

SCENE ONE

August, 1944.

Lights come up on Astra.

ASTRA

The ladies were never of one mind about war. Marie, she put it this way...

Marie enters behind Astra.

MARIE

Humans aren't made for this kind of conflict. War destroys. Nothing more. It leaves its scars on people, families, the very landscapes. It improves nothing and no one.

Marie exits.

ASTRA

Can't blame her, though. She grew up in a part of France gouged out by bomb craters and trenches, in a town where every man, woman, and child lost loved ones to the War to End All Wars. Obviously she'd have some dim views of the war that followed it. But not all of her compatriots agreed with her assessment.

Sofia and Suzanne enter.

SOFIA

Of course we're meant for war. Why else would we keep doing it?

SUZANNE

It's not about being *meant* for it, it's just *easy*.

SOFIA

I don't know how easy it is, *mi amore*, in the last one they spent a lot of time and blood trying to move forward a few feet.

SUZANNE

It's not easy for soldiers, *mon coeur*, nothing is. It's a shortcut for nations. That tribe has better land, that city has more gold, that country loves the wrong god. They could try to talk things out, work together, find a common good, but that's too much effort. Easier just to tell a bunch of peasants that there's glory in war and send them marching off to invade.

SOFIA

Doesn't *seem* easier. We just think it is, because we're wired to fight our neighbours rather than love them.

SUZANNE

Of course we are.

SOFIA

It's why no matter how little war gets us, we can't stop doing it.

Suzanne and Sofia exit.

ASTRA

Easy, hard, futile, human nature, whatever war is to us as a people, to Jessica it was something simpler... a duty.

Jessica enters.

ASTRA (CONT'D)

Jessica Keller. Born and raised in the Canadian prairies. Middle child of five, and the only daughter. She never managed an interest in homemaking or finding a farmer's son to marry, preferring the more... active games of her brothers.

Jessica wrestles with Benjamin and David, her younger brothers.

JESSICA

Ow!

BENJAMIN

Don't be a wimp, big sister.

JESSICA

Oh I'll show you wimp, Benji.

Jessica flips and pins Benjamin. David tries to grab her but she flips him too.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

Nice try, Davey.

ASTRA

She always managed to give her brothers a run for their money before the inevitable scolding from her mother.

Jessica jumps off Benjamin and David, as if being scolded. Benjamin and David exit.

ASTRA (CONT'D)

She dreamed of a more adventurous life than fields of grain could provide, but fate has a way of making us regret our wishes. A more adventurous life found the Keller family when the Commonwealth took a stand against the Axis powers. Jessica watched as all of her brothers answered the call of King and Country, while she stayed behind to wait and worry over their fates. This never sat right with Jessica. Keeping the home fires burning while her brothers battled Hitler's goons wasn't enough. It made her feel powerless. Helpless. Her parents said that her brothers were good, strong men, and had the Lord on their side and all would be well.

JESSICA

Sometimes parents lie. Every authority lies eventually, it's how they get you to do things. Or do nothing.

ASTRA

Doing nothing got harder the first time they got a telegram from the government. Matthew Keller, killed in action in the siege of Malta. Then the oldest, Fred Keller... his ship was sunk somewhere in the Atlantic. Two brothers down, leaving only the two youngest somewhere in Europe, fighting to stay alive with no older Kellers to look out for them.

JESSICA

Well that's simply unacceptable.

ASTRA

From there nothing would stop her. Not begging from her mother, or angry refusals from her father, or even the countless officials assuring her women had no place in combat. She found her way into the armed forces... only to spend her days moving tiny planes around a map of Europe. And more often than she or anyone would like, removing them.

An office set appears in the background while Jessica and Astra talk. Reese enters and takes a seat behind the desk.

JESSICA

This is even *worse* than doing nothing. This is... this is standing around and waiting for *everyone's* brothers to die. Good men die every day and I'm here... making tea and coffee and moving toys on a map.

ASTRA

She looked for other opportunities. Codebreaking, surveillance, someplace where she could make a real difference, but each time the only services they required from her seemed to be typing and the preparation of hot beverages. She needed someplace she could ensure that she wouldn't lose one more brother. That was her goal: fight the ticking clock of mounting casualties and get her brothers home safe. All she had to do was... was... actually she was a little fuzzy on that.

Astra steps aside. Jessica takes a seat in front of Reese's desk. She appears nervous.

REESE

Your file is... interesting, Sergeant Keller.

JESSICA

In what way?

REESE

Combat scores are high, according to everyone you trained or served under. Seasoned drill sergeants say they wished the men they were sending to battle fought as well as you.

JESSICA

Captain Reese, I don't know what Corporal Jenkins told you--

REESE

He told me the expected nonsense about you attacking him for no reason. Even after I mentioned some of my staff had been at the pub in question, and reported that he got overly forward, you responded, and five minutes later he woke up missing a tooth. Impressive, really.

JESSICA

Sir... I'm confused. I thought... isn't this a disciplinary meeting?

REESE

Oh no. In my eyes "discipline" is a sergeant teaching a corporal about respect. No, this is... something else. Perhaps better, perhaps not.

JESSICA

What, precisely? Sir?

REESE

The cryptography lads were sad to lose you, I'm told. They say you're very quick to encode and decode.

JESSICA

It's just puzzles, sir. I like puzzles. But it wasn't... the position wasn't what I was hoping for.

REESE

And what were you hoping to do?

JESSICA

End the war. Sir.

REESE

...The whole thing.

JESSICA

For preference. ...Sir.

REESE

You're one woman, how exactly are you going to end this war?

JESSICA

I'm still working on that part, Captain. Don't suppose Hitler's going on any long hikes without guards?

REESE

No such luck. Especially if the rumours are true about his own people trying to kill him off last month. We've gotten ourselves a foothold in Europe now. We're just going to have to hope it holds so we can fight our way to Berlin.

JESSICA

Mm.

REESE

That troubles you?

JESSICA

More fighting, more casualties.

REESE

That's war, Miss Keller. Soldiers die.

JESSICA

I know that, sir.

REESE

But there are soldiers you'd rather not die?

JESSICA

Wouldn't we all rather--

REESE

Perhaps Corporal David Keller. He's in Italy, if I'm not mistaken. Or Private Benjamin Keller. Landed on Juno Beach.

JESSICA

Is he--

REESE

Took a round to the leg but doing fine.

JESSICA

Really?

REESE

Alive, well, should be redeployed soon.

JESSICA

To where?

REESE

Need to know.

JESSICA

Of course.

REESE

The longer we're fighting Jerry, the longer all our lads, including your brothers, are at risk. But the way we cut the fighting short is by ensuring a smooth march to Berlin. And there might be a way you can help with that. You probably haven't heard of the Special Operations Executive--

JESSICA

The Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare, you mean? Churchill's Secret Army? The Baker Street Irregulars?

REESE

Heh. You are a clever one.

JESSICA

I hear things. Sir.

REESE

Good at fighting, good at surveillance, good with codes. Quite the CV. Though your search for more meaningful contributions did lead you down some roads best left untraveled.

JESSICA

Sir, I--

REESE

Before I go on... are you sure you wish a more active post? Your current position is far safer.

JESSICA

My father used to say that wishing for a better world doesn't do anything, but if you fight for a better world, you might just get one. I want to fight, Captain.

REESE

How's your French?

JESSICA

C'est bien. Pourquoi?

REESE

Your German?

JESSICA

I hear it better than I speak it but I get by.

REESE

There's a resistance cell in France. Sabotage, spying, assassination, anything they can do to make Jerry's stay in their country uncomfortable. Not sure exactly who's in charge.

Marie enters, standing away from the desk.

ASTRA

That would be Marie. I mentioned her.

A German soldier crosses in front of the stage.
Marie gestures at him from behind his back.

REESE

Whoever they are, they've got some sort of impressive network going. People able to get close to the occupiers.

Suzanne enters in front of the soldier. She gives him a wink, and moves in close.

ASTRA

Suzanne does have a way with men in uniform. Or out.

REESE

Not to mention infiltration. The way they get into Nazi bases, they must have a team of stealth experts.

Sofia enters behind the soldier.

ASTRA

Mostly just Sofia.

Sofia removes a document from the soldier's pocket while Suzanne holds his attention. While Reese talks, Sofia takes the document back to Marie, who photographs it with a miniature camera. Sofia then returns it to the soldier's coat, and she and Suzanne exit.

The soldier begins to follow, but checks his pockets, finding the document there. He looks confused.

REESE

Somehow they've been operating right under the Germans' noses since the occupation began without getting caught. We only know they exist because they've done us some favours. We've no idea who's leading them any more than Jerry does. Not a clue how the chap's kept himself secret.

The soldier begins to follow Suzanne, but Marie moves in. After a brief exchange of blows, she stabs him in the chest, lowering him to the ground. Marie snaps her fingers, and Suzanne and Sofia return. They give her a scolding look, Marie shrugs, then all three carry the soldier's body offstage.

REESE (CONT'D)

Now we're hoping they can help us with something.

JESSICA

And you need me for this?

REESE

A request from our contact. Apparently they make use of the fairer sex from time to time.

ASTRA

"Time to time." You could say that, yes.

JESSICA

I'm sorry, sir, I don't see how following you to a meeting with some malcontents in France is going to--

REESE

Miss Keller, the Normandy landings would have gone much poorer had the Jerrys been able to call for reinforcements. They weren't, because of saboteurs. And now if we can hold Normandy, we're in a position to retake the continent. But this may require further ungentlemanly warfare. Are you game to assist, or would you prefer to continue making coffee for the lads in the air force?

JESSICA

Might I make one request, sir? My brothers...

REESE

You want them sent home?

JESSICA

Not so drastic. They'd never accept, anyway. But maybe, they could be moved to less risky positions?

REESE

I'll see what I can do. Pack the essentials, and only the essentials. We leave at oh two hundred.

JESSICA

Oh two hundred?

REESE

We could wait until closer to noon, if you'd rather give the Germans an easier time seeing us coming.

JESSICA

No sir.

REESE

Now... I don't suppose that you've ever parachuted before?

JESSICA

No sir, but it's only falling out of an airplane. How hard can it be?

SCENE TWO

During the next speech, the office becomes a bar in France. Reese and Jessica exit. Major Kaufman takes a seat at a table. Suzanne and Sofia are behind the bar, while Marie is at a nearby table with her back to the audience.