

Scene Two
Rhode Island Country Club Clubroom
The Next Day

(MAGGIE is interrupting the cocktail hour of ELLSWORTH SNOW, a gaunt, sour-faced man in his sixties, and his wife, WINIFRED, a benevolent, slightly vacant woman in her fifties. Both are dressed more conservatively, more expensively, than MAGGIE.)

ELLSWORTH. No.

MAGGIE. No? But the Company is one hundred percent behind the idea –

ELLSWORTH. The Company? What Company?

MAGGIE. Well, Celeste. And she's already begun her process.

ELLSWORTH. Her what?

MAGGIE. Her process. She's halfway to becoming a man as we speak.

ELLSWORTH. Dear God.

MAGGIE. If we interrupt her now, who knows where she'll end up?

ELLSWORTH. You people are insane. Besides, this is all moot. Once Andrew shipped out, the Board and I decided to cancel the 1942 season, to go dark until the war is over. Now if you'll excuse us, this is a private –

MAGGIE. Have you refunded the tickets?

ELLSWORTH. No, not yet.

MAGGIE. Then we're saving you a loss!

ELLSWORTH. We'll just end up refunding them all over again. People bought tickets to see Andrew direct Shakespeare.

MAGGIE. I promise, this'll be the next best thing. I have all of Andrew's notes and blocking, all of his prep work – I'll simply be following his recipe, it'll be like baking a cake!

ELLSWORTH. The Oberon is not a cake, Mrs. Dalton, it is a business. No, better to wait this out and come back at full strength in a year.

MAGGIE. A year?! So you would deprive your neighbor of Art as well as pork chops?!

ELLSWORTH. Art? Don't you know there's a war on, Mrs. Dalton? The Navy's taken over Newport, Brown's training officers, Narragansett's blacking out its windows every night -

MAGGIE. - And we'll be selling war bonds and stamps in the lobby, letting soldiers on leave see the show for free -

ELLSWORTH. That's not - go home and roll some bandages, Mrs. Dalton. We need to focus on the war effort, not on frivolity.

MAGGIE. But that's just it! This play is the war effort, Mr. Snow. Andrew specifically chose the *Henriad* to support our troops, to support us all.

ELLSWORTH. Support us how?

MAGGIE. We all need to be in the same war, Mr. Snow, whether soldier or homemaker, Marine or millworker. Our souls united in common cause.

ELLSWORTH. Our souls -?! May I remind you, Mrs. Dalton, you're not talking about a religious miracle, you're talking about a play. A two-hour play.

MAGGIE. Em, more like four hours.

ELLSWORTH. Dear God.

MAGGIE. Four hours that will uplift the morale of our audience for as long as this conflict lasts!

ELLSWORTH. And how do you figure that?

MAGGIE. The Linger Effect.

ELLSWORTH. The what?

MAGGIE. The Linger Effect. Well-documented. A play - it leaves a glow that lasts for days, weeks, sometimes a lifetime.

ELLSWORTH. Now you're truly speaking nonsense.

MAGGIE. Not at all. Why, even you. You can't tell me that Andrew's *Lear* doesn't cross your mind every now and then.

ELLSWORTH. Well, of course, yes, it crosses my mind, but -

MAGGIE. You see? The tragedy lingers.

ELLSWORTH. Fine, yes, but a lingering tragedy is the last thing we -

MAGGIE. Exactly! The *Henriad* does not speak of tragedy, but of patriotism, sacrifice, victory! And that victory shall linger with those who are lucky enough to see our production for the rest of their lives.

ELLSWORTH. The Linger Effect.

MAGGIE. Exactly, yes.

ELLSWORTH. You know, the more I think about it, the more I think you're right, Mrs. Dalton. If you put on this show, there will be a Linger Effect. A big one. For generations, Rhode Islanders will double over with laughter as they recall how the hallowed Oberon Play House permitted a gaggle of unprofessional girls with false mustaches, directed by a neophyte, to put on a two -

MAGGIE. Four -

ELLSWORTH. - A four-hour hysterical embarrassment that caused the Play House to not only go dark the rest of the war, but to be shuttered for all time. Are you prepared, madam, to destroy everything your husband has built? Everything that he -!

WINIFRED. I love the theater.

(All is silent.)

ELLSWORTH. Excuse me, dear?

WINIFRED. I love a good play.

ELLSWORTH. Well...so do I, dear. So do I. But this would be a far cry from a good -

(MAGGIE has an idea.)

MAGGIE. OH MY GOD!

(All start.)

ELLSWORTH. (Looking around, grabbing his heart.) Honestly woman, you can't just proclaim like that in normal -

MAGGIE. Mrs. Snow!

WINIFRED. Yes?

MAGGIE. Why didn't I think of this before!

ELLSWORTH. Of what?

MAGGIE. Have you...have you ever acted, Mrs. Snow?

WINIFRED. Winifred, please - and yes, back at Miss Porter's finishing school.

MAGGIE. And I'll bet you were spectacular.

WINIFRED. Well, I - I did turn a head or two. The *Cranston Clarion* called me "rounding out the cast."

MAGGIE. I'll bet they did.

ELLSWORTH. Mrs. Dalton, I don't like where this is -

MAGGIE. If I may be so - Mrs. Snow - Winifred - how would you like to be in our play?

WINIFRED. To be in your -?

MAGGIE. Exactly.

WINIFRED. Oh, no, I couldn't -

ELLSWORTH. Oh no, she couldn't.

MAGGIE. You'd be spectacular.

WINIFRED. Do you really think so?

ELLSWORTH. Mrs. Dalton -

MAGGIE. I do. I'd even go so far as to say you'd round out the cast.

WINIFRED. (Blushing.) Me? No.

MAGGIE. We're holding auditions tomorrow, but -

ELLSWORTH. Auditions? Who said you could schedule -?

MAGGIE. - But I am prepared to pre-cast you. That's how much I believe in you, Mrs. Snow.

WINIFRED. You do?

ELLSWORTH. Mrs. Dalton. My wife does not act.

MAGGIE. Oh, but she did once.

WINIFRED. I did. I did, indeed.

MAGGIE. And you will again? Tell me you will.

WINIFRED. Ellsworth?

(She turns her full power on ELLSWORTH, asking permission, her face an unwavering, heartbreaking plea.)

ELLSWORTH. Winifred, imagine all the time this will siphon from your - it's the start of the Social Season, after all, you... Peaches, please, think of your friends, the Women's Committee, all the ladies who will fill up those seats on opening night and watch you make a...

WINIFRED. Yes?

(ELLSWORTH can see how much this means to WINIFRED, can't break her heart.)

ELLSWORTH. ...A triumph. You would make a triumph.

(WINIFRED hugs ELLSWORTH.)

WINIFRED. Oh, darling!

(MAGGIE applauds. Embarrassed to do so in public, ELLSWORTH struggles to gently break the embrace.)

ELLSWORTH. That's all right, that's enough, dear.

MAGGIE. Then we can count on you, Mrs. Snow?

WINIFRED. Oh, yes indeed. Yes, you can.

MAGGIE. (To ELLSWORTH.) And you? May we count on you and the Board?

(ELLSWORTH stares daggers at MAGGIE.)

ELLSWORTH. You may.

(MAGGIE raises her glass.)

MAGGIE. Then here's to the *Henriad*!

(The other two raise theirs, ELLSWORTH reluctantly.)

ALL. The *Henriad*!