

PERUSAL SCRIPT



by **Jenifer Nii**



Newport, Maine

© 2013 by Jenifer Nii
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

CAUTION:
Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that

SUFFRAGE

being fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States Of America, the British Empire, including the Dominion Of Canada, and the other countries of the Copyright Union, is subject to royalty. Anyone presenting the play without the express written permission of the Copyright owners and/or their authorized agent will be liable to the penalties provided by law.

Script and music copies must be purchased from the Publisher and Royalty must be paid to the publisher for each and every performance before an audience whether or not admission is charged. A performance license must first be obtained from the publisher prior to any performance(s).

Federal Copyright Law -- 17 U.S.C. section 504 -- allows for a recovery of a minimum of \$250 and a maximum of \$50,000 for each infringement, plus attorney fees.

The professional and amateur rights to the performance of this play along with the lecturing, recitation, and public reading rights, are administered exclusively through LEICESTER BAY THEATRICALS without whose permission in writing no performance of it may be made. For all other rights inquiries may be made to the authors through LEICESTER BAY THEATRICALS Any adaptation or arrangement of this work without the author's written permission is an infringement of copyright. **Unauthorized duplication by any means is also an infringement.**

FOR PUBLIC PERFORMANCE RIGHTS YOU MUST APPLY TO THE PUBLISHER OR YOU ARE BREAKING THE LAW!

The possession of this SCRIPT whether bought or rented, does not constitute permission to perform the work herein contained, in public or in private, for gain or charity. Proper prior application must be made and license granted before a performance may be given. Copies of this SCRIPT and all other rehearsal materials may be bought and/or rented from:

LEICESTER BAY THEATRICALS
P.O. Box 536 Newport, ME 04953-0536
www.leicesterbaytheatricals.com
Printed in the United States Of America

THIS NOTICE MUST APPEAR IN ALL PROGRAMS, ON ALL POSTERS AND PUBLICITY MATERIALS AND INTERNET ADVERTISING/WEBPAGES FOR THE PLAY:

“Substitute ‘Name of the Play’ is presented through special arrangement with Leicester Bay Theatricals. All authorized materials are also supplied by LBT, www.leicesterbaytheatricals.com”

NOTE: Your contract with Leicester Bay Theatricals limits you to making copies of this document for persons directly connected with your production. Do not distribute outside of your cast and crew. Following your performance run you must destroy all photocopies, preferably by shredding them. If we sent you the document in printed format, you must return that document to us. If we provided you with an electronic PDF file, simply trash that on your computer so that it cannot be recovered. The electronic document may only be on ONE computer -- it may NOT be duplicated. This is also a part of your contract with Leicester Bay Theatricals.

Title art is used here courtesy of Plan-B Theatre Company, Salt Lake City.

Characters (2f)

RUTH: in her early 20s, the fourth of five wives. Becomes passionate about winning the vote for women, and that she and other women have the right to be seen and treated as equals. There is mounting frustration with the notion that a woman must submit to her husband and all men. This is the only life she has ever known, and she is shocked and attracted to the thought of another.

FRANCES: a generation older than RUTH, the second of five wives. She is more “practical,” worried about running out of money, running a household, keeping the family together until her husband returns. She believes that she already has a voice and that she is fulfilling an even greater role and endowed by an even greater authority—at present and into eternity—by holding firm to her faith and her stewardship over her children.

Setting:

Utah, 1887 up until Utah attains statehood in 1895-1896

Set:

A table, some chairs. Serving as a kitchen, assembly pulpit, sheriffs' office, FRANCES's work. The intention is that the play be performed on a nearly bare stage with all locations minimally suggested.

SUFFRAGE received its world premiere at Plan-B Theatre Company April 4-14, 2013. The production featured the following cast and creative team:

Frances -- *April Fossen*

Ruth -- *Sarah Young*

directed by *Cheryl Ann Cluff*

stage managed by *Jennifer Freed*

designed by: *Cheryl Ann Cluff* (sound), *Phillip R. Lowe* (Costumes), *Jesse Portillo* (lighting), *Jerry Rapier* (props), *Randy Rasmussen* (set)

SUFFRAGE a play by Jenifer Nii 2W Simple setting, 1800's costumes. About 75 mins. (***For Professional, Educational and Amateur theaters.***) **SUFFRAGE** is an exploration of late 1800s Utah, the second territory in the Union, by 1870, to grant women the right to vote. Wyoming had previously granted that right in 1869. That right was stripped 12 years later when suffrage became a whip for Washington politicians who wanted to end polygamy. The two issues became entwined in a strange, more-than-a-little-malicious way. During the two decades portrayed in the play, Utah women found themselves being called upon to stand strong on two equally threatening fronts. And they did. The story of Ruth and Frances, conveys a bit of what women—particularly polygamous women—faced. The attack was on their way of life, which in so many ways must have felt like an attack on their God and family. The overhanging threat was that women might again be deprived of what in so many ways is a recognition of their humanity—their right to speak, to affect, to change the world in which they are citizens. Do we believe that we, each of us, can change our world for the good—and are we willing to do what we say we believe? This is the foundational thread of this most incredible play. Nominated for the 2013 American Theatre Critics Association/Steinberg Award for Best New American Play Produced Outside New York. **ORDER # 3214**

SUFFRAGE

SCENE ONE: *Dialogue should begin before LIGHTS up, so when the characters enter they are mid-conversation.*

RUTH: Sister, I simply mean to say...

FRANCES: You *mean* to say? There is something you have left unsaid?

RUTH: Kindness doth not begin with thee.

FRANCES: Says the pugilist.

RUTH: Charlie Sims is despicable. The way he treats our son.

FRANCES: He is eight years old, Ruth. They are all despicable when they are eight years old. Even our little James, on occasion.

RUTH: Eight is old enough to have the Holy Spirit bestowed upon him. It is old enough to know right from wrong and to be held accountable. And if it is good enough for the Lord, it is good enough for that despicable Charlie Sims and his despicable, irresponsible father!

FRANCES: *(Beat.)* His father is horrible.

RUTH: Which is *why* I bloodied his nose and not that of the demon child. Charlie Sims did not pluck those slurs out of the air. He was taught them.

FRANCES: And by the same token, our child learned today that it is acceptable—

RUTH: What was I to do? // What was I to do?

FRANCES: // That it is acceptable to answer insults with violence. And from a woman, no less!

RUTH: He called us godless perverts, Frances! Mindless, godless perverts. What was I to do?

FRANCES: Well, I believe it safe to say that pummeling a grown man on the steps of the church might not have been the most prudent thing.

RUTH: He waited for us to come out! Lying in wait like some kind of...It was a premeditated act of awfulness, and it had to be stopped.

FRANCES: I simply suggest that there might have been another, perhaps less violent way.

RUTH: Benjamin is gone. Who is left to defend us? Will it be you?

FRANCES: They were but words, sister. Ugly words from an ignorant child.

RUTH: They put our husband in prison, sister. With words identical.

FRANCES: *(Rises quickly, change of pace.)* Which is why we must use softness to turn away wrath. We have a family to think of. You and I, we must stand strong for our children and our sister wives. This is no time for rashness.

RUTH: Yes, sister.

FRANCES: I am serious.

RUTH: Of course.

(Beat. Set RUTH in motion, engage in an activity. Speaking quieter.)

Though rashness can be quite gratifying.

FRANCES: Stop it. // Hush!

RUTH: *(Continuing in fun)* // Satisfying—to unleash the force of a thousand restrained rebuttals in one taut swing against a man so utterly // repellent.

PERUSAL SCRIPT -- SUFFRAGE -- Jenifer Nii

FRANCES: (*Overlap.*) // Right this instant.

RUTH: (*Beat. Still soft, teasing.*) You will note that Bishop Jameson made no move to intervene until *after* I exacted justice.

FRANCES: In heaven's name... 'justice.' No one need wonder from whence our daughter inherited her imprudence.

RUTH: Do *not* speak to me of her.

FRANCES: We must. She cannot continue to *do* these things—

RUTH: Agreed.

FRANCES: Then what do you propose to do?

RUTH: What have we not tried? What is there left to do?

FRANCES: Exorcism.

RUTH: Were we so insolent in our youth?

FRANCES: You can better speak to matters of youth. But no, I daresay not. I am just relieved Brother Canfield did not take harsher measures against her. Stealing from a place of business! And this after all that nonsense with whatever that dreadful child's name is. What has become of our children of a sudden?

RUTH: I do not know.

FRANCES: Three of the thirteen have already begun to stray! We must do better.

RUTH: Where are we lacking? What more can we do?

FRANCES: It might not be a matter of more...

RUTH: Meaning?

FRANCES: There are times, sister...when what you say to them, the whispered encouragements when there ought to be discipline.

RUTH: This is my doing?

FRANCES: No. But *any* encouragement—

RUTH: If I have encouraged them, it is only to speak the truth. I did not mean for them to plunge headlong into lunacy.

FRANCES: The distance is short between words and deeds, sister. These are dangerous times. The shadow of the adversary grows and with it the temptation to follow unclean paths. Any move toward rashness is slippery and treacherous.

RUTH: I know as much.

FRANCES: Do you?

RUTH: You doubt?

FRANCES: Do not be angry. It is only that I worry for you. At times you seem quite...sad. I do not wish this for you, as a sister and a friend. *If* we are still friends.

RUTH: Of course. Of course. Forgive me. I fear that as much as I want to believe that I am a strong, independent woman, Benjamin's absence has...unsteadied me.

FRANCES: It has all of us.

RUTH: Why is this happening, Frances? Why have they taken him from us? We are not evil. We are not even...disruptive! What threat pose we to them in asking simply to be allowed the freedom to follow our God? To love, and marry, and raise up our family? What threat is it to anyone who or how many a man chooses to marry?

PERUSAL SCRIPT -- SUFFRAGE -- Jenifer Nii

FRANCES: I do not know.

RUTH: Why will they not leave us alone?

(LIGHTS fade)

SCENE TWO: *BOTH enter. RUTH stays in one place. FRANCES busies herself with household stuff.*

RUTH: Absolutely enthralling!

FRANCES: Very interesting indeed.

RUTH: I have never heard anything like it. Did you not find it stirring?

FRANCES: Well—

RUTH: Such a powerful argument in defense of womankind!

FRANCES: You did not find her a bit...caustic?

RUTH: She is from New York City. City people are 'passionate.'

FRANCES: I do not question her passion.

RUTH: Then what?

FRANCES: It is late, and I do not wish to quarrel.

RUTH: I merely pose a question regarding your opinion of an experience we shared.

FRANCES: About which we were...differently moved.

RUTH: What are your objections?

FRANCES: I have no "objections," per se.

RUTH: Then *what?*

FRANCES: We are different women, Ruth.

RUTH: Yes we are. Sometimes I wonder if we two can be called sisters at all.

FRANCES: Sisters, not twins.

(RUTH 'Pshaws' the remark.)

Would you rather I bind my beliefs to yours— let alone Elizabeth Cady Stanton, whom I do not know— without question or deliberation?

RUTH: Of course not.

(Getting caught up in the drama again, lots of pacing.)

But some things are true, sister, and the truth *must* ring through to the very depths! Miss Stanton's call was like...it was like a *revelation!* A voice in the wilderness.

FRANCES: Oh, Ruth...

RUTH: *(Frustrated and annoyed.)* What?!

FRANCES: I do not begrudge you your interests. Perhaps I even envy your zeal.

RUTH: Then please unpinch your face.

FRANCES: *(Realizing that her face is, indeed, pinched.)* We must exercise our gifts.

(Beat.)

Let us agree to peaceably disagree.

RUTH: Fine.

PERUSAL SCRIPT -- SUFFRAGE -- Jenifer Nii

FRANCES: Then we are settled.

RUTH: Settled. If not satisfied.

FRANCES: I am glad.

(Busying herself.)

So. Who is to help James with his letters?

RUTH: Oh, no. No, no, no. It is not my turn already.

FRANCES: I am afraid it is.

RUTH: It is May's turn!

(Beat. FRANCES looks at her knowingly.)

May should have a turn!

FRANCES: *(Softer, in case anyone is listening.)* Once again, sister: There is a reason May does not have a turn.

RUTH: They could learn together! Teach one another!

(Another knowing look from FRANCES. RUTH sighs, resigned.)

I will attend to James.

(Beat, pouting.)

Miss Stanton would have much to say about May.

FRANCES: Back again to Miss Stanton.

RUTH: *(Exuberant, awestruck.)* Oh, Frances.

FRANCES: Miss Stanton seemed to have much to say //

RUTH: // She. Is. Fascinating.

FRANCES: // about a great many things.

(Sighs.)

What were you two twittering about afterward? Such excitement on your faces.

RUTH: You will be pleased to know that she firmly disapproves of those who persecute us.

FRANCES: She defends us?

RUTH: She does. She concedes that the roots of polygamy are in Holy Scripture.

(The following sentence should start slower and build up speed.)

And while she believes that all of Christianity and religion in general are delusional and that marriage is a manifestation of patriarchal oppression it is absolutely unjust for society to use its laws to empower one delusion over another just because they for whatever reason feel threatened.

(Small beat to breathe.)

And that monogamy actually traces back to Pagan Rome.

FRANCES: *(Beat.)* My goodness.

RUTH: Indeed.

FRANCES: Pagan Rome...

RUTH: We are at the head of a rising movement, Frances! There is much to be done.

FRANCES: You might start with laundry. We are all filthy and spotted.

RUTH: How can you speak of...Sister, why do you not see?

FRANCES: See *what?*

RUTH: All that might be attained if only we women would stand and claim what is our right?

PERUSAL SCRIPT -- SUFFRAGE -- Jenifer Nii

FRANCES: What right is that?

RUTH: To speak, and have our voices heard!

FRANCES: We have that already.

RUTH: Not as equals! Not as individuals and citizens.

FRANCES: No?

RUTH: (*Mocking.*) We are delicate flowers, to be shielded from the unsavoriness of lawmaking.

FRANCES: You have witnessed the delicacies of “lawmaking.” It reeks with a stench.

RUTH: That may be so, but—

FRANCES: Good men going this way and that against principle and promise—all to gain favor and power. If only in their own estimation.

RUTH: Which we women will combat!

FRANCES: Huzzah!

RUTH: Do not make light of this, Frances. Is it not true that while we may own property, pay taxes and assist in supporting the government, we have no right to say who shall disburse those taxes or how that government shall be conducted? We have no right to say who shall decide on a question of peace or war which may involve the lives of our sons, brothers, fathers and husbands. If we have voice, it is a whisper only. We deserve to be heard. We deserve the vote.

FRANCES: And what are you willing to risk to gain it? Miss Stanton said it herself that the suffrage issue is but part of the “Mormon Question.” Polygamy is intertwined with it, *our* lives are intertwined with it, and there are those who would use the vote to attack us.

RUTH: So we will fight them on both fronts.

FRANCES: But why *now*? Women had the vote for 17 years before it was taken from us. What did it change? Were we more free then? Did women rise up and claim what you now say we lack? There were no woman lawmakers, no councilmen, no governors. Nor were women enslaved or their way of life impinged. We were free then as we are now to use the gifts God has given us— as helpmeets to our husbands and counselors and teachers to our children.

RUTH: It is different!

FRANCES: They use the same arguments. They are motivated by the same nefarious designs.

RUTH: We have gained strength since 1870. We have the National Woman Suffrage Association, and the Woman Suffrage Association of Utah. We have Brother Brigham’s wife. Apostle Richards’ wife. Sarah Kimball. Even the brethren of the Church supports us! They said as much in the newspaper!

(Finds the newspaper, waves it in the air, finds the page, reads.)

George Q. Cannon and Brigham Young: “Under the laws of Congress a woman born in the United States is a citizen just as much as a man.... If woman is entitled to the name and position of a citizen, should she not also be invested with the rights and privileges of a citizen, so far as she is capable of properly exercising them?” These are God’s chosen who have spoken for all to hear. Surely this proves that our cause is just. We will use these attacks against us to prove that women are not lambs being blindly led about by our husbands.

FRANCES: Is that how you feel about your marriage?

RUTH: (*Smallest beat.*) Of course not.

FRANCES: A relief to hear.

RUTH: Are you satisfied with yours?

FRANCES: You would ask this?

RUTH: I wonder whether you have questioned.

FRANCES: *(Beat.)* You are young.

RUTH: *(Protesting.)* I am //

FRANCES: // If you were *not* so young, you would know that anyone who has reached my age and years in marriage has asked more questions than you have yet thought of. Do not presume otherwise. What you know of life...What *you* know of life...

RUTH: Respectfully, sister, what if it can be better than what we have now? Should we not claim it if we can? It is true that I am...subordinate...but might I not still ask? How shall we know whether progress is possible if we do not try?

(Beat.)

You say women did nothing when they had the vote. I say there are those among us *today* who were not of age then, and we are determined.

FRANCES: Very well: Would I like the vote restored? Yes. But what I would like even more is for our lives to be ours. For our children to be unburdened from condemnation they are too young to bear. More than casting a ballot, I want to know that the ones I love have enough food and are kept safe from harm and cruelty and taught what they need to know to enter the Kingdom of Heaven as noble and exalted sons and daughters of God. I want to know that they are happy. This, to me, is more important than any vote—be it by a man or a woman.

RUTH: I too wish for our children a righteous, honorable life. And that while they are here are on earth, they might realize a portion of that by exercising the freedom we will fight to obtain.

FRANCES: And if you lose?

(LIGHTS fade.)

SCENE THREE: *FRANCES visits Benjamin in jail. She holds his hand in his.*

FRANCES: Samuel sends his love. Of course. He would never say as much. He is becoming quite a man. You would be so proud. He has taken to following the sisters and me around, offering to lift every heavy thing. And then when he thinks himself alone flexes his muscles in all reflective surfaces.

(Laughs.)

This morning I found our windows stripped of curtains, which I soon found on the backs of our brave son and May, who were engaged in fierce, cloaked battle for your freedom. Proper soldiers always have cloaks and broom handle bayonets. And May, of course, was with him step for step. It was a sight to see...He tries to be strong. He believes it now his responsibility. Angeline is... heavy laden. She does all that she is able, though it grows more and more difficult seemingly by the day. She misses you dearly. As do May and Ruth. And I.

Yes, I have spoken with him. Malignant man. We have, at least for the moment, reached an agreement in principle. I blame you, you know. That we are beholden to such a ghastly creature for our house and home.

PERUSAL SCRIPT -- SUFFRAGE -- Jenifer Nii

(Beat.)

We manage. It is not easy.

Are you well, my love? Well, they will have a piece of my mind. That is hardly enough to sustain a grown man. I will bring a roast.

(Scoffs.)

“Rules.” I will bring enough for the guards. Perhaps they will share

(Softer, concerned.)

Are you well treated, Benjamin? Do they see to your needs—aside from the drivel they feed you? You should not be made to suffer at the hands of beasts.

(Reacts to Benjamin's rebuke.)

No! I will not! Such a man as you should not be treated so. Such a man should not be imprisoned, or put on trial. For what? What right have they to pass judgment on you? On us?

(Feeling a bit foolish at her outburst.)

Were it up to Ruth, we would take up arms against them. You can imagine, coming from Ruth.

(Beat.)

I will reason with her. Of course.

(Gaining speed and energy again.)

But to hear them speak, Benjamin! To hear what they would do...They snarl about as if we were worse than the basest...

(Another reprimand.)

Of course.

(Benjamin asks about the children.)

They are...Of the children, I do not—

(FRANCES is interrupted by the guard, who proclaims their visit over. To guard.)

We were to have 30 minutes. I was *told*... And it has certainly not been 30 minutes. I am sorry, but while I may be just a “lil’ country woman,” I am able to tell the time. Oh, for pity’s sake this is a prison! What life-and-death obligations must you attend to in the next 15 minutes? Lunch? Sitting? What matters of timely, grave importance would anyone with any sense leave to *you*? Who is your supervisor? I will have words with him.

(To Benjamin.)

I am sorry, Benjamin, but this is simply too much. Again and again we are interrupted, eavesdropped upon, our visits cut short. I will have my time with my husband!

(To Guard.)

Do you hear me? I will have my time!

(The guard is unmoved. To Benjamin.)

We *will* speak about the children more next week.

(Louder, so the Guard will hear.)

If we are permitted more than a passing glance and half a syllable. Pray for them, that the Lord will guide them and hold them close. They want for their father.

(SHE is gently pulled from her seat. Pulls away.)

I can stand on my own.

PERUSAL SCRIPT -- SUFFRAGE -- Jenifer Nii

(To Benjamin.)

Benjamin. Husband. Pray for us all.

(LIGHTS fade.)

SCENE FOUR: *RUTH stands, addresses the audience as if at a suffrage gathering. FRANCES at the sheriff's office. The action takes place simultaneously.*

FRANCES: *(Pulls up a chair, sits.)* Thank you. A glass of water would be very nice, yes. Wait. No, I am sorry. No need.

(Gathering herself.)

I am sorry, Sherriff. I am afraid I am quite upset. Appalled, really. We are all just appalled.

RUTH: My dear sisters in Zion, and sisters and brethren

(Point to a man.)

in the cause of suffrage, it is an honor to stand before you today. I am humbled and not a little afraid, for I am not as so many of the speakers who preceded me, or who will follow. I am not educated as they are, or sophisticated. I am not an orator or philosopher. The only quality I can claim that is of any merit here today is that I believe. And I pray that my belief in this most important cause may overcome my shortcomings.

FRANCES: I have no idea what has gotten into Julia. To say that we did not raise our daughter to commit these kinds of acts is of no use now, but...

RUTH: Thank you for this honor. I will serve you, and the Woman Suffrage Association, with all that I have.

FRANCES: Of course. We will comply with whatever punishment befits this kind of behavior. We will make restitution. And she will restore the property to its original state. It is inexcusable. I simply cannot understand.

RUTH: Let there be no mistake about what this movement for suffrage really means. This is a call to be—and be honored for—who we truly are. Men *and* women. None of us wants to turn the world upside down, or to convert women into men, or supplant the will of God. Rather, we desire women to be free to add the totality of their virtue—to contribute what is uniquely ours—not only to our families, but to our communities, cities, states, and nation.

FRANCES: I do not expect leniency for her. First thievery, and now this.

RUTH: Where much is given, much is expected. Let women have the same opportunities for education, observation, and experience and see if she is not equally endowed with man and prepared to bear her part on all general questions—socially, spiritually, *and* politically.

FRANCES: She is sullen of late, and angry. She questions everything, and will not hear answers. The only time she seems at all herself is when she is permitted to visit with her father. Though those occasions are rare, and brief, and terrifying in their own way. Children should not see their parents imprisoned. It has been hard for her. For all of us, but she seems especially shaken.

RUTH: Let it be known that we do not wish to take the place of men. Enfranchisement will not allow women to become any but who and what we are.

FRANCES: She does not understand. *I* do not understand, Brother Canfield. Sheriff. I do not understand why

PERUSAL SCRIPT -- SUFFRAGE -- Jenifer Nii

we are pursued and punished.

RUTH: There are those who bind our call for woman suffrage with that of polygamy. They believe, and they have said as much, that they will use this issue to criminalize the way of life for many families in this community. Including mine. My own husband is imprisoned; I know not what risks I take by speaking publicly. We shall see.

FRANCES: This is not directly your concern, I know, but why are so many people—some who are thousands of miles away—so concerned with how we create our family? You know us, Sherriff. You know my husband. He has done nothing to injure them, nor would he ever wish to.

RUTH: Others proclaim restoring the vote to women will increase the power of the Church—for surely we submit to our husbands in all things.

FRANCES: If our lives are a sin, let them condemn us where they worship.

RUTH: But I know of no more independent woman than one who lives the law of polygamy—for she must hold herself up among many, and care for the needs of more. That said, if you doubt us, let us prove it. Given the vote, we will study. We will learn, and we will act. For ourselves, and for our families.

FRANCES: Let them bring us before *their* God, and let Him pass judgment.

RUTH: To our sisters who believe in their heart, who fear in their heart that suffrage is an affront to the will of The Almighty, I say only that the sole goal of our movement is equality under the law. True partnership with men in shaping the rules that govern us, and to ensure that they are fair.

FRANCES: We are good people. We live and work and love like any other. Our hearts are the same, and our desires. For ourselves, our children, and our fellow man. We are people of faith, which faith distinguishes us from others. But are we so alien as to warrant this?

RUTH: We offer up to God what is His, acknowledging His supremacy in all things. And it is for this reason—because God Himself has created us as partners to our husbands and stewards of the earth—that we engage in this work.

FRANCES: Having said that, I will ensure that my daughter pays her penance.

RUTH: So I am honored that you have such faith in me, and I dedicate myself to this great cause, and to you. We cannot fail.

(RUTH and FRANCES come together, having left their respective appointments. FRANCES is walking quickly, agitated.)

Well? What did he say?

(FRANCES turns and glares.)

Frances, I have said that I am sorry. I have said it again and again.

FRANCES: Yes you have.

RUTH: Will you not forgive me?

FRANCES: I am sure I will.

(RUTH screams in frustration. Overlap.)

You were not there! You left me there to *grovel* on behalf of our child, and then escort her home from the office of the Sherriff. Alone.

RUTH: I know, and I *am* sorry.

FRANCES: She is not of your blood, it is true. But we have taken a vow before God to serve as stewards and protectors of our children. And they are *all* our children, Ruth // blood or not.

PERUSAL SCRIPT -- SUFFRAGE -- Jenifer Nii

RUTH: // I know!

FRANCES: Then where were you?

RUTH: I have been given a tremendous responsibility. I could not *not* be present to accept it.

FRANCES: Apparently not.

RUTH: (*Drawing closer to FRANCES. She is earnest.*) What did Sherriff Wilson say?

FRANCES: (*Softening.*) There will be no formal punishment, provided she repairs and repaints the damaged fence. Which she will do. Straightaway. Without help. If she can pull it down, she can put it up.

RUTH: Agreed.

FRANCES: We should meet to decide the rest of her repentance.

RUTH: She will offer a personal apology, at minimum.

FRANCES: Oh, there will be more. There is much more in store for that young lady, rest assured. Much much much much more.

RUTH: I see that.

FRANCES: Will you see that she follows through with the repairs?

RUTH: Of course.

(*Beat.*)

Sorry, when?

FRANCES: (*Knowing where this is going.*) Oh, Ruth!

RUTH: It is only that I am to preside at a //

FRANCES: // Just...Go. Go!

(*Shoo-ing her away.*)

// Go!

RUTH: // Go where?

FRANCES: Anywhere! Accept an award. Change the world. But right this instant, I cannot look at you.

RUTH: I am sorry!

(*FRANCES fumes.*)

Frances!

FRANCES: (*Beat. Collects herself.*) There are priorities in life, Ruth.

RUTH: I know.

FRANCES: Then please do not make me ask which are yours.

RUTH: Now just a minute—

FRANCES: If you had seen the look in her eyes when I went to collect her...I have never seen such emptiness in one so young. The way she sat. The heaviness of her shoulders. She is too young to feel such pain, Ruth! And she is *far* too young to believe she must face it alone.

RUTH: She is not alone.

FRANCES: Clearly, she believes she is.

RUTH: I will speak with her.

FRANCES: She listens to you. Looks to you as a guide and an example.

RUTH: I know.

(*Small beat.*)

I will see that she mends the fence.

FRANCES: (*Softening, sincere.*) Thank you.
(*LIGHTS fade.*)

SCENE FIVE: *RUTH rushes in. Frances is at table, bent over a ledger.*

RUTH: We are under siege.

FRANCES: Siege?

RUTH: Yes!

FRANCES: Sister...

RUTH: Have we not endured enough? The harassment. The assassinations. But then...Then! The Cullom Act. The Edmunds Act. And now...do you know what they mean to do now?

FRANCES: Clearly not.

RUTH: It was not enough for Edmunds to target polygamists. No. The distinguished Senator of Vermont and Congressman of Virginia propose to disenfranchise *all* Utah women. Deprive all of any right to vote.

FRANCES: What?

RUTH: Yes. And that is not all. Would you like to know what else our Congress is considering for us?

FRANCES: I...

RUTH: Our Congress now proposes...I have it here!

(*Whips out the newspaper report, waves it in the air.*)

I would not have believed it myself, but I have it here. The vile, putrid...

FRANCES: Ruth—

RUTH: The Edmunds-Tucker Act! Introduced to wide acclaim, this bill seeks to: (She reads.)

- Disincorporate the Church
- Require an anti-polygamy oath for all prospective voters, jurors and public officials
- Prohibit the practice of polygamy and punish it with a fine and imprisonment of up to five years
- Abolish the common law spousal privilege for polygamists, requiring wives to testify against their husbands

This is only part of what they would do to us, sister. It goes on.

FRANCES: This is...not right.

RUTH: It is *not*.

FRANCES: I did not believe they would go so far.

RUTH: They will go as far as we let them, Frances.

FRANCES: They would eradicate our religion entirely, by *law*?

RUTH: They would purge us as a scourge.

FRANCES: They, whose own ancestors fled—

RUTH: Yes.

FRANCES: Crossed land and sea to escape the very same—

RUTH: The *very* same.

FRANCES: But...what of the Constitution?

PERUSAL SCRIPT -- SUFFRAGE -- Jenifer Nii

RUTH: Irrelevant.

FRANCES: Our founding principles?

RUTH: Trivial compared to the threat we pose to the soul of humankind. And because we do not have the vote, we are powerless to stop them.

(Beat.)

Do you believe me now?

FRANCES: Will it succeed?

RUTH: It might. The movement has support from powerful people, who wield their power like a scythe.

FRANCES: God will not allow it.

(Taking it in.)

No. God will not allow it. He will not allow the Kingdom on earth to fall at the hands of...Congress.

RUTH: It seems to me He has allowed a great many things.

FRANCES: Do not say that. Do *not* say that! How is He to bless us if we do not have faith?

RUTH: Suffrage is a *right* that should be claimed by every citizen of this country. In this we should not have to rely on a “blessing”. From God or anyone else.

FRANCES: You walk dangerously, Ruth.

RUTH: We are in danger.

FRANCES: My concern is for you.

RUTH: This *is* about me! And you!

(FRANCES begins to protest. RUTH pushes ahead.)

I will gather the women. I can stop this.

FRANCES: You.

RUTH: Yes! We must come together now. There is no more time.

FRANCES: You. You can stop this.

RUTH: Yes!

FRANCES: *(Her face reflecting profound sorrow.)* That evil is before us, I cannot deny. I do not doubt your report. But I believe that the Lord will provide passage to safety, as He did Moses and the Israelites. Whether that is through suffrage or some other way, I do not know. But our God is the God of Heaven and Earth, and for the faithful and humble he parted the sea, sent manna from heaven, and restored his church in these latter days. Faith is not faith if every step is made clear and smooth.

RUTH: Faith without works is dead.

FRANCES: True. And perhaps there is more that I must do to manifest His will. If this is the case, then I am willing. But sister, I look at you and—I fear.

(RUTH begins to defend herself.)

No, please. Let me speak. Like the army of Helaman—

RUTH: All men.

FRANCES: —we are called to fight the adversary. I am ever your sister in this. But it would do well to remember: the Stripling Warriors attributed their victories to their mothers. But you...That people look at you, and listen to you, and come to stand behind you ready to follow. The speeches *are* rousing. And you have become quite a skilled performer. But I fear you have lost your way, Sister. You envision yourself a warrior, and forget the source of their strength.

PERUSAL SCRIPT -- SUFFRAGE -- Jenifer Nii

RUTH: (*She seethes.*) Without “warriors” like me, sister? You are banished.
(LIGHTS fade.)

SCENE SIX: *RUTH and FRANCES are seated, exhausted, numb, talked out. A long silence.*

FRANCES: Bishop Jameson will speak to the brethren to see what aid is available. Sister Richards, also, from the Relief Society.

RUTH: Yes. Very kind.

FRANCES: Lucy will collect the younger children. Perhaps Angeline can see to the others if she is well enough. Family meeting following evening meal.

RUTH: A few months awaiting trial is injustice enough. But *two years* he is to be imprisoned! Longer for polygamy than for robbery!

FRANCES: Yes.

RUTH: How will we live so long without him?

FRANCES: We will do what we must.

RUTH: How?

FRANCES: We will find work, those of us who can. The rest will shoulder the other duties.

RUTH: I don't...

FRANCES: We will discuss specifics tonight.

RUTH: What are you //

FRANCES: And while the brethren may offer some assistance, we cannot place too great a burden on them.

Since the passage of Edmunds Tucker, federal marshals have taken away even more of our men, and there is no end in sight. We are not the only family affected, and there will be great need. To be safe, we must rely only on ourselves. Angeline is first among us, and of course will speak first. But...

RUTH: Frances...

FRANCES: We must all come to an agreement.

RUTH: Frances, look at me.

FRANCES: We cannot rely on...her health.

RUTH: Please look at me.

FRANCES: You must help me. We must stand together, you must help me.

RUTH: Frances!

FRANCES: What?!

RUTH: (Beat.) What will we do?

FRANCES: We will go on. We have no choice.

RUTH: (*Beat. Nods, gathers herself.*) Angeline...

FRANCES: Yes.

RUTH: In her state, she cannot lead. Were it solely a matter of age...that would be enough. She cannot withstand.

FRANCES: Would that the trail had been kind to her. I was a child, cared for and coddled as much as was

PERUSAL SCRIPT -- SUFFRAGE -- Jenifer Nii

possible, and yet it was almost too much. Angeline suffered so. I truly thought she would not survive Winter Quarters. And then Wyoming...

RUTH: She has endured much.

FRANCES: Which is foremost the reason I cannot be seen to be fomenting mutiny against her.

RUTH: I shall help in any way that I can, but I am fourth. To speak out of turn would be—

FRANCES: May—and even Lucy—are loving mothers and wives, but they are not so strong as you. They will need us both to carry on.

RUTH: We will care for them.

FRANCES: We both of us must find work. The mortgage holders have been forgiving so far of our obligation. They believed as we did that the trial would end in our favor. But now we must pay.

RUTH: I can take in mending, pressing, other needlework.

(A resigned chuckle.)

Sadly these are my only skills.

FRANCES: I will see about bookkeeping. With so many men imprisoned, there may be opportunities.

RUTH: What of the smithy? Mr. Samuelson has retained Benjamin's position only while we awaited trial.

FRANCES: I will speak with him.

RUTH: Good. He does not like me.

FRANCES: *(Weary smile.)* He fears you. As is wise.

RUTH: He fears all members of the Church. And all women. It is not only me.

FRANCES: You are the only one who has accosted him in the public square. He reserves a special terror for you.

RUTH: *(Pouts.)* Then you will speak with him.

(Small beat.)

What will you say?

FRANCES: I do not know. What can one say in such a circumstance?

RUTH: We are alone.

FRANCES: Would that we were, sister. Were it we two alone, I would have confidence in our fate. But there are 16 who depend upon us, and we with limited means to care for them.

RUTH: *(Gathering herself.)* I will do my part.

FRANCES: You are needed. Here.

RUTH: I understand.

(FRANCES looks at her, doubtfully because of RUTH's passion for the suffrage movement.)

I do.

(LIGHTS fade)

14 MORE PAGES OF RIVETING THEATRE