

**PART 1: Herding Cats**

THE HOST

About 100 women have run for president of the United States. How many can you name? Go ahead. Not many.

(Beat)

Welcome to *Herstory!* A "quick hits" look into the amazing lives of women who ran for president. I am your host. I'm creating a series of #badasswomen who ran! You know bite-size, but also not bite-sized because they are also full people. The first woman to try was Victoria Woodhull ...

*Something subtle, an entry of a ghost. Maybe a distant bit of Victoria's laugh or just some bit to let us know there's been a change. Then --*

THE HOST

I thought I heard ... all these women ran for president but we treat it like it's a novelty.

*A more forceful ghostly presence maybe some wrapping or other sort of odd poltergeisty activity but it's unclear if it's from outside or in the room. It can start underneath the host's previous line and then prompt her next line --*

THE HOST

I have this studio rented for the day. There's a sheet. A sign-up sheet. Respect the sheet. Hello? RESET! RESET!

(Beat.)

Edit all this out. Direct and clear. Not messy. History is so. It's annoying, the way it gets so. If I can just show you all the women that ran, put them in order, we can understand it. Solve it.

*Victoria the ghost haunts harder here. Maybe her laugh more forward prodding, judging.*

THE HOST

No. I am a neutral reporter of facts. This is not about me. It's about them.

(Deep breath.)

Women. Presidents. They. Um. Welcome to *Herstory!* A "quick hits" look into the amazing lives of women who ran for president. I am your host. The first woman to try was Victoria Woodhull ...

VICTORIA

Yes?

THE HOST

What?

(Beat.)

She was complicated. Some basic facts. She was born in Homer, Ohio in 1838. She ran for president in 1872 - before women could even vote! Her running mate was Fredrick Douglass! She was a suffragette, the first woman to address Congress, a stockbroker, an advocate for free love, a newspaper editor who published the first English Language edition of the Communist Manifesto. Died in England in 1927. She pulled herself up from nothing and achieved the American Dream!

*A beat. It seems hollow empty. Victoria moves or laughs or does something ghostly. She moves to assert control. Maybe a bit of a laugh or a gust blows papers, a disturbance and shift in power.*

VICTORIA

She was born in Homer Ohio in 1838.

THE HOST

One of ten children. Six of whom survived to adulthood. Her father was abusive. He had them do faith healing and sell fake cancer cures.

VICTORIA

She ran for president in 1872 - before women could even vote!

THE HOST

She technically wasn't old enough to run. Some saw it more as a stunt to improve her speaking fees and newspaper subscriptions.

VICTORIA

Her running mate was Fredrick Douglass.

THE HOST

She put him on the ticket without his permission, he didn't want it, and he campaigned for Grant.

VICTORIA

She was a suffragette

THE HOST

Who blackmailed members of the movement

VICTORIA

the first woman to address Congress --

THE HOST

The motion she spoke on was quickly tabled and ignored.

VICTORIA

a stockbroker --

THE HOST

She and her sister seduced Vanderbilt and took advantage of a scheme to drive up gold prices and manipulate the market causing a panic and the financial ruin of many.

VICTORIA

An advocate for free love -

THE HOST

She'd later disavow this and also wrote in favor of eugenics.

VICTORIA

a newspaper editor who published the first English Language edition of the Communist Manifesto --

THE HOST

Her articles are often said to be ghostwritten by her husband and she was denounced by Karl Marx himself.

VICTORIA

Died in England in 1927.

THE HOST

She left America, abandoned the fight for equality to live in quiet, wealthy exile and fade away from history.

VICTORIA

She pulled herself up from nothing and achieved the American Dream! The American dream. Who's dream is that?

THE HOST

Who are you?

VICTORIA

Who are you? Calling to me.

THE HOST

Victoria Woodhull?

VICTORIA

Or some flicker of her.

THE HOST

This is. This is not happening. I got this grant and I can only afford one day of studio time and I have to ... I have ten women candidates I want to get through this season. So ... I just need to give a brief summary and --

VICTORIA

And what? Shrink me down into a doll?

THE HOST

It's not --

VICTORIA

You want a performance? Here:

(Beat. Recites.)

Once I saw a man, so wretched there was even dirt in the corner of his eyes. And I stopped to help him. He called me, "devil." Not unusual for me. But he said I personally ruined him. That I took his money during the panic. And I saw him, so broken, and I knew I must be better. I must fight. So I fight ... for you!

THE HOST

You gave that speech and -

VICTORIA

No mere speech. But you are leaving out the most vital part of my life.

THE HOST

When you were jailed for --

VICTORIA

The spirits!

THE HOST

No. That's not --

VICTORIA

To leave them out is to write Hamlet without the Father's ghost.

THE HOST

That's not that big a deal.

VICTORIA

I brought my son back to life! I was guided by the spirit of Demosthenes! I saw devils with forked tails dancing around the heads of hypocrites! I lead the Spiritualists! Communed with --

THE HOST

Yeah. Yeah. Yes. Yes. Right. OK. But that's not. It's not. It makes you sound -- this is an all ages, badass women kind of thing. Not like ... all that ghost stuff is --

VICTORIA

Do you not believe?

THE HOST

People love horoscopes or lucky charms or whatever. But. You know. I'm sure metaphorically the ghosts --

VICTORIA

They were real. What am I now to you?

THE HOST

You are a representation of my fears and concern that I cannot get this podcast done because I'm not smart enough or my voice sounds dumb. Like when in 3rd grade Katie Foy said my hair was weird and kept trying to stick pencils in it and I started crying and I begged my mom to straighten it. But. I shouldn't, cause my hair is great. Not great. Regular. Good. Not bragging or. It's just. Hair. But. But.

VICTORIA

I'm not sure what --

THE HOST

I'm not sure either. Why did I remember that? Why do our brains remember embarrassing things that upset us? Why is my brain making you up to upset me?

VICTORIA

When I was jailed in the worst prison cell in the city I had a dream they were coming to kill me. I forced them to move my cell. The next day the Barnum museum caught fire, and it burned down the jail where we were held. I would have died.

THE HOST

The sources I read said that didn't happen like that.

VICTORIA

I was there.

THE HOST

You aren't really a reliable source.

VICTORIA

I am not a reliable source on my own life?

THE HOST

I'm saying it's not ... STOP THIS! RESET. Reset. Just cut all this out. Look, Victoria, or my brain, or my whatever you are, I have a limited amount of time before they shut off the equipment and kick me out. I have imagined conversations with people all the time. It's how I get through my anxieties. I imagine all the possible outcomes and then I move on. I make a ... a choice and I move on. I don't have time for you.

(Beat.)

Here's the thing folks --

VICTORIA

Folks? What folks?

THE HOST

The people listening. I'm talking to them.

VICTORIA

Talk to me.

THE HOST

No.

(Pivots. But extremely fast, breathless, careening out of control.)

Here's the thing. Researching Victoria Woodhull. It's hard. She dictated a biography and it was ... very extravagant and very Horatio Alger 'up by your bootstraps,' painted herself as the great hero. Also the guy writing it was sort of being blackmailed. So there's this hagiographic self-congratulation

semi-blackmailed sorta-auto-biography. But! But! Before that, were articles attacking her. Calling her a whore and a communist and even "Mrs. Satan!" Like twitter but worse and more, and she's cancelled and uncanceled and everyone is hating her for every reason. She dies. Next comes a new biography playing up her celebrity, calling her: 'The Prostitute Who Ran for President.' Muckraking dirt; they even paid this famous anarchist three thousand dollars to tell a story about how she took his virginity. Her daughter was going to write a counter-counter biography but she didn't. Then Victoria is sort of forgotten; then there's this sort of feminist reclaiming of her. Like in academic circles, -- also the eugenics stuff when she was in England. I'm trying to sort through all -- also! Also, Susan B. Anthony hated her for ... she burned diary pages and Elizabeth Cady Stanton -- oh! And Anthony Comstock this anti-pornography guy was always trying to get her arrested! All these piles of facts. Facts! Facts! And how do you explain it or what do you leave out or what's a tangent and is it all a tangent and ... I'm trying! And it keeps growing and I'm whacking at all of history to cut it down but I can't get my arms around her!

*All the air goes out of The Host like a deflated balloon, she's exhausted trying to explain it.*

VICTORIA

Do you feel better? Saying all of that? To the *folks*.

THE HOST

No. It's an excuse. I should be able to explain you. If I just study the sources long enough we can solve anything. Things make sense in the end.

VICTORIA

No.

THE HOST

No what?



VICTORIA

No.

THE HOST

(Lets out an annoyed scream.)

What the actual fuck! Stop it! It. It. It. History makes sense, Victoria, there is good and there is bad.

VICTORIA

All these years later and women are still tidying the world for men.

THE HOST

I'm trying to introduce you to the world. Put your best foot forward.

VICTORIA

Put all of me forward.

THE HOST

So they can hate you?

VICTORIA

So they can see me. Plain. Real. In full.

THE HOST

I want you to be better!

VICTORIA

Be a better what?

THE HOST

Can flawed people be inspiring? Like deeply flawed? Like if you have 20 good views but one really bad one does that -- is it invalidating? Or. See I want to avoid this.

(Beat.)

Tell me why you did it. What do you believe?

VICTORIA

Who am I? Which Victoria do you want to ask?

*The voices, all different, come from all different locations.*

CHILD VICTORIA

The poor child in Homer, Ohio?

YOUNG ARROGANT VICKY

The bright, green velvet dress clad stock broker?

VICTORIA, CONFIDENT BUT OLDER

Women's right's advocate?

SPOOKY VICTORIA

The spiritualist?

OLDER PROPPER ALMOST BRITISH

The eugenicist?

FREE LOVE VICKY

The one who stood up on stage and said "If I want to have a different man in my bed every night that is my right and my choice!"

BROKEN VICTORIA

The starving broken woman who denied every being pro Free love. Only God's love.

OTHER VICTORIA

The mother?

ALL VICTORIAS

(Overlapping.)

Ask me ...

THE HOST

How are you all these things?

VICTORIA

Points on a graph. Chapters. Is one a liar? The truth to me at 14 was not the truth to me at 40. Yet we both speak it contradictorily and correct(ly).

THE HOST

Then how do I understand you? How do I understand any of them?

VICTORIA

Take the book of my life. The whole volume and then fire a gun dead center. In the shred of the pages, looking straight through: all the prose in that bullet hole you will see lined up every moment of me and for a brief flash, a short glimmer you will understand. The whole of the hole.

THE HOST

The hole of the whole? But. That's not enough!

VICTORIA

I know.

THE HOST

Why did history forget you?

VICTORIA

Because it's dumb.

THE HOST

It's not! I can solve this! We just need to do it differently! This is a bad format! The format. We start over. Reset. Reset. Sorry folks.

VICTORIA

Folks ...

THE HOST

This is not. Not. No. It. I need a better idea. I know! Like a PBS. Man on the street. Not *man*. Person on the street. People.

That will do it. This didn't work. This sort of just me talking.  
I know. This next one will work. Stay with me. I can solve this.  
Her. This. I can do this -- RESET!