And Justice for Some
EXPLORING AMERICAN JUSTICE THROUGH DRAMA AND THEATRE

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Voicings: The Story of the Rosenberg Case

Based on Oral Histories of Radical Women of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s and Their Daughters

By Wendy Lement with contributions by Kristy Kanhai, Tammy King, Meghan Lee, Naomi Letendre, Ruth-Anne Macauley, Christine Proulx, Kristen Sargent, and Valentina Walczak

Characters

Voicings premiered in 1998 at Regis College with the following cast:

LAURA ROSS ..................................................Meghan Buckley
MARY BETH/ANNOUNCER/PIANIST ..........................Jessica Clancy
ANN TIMPSON/PRINCIPAL .................................Kali Walker
JOAN SOKOLOFF ............................................Catherine Jordan
YOUNG JOAN/ CAROL* ....................................Kaitlin Varoski
KIM .................................................................Jeanne Fischetti
YOUNG KIM ........................................................Julie Blank
YUMIKO KASHU .................................................Yumiko Mochizuki
JUDITH WOODRIFF ..........................................Kristen Pulsifer
YOUNG JUDITH WOODRIFF .................................Julie Keefe
SARA SUE KORITZ .............................................Anna Perez
JEAN/NORA* ....................................................Catherine Kamp
LUCY RICARDO/ETHEL ROSENBERG ..................Erin Conroy
JULIUS ROSENBERG ..........................................Lawrence Bull
MRS. BELIOT ....................................................Allyson DiGregory
RABBI/KATZINSKY** ........................................Nina Schiarizzi
RICKY RICARDO/SPORTSCASTER .........................Ron Heneghan
FBI AGENT ....................................................David Smailes
ENSEMBLE/DANCER ........................................Christine Proulx
ENSEMBLE/PERCUSSION ....................................Jennifer Savoie

All cast members also play a variety of smaller roles including reporters, various officials, students, and men and women on the street.

The musical score was composed by Peter Stewart. The musical director was Miranda Henry Russell. The choreographer was Mimi Katano. Costumes were designed by Jeff Burrows and Andrew Poleszak.

The set consists of a series of platforms of different sizes and heights. Downstage center is a flat cleared area. Set changes are very minimal, a stool or benches come on and off as needed. Props and costume changes are suggestive. Three large screens hang on which slides are projected. The play begins with a voice collage of the women who were interviewed and a slide collage.

Setting: Boston, New York, and various locations

Date: 1905–1997

*The characters of Nora and Carol are based on the oral history of Sara Sue Koritz.
**The character of Katzinsky is based on an interview with Aaron Katz.

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SCENE ONE: THE 1905 REVOLUTION

Setting: 1997, Boston in a living room of an old lady named Laura Ross. The setting changes as LAURA tells her story of the 1905 Revolution. From the little living room in her Boston apartment, the story moves into a synagogue in a Jewish Ghetto in Russia. The flashback takes place in three separate acting areas, the STUDENTS in one, the synagogue in another, and the SOLDIERS in a third space. When the story brings the STUDENTS and then the SOLDIERS into the synagogue, each group reacts as if they were in the same space, but physically they remain in their own distinct area.

LAURA: (Laura is sitting in a rocker swaying back and forth as she tells her story.) It’s a long, long struggle for us to maintain the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. We have to learn our history. Not just the history fed to us by people who are trying to take it away, for expansionist purposes, for big profits. We have as much right in this world as anybody else. Right? We’re in the struggle. It’s not done for. We are in a situation where you need to know what side you’re on. Like that song. We want a world where we all have chance. Right? And our families, and the people who come from other countries. You have to resurrect all the people who . . . that were pawned through the centuries. You know. (The company quietly sings “Hine Ma Tov,” a Jewish prayer, as they enter with benches and set up the synagogue.) My mother and father came from Velnagambania, they lived in a Jewish Ghetto. My first husband’s grandmother and her husband were the keepers of the synagogue. What they would call the janitors, or the . . . I don’t know what you would call them. (Laura gets up and becomes one of the members of the synagogue and sits on the bench, and holds her grandmother’s hand.) But anyway, one day, during the 1905 Revolution, which was the Russian Scholars against the Czar. This particular day, in the middle of service . . .

WOMAN ONE (LAURA’S GRANDMOTHER): The place was all filled, and people were sitting on benches.

STUDENT ONE: (Students run into their space.) The Czar’s troops raided the University . . .

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STUDENT TWO: Running . . . *(We hear barking off stage.)*

STUDENT THREE. And chased us . . .

STUDENTS ONE & TWO. Running . . .

STUDENT FOUR. Until we came to the synagogue.

STUDENTS ONE, TWO, & THREE. Hearts pounding . . .

WOMAN TWO: The students came right into the synagogue.

ALL STUDENTS: Pounding . . .

WOMAN THREE: And we knew they’d be killed . . .

STUDENT ONE: . . . if we’re caught.

WOMAN FOUR. So . . . we hid them . . . under the benches. *(The students are hid.)*

ALL: We were terrified.

RABBI: But I kept going on with the service. *(Rabbi sings throughout. He stands behind the rest of the members of the synagogue.)*

SOLDIER ONE: *(A commander and two soldiers enter, barking. The commander holds the two soldiers on leashes attached to collars.)* We tracked the students to the next village.

SOLDIER TWO: *(to the Commander)* Hey, they could be in there.

COMMANDER: So I gave the command. *(The soldiers enter. The Commander lets the two soldiers off of their leashes and one breaks to the left, the other to the right as the Commander stands and watches.)*

LAURA: They came right into my grandmother’s synagogue. They were looking for these students.

ALL STUDENTS: *(quietly)* Pounding.

WOMAN ONE: And the place was filled with people.

ALL STUDENTS & WOMEN: *(whispering)* Nobody moved.
SOLDIERS ONE & TWO: (sniffing) As we inspected the place.

ALL STUDENTS & WOMEN: (quietly) Pounding.

WOMAN TWO: And then . . . they left. (All sigh.)

LAURA: And that was the 1905 Revolution. (Laura begins to move from the bench in her husband’s great grandmother’s synagogue to her living room, into her chair.) And the Jews didn’t have a plate to eat in but they were supporting these Russian college students. Isn’t that something? So this goes all the way back. You know, people’s rights or capitalism. Well, they didn’t get any of the students. I hope they lived to the second revolution. They won in 1917. So that was 1905 Revolution. And that was my first husband’s grandmother who sat there. (laughs) It sounds like a crazy tale but we have a lot of family tales. You know. (Laura stands and sings “Which Side Are You On.” The company joins in as the benches are moved for the next scene.)

SCENE TWO: THE STRIKE

The company sits on stage miming a weaving motion to the beat of a drum. The person beating the drum walks throughout the space, representing the foreman. ANN sits in front.

ANN: I was a union organizer for the textile industry. I was nineteen years old and barely making ten dollars a week. We knew that the workers needed to organize in order to improve working conditions and get more pay. I was in Pawtucket, PA and we were organizing a strike at a textile mill. Well, we got all the men outside and there was an excited murmur over the crowd. We were going to stand up against our oppressors. We were going to get more pay. We were going to fight. (chants) We’re going to fight. We’re going to fight. (louder) We’re going to fight.
ALL: (Other actors join in standing one at a time.) We're going to fight. We're going to fight. We're going to fight. (louder). WE'RE GOING TO FIGHT! WE'RE GOING TO FIGHT! WE'RE GOING TO FIGHT! WE'RE GOING TO FIGHT! WE'RE GOING TO FIGHT! WE'RE GOING TO FIGHT! (softer) We're going to fight. We're going to fight. We're going to fight. (very tired, moving down to ground) We're going to fight. We're going to fight. We're going to fight.

ANN: I looked around. The men had all gotten really tired and discouraged. They were almost ready to give up. So I took it upon myself to rally them back up. (She stands on a chair.) Come on men. We're doing good. Remember what we are fighting for. We need more money to feed our families. And we are not animals. The owners of this mill must take notice of us. We need better working conditions. We've gotta fight! (She begins to sing “Solidarity Forever.” The workers join in the chorus as they rise. Ann leads the workers around the stage where they pick up sticks, which they hold as picket signs. The workers march into the final tableau. A priest now stands above and the workers remain frozen through Ann's speech.)

Now during the Lawrence strike while all the mills were shut down, I was sent there to help. The workers in Lawrence, in the Lawrence mills, mostly were Italians and mostly were foreign born that come here for a better life and so forth, and a lot of them, when they were still noncitizens worked in the Lawrence mills. Many Americans, their offspring, many of their sons and their daughters worked in the mills too. Well, there was this Catholic priest. I’m not necessarily picking them out as against any other kind of minister. But during one of the big strikes, this particular priest was urging the workers. He says . . .

PRIEST: (Deflated, the workers sit down one at a time during this speech.) You should be thankful that you have jobs. You’re foreigners you have come here from another country and the employers were good enough to give you jobs. You should be thankful to them for doing this.

ANN: And, uh, and at the same time—oh, and he says, by the way . . .
PRIEST: You should have nothing to do with that woman . . .

ANN: He was speaking about me.

PRIEST: . . . because she is the Red Flame from Hell!

ANN: And that became my nickname.

NEWSPAPER MAN ONE: Red Flame sets Lawrence ablaze!

ANN: Wherever I went, the newspapers picked it up—described me as the Red Flame.

NEWSPAPER MAN TWO: Why do they call you the Red Flame?

ANN: (laughs, to audience) I didn’t have red hair. Well, uh, now I’m kind of gray.

NEWSPAPER MAN THREE: So, it’s not the hair?

ANN: (to the reporter) No. (to the audience) Anyway, the publicity didn’t have the effect that they thought among the workers, because the workers knew that the speeches I made talked about their wages, their working conditions, why the mills were beginning to move south.

NEWSPAPER MAN ONE: Red Flame sets Georgia ablaze!

ANN: (rolls her eyes at the reporter, then continues) Workers from Atlanta appealed to me to come and help them organize, because they were worse off than the northern workers. And cause I was quite good at it. I went to Georgia, one of the worst antilabor states in America, to organize a strike. (company hums “Solidarity Forever” and moves into a strike tableau) Now Georgia had this law that said:

PUBLIC OFFICIAL: Anyone who provokes, through either speech or writing, riots in the streets will be in violation of the antiinsurrection law.

ANN: “Riots” meant even peaceful demonstrations. So, I was arrested. (Two actors become police and pull Ann downright. One actor stands above as the judge, while the workers look on.)

JUDGE: And the punishment for violating the antiinsurrection law is . . . the death penalty.
REPORTER TWO: Red Flame to burn in the electric chair.

ANN: So there I was, eighteen or nineteen years old, and sentenced to death. They kept me in jail for seven weeks. My lawyers fought and argued, and finally forced the court to let me out on bail, even though it was a capital punishment case. So I made bail . . . and went on a national tour. *(Ann sings “The Popular Wobbly” and the workers join in.)* I went around and talked about labor unions and antiinsurrection laws and the working conditions of the textile industry.

SUPREME COURT JUSTICE: Eventually, the case came to the U.S. Supreme Court, and the antiinsurrection law was declared unconstitutional.

ANN: And my conviction was overturned. That is why I am still here today, and why I’m still going to:

ALL: FIGHT! *(Musical reprieve of “The Popular Wobbly” takes us into the next scene.)*

SCENE THREE: THE BOOK

JOAN: When I was a little kid, I went on picket lines with my parents. *(Lights up on actors in a picket line. Young Joan is among them.)* I remember picketing this store called Dutton’s in what we now call the South End and they wouldn’t hire, well then they were called Negroes, they wouldn’t hire Negroes, so we picketed to get them to employ black people, and I remember the people walking by saying . . .

PEOPLE ON THE STREET: Go back to Russia!

JOAN: This had to be 1948, and I remember friends of mine on my street saying . . .

GIRL ONE: I can’t play with you because Negroes go to your house.

JOAN: And when my mother was called before commissions. Her name was in the paper. She was named by the FBI. That was in the paper, too. And I remember kids saying . . .

GIRL TWO: I can’t play with you, your mom’s a Communist.

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JOAN: I remember other kids saying . . .

GIRL THREE: Well, even though your mom’s a Communist, my mom says she’s nice, so I can play with you.

JOAN: I remember feeling that we were doing the right thing. I do remember always feeling her values were right. If I didn’t do something that she wanted me to do, I felt really guilty. Once, on my way to school she said . . .

MOTHER: (Lights up on Young Joan and her mother.) I want you to take this book of Langston Hughes poetry and give it to your teacher. Tell her she should read from this every day during Negro History Month.

YOUNG JOAN: (tentatively) Okay.

JOAN: (to audience) What could I do? It was totally absurd of her to ask me to do this but she was my mother. I couldn’t say, no. (Young Joan and the other actors set up the classroom.) So I got to school and put the book in my desk and thought about it every day. Maybe it wasn’t such a bad idea. (Lighting and sound effects indicate that this is a fantasy.)

YOUNG JOAN: (to the teacher as she enters) Here, Mrs. Jones, I brought this book in for Negro History Month. My mother says you should read from it every day.

MRS. JONES: (taking book) Why, thank you, dear. What a wonderful idea. Children, see what Joan has brought in? Let’s thank her. (children clap) You get an A+ for the year. (The fantasy ends.)

JOAN: (To audience) But the longer I sat there, the more it seemed like the worst idea ever. (Lights and sound signal the second fantasy.)

YOUNG JOAN: (to Mrs. Jones) Here, I brought this book in for Negro History Month. My mother says you should read from it every day.

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MRS. JONES: (backing away) That’s very nice, dear. (to children, pointing at Young Joan) COMMUNIST!

Children, she’s part of a Communist plot! (Children scream and the fantasy ends.)

JOAN: So, I put the book in my desk and it sat there for months. I was scared. One day, I went home and my mother asked . . .

MOTHER: Well, did your teacher read from the book?

YOUNG JOAN: No. I showed it to her. She said she couldn’t do it because . . . she didn’t have enough time.

MOTHER: Hmph!

JOAN: I felt so guilty. I should have done it. Why didn’t I? I was nine years old. I had these very bigoted Boston schoolteachers. There were a number of things of that sort. (Joan’s Mother reads “Freedom 2” from Langston Hughes’ book.)

SCENE FOUR: ACCUSED

KIM: (Piano music from “Strange Fruit” plays under Kim’s monologue. Behind her actors set up a living room, sit and read. Young Kim is among them.) I grew up with lots of books in our house. So, even though the outside world seemed to think the country was on the right track, there were hints that all was not right. My mother had this book with pictures of black children living under the most terrible conditions, sleeping on dirt floors. These people were so...neglected, and when you compared how they were forced to live with people I knew, you couldn’t help but think, well, something has to be done. I mean, there were pictures of black men being lynched. Oh, and that song my mother used to sing, Strange Fruit. (A cast member sings a verse of “Strange Fruit” as Kim listens. The piano continues under the following, as the actors begin stuffing envelopes.) I was surrounded by adults who I felt would do anything to change the world and make it better. And I was allowed to sit in on night meetings when they were
held at our house. There were lots of leaflets and petitions, and I would often join my mother on the
picket line. I remember growing up to believe that you should speak out. It was a very open feeling.

(The actors begin leaving the living room in secrecy, one by one, throughout the following.) My first sense
that things were changing came when my parents told me not to let anyone in the house and not to
talk to strangers. This was very different. Now, I was supposed to learn not to trust anyone, including
my neighbors who were being questioned about my family’s political activities. It was such a shock.

Once a musician named Paul Robeson gave a major concert at the State Park. (voiceover of Robeson’s
opening speech at the concert) Violence broke out, due to Robeson’s presumably Communist beliefs.
(Recording of Robeson singing “Every Time I Feel the Spirit” plays while actors move in a slow motion riot.
They freeze and Kim continues speaking while the music plays low under.) I actually saw the film footage.

The thing was that the police, who were supposedly there to keep order, were allowing the riot to
happen. They just stood by and watched. And my stepfather was there. (Actors move into a bus for-
mation taking on the roles of people in Kim’s story.) He was on a bus that arrived at the concert when
the crowd started throwing stones. The bus driver ducked to avoid the rocks, and my stepfather
grabbed the wheel. I thought that was such a heroic thing to do. One rock hit him in the neck, but he
kept hold of the wheel. Sometimes it’s everyday folks who perform the most remarkable acts of
bravery. This was a very big event in my life. (music ends)

Then, when I was eleven, my stepfather died and a lot of our friends came to his funeral. (Slides of
headlines about the Smith Act Trials are projected. Actors move into a funeral arrangement.) Later,
during the Smith Act Trials, the fact these people attended his funeral would be used as evidence
against them. (Several actors move apart from the group.) My mother and I went to the trials. These
were people we knew, good human beings, being put on trial for their beliefs. I began to view the
country as a place of danger. (The separated actors run off in different directions.) Friends of mine were

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stopped by FBI agents, who tried to trick and even torture them into implicating their parents. I knew I could never stand up to that kind of interrogation so I felt the best way to keep my family safe was for me to not know as much as possible. *(One by one the slides go out during the following lines, and the remaining actors run off in various groupings.)* I stopped reading newspapers and watching newsreels. I stopped listening to conversations. I separated myself from the world in which I lived. I felt this was the best way to protect the people I loved. If I didn’t know anything, I couldn’t give anything away. My six-year-old brother was so terrified, he devised a plan to escape our house using the fire escape, so he could never be trapped by people who came to question him. It was his way of coping.

Then my mother was blacklisted. Of course they don’t tell you, but one day they cut her character from the T.V. series she was in, and suddenly no one in New York would hire her. So she moved to Chicago to find work. I was sent to boarding school, where I had a mini-persecution of my own. *(In shadow we see a tableau of a student whispering to the principal.)* And what frightened me most about the incident was not the accusation, though I did nothing, it was the fact that it was all done in secret.

**YOUNG KIM:** *(stopping a girl in the hall)* Lori . . .

**LORI:** *(evasive)* Hi, Kim. Look, I’m late for gym. . . . See you . . . sometime.

**YOUNG KIM:** But I just . . . *(stops another girl)* Hey, Agnes, wait up.

**AGNES:** I can’t.

**YOUNG KIM:** Please, just for a second. What is going on?

**AGNES:** I’m sorry, but I can’t be . . .

**YOUNG KIM:** What!?

**AGNES:** I . . . I’m not supposed to talk to you.

**YOUNG KIM:** Why? God, just tell me.
AGNES: Well . . .

YOUNG KIM: Please.

AGNES: (pause) Okay, but let's get out of the hallway.

YOUNG KIM: (They move.) Now tell me.

AGNES: It's the thing with Mary Beth Johnson . . .

YOUNG KIM: What thing?

AGNES: Whatever you said to her, that, you know . . .

YOUNG KIM: No, I don't know.

AGNES: Well, I don't know either. But what ever you said, it drove her to commit suicide.

YOUNG KIM: What!? I just saw her go into the office.

AGNES: Well, she tried to kill herself. Anyway, we all had to go and tell her what we knew.

YOUNG KIM: About Mary Beth, everyone knows she's . . .

AGNES: About you.

YOUNG KIM: Me?

AGNES: You know . . . your political . . . whatever.

YOUNG KIM: But no one has asked me about any of this.

AGNES: Whatever it was, you shouldn't have said it to Mary Beth.

YOUNG KIM: But I didn't! Look, when was this supposed to have happened? That I said . . . whatever it was.

AGNES: Saturday afternoon. There were some girls in the lounge talking.

YOUNG KIM: Saturday afternoon . . . I wasn't even in the lounge then. People must know I wasn't there.
AGNES: She says you were, and now they’re going to expel you.

YOUNG KIM: Expel? This is crazy. They haven’t asked me anything. Nobody has said a word.

AGNES: Well, they figure cause your mom’s . . . you know, that you must have done it.

KIM: (to the audience) That was enough. If they weren’t going to confront me, I was going to them. I became my own advocate. After waiting for what felt like an eternity, I was finally called in to defend my case. (Young Kim moves to the office. The principal stands above.) Inside the office were the principal and . . . all of my teachers. (Teachers march in wearing sportslike banners with either a L (for Left) or R (for Right). They take their positions Left and Right. Throughout the following scene, score is kept on the projection screens.)

SPORTSCASTER: (with a microphone) Ladies and gentlemen we’re here at the Meadow Creek School for the final face off between suspected Communist sympathizer: Kim Becker on the left . . .


SPORTSCASTER: And today’s challenger: Mary Beth Johnson on the right.

TEACHERS ON RIGHT: (cheer) Go Mary Beth! Go Mary Beth! (Teachers chant low under the following.)

SPORTSCASTER: Kim looks scared, but determined. While everyone knows that Mary Beth has a history of being unstable . . . today she’s poised and ready for a fight. Here comes the Principal, Mrs. Wetling.

Let the battle begin.

PRINCIPAL: (She tries her best to make everyone happy and hates confrontation.) Now Kim, I hear you’ve been causing some trouble here at Meadow Creek.

KIM: No. I haven’t done anything wrong.

PRINCIPAL: (relieved) Oh . . . well, good. I guess that settles that.

TEACHERS ON RIGHT: (chant) Kick Kim out. Kick her out.
PRINCIPAL: *(changes to a stern tone)* It has been brought to my attention that you made several inappropriate comments to Mary Beth Johnson last Saturday afternoon.

KIM: But . . .

TEACHERS ON RIGHT: Boo!

PRINCIPAL: Perhaps we should hear from Mary Beth.

TEACHERS ON RIGHT: *(chant)* Go Mary Beth. Go Mary Beth. *(Teachers continue low under the following.)*

SPORTSCASTER: The tension in this room is not to be believed. Mary Beth looks confident as she steps up to speak.

MARY BETH: *(glows with anticipation, then suddenly whimpers as she speaks)* Well, we were all talking in the lounge. And then Kim says, out of the blue, she says, “Your daddy is a dirty capitalist pig.” And then she says, “people are starving and it’s your daddy’s fault, cause he’s an investment banker.” *(Teachers on the Right hiss at Kim.)*

SPORTSCASTER: This round is not going well for Kim. She looks frightened and confused.

MARY BETH: And I felt so bad . . . that I . . . that I . . . that I . . . swallowed this whole bottle of aspirin. *(holds up bottle and then sinks into tears)*

TEACHERS ON LEFT: *(shaking their heads)* T-t-t-t-t-t-t-t.

TEACHERS ON RIGHT: *(chant)* Expel Kim! Expel Kim! *(During this Mary Beth stands and smiles triumphantly.)*

SPORTSCASTER: It looks like it’s all over for Kim.

PRINCIPAL: *(blows whistle)* In light of this accusation, Kim, I have no other choice, but to . . .

YOUNG KIM: *(shouts)* WAIT!

ALL TEACHERS: *(murmur)*

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SPORTCASTER: All eyes are on Kim as she steps up to speak. What will she say?!

YOUNG KIM: (Young Kim makes a sign for them to stop.) I wasn’t in the lounge on Saturday. I was at the movies. Look, here’s my ticket. (She holds up the ticket.)

TEACHERS ON LEFT: (cheer wildly) No more witch-hunts! No more witch-hunts!

SPORTSCASTER: Holy, moly! Look at that comeback!

PRINCIPAL: Well, I guess it was just one big . . . misunderstanding. Let’s all go to the cafeteria.

TEACHERS ON RIGHT: (chant) Go Mary Beth. Go Mary Beth! (Mary Beth slowly stands as if recovering from a punch and gets ready to take a swing.)

SPORTSCASTER: Oh my Lord. Would you look at this. Mary Beth is coming back for more. She looks more determined than ever.

MARY BETH: Just one minute! Kim brainwashed the foreign students with her Communist crap.

PRINCIPAL: (whines) Oh no. (back in control) Kim, is this true?

YOUNG KIM: No . . . I . . . I volunteered to help a student with her history homework. That’s all.

MARY BETH: She twists the readings to reflect her Communist ideas.

ADULT KIM: (Everyone freezes as Adult Kim enters and speaks to the audience.) This made me furious. I specifically made the decision to focus strictly on vocabulary. I would never have let her know my beliefs. I felt that was unfair because she couldn’t speak English very well.

MARY BETH: Just ask Yumiko Kashu.

TEACHERS ON RIGHT: (running in circles around the stage while they chant) Find Yumiko! Find Yumiko! (Teachers on the Left go into a huddle formation.)

SPORTSCASTER: (over the chant) The teachers on the Right are turning the school upside down looking for Yumiko Kashu. Will they find her in time? (pause) Yes! She’s being dragged to the principal’s office.
What a fight! The principal is having trouble containing the crowd. I wouldn’t want to be in her shoes.

(Yumiko stands frozen center stage.)

PRINCIPAL: (yells) Quiet! (calmer) Now, Yumiko. Does Kim help you with your homework?

YUMIKO: Yes. Kim is very nice.

TEACHERS ON RIGHT: (chant) Kick Kim out! Kick her out!

PRINCIPAL: (makes a sign to quiet them, and it works) Shhh! And when Kim helps you, does she . . . change things?

YUMIKO: I’m sorry?

PRINCIPAL: Does she, say . . . negative things about . . . the United States?

YUMIKO: I don’t understand. Maybe Kim can explain it to me. (Teachers on the Left giggle.)

PRINCIPAL: Look, Yumiko, does Kim tell you things . . . about the Soviet Union?

YUMIKO: No . . . we study Greece now. Do you want Kim to tell me about the Soviet Union, too?

PRINCIPAL: No!! (takes a deep breath) Yumiko, how does Kim help you study?

YUMIKO: Oh. She tells me what the words mean.

PRINCIPAL: That’s all she does?

YUMIKO: Yes. She . . . translates the words for me. She is very nice.

SPORTSCASTER: There is a hush in the crowd, ladies and gentlemen. (All teachers say “hush.”) After what’s happened here so far. It’s anybody’s guess how this battle will end.

PRINCIPAL: I see. Well, Kim, I’ll ask you to step outside the office, so that we can . . . figure it out. (The company turn their backs and freeze during the following.)
ADULT KIM: (to audience) Apparently, I had created quite a stir. While half the faculty assumed I must be guilty of something, the other half was afraid of getting caught up in a witch-hunt. They argued for what seemed to be forever. Then I was finally called back in.

SPORTSCASTER: This is it, folks. Kim's fate is about to be decided. Which side are you on? Let's listen in.

PRINCIPAL: Kim, after considering all that has been said today, and everyone's thoughts and feelings, and of course, what's best for the future of Meadow Creek . . . We've . . . I've . . . that is . . . you can stay at the school.

TEACHERS ON LEFT: (cheer wildly)

PRINCIPAL: On the condition that you and I meet once a week to discuss your “ideas.” Is it agreed?

YOUNG KIM: Yes, Mrs. Wetling. (Teachers on the Left turn into circle formation and yell, “YES!!” Teachers on the Right move into a defensive huddle.)

SPORTSCASTER: That winds up the final match between Kim Becker and Mary Beth Johnson. For more accusations, stay tuned for the Smith Act Trials. So long for now. (Dream music starts as the actors move into their positions in the minefield.)

SCENE FIVE: THE MINEFIELD

KIM speaks slowly. Dream music with sounds of war plays under the following. As each character speaks, the actress playing her younger counterpart slowly moves from behind her into the minefield. The rest of the actors serve as obstacles in the minefield, moving almost imperceptibly.

KIM: (as Young Kim walks cautiously through the mist) My entire sense of the McCarthy era is of walking in a minefield—that sense of the wrong action hurting, not only yourself, but many people. My memories are like those of someone who has lived through a war, but I never have.

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JOAN: (as Young Joan enters the fog) I was scared of losing my mother. Of being abandoned. Wicked separation problems. Never went to summer camp. Went once and they had to come get me. I was terrified something would happen while I was gone. I was terrified. People were in prison, people went underground. I had to be there to make sure everything’s okay. Financial disaster, being blacklisted, my father’s health, all that stuff. I was just a worried little kid. The FBI sat in front of our house and it was scary. Not in a physical sense, but emotionally, it was terrifying.

JUDITH: (as Young Judith enters the space) I would ask myself questions. I heard how many people who had gone underground had poison, so if they were found, they could kill themselves. Then they wouldn’t have to be tortured or reveal the names of people they loved. So I thought about that, and I thought I would probably just kill myself and that . . . that was the solution.

KIM: I used to dream of walking in a minefield and never knowing where to step.

ALL: Never feeling safe. (The company freezes then moves quickly off while the music plays under.)

SCENE SIX: THE ARREST

YOUNG JOAN and her mother ELAINE sit on a corner of the stage. ELAINE is reading to her daughter from the Langston Hughes book. ELAINE is in a nightgown. Her bathrobe covers YOUNG JOAN. They share the lines from “I Dream a World” as if reading a goodnight story.

JOAN: There was a little satellite McCarthy committee here. I think it was run by a guy named Powers. But it was a mini, little McCarthy, H.U.A.C. thing. And my mother was called before that state investigating committee, and I remember one night the police came. (Three actresses sing “Who’s Going to Investigate the Man Who Investigates the Man Who Investigates Me,” Andrews Sisters’ style while the following action takes place. All movements are done as a dance: Police officers enter and knock on the

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door. Joan’s mother gets up to answer the door. She peeks her head out. The officers enter violently. Under
the direction of a head officer, they begin taking dozens of books off the shelves. Elaine is held back by
two officers. Young Joan looks on in terror. The officers leave with their mimed boxes of books. Young Joan
runs to hug her mother. The officers throw her off. She returns and puts the bathrobe over her mother’s
shoulders. They drag Elaine out of the apartment. Young Joan watches as her mother disappears from
sight. The song continues as the police office is set up.)

JOAN: Not only had they arrested my mother, they arrested our books—big piles of “subversive” books. She
was in jail overnight, and this kind of funny anecdote happened. Women appreciate this.

This scene is conducted in front of giant shadows. Lights up on ELAINE in the police station. She is being
interrogated. The police shove imaginary book after book at her.

ELAINE: I want to speak to my lawyer.

OFFICER ONE: We know you have ties to the Communist Party.

ELAINE: I have rights.

OFFICER ONE: Just tell us who’s in your little circle of friends and you can go home tonight.

ELAINE: I want to speak . . .

OFFICER ONE: . . . to your lawyer. Yeah, I know. Frank, search her.

OFFICER TWO: Me? Shouldn’t we get a woman?

OFFICER ONE: I said, search her. (yells) And can anybody get some coffee in here. We’re going to be up all
night with this one.

ELAINE: I want to speak to my . . .

OFFICER ONE: Would you shut up with the lawyer, already. Frank, I told you to search the broad.

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OFFICER TWO: I . . . I feel weird.

OFFICER ONE: For Christ sake! I’ll search her myself. (The officer begins the search. Elaine protests.) What the hell are you getting paid for, Frank? Huh? Unbelievable. (feels something) Wait a minute. What have we here? (He pulls an imaginary tampon from Elaine’s bathrobe pocket, then speaks to Elaine.) And what might this be?

ELAINE: It’s a . . . tampon.

OFFICER ONE: (laughs smugly) A tampon. Right. (pause) Frank, what’s a tampon?

OFFICER TWO: (too embarrassed to say) Ahhh . . .

OFFICER ONE: Call in the squad.

OFFICER TWO: But . . .

OFFICER ONE: I said call the bomb squad. Now! (Officer Two runs out.) I bet the CIA will be very interested in this little device. What other weapons has the KGB planted on you? I asked you a question! (Elaine tries to control her urge to laugh. Suddenly alarms are sounded, lights flash and a squad of men rush in with protective headgear. Officers One and Two and Joan are shoved aside, as the squad dissects the tampon.)

SQUAD LEADER: (removing his hood) It’s safe now. We’ve managed to deactivate the device. (He calls to a janitor who is sweeping.) You there.

JANITOR: Me?

SQUAD LEADER: Bring this device to the lab. (The Janitor crosses and picks up the tampon. As he runs out, he drops it.) Be careful, you idiot!
JANITOR: (starts to leave then turns) But it’s a tampon. (The Squad Leader looks confused. The Janitor shrugs his shoulders and leaves. Musical reprieve of “Who’s Going to Investigate” serves as a transition to the next scene, along with slides/film clips of the McCarthy Hearings.)

SCENE SEVEN: THE LUCY SHOW

JEAN: Now, I was born at the height of the baby boom, so I don’t have any memories of the McCarthy era. Just the stories my mother told me. When I was growing up, I remember her always going to meetings, or having meetings at our house. It seemed as though she was on a million committees—the NAACP, the Fair Housing Committee. She said she had some kind of disease. It was . . . what did she call it? (remembers) “Committee-itis.” She would walk into a meeting with full intentions of resigning from, whatever committee it was. And before the meeting had ended . . . she had somehow been made the new chair of that committee. Committee-itis. I think it’s genetic. Anyway, my favorite story was about the day my oldest sister was born, which was in 1953. And as she would tell the story, I couldn’t get the I Love Lucy Show out of my head. You know the one, when Lucy’s pregnant with Little Ricky and she’s wearing this little white puffy, maternity blouse, and Ricky’s holding the little suitcase and they’re ready to go the hospital. (The actors enter wearing flowers on their outside wrists, and move as Hollywood show girls. They enter singing the “I Love Lucy” theme: “I love Lucy, and she loves me.” They stop momentarily, as no one knows the rest of the words. After a brief moment they continue the song singing “da da da.” They form a heart. The company runs off revealing Lucy on a bench very pregnant. She mimes eating a box of chocolates. She deals a deck of cards and gets chocolate all over them. She wipes the chocolate off on various places, making more and more of a mess. Throughout the “bit,” we hear canned laughter provided by the actors off stage. Laughter and applaud signs are flashed at appropriate times.)

LUCY: (yells to Ricky) Ricky!

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RICKY: (from off) Just a moment, Dear.

LUCY: (yells) Ricky, you promised you’d play cards with me.

RICKY: (off) In a minute, honey. I told you, I have to finish this arrangement, before I go to the club.

LUCY: (yells) Ricky, if you don’t come and play cards with me, I’ll . . . I’ll call my mother and ask her to move in here till the baby’s born, (starts to cry) so I’ll have someone to play with, and I won’t have to sit here by myself.

RICKY: (enters and goes to her) Now, Lucy you don’t have to do that.

LUCY: (crying) It’s just that I feel so fat . . . and I can’t go to the club . . . and you won’t play cards with me.

RICKY: Oh, honey, I’ll play cards with you.

LUCY: (sniffling) You will?

RICKY: Yes.

LUCY: I love you, Ricky. (She hugs him, getting chocolate all over him—canned laughter.)

RICKY: Look what you’re doing! (He speaks in Spanish.) Lucy, you’ve got chocolate over everything.

LUCY: You sit right there, I’ll clean it up. (She stands and bends to pick up a cloth, but gets a labor pain. Her head shoots up and her eyes get big.) Ohhhh.

RICKY: Lucy, what is it?

LUCY: Ricky . . .

RICKY: What? What’s happening?

LUCY: Ricky, I think it’s . . .

RICKY: What?

LUCY: Ricky, it’s the baby.
RICKY: The baby? (Lucy nods.) He's coming? (Lucy nods.) Now? (Lucy nods.) AHHHH!! Oh my God! Oh my God! (He starts running around the room in a panic.) Keep calm, Honey. I got everything under control. (He takes deep breaths and then runs out of the room speaking Spanish very quickly.)

LUCY: (Lucy calmly walks over to the phone.) Gladys, honey, give me Murray Hill 6-5198. . . That's right, Gladys, it's the baby. . . Yes, I remember when you had little Henry . . . (She puts on a jacket.) Well, not everyone says he's trouble. . . No, dear. . . Honey, Can you put me through to the doctor? . . . Thank you, Gladys. I hope to see you there, too. (pause) Hello, Dr. Rose, . . . This is Mrs. Ricardo . . .

RICKY: (bursts into the room with a little suitcase half closed with a negligee hanging out. He runs into the phone cord, accidentally disconnecting it. He then grabs Lucy and sits her down on the couch.) Lucy, honey, what are you doing on your feet. You sit here while I call the doctor.

LUCY: But, Ricky . . .

RICKY: No buts, you sit right there. (He fumbles in the phone cord, again speaking Spanish very fast, with phrases like "We're having a baby," coming through in English. Suddenly, there is a very loud knock on the door.) How did he get here so fast? (Lucy starts to cross to the door. Ricky tries to stop her.) No, Lucy, don't move. I'll get it. (He trips over the phone cord.)

LUCY: (crosses to the door, and opens it) May I help you?

FBI AGENT ONE: Are you Mrs. Ricardo?

LUCY: I am?

RICKY: Who is it, Lucy?

MRS. CARMICHAEL: (from off) What's all the racket down there?

LUCY: (shouts up) Nothing, Mrs. Carmichael. Go back to bed.

FBI AGENT TWO: We'd like you to come downtown to the station with us.

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RICKY: What are you talking about?

MRS. CARMICHAEL: (off) There’s something going on down there.

LUCY: (shouts up) Shove it, Mrs. Carmichael. (sound of a door slamming)

FBI AGENT ONE: We have a few questions, about your Communist activities. (Lucy makes her famous “eww” sound.) So you if you don’t mind coming with us.

RICKY: Communist activities! The only thing Red about Lucy is her hair. (canned laughter)

FBI AGENT TWO: We’ll determine that, Mr. Ricardo.

LUCY: (gets that “I’ve got an idea” look in her eye) Well, I’d love to talk to you, gentlemen . . .

RICKY: Lucy, what are you saying?

LUCY: But, I’m just about to give birth. (She points to her pregnant stomach.) So if you gentlemen will excuse us.

FBI AGENTS ONE & TWO: (very embarrassed, fumbling over each other) Oh . . . um . . . of course . . . we’ll catch you at a better time . . . um . . . good luck with the kid and all . . . (They leave.)

RICKY: (moves to her) Lucy, you were wonderful.

LUCY: Was I?

RICKY: (hugs her) You were great.

LUCY: I was, wasn’t I? Did you see how those FBI agents turned red when I told them about the baby?

(Ricky pauses for a second, then laughs uncontrollably.) What! What are you laughing at? Ricky tell me!!

RICKY: (gets his laughter under control) Lucy, you just called the FBI: RED!!

They both laugh—LUCY with her famous laugh. Actors enter with the “I Love Lucy” theme—“da da da.”

This time the heart reveals LAURA standing downstage.
SCENE EIGHT: A VOICE OF RESISTANCE

LAURA: They wanted to get me as a Communist, and I took the Fifth Amendment. It’s my right not to tell them who I am. That is a matter of my own personal opinion. That’s what the Constitution says, of the United States. We are not going to lay down by the witch hunters. (corrects herself) In front of the witch hunters, “by the witch hunters,” I said. (She laughs.) It’s a long, long struggle.

SCENE NINE: THE ROSENBERGS’ ARREST

Various headlines and newspaper clips about the arrest and the start of the case are displayed on slides. A drum punctuates each speech.

ANNOUNCER: July 17, 1950: FBI agents reported to Hoover on the day of Julius Rosenberg’s arrest:

FBI AGENT: Ethel, his wife, made a typical Communist remonstrance, demanding a warrant and the right to call an attorney. She was told to keep quiet and get in the other room with the children.

ANNOUNCER: August 11, 1950: Myles Lane of the Justice Department to reporters, the day before Ethel Rosenberg’s arrest:

LANE: Her crime jeopardizes the lives of every man, woman, and child in this country.

ANNOUNCER: August 12: New York Times, Ethel Rosenberg’s arrest:

REPORTER: Atomic spy plot is laid to a woman.

Lights up on LAURA sitting by the fire, reading a letter.

LAURA: Well, they were in separate cells. They used to write notes to each other and poems. They were like two lovers in jail, under the most awful circumstances possible.

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Lights up on ETHEL and JULIUS in their separate cells.

JULIUS: August 12, 1950. Dearest Ethel, I heard the news over the radio last night and after strenuous efforts to see you or contact you I’ve been given permission to write this letter. Let me know as soon as possible how you are feeling. How are the children? Has any provision been made for them? I am fine and all’s well. I expect the lawyer to see me this morning and I’ll instruct him to send you commissary money, newspapers and all the little things he can do to make it easier. Tell me your plans for the children and I’ll try to have the lawyer arrange a meeting for us to decide on the children. Keep a stiff upper lip. All my love. Your Julius.

ETHEL: August 12, 1950. My dearest darling Julie, By now you must know what has happened to me. Darling, I wish I could say that I am cool, calm and collected but the fact is that although, contrary to newspaper reports, I have not been hysterical at any time, I have shed many anxious tears on behalf of the children and have been feeling badly that I won’t be seeing you on Sunday. My heart cries aloud for you and the children. Now indeed it is harder to be inside than out because each of us knows the other is not free to care for our dears. How unfortunate it was that I never got around to discussing arrangements for them with the proper people. I had been planning to do that very thing this week so that the kids should be subjected to as little strain as possible, in the event I was detained—and I must confess my mind does leap ahead to the frightening possibilities for them. However, I guess I will feel lots better after I see Mr. Bloch and ask him to get in touch with those people who can help us in the matter of the care of the children. By all means, sweetheart if you have any ideas about this and/or any of our other problems, please communicate with our lawyer and also write me about same.
Sweetheart, I talk with you every night before I fall asleep and cry because you can’t hear me. And then I tell myself that you too must be choking with the same frustration and wondering if I can hear you. Darling, we mustn’t lose each other or the children, mustn’t lose our identities. I try to think of the good, fine life we’ve led all these years and I am agonized with my longing to go on leading it. All my love and my most devoted thoughts to you, my dearest loved one. Please write me as soon as you can.
I love you, Ethel.

(A sound cue of cell doors closing gives the sense that time has passed.) August 29, 1950. My dearest darling Julie, I am hoping that by now you have received my second letter. By now I know that my first one finally reached you. Oh darling, even though we were able to spend some time together the day we went to court, it seemed to me when I had returned here that there were so many other ways I might have expressed my feelings to you, so many other things I might have said. So let me say them now, my dear one. And yet, I couldn’t ever say enough what pride and love and deep regard for you I feel. What you wrote me about ourselves as a family, and what that family means to you made my eyes fill. There came to me such an abiding sense of faith and joy, such a sure knowledge of the rich meaning our lives have held that I was suddenly seized with an overwhelming desire to . . . (They turn to each other and, the lines begin to overlap.)

JULIUS: . . . see you and say it to you and kiss you with all my heart. Sweetheart, we must go on pouring out all that we feel towards each other, in our letters as I know how this strengthens the deep bond between us.

ETHEL: That bond you described as well in your last writing.

JULIUS: How frustrating it is, though when we have been accustomed to day-to-day association to have only this means of communication.
ETHEL: I treasure the time we spent together last Wednesday—which already seems so long ago—and can’t wait for our next meeting.

JULIUS: Love you sweetheart.

ETHEL: Your, Ethel. (Ethel’s theme plays. They turn away as they realize they are indeed alone, as lights fade.)

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE: UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

A theme song plays, and a slide that reads “Unanswered Questions, 1998” is projected. Characters are in today’s dress.

HOST: Welcome to “Unanswered Questions.” The show that answers the most difficult questions of the century—in a fifteen-minute format. (overly dramatic) According to Hugh W. Hunter of the Yale Herald “The Rosenbergs were sent to the electric chair on June 19, 1953, after what then FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover called: The Trial of the Century.” The Rosenbergs, who were suspected to be Communist sympathizers during the Red Scare of the 1940s and 50s, were tried for allegedly transmitting the secrets of the Manhattan Project—the scientific effort that produced the atom bomb—to the Soviet Union. Today’s question is: Were the Rosenbergs guilty? Now to help us answer this question we’ve selected people from our audience, people like you. Let’s begin with you Ms . . .

JONES: Jones.

HOST: Ms. Jones, were the Rosenbergs guilty?

JONES: Umm . . . Were they the ones that had that day care center?

HOST: Nnno . . . We’ll get back to Ms. Jones.

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KATZINSKY: Excuse me, I don’t mean to interrupt, but you said the Rosenbergs were tried for transmitting the secrets of the Manhattan Project, or in effect “the Bomb.”

HOST: That’s correct, Ms . . .

KATZINSKY: Katzinsky. See, that’s the thing. They were actually tried for conspiracy to commit espionage. *Conspiracy*, that’s like saying they had a conversation about it.

MILLER: Wasn’t it her brother or someone who implicated them?

KATZINSKY: There were two witnesses, David and Ruth Greenglass—Ethel’s brother and sister-in-law—who were both facing the death penalty if they didn’t testify against the Rosenbergs. At first, Greenglass even said his sister was innocent, and then he changed his story.

HOST: Yes. But they were found guilty of selling the bomb.

KATZINSKY: No. On the basis of these two, unreliable witnesses and some very shaky evidence, like a Jell-O box, the jury found them guilty of conspiracy. Then Judge Kaufman comes along and sentences them for selling the secret of the atomic bomb, which even all the scientists say is ridiculous, causing the Korean War, and causing the future deaths of millions of people.

BELIOT: You know, you people on the left keep saying that the Rosenbergs were martyrs. But the truth is, it came out last year that they were guilty.

MILLER: I saw that in the papers.

HOST: So you disagree with our guest, Ms . . .

BELIOT: Mrs. Beliot. Now we finally have proof that they were guilty.

KATZINSKY: Guilty of what, exactly?

BELIOT: Guilty. A Soviet agent, Alexander Feklisov, admitted that he met Julius Rosenberg on a regular basis from 1943–1946. And that Rosenberg passed on secrets to the Soviets.
KATZINSKY: All right, let's say you buy everything Feklisov says. I personally happen to be suspicious of his motives, but for the sake of argument, let's say it's all true. At the very worst, he says that Julius Rosenberg gave him very low-level stuff, information that wasn't of any real use. And he says that he never met with Ethel Rosenberg and that she had nothing to do with it. So right there, a man was executed for something that normally he would receive a jail sentence. And on top of that, an innocent woman was killed.

MILLER: Yeah... But what about those papers the Ve... the something papers that were just released.

KATZINSKY: The Venona Papers.

MILLER: Yes. That was it.

HOST: Miss Jones, you wanted to say something.

JONES: (proudly) Well, my sister went to Verona once... (She looks around and sees everyone staring at her.) when she was in High School.

HOST: (pause) I see. Yes, what about the Venona Papers? They were *communiqués* sent by Soviet agents in the United States to the Soviet Union, during World War II.

BELIOT: They were intercepted by U.S. Intelligence and decoded. And they say point blank that the Rosenbergs were the masterminds of a spy ring and that they recruited other spies.

HOST: Miss Katzinsky, no doubt you have something to add.

KATZINSKY: First of all, if you actually read the papers, which I have, you'll notice some very peculiar things.

HOST: Such as?

KATZINSKY: Well, of course the *communiqués* are written in code. Then the agents' names are coded. So in a sense, it's a double code—because the KGB took great pains to make sure their agents weren't dis-
covered. Now the U.S. agents claim that the code name for Julius Rosenberg was “Liberal.” And when you read through the stack of papers you’ll see the name “Liberal” used dozens of times. Now in this one particular communiqué it says that “Liberal” recommended the wife of his wife’s brother, Ruth Greenglass. Thus pointing directly to Julius Rosenberg.

BELIOT: Exactly!

KATZINSKY: If you were a KBG agent, would you send a communiqué to Moscow that explicitly gives the name of two agents? I don’t think so. You’d be shot.

BELIOT: You people will grab at anything, even when the evidence stares you in the face.

HOST: What about it, Ms. Katzinsky? Are you in denial?

KATZINSKY: Look, once again, even if you take the Venona Papers at face value, they clear Ethel Rosenberg. They say, due to her health, “Liberal’s wife does not work,” meaning she isn’t an agent. And once again, the information allegedly passed on by Julius Rosenberg was insignificant. The papers mention an antenna. And another thing, you have to remember that the Soviets were our allies during World War II, against Hitler.

HOST: Well, we are running out of time. So I’ll pose the big question: (drum roll) Were the Rosenbergs guilty? Ms. Miller?

MILLER: Me . . . well . . . I don’t know . . . I mean, there doesn’t seem to be any evidence against Ethel. But there’s . . . um . . . all this incriminating stuff against Julius. But it’s not really clear what exactly he.

HOST: We’re running out of time, Ms. Miller. Just answer the question: yes or no.

MILLER: (starts to panic) I . . . Oh, gosh . . . I just don’t know. (She starts to cry.)

the sound of a buzzer

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HOST: (trying to cover) Well, it looks as if . . . we have a tie. We’ll just have to invite the Rosenbergs on next week’s show, and ask them. (All the guests turn to him in horror.) Oh, I guess it’s too late for that. (suddenly bright, the theme song plays under) Tune in next week to “Unanswered Questions,” the show that answers the most difficult questions of the century—in a fifteen-minute format. (theme song up to cover transition to next scene)

SCENE TWO: OFFICE FOR CLEMENCY

The year is 1951. The three women are busy at work—mimed. One is taking notes from the New York Times. One is at the typewriter. The third is stuffing envelopes.

NORA: (The scene is the office for clemency. Nora sits with the New York Times.) We used to get the New York Times every day and I read the reports of the Rosenberg trial as it was going on. And what sprang out at me was Elizabeth Bentley, who was a paid informant for the government. It was her testimony that established a so-called fact that being a Communist was equal to being a traitor. In other words, your allegiance was not here, it was to the Soviet Union. And so that startled me and disturbed me. Because I knew it wasn’t true. And I felt that the case itself was not proved. That we had to come to the defense of the Rosenbergs, because there was a terrible, a terrible mis-justice that was already in the works. And that summer, the National Guardian had a series of articles exposing what was in back of the Rosenberg case. So a number of people around the Dorchester, Roxbury, Mattapan area where I was living, in a modest apartment in a three-decker, we got together to talk about this. And early that fall, a professor named Stephan Love, spoke at the Harvard Law School. So I was asked if I would take notes, I knew shorthand, which was just like knowing another language, and I have used it all my life since. (She hands notes to Anna who takes them and types them up.)
ANNA: (at the typewriter) And then, we, we just started having an office. We got an office on Mass. Ave. We had practically no money, any of us. I think my husband Paul and I were among the poorest ones cause he had been, it was a tough time and he had been working in unions and we had come back to Boston, and there were just no jobs around. So they offered to have me work for the cause for thirty-five dollars a week. It was supposed to be a part-time job, but when you are committed to something there is no time limit on what you do. My son was about six years old then. We were involved on the case for a few years and he was eight when they were executed. It was a difficult time. There was an old typewriter somebody had given the office. We didn't have any money to have letterheads printed. So every time I wrote a letter to a rabbi or minister, a union or lawyers, I typed the letterhead and I figured out the exact spacing so I wouldn't have to re-center for each line. (Anna hands the typed page to Carol who is stuffing envelopes.)

CAROL: (stuffs the paper into envelopes) Well, a committee in New York printed the complete transcript of the trial, amounting to ten little thin books. And Professor Love had folded down pages over one hundred times, of, of irregular, I'll call it, irregular actions by Judge Kaufman. I mean there were so many strange things. He, the judge, interjected himself to help out any prosecution witness, putting words in their mouth and helping them along in what they were trying to say. And people can second guess poor Emmanuel Bloch, who worked like a tiger to defend those people. So, it was just, the whole thing was so tragic, and we were completely dedicated to trying to get some kind of either a new trial or something, and appealing to the Supreme Court.

NORA: We made appeals to all kinds of people around Boston.

ANNA: At one point, I mean there's funny things that you do, at one point we looked up addresses in the phone book of everybody named Rosenberg.

ALL THREE: We tried all kinds of things.
Scene Three: The Girls’ Room

A school buzzer sounds as actors run on giggling in pairs from opposite ends of the stage. They run to an imaginary mirror downcenter and primp for a moment before taking their positions as the walls and sinks of the girls’ room. Young Judith and Julie are the last to enter. They freeze in a pose under the following.

Judith: When I was in junior high, my social studies class held forums on current events. I remember one particular day we were told that we would be discussing the Rosenberg case that afternoon. Right before class I happened to bump into Julie Tanner in the bathroom. She was in front of the mirror, as usual, combing her hair and putting on lipstick. Julie Tanner was very popular. She had many friends and hung out with the “in crowd.” She was beautiful, trendy and outgoing. She was everything that I wasn’t. But we did have one thing in common and today was the day to show it. So I turned to Julie and I said:

Young Judith: Julie . . .

Julie: (half paying attention to Judith, half to herself) Yes . . .

Young Judith: You know how they’re going to be talking about the Rosenbergs in social studies today?

Julie: Yes.

Young Judith: Well, I know that your family, like mine, stands behind their innocence and is really involved with trying to save them from execution. My mother told me that your family has raised a lot of money in support for their clemency.

Julie: Oh, yes, tons of money.

Young Judith: Well, today in class I would like to stand up and say how I believe the Rosenbergs are innocent.

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JULIE: Yes . . .

YOUNG JUDITH: But people never listen to me. And I was thinking, well, since you are so popular, that if you stood up then the rest of the class would listen to you.

JULIE: Oh, yes.

YOUNG JUDITH: So if I stand up, you will stand up with me, then?

JULIE: Of course I will.

YOUNG JUDITH: Oh great. I need you to promise me though, because I’m not going to do it without you.

JULIE: Of course, I’ll go with you.

YOUNG JUDITH: (holding out her pinky) Promise?

JULIE: (taking hold of Judith’s pinky) Pinky. (exit)

JUDITH: (to audience) So I was really excited at that point that Julie was going to get up there in front of the class with me. I even tried to make myself look a little bit more glamorous. (She fixes herself in the mirror, imitating Julie. At the sound of the bell, walls and sinks transform into students in class.) When class began and the teacher announced:

TEACHER: Good afternoon class. Today we are going to be talking about the case of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. Does anyone have anything to say about the Rosenberg spy ring?

JULIE: (Young Judith looks to Julie who whispers back.) You go first.

YOUNG JUDITH: (whispers) You promise to back me up?

JULIE: (whispers) I said, yes.

TEACHER: Did anyone do the reading last night?

JUDITH: I raised my hand with poised confidence and took my place at the head of the class. I stood there and said:

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YOUNG JUDITH: I believe that the Rosenbergs have been wrongly accused . . . (pause, quiet laughter) I believe that the Rosenbergs are innocent. (scattered laughter) And I know I’m not the only one who feels this way. (More laughter as the class becomes an ugly laughing mob, and the teacher joins in.)

JUDITH: I looked toward Julie to signal her to come up to the front with me. She didn’t budge. I could feel my face get redder as more and more kids continued laughing at me. I thought, c’mon Julie, stand up here with me. The kids will listen to you. But, to my horror, not only did she not stand up here with me, (Julie joins the mob.) but she began laughing alongside everybody else. I never felt so betrayed and so alone. I stepped off the platform and the laughter slowly ceased. (school bell rings) Later that day, I bumped into Julie again in the bathroom.

YOUNG JUDITH: Julie, why didn’t you get up there with me? You promised me that you would.

JULIE: (fake sympathy) I know, I would have stood up there with you, but I saw how everyone was laughing at you. And I just didn’t want them to laugh at me, too. You understand, don’t you?

YOUNG JUDITH: No, I don’t. Your whole family is working so hard on behalf of Ethel and Julius—sacrificing their time and money—and you don’t even have the courage to stand up for it.

JULIE: No, it’s not that. I just didn’t want to upset anyone. I just want everyone to like me, that’s all.

JUDITH: (angrily speaking Young Judith’s thoughts) I can’t believe you promised me and then you turned around and laughed at me.

JULIE: (comforting) Oh, it’s not really a big deal. Really. (Julie takes her place as part of the wall.)

JUDITH: And she left. I never did speak to her again after that day. It made me wonder, though, how many more Julie Tanners were out there, afraid to speak out, afraid to be their own voice amidst all the madness? Afraid. (A buzzer sounds and the actors freeze, covering their faces with crossed hands, and then move quickly off.)

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SCENE FOUR: SENTENCING

ANNOUNCER: At a February 1951 Congressional committee on atomic energy, six months after Ethel Rosenberg’s arrest, U.S. attorney Myles Lane said:

LANE: The case is not strong against Mrs. Rosenberg. But for the purpose of acting as a deterrent, I think it is very important that she be convicted, too—and given a stiff sentence.

(ETHEL and JULIUS stand downcenter listening to their sentence. Their focus is center, above the heads of the audience. The actor playing KAUFMAN sits facing upstage on a platform above and behind them. He speaks into a microphone. A slide of KAUFMAN is seen above him.)

ANNOUNCER: On April 5, 1951, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were found guilty of conspiracy to commit espionage. Judge Kaufman handed down the following sentence:

KAUFMAN: The issue of punishment in this case is presented in a unique framework of history. It is so difficult to make people realize that this country is engaged in a life-and-death struggle with a completely different system. This struggle is not only manifested externally between these two forces, but this case indicates quite clearly that it also involves the employment by the enemy of secret as well as overt outspoken forces among our own people. All of our democratic institutions are, therefore, directly involved in this great conflict. I believe that never at any time in our history were we ever confronted to the same degree that we are today with such a challenge to our very existence. The punishment to be meted out in this case must therefore serve the maximum interest for the preservation of our society against these traitors in our midst.

Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, I consider your crime worse than murder. Plain, deliberate, contemplated murder is dwarfed in magnitude by comparison with the crime you have committed. The evidence

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indicated quite clearly that Julius Rosenberg was the prime mover in this conspiracy. However, let no mistake be made about the role which his wife Ethel Rosenberg played in this conspiracy. Instead of deterring him from pursuing his ignoble cause, she encouraged and assisted the cause. She was a mature woman—almost three years older than her husband and almost seven years older than her younger brother. She was a full-fledged partner in this crime. Indeed the defendants Julius and Ethel Rosenberg placed their devotion to their causes above their own personal safety and were conscious that they were sacrificing their own children, should their misdeeds be detected—all of which did not deter them from pursuing their course. Love for their cause dominated their lives—it was even greater than their love for their children.

Your spying has already caused the Communist aggression in Korea, with the resultant casualties exceeding fifty thousand and who knows but that millions more of innocent people must pay the price of your treason. By your betrayal you undoubtedly have altered the course of history to the disadvantage of our country. By immeasurably increasing the chances of atomic war, you may have condemned to death tens of millions of innocent people all over the world. It is not in my power, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, to forgive you. Only the Lord can find mercy for what you have done. The sentence of the Court upon Julius and Ethel Rosenberg is, for the crime for which you have been convicted, you are hereby sentenced to the punishment of death, and it is ordered upon some day within the week beginning with Monday, May 21, you shall be executed according to law.

SCENE FIVE: THE ROSENBERGS AT SING SING

ANNOUNCER: Ethel Rosenberg was transferred to the Death House at Sing Sing, and was housed in solitary confinement, as the only female prisoner in the Condemned Cells. Immediately, their lawyer, Emanuel Bloch filed in court for a writ of habeas corpus. In her supporting affidavit, she stated:

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ETHEL: (She stands center stage.) My removal to and detention in the Sing Sing Death House was made with the object and purpose of demoralizing my spirit and overcoming my will to resist efforts of the government to compel me to admit guilt of the crime for which I have been convicted although I am innocent of any such charge. I am sealed in the gray walls of this prison as if in a tomb. I am alone in an entire building except for the matron who guards me. I see no other human being from morning to night and from night to morning. I have no occupation other than to sit immured in the aching soundlessness of my narrow cell. I have no recreation other than to walk on a bare patch of ground, surrounded by walls so high that my only view is a bare patch of sky. Sometimes I can see an airplane passing by; sometimes, a few birds; sometimes, I hear the noise of a train in the distance. Otherwise, there is always dead silence. The power to transform a vital human being into a caged animal is a power to coerce that rivals the deliberate infliction of physical torture and pain.

Lights up on ETHEL and JULIUS in their cells.

ETHEL: April 17, 1951. My very own dearest husband, I don’t know when I’ve had such a time bringing myself to write you. My brain seems to have slowed to all but a complete halt under the weight of the myriad impressions that have been stamping themselves upon it minute upon minute, hour upon hour, since my removal here. I feel, on the one hand, a sharp need to share all that burdens my mind and heart and so bring to naught, make invalid the bitter physical reality of our separation, yet am stabbed by the implacable and desolate knowledge that the swift spinning of time presents a never-to-be-solved enigma.

JULIUS: Precious Woman, Ethel, my darling, you are truly a great, dignified and sweet person. Tears fill my eyes as I try to put my sentiments on paper. I can only say that life has been worthwhile because you have been beside me. I firmly believe that we are better people because we stood up with courage,
character and confidence through a very grueling trial and a most brutal sentence, all because we are
innocent. All the filth, lies and slanders of this grotesque political frame-up, in a background of world
hysteria, will not in any way deter us, but rather spur us on until we are completely vindicated. We
didn’t ask for this; we only wanted to be left alone, but the gauntlet was laid down to us and with every
ounce of life in our bodies we will fight till we are free.

ETHEL: (The two letters begin to overlap.) I shall seek to console myself by recounting for you all that it is
humanly possible for me to do, at one writing or another, though the incident described, the thought
circumvented, the emotion captured be not of that exact moment’s making.

JULIUS: Honey, I think of you constantly. I hunger for you. I want to be with you. It is so painful that such
a great hurt can only mean that I love you with every fiber of my being. I can only repeat over and
over again that the thought of you more than compensates for this pain because of all the happiness
you have brought me as my wife. Sweetheart, I can’t let go of you; you are so dear to me. If you are
able to get just part of the sustenance you engender in me I am sure you will have the strength to with-
stand the hardships that face us.

ETHEL: Darling, do I sound a bit cracked? Actually, I am serious about it and find that I must at least
express my deep-seated frustration so that you will comprehend, all I must endure in order to “wrest
from my locked spirit my soul’s language.” As you see, sweetheart, I have already embarked on the next
lap of our history-making journey. Already there appear the signs of my growing maturity. The bars
of my large, comfortable cell hold several books, the lovely, colorful cards—including your exquisite
birthday greeting to me—that I accumulated at the House of Detention line the top ledge of my
writing table to pleasure the eye and brighten the spirit, the children’s snapshots are taped onto a
“picture frame” made of cardboard, and smile sweetly upon me whenever I so desire.

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(Heinemann: Portsmouth, NH).
JULIUS: Now I’d like to talk about our greatest possession, our two dears. I got a wonderful letter from Michael and it moved me very deeply. I promptly wrote, reassuring him of our love and answering his two questions on a level he could comprehend. I told him we were found guilty and I also explained about the appeal to the higher courts and let him know everything will finally come out all right. That we want very much to see him and we are making every effort to get permission from the court for us to have a visit with the children. On the whole I think Michael will be able to understand. I did not tell him of our sentence. I said we will tell him all about our case when we see him. It is cruel to be separated from our children but it is good to know they are well and growing up.

ETHEL: Within me there begins to develop the profoundest kind of belief that somehow, somewhere, I shall find that “courage, confidence and perspective” I shall need to see me through days and nights of bottomless horror, of tortured screams I may not utter, of frenzied longings I must deny! Julie dearest, how I wait upon the journey’s end and our triumphant return to that precious life from which the foul monsters of our time have sought to drag us!

JULIUS: It all seems so unreal, but yet the cold reality of the steel bars are all around me. I eat, sleep, read and walk four paces back and forth in my cell. I do a lot of thinking about you and the children and I intend to write at least once a week to each of you. My family is one hundred percent behind us and it encourages me. I know as time goes on more and more people will come to our defense and help set us free of this nightmare. I caress you tenderly and send all my love.

BOTH: Darling, I love you.

ANNOUNCER: On May 16, 1951, Julius was also transferred to the Sing Sing Death House.

ETHEL sings “What Shines from my Cell,” by Edith Segal.

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ANNA: During that period, we read the letters as they were being . . . some of them were published while they were still in jail and were writing to each other. And I, having been separated from my husband when he was in jail, and knowing the stiffness, the stiffness in expressing his feelings. I read into those letters by Julius, you know, the hesitancy about expressing his feelings or his love or things like that, and how they opened up. Now maybe only because it had happened to me on a much lesser scale, much less dangerous scale.

ETHEL sings “Ave Maria.” Julius’ letter overlaps the end of the song.

JULIUS: My Lovely Nightingale, Oh joy of joy, I caught a couple of bars of your rendition of Gounod’s “Ave Maria” and the “Alleluia.” Imagine if only your door were open, what a lovely concert we would have. I reminisced a bit of the many times you would sing my favorite arias and folk tunes. Honey, as I thought of it I just adored you. Too bad you weren’t closer. I’m sure I would have conveyed my deepest feelings for you in a way that is very proper indeed for two lovebirds.

LAURA: It was like they were out in a garden having love with one another.

JULIUS: I send you my tender kisses as messages of my heart.

LAURA: They were saying such exuberant things in their letters.

JULIUS: I’ve got a little secret to tell you my wife, that I am very deeply in love with you—as if you didn’t know it.

LAURA: Like they had just been married or had not been married yet.

JULIUS: Well what do you say?

LAURA: They were talking as though tomorrow they were going to be free and they were going to do all these wonderful things that they had been doing all these years.
ETHEL and JULIUS sing and waltz to “I'm Dreaming of Waltzing,” by Edith Segal.

LAURA: It was so terrible to read these letters. I had a stack of poems that Ethel had been sending to her husband in jail. Every time I read them, I would start . . . I couldn’t read them anymore. I threw them out. (She tears up the letters and cries.)

ETHEL sings “Eitz Chaim Hi” a Hebrew song of peace to comfort LAURA. ANNA and LAURA join in singing during the transition to the next scene. A collage of photos and headlines are projected, which chronicle events between Julius Rosenberg’s move to Sing Sing and the eve of the execution.

SCENE SIX: THE DEMONSTRATION

The scene starts in the office for clemency where ANNA, NORA, and CAROL are making picket signs for clemency.

ANNA: Well, the things that took place the last week, that week of the ups and downs. The case had been appealed to the Supreme Court. But the Court was out of session for the summer. The Rosenbergs were going to be safe for the next, till October. Then all of a sudden, through a series of covert visits and phone calls, the Supreme Court was called back from their recess. I mean it had never been done in our history. Having these people, they had already left and gone to Maine and all kinds of places. They had to come back. Then one judge gave them a stay of execution, and then he was forced to rescind that. So every single day it was a different position, ups and downs. It was crazy.

NORA: One day we’re reeling from happiness. At least we have the summer to try to get more proof that they never had a table with an x-ray machine, whatever you call it. But it would have meant four
months of gathering more proof and more opposition to the death sentence. The next day it was gone. Hope was gone. (She grabs a picket sign defiantly.)

The scene moves out onto the street. Slides of the Massachusetts Statehouse and other Rosenberg demonstrations are projected. Sounds of a rally are heard by OPPOSITION PROTESTERS, who stand facing upstage on either side of the stage.

CAROL: We held a vigil outside the statehouse, all day. I mean it must have been at least twelve hours with signs and all that. And here’s what happened. This is a very important thing, cause it shows the opposition had help, from many sources, including some reporters. Because that day, they had signs that said: “Ethyl Burned.” Cause there’s ethyl gasoline, so her name was spelled E-T-H-Y-L. Ethyl will burn. (dodging a rock) And they were starting to throw things at us.

ANNA: (taking control) When you are having a picket line, a demonstration, and it’s for a specific cause, you can’t have everyone on that line talking to the reporters, the policeman, whatever. Because each one may have, a . . . an individual personal opinion or observation which is not the position of the whole line. So I was the spokesperson for that line. The first thing I did was speak to the policeman in charge. (She stops a policeman and speaks to him. Noise from the crowd covers their conversation.) Thank you. (yells after him) And by the way, we expect our civil rights to be upheld, our right to free speech, our constitutional rights. (to audience) So I got his name, and when opposition people harassed, and the police that were supposed to protect us turned their heads, I’d say, (to nearby officers) I spoke to Captain Joe Blow. (to audience) I don’t remember his name. (to officers) And he said he would protect us. We have our rights! (to audience) Blah, blah, blah. So I would quote that captain. That was one of the things. Another thing is that as a few of the representatives came out of the state house, (actors perform the following) and one of them was frankly attacking somebody. I had my sign.

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I just punched him like this. *(She jabs her sign into the representative and yells at him.)* Hey, you can’t attack someone on my picket line, Buster. *(She hits him with the sign again, then speaks to the audience.)* I was not what you’d call a mute person.

**SCENE SEVEN: DROP DEAD**

*The scene is a market on the Lower East Side. LAURA is picketing and handing out fliers about the Rosenbergs’ innocence to passersby. She stops and speaks to the audience.*

*LAURA:* Well, I lived in a Jewish community and they thought that the Communists, instead of helping them, were hurting them. They thought if the government was pouncing on you, you must be doing something wrong. I remember one case when I was giving out fliers on the Rosenbergs, and this little old man he was about four feet eleven, and had a beard about four feet eleven. He was walking and said:

*MAN:* *(spelled phonetically)* Vet za haget.

*LAURA:* *(to audience)* It means “drop dead.” So he came back with his chicken, the chicken head was outside his parcel. He didn’t have the chicken plucked, because it cost ten cents. So he was going to take it home and pluck it.

*MAN:* Vet za haget.

*WOMAN ONE:* *(a passerby)* You’re defending those good for nothings? They bring nothing but shame on our community. Everyone knows they’re guilty.

*LAURA:* Well if they’re are guilty, I don’t know that. I haven’t seen proof that they’re guilty of anything.

*WOMAN TWO:* They had a trial. The jury examined the evidence and . . . they’re guilty. So you can take your fliers and your Communist ideas and get out of our neighborhood.

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LAURA: You call that a trial? It was absolute nonsense. It was like a Nazi trial. It was all these people who brought forth obscene, unimaginable things against them. There were plants everywhere. That wasn't justice.

WOMAN ONE: Yeah, well, the Judge said they tried to give the atom bomb to the Russians. Jews have enough problems in this country. Now we need to be tied to the KGB?

LAURA: The Rosenbergs' only guilt was that they worked too hard to help the people. People like you. Maybe they worked too hard to do things, that they didn't get enough people behind them. I do not know. But I can tell you that I don't blame them for anything.

WOMAN THREE: Well I do. So stop cluttering up the street.

LAURA: (on a soapbox) Look, we are all trying to keep our heads above the water. Don't you see they're trying to divide us? What side are you on? Goons and Gings and Company Finks, is that what side you're on? You have to know that capitalism is not going to just give away. Our earnings are not going to increase by themselves. Can't you see you are being used as pawns? You know, anti-Semitism, anti-Negro, all these things. Pit one roof against the other. Defending the Rosenbergs means taking a stand against the real enemy. (to audience) They all just stared at me, and then the old man, the one with the chicken. He comes up and spits at me, and he says:


LAURA: Meaning: “I told you to drop dead and you are still standing there.” (crowd leaves) So that was some of the atmosphere. Some people felt that the Rosenbergs were bringing bad things on Jewish communities. They were separating the Jews from the rest of the community. And this was a Jewish ghetto.

SCENE EIGHT: FACING DEATH

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ANNOUNCER: On June 15, 1953, the Supreme Court turned down a stay of execution for the Rosenbergs.

MICHAEL: Dear President Eisenhower, I saw on television on Monday, Mr. Otis is not in prison anymore because the President of the country let him go. It said that his wife wrote a letter to the President over there and she told why Mr. Otis should be let go. I think it is a good thing to let him go home because I think prison is a very bad place for anybody to be. My mommy and daddy are in prison in New York. My brother is six years old. His name is Robby. He misses them very much and I miss them too. I got the idea to write to you from Mr. Otis on television. Please let my mommy and daddy go and not let anything happen to them. If they come home Robby and I will be very happy and will thank you very much. Very Truly Yours, Michael Rosenberg

ANNOUNCER: Denying clemency, President Dwight Eisenhower explained to his son, John:

EISENHOWER: To address myself to the Rosenberg case for a minute. I must say that it goes against the grain to avoid interfering in the case where a woman is to receive capital punishment. Over against this, however, must be placed one or two facts which have greater significance. The first of these is that in this instance, it is the woman who is the strong and recalcitrant character. The man is the weak one. She has obviously been the leader in everything that they did in the spy ring. The second thing is that if there would be any commuting of the woman’s sentence without the man’s, then from here on the Soviets would simply recruit their spies from among women.

Lights up on JUDITH who sits next to YOUNG JUDITH in bed.

JUDITH: Every night I use to lie in bed and think . . .

YOUNG JUDITH: (in bed) If I were Ethel Rosenberg, what would I do? Could I be Joan of Arc? Could I really do that?

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JUDITH: At that particular time, being a mother, was very definitive, it was like, being a mother versus being a revolutionary. I grew up very much with St. Joan. I met all those people who were revolutionaries. I was raised to be a revolutionary, as a child. My father believed that we should . . . Well, I think I was raised . . . possibly to die. Which is why the story of St. Joan was so close to me.

YOUNG JUDITH: Ethel is so much like St. Joan, if St. Joan had children. (wide eyes) What if St. Joan had children in addition to her other problems?

Lights up on the ROSENBERGS in their cells. They move toward each other downstage and hold hands as they speak.

ETHEL & JULIUS: Dearest Sweethearts, Our most precious children,

ETHEL: Only this morning it looked like we might be together again after all. Now that this cannot be, I want so much for you to know all that I have come to know. Unfortunately, I may write only a few simple words; the rest your own lives must teach you, even as mine taught me.

JULIUS: At first, of course, you will grieve bitterly for us, but you will not grieve alone. That is our consolation and it must eventually be yours. Eventually, too, you must come to believe that life is worth the living. Be comforted that even now, with the end of ours slowly approaching, that we know this with a conviction that defeats the executioner!

ETHEL: Your lives must teach you, too, that good cannot really flourish in the midst of evil; that freedom and all the things that go to make up a truly satisfying and worthwhile life, must sometimes be purchased very dearly.

JULIUS: Be comforted then that we were serene and understood with the deepest kind of understanding, that civilization had not as yet progressed to the point where life did not have to be lost for the sake of life; and that we were comforted in the sure knowledge that others would carry on after us.

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ETHEL: We wish we might have had the tremendous joy and gratification of living our lives out with you.

Your Daddy, who is with me in the last momentous hours, sends his heart and all the love that is in it

for his dearest boys. Always remember that we were innocent and could not wrong our conscience.

ETHEL & JULIUS: We press you close and kiss you with all our strength.

JULIUS: Lovingly, Daddy—Julius,

ETHEL: and Mommy—Ethel.

Ethel’s theme plays in the transition to the next scene.

SCENE NINE: THE EXECUTION

Lights up on ANN, NORA, and CAROL in their office.

ANNA: We were so . . . it was as though we were losing close relatives. Close relatives. I never saw them in

life, but my husband Paul and I and the other women—here’s what happened.

NORA: On Friday, they were going to be put to death. And out of respect for the Jewish Sabbath, they were

going to be put to death before sundown Friday night because the Sabbath, every holiday of the Jewish

religion, begins the evening proceeding the full day. So they were gonna be murdered, executed, at

eight o’clock or eight something, right before sundown.

CAROL: It’s like you’ve been put through a ringer, up, down, and sideways. A few of us gathered at this

couple’s house. We didn’t have television, it was radio at that time and you heard the news.

Lights up on JUDITH on the street.
JUDITH: I never told my parents, in fact, but I was so worried that she would be . . . especially Ethel. I think most of us identified . . . she had those big doe eyes, and she looked totally like she had been trapped, you know. I knew about her mother, we had read all these stories about how her mother made her miserable, and she was so alone. So anyway, on the evening they were to be . . . killed, I decided that that only thing that might save them was God. But I didn’t know where to find him.

Lights up on LAURA in the factory. We hear the sound of the machines, and actors are working the looms.

LAURA: I lived in New York, and I happened to be working at the same place that Ethel Rosenberg had worked at years before. And I was a union organizer in my shop, Bell Textiles. So I closed down the shop and we joined the march. We went from Union Square to, we walked to the Rosenberg’s house. That was at the time, at sundown, when they were executing them.

Lights up on JUDITH. A crowd forms in the street. YOUNG JUDITH is lost among them.

JUDITH: I got on the subway and went to St. Patrick’s Cathedral. I actually went there by myself. Of course I was Jewish, and I wasn’t much of a believer because, well—given the world in which we live—I didn’t see that praying to anything really helped. It seemed to me that it was more of a comfort for you than anything that would actually intercede on your behalf. However, I was willing, being a child, to suspend disbelief. (In a dance, the crowd transforms into worshippers in the Cathedral, singing a Gregorian chant, which continues under the scene. Young Judith enters the church.)

JUDITH & YOUNG JUDITH: As I entered the church, everything looked so huge.

YOUNG JUDITH: And it felt cold.

JUDITH: I couldn’t take my eyes off of the stain glass windows.

YOUNG JUDITH: People were kneeling, saying some chant I couldn’t understand.
JUDITH: And some people walked in a line to this man in white.

YOUNG JUDITH: So I got in line. It looked like the man in white was putting something in their mouths. And he was saying something . . .

PRIEST: Body of Christ.

WORSHIPPERS: Amen.

PRIEST: (to Young Judith) Body of Christ.

YOUNG JUDITH: Oh. I’m not really here for that. I was hoping maybe I could get in touch with God here. (She speaks to each person as they step forward to receive Communion.) This really shouldn’t be happening.

WORSHIPPER ONE: Shhh.

YOUNG JUDITH: Ethel and Julius simply can’t die. They just can’t.

WORSHIPPER TWO: Shhh.

YOUNG JUDITH: This is all wrong, can’t you see?

WORSHIPPER THREE: Shhh.

YOUNG JUDITH: Please, God, hear my prayer.

JUDITH: (to audience) I wasn’t sure if God heard me, so I thought I better go to another place, just to make sure. (As Young Judith steps out of the church, the actors transform back into the street scene as Laura emerges.)

LAURA: We had a thousand people on that march. All the union people and the people supporting us left from Union Square to the Rosenberg house. I had never been able to meet Ethel. She was in Sing Sing. I couldn’t go to see her. So, I went to see her before she died, well, the home she lived in.
The street scene transforms into a Hindu Temple. WORSHIPPERS sing a Hindu prayer, which continues under the scene. YOUNG JUDITH stands in the center of the WORSHIPPERS who sit in a yoga position around her. Lights up on JUDITH.

JUDITH: I had never seen anything like this place before, so I thought . . .

JUDITH & YOUNG JUDITH: Maybe, just maybe I could find Him here.

YOUNG JUDITH: People were sitting strangely. I guess they were praying, and there was music that sounded so peaceful that God must be here. (She looks up.) Please, God, please hear my prayer. This execution must be stopped. I need your help.

JUDITH: (to audience) So I waited . . . but I wasn’t sure if he heard me. (The crowd stands and moves to another part of the stage singing a Muslim prayer, and transforming into a Mosque with people bowing in prayer. The prayer continues under the scene.)

JUDITH: I walked into this great mosque, and saw people on their knees, bowing in prayer.

YOUNG JUDITH: And I thought they looked very serious and very devoted.

JUDITH & YOUNG JUDITH: If God was anywhere, he was certainly here.

YOUNG JUDITH: So, I got on my knees and begged. God, don’t you understand? They have two children, littler than me. (She starts to cry.) How can you take them away? They didn’t do anything bad, God. I’ll do anything. Please let them live. (She sobs. Lights fade out on Young Judith and up on the Radio Announcer standing at a microphone.)

ANNOUNCER: On June 19, 1953, the official observer of the execution gave the following report to the press:

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**OBSERVER:** Julius and Ethel Rosenberg have gone to the electric chair. The first to go into the death chamber was Julius Rosenberg. The first volts of electricity entered his body at 8:04 p.m. She died a lot harder.

**ANNOUNCER:** Hearst reporter Bob Considine also witnessed the execution:

**CONSIDINE:** Ethel wore a Mona Lisa smile. Her little minnow of a mouth was curled at the edges in the faintest possible way. She was dressed in a dark green print of cheap material, a prison dress that revealed her plump legs below the knee. Her dark brown hair was set in an almost boyish manner. As the hood was lowered over her eyes and the black strap placed across her mouth, she was looking straight ahead almost triumphantly. As the torrent of electricity swept through her body ... from every pore there seemed to emanate a strange, unearthly sound made up almost exclusively of the letter Z. Now she seemed about to stand. Her hands contracted into fists. Thus she sat, lifted off her seat as far as the straps would permit, and I had the startled feeling that she would break those bonds and come charging across the floor, wielding those tight little fists.

**OBSERVER:** Believing she was dead, the attendants had taken off the ghastly strapping and electrodes and black belts and so forth. These had to be readjusted again and she was given more electricity, which began again the ghastly plume of smoke that rose from her head and went up against the skylight overhead. After two more of those jolts, Ethel Rosenberg had met her maker, and she'll have a lot of explaining to do.

**CONSIDINE.** She could relax now. Her face possessed the same quizzical half smile that had been painted upon it minutes before. As she was pushed out of sight on a wheeled table her right leg was flexed in an easy and almost nonchalant posture. It was a trying experience when, a few minutes later, briefing thirty-eight reporters from half a dozen countries, the first question asked was a shrill one from a lady

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reporter. “What did Mrs. Rosenberg wear tonight?” she called up to me. It just seemed so damned
callous. (*lights out on the Announcer and Observer and up on Anna*)

ANNA: We drove that night. We got to New York. We must have left in the middle of the night, because we
got to New York in the morning. And it was roasting, and I had very few clothes to my name. So, I had
a dress that I was going to put on for the . . . I presume . . . it was black. We arrived at the street where
the office or whatever the building is, around noontime. There were thousands, there were maybe a
hundred thousand people crowding the streets all around there. But, we were taken in, cause we had
been running the office in Boston. Somehow we had something that let us in. How did we get into the
. . . into the Rosenberg . . . not the committee . . . where the two . . . the two, um, coffins, the open
coffins were there. And we were there. (*pause*) And we saw the bodies. It was just weird. It was . . . I
felt as though I had lost a sister, when I looked at her. It was an amazing thing for me to see those two
faces, those two bodies lying there. The courage they . . . the courage she had of knowing that she will
never see her children again. And that those children would never have their mother and father who
love them very much, all through their growing years. That’s all things they gave up. (*She fights back
tears.*) And there was my political and spiritual sister. It’s so sad. I never met her, till she was dead.

Until my Ethel, my sister, was gone. (*The scene transforms to the funeral of the Rosenbergs. A Rabbi leads
mourners in “Eli Eli,” a traditional Hebrew hymn. Laura turns from the funeral to address the audience.*

*The hymn continues under the following.*)

LAURA: I went to their funeral. It was a Jewish place. It was a Jewish undertaker. We all marched there from
different parts of the city, and we had a cortege watching over her and her husband. And it was a very
. . . very touching thing. It was near a Brown Stone where I lived. (*speaks as if giving a eulogy*) Ethel to
me was a strong woman. And she to the end, stuck to her principles. And that is what I want to take
away with me. She is a great force in my life, when things get dreary—I live alone . . . I’m not always
friendly—I look to her. Ethel stood out, as a woman and as a Communist, as a free person and as a union leader. And that’s all I have to say. (She breaks down crying.)

ETHEL enters and sings “If We Die,” by Ethel Rosenberg, as if comforting her. LAURA and SARA join in.


Individual cast members sing each verse and the whole cast sings the chorus and the repeated verse. The play ends with a voice collage of the women who were interviewed and a slide of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg.
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