

OLYMPE. (*Narrator voice.*) Marianne Angelle: Activist for freedom from slavery in the Caribbean, lover of cheeses and universal human rights, strong yet sardonically sympathetic.

MARIANNE. *No, she said, sardonically. Pamphlets.*

OLYMPE. I am! I will! It will be great research for the play. What you're doing is bold and important. You're a goddamn spy for freedom! That's box office gold! Come on. You make me believe that a better world is possible. If people listen to you. And a lot of me.

MARIANNE. OK they say write what you know, right? But what if you write what you *want*. That's what we're really fighting for isn't it? Women's agency over their own lives.

OLYMPE. Yes.

MARIANNE. The abolition of slavery across the planet.

OLYMPE. Yes.

MARIANNE. Maybe you don't need to dress your ideas in drama. You can write a monologue! Why don't you write a manifesto.

OLYMPE. Or...a declaration?

MARIANNE. Sure, yeah. Like the Americans.

OLYMPE. Like the Americans! "We hold these truths and-the-fact-that-women-are-people to be self-evident."

MARIANNE. That sounds pretty revolutionary to me. Also no risk of puppets. Everybody wins.

*Pause. Olympe likes this. Then she thinks. Seriously.*

OLYMPE. Marianne. Do you dream of guillotines? Every night?

MARIANNE. No. Chains.

*KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK on the door.*

*Olympe and Marianne freeze. Oh no. Then...*

*Knockknockknockknockknock—like a hummingbird knocking, fast and fluttery.*

*Marianne gets on one side of the door with a book held as a weapon if needed, through the door...*

OLYMPE. Who's there?

CHARLOTTE. Who's...*there?*

OLYMPE. Well. *You're* the one at the door, who are you?

CHARLOTTE. You're obviously at the door too, and I'm here for a writer.

MARIANNE. Did she say a writer?

OLYMPE. I think that's what she said.

*Charlotte bursts in with a book.*

CHARLOTTE. YES IT'S WHAT I SAID, I SAID A WRITER, I NEED A WRITER, WHO IS THE WRITER AND WHAT'S MY LINE? Are you a writer? If not— (*Turning to Marianne.*) are you a writer? This isn't a complicated question. *Where do they keep the writers, I need a line.*

OLYMPE. I'm sorry, you need a *line*?

CHARLOTTE. That's what I said, but I don't care what *I'd* say, I wanna know what *you'd* say. Isn't that how this works? I need that to be how this works.

MARIANNE. And I need you to back the France off. What do you want? Who sent you?

CHARLOTTE. *I sent me* and, I want some dialogue. That's what you do right? You're that real live lady writer guy? You write plays and stuff.

MARIANNE. And pamphlets about the rights of Caribbean slaves, which means she's very busy and we have no idea who you are or whose side you're on, also you're very loud and immediately unsettling, so why don't we do this another time and/or never.

CHARLOTTE. *I don't have time for another time and/or never.* I have a guy to murder, which will land me on the scaffold, which is why I came to you, which is why, as I yelled upon arrival, I NEED A LINE. My actions will be talked about for centuries and I don't want to sound like a dingbat. I need something that will sink into their memories for all time, something with a lot of "fuck you" in it. So. Playwright. Write.

OLYMPE. I mean...thank you for your enthusiasm but this isn't really my thing—

CHARLOTTE. COME ON. How many feminist playwrights do you think there are in Paris. *One. You.*

OLYMPE. And trust me that turning down an opportunity to tell

someone what to say is *really* hard for me but I'm already juggling a lot now.

CHARLOTTE. Aren't we all: life, revolution, impossible beauty standards. *Help me.*

OLYMPE. I'm trying to help a lot of people...without leaving my office.

CHARLOTTE. Please. It's rare to be in the company of like minds in like corsets, and I know you're a "writery" kind of writer. So. If you write it? I'll say it, I'll shout it, I'll sing it.

OLYMPE. Sing it?

MARIANNE. NO.

CHARLOTTE. YES.

OLYMPE. Can you just gimme some context here. *What* exactly do you need written?

CHARLOTTE. Last words.

MARIANNE. Last words?

OLYMPE. Like...for a toast? Are you going to a wedding?

CHARLOTTE. No. I'm going to kill Jean-Paul Marat.

By stabbing.

Because he's awful.

MARIANNE. You're going to kill the journalist Marat?

CHARLOTTE. Yeah. Because he's awful.

OLYMPE. And by stabbing?!

CHARLOTTE. Yeah. Because he's awful.

OLYMPE. OK. Well. Now I *have* to write a play about her.

MARIANNE. *What about my pamphlets?*

OLYMPE. What about a torrid romance between a gorgeous assassin and a narcoleptic judge!

MARIANNE. *No.*

CHARLOTTE. What? No. I need *one* line, not a whole (and obviously terrible) play.

OLYMPE. *(Making a note.)* No I'm really seeing this. A woman willing to risk it all for vigilante justice. Yes!

MARIANNE. Should you maybe ask her *why* she's going to kill this guy before you make her a hero?

OLYMPE. I'm sure it's a good reason, look at that face. Now what if we call the play: "*The Young Assassin.*"

*Charlotte and Marianne make a "meh" sound.*

Or maybe just, "*Stabbing: The Musical!*"! Oh this is gonna be great.

MARIANNE. Not anymore.

CHARLOTTE. Hold on, is she quoting me? Are you quoting me?

MARIANNE. Oh, theatre people don't quote, they embellish.

CHARLOTTE. Which would normally just be annoying, but this city is more than a little pissed off at the embellished or have you missed the last few beheadings. They don't like flourish.

OLYMPE. Theatre isn't flourish. It's fundamental.

MARIANNE. Here she goes.

OLYMPE. Story is the heartbeat of humanity and humanity gets really dark when the wrong stories are leading the people.

CHARLOTTE. Well I'm not here to make a *story*, I'm here to make *history*.

OLYMPE. *History is* a story. Just with...an extra... "hi."

MARIANNE. Stop.

OLYMPE. *(Using her hand as a puppet.)* Hi, Story!

MARIANNE. *We said no puppets.*

OLYMPE. Sorry.

CHARLOTTE. I don't think I was being clear. I'm an assassin. About to assassinate.

OLYMPE. And we'll get to that, but we have to do some character development first—

CHARLOTTE. I don't understand—

MARIANNE. It's all part of her creative process.

CHARLOTTE. I did not sign up for this.

OLYMPE. Because it's a *new* play—

CHARLOTTE. Oh god.

OLYMPE. Set during the French Revolution!

CHARLOTTE. I don't have time for—

OLYMPE. Starring lots of furious women!

CHARLOTTE. *(Being a furious woman.) I said I do not have time for such frivolity, I need some last words, and I need to sharpen my knife.*

*Charlotte reveals a long steak knife.*

*Pause.*

MARIANNE. Yeah. I'd watch a play about her.

OLYMPE. Right? What if she wears a sparkly mask?

CHARLOTTE. I'm not wearing a mask. I *want* people to know that I did it. Just. How long do I have to sit through this stupid play until we get to the murdering?

OLYMPE. Well, the exposition, rising action, it'll probably be a while.

MARIANNE. While we're waiting you could tell us your name?

CHARLOTTE. Right. Hi. Charlotte Corday.

OLYMPE. Spot on Charlotte Corday, a soon-to-be-killer in revolutionary France.

CHARLOTTE. Well don't say it like *that*. Not in that "You're a killer!" kind of way. Marat is a sick, fundamentalist, political *pundit* who has caused the deaths of thousands of innocent people with no tool as brave as a sword, no, he uses *words*. So really, I'm an editor.

OLYMPE. I wish I was that young and angry.

CHARLOTTE. Thank you, but you don't seem to get that I am on a deadline. That is not a pun but it could be. And I'm sure this performing art we're in the middle of is lovely but not lovelier than justifiable homicide, and I'm not sure if this *is* the play or if we're still in the prologue, because plays are only for rich people and chandeliers and I'm on a damn mission to maim, so if we're not actively avenging, can we get to the pointy point?

*Pause.*

OLYMPE. It's not for rich people.

CHARLOTTE. Theatre?

MARIANNE. I mean...

OLYMPE. No. It's just... I mean the chandeliers came with the space—

CHARLOTTE. So did the starving peasants outside.

OLYMPE. But I—no—the revolution just opened the theatres to the masses. Playwrights can finally write what they want. Theatre is democracy! Really pretty democracy with great hats and—Am I really writing for rich people?

MARIANNE. I mean...

CHARLOTTE. Yes. The ones who aren't fled or dead. Vigilante mobs always ruin the party. Isn't theatre just another party?

OLYMPE. No. It's culture.

CHARLOTTE. Isn't culture just another party?

OLYMPE. Culture is civilization! It's definitive, it lasts, the French are really into it! And I write pamphlets too, and we do a little community outreach and—oh god you're right.

MARIANNE. Ooh. She never says that.

OLYMPE. But art is all I know how to do. Truly. I'm useless in the sunshine. *(Getting annoyingly dramatic.)* Only *theatre* gives my soul—

CHARLOTTE. Ohmigod is this going to be a play about a play?

MARIANNE. *That* is the worst.

CHARLOTTE. *That* is the worst. Art about the rich is one thing, but art about rich people's art is too far.

MARIANNE. Agreed.

OLYMPE. Now wait just a minute, the performing arts are a vital part of—

CHARLOTTE. *Art and anything else that fakes its way through this life is useless to real human beings trying to fix the goddamn world.*

*Pause. Taken aback by her tone.*

OLYMPE. Well. It might be fiction, but it's not fake. The beating hearts in front of you are real. The gathering of people, the time spent is real.