

THE REVOLUTIONISTS

ACT ONE

PROLOGUE.

In the dark.

A time of unrest in Paris—crisis—danger—threat.

The hum of “Our Song” faintly wafts in.

The sound of a scared breath that we are breathing.

It’s our breath—we are trying to steady our breath

Breath

Breath—

Then a sharp white light on, or the engorging shadow of...

A guillotine, its blade rising to the top.

A gasp.

Which slams into:

ONE.

*Olympe standing at her writing,
startled into an idea for a new play...*

OLYMPE. Well *that’s* not a way to start a comedy. With an execution? That’s just basic dramatic writing: Don’t start with beheadings. Audiences don’t want plays about terror and death—no—they want...hope. Yes, I have to write about...grace and power

in the face of crisis. Artistic defiance. Yes. That’s good. There we go.

Spitballing now, testing out ideas as they come.

OK, what if I write a play that is the voice of this revolution, but not the hyperbolic, angry-yelling kind. I will write the wise and witty kind that satirizes and inspires and says to the held breath of a rapt audience...“something...profound.”

So yeah. We’re gonna have to cut the guillotine.

Marianne has entered with a bag—luggage.

She wears a red protest sash that reads: “Revolution for all!”

MARIANNE. Cut that thing! Serves it right.

OLYMPE. Oh my god, Marianne!

MARIANNE. I know this is crazy to just show up like this but hello and surprise!

Hugs!

OLYMPE. Hello and surprise! Oh my god, for a second I thought you were the national guard.

MARIANNE. Are they coming for the writers already?

OLYMPE. Only the important ones. I should be fine. Come in, come in. What are you doing here?

MARIANNE. Many things including, I hope, staying with you. Is that OK?

OLYMPE. Of course! Oh my god. Stay as long as you need.

MARIANNE. Thank you thank you.

OLYMPE. Don’t thank me. I’m so glad to see you. I thought you went back to the Caribbean.

MARIANNE. Vincent went back, I stayed in Nice.

OLYMPE. Ooh Nice is nice.

MARIANNE. For some. For me? A lot less beach and a lot more political reconnaissance.

OLYMPE. What does that mean?

MARIANNE. Gathering intelligence to send home. That’s why I’m back. Things are heating up and we need an eye in Paris and I’m it.

OLYMPE. So wait. I’ve been restarting the same play for a month

while you became a damn spy?!

MARIANNE. I mean...

OLYMPE. GIRL.

MARIANNE. I know.

OLYMPE. Look at you!

MARIANNE. Well, we decided we needed our own intel, really tap into the political machines or we'll never figure how to break them.

OLYMPE. You are my spy friend! God, you make me so much more interesting.

MARIANNE. Well don't get comfortable, I'm also here because I need you.

OLYMPE. Playwrights *love* hearing that. It's so rare.

MARIANNE. I need you to write for us. Pamphlets, articles, treatises about slavery—

OLYMPE. Monologues?

MARIANNE. Abolition human interest stories.

OLYMPE. But *as* monologues?

MARIANNE. Just—sure. Help us! You're the best writer I know.

OLYMPE. How many do you know?

MARIANNE. (*Lying.*) So many. (*Not lying.*) And you can help people understand what we're fighting for, freedom, justice, humanity, come on.

OLYMPE. Of course I'll help! But why don't *you* write this?

MARIANNE. Because I'm a better spy than I am a writer. Please.

OLYMPE. Yes. I'll write anything you want...as soon as I write my play.

MARIANNE. The play you can't even start? I'm rebelling against slavery and you're battling writer's block.

OLYMPE. *I'm not blocked.* I'm just...mentally...hibernating. There's a lot of pressure to write something profound these days. And then I keep thinking if I come up with a good title it'll get me started. Something tantalizing but really vague like...*"The Revolutionists."*

MARIANNE. You could do better.

OLYMPE. I know. Nothing's working. There is drama everywhere you look these days, why can't I write any of it?!

MARIANNE. You can! Pamphlets! For me! Write the truth that needs writing.

OLYMPE. But that's *your* truth. Which I will totally write, I will, but I also really need something of my own. I need a play that's good and important and annoyingly prescient.

MARIANNE. Then write the truth of an artist staring down a civil war.

OLYMPE. And end up with a play about a playwright writing a play? I'd rather watch a guillotine.

MARIANNE. So would everyone.

OLYMPE. Would they? Dammit. Back to guillotines.

MARIANNE. That's not what I meant.

OLYMPE. Setting: Now. Paris, France, 1793. Guillotines are very big these days. Actually they just came out with small ones too, for kids to kill mice and for wives to make salad.

MARIANNE. That's so messed up.

OLYMPE. It is. Everything is. Which is why the people's revolution has risen up with force enough to remove the king from power—

MARIANNE. and from his own head.

OLYMPE. Exactly. Danger, unrest. An epic battle for freedom and peace—

MARIANNE. For white men.

OLYMPE. Exactly. Which is why *my* play... (*A great idea.*) could be about *women* showing the boys how revolutions are done. Yes! Fighting for their rights to life, liberty, and...divorce.

MARIANNE. Divorce and decapitation? (*Slipping into couplets.*) I hope it's better than it sounds.

OLYMPE. It's comical yet quite profound

MARIANNE. Just doesn't sound like comedy—

OLYMPE. I know, but that's what it could be.

MARIANNE. You know it's always in the timing,