

Grace Choi

14 years old

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8th Grade

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Woman Explorers of the Round Table

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CHARACTERS: Bessie Coleman, an African-American wearing an antique pilot's uniform
Elizabeth Blackwell, wears a nineteenth-century gown
Victoria Woodhull, a dark-haired woman in nineteenth-century men's clothes
Rosalind Franklin, a woman with dark hair cut in a bob

ACT ONE

Scene One

SETTING: There is a round table with four chairs. A black bag, some books, and some papers are scattered on the table.

AT RISE: ELIZABETH and ROSALIND are seated in two of the four chairs.

ELIZABETH BLACKWELL: (exasperatedly) And so after hours and hours of grueling examination, my patient finally tells me that he made up his injury. Rosalind, I thought I was about to lose it there.

ROSALIND FRANKLIN: (exclaiming) Wait what! Why would he put himself through that?

ELIZABETH BLACKWELL: First of all, how did that kid get away with his ruse for a whole week? Second, you've wasted all of my time. And apparently, he did it to get a girl's attention. Honestly, faking an arm injury for a week and getting yourself bled by leeches isn't worth it. Just get her some flowers or something.

ROSALIND FRANKLIN: The effort was clearly there but it wasn't well thought out. Still, in the end, did it all work out?

ELIZABETH BLACKWELL: He got the girl's attention with his stupidity alright. But in a twist of fate, he hurt himself for real afterward. He went through a week of actual pain and another bleeding. The bright side was he and the girl got a happy-ever-after.

ROSALIND FRANKLIN: (laughing) Ah, young love. Being Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell must never have gotten boring.

ELIZABETH BLACKWELL: (jokingly) Indeed, each day, I faced a new surprise. Instead of exploring medicine and helping people, who knew I signed up to be Matchmaker. And everyone knows Matchmakers get to hear all the interesting new stories.

ELIZABETH BLACKWELL: (now serious) But in all honesty, during my time, just the fact that I was even able to learn how to be a doctor was unheard of. I was the first female doctor *ever*, and I mean ever. It all started when one of my gal-friends was sick, like dying sick. (irritably) The doctor, some random dude, couldn't help her because girls confused him. I think he had a terrible love life. (suddenly morosely) No help equaled muerto. And she was a good one too.

ROSALIND FRANKLIN: How sad. That there, my friend, is the opposite of what Darwin meant by natural selection.

ELIZABETH BLACKWELL: After seeing how much the dude messed up, I thought if that's the skill we have today, I could do so better. So off to med school I went. In med school, I received a lot of hate. I sat alone from everybody else in my lectures and was excluded from any labs. The local people thought Elizabeth Blackwell was crazy or a witch for not doing "normal" women things like cooking and sewing. If I cooked, I would burn the house down.

ELIZABETH BLACKWELL: C'mon, just think about it. Me, a witch! What kind of thing did they eat to hallucinate? I was just trying to help them.

ROSALIND FRANKLIN: Being a woman can be so hard. All I wanted was to explore the wonders of science, and here I was being underestimated. The worst thing is you can't speak up for yourself. (mockingly) Oh you're a woman, you must be so stupid. And when they found out I was Jewish...They thought I would kill them to cook food from their blood for Passover or (mock whisper) a hated Communist. (sarcastically) And of course, all of them knew I had a set of horns hidden somewhere that I would sew or buy accessories for.

ROSALIND FRANKLIN: (angrily) Everyone thought I was too dumb to do anything. After countless x-rays, I had taken a picture of the elusive DNA. (holds up a paper) My photograph, my precious baby. When they actually realized how smart I was, they stole my baby. (throwing hands up)

ROSALIND FRANKLIN: (jabbing her finger at one of the books) Since with the picture, it's obvious what DNA looks like, so they claim the discovery. They are credited just because

they published their paper first. Dr. ROSALIND Franklin isn't even a footnote when the whole paper is based on *my photograph*. They didn't even bother with my name.

ELIZABETH BLACKWELL: Oh Rosie! How bad you must have felt when all your hard work was reduced to nothing. It's time for history to right itself. ROSALIND Franklin was the first person to discover the shape of DNA, not Watson and Crick. History's hidden explorers should be acknowledged.

(ROSALIND gathers up all the papers and books in her arms)

ROSALIND FRANKLIN: That x-ray picture was my whole career. My whole life was an uphill battle. In university, I fought my way for a degree. With my helpful teacher, I fought to master x-ray techniques. Finally, in the lab, I staked everything on that one picture not even knowing I was successful or not. When Watson and Crick published, there was nothing I could do because no one would believe me. I died from the x-ray radiation which gave me cancer not even seeing justice. (she stops with her breath panting)

(ROSALIND drops everything in her arms in a clutter, a moment of silence descends on the two)

ELIZABETH BLACKWELL: (trying to sound cheerful) The good thing about being underestimated though is when you prove them wrong. The looks on their faces are ten times stupider.

(ELIZABETH and ROSALIND clean up the mess)

ROSALIND FRANKLIN: I'll stop talking about my sad, pitiful story. Tell me more about yours. Cheer me up. (tries a smile)

ELIZABETH BLACKWELL: I eventually earned my professors' and classmates' respect and graduated first in my class. With my power, I finally got people to realize how wrong the doctors of my time were. After cutting up bodies and getting who-knows-what on their hands, these people did not wash them! No wonder my colleagues had such low success. Everything is a biohazard when lives are at stake.

ROSALIND FRANKLIN: I'm so happy you got what you deserved. I only wish people knew the truth about my story. Anyway, Dr. Blackwell is racking up those firsts.

(BESSIE COLEMAN walks on stage)

BESSIE COLEMAN: And touchdown. Flying in the air never gets old y'know. The wind in your hair. The incredible views. (with a sigh) Just amazing. With each flight, I explore a new corner of the skies.

BESSIE COLEMAN: Wait a minute, why are you two already here?

ELIZABETH BLACKWELL: Bessie, you finally arrived. While you are thirty minutes late, your trip must have definitely been worth the wait. Come join us. Now we are just waiting on Victoria.

BESSIE COLEMAN: (sheepishly) Oops. The flying Atlantic made me lose my sense of time. No matter how many times I cross it, I am always awestruck by its turquoise beauty.

(takes off antique aviator goggles and sets them on the table)

BESSIE COLEMAN: I'm so glad I took up flying even though I had so many barriers in my path. As a woman, I was set down. As of both African-American and Native American descent, it was twice as hard for me. Yet the sky was in my blood. Nobody could stop me from answering its cry.

ROSALIND FRANKLIN: Elizabeth, let me introduce you to the fearless Bessie Coleman! You may know Amelia Earhart, but Bessie is the first female pilot of color. The time has come for people to know her name. (turning to Bessie) Tell us all about the latest stunts and tricks you've learned.

BESSIE COLEMAN: I learned how to do the hammerhead stall. During the stunt, I'm mimicking the fall of Icarus. I'll go as high up to the sun as I can get. Suddenly, I dive to the ground and narrowly escape being splattered.

ROSALIND FRANKLIN: (shuddering) I'm glad I'm not an aviator. Any little mistake, and I end up like Icarus. I don't just fall; I die. A mistake in science just means extra calculations.

(suddenly VICTORIA WOODHULL runs on stage holding a newspaper)

VICTORIA WOODHULL: (rapidly with energy) I've just come back with information from the twenty-first century. Well ladies, the times have changed.

BESSIE COLEMAN: Victoria, my good friend, you always know how to make an entrance.

VICTORIA WOODHULL: Get this; a few decades ago, any woman even thinking about having a government office was impossible. But now, 2,478 women hold positions! And several women have gotten close to becoming the president. It's about time. As written in the Constitution, we were all created equal, but for some funny reason, our government is made up of a disproportionate number of white men. Oh and, did I tell you about the integration happening in the government? People of all races are now in office!

ELIZABETH BLACKWELL: I remember when you first tried to run for office in the good old 70s, the 18070s. Everyone thought you had lost your marbles. Your fellow male candidates laughed at you; you were the impossible longshot. In the end, you may not have gotten very far politically, but culturally you impacted the whole world. Then, you turn around and make a fortune on the New York Stock Exchange. You even were one of the first women to own a brokerage firm. I heard all about you, Victoria the explorer of the barriers of social conventions.

VICTORIA WOODHULL: (puts a hand on heart) Awww...thanks for those kind words. (wistfully) It seems everyone's forgotten me though. I was part of the women's suffrage movement, but history seems only to remember Susan B. Anthony, Lucy Stone, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. This is fine with me because these three were very hard-working lovely ladies. Still, history does not remember their first female presidential candidate.

VICTORIA WOODHULL: Speaking of elections, 2020 *is* an election year. The time has come for diversity. While we went from zero women to around 2,500, that's less than thirty percent of the entire government. When 50% of your population is represented in less than 30% of the vote...(shakes head)

ELIZABETH BLACKWELL: Of all the times, now is perfect. After all, March is National Women's Month. Women, people of color, and especially women of color have their moment now. People from all over must come together to work towards equality. Even though you might think you won't have an impact, one voice is better than none.

BESSIE COLEMAN: To learn about our future, we must first look at the past. By learning about the stories of female explorers who broke the boundaries in medicine, science, aviation, politics, or others, we can use our knowledge for the future and honor these trailblazing women.

THE END