

BLIND TO THE TRUTH

A One-Act Wartime Drama

By



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CHARACTERS

BETTY JO	Brilliant WAVE in her 20's, very nearsighted, highly respected, secretly engaged
MAGGIE	Another WAVE, in her 20's, lively and impulsive
EDITH	Another WAVE, in her 20's, sensible and caring
JEFFERSON	BETTY JO's boss, middle-aged, supervisor of NAVY code operations, kind and friendly
MULLIGAN	BETTY JO's new boss, middle-aged, supervisor of new bombe project, mercurial temperament
BOB	MR. MULLIGAN's assistant, in his 20's, comes across as awkward and shy with glimmers of cleverness that reveal an underlying confidence

SETTING

The United States Navy Headquarters in Washington, D.C.

TIME

Summer of 1943

DEDICATION

This play is dedicated to Walter and LaDonna Jones.

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Contains possible identifiers and is therefore covered for now

BLIND TO THE TRUTH

ACT ONE

Scene 1

AT RISE:

A conference room of the Navy Headquarters, 1943. Sounds of quick typing and low murmuring as lights go up, followed by a shrill whistle and sounds of chairs scraping and people standing. Giggling, MAGGIE enters pushing BETTY JO. EDITH follows with interest.

BETTY JO

Why are we eating in here? All the other WAVES eat in the mess hall.

MAGGIE

Betty Jo, it's about time you told us the real reason you took a weekend off.

BETTY JO

Time with family! Everyone needs a break—

EDITH

You worked day and night on JN-25 and didn't stop until you saved Midway! No way would you take a random break—

MAGGIE

That's okay. (to Edith) We know.

BETTY JO

How did you—

MAGGIE

Lou told me. He says Fred was acting the same way you've been since they got off the ship. As soon as they were off patrol yesterday, Lou turned to him and said, (mimicking Lou) "Freddie ole pal, out with it—and congratulations!"

BETTY JO

Why didn't Freddy tell Lou not to tell anyone?

MAGGIE

He did—oh, um...

EDITH

Betty Jo, why the secrecy? Fred is a wonderful man!

BETTY JO

Edith, don't you remember what the recruiting officer told us? "Once a girl gets engaged, it is her duty to forfeit her military status and put her family first." There is a war to be won for our whole nation, and we both agree that the best way to take care of each other is to win it. I can't get sacked now. So no ring, no telling our friends—

MAGGIE

—Not even us—

BETTY JO

—Just a simple proposal and a promise to marry the day the war ends.

MAGGIE

Oooh, that is so romantic! You and Fred are so noble together...

(JEFFERSON enters.)

JEFFERSON

What's this, Maggie? Falling in love, Miss Midway?

BETTY JO

We were just...

EDITH

Discussing friendships.

MAGGIE

Betty Jo's got—noble friends.

JEFFERSON

He's a noble young man, all right—spotted that Japanese spy before he could enter the translating room. Wrangled him single-handedly. If you ask me, he'd make a good match for the hero of Midway.

BETTY JO

Oh Mr. Jefferson, I don't really—

JEFFERSON

Miss Robin, I don't have time for protestations. There's an official who need to speak with you on urgent business. (to EDITH and MAGGIE) Excuse us, ladies.

(EDITH and MAGGIE leave, whispering to each other)

BETTY JO

Um...about Fred...

JEFFERSON

Don't be ashamed, Miss Robin! Fred Carson is a nice young man! Always looks up at your cipher room window when he marches by. Now that he's finally off that ship, I'm sure any day now he'll ask you on a date!

BETTY JO (relieved)

Oh...well, who knows?

(Footsteps approach. MULLIGAN and BOB enter.)

JEFFERSON

You must be Mr. Mulligan! Have a seat! (to BOB) And you are?

MULLIGAN

My assistant, Bob.

JEFFERSON

Right. Delighted. This is Miss Betty Jo Robin, the young lady who will be helping you with Operation Greenberry.

MULLIGAN

Delighted, Miss Robin. I am John Mulligan, Navy executive officer in charge of the new Operation Greenberry Project.

(BOB stands and offers BETTY JO his chair.)

BOB

Miss Robin.

MULLIGAN

Mr. Jefferson says you were instrumental in averting a national crisis...But you look distressed, Miss Robin.

BETTY JO

Excuse me, sir. I'm quite nearsighted. I never realize when I'm squinting.

JEFFERSON

Miss Robin's glasses broke last week. Because of the war shortages, she hasn't been able to get new ones. But I can assure you it hasn't affected her work.

MULLIGAN

So I gather.

JEFFERSON

Mr. Mulligan arrived with a stack of papers qualifying him as the right man for his job. Numerous government officials have endorsed him to head the most top-secret code work the Navy has ever known. Miss Robin, as of tomorrow, you will no longer work under my supervision.

MULLIGAN

I'll try to explain my presence as quickly as I can. The Navy has recently become aware of major threats at sea. It's a fact—the Germans are reading our most critical messages. I will disclose what little information I am allowed to give you. Instead of breaking codes, you will now be making codes.

BETTY JO

I will be encoding the United States' communication?

MULLIGAN

Only their most critical communication. You will also be testing our newest cipher machine, our metaphorical "bombe." Not even other WAVES must have any idea what you are doing.

JEFFERSON

Betty Jo, the fate of our nation may rest in your hands. You do not have to accept, but—

BETTY JO

Of course I accept! Um...when do I start?

MULLIGAN

Miss Robin, I thank you. Now come with me and Bob to the Greenberry room. Mr. Jefferson, thank you.

(Lights fade as BOB, MULLIGAN, and BETTY JO exit. JEFFERSON exits separately.)

END SCENE

Scene 2

Later that day. A dimly lit room with a large desk and the bombe machine and a metal cabinet against the wall. BETTY JO is busy at the machine. BOB bursts in carrying a can. MULLIGAN enters behind him.

BOB

Miss Robin—
(stumbles)

MULLIGAN

No! Bob! You *must* be careful; we can't afford—*You* can't afford to—
(Suddenly sees BETTY JO.)

Still here, Miss Robin? My, you *are* a hard worker!

BETTY JO

I was almost done—figured I'd finish. Here's today's cipher...see...use the additives on the left...I encoded the rest of the rendezvous instructions.

MULLIGAN

The break whistle blew an hour ago...

(MR. MULLIGAN studies the paper.)

Well, I can't discourage this dedication. Not even a German could crack this. Well done!

BETTY JO

Um...Mr. Mulligan...

MULLIGAN

Yes? What?

BETTY JO

If I may...what is that?

MULLIGAN

Oh, that! Just machine oil! Bob, that cabinet. No, the one with the lock. Use the key I gave you.

BETTY JO

Just machine oil?

MULLIGAN

Maybe I should say *valuable* machine oil. These new bombe machines are still in the testing stage and cannot function without it. And it's extremely expensive—I don't have to remind you about war shortages. Just—don't touch it. Please.

(MULLIGAN exits.)

BETTY JO

Does he always talk to you like that?

BOB

He didn't mean—it was clumsy—I could have—

BETTY JO

—But still. You didn't.

BOB

Thanks, Miss—

BETTY JO

—Please, call me Betty Jo.

BOB

—Betty Jo. Oh—before I forget—a letter. It came, I mean. For you.

(BOB fumbles in his pocket.)

BETTY JO

Victory Mail? From...

(BOB pulls out a crumpled letter as candy wrappers and small papers fall out with it. BETTY JO bends to pick them up, but stops when she sees the name on the letter.)

Freddy!

BOB

Yes, well—I'll leave you alone. Good day, Miss Rob—Betty—Jo.

(Bob exits.)

BETTY JO

Bye, Bob!

(BETTY JO opens the letter.)

Betty, my dearest love... Oh, no. Oh, no...

(BETTY JO trails off as she stares at the letter. Lights fade.)

END SCENE

Scene 3

The conference room, the next day. BETTY JO is sitting in a chair staring at the letter. EDITH and MAGGIE enter.

EDITH
Anything wrong?

BETTY JO
Oh, no. Just a bit of business.

MAGGIE
Don't tell us what it is!

EDITH
She knows, Maggie!
(EDITH winks at BETTY JO)
And I'm sure she's having lots of fun sharpening pencils and emptying trash!

BETTY JO
You guessed it. Now if you don't mind, it's keeping me very—

MAGGIE
—Oh, Betty, how's Fred doing? Lou says he hasn't seen him since they got off the ship.

BETTY JO
He's—very busy.

MAGGIE
I hope he's not too busy to take you to the Emerald Café later this week—there's going to be a dance!

EDITH
Maggie—

MAGGIE
Lou asked me today! I'm wearing that pink satin—I'll need to spruce it up a little, though—the Emerald Café is pretty high end.

EDITH
Maggie.

MAGGIE

Sorry, sorry. I'm being rude. I haven't even asked Betty Jo what she's going to wear. That yellow print, right, Betty?

BETTY JO

Well, I'm—

(BOB suddenly bursts in, stopping abruptly when he sees the girls.)

BOB

Oh, excuse me—my coat—I left it. Here.

(BOB darts to the coatrack and snatches the coat, accidentally pulling over the coatrack as he darts back to the door. He moves to fix it, but BETTY JO beats him to it.)

Thanks, Miss—

(BOB exits.)

MAGGIE

Well, he's cute! You work with him?

BETTY JO

He's my boss's assistant. Brings in paperwork and brings out Mr. Mulligan's temper. Never saw such a quick turn from sunny to stormy, even on the East Coast. It's almost like Mr. Mulligan's two different people.

EDITH

But he's pleased with you?

BETTY JO

Well, the sun comes out when I'm around!

MAGGIE

And what about—him? Is he always so...

BETTY JO

Oh, Bob. Yes—but he's really quite nice. Doesn't say much, always in a hurry. I guess Mr. Mulligan keeps him busy.

MAGGIE

You like him?

BETTY JO

Bob reminds me of Freddy in some ways...some of his little quirks. Even likes the same candy! Sort of like Freddy if you take away his signature confidence. Well, I—guess I should get to work.

(BETTY JO exits)

MAGGIE

(to Edith) Ooh...

(MAGGIE and EDITH exit through the other door. A few seconds after they leave, BETTY JO cautiously opens the door. When she sees no one is around, she reenters and sits down again. She starts to pull out the letter but stops when JEFFERSON rushes in.)

JEFFERSON

Oh, hello, Betty Jo. Isn't your next shift about to start?

BETTY JO

Not for another hour. I just went in here to—think about some things.

JEFFERSON

Well, there's a lot to think about. The war at sea is going from bad to worse.

(BETTY JO stands in alarm)

The Germans are predicting our every move. Oh Miss Robin—don't misunderstand me—It's not your fault! That is certainly not what I mean. I have full faith you're doing everything in your power. Just don't be surprised if your shifts get longer. Miss Robin, if anyone can turn this war around again, it's you.

(JEFFERSON exits. BETTY JO slowly pulls out her letter again and uncrumples it. Then she collapses into the chair, clutching the letter to her heart. Lights fade.)

END SCENE

Scene 4

The code room, a few days later. The break whistle blows. BETTY JO leaves the machine, sits at the desk, and starts writing on a V-Mail form, murmuring to herself as she writes.

BETTY JO

Dearest Freddy, it's been nearly a week since I received your V-mail, and to think I have not responded yet! We've written each other so much these past two years that I should be used to it. I hope you didn't think I was upset with you. I just didn't expect to be separated again so soon, after your being gone so long before—no, not that.

(BETTY JO crosses out her last sentence.)

You are doing your duty to our country, and I am very proud of you! The war news is getting worse—every day, more blue stars turn gold—no, scratch that.

(BETTY JO crosses out another line, visibly frustrated.)

We'll win this war together, even though we're apart again! I am in a different unit now from Edith and Maggie, but I see them at lunch and at our apartment. We don't talk about work, of course, but the company is comforting. I miss talking to you face-to-face.

(BOB enters, unnoticed by BETTY JO, with a stack of papers. He silently begins to file the papers.)

I hope you get this letter soon—since your operation is so top-secret, they can't tell me if or when they'll stop delivering V-mail to your ship. Wherever you are... Ugh, stay positive. If you get this letter—

(BETTY JO slams down her pen. BOB jumps, startled.)

I wish we could just talk!

(BETTY JO crumples the letter and starts to rise. BOB starts to exit, but collides with the doorframe, dropping the folders.)

BETTY JO

How long have you been there??

BOB

I'm sorry—just came—papers to file—

BETTY JO

Oh. On your break?

(BOB is hurriedly gathering the papers in no particular order.)

No, it's alright! You can stay—that is, Mulligan won't be happy if you bring them back to him like that.

BOB

I'll just—if you don't mind—sorry.

(BOB hastily begins to sort them again.)

BETTY JO

Do you ever get frustrated with Victory Mail?

BOB

No.

BETTY JO

That's nice.

BOB

Yep.

BETTY JO

I guess it's a little hard to keep it so positive these days.

BOB

Soldiers need that. At sea, I mean—it's hard.

BETTY JO

Is it.

BOB

But—there are good things.

(BETTY JO uncrumples her letter and picks up her pen.)

Here, too.

BETTY JO

There are...

BOB

Weather—flowers—and people—you know—working together—making friends.

BETTY JO

That's right.

(BOB grabs the rest of his papers and exits.)

BETTY JO

You know, Freddy, you always have helped me see the good things, even in wartime. I'll keep trying to see them while you're gone. All the good things I see make me think of you, and it almost feels like you're still here. The weather is still beautiful. The yellow roses are in bloom just outside—at least, I think they're roses! And I'm still making friends, as you must be, too. The nicest people in the world work in the NAVY. I guess that makes sense; after all, you're in the NAVY! I love you, and I pray I will see you soon. Semper Paratus. Betty Jo.

END SCENE

Scene 5

The code room, a few weeks later. BETTY JO enters, writing a letter as she walks.

BETTY JO

It's been weeks since you've gone, but it's flown by in some ways. I expect to hear from you any day now. They must keep the Naval Security Force very busy these days, for you not to have been able to write yet. It's been a little lonely, but I'm honored to be doing my part, as you are. I got up an hour early today just so I'd have time to write you before work. I'm getting used to my new job. My boss seems very pleased.

MULLIGAN (offstage)

Bob?? Where are you?

BETTY JO

He is always angry at his assistant, though.

MULLIGAN (offstage)

Bob!!

BOB (from just outside the door)

Sorry sir!

(BOB bursts in, looking for MULLIGAN.)

BETTY JO

He's in there—were you—

BOB

Just got here.

(BOB exits.)

BETTY JO

I do miss our talks alone, sweet Freddy—where was I? Oh yes. Bob is annoying, but I feel sorry for him. I can tell he needs friends. He is very reserved. You'd be good for him, Mr. Confidence—wish he could meet you. But since you're not here, I'll be as patient and kind as you would. I should get to work now. Much love. Semper Paratus. Betty Jo.

(MULLIGAN enters with coffee in hand.)

MULLIGAN

Why, Miss Robin! Earlier than usual this morning!

BETTY JO

Well, the earlier I get here, the fewer gold stars.

MULLIGAN

Splendid.

BETTY JO

Have you got this morning's messages yet?

MULLIGAN

Bob is getting them ready now. I must speak with you for a moment.

(MULLIGAN sets down his coffee on the desk.)

BETTY JO

Of course—

(BOB enters with the papers.)

MULLIGAN

I have received more specific instructions.

BETTY JO

For Operation Greenberry?

MULLIGAN

Yes, Miss Robin. As usual, everything I am about to tell you is top-secret.

BETTY JO

Yes, sir.

MULLIGAN

With the U-Boats tearing apart our operations in the Pacific, the NAVY has decided to send several ships on an important invasion. If all goes as planned, this will be the end of the U-Boat domination and a major turning point in the war.

BETTY JO

But only if they stop decoding our communication.

MULLIGAN

Precisely, Miss Robin. That is where you come in.

BETTY JO

I see.

MULLIGAN

Do you have any questions for me at this time?

BETTY JO

When is the invasion?

MULLIGAN

Ah, yes. The invasion is scheduled for exactly two weeks from today, weather permitting.

BETTY JO

Oh my—then the ships—

MULLIGAN

We added you to this project as soon as the ships departed for preparations, but from here on out, it's full speed ahead.

BETTY JO

I see—

MULLIGAN

The communication is ever so much more critical than ever before.

BETTY JO

I understand, sir. Let me run and get my coffee, and I'll start early today.

MULLIGAN

Very good, Miss Robin. And Miss Robin, let me assure you that you are the perfect candidate for a position of this importance.

(BETTY JO exits.)

Ah, Bob. I didn't hear you come in. Where are those papers?

BOB

Right here, sir.

MULLIGAN

Set 'em down. We must move quickly today. Go see if anyone has letters to mail, and then—

(BOB tries to place the papers on the desk, but knocks over the coffee, spilling it on the papers and MULLIGAN.)

BOB

Oh—so sorry—I didn't mean—
You can have my coffee today--

MULLIGAN

Bob!! What disgusting clumsiness!
It's rationed! Boiling hot, too!

(BETTY JO enters amid this hullabaloo.)

MULLIGAN

Bob, if this wasn't such a crucial time, I'd have a mind to sack you. In fact, maybe it would be better for our nation if I—

BETTY JO

NO!

MULLIGAN

Ah, Miss Robin. My apologies. You see, we've had a bit of a disagreement. But nothing you should have to witness. I apologize for shouting in your presence.

(BETTY JO exits. BOB begins to pick up the broken pieces of the mug.)

Bob, I will speak to you when you finish.

(MULLIGAN exits. BETTY JO enters with a hand towel.)

BETTY JO

Here. Hand me the papers.

(BOB retreats and picks up a mop as she picks up the papers.)

Oh, isn't this pretty! They look like parchment or something. Haven't you ever heard of tea-dye? Maybe you just invented coffee-dye! They say Amy Carmichael dyed her skin with coffee. What a spy she was! You know, Roosevelt is talking about ending the ration on coffee. Then we won't have to worry about spilling a cup now and then. But we have to thin our coffee for now, so everything's still legible. So you see, no harm done—

BOB

No. I'd better go.

BETTY JO

I meant besides that—I'm sorry. You don't really think he meant that, do you?

BOB

He's always doing that. Yelling, I mean. Threatening to sack. Nothing new.

BETTY JO

Well, I'm sure deep down he knows the nation will be better off if you stay.

BOB

Really?

BETTY JO

You know that! Here, you'd better take this coffee. You need it more than I do.

BOB

No—I'd really better go.

BETTY JO

Take it. Please don't be—

(BOB exits. BETTY JO notices that the letter has gotten splashed with coffee.)

I'll write another one during lunch, I suppose. Oh, Freddy--

(BETTY JO gets to work.)

END SCENE

Scene 6

The conference room. A few days later. EDITH and MAGGIE are eating lunch hurriedly.

MAGGIE

I told her we take out the trash and sharpen pencils.

EDITH

Let me guess—she asked what Specialist Q means.

MAGGIE

I said, Q for communications.

EDITH

And that didn't shut her up.

MAGGIE

She said, "Q doesn't stand for communications." So I said, "What do you know, the Navy can't spell! You'd better enlist right away and help us fix that."

EDITH

These poor civilians.

MAGGIE

I'd describe the look on her face if we had more time now—want my apple?

EDITH

No, thanks. You know, I'm almost grateful for shorter breaks—less time to spend worrying about things.

MAGGIE

And more time to spend *doing* something about them.

EDITH

Where's Betty?

MAGGIE

Probably *doing* something...

EDITH

She's too thin to miss lunch again. Wish I knew which room she worked in.

MAGGIE

Well, you know her. You know, her mother didn't even want her to join the WAVES.

EDITH

Really?

MAGGIE

Said Betty Jo was destined to be a farm girl. That Radcliffe scholarship changed her mind, but she still wasn't happy when Betty declared her math major and joined us—oh, do you have a napkin?

EDITH

Here. What changed her mind about the WAVES?

MAGGIE

I think Fred did—Betty said her mother was delighted when they met. But then he was shipped out so soon. They wrote each other three times a day.

EDITH

At least this way Betty can help keep him safe.

MAGGIE

She would have enlisted no matter what, though. Nothing stops Betty Jo—

EDITH

Not even the break whistle—

(BOB enters.)

Oh, excuse me, Bob. Could you please ask Betty to come join us?

BOB

Busy.

MAGGIE

Aw, come on! Tell her I'll give her a cookie!

BOB

An errand—work, I mean—sorry—maybe Mulligan—

EDITH

Maybe she's writing a letter again.

MAGGIE

I'll give you half?

BOB
What kind?

MAGGIE
Molasses.

BOB
Not bad.

(He exits towards the Greenberry Room.)

EDITH
You have molasses cookies??

MAGGIE
No, but you do.

EDITH
Maggie—

MAGGIE
Hey, I didn't steal any this time!

EDITH
Good, 'cause I only brought one today. And apparently it's in high demand.

(BETTY JO enters with a half-finished letter.)

BETTY JO
Sorry girls, I lost track of time.

EDITH
Have a seat!

MAGGIE
Ooh, V-Mail! Who is it this time?

BETTY JO
Oh, you know I haven't been writing as many people these days!

MAGGIE
Yeah, we're all busier than we used to be.

BETTY JO

That too.

EDITH

At least you have a quiet office to write in. I have to write mine with Maggie hanging over me.

(BOB enters.)

MAGGIE

Must be nice to have no distractions.

(BOB stumbles, dropping the box of papers he is carrying.)

BETTY JO

Um yeah, it sure is.

MAGGIE

Here, we saved you a molasses cookie.

BETTY JO

Molasses? My favorite!

MAGGIE

But half is for Bob.

BETTY JO

Bob?

MAGGIE

We sent him to fetch you.

BETTY JO

Oh, you did.

(JEFFERSON enters with more papers.)

JEFFERSON

Need some help, son?

BOB

No.

JEFFERSON

Miss Clark, if you'll take these, I can—

EDITH

Yes sir.

(EDITH picks up her lunch bag, takes the papers from JEFFERSON and exits.)

MAGGIE

Edith—wait! The cookie!

(MAGGIE exits.)

JEFFERSON

You need a box that's still intact, that's the trouble.

BOB

It's all we got—Mulligan, I mean.

JEFFERSON

There's one in my office. Wait right here—I'll run and get it for you.

(JEFFERSON exits.)

BETTY JO

You should see how disorderly his office is! You might as well sit down—it'll be a while.

BOB

Maybe I should—

BETTY JO

Please! Haven't you eaten yet? I'll give you half my cookie.

BOB

What kind?

BETTY JO

They say it's molasses.

BOB

No thanks. You know, Mulligan might—

BETTY JO

Don't you have food?

BOB

Later—lunch, I mean. No time now.

BETTY JO

Well, you can't go back to Mulligan with papers all over the floor—

(BOB exits. BETTY JO watches him go. Then she whips out her pen and begins working on her letter again.)

I wish I knew you were reading this. But I'm going to assume you are and keep finding good things to tell you about. There are plenty these days. Such as beautiful weather—and pretty flowers—and—

(BOB reenters with file folders.)

BETTY JO

Friends.

BOB

Mulligan?

BETTY JO

Use your head.

BOB

I don't mean—letters—it's an accident. I have—errands—you're writing—it happens. My coming in, I mean.

BETTY JO

Don't feel bad—you can—say something, though. Don't feel like you'll be—distracting, or anything.

BOB

Like what? To say, I mean.

BETTY JO

Well, maybe you could say hello.

BOB

Hi.

BETTY JO

That works, too. And then, maybe you could say something good about yourself.

BOB

Me?

BETTY JO

Yes. Start with how you're doing this country a service.

BOB

Me?

BETTY JO

And then, you can talk about the good things happening.

BOB

What?

BETTY JO

Well, weather. Flowers. And people working together. And making friends!

(JEFFERSON enters.)

JEFFERSON

Here's a box! Stacked them already? Good. Right in here. I can take it from here—I was headed that way anyway.

(JEFFERSON takes the box and exits.)

BOB

I'd better go—work, I mean.

BETTY JO

Bob.

BOB

Mulligan.

BETTY JO

I know, but I just wanted to say—

BOB

What?

BETTY JO

It was nice chatting with you, Bob.

BOB

Thanks, Miss—

BETTY JO

Betty Jo.

(BOB exits. BETTY JO picks up her letter.)

It's amazing what reminds me of you these days—really, all the good things you always told me to look for remind me of you. I guess that's a good reason to keep looking for them! You know, I've noticed that sometimes we don't always see quite what we're looking for. But then what we see instead might actually be very nice. Well, our break is almost up, so I'm going to get back to work. We're going to bring you home, Freddy. You and every man at sea. Much love. Semper Paratus. Betty Jo.

END SCENE

Scene 7

A few days later. The conference room. BETTY JO is writing a letter.

BETTY JO

...I've been trying to work through my breaks, but I get to the point where what's in front of my face doesn't make sense anymore. In a rare burst of eloquence, Bob said I need to take my breaks more seriously. He can be really nice at times. Oh that's right, you haven't met Bob. I keep forgetting. Strange to think you've been away that long. Sometimes it seems like you're still here. Everything blurs together these days.

(She squints out the window.)

Literally everything. My glasses are still broken, but you know I'm doing just fine! That sounds like something you'd do; you're always breaking stuff. I hope the NAVY's drilled that out of you by now. Did you break your pen, too? You know I don't embrace that goodbye note being the last--

(JEFFERSON enters.)

BETTY JO

Oh, it's you, Mr. Jefferson.

JEFFERSON

Oh, excuse me, Miss Robin. Just passing through. Writing a letter? Someone special at sea?

BETTY JO

Ah, yes, but I don't know who's receiving V-Mail these days.

JEFFERSON

To my understanding, all the ships are. Except the ones for the most dangerous operations, of course. Bob takes the mail again at five. Remember a censor reads it first!

(JEFFERSON exits.)

BETTY JO

The other girls read the letters they get out loud. It keeps the morale up, but I think they're wondering why I haven't read anything lately. Frankly, I am, too. Your wit is just the thing to keep spirits high. But I'll keep looking for good things to tell you about...as long as...

(EDITH and MAGGIE enter.)

MAGGIE

Betty! Come on outside with us! Your eyes look so tired.

BETTY JO

Oh, that's alright. Maybe I'll just—close them for a while.

EDITH

Alright. Um—do you need anything?

BETTY JO

Well—now that you...oh, you know what? Pick some flowers for the conference room, if you will. That always brightens this place up.

MAGGIE

I'm allergic. But the fresh air would do you good!

EDITH

I'll show you a spot where they never even mow. Plenty of wildflowers.

MAGGIE

You haven't gone for a walk in weeks! A little stroll around the grounds—

EDITH

It's a perfect day to write a letter about.

MAGGIE

We have a few to write as well.

EDITH

Are those yellow roses over there?

MAGGIE

Oh, how pretty! Would you look at that. I've never seen them before.

BETTY JO

Oh, yes—um, oh dear, it looks like I'll have to go back to work pretty soon.

MAGGIE

Can't you—?

EDITH

Keep it down—

BETTY JO

I can—sort of.

EDITH

They're over there.

MAGGIE

Don't worry. We'll cover for you whenever we need to.

EDITH

That's what friends are for.

BETTY JO

Friends.

(EDITH and MAGGIE exit.)

BETTY JO

It always helps me to have someone to talk with, but—

(MULLIGAN enters behind her.)

Oh, hello! Oh—hello Mr. Mulligan.

MULLIGAN

Greetings, Miss Robin. Pardon me for startling you. Have you by any chance seen Bob?

BETTY JO

No, not yet, not since he ran to the postal center.

MULLIGAN

Ran, you say? Hm.

BETTY JO

So he should be back any minute—is something wrong?

MULLIGAN

Nothing you need to be distracted with. I'm just expecting an important letter, is all. If everyone worked as efficiently as you, Miss Robin, this war would speed to a close.

(MULLIGAN exits.)

BETTY JO

You know, sometimes I find it hard to see the good things. I guess negativity is always easier to see.

(BOB enters with a stack of mail.)

But appearances are deceiving.

BOB

Yes, they are.

BETTY JO

Oh—Bob!

(BOB drops the mail.)

BOB

Oh—sorry. Another letter? I didn't realize, I mean—sorry.

BETTY JO

Oh, that's quite alright. An officer reads them all first anyway.

BOB

You ever try writing in code?

BETTY JO

You didn't go outside?

BOB

The mail—breaks—it comes when—you know.

(BETTY JO hands him the mail.)

BETTY JO

Oh, I see.

BOB

You do.

BETTY JO

Bob. Um, you know—

BOB

Sounds like me.

BETTY JO

You're talkative today.

BOB

Sorry.

BETTY JO

Don't be! But actually, I was kind of hoping—could I run something by you? It's kind of related to work—that's why I can't ask Edith or Maggie.

BOB

Mulligan.

BETTY JO

Do you have just a minute?

BOB

Yep.

BETTY JO

If you're writing a letter—

BOB

Again.

BETTY JO

And you've maybe not received a letter in a while—

BOB

You haven't?

BETTY JO

What would you think?

BOB

What would I think?

BETTY JO

I'm asking you.

BOB

Sorry—I'm trying, you know—um. Well, it might look like—you know.

BETTY JO

But if it wasn't that—

BOB

Well, I mean, if someone was at sea—working on something—something like this, I mean—things might be—different, you know.

BETTY JO

I guess they would.

BOB

But either way—

BETTY JO

What?

BOB

Appearances are deceiving.

MULLIGAN (offstage)

Bob? You're late!

BETTY JO

Bobby?

BOB

Mulligan.

BETTY JO

I know, but—thanks.

BOB

For what?

BETTY JO

I don't know exactly. But thanks all the same.

(BOB exits.)

Sometimes when we look carefully at all those things that don't seem right, we see right through them. That's when all the good things become clearer. You know, Freddy, I still believe I will see you soon. I love you. Semper Paratus. Betty Jo.

(The whistle blows. BETTY JO exits.)

END SCENE

Scene 8

The code room, the next day. BETTY JO is busily working at her desk, an empty water glass beside her. MULLIGAN is examining the machine.

MULLIGAN

You're correct, Miss Robin. It seems you understand the bombe machine better than I do.

BETTY JO

Glad to be of service.

MULLIGAN

Are you finding it helpful?

BETTY JO

Well, I always prefer to rely on my brains, but the machine does speed up the ciphering immensely.

MULLIGAN

That's what I like to hear. Very good, Miss Robin. I'd say you'll be running this place eventually, but at this rate you'll end the war even sooner.

BETTY JO

That's my goal, sir.

MULLIGAN

Oh, and Miss Robin, I understand not every employee around here has been as efficient as you. If you notice Bob dallying, please direct him to his duties. The last thing I wish to see is for him to distract you in your work.

BETTY JO

Oh—

MULLIGAN

To do so is a hindrance to our war effort. That's all for now. I shall return shortly. Continue, please.

(MULLIGAN exits to his office. BOB enters with mail.)

BOB

Sorry I'm late—I'm between meetings.

BETTY JO

You were gone a while this time. Must be pretty long meetings.

BOB

Not as long as his. Mr. Mulligan, I mean.

BETTY JO

Any mail for—

BOB

Mulligan? Yep.

BETTY JO

Oh—well, I've finished the key. Just have to encipher the messages about next Friday's secret landings.

BOB

How do you—

BETTY JO

How do I what?

BOB

You're—nearsighted. The machines. They're big, you know. Small letters and numbers. How do you...

BETTY JO

Oh, I learned a long time ago where everything was. I stayed late my first day to scrutinize the bombe until I'd memorize each detail. It's all in my head now.

BOB

Pretty—pretty smart.

BETTY JO

Aw, thanks! Wanna know a secret? That's how I navigate this whole establishment. I'm more nearsighted than the Navy thanks—I just memorized the eye charts.

BOB

Wow. Sounds hard.

BETTY JO

Not really. I can still see large shapes and colors, and I can usually guess what they are. And then I memorize them and see them even with my eyes closed!

BOB

Smarter than me.

BETTY JO

Aw, not that smart—I already tipped over my water glass.

BOB

Sounds like me. Nerves, you know.

BETTY JO

Too much pressure. If only there was more time...

BOB

Um...If you don't mind, I'll stick around. Till it's done, that is—the codes. He's pretty anxious—Mr. Mulligan is—wants these as soon as possible.

BETTY JO

No one knows that better than you. *Anxious* is a nice way to put it.

BOB

Well, they are important...

BETTY JO

I'm well aware, thank you. Next Friday is only seven days away. I feel like the whole weight of this war is on my shoulders. And I have to admit—lately I've felt like I'm—insufficient.

BOB

How?

BETTY JO

I'm working as hard as I can, but the Germans are, too. And apparently they're just as smart as I am. All I want is to save lives, but so far—

(MULLIGAN enters)

Thank you, Bob, a glass of water would be just the thing. A little ice, please, helps me work faster. Oh hello, Mr. Mulligan. I'm just finishing up.

MULLIGAN

Wonderful, Miss Robin. The sooner we get this information, the better for our troops. Bob, I don't recall leaving my desk so untidy. Why don't you come help me with these papers?

BOB

Yes sir, just a minute. Want ice, Miss Robin? In the water, I mean. Betty Jo.

(BOB picks up her glass. MULLIGAN exits.)

You shouldn't. Feel like that, I mean. Insufficient. There are other people fighting, too. Just as much.

BETTY JO

That's very nice of you, Bob, but my ability to disguise these messages is the difference between life and death...

BOB

You're doing all you can—more than most.

BETTY JO

And yet I can never do enough!

BOB

Don't—

BETTY JO

People are still dying—and every indication says the worse is yet to come!

BOB

It would be worse without you—what you've done—

BETTY JO

Bob, if Friday turns out like these last couple weeks have been—it'll be death to thousands of troops at once. Maybe death to our nation. Death to—

(BETTY JO breaks off and buries her face. BOB stares for a minute, then quickly fills the water glass from a pitcher and brings it to her. He almost places a hand on her shoulder, but stops himself.)

BOB

Miss Robin. Betty.

(BETTY JO lifts her head and takes the glass, drinking a little water.)

BETTY JO

Thank you...I'm so sorry. I shouldn't burden you—

BOB

—It's fine. You've been working too hard. I mean, not too hard, but—very hard—

BETTY JO

And yet I feel—

BOB

—You shouldn't. Don't listen to that. What you feel, I mean. Just keep pushing as hard as you can. So are they. And very soon, you'll push just a little harder than them. The Germans. And then a little harder, and a little harder, and before you know it, they'll collapse. I don't feel it. I know it.

BETTY JO

You sound just like Freddy—

BOB

Freddy?

BETTY JO

Someone I know. A friend, I mean. Oh dear...

MULLIGAN (off)

Bob???

BETTY JO

You'd better go. And Bob—thank you.

BOB

Miss—Betty Jo—whatever you need—if you ever need anything, I mean—I'm here.

(Bob exits.)

END SCENE

Scene 9

The code room, a few days later. BETTY JO is working the machine harder than ever. Papers are strewn everywhere. BOB enters.

BETTY JO

Three more days, Bobby.

BOB

Relax.

BETTY JO

How can I relax? The war's not getting better.

BOB

It will, it will. Trust me.

BETTY JO

And wouldn't you know, this rotor is getting jammed. Think we may need that machine oil Mr. Mulligan was talking about.

(MULLIGAN enters.)

Where is that can? In the cabinet?

MULLIGAN

No, Miss Robin, let me handle this! I'll do it tonight. I always stay late to take care of the machines.

(BETTY JO walks towards the cabinet.)

BETTY JO

We still have an hour. Work would be faster if—

MULLIGAN (harshly)

No! I am the only one who should grease the bombe machines! They are extremely delicate, and only I know how! I will do it tonight! (softens) Excuse me—I've had a stressful day. We all have. Thing is, I have the only key, and I seem to have misplaced it. Bob, we need to look for it. Keep up the great work, Miss Robin.

(MULLIGAN exits.)

BETTY JO

Who does he think I am? You?

BOB

He never yells like that—to you, I mean. Must be that key. The lost one, I mean.

BETTY JO

Well, you'd better help him find it. That was a storm I didn't forecast.

BOB

Sure is temperamental.

BETTY JO

Sure is! Where do you suppose he got the name Mulligan? I thought the Irish were supposed to be—

BOB

—Jolly?

BETTY JO

Yes, exactly!

BOB

You know, Betty Jo, I feel like that. Irish—no not that—jolly. Lately.

BETTY JO

Wish I could say the same. Maybe I will when I finally push down those Germans.

BOB

Finally, you say *when*.

BETTY JO

Well, after we talked yesterday, I looked at that cipher I was using for the message about the landing. And then I coded it into a new message entirely and ciphered that one. The new message looks so legitimate that if the Germans get past my cipher they'll think they have the original, but they'll show up in the wrong place.

BOB

That's clever! Of you, I mean.

BETTY JO

I think we'll finally push down the Germans, Bobby. You're right. Can't say I feel jolly like you, though, at least not till it's over.

BOB

No, not that—I didn't mean always—I meant, you. Around you. You make me that way, I mean.

BETTY JO

Aw, well I'm afraid I haven't been the best of company—

BOB

—No, I mean it. You're nice—not like him. Mr. Mulligan. Or most people, I mean. Cheerful—and nice—and strong and—pretty...

(BOB pulls a yellow rose out of his pocket and steps closer so she can see it.)

BETTY JO

Oh, how nice! Just like the flowers outside the code room window!

BOB

It is—just don't tell him. Mr. Mulligan, I mean. He asked for them. Outside the window.

BETTY JO

Really? But why?

BOB

Betty Jo, tonight—after work—I was wondering—

BETTY JO

What?

BOB

At the Emerald Café—there's a dance, you know—would you—come?

BETTY JO

With you?

BOB

With me.

BETTY JO

Bob, that's awful nice of you—but I don't think I can.

BOB

I can drive you home. Afterwards, I mean.

(BETTY JO picks up the rose and fiddles with it.)

BETTY JO

Bob, there's—Freddy.

BOB

Freddy?

BETTY JO

My friend I told you about. We're—very good friends.

BOB

So he's your—

BETTY JO

—I didn't say he was—

BOB

—That means he is. Don't you know—

BETTY JO

—Yes, I do! That's why I couldn't tell anyone. Not even you. I'm so sorry, Bobby, but—you're a great guy and I'd still love to be friends. Freddy will be delighted to meet you; I know he will.

BOB

Friends.

BETTY JO

Please don't tell anyone—if you really are my friend, don't tell Mr. Mulligan about Freddy.

(BOB exits. BETTY JO watches him go. Finally, she looks down at the rose she has been absentmindedly handling. Suddenly, she studies it alertly and opens up a few petals.)

BETTY JO

What—oh, my. Oh, my.

(She grabs paper and begins frantically writing.)

END SCENE

Scene 10

The conference room late that night. EDITH and MAGGIE enter, dressed in evening gowns, and begin searching the room.

MAGGIE

I know I left my purse here somewhere...

EDITH

Good thing we pass by here anyway! Lou's going to get impatient if you don't hurry up.

MAGGIE

I think I'd go crazy if we didn't have these dances. All the pressure of the war. Nice to still have fun.

EDITH

With other military, of course. The way those civilian women treat us.

MAGGIE

Ugh, don't remind me. Hey, I know. Let's link arms next time we march down Main Street. Then if that fat lady tries to knock us out of line again, she'll just keel over at our resistance.

EDITH

That's letting her off easy, but I'm game.

MAGGIE

Let's check the closet.

EDITH

I have to feel sorry for her, in a way. These women think we're taking the men's jobs so the men can be sent to fight.

MAGGIE

I just wish they understood we're actually protecting their boys.

EDITH

We've all got men at sea, and we're just trying to get them home. Did you check the top shelf?

MAGGIE

I guess Fred must be gone—Betty Jo didn't come to the dance.

EDITH

Poor girl. She hasn't laughed much lately.

MAGGIE

Fred always made her laugh—without trying! That wit of his—

EDITH

Listening to them talk was like a verbal tennis match.

MAGGIE

A perfect match.

EDITH

His wit and her brains.

MAGGIE

Maybe it fell behind the desk. What happened to that boy you met last year? Frank? I thought he'd be taking you to the dance tonight.

EDITH

Well, we had been writing each other, but then one night I had a dream that his plane was—you know. And then I never heard from him again.

MAGGIE

Oh my word. I'm so sorry. Did you ever—

EDITH

My brother used to be in his unit. He eventually told me Frank was MIA, but I already knew.

MAGGIE

Oh, Edith. I feel so guilty now—me having all this fun, while you and Betty—

EDITH

It's alright. I don't blame you. I met some nice people tonight. Did me good. And I did laugh so when we played that shoe game. Next time borrow some shoes, okay?

MAGGIE

When we threw our shoes in the pile, I cringed when I saw that great big hole in mine—no one wanted to pick that shoe up!

EDITH

Glad you threw the other shoe next round. I'd hate for you to sit out *two* dances!

MAGGIE

It didn't look much better.

EDITH

No, but at least Lou knew it must be yours—you were the last one standing!

MAGGIE

Hey, consider it a statement of patriotism! Use it up, wear it out—

EDITH and MAGGIE (together)

Make it do, or do without!

MAGGIE

Oh, here it is! How on earth did I leave it here?

EDITH

Maybe the janitor moved it.

MAGGIE

And opened it, too? Let's make sure everything's still inside it.

EDITH

Hurry, it's almost midnight. Do you think Lou really cares about your mascara?

MAGGIE

You'd better care; our key is also in my purse.

EDITH

Maggie, Maggie. Do you think I'd entrust you with our only key? I have a key, silly.

MAGGIE

That doesn't mean I don't want to find my key!

(MULLIGAN enters.)

MULLIGAN

Oh, excuse me, ladies! My deepest apologies! I'm working a little late tonight, as you can tell. I didn't mean to startle you. Were you looking for this?

MAGGIE

My key.

MULLIGAN

Yes, of course. You see, I've lost my file cabinet key, and Bob has been searching ever so diligently for it. He isn't the brightest, as you can surely imagine, and he brought this one to me. "No, Bob," I said, "those WAVES are far too intelligent to mistake my little key for one of theirs! You shouldn't have checked their bags." Well, my apologies, ladies. Here is your key.

(EDITH takes the key, while MAGGIE flips through her purse, checking each item.)

MAGGIE

Yes, well—thank you.

EDITH

Of course—good night.

MULLIGAN

Good night.

(The girls exit as BOB enters behind MULLIGAN.)

BOB

You shouldn't have checked their bags.

MULLIGAN

Bob! I thought you'd left for the night.

BOB

My briefcase—I forgot. It was there. Still.

MULLIGAN

Of course you'd leave your briefcase. Well, I'm giving up for the night. We'll search better in the early morning light.

BOB

Of course. Sir—

MULLIGAN

What now?

BOB

You don't really think—I mean, the key—you know—

MULLIGAN

Bob, do you try to be exasperating?? Because if you were as good at your work as you are at trying my patience, the war would be over and Admiral King could retire.

BOB

No sir—yes sir—sorry sir—it's just, I mean, who'd want to—steal? Our key, I mean? I mean, do you really think—

MULLIGAN

Ah, that. Well, I suppose anything's possible. You've been hearing the rumors of spies, I'm sure. Perhaps I overreacted, though. After all, who else would possibly have a use for our oil? Well, no more racking our brains tonight. Go get some shuteye.

(They exit.)

END SCENE

Scene 11

The next day, in the code room. BETTY JO is working very hard. The pressure is evident. BOB enters.

Bob. BETTY JO

Miss Robin. BOB

Bob, please—I need to talk to you. BETTY JO

Oh? BOB

It's about business. BETTY JO

Fine. BOB

Bob, that yellow rose bush—why did Mr. Mulligan want to put it there? BETTY JO

He didn't say. Guess he's fond of them—roses, I mean. Yellow ones. Tends to it for a while each day. During breaks, you know. BOB

He tends to the rosebush? Don't we have a gardener for that? BETTY JO

That security officer likes them, too. Roses. Goes to look at them while Mr. Mulligan is inside, you know. BOB

Which security officer? BETTY JO

Lou. Louis Morgan, I mean. BOB

BETTY JO

Oh. Probably picks one for Maggie now and then.

BOB

No, just sketches them. Miss Maggie, she's got allergies... Says he's painting a landscape for her birthday. Lou said that. Wants to look at flowers. Up close, you know.

BETTY JO

Doesn't Mr. Mulligan mind?

BOB

He wants another one. A rosebush. Yellow. Said if all this keeps up, we need to plant another one. Like the first one. I heard him.

BETTY JO

All this gardening must be keeping him busy. He never got around to fixing my machine. It's exhausting having to figure so much manually.

BOB

He hasn't found time to look for the key. Not much.

BETTY JO

But he stays late...

(She returns to her code work.)

BOB

Miss Robin, the Germans read your code that you made two days ago.

BETTY JO

I figured that.

BOB

You did?

BETTY JO

Wait a minute, today's news report hasn't come in yet. How do you know?

(They stare at each other.)

BOB

Miss Robin—Betty Jo. If I may. The time has come—we need to—trust each other. Friends. Like you said yesterday, you know. I trust you—do you trust me?

BETTY JO

I—I think I do...

(BOB reaches into his pocket and pulls out MR. MULLIGAN's missing key.)

Is that—

(BOB brings it closer so she can see it, then pockets it.)

Bobby. I trust you.

BOB

I want to get him home safe. Fred, I mean.

BETTY JO

Oh, Bob...

BOB

I want to be his friend, too, you know.

BETTY JO

You seem just like him when you say that—so honorable.

(She pulls out the rose.)

I spent all night trying to decipher the writing in the petals. It turned out to be my coded message from two days ago, with instructions for breaking the cipher.

BOB

He was pleased. Mr. Mulligan was.

BETTY JO

So I encoded yesterday afternoon's messages but gave Mr. Mulligan different instructions. If anyone tries to crack that cipher with the fake additives, they'll end up with a false message. It's plausible enough to look legitimate—but appearances are deceiving.

BOB

Appearances are deceiving.

(A door slams.)

BETTY JO

He's coming—

(BOBBY is on his hands and knees, feeling the cracks between the floorboards. MULLIGAN enters.)

MULLIGAN

Ah, Miss Robin! Working hard, I see.

BETTY JO

Yes sir.

MULLIGAN

Got any messages ready yet?

BETTY JO

Ah, not yet—I'm trying out a complicated cipher, and—

MULLIGAN

—Ah, yes. Well, efficiency is of the essence. I needn't tell you that.

BETTY JO

No, sir. Um—this rotor is still sticking...

MULLIGAN

Yes, Miss Robin, and as soon as Bob and I find that key, I will gladly fix it.

BOB

Did you check the floorboards? In your office, I mean. Or maybe outside?

MULLIGAN

Ah, the floorboards. Excellent suggestion, Bob. We'll find that key if it's the last thing we do today. Miss Robin, please continue to work as fast as you can. Many lives depend on you right now.

BETTY JO

I am aware, Mr. Mulligan.

(He exits.)

I'm beginning to despise him.

BOB

Beginning?

BETTY JO

Oh, hush. I need to finish these ciphers and then figure out some fake additives. Without the machine.

BOB

Your shift ends in two hours—

BETTY JO

I'll stay over the break. I'll keep working into my afternoon shift.

BOB

Don't.

BETTY JO

I have to. He'll get suspicious if I don't finish—

BOB

—Miss—

BETTY JO

—And he'll be even more suspicious if—

BOB

—Betty Jo, I would strongly advise you not to remain here. Alone.

BETTY JO

Alright—we'll blame the cipher rotor.

BOB

And I'll keep searching for it. The key, you know.

(BOB opens the door.)

Mr. Mulligan? The vents? Should we check them?

END SCENE

Scene 12

The code room later that same day. BETTY JO bursts in just as BOB enters from MULLIGAN's office.

BETTY JO

Bob. I was going to take that rose to show Mr. Jefferson, but the writing—

BOB

Disappearing ink?

BETTY JO

Why didn't I think of that sooner? Now it's our word against his...

BOB

Unless...

BETTY JO

We have to find more proof.

BOB

We will, I think.

BETTY JO

It has to be soon! Tomorrow is the last day before—

BOB

Please. Confidence.

BETTY JO

You're right, Bobby. Fretting won't help.

(MULLIGAN enters.)

No, I haven't seen it. Did you ask the custodian? Maybe someone swept it up by mistake. Oh, and then that would have emptied into the incinerator.

MULLIGAN

Splendid idea. Bob, go talk to Jim. See if he remembers sweeping up anything bulky.

(BOB exits.)

Miss Robin...

BETTY JO

Almost done with the first set.

MULLIGAN

Well, I'll go ahead and give you the afternoon messages so you can get started faster. If I'm in a meeting, Bob can put the morning messages on my desk. And Miss Robin, please stay until all the work is complete.

BETTY JO

Yes, sir.

(Bob enters.)

BOB

We are welcome to check. The garbage, I mean. Jim said so. It doesn't light till nighttime. The incinerator, you know.

MULLIGAN

Splendid. Let's go.

BOB

Let me find some gloves—I'll follow. When I find them.

(MULLIGAN exits.)

BETTY JO

Bob, be careful.

BOB

Jim's coming. With us, I mean.

BETTY JO

Still, be careful...any friend of mine has an obligation to stay safe.

BOB

I'll remember that. Thanks.

(BOB pulls two pairs of gloves from a drawer.)

BETTY JO

I'm coming back tonight. As soon as Mr. Mulligan goes back inside to work on the machines, I'm going to the rosebush. I'll cut that rose—with nail scissors or something—and bring it to the main office before Lou gets there.

BOB

I'll go—

BETTY JO

No! You need to stay inside and keep Mr. Mulligan distracted so he doesn't look out the window. Tell him you're looking for the key, or something.

BOB

If one of them sees you—Mr. Mulligan or Lou—

BETTY JO

Bob. Sometimes we need to take extra risks to keep others safe. What's one of me to thousands of soldiers? So many individuals, all with wives, sweethearts, mothers, sisters. And Freddy is one of those men.

BOB

Right...right. Try to be careful, though. As much as you can, I mean. Any friend of mine has...I'd better go.

(BOB exits.)

END SCENE

Scene 13

The code room. Night is falling. BOB is staring out the window. He gives a signal. A few moments later, BETTY JO enters.

BOB

He'll be inside. Any minute. Hurry.

BETTY JO

If he sees me, I'll just say I'm admiring the new flowers. You're the one who needs to be careful.

(As they speak, BETTY JO puts on gloves. BOB hands her an empty paper sack and a flashlight.)

BOB

No, not me. Betty Jo. I'm a schmuck. As the Germans would say, anyway. Mr. Mulligan doesn't mark me, you know. I don't know much—I'm no threat. Awkward—slow—he doesn't have to worry. About me getting in his way, I mean.

BETTY JO

Oh Bob, you don't do yourself justice.

BOB

No, really. You're smart. You figure things—he knows that. He'll watch you more. He only needs you for a few more of those. Codes, I mean. If he thinks you know—anything—he'll destroy you.

BETTY JO

Not if I can help it.

BOB

We.

(A door slams.)

Go!

(BETTY JO exits.)

That you? Mr. Mulligan?

(BOB pulls the blackout curtain as MULLIGAN enters.)

MULLIGAN

Bob. You're still here?

BOB

We gotta find it. That key, I mean. It's in two days. Less than that—the landing.

MULLIGAN

Yes, we do. Tonight.

BOB

Did you check them yet—the vents, you know?

MULLIGAN

Yes, Bob, I did. And as I was searching, you know what struck me?

BOB

Um—the wall?

MULLIGAN

Very funny, Bob. No, I realized that the last person who actually had that key was you.

BOB

Oh—maybe I should check—my briefcase. Or my other coat. Pockets, I mean.

MULLIGAN

Don't trouble yourself; I already did.

(BOB instinctively moves to exit, but MULLIGAN blocks him.)

You know, Bob, lately a few other things have been odd around here, too. For example, my desk. It always seems to be just a little messier than I left it. My papers get shifted ever so slightly. And do you know what I found between some of my top-secret papers yesterday?

BOB

The key?

MULLIGAN

Stop being an idiot. I found a hair.

BOB

Just a hair.

MULLIGAN

Looked just like your hair.

BOB

That's hardly proof—

MULLIGAN

It's proof that you are a lot smarter than I gave you credit for. I must congratulate you, Bob. Betty Jo Robin was the only one I thought I needed to worry about. But now I'm gaining confidence in your brains.

BOB

That's the nicest thing you've ever said.

MULLIGAN

Isn't it, though? In fact, I believe you are so clever that you know exactly where my key is.

BOB

It's lost. Maybe I did it. Misplaced it—

MULLIGAN

Bob, I am going to give you a chance. Give me that key—right now—and you'll be just fine.

BOB

What are you going to do with it?

MULLIGAN

I'm sure you're clever enough to figure that out—Bobby.

BOB

No!

(MULLIGAN suddenly lunges for BOB.)

MULLIGAN

I think you keep it on you!

(A vicious struggle ensues, in which BOB fights aggressively. A drastic change has come over BOB; he seems quite a different person. Finally, though, MULLIGAN yanks the faulty rotor off the bombe machine and strikes BOB in the head. BOB collapses behind the desk. MULLIGAN snatches the key from BOB's pocket.)

Just as I suspected...you'll be out for a while. Just in case, though...

(MULLIGAN unlocks the cabinet and removes the can. He puts on gloves, sets the can on the floor, and begins to open it.)

I believe there's enough for two.

(Footsteps. MULLIGAN freezes. BETTY JO, still wearing her gloves, opens the door.)

BETTY JO

Why, Mr. Mulligan! I didn't think anyone was here!

MULLIGAN

Fixing your bombe machine, as you can see. This rotor has quite fallen out. Your shift ended an hour ago.

BETTY JO

Oh, I left my nail scissors in my desk! Have to master that dress code before I master the ciphers, you know!

MULLIGAN

Stay there; I'll get them for you.

(He carefully steps behind the desk and searches through the drawers.)

Stay there!

BETTY JO

Isn't this—oh, you found the key?

MULLIGAN

Bob found it himself, just before he left.

(BETTY JO stares at him for a moment; then she suddenly snatches the can and runs for the exit. MULLIGAN blocks her. BETTY JO instinctively rips the lid from the can and hurls the contents into MULLIGAN's face, as BOB rises, grabs the rotor, and pounds the fuse box. An alarm sounds. Blackout. Over the blackout and alarm, we hear the following.)

MULLIGAN

No—No—Nooooo!!!

(A loud thud.)

BOB

Betty!

BETTY JO

Where are you?

Get out! Now!

BOB

Where did you—

BETTY JO

Just go!!! Run!

BOB

(Running footsteps.)

Who's there?

JEFFERSON

Betty?

MAGGIE

Maggie!

BETTY JO

Get in the conference room—and stay there!

MR. JEFFERSON

Betty Jo—in here! Now!

EDITH

What—

BETTY JO

No time! Hide!

MAGGIE

Quiet!

EDITH

(A door slams. Silence.)

DIRECT SEGUE TO NEXT SCENE

Scene 14

The lights come back up as the alarm fades out. We are now back in the conference room. Silence. JEFFERSON enters.

JEFFERSON

The police are with Mulligan! Coast is clear!

(EDITH and MAGGIE come out from hiding.)

EDITH

Betty Jo?

(MAGGIE crosses to cabinet and carefully opens the door.)

BETTY JO

Maggie—don't let them hurt me—

(MAGGIE squeezes her hand reassuringly, helping her out.)

JEFFERSON

Are you alright?

EDITH

Just sit down.

JEFFERSON

It's safe now, Miss Robin! The police have Mulligan. And Lou.

BETTY JO

Lou? I didn't see him—

MAGGIE

And who do you think kept him from checking the rosebush this time?

EDITH

Maggie needed a ride home immediately to get ready for the dance. She convinced Lou to delay his last bit of paperwork just a few minutes and drive her.

MAGGIE

On the way, the tire went flat...

EDITH

And I popped out of the backseat and held a gun to his head.

BETTY JO

You *what*?

MAGGIE

And I handcuffed him!

BETTY JO

Maggie—

JEFFERSON

It's time you knew. Your friends are official U.S. Navy spies.

MAGGIE

My mission was to keep tabs on Louis.

EDITH

And mine was to keep tabs on Maggie—

MAGGIE

Hey!

EDITH

—I mean, to back her up.

BETTY JO

And Mr. Mulligan?

JEFFERSON

Those papers had me fooled—until today. They'll be tested for forgery—if the poison didn't get to them.

BETTY JO

Poison???

JEFFERSON

Didn't you know? The top-secret compound you threw at him. Beats me how he got his hands on it, but he didn't live long enough to say. You escaped just in time.

EDITH

From Mulligan and from the poison.

MAGGIE

It's fast acting. The police had to wear gas masks and gloves just to—

JEFFERSON

What's the matter?

EDITH

Betty Jo!

BETTY JO

Bobby! Where's Bobby?

JEFFERSON

Why, I don't know—

MAGGIE

He wasn't with the police—

BETTY JO

He didn't follow me! I thought he was right behind me! Oh, if he stayed in the room—

EDITH

Say, we'd better—

(The door opens and BOB steps in.)

BETTY JO

Bobby!

EDITH

Ah, yes. As I was saying, we'd better go—see how the police are getting on with Mulligan.

(EDITH, MAGGIE, and JEFFERSON exit.)

BETTY JO

Are you alright? I thought you were—

BOB

Just a little unsteady—had to stop in the corridor. Lost your footsteps, it was dark, you know.

BETTY JO

Are you hurt?

BOB

Lousy aim. Mulligan, I mean. Just stunned. Are you? Safe? Betty Jo?

BETTY JO

Am I safe? You're asking me if I'm safe?

BOB

I tried to—

BETTY JO

There is nothing you can say to justify what you did!

BOB

Betty?

BETTY JO

Bob, you're a terribly good spy, but a terribly wicked man. If you had been content with just spying for the Germans, I would forgive you now—

BOB

—Betty Jo—

BETTY JO

—But did you have to be a friend to me too? I trusted you, Bob—if that's even your real name. I admit it, I believed you were my friend! And I needed a friend like you around, a friend like Freddy.

BOB

Betty!

BETTY JO

As I got to know you, you reminded me more and more of Freddy. I thought you were just like him. But I was blind to the truth. I even believed you were on our side, until you betrayed me just now.

BOB

Betrayed? Oh, no—

BETTY JO

Don't you dare deny it! I know who had that key! And you made me think you were keeping it to protect me! It's a good thing I caught Mulligan off guard when I came back in, or he would have done me in with that poison, just like you wanted him to.

(A great change, in voice and persona, comes over BOB again.)

BOB

No! You've got it all wrong! Betty, I—

BETTY JO

Too scared to do it yourself? Is that why you were hiding behind the desk?

BOB

No! Betty, listen, no! I was—

BETTY JO

Too bad I didn't know that was poison, or I should have saved some for you. Don't you realize evil is even worse when it is disguised as good?

BOB

Yes, that's it, disguised as—

BETTY JO

How could you do it, Bobby? You almost killed Freddy by being a spy, and then you almost killed your friend by being a traitor. How could you, Bobby, how could you?

BOB

No, Betty Jo! Wait, just wait!

(BETTY JO picks up a lamp.)

BETTY JO

No, you will wait till Mr. Jefferson gets back. I am going to do this country a service and turn you in, no matter what it costs me.

(BETTY JO tries to club BOB, but he grabs her arm; she drops the lamp. She strikes him in the face with her free hand, which he also grabs as he sinks to one knee. BETTY JO gasps and clasps his hand in both of hers; then she moves her hand to his face. She slowly sinks to her knees.)

Oh—oh—
BETTY JO

Will you marry me?
BOB

I'm sorry! I'm so sorry—
BETTY JO

(He gently embraces her.)

BOB
Elizabeth Josephine Robin, my dearest love, will you marry me?

BETTY JO
You already asked me—I already answered—I said yes! A few weeks ago! Under that willow tree in my backyard. We promised to marry the day the war ends—

BOB/FRED
That day will be quite a bit sooner now that we've uncovered the Germans' best spy.

BETTY JO
You are Freddy! You were Freddy this whole time!

BOB/FRED
I assumed you'd figure it out sooner—we'd have to keep quiet about it, of course.

(He begins to remove elements of an extremely professional disguise—
prosthetics, makeup, hair, etc.)

I didn't count on you breaking your glasses. Nice timing!

BETTY JO
So you played along?

BOB/FRED
Well, I quickly became suspicious of Mulligan. I realized you may be in danger and that we'd both be significantly safer if he didn't know about us.

BETTY JO
So you kept a distance—never gave me your hand—

BOB/FRED

I even had to change my cologne.

BETTY JO

Of course—everything makes sense now! Oh no, did I hurt you?

BOB/FRED

No, not at all.

BETTY JO

I should have recognized you—

BOB/FRED

I was planning to tell you as soon as we captured Mulligan. Obviously, things didn't quite go as planned.

BETTY JO

But just now—oh, why did I ever doubt?

BOB/FRED

It's not your fault, Betty Jo. You've been through a lot tonight—you were scared. You were right not to trust anyone associated with Mulligan.

BETTY JO

I shouldn't have let myself get hysterical! I should have trusted my instincts—

BOB/FRED

—No, it's all my fault. I really should have told you sooner. But we're safe now, Betty Jo.

BETTY JO

Safe—finally. Both of us. And our soldiers—

BOB/FRED

There's still time for our ships to change course. Jefferson's radioing them now. I happen to know we have a solid plan B ready.

BETTY JO

Thank God.

BOB/FRED

Thanks for these, by the way.

(He pulls her letters out of a pocket.)
Remember who made the trips to and from the postal center?

BETTY JO

Well, you can thank me for your free ticket to the live versions.

BOB/FRED

Well, your letters helped me see the good things in life. Helped me get through—this.

BETTY JO

Oh, Fred. You really are marvelous.

BOB/FRED

Yes, I should have gone into acting, don't you agree?

BETTY JO

Don't move to Hollywood yet—every day I said, "Bob is really just like Freddy!"

BOB/FRED

He is, isn't he! They'd be good friends if they were to meet.

BETTY JO

You just don't want to admit I almost had you figured out!

BOB/FRED

Almost isn't good enough when you're dealing with a Navy spy, Betty. But I'm glad to see you're so honorable!

BETTY JO

Oh? Did you have any doubts?

BOB/FRED

Never, Betty.

(FRED pulls a ring out of his pocket. JEFFERSON enters.)

JEFFERSON

We've radioed the ships! We've foiled Mulligan's plot—oh.

BETTY JO

Mr. Jefferson!

BOB/FRED

Mr. Jefferson, I can explain—

JEFFERSON

Well, I'll be. Fred Carson! Were you in disguise this whole time? Nice espionage, son.

BETTY JO

Mr. Jefferson, I—

JEFFERSON

—Miss Robin, thanks to your work, we won't have to worry about those Germans anymore. You've saved more lives than you will ever know.

BETTY JO

Really? Well, Mr. Jefferson—

JEFFERSON

—Oh, and before I forget—your new glasses came in the evening post. I put them on your desk.

BETTY JO

Oh! Um, Mr. Jefferson—

JEFFERSON

—And you can forget about what that recruiting officer said. Besides, that rule never applied to Senior Cryptanalysts.

BETTY JO

Sir?

JEFFERSON

Oh yes, did I forget to mention? Miss Betty Jo Robin, as of tomorrow, I am promoting you to Senior Cryptanalyst of the U.S. Navy German Code Unit. You do not have to accept, of course, but if you do—

BETTY JO

Of course I accept!

JEFFERSON

Excellent. Hopefully this will be safer than your last mission. Betty Jo, Fred—best wishes to you both.

BOB/FRED

Thank you, sir.

BETTY JO

Thank you.

(JEFFERSON exits.)

BOB/FRED

Here, you can wear this now—now that we aren't undercover anymore.

BETTY JO

Oh, Fred.

BOB/FRED

Isn't life peculiar, Betty—this mission had every indication of being an opportunity for me to protect you. Looks like it ended up being the other way around.

BETTY JO

Well, Freddy—appearances are deceiving.

(Lights fade.)

END OF SCENE

END OF ACT

END OF PLAY