

Scene Five

Outcasts

Night-time. TESS is sitting reading a book. CELIA arrives, looking for her.

CELIA. What are you doing out here?

TESS. Daydreaming.

CELIA. It's the middle of the night. Listen, have you finished your Cuvier notes? Caro thinks we need to learn the fossil studies. Have you read them?

She takes the half-finished poem out of TESS' hand.

TESS. Give it back! It's impossible. Nothing rhymes with orchard.

CELIA. Pilchard.

TESS. What?

CELIA. Pilchard rhymes with orchard. Sort of. Use that.

TESS. You can't write a love poem about a pilchard.

CELIA. You could. 'A pilchard caught swimming off Dover...'

TESS. Alright! I'll do Cuvier later.

CELIA. The test's tomorrow.

TESS. I can't concentrate.

CELIA. Just think about something else. Cuvier. How was botany?

Beat.

Tess?

TESS. I'm thinking. About Cuvier.

CELIA. Tess, don't -

TESS. Just leave me be.

CELIA. You can't risk another failure.

TESS. I haven't failed anything.

CAROLYN goes.

MISS BLAKE. Is everything alright?

MRS WELSH. What's this? (Holds up the leaflet.)

MISS BLAKE. Ah.

MRS WELSH. Ah? Miss Blake, you know my stance on this.

MISS BLAKE. I don't see the harm in inviting the girls to listen.

MRS WELSH. If we get blown off-course, now -

MISS BLAKE. I don't believe this. We've already told them they can't speak, now they can't listen!

MRS WELSH. Their right to graduate hangs in the balance.

MISS BLAKE. What about their right to vote for who runs the country? For their future! Surely that's more important.

MRS WELSH. No, it is not.

Beat.

MISS BLAKE. You can't possible mean that. (Beat.) It's just a meeting. Mrs Welsh, please be reasonable!

Beat.

MRS WELSH. Miss Blake. You're going to have to make a decision.

MISS BLAKE. Please. Please don't ask me to choose. My whole life is here.

A stand-off.

CELIA. Carolyn told me.

TESS. What?

CELIA. About botany.

TESS. She's got no business –

CELIA. I said I'd help you.

TESS. I don't want your help.

CELIA. You need it.

TESS. I don't. If I do, I'll ask for it.

CELIA. You're too proud, Tess.

TESS. You're just jealous.

CELIA. What?

TESS. Of what I've got with Ralph.

CELIA. I worked hard to get here, I'm not about to throw it away.

TESS. I'm not throwing it away.

CELIA. He'll ruin your education –

TESS. He is an education.

CELIA. He's not.

TESS. I'm just not interested in Cuvier! And today, three hours on the science of war? I don't see the point.

CELIA. It means we won't make the same mistakes again.

TESS. Who?

CELIA. Us. People.

TESS. No, Celia. Men. It means men won't make the same mistakes again. The only impact we women ever had on war was when Brudenell's wife knitted him a new jersey and the troops said, 'That looks warm, what do you call that, Lord Cardigan?' We don't get to make decisions –

CELIA. We do.

TESS. Like what?

CELIA. Like family. Don't you want to teach your children to be good, responsible people?

TESS. Oh, that's exactly what we need, another lot of good, responsible, quiet women while our sons stand up in Parliament.

CELIA. And you're going to change that how? By giving up!

TESS. We can't compete, we can't even vote.

CELIA. And we'll never get the vote if you sit under an apple tree all night.

TESS. At least in an orchard I know where I am.

*Beat.*

CELIA. What's happened to you? You used to want this so much. He's put doubts in your head, hasn't he?

TESS. What?

CELIA. He doesn't approve.

TESS. You don't know him. He's not like the others.

CELIA. They hate us being here.

TESS. He believes in this! Maybe more than I do. It's me, Celia. I just don't know what I want any more.

CELIA. Listen. If he believes in this, then he likes you because of your mind. We're thinkers, scientists!

TESS. Outcasts.

CELIA. What?

TESS. We're bluestockings, Celia. Untouchables. If I mess this up with Ralph then who else is going to have me? We're not good Christian women any more. We're not meek and mild. We're dissenters. No one will have us. What if I want to be a mother? It's all very well for you.

CELIA. What's that supposed to mean?

TESS. You've never had a - you only want... You know what I mean.

CELIA. I only want what?

*Pause. CELIA is hurt.*

You really have no idea, do you.

TESS. Come on.

CELIA. You should watch yourself, Tess. I've never - I haven't - I mean, I've never had a Ralph. I want that too. Almost more than anything. But being here... it's not until it's taken away that you understand. They sent me home. Nervous exhaustion. I worked through till dawn every night then went straight to prayers. I had to fight to come back. What would I have done if they'd said no? Don't throw this away. Not when it's only just started.

### Scene Six

#### Raising the Banner

CAROLYN and TESS are in MRS LINDLEY's haberdashery buying fabric for a banner. The doorbell rings and LLOYD and EDWARDS enter.

EDWARDS. Hello, ladies.

MRS LINDLEY. Gentlemen. I was about to close.

*While they talk, MRS LINDLEY cuts the fabric to size and measures out the ribbon for the WOMEN.*

LLOYD. Oh, we can wait.

EDWARDS. Hello, ladies. Is that for a dress for Newmarket?

CAROLYN. Not unless I'm to troop around the paddock in forty yards of calico.

LLOYD. We haven't seen you around much.

EDWARDS. I was hoping we'd see you more often.

TESS. Well. We mostly take lectures at college now.

CAROLYN. Maudsley had us banned.

LLOYD. We know. We heard.

CAROLYN. Will it take paint, the calico?

MRS LINDLEY. What sort of paint?

CAROLYN. Just something - for lettering. Emulsion.

MRS LINDLEY. Yes, it'll take paint.

LLOYD. Do you think a banner's going to help? Are you really intending to fight this?

MRS LINDLEY packages the fabric. HOLMES arrives.

HOLMES. Ladies. Fellas, what are you doing here?

LLOYD. Just seeing what's on display.

MRS LINDLEY. Mr Holmes. Your package arrived from Paris this morning.

HOLMES. Good, thank you. And do you approve?

MRS LINDLEY. Silk brocade with double stitching? Absolutely.

*She opens a box containing a delicate pair of gloves.*

HOLMES. Let's have a look. Well, ladies, what do you think?

CAROLYN. Maison Worth? They're all the rage on the Champs-Elysées.

HOLMES. They're this season's. Thank you, ma'am. Fellas, see you back at college.

LLOYD (*suddenly*). You can't seriously believe you'll win?

CAROLYN. We might do.

HOLMES. But, ladies, you can't vote.

CAROLYN. Nor can you.

LLOYD. We can't, no, but all of the graduates can. I'm afraid there's little point in your motion.

CELIA. What happened? What happened?

TESS. I've got to go in, I've got to pack.

CELIA. Pack? Tess!

TESS. I can't stay here, I can't be here. I have to go.

CELIA. Tess! Listen, I know I'm the last person you want to speak to, but don't do this.

TESS. I can't do it, I can't be here. I can't be here!

CELIA. Not now. Not when we're so close. Please!

TESS *heads to go inside, CELIA blocks her way and they almost struggle.*

Stop it. Stop it! What are you doing, you've worked so hard! Talk to me.

TESS *stops.*

TESS. There was a girl at home. Lived at the parsonage. Annabel. She'd spend a whole afternoon sewing a ribbon onto a bonnet, and she'd be content. Why wasn't that enough for me, Celia? You know, I'd climb the roof of Will's classroom just to listen. Once I lost my footing and they found me hanging by my underskirt, but I wouldn't let go of my notebook. I should have fallen and cracked my skull right then and there, I'd have been better off.

But no. I was stubborn. Forfeit any hope of reputation, of a good match, wreck Mother's nerves with worry, all for this, to be here. And then I meet a boy. A poet. A poet! In a library. And I fall for him like a rock. And suddenly I can't think because my mind is full of him. I read Keats and hear his voice. I look at Vermeer and there he is, in oils. And I love him with every thought and bone and sinew. And then he buys a ring. But it's not for me. And now. What am I now? He's carved out my heart, Celia. What do I do?

CELIA. You carry on.

TESS. I can't. I've got nothing left.

CELIA. That girl on the roof. What would she say to that? If she knew when you were grown, that you'd be standing here, now, ready to go home? You owe her more than that. We might graduate, Tess. Can't you see? We'd be the first. The first! Thank God we're not like Annabel. We're not passengers. People like us don't get buffeted by the wind; we change its course. We are the luckiest, luckiest women alive. And you're ready to pack up and go home? You do what you have to, but if you leave now you might as well have cracked your skull because that little girl would never forgive you. And nor would I. Come on, Tess?

### Scene Ten

#### The Viva

COLLINS and RADLEIGH *enter with MRS WELSH to give the WOMEN their vivas. CAROLYN, CELIA and TESS stand. TESS is still weak from the stresses of the night before.*

COLLINS. Morning.

CAROLYN. Good morning.

COLLINS. I trust you are ready?

RADLEIGH. I hope you're not about to waste our time.

CELIA. No, sir.

COLLINS. Willbond, Addison and Moffat, yes?

MRS WELSH. That is correct.

COLLINS. Miss Willbond, I've read your papers. All eight hundred pages of them. You suggest here that a student in Zurich is legitimately challenging Galileo.

RADLEIGH. The man's seventeen.

COLLINS. You've read his thesis?