

**ACT ONE****SCENE 1**#00 – *Overture*

(MRS. KIRK'S NYC BOARDING HOUSE: #1 - January 1865.

*Lights come up on PROFESSOR BHAER, a German professor in his mid to late 30's. HE is quite proper. HE calls with authority.)*

**PROFESSOR BHAER**

Miss March! Another letter has arrived for you! Miss March!

*(JO MARCH, an impassioned girl of 19, shouts loudly from off stage. The PROFESSOR reacts)*

**JO**

*(Offstage)*

Mrs. Kirk, the mutton you ordered is on the kitchen table!

*(SHE rushes into the parlor)*

Thank you, Professor!

*(SHE grabs the letter)*

Christopher Columbus! Another publisher.

*(SHE looks at the Professor)*

Another rejection?

**PROFESSOR BHAER**

I have no idea. I do not read your letters. But they keep arriving and I keep bringing them to you.

**JO**

And I keep hoping -

**PROFESSOR BHAER**

We all keep hoping for your success, Miss March. The entire boarding house keeps hoping. You have us all on edge.

**JO**

*(SHE reads)*

‘My dear Miss March. I read your story.’ Well, he’s read it. ‘Unfortunately... unfortunately I found your tale tasteless and vulgar. Not at all suitable for my readers. My advice to you-’

*(SHE hands him the letter)*

PROFESSOR BHAER

(HE reads)

'My advice to you is to return home and have babies. This is what women are made for. Sincerely F. Putnam.'

JO

Twenty-two.

PROFESSOR BHAER

Twenty-two?

JO

Twenty-two rejections since I've been in New York. They all say the same thing. Go home. Give up.

PROFESSOR BHAER

F. Putnam is an idiot. His words are stupid.

JO

F. Putnam is one of the most powerful publishers in the city.

PROFESSOR BHAER

You cannot lose faith, Miss March. There will be someone who will like your story. I am certain of it...

JO

Professor Bhaer? Is it possible I could read my story to you? I would so respect your opinion.

PROFESSOR BHAER

Yes. Of course.

JO

(SHE joyfully grabs her portfolio)

Actually, it's one of my best.

(SHE settles in: Reads)

'It's a mean and stormy night. The moors are bleak and bloody. Thunder claps! Lightning strikes!

#1 - An Operatic Tragedy

The fair Clarissa, her clothes in disarray, races across the wild coastal heath -

(CLARISSA appears on A WILD HEATH)

NOW SHE STOPS!

NOW SHE RUNS!

WILL SHE ESCAPE?

Please note that the track for "An Operatic Tragedy" is in the audition materials if you would like to use it. You are welcome to either read or sing those lines and use the track if it is helpful for you.

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**(JO)**

WILL SHE BE CAUGHT?

With bold determination, the villainous aristocrat Braxton Prendergast, lurches for her -

(*BRAXTON appears*)

THERE'S NO ESCAPE:

SHE'S BUT A CHILD.

AND YET SHE TURNS TO FIGHT WITH EYES ABLAZE!

THIS NOBLE GIRL MEETS HIS GAZE, UNAFRAID.

SHE WILL NOT BE DEFILED!

**CLARISSA & JO**

Keep away from me, you wretch!

**BRAXTON & JO**

I cannot keep away. Your beauty draws me. Your passion ignites me.

(*JO continues to mouth and act out the story*)

I'VE GOT TO HOLD YOU.

**CLARISSA & JO**

I DEFY YOU!

**BRAXTON**

GOT TO HAVE YOU

**CLARISSA**

LET ME BY YOU!

**BRAXTON**

COME CLOSE -

**CLARISSA**

DON'T COME TOO CLOSE -

**BRAXTON**

COME CLOSE -

**CLARISSA**

DON'T COME TOO CLOSE -

**BRAXTON & CLARISSA**

SO CLOSE, SO CLOSE TO ME

**BRAXTON**

(*Front*)

I'll have her. And the mother too.

**JO**

And at that moment, Rodrigo appears in magnificent splendor!

**RODRIGO & JO**

*(HE appears, brandishing a sword)*

Unhand that woman, villain!

**BRAXTON, CLARISSA & JO**

Who are you?

**RODRIGO & JO**

I AM YOUR DESTINY!

YOUR BITTEREST FOE!

**RODRIGO**

YOU STOLE WHAT WAS RIGHTLY MINE

TEN LONG YEARS AGO!

YOU LEFT ME COLD, ALONE AND FORGOTTEN,

NOW I'M BACK TO SETTLE THE SCORE!

**PROFESSOR BHAER**

*(Interrupting her diplomatically)*

Miss March!

*(HE smiles at her)*

Tell me, what is it you are writing here?

**JO**

Blood-and-guts stuff. It's all the rage. The magazines and periodicals are full of it.

**PROFESSOR BHAER**

Violence and seduction on every page?

**JO**

Read Shakespeare. Read history. Read the newspapers.

**PROFESSOR BHAER**

It is getting late. Perhaps it is best we pursue this some other time.

**JO**

No. I want to know what you think, Professor.

**PROFESSOR BHAER**

Blood and guts stuff? What you think the world wants to hear? If I have noticed nothing else about you, Miss March, I have noticed you are unique. Something you should try not to forget. I think you could do better.

**JO***(taken aback)*

Better? ... And who are you anyway: an aging German professor, close to 50 - ?

**PROFESSOR BHAER***(taken aback)*

I am 34.

**JO**

34, really? Well - you look a lot older.

**PROFESSOR BHAER**

I worry a lot.

**JO**

And just what do you worry about?

**PROFESSOR BHAER**

How to avoid a conversation such as this! Now I will go to dinner.

*(HE starts away, immediately turns back)*

Miss March, since you have been here - six weeks now, is it? - you shout, you rant, you upset the whole order of this boarding house. I am a serene and peaceful man.

**JO**

You're aloof, you're arrogant -

**PROFESSOR BHAER**

Arrogant? Miss March, I spoke my mind, as you spoke yours. Obviously, it was not appreciated on either side.

*(HE goes)*

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**#2 - Better****JO**

Obviously!

*(HE goes)*

My stories were a great success in Concord.

*(SHE looks at her story)*

BETTER?

BETTER THAN WHAT?

BETTER THAN THIS DAZZLING PLOT?

BETTER?

THIS STORY WILL BE MY 'KING LEAR'.