

Founding Daughters
A Zoom Play for Teens
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Founding Daughters

CAST: 9-25; 7 female; 18 male* (the male roles are pretty small; doubling encouraged)**

(does not include the 5 other characters that are just voices; they can be taken from the cast or if you wish, cast extra actors for those roles; Zoom windows sometimes load slowly and voices can be immediate which is why I sometimes used them.)

*While colorblind casting can always be used, please note that KATE needs to be a woman of color and STEPHEN should be white.

****With doubling: 5f, 4m;** (Doubling below full cast)

FULL CAST

HISTORIAN (m) white; ageless; voice

FEMALE VOICE 1 (f)

FEMALE VOICE 2 (f)

HEROINES

SYBIL LUDINGTON (f) 16; Known for her fearless ride in April 1777 to call up the militia

DICEY LANGSTON (f) 16;

DEBORAH SAMSON (f) 16; tall; served in the Continental Army disguised as a man

KATE (aka "Mammy Kate") (f); age unknown; 20's-30's in play; African-American, tall

SYBIL'S STORY

MESSENGER (m) ageless

HENRY LUDINGTON (m) 35-40, Sybil's father; a colonel in the militia

ABIGAIL LUDINGTON (f) 35-40; Sybil's mother; pragmatic mother of 12

OLD WILLEM (m) cranky voice

PHILLIP (m) militia-man; kindly

HARRY (male voice) Just a simple-minded man who lives in the woods

ZEKE (male voice) Harry's mate in the woods; equally simple-minded

SKINNER 1 (m) (any age) looking for trouble

SKINNER 2 (m) again, looking for trouble

KATE'S STORY

STEPHEN HEARD (m) 30's; southern plantation owner on the side of the Americans

BRITISH SOLDIER (m) ageless; guards Stephen

DICEY'S STORY

BILL CUNNINGHAM (m) 20's; head of the "Bloody Scouts," murderous; loyalist

MICHAEL (m) late teens-20's; British soldier

LOUIS (m) late teens-20's; British soldier

JAMES LANGSTON (m) (late teens); Dickey's brother; soldier in Continental Army

SOLOMON LANGSTON (m) (older man); Dickey's father; committed to the revolution

EARL (m) late teens, 20's; another murderous Bloody Scout

THOMAS (m) late teens, 20's; murderous Bloody Scout

DEBORAH'S STORY

JIM (m)
JACK (m)
PRUDENCE (f)
JONAH (male voice)
CAPTAIN (male voice)
PRIVATE BANKS (male) late teens
DOCTOR NEELY (male) 30's-40's
MAISEY (female) teens; Doctor Neely's daughter

DOUBLING: 9 (5 female; 4 male) Feel free to rearrange

1. SYBIL (f)
2. DICEY (f)
3. DEBORAH (f)
4. KATE (f)
5. ABIGAIL/PRUDENCE/MAISEY (f)

6. HENRY/SKINNER 1/BILL CUNNINGHAM/JIM/LOUIS/DR. NEELY (m)
7. SKINNER 2/STEPHEN HEARD/EARL/JACK/ MICHAEL (m)
8. PHILLIP/BRITISH SOLDIER/SOLOMON LANGSTON/(m)
9. JAMES LANGSTON/THOMAS/PRIVATE BANKS/MESSENGER (m)

VOICES: (You may use a mixture of male and female): Historian, Female Voice 1, Female Voice 2, Child's Voice 1, Child's Voice 2., Child's Voice 3, Harry, Zeke, Jonah, Captain

PLACE:

Various locales during the Revolutionary War: New York State (Sybil), Georgia (Kate), South Carolina (Dicey), Massachusetts (Deborah)

TIME:

1770's - 1783

SYNOPSIS: An episodic sneak peak into some of the heroic deeds of young women (teens and early twenties) that would be long forgotten if not for oral history.

Founding Daughters

A play for Zoom

Photo of the Revolutionary war period appears.
We hear music from the period – perhaps some
fife and drums.

The photo is out and we hear the HISTORIAN.

HISTORIAN

Listen, my children, and you shall hear of the midnight ride/

FEMALE VOICE

CUT!

ANOTHER FEMALE VOICE

Get the hook!

(Four windows appear and we see SYBIL, DICEY,
DEBORAH and KATE.)

KATE

That poem is over-exposed.

DEBORAH

Inaccurate.

DICEY

And hugely romanticized.

SYBIL

He rode fifteen miles. No biggie.

KATE

She road 40 miles.

SYBIL

I did.

DEBORAH

In the pouring rain.

SYBIL

True.

DICEY

Alone.

SYBIL

Well, I had the horse.

DEBORAH

That's right. You had Star.

SYBIL

His name was not "Star!" Really, I had more imagination than that. Someone made that name up.

KATE

Some say all of our stories are made up.

DEBORAH

Except mine.

KATE

That's because you sued the U.S. government.

DEBORAH

Petitioned. Please. I petitioned.

DICEY

Just goes to show, if you're a woman and you want to get written down in history –

DICEY, SYBIL, KATE, DEBORAH

Sue the U.S. government.

SYBIL

So, how are we remembered?

DEBORAH

Family.

DICEY

I told my children...

KATE

And they told their children...

SYBIL

And the stories made it to today. And they're far more accurate than a poem written fifty years after the fact.

DEBORAH

Who shall go first?

KATE

Let's go in order of our heroic deeds!

DEBORAH, DICEY, KATE AND SYBIL

APRIL 1777.

(DEBORAH, DICEY, and KATE LEAVE.)

SYBIL

A messenger arrived at our home in New York State. Father was in charge of the militia.

(MESSENGER appears. Tired and out of breath. You could have the MESSENGER soaking wet and show that by having MESSENGER squeeze a hat where water pours out of it. Hey! It's Zoom! The water can spill into an unseen pot!)

MESSENGER

Urgent message for Colonel Ludington! Extra urgent! Exceedingly urgent!

(SYBIL comes to the door.)

SYBIL

May I help you?

MESSENGER

You don't look like Colonel Ludington. *Urgent message for Colonel Ludington! Extra urgent!*

(ABIGAIL and HENRY LUDINGTON appear.)

ABIGAIL

Sybil, who is here so late at night?

SYBIL

Someone for Papa.

MESSENGER

Exceptionally urgent message for Colonel Ludington!

HENRY

It's an exceptionally urgent message for me, my dear. I don't want to worry your delicate sensibilities. See to the children.

ABIGAIL

My “delicate sensibilities” gave birth to twelve children. And have kept them alive these past sixteen years. Trust me, I can handle a message.

MESSENGER

An extraordinarily urgent message.

HENRY

Continue.

MESSENGER

Governor Tyron..... yes, Governor Tyron.

HENRY

Despicable man. What about him?

MESSENGER

Attacking Danbury! Fires! Booms! Guns! Fires! Booms! Guns!

HENRY

Our munitions are stored in Danbury.

MESSENGER

Yes! Must ... gather militia! Must gather...

(MESSENGER passes out.)

ABIGAIL

Oh dear. The poor man is out like a light. Men can be such delicate creatures. Children, drag him to the kitchen and administer smelling salts.

(Maybe noises of children dragging MESSENGER to kitchen.)

HENRY

I must gather my militia. They are scattered everywhere for the spring planting. I also should be here to meet them. It's so hard being needed in two places at once.

SYBIL

I'll fetch them. I know my way around these parts.

ABIGAIL

But you're needed here to help get the children to bed.

(CHILDREN'S VOICES.)

VOICE 1

Sybil, read me a story....

VOICE 2

Sybil, braid my hair...

VOICE 3

Sybil, sing me a lullaby...

VOICES

SYBIL!

SYBIL

I'm out of here. If I leave now, I'll be back before dawn.

ABIGAIL

Are you trying to get out of minding the children?

SYBIL

Really, Mother. If I was your son, we'd have the horse suited up and I'd be ready to ride. I believe in this cause. Now I have a chance to do something more meaningful than mending uniforms/

HENRY

/I'll make a map.

SYBIL

I'll get the horse!

ABIGAIL

I'll get a stick!

SYBIL

A stick?

ABIGAIL

Anything can happen in the woods. It's always wise to carry a stick. A big stick.

HENRY

Start in Josiah's farmstead. It's best to make sure Old Willem doesn't see you. He's a loyalist and is known to spy for the British. He'd report you in a heartbeat.

ABIGAIL

I'll get two sticks.

SYBIL

I'll be fine, Mother.

(Noises of getting ready. ABIGAIL and HENRY leave. SYBIL is seen with her horse. The horse can be a stick horse, a photo of a horse, whatever works for you. Some "neighs" or "whinnies" are heard. The narrators can have a zoom window or you can simply hear them. Your choice.)

KATE (NARRATING)

Sybil left Kent and headed south to Lake Carmel.

DEBORAH (NARRATING)

It was tricky. She couldn't stay on the main roads because of the danger of running into the British or loyalists.

KATE

Don't forget the "Skinners."

DEBORAH

Yes, she had to avoid those Skinners – they were just outlaws with no loyalty to anyone. They just liked making trouble.

SYBIL

The woods were muddied and slippery. Plus they were good hiding places for people you don't want to meet.

(We see SYBIL alone on her horse. All is quiet except for the rain. She strokes her horse – which can be a photo or a stick horse or what you will. Sounds of a twig falling – or is it footsteps are heard. SYBIL stops in her tracks. A sound of a branch breaking. Her horse "neighs.")

SYBIL (cont'd - whispering)

Shh. Don't spook. It's probably nothing.

(More twig sounds. Rains. And suddenly, a screeching owl flies overhead. A neigh. SYBIL strokes her horse.)

SYBIL

Just an owl. You're fine. *We're fine.* We just have to get past Old Willem's home and then we're on the road.

(Thunder and lightening. SYBIL and her horse are now in a full-fledged gallop.)

VOICE OF OLD WILLEM

Who's there? *Who's out there?*

(Sound effects of rain, thunder, woods or music. Your choice.)

SYBIL

I went to the home of a militia man in Lake Carmel. It took forever for someone to answer the door.

"Please answer! Please! Please! Please!"

(A Zoom window opens up and we see PHILLIP.)

PHILLIP

What in tarnation/

SYBIL

Please Mr. Sheridan. It's Sybil Ludington.

PHILLIP

And so it is. A bit of a drowned rat you are.

SYBIL

Please, sir. I have no time. The British are in Danbury. They are confiscating all of our supplies. My father begs for you to come at once.

PHILLIP

And I am ready. Do you not see that I sleep in my clothes ready to answer the call?

SYBIL

If you could gather the men in town and meet on my father's farm, I'd be ever so grateful. I still have a long way to go.

PHILLIP

Of course, of course. Can I get you something? Some food for the journey?

SYBIL

There's no time! I must hurry.

(SYBIL exits.)

PHILLIP

A glass of water?

SYBIL

There's not time. Hurry!

PHILLIP

Some dry clothes?

SYBIL

Please, sir!

PHILLIP

All right then. Must hurry. I will hurry.

(PHILLIP exits.)

KATE

Sybil continued south all the way down to Mahopac.

DEBORAH

In each town, she found the home of a militia man. The plan was to awaken one man in each village and he will find the others. Of course, not everyone answers their doors at midnight.

KATE

In the outskirts of town, there was trouble.

(SYBIL soothes her horse and remains as still as a statue. We hear some rustling in the woods.)

HARRY (VOICE)

Do you hear that, Zeke?

ZEKE (VOICE)

What's that, Harry?

(SYBIL and her horse remain very, very still.)

HARRY (VOICE)

I don't know. A horse.

ZEKE (VOICE)

Probably a bear.

HARRY (VOICE)

I don't like bears, Zeke.

ZEKE (VOICE)

Nobody does, Harry.

(HORSE "neighs.")

HARRY (VOICE)

That's – not a bear...

ZEKE (VOICE)

A horse! Praise the lord! A free horse!

KATE

And like a shot, Sybil and her horse...

(Zoom in again on SYBIL and her horse.)

SYBIL

Who was not named Star....

KATE

Flew out of the woods.

HARRY (VOICE)

A missed opportunity.

ZEKE

That's the story of our lives, Harry.

DEBORAH

Sybil headed north to Kent Cliffs in the blinding rain.

SYBIL

Making sure I was at the correct home and not at the home of a loyalist.

DEBORAH

In the middle of the night, she reached Redding Corners.

KATE

She made it all the way to Stormville. Which was a very appropriate name for the night.

DEBORAH

As she headed back, she finally could relax. The rain stopped. Dawn would be breaking soon. Surely nobody would be around at that hour.

(SYBIL and her horse breathe a sigh of relief.)

(Beat. Then an attack by 1-2 men.)

KATE AND DEBORAH

Skinner!

(We hear noises and 2 men are trying to pull SYBIL off of her horse. Maybe one has a musket. Maybe sticks. Stage the fight as best you can with SYBIL in one window and 1 or 2 men in additional windows. Horses whinny. Rain slams down.)

SKINNER 1

Hey, hey little lady! Going somewhere?

SYBIL

Just home, sir.

SKINNER 2

You're out mighty late.

SYBIL

Just summoning a doctor, sir. Illnesses happen at all times of the day – and night.

(Yells from the men to “Get her” and from SYBIL in distress. The MEN (or MAN) tries to grab at SYBIL. She fights them off with her stick from her mother. SYBIL finally escapes.)

SYBIL

Thank-you, Mother for the stick!

DEBORAH

It was dawn when Sybil finally reached home.

KATE

Already, many men from the southern towns had gathered.

DEBORAH

Four hundred militia men gallantly fought to save Danbury but it was too late. The fires had started in town before Sybil began her ride.

SYBIL

As Danbury burned, the British found the militia's stash of rum.

DEBORAH

And drank it. All.

SYBIL

Which made it easier for our men to push the British back and stop their advancing. In a war between trained soldiers and patchwork farmers, we considered the pushback of drunk soldiers a win. (Beat.) And unlike Paul Revere, I was *not* captured by British soldiers.

(Maybe she curtsies.)

Just an observation.

KATE

My Master was captured by the British. A truth.

(DICEY appears in a window.)

SYBIL, DEBORAH, DICEY

1779.

KATE

I was called "Mama Kate."

DICEY

She was said to be seven feet tall.

KATE

A bit of an exaggeration.

DEBORAH

She claimed to be the daughter of an African King.

KATE

That's true.

SYBIL

And she saved the future governor of Georgia's life with a laundry basket.

KATE

Also true. It should be noted that the future governor, Stephen Heard, was very short and could fit quite comfortably in a laundry basket.

(DEBORAH and KATE leave.)

DICEY

In fact he was miniscule.

(STEPHEN HEARD appears. He is shackled.)

STEPHEN

Let's just say I was diminutive.

BRITISH SOLDIER

It won't take a lot of rope to hang you!

STEPHEN

More's the pity. I would have at least liked to deplete your rope supplies.

(KATE enters with laundry basket. STEPHEN clearly recognizes KATE but wisely stays silent.)

BRITISH SOLDIER

This is a restricted area.

KATE

Just collecting laundry, sir. Trying to do my job. Do you have anything that needs washing? I am also handy with a needle if you need repairs.

(To STEPHEN.)

You look like you could use some clean clothes.

BRITISH SOLDIER

Never mind him. He'll be dangling from a rope in three days time.

KATE

But one would like to meet his Maker in a clean set of clothes, don't you think?

BRITISH SOLDIER

I have no care as to how he meets his Maker.

STEPHEN

I ... would be appreciative if you ... could clean up the collars and cuffs. Is that possible?

KATE

Consider it done.

BRITISH SOLDIER

I do have some clothes that need mending. I'll retrieve them. Wait here.

(BRITISH SOLDIER exits.)

STEPHEN

What are you/

KATE

Shh! Can you pop into the basket?

STEPHEN

With my feet and arms tied?

KATE

Are you ever unshackled?

STEPHEN

For meals. They're not too worried about me going anywhere.

KATE

What time is breakfast?

STEPHEN

6 a.m. sharp.

KATE

I need to make sure this basket is the right size for you. Can you jump in? Or roll in?

STEPHEN

You're not thinking/

KATE

I am. I'm going to sneak you out with the laundry. Give me a few days. I will get the British to trust me.

STEPHEN

The British don't trust easily.

KATE

Nobody sees a woman as a threat. Especially one with my skin color.

(STEPHEN manages to get in the basket.)

STEPHEN

I only have a few days.

KATE

I realize that.

STEPHEN

Kate – you could just run away. Forget about me. Be free.

KATE

And leave Jack and my babies behind? No, Sir. You have shown me many kindnesses over the years. As the daughter of an African king, I am honor-bound to repay you.

STEPHEN

By stuffing me in a laundry basket?

KATE

That's my plan.

(STEPHEN rolls out.)

(BRITISH SOLDIER returns and puts things in basket.)

BRITISH SOLDIER

These could use a good washing. And see here? The waist is threadbare. Some new cloth would take care of that. Before you leave, check the tent next door. There are some good men there who would appreciate some clean clothes.

KATE

Yes, Sir. Will do, Sir.

(KATE exits.)

BRITISH SOLDIER

I do appreciate these women who follow us from camp to camp. They do provide a few reminders of a genteel life. I long for those sweeter days. (Beat.) You'll never see them.

STEPHEN

Who knows? Heaven is said to be very genteel.

(NARRATION can be done as voiceover or through Zoom windows.)

DICEY

Kate did the laundry for the British for two days.

SYBIL

On the second day, she added something sweet so the British would be in palm of her hands.

KATE

Honey cakes! And honey, *nobody* ever said “no” to my honey cakes.

(KATE is with the BRITISH SOLDIER in the tent with STEPHEN – 3 Zoom windows.)

BRITISH SOLDIER

Now these honey cakes are what makes life worth living.

KATE

So happy that you like them, Sir. Would you mind if I offered some to your prisoner?

BRITISH SOLDIER

I’m feeling generous. He may have one bite.

(STEPHEN is shackled but KATE does break off a piece of the cake and feed it to STEPHEN.)

STEPHEN

Ahh... sweet as sunshine. I seem to remember... something similar ... in my past.

KATE

I daresay, everyone has something similar in their past. I must be off. The laundry does not do itself.

BRITISH SOLDIER

If you feel inclined to bake another honey cake, We’ll be moving on soon. Who knows when I will see cake again.

KATE

Consider it done.

(KATE exits.)

BRITISH SOLDIER

A remarkable woman.

STEPHEN

Indeed.

(Again, narration can done as voiceovers or through Zoom windows.)

DICEY

Kate made herself very busy that day.

SYBIL

She baked and she laundered and baked again and laundered again.

DICEY

Time was running out and she had to rescue Stephen Heard the next morning. If caught, she had no doubt that she would be hanging side-by-side with him.

(In a Zoom window.)

KATE

That would *not* be a fitting end to the daughter of an African king. I got up before dawn to bake my last honey cake. I wanted its aroma clinging in the air when I marched into the camp. My husband had two horses ready just out of town. Everything was set. It was “do or die.” And yes, I worried about dying.

(ZOOM windows open to BRITISH SOLDIER and STEPHEN. They are back in the prison tent.)

KATE

Here are your shirts as promised.

BRITISH SOLDIER

And...

KATE

And new buttons for your dress coat.

BRITISH SOLDIER

And?

KATE

And I spiffed up the collar so it will stay up.

BRITISH SOLDIER

And ... a honey cake?

KATE

Oh, Sir. I did bake one for you.

BRITISH SOLDIER

That's what I wanted to hear!

KATE

But the Captain confiscated all of them before I could bring it to you. He said he would dole them out.

BRITISH SOLDIER

He stole my honey cake?

KATE

That's one way of looking at it, Sir.

BRITISH SOLDIER

Well, I never ... I should ... I think I will ... I probably shouldn't... but I am going to have words with my Captain.

KATE

Is that wise, Sir?

BRITISH SOLDIER

I think if I state my case that one of the honey cakes was baked especially for me, he would certainly hand it over.

KATE

If he is a man of honor.

BRITISH SOLDIER

He's a Captain in the British Army. Of course he is a man of honor!

KATE

Then I wouldn't waste any time, Sir. The cakes get gobbled up pretty quickly.

BRITISH SOLDIER

Yes. Indeed. There's no time to waste.

(BRITISH SOLDIER exists.)

STEPHEN

You're early.

KATE

I thought you'd be unshackled for breakfast.

STEPHEN

I don't think they plan on feeding me today. They do plan on hanging me though.

KATE

Don't worry.

Who's worried?
STEPHEN

It would be easier without the handcuffs.
KATE

I agree. Unlock them.
STEPHEN

A key would be required.
KATE

Look up.
STEPHEN

(KATE does so and sees keys.)

Keys!
KATE

They're pretty careless about them. But they probably figured I'd never be able to get up that high.
STEPHEN

But I can.
KATE

Hurry! If the Officer doesn't get his honey cake he'll be back in a flash and pretty mad.
STEPHEN

(And deftly, KATE reaches for the keys. They fall on the floor. She unlocks STEPHEN'S chains.)

Get in the basket.
KATE

I do feel a bit silly.
STEPHEN

Feeling silly is better than being dead.
KATE

Good point.
STEPHEN

BRITISH SOLDIER VOICE

What will you trade for some of my honey cake? (Beat.) Not good enough. Besides, if I share it with all of you, there will be none left for me.

KATE

Hurry!

(STEPHEN climbs into laundry basket. KATE lifts it over her head.)

BRITISH SOLDIER VOICE

All right. But let's split it inside your tent where no one else can see.

STEPHEN

Is it clear?

KATE

Barely. I'll just saunter out slowly.

(She does so.)

As if I do not have a care in the world.

(She does so).

Do not move!

(Beat as KATE walks through the camp.)

When they tell my story, they say I left carrying Stephen in the laundry basket over my head. And while that is a very nice touch, it isn't efficient. I simply picked the basket up in my arms as always. I did not hurry. It was early and the soldiers were hovering over their pitiful excuse for coffee. A few waved at me. I smiled. And when I reached the woods, I blew out of there like a bat from "you-know-where."

STEPHEN

Her husband was ready with the horses. Say what you may about my size, on a horse – I could fly like the wind.

KATE

Later Stephen became governor.

STEPHEN

But before that, I made sure that Kate and her husband Jack had a plot of land for themselves and their children.

KATE

He built us a house.

STEPHEN

And released her from slavery.

KATE

Later, people questioned me. Why would I save someone who had enslaved me? My father...

STEPHEN

The African King –

KATE

- believed in repaying kindness with kindness.

STEPHEN

You really are an African Princess.

KATE

And that's the truth.

(VOICES or Zoom windows.)

DEBORAH, SYBIL, DICEY KATE

1781.

DICEY

Emerson, South Carolina was lousy with Loyalists. Everywhere you turned there were Tories. But I am a Langston and I am proud to support the revolution. The British Army camped at our plantation. Everyone knew where our loyalties were. It was no secret that my brothers were members of the Continental Army. Even when my brothers were nearby, they never came home. The Bloody Scouts would have killed them. The Bloody Scouts led by Bill Cunningham were so extreme and violent even the British didn't want them on their side.

(Zoom window opens. BILL CUNNINGHAM is there.)

BILL CUNNINGHAM

The Langstons are nothing but vermin. I aim to destroy each and every one of them. Shoot them all and let them become food for worms!

DICEY

See what I mean?

BILL CUNNINGHAM

I'll be watching the lot of you. I won't rest until every Langston is dead. Your days are numbered.

(His Zoom window closes.)

DICEY

He was a problem. But I wasn't afraid of him. I wasn't afraid of much. When you grow up with four brothers throwing spiders at you, you learn to get mad. Not scared. Guns? Not scary. Sure I had a respect for what they could do. I saw enough of their carnage first hand. And I was as good a shot as any man. Death didn't scare me. My mother died young. People died all the time. It was part of life. (Beat.) Oh. Snakes. Yes, I was afraid of snakes.

(We hear SYBIL and KATE as we watch DICEY.)

SYBIL

In 1781, the British were camping on the Langston land. Dicey was out riding her horse when she spied them in the distance.

KATE

She tied up her horse and quietly approached.

DICEY

Shhh, Star.

SYBIL

Why does everyone think everyone's horse was named Star?

DICEY

You need to wait here. You are not as quiet as I am. *Don't neigh!*

(DICEY approaches. Two Zoom windows appear. We see two British soldiers: Michael and Louis.)

MICHAEL

Any more whiskey?

LOUIS

Running low.

MICHAEL

I'll bet the big house is well-stocked.

LOUIS

It's just an old man and his daughter. I wouldn't count on it.

MICHAEL

We could send Bill Cunningham to check it out. Give him a jigger of whiskey and he'll do anything.

LOUIS

I hear he's on a mission to go to Little Eden in the morning. They think a few of those wretched Americans have set up camp there.

MICHAEL

We should go. Nothing happening here.

LOUIS

Louis! We're under orders to head south tomorrow. A big fight is coming. We can't be roaming around parts unknown. Let Cunningham murder the Americans for us. Makes our life easier.

MICHAEL

A spot of whiskey would make our life a lot easier.

(We hear a rustle in the tree branches from DICEY. SHE freezes.)

LOUIS

Who goes there? Announce yourself.

(A bird emerges from the tree. DICEY breathes a sigh of relief and exits.)

MICHAEL

Spooked by a bird. A dull-witted, idiotic bird.

LOUIS

You're right, Michael. Whiskey would make our life easier.

SYBIL (Voice or Zoom window.)

And as silent as a stone, Dicey made her way home.

KATE (Voice or Zoom window.)

Her brother James was camped at Little Eden.

SYBIL

And she wasn't going to let him die.

DICEY (Zoom window.)

When I was a child, my brothers and I explored every inch of the woods. We studied the trees. We knew which tree we could shimmy up and which branches we could swing on. We'd make the long trek to the Tyger stream and when it was high, we would swim. They boys would strip down to their long johns and I learned to swim in my petticoats. Little Eden was just a mile past the stream. Ten miles from my house. I knew a few shortcuts. If I left right after Papa falls asleep, I could make it to Little Eden, warn James, and be home to make breakfast. No one would be the wiser.

KATE (Voice or Zoom window)

But she never made the trek after dark.

DICEY

I know these woods like the back of my hand.

SYBIL

I hope so.

(We see DICEY moving. She constantly looks around but she keeps going forward. *Note: Dicey can do this while sitting.

We hear sounds from the woods – owls, rodents, deer. DICEY keeps moving. Wind noises. DICEY keeps moving. Every once in a while she checks the sky to get her bearings. Maybe a compass. And then keeps moving. Soon we hear the water sounds from the stream. You can use photos of woods and a stream to enhance the visual if you wish.)

DICEY

It's higher than usual.

(She takes off her cloak and hat and puts it on the bank and then stares at the stream.)

DICEY

If I can swim in my petticoats, I can swim in my dress.

(DICEY enters the stream. Use water sounds and consider a water sheet or blanket that will get higher and higher. It reaches her neck. DICEY splashes to stay afloat. Water sounds increase.)

KATE

The water was higher than expected.

SYBIL

The stream ran fast swollen with rain.

KATE

And then a terrible thought entered Dicey's head.

DICEY

Please don't let there be snakes. Please don't let there be snakes. Please. Please.
Please!

(DICEY turns and twirls in the water. Maybe she goes under for a second and then manages to come up for air. And then suddenly, all is quiet again and DICEY is on the other side.)

KATE

She bobbed past rocks.

SYBIL

Past tree branches.

KATE

And finally was deposited on the other side of the creek.

(KATE and SYBIL exit.)

DICEY

Something's not right.

(SHE checks her compass and looks at the night sky.)

I'm too far south.

(And she turns north and continues her trek. Give it a moment – again with forest sounds or watching DICEY wearily make her way to Little Eden. A window may open and we may see a crackling fire. Maybe the sound of men – laughing or just talking. A Zoom window opens and we see JAMES LANGSTON.)

JAMES

Who's there? Announce yourself or I'll shoot.

DICEY

James!

JAMES

Dacey! What are you/

DICEY

You have to leave. Now! Break camp and get as far away from here as possible.

JAMES

You do realize it is the middle of the night.

DICEY

Yes, I do realize that. Haven't I travelled hours in the dark to get here?

JAMES

You look terrible.

DICEY

Gee, thank-you. You've seen better days yourself.

JAMES

Come by the fire. Dry yourself.

DICEY

That seems silly. I'll be back in the stream soon and soaked to the bone.

JAMES

You'll stay the night.

DICEY

Do you not listen when I speak? You have to break camp. *Now*. Bill Cunningham and his merry band of blood scouts will be here at daybreak to kill you.

JAMES

Are you sure?

DICEY

No. I always traipse around the woods at midnight and almost drown in streams on a whim. *Yes, I'm sure*. I heard two Redcoats speaking of it.

JAMES

You will come with us.

DICEY

No! I've got to be back in bed at daybreak. I can't worry father. And if anyone comes looking for me, they will plainly see that I spent the night at home.

(As a good southern girl.)

“Why no, Mr. Cunningham, Sir. I haven’t delivered a message to anyone! I’ve been home all night tending to my father. I am just putting breakfast away now. There’s some left. Would you like some bread and jam? Some say my bread is the best in the county.”

JAMES

Let me at least give you something warm to wear.

DICEY

I have a cloak waiting for me on the other side of the stream.

JAMES

You left something in the woods! What if someone finds it?

DICEY

That’s why I need to turnaround now and collect my belongings. *Now, tell the others – leave!*

JAMES

Dicey.... Thank-you.

DICEY

Of course.

JAMES

And Dicey –

DICEY

What?

JAMES

Cross the stream south of here. It will make the way back longer but it’s safer.

DICEY

I figured that out. No worries. I will do that.

JAMES

Dicey....

DICEY

What?

JAMES

Your bread is the best in the county. Love to Father. Until later.

(DICEY and JAMES touch the screen as if they are touching each other.)

JAMES (cont'd)

Skedaddle.

DICEY

You, too.

(JAMES exits. KATE and SYBIL either appear in a window or we hear their voices.)

KATE

Dacey started her long way home.

SYBIL

She found her cloak.

(DICEY puts on her cloak and bonnet.)

KATE

She was home before anyone could miss her.

DICEY

I love it when plans go as planned.

SYBIL

Mid-morning, as Kate was butting away breakfast, there was a knock at the door.

(SYBIL and KATE exit.)

(Three Zoom windows open. We see SOLOMON LANGSTON. BILL CUNNINGHAM and his cohorts EARL and GEORGE.

SOLOMON

Good morning, gentlemen. To what do I owe this honor?

EARL

You know, old man.

THOMAS

Been riding around these woods? Sticking your nose where it doesn't belong?

SOLOMON

I don't know what you are talking about.

BILL CUNNINGHAM

Maybe you do and maybe you don't. But you know what I think this morning is good for?

EARL

What, Bill?

BILL CUNNINGHAM

It's good for a killing.

THOMAS

Couldn't agree more.

(DICEY enters.)

DICEY

Good Morning. To what do we owe this dubious pleasure?

BILL CUNNINGHAM

Of course maybe the old guy knows nothing. Turn our guns on the little lady here. I am thinking it was she that warned the men over in Little Eden.

DICEY

Why no, Mr. Cunningham, Sir. I haven't delivered a message to anyone! I've been home all night tending to my father. I am just putting breakfast away now. There's some left. Would you like some bread and jam? Some say my bread is the best in the county.

SOLOMON

See. You've come to the wrong house.

BILL CUNNINGHAM

We know where your loyalties lay. What do you say, men? Shoot him?

EARL

We've been gunning for him for awhile.

(Stage this the best you can. Guns appear in the windows. Or barring the use of guns, photos of the guns. There is a photo (may be under copyright of) of DICEY standing in the way of her

father and the BLOODY SCOUT. If it's in fair use, use it.)

NO!

DICEY

Out of the way!

EARL

I'm not moving.

DICEY

Shoot her!

BILL CUNNINGHAM

Go on, then. Shoot me through my heart. If you know where the heart is.

DICEY

Shoot her!

BILL CUNNINGHAM

(BEAT.)

She's thirteen!

THOMAS

Fifteen!

DICEY

Lots of blood and guts in you. (Beat.) Put the guns down. No shooting today.

THOMAS

I was in the mood.

EARL

I'd like to see you display as much bravery as that one. We've got better things to do.

THOMAS

Don't relax. We'll be back.

BILL CUNNINGHAM

(BILL, EARL and THOMAS exit.)

Any more bread left?

SOLOMON

DICEY

A big chunk.

SOLOMON

I wouldn't mind some.

DICEY

Father... about last night ...

SOLOMON

I don't want to know where you went.

DICEY

You know?

SOLOMON

Put some extra jam on the bread, please. I do love my jam.

(SOLOMON exits.)

DICEY

I continued to pass messages to the Continental Army. I was questioned over and over again by British soldiers. There were lots of threats against my life but I was lucky. Nobody wanted to shoot a fifteen year-old girl.

(DICEY exits. VOICES of the HEROINES are heard.)

DEBORAH, SYBIL, DICEY, KATE

1782.

(DEBORAH appears in a Zoom window.)

DEBORAH

I was orphaned young. From ages ten to eighteen, I was an indentured servant. I learned to do everything. And when I was released at age eighteen, I worked many jobs. I taught. I wove baskets. I fashioned wooden tools, sleds, weather vanes. I even made pie crimpers and sold them door-to-door. And even with all those abilities, I could barely feed myself.

(Two Zoom windows open.)

JIM

She was thick-waisted.

JACK

Big-boned.

JIM

Plain.

JACK

Taller than the average man.

JIM

At least 5'9".

JACK

Poor marriage material.

JIM

Just not a good-looking woman.

DEBORAH

But uncommonly good-looking as a man.

(JIM and JACK'S windows go out.)

DEBORAH

The best-paying jobs were in the army. And so in early 1782, I, Deborah Sampson, enlisted as Timothy Thayer. There was a nice bonus involved. And I was a fervent believer in the cause.

(DEBORAH puts on an army cap. PRUDENCE appears in a window.)

PRUDENCE

My land, Miss Sampson. Why ever are you dressed like that? Most unseemly. I am sure there is a law against a woman wearing men's clothes. Especially an army uniform. You should be ashamed. Go home and change and offer apologies for trying to change the natural order of things.

DEBORAH

And that self-righteous biddy turned me in. I had to give back my bonus, stand up in church and apologize to all for my behavior and was shunned for my effort. (Beat.) So I moved. I got hold of some more farm clothes and found my way to Uxbridge, Massachusetts. And lo and behold, there was a recruiter. But not any recruiter. A r

DEBORAH (cont'd)

recruiter for a highly elite army troop. I was taller than most men. Stronger than most men and was accepted immediately. So Deborah Sampson, who became Timothy Thayer was now known as Robert Shurtleff, U.S. Army Elite. Of course there were problems.

(JONAH WILKES' voice.)

JONAH

Hey Shurtleff! When you going to grow some peach fuzz on that baby chin of yours?

DEBORAH (AS ROBERT)

All in good time, friend. At least I don't have to worry about my beard getting singed off in battle. (Beat.) And then there were the bathroom necessities. The men chalked it up to me being uncommonly private as a private. When you're bigger and stronger than most of the men, they don't question much.

(DRUMS and FIFE give way to battle sounds – muskets being loaded and shot. Perhaps a zoom window of a battlefield with billowing smoke.)

CAPTAIN'S VOICE (amid the smoke and battle noise)

Prime, load! (Beat.) Shoulder. (Beat.) Make Ready... Take Aim! (Beat.) FIRE!

(Noise of muskets. Then canons.)

CAPTAIN'S VOICE

Shurtleff! Wilkes's down. Man the canon! Man the canon!

DEBORAH

I was on it like a shot. People say women are too nurturing to be soldiers. But I would argue that it is our ability to nurture that makes us better soldiers. When you are in a unit with others, everyone's life is as important as your own. Your one life has been extended into thirty lives.

(Canon sounds. Let it build for a moment. Then all is quiet.)

END OF EXCERPT