

PART 4: Everyday Shit

This episode is mostly a soundscape of Victoria getting ready and then heading to the hall where she gives her speech declaring her run for president. It is punctuated by a few declarative statements about the period but mostly the focus is on the sound.

THE HOST

Context gives meaning to facts that can seem abstract. So we wanted to take you through a day in the life of Victoria Woodhull.

Sound of waking up getting dressed.

THE HOST

Before getting dressed, use the chamber pot which is still filled from the night before.

Sound of peeing into a chamber pot.

THE HOST

Indoor plumbing was just beginning in New York City but mostly there were outhouses and alleys. The waste was called 'night soil' because it's better than calling it shit piles. These were collected by night soil men who would scoop it and cart it off. These type of contracts were highly sought. Along with collecting, removing, and selling the horses that died in the street.

Slides the pot back under the bed.

THE HOST

Water spread cholera. Doctors also felt baths and bathing led to sloth and masturbation so they were discouraged. Most women would dab with a vinegar sponge and perfume.

Sound of scrubbing, perfume spritzer.

THE HOST

Hair was rarely cut and infrequently washed. It was often straw-like and fragile. Tight braids helped keep it in order. Brushing was vital. Sometimes women would add an egg or ammonia. Liquid shampoo was not invented until 1927.

Sound of Victoria getting dressed.

THE HOST

Skin at this time often had a crust of dust, ash, and dandruff. Oily skin and tight layers of clothes held it to the skin. Speciality scrapers existed but any small object could help carve off the crust.

Sound of scraping.

THE HOST

Whale oil lamps lit homes and streets. Burnt whale or coal or wood left an ashy residue on the body and walls and furniture and everything. Also the smoke and pollution from factories and slaughterhouses didn't help. Even in summer windows were often kept closed because people believed bad smells or miasma was the cause of disease. Germ theory came about in the 1880's but it took a while to take hold.

Movement of clothes.

THE HOST

Underwear for women had no crotch area because in forty pounds of clothes there was no way to pull down underpants and use a chamber pot or an outhouse. First the underwear. Then the chemise. Knitted stockings with garters. Then the chemilets or leglets. They tie at the waist. Next the corset, made of whale baleen and tied tightly. A loose shirt over the corset. Next the cage. Cage crinoline which is a stiff fabric skeleton over which your dress will lay but pulled away from your legs. A dress must never go above the ankles. And then the dress itself. The lace and fabrics are too delicate to wash, So you must protect it from your body with dress shields to keep your sweating armpits from staining the dress. Forty pounds of clothes. That's the basics unless you find ...

VICTORIA

Hell's bells.

Sound of ripping. Moving around the dress.

THE HOST

Menstruation was rarely talked about and there are few sources on what women did. It wasn't until the 1890's that sanitary aprons could be bought at a chemist. Remember underpants were

crotchless. Many women did nothing. Or they used raw cotton wadded up, or belts tied of whatever rags they could find. Some women made little cloth triangles attached to string that tied around the waist called clouts. Now breakfast.

Sound of Victoria in the kitchen. Makes food over the following:

THE HOST

Cooking is slow over temperamental ovens. Eggs must be beaten by hand. Flower sifted and sifted again. Refrigeration is rare outside of manor houses. Food is seasonal, often close to rotting or simply made. Bugs plenty of bugs. Meals were all day or multi day affairs to prepare. An average breakfast was: a few boiled eggs, corn bread. Some excerpts from cookbooks of the period: "Eggs will keep for some good time buried in charcoal or wheat bran, after greasing them a little with mutton tallow." Or if you wanted to cook Calf's Rennet: "take the rennet from the calf as soon as it's killed, empty it of its contents and hang it to cool in a dry place for five days. Then turn the inside out, slip off the curd with your hand. Fill the rennet with salt and mix with very little saltpeter and lay it in a stone pot. Sprinkle with salt and vinegar and store it for several weeks." Rennet is used to make cheese. So this is the process to start the process to make cheese. You made your own cheese.

VICTORIA laces up her shoes.

THE HOST

Shoes were thigh high leather and wood on the soles. You had to use a special strap device to tie your boots yourself. Just in case you were wondering, it is impossible to "pull yourself up by your bootstraps. That phrase originally meant "an impossible task" so when someone tells you to do that they're telling you to do the impossible. No one ever did that. Let's walk outside.

Sound of Victoria leaving the house down the stairs. The loud sounds of the street.

THE HOST

Cattle moved across Manhattan from the fodder to the slaughterhouse. Teamsters in ox carts. Carriages. There was shit on the streets. A lot of horseshit but also a lot of human shit. There's still pit channels as well as some sewer lines. Women were not supposed to walk alone or cross the street when there was any traffic. Ladies Mile, a long street of shops, was one of

the few places ladies could walk. A woman walking alone was thought to be a sex worker or fair game.

VICTORIA walks.

THE HOST

The population in New York in 1872 the year Woodhull would run for president was 995,092. There were 60,185 arrests related to drunkenness and 63 arrests for homicide. This was a police force of 1,984. In the past two years there were The Orange Riots where 150 people were wounded, including 22 militiamen, around 20 policemen injured by thrown missiles, and 4 who were shot, but not fatally. About 100 people were arrested. A bit earlier were the Draft Riots where 120 individuals were killed and the Colored Orphans Asylum burned to the ground. And before that was the Astor Place riot which was a fight between two mobs arguing over which actor was better at acting in Shakespeare plays, which left between 22 and 31 rioters dead, and more than 120 people injured. Riots were common enough. And you learned how to avoid them. But not as common as laundry.

Sound of riots. Then turning into the flapping and folding of laundry.

THE HOST

Laundry was an all-day affair. Running errands. Social calls. You'd leave your calling card. Some women like Susan Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton would work at their newspaper all night. Other women hosted charity events or had interesting men give lectures. Séances. Or women would lie in bed stricken with what was called hysteria, a catch all term for real and imagined disease or mental disorders. Some women worked --

Sound of machines.

THE HOST

Unmarried or widowed women often had to take work as maids, or cleaners, or seamstresses. Some worked in the factories. Some factory girls as young as fifteen worked seven days a week fourteen hours a day with a single half hour break. Most factories had no bathroom. On average a hundred workers died a day. But there were always more desperate women seeking work.

Rowdy nightlife bars, people shouting, drunks.

THE HOST

Night. Various gangs patrolled the streets. And fights could spill out from any of the public houses for any variety of reasons; The Whyos were one such gang. One of their members was rumored to carry a copper eye gouger and axe blades on his boots. Immigrant communities stuck to their areas but a thousand languages could be heard and the smell of various push carts selling all manner of quick bites filled the air.

The street up to the steps of the theatre. The audience filling in all of it getting ready.

THE HOST

There were a thousand venues for performers, from hole-in-the-wall back of the bar speaking rooms to gilded ornate venues. Actors, though, were considered sex workers because after the show they were often pimped out. This was also true of the ballet. The ballet was considered a base and debauched artform. The stink of the audience was well known, all the unwashed men, their hair glistened with pomade or some other hair oil and mustache wax filled the air. The lights were hot and smelled of lime. Melodramas and minstrel shows, musical halls and pantomimes. Lecture circuits, trick acts, all could be seen. Amongst them was Victoria Woodhull. And tonight in front of a large crowd, she would say --

Shuffling of people.

VICTORIA

Once not long ago I was in a slum. And I saw a man. So thin. Thin as a rail. Thinner. Dirty even between the folds of his eyes. And I held him and I gave him some bread ...

THE HOST

There. That was good.

VICTORIA

Was it?

THE HOST

Give your speech.

VICTORIA

So this is a telling of a time or a person?

THE HOST

What?

VICTORIA

You have now managed to both pull me and you from the story. You've stripped all of our personhood away.

THE HOST

You're too egotistical.

VICTORIA

Why? Because I want my story told?

THE HOST

It's not about you.

VICTORIA

It's not?

THE HOST

What do *you* want from *me*?

VICTORIA

Give all of me a chance.

THE HOST

You want more about *you*. How about your husbands?

VICTORIA

No I'm --

THE HOST

Oh! I got it. This will be good! Fun! We can explore all sorts of things. Just give me a second. Or two. I need some sound effects.

VICTORIA

What?

THE HOST

Here's some --

Game show sound effects play.

VICTORIA

Was that a honk or --

THE HOST

Reset! Reset for fun!