

ANGELS OF BATAAN

A one act play

By Tracy Wells

CHARACTERS

8+ F, 4+ M, 4+ either (16-40+ possible)

HELEN BAILEY, 21	2 nd Lt. nurse in the U.S. army; wants a life of adventure; sister of Sally; female
SALLY BAILEY, 18	2 nd Lt. nurse in the U.S. army; a bit of a scaredy-cat; sister of Helen; female
EDITH WEBB, 22	2 nd Lt. nurse in the U.S. army; quiet and attentive to her work; female
MILLIE PLINDERS, 20	2 nd Lt. nurse in the U.S. army; glamorous, big city kind of gal; female
JEAN PERKINS, 19	2 nd Lt. nurse in the U.S. army; hopeless romantic hoping to find love; female
LAURA APPLEBY, 21	2 nd Lt. nurse in the U.S. navy; has a fella in the army; female
JOSIE ALLEN, 29	1 st Lt. nurse in the U.S. army; second in command; likeable and compassionate; female
MAUDE DANIELS, 52	Captain and command nurse in the U.S. army; tough and no-nonsense; female
DR. EDWARD STEVENS,	Major in the U.S. army and staff physician; kind and capable; male
JOE JEFFRIES, 18	Soldier in the U.S. army; loves a good joke; male
HENRY BENNET, 19	Soldier in the U.S. army; stubborn; male
GEROGE SANDERS, 20	Soldier in the U.S. army; soft spoken and kind; male
MR/MRS. JAMESON, mid-40's	Wealthy British citizen detained at Santo Tomas; any gender
BETTY/BILL THOMPSON, 39	American detained at Santo Tomas; any gender
RUBY THOMPSON, 15	Bill/Betty's teenage daughter, also detained; female
ED/EDWINA MARTIN, mid-60s	Older American detained at Santo Tomas; any gender

ENSEMBLE*	Additional nurses**, soldiers, and Santo Tomas POWs. If using ensemble, it should be at least 3 M and 3 F, but it can easily be much larger.
RADIO VOICE	Delivers news of the war; may be played onstage or off
ADMIRAL KINCAID	Offstage voice (can also be played onstage); male

*If using a smaller cast, you can depict soldiers lying in the beds with use of props instead of live actors.

**Note that amongst the American nurses stationed at Bataan were several Filipino nurses. If you have the ability to cast accordingly, I encourage you to do so. Do note, however, that the Filipino nurses were not detained at Santo Tomas.

SETTING

Various army bases in Manila and Bataan, as well as the Santo Tomas Internment Camp, all located in the Philippines from 1941-1942 during World War II.

TIME

This play takes place primarily over a five year period of time—1941 to 1945—during WWII.

SET

This play takes place over multiple locations in the Philippines, so the use of minimal set and props will help make transitions smoother, and this play lends itself well to that. However, if budget, time, and talent allow, feel free to expand the set as you'd like. Additionally, background music and sounds are noted for each scene to enhance the mood and atmosphere. You can omit those if you'd like. Note that the following locations are depicted:

- Clark Field, Manila: nurses quarters, outside of a dance hall
- Camp Limay, Bataan: an outdoor jungle hospital ward
- Santo Tomas: the courtyard of the internment camp
- Leyte Island: airport tarmac—suggested setting only
- Arlington National Cemetery, Washington D.C.-suggested set only (a single white tombstone)

Also note that an important element of this play is the sharp contrast of paradise and war. Even as the nurses struggled with the events unfolding around them, the palm trees continued to sway. There were even palm trees located in the courtyard of the Santo Tomas Internment Camp. Additionally, this contrast highlights the disparity between the image the Americans had of the Philippine islands as a tropical destination, versus the poverty of many of the people who actually lived on the island. Those contrasts should be considered when devising the set for this play.

COSTUMES

All costumes should reflect the time, including nurse and soldier uniforms as well as civilian clothing for the nurses in Manila. The uniforms should become dirtier and more tattered as the play progresses. In Santo Tomas, all nurses and POWs should be in clothes that are quite tattered and worn. Note that for the opening scene the nurses could also be wearing dress uniforms, or might wear a blue nurse's cape over their white uniforms.

RUNTIME

Approximately 35-40 min.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

Scene 1: Tarmac, Leyte Island, February 20, 1945

Scene 2: Clark Field Army Base, Manila, December 8, 1941 through December 24, 1941

Scene 3: Camp Limay, Bataan, December 29, 1941 through April 9, 1942

Scene 4: Santo Tomas, July 2, 1942 through February 3, 1945

Scene 5: Arlington National Cemetery, Washington D.C. 2001

SCENE TRANSITIONS

Scene transitions should be smooth and incorporated into the scene itself. Scenes are provided for designation of time and place and for ease of rehearsal.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The Angels of Bataan is a work of historical fiction based on events that occurred in and around Manila, Bataan, and the Santo Tomas Internment camp in the Philippines between 1941 and 1945 during World War II. The characters and incidents depicted have been shaped to serve the story. Some characters are entirely fictitious while others are based on multiple individuals.

SCENE ONE

AT RISE: An airport tarmac on Leyte Island, Philippines, February 20, 1945. A pool of light is center. HELEN, SALLY, EDITH, LAURA, JEAN and MILLIE are standing in the pool of light with their backs to the audience. They are in uniform with a Bronze Star medal pinned to their chests.

KINCAID

And to the brave women in uniform who so proudly represented these United States of America during the Battle of the Philippines and in the months and years during their imprisonment, I present the Bronze Star medal of valor. May these nurses—these Angels of Bataan—spread their wings and soar into a bright future.

EDITH

(turns sharply, in military fashion)

Sixty-six. The number of US army nurses detained in the Santo Tomas Internment Camp in the Philippines during WWII.

(salutes)

LAURA

(turns sharply, in military fashion)

Eleven. The number of U.S. navy nurses also imprisoned in the nearby Los Banos internment camp.

SALLY

(turns sharply, in military fashion)

Three-thousand eight hundred. The number of U.S. and European civilians detained in Santo Tomas alongside the nurses.

(salutes)

MILLIE

(turns sharply, in military fashion)

One thousand and two. The number of days the nurses were imprisoned with little food, shelter, or medical supplies.

(salutes)

JEAN

(turns sharply, in military fashion)

Thirty-two. The average percentage of body weight the nurses lost due to starvation and disease.

(salutes)

HELEN

(turns sharply, in military fashion)

And the number of nurses who died?

(salutes)

Zero.

(A pause, then ALL NURSES hold up their right hand and begin to chant their oath.)

ALL NURSES

As an Army nurse I accept the responsibilities of an officer in the Army Nurse Corps. I shall give faithful care to the men who fight for the freedom of this Country and to the women who stand behind them. I shall bring to the American soldier, wherever he may be, the best of my knowledge and professional skill. I shall approach him cheerfully at all times, under any conditions I may find. I shall endeavor to maintain the highest nursing standards possible in the performance of my duties. I shall appear fearless in the presence of danger and quiet the fears of others to the best of my ability. My only criticism shall be constructive. The reputation and good name of the Army Nurse Corps and of the nursing profession shall be uppermost in my thoughts, second only to the care of my patients. I shall endeavor to be a credit to my country and to the uniform I wear.

(ALL salute. ALL except HELEN turn sharply, as before, and march offstage.)

HELEN

Our uniforms...so crisp, so white, so...clean.

(smiles, remembering)

They nearly gleamed in the island sun, the tropical breeze teasing the hems of our skirts, begging us to come out and play at the end of the day.

(takes off her cap or takes it out of her pocket and looks at it, thoughtfully)

If only we'd known just how quickly it all would change.

(Lights change as scene changes. The sounds of big band music fills the air. The lighting transports us to a tropical paradise.)

SCENE TWO

AT RISE: Inside the nurse's quarters at Sternberg Hospital in Manilla, Philippines, December 8, 1941. It is decorated with wicker and bamboo furniture, seashells, tropical flowers, and palm fronds. A vanity is also present. EDITH sits, reading a book. LAURA sits, primping and preening. JEAN stands nearby, doing the same. ALL are wearing cocktail dresses. A radio is playing big band music lightly in the background.

JEAN

I'm gonna dance with three...no, four...no, *ten* officers tonight!

LAURA

You hear that, Edith? Our Jean has plans to steal the heart of every officer at the dance.

EDITH
(without looking away from her book)

Hmmm.

JEAN
What d'you care, Laura? You got a fella.

LAURA
Yeah, I do, don't I?
(smiles, wistfully)

JEAN
You gonna do any dancin'?

LAURA
Maybe. I haven't decided.

JEAN
Well, you can, you know. Frank don't mind. He said so in his last letter to'ya.

LAURA
I know. Too bad he's stationed so far away.

JEAN
Europe ain't that far.

LAURA
But if the U.S. goes to war...

JEAN
We're not talkin' about no silly war tonight. We're talking about dancin'!
(takes EDITH'S book and snaps it shut)
Why don't you get your nose out of this book and join us here on planet Earth?

EDITH
Hey! I was reading that!

JEAN
There's a dance goin' on in the mess hall, you know.

EDITH
I put on a party dress, didn't I? You said I had to come. You didn't say I couldn't bring my book.

(EDITH snatches book back and begins to read again as MILLIE enters, carrying a large makeup case.)

JEAN

Well, look what the cat dragged in.

MILLIE

(leaning over to look in the mirror)

Oh, give it a rest, Jean, you know I look good.

JEAN

You always look good, Millie. That's what I'm afraid of! One look at you and the officers will be sayin', "Jean, Who?"

(leans in)

Say, Millie, would'ya mind hangin' back about ten minutes or so? Let me head on in first, meet a few of the fellas, maybe have a dance or two?

MILLIE

Oh, I don't care a lick about any of those soldier boys. You can have every dance for all I care. Now make room so I can finish putting my face on.

(shoves LAURA a little, opens makeup case and applies makeup)

LAURA

You've practically got an entire drugstore in that makeup kit of yours.

MILLIE

I need to practice if I'm going to make it to Hollywood.

JEAN

Hollywood? She must've made quite the detour when she hit the Pacific Ocean, am I right?

(elbows EDITH, with a chuckle)

Am I right?

EDITH

(without looking away from her book)

Hmmm.

MILLIE

I want it all...the glitz...the glamor...the flash bulbs going off as I make my way down the red carpet at my latest premiere...I want to be a star!

JEAN

Then what'd ya come all the way to Manilla for?

MILLIE

It costs money to be a star. There's headshots and a new wardrobe and a new apartment... nursing pays the bills. And what better place to be a nurse than on a tropical island?

LAURA

You sure can't beat it...sunshine...warm breezes...more of a vacation than work most days.

EDITH

I think it's kind of boring.

JEAN

She lives!

(snatches EDITH'S book away again)

Edith has finally emerged out of the cocoon that is this book and now she's a butterfly!

EDITH

Hey! Give that back!

(JEAN opens and closes the book like flapping wings and prances around as EDITH chases her. They nearly crash into HELEN and SALLY who enter, both wearing white nursing uniforms and carrying suitcases. EDITH snatches her book back and sits down.)

JEAN

Sorry about that.

HELEN

It's no trouble.

(holds out a hand)

I'm Helen Bailey and this is my sister, Sally. We're the new recruits...the new army nurses stationed here at Clark Field.

MILLIE

Oh, they don't call the new nurses recruits. We're not really in the army.

JEAN

Well, we kinda are, most of us anyway.

(points a thumb at LAURA)

Laura's a navy nurse. The rest of us are army.

LAURA

I think what Millie was getting at is that we don't have all of that military protocol to follow. We just focus on our nursing duties.

JEAN

Which around here ain't much. I'm Jean, by the way. Our nursing duties are pretty light. The Philippines don't see any action, so most of the time we're bandaging up cuts and scrapes when the boys play a little too rough out in the ball field.

LAURA

We have a lot of time to enjoy the island. It's our own little slice of paradise.

HELEN

Just what I was looking for!

(turning to SALLY)

See? I told you it wouldn't be so bad.

(turning back to the other nurses)

Sally didn't want to come...didn't want to enlist, if I'm being honest.

SALLY

I would've been just fine working with Doc Edwards in his clinic back home.

LAURA

Where's home?

HELEN

Beaconsfield, Iowa. A super small town.

LAURA

I always thought small towns were charming.

HELEN

Charming? Sure. Exciting? Not so much. We had to get out of there. If not we would've become just like Mamma. She's never stepped foot outside Beaconsfield and she never will. I wanted more for myself...more for us.

SALLY

Helen always thinks we have to do everything together.

HELEN

It's like Mamma says...as long as we're together, everything is going to be just fine.

SALLY

You promise?

HELEN

I promise. You'll see...it's going to be great!

(excitedly)

We'll have adventure and excitement...we'll experience everything this world has to offer.

SALLY

What about the war? What about Pearl Harbor?

MILLIE

The war? That's miles away.

HELEN

Don't mind her. She'll come around, just like she did when I convinced her to come here.

SALLY

Dragged me kicking and screaming is more like it.

EDITH

I can relate.

JEAN

(takes SALLY'S bag)

Now tell me you have a party dress and some nice dancin' shoes in here.

SALLY

Dancing shoes? What would I need those for on an army base?

JEAN

(looking incredulously at HELEN)

Didn't you tell your sister nothin'?

(to SALLY)

It's the Clark Field social tonight, darlin'!

MILLIE

Why don't we get you settled so you can freshen up before the social? Your rooms are on either side of mine.

SALLY

We get our own rooms?

MILLIE

Of course! This isn't one of those boring ole' regular nursing assignments...this is paradise!

HELEN

(picks up her suitcase and turns to SALLY)

What do you say, Sally? Ready to dive into this new adventure headfirst?

SALLY

Do I have a choice?

EDITH

Probably not.

MILLIE

Follow me.

(MILLIE exits, chuckling with HELEN and SALLY. JEAN snatches EDITH'S book as LAURA laughs. Lights slowly fade into a spotlight on the radio as it gets louder, the sounds of big band music changing suddenly into a news bulletin.)

RADIO VOICE

The US is officially at war! Following their surprise attack on the US military base in Pearl Harbor, Japan has declared war on the United States. But don't worry...the United States troops are on alert! On the ground, in the sea, and in the air, defense must be everywhere. Where will the Japanese military strike next? Only the Japanese Imperial Commander knows. But rest assured that wherever the next target may be, our boys will be there...ready and waiting.

(End of news bulletin music plays and transitions into big band music playing from within the army social. As lights fade out wider, we find ourselves outside the mess hall on Clark Field, later that evening. The radio is removed. The dance is about to take place. There are a few tables and chairs and possibly party lights. JEAN is trying to dance with EDITH, who isn't having it. MILLIE and LAURA stand nearby, amused.)

JEAN

No, Edith, its step, step, turn...not step, turn, step!

EDITH

I told you I can't do this, Jean. I have two left feet.

LAURA

Edith doesn't have to dance if she doesn't want to.

JEAN

Fine! I'll leave her be.

(JOSIE and MAUDE enter in uniform followed by DR. EDWARD STEVENS, who wears a shirt and tie and long white lab coat. He is intently looking at a clipboard. They cross as JEAN says her next line and stop behind her, unseen.)

But I'm gonna to dance so much Maude'll have to drag me out of bed tomorrow for my shift.

MAUDE

Thanks for the heads up, Perkins.

JEAN

Nurse Daniels! I didn't see you there.

MILLIE

(leaning over and whispering in Jean's ear, smirking)

But did you see Dr. Stevens?

(DR. STEVENS steps around MAUDE, looking at his clipboard.)

JEAN

(nervous, fumbling)

Oh! Hey there, Dr. Stevens. You goin' to the social tonight?

DR. STEVENS

I don't think so. I've got a lot of work to do over in the clinic.

MAUDE

I'm going to head back to the clinic with Dr. Stevens. Josie, remind the girls how nurses should behave themselves while attending social gatherings on the base.

JOSIE

Yes, of course, Nurse Daniels.

(MAUDE and DR. STEVENS exit.)

JEAN

(imitating Maude)

Now remember, girls, you must be on your best behavior at all times.

(tapping LAURA on the head)

Laura...no dancing!

(tapping MILLIE on the head)

Millie, no laughing!

(tapping EDITH)

And Edith....

(EDITH looks up)

Nevermind. Edith is always on her best behavior.

JOSIE

Now, Jean, you and I both know Nurse Daniels just wants the best for her nurses. She just doesn't want you getting into trouble.

JEAN

Now what kind of trouble can a girl get into around here?

(JOE, GEORGE and HARRY enter, jovial and joking around)

JOE

I can think up some trouble if you're interested, Jeannie!

(puts his arm around her)

JEAN

(removing his arm)

You're barkin' up the wrong tree, Joe.

JOE

Aw, you don't gotta be like that. I didn't mean nothin' by it.

GEORGE

You always mean somethin' by it, Joe.

LAURA

Are you guys on your way to the social?

GEORGE

You know it!

JOSIE

I've got some work I need to catch up on as well, so I'm going to head over to the clinic.

(starts to exit, then stops and turns around)

And ladies, if you want to stay on Nurse Daniels' good side...don't do anything I wouldn't do.

(exits)

JEAN

We won't!

(turns to the group with a devious look)

Or will we?

(HELEN and SALLY enter, still in uniform and carrying towels and other supplies.)

JOE

Well, well, well, it looks like we have some new recruits!

HELEN

We're not recruits. We're nurses.

JEAN

They can see that! Why are you still in uniform?

SALLY

Little miss adventure seeker wanted to impress the command nurse by restocking the clinic.

JEAN

There's plenty of time to restock the clinic tomorrow. Tonight is for dancing!

(The sound of an explosion is heard. ALL react.)

MILLIE

What was that?

GEORGE

Transformer must've blown.

HENRY

Don't worry, girls, this sorta thing happens all the time.

(Another explosion is heard.)

EDITH

I don't think that was a transformer.

(The sound of an air raid siren is heard.)

JOE

The air raid siren!

(ALL look up.)

LAURA

We're under attack!

(Lights change, and the sounds of explosion are heard. It's chaos; there's screaming and shouting. SOLDIERS and other NURSES enter, running. MAUDE and DR. STEVENS enter, triaging. Many stumble and fall. Some, including JOE, don't get up again. SALLY, JEAN and MILLIE fall, injured. It culminates in one large explosion, during which the lights go out, except for one spotlight on HELEN, who turns to audience, holding a letter in her hand. Action could continue in slow motion as HELEN reads.)

HELEN

I'd never seen anything like it. Dust everywhere. Blood everywhere. Ears ringing so loud I couldn't hear Sally calling my name...couldn't hear her when she fell.

(sad, but proud)

You would've been so proud of her, Mamma. She didn't want to be there—she'd told me that so many times. But I'd promised her paradise and she'd followed me halfway around the world... straight into a battlefield. We'd only been off the plane for a few hours when the first bomb hit. Thank goodness Sally and I were on our way to the clinic with supplies. And our Sally, she jumped right into action...making tourniquets out of the soldiers' belts to stop the bleeding, applying compresses to wounds, bandaging what she could. You should've seen her, Mamma. She knew just what to do. But then that last bomb hit... I thought I'd lost her, Mamma. Once the dust cleared I saw her lying on the ground, her left leg covered in blood. And what did I do?

(look down, ashamed, then looks up)

I froze.

(Lights change and it's the aftermath of the bombing. SALLY is sitting up, assessing her wounds and bandaging them. LAURA is bent over MILLIE, working on her. MILLIE has a gash on her head. DR. STEVENS is helping HENRY to stand. GEORGE lays nearby. MAUDE is triaging. HELEN stands there, frozen.)

MAUDE

I need towels!

(when no one responds, MAUDE looks up and at HELEN)

Bailey, I need towels right now!

HELEN

She...

MAUDE

Oh, for goodness sake, snap out of it, Helen!

(stands and crosses to HELEN)

You don't have time for shock. We need you.

HELEN

She...needs me.

MAUDE

We all need you! These soldiers need you. You're a nurse, Helen Bailey! You don't have the luxury of freezing up in a crisis. Now get going!

(HELEN crosses to SALLY who is bandaging her leg.)

HELEN

Sally! Your leg...

SALLY

I'm okay. I swear.

HELEN

This wasn't what I promised you. Not even close.

SALLY

I didn't become a nurse for tropical breezes. I became a nurse to help people. And that's what I'm going to do right now. You are too.

HELEN

(shakes her head, clearing it, then gets to work)

Right. Who needs supplies?

DR. STEVENS

How's the ankle, private?

HENRY

It'll hold.

(looks around)

Where's George?

GEORGE

(groaning loudly and holding up a hand)

Over here.

(DR. STEVENS rushes over to GEORGE and works on him.)

LAURA

Now, Millie, hold still. You've got a big gash on your head. You've gotta let me check it out.

MILLIE

It's nothing...just a scrape.

(touches her forehead, near the gash, then looks at her fingers)

Maybe a little more than a scrape.

LAURA

Lie back and let me dress it. We don't want a scar on your face before you get to Hollywood.

MILLIE

A scar! I can't have a scar...not on my face.

LAURA

Then lie back and let me work.

HENRY

Where's Joe?

JEAN

(trapped under a fallen piece of debris)

Hey, can someone get this thing off of me?

DR. STEVENS

I've got it.

(DR. STEVENS rushes to JEAN and removes the debris.)

JEAN

Thank you, Dr. Stevens.

(JEAN starts to stand but DR. STEVENS stops her.)

DR. STEVENS

Wait! Let me check you out first—make sure nothing's broken.

JEAN

I'm alright, I swear. I just need to shake it off so I can get to work.

DR. STEVENS

You might've hit your head. You could have a concussion.

JEAN

(putting a hand on his shoulder, reassuringly and smiling)

I'm fine. I promise.

(DR. STEVENS helps JEAN stand. They look at one another for a moment, then each go in opposite directions, back to work.)

HENRY

Joe! Buddy, where are you?

SALLY

Do we have any more bandages?

HELEN

Right here.

(HELEN brings over supplies.)

SALLY

How about some gauze? Cotton? Muslin?

HELEN

(looking quickly through the supplies)

No. We don't have any of that.

SALLY

Give me your stockings.

HELEN

My what?

SALLY

Your stockings. Quick, Helen, we don't have much time and I've got to stop the bleeding.

(HELEN takes off her stocking and hands them to SALLY, who uses them on the soldier she's working on. MILLIE and LAURA each rush to a patient as JOSIE enters, carrying supplies.)

JOSIE

The hospital's still standing, but I'm not sure how much longer. We evacuated all the patients and the nurses are gathering supplies. I brought some with me.

MAUDE

Good work, Nurse Allen.

EDITH

Do you have any rubber tubing? I need to make a tourniquet.

JOSIE

(looking through her supplies)

No, I'm sorry, I don't.

SALLY

Just use his belt. That's what I did.

(EDITH takes off the soldier's belt and ties it around his legs as JOSIE crosses to LAURA.)

JOSIE

What do you need?

LAURA

I need about 3 more sets of hands...but I'll take some tongue depressors and tape.

JOSIE

I've got the tongue depressors but no tape.

HELEN

What about your stockings? Will they do the job?

LAURA

Yes! Great idea.

(takes off her stockings and uses them)

HENRY

Joe? Has anyone seen Joe?

JEAN

(seeing JOE)

I think he's over here.

(rushes over and kneels by him)

Joe! You all right?

(checks his pulse)

I'm not getting a pulse.

DR. STEVENS

(rushes over then kneels down and checks his pulse)

There's no heartbeat. Quick! Let's roll him over.

(DR. STEVENS and JEAN roll him over onto his belly and together they use the Holger Nielson technique.)

JEAN

Well? Did it work?

DR. STEVENS

(leans down and checks JOE'S pulse; sadly)

I'm afraid not. He's gone.

HENRY

No!

GEORGE

(tries to sit up)

What? What is it?

EDITH
(helping GEORGE lie back down)

Shhh. Just rest right now.

GEORGE
Rest? Honey, those days are long gone. This ain't paradise anymore. This is a battlefield.

(The sound of the air raid siren is heard.)

LAURA
Again?

EDITH
It's got to be the Japanese. They must be targeting the U.S. bases in the Pacific.

JOSIE
We've got to get the survivors out of here, fast.

DR. STEVENS
Listen up! Anyone who can walk, get moving and find some cover.

(HENRY and other soldiers exit, slowly and painfully.)

MAUDE
Nurses, our priority right now is getting these boys to safety. Gather any supplies you can quickly and work together to move these boys out of harm's way.

ALL NURSES
Yes, Nurse Daniels.
(ALL NURSES except JEAN start gathering supplies and helping to move SOLDIERS to exit. JEAN crosses to MAUDE.)

JEAN
What about Joe? We can't just leave him here!

MAUDE
I'm afraid we have to, Jean. We're at war now, and sometimes in war we have to make tough decisions and do things we never thought we would...things we didn't know we were capable of.

JEAN
I didn't sign up for this.

MAUDE
None of us did, Jean...none of us did.
(MAUDE and JEAN help carry a SOLDIER offstage as lights slowly fade into a spotlight on an army radio.)

RADIO VOICE

After six days of heavy bombing by the Japanese, Clark Field base lies in ruins. Our boys did all they could to defend the U.S. stronghold in Manila, but the enemy in the sky proved to be too much for them. At Sternberg Hospital, U.S. army and navy nurses work overtime to manage the constant flow of wounded and dead. Without enough beds, the wounded spill out into the hallways and corridors of the hospital, some even lying in the hot sun of the hospital lawn. Supplies are running low but hopes remain high! And why shouldn't they when our boys have the best nurses in the world to get them back into fighting shape!

(End of news bulletin music plays. MAUDE enters into spotlight and turns off the radio. JOSIE enters, holding a telegram.)

JOSIE

This just in from General MacArthur.

(JOSIE hands telegram to MAUDE)

MAUDE

December 24, 1941. Effective immediately, all U.S. Army nurses are to evacuate Sternberg Hospital at Clark Field in Manila and transport the soldiers under their care to Camp Limay, on the peninsula of Bataan in anticipation of the fall of Manila to enemy forces. All Navy nurses are to remain in Manila to support the patients that are unsafe to travel.

JOSIE

Camp Limay! But there's nothing there. How can we setup a hospital in the middle of jungle?

MAUDE

I don't know, Josie. But we're about to find out.

(MAUDE puts the telegram in her pocket and exits, followed by JOSIE as lights come up on scene.)

SCENE THREE

AT RISE: Camp Limay, Bataan, December 29, 1941. Jungle noises can be heard. A canopy of greenery surrounds the scene, including palm trees and tree trunks. A rustic outdoor hospital with carts or crates of medical supplies and cots or pallets of blankets and clipboards are present, on which SOLDIERS, including GEORGE, rest. A large sheet or piece of fabric with a crudely painted red cross is hung up. SALLY is redressing a SOLDIER'S wound while EDITH reads to GEORGE and MILLIE wipes a SOLDIER'S brow. DR. STEVENS and JOSIE are moving a bed and supplies. HENRY stands nearby, on crutches. All nurses are now wearing khaki or green slacks/button up shirts or coveralls and boots. Their hair is tied back with bandanas or they wear a khaki army hat. DR. STEVENS wears similar attire, though with a khaki tie and his white lab coat. They all wear white bands with red crosses on their arm. They are all dirty.

EDITH

(reading)

Now this is the Law of the Jungle — as old and as true as the sky; And the Wolf that shall keep it may prosper, but the Wolf that shall break it must die.

As the creeper that girdles the tree-trunk the Law runneth forward and back —
For the strength of the Pack is the Wolf, and the strength of the Wolf is the Pack.

SALLY

See? We're just like one big pack of wolves, out here in the jungle.

MILLIE

Do we have to be wolves? Wolves are so hairy and smelly.

SALLY

A wolf pack conveys strength and a sense of family.

EDITH

That's why Kipling's The Jungle Book was such a masterpiece. Kipling used animals to describe human behaviors and characteristics. The themes of freedom, law, and abandonment are prevalent throughout this book.

(holds up book)

GEORGE

I'd never abandon you, Edith.

(EDITH smiles)

MILLIE

Well I would abandon this jungle hospital in a heartbeat.

(scratching at her arm)

At this point my mosquito bites have mosquito bites.

JOSIE

(places a cot or bedding)

How about this for our surgical pavilion? This could be our operating table.

HENRY

Did you just call that dirty old cot your operating table?

JOSIE

It's the best we can do out here. Don't worry, Henry, we'll cover it with fresh sheets.

HENRY

Remind me not to need surgery anytime soon.

DR. STEVENS

Then stay off that foot. If it gets infected, it's going to have to come off.

HENRY

You got it, Doc.

(sits as JEAN and MAUDE enter. JEAN is carrying a crate.)

MAUDE

Supply transport just dropped these off.

JOSIE

That's it?

JEAN

'Fraid so.

(JEAN hands the crate to JOSIE and crosses to DR. STEVENS.)

Anything I can do to help?

DR. STEVENS

I think Josie and I have everything covered.

JEAN

Oh...okay.

MAUDE

Jean, quit flirting with Dr. Stevens and help us organize these supplies.

(JEAN crosses to MAUDE as DR. STEVENS looks up, surprised.)

MILLIE

Can you believe we missed Christmas? This is the first year I didn't celebrate.

MAUDE

General MacArthur's orders came on Christmas Eve. There was no time for celebration.

EDITH

I know. I just wish I'd at least gotten a card or something from back home.

SALLY

Can we even get mail out here?

MAUDE

I don't know.. There's not too many people who even know where we are.

JEAN

Not even Santa?

MAUDE

Especially not Santa.

HENRY

(picks up army radio)

I wonder if we could get some Christmas carols on this thing.

MAUDE

(crosses to HENRY and snatches the radio)

That's government issued property. It's for military communication, not Christmas carols.

JOSIE

Can't we bend the rules a little? It might be December 29th but it's still Christmas after all.

MAUDE

Fine. But if MacArthur gets wind of this, you're taking the blame.

(JOSIE takes the radio and sets it down then turns the dial until instrumental Christmas music is playing. HELEN enters holding a mail sack in one hand and a telegram in the other.)

HELEN

Mail's here!

(MILLIE, EDITH, JOSIE, JEAN and SALLY rush over. HENRY crosses as quickly as he can. HELEN passes out the mail.)

JEAN

Santa found us after all!

EDITH

(holding up a couple of red and green envelopes)

Christmas cards!

MILLIE

Anything for me?

HELEN

You've got a big one, Millie.

(pulls out manilla envelope which she hands to MILLIE)

MILLIE

The latest issue of Photoplay magazine! Oh, darling, how I've missed you.
(clutches it to her chest)

SALLY

Did Mamma send anything?

HELEN

Of course she did. You know Mamma.

(HELEN hands SALLY a card, who finds a spot and reads)

JEAN

You got anything left in that sack of gifts for a good girl like me, Santa?

HELEN

(reaches into sack, pulls out letter and reads the envelope)

There's just one more, but it looks like it's for Laura.

(hands it to JEAN)

JEAN

It's from Frank. The mailroom made a mistake. They must think Laura's still with us, instead of back in Manila with the other Navy nurses.

JOSIE

Didn't you hear? Manila's fallen to the Japanese. The nurses left behind were captured by the Japanese. They're most likely prisoners of war now.

JEAN

Poor Laura.

(puts letter in her pocket)

I'll just hang onto this letter for her...keep it safe until we see her again.

EDITH

If we see her again.

JEAN

(angrily, crossing to EDITH)

What do you mean, *if*? She's our friend and you're just gonna write her off like that?

EDITH

I'm just trying to be realistic, that's all.

JEAN

(laughs ruefully)

That's rich. If we're being real, then just admit you don't know what you're talkin' about.

EDITH

What I'm talking about is the Japanese Imperial Army. We've all heard how they treat their prisoners. And they're not exactly known for being modern in their views about women.

JEAN

That doesn't mean she's dead!

DR. STEVENS

(crosses to JEAN to comfort her)

Laura's strong and smart. If anyone can get out of there alive, it's Laura.

JEAN

That's all I was trying to say.

HELEN

(holds out a telegram to MAUDE)

Nurse Daniels, this telegram also came for you.

MAUDE

(takes telegram and reads it, then sighs)

Our rations have been cut.

DR. STEVENS

(takes telegram and reads)

We're down to two meals a day...fifteen hundred calories. That's not enough...not out here in the heat, not with the kind of work we do.

MAUDE

I know. But that's all we've got until relief comes through with more supplies.

(points at crate)

JOSIE

Why don't we switch gears...focus on something a little more...pleasant.

MILLIE

Pleasant? We're out in the middle of the jungle, covered in dirt and sweating the rouge right of our cheeks. If you can find anything pleasant about that then it really *will* be Christmas!

HELEN

Christmas! That's it! We should have a big Christmas feast.

SALLY

I love your enthusiasm, Helen, but have you seen our food stores?

(crosses over to a crate and pulls out a can and a bag of rice)

Canned corn beef hash. Rice. That's pretty much it.

HELEN

We might not have a lot of government issued food, but we can celebrate with what we have.

(HELEN pulls food out of the crate as LAURA enters, her clothing filthy and torn. Initially she is not seen by the nurses or soldiers.)

I think this is going to be a fine Christmas dinner. All we need is a fire and—

JEAN

Laura!

HELEN

Yes, of course it would be great if Laura were here, but—

JEAN

She's here!

(JEAN runs to LAURA hugging her. ALL run to LAURA.)

MILLIE

We heard Manila was taken over by the Japanese! How did you get away?

LAURA

Well, it was like this...two days after you all left for Bataan, MacArthur declared Manila an open city, pulling out the rest of the troops and giving the Japanese easy access to take over.

HELEN

What happened to the nurses at Clark Field once the Japanese took over?

LAURA

I...I don't know. I escaped just before Manila fell.

HELEN

Well this calls for celebration! And what better way to celebrate than with a Christmas feast!

LAURA

But Christmas is already over...and a feast? On army rations? Wait 'till Frank hears about this!

JEAN

Oh! Speaking of Frank, his came for you.

(JEAN takes the letter out of her pocket and gives it to LAURA. LAURA opens letter and reads while NURSES are preparing to celebrate. JEAN watches as LAURA'S face falls.)

What? What is it?

LAURA

Now that the U.S. has declared war on Germany, Frank's unit is going into battle!

(LAURA turns to JEAN, tearfully; JEAN embraces her as lights fade into a spotlight on the radio as a news bulletin comes on.)

RADIO VOICE

The U.S. has officially entered War! Only hours after Adolf Hitler declared war on the United States, President Roosevelt made a declaration of his own, engaging the U.S. in the war in Europe. Meanwhile, war continues to rage between the U.S. and Japan in the Philippines. General MacArthur has consolidated his troops on the Bataan Peninsula where undoubtedly they will fight hard against the invading Japanese, who continue to push their way to Limay, resulting in hundreds of newly wounded U.S. soldiers every day. As for the army nurses caring for our troops out in the jungle, help is on the way! General MacArthur has called for reinforcements of troops and supplies. So hang in there ladies! Relief is coming!

(End of news bulletin music plays. JEAN enters into spotlight and turns off the radio as lights come up on scene. It's several months later in April 1942. The sounds of the jungle can be heard around them, along with occasional explosions heard in the distance. The nurses are ragged, their clothing dirty.. HELEN, SALLY, MILLIE, JOSIE and LAURA are nursing SOLDIERS. GEORGE is sitting up. HENRY walks using a wood stick. EDITH is lying on one of the cots, ill. Other NURSES and SOLDIERS can also be present.)

JEAN

(angrily, just after turning off the radio)

Relief my—

(stops quickly as DR. STEVENS and MAUDE enter)

DR. STEVENS

How are the patients doing today?

MILLIE

Which ones? We've got so many it's getting hard to keep track.

JOSIE

No kidding. Do you know our surgical teams performed one hundred and eighty-seven surgeries in the last twenty-four hours? It's a wonder we haven't amputated the wrong leg at this point!

MAUDE

That's why our charting is so important.

(picks up a clipboard and holds up a paper with a chunk missing)

What happened to this soldier's chart?

SALLY

It's the humidity. We can't keep anything dry anymore...papers, bandages, wounds...

DR. STEVENS

We have to do our best. If we can't keep the soldiers' wounds dry they can develop infections.

HELEN

What about banana leaves?

(picks up a nearby banana leaf to show DR. STEVENS)

The leaves of a banana plant are waxy, so they won't adhere to the wound, but they are also impervious to water, so they can keep the wound dry and allow the infection to drain.

DR. STEVENS

I think it's brilliant! Good thinking, Helen!

(to MAUDE)

Let's assemble a team to harvest as many banana leaves as we can find.

HENRY

I'll help!

(HENRY exits with DR. STEVENS.)

GEORGE

(stands, a little shaky)

Me, too!

LAURA

I think you'd better stay here and rest up, George.

GEORGE

No! I'm tired of laying here, watching everyone around me working themselves ragged.

(crosses to EDITH and picks up her book)

Look at Edith! The girl came here to help people and now she's so sick she can't even read!

EDITH

It's only a bout of dysentery. I'll be better in a few days, I promise.

(tries to sit up but falls back down into a lying position)

GEORGE

I've got to do something! I'm ready to fight now!

JOSIE

Not now, George...maybe soon. But you know what you can do?

(guides GEORGE to EDITH'S bedside)

Read to Edith...give her comfort. Nurses like Edith do that for their patients everyday.

GEORGE

I can do that.

(GEORGE sits next to EDITH and reads as an explosion is heard.)

MAUDE

That sounded awfully close. I'd better see if there's been any communication from higher up.

(exits)

SALLY

The bombs and gunfire are getting louder. By the sound of things I wouldn't be surprised if the Japanese will be here in Bataan in a matter of days.

LAURA

Will that red cross do us any good once the Japanese arrive?

HELEN

That's an international symbol that gives protection to the wounded and sick. They have to leave us alone, don't they?

JOSIE

We can hope, but this is war, Helen. And everyone knows, all's fair in love and war.

JEAN

If that's true, then I don't care what Maude says. I'm going to finally tell Dr. Stevens how I feel about him...next time I see him.

LAURA

We love you, Jean, but everyone knows you're all talk when it comes to men.

JEAN

That's not true! I'm only half talk! Besides, when it comes to Dr. Stevens...it's...well, it's different. I think I might actually love him.

LAURA

Aw, that's wonderful, Jean!

JEAN

Is it though? You should know better than anyone, Laura...out here, with the sickness and the death...with bombs exploding and the enemy at our door...this is no place for love.

LAURA

This is exactly the place for love, Jean. It's in everything we do as a nurse...in every wound we clean, in every limb we set. It's at the core of who we are. Can't you see, that Jean? There's nothing more important in this world than love, so if it you can't find it here...amongst the fear and the chaos and the uncertainty...well, I don't know where you'll find it.

JEAN

I guess you're right. I'll...I'll tell him when he gets back.

(A loud explosion is heard. All react.)

SALLY

That was close. The Japanese will be here before we know it.

(MAUDE enters, holding a telegram.)

MAUDE

We have a telegram from General Wainwright.

(reading)

April 9, 1942. The fall of Bataan at the hands of enemy forces is now a certainty. It has been determined that the women in service are particularly vulnerable and must evacuate. Effective immediately, all U.S. Army nurses are to depart Camp Limay for the Malinta Tunnels on the island of Corregidor in anticipation of the fall of Bataan to enemy forces. Upon arrival in Corregidor, a small number of nurses will board a Navy PBY seaplane en route to Australia.

SALLY

What about the soldiers? You just said the nurses were to evacuate...you didn't say anything about the patients in our care.

MAUDE

That's because they're not going. General Wainwright's orders apply only to the nurses.

MILLIE

So we're just supposed to leave them all behind...these men we've been caring for all this time?

MAUDE

I'm afraid so.

EDITH

(patting the book in GEORGE'S hand)

I want you to keep this, George. Finish reading it. When I see you again we'll discuss the ending.

GEORGE

Okay.

(looks down at the book sadly, then at EDITH)

JEAN

Dr. Stevens! I never got to tell him!

(buries her face in LAURA'S shoulder, crying)

MAUDE

I need to send a list of nurses who are going with me to Corregidor and who wants to leave this war behind and go to Australia instead.

(ALL are quiet as they consider. Then one by one, as they say their line they step forward in military fashion and salute.)

JOSIE

I'm going with you, Nurse Daniels.

MILLIE

Me too.

JEAN

If Dr. Stevens is stuck in this war then so am I. I'm going with you.

LAURA

I'd like to think that if Frank needed help, there's a nurse ready and waiting. I'm going too.

HELEN

Count me in.

EDITH

Me too.

MAUDE

Thank you, Nurse Webb, but you just rest. I'll make sure everyone knows you're with us.

HELEN

Well, Sally, what about you? Are you with us too?

SALLY

You promised me adventure, Helen. I guess I'd better see where this adventure takes me. I'm in.

MAUDE

Very well. I'll radio transport and let them know the nurses of Bataan are ready to make their way to Corregidor.

(MAUDE exits. All nurses begin to pack up items or tend to patients. SALLY turns to HELEN.)

SALLY

We're going to be alright, won't we Helen?

HELEN

It's just like Mamma says...as long as we're together, everything is going to be just fine.

(HELEN hugs SALLY so she can't see HELEN'S worried face.)

I promise.

(The sound of bombing continue as lights fade on scene.)

SCENE FOUR

AT RISE: Courtyard of the Santo Tomas Internment Camp, July 2, 1942. There is barbed wire and ramshackle shanties made of lumber, blankets, palm branches, etc. awkwardly hung up. There are palm trees and other tropical plants. At the start, the scene is in darkness except for a spotlight on radio playing big band music. A center structure that looks like a small wooden stage is center. A moment later the music changes to a news bulletin.

RADIO VOICE

Our ladies in the Pacific are on the move again! After evacuating Bataan for the island fortress of Corregidor known as "The Rock", U.S. army nurses once more found themselves creating a hospital where there once was none. Deep underground, in the corridors of the Malinta Tunnels, the nurses cared for their patients day and night, undeterred by the Japanese bombs that rained from the sky overhead. After their ordeal in the jungles of Bataan, these cool concrete catacombs were just what the doctor ordered! But less than a month after their arrival, Corregidor fell to Japanese forces and the nurses stationed at The Rock were confined to the Santo Tomas Internment camp in Manila. What will become of these heroic ladies? Only time will tell.

(End of news bulletin music plays. HELEN enters into spotlight, carrying a suitcase, whose contents are sticking out of every side, and twists the dial on the radio. Melancholy jazz music plays in the background. HELEN turns to the audience, holding a letter.)

HELEN

(reading)

We never expected it to end up like this. Now here we are...locked inside these walls, barbed wire surrounding us, our captors cruel. They don't know what to make of us...women in the military, not having any women in their ranks themselves.

(smiles)

Sally is really coming into her own here, Mamma. I honestly think she's stronger than I am! She's got a bit of a cough right now, but it's nothing to worry about. With thousands of people all crammed in one place we're bound to catch a cold every now and again. I'm taking good care of her. Heck! We're taking care of one another, just the way you taught us.

(Lights change and we are in the courtyard. SALLY, MILLIE, LAURA and JEAN are standing near a crudely thrown together shanty. In another area, MAUDE and JOSIE are planning a hospital space. JOSIE has a clipboard with papers on it. MRS. JAMESON, BILL, RUBY, EDWINA and other POWs are also engaging in various activities. RUBY has the radio. SALLY coughs here and there. HELEN looks around.)

JEAN

(waving her hand)

Helen! Over here!

(HELEN crosses to JEAN and the rest of the group.)

SALLY

What took so long? We've been here since yesterday morning.

HELEN

They kept me in holding an extra night but didn't tell me why...ransacked my suitcase too.

LAURA

Welcome to Santo Tomas, where you have no rights and the guards can do whatever they want.

SALLY

Hey, it could be worse. You heard what happened to the men that were left behind in Bataan.

(All look down, sadly. JEAN starts to cry.)

LAURA

You've got to stay strong, Jean. You need to believe that somewhere Dr. Stevens is safe and one day soon you'll see him again. That's what I'm doing when it comes to Frank.

(JEAN and LAURA embrace as MAUDE and JOSIE cross over.)

JOSIE

The guards say the most critical patients will be taken over to the convent, which is being used as a makeshift hospital. But we will do our initial evaluations and many treatments here in camp.

MAUDE

We've chosen a location here in the courtyard that we're calling the clinic. I'm going to need everyone to pitch in to get it up and running as soon as possible. We'll all take shifts both here in the triage center and at the convent along with the navy and civilian nurses.

JOSIE

I've created a schedule so that everyone knows their shifts.

(JOSIE passes out schedules to NURSES.)

JEAN

I see you've got Edith on the schedule. Is she feeling strong enough to work?

(EDITH enters, smiling.)

EDITH

I sure am.

ALL NURSES

Edith!

(ALL NURSES rush over to EDITH, excitedly.)

MILLIE

You look so much better, Edith!

EDITH

Thanks, Millie. You look great as always.

JEAN

It's maddening, isn't it? No matter what happens, Millie still looks like a Hollywood starlet.

MILLIE

Yeah, well, let's hope the casting directors agree with you when we get out of here.

EDITH

If we get out of here.

JEAN

Now, don't you go starting that "if" business again. Edith. We've all got to stay strong. We've got to believe that one day soon we'll be home again.

EDITH

I'll do my best.

MAUDE

That's all we can do. So get yourselves settled and meet me at the clinic so we can get it set up.

HELEN

Setup with what? They took nearly everything we had when we arrived.

(BILL looks up and listens as RUBY fiddles with the radio.)

JOSIE

The guards give the camp an allotment of thirty-five cents per person per day to cover food, utilities, medical supplies, sanitation...you name it. The Japanese have allowed certain Filipino merchants, officially designated, to come in and sell supplies as well as fresh fruit and vegetables, candy, clothes...that sort of thing.

(BILL taps RUBY on the shoulder, then stands and crosses to MAUDE. RUBY tucks the radio out of sight and follows.)

BILL

If I may...

(holds out his hand to HELEN and others)

Name's Bill Thompson.

(indicated RUBY)

This here's my daughter Ruby. We heard you talking about the Filipino merchants.

RUBY

My dad was eavesdropping. He does that a lot.

BILL

Hard not to around here.

(chuckles, then leans in)

But about those merchants...you might want to know...there's unofficial merchants too...people who can get things in, and more importantly, get things out.

HELEN

Get things out? Like what?

BILL

Like things you might not want the guards to see...letters to loved ones...special intelligence reports...military correspondence.

MAUDE

Is that so? And can those letters and...reports...can they find their way inside the camp too?

BILL

That's a little trickier. The guards are a lot more concerned about what's coming in the camp than what's going out. But for the real important stuff we have our ways...we use the laundry.

MAUDE

The laundry? Genius! Tell me more.

BILL

I'll do you one better...I'll show you! Right this way.
(exits with MAUDE)

JEAN

Who is your dad anyway? Some sort of military spy?

RUBY

He's a teacher. That's why we're in Manila. He was an English language teacher at a school downtown. Now he teaches at the school they set up here in camp.

HELEN

They have a school here too?

(MRS. JAMESON strolls by. She is dressed better than most.)

RUBY

Had to have one. There's nearly a thousand school aged- kids inside these walls. Can you believe it? I become a prisoner of war and I *still* have to go to school.

MRS. JAMESON

That's not all we've got here either. I'm Mrs. Jameson. I overheard Ruby telling you about our school, but we have a lot more than that. We have an exercise field, religious services...even a lending library!

EDITH

A library! That's amazing!

(EDWINA looks up from where she sits nearby. She is dressed over the top, with a feather boa and hat. She looks out of place.)

MRS. JAMESON

Would you like me to take you there?

EDITH

Would I ever!

(exits with MRS. JAMESON)

RUBY

We also have a coffee shop when we can get coffee from the Filipino merchants.

EDWINA

Don't forget about the theater, darling.

(crosses over and holds out her hand)

Ms. Edwina Martin. Charmed, I'm sure.

MILLIE

You said there's a theater?

EDWINA

Oh, yes. We call it Theater Under the Stars!

RUBY

The name fits. It's just a bunch of wood planks nailed together to make a stage.

EDWINA

Theater can happen anywhere, darling. You don't need curtains and walls to make theater. You just need a little imagination.

MILLIE

I've got imagination.

EDWINA

You've got that certain something too, don't you?

(tilts MILLIE'S chin, looking her over)

Don't tell me you're an actress?

MILLIE

Aspiring, yes! Can you tell?

EDWINA

I can tell that you're hungry for stardom. I'd be willing to help you...if you'd like. Ms. Edwina Martin is a performer herself, darling.

RUBY

She's always performing. On the stage, at the coffee shop...in the bathroom...

EDWINA

Have you heard the acoustics in the shower, darling? They're marvelous! They simply can't be wasted!

(turning to MILLIE)

I know everyone in Hollywood. One word from Ms. Edwina Martin and you'll be at the top of every casting list in town. I don't put my name on the line for just anyone, you know. You'll have to work with me every chance you get if you want to be ready for the big time.

MILLIE

I'll do it!

JOSIE

Don't forget about your nursing duties, Millie.

EDWINA

You're a nurse as well? Well that changes everything, darling! Hollywood loves a good backstory, and there's no better backstory than an army nurse turned prisoner of war turned actress. Why, the article in Photoplay Magazine basically writes itself!

MILLIE

Photoplay Magazine? That's my favorite!

EDWINA

Come with me, darling. We have much to discuss.

(EDWINA exits exit with MILLIE.)

JOSIE

Well, I guess we should go ahead and get the clinic set up.

(JEAN crosses to the clinic area followed by SALLY, HELEN and LAURA. JOSIE follows behind the rest of them.

What are you up to right now, Ruby?

RUBY

I don't know. Nothing. Maybe listen to the radio.

JOSIE

You've got a radio? How'd you get it past the guards?

RUBY

I've got my ways.

JOSIE

I bet you do! You know, someone who with quick thinking and ingenuity like that would make a great nurse. Want to help us set up the clinic?

RUBY

You bet!

JOSIE

Come on...and bring the radio.

(JOSIE crosses to clinic area as RUBY grabs the radio and runs to meet JOSIE and the other NURSES. RUBY turns the radio dial to big band music as lights fade into a spotlight on the radio. BILL and MAUDE step into the spotlight from either direction, as if meeting in secret. BILL holds out a telegram.)

BILL

This just came in from the laundry network.

MAUDE

(reading)

Control of all civilian prison camps, including Santo Tomas will officially pass to the War Prisoners Department of the Japanese Imperial army. New regulations will be enforced including the elimination of contact with outside merchants. Additionally, the Japanese army will now supply the camp with all required supplies and food. All electronic devices will be confiscated and use of the radio will be restricted to essential announcements only.

BILL

Things must not be going well for the Japanese.

(RUBY enters, excited, and hands BILL and MAUDE invitations.)

RUBY

Big show tonight at the Theatre Under the Stars. Everyone's invited!

(smiles and exits)

BILL

Should we tell them?

MAUDE

Not tonight. Let's just enjoy it all while we still can.

(MAUDE turns the dial on the radio and the big band music grows louder. Then she and BILL exit in opposite directions. Lights come up slowly on the scene. Shabby, handmade decorations fill the stage, which is set for a variety show. All NURSES, MRS. JAMESON, EDWINA and several POWS stand/sit near the stage, watching. MILLIE, RUBY and EDWINA are offstage or out of sight. A few POWS playing handheld instruments are on the stage. They play the last few notes of their song, in time with the music on the radio. The music ceases and all NURSES and POWS watching applaud. MAUDE and BILL enter and watch. EDWINA enters and steps onto the stage and addresses the assembled group.)

EDWINA

Let's give another round of applause to our very own international band, the Camptown Races.

(waits while ALL applaud.)

Next up, our very own Millie Plinders will make her theatrical debut right here at Theater Under the Stars! She'll be joined by Ruby as they perform Act Two, Scene Five of Romeo and Juliet!

(EDWINA exits the stage and watches from the side as MILLIE and RUBY step onto the stage to applause. They wear crudely assembled costumes.)

MILLIE

(as Juliet)

Now, good sweet nurse—O Lord, why lookest thou sad?
Though news be sad, yet tell them merrily;
If good, thou shamest the music of sweet news
By playing it to me with so sour a face.

RUBY

(as Nurse, holding her back and aching)

I am a-weary, give me leave a while.
Fie, how my bones ache! What a jaunce have I!

(RUBY and MILLIE mimes in character during the nextlines.)

JEAN

(aside to LAURA)

Ha! That looks familiar. Ruby must've been studying a certain someone.

LAURA

Who?

(MAUDE crosses to stand nearby, unseen by JEAN.)

JEAN

Why, Maude of course! Ruby's got her down pat. Can't you see it? A super old nurse with aching bones who's constantly yelling at everyone? Someone should tell Maude that if she's not careful, Ruby could replace her in a heartbeat and no one would be the wiser!

MAUDE

Thanks for the heads up, Perkins.

JEAN

Nurse Daniels!

(relaxes a bit, incredulous)

Are you constantly standing right behind me, just waiting for me to put my foot in my mouth?

MAUDE

I'm always there, Perkins. Watching and waiting....

(smirks at LAURA and crosses away)

JEAN

(to LAURA)

You know, a heads up from *you* would be nice.

MILLIE

(as Juliet)

Is thy news good or bad? Answer to that.

MILLIE (Cont.)

Say either, and I'll stay the circumstance.
Let me be satisfied, is't good or bad?

(MILLIE and RUBY mime in character during the next lines.)

SALLY

Let it be good news. We've had enough bad news to last me the rest of my life.
(coughs)

HELEN

Are you okay?

SALLY

(waving her off, dismissively)

I'm fine.

HELEN

You've had that cough for months now, Sally.

SALLY

(agitated)

I said I'm fine.

RUBY

(as Nurse)

Go thy ways, wench, serve God. What, have you din'd at home?

MILLIE

(as Juliet)

No, no! But all this did I know before.
What says he of our marriage? What of that?
Sweet, sweet, sweet nurse, tell me, what says my love?

(During MILLIE'S line, HENRY and DR. STEVENS enter, unseen by ALL assembled. DR. STEVENS is weary and leans on HENRY for support. Perhaps they are followed by additional weary SOLDIERS. They are all wearing filthy, tattered attire.)

HENRY

Can anyone give us some help here?

JEAN

(turns to see DR. STEVENS)

Dr. Stevens!

(ALL turn as JEAN rushes to DR. STEVENS, who collapses into her arms. She and HENRY gently lower him to the ground. All NURSES and RUBY spring into action—assisting SOLDIERS if present, clearing the crowd of POWS, who exit, getting the clinic setup, etc. EDWINA rushes up to the stage. BILL and MRS. JAMESON stand nearby, watching. HELEN, JOSIE and RUBY cross to treat DR. STEVENS. LAURA and SALLY cross to treat HENRY. Gradually, throughout the next several lines, you can hear the sounds of bombs. At first it's in the distance, but the sounds grow steadily louder.)

JOSIE

His wounds look infected. We need saline and gauze bandages, stat!

(RUBY rushes to the clinic area then crosses back with supplies.)

JEAN

I thought I'd lost you.

DR. STEVENS

Lost me? You can't get rid of me that easily.

(tries to chuckle, but requires effort)

JEAN

There's something I need to tell you, Dr. Stevens—

HELEN

(to DR. STEVENS)

Now, Dr. Stevens, I need you to lie back for a minute.

DR. STEVENS

But Jean was just about to say—

JEAN

It can wait.

HELEN

This might hurt a little.

JEAN

You can hold my hand if you want to.

(smiles and holds out her hand)

DR. STEVENS

I want to.

(DR STEVENS takes JEAN'S hand and holds it as HELEN uses the supplies to treat his wounds. DR. STEVENS cries out in pain. LAURA and JOSIE have HENRY seated in the clinic area.)

LAURA

How's your leg doing, Henry?

HENRY

It's alright. Don't worry about me. How's Dr. Stevens?

SALLY

He'll be okay, thanks to you.

EDITH

(rushes over to HENRY)

George, has anyone seen George?

HENRY

Edith...I'm sorry but he—

EDITH

(bringing a hand to her mouth)

No.

HENRY

Once MacArthur surrendered Bataan to the Japanese, they took us all to the town of Bagac. They took all of our possessions. Then they marched us...all of us...no matter how sick, no matter how close to death...from Bagac to Camp O'Donell.

LAURA

But the distance...that's almost seventy miles.

HENRY

That's correct. We had little food or water. Many were beaten. Hundreds died every day. And George...his body wasn't strong enough. But his heart—his heart was stronger than anyone's. He carried on much longer than the guards thought he would. When it all became too much he made me promise...

(taking a deep breath, taking EDITH'S hand, speaking for George)

“Tell Edith that at the end of the book, Mowgli...he finds his pack...his sense of strength...his family. He finds them and they are together again.”

EDITH

He finished it.

HENRY

Stayed up day and night reading until the Japanese came.

(HENRY embraces EDITH as MAUDE then crosses to HELEN and DR. STEVENS.)

HELEN

(to RUBY)

Monitor the gauze to make sure it's clean and isn't too soaked with blood. If you need to change it, do it just like I showed you.

MAUDE

You've come a long way, Bailey. I'm proud of you.

HELEN

Thank you, Nurse Daniels.

(The sound of bombing gets louder. BILL crosses to MAUDE)

MAUDE

Sounds like the war has made its way back to Manila.

BILL

I'd say it's already here.

(The sounds of bombs continue, as lights fade into a spotlight on the radio as we hear the start of a news bulletin.)

RADIO VOICE

As the U.S. enters its fourth year of war, the Angels of Bataan close in on nearly three years of imprisonment. Tales of their heroism have been heard throughout the world as the Angels, despite being prisoners themselves, continue to nurse the sick. And with the prison camps now under the control of the Japanese Imperial Army, conditions have gone from bad to worse. There is little food or drink, with prisoners receiving only one meal per day. Deaths from malnutrition occur daily, and the severely ill are no longer being sent to hospitals, straining already limited resources. But there is hope on the horizon! On Christmas morning, 1944, American planes rained down leaflets expressing their hopes for the new year. Could liberation be mat hand for our Angels of Bataan? Hold on just a little while longer, ladies...our boys are coming for you!

(End of news bulletin music plays. We see a hand reach into a spotlight and feel around for the dial of the radio, which she turns to a classical station. Sad/melancholy music plays as lights come up on scene, which depicts an even shabbier camp than before. We also hear occasional bombs. We see that it was LAURA, lying down, who changed the station. Two years have passed. All POWS are filthy, their clothes ragged. SALLY lays listless on a cot or mat, along with other SOLDIERS and POWS, if present. MAUDE, EDITH and RUBY weakly care for SOLDIERS and POWS, MILLIE cares for MRS. JAMESON, who is lying down, skin covered in red sores. HELEN sits at SALLY'S side, trying to feed her. JOSIE stands nearby.)

HELEN

She won't eat anything.

JOSIE

Just keep trying. She need all the nutrients she can get. How's Mrs. Jameson?

MILLIE

It's definitely beriberi...the dry version. She has the telltale lesions.

(holds up MRS. JAMESON'S arm as EDWINA stumbles in.)

EDWINA

It could be worse. Wet beriberi is basically a death sentence. She's pretty lucky.

MRS. JAMESON

Pretty lucky! That's easy for you to say. Your skin isn't covered in painful sores.

EDWINA

And thank goodness for that, or else I'd never get back onstage...not with a face full of scars!

MRS. JAMESON

Scars! I can't have scars...not on my face.

MILLIE

Then lie back and let me work.

(MILLIE continues working on MRS. JAMESON as SALLY lets out a hacking cough, then goes still. MAUDE rushes over.)

HELEN

Sally, I'm here!

MAUDE

Is she breathing?

HELEN

(bends down and checks, relieved)

She's still breathing, thank goodness. I can't lose her, Nurse Daniels! I promised Mamma that we'd stay together...that I'd keep her safe. She wouldn't be here if it weren't for me. I begged her to come. I told her she'd be sorry if she didn't. Told her I'd never forgive her if she stayed behind. And now I'll never forgive myself for doing this to her.

MAUDE

You didn't do this to Sally. No one did. This is war.

RUBY

She once told me the best decision she ever made was to be an army nurse. She said she felt like she was making a real difference...that this was the kind of work she was meant for.

(JEAN enters with DR. STEVENS.)

HELEN

She can't die, not now...not after everything we've been through.

JEAN

Then she won't. You've just got to stay strong and believe that one day soon she'll be well again.

HELEN

(squeezing SALLY'S hand)

Then that's what I'll do.

MAUDE

Nurse Perkins, where have you been? Your shift started twenty minutes ago.

(JEAN holds out her left hand, on which is a gauze ring.)

JEAN

Actually, it's Nurse Stevens now.

LAURA

(sitting up)

You did it? You got married?

DR. STEVENS

(putting his arm around JEAN)

We were taking care of Pastor Phillip, and he was starting to feel better so we thought, what the heck, might as well do it now.

EDITH

(crossing to JEAN, excitedly, though weakly)

Let's see the ring!

(RUBY, MILLIE and LAURA cross to JEAN to admire her ring)

JEAN

It's only made of gauze for now, but we'll get a new one when we get home.

EDITH

If—

JEAN

(interrupts quickly)

Don't even say it. We are *not* starting that "if" business again, Edith.

EDITH

I was just going to say—

JEAN

No! I will not allow any negative thoughts on my wedding day. I absolutely forbid you to say it.

EDITH

(laughing)

I was just going to say that if you were interested, my uncle owns a jewelry shop in Queens. I'm sure he'd be happy to help you find a beautiful ring.

JEAN

Oh...well, in that case!

(JEAN embraces EDITH and they laugh as BILL enters.)

BILL

Look what just dropped from a passing American bomber.

(holds up a pair of goggles with a note attached)

It's a pair of aviator goggles with a note tied to them.

(takes the note off the goggles and reads)

It says, "Roll out the barrel. Santa Claus is coming."

MAUDE

Santa Claus is coming?

JEAN

See? Santa always finds us!

JOSIE

Maybe the U.S. army reached Manila. There's a chance we might be set free!

RUBY

But what does it mean by, "roll out the barrel?"

BILL

It's from a polka song. It means to celebrate.

EDWINA

So then it doesn't have anything to do with those barrels the guards are placing around the camp?

MAUDE

Barrels?

EDWINA

You know...the ones stuffed with cloth that smells like kerosene?

DR. STEVENS

You don't think—

JEAN

What is it?

DR. STEVENS

The Japanese must know the end is near. I think they might've made a bunch of giant bombs and placed them around the camp so when the U.S. army starts shooting...

BILL

The entire camp will blow to smithereens.

(ALL stare in disbelief. The sounds of bombing grow louder. ALL look up in unison and then the lights go out, except for one spotlight on HELEN, who stands and turns to audience, holding a letter in her hand. The classical music transitions to Clair De Lune by Claude Debussy. As she reads and describes the events, the lights slowly come up, red like flares and fire. There is smoke. The events play out in slow motion behind her as the music swells, drowning out the sound of bombs.)

HELEN

(reading)

We thought that was it...we were done for. The power went out. We sat there in the dark, holding hands, waiting. I squeezed Sally's hand as tight as I could, Mamma...letting her know I was there...letting her know we were together and that everything was going to be fine...even as I was certain that death had finally caught up with us.

Then suddenly, in the darkness the red glow of flares lit up the sky. We looked at one another, not sure what it was. The bombing and gunfire grew louder. I'm not trying to scare you Mamma, but I have to tell you...we thought this was the end. Then came the rumbling...a rumbling so powerful...so strong, it knocked down furniture and sent us flying out of one another's arms. We used what we could to shield us from imminent danger...a cot, a woven mat. the supply cart...anything to protect us from flying debris or...worse. Several minutes went by before we realized the rumbling wasn't coming from the homemade bombs the guards had laid out...it was the sound of U.S. tanks crashing through the front gates of camp. They were here...Santa Claus had come. We were liberated! After the bombings at Clark Field, after the months spent in the Jungle Camp, after one thousand and two days of confinement inside these walls with almost no food or water or medicine, we were...

(stops, drops the letter at her side and looks up, tearfully)

We were finally free.

(HELEN turns and reenters the scene, taking SALLY'S hand as the shadow or back of a SOLDIER enters the scene. At first, the NURSES and POWS cower as the shadow grows larger, unsure if he is friend or foe. Then he speaks.)

SOLDIER

Howdy folks. Who's ready to go home?

(NURSES and POWS turn to one another, smile and embrace and exit. HELEN squeezes SALLY'S hand.)

HELEN

You hear that, Sally? We're going home.

(Lights fade on the scene as the sound of Clair de Lune fades out.)

SCENE FIVE

AT RISE: Arlington National Cemetery, 2001. A pool of light is center. EDITH, ANN, JEAN and MILLIE are standing in the pool of light with their backs to the audience. They wear long dark coats and hats. On their coats is pinned the medal of valor. If possible, they look older. A simple white tombstone is center, though hidden by the NURSES. Perhaps some emotional instrumental music is playing. One by one, as they say their lines they turn in military fashion, as in Scene One.

EDITH

February 3, 1945...all sixty-six army nurses and the other 3,800 civilian and military prisoners of war at the Santo Tomas internment camp were liberated by a flying column of the 1ST Calvary of the United States Army.

(salutes)

LAURA

February 23, 1945...all eleven navy nurses along with 2,147 allied civilian and military prisoners were liberated as well from the Los Banos internment camp.

(salutes)

MILLIE

February 19, 1945...the army nurses now known the world over as the Angels of Bataan were awarded the Bronze Medal of Valor on the airport tarmac in Leyte Island in the Philippines.

(salutes)

JEAN

February 24, 1945...after thirty-seven hours in the air spanning nearly 7,500 miles, the Angels of Bataan touched down at Hamilton Field in San Francisco, California...home at last.

(HELEN enters slowly, older and weary, carrying a white rose. As she enters, the nurses turn to face her then part in the center, revealing the tombstone. HELEN crosses to the tombstone then turns to the audience. The NURSES turn to face her.)

HELEN

The Angels and I returned to a very different world than we had left over three years before. There were new advancements...new technologies.

HELEN (Cont.)

It was as if we were time travelers or space explorers and had stepped foot on a new planet. And what's more, we were celebrities, media darlings...posing for pictures, giving speeches...we barely had a moment to catch our breath.

Thankfully Sally recovered quickly after the liberation. We had made it home...together...and everything was going to be just fine. Sally and I settled back into life at home. I married a kind and supportive man and together we spent a life of adventure and love.

(chuckles)

Sally had enough adventure in the Philippines to last several lifetimes, but she continued to work, using her quick thinking and calm demeanor to help thousands of people throughout her forty years as a nurse. She was greatly admired by her parents, her husband, her children, and...her sister, who was in awe of her until the day she died, tired, yet fulfilled, at the age of eighty-three.

(The sound of a trumpet playing Taps is heard. A SOLDIER enters, marching, and holding a folded American Flag. He kneels and presents it to HELEN, who turns to face him.)

SOLDIER

On behalf of the President of the United States, the United States Army, Marine Corps, and a grateful nation, please accept this flag as a symbol of our appreciation for your loved one's honorable and faithful service.

(HELEN accepts the flag. SOLDIER stands, salutes, does an about face and exits. HELEN turns toward the audience.)

HELEN

The American flag...so crisp, so clean, so...symbolic.

ALL NURSES

(putting a hand over their heart)

With liberty and justice for all.

(Spotlight narrows in on HELEN as she looks down at the flag.)

HELEN

For all.

(HELEN places the white rose at the base of the tombstone and exits. The spotlight narrows to focus on the tombstone, slowly fading until lights black. End of play.)