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The pirate queen

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University of Iowa

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The Pirate Queen

by

Guadalupe Flores

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Master of Fine Arts
degree in Theatre Arts (Playwriting) in the
Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

May 2017

Thesis Supervisor: Art Borreca

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Graduate College
The University of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTER'S THESIS

This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

Guadalupe Flores

has been approved by the Examining Committee for
the thesis requirement for the Master of Fine Arts degree
in Theatre Arts at the May 2017 graduation.

Thesis Committee:

Art Borreca, Thesis Supervisor

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To the women who fight.

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Thanks also to Art Borrecca (who, apropos of nothing, is the best version of Bertolt Brecht ever portrayed on stage); Dare Clubb, fellow mensch and lover of Shakespeare; and Lisa Schlesinger, who set an example for teaching that I have no hope of matching.

As always, to my parents, who support my work despite not really having a clear idea of what I do, and my son, who occasionally lets a glimpse of the pride he has in his old man's work slip free.

And to everyone who tells stories, heard and unheard.

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

Five women actors working during the Golden Age of Hollywood vie for the lead role in a sprawling epic movie titled “The Pirate Queen.” Alliances and rivalries form among the women with the impending involvement of America looming in the background, and the struggle between freedom and fascism threads through the action on the film set.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE.....	vi
THE PIRATE QUEEN.....	1

PREFACE

This play began with a much greater portion of seriousness to it than the final produced version had, and I think that was a good thing. I tend to mix both drama and comedy equally in my work but *The Pirate Queen* almost demanded (along with two dramaturgs) a lighter touch, which, after much grumbling and feet dragging, I agreed and complied with. Despite this, remnants of more serious ideas occasionally float to the top. Again, I think this is a good thing, not because I particularly mourn those ideas given less weight but because of understanding that what we laugh at is rooted in defying what we fear.

The story of the play takes place shortly before America enters World War II, when we could say with some assuredness that Americans were the “good guys.” It was rewritten shortly after the 2016 Elections, well after the idea of American Exceptionalism met its demise and certainly in a period where we can no longer refer to our country collectively as “good guys.” This story is not an elegy for some hazily dreamed of time when we were glorious defenders of truth and justice – our history is too riddled with slaughter and destruction to justify that. What it is, though, is a reminder that when our immediate time seems as dark as it could possibly ever be, those who came before us fought as best they could, for themselves as well as others, in times that were much darker.

And so we fight now, each in the best way we know how.

The Pirate Queen

By G. Flores

Characters:

Evelyn – A fresh-faced, seemingly all-American girl who competed in the 1936 Olympic Games for Nazi Germany.

Miranda – A Latina movie star, well-known for portraying a single character multiple times. Speaks with an exaggerated Spanish accent (some of the time).

Kate - A sneeringly patrician actress who is prodigiously talented but is more often than not typecast as a woman who's a little too smart and destined for spinsterhood.

Lucy – A beautiful but clumsy woman who almost always looks lost and befuddled. It's only sometimes an act.

Josephine – An expatriate African American dancer, recently escaped from Paris after the Nazi invasion and occupation of France.

Stan – a clerk at a Hollywood studio.

Brenz – a film director heading the production of The Pirate Queen, involved in a relationship with Eva (it's complicated).

Eva – the original star of The Pirate Queen and now fight master of the film.

Time:

Early on a Monday morning, in the fall of 1941.

Place:

A soundstage in Hollywood during a pause in the filming of an epic pirate movie.

One

There is darkness for a moment, filled with the rustling of a large crowd.

The lights rise and music swells. The billowing main sail of a Spanish galleon is the first thing to become visible in the dim light and haze of gun smoke and sulfur. Distant cannon fire echoes in the air. The name *Bonne Chance* can be seen as the smoke parts on the prow of the ship.

The lights rise further and the entire ship becomes visible. Sailors in the uniform of an undetermined nationality surround the single figure of a woman dressed in dashing pirate garb. She beams with confidence and fire.

One of the sailors steps forward, clearly the one in command. He points at the pirate and raises his chin imperiously.

SAILOR

Surrender, sea witch! You are surrounded and your filthy sea swine you call a crew are either dead or are on their way to breathing their last at the bottom of the Caribbean. There is no escape!

EVA

Ha! You think this is the end of my reign as the Pirate Queen?! Think again, you weak-chinned, soft-bellied imperialist dog! As long as a single pirate breathes, freedom still sails the Seven Seas. Now fight me or leave my ship, you milk-drinking pig!

They fight, and it is as totally awesome as you would think it would be. At the end of it, the Pirate Queen stands victorious over the others, her sword raised high in victory. Her sword goes a little too high and she loses her balance, toppling over the side of the ship, landing with an audible thud, followed by a cry of pain.

The lights rise even further, revealing a film crew. BRENZ stands upright, arms waving wildly.

BRENZ

Cut! *Gott in himmel*, cut! (to the cameraman) Tell me you got that, please.

CAMERAMAN

Yessir!

BRENZ

Wunderbar!

Blackout.

Two

The dark and silence is broken by light shining through a single door. Two figures are silhouetted in the frame. One of the figures reaches into the dark and lights come on, revealing the sound stage once again. The sails hang limply, the deck is empty. The film camera is still in place, along with folding chairs used by the crew. Various stands, lights and tables dot the area, draped with costumes and prop weapons.

STAN and EVELYN step into the space, dwarfed by the mockup of the pirate ship. The lights now reveal that it is not a complete replica. It contains enough to simulate a galleon for film-making purposes.

STAN

Make yourself comfortable. There's water over there. An ashtray somewhere, I think.

EVELYN

(Eyes wide at the sight of the ship) Wow... Oh, uh, sorry, I don't smoke.

STAN

Sweetheart, you're in Hollywood. Everyone smokes.

EVELYN

Is there smoking in this movie?

STAN

How would I know?

EVELYN

Don't you work for Mr. Brenz?

STAN

Yes, but that doesn't have anything to do with movies. I just handle the actors and actresses coming in and out. I like to compare it to herding cats but most of the cats I know don't have drinking problems.

EVELYN

Oh. All right. Sorry.

STAN

Don't be. (pause) You know, you look familiar but not in a "have I seen you in anything" sort of way.

EVELYN

(abashed) Maybe.

STAN

(amused) Oh, you ARE new here, aren't you? Usually the reaction to a question like that is a rattling off of everything you've ever done that anyone might have possibly paid attention to. Okay, darlin', where might I have seen you before?

EVELYN

The Olympics.

STAN

Oh! (peers intently) You won a medal?

EVELYN

Yes. In fencing.

STAN

Well, that makes sense, I suppose. Explains why you're here. Ever do any acting before?

EVELYN

No.

STAN

That's okay. Movies nowadays don't require much experience. You just do what the director tells you to do and look pretty. Well, make yourself at home. I need to get back to the front office. I suppose you could do warm ups or stretches or whatever you athlete-types do in your spare time.

EVELYN

Thank you!

STAN

Don't mention it. (pause) Where are you from, sweetie? I can't exactly place your accent.

EVELYN

I... (quietly) I was born in Indiana. But I grew up in Germany.

Stan is clearly startled. He grimaces.

STAN

Oh! Well. This must be a... difficult time for you right now. Being here in the States, I mean. So you were in the Olympics for Germany? The Nazis?

EVELYN

Yes. The government thought it would be a good idea for me to come tour the States. I had been wanting to meet Mr. Brenz when we heard about the... accident. I've seen all of his movies. I... suppose it was lucky that I was in California when it happened. So we came down to the studio after talking to an agent.

STAN

But you were born in Indiana? That means you're an American.

EVELYN

My folks were German immigrants. When the farm they had failed, they decided to move back. So yes, I'm an American but I grew up German. I guess that's why I don't really have an accent. It got all mixed up living in Berlin, too. Everybody spoke a lot of different languages.

STAN

Were those your parents we left back in the office, then?

EVELYN

No. They're my... I'd guess my chaperones? The lady is Frau Melcher. She's my coach with the Olympic team in Germany. The man is from the government. Herr Weber. My parents are... gone.

STAN

(realizing) I'm sorry. (pause) You want my advice, hon? Don't talk too much about it. About being German, I mean. There're a lot of people here in Hollywood who would be a little touchy about you being sent here by the Nazis.

EVELYN

Okay. Thanks. (pauses, then stammers out) I'm not a Nazi, y'know. I'm German, and American too. But-

STAN

Hey, look, you don't have to explain it to me, okay? You seem like a nice kid. Hopefully that's what everyone will focus on. All right, gotta head back.

Stan turns and leaves. Evelyn looks around the room curiously, her eyes settling on a rack of

swords, fencing foils and a couple of sabers. She grins, moves to the rack and grabs one of the foils, hefting it to feel the weight and balance. She puts it back and grabs another, and after holding it for a few moments, nods and moves to the center of the room.

She slashes at the air around her, her movements casual and assured, no longer the shy farm girl. She takes the *en garde* position, is absolutely still for a long moment, then makes a flurry of attacks at an imaginary opponent.

She grins mischievously and looks around to make sure she's still alone. After a moment, she runs to the pirate ship and clammers on deck. Taking a deep breath, she begins to sing Carl Orff's "O Fortuna." As she reaches a climax, her sword goes high.

Stan walks in, followed by MIRANDA. Evelyn does not see them. She stops when she has reached the end of a particularly powerful note and Stan and Miranda applaud.

MIRANDA

Now that, that was *magnifico*!

STAN

Wow. You didn't say anything about being able to do that, kid.

EVELYN

(rushing down from the ship) I'm sorry, I know I wasn't supposed to be up there but I couldn't help myself.

STAN

Don't worry about it. I've climbed up there myself when no one's looking. Trust me, I get it. (to Miranda) So you were telling me how they hid all those men holding up that huge headdress you were wearing?

MIRANDA

The magic of movies, *chiquito*. Aim the camera the right way, some half naked girls dancing around me and no one will notice the poles held in the hands of big, burly men. *Aie*, but my neck afterwards! It was no small thing to carry it.

STAN

Well, I loved it! Say, would you mind...?

Stan pats his pockets and pulls out a small notebook. He grins shyly and holds the notebook out and a pen.

STAN (con't)

An autograph would be just peachy.

Miranda smiles a broad, Hollywood smile.

MIRANDA

But of course. I would be happy to do so. *Que lindo!*

She pinches his cheek before taking the notebook and pen.

STAN

Could you make it to Stan?

MIRANDA

Of course. (writes) "To my friend Stand..."

STAN

"Stan." No "d" at the end.

MIRANDA

Of course. That is what I said.

STAN

Of course. Could you make it to "my VERY good friend?"

MIRANDA

Of course. (writes with a flourish) Here you are, *mijito*.

STAN

Thank you so much! Oh, this is another actress trying out for the part. Evelyn, right?

EVELYN

Yes, Evelyn.

STAN

Right, this is-

EVELYN

I know. (shyly) I very pleased to meet you, Miss-

MIRANDA

Please, call me Miranda. And the pleasure is mine, no? You are very charming. You are what is called “All-American,” yes? So young and fresh faced. And a VERY powerful singer as well!

EVELYN

(meekly) Thank you...

STAN

Is there anything I can get you while you wait, Miranda? Mr. Brenz should be here soon. He’s with the lead... sorry, former lead, Eva. She’s in the hospital getting looked over once more by the doctors. Just between us, she’s lucky she didn’t break both legs.

MIRANDA

That bad? No wonder the call went out for a replacement so quickly!

STAN

I think it was more of a money issue. I mean, look at all this! The longer the filming is delayed, the more money the studio loses. She had to be replaced as soon as possible.

MIRANDA

Si. (to Evelyn) It is bad for her but good for us, yes? *Mijito*, might you have champagne somewhere? I know Eva was fond of bubbly. She MUST have a case here, no?

STAN

Oh, uh, no, but I can go see if I can-

MIRANDA

(laughs) I am kidding. It is a joke, no?

STAN

Yes! Yes it is!

Stan and Miranda share a long, fake laugh.

STAN

(to Evelyn) So you and Miranda will keep each other company for a while, okay? Mr. Brenz called and said he’s running late, and you and the other actresses might be spending a little time together before he gets here.

MIRANDA

But this is very odd, yes? That we will be “spending time together?” I understand that this situation is very difficult but I have never been asked to wait with the other actresses trying out for a part before, at least not since I was a very young and unskilled performer. Why is this so?

STAN

(hesitates) Can I be honest with you?

MIRANDA

(smiles grandly) Of course! It is the best policy!

STAN

Things are pretty crazy right now. This movie is a pet project of Mr. Brenz' and Eva's. They've put a lot of their own money and efforts into it. Mr. Brenz wrote the script but almost all the ideas are Eva's. They were working on a tight schedule under an even tighter budget and now... Well, the accident is a huge monkey wrench. Things have to get back moving again or else the money runs out and-

MIRANDA

Say no more. I understand. The need for expediency is paramount, *si*?

STAN

Yep. If they were able to get more money from somewhere else, they could probably take a little more time to get it right, but what with the possibility of war, money's in short supply. We're waiting on word from... several sources of funding, hopefully today. Okay, I really got to get back to the front office. Ta-ta for now.

Stan spins and leaves. Miranda sweeps around the room, not really examining her surroundings as parading for the benefit of Evelyn. She stops, turns and fixes Evelyn with a dazzling smile.

MIRANDA

You are interested in this role as well, *chiquita*?

EVELYN

Um, yes. Sort of.

MIRANDA

One cannot "sort of" be a movie star, *niña*. You are either interested or you are not.

EVELYN

Well, yes then. I am.

MIRANDA

You want to be famous! Adored by millions!

EVELYN

No. Not really.

MIRANDA

Oh? Then why are you here?

EVELYN

I... well, my people thought I should do it. And I really wanted to meet Mr. Brenz.

MIRANDA

Your “people?” Who are your people?

Evelyn thinks for a moment, then brightens.

EVELYN

My coach? She thought that with what I could do, I’d be perfect for this.

MIRANDA

And what is it that you can do, *chiquita*?

EVELYN

I can sword fight.

This catches Miranda off guard. She looks at Evelyn closely.

MIRANDA

That is interesting. Yes. How did you learn how to do this?

EVELYN

I was in the Olympics. I was a fencer.

MIRANDA

Ah, *si*! That is why your face has some familiarity to it. You were in the newspapers for some time, were you not?

EVELYN

Yes.

MIRANDA

How very interesting! You will be very good at this movie if you are casted, yes?

EVELYN

I think so.

MIRANDA

You must show me what you can do. *Ahora*!

Miranda sweeps to one of the couches and lounges on it dramatically. She waves her hand at Evelyn.

MIRANDA

Go on, please with the swordfighting.

EVELYN

(meekly) Okay.

Evelyn returns to the rack and retrieves the sword she had before and returns to the center of the room. Taking a deep breath, she takes position.

MIRANDA

Ah yes, very dramatic! So fierce and commanding! Now do something swordfighty.

Evelyn grimaces in embarrassment and shakes her head to clear it. She stands motionless for a long moment, then moves with astonishing speed and grace, slashing and thrusting at an invisible opponent. She comes to an abrupt halt. Miranda smiles grandly.

MIRANDA (con't)

Oh my, that was *maravilloso*! You are very good, I think. However, this is very different from sword fighting for the movies. You know this, yes?

EVELYN

(smiling shyly) Thank you. I trained hard for a long time. (pause) How is it different?

MIRANDA

What you do is very real, but in the movies, it is very not real, *comprende*?

EVELYN

I think so.

MIRANDA

(teasing) I'm sure an All-American girl such as yourself was having so many young men always taking her to the movies and buying her, what are they, ice cream floats at a soda shop? This is not a true thing here?

EVELYN

I don't know. I grew up in Germany. There are a lot of movie theatres, but they don't have any soda shops in Berlin.

Miranda stares at Evelyn for a moment and her eyes widen at the realization.

MIRANDA

Ah, *si!* You competed for the Nazis! This I now realize. How interesting. You are a Nazi. But you are also American.

EVELYN

No. I mean, I AM American, but I'm German too.

MIRANDA

But not a Nazi? Are not all Germans Nazis today?

EVELYN

I...

MIRANDA

Yes? This is true?

EVELYN

(long pause) I had to swear an oath of loyalty to the Nazi Party if I wanted to compete in the Olympics. But I'm not a Nazi, if that makes any sense. Many Germans are not. But too many are.

MIRANDA

Swearing an oath is a very serious thing.

EVELYN

It is. But I had to do it.

MIRANDA

To swordfight?

EVELYN

To live.

Blackout

Three

A spot rises on Miranda, who preens in front of a clapboard that snaps shut, causing her to jump in startlement.

MIRANDA

Eejole!

BRENZ

Action!

MIRANDA

Que?

BRENZ

Action. Please, say the lines of the script pages we gave you.

MIRANDA

Oh, *jes*, the script... where is my script?

There is a pause while Brenz speaks to Stan, who finally hands Miranda a couple of pages. She grins broadly and pinches Stan's cheek before he moves out of camera range.

MIRANDA

Ahora! (looking at pages) Where do I begin?

BRENZ

At the first line.

MIRANDA

Which one is that?

BRENZ

The first line. The first one on the page.

MIRANDA

The first line? On the first page?

BRENZ

Yes! The very first line!

MIRANDA

Ah, *si*. (dramatic pause) Hold! Come no further, you feet-kissing curs of a crowned head! If any of you take one more step, you will taste the edge of cold steel!

STAN

(off camera, monotone) Surrender, sea witch. You are surrounded and your filthy sea swine you call a crew are either dead or are on their way to breathing their last at the bottom of the Caribbean. There is no escape.

MIRANDA

Ha! You think this is the end of my reign as the Pirate Queen?! Think again, you weak-chinned, soft-bellied imperialist dog! As long as a single pirate breathes, freedom still sails the Seven Seas. Now fight me or leave my ship, you milk-drinking pig!

Cut! *Danke, mein fraulein.* That will be all.

BRENZ

But there are still many lines-

MIRANDA

Nein, we have the lines we need, *danke*.

BRENZ

Would you like to see me sword fight? I have done many sword-

MIRANDA

That will be all, *fraulein*.

BRENZ

(muttering) Asshole.

MIRANDA

Was...?

BRENZ

Adios! It is goodbye in the language of my people!

MIRANDA

Blackout.

Four

The door opens and Stan enters, followed by KATE. Kate comes to an abrupt stop at seeing Miranda.

Well. I thought this was the audition for “The Pirate Queen,” not “The Sea Witch.”

KATE

Miranda hisses, her hands forming claws.

You. What are you doing here?

MIRANDA

Same as you, darling. Only with a modicum of more talent. No, strike that. A GREAT deal more talent.

KATE

Miranda points at Kate and turns her nose up and away.

MIRANDA

This one. I will not be in the same room as this one.

STAN

Oh, now ladies-

KATE

You could just leave. Go on, the door's right there.

MIRANDA

PUTA! I'll scratch your eyes out-

STAN

STOP! Sorry, sorry! Please, ladies, can we just make the best of this? There's nowhere else to put all of you until Mr. Brenz gets here, so how about we all get along?

MIRANDA

This is intolerable! I am not some young, unskilled actress who will be treated unjustly! It is an outrage. (to Evelyn) No offense, *mijita*.

EVELYN

None taken.

STAN

I'll get a hold of some champagne. I promise. Would that help?

Miranda pauses and thinks. She nods slowly.

MIRANDA

Yes. But an entire bottle for me. The others must share another.

STAN

Sold!

Stan spins on his heel and exits speedily.

KATE

Well, that explains your acting, I suppose. Always drunk?

MIRANDA

(steaming) *Dios mio*, I will cut you-

Evelyn moves quickly between Miranda and Kate, thrusting her hand out to Kate.

EVELYN

Hello, I'm Evelyn. Pleased to meet you.

Kate looks at Evelyn skeptically. After an uncomfortably long moment, she takes the proffered hand.

KATE

Evelyn. You know who I am?

EVELYN

Yes ma'am.

KATE

"Ma'am?" Aren't you just darling? Why are you here, Evelyn?

EVELYN

The same reason you and Miranda are.

KATE

Is that right? Well. So what movies might have I seen you in?

EVELYN

I've never been in a movie.

KATE

(barks a laugh) Well, then it appears my competition is untrained and (to Miranda) unskilled, at least so far. I would wish you the best of luck, Evelyn, but luck won't do you a lick of good here.

MIRANDA

Enough! Come *mijita*, we don't need to listen to this, this... harridan!

KATE

Ooh, such a fancy word for you, Miranda! Reading more than the Dick Tracy comics in the newspapers nowadays?

Miranda ignores her and pulls Evelyn to the other side of the room.

MIRANDA

She is a bitter woman. Do not listen to her poison.

EVELYN

Why is she bitter? She's famous.

MIRANDA

Because, she is in love with a cad. A man with the morals of a *gato*, si?

EVELYN

Wait. Do you mean-

MIRANDA

Yes. Her costar of many films, who is a married man, as well as a, how do you say... philanthroper?

EVELYN

(confused)... philanthropist?

MIRANDA

No no, the other one. Who sleeps with many women.

EVELYN

(thinks) Oh! You mean philanderer!

Evelyn has blurted this out a little too loudly, causing Kate to glare at the other two women.

KATE

I would have thought idle gossip would have been beyond even you, Miranda. How disappointing. Actually, no – it meets every expectation I have of you.

MIRANDA

It is not idle or gossip. Everyone knows this to be the truth. (to Evelyn) It has made her very difficult to work with. It is only, admittedly, her great talent that keeps her working.

KATE

Thank you for admitting the truth of my talent, at least. But the truth in Hollywood? Half of what's the "truth" in this town is either publicity stunts or absolute shit spread out of spite.

Evelyn gasps at the word "shit." Kate looks at her and grins.

KATE (con't)

(laughing) You're going to hear worse than that if you're going to be working in this town.

EVELYN

I HAVE heard worse. I just didn't expect it from someone like you.

KATE

And what am I, exactly?

EVELYN

To me? A glamorous movie star. I know it's all in the movies, but I guess I was expecting some of it to be real. Some of it.

KATE

Sorry to be such a disappointment. Where are you from, child?

EVELYN

(pause) Indiana. Originally.

KATE

Where in Indiana?

EVELYN

A town called Stinesville. A small town.

KATE

Of course it's a small town, every town in Indiana is small. With what, a total population of 200?

EVELYN

202, actually.

Kate laughs loudly and long. Evelyn looks embarrassed but lifts her chin defiantly as the laughter continues.

EVELYN

What's so funny?

KATE

You! A small town bumpkin is actually going to try and win a role like this! Little girl, you are way out of your league. Just go on home.

EVELYN

I've had to fight tougher women than you.

KATE

Is that right? And where would that have been?

EVELYN

Berlin. In 1936.

KATE

What? What are you talking about?

EVELYN

I was a fencer in the Olympics. And fighting with steel is a lot tougher than fighting with words.

KATE

Well, aren't you a brave little thing. I suppose you'll find out soon enough how much words can hurt. Maybe after your 100th audition and you still haven't landed a role. That is, if you're self-respecting enough to not sleep with a director just to get a job. My guess that it's the only reason this one (gestures at Miranda) is working.

MIRANDA

Ha! I have slept with men, yes, but it was true romance! And at least I am using my lady parts, you cow! Your man is too busy keeping his wife happy to be bothered with you now!

KATE

(angrily) Fine! You may be right, (to Evelyn) she's probably right. He's busy with his work and his family. But I have my work too and I'm pretty sure it holds up far better in comparison to yours! All you do is dress in tight clothing and sway around, singing crap like (mockingly) "chica chica boom chic."

MIRANDA

That "swaying around" has purchased me a mansion in Beverly Hills, *puta!*

KATE

And there goes the neighborhood. (to Evelyn) You want my advice, kid? Head back home and don't look back. This town will suck your soul dry.

EVELYN

I'm not leaving. Not until I've auditioned for Mr. Brenz.

KATE

Fine. Ignore the advice of your elders. (pause) At least you won't have to worry about having to sleep with this director. I think he genuinely loves the ex-pirate queen to be. Or is genuinely afraid of her. But every audition is a crap shoot and even I can screw them up every now and then.

Blackout

Five

A spot rises on Kate, who holds sheets of paper in her hand. She looks up and nods. A clapboard appears before her face and shuts with a slam.

KATE

Hold! Come no further, you feet-kissing curs of a crowned head! If any of you take one more step, you will taste the edge of cold steel!

STAN

(off camera, monotone) Surrender, sea witch. You are surrounded and your filthy sea swine you call a crew are either dead or are on their way to breathing their last at the bottom of the Caribbean. There is no escape.

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Ha! You think this is the end of my reign as the Pirate Queen?! Think again, you weak-chinned, soft-bellied imperialist dog! As long as a single pirate breathes, freedom still sails the Seven Seas. Now fight me or leave my ship, you milk-drinking pig!

BRENZ

Cut! Thank you, *fraulein*, that was most impressive!

KATE

Thank you, Brenz. (pause) Especially since I really didn't have much to work with.

BRENZ

I beg your pardon...?

KATE

I mean, these lines! "Feet-kissing curs?" Dear god...

BRENZ

Oh, well see-

KATE

I mean, the sheer hokeyness of it all! "Taste the edge of cold steel" seemed like the worst, but then-

STAN

Uh, Kate-

KATE

But then I get to lines like "breathing their last at the bottom of the Caribbean!" That's just stupid. If you're at the bottom of the Caribbean, you're not breathing at all. That's why you're at the bottom of the Caribbean – you've stopped breathing completely.

STAN

Kate-

KATE

And I almost laughed out loud at "freedom still sails the Seven Seas." Who writes crap like this?

STAN

KATE!

WHAT?!

KATE

(long pause) Mr. Brenz wrote the script.

STAN

(pause) Oh. Shit.

KATE

Blackout.

Six

The door opens, with Stan leading JOSEPHINE into the room.

Mr. Brenz sends his apologies once again ladies and reassures me that he will be here within minutes. Until then I think most of you know-

STAN

Josephine! When did you get into town? Or into the Americas, for that matter?

MIRANDA

The two women smile, embrace and engage in a very elaborate air kiss.

Flew in from Morocco. The Nazis had no idea I was going to hop a transatlantic. They thought I was on a Goodwill tour for the Vichy.

JOSEPHINE

How ridiculous. They are very stupid.

MIRANDA

You don't have to convince me. How are you, my dearest?

JOSEPHINE

I am very fabulous, as always. (waves at Kate) This cow you already know, but let me introduce you to this *niña*. Evelyn, come here!

MIRANDA

Oh, I know who Evelyn is. I was in Berlin for the games. You competed for Germany. I assume that man out in the front office is with you?

JOSEPHINE

Everyone becomes silent. Evelyn looks at Josephine quizzically.

EVELYN

Yes. How did you know?

JOSEPHINE

It's hard not to notice the disdain he looked at me with. It's the same look I get from them in France. I'm clearly not Aryan, so I'm clearly inferior in their eyes. So. You're a Nazi?

EVELYN

(pause) All of us who competed for Germany were required to join the Nazi party.

KATE

That doesn't tell us anything.

Evelyn finally looks up and stares at Kate, defiant.

EVELYN

I had to join the Nazi party. I had no choice.

KATE

So you're telling us you're officially a Nazi, but unofficially not one. It seems like you want the best of both worlds. So the whole farm girl act really is just an act, is it?

EVELYN

No. I was born here, in America. My parents are Germans. They moved back when I was still a child.

KATE

And look at you now - a living, breathing example of the master race trying to make it in Hollywood.

EVELYN

(angry) I am NOT a-

JOSEPHINE

Leave her alone. She's a guest in our country and we should treat her like one, regardless of what trouble Germany is causing right now.

EVELYN

(to Kate) You don't know anything about me and what I've had to do!

KATE

And I don't care, either. Right now, you're just one more potential competitor. Well "potential" may be giving you too much credit.

Kate turns away, leaving Evelyn fuming. Miranda smiles broadly and sweeps towards Evelyn, clasping her around the shoulders.

MIRANDA

Josephine is correct! Good manners demands it! That is something this one (gestures to Kate) does not understand. Let us speak of it no more.

KATE

I'll speak of it as I please.

JOSEPHINE

I don't think anyone would expect any less from you, Kate. How old are you, Evelyn? You look so young.

EVELYN

Eighteen.

JOSEPHINE

So very young! You were 13 when you won your medal, weren't you?

EVELYN

Yes ma'am. But I've been training for much longer. I actually first picked up my first fencing foil here in the States, on my parents' farm in Indiana. My father fenced before he and my mother were married but he stopped once I was born. He was my first teacher. (smiling) I used to pretend the scarecrow out in the field was a pirate.

JOSEPHINE

Please, call me Josephine, or Jo, if you like. So you've come full circle, fighting pirates in Indiana and now trying out for the role of a pirate queen. Your parents must be very proud of all your accomplishments.

EVELYN

Yes ma-... Josephine. They are. Or were.

KATE

Yes, I'm sure the whole of Germany is quite proud of their little fencing prodigy. How does your little town in Ohio feel about their hometown girl working for the Nazis? I'm not sure brown shirts would be considered as American as apple pie, even in the ass end of the U.S.A.

MIRANDA

Madre de dios, just be QUIET! (to Evelyn) "Were?"

The door opens and BRENZ enters, looking mildly concerned but quickly plasters a very smarmy smile on his face.

BRENZ

Ladies! How absolutely pleased I am to have all of you here!

All the women smile and murmur greetings. As they begin to cluster around him, Kate takes his arm and pulls him from the rest of the group.

KATE

My dear Mr. Brenz. My dear, dear Mr. Brenz-

BRENZ

Please, we should dispense with formalities. Call me Brenz.

KATE

Can I call you Solomon, then? Or maybe Sol?

BRENZ

No.

KATE

All right then, Brenz it is. Brenz, I am very interested in this role. Very interested. I can't fully express how interested I am in it.

BRENZ

Ja, that is good. I am glad, otherwise your presence here would be problematic.

MIRANDA

Oh, it already is.

KATE

I just want you to know, my dear Brenz, that I am willing to do anything for this role. ANYthing.

Brenz laughs uncomfortably and tries to extricate himself from Kate's grasp.

BRENZ

Yes, quite, good to know. Ah, now please, I must...

He finally pulls himself free with a yank.

BRENZ (con't)

Miranda, it is very good to see you once again.

MIRANDA

Dear Brenz. (slightly insincerely) And how is our dear Eva? Did she suffer much in the accident?

BRENZ

(downcast) Oh, my little barn swallow just barely avoided a catastrophic injury, by sheer luck! The doctors said that if she had not landed exactly on her tuckus, she could have broken legs, arms, all of those things. And... she will be joining us very soon, which is what I must speak to all of you about. But first, two of you I have not made the acquaintance of. However, reputation precedes both of you.

Josephine steps forward and extends her hand, which Brenz takes and kisses demurely.

BRENZ

I am deeply honored, Miss-

JOSEPHINE

Please. As you said before, we should dispense with formalities. Josephine, or Jo.

BRENZ

Indeed. Josephine, then. Thank you for coming to this... odd audition. But matters became urgent.

JOSEPHINE

Think nothing of it. I have wanted to meet you for some time, Brenz. We have... mutual friends who speak highly of you.

BRENZ

This is good to hear. We will speak of them soon, but first...

He turns to Evelyn, who extends her hand with a bright smile.

EVELYN

Sir, it is a real honor.

BRENZ

And you are our young Olympian, yes? I assume that man out there in the front office is your Nazi party escort here in America?

JOSEPHINE

You picked up on that too?

BRENZ

I'm a German Jew. It is a matter of survival to be able to pick up on it. (to Evelyn) And what did your handlers say about you auditioning for a Jewish filmmaker?

EVELYN

I convinced them it was a good idea. That it was an opportunity to show the world what kind of talent the Fatherland is capable of producing.

BRENZ

I see. And is that reason one you believe?

EVELYN

(pause) I really wanted to be here.

BRENZ

That doesn't quite answer my question-

The door opens and Stan comes in, an envelope in his hands.

STAN

Sir, a telegram came in for you.

BRENZ

Danke. Stan, did we not have one more actress scheduled to join us?

STAN

Yessir, and she just called. She'll be here soon. Seems she had an... accident happen on the way.

KATE

Oh hell! Don't tell me it's... is it the train wreck?

Stan grimaces and nods assent, then shakes his head no as Brenz glares at him.

STAN

Uh, I better get back to the front office. (exits hastily)

BRENZ

Please! That is an unseemly nickname for a very talented performer!

KATE

Fine. I hope we have the number of a good doctor handy. One of us will probably need it.

MIRANDA

Is it... is it who I think it is?

BRENZ

It is-

MIRANDA

DO NOT SAY HER NAME. Do not say the name of that evil woman!

BRENZ

But-

MIRANDA

There are no buts here! I will not stand for it, do you hear me? She, this woman, (to Kate) how did you call her...?

KATE

Train wreck. The kind of train wreck that takes out a whole fucking Indiana town by crashing into grain silos and creating a fireball that roasts the whole of Stumpville-

EVELYN

Stinesville-

KATE

-into a big fucking bowl of popcorn. Or a loaf of bread or whatever the hell you hicks grow in that part of the country.

MIRANDA

This train wreck, she must not be allowed here. She is a destroyer! An unparalleled villainess!

BRENZ

That seems a bit hyperbolic-

MIRANDA

NO! No, it is not. I must... I must tell you the story of how she ruined my life!

KATE

(to Brenz) Great, do you see what you did? Now she's going to tell a story.

MIRANDA

She, this devil woman, this home wrecker... she stole my lover!

BRENZ

Oh. Ah. The gentleman from Cuba.

MIRANDA

Yes! YES. He, he was handsome beyond belief, well-groomed and well-dressed, a set of conga drums always hanging from his shoulders. We were happy, or so I thought. Until SHE came, the train wreck, yes? That is what you call her?!

KATE

Yup.

MIRANDA

(dramatically) I remember the night as if it were only yesterday! We were in the Brown Derby, eating, drinking and laughing gaily! Then she walked in and caught *mi amor*'s roving eye. Before I knew it, I was alone, disgraced and heart-broken in the public eye, the shame almost too great to bear! (with great dignity) I will insist, dear Brenz, that if she is allowed to audition, that I will refuse to!

BRENZ

All right.

MIRANDA

(surprised) *Que?* What did you say?

BRENZ

All right. Please, Miranda, stay. I cannot tell why at just this moment it is important that you see this through, but believe me when I tell you that you will not regret learning more about what Eva and I are doing here. Think of all the times you have been treated unfairly in this industry by powerful people – now that you have some power of your own, I'm asking you to use it fairly.

Miranda struggles with the decision, while Kate looks on grinning and the others wondering. Josephine finally moves to Miranda, her hand clasping the other's shoulder.

JOSEPHINE

Stay. And be the better woman. Indeed, be the best woman. Greet her happily and with open arms. Extend the hand of friendship despite the wound she has given you.

MIRANDA

Yes. Yes! I will be the better woman. I will rush to her and embrace her as she enters through that very door!

Blackout

Seven

A spot rises on Josephine, who is chatting with Stan while they wait.

BRENZ

Now then, are we ready, Josephine?

JOSEPHINE

Of course, my dear Brenz.

Stan lifts the clapboard and snaps it shut. Josephine takes a moment and then transforms. She becomes a fiery pirate queen, frighteningly believable.

JOSEPHINE

Hold! Come no further, you feet-kissing curs of a crowned head! If any of you take one more step, you will taste the edge of cold steel!

STAN

(responding in kind) Surrender, sea witch. You are surrounded and your filthy sea swine you call a crew are either dead or are on their way to breathing their last at the bottom of the Caribbean. There is no escape.

JOSEPHINE

Ha! You think this is the end of my reign as the Pirate Queen?! Think again, you weak-chinned, soft-bellied imperialist dog! As long as a single pirate breathes, freedom still sails the Seven Seas. Now fight me or leave my ship, you milk-drinking pig!

There is a moment of silence, then Brenz and Stan begin clapping. Josephine smiles grandly and bows.

BRENZ

That was magnificent! (long pause) You know the studio will not allow me to cast you as the queen.

JOSEPHINE

Of course. But that's not why I'm here, is it?

Blackout

Eight

The door flies open and LUCY falls into the room, knocking a small accent table next to the door across the floor clattering. Stan is framed in the doorway behind her, staring down in horror.

STAN

Holy- Are you okay?!

LUCY

Yes! Yep! Just fine here! Meant to do that!

She scrambles to her feet as Stan moves to help her up. Grabbing his arm, she nearly pulls him down onto the floor as well.

STAN

Ow! Hey, what are you doing?!

LUCY

Sorry, sorry! Okay, I got it.

She stands, wobbly but eventually stable. She smiles widely.

LUCY (con't)

Hey everyone! (sees Miranda and quails) Oh. No.

KATE

(groaning) It's her. The train wreck.

MIRANDA

Shh! Be silent! This is my moment of graciousness! Lucy, *chiquita*, how are you?

Miranda sweeps towards Lucy to embrace her. Lucy, frozen in terror, almost allows Miranda to embrace her then jolts in fear, sending both of them tumbling to the floor. Miranda is still for a moment while Lucy scrambles away. Josephine and Evelyn rush to Miranda and try to sit the unconscious woman upright.

JOSEPHINE

Miranda! Miranda, can you hear me? Open your eyes, darling!

LUCY

Did I kill her? I didn't mean to kill her!

Miranda awakens with a shuddering breath and her hands fly up to her head.

MIRANDA

OW! GODDAMIT. MY HEAD WHY DOES IT HURT SO MUCH! JESUS YOU STUPID...

Everyone freezes, staring at Miranda.

KATE

What... what happened to your accent?

MIRANDA

Oops. I mean... ouch?

Miranda? JOSEPHINE

Oh my. LUCY

Now I'm the only one with a ridiculous accent? BRENZ

Well, there's still your Eva. KATE

(angrily) It's not ridiculous! It is a symphony of recklessly pronounced consonants and vowels! BRENZ

It's not what it looks like. Really. Oh god, help me up. MIRANDA

You've been faking it? For years? KATE

That's... amazing. JOSEPHINE

You mean you're not really Spanish? EVELYN

(angry) Goddamit, I was Brazilian not Spanish but none of you *gringos* going to my goddam movies knew the goddam difference, did you? You wanna know the truth? I'm a Puerto Rican from New Jersey. MIRANDA

(surprised) Hey, you're from Jersey?! I'm from Jersey too! Whereabouts? STAN

Not the time, Stanley. BRENZ

Sorry. STAN

Who else knows? JOSEPHINE

My agent. My family, of course. And now all of you because of this damn fool! MIRANDA

LUCY

I'm sorry, I was just... it was an accident.

MIRANDA

My ass it was an accident! Just like stealing my boyfriend was an accident? Are you saying you just fell on his dick accidentally? If I have a fractured skull, then I really will kill you!

EVELYN

Where does it hurt exactly?

Miranda hisses as Evelyn pokes at her injury.
Evelyn slowly parts the hair around the spot.

EVELYN

Well, the good thing is, you hit the thickest part of the skull-

KATE

I'd guess her skull's pretty thick all the way around.

MIRANDA

Shut up, *puta*!

KATE

Oh, why even bother with that now?

EVELYN

I think you'll be okay.

MIRANDA

Thank you. Please help me stand.

Josephine and Evelyn help Miranda up. She spins and strides to the sword rack, pulling one of the foils away and brandishing it towards Lucy.

MIRANDA (con't)

Every time you show up, something goes wrong! You play this wide eyed innocent but you're all schemes and plans. You're far too smart and you hide it so damn well but I'm on to you! (to the room) Does everyone remember that time in Chicago when she "accidentally" set that girl's hair on fire? The one who was the obvious choice for the lead of that particular cattle call? Or in New York when she "accidently" knocked the star she was understudying off the stage? Then she had to go on and rescue the show. And now this?! Nearly killing me and ruining my career?! AND YOU STOLE MY FUCKING BOYFRIEND.

EVELYN

Wow. Did all of that other stuff really happen?

I have no idea.

JOSEPHINE

Yes. Yes it did, but so what?

KATE

Kate walks towards the sword rack and pulls another foil out

What do you mean, “so what?!” She’s evil!

MIRANDA

Ladies, please, I think we can-

BRENZ

No, we can’t do anything! My goddam life is over! OVER!

MIRANDA

Hey, you can’t talk to Mr. Brenz that way-

STAN

I’ll do anything I damn well please! And what will please me most of all is to beat the crap out of this idiot!

MIRANDA

Kate moves towards Lucy, grinning evilly and moving the blade in slashing motions.

She’s just doing what she needs to in order to succeed. I admire that in this man’s Hollywood, where a woman does what she has to. Here.

KATE

She throws the sword to Lucy, who grabs at it clumsily, managing to keep it from falling to the floor.

Owowow. I, uh, I dunno-

LUCY

Miranda charges Lucy, sword flashing forward. Lucy is holding her sword by the wrong end and the hilt swings wildly back and forth. Miranda is unsure how to get past the unusual defense.

Goddamit, fight right!

MIRANDA

LUCY

This is the only way I know how to fight!

MIRANDA

Then what the hell are you doing here, aside from pissing me the hell off?

LUCY

(almost crying) I wanna be in the movie!

Evelyn strides to the two and knocks their blades away. Stepping between them, she faces Miranda.

EVELYN

Stop it. She obviously doesn't know what she's doing. You could hurt her.

MIRANDA

I'm TRYING to hurt her!

EVELYN

Well, don't do it with a sword. It's not right. Even if it is a fake weapon, it's still a weapon.

Miranda screams in rage but turns away, walking to sulk beside one of the couches. All of the women and Stan stand around uncomfortably for a few moments, while Brenz finally realizes he has not read his telegram. He reads it, and finally crumples it in his fist, frustration on his face.

BRENZ

Ladies, I need to check on Eva. Will you excuse Stan and myself?

They don't wait for the women to assent, scurrying through the door in a near panic. There is silence for a long moment.

JOSEPHINE

So... okay. Things are tense. How about we change the subject? Um, how many of you have been training in fencing? Miranda, obviously. Kate?

KATE

Of course. You know I always prepare thoroughly for a role.

JOSEPHINE

So you expect to get it, then?

KATE

Yes.

JOSEPHINE

What makes you so sure?

KATE

(icy smile) Let's take a look at the cast of characters, shall we? Over here we have probably the best actress in the room by virtue of the huge lie she's been living. She knows how to hold a sword but I think we can all agree that ONE of us is going to spill the beans. It's all over for her.

Miranda throws the sword in her hand to the ground and covers her face with her hands. Evelyn starts to move towards her but Josephine takes her by the shoulder and shakes her head "no."

KATE (con't)

The train wreck over there is probably the right look but she's always been a comedic actress because she actually IS a train wreck. (to Lucy) Let me guess, your agent suggested you audition because you can't get cast in any more comedies, right?

LUCY

... maybe.

KATE

Ha! Definitely! But you're not going to get cast here exactly BECAUSE you can't get cast anywhere else. It's not gonna happen.

LUCY

(pouting) Shut up.

KATE

And the kid here is obviously VERY good with a REAL sword but acting and sword fighting in movies is a very different story altogether. You can't be stammering out your lines like a Midwestern farm girl when you're in front of the camera, with time and money running out, and everyone snickering behind their hands except the director and producers. No, they'll be pulling out their hair thinking of the huge losses at the box office they'll have to explain to the studio heads.

EVELYN

I don't (stammers) stammer.

KATE

And you, my dear Josephine. You are a talented dancer and I wouldn't be surprised if you were a fabulous actor as well. But you have no acting experience and it makes no sense at all that you're here.

Josephine smiles and shrugs.

JOSEPHINE

I'm trying to expand my bag of tricks.

Kate frowns suspiciously. Josephine walks to the sword rack and removes a foil.

JOSEPHINE (con't)

Yes, I've also been training. I think I've gotten rather good at it too. It's not that much different than dancing with a partner but this time I'm leading. And I like it. It's... fun.

Evelyn smiles at this.

EVELYN

It is! I've been doing it for years, most of my life, really, and it never stops being fun!

JOSEPHINE

(grins) Would you like to spar a little? I would be honored to fence with an Olympic champion. And... I'd like to test myself against a real fencer. My coach has been extraordinary but I suspect he's gone easy on me while I've been preparing. Perhaps you could see fit to show me where I really stand.

EVELYN

(thinks) We don't have the proper protective gear, but these seem relatively safe as long as we don't go crazy. We stay away from each other's faces - just the body, okay?

JOSEPHINE

That sounds grand. Ladies, clear a space.

The others move to along the edges of the room, Lucy nearly tripping and falling head first. Evelyn and Josephine face each other and salute, both moving quickly into position.

The fight begins slowly, with feints and sweeps that test the defenses of each other.

The fighters come together earnestly and Josephine's sword is knocked from her hand. She is clearly startled.

JOSEPHINE

How... how did you do that?

EVELYN

(grins) You can ask your trainer when you get back home. Again?

JOSEPHINE

(smiling) Yes, please.

They take position, standing silently. Evelyn rushes Josephine, her sword slashing. Josephine manages to keep a third of the blows from making contact with her body. She begins laughing and holds her sword high.

JOSEPHINE (con't)

Ow, ow, all right, all right, I yield! (still laughing) I was barely able to keep you off of me! How are you able to move so fast? You're not even winded!

EVELYN

I've been doing it for so long I don't even think about it anymore. I guess my body's used to it. How long have you been training?

JOSEPHINE

Almost three months now?

EVELYN

You weren't too bad at all, really, not for three months. Maybe dancers are a natural fit. (grins) Again?

Josephine grins in return and nods.

JOSEPHINE

I give you permission to go easy on me.

Blackout

Nine

BRENZ

Stand in ze light, please.

LUCY

(from the darkness) What? What's a "Z" light?

BRENZ

(impatient) Ze light, ze light, zis light right here!

LUCY
You talk funny. Why do you talk funny?

STAN
He's German. And a director. It's almost a requirement.

LUCY
Oh! Well, that makes sense. I think... so, "ze light" is "the light?"

BRENZ/STAN
YES.

LUCY
Okay. Right here?

She moves into the spot, shading her eyes from the sudden bedazzlement.

BRENZ
Perfect!

Stan moves forward and snaps the clapboard in front of Lucy's face. She shrieks in terror and stumbles out of the spot, crashing into Stan.

STAN
Ow! What the hell?!

LUCY
Sorry, sorry! You scared me? What was that?

STAN
It was the clapboard! Haven't you ever seen a clapboard before?!

LUCY
Yes, but I didn't see that one, I just heard a loud... clap.

STAN
(sighs) Great. I'm bleeding. Mr. Brenz, I'm bleeding.

BRENZ
Very well, let us take a moment before continuing. We will see to your injuries, Stanley.

STAN
Thank you, sir.

They both walk around Lucy, who is still shading her eyes. The door opens and closes as the two men exit, startling Lucy once again.

Hello?

LUCY

Blackout.

Ten

Josephine and Evelyn are on opposite sides of the room, both grinning and Josephine breathing heavily.

JOSEPHINE

(panting) Well, Kate, I think you have some serious competition here. I suppose all she needs now is acting lessons.

KATE

(sneering) It's going to take more than lessons. I've been acting since I was a teenager, maybe the same age as this kid when I started.

EVELYN

I'm not a kid.

KATE

You know what my first show was? A stage play. Romeo and Juliet.

LUCY

Ooh, I love Shakespeare! Who did you play?

KATE

Romeo.

LUCY

Really?

KATE

No.

LUCY

Wow. You're really mean.

KATE

And you're an idiot. Now shut up. My point, "kid," is that I've been acting for as long as you've been alive-

MIRANDA

Longer.

KATE

You can shut up too. I can pretend to sword fight. You can't pretend to be a good actress.

MIRANDA

You don't tell me to shut up!

KATE

Oh, what are you going to do, bludgeon me with a Czech dialect?

MIRANDA

How about I stick this sword up your-

JOSEPHINE

Girls, girls, stop!

MIRANDA

I am tired of this cow dumping on all of us just because she's a "trained" actress. (snootily) I'll have you know I also played Juliet not too long ago-

KATE

Oh please.

MIRANDA

What, you think I can't do Shakespeare?

KATE

No. That it was "not too long ago." You're a bit long in the tooth to play Juliet, old girl.

JOSEPHINE

(trying to defuse the tension) Do you remember any lines from the play, Miranda?

MIRANDA

(grumpily) Yes.

JOSEPHINE

Why don't you recite some?

MIRANDA

(still grumpily) I don't want to.

JOSEPHINE

Oh please, darling. Don't you want to show Kate what you can do?

MIRANDA

She doesn't deserve to see what I can do.

Kate guffaws mockingly, bringing a glare from Miranda.

KATE

It isn't a matter of anyone deserving anything, at least not here. It's about doing what you're supposed to as an actor, as a performer. It's not about showing off because we're women, and we CAN'T show off, we just take the roles given to us. But in every case where I was cast in one of these piddly-ass roles in a Shakespeare production, I made it a point to show every man acting with me that not only was I as good as them, I was better. Because I would remember everyone's lines. Everyone's.

All the others look at her with a mixture of awe and skepticism. Lucy steps closer meekly.

LUCY

Did you really? All of them?

KATE

Yes. And don't come any closer. I want to keep all my vital organs intact, thank you very much.

JOSEPHINE

Darling. You realize how improbable that sounds, don't you?

KATE

I don't care how it sounds. It's the truth.

MIRANDA

Prove it. I can remember a lot of the men's lines too but all of them? That's a bald faced lie.

KATE

What's the point of proving it to you?

Lucy almost jumps in to the air, takes a few steps forward, spins and runs out the room.

LUCY

I'll be back!

The door slams behind her.

MIRANDA

What is that idiot doing now??

KATE

Who cares?

EVELYN

It really seems to me that remembering everyone's lines in Romeo and Juliet is impossible. I've only read it once, in school. There's a lot.

KATE

And that's exactly why you have no chance here in Hollywood. That's the kind of work you need to do to be an actor. A real one, at least.

JOSEPHINE

This is a film. I don't think that kind of work is necessary. And it's all about fun right now, isn't it? Keeping the people entertained while a war tears apart half the world?

Lucy runs back in, a large book in her arms. She drops it on the table with a bang.

EVELYN

What's that?

LUCY

Shakespeare. I saw it in a corner in the front office when I came in. And... (eyes wide) The script for The Pirate Queen!

All the women rush to Lucy to see. She sets the script on a table and begins reading while the others crowd around.

LUCY (con't)

Look, it starts with a sea battle! This is gonna be a great film!

MIRANDA

Just because it starts with a sea battle? How stupid are you, exactly?

Lucy frowns and begins to retort, then stops and shakes her head.

LUCY

Okay. I probably deserved that. I didn't mean to knock you out. Or steal your boyfriend. (brightens) If it makes you feel any better, we're gonna get married!

Miranda stares at Lucy then lunges for her, stopped just in time by Josephine and Evelyn.

MIRANDA

She just keeps rubbing new salt in fresh wounds! Agh!

JOSEPHINE

Easy, easy! Come on over here and sit down.

KATE

(to Lucy) You should probably stop talking. Forever.

Josephine attempts to distract Miranda's anger and calls out to Kate.

JOSEPHINE

Well?

KATE

Well what?

JOSEPHINE

I'd like to hear you put your money where your mouth is.

LUCY

(picking up the book) We can see if you really can remember all the lines! Or we can all do lines too! It'll be fun. (to Evelyn) Hey, come here! You can be Romeo.

EVELYN

Okay! Hi, I'm Evelyn.

LUCY

Nice to meet you! My name's Lucy. Not train wreck. In case, you know, you thought that's what it might be.

The door slams open and Brenz rushes in. He has a clear and definite look of panic on his face.

BRENZ

Ladies, please! Gather round. I have some very important news I must share with you. (dramatic pause) First, um, how do I say this... Uh, Eva, my beloved and former lead of The Pirate Queen will still be involved with the film.

The women stir in surprise, some muttering and Kate outwardly angry.

KATE

Then we've been wasting our time here? Is that what you're telling us, Brenz? This whole day has been a waste of my time?

BRENZ

No, no, not at all. It's just that, well, you know that we had a fight master hired for the film. He trained Eva tirelessly to get her prepared for the role. He was choreographing all of the fights in the film. I, rather, we, Eva and I, we have decided to relieve him of his duties as fight master.

MIRANDA

Really? But wasn't he one of the best? Who's replacing him?

BRENZ

(long pause) Eva.

There is a moment of shocked silence, then all the women begin shouting in fury. Kate silences them with upraised waving arms, then turns to hiss at Brenz when there is silence.

KATE

Are you insane?

BRENZ

No-

KATE

You clearly are, if you think you can hand over an absolute necessity regarding skill and training to your "beloved!" It's bad enough we're all at risk of severe injury because she's here (gestures at Lucy) but you're going to place the use of weapons on a movie set in the hands of an actress who has just learned how to fake sword fight? No! Hell no!

There is a long moment of silence as Brenz looks from woman to woman, seeking sympathy. There is none. He drops to his knees suddenly, wailing.

BRENZ

PLEASE! PLEAAAAAASE! You must help me or she will leave me, my soft little dumpling of joy and mirth will leave my life in darkness and despair!
PLEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEAAAAAAAASSE! (ends with sobbing)

MIRANDA

Wow.

KATE

Um, okay.

EVELYN

(to Josephine) Is this normal in Hollywood?

JOSEPHINE

I don't think it's normal anywhere.

Lucy moves to Brenz, a look of concern on her face. She pats him on the shoulder consolingly.

LUCY

Hey. Hey, it's okay. Don't cry. It's really weird. So stop, okay?

BRENZ

I cannot! My life is over unless I can find a place for my Eva in this movie! Over, I tell you!

KATE

What exactly is it that you want from us, Brenz? How can we "help" you?

Brenz' head comes up, suddenly calm and collected.

BRENZ

It is very simple, really. She will be here in moments, and I would like all of you to consent to practice under her tutelage a fight scene.

MIRANDA

And what exactly is the point of that?

BRENZ

It will do one very important thing – she will demonstrate that she is competent enough that whoever of you is chosen for the lead of The Pirate Queen will be confident in her abilities to train you.

JOSEPHINE

All right.

BRENZ

I am infinitely confident that she will NOT muck it up so horribly that she will be convinced that she has over extended herself and will be better off lighting up the screen with her radiant beauty rather than teaching actresses how to look good with a sword. Infinitely. Confident.

MIRANDA

Okay. And what's in it for us?

BRENZ

(pause) What do you want?

The women look at each other and move to one side to confer. Kate is arguing against all of them but she

eventually acquiesces, albeit sullenly. Josephine is apparently designated as the official negotiator and steps forward to Brenz.

JOSEPHINE

All right, here are our terms. Whether Eva is competent enough or not, you must agree to follow through on all of them.

BRENZ

(deep breath) All right. Let me hear them.

JOSEPHINE

First, you, Stan and Eva keep Miranda's secret about her accent safe. No one else knows about it.

BRENZ

Agreed!

JOSEPHINE

Second, we all want a screen test. Something on film that we get a copy of.

BRENZ

Ja!

JOSEPHINE

And we all want a favor set aside for future use. We get to make one phone call and if it's in your ability to do it, you do it, whether it's getting a part in a new film or getting us an audition with a director you have some pull with.

BRENZ

(pause) All right. I promise to do what I can. My word of honor.

Josephine looks to the others, who nod after a moment. She smiles broadly at Brenz.

JOSEPHINE

You have yourself a deal then, my dear Brenz!

Brenz grins broadly and moves to shake the hand of each individual woman.

BRENZ

Wundabar! You will not regret this, I promise you. You have saved me, dear ladies! Saved me!

From the other side of the door comes a long, plaintive wail.

EVA

BREEEEEEEEENZ!

BRENTZ

Mein gott, it is her! She is here! Again ladies, thank you and just in time!

Brentz rushes to the door, takes a deep breath before grabbing the door handle and pulls it wide open. On the other side of the door is EVA, being pushed in a wheelchair by an even more harried Stan.

EVA

(dramatically breathless) Brentz. You left me!

BRENTZ

Nonono, my little ball of yarn spun from the finest cashmere, I left you in the hands of the finest doctors of Holly-

EVA

Lies! Those quacks had my life hanging by a thread! I'm lucky to be alive!

BRENTZ

Now, now, my little duckling gracing the still, clear waters of a placid forest pond, that may be an exaggeration-

EVA

(tearful) Are you calling me a liar, Solomon?

BRENTZ

No! No, I... give me a moment, my slice of apple pie covered with a delicious dollop of vanilla ice cream, whilst I take care of business?

He looks to the other women and gestures for help with Eva. Evelyn moves quickly to Eva's side.

EVELYN

Hello! I'm really looking forward to working with you.

EVA

Who are you? Brentz, who is this?

BRENTZ

It is the young Olympic fencer, my bowl of oatmeal covered in cinnamon and a spoonful of honey harvested from the Elysian Fields.

EVA

Oh, the Nazi?

BRENZ

Yes, but I believe she is a nice one.

EVA

No such thing.

BRENZ

Indeed, my flask of 20-year-old scotch, with just the right amount of smokiness in the aftertaste.

Brenz pulls Stan to the side hurriedly.

BRENZ (cont')

Go, bring those bottles I set aside in here immediately! Make haste!

STAN

Yessir! Oh, I almost forgot, another telegram came for you.

BRENZ

Danke. Now go!

Brenz reads the telegram while Evelyn flatters Eva. After reading, Brenz appears deflated but then looks at Josephine with what appears to be hope.

EVELYN

... and I've seen all your films. I may be your biggest fan, probably in all of Germany. Cinema was very respected there when I was living in Berlin and you are one of the most respected actresses. Absolutely. Your name was whispered as if magical, a charm that would whisk away all to a realm unparalleled.

EVA

(smiling) Brenz, this child is absolutely charming! Where ever did you find her?

BRENZ

She found us, interestingly enough. (to Evelyn) Thank you. You are very good at that. (to Eva) But now to more important business. I must ask you once more, for the sake of my own conscience, if this is something you want to do-

EVA

Yes!

BRENZ

But my little *strudel*, my *edelweiss*, my snow-covered Alpine peak, what you ask may not only be moderately dangerous to your health but it is also-

EVA

Nonsense! This is what we agreed must happen, for the sake of this film! I will not be swayed on this, Solomon.

BRENZ

But my little pint of fine Bavarian ale, you are a movie star, not a fight master, and could be injured.

Stan pushes through the door with a cart laden with bottles of champagne cooling in buckets of ice.

EVA

Your sweet words are useless! I will not sit on my *csikk* while you create a masterwork that was created for me by both of us! I will have an active part in this movie, even if - ooh, champagne!

BRENZ

Yes... YES. Champagne! Here, my little fawn, my tender little colt prancing in a sun-dappled meadow, I will push you here, and you will drink your fill, *ja?* Ladies, please, help yourselves.

He maneuvers her wheelchair close to the table holding the champagne. He motions to Stan to step further away while Eva pours herself a glass.

BRENZ

Well done! Now, mind the front in case any more telegrams come in, although I think we will see no more.

STAN

I'm sorry, sir.

BRENZ

It is of no matter. We still have hope.

STAN

Yessir. (exits)

EVA

Solomon!

BRENZ

(panicked) Yes, my ray of sunshine spilling over a pastoral valley filled with the laughter of *kinder!*

EVA

This champagne is warm. Take me over to the *Bonne Chance*.

BRENZ

Of course, my nymph of chiffon and Chanel No. 5.

Brenz rolls Eva over to the pirate ship. She waves him away grandly.

EVA

By now, Solomon has no doubt informed you of what our plans are, yes?

All the women nod. Eva smiles.

EVA (cont')

Good! Then for the sake of efficiency, we will have one glorious fight scene, which we will spend some time choreographing. This scene will determine who are the most worthy of assuming the crown, (wistfully) my crown, of the pirate queen! (fervently) Are you with me!?

The women look unsure but nod, shrug and mutter incoherently.

EVA (con't)

(scowls) Hmph! Solomon, hand me a sword!

BRENZ

Yes, my warrior queen who is stern in her rule yet merciful with the weak, helpless and innocent.

Brenz rushes to her with a sword. She takes it and lays it across her lap.

EVA

I must be truthful now, in that your enthusiasm, your fervor for this role is not what it should be.

MIRANDA

Who are you talking to-

EVA

(wild-eyed) ALL OF YOU! I do not see it, the fire, the frenzy, the berserker rage that fills the belly and burns in the eyes of a pirate queen! Do any of you truly know what it is that drives us, me and my beloved, Brenz, to create our art, our work, our film that is destined to reverberate in the minds and souls of the world?

KATE

...I can't say that we do.

EVA

Then let me tell you a story.

MIRANDA

Great. (to Kate) Now whose fault is it that someone's telling a story?

EVA

It all began-

She gestures with the sword and moves as if to pace forward but realizes she's in a wheelchair.

EVA (con't)

Brenz!

BRENZ

(rushing forward) Yes, my wheeled figure of Victory, shining the way forward towards glory and conquest.

EVA

I need to pace dramatically.

BRENZ

Of course, my rolling siren of unreasonable yet still enchanting demands.

He rolls her in front of the women slowly back and forth as Eva begins her tale.

EVA

It was not long ago when my beloved, who is Brenz if you have not caught on to that yet, when he and I first conceived of this child we call The Pirate Queen. We were spending an enchanted evening in Paris, or London, or some such destination of renown-

BRENZ

I believe it was Toledo-

EVA

Of course! In Spain-

BRENZ

Ohio-

EVA

Drinking champagne as we are wont to do-

BRENZ

Far too often-

EVA

And it struck me! Like a lightning bolt from heaven, or Athena bursting forth from the very forehead of Jove! The idea to make a movie - nay, a film – that upended all that is expected from the typical Hollywood dreck! We would make a movie of a woman not JUST as powerful as the men around her, but MORE powerful. And it would not be an anomaly, an aberration – it would be natural, and just, and truly expressive of what we as women in Hollywood are capable of. That we are not just romantic interests. We are not just decoration and arm candy for the leading men. That we are not just emotional entanglements for the men to work through until they achieve their goals. We are and can be the focus and center of a story without the need for a man to lead us to our enlightenment.

The other women stir, clearly excited. Kate grins wolfishly.

KATE

Hell yeah!

EVA

From this day forward, we hold the studio! From this day forward, we sail this ship! From this day forward, we make history! ARE YOU WITH ME!?

ALL

YES!

EVA

Excellent! Then grab a sword and prepare yourselves!

KATE

What's the scene?

EVA

What?

KATE

The scene. We can't just "fight." We need, or at least I do, some motivation. A purpose. I'm a proper actress.

EVA

I... I don't know.

LUCY

(excitedly) I do! We can do a scene from The Pirate Queen! We have the script right here.

All the women look at each other then nod.

JOSEPHINE

That's a good idea. We can fight and have lines as well.

KATE

Good. This way all of you will know who the best actress for this role is, aside from the previous queen, that is.

EVA

(sniffs) Thank you.

MIRANDA

Of course you are. But I think we might need one more sword in play, for a balanced battle

There is a moment of silence. Then all at once-

ALL

STAN!

Blackout.

Eleven

A spot rises on Eva, in her wheelchair. She is pouting.

BRENZ

But my creampuff, my cupcake, my lemon meringue pie, there is no need for you to do this-

EVA

All the others had a special screen test! Why must I be left out? And what happened to the Spanish woman's accent?

BRENZ

Pay no mind to that, my pillow of goose down and imported Japanese silk. An... arrangement was made with them to smooth out the transition from our previous fight master to your delicate and lovely but inordinately skilled hands. There is no-

EVA

Solomon! These words that we wrote, we created, will have never been said by me on the screen. People will never see me say them. History must know what was lost when I stepped down from the poop deck of the *Bonne Chance*. Now... I WANT MY SCREEN TEST.

BRENZ

Ja, ja. (sighs) Stan...

Stan moves the clapboard in front of Eva and snaps it shut. Eva begins, overwrought and over-the-top, exactly what one would expect from her.

EVA

Hold! Come no further, you feet-kissing curs of a crowned head! If any of you take one more step, you will taste the edge of cold steel!

STAN

(off camera, monotone) Surrender, sea witch. You are surrounded and your filthy sea swine you call a crew are either dead or are on their way to breathing their last at the bottom of the Caribbean. There is no escape.

EVA

Ha! You think this is the end of my reign as the Pirate Queen?! Think again, you weak-chinned, soft-bellied imperialist dog! As long as a single pirate breathes, freedom still sails the Seven Seas. Now fight me or leave my ship, you milk-drinking pig!

Brenz darts to kneel at Eva's feet.

BRENZ

That... that was brilliant. Stupendous. Magnificent. Oh, how I rue the day that your delicate foot took that step off the edge of the *Bonne Chance*! You... you are truly my pirate queen!

Eva smiles graciously and holds her hand to Brenz's cheek.

EVA

I know. And I will never let you forget it. Now let's make a movie.

Blackout.

Twelve

All the women stand arrayed in formation, prepared to fight, with Stan among them, nervous and unsure. Eva holds a foil in one hand like a conductor's baton.

STAN

I'm not sure I can do this-

KATE

Shut up, yes you can.

STAN

Look, all of you have been practicing and this is my very first time doing this! I know it's fake sword fighting but I could still get hurt!

KATE

You are such a little girl.

STAN

(hurt) I am not!

KATE

Then shut up and do what we tell you.

EVA

Ladies! Are we ready?

ALL (except Stan)

Yes.

STAN

I'm not a lady!

KATE

True. You're nowhere near as tough as one.

EVA

Enough. Begin!

There is a pause. Swords are raised.

MIRANDA

You dare board my ship?! Stand fast or I'll have my men cut you down like the wheat in the fields of the oppressed peasants groaning under the heel of your sovereign!

KATE

I can't believe you get to be the pirate queen just because of a coin toss.

MIRANDA

Ha! Get used to losing, you cow! Now say your frigging line!

KATE

(grumbling) Fine! Our king is terrible in his might and his men will not cower before a mere woman! Our orders are to take you back, in chains or drowned in a cask of rum!

EVELYN

(to Lucy) Wow, they're really good.

I know.

LUCY

Kate and Miranda are staring at Lucy and Evelyn.
Lucy nudges Evelyn.

Isn't it your line next?

LUCY (con't)

EVELYN

Oh yeah! Uh... (stiffly) The queen of the pirates is no mere woman. She is the greatest captain and fiercest fighter in all the hemisphere! And we will stand with her, to the death!

KATE

Then die you will, dog! And my blade will be the one to cut you down!

EVELYN

I think not, you... you... oh jeez, what's the rest...?

KATE

Come on, kid, we're burning daylight here.

MIRANDA

You can do it, Evelyn.

KATE

She probably can't.

MIRANDA

I will whack you for real with this sword.

EVA

Ladies! Focus!

EVELYN

I got it! I think not, you pink-skinned son of inbred aristocracy draining the life blood of the vital yet unenlightened proletariat!

KATE

Finally. Well then, sir, I am for you!

They stand motionless for a long breath. Kate moves in quickly, slashing high with an ornate flourish. They slash at each other, blocks and parries as powerful as the thrusts and cuts.

The fighters part, breathing hard. They are equally matched in speed and strength. They circle, pushing the others back. Kate attacks again and pushes Evelyn towards Miranda, who swings Evelyn behind her and slashes at Kate.

MIRANDA

Ha! Loyal though he may be, he is but a man! Fight me yourself, lackey of injustice and fear!

Kate is forced back and is pushed against one of the couches. She falls back stiff-legged, grabs a cushion and throws it at Miranda, then climbs up and over the couch, putting the furniture between them.

EVA

And now, the rest of you! Engage your opponent!

The entire group begins a melee. Kate corners Miranda and slays her according to the script. All stop to watch Miranda's death scene.

MIRANDA

I am done! I am sped, and soon to be dead.

EVELYN

No, no oh queen. Don't leave us. How will we go on? How will we fight without you?

MIRANDA

But, I will never leave you. Though my flesh may expire, my spirit fights on! You will see me in the eyes of children begging in the streets. You will see me reflected in the blood spilled by righteous men in the service of freedom. You will hear me in the songs of workers enslaved to the machineries of capitalism.

EVELYN

Please, no. Stay but a moment longer.

MIRANDA

I cannot. My life is...

She dies. There is silence for a moment, then all applaud.

KATE (con't)

(to Miranda) All right. You're not a bad pirate queen.

MIRANDA

(surprised) Thanks. So... You're not going to say anything else that totally undercuts the compliment?

KATE

Maybe later.

LUCY

I'm thirsty. I like champagne. It should be cold now, right?

EVA

Champagne is a VERY good idea.

MIRANDA

(accent) Oh yes, this is what I need.

KATE

I think we could all use a drink right now.

EVELYN

I've... never had champagne before.

KATE

I don't even know what to say to that. You just a walking cliché of Midwestern *naïveté*, aren't you?

JOSEPHINE

Oh, leave her alone. I think it's charming.

LUCY

Champagne is good.

As Lucy reaches for a glass, Kate grabs it and holds it away, out of the other woman's reach.

KATE

Nope. Alcohol in you is just asking for trouble.

MIRANDA

Yeah! The damage you would do even the slightest bit tipsy-

LUCY

(angry) You can't do that!

KATE

The hell we can't.

JOSEPHINE

I'm afraid I'm going to have to agree, my dear. It would be tempting fate.

LUCY

But that's not fair! I deserve champagne!

EVELYN

Normally, I would be on your side. But you did knock Miranda out. Cold.

MIRANDA

And my head still hurts!

LUCY

(fuming) Fine! See if I care!

She stalks off to sulk away from the others.

EVA

Pour me a glass, someone, and then I must go find Solomon. To report on what I saw.

JOSEPHINE

And what will you say, Eva?

Eva takes her glass and breathes in the scent of the champagne. She holds it up to salute all in the room.

EVA

That it will be very difficult to choose who will be the pirate queen. My regards, ladies. Well done. Know that whoever is chosen, they are only one of many queens who have stolen my heart.

She drinks, then thrusts the glass out to Stan, who places it on a nearby table.

EVA (cont')

Take me to Solomon, Stanley! Immediately!

STAN

Yes ma'am.

They exit. The others relax visibly. Evelyn sniffs at her glass. Lucy finds one of the telegrams left behind by Brenz on a nearby table and reads it.

MIRANDA

Go on, Evelyn. Take a drink. Tell us what you think.

Evelyn takes a small sip. Her eyes widen and she takes another, longer drink.

Oh my.

EVELYN

I think she likes it.

JOSEPHINE

(shouting) I like champagne!

LUCY

(shouting back) Yes. We know.

KATE

Thanks, everyone. About agreeing to, you know.

MIRANDA

Doesn't mean I might not say anything later.

KATE

(pause) I kind of hate you.

MIRANDA

I want this role. And I'll use any leverage I can get.

KATE

It might not make a difference.

LUCY

What are you babbling on about, train wreck?

KATE

Wow. Are you always so mean?

LUCY

Lucy gestures at them all with a sweep of her arm.

Look at all of us. We're the ones who were asked to come in and audition for the role. Now really and seriously think about what this role is and how each of us would look performing it.

LUCY (con't)

I think I'm perfect for this role.

KATE

MIRANDA

So do I.

EVELYN

(shrugging) I don't really know.

LUCY

So you (pointing to Kate), you're bitter, sour-faced and swear like a sailor. I just don't see it happening. Not because you're not a good actress. It's just that no one likes working with you.

KATE

Hey, you watch your fucking mouth!

LUCY

(to Evelyn) And you, you're an athlete not an actress. Doesn't mean you can't become one, but it still doesn't make sense to spend time teaching you instead of going with a good actress who knows a little bit of fencing.

EVELYN

Okay. I'm going to have more champagne.

LUCY

You should. So you (to Miranda), maybe? But there's the whole Spanish thing. How is it going to sound with you talking with an accent and everyone else isn't? Although clearly you're REALLY good with accents. Like, really.

MIRANDA

Mark of Zorro! Did you see it? Some people talked with Spanish accents.

LUCY

Yeah, but none of the leads.

MIRANDA

Oh. Shit. You're right.

LUCY

And you! I have no idea why you're here.

JOSEPHINE

I beg your pardon?

LUCY

For THIS role. We all have our thing, right? But none of us are known for taking roles like this. I just think it's a little strange. You know what IS the one thing we all have in common?

JOSEPHINE

What?

LUCY

We all have money. A lot. Except maybe Evelyn. I dunno if she does. But the rest of us? I read the trades. We all do pretty well.

MIRANDA

All right. And...?

KATE

My thoughts exactly.

LUCY

Think about it! This movie is in trouble, right? Behind schedule and over budget? I think they fired the fight master and put Eva in because it was cheaper. It's why we're all crammed in here like a cattle call except we don't do cattle calls anymore, do we?

KATE

Still not getting your point, train wreck-

LUCY

Stop calling me that! My point is this – we're not here because we're all potential pirate queens. We're here because we're all potential investors.

Everyone stares at Lucy, the words sinking in.

LUCY

(excitedly) Do you see it? All of us would love to be in this movie but even more, we love the idea of this movie. All of it, the woman in charge and kicking butt across the Seven Seas, and an actress the actual lead and looking for adventure and not chasing a man who's the REAL lead for love and romance. You can't tell me that didn't hit you right away, the fact that there's no A-list male star hogging all the glory.

KATE

Yeah.

MIRANDA

Of course.

JOSEPHINE

(smiling) Yes.

LUCY

And I can tell you right now that if Brenz or Eva came through that door right at this moment and asked us to be co-producers of this film, we would all say yes.

All the women are silent, thinking.

LUCY

Am I right?!

KATE

...yes.

MIRANDA

All right. Yes. Especially now that I remember what Stan told me when I first got here.

KATE

What was that?

MIRANDA

Brenz and Eva have a lot invested in this movie – money as well as time and effort. The studio's not going to put any more financing into their pet project, so while they audition women who'd love to BE in the movie-

LUCY

They find women who want the movie to be made! Exactly!

Josephine takes a seat on one of the couches.

JOSEPHINE

An interesting theory. I'm not sure there's anything to it, however. But yes. I would like it made as well.

LUCY

And we WILL do it! We just wait for Brenz or Eva to ask us-

MIRANDA

We should just offer it-

LUCY

No! We need to play it smart, let them think we're the ones doing them a favor and not the other way around.

KATE

Why?

LUCY

We make the leverage! If we offer first, we automatically put ourselves in the weaker position. Let them come to us.

EVELYN

Tactically speaking, she's correct. It's always better to fight from a defensive posture. Attack is risk. Let them come to us.

KATE

We're assuming she's correct. Recent history has shown the train wreck is less than accurate in her judgement.

LUCY

I'm tired of you calling me that! And I want some of that champagne!

She reaches for the bottle and snarls when Miranda pulls it out of reach.

LUCY

Do you wanna fight? Because I will fight you!

MIRANDA

Hey, hey, easy...

KATE

Calm down, train wreck.

LUCY

STOP CALLING ME THAT! I'll fight both of you!

She rushes to the weapons rack, pulling a sword free.

EVELYN

Uh, sword fighting when you've been drinking is a really bad idea. It's actually against the rules.

LUCY

I haven't been drinking and I don't care about your rules! (to Kate) You! Get up and fight!

KATE

I am not going fight- AAAAHHH!

She rolls off the couch onto the floor as the sword Lucy wields comes slashing down.

LUCY

Come back here!

EVELYN

Hey, stop!

NO!

LUCY

Evelyn tries to stop Lucy's attack of Kate but is thrown back by Lucy's rage. Evelyn blocks and backs up, on the defensive.

Someone, help!

EVELYN

Miranda and Josephine grab swords and dash to stop Lucy, and are immediately thrown back by the other woman's attack. Evelyn tries to come in from the other side but the enraged Lucy is too quick.

I'LL FIGHT ALL OF YOU!

LUCY

What has gotten into her?

KATE

Perhaps calling her train wreck hasn't helped, hmm?

JOSEPHINE

Fine, maybe it hasn't.

KATE

Kate stands and retrieves a sword, joining the effort to subdue Lucy.

The fight is strangely lopsided. Lucy moves quickly and speedily to fend off attacks and attacks in her own right with surprising efficiency, driving her opponents back much more easily than would seem possible. Miranda pulls away from the melee and circles around to behind Lucy unnoticed.

(panting) I don't understand! How is she able to do this? I can't get anywhere past her defense.

EVELYN

She can't keep this up. Not for much longer.

JOSEPHINE

Miranda slides up behind Lucy, grabs her shoulder to pull her to face her and punches her square in the

chin. Lucy spins around almost balletically, falling towards the couch.

LUCY

Ooh! I'm sleepy.

Her sword falls to the ground. She sits abruptly on the couch, curls up and falls asleep.

EVELYN

What did you do!?

MIRANDA

Hey, I owed her one! Jesus, that felt good.

Evelyn rushes to Lucy and examines her with concern.

JOSEPHINE

Miranda, dear, that may have been entirely unneces-

MIRANDA

I OWED HER ONE.

JOSEPHINE

Is she all right?

EVELYN

Yes. I think so.

MIRANDA

She has a glass jaw.

JOSEPHINE

And how did you know this?

MIRANDA

After she took off with my boyfriend, I found out everything I could about her. (bemused) Didn't think that particular tidbit of information would actually come in handy.

KATE

I need another drink.

JOSEPHINE

I'm with you, dear.

The women limp towards the champagne and refill their glasses. Each of them takes a seat.

KATE

What if she had a point? Disregard the whole fight. Are we being set up to become investors in a failing Hollywood epic?

MIRANDA

I'll grant that none of us are typical Hollywood actresses. Despite that, we're all successful in our particular niches. Aside from Evelyn, we've managed to succeed regardless of how Hollywood sees us.

JOSEPHINE

(smiling at Evelyn) I would say that the same idea applies to Evelyn, but in a very different way. Why pay attention to her ramblings, though?

KATE

Because there's something to it, isn't there? Maybe the train wreck is right-

JOSEPHINE

Maybe you shouldn't call her that.

KATE

Oh really? Were you not part of the whole epic battle to keep her from beating us into a bloody pulp?

JOSEPHINE

That doesn't mean you should call her that.

LUCY

(muffled) It's mean.

KATE

All right, fine! But know I'm about out of patience and time. I don't know if there's anything to keep me here aside from... (sighs) Lucy's supposition. And I don't think that's enough at this point.

JOSEPHINE

Just stay a bit longer. Have more champagne.

KATE

No. I think I'm done. No offense, Josephine, or to any of you for that matter, but I'm clearly the best choice for the role of the pirate queen. If you want to go along with Brenz' charade of auditioning all of us together in order to get financial support along with a new lead, fine. I would rather have had a more straightforward proposition.

She stands and brushes her clothing straight.

KATE (con't)

I'll just wish you all good luck. With me out of the running, one of you should be able to get cast.

JOSEPHINE

Wait!

KATE

(exasperated) What?

JOSEPHINE

Let's fight for it. The role.

KATE

What do you mean?

JOSEPHINE

We've all proven we can handle a sword. Let's face each other, find out which one of us is truly the best for the role. Use all the tricks we've learned to make the best show we can. Not real fighting of course, but flash and splash, if you will.

KATE

(exasperated) What would be the point? If I win, I'm either working for a director who's too stupid to realize I'm the best choice, or a director who's barely holding together a sinking ship that doesn't have enough money to stay afloat.

JOSEPHINE

I think we can all agree that Brenz is not stupid. (pause) If you win, I will invest in the movie.

KATE

What? Really?

JOSEPHINE

Yes, really.

MIRANDA

So will I.

KATE

What's gotten into you two?

JOSEPHINE

Let's just call it reckless idealism.

MIRANDA

How would we do this?

JOSEPHINE

How about teams to start with? Two against two to start, then the last two to finish. The deciding duel.

EVELYN

What about Lucy?

LUCY

(muffled) I'll fight all of you!

JOSEPHINE

I think she's taken herself out of the running. What do you say?

The women think again for a long moment.

KATE

The losers remove themselves from consideration, then? Regrets are given to Brenz, no hard feelings and the winner will be the only one up for the role?

JOSEPHINE

(smiling) Yes.

MIRANDA

I'll agree to that. And the rest of us, if we want, talk to Brenz about Lucy's suspicions.

KATE

(grinning) All right. What are the teams?

JOSEPHINE

How about you and Miranda against me and Evelyn?

KATE

What does the kid have to gain by doing this? She has no money and if she wins, she's still not going to get cast.

EVELYN

I don't mind! I'll fight to keep things even and fair!

JOSEPHINE

No. Kate's right, Evelyn. You have nothing to gain as things stand. (pause) I'll stake her the investment in the film, if we lose.

Evelyn gasps in astonishment while Kate grins.

MIRANDA

And if that's what's truly happening here.

KATE

You weren't kidding when you said reckless idealism. (pause) Still, you're taking the professional. That hardly seems fair.

JOSEPHINE

Trust me, she'll be more of a handicap than advantage. We'll be evenly matched. Tell you what, if she makes contact aside from steel on steel, you win automatically. Let me just have a quick word with my partner first.

KATE

All right. But make it quick.

Josephine pulls Evelyn to the side.

JOSEPHINE

I want us to lose. Can you make that happen?

Evelyn looks at the other woman in surprise. She nods.

EVELYN

Yes. But why?

JOSEPHINE

You will find out, very soon. Can you do it? For me?

EVELYN

(pause) Yes.

Josephine and Evelyn turn to face the other two. Miranda moves to Kate and they square off. Kate grins.

KATE

Shall we?

Josephine looks to Evelyn, who nods her agreement. They move to stand closer in ready positions.

They begin their contest slowly at first, then with greater intensity. It moves across the room, blades flying.

Kate makes a thrust and slips slightly off balance. Instead of giving the other woman a moment to steady, Evelyn deliberately makes contact on Kate's body.

Kate grabs where she was struck.

KATE

You lose. How did that happen? You're better than that.

EVELYN

(to Josephine) Like that?

JOSEPHINE

(smiling) Yes. (to Kate and Miranda) It's now left to you two. Good luck.

Kate stares at the other two women and puts her sword down. She turns to Miranda.

KATE

It's just us. Shall we get this over with?

MIRANDA

Yes, let's. I concede.

KATE

What?

MIRANDA

I concede the fight. The role is yours.

KATE

You're giving up?

MIRANDA

Not exactly. I want this movie to succeed and I have to face the fact that I may not be the best choice for this role. So-

KATE

You're going to invest. You're going to put your money in it.

MIRANDA

Yes. Maybe it's time to start thinking bigger. And there are only so many mansions in Beverly Hills to buy. Why not here and now, with this movie? Take the role. No, we'll give you the role

– we’ll insist on it. If we all become investors, producers on this movie, we’ll have the pull to make you the lead.

Kate looks from Miranda to Josephine.

KATE

You’re serious about this. Both of you.

Josephine and Miranda nod, smiling.

KATE

All right. You have a deal. So what do we do now?

JOSEPHINE

Let me take care of it from here. I have something I need to speak to Brenz about aside from the film. I’ll use the opportunity to broach the subject of financing and lay out our offer.

KATE

(smiling) You’re all right, Josephine.

JOSEPHINE

So are you, Kate. Despite being extraordinarily unpleasant. (smiling) At times.

KATE

Let’s be honest – I’m kind of a bitch – at times. (grinning) It’s how I fight. Hopefully someday, women who act won’t have fight to make it in Hollywood and succeed on talent alone. But until they do, I’m setting the best example of bitchery I can.

She turns to Evelyn and holds her hand out to the younger woman.

KATE

You’re okay too, Stumpville.

EVELYN

Stinesville.

KATE

Whatever. (nods at Lucy) What about this one? Are we actually going to have her as part of this?

MIRANDA

(scowling) I would really prefer not-

EVELYN

She figured out what was going on. It’s only fair.

MIRANDA

IF what she figured out is actually real.

JOSEPHINE

We'll find out soon enough. But yes, she should be part of it.

Kate looks down at Lucy and shakes her head.

KATE

Yes. She should be. The more I think about it, the more probable it seems. Wouldn't it be funny that out of all of us starting on this project together, she actually turns out to be the better business woman?

She shrugs and puts her sword away, turning to smile at the others.

KATE (con't)

I expect I'll be hearing from all of you soon. Goodbye... for now.

Kate exits. There is a moment of silence.

MIRANDA

(beaming) Josephine, darling, it's been fabulous. And really strange, too. Let's do lunch soon. Especially if this is truly what we expect it to be.

JOSEPHINE

Of course, darling.

MIRANDA

Evelyn, good luck. You seem like a decent young lady. Don't let this town change that.

EVELYN

Thank you!

She clasps Miranda in a sudden and unexpected hug. Miranda is surprised but laughs.

MIRANDA

Oh my. I'm not used to something that genuine.

She sweeps towards the door and opens it grandly. She gives a great wave of her arm.

MIRANDA

(accent) *Adios, señoritas!*

She exits, the door closing with a slam.

EVELYN

So... now what?

JOSEPHINE

We wait.

She moves to the rack and places her sword in it, then holds out her hand for Evelyn's weapon.

EVELYN

For what? Neither one of us will be in the movie now.

JOSEPHINE

No.

Josephine places Evelyn's weapon away.

EVELYN

Then what-

JOSEPHINE

I don't know about you, but I could use something to eat. How does lunch sound to you, once we're finished here?

EVELYN

(confused) Okay. That sounds great. I'm really hungry.

JOSEPHINE

A couple of glasses of champagne on an empty stomach will do that to you. We can talk of my investment in you and what you will do now.

EVELYN

What I do now? I have to go back to Germany.

JOSEPHINE

Oh? For what, my dear?

EVELYN

Well... I... I belong there. I think.

JOSEPHINE

I will argue that you belong here, if not in Hollywood, America. What is it that you will think you will do once you return to Germany?

EVELYN

What I've been doing, I suppose. Train. Fence. Compete.

JOSEPHINE

And you can do that as easily here, but for different reason. Better reasons. I've seen what the Nazis have done to Europe and soon the United States will enter the war. You belong on this side of that fight, here with us.

EVELYN

But what will I do? The German government provides everything for me back there because of winning in the Olympics. Here I don't have anything. If I had been cast in this movie I could live here, of course, but that's not going to happen, is it? And even with your generosity, I won't see anything from my share of the movie for a while, will I? I don't know how it could work, Josephine.

JOSEPHINE

(smiling) I have an idea about that.

Brenz enters, pushing Eva in her wheelchair. He rushes both of them to the two women.

BRENTZ

Well?

EVA

Tell us what happened?!

JOSEPHINE

(smiling mischievously) My dear Brentz. My dear Eva...

BRENTZ/EVA

YES?

JOSEPHINE

You have your financing! And we WILL make this movie!

Brenz and Eva shout with delight. Josephine goes to each of them for a congratulatory embrace while Evelyn stares at all three dumbfounded.

EVELYN

It's real? And you... you were in on this?

JOSEPHINE

Oh yes. It was my idea, actually.

BRENZ

Our dear Josephine called us almost as soon as she had landed in the U.S. with a request to audition. When I told her that the film would almost certainly be canceled because of money concerns, she immediately came up with the idea of bringing together the most successful women in Hollywood who might be enticed into supporting the production, if skillfully... coaxed, in her words.

JOSEPHINE

I really didn't have to do much. These women were quite ready for this moment.

EVA

And how many of these actresses will help fund our film?

JOSEPHINE

All of them.

The jaws of Brenz and Eva drop quite low. They begin laughing again, even more excitedly (if possible).

BRENZ

Josephine, you have exceeded all of our hopes and expectations! How can we ever begin to thank you?

JOSEPHINE

Ah yes, as to that. Aside from my own stake in this movie, I will provide an additional one for young Evelyn here. I am certain that she must not return to Germany-

EVA

Certainly not! There are far too many Nazis there.

BRENZ

Correct as always, my geopolitically perceptive jewel.

EVA

She will stay here in America. We insist, don't we Solomon?

BRENZ

Absolutely, my surprisingly nurturing flower of femininity.

EVELYN

Thank you both, very much. But I was telling Josephine, I don't have anything here. My family is gone. I don't remember anyone from my old hometown in Indiana. I don't even have a job. What would I do?

EVA

(eyes widening) Yes. YES. That's it! Solomon, push me over there so that I may gesture grandly and look into the sky enraptured by my personal vision!

BRENZ

But we are inside and there is no sky to-

EVA

NOW!

BRENZ

Immediately, my suddenly terrifying mistress of stage and screen!

EVA

I see it as if it were real, as solid as this earth beneath us! A film of epic span and glory, sea battles and swordfights, blood and terror spread across the seas by not one, not two, but FIVE pirate queens! Think of it! Five hearty, lusty women with steel in one hand, a musket in the other, danger in their eyes and freedom in their hearts! They will struggle mightily against the oppression of European men who despise their rebellion and independence, imperialists who seek to enforce the restrictions of the ruling class upon these stout-hearted fighters and warriors!

JOSEPHINE

All of us? You mean to cast all of us in this film, including Evelyn?

EVA

YES! Can you not see the gloriousness of it, the sheer audacity of the vision I have been gripped with? It will terrify all those across the globe who seek to grind under their boot heel the spirit of independence – the same spirit that freed America from England! The same that made France a republic! The same spirit that fights the Nazis across Europe and soon across the world!

BRENZ

This... this will require significant rewrites to the script, my fiery beacon of hope and optimism.

EVA

Yes. Yes, it will, Solomon. You should probably get started.

BRENZ

Mein gott. Ich hasse schreibe.

EVA

In the meantime, you will stay with us, young lady.

EVELYN

Thank you. That's very kind of you. All of you. Thank you.

And you as well, Josephine.

EVA

I accept. We were both about to have lunch. Would you care to join us?

JOSEPHINE

I would be delighted!

EVA

As would-

BRENZ

REWRITES!

EVA

Yes, of course my relentless and ruthless yet disarmingly enchanting taskmaster. I will have Stan call you a car. Come.

BRENZ

(gestures at Lucy) What about her?

EVELYN

Josephine looks at Lucy, who has curled into a fetal ball on the couch.

She'll be fine.

JOSEPHINE

The four exit quietly, closing the door softly behind them.

Lucy snores alone for several long seconds.

She bolts upright, shouting...

I'LL FIGHT ALL OF YOU!

LUCY

She looks around, confused and a little scared.

Hello...?

LUCY (con't)

Blackout.

Epilogue

A spot rises on Evelyn, who stands uneasily.

BRENZ

There is no need to be nervous, *liebchen*. We do not have to do this if you do not wish it.

EVELYN

No. I would like to. But I'm not an actress.

BRENZ

Then what would you like to do instead of act?

EVELYN

Can I sing? Would that be all right?

BRENZ

Of course. What would you like to sing?

EVELYN

It was a favorite of my father's. Could I do that instead?

BRENZ

Yes. By all means. Stan...

Stan moves the clap board in front of Evelyn and snaps it shut. She begins singing. It is Sophie Tucker's "I Ain't Taking Orders from No-One." When she is finished, she grins.

EVELYN

How was that?

Blackout.

End play.