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Badger

A Play in Two Acts

By Don Zolidis

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Badger (full-length) by Don Zolidis
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Full-Length Historical Drama
9w, 5m, 1 any gender, plus ensemble

In 1944, five young women take newly-available jobs at one of the largest munitions factories in the United States: the Badger Ordnance Works. Facing dangerous work with highly flammable powder as well as insidious sexism, the women form an unlikely friendship through joy and heartbreak. A vibrant ensemble brings the factory to life as each of the women confronts not only the challenges of entering the workforce in the darkest days of World War II, but also who she is and what she truly values. Unforgettable human stories make the era immediate in this captivating ensemble drama.
(A one-act version of this play is also available.)

Cast of Characters

ELEANOR MURRAY, 20, a dreamer

ROSE, 18, a newlywed, nervous

BARBARA, 23, a young mother determined to earn her own money

IRENE JACOBS, 21, a strong, forceful woman. *(can be gender non-conforming, but not required)*

GRACE, 19, a free spirit, unattached, a bit of a hellraiser.

CHORUS, comprised of other men and women, dressed in the uniform of the day (coveralls, headscarves for the women, at different times they may don facemasks or become locals) – should be at least 5 M and 5 F – can easily be more. The Chorus plays workers, dancers, and soldiers at various times in the play.

BURT, an older worker, kind of a sexist jerk. (one of the Chorus members)

TIMOTHY, 18, walks with a serious limp, from polio at a young age. (one of the Chorus members)

CHESTER, 40s, the supervisor (one of the Chorus members)

MATTHEW, 19, married to Rose, on leave from basic training (one of the Chorus members)

JOHN, mid 20's, Barbara's husband. (one of the Chorus members)

JOE, a man in a training video (one of the Chorus members)

BOB, a man in a training video (one of the Chorus members)

GLADYS, a woman ordnance worker (one of the Chorus members)

MARY, a woman ordnance worker (one of the Chorus Members)

BEN, 30s, a worker at the plant (one of the Chorus members)

MR. PRENTISS, Barbara's father-in-law (one of the Chorus members)

NEWSREEL VOICE

JULIE, 3, Barbara and John's daughter

On creating the machines: Much of the play takes place on the factory floor of the Badger Ordnance Works. In reality, this area was dedicated to massive pressing machines, vats, and conveyors that created smokeless powder in World War II. All of these devices should be suggested rather than literal. Movement, sound, and pantomime can create some of the effect, but please be creative and theatrical in the depiction of the "work."

For instance, the chorus may become the machines, or may become other workers working the machines in synchronous movement.

This training video from 1961gives a strong sense of the type of work done at Badger:
https://video.wpt.org/video/in-wisconsin-a-day-at-badger/
The locations within the plant include -

PRESS HOUSE: - (6:45-7:30 in the training video) Nitrocellulose is shaped into 50-pound blocks in a large pressing device. The workers shape and funnel the raw material – then remove the round blocks when finished. Constant cleaning of the area.

MIX HOUSE: - (7:30-8:00 in the training video) the round blocks are loaded into another massive machine, where they are broken up with additional chemicals. The area is constantly cleaned – once the material is processed it must be removed –

CUTTING HOUSE: (9:45-10:15 in the training video) – strands of material are threaded through a large comb-like device into a cutting machine, creating something like spaghetti. Large sections of cut material are then loaded into barrels.

Setting: 1944-45, Baraboo, Wisconsin. The Badger Ordnance Works and environs.

W.O.W.s at Badger Ordnance Works, 1944.

W.O.W.s operating machines in the cutting house, and the mix house.

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A sign over the original Badger Ordnance Works. 1945.

Act One

The factory.
The WORKERS, (members of the chorus, male and female, dressed in coveralls) stand silhouetted, frozen in working positions.)

NEWSREEL VOICE

A vast armada of workers is headed to American factories to counter the Axis powers. Men and women by the thousands are putting their backs into creating the vast amount of munitions and ordnance required for total victory.

The workers move.
FOCUS on three women, moving in unison.

These little darlings are changing their aprons for coveralls and doing their part for the war effort. Nice going, girls!

The women give a thumb's up.

IRENE, dressed in regular clothes, speaks to the audience.

IRENE *(to the audience)*

You couldn't spit without hitting one of the posters.

CHORUS VOICE

The girl he left behind is still behind him. She's a Wow!

One of the female workers poses as if she's in a poster.
BARBARA emerges and speaks to the audience.

BARBARA *(to the audience)*

The whole plant was built in just over a year – they were working day and night – trucks everywhere. You couldn't hardly sleep. I didn't really think I'd be one of the people working there, but -

CHORUS VOICE

Do the job he left behind! Apply today at Badger Ordnace Works and keep `em shooting!

Two WORKERS pose like the workers in the sign.
ROSE emerges and speaks to the audience.

ROSE *(to the audience)*

I'd never worked before, but when my husband got drafted, I started to think about it.

CHORUS VOICE

Your country needs you! Apply today!

GRACE enters, and speaks to the audience.

GRACE *(to the audience)*

I needed to get outta my house cause my parents were driving me nuts –

CHORUS VOICE
Live right on campus! Daycare provided!

IRENE *(to the audience)*
And they started you at 68 cents an hour, and you couldn't beat that.
CHESTER enters, in coveralls.
ELEANOR enters, and speaks to the audience.

ELEANOR *(to the audience)*
I figured, what's the worst that could happen?

CHESTER
Death. You could die.
The five women (and others) gather to listen to CHESTER.
Inside this plant we refine smokeless powder and rocket propellant, both of which are extremely explosive. A single spark – whoop – you're gone. We'll be finding pieces of you all over the county. So we're gonna talk about safety first. Okay? Who knows what creates sparks?

IRENE
Matches?

CHESTER
You're right. Anything else?

GRACE
Rocks.
No real reaction from Chester
A couple of rocks hit together. You know, a flint?

CHESTER
Are you planning on bringing flint into this factory?

GRACE
No I was just answering your question.

CHESTER
Do not bring flint into this facility. Each day when you arrive you will remove all spark-creating devices from your pockets – matches, lighters… rocks. You will wear coveralls, hair cover, and steel-toed shoes. It's not gonna be a flattering outfit for you girls, but my favorite saying is, `you're not here for socializing, you're here for our boys in uniform.' Plus there can be some spray from the nitric acid, which will eat holes in your clothing and your skin.

GRACE
Can I smoke during my breaks?

CHESTER

No you cannot smoke during your breaks.

GRACE

The things I do for my country.

CHESTER

I don't like jokes and I do not have a sense of humor. Funny pictures, clowns, children's laughter, I don't appreciate any of it. What I do appreciate… is safety. Okay, Grace?

GRACE

Yes, sir.

CHESTER

Here are your safety notebooks which will contain rules for your particular station. And girls? Your country thanks you. You are doing an important thing here. You should be proud.

Scene change to the Press House.

ROSE speaks to the audience as she puts the coveralls over her outer clothes and attaches her bandana.

ROSE *(to the audience)*

I was so nervous I put my coveralls on backwards the first time. I almost started crying because they didn't fit, but then I realized my mistake. They assigned me to the Press House.

BURT, older, is already working. ROSE takes her spot on the line. She has her safety notebook with her.

She exhales and starts trying to do the work.

She smiles at BURT. He doesn't smile back. He just works.

ROSE *(to BURT)*

I'm a little nervous.

He doesn't respond.

I said I'm a little nervous.

BURT

No reason to be nervous. We could die at any time. I could have a heart attack, get in a car accident. When it's your time, it's your time. Not much point worrying about it.

ROSE

I just meant I was nervous because this is my first job.

BURT

Oh. Hm.

ROSE

My husband is in basic training right now so I figured… I'd do my part. For my country.

BURT

Yup.

ROSE

I guess the advertisements worked! I just saw those posters and… I'm Rose, by the way.

BURT

Hm.

ROSE

So… what is that awful smell?

BURT

That's the ether.

ROSE

How can you stand it?

BURT

You get used to it. Little hairs in your nose get burned out so you can't smell nothing. If you ask real nice I bet they can put you in a non-smelling part of the factory.

ROSE

Oh that would be great.

BURT

There ain't a non-smelling part of the factory.

ROSE

Oh.

BURT

This ain't a sewing circle.

ROSE

Right.

She looks over the machines in front of her and reads from her manual.

`In the press house, nitrocellulose is shaped into 50 pound blocks.' 50 pounds. That's heavy.

BURT

Yup.

ROSE

Do you have to pick that up or…?

BURT

I guess that's one way to move it.

ROSE

What's the other way?

BURT

Horses.

ROSE

We have horses?

BURT

Nope.

He stares at her.

ROSE

Oh that was a joke. Sorry. So um…

BURT *(sighing)*

You're gonna take the raw material, it's coming down the conveyor belt, it goes in the presser there, you shove it in, make sure it's full, the machine does the work, then you roll it out, put it on the buggy there. Not hard.

ROSE

`Work areas must be kept spotless at all times.'

BURT

Sure. I guess.

ROSE

It says here spotless.

BURT

Oh it does? Oh gee. You can keep your side spotless if you want.

ROSE

Well according to the manual –

BURT

All right I'm taking a piss.

ROSE is shocked by his language.

You're gonna come in here and take a man's job, you better act like a man.

ROSE

But um… how am I going to run this by myself?

BURT

I guess you'll have to be as good as two men then. I'll be back when I feel like it.

He exits.

ROSE *(to the audience)*

So it was a little different than the advertisements.

Lights change to the changing area.
Exhausted, IRENE and GRACE are hanging up their uniforms.
IRENE sits heavily, taking off her boots and finding her shoes.
GRACE is shaking out her hair and trying to make it look nice.

IRENE

At about the six hour mark I was hoping I would die.

GRACE

Ever had a job before?

IRENE

Nope. I don't think I've ever stood up this long before.

GRACE

You get used to it. How does my hair look? I just had it done on Tuesday.

IRENE

Looks like hair.

GRACE

Be serious.

IRENE

It looks great. Real pretty.

GRACE

Probably looks like a bird's nest. I'm gonna have crows trying to land on my head. You sure it looks okay?

IRENE

You got a hot date or something?

GRACE

You never know who you're gonna meet.

IRENE

It's eight o' clock in the morning.

GRACE

Right, so every other gal looks like a million bucks and I look like I've been exhumed from a grave.

IRENE

I don't know how you have any energy. I'm hurting in places I didn't even know I could hurt. My butt hurts. I don't know how my butt hurts, but it hurts.

GRACE

I grew up on a farm. This ain't nothing.

IRENE

And the smell –

GRACE

I'd rather smell like ether than cow manure any day of the week. This way I just knock the men unconscious instead of sending them for the hills. You got a fella?

IRENE

Nope.

GRACE

Slim pickings these days. It's like a harvest after a swarm of locusts passed through. Take what you can get and hope it's not rotten.

IRENE

I'm just trying to keep my head down and do my work.

GRACE

That's no fun.

ELEANOR and BARBARA enter, getting out of their coveralls.

BARBARA

I don't know about you girls, but I'm about to die.

IRENE

Thank you. This one's ready to go out on the town.

BARBARA

Nope. Put me in a coffin, bury me six feet under.

Skipping Forward

GRACE

That's a lot of gum.

BARBARA

I just thought about our boys overseas… trying to get them what they need.

GRACE

Right.

BARBARA

Think about it: What we make here… the powder – that creates a tiny explosion that propels a bullet on the front lines. We're changing the course of the war.

They all crack up.

GRACE

Just today we managed it?

BARBARA

I know it's silly. But I like it. I want my husband to have all the powder in the world.

GRACE

I'll drink to that. Speaking of which…

The other women groan.

You don't even know what I was suggesting!

IRENE

Whatever it is, I'm too tired to do it. See you tomorrow, girls.

BARBARA

See you at *work*.

IRENE *(proud)*

At work.

Lights change.

BARBARA, writing a letter.

BARBARA *(writing)*

Dear Lunkhead –

Guess what? You are married to a working gal. I took the admission test at Badger Ordnance Works and I passed. That's right! I'm a WOW. So nuts on ya. It's out with aprons and in with smokeless powder. How `bout when you get back I'll take YOU out to dinner? Won't that be a stitch? Taking my boy out on the town! Little Julie is overjoyed her Mama's doin' her thing for the ol' U.S. of A. She can't wait until she sees you again. In other news: your parents are about to have me a committed to a mental hospital. Your Mom is your Mom and I love her to death and haven't even strangled her yet. Your Dad's arches hurt, his back hurts, his neck hurts, and I

could fill you in on every other physical ailment he's got because the ol' man won't shut up about it. You'd think he'd be a doctor for the amount he knows about griping. Write me back, will ya? Love ya lots. Barbara.

Lights shift to ROSE, speaking to the audience.

ROSE *(to the audience)*

I cried the whole first week. I know it's stupid, I know you're not supposed to cry at work, everybody knows that – but every day -

The CHORUS forms a gauntlet for ROSE to walk through in her uniform.

WORKER

You make that uniform look beautiful!

ROSE passes him.

Another WORKER wolf whistles at her.

A third worker gets right in front of her.

WORKER 3

Hey what'd you bring me for lunch?

She tries to get around him. He moves to stay in front of her.

You didn't bring me lunch? Why not?

ROSE

Sorry didn't think of it.

WORKER 3

You don't want to talk to me? I'm just being nice.

ROSE

I have to get to work.

WORKER 3

Oh, right. *Work.* You gotta *work.* You didn't make any lunch but you gotta *work*. I get it.

Other workers approach.

WORKER 4

Hey what's the problem?

WORKER 3

Rose didn't make us lunch.

WORKER 4

Why not?

WORKER 3

Cause she's getting full of herself. This is how it starts, boys. The girls start having jobs and the next thing you know we all starve to death.

ROSE

Maybe you should make your own lunch.

WORKER 4 reacts like she's flung an insult at him.

WORKER 4

She got you there, Bob!

WORKER 3

That was mean. You can make it up to me by bringing me a lunch tomorrow.

ROSE

Nobody eats lunch at four in the morning anyway.

WORKER 3

I have a special diet. I want the crusts off the edge of my sandwich.

ROSE

Excuse me.

WORKER 3

Sheesh I'm trying to be nice and she gets rude. I could be the love of your life and you'd never know.

WORKER 4

Don't be ridiculous, Bob. I'm the love of Rose's life. Ain't that right, sweetheart?

ROSE

I'm married, thank you.

She escapes them.

WORKER 3

Remember my sandwich!

Rose spots Burt in the Press House.

She gets to work.

BURT

Oh sure girls get to be late. Probably took all evening getting your hair ready to be in a bandana.

Rose tries to ignore him and work.

I'm taking a piss. I'll be back when I feel like it.

ROSE

Fine.

Rose tries to work both stations, it's almost impossible.
She goes back and forth, moving quickly, trying to keep everything in motion.
It's overwhelming. She starts crying, but keeps working.

TIMOTHY hobbles in.

TIMOTHY

Whoah. What's going on?

ROSE

Can you give me a hand please?!

TIMOTHY

Sure, sure, sure.
He takes over one of the stations.

ROSE

You stuff it in the presser.

TIMOTHY

I know I'm in a press house too.
He gathers material and feeds it into a machine.
Where's your partner?

ROSE

He left.

TIMOTHY

What?

ROSE

He left. He walked away. He does it every day. Sometimes he's gone for half an hour or more.

TIMOTHY

You're fooling.

ROSE *(in tears)*

Nope. Says he's going to the bathroom and leaves. I don't know why he hates me, he just does. And I'm just – I'm sorry I shouldn't be crying on the job it's stupid.

TIMOTHY

He's probably in the men's washroom. I saw a bunch of guys in there.

ROSE

In the washroom?

TIMOTHY

They're shooting craps.

ROSE

They're shooting craps?!

TIMOTHY

It's all right, I'll help you. Sometimes I cover for people.

ROSE

You don't have to -

TIMOTHY

I'd go yell at `em but they aren't going to listen to me anyways.

ROSE

Don't worry about it.

TIMOTHY

They probably think it's funny to make you do all the work.

ROSE

Yeah some joke. The other girls get to work with each other and I'm stuck with these jerks…

TIMOTHY

You can ask Mr. Baines for a switch.

ROSE

I just started, I can't ask for - nobody thinks I can do the work anyway. They'd just laugh, say I couldn't hack it. I don't understand why they hate me.

TIMOTHY

They don't hate you.

ROSE

They hate me. They hate that there are women here. We wouldn't even be here if there were enough men to do the work –

TIMOTHY

I know.

ROSE

Are you back?

TIMOTHY

From what?

ROSE

From the war?
She points to his leg.

TIMOTHY

Oh. No. Um… I had polio. I guess I'm not enough of a man to fight. So… I do what I can, draw my eighty-five cents an hour and hope to make a difference.

ROSE

Well I'm sure it's appreciated.

TIMOTHY

Sure.

ROSE

By me, at any rate.

TIMOTHY

What do you have to appreciate?

ROSE

My husband's in basic training.

TIMOTHY

You have a husband?

ROSE

Why is that strange?

TIMOTHY

How old are you?

ROSE

Eighteen.

TIMOTHY

How long you been married?

ROSE

Three months. He found out he got drafted and –

TIMOTHY

Right.

ROSE

Like you know.

TIMOTHY

I don't know.

ROSE

We were in love and we decided to get married before he left. And you don't know anything about it.

TIMOTHY

I didn't say anything.

ROSE

You look smug.

TIMOTHY

I – you were in love, you got married, it's going to be great.

ROSE

It will be. It is great.

TIMOTHY

Good.

ROSE

Everybody tried to talk us out of it, but I think, when you really love someone, you know right away.

TIMOTHY

I wouldn't know. Not a lot of girls lining up to be my dance partner, if you know what I mean.
Short pause
This is when you tell me that the right girl will certainly come along. To buoy my spirits.

ROSE

What if the right girl doesn't come along?

TIMOTHY

Then I guess I'm doomed to be alone then, aren't I? You're a bag full of rainbows.

ROSE

I just don't want to lie to you.

TIMOTHY

Because you know the future?! All right – your marriage is going to work out and my life will be hopeless misery.

ROSE

Why do you think my marriage is in trouble?

TIMOTHY

I don't! I don't know anything about your marriage.

ROSE

That's right.

TIMOTHY

And you're not a fortune teller. I think. Are you a fortune teller?

ROSE

No.

TIMOTHY

Whew.

ROSE

Say, what's your name anyway?

TIMOTHY

Timothy.

ROSE

Timothy or Tim?

TIMOTHY

Timothy. When I was a kid, I went by Tim, but then…
Gestures to his limp.

ROSE

I don't get it.

TIMOTHY

Tiny Tim? From *A Christmas Carol?* A lot of Dickens scholars in high school.

ROSE

I figured you got hurt in the war.

TIMOTHY

Nope. I get to stay home out of danger. Lucky me.

ROSE

Do you really think we're out of danger? I wonder if a German bomber could make it this far.

TIMOTHY

To Wisconsin?

ROSE

It could happen.

TIMOTHY

How is a Nazi bomber going to make it to the middle of nowhere Wisconsin? That's the whole point of putting the ordnance plant out here. Away from any targets.

ROSE

I thought they put it here in case the whole thing blows up, it wouldn't kill that many civilians.

TIMOTHY

I hadn't considered that, but that is a very good point. A disturbing point, but a good point.

ROSE

You know what I think about? When I'm working? I wonder if there's a girl in Germany doing the exact same thing as me. I'm sure there is, actually. There's some munitions factory somewhere in the third Reich, and all the women are pumping out powder as fast as they can. Both of us, on opposite sides of the world, providing the weapons so our husbands can kill each other. Think about that. So much work goes into the war. For what? What are we making?

TIMOTHY

Hm.

ROSE

What if we just stopped? What if all the women said, `we're not going to do this anymore'? And we walked off the job? All the factories go dark. `You'll have to find some other way to kill each other. '

TIMOTHY

And the men pick up rocks and clubs and do it the old-fashioned way. It's a pretty thought, it is, but cruelty seems to be the natural order of things. From everyone on every side. But it's nice to think like that. What's your name, anyway?

ROSE

Rose.

TIMOTHY

Nice to meet you, Rose.

BURT returns, spots TIMOTHY.

BURT

Hey what are you doing?

TIMOTHY

Your job.

BURT

I can do my job fine I don't need some cripple trying to do it for me –

TIMOTHY

You have a good day in the washroom? Make some money?

BURT

What of it?

TIMOTHY

Seems like you're getting paid to make powder, not shoot dice.

BURT

Why don't you tell it to my supervisor? If you got a problem. You got a problem?

TIMOTHY

Do your job.

BURT

Get outta here.

BURT stares down at TIMOTHY for a moment.

TIMOTHY

I need to get back to my station –

BURT

Sure you do.

ROSE

Thanks for helping, Tim.

TIMOTHY

Timothy.

ROSE

Right.

He exits.
ROSE and BURT work.
They keep working as the lights come up elsewhere on BARBARA, at night, reading a letter.
JOHN, in uniform, speaks the letter.

JOHN

Dear Babs –
Working girl, huh? With a helmet and overalls and everything? Ain't that something? I bet you make that outfit look like a million bucks. I can't tell you exactly where we are right now, but it's boring. I guess that's better than exciting. So far war is a lot of sitting around waiting to do nothing. The food is terrible, weather is terrible, even the nurses here are mean. Remember when I told you I wanted to go to Italy for our honeymoon? Forget it.

I got you and Julie's picture in a locket around my neck and I look at it all the time. Some of the guys make fun of me, but I like to remember what I'm fighting for. You keep me going. Even before the war, you kept me going. I'm real proud of you and I love you like crazy. John.

MR. PRENTISS enters, rubbing his eyes, in pajamas.

MR. PRENTISS

You gotta have every light in the house on?

BARBARA

I don't have every light on.

MR. PRENTISS turns out some lights.

MR. PRENTISS

You know what the price of electricity is? Probably costs twenty cents to have that bulb on for a minute.

BARBARA

I'd wager it's less than that.

MR. PRENTISS

You know a lot about electricity bills, don't ya? Even though I haven't seen you paying them around here. You sure know a lot.

BARBARA

You want me to pay the electricity bill, George?

MR. PRENTISS

You think I'd ask my daughter-in-law to pay for her own electricity? That's what you think of me?

BARBARA

I can pay it if you want me to. I got my own checking account and everything.

Skipping Forward

GRACE

I'm playin' myself. And I say, `I don't know but I'm here now.' `Kiss me, you fool. You beautiful little fool.' YES. I don't know how those actresses do it, to be honest with you. Sometimes they gotta slap their leading man. How are you gonna slap Cary Grant? You couldn't pay me enough money to slap that man. If some director told me to slap Cary Grant, I'd slap the director instead.

ELEANOR

You probably wouldn't be working on the movie for long.

GRACE

Right.

ELEANOR

I bet you'd be a great actress.

GRACE

You think? I think so too. No seriously – I think I would be amazing. I can do all the parts. Thank you, Eleanor. You have exquisite taste.

ELEANOR

Don't mention it.

GRACE

What do you think about?

ELEANOR

Hmm?

GRACE

When you're working on the line. What goes through your head?

ELEANOR

It's pretty silly.

GRACE

Sillier than kissing Cary Grant?

ELEANOR

Yes.

GRACE

Prove it.

ELEANOR

Mars.

GRACE

Mars? As in the planet?

ELEANOR

Yes.

GRACE

You think about the planet Mars?

ELEANOR

Stories happening on Mars.

GRACE

What sort of stories happen on Mars?

ELEANOR

Adventure stories. Love stories.

GRACE

You don't say. With Martians?

ELEANOR

And humans. Forbidden love.

GRACE

Wow. I never woulda thought. Now every time you're quiet, I'm gonna know… Eleanor's doing her Martian love story in her mind–

ELEANOR

Sometimes I write them down.

GRACE

You do?! I wanna see one.

ELEANOR shakes her head.

No no no you can't stand there and say you're writing Martian-human forbidden love stories and *not* share that with me. I gotta see that.

ELEANOR

I've never shown them to anyone.

GRACE

I bet they're amazing. Wait a minute, are they… are they… *dirty?*

ELEANOR is embarrassed

They're dirty?! OH NOW I NEED TO SEE THEM.

ELEANOR

Shhh!

GRACE

This is the best thing I've heard all day. This is better than D-Day as far as I'm concerned.

ELEANOR

Don't tell anyone!

GRACE

Are you kidding? I'm making posters!

ELEANOR

Grace!

GRACE

Show me one. Bring it in, I want to read it.

IRENE and other workers in the cutting house.

IRENE *(to the audience)*

My favorite part of the job was the paychecks. My body ached, my head hurt every day when I wasn't at the factory, but every two weeks…

She takes out a paycheck.

My name right on top. Irene Jacobs. And then right here – fifty four dollars and fourteen cents. The first time I went to open a checking account they asked me if I had my husband's permission. I said I didn't have a husband, then they asked if they could speak to my father. My father's been dead twelve years. It's just me. And I'm a real person with my own money. Cash it. It was worth it just to see the look on his face, and every two weeks I'd make sure to ask for that teller when I brought in my check. It wasn't about the money, honestly, it was about being a human being worthy of respect. You see this? It's my name. Respect me. Which made the little slights at the plant a little harder to take. You could always tell when they'd shown the men a training film.

NEWSREEL VOICE

Women in the workforce present special problems for supervisors. This scenario will help you learn how to deal with the unique difficulties of employing women.

JOE and BOB downstage – their acting is awful. CHESTER and some other men watch.

BOB

You're a good foreman, Joe. What seems to be the trouble?

JOE

Women scare me. At least they do in a factory.

BOB

I understand your problem. It takes women some time to feel at home. But, it can be done.

JOE

You talk like a man who knows women.

BOB

We'll see, Joe. We'll see. Women workers can be surprisingly good producers. But remember: a foreman will always have the eternal feminine to contend with.

CHESTER enters to oversee IRENE and the other women.

CHESTER

Let's remember to wear those safety glasses, girls. And I want to make it clear: just because I'm talking to one of you, doesn't mean I have any special interest in you. I know you girls like to get jealous. But I do not mix pleasure with business. Right. A little encouragement. Well done, everyone. Remember that we could all die if you make a single mistake.

He exits with his hands clasped behind his back.

IRENE

He's a breath of fresh air.

GLADYS

It's a wonder he's not married.

MARY

Can you imagine? `Dear. I have observed the meatloaf is burned again. Please rectify this in your next meal.'

They laugh.

`Honey. I would like to remind you that we, like all humans, must die. Please consider wearing galoshes.'

IRENE

At least he's a straight shooter.

GLADYS

Yeah, he'll tell you to your face you aren't as good as a man.

IRENE

Maybe you girls just aren't working hard enough.

MARY

Please. We all work twice as hard as any man here.

GLADYS

Agreed. And that's why they pay us less.

IRENE

What do you mean, they pay us less?

GLADYS

They pay us less. Course they do.

IRENE

How do you know that?

GLADYS

My husband Gary started a month after I did. He's making ninety cents an hour now. Got promoted right away.

MARY

That's how they do it. They give the men different job titles – or they only put women in the cutting house. And that justifies them giving us squat.

IRENE

You knew about this?

GLADYS

Yeah, what are you gonna do? Besides, if I made more'n Gary he'd get all mad. I wouldn't want to live with him. He's bad enough.

MARY

Oh come on Irene stop acting all shocked. At least we got jobs. That's just the way things are.

Lights shift to the Prentiss Home.

BARBARA speaks to the audience.

BARBARA *(to the audience)*

When you had a man at war you were afraid of everything. The phone ringing. The mailbox. A strange car pulling up outside your house. A man with a look of purpose and regret walking towards you to tell you your world was ending. All day, every day, you were holding your breath. Just let me get through today. Let me hear nothing today. And then at work… you could tell – there'd be a new sorrow on a woman's face near you. She'd gotten a letter. She'd gotten a call. And maybe for a second you'd feel lucky that it wasn't you this time. But it was always there. Until you got news.

She opens a letter,

`We regret to inform you… that your husband… John Andrew Prentiss… was captured by the Italian government during a military action on March the fourth. Further details cannot be related at this time.

BARBARA sets down the letter.
She takes a minute.
And then it's you with the new sorrow.

The girls are gathered around ELEANOR as they get out of their coveralls. GRACE has the pages. ELEANOR can't bear to watch. ROSE and IRENE crowd her. Other girls are nearby.

GRACE
Quit pushin!

IRENE
I want to see!

GRACE
Hold your horses, I'm gonna read it.

ELEANOR
I don't know that you should read it out loud.

GRACE
Oh honey I am reading this out loud. Okay…

IRENE
Hurry up!

GRACE
Don't rush me I got a process!
She reads in a breathlessly dramatic voice.
`His taught skin, bronzed by the Martian sun and tanned by the rusty dust that carried across the winds, gleamed in the candlelight.' Ooh. `The Barbarian Queen's eyes lingered over every line of his body, then narrowed. `Earth Man… I do have one use for you,' she purred.'

IRENE *(crowding in)*
WHAT?!

GRACE
Back off! `And what would that be?' `What would that be, My Queen. Address me properly.'
The girls gasp.
`What would that be… My *Queen*?' `Remove your tunic.'
The girls gasp.

ROSE
WHAT ARE YOU WRITING?!

IRENE

Skipping Forward

ROSE

I liked it. I was scared of it, but I liked it.

GRACE

Thank you.

ROSE

Did you hear it, Barb?

BARBARA

Yeah.

ROSE

What'd you think?

BARBARA

It was grand.

GRACE

It was more'n grand, it was fabulous! And I was fabulous in it.

IRENE

You all right?

BARBARA

I'm fine.

IRENE

You sure?

BARBARA

Um… just got a letter…
The other women drink this in.

IRENE

Oh.

ELEANOR

Oh no.

BARBARA

He's alive. He's been taken prisoner in Italy.

IRENE

Oh honey.

She holds BARBARA.

It's gonna be all right.

BARBARA

…yeah. I know.

IRENE

We're here for you, okay? We're here.

BARB nods.

GRACE

Anything you need.

Lights change.

NEWSREEL VOICE

On Italy's East Coast, British artilleryman prepare to take Orsonia, an enemy-held town important to the allies, as the 5th and 8th armies drive toward Rome. Officers plot the direction of fire – the barrage begins.

The sound of explosions.

GRACE and ROSE are getting dolled up together.

ROSE

It feels a little frivolous to be putting on a dress when there's still fighting.

GRACE

It wouldn't kill ya to have a good time. Besides, what are we fighting for? The right to dance.

ROSE

I'm sure that's not it.

GRACE

That's what I'm fighting for. And since we work all night, might as well dance all day! This way I won't make terrible choices like I usually do.

ROSE

Terrible choices?

GRACE

At night, everyone looks good. But at ten a.m.? I'll know for sure what I'm getting into.

Lights change to the dance. The music strikes up. Something like Roll out the Barrell or another polka.

The Chorus members become other dancers or band members.

ELEANOR enters, her hair done, embarrassed.

GRACE

Look at you!

ELEANOR

I don't really dance, so –

ROSE

I didn't even recognize you.

GRACE

I thought, who is this babe? That's Martian queen energy.

ELEANOR

Oh -

GRACE

Today, I want you to go up to a boy and tell him, "Earth Man, I do have a use for you."

ELEANOR laughs.

`Remove your tunic.'

More laughs

`I would see if you Earth men are as impressive as they say.'

ROSE

You're gonna drive her outta here, stop it!

ELEANOR

I've never been to a dance before.

GRACE

It's easy. You just follow the guy's lead. And if he's terrible, don't tell him. And if he's good, don't tell him.

She looks over at the men.

The pickings are whatever is below slim.

TIMOTHY approaches.

TIMOTHY

Hi.

ELEANOR

Hello.

TIMOTHY

Rose, would you like to dance?

ROSE

Oh. Uh… of course.

He leads ROSE off to dance. GRACE leans in to ELEANOR.

GRACE

You can do better anyways.

TIMOTHY *(to ROSE)*

We're gonna have to go slow.

ROSE

I prefer slow, actually. I have a terrible time finding the beat.

TIMOTHY

I can't find the beat either. I guess, even if I did find it, I wouldn't be able to keep up with it, so –

ROSE

So we'll make our own beat.

TIMOTHY

Done.

They try to manage as BARBARA enters, in a dress.

GRACE

You made it!

BARBARA

My in-laws agreed to watch Julie.

GRACE

I'm so glad you're here.

BARBARA

Thanks.

She takes a deep breath

ELEANOR

Do we just wait for the boys or…?

GRACE

Sometimes they need encouragement.

She shouts across the dance floor.

Hey!

Gestures to ELEANOR and BARBARA as if to say "look at this"

The men turn away.

Who needs ya?

ELEANOR

That's helpful to my self-esteem.

BARBARA

You look divine.

GRACE

Remember: Martian Queen. You have powers they can't imagine. *Kneel before me.*

IRENE enters, dressed as a man. She looks great.

The girls react. IRENE does a spin.

ELEANOR

What are you wearing?!

IRENE

I figured there wouldn't be enough men here, so I volunteer.

She does a manly walk back and forth.

GRACE

Ha!

IRENE hams it up, maybe grabs her crotch and spits or other suitably disgusting male behavior.

IRENE

Am I doing it right?

ELEANOR

That is…

IRENE

Sorry, I have to remember I'm a gentleman.

She stands up straight, spiffing herself up.

BARBARA

You look great.

IRENE *(to GRACE)*

Excuse me miss, may I have this dance?

GRACE

Of course, sir.

She calls out to the men.

See?! A real man asks!

They dance.

Are you leading?

IRENE

I guess.

BARBARA and ELEANOR look at each other.

ELEANOR

So…?

BARBARA

I thought you'd never ask.

ELEANOR and BARBARA do their best to dance.
Everyone dances.

Lights change to outside. Later.
ROSE helps TIMOTHY limp to a spot to sit down.

ROSE

You okay?

TIMOTHY

Overdid it. Sorry.

ROSE

It's all right.

TIMOTHY

Sometimes I think… I can do everything that a… normal person can do and – I can't.

ROSE

You have to pace yourself.

TIMOTHY

Yeah.

ROSE

I had fun.

TIMOTHY

I'm glad.

ROSE

It's terrible that you wasted all your time with me, though; I'm sure there were other girls just dying to dance with a handsome young man.

TIMOTHY

I don't think they wanted to dance with me.

ROSE

Why do you get down on yourself like that? So what. So you're not dancing a jig anytime soon. That's not what a girl is looking for.

TIMOTHY

Some of them –

ROSE

Then you don't want to be with them anyhow. Any girl worth a darn is going to look past… this and see what's really important about you. That you are a kind, decent man with a good heart.

TIMOTHY

You can tell all that about me, huh?

ROSE

I am a fantastic judge of character. Lately. I have become a fantastic judge of character.

TIMOTHY

Not so much earlier?

ROSE

Not so much.

TIMOTHY

Well thank you for… seeing me. And dancing with me.

ROSE

Least a girl can do. Besides, I think people at Badger can only dance with other people at Badger. Cause of the smell. We're used to it.

TIMOTHY

Maybe that's it.

ROSE

You know sometimes when I don't smell ether I get a headache. I heard of a gal who takes little pieces of explosives home and sleeps next to them - otherwise she gets an awful headache.

TIMOTHY

Huh. That's probably not good. Another reason to leave.

ROSE

You're thinking of leaving Badger?

TIMOTHY

Oh sure. Eventually. I got this dream of being a teacher.

ROSE

A teacher?

She laughs.

TIMOTHY

Why is that funny? Everything right now celebrates these warriors and the scientists and the workers and I just want to tell people that there's more to life than that. Literature, poetry, art. Beauty. The things that make life worth fighting for. The whole society right now is conscripted to the war effort – an arsenal of Democracy, that's what FDR said we had to become – but think about that: that means that our individuality and our spirit get hammered out of us until we become a machine – I don't want to be a part of a machine. I want to be a human being.

ROSE

Wow.

TIMOTHY

Sorry I get carried away.

ROSE

I bet you'll be a really good teacher.

TIMOTHY

You think?

ROSE

Until you encounter children. Children are monsters. They'll murder you.

TIMOTHY

Unfortunately, it seems to be a requirement of being a teacher: encountering children. Job hazard.

ROSE

I think you should follow your dream.

TIMOTHY

What about you? You got a dream for after the war?

ROSE

Oh sure. It's little. I want to travel. I ain't never been out of Wisconsin.

TIMOTHY

Never?

ROSE

Nope. I been to Green Bay, that's about as far as I've gone. So maybe there's a world out there, where a person could go and… be free… like a balloon that escapes from the fair – up there wandering over the world – my Mom wants me to start working on grandkids right away, but –

TIMOTHY

You're eighteen.

ROSE

I know! She keeps telling me, `I'm gonna die soon, I just want one chance to hold a baby before I go.' She's forty-two. Picture of health. But she always thinks she's gonna die. Every time we have a cold snap she thinks she's gonna catch pneumonia and freeze to death. `Oh here it comes if only you had listened to your mother… no grandchildren, so sad…"

TIMOTHY

She sounds fun.

ROSE

I was happy to move into the worker housing, let me tell you.

TIMOTHY

I bet.

ROSE

So tell me: which one of the girls do you have your eye on?

He laughs.

You can tell me. Eleanor?

TIMOTHY

Who's Eleanor?

ROSE

She was standing next to me when you came over. Grace? I bet it's Grace.

He laughs again.

TIMOTHY

No.

ROSE

Who is it then?

A moment.

TIMOTHY

She's uh… she's a married woman.

ROSE *(catching on)*

Oh. That's… too bad.

TIMOTHY

Right. Probably impossible.

ROSE

Definitely. Definitely impossible.

Pause.

TIMOTHY

You know, I'm the kinda person who's never had a lot of courage. Not just about going to war, but about… everything in life. I guess I'm just used to people pitying me – it's a pretty awful feeling when you notice strangers looking at you like you're a broken little puppy – but, I just wanted to say it's nice not to be pitied. By you.

ROSE

Me?

TIMOTHY

Yeah you never looked at me like I was something pitiful, you looked at me like I was a full person. That's kinda rare. So I guess I thought maybe… I could be a full person to you.

ROSE

Timothy. You know I'm married.

TIMOTHY

I know. I'm sorry.

ROSE

You're very sweet and all.

TIMOTHY

Right. A fella's gotta dream, right?

ROSE

A girl's gotta dream too.

She kisses him on the cheek, then heads off.
Timothy waits, bemused.
Lights change to inside.
GRACE and IRENE are dancing. IRENE spins GRACE around energetically. They're having a blast. The musicians stop for a break.

GRACE
You are too much! Where did you learn to lead?

IRENE
It's twice as easy as following. You get to walk forwards, and you just raise up your arms and twirl the girl.

GRACE
You could teach the men a few things.

IRENE
I'm sure I could. Well, my dear, can I get you a drink?

GRACE
Oh. Such a gentleman!
IRENE exits to get a drink.
BEN, a middle-aged man, approaches GRACE.

BEN
Want to dance?

GRACE
My dance card is full, I'm afraid.

BEN
With what?

GRACE
With dances.
She walks away from him.

BEN
Hey what gives?

GRACE
Nothing gives, I'm tired. I've been dancing all day.

BEN
Yeah I watched you.

GRACE
Great. I'm glad I was entertaining.

BEN
It was a little queer, to be honest. A girl dancing with another girl?

GRACE
What can I tell ya? When a girl has it, she has it.

BEN
You're gonna dance with a fake man but not a real man?

GRACE
Are you supposed to be the real man?

BEN
You wanta find out?

GRACE
Not really. I'll take your word for it, but so far I'm not impressed.

BEN
You think this is real funny, don't you?
IRENE returns with a drink.
What are you supposed to be? Coming in here, takin' our jobs, pretending to be a man. Freaks.

IRENE
All right, sir –

BEN
You're a joke. Everyone's laughing at you.

GRACE
From what I can tell they're laughing at you actually.
He lunges at her – IRENE gets in the way.

IRENE
Don't touch her.

BEN
Oh that's how it is? You're a real tough guy now?
He shoves IRENE backwards.
She throws her drink in his face.
He punches her.
Other men rush to restrain BEN and pull him off of her.
Come on, get up! You wanna be a man, come on!

MAN
Hey come on Ben what're you doing?
GRACE helps IRENE up.

BEN

Get outta here freaks!

MAN

All right all right all right –

The men drag BEN backwards.

GRACE guides IRENE out of the room.

GRACE

Come on let's go.

BEN

That's what I thought!

GRACE helps IRENE outside. IRENE holds a cold drink to her face.

GRACE

You all right?

IRENE

Owww… sometimes drunk idiots pack a wallop.

GRACE

Here, sit down. Well that was a first. I've never had a gal take a punch for me before.

IRENE

I shoulda hit him back.

GRACE

Next time. You ever been punched before?

IRENE

My Daddy was a mean drunk, so…

GRACE

I'm sorry.

IRENE

He's dead now. But he was a class A bastard when he was alive. Didn't really take a shine to me or my brothers. We all got plenty of bruises.

GRACE

I'm sorry to hear that.

IRENE

It is what it is. People lash out. When you don't have nothing, you want to lash out at something. You can't punch life, so you punch you the nearest soft thing available. That was me. Or my brothers. Or my mother before she left.

GRACE sits next to her.

GRACE

I had a fun time today.

IRENE

Sorry I ruined it.

GRACE

You didn't ruin it. You were the reason I had fun. I woulda danced with you all day.

IRENE

Ah it was stupid. They want you in a dress, right? Unless they need you to work. Then you can work like a man, but you can't get paid like a man. You can't get respected like a man. And once the job is done… back into the dress, right? And if you don't like it… we got ways. Stupid to think that's it gonna be any other way. You fit in the box or they cut your arms off. You know that Cinderella story? The stepsisters, they don't fit in the shoe, they can't fit in the perfect shoe, and they want so bad to be the princess in the story the first one cuts off her toes. I think about that. You don't fit. You'll do anything to fit in. Even if it means severing pieces of yourself. Just lop `em right off and hope nobody notices the blood.

GRACE

What parts of yourself are you chopping off?

IRENE

Oh – so many.

GRACE

Yeah?

IRENE

Yeah.

GRACE

Me too.

They sit there a moment.

IRENE

I really liked dancing with you tonight.

GRACE

It was fun.

IRENE

It felt… comfortable.

GRACE

Nobody trying to grope ya.

IRENE

Yeah.

IRENE gathers her courage. GRACE notices.

GRACE

You all right?

IRENE nods.

You sure?

IRENE

I just wanted to let you know that you were beautiful tonight – today.

GRACE laughs.

GRACE

And you were very handsome. In a beautiful way. Best man there.

IRENE sets her hand down between them.

GRACE notices. She puts her hand over IRENE's in a friendly way – at first.

It becomes something more. They notice.

I'll… I'll see you at work.

IRENE

Okay.

GRACE takes a moment, stands up.

GRACE

You okay to get home?

IRENE

Sure.

GRACE

All right.

She stops – kisses IRENE on the top of the head, and leaves.

IRENE waits there. Smiles.

ROSE's house.

She enters, dancing, humming or perhaps singing the song that was played during the dance. MATTHEW enters, in fatigues.

MATTHEW

What's got you so wound up?

ROSE

Oh!

MATTHEW

That any way to greet your husband?

Lights Down.

End of Act One

Act Two

BARBARA, in work uniform, in the mix house.
JOHN, in uniform, lays on the ground near her.
The female WORKERS work around her during this speech.

BARBARA *(to the audience)*

You try to get lost in the routine. Empty your mind, think about production quotas, think about heaps of smokeless powder rumbling out of the plant, heading to the guns of the boys in Europe and the Pacific. Maybe to the boys who are trying to rescue your husband. Maybe they're on the way right now.

Some of the men become SOLDIERS, moving silently.

Something you've created propelling ammunition across a battlefield – a bullet fired from the gun of one soldier, sliding into the body of another man. There's smoke and fire and bombers roaring overhead – they reach the prison where he's held… someone bashes in a metal door with a boot and there he is, the man whose face you see every time you close your eyes, like a skeleton…

The men freeze as they approach JOHN

You realize you're shaking. Is he dead? Are his eyes still bright? Can he laugh? And if he comes home, what kind of person will he be?

Lights change to the home of ROSE and MATTHEW. Evening.

MATTHEW

Where you goin?

ROSE

I have to work.

MATTHEW

At ten o' clock at night.

ROSE

My shift starts at midnight.

MATTHEW

Oh. Midnight, huh?

ROSE

Yes.

MATTHEW

Your husband's home for two weeks before shipping out and instead of spending that time with him, you go to *work*.

ROSE

It's my job.

MATTHEW

You sure you're not going to a dance or nothing? Out on the town. Stepping out.

ROSE

No I have to work.

MATTHEW

That's funny cause I heard about a dance. I ran into Jimmy Schneider at the A and P. I guess there was a big dance the other day. That's funny, isn't it? That's real funny.

ROSE

What do you want, sweetheart?

MATTHEW

What do *you* want, Rose?

ROSE

I went to the dance.

MATTHEW

Oh. Oh you did? You didn't want to tell me about that?

ROSE

I didn't figure you wanted to hear about it.

MATTHEW

Why is that?

ROSE

It was just a dance.

MATTHEW

Uh-huh. You wanna hear a joke?

ROSE

No thank you.

MATTHEW

I'm gonna tell it anyway. So there's this dumb mug – a real moron, know what I'm saying? And this moron volunteers for the army – they say, `who wants to shoot a gun?' and he raises his hand and says `all right I'll do it I ain't good for much else anyways.'

ROSE

I don't like this joke.

MATTHEW

It gets better. So you know what happens? This moron's wife goes to a dance with another man. Right? Here's one guy going off to war, and as soon as he does that his girl goes and finds another guy. That's funny, right? The punchline – get this – the punchline is that the new guy is a cripple. He don't even have two working legs. That's real funny, ain't it?

ROSE

We just talked.

MATTHEW

You're not laughing.

ROSE

We just talked, Matt.

MATTHEW

I just told a joke, why ain't you laughing? You didn't think it was funny? Should I tell it again? Cause people are laughing at me. I guess I'm the joke then, right?

ROSE

Nobody's laughing at you.

MATTHEW

DON'T CONTRADICT ME!

ROSE

I just talked to him!

MATTHEW

I'm risking my life – FOR YOU – you can't even wait til I'm outta the country!

ROSE

I just talked –

MATTHEW

QUIT LYIN! Jimmy told me what he saw! You were dancing, or you were trying to dance cause the guy can't even walk!

MATTHEW gets up from where he's sitting.

ROSE

I'm sorry, okay, I'm sorry I –

MATTHEW

What?

She can't say anything else.

WHAT?!

ROSE

I didn't mean to –

MATTHEW

Didn't mean to WHAT?!

ROSE

It didn't mean anything –

MATTHEW

What didn't mean anything? *What* didn't mean anything?!

ROSE

We just danced a little bit!

MATTHEW flips out. He's on the edge of physical violence.

MATTHEW

You think I'm stupid?! *HUH?!*

ROSE

No!

MATTHEW

I don't want you ever talking to that freak again, you got me? *You got me?!*

ROSE

Okay.

MATTHEW destroys something. Throws a mug, a chair, anything he can get his hands on. ROSE is terrified.

MATTHEW calms himself down.

MATTHEW

Aw crap. Aw darn it. I'm sorry, baby. I'm acting like a real heel. I'll fix that. I'll fix that.

He tries to put the broken thing back together again.

ROSE

It's all right.

MATTHEW

You know I got a temper.

Skipping Forward

CHESTER

He's got a family to support –

IRENE

The boy is twenty years old. He's not married. I been here longer, and he's making thirteen cents an hour more'n me.

CHESTER

Irene, you're a special gal, but sometimes logic can escape you. I need to go.

IRENE gets in his way.

IRENE

Sir, with all due respect, all the men make more than me. All the men are making more than all the girls. Why is that?

CHESTER

Men have families to support –

IRENE

Women don't?! Half the girls that work here are mothers! And most of them have husbands overseas! And what does it matter anyway?! If our work is the same we should get paid the same.

CHESTER

You're getting emotional/ about this.

IRENE

I'm not getting emotional, I'm asking you why I don't get the paid the same as a man when I do the same work as a man!

CHESTER

If you calm down, I can explain it to you.

IRENE

Explain it then.

CHESTER

First of all, some of the work is not the same –

IRENE

We're doing the same work, you just give them a different title/ so you can pay them more –

CHESTER

I'm not going to talk to you when you're hysterical. If you don't like your job/, you are free to quit and get a job somewhere else.

IRENE

I like my job fine I just want respect –

CHESTER

You are respected – you are a valuable/ part of the war effort –

IRENE

Then why ain't I valued like a man? I pay taxes. This whole plant runs on money/ that I send to –

CHESTER *(overlapping)*

I'm done. If you want to get silly and cry/ about it –

IRENE *(overlapping)*

I'm not crying/ about –

CHESTER *(overlapping)*

We're done, Irene. I'm done talking about it.

IRENE

I'm not done talking about it!

CHESTER

I hope, for your sake, that you are. Because I can get a new gal in here to take your place in five minutes.

IRENE

Do you think it's fair?

CHESTER

I don't decide pay.

IRENE

Who does?

CHESTER

I gotta go. If you want to keep your job, you'll drop this.

He escapes.

ELEANOR and GRACE are in work uniforms, on the line. ELEANOR is lost in thought. GRACE watches her.

GRACE

Are you in Mars again?

ELEANOR laughs.

You can tell me.

ELEANOR

A little bit.

GRACE

Yeah? What's happening?
ELEANOR smiles.
Oh it's that good, is it?

ELEANOR

It's pretty good.

GRACE

Kneel before me. That's good. I gotta try that on my next date.

ELEANOR

She doesn't actually say that. She says `Now kneel.'

GRACE

Remove your tunic. My powers are greater than yours. Heh heh.

ELEANOR

Can I tell you a secret? I mailed it. My story.

GRACE

Really?

ELEANOR

Yes! Two magazines – *Amazing Stories* and there's an all-female science fiction journal out of Los Angeles.

GRACE

That's fantastic. They're gonna publish it for sure!

ELEANOR

Maybe.

GRACE

Aw they will! If they don't, I'll tell `em I'm cancelling my subscription.

ELEANOR

You have a subscription to *Amazing Stories*?

GRACE

No, but I can threaten.

ELEANOR

Thanks.

An Alarm sounds.

The workers do not know what to do.

VOICE

Shut down production on the line. Repeat: shut down production on the line.

CHESTER enters as the workers shut down their machines.

CHESTER

Let's go! Let's go! Come on, girls! You need to be faster than this! Get it done! Step away from your machines.

The women step away from their spots.

CHESTER stops a stopwatch.

Thirty-five seconds. Thirty-five seconds. If this were an actual fire, this room would be a crater right now. You need to be better, you need to be quicker – you there –

Points to a woman.

Why aren't you wearing your safety goggles? You think this is a jamboree? We're just having fun and chit-chatting? You need to FOCUS. And next time you think about why you aren't getting paid the same as the men, remember they did it in thirty-one seconds.

He walks off.

Lights change to ROSE in the press house.

ROSE *(to the audience)*

After my husband shipped out I felt like I could breathe again. I tried to keep my head down, I refused invitations from Grace to go out dancing again, I just tried to do my job. Tried to remember who I was.

TIMOTHY finds a spot on the line near ROSE.

TIMOTHY

Looks like you could use a little help.

ROSE

I'm all right.

TIMOTHY

Sure. They've got me floating so… Anywhere I see a need…

ROSE

Good.

TIMOTHY

Did I do something that was wrong? I'm sorry if I did I just – I don't know what I said. I guess I shouldn't have been that forward with you at the dance.

ROSE

No you shouldn't have.

TIMOTHY

Okay. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to… interfere in your life.

ROSE

I'm just trying to do my job, Timothy. It's hard enough to work all night with a husband at war –

TIMOTHY

I know.

ROSE

You don't know what it's like. I'm just trying to be a good person, do my part for the war, try to survive until it's all over.

TIMOTHY

Until what's all over?

ROSE

The war.

TIMOTHY

Oh. You sure you don't mean life?

ROSE

That's not what I said.

TIMOTHY

That's what it sounded like. Do the right thing until the clock runs out.

ROSE

You think you know me so well, don't you?

TIMOTHY

I know girls like you.

ROSE

I thought no girls wanted to talk to you. Or was that a lie?

TIMOTHY

I can observe –

ROSE

Uh huh. Well I don't want to be observed, so you can go work somewhere else.

TIMOTHY

I'm sorry.

ROSE

For what?

TIMOTHY

For being in your way, I guess.

ROSE

Maybe you should be sorry for flirting with a married woman. If I were you, that's what I would be sorry for.

TIMOTHY

You flirted with me too.

ROSE

You asked me to dance!

TIMOTHY

And we had fun! Didn't we have fun? Am I remembering the night wrong?

ROSE

It doesn't matter if we had fun, it's wrong.

TIMOTHY

Why?

ROSE

Maybe you don't care about my marriage, but I do. And it's important to me not to be stepping out with some… man.

TIMOTHY

Were you gonna say cripple?

ROSE

I wasn't gonna say that.

TIMOTHY

You looked like you were gonna say that.

ROSE

Well? What if I did say that?

TIMOTHY

I had a great time with you. I really like you, and I thought you really liked me. I'm sorry if I pushed things too far; I haven't had a lot of experience with girls so maybe I made a mistake. But I won't bother you anymore. If you change your mind, you know how to find me.

He exits.

Lights switch to BARBARA at home.

BARBARA *(writing a letter)*

Dear Lunkhead –

I'm not gonna mail this letter cause I don't know how it would get to you, so I'm gonna keep it here in Wisconsin and then give it to you when you get home. Julie's growing like a weed and she's real proud of you. She can't wait to tell you all about horses cause she knows everything you can know about them. She tells me just about every day.

I miss you. It feels like half of my ribs are missing. Sometimes I feel like I can't even take a deep breath without shattering like glass. But this is a happy letter, right? It's tough for me but I know it's got to be a hundred times as tough for you. But I want you to make it. All right? Even though you can't read this right now, I want you to *make it* through the war. Whatever it takes. Cause I don't tell you this enough but I love you like crazy. I've always loved you like crazy. The other day I saw this couple – musta been in their eighties, and they were sitting on a park bench near Cooper's Pond – and he had his arm around her shoulder like they were high school kids. They were just sitting. I want that to be us someday. Sixty years from now. I want that to be us. Love, Barbara.

IRENE's home. She's cleaning up after dinner.

GRACE is there.

IRENE

See, I do own a dress.

GRACE

It looks very fetching.

IRENE

And, I'd like to add, I can cook.

GRACE

No kidding. It's like I don't even know you.

IRENE

I'm full of surprises.

GRACE

Thanks for the dinner, by the way. I was getting a little tired of ravioli.

IRENE
Don't mention it. I don't ever get to cook for anyone, so I figured it would be fun.

GRACE
Yeah the kitchens in these houses are less than spectacular.

IRENE
They threw up these apartments in about a week, so I'm just glad the walls are still standing.

GRACE
Did you hear about Jenny Weissman's house? Her door fell down. Apparently the wood for the doorframe was rotten – the screws for the hinges ate right through it. She was just standing there and it fell straight in on her, landed on her cat.

IRENE
I guess they figure this place is temporary.

GRACE
Let's hope.

IRENE
I'm just glad there's a roof. When I was growing up we didn't have a roof.

GRACE
You didn't?

IRENE
We didn't have a lot.

GRACE
That's too bad.

IRENE
For two years we lived out of a car.

GRACE
Oh.

IRENE
There were five of us. In the beginning. My father had a little store when I was real young, but then that went out of business, so… We stayed with relatives for a bit but we wore out our welcome pretty quick – We had nothing. I remember I stole a pair of shoes. We were staying near a lake and this girl and her family had gone swimming – and I just… took her shoes. Ran out – snatched `em off the ground, and ran off without looking back. Like I was some kind of

animal living in the woods. I get back to the car and I'm crying and I'm holding these shoes in my hands like I've killed someone, you know? They didn't even fit. They were too big. My father was so angry – I made up this lie that I just found them in the forest but he knew – he had to have known… and… there were a moment when I was sure he was going to beat me and make me take them back – humiliate me – but he didn't. He just said okay. That's when I knew…

GRACE

Knew what?

IRENE

He'd given up. I was maybe nine years old. And he uh… he hung himself a few months later.

GRACE

I'm sorry.

IRENE

It is what it is. After he was gone, things got a little better. But I still think about those shoes. I still feel awful about stealing them. First thing I did when I got my own checking account was buy myself a pair. You know there's something holy about having your own money – not having to ask, not having to beg, to be able to walk into a store with money in a pocket from a job you worked at, and get what you need. For yourself. It's like every day I'm filled with brilliant white light and that light is called dignity.

GRACE raises a glass.

GRACE

To dignity.

IRENE

Damn straight. Dignity.

They clink glasses.

Speaking of which… I talked to Chester.

GRACE

Ugh. Anything?

IRENE

Like talking to a wall.

GRACE

He's a chicken. And he's not the one that makes the decisions anyway. I'm sure it comes from above, but he's such a coward he doesn't want to ruffle any feathers.

IRENE

Right.

GRACE

I think you should fight him.

IRENE

That didn't work out so well for me last time.

GRACE

Not with your fists, goof. With your brain. You're ten times smarter than him on his best day. Outsmart him.

IRENE

Maybe I'll just dress like a man and they'll be confused and pay me more. When I had short hair* I got mistaken for a man all the time. `Excuse me sir here's the extra money we've been keeping away from the girls.'

*(*If the actress playing IRENE has short hair, this line can be "I get mistaken for a man all the time.)*

GRACE

I never realized there was a trouser bonus before.

IRENE

There's a trouser bonus for a lot of things. That's why they don't want us wearing `em.

GRACE

Sometimes it feels good to be in a dress, though.

IRENE

Sometimes. It's nice to have somebody here.

GRACE

Yeah.

IRENE

You got any family nearby?

GRACE

I grew up outside of Madison -

IRENE

City girl –

GRACE

Nope. On a farm.

IRENE

Oh right. You told me. And you came out here by yourself?

GRACE

I got slightly kicked out of my house.

IRENE

Slightly?

GRACE

It was strongly suggested that I get the hell out. It was a good suggestion, honestly. And I heard about the jobs up here so I figured to make a few bucks before I headed west.

IRENE

To make your fortune.

GRACE

Right. `There's gold in them thar hills.' But… my father is a pretty strict man; we didn't see eye to eye on a lot of things. He wanted a perfect little princess and I wanted to be a human being. So I split. Best decision I ever made, honestly.

IRENE

I'm glad you made it.

GRACE

Yeah?

IRENE

Yeah.

GRACE laughs.

GRACE

Me too.

A moment.

IRENE

You want me to turn on the radio?

GRACE

Sure. It's your place.

IRENE

All right.

She turns on the radio. Something like the Andrews Sisters plays.
Irene tries to gather her courage.

GRACE

You okay?

IRENE

Just a little nervous.

GRACE

What for?

IRENE

I should probably let you get ready for work.

GRACE

All right.

IRENE

I'm supposed to train another boy at the cutting house today. Who's still getting paid more'n me.

GRACE

You should refuse.

IRENE

Not sure that's a possibility.

GRACE

You'd be surprised what the possibilities are.
Pause.

IRENE

Hey – before you go… you wanna dance?
GRACE laughs.

GRACE

In the kitchen?

IRENE

It's silly – forget it –

GRACE

Nah – I would love to dance with you in the kitchen.
GRACE tries to take IRENE's hands.
Who's leading this time?

IRENE

Who knows?

They dance.

The music rises as the lights fade.

Lights change to ELEANOR, holding a letter.

ELEANOR *(to the audience)*

The letter came a few days later.

`Dear Miss Murray – The editors at *Amazing Stories* have finished reviewing your story, "*The Barbarian Queen of Mars*." Although there is much to recommend it, we feel that our readers would not respond to the melodramatic elements of the narrative, which show an overly feminine imagination –

She crumples it up, tosses it behind her.

I started writing something new.

`Dear Idiots – Perhaps it is too much to hope that you remove your heads from up your behinds. Seeing as how you have lived most of your life in this condition, you're unlikely to change now. However, I shall use my overly feminine imagination to suggest other places where you can stick your wisdom.

She looks at that letter.

I didn't mail it, but I wrote it. And I kept it. Then I wondered, what would a Martian Queen do in this circumstance? And I started working on a story a Martian Queen would write - *The Dragon Enchantress of Mars.*

She starts typing.

After work. BARBARA is getting out of her overalls in the dressing area.

ELEANOR

Are you going to the meeting?

BARBARA

Yeah I'll be there.

ROSE enters, in uniform.

ELEANOR

I'm heading over.

BARBARA

See you over there.

ROSE starts getting out her coveralls.

You coming tonight?

ROSE

I said I would be. Got any word on um…?

BARBARA

John?

She shakes her head.

ROSE

Oh I'm sorry to hear that. I'm sure they'll rescue him soon. Italy's almost finished.

BARBARA

Thanks. How's your husband?

ROSE

He's in Australia. Just think about that – been in Wisconsin his whole life, and now he's on the other side of the world.

BARBARA

Yeah. Our dream honeymoon, if we had a million bucks, we were gonna go to Rome. Now I think he's had enough of Italy.

ROSE laughs a little.

ROSE

How do you do it?

BARBARA

What else am I gonna do? Cry all day? My worrying ain't gonna help him none.

ROSE

Right.

Pause.

Do you love your husband?

BARBARA

Of course.

BARBARA takes in ROSE.

ROSE

I mean… how did you know? Okay, so, when me and Matt started dating I thought he was wonderful and – you know I was just getting to know him –

BARBARA

Right.

ROSE

And then he got drafted and… I mean we had only been dating for a couple of months –

BARBARA

Mm-hm.

Skipping Forward

ROSE

And what was I gonna say, no?

BARBARA

Yes!

ROSE

That would have crushed him!

BARBARA

What did you want?! You spend so much time worrying about what he wants, you never think about what you want! You *exist*, Rose. You have a right to exist. What do you want?

ROSE

I don't know.

BARBARA groans.

I don't. I…

BARBARA

In the deepest part of your heart, what do you want?

ROSE

I want… him not to come home.

Pause.

That's really awful, isn't it? But that's what I think about – and I know that makes me a horrible person but I… I kind of imagine what it would be like to see that black car pull up in front of my little house, and for them to tell me… `we're so sorry, ma'am, but your husband was killed in combat…' That makes me just the worst, doesn't it? I hate myself sometimes and –

BARBARA hugs her.

BARBARA

Hey. You're all right. You're human.

ROSE

It's so ugly what goes on in my head –

BARBARA

Shhh….

Another WOMAN enters –

WOMAN

Are you gals coming to the…?

BARBARA

Yeah we'll be right there.

BARBARA holds ROSE.

Lights shift to a large open space.

All of the women are there. Some in coveralls, some not.

IRENE

Thanks for coming, everybody.

WOMAN 2

What's this about?

IRENE

Are we all here?

ELEANOR

Just about.

IRENE

All right.

BARBARA and ROSE enter, sit near the back.

IRENE looks to GRACE, who gives her a thumb's up.

So – I've talked to a bunch of the men, and I've talked to a bunch of you, and it's pretty clear what's going on: We're getting paid less than the men. We all do the same job. Sometimes they get fancier titles when they're doing the same thing, but mostly… we just get paid less.

Grumblings from some of the women

I know it's kind of rude to even talk about it, but someone has to. I brought it to Chester's attention, and he does not care. He basically told me if I didn't like it, I could quit. We're half the workers at Badger, and we're most of the workers on the third shift. If we wanted to, we could bring this plant to its knees.

WOMAN 2

What are you talking about?

IRENE

I'm talking about going on strike. All the girls.

Big reaction from the women.

WOMEN

Are you crazy? They'll fire us! That's ridiculous, etc…

IRENE holds her hands up and everyone quiets.

IRENE

There's five thousand women who work at Badger. We are the blood that keeps this factory alive. And if we stick together, there's nothing we can't do. They can't fire us – there's no way they can get near enough replacement workers. They *need* us.

Another reaction from the women.

WOMEN
I like my job. How am I gonna get money? I don't wanna quit, etc…

GRACE
Let her talk!

IRENE
Nobody's telling you to quit your job. Nobody quits. It's a strike. And if we all do it, they won't fire any of us.

The WOMEN are unconvinced.

This is what the men did. In every other industry? They organized, they formed unions, and they fought. And you know that they got? Better hours, better wages, better conditions, and they won, because they were unified. They fought against injustice. They fought for their lives.

BARBARA stands up.

BARBARA
You think you're fighting for your life? What about our boys fighting for theirs?

IRENE
I'm not talking about that right now.

BARBARA
Yes but you are. Because we make the powder that helps them fight, and you're asking us to cut that supply off.

IRENE
Management will cave –

BARBARA
And what if they don't? What if we have to spend weeks on strike? Months? What if we can't get the powder out to our boys on the front line? What if there's some man out there that's fighting for his life and he needs what we're giving him?

IRENE
They will be all right –

BARBARA
You don't know that!

IRENE
There are other plants in this country producing ammunition –

BARBARA

But we're the biggest one and they count on us!

IRENE

Which is why they will cave quickly –

BARBARA

You are playing a game with people's lives! You're playing a game with my husband's life!
Agreement from some of the other women.

IRENE

This is our chance –

BARBARA

For what?

IRENE

For equality! To not be treated like second-class humans! Before this, you couldn't get a job, you couldn't get a loan, you couldn't buy a car or a house without some man having to vouch for you! Well we got jobs now and we do the same jobs as them and we deserve to be paid the same as them!

BARBARA

We are in this together –

IRENE

Then why aren't they paying us the same?! They want *you* to believe in sacrifice while they squeeze every dollar out of us!

BARBARA

You think they aren't sacrificing?! You think my husband, who is sitting in an Italian prison camp right now, isn't sacrificing for you?! You're talking about money! I'm talking about lives!

IRENE

You think this just happened?! Someone *decided* this! There was a room where a bunch of men sat together and *decided* that we weren't worth as much! That was a decision that was made! And I think that decision stinks! Not only does that decision stink, it is unfair, it is unethical, and they will KEEP DOING IT if we let them get away with it. We've got our leverage NOW, this is our chance – they can't tell us no, we just have to demand our rights!

BARBARA

And if people die, so be it.

IRENE

THAT'S NOT ON US! That's their choice!

BARBARA

Which you are forcing them to make!

IRENE

Yes! If they love money more than they love our boys, then yes!

BARBARA

And what do you think the answer is gonna be?

No answer from IRENE.

You're the smart one, Irene, what are they gonna do? If we start this fight –

IRENE

We didn't start this fight. They started this fight. We're fighting *back.*

BARBARA

If there's a strike, what are they gonna do?

IRENE

They're gonna dig in.

BARBARA

Right. Which means people die.

IRENE

Yes. And why do you think we're responsible for that?

BARBARA

You're asking me to gamble my husband's life for a couple of cents an hour.

IRENE

I'm asking you to fight for what's right.

BARBARA

I want to get paid the same, Irene. Course I do. But more'n that I want my husband to be safe, and more than even that, I want this war to end. And if we stop production at this plant, then this war goes on longer. And more men die. And more women and children die. And we give our enemies a breath of life. I love this country, and I believe in our mission, and I'm going to keep helping.

IRENE

I wish our country believed in you as much as you believe in it.

BARBARA

Their needs are life and death.

GRACE

And ours aren't?

IRENE

It's everyone, or it's no one. So let's take a vote on it. Majority rules.

BARBARA

I'm not striking. No matter the vote –

IRENE

Barbara –

BARBARA

I'm not striking, Irene.

They stare each other down. IRENE breaks away.

IRENE

All right show of hands. If you want to go on strike until we're paid the same as the men, raise your hands.

IRENE raises her hand.

GRACE raises her hand. ROSE raises her hand.

Two or three other women raise their hands.

ELEANOR doesn't. BARBARA doesn't. The majority do not.

So that's it, then?

BARBARA

After the war we can fight for equality.

IRENE shakes her head.

IRENE

After the war, we've already lost.

She walks out.

Lights change.

NEWSREEL VOICE

Italy's zero hour has arrived! The allies mighty air armadas launched devastating raids on the remaining ports on the Messina triangle, bombing all important transportation lines and airfields.

BARBARA settles in at home.

JULIE, age 3, is struggling in bed. BARBARA enters.

BARBARA

Shhh… Mama's here. It's okay. Shhh…

JULIE

I had a nightmare.

BARBARA

I know. But it's daytime now. Time to get up.

JULIE

Is Daddy home?

BARBARA

Not yet, sweetheart.

JULIE

When is he coming home?

BARBARA

Soon, baby. Soon.

She holds JULIE.

Lights switch to TIMOTHY, coming out of his house. ROSE is waiting for him.

TIMOTHY

What are you doing here?

ROSE

Thought I might ride the bus with you to work.

TIMOTHY

Really?

ROSE

A girl can't ride a bus?

TIMOTHY

I just –

ROSE

I want us to be friends.

TIMOTHY

All right.

ROSE

I miss talking to you, that's all.

TIMOTHY

I miss talking to you. When you're not yelling at me.

ROSE

I didn't yell at you!

TIMOTHY

You raised your voice!

ROSE

I wouldn't say that was yelling. That was a forceful discussion.

TIMOTHY

Okay. I appreciate your forceful discussion.

ROSE

Sure.

TIMOTHY

So let me ask you a question –

ROSE

Oh boy.

TIMOTHY

You don't know what the question is!

ROSE

I can guess what it is.

TIMOTHY

It's a good question.

ROSE

Ask it.

TIMOTHY

If I said, run away with me tonight, and never look back, would you do it?
ROSE reacts –
That was a good question!

ROSE

That is not - ! No, Timothy. No I will not run away with you… tonight.

TIMOTHY

You said you'd never been out of Wisconsin. Well I got a cousin in Milwaukee – he might be able to put us up for a while – and there's plenty of jobs –

ROSE

Milwaukee is still in Wisconsin.

TIMOTHY

I know that. But it's close to not being in Wisconsin. We could visit Illinois on trips.

ROSE

Timothy.

TIMOTHY

Cause I think I love you.

ROSE

You think you love me.

TIMOTHY

I'm pretty sure.

ROSE

How about this? Let's get to know each other. Because I'm done with running from one man I barely know to another man I barely know. And if we still want to run off together, then we'll see.

TIMOTHY nods.

TIMOTHY

`We'll see' is better than anything I've gotten before.

ROSE

It's the first time I haven't said yes.

He laughs.

So would you like some coffee before work? It's terrible.

TIMOTHY

I would love to have terrible coffee with you.

They walk off.

Lights shift to the factory.

IRENE, GRACE, ROSE, and ELEANOR are getting into their work overalls. Going through the inspection of their pockets.

IRENE *(to the audience)*

Every day I went to work. What else was I going to do? Standing in the mix house – keep the machine of production going, one tiny cog in the arsenal of Democracy -

The other WORKERS in the factory continue to pantomime the production.

NEWSREEL VOICE

The storm breaks in full final fury on the German Rhine.

Explosions.

Swiftly exploiting successes, three American divisions smash into the battered town of Cologne.

GRACE *(to the audience)*

It felt like we were fighting too. We were doing our part.

ROSE *(to the audience)*

The end grew closer. You could trace the movement in the newspaper – island to island – I imagined my husband there, somewhere in the Pacific -

ELEANOR *(to the audience)*

You kept dreaming. The paychecks kept coming. You kept at it.

BARBARA is getting ready to go to work -

BARBARA *(to the audience)*

And every day you imagined he was going to walk through the door –

She looks.

JOHN walks through the door. He uses a cane now.

Everyone else freezes. Focus on them.

JOHN

Hey Honey.

BARBARA

Hey Lunkhead.

She squeals and throws her arm around him.

JOHN

Easy! I'm still fragile!

BARBARA

You're not fragile you big lummox.

She wraps him up. Feels him.

You are skin and bones.

JOHN

Italian cooking is over-rated.

BARBARA

I didn't think –

JOHN

I'm home.

BARBARA
Oh God I missed you so much. I missed you like half my ribs were gone.

JOHN
I missed you like my whole stomach was gone. Let me see you. You're wearing pants.

BARBARA
Yeah.

JOHN
I ain't never seen you in pants before.

BARBARA
I'm gonna wear a dress to an ammunition factory?

JOHN
I bet you're the prettiest girl there.

BARBARA
We all wear coveralls and scarves. Not exactly the runway.

JOHN
You still knock `em dead.

BARBARA
And I bet you were the prettiest soldier in Italy.
He laughs.

JOHN
You know it.

BARBARA
I think Julie's asleep, but let's wake her up.

JOHN
You goin' in to work tonight?

BARBARA
Are you kidding? I'm calling in sick. First time.

JOHN
Proud of you.

BARBARA

I'm proud of you.

They hug.

Let me go get Julie – and for heaven's sake, can we please move out of your parents' house?

JOHN

Are you paying for it?

BARBARA

Sure.

She pushes him off-stage, turns to the audience.

About twenty minutes later I heard it.

Lights switch to the factory.

GRACE, ELEANOR, IRENE, and ROSE are at their stations with other workers.

GRACE steps forward.

The lights flicker – an immense deep THOOM.

GRACE *(to the audience)*

I was outside when it happened. On my way to the mix house. I felt it before I could see it. Like all the air had been sucked away, I remember my feet slipping on the ground, like a hole had opened up in the air behind me – then the wave of force hit me so hard – all I saw was red and I was face-down in the grass –

She falls slowly.

ROSE speaks to the audience.

ROSE *(to the audience)*

It felt like a bomb. They couldn't have reached us, could they? The whole building shook like an earthquake – barrels tipped over, fifty pound tubs of material tossed into the air – and then everything went dark. I could hear shouts and I rushed outside – you could still see the plume of smoke in the air, like a mushroom cloud –

The other WORKERS come outside and stare up at the explosion.

IRENE *(to the audience)*

I thought about Grace. I knew she was at the mix house and the explosion came from that direction so I rushed outside – in the dark you couldn't tell who was who – everyone was wearing the same thing, everyone had a mask on, their hair covered – I started pulling at people, trying to find her –

ELEANOR *(to the audience)*

I was supposed to be there. In the mix house. But I had taken a break and I was walking outside – the stars were out, and I was lost in them… and then I felt the wave pass through me like a sudden wind. I fell to the ground and turned back and saw the plume of smoke rising against the stars.

IRENE makes her way through the workers, looking for GRACE.

IRENE *(to the audience)*

I started feeling things landing on me – and I realized it was bits of the nitrocellulose – falling like snow. Like snow in August.

GRACE *(to the audience)*
My ears didn't work. I didn't realize I was only seeing red – like the after-image from the explosion, in front of everything.

IRENE finds GRACE.

I didn't even recognize her face.

IRENE holds GRACE.

Everyone FREEZES.

End of Excerpt
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