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We Were Here

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

in

Creative Writing and Writing for the Performing Arts

by

Rachell Anne Campbell

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The Thesis of Rachell Anne Campbell is approved:

Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

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Thank you to Susan Page, Donna Harvey, Jean Dreckman, and Delena Close (pictured below) and their families from whose stories this play was born; and to Ashley Crosby, Susanna Vaughan, Bri Dally, Kendra Kay, and Rickerby Hinds for keeping it alive.



We Were Here is dedicated to my grandmother Mary Lou Andrews, who understood the importance, beauty, and strength of girl friends. And who left behind many who miss her “ornery” self.

WE WERE HERE

THE CAST

DONNA HARVEY – 25, a riveter

SUSIE PAGE – 17, a welder

IDA JENSEN – 47, a supervisor and head of “female moral”

JEAN DRECKMAN – 19, a painter of airplane insignia

INTERCOM / MALE VOICE & RADIO – pre-recorded

THE TIME

1942-1945. Douglas Aircraft Corporation. Santa Monica, California.

THE PLACE

A homemade lunchroom- once a tucked away and forgotten space, now recently found.

THE SOUND

Factory noise should be heard at all times. It should be all-surrounding from the time of the audience’s entrance, but never distracting.

INTERCOM / MALE VOICE

Occasional factory announcements are made over an intercom. These are never good news and the girls know it. It is played by a male voice.

THE RADIO

The radio is it’s own character and should play at all times unless otherwise noted in the text. It plays between each transition to show the passage of time with news reports, music, advertisements, programming etc. switching quickly between each only to leave clues to show how much time has past..

*All direct text from RADIO is transcribed from authentic WWII news reports that can be used as the recordings for the performance.

A WINTER: December 24th, 1942

RADIO plays from the announcement of the attack on Pearl Harbor to December 1942 and then...

RADIO

Christmas Eve 1942...this is a happy Christmas alright, a great Christmas. And next year, pray God, all of you will be singing this at your own fireplaces, around your own trees. This song that means so much to all of us...

RADIO plays Christmas music.

Lunch bell sounds.

DONNA enters. She is six months pregnant. She is carrying a lunch pail, a nice handbag, and a few paper bags stuffed with clothes. She goes to the table and puts down her things. Then she walks through the lunchroom inspecting it. She touches all the surfaces as if checking for dust. She goes over to the table, glances back at the door, and then places out three crocheted doilies. She adjusts them neatly. She opens her lunch pail and pulls out a sandwich wrapped in wax paper and a carrot. She lays them out. She grabs out four peppermints wrapped in brown paper. She places them in the center of the table and unwraps them so they have a pleasant presentation. She looks at the table she has set up and looks pleased with herself.

SUSIE enters. SUSIE is carrying a bucket of sand and a bunch of palm branches. SUSIE keeps dropping branches and not noticing. JEAN enters, trailing behind SUSIE. She keeps picking up everything SUSIE's dropping.

JEAN

Will you stop and just let me carry something already. You're dropping more than you're holding.

JEAN spots DONNA.

Merry Christmas, Donna. JEAN

Merry Christmas, Jean. DONNA

I don't need help. SUSIE

Ha! JEAN

It'll be brilliant. Trust me. Another victory for the west! SUSIE

I don't trust people who loose battles with palm trees. JEAN

What are you two doing? DONNA

You'll see! SUSIE

Susie's making a surprise. JEAN

Lord help us. DONNA

SUSIE kneels down beside her creation, carefully putting it together.

JEAN goes over to DONNA and puts her hands on DONNA's stomach. JEAN talks to the baby. This is a routine.

Merry Christmas, baby. Wait till you see it. You'll love Christmas. JEAN

He already loves the singing. Bounces around every time. DONNA

JEAN

You like music, little one? We'll have to get Aunt Susie to sing to you.

DONNA

You going to Susie's tonight?

JEAN

Yep.

DONNA

I'm glad. I hate you being alone. 'specially on Christmas Eve.

SUSIE

She's spending the night too. No one should wake up alone on Christian morning. And no one oughta let 'em. Isn't Christian—There. And I'll just tie this bow around it....there! Stand back and see if it holds.

DONNA

...what is it?

SUSIE

It's a Christmas tree.

DONNA

No it's not.

SUSIE

Yes it is.

JEAN

I can see it.

DONNA

Maybe a *California* Christmas tree.

SUSIE

It's a perfect Christmas tree.

JEAN

I like it.

SUSIE

Wait till we get the trinkets on it.

JEAN

Trinkets?--You're too much.

JEAN goes over to her bag and starts pulling out her Christmas surprise--a red and green paper chain.

JEAN

Look what I made!

SUSIE

Hey, that's swell!...look at it. Must-a taken forever.

JEAN

No glue. No staples. Had to fold down every little piece-a paper.

SUSIE

Use it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without.

SUSIE spots the peppermint on the table.

SUSIE

Would ya look at that? These from you, Donnie?

DONNA nods.

SUSIE

What a treat! Can't ever get sugar any more. Real peppermint.

SUSIE reaches for one of the peppermints.

DONNA

Let's wait for Ida.

SUSIE agrees.

JEAN

I hope she comes in.

SUSIE

She will. She always comes in when we're making a ruckus. Where'd you get those peppermints? Mom barely got enough sugar to make a molasses cake—it looks like a brick.

DONNA

It's just a few pieces. I snuck 'em away from Momma's stash. She's been hidin' 'em since the war broke out.

JEAN

I can't even find enough to put a lump in my coffee. And Christmas just isn't Christmas without...

JEAN grabs her paper chain and moves a chair by the doorway to hang it up.

SUSIE

Without what?

SUSIE grabs another chair to help her hang the chain. They stand on the chairs.

JEAN

Oh never mind. It's not my place to complain.

SUSIE

Wishing's not complaining. Tell.

JEAN

An apple pie...I love apple pie. Papa used to make one for me every year. It's my favorite.

SUSIE

Apple pie. Now there's a distant memory. Fruit's harder to get than sugar.

IDA enters and catches the girls standing on their chairs.

IDA

Can you stop trying to kill yourselves for five seconds? Get down.

SUSIE

It's for a good cause.

IDA

It's paperwork for me. Get down.

JEAN

Merry Christmas, Ida.

IDA

Merry Christmas. Just came to see if everything was going all right for you gals—tucked away back here.

SUSIE
Just swell. Donna's got us fixin' up the place.

DONNA
Just a little cleaning is all.

SUSIE
I brought in Radio.

JEAN
Only works about half the time.

SUSIE
The important half.

DONNA goes to RADIO.

DONNA
It's a nuisance.

IDA
Got to have something to drown out those machines, I guess.

DONNA turns off RADIO.

SUSIE
Hey!

DONNA
We could use a little quiet.

IDA
(about the tree)
What is that?

SUSIE
It's our Christmas tree.

IDA
Of course it is—you make it?

SUSIE
Yes I did. Jean helped—a little.

JEAN
I picked up the pieces.

IDA

Half-a this factory's job is makin' planes—the other half's is picking up after Susie... Well, I better leave you girls to your party.

DONNA

Won't you join us?

JEAN

You have to stay.

DONNA

We want to thank you. If you'd kicked us out of here...it's so nice to have some peace.

SUSIE

'specially when you didn't even report us.

IDA

I can understand wanting a place of your own...all right. I'll stay. For a minute.

DONNA

Good. Here. This one's yours.

DONNA shoes IDA the doilies on the table.

IDA

For me?

DONNA

We were hoping you'd stay. I wanted to be prepared.

IDA looks at the doily.

IDA

Did you make this? It's lovely.

SUSIE

She's improving...her first one looked like the cat got to it.

IDA

It's very nice. Thank you.

DONNA

I made one for you two as well. Merry Christmas.

Merry Christmas. JEAN

What's in the bags? SUSIE

My clothes DONNA

Clothes? SUSIE

Well, my work clothes at least. Thought you might be able to use them. Got plenty-a wear yet. DONNA

You're not going to use them? JEAN

No...well, you see I've decided that today ought to be my last day. Baby's pretty far along now and I think it's time I left Douglas Aircraft behind me. DONNA

What? JEAN

You're leaving--today? SUSIE

I'm not coming back after Christmas. DONNA

When are you due? IDA

March 3rd DONNA

Then you can work a while yet—we could move you to secretarial if it'd be easier in your condition. IDA

No...thank you. I appreciate it, but my riveting days are over. DONNA

IDA

Factory still needs women like you.

JEAN

And what about us? It was your idea to find this place. It's not right without you.

DONNA

You'll still have each other....I thought you'd be happy for me.

JEAN

We are...

DONNA

This is what I've always wanted. This is just a job. And we're just here until the men get back. It's not--

INTERCOM

Margaret Taylor to the front office. Margaret Taylor to the front office.

The girls look up towards the intercom and then pause. JEAN makes the sign of the cross. They take a moment of silence, each in their own way.

IDA

You know her?

The girls shake their heads "no."

JEAN

We always pray for them, anyway.

IDA

It's just for the front office. I'm sure it's nothing--

SUSIE

We get telephone calls in the front office.

IDA

They say it's a phone call if there's a---

DONNA

---Not when it's bad news.

Silence.

This is not just a job. Not for me. SUSIE

Me either. JEAN

Silence, they try to shake off the intercom.

PLEASE...IT'S CHRISTMAS—AND I BROUGHT SOMETHING SPECIAL...TO REMEMBER ME BY. DONNA

DONNA gives them each a tube of lipstick.

No! The one from Macy's? JEAN

Yep! DONNA

Thank you ! JEAN

Thank you. IDA

IDA fiddles with the lipstick and marks a bit on the back of her hand, unsure.

What a red! SUSIE

You'll look just like Judy. DONNA

She's a kid. SUSIE

So are you. DONNA

Seventeen is hardly— SUSIE

Judy Garland's twenty. JEAN

No! SUSIE

Thought you'd know that. IDA

I prefer newspapers to star magazines. SUSIE

I can't get enough of 'em. Thank you. It's beautiful. JEAN

Just' cause you're doin' man's work doesn't mean you got to look like 'em. DONNA

You got a mirror? JEAN

Here. I'll help you. DONNA

DONNA helps JEAN with her lipstick.
Through the following the girls help
each other put on their lipstick.

Man's work? SUSIE

Let it go, for now. IDA
(quietly to SUSIE)

Judy Garland, huh? SUSIE

Sure. DONNA

You look like Kate. JEAN

Hepburn? Oh no not her. DONNA

What's wrong with her? SUSIE

Sure, out-a uniform you're the spitting image. JEAN

I can see it. IDA

Let's see. SUSIE

SUSIE pulls off DONNA's head scarf.

Come on. I'll have to put it back-- DONNA

--Stand tall. JEAN

JEAN makes DONNA stand tall.

There. "Put me in your pocket, Mike".... JEAN

I'm not saying that. DONNA

"Put me in your pocket, Mike!" JEAN

Say it! Say it! SUSIE

JEAN and SUSIE laugh, DONNA stands tall and tries to compose herself.

"Put me in —" DONNA

DONNA starts laughing, she can't do it.

The best part of that movie...Cary Grant. SUSIE

Jimmy Stewart. JEAN

Too gangly. IDA

Who's your pick? JEAN

Clark Gable. IDA

They all go silent in appreciation, sigh
and nod.

JEAN
"Frankly my dear, I don't give a damn."

Jean! DONNA

Come on! The world's chanin'-- Say damn, Donna. SUSIE

No. DONNA

Say damn, Donna. SUSIE

No. DONNA

Say it! SUSIE

Leave her alone. IDA

Who's your pick, Donna? JEAN

DONNA doesn't answer.

SUSIE
Come on, who is it?--Who you carrin' a torch for?

DONNA

Eddie.

JEAN

Well, who can blame her—he's the most handsome man in the world.

SUSIE

Next to Jake.

IDA

You got some poor boy to fall for you?

SUSIE

I've got 'em lined up down the block on Saturday nights. Jake's my brother. See. There, doesn't he look sharp in his Navy uniform?

SUSIE shows IDA a picture of Jake.

IDA

You're practically twins—

JEAN

--but he's prettier.

SUSIE

Oughta see Jean's Papa. Show Ida the snapshot. He's single. And he's got that rugged old man look.

IDA

I'm sure Mr. Dreckman can get his own dates.

JEAN shows IDA the snapshot of Papa.

JEAN

Not so. He's totally useless with women. How he ever got my mother, I'll never know.

IDA

You never asked her?

JEAN

She died when I was three. It's always just been Papa and me. Guess what he's getting' me for Christmas....He's savin' for a bike to buy when we gets back. (to IDA) He's in the Air Force. Mine's rust through. And there's nothing better than riding down the road on a new bicycle.

Your own kind of freedom. IDA

Adventure! JEAN

Exactly! That's what Mary Lou's for. SUSIE

Mary Lou? DONNA

Her car. Susie likes to name things...But, you can't drive to freedom on five gallons a week. No, I'd take my bike any day. Even know what color I'll get... JEAN

What color? SUSIE

Cranberry. JEAN

Cranberry? IDA

It's a red. DONNA

I know--Why's nothing's just plain ol' red anymore—got to be something fancy like cranberry or— IDA

SUSIE reads the bottom of her lipstick.

“Passionate Inspiration” SUSIE

Exactly. IDA

It's artistic flair. JEAN

I do not look like Katharine Hepburn. DONNA

Oh, you do too. SUSIE

No. DONNA

What's wrong with her? SUSIE

She's too liberal for Donnie. She wears pants. JEAN

So do you. SUSIE
(to DONNA)

Not when she doesn't have to. IDA

She wears pants, when she doesn't have to? SUSIE

Yep. JEAN

Every day? SUSIE

Looks that way. JEAN

I like 'em. SUSIE

Not every day. DONNA

Sure! Without stockings, my legs rub together. SUSIE

I miss stockings. IDA

I hate 'em, they ride up my... JEAN

JEAN realizes what's she's saying and stops.

DONNA
Mama and I did the craziest thing the other day...We gave over our girdles. Our girdles will win the war.

IDA
No.

DONNA
Yep.

IDA
No girdles.

DONNA
Our men need the supplies.

JEAN
(teasing)
Of girdles?

SUSIE
Of rubber.

JEAN makes a face at SUSIE.

IDA
How will you get on?

DONNA
I'll make do.

SUSIE
I like the idea. Freedom for all! Europe and your stomach!

JEAN
You should write poster slogans.

SUSIE
I should---Ladies, throw your cares away, throw your girdles Hitler's way!

IDA
I don't see how we could live without them. A lady's got to have some support.

Ha! Never got any before. SUSIE

Not now. DONNA

What? Couldn't even vote 'til ten years ago. SUSIE

Twenty...or More. IDA

You would know. Why do you need a girdle anyway? SUSIE

Because unlike twiggy little things, I've got a figure. Maintained properly by... IDA

Excessive amounts of rubber. JEAN

Hush now. All I'm saying is a girl can use all the help she can get. IDA

You're as lovely as the spring, Ida. JEAN

JEAN goes to hug IDA, IDA steps back and goes to leave.

If you're sure you're not going to use these I can keep them in my office for when the new recruits arrive. IDA

I can't believe you're going. SUSIE

It's perfectly normal. JEAN

Sure. It's just a job. IDA

It's not for me. SUSIE

Some people are different.

DONNA

Some people are selfish.

SUSIE

That's too far. Be kind or I'll send you outside.

IDA

She should be excited about her new life.

JEAN

Sarah Adams report to the East Block. 13:00 hrs. Sarah Adams report to the East Block. 13:00 hrs.

INTERCOM

They listen to the news and then move on as normal.

Sure. She gets to play house, while the rest of us are fighting to keep our--you know--country.

SUSIE

Go outside.

IDA

But I—

SUSIE

Out.

IDA

SUSIE exits.

It is good news.

IDA

She's just jealous.

JEAN

I am not!

SUSIE

(From outside)

IDA

(Shouting to SUSIE)

Further out the door, Susan. (back to DONNA) What I don't understand is, why you have to go right now.

DONNA

It never felt right for me to be here. Too risky, and besides it's my hope—and I hope yours is too, that they'll return soon and things will go back to the way they're supposed to be.

IDA

Supposed to be?

DONNA

Women, in the home.

JEAN

I think we're doing a great job.

DONNA

But it's not what we were made for. We need to take care of our husband and our children.

IDA

And if we don't have either?

DONNA

Well, of course it's different with...

IDA

--Old Maids?

DONNA

Widows.

IDA

How do you know that?

DONNA

People talk.

JEAN

Who's a widow?

SUSIE
(from outside)

What are we talking about?

IDA
(to SUSIE)

You are out there for a reason, remember.

JEAN

You're a widow?

IDA

We are completely losing the point.

JEAN

You were married?

IDA

The start of the first war. He was killed.

JEAN

And you never married again?

IDA

Didn't care to. Now. *Widow* or not. I'm damn good at this job, and I'd like to keep it.

DONNA

Because there's no one providing for you.

IDA

Providing for me?--- you sound older than I am.

JEAN

--And what about me? I'm not saying I want to do this forever, but I am doing my part and I have never been prouder of anything in my life.

DONNA

But do you think it's the best life you could have?

JEAN

No. I think it'd be best if there wasn't a war on and Papa came home. But instead I'm gunna make some planes to destroy some sons of a...

SUSIE pops her head around the corner.

IDA

I agree.

DONNA

It's our job to keep everything the same, so they'll have an easy transition—back to us.

IDA

Nothing will be the same. And we need every hand on deck. Including newlyweds and mothers.

DONNA

It'll be done soon. You're just working here till the men get back. There's no sense in wrapping what little dignity you have left on a temporary job you shouldn't be doing.

IDA exits.

JEAN

What an awful thing to say.

SUSIE enters.

SUSIE

--You're a bitch, you know that?

DONNA

Don't use such—

SUSIE

Bitch. And I'll say it again. How dare you say a thing like that to, Ida?

DONNA

You're all backwards.

SUSIE

And maybe sideways and upside down. But I'm not the one sitting here insulting the best woman we've got.

INTERCOM

Betty Grey you have a telegram in the front office. Betty Grey, telegram.

SUSIE

(very concerned)

Betty.

JEAN

She'll be okay. Telegram *announcements* are okay. If the worst happens...they come and find you....

Silence.

DONNA

I have to get out of here.

SUSIE is about to yell at DONNA again when IDA enters, carrying a stack of papers. IDA slams the papers on the table in front of DONNA.

DONNA

What are---

IDA

--Hush. (Reading from the papers) Delena Close, Helyn Potter, Lois Lettow, Tessie Wilson---Gave their lives while serving the defense industry. And these (IDA picks up the large stack of papers) are all women who work at Douglas Air Craft. Every one of them could be seriously injured. That's the risk we signed up for. But we come here instead of sitting at home waiting for telegrams because we had to do something. And that takes more than a little *dignity*.

DONNA

It's not for me.

DONNA packs her things.

DONNA

Goodbye, girls. Merry Christmas.

DONNA exits.

Silence.

JEAN

I didn't get to give her her painting.

IDA

Painting?

JEAN pulls out three paintings.

JEAN
I made one for everyone...for Christmas. Thought we might hang them up. (to IDA) I made one for you too.

IDA
It's beautiful. (Silence) Go find her.

JEAN
She probably won't really--

IDA
--She will.

JEAN
You think?

IDA nods.

JEAN runs after DONNA.

SUSIE turns on RADIO.

Silence.

IDA
Now I've done it.

SUSIE
What?

IDA
I'm too easily offended—and hotheaded.

SUSIE
You?

IDA
Me.

SUSIE
She had it coming. And you gave a riveting speech.

IDA
It was uncalled for.

SUSIE
She practically screamed for it....

IDA smiles in spite of herself.

SUSIE

I should apologize. I was rude.

IDA

Rude-*er* than usual anyway....A cross word should never be the last one.

A man's voice is heard outside the door.

MALE VOICE

Ida. Telegram.

IDA exits and then returns with a telegram in her hand. SUSIE stares at her in horror.

SUSIE

Jake?

IDA shakes her head. SUSIE sighs, and rushes toward IDA. SUSIE looks at the telegram, then back at IDA, and runs for the door.

IDA

Don't tell her. Don't say anything---just let her come back in here.

DONNA enters.

DONNA

I left my coat--

SUSIE

--Have you seen Jean?

DONNA

No.

SUSIE bursts out the door.

DONNA

What's happened?

IDA holds up the telegram.

Jean?

DONNA

IDA nods.

JEAN enters and sees DONNA.

JEAN
There you are. I've been looking for you. I'm sorry—we're sorry. We should have been celebrating with you. You were just excited....Here. Merry Christmas.

JEAN hands DONNA the painting.
DONNA looks down at it for a moment.

DONNA
Thank you....You did this?

JEAN
I still have a lot of learning to do.

DONNA
It's breath-taking.

JEAN
I try. Papa says he's going to get me lessons when he gets back. He loves my paintings. He has most of them hanging in his office--even the bad ones.

IDA walks over and puts her hand on JEAN's shoulder.

IDA
It's beautiful...

JEAN
See, out behind the house. Rows and rows of sunflowers, he plants them, just for me. Sunny Jean. That's what he calls me...

DONNA
...It's perfect.

IDA
...Jean?

JEAN turns toward IDA.

JEAN

What's happened?

IDA takes JEAN's hand, but can't tell her the news.

The lunch bell rings.

IDA puts the telegram in JEAN's hand.

JEAN steps back and drops the telegram.

No. No.

JEAN

Honey...Your father's been killed in action...(to DONNA) Get her some water.

IDA

DONNA gets the water.

Try and sit down.

IDA

I'll take her home.

DONNA

She shouldn't go back to the dormitories. She'll be alone.

IDA

I want to keep working.

JEAN

We ought to get you—

IDA

I have to keep working.

JEAN

We need to take you home.

DONNA

That's *not* home.

JEAN

But if you're not fit to—

DONNA

JEAN
—If my Papa died working, then I will too!

JEAN tries to bolt, IDA gets between
JEAN and the door.

IDA
(to DONNA)
Go get Susie.

DONNA exits.

IDA
You can't honey. I can't let you work. I can leave you alone in here. Or I can take
you home.

JEAN
Please!

IDA
You're unfit.

JEAN
No.

IDA
Sit down, Jean.

JEAN tries to get around IDA, IDA
blocks her. IDA moves to touch her and
put her in the chair.

JEAN
Don't touch me. Don't touch me.

JEAN sits, she stares straight in front of
her wringing her hands. She does not
cry. IDA stands behind her watching.

SUSIE enters, she looks at IDA, she
touches IDA on the arm and IDA exits.
SUSIE goes over to JEAN and puts her
hand on her shoulder.

JEAN
Don't touch me, please. Just go.

I'm not leaving you.

SUSIE

SUSIE looks around the room, trying to figure out how to help JEAN.

SUSIE picks up JEAN's painting.

It's beautiful.

SUSIE

JEAN pushes the painting away.

SUSIE looks at the painting in her hand. She stands up and puts it by RADIO.

Looks perfect in here.

SUSIE

SUSIE sits back down beside JEAN and tries to take her hand. JEAN pulls away.

Let me go back to work.

JEAN

SUSIE shakes her head "no."

SUSIE goes to RADIO and flips the dial until she finds the right song. She lets it play for a moment. SUSIE starts singing along with the song.

SUSIE tries to get JEAN to stand up and dance with her. JEAN is reluctant, but SUSIE's kindness works on her. They dance slowly, swaying to the music while SUSIE sings softly.

Susie?...

JEAN

SUSIE stops their dance and looks at her.

My Papa's dead.

JEAN

JEAN finally breaks down. SUSIE holds her.

Silence.

SUSIE
Move in with Mom and me...I won't let you do this alone.

SUSIE holds her and then puts her arm around her to move her towards the door.

They exit.

A SUMMER: JULY 21th, 1943

RADIO plays from December 1942 to July 1943 and then...

RADIO

July 21th, 1943. From North African bases, British and American Air Forces completed the most delicate air mission ever attempted...the bombing of Rome: capital and arsenal of Axis Italy. For weeks, crews studied detailed charts of the city. Maps, carefully marked, were memorized. Holy shrines, churches and hospitals, were specifically designated with circles and crosses. Orders were, that these non-military objectives were not to be damaged, but military targets along side must be blasted. Five hundred huge bombers, in wave after wave.

RADIO plays music.

Lunch bell rings.

SUSIE walks in and sits. Her hair is slick with sweat. She drinks water from a canteen, it doesn't help. SUSIE drops down into a chair, sulking.

JEAN enters in a huff, carrying a can of paint.

SUSIE

Hank?

JEAN

"Not to Regulation, Regina. Not to regulation." I just added a little red to the wing.

JEAN holds up the can of paint.

JEAN

Bought it myself...

JEAN shoves the can of paint somewhere in the room.

SUSIE

Bet it looked nice.

JEAN

It did. Thought I'd strike fear into those—into some hearts. Hank didn't think so. Made me scrap the whole thing.

SUSIE

Hank's a boob. You got a cig? I'm dying?

JEAN gives SUSIE a cigarette.

JEAN

You shouldn't smoke, Ida'll flip her wig.

SUSIE

No one's—

JEAN

--it's against the rules.

SUSIE

What are you gunna do about it?

JEAN

I could report you.

SUSIE

You won't.

SUSIE leans back in her chair and goes to strike a match for her cigarette. IDA enters. SUSIE sees IDA and throws her chair forward.

SUSIE

Oh, it's just you.

SUSIE goes to light the cigarette

IDA

Excuse me?

IDA takes the matches and cigarette before SUSIE can light up.

IDA

Do you have any idea how dangerous and stupid it is for you to be smoking in here?

SUSIE

It's one cig.

IDA

That hits one gas fume and the whole factory goes up. Sometimes, girl, I swear you'll be the end of me.

SUSIE

Jeezy-Pete's, I'm sorry. This kind of day, you need something to get you through.

IDA

Well, with a stunt like this—it'd be your last.

JEAN

Any word, Ida?

SUSIE

On what?

IDA
(overlapping)

No.

INTERCOM

Susan Page report to the West Block. 13:00 hrs. Susan Page report to the East Block. 13:00 hrs.

SUSIE moans and puts her head down on the table.

Silence.

JEAN

Sarah Adams lost her husband yesterday. France.

IDA

I know. I drove her home.

SUSIE turns off the radio.

SUSIE

I hate that song.

IDA looks at SUSIE, she finally understanding.

Jake go back from his leave? IDA

What about it. SUSIE

He'll be alright. IDA

Is that what you said to Sara Adams?...I hate the West Block. It's as hot as hell--, you'd think they were trying to suffocate us. SUSIE

And it's already smoldering. JEAN

Look at you two. You look sadder than a popsicle on the sidewalk. IDA

Leave us alone...What were you two talkin' about, earlier? SUSIE

I'm buying a house. IDA

A house? SUSIE

She decided to go for it. JEAN

A whole house? SUSIE

Just the front door. IDA

She found one. On Main. JEAN

Main's nice. SUSIE

I'll help you paint it. JEAN

IDA
No "it" yet. The Bank.

SUSIE
The housing shortage.

IDA
Being a woman doesn't help. Swear, if I was doing it under a husband's name, the house'd be mine already.

JEAN
Nobody can get houses right now. Only factory rentals.

SUSIE
Only gunna get worse when the men come back.

IDA
What do you know about it?

SUSIE
I read. I may have dropped out of high school, but I'm not dumb.

IDA
Burning the factory down aside?...There's got to be more to it. I'm qualified. But it won't go through.

SUSIE
After all this, you'd think they'd've figured out we can do a thing or two...it's too hot in here. Let's take our clothes off.

IDA
Absolutely not.

SUSIE
Come on.

IDA
All skin must be covered at all times.

SUSIE
Be a sport.

DONNA peeps her head around the corner.

IDA
We are still in a public place and I won't tolerate nudity.

JEAN
It's just us.

DONNA sneaks in, carrying a pack of
Coca-Cola behind her back.

IDA
I will not have you running around a place of business like--

DONNA
--naked chickens in a hen yard.

JEAN
DONNA!

SUSIE
Donna?

JEAN runs to hug DONNA.

SUSIE
What are you doing here?

JEAN
How's Davy!?

IDA
How's that baby?

DONNA
He's fine.

SUSIE
What are you doing here?

DONNA
I thought you all might need a break from the heat.

JEAN
You shouldn't have...It's so nice of you to visit.

DONNA
Actually. I thought I'd come back to work.

That's wonderful. JEAN

You're really coming back to work? SUSIE

Yes. DONNA

That's it? IDA

Yep. Thought it was time I did what you said—put in my hand to serve my country. DONNA

While leaving your son at home to raise himself? SUSIE

Mother's with him, and Dad helps. DONNA

IDA studies DONNA.

They assign you back to riveting? IDA

I start tomorrow. Just came in to finish the paperwork, pick up my uniform. DONNA

It's so *cold*. Thank you. JEAN

Yea, thanks. SUSIE

How's Davy? Haven't seen him in a while, bet he's getting big. JEAN

Huge, and the happiest baby you've ever seen. Smiles all the time-- DONNA

---they say that's gas. SUSIE

DONNA

So what's the news with all of you?...Susie, you look all grown up.

SUSIE doesn't answer.

INTERCOM

Marcy Davis to Payroll. Marcy Davis to Payroll.

IDA

I'm lookin' to buy a house.

DONNA

You're buying a house?---Alone.

SUSIE

Women are allowed to own property, now.

DONNA

Oh sure—I just...

JEAN

Isn't it exciting!

SUSIE

Get a good one—right on the beach.

DONNA

She may not have a choice with this housing market.

IDA

That's the truth.

SUSIE

Doesn't hurt to dream.

DONNA

Is now really the best time to be looking to buy? This job isn't exactly stable and--

SUSIE

There you go, been back five seconds and you're already criticizing.

DONNA

I'm not criticizing, I'm just wondering if you've thought it all the way through.

SUSIE

Have you ever met, Ida? Of course she's thought it all the way through.

It just doesn't seem wise...

DONNA

Wise?

SUSIE

--No...It's true—the market's jam-packed, and I'm a single woman with no housing history. It's probably the dumbest thing I've ever done. I have no right to own a home—no right to want one. But I do. Owning a bit—a somethin' really means something to someone who's never lived anywhere long enough to put her name on the front door.

IDA

I didn't mean anything by—

DONNA

--I'm sure you didn't—It's not you...I think I've just been savin' that speech for the banks for so long that it just slipped out...

IDA

If we can do anything to help...

JEAN

I'll let you know.

IDA

It sounds wonderful.

DONNA

Now it's your turn.

IDA

For what?

DONNA

A little honesty.

IDA

What.

DONNA

You're not here 'cause of patriotism.

IDA

Are you calling me unpatriotic?

DONNA

IDA

I'm calling you a hypocrite...Something's happened. You made more than a little stink about wanting to get out of here—

SUSIE

More than a little stink! She threw a parade!

IDA

Susan. (Pause) Now, I can handle insults--but I won't stand for hypocrisy.

DONNA

We can't afford it...Eddie's pension is...No. It's my fault. I've put us into some debt. It's so shameful. 'specially with a war on...what a waste.

JEAN

Spent a year's coupons on clothes, after Papa...took a month's salary too.

SUSIE

Bought a book a week since Jake enlisted.

IDA

It's natural.

DONNA

But I'm going to get us out of it...I'm sorry about the things I said. I didn't know any better. We are lucky that we can work...I need to be here. And I was hoping maybe with you all...it might not be so hard. Missing Eddie's one thing... but Davy...I don't want to miss a second of it.

IDA

Wars don't last forever.

DONNA

Doesn't feel that way.

JEAN

You're a great mother. You'll find a way.

DONNA

It's just for a little while...Will you forgive me, Susie? I know we never saw eye to eye but...

SUSIE
(teasing)

--hand me another Coke.

DONNA does.

WELCOME BACK....

SUSIE

WELCOME BACK....

JEAN

IT'S GOOD TO HAVE YOU. PLACE GOT A LITTLE RUN DOWN WHILE YOU WERE GONE.

SUSIE

I CLEANED.

DONNA

NOT LIKELY.

SUSIE

SO HOW OLD IS DAVY NOW? HAS HE SAID HIS FIRST WORD YET?

DONNA

NO, NOT YET.

IDA

HE'S ONLY FOUR MONTHS OLD.

SUSIE

WHEN DO THEY START TALKING?

DONNA

MUCH LATER THAN THAT.

SUSIE

MY FIRST WORD WAS "JAKE."

DONNA

SURELY NOT.

SUSIE

NO KIDDIN'. JAKE TRAINED ME FOR MONTHS—LIKE A PARROT---JEAN GOT TO MEET HIM THIS WEEK.

DONNA

REALLY? YOU HIT IT OFF?

JEAN

SURE, FELT LIKE I KNEW HIM ALREADY. BEEN LIVING IN HIS ROOM SINCE CHRISTMAS.

SUSIE

HE LIKED YOU TOO.

He did? JEAN

Thinks you're swell. SUSIE

That's what he said? JEAN

Yep (Pause) And he asked what I thought of you. SUSIE

What'd you say? JEAN

That I loved you like a sister... SUSIE

I love you too. JEAN

Oh, It's good to be back with the girls---can any one use zucchini? Got it comin' out of my ears. DONNA

No thank you, never could stomach the stuff. IDA

Got some good strawberries too. DONNA

Now those I'll take. IDA

Donna's got the best Victory Garden in the state. And not just yams...(to SUSIE) carrots. JEAN

We can grow carrots. SUSIE

But we don't. JEAN

Then you be in charge of the garden? Who's stopping you? SUSIE

Mom. Says I over-water.

JEAN

You do. You're making a garden not a swimming pool.

SUSIE

Listen to you, practically sisters.

DONNA

When did they say you'd hear about the house?

JEAN

Weeks maybe. Who knows.

IDA

No one's efficient like you.

SUSIE

That's right. If Ida was running it, they'd be plopping out houses like cow pies.

JEAN

You're own home.

DONNA

Your own name on a deed.

JEAN

Your own cockroaches and rats. How many girls you think you'll adopt?

SUSIE

The whole point is for peace and quiet---It will be me and me alone.

IDA

She'll have a new outta-state-er on the couch every night.

JEAN

I will not—

IDA

---you're a big softy. Any girl that comes up to you with a bug bite's gunna end up on your couch.

JEAN

You all keep pushin' me and just you see what happens.

IDA

SUSIE
I've seen it...And I heard you made a man cry last week.

IDA
Oh, I did not.

JEAN
Probably scared him to death. Never had a *woman* over him before.

SUSIE
Or under him for that matter.

DONNA
Susan Page.

SUSIE
Lighten up, Donna. You haven't changed a bit.

JEAN
Who was it? Who cried?

SUSIE
Hank.

JEAN
Did you! Did you really!?

IDA
Oh, he had it coming.

JEAN
Yes!

SUSIE
I knew it! Mr. Puchenelli never lies.

DONNA
Mr. Puchenelli?

SUSIE
My supervisor. He's Italian.

DONNA
Puchenelli's *Italian*. You don't say.

SUSIE

Yep. He takes good care of me. He knows my stations too far from the bathroom, so whenever he sees me drinking he says,--

JEAN

(in a fake Italian accent)

--"No. No. Susan, do not go to the bathroom."

SUSIE feigns annoyance and gives
JEAN a shove. They laugh together.

IDA

Did you two read the paper this morning?

SUSIE

Not yet.

JEAN

Why?

IDA

Rome was bombed yesterday...

SUSIE

Who did it?

DONNA

Us. Or Allies anyway.

JEAN

They bombed Rome?

SUSIE

Guess it had to happen sometime. Mussolini's been—

JEAN

--But *Rome*....

SUSIE

It's controlled by Hitler.

JEAN

Not the *Holy City*. It's supposed to be neutral.

SUSIE

Just the Vatican is neutral.

JEAN
(overlapping)

Did they hit the Vatican?!

SUSIE looks at JEAN, finally
understanding.

DONNA
They dropped pamphlets before. Saying they were not aiming for monuments.

Silence. JEAN hits the table and stands
up.

JEAN
Is nothing sacred anymore?!

DONNA
Rome isn't *free*. Without our involvement--

JEAN
---it was safe.

DONNA
Not for the people—who knows---

JEAN
---but the art, the monuments, the history, the--

IDA
--people. We don't know how many civilians could've been hit. (to SUSIE) And
I'm not sure, but I think Mr. Puchenelli had—

SUSIE
---family. (Pause) I never asked him---I should go talk to him.

SUSIE gets up to go.

SUSIE
I'm sorry, Jean. I'm sure they didn't hit anything....precious.

JEAN nods. SUSIE exits.

JEAN
I don't want to believe it.

DONNA

I guess it's harder for you....since you're Catholic.

JEAN nods.

JEAN

It's more than that--- I'm an artist. Or I wanna be. I've always dreamed of going to Rome...the Sistine Chapel--The Sistine Chapel! What if something's happened to it? What if Rome isn't Rome anymore?

DONNA

It's survived many wars before.

JEAN

There's never been a war like this one.

IDA

There's still beauty after war.

Silence.

DONNA

And love.

JEAN scoffs.

DONNA

There is... don't shut it out.

JEAN

I'm not.

DONNA

No? Then who have you let in?

JEAN

Susie. You two...Mamma Page.

IDA

And any one else?

JEAN

No.

DONNA

No?...No...men at all?

No. JEAN

Well...alright, but I was just curious....what did you think of Jake? DONNA

...He's nice. JEAN

That all? IDA

Of course. JEAN

Because when Susie said... DONNA

...There's nothing. JEAN

I knew it! DONNA

Stop. JEAN

Come on tell us...does he feel the same? DONNA

I don't feel anything. JEAN

Oh, you're squirming like a worm. What happened? IDA

Nothing....it's just letters. JEAN

What! DONNA & IDA

He just asked if he could...write me. JEAN

DONNA

It's better than radio romances! Tell us everything. Does Susie know?

JEAN

No! And I *can't* tell her. And there's nothing to tell.

They give JEAN a look.

JEAN

There isn't. He was here. Now he's not. He wants to write me. Whatever that means. Besides, I pity the girl who has to get past Susie.

DONNA

It may be an easier...for some.

JEAN

I'm not interested. It's not worth it.

IDA

Don't be silly.

JEAN

There's no point.

DONNA

Really knowing someone---having them really know you--

JEAN

--and then he's dead.

DONNA

It's worth the risk.

IDA agrees.

JEAN

I can't go through it again. I can't care about Jake because...

IDA

So it's better not to love anyone?

JEAN

Isn't that what you've done?

IDA

I did. And I regret it.

JEAN
He's not interested in me anyway.

DONNA
He asked to write you.

IDA
Don't underestimate your charms, Jean-girl.

JEAN
I have no charms—I'm from Iowa.

IDA
There's nothing wrong with that...You'll see.

Lunch bell sounds.

They start to pack up their belongings to leave.

DONNA
Susie said he liked you....and he *is* handsome.

JEAN
It's good to have you back.

DONNA
It's good to be back.

DONNA exits.

IDA
Take it from me, honey. If it finds you...it's worth keeping—and this Jake....sounds like a keeper.

IDA exits.

JEAN sits alone. She pulls a letter, from Jake. She starts to read.

There is an explosion off stage.

JEAN stands and looks toward the door.
IDA enters.

What happened! JEAN

Looks like it's in the West Block-- IDA

IDA tries to grab JEAN's arm. JEAN
pulls away.

--No! JEAN

What? IDA

Susie's in the West Block! JEAN

JEAN and IDA run out.

A FALL: SEPTEMBER 29th, 1944

RADIO plays from July 1943 to
September 1944 and then...

RADIO

September the 23rd, 1944. World News Today, brought to you by Admiral Corporation in behalf of Admiral Distributors and dealers all over America and in many foreign lands by short wave broadcast direct from important overseas stations and leading news centers in our own country. BBC's Robert Roberson reporting, "The position of the hard-pressed airborne troops at Arnhem is still not clear. Correspondence with the forces at Arnhem reports that they are fighting on magnificently although they are short of ammunition and water and some have had no food for several days. War correspondent Alan Wood writes if in the years to come, any man says to you 'I fought at Arnhem,' take off your hat to him, and buy him a drink."

RADIO plays music.

INTERCOM

Evelyn Andrews to the front office, please. Evelyn Andrews to the front office.

DONNA enters carrying bags. She puts them down. She takes a banner out of one of the bags. She hears the song on the radio and turns it up. She gets a chair and pulls it over to the back wall. She hangs up a banner---"Happy Birthday Jean."

The lunch bell rings.

DONNA puts the chair back.

SUSIE enters. She is wearing the same uniform as before, but it is buttoned all the way up. Carefully, and with great pride she's holding an apple pie.

DONNA

No!

SUSIE

Yep.

...stable? DONNA

Yeah. SUSIE

I know. DONNA

SUSIE puts a letter by RADIO.

What's that? DONNA

Letter for Jean. She's been getting a lot of letters—from Jake. SUSIE

Really? DONNA

Yep, one a day at least. SUSIE

How do you feel about that? DONNA

DONNA turns off RADIO.

It's wonderful...of course. SUSIE

If you can't tell the truth in here...where can you? DONNA

Of course I'm happy for them, but... SUSIE

But... DONNA

And they really are perfect for each other. SUSIE

But... DONNA

SUSIE

I hate it. I think I got one letter from him last month and it was all about Jean.

DONNA

You'll always be his sister. Nothing will change that.

SUSIE

It already has. And it's not just him. Everyone prefers her. I can't stand to be seen in public with her anymore—who would look at me when...

DONNA

You're beautiful.

SUSIE

Oh, sure.

SUSIE pulls down the collar of her uniform. Her neck is covered in burn scars.

DONNA

They're getting better.

SUSIE

Not to anyone else. Jake hasn't seen me yet.

DONNA

No one who loves you thinks any differently of you. You're still our crazy Susie.

SUSIE

Just a little rougher round the edges....that's what I told Jake.

DONNA

You're a miracle---Where on earth did you get apples? Neighbor have a tree? I know they don't or Ida would have climbed it by now.

SUSIE

I'm not telling--Can you come over tonight? You haven't been over in ages.

DONNA

Not tonight.

SUSIE

You've got three people to watch Davy now that Eddie's back—or bring everybody along. We'd love to see them. As long as I don't scare Davy.

DONNA

Will you stop it. Davy will never be afraid of his Aunt Susie—you've made all of us proud, don't you think on it a second.

SUSIE

You haven't seen me in a bathing suit—

DONNA

You haven't seen me—I'm still clinging to baby fat.

SUSIE gives DONNA a look.

DONNA

You're beautiful.

SUSIE

Can't take one night away from love making with Eddie? He's been back a month—surely you need to give yourself a break--

DONNA

--Susie.

SUSIE

You're married. Can't we talk about---

DONNA

No.

SUSIE

Old fuddy duddy.

DONNA

I can't come tonight.

SUSIE

You've waited long enough for him. I wouldn't give him up either.

JEAN enters.

SUSIE

Jean!

DONNA

Happy Birthday!

SUSIE turns on RADIO

JEAN
(Noticing the banner) What have you done? (Pause. She sees the pie.) No! (Looks at SUSIE) You didn't...

JEAN goes over to look at the pie.

Apple pie?
JEAN

Apple pie....your favorite.
SUSIE

How'd you...where'd you get apples?
JEAN

My secret.
SUSIE

It's beautiful. It's just...the most beautiful thing—it smells good!--An apple pie!
JEAN

JEAN hugs SUSIE.

Happy Birthday, Jeanie.
SUSIE

How'd you ever?
JEAN

Stop asking. I won't tell ya.
SUSIE

Our Susie's magic.
DONNA

A bicycle bell rings off stage. The girls look towards the noise. The bell rings again. The girls follow the noise towards the door. IDA enters with a beautiful red bike.

Ida. What did you do?
JEAN

Happy Birthday, Jean-girl.
IDA

JEAN
I can't believe it...but...how'd you?

IDA
Female ingenuity. Got it at a pawnshop a month ago. Barely outta the scrap pile.

DONNA
A pawnshop?

IDA
Nothin' a coat of *cranberry* paint and some elbow grease didn't fix--Try her out.

JEAN stares at the bike.

SUSIE
Come on, try it, Sunny Jean.

Silence.

JEAN
It's so beautiful.

They all move closer to the bike.

SUSIE
And look.

JEAN
What?

SUSIE
(Unable to contain her excitement, she whispers)
It's got a bell!

SUSIE rings the bell.

IDA
Want to ride?

JEAN nods. JEAN pedals a few times,
the girls applaud.

JEAN
It's the most beautiful bike in the world!

It sure is. SUSIE

You should all ride it. JEAN

Let's take it on the boardwalk after work. DONNA

Thought you had to get home. SUSIE

I can take a minute. DONNA

A bike. The beach...And a PIE! I'm the luckiest girl in-- JEAN

--A pie? IDA

IDA steps over to the table.

No...an apple pie? IDA

Apple pie. SUSIE

Where'd you get apples? IDA

Female ingenuity. SUSIE
(teasing IDA)

You're all a bunch of magicians. JEAN

Well. Mine's a little more traditional, but I hope you still like it. DONNA

DONNA turns off RADIO and hands
JEAN a present.

IDA

What beautiful paper.

I don't want to tear it.

Rip it open! It's the best part.

What did you do?...Is it really?

Open it.

Donna.

An artist's got to have her tools.

It's perfect.....it's all too perfect. I don't know what to say.

Then paint it.

Let's try the pie.

Yes--You got a knife?

JEAN

SUSIE

JEAN pulls at the corner and unwraps the present slowly. The paper falls away to reveal a beautiful wooden box.

JEAN

DONNA

JEAN opens it. It is a paint box.

JEAN

DONNA

JEAN takes out one of the brushes and lightly touches the tip with her finger. She touches the brush to her cheek.

JEAN

DONNA

Silence.

JEAN smiles.

SUSIE

IDA

SUSIE

Mother of Pearl. I knew I was forgetting something.

IDA pulls a knife out of her pocket.

Got a napkin?

IDA

SUSIE shakes her head.

My hanky. It's fresh.

JEAN

JEAN hands IDA a handkerchief. IDA
wipes her knife and hands it to SUSIE.
SUSIE starts to cut the pie.

Is there any sense in asking if you brought plates?

IDA

I did. I did. They're in the bag, by Radio.

SUSIE

IDA gets the plates.

Tell us the secret.

DONNA

Won't do it.

SUSIE

Buy 'em on the black market?

JEAN

They laugh.

SUSIE puts pie slices on plates and
passes them around. DONNA passes
out forks.

Looks like apple pie to me.

IDA

Fillin's perfect.

DONNA

Design's beautiful.

JEAN

SUSIE
My life's crowning achievement....ready?

They all look at their pie and hold up
their forks. They all nod.

ALL
1...2...3.

They all take a bite of the pie. They talk
with their mouths full.

JEAN
This is delicious.

DONNA
Best pie I ever had.

They all agree.

SUSIE
Not bad, if I do say so myself.

JEAN
Not bad! It's brilliant!

IDA
Apple pie.

JEAN
That *tastes* like apple pie. Not like Momma's molasses cake. It is *not* cake.

DONNA
Wish we had some milk.

SUSIE
I thought of everything.

SUSIE pulls out a bottle of milk and one
cup.

SUSIE
Can we share the cup? Momma wouldn't let me take anymore.

IDA
Sure. Fill her up.

Let's have a toast.

DONNA

DONNA takes the cup of milk.

To female ingenuity!

DONNA

They all agree and then drink and pass the cup of milk around.

I can't believe you found apples.

JEAN

I can't believe you *made* a bike...Did everyone have enough pie?—I have one more thing for Jeanie.

SUSIE

Well, go ahead.

IDA

You ready?

SUSIE

I guess so.

JEAN

SUSIE gets the letter and gives it to JEAN.
JEAN opens the letter and reads the first line and then puts it down on the table.

I can't. I can't.

JEAN

Regina Dreckman, You read that letter or I'll read it to you.

SUSIE

Give her a minute.

IDA

JEAN opens the letter again and starts to read.

Read it! Read it!

SUSIE

JEAN shakes her head "no."

What does it say?
IDA

He---
JEAN

What!
IDA

He wants to marry me!
JEAN

SUSIE wraps her arms around JEAN.
IDA stands, unable to control herself.
DONNA stares at the paper in JEAN's
hand.

What does he say?
IDA

I'll just read the last bit... *I am forced by my heart to utter the most frightening words
I've ever written....*
JEAN

You better keep reading.
IDA

DONNA is in a world of her own,
remote and strange.

*I love you. If only you could see my face and hear my heart, pounding as I write this,
you'd know those words are not enough...*
JEAN

DONNA stares off, unable to look at
JEAN.

*...would you consider taking me as your husband? I love you, my darling. Let me be
yours.*
JEAN

DONNA tries to pull herself together.

What's the postscript?

IDA

JEAN

*Ps.
Sis has a gift for you. I got it in the Philippines. Funny enough it was made in Mexico,
but it's found its home with you, as I hope to soon. I love you.*

JEAN looks at SUSIE in shock.

You knew?!

JEAN

Of course I knew.

SUSIE

SUSIE gets down on one knee like she's proposing to JEAN. JEAN stares back at the box.

Wait a minute.

JEAN

What's wrong?

SUSIE

I don't know if I can do this.

JEAN

Are you batty? It's Jake we're talking about.

SUSIE

He isn't back yet. If I put that ring on my finger and he doesn't...AND he doesn't even know me....

JEAN

You've been writing him over a year.

SUSIE

Just letters. I haven't seen him since...

JEAN

This is ridiculous. You've been...khaki wacky...since you met this boy—

IDA

SUSIE laughs at IDA's slang.

But marriage is— JEAN

Do you love him? IDA

Yes. JEAN

Do you know he loves you? IDA

Yes. JEAN

You think you could tolerate being around him day in, day out, for another forty years or so? IDA

Definitely. JEAN

Then marry the man! IDA

But... JEAN

But what. IDA

How do you feel about it—really? JEAN
(to SUSIE)

Now isn't the— SUSIE

--I can't open this box unless you tell me how you feel about it. JEAN
Silence.

I think, it might be strange...for a while...but honestly---I'd be crazy not to---the truth is, I can't wait for you to be my real sister— SUSIE

Honest? JEAN

Honest. SUSIE

What's the answer then!? IDA

Yes! Of course, yes! JEAN

Open the box, open the box! SUSIE

JEAN opens the box and sees the ring.
The girls all react. DONNA tries to hold
herself together.

It's stunning. IDA

Here, let me put it on you. SUSIE

May I put it on? DONNA

Silence.

DONNA looks up at SUSIE for
permission. SUSIE nods. JEAN holds
out the box to DONNA. DONNA takes
the ring out and looks at it.

It's beautiful. DONNA

DONNA puts the ring on JEAN's finger.

May you always be happy-- DONNA

DONNA loses her composure.

Donnie! JEAN

IDA and SUSIE come around her to comfort her.

DONNA
I'm sorry, I'm so sorry.

JEAN
Don't be sorry.

DONNA
It's your day. I shouldn't--

JEAN
I can't be happy unless we all are, come on, lovely. What's wrong?

DONNA can't bring herself to say it.

IDA
Eddie?

DONNA nods.

JEAN
He's safe. He's been home safe for weeks.

DONNA shakes her head.

SUSIE
No?

DONNA
He's home but... He doesn't look at me. He doesn't touch me. He doesn't hold Davy. He wanders around the house like a stranger. He won't eat anything...

IDA
...He needs time.

DONNA
But I've always been able to fix it—before.

IDA
You can't put that on yourself. He's been though--

DONNA
Hell! I can see it. I can see it all over him. I'd rather he come home wounded.

SUSIE

Don't say such a thing.

DONNA

I can change a dressing on a wound. I can't fix this. It's taken everything, but his life. And maybe I wish it did.

IDA

Now you listen to me. You take that back. You take that back right this second.

SUSIE

Let her say her peace.

JEAN

No. You have no idea what it feels like when they don't come back—we do.

IDA

This earth's lost more men than we could spare. We need every single one of them that's left...He needs more time. It's up to you to do the fighting now.

JEAN

...and pay a little respect to those who didn't get the chance to.

SUSIE
(to IDA)

How did you survive it?

IDA

I didn't--I became someone else...one day at a time.

Silence.

JEAN

I'm sorry. I shouldn't have—

DONNA

No. I need to remember. And be grateful.

JEAN

Can we help? Take Davy once in a while.

SUSIE

Get you a drink?

DONNA

He just needs more time.

JEAN
And to be around people. Livin' with the Page's is the only way I made it through.

SUSIE
And I'm counting on all of you if something ever happens to...

SUSIE turns on RADIO.

JEAN
You won't be alone.

Silence.

IDA
I love this song.

SUSIE
'course, it's old.

IDA
Well then turn it up, I can't hear it.

SUSIE turns up RADIO.

SUSIE
Would Eddie like some pie?

DONNA
Maybe I can get the recipe?

SUSIE
Not on your life.

The lunch bell rings.

DONNA
Jean...

JEAN
Yea?

DONNA
You're engaged.

JEAN
Oh my gosh!

Your engaged! – to my brother!

SUSIE

I can't believe it!

JEAN

Congratulations.

IDA

I wish I could tell Papa.

JEAN

He knows—and I'm sure he's very proud.

IDA

I'll help you clean up.

JEAN

Susie and I'll do it. Go on you two. We'll see you after.

IDA

DONNA and JEAN put everything in the bike's basket and walk the bike off stage.

SUSIE and IDA start cleaning.

What a party.

SUSIE

I need to talk to you about something.

IDA

What'd I do now?

SUSIE

Nothing. (Beat) Well, I'm sure something, but nothing I'm planning on scolding you for right now. (Pause) I needed to tell you something that I don't want you to hear from anyone else.

IDA

Is it your house?

SUSIE

No. I've given up on that one.

IDA

You can't give up---

SUSIE

--It's not that.

IDA

SUSIE looks at IDA.

IDA

I need you to know how proud I am of you. You're the only girl who came back after the accident—the rest were all too spooked, but you faced it. You've thrown yourself even harder into your work. And you've worn your...

SUSIE

Scars—

IDA

...You're truly something. No one has worked harder or loved this life more than you have.

SUSIE

I can't imagine doing anything else. Hal and I get along just great.

IDA

Hal?

SUSIE

My welder.

IDA

You named your machine—oh, of course you did--

SUSIE

--if you're gonna spend ten hours a day with someone you better get to know them by their first name.

IDA

Listen. You love this job, and it's also taken so much from you.

SUSIE

It's not so bad.

IDA gives SUSIE a look.

IDA

It was a long recovery—for a girl who never sits still for ten minutes.

SUSIE

Why the speech Ida?—you're a woman of few words until you're giving the Gettysburg Address.

IDA

You won't be able to be a weld much longer—you might should consider other options for your future...away from Hal...We've told us to reduce production by 60%--by March.

SUSIE

I don't understand.

IDA

This couldn't last forever.

SUSIE

But it's got to.

IDA

You're good at other things than welding.

SUSIE

Like what?

IDA

You're dramatic. Be an actress. That's a good quality...*there*.

SUSIE's not amused.

SUSIE

We should fight this. Get them to make refrigerators or something.

IDA

You want to weld refrigerators?

SUSIE

I'll weld anything. But I don't have to weld. I'll tack. I'll rivet. – I have to stay here—where else will hire me? I'm plenty able to work—but no one will test me out if I look like this—

IDA

That's not true.

SUSIE

And what about you? You get to stay don't you?

IDA

They're not sure.

SUSIE

But you're the best. What about the letter? —that recommendation letter Mr. Ellis wrote for you...for the bank. He said you're best man they've got.

IDA

Somebody from the front lines is gonna be better.

SUSIE

I can't—this is--

IDA

I know--That's why I wanted you to hear it from me.

SUSIE

We'll fight it, won't we? Or we'll find jobs—we'll--

IDA

It won't work. You want Jake to be able to have a job when he gets home don't you?

SUSIE

Jake's going back to school with the G.I. Bill, he doesn't need to weld...I need my job more than he does.

IDA

It's their time now...

SUSIE

Then what are we supposed to do?

IDA
(teasing)

Marry them.

SUSIE

No one will want to marry me like this. And even if they did—I love this job--- I'll petition....I'll write to the president.

IDA

People lose their jobs every day. Ten years ago no one had a job.

SUSIE

Then FDR created them.

IDA

Honey...It's no use

SUSIE

No...I won't. It'll just take some female ingenuity.

SUSIE exits and IDA follows.

THE LAST SPRING: April 12th, 1945

RADIO plays from September 1944 to April 1945 and then...

RADIO

April 12th, 1945. On the American drama theater with the Western Family and Daniel Boone in the exciting days following the American Revolution—We interrupt this program to bring you a special news bulletin from CBS World News. A press association has just announced that President Roosevelt is dead. The President died of a cerebral hemorrhage. All we know so far is that the President died in Warm Springs in Georgia---

RADIO goes to static.

Lunch bell rings.

IDA enters, hears the static and hits RADIO. RADIO goes to music.

IDA is holding the deed to her new house. She tries to place the deed in a few different places so that the girls happen upon it. A man's voice is heard outside.

MALE VOICE

Ida—Ida.

IDA jumps and exits. She comes back in holding four envelopes. She sits down. She puts the deed to her house on the table. She opens and reads her letter. It is her termination paper. She looks at the deed.

DONNA enters. She's beaming. IDA hears her and slips all the papers into her lap.

IDA

Well don't you look nice?

DONNA

I've got to tell you something or I'll bust.

DONNA turns off RADIO.

IDA

Well sit then.

DONNA

I'm so glad to catch you alone.

IDA

Tell me. I can't take it.

DONNA leans in close.

DONNA

Eddie and I made love last night.

IDA

Oh, honey!

DONNA

It was wonderful. Just like we used to be.

IDA

How'd it happen?

DONNA

I can't tell you that.

IDA

You better.

DONNA

It's too intimate.

IDA

But what happened. There was no change yesterday and today you're glowing like a firefly.

DONNA

It had been getting a little better for a while, so yesterday Eddie decided to look for work—he found a job in an hour. He came home whistlin' like I don't even know what! I hadn't heard him like that in years. And when he got home he played with Davy for hours. It was as if he woke up and had something to live for.

And... IDA

And...Later that night, we sat by the radio—late when everyone else was asleep... DONNA

Yes... IDA

Oh, Idie. It was wonderful. We were sitting by the fire, and he looked at me. Kept looking at me. Kept looking at me till I blushed. Then he leaned in and... it was as if we were sixteen again---as if he couldn't remember how to do it. Like he was figurin' it all out. DONNA

So what did you do? IDA

...I jogged his memory. DONNA

What!...In the living room?! IDA

I know! DONNA

Right on the rug! IDA

In front of the fire! DONNA

I can't believe you. IDA

I know! My parents coulda walked in any minute...I didn't care. DONNA

And what happened after? IDA

After? DONNA

How was his mood? Were you able to talk things out. IDA

DONNA

We talked till dawn. Everything broke down. It was like our first date all over again.

IDA

I should say not.

DONNA

Well—the feelings of it all...but somehow new--better even than it used to be. We're not love sick kids anymore. Now we're choosing each other for the right reasons—real reasons.

IDA

How was it this morning?

DONNA

Oh. I can't tell you that.

IDA

I meant his attitude...this morning?

DONNA nods and then buries her head in her hands.

IDA

My goodness, girl.

DONNA

I know. I don't know what's happened to me.

IDA

Your husband's back.

DONNA

I missed him so much.

IDA hugs DONNA.

IDA

I know you did.

The papers fall off IDA's lap. DONNA spots them first. The deed is on top.

DONNA

You dropped your—Is this what I think it is?

DONNA picks up the deed, but leaves the rest.

DONNA

No! You didn't--

SUSIE and JEAN enter.

IDA hides the termination papers.

IDA

--Where have you two been?--

DONNA

--Who cares! Why didn't you tell us?

JEAN

What?

IDA

I didn't want to get anyone's hopes up until it was final.

SUSIE

What are we talking about?

DONNA

Can I tell them?

IDA nods. DONNA lays the deed out on the table. SUSIE and JEAN study it for a second and then gasp and look at IDA.

JEAN

Why didn't you tell us!

SUSIE

How could you not tell us! YOU GOT A HOUSE!!!

SUSIE hugs IDA.

IDA

Like, I said. It wasn't final.

SUSIE

Read the address! Read the address!

DONNA
2303 27th St. Santa Monica, California.

SUSIE
Beautiful!

JEAN
Let me see!---Right there "Ida Jensen" You're name's on a deed!

SUSIE
A real deed!

IDA can't help, but get excited again
about the house.

IDA
It is, isn't it?

DONNA
You have a house. Your own house.

JEAN
When can you move in?

SUSIE
I'll help.

DONNA
We'll all help.

IDA looks at all of them smiling back at
her.

SUSIE
We should celebrate!

DONNA
When do you move in?

IDA
First of the month.

DONNA
Less than two weeks.

JEAN
Can I help you paint it? Does it need paint?

From you...it'll always need paint. IDA

Any use for a welder? SUSIE

SUSIE turns on RADIO.

There'll always be use for a welder. IDA

IDA goes silent. RADIO goes static.

This old thing. SUSIE

SUSIE fiddles with the dials. The perfect song comes on.

Stop. There. That's perfect. JEAN

Silence. IDA stares at the termination papers in her lap.

Ida? SUSIE

IDA looks at SUSIE.

I have to tell you all something. IDA

IDA takes SUSIE's hand and looks at the rest of them. They all look back at her in concern. IDA tries to find the words. She can't and so she hands them the envelopes.

Silence.

Effective immediately! SUSIE

We've been laid off. IDA

SUSIE
--Immediately?!

IDA
You're supposed to check out as soon as I hand you the paperwork—but--

DONNA
This is our last lunch together?

SUSIE
We don't even get to go back to work after lunch? Finish the day?

IDA shakes her head.

SUSIE
I want to weld. They can't...I need to say goodbye.

DONNA
No more rivets.

JEAN
You said *we've*. We as in...

IDA nods.

JEAN
-They can't do that!
- They can't run this place
without you.

SUSIE
-You're the best man they've got!
-Who do they think they are?

DONNA
You're an essential part of—

IDA
Not essential enough. They've found my replacement.

Pause.

JEAN
Who?

SUSIE
Do you? Can you know who...

IDA looks at DONNA. DONNA is
confused and then understands.

No. DONNA

IDA nods.

But. DONNA

What? SUSIE

Eddie. DONNA

IDA
He was a supervisor of mechanical process in the Navy. He's very qualified. I start training him—

DONNA
Monday. Oh Ida, I didn't know—

IDA
I know you didn't—and Eddie doesn't either.

DONNA
What about the house?

JEAN and SUSIE realize what no job means for IDA.

IDA
I think I'll sell it. The market's still hot.

SUSIE
No.

JEAN
This is awful. I mean no offense to Eddie, but they can't keep good workers from working.

DONNA
No, they can't!...I know—I didn't think we belonged here but we do! And I know this job means the world to him. But, it means the world to me....we can't just walk out that door—can you please turn that radio off!

I want it on!

SUSIE

JEAN turns RADIO down low.

JEAN
Not today. If you two ever needed to be on the same side, it's today.

DONNA
I'm sorry.

SUSIE
Me too.

JEAN
Anywhere else hiring?

IDA
Not women.

JEAN
Where we supposed to look for work?

DONNA
What were you before?

SUSIE
A child.

IDA
You still are—you have your whole life ahead of you.

SUSIE
People always say that, but it never feels true.

IDA
It is true. Room for a lot of reinvention. It'll just take a little female—

ALL
Ingenuity.

IDA
It's important for them to have jobs. It's helped Eddie already...And if your father was here, he would--

JEAN
---don't use Papa. He was proud of me for goin'. He'd hate to see me lose it.

DONNA
Leaving your job would've meant coming home to him.

JEAN
Well, I'm not, 'cause he didn't come home to me.

Silence.

DONNA
Maybe it's for the best. I can spend more time with Davy, and now that Eddie and I are better--

SUSIE
You two make up?

DONNA and looks at IDA.

JEAN
Did you talk things out?

DONNA
In a way...

SUSIE
Wait a second...

JEAN
Oh. I see...

SUSIE
(Shaking DONNA's hand)
Congratulations!

JEAN
(Shaking DONNA's hand)
We knew you could do it!

IDA
Oh. Come now. Leave the girl alone.

SUSIE
It's a big deal. He's been home for months without a--

JEAN

--How was it?

IDA
Regina Dreckman. You don't ask questions like that.

SUSIE
Sure we do! Give all the details.

DONNA
It was wonderful.

JEAN and SUSIE celebrate.

JEAN
Is he all better then?

IDA
It'll still take a while.

SUSIE
But you feel better?

DONNA
Yes.

JEAN and SUSIE dance together, arm in arm, singing.

The factory noise goes off. Only RADIO remains.

JEAN and SUSIE stop dancing. They look out towards the factory. IDA and DONNA stand up and look out the door.

DONNA
What's happening?

DONNA turns off RADIO.

IDA
They've stopped production.

Complete silence.

It's too quiet.

SUSIE

SUSIE goes to turn on RADIO.

Leave it. Please.

DONNA

This isn't fair.

JEAN

It couldn't go on forever.

DONNA

What are we supposed to do?

SUSIE

Put one foot in front of the other.

IDA

They are unable to go.

We can't leave.

SUSIE

This couldn't have gone on forever. No friends stay together in one place their whole lives.

IDA

Yes they do. Everyone in Iowa's been friends for generations.

JEAN

Well, it just doesn't happen in the west. We're all a bunch of drifters.

IDA

But you wanted a house so you wouldn't have to any more.

DONNA

Well, life had other plans.

IDA

Silence.

They can't make us. We're staying right here.

SUSIE

SUSIE sits. JEAN joins her.

DONNA

I'm not walking out that door until I'm good and ready.

DONNA sits.

IDA

It's over. You have to--

SUSIE

--No.

SUSIE stands and starts unbuttoning the top of her uniform. She pulls her arm out of her sleeve.

SUSIE

I have earned the right to work here until I am damn well ready to leave. If you take this away from me. I'm nothing.

IDA

No you're not.

SUSIE puts her arm back into her sleeve.

SUSIE

I'm a scarred girl who looks like she may have been pretty once—

DONNA

The scars will soften.

SUSIE

I won't. I can't go back to dresses, stockings, and girdles. I need to be useful and—

IDA

We are always useful.

JEAN

That's not what the posters said.

IDA

Posters?

JEAN

They were all over the place. "Turns out you gals are useful after all!"

DONNA
Damn posters...Well they are. They're wrong. Damn wrong.

SUSIE
I can't stop.

IDA
At the end of the day...it was just a job.

JEAN
You know that's not true.

IDA
We're the ones that matter. And we will still have each other.

JEAN
You say friendships never stay.

IDA
Nothing ever stays. But today isn't goodbye.

DONNA
What are they doing with the plant?

IDA
Passenger aircraft. You can fly to Rome—in less than two days.

JEAN
Rome.

IDA
The world's got it's whole life ahead of it.

JEAN
It's a new world. We're going to be a part of it.

SUSIE
Jake's not home yet.

IDA
He will be soon.

IDA starts picking up, taking some of the articles left behind that have turned the room into a home.

No. Not yet.

SUSIE

What are we staying for?

IDA

It's okay to be sad, Idie. You don't have to drift so quickly. Sit in it a while.

JEAN

IDA looks up and looks into each of their faces. She sits, she doesn't know what to do.

IDA

I'm so sorry girls, I've done everything I can.

JEAN

You've done plenty—this isn't your fault.

IDA

I don't want to leave either.

SUSIE

We know you don't.

IDA

This is where we belong.

SUSIE

We've got to do something---A ritual. Something that says...

JEAN

...we were here...I have an idea.

JEAN goes to a corner of the room and pulls the old bucket of red paint and opens it.

JEAN

Been here for ages. 'bout time someone used it.

JEAN grabs a paintbrush and quickly writes "We Were Here" in large dripping red letters on the wall.

Here—

JEAN

JEAN holds out the old can.

Sign it.

JEAN

SUSIE stands and takes the can from JEAN. SUSIE dips her fingers in the can of paint signs her initials under "We Were Here." DONNA and IDA stand up, they do the same. JEAN takes the can back and signs her initials. They finish, looking at the wall and then at each other. Their hands are covered in paint, SUSIE puts hers in DONNA's.

Blood sisters.

SUSIE

We were here.

IDA

The lunch bell rings.

We gunna listen to it?

IDA

It's time to go.

DONNA

They gather their things and prepare themselves to leave.

Wait...Susie. How'd you make that apple pie?

DONNA

A world without apples and sugar, but you made an apple pie.

IDA

...they weren't apples.

SUSIE

What?

DONNA

No apples?—in the apple pie?

JEAN

Nope. Soda crackers.

SUSIE

Soda crackers?

IDA

With lemon juice and cinnamon.

SUSIE

Saltines...It was the best apple pie I ever ate. Female ingenuity.

DONNA

One by one, they exit.

DONNA pauses by the door to take one final look and then exits.

The stage remains empty in silent protest.

END OF PLAY