

Mrs. Whitman's Words for Women

Copyright 2018

Synopsis

In the fall of 1918, three young women meet when they move into the recently built Martha Cook Building, one of the first female dormitories on the campus of the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

As these three navigate a system meant more to develop them into gracious wives and competent hostesses than successful career women, they begin to see and rebel against the limits placed on them. Their ultimate campaign, an effort to illegally distribute information about birth control to factory girls in Detroit, brings results none of them could have anticipated.

Characters

NOTE: All roles are open to actors of any race. Diverse casting is encouraged.

Grace, 17-18 A young woman from rural Michigan who is at the University studying veterinary science. Her family is counting on her to find a husband and marry quickly and well.

Roy, 23-25 Grace's brother, a medical student at the University, married and expecting his first child. He has been charged with finding his sister an appropriate husband as soon as possible.

Lillian, 21 The daughter of a math professor at the University, Lillian is occupying the spot that should have been filled by her brother George, who was killed in action in the war. Grieving, but always looking for light, she isn't quite sure where she fits.

Ida, 18 At the university to study industrial engineering with a plan to eventually "run something," Ida has a big personality and ideas to match. She arrives in Martha Cook arrives with trunks of clothing and an unusual amount of street smarts for a young woman raised in wealth and culture.

Alice, 21 Roy's pregnant wife who finds herself slightly in awe of these University women. She is their age, but she's already made most of the choices that will dictate her life's path. She is envious of how much is open to them.

SCENE 1. September 26, 1918. A Thursday. A dorm room in the two-year-old Martha Cook Building on the University of Michigan campus. This is one of only a few rooms in the building meant to house two students. The beds are made, simply, with Building provided bedding. Immediately outside the door is a small vestibule with a sink. This area is shared with a neighboring room. Outside the vestibule is the main corridor. At rise, GRACE and her brother ROY stand among her boxed things. A college newspaper, the Michigan Daily lays on a shelf somewhere, or maybe ROY holds it.

ROY

I ought to get back to Alice.

GRACE

Of course.

ROY

Write to Father and Mother soon.

GRACE

I will.

ROY

You know how to get to Bethlehem United? On Sunday?

GRACE

Is it hidden?

ROY

Alice and I will arrive at ten minutes to ten. We sit near the front.

GRACE

I don't need to sit with you. I'm not a—

ROY

Sitting with us is mandatory.

GRACE

Why?!?

ROY

Father said so. Those are his exact words.

GRACE

How will he know where I sit?

ROY

He's charged me with seeing to it that this goes smoothly. I'm not going to lie to him.

GRACE

It will go smoothly.

ROY

It will, if you settle down and focus.

GRACE

On my studies.

ROY

Those come easy to you. It's all the rest of—

GRACE

Roy.

ROY

Remember, I'm a short walk away. And Alice is too.

GRACE stares him down.

Are you going to unpack your things?

GRACE

Of course!

ROY

When?

GRACE opens the nearest box and takes a few things from it and throws them on one of the beds.

I don't understand why you're angry with me. I'm on your side. (*GRACE devotes her attentions to unboxing some more of her things, hoping he will take this as a cue to leave*) Just days before we left, Mother went into hysterics. She was going to write to Aunt Clara and send you to St. Louis, to be hired out—as kitchen help! And Father considered it! But **I** insisted that we stay the course, that Michigan would be best for a brain like yours. And with Alice and me nearby, and you in the Martha Cook Building, I promised them all would be well. Think of it! You're probably only the second person to occupy this room! I'm not asking you to sing my praises in the streets, but—

GRACE

(quite measured) I am grateful, Roy. And I am ready to be here . . . on my own.

ROY

I'm glad to hear it, Grace, because this is it. You've really got to do it now. Get out! Meet people!

GRACE

But not attract attention to myself. Not cause a ruckus. Find a way to fit.

ROY

Shouldn't be hard here in this building! Bound to be lots of socially adept young women up and down this very hallway! Alice and I will be by early next week. She has plans to bake you a cake.

ROY exits. After a moment, sticks his head back in.

GRACE

What?

ROY

One last bit of advice? You don't need to be serious all the time. The best university girls are the ones who know how to have a little fun. Oh! And when someone gives you a green ribbon, you must wear it, on your wrist, or pinned to your dress. Everyday.

GRACE

What? Why?

ROY

It lets people know you're a freshman.

GRACE

Who wants to know?

ROY

Everybody.

ROY exits. After a moment, sticks his head back in.

ROY

One last thing.

GRACE

Déjà vu.

ROY

(picking up the paper, shaking it gently) The Women's news section is just about a half column, always on page two!

GRACE

...

ROY

Referencing a newspaper article is an easy and inoffensive way to start a conversation.

GRACE

...

ROY

Alice and I will be by, say the second day of class. You can tell me about your professors. And any interesting friends you've made—

GRACE

Go!

ROY exits. After a moment, GRACE finds her textbooks and lays them out on the empty bed. LILLIAN enters from the vestibule, a small booklet in her hand, a green ribbon pinned to her dress. LILLIAN is an old soul, the kind of person you have to stand close to in order to find out that she has a sense of humor. Through parts of the following exchange, GRACE is opening and perusing her textbooks.

LILLIAN

Has he left?

GRACE

Roy? Yes!

LILLIAN

That wasn't your father?

GRACE

Oh no, my brother, Roy. He's here as well, in the medical school.

LILLIAN

I'm Lillian, Lillian Dodsley.

GRACE

I'm Grace McBride. *(noting LILLIAN's ribbon)* Oh, you've got yours?

LILLIAN

Yes. I was accosted on University and told to wear it at all times. I'm not quite sure what it's about.

GRACE

It marks you as a freshman.

LILLIAN

I think my being nervous about everything ought to do that just fine. Strike that. It's a privilege to be here.

GRACE

So, you're mine? I mean, are we sharing this room?

LILLIAN

(taking the ribbon off, futzing with it) Oh no. I'm next door. I share your sink. Connected to you, but by myself.

GRACE

Only a few doubles in the whole building, I understand.

LILLIAN

I wanted a roommate, but my father thought I'd be more likely to succeed academically with the fewest possible distractions. And also, the flu.

GRACE

Oh, the flu isn't here.

LILLIAN

Not yet.

GRACE

I can study just about anywhere, but my brother told my father I'd be more socially engaged if I had a roommate. He's right, to my strong displeasure. I wonder what she'll be like.

LILLIAN

You have to be a certain kind of girl to live in this building.

GRACE

Oh, I know. The application took ages. But my father didn't want me in a League House.

LILLIAN

The application?

GRACE

Yes! Well, it wasn't long, but they wanted friends as references! And "Preferably from Ann Arbor," they said! I don't know anyone here except my brother and his wife! I've never left Edmore before now!

LILLIAN

I didn't fill out an application. (*GRACE is aghast*) Maybe my father did it for me. We had a difficult summer. This is nice, these windows. You get a lot of light. (*picking up the paper*) Is this today's?

GRACE

I think so. My brother picked it up on our way here. He thinks reading it every day will make me interesting.

LILLIAN

There are instructions on how to make an influenza mask! Right on the front page!

GRACE

That's going overboard, don't you think?

LILLIAN

Is it? Maybe. No local deaths reported. And it says right here there aren't even any cases on campus. So why would we make masks? (*flipping paper*) Hmmmm.

GRACE

What are you looking for?

LILLIAN

Sometimes they list the local soldiers who've died, University men.

GRACE

Oh. Do you have a boyfriend over there?

LILLIAN

No, but sometimes I know someone. I've lived here in Ann Arbor all my life. (*closing the paper*) Your window is so much bigger than mine. You get a lot of light.

GRACE

Are you an artist?

LILLIAN

No. I mean . . . not the drawing kind. I do play music.

GRACE

Oh! Are you studying music here?

LILLIAN

No. Literature. To teach it. You?

GRACE

Veterinary Science. I'm going to be the kind of animal doctor that travels from farm to farm, and all that. I'm going to travel all over Michigan. I'm very good with animals.

LILLIAN

Dogs and cats?

GRACE

Yes. And cows, pigs. Horses and goats. My family farms.

LILLIAN

Oh. My family teaches. I mean, my father does. Here. He's a professor of mathematics.

GRACE

Then why are you in Martha Cook? Isn't your family nearby?

LILLIAN

A short walk. Twenty minutes or so.

GRACE

You didn't want to live at home?

LILLIAN

My mother needs quiet. I wasn't even meant to be here, really. I shouldn't say that. It's a privilege—

She is interrupted by an absurdly loud THUNK from the hall and a shouted "Damnation!" to which both women respond with wide eyes. GRACE's manner changes as she realizes the owner of the voice might be the roommate for whom she is waiting. GRACE gestures to LILLIAN to peek out the door. LILLIAN does.

Need help?

IDA

(OS) All kinds!

LILLIAN exits into the hall and a moment later, holds the door open and in comes IDA, carrying too many bags.

IDA

How on earth did you get all your things up here?

GRACE

Brother.

LILLIAN

Father.

IDA

Then this may be something of an uphill battle. (*big breath*) I'm Ida Kettering.

GRACE

Grace McBride.

LILLIAN

Lillian Dodsley.

IDA

Are we to fit three in here?

LILLIAN

Oh, no! I'm next door, by myself. Connected, though. I share—

GRACE

She shares our sink, yes. I'm with you, in here.

IDA

Wonderful. (*stands and moves to door*) Don't touch anything. I've all kinds of illicit materials and wouldn't want you to be scandalized. Once more, unto the breach, dear friends! (*exits*)

GRACE

Oh my.

LILLIAN

She's . . . something.

GRACE

She's a tornado. Did you hear her swear in the hall?

LILLIAN

Who could've missed it?

GRACE

They won't let her stay if they hear her talk like that.

LILLIAN

It will be up to you to teach her some manners!

GRACE

Me?!?

LILLIAN

(reading from the small booklet, *The Martha Cook Handbook*) The Martha Cook Building philosophy is that we exert a combined influence on one another.

GRACE

What am I supposed to—? I can't stop her swearing!

LILLIAN

Then they might kick you out too!

GRACE

If they try, I'll tell them you're the one who taught her all those words!

LILLIAN

Yes—that's our combined influence! (*a light moment*) "Illicit materials?" Was she being serious?

GRACE

Of course not. She's trying to shock us. I bet she's from a big city.

LILLIAN

You can always sit in my room.

GRACE

Maybe she'll be good for me. I don't . . . attract people.

LILLIAN

I think you're nice.

GRACE

I shouldn't have said "people," I should have said "men," or "suitors," I suppose.

LILLIAN

Do you want suitors?

GRACE

I don't want to be "worried about." My parents say, "We worry about Grace." All of Edmore is "worried about" me.

LILLIAN

Edmore, Michigan?

GRACE

Yes, smack in the middle of the mitten. It's going to be my hub when I'm doctoring—

LILLIAN

I've heard of that place.

GRACE

I don't think you have. What with me and Roy and Alice gone, they've lost a significant percentage of the population!

LILLIAN

(laughing) It's where they found Noah's diary!

GRACE

How did you know about that?

LILLIAN

My brother George found a pamphlet in our neighbor's attic years ago that said that just one hundred thirty miles from Ann Arbor someone had found ancient Eastern artifacts! Hieroglyphics and all! Right off the bat my father told him they were forgeries. It made absolutely no sense to think that ancient Egyptians lived in Michigan. But George believed.

GRACE

So did I!

LILLIAN

And on the last page it said that they had found a copy of Noah's diary! The very man who built the ark had kept a diary and left it in Edmore, Michigan. *(GRACE laughs)* George was fascinated. He wrote letters to the author of the pamphlet, who never wrote back, and to some officials in Edmore, who did and kindly said it couldn't be proved one way or the other.

GRACE

And then it was.

LILLIAN

How old was I? Thirteen?

GRACE

I was ten.

LILLIAN

And they made an announcement. Everything was fake, officially.

GRACE

Oh, it was horrible. My little heart broke. But it got me thinking a lot about the Bible, about the unlikelihood of all those Old Testament stories being empirically true.

LILLIAN

Did you become a pagan?

GRACE

I became a reader. I practically moved into our town library, eventually had them borrowing things for me from all over the state—Charles Darwin, John Herschel, Hermann Gunkel, very eye-opening.

LILLIAN

My goodness.

GRACE

How did George take it, all of it being fake?

LILLIAN

He focused on discovering how the researchers knew the objects were forgeries. He wrote many, many letters. He was just about to turn eleven and declared his intention to become an archaeologist.

GRACE

Wonderful! Is he succeeding?

LILLIAN

No, that didn't come to pass. *(she pins the ribbon back on)*

GRACE

You're going to wear the ribbon?

LILLIAN

I'm not very good at breaking rules.

IDA

(entering with several bags) One more trip ought to do it. *(noticing that GRACE's things are on both beds)* So, kind friend, do I get the floor or the hallway?

SCENE 2. That evening.

ROY

Dear Father,

We are settling in well here. Alice and I are in our own house, just outside of campus. What I call “small,” my darling wife calls “cozy.” She is feeling much better now that she has reached her sixth month (forgive the indiscretion) and she continues to dream of a Christmas baby. My classes begin soon, but we are hoping to host a few of the other medical students and their wives for a luncheon before things get too busy.

Campus is rather chaotic, what with the Student Army Training Corps soldiers moving in. The SATC is an operation that, by and large, seems poorly planned and constantly under amendment. Of course, I have grown up with stories of Uncle Roy, God rest his soul, as the model of the ideal military man. These directionless layabouts couldn’t hold a candle to our Spanish-American War hero. How I wish I could’ve known him, and how I wish this absurd injury hadn’t kept me from joining the fray!

The Government has required the University to switch from the traditional academic calendar to trimesters to accommodate a military training schedule, and no one seems to be confident about things like holiday breaks, exam dates, etc. I know only that classes will start next week, in October, and the term will end in February. It is not something over which I can exert any influence, so I must leave it to a higher power and trust that it will work itself out.

I left Grace just a few hours ago. I have yet to meet her roommate, but the Martha Cook Building is just as described, and I can assure you now that going out of your way to secure money to put her there was worth it. The Building rule is that fathers and brothers are allowed upstairs with the permission of Miss Mack, the House Director. I secured that permission and had her introduce me to the maid who runs the elevator, so please tell Mother not to worry any further. I shall have ready access to check on Grace and keep her focus where it ought to be. I instructed her to meet Alice and me for the 10 o’clock service at Bethlehem United this Sunday. I can’t say precisely why, but I have a great sense of clam about the situation. God has put Grace here, and all will be well.

Of course, I have not forgotten what you and I discussed. While she is still up to it, Alice will help me put Grace in the path of eligible young men. Given what I have seen of her building mates and environment, I am sure she will grow quickly into a charming hostess, the kind of young woman that will attract suitable callers. I recognize that our time is limited. I reminded her to write.

Give Mother my best.

Sincerely,
Roy

SCENE 3. Thursday, October 3. The dorm room. GRACE remains partially unpacked and is deeply engaged with a text book. A small, covered basket sits on IDA's side. IDA takes an apple from her pocket and puts it in the basket, then snaps something up off of her bed, about the size of a wedding table place-card and hands it to GRACE.

GRACE

(taking in what's on the card) Who's Helen? Do you know her?

IDA

Who?

GRACE

Helen B. Happy. It's a funny name. Is that someone you know?

IDA

Grace!

GRACE

What?

IDA

Read it out loud.

GRACE

(reading) "Work like Helen B. Happy."

IDA

Don't you hear it?

GRACE

What? *(reading)* "Work like Helen B. Happy."

IDA

Work like hell and be happy!

GRACE

What? Oh! *(handing the card back to IDA)* That's clever.

IDA

You keep it. I think you need the reminder.

GRACE

What?

IDA

You've got the work part down, but you're not having any fun.

GRACE

(holding up her text) This makes me happy. This is my fun. *(IDA sighs, exasperated)* Ida, I've got four years, and I figure if I buckle down for the first two, after that I'll start on the other stuff. Clubs, and boyfriends, and all that. Once I'm sure that nothing can sidetrack me from finishing.

IDA

You lovely, level-headed, academic angel. Did you read the Daily? Did you see we have to choose a sport?

GRACE

What?

IDA

In the Daily, it said Freshman Girls have to choose a sport. The choices are archery, field hockey, tennis and military marching.

GRACE

I don't want to do any of those. Time-wasters, all.

IDA

You've got to pick one.

GRACE

What are you doing?

IDA

Archery, of course.

GRACE

Why?

IDA

To vanquish my enemies. *(GRACE laughs, IDA poses, strikingly well)* I'm Artemis, the goddess of the hunt.

GRACE

It'll be military marching for me. No goddess for that, I suppose. *(a glance toward the basket)* Why are you hoarding food?

IDA

I'm not hoarding.

GRACE

The last three days you've been sneaking food up here from meals.

IDA

I'm taking a trip.

GRACE

Where are you going?

IDA

Detroit.

GRACE

Alone?

IDA

Yes.

GRACE

Why?

IDA

I'm to meet someone.

GRACE

Family?

IDA

No.

GRACE

Friend?

IDA

Not yet.

GRACE

How are you getting there?

IDA

The train. That's what the snacks are for.

GRACE

I see. You're leaving school, hopping on a train to travel, what? How far? A hundred miles?

IDA

Half that.

GRACE

Fifty miles to a strange city. You've not been there before?

IDA

No.

GRACE

Arriving in a strange city, making your way to—a home? Or an office?

IDA

Home.

GRACE

The home of a man who—

IDA

Woman.

GRACE

Woman?

IDA

Perhaps a man lives there too, but I'm going to see a woman. Her name is Ruby Zahn.

GRACE

You show up at the door of Ruby Zahn, and then what?

IDA

Have a conversation.

GRACE

In which?

IDA

In which I try to convince her to do something.

GRACE

Convince her to do what?

IDA

Say, what do you make of Lillian?

GRACE

Don't change the subject.

IDA

I must. What do you make of Lillian?

GRACE

If you're not going to answer my question, I'm going back to reading.

IDA

We're only two days in! You can't possibly be behind yet!

GRACE

I'm not! But I want to be ahead!

IDA

The best part of living in a building full of women is that you learn about each other and lift each other up. I'm not trying to gossip. I sincerely want to know.

GRACE

She's fine. She seems to be making an effort to convince herself that she wants to be here. And sad. She seems a little sad.

IDA

Yes. Yes, she does. I agree. Why?

GRACE

She seemed very fixated on finding the names of dead people in the paper.

IDA

Oh. I meant what's the cause of her sadness, not what evidence you have for your opinion.

GRACE

It's not our place to—I tried not to speculate, but—

IDA

Is she unmoored? Listing through her days with no direction or purpose?

GRACE

(amused) I don't think so!

IDA

Play along! Is she devastatingly lonely?

GRACE

Maybe?

IDA

Longing for the companionship of some long-lost chum?

GRACE

Like someone from school? Or a favorite cousin who died!

IDA

Oh, yes! Perhaps she's wallowing in the depths of grief!

GRACE

That seems the most likely.

IDA

I'm going to find out.

GRACE

How?

IDA

I'm going to ask her.

GRACE

(snidely) People don't always answer the questions they're asked.

IDA

She shouldn't be alone, just sitting in her room, by herself. There was a girl once who everyone thought was snobbish and rude. All the girls around her took to ignoring her after their early overtures were met with silence. It went on for weeks until one day one of them heard her singing—in perfect French! She had only just arrived in the States! She didn't speak a word of English.

GRACE

Lillian speaks beautiful English.

IDA

Of course she does! My point is that we can't let her push us away just because she's shy and sad.

GRACE

Her father thought she'd do better with her studies if she wasn't distracted.

IDA

Fathers! What do they know? We'll make her an honorary resident of this room. We will take her in. What do you say?

GRACE

Lillian might not want that.

IDA

Of course she does. I've suffered tragedy and I've been taken in and I can tell you that there are few better feelings than knowing someone wants you.

GRACE

(highly incredulous) You've suffered tragedy? Tell me, dear friend, who took you in?

IDA

I'm going to tell you something. You should prepare yourself adequately. I don't share this with everyone and I don't want my reputation to precede me here on campus. My life is like a Frances Hodgson Burnett story. You know those?

GRACE

"The Secret Garden?"

IDA

Yes. And "A Little Princess."

GRACE

I read that one too!

IDA

Things happen to me. Things have always just happened to me. I bet you think nothing much has happened to you.

GRACE

You might—

IDA

Maybe it has, maybe it hasn't. You can recount your life for me sometime and I can help you figure out what has happened to you.

GRACE

Perhaps I will.

IDA

As far as I go, a lot has happened to me. Elizabeth Deeds, "Aunt Elizabeth," to me, took me under her wing a few years back. I'd been orphaned and—

GRACE

Oh no! Ida, I shouldn't have joked—

IDA

I made a go of it on my own for a short while. I think Aunt Elizabeth admired my resourcefulness, but she wasn't comfortable with the way things were, and she made room for me. She is a widow, and childless, and I intend to follow in her footsteps when I finish here. It's like a book, really. Or it will be, once I get to the triumphant ending.

GRACE

It's just like a book. (*IDA laughs*) Follow her footsteps into what?

IDA

Her husband Martin, several years deceased—

GRACE

Your uncle?

IDA

(*ignoring the question*) Martin owned a machine parts factory which converted to making airplane parts once the US joined the war. Dayton Manufacturing, it's called. When he died it became hers. And someday, I'd like it to be mine.

GRACE

You're not going to fly planes?

IDA

No. Well, perhaps. But I'm to study Industrial Psychology.

GRACE

What's that?

IDA

It gives insight into the mind of the worker. It examines the best methods for maximizing productivity.

GRACE

Is that why you're going to Detroit? To look at Ford's factories?

IDA

No. It has nothing to do with that. Well, not in the way you're thinking. When I do run a factory, I'm going to do it on my own, and fairly. And, in a roundabout way, the trip does have something to do with that. I want to depend only on myself and my ability. Fathers, uncles, husbands, nephews—

GRACE

You've got nephews?

IDA

No. But men, in general . . . are not to be relied upon. Independence is the aim.

GRACE

I think I could be independent if I was a travelling veterinarian.

IDA

Is Roy going to let you do that? Is your father?

GRACE

I'm here, aren't I? (*IDA concedes*) I feel a bit guilty about how little I miss home.

IDA

Nuts to that! You're getting ready to do amazing things!

GRACE

Don't be ridiculous.

IDA

You are! You're going to do amazing veterinary things! You're going to save species from going extinct! Bring back species that we've already lost! You're going to argue with God!

GRACE

As much as I like that idea, Ida, I need to focus.

IDA

Look where we are! The world is laid out before us, and we can take it for our own.

GRACE

Do you really think we can?

(a knock at the door)

IDA

Visitors?

GRACE

I'll open it.

IDA

Maybe it's Lillian.

GRACE

If it is, don't ask her why she's sad.

IDA

Fine. I won't ask—today. But our taking her in begins . . . right . . . now!

GRACE flings open the door to find ROY and a pregnant-but-barely-showing ALICE. ALICE is holding a covered cake plate.

GRACE

Roy! Alice! I forgot you were coming. Ida, this is my brother, Roy McBride, and his wife, Alice. Roy, Alice, this is my roommate Ida Kettering.

ROY

Miss Kettering, how do you do?

IDA

(put her hand forward to shake, perhaps ROY thinks she means for him to kiss it, and there is a moment of discombobulation when she grabs his hand and shakes it) How do you do, Mr. McBride? Mrs. McBride, lovely to meet you.

ALICE

Likewise. Grace, I brought you a cake.

GRACE

Alice, how sweet of you!

IDA

Do I smell lemon? Lemon is my favorite.

ALICE

There's lemon in it, and limes and oranges.

IDA

Father, son and holy citrus!

GRACE chuckles before realizing that neither ROY nor ALICE has found this funny.

GRACE

It sounds wonderful.

ROY

How's the food here?

GRACE
Very nice.

IDA
Passable.

GRACE

Ida's used to finer things. She's fancy!

IDA

Oh, not as fancy as you might think! Cook just took a liking to me and made my favorites when I asked! Let me see if Lillian is in! We shouldn't have cake without Lillian!

IDA exits.

ROY

Cook?

GRACE

She's wealthy. Her aunt owns Dayton Manufacturing in Ohio. Ida lives with her.

ROY

Where are her parents?

GRACE

She's an orphan! Things happen to her.

ALICE

Oh, that's awful.

ROY

She seems to have made out just fine.

GRACE

She's interesting.

IDA returns with LILLIAN, who seems loathe to interfere.

IDA

Mr. and Mrs. McBride, this is our neighbor Lillian Dodsley.

ROY

How do you do? Any relation to the mathematics professor?

LILLIAN

Yes, he's my father.

ROY

He's a tough one, but I learned a lot. Got top marks, too.

ALICE

Roy.

ROY

What? That's not something to be ashamed of.

IDA

I don't think he teaches anything I need. Lillian, we may remain friends!

ROY

Grace, tell me, how's it all been going? Have you read the Daily today?

GRACE

Yes. I noted the flu prevention advice: "Avoid sneezing people." Seems to me by the time you know a person is sneezing, it's a little late to—

LILLIAN

A Michigan alum died of the flu in Ohio.

ROY

Hasn't made it this far, though. We're all right.

LILLIAN

They're planning to close all the theaters! To prevent it spreading!

ROY

That's precautionary.

LILLIAN

(*to ROY*) Have you been able to find the war deaths listed? I haven't been able to find them.

ROY

They list them under the heading "For Liberty," when there are any to show.

LILLIAN

I know that, but I haven't seen—

ROY

Won't be long now, til the war is over. (*to GRACE*) I asked because there was an item about the new French professor coming. She's going to run a Cercle Francais. That might be good for you, Grace.

GRACE

My French isn't nearly good enough for that!

IDA

Mon français est excellent! (*the words are correct, the pronunciation is abysmal*) I can get you up to speed and we can go together.

ROY

How kind. Are you studying French?

IDA

Mais, non. I know it already! A dear friend from home is a native speaker.

ROY

That's fine!

IDA

I'm in Industrial Psychology.

ALICE

That sounds daunting.

ROY

A relatively new program, and I don't believe there are many girls in it.

IDA

Oh, no! I'm the only one of the first years. And only the third all together.

ROY

Is that right? What do you expect to do when you leave here?

IDA

Run something! Aunt Elizabeth's got a factory, building airplane parts, but who knows what it'll convert to when the war is over!

ROY

Grace mentioned that! What was it, Dayton Manufacturing? And your aunt is the owner?

IDA

She is. She was partnered in it with her husband before he passed.

ALICE

I'm sorry for your loss.

IDA

Thank you.

ROY

Well, aren't you a pip!

IDA

A pip? Maybe. I'm just trying to keep my head above water in these classes.

ROY

I'm sure you'll do fine. And if you don't—you can change your major to French!

IDA

I will remember that advice come exam time!

ROY

I feel a little sorry for you girls, everything being so topsy-turvy on campus. These military men taking up so much space. I worry you're not getting the traditional Michigan experience.

IDA

We've got to make room for them. Isn't it admirable? Studying and getting ready to fight?

ROY

They don't belong here. They'd be better off in boot camp. Say, has anyone given you a green ribbon?

GRACE

Lillian has one.

ROY

Excellent! Grace, you've got to get into the spirit!

ALICE

Roy, will you go down to the kitchen and see if they've got a cake server we can borrow? And maybe some small plates?

GRACE

I'll go, too, to . . . help.

IDA

Yes. Roy shouldn't be wandering the Building by himself. It's a relatively new building, and I don't believe there are many boys in it.

ROY isn't sure whether he's been insulted, but he chooses to chuckle as he exits with GRACE.

ALICE

There's only one girl in Roy's year in medical school. She fainted on the first day of class and he felt awful about it.

IDA

Did he?

LILLIAN

I used to faint a lot, while I was gardening. It was a bit scary, the first few times.

IDA

And did anyone suggest you should stop gardening forever, that you weren't cut out for it?

LILLIAN

Of course not. My mother would bring me a glass of water and I would sit in the shade for a bit.

IDA

There are still people who don't want women to be doctors, or business owners and they will cling to the most meaningless anecdote to support their argument.

ALICE

Roy doesn't think that! He just wondered if this particular girl was really cut out for medicine.

IDA

I think she ought to be allowed to decide if she is.

ALICE

Of course.

IDA

Does he wonder about his sister's choice of a program? Veterinary Science is mostly men.

ALICE

Oh, no! You should see Grace with horses, and cows . . . my goodness, even the ducks. They flock to her! And she's only She should spend her time here doing what she enjoys.

IDA

I think that's what we're all trying to do. Looking around a factory floor, trying to see how things could be better, I get excited. When Grace tends farm animals, I'm sure she feels the same way. And when Lillian—what do you do?

LILLIAN

I read novels.

IDA

That's not a good example, unless you read with wild abandon. (*LILLIAN shakes her head no*) We deserve the opportunity to pursue things we are passionate about.

Roy would never—
ALICE

Alice, I'm sorry we upset you.
LILLIAN

Oh, I'm fine. The baby makes me tired, though.
ALICE

I'm sorry, Alice. I get . . . enthused.
IDA

No apology necessary.
ALICE

I didn't realize you were in a delicate condition.
IDA

The corset helps.
ALICE

ROY and GRACE return with a cake slicer.

Shall we have cake?
GRACE

SCENE 4. Tuesday, October 15. ROY alone.

ROY

Father,

We are two weeks into the term and things are going well. My professors are exceptional, and I am besting their expectations. If I am unable to be on the front, facing down the Huns, I resolve to finish this year as the best new doctor in Michigan.

Ann Arbor remains a haven from the spread of Spanish influenza. There is no indication that it will hit here as it has in so many other places. The only cases reported locally seem to be among the SATC men. Living in such close quarters, and with such low regard for hygiene, they pass the virus from man to man unimpeded. Those infected are quarantined though, and there have been no fatalities. Alice and I continue to pray for the afflicted and for protection for ourselves and those we love.

I have met Grace's roommate and she is an interesting person. Ida Kettering, niece, and apparent ward, of the lady-owner of Dayton Manufacturing in Ohio, is a strong contrast to our beloved Grace. Being raised by a widowed aunt in a situation of privilege has had some effect on her character. She is high-spirited and a little bit forward, but perhaps these are the exact qualities we need to draw Grace into a life of engagement and activity. I will note that when we first arrived for our visit, Grace did not have her nose in a text, and seemed in tune with her new friend's lively demeanor. Miss Kettering is pursuing a degree in Industrial Psychology, a relatively new field, that, in all honesty, seems to me like a lot of mumbo jumbo. She has an eye to taking over the factory when her aunt's time is finished. Can you imagine? What husband would endorse such a pursuit? What children would take pride in their mother roaming a factory floor, face smudged with grease, hair blown about by exhaust fans? To come to the University of Michigan only to end up a factory girl. It's quite laughable. Alice and I agree that by the end of term this February, Miss Kettering may well have adjusted her course of study to focus on something more practical and suitable for a young woman of means.

I will keep a close eye on the situation, perhaps deploying Alice, who seems to get lonely while I am at class, on missions of espionage.

My regards to Mother.

Roy

SCENE 5. Wednesday, October 16. IDA alone, reading a pamphlet or newsletter, something clearly not a textbook. After a moment, GRACE enters, in her gym suit. She looks, and feels, ridiculous.

IDA

Marching go well?

GRACE

You're back!

IDA

You look quite serious. You're a top student, you say?

GRACE

You missed your classes.

IDA

The train ran late.

GRACE

Did you have your conversation with Ruby Zahn?

IDA

You remembered her name.

GRACE

Of course I did. And?

IDA

I need to go back.

GRACE

When?

IDA

I wanted to go again this coming weekend, but the flu seems to be taking hold there. They are preparing to shut all the public buildings down. I'll wait until it passes.

GRACE

Don't tell Lillian. She'll have you quarantined. What are you reading?

IDA

Are you going to change?

GRACE

They won't let me sit down for dinner in the Dining Room looking like a puffed up sailor! (*IDA laughs*) But first I need to look something up. I was reciting the bones of the hand while I marched and I think I missed one.

GRACE takes a text from the shelf and flips to a page marked with the "Helen B. Happy" card.

Work like hell and be happy.

IDA

That's right.

GRACE

It should be easy for me. Working like hell is what makes me happy!

IDA

So?

GRACE

There are things I want to learn, and do and try, but I'm required to march around a field for hours in order to, what? Bolster my strength? Ward off the flu?

IDA

Someday you'll determine your own path, every single day, and your time will be spent as you like it. It won't always be easy, but it will always be good.

GRACE

My brother and Alice are pestering me about meeting this boy from Roy's class.

IDA

Tell them you don't want to.

GRACE

I have! Another wasted afternoon pursuing something I don't even want. Yet.

IDA

Well, you could just go and be rude.

GRACE

I don't want to upset Alice, or Roy, to be honest. I know they care about me.

IDA

Then why won't they listen? (*GRACE shrugs*) We have to exert the little control we have, Grace.

GRACE

I just . . . Roy seems to think I'm missing out on the whole Michigan experience by not meeting boys and being courted. But he thinks the Michigan experience is the same for everyone, and I think it won't be the same for me.

IDA

Will he come around?

GRACE

I'm not Alice. Alice is fine, but I'm not Alice.

IDA

I like Alice.

GRACE

Oh, so do I.

IDA

But I don't want the same things she wants. And neither do you. You're rather unconventional.

GRACE

I am not. (*IDA laughs*) I'm not!

IDA

I picture you, five or six years from now, riding a horse from town to town—or maybe an automobile!—pulling up to City Hall, and announcing that Dr. McBride is here to see anyone who requires her services.

GRACE

Dr. McBride, in her automobile!

IDA

And the people in each town will be so glad to see you because their animals need help and you've got all the answers.

GRACE

And where's my husband?

IDA

If you've got him—

GRACE

If I've got him!

IDA

—he’s stayed at home watching the babies, while you make your rounds!

GRACE

I’ve gone off, without my husband and children, riding from town to town, in a Model-T, fixing animals?

IDA

Absolutely.

GRACE

I’ve just spat in the face of every expectation?

IDA

(flipping to a page in her pamphlet) I think you’re one who’s meant “To look the whole world in the face with a go-to-hell look in the eyes; to have an ideal; to speak and set in defiance of convention.”

GRACE

What is that? What are you reading?

(a knock at the door)

Who is that? Ida, what are you reading?

IDA

Nothing. Answer the door.

GRACE

I want to know what that was about.

(knocking)

IDA

It’s about you. I’ll tell you later, I promise.

ALICE

(OS) Are you here? Grace?

GRACE

One moment! *(to IDA)* Don’t show that to Alice.

IDA widens her eyes, tucks the sheet away. GRACE opens the door.

Alice! Hello!

ALICE

(entering) You look well, Grace. Hello, again, Miss Kettering.

IDA

Please, let's make it "Ida."

ALICE

Then "Alice" as well.

IDA

Thank you, Alice.

ALICE

I've come for my cake plate. Do you have it?

IDA

Oh, yes! We've got it. We finished the cake in Lillian's room and washed the plate. I think we may have left it there. I'll see.

IDA exits.

ALICE

Are you all right? You look flushed.

GRACE

I'm fine. I just got back from marching. Then Ida got me worked up . . . laughing. We were laughing.

ALICE

Do you find her funny?

GRACE

Sometimes. I'm getting used to her.

ALICE

Are you ready to step out a little? Roy told you about the young man in his Physiology Laboratory? Michael, I think he's called.

GRACE

Oh, I don't know. Classes have just really started and there are already so many other obligations, distractions—

ALICE

(talking over her) We're hosting some medical students and their wives Saturday for lunch at our place and Roy and I would like it very much—

IDA enters with the cake plate followed by LILLIAN, carrying her ukulele, down at her side.

IDA

(cutting them both off) We've got it! Clean as a whistle.

ALICE

Hello again, Miss . . . ?

LILLIAN

Dodsley. But "Lillian" is fine.

ALICE

Then "Alice," please.

LILLIAN

Of course.

ALICE

What's that toy guitar?

LILLIAN

(surprised to find the ukulele in her hand) I didn't mean to bring this with me. I was daydreaming, working on something in my room. I should have left it there.

IDA

What on earth is it?

LILLIAN

It's called a ukulele. They're popular in Hawaii.

IDA

You've been to Hawaii?

LILLIAN

No, it's a bit of a story, actually.

GRACE

Tell it!

LILLIAN

My brother George had a friend, James, stationed in Hawaii. James sent it to him from there. When George went overseas, he left it in my care.

ALICE

You'd better write him to buy himself a new one, if you're getting good at playing it! I'd bet he'd like to hear about it!

IDA

Lillian?

LILLIAN

There isn't a way to say this that won't sound abrupt, so I apologize. George was killed at Belleau Wood.

ALICE

Oh! Lillian! (*all motherly instinct, ALICE wraps LILLIAN in her arms*) I'm so very sorry.

*A moment of love and comfort, but the level of intimacy should feel unusual.
ALICE has, with the kindest of hearts, crossed a line.*

I'm sorry, my manners, I don't know what—

IDA

That was just a few months ago, the beginning of the summer.

LILLIAN

(*only slightly emotional*) It's all right. We're proud of him.

ALICE

I'm sure you are. And what a beautiful thing, to be learning to play the instrument he left you. May we hear something?

LILLIAN

Oh, I don't know.

GRACE

Please, Lillian?

IDA

I'd like to hear it. I've never seen one of those.

LILLIAN

I mostly play silly songs.

ALICE

That might be good, right now, if you can muster it.

LILLIAN

All right.

LILLIAN prepares to play, and the others assemble themselves as an audience. She begins to play. Even before she starts singing, the transformation is remarkable. With the wall of an instrument between her and others, LILLIAN is a much more relaxed communicator, and funny. She plays and sings, "He'd Have to Get Under—Get Out and Get Under." If the actress playing IDA is capable, she might join in and sing harmony a little ways into the song, perhaps after shouting, "Oh! I know this one!" By the middle of the verse, the others are laughing and by the line "to fix his little machine," they are wonderfully scandalized and doubled over.

LILLIAN

(singing)

Johnny O'Connor bought an automobile
 He took his sweetheart for a ride one Sunday
 Johnny was togged up in his best Sunday clothes
 She nestled close to his side
 Things went just dandy till he got down the road
 Then something happened to the old machinery
 That engine got his goat
 Off went his hat and coat
 Everything needed repairs.

He'd have to get under
 Get out and get under
 To fix his little machine
 He was just dying to cuddle his queen
 But every minute when he'd begin it
 He'd have to get under
 Get out and get under
 Then he'd get back at the wheel
 A dozen times they'd start to hug and kiss
 And then the darned old engine it would miss
 Then he'd have to get under
 Get out and get under
 And fix up his automobile.

Millionaire Wilson said to Johnny one day—

ALICE stands.

ALICE

(laughing and holding her small baby belly) Please stop! Please stop! You're wonderful, Lillian! But I can't take it! Excuse me!

*ALICE exits, just out to the sink, maybe we hear here splash water on her face.
LILLIAN looks after her, smiling a smile that reaches her eyes.*

GRACE

Lillian! She's right! You're wonderful!

IDA

You're a star! You have to play for the Building!

LILLIAN

Oh, no!

IDA

Absolutely! You must! I can talk to the Tea Committee! You can play at tea on Friday!

LILLIAN

I don't play in front of people.

IDA

You just played in front of us!

LILLIAN

I mean on a stage, in a show, I don't . . . It's just for me.

GRACE

Thank you for sharing it with us. Maybe you can play us the rest some other time, when Alice isn't . . .

IDA

Great with child!

GRACE

Ida!

IDA

What? It's just us!

ALICE returns.

ALICE

Thank you, Lillian, again. I haven't laughed like that since . . . well, since we arrived for the year I think.

LILLIAN

I'm glad it made you happy.

IDA

I think Lillian should play for the whole building!

ALICE

I think it's nice to have something just for yourself. (*a moment*) I've got to go. Roy will be home soon and we'll need to eat. I'm getting tired earlier and earlier.

GRACE

I should've returned the plate to you.

ALICE

Oh, no! It gave me somewhere to go. It can get lonely in our little house when he's gone to class all day.

LILLIAN

If you'd ever like company . . . ?

ALICE

You're welcome to come down and sit in my little kitchen any time you'd like, Lillian. I think I need to apologize again, for my gesture earlier. My emotions got the best of me. My brother, Adam, is still over there. I pray for him constantly.

LILLIAN

Oh, Alice.

ALICE

May I pray for the repose of George's soul?

LILLIAN

I'd be grateful. I'd like to hear about your brother.

ALICE

Then come and visit me. Grace, Ida, studying tonight?

GRACE

Yes.

IDA

We'll see.

GRACE

Alice, I'll walk you out.

ALICE

Wonderful. We can plan for lunch on Saturday. Goodbye, girls.

GRACE and ALICE exit.

IDA

I think if you managed to get up in front of a crowd just once, Lillian, there'd be no stopping you.

SCENE 6. Sunday, October 20. ROY alone.

Dear Father,

I hope you are doing your best to keep Mother away from the news. One teaching assistant here has died of the flu and the Ag College is under quarantine. However, daily life is normal and the local outlets insist that this is the crest of the disease. As Abraham begged for the city of Sodom, I pray for Michigan. Although with Alice, me, Grace, you and Mother, we are already halfway to the ten required for salvation.

Alice and I did host a luncheon for a few medical students and their wives. One young man who attended, Michael Rhead, may be a good match for Grace. Obviously, he attended without a wife. We invited Grace, but she claimed to be overwhelmed with schoolwork. Mr. Rhead is my age and will be graduating this Spring. Alice says he is reasonably handsome. I shall not let the idea go just yet.

Alice visited Grace earlier this week to retrieve her cake plate and reported back that Grace seems in good spirits. Alice says my original estimation of Ida was accurate, but that I shouldn't worry, and that Ida's ways may just take some getting used to. There are several med in the medical school from industrial juggernauts like Dayton, and I have had no issue with them thus far. However, I will trust Alice's opinion for now and stay out of it, but should anything go awry, I will be speaking to those in power about changing Grace's arrangements.

Alice feels that we are close to convincing Grace that she can balance school and a potential courtship, so we are forging ahead, and plan to host her and Mr. Rhead at our home for tea very soon. Let Mother know that he is from Michigan, so should things work out, we shall all still be together for the holidays.

Send Mother love from Alice and me,

Roy

SCENE 7. Thursday, October 24. The empty room.

GRACE

(OS) Anyone here? I've got my brother along! Ida? Lillian?

GRACE and ROY enter.

ROY

Lillian might be with Alice. I found them drinking lemonade in our kitchen yesterday. I have so many responsibilities, Alice gets lonely. It's good for her to have a friend.

GRACE

Ida's at class, I think. She had plans to take the train to Detroit again, but with the flu—

ROY

Take the train to Detroit? By herself? For what?

GRACE

She knows someone there. A relative, I think, elderly, in need of company. How are your classes? How's the girl who fainted?

ROY

Oh, here's a story you won't find in the Daily! She's pregnant! By one of those SATC buffoons!

GRACE

Oh my!

ROY

She's had to drop out of school, of course. We can hardly have a girl in that state in the medical school!

GRACE

She could have finished the term!

ROY

To what end? She can hardly be a doctor AND a mother! I'm sorry, did you say "again?" Ida's already been to Detroit and back?

GRACE

Yes. Thank you for walking me up. I've got a test in General Pathology tomorrow and I've got the next two hours set aside to study, so . . .

ROY

Funny you bring up Pathology, I've got a paper to turn in Monday on Diseases of the Blood. Mind having a look at it for me?

GRACE

I'm very busy, Roy, but I'll help you with it if you stop talking to me about Michael Rhead.

ROY

Grace! Part of the bargain is that you find a husband while you're here.

GRACE

I know, but no one said I had to find him in the first month!

ROY

All the men like freshmen girls, Grace, because they are new, "fresh."

GRACE

Campus isn't a butcher shop.

ROY

I know. I'm sorry. But it would be good if you could meet someone before—

GRACE

Before word gets out on me?

ROY

There's no one else here from Edmore, but Alice said—

GRACE

It's a very big pond here, Roy. The people in Edmore . . . Edmore is so . . . it's a very small pond.

ROY

And you made a very big splash.

GRACE

You talk like I'm Lady Godiva, riding naked through—

ROY

To some people, you're worse.

GRACE

Don't say that.

ROY

You trampled on the sacred, Grace. I understand what you were trying to say—

GRACE

Do you?

ROY

(*cont*) but you embarrassed your fiancé.

GRACE

We were not engaged.

ROY

He was going to propose.

GRACE

He claimed he found a piece of the Ark! Noah's Ark!

ROY

And who's to say it couldn't have been?

GRACE

Me! Me! I say it couldn't have been!

ROY

On what grounds?

GRACE

On the grounds that there was no Ark, Roy! There was no Ark! It's a myth! Like Zeus, and Achilles and Adam and Eve!

ROY

Are you a heathen now? Is that it? The flood is a myth! Well, is God is a myth?

GRACE

You're studying science, Roy! Look at the evidence! God got mad at people and animals and decided to start over? What about the fish? What about the dolphins? What about the turtles? If God wanted all the animals gone, then He would have drained the oceans too! Or burned everything! Exploded the earth and started over. Genesis is a made-up story, created from oral tradition for a population that was largely illiterate. Have you heard of Hermann Gunkel, Roy? He's written a lot about Genesis, looking at it as a collection of legends and not—(*ROY sighs*) What?

ROY

I love you, Grace, but for the first time, I'm worried that this isn't going to work.

GRACE

Don't say that.

ROY

Do you understand what you did, that day in Church? You laughed at him, in front of people.

GRACE

At best, he was ridiculous. At worst, he was taking advantage of the gullible people in his congregation.

ROY

It wasn't your place to let them know. People don't like show-offs, Grace.

GRACE

Do people ask show-offs to help them with their Diseases of the Blood papers?

ROY

No. Brothers ask sisters to do that.

GRACE

When my intelligence is useful to you, suddenly it's not an embarrassment.

ROY

Are you making many friends?

GRACE

I've got Ida, and Lillian, and I won the Name Game last week. I only mixed up two—Victoria Shaw and Valiera Sheldon!

ROY

What are you talking about?

GRACE

It's a contest. We had it in the Blue Room. You have to name all the girls in the—

ROY

Are you attending things? Going anywhere? Michael Rhead—

GRACE

We're having a Backwards Party on Friday evening.

The sound of the outside door, then water running at the sink. IDA is washing her hands.

ROY

A what?

GRACE

A Backwards Party. It's a dinner, you know, but you do everything backwards—dessert first, and utensils upside down.

Grace—

ROY

GRACE

The girls even said Mackie has to eat with her right hand!

ROY

...

GRACE

She's left-handed.

ROY

Right.

GRACE

It's funny. I'm looking forward to it.

ROY

Are you inviting guests?

GRACE

No. It's just for the Cookies.

ROY

For whom?

GRACE

The Cookies. Us. The residents of the Martha Cook Building.

ROY

Hmm. Well, don't make too much of a night of it. Michael Rhead has accepted our invitation for Saturday afternoon.

GRACE

Oh.

ROY

I've already told Father and Mother that you're meeting him.

GRACE

Why? Roy, why?

ROY

Have you met any men?

GRACE

...

ROY

Well, you're meeting one on Saturday, and if it goes well, you can invite him to something here. Weren't we told there would be events to which guests would be invited? Dances and things?

IDA has entered and has overheard much of this last exchange. Over the next several lines, she locates and gathers her flu mask.

IDA

There will be. Although they'll be informal. Not like the year the Building opened, they've said, because of the war.

ROY

I see.

IDA

I forgot this ridiculous thing. Professor Mathers is adamant we wear them in class. It makes it difficult for everyone to hear my extraordinary ideas.

ROY

I can't imagine you having a problem being heard.

IDA

The Martha Cook Administration thinks it seems insensitive to host a Mock Wedding or a Winter Formal when so many of our young men are fighting abroad, and so many of their family members are worried about them.

GRACE

Lillian's own brother—

IDA

What kept you from the front, Roy?

ROY is taken aback, maybe stumbles with an "I—I—"

Grace can tell me later. I'm nearly late for class.

IDA exits.

GRACE

I'll explain it to her.

ROY

You absolutely will not.

GRACE

But you have a legitimate reason.

ROY

It isn't her business. Our lives are not her business.

GRACE

So what? I'll just tell her you lost your toe.

ROY

And the next time she sees me she'll demand that I take off my shoe and sock and prove it to her. Who does she think she is?

GRACE

It was her way of defending me.

ROY

From what? Me? What was I—?

GRACE

She was acting like my friend, standing up for me.

ROY

She's strange, Grace. You see it, don't you? Do you suspect her Aunt paid her way into the Building? Made a large donation?

GRACE

Don't be ridiculous.

ROY

Does she have a boyfriend?

GRACE

Not that I know of.

ROY

Does Lillian?

GRACE

No, I don't think so.

ROY

Then neither of them is of any practical use to you.

ROY fishes his paper out of his bag.

Can you look at this before tomorrow evening?

GRACE nods.

ROY exits. GRACE may be momentarily overwhelmed. After she collects herself, she takes a look at ROY's paper, as if to sit down with it, then tosses it aside and makes to IDA's side of the room, where she begins to gently poke about to see if she can find the mysterious thing that IDA was reading the other day. She doesn't hear LILLIAN come in. After a moment—

LILLIAN

Grace?

GRACE starts.

GRACE

My brother thought you were with Alice.

LILLIAN

No. We had lemonade yesterday. We might go for a walk tomorrow. I find it very calming to be with her. What are you looking for?

GRACE

Something Ida had. Something I wanted to read. I didn't hear you come in.

LILLIAN

Would you mind if I read in here?

GRACE

Why?

LILLIAN

I don't have to. Just, the way the light comes in, it's . . . nicer and I . . .

GRACE

I'm sorry. Of course you can. Ida's at class.

LILLIAN

My father thinks I don't like to be around people. He thought he was doing me a favor by putting me in there alone. But the truth is, I only ever really had one friend, and when I lost him, I didn't quite know how to be around other people. It's not that I don't like it, it's just that sometimes I don't quite know how to do it.

GRACE

Oh, Lil.

LILLIAN

But being in here, in this building, on this floor, next to you and Ida. It's somehow a little easier than at home.

GRACE

That's good.

LILLIAN

My mother . . . can't tolerate a lot of noise anymore, since George. And we've all gotten used to being quiet—silent, really. So the very first day, when we heard Ida in the hall, and she was swearing, and you and I were laughing, that was the first time I'd felt like myself in months. I laughed like that with George. He was funny.

GRACE

You are, too.

LILLIAN

Really?

GRACE nods. They settle into a quiet moment. LILLIAN reads. GRACE gently pokes through IDA's things, not wanting to really dig in, especially in front of LILLIAN, but she wants to hear that sentence again. GRACE realizes she won't be able to find it, thinks for a moment and then—

GRACE

Did you have boyfriends, in high school?

LILLIAN

No.

GRACE

All right.

LILLIAN

All right.

GRACE

Wasn't anyone worried about you?

LILLIAN

I don't know. George never had girlfriends. I thought maybe we'd just stay in the house together after our parents passed. Now I don't know.

GRACE

Roy and Alice started going together when she was twelve. By the time she was fourteen, everyone knew they'd get married. People in Edmore, including my family, didn't know what to make of me.

LILLIAN

I suppose it's a good thing you came to Ann Arbor.

GRACE

It's a privilege to be here?

LILLIAN

Isn't it?

GRACE

It is. It is. I could've been forced to go a number of places when I was run out of town, but I ended up in the best place I can imagine.

LILLIAN

Run out of town?

GRACE

Sort of, yes. There was a man, Douglas Moore, descended from Edwin Moore, who founded the town. Ed. Moore. Edmore.

LILLIAN

I understand.

GRACE

He was a deacon in our church, and it became sort of understood that he was going to propose marriage to me.

LILLIAN

What did you think of him?

GRACE

I thought I might be able to tolerate him. Until . . .

LILLIAN

Tell it, Grace.

IDA enters, exasperated.

IDA

Professor Mathers has left campus. His son in Minnesota has the flu, and he's gone to be with him.

LILLIAN

Oh no!

IDA

He's expected to recover, that's what the note on the classroom door says, but Mathers won't be back for at least a week. *(a moment)* Did I interrupt?

LILLIAN

Yes, Grace, finish your story. Ida, did you know Grace was to be engaged to a minister?

IDA

I did not! A minister with a wife named Grace! That seems like something that would have garnered Roy's stamp of approval.

GRACE

I ruined it.

IDA

On purpose?

GRACE

No!

LILLIAN

Tell us what happened.

GRACE

He, Douglas—

LILLIAN

(to IDA) The minister.

IDA

I gathered.

GRACE

He was giving a sermon one day, and I was there, as were most members of the church. He held up a strange piece of wood. He told those assembled that he had been walking in the woods and spotted it, and heard . . . heard the voice of God tell him it was a remnant of the Ark.

IDA

The Ark of the Covenant? Or Noah's?

GRACE

Noah's. The people of Edmore have a special relationship with the Ark and Noah. Lillian, I'm sure you remember.

LILLIAN

I do.

GRACE

And many in the community still choose to believe, even after those alleged relics were declared frauds years earlier, that they were real, and that only those of true faith could see it.

LILLIAN

Oh my.

GRACE

And Douglas held it up, this piece of wood, and declared it to be a sign that we, the people of Faith United, were to build a new place of worship, centered around this . . . stick . . . and he would need all of those assembled to dig deep into their hearts, and their pockets, to see if we could make his dream, God's dream, a reality.

LILLIAN

And you . . . ?

GRACE

I laughed. Loudly. From the back.

IDA

Oh, good!

LILLIAN

People heard you?

GRACE

Yes. It sounded like a dog bark. And everyone turned and stared and it felt . . . very accusatory.

IDA

You were surrounded!

GRACE

I was. And before I even knew what I was thinking, I stood and asked, "Do you mean to tell me you all believe him?" and they didn't move, or look away, so I slowly made my way out the back door.

IDA

Did you burst into flames?

GRACE

After a moment, my father appeared, turned me in the direction of home, and told me to start walking.

LILLIAN

Was he angry?

GRACE

Just sad. So sad. He and Mother both thought Douglas was my last, best chance. No one ever really said out loud that he had been my only chance.

IDA

Isn't it funny?

GRACE

No.

IDA

It is! A scandal, if you want to call it that, opened up a new world for you. If you hadn't laughed, you'd be up there, married to a deacon and maybe having a baby. But you laughed, and so you're here, getting to do bigger things than you ever dreamed.

GRACE

I hadn't considered that.

IDA

Amazing things can happen when you're on your own.

LILLIAN

Things worked out.

GRACE

They did.

IDA

The church . . . the church . . . hold on.

IDA digs out her pamphlets and books from the secret spot and rifles through them.

This is the one!

LILLIAN

Is that what you were looking for?

GRACE

(softly) Yes.

IDA

You were looking for these? Why?

GRACE

I . . . I . . . I wanted to find that sentence. That sentence that you said to me the other day. It gave me a lot of courage in the moment, and when Roy was here earlier, yelling at me, I wanted that feeling again.

IDA

Oh, I've got that one memorized. "To look the whole world in the face with a go-to-hell look in the eyes; to have an ideal; to speak and set in defiance of convention."

LILLIAN

What is that?

IDA

It's a woman's duty.

LILLIAN

What woman?

IDA

All women. Me. And you. Both of you.

LILLIAN

Who said it?

IDA

Hold on. I need to find the—I thought it was in number 5—ah! There it is! *(reading)* "Female attendance at churches is diminishing in proportion to their interestedness in social advancement; --thus becoming investigators instead of believers." See? You're part of something bigger.

GRACE

What is that? What are you reading from?

IDA

It's a newsletter, although it's not new, anymore. It's over three years old. The feminist frontier is finally reaching the middle of America.

GRACE

Is that what it's called? "The Feminist Frontier?"

IDA

No. It's called "The Woman Rebel."

LILLIAN

Let me see it.

IDA

I can't. It's not. I'm not supposed. It's not entirely legal. My having it.

GRACE

What?!?

IDA

Seven issues were printed and mailed out, but most were suppressed by the Post Office.

LILLIAN

Suppressed? By the Federal Government? Ida, what are you? Some kind of spy?

IDA

Don't be ridiculous.

GRACE

Then how did you get it?

IDA

Some girls I knew, they had a connection to the publisher. Margaret Sanger is her name.

GRACE

Give it to me. I want to read it.

IDA

No. You shouldn't even know it's here. You could get in trouble.

LILLIAN

Well, we already know.

IDA

Step into the hall, while I hide them somewhere new.

GRACE

You're being silly.

IDA

If someone finds out I have these, there will be consequences. It's better for you if you don't know exactly where they are.

LILLIAN

Give us a bit more first, before you put them away.

GRACE

Yes, do!

IDA

Oh, all right. (*IDA flips through an issue or two, but she knows exactly what she's looking for.*) One of the Rebels quotes a publication called the Western Watchman, a terrible church-y thing, and goes on to rail against it. Here is what is quoted and disputed. "We say, a young girl's business is to get a husband. Having got a husband, it is her business to beget children. Under ordinary conditions of health a young wife ought to have a child in her arms or on her bosom all the time. When she is not nursing a child, she should be carrying one. This will give her plenty to do, and she will have no time for political meetings or movements."

LILLIAN

Oh. Oh. That makes me angry. He's saying we need to be distracted so we don't go and develop opinions.

GRACE

What does the writer say? What's the response?

IDA

Let's save that for another day. You two step out while I tuck these away.

GRACE

I might like to walk a bit.

LILLIAN

Me too.

LILLIAN and GRACE exit. IDA takes a moment to savor the feeling of having successfully reeled them in before she goes about finding a place to sock away her stash of newsletters.

SCENE 8. Saturday, October 26. ROY alone.

Mother,

I am writing with news that will cheer you.

In just a few moments, Alice and I expect to greet two very special lunch guests. Can you guess who they will be? Of course! Grace and my classmate Michael Rhead. I am betting Father has told you about him. He is an extremely bright medical student from Battle Creek. That is less than one hundred miles from home, so while it does not meet your specific definition of “nearness,” one must admit it isn’t agonizingly far. Rhead’s ultimate goal is to return there and join Dr. Kellogg at the Battle Creek Sanitarium. Catch Doc Stewart after Sunday service and ask him to tell you about that place. They are leading an amazing revolution in holistic health care.

I hope that, with the progress we make today, and with the Lord’s blessing, we can prepare ourselves for Grace to be engaged by Christmas and ready to leave the University of her own accord after this term.

Grace will be married and you will have no more worries about the farm.

I told you I could do it!

Your son,

Roy

SCENE 9. Later the same day. The dorm room, GRACE alone. She sits with a textbook but is clearly distracted. Her angry breathing might be audible as she attempts to quell her emotions. She slams the book shut and shelves it. She makes a half-hearted attempt to find Ida's illicit materials, realizing quickly that her search will be futile. IDA enters, wearing a flu mask.

IDA

(through mask) I want a full rep—*(realizing she has mask on, pulling it off)*—damn this ridiculous thing! It's gotten so I don't even know when I'm wearing it. And for what? The flu can make it across the Atlantic, but not through four layers of cotton?

GRACE

Did you get what you needed at the library?

IDA

Most of it. The boys are so competitive. I swear one of them runs to the library on Friday after class and checks out all the material that might help with the assignments. They are more concerned with causing the failure of others than they are with ensuring their own success. I got creative, though. Found some minor publications with articles that will serve me. Grace?

GRACE

That's very good. Are you planning to go back to Detroit soon?

IDA

In a week or so, if they open up the public buildings by then. The Daily's been reporting on it so it's easy to keep an eye—What's wr—?

GRACE

That's good. It's good that you get to go where you want, and have the conversations that you want to have.

IDA

What happened?

GRACE

Nothing.

IDA

Michael Rhead. The luncheon. *(GRACE says nothing)* At the very least, it's over. *(nothing)* Isn't it over?

GRACE

I presume so, by now. I left before it ended.

IDA

I like the sound of this. Why?

GRACE

I feel horrible for Alice. She tried to make it so nice.

IDA

I feel horrible for you. What happened? Was he awful?

GRACE

He was perfectly polite, at the outset, almost to the point of being dull. Roy and Alice kept encouraging him to talk about himself, and I started to feel like he was selling himself to me. He was talking about his grades, his ancestry—he is of hearty Scottish stock, Ida!

IDA

Is he?

GRACE

I heard about the land his family owns, and his sister, who, as it happens, is married to a minister.

IDA

Bless those girls who suffer so the rest of us don't have to.

GRACE

I got bored and started daydreaming a little. And all I saw in my head was me, myself, doing what I wanted to do. Not being a doctor's wife, not being a minister's wife, not being a wife. Just, every single day, deciding what I wanted to do and doing it.

IDA

My darling revolutionary!

GRACE

Roy caught me drifting. He said, "Grace, wait until you hear about the place Michael wants to go when he graduates!"

IDA

Some hospital, middle of nowhere?

GRACE

No. A place called The Battle Creek Sanitarium. They seem to subscribe to an unconventional protocol for achieving overall health. This protocol involves, in large part, "rectal applications," a phrase he used, not once, but twice, during lunch!

IDA

(laughing) I bet Roy set him right!

GRACE

That was the strange thing! Roy said nothing! Roy hummed and nodded. I caught Alice's eye and she looked utterly mortified.

IDA

He's off the list, though, I'm sure.

GRACE

You give my brother too much credit. After we had finished eating, Alice began to clear and, in the most contrived of tones, Roy said he would help and began to gather things and move to the kitchen.

IDA

You were left alone.

GRACE

Alone together.

IDA

And?

GRACE

I don't want to tell you.

IDA

You must.

GRACE

It's terrible.

IDA

I'm your friend, Grace, your true friend. I don't want your life's path to be dictated by anyone but you. What happened? *(GRACE hesitates)* I won't look at you while you tell it.

GRACE

Once he was sure they were out of earshot, he put his hand on my thigh and whispered, "I understand your prospects are quite limited."

IDA

The beast.

GRACE

Then he put his other hand on my neck and said, “I’m betting I’m as good as you’ll get.”

IDA

He knew.

GRACE

Yes.

IDA

How?

GRACE

I didn’t ask. His sister, maybe? Do ministers and ministers’ wives gossip with each other?

IDA

My darling, I am so sorry.

GRACE

Don’t you apologize! If it wasn’t for you, I wouldn’t have had the courage to do what I did next!

IDA

Which was?

GRACE

I flung his hand off my neck and stood up. I looked him in the eye and said, (*ROY enters, followed by ALICE*) “Go to hell.”

ROY

That isn’t what you said. Alice, tell her what she said. (*ALICE hesitates*) Alice.

ALICE

Grace, you said—

GRACE

I said, “See this look in my eyes? Do you know what it’s telling you? It’s telling you to go to hell.”

IDA’s internal response to this news is excitement and delight, but she realizes this isn’t her fight, and even more, that GRACE doesn’t need her.

ROY

We couldn’t fix that, Grace, after you left. We couldn’t fix that. He won’t see you again!

GRACE

You don't know the half of what happened! While you and Alice were in the kitchen, he put his hands on me, said things to me that suggested—

ROY

That means he likes you, Grace!

GRACE

It wasn't like that!

ROY

You wouldn't know what it's supposed to be like! You've managed to not have a single real suitor your entire life.

GRACE

I have time!

ROY

But now your chances here are about as good as they were in Edmore! You think he won't tell people you cussed him out over lunch?!?

GRACE

I'll be glad if he does!

ALICE

Roy, maybe talk to him in class on Monday and see if it can't be smoothed over.

ROY

No! He said he's through with her! I'm not going to beg!

IDA

Perhaps you can leave it to Grace, for this term, maybe. And if she doesn't find anyone, when we return in the Spring, you can start in again with the set-ups.

ROY

Thank you for your thoroughly ignorant opinion, Ida, but Grace needs to understand what's at stake.

ALICE

Roy, be careful.

ROY

After the debacle with Deacon Moore, Mother and Father were distraught. They concocted this plan to get you out of town and get you married. They scraped together money, Grace. They borrowed from Uncle James and Aunt Clara. Father took the money he'd saved to fix the Holt and used it instead to try to fix you.

ALICE

Roy, don't be cruel.

ROY

This is just the truth, Alice. They've invested everything they have in you, Grace, because they love you. No more dilly-dallying.

GRACE

I'll make sure it's worth it. I'm becoming a veterinarian. A travelling veterinarian. I'll make them proud.

ROY

Pride doesn't finance a farm.

GRACE

Is the farm in trouble?

ROY

It's a family farm, Grace. And you're a part of this family. I've seen Father's books and—

ALICE

Roy, let's go.

ROY

So you need to find a husband. We need to find you a husband. That's why you're here. Not to entertain some ridiculous daydream.

ROY takes ALICE's hand and leads her out. Perhaps ALICE casts an apologetic glance over her shoulder. After a tense moment, GRACE speaks.

GRACE

Where are they?

IDA

They're gone, to the elevator by now, I'm sure. Are you—?

GRACE

Not them. Where are your books, your newsletters?

IDA

Now might not be the—

GRACE

Now is the time! Now is just the time. I need you to teach me how to do this. To stand up to him. I know what I'm here for and it isn't what he says.

IDA moves to her stash (maybe multiple places) and pulls pamphlets, newsletters and a book or two. She hands them to GRACE.

Your next trip to Detroit, does it have anything to do with what's in these? (*IDA nods*) Could you use some help?

END OF ACT I

ACT II

SCENE 1. Monday November 11, 1918. Early afternoon. The sound of a train whistle and a train rolling down a track. Lights up on IDA and GRACE on the train, returning from Detroit. IDA hasn't made much progress on her mission, but is talking herself into the idea that there is still hope. GRACE is utterly shell-shocked.

IDA

You haven't said much. Did you like her? Ruby Zahn? I think we got somewhere. I think we inched her forward a bit. She is said to have a particular interest in destitute mothers and delinquent girls. She's been in it for years. She's done all kinds of work on public playgrounds. And suffrage, of course. Grace?

GRACE

I had imagined we were going to talk about suffrage.

IDA

Why?

GRACE

Because it just passed! Michigan women can vote! In the state, at least.

IDA

That battle is half-won.

GRACE

My mother would have keeled over if she was in that room.

IDA

That's why it's us, the young women, leading the charge.

GRACE

Ruby Zahn isn't young.

IDA

No, there are a few like-minded older ones, but they've been active in the movement since they were young. I don't think I expected you to be scandalized.

GRACE

I didn't expect you to be scandalous! On the way there, you said we were going to talk about helping factory girls!

IDA

And we did! Mr. Ford has just begun hiring women. We might as well help him get it right from the outset.

GRACE

It just doesn't seem right—to talk about it.

IDA

“I say, discuss and expose all—I am for every topic openly.” Do you know who said that?

GRACE

One of your women rebels? Mrs. Sanger?

IDA

No. Walt Whitman.

GRACE

I hardly think Walt Whitman would endorse the discussion of factory girls bearing children out of wedlock!

IDA

Someone needs to help them.

GRACE

Someone can tell them not to have intercourse, which one presumes they already know.

IDA

We can presume nothing.

GRACE

Why?

IDA

Because they are young, they are romantic, they fall in love and they are persuaded.

GRACE

Moral people wait until they are married.

IDA

It's naïve to think that.

GRACE

So what if a girl does find herself in a family way? She just marries the father and moves on to being a wife and mother.

IDA

Even if that works out, you end up with a household with one wage-earner and multiple mouths to feed. Women don't have the information they need to control the size of their families.

GRACE

How did my mother manage to have only two children?

IDA

Have you ever asked her?

GRACE

Don't be ridiculous!

IDA

I'll tell you how. Someone told her how to prevent it. Someone gave her information.

GRACE

What particular interest do you have in delinquent girls and destitute mothers, you soon-to-be lady industrialist?

IDA

Imagine a girl. I'm going to tell you about her and you tell me if you think you could be friends with her. Imagine a girl, born in New York, right at the turn of the century.

GRACE

Our age.

IDA

Roughly. She was the first child her parents had, and her mother died soon after giving birth. Her father drove a delivery wagon and paid a neighbor to mind the girl during the day. She grew up with just enough, and even once she was old enough, her father wouldn't let her work. He insisted she stay in school.

GRACE

Good for him!

IDA

It was good. Well, if not good, it was satisfactory. They had just enough and no more. When the girl was 13, he died.

GRACE

And what did she do? She'd have to go to work then, I suppose.

IDA

She did. She stopped going to school and she found factory work. She couldn't afford rent on the flat she'd shared with her father, so she left that and moved into an all-female boarding house.

GRACE

That's terrible. That's hardly a home.

IDA

She would tell you it wasn't all that bad! She had fun there. It was hard to be on her own, in the streets, because she was pretty and people knew she had no one looking out for her. But at the boardinghouse, with the girls, she felt safe.

GRACE

How about at the factory?

IDA

At the factory, she made less than half what the boys made, fended off leering eyes and grabbing hands and developed an incurable cough from the things she was inhaling every day. Still, she stayed there for two years. It took that long for her to find the next step.

GRACE

This is like a Frances Hodgson Burnett book.

IDA

Remember, she was in New York, so there were . . . other opportunities.

GRACE

This is not like a Frances Hodgson Burnett book.

IDA

She found work, through one of the girls in the boarding house, at a concert saloon, as a living statue.

GRACE

A what?

IDA

She posed as famous works of art. Like Venus Rising from the Sea, or The Greek Slave.

GRACE

She posed as a slave?

IDA

The Greek Slave is just a woman, standing there, like this? *(IDA does the posture, maybe gets rocked by the train motion)*

GRACE

(laughing) She must have been a sight better at it than you are! *(IDA settles back down)*
And I suppose she wasn't wearing much?

IDA

She had to look like the statue. The statue was a nude.

GRACE

I could not be friends with this girl. (*IDA's face indicates "case closed"*) Finish the story.

IDA

She stood on a rotating platform several times an evening and people looked at her.

GRACE

Men.

IDA

Of course. She grew popular, had admirers and earned about three times what she had been making at the factory. After a year or so, one particular admirer arrived on the scene. He was young, and wealthy. A "Fancy Man," was what the other girls called him. She just called him his name—Teddy.

GRACE

And he saved her from the wretched life?

IDA

She didn't find it all that wretched, Grace. The girls she worked with were funny and sweet. They took good care of each other. One of them spoke a little French, it was part of her act. She taught it to our heroine. Another one wanted to get on the legitimate stage. She had the complete works of Shakespeare in the dressing room and had the girl read scenes with her when they weren't required out front. She furthered her education, as best as she could.

GRACE

It can't have been all books and laughs.

IDA

Oh no! There were fights and arguments, and once one of the girls just disappeared. It was rumored that she had to go underground, that her boyfriend was active in the union movement and they had to run. The other girls missed her, but they divided up the things she'd left behind.

GRACE

But not our girl! Because wealthy Teddy had fallen in love with her!

IDA

Oh, yes right! She and Teddy had dinners, and he bought her gifts, for which she treated him to . . . certain favors.

GRACE

Oh. (*eyes opened*) Oh! I could not be friends with this girl. But please finish.

IDA

He was ready to declare himself to her, and tell his family all about her, when she found herself in the family way.

GRACE

He left her high and dry, didn't he?

IDA

Oh no! He was more determined than ever to make a life with her. He spoke to his parents, keeping out the more colorful details, but they were unwilling to accept her, solely on the fact that she was an orphan of no significant name, and uneducated.

GRACE

So they ran away together?

IDA

Teddy proposed it, and the girl considered it, but they waited too long.

GRACE

What do you mean?

IDA

Teddy's father had friends in the police force. They followed Teddy, who led them right to the concert saloon where they arrested the girl. Her friends and co-workers were particularly curious, because they arrested this girl only, and did not raid the whole place. The girl knew this was because of Teddy's family, and also because many of the saloon's repeat customers were police themselves.

GRACE

This is the most scandalous thing I've ever heard!

IDA

Teddy's father met the girl at the station. He said he would bail her out and pay the fine if she would agree to being sent away, out of the state and being given a position as a domestic in the home of a wealthy industrialist. The girl said she would agree on two conditions. Teddy's father must find her a doctor who would relieve her of her burden, and the industrialist must agree to pay her as much as she was making in the concert saloon. These conditions were met and the girl was sent to Dayton, Ohio.

GRACE

Oh! Oh! It was your Aunt Elizabeth! That's where you met this girl! She worked for you!

IDA

It was all fine and good for about a year (although the girl made a terrible domestic) and then, somehow, Teddy found out where she was. He began to write letters to her, telling her he'd come down from New York as soon as he had enough money secreted away.

The other girls working in the house were unlike the girls from the concert saloon in that they could not keep a secret. Aunt Elizabeth soon found out and told Teddy's parents. Distraught, they told Elizabeth to do whatever she could, at any expense and they would foot the bill. They wrote her that they could not have their son married to a woman whose bosoms had been seen by half the men in New York. Aunt Elizabeth asked the girl what she wanted.

GRACE

And what did she demand? Do you know? Let me guess! A fur coat! An automobile! Oh! An airplane!

IDA

Grace.

GRACE

Well, what?

IDA

She demanded an education at a top university, with a monthly stipend, a wardrobe, elegant accommodations, and the opportunity to be around people of a higher class while she was wearing clothes. (*something dawns on GRACE*) Aunt Elizabeth told her to choose a university outside Ohio and she would take care of the rest.

GRACE

And she chose the University of Michigan.

IDA

She did. I've let you believe a number of things about me that weren't true, Grace. You're my best friend and you deserve to know what's what. So, could you be friends with a girl like that?

SCENE 2. An hour later, the same afternoon. The dorm. ALICE sits, ROY paces.

ROY

I've a mind to go see Miss Mack and ask how on earth she lost my sister.

ALICE

That could get Grace into trouble, Roy. And don't we want her here as long as she can be?

ROY

Of course! Are you sure Lillian isn't in?

ALICE

I'll knock again.

ALICE goes out the door and knocks at LILLIAN's. ROY pokes through his sister's things, maybe turns down her bed.

(OS) Lillian? Are you in?

ALICE returns.

When was the last time you spoke to Grace?

ROY

I saw her walking to class on Friday morning. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary. She wasn't keen on talking to me. Still upset about Rhead, although in the big picture, it's me who's got the right to be—

ALICE

I wonder if she isn't more upset that you expect her marriage to save the farm.

ROY

Every girl here is looking for a husband. Some of them have to wait for years. Lucky for Grace, she's got us helping.

ALICE

Maybe Grace wants other things.

ROY

Do you know they host an event here at Martha Cook called the Husband Hunting Tea? Have you heard about that?

ALICE

No.

ROY

They invite all the Law School men for tea and see who might make a good catch. These girls all want the same thing—a husband, a home and a family. I bet they're all jealous of you—you have all three!

ALICE

When you saw Grace on Friday, were you able to tell her about Sam Hetzel?

ROY

No. She wouldn't let me get a sentence out. She didn't even stop. She strolled by and hollered over her shoulder, "I'll see you Monday, Roy!"

ALICE

Oh. Oh.

ROY

I'm getting sick to my stomach.

ALICE

How long do you think she's actually been gone?

The outer door opens.

Grace, is that you?

LILLIAN

(poking her head in, flu mask on) No, it's Lillian. Just getting back from class.

ALICE

Have you seen Grace? *(LILLIAN does not respond)* Lillian? Has Grace been gone all weekend?

ROY

What? Gone all weekend? Lillian?

LILLIAN

(pulls mask down around neck) She left on Friday, I don't know exactly when, she and Ida—

ROY

Ida? She left with Ida and she's been gone three days? Alice!

LILLIAN

They said they'd be back this morning! I thought they'd be here by now. Maybe the train—

ROY

The train?!? They're on a train? To where?

ALICE

Roy, lower your—

ROY

Don't tell me to lower my voice, Alice! Lillian, weeks ago my sister told me that Ida had taken the train to Detroit. Did she go back? Did Grace go with her?

LILLIAN nods, pulls her flu mask off and sets it down. ALICE sinks. ROY fumes.

ALICE

I'm sure they're fine. You said Ida's been before? She must know her way around, then.

ROY

Where on earth did they sleep? What did they eat?

LILLIAN

Ida knows someone there. She had an appointment of some kind.

ROY

But why would she need Grace to go with her? She's already gone on her own. What would she need Grace for?

A noise in the outer hallway. IDA and GRACE returning with small valises, arm in arm. ROY, LILLIAN and ALICE are silent as IDA and GRACE enter.

IDA

A welcoming party!

ROY

Grace, thank God.

ALICE

We were worried.

GRACE

About what?

ROY

You, of course! You weren't at church yesterday.

GRACE

I'm done with Bethlehem United. The service is in German, for heaven's sake!

ROY

There's an English service at 7 a.m. I chose the German one because I thought you might have an easier time behaving appropriately if you couldn't understand what was being said.

ALICE

Roy.

ROY

(on the edge of tears, maybe?) But that's not why you weren't there. You weren't even in town.

GRACE

No, I was in—well, it's a little complicated—I was on—

ROY

Some kind of little trip?

LILLIAN looks at GRACE in a way that indicates that ROY knows the truth.

GRACE

I accompanied Ida. To Detroit.

ROY

In what capacity? Carrying her suitcases? Pressing her dresses?

ALICE

Stop it.

ROY

Brushing her hair? Tying it back?

IDA

Grace! Stop scaring your brother! I had business there, Roy—*(off a look from GRACE)*— Not even business, really! Silly to call it that!

GRACE

Remember, Roy, I told you about Ida's elderly family member the last time she made the trip? Mrs.?

IDA

Yes! Mrs. Whitman. I was sent, by my aunt, to visit Mrs. Whitman! An old family friend! Mrs. Whitman is aged and infirm and I brought Grace along to have someone to talk to. My Aunt Elizabeth encouraged me to bring a friend—she even paid for both train tickets! It was absolutely wrong of us not to tell you. It made it more fun, pretending we were on a secret adventure. It was silly.

GRACE

We were safe.

ROY

(he has collected himself) Grace, you can't wander off, to strange cities with strange people. If you leave Ann Arbor again, I'll inform Father.

A whoop from down the hall. Another. Group laughter. The sound of distant church bells, dissonant, from many different churches, ringing.

LILLIAN

What's going on?

ROY

Probably still whooping about getting the vote.

IDA

We won't stop whooping about that for a while. Even old Mrs. Whitman, who won't even be alive for the next election, was whooping about getting the vote.

A scream of joy, hollering, maybe a song breaks out? IDA runs out and down the hall. More sounds of young women whooping.

ROY

Isn't anyone in class?

IDA returns.

IDA

The Huns signed the Armistice! The war is over!

A stunned moment, then ROY whoops. IDA grabs GRACE by the hand and pulls her toward the door.

We're not missing this!

GRACE

Come on, Lillian!

LILLIAN, more stunned than joyful, goes to exit, doubles back for her flu mask and leaves with IDA and GRACE.

ROY

Who would've guessed?

ALICE

Don't you want to go and celebrate?

ROY

She shouldn't be dragging my sister off to—

ALICE

Set your anger aside for the rest of the day. It's historic, Roy. We shouldn't miss this.

ROY

You can't go out there!

ALICE

I'll be fine!

ROY

(attention on the window) The streets are flooding with people. Look, the Army band's warming up. You can't be jostled like that. And the flu. If anything were to happen, I'd never—

ALICE

Fine. But you go.

ROY

I'm not just going to leave you here.

ALICE

You need to keep an eye on your sister. It's a melee!

ROY

I know. Father would be furious if he knew she was out there alone.

ALICE

Then go!

ROY

What will you do?

ALICE

I'll sit and read something. I'll unpack Grace's things! I'll set her side of the room to order.

ROY

You're wonderful. *(taking the moment in)* Our baby is going to grow up never knowing war.

ROY kisses ALICE and exits. ALICE looks out the window for a moment, taking in the scene of thousands of people rushing into the street, filled with joy at the prospect of peace. After a moment, she pulls GRACE's suitcase onto GRACE's

bed, intending to unpack and sort her things for her. There are, however, issues of The Woman Rebel on top of the packed clothing. ALICE is taken aback by the headlines, flips through the newsletters, then sits down with them.

SCENE 3. Late the same evening. ALICE sleeping in a chair, newsletters on her lap. ALICE is beautiful in repose. The sound of water running at the sink. LILLIAN peeks in to see if GRACE and IDA have returned. She sees ALICE sleeping and enters the room, turns on a lamp and is mesmerized by ALICE. LILLIAN hangs her just-washed flu mask to dry, then sits and stares, eventually reaching out to touch ALICE's face. ALICE starts, and over the first few lines, tucks IDA's papers at her side.

ALICE

Oh, my! Did I fall asleep? I'm so sorry.

LILLIAN

Don't apologize. You looked beautiful. I mean—

ALICE

Did I?

LILLIAN

You looked like a painting.

ALICE

You flatter me, Lillian. What time is it? It's so dark!

LILLIAN

It's late. Roy hasn't come back yet?

ALICE

No, but I suppose it's quieted down enough for me to make my way home now.

LILLIAN

You can sit for a minute. I'd like you to, if you would.

ALICE

Tell me, how was it out there? What went on?

LILLIAN

Oh, all kinds of things. I didn't stay out too long!

ALICE

No?

LILLIAN

I was in the street for a little while, but then walked home, to my parents' house.

ALICE

They weren't out celebrating?

LILLIAN

No. It's George's birthday.

ALICE

Oh.

LILLIAN

A hard enough day, I think, but to have the war end—in a way it caused them extra grief, my Mother especially.

ALICE

I see.

LILLIAN

If he could've survived until his birthday, he would have made it to the end of the war.

ALICE

You had no control over that. You know that, of course.

LILLIAN

I feel guilty for not being able to celebrate the peace.

ALICE

I can stay here with you, at least until the others get back.

LILLIAN

Thank you. I'm being a bit silly. Alone or in company, I don't get him back.

ALICE

No, you don't. But you're not silly.

LILLIAN

Mother's going to go visit her sister on the East Coast, through the holidays, she said. We've still got all his things, around, you know? I think Father may try to clear it all out while she's away.

ALICE

I'd like to hear about him, your brother.

LILLIAN

Really? All right. He was meant to be here, at the University this fall. Even when he went to Europe, Father said they'd just push his attendance back a year. He was so excited to have George here with him. Then after Belleau Wood, he decided I should take the spot. I wasn't planning on school, but here I am. George would've liked it better. He played the piano.

ALICE

Did he?

LILLIAN

Yes. And he was just learning the ukulele, you know, when he shipped out.

ALICE

Did he only play funny songs?

LILLIAN

Oh, no! He was a real musician. My mother thought it was important that he play at church. (*ALICE nods*) But sometimes he'd slip in a line, just instrumentally, from a silly song we knew, and he'd catch my eye across the church and I'd have to bite my lip to keep from laughing.

ALICE

He sounds wonderful.

LILLIAN

He was. (*she tears up*) I'm sorry.

ALICE

(*making her way to standing*) Don't apologize. (*she moves to LILLIAN*) Come here. I'm sure he's looking down over you and he's proud of you. And you have to do your best to honor his memory.

LILLIAN

I know.

ALICE

Come here.

LILLIAN steps into ALICE's embrace and her guard falls. She weeps. ALICE kisses LILLIAN on the forehead. They separate but remain holding hands. IDA and GRACE tumble in loudly, giddy, laughing.

IDA

Look who's still here! Are you dancing? Come here, Grace!

IDA twirls GRACE in a circle.

Lillian, we lost you quite early! Did you have fun?

GRACE

The parade seemed a mile long! We started out by the Army band and ended up by the Navy band!

IDA

All the flags from allied nations. That was lovely to see. Mostly Old Glory, of course, but lots of others as well.

GRACE

Where's Roy?

ALICE

He's not back yet.

GRACE

He was on the float with the medics.

LILLIAN

The float?

GRACE

Yes, didn't you see it?

LILLIAN

No.

IDA

Did you see the effigy of the Kaiser, being dragged behind that wagon?

LILLIAN

No.

GRACE

You missed everything!

LILLIAN

Maybe. I'm awful tired now, though. I'm going to go get ready for bed.

ALICE

Good night, Lillian. Thank you for visiting with me.

LILLIAN

Of course. Good night, girls.

LILLIAN exits to her room.

ALICE

So Roy was on a float?

GRACE

Yes, the medics built a big phony operating table and they made it to look as if they were dissecting the Kaiser alive!

IDA

With his silly hat and his huge moustache!

ALICE

It sounds gruesome.

GRACE

It does now, but at the time, it was quite funny.

ALICE

And did the parade just end now?

IDA

Oh no, hours ago. They opened up the theatres and there were all kinds of shows. Not the highest of quality, of course, being impromptu.

GRACE

Many sing-alongs! And patriotic performances!

IDA

Oh yes! Lots!

GRACE sings or hums a snippet of The Marines' Hymn: "From the halls of Montezuma, to the shores of Tripoli."

ALICE

I suppose I'll be fine making my way home now.

IDA

The streets are clear.

GRACE

I can walk you. *(noticing her open suitcase)* Oh. You've been in my bag.

ALICE

I was trying to be kind and unpack your things for her after your trip. It was intrusive, I see that now.

GRACE

There are things missing.

ALICE

Here. *(She reaches between the chair cushions and hands them to GRACE)*

IDA

Does Lillian know you've seen them?

ALICE

No. Did she get these from you, Ida?

GRACE

You won't tell Roy? Will you?

ALICE

Oh my. Grace.

GRACE

You have to keep it secret.

ALICE

This isn't. None of this is. Appropriate.

IDA

It's information.

ALICE

Forgive me, Ida, but Grace is my concern right now. There's a column in there supporting assassination as a political tactic!

GRACE

No one is assassinating anyone, for heaven's sake!

ALICE

Grace! If you're being corrupted? Roy and I have been charged with—

GRACE

Charged with me! I'm in your charge. It's ridiculous. I'm grown!

ALICE

It seems if we leave you to your own devices, you're going to turn into a radical—

GRACE

Stop.

ALICE

How do you expect to settle back down and run a household, knowing that people are writing things like this? The more you know, the less you'll fit.

GRACE

Who says I want to fit?

ALICE

What do you mean?

GRACE

Never, not once in my life, has anyone asked me if I wanted a husband, if I wanted children, or a farm, or to stay in Michigan close to my parents.

ALICE

(a moment, and then a decision to echo ROY) What are you talking about, Grace? Those are all the normal things to want!

GRACE

Why? Because you want them? Are you saying I'm not normal?

IDA

I'm not.

GRACE

What?

IDA

I'm not a normal girl, you know that. And I've got a strong suspicion you aren't either.

ALICE

This is starting to sound quite perverse.

GRACE

Alice! Ida just means that we are part of a new generation of women! You are too! We can have bigger ideas, live different lives, than our mothers before us! We can stretch our—

ROY stumbles in, face flushed and happy. The tone in the room shifts quickly and completely.

ROY

My Alice! Thank goodness you're here!

He sweeps ALICE into his arms and spins. GRACE discreetly sets the pamphlets down and IDA discreetly picks them up and tucks them out of sight.

ALICE

(laughing, maybe falsely at first) Where did you think I'd be?

ROY

Well, I went home, of course, expecting you there. It had been hours! But you weren't there! I'm so sorry. I got . . . caught up.

ALICE

I'm glad you did. Roy, I think we ought to talk—

ROY

Did you watch any of it out the window?

ALICE

A bit. After you left, I—

ROY

It was wonderful! And chaotic. I wish we could've been in it together. But there are places you ought to be right now, and places you ought not go. That kind of manic celebration would've gotten the mother of my child much too riled up.

GRACE

It's a good thing Alice has got you, Roy.

ROY

Grace, I rode the float! You saw me?

GRACE

Yes.

ROY

Sam Hetzel was on it with me. He's a friend from last year. He's agreed to meet you, to have lunch. Alice, will Saturday work?

ALICE

Yes.

ROY

Wonderful. Saturday it is. And Grace?

GRACE

Yes?

ROY

I forgive you for earlier—for going out of town and for the way you spoke to me—in the spirit of the day, I forgive you.

ROY and ALICE exit.

GRACE

I'm not sorry.

IDA

I didn't suppose you were. Do you think she's going to tell him? About what she saw?

GRACE

We can't monitor her every minute. But if we're moving forward, the sooner, the better.

IDA

Moving forward?

GRACE

So we spoke to Mrs. Zahn about the information these girls need, but what is that information? Where is it? All "The Woman Rebel" ever says is that it needs to be conveyed. Where are the facts?

IDA

(somewhat surprised) Do you feel ready for that? It's very specific, very . . . anatomical.

GRACE

Have you ever put your arms inside a cow to deliver a calf? *(IDA balks, maybe gags)* My tolerance for anatomy is very high.

IDA opens a text book and from within it draws out "Family Limitation."

IDA

Here, also by Sanger. Also somewhat illegal.

GRACE

"Family Limitation?" Let the corruption continue.

IDA laughs.

SCENE 3. ROY alone. November 12, 1918.

ROY

Father,

I hope you were able to celebrate the news of the armistice yesterday! I doubt you had a celebration in Edmore akin to what we had here, but I'm sure it was a memorable Monday, perhaps the most memorable of our lives. It is thrilling to know that peace reigns once again. "God is in his heaven and all is right with the world," as Mother's favorite, Mr. Browning, wrote.

How are we to process history being made before our eyes? The war ending on Monday, and Michigan women getting the vote only a few days before. Have you asked Mother whether she intends to exercise her right? (*chuckles*) I think her nerves would get the best of her, and she'd second guess herself for months after any election. Alice, I know, will do no more than second my vote, as I expect most wives will do for their husbands. So the number of votes will increase, but the ratio of votes will remain about the same. It is the young, unmarried women that create uncertainty.

The SATC has been told by the government to disband immediately, for there is no need for them to keep training, but the University is insisting that they be allowed to finish the term. Their presence here has caused such chaos, their departure will be welcome to all who wish to see the true spirit of Michigan restored. A number of their men still have the flu, and they are asking for senior medical students to assist in their care, but I have begged off, being unwilling to carry the virus home to my pregnant wife.

Grace has another date this weekend, with a new fellow, Sam Hetzel. As you can guess by his name, he is German, but I assure you he was no sympathizer. He has two drawbacks. The first is that he is from Iowa. The second, he is not graduating for two more years. For my part, I intend to see if he can be swayed to settle near Edmore, and for yours, please consider the possibility that the farm might have to eke by without a third income for a little while longer. Grace doesn't yet understand that there isn't tuition money for her beyond this term—she is still maintaining her veterinary dream—but we attempted to increase the pressure on her without revealing all. If it comes up while we are home for Thanksgiving, let's not let her know that February will mark the end of her time as a student.

Love to Mother.

Your son,

Roy

SCENE 4. Saturday, November 16, 1918. The empty room. 1 pm.

ROY bursts in.

ROY

Grace! Grace! (*he sees no one is there, looks around for information*) Lillian! Ida!

LILLIAN peeks her head around the door.

LILLIAN

Yes?

ROY

My sister's gone missing again.

LILLIAN

Missing?

ROY

She was supposed to be at lunch at my house half an hour ago. I've left Alice there entertaining Sam Hetzel and come to find her.

LILLIAN

I haven't seen her today.

ROY

I haven't seen her since the Pep Meeting yesterday.

LILLIAN

Oh, I wasn't there.

ROY

Why not? Honestly, you girls—

LILLIAN

Those kinds of gatherings are just hot beds of flu.

ROY

The flu has passed, Lillian. Congratulations, you survived. (*a thought occurs*) Say, my sister hasn't taken off on a day trip again, has she?

LILLIAN

I truly don't know. I haven't seen her since—

IDA comes in.

IDA

Oh, hello.

ROY

Ida, where is Grace? Where were you?

IDA

I'm not her keeper, and you are not mine.

ROY

She was meant to be at my house for lunch.

IDA

As far as I know, she intended to be there.

ROY

What? What did she say to you about it?

IDA

I was here when you demanded her attendance. I thought it was presumptuous.

ROY

(laughing) You thought it was presumptuous! That's rich! Grace has a family obligation.

IDA

She's obliged to be awarded to the first semi-appropriate man that will have her? For life?

ROY

She is obliged to take responsibility for the next phase of her life. She is obliged to respect her role in maintaining our family's legacy.

IDA

Or what?

ROY

Or she can anticipate a life without our support.

IDA

And so what? She'll be able to support herself once she's a veterinarian.

ROY

There's no future as a vet. That's a little girl's silly daydream! And the needs of our family are greater than Grace's fantasies. If the plan holds, in three months she'll be a wife, and in a year, she'll be a mother.

LILLIAN

(referencing a small pad of paper she has taken from her pocket) “Nearly all women are no better than slaves;”

IDA laughs.

ROY

What?

LILLIAN

“that is to say social restrictions prevent the full, free and natural development of nearly every woman that is born.”

ROY

What is that? Stop that.

IDA

“For a rich man’s wife is merely his most costly possession.”

LILLIAN

“I believe that deep down in women’s nature lies slumbering the spirit of revolt.”

ROY

This is not something you’re learning here, Lillian. Where did you pick up that nonsense?

IDA

“We are a race of women that of old knew no fear and feared no death and lived great lives and hoped great hopes.”

ROY

Stop it! Shut up with that.

IDA

That’s Olive Schreiner, Roy. Have you heard of her?

ROY

I’m reporting you to the House Director.

LILLIAN

For what? Saying words you don’t like?

IDA

“I am the Master of all. I am the daughter of strength. . .

IDA and LILLIAN

I am the dawn of life. I am I. I have no desire to be free, for I am free.”

ROY

(lunges at LILLIAN to grab the pad from her hand) Give me that!

IDA

(getting in his way, exhibiting a toughness that we haven't scene) Don't you touch her.

ROY exits, flustered. LILLIAN and IDA relax.

IDA

Oh, Lillian! You were marvelous!

LILLIAN

That was scary, and exhilarating. I'm afraid we may have done more harm than good.

IDA

Maybe, but right now, I don't care!

LILLIAN

I wanted to shout at him, but I couldn't think of my own words. It was easier to call upon the words of others. I felt powerful. I felt like a witch!

GRACE enters from IDA's room.

GRACE

I'm sorry to do that to you. I'm glad Ida showed up. I'm glad you had each other.

IDA

Oh! You're here?

GRACE

I didn't go to the Hetzel lunch, as you can see. I didn't expect Roy to come searching for me! Lillian spotted him storming up the street and I hid in her room.

IDA

My word! Quite the schemers you're becoming! And, Lil, you've been reading.

LILLIAN

There aren't too many possible hiding places in this room.

GRACE

What do you mean?

IDA

Lillian told Roy off! Quoting from the "Rebel" like she was hexing him!

LILLIAN

Ida joined me, thank goodness.

GRACE

He didn't see any of it, did he? Your papers? Your books?

IDA

Oh no!

GRACE

Because he wouldn't hesitate to turn you in. He doesn't like you.

IDA

I give a damn? I've been prepared for this since Alice found everything. I can't believe she hasn't squealed.

GRACE

Me neither. Lillian, Alice has seen all of Ida's--

LILLIAN

I know. She told me.

IDA

She snooped around while we were out celebrating the armistice.

LILLIAN

I know. She won't tell Roy.

IDA

Are you sure?

LILLIAN

Absolutely.

IDA

How?

LILLIAN

(hesitating) She asked me to help her find the information.

LILLIAN

What information?

LILLIAN

Birth control.

GRACE

What?!?

LILLIAN

She said Roy keeps talking about having seven or eight babies, and she only wants two. Do you have it, the real information? (*IDA nods*) Every woman that wants to know should know.

IDA

But if it got back to Roy . . .

LILLIAN

It wouldn't.

IDA

Grace, I hate to say this, but you may need to run down and see Alice and apologize for dodging lunch.

GRACE

Why?

IDA

We need to throw Roy off the scent. That was reckless, what Lil and I just did, as fun as it was. And if we intend to bring Alice into the know . . . you need to go and play the part of the dutiful sister.

GRACE

I can do it. (*she takes in, for a moment, the joy of having people on her side*) I'm so happy here with you two. I don't care about saving the farm. Let them sell it.

IDA

Don't worry about that now.

GRACE

But, if I was . . . to marry him . . .

LILLIAN

Hetzel?

IDA

You haven't even met him!

GRACE

He's got two more years of medical school. So if I was to do it, even if Roy wouldn't let me stay in the veterinary program, I could still stay in Ann Arbor. And still be close to the two of you. For a little while, at least.

IDA

Let's not concede just yet. Go and smooth things over. Don't fall in love. Tell them you made a mistake on the time. We'll stay here and, I don't know . . .

LILLIAN

Cast some spells?

SCENE 5. Early the same evening. ROY alone.

Dear Father,

I didn't expect to be writing again before Thanksgiving, but I have the most excellent news. We just concluded a very successful lunch with Grace and Sam Hetzel. Grace was quite late, but Sam was patient, and it turns out she had written the time down incorrectly in her date book.

They got along swimmingly. I have never known Grace to be so agreeable! If Mother could have seen her, the old sparkle in her eyes would have come right back. Our prayers have truly been answered.

We talked of all sorts of things. Sam was kind enough to bring Grace a green ribbon! Traditionally, all the freshmen girls get these the first week, but because of the war and the flu and all the upheaval, these traditions were given little thought. Grace donned the ribbon like a good sport. I felt sad, for a moment, that she won't be a Michigan girl for much longer. I am buoyed, however, by the fact that we are now right back on track.

In less pleasant news, I had an extremely frustrating encounter with Ida, the roommate. She seems to have drawn the third girl in their suite, Lillian, a professor's daughter, into a cyclone of unnatural feminism. The things they were saying! Were I to record them here, I would have to ask you to burn this upon receipt. I told them in no uncertain terms that I would have none of their pagan drivel. I have said nothing to Grace, but I intend to compose a letter today to the House Director and have Grace put in a different room, perhaps a different building, when we return to campus after Thanksgiving.

I am not worried. As I mentioned, Grace was a delight at lunch. She is, as yet, unblemished by this unfortunate pairing. It's all going to work out.

Sincerely,

Roy

SCENE 6. Monday, November 25, late afternoon light bathes LILLIAN, who sits alone with her ukulele in the dorm room. She sings:

LILLIAN

If you want to feel wretched and lonely and blue,
Just imagine the girl you love best
In the arms of some fellow who's stealing a kiss
From the lips that you once fondly pressed

But the world moves apace and the loves of today
Flit away with a smile and a tear,
So you can never tell who's kissing her now
Or just whom you'll be kissing next year.

I wonder who's kissing her now, I wonder who's teaching her how,
I wonder who's looking into her eyes, breathing sighs, telling lies.
I wonder who's buying the wine for lips that I used to call mine.
I wonder if she ever tells him of me, I wonder who's kissing her now.

GRACE enters before the song is over. When LILLIAN finishes—

GRACE

That's a sad one.

LILLIAN

I know. I love it, though. *(she strums a chord or two)* Say, I stopped in at Roy's to ask Alice how Thanksgiving was and she wasn't there. Have you seen her?

GRACE

Oh, she stayed in Edmore. She isn't supposed to deliver the baby until Christmas time, but Roy thought the travelling back and forth would be too much on her. Roy expects to bring both of them back after the first of the year.

LILLIAN

Oh. That's a ways away.

GRACE

Alice told Roy she wants to name the baby George, if it's a boy.

LILLIAN

What?

GRACE

I thought they'd settled on Daniel, but Alice had a change of heart.

LILLIAN

Oh. All right. How was your date?

GRACE

Not abominable.

LILLIAN

Really?

GRACE

Sam isn't awful. That doesn't mean I'm over the moon. If I never saw him again, I wouldn't grieve the loss. (*she sings*) I wonder who's kissing him now, It won't cause a fuss or a row, Whomever is looking at Mister Hetzel, German beer, salted pretzels!!!

LILLIAN laughs. IDA enters, in distress, carrying a letter.

IDA

Is there something funny? Please tell me something funny!

LILLIAN

Silly songs. What's wrong?

IDA

I'm through in Detroit. Mrs. Zahn turned me down flat. She said she can't risk arrest. She admires me and my passion and grit, but she has too many things just on the verge of success right now, and with the momentum of suffrage, she can't jeopardize her position.

GRACE

I'm so sorry. I'm afraid it was my fault. I may have made some faces in our meeting.

LILLIAN

What did you want her to do, exactly?

IDA

Oh, I'm sorry, Lillian. Ruby Zahn is a progressive club woman in Detroit. I was trying to convince her to help me covertly educate factory girls about birth control.

LILLIAN

That's illegal.

IDA

Technically, but I wasn't planning to have her stand with me on the street, talking about cots and pessaries.

GRACE

What were you planning?

IDA

Leaflets, maybe? I hadn't gotten that far. I needed to know I had backing.

LILLIAN

Why?

IDA

Technical things—producing the information, printing it, as well as deciding where to distribute, connections inside the labor force . . .

LILLIAN

Do you know what you want to say?

IDA

Sort of.

GRACE

Sort of a shortened up, facts-only, "Family Limitation?"

IDA

Yes. Straightforward, factual information on how to prevent pregnancy. But there are hundreds of factory girls in Detroit, and my hand will fall off if I try to write out that many copies.

LILLIAN

I can help.

IDA

Lillian, even with all three of us writing, it would take ages to make enough.

LILLIAN

That's not what I meant. My father has a typewriter at our house, and a mimeograph.

GRACE

A what?

LILLIAN

It's a machine. My father loves innovations. You make a stencil with a special sheet and a typewriter, then you crank it through and it duplicates it over and over.

IDA

How many could we make?

LILLIAN

You can crank it until your arm falls off. George and I used to publish a pretend neighborhood newspaper. He could get it going as fast as one copy about every two or three seconds. And we were just kids.

GRACE

So we could make twenty copies, in a minute?

LILLIAN

Easily, after all the preparation is done. How many do you need?

IDA

I don't know. A hundred? Two hundred?

LILLIAN

I don't know how much paper my father's got.

IDA

I can get paper.

GRACE

And we don't need connections in the labor force, we just need to be there when the workers come out of their shift.

IDA

We?

GRACE

Me.

LILLIAN

Me too.

IDA

Are you serious, Lillian? You might get into trouble, down the road.

LILLIAN hums a line "I wonder who's kissing her now." They settle down to work.

SCENE 7. December 1. The basement in LILLIAN's family home. In the darkness, the sound of a mimeograph machine going, then slowing, then grinding to a halt. Lights up on IDA reading, GRACE shaking her hand out from cranking the machine. LILLIAN enters.

LILLIAN

My father's last class just ended. Are we through? He'll be home--

GRACE

Let me see them again.

IDA passes a mimeographed sheet to GRACE who takes it reverently and shakes her head.

I can't believe we did it.

IDA

They look beautiful.

GRACE

"Mrs. Whitman's Words for Women." It sounds like a prayer book.

IDA

You're an old hand at blasphemy, Grace.

GRACE

Dear old Mrs. Whitman.

IDA

My elderly . . .? What did you tell Roy she was? My Aunt?

GRACE

I don't remember. I just kept talking until he seemed convinced. *(a beat)* I feel proud.

LILLIAN

We haven't done anything yet.

GRACE

But we are about to. And it's going to make a difference.

LILLIAN

I think the drawing of the pessary copied well, if I do say so.

GRACE

Lillian, it's a good thing we had you. Mine and Ida's attempts looked like bowler hats.

IDA

(busts out laughing) Pity the poor old girl who tries to tuck a bowler hat inside her!

GRACE

(Laughing) Yes, hold on a moment dear, I've got to fold this thing just right!

LILLIAN

Quite romantic!

IDA

I might try to buy one while I'm home for Christmas.

GRACE

A bowler?

IDA

No! A pessary!

LILLIAN

What on earth for?

IDA

Because I want to know!

GRACE

Won't Mrs. Deeds stop you?

IDA

She knows better than to monitor me.

LILLIAN

(referencing sheet) The information about the cots is good, and the douches.

GRACE

Cots are so expensive, and you have to count on the boy to have one.

IDA

Why?

GRACE

What do you mean?

IDA

Why do you have to count on the boy?

GRACE

He has to have it. He has to put it on.

IDA

The girl could have it. She could say, "Put this on."

LILLIAN

And where would she get it?

IDA

She would buy it! Just like the boy would!

GRACE

Oh, don't tell me you're going to buy some cots, along with your pessary.

IDA

I might. I might make it a whole experiment while I'm home. A pessary, a few cots, a fountain syringe, maybe a bulb one too, just to see the difference . . .

LILLIAN

Lysol, bichloride, what's the other one?

GRACE

Potassium Permanganate.

LILLIAN

How do you remember that? I forgot it the minute we got it spelled correctly on the stencil.

GRACE

The druggist in Dayton is going to be very suspicious.

IDA

Perhaps he'll think I'm just being overly cautious.

GRACE

He might think you have many lovers.

LILLIAN

Oh yes, he'll have a very low opinion of you, Miss Ida Kettering.

GRACE

Or a very high one!

IDA

Who cares? I'll be back here after the New Year.

LILLIAN

Leaving your scandalous reputation behind you.

IDA

Of course.

GRACE

Marvelous.

IDA

You're marvelous, Grace. And you too, Lil. We did it. Only one more step.

LILLIAN

Are we on for the train on Friday?

IDA

Yes, the early one. Mrs. Zahn will host us overnight. She can't revolt, but she's willing to shelter and feed the revolutionaries. I want to be sure we're outside the factory and ready by the time the whistle blows.

LILLIAN

And we just stand outside and hand them out?

IDA

It's better to move within the mass of people, so you're not noticed or pinpointed. As casually as you can, just blend in with the woman and press them into their hands. Be discreet.

GRACE

Let's fold them, so the flower and the title are on the front.

IDA

Yes. The information shouldn't be visible on the street.

LILLIAN

We need to do that back at Martha Cook. My father's going to walk in any second. (*folds one and pockets it*) I need one to mail to Alice.

IDA nods.

SCENE 8. ROY alone.

Dear Miss Mack,

As I'm sure you are aware, this is my second letter on this subject. My sister, Grace McBride, has had the great misfortune to be put in a room with one Ida Kettering. My family wishes me to impress upon you that the situation must change immediately.

You know better than I how Miss Kettering came to be allowed into the Building, although I think I can say unequivocally that her social status and financial position might enable one to overlook substantial flaws in her character. Her very presence is fraught with hostility and condescension. She is preventing my sister Grace, a gentle Christian girl, from achieving her goals here at Michigan.

There are two courses of action that my family would find acceptable. Number one, remove Miss Kettering from the Building and leave my sister where she is. Number two, if the University cannot abide by upsetting that apple cart (perhaps they see a Deeds-Kettering library in the future?), we would ask that you simply move my sister to another room. It has been intimated to me that the Martha Cook Building is at capacity. I don't think it would be fair to move Grace to another building, but if the only way to get her past the reaches of this hot-tempered, snide, she-devil is to put her somewhere else entirely, so be it.

I await your reply.

Sincerely,

Roy McBride

SCENE 9. Sunday, December 8. GRACE and IDA two days after returning from Detroit.

GRACE

I really should unpack.

IDA

You haven't?

GRACE

I've been trying to catch up on my schoolwork!

IDA

Have you gotten anything less than an A?

GRACE

(a bit sheepishly) No. *(a confession?)* But I have an idea that if I do well, I mean, perfectly, I could apply for some scholarship or something, give my parents some relief from paying for me—maybe there's something I haven't heard of.

IDA

Maybe there is.

GRACE pulls a copy of "Mrs. Whitman's Words for Women" from between the pages of her textbook.

IDA

Grace! Don't be so careless!

GRACE

Oh! I shouldn't be using this as a bookmark. I've gotten used to it—the words, the ideas. They don't feel so scandalous anymore.

IDA

Hide it.

GRACE

(she does) I wish we could go back. It was exciting, wasn't it? The activity of the city, the crowd, your heart racing, and the women! The women somehow seeming to know that we were on their side and just taking what we gave them, so discreetly and sometimes even with a nod! It was like we were all in on it. It was . . . powerful.

ROY appears at the door.

ROY

What was?

GRACE
Hello, Roy.

IDA
(in greeting) Roy.

ROY
What was powerful?

GRACE
The sermon I heard at the 7 o'clock service this morning. You might want to consider coming to the early one, if you can manage not to sleep in.

ROY
Ida, would you mind giving me and my sister some privacy?

GRACE
That isn't necessary.

ROY
Yes, it is.

IDA
Grace?

GRACE
It's fine, Ida.

IDA
I need to check my mail box. I'll wait for you in the Blue Room. Tea starts in half an hour.

IDA exits.

GRACE
Roy, we need to talk about you coming up here and barging in. That's going to stop.

ROY
There are things that need to be taken care of, Grace. Changes that need to be made.

GRACE
I told you I'm not leaving the Building. And you can't see Mackie right now anyway. She's away from campus until this evening.

ROY
Fine.

GRACE

Fine? You're conceding? You're going to leave me alone?

ROY

So what was that sermon about? The "powerful" one?

GRACE

Forgiveness and gratitude.

ROY

What was the scripture?

GRACE

Christ healing the ten lepers.

ROY

You are good. And you heard it at Bethlehem United.

GRACE

Where else?

ROY

Detroit, maybe?

GRACE

What?

ROY

(kicking her still-packed suitcase) What's this?

GRACE

Nothing.

ROY

That's yours. Why is it packed?

GRACE

It's books! It's books from home that I'm not using! There isn't much storage in here.

ROY

(moves to the suitcase and hefts it) This isn't full of books.

GRACE

All right! I went again, with Ida. I'm sorry. But listen—she had to. She had to visit her elderly friend again. Mrs. Um. Mrs. Whitman? And Ida didn't feel well, but her Aunt insisted she go. I accompanied her, to make sure she was all right.

ROY

I said if you left town again, I'd tell Father.

GRACE

But I have good news! Sam and I have a date on Wednesday! He's taking me to—

ROY

Cancel it.

GRACE

What?

ROY

Cancel your date. It's over with Sam.

GRACE

I'm finally doing what you want, Roy! I'm seeing Sam! For real! I don't know that I want to marry him. *(off his look)* I mean, I could. I could maybe . . . marry him. He is nice. Spending time with him—

ROY

(exasperated and heartbroken) You shouldn't have gone to Detroit.

GRACE

I said I was sorry!

ROY pulls a copy of "Mrs. Whitman's Words for Women" from his pocket.

ROY

What is this?

GRACE

Did you get that from Alice?

ROY

Alice? You think this obscenity belongs to my wife?!?

GRACE

Well, I don't know what it is.

ROY

You've become a liar, Grace. A good one. And that breaks my heart.

GRACE

No!

ROY

I wanted such good things for you. I wanted you to be happy and learn what as much as you could while there was time and money. You're brilliant about books, but not about people. You let that girl use you. Ida used you. For this. (*the pamphlet*)

GRACE

You can leave. And take whatever-that-is with you.

ROY

You know who else was in Detroit last Friday? Michael Rhead. He spotted you, he said, lingering outside of one of Ford's factories right before the whistle was to blow. He said he thought about calling out to you but he thought you might cuss him out again.

GRACE

You've never let me tell you what he—

ROY

But instead he hung around to see what you were up to. He thought you might be waiting for a beau, that the reason you'd rejected him was because your heart belonged to some factory worker.

GRACE

He's got an idea about me—that I'm some kind of brazen—

ROY

Rhead said you were with two other women, but he didn't know who they were. I suspect I do. I mean, you've only got two friends.

GRACE

I wasn't with anyone. Ida was in her meeting. Her visit.

ROY

Yes, Mrs. Whitman.

GRACE

Yes.

ROY

You didn't go on the visit?

GRACE

No. Ida felt better by then. We both thought the train ride would be hard on her, but it turned out it was soothing.

ROY

I see.

GRACE

And I was waiting for her. And I thought it would be fun to see the people spill out of the factory. I've never seen anything like that.

ROY

Rhead said as the last whistle sounded, you blended into the crowd exiting from their shift. He lost track of you.

GRACE

It was a little scary, to be in that throng. Like Armistice Day, but the people were grouchy!

ROY

And when the dust had settled, there were six or seven of these scattered about the street. He collected them all. He's gave me this one and kept the rest. "Mrs. Whitman's Words for Women." That's clever. A slap in the face to me, to my gullibility. This is illegal, Grace. Printing it, distributing it, it is against the law.

GRACE

I had nothing to do with any of that.

ROY

Michael Rhead is willing to swear that he saw you in Detroit, distributing illegal information to female factory workers. He's going to go to the police—

GRACE

That vindictive—

ROY

If you don't accept his proposal.

GRACE

What?

ROY

If you accept his proposal he will give me all the copies he has of this filth, and I will burn them.

GRACE

His . . . proposal?

ROY

He wants to marry you.

GRACE

Why?

ROY

Because he's ready to start his career and his family. He's ready for a wife.

GRACE

I don't. This is. He doesn't want **me**. He doesn't even like me. And if he thinks I wrote that, he should like me even less.

ROY

The information contained in this thing is perverse, Grace. The highest calling of a woman is to be a mother, and to instruct good Christian women on how to circumvent that obligation? It's sinful and it's criminal and it's got to be stopped. So whatever you decide, I'm taking this to the police and telling them to have a good look at Ida Kett—

GRACE

It was me. Just me. I don't know who those women were that Michael Rhead thinks he saw with me. I was alone. Ida invited me to Detroit for company, and to have lunch after her visit with Mrs. Whitman. The real one. I had an idea a few weeks back, it came from a lecture in *The Animal Body*. It's not safe for women to have nine or ten or twelve babies in as many years, Roy. And they aren't allowed to know how to stop it? That's not fair.

ROY

It's the law.

GRACE

It isn't just.

ROY

You acted alone? This was all your idea?

GRACE

It was.

ROY

I don't believe you. This has Ida written all over it. Any other room in this building and you would've—(*been fine*).

GRACE

Roy, if you say anything about this to anyone in a position of authority I will tell Alice you made me cut off your toe so you wouldn't get drafted.

ROY

Grace.

GRACE

I'll tell Alice. I'll tell Father. How you schemed to make it look like an accident with the Holt, but you were too afraid to do it yourself. I'll tell my new husband. Everyone will know Roy McBride is a coward. Roy McBride let men die in his place.

ROY

Stop it!

GRACE

I did this by myself.

ROY

Then you're ready to become Mrs. Rhead? (*GRACE does not immediately respond*) There are three ways out of this, Grace. You marry the man, you face charges for the circulation of obscene literature, or you tell the authorities yourself who actually did this.

GRACE

When?

ROY

What?

GRACE

When do I have to marry him?

ROY

He'd like to bring you home as his wife for Christmas. Leave you in Battle Creek to set up house while he finishes school.

GRACE

That's less than two weeks from now.

ROY

I'll tell him you accept?

GRACE nods.

You should probably start packing.

ROY exits. GRACE is in shock. After a moment she slips a copy of The Woman Rebel out from between two books and finds the page she is looking for.

GRACE

(reading) “Yet it is also true that nearly all women are no better than slaves; that is to say, social restrictions prevent the full, free and natural development of nearly every woman that is born. Certainly the same is true of nearly every man; but the restraint is greater for women, and the degradation is greater.”

ALT---“I am the master of all. I am the daughter of strength. I am the dawn of life. I am I. I have no desire to be free, for I am free.”

SCENE 10. LILLIAN and her ukulele. She sings, slowly and sadly, "Michigan Goodbye."

Fare thee well, dear old Alma Mater,
Fare thee well, old home of mirth and cheer
We will take strong friendship with us
And those memories dear.

Tho' we roam the wide world over
Our hearts are with you to a man
So then here's to you, our maize and blue
Dear old Michigan.

Farewell to you old State Street;
And so long Tappan Hall
Goodbye to you, dear Barbour Gym,
Library Chimes and all.
Tho' we sail across the ocean,
We remember old time's tie.
So now, adieu, farewell to you,
Goodbye, Michigan, goodbye.

SCENE 11. Febraury. IDA reading. HARRIET enters shyly. All GRACE's things are gone.

Hello? HARRIET

Harriet? IDA

Yes. HARRIET

Well, come in. I'm Ida. IDA

I figured. HARRIET

Welcome. IDA

I'm glad this spot opened up. HARRIET

Is that all you brought? IDA

HARRIET
Oh, no. My things are being driven over from the League House I stayed in first term. This is much more elegant. I've heard they've talked of hosting weddings here in the future. *(IDA doesn't respond)* I'd like that.

HARRIET reaches into her bag and pulls out a valentine. She moves to hang it near her bed.

This is from Charles. I expect we'll get engaged this—oh! What's this? Something the previous resident left behind?

HARRIET is holding the "Work like Helen B. Happy" card.

That's funny. "Work like Helen B. Happy."

IDA snatches it from her hand and crumples it (ideally burns it)

Stop!

IDA

It's a lie.

HARRIET

No, it's not.

IDA

You can either work like hell, or you can be happy. I choose the former.

A moment of quiet.

HARRIET

You liked the girl who was here, the girl before me?

IDA

I did.

HARRIET

Have you spoken to her?

IDA

She's married now.

HARRIET

That's wonderful!

A moment of quiet.

Who's next door?

IDA

I expect there'll be a new girl. It used to be Lillian, but she's gone. Her mother needed to go out east for her health and Lillian's father wanted her back in the house. He said he was lonely.

HARRIET

A man does like a woman around! (*off IDA's lack of agreement*) Don't you think?

IDA

This Charles of yours, what's his game?

HARRIET

He was a pilot in the war. He's coming home in May, after he's discharged.

IDA

Hmmmmm.

HARRIET

What?

IDA

A lot of those boys who went to fight are going to come back different.

HARRIET

Oh, we've been writing back and forth. All the time. He's the same.

IDA

I mean physically.

HARRIET

He didn't get hurt, thank heavens.

IDA

I mean inside.

HARRIET

What are you talking about?

IDA

A lot of those boys are going to come back with diseases. They've been with women over there—

HARRIET

Not Charles!

IDA

All right. That's good. Good for you, then. Old loyal Charlie, faithful and true.

HARRIET

Don't make fun.

HARRIET notices IDA's small suitcase, packed and ready.

You've still got a bag to unpack.

IDA

It's staying the way it is. I'm taking a trip.

HARRIET

The term's just about to start. You're leaving?

IDA

Yes.

Where are you going?
HARRIET

Detroit.
IDA

Alone?
HARRIET

Yes.
IDA

Do you have family there?
HARRIET

No.
IDA

Friends?
HARRIET

Hundreds.
IDA

(in disbelief) I just bet you do.
HARRIET

If you ever want to meet them, you're welcome to join me.
IDA

NOTE: Michigan became a dry state in April of 1918, and stayed so until the national repeal in 1933, so at no point, ie when the revelers return from the peace parade, should anyone appear to have been drinking.