

Scene Five

(The court of King Charles. The setting doesn't appear as grand as before, the light shifted, to create a more muted scene.)

(ISABELLE is with the LADY OF THE COURT.)

LADY OF THE COURT. I want you to know that my girls and I pray for Joan every day. We've put a statue of Saint Catherine in our chapel and the girls go in there every evening and light candles and they pray for a full half hour.

(The LADY OF THE COURT brings out some folded notes.)

They wrote these notes to give to Joan. Just some words of encouragement.

ISABELLE. She doesn't read.

LADY OF THE COURT. Oh my gosh. Of course. I'm so sorry. They're short – I can read them to you and you can let Joan know what they say.

ISABELLE. My daughter needs to be rescued. She doesn't need notes.

LADY OF THE COURT. Yes, I know.

ISABELLE. I've asked to see the king. I need to talk to him. He needs to find a way to save her. But I can't get in to see him. I was told to put my name on a list and come back in a month.

LADY OF THE COURT. No, that isn't right.

ISABELLE. So I thought a letter from me might help – I paid a scribe in the marketplace. If you could get it to him, as soon as you can, I'd much appreciate it.

(ISABELLE hands the letter to the LADY OF THE COURT.)

LADY OF THE COURT. Absolutely. I'll see what I can do. I don't have direct access to the king, but my husband knows the secretary of one of his ministers.

ISABELLE. But we need to get it to the king direct. He's the one who loves our Joan.

LADY OF THE COURT. Yes, of course. May I read this?

ISABELLE. Yes, go ahead.

(The LADY OF THE COURT takes a moment to read the letter.)

LADY OF THE COURT. This is...are you sure this is what you want to say?

ISABELLE. What do y'mean?

LADY OF THE COURT. It's a bawdy poem.

ISABELLE. That bastard. This fellow swore to me he was followin' me word for word.

LADY OF THE COURT. You have to be very careful with who you pick to write your letters.

ISABELLE. I was. This man had his own booth. He was nicely dressed and his hands were clean. He even gave me a choice of paper. I got the best kind. I paid extra for it, and look what he did.

LADY OF THE COURT. There're are so many unscrupulous people out there. We'll do this over.

(Calling.)

Monique, call the scribe, please.

He'll be here in a moment.

ISABELLE. What does it say?

LADY OF THE COURT. Oh, we don't need to read it.

ISABELLE. I'd like to know.

LADY OF THE COURT. It's about your daughter. It's extremely crude.

ISABELLE. Why would he write such a thing?

LADY OF THE COURT. I don't know. Let's just tear it up, shall we?

ISABELLE. He knew I was her mother, he knew I was in distress. Why would he want to do that to me?

LADY OF THE COURT. People can be so vile.

ISABELLE. I don't understand. I thought that my daughter was loved.

(The SCRIBE comes in with his writing box.)

SCRIBE. You called for me, Madame?

LADY OF THE COURT. Yes. Madame Arc would like to dictate a letter. Let's use your nicest paper.

SCRIBE. Yes, Madame.

ISABELLE. I remember you. You took down a letter for my Joan. It was right before the coronation.

SCRIBE. Yes, Madame, I did.

ISABELLE. Did you write many letters for her?

SCRIBE. Quite a few, yes.

ISABELLE. When was the last time you saw her?

SCRIBE. About two weeks before she was captured.

ISABELLE. Did you enjoy the time you spent with her?

SCRIBE. Did I enjoy...?

ISABELLE. Did you talk about things with her, did you have conversations? Was she jolly?

SCRIBE. Jolly?

ISABELLE. Silly word, I'm sorry – never mind. I just wanted to know how she was.

SCRIBE. Madame, whenever you're ready.

(A beat.)

ISABELLE. Havin' a hard time, gatherin' my thoughts...

LADY OF THE COURT. Take your time.

ISABELLE. I don't know what to say.

LADY OF THE COURT. What did you say to the other scribe?

ISABELLE. I can't remember. Sorry. I'm still a little upset.

LADY OF THE COURT. Take your time, dear.

ISABELLE. I'm sorry.

LADY OF THE COURT. It's all right. You've been through a lot.

SCRIBE. Shall I come back later, Madame?

LADY OF THE COURT. I think so, yes.

(The SCRIBE starts packing his kit.)

ISABELLE. Was that letter too harsh?

SCRIBE. Excuse me?

ISABELLE. The one she wrote to that duke before the coronation. Did she step on too many toes, do you think?

SCRIBE. I don't know. I just write down the words.

ISABELLE. Why don't you care more?

SCRIBE. Madame?

ISABELLE. You spent time with my daughter, you took down her words. Why aren't you more grieved that she's bin' taken?

SCRIBE. I'm just trying to be professional, Madame.

ISABELLE. No one cares around here.

LADY OF THE COURT. We care, of course, we all care.

SCRIBE. We do, Madame, we care very much.

ISABELLE. Then why isn't anything bein' done for her? Why didn't the king pay her ransom?

SCRIBE. To be honest, Madame, our treasury is quite depleted. And her ransom was set extremely high. It's the highest on record, it seems.

LADY OF THE COURT. Which is a good thing, really. It shows how much she's valued. The English will want to take good care of her.

ISABELLE. She's chained to a wall in the dark. She can barely move. Her guards are always tryin' to touch her. Does the king know how much she's suffering?

LADY OF THE COURT. I'll make sure that he knows. I'll write the king a letter myself.

ISABELLE. They're going to burn my girl, do you understand?

(The LADY OF THE COURT nods to the SCRIBE that he should go. The SCRIBE exits and the LADY OF THE COURT takes ISABELLE's hands.)

LADY OF THE COURT. Your daughter will be all right. I know it in my heart.

ISABELLE. How do you know?

LADY OF THE COURT. My daughters and I were talking about Joan this morning and my youngest said to me, "You know, Mama, I had a dream last night that I was sitting next to the Maid. We were at a big banquet and she was wearing the most beautiful dress and we were giggling together because we were the best of friends."

ISABELLE. My daughter doesn't wear dresses.

LADY OF THE COURT. Yes, of course. The dress is only a symbol. Of better times, don't you see?

ISABELLE. The dress was dreamed up by a girl who eats peacock twice a week and goes to sleep in a nice soft bed. And Joan doesn't giggle. Never has. I don't know what your daughter was thinkin'.

LADY OF THE COURT. She's just a little girl.

ISABELLE. Is that all you people have to offer? A silly dream and some prayers in front of your fancy altars? That king of yours – he should be ashamed of himself, the way he used my daughter.

LADY OF THE COURT. Isabelle, we're doing the best that we can. I feel sick about this. I love your daughter.

ISABELLE. No, you don't. You don't know her. You never cleaned her nose or wiped her bum or picked the knots out of her hair. You never felt her weight against you when she fell asleep. You don't know the smell of her. She never hid her face behind your skirts or cried for you to pick her up. You never watched her grow up into somethin' that's taller and smarter than you. You never knew her restlessness. And you don't know her fear. My child is so afraid.

LADY OF THE COURT. Isabelle, listen to me – whatever happens, I know you'll be a comfort to her. That's all we can do when our children are hurting, to be there for them, to hold their hands, and sing to them, and tuck them in.

ISABELLE. For God's sake, there's nothing to tuck her into! She's on a pallet with irons around her wrists, still calling out to her bloody saint!

LADY OF THE COURT. Oh Madame Arc, I don't know what else to do for you. I'm so sorry. I'm so very, very sorry. Please forgive me... I'm just a mother.

ISABELLE. Oh lady, bless your heart. And bless your daughters for their pretty dresses and their clever minds. Bless them for having the good manners to write notes to a girl who's about to be tied to a stake. You've raised them up well.

(ISABELLE leaves.)

(Fade out.)