



Sample Pages from Failure and Fortitude: The Female Edison

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FAILURE AND FORTITUDE: THE FEMALE EDISON

A PLAY IN ONE ACT BY
Lindsay Price



Failure and Fortitude: The Female Edison
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Failure & Fortitude: The Female Edison is an independent one-act version of Act Two of the full-length play *The Female Edison* by Lindsay Price. It can be performed without any knowledge of Act Two.

There is also an independent one-act version of Act One called *Patterns & Power: The Female Edison*.

All three versions of the script can be found at theatrefolk.com

Characters

1 W, 12 AG, plus 3 groups (3/4/4)

GROUPS

There are three groups in the play. All three should be made up of any gendered actors. The size of each group depends on your situation. You can also have individual characters join these three groups when they're not needed elsewhere in the play. The choice is yours. Numbers have been suggested for the size of group. You can certainly expand the groups to fit your situation.

19th Century Woman: (AG) This small group embodies how people of the time think about women. Read the quotes in the Appendix and you'll get a full picture of their attitude. They are straight-laced, strict and unbending. They hate Margaret and what she represents. Three actors.

Inventors: (AG) This small group represents Inventors of the time. They have confidence and power. Even though the energy is "male", don't be bound by gender to keep the group all male. They are always smug and think they're better. Four actors.

Invention: (AG) This small group represents the creativity and energy of what creating a new invention represents. Think of them as insight into Margaret's inner creative side. They are whimsical and fun. They are the only thing "silly" about Margaret and not something she'd ever outwardly show. Even when she talks to these characters, she's always practical. The inventions are always bursting with excitement. Four actors.

INDIVIDUALS

Margaret: (W) Inventor. Spirited, stubborn, tough and stuck in a world that won't let her use her mind.

Charles Annan: Machinist. Inventor.

John Knox: Factory Supervisor.

David Cantwell: Patent Lawyer.

Wil Graham: Machinist.

Lewis Abbot: Machinist.

Arthur Duncan: Acting Commissioner.

Patent Office Clerk: Duncan's clerk.

FACTORY OPERATIVES

Emma

Grace

Ruth

Ellie

Alice

There are also four female inventors who should come from your cast of actors.

Gender

It is intentional that the gender breakdown for the play has a majority of Any Gendered (AG) roles, even though the character names are seemingly binary. Don't feel limited by the gender constraints of the time period and the names of the characters. Feel free to have roles played by whomever fits the role best, especially the individual "male" roles. The names and pronouns must be kept given the time period and some are actual names of individuals from Margaret's life, but do not feel bound by the number of traditional male roles. One of the original productions had a wide mix of gender, ethnicity, and students with different physical abilities. It all worked and fit the show perfectly. **This play is about breaking patterns. Break them.**

Having said that, Margaret's struggle has everything to do with being a woman inventor and to that end, it is against the intention of the playwright to have her played by a male actor. But keeping those struggles in mind, please feel free to have the role played by a non-binary or trans actor.

Set

A blank stage with two sets of risers upstage, big enough so that four to five actors can stand across. Another option is to have two small square risers, one stage left and one stage right. There are many "group" tableaux and anything you can do to create levels with these groups in the set, the better. Any and all machines are created by the actors. Use cubes or stools for any seating. If you use cubes, these can also be an option for people to stand on to give height for characters who want to show "power" over other characters.

Costumes

Though the story is set in the 19th century, the main character clearly states that they are aware they are not in the 19th century and that "this is theatre." The stage is not a factory and the characters aren't dressed as 19th century individuals. You're looking for something atmospheric and not authentic. Use muted, faded brown for the operatives, crisp light colours for the 19th century group, and straight lines for the inventors. The Invention group should look the embodiment of their creativity and energy. Avoid obvious 21st century clothing pieces, but don't worry if that is all you have

access to. There is a divide between the groups in the play and that should be visualized.

It's important to note that Margaret worked in factories her whole life. She is working class and should not come across as a "lady." However you choose to dress Margaret, it should reflect her factory-dominated life.

Sound

You'll want some kind of factory whistle and the sound of a gavel hitting a desk. Any machine sounds could be created by the Invention group. There is a moment of music suggested, which should be something light like Debussy's *Claire de Lune*. There is a moment when Charles and two of the groups hum as they exit, something like Strauss' *Blue Danube Waltz*

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Vocabulary

Bevel:	As in bevel gear, toothed rotating part used to transfer energy
Cam:	A cam is a mechanical part that either rotates or moves back and forth
Cog:	Tooth-like part at the end of a wheel or gear
Cross Brace:	Two diagonals crossing each other, used as support
Follower:	A mechanical part that reciprocates the motion of the cam
Feedshaft:	Used for rotating actions
Gear:	Rotating circular machine part
Guide Finger:	Projecting machine part that guides
Knife Frame:	Frame that holds cutting device
Lever:	A bar and a pivot point, used to move something
Lug:	Used as a connector
Patent:	A license with a right for a limited time to make, use, or sell an invention.
Pinion:	Round gear
Plate-Knife Folder:	Mechanical part that folds the paper
Roller:	Feeds the paper through the machine
Tucking Knife:	Mechanical part that folds the paper
Winch:	Device to pull in or let out tension of a rope or cable

A factory whistle blows. Lights come up on MARGARET, centre stage. Individual INVENTOR voices talk to her from the dark. It is suggested that you use four INVENTORS, but certainly you can expand that to fit your situation. Divide up the INVENTOR lines in the way that works best for you.

INVENTOR: Is your idea new?

MARGARET: Yes.

INVENTOR: Is your idea different?

MARGARET: Yes.

INVENTOR: Is your idea worth protecting?

MARGARET: Yes.

INVENTOR: Are you worth protecting?

MARGARET: Yes.

INVENTOR: Are you?

MARGARET: Yes!

INVENTOR: You aren't a real inventor, though, are you?

INVENTOR: Not really.

MARGARET: Yes I am.

INVENTOR: How could you be?

During the following text, the INVENTORS move to one side of the stage to form their tableau.

On the other side of the stage, lights come up on a small group of individuals of all genders. This is important. They represent how people of the time think. They stand straight, perhaps a little haughty looking, and represent through physicality the quote they are about to say: refined, and elegant. This group is the representation of the stereotype of the 19TH CENTURY WOMAN. You can decide how this group speaks: in unison, in pairs, with individual speaking voices, or you can identify a vocal representative. Some suggestions have been made, feel free to experiment with sound. It is suggested that you use three in the

19TH CENTURY group, but you can certainly expand this to fit your situation.

Note: You can find the sources for all quotes in the APPENDIX.

19TH CENTURY: (*all*) “The power of a woman

19TH CENTURY: is in her refinement, gentleness and elegance;

19TH CENTURY: it is she who makes etiquette,

19TH CENTURY: and it is she who preserves the order and the decency of society.”

MARGARET: (*referring to the 19TH CENTURY group*) If you look at this from their side, I am a failure. It’s the 19th century. I am not married. No children. I am not interested in making a house or a home. According to them, I am no woman.

Lights come up on the INVENTORS in their tableau. This is a small group of individuals of all genders. They stand with confidence and power. They look haughty. You can decide how this group speaks: in unison, in pairs, with individual speaking voices, or you can identify a vocal representative. Some suggestions have been made, feel free to experiment with sound.

INVENTOR: Inventors are a special breed.

INVENTOR: You need skills,

INVENTORS: training.

INVENTOR: Ingenuity and creativity.

INVENTOR: You need to look at the world around you with unique eyes.

INVENTOR: To be the first to do something?

INVENTOR: To create what no one has been able to do?

INVENTORS: Powerful.

MARGARET: If you look at this from their side... (*smiling*) I am a failure. No education. No training. No experience. It makes perfect sense I would fail. How could I invent anything properly? How could I understand the process?

And from offstage the INVENTION group runs on with a gleeful noise. They are a small group of individuals of all genders. They move with excitement and energy. They should look different than the rest of the cast, if possible. This group is the representation of INVENTION. You can decide how this group speaks: in unison, in pairs, with individual speaking voices, or you can identify a vocal representative. Every line here is said with SUCH excitement. They can't contain themselves. It is suggested that there are four in the INVENTION group but you can certainly expand this to fit your situation. They gather around MARGARET.

INVENTION: Are you new?

INVENTION: Useful?

INVENTION: (all) Inventive?

INVENTION: Do you solve a problem that everyone around you hasn't been able to solve?

INVENTION: Are you a machine? A device?

INVENTION: (all) A process?

INVENTION: A method of doing something? Do you improve a method?

INVENTION: (complete glee) You could be an invention!

MARGARET: Failure is in my blood. Which I consider incredibly lucky. You can't be an inventor unless you fail.

INVENTION: (all) Yes!

MARGARET: You can't create if you don't fail.

INVENTION: (all) Yes!

MARGARET: (all) An invention is simply a new thing or a new way of doing things. How can you do something new without failing first?

INVENTION: (all) Yes!

INVENTION: To the invention!

The INVENTION group cheers! They have a moment where they swirl around MARGARET with joy and chatter at the same time. They are demonstrating physical and vocal joy.

INVENTION: (*during their movement, everyone talking at the same time but not saying the same thing*) I love inventions, it's the most amazing thing to do. Can you believe you get to invent something, isn't that awesome. I can't wait to see what we're going to do next. What is it, what is it, what is it? I can't believe how snobby those groups look. Look at them! What are we going to do next? What are we going to do next?

They finally gather upstage, totally focused on MARGARET.

MARGARET: An inventor fails in the face of the rules. And has the fortitude to ignore the rules. That is everything an inventor is and does. Failure and fortitude.

INVENTION: (*all*) To failure!

MARGARET: No matter what they say, I am an inventor. My name is Margaret E. Knight. I was born in Maine in 1838. I died in 1913. I quit school at 12 years old to go work in a textile factory. I worked in factories my whole life. This is a true story, but it's not a textbook or a documentary. Some details are real, some not. There isn't much written down. But know this. I am real. Flesh and blood. I am an inventor. Cogs and oil. It was what I was born to do.

19TH CENTURY: (*all*) "The family institution..."

19TH CENTURY: "...is repugnant to the idea of a woman adopting a distinct and independent career from that of her husband."

INVENTORS: "The female mind..."

INVENTOR: "...has as yet manifested very little of the kind of genius termed mechanical, or inventive."

The INVENTION group jeers and blows raspberries at the 19TH CENTURY WOMAN and the INVENTORS.

MARGARET: (*referring to the stage*) This space is going to become many places. (*gesturing to the groups onstage*) These groups will become many people. Everything happened in the 19th century, but we all know we're far away from there. In time, anyway. In some ways, hardly any time has passed at all.

19TH CENTURY: "'Ladylike' can never go out of fashion.

19TH CENTURY: It is at once a compliment of the highest order and a suggestion of subtle perfection."

MARGARET: (*quoting from her patent*) “I wish to have it understood that, believing myself to be the first to invent a device to hold back or push back a point or portion of one edge of the paper tube while the blade or tucking knife forms the first fold, represented in Fig. 10 which is the basis of the flat-bottomed bag.” (*pause*) In my obituary they called me “The Female Edison.” Other inventors who just happened to be women were called this as well. It’s like they lumped us all together. As if any one of us couldn’t stand on their own name. As if we need someone else’s name to validate our inventions. That has always stuck in my craw a little. (*beat*) Let’s get started.

There is the sound of a very slow condescending clap as CHARLES saunters onstage. CHARLES is interrupting the story. He is backed up by both INVENTORS and the 19TH CENTURY WOMAN groups. They are happy to see him, they are on his side and react favorably to his presence. The INVENTION group supports MARGARET.

MARGARET: (*to CHARLES*) What are you doing here?

CHARLES: Inventor? Is that what you’re calling yourself? Please.

INVENTORS: Please.

INVENTION: Get out!

CHARLES: Female Edison? That’s laughable.

INVENTORS: Impossible.

19TH CENTURY: Insulting.

MARGARET: Get out! You’re not part of the story yet.

CHARLES: There’s no way a woman could have the sense to understand such mechanical complexities.

19TH CENTURY & INVENTORS: Never!

MARGARET: Is that right?

CHARLES: Facts are facts. (*holds up a piece of paper*) Patents are patents.

MARGARET: Get out of here, you ratbag!

The 19TH CENTURY group gasps. The INVENTORS mutter in disapproval.

CHARLES: Language, Margaret, language.

CHARLES strolls off, humming the Blue Danube Waltz, holding high the piece of paper. The 19TH CENTURY WOMAN and INVENTORS join in, also humming and follow CHARLES off, sneering at MARGARET as they exit. The INVENTION group verbally jeers at the exiting group. They then flow back to MARGARET who has been pacing.

MARGARET: I can't believe he just showed up in my story when he wanted to. It's my story. I get to say who comes and goes. (*calling out*) I'm gonna knock some heads together.

INVENTION: (*reacting*) Hey!

MARGARET: (*takes a breath*) Of course I'm not going to do that. How would that look? I have enough trouble as it is. (*beat*) But I would sure think about it... (*she breathes and starts again*) It's 1867. The Golden Age of Invention.

The factory whistle blows again. The INVENTION group runs to the side to observe in a tableau, out of the way. From the other side of the stage, the OPERATIVES enter, chatting together, getting into their place on the factory line. KNOX, the foreman, is checking items on a wooden clipboard and a pencil. Every upcoming action on the factory line should be mimed. See the APPENDIX for action suggestions.

KNOX: Ladies, ladies, ladies. Let's get ready to work.

OPERATIVES: (*brightly*) Yes, Mr. Knox.

KNOX: Margaret, you're about to be late.

Everyone freezes.

MARGARET: (*to audience*) Have you ever looked at something and wondered how it's made?

INVENTION: Where it came from?

INVENTION: Who thought it into existence?

INVENTION: Who thought of a way to make it better?

MARGARET: Nobody does, do they? Why would they? You use what's in front of you. That coffee cup. That shower curtain. That dishwasher. It's just there and always has been. Except it hasn't.

Everything came into being because someone said, “Why do we do things this way? What if there was another?”

INVENTION: What if?

MARGARET: *(beat)* I’ve worked in factories a good part of my life. In 1867 in Springfield, Massachusetts, I was making paper bags.

Everyone starts moving again.

KNOX: Margaret, you’re about to be late.

MARGARET: But I’m not, I’m here.

KNOX: What’s our one rule, ladies?

OPERATIVES: *(brightly)* Do your job.

The factory whistle blows.

KNOX: Have a productive day, ladies. *(exits)*

Everyone now has their own repeated action on the factory line. They are all operating “machines” to make paper bags. At this point, machine-made paper bags are envelopes, like manila envelopes. They don’t have flat bottoms.

The OPERATIVES feed the paper into the machine, the machine glues the paper into a tube. The OPERATIVE pulls a lever down to flatten the tube. The machine folds and glues one end to create the envelope shape. The OPERATIVE raises the lever, removes the bag, inspects it, and places it to the side. Each OPERATIVE is making their own bags, and they are paid by how many bags they make.

This series of movements is quick and the OPERATIVES do it without thinking. They carry on their conversations, while they work their machines.

GRACE: Margaret, pay attention!

MARGARET: Sorry. *(stifles a yawn)*

EMMA: Oh don’t yawn, it makes me yawn! *(yawns)*

RUTH: Have a late night?

ELLIE: I sure did. *(gleefully)* I’m so tired today.

EMMA: She was out with her fella.

GRACE: What?

ALICE: On a Sunday? Goodness, Ellie.

ELLIE: Oh goodness yourself, Alice.

ALICE: On a Sunday...

ELLIE: It's our only day off, I've got to make the most of it.

EMMA: Hear, hear!

GRACE: Settle down, please.

ELLIE: I tell you this, ladies, my days here are numbered.

RUTH: You've said that before.

EMMA: How many times, Ruth?

RUTH: Three. She's said it three times.

ALICE: Three times? Goodness, Ellie.

ELLIE: So glad you're all keeping count.

EMMA: (*yawning*) I can't keep my eyes open...

GRACE: Emma, pay attention!

Everyone continues their actions silently.

MARGARET: (*to audience*) This goes on every day. Variations on a theme. Everyone is tired. They're looking after family, they're supporting family, they want their own families. I don't always pay attention. I don't need to. My hands make the movements pretty much by themselves now. I spend my days... thinking.

All the OPERATIVES pull a folded up modern paper bag out of their costumes. They shake them open and hold them in the air. They move slowly in a circle around MARGARET. If you want, the INVENTION group holds up their own paper bags as well. If there is room, have them join the circle around MARGARET. Otherwise, have them stay in their tableau, looking on with rapt attention.

At the same time, the INVENTORS enter slowly with uniform and unison movements. They move across the upstage riser in a line. They move with their hands behind their backs, in a superior stance. They ignore the action, and in no way interfere or upstage the

action. Once everyone in this group has entered, they slowly turn and face downstage, in neutral.

MARGARET: (to audience) Have you ever thought about how paper bags are made?

ELLIE: Of course they haven't, Margaret. It's a silly question.

GRACE: Don't be unkind, Ellie.

ELLIE: Just being honest.

MARGARET: Today paper bags have flat bottoms. Back then we put them together like envelopes.

EMMA: They're so awkward.

RUTH: And they hardly hold anything.

ALICE: I suppose they're not very practical...

MARGARET: Why do we do it this way? What if there was another? A problem to solve.

GRACE: This factory does make flat bottom paper bags.

MARGARET: By hand. There's no machine to mass produce them, so it's expensive. There's no machine; it doesn't exist. Yet. Other girls were thinking about getting married. I was thinking about a machine that didn't exist. A problem to solve. An invention!

And now the INVENTORS move, swiftly toward MARGARET, swarming her, talking forcefully. This causes the OPERATIVES to scramble out of the way and the INVENTION group shows concern.

INVENTORS: (all together) Is your idea new?

MARGARET: Yes.

INVENTORS: (all together) Is your idea different?

MARGARET: Yes.

INVENTOR: Is your idea worth protecting?

MARGARET: Yes.

INVENTOR: Are you sure? You don't have anything.

INVENTOR: You don't even have a drawing.

INVENTOR: Ideas aren't machines.

INVENTOR: You can't patent an idea.

INVENTOR: Ideas are nothing.

The INVENTION group chases the INVENTORS offstage, verbalizing as they do, and return to their watching position. In the moment, the OPERATIVES return to their spots. The factory whistle blows. KNOX enters.

KNOX: Ladies, ladies, ladies. Let's get ready to work.

OPERATIVES: Yes, Mr. Knox.

They all start their repetitive gestures as they work at their machines.

ELLIE: Oh, my back hurts.

ALICE stretches and yawns wide.

KNOX: Look alive, Alice.

ALICE: *(yawning)* Sorry, Mr. Knox.

KNOX: What's our one rule, ladies?

OPERATIVES: *(brightly)* Do your job.

The factory whistle blows.

KNOX: Have a productive day, ladies. *(moves to the side, involved with his clipboard)*

ALICE yawns.

GRACE: Close your mouth, Alice, you'll catch flies.

ELLIE: Late night?

ALICE: My sister had her baby at 3am.

All the OPERATIVES except MARGARET ooh and aww and, for a second, stop working. They gather around ALICE. MARGARET takes out a small notebook and a stub pencil.

MARGARET: *(making notes)* There has to be a way. It's senseless to glue them by hand.

INVENTION: *(all)* Has to be.

GRACE: What did she have?

ALICE: A boy.

The OPERATIVES ooh and aww and continue talking silently. MARGARET wanders over to the INVENTION group.

MARGARET: (to INVENTION) Ideas are not nothing. Ideas are the start.

INVENTION: It's stupid to say ideas are nothing.

MARGARET: I know.

INVENTION: A true inventor wouldn't say that.

INVENTION: You don't have a machine, if you don't have the idea.

MARGARET: What does it need to do?

INVENTION: Feed, cut, fold.

MARGARET: Multiple folds to create the bottom and then paste.

INVENTION: (all) Feed, cut, fold, paste.

RUTH: What's his name?

ALICE: Michael. I prefer James for a boy.

MARGARET: What creates the folds?

INVENTION: (all) Feed, cut, fold, paste.

ELLIE: I adore the name Alexander.

GRACE: Nonsense. John. William. George. Maybe Frank, but only in certain families.

MARGARET: Some kind of arm? That's where I'd start.

INVENTION: Yes!

MARGARET: And something to crease the paper so it folds easily.

INVENTION: (all) Feed, cut, fold, paste.

ELLIE: What's wrong with Alexander?

GRACE: It's vulgar.

ELLIE: What are you talking about?

The OPERATIVES start loudly arguing about names. KNOX looks up.

KNOX: Here, here! What's going on? Why have you stopped, Grace?

GRACE: Sorry, Mr. Knox. Ladies!

OPERATIVES: (*hurriedly*) Sorry, Mr. Knox.

They all scramble to get back to work.

INVENTION: (*all whisper*) Feed, cut, fold, paste.

KNOX: Don't let me catch you taking an unscheduled break again. I'll dock your pay.

RUTH: Alice's sister had her baby.

KNOX: (*softening*) She did? Boy or girl? (*shaking his head*) It doesn't matter! (*exits muttering*)

GRACE: I can't wait to have babies of my own.

EMMA: I can.

RUTH: Don't you want a family?

EMMA: Screaming kids and little help? I've seen enough of that.

ALICE: All girls want a family.

INVENTION: (*all whisper*) Feed, cut, fold, paste.

EMMA: Margaret doesn't, do you, Margaret? Margaret?

MARGARET: (*in her own world moving back to OPERATIVES*) Feed, cut, fold, paste...

ELLIE: Margaret!

MARGARET: What?

GRACE: Margaret, pay attention!

EMMA: You don't want a family, do you?

ALICE: (*aside to RUTH*) She's awfully old now.

ELLIE: Alice! What a thing to say.

RUTH: (*whispering to ALICE*) She's nearly 30.

EMMA: She can hear you.

MARGARET: I'm too busy for a family. (*putting her notebook away*)

GRACE: What on earth could you be doing?

EMMA: Always with that notebook.

ALICE: You're going to get in trouble.

ELLIE: What are you doing?

MARGARET: Thinking.

EMMA: Why?

RUTH: When you don't have to?

ALICE: Don't let Mr. Knox see.

GRACE: Ladies! Eyes on your own machines and your own work.

OPERATIVES: Yes, Grace.

Everyone continues to work silently. Lights narrow as EMMA turns to MARGARET. They are in their own moment, no one else is listening.

EMMA: Margaret? What is it... what are you thinking about?

MARGARET: Do you really want to know? *(to audience)* In the real world, Emma wouldn't want to know.

EMMA: Yes. If you don't mind.

MARGARET: A machine that doesn't exist.

EMMA: *(trying to process this)* Oh. Like the ones we use?

MARGARET: Sort of.

EMMA: How can you do that? Think. I don't... I don't think. Ever.

MARGARET: *(kindly)* You're busy. How many kids are at home?

EMMA: *(matter of fact)* Seven.

MARGARET: *(matter of fact)* And your mother died...

EMMA: *(matter of fact)* A year ago. After Samuel was born.

MARGARET: Everything is on you.

EMMA: I guess. I never thought of it any other way. *(small smile)* See? I don't think.

MARGARET: You're busy.

EMMA: (*realizing*) I don't even think about what it would be like to have time for myself. How could that possibly happen? It doesn't. It won't.

MARGARET: No.

EMMA: (*looking around*) It never crosses my mind that I'll get free of this.

MARGARET: None of you do.

EMMA: No. Why would I expect anything different? Speaking of which...

MARGARET: We're not in a hurry. It's not real.

EMMA: I don't want to let Mr. Knox down. Good luck with your thinking.

EMMA returns to the silent movements of the other OPERATIVES. During the above, CHARLES has quietly entered on the upstage riser.

CHARLES: You'll never do it. You'll never figure it out.

INVENTION: (*all*) Hey!

MARGARET: Stop interrupting my story!

CHARLES: What do you know about machines? You're nothing but an operative.

The INVENTION group hisses at CHARLES, who pays them no mind.

CHARLES: (*referring to the OPERATIVES*) Look at them. Same actions, day after day. They don't understand the mechanics. They do what they're told. Why, they're nothing more than machines themselves. Just another cog. And one day they'll leave or the factory will spit them out and replace one cog with another.

The INVENTION group hisses and vocalizes at CHARLES to leave MARGARET alone. (don't say the same thing, speak in syncopation)

MARGARET: Get out!

CHARLES: The same will happen to you. The factory will spit you out when you're too old to do your job. Thrown out like yesterday's trash. You'll see. (*strolls off*)

The INVENTION group yells after CHARLES to leave MARGARET alone.

MARGARET: (*yelling overtop*) I am not a cog in any machine. I am my own person, with my own ideas and my own mind. I don't have a husband and no one helped me. I am an inventor!

INVENTION: (*all*) Margaret E. Knight! Inventor!

There is a moment of silence. MARGARET regroupes. She takes a deep breath.

MARGARET: (*to audience*) Sorry. He'll be back. Clearly he's going to keep coming back, but I'm not introducing him until the last possible second. You'll have to wait. (*beat*) Inventions take time; what else do I have?

The factory whistle blows. The OPERATIVES, still at their stations, stretch and yawn. MARGARET joins them. KNOX enters, focused on his clipboard.

KNOX: Ladies, ladies, ladies. Let's get ready to work.

OPERATIVES: (*brightly*) Yes, Mr. Knox.

They all start their repetitive gestures as they work at their machines.

ELLIE: Oh, my back hurts.

ALICE stretches and yawns wide.

KNOX: Look alive, Alice.

ALICE: (*yawning*) Sorry, Mr. Knox.

KNOX: What's our one rule, ladies?

OPERATIVES: (*brightly*) Do your job.

MARGARET: I can do this.

The factory whistle blows. KNOX circles behind, focused on his clipboard. The INVENTION group starts to slowly, slowly move into the shape of the machine MARGARET is envisioning in her head. They do not complete the machine until indicated. A diagram of the final machine from MARGARET's patent and a suggested final grouping for the INVENTION group is included in the APPENDIX.

INVENTION: Feed, cut, fold, paste.

MARGARET: Feed, cut, fold, paste. Ideas in my head.

INVENTION: Feed, cut, fold, paste.

MARGARET: Drawing into the night until my candle is a puddle on the table. How do I turn scribbles into action?

The factory whistle blows. The OPERATIVES, still at their stations, stretch and yawn. KNOX is right there.

KNOX: What's our one rule, ladies?

OPERATIVES: (*brightly*) Do your job.

MARGARET: I can do this. Scribbles into a machine.

INVENTION: Feed, cut, fold, paste.

MARGARET: It's not impossible.

The OPERATIVES start their repetitive gestures as they work at their machines. KNOX circles behind, focused on his clipboard. If possible, the OPERATIVES and KNOX match the speed of movement of the INVENTION group. It should all look like one dance. The dialogue lines however, are not in slow motion. Just the actions.

ELLIE: I can't wait till tomorrow!

MARGARET: Make a sketch?

INVENTION: Yes. Done.

EMMA: Going out with your fella?

MARGARET: Make a paper model?

INVENTION: Yes. Done.

ALICE: On a Sunday? Goodness, Ellie.

ELLIE: It's our only day off, I've got to make the most of it.

EMMA: Hear, hear!

MARGARET: Make a plate-knife folder?

INVENTION: Yes. Done.

ELLIE: Margaret, you're talking to yourself again.

ALICE: That's not going to attract a man.

EMMA: Ugh to that, Alice.

MARGARET: Does it work? Will it make something?

INVENTION: (*all together*) Feed, cut, fold, paste.

RUTH: Margaret? Margaret!

MARGARET: Cut, fold, paste... two folds...

ELLIE: She's losing it...

GRACE: Eyes on your machine, ladies.

OPERATIVES: Yes, Grace.

The factory whistle blows. The OPERATIVES, still at their stations, stretch and yawn. KNOX is right there.

KNOX: What's our one rule, ladies?

OPERATIVES: (*brightly*) Do your job.

MARGARET: (*to the audience*) In some ways, the theatre is like inventing. Anything can happen.

During the following the INVENTION group moves into their final position, upstage in front of the riser (see APPENDIX). They become the final version machine. They move as one as the machine. The OPERATIVES and KNOX start to move, slowly (not speaking slowly, just moving) around the completed machine, mimicking their movements as they move individually.

Combine the words any way you wish. Use music to underscore, if you wish. This is a MOMENT for MARGARET.

INVENTION: (*individually speaking*) Cam, roller, bevel, gears

MARGARET: This stage can be anywhere.

OPERATIVES & KNOX: (*individually speaking*) Cog, pinion, guide finger, winch

MARGARET: The theatre creates worlds that don't exist. I create machines.

INVENTION: (*individually speaking*) Follower, feedshaft, cross brace, arm

MARGARET: I can invent anything. No matter what they say or how they see me. *(to group)* Hold!

Everyone freezes. MARGARET looks at the machine.

MARGARET: *(this is special)* That's it. That's what I want. It's beautiful. At the moment it's only in my head, but still. *(she breathes)* Still. Scribbles into action.

There is a moment. MARGARET, very quietly, to the INVENTION group.

Ok. Off you go.

The INVENTION group slowly dissolves the machine and slowly returns to their observation place. MARGARET, back to practicality, turns to the audience and speaks as this is happening.

MARGARET: Some say the theatre is quite magical. A world created out of nothing. Well, not nothing: words, set pieces, actors, designers. There's nothing magical about machines. Everything is practical and methodical. Everything connects and if something doesn't work, there's a reason. Everything takes time. Months. Years. Magic doesn't solve problems. But this is theatre, so a little magic isn't out of the question. Let's speed up the process.

There is the sound of something sped up. Everyone onstage moves in rapid circles. KNOX exits. The factory whistle blows. The OPERATIVES move downstage, all crowding around MARGARET, who has grabbed a small wooden box.

ELLIE: *(looking inside the box)* What's that?

MARGARET: It's called a plate-knife folder.

ALICE: What's that?

MARGARET: It's part of a machine. An important part.

RUTH: What does it do?

EMMA: What are you going to do with it?

MARGARET: Test it.

ELLIE: Why?

MARGARET: To see if it works the way I think it will.

GRACE: How are you going to do that?

MARGARET: (*putting the box down, off to the side*) There are so many old machines in the back. I'm going to ask Mr. Knox if he would let me use one after hours.

GRACE: (*this is not acceptable*) What?

ALICE: You're going to talk to Mr. Knox? Goodness, Margaret.

GRACE: You can't do that.

EMMA: Why not?

RUTH: She'll get in trouble.

GRACE: She'll get us in trouble.

ELLIE: How?

ALICE: Oh Margaret, don't get us in trouble.

EMMA: Mr. Knox wouldn't do that.

GRACE: You don't know.

ELLIE: The worst thing that'll happen is that he'll say no.

MARGARET: Exactly.

GRACE: Margaret. This is going over the line.

MARGARET: What line?

GRACE: It's one thing for you to be drawing in the corner before shift. Even that has caught the attention of Management, don't think it hasn't. We all have rules to follow and we have jobs to do. Do your job, Margaret. That's it.

Music plays. Something soft and lilting like Debussy's Claire de Lune. The OPERATIVES look around startled and clump together. MARGARET shakes her head. She is being interrupted again.

The 19TH CENTURY group "floats" in. They are physicalizing grace and dignity. CHARLES and the INVENTORS also enter, smartly, with purpose. Another option is that you play a waltz and the 19TH CENTURY group waltzes in with the INVENTORS. CHARLES speaks as the others move. The music lowers.

CHARLES: “A woman must have grace and dignity.

CHARLES & 19TH CENTURY: There should never be rowdiness or carelessness.”

CHARLES: “The female mind has as yet manifested very little of the kind of genius termed mechanical, or inventive.

INVENTOR: We do not believe,

INVENTOR: A woman would ever have invented the compass,

INVENTOR: The printing-press,

INVENTOR: The steam-engine,

INVENTOR: Or even a loom.

19TH CENTURY: (*all*) There is no need

CHARLES: that woman should help man in his task of subduing the world.

INVENTORS: (*all*) He has the strong arm

CHARLES: and the ingenious mind to understand and grapple with things of earth.”

The music rises. The groups move off. CHARLES holds up the piece of paper, as if taunting MARGARET, and also leaves. MARGARET and the OPERATIVES watch them go.

The music fades. There is a moment of silence.

EMMA: (*firmly*) You should talk to Mr. Knox.

GRACE: Emma!

EMMA: You should definitely talk to Mr. Knox.

ELLIE: If you don't do it, I will.

ALICE: Goodness, Ellie.

ELLIE: Goodness yourself, Alice.

RUTH: I don't know...

GRACE: (*referring to the 19TH CENTURY group*) I think they're right. We have our place, men have theirs. You should stay out of their world.

ELLIE: Like you do?

GRACE: I know my place.

The factory whistle blows. The OPERATIVES exit. MR. KNOX enters and MARGARET turns.

MR. KNOX: Margaret? What are you doing here? The day is over.

MARGARET: I... I'd like to ask you something.

MR. KNOX: I'm on my way out, Margaret. We can address this in the morning, yes?

MARGARET: I want to ask if I can use one of the old machines in the garage.

MR. KNOX: Why?

MARGARET: They're not on the factory floor, I wouldn't be using any company time, I need to test my –

MR. KNOX: Margaret, this has nothing to do with your job so it has nothing to do with –

MARGARET: I'm inventing something! A machine. I'm making a machine. Inventing a machine. *(she runs to get the box)*

MR. KNOX: *(that catches his attention)* What?

MARGARET: To mass produce flat bottom paper bags. *(beat)* You wouldn't have to have them done by hand anymore.

MR. KNOX: *(that catches his attention)* That doesn't exist.

MARGARET: Yet.

MR. KNOX: How would you know how to make a machine like that?

MARGARET: I have drawings. And a paper model. *(to self)* Just a cog. *(back to KNOX, gesturing to the box)* I need to test a part. Once I do that I'll make a wooden model.

MR. KNOX: *(takes the box)* Let me see.

MARGARET: I have to test the plate-knife folder before I go any further.

MR. KNOX: You made this, and no one –

MARGARET: *(takes the box back)* No. No one helped me make this, Mr. Knox. *(KNOX freezes and MARGARET turns to the audience)* So.

Fact or fiction. (*puts the box down off to the side*) Did Mr. Knox help me out of the goodness of his heart? In 1867? Is that what really happened? Maybe I offered him a side deal.

MR. KNOX: (*unfreezing*) Ok I'll help. But you'll pay me 60% of any proceeds. 70%! (*freezing*)

MARGARET: If I was watching this, my question would be how did I get so much done on my inventions and keep my job at the same time.

MR. KNOX: (*unfreezing*) You're fired, Margaret! Fired! And I'll make sure you never work in another factory in all of Massachusetts ever again!

MARGARET: No one knows how I didn't get into trouble. (*to KNOX*) Do you know?

MR. KNOX: Not a clue.

MARGARET: (*to audience*) You'll have to decide if you want to trust me.

MR. KNOX: (*breaking character*) How do you want me to play this? Out of the goodness of my heart?

MARGARET: Yes. We already have one villain in the story.

MR. KNOX: You got it.

MARGARET: (*to audience*) And the real takeaway here is nothing gets done alone. You can have all the fortitude you want, but in my time, in any time really, we need help to get things done. To make it happen. I could invent in my room for hours on end and never let my machines see the light of day. Just me and the tools without any talk about who or what I'm supposed to be or do. But it doesn't work that way. (*to KNOX*) I need your help.

There is the sound of a gavel hitting a desk three times. The lights narrow down to focus on MR. KNOX, who moves downstage. They are talking in front of the Acting Commissioner of Patents as a witness.

KNOX: Yes, sir. Sorry, sir, I'm a little nervous. Everyone looking. Ha. So. The first thing I saw was the plate-knife folder. At the factory, yes, sir. Where Margaret works, with me, for me, for the factory, where I, me, yes... Sorry, sir. It worked? Yes. By gum, it did work. And then she made a wooden version. And it worked. (*with awe*) We made bags. The machine made them! It wasn't perfect. A rickety thing. All shaky. Yes, sir, I saw it work with my own eyes. Hundreds of bags! Not perfect. It wasn't able to glue the flaps.

But other than that? Remarkable. (*getting excited*) And then she moved on to iron and we made thousands of bags. I saw it! I was there! Thousands! (*calming down*) Remarkable.

Lights come up on MARGARET. KNOX freezes.

MARGARET: (*to the audience*) We've jumped a bit. But that's the gist of the story. Paper, wood, iron. (*gesturing to KNOX*) And what's this? Who is Mr. Knox talking to? More jumping around I'm afraid. (*turning in the other direction*) It starts over here.

Lights change. KNOX exits and MARGARET starts pacing. CANTWELL, a patent lawyer, preoccupied with a brief, enters reading. MARGARET sees him and crosses the stage with purpose and spirit.

MARGARET: (*on the move*) Excuse me? Excuse me, Mr. Cantwell!

CANTWELL: (*looking up, surprised at her force*) Yes?

MARGARET: Mr. Cantwell?

CANTWELL: Can I help you? Did I have an appointment with your husband?

MARGARET: I need a lawyer. A patent lawyer.

CANTWELL: My dear, you must be mistaken. Easy to do. Whatever you're looking for –

MARGARET: I need a patent lawyer, you specifically.

CANTWELL: You couldn't possibly afford me. I can recommend –

MARGARET: A hundred dollars a day. That's what you charge, isn't it?

CANTWELL: Yes.

MARGARET: You're supposed to be the best. You better be, at a hundred dollars a day. You better know what you're doing. I'm not looking to be swindled, Mr. Cantwell, and rest assured I am no shrinking violet. I've had quite enough of people stealing from me, so if you're one of those lawyers who cheat women out of their savings, you won't get away with it.

CANTWELL: Can we start again, please? Before I was confused. Now. You know who I am, may I ask who you are?

MARGARET: Margaret Knight.

CANTWELL: Good morning, Mrs. Knight. And you're looking for a patent lawyer because...?

MARGARET: I've filed a patent interference suit and I need a lawyer for the hearing in front of the Commissioner of Patents.

CANTWELL: Mrs. Knight, how did you find me? Did your husband –

MARGARET: Let's start there. It's Miss Knight, Mr. Cantwell. Miss Knight. All right?

CANTWELL: I see.

MARGARET: I've spent two years working on a machine and someone took it out from under me.

CANTWELL: You invented something and someone has claimed it as theirs.

MARGARET: He stole my invention. And I want it back.

There is the sound of stamping offstage. Everyone in the cast enters from all over. They walk with a STAMP, step, STAMP, step, STAMP, step, STAMP, step pattern. Everyone holds a piece of paper over their heads. Once the pattern has been established, add a STAMP, STAMP, STAMP to end the pattern and everyone freezes.

INVENTOR: "A country without a patent office and good patent laws is just a crab, and can't travel any way but sideways and backwards."

Everyone moves in the pattern, STAMP, step, STAMP, step, STAMP, STAMP, STAMP.

CANTWELL: "The patent system changed this; and added the fuel of interest to the fire of genius, in the discovery and production of new and useful things."

19TH CENTURY: "The female mind has as yet manifested very little of the kind of genius termed mechanical, or inventive."

INVENTION: (all) "Necessity is the mother of invention."

Everyone moves in the pattern, STAMP, step, STAMP, step, STAMP, STAMP, STAMP. The INVENTION group rushes together to one side. The INVENTORS and CANTWELL are on the other. The 19TH CENTURY group is upstage. MARGARET is off to the side

watching everything. During this, CHARLES enters to stand on the upstage riser with the 19TH CENTURY.

INVENTION: The inventor has an idea. Ta da!

INVENTION: And turns that idea into something,

INVENTION: A machine!

INVENTION: A device!

INVENTION: A method for doing!

CANTWELL: That needs to be protected.

INVENTOR: In order to be protected,

INVENTOR: And to make money,

CHARLES: You need a patent.

Everyone holds up their paper.

INVENTION: Not everything that is invented can be protected.

INVENTION: You can't patent an abstract idea or a natural phenomenon.

INVENTOR: Are you new?

INVENTION: Yes!

INVENTOR: Are you different?

INVENTION: Yes!

CANTWELL: Are you worth protecting?

INVENTION: Yes!

INVENTOR: If you don't know how to protect yourself, you're useless as an inventor.

CANTWELL: Someone can copy your invention and then you're done for.

CHARLES: The patent gives the inventor the exclusive right to their invention for a limited time. *(moves to the INVENTOR group)*

INVENTOR: They can make it, sell it...

CHARLES: Profit from it.

MARGARET: *(to audience)* When I was 12 years old, I worked in a textile factory. A boy died when a shuttle flew off the loom and hit him in the side. I invented a way to stop that from happening. They used it in factories all across Massachusetts. No one told me I should patent my invention. Why would they? I was 12. I never saw a dime.

INVENTOR: No one else can make the same thing you do, or use the same method you invented if you own the patent.

INVENTION: The stakes are pretty high for inventors.

INVENTOR: If you don't protect what's yours.

CHARLES: *(directly to MARGARET, holding up the paper)* What good are you?

They exit as MARGARET talks. CANTWELL returns to the side to observe.

MARGARET: In 1869 when I filed my patent, the fee was \$35 and lasted 17 years. In today's dollars that's \$790. Do you have an extra \$790 lying around? I don't. *(takes out an envelope and a piece of paper)* And I didn't.

The factory whistle blows. By now everyone not needed onstage should be gone. The OPERATIVES run in, as does MR. KNOX, surrounding MARGARET. They are standing on the upstage riser.

ELLIE: What happened?

MARGARET: They... They said no. They didn't give me the patent. They're saying someone had already invented the machine. And gave him the patent. For my machine.

MR. KNOX: That's impossible.

MARGARET: *(putting the letter back in the envelope)* Yes...

ALICE: Oh well. That's that.

GRACE: Exactly. Back to work, ladies.

RUTH: I thought... I'm sorry, Margaret.

EMMA: *(to MARGARET)* Are you okay?

KNOX: *(subdued)* Ladies. Let's get ready to work.

OPERATIVES: *(for the first time, subdued.)* Yes, Mr. Knox.

KNOX: What's our one rule, ladies?

OPERATIVES: (*subdued*) Do your job. (*they don't move*)

MR. KNOX: (*turns to move away, and turns back*) I'm so sorry, Margaret. I can't imagine how this happened but... I don't know. I'm sorry. It was a remarkable machine. I'm glad I saw it in action.

The factory whistle blows. The OPERATIVES and KNOX freeze, with heads down. MARGARET moves forward and the lights narrow around her.

MARGARET: (*to audience*) Have you ever looked at something and wondered how it's made? Where it came from? Who thought it into existence or who thought of a way to make it better? I did. I thought this into existence. I invented a machine. A new and improved machine for making paper bags. No one else just happened to have the exact same idea at the exact same time. Two years of my life. Two years to end like this? Be it known that I, Margaret E. Knight of Boston in the county of Suffolk, and state of Massachusetts have invented a new and improved machine for making paper bags; and I do hereby declare the following to be a full and correct description of the same. I invented it! It makes no sense! (*quiet*) It makes no sense.

Lights change. CANTWELL crosses over to MARGARET, taking notes. The INVENTION group moves quietly to form the shape of a paper bag machine with their bodies (see APPENDIX). They stand in front of the OPERATIVES group, in front of the upstage riser.

CANTWELL: So let me get the timeline straight. You started with sketches, made a paper model...

MARGARET: February, 1867, March, 1867.

CANTWELL: Constructed the –

MARGARET: Guide finger and plate-knife folder.

CANTWELL: And attached it to an old paper bag machine. And then a wooden model?

MARGARET: That's right.

Lights change. MARGARET moves to KNOX, and the OPERATIVES staring at the INVENTION, as if staring at MARGARET's machine.

EMMA: Is that... it?

ALICE: It doesn't look like... um...

RUTH: It doesn't look like a machine.

ELLIE: Be supportive, Ruth.

GRACE: It doesn't look like a machine. Waste of time.

KNOX: (*admiring*) It's beautiful.

MARGARET: It's just a wooden prototype. (*to audience*) Obviously it didn't happen like this. None of this happened during work. And (*gesturing to the INVENTION*) the wooden version could only fit on a table. But, the magic of theatre... (*back into the scene*) It's just a wooden prototype.

ALICE: Does it work?

EMMA: Of course it does.

GRACE: You don't know that.

ELLIE: Be supportive, Grace.

GRACE: I don't like it.

ELLIE: You wouldn't.

KNOX: (*clapping his hands together, once, in excitement*) Let's start her up!

The INVENTION group starts to do their movements one after the other as if a paper bag is being fed through the machine (see APPENDIX). They make the noise of a machine in motion. It is doing what it was supposed to do. At the end, KNOX pulls out a folded paper bag from the costume of the last INVENTION in the machine, that is properly folded but isn't pasted at the bottom.

KNOX: It did it! It did it! Holy smokes! Holy smokes!

GRACE: Mr. Knox!

KNOX: Sorry, Grace.

RUTH: What did it do?

ALICE: I don't know.

KNOX: It cuts and folds the bottom. Automatically. Holy – (*turns that into a cough*) All it needs is paste. (*to MARGARET*) You did it!

Lights change. Everyone onstage returns to neutral. CANTWELL moves forward.

CANTWELL: A wooden model, and then an iron model? Did you make those?

MARGARET: The wooden model, yes. And the iron model... I made it but it was nowhere near what I wanted. I had to go to Boston. That's where –

CHARLES enters on the upstage riser, interrupting.

CHARLES: (*talking as he enters*) “There is nothing we so much admire!”

MARGARET: I can't stand this.

On the other side of the stage, The 19TH CENTURY group slightly enters on the upstage riser.

CHARLES: (*to the group*) Take it away!

19TH CENTURY: “There is nothing we so much admire in a young woman as a modest, quiet behaviour, and gentleness of spirit. It sheds the softest luster upon her character and makes upon our minds (*posing as a lovely impression*) a lovely impression.”

MARGARET: I can't stand this, I can't stand this, I cannot. (*to the 19TH CENTURY*) Get out!

The 19TH CENTURY group gives a haughty sniff and exits.

CHARLES: (*moving downstage*) There's no way a woman could have the sense to understand such mechanical complexities.

MARGARET: (*to audience*) There is some question as to whether or not he actually said those words at the interference hearing. It's on the internet, but who can trust that? This is Charles Annan.

CHARLES: Charles Annan, inventor.

MARGARET: Charles Annan, thief.

CANTWELL: You know him, then? The inventor who filed for the patent before you.

MARGARET: Yes. But we're not quite there yet.

There is the sound of a bell, the kind on a door when it opens into a shop. WIL Graham has stepped forward in the previous dialogue. CHARLES moves upstage but does not exit.

WIL: Hey, Miss? You're in the wrong place, yeah?

MARGARET: This is the machine shop of Lincoln & Graham, is it not?

WIL: Aye. I'm Wil Graham.

MARGARET: I have a job for you. I need improvements made to this machine.

WIL: What, yeah?

MARGARET: Just a few adjustments. I'll tell you exactly what I want.

WIL: *(skeptical)* Oh yeah? What does it do?

MARGARET: It makes flat bottom paper bags. It's going to.

There is the sound of a gavel hitting a desk three times. The lights narrow down to focus on WIL, who faces out. They are talking in front of the Acting Commissioner of Patents as a witness.

WIL: *(all skepticism is gone)* Aye, sir, I did exactly what I was told. Miss Knight knew what she wanted and she was very clear, and I daren't stray. I was employed to do a job. Her job. Nothin' more. No, sir. I didn't think of nothin', yeah? It was her machine from beginning to end. She wanted gears for pulleys and the lug which protects the lever in a new position. And then she wasn't happy with what I had done and got someone else.

The lights change. CANTWELL moves forward. WIL exits and LEWIS Abbot enters to stand beside CHARLES.

CANTWELL: Oh really? You took it to another shop?

MARGARET: I knew what I wanted. *(a little frustrated)* I knew what I wanted, I could see what I wanted, I just couldn't... Another shop was my only option.

CANTWELL: And that's where Annan saw it.

CHARLES: *(looking over LEWIS' shoulder)* What are you working on?

LEWIS: It makes flat bottom paper bags.

CHARLES: Automatically? It does not.

LEWIS: It cuts and folds the paper. See, look here. And here.

CHARLES: Amazing. That's amazing!

LEWIS: Three folds, one, two, three, and it pastes after each fold. One complete paper bag all machine made.

CHARLES: I never would have thought of that...

There is the sound of a bell, the kind on a door when it opens into a shop. MARGARET steps forward.

MARGARET: Good morning, Lewis.

LEWIS: Good morning, Miss Knight.

MARGARET: How is it coming along?

LEWIS: I have it all set up for you to see the newest adjustments. I've altered the shape of the cam and attached the pasting apparatus.

MARGARET: Excellent.

CHARLES: This is your invention.

MARGARET: It is.

LEWIS: Miss Knight, this is Charles Annan. He's another machinist.

MARGARET: Nice to meet you, Mr. Annan.

CHARLES: It's a great pleasure to meet you. I'm admiring your machine.

MARGARET: It's been a lot of work.

CHARLES: An automated way to make paper bags? You could make a lot of money with that.

MARGARET: You don't plan on stealing it, do you?

CHARLES: Oh absolutely not.

MARGARET: *(now breaking out of the moment)* Liar!

CHARLES: I beg to differ.

MARGARET: I showed you my model. I let you see what I was doing.

CHARLES: Margaret, you didn't invent anything. You wouldn't understand how.

MARGARET: You're a liar and a thief!

CHARLES: That prototype... subpar at best. Lewis here, could barely understand your instructions.

LEWIS: Um...

MARGARET: That's not true and you know it.

CHARLES: It was a good attempt. For a woman. I'll give you that. But facts are facts. (*holding up the paper*) I have the patent.

MARGARET wheels around and moves back to CANTWELL. CHARLES remains, observing. LEWIS exits.

MARGARET: I filed my patent application in February, 1870. By then, he had already gone ahead and filed and received his own patent for a new and improved machine for making paper bags.

CANTWELL: First to file isn't important in the US. In other countries, yes, but here you have to prove you're the one who was the first to invent. Not just a couple of sketches, you have to prove you were the first to move from idea to practice. It doesn't have to be perfect but you have to show you've executed on the machine before he did. Can you do that?

There is movement onstage as the actors enter and move in patterns around MARGARET. By the end of MARGARET's speech, the four women inventors are downstage. The 19TH CENTURY group stands on the upstage riser with CHARLES.

MARGARET: (*to audience*) Failure and Fortitude. I have failed as a woman. I have failed as an inventor. I have failed to get the necessary patent. What good am I? There are still so many unanswered questions: where did I come up with the \$100 a day on my salary to pay the lawyer? That's over \$2,000 a day now. How did I keep my job over the 16 days I'd have to be at the patent hearing? Not even if Mr. Knox was helping me out of the goodness of his heart would the management have allowed that. Why did I bother to appeal at all? How could I possibly win? (*referring to CHARLES*) That's what he was counting on. He was counting on the fact that I would be discredited and disbelieved because I was a woman. Like so many of us were. Are.

MARGARET turns to the four women inventors: ELLEN ELGIN, MARY KIES, SYBILLA MASTERS, and

WOMAN. If you do not have a black actor to play Ellen Elgin, do not include her lines.

ELLEN ELGIN: Ellen Elgin, in 1888 I invented a clothes wringer. But I sold the patent for \$18. I knew that if it was common knowledge that a black woman patented the invention, white ladies would not buy the wringer. *(turns her back to audience)*

MARY KIES: Mary Kies, one of the first US women granted a patent in her own name. *(like an announcement)* A new technique for weaving straw and silk. Everyone says I died penniless. Sad and penniless. Like I was worthless. Like I never did anything. *(turns her back to audience)*

SYBILLA MASTERS: Sybilla Masters, 1715, a method for making cornmeal. I had the idea, but the patent was awarded to my husband. *(turns her back to audience)*

WOMAN: You don't know who I am or what I made because I never patented my inventions. I was married and I wasn't allowed to have a job or make my own money. *(turns her back to audience)*

19TH CENTURY: *(all)* "The family institution

19TH CENTURY: is repugnant to the idea of a woman adopting a distinct and independent career from that of her husband.

19TH CENTURY: A married woman is incapable,

19TH CENTURY: *(all)* without her husband's consent,

19TH CENTURY: of making contracts which shall be binding on her or him.

19TH CENTURY: The paramount destiny and mission of women are to fulfill the noble and benign offices of wife and mother."

MARGARET: Failure and Fortitude. *(beat)* I am no ordinary person.

There is movement on the stage as all actors enter or move to observe as if in the audience of a courtroom. This includes the OPERATIVES, KNOX, the mechanics, and the three identified groups. Everyone in the cast should be onstage.

During the movement, the three groups speak at the same time. They may or may not get through their text. If necessary they keep repeating until everyone is in place. They stop talking immediately when the gavel is heard.

19TH CENTURY: (*all at the same time as below*) “The power of a woman is in her refinement, gentleness and elegance; it is she who makes etiquette, and it is she who preserves the order and the decency of society.”

INVENTORS: (*all at the same time as above and below*) “The female mind has as yet manifested very little of the kind of genius termed mechanical, or inventive. We are constrained to say we do not believe a woman would ever have invented the compass, the printing-press, the steam-engine, or even a loom.”

INVENTION: (*all at the same time as above*) “To all whom it may concern: Be it known that I, MARGARET E. KNIGHT, of Boston in the county of Suffolk and State of Massachusetts, have invented a new and improved machine for making paper bags; and I do hereby declare the following to be a full and correct description of the same.”

The speaking is stopped when everyone is in position and with the sound of a gavel hitting a desk, three times.

Arthur DUNCAN, Acting Commissioner, stands centre on the upstage riser, holding an antique looking folder of materials. The PATENT OFFICE CLERK stands beside DUNCAN. The OPERATIVES and KNOX are together on one side of the stage. The INVENTION group is on the same side but sitting on the riser. The 19TH CENTURY and the INVENTORS are on the other side of the stage together. Use levels!

CLERK: Next we have Knight vs. Annan. In the matter of the interference between the application of Margaret E. Knight for letters-patent for a Machine for Folding Paper Bags and a patent granted to Charles F. Annan for a similar invention. All rise for acting commissioner, Arthur Duncan.

MARGARET: Courtroom scenes are a little boring, aren't they? It's a lot of blah, blah, blah. (*gesturing*) How quickly does this put you to sleep?

The INVENTION group runs forward. Divide up the following among a couple of individual speakers.

INVENTION: This lever is connected, by rod L and bent lever M, to an arm, Y, attached to the follower. See Figs. 2 and 4. A spiral spring, Z, is attached by its free end to rod L and by its fixed end to a crossbar of the frame A –



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