

FACTORY GIRLS

BY CREIGHTON IRONS AND SEAN MAHONEY

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ACT ONE

Scene 1

On scrim –

***Rise, sisters, and your banner raise;
Will ye look for brighter days?
-The Voice of Industry, 1847***

An old classroom at Wheaton College, mid-1880's. LUCY LARCOM, nearing 60 but still with great energy, is packing her belongings into an apple crate. A gaggle of 8-12 college-aged women gathers at the door, shushing each other excitedly. When LUCY hears them sing, she pauses packing and listens proudly.

GIRLS

A RUSHLIGHT, FLICKERING AND SMALL
IS BETTER THAN NO LIGHT AT ALL.

OLD LUCY

My dears...

The girls shuffle into the room, awkwardly hiding something.

MARGARET (SARAH)

Ms. Larcom, I will say it if the others won't. *Please* don't go!

LYDIA (GLADYS)

Who will lead us?

OLD LUCY

Caroline is a strong editor.

CAROLINE (HARRIET)

But you are our advisor and founder.

OLD LUCY

And now I must go write myself. I love you girls, but I talk with you all too much in the halls of the dorm. I have to engage with the solitude of my craft for a while.

BETSY (ABIGAIL)

If we can't convince you to stay...

OLD LUCY

I've already bought my railroad ticket.

LYDIA

Let us at least present you with this.

The girls present a leather-bound book.

OLD LUCY

Thank you, it's beautiful...

RUTH (*MARTHA*)

Open it up, you old bird.

CAROLINE

They're your articles, from *The Lowell Offering*...

OLD LUCY

...nearly forty years ago. Where did you dig these up?

LYDIA

Ruth is resourceful.

A curtsy. LUCY opens the book. Guitar music begins.

OLD LUCY

Oh, girls... Now you have me looking back when I mean to be looking forward!

BETSY

You always said there could be no *Rushlight* without *The Offering*.

OLD LUCY

It's true. Nor would I be a writer.

RUTH

How could any art happen in Lowell. It's all just cloth and brick and smoke.

OLD LUCY

Oh, but at the beginning anything was possible. Girls your age were flooding into the city to see what they could become.

A driving, one-note ostinato begins very quietly as lights come up on a shack in the New England countryside, crescendoing gradually.

LYDIA

Like your friends Harriet Farley and Sarah Bagley?

OLD LUCY

My heroes. I see some of Harriet in you, Caroline; you share her unwavering decorum, her patience, and her intellect.

CAROLINE steps forward and becomes HARRIET FARLEY

Sarah was more like Margaret—fiery and brash, not far removed from the sturdy backwoodsmen who settled her New Hampshire home.

MARGARET steps forward and shakes out her mane of red hair, becoming SARAH BAGLEY. The two look at one another...

Our whole world changed the day they came together.

...and turn and exit. We are back in 1843. The girls of RUSHLIGHT become actors as LUCY remembers her days in LOWELL. One puts on a hat and tucks up her hair, becoming an AGENT, then steps forward and announces:

AGENT

Seventy-five young women ages 15 to 35 wanted for work in the cotton mills of Lowell, Massachusetts. Operatives will be paid up to \$3 per week and will receive free board for the first month.

FLORILLA, a homely girl with two black eyes, comforts her similarly abused mother.

SONG: Something Grand Before Us—SARAH BAGLEY, FLORILLA, GEORGIA

FLORILLA

MAMA...

A split stage; ABBOT LAWRENCE is giving a tour of the Boot Mills of Lowell, Massachusetts to a small group of dignitaries.

ABBOT LAWRENCE

And this, gentlemen, is our spinning room, where our New England female operatives spin southern cotton into our patented Boott Mills cloth. We are destined to be the most extensive cotton spinners in the world.

FLORILLA

WAGON'S HERE

DIGNITARY 1

Where is the coal?

ABBOT

All of our energy comes from that wheel: the Concord and the Merrimack converge here after a 32-foot drop to create all the power needed to run this industry.

FLORILLA

PLEASE DON'T CRY,
IT'S JUST ONE YEAR

BRITISH DIGNITARY 2

And worker retention, is this a problem?

ABBOT

Quite the opposite; we have a flood of young women eager to work.

FLORILLA

MAMA

FL.'S MOTHER
You come back, ok?

FLORILLA

I'LL SAVE EVERYTHING I EARN
AND TAKE YOU FAR AWAY FROM HIM
WHEN I RETURN

ABBOTT

(con't)

Respectfully, the Lowell system is our American response to Britain's factories. We believe that we can create a safe work environment with payment in cash, lectures, and safe housing while still maintaining a profitable New England business.

They walk through the spinning room. In another NH town, GEORGIA, a pretty country girl, is putting on her best bonnet, her bags nearby.

FLORILLA

MAMA

GEORGIA

MONEY JUST FOR ME

In the mills, HARRIET FARLEY, 27, a strong, graceful operative, approaches the tour.

HARRIET FARLEY

Good afternoon, Mister Lawrence.

GEORGIA

CLOTHES TO CALL MY OWN

LAWRENCE

Gentlemen, the pride of Lowell, Ms. Harriet Farley.

GEORGIA

I'LL LIVE A LIFE MORE FREE

LAWRENCE

Ms. Farley is a shining example of all we hope for our operatives.

GEORGIA

THAN ANYTHING I'VE KNOWN

LAWRENCE

What's more, she is a top writer for our company-sponsored magazine, *The Lowell Offering*.

HARRIET

It is a pleasure to meet you all. Welcome to the City of Spindles.

The stage shifts so that we see only the countryside and girls all over preparing themselves for the trip to Lowell. HARRIET is holding up a copy of The Lowell Offering that beckons the girls to come to Lowell.

GEORGIA & FLORILLA

OH, CAUSE I KNOW...
THERE'S SOMETHING GRAND BEFORE US
I DON'T KNOW WHAT IT IS, BUT I KNOW
I HAVE TO GO...
SO I'M HEADING DOWN
FROM THIS ONE-HORSE TOWN
ON A WAGON BOUND
FOR LOWELL.

AGENT

Young women wanted for work in the cotton mills of Lowell! Excellent pay, room and board...

FLORILLA
MAMA

GEORGIA'S SISTER
You *want* to be a factory girl?

IT'S THE ONLY CHANCE WE'VE GOT
AND IF WE FAIL IN TRYING, WELL,
AT LEAST WE FOUGHT

GEORGIA
THERE'S NOTHING HERE FOR ME...

MAMA

GEORGIA'S SISTER
But Easter's coming!

I'LL SAVE EVERYTHING I EARN
AND TAKE YOU FAR AWAY FROM HIM
WHEN I RETURN

GEORGIA
POWDER FOR MY FACE
STOCKINGS FOR MY THIGHS
CALICO AND LACE
AND MEN TO WIN THE PRIZE

AND UNTIL THEN
WHEN HE SWINGS,
REMEMBER WE WILL SOON
START OVER AGAIN,

FLORILLA AND GEORGIA

BECAUSE I KNOW...
THERE'S SOMETHING GRAND BEFORE US
I DON'T KNOW WHAT IT IS, BUT I KNOW
I HAVE TO GO...
SO I'M HEADING DOWN
FROM THIS ONE-HORSE TOWN
ON A WAGON BOUND
FOR LOWELL.

SARAH BAGLEY, a striking woman of formidable energy, storms onto the stage in another NH town followed by her father.

SARAH'S FATHER

Sarah George Bagley, don't you walk away when I'm talking.

SARAH

YOU HAVE TO LET ME GO

SARAH'S FATHER

Sarah—

SARAH

I'M THIRTY-ONE YEARS OLD
AND I'VE NEVER LEFT NEW HAMPSHIRE
I NEED TO SEE WHAT ELSE IS OUT THERE

SARAH'S FATHER

I need your help here—

SARAH

LET HENRY RUN THE MILL
IF YOU BELIEVE HE CAN, I KNOW HE WILL...
REMEMBER I WAS JUST THIRTEEN
WHEN FIRST I TOOK YOUR PLACE AT THE MACHINE...

PAPA, PLEASE...
THINGS ARE CHANGING FAST, AND LOWELL IS THE PLACE I WANT TO BE
AND I KNOW WE CAN USE THE MONEY
SO HUG ME BEFORE I LEAVE..
PAPA, HUG ME BEFORE I LEAVE...

SARAH'S FATHER

All right then. It's best you leave before mother wakes. I can take care of her for now.

SARAH

I'll send money for doctor fees.

SARAH'S FATHER

If you get there and you can't find work good enough—

SARAH

I know.

SARAH'S FATHER

Try again. That's what Bagleys do.

SARAH

Yes, Pops.

BECAUSE I KNOW...
THERE'S SOMETHING GRAND BEFORE US
I DON'T KNOW WHAT IT IS,

SARAH, FLORILLA, AND GEORGIA

BUT I KNOW
I HAVE TO GO...
SO I'M HEADING DOWN
FROM THIS ONE-HORSE TOWN
ON A WAGON BOUND
FOR
LOWELL!

As they board the wagon

THERE'S SOMETHING GRAND BEFORE US
I DON'T KNOW WHAT IT IS, BUT I KNOW
I HAVE TO GO...
SO I'M HEADING DOWN
FROM THIS ONE-HORSE TOWN
ON A WAGON BOUND
FOR...

The ostinato continues... The city of Lowell, Massachusetts rises up to meet the travelers.

AGENT

Lowell, Massachusetts. An entire city of independent young women.

OLD LUCY

We came in droves from all over New England, women who were grave (*ABIGAIL steps forward*), frivolous (*MARTHA steps forward*), melancholy (*HEPSABETH steps forward*), and

high-spirited (*SARAH lifts her head*), all filled with the spirit of self-sacrifice. The rushing Merrimack opened upon our sights and wound its way through our hearts like a dream realized.

Awestruck, the new girls marvel at the city before them while the girls already in Lowell reinforce the vision.

ALL GIRLS

I NEVER THOUGHT THAT I COULD EVER GET SO FAR FROM HOME
I NEVER THOUGHT THAT I COULD EVER GET SO FAR
I NEVER THOUGHT THAT I COULD EVER GET SO FAR FROM HOME
I NEVER THOUGHT THAT I COULD EVER GET SO FAR

I NEVER THOUGHT THAT I COULD EVER GET SO FAR FROM HOME
I NEVER THOUGHT THAT I COULD EVER GET SO FAR
I NEVER THOUGHT THAT I COULD EVER GET SO FAR FROM HOME

THERE'S SOMETHING GRAND BEFORE US

I NEVER THOUGHT I WOULD EVER GET
TO THE CITY OF SPINDLES
A NEW BEGINNING
A CHANCE TO STAND ON MY OWN
ON A WAGON BOUND FOR LOWELL.

Lights.

Scene 2

A cold rain, late at night. SARAH arrives at the front door of a boardinghouse lugging a beat-up horsehair trunk. The faint sound of girls singing can be heard from another boardinghouse. SARAH knocks. A GIRL opens the door.

BACKGROUND SINGING (under scene)

WE SPIN ALL DAY
AND THEN IN THE TIME FOR REST
SWEET PEACE IS FOUND
A JOYOUS AND WELCOME GUEST
DESPITE OF TOIL WE ALL AGREE
OR OUT OF THE MILLS OR IN...

SARAH

Good evening, I'm looking for a room, I was told—

GIRL

No beds here. Try Boott 3.

She slams the door. SARAH picks up her trunk and continues down the row. Again she knocks, the door opens a crack. A ruddy Irish girl answers.

GIRL 2

State your name.

SARAH

Sarah George Bagley, I—

GIRL 2

What are your wares?

SARAH

I'm no peddler, I'm looking for boarding and I was told—

The door slams, cutting her off. She drags her trunk and heads off stage in the rain in search of another door.

Lights rise on the parlor of Boott Boardinghouse #6. Eight to ten young women are standing in a semi-circle in the living room of the boardinghouse—the singers we have heard. GLADYS accompanies on the pianoforte.

GIRLS

...DEPENDENT ON OTHERS WE NE’ER WILL BE
SO LONG AS WE’RE ABLE TO SPIN.

The girls sit. HARRIET FARLEY, the leader of the gathering, stands.

HARRIET

Thank you, ladies. Rather than share our submissions for the next issue of *The Offering*, I have called tonight’s Self-Improvement Circle to address one order of business.

ALL

Orestes Bronson.

ORESTES BRONSON

(downstage and imagined by the girls)

“The operatives are well dressed, and, we are told, well paid. They are said to be healthy and happy, but the great mass wear out their health without becoming one whit better off than when they commenced labor. The poor girls when they can toil no longer go home to die. ‘She has worked in a factory’ is enough to damn to infamy the most worthy and virtuous girl.”

HEPSABETH

That gasbag. What does he know?

ABIGAIL

Hepsabeth, your tongue, as usual.

HEPSABETH

He is. Why else would he spout such dreck?

HARRIET

His flaw is ignorance, not idiocy. It is my job as head writer of *The Lowell Offering* to correct him.

GLADYS grabs a pencil and furiously transcribes all that HARRIET is saying.

SONG: Dear Sir—HARRIET FARLEY

HARRIET

DEAR SIR

WHERE DID YOU HEAR, SIR

THAT WORKING IN A FACTORY

WOULD DOOM A GIRL TO INFAMY?

WE'RE HERE, NOW
LET ME BE CLEAR, NOW
TO BETTER OURSELVES, AND TO WORK AND TO LEARN,
AND TO MAKE THE BEST WAGES A WOMAN CAN EARN...!

MISTER BROWNSON, YOU HAVE WRITTEN
THAT WE WORKERS HAVE NO LOVE FOR LIBERTY

OTHERS

No, not so! *etc.*

HARRIET

BUT YOU WERE BORN A SON OF FREEDOM—
AND WE HAVE COME TO LOWELL TO BE FREE!

OTHERS

That's right! *etc.*

HARRIET

AND OH, MAN,
DIDN'T YOU KNOW
THE OPERATIVES WHOSE NAMES YOU MOCK
CAN TRACE THEIR BLOOD TO PLYMOUTH ROCK

SO I, NOW,
BEG TO KNOW WHY AND HOW
YOU THINK IT WISE TO DAMN THE ONES
WHO WILL RAISE NEW ENGLAND'S SONS

SARAH appears at the window and looks in with wonder.

FOR THOUGH WE WORK HARD
OUR MINDS ARE BRIGHT
AND OUR SOULS CAN BE SEEN IN THE WORDS WE WRITE!
SO IF YOU EVER DOUBT
WHAT A FACTORY GIRL CAN BE
LOOK NO FURTHER THAN THE LOWELL OFFERING!

THE CITY LIGHTS SHINE DOWN ON THE MERRIMACK

LOOKING FORWARD, AND NEVER BACK
TO SAD TIMES WHEN I WAS MOTHERLESS AND FATHERLESS
OH LOWELL, YOU TOOK THIS BAREFOOT ORPHAN IN
AND LIFTED ME UP TO HEIGHTS HIGHER THAN
WOMAN HAS EVER BEEN...

GLADYS sniffles.

HARRIET

OTHERS

SO PLEASE, SIR
LISTEN TO ME, SIR
THE GIRLS YOU FALSELY REPRESENT
ARE WORTHY AND INTELLIGENT

YOU SAY THAT
YOU SAY THAT
WE'RE NOT
WORTHY

SARAH knocks at the door.

AND WE, NOW
BEG YOU TO SEE, NOW
THAT THOUGH YOU MAY MEAN NOTHING BY
THESE WORDS, THEY LEAVE A BLACKENED EYE,
SO IF YOU ARE A MAN, YOU'LL TRY
(sweetly)
TO RIGHT THIS INJURY
AND TELL THE WORLD THAT THEY ARE VIRTUOUS GIRLS
WHO WORK IN THE FACTORY.

AND WE
BEG YOU TO SEE

YOUNG LUCY has run to the door and now opens it to find a soaking wet SARAH.

LUCY

Well, you can't come in like that.

HARRIET

Until next week, ladies!

The girls disperse; some take an interest in the new girl, some head up to bed.

MRS. LARCOM

(pushing LUCY aside) Forgive my daughter's manners, she knows better. Come, dear, you're soaked through. Where are you down from, Ms...

Fast, overlapping dialogue...

SARAH

Sarah Bagley. From Meredith, New Hampshire.

MS. LARCOM

Well let's get you dry before you drown, Ms. Bagley... Lucy!

HARRIET

A fellow Granite Stater!

MS. LARCOM

(to LUCY) Fetch a blanket and put the kettle on. (to SARAH) We're all two to a bed already, but you can pass the night by the kitchen fire so you don't catch your death.

HARRIET

Abigail, bring some dry clothes—my nightgown will do.

MS. LARCOM

Don't get too attached, Ms. Farley, she leaves in the morning. *(she hurries off to find a mop)*

SARAH

Farley? Are you Harriet Farley?

LUCY comes in with the blanket, GLADYS, a snotty, sniveling young woman who probably doesn't smell great, takes it and wraps it around SARAH.

GLADYS

Yes, she's a bit shorter than you imagine she'd be isn't she?

SARAH

I'm a big fanatic of your work in the *Offering*. Your "Joan of Arc" article is a big reason I made the jump to come to Lowell.

HARRIET

You've stumbled into the right house. Many of the *Offering's* writers live here in Boott 6.

GLADYS

Gladys Winthrop, spinning room. Specializing in poetry. I also play the pianoforte.

SARAH

It's a pleasure.

MRS. LARCOM comes to mop the floor; ABIGAIL enters with the nightgown.

MRS. LARCOM

Let's get you to the hearth, Ms. Bagley, these young ladies have a 4:30am bell and a long day.

HARRIET

Mrs. Larcom, I think we can fit three to a bed for a night.

MRS. LARCOM stares at HARRIET, then at SARAH. A pause.

MRS. LARCOM

You plan on working in the mills?

SARAH

I do.

MRS. LARCOM

They know to expect you?

HARRIET

I'll personally take her to the overseer in the morning. (*MRS. LARCOM isn't satisfied*) And if there are any issues I'll cover her board for the first weeks.

MRS. LARCOM

a dismissive wave of the hand and she has accepted the plan

To bed, all of you.

SARAH

Ms. Farley, I don't know how to thank you.

HARRIET

Call me Harriet. My family is in Claremont, you know.

SARAH

Truly??

GLADYS

Oh, you were practically neighbors! There was another girl here from Meredith a year or so ago, what was her name, you probably know her... Oh, I can't remember, with this head cold and this- cough- and all. (*she coughs loudly and with a very strange high pitch*). Do you play cribbage? We'll have to teach you cribbage! The bed's plenty warm. Warmer now that we'll have three! Up the stairs, only two flights, not bad! There's the living area, of course, where our Self-Improvement circles...

Her quick talking, nervous voice fades off as the three go up the stairs to the room.

Scene 3

LIGHTS UP on HARRIET and GLADYS getting dressed in the boardinghouse. The morning bells are ringing. SARAH sleeps.

HARRIET
whispering

I'll leave her a note about breakfast.

SARAH
stirring

Hmm what? (*realizing*) You're dressed. You're leaving?? What time is it??

GLADYS

Second bells, we're off to the floor.

SARAH

I'm coming.

HARRIET

Sleep, come tomorrow! You had a long trip.

SARAH

...No...

GLADYS

Really, Sarah, we're already behind the clock, there's no sense in—

SARAH

flying into action, throwing her dress over her head

I did... not... come to Lowell... to sleep. How do I look? (*a pause: she is terrifically disheveled*) Oh pile on the agony! Just lead the way.

They rush out, giggling.

Lights rise on the factory floor of Boott Mills. The machines—giant skeletons of wood and steel—are in constant motion from belts attached to the drive shaft. Their clatter is cacophonous. LUCY has poems tacked to her loom, others have books sewn in to their work clothes, there are plants all over the place and in the windowsills, which are nailed shut.

BEN

All operatives to your stations! Great day to be a working woman in New England!

SARAH

So these Crompton looms – anything special I need to know?

GLADYS

They're new to us, too.

ABIGAIL

Put your hair back. These things can make a meters of cloth in a minute, but they can also break your neck.

SONG: Think Like a Machine—ALL

ABIGAIL

FIRST YOU TAKE THE BOBBIN HEAD
AND SEND IT THROUGH THE ROVING
THEN STAND ASIDE AND WATCH THE SHUTTLE GO...

HEPSABETH

FORGET ABOUT THE CHORES YOU HAD
THE PAINFUL HOURS SEWING
JUST MIND THE THREAD, WITH ONE EYE ON THE ROW
THIS LOOM WILL SHOW YOU ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

SARAH

Is there any place quieter or is all the work this loud?

HARRIET

IN THE CUTTING ROOM
FLOWERS FILL THE WINDOWS
AND FABRIC FINDS A SHAPE BENEATH OUR HAND

MARTHA

THOUGH THE PAY IS LESS,
A LOWELL GIRL CAN BREATHE THE AIR...
UNTIL SHE GETS HER GOLDEN WEDDING BAND.

ALL (NOT SARAH)

THIS LOOM WILL SHOW YOU ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW
JUST BEND YOUR KNEES AND TRY TO FEEL AND

THINK LIKE A MACHINE - SLIP INSIDE THE GEARS
FORGET ABOUT YOUR HOME, FORGET ABOUT YOUR FEARS.
THINK LIKE A MACHINE - FEEL THE SHUTTLE SLIDE
THE RHYTHM OF THE LOOM WILL BE YOUR GUIDE...

SARAH

I see... they're a lot like the handlooms we had back home, but the shuttle... the shuttle flies!

ALL

HEY, HAH...HEY, HAH...HEY, HAH...HEY, HAH...

TWICE SIX, TWICE SEVEN - TWICE TWENTY AND ELEVEN
TWICE SIX, TWICE SEVEN - TWICE TWENTY AND ELEVEN
TWICE SIX, TWICE SEVEN - TWICE TWENTY AND ELEVEN
TWICE SIX, TWICE SEVEN - TWICE TWENTY AND ELEVEN...

FLORILLA

What are they saying?

GLADYS

It's the rhythm of the looms! Helps us focus.

Across the factory floor, a drunken, disheveled man (MICHAEL), FLORILLA's stepdad, stumbles out. FLORILLA quickly ducks behind a loom as MARTHA steps in front of him.

MICHAEL

I...I know you are here, Florilla! You can't hide from me forever! I own you!

MARTHA

There's nobody by that name here.

MICHAEL

I can smell you!

ABIGAIL

Let me help you find the way out, sir.

ABIGAIL and a few other girls gently guide him out.

ALL (ADD SARAH)

THINK LIKE A MACHINE - FLY ON METAL WINGS
LISTEN TO THE SONG A BRAND NEW CITY SINGS

ALL (ADD MEN)

THINK LIKE A MACHINE - SPIN INSIDE THE THREAD
AND BLOCK OUT ALL THE CLATTER IN YOUR HEAD

The bells clang noisily.

BEN

Mid-day bells! Thirty minutes for dinner.

The girls charge out of the factory and hurry to the boardinghouse.

SARAH

One half hour to get to the boardinghouse and back?

LUCY

And to eat!

Girls are calling to each other, shouting, all hustling together to dinner.

The girls crowd into the dining room, eating fast, fighting; MRS. LARCOM hustles them around; the impression is a constant bustle, overlapping dialogue.

HEPSABETH

Pass the potatoes, Georgia.

GEORGIA

Ah, still following the doctrines of Professor Graham are we, Hepsy? How long has it been?

HEPSABETH

Three weeks, no meat. Three graham crackers a day.

GLADYS

So how are you feeling?

HEPSABETH

Carnivorous.

The bells ring again, and the girls hurry back to the factory. The work begins again

ALL

HEY.... HAH...

GLADYS

Just five more hours till the dinner bell!

SARAH

And what happens after dinner?

ABIGAIL

Some rest. Some recreate.

HARRIET

Some write!

LUCY

FOR AT THE FINAL BELL THE NIGHT IS YOURS AND YOURS ALONE...
AND EVERY PENNY EARNED IS ONE TO CALL YOUR OWN...

ALL

THIS SACRED TIME'S THE SECRET GIFT OF LOWELL.
WE READ AND SHARE OUR WRITING,
THE OIL LAMP IGNITING
ALL THE DREAMS DEEP IN OUR SOUL...

The overseers stride out. Back to work!

HARRIET

BACK INSIDE THE FACTORY - AT EVERY WORKER'S STATION,
WE POST OUR WRITTEN WORDS FOR ALL TO READ.
WE HOPE THE LOWELL OFFERING
OUR HUMBLE PUBLICATION
CAN HELP TO KEEP THE WORKERS' MIND AT EASE--
AND HELP YOU PASS THE HOURS AS YOU WEAVE...

ALL

THIS LOOM WILL SHOW YOU ALL YOU NEED--
TO THINK LIKE A MACHINE!

AMOS, an overseer, pulls a lever and the giant wheel comes up out of the water, the machines slow to a halt. BEN, ABBOTT LAWRENCE'S right hand, strides onto the stage.

BEN

Ladies, your attention briefly before you head home. Ah... *(he fumbles a bit with a sheet of notes)* How are the Cromptons? Pretty slick? *(no answer)* Ms. Farley?

HARRIET

I am in the cutting room, Mister Curtis.

GLADYS

The new looms are fast but we can handle them, sir.

BEN

Good. Um, I have come by this evening to announce a new company initiative; the Boott Mills Premium System. Instead of merely being paid for time on the floor, all overseers' salaries will now be tied to their output. Overseers, your base salary will fall to \$3 per week; *(overseers groan)* however, you will receive an extra 10 cents per hundred yards of fabric your workers produce. *(Overseers smile)* Spinners, weavers, and cutters, your pay will remain constant.

No questions. He checks his pocket watch.

Thank you, Mr. Warren.

He strides off. The bells clang.

AMOS

All right, let's move out! Tomorrow we do this all again, ladies!

The girls exit en masse.

Scene 4

The girls enter from the mill, bustling

HARRIET

Oh, what of it, really? Our salary is still the same.

ABIGAIL

Back on Meadowview farm—

HEPSABETH

Here we go again—‘back at Meadowview’ like it was Valhalla with udders and candles.

ABIGAIL

—no one told how fast you milked the cow, long as the milking got done.

GEORGIA

No one paid you, either.

MARTHA

Why are we talking about cows?

GLADYS

If they institute more speed-ups I’ll be too tired even for Chopin.

ABIGAIL

They’ll add more looms.

HARRIET

They can’t *require* you to work extra looms.

GEORGIA

But can’t you be fired for it?

HEPSABETH

You can bet on speed-ups for everyone. You heard Mister Curtis—the overseers are the ones that stand to make more money, and you know old man Weatherspoon in Spinning #3....he’ll ride us until we break.

SARAH

I know I’m new, but....didn’t we all come here to earn?

MARTHA

Girls come to Lowell for lots of reasons.

HEPSABETH

Abigail is putting her brother through Amherst. Florilla's on the run from her crazy step-father.
(*FLORILLA acknowledges this is true*) Why are *you* here, Martha?

MARTHA

I'm looking for a man, not a "Boston Marriage" like you.

ABIGAIL

Girls will work themselves to death to keep their jobs, mark my words on this one.

MARTHA

Georgia, stay near me, these women have lost their minds. Speaking of old maids, I reserved the common room for quadrille practice in ten minutes, so clean up your patchwork, Abby.

SARAH

Seeing ABIGAIL'S quilting

You quilt, as well?

MARTHA

Miss Abigail's fashion sense leans towards the quaint and...grand-maternal.

ABIGAIL

Why thank you, Martha. Yes, I'm admittedly quite possessed with my patchwork. Martha can have her charge account, I'll save my money and sew.

GLADYS

Honestly, what good is a damn machine anyways if—

MRS. LARCOM

sing-songy as she passes by with laundry

Language!

ABIGAIL

What she means, Sarah, what good is a *stinking* machine if it makes you work even harder than you did on the farm?

SONG: Live Free Or Die—ABIGAIL, SARAH

ABIGAIL

TURNIN' OUT CLOTH TWELVE HOURS A DAY
YOUR LIFE AIN'T EVEN YOUR OWN
THE CONSTANT CLATTER AND DRONE WON'T LET YOU BE
SO WHEN I GET OFF AFTER EARNIN' MY PAY
AND PICK UP MY NEEDLE AND THREAD
I'M BACK ON THE OLD HOMESTEAD
AND I AM FREE!
CAUSE BEIN' HOME JUST MEANS THAT MUCH TO ME

PIECE BY PIECE WE STITCH EACH SQUARE
PATCHWORK QUILTIN IN THE COUNTRY AIR
WORKIN TO THE RHYTHM OF THE ROCKIN' CHAIR
I KISS MY CARES GOODBYE
FROM MY LAP TO MY SISTER'S KNEE
THE ONLY OVERSEER IS THE MAPLE TREE
THE FAMILY WAY IS TO STAY BENEATH THE SKY
AND LIVE FREE OR DIE

SARAH

LONG SUMMER NIGHTS IN MEREDITH TOWN
I WOULD HEAR UNCLE AINSWORTH SAY
"NEVER THROW NOTHING AWAY THAT YOU CAN USE"

ABIGAIL

MOTHER'S OLD DRESS WHITES AND HER CALICO GOWN
ALL FRAYED AND SPECKLED WITH SILT
BEAUTIFULLY BOUND IN A QUILT OF REDS AND BLUES

SARAH & ABIGAIL

A WAY OF LIFE I HOPE WE NEVER LOSE
PIECE BY PIECE WE STITCH EACH SQUARE
PATCHWORK QUILTIN IN THE COUNTRY AIR
WORKIN TO THE RHYTHM OF THE ROCKIN' CHAIR
I KISS MY CARES GOODBYE
FROM MY LAP TO MY COUSIN'S KNEE
THE ONLY OVERSEER IS THE MAPLE TREE
THE FAMILY WAY IS TO STAY BENEATH THE SKY
AND LIVE FREE OR DIE

ABIGAIL

AS I SEW WITH HUMBLE CARE
MY HEART SENDS OUT AN HONEST PRAYER
THAT GINGHAM SQUARES CAN HOLD MY COUNTRY PRIDE;
WITH EACH EDGE I BIND, I PRAY
I MAY SPEND EACH NIGHT AND DAY
WITH FAMILY AND LOVED ONES BY MY SIDE
AND LIVE FREE OR DIE

ALL

LISTEN TO THE PRAYER
LISTEN TO THE PRAYER
LISTEN TO THE PRAYER

ABIGAIL & SARAH

LIVE FREE OR DIE!

MARTHA has brought MRS. LARCOM to enforce that she has indeed signed out the space.

MRS. LARCOM

Ok, quilters, Martha has signed out the room. The quilting bee can move upstairs.

MARTHA

Yeah, buzz off. Gladys, let's begin with the first movement?

GLADYS takes her place at the piano and plays as the girls exit and MARTHA begins dancing.

Scene 5

Lights shift to reveal ABBOTT LAWRENCE in his office. A knock.

LAWRENCE

Mister Curtis. Have a seat.

BEN

Sir, it was another good week. the premium system is—

SONG: Make the Day Last—LAWRENCE and BEN

LAWRENCE

MY FATHER, A FARMER, A SON OF THE SOIL,
RISKED ALL THAT HE HAD FOR HIS SONS TO BE FREE;
HE LAY SIEGE TO THE BRITISH IN BOSTON, STAYED LOYAL
TO THE LAND OF HIS BIRTH, THOUGH DEATH SEEMED MORE LIKELY THAN
VICTORY.

THREE TIMES, THE REDCOATS ASSAULTED HIS REGIMENT,
AND HIS ARM CAUGHT THE FIRE OF A REGULAR'S BLAST
BUT THOUGH HE WAS WOUNDED, MY FATHER TOOK SEVEN,
AND SOMEHOW, THE YANKS FOUND A WAY TO MAKE THE DAY LAST
TO MAKE THE DAY LAST.

BEN

Samuel Lawrence, of course, I know his name.

LAWRENCE

All that we hold dear, Benjamin—independence, opportunity, the right to pursue our happiness—
men risked their lives for it.

BEN

Yes, sir. My grandfather fought.

LAWRENCE

And this is our fight.

WE'VE BESTED THE BRITISH IN BATTLE, BUT NOW WE MUST
BETTER THE BRITS IN PRODUCTION AND TRADE
THE FACT'RIES OF LOWELL SEEMED UP TO THE CHALLENGE
UNTIL THE DREAM BEGAN TO FADE,

THEN MY BROTHERS AND I BOUGHT THIS STRUGGLING MILL,
THOUGH SO MANY TOLD US ITS HEYDAY HAD PASSED
AND JUST LIKE MY FATHER AT OLD BUNKER HILL
WE FOUGHT AND WE FOUND A WAY TO MAKE THE DAY LAST
BY THE FORCE OF OUR WILL, WE MADE THE DAY LAST

AND FOR A DECADE, THE MONEY ROLLED IN!
TILL THESE UP-RIVER UPSTARTS BEGAN CUTTING IN
SO I HIRED AN AGENT, FROM HARVARD, WHO SWORE
THAT HIS VISION COULD BRING THIS MILL BACK TO WHERE IT WAS
BEFORE...

He turns vicious

BENJAMIN CURTIS, ARE YOU NOT THAT AGENT?

BEN

I AM, MISTER LAWRENCE, BUT PLEASE, SIR, BE PATIENT,
THE SYSTEM NEEDS TIME

LAWRENCE

WELL TIME IS NOT SOMETHING WE HAVE.

BEN

Sir, with respect, the figures are up...

LAWRENCE

THE CROMPTONS ALONE SHOULD ACCOUNT FOR THESE NUMBERS!

BEN

THE CROMPTONS ARE FINE, BUT THE DAYLIGHT ENCUMBERS US

LAWRENCE

ARE YOU BLAMING THE MAKER FOR THE LENGTH OF THE DAY?

BEN

EXPLAINING, NOT BLAM—

LAWRENCE

FIND A WAY!

LAWRENCE

I NEED A MAN WHO CAN THINK LIKE A SOLDIER
WHO WILL RISK ALL HE HAS IN THE THICK OF A FRAY
IF I CAN'T BE CONVINCED THAT THAT SOMEONE IS YOU,
THEN I NEED TO FIND SOMEBODY NEW
UNLESS YOU FIND A WAY.

BEN

The whale oil lamps, sir. From the ballroom. Are they procurable?

LAWRENCE

Yours if you want them.

BEN

I'LL FIND A WAY TO MAKE THE DAY LAST.

BEN exits.

Scene 6

On the factory floor; all are working to the (faster) MACHINE beat. GLADYS is coughing. The girls shout above the clamor.

ABIGAIL

They are so much faster!

SARAH

It's not so bad. I worked three handlooms at a time back in Meredith.

HEPSABETH

Oh, Christ, everything's "not so bad" with this one.

The bells clang loudly.. End of the day. The clatter subsides, the looms slow to a halt. HARRIET runs into SARAH on the front steps of the boardinghouse. As the girls tidy and leave their looms, HARRIET make her way down to SARAH. SHE is intercepted by BEN.

BEN

Good day, ladies! Enjoy the Sabbath. (*pulling HARRIET's eye*) Ms. Farley, will I see you in church tomorrow?

HARRIET

You've become a Unitarian? (*beat; she ribs him*) Have you recently seen the light, Mister Curtis?

BEN

I've recently been more interested in my...spiritual side. I thought I'd come down and see what your minister has to say.

HARRIET

Then I suppose I will. Good day.

BEN

Good Day, Miss Farley.

SARAH and HARRIET make "OMG" eyes at each other as BEN walks away.

SARAH

Well, well well!

HARRIET

It's nothing and nothing will come of it. So... two full weeks of weaving, what do you think?

SARAH

I love these machines, they get so much done! But it *is* loud.

HARRIET

Cacophonous. The spinning room may not pay as well, but at least I can hear my thoughts. I get so much writing done just standing at the loom.

SARAH

I've been meaning to ask you. What does it take to get into the *Offering*?

HARRIET

Do you write? I feel like such a fool, I didn't even ask...!

SARAH

I've tried, but I always snapped the quills. I want to try again; I'm sure I'm at least as good as Gladys.

HARRIET

If I had half your drive!

SONG: The Wheel And The Water—HARRIET and SARAH

HARRIET

OH, MY NEWEST SISTER, WHAT CAN I SAY?
YOU COME TO THIS CITY AND SHOW ME A WHOLE OTHER WAY
ALIVE WITH THE DRIVE OF THE COUNTRY, FROM MOUNTAINS AND
STONE,
YOU'RE BRINGING A PART OUT OF ME THAT I'VE NEVER KNOWN

FOR JUST LIKE A WHEEL WHEN THE RIVER IS LOW,
I'VE ALWAYS SPUN STEADY, BUT ALWAYS SPUN SLOW
AND NOW YOU RUSH IN AND I'M RACING ALONG WITH THE FLOW...

WHERE THE WHEEL HITS THE WATER,
AND THE WAVES MEET THE WOOD,
IT'S A MOTHER'S PUSH FOR HER DAUGHTER,
TO DO THE THINGS SHE NEVER COULD,
THE WHEEL MEETS THE WATER AND EVERYTHING TURNS FOR GOOD.

SARAH

I'LL NEVER FORGET WHEN I GOT OFF THAT WAGON IN LOWELL,
I KNEW RIGHT AWAY THAT WE SHARED A NORTH COUNTRY SOUL,
SO TEACH ME TO WRITE, EVERY NIGHT,
AND SHED LIGHT THROUGH MY PEN,
TO CHANNEL MY HEART AND FIRE,
YOU INSPIRE ME, TIME AND FOREVER AGAIN--

AND WHEN THIS IS OVER AND ALL'S SAID AND DONE,
A FACTORY GIRL'S WORKDAY OF WAGES IS WON, WE'LL BE
CLOSE AS THE FIBERS AND THREADS IN THE FABRIC WE'VE SPUN.

BE THE WHEEL TO MY WATER,
COME MAKE SENSE OF MY WAVES,
COOL ME DOWN WHEN I'M HOTTER,

SARAH AND HARRIET

SLOW MY RUSH WHEN I GET TOO BRAVE,
FROM THE NORTH COUNTRY CRADLE--
WE'LL ROCK 'TIL WE ROLL TO THE GRAVE...

TAKE MY HAND...CAN YOU SETTLE MY FEAR?
TELL ME NOW...WILL YOU ALWAYS BE HERE?
MAKE A PROMISE...
ON MY MOTHER'S SHAWL...
THAT YOU'LL NEVER CHANGE,
AND WE'LL NEVER CHANGE,
WE'LL KEEP ON RISING,
THE RIVER IS RISING,
AND NEVER WILL FALL!

SARAH

HARRIET

THE BLADE HITS THE TURBINE,
THE HIGHER THE RIVER,
THE AXLE GOES ROUND,
THE LOUDER THE SOUND,

SARAH AND HARRIET

LET'S NEVER SURRENDER THE FRIENDSHIP WE'VE FINALLY FOUND...
WHERE THE WHEEL HITS THE WATER

AND THE WAVES MEET THE WOOD
IT'S A MOTHER'S PUSH FOR HER DAUGHTER
TO DO THE THINGS SHE NEVER COULD

THE WHEEL MEETS THE WATER AND EVERYTHING TURNS--
EVERYTHING TURNS...

HARRIET

SO I'LL KEEP ROLLING...

SARAH

AND I'LL KEEP ON DRIVING...

Scene 7

OLD LUCY

reading from her book to her student performers

Ah... September, 1843. The religion of our fathers overhangs us like the shadow of a mighty tree against the trunk of which we rested, while we look up in wonder through the great boughs that half hide and half reveal the sky. Some of the boughs are already decaying, so that perhaps we may to see a little more of the sky than our elders. Still, all girls are required to worship; I do not appreciate this requirement.

The Sunday bells are ringing. SARAH and HARRIET share a pew, kneeling together. Meanwhile, at the boardinghouse, MRS. LARCOM and LUCY argue over church.

MRS. LARCOM

Lucy Larcom, this is not a negotiation.

LUCY

But mother—

MRS. LARCOM

No buts!

LUCY

I have never felt so far from the spirit of the creator as when I sit in your ‘fire and brimstone’ punishment pen.

MRS. LARCOM

When you turn eighteen you can change—

LUCY

What if I won’t go to church at all? What if I—

MRS. LARCOM

LUCY! While you live in my house, you are a Baptist. Is that understood?

LUCY

Grr. Yes, mother.

Lights shift to highlight SARAH and HARRIET. The minister’s voice finishes,

MINISTER

And so go forth in the name of God. Amen.

SARAH & HARRIET

Amen.

They rise to leave—a quick transition. BEN is behind them, but is too shy to approach the pair.

HARRIET

Aren't you excited? Your first submission for *The Offering*!

SARAH

Our submission. There are as many of your words as mine.

HARRIET

I merely edited.

SARAH

Do you think they'll like it? What time does the circle start?

HARRIET

Sarah George Bagley is nervous! Rehearse with me.

SARAH

You wanted to hear Emerson's Lyceum Lecture.

HARRIET

What does some old transcendentalist have over my best friend?

SONG: RIVER RISING aka The Pleasures Of Factory Life-SARAH

SARAH

Ok...

THIS SHOWS THE WORLD WHAT WE CAN DO

HARRIET

I love this new opening.

SARAH

THAT WE CAN WEAVE AND WE CAN WRITE
WE'RE MORE THAN JUST THE DIRT BENEATH THEIR SHOE

...

And then, um...

HARRIET

THAT WE ARE LOWELL'S LIGHT.

SARAH

Yes! You don't think they'll laugh at me, do you?

HARRIET

Not as much as I will.

SARAH

Hattie!

HARRIET

Joking! Keep going.

SARAH

SO THE WORDS OF THE FACTORY GIRLS
PUT FORWARD HERE IN INK
NOW SPAN THE NATION
AND PLEAD OUR CASE

HARRIET

I think we changed "plead" to "state."

SARAH looks a bit frustrated but makes a note on her paper.

SARAH

SHELLS OF BEAUTY AND POEM'S PEARLS
ARE PROOF THAT WE CAN THINK
A PROCLAMATION
OF WOMAN'S PLACE

HARRIET

Say what you mean!

SARAH

WITH THIS PAPER- WE CLIMB INTO THE RANKS

OF THE HUMAN RACE

HARRIET

You have a natural inclination toward metaphor.

SARAH

Is that a bad thing?

HARRIET

It's marvelous! But sharpen it... What are you in fact trying to say?

SARAH

LET THE OFFERING STAND TO PROVE
THAT WOMEN IN THESE MILLS
HAVE BRAINS OF NEEDLES
AND SOULS OF STARS

HARRIET

Better! But—tighter!

SARAH

YEARS OF LABOR CANNOT REMOVE
THE SPIRIT OF THE HILLS
WE'VE KEPT OUR VIRTUE
WE BEAR NO SCARS!

HARRIET

Louder!

SARAH

PUT THE PAST BEHIND US NOW,
FOR THE FUTURE'S FIN'LY OURS...

SARAH & HARRIET

THIS SHOWS THE WORLD WHAT WE CAN DO
THAT WE CAN WEAVE AND WE CAN WRITE
WE'RE MORE THAN JUST THE GIRLS YOU THOUGHT YOU KNEW
THAT WE ARE LOWELL'S LIGHT!

The song mellows as the girls gather for the self-improvement circle. HARRIET and SARAH share a deep breath of encouragement.

ALL

SO LONG AS WE'RE ABLE TO SPIN

HARRIET

Our first *writer* needs no introduction. Though she has been here only three months, she has lit us all with her bright spirit. Sarah George?

SARAH

nervous

Thank you.

THIS SHOWS THE WORLD WHAT WE CAN DO
THAT WE CAN WEAVE AND WE CAN WRITE
WE'RE MORE THAN JUST THE GIRLS THEY THOUGHT THEY KNEW
THAT WE ARE LOWELL'S LIGHT

The pleasures of factory life are like "Angels visits, few and far between"—said a lady whom fortune had placed above labor. Yet pleasures there are, even in factory life. In the mill we see displays of the wonderful power of the mind. Who can closely examine all the movements of the complicated, curious machinery, and not be led to the reflection, that the mind is boundless, and is destined to rise higher and still higher, and that it can accomplish almost any thing on which it fixes its attention!

THOUGH WE WORK WITH OUR HANDS AND BACKS
WE KEEP OUR MINDS MAINTAINED

SARAH AND HARRIET

AND BOUND TOGETHER,
WE'RE TWICE AS STRONG.

ALL

AND JUST LIKE THE MERRIMACK
WE CANNOT BE CONTAINED!
WE'RE GAINING POWER
RUSHING ALONG

THE RIVER'S RISING NOW

NOW WE'RE RACING TOWARDS A DREAM!

THIS SHOWS THE WORLD WHAT WE CAN DO
THAT WE CAN WEAVE AND WE CAN WRITE
WE'RE MORE THAN JUST THE GIRLS YOU THOUGHT YOU KNEW
THAT WE ARE LOWELL'S LIGHT!

The girls crowd around SARAH and celebrate her work. HARRIET and SARAH share a long hug.

Scene 7.5

*In the black of early morning, BEN wheels the whale oil lamps out with AMOS's help.
MAKE THE DAY LAST underscores the scene*

Scene 8

Darkness. The girls are all in bed. The first bells ring in the distance. Girls groan and move in beds, then slowly rise and prepare for the day.

MRS LARCOM

Young la-dies! Up with you! Those shuttles won't change themselves! Eat! Rise! Pee! Get up! Get up! Water's high, spindles will fly!

SONG: Morning Bells—FLORILLA, ALL

MARTHA

ISN'T IT A PITY, SUCH A PRETTY GIRL AS I,
SHOULD BE SENT TO THE FACTORY TO PINE AWAY AND DIE.
MORNING BELLS I HATE TO HEAR
RINGING DOLEFUL LOUD AND DREAR.

FLORILLA

HOPING THAT I WAKE UP, AND THIS LIFE HAS BEEN A DREAM;
AND I'VE SLEPT THROUGH THESE MORNING BELLS,
I'M AN ENGINE FULL OF STEAM
FLYING UP THE PORTLAND LINE
SMILING 'CAUSE THE DAY'S ALL MINE

ALL

MORNING BELLS ARE RINGING
EARLY BIRDS ARE SINGING
MORNING BELLS ARE RINGING
LOWELL GIRLS ARE SINGING

The girls make their way to the factory; The bells ring again. Just before the looms start up, we see a bunch of giant whale oil lamps scattered around the room.

BEN

Looms will be live in thirty seconds, ladies. You may have noticed the whale oil lamps scattered around the mill. They'll give us light enough to work summer hours in these shortening winter months.

SARAH

Fourteen hour days year round?

BEN

If all goes well, you may even see a raise in your pay in the future.

BEN nods to AMOS, who takes over as BEN leaves

MARTHA

You could use the money, Hepsy—that shawl’s looking more holy than righteous these days.

HEPSABETH

Shut your trap, Martha. At least I can dress up, you’ll still have that recessive English chin and that resting hog face. *(pushes her nose up like a pig)*

ALL

MORNING BELLS ARE RINGING
EARLY BIRDS ARE SINGING
MORNING BELLS ARE RINGING
LOWELL GIRLS ARE—

GLADYS screams. Her finger has been caught in the fast moving shuttle and cut cleanly off. AMOS hurries to her, ushering her off the floor.

AMOS

She’s fine, ladies, back to work. Mind the bobbins, no breaks!

The girls turn back to their looms.

In a boardroom adjacent to the factory floor, THE BOARD is getting situated. ABBOTT LAWRENCE hobnobs with a few members as they find their seats and make small talk. HARRIET sits uncomfortably in the corner.

BEN appears in the doorway. ABBOTT excuses himself.

LAWRENCE

THE LAMPS ARE IN PLACE?

BEN

YES, SIR, ONE AND ALL,
BUT I’M WORRIED MORALE WILL ERODE BEFORE LONG.

ABBOTT

SO THROW THEM A PARTY, “A LIGHTING UP BALL,”
AND WE’LL HONOR THE WORKERS WITH DANCES AND SONG.

BEN

Yes, sir

LAWRENCE

Excellent work, Benjamin.

BEN exits. LAWRENCE turns his attention to THE BOARD.

LAWRENCE

Are we all met? Very good. I just received word from our new head agent that our working hours will be extended through the winter; should be a sharp rise across the board.

Applause, huzzahs.

LAWRENCE

Before we carry on with the mundanities, I would like to acknowledge the brilliant editress in our midst. Ms. Harriet Farley of the *Lowell Offering*! Reverend Thomas, what is the current circulation of *The Offering*?

REVEREND THOMAS

Four thousand and climbing, sir.

BOARD MEMBER

And people are reading it?

HARRIET

If I may, sir. We are often met by new operatives whose only knowledge of Lowell is from the pages of our humble magazine.

LAWRENCE

The magazine’s success has certainly lifted the Lowell brand, and gives us a real edge over these fledgling mills. With this in mind, Reverend Thomas, the board, and I would like to make you the sole editor of the *Offering*. Here is the key to the press and our undying thanks for your hard work.

HARRIET

Mister Lawrence, sir, I... I am not worthy of such responsibility—

LAWRENCE

That's nonsense and you know it. I've watched you grow here, Miss Farley—both in the cutting room and through the paper. There is no one I trust more with this power. Men – to Harriet Farley, the Offering, and her women writers!

The board begins to pour whiskey- and there is an awkward moment as they wait for HARRIET to exit. She may be “part of the team,” but she is not one of the Boys’ Club.

Thank you, Harriet.

MAKE THE DAY LAST!

HARRIET leaves, the men drink. on the factory floor, overseers light whale oil lamps.

Scene 9

The boardinghouse. SARAH is sitting on her bed with ABIGAIL, FLORILLA, and HEPSABETH.

SARAH
(*vacantly*)

It happened so fast—

HEPSABETH
Shhhoopp! Like Marie Antoinette. WHOMP.

ABIGAIL
She lost her focus.

HEPSABETH
She lost her finger.

SARAH
Poor Gladys.

HEPSABETH
We should have a “finger funeral.” Bury it out behind the mill. (*sings ‘taps’ over dialogue*)

ABIGAIL
Hepsey!

FLORILLA
My uncle lost his left foot when his horse pinched him against the fencepost. Oh, and my cousin was feeding the hogs when he got knocked off his feet and just trampled, I mean—

ALL
Ok, hey ok...!

HARRIET enters excitedly.

HARRIET
Sarah George! I’m so glad you’re home.

SARAH
Gladys was hurt.

HARRIET

I heard. What a terrible accident.

HEPSABETH and ABIGAIL stand to leave.

ABIGAIL

Well we better get dressed. Are you coming?

HEPSABETH

Show me your dress, Florilla...

FLORILLA

It's my work dress, you've seen it a hundred times.

In another room, MARTHA and GEORGIA are getting ready for the lighting up ball.

MARTHA

No more sonatas for her, I suppose. Blush?

GEORGIA

Typical Gladys, lost in the clouds. I also heard three girls from the weaving room were coughing up blood and had to take a wagon home today.

MARTHA

Some aren't made for city life.

SARAH and HARRIET, playing cribbage

SARAH

Were they ever this fast when you were in the weaving room?

HARRIET

No. But these are faster times, the water's high. Cut the deck?

SARAH

Do you have time before the dance?

HARRIET

There's always time for cribbage! Did you get the dress hemmed?

SARAH

I'm not sure I want to go anymore...

MARTHA and GEORGIA...

MARTHA

Those god-damn lamps... I smell like low tide.

GEORGIA

And my pores are clogged.

MARTHA

At least we get a dance out of it.

HARRIET and SARAH's room.

HARRIET

Shake it off, you're coming! I've been bursting to tell you—at the board meeting today—

SARAH

How can people celebrate, you know? Gladys is maimed.

HARRIET

Nothing can hold Gladys down for long. And, it's already half past! Sarah we have to get ready.

SARAH

But—

HARRIET

You are coming to this dance with me.

In the main room, LUCY storms away from her mother.

MRS. LARCOM

You can't go showing your shoulders, young lady!

LUCY

Martha is, and always does!

MARTHA

coming down the stairs

Did I hear my nom de plume?

MARTHA is dressed to absolutely impress, with a suggestive and stunning gown.

HEPSABETH

How many weeks' wages are you wearing there, Martha?

MRS. LARCOM

Martha Jane Pitman, what *would* your homespun country mother say?

MARTHA

I didn't come here for my mother. Right, Georgia?

GEORGIA

She is looking quite spruce since she purchased some new threads, don't you all think?

MRS LARCOM

Lucy, you are wearing this shawl, and that's final. There will be time later in life for such frivolity and shoulder-showing.

LUCY

Mother! Ugh. (*She wears it.*)

MRS. LARCOM

Be cautious on the dance floor, young ladies—remember to leave some room for the holy ghost.

ALL

(*in placating tone*)

Thank you, Mrs. Larcom.

Smiling, MRS. LARCOM exits.

**SONG: Spruce and Rusty—MARTHA and GEORGIA;
ABIGAIL, FLORILLA, and HEPSABETH**

MARTHA

Lucy Larcom. Are you really going to listen to your mother? When was the last time she felt a man's had on the small of her back?

LUCY

I'm not here for a man like you, "sister." I can dress how I please.

HEPSABETH

Go powder your beak, you wag.

MARTHA

You *are* one to crow, Hepsabeth, though I do like your dress.... it reminds me of the jackets the lumberjacks wore back home. (*imitates Hepsabeth's 'athletic' stature as music starts*)

MARTHA

I ALSO CAME DOWN FROM THE FAMILY FARM
AND I WAS RUSTY ONCE LIKE YOU
I HAD TO LEARN TO TALK RIGHT
AND AT THE END OF THE NIGHT
I DIDN'T SIT AROUND ACTING BLUE
BECAUSE THERE AIN'T NO PLACE FOR A CRYING FACE
IF YOU EVER WANT TO HAVE A BEAU
AND IF THE SUN IS SHINING, THEN YOU BETTER QUIT WHINING
BOUT THE COLD NORTH COUNTRY SNOW

MARTHA AND GEORGIA

GO SPRUCE, SO SPRUCE,
NO MORE DIRTY NAILS, GET RID 'A THAT DRESS
SO SPRUCE, SO SPRUCE,
YOU GOTTA CLEAN IT UP IF YOU WANNA IMPRESS
GO SPRUCE, SO SPRUCE,
NO MORE COUNTRY FUNK, SO GET RID OF THAT TAN
SO SPRUCE, SO SPRUCE
IF YOU EVER WANT TO GET A MAN.

GEORGIA

PETTICOATS, AND CRINOLINES AND BLOOMERS ARE THE THING
YOUR STOCKINGS BETTER BE SILK, YOUR SKIN WHITE AS MILK
IF YOU WANT TO GET YOURSELF A RING
THE ONLY PIGMENTATION THAT YOU WANT ON YOUR FACE
IS ABLUSH OF CARMINE TINT
YOU NEED TO SPEND MONEY, HONEY, FASHION AIN'T FUNNY,
AND WE'RE TRYING TO DROP YOU A HINT...

MARTHA AND GEORGIA

GO SPRUCE, SO SPRUCE,
NO MORE DIRTY CLOTHES, YOU GOTTA WASH YOUR TOES
SO SPRUCE, SO SPRUCE,
AND IF A FARMER'S POOR BETTER TURN UP YOUR NOSE.
GO SPRUCE, SO SPRUCE,
JUST LISTEN TO US, WE'LL BE YOUR GUIDE
SO SPRUCE, SO SPRUCE,
IF YOU EVER WANT TO BE A BRIDE.

GLADYS

SO YOU DRAPE YOURSELVES IN FUR
AND RING YOUR NECKS IN SILVER
YOU PRETEND TO BE MATURE
THINK YOU'RE JUST SO SPRUCE (SO SPRUCE)

BUT YOU SCRUBBED TOO CLEAN
FORGOT THE FARM THAT YOU CAME FROM
NO LONGER LIVING LEAN
YOU'RE STUCK IN THE MACHINE
BUT THE SCREWS ARE LOOSE

SO I'M GONNA STAY RUSTY
GOTTA KEEP IT SO RUSTY
YEAH I GOTTA STAY RUSTY
GONNA TAKE CONTROL
'CAUSE RUSTY IS MY SOUL!

HEPSABETH

I WAS BORN IN LIVERMORE
TO A BLACKSMITH AND A MAID
WORKED ALL NIGHT SCRUBBING KITCHEN FLOORS
AND I NEVER ONCE GOT PAID

(ADD ABIGAIL AND GLADYS)

NOW I'M OUT HERE ON MY OWN (CH CH CH CH CH NA NA NA)
AND I WORK HARD EVERY DAY (CH CH CH CH CH NA NA NA)
NOTHING'S EVER BEEN HANDED TO ME
THAT I JUST COULDN'T GIVE AWAY

SO I'M GONNA STAY RUSTY (RUSTY!)
I GOTTA KEEP IT RUSTY (RUSTY!)
YEAH I GONNA STAY RUSTY (RUSTY!)
GONNA LET IT SHOW
CAUSE RUSTY'S ALL I KNOW!

MARTHA & GEORGIA

LUCY

GO SPRUCE, SO SPRUCE

AM I GONNA STAY RUSTY?

NO MORE DIRTY NAILS,
GET RID 'A THAT DRESS
GO SPRUCE, SO SPRUCE
GOTTA CLEAN IT UP
IF YOU WANNA IMPRESS

AM I GONNA STAY RUSTY?

ABIGAIL, FLORILLA, HEPSABETH

GO SPRUCE, SO SPRUCE,
PETTICOATS AND CRINOLINES
AND PETTICOATS AND CRINOLINES
AND BONNETS, AND BANGLES,
AND BAUBLES AND BEADS,
IT'S ALL YOU NEED

NO YOU GOTTA... NO YOU GOTTA
STAY RUSTY

GLADYS

NO YOU GOTTA STAY RUSTY!

ABIGAIL

I GOTTA KEEP IT RUSTY

HEPSABETH

NO GO GOTTA STAY RUSTY
I'M GONNA LET IT SHOW...

ALL THREE

SO I'M GONNA STAY RUSTY (RUSTY!)
I GOTTA KEEP IT RUSTY (RUSTY!)
YEAH I GONNA STAY RUSTY (RUSTY!)
WE'RE GONNA TAKE CONTROL
CAUSE RUSTY IS MY SOUL.

SPRUCE GIRLS

RUSTY, RUSTY, RUSTY, RUSTY

SO SPRUCE!

RUSTY, RUSTY, RUSTY
RUSTY!

Scene 10

The Lighting-Up Ball... The 'band' plays, the people dance.

SARAH

Sole editor??

HARRIET

I know. I haven't wrapped my head around it.

LUCY

Who will print the papers?

HARRIET

We will, dear.

LUCY

But what man?

HARRIET

No man. Us.

BEN

(approaching)

Ms. Editor, may I have this dance?

HARRIET

Mr. Curtis!

BEN

Ladies.

As BEN escorts HARRIET onto the floor, SHAMUS, an Irish laborer, makes his way to LUCY.

SARAH

Looks like it's you and me, kid.

SHAMUS

Would a luminous angel such as yourself deign to dance with a clodhopper like me?

SARAH motions for LUCY to go; she does, blushing.

SONG: The Dance –LUCY, SEAMUS

LUCY

You must be a poet.

SHAMUS

Aye, a writer, but not by trade—only bits and pieces for *The Voice of Industry*, the labor paper that just started over on Dutton Street.

LUCY

And your trade?

SHAMUS

Mechanic, trained by the best in Galway. Lots of us coming to America these days, more every summer. Not enough work over there and the men in my family just happen to be good with their hands.

LUCY looks blankly, awkward pause.

WHAT THE HELL AM I SAYING?... GOD I SOUND LIKE A BUFFOON
YOU'VE GOT TO BE SHARPER NOW, SHAMUS, TO MAKE HER SWOON!

SHAMUS

And you Lucy- you write for the *Offering*? My little sister Mary Margaret has the latest copy, she loves it like a baby lamb.

LUCY

Thank you? I didn't think you people - I mean - Irish...people - actually read our work.

SHAMUS

You think all we do is drink and fight? Ireland has a long line of literary legends. Well, not a long yet, but at least it's a line.

LUCY

Of course! Maria Edgeworth is one of my true favorites. (*beat*) You don't know her, do you?

SHAMUS

I would like to.

LUCY

SOMETHING... HOW HIS HAND FITS ON MY BACK...

NO, KEEP UP YOUR DEFENSES, THIS IS A FULL ATTACK

RUSTIES

EASY LUCY NOW, DON'T YOU GET CARRIED AWAY

SHAMUS

EASY MAN, BREATHE DEEP

MARTHA

He's sweet...

GEORGIA

As a leprechaun with a lollipop.

MARTHA AND GEORGIA

DO WHAT YOU CAN TO MAKE YOUR MAN STAY

SHAMUS

WHAT CAN I SAY THAT WILL MAKE HER HEART LEAP?

SHAMUS

I hear they've been adding hours in some of your factories.

LUCY

How'd you hear that?

SHAMUS

Word gets around in the labor circles in a small town. *(beat)* You and your friends should consider joining our fight for a ten-hour workday.

LUCY

I didn't know there was such a thing.

SHAMUS

Well there isn't, yet. That's why we're fighting for it. *(beat)* Say, I'll be working on the canal just outside The Boott Mill all month, may I look out for you? In a....mechanical way, of course.

LUCY
(Smiling)

Of course. And I'll read your *Voice Of Industry* paper as well on the weekend.

LUCY

SEAMUS

TOO LATE... DOES HE KNOW I'M UNDER HIS SPELL?
I CAN'T STAY QUIET! I DON'T CARE IF SHE CAN TELL,
LET HIM HEAR MY HEART BEATING, I CAN FEEL HIS SWELL!
HEAR MY HEART BEATING, I CAN FEEL IT SWELL!

BOTH

SPIN ME AND TWIST ME AND TOSS ME AND TWIRL
THE CLICK OF OUR SHOES, THE WHOOSH OF YOUR/MY GOWN
DANCE WITH ME
DANCE WITH ME
I'M DANCING I'M DANCING
I'M DANCING NOW
DON'T LET ME DOWN.

The Song ends; BEN and HARRIET awkwardly split off, and SHAMUS and LUCY do as well. SARAH and HARRIET re-unite on the porch - somewhere private.

SARAH

Hey, Hattie, how was that?

HARRIET

Oh, he's nice.

SARAH

Just nice? (*elbows her in an 1840's way*)

HARRIET

Oh please! I'm too busy for all that. How's your night going?

SARAH

I can't get that snapping noise of poor Gladys' finger out of my head.

HARRIET

(*takes SARAH by arms*)

Sarah, look at me. I know you care. And I understand it, completely. But you have to move past this! We are paid employees, here by choice and the grace of God. But to properly mourn... we can always have Hepsy's finger funeral.

SARAH

Hattie!

HARRIET

I know, that was terrible. But it's true. She's lucky it wasn't her hair.

SARAH

Maybe I just need to go write and let it burn off.

HARRIET

Here, if you're "running hot"—take a pull of this.

HARRIET slides SARAH a leather bound flask.

SARAH

Harriet Jane Farley! What is this?

HARRIET

Colonel Kluck's Canadian Whiskey. Some kindling for the fire. Hurry up, before the Temperance League attacks us.

SARAH

laughing

What? Ugh, all right....

SARAH takes a huge swig and almost chokes.

HARRIET

Ah ha! That's it, right there! She's ready!

SARAH

she swallows with difficulty

Yes - I'm - I'm ready! Where'd you get this?

HARRIET

Lawrence gave me this flask when our subscriptions hit one thousand. He's always given me gifts like that...kind of old-fashioned but they mean something. I save it for special nights.

SARAH

Well, go easy. We don't want to be reading about you in the Courier's society section, Ms. Editor.

HARRIET

Ha! Go! Write! Burn Sarah Bagley, burn!

SARAH

Bring the Cold Water Army to put out my burning embers! woo hoo!

HARRIET (*as she walks away*)

“Cold Wa-ter Ar-my we here pro-claim! claim! claim!”

SARAH heads happily back to the boardinghouse and HARRIET looks longingly at her inspired roommate. She looks at the flask, takes a rip, and goes back in to the dance and spins FLORILLA.

Scene 11

The next evening, the girls gather in the boardinghouse for a Self-Improvement Circle .

ALL

DEPENDENT ON OTHERS WE NE’ER WILL BE
SO LONG AS WE’RE ABLE TO SPIN.

The girls sit in a semi-circle.

HARRIET

Welcome, all! And welcome back, Gladdie. You’ll be back on that piano in no time.
(*GLADYS waves with her 4-fingered hand, still bandaged*) I know time has been precious
with the longer hours on the floor and the ball the other night, but I hope some of you
have had time to write submissions for our next *Offering*?

SARAH

I have one, Harriet. Ahem. Ms. Editor.

A round of knowing applause

HARRIET

Yes, Sarah, we can’t wait. Share.

SONG: Has the Bell Become the Sun--SARAH

SARAH

WHERE TWO RIVERS MEET
THERE SPINS A WHEEL
THAT DRIVES AND CALLS ALOUD
A PROMISE MADE OF STEEL

BUT WHEN WE CAME TO WORK,
THE WATER GREW TOO HIGH
AND WHALE OIL CLOUDS THE AIR
AND ERRANT SPINDLES FLY

HYPNOTIZED, ONE AND ALL,
BY THE JANGLING COPPERS OF OUR PAY
MESMERIZED BY CALL OF THE BELL

The others sing with her and been to mime working the looms (or not?)

SARAH AND GLADYS (*others on aahs*)

THE LOOM AND SPINDLE CRY
A BROKEN SERENADE
AND GIRLS LEAVE HOME TO DIE
OUT OF SUNLIGHT, IN THE SHADE

FROM THE FARM AND THE BLOOM
OF THE GENTLE SUGAR MAPLE TREE
TO THE ARMS OF THE LOOM AND THE BELL!

ALL

STRIVING, TURNING, DRIVING, YEARNING,
STRIVING, TURNING, DRIVING, YEARNING,
FREE FROM SOMETHING, STILL SURVIVING,
TURNING ALWAYS...

HEY... HAH...

STRIVING, TURNING, DRIVING, YEARNING,
STRIVING, TURNING, DRIVING, YEARNING

SARAH

(*overlapping*)

WE DREAMED THAT WINTER'S CHILL WAS DONE
BUT WE GAVE AWAY OUR SPIRITS TO THE LOOMS,

ALL

AND THE BELL BECAME THE SUN.

SARAH

They lured us here with the promise of a better life. Instead, we find ourselves working fourteen hour days to the confined, contagion-laden stench of dead whales with no time for our souls.

WE DIDN'T COME TO JUST SPIN THREAD
DIDN'T COME TO LIVE AND DIE IN VAIN
TO KNOW JUST CLOTH AND BREAD
OR TO NEVER FEEL THE SKY OR RAIN
NO WE CAME HERE FOR A DREAM!

ALL

HAS THE BELL BECOME THE SUN?
HAS THE BELL BECOME THE SUN?

SARAH

The company must change its ways and institute a 10-hour workday!

GIRLS

overlapping

I DON'T THINK I CAN TAKE ANYMORE OF THE BANGING AND
CLANGING AND RINGING OF ALL OF THE BELLS...

SARAH

HAS THE BELL REPLACED THE SUN?

The girls stand in stunned silence. Hepsabeth breaks the silence.

HEPSABETH

They can't staaaaand the fire! Cool me down!

ABIGAIL

Someone finally said it. Someone had to, and you said it.

GEORGIA

Said what?

GLADYS

I feel so strong right now.

FLORILLA

This is poppycock.

AMELIA

How so?

FLORILLA

Lowell saved my life and little Miss Priss thinks it's prison.

HEPSABETH

Priss? What was prissy about that?

HARRIET

Ladies, may I have a word with Sarah? (*they fall silent*) Alone.

The girls file out of the room.

MARTHA

(*mumbling*)

Politics make my brain ache. I'm here to get a full purse and a ring and—

ABIGAIL

Better watch your fingers then.

When the room is empty...

HARRIET

Wow, fire was right. Was that the Colonel Kluck's talking?

SARAH

I'm sure it could use a little editing—

HARRIET

A little? Sarah, I will support you always, but we can't publish that.

SARAH

Why?

HARRIET

It's political, it damns the company, it—

SARAH

But you are the editor now—

HARRIET

As of three days ago! But I won't be for long if my very first act is to print a tirade against the very corporation that gave me the position. (*beat*) I'm the wheel, remember? What's my job?

SARAH

Cool me down, I suppose.

HARRIET

What if, instead, you start a petition? To the state legislature? Something above the fray. I could even help circulate it...

SARAH puts her article down and walks for the door.

SARAH

(after a beat) That's an idea..... getting signatures will also get the word out.

HARRIET

Let *The Offering* spread sweetness and light... you spread the heat.

SARAH

I'll get started. *(beat... HARRIET forces a smile)* See you at home, Hattie.

HARRIET

See you at home, Sarah George.

SONG: The Fathers Of '76—HARRIET, SARAH, ALL

She picks up SARAH's article...

HARRIET

DO WE REALLY JUST SPIN THREAD?
DO WE LIVE AND DIE IN VAIN?
OR KNOW JUST CLOTH AND BREAD?
IS IT BAD WE NEVER FEEL THE RAIN?

WE'VE SPENT GENERATIONS ON THE KITCHEN FLOOR
NEVER ALLOWED TO HOPE OR TO DREAM FOR ANYTHING MORE
WE COME FROM SHADOWS AND COBWEBS, FROM CORNERS
FROM WAY OUT OF SIGHT
AND HERE WE ARE, WRITING OUR WAY TO DIZZYING HEIGHTS!

AND SARAH'S RIGHT, GIRLS *ARE* DYING, AND THE BELL *IS* OUR MASTER
BUT WHAT SHE DOESN'T SEEM TO SEE ARE THE GAINS THAT WE'VE MADE
THESE GAINS WILL OUTLAST HER
WE'RE BREAKING THROUGH, IT TAKES TIME, IT TAKES TEARS
FOR ANY WORTHY MISSION, THERE'S ALWAYS ATTRITION
OUR PENS SHOULD BE USED NOW FOR PROGRESS AND NOT AMMUNITION

FOR WE ARE THE DAUGHTERS OF THE SONS OF THE FATHERS OF '76
AND THIS IS OUR CHANCE TO DO WHAT WE'VE KNOWN ALL ALONG WE CAN
WE CAN'T LET THIS CHANCE PASS US BY
CAN'T GIVE THEM REASON TO DENY
WHAT WE CAN DO
WHAT WE'RE DOING NOW

SARAH

SO WE FIGHT, ARMED AND READY, OUR WORDS AS OUR WEAPON
AND IT'S THE MEN WHO DECLARED US TO BE
EQUAL AND FREE
WHOSE FOOTPRINTS WE STEP IN
ONCE MORE THE PEN RISES AGAIN
TO PROVE THAT ITS POINT
CAN STAB LIKE A SWORD
WE LAY CLAIM TO THE RIGHTS THEY SECURED US
AND WON'T BE IGNORED

The "Rusty" girls gather behind SARAH, joining the petition

FOR WE ARE THE DAUGHTERS OF THE SONS OF THE FATHERS OF '76
AND THIS IS OUR CHANCE TO DO WHAT WE'VE KNOWN ALL ALONG WE CAN
WE CAN'T LET THIS CHANCE PASS US BY
CAN'T GIVE THEM REASON TO DENY
WHAT WE CAN DO
WHAT WE'RE DOING NOW

ALL

WE'RE THE DAUGHTERS OF THE SONS OF THE FATHERS OF '76
AND THIS IS OUR CHANCE TO DO WHAT WE'VE KNOWN ALL ALONG WE CAN
WE CAN'T LET THIS CHANCE PASS US BY
CAN'T GIVE THEM REASON TO DENY
WHAT WE CAN DO
WHAT WE'RE DOING NOW

SARAH starts a petition

SARAH

We hope the Massachusetts legislature will agree to hear our petition—that to compel workers to labor fourteen hours a day amounts to a crime against our humanity.

SARAH & HARRIET

WE DIDN'T COME TO JUST SPIN THREAD
WE CAME TO LIVE OUR MOTHER'S DREAM

Blackout.

ACT TWO

Scene 1

Pitch black.

SARAH

In a harsh whisper

Psst. Abigail.

ABIGAIL

Hmm? Is it time? Am I late?

SARAH

Shh, no, no... It's midnight. Get up.

ABIGAIL

sigh

I dreamt I patched a quilt for President Tyler. Does that sound strange?

SARAH

Yes.

A driving ostinato creeps in; ABBOTT LAWRENCE in silhouette downstage.

LAWRENCE

Dear Ms. Farley,

It is a great service to Boott Mills that you are able to represent our corporation with such intelligence and grace through the pages of *The Lowell Offering*. Your willingness to speak to potential investors in the great cities of our young nation will certainly help the company to continue to rise. We have the greatest faith in you.

In Philadelphia, BEN and HARRIET stand "backstage" at an investor meeting.

BEN

They're ready for you, Ms. Farley.

HARRIET

Thanks, Mister Curtis. Ben.

LAWRENCE (*in a letter*)

Your work shall not go unrewarded, Harriet, nor my gratitude unexpressed. Everlastingly,
Abbott Lawrence.

Meanwhile, SARAH's girls are gathering for the meeting. HEPSABETH in doorway.

SARAH

Hepsabeth? What are you doing here?

HEPSABETH

Just following the pretty girls.

SARAH

I wasn't expecting you to join us.

HEPSABETH

Why are you so surprised? I want those whale oil lamps gone just as much as you do.
Neither of us have to tell Florilla.

SARAH

Well, come on in. It's great to have you aboard. Let's get started.

SONG: Factory Tracts/Harriet's Tour—HARRIET, SARAH, et al

BEN

Brothers of the Philadelphia Rotary, please welcome a woman who exemplifies all of the
attributes of our famed Lowell system, both in her industrious nature and her dedication to the
corporation. The editor of the world-renowned *Lowell Offering*....Miss Harriet Farley!

HARRIET accepts the applause.

HARRIET

Thank you, Philadelphia.

AND THANK YOU, GENTLEMEN
FOR THE CHANCE TO SPEAK
ABOUT THE RICHES THAT OUR PAPER HAS IN STORE

PRINTED BY LOWELL MILLS
DARING AND UNIQUE
THE VOICE OF WORKING WOMEN, STRAIGHT FROM THE FACT'RY
FLOOR.

Back in Lowell, SARAH holding court at the meeting. She holds up the petition.

SARAH

Here it is, 5,000 signatures. The Massachusetts State Legislature will hear us next week. (*The girls cheer.*) They will make us testify. Who will answer the call?

YOUR WORDS ARE THE WILL OF THE WORKER
YOU SPEAK THE TRUTHS THAT OTHERS WILL NOT
SO SHARE YOUR MIND SO THAT OTHERS WILL QUESTION
WHAT HATH GOD WROUGHT? WHAT HAVE WE WROUGHT?

In New York City...

HARRIET

Thank you, New York.

WITH PAGES OF POETRY
FULL OF DIGNITY AND GRACE
THE GIRLS DISTILL THE MIND'S IMMENSITIES IN INK.

THE VOICE OF A LOWELL GIRL
IS CULTURED AND URBANE
WE SPEND THE DAYLIGHT WORKING, BUT IN THE DARK WE THINK

Back in Lowell...

SARAH

We need two more speakers. (*a little quiet and shifty in room*)

GLADYS

Uhh...I would....but I am not good in front of a crowd. Plus....my lisp gets even worse when I'm nervous. And now with my ghost finger—

SARAH

You will be fine, Gladdy. Just stand up straight, keep your tongue tight and project. Your testimony is crucial.

GLADYS

Like this? Or this?

SARAH adjusts GLADYS' posture in a non-verbal, cute, motherly way.

ABIGAIL

Well, if she can do it, I guess I can too. Lord, raise me up.

SARAH

ABIGAIL & GLADYS

LET THEM KNOW (LET THEM KNOW)
LET THEM SEE (LET THEM SEE)
SPREAD THE WORD THAT THE SOULLESS CORPORATION
IS KILLING YOU!
AND KILLING ME!

NOW, WE SPEAK NAMES AND FLYERS FROM THE DARKNESS
NOW WE'RE KEEPING LIGHT A FIRE IN THESE HEARTS AND
RUSTY! SPREAD FOREVER, EVER HIGHER
EVER ONWARD...

HARRIET

When you invest in the Lowell System, you invest in the future of America. Thank you all.

SARAH

Are you ready, ladies? (*They are*) Tomorrow, The State House in Boston.

Scene 1.5

MRS LARCOM silently folds the laundry as LUCY approaches the steps excitedly.

LUCY

But she chose me to speak, Mother!

MRS LARCOM

You're not going to Boston.

LUCY

But mother, I got my looms covered, and you know it's the right cause—

MRS LARCOM

Lucy Elizabeth. When you are married and settled down, you can take up causes.

LUCY (exasperated)

It's so unfair!

I KNOW THAT TIMES ARE DIFFERENT NOW
I'M NOT AS YOUNG AS I MAY SEEM
A MOTHER KNOWS REALITY
A DAUGHTER HAS A DREAM

MS LARCOM

I KNOW MY SHIP HAS SAILED AWAY
BUT I WON'T WIDOW WALK
I REBUILT MY LIFE IN LOWELL
SO WATCH OUT HOW YOU TALK

(With HARRIET behind her, in unison and in a shadow)

LET PATIENCE DO ITS PERFECT WORK
LET PATIENCE DO ITS PERFECT WORK

LUCY (with SARAH behind her in shadow)

YOUR GENERATION DOESN'T UNDERSTAND
THE TIME FOR CHANGE IS NOW

ALL

ALL OF THE GAINS WE'VE MADE
ALL OF THE WOMEN WHOSE SHOULDERS YOU STAND ON

LUCY

ALL OF THE MILES TO GO
WHY CAN'T WE SPEAK, WHEN WE KNOW

WHAT'S RIGHT
WHAT'S WRONG
WHOSE TIME HAS COME
AMERICA WAS BUILT TO BE THE LAND OF THE FREE
WHY CAN'T THAT BE ME?

ALL

I KNOW THAT TIMES ARE DIFFERENT NOW
I'M NOT AS (OLD/YOUNG) AS I MAY SEEM
A MOTHER KNOW WHERE DANGER LIES
A DAUGHTER KNOWS HER DREAM

They each go back to their work as SARAH and HARRIET retreat into the background.

Scene 2

The Massachusetts State Legislature. WILLIAM SCHOULER sits on a high chair behind SARAH, ABIGAIL, and GLADYS, who are seated at the front of the stage looking out at the audience.

SPEAKER (cross-dressed girl)

Hear ye, hear ye!! The Massachusetts State Legislature, on this day, the 5th of February, 1844, do assemble a special committee of the House to hear grievances from operatives of Boott Mills in Lowell. Presenting Representative William Schouler, chair.

SCHOULER

Ms. Bagley, your name and reputation precede you. This special meeting of the Massachusetts State Legislature will address all your concerns. I will note that this government has neither history of nor interest in regulating labor conditions, and yet the thousands of signatures you have leave us no choice but to hear your case.

SARAH

Thank you, sir. We hope you answer our call.

SCHOULER

Who will speak first?

SONG: The 10-hour Day—SARAH, ABIGAIL, GLADYS

SARAH

I will.

A COUNTRY GIRL HEARS STORIES TOLD
OF SPINDLES THAT TURN THREAD TO GOLD
AND HOPING FOR THIS DREAM TO FIND
SHE LEAVES THE SKY AND RAIN BEHIND

GLADYS

AND RIDING FROM THE ROLLING HILLS
SHE DREAMS OF LIFE IN SUNLIT MILLS
BUT STEPPING FROM THE WAGON BED
SHE SEES A DIFFERENT LIFE AHEAD

ABIGAIL

EXHAUSTED FROM THE JOURNEY
SHE GRABS AT ANY JOB

WORKING THE LOOM IN THE CORNER OF THE ROOM
HER TOES AND FINGERS THROB

GLADYS AND ABIGAIL

SHE THOUGHT THAT THE MACHINES
WOULD EASE LABOR'S BURDEN
BUT THE OVERSEER SEES IT OTHERWISE

SARAH

With the aid of the recently installed whale oil lamps, the company has extended the workday from what natural sunlight allows. With this imposition, the bell has replaced the sun as the governor of our daily rhythms. And the bell has no respect for nature's order.

ABIGAIL

I CAME TO HELP MY FAMILY

GLADYS

AND I CAME TO BE FREE

SARAH

BUT THE HUSTLE LEAVES NO TIME TO EAT

ALL THREE

NO TIME LEFT FOR ME

THE QUIET COUNTRY BREEZES
THAT GRACED OUR FAMILY'S FARMS
BLOW SO FAR AWAY...

SARAH, GLADYS, ABIGAIL

NOW THEY WORK US WHEN THE SUN
HAS FALLEN OUT OF THE SKY
BY THE TIME THE DAY IS DONE
WE'RE TOO TIRED TO CRY
IF WE GOTTA STAY AWAY
FROM MOTHER NATURE'S SWEET SONG
GOD GRANT THE WORKING DAY

MAY BE TEN HOURS LONG

SARAH

We the undersigned peaceable, industrious and hardworking men and women of Lowell, in view of our condition, the evils already upon us, by toiling from thirteen to fourteen hours per day, confined in unhealthy apartments, exposed to the poisonous contagion of air, debarred from proper physical exercise, mental discipline, and mastication cruelly limited, and thereby hastening us on through pain and disease to a premature grave, pray the legislature to institute a ten-hour working day in all the factories of the state.

SARAH AND CHORUS

MORE TIME TO SLEEP	MORE TIME
MORE TIME TO WRITE	MORE TIME
MORE TIME TO KEEP	MORE TIME
MORE TIME AT NIGHT	MORE TIME

MORE TIME TO CHEW	MORE TIME
MORE TIME FOR TEA	MORE TIME
MORE TIME FOR YOU	MORE TIME
MORE TIME FOR ME	MORE TIME

MORE TIME TO THINK	MORE TIME
MORE TIME FOR PRAYER	MORE TIME
MORE TIME FOR INK	MORE TIME
MORE TIME TO SHARE	MORE TIME
MORE TIME!	
MORE TIME!	
MAY BE TEN HOURS LONG	

SCHOULER

You make a strong case, Ms. Bagley. I will come to the mills myself to investigate. This week. If conditions are as deplorable as these women claim, the government may intervene. Do all present understand?

SARAH, ABIGAIL, GLADYS

Yes, sir.

SCHOULER

Next week, then.

They all file off, fired up and happy.

Scene 3

AMOS he pulls a lever to slow the looms down. ABIGAIL shouts above the noise.

ABIGAIL

The looms feel slower to you?

GLADYS

Like a stroll by the Saco in the fall!

AMOS

Keep up the good work, ladies! Work is a blessing! All is possibility! Lowell! America!

ALL

THINK LIKE A MACHINE! FLY ON METAL WINGS
LISTEN TO THE SONG A BRAND NEW CITY SINGS
THINK LIKE A MACHINE - SPIN INSIDE THE THREAD
AND BLOCK OUT ALL THE CLATTER IN YOUR HEAD

BILL SCHOULER has entered with LAWRENCE and watches approvingly

HEY... HA....

SCHOULER

Plugging his ears and shouting

Never get used to that noise, do you, old boy?

LAWRENCE

Entering, shouting

That's the sound of America becoming the greatest nation in the world, Billy!

SCHOULER

Shaking hands

Still quite an operation after all these years. Massive flowers in the windows, ruby-cheeked operatives... all seems in fine order. What am I missing?

LAWRENCE

Nothing, Bill. As you know, the hours can be long, but each overseer is committed to providing a healthy workplace. We are even building a hospital this year for the occasional girl who falls ill.

SCHOULER

See, now that's business in action, keep the government out and let the competitive visionaries like yourself handle the details. My commendations, Abbott.

LAWRENCE

Thank you, Bill.

SCHOULER puts on his hat and SARAH approaches the men.

SARAH

Sir, excuse me, when do you think the legislature will render its decision?

SCHOULER

Ms. Bagley, so nice to see you again, in your...natural habitat. We will render a decision very soon, certainly as soon as next month. Thank you for your moving testimony.

SCHOULER leaves. LAWRENCE follows him out. The clatter of the looms quickens. Suspect, SARAH returns to her loom.

GIRLS

TWICE SIX, TWICE SEVEN, TWICE TWENTY AND ELEVEN...

Lights fade on the factory.

Scene 4

One month later. GEORGIA runs into the boardinghouse, screaming

GEORGIA

Entering

Ahhhh!!! Martha! MARTHA!

MARTHA

What? What's on fire?

GEORGIA

Look! (*a ring!!*) Nathan proposed!

MARTHA

On a Tuesday night?

GEORGIA

We're to be married this August at his parents' seaside home in Gloucester!

MARTHA

I'm so happy for you.

GEORGIA

You'll have to help me find a dress!

MARTHA

Beacon Hill, here we come.

SARAH is alone in her room, playing with the cribbage cards. HARRIET bursts in the door. A hug.

SARAH

Hattie, you're back! Tell me everything, how was the trip?

HARRIET

It was actually nice! I started teaching Ben cribbage.

SARAH

Oh! How is he?

SARAH starts dealing

HARRIET

Like most men... impulsive and cant keep his cards in tight, but he's trainable.

SARAH

And the tour itself?

HARRIET

No, you first! I haven't seen you since you took the petition to Boston. Any word?

SARAH

None yet. Scholar visited a few weeks ago, so we should hear any day.

HARRIET

Ooh, Sarah, I actually can't play right now.

SARAH

But "there's always time for cribbage."

HARRIET

I have to prepare an editorial for tomorrow's meeting. Have you been writing?

SARAH

Just a lot of thinking.

HARRIET

Leave a lamp lit for me... I'll be home late, but see you at first bells.

On scrim - The Ruling. or spoken by SCHOULER (his actual quote, below) Time change?

SCHOULER

"We acknowledge your grievances, but we say, the remedy is not with us. We look for it in the progressive improvement in art and science, in a higher appreciation of man's destiny, in a less love for money and a more ardent love for social happiness and intellectual superiority. Your committee, therefore, while they agree with the petitioners in their desire to lessen the burdens imposed upon labor, differ only as to the means by which these burdens are sought to be removed." Signed, Bill Schouler.

SARAH flops on her bed and starts to sob. A knock at the door.

SARAH

Hattie?

LUCY enters. [MUSIC in]

LUCY

It's me. I just heard about the ruling.

SARAH

Schouler and Lawrence are old eating club buddies from Harvard...now I don't think there was ever a chance.

LUCY

There might be another way.

LUCY

DO YOU REMEMBER THE MAN THAT I DANCED WITH
AT THE LIGHTING UP BALL?

SARAH

With the accent?

LUCY

Yes, AND TALL,
AND WITH INK ON HIS FINGERS

SARAH

I THINK I REMEMBER

LUCY

WELL THIS WEEK, I MET HIM FOR TEA
AND HE (*voice even lower*)
HE RUNS THE LABOR PAPER DOWN UNDERGROUND
NEAR THE CENTER OF TOWN
I FORGET WHAT IT'S CALLED, the voice of something...

SARAH

The Voice Of Industry?

LUCY

That's it!

SARAH

The labor radicals?

LUCY

THEY HAVE THEIR OWN PRESS AND THOUSANDS OF SUBSCRIBERS.
AND... HE'S STARTING A DEPARTMENT OF FEMALE WRITERS

SARAH

We already lost.

LUCY

So try again.

MRS. LARCOM appears in the doorway with a letter.

MRS. LARCOM

A piece of mail came for you, Ms. Bag—Lucy.

LUCY

Sarah was just sharing some stories of her girlhood in New Hampshire.

MRS. LARCOM

You have some laundry to tend to.

LUCY

Yes, Mother.

*LUCY exits, giving SARAH one final mimed encouragement behind her mother's back.
MRS LARCOM holds the letter out to SARAH, then pulls it back to say:*

MRS. LARCOM

I know you've got some ideas in your head about this mill. You'd do well to remember that it's all some of us have. And let my daughter alone, she is a child.

MAKE THE DAY LAST in Cmin transition

Scene 5

LAWRENCE sits with BEN in his office. U/S with “striving turning” baseline

BEN

Is it that obvious?

LAWRENCE

Come now. You’re no true Universalist, and yet you have found your way to their meeting rather... religiously, wouldn’t you say?

BEN

It’s the message, ah...Catholicism isn’t working for my generation.

LAWRENCE

Look here Curtis, Miss Farley has been like a daughter to me; she is a fine woman to have your eye on. Just not your paws. Aim lower, it suits us both.

BEN

Understood, sir.

LAWRENCE

One more thing; I would like to avoid any more setbacks before the shareholders’ meeting next month. There’s no place for any whispers against the company... Have your overseers discreetly remove anyone speaking of resistance. Understood?

BEN

Of course. I wondered, too— Should I lift the wheel a bit to improve morale?

LAWRENCE

No. Keep it at full speed for now....the water is never this high.

BEN nods and heads back onto the floor and pushes the lever back to high.

SONG: BELL/SUN REPRISE—All girls

ALL

STRIVING, TURNING, THRIVING, LEARNING
STRIVING, TURNING, THRIVING, LEARNING
FREE FROM SOMETHING STILL SURVIVING,
TURNING ALWAYS

Scene 6

A meeting of the Self-improvement circle. SARAH is conspicuously absent.

SONG: Song of the Spinners—SIC girls

DEPENDENT ON OTHERS WE NE’ER WILL BE,
SO LONG AS WE’RE ABLE TO SPIN

HARRIET

Welcome, ladies. Thank you all for making time for this Self-Improvement Circle, I know there has been a lot going on.

FLORILLA

Where is Sarah, by the way? Isn’t she your prize horse?

Lights up on a meeting of The Voice of Industry. SHAMUS stands before a gathering of men. SARAH stands outside the door and opens the letter MRS LARCOM gave her.

SONG: Letter About Your Mother—SARAH’S DAD

SARAH’S FATHER

(up behind her)

DEAR SARAH GEORGE, I HOPE THIS FINDS YOU WELL
I HATE TO WRITE TO YOU IN HASTE
BACK HERE AT HOME, WELL IT’S BEEN HELL,
I DON’T KNOW HOW TO PUT IT ANY OTHER WAY

YOUR MOTHER SLIPPED AGAIN...
THEY SAY IT’S WATER ON THE BRAIN
SHE CRIES ALL NIGHT FOR YOU
I CAN’T IMAGINE HER PAIN
THEY MOVED HER TO A PLACE WHERE THEY SAY
SHE’LL BE MORE COMFORTABLE, BUT WE NEED TO FIND A WAY TO PAY

I FOUGHT YOU LEAVIN, BUT I SEE HOW YOU WERE RIGHT
AND NO ONE HAS MORE FIGHT THAN YOU

SO DAUGHTER, SEND HOME WHAT YOU CAN
MY DAUGHTER, SEND HOME WHAT YOU CAN
SWEET SARAH, SEND HOME WHAT YOU CAN
YOUR MOTHER AND I ARE DEPENDING ON YOU.

SARAH folds the letter and begins to leave but hears SHAMUS's passionate speech through the door.

SHAMUS

The Voice of Industry is changing minds and fueling the fire! Our paper spreads the fight for justice to thousands. But it's not enough. We need to double our reach, to move people to act.

He continues miming a speech as SARAH braces herself to enter, she feels the challenge before her.

SONG: Shield and Sword—SARAH

SARAH

MY MOTHER USED TO WALK THE FIELDS ON THE EAST SIDE OF OUR LAND
AND CALL FOR ME WHEN DAY BECAME THE NIGHT
SHE WOULD CLING TO ME FOR SAFETY AS I LED THE WAY BACK HOME
AFRAID OF THE SHADOWS IN THE MOONLIGHT
I MADE A SWORD FROM A SAPLING AND A SHIELD OF POPLAR BARK
SHE WOULD CALL ME JOAN OF ARC... SHE CALLED ME JOAN OF ARC
AND I WAS THE ONE WHO SAVED HER
FROM THE DEMONS SHE IMAGINED IN THE DARK

SO WHY AM I SO TERRIFIED OF WALKING THROUGH THAT DOOR,
WHEN I KNOW WHAT THEY'RE FIGHTING FOR IS GOOD?
I'M ALONE AND I AM SCARED IN WAYS I'VE NEVER FELT BEFORE,
AND I DON'T KNOW HOW TO DO THE THINGS I SHOULD.
I LEFT THE SHIELD OF POPLAR IN THE COOL WHITE MOUNTAIN SHADE
AND SINCE THEN I'VE BECOME AFRAID; HAVE I BECOME AFRAID?
WAS I ONLY BRAVE IN SAPLINGS?
WAS I BETTER IN THE DAYS THAT WE PLAYED?

WHERE IS MY SHIELD?
WHERE IS MY SWORD?
HAVE I SHIED AWAY?
WHAT HAVE I IGNORED?

SHAMUS (*to fellow men*)

There are over twenty-five thousand people in this town, and our paper reaches less than half. Our cause is noble, but our support is lacking. We need -

SARAH
entering

Hello, is this *The Voice of Industry* meeting?

The men turn to see SARAH, nervous in the doorway.

THOMAS

And who might you be?

SARAH

Sarah Bagley.

SHAMUS

Miss Bagley, it is a pleasure. Gentlemen, this is the face of one of the strongest pens in Lowell. *The Offering* is lucky to have you.

PHILLIP (other XD)
mocking

Oh, dewes and flowers, *The Offering*!

SHAMUS

Phillip, she's not one of them. *(to SARAH)* We will do all we can to get back at that stoolie Schouler. I heard your petition was rejected.

SARAH

We try again, right?

SHAMUS

Indeed. How would you feel about heading up a female department for the *Voice*?

THOMAS

Shamus, a woman? On our staff? Are you drunk? It's too risky, our readership isn't ready for a woman's voice. She's out of her sphere.

SHAMUS

They may not have the vote, but they hold the economic power in town. Half the new bank accounts opened last year belonged to women. Ms. Bagley could speak for them.

PHILLIP

But the fight will be in the capitol! We need men for that.

SHAMUS

We need revolutionaries who don't fear change. Does that describe you, Phillip?

PHILLIP folds.

SARAH

reconsidering

I'm sorry, I...they're firing operatives at the mill for speaking out. I don't think—

SHAMUS

We can use a pseudonym on the masthead for now. And we'd want you to bring on other female writers. You are the leader the working women and men of Lowell have been waiting for. Ms. Bagley? Are you ready for this?

SARAH

WHERE IS THE GIRL WHO LEFT THE FARM TO PAY HER BROTHER'S WAY?
WHERE IS WARRIOR IN THE WOODS WHO KEPT THE DARK AT BAY?
WHERE IS THE FIGHTER WHO WAS BORN IN GRANITE AND IN FIRE?
HELP ME FIND
THE FEARLESS GIRL
I LEFT BEHIND!

SHAMUS

Will you join us?

SARAH offers her hand. SHAMUS shakes it firmly.

SARAH

SO THIS IS MY SHIELD,
AND THIS IS MY SWORD
AND I WILL NOT SHY AWAY,
I WILL NOT BE IGNORED!

GLADYS, ABIGAIL, and HEPSABETH step forward to join SARAH in a circle.

WE WILL LAY BLAZES
FOR ONE AND ALL
AND BY OUR WORDS
NO MORE WILL FALL

Lights.

Scene 7

Later that week....

OVERSEER XD

What is this? (*he picks up the Voice of Industry, Sarah's first article with the paper is on the cover*)

HEPSABETH

A flyer. Just a pamphlet.

OVERSEER XD

Reading- in SARAH's register

WE DIDN'T COME TO JUST SPIN THREAD
DIDN'T COME TO LIVE AND DIE IN VAIN
TO KNOW JUST CLOTH AND BREAD
OR TO NEVER FEEL THE SKY OR—

Where did you get this?

HEPSABETH

I... wrapped my lunch in it.

OVERSEER XD

DO YOU FIND THIS WORK SO TERRIBLE?

HEPSABETH

Sir...

OVERSEER XD

IS IT REALLY SO UNBEARABLE?

HEPSABETH

I ONLY WANT TO SHARE WHAT I BELIEVE TO BE RIGHT

OVERSEER XD

THEN GIVE UP YOUR LOOM; YOU ARE LEAVING TONIGHT.

HEPSABETH

Mister Robinson—

OVERSEER XD
THIS IS TREASONOUS

HEPSABETH
Help me, Sarah!

OVERSEER XD
GOODBYE, AND TAKE YOUR FLYER AS YOU GO.

HEPSABETH is roughly escorted out.

Scene 8

The girls line up for baths. The girls walk across the stage to get in line. Some of the more Spruce girls pipe up and sing a cappella.

Song: The Night Before Payday—MARTHA and GEORGIA

MARTHA GEORGIA, and FLORILLA

IT'S THE NIGHT BEFORE WE GET PAID
AND WE'RE GONNA SPEND A LOT OF MONEY TOMORROW
YOU KNOW WE'VE GOT IT MADE
KNOWING WE'LL NEVER HAVE TO BORROW—
NEVER BORROW

MARTHA

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE BANGLES, BAUBLES, AND BEADS
I KNOW JUST WHAT THIS GIRL IS GONNA NEED

GEORGIA

A FINE TOOTH COMB FOR HER SILKEN HAIR

ALL THREE

AND OTHER ETCETERAS OF VANITY FAIR, OH, OH

MRS. LARCOM

(rings a triangle) Number forty-three! And no holding your place with a soap bar, all girls must be physically present to keep their bath number.

FLORILLA goes to kick a soap bar away.

GLADYS

That's Sarah's soap!

FLORILLA

Not anymore it's not.

ABIGAIL

What did she ever do to you?

FLORILLA

Hepsabeth was my roommate.

GLADYS

That's one way to say it, Flo. (*implying lesbian undertone*)

GEORGIA

Hepsy made her own choices.

MARTHA

Well, Georgia, I wouldn't have thought you'd stand with them.

GEORGIA

I can speak for myself, Mar. Don't lump me in with those loons.

GLADYS

Who are you calling a loon? Well I'll—

FLORILLA

What? Poke her eye out with your stump?

SARAH comes in to take her spot at her bar of soap—it's not there.

FLORILLA

Speak of the devil. Need something to wash the guilt away?

SARAH

Excuse me?

FLORILLA

Your hands sure are dirty, Sarah. Of should I call you "an anonymous female operative?"

SARAH

You don't know what you're talking about.

GLADYS

Then this isn't your fight.

MARTHA

She's making it ours. (*to SARAH*) Watch yourself. You don't speak for most of us.

SARAH storms out. LUCY, who has been watching, leaves her mother at the wash bin and chases SARAH.

ABIGAIL

Leave her be. I know *I* forgive her.

MARTHA

Of course you do, Abigail, you'd forgive King George for the tea party too. By the way, can you still take my loom Monday so I can shop in Boston?

ABIGAIL

Yes, Martha.

GLADYS

Don't you already have two?

ABIGAIL

If I take on extra looms this month, I can earn enough to be out of here in three months, and then... Autumn at Meadowview.

GLADYS

And no more sharing a tub with forty-nine other girls.

Upstairs, SARAH sits on her bed and cries. LUCY comes to comfort her.

LUCY

Sarah? Are you ok?

SARAH

I'm fine, Lucy. Go back downstairs, you mother will riot if she -

MRS. LARCOM comes up with suds up to her arms. She is holding a newspaper.

MRS LARCOM (*coldly staring at SARAH*)

Lucy, dear, go on downstairs and help the rest of the girls bathe, please.

LUCY (*scared*)

Yes, mother.

MRS LARCOM

Sarah, we need to talk about this....

SARAH

About what? That's -

MRS LARCOM

Florilla told me. I know it's you.

SARAH

It's anonymous, it's -

MRS LARCOM

Sarah, I won't your name over to the corporation, but I can't risk the rest of the girls and my own daughter. I think it's best if you find another place to live. Please have your things out by the end of the week.

SARAH puts her head down.

Scene 9

In a meeting room, LAWRENCE and BEN laugh with NEW YORK investors (all cross-dressed factory girls) who are interested in buying the company.

SONG: Velvets and Furs—MEN (including 3 cross-dressed women)

ALL ASSEMBLED

OH! SHE STRUTS AND SHE PURRS IN VELVETS AND FURS
SHE'S A HARD WORKING LASS
SHE SMOKES AND SHE DRINKS IN SATIN AND MINKS
SHE'S LOWELL'S SUPERIOR CLASS.

LAWRENCE

So the priest says, "Bellows Falls? more like fellow's balls!"

INVESTOR A

Laughing

Ha ha, old boy, still a way with the regional humor.

INVESTOR B

I must say, that presentation at the Harvard Club by your Ms. Farley is one of the very reasons we are so interested in buying more shares.

INVESTOR C

But your magazine, it's going out of vogue, I hear.

LAWRENCE

With all due respect, *The Offering* is all the rage in republican France at the moment, and even Charles Dickens has proclaimed its worth.

INVESTOR B

Yes, but all we heard about on the ride up was this new *Voice of Industry*. What do you plan to do about that?

LAWRENCE

It's a fringe movement, nothing more. An anonymous...anti-American sentiment meant to stir up trouble in our utopia. Probably not even written by a woman. (*that's a joke*)

ALL

All right then! To the factory girls! To America!

INVESTOR C

Allow me to ad-lib... Ahem:

THE LASS FROM THE FINISHING ROOM
ONCE BEGGED FOR MY LOVE ON HER LOOM
SHE THOUGHT THAT THE SLIDE
WOULD MAKE HER A BRIDE
BUT NEVER WILL I BE A GROOM!

ALL

OH! SHE STRUTS AND SHE PURRS IN VELVETS AND FURS
SHE'S A HARD WORKING LASS
SHE SMOKES AND SHE DRINKS IN SATIN AND MINKS
SHE'S LOWELL'S SUPERIOR CLASS.

INVESTOR A

So say we believe Boott mill here can stay profitable going forward. What kind of investment share are you looking to sell off?

LAWRENCE

Pauses, sobers up a little

Oh, well, we will get to all of that, gentlemen. Ben, see if you can go find Ms. Farley.

BEN

Yes, sir.

BEN exits.

LAWRENCE

To be frank, good sirs: I am planning to not just sell some of my valuable shares – I plan on selling them all.

INVESTOR B

What? The whole thing? That's never happened in Lowell's history. You Brahmins never sell.

LAWRENCE

Well - there are some provisos, of course. I still have an interest in the success of this venture, as it provides a blueprint for what I hope all American manufacturing will be, and in preserving as many jobs of these girls as possible... But I am ready for other ventures.

INVESTOR

You mean, you see trouble on the horizon and you want out.

LAWRENCE

Absolutely not. But it is time for new ownership, as I've done my time here. I would highly suggest Benjamin Curtis stay on as your Head Senior Agent to ease the transition, as he is familiar with the gears, the operatives, and the system, and has my own personal stamp of approval.

INVESTOR

You still leave this question of *The Lowell Offering*. If it is the image of the mills, and it drives your sales so much – then these mills are in decline. The revolution is at your door, how do you plan to fight it?

A knock at the door. BEN enters, followed by HARRIET.

HARRIET

Mister Curtis said you had an urgent matter, Mister Lawrence.

LAWRENCE

Miss Farley, good to see you as ever. You remember the Manhattan Investing Group. Can you personally speak to these attacks from this new paper in town?

HARRIET

straightening, puts on her 'game face'

Their barbs will wither and die, sir. For like all of us, the writer of these words came to Lowell of her own free will and, should she choose it, will leave by the same. Thousands more, the Irish and others, who are desperate for the better life that this great company allows will flood to fill their places. And when she and others at the petty *Voice of Industry* have scattered, we at the *Offering* will still be here, honoring the beauty of our womanhood and God's wonders with our words.

LAWRENCE

Any questions, gentlemen?

An approving and stunned silence.

LAWRENCE

A thousand thank yous, Ms. Farley.

LAWRENCE nods to Ben, who escorts HARRIET out. A jubilant huzzah, and again: VELVETS AND FURS chorus plays them off.

Outside, in the hallway, HARRIET furiously confronts BEN.

HARRIET

What was that?

BEN

What?

HARRIET

Using me to appease those greasy men!

BEN

This was Abbott's idea, I wasn't—

HARRIET

(she's hurt by Abbott, taking it all out on Ben)

NO, BEN!

DON'T HIDE BEHIND HIM

YOU'RE THE ONE WHO BROUGHT ME THERE

AND YOU'RE THE ONE WHO'S CLAIMED TO CARE,

DON'T TOUCH ME!

THIS IS ALL TOO MUCH FOR ME...

YOU'RE NOT A PRINCE, AND HE'S NOT A KING,

AND I'M NOT SOME DOLL ON YOUR COMPANY STRING

BEN

Harriet, please—

HARRIET

I HAVE GIVEN ALL I HAVE TO RAISE THE STATURE OF THIS
BUSINESS AND MY NAME

AND NOW I SEE WHAT I'M BECOMING AND MY PRIDE IS TAKEN
OVER BY MY SHAME

BEN

Hear me out—

HARRIET

SO IF YOU AND MISTER LAWRENCE WANT TO CASH YOUR CHIPS
AND GIVE UP ON THE DREAM
THEN DON'T LOOK FOR HELP FROM ME

She turns away, upset.

BEN

Shhh...

WE ALL RISE TOGETHER... WE ALL PLAY OUR ROLES
THE DREAM ISN'T OVER... IT JUST CHANGES AS IT GROWS

I KNOW YOU FEEL USED NOW... SOMETIMES I DO TOO!
BUT THIS GREAT EXPERIMENT CANNOT SURVIVE WITHOUT YOU

HARRIET

He's going to sell, isn't he.

BEN

(nods) But the mill goes on.

TWO STEPS FORWARD...
ONE STEP BACK...
BUT ALWAYS THE FUTURE...
NEVER THE PAST!

BEN AND HARRIET

TWO STEPS FORWARD... ONE STEP BACK

BEN

WE DO WHAT WE CAN TO MAKE THE DAY LAST
TO MAKE THE DAY LAST

HARRIET

What will happen to the magazine?

BEN

Everything will stay the same. Trust me.

KEEP WRITING AND FIGHTING TO MAKE THE DAY LAST.

HARRIET nods.

Scene 10

SONG: As Is Woman – SARAH

Scattered in groups all across the stage, girls read the papers.

MARTHA

Better not let an overseer catch you with that.

GEORGIA

Listen: “*The Offering* is the mouthpiece of the corporation, and is the mouthpiece on the head of this vile beast, this soul-less corporation system that continues to strike its own daughters down.”

FLORILLA

Who wrote that?

GEORGIA

The same “anonymous female operative” that got Hepsabeth fired.

Elsewhere...

SARAH

As is woman... so is the race. As is woman... so is the race.

The girls stand and flank SARAH defiantly.

GLADYS

(reading)

Abigail, look at this:

AS IS WOMAN, SO IS THE RACE
IT'S TIME FOR US TO TAKE OUR PLACE
AND TRY AGAIN
WE'VE GOT TO TRY AGAIN

ABIGAIL and GLADYS

AS IS WOMAN, SO IS THE RACE
YOU'VE GOT TO LOOK US IN THE FACE
AND TRY AGAIN
WE'VE GOT TO TRY AGAIN

GLADYS *(still reading)*

THE OFFERING PUTS A GLOSS ON INHUMANITY
DOOMS US TO ETERNAL SLAVERY
FROM EVERY ROLLING RIVER
FROM MOUNTAIN, VALE, AND PLAIN
WE CALL ON YOU TO DELIVER
US, FROM THE TYRANT'S CHAIN
LET IT NOT BE IN VAIN
WE'VE GOT TO TRY AGAIN-TRY AGAIN-TRY AGAIN

MARTHA

Harriet's rebuttal in *The Offering* is a kick in the teeth!

FLORILLA

(ripping it the paper from MARTHA to read it)

"I cannot speak of the factory system as she represents it for it never seemed to me to be Inquisition torture or slave-driven task work. I never felt disposed to croak or whine about my factory life and have endeavored to impose a cheerful spirit into the little magazine I edit."

MARTHA

What can they say to that?

Elsewhere...

ABIGAIL

WHEN IT SEEMS WE'LL NEVER WIN,

ALL

WE TRY AGAIN

ABIGAIL

WHEN THEY KNOCK US TO THE FLOOR,

ALL

WE RISE

ABIGAIL

WHEN WE LOSE THE ONES WE LOVE,

ALL

WE TRY AGAIN

ABIGAIL

WE REACH FOR MORE, WE TRY AND TRY!

SARAH

SO SONS OF LIBERTY, EMPLOY YOUR PRIVILEGES AS MEN
AND USE YOUR VOTE SO SCHOULER NEVER LEGISLATES AGAIN!
WE VALUE NOT THE FEEBLE THREATS OF TORIES IN DISGUISE
WHILE THE FLAG OF INDEPENDENCE O’ER OUR NOBLE NATION
FLIES

LISTEN NOW TO OUR CRIES!

WE’VE GOT TO TRY AGAIN – TRY AGAIN- TRY AGAIN

GLADYS

Harriet’s editorial in *The Offering*...

ABIGAIL

“I invite the anonymous author or the *Voice of Industry* to show herself at a meeting of our self-improvement circle, to bring to her veiled and seditious articles the humanity that she so publicly extols.”

SARAH (et al?)

TRY AGAIN – TRY AGAIN- TRY AGAIN

Scene 11

Fast forward a month to the next Self-Improvement Circle. The girls are assembling. June, 1845. The girls are chatting nervously.

HARRIET enters through the front door.

HARRIET

Sorry I'm late. Shall we begin? Um, *(she hums a note... all stand)*

ALL

DEPENDENT ON OTHERS WE NE'ER WILL BE,
SO LONG AS WE'RE ABLE TO SPIN.

SARAH arrives in the doorway. The girls gasp.

HARRIET

So it is you.

SARAH

I had no choice.

HARRIET

We always have a choice.

SONG: 'Circle Showdown'—SARAH AND HARRIET

SARAH

I DIDN'T COME HERE TO FIGHT
I SIMPLY COULDN'T HIDE AWAY
FROM EVERYTHING I'VE SEEN

HARRIET

You're being reckless, Sarah, you—

SARAH

YOU KNOW WHAT IS RIGHT!
THE LINES ARE LIFE AND DEATH, NOW...
THERE'S NO IN-BETWEEN

HARRIET

Sarah—

SARAH

HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN, HARRIET?
WE CAME HERE FOR A DREAM.

HARRIET

WE UNDERSTAND YOUR VIEW
BUT OUR PLACE IS NOT IN POLITICS
AND WE'VE COME TOO FAR TO BITE THE HAND THAT FEEDS

WE'RE PART OF SOMETHING NEW
THE GEARS ALL IN MOTION
AND FIGHTING WORDS AREN'T WHAT THIS MOVEMENT NEEDS

SARAH WE HAVE A CHANCE TO LIFT OURSELVES HIGHER
SO COME BACK TO US NOW

OUR VOICES ECHO THROUGH THE LAND
AND IN THE LANDS ACROSS THE SEA

SARAH

NOW'S THE TIME FOR US TO TAKE COMMAND
OF OUR OWN DESTINY

OH, HATTIE, WHAT HAVE YOU BECOME?
YOU'RE TURNING YOUR BACK ON EVERYTHING WE CAME FROM

HARRIET

THIS IS HOW WE RISE (*Holds up Offering*)

SARAH

No...

THIS IS HOW WE DIE

HARRIET

With mounting anger

SARAH leaves, distressed. ABIGAIL chases her outside.

ABIGAIL

Sarah, wait. Don't leave. Because you know I would follow you anywhere, and I still have a few more months before I can head back to Meadowview.

SARAH

Oh Abigail... what do I do?

ABIGAIL

Try again. That's our way. You know we're behind you. I'll take your loom tomorrow. Go fight.

SARAH

Thank you, sister.

They embrace. ABIGAIL goes back to the circle. SARAH goes into the night.

Scene 12

In her company cottage, Harriet is at her desk, writing an editorial for the dying Offering. She reflects on what the girls have done, and each girl holding a submission walks up from behind her to support.

HARRIET

(On scrim)"The Lowell Offering, End of Volume 4"

One last note. We recognize economic hardship in these tense times, but the Offering can only continue to subsist if our regional agents pay us for issues received. Please, sisters in the field, collect your receipts so your editor can pay her debts to keep our humble paper going. Godspeed, yours, Harriet Farley.

HARRIET crosses out that last line and stands up from her desk.

SONG: Paper Dolls—HARRIET

HOW HAS THE SCENE CHANGED?
HOW HAS THE WINDOW DARKENED?
IS EVERYTHING THAT WE HAVE GAINED
ONLY MADE OF PAPER?

I USED TO READ TO THE HORSES AT NIGHT
AS THEY STOOD THERE IN THEIR SLEEP
CREEP TO THE BARN BY CANDLE-LIGHT
WITH THE NIGHT BLACK DARK AND DEEP

I'D STAND TALL ON THE BALES OF HAY
AND SPEAK EACH WORD I WROTE
TIL THE INK BLACK NIGHT GAVE WAY TO GRAY
AND MY VOICE STUCK IN MY THROAT.

WHEN THE SUN ROSE HIGH
MY WRITING STAYED IN SHADE

WHEN I CAME TO THE FACTORY
AT THE YOUNG AGE OF FOURTEEN
AND LEFT THE BARN TO MAKE MY WAY
UNHEEDED AND UNSEEN

ONLY PAPER DOLLS ON THE MAPLE CHEST
HUNG ON MY EVERY WORD
I STIRRED THEM FROM THEIR PAPER REST
SO MY WRITING COULD BE HEARD

BUT NO ONE REALLY EVER HEARD ME
UNTIL NOW

AND HERE OUR WORDS WERE RINGING
IN PEOPLE'S MINDS AND EARS
OUR VOICES THUNDERED, FEARLESSLY
INTO NEW FRONTIERS
AND I'VE NEVER BEEN SO HAPPY--
FINALLY IN THE LIGHT
I HAVE REAL FRIENDS AROUND ME
AND WE WRITE
WE WRITE NOW

ARE WE ONLY PAPER DOLLS,
IN SOMEONE ELSE'S PLAY?
ARE WE ONLY PAPER DOLLS
CUT OUT, HUNG UP, AND THROWN AWAY

I USED TO READ TO THE HORSES AT NIGHT
AS THEY STOOD THERE IN THEIR SLEEP
CREEP TO THE BARN BY CANDLE-LIGHT
WITH THE NIGHT BLACK DARK AND DEEP
AND NOW...
AND NOW...

Scene 13

In the office, LAWRENCE and BEN talk (sing?) tensely.

LAWRENCE (*throwing a newspaper down*)

Can you believe this? Schouler's been voted out! This....gynecocracy is getting out of control!

BEN

Sir, if we just slow the looms back to pre-speed up levels and—

LAWRENCE

No, we can't show any profit dips before the sale. Let me think... nothing else to rock the schooner....

BEN

There is unrest, Mister Lawrence, and I'm losing operatives—

LAWRENCE

Let them go, there are more.

BEN

Respectfully, sir, this is hasty, we *are* bleeding capital but—

LAWRENCE

Once the sale goes through, we'll save hundreds of jobs, I'll be free of all this stress, and you will be the new man to carry the torch around here. Bring back the night classes. Revive the Offering. Build them a god damn gymnasium. But for now—we have to push.

A few days later, the girls are working fast.

SONG: Machine –Final Reprise

ALL

HEY... HA... HEY... HA...

TWICE SIX, TWICE SEVEN TWICE TWENTY AND ELEVEN

THINK LIKE A—

ABIGAIL gets her hair caught in the now-very-fast looms, and is suddenly and horrifically killed.

GLADYS

Abigail!

Scene 14

ABIGAIL's funeral. All girls and BEN are there. The girls come slowly together, and LUCY stands to speak.

SONG: THY SISTER'S KEPER – LUCY, ALL

LUCY

ALL DAY SHE STANDS BEFORE HER LOOM;
THE FLYING SHUTTLES COME AND GO:
BY GRASSY FIELDS, AND TREES IN BLOOM,
SHE SEES THE WINDING RIVER FLOW:
AND FANCY'S SHUTTLE FLIETH WIDE,
AND FASTER THAN THE WATERS GLIDE.

(add harmonies)

“I WEAVE, AND WEAVE, THE LIVELONG DAY:
THE WOOF IS STRONG, THE WARP IS GOOD:
I WEAVE, TO BE MY MOTHER'S STAY;
I WEAVE, TO WIN MY DAILY FOOD:
BUT EVER AS I WEAVE,” SAITH SHE,
“THE WORLD OF WOMEN HAUNTETH ME.

GLADYS

Abigail was my best friend in the world. She never said it, but she hated this factory with every part of her being. However, she loved her Lowell sisters as much as she loved her “old maid” quilting. As many of you know, she came to earn money to put her brother through college; she only had two and half months left until she earned as much as she needed, and she couldn't have been more excited about going home to “dear old Meadowview.” Abigail, you're going home.

GLADYS is comforted by the others.

SO UP AND DOWN BEFORE HER LOOM (Hey... Ha...)
SHE PACES ON, AND TO AND FRO,
TILL SUNSET FILLS THE DUSTY ROOM,
AND MAKES THE WATER REDLY GLOW,
AS IF THE MERRIMACK'S CALM FLOOD
WERE CHANGED INTO A STREAM OF BLOOD.

TOO SOON FULFILLED, AND ALL TOO TRUE
THE WORDS SHE MURMURED AS SHE WROUGHT:
BUT, WEARY WEAVER, NOT TO YOU
ALONE WAS WAR'S STERN MESSAGE BROUGHT:

“WOMAN!” IT KNELLED FROM HEART TO HEART,
“THY SISTER’S KEEPER KNOW THOU ART!”

SARAH approaches MARTHA, sitting aside on a rock, as girls hug and console one another in the background.

SARAH

Martha?

MARTHA

I can’t believe she’s gone. You know, all the times I made fun of her - she never said anything back. I wish I could hear her sweet voice again and see her over there knitting and smiling like an idiot.

SARAH

I know, Martha. She saw the best in you.

MARTHA

She covered my loom. I... it was because of me.

SARAH

She took mine, too... But she wanted us to fight.

MARTHA

How?

SARAH

If you can convince your corner of the floor walk out tomorrow, we shut down the entire mill.

MARTHA

Sarah, I can’t strike. Without this income—

SARAH

If we turn out together, we can avenge Abigail’s death and force their hand. And Lawrence will *have* to hear us out.

MARTHA

I’m not sure... I mean, I have suitors, a few dates with a few Brahmins, but nothing for certain in case I get blacklisted—

SARAH

It’s a risk, I can’t sugarcoat it. But we will protect you, we take care of our own. (*beat*) Please... for Abigail.

MARTHA

What do I do?

SARAH

Wait for my cue tomorrow.

MARTHA

Tomorrow? Independence day? Always with the dramatic gestures.

SARAH nods, MARTHA accepts; the bells clang and the scene swirls around them. The factory gears grind again. SARAH steps forward.

AMOS

Ms. Bagley...back to your loom. You know the drill.

SONG: The Strike—SARAH, HARRIET, ALL

SARAH

SHE CAME HERE TO WORK
NOT TO DIE
NOW ABIGAIL'S GONE
AND WE KNOW WHY
ONE MORE LIFE
LOST IN VAIN
TO THE MILL

BEN strides on to help

BEN

Sarah, please, it's been hard for everyone.

SARAH

THEY WORE HER DOWN
THE BELL HAS WON
THE SHADOW OF DEATH
HAS REPLACED THE SUN
WHO'LL BE NEXT?
IS IT ME?
WILL IT BE YOU?

GIRLS begin to leave their looms and crowd behind SARAH. In her apartment, Meanwhile, HARRIET writes an editorial responding to ABIGAIL's death in the final issue of the Offering.

HARRIET

THE OFFERING IS SADDENED BY THE NEWS
A WRITER FROM THE LOWELL FAMILY GONE
HER MIND WAS BRIGHT AND AGILE
BUT HER BODY SADLY PROVED TO BE TOO FRAGILE.

YET REVERENT, WE FIND SOLACE IN OUR FAITH
AND KNOW THE LORD WILL BRING ANOTHER DAWN
REJECTING WHAT FIREBRANDS CLAIM,
THIS PAPER HOLDS THE COMPANY FREE FROM BLAME

SARAH

NO MORE WILL WE TOIL
AND DIE IN VAIN
SO JOIN ME TO FIGHT
A FACTORY GIRL'S CAMPAIGN
TIME TO RISE
TIME TO STRIKE
WE'RE TURNING OUT!

The strike begins—the girls exit the factory and spill into the street. Each girl struggles with the decision to walk.

HARRIET

SOME OPERATIVES ARE PLANNING ON A STRIKE
THE OFFERING IMPLORES THEM NOT TO GO
THEY'LL SACRIFICE THEIR LIVELIHOODS
AND JEOPARDIZE THEIR FAMILY'S GOOD NAME.

LUCY goes to join them at the last minute, but the presence of her mother keeps her from joining the crowd.

SARAH

MARCH OUT OF THE MILL
DON'T DOUBT YOUR CHOICE!
MARCH UP TO THE HILL!
WE NEED YOUR VOICE
NOW WE STRIKE

HARRIET

JUST AS JOAN OF ARC
BURNED ON HER PIKE
SO, TOO, WILL RABBLE ROUSERS
BE LAID LOW
IGNORE THE "VOICE OF INDUSTRY"

NOW AS ONE,
WE'RE TURNING OUT!

REMEMBER WHAT THE OFFERING'S
ABOUT

GEORGIA's group joins the mass.

SARAH

ISN'T IT A PITY SUCH A PRETTY GIRL AS I
SHOULD BE SENT TO THE FACTORY TO PINE AWAY AND DIE
OH I WILL NOT BE A SLAVE
I CANNOT BE A SLAVE
FOR I'M SO FOND OF LIBERTY
I CANNOT BE A SLAVE!

Harriet appears SL, approaching the girls cautiously and protected.

HARRIET

Simultaneously as all strikers sing "Isn't it a pity"

YOU'VE GOT TO TURN AROUND
YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE STIRRING UP
THE FACTORY MEN WON'T GIVE ANOTHER THOUGHT
THERE'S MORE OUTSIDE THE GATE
HUNGRY JUST FOR POCKET CHANGE
ALL YOUR PLEAS AND PASSION ARE FOR NAUGHT.

SARAH

TOO LATE TO TURN BACK
THERE'S NOTHING LEFT FOR US TO GIVE
TOO LONG, TOO HARD, TOO MANY, TOO CONFINED
NOW WE'RE DYING FAST
WE HAVE TO STAND FOR WHAT IS RIGHT
AGAINST THIS SLAVERY OF SOULS AND MINDS

ALL STRIKERS

ISN'T IT A PITY SUCH A PRETTY GIRL AS I
SHOULD BE SENT TO THE FACTORY
TO PINE AWAY AND—

ABBOTT LAWRENCE strides in and seeks to quash the strike.

LAWRENCE

Good afternoon, Miss Bagley. I understand you have a grievance. Let's speak over here, and we can work something out in a civil way.

SARAH

Your parents won our freedom in 1776 and now *you* have stolen it.

HARRIET

If you want to address these issues, now is not the time. A civilized forum -

SARAH

We should be able to work without fearing death. Harriet, he must hear us.

LAWRENCE

YOU INGRATE, AS LONG AS PEOPLE ARE WILLING TO WORK,
THIS SYSTEM WILL THRIVE.
WHETHER IT'S YOU NEW ENGLAND GIRLS OR THE IRISH,
THEY ALL COME TO LOWELL AS A WAY TO SURVIVE.
THIS MILL IS STILL THE BEST OPTION IN THE WORLD!

SARAH

But you can make it better!

She looks to HARRIET... HARRIET leans forward but holds back from acting.

She had two and a half months left and she was going home.

LAWRENCE

AND YOU'RE NOW GOING HOME NOW, TOO
FORMER FACTORY GIRL.

Feel free to exercise your own options in the future. We will go on without you.

SARAH

Harriet, please!

LAWRENCE

Anybody else? Otherwise, let's all get back to your looms and forget this...unpleasant exchange ever occurred. Forgive me for raising my voice.

SARAH starts to leave.

SARAH

Please, Hattie. Help us.

LAWRENCE

Now, gentlemen, let's find a drink and finally sign those papers. Harriet, come with us.

HARRIET starts to walk towards the podium, torn.

HARRIET

WE'VE SPENT GENERATIONS ON THE KITCHEN FLOOR
NEVER ALLOWED TO HOPE OR TO DREAM FOR ANYTHING MORE
IF YOU THINK TAKING OUR JOBS AND OUR VOICES WILL WIPE OUT OUR POWER
THEN FIRE ME TOO, BUT THIS IS THE WORKING GIRLS HOUR

FOR WE ARE THE DAUGHTERS OF THE SONS OF THE FATHERS OF '76
AND THIS IS OUR CHANCE TO DO WHAT WE'VE KNOWN ALL ALONG WE CAN
WE CAN'T LET THIS CHANCE PASS US BY
CAN'T GIVE THEM REASON TO DENY
WHAT WE CAN DO

HARRIET AND SARAH

WHAT WE'RE DOING NOW!

ALL

ISN'T IT A PITY SUCH A PRETTY GIRL AS I
SHOULD BE SENT TO THE FACTORY
TO PINE AWAY AND DIE
OH I WILL NOT BE A SLAVE
I CANNOT BE A SLAVE
FOR I AM SO FOND OF LIBERTY
I CANNOT BE A SLAVE.

Scene 15

In their bedroom, SARAH somberly packs her trunk. HARRIET sits on the bed.

HARRIET

I thought of him as a father. He essentially raised me here.

SARAH

You had to stand up for yourself...his time has passed. *(beat)* I just wish we had actually done something.

HARRIET falls back on the bed.

HARRIET

What do I do now? *(Sitting back up.)* What are you going to do?

SARAH

I'll travel back up to Meredith for a while, see my family, maybe stop in on our old friend Hepsabeth in Newport. Then who knows? *(beat.)* Want to come?

HARRIET

With you?

SARAH

Just for a spell. Meet my father, I know he wants to meet the woman who changed his daughter's life.

HARRIET

OK, then.

SARAH

OK, then. *(beat)* And you don't need to pack a thing - my homespun closet is calling your name.

HARRIET

Oh my... I can hear it wailing through the willows already.

SARAH

So Spruce. *(they laugh)* One thing, Hattie...

HARRIET

Hm?

SARAH

Don't tell my father we gave up with nothing to show. He... (*she begins to break down*) He wouldn't be proud.

HARRIET

We'll tell him everything....together. We have nothing to be ashamed of.

A knock at the door... MRS. LARCOM and LUCY appear, packed to leave. MRS. LARCOM carries a quilt, LUCY carries her poem.

MRS. LARCOM

Quite a Fourth of July, wasn't it?

SARAH

drying her eyes

"Full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

MRS. LARCOM

Nothing? Young lady... Yesterday showed these old eyes something I never dreamed they would see; a group of women speaking out. Raising their voices together. I am proud that my daughter was able to witness such a thing. And I owe you an apology. (*SARAH shakes her head*) Before you go... before we all go.

The other girls step out of the shadows, singing "oohs" from "Live Free or Die."

GIRLS

OOH...

MRS. LARCOM

holding out ABIGAIL's quilt and covering SARAH

I found this in Abigail's affects. I'm certain she would want you to have it.

GIRLS

OOH... LIVE FREE OR DIE
LISTEN TO THE PRAYER (ETC)

HARRIET

Abigail's quilt...

SARAH

It is beautiful.

LUCY

See the maple tree?

SARAH

From “fair old Meadowview”.

LUCY

There is one... where is it... here. This is my favorite.

SARAH

“Try again.”

MRS. LARCOM

You planted a tree, Sarah Bagley. And you too, Harriet. Time will see what becomes of them.

LUCY and MRS. LARCOM leave the two friends alone.

HARRIET

OH, MY DEAREST SISTER, LOOK AT US NOW
LEAVING THE LOOM AND THE PEN FOR THE FARM AND THE PLOW
BUT NO MATTER WHAT COMES ALONG IN THE YEARS UP AHEAD

SARAH

YOU CHANGED ME FOREVER
IN WAYS THAT COULD NEVER
BEGIN TO BE WRITTEN OR SAID

LUCY, SARAH, HARRIET

WHERE THE WHEEL MET THE WATER
AND THE WAVES MET THE WOOD
WAS A MOTHER’S PUSH FOR HER DAUGHTER
TO DO THE THINGS SHE NEVER COULD
THE WHEEL MET THE WATER, AND EVERYTHING TURNED
EVERYTHING TURNED

SARAH

SO YOU KEEP ON ROLLING

HARRIET

AND YOU KEEP ON DRIVING

OLD LUCY

as she speaks, the students lose their costumes and transform into their “current” selves
Thus we working girls may have learned from the webs of cloth we saw woven around us. Every little thread must take its place as a warp or woof, and keep in it steadily. Though I wasn’t bold enough to march with you then, I’ve been marching ever since in the direction you pointed, with my pen as my sword, and my head and heart as my shield. In your words, in your faces, I will always remember: whatever with the past has gone, the best is always yet to come.

SARAH

I NEVER THOUGHT THAT I COULD EVER GET SO FAR FROM HOME

SARAH & HARRIET

I NEVER THOUGHT THAT I COULD EVER GET SO FAR

ALL

I NEVER THOUGHT THAT I COULD EVER GET SO FAR FROM HOME
I NEVER THOUGHT THAT I COULD EVER GET SO... FAR
I NEVER THOUGHT THAT I COULD EVER GET SO FAR FROM HOME
I NEVER THOUGHT THAT I COULD EVER GET SO FAR
I NEVER THOUGHT THAT I COULD EVER GET SO FAR FROM HOME
I NEVER THOUGHT THAT I COULD EVER GET SO—FAR

THE END

LIVE FREE OR DIE plays over the bows.

. . .

FLORILLA SMITH left Boott Six after five years to start a hotel in the deep woods of Maine. She never saw her family again after leaving for Lowell.

GEORGIA GREEN opened a nursery in BOSTON after marrying Nathan Appleby.

MARTHA PITMAN went on to divorce MICHAEL, and moved to Colorado and opened the far west's first hair salon.

HEPSABETH CULLINAN and her later New York 'companion' HILDA HAGGERTY started an organic farm in Vermont, where they revolutionized vegetarian fare in the 1860's with their 'H and H's Handrolls. She is still hungry.

LUCY LARCOM became a professor of literature at Wheaton College, and blossomed into a famed and widely published author of her time. Her work "A New England Girlhood," focusing on her time in Lowell, was a national best-seller and is still read in classrooms today.

HARRIET FARLEY landed in New York City soon after leaving Lowell and became a strong anti-slavery advocate while writing children's books. She married, had children, and lived a long, happy domestic life.

SARAH BAGLEY moved back to Lowell a year later to become the first female telegraph operator in America. In 1849, she moved to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania where she worked with the Quakers as the executive secretary of the Rosine Home, providing a safe place for prostitutes and disadvantaged young women. While in Philadelphia, Bagley met James Durno, a homeopathic doctor, and they married on November 13, 1850.

In 1873, the Massachusetts State Legislature passed a 10-hr workday.

ALL

RUSTY, RUSTY, RUSTY....
RUSTY.