



Sample Pages from The Female Edison

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THE FEMALE EDISON

A PLAY IN TWO ACTS BY
Lindsay Price



The Female Edison

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Printed in the USA

The Female Edison focuses on two inventions of nineteenth century inventor Margaret E. Knight. There are also two independent one-act versions of the script available:

Patterns & Power: The Female Edison

Failure & Fortitude: The Female Edison

Both can be performed without any knowledge of the other and are by Lindsay Price. They are available at theatrefolk.com

Characters

2W + 22 Any Gender

Each act has its own breakdown of roles. You can have a separate cast for each act or you can use the same cast, who assume new roles in Act Two.

The first production cast two separate Margarets - one for Act One and one for Act Two. This way you can divide the workload among two actors. There is optional text in the script to address the change of performer.

The cast size has been calibrated to match the cast size in Act Two, with five additional Operatives to be in the Act One group scenes. They do not have identified lines in the script or have specific character names. You can reassign lines to them and give these actors names should you desire. You can also perform with a cast size of 2W+17AG.

Act One

2W/22AG

See provided note about 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

5 additional Operatives for group scenes (see above)

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

Act Two

2 W, 11 AG, plus 3 groups (3/4/4)

See provided note about gender.

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

Please see the provided note about gender

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

Mattie: (W) Plays Arthur Duncan, Acting Commissioner.

Charles Annan: Machinist. Inventor.

John Knox: Factory Supervisor.

David Cantwell: Patent Lawyer.

Wil Graham: Machinist.

Lewis Abbot: Machinist.

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.

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" tableaus 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 in Act One 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. There is a divide between the child workers and Management in Act One, and a divide between female factory workers and male authorities in Act Two. (Please see gender note regarding this). Also in Act Two, use crisp light colours for the 19th century group, and straight lines for the inventors. The Invention group should be the embodiment of their creativity and energy.

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.

In Act Two, you will also need the sound of a gavel hitting a desk. 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*

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.

Act One 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.

Act Two 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

ACT ONE: Patterns & Power

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: Are you?

SAMUEL: No.

CHARLIE: 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: 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 move 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: (*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 never went to 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. A bunch of 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 more slowly, 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.

GREEN: (to MATTIE) Don't be disrespectful. Can I have your drawing?

MATTIE: Are you going to tear it up?

GREEN: No. I'm going to take it to Mr. Lightbody.

STICKNEY & JIM: What?

BAKER: What are you doing?

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!

GREEN starts to exit and MATTIE is right behind him.

MATTIE: Excuse me! It's my invention and I should get to explain it.
(backing down a little) With respect...

BAKER: Unbelievable!

STICKNEY: Ungrateful child!

JIM: Go home, Mattie!

GREEN: (to the men) Would you shut up? (to MATTIE) You think you can explain your invention in full to the Weaving Superintendent, and the Mill Manager? You can't cry, or run away. I'll be quite cross if you do.

MATTIE: (standing up straight) I'm the inventor. I'm the one who knows how this works. I'll explain it to anyone you want.

GREEN: All right, then. Lead the way.

GREEN gestures out of the office. MATTIE leads the way, but circles back to stand with MARGARET. GREEN exits, as if he is following MATTIE. BAKER and STICKNEY follow behind, sputtering at the unbelievability of the situation. JIM looks at MARGARET.

MARGARET: Believe me now?

JIM: How did you do that? Just stand up to them?

MARGARET: I'm spirited.

JIM shakes his head and exits.

MARGARET: Patterns. Children don't know anything until they become adults.

MATTIE: Of course it works. Who cares if I'm 12 or 112.

MARGARET: How could I know? A stupid factory girl who doesn't even go to school and who would never go to school again. How could they know? They saw waves and waves of us day in and day out, children are disposable, children are cogs, pieces of machines. Who knew one of us would be able to think?

MATTIE: I knew.

MARGARET: We're different.

The factory whistle blows. From one side the OPERATIVES enter and from the other, James PIERCE enters leading the MANAGEMENT. The OPERATIVES gather together.

PIERCE: We would like to announce a safety measure that will be added to all our looms in all four weaving rooms and in all seven mills. This new covered shuttle will prevent injury, maintain our production schedules, and keep our mills running at peak efficiency. *(to the MANAGEMENT)* Well done, gentlemen!

The MANAGEMENT claps loudly as all congratulate one another. GREEN approaches MATTIE.

GREEN: Congratulations, Mattie.

MATTIE: He never said it was my invention.

GREEN: He didn't. But we know. *(exits)*

The OPERATIVES gather around MATTIE.

MARY: Did they really use your idea?

MATTIE: Mr. Green showed me the prototype.

HENRY: I can't believe it.

CHARLIE: No one asked you to.

SARAH: Mattie... you did it. You changed the machine.

MATTIE: Yep.

SARAH: What else are you going to do?

STICKNEY: (to the OPERATIVES) Back to work! You heard the announcement.

JIM: Back to work!

The factory whistle blows. MANAGEMENT gather to form a tableau stage left, arms folded. The OPERATIVES form a tableau stage right, arms on their hips. MARGARET comes to stand beside MATTIE.

MARGARET: Breaking the pattern is a powerful thing.

MATTIE: I guess. No one paid us anything.

MARGARET: No. It never occurred to them that they should. And at the time, it never occurred to me that I should be paid or that I should patent the invention so that I could continue to be paid. I was 12.

MATTIE: I am 12. That shouldn't matter. I made something they used. And they used it in mill after mill after mill. And no one knew it was me.

MARGARET: They know now.

MATTIE: (to the audience) My name is Mattie Knight. I build things. I make things. I'm an inventor. And I've only just begun.

CHARLES ANNAN (a character from Act Two) pushes his way through the groups. They all verbally protest at being shoved. The verbal protests grow as CHARLES shoves his way in between MATTIE and MARGARET.

CHARLES: (holding up a piece of paper) You've just begun, have you? We'll see about that.

Blackout.

ACT TWO: Failure and Fortitude

Music plays. The light is very dim. MATTIE enters holding a lantern.

MATTIE: Hello! Margaret? Hello?

She continues to cross.

MATTIE: Margaret? Where are you?

MARGARET: *(entering)* Mattie? Mattie!

They cross to each other.

MATTIE: There you are. That blackout threw me for a loop. Everyone disappeared.

MARGARET: It's a new act.

MATTIE: *(if you have changed Margarets for Act Two)* You look different

MARGARET: *(if you have changed Margarets for Act Two)* Casting change. *(shrugging)* It's theatre.

MATTIE: What happened? Who was that guy? Do I have to hit someone?

MARGARET: No. Maybe. No, no no. No hitting. You're going to learn all about him.

MATTIE: It's the paper bag, isn't it? Oh, I can't wait. Where are we?

MARGARET: You're getting ahead of the story.

MATTIE: I can't wait. Is there a role for me? I want to be a part of this. And I want to be a man.

MARGARET: Ask backstage.

MATTIE: Ok. When I enter, don't let on you know me!

MATTIE runs off.

The factory whistle blows. A light comes up centre stage. MARGARET moves to stand in it. 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 of doing?

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 talks at the same time but doesn't say the same thing. Pick and choose.*) 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. I have invented my entire life. 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.”

MARGARET: (*to audience*) You know the drill. (*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.” (*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: (*scoffing*) Please.

INVENTION: (*all*) Get out!

CHARLES: You don't look like any inventor I've ever heard of.

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. The INVENTION group moves to verbally jeer at the exiting group. They then move 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: (*all, 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: *(all)* 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. Each OPERATIVE pulls a lever down to flatten the tube. The machine folds and glues one end to create the envelope shape. Each 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 yawns*)

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) Is your idea new?

MARGARET: Yes.

INVENTORS: (all) 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 (don't say the same thing, speak in syncopation) at CHARLES to leave MARGARET alone.

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 regroups. 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*) 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 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 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 head. 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*) Can you imagine if someone, anyone, had let me know when I was 12 that I should patent that invention? They used it in factories all across Massachusetts. (*as in 'what amazing things'*) What could I have done?

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 the 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 group, 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 "machine"*) 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 during 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 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 actors enter to 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.

MATTIE enters. She is playing Arthur DUNCAN, Acting Commissioner, and 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



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