

Scene Seven

(Lights up on JACQUES.)

JACQUES. Jacques Arc would not allow his wife to be there at the burning. He sent her off to a chapel clear to the other end of the city where she'd be spared the smell of the smoke. He was told that the crowds would be thick and if he wanted to be anywhere near his daughter that he had to get there early. He took his place near the stake before dawn and watched as the pitch-covered kindling and logs were brought in. He stood his ground as the square filled up and he shut his ears to all the ugly talk. When his daughter's cart rolled up, he raised his hand so she could see him. He wanted her to know that her da was proud of her. He wanted her to know that her da had her back. He watched. He watched. He never took his eyes off his child and saw her through her agony. Once it was over, Jacques felt it his duty to stay until every last trace of his girl was gone. Relic traders rushed the mound to collect his daughters' blackened bones to sell as souvenirs. Then soldiers came and beat them back and shoveled the smoking mess into buckets to throw in the river. A monk who was there to cleanse the spot with holy water scooped a fistful of ash into a rag and gave the bundle to Jacques. Then the monk led Jacques out of the square because the Maid's father had lost his sight.

(Lights up on PIERRE.)

PIERRE. Pierre had shown up for the burning as well, but he spent most of the time in a tavern drinking himself sick. He paid his bar bill with a hank of his sister's hair that he kept in a pouch along with the tip of the arrow he once pulled from her flesh. He went back to the army, drank some more, and prayed to God that he'd get hit.

(Lights up on ISABELLE.)

START

ISABELLE. Jacques died in the ox cart on the way home. Isabelle buried her husband next to their daughter's

ashes up on the grassy hill where Joan first had her visions.

Isabelle Arc was never going to get over it. Never. But she wasn't goin' to fade away in the dark of an empty house. She got herself a proper horse and wagon and she traveled. She learned herself how to read. She went to Rome and she met with the pope and told that man in the hat that her daughter was no bloody heretic. She faced a tribunal of clergy, three rows of them in robes black as crows, all of them just waitin' for the poor dim peasant woman to fall to pieces. But she didn't. Isabelle Arc stared those bastards down and she cleared her Joanie's name. Isabelle Arc still went to church but she didn't talk to priests. She talked directly to God Almighty Himself and raged at Him at will. She had no fear of Him. Nor of death. She planned on shaking her fists for all eternity.

(Lights transition to reveal that ISABELLE is standing on grassy mound that's scattered with meadow flowers, framed by a fine blue sky. She listens to the sound of bird song and the soft hum of bees.)

You hear those birds? How do they keep up it all day. It must be for pure enjoyment. And look at all these wild flowers – how do such delicate things manage to push their way up outta the dirt. And all those silly bees digging in to those blossoms, sucking up the nectar, not givin' up – oh the greedy, greedy things. And smell that air. So full of the sweetness of grass and bud and life. And the sky. Such a clear, clean blue. This is what made my daughter's heart so large. She didn't need to conjure up some saint. This, all this, this...is pure goodness.

I had a daughter once.

(Lights fade.)

End of Play