

PART 3: Polite Company

THE HOST

Let's get some theme music.

Some music, a little harsh.

THE HOST

No. More ... upbeat.

Some music, better.

THE HOST

Jazzier. Like smooth jazz.

Jazzier intro.

THE HOST

Yes! That, play that. I'll reset. From the top. Yes! Like a nice little simple chat podcast. Nothing too hard. Easy like smooth jazz. Let's start!

Jazzy theme plays.

THE HOST

Hello. Welcome to Subtle Change the quiet, contemplative podcast where we talk about the issues, but don't get crazy about it. Today we're going to explore the women who ran for president. But not in a bombastic direct way. We're going to do it ... through music --

Theme starts to play

THE HOST

(Playfully performatively laughs.)

Not you theme song! Get out of here!

Theme plays itself off.

THE HOST

Today we are talking about Victoria Woodhull. But we're going to explore her through -- her campaign song! This should be fun! To help us out we've gotten local quad-state coffee house singer songwriter Grace here to recreate it for us.

GRACE

Hi! Can I plug some dates?

THE HOST

No.

(Beat.)

So the song is called "Victory for Victoria."

GRACE

Makes sense.

THE HOST

And dollars!

GRACE

What?

THE HOST

It was. Never mind. So it says here that it's sung to the tune of "Comin' Thro' the Rye." Do you know that song?

GRACE

Nope.

THE HOST

Disappointing.

GRACE

But I went to google dot com and printed out the lyrics but I ran out of red ink so it's --

THE HOST

Fine. We want to modernize it anyway. Give it a real sense of timelessness. But also keep the spirit of the original.

GRACE

That's a lot to ask.

THE HOST

Not really. Let's hear what you've come up with

GRACE

(Sings, plays.)

If you nominate a woman

In the month of May,

Dare you face what Mrs. Grundy
And her set will say?

THE HOST

Hold on. Stop. Stop. Stop.

GRACE

Sorry. What's wrong?

THE HOST

Mrs. Grundy comes up a lot in this song so I should have explained that.

GRACE

OK, sure.

THE HOST

Mrs. Grundy was a character in a book who was like the nosy prudish neighbor who was always very conservative and constantly shocked. Like in the movies that wealthy woman who is always like "oh my!"

GRACE

Margaret Dumont in the Marx Brothers movies.

THE HOST

That's not really a current reference.

GRACE

Sorry.

THE HOST

It's why you're the musician not the host.

GRACE

So what's a contemporary reference?

THE HOST

Start again, Grace.

GRACE

(Sings, plays)
If you nominate a woman
In the month of May,

Dare you face what Mrs. Grundy

THE HOST

Hmmm.

GRACE

(Stops.)

What?

THE HOST

It's just not. Can you change it up?

GRACE

How?

THE HOST

It's just coming across as ... Not likeable.

GRACE

So make it?

THE HOST

The song, just make it feel more likeable.

GRACE

Um, OK ...

(Sings, plays)

If you nominate a woman

THE HOST

Stop.

GRACE

I barely --

THE HOST

I know but now it's not serious enough. Can you be more serious?

GRACE

If you nominate a woman
In the month of May ...

She stops playing.

THE HOST

Why'd you stop?

GRACE

It's just that --

(Becomes Victoria.)

This frivolity is what you want? You're avoiding the truth. That I would --

THE HOST

STOP IT!

GRACE

What? What's wrong?

THE HOST

Play the song!

GRACE

(Her voice merged with Victoria.)

I was.

THE HOST

Also this time be less academic. It sounds like you're trying to be smarter than the audience.

GRACE

What are you trying to achieve with this?

THE HOST

What?

GRACE

Said 'coming right up!' ---

(Sings.)

If you nominate a woman

In the month of May, --

THE HOST

(Deep sigh.)

It's good but is it a version I want to have a beer with? You know. Like ... make it sound smart but not too smart, approachable but professional. Like a mother but not a nagging mother.

GRACE

That's how you want the song?

THE HOST

Yeah, but you know have fun with it.

GRACE

(Her voice warps in and out of Victoria's.)

Once not long ago I was in a slum. I saw a man. Thin as a rail. Thinner. Dirty even between the folds of his eyes. He looked up and called me "devil." Not uncommon for me. Many curse me, but then he called me by name ... And said *I* personally ruined him. It was I who --

THE HOST

STOP! YOU'RE NOT IN THIS!

GRACE

What?

THE HOST

Play the song!

GRACE

I was.

THE HOST

No! You were giving that speech.

GRACE

What?

THE HOST

This is. Listen. No. No. This is supposed to be fun. I don't have time for this. The studio and the grant. It was all just. Victoria Woodhull is just one. The first. There are --

GRACE

I'm not sure what you're asking.

(Victoria takes over.)

The problem is you deny me. All of me. Embrace my flaws. My story is not some little song.

THE HOST

Let's skip ahead. I think we got the first part. The Mrs. Grundy the whole ... keep going.

GRACE

OK.

(sings.)

How they'll jeer and frown and slander
Chattering night and day;
Oh, did you dream of Mrs. Grundy
In the month of May?

GRACE stops.

THE HOST

Why'd you stop? You were almost good that time.

GRACE

Thanks? But. This next part ...

THE HOST

What?

GRACE

Lyrics, look.

Slides the lyrics to host.

THE HOST

Oh. Yeah ... you have to remember this song is from 1872. And it's about her running mate.

GRACE

Yeah I don't want to ...

THE HOST

I'll read it ...

(Beat, reading.)

If you nominate a Negro,
In the month of May
Dare you face what Mr. Grundy
And his chums will say?
How they'll swear and drink and bluster,
Raging night and day;
(Beat.)
It's really pro ...

GRACE

Right but ... I don't ... and you want to modernize it. Right?

Grace continues talking but it becomes very quiet as Victoria talks over her.

VICTORIA

You argue about semantics as women die in the street. And this!
Of all I have achieved you crunch me down into --

THE HOST

ENOUGH!

GRACE

Sorry ... it was just a suggestion.

THE HOST

We are doing the song! That's what we are doing!

GRACE

Sorry? I'm not --

THE HOST

Not you! You but not you! Here! We need to cut it down. It's too long, people hate long things, they're too complicated.

GRACE

Actually it's more that it's very repetitive --

THE HOST

Give me the paper. Cross this. Do that. Here. Just do those lines.

GRACE

But it's --

THE HOST

JUST DO IT!

GRACE

Let me try.

(Sings, plays)

Yes! Victoria we've selected
For our chosen head.
With Fred Douglass on the ticket
We will raise the dead.
Then around them let us rally
Without fear or dread

And next March, we'll put the Grundys
In their little bed.

(Beat.)

Is that what you want?

THE HOST

I don't know anymore.

GRACE

What does 'we will raise the dead' mean?

THE HOST

It's. She's ...

VICTORIA

Tell her.

GRACE

Is it literal?

THE HOST

This isn't working.

GRACE

No, it's fine. We're using the song as a sort of --

THE HOST

I know what we're doing. It's too easy. It's not. It's not. We
need to be more real. To really. I need to reset. Thanks Grace
goodbye --

GRACE

But I can --

THE HOST

Goodbye.

THE NPR studio ambiance goes away. It gets quieter.

THE HOST

Don't gloat.

VICTORIA

About what?

THE HOST

I need to take emotion out of it. But also be in the period.
Fact. Facts. Just the facts. Just the facts and that will settle
it.

VICTORIA

What do you want from me?

THE HOST

For it to make sense. For it to ... RESET!