ACT ONE

Scene 1

On scrim –
“*The children of New England between 1820 and 1840 were born with knives in their brains*” - Ralph Waldo Emerson

An old classroom at Wheaton College, mid-1880’s. LUCY LARCOM, nearing 60 but still with great energy, is packing her belongings into an apple crate. A gaggle of 8-12 college-aged women gathers at the door, shushing each other excitedly. When LUCY hears them sing, she pauses packing and listens proudly.

GIRLS

A RUSHLIGHT, FLICKERING AND SMALL IS BETTER THAN NO LIGHT AT ALL.

OLD LUCY

My dears…

The girls shuffle into the room, awkwardly hiding something.

GIRL 1

Ms. Larcom, don’t go!

GIRL 2

Who will lead us?

OLD LUCY

Caroline has proven a worthy editor.

CAROLINE

But you are our advisor and founder.

OLD LUCY

And now I must go write myself. I love you girls, but I can’t get any writing done as a teacher. I talk with you all too much. I have to engage with the solitude of my craft for a while.

GIRL 3

If we can’t convince you to stay…
OLD LUCY
And you cannot. I’ve already bought my ticket.

GIRL 2
Let us at least present you with this.

*The girls part, revealing a chair upholstered like a quilt.*

OLD LUCY
Oh, girls…

GIRL 3
Look closely.

OLD LUCY
*putting on her glasses*
It’s covered in quotations!

GIRL 1
Each of us chose a bit from our favorite *Rushlight* piece. So you’ll have something to remember us by.

*LUCY is carried into memory briefly. MUSIC CUE - River chorus (?)*

GIRL 2
Ms. Larcom?

OLD LUCY
I’m sorry, for a moment… you’ve carried me to another place and time.

GIRL X
A good one?

OLD LUCY
A very full one. The day I left Lowell.

GIRL Y
You’ve always talked of Lowell as if it were some Yankee El Dorado. Isn’t it just some run-down factory town now?

OLD LUCY
It wasn’t when I was your age. Then, all was expectation. Things were happening, and no one could guess just what. And girls your age rushed down to the city to find out.
A driving, one-note ostinato begins very quietly as lights come up on a shack in the New England countryside, crescendoing gradually.

GIRL X
Like your friends Harriet Farley and Sarah Bagley?

OLD LUCY
They were less my friends; more my heroes and idols, although we did socialize. I see some of Harriet in you, Caroline; you share her unwavering decorum, patience, and intelligence.

CAROLINE steps forward and becomes HARRIET FARLEY
Sarah was more like Margaret—fiery and brash, not far removed from the sturdy backwoodsmen who settled her New Hampshire home.

MARGARET steps forward and shakes out her mane of red hair, becoming SARAH BAGLEY. The two look at one another...

A whole world changed the day they came together.

…and turn and exit. We are back in 1843. The girls of RUSHLIGHT become actors as LUCY remembers her days in LOWELL. One puts on a hat and tucks up her hair, becoming an AGENT, then steps forward and announces:

AGENT
Seventy-five young women ages 15 to 35 wanted for work in the cotton mills of Lowell, Massachusetts. Operatives will be paid up to $3 per week and will receive free board for the first month.

FLORILLA, a homely girl with two black eyes, comforts her similarly abused mother.

SONG: Something Grand Before Us—SARAH BAGLEY, FLORILLA, GEORGIA

FLORILLA

MAMA…

A split stage; ABBOT LAWRENCE is giving a tour of the Boot Mills of Lowell, Massachusetts to a small group of dignitaries.

ABBOT LAWRENCE
And this, gentlemen, is our spinning room, where our operatives spin southern cotton into Boott Mills yarn. We are not only destined to be the greatest cotton growers but the most extensive cotton spinners in the world. We have all the elements among ourselves to do so.

FLORILLA

WAGON'S HERE

DIGNITARY 1

Then where is the coal?

ABBOT

All of our energy comes from that wheel: the Concord and the Merrimack converge here after a 32-foot drop, creating all the power to run this industry

FLORILLA

PLEASE DON'T CRY,
IT'S JUST ONE YEAR

BRITISH DIGNITARY 2

And worker retention, is this a problem?

ABBOT

Quite the opposite; we have a flood of young women eager to work.

FLORILLA

MAMA

FL.'S MOTHER

You come back, ok?

FLORILLA

I'LL SAVE EVERYTHING I EARN
AND TAKE YOU FAR AWAY FROM HIM
WHEN I RETURN

ABBOTT

(continued)
Respectfully, the Lowell system is our American response to Britain’s factories. We believe that we can create a safe work environment with payment in cash, lectures, and safe housing while still maintaining a profitable New England business.

*They walk through the spinning room. In another NH town, GEORGIA, a pretty country girl, is putting on her best bonnet, her bags nearby.*

FLORILLA

MAMA

GEORGIA

MONEY JUST FOR ME

*In the mills, HARRIET FARLEY, 27, a strong, graceful operative, approaches the tour.*

HARRIET FARLEY

Good afternoon, Mister Lawrence.

GEORGIA

CLOTHES TO CALL MY OWN

ABBOTT

Gentlemen, the pride of Lowell, Ms. Harriet Farley.

GEORGIA

I’LL LIVE A LIFE MORE FREE

ABBOTT

Ms. Farley is a shining example of all we hope for our operatives.

GEORGIA

THAN ANYTHING I’VE KNOWN

ABBOTT

What’s more, she is a top writer for our company-sponsored magazine, *The Lowell Offering.*

HARRIET

It is a pleasure to meet you all. Welcome to the city of spindles.
The stage shifts so that we see only the countryside and girls all over preparing themselves for the trip to Lowell. HARRIET is holding up a copy of The Lowell Offering that beckons the girls to come to Lowell.

GEORGIA & FLORILLA

OH, CAUSE I KNOW…
THERE’S SOMETHING GRAND BEFORE US
I DON’T KNOW WHAT IT IS, BUT I KNOW
I HAVE TO GO…
SO I’M HEADING DOWN
FROM THIS ONE-HORSE TOWN
ON A WAGON BOUND
FOR LOWELL.

AGENT
Young women wanted for work in the cotton mills of Lowell! Excellent pay, room and board…

FLORILLA

MAMA

IT’S THE ONLY CHANCE WE’VE GOT
IF WE FAIL IN TRYING, WELL,
AT LEAST WE FOUGHT

MAMA

I’LL SAVE EVERYTHING I EARN
AND TAKE YOU FAR AWAY FROM HIM
WHEN I RETURN

AND UNTIL THEN
WHEN HE SWINGS,
REMEMBER WE WILL SOON
START OVER AGAIN,

GEORGIA’S SISTER

You want to be a factory girl?

GEORGIA

THERE’S NOTHING HERE FOR AND
ME….

GEORGIA’S SISTER

But Easter’s coming!

GEORGIA

POWDER FOR MY FACE
STOCKINGS FOR MY THIGHS
CALICO AND LACE
AND MEN TO WIN THE PRIZE

FLORILLA AND GEORGIA

BECAUSE I KNOW…
THERE’S SOMETHING GRAND BEFORE US
I DON’T KNOW WHAT IT IS, BUT I KNOW
I HAVE TO GO…
SO I’M HEADING DOWN
FROM THIS ONE-HORSE TOWN
ON A WAGON BOUND
FOR LOWELL.

SARAH BAGLEY, a striking woman of formidable energy, storms onto the stage in another NH town followed by her father.

SARAH’S FATHER
Sarah George Bagley, don’t you walk away when I’m talking.

SARAH
YOU HAVE TO LET ME GO

SARAH’S FATHER
Sarah—

SARAH
I’M THIRTY-ONE YEARS OLD
AND I’VE NEVER LEFT NEW HAMPSHIRE
I NEED TO SEE WHAT ELSE IS OUT THERE

SARAH’S FATHER
But I need your help here—

SARAH
LET HENRY RUN THE MILL
IF YOU BELIEVE HE CAN, I KNOW HE WILL…
REMEMBER I WAS JUST THIRTEEN
WHEN FIRST I TOOK YOUR PLACE AT THE MACHINE…

DADDY, PLEASE…
THINGS ARE CHANGING FAST, AND LOWELL IS THE PLACE I WANT TO BE
AND I KNOW WE CAN USE THE MONEY
SO HUG ME BEFORE I LEAVE..
PAPA, HUG ME BEFORE I LEAVE…

SARAH’S FATHER
If you get there and you can’t find work good enough—
SARAH
I know.

SARAH’S FATHER
Try again. That’s what Bagleys do.

SARAH
Yes, Papa.

BECAUSE I KNOW…
THERE’S SOMETHING GRAND BEFORE US
I DON’T KNOW WHAT IT IS,

SARAH, FLORILLA, AND GEORGIA

BUT I KNOW
I HAVE TO GO…
SO I’M HEADING DOWN
FROM THIS ONE-HORSE TOWN
ON A WAGON BOUND
FOR
LOWELL!

As they board the wagon

THERE’S SOMETHING GRAND BEFORE US
I DON’T KNOW WHAT IT IS, BUT I KNOW
I HAVE TO GO…
SO I’M HEADING DOWN
FROM THIS ONE-HORSE TOWN
ON A WAGON BOUND
FOR…

The ostinato continues... The city of Lowell, Mass rises up to meet the travelers.

AGENT
Lowell, Massachusetts. An entire city of independent young women.

OLD LUCY
We came in droves from all over New England, women who were grave (ABIGAIL steps forward), frivolous (MARTHA steps forward), melancholy (HEPSABETH steps forward), and high-spirited (SARAH lifts her head), all filled with the spirit of self-sacrifice. I remember how
beautiful the Merrimack looked to me in childhood, the first true river I ever knew; it opened upon my sight and wound its way through my heart like a dream realized; its herbals, its rocks, its rapids are more fixed in my memory than anything about the sea.

AGENT
Paradise, you might say. Or hell on earth, depending on who you ask.

_Awestruck, the new girls marvel at the city before them while the girls already in Lowell reinforce the vision._

ALL GIRLS

I NEVER THOUGHT THAT I COULD EVER GET SO FAR FROM HOME
I NEVER THOUGHT THAT I COULD EVER GET SO FAR
I NEVER THOUGHT THAT I COULD EVER GET SO FAR FROM HOME
I NEVER THOUGHT THAT I COULD EVER GET SO FAR

I NEVER THOUGHT THAT I COULD EVER GET SO FAR FROM HOME
I NEVER THOUGHT THAT I COULD EVER GET SO FAR
I NEVER THOUGHT THAT I COULD EVER GET SO FAR FROM HOME

THERE’S SOMETHING GRAND BEFORE US

I NEVER THOUGHT I WOULD EVER GET
TO THE CITY OF SPINDLES
A NEW BEGINNING
A CHANCE TO STAND ON MY OWN
ON A WAGON BOUND TO LOWELL.

_Lights._
Scene 2

A cold rain, late at night. SARAH arrives at the front door of Boardinghouse #6 with a beat-up horsehair trunk. She knocks.

Inside, 8-10 young women are sitting in a semi-circle in the living room of the boardinghouse. ABIGAIL stands, reading from a paper.

As ABIGAIL sings, YOUNG LUCY (from here on just “LUCY”) scribbles a poem on a scrap of old parchment. Hearing the door, she hurries to finish. The dialogue should go concurrently with the song.

LUCY

Coming!

LUCY puts down her pen and wipes her ink-stained fingers on her stockings, then goes to answer the door.

OLD LUCY

still in the classroom, putting on a bonnet

I was a precocious 15 year-old, never without my pen even then. It hasn’t surprised me to find that the last few years have aged me into my mother. What has surprised me is that I don’t think that’s such a bad tenet. (the bonnet on, she becomes MS. LARCOM, her mother)

LUCY opens the door to find a soaking wet SARAH.

LUCY

Well you can’t come in like that.

MRS. LARCOM

Lucy! (pushing LUCY aside) Forgive my daughter’s manners, she knows better. Come, dear, you’re soaked through.

SARAH

Is this Boott Number Six?

MRS. LARCOM

It is.

SARAH

I was told by my cousin Melissa told me I could possibly rent a bed here.
MRS. LARCOM
These slavers certainly run on their own schedule these days. Lucy, put on some tea for our new boarder. I’ll find you a towel. Come on in.

ABIGAIL

FORGET ME NOT, FORGET ME NEVER
TIL YONDER SUN HAS GONE FOREVER.
REMEMBER ME WHEN THIS YOU SEE
AND I’LL REMEMBER YOU.

*The others applaud. HARRIET FARLEY, the leader of the gathering, stands. MRS. LARCOM exits briefly, and SARAH stands dripping.*

HARRIET
Thank you, ladies. I shall review each submission from tonight’s Self-Improvement Circle and make selections for the next issue of *The Offering* by Sunday evening. Before we adjourn, though, I have one order of business.

ALL

Orestes Bronson.

ORESTES BRONSON
*(downstage and imagined by the girls)*

“The operatives are well dressed, and, we are told, well paid. They are said to be healthy, content, and happy. This is the fair side of the picture; the picture exhibited to distinguished visitors. But the great mass wear out their health, spirits and morals, without becoming one whit better off than when they commenced labor. The bills of mortality in their factory villages are not striking, we admit, for the poor girls when they can toil no longer go home to die. She has worked in a factory’ is almost enough to damn to infamy the most worthy and virtuous girl.”

HEPSABETH

That gasbag. What does he know?

ABIGAIL

Hepsabeth, your tongue, as usual.

HEPSABETH

He is. Why else would he spout such crap?

SARAH

Well it ain’t true.
Monday, Jan 11, 2016

All turn to look at the new girl, soaking by the door.

MRS. LARCOM
Reentering with a towel
A new boarder- this is Sarah, girls, Melissa’s cousin.

BETSY
Oh, I miss that one, with her ‘da-own’s’ and ‘haow’s. Northern New Hampshire girl, huh?

MRS. LARCOM
She’ll start on the floor tomorrow. I’ll collect some dry clothes and see what I can do about a bed.

HEPSABETH
Bronson’s an idiot.

HARRIET
His flaw is ignorance, not idiocy. It is our job as writers of The Lowell Offering to correct him.

SONG: Dear Sir—HARRIET FARLEY

HARRIET
DEAR SIR
WHERE DID YOU HEAR, SIR
THAT WORKING IN A FACTORY
WOULD DOOM A GIRL TO INFAMY?

WE’RE HERE, NOW
LET ME BE CLEAR, NOW
TO BETTER OURSELVES, AND TO WORK AND TO LEARN,
AND TO MAKE THE BEST WAGES A WOMAN CAN EARN...!

MISTER BRONSON, YOU HAVE WRITTEN
THAT WE WORKERS HAVE NO LOVE FOR LIBERTY

OTHERS

No, not so!

HARRIET

BUT YOU WERE BORN A SON OF FREEDOM—
AND WE HAVE CHOSEN WORK TO SET US FREE.

OTHERS

That’s right!

HARRIET

AND OH, MAN,
DIDN’T YOU KNOW, MAN
THE OPERATIVES WHOSE NAMES YOU MOCK
CAN TRACE THEIR BLOOD TO PLYMOUTH ROCK

SO I, SIR,
BEG TO KNOW WHY, SIR
YOU THINK IT WISE TO DAMN THE ONES
WHO WILL RAISE NEW ENGLAND’S SONS

FOR THOUGH WE WORK HARD
OUR MINDS ARE BRIGHT
AND OUR SOULS CAN BE SEEN IN THE WORDS WE WRITE!
SO IF YOU EVER DOUBT
WHAT A FACTORY GIRL CAN BE
LOOK NO FURTHER THAN THE LOWELL OFFERING!

How does that read, Gladys?

GLADYS

He will not bear to show his face when this is published.

HARRIET

SO PLEASE, SIR,
LISTEN TO ME, SIR,
THE GIRLS YOU FALSELY REPRESENT
ARE WORTHY AND INTELLIGENT

AND WE, SIR
BEG YOU TO SEE, SIR,
THAT THOUGH YOU MAY MEAN NOTHING BY
THESE WORDS, THEY LEAVE A BLACKENED EYE,
SO IF YOU ARE A MAN, YOU’LL TRY
(sweetly)
TO RIGHT THIS INJURY

OTHERS

YOU SAY THAT
YOU SAY THAT
WE’RE NOT
WORTHY

AND WE, SIR,
BEG YOU TO SEE, SIR
AND TELL THE WORLD THAT THEY ARE VIRTUOUS GIRLS WHO WORK IN THE FACTORY.

HARRIET

Until next week, ladies.

The girls disperse. MRS. LARCOM comes down.

MRS. LARCOM

Some dry clothes and I’ve found you a cot, for tonight at least. All are two to a bed already, but there is one spot next to Gladys that’s open until Samantha comes back; she can show you the room.

SARAH

Thank you, Mrs. Larcom.

GLADYS, a snotty, sniveling young woman who probably doesn’t smell great, approaches SARAH enthusiastically.

GLADYS

Glad to meet you, Sarah! Gladys Winthrop, spinning room. I also play the pianoforte.

HARRIET

On the way out

And a fine poet, to boot.

SARAH

Ms. Farley?

HARRIET

Have we met?

SARAH

No sorry- I’m just – well, I’m a big fanatic of your work in the Offering. Your ‘Joan Of Arc’ piece last year was a huge influence on my coming to Lowell.

HARRIET

Thank you. I truly appreciate it. Where are you from, Ms…

SARAH

Sarah Bagley. Down from Meredith, New Hampshire.

HARRIET

14
Meredith? I’m from Claremont. Been here for twelve years. So I guess we haven’t met.

SARAH

We have now.

HARRIET

Find me at the first bells on the steps—4:30. We’ll walk to the mills together. The least I can do for a fellow Granite Stater.

SARAH

I will. Thanks.

GLADYS

Meredith, eh? There was a girl here from Meredith a year or so ago, what was her name, you probably know her… Oh, I can’t remember, with this head cold and this- cough- and all. (she coughs loudly and with a very strange high pitch). The bed’s not too bad. I brought a wool blanket from home so it’s plenty warm. Warmer now that we’ll have two! Your cousin, I loved your cousin, does she have a great big family now? She was always so pretty. Oh, these are the stairs, of course, and the living area, where our Self-Improvement circles…

*Her quick talking, nervous voice fades off she leads SARAH up the stairs to the room.*
Scene 3

The morning bells ring loudly and early, and lights rise on the factory floor of Boott Mills. The machines—giant skeletons of wood and steel—are in constant motion from belts attached to the drive shaft. Their clatter is cacophonous. LUCY has poems tacked to her loom, others have books sewn in to their work clothes, there are plants all over the place and in the windowsills, which are nailed shut.

BEN
All operatives to your stations! Great day to be a working woman in New England!

SARAH
So these Crompton looms – anything special I need to know?

GLADYS
They’re new to us, too.

ABIGAIL
It’s not so hard, really. If you are fast and tough.

**SONG: Think Like a Machine—**ALL

ABIGAIL

FIRST YOU TAKE THE BOBBIN HEAD
AND SEND IT THROUGH THE ROVING
THEN STAND ASIDE AND WATCH THE SHUTTLE GO...

HEPSABETH

FORGET ABOUT THE CHORES YOU HAD
THE PAINFUL HOURS SEWING
JUST MIND THE THREAD, WITH ONE EYE ON THE ROW
THIS LOOM WILL SHOW YOU ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

GEORGIA
Is there any place quieter or is all the work this loud?

HARRIET

IN THE CUTTING ROOM
FLOWERS FILL THE WINDOWS
AND FABRIC FINDS A SHAPE BENEATH OUR HAND
THOUGH THE PAY IS LESS,
A LOWELL GIRL CAN BREATHE THE AIR...
UNTIL SHE GETS HER GOLDEN WEDDING BAND.

ALL (NOT SARAH)

THIS LOOM WILL SHOW YOU ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW
JUST BEND YOUR KNEES AND TRY TO FEEL AND
THINK LIKE A MACHINE - SLIP INSIDE THE GEARS
FORGET ABOUT YOUR HOME, FORGET ABOUT YOUR FEARS.
THINK LIKE A MACHINE - FEEL THE SHUTTLE SLIDE
THE RHYTHM OF THE LOOM WILL BE YOUR GUIDE...

SARAH
I see… they’re a lot like the handlooms we had back home, but the shuttle… the shuttle flies!

ALL

HEY, HAH...HEY, HAH...HEY, HAH...HEY, HAH...

TWICE SIX, TWICE SEVEN - TWICE TWENTY AND ELEVEN
TWICE SIX, TWICE SEVEN - TWICE TWENTY AND ELEVEN
TWICE SIX, TWICE SEVEN - TWICE TWENTY AND ELEVEN
TWICE SIX, TWICE SEVEN - TWICE TWENTY AND ELEVEN...

FLORILLA
What are they saying?

GLADYS
It’s the rhythm of the looms! Helps us focus.

ALL (ADD SARAH)

THINK LIKE A MACHINE - FLY ON METAL WINGS
LISTEN TO THE SONG A BRAND NEW CITY SINGS

ALL (ADD MEN)

THINK LIKE A MACHINE - SPIN INSIDE THE THREAD
AND BLOCK OUT ALL THE CLATTER IN YOUR HEAD

*The bells clang noisily.*

BEN

Mid-day bells! Thirty minutes for dinner.

*The girls charge out of the factory and hurry to the boardinghouse.*

SARAH

One half hour to get to the boardinghouse and back?

LUCY

And to eat!

*Girls are calling to each other, shouting, all hustling together to dinner.*

*The girls crowd into the dining room, eating fast, fighting; MRS. LARCOM hustles them around; the impression is a constant bustle, overlapping dialogue. The bells ring again, and the girls hurry back to the factory, assuring Sarah there are only 5 more hours of daylight and work. Along the way...*

SARAH

Then what?

ABIGAIL

Then we go home and recreate.

LUCY

FOR AT THE FINAL BELL THE NIGHT IS YOURS AND YOURS ALONE...
AND EVERY PENNY EARNED IS ONE TO CALL YOUR OWN...

ALL

THIS SACRED TIME’S THE SECRET GIFT OF LOWELL.
WE READ AND SHARE OUR WRITING,
THE OIL LAMP IGNITING
ALL THE DREAMS DEEP IN OUR SOUL...

*The bells ring. Back to the factory!!*

HARRIET
BACK INSIDE THE FACTORY - AT EVERY WORKER’S STATION, 
WE POST OUR WRITTEN WORDS FOR ALL TO READ. 
WE HOPE THE LOWELL OFFERING 
OUR HUMBLE PUBLICATION 
CAN HELP TO KEEP THE WORKERS’ MIND AT EASE-- 
AND HELP YOU PASS THE HOURS AS YOU WEAVE...

ALL

THIS LOOM WILL SHOW YOU ALL YOU NEED-- 
TO THINK LIKE A MACHINE!

ABBOTT LAWRENCE, 50s, rakishly handsome, with a charming face, strides onto the 
factory floor.

ABBOTT

Shouting above the noise

Mister Curtis, lift the wheel, if you would.

BEN does so. The wheel comes up out of the water, the machines slow to a halt.

BEN

Ladies, your attention to the owner of these mills, Abbott Lawrence!

ABBOTT

Good evening, operatives. It is good to see you all happy and healthy today; I am glad the new 
Crompton looms are cooperating. I have come by this evening to announce a new company 
initiative; the Boott Mills Premium System. Instead of merely being paid for time on the floor, 
all overseers’ and operatives’ salaries will now be tied to their output. Overseers, your base 
salary will fall to $3 per week; (Cross-dressed overseers groan) however, you will receive an 
extra 10 cents per hundred yards of fabric your workers produce. (Overseers smile) Spinners and 
weavers, your pay will be reduced by 50 cents a week, but you will be entitled to an additional 2 
cents per piece. American incentive in action! Any questions?

No questions. He checks his pocket watch.

Good! The evening bell will ring in a moment; the premium system will begin tomorrow. Good 
night, ladies. The Dream of Lowell lives on.

He strides off. The bells clang.

BEN
Great work all, see you at 5am tomorrow!

*The girls exit en masse.*
Scene 4

_In foyer of boardinghouse. SARAH comes in and MARTHA intercepts her._

MARTHA

Sarah—

SARAH

Hi—

MARTHA

—you’re new, you’re - fresh. Like the morning dew on a lilac. Don’t end up like her.

SARAH

Who? Harriet?

MARTHA

She’s a lifer. You don’t have to be. You are naturally beautiful, and I could help you.

SARAH

I never said I wanted to be. (_beat_) A lifer, that is.

MARTHA

Look, all I’m saying is….watch out for her. And them.

SARAH

Them?

MARTHA

You know, Harriet, Ben Curtis, company all of their ilk. Old Abbott still holding up the tent of Frank Lowell. What a joke. Coming from a guy whose wife jumped on the back of his best friends’ horse and left him in the middle of the night for a Wyoming ranch two years ago. That’s why he’s so “driven.”

SARAH

Is that truthful?

MARTHA

Well- you didn’t hear it from me. And I didn’t hear it from Agnes, who didn’t hear it from his personal chambermaid.

_The rest of the girls enter from the mill._
HARRIET
It is an opportunity to earn and save using our God-given energies!

ABIGAIL
No. Back on Meadowview farm—

HEPSABETH
Here we go again—‘back at Meadowview’ like it was Valhalla with udders and candles.

ABIGAIL
—no one cared how fast you milked the cow, long as the milking got done.

GEORGIA
No, but if you need to sell the milk, you’ll make more for a gallon than a quart.

MARTHA
What are you even talking about? Cows?

GLADYS
I’m only concerned with having less time and energy to write and to practice my Beethoven.

HARRIET
You aren’t required to work extra looms, it’s only an option.

HEPSABETH
But you can bet they’ll speed the looms up for everyone. You heard Mister Lawrence—the overseers are the ones that stand to make the most, and you know old man Weatherspoon in Spinning #3….he’ll ride us until the cows come home.

SARAH
But didn’t we all come here to earn?

FLORILLA
Girls come to Lowell for lots of reasons.

HEPSABETH
Abigail is putting her brother through Amherst. I’m here to eat, earn, and crack jokes. Why are you here, Martha?

MARTHA
Don’t look at me with your judgmental stare, Hefty Hepsy the husky “vegetarian”. I know your secrets too.
ABIGAIL
Then where will it end? Girls will work themselves to death for an extra penny per piece, mark my words on this one.

SARAH
Seeing ABIGAIL’S quilting
You quilt, as well?

MARTHA
Miss Abigail’s fashion sense leans towards the quaint and…grand-maternal.

ABIGAIL
Why thank you, Martha. Yes, I’m admittedly quite possessed with my patchwork. Martha can have a charge account, I’ll save my money and sew.

GLADYS
Honestly, what good is a damn machine anyways if—

MRS. LARCOM
sing-songy as she passes by with laundry
Young la-dies! Language!

ABIGAIL
What she means, Sarah, what good is a stinking machine if it makes you work even harder and longer than you did on the farm?

SONG: Live Free Or Die—ABIGAIL, SARAH

ABIGAIL

TURNIN’ OUT CLOTH TWELVE HOURS A DAY
YOUR LIFE AIN’T EVEN YOUR OWN
THE CONSTANT CLATTER AND DRONE WON’T LET YOU BE
SO WHEN I GET OFF AFTER EARNIN’ MY PAY
AND PICK UP MY NEEDLE AND THREAD
I’M BACK ON THE OLD HOMESTEAD
AND I AM FREE!
CAUSE BEIN’ HOME JUST MEANS THAT MUCH TO ME

PIECE BY PIECE WE STITCH EACH SQUARE
PATCHWORK QUILTIN IN THE COUNTRY AIR
WORKIN TO THE RHYTHM OF THE ROCKIN’ CHAIR
I KISS MY CARES GOODBYE
FROM MY LAP TO MY SISTER’S KNEE
THE ONLY OVERSEER IS THE MAPLE TREE
THE FAMILY WAY IS TO STAY BENEATH THE SKY
AND LIVE FREE OR DIE

SARAH

LONG SUMMER NIGHTS IN MEREDITH TOWN
I WOULD HEAR UNCLE AINSWORTH SAY
“NEVER THROW NOTHING AWAY THAT YOU CAN USE”

ABIGAIL

MOTHER’S OLD DRESS WHITES AND HER CALICO GOWN
ALL FRAYED AND SPECKLED WITH SILT
BEAUTIFULLY BOUND IN A QUILT OF REDS AND BLUES

SARAH & ABIGAIL

A WAY OF LIFE I HOPE WE NEVER LOSE
PIECE BY PIECE WE STITCH EACH SQUARE
PATCHWORK QUILTIN IN THE COUNTRY AIR
WORKIN TO THE RHYTHM OF THE ROCKIN’ CHAIR
I KISS MY CARES GOODBYE
FROM MY LAP TO MY COUSIN’S KNEE
THE ONLY OVERSEER IS THE MAPLE TREE
THE FAMILY WAY IS TO STAY BENEATH THE SKY
AND LIVE FREE OR DIE

ABIGAIL

AS I SEW WITH HUMBLE CARE
MY HEART SENDS OUT AN HONEST PRAYER
THAT GINGHAM SQUARES CAN HOLD MY COUNTRY PRIDE;
WITH EACH EDGE I BIND, I PRAY
I MAY SPEND EACH NIGHT AND DAY
WITH FAMILY AND LOVED ONES BY MY SIDE
AND LIVE FREE OR DIE

ALL

LISTEN TO THE PRAYER
LISTEN TO THE PRAYER
LISTEN TO THE PRAYER

ABIGAIL & SARAH

LIVE FREE OR DIE!

MRS. LARCOM
Ok, ladies, that’s enough! To bed, my dears!

The girls rush off to their rooms. SARAH prepares to go with GLADYS.

HARRIET
Sarah, have you found a permanent bed yet? (she hasn’t) Why don’t you share mine: my dear bunkmate Louisa was married recently and I have trouble sleeping alone.

SARAH
Harriet, I would be so grateful. As much as we love Gladys…..(imitates her high-pitched cough)

HARRIET wipes her nose, imitating GLADYS a bit. They both laugh. SARAH and HARRIET start upstairs.
Scene 5

On the factory floor; all are working to the (faster) MACHINE beat. GLADYS is coughing. The girls shout above the clamor:

ABIGAIL
Told you: faster looms across the whole floor.

SARAH
It’s not so bad. I worked three handlooms at a time back in Meredith.

HEPSABETH
Oh, Christ, everything’s “not so bad” with this one.

ALL

HEY… HAH… HEY… HAH…

The bells clang loudly. End of the day. The clatter subsides, the looms slow to a halt.

BEN
Good day, ladies! Enjoy the Sabbath. (pulling HARRIET’s eye) Ms. Farley, will I see you in church tomorrow?

HARRIET
You most certainly will.

As he sings, BEN walks around the factory floor, checking each loom. He gets lost in his thoughts for Harriet.

**SONG: Harriet Farley—BEN**

EVERY SINGLE SATURDAY  
I HATE TO SEE YOU GO  
KNOWING AS YOU WALK AWAY  
THAT YOU MAY NEVER KNOW  
HOW EVEN JUST A PASSING GLANCE  
SNARES ME IN YOUR GLASSY TRANCE  
HOW EVERY TIME YOU SMILE, I’M ON THE FLOOR  
I KNOW I’M JUST AN AGENT TO YOU NOW  
BUT SOMEDAY I’LL BE MORE  

HARRIET FARLEY, LOOK MY WAY
MY MIND AND MY HEART ARE IN DISARRAY
AND ONE LITTLE LOOK MAKES IT ALL OKAY…..

THERE’S SO MANY OTHER WOMEN HERE
UNDER MY COMMAND
BUT I’D MAKE ALL OF THEM DISAPPEAR
JUST TO HOLD YOUR HAND
DO YOU FEEL MY EYES ON YOU
SUNDAYS IN THE CHAPEL PEW?
A NOD FROM YOU WOULD MAKE ME SAY “AMEN”
I’M ONLY MASTER CURTIS TO YOU KNOW
BUT SOMEDAY I’LL BE “BEN”

HARRIET FARLEY, LOOK MY WAY
MY MIND AND MY HEART ARE IN DISARRAY
AND ONE LITTLE LOOK MAKES IT ALL OKAY…..

FROM YOU….
I WANT TO BUY FOR US A ROSE COVERED COTTAGE
BY THE RIVERBANK, UP SOMEWHERE FAR AWAY
FREE FROM THE TANGLES AND KNOTTAGE
UNTIL THEN, I’LL PRAY THAT

SOMEDAY SOON YOU’LL LOOK MY WAY
MY MIND AND MY HEART ARE IN DISARRAY
AND ONE LITTLE LOOK MAKES IT ALL OK
FROM HARRIET FARLEY.

Outside, SARAH and HARRIET are walking home.

HARRIET
So you saw my latest round of notes?

SARAH
Yes, and I feel as dumb and illiterate as ever. What does it take to get into the Offering?

HARRIET
You are very close. And you are not dumb. You just need some polish.

SARAH
I feel like Paul Revere’s sword after three months of your editing.
HARRIET
“The Pleasures of Factory Life” is a beautiful concept… Let the facts and imagery lead and beware of tangents.

SARAH
I know – I just – I get very into it.

HARRIET
Only means you need an editor—to reign in the fire.

SARAH
You think I have fire?

HARRIET
More than anyone I’ve ever met.

**SONG: The Wheel And The Water**—HARRIET and SARAH

HARRIET
OH, MY NEWEST SISTER, WHAT CAN I SAY?
YOU COME TO THIS CITY AND SHOW ME A WHOLE OTHER WAY
ALIVE WITH THE DRIVE OF THE COUNTRY, FROM MOUNTAINS AND STONE,
YOU BRING OUT A PART OF ME DEEP DOWN THAT I’VE NEVER KNOWN

FOR JUST LIKE A WHEEL WHEN THE RIVER IS LOW,
I’VE ALWAYS SPUN STEADY, BUT ALWAYS SPUN SLOW
AND NOW YOU RUSH IN AND I’M RACING ALONG WITH THE FLOW...

WHERE THE WHEEL HITS THE WATER,
AND THE WAVES MEET THE WOOD,
IT'S A MOTHER'S PUSH FOR HER DAUGHTER,
TO DO THE THINGS SHE NEVER COULD,
THE WHEEL MEETS THE WATER AND EVERYTHING TURNS FOR GOOD.

SARAH
I’LL NEVER FORGET WHEN I GOT OFF THAT WAGON IN LOWELL,
I KNEW RIGHT AWAY THAT WE SHARED A NORTH COUNTRY SOUL,
YOU TEACH ME TO WRITE, EVERY NIGHT,
AND SHED LIGHT THROUGH MY PEN,
TO CHANNEL MY HEART AND FIRE,
YOU INSPIRE ME, TIME AND FOREVER AGAIN--

AND WHEN THIS IS OVER AND ALL’S SAID AND DONE,
A FACTORY GIRL’S WORKDAY OF WAGES IS WON, WE’LL BE
CLOSE AS THE FIBERS AND THREADS IN THE FABRIC WE’VE SPUN.

BE THE WHEEL TO MY WATER,
COME MAKE SENSE OF MY WAVES,
COOL ME DOWN WHEN I'M HOTTER,

SARAH AND HARRIET

SLOW MY RUSH WHEN I GET TOO BRAVE,
FROM THE NORTH COUNTRY CRADLE--
WE’LL ROCK ‘TIL WE ROLL TO THE GRAVE...

TAKE MY HAND...CAN YOU SETTLE MY FEAR?
TELL ME NOW...WILL YOU ALWAYS BE HERE?
MAKE A PROMISE...
ON MY MOTHER’S SHAWL...
THAT YOU’LL NEVER CHANGE,
AND WE’LL NEVER CHANGE,
WE’LL KEEP ON RISING,
THE RIVER IS RISING,
AND NEVER WILL FALL!

SARAH 

HARRIET

THE BLADE HITS THE TURBINE,
THE AXLE GOES ROUND,
THE HIGHER THE RIVER,
THE LOUDER THE SOUND,

SARAH AND HARRIET

SO NEVER SURRENDER THE LOVE THAT WE FINALLY FOUND...

WHERE THE WHEEL HITS THE WATER
AND THE WAVES MEET THE WOOD
IT'S A MOTHER'S PUSH FOR HER DAUGHTER
TO DO THE THINGS SHE NEVER COULD
THE WHEEL MEETS THE WATER AND EVERYTHING TURNS--
EVERYTHING TURNS...

HARRIET

SO I’LL KEEP ROLLING...

SARAH

AND I’LL KEEP ON DRIVING...
Scene 6

*Lights shift to reveal BEN and ABBOTT LAWRENCE, the factory owner, meeting for a Saturday drink in ABBOTT’s office.*

**BEN**

Well?

**ABBOTT**

*(head down, looking at receipts a bit flustered)*

Well what?

**BEN**

How are the numbers?

**ABBOTT**

Well Benny…. despite cotton at its highest since the Panic of ’37 and all this new competition up the river, we somehow had our best quarter in a decade. What do you think there, Curtis?

**BEN**

So The Premium System is working!

**ABBOTT**

Well, let’s not get ahead of ourselves here. Water’s high, and it’s just one quarter.

**BEN**

Still –

**ABBOTT**

Still – the Irish are flooding to Boston in droves, and it won’t be long before the boys up the river start hiring the lasses for a potato a day. It’s a reprieve, nothing more, young man. But a well-timed one. Without the profit from the *Offering* and your Premium System, we would have had a very rough shareholders’ meeting this month.

**BEN**

The System will continue to help. As will the *Offering*.

**ABBOTT**

Curtis, when we first built these mills, times were simpler. The little bobbin girls could lay up for twenty or thirty minutes at a time. Floods of girls ready to work and learn. Dances every week. They were good years.

**BEN**

31
Are you concerned that incentivizing workers will change that?

ABBOTT
Oh, things are already changing. I suppose we must adapt to the times. And you—you have the kind of mind that could keep this mill afloat come hell or low water. You may be called on.

BEN
Called on?

ABBOTT
You’ve seen how fast that water can drop. Anything can happen.

BEN
Of- of course, sir.

ABBOTT
In the meantime—to your premium system, and to Lowell. (they toast)

BEN
To Lowell.
Scene 7

OLD LUCY

addressing her student performers

The religion of our fathers overhung us children like the shadow of a mighty tree against the trunk of which we rested, while we looked up in wonder through the great boughs that half hid and half revealed the sky. Some of the boughs were already decaying, so that perhaps we began to see a little more of the sky than our elders. Still, all girls were required to worship; I did not appreciate this requirement.

The Sunday bells are ringing. SARAH and HARRIET share a pew, kneeling together. Meanwhile, at the boardinghouse, MRS. LARCOM and LUCY argue over church.

MRS. LARCOM

Lucy Larcom, this is not a negotiation.

LUCY

But mother—

MRS. LARCOM

No buts!

LUCY

I have never felt so far from the spirit of the creator as when I sit in your ‘fire and brimstone’ punishment pen.

MRS. LARCOM

When you turn eighteen you can change—

LUCY

What if I won’t go to church at all? What if I—

MRS. LARCOM

LUCY! While you live in my house, you are a Baptist. Is that understood?

LUCY

Grr. Yes, mother.

Lights shift to highlight SARAH and HARRIET. The minister’s voice finishes,

MINISTER

And so go forth in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

33
SARAH & HARRIET

Amen.

They rise to leave—a quick transition.

HARRIET

Aren’t you excited? Your first submission for The Offering!

SARAH

I wish tonight would come already.

HARRIET

Why? We have Emerson’s lecture first, and weren’t you interested in the German class that—

SARAH

I’m just nervous!

HARRIET

Sarah George Bagley is nervous?? Rehearse with me, we have a minute.

SONG: RIVER RISING aka The Pleasures Of Factory Life-SARAH

SARAH

THIS SHOWS THE WORLD WHAT WE CAN DO

HARRIET

I love this new opening.

SARAH

THAT WE CAN WEAVE AND WE CAN WRITE
WE’RE MORE THAN JUST THE DIRT BENEATH THEIR SHOE
…

And then, um…

HARRIET

THAT WE ARE LOWELL’S LIGHT.

SARAH

34
Yes!

_They laugh together and continue towards the boardinghouse. As the song continues, the girls congregate for various activities, culminating in the self-improvement circle._

OLD LUCY

For us in Lowell, the Sabbath was a not only time to worship, but also a time for writing, re-writing, reading, quiet study, and taking classes.

GERMAN PROFESSOR (XD)

Acht-Neun-Zehn! Enunciate, studenten!

STUDENTS

Acht-Neun-Zehn!

SARAH

SO THE WORDS OF THE FACTORY GIRLS
PUT FORWARD HERE IN INK
NOW SPAN THE NATION
AND PLEAD OUR CASE

HARRIET

Didn’t we change “plead” to “state”?

_SARAH makes a note on her paper._

SARAH

SHELLS OF BEAUTY AND POEM’S PEARLS
ARE PROOF THAT WE CAN THINK
A PROCLAMATION
OF WOMAN’S PLACE

WITH THIS PAPER- WE CLIMB INTO THE RANKS
OF THE HUMAN RACE

LUCY

Many of the prominent men of the country were in the habit of giving Lyceum lectures, and the lecture of that day was a means of education, conveying to the people the results of study and thought through the best minds. At Lowell, it was more patronized by the mill-people than any mere entertainment.
A large group of girls sit down together as a lecture starts, all whipping out notebooks assiduously.

EMERSON (XD, or SCHOULER swing)
The earth laughs in flowers.

The girls swiml and form a Self-Improvement Circle, where SARAH stands and presents.

SARAH

THOUGH WE WORK WITH OUR HANDS AND BACKS
WE KEEP OUR MINDS MAINTAINED

SARAH AND HARRIET

AND BOUND TOGETHER,
WE’RE TWICE AS STRONG.

ALL

AND JUST LIKE THE MERRIMACK
WE CANNOT BE CONTAINED!
WE’RE GAINING POWER
RUSHING ALONG

THE RIVER’S RISING NOW
NOW WE’RE RACING TOWARDS A DREAM!

THIS SHOWS THE WORLD WHAT WE CAN DO
THAT WE CAN WEAVE AND WE CAN WRITE
WE’RE MORE THAN JUST THE GIRLS YOU THOUGHT YOU KNEW
THAT WE ARE LOWELL’S LIGHT!

HARRIET

(HARRIET turns away, in down stage tableau-with little pauses between)

The Lowell Offering, End of the volume. Our goals continue to be met with each passing issue. Our main aim is diminishing prejudice against factory operatives and publishing only the contributions of females actively employed in the mills.

Deaths among the female operatives of Lowell, from September 1 to 29. Miss Hannah Fay, age 17; Miss Sarah Silsbee, aged 20; Miss Amanda Buttrick, aged 19.
By the report of the city physician, we are glad to learn that the number of deaths in Lowell was 109 less than last year.

May you all stay warm in both your head, hearts, and bodies through this cold winter season and continue to let patience do its perfect work.

ALL

WE’RE MORE THAN JUST THE GIRLS YOU THOUGHT YOU KNEW
THE LOWELL OFFERING....
Scene 8

Darkness. The girls are all in bed. The first bells ring in the distance. Girls groan and move in beds, then slowly rise and prepare for the day.

MS LARCOM
Young la-dies! Up with you! Those shuttles won't change themselves! Eat! Rise! Pee! Get up! Get up!

**SONG: Morning Bells—FLORILLA, ALL**

FLORILLA

ISN'T IT A PITY, SUCH A PRETTY GIRL AS I,
SHOULD BE SENT TO THE FACTORY TO PINE AWAY AND DIE.
MORNING BELLS I HATE TO HEAR
RINGING DOLEFUL LOUD AND DREAR.

MARTHA

HOPEING THAT I WAKE UP, AND THIS LIFE HAS BEEN A DREAM;
AND I'VE SLEPT THROUGH THESE MORNING BELLS,
I'M AN ENGINE FULL OF STEAM
FLYING UP THE PORTLAND LINE
SMILING 'CAUSE THE DAY'S ALL MINE

ALL

MORNING BELLS ARE RINGING
EARLY BIRDS ARE SINGING
MORNING BELLS ARE RINGING
LOWELL GIRLS ARE SINGING

The girls make their way to the factory; The bells ring again. There are giant whale oil lamps scattered around the room.

BEN
Looms will be live in thirty seconds, ladies, big week coming up.

SARAH
Mister Curtis, what are - those?
Ah, yes. (to everyone) You may have noticed the whale oil lamps scattered around the mill. They’ll give us light enough to extend the workday in these shortening winter months. We will now be able to work summer hours the whole year round.

SARAH
Fourteen hour days year round?

BEN
More opportunity, ladies. With the water high, we can all profit.

GEORGIA
You could use the money, Hepsy—that shawl’s looking more holy than righteous these days.

FLORILLA
Shut your trap, Georgia. At least she can dress up, you’ll still have that recessive English chin and that resting hog face.

ABIGAIL
Every day with these two…

LUCY
BOARDING UP THE WINDOW, JUST TO KEEP THE THREADS SO WET.... ALL THE DUST AND THE COTTON LINT MIXES WITH MY SWEAT. THINGS LIKE THIS YOU KNOW MUST BE WHEREVER THERE’S A FACTORY.

ALL
MORNING BELLS ARE RINGING
EARLY BIRDS ARE SINGING
MORNING BELLS ARE RINGING
LOWELL GIRLS ARE SINGING

Lights shift... Meanwhile, in a boardroom adjacent to the factory floor, HARRIET speaks about the gains the Offering has made to The Board.

HARRIET
Gentlemen, our circulation is now at four thousand and climbing. Even still, We are often met by new operatives whose only knowledge of Lowell is from the pages of our humble magazine. The
quality of our articles grows with every passing issue and each girl that comes to Lowell to realize her dream.

ABBOTT
Very commendable, Ms. Farley; the magazine’s success has certainly lifted the Lowell brand, and gives us a real edge over these up-river upstarts. With this in mind, the board and I would like to finally and officially sign over the paper and make you the sole editor of the Offering. You will have no more company oversight. Here is the key to the press and our undying thanks for your hard work.

HARRIET
Mister Lawrence, sir, I… I am not worthy of such responsibility—

ABBOTT
That’s nonsense and you know it. I’ve watched you grow here, Miss Farley—both at work and in the paper. You were groomed for this; there is no one I trust more with this power. Men – to Harriet Farley and her women writers!

_The board begins to pour whiskey- and there is an awkward moment as they wait for HARRIET to exit. As much as she is doing for the company, she is not one of the Boys’ Club._

Thank you, Harriet.

_HARRIET leaves, the men drink. Back on the factory floor…_

**SONG: Machine Reprise—ALL**

ALL

HEY, HAH...HEY, HAH...HEY, HAH...HEY, HAH...

_The whale oil lamps are lit by overseers._

EMMETT
The gift of an extra hour! The more we make the more we make, ladies!

GLADYS
Wow. They’re kind of pretty in a funny way.

ALL

TWICE SIX, TWICE SEVEN - TWICE TWENTY AND ELEVEN
TWICE SIX, TWICE SEVEN - TWICE TWENTY AND ELEVEN

At the chorus, GLADYS screams. Her finger has been caught in the fast moving shuttle and cut cleanly off. BEN hurries to her, ushering her off the floor.
Scene 9

The boardinghouse. Girls are readying themselves for the Lighting Up Ball.

SARAH
How fast was that?

HEPSABETH
Shhhoopp! Like Marie Antoinette. WHOMP.

ABIGAIL
She lost her focus.

MARTHA
She lost her finger.

HEPSABETH
No more etudes with that hand.

GEORGIA
Typical Gladys, lost in the clouds. I also heard three girls from the weaving room were coughing up blood and had to take a wagon home today.

ABIGAIL
Nothing new there.

SARAH
Do you think the Cromptons are too fast?

FLORILLA
It’s not the speed, it’s also those lamps.

HEPSABETH
Those god-damn lamps.

MARTHA
Terrible for my skin.

HEPSABETH
And the stench!

SARAH
Poor Gladys.
HARRIET
Don’t let it keep you from the ball, Sarah. It was a typical factory accident.

SARAH
But what’s next? Her arm? Her neck?

HEPSABETH
We should have a “finger funeral.” Bury it out behind the mill. *(sings ‘taps’ over dialogue)*

HARRIET
Hepsy!

FLORILLA
My uncle lost his left foot when his horse pinched him against the fencepost. Oh, and my cousin was feeding the hogs when he got knocked off his feet and just trampled, I mean—

ALL
Whoa, ok, hey…

HARRIET
Enough. But we understand—tending a loom still isn’t as dangerous as riding a horse.

ABIGAIL
Not as much fun, either.

HARRIET
Come with us, Sarah. Please?

SARAH
Fine.

OLD LUCY
*(downstage, as ‘young’ Lucy looks in a mirror)*
One result of my infantile novel-reading was that I did not like to look at my own face in a mirror, because it was so unlike that of the heroines always pictured with high white foreheads and cheeks of a perfect oval. Mine was round, ruddy, and laughing with health; and, though I practiced at the glass a good deal, I could not lengthen it by puckering down my lips. I quite envied the girls who were pale and pensive-looking, as that was the only “ladyfied” standard in the romances.

*OLD LUCY turns, becoming MRS. LARCOM.*
MRS. LARCOM
You can’t go showing your shoulders, young lady!

LUCY
Georgia is, and always does!

GEORGIA
Entering
Did I hear my nom de plume?

GEORGIA is dressed to absolutely impress, with a suggestive and stunning gown. (musical cue)

HEPSABETH
How many weeks’ wages are you wearing there, Georgia? (cough talk) (Floozy)

MRS. LARCOM
Georgia Pitman, what would your homespun country mother say?

GEORGIA
I came to work for a husband, not for my mother. Right, Martha?

MARTHA
She is looking quite spruce since she purchased some new threads, don’t you all think?

MRS LARCOM
Lucy, you are wearing this shawl, and that’s final. There will be time later in life for such….frivolity.

LUCY
Mother! Ugh. (She wears it.)

MRS. LARCOM

YOUNG LADIES
SOON YOU WILL BE SURROUNDED BY DASHING MEN
AND THE TONES OF LOVE AND WORDS OF COMPLIMENT WILL FLOW OUT TOGETHER
WHEN A DARING HAND AGAINST YOURS PRESSES
WHEN HE COMES IN CLOSE TO LIFT YOUR DELICATE TRESSES
JUST AS LIGHT AS A FEATHER

WHEN THE MOONLIGHT INVITES TO TRUSTING
AND YOUR FEELINGS ARE INTENSE
WHEN THE STARS SEEM TO BREATHE OUT INNOCENCE

LISTEN WITH CAUTION TO THE WORDS YOU HEAR
REMEMBER YOUR FATHERS AND WHAT THEY HOLD DEAR
WHEN HIM WHO YOU FANCY LOVES YOU
TURNS UP THE HEAT
STAY ON YOUR FEET
AND LISTEN WITH CAUTION TO THE WORDS YOU HEAR
LISTEN
YOUNG LADIES

ALL
(in placating tone)

Thank you, Mrs. Larcom.

Smiling, MRS. LARCOM exits.

   SONG: Spruce and Rusty—MARTHA AND GEORGIA:
     ABIGAIL, FLORILLA, AND HEPSABETH

GEORGIA
Sarah Bagley. Is that not the same frayed shawl you came here in? You deserve better. We New Hampshire sisters deserve better.

SARAH
I’m not here for a man like you, ‘sister.’ I can dress how I please.

GEORGIA
How could you be homesick for that mud-stained shack you left?

HARRIET
Watch it Pitman. We all have our pasts.

HEPSABETH
Yeah, go powder your beak, you wag.

ABIGAIL
Easy, friends.

MARTHA
You *are* one to crow, Hepsabeth… I remember when that dress was in style….when knuckle-dragging cavemen walked the earth. (*imitates Hepsabeth’s ‘athletic’ stature as a caveman physically as music starts*)

GEORGIA

I ALSO CAME DOWN FROM THE FAMILY FARM
AND I WAS RUSTY ONCE LIKE YOU
I HAD TO LEARN TO TALK RIGHT
AND AT THE END OF THE NIGHT
I DIDN’T SIT AROUND ACTING BLUE
BECAUSE THERE AIN’T NO PLACE FOR A CRYING FACE
IF YOU EVER WANT TO HAVE A BEAU
AND IF THE SUN IS SHINING, THEN YOU BETTER QUIT WHINING
BOUT THE COLD NORTH COUNTRY SNOW

MARTHA AND GEORGIA

GO SPRUCE, SO SPRUCE,
NO MORE DIRTY NAILS, GET RID ‘A THAT DRESS
SO SPRUCE, SO SPRUCE,
YOU GOTTA CLEAN IT UP IF YOU WANNA IMPRESS
GO SPRUCE, SO SPRUCE,
NO MORE COUNTRY FUNK, SO GET RID OF THAT TAN
SO SPRUCE, SO SPRUCE
IF YOU EVER WANT TO GET A MAN.

MARTHA

PETTICOATS, AND CRINOLINES AND BLOOMERS ARE THE THING
YOUR STOCKINGS BETTER BE SILK, YOUR SKIN WHITE AS MILK
IF YOU WANT TO GET YOURSELF A RING
THE ONLY PIGMENTATION THAT YOU WANT ON YOUR FACE
IS ABLUSH OF CARMINE TINT
YOU NEED TO SPEND MONEY, HONEY, FASHION AIN’T FUNNY,
AND WE’RE TRYING TO DROP YOU A HINT...

MARTHA AND GEORGIA

GO SPRUCE, SO SPRUCE,
NO MORE DIRTY CLOTHES, YOU GOTTA WASH YOUR TOES
SO SPRUCE, SO SPRUCE,
AND IF A FARMER’S POOR BETTER TURN UP YOUR NOSE.
GO SPRUCE, SO SPRUCE,
JUST LISTEN TO US, WE’LL BE YOUR GUIDE
SO SPRUCE, SO SPRUCE,
IF YOU EVER WANT TO BE A BRIDE.

GLADYS

SO YOU DRAPE YOURSELVES IN FUR
AND RING YOUR NECKS IN SILVER
YOU PRETEND TO BE MATURE
THINK YOU’RE JUST SO SPRUCE (SO SPRUCE)

BUT YOU SCRUBBED TOO CLEAN
FORGOT THE FARM THAT YOU CAME FROM
NO LONGER LIVING LEAN
YOU’RE STUCK IN THE MACHINE
BUT THE SCREWS ARE LOOSE

SO I’M GONNA STAY RUSTY
GOTTA KEEP IT SO RUSTY
YEAH I GONNA STAY RUSTY
GONNA TAKE CONTROL
‘CAUSE RUSTY IS MY SOUL!

HEPSABETH

I WAS BORN IN LIVERMORE
TO A BLACKSMITH AND A MAID
WORKED ALL NIGHT SCRUBBIN KITCHEN FLOORS
AND I NEVER ONCE GOT PAID

(ADD GLADYS, ABIGAIL AND FLORILLA)

NOW I’M OUT HERE ON MY OWN (CH CH CH CH NA NA NA NA)
AND I WORK HARD EVERY DAY (CH CH CH CH NA NA NA NA)
NOTHING’S EVER BEEN HANDED TO ME
THAT I JUST COULDN’T GIVE AWAY

SO I’M GONNA STAY RUSTY (RUSTY!)
I GOTA KEEP IT RUSTY (RUSTY!)
YEAH I GONNA STAY RUSTY (RUSTY!)
GONNA LET IT SHOW
CAUSE RUSTY’S ALL I KNOW!
MARTHA & GEORGIA

GO SPRUCE, SO SPRUCE
NO MORE DIRTY NAILS,
GET RID ‘A THAT DRESS
GO SPRUCE, SO SPRUCE
GOTTA CLEAN IT UP
IF YOU WANNA IMPRESS

SARAH

AM I GONNA STAY RUSTY?

GO SPRUCE, SO SPRUCE
NO MORE DIRTY NAILS,
GET RID ‘A THAT DRESS
GO SPRUCE, SO SPRUCE
GOTTA CLEAN IT UP
IF YOU WANNA IMPRESS

ABIGAIL, FLORILLA, HEPSABETH

AM I GONNA STAY RUSTY?

GO SPRUCE, SO SPRUCE,
PETTICOATS AND CRINOLINES
AND PETTICOATS AND CRINOLINES
AND BONNETS, AND BANGLES,
AND BAUBLES AND BEADS,
IT’S ALL YOU NEED

GLADYS

NO YOU GOTTA STAY RUSTY!

FLORILLA

I GOTTA KEEP IT RUSTY

HEPSABETH

NO GO GOTTA STAY RUSTY
I’M GONNA LET IT SHOW…

ALL THREE

SO I’M GONNA STAY RUSTY (RUSTY!)
I GOTTA KEEP IT RUSTY (RUSTY!)
YEAH I GONNA STAY RUSTY (RUSTY!)
WE’RE GONNA TAKE CONTROL
CAUSE RUSTY IS MY SOUL.

RUSTY, RUSTY, RUSTY
RUSTY

RUSTY, RUSTY, RUSTY
RUSTY!
Scene 10

*The Lighting-Up Ball; ABBOTT LAWRENCE welcomes the workers of the mills.*

ABBOTT (maybe sung recit-y in cool guy outfit?)

Dear people of Lowell. It’s been a long season so far, and the addition of the Whale-oil lamps has been a rousing financial success for the Premium system. Let us dance, tonight, to remind of us to smell all of the roses among the thorns and shrubbery of life, and that the mildly pungent lamps will turn to sublimely fragrant flowers when payday arrives for all. *(The guests looked at each other, puzzle)* Gentlemen?

*He turns to the ‘band’ to cue them. The people dance! Presently, SHAMUS makes his way to LUCY. BEN and HARRIET dance, too.*

**SONG: The Dance –LUCY, SEAMUS**

LUCY

So, you’re a writer?

SHAMUS

Not by trade—only bits and pieces for *The Voice of Industry*, the labor paper that just started over on Dutton Street.

LUCY

And your trade, then?

SHAMUS

Mechanic, trained by the best in Galway. Lots of us coming to America these days, more every summer. Not enough work over there and the men in my family just happen to be good with their hands.

*LUCY looks blankly, awkward pause.*

WHAT THE HELL AM I SAYING?… GOD I SOUND LIKE A BUFFOON YOU’VE GOT TO BE SHARPER NOW, SHAMUS, TO MAKE HER SWOON!

SHAMUS

And you Lucy- you write for the *Offering*? My little sister Mary Margaret has the latest copy, she loves it like a baby lamb.

LUCY

Thank you? I didn’t think you people - I mean - you - Irish - really read our work.
SHAMUS
You think all we do is drink and fight? Ireland has a long line of literary legends. Well, not long yet, but at least it’s a line.

LUCY
Of course! Maria Edgeworth is one of my true favorites. *(beat)* You don’t know her, do you?

SHAMUS
I would like to.

LUCY

SOMETHING… HOW HIS HAND FITS ON MY BACK…
NO, KEEP UP YOUR DEFENSES, THIS IS A FULL ATTACK

RUSTIES

EASY LUCY NOW, DON’T YOU GET CARRIED AWAY

SHAMUS

EASY MAN, BREATHE DEEP

MARTHA

He’s sweet, don’t you think?

GEORGIA

As a leprechaun with a lollipop.

MARTHA AND GEORGIA

DO WHAT YOU CAN TO MAKE YOUR MAN STAY

SHAMUS

WHAT CAN I SAY THAT WILL MAKE HER HEART LEAP?

SHAMUS
I hear they’ve been systematically speeding the looms up in some of your factories.

LUCY

How’d you hear that?
SHAMUS
Word gets around in the labor circles in a small town. (beat) You and your friends should consider joining our fight for a ten hour workday.

LUCY
I didn’t know there was such a thing.

SHAMUS
Well there isn’t, yet. That’s why we’re fighting for it. (beat) Say, I’ll be working on the canal just outside The Boott Mill all month, may I look out for you? In a….mechanical way, of course.

LUCY
(Smiling)
Of course. And I’ll read your Voice Of Industry paper as well on the weekend.

LUCY  SEAMUS
TOO LATE… DOES HE KNOW I’M UNDER HIS SPELL?
I CAN’T STAY QUIET! I DON’T CARE IF SHE CAN TELL,
LET HIM HEAR MY HEART BEATING, I CAN FEEL HIS SWELL!
HEAR MY HEART BEATING, I CAN FEEL IT SWELL!

BOTH
SPIN ME AND TWIST ME AND TOSS ME AND TWIRL
THE CLICK OF OUR SHOES, THE WHOOSH OF YOUR/MY GOWN
DANCE WITH ME
DANCE WITH ME
I’M DANCING I’M DANCING
I’M DANCING NOW
DON’T LET ME DOWN.

The Song ends; BEN and HARRIET awkwardly split off, and SHAMUS and LUCY do as well. SARAH and HARRIET re-unite on the porch - somewhere private.

SARAH
Hey, Hattie, how was that?

HARRIET
Oh, fine. Ben is nice.

SARAH
51
Just nice? Really? (*elbows her in an 1840’s way*)

HARRIET
Oh please! I’m too busy with the paper and work right now for anything, especially with him. How’s your night going?

SARAH
I can’t get that snapping noise of poor little Gladys’ finger out of my head.

HARRIET
(*takes SARAH by arms*)
Sarah, look at me. I know you care. And I understand it, completely. But you have to move past this! We are paid employees, here by choice and the grace of God. But to properly mourn… we can always have Pepsi’s finger funeral.

SARAH
Hattie!

HARRIET
I know, that was terrible. But it’s true. She’s lucky it wasn’t her hair.

SARAH
Maybe I just need to go write and let it burn off.

HARRIET
Here, if you’re ‘running hot’- take a pull of this.

_HARRIET slides SARAH a leather bound flask._

SARAH
Harriet Jane Farley! What is this?

HARRIET
Colonel Kluck’s Canadian Whiskey. Some kindling for the fire. Hurry up, before the Temperance League attacks us.

SARAH
*laughing*

What? Ugh, all right….

_SARAH takes a huge swig and almost chokes._

HARRIET

52
Ah ha! That’s it, right there! She’s ready!

SARAH

*she swallows with difficulty*

Yes - I’m - I’m ready! Where’d you get this, anyways?

HARRIET

Lawrence gave me this flask when our subscriptions hit one thousand. He’s always given me gifts like that…kind of old-fashioned but they mean something. I save it for special nights.

SARAH

Well, go easy, miss editress. We don’t want to be reading about you in the Courier’s society section.

HARRIET

I’m a good minister’s daughter, Sarah, you know that as well as anyone. I’m still fun occasionally though…. Go! Write! Burn Sarah Bagley, burn!

SARAH

Bring the Cold Water Army for the aftermath! woo hoo!

HARRIET (as she walks away)

“Cold Wa-ter Ar-my we here pro-claim! claim! claim!”

*SARAH heads happily back to the boardinghouse and HARRIET looks longingly at her inspired roommate. She looks at the flask, takes a rip, and goes back in to the dance and spins FLORILLA.*
Scene 11

The next evening, the girls gather in the boardinghouse for a Self-Improvement Circle.

ALL

DEPENDENT ON OTHERS WE NE’ER WILL BE
SO LONG AS WE’RE ABLE TO SPIN.

The girls sit in a semi-circle.

HARRIET

Welcome, all! And welcome back, Gladdie. You’ll be back on that piano in no time. (GLADYS waves with her 4-fingered hand, still bandaged) I know time has been precious with the longer hours on the floor and the Ball the other night, but I hope some of you have had time to write submissions for our next Offering?

SARAH

I have one, Harriet.

HARRIET

Yes, Sarah, we can’t wait. Share.

SONG: Has the Bell Become the Sun--SARAH

SARAH

WHERE TWO RIVERS MEET
THERE SPINS A WHEEL
THAT DRIVES AND CALLS ALOUD
A PROMISE MADE OF STEEL

BUT WHEN WE CAME TO WORK,
THE WATER GREW TOO HIGH
AND WHALE OIL CLOUDS THE AIR
AND ERRANT SPINDLES FLY

HYPNOTIZED, ONE AND ALL,
BY THE JANGLING COPPERS OF OUR PAY
MESMERIZED BY CALL OF THE BELL

Lights come up in a wash behind SARAH to reveal the factory floor. The women working the looms sing with her.
SARAH AND GLADYS (others on aahs)

THE LOOM AND SPINDLE CRY
A BROKEN SERENADE
AND GIRLS LEAVE HOME TO DIE
OUT OF SUNLIGHT, IN THE SHADE

FROM THE FARM AND THE BLOOM
OF THE GENTLE SUGAR MAPLE TREE
TO THE ARMS OF THE LOOM AND THE BELL!

ALL

STRIVING, TURNING, DRIVING, YEARNING,
STRIVING, TURNING, DRIVING, YEARNING,
FREE FROM SOMETHING, STILL SURVIVING,
TURNING ALWAYS…

HEY... HAH...

STRIVING, TURNING, DRIVING, YEARNING,
STRIVING, TURNING, DRIVING, YEARNING

SARAH
(overlapping)

WE DREAMED THAT WINTER’S CHILL WAS DONE
BUT WE GAVE AWAY OUR SPIRITS TO THE LOOMS,

ALL

AND THE BELL BECAME THE SUN.

SARAH

They lured us here with the promise of a better life. Instead, we find ourselves working fourteen hour days to the confined, contagion-laden stench of dead whales with no time for our souls.

WE DIDN’T COME TO JUST SPIN THREAD
DIDN’T COME TO LIVE AND DIE IN VAIN
TO KNOW JUST CLOTH AND BREAD
OR TO NEVER FEEL THE SKY OR RAIN
NO WE CAME HERE FOR A DREAM!

ALL

55
HAS THE BELL BECOME THE SUN?
HAS THE BELL BECOME THE SUN?

SARAH
The company must change its ways and institute a 10-hour workday!

GIRLS
overlapping
I DON’T THINK I CAN TAKE ANYMORE OF THE BANGING AND CLANGING AND RINGING OF ALL OF THE BELLS…

SARAH

HAS THE BELL REPLACED THE SUN?
Scene 12

*In a split stage away from the boardinghouse, SARAH approaches HARRIET in her editors office, as she is sorting through submissions and has two piles in front of her.*

SARAH

Hattie, I wanted to come by—

HARRIET

Wow, fire was right. Was that the Colonel Kluck’s talking?

SARAH

*(laughs nervously)*

No….that was me. And I’m sure it could use a little editing—

HARRIET

A little? Sarah, I will support you always, but we can’t publish anything like that.

SARAH

Why not?

HARRIET

It’s political, it damns the company, it—

SARAH

But you are the editor now-

HARRIET

Yes, as of three days ago! But I won’t be for long if my very first act is to print a tirade against the very corporation that gave me the position. *(beat)* I’m the wheel, remember? What’s my job?

SARAH

Cool me down, I suppose.

HARRIET

What if, instead, you start a petition? To the state legislature? Something above the fray. I could help circulate it…

*SARAH puts her article down and walks for the door.*

SARAH

*(after a beat)* That’s an idea….. getting signatures will also get the word out. I’ll go get started! *(beat… HARRIET forces a smile)* See you at home, Hattie. I love you.
HARRIET

Love you too, Sarah George.

**SONG: The Fathers Of ’76—HARRIET, SARAH, ALL**

*She picks up SARAH’s article…*

HARRIET

DO WE REALLY JUST SPIN THREAD?
DO WE LIVE AND DIE IN VAIN?
OR KNOW JUST CLOTH AND BREAD?
IS IT BAD WE NEVER FEEL THE RAIN?

WE’VE SPENT GENERATIONS ON THE KITCHEN FLOOR
NEVER ALLOWED TO HOPE OR TO DREAM FOR ANYTHING MORE
WE COME FROM SHADOWS AND COBWEBS, FROM CORNERS
FROM WAY OUT OF SIGHT
AND HERE WE ARE, WRITING OUR WAY TO DIZZYING HEIGHTS!

AND SARAH’S RIGHT, GIRLS *ARE* DYING, AND THE BELL *IS* OUR MASTER
BUT WHAT SHE DOESN’T SEEM TO SEE ARE THE GAINS THAT WE’VE MADE
THESE GAINS WILL OUTLAST HER
WE’RE BREAKING THROUGH, IT TAKES TIME, IT TAKES TEARS
FOR ANY WORTHY MISSION, THERE’S ALWAYS ATTRITION
OUR PENS SHOULD BE USED NOW FOR PROGRESS AND NOT AMMUNITION

FOR WE ARE THE DAUGHTERS OF THE SONS OF THE FATHERS OF ’76
AND THIS IS OUR CHANCE TO DO WHAT WE’VE KNOWN ALL ALONG WE CAN
WE CAN’T LET THIS CHANCE PASS US BY
CAN’T GIVE THEM REASON TO DENY
WHAT WE CAN DO
WHAT WE’RE DOING NOW

SARAH

SO WE FIGHT, ARMED AND READY, OUR WORDS AS OUR WEAPON
AND IT’S THE MEN WHO DECLARED US TO BE
EQUAL AND FREE
WHOSE FOOTPRINTS WE STEP IN
ONCE MORE THE PEN RISES AGAIN
TO PROVE THAT ITS POINT
CAN STAB LIKE A SWORD
WE LAY CLAIM TO THE RIGHTS THEY SECURED US
AND WON’T BE IGNORED

*The “Rusty” girls gather behind SARAH, joining the petition*

FOR WE ARE THE DAUGHTERS OF THE SONS OF THE FATHERS OF ‘76
AND THIS IS OUR CHANCE TO DO WHAT WE’VE KNOWN ALL ALONG WE CAN
WE CAN’T LET THIS CHANCE PASS US BY
CAN’T GIVE THEM REASON TO DENY
WHAT WE CAN DO
WHAT WE’RE DOING NOW

ALL

WE’RE THE DAUGHTERS OF THE SONS OF THE FATHERS OF ‘76
AND THIS IS OUR CHANCE TO DO WHAT WE’VE KNOWN ALL ALONG WE CAN
WE CAN’T LET THIS CHANCE PASS US BY
CAN’T GIVE THEM REASON TO DENY
WHAT WE CAN DO
WHAT WE’RE DOING NOW

*SARAH starts a petition*

SARAH
We hope the Massachusetts legislature will agree to hear our petition—that to compel workers to labor fourteen hours a day amounts to a crime against our humanity.

*SARAH & HARRIET*

WE DIDN’T COME TO JUST SPIN THREAD
WE CAME TO LIVE OUR MOTHER’S DREAM
ACT TWO

Scene 1

Pitch black.

SARAH
In a harsh whisper
Psst. Abigail.

ABIGAIL
Hmm? Is it time? Am I late?

SARAH
Shh, no, no… It’s just midnight. Get up, and help me gather the others.

ABIGAIL
sigh
I dreamt I patched a quilt for President Tyler. Does that sound strange?

SARAH
Yes.

A driving ostinato creeps in; ABBOTT LAWRENCE stands downstage.

ABBOTT (Out to the audience)

Dear Ms. Farley,
It is a great service to Boott Mills that you are able to represent our corporation with such intelligence and grace through the pages of The Lowell Offering. Your willingness to speak to potential investors in the great cities of our young nation will certainly help the company to continue to rise.

In Philadelphia, BEN and HARRIET stand “backstage” at an investor meeting.

BEN
They’re ready for you, Ms. Farley.

HARRIET
Yes, as soon as… I can figure this final button...

She struggles a bit.
ABBOTT
I have enlisted Benjamin Curtis to arrange your travel and accommodations for the tour. I trust that he will be as indispensable to you as he has become to me.

BEN
May I?

BEN fixes the button.

HARRIET
Thanks, Curtis.

ABBOTT
Your work shall not go unrewarded, nor my gratitude unexpressed. I grow ever proud of the young, barefoot girl who has dedicated her life to Francis Cabot Lowell’s vision. Godspeed to both of you. Everlastingly, Abbott Lawrence.

Meanwhile, SARAH’s girls are gathering for the meeting. HEPSABETH in doorway.

GLADYS
Hepsabeth?

HEPSABETH
Why are you so surprised? I want those whale oil lamps gone.

SARAH
Does Harriet know?

HEPSABETH
Not yet.

SARAH
Well, come on in. It’s great to have you aboard. Let’s get started.

SONG: Factory Tracts/Harriet’s Tour—HARRIET, SARAH, et al

ROTARY PRESIDENT
Brothers of the Philadelphia Rotary, please welcome our featured guest of the evening. This woman exemplifies all of the attributes of the famed Lowell system, both in her industrious nature, her use of the royal ‘we’, and her dedication to the corporation. The editor of the world-renowned Lowell Offering….Miss Harriet Farley!
HARRIET accepts the applause.

HARRIET

Thank you, Philadelphia.

AND THANK YOU, GENTLEMEN
FOR THE CHANCE TO SPEAK
ABOUT THE RICHES THAT OUR PAPER HAS IN STORE

PRINTED BY LOWELL MILLS
DARING AND UNIQUE
THE VOICE OF WORKING WOMEN, STRAIGHT FROM THE FACT’RY FLOOR.

Back in Lowell, SARAH holding court at the meeting. She holds up the petition.

SARAH

Here it is, 5,000 signatures. The Massachusetts State Legislature will hear us next week. (The girls cheer.) They will make us testify. Who will answer the call?

YOUR WORDS ARE THE WILL OF THE WORKER
YOU SPEAK THE TRUTHS THAT OTHERS WILL NOT
SO SHARE YOUR MIND SO THAT OTHERS WILL QUESTION
WHAT HATH GOD WROUGHT? WHAT HAVE WE WROUGHT?

In New York City…

HARRIET

Thank you, New York.

WITH PAGES OF POETRY
FULL OF DIGNITY AND GRACE
THE GIRLS DISTILL THE MIND’S IMMENSITIES IN INK.

THE VOICE OF A LOWELL GIRL
IS CULTURED AND URBANE
WE SPEND THE DAYLIGHT WORKING, BUT IN THE DARK WE THINK

Back in Lowell…

SARAH

I need two more volunteers to speak. (a little quiet and shifty in room)
GLADYS
Uhh…I would….but I am not good in front of a crowd. Plus….my lisp gets even worse when I’m nervous. And my ghost finger-

SARAH
You will be fine, Gladdy. Just stand up straight, keep your tongue tight and project. Your testimony is crucial.

GLADYS
Like this? Or this?

SARAH adjusts GLADYS’ posture in a non-verbal, cute, motherly way.

ABIGAIL
Well, if she can do it, I guess I can too. Lord raise me up.

SARAH ABIGAIL & GLADYS
LET THEM KNOW (LET THEM KNOW)
LET THEM SEE (LET THEM SEE)
SPREAD THE WORD THAT THE SOULLESS CORPORATION IS KILLING YOU!
AND KILLING ME!

NAMES AND FLYERS FROM THE DARKNESS
NOW, WE SPEAK LIGHT A FIRE IN THESE HEARTS AND
NOW WE’RE KEEPING SPREAD FOREVER, EVER HIGHER
RUSTY! EVER ONWARD…

HARRIET
When you invest in the Lowell System, you invest in a way of life. Thank you all.

SARAH
Are you ready, ladies? (They are) Tomorrow, Boston.
Scene 2

The Massachusetts State Legislature. WILLIAM SCHOULER sits on a high chair behind SARAH, ABIGAIL, and GLADYS, who are seated at the front of the stage looking out at the audience.

SPEAKER (cross-dressed girl)
Hear ye, hear ye!! The Massachusetts State Legislature, on this day, the 5\textsuperscript{th} of February, 1845, do assemble a special committee of the House to hear grievances from operatives of Boott Mills in Lowell. Presenting Representative William Schouler, chair.

SCHOULER
Ms. Bagley, your name and reputation precede you. This special meeting of the Massachusetts State Legislature will address your concerns with the working environment in the factories of Lowell, as well as your petitions for a state-mandated ten-hour workday. I will note that this government has neither history of nor interest in regulating labor conditions, and yet the thousands of signatures you have leave us no choice but to hear your case.

SARAH
Thank you, sir. We hope you hear our call.

SCHOULER
Who will speak first?

\textbf{SONG: The 10-hour Day—SARAH, ABIGAIL, GLADYS}

SARAH
I will.

A COUNTRY GIRL HEARS STORIES TOLD
OF SPINDLES THAT TURN THREAD TO GOLD
AND HOPING FOR THIS DREAM TO FIND
SHE LEAVES THE SKY AND RAIN BEHIND

GLADYS

AND RIDING FROM THE ROLLING HILLS
SHE DREAMS OF LIFE IN SUNLIT MILLS
BUT STEPPING FROM THE WAGON BED
SHE SEES A DIFFERENT LIFE AHEAD

ABIGAIL

EXHAUSTED FROM THE JOURNEY

64
SHE GRABS AT ANY JOB
WORKING THE LOOM IN THE CORNER OF THE ROOM
HER TOES AND FINGERS THROB

GLADYS AND ABIGAIL

SHE THOUGHT THAT THE MACHINES
WOULD EASE LABOR'S BURDEN
BUT THE OVERSEER SEES IT OTHERWISE

SARAH
With the aid of the recently installed whale oil lamps, the company has extended the workday from what natural sunlight allows. With this imposition, the bell has replaced the sun as the governor of our daily rhythms. And the bell has no respect for nature’s order.

ABIGAIL

I CAME TO HELP MY FAMILY

GLADYS

AND I CAME TO BE FREE

SARAH

BUT THE HUSTLE LEAVES NO TIME TO EAT

ALL THREE

NO TIME LEFT FOR ME

THE QUIET COUNTRY BREEZES
THAT GRACED OUR FAMILY’S FARMS
BLOW SO FAR AWAY...

SARAH, GLADYS, ABIGAIL

NOW THEY WORK US WHEN THE SUN
HAS FALLEN OUT OF THE SKY
BY THE TIME THE DAY IS DONE
WE’RE TOO TIRED TO CRY
IF WE GOTTA STAY AWAY
FROM MOTHER NATURE’S SWEET SONG
GOD GRANT THE WORKING DAY
MAY BE TEN HOURS LONG

SARAH
We the undersigned peaceable, industrious and hardworking men and women of Lowell, in view
of our condition—the evils already come upon us, by toiling from thirteen to fourteen hours per
day, confined in unhealthy apartments, exposed to the poisonous contagion of air, debarred from
proper physical exercise, mental discipline, and mastication cruelly limited, and thereby
hastening us on through pain, disease and privation, down to a premature grave, pray the
legislature to institute a ten-hour working day in all the factories of the state. Please hear our
words.

SARAH AND CHORUS
MORE TIME TO SLEEP       MORE TIME
MORE TIME TO WRITE        MORE TIME
MORE TIME TO KEEP         MORE TIME
MORE TIME AT NIGHT        MORE TIME
MORE TIME TO CHEW         MORE TIME
MORE TIME FOR TEA         MORE TIME
MORE TIME FOR YOU         MORE TIME
MORE TIME FOR ME          MORE TIME
MORE TIME TO THINK        MORE TIME
MORE TIME FOR PRAYER      MORE TIME
MORE TIME FOR INK         MORE TIME
MORE TIME TO SHARE        MORE TIME
MORE TIME!                MORE TIME!
MORE TIME!                MORE TIME!
MAY BE TEN HOURS LONG

SCHOULER
You make a strong case, Ms. Bagley. I will come to the mills myself to investigate. This week.
If conditions are as deplorable as these women claim, the government may intervene. Do all
present understand?

SARAH, ABIGAIL, GLADYS

Yes, sir.

SCHOULER
Next week, then.
They all file off.
Scene 2.5 (interlude)

*LUCY stands downstage as the factory floor is set behind her in a silent dance.*

LUCY

ALL DAY SHE STANDS BEFORE HER LOOM;
THE FLYING SHUTTLES COME AND GO:
BY GRASSY FIELDS, AND TREES IN BLOOM,
    SHE SEES THE WINDING RIVER FLOW:
AND FANCY’S SHUTTLE FLIETH WIDE,
AND FASTER THAN THE WATERS GLIDE.

*(add harmony from the floor behind her)*

“I WEAVE, AND WEAVE, THE LIVELONG DAY:
    THE WOOF IS STRONG, THE WARP IS GOOD:
I WEAVE, TO BE MY MOTHER’S STAY;
    I WEAVE, TO WIN MY DAILY FOOD:
BUT EVER AS I WEAVE,” SAITH SHE,
    “THE WORLD OF WOMEN HAUNTETH ME.

“THERE BE SAD WOMEN, SICK AND POOR:
    AND THOSE WHO WALK IN GARMENTS SOILED:
THEIR SHAME, THEIR SORROW, I ENDURE;
    BY THEIR DEFECT MY HOPE IS FOILED:
THE BLOT THEY BEAR IS ON MY NAME;
WHO SINS, AND I AM NOT TO BLAME?

SO UP AND DOWN BEFORE HER LOOM
*(Hey… Ha…)*

(She paces on, and to and fro,
TILL SUNSET FILLS THE DUSTY ROOM,
    AND MAKES THE WATER REDLY GLOW,
AS IF THE MERRIMACK’S CALM FLOOD
WERE CHANGED INTO A STREAM OF BLOOD.

TOO SOON FULFILLED, AND ALL TOO TRUE
    THE WORDS SHE MURMURED AS SHE WROUGHT:
BUT, WEARY WEAVER, NOT TO YOU
    ALONE WAS WAR’S STERN MESSAGE BROUGHT:
“WOMAN!” IT KNELED FROM HEART TO HEART,
    “THY SISTER’S KEEPER KNOW THOU ART!”

*LUCY goes to take her place at her loom. They silently continue working.*
Scene 3

ABBOTT stands at his office desk on the apron as the girls work silently behind him.
BEN enters.

ABBOTT
Benjamin, old boy, you’re back just in time. How was the tour?

BEN
It was -

ABBOTT
Tell me later, we have infinitely pressing business. (HARRIET enters behind BEN) Ms. Farley, welcome back. Close the door behind you. (she does) I’m sure you’ve heard about the impending visit of Congressman Schouler. He’ll be here today and I want to give him the old “gold glove” style tour we used to do so well—the three of us. That means a few adjustments in every department,

BEN
How so, sir?

ABBOTT
Ben, pull back the speed on all the spinning looms right after the second bells; and the old single-loom formation on the floor should be followed for the day. Ms. Farley, is there anything in the weaving room we should worry about before we come through?

HARRIET
Not that I know of.

ABBOTT
Fine. We should have nothing to fear, but I just want to make certain. You both know how important it is that he sees only the best side of this operation, correct?

BEN
Of course.

ABBOTT
That’s my boy, Ben. Oh, and of course, you too, Miss Farley. See you at second bells.

BEN exits to the floor, where he pulls a lever to slow the looms down. HARRIET starts to follow.

ABBOTT
A moment, Ms. Farley. (she stays) Your efforts on this promotional tour have yielded large dividends for our shareholders, and your work for the corporation has meant a great deal to me and the whole operation. We’ve got a big couple months coming up, and we’d like to offer you
our corporate apartment right in town so we can all focus on this next quarter and so you can hone in on your responsibilities as the editor of the Offering.

HARRIET
Mister Lawrence, sir, I am honored, but… do you mean I would move out of Boott Six?

ABBOTT
It’s up to you, but it is a three-room apartment with a lounge chair and an astral lamp. We’d also like to offer you a modest stipend as full-time editor. You can of course continue in the weaving room part-time if you’d like, but we value your editorial voice more at this crucial time in our history.

HARRIET
Thank you, sir. I’m not sure what to say.

ABBOTT
Good. The apartment will be available at the end of the month- Let me know when I should send the moving boys. I look forward to hearing more about the investor tour after this madness passes.

HARRIET
Thank you, Mister Lawrence.

_HARRIET goes to the weaving room. Back among the looms, ABIGAIL shouts above the noise._

ABIGAIL
The looms feel slower to you?

GLADYS
Like a stroll by the river!

OVERSEER XD
Keep up the good work, ladies! Work is a blessing! All is possibility!

ALL

_THINK LIKE A MACHINE! FLY ON METAL WINGS
LISTEN TO THE SONG A BRAND NEW CITY SINGS
THINK LIKE A MACHINE - SPIN INSIDE THE THREAD
AND BLOCK OUT ALL THE CLATTER IN YOUR HEAD_

_BILL SCHOULER has entered (with a small posse?) and watches approvingly_

HEY… HA….
SCHOULER
_Plugging his ears and shouting_

Never get used to that noise, do you, old boy?

ABBOTT
_Entering, shouting_

That’s the sound of America becoming the greatest nation in the world, Billy!

SCHOULER
_Shaking hands_

Still quite an operation after all these years. Massive flowers in the windows, ruby-cheeked operatives… all seems in fine order. What am I missing?

ABBOTT

Nothing, Bill. As you know, the hours can be long, but each overseer is committed to providing a healthy workplace. We are even building a hospital this year for the occasional girl who falls ill.

SCHOULER

See, now that’s big business in action, keep the government out and let the visionaries like yourself handle the details. I never thought the beanie-wearing Harvard runt had it in him. My commendations, Abbott. And sorry about your wife.

ABBOTT

_burned but respectful_ Thank you, Bill.

_SCHOULER puts on his hat…and SARAH approaches the men._

SARAH

Sir, excuse me, when do you think the legislature will render its decision?

SCHOULER

Ms. Bagley, so nice to see you again, in your…natural habitat. We will render a decision very soon, certainly as soon as next month. Thank you for your moving testimony.

...and leaves. _ABBOTT follows him out. The clatter of the looms quickens. Suspect, SARAH returns to her loom._

GIRLS

_TWICE SIX, TWICE SEVEN, TWICE TWENTY AND ELEVEN…_

_Lights fade on the factory. On the scrim, we see the verdict from the legislature that Schouler foreshadowed – the government will not intervene._
Scene 4

_HARRIET is in their room in the boardinghouse, packing a trunk. She packs by candlelight. In the hallway outside her door,_

**MARTHA**

_Entering_

Georgia! GEORGIA!

GEORGIA

I’m behind you!

MARTHA

I need my horsehair crinoline.

GEORGIA

For a Tuesday night?

MARTHA

For this weekend, but I need to brush it.

GEORGIA

Why such a rush?

MARTHA

I’m seeing Nathan again.

GEORGIA

What?? A true prospect, independently wealthy, and not a corporation man. Come with me, I have a shiny new broach from Willoughby’s you _must_ wear with that shawl. Next stop, Beacon Hill.

_On scrim - The Ruling, or spoken by SCHOULER (his actual quote, below)_

**SCHOULER**

“We think that it would be better if the hours for labor would be less. if more time was allowed for meals, if more attention were paid to ventilation and pure air in our manufactories, and workshops, and many other matters. We acknowledge all this, but we say, the remedy is not with us. We look for it in the progressive improvement in art and science, in a higher appreciation of man’s destiny, in a less love for money and a more ardent love for social happiness and intellectual superiority. Your committee, therefore, while they agree with the petitioners in their desire to lessen the burdens imposed upon
labor, differ only as to the means by which these burdens are sought to be removed.”
Signed, Bill Schouler.

SARAH puts her head down.

SARAH re-enters ‘reality’, heavy, drooping, devastated by the ruling. Upon seeing HARRIET, she brightens a small bit.

SARAH

Hey Hattie- you’re back How was the trip?

HARRIET

Long. You look tired, Sarah George.

SARAH

Thank you for noticing! I am.

HARRIET

Well.. (awkward pause) how are you feeling about the ruling? I’m so sorry, I thought you had the legislature’s ear.

SARAH

I did too, what can we do.

HARRIET

She heard already

All in good time, Sarah.

SARAH

What time? How many girls went home coughing last week? At least five, just on our floor. (beat. HARRIET looks at her with pity and compassion) What are you doing? Oh God, are you sick too? You’re going home?

HARRIET

No, no… Mister Lawrence has offered me a temporary residence in the corporation apartment until the publishing season is over. He, um… He’s impressed with the latest work of The Offering and wants to keep the momentum up.

SARAH

“The roost” on Dutton street? Hattie, that’s quite a place! You must really be selling cloth.

HARRIET
I was going to wait until the end of the month, but… I have a lot to catch up on at the paper. You understand, right? Oh Sarah, don’t….

SARAH
No, no, I’m fine, you’ll be fine, it’s a big deal to have your own place….

SARAH starts to cry quietly and shrugs it off. HARRIET comforts her.

SONG: The Wheel and the Water Reprise—SARAH AND HARRIET

HARRIET
SHH, YOU’RE STILL MY SISTER—
I’M NOT GOING FAR
WELL, THEN WHY DON’T YOU STAY?
WITH ALL THAT’S BEEN HAPPENING,
IT’S PROBABLY BETTER THIS WAY…

SARAH
When will I see you?

HARRIET
I’ll come by for supper tomorrow. I… have to go over some articles. Tomorrow, all right?


SARAH flops on her bed and starts to sob.

A knock at the door.

SARAH
Hattie?

LUCY enters.

LUCY
It’s me. I just heard about the ruling. I’m…. so sorry, Sarah.

SARAH
Well, at least we tried. Not that it would have mattered, Schouler and Abbott are old crew buddies from Harvard, there was never a chance.
LUCY
Well….what was your motto? Try again?

SARAH
shaking her head
Not this time.

LUCY
You remember the man I danced with at the Lighting Up Ball? (SARAH shakes her head no, Lucy breaks into Irish accent) Shamus, the fetchingly manly Irish boy? Well, we met for tea this week, and he won’t stop talking about the men’s labor paper.

SARAH
The Voice Of Industry?

LUCY
They have their own press and thousands of subscribers. And… he wants to bring on a female writer.

SARAH
We’re a losing cause.

LUCY
I told him about you on our Botany class ramble last week. They meet Wednesday nights, same as The Offering, at the mechanics room on Main Street.

SARAH
I’m sorry, Lucy.

LUCY
Consider it? (a shrug) By the way, where is Harriet going?

SARAH
She… she’s on the road again. I’ll see you at first bells. Don’t hog the bacon, kid.

LUCY leaves. SARAH wipes her face and sits on the bed.
Scene 5

*ABBOTT sits with BEN in his office.*

BEN

Is it that obvious?

ABBOTT

Come now. You’re no true Universalist, and yet you have found your way to their meeting rather... religiously, wouldn’t you say?

BEN

It’s the message, ah... Catholicism isn’t working for my generation.

ABBOTT

Look here Curtis, Miss Farley has been like a daughter to me; she came here at fourteen and worked on my floor when I was your age. She is a fine woman to have your eye on. Just not your paws.

BEN

Agreed, sir.

ABBOTT

One more thing; I would like to avoid any more setbacks before the shareholders’ meeting this month. There’s no place for any whispers against the company... Have your overseers discreetly remove anyone speaking of resistance. Understood?

BEN

Of course. I wondered, too—morale seemed to improve the other day when we slowed the looms down. Should I lift the wheel a bit?

ABBOTT

No. Keep it at full speed a bit longer....while the water is high.

*BEN nods and heads back onto the floor and pushes the lever back to high.*

**SONG: BELL/SUN REPRISE—All girls**

**ALL**

STRIVING, TURNING, THRIVING, LEARNING
STRIVING, TURNING, THRIVING, LEARNING
FREE FROM SOMETHING STILL SURVIVING,
TURNING ALWAYS

What is this?

A flyer. Just a pamphlet.

Reading- in SARAH’s register
WE DIDN’T COME TO JUST SPIN THREAD
DIDN’T COME TO LIVE AND DIE IN VAIN
TO KNOW JUST CLOTH AND BREAD
OR TO NEVER FEEL THE SKY OR—

Where did you get this?

I… wrapped my lunch in it.

DO YOU FIND THIS WORK SO TERRIBLE?

Sir…

IS IT REALLY SO UNBEARABLE?

I ONLY WANT TO SHARE WHAT I BELIEVE TO BE RIGHT

THEN GIVE UP YOUR LOOM; YOU ARE LEAVING TONIGHT.

Mister Robinson—
THIS IS TREASONOUS

HEPSABETH

It’s a mill, it’s not a dictatorship!

OVERSEER XD

GOODBYE, AND TAKE YOUR PAPER AS YOU GO.

The rest of you, this is a fair warning. As long as you are employed by this company, you will not speak out against its policies.

HEPSABETH

No! I was just….considering….right, Sarah? Sarah, please! Help me! This isn’t funny.

SARAH does not respond but bends her head to work. HEPSABETH is escorted out.
Scene 6

A meeting of the Self-improvement circle. SARAH is conspicuously absent.

**SONG: Song of the Spinners—SIC girls**

DEPENDENT ON OTHERS WE NE’ER WILL BE,
SO LONG AS WE’RE ABLE TO SPIN

HARRIET
Welcome, ladies. Thank you all for making time for this Self-Improvement Circle, I know there has been a lot going on.

FLORILLA
Where is Sarah, by the way?

MARTHA *(new to circle)*

Conspicuously absent.

HARRIET
Would anyone like to begin, or shall we start with the anonymous submissions? Maybe one of our…newer voices to the Circle.

MARTHA
I’d like to share. Ahem. This is “Love in a Factory.” A 1-2-3-4

**SONG: Falling In Love In a Knitting Factory—MARTHA**

MARTHA

FALLING IN LOVE IN A KNITTING FACT’RY
AIN’T ALWAYS WHAT IT SEEMS
WHEN YOU FALL IN LOVE IN A KNITTING FACT’RY
GOTTA LOOK BETWEEN THE SEAMS

HE’LL CATCH YOUR EYE, LIKE THE EYE OF A NEEDLE
AND TELL YA THAT HE’LL GIVE YOU EVERYTHING THAT YOU NEED,
HE’LL
SPIN YA LIKE A SPOOL OF THREAD
THAT’S LOVE IN A FACT’RY.

HARRIET
What… energy, Martha. Interesting rhyme scheme, the “need he’ll needle” bit.
GLADYS

Very “on point.”

HARRIET

Ok. *(maternally).* Would anyone else like to share?

*Lights up on a meeting of The Voice of Industry. SHAMUS stands before a gathering of men. SARAH stands with LUCY outside the door, nervous.*

SARAH

You brought me here, you did what you told your boyfriend, now let’s go.

LUCY

Sarah, we have to go inside.

SARAH

*a whisper that comes out harsher than she intended*

I’m not going!

LUCY

They’ll be missing me at the Self-Improvement Circle. Thank you for coming here with me.

*LUCY leaves, a bit rattled. SARAH sighs painfully and puts her ear to the door.*

SHAMUS

*The Voice of Industry* is changing minds and fueling the fire, certainly. Our paper spreads the fight for justice to thousands. But it’s not enough. We need to double our reach, to move people to act, to…

*He continues miming a speech as SARAH braces herself to enter, she feels the challenge before her.*

**SONG: Shield and Sword—SARAH**

SARAH

MY COUSIN’S FAMILY SHARED THE FIELDS ON THE EAST SIDE OF OUR LAND
AND WE’D PLAY UNTIL THE DAY BECAME THE NIGHT
SHE WOULD CLING TO ME FOR SAFETY AS WE FOUND THE WAY BACK HOME
AFRAID OF THE SHADOWS IN THE MOONLIGHT
I MADE A SWORD FROM A SAPLING AND A SHIELD OF POPLAR BARK
SHE WOULD CALL ME JOAN OF ARC… SHE CALLED ME JOAN OF ARC
AND I WAS THE ONE WHO SAVED HER
FROM THE DEMONS WE IMAGINED IN THE DARK

SO WHY AM I SO TERRIFIED OF WALKING THROUGH THAT DOOR,
WHEN I KNOW WHAT THEY’RE FIGHTING FOR IS GOOD?
I’M ALONE AND I AM SCARED IN WAYS I’VE NEVER FELT BEFORE,
AND I DON’T KNOW HOW TO DO THE THINGS I SHOULD.
I LEFT THE SHIELD OF POPLAR IN THE COOL WHITE MOUNTAIN SHADE
AND SINCE THEN I’VE BECOME AFRAID; HAVE I BECOME AFRAID?
WAS I ONLY BRAVE IN SAPLINGS?
WAS I BETTER IN THE DAYS THAT WE PLAYED?

WHERE IS MY SHIELD?
WHERE IS MY SWORD?
HAVE I SHIED AWAY?
WHAT HAVE I IGNORED?

A flashback... SARAH’s father steps on stage

SARAH’S FATHER
What’s wrong, Sarah? Is it too hard there? Then come home.

SARAH

I STOOD FOR WHAT I THOUGHT WAS RIGHT—
I TRIED WITH ALL MY MIGHT
AND THEY BRUSHED ME TO THE SIDE

SARAH’S FATHER
So try again.

SARAH

HOW COULD I TRY AGAIN, WHEN THEY JUST
SENT AWAY MY FRIEND
AND I STOOD THERE WHILE SHE CRIED?

SARAH’S FATHER
Because that’s what Bagleys do.

SARAH
SHE PLEADED WITH ME
TO HELP HER
AS THEY WALKED HER TO THE DOOR
AND I JUST BENT MY KNEES AND...
JUST BENT MY KNEES AND TRIED TO FEEL...

SARAH’S FATHER

Try again, Sarah.

SARAH

HELP ME FIND MY SHIELD
HELP ME FIND MY SWORD
AND NOT SHY AWAY
AND NOT BE IGNORED

CAN I LAY BLAZES
WHERE THE WAY IS DARK,
AND TAKE MY PLACE
AS JOAN OF ARC?

SARAH’S FATHER opens the door; SARAH looks at the image in disbelief. 
HE kisses her hand and exits.

SHAMUS (to fellow men)

We need to truly spread the word. There are over twenty-five thousand people in this town, and our paper reaches less than half. Our cause is noble, but our support is lacking.

SARAH 

entering

Is this The Voice of Industry meeting?

The men turn to see SARAH, nervous in the doorway.

THOMAS (xd)

And who might you be?

SARAH

Sarah Bagley.

SHAMUS

Ms. Bagley, it is a pleasure. Gentlemen, this is the face of one of the strongest pens in Lowell. The Lowell Offering has been lucky to have you.
PHILLIP (other XD)  
mocking

Oh, dews and flowers, The Offering!

SHAMUS
Phillip, she’s not one of them. (to SARAH) I heard your petition was rejected. I’m sorry. We will do all we can to get back at that stoolie Schouler.

SARAH
We try again, right?

SHAMUS
Indeed. How would you feel about heading up a female department for the Voice?

THOMAS (CROSS-DRESSED)
Shamus, a woman? On our staff? It’s too risky, our readership isn’t ready for – a woman’s voice. She’s out of her sphere.

SHAMUS
They may not have the vote, but they hold the economic power in town. Half the new bank accounts opened last year belonged to women. Ms. Bagley could be a powerful voice for the women operatives.

PHILLIP
But the fight will be in the capitol! We need men.

SHAMUS
We need revolutionaries who aren’t afraid of change. Does that describe you, Phillip? Et tu?

PHILLIP folds.

SARAH  
reconsidering

I’m sorry, I… I came here to send money home and they’re firing operatives at the mill for speaking out, I don’t think—

SHAMUS
We can use a pseudonym on the masthead for now. And we’d want you to bring on other female writers. You are the leader the women of Lowell have been waiting for. Ms. Bagley?

SARAH
WHERE IS THE GIRL WHO LEFT THE FARM TO PAY HER BROTHER’S WAY?
WHERE IS WARRIOR IN THE WOODS WHO KEPT THE DARK AT BAY?
WHERE IS THE FIGHTER WHO WAS BORN IN GRANITE AND IN FIRE?
HELP ME FIND
THE FEARLESS GIRL
I LEFT BEHIND!

SHAMUS

So will you join us?

SARAH offers her hand. SHAMUS shakes it firmly.

SARAH

SO THIS IS MY SHIELD,
AND THIS IS MY SWORD
AND I WILL NOT SHY AWAY,
I WILL NOT BE IGNORED!

I WILL LAY BLAZES
WHERE THE WAY IS DARK
AND LEAD THE WAY
LIKE JOAN OF ARC

GLADYS, ABIGAIL, and HEPSABETH step forward to join SARAH in a circle.

SARAH

Ladies, the Lowell Offering has served its purpose. We now have a fight in front of us. Welcome to The Voice of Industry, a paper that will give us the platform and power we need to win the battle for our humanity.

THIS IS OUR SHIELD! (can other voices come in- G,A, and H?)
THIS IS OUR SWORD
WE WILL NOT SHY AWAY
WE WILL NOT BE IGNORED

WE WILL LAY BLAZES
FOR ONE AND ALL
AND BY OUR WORDS
NO MORE WILL FALL!

Lights.
Scene 7

GEORGIA is preening in a chair, practicing poses for an upcoming daguerreotype session, while still governing over the boardinghouse door, as MARTHA pretends to be the photographer. The door slams.

GEORGIA
Last one, we all need to bathe. NEXT.

CRAZY PEDDLER
Come to the The Great Moon-atorium! Only two shillings for a ticket! You’ll see things you never saw before; little insects magnified as big as a hoss. You’ll see the sun inhabited jest like the earth, folks, there fifty miles high- and the spots, them are the shadders!

MARTHA
Shadders?

CRAZY PEDDLERS
Shadders! In the sky! Moonatorium! One night only!

GEORGIA
Enough darkness, no one wants to see your charade, lunatic. NEXT.

MARTHA
You said-

GEORGIA
Oh right. To bathe, perchance to be clean. Move aside, newer girls, let numbers four and seven take their exalted place in the front of the bath line. Pay-day is tomorrow, and those jingling coppers need a clean hand to land upon.

The girls walk across the stage to get in line. SARAH comes in, and tries to lay low. FLORILLA approaches her in a prison-y way.

FLORILLA
So Sarah, trying to wash the guilt away?

SARAH
Excuse me?

FLORILLA
Your hands sure are dirty.
SARAH
Look, I’m just as sorry as you-

FLORILLA
Just as sorry? Hepsabeth was my roommate, and you got her fired. Now I’m alone, and it’s all your fault.

GEORGIA (aside to MARTHA)
Ooh, this is good, I wish I had a carafe of red wine for this.

SARAH
Look here, Florilla, I know you’ve had a tough year, but Hepsabeth made her own choices. I don’t know what you are talking about.

FLORILLA
Oh please, Sarah, we all know it’s you in the Voice. It has to be. Why are you living a lie? More people are going to be blacklisted.

MARTHA
She does have a point, Sarah. Without Harriet, and now, Hepsy gone, you don’t exactly have much backing around the old boardinghouse.

SARAH
Mind your own business, Martha. This isn’t your fight.

GEORGIA
You are making it ours, Sarah. Watch yourself. You don’t speak for most of us.

SARAH storms out of the bathroom.

FLORILLA
I knew it.

ABIGAIL
Leave her alone, girls, She’s doing her best. I know I forgive her.

GEORGIA
Of course you do, Abigail, you’d forgive King George for the war too. By the way, can you still take my loom Monday so I can shop in Boston?
ABIGAIL
Yes, Georgia. Yours too, Martha, I know you are thinking about it.

GLADYS
Three at once?

ABIGAIL
If I take on extra looms I can earn enough to be out of here in three months, and then… Autumn in New Hampshire.

GLADYS
And no more sharing a tub with forty-nine other girls.

VOICE
Next!!
Scene 8

*In a meeting room, ABBOTT and BEN laugh with NEW YORK investors (all cross-dressed factory girls) who are interested in buying the company.*

ABBOTT

So she says, “Bangor? I hardly even know her!”

INVESTOR A (ROBERT?)

*Laughing*

Ha ha, old boy, still a way with the regional humor.

INVESTOR B

I must say, that presentation in Manhattan by your Ms. Farley is one of the very reasons we are so interested in buying more shares.

ABBOTT

A real gem, isn’t she?

BEN

A true New England daughter.

INVESTOR C

But your magazine, *The Offering*, it’s going out of vogue, I hear.

ABBOTT

With all due respect, *The Lowell Offering* is famous worldwide. It’s all the rage in republican France at the moment, and even Charles Dickens has proclaimed its worth.

INVESTOR B

Yes, but all we heard about on the ride up was this *Voice of Industry*. Some radical new female writer for them has been skewering *The Offering* and your very corporation. What do you plan to do about that?

ABBOTT

It’s a fringe movement, nothing more. An anonymous…anti-American sentiment meant to stir up trouble in our utopia. Probably not even a woman. (*that’s a joke*).

ALL

To the factory girls!
SONG: Velvets and Furs—MEN (including 3 cross-dressed women)

OH! SHE STRUTS AND SHE PURRS IN VELVETS AND FURS
SHE’S A HARD WORKING LASS
SHE SMOKES AND SHE DRINKS IN SATIN AND MINKS
SHE’S LOWELL’S SUPERIOR CLASS.

INVESTOR C
Allow me to – free-style… Ahem:

THE LASS FROM THE FINISHING ROOM
ONCE BEGGED FOR MY LOVE ON HER LOOM
SHE THOUGHT THAT THE SLIDE
WOULD MAKE HER A BRIDE
BUT NEVER WILL I BE A GROOM!

ALL

OH! SHE STRUTS AND SHE PURRS IN VELVETS AND FURS
SHE’S A HARD WORKING LASS
SHE SMOKES AND SHE DRINKS IN SATIN AND MINKS
SHE’S LOWELL’S SUPERIOR CLASS.

INVESTOR A
So say we believe Boott mill here can stay profitable going forward. What kind of investment share are you looking to sell off?

ABBOTT

*Pauses, sobers up a little*

Oh, well, we will get to all of that, gentlemen. Ben, see if you can go find Ms. Farley.

BEN

And bring her here?

ABBOTT

No, take her for a swim, yes bring her here! *(laughter)* Tell her it’s urgent.

BEN

Yes, sir.

*BEN exits.*

ABBOTT
To be frank, good sirs: I am planning to not just sell some of my valuable shares – I plan on selling them all.

INVESTOR B
What? The whole thing? That’s never happened in Lowell’s history. No one sells.

ABBOTT
Well - with some provisos, of course. I still have an interest in the success of this venture, as it provides a blueprint for what I hope all American manufacturing will be… But since my wife….and I …..separated, I have not the heart to stay here in Lowell.

INVESTOR
You mean you see trouble on the horizon and you want out.

ABBOTT
Absolutely not. I have made this mill what it is today, and it is as strong as ever. Dividends have remained high, even with all the competition up the river.

INVESTOR
I hope you can see how this would come as a shock— you Brahmins never let outsiders like us into your clubs.

ABBOTT
Certainly. But I assure you, there is no foul play here. I want to honor the dream that Lowell began with—an industrial utopia, our American answer to the British factory system—but it is time for new ownership. I would also highly suggest Benjamin Curtis stay on as your lead Agent to ease the transition, as he is familiar with the gears and the workforce, and has my own personal stamp of approval.

INVESTOR
You still leave this question of The Lowell Offering. If it is the image of the mills, and it drives your sales so much – then these mills are in decline. The revolution is at your door, how do you plan to fight it?

A knock at the door. BEN enters, followed by HARRIET. Lows whistles and chuckles of approval. ABBOTT shoots them a look, they settle down.

HARRIET
Mister Curtis said you had an urgent matter, Mister Lawrence.

ABBOTT
Miss Farley, good to see you as ever. You remember the New York Investing Group. I’m sure you’ve heard by now of the attacks in The Voice of Industry on your fair magazine.
HARRIET
I have, sir.

ABBOTT
What confidence do these men have that your magazine will weather the attacks hurled at it?

HARRIET
straightening
Their barbs will wither and die, sir. For like all of us, the writer of these words came to Lowell of her own free will and, should she choose it, will leave by the same. Thousands more who are desperate for the better life that this great company allows will flood to fill their places. And when she and others at the petty Voice of Industry have scattered, we at the Offering will still be here, honoring the beauty of our womanhood and God’s wonders with our words.

ABBOTT
Any questions gentlemen?

An approving and stunned silence.

ABBOTT
A thousand thank yous, Ms. Farley.

HARRIET
It is only the truth sir.

ABBOTT nods to Ben, who escorts HARRIET out. A jubilant huzzah, and again:

ALL

OH! SHE STRUTS AND SHE PURRS IN VELVETS AND FURS
SHE’S A HARD WORKING LASS
SHE SMOKES AND SHE DRINKS IN SATIN AND MINKS
SHE’S LOWELL’S SUPERIOR CLASS.

Outside, in the hallway, HARRIET confronts BEN.

HARRIET

SHORT RECIT SONG HERE: Harriet says “wtf, i’m not your tool”
Ben says “it wasn’t me, it was Abbott”
Harriet says “do you not make your own choices??”
Ben says it’s my job
Harriet says do what you believe is right.
Scene 9

HARRIET and SARAH kneel in church. When they speak, they speak straight out to the audience without acknowledging the other. Again, the other girls are preparing for church.

BETSY

Good for Harriet.

MARTHA

What?

BETSY

She’s defending us. As only she can.

MARTHA

In the Offering? Let me see… “I cannot make a speech or talk politics, or speak of the factory system as she represents it, for it never seemed to me to be Inquisition torture or slave-driven task work. I never felt disposed to croak or whine about my factory life and have endeavored to impose a cheerful spirit into the little magazine I edit.”

In another room…

GLADYS

This writer from The Voice of Industry is really making things personal.

ABIGAIL

The new woman?

GLADYS

Listen: “I notice that I have been favored by a specimen of refined literature, from the pen of one of the geniuses of the age. Have the columns of The Offering ever contended against oppression in any form? If so, I would like to read the article.”

SARAH continues on to church. In the boardinghouse, FLORILLA reads the papers:

FLORILLA

Holy mother of…

LEAFY

Florilla, watch your mouth, we’re already late for mass!
Listen to this. “We are not the poor, caged birds that the Voice Of Industry portrays us to be, singing of the flowers that surround our prison bars, apparently unconscious that those bars exist. If conditions deteriorate so that the time we spend in the factory is not worth the money that they pay us, we can leave of our own free will. But what existing institution would better serve us?”

The church bells ring. SARAH and HARRIET make their way to the pew they share. Other girls are still on the way. GLADYS, holding a rolled-up The Voice of Industry in her hand on the way to church, stops and grabs ABIGAIL's arm.

Florilla was right.

Shhh, Gladys!

Hear this:

SARAH
Pin light, to the audience
The Offering is the mouthpiece of the corporation, and is the mouthpiece on the head of this vile beast, this soul-less corporation system that continues to strike its own daughters down.

SARAH and HARRIET silently pray next to each other.

It gets worse.

HARRIET
I invite the anonymous author or the Voice of Industry to show herself at a meeting of our self-improvement circle, to bring to her veiled and seditious articles the humanity that she so publicly extols. Let us continue this discourse in the civilized manner that has come to identify the Factory Girl.

SARAH and HARRIET stand from their pews. The other girls come into church late. We are back in reality.

MINISTER
Let us greet our neighbor in the peace of the Lord, which passeth all understanding.
ALL

AMEN.
Scene 10—*The New England Workingmen’s Association Convention- March 1845*

*SARAH* and a small but growing group of nervous FLRA girls arrive at the convention a bit late. They are guided in and introduced as the guests of honor, women who have brought energy and muscle to the workingmens’ campaign.

**SONG: The Brook Farmers—CROSS DRESSED MEN(?)**

AND BLEST ARE THEY WHO IN THE MAIN  
THIS EVEN NOW DO ENTERTAIN;  
LIVE IN THE SPIRIT OF THIS CREED  
YET FIND THE STRENGTH OF LAW  
ACCORDING TO THEIR NEED!

*The FLRA girls looked confused at each other. SARAH shifts nervously.*

**GLADYS**  
It was one thing to speak before the Legislature…..but these are our peers! I’m too scared.

**ABIGAIL**  
Pull it together, woman, we need you to be convincing. Just picture them in their undergarments.

**GLADYS**  
I get the distinct feeling Brook Farmers don’t wear any.

**SARAH**  
Stand up straight, ladies. It’s time.

**SONG: As Is Woman – SARAH**  
*As Is Woman – SARAH*

A well-dressed man takes the stage with the banner ‘New England Workingmen’s Association’ behind him.

**SPEAKER**  
Thank you, Brook Farmers. On behalf of all of New England’s Workingmen’s Association, I humbly thank you and all assembled for answering our clarion call. A call for more concerted measures to find a more excellent system of labor than that which has so long prevailed, and thus, under God, remove the heavy burdens which have long rested upon us and our children and let the oppressed go free.

*Loud, strong cheers from the crowd.*
And now, please welcome the newest fully recognized members of our fledgling group, and let their voices be heard for the first time in history as true human beings and equals, in both labor and leisure… Gentlemen, the 600 member-strong Lowell Female Reform Association!

*Amongst huzzahs, SARAH walks defiantly through the crowd and up to the stage. GLADYS and GEORGIA are holding a beautifully colored banner behind them that reads, “Union for Power- Power to Bless Humanity”.*

*SARAH looks out over the enraptured crowd. She starts chanting slowly and softly, and the girls join in with her as the vamp builds in intensity.*

SARAH

As is woman… so is the race. As is woman… so is the race.

The girls stand and flank SARAH defiantly.

AS IS WOMAN, SO IS THE RACE
IT’S TIME FOR US TO TAKE OUR PLACE
WE’VE GOT TO TRY AGAIN
WE’VE GOT TO TRY AGAIN
AS IS WOMAN, SO IS THE RACE
YOU’VE GOT TO LOOK US IN THE FACE
AND TRY AGAIN
WE’VE GOT TO TRY AGAIN

THE OFFERING PUTS A GLOSS ON INHUMANITY
DOOMS US TO ETERNAL SLAVERY
FROM EVERY ROLLING RIVER
FROM MOUNTAIN, VALE, AND PLAIN
WE CALL ON YOU TO DELIVER
US, FROM THE TYRANT’S CHAIN
LET IT NOT BE IN VAIN
WE’VE GOT TO TRY AGAIN-TRY AGAIN-TRY AGAIN

ABIGAIL

WHEN IT SEEMS WE’LL NEVER WIN,

ALL

WE TRY AGAIN
ABIGAIL

WHEN THEY KNOCK US TO THE FLOOR,

ALL

WE RISE

ABIGAIL

WHEN WE LOSE THE ONES WE LOVE,

ALL

WE TRY AGAIN

ABIGAIL

WE REACH FOR MORE, WE TRY AND TRY!

SARAH

LET OPPRESSION SHRUG HER SHOULDERS
AND A HAUGHTY TYRANT FROWN
AND LITTLE UPSTART IGNORANCE IN MOCKERY LOOK DOWN
I VALUE NOT THE FEEBLE THREATS OF TORIES IN DISGUISE
WHILE THE FLAG OF INDEPENDENCE O’ER OUR NOBLE NATION FLIES

LISTEN NOW TO OUR CRIES!

WE’VE GOT TO TRY AGAIN – TRY AGAIN- TRY AGAIN

SARAH

Where can you help our cause? At the ballot box. Use your vote to remove Bill Schouler from elected office this election. Let them know that you, the sons of American freemen, will not tolerate the injustice to your sisters!

A huge applause.
Scene 11

Fast forward a month to the next Self-Improvement Circle. The girls are assembling. June, 1845. The girls are chatting nervously.

HARRIET enters through the front door.

HARRIET
Sorry I’m late. Shall we begin? Um, (she hums a note… all stand)

ALL

WE SPIN ALL DAY
AND THEN IN THE TIME FOR REST
SWEET PEACE IS FOUND
A JOYOUS AND WELCOME GUEST
DESPITE OF TOIL, WE ALL AGREE,
OR OUT OF THE MILLS OR IN,
DEPENDENT ON OTHERS WE NE’ER WILL BE,
SO LONG AS WE’RE ABLE TO SPIN.

HARRIET
Ladies: it’s no secret that we have been defiled again. Mister Bronson appears gallant when held next to this assailant, who hides behind their cowardly anonymity in the editorial pages of The Voice of Industry. Perhaps tonight, though, we will get a chance to meet her—or him—if they choose to accept my very public invitation to our circle.

An uncertain murmur.

GEORGIA
So… shall we just wait, then, or…

HARRIET
No, no of course, let’s present. Dos anyone have a poem? An essay? (LEAFY raises her hand.)

HARRIET
Please, Leafy.

SONG: Kirk Boott—LEAFY AND FLORILLA

LEAFY

THERE CAME A YOUNG MAN FROM THE OLD COUNTREE
THE MERRIMACK RIVER HE HAPPENED TO SEE
WHAT A CAPITAL PLACE FOR MILLS QUOTH HE

99
HARRIET
I appreciate the…historical take, Leafy. Tighten up your diction and maybe—

SARAH arrives in the doorway. The girls gasp.

HARRIET
Si it is you.

SARAH
I had no choice.

HARRIET
You always have a choice.

SONG: ‘Circle Showdown’—SARAH AND HARRIET

SARAH
I DIDN’T COME HERE TO FIGHT
I SIMPLY COULDN’T HIDE AWAY
FROM EVERYTHING I’VE SEEN

HARRIET
You are reckless, Sarah, you—

SARAH
YOU KNOW WHAT IS RIGHT!
THE LINES ARE LIFE AND DEATH, NOW…
THERE’S NO IN-BETWEEN

HARRIET
Sarah—

SARAH
HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN, HARRIET?
WE CAME HERE FOR A DREAM.
HARRIET

WE UNDERSTAND YOUR VIEW
BUT OUR PLACE IS NOT IN POLITICS
AND WE’VE COME TOO FAR TO BITE THE HAND THAT FEEDS

WE’RE PART OF SOMETHING NEW
THE GEARS ALL IN MOTION
AND FIGHTING WORDS AREN’T WHAT THIS MOVEMENT NEEDS

SARAH WE HAVE A CHANCE TO LIFT OURSELVES HIGHER
SO COME BACK TO US NOW

OUR VOICES ECHO THROUGH THE LAND
AND IN THE LANDS ACROSS THE SEA

SARAH

NOW’S THE TIME FOR US TO TAKE COMMAND
OF OUR OWN DESTINY

OH, HATTIE, WHAT HAVE YOU BECOME?
YOU’RE TURNING YOUR BACK ON EVERYTHING WE CAME FROM

HARRIET

THIS IS HOW WE RISE (Holds up Offering)

SARAH

No…

THIS IS HOW WE DIE

HARRIET

With mounting anger
Is the work here hard? Yes. Are the hours long? Yes. Is life hard? YES. But this is all we have! We built it before you got here. We built it over generations. And you are content to burn it all down because —

SARAH

Because the dream is dead, and we are dying too!

HARRIET

We came here of our own free will! And you, selfish, selfish you, are ruining us! (beat) Go home, Sarah. Go back to Meredith. And ruin someone else’s life.
SARAH leaves, distressed. ABIGAIL chases her outside.

ABIGAIL
Sarah, wait. Don’t leave. Because you know I would follow you anywhere, and I still have a couple more months before I can head back to New Hampshire.

SARAH
Oh Abigail… what do I do?

ABIGAIL
Try again. That’s our way. Try again. You know we’re behind you. I’ll take your looms tomorrow. Go fight.

They embrace. ABIGAIL goes back to the circle. SARAH goes into the night.
Scene 12

_In her company cottage, Harriet is at her desk, writing an editorial for the dying Offering. She reflects on what the girls have done, and each girl holding a submission walks up from behind her to support._

**HARRIET**

_(On scrim)_"The Lowell Offering, End of Volume 4”

Deaths were down again in 1844, with fifty-two less than 1843. One last note. We realize economic hardship in these tense times, but the Offering can only continue to subsist if our regional agents turn in their receipts and remit payment for issues received. An unsettling arrest in Boston for re-selling stolen Offerings has the editorial department on alert and pleading to the honest part of our reader’s and vendor’s hearts. Now we have up to three hundred dollars, due to a poor factory girl.

_HARRIET crosses out that last line and stands up from her desk._

**HOW HAS THE SCENE CHANGED?**

**HOW HAS THE WINDOW DARKENED?**

**ARE WE ONLY PAPER DOLLS?**

_SONG: Paper Dolls—HARRIET_

I USED TO READ TO THE HORSES AT NIGHT  
AS THEY STOOD THERE IN THEIR SLEEP  
CREEP TO THE BARN BY CANDLE-LIGHT  
WITH THE NIGHT BLACK DARK AND DEEP

I’D STAND TALL ON THE BALES OF HAY  
AND SPEAK EACH WORD I WROTE  
TIL THE INK BLACK NIGHT GAVE WAY TO GRAY  
AND MY VOICE STUCK IN MY THROAT.

WHEN THE SUN ROSE HIGH  
MY WRITING STAYED IN SHADE

WHEN I CAME TO THE FACTORY  
AT THE YOUNG AGE OF FOURTEEN  
AND LEFT THE BARN TO MAKE MY WAY  
UNHEEDED AND UNSEEN

ONLY PAPER DOLLS ON THE MAPLE CHEST  
HUNG ON MY EVERY WORD

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I STIRRED THEM FROM THEIR PAPER REST
SO MY WRITING COULD BE HEARD

BUT NO ONE REALLY EVER HEARD ME
UNTIL NOW

AND HERE OUR WORDS WERE RINGING
IN PEOPLE’S MINDS AND EARS
OUR VOICES THUNDERED, FEARLESSLY
INTO NEW FRONTIERS
AND I’VE NEVER BEEN SO HAPPY--
FINALLY IN THE LIGHT
I HAVE REAL FRIENDS AROUND ME
AND WE WRITE
WE WRITE NOW

ARE WE ONLY PAPER DOLLS,
IN SOMEONE ELSE’S PLAY?
ARE WE ONLY PAPER DOLLS
CUT OUT, HUNG UP, AND THROWN AWAY

I USED TO READ TO THE HORSES AT NIGHT
AS THEY STOOD THERE IN THEIR SLEEP
CREEP TO THE BARN BY CANDLE-LIGHT
WITH THE NIGHT BLACK DARK AND DEEP
AND NOW…
AND NOW…
Scene 13

In the office, ABBOTT and BEN talk (sing?) tensely.

ABBOTT (throwing a newspaper down)
Can you believe it? Schouler’s out! These amazons are getting out of control.

BEN
Sir, if we just slow the looms back to pre-speed up levels—

ABBOTT
No, we can’t show any profit dips before the sale. Let me think… nothing else to rock the schooner…..If we can just hold on for another week or so—

BEN
A week? There is unrest, Mister Lawrence, and I’m losing operatives—

ABBOTT
Look, Curtis, I know it’s not the way it was, but things have changed. We need to cut our losses and forget about the old vision of Lowell just to save our asses at this point. This competition up the river is is breaking our back.

BEN
Respectfully, sir, this is hasty, we are losing money but the girls still believe—

ABBOTT
Believe? They got Schouler voted out of office! They won’t stop now, and these labor groups aren’t going anywhere. Once the sale goes through, I’ll be free of all this stress and you will be the new man to carry the bag. Bring back the night classes. Revive the Offering. Build them a gymnasium for all I care.

BEN
Of course, sir. Of course.

A few days later, the girls are working fast.

SONG: Machine —Final Reprise

ALL

HEY… HA… HEY… HA…
TWICE SIX, TWICE SEVEN TWICE TWENTY AND ELEVEN
THINK LIKE A—
ABIGAIL gets her hair caught in the now-very-fast looms, and is suddenly and horrifically killed.

GLADYS

Abigail!
Scene 14

Abigail’s funeral. All girls and Ben are there. The girls come slowly together, and Abigail stands to speak.

GLADYS
Abigail was my best friend in the world. She hated this factory with every part of her being but she loved her Lowell sisters as much as she loved her quilting. As many of you know, she came to earn money to put her brother through college; she only had two and a half months left until she earned as much as she needed, and she couldn’t have been more excited about going home for “autumn in New Hampshire.” Abigail, autumn came early for you.

GLADYS is comforted by the others.

SONG: Autumn – LUCY, ALL

LUCY

Air's so stale here,
Still you're smiling
Fresh with autumn's sigh.
Splashed with yellow
Edges browning
Why would you leave the sky?

Far below the leaves turn to ground
Am I lost or found?
In the autumn

ALL

Falling, you can find me
On a wave up in the breeze
Falling, will you find me
High above the lonely trees?

HEPSABETH

Drifted now so far from home
What have we left behind?

FLORILLA
WE HAVE LEFT OUR BRANCHES, BOUND FOR THE EARTH
OUR TRIP IS FAST AND BLIND.
FAR BELOW THE LEAVES TURN TO GROUND

ALL

AM I LOST OR FOUND?
IN THE AUTUMN

FALLING, YOU CAN FIND ME
ON A WAVE UP IN THE BREEZE
FALLING, WILL YOU FIND ME
HIGH ABOVE THE LONELY TREES?

OOH

ABIGAIL

THE SUNLIGHT ON MY FACE,
WEIGHTLESS IN THE BLUE,
I MAY NEVER LAND, MAY I NEVER LAND

ALL

FALLING, YOU CAN FIND ME
ON A WAVE UP IN THE BREEZE
FALLING, WILL YOU FIND ME
HIGH ABOVE THE LONELY TREES?

SARAH approaches GEORGIA as girls hug and console one another.

SARAH

Georgia?

GEORGIA

I can’t believe she’s gone. You know, all the times I made fun of her - she never said anything back. I wish I could hear her sweet voice again and see her over there knitting and smiling like an idiot.

SARAH

I know, Georgia. She saw the best in you.

GEORGIA

None of this feels worth it anymore.

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SARAH
Well…..there is something you can do.

GEORGIA
What?

SARAH
If we can get you and the rest of your corner of the floor to walk out tomorrow, everything will back up within minutes. We could shut down the entire factory. With the cloth-room down—

GEORGIA
Do you mean…go on strike?

SARAH
If we turn out together, we can avenge Abigail’s death and force their hand. And Abbott and his ‘visiting dignitaries’ will have to hear what we say.

GEORGIA
I’m not sure… I mean, I have suitors, but nothing necessarily nailed down in case I get blacklisted—

SARAH
I’ll make sure you don’t get fired. Join us. For Abigail. It’s time.

GEORGIA
What do I do?

SARAH
Just wait for my cue.

GEORGIA nods and the scene swirls around them. The factory gears grind again. SARAH steps forward.

BEN
Ms. Bagley, back to your loom. You know the drill.

**SONG: The Strike—SARAH, HARRIET, ALL**

SARAH
SHE CAME HERE TO WORK
NOT TO DIE
NOW ABIGAIL’S GONE
AND WE KNOW WHY
BEN

Sarah, please, it’s been hard for everyone.

SARAH

THEY WORE HER DOWN
THE BELL HAS WON
THE SHADOW OF DEATH
HAS REPLACED THE SUN
WHO’LL BE NEXT?
IS IT ME?
WILL IT BE YOU?

GIRLS begin to leave their looms and crowd behind SARAH.

In her cottage, HARRIET writes an editorial responding to ABIGAIL’s death. It is somehow made clear that it is the final issue of the paper.

HARRIET

THE OFFERING IS SADDENED BY THE NEWS
A WRITER FROM THE LOWELL FAMILY GONE
HER MIND WAS BRIGHT AND AGILE
BUT HER BODY Sadly PROVED TO BE TOO FRAGILE.

YET REVERENT, WE FIND SOLACE IN OUR FAITH
AND KNOW THE LORD WILL BRING ANOTHER DAWN
REJECTING WHAT FIREBRANDS CLAIM,
THIS PAPER HOLDS THE COMPANY FREE FROM BLAME

SARAH

NO MORE WILL WE TOIL
AND DIE IN VAIN
SO JOIN ME TO FIGHT
A FACTORY GIRL’S CAMPAIGN
TIME TO RISE
TIME TO STRIKE
WE’RE TURNING OUT!
The strike begins—the girls exit the factory and spill into the street. Each girl struggles with the decision to walk.

HARRIET

SOME OPERATIVES ARE PLANNING ON A STRIKE
THE OFFERING IMPLORES THEM NOT TO GO
THEY’LL SACRIFICE THEIR LIVELIHOODS
AND JEOPARDIZE THEIR FAMILY’S GOOD NAME.

LUCY goes to join them at the last minute, but the presence of her mother keeps her from joining the crowd.

SARAH     HARRIET

MARCH OUT OF THE MILL  JUST AS JOAN OF ARC
DON’T DOUBT YOUR CHOICE!
MARCH UP TO THE HILL!
WE NEED YOUR VOICE
NOW WE STRIKE
NOW AS ONE,
WE’RE TURNING OUT!

JUST AS JOAN OF ARC
BURNED ON HER PIKE
SO, TOO, WILL RABBLE ROUSERS
BE LAID LOW
IGNORE THE “VOICE OF INDUSTRY”
REMEMBER WHAT THE OFFERING’S
ABOUT

GEORGIA’s group joins the mass.

SARAH

ISN’T IT A PITY SUCH A PRETTY GIRL AS I
SHOULD BE SENT TO THE FACTORY TO PINE AWAY AND DIE
OH I WILL NOT BE A SLAVE
I CANNOT BE A SLAVE
FOR I’M SO FOND OF LIBERTY
I CANNOT BE A SLAVE!

Harriet appears SL, approaching the girls cautiously and protected.

HARRIET

Simultaneously as all strikers sing “Isn’t it a pity”
YOU’VE GOT TO TURN AROUND
YOU DON’T KNOW WHAT YOU’RE STIRRING UP
THE FACTORY MEN WON’T GIVE ANOTHER THOUGHT
THERE’S MORE OUTSIDE THE GATE
HUNGRY JUST FOR POCKET CHANGE
ALL YOUR PLEAS AND PASSION ARE FOR NAUGHT.

SARAH

TOO LATE TO TURN BACK
THERE’S NOTHING LEFT FOR US TO GIVE
TOO LONG, TOO HARD, TOO MANY, TOO CONFINED
NOW WE’RE DYING FAST
WE HAVE TO STAND FOR WHAT IS RIGHT
AGAINST THIS SLAVERY OF SOULS AND MINDS

ALL STRIKERS

ISN’T IT A PITY SUCH A PRETTY GIRL AS I
SHOULD BE SENT TO THE FACTORY
TO PINE AWAY AND—

ABBOTT LAWRENCE strides in and seeks to quash the strike.

ABBOTT

Good afternoon, Miss Bagley. I understand you have a grievance. Let’s speak over here, and we can work something out in a civil way.

SARAH

Your parents won our freedom in 1776 and now you and your soulless corporation have stolen it. They all deserve to hear us.

HARRIET

Sarah, if you want to address these issues, now is not the time. A civilized forum -

SARAH

We should be able to work so that doesn’t kill us, Harriet. He must hear us out.

ABBOTT

Look, ladies, as long as people are poor, this system will thrive. People, whether it’s you New England girls or our new, Hibernian population, will always come to Lowell. It’s still the best option in the world. Nothing you can do can change that.

SARAH

But she died because of your Premium system, and your unburdened greed. Abigail, our Abigail… Harriet, help me!

Harriet leans forward but holds back from acting.
She had two and a half months left and she was going home. Your ‘system’ has killed our angel because of the quotas she had to keep up with just to save. It’s all too much. No wonder your wife left you on horseback.

ABBOTT

Enough! Ms. Bagley, we’ll need you out of the boardinghouse by the morning bells. I’m sorry it had to be this way. Feel free to exercise your own options in the future. The system will go on without you.

SARAH

Harriet, please!

ABBOTT

Anybody else? Otherwise, let’s all get back to your looms and forget this…unpleasant exchange ever occurred.

SARAH starts to leave.

SARAH

Please, Hattie. Help us.

ABBOTT

Now, gentlemen, let’s get a drink and sign those papers. Harriet, why don’t you come with us.

HARRIET starts to walk towards the podium.

HARRIET

WE’VE SPENT GENERATIONS ON THE KITCHEN FLOOR NEVER ALLOWED TO HOPE OR TO DREAM FOR ANYTHING MORE IF YOU THINK TAKING OUR JOBS AND OUR VOICES WILL WIPE OUT OUR POWER THEN FIRE ME TOO, BUT THIS IS THE WORKING GIRLS HOUR

FOR WE ARE THE DAUGHTERS OF THE SONS OF THE FATHERS OF ‘76 AND THIS IS OUR CHANCE TO DO WHAT WE’VE KNOWN ALL ALONG WE CAN WE CAN’T LET THIS CHANCE PASS US BY CAN’T GIVE THEM REASON TO DENY WHAT WE CAN DO

HARRIET AND SARAH

WHAT WE’RE DOING NOW!
ALL

ISN’T IT A PITY SUCH A PRETTY GIRL AS I SHOULD BE SENT TO THE FACTORY TO PINE AWAY AND DIE OH I WILL NOT BE A SLAVE I CANNOT BE A SLAVE FOR I’M SO FOND OF LIBERTY I CANNOT BE A SLAVE

OH I WILL NOT BE A SLAVE I CANNOT BE A SLAVE FOR I’M SO FOND OF LIBERTY I CANNOT BE A SLAVE!
Scene 15

*LUCY stands downstage, reading a poem aloud to her mother*

**LUCY**

SHE WHO PLANTS A TREE  
PLANTS HOPE  
ROOTLETS UP THROUGH FIBERS BLINDLY GROPE;  
LEAVES UNFOLD INTO HORIZONS FREE.  
SO ONE’S LIFE MUST CLIMB  
FROM THE CLODS OF TIME  
UNTO HEAVENS SUBLIME.  
CANST THOUGH PROPHESY, THOUGH LITTLE TREE,  
WHAT THE GLORY OF THY BOUGHS SHALL BE?

She rolls up the poem deliberately, and MRS. LARCOM holds her and walks her off. In there bedroom, SARAH somberly packs her trunk. HARRIET sits on the bed.

**HARRIET**  
I thought of him as a father. He essentially raised me here. I’m sorry I couldn’t see it for myself earlier. And Ben, poor Ben…

**SARAH**  
That took a lot of resolve. You had to stand up for yourself. *(beat)* I wish it had actually done something though.

**HARRIET falls back on the bed.**

**HARRIET**  
What do I do now? *(Sitting back up.)* What are you going to do?

**SARAH**  
I’ll travel back up to Meredith for a while, see my family, maybe stop in on our old friend Hepsabeth in Newport. Then who knows? *(beat.)* Will you come with me?

**HARRIET**  
Come with you?

**SARAH**  
Just for a spell. Meet my father, I know he wants to meet the woman who changed his daughter’s life.
HARRIET

OK, then.

SARAH

OK, then. (beat) And you don’t need to pack a thing - my homespun closet is calling your name.

HARRIET

Oh my… I can hear it wailing through the willows already.

SARAH

So Spruce. (they laugh) One thing, Hattie…

HARRIET

Hm?

SARAH

Don’t tell my father we gave up with nothing to show for it. He… (she begins to break down) He wouldn’t be proud.

HARRIET

We’ll tell him everything….together. No need to be ashamed.

A knock at the door… MRS. LARCOM and LUCY appear, packed to leave. MRS. LARCOM carries a quilt, LUCY carries her poem.

MRS. LARCOM

Quite a Fourth of July, wasn’t it?

SARAH
drying her eyes

“Full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”

MRS. LARCOM

Nothing? Young lady… Yesterday showed these old eyes something I never dreamed they would see; a group of women speaking out. Raising their voices together. I am proud that my daughter was able to witness such a thing.

SARAH

Thank you.

MRS. LARCOM

Before you go… before we all go.
The other girls step out of the shadows, singing “ooohs” from “Live Free or Die.”

GIRLS

OOH…

MRS. LARCOM

holding out ABIGAIL’s quilt and covering SARAH

I found this in Abigail’s affects. I’m certain she would want you to have it.

GIRLS

OOH… LIVE FREE OR DIE
LISTEN TO THE PRAYER
ETC

HARRIET

Abigail’s quilt…

SARAH

It is beautiful.

LUCY

See the maple tree?

SARAH

From her family’s farm. “Fair old Meadowview’.

LUCY

There is one… where is it… here. This is my favorite.

SARAH

“Try again.”

MRS. LARCOM

You planted a tree, Sarah Bagley. And you too, Harriet. Time will see what becomes of them.

HARRIET

OH, MY DEAREST SISTER, LOOK AT US NOW
LEAVING THE LOOM AND THE PEN FOR THE FARM AND THE PLOW
BUT NO MATTER WHAT COMES ALONG IN THE YEARS UP AHEAD
SARAH

YOU CHANGED ME FOREVER
IN WAYS THAT COULD NEVER
BEGIN TO BE WRITTEN OR SAID

LUCY, SARAH, HARRIET

WHERE THE WHEEL MEETS THE WATER
AND THE WAVES MEET THE WOOD
IT’S A MOTHER’S PUSH FOR HER DAUGHTER
TO DO THE THINGS SHE NEVER COULD
THE WHEEL MEETS THE WATER, AND EVERYTHING TURNS

OLD LUCY

*it is unclear if she is speaking to HARRIET and SARAH or her students*

Thus we working girls might have learned from the webs of cloth we saw woven around us. Every little thread must take its place as a warp or woof, and keep in it steadily. Let to itself, it would be only a loose, useless filament. Trying to wander in an independent or a disconnected way among the other threads, it would make the whole web an inextricable snarl. Yet each little thread must be as firmly spun as if it were the only one, or the result would be a worthless fabric.

Though I wasn’t bold enough to march with you then, I’ve been marching ever since in the direction you pointed, with my pen as my sword, and my head and heart as my shield. In your words, in your faces, I will always remember: whatever with the past has gone, the best is always yet to come.

SARAH

I NEVER THOUGHT THAT I COULD EVER GET SO FAR FROM HOME

SARAH & HARRIET

I NEVER THOUGHT THAT I COULD EVER GET SO FAR

ALL

I NEVER THOUGHT THAT I COULD EVER GET SO FAR FROM HOME
I NEVER THOUGHT THAT I COULD EVER GET SO… FAR
I NEVER THOUGHT THAT I COULD EVER GET SO FAR FROM HOME
I NEVER THOUGHT THAT I COULD EVER GET SO FAR
I NEVER THOUGHT THAT I COULD EVER GET SO FAR FROM HOME
I NEVER THOUGHT THAT I COULD EVER GET SO—FAR

THE END

LIVE FREE OR DIE plays over the bows. As the actors receive applause, a projection shows the following:

ABBOTT LAWRENCE moved up the river and started a new mill town by his own name. He ran unsuccessfully for vice-president on the Whig ticket and died stinking rich in 1855.

HARRIET FARLEY moved to NYC etc et

SARAH BAGLEY moved etc etc telegraph

LUCY LARCOM moved out west etc etc, last word was “freedom”

In 1873, the Massachusetts State Legislature passed a 10-hr workday.