

LET THEM HOWL

BY SHARON BAJER

CHARACTERS:

PROFESSOR MCDOWELL
MALLORY, A STUDENT
NELLIE MCCLUNG
MR. ROBERTSON JONES
SIR
MADAME
NEWSIE
LILLIAN THOMAS
FRANCIS BEYNON
TICKET SELLER
SHABBY GENTLEMAN
MARY CRAWFORD

Play within a play

HORACE
GWENDOLYN
GERTIE
MOLLIE
MAUDIE SPARKS
AUNT WILLIE
BARBERSHOP QUARTETTE
FRANCIS GRAHAM
PAGE
MR CROWLEY
MRS CROWLEY
MRS PERRY
MISS HAIG
MR SKINNER
FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER

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The set consists of a door in a doorframe on wheels that can be pushed and turned easily about the stage. This door will be the portal into different rooms and different times. The other set pieces can be indicated with old wooden chairs and boxes, or set pieces as needed.

Present day. PROFESSOR MCDOWELL sits at her desk. There is a knock at the door.

Professor McDowell: (*calling*) Door's open.

A young female student, MALLORY opens the door and enters tentatively.

Professor McDowell: Come in. Sit. I don't bite.

Mallory enters. Sits. They stare at each other, each waiting for the other to speak.

Professor McDowell: (*finally*) Yes?

Mallory: I thought you wanted to see me.

Professor McDowell: Indeed.

(another long pause)

Mallory: Am I in trouble or something Professor?

Professor McDowell: Why do you think you are in trouble?

Mallory: Well, you're giving me that disappointed look. You know, all... stern and serious. (*she imitates Professor McDowell's stern expression*)

Professor McDowell: Is that how I look?

Mallory: That's how most people look at me.

Professor McDowell: Mallory, can you tell me why you took this course?

Mallory: It's required.

Professor McDowell: It's *required*.

Mallory: Yeah. I'm not really interested in this stuff.

Professor McDowell: This *stuff*?

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Mallory: Yeah. Sorry. I know I shouldn't say that. I mean what a bunch of feminists did a hundred years ago doesn't mean that much to me.

Professor McDowell: Is that right?

Mallory: Sorry, you're probably a feminist.

Professor McDowell: Probably.

(pause)

Mallory: Look. I don't...I'm not mad about my mark.

Professor McDowell: You should be.

Mallory: I deserved a fail on that assignment. I'm not...I couldn't think of a topic. Anyway, I'm not going to appeal it or anything. Do you think it's too late to drop the course?

Professor McDowell: Yes.

Mallory: Damn. My parents are going to kill me.

Professor McDowell: Did you understand the assignment?

Mallory: Yes.

Professor McDowell: What was it?

Mallory: You wanted us to write a speech.

Professor McDowell: I wanted you to write a speech about something that would change the minds of others – something you felt strongly about.

Mallory: I couldn't think of anything!

Professor McDowell: Did you have any ideas at all?

Mallory: No!

Professor McDowell: I don't believe you.

Mallory: Are you calling me a liar?

Professor McDowell: Were you afraid I'd make you do the speech in front of the class?

Mallory: Would you have?

Professor McDowell: Does that scare you?

Mallory: I'm no good at public speaking okay! I'm horrible at writing! I'm a crappy student! I don't care about women and history stuff and I shouldn't even be here!

Professor McDowell: So why are you here?

Mallory: My parents made me. They made me take this stupid course!

Professor McDowell: Where would you like to be instead?

Mallory: The beach.

Professor McDowell: Your parents only want what's best for you.

Mallory: They don't know what's best for me!

Professor McDowell: Do you?

(Mallory shrugs)

Professor McDowell: Is there anything in your life that you feel is unfair that you'd like to change?

Mallory: Going to university.

Professor McDowell: You are a bright young woman living in an amazing time! You have the privilege of getting a proper education at an excellent university! You have the power and freedom to shape your future into whatever you want it to be! I don't understand why you aren't excited by that!

Mallory: Why do you care anyway? You get paid whether I go here or not right?

Professor McDowell gets up and walks slowly to the door. She closes it.

Professor McDowell: "Women who set a low value on themselves make life hard for all women." Do you know who said that?

Mallory: I don't know. Margaret Atwood?

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Professor McDowell: A woman by the name of Nellie McClung. Do you recall anything about her in the *required* reading?

Mallory: Well yeah. She fought for the vote.

Professor McDowell: A lot of women at the time did. What was so special about her?

Mallory: Well I suppose you put her in the course because she lived in Manitoba and you couldn't think of anyone else from here that did anything interesting. *(pause)* You have that look again.

Professor McDowell: *(takes a deep breath)* Did you find anything intriguing about her? *(pause)* She was a teacher, a writer, a politician, a mother. She was part of a group called The Political Equality League that fought for women's suffrage.

Mallory: She was a suffragette?

Professor: Oh please don't say "suffragette". She was a *Suffragist*. The British Suffragettes were very violent. Nellie and her crew were much more civil. They used wit and words to get their point across.

Mallory: Touchy.

Professor McDowell: No, no. A lot of people make that mistake. It just irks me that's all.

Mallory: *Suffragist*.

Professor McDowell: Excellent. So, can you think of anything that you'd like to change for women today?

Mallory: Not really. Sorry. You are seriously wasting your breath.

(pause)

Professor McDowell: *(regrouping)* Do you like music? Theatre?

Mallory: Not really.

Professor McDowell: *(forced sweet)* There's a show in the Exchange district that starts in a few minutes. I have an extra ticket and I'd like you to be my guest.

Mallory: I don't know. I think I'm busy.