

**PART 8: Behold My Ruins**

TENNIE

Finish it? She can't even start it! She's dithering and throwing everything at a wall and for what?

THE HOST

To figure it out!

TENNIE

What if there's nothing to figure?

THE HOST

Then let me figure out there's nothing to figure out.

TENNIE

Why not just break it?

VICTORIA

Because, Tennie, you and I both tried the same. We both read the ancients and wondered about them. Their whole lives.

TENNIE

All them ghosts you kept talking to. Is that it?

THE HOST

Because the past keeps hurting us now.

TENNIE

Why even put up with it?

*THE HOST and VICTORIA both speak*

THE HOST

I'm trying --

VICTORIA

It's about --

(beat.)

Oh sorry.

THE HOST

No you go.

VICTORIA

Maybe it's vanity. I like being remembered. I ran to bring attention.

THE HOST

To what?

VICTORIA

To all of it. You feel it's some grand plan, what I did, why I did it. My motives changed by the day, the hour. Noble at times, personal at others. Deluded.

TENNIE

It's a sops game thinking history can be understood in the present.

THE HOST

It's just disappointing. When you read about these great people, they did great things. And you just ... failed.

VICTORIA

When we lived the history, we didn't know the end. To you it seems an easy straight path. Our losses are obvious. Our defeats unavoidable but in the moment it happened ... it was possible.

TENNIE

Not really, Vick, you weren't a serious candidate.

VICTORIA

It was an unserious time.

THE HOST

I don't like living in ... I want to be away from it. I want to see a hundred years from now to know we make it, to know we live. That I fail, or the country -- or the election and it still ends up OK.

VICTORIA

It's not OK. It never is. We just live through it or we die.

THE HOST

But then how do I explain that. Explain you. I want to be fair to you and history to all of it. But it's --

VICTORIA

Tell it plain.

THE HOST

I can't. It's too big. There's all these plays and movies and books of people's lives, how do they pick what to put in and what to leave out? Isn't it wrong to just show the important moments? Aren't most of our lives just boring moments punctuated by some few scenes of panic and chaos? How many more days did you spend bored or tired. More days than you spent running for president, or addressing congress or fighting.

VICTORIA

We the dead exist now only for you the living. You pick the pieces that can make your days better. Easier. Choose one bone and make it a lantern. Light your way forward.

THE HOST

I don't know what that means.

TENNIE

(Angry sigh.)

Then fuck it all. Our memories are liars, our history is unknowable, there is nothing to it. Let it all go! Burn it down and forget it.

VICTORIA

We're dead, what we think doesn't matter.  
*An alarm goes off.*

THE HOST

Fuck. Shit.

VICTORIA

Time's up. Come on Tennie.

*They walk off.*

THE HOST

No! I still have ... I left some extra time. I always set my clocks fast. But. Hello? Are you there? Is. I have a hundred women to profile in this brief series and I can't get past the first one. I can't even begin to start.

*The Host sighs.*

THE HOST (cont.)

Does any of this even help? Does ...

ANTHONY

Excuse me. I hate to bother you, but --

THE HOST

Who?

ANTHONY

Susan B. Anthony you've probably seen my coin.

THE HOST

Not for a while, it's not very --

ANTHONY

Popular. Yes. I'd blame misogyny but it really was poorly designed. Too akin to a quarter.

THE HOST

Why couldn't you have run for president you're much less ... strange than Victoria.

ANTHONY

If I had run they'd have made me plenty strange. But. I need to register a complaint.

THE HOST

Oh Christ.

ANTHONY

I understand that it is necessary in fiction to distort and change events. I enjoy Shakespeare, I know his histories are not histories. But. The scene with Woodhull and Stanton. There was a great deal wrong with that scene. I am not even sure when it is set? After her run, but we are all together at some convention. The movement was split then and Victoria was ruined and gone.

THE HOST

I was trying to give a sense of -

ANTHONY

You put in a joke about us voting. Women voting. You play it like it was frivolous civil disobedience. But it was more. I did vote. And I was arrested. Jailed. Brought to trial for the sin of trying to vote.

THE HOST

We can't -

ANTHONY

Also Stanton was not upset by Douglass being on the ticket. Also, also you had me say that -

THE HOST

I get it. But. We can't nitpick all the -

ANTHONY

Nits. Yes. It was not a nit. YOU WANT TO MAKE HER A HERO! A feminist icon! She was a woman, yes! She ran for president, yes! But she was no friend to the movement! To us! She deserves nothing!

THE HOST

That's not --

ANTHONY

What is she but a carnival! A tent revival! Oh ghosts! Oh show some leg! Oh look at me, look at me! I shall draw the world toward me for what! She left no mark. Why? Because of the cruelty of history? No! Because she was smoke. She has NO substance.

THE HOST

She did though --

ANTHONY

She took Stanton from me! I told Stanton that she would bring us down. I was a loyal friend and confidant for over two decades to Elizabeth Cady Stanton! And she ... she ... she sided with Woodhull. She froze me out. She said I wrote these letters that ... Victoria took away my best friend.

THE HOST

You tore out your diary pages during this time and burned them.

ANTHONY

I do not regret it.

THE HOST

What you wrote or what you burned?

ANTHONY

Yes.

THE HOST

You and Stanton reunited -

ANTHONY

We had to try and save women's rights from the arson of Victoria Woodhull. Woodhull is the one that made women's suffrage the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment instead of the 16<sup>th</sup>. But you write this story knowing we get the vote, so you don't see her as destroying us. Maybe a woman writing a hundred years hence will paint you as naive or churlish because she sees your history as inevitable. The pain of living in the present is the unknown. Her run for president was not some glorious moment.

THE HOST

That's what I was trying to tell her.

ANTHONY

You can't tell her anything.

THE HOST

But, you and her and Stanton and Comstock and all of the terrible and notable people they all together made the history that shapes my life. Is my life. Leads my ideas. She is worthy of praise and scorn and to be seen. To be debated.

ANTHONY

On Election Day both Victoria and I were in jail. I for the civil disobedience of voting and she for obscenity. It ended. There were no sweet little playlets, no witty bon mots about who was virginal and who was a slattern. I would die before I could vote. Stanton would die before she could vote. Lucy Stone would die before she could vote. Mott. Isabella. But Woodhull, she lived long enough to see it. But she wasn't even in America. She never even cast a ballot. And we all died for it and for what? For her to not even vote.

THE HOST

Yes well.

ROXY

Are we talking dirt? Oooh I love me some dirt, even though I believe in the Mother of Israel and all that's good.

THE HOST

Roxy Claflin. Victoria -

ROXY

Her mama - Roxy Claflin - mother of Victoria and Tennessee and the whole brood! I was there when Vicky decided she was going to be president! You playing the facts all wrong! You leave out all her sisters! And my adventures! Like when I -

THE HOST

No! It's supposed to be about understanding the presidency. This was supposed to be short little bite sized positive uplifting things! And now it's all --

ROXY

For not knowing dirt you sure talk a heap!

THE HOST

I want to understand loss. Losing. Why the women who ran lost and what they have in common and -

ROXY

Vicky lost touch with God and got too big. Story over.

THE HOST

You also tried to blackmail Vanderbilt so he cut them off. And you would pawn her jewelry and steal her things.

ROXY

What possessions? Wasn't she a communist then? Communists say possessions are all the people's possessions and possessions aren't worth nothing so I just took her possessions to sell to non communists who think possessions are worth something! I was saving her! Her husband was a right heathen! Also he hit me.

THE HOST

The court found that he did not -

ROXY

Court of men! Men looking out for men. I thought you was on the woman's side -

THE HOST

I'm on the side of ... it's not. Victoria --

ANTHONY

You must get back to the main story!

THE HOST

Susan B. Anthony, you're still here?

ROXY

She blends with the wallpaper.

ANTHONY

Tell the part about the blackmail.

ROXY

Mine?

ANTHONY

No Victoria! Against the movement! To support her run!

BUCK

Where the hell is everyone? Roxy!

ROXY

Buck that you?

BUCK

Who the hell else!

CANNING

Hachacha looks like a group grope, just what Doc Canning ordered!

*It starts getting out of control overlapping. All the characters start to pour in.*

BLOOD

You must focus on the politics. This is all a distraction.

ROXY

Shut up Blood!

THE HOST

Please just --



TENNIE

Fine mess -

STANTON

You must get to the trial!

BUCK

I got a miracle cure! Who wants a bottle?

*All wanting to get their own points across and discussion. It overlaps into a cacophony of sound and fury.*

THE HOST

ENOUGH! ENOUGH! ENOUGH! This is my show! This is my story to tell! I will do it! GO AWAY!

(Beat.)

The women's movement was a noble cause run by mortal people. When they started to ice out Victoria, because of her checkered past and lack of antecedents Stanton vented to Woodhull about Blackwell's affairs. Patton's dalliances. Phebe Hanaford was leaving her husband. All the dirt. All the same problems that they rubbed Victoria's nose in, they were also living. And Victoria remembered because she was good at remembering. So when she ran for president she sent all of these women personal notes saying that they must support her or her newspaper would publish all their dirty laundry. It was cruel and nasty. But at the same time she was financially ruined. She was desperate, angry, it felt like the spirits abandoned her. Where was this future that was promised? She would win the presidency and then the world. But now the world was coming undone.

(Beat.)

And so it built, her anger, and finally she decided to publish a story against all the hypocrisy of the men of the city and society. She wrote an article about a debauched party that was held every year where men of society and women would wear masks and ... it's a terrible story. She and Tennie witnessed two upper class men of note rape, repeatedly, two young teenagers who they got drunk to unconsciousness. And then she wrote -

VICTORIA

"And this scoundrel to prove he had seduced the maiden carried for days on his finger exhibiting in triumph the red trophy of her virginity ..."

THE HOST

That phrase -

VICTORIA

"The red trophy of her virginity." It's from Deuteronomy.

THE HOST

But it's Biblical pedigree did not prevent it from being called obscenity. Many of the Woodhull Claflin newspapers were sold via subscription and mailed out. So moral crusader Anthony Comstock used a little known postal law against mailing obscenity to have Victoria and Tennie arrested. This law never before was enforced. But they were arrested and jailed on Election Day for mailing pornographic material. And so it was. The end of the campaign. The end of her place as a hero of women's rights. The end of her money. And what can we learn? Jailed for exposing terrible men. What is the lesson? Why did we forget her? A whole generation of good and bad huge highs terrible lows. An American story. A woman's story. And she's gone. Why? Why? In all of this what is there? Anything? Courage? Bribery? What do you need? What do we lack? In all this? Of taking all of these stories that contradict, change, full of ... shit. All this shit. What do you do with it?

VICTORIA

Weigh it on the great scale. The lies. Mine. Yours. The run. History is not made by gods. It's made by cowards. Compromise. Accidents. Good intentions. Bad moods. What was real was what it was. Take it all and place it against a feather. What do you see?

*A long pause, then --*

THE HOST

Once not long ago I was doing a podcast. Giving out information. Information, you know information, the dirt of forgotten stories heaped down and changing. The myth of their past, their letters, their contradictory accounts. Wreckage of the great ship crashed by these so named Captains of History ... and I saw a woman. So forgotten. Forgotten as a candidate. Mostly. Dirty even between the folds of her eyes. And I held her and I gave her some notice ...

And she looked up and called me "naive." Not uncommon for me. Many try to tell me what I'm doing wrong, but then she called me by name ... And said *I* personally forgot her. It was I who grew up

and went to school and college and never learned her history, my own history.

Yes! Yes. Yes ... I was once angry. I still am. And I thought I was failing. Unlocking all the reasons ... I was ... it was --

(Her words catch.)

In that moment I said "I must be better." And I vowed to work for the uncommon women, the radical women, who did nothing wrong but come into this world. I fight ... for you!

(Long beat.)

Do you believe me? Who's next?

END OF EPISODE

END OF SEASON 1