



Sample Pages from Patterns and Power: The Female Edison

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PATTERNS AND POWER: THE FEMALE EDISON

A PLAY IN ONE ACT BY
Lindsay Price



Patterns and Power: The Female Edison

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

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

Characters

2W + 17 Any Gender

Margaret: (W) Inventor. Adult. Worked in factories and many jobs where she used her hands (repairs, furniture upholstery)

Mattie: (W) Margaret at 12 years old. Tough. Spirited.

MARGARET'S FAMILY

Hannah: Margaret's mother, factory worker

Jim: Margaret's brother, Weaving Room #3 Assistant Overseer

Charlie: Margaret's brother, factory worker

FACTORY OPERATIVES

Harriet

Mary

Sarah

Eliza

Lucy

Frances

George

Henry

Samuel

FACTORY MANAGEMENT

Baker, Jacob. Weaving Room #2 Overseer

Green, Daniel. Foreman of Repairs

Lightbody, Eugene. Superintendent of Weaving

Stickney, William. Weaving Room #2 Assistant Overseer

Pierce, James. Mill Manager #4

MARGARET & MATTIE

It's important to note that Margaret has worked in factories her whole life. She is working class and should not come across as a "lady." However you choose to dress Margaret and Mattie, it should reflect their factory-dominated lives. The two characters are spirited, stubborn, tough, and stuck in a world that won't let them use their minds. Mattie at 12 years old was working 12 hour days at a textile mill. She's not a 21st century 12-year-old. Research images of female factory workers from the 19th century to get a sense of physicality and to create a vocabulary of gesture.

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 a lot of "group" tableaux and anything you can do to create levels with these groups on the set, the better. Any and all machines are created by the actors. Use cubes for any seating, or stools. 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 in a play, the stage is not a factory, and the characters aren't dressed as 19th century factory workers. For both acts, choose atmosphere over authenticity. Muted, faded browns, and denim. Avoid obvious 21st century clothing pieces, but don't worry if that is all you have to draw from. Steampunk would be appropriate as well.

Sound

Create a factory soundscape to use throughout. You can do this through recorded sound effects or, in keeping with the theatrical nature of the play, have your actors create the various sounds live. You'll also definitely want some kind of factory whistle.

Acknowledgments

I would like to warmly thank Todd Espeland, Carolyn Greer, Rassika Risko, and Cherrie Firmin for their support in bringing this play to life. It couldn't have happened without you.

Vocabulary

Overseer:	Manager of a room in the mill (weaving room, spinning room), weaving rooms may have up to 500 looms.
Assistant Overseer:	Assistant Manager
Operative:	Another name for Mill workers
Spinning Mule:	Machines that twisted, thinned and spun cotton fibres around bobbins at high speed.
Spinner:	In charge of spinning machines, often 3-4 at a time which held many, many bobbins. They make sure everything runs smoothly with the threads.
Piecer:	"Piece-er" When thread breaks, piecers have to quickly tie the threads back together so that the machines can keep moving.
Doffers:	Removes the full bobbins from the machines and replace with empty bobbins.
Power Loom:	A machine that takes thread and weaves it into fabric.
Weaver:	In charge of a loom.
Shuttle:	Compartment that holds the thread bobbin as it weaves back and forth. Steel tipped.

CHARLIE, SAMUEL, MATTIE and HARRIET stand side-by-side, looking up. They are looking up at the factory through the front gates. While MATTIE is 12, HARRIET and SAMUEL are 10 and CHARLIE is 13, do not focus on an accurate age look. Go for attitude and behaviour.

CHARLIE: (elbowing SAMUEL) Are you scared?

SAMUEL: No.

CHARLIE: (teasing) Are you?

SAMUEL: No.

CHARLIE: (trying to scare) Not even a little? Joe Miller lost his hand.

MATTIE: (still staring forward, not looking at CHARLIE) Charlie, stop being mean.

CHARLIE: Being truthful ain't mean. You can't be a baby.

SAMUEL: I'm not a baby and I'm not scared.

HARRIET: I'm scared.

CHARLIE: You're a girl.

MATTIE reaches out and gives CHARLIE a hard shove, without taking her eyes off the factory.

CHARLIE: Hey!

MATTIE: (to HARRIET) You're piecing for your sister, right? She'll look after you.

HARRIET: Sarah says they beat you if you're slow.

CHARLIE: (coming up behind HARRIET) I heard a spinner got too close, got her hair caught, took her scalp clean off before she could cry for help.

CHARLIE tugs at HARRIET's hair. HARRIET gasps and grabs her head.

SAMUEL: Maybe I'm a little scared.

MATTIE: Charlie, I'm gonna take apart your sled and hide all the bolts.

HARRIET: (to MATTIE) Are you scared?

SAMUEL: Nothing scares her.

HARRIET: *(trying to get her attention)* Mattie?

MATTIE: I just want to see the machines. Up close, not hear them from out here. I can't wait to see the machines.

A factory whistle sounds loud and long. The four characters look up. The factory whistle blows again and the stage becomes flooded with people: All characters, including OPERATIVES & MANAGEMENT, SAMUEL, CHARLIE, HARRIET, join in. MATTIE moves to the side and is joined by MARGARET. MARGARET is an older version of MATTIE. They watch the action.

Everyone marches in mechanical synchronized patterns about the stage. I suggest dividing the cast into groups, giving each group a pattern to follow as they walk. This way you have controlled chaos. Establish this movement quickly.

As everyone moves they make the sounds of a factory: machines whir (whirrrrr), steam hisses (hissss-ah), the constant thump of pistons (dun, dun, dun, dun, dun), the rhythm of cogs and wheels (whoo-cha, whoo-cha). Divide the sounds among the actors, just as you divide the movement among groups. You may also choose to use a recorded factory soundscape.

Once everyone is onstage, OPERATIVES and MANAGEMENT find their way into two circles, one clockwise, one counterclockwise constantly moving. Again, establish quickly.

The mechanical sound builds to a crescendo. At the peak, there is a loud scream. If you don't have any actors who can do it justice, make it a recorded sound that is long and echoes.

All sound stops. Everyone stops and reacts in super slow motion. The reaction: arms thrown up, everyone careens to one side (the same force of action as if someone jams on the brakes) but still in super slow motion.

FRANCES, GEORGE and LUCY push forward. As soon as they start to move, everyone snaps into normal movement, and divides into two groups: OPERATIVES stage left and MANAGEMENT stage right. Think levels, not lines. The MANAGEMENT pose with condescending looks and their arms folded. The

OPERATIVES stand with hands on hips; they're all older than their years.

At the same time MARGARET and MATTIE move DSR. Don't wait for everyone to get in place to start the following dialogue. Have them start as they push through – make it urgent.

FRANCES: What happened? Did you see it?

GEORGE: A shuttle flew off one of the looms.

FRANCES: Who got hit?

LUCY: Peter. In the side.

GEORGE: Is he okay?

LUCY: They're taking him to the surgeon now.

A factory whistle blows. FRANCES, GEORGE and LUCY run and make their way back to the OPERATIVE group. The factory whistle sounds again.

All the OPERATIVES make a repeated gesture, whatever they do when they are in their loom figuration. Their faces and bodies are machine-like. Rigid, unchanging. MARGARET moves forward, MATTIE follows.

MARGARET: (*looking at the OPERATIVES*) There's a pattern to the way machines work. They must operate in a certain way. The same way every time. Rigid. Unchanging. Machines are excellent rule followers. And a machine can't break their pattern unless something, or someone, gets in the way.

MATTIE: (*looking at the OPERATIVES*) "You can't change a machine." I don't believe that.

The OPERATIVES freeze as the MANAGEMENT comes to life. They silently argue with one another.

MARGARET: (*watching MANAGEMENT*) There's a pattern to the way people work. They feel they have to operate in a certain way. The same way every time. Rigid. Unchanging. People are excellent rule followers. Change is hard for most. And a person won't break a pattern unless something, or someone, gets in the way.

From the MANAGEMENT group, the Foreman of Repairs Daniel GREEN moves downstage, storming in

front of MATTIE and MARGARET, who move out of the way as the others, Weaving Room #2 Overseer Jacob BAKER, Weaving Room #2 Assistant Overseer William STICKNEY and Weaving Room #3 Assistant Overseer JIM follow after. GREEN is studying a piece of paper.

BAKER: She's a girl.

STICKNEY: It's not going to work.

GREEN: You told me to do my job. So that's what I'm going to do.

STICKNEY: You're going to lose your job.

BAKER: I'll see to it!

GREEN: I think that's for Mr. Lightbody to decide.

BAKER: She's a girl. It can't possibly work!

They move circling back into the MANAGEMENT group. As MARGARET and MATTIE talk, everyone, OPERATIVES and MANAGEMENT, slowly moves into poses. MANAGEMENT, condescending. OPERATIVES, hands on hips, arms folded, older than their years.

MATTIE: Of course it works. (*directly to MANAGEMENT*) Ratbags!

MARGARET: Mattie.

MATTIE: Sorry. (*directly to MANAGEMENT*) Mr. Ratbags! (*MARGARET laughs*) I hate it when people say that. "She's a girl."

MARGARET: They say it all the time. Even now.

MATTIE: People are awful.

MARGARET: Some people.

MATTIE: (*directly to MANAGEMENT, with disgust*) Management people.

MARGARET: (*smiling*) Maybe.

MATTIE: How come we never invented anything that turns idiots into turnips?

The factory whistle blows. OPERATIVES and MANAGEMENT move forward to form a group, with levels, around MARGARET and MATTIE.

MATTIE: (*gesturing to the audience*) Are you going to let them in? We're not making much sense.

MARGARET: It's theatre, anything's possible. (*to the audience*) My name is Margaret E. Knight. I was born in 1838. I'm an inventor.

MATTIE: Mattie Knight. I'm 12.

MARGARET: You don't look 12.

MATTIE: It's theatre. Anything's possible.

MARGARET: I left school. I never married. I worked my whole life. (*to the audience*) You know nothing about me. (*shrugging*) Not that you should.

MATTIE: (*to audience*) You should. And you've all used one of her inventions.

MARGARET: Don't get ahead. (*to audience*) This is a true story, but it's not a textbook or a documentary. Some things are real, some not. There isn't much written down. 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.

MATTIE: "Female Edison." I don't need someone else's name to give me value. I am Margaret E. Knight!

MARGARET: That has always stuck in my craw a little.

MATTIE: How many machines did we invent?

MARGARET: Eighty-nine over the years. Over 20 patents. I had my own laboratory in Boston.

MATTIE: Cracking.

MARGARET: We don't often get to write our own stories. Our own histories. We have to accept what other people decide is history. What other people write down.

MATTIE: I don't want to let other people decide.

MARGARET throws her arms up and the OPERATIVES and MANAGEMENT respond. They repeat their gestures as if being in an accident: arms thrown up and careening to the side. Everything in super slow motion. Those in the back of each group will also have to incorporate a few steps backward to give space for the next movement.

MARGARET: (*as the group moves*) It's not 1838 or 1850 or 1914.

MATTIE: We're way too clean.

MARGARET: (*gesturing to the group*) They aren't machines and this space isn't a factory.

MATTIE: But it could be. Close your eyes and imagine the roar of machines.

MARGARET: Close your eyes and you're just like me – seeing it all in my head.

MARGARET gestures again and the groups stop in place. Now each actor begins to move independently in their own circle, revolving in place, in slow motion, each repeating a mechanical gesture.

MARGARET: In my head, machines fly apart and come back together. Over and over again until I can see each section up close, figure out how they're supposed to work, and the solution presents itself.

MATTIE: Problems are meant to be solved.

MARGARET snaps her fingers and the group snaps back into moving normally. They all exit variously.

MARGARET: I've always been different.

MATTIE: I don't care about what girls do or what girls like. "Get married." (*she shudders*)

MARGARET: I've always known I was different.

MATTIE: Why would I play with dolls when I can build things?

MARGARET: My story begins at 12.

HANNAH: (*offstage*) Mattie! Margaret Eloise Knight.

MATTIE: She's using all three names. I'm gonna get it.

MARGARET: Maine. 1850.

HANNAH: Mattie!

MATTIE: (*calling out*) I'm here.

MATTIE crosses to a wooden box of tools (or a couple of OPERATIVES bring the box to her) and starts working.

MARGARET: The pattern of life in the 19th century.

MARGARET moves to the side and watches. CHARLIE enters on the run, JIM enters, slower as if trying to be an adult.

CHARLIE: *(entering and running to MATTIE)* Mattie! *(looking at what she's doing)* Did you fix my brake?

MATTIE: Almost finished. *(she holds up a part)* I'll attach it to the cart this afternoon.

CHARLIE: That's cracking. You're the best.

JIM: Child's games.

CHARLIE: Fast and fun games.

JIM: You're too old for this, Charlie.

MATTIE: No one asked you, Jimmy.

JIM: Stop calling me that! It's Jim. Mr. Knight at the factory.

CHARLIE: You're not an Overseer yet. You're just an assistant.

JIM: It's only a matter of time. *(exits)*

CHARLIE: I'm so glad I'm not working under him.

HANNAH: *(offstage)* Mattie!

MATTIE: *(to CHARLIE)* I gotta talk to Ma. We'll do this later, ok?

CHARLIE runs off as HANNAH enters, stalking over to MATTIE. MATTIE takes a tool out of the box and starts working on something else.

HANNAH: *(hands on hips)* You're not quitting school to work at the mill.

MATTIE: I am.

HANNAH: You're not.

MATTIE: I am. You know I am.

HANNAH: I do. That doesn't mean I like it.

MATTIE: Oh, Ma.

HANNAH: If your father were still alive it would –

MATTIE: He's not.

HANNAH: The factory –

MATTIE: – needs girls. We need money.

HANNAH: That doesn't mean I like it. (*she freezes*)

MATTIE: (*to MARGARET*) This is not the way it happened...

MARGARET: That's what it says in the script.

MATTIE: Uh huh.

MARGARET: I'm deciding my history.

MATTIE: You're giving a fairy tale version of the pattern of life in the 19th century.

MATTIE gestures and HANNAH twitches. She stands above MATTIE and is much harsher and weary.

HANNAH: No more school for you, Mattie. You start at the mill tomorrow.

MARGARET gestures and HANNAH freezes.

MARGARET: Can you imagine if we had more school? Or even if we had just been a boy.

MATTIE: Can't think like that.

MARGARET: I know.

MATTIE: Gotta just... (*holding up the tool*) figure it out.

MARGARET: A tool in my hand,

MATTIE: Is a tool in my hand.

MARGARET: It doesn't care who I am.

MATTIE: I can make it do whatever I want.

MARGARET: And no one will stop me. My way, please.

MATTIE: All right, all right. So sappy though.

MARGARET gestures at HANNAH.

HANNAH: If your father were still alive it would –

MATTIE: He's not.

HANNAH: The factory –

MATTIE: – needs girls. We need money.

HANNAH: That doesn't mean I like it.

MATTIE: That doesn't change anything.

HANNAH: What are you making?

MATTIE: A foot warmer. You can use it when you're sewing at night.

HANNAH: How do you know how to do that?

MATTIE: It's a pattern in my head. I can't explain it more than that. See a problem, figure out.

HANNAH: I wish you didn't have to go to the mill.

MATTIE: You can't build anything with wishes.

HANNAH: That doesn't mean I don't have them.

A factory whistle sounds.

MARGARET: The pattern of working at the mill.

A factory whistle sounds. The stage floods with OPERATIVES (including HANNAH) on the move. They move in patterns about the stage. The soundscape of the factory is heard. MANAGEMENT (including JIM) stand on cubes so they are above the OPERATIVES, always watching. They pose according to their personalities, always watching.

The OPERATIVES come to a stop. They face the audience. Think levels and shapes, not lines. The soundscape fades.

MATTIE: In mill towns, you eat, breathe and live the mill.

CHARLIE: Everyone works at the mill.

HANNAH: If you can dress yourself, you're going to the mill.

SAMUEL: My whole family works there.

FRANCES: My brother started at 5 years old.

HENRY: Why wouldn't we work?

GEORGE: Why would I go to school?

LUCY: We have families to feed.

SARAH: I can do a man's work.

ELIZA: Operatives work 12 hour days.

MARY: I can do work a man can't do.

HARRIET: They need us.

ENSEMBLE: First whistle.

The OPERATIVES fall to the floor. And slowly rise to their knees in various poses of stretching.

CHARLIE: 4:30 am.

FRANCES: The mill wakes us up, tells us to eat, tells us we're about to be late.

ELIZA: I don't want to get up.

GEORGE: It's so dark out.

MARY: It's always dark out.

HARRIET: It's the same every day.

ENSEMBLE: Second whistle.

They rise to their feet and begin different repeated gestures: washing their faces, miming putting on clothes, eating a bun quickly, yawning.

HANNAH: 5:30 am.

HENRY: Get dressed.

LUCY: Eat something.

SAMUEL: Same every morning.

SARAH: Don't be late.

CHARLIE: If you're late, Management docks your pay.

HARRIET: Or worse.

ELIZA: What's worse than working for no pay?

ENSEMBLE: Third whistle!

The OPERATIVES run in various patterns. They assemble into group tableaux of machines in action. (SEE APPENDIX). The machines never stop moving.

MARY: 6:30 am.

ELIZA: Work begins.

HANNAH: You better be through the gates.

GEORGE: The machines start.

CHARLIE: So hot.

SARAH: Windows are nailed shut.

HENRY: Lint in the air.

FRANCES: So loud.

MARY: Can't talk.

SAMUEL: The machines never stop moving.

HARRIET: If the threads break you have to knot them back together quick.

LUCY: The machines never stop moving.

MARY: Overseers never stop watching.

HANNAH: Everything's the same.

ELIZA: Minute by minute, second by second.

FRANCES: Noon.

The ENSEMBLE drops their gestures and stretch.

CHARLIE: 35 minutes to eat.

HARRIET: Run home.

SARAH: We all live close to the mill.

HENRY: The mill tells you when to eat and when you're about to be late.

The OPERATIVES resume their machine gestures and movements.

LUCY: 12:35.

HANNAH: The machines begin again.

FRANCES: They don't stop till end of day.

CHARLIE: Same movements.

ELIZA: Nothing stops.

GEORGE: Doffers take off the full spindles.

HENRY: Put on the empty ones.

Everyone starts to move in slow motion – same gestures, but now super slow. Voices remain at normal speed.

SARAH: Spinners work up to 8 sides at a time.

HARRIET: Piecers tie the broken threads.

SAMUEL: Nothing stops.

ELIZA: Rows and rows spinning cotton into thread.

GEORGE: Weavers watching the looms.

FRANCES: Shuttles flying back and forth.

CHARLIE: Hours and hours.

FRANCES: Lint in the air.

MARY: Overseers watching.

Everyone starts to revolve in place, doing their gestures individually.

SARAH: No one ever complains.

HENRY: Why? You'd lose your job.

FRANCES: Can't lose the job.

MARY: We have families to feed.

LUCY: We need the money.

HENRY: We need the money.

ELIZA: Never enough money.

ENSEMBLE: Ring out.

HANNAH: 6:30. Day is done.

The OPERATIVES snap to neutral and stand in place.

MARGARET: Patterns. We all worked. All day, every day. Six days a week, the same motions 12 hours a day. We did what we were told. We never complained. That was the pattern of life. Rigid. Unchanging. I never complained, because, well, I was different.

MATTIE moves among the OPERATIVES.

MATTIE: Every day I'm surrounded by machines. All I see are machines. The mechanics. The sound. The way the gears move. I've never seen anything like it. It's... amazing. Don't you think?

MARGARET: Machines are amazing things. Always have been.

MATTIE: Better than boys.

MARGARET: Different than boys.

MATTIE: Have you seen them? They can barely tie their shoes.

All the boys complain loudly at the insult.

Girls are necessary. They need us to make the factory work.

All the girls cheer loudly.

MARGARET: They want us because they can pay us less. They still do. Patterns.

There is the sound of a scream. If you don't have anyone who can do it justice, use a recorded sound that is loud and echoey. Everyone reacts, throwing their arms in the air (this time at normal speed), crashing into one another, falling, nothing orderly. The OPERATIVES get themselves up and all start talking to one another.

FRANCES: What happened? Did you see it?

GEORGE: A shuttle flew off one of the looms.

FRANCES: Who got hit?

LUCY: Peter. In the side.

GEORGE: Is he okay?

LUCY: They're taking him to the surgeon now.

BAKER, Jacob, Overseer of Weaving Room #4, and STICKNEY, William, Assistant Overseer, barge downstage, scattering the OPERATIVES. LIGHTBODY,

*Eugene, Superintendent of Weaving, follows behind,
more thoughtful than angry.*

All the OPERATIVES crowd around MANAGEMENT.

STICKNEY: Clear the way! Clear the way!

BAKER: One accident and the whole mill comes to a halt? Get back to work all of you.

STICKNEY: Back to your rooms!

JIM: Yeah, back to your rooms!

LUCY: (to LIGHTBODY) Sir, sir! Mr. Lightbody.

BAKER: What do you want?

STICKNEY: Don't bother the Superintendent!

LIGHTBODY: (gently) What is it?

LUCY: Do you think Peter'll be back tomorrow?

BAKER: How is he supposed to know?

STICKNEY: Don't ask stupid questions.

LIGHTBODY: What's his name?

CHARLIE: Peter.

LIGHTBODY: He won't be back. I'm sorry.

LIGHTBODY exits.

BAKER: Stop standing around.

STICKNEY: Back to work!

JIM: Yeah, back to work!

They stalk off. The others are somber.

HENRY: That's it, then.

HARRIET: I guess.

CHARLIE: Back to work.

*The OPERATIVES move slowly and recreate the looms.
They start their repeated movements and gestures.
MATTIE begins to circle in and out of the looms. And*

at the same time, HANNAH has moved to stand by MARGARET.

HANNAH: Accidents happen. It's life in the mill.

MARGARET: It was the first one for me.

MATTIE: (*circling the loom*) The shuttle flew off the loom. Problem. Shuttles shouldn't do that. Solution.

HANNAH: You wouldn't stop muttering. And drawing, you drew on the walls, on scraps of butcher paper.

MARGARET & MATTIE: Everyone is thinking about Peter.

MATTIE: Problem. The loom. The way it's made? Solution. What will stop the shuttle?

HANNAH: (*referring to MATTIE*) Where does that come from? No one taught you to think this way.

MARGARET: No one taught me not to think.

HANNAH: (*with a laugh*) I suppose. You were so pigheaded.

MARGARET: I liked "spirited" better.

HANNAH: I couldn't have stopped you.

MARGARET: You were too tired to try, most nights.

HANNAH: Seeing it now, it was a hard life. But we never knew any different. It was just life.

MATTIE: Everyone is thinking about Peter.

HANNAH: Do you regret never getting married and not having children?

MARGARET: Do you regret getting married and having children?

During the following HANNAH and MARGARET share a look. HANNAH exits. HARRIET leaves her position as part of one of the looms and runs to MATTIE.

HARRIET: Mattie. Mattie! (*whispering*) What are you doing?

MATTIE: Problems are meant to be solved. Keep trying.

HARRIET: You can't be in the weaving room during lunch. If an Overseer catches you...

MATTIE: I can't fix this if I can't see the loom.

HARRIET: You're not supposed to be here. I'm not supposed to be here. We'll get the strap. Worse. Emily was fired for reading.

MATTIE: Five seconds, that's all. I need to see the shuttle, so I can picture the movement.

HARRIET: (*looking behind her*) You're gonna get in trouble!

MATTIE: Not if I fix the loom.

HARRIET: How could you know how they work?

MATTIE: All machines can be improved.

HARRIET: Someone's coming. You better be right behind me! (*circling back around to her place in the looms*)

MARGARET: (*joining MATTIE*) If I study the machine long enough, I can see it in pieces.

MARGARET gestures and all the looms break apart. Each OPERATIVE steps back, revolves in their own circle, and keeps repeating their actions individually.

MATTIE: Moving parts.

MARGARET: Cogs and wheels and gears.

MATTIE: Independent of each other.

MARGARET: All I want to do is fix the machine.

MATTIE: The answer is here. What if... no, that won't work. What else? If I put something there? What would that look like? There has to be a way – What would happen if...?

JIM enters and stands beside MARGARET.

During the following, the OPERATIVES slowly and variously return to neutral and exit. Make it slow and various. MATTIE mutters, pulls out a grubby pencil and a piece of paper and is working on her drawing.

JIM: I never thought you would actually fix it.

MARGARET: Why not? You believed I could fix your sled.

JIM: A sled is much different than a power loom.

MARGARET: Is it?

JIM: Do you remember what happened to Peter?

MARGARET: No. (*calling out*) Mattie, what happened to Peter?

MATTIE: (*preoccupied with her drawing*) What?

MARGARET: What happened to Peter?

MATTIE: Haven't seen him in days. Everyone stopped talking about him.
Life moves on.

MARGARET: Life at the mill.

JIM: He was the only one working. He had baby sisters, and the mill
wouldn't take his father.

MARGARET: In a mill town you eat, breathe, and live the mill, until you
don't.

JIM: Do you know what happened to us? Me and Charlie and Ma?

MARGARET: There's nothing written down. When there's nothing
written down, you disappear.

JIM: Yeah. Guess we never did anything worth remembering.

MARGARET: Someone has to decide you've done something worth
remembering. History is made in repetition. People remembering
dates, names, events over and over. And if the repeat is wrong?
Doesn't matter. It's history now.

MATTIE: (*as if visualizing the machine*) How do I improve you? How do I
make you better?

CHARLIE: (*running onstage*) Mattie! When are you gonna put that brake
on my cart?

MATTIE: Later. I'm busy.

CHARLIE: You're not doing anything.

MATTIE: I'm thinking. (*muttering*) There has to be a way to stop the
shuttle. How do I stop you?

CHARLIE: (*looking around*) Who were you talking to?

MATTIE: The machine.

CHARLIE: What machine?

MATTIE: The one in my head.

CHARLIE: Okay...

JIM: (*moving to MATTIE*) Machines break down all the time.

MATTIE: What if they didn't?

JIM: You can't change a machine.

MATTIE: What if you could?

JIM: You can't. That's not how this works.

MATTIE: No machine is perfect. That means it's changeable.

JIM: That's stupid.

CHARLIE: Mattie's not stupid.

JIM: Besides, who's gonna listen to you?

CHARLIE: You could help. You've got the ear of an Overseer.

JIM: No.

CHARLIE: When did you get to be such a jerk?

JIM: It's no use, Mattie.

MATTIE: If you say so. (*JIM exits*)

CHARLIE: Are you gonna stop?

MATTIE: Never.

MATTIE focuses on her paper. CHARLIE exits.

MARGARET: Problem. The machine isn't safe.

MATTIE: (*holding up her paper*) Solution. The machine has to be safe. There has to be a way to make the loom safe. (*casually*) A failsafe. (*eyes go wide, a realization*) That's it. That's it! When something goes wrong, it has to stop. If a shuttle comes loose, if it breaks the pattern of movement, something stops the shuttle. A shuttle cover so it can never fly off the loom. That's it!

MARGARET: (*calmly*) Congratulations.

MATTIE: Why aren't you more excited? I got it! I got it!

MARGARET: Problem. How do you make someone listen?

MATTIE: Solution. How did you do it?

MARGARET: Don't get ahead of the story. Figure it out.

MATTIE: They have to listen to me. I can fix the machine! (*beat*) Don't they have to listen to me?

MARGARET: The pattern of speaking to Management.

The factory whistle blows. The factory soundscape comes up. The OPERATIVES and MANAGEMENT move across the stage. In all the following patterns, MATTIE moves against the current. People get in her way, she has to fight to get people to talk to her, she is trying to break the pattern and it is impossible. Note: You want the stop and start in these sections to be as efficient as possible, otherwise it will become clunky. Move quickly from one section to the next.

MATTIE sees JIM and runs to him. Everyone else freezes. The soundscape stops.

MATTIE: Jim!

JIM: Why aren't you in your room?

MATTIE: I need to talk to your Overseer.

JIM: Absolutely not.

MATTIE: But it's about the –

JIM: Stop pursuing this. You'll get me in trouble.

JIM stalks away. The factory whistle blows. The soundscape starts up. The OPERATIVES and MANAGEMENT move to get in MATTIE's way. She is against the current, fighting her way through.

MATTIE sees SARAH and runs to her. Everyone else freezes. The soundscape stops.

MATTIE: Sarah! Wait!

SARAH: I gotta get lunch going, Mattie.

MATTIE: You just moved to one of the weaving rooms?

SARAH: So?

MATTIE: Who's your Overseer?

SARAH: Baker.

MATTIE: How do I talk to him?

SARAH: You don't. Not if you want to keep your job.

MATTIE: But I have a really good reason, one he'll want to hear.

SARAH: He doesn't want to know you exist.

The factory whistle blows. The soundscape starts up. The OPERATIVES and MANAGEMENT move to get in MATTIE's way. She is against the current, fighting her way through. The Assistant Overseer in Weaving Room #4 William STICKNEY moves downstage. His head is deep in a ledger book as he walks.

MATTIE: (calling out as she fights through the crowd) Mr. Stickney! Mr. Stickney!

Finally she breaks through tumbling basically at the feet of MR. STICKNEY. Everyone else freezes.

MATTIE: Sir, sir? Mr. Stickney?

STICKNEY: Who are you?

MATTIE: (scrambling up) Mattie Knight.

STICKNEY: Where are you supposed to be?

MATTIE: I'm in Upper Spinning, sir, but I wanted to talk to Mr. Baker and –

STICKNEY: (not even listening) No.

The factory whistle blows. MANAGEMENT exits. The OPERATIVES move to gather around MATTIE.

MARGARET: There are so many patterns. Expectations. Traditions. We're supposed to act a certain way, do certain things, not do others. Do your job, keep quiet, follow the rules. For how many centuries has it been like this? Will it always be like this? To this very day an adult expects that they know more and a child knows less.

MATTIE: All I have to do is get one of them to listen. Just one.

FRANCES: They'll never listen to you.

MATTIE: I'm not giving up. (thinking) I gotta get to the Foreman of Repairs. He's the one who'll know what I'm doing.

MARY: If you want to fix a loom, shouldn't you talk to an Assistant Overseer in Weaving?

LUCY: That's a good idea!

FRANCES: It'll never work.

MATTIE: I tried that. Mr. Stickney didn't even stop walking.

HANNAH: You talked to an Overseer?

MATTIE: Assistant Overseer.

SARAH: You don't want anything to do with Mr. Stickney.

CHARLIE: He hit me across the ear yesterday. He's not my boss.

FRANCES: He works for the mill, he's your boss.

MATTIE: What's his name? (*looking up*) Does anyone know his name?

FRANCES: Mr. Stickney?

MATTIE: No, no. The Foreman of Repairs.

SAMUEL: Grey?

MARY: No, Green. Mr. Green.

MATTIE: Right. (*thinking*) Green, Green, Green.

FRANCES: There's no way he'll talk to you.

MATTIE: (*not really listening*) If he sees my drawing...

SAMUEL: He'll tear it up.

CHARLIE: Mr. Stickney would, that's for sure.

MATTIE: (*thinking*) If I can get him to see it.

SARAH: (*grabbing MATTIE by the shoulders*) Mattie, stop this! You're just an operative.

MATTIE: (*breaking away*) So it'll be a little harder.

HARRIET: You'll lose your job.

MATTIE: Not if it works.

HENRY: You're a girl.

MATTIE: (*to HENRY*) He wouldn't talk to you either.

LUCY: Yeah, doffer.

SARAH: You're supposed to come to the mill, do your job and go home.

MATTIE: I know I can fix it.

HARRIET: How?

The factory whistle sounds.

HENRY: We gotta go.

STICKNEY: (*entering*) What's happening? What are you all standing around for?

HENRY, HARRIET, SAMUEL, and ELIZA run off without even speaking.

SARAH: We're just returning to our stations. (*exits with FRANCES*)

HANNAH: Coming, Mattie? (*exits*)

MATTIE: I need to speak to the Foreman of Repairs.

STICKNEY: (*condescending*) Do you?

MARY squeaks and runs off.

MATTIE: I can stop the shuttles from flying off the looms.

STICKNEY: Anyone standing in front of me in the next 5 seconds gets the strap. 5, 4, 3, 2 –

CHARLIE: Come on!

CHARLIE pulls on MATTIE. CHARLIE continues running offstage, MATTIE joins MARGARET. STICKNEY continues walking and exits to the other side of the stage.

MARGARET: Having fun yet?

MATTIE: Ha ha.

MARGARET: The pattern of talking to Management? No one talks to Management. Especially not 12-year-old spinning room operatives.

MATTIE: Why can't I have the fairy tale version?

MATTIE gestures and MANAGEMENT enter in a group, each holding a piece of paper with MATTIE's drawing.

ALL: Mattie! Mattie! Mattie!

STICKNEY: This drawing is amazing!

BAKER: It will solve all our problems.

PIERCE: You are exceptional.

JIM: She's my sister, you know. I've always known how smart she is!

GREEN: There's no way I could ever come up with such an invention.

LIGHTBODY: Why haven't we thought of this before!

GREEN: You must come work for me.

PIERCE: We want to hear more of your ideas.

STICKNEY: Three cheers for Mattie!

ALL: Hip hip hooray! Hip hip hooray! Hip hip hooray!

They exit, waving their papers.

MARGARET: That's what you want? Management to cheer as they parade around the factory? That is a fairy tale.

MATTIE: I want someone to listen to me because I have a good idea. If I have a bad idea, then I deserve whatever I get. But I don't. I have the answer.

MARGARET: You have a solution they didn't come up with.

MATTIE: Who cares who came up with it? Who cares what I do or who I am?

MARGARET: (*singsong*) That's not how things work...

MATTIE: You're enjoying this, aren't you?

MARGARET: (*with a smile*) I've been through it.

MATTIE: Who cares how things work! It doesn't mean I'm going to stop wanting things to be different or I'm going to stop being different, even if no one listens. Even if everyone says I'll never do it.

MARGARET: A tool in my hand...

MATTIE: Is a tool in my hand. Tools don't care who I am.

MARGARET: Are we giving up?

MATTIE: We haven't even started.

MATTIE strides across the stage and is met by HANNAH entering from the opposite side of the stage.

HANNAH: Mattie! Mattie. What did you say to Mr. Stickney?

MATTIE: What did he say I said?

HANNAH: He's blaming me, Mattie. For your behaviour.

MATTIE: What?

HANNAH: He says if you bother him again, he'll get Mr. Baker to dock my pay. Charlie too.

JIM strides on, CHARLIE scrambles behind.

CHARLIE: Watch out, Mattie!

JIM: What did you say to Stickney?

MATTIE: I guess he knows who we are...

JIM: How dare you endanger my job!

CHARLIE: He can't dock your pay.

JIM: He can damage my reputation.

HANNAH: Promise me you're not going to keep at this.

JIM: Stop talking to Management!

MATTIE: I promise I won't talk to Mr. Stickney.

JIM: All of them.

HANNAH: Mattie. It's not just you.

MATTIE: I promise... I won't get in trouble. *(she runs offstage)*

HANNAH: *(calling after)* How can you do that?

CHARLIE: Go Mattie!

JIM: You won't find it so funny when you lose your job because of her.

*JIM exits and CHARLIE exits behind, imitating JIM.
MARGARET laughs out loud.*

HANNAH: Stop laughing. You were so pigheaded!

MARGARET: It's my best trait. Served me well.

HANNAH: Everyone else does what they're told.

MARGARET: Not everyone. *(beat)* Children don't work in factories anymore, you know.

HANNAH: Why not? What on earth do they do all day? *(she exits)*

The factory whistle blows. The soundscape starts, quietly. The OPERATIVES cross the stage as does the MANAGEMENT. MATTIE enters and moves centre stage. The two groups each form a circle and move in concentric circles around MATTIE. MATTIE is concentrating on trying to get in front of Daniel GREEN as he moves around the circle.

MARGARET: How does a 12-year-old girl with little education, no experience with mechanical engineering, get someone to listen to her idea?

MATTIE: Mr. Green!

She misses. The circles keep moving.

MARGARET: History doesn't say how. I don't even know, really. I'm a character in a play.

MATTIE: Mr. Green!

MARGARET: But it did happen.

MATTIE: Mr. Green! Dang it!

She misses. The circles disperse. GREEN, BAKER, JIM, and STICKNEY move downstage and freeze. They are in GREEN's office. MATTIE, HARRIET and CHARLIE move downstage right. Everyone else exits.

MARGARET: Look it up. That part didn't disappear. It isn't made up. This is a true story. Maybe it happened like this, maybe it didn't. It doesn't matter. I'm deciding my history.

The factory whistle blows.

HARRIET: I'm so hungry.

CHARLIE: Let's go.

MATTIE: Go without me.

CHARLIE: What are you doing?

MATTIE: Nothing.

HARRIET: When you say nothing, it always means something.

MATTIE: You don't want to get in trouble. So scat.

HARRIET: Oh Mattie, don't get in trouble.

CHARLIE: I really don't want my pay docked.

MATTIE: I won't get in trouble.

CHARLIE: So what are you doing?

MATTIE: The Foreman of Repairs never leaves right at 6:30. I'm going to slip my drawing under his door.

CHARLIE: What if he tears it up?

MATTIE: I'll draw another one.

CHARLIE: But what –

MATTIE: Get out of here, would ya? I don't want to miss him. (*crosses the stage*)

CHARLIE: (*to HARRIET*) Yeah. Get out of here.

HARRIET: Don't you be like that, Charles Knight. You're just as scared as me and you know it.

The two watch MATTIE as she sneaks up to the Foreman's "door." As she does, now GREEN, BAKER, JIM, and STICKNEY come to life. The OVERSEER and ASSISTANT OVERSEERS are ranting at GREEN, who looks a little bemused. He sits and the others pace and rant. JIM, who is new at this, is off to the side, interjecting when he can.

BAKER: Lightbody is up my nose about this work stoppage.

STICKNEY: Right up his nose.

JIM: (*echoing*) Yeah.

GREEN: Is he now?

BAKER: We can't get behind again. Another work stoppage would be a disaster.

STICKNEY: Disaster!

JIM: (*echoing*) Total disaster!

GREEN: It wasn't a work stoppage. It was an accident.

BAKER: So what are you going to do to make sure there are no more accidents?

GREEN: I don't know yet.

BAKER: That's not good enough. This is your job.

STICKNEY: Your job.

JIM: Yours!

BAKER: You're supposed to be the Foreman of Repairs. Do your job!

STICKNEY: Exactly!

JIM: Yeah!

STICKNEY: *(to JIM)* What are you doing?

JIM: Nothing?

STICKNEY: Stop copying me.

GREEN: *(with a sigh)* That poor boy.

STICKNEY: Children are disposable. There's a million more where he came from.

JIM: Well, disposable seems a little...

STICKNEY glares at JIM, who swallows his words.

GREEN: Gentleman, I appreciate your visit and will take all your... helpful comments into consideration. But perhaps we could call this a day?

MATTIE takes her drawing and slides it "under the door." The men stop and look at it.

STICKNEY: What's this? *(swoops down to pick up the paper)*

GREEN: It's my office, Stickney. I'll take the pieces of paper that come under the door. *(takes the paper from STICKNEY)*

BAKER: What is it?

GREEN: It's a drawing...

He strides to the "door" and "opens" it to see MATTIE standing there. This is too much for CHARLIE and HARRIET who exit on the run.

STICKNEY: What are you doing here?

JIM: *(frustrated)* Mattie!

STICKNEY: I warned your mother the next time –

GREEN: Did you draw this?

MATTIE: Yes. It's my invention.

GREEN: What's your name?

MATTIE: Mattie Knight. I'm in Upper Spinning.

STICKNEY: *(to JIM)* This is your fault.

JIM: I had nothing to do with it!

GREEN: Gentlemen! Thank you, I can handle this. *(handing the paper to MATTIE)* Show me.

MATTIE: It's a solution. A shuttle cover.

GREEN: It's very simple.

MATTIE: *(pointing)* You just need to add it – there to the loom. See? It stops the shuttle from flying off.

GREEN: Huh.

MATTIE: You could prevent a lot of injuries.

BAKER: See here, girl. What are you trying to pull, wasting our time like this?

STICKNEY: Wasting our time!

GREEN: It could work.

BAKER: What?

STICKNEY: I don't believe it.

MATTIE: I've drawn it out the best I can.

GREEN: It's crude, but it's clear. I see what you're trying to do. And no one helped you?

MATTIE: It's my invention.

BAKER: You're not actually listening to her. She's a girl.

STICKNEY: It's not going to work. *(to JIM)* Tell her!

JIM: *(to MATTIE)* You have no idea how machines work.

MATTIE: You haven't even looked at it.



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