

PART 2: Through Other Eyes

THE HOST

Reset. Hard reset. OK, this will work. Something more. Insightful. Interviews. It's not about me. Report the facts. Narrow focus. The women who ran for president. Victoria was the first and also not even legally allowed to, not because she was a woman but because she was only 33. People didn't really care about that because they didn't take her seriously. But why?

VICTORIA

They feared my ideas.

THE HOST

No. You're not in this. This is an exploration of you. But without you.

VICTORIA

Without me? That's how --

THE HOST

Shh. This is an interview podcast now. And my first subject is a former wall street broker who used to attend Victoria's speeches on 14th street. Sir, do you think Victoria's run for president was real?

As we move through different interviews the sounds and soundscape shift and change to reflect each person.

WORKER

Sure it was real. I was there. The words and the way she spoke. In the downturn I lost it all. President Grant didn't help. Boss Tweed didn't help. Are they real? What she said up there, she felt my pain. You don't just get in front of the world and announce your candidacy as a lark! Ain't you ever hear tell about how she saw that man on the street, he was broken by the panic and she knew she had to be more than just a gold digger.

THE HOST

What about her past? That she --

WORKER

We all got a past. I got syphilis. All us got itches we don't wish we had. Ain't Grant just riding his past of beating those bloody grey bastards? 'Scuse my French. I don't care what she did, I care what she can do. Past is dead. But if the past makes future use that past.

THE HOST

But why do you think she's doing it?

WORKER

Why she want to be president? Cause, it's president. Hell I'd do it just for the house.

THE HOST

Thank you. Now let us move on ... ah here is Elizabeth Cady Stanton the famed suffragette leader! What are your thoughts on Victoria Woodhull's run?

ELIZABETH CADY STANTON

First it's Suffragist. Let us not demean with endings that are not needed. One needs no suffix to fight injustice. Oh, that's good, put that on a placard!

(Takes a beat.)

I was the first woman to run for national office. I received 24 votes. When Susan Anthony and I worked for Women's Rights we had to fight every day. Did I make mistakes? Yes. I regret certain moments, but in the end the movement is bigger than one person.

THE HOST

But Woodhull --

ELIZABETH CADY STANTON

I'm getting to it. Victoria cares about Victoria; if that happens to line up with your ideals then great. But when your ideals no longer help Victoria then Victoria is gone. She's not a movement, she's a person. There's a reason we don't remember her. Fireworks are bright, dazzling fun, but there's no meaning to them beyond the momentary rush. I served the cause; Victoria wants to be the cause. Real things last, showmen fade. Except Barnum maybe, people remember him. And certain celebrities. Look it's not *all* one thing or another. But. I've said my piece.

THE HOST

Thank you for --

VICTORIA

She supported my campaign. Me. Until *I* was no use to *her*. What she said is --

THE HOST

That's not the format! You aren't in this! Stop interrupting!

VICTORIA

The suffrage movement took my money, my fame and never let me forget I was from poverty, a scarlet past! When I asked for full throated support they --

THE HOST

You blackmailed them.

VICTORIA

I was owed. The spirits said I was to be president. The fates moved it.

THE HOST

Then why did you lose?

VICTORIA

Fear. Men like Anthony Comstock took --

THE HOST

Comstock! Yes! Actually he's the next interview. Because this podcast is an interview show not a conversation with Victoria Woodhull. Format. Cut all that. Reset. Reset to the format. I'm here now with anti-vice crusader Anthony Comstock.

COMSTOCK

Your outfit is too revealing, your exposed ankles could drive men to self abuse. You are very much a problem.

THE HOST

Can you talk about Victoria Woodhull?

COMSTOCK

I 'can.' But 'may' I? You mean 'may' not 'can.' Also can is slang for the posterior and thus we must not use such language lest it lead to lust.

THE HOST

The word 'can?'

COMSTOCK

Stop tempting me harlott!!

(Calms himself.)

The world must understand: Victoria Woodhull is a wanton slattern. I had a friend who once saw a French Postcard that so engorged him he sought out a prostitute and died of the pox. This is happening everywhere! Young innocent boys hear Victoria Woodhull preach free love and then ... I cannot even say it.

THE HOST

Say what?

COMSTOCK

Stop moving your lips in such a lewd manner!

(Beat.)

Was she serious? Serious as the plague! A woman is a saintly creature and this nasty woman would spoil and mar womanhood with the mark of Jezebel. She says *all* women are harlots, are whores, because of supposed inequality in marriage? All the men I know treat their wives well! I am offended on behalf of women! My mother was not a whore, Mrs. Woodhull! Will not someone think of the children?

THE HOST

That's why you used a never before enforced postal law to have her imprisoned?

COMSTOCK

Lock her up for the good of society, yes! If she wasn't guilty she wouldn't have been arrested! I only wish we could mete out Biblical justice. Now I must go and shut down a candy store. Sugar is the devil's pert alluring treat! I GO!

THE HOST

Um. Thank you.

VICTORIA

His voice is worth hearing?

THE HOST

You have to hear all sides ...

VICTORIA

Do you? What of her?

ISABELLA

Hello!

THE HOST

Oh. Um, hi.

ISABELLA

Isabella Beecher Hooker. Of the famous Beecher family. My sister wrote Uncle Tom's Cabin. I was a crusader for equality. All forms.

VICTORIA

Is she worth hearing?

THE HOST

Yes ...

ISABELLA

Harriet also wrote another book with a character based on Victoria. But it was very mean. But most important was Victoria's connection to the other world.

THE HOST

Oh *ghost* stuff ...

ISABELLA

No mere stuff, the stuff of the Holy Father.

THE HOST

Oh holy stuff, huh.

VICTORIA

Let her speak.

THE HOST

I am, go ahead Ms. Beecher ...

ISABELLA

Oh I don't understand all of what Victoria says about politics or marriage or those ideas, but the spirits chose her. I've never been drawn to any woman like her. I know she has visions and it's all the will of the Almighty. She said her gentleman ghost told her --

THE HOST

You know, sorry. We already had Cady Stanton so the suffragette -- suffragist -- angle is covered. Thank you for your time, but --

VICTORIA

She was my benefactor.

ISABELLA

The spirits are God's conduit. We serve them. Her spirit told her she is to be President this next time and following that ruler of the world for our country is destined to rule all others.

VICTORIA

I told you not to tell anyone that.

ISABELLA

Tis what you said.

VICTORIA

I know, but --

THE HOST

Wait! You believed that? That you would rule the world?

VICTORIA

I believed what the spirits told me. As I said to her: I dare not tell you all I see in the future, God knows it, Demosthenes knows it, I know it, that is enough.

THE HOST

I'm not including ghost stuff! This is why! It makes you sound ... stop talking to her! Stop! Reset! Reset! You're breaking format.

I have to stop this. Interviews. WE ARE ONLY DOING INTERVIEWS!
Planned interviews! Here. Next.

BUCK

My turn, make way. Buck Clafflin. Doctor, entrepreneur, father
to Victoria.

THE HOST

You were not a doctor, you sold fake cancer cures --

BUCK

Fake? What's fake? Nothing is a hundred percent. Vicky. Yes,
My pig-headed, full-bosomed, arrogant daughter was of course
serious. She was drawing men since she could walk. She was a
real high ass if you know the turn. Course she went to politics!
I wish I could pull half the schemes the boys in Washington did.
Speaking of that, I have here some magic soap that Vicky
personally blessed, you want to buy it? Ten dollars.

THE HOST

No.

BUCK

Five dollars?

THE HOST

No.

BUCK

I'll put you down for six bars.

THE HOST

I don't want --

BUCK

I have all sorts of Victoria souvenirs at good prices.

THE HOST

You have no problem selling your daughter? Her things?

BUCK

Selling is the American way. All stories of American greatness
are about selling! Making your fortune --

THE HOST

Honest business.

BUCK

You're funny, not funny like a man, but funny. No man made a fortune being honest.

THE HOST

That's not --

BUCK

Vicky been playing since her first womanhood. This one game we use to run: She'd get a man up in her room. Charge him for the business. Then I'd come in as the 'aggrieved father' lamenting: "lo how you "ruined" my virgin daughter!" We'd blackmail him good! Wait. Was that Vicky or ... eh it made some good money.

THE HOST

You abused her.

BUCK

Abused is a modern word we didn't have that then. You all invented that to make us look bad! You don't want fame unless your daddy gave you a slap or ignored your fuss. Normal happy folk don't run for president. So thank me for it!

THE HOST

Thank you for what?

BUCK

All of it. Now how many genuine Vicky bonnets do you want? Volume discount!

THE HOST

Victoria's father. Let's find someone else. Ah, here's a rabbi from the Lower East Side. What did you think of Victoria's run for president? Was she serious?

RABBI

Legitimacy. Intent. The Talmud says: "it is not the thought that counts, but the deed." Let me tell you a story.

THE HOST

About Victoria?

RABBI

About all of us.

THE HOST

So not Victoria.

RABBI

I ignore you and continue. Two rich men are at some event and a woman comes up collecting for the Widow's Pension House. The first rich man, he is deeply moved, really believes in his heart in the good of the cause. He reaches into his wallet and gives five dollars. The second man cuts her off half-way: "ok, ok, enough!" Rolls his eyes, but he's at a party, everyone is giving, he doesn't want to look like a horse's ass. He gives her a hundred dollars. Who is the better person? The Talmud would say the second man. Because the actual giving is what matters, not why you feel. You give to charity Thoughts and prayers does not feed the poor, actual food does. Good wishes don't plant trees. Did Woodhull run for selfish reasons? It doesn't matter. What matters is she ran. And that's that.

THE HOST

That's that. Now let's here from Commodore Vanderbilt who helped finance Victoria --

VANDERBILT

I am Commodore Vanderbilt the richest man in America. My answer: She was secretly a communist and a grand harlot charlatan who tried to steal my money through schemes and chicanery. Buxom sister, though.

THE HOST

Oh. If she was a communist maybe we should ask Karl Marx what he thinks --

KARL MARX

She was a capitalist in worker's clothing. Out for nothing but profit. The whole question of legitimacy is foolish because the system is so broken that there is no legitimacy to any of it. Buxom sister, though.

THE HOST

Thanks? So that's --

SCHUYLER COLFAX

I've been waiting. I wait my turn. I am a decent man.

THE HOST

Oh I didn't see you there --

SCHUYLER COLFAX

I know my place. Schuyler Colfax, the vice president to the great General Grant. You've heard of me.

THE HOST

I guess ...

SCHUYLER COLFAX

Mrs. Woodhull is a symptom of an impure age. You know it's all a trick. How did she earn? On her back. She was getting too old to attract suitors --

THE HOST

That's not proven to be true ...

SCHUYLER COLFAX

A free lover like her? Proves itself. That's the root of her problem. She flitted. Politics is for loyal men. If you are not a Republican you're a Democrat, while terrible is a million miles better than what she was. Nothing. She was a woman without a party. Stuntery! I worked my way up. I carried water for the party and I made alliances and made deals and I bided my time. Small little changes, appointments, meetings. That's politics. Not declaring yourself this or that. You don't want radicals running things! You know what you get then? War. The Civil War happened because politics became about issues, instead of money, appointments, meetings. No *real* candidate is a radical. She lost. Pish and humbug that's Vicky Woodhull to her immoral core.

THE HOST

Thank you for ... that. And --

TENNIE

You sure ask a lot of men about a women's story.

THE HOST

Victoria?

TENNIE

Oh what? We all sound the same to you?

THE HOST

All who?

TENNIE

Dead ladies. Claflin ladies. I'm Tennie.

THE HOST

Her sister.

TENNIE

She's my sister.

THE HOST

That's what I said.

TENNIE

Is it? Sorry my ears can be waxy. Why not interview me?

THE HOST

Sure. That'd be great.

TENNIE

My sister. Oh where to start.

THE HOST

This is Tennessee Claflin, Victoria's youngest sister.

TENNIE

For money Victoria delivered speeches -- the entrance fee was twenty cents. Across from her was another show, also twenty cents. In that show trained raccoons would raise the American flag, play a bugle, walk a tightrope, and do laundry. When Vicky's hall was sold out they'd say "Eh, let's go see the raccoons." Cause it was the same. Both ideas were equally ridiculous: a woman politician and a bugle playing raccoon.

THE HOST

So it was a joke to people?

TENNIE

Not a joke exactly. A fake. Talking is fake. Real was the pain of living. We made money, but still you woke up and you were there in the shit of it all. I was the first woman to run for Congress. Well ... Stanton, but come on. She knew poverty from books. We lived it. It coated us.

THE HOST

So her run was --

TENNIE

Let me tell it.

THE HOST

You are --

TENNIE

No. All of it. The whole show.

THE HOST

What? No. Talk about her run for president.

TENNIE

President. Ha. Ain't no president. President is a tall tale. Presidency is just a myth we tell so we can sleep at night. This noble office that dies for the sins of back room deals. If the people saw how it was really done they'd string up politicians from here to Oregon. And they'd deserve it.

VICTORIA

That's a gross oversimplification.

TENNIE

(Gets annoyed)

You're a gross over--

(Stops. Smiles.)

I'm just giving my thoughts, Vicky. What are you doing? What do you think?

THE HOST

It's not about me.

TENNIE

Oh? Cause you had me fooled with your whole --

VICTORIA

Easy Tennie.

(Beat.)

My sister has a gumption that can be misconstrued as a sort of merry chaos.

TENNIE

That so?

VICTORIA

You know it is so. Tennie and I were partners in our business. We both opened a brokerage --

TENNIE

I was the one that slept with Vanderbilt though, you just did the readings.

VICTORIA

That's not --

TENNIE

She was a brain. I was a body.

THE HOST, TENNIE, and VICTORIA all speak over each other.

VICTORIA

No. Tennie --

THE HOST

If I could --

TENNIE

What I saw. The red stain of --

VICTORIA

Let us not deal with that.

THE HOST

If I --

TENNIE

When they jailed us --

VICTORIA

I'm not saying --

THE HOST

Just --

TENNIE

Saying! Saying is --

VICTORIA

You're not --

TENNIE

It's all the --

THE HOST

Stop. Stop! This is getting out of control! This isn't working. I can't have it like this. All these ... no. no. This format is wrong, too. I thought I could ... all this history. I have to make it more ... I have to just take the history out of it. All of you talking! I need ... NPR! NPR! They are always so calm and smart and. RESET! NPR! Modern version! That's what -- yes! RESET!