath. A worn wooden chair is placed beside a low step. A colored scarf drapes over it. The sound of muffled crowd noise begins to build—press murmurs, shouted names, anticipation. A government oath ceremony. PHOOLAN enters from the side, pausing just offstage, hand on heart, listening for the moment her name will be called. She looks at the chair, then at the audience.)

PHOOLAN DEVI

“CALL MY NAME”

PHOOLAN

They are about to call my name.
Phoolan Devi.

And I wonder—what name will they hear?

Will they hear “Bandit Queen,” like the headlines?
Or will they hear the girl who survived abduction, endured prison, and rose from
massacre—now stepping into Parliament?

Let them say it.
Let them choke on the weight of it.

Because I’m still walking through that door.
Not for revenge.
But for the people.
Because in me... they see themselves.

I was ten when I stood on my father’s stolen land.
Next to my sister.
Empty hands. Bare feet.
A sack of chickpeas in our arms.
That’s all we had.
But it was enough.
We stayed.
We didn’t cry.
We didn’t run.

We stayed until the sunflowers turned their faces toward us.
We stayed in the light.
In Surat dada’s favor.
And for one small, shining moment—even barefoot and hungry—we felt... chosen.

I became the thing they could not own.

And now they’ll swear me in.
In clean halls with polished floors.
They’ll ask me to raise my right hand—
But they won’t ask where that hand has been.

PHOOLAN (CONT'D)

They won't ask what it's held:
A rifle.
A girl's wrist.
A broken prayer.

They will only hear my name.

(beat)

Phoolan Devi.
Not a whisper. Not a warning.

A woman.
A weapon.
A seed.

(She reaches into her pocket, takes out a sunflower pin or petal. Fastens it deliberately.)

Let them say it.
Let them look me in the eye and say it.
Because when they do—
The girl they tried to erase?
She's the one holding the pen.

And today—
I write the law in ink they cannot wash away.

(PHOOLAN stands strong in a shaft of golden light, a sunflower pinned to her chest. The sunflower fades with her, its image dissolving into a spooling strand of DNA—an elegant helix suspended midair across the back wall. The ambient soundscape shifts—crickets and rural breeze give way to the soft hum of laboratory electricity. The floor turns to sterile white. A desk slides into place. On it: a microscope, a notebook, a single developed photograph. The lights cool—sterile, exacting, like a fluorescent overhead bulb. A soft clicking begins—shutter. Slide. Shutter. Projection: 1952 Kings College, London: "Photo 51" ROSALIND steps into the light, magazine in her hand.)

ROSALIND FRANKLIN

"PHOTO 51"

ROSALIND

Use your words Rosalind...
Seething — that's the word.

(she lifts the magazine-reading)

"Molecular Structure of Nucleic Acids: A Structure for Deoxyribose Nucleic Acid."
By Crick and Watson.
Let's see here, yes-the final paragraph,

(she reads)

Ah – here it is - "We have also been stimulated by the unpublished data of Dr. M.H.F. Wilkins and Dr. R.E. Franklin."

Stimulated?

That's how they framed it?

As though they glanced at my work like it was an afternoon coffee, then produced the double helix by divine inspiration.

They didn't glance.

They copied.

Behind my back—without my consent—they were handed Photo 51.

My photograph.

The result of over one hundred hours of X-ray crystallography—days-bent over a microscope, fine-tuning conditions with such precision that one slip of heat or humidity could render everything useless.

And what did they do with it?

They guessed. Built models.

While I waited for proof.

While I took the high road and told you: "We won't speculate. We'll let the photograph tell us what it is."

Because that's what science is.

Patience.

Rigor.

Restraint.

But apparently restraint doesn't win races.

And science, as it turns out, is a race.

Not for truth.

But for credit.

(Pause. She folds the photo, slowly.)

ROSALIND (CONT'D)

They have some nerve to claim I don't understand what the photograph reveals.
Really?

Then why did I take it in the first place?

Why do my notes show I was planning to confirm the structure before publishing?
Why didn't anyone simply say:
"We saw it. We used it. Thank you."

Because they didn't want to share a Nobel with a woman?
Maybe I should wear lipstick to the lab.
Maybe I should flatter or flirt or fawn.
So they don't call me uncooperative.
Secretive.
The "dark lady."
You know they call me Rosy just because they know I hate it.

And how am I supposed to be "sociable"—when women aren't even allowed in the
lunchroom, where all the real conversations happen?

(Pause. Her voice quiets.)

Maybe I should have smiled more.

(she straightens)

But I didn't come here to smile.

I came here for the structure of life itself.
To understand the geometry of the world we inhabit.
To study coal and viruses and DNA—not because I want fame.
But because I want the truth.

(she gently sets the photograph on a desk or into an open journal)

It's very hard not to be bitter.

I'm just being honest.

Geez—I'll probably do that better than them too.

(ROSALIND storms off silently. The lab light dims. The sound shifts: not machines, but nature. Wind rustling corn stalks. A cicada. Then: a single kernel of corn drops to the stage—a soft “tick.” The light shifts to soft sunlight over tilled earth. A wooden lab bench is already onstage with a small stool. Projection: 1980 New York, Cold Harbor Laboratory. BARBARA MCCLINTOK enters slowly, carrying an ear of corn. She turns it in her hand as if it were a mystery. She places it down gently, like a sacred object.)

BARBARA MCCLINTOCK

"LISTEN TO THE CORN"

BARBARA

Beautiful, isn't it? I know, I know—it's just an ear of corn. Some people collect stamps. I collected kernels. Less sticky, more colorful.

(She sets the corn down with care. A pause.)

I've always said plants are extraordinary. You so much as pinch a leaf, you set off an electrical impulse. They respond—to pressure—to danger—to change. They're sensitive, adaptable...capable of almost anything.

(she pauses, then softens)

You could say I was a detective. Except my mysteries were written in DNA. I spent most of my career examining kernels, mapping their colors but it was under a microscope, that I saw something strange. Genes—moving. Jumping, in fact. From one location on the chromosome to another.

What you need to understand is: most scientists wanted their genes to behave. To stay lined up like students in assigned seats. But mine were the class clowns—a bit all over the place. Probably needed a good talking-to. A kernel would be yellow—then suddenly, purple. The gene responsible for color had jumped.

Hence the name: "jumping genes." It was the original Snap, Crackle, Pop.

The technical term is transposable elements.

(she leans on the table)

But I was alone in my excitement. When I presented my findings, they didn't just question—they ignored. A woman, working alone, talking about mobile genes in the 1950s? "Bellevue calling."

It was so much easier for them to believe I had made a mistake than to consider that the genome was more dynamic than they'd ever imagined.

"Genes don't move," they said.

"You must have made an error."

(Beat. She closes her eyes briefly, steadying herself.)

It wasn't just disagreement.

It was dismissal.

(She looks up again. Firm.)

BARBARA (CONT'D)

So, I gave talks. Published papers. Tried to show them what I saw so clearly. But, there certainly were nights I did wonder—what if they're right? What if I'm just...seeing things?

(Beat. Stronger now.)

But I wasn't. I knew what I saw. And I trusted it.

(she pulls out a chair and sits, slowly)

I'm sorry-I hope you don't mind if I sit. Old bones.

So—I did what any good stubborn scientist would do. I kept working. Not for applause. Not for fame. But because the truth was there. Waiting to be uncovered.

Science does not exist to make us comfortable. It exists to reveal truth.

(she smiles slightly)

It took decades. But eventually, my work was seen. Respected. In 1983, I finally received the Nobel Prize.

Alone.

The only woman to ever win the Nobel in Physiology or Medicine.

(beat)

The ceremony was...overwhelming. I spent three days figuring out how to pin my name tag to a silk dress. You win some, you improvise the rest. The night came and it was a room full of the world's greatest minds—all in tuxedos and evening gowns. Chandeliers glittering overhead. Hundreds of eyes watching me. When I walked onto that stage, for the first time—I saw it.

(she holds the moment)

Respect.

Not because I won an award.

But because my work had finally been understood.

And that-

that was enough.

(The soundscape slowly shifts—as BARBARA exits with dignity. As she disappears into the shadows, the spotlight fades completely. A beat of silence. Then—a deep, resonant heartbeat begins to pulse through the space—slow at first, then steadier. The cornfield projection dissolves into stark black and white. The sound of a prison door slamming shut echoes. A spotlight cuts across the stage like a searchlight. The background now shows barbed wire, overlaid with projected text in red, each phrase appearing one at a time: Projection: Top Ten Most Wanted 1971 Los Angeles. ANGELA DAVIS enters through the shadows. She steps slowly, precisely, each footstep in time with the heartbeat. She wears a jacket, handcuffs hanging open from one wrist. She pauses. Looks out.)

ANGELA DAVIS

“MAKE A CHOICE”

ANGELA

You want to know why I’m not ashamed to be a radical?

Let’s look at the etymology:

“Radical”—

from the Latin *radix*,

meaning *root*.

To be radical is to grasp things at the root.

That’s the only way we’ll change the world.

I am not guilty of what I’ve been accused of. But I did choose to be here.

When the Black Power Movement was gaining momentum, I was studying in Germany. I saw them—on TV. The Black Panthers. All lined up. Beautiful naturals. Black jackets. Guns. Power.

But beyond the aesthetic, it was clear what they were fighting for. Justice that wasn’t cosmetic. Not a bandage— but something that reaches the root of the wound.

The world was changing, and I wanted in.

I made a choice.

I came home.

I joined the Communist Party.

I started teaching at UCLA.

And I did not hide who I was.

They tried to scare me off.

Wrote hit pieces.

Sent death threats.

I didn’t flinch.

I made a choice.

When I heard about the Soledad Brothers—I recognized in them what I have seen in so many of the women here. They were targeted, singled out. Arrested for petty crimes-things that so many with money, with resources, with a different skin color get away with every day.

And I gave what I had:

My name.

My resources.

My strength.

ANGELA (CONT'D)

Because I believed in their freedom like I believed in my own.
I made a choice.

No, I didn't buy those guns to be used that way.
But I don't regret it.
It represented a line in the sand.

That single act—
put my face on the FBI's Top Ten list.
I went underground.
Disguises.
Wigs.
I moved in shadows.
And people sheltered me.
Risky everything.
And I will never stop being grateful.

And when they finally caught me?
The moment fear should've shattered me?
I felt... calm.
Because I knew, even if we lost that battle, the fight had only just begun.

(Beat. She softens—an internal shift.)

George Jackson wrote about a man who painted a night sky on the ceiling of his cell.
Because it had been years since he saw the moon and the stars.

Some people are being deprived of the sky.
Like you-
And all the women on this cell block.

So, don't pity me.
I made a choice.
My commitment to being a revolutionary brought me to this point.
Through solitary.
Through being brutalized and drugged in a mental ward.
Through the silence-adrift in my own psychological sea.

The future?
I don't know

Maybe I'll never be released.
Maybe they'll find me guilty.
Maybe I'll die in the gas chamber.

ANGELA (CONT'D)

But today?
I'm doing what I can
when I can
where I can.

Organizing right here.
With you.
With anyone who'll fight beside me.

The people out there?
Rallying in the streets?
They're not just saying "Free Angela Davis."
They're saying:
Free every sister.
Free every cell.

This cage isn't the end of our power.
It's the start of it.

(ANGELA steps backward into darkness. A long beat. A slow toll of a single bell sounds—measured, distant. A new light begins to rise—cool, pre-dawn blue. A pane of frosted window light streams across the floor. In the near distance, the faint cries of unrest—horses, voices, muffled drums—suggest the approach of conflict. Projection: 1762 St. Petersburg Russia. The rumble grows slightly. A flicker of candlelight joins the pale blue, and CATHERINE THE GREAT is revealed center stage—standing before a mirror, motionless, a folded Russian military coat in her hands. She speaks, almost to herself—)

CATHERINE THE GREAT

"I WILL CHOOSE"

CATHERINE

I must pretend to be calm.
You never know who's watching.
Who's whispering.

(She takes a book, pretends to read—can't focus. Fidgets with her dress.)

My mother chose this awful dress when I first arrived.
She was clear, "You don't get to choose."

I came as Sophie Friederike Auguste.
A speck from a speck of a city—sent across a continent to marry a stranger and secure a future that was not my own.

"Smile more," she said.
"Speak only when asked."
"Show humility, but don't fawn."

Mother—
so skilled at withholding her love
and calling it discipline.

So, I taught myself.
I read. I retreated to the world of books.
And I waited.
And I impressed.
So interesting that her greatest disappointment became the girl chosen to wed the heir to Russia.

But they warned me:
"There are ears behind the walls. Eyes behind the grates."

The whispers have reached Peter now.
He knows.

Cousin Peter—
so pale, so delicate.
He avoided my eyes like a boy avoids his lessons.
One year older, yet it was he who seemed the child.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

Two young puppets sent to bond great empires.
He, grandson to Peter the Great.
I, the unloved girl chosen to serve beside him.

Our wedding night?
He opened a wooden box and laid toy soldiers across the bed.
He mimicked battles, cannons, war cries.

But I had my own war to fight.

I returned to my books.
To me, Russia was a language to be learned—and I was fluent within months.
When I fell ill, they brought a Lutheran minister.
“No,” I said. “Bring me an Orthodox priest.”
A priest of the Russian court.
Of the Russian people.
And that moment...
That moment changed everything.
Russia saw me – took me in their hearts.

That was the day I became Catherine.

Peter showed no respect.
He moved through power like a child with a toy-
Making whatever reckless choice pleased him.
To end our war with Prussia.
To give back the land we bled to keep.
To disband the army.
To mock the throne he was gifted, not earned.

It was clear — I had not spent these years in study for nothing.
I had made allies.
The church.
The nobles.
The army.

(Pause. A sudden noise.)

He knows they're coming.

(to maid)

No—I will not wear the dress.

(She reaches for the military coat.)

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

This.

(she puts it on)

Because it is they—the soldiers—who will decide.
Peter may play his games.
But I have earned their loyalty.
I will march with them.
And Peter will step aside—like a child sent to bed.

(she examines herself in the mirror)

And I will build new cities.
Hospitals.
Schools.

Schools for girls—
girls like me, from forgotten corners of Europe—
so they may find new worlds of their own.

And I will make it law that women may govern,
may write,
may rise.

(She looks out the window. Straightens.)

It is time.

(she places the hat on her head)

They will whisper.
They will lie.
They will call me tyrant, temptress, whore.
Let them.

Because I am Catherine.
And they will call me Great.

(CATHERINE stands centered. Her military coat's buttons glint softly in the light. She slowly removes the crown from her head and places it on a pedestal downstage—not as defeat, but as release. A subtle golden light fades in, overtaking the colder palette of Catherine's world. Echoes of Russian court music dissolve into a low, haunting Egyptian reed melody—sparse and ghostly, like wind through sandstone. A projection: 30 BC Alexandria, Egypt. From the shadows, CLEOPATRA enters barefoot, the hem of her gown trailing behind like a tide. She pauses at the same pedestal.

Her hand hovers above the discarded crown—doesn't touch it. Instead, she withdraws her own golden asp-shaped armband and fastens it. Sand is projected beneath her feet. A soft dust haze rises. Somewhere far off, the sound of a distant crowd, a siege, drums of Rome. She stands tall. Regal.)

CLEOPATRA

"I AM NO ONE'S SPOILS"

CLEOPATRA

They should be ashamed.
To force a Pharaoh to take refuge in her own tomb.

They want these treasures?
The gold? The jewels?
Is that what all this blood was for?

(she touches a piece of treasure, then throws it aside)

I should burn it all.
Reduce the spoils—
and myself—
to ash.

Octavian seeks glory?
Let him inherit dust.

(Pause. Quieter, more inward.)

Glory. Was I ever so bewitched by power, blinded by its shine?

Yes—I had ambition.
But it was not for myself.
It was for Egypt.

I was not born of her blood, but the spirit and love of Egypt has woven itself into my bones. I've known her gods. Spoken her language. Studied her stars and sciences from within the walls of Alexandria's library.
I was born, no, destined to lead.
Egypt raised me.
And I raised her.

My father named me Queen because he knew I would fight.
And I did.
Against my own brother—who thought he could cast me into exile.
But I returned.
I reclaimed my throne.
And I gave my life for this land.

I wept through nights of famine.
I negotiated peace, forged alliances, watched borders like a mother guards her child.

CLEOPATRA (CONT'D)

I walked into foreign courts speaking their tongue, carrying Egypt's name with strength and pride.

I was more than Queen.

(she falters, voice softening)

But what will remain now?

Octavian writes a different history.

He paints me as a temptress.

A harlot.

A distraction.

And now he burns my city and mows down my people.

(Beat. She turns to her handmaidens.)

Eiras...

Charmion...

You stayed.

Not just servants.

Sisters.

Thank you.

(She breathes.)

Mark Antony has gone before me.

And I will follow.

We were bound.

What will become of my children?

I can only pray they've fled.

I must believe they have.

It is all I have left.

(she notices something near her)

Ah...

Be still.

(The asp slithers. She kneels.)

CLEOPATRA (CONT'D)

Do not frighten the poor thing.

She comes with fangs, yes-

But not fear.

She comes to deliver mercy,

Where men would offer spectacle.

(she gently lifts the asp onto her arm)

So...

this is how it ends.

Not with surrender.

But with choice.

He can take the gold.

He can take the throne.

But he will never have me.

(she raises the asp)

I am no one's spoils of war.

(Blackout. A deep drumbeat rises from below—as if from the hull of a ship. A low, keening sea shanty begins to hum, warped by wind and time. Sounds of distant gulls, sails cracking, and water lapping shore creep in. Lights, a stormy blue greens spill across the stage floor. A lantern light sways. Fog curls at the edges of the space, evoking salt air and sea spray. A large shadow crosses the stage—a mast, or perhaps the silhouette of a ship's prow. Then—projection: 1588 County Mayo, Ireland. A boot strikes wood. Then another. GRACE O'MALLEY storms on deck in full command, the crash of the ocean rising around her. She plants her feet as if daring the tide to rise higher.)

GRACE O'MALLEY

"NO CROWN BUT THE SEA"

GRACE

Grace O'Malley. County Mayo, Ireland.
Ever heard of me?

(Beat. Smirks.)

Of course not.
If you had, you'd be cowering in your boots.
They used to call me the Dark Lady of Doona.
The name alone turned ships around.
And I earned it.

Every time my clan was attacked,
I didn't write letters.
I launched cannons.

You've heard of Braveheart, haven't you?

(Beat. Then scoffs.)

Overrated.
It's so hard being a warrior when you're a man.
He got a crown and a war cry.
I got footnotes—if I was lucky.

Let's fix that.

My father was a chieftain—"Chief of the Nation."
We ruled the west coast waters like they were our own breath.
We traded. We protected.
We didn't ask permission.

I was born with the sea in my blood and battle on my tongue.
When I was eight, my father said I couldn't sail because of my long hair.
So I cut it off.
Nothing was going to keep me from doing what I was made to do.

(She circles slowly, with force.)

I married once. Then twice.
Each man thought his title might eclipse mine.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Until the enemies came.
And I was the one who led.
When they killed my first husband, I led the counterattack.
When they took my second love,
I stormed the stronghold myself and spilled the blood of his murderers.

(She draws her sword. Not to threaten—but to honor.)

But this?
This blade was child's play compared to what came next.
I sat across from Queen Elizabeth I.
England was carving up Ireland like a feast.
But I faced her—woman to woman.
And I didn't bow.
I got my lands back.
I got my brother freed from her prison.
She spoke Latin.
So did I.

And I made damn sure she remembered my name.

(Softer now, but steady.)

They always thought it should've been my brother.
But it was me who earned their loyalty.
Me who kept the clans alive.

I've been erased.
Mocked.
Buried beneath every man's story.

But I was the one who took the helm.
The one who fought the wind.
The one who ruled with no crown but the sea.

So next time you speak of kings,
Speak of Grace.
And speak her name with salt in your mouth.

(GRACE exits into shadows, her sword still glinting faintly. As her footsteps fade, the sound of the sea rolls in, then ebbs. A solitary drumbeat begins—measured, revolutionary, echoing the rhythm of marching feet. A lantern is extinguished. Projection fades in 1793 Paris, France. A guillotine silhouette appears briefly in shadow—symbolic, never literal. A red sash drops from above, slowly unfurling like a flag or blood-soaked parchment. OLYMPE enters upstage, barefoot, in torn finery. She carries a folded document—her final declaration. She crosses center slowly, pausing beneath the projection, and lifts her head to the crowd.)

OLYMPE DE GOUGES

"A FEW MOMENTS TO SPEAK"

OLYMPE

I once wrote:

"If a woman has the right to mount the scaffold, she should also have the right to mount the podium."

Apropos, then, that I've been granted a few moments to speak—
on my last day.

My fellow French women and men:
this is not the time to cower in fear.
Not the time to abandon our struggle for liberty and equality.
Not the time to turn away from the bright, blinding truth of tyranny.

Do not believe that injustice fades when ignored.
It festers.
It spreads.
It feeds on its own inequity.

Where were we, four years ago?

Hope for the future of the Revolution.
We hoped for the rights of women—
to marry by choice,
to divorce without shame,
to be citizens.

We hoped to end slavery—
that no human be property.

We hoped for a France renewed.
A true fraternity—
of men and women,
equal and free.

But what have we seen since?

Thousands executed without trial.
Thousands more dead in prisons.
Power run rampant, fueled by fear.

Women are still possessions.
The colonies still trade in flesh.

OLYMPE (CONT'D)

The establishment wants women to fail.
Because if we question slavery,
if we question forced marriage,
if we ask whether citizenship should belong only to men—
then their whole house of power begins to crack.
And that is what they fear most.
Not our outrage.
Our questions.

Do not think yourselves safe, men of France.
Privilege will not protect you from tyranny.

Any citizen—
man, woman, rich, poor—
can be pulled from bed and sent to die
on the whim of a ruler drunk with fear.

Is this the nation you want to call home?

I regret nothing.

I handed over my manuscripts myself.
Let them read my plays, my letters.
Let them try to twist my words into treason.

I stand by every syllable.

There were nights I was afraid—
that I'd be forgotten,
that my words would die with me.

But truth has a way of surviving.
And my words...
they are already moving
from woman to woman,
from hand to hand.

Despite everything—
I still hope.

Because even this moment
is a choice.
Hope or despair.
And I choose hope.

OLYMPE (CONT'D)

They think by silencing me
they'll extinguish the spirit of independence
burning in every French woman's heart.
They think by executing me
they'll teach you that speaking out
means death.

They are counting on your silence.

But I'm counting on your courage.

Don't bow to another ruler
who wants you on your knees.
Don't wait until the bodies pile higher.
Don't wait until it is your bed they come for.

(She turns, sensing movement. Delivers her final words quickly, urgently.)

Speak out against tyranny.
Speak out against injustice.
Even if it costs you your life.

For I stand on the shoulders of thousands—
all crying out for justice.

Liberté.
Égalité.
Fraternité—
for women
and for—

(A sudden blackout. We hear the unmistakable metallic clang of a guillotine drop. Then—silence. A single candlelight glow emerges upstage center. Slowly it expands into the dim, cool light of a royal chamber at twilight. A faint chime of a clock bell tolls, marking the passage of time—Projection: 1603 Richmond Palace, England. A high-backed throne-like chair is revealed. A crown rests askew on its seat. Tattered velvet drapes stir faintly. Then, a slow, deliberate entrance: ELIZABETH I, aged and breathless but upright, enters downstage left, clutching the armrests of the chair. She scans the air—then...)

ELIZABETH I

“JUST ELIZABETH”

ELIZABETH

Where are you, Death?

We both know I’ve stared you in the face many times before. You don’t frighten me. You’ve followed me since I was a child—since the day my mother lost her head...

(Her voice catches)

The same day a princess became “the bastard child of a whore.”

(She grips the chair’s armrests, trying to rise. She freezes—hearing something.)

Do thy worst. I dare you.

(she steadies herself, continuing)

Because that lonely, red-headed child—she found other ways to wield strength. When they called womanhood a weakness, I made my mind unassailable. No memory quicker. No resolve stronger. Before I wore the crown, I survived lifetimes in the “school of experience.” And there I mastered the four virtues most fit for a ruler:

(She stands tall now—forceful, defiant.)

Justice.

Temperance.

Magnanimity.

Judgment.

I do not fear you. You should fear me.

(She hears something. Looks up, sharply.)

Who goes there? Show yourself. You should know better than to startle a queen—especially a dying one.

(Her expression shifts as if recognizing someone in the shadows. She laughs, bitterly.)

Do my eyes deceive me?

The two least merry Marys in the realm - how utterly uninspired.

(beat)

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

If you are to be my last conversation, I'll call you not by who you were, but what you became.

(turns to the left, addressing Bloody Mary)

You—remembered simply as... (a scoff) "Bloody Mary."

The only grace of your legacy was clearing the path—for the queen England truly needed.

Your greatest sin?

Imprisoning the sister you once called "beloved" and yet you visit me now for what—forgiveness?

Don't you dare.

I learned early that to show emotion is a luxury granted only to those without power.

So, leave me, sister.

I've no forgiveness to give.

(Beat. Turning slightly, voice softens.)

And you. Mary Queen of Scots.

I see you lurking in the shadows.

We were friends once.

Confidantes through our letters.

Two queens on opposite ends of a sword.

I warned you to be cautious. But you married your husband's killer.

You gave your crown to men who used you.

(rising emotion)

I learned to use men. But never let them bind me.

I ruled alone.

You had the people's love.

But what I treasured—was our words.

And I thought you understood me.

Yet, rumors of conspiracy in your name left me no choice.

(she lifts her chin, regaining power)

So yes. I signed your death warrant.

And yes.

I wept.

But my crown—and England itself—could not hang by a thread..

And in your death, I became unstoppable.

(she rises, invoking the voice of her legendary speech)

They said I had the body of a weak and feeble woman.

But I had the heart and stomach of a king.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

And not just any king—
A king of England.

(She looks at both ghosts now. Softly, but with bite.)

I have survived
plots,
plagues,
wars.
I transformed an illegitimate nothing into England's greatest ruler.
My name will echo through time when yours are only whispers.
And yet...

(Beat. Then—a flicker of something unexpected.)

I would give my kingdom—every acre, every crown jewel—for just a few more moments.
A few more moments not as England's Queen...

(final whisper)

...but just Elizabeth.

(A moment of silence. Then—A deep oceanic hum begins to pulse beneath the silence—like breath echoing through a conch shell. The lighting shifts gradually from the candlelit dusk of ELIZABETH'S chambers to a submerged blue-green wash, like sunlight refracted through water. The throne retracts or is slowly wheeled off as projected text emerges, sleek and modern, across a now fluid, undulating background: 1992 Washington DC: Offices of NOAA. The background shifts to data maps of the ocean floor, tide charts, sonar imaging. A desk rolls into place—more modern now, strewn with folders. From stage left, SYLVIA EARLE enters. She gently removes a NOAA badge from her blazer and sets it on the desk. She exhales. Composed.)

SYLVIA EARLE

"THE TIDE WON'T WAIT"

SYLVIA

Administrator Knauss and
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration colleagues.
Thank you for coming.
I stand before you suffering from dry rot.
I belong in the water—
not wading through red tape.

Yes, your administration is better than the last.
But the inaction of good people can be worse
than the wrongdoing of a few.

You said it wasn't NOAA's job
to assess oil pollution in the Persian Gulf.
Even as we collectively watched the ecosystems collapse.

I'm sorry but, my parents taught me:
Leave a place better than you found it.
And we are all failing that.
So I resign.

Many have wanted me to stay
because I'm the first woman in this role?
But, I wasn't hired because I'm a woman.
I was hired because I do the work.

That's the same work I've been doing since I was the only woman—on my first expedition.
The papers called it:
"Sylvia Sails Away with 70 Men."
But I wasn't there for headlines.
I was there to explore.
I was there to do the work

One night, there, in the middle of the Indian Ocean
a school of silversides
formed a living sphere around me.
They opened up and let me in.
As if to say:
"We see you. You belong."

SYLVIA (CONT'D)

Now I don't know if you've ever experienced something like that Mr. Knauss
But if you had, you'd realize there is only one action to take here.
And that why I came back to fight for them.
For this.

So no, I'm sorry-being the first isn't enough.
Not in 1992. Not now.

And I didn't take this job to stand on the shore.
I took it to swim ahead of the tide.
And if *it* won't turn with me—you won't turn with me.
Then I'll ride it alone.

Because I've seen what's down there.
And damn it, it sure as hell worth fighting for.

(SYLVIA EARLE exits her final words lingering like the echo. The soundscape shifts—gently—from the low pulse of oceanic currents to a higher, purer tone, like the first note of a crystal singing bowl. A quiet snowfall of white petals or paper flakes may fall faintly from above, catching the light. A simple chair and a small white canvas are placed center stage. The backdrop fades to projection: 1980 December New York City: Imagine. A single white spotlight opens, revealing YOKO ONO already seated. She wears black in mourning, her posture elegant but weighted. On the floor beside her, small white rocks are scattered like fallen thoughts. She holds one gently in her palm.)

YOKO ONO

"LISTEN"

YOKO

They keep telling me I should say something simple.
Say "thank you for coming."
Say "John loved you all."
Say something... brief.

(beat – she closes her ears with her hands-then releases)

But when you layer the silence of grief on quietude on reflection-
you get a texture of deafening vibrations with a cylinder you can capture.
The space between.
I live in this space.

(she faces east)

Mama always said I saw things other people didn't.
And I would say—Mama, you just have to listen.

(She picks up a white stone. Turns it in her hand.)

After the war, they tore up the streets near my primary school.
Destroyed the wild dandelions with rows of small white rocks.
And when each stone fell, I heard it – an apology;
"Sorry."
"Sorry."
"Sorry."

Mama said, "Yoko, the rocks aren't speaking, but if they are-they're not speaking to you."
They were – you just needed to listen.

(she faces west)

I met John in 1966 he had already read my art book.
An abstract diary of a life in flux entitled Grapefruit.
He asked why.
John always asked.

(she faces east)

Mama, brother and I spent much time at Karuizawa-the foot of Mount Asama.
The volcano had not erupted in over 100 years but I asked:
"Are you sure mama?"
"Yes, it is safe, Yoko...we are safe."

YOKO (CONT'D)

But, to be extra safe I asked the dandelions to protect us.
They said, Ask the rocks.

(she faces west)

John was always, how did you, and why did you, and what did you-
He asked, and asked, and asked.

(Smiles. She faces east.)

I always wanted to fill my pockets with dandelions and white rocks.
Safety and apology.
But they made too much noise.

(She faces the audience.)

John once climbed a ladder at my art show.
At the top, white stones and a magnifying glass.
Inside, a dandelion
and single word.
"Yes."

I imagine him saying, "Sorry, sorry, sorry."
We can still hear him.
You just have to listen.

(As YOKO exits, she places the white stone gently at the edge of the stage. A sustained hum—like the low, resonant ring of a meditation bowl—lingers. The light dims around the stone, but its presence glows faintly. A faint ping echoes—like sonar. Another. Then silence. Then again—more rhythmic now. A single tone flickers like Morse code. Projections of constellations, static, and digital maps begin to animate subtly on the backdrop. Overhead, a projection appears: 2009 Long View California. JILL TARTER enters briskly: She notices the white stone still glowing faintly on the edge of the stage. She pauses. Picks it up. Turns it in her hand. A small, unexpected smile.)

JILL TARTER

“SIGNAL COMPLETE”

JILL

One day until your TED Talk.
Forty-seven rewrites.
No pressure, right?

(she jumps up and down lightly, psyching herself up)

Okay—here we go.

(writes on her notepad)

“Since the dawn of time, humanity has looked up at the stars and...”

(sighs)

Uggg. No. Too Sagan. Too much cosplay. You’re a scientist, Jill. Give them the science.

(Beat. Shakes her head.)

No more notes. Just... walk on that stage and tell them why this matters.

(She straightens. Focuses outward, as if seeing the TED audience.)

Why search for extraterrestrial intelligence?
People question it – mock it – our own Congress killed funding in thirty seconds. Called it the “Great Martian Chase.” A waste of tax payers dollars. But, you don’t spend your life listening for signals from the stars just to quit.

And yes—

This isn’t a hobby.

It’s my entire life’s work.

(She pauses. Softens.)

It started on a beach in Florida.

A little girl.

Looking up.

Holding her father’s hand.

Wondering...if someone out there was doing the same.

And when he squeezed my hand.

Proud.

That moment, that curiosity, that connection-paved the path. And eventually, it became

JILL (CONT'D)

more than wondering—it became belonging with...no not with- belonging to...the universe.

Uggg.

(Beat. She looks up, as if speaking to him.)

If you were here, Dad, you'd help me find the words.

(softly, imitating his voice)

"Every opportunity is a chance to seize the day. Especially the scary ones."

(She laughs, shakes her head. Then back to audience. Quiet. Personal.)

For anyone who's lost someone—you know you have to believe there's more out there. Even when you can't see it.

That belief shaped everything. My research. My college choice. Dad went to Cornell—so Cornell was it.

(joking)

Plus, we had no money, and legacy status might mean a scholarship, right?

(puts on a pompous voice, jokingly)

"Yeah... if you're a dude."

(Back to audience. Steady.)

But my father told me to dream big. So, I did. Said hard work would take me anywhere. And it did. Secured a scholarship from Procter & Gamble. But, getting in was just the first hurdle. The real shock - Day One:

First engineering course-three hundred students.

One woman.

Me.

Fine.

I'll outwork them all.

Professors ignored me.

Lab partners doubted me.

Even the campus wasn't built for me—no women's restrooms in the engineering department.

I had to leave the building just to pee.

Then came the final blow.

JILL (CONT'D)

Procter & Gamble found out I planned to get married. Apparently, a woman can't have a husband and a future in science. They pulled my scholarship.

(Beat. Shoulders drop. A crack of vulnerability.)

Being a woman in this field never stopped me, but as a scientist, being asked to prove yourself before any results is...is exactly why standing in front of you today.

Because at SETI, we do the same thing. We ask for you to believe before there is proof. We send signals into the unknown, hoping someone will hear us. Everything I've studied says there is life out there. But I still can't prove it...

(she smiles)

Yet.

(Beat. Then firmer.)

All those radio telescopes? They're not waiting for a symphony. Just one clear signal. One whisper across the cosmos—
will change
everything.

This isn't about aliens.
This is about humanity-how we see ourselves.

(All of the other characters enter the stage and watch JILL. Her voice builds as she speaks to the audience and her fellow women on stage.)

To stand up. Look out. And be reminded that here—on this tiny planet—how deeply we are connected. How similar we all really are. And most importantly—
no matter where you are,
no matter what you've lost—
You *never* really are... alone.

(She looks up. A beat. A small smile.)

You were right, Dad.
The scariest opportunities are always worth seizing.

(pause)

And maybe...just maybe- someone out there...
is listening back.

That's it.

JILL (CONT'D)

Let's send it.
Signal complete.

Shoot-that was good – I have to write that all down.

(She exits slowly, the white stone in her hand. As she disappears into shadow, the stage dims to near black. The final “ping” of a radio signal echoes—soft, distant, fading into silence.

A low harmonic swell begins—part choral, part mechanical. It hums like breath traveling through time. A soft “click” of a switch. A projector spool. A match struck. One by one, soft spotlights illuminate the ensemble—scattered across the stage like constellations. Each woman stands in her own pool of light, facing different directions. Still. Listening.

Then—

A single voice from the ensemble speaks—gentle, almost a whisper)

ENSEMBLE

You've walked the gauntlet of genius,
of grief,
of rebellion,
of glory.

You've seen the wound hidden in corsets.
Heard the drums of war in laboratories.
Felt the heat of the fire they started.
We became the flame.
We became the movement.
We became what's next.
Because a story is not history
Until someone chooses to remember it.
A revolution isn't real
Until someone closes to continue it.
And justice isn't justice
Until everyone
Is free.
Write the next chapter.
Paint the next project.
Vote the next law.
Name the next girl
After a woman who wouldn't break.
Do something they can't ignore.
This isn't a curtain call –

But a call to action.
What comes next.
You do.

(Blackout. A final heartbeat trails off.)

END OF PLAY

FIGHT LIKE A GIRL – BONUS MONOLOGUES

The Bonus Monologues section is designed to provide directors with maximum adaptability for a wide range of productions. These pieces offer expanded representation, additional casting flexibility, and opportunities for rotation, understudy, or alternate casting without disrupting the arc or integrity of the core performance.

WHEN TO USE BONUS MONOLOGUES

- To tailor run time for your audience (*add 1–2 monologues if your total production runs short, or sub in shorter options.*)
- To feature additional actors in large ensemble or educational settings.
- To create custom variations between matinee and evening performances.
- To deepen thematic moments through regionally relevant or culturally resonant voices.
- To highlight specific identities, stories, or experiences not currently centered in the main arc.

PLACEMENT SUGGESTIONS

These monologues are written to stand alone or seamlessly slot into existing moments. Use them:

- Before the intermission to create a button or reflection.
- After any major ensemble interlude to shift tone or focus.
- In place of a core monologue, if casting, age, or tone needs adjustment.
- As pre- or post-show programming, especially in student or community productions.

ROTATIONAL CASTING IDEAS

For school or repertory settings:

- Rotate Bonus Monologues nightly to give more students or cast members performance opportunities.
- Feature understudies or swing cast in bonus pieces to keep them artistically engaged.

PERFORMANCE NOTES

- Each piece should be performed with the same intentionality and emotional truth as the main show.
- Bonus monologues may be staged simply—a stool, a spotlight, and the words.
- Consider adding a projection, title card, or transitional lighting to integrate the moment into your show's visual language.

IF YOU CUT FOR TIME

- We recommend always keeping the first and final monologues of each act to preserve the overall arc.

ANNE LISTER

"THE LIGHT OF TRUTH"

(1834. ANNE LISTER stands at Shibden Hall, dressed in black. She is holding an onyx ring in her pocket, preparing to propose to Ann Walker. The moment is private, vulnerable, and defiant.)

ANNE

I know what your family wants for you, Ann.
A gentleman.
With the right lineage, the right name, the right... everything.

But I wonder—has it always been no?
Or has the right man simply never asked?
What if it wasn't a man you were waiting for...
But the right person?

I cannot be a man—nor would I wish to be.
But I swear to you, I can be everything a gentleman should be.

You've seen me among the men—speaking of science, politics, God and hunting.
You've watched me at your table, holding my own.
You've seen how I run Shibden. How I protect what I love.
What more is a husband, really?

They call me Gentleman Jack like it's a joke.
But I would wear that name with honor—if it was yours.

Let the world call this sin, scandal, farce.
I will call it what it is:
A marriage.
Not before man's law, but before God's.

What respect can I have for public opinion if I cannot respect the truth of my own heart?

When you first came to Shibden, I felt something shift.
As though the rightful mistress had crossed the threshold.
I've planned every corner of this estate with care—
But what good is a library tower without someone to share the books?
What joy in the gardens, if not your hand in mine?

You've never looked at me with shame.
Not for my stride, my coat, my collar.
Not like others have.

ANNE (CONT'D)

You know the scars I carry.
The women who loved me quietly, then disappeared.
The letters that turned cold. The doors that closed.

But you—
You've made me brave enough to ask again.

So, I will ask.

(she removes the ring from her pocket—small, dark, simple)

It's onyx.
They say it's a stone of protection. Of strength.
I hoped it might remind you of me... even if you said no.

Ann...
This ring is not a trinket.
It is a covenant.
That I will honor you, shelter you, never hide you.
That I will walk beside you not as a secret, but as a spouse.

You've teased me about my diaries, my cipher.
They are full of you.
I'll teach you the code, if you like.
You may read every page.

No more hiding. Not you. Not me.

(She breathes, steady now. One final offer.)

So—
If the world cannot imagine a husband like me,
let us imagine a world of our own.

(she kneels, or offers the ring—gentle, reverent)

NELLIE BLY

"THE ASYLUM DOOR"

NELLIE

"Do I regret going too far?"

(she leans forward, calm but flaring)

You ask that like it's a question about decency. About propriety.

(scoffs slightly)

Do I look like a woman who's ever worried about being proper?

(she takes a breath)

It's been thirty years. And I still wake up in cold sweats thinking I'm back in that asylum.

Maybe it's the fever I have now. Maybe it's this damn chair.

But I can still smell it—the antiseptic, the urine, the rot in the walls.

And the women.

Oh, the women.

Writhing. Ragged. Eyes sunken, wrists tied in leather like animals.

You call it going too far.

I call it doing what men wouldn't.

The women in Blackwell's weren't lunatics.

They were grief-stricken. Depressed. Divorced. Inconvenient.

Dragged off by brothers and husbands—filed away like bad ideas.

And all I had to do to join them...

Was refuse to sleep.

One sleepless night. A few "mad" mutterings.

And polite society signed my admission papers.

(laughs—dry)

That's all it took.

You think I went too far?

I didn't go far enough.

I wanted to stay longer.

I wanted to see how deep it went.

How many women they could crush behind those locked doors.

You don't forget that place.

The thick air. No ventilation. No food. Too much medicine.

And when the women started to drool and fade, they blamed them.

NELLIE (CONT'D)

They didn't treat madness.
They *manufactured* it.

(she steadies herself)

They called me a "stunt girl."
Not an investigative reporter.
Not a detective.
Just a girl.
A girl pulling stunts to get attention.

(scoffs)

Is that what you think I was after?
Attention?

Here's what I was after:
Truth.
Change.
Freedom.
For the women left behind when I got out.

Because I got out.

They called me brave.
But I was lucky.
Because I had an editor who believed me.
A name people recognized.
A platform to speak from.

Most women don't get that.

You want to talk about going too far?
Try circumnavigating the globe as a single woman in the 1800s.
Try outrunning deadlines, sea sickness, and skepticism.
Try walking back into rooms full of men who want to close the door on you again.
I did all of it.
And I'd do it again.
Not for fame.
Not for the byline.

For the women still inside.
Still invisible.
Still screaming.
Still unheard.

NELLIE (CONT'D)

(she softens slightly)

You don't get to ask me if I regret it.
You get to ask me how to do it next.

(Beat. Quiet but charged.)

And I'll tell you.
But only if you're willing to go even further than I did.

(She leans back. Smiles.)

Because that's the job of a reporter.

VIRGINIA WOOLF

“DON'T BE A WHAT IF”

VIRGINIA

I've been thinking about something - A question – really.
What if-
Shakespeare had a sister?
What if, her name was Joan.
What if, she had the same wit. Same genius. Same gift for rhythm and revenge.
But Joan...
Joan would never be taught to read.
She had no books. No room.
She went mad, eventually. Buried in an unmarked grave.
History calls her a “what if.”

There are so many Joans - women unfairly silenced through the centuries - Nan Mozart - Anne Finch. Woman whose names never even make it to the margin.

History is cruel to women.

My brothers went to Cambridge and as a girl, I had to make do with father's library. See, they learned to debate and I learned to listen through walls. For I was born into their society – a patriarchy and from what I can see, things haven't changed too much.

I could be bitter.
Some days, I am.
But mostly - rather than complain about it, I decided to do something about it.

We bought a press - right there in our dining room-between the tea and the cat.
We published our own words.
Freuds too.
And Katherine Mansfield, E.M. Foster, T.S. Eliot.
We didn't wait for permission.

So, here's my challenge to you - to every person in this room with a pulse and a voice and something to say:
Live an unapologetic life - an authentic life.
Loud, if need be. Unruly. From this moment on we, and the women we write-will never stay confined to society's limited expectations.
I am a woman with no filter and widely unpopular opinions because they are from the brain of a woman.

VIRGINIA (CONT'D)

And I'll let you in on a little secret:
For most of history,
Anonymous was a woman.

So let me ask -
With all the things you – the so-called moral majority now deem “inappropriate”...
With your book bans, your outlawed words, your locked libraries...
Do you honestly think you can silence a thinking mind?

Bolt the doors. Board up the shelves.
But...your problem is that there's no gate - no lock - no bolt you can set upon the freedom
of a woman's mind.

Women weren't absent from history because they lacked talent or brilliance.
They were absent because silence was enforced.
Because speech was punished
Because no one listened when they dared to speak.

So I dare you-
Don't be a What If.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

“THE THINGS WE MUST DO”

ELEANOR

They told me to say nothing.

But last week, I watched a woman with the voice of heaven be turned away—because of the color of her skin.

Constitution Hall, they said, was not “appropriate” for her to sing.

(Beat. She picks up the letter. Her hand lingers.)

And I think: If I say nothing—what am I?

When I was a child, my mother called me “Granny.”

It hurt. Deeply. But it taught me something.

You cannot let the world decide your worth.

You decide it.

You live it.

Franklin’s mother tried to stop our marriage. She thought I was plain. Improper. Too outspoken.

But when polio took Franklin’s legs—it was my voice he stood on.

And when I found myself lonely in the house that bears every man’s name but mine—I found Lorena.

A journalist. A friend. A woman who loved me and gave me a sapphire I wore to my husband’s inauguration.

Was that scandalous? Perhaps.

But I’d already learned how to survive the scrutiny of men.

J. Edgar Hoover kept three thousand pages on me.

Not because I was dangerous.

But because I was loud.

Because I didn’t stay in the drawing room and pour tea.

I went to the factories. To the protests. To the colored schools they tried to hide from our view.

And I wrote. Every single day.

To document.

(Beat. She returns to her desk. Takes a breath. Begins to type again.)

I’m resigning from the Daughters of the American Revolution today.

They want to bar Marian Anderson from singing in their hall?

ELEANOR (CONT'D)

Fine.

Let her sing at the Lincoln Memorial—where justice echoes louder.

(beat)

Some will call me improper. Unpatriotic.

But I believe patriotism is asking more of your country than silence.

And I believe being First Lady means being first.

To act. To speak. To say what must be said.

You must do the thing you think you cannot do.

Not because it is easy.

But because it is necessary.

HEDY LAMARR

"THE FREQUENCY OF GENIUS"

(offstage)

STAGEHAND

Miss Lamarr, they need you on set in two minutes.

HEDY

Tell them they'll get me in three. Maybe four. Beauty takes time. So does revolution.

(she turns slowly toward the dressing room mirror)

They want the star. The dress. The profile.
Now, where were we?

(offstage)

REPORTER

Miss Lamarr, do you think beauty sleep actually works—or were you just born looking like that?

HEDY

Is that really a question? Don't you want to ask me something important—like, is it true you invented a weapon to fight Nazi's between takes on your last film?

(silence)

Because I did.
Now sit tight, darling. I'll tell you everything-
While the powder sets.

(She crosses to center. Picks up a folded blueprint and opens it deliberately.)

They said no.
To *this*.

(holds up the blueprint)

Frequency-hopping spread spectrum. A way to skip between radio channels-so the Nazis couldn't jam our torpedo's.

A weapon. Designed in secret. Over dinner. Between takes.

HEDY (CONT'D)

And they said no.
Not because it wouldn't work.
But because I wore a gown to the meeting.

"They said"—and I quote—
"You could do more for the war effort using your beauty."

(beat)

As if that was all I brought into the room.
Look at me. Go ahead. They all do it. But what they don't see...
Brilliance doesn't wear lipstick.
Doesn't sign autographs.
Brilliance is the scratch of graphite at midnight.
The calculations scribbled on cigarette cartons.
The idea that won't stop knocking.
This was supposed to save lives, but they'd rather save face.
So, I gave them what they wanted.
A smile. A kiss. A showgirl on the war bond stage.
Millions raised darling.
Millions.
And while they were clapping for my check bones-
I kept the patent.

Filed it under "frequency-hoping."
Forgotten by the Navy.
Like a bomb waiting for detonation.

So, they may pin-up my picture now-
But sweetheart-
They'll be paying me for the next hundred years.

(beat)

You can't print any of that can you?

(offstage)

REPORTER

No.

HEDY

(smiles)
Be a doll and go tell them-
I'm ready for my close up.

HYPATIA

"A GODDESS IN EXILE"

HYPATIA

"To Synesius"

(Lights up on HYPATIA. Distant shouts. A thudding below, like a mob building outside the door. She moves quickly but deliberately, writing at her desk, aware her time is running out. She hears something, freezes—then continues, speaking aloud as she writes.)

To my esteemed student—
Brother.
Synesius.

I dare you to keep this letter.

I know you've burned the others and I know why.
Because they will come for me soon.
And you, Bishop of Ptolemais, will say you had no knowledge.
Just as you always have.

Do you already know the plan, Synesius?
Will they drag me from the Library, or from the streets?

(Beat. She stiffens. Softly—ironic.)

You see what I've done? Guaranteed you'll burn this letter—
even as I tell you, this will be the last.

(she folds part of the parchment, continues)

I do not blame you for your caution.
These are dangerous times.
They even let you marry—
as if to coax your loyalty with comfort.

Had I been born a man, they might have offered me a seat in the church.
A chance to wear robes, sit beside Cyril, and lend him my mind.
"Look!" they would say.
"Even the great Hypatia believes with us now."

But no. I am not here to serve power.

I am here to speak truth.

(beat)

HYPATIA (CONT'D)

Would you write to Cyril?
Would you ask him—gently, publicly, like a Bishop should—
whether there is still room in this city for the thinking mind?

Ask him if every difference must end in blood.

Ask him if reconciliation is heresy.

(She walks to a window. Distant torches flicker.)

Mayor Orestes asked me what I thought.
About Cyril. About the rift.

I told him: meet.
Offer mutual respect. Speak, not shout.

The next day?
Stones. Broken skulls.
Grown men bleeding on the theater floor—over who is “right” about God.

I did not even attend.
But they say it was my fault.

Always my fault.
They call me sorceress. They call my astrolabe—the very one you helped me design—a
“tool of the devil.”

It is math. Not magic.

(She opens a drawer. Takes out an astrolabe. Runs her fingers across it reverently.)

Cyril fears a woman who reads the stars.

So here I am, writing to you one last time.
My students and I still walk the city.
We speak at temples, at theaters.
We preach peace louder than their sermons of hate.

But even I know the tide is turning.

HYPATIA (CONT'D)

The new emperor?
He arrives in velvet and gold, swinging a cane like a wizard's wand.
He punishes. He does not mediate.
He echoes Cyril—and calls me sorceress, too.
Emperor Theodosius:
the drama queen.

(Beat. She tries to laugh—then softens.)

You remember the walk to the Cerapium.
How far you traveled to study.
How hungry we all were to learn.

Now the halls are quieter.
The scrolls dustier.
The sky no less vast—but fewer eyes left to map it.

Will our knowledge be lost, Synesius?

The orbits?
The force that binds us to Earth?
The geometry of light?

Will the future think we lived in darkness?

(She grips the letter tightly. Decides.)

Promise me this.
That you will teach what I taught you.
That you will protect the scrolls that remain.

That you will keep questioning. Even if it costs you something.

(She moves back to the table. Takes a final breath.)

You always call me: Philosopher. Mother. Sister.
But I am simply this:
A mind devoted to truth.
A life dedicated to knowledge.

And yes—maybe to you.

You ask for prayer.
For clarity.

HYPATIA (CONT'D)

I give you this:

Look to the stars, Synesius.

If they kill me—look there.

That is where I will be.

(HYPATIA seals the letter. Lingers a breath longer. Then exits into the gathering dark.)

KATE SHEPPARD

"A HOUSEHOLD RIGHT"

KATE

(quietly, almost to herself)

Tomorrow... they vote.

Thirty-two thousand names. Thirty-two thousand women who dared to speak... even though no one asked them to.

(beat)

And I keep thinking—what if it's not enough? What if they laugh again?

(she stiffens, then sets her shoulders)

I didn't come this far to be laughed at. I came to change the country. And if that makes me unpopular—fine. I've been called worse.

(straight to audience)

Let me ask you something. What are three words that describe you? Think about it. Not what you wish—but what others say when your back is turned. I'll go first.

Determined. Relentless. Passionate.

They meant it as an insult.

I took it as a mission statement.

(realizes)

I should've started with an introduction. Kia ora. I'm Kate Sheppard.

Yes, like the actress. Or duchess. But I'm not a household name.

I'd rather be a household right.

(beat)

Do you ever feel invisible? Not just unseen—but unheard? Like your voice can't make it past the door? I did.

And I wasn't alone. Half the population felt it too.

We couldn't vote. We couldn't keep our own children in a divorce. We couldn't own property.

We weren't citizens. We were scenery.

(sits or leans, thinking)

KATE (CONT'D)

So, I didn't just complain. I did something.
I edited *The White Ribbon*—the first woman-run paper in New Zealand.
I wrote pamphlets. Heaps of them.
My favorite? This one.

(she pulls a folded paper from her pocket)

"Ten Reasons Why the Women of New Zealand Should Vote."
Simple. Sharp. No fluff.

(reading it aloud)

Number two: "Because it has not yet been proved that the intelligence of women is only equal to that of children, nor that their social status is on par with that of lunatics or convicts."

(chuckles)

Blunt, I know. But it worked. So did number six.

(reads again)

"Because the presence of women at the polling booth would have a refining and purifying effect."

(chuckles, then beat)

Honestly, I just wanted them to stop treating us like smoke needing to be cleared.

(straightens)

I hand-delivered that petition to Parliament. Unrolled it right there across the chamber floor. It was taller than a man. Heavy, too—but that weight belonged to us. To all of us.

And tomorrow... they vote.

(beat)

I don't know what they'll decide. But I know what I'll keep doing.
Raising my voice. Writing the truth. Standing in the doorway until they let us in.

(sharply, with pride)

I don't need to be a household name.
I need to be—

(pause)

a household right

NANCY WAKE

"I'M GLAD I WAS THERE"

(1944. A small safehouse in France. NANCY, 32, speaks aloud to Henri—her husband, now gone. The walls are thin. A storm rolls in outside. She addresses him like he's in the room, her grief flickering beneath her gallows humor.)

NANCY

Five hundred thousand francs, Henri.

That's what the Gestapo offered—for me.
The White Mouse.
If we were poorer, I might've told you to turn me in.

(beat)

Kidding.
Mostly.

But I wear it like a badge now—
That I was worth half a million francs...
and you never gave me up.

(She kneels beside a battered satchel. Pulls out a small cloth-wrapped object.)

Seven tries it took me to leave Marseille.
Seven.
Do you remember the last time?
No—you wouldn't.
I never got to tell you.

(Beat. She unwraps a radio coil, lets it dangle.)

We were nearly captured.
One of our men smashed the radio so it wouldn't fall into German hands. Smart, really.
But with it gone, London couldn't reach us. No drops. No codes. No hope.
The nearest working signal? Two hundred kilometers away.
Through checkpoints.
Past soldiers.
Alone.

Any man would be stopped.
But a woman?
A pretty woman with turnips in her basket?

NANCY (CONT'D)

(she mimics a German accent—amused)

“Do you want to search moi?”

(nods, remembering)

Too afraid? They’re suspicious.

Too bold? They’re angry.

Just the right smile?

They wink.

They wave you on.

She’s harmless. She’s nothing.

And I cycled.

All day.

All night.

Thirty-six hours.

Couldn’t walk for days. Legs raw. Thighs torn open.

But we had our radio. And 7,000 fighters got their supplies.

(beat)

That was the cost.

(She softens. Picks up a worn photo of Henri.)

I prayed your road out was easier.

Every push of that pedal, I imagined you ahead of me—
just out of sight.

And every bead of sweat, every breath,
was a promise to find you again.

(beat)

But I didn’t know...

You were already gone.

(Pause. She stands tall. Back straight. Breath deep.)

Henri—

I’ve killed a man with my bare hands.

I’ve given orders that ended lives.

I’ve lied, stolen, exploded bridges and hearts alike.

I do not regret it.

NANCY (CONT'D)

But I regret what it cost you.

(Quiet. A flicker of sorrow. Then resolve.)

You never betrayed me.

Not for francs.

Not for freedom.

Not for your life.

And so, I will not betray what we fought for.

You called me stubborn.

I call it survival.

(Beat. Her voice firms.)

They think they've seen the worst of me.

But they haven't seen what I'll do now.

Because I'm still here.

And I'm not done.

(Beat. Quiet.)

I'm glad I was there.

And I'd do it again.

(She tucks the radio piece into her coat. Then the photo. Turns. Walks out into the night.)

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