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Badger

One-Act Version

By Don Zolidis

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One-Act Historical Drama

8w, 5m, 1 any gender plus ensemble

In 1944, four 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.

Cast of Characters

ROSE, 18, 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)

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)

NEWSREEL VOICE

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.

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 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.

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

CHESTER
Death. You could die.
The four 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.

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 leaves.

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.

IRENE

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

GRACE

That's no fun.

ROSE 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.

IRENE

You'd still smell.

BARBARA

That's what I'm afraid of. Hoo.

She sits heavily to take off her boots.

IRENE

So where are you at?

BARBARA

They got me at the cutting house. No explosions on day one.

GRACE

We should celebrate.

IRENE

Celebrate what?

GRACE

The future.

IRENE

You're nuts.

GRACE

How `bout we go out then?

IRENE

Go out where?

GRACE

For breakfast.

BARBARA

Gotta get home to my kid, thanks.

IRENE

Aw, how old?

BARBARA

A girl. Two.

IRENE

Is your husband…?

BARBARA

He's in Italy. Army. Barbara but my friends call me Barbie. And my co-workers, which I have never had before, can call me… Barb. Let's see if I can remember your names from the orientation: Irene – and Grace and... Rose

ROSE

Right.

BARBARA *(to ROSE)*

You live through your first day?

ROSE

Mostly.

IRENE

I found the best way was just to count your money. Just over one cent a minute.

GRACE

Somebody's a math whiz!

IRENE

All day long. Imagining pennies dropping into the jar. Clink. Clink. Clink.

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. 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

Skipping Forward

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

Thanks.

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

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

What's your name, anyway?

ROSE

Rose.

TIMOTHY

Nice to meet you, Rose.

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.

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.

Lights shift back to the factory.

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.

IRENE

Sir? Can I talk to you?

CHESTER

I'm not going to portray any special attention to you, Irene.

IRENE

I talked to Randy Michaelson. You know him?

CHESTER

New fella?

IRENE

Just got hired last week.

CHESTER

Is he working out well?

IRENE

I'm training him on the threading house this week – and he's doing fine – he's okay.

CHESTER

Excellent.

IRENE

But he's making eighty five cents an hour.

CHESTER

Right.

IRENE

And I just got a raise to seventy two cents an hour.

CHESTER

Yes.

IRENE

I've been here a month already – no problems with my labor, I get my work done –

CHESTER

Okay I think I see where this is going.

IRENE

Why is he making more than me?

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.

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

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

Men have families to support.

IRENE

And the women don't?!

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?

CHESTER

I can get a new gal in here to take your place in five minutes. All right? I got work to do. If you want to keep your job, you'll drop this.

He escapes.

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.

Lights change to GRACE and ROSE getting dolled up together in the company bathroom.

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.

ROSE and GRACE wait.

ROSE

Do we just wait for the boys or…?

GRACE

Sometimes they need encouragement.

She shouts across the dance floor.

Hey!

Gestures to ROSE as if to say "look at this"

The men turn away.

Who needs ya?

ROSE

That's helpful to my self-esteem.

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

The girls react. IRENE does a spin.

GRACE

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?

ROSE

That is…

IRENE

Sorry, I have to remember I'm a gentleman.
She stands up straight, spiffing herself up.

ROSE

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.
ROSE waits.

TIMOTHY approaches.

TIMOTHY

Hi.

ROSE

Hello.

TIMOTHY

Rose, would you like to dance?

ROSE

Oh. Uh… of course.
He leads ROSE off to dance.

TIMOTHY *(to ROSE)*

We're gonna have to go slow.

ROSE

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

Skipping Forward

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. 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. 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.

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? 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.

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.

Lights shift to ROSE and TIMOTHY, elsewhere outside the dance.

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

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.

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.

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.

ROSE

Wow.

TIMOTHY

Sorry I get carried away.

ROSE

I bet you'll be a really good teacher.

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

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. Grace? I bet it's Grace.

He laughs again.

TIMOTHY

No.

ROSE

Who is it then?

A moment.

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

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.

NEWSREEL VOICE

Great events in the Pacific! Racing to history! A vast armada of troopships, guarded by the largest naval striking force ever assembled, sails to the attack. Destination: The Marshall Islands.

The workers create the mix house.

They work the machines.

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 switch to BARABRA, getting out of her overalls in the dressing area. She has a letter in hand.

BARBARA

Dear Lunkhead –

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.

She looks over at ROSE.

You coming tonight?

ROSE

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

BARBARA

John?

She shakes her head.

Skipping Forward

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 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?

IRENE

They will be all right –

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!

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?!

IRENE

You think this just happened?! Someone *decided* this! 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 their choice!

BARBARA

Which you are forcing them to make!

IRENE

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

BARBARA

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

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, 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.

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.

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

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. 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
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, and ROSE 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.

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 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.

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

About twenty minutes later I heard it.

Lights switch to the factory.

GRACE, 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 –

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

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.
To purchase this play, visit www.concordtheatricals.com