

PART 5: FUN AND GAMES

Cheesy 70's game show music plays.

THE HOST

Welcome to the Free Love Game! Our contestant this week is Victoria Woodhull! Tell us what you think about marriage Vicky!

VICTORIA

Marriage is bound by love or law. And in the case of law where one is held without power it is no better than prostitution.

THE HOST

Spicy!

Whacky sound effect plays.

VICTORIA

What is that noise?

THE HOST

That noise means it's time to meet our husbands! Bring them out!

Cheesy music plays.

THE HOST

Husband number 1, the simple country doctor and adorable drunk Canning Woodhull!

WOODHULL

Hacha! A bottle a day keeps the doctor at play!

THE HOST

That's the spirit! Get it, spirit, alcohol.

VICTORIA

What is this act you're doing?

THE HOST

I'm the host of the Free Love Game! And now it's time to meet husband number 2 ... and then 3 according to some sources --

(Beat.)

Colonel James Blood!

BLOOD

Hello.

THE HOST

You fought for the Union, correct?

BLOOD

Yes.

THE HOST

Good that avoids the whole --

Sad trombone noise.

BLOOD

Yes. Victoria helped me with my wounds. She was a psychic healer via magnets.

THE HOST

And you married ... twice?

BLOOD

Marriage is a complex social contract that is more about assessment of property than any real --

CANNING

Well la-dee-dah! What a fancy lad! Makes me need a sniff of ether just to sit through it.

BLOOD

Now Canning you --

CANNING

(Take a long sniff.)

Shhh I'm self medicating.

VICTORIA

What is this farce?

THE HOST

The number one syndicated historical dating presidential woman-centric game show on the air. That's what.

Upbeat sound effects.

VICTORIA

That is but a jumble of words without --

Cut off by sound effects.

THE HOST

That's the shut your pie hole sound! You know what that means!

VICTORIA

I certainly do not.

THE HOST

Time for husband number ... last. The final one: John Biddulph Martin.

MARTIN

Hello.

THE HOST

And you're British?

MARTIN

Yes, met Victoria in England she was lecturing. Vanderbilt's son had paid to send Tennie and Vicky to England. Luck favoured me.

THE HOST

Awww, cute.

CANNING

Hornswoggle, Vicky was giving Vanderbilt the gribble until he croaked and Junior was afraid of blackmail so he paid them off to shove off!

BLOOD

You don't know you were dead by then.

CANNING

Where were you, Blood?

BLOOD

Working.

CANNING

Oh please!

MARTIN

If I might --

CANNING

Blood you have to --

BLOOD

We offered you --

MARTIN tries meekly to butt in but they all fight. Finally The Host breaks it up.

THE HOST

OK! OK! This isn't part of the game!

VICTORIA

What is this *game*?

THE HOST

You have to match your husband to see who is the ... something or other. Win the big prize ...

VICTORIA

What is the prize?

THE HOST

The presidency of course! That's the whole reason we're here! Personal life reflects political life. Especially for women. So understanding your bad life choices can --

VICTORIA

Bad life choices?

THE HOST

You married this guy!

CANNING

Me?

THE HOST

Yes! A drunk disgraced country doctor!

VICTORIA

Is that how you see it?

THE HOST

You did marry him, yes?

CANNING

Hell yes she did! And we had two kids! And I was a fine doctor. I even brought my morphine.

(Drinks some.)

Mmmmm. That's good 'phine. Hachacha!

THE HOST

Life choices.

VICTORIA

My father beat us. My mother would spend her time at the Revival tents or cooking up his fake cures in a big iron vat. He took my

sister Tennie and had her tell fortunes or pimp her out; whatever made the coin.

CANNING

Old Buck was a real son of a bitch! But quick to share the rum! I met Vicky when I was treating her rheumatism. That girl was always in some dark mood brooding about this or that. Then one day I was checking out her belly and I met her eyes and I said, "You know what? My little, puss, you tell your father I'll take you for a wife."

THE HOST

Romantic. But really, *him*? You're a strong independent woman and ... this guy?

VICTORIA

What choice did I have? I trusted the world. I was fourteen. You make it sound as if I had any control over my life. I did what the men told me, what society did. By law and life it told me marriage was good and I thought it would be. What decision can a scared sick 14 year old make? What were you deciding then?

CANNING

It was a hell of a ride! Hachacha!

THE HOST

(Realizing.)

Fourteen. You were only a child

VICTORIA

To be a child you need a childhood. I was a mule, I was a fortune teller, I was a money tree, I was an object of pleasure, I was never a child.

CANNING

Everybody grows up sometimes. Hachacha! Aww, come on Vick was it so bad?

VICTORIA

You didn't know what to do with me so you would screw me and leave me and then screw someone else.

CANNING

I did love house calls! Hachacha!

THE HOST

So your views against marriage were shaped by --

VICTORIA

Against? No. I believed in a true marriage. Partnership. But that is not that. A doctor and child are not equals are not. Soon I found I was pregnant.

CANNING

And baby makes three! Let me know when he can buy me smokes! Ha cha cha!

VICTORIA

Only it wasn't easy. Byron, he was born on an icy day and I laid in the blood unsure what to do until a neighbor woman came, taught me to nurse. I was fifteen and didn't have those natural instincts that they say you have.

CANNING

A bouncing baby imbecile!

VICTORIA

He was what we called then feeble-minded. I'm sure you have a nicer euphemism now. No teeth, never talked. Maybe it was from the drugs or drink. Right before he was born Canning kicked me hard in the stomach for burning the tallow.

CANNING

She deserved it! She was clumsy! HACHACHA!

VICTORIA

Maybe it was me. A poison in me. But there he was.

THE HOST

I'm sorry.

VICTORIA

For what? It's funny right! This game! His *antics*. A drunk is a fun character, the clown. The relief.

CANNING

Love you too, baby!

VICTORIA

We had another child. Again as soon as I pushed her out he was gone. Off to the tavern.

CANNING

Needed to get my pickle pickled!

VICTORIA

In his rush he cut the cord but didn't tie it up. I woke to see my daughter's life running out of her. Dying right next to me.

CANNING

Oopsy, ain't I a clumsy fool! Ha cha cha!

VICTORIA

And again who helped? The women of the boarding house. They tied her up. They swaddled her. They helped me. And she is fine. Zulu Maude. She is a fine girl.

THE HOST

And on to Colonel Blood ...

VICTORIA

I was established as a healer; we met on more equal terms. Both in unhappy marriages.

BLOOD

I helped her create the newspaper, I introduced her to the work of Marx.

THE HOST

Some say he wrote your articles --

VICTORIA

No one creates alone. I wrote my articles in a trance. He copied the words I pulled from the other side.

THE HOST

Right. Let's not get into that --

BLOOD

We lived in a mansion. She earned it from the brokerage. I helped with investments, I pushed her toward politics.

CANNING

I was there too!

THE HOST

What?

VICTORIA

Canning did come back. In the grand house on 14th street my father and siblings did come to live with Colonel Blood and myself.

THE HOST

Your abusive father?

VICTORIA

Yes.

THE HOST

And your drunkard first husband, who treated you like crap?

VICTORIA

Yes. He watched our children, he was very good with them.

THE HOST

You left a drunk in charge of your children?

CANNING

Not just a drunk also a morphine addict. I tried to dry out. But that waggon is slippery, kept falling off! Hachacha!

BLOOD

Her mother and sister Utica would also steal her things and sell them.

VICTORIA

Family is complicated.

THE HOST

Why would you do that! You let your abusers stay with you? You were independent, you had money!

VICTORIA

They were my blood.

THE HOST

They're bad!

VICTORIA

They are not *bad*. They are products of a broken system. A broken idea of how things run. Society pushes the poor toward criminality toward sin because of the rot inherent in the system. They are not born bad or wrong.

THE HOST

So you forgive them for all they did?

VICTORIA

Sometimes. Sometimes I hated them.

BLOOD

She was too easy on them. Her mother, Roxy, also tried to blackmail Vanderbilt and that caused him to cut them off. She in her greed ruined Victoria's life.

VICTORIA

She also held me and traveled with me across the country. She stayed with me when you left!

BLOOD

You left me!

VICTORIA

You poisoned me!

BLOOD

I never did!

VICTORIA

You slept around!

BLOOD

So did you! That was our deal! Free love!

CANNING

Sometimes I hopped in between them. Snuggly. Hachacha!

VICTORIA

And things changed. You used me! You liked my fame!

BLOOD

I *liked* your fame, you *loved* your fame! You ate it up like french cakes!

VICTORIA

And when I had no money --

BLOOD

Your family chased me away! I never was cruel to you, I did nothing but love you!

VICTORIA

Squeezed me dry. You were still a man. And a man, even the most innocent man, in this world is cruel. Is rotted by the world!

BLOOD

And you are of the world as well. Cruel by turn, vainglorious, demanding.

VICTORIA

And have I not the right to be?

BLOOD

And the blackmail? And the fake --

VICTORIA

I did what I needed to do. Same as any man!

BLOOD

The same men who you call rotted and wrong?

Very loud stupid sound effect

THE HOST

Let's leave it there. Partnerships end. Not always well. Noble ideas and goals meet the reality of having to live the everyday.

VICTORIA

That's not it at all!

THE HOST

So you and you sister Tennie leave America ...

VICTORIA

After the scandal. The obscenity trial. The women's movement turned sour. It was a great many deluges washing over me.

THE HOST

Everything is a lot of things, I'm trying to get to the meat of it.

VICTORIA

It's hard to watch someone try to summarize your life. One wants to keep adding more in.

THE HOST

Your last husband ...

MARTIN

Hullo!

VICTORIA

Sir John Biddulph Martin. The shy intellectual. He actually clipped articles about me before we met.

MARTIN

I saw her speak! She talked about this indigent fellow she saw in a slum. He called her a demon.

VICTORIA

Devil.

MARTIN

Yes, sorry, devil. Maybe it's best I don't speak. Victoria is very capable. I am better just sitting here.

THE HOST

You don't have anything else to say?

Beat. Silence.

THE HOST (cont.)

He's just sitting there quietly.

VICTORIA

He enjoys that. He sometimes says love enjoys silence. He could spend the whole day in a room and you'd barely know he was there.

THE HOST

Sounds ... um ... nice?

VICTORIA

It was. Even after he died it was like he was still there because the house was quiet.

The Host lets out a long annoyed sigh.

VICTORIA

What?

THE HOST

You gave up! Exile in England and you - you didn't do anything else! For suffrage! For women! For history!

VICTORIA

I was broke. I was dead in a coma for a week. They stripped me bare and I took the only escape I could.

THE HOST

You are supposed to fight!

VICTORIA

Supposed to?

THE HOST

You don't give up! Heroes don't give up!

VICTORIA

And you'd have me what? I did not live for your enjoyment! I did not exist in history as a REAL PERSON for you to make me a symbol for you!

THE HOST

I want you to be better! Do better!

VICTORIA

I'm dead!

THE HOST

Died in your estate! Rich. Alone. And what did you achieve!

VICTORIA

I chose victory in surrender.

THE HOST

Why is everyone so terrible and a failure and just --

VICTORIA

We, the gone, the dead, the historical are the same as you. Don't treat us as unknowable myths. We hurt and pissed and laughed and lived. Don't reduce us to a quote or ideology, we change we --

THE HOST

No! No! I'm still mad at you! Did you ever care about women's rights? Any of it? Was you run for president complete --

VICTORIA

Yes! I wanted all those rights. And I got them. FOR ME! In England. In my garden. He gave me the vote of the house. He got me the RIGHT to live how I wanted. I got it. FOR ME.

THE HOST

Selfish. Self-serving. That's what they always said about you!

VICTORIA

You want me to be perfect but I was born flawed, I lived flawed, I died flawed. Don't build me a statue; it'll save you the time of tearing it down.

THE HOST

But how can we learn from you, take anything from you ... them. All the women who ran. They gave up.

VICTORIA

The lesson is don't draw lessons. Things happen.

THE HOST

Things happen! Oh great! Yeah wow. Things happen. There has to be more!

VICTORIA

Why?

THE HOST

Because it's a terrible ending!

VICTORIA

History is not about us. It's about you.

THE HOST

Can we learn from it?

VICTORIA

You tell me.

THE HOST

I can't.

VICTORIA

You must.

THE HOST

No. No. Fine. I create the Victoria I want to see. This isn't working. This was dumb all these ...

Stupid sound effect plays.

THE HOST

Austere. We need. Theater! That will. A play's the thing.

VICTORIA

That's not --

THE HOST

Shh, shush. I'll make the Victoria I want to see. Reset! How much time do we have left? Oh. That's not much ... I can make it work. Concise scenes. A play! Reset! Curtain down!