

**PART 6: Serious Important Drama**

THE HOST

A stage! A thrust ... no proscenium? Which is ... you know like a big wooden stage with red curtains and those boxes on the side that look cool, but actually have terrible sightlines. Here I present: a serious play. A Tragedy in 74 Acts. Abridged. We don't have time to do the full 6 hour epic so it'll be selected scenes from the great drama -- Woodhull: A Feminist Phantasmagoria on Women's Themes: Part 1 She-llenium Approaches  
(Beat.)

The curtains parts. Homer, Ohio. Dirt on the stage, some old trees. A very young Victoria with her mother Roxanna "Roxy" Clafflin. Salt of the earth people. Her mother has returned home from another reviviallist meeting. Roxy is filled with an energy and power from the preacher.

*It becomes a staged scene:*

YOUNG VICTORIA

Mama.

ROXANNA

Yes girl?

YOUNG VICTORIA

Why is it you end up in the fits? When you see the preacher you fall on the ground and kick and scream! Are you sick?

ROXANNA

Vicky girl that is wellness. The sickness is this broken earth. When I get the fits and I scream to Jesus -- oh it's the purity. Only time we not full of sin!

YOUNG VICTORIA

Even me mama?

ROXANNA

Specially female-kind. Preacher say: 'We got that sin swarming us, clinging like the mud. We at the edge.'

YOUNG VICTORIA

Edge?

ROXANNA

Edge of the bowl of sin. Teetering ready to fall in! Then he paints the world of sin -- Hell! And in the center of the bowl stands Old Scratch hisself! And there we are but a little spider hanging by a tiny strand above the flames!

YOUNG VICTORIA

On the edge of the bowl ...

ROXANNA

(Builds to an orgasm.)

Edge of the edge. And the preacher, he builds it - He knocks us in to see it! Pinch-face demons, the brutes with sticks, the whole unsaved screaming as they flesh is charred away! And he takes us right to the ABYSS! SAAAVE ME! SAAAAAVE ME! And he saves us! Saave me! And he fills us up. Gives us the blessings and we falls and kick and scream in pure pleasure.

*Gasps and almost post coital.*

YOUNG VICTORIA

It feels good?

ROXANNA

Better than what any other man can do. Flesh is one thing, but to stroke the soul, I almost buckled again just thinking on it. In that moment all of it is all of it and the world is nothing but God's love.

YOUNG VICTORIA

How he make it so you see them things? Devils and angels ...

ROXANNA

Words can make things appear.

YOUNG VICTORIA

Oh. I want to make people see things.

ROXANNA

Go chop the wood, make me see a pile of wood. Women ain't for making words they for making babies.

YOUNG VICTORIA

But I want --

ROXANNA

Don't ever let anyone see you want. People see want; they see something they can take. God gives his love free. A man is all on terms. Run along now, run off.

*The scene fades.*

THE HOST

The curtain closes. Then let's jump like eight scenes later. Victoria's father Buck has taken Tennie and Vicky away. The curtain parts. The scene begins in a ramshackle cabin. Night. A few shouts in the far distance. They huddle together.

YOUNG VICTORIA

Daddy where are we?

BUCK

Across the state line, Vic.

YOUNG VICTORIA

Which state?

BUCK

State of my boot in your rear if you keep it up.

LIL TENNIE

It's cold.

BUCK

Shut up, Tennie.

YOUNG VICTORIA

Can't we go home?

BUCK

Ain't going back to Ohio.

VICTORIA

But why?

BUCK

Cause it's a town of square-heads. Forget that! What we need now is a coin. A cash cow. I know! I always sensed great power in you Tennie. Something mystical and sellable! Don't you feel it? A power?

LIL TENNIE

A tingle? Like when I ate that toad?

BUCK

What? No. Maybe. Don't eat no toads. Not without giving your papa a leg. You use this power to read fortunes and talk to spooks. I'll fix the purchase price.

YOUNG VICTORIA

Why do we gotta charge them?

BUCK

Because the American way is if you help someone you get paid. If everyone did things for free we'd all be poor and if everyone was poor then where'd we be? The poor need the rich to hate and the rich need the poor to hate.

YOUNG VICTORIA

People hate us?

BUCK

Girl you know people already hate you. Best let them hate us for being rich cause then we get to get rich.

LIL TENNIE

Could be fun.

*Back to the Host.*

THE HOST

The curtain closes. Then we can skip over the first couple acts.

(Flipping through a script making notes.)

Going from town to town selling spiritualism and fake cancer cures. The marriage to Canning. We covered that, but very quickly: curtain --

*Scene with Victoria and CANNING.*

CANNING

Hachacha!

CHILD VICTORIA

My cough ...

CANNING

Time for some opium.

CHILD VICTORIA

For me?

CANNING

For me! And pinch of cocaine. For luck.

(Snorts.)

That's good luck. And one to grow on.

(Snorts.)

It's hard being an educated man among the fleas. Wash that down with some of this.

(Drinks.)

Ew. What was that? Another swig to see.

(Drinks.)

Still terrible but kicks like a mule. Ha cha cha! Might as well finish this stuff up. I think it might be formaldehyde. Waste not want not.

CHILD VICTORIA

Do you have my medicine?

CANNING

Greedy mouse. You're trouble.

CHILD VICTORIA

I'm not.

CANNING

You know what? My little, puss, you tell your father I'll take you for a wife.

CHILD VICTORIA

Oh. OK.

*Back to the host.*

THE HOST

They get married. The children. It's horrible. He's a drunk. She goes back to her family. Buck is promoting Tennie as a faith healer. Tennie is accused of manslaughter when they burn off a woman's breasts trying to treat her cancer. Victoria and Tennie go to New York ... oh we can do a scene where she meets Vanderbilt.

(Beat.)

Curtain up on Commodore Vanderbilt's mansion. Imposing large. Vanderbilt is a lithe, smug shark of a man. Your standard robber baron. But he had an open door policy ...

*VANDERBILT home.*

VANDERBILT

I let anyone visit. You never know what rube might have a good idea you can steal. I mean invest in. Ha ha. But you ladies don't care about business.

VICTORIA

We care very much about business. We are destined for great wealth!

VANDERBILT

You should leave.

TENNIE

Oh just a moment, more. Victoria senses spirits, right Vicky?

VICTORIA

Yes your ... wife. I sense her!

VANDERBILT

Yeah she's an invilid she's upstairs.

VICTORIA

Her aura hangs like a ripened peach. A child? Passed on?

VANDERBILT

George? You sense him?

VICTORIA

Yes! He wants something ...

VANDERBILT

Probably money! Ghost money! Thirteen children and they all want a hand out! Get out of here you greedy ghost! And you both --

VICTORIA

No! He speaks of ... making money. Of a plan! May we sit?

VANDERBILT

I guess. But don't get comfortable.

VICTORIA

He wants ... your son ... dead son ... who I'm definitely speaking with from the other side wants you to invest ... in us. A firm.

VANDERBILT

Lady brokers? No!

VICTORIA

Our destiny is in this city. I since childhood was guided by a kindly spirit. The great philosopher Demosthenese --

VANDERBILT

Philosopher! That's almost as bad as a poet!

VICTORIA

He spoke of riches!

VANDERBILT

Riches, you say? Go on ...

VICTORIA

I was in Pittsburgh and I knew his path for me. In a vision I saw ... a room. Slow it came to focus: a chair formed, then the wallpaper, which dripped and created a table and floor. On that table was a book, but I couldn't read the letters. I saw a flickering spirit he said: '17 Great Jones Street, New York City. That is where your home shall be.' And I said: WHO ARE YOU! And in the dust of a mirror slow at first came a stir.

VANDERBILT

Level of disinterest rising ...

VICTORIA

Wait for it. The dust rippled forming letters and then the letters burst into holy pale fire and so it said I AM DEMOSTHENES."

VANDERBILT

Sounds like a lavender.

VICTORIA

And I went to Great Jones Street and I found there a boarding house and they did indeed have a room to rent --

VANDERBILT

Unimpressed!

VICTORIA

The room from my vision and on the table -- a book! That book:  
The collected works of ... Demosthenes!

*Beat.*

VANDERBILT

And?

VICTORIA

And so the fates willed me here! My fortune is predestined!

VANDERBILT

I've heard enough and that's too much! Let me get my butler to  
sweep you both into the gutter!

TENNIE

Wait! I'm having a fit! I'm rolling around. I need a moment  
before you throw us out. Alone ... an aside with Vicky.

VANDERBILT

Fine go over to that corner and I'll wait here and cross my arms  
and grumble about how I don't like you both.

TENNIE

Vicky we're losing him!

VICTORIA

This is our destiny!

TENNIE

I know, but --

VICTORIA

He can be persuaded! I shall explain it plainly!

TENNIE

I don't know if that ... let's play it how papa taught us.

VICTORIA

What do you mean?



VANDERBILT

I'm done with this! You both can --

TENNIE

Wanna see my tits?

VANDERBILT

What?

TENNIE

Tit for tat, your tat for my tits.

VICKY

The spirits will it.

VANDERBILT

I'm not one to defy the spirits. Let's see 'em.

THE HOST

Curtain closes. Oh nudity on stage. Sorry. I didn't realize this was ... anyway soon Victoria becomes Vanderbilt's personal medium and Tennie becomes his personal ... friend. You get it. Skipping ahead. They get a tip on the Gold Corner Scam. They make a ton of money. Vanderbilt sets them up with a brokerage. Victoria and Tennie buy a mansion ... oh right! She meets her second husband. That was ... before this. Sorry the time line gets a bit ... she was running a health hotel and healing with magnets. That was before ... sorry let's back up to that scene for a minute. Victoria with Colonel Blood:

*The Healing Hotel, a small room. BLOOD is with VICTORIA.*

VICTORIA

Evening to you, Colonel.

BLOOD

Call me Jim. You see ghosts they say.

VICTORIA

I do.

BLOOD

I see the men who died. I see them marching, I hear them.

I can help you.

VICTORIA

I could love you.

BLOOD

I am married.

VICTORIA

To what?

BLOOD

To a drunk. To a carouser. I left him, but I am still married.

VICTORIA

Why?

BLOOD

Cause the laws of God and Ohio are foolish, Colonel. Because I thought that a man and a woman are united and become one thing. I have children.

VICTORIA

How do you get them to stop? The ghosts?

BLOOD

How do you get the sun to stop?

VICTORIA

Wait til dark.

BLOOD

In the darkness all things become invisible. Pain. Thighs. Fingers. Fear. Belief.

VICTORIA

Sounds good to me.

BLOOD

Remove your shirt. It's time for me to lay the magnets.

VICTORIA

Let me see you first.

BLOOD

VICTORIA

You see me plenty now.

BLOOD

Women hide all sorts of lies under dresses. I knew women who padded and filled themselves up. Fought behind more cotton than Jackson at New Orleans.

VICTORIA

Take off your shirt.

BLOOD

Join me.

VICTORIA

The look of an actual woman would be as shocking as seeing a manticore.

BLOOD

I've seen war a manticore barely raises an eyebrow. Let us make mythology together.

THE HOST

And scene. The curtain -- what time is it? What? We have so much ... the Beecher scandal. The whole ... OK! Wow. This story is just. It's just. She has the newspaper. She decides to run for president and -- no I should show that moment just quick from her speech:

VICTORIA

I once was in a slum giving out bread. I saw a man so broken there was dirt even between the folds of his eyes and --

THE HOST

Wait, no, not that speech. Here --

VICTORIA

While others of my sex devoted themselves to a crusade against the laws that shackle the women of the country, I asserted my individual independence; while others prayed for the good time coming, I worked for it; I boldly entered the arena of politics and business and exercised the rights I already possessed. I now announce myself as candidate for president. I am well aware that in assuming this position I shall evoke more ridicule than

enthusiasm at the outset. But this is an epoch of sudden changes and startling surprises. What may appear absurd today will assume a serious aspect tomorrow.

THE HOST

She made inroads with various groups. People denounce her. Anthony Comstock, the moral crusader, starts targeting her. Damn I had a whole little musical interlude with him ..

COMSTOCK

(Sings.)

It's not nice to look at vice!  
 You have to put dirty books on ice!  
 It's not fair to stop and stare  
 At a postcard with a naked deerrier  
 And here's my righteous homily  
 Don't look at all that pornograph--

*He's cut off.*

THE HOST

No time for that! There was also going to be like sexy dancing postcards and magazines and he was going to destroy them. But really that's not even that important to the story!  
 Intermission!!

*Brief intermission music.*

THE HOST

On to her presidential run! She was running on a platform of free love, equal rights, she put Fredrick Douglass on the ticket against his wishes. It was. She became friends - sort of -- with Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Oh man skip over that act. That one. Here's a scene I oops -

(Drops some pages.)

Not sure where this goes. It's of her with Anthony and Stanton speaking at a convention. Not sure where, let's just -- curtain!  
 Ladies talking! Equal rights something or other GO --

*Scene changes to*

*SUSAN B. ANTHONY is with WOODHULL*

VICTORIA

What is the speaking order, Anthony?

ANTHONY

Does it matter?

VICTORIA

It is vital.

ANTHONY

What is vital is that these programs need folding. Will you help me?

VICTORIA

I could. Where is Elizabeth?

ANTHONY

Arranging everything. You're folding like a Portuguese whaler. Delicate and across with the thumb like this.

VICTORIA

Does a fold matter so much?

ANTHONY

If our programs are bent how can we be taken seriously.

VICTORIA

Perish the thought. You've been at this a long time Anthony.

ANTHONY

Since girlhood. Elizabeth was ... often saddled with a newborn or other maternal duties.

VICTORIA

How many children did Mr. Stanton saddle her with?

ANTHONY

Seven. And while there must be pleasure to the act ... one can find other methods than adding cargo to a ship that is already listing under the weight.

VICTORIA

You can enjoy the act and avoid the result if you plan accordingly?

ANTHONY

Speak you of murder?

VICTORIA

Practicalities. I would never eschew motherhood. Though I've known plenty who visited Madame Restell.

(Beat.)

You, though Anthony never suffered under wedded bliss.

ANTHONY

(Very flat.)

No. I'm far too frivolous.

(Beat.)

Just let me fold. You stack them.

VICTORIA

Are you a virgin, Anthony? I am curious. You speak on many subjects of womanhood, of motherhood, but what comes from experience?

ANTHONY

Need a professor of antiquities be a centurion of Caesar to write of Caesar?

VICTORIA

Do you like me, Anthony?

ANTHONY

I'm a Yankee, we don't care about such things.

VICTORIA

The frontier is different.

ANTHONY

If we only associate with those with whom we agree on all things we will find ourselves dining alone.

VICTORIA

But cast the doors so wide you lose all sight of what is right?

ANTHONY

Is this about George Train again? Train spoke well to women's suffrage. When Elizabeth and I were in Kansas he was quite forceful.

VICTORIA

He also speaks of the dangers of Negroes and their votes. He turned it into --

ANTHONY

If we can scare racists into thinking white women would outvote the other ... we must get the vote and any ally can be of use. To associate with racists is not to be racist.

VICTORIA

I'm sure they will carve that above the door of women's paradise.

ANTHONY

You are speaking sixth.

VICTORIA

Sixth?

ANTHONY

It's the order Elizabeth set.

VICTORIA

Right before the midday break? They'll be straining and hungry! I am lightning behind the podium! I should --

ANTHONY

Elizabeth still thinks you put Douglass on your ticket as a personal slight against her.

VICTORIA

It was not.

ANTHONY

This? This is not a fold. It's a crease!

VICTORIA

You're such a pleasure Anthony, like eating trout.

ANTHONY

Trout is a garbage fish.

VICTORIA

The fish we deserve for our era.

VICTORIA

I ran for president not to spite Stanton, not to spite Grant, I ran because it needed to be done. First as farce, then as tragedy, then as victory. The failure makes the success happen. I made it so the option existed. Men need precedence. Politicians especially, because they are lawyers. And lawyers are dumb and cannot understand anything without a precedence to cite. I am the precedence president. The first case.

ANTHONY

They ridiculed you.

VICTORIA

They ridicule you, Anthony, and you never ran. They ridicule me and I was almost president.

ANTHONY

Almost?

VICTORIA

Closer than you.

*STANTON enters.*

STANTON

Are the programs ready?

ANTHONY

Almost. Folding is not an art all take to naturally.

VICTORIA

A more pressing issue, I'm to speak sixth?

STANTON

I placed you there to keep them in the hall. If I don't have you there they'll be sneaking out to nibble sandwiches.

VICTORIA

Is this because of the articles? They are all lies. Free love as an issue --

STANTON

It is madness at times. They call you wanton but for what? Henry Blackwell is carrying on with Abby. Phoebe is leaving her husband. Mary as well. We all suffer the same yoke but they are afraid to admit it. That we are all suffering and sinning.



VICTORIA

Really, what else?

ANTHONY

Elizabeth ...

STANTON

I'm not the town gossip. I abhor gossip. But Ward Beecher is sleeping with Lib Tilton and seven others minimum.

ANTHONY

Liz! She told you that in confidence!

STANTON

Victoria is one of us. She understands. Her past would make a penny dreadful blush.

ANTHONY

She makes everything tawdry.

VICTORIA

You make everything heavy. Even the air sags under your speeches. Susan B. Anthony, Susan be interesting.

*STANTON laughs.*

STANTON

Sorry, Susan, but I just enjoy word play regardless of whether I agree with it or not.

ANTHONY

The shiny new bauble is always a joy. But in the end it tarnishes and you find the old steady tin ring does just fine.

VICTORIA

What?

ANTHONY

It was a ... metaphor. And. I thought it was ... I must put these programs in their place!

*ANTHONY exits.*

VICTORIA

She has a gait like a draught horse.

STANTON

Be not mean. She has done good work.

VICTORIA

I mean nothing by meanness, I'll speak fourth behind Lucy Stone.

STANTON

Not possible.

VICTORIA

Did you vote for me?

STANTON

Oh women can't vote.

VICTORIA

Please. I know you and Susan love to vote and watch them tear up your ballot.

STANTON

Small pleasures.

VICTORIA

Did you vote for me?

STANTON

I vote straight Republican. Every time.

VICTORIA

How standard.

STANTON

My husband did co-found the party so ...

VICTORIA

And they are. I understand the ugliness of it all. Once doing charity in the slums of The Points I met a man. He was so dirty there was even soot in the corner of his eyes. He was so shattered --

STANTON

Called you devil. I have heard and read the speech. You give it too often.

VICTORIA

I should have won the presidency. I was promised it by the spirits. I was told I would not fail.

STANTON

Failing is noble. We women must fail, and fail, perhaps forever but in our failing we can shame them. If only for a second's second. We shame them and get a small crumb of change and we use that. I'd settle for that.

VICTORIA

We settle before we even begin to fight. That is why we lose.

*The scene ends*

THE HOST

Right that goes into act eight, but ... see there's too much. And I don't have. The context. About. You see the whole women's movement fight. You need more! You need -- Stanton and Fredrick Douglass got into a fight about who should get the vote. Whether the 15th amendment - she gave a speech and said:

STANTON

They congratulated themselves on the passage of the fifteenth. Securing "manhood suffrage" and establishing an aristocracy of sex. The lower orders of men - slaves of yesterday are legislators today. Ignorant Africans in whose eyes women are simply the beings of lust. Think of Sambo who does not know the difference between monarchy and a republic. Who cannot read the Declaration or a spelling book. They make laws for the daughters of Adams and Jefferson! Women of wealth and education! Shall American statesmen amend the Constitution to make wives and mothers the political inferiors of the unlearned and unwashed ditch diggers, bootblack, butcher and barbers fresh from the plantation? To establish aristocracy on sex alone?

THE HOST

Then Douglass countered:

DOUGLASS

There is no greater name than Elizabeth Cady Stanton. There were few houses in which a Black man could put his head, but this wooly head of mine found refuge in her home. And if I had been blacker than sixteen midnights without a single star she would

have shown me equal hospitality. This I believe. There is no greater champion for women's rights, for equal rights, but. But the employment of names like Sambo and bootblack; I cannot coincide with that. I must say I do not see how anyone can pretend that there is the same urgency in giving the ballot to the woman as to the Negro. It is a matter of life and death for us. When women, because they are women are hunted down and killed for no crime but being women - when they are strung up on lampposts, when their children are torn from their arms and their brains bashed against the ground then they will have the urgency to obtain the ballot equal to our own.

THE HOST

Then another suffragist Lucy Stone contended:

LUCY STONE

The gentleman who addressed you claimed that Negroes had the first right to suffrage. What he says the Ku Klux Klan did to blacks in the South the Klu-Kluxers are doing here in the shape of men. Women are in mortal danger. Men take away children from mothers who have no legal right to their own children! Woman has an ocean of wrongs too deep for any plummet. The Negro too has an ocean too deep to be fathomed. But I hope the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment passes so that at least someone can get out of this terrible pit.

THE HOST

So it's. Um. Well ... one woman of color spoke. Frances Harper. She's -- do we have time? No? But. Just a snip of it --

HARPER

You white women speak here of rights. I speak of wrongs. I, as a colored woman, have had in this country an education which has made me feel as if I were in the situation of Ishmael. I do not believe that giving the woman the ballot is immediately going to cure all the ills of life. I do not believe that white women are dew-drops just exhaled from the skies. I think that like men they may be divided into three classes, the good, the bad, and the indifferent. Give women the ballot-box? Go on. The white women of this country need it. I tell you that if there is any class of people who need to be lifted out of their airy nothings and selfishness, it is the white women of America.

THE HOST

So that. Sure. And I -- not about me. But. She. And you have to understand during Reconstruction it was -- but then also -- I want to get to this, but I can't because! It's unfair. But everyone! Everything I'm just -- no. No! I can't -- ah! And if we put it in people are mad - but if you leave it out people are mad and ... that's not even about Victoria! But. It is in the -- Do you? I mean.

(Sound of the script falling pages scattering.)

No! I've dropped the whole thing! It's all over the place! No. No. Oh, it's ...

TENNIE

Let me help.

THE HOST

What?

TENNIE

Me. Tennie.

THE HOST

Her sister. Right. But this podcast is just a play; you can't talk to me. There's no direct address.

TENNIE

I am talking ain't I?

THE HOST

I'm trying to --

TENNIE

You're trying too hard. Let me do it. I can do it for you.

THE HOST

I want to explain --

TENNIE

I know. Why my sister ran. Why women run and do stupid things.

THE HOST

Not stupid.

TENNIE

I didn't say stupid. You're stressed. Let me do it.

OK ...

THE HOST

OK?

TENNIE

I'm just tired and confused and --

THE HOST

Just say it. Say I can do it.

TENNIE

You do it.

THE HOST

OK! Reset! Let's do this right.

TENNIE