

Synopsis

It begins with a dream...

A woman dreams a court room and finds an obelisk in it. Examining the obelisk symbols, she realizes what the trial is about: the patriarchy. *Finally.*

The patriarchy has gone way too far. Three witnesses will testify: Eve of The Garden of Eden fame, Emma Amethyst, a time-travelling healer and herbalist and Jane Doe, an overwrought working mom in today's world.

It will be up to you, the audience/jury, to pass judgement, to sing-a-long with a few feisty songs. and finally, to join a conversation about *your* dream for the future.

**This work is dedicated to the children and the children's children —
ours, yours, and all beings.**

Production Notes

This is Readers' Theatre; everyone uses a script.

The Witnesses use the podium for their scripts. Court Clerk has hers on a clipboard. The Narrator can simply carry her script.

The grey obelisk is to enhance the stage and remind the audience of this global, ancient and pervasive symbol of patriarchy. It is 6' tall and about 1' square. (The base slightly larger, top slightly smaller.) The surfaces are inscribed with symbols such as assault rifle, judge's gavel, stack of money, a ladder with a stick woman at the bottom and a stick man on top, pesticide container, etc. When the obelisk is opened, there are colourful symbols of feminism, wholeness, inclusivity.

The Characters:

Narrator — wears her usual clothing; brings the problem to the audience; her demeanour is sombre, reasonable.

Court Clerk carries pen and clipboard and wears a black court gown; she is concerned with keeping order and moving things along.

Eve Anonymous — Witness 1 (her theme is violence) carries an apple, wears a snake around her neck and wears a flowery dress. She's fed up.

Emma Amethyst— Witness 2 (her theme is healing) wears a shawl and an apron and long wraparound skirt concealing modern trousers; carries a basket with herbs. Hidden beneath the leaves is a nurse's cap. She's "seen it all before." She time travels.

Jane Doe— Witness 3 (her theme is opportunity) wears a business suit, watch, carries cell phone. She's well educated and capable but overextended and flustered.

Onstage:

Musician(s), keyboard & chime

Witness stand/podium

Obelisk SL

3 witness chairs SR

1 chair for CC SL

Offstage: funeral wreath

Music

There are 4 songs; 3 are familiar tunes with original lyrics and one is original. The musician will also play the first few bars of a funeral dirge and the theme from the film, Working 9 to 5. All song lyrics are printed in the programme for audience participation. The playwrights imagine a pianist, although another instrument may be used. Use sound effects as you feel inclined to add to the fun.

Patriarchy on Trial

Musician and **Narrator** enter. **Narrator** walks to CS, surveys audience a moment.

Narrator: Hello, friends. Thank you for coming tonight. I need to talk with you about something that's been bothering me. It's this:

When I was walking down a street in my neighbourhood last October, I was flabbergasted to see an effigy of an old woman hanging from a tree. She was dressed in black, had long grey hair. Big chains hung around her neck. Her mouth was open in a silent scream. Next to her was a plastic jack o'lantern. OK. I got it. So this woman was a Hallowe'en decoration. She was supposed to be funny. But. What's funny about a woman being tortured and hung in a tree?

So, you can see why I needed to talk about this, right? I was wondering, what irrational impulse is driving the way society works today? Could it be the patriarchy?

decisively **Patriarchy!** *pause*

I know. Some of you may be thinking, "Yeah, let's really sock it to 'em." And some may be thinking, "Oh-oh, here it comes! A bunch of man-haters ready to knock down every guy on the planet."

But no. This play is not about blaming men for all the ills of this world. Men suffer from patriarchal systems, too. More men than women are lonely, suffer from drug abuse and die by suicide.

Patriarchy does not serve any gender, colour, age or ability. Patriarchy. What do I even mean by the word? Competition. Winner-takes-all. I mean, it is a system of society in which elite men hold the power. [*pause*]

I can think of a symbol of this in my own life. When I was a kid, my father was the head of the household. We were reminded of this every time we sat down for dinner because he sat at the head of the table. Even though my mother was a professional nurse who made life and death decisions at work, she bowed to my father's power at home.

Lots of signs, eh? My friend heard this one regularly: “Woman, get me a beer!” But you might ask, isn’t it natural and universal that men, who are bigger and stronger, should have more power and privilege than women? No! In fact, in most prehistoric societies women and men shared tasks and power — and honoured Nature, upon whom life depends. Some egalitarian societies still exist today, for example among the Haudenosaunee/Mohawk in eastern Canada and the US.
pause

Ever since I saw that martyred woman hanging, I’ve been thinking a lot about patriarchal systems that have brought us to this moment in time.

Friends. Last night I had the strangest dream. [*SFX: chimes.*]

Gesturing. There was a stage — just about like this one. Three witnesses and a court clerk were there. [*the witnesses and Court Clerk enter and take their seats*].

There was a podium, and an obelisk. In my dream, [*SFX Chime*] I studied the symbols on the obelisk...guns, jock strap, nuclear mushroom cloud, money, whalebone corset... but it was the judge’s gavel that provided the clue that I was in a court room! But who was on trial? And then like a fist on a Friday night, it hit me. The symbols were of patriarchal power. So, it was the **patriarchy** on trial! **Finally!**

Tonight, I invite you into my dream court [*SFX Chime*]. I ask you to serve as the jury. Are you up for this? *Pause* This is what happened....

Narrator sits.

CC: *Standing* Hear ye! Hear ye! This court is now in session! I call the first witness.

Eve goes to the witness stand.

CC: State your full name.

Eve: Eve.

CC: Your **full** name.

Eve: Eve. They didn't bother to give me another name.

CC: Let the record show that Eve Anonymous is the first witness.

Place of birth?

Eve: The Garden.

CC: What do you want to say to the esteemed members of the jury? Please don't be shy.

Eve: "Shy" has never been a problem for me. I'm the one who talked to the snake, remember? However, being shut up, shut away, silenced, lied about and violated — for 3,000 years — now **that** has been a very big problem for me, *gestures to audience* and all who came after me.

Do you remember when you were a kid and there was something you really needed to say? Remember when some big person told you, "No! Don't talk. Don't bother me. Don't tell. Just shut right up!" Remember? It was kind of like that. And I was not a child.... Actually, I was **never** a child!

CC: Proceed. *Returns to her seat.*

Eve: Esteemed members of the jury. Regardless of what you have heard in your churches, synagogues and mosques around the world and throughout the eons, it was not **my** fault! *pause* Just a recap here:

Men wrote the story about how Mr. ManGod made a man, put him to sleep and made **me** out of his rib. **Hell—o!! As if.**

Then the snake and I had a thing. I picked the forbidden fruit of knowledge, the man followed along and then **zap!** We were thrown out of the Garden forever.

And, so the story goes, because I was a bad girl, all women forever have been cursed with painful child birth —*sarcastically* as if there had been a plan for easy child birth? hah! — and men are always on top! That was almost the end of the story, but there was more. There is always more.

Because ManGod was jealous, Mother Earth, Gaia, Isis, Pachamama, Frigga, Kali — and all the other goddesses were cursed, too.

So that’s how it was and that’s how it is. Men gave themselves power over everything. “Bad old Eve.” All my fault because I reached for knowledge. Maybe you know what I mean? Sing along with me:

Sings “It Had to be Me”

Tune: It Had to be You (Jones & Kahn, 1924)

Lyrics: Biasutti, 2023

It had to be me,
The blame is on me.
I talked to the snake
I ate from the tree
The blame is on me.

Sure, Eden was great,
With nary a chore
But give me a break
A bit of a bore —
I hungered for more.

It had to be me
The blame is on me.
It’s knowledge I craved
So call me depraved,
Don’t blame it on me!

CC: But Eve Anonymous, surely that old blame story doesn’t matter today. Aren’t women also cared for and protected by the patriarchy?

Eve: Protected *from* the patriarchy *by* the patriarchy? Don’t make me laugh. Listen, I’ve been floating around in the minds and hearts of storytellers,

artists and rule makers for 3,000 years. I've been kept alive this way, and sister, I've seen it all.

The patriarchy has used me as an excuse to denigrate, humiliate, exclude and violate. Still does. Violence has become **NORMAL**.

CC: Thank you for this compelling testimony, I would...

Eve: I'm NOT finished!

Protection? Ha! Only 500 years ago, we were in the throes of the European witch trials.

CC: But that is also **old** history.

Eve: In some countries, there are still witch hunts. And, there is the Taliban, today.

But speaking of history — sure. The Renaissance, Age of Enlightenment and then we run into the diabolical Doctrine of Discovery! Look how that worked for everyone except elite men! It didn't.

Today's violent society couldn't have been created without subjecting, killing, torturing, sterilizing and raping women and violating Mother Earth. Men who spoke out and stood up for us were silenced.

Two steps forward, one step back. Quite a little line dance, eh? We finally have safe houses for women but they're always underfunded. We finally recognize spousal assault as a crime, but it's still hard to get a conviction.

One hundred Canadian women and girls go missing or are murdered every year, and don't you wonder? Where **are** the missing? in a forest? in a landfill site? Sold to the highest bidder?

No. There is nothing about the patriarchy that is **not** violent.

CC: Eve Anonymous, you have given strong testimony about violence and the patriarchy...

Eve: I am still NOT finished!

When violence permeates our world, sliding it into society disguised as entertainment, when newscasts focus primarily on it, when sports celebrate it, violence seems normalized. For many, it's hardly noticeable any more. But I notice it.

I notice it!

CC: *gently* Eve Anonymous, is there anything more you would like to add?

Eve: Only this. *holds up apple* Patriarchy can just kiss my apple! *She slaps her fanny and sits.*

CC: I call the next witness. *Emma goes to the witness stand.*
State your name please.

Emma : Emma Amethyst.

CC: Place of birth?

Emma : Where the healing herbs grow.

CC: Thank you. Please proceed with your testimony.

Emma : First, I want to ask this honourable jury if, when you walked here did you notice the herbs underfoot? Such bounty! Myself, I was delighted to be able to find Queen Anne's lace. Now I can make a potion with the seeds for my countrywoman Elizabeth. She has had ample children, and does not wish for more.

You look puzzled—do you wonder how I know about birth control, even though I am from the Middle Ages? I learned from my mother, and my mother's mother, and my ancestors going back to ancient times, wise women who came before me.

The townspeople come to me to cure their stomach complaints, their aching joints, their headaches. And women come to me in secret, seeking some control over their bodies.

But not everyone in the village appreciates my wisdom—the feudal lords, priests and their officers fear my power. And this happened all over the world, not just Europe where I am from.

Would you sing along with me?

Sings: My Best Healing Things

Tune: My Favourite Things by Rogers and Hammerstein, 1959)

Lyrics: Biasutti, 2023

Ginkgo and willow and ergot and camomile
Basil and feverfew, mint, flax and yarrow.
Herbs that I find near rivers and springs...
These are a few of my best healing things.

When the dog bites,
When the bee stings,
When the baby's due,
I simply provide all my care and my love
And I will be there for you.

We are considered a challenge to power
Of men in the clergy and newly-trained doctors.
“Sex with the devil!” is their explanation
For skills we perfected in each generation.

They say, “**witch-es**”
They say, “**e-vil**”
But we're **wo-men** true.
We are mistrusted by powers-that-be,
But someday we'll get our due!

We wise women began to be considered more and more as a threat to the power of the state and church... well... let me tell you what happened to me....

The day they burned my mother at the stake, I prayed and prayed for rain, but no rain came. They brought her from the prison, her hands

bound, a rope around her waist tied her to the ones ahead and behind her. Our eyes met. “Bless you, *liebchen*,” she said. “Be strong!” and then the soldiers poked her in the back to make her move faster. Faster toward where the wood was piled in the town square. Faster toward the poles that stood waiting for the men to bind the prisoners to them, before lighting the kindling.

“Come,” my auntie said. “We can do no more for her.” And we left, leaving behind all the stories my mother would have told, all the teachings she would have given, all the songs she would have sung.

Of course, I was not the only child left this way. Over 300 years, they executed tens of thousands of us... mostly women like my mother — healers, gardeners, foragers, midwives, women who helped people die with dignity. *Sighs deeply.*

Excuse me. Let me leave that sad time. *She turns her back to the audience, removes shawl, puts on a nurse’s cap.*

When healing becomes more organized, we aren’t allowed to go to medical school. We can become nurses, providing loving care, following orders of a male doctor. Our historical teachings are discredited or co-opted by western medicine. The willow bark that we used for millennia to treat aches and pains becomes aspirin. The foxglove tea that we brewed for heart conditions becomes digoxin.

That’s all well and good, but were we, and other Indigenous healers, given the credit for such discoveries? No, we were not. I make my case!

Emma turns,, removes cap and long skirt to reveal casual trousers. As she does this, CC stands and says:

CC: Ma’am? Are you still here?

Emma : Give me a minute I had to time travel another century or so. So, where are we these days?

When I turned 18 in 1967, the second wave feminism movement was at its height, focusing on reproductive rights and sexual equality. 13 million women around the world were using the birth control pill.

When I was 22, I wanted to join them. *pause*

But my Catholic doctor had another idea. He would not prescribe the pill until I gave him a firm wedding date. In his mind, this precaution would prevent me from having sex before the holy sacrament of marriage. Bless his little heart! *She smirks.*

I remember Heather. We met in first year university. She was bright, capable and funny. But she was also unlucky. She got pregnant. Heather had to appear before a **committee** of doctors and convince them that she was mentally unstable, so she could have an abortion.

And another thing. When I was expecting my daughter, Sarah, I was less concerned about the process of labour and delivery than I was about the routine shaving and episiotomy, that helped turn childbirth into a medical procedure. As it happened, Sarah popped out in no time, so I didn't have to argue about any of that.

AND! What is it with all this concern about “feminine hygiene”? Why did it take until 2023 to admit that women athletes might actually be having a period and might actually leak?

And vaginal deodorants – really? Shaving pubic hair? Let me be clear. Menstruation, masturbation and menopause are not medical **problems** for the patriarchy to **treat, perfume, clean up, clip or medicate!**

CC: Ma'am, please watch your language. There may be patriarchs here tonight!

Emma : See what I mean? Normal everyday “lady functions” are considered rude to discuss — even though we can talk about **Viagara** until the cows come home!

We are supposed to fit in to some crazy ideal of what a woman should look like—the stereotypical Barbie — not too fat, not too thin, certainly not too old and definitely not bloody!

CC: **Ma'am!**

Emma: I'm going to ask you good folks of the jury a question: is your second toe longer than your big toe? That's called Morton's toe. I've got Morton's toe, and I'm completely fine with that. But can you believe that it is possible to have toe-shortening surgery to make your foot look (*air quotes*) "better"?

It's sometimes called a Cinderella procedure. All so we can wear stilettos?! Enough said!

And **wait!** Did you know that you can also have cosmetic surgery to have your labia shortened, to make your vulva look "better"? Please do not check on that right now!

CC: *Horried.* No!

Sings: Leave My Wrinkled Face Alone
(Pogue, 2023)

Leave my wrinkled face alone.
I love all the lines its grown
You cut and paste your own face
Stitch a bum up in its place —
But leave my wrinkled face alone.

Leave my lovely breasts alone.
I don't need your silicone.
I don't want your pokey wire
To lift them ever higher
I like how my breasts have grown.

Leave my labia alone.
Your opinion is over-blown
Whether smooth or long or bitty
I think they're very pretty.
I'm fond of the ones I own.

Now, where was I? Oh, yeah. The back-in-the-day-restrictions on our personal choices. Since then, there has been a lot of legislation on human

rights, for example reproductive rights and 2SLGBTQI+ rights that has let us settle into a **dangerous** complacency.

Surely, now you'd think that patriarchy is dead and we could forget about the bad old days?

Now that males, typically bigger and stronger than women, no longer need to go out on the hunt to provide game for the village?

Now that many women have some control over their reproduction, and now that household tasks are less labour-intensive?

Now that more people can benefit from more life choices?

Surely now, patriarchy is dead?

No.

The systems of power passed from generation to generation still continue to favour cisgender men as the locus of influence, with everybody else needing to be controlled.

Think of the current threat to women's control over their own bodies. Think of the current threat to the queer and trans communities. Homosexuality was decriminalized in Canada way back in 1969, yet today, folks with diverse sexual orientation or gender diversity are under attack again.

Patriarchy endures. It endures like a great ugly wart that just keeps coming back. And I don't have a cure for that! It's time to get rid of it.

Emma returns to her seat.

CC: I call the final witness.

SFX: a few bars from the theme song, *Working 9 to 5*

Jane rises and, checking her cell phone, walks slowly to the podium then checks her watch.

Jane: Oh no! *to Court Clerk* I hope this won't take too long? I'm so sorry, but

it's already 5:00 o'clock. I have to pick up the kids soon.... and then there's laundry and I've still got this report to finish. Hmmmmm Maybe I can work on it after I make dinner.? **Wait!** Wasn't there a thing for tonight? Did I need a babysitter? *scrolls on phone*

CC: **Ahem! If I could have your attention please?** I need you to state your name. Please.

Jane: What? Oh. Sorry. Jane. Jane Doe.

CC: Let the record show that Jane Doe is the final witness. Place of birth?

Jane: Everywhere.... *checks cell phone again and talks to herself.* Well, so much for that. I forgot we were having dinner with Ted and Alice tonight. I'd better check to be sure the babysitter is still available. I'll work on the report after we get home ...it will be another late night for me.....

CC: Ms Doe?

Jane: Oh! I'm so sorry. I'm focussing now. Really. I'm right here.

CC: You have been called to testify against the patriarchy and...

Jane: *distractedly looks at her cell phone again, then speaks to herself:*

Another day in the life of Wonder Woman....

Why do I feel like I am always running but getting nowhere?
I have a job that I love, but was passed over for the last round of promotions after my maternity leave. I feel like I'm smashing my head against the glass ceiling. And it hurts!

I have children I love, but I feel guilty that I don't spend enough so-called quality time with them. It all gets reduced to "brush your teeth" and "do your homework."

I have a partner I love, but I'm too tired for conversation — never mind sex! Life, eh? *to the Jury Well*, let me tell you what my life is like! Sing along with me.

Sings: I am Working, Always Working

Tune: I've Been Working on the Railroad (Traditional, 1800s)

Lyrics: Biasutti, 2023

I am working, always working,
All the live-long day.
I am working, always working,
For sub-standard pay.

I am working in the kitchen,
In the nursery too.
But when I want to work the board room
Challenges ensue.

Women gotta know.
We all gotta know.
Women gotta toot their ho-o-orns.
Catharine and Alice,
Rosalin and Maude
Harriet and Hedy Lamarr.

Can't you hear the voices calling?
"Please give me my due!"
All those names that I'm recalling,
Wo-men strong and true.

Scientists are working in the labs-oh.
Artists are working in the halls – oh-oh-oh.
Women forgotten and refused;
Names that we should know.

Singin' fee, fie, fiddly-i-o
Fee, fie, fiddly-i-o-o-o-o
Fee, fie, fiddly-i-o ———
Give us what you owe!

CC: Ms Doe! If I could have your attention for a moment?

Jane: *Staring out to the audience/jury*
 Who was the fool that taught us that we could have it all?
 Not now, not the way our society works. *She puts down her cell phone.*
 Now, don't get me wrong—I **am** a feminist.

(CC shrugs and lets her go on. These witnesses have been difficult!)

I know my herstory. It was feminist activists in the late 1800s who marched for the vote and property rights. That was in the first wave.

In the 1960s and 70s, the feminist agenda was reproductive rights and equal pay for equal work. This was part of a whole wave of change: civil rights, peace, gay rights, Indigenous rights, eco-justice.

SFX: *Musician plays a few bars from “If I Had Hammer”*

And the third and fourth waves are exposing the additional inequality faced by women marginalized by race, culture, class or sexual identity.

But all these waves have not yet floated us to a place where women and men — all genders – have equal opportunity to be our best selves. And not everyone has my unearned advantage as an educated cisgendered, well-off citizen.

Why aren't there child care spaces in every workplace?
 Why can't my husband or I take parental leave when the kids are newborn or sick without it affecting our jobs?

Why isn't it an equally valid choice to to stay home and make crafts with the kids or do volunteer work for the Alberta Wilderness Association, for example? Or, not to have kids at all?

Why is it that, at the current pace, it will be at least 50 years before there is legal gender equality everywhere?Now, where did I read that?

CC: Ms Doe? Ms Doe?

Jane is completely oblivious, Jane begins searching on her phone...

.....It was from the World Bank Report, I think... Oh! here it is:
Reading from the screen.

“Governments cannot afford to sideline half of their population. Denying equal rights to women across the world is not only unfair to women, but is a barrier to countries’ ability to promote green, resilient, and inclusive development.”

See? And that’s from the World Bank, a patriarchal institution if ever there was one. Hah! *She stares at her screen again.*

CC: Ms Doe? Are you finished your testimony?

Jane: What? Oh, right.

Patriarchy is bad for the economy, and bad for humanity.
Patriarchy is bad for Earth and water... in other words, bad for all the beings of the world.

A beat. Jane has suddenly heard herself.

Wait! all the beings of the world..... Well. I’ve just made an executive decision.... I’m not going home after all. I am going to stay right here with all of you and see how this trial turns out.

Frank can pick up the kids and the sitter. He can go to dinner without me.

Bad for **all** beings. I have nothing more to say.
Jane returns to her seat and mimes her phone call.

CC: And now, where are the witnesses for the defence?

All witnesses: *Standing, loudly* **There is no defence!**

CC returns to her seat as Narrator rises.

Narrator: Well, members of my dream jury, the charges against the patriarchy are dire, amongst other crimes, it is accused of:
 Minimizing women, leading to violence.
 Assuming control over women's bodies.
 Suppressing women's ability to achieve their potential.
 What say ye?

Sing along with me:

Sings: If Patriarchy's Guilty

Tune: If You're Happy and You Know It (Traditional)

Lyrics: Biasutti, 2023

If patriarchy's guilty, clap your hands (*clap, clap*)
 If patriarchy's guilty, clap your hands (*clap, clap*)
 If patriarchy's guilty, if patriarchy's guilty, if patriarchy's guilty,
 Clap your hands (*clap, clap*).

Let's all work together, clap your hands (*clap, clap*)
 Let's all work together, clap your hands (*clap, clap*)
 Let's all work together, make the planet so much better,
 If patriarchy's guilty, clap your hands. (*clap, clap*)

Narrator: The jury has spoken, sung, or clapped, and so...

SFX: *a few bars of a funeral dirge as*

C.C. *holds funeral wreath high, solemnly crosses stage to hang it on obelisk.*

Narrator *moves mics to SL as Jane moves podium to back of stage, centre then joins Narrator.*

Eve and Emma *move obelisk to CS, then open and raise it up, moving it slowly from side to side as*

SFX *a few bars of happy, lively music and Witnesses cheer*

Eve and Emma *move obelisk back to lean against podium*

Cast *lines up CS and bows twice, then gestures to musicians who rise and bow*

Narrator: Now I can tell you end of my dream. After I saw all the glorious symbols of peace, equality, justice — the goddess, the rainbow, —the **love** — I saw that the jury stayed in the court room. They turned to their neighbour and shared their dream for the Great Transformation. I invite you do this, too. After 10 minutes, we'll reconvene to hear about it. What is **your** dream?

Option:

*Close the evening with a freedom song such as **Bread and Roses**.
(The term coined by suffragette Helen Todd in 1912.)*

Ta-da! The End.