

Audition for the part of Nellie March
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There is no need to learn these scenes but please be familiar with them and please ensure you have read the play synopsis and character synopsis. You may choose to print this out yourself and bring along, but there will be a hard copy available for you to use on the day. You may not read off a phone or a tablet at the audition.

Opening Scene

Evening light across the stage. Nellie appears from behind the house. She is holding a gun. She sits on the sawhorse, looking stage left, searching and waiting for something.

Nellie: You're around here somewhere. I know you are.

She waits.

Nellie: Come on. You won't be far away. Sliding along in the grass, staying hidden. But that won't work, so don't try any of your tomfoolery on me.

She hears the fox.

Nellie: I can hear you. You've given yourself away now.

Then she sees the fox and raises the gun to her shoulder.

Nellie: There you are. You are a bold one – to come so close.

Bu then she stops still as is mesmerised and the tone of her voice changes

Nellie : Oh my. . . My goodness. . . What an exquisite thing.

She lowers the gun. There is an odd, fascinated smile on her face.

Lights come up stage left. Banford is busy at the kitchen bench. Then she goes to the door.

Henry is trying one last time to convince Nellie to marry him
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Henry: (*Henry takes her in his gaze*) I never knew such a simple thing would make such a difference.

Nellie: What thing?

Henry: The dress. It makes you different. I have only seen you in breeches and puttees and boots. Nellie, it never occurred to me that underneath that all armour was a woman's legs.

Nellie: Oh for heaven's sake. You might as well call me a man!

Henry: (*thrown by this*) No I didn't mean. . . Yes, you wear men's breeches and boots. (*Henry reaches and very gently tilts her head up so that she must look at him*) But yours is not a man's face.

Nellie: I must go to Jill. This is breaking her heart.

Henry: (*caustic*) Yes, your heart as well, and mine.

Nellie: Your heart?

Henry: Yes mine! Don't look so surprised. Isn't mine as good as hers? (*no reply*) Or do you think me heartless? Here (*he grabs her hand and forces it onto his chest*). Can you feel that? Feel the heartbeat Nellie. It's a signal, isn't it?

Nellie: Its terrible Henry. Its paralysing.

Henry: No, it is a simple heartbeat. But it knocks on the door of your soul. You know that. It's a signal and it's telling you only one thing in its beat. Don't think of Jill anymore. You'll marry me before I go back, won't you. I need you Nellie as somebody at the back of me.

Nellie: You'd easily find somebody who would suit you better.

Henry: But not one I wanted for good. There are girls, nice to walk out with now and then, but not nice to marry.

Nellie: I'd be a fool to go on with this. But I don't know whether I'm against it, or not. I just don't know.

Henry: But you must know whether you want to sit here with me, this minute, or not?

Nellie: I don't even know that. I might wish I was somewhere else.

Henry: Why did you think I was the fox that night you got startled?

Nellie: Because *(pauses)* Because that was the first time I fully realised that you were just like him. Although I sort of knew that, even back to the first evening you arrived and stood in the doorway.

Henry: I am not the fox Nellie. Anyway the fox is dead. He can't touch you now.

Nellie: What on earth do you mean by that? It's not him anyway. As you said the fox doesn't matter anymore.

Henry: The vixen may not think that. Ah. Do you wish you were with Jill. Is that it? Do you wish instead of being here in the cold outside with me, you had gone up to a warm bedroom.

Nellie waits a while before she responds.

Nellie: No. I don't wish that.

Henry: Do you think you could spend all your life with her? When your hair grows white and you are old and always be feeling like that?

Nellie: No. I don't see her and I as two old women together.

Henry: And me as an old man and you as an old woman?

Nellie: *(attempting to be funny)* I don't know why you're harping on about old age it sounds silly coming from someone so very young.

There is a silence.

Henry: Please don't make fun of me. I'm serious, and when I'm serious, I don't believe in making fun of it.

Nellie: You men! Nobody must make fun of you.

Henry: I don't want to be laughed at.

Nellie: I'm not laughing at you.

Henry: So you believe me?

Nellie: In someways yes I do. I thought I was happy at Bailey Farm. Now I don't know.

Henry: So you agree to marry me before I go?

Nellie: Yes.

Henry: So that's settled it then.

Nellie gets up.

Henry: Nellie, now that you've said it. Will you kiss me?

There is a very tentative kiss

Nellie: (*suddenly confident*) You surprise me. What a frightened kiss from a man who is a hunter. You are so sure we will be right together. Why Henry, why so sure when you will find it so difficult to make love to me?

Henry: I have to. . . come to terms with that. . . I'm just as afraid as you.

Nellie: I am not afraid of that.

Henry: You see, now that I know you really are to be my wife. I am afraid.

Nellie: Remember the hind on the ridge that day? You had her in your sights, but you said did not need to take her because you already thought you possessed her. You think you can possess me now. I know you think that, because that is what matters to you Henry, ownership. But that is not the same as making love. So what will you do when. . .

Henry: (*cutting her off*) Can we not talk of that just now. That will come in time, but it is not for now.

Nellie gives a little smile.

Nellie: You will be afraid, won't you.

Henry: Do not *laugh* at me.

Nellie: Do you want to make love to me now?

Henry is uneasy, embarrassed and insecure by the direct nature of the question.

Henry: You *are* laughing at me.

Nellie: No. I'm only asking you a question.

Henry: No I do not want to. I don't need to.

Nellie: Then I *am* the hind on the ridge. (*there is a pause*). Do you know why? Because I am no longer afraid of you. (*another pause*) If we were married already I could sleep in your shelter and not Jill's. It will be agony to sleep with her tonight, in her state, knowing I am the cause of it. Could you save me from that Henry?

Nellie's closing Monologue

Nellie is alone on stage sitting on a chair down stage, slightly stage left of centre. She is wearing her nice dress, necklace, stockings, shoes, and a wedding ring. She opens her heart in a devastating display of despair and resignation.

Nellie: We were married at Christmas. We went to Cornwall, to Henry's people, for the honeymoon. I wanted to marry him, more than I knew, and so I ought to be filled with new life and new blood and new love. My old way of love is dead. I want to rise to the new, to exert myself, yet I can't. He won't have the love that does that. Jill did. She needed me to be strong. He will not have me like that, and so I droop and bleed.

The love he wants must be passive. It must be submerged, just like the ocean kelp I saw in Cornwall. Under the surface of the sea it has powerful roots and is as strong and as resistant as oak trees are on land. But that is only under the water. Strong, bending, yet unbreakable, swaying fronds, searching in the sea, but never rising above it. But when they die, and wash up on the beach, and in the air, they dry out, become brittle and disintegrate at the slightest touch.

Looking at the kelp helped me understand. At Bailey Farm I felt responsible. I failed when the roots came loose. At first it seemed easy to make just one creature happy, to make Jill happy, but the more effort was made, the worse was the failure. I seem to have been all my life reaching and stretching and when whatever it was I was reaching for seemed near, it got further away. And I'm still reaching for it. Whatever "it" is?

I could never have made Jill happy. In a way I'm glad she is dead now. Not glad how she died. No, glad because she would have fretted herself to death eventually anyway, growing thinner and thinner, weaker and weaker, and that would have been terrible to watch. I suppose I want to make Henry happy. But Jill was right when she said the day Henry went back to camp that it would cost me my own happiness. I know I will fail, and every time I do the failure will be a little more ghastly.

I think I can see it, sometimes, happiness. It's there, the fatal flower of happiness, growing blue and lovely in a crevice on a cliff face just beyond your grasp. But the more you reach for it the more you become aware of the gulf below the precipice, the pit into which you could fall if you reach too far. But

when you get close to it, you realise it is the flower itself which is the pit and so you only see a mirage, the allusion, of unattainable happiness. The search and strain for it is the awful mistake of happiness, whether it be your own, or someone else's. It ends in a bottomless nothingness because you have strained and reached too far. I don't think I can reach and strain anymore. Do I leave my destiny to Henry then? Give myself without defences, be submerged? No. I can have him beside me though. But only as long as I stay always alone, always awake, always watchful, and never ever give in.