ACT ONE

(Blackness. Then a single light. Emilie is in this light. She is a little stunned to be here. She breathes – also stunning.)

EMILIE. Breath.

(She flexes her hands, testing, getting her bearings.)

Body.
Again.

(She steps out of her spotlight, then steps back in.)

Space.
And Time.
Again?
Life again?

(She starts with the basics…)

There are things called living and things called dead that exist as people. Hearts and the squaring of hearts.

(She draws a simple heart. Then squares it: ♥²)

(She finds F=mv is written.)

Then there are things called ‘living’ and things called ‘dead’ that exist as Force and the squaring of Force. Motion, mass. Squared.

(She squares it: F=mv² remembers this now…) Force Vive, it’s called. The Living Force. “Living” because of that little 2.

(She erases the²: F=mv)

Now it’s “dead.”
(She squares it again: \( F=mv^2 \))

EMILIE: (cont.) And alive again. Mathematically speaking. But there is something sweeping about this notion: ‘when you square it, you give it life.’

(A new energy into...)

I died thinking two things: One – I’m not done. Two?

(She points to the \( x \).)

Two. A number that seems the symbol of a double. But made small and set on high? Is an imperative to expand, extend exponentially – a life-like dynamic – yes! Squaring adds life – that’s why we called it Living Force – that’s what I fought for. That number in that equation was my life’s work –

No, my life’s question. And I died without an answer. I died thinking: Living and the Living Force...so what?

(She gets it now...)

And that’s the impossible question that brought me here:

(She touches the \( x \).)

What do we mean?

(see that LOVE and PHILOSOPHY are written)

And I realize it’s a bold attempt to quantify such things...

But Time and Space are generous tonight. So I ask...

Of all my loving –

(She marks under LOVE.)

and all my knowing –

(She marks under PHILOSOPHY.)

What matters, what lasts? If lasting even matters. What’s the point?

Asking tricky questions is what I do best.
EMILIE. Oh well, thank you for being such a gentleman.

VOLTAIRE. For everything I did for myself, that I needed for myself, I'm sorry. I'm sorry I ruined your version of how my life would happen. I'm sorry!

EMILIE. You betray me, in my own house, twice?! You trash my work, you lie to me, you ruin everything we built, everything that mattered, wrecked it, ripped it up, ripped it, ravaged it – everything that made sense – GONE!

(She realized she has just ripped Newton's Principia, pages scatter on the floor.)

EMILIE. whistles to MADAM who charges V and slaps him hard. MADAM nods to EMILIE and leaves.)

I would suggest, if you wish to retain my friendship and the immediate privileges that arrangement entails, not least of which is keeping you out of jail on an alarming number of occasions, that you refrain from any form of literary bribery until I am quite out of range. You have betrayed me and broken my heart. Get the hell out of my house.

(VOLTAIRE leaves. A moment to pick up the pages, salvage the precious book.)

(EMILIE wipes through all the marks under LOVE – as well as the² of the.)

EMILIE. One must study throughout.

(VOLTAIRE and SOUBRETTTE, as Marie-Louise, enter and she lets him have his way.)

(EMILIE senses their behavior but won't acknowledge them.)

Study not only affords women a chance at the glory denied them in so many other pursuits –

(They knock something over, challenging Emilie's focus as Emilie make a few marks under PHILOSOPHY.)
EMILIE. (cont.) I see him at a salon discussing Newton, the opera a few times, at court a few more, ballet, gardens, the pâtisserie near my house. It was after we met at Mass that I knew for certain chance had become choice.
The scene at the opera.

(At the opera. Some crackling music/vocals. VOLTAIRE moves to her and they sit. They both know that they’re being watched.)

(SOUBRETTE joins GENTLEMAN, MADAM, as audience.)

VOLTAIRE. Madam Marquise. It is a pleasure to see you.
And be seen with you.
EMILIE. We seem to be making a habit of it.

VOLTAIRE. I do love that pâtisserie. How was your éclair?

EMILIE. Much like you I’m afraid: too sweet, not quite filling. How was your tarte?

VOLTAIRE. Couldn’t stop myself. Speaking of which, you’re not bored by my growing infatuation with you?

EMILIE. On the contrary. I think it’s good for your health.

VOLTAIRE. My health? You barely know me, Madam.

EMILIE. I know your reputation. And your work, Monsieur.

VOLTAIRE. You do?

EMILIE. Of course I do.

VOLTAIRE. Of course you do.

EMILIE. Most of your operas by heart. Though I thought that last one was a bit wordy.

VOLTAIRE. Now you tease.

EMILIE. If honesty is game-play.

VOLTAIRE. Everything’s a move, my dear.

EMILIE. A dear perhaps, but not yours yet.

VOLTAIRE. I hear a “yet.”

EMILIE. And missed the “not.”
VOLTAIRE. My god...
EMILIE. You have one?
VOLTAIRE. Only muses.
EMILIE. They're a fickle bunch.
VOLTAIRE. (falling for her) Madam, you are...
EMILIE. Speak, poet. The anticipation tortures the air –
VOLTAIRE. (sincere) Goddess.
   Unstoppable.
   I fear –
EMILIE. What's to fear?
VOLTAIRE. A dangerous thing.
EMILIE. For you or me?
VOLTAIRE. We may be in this one together.
EMILIE. You presume too much.
VOLTAIRE. I do.
EMILIE. Well, stop it. I am not that easily deduced.
VOLTAIRE. I know that you're a devastating force at cards,
you're married to a military creature, and you scare
off any allies at court with your excruciating habit of
reading.
EMILIE. You're not scared then?
VOLTAIRE. I don't plan on playing you in cards. And don't
tell anyone but...I read too.
EMILIE. Well then, perhaps we do have...like minds, mutual
interests.
VOLTAIRE. Very mutual, very interesting. And I'm a quick
study.
EMILIE. Not too quick – that'd disappoint.
VOLTAIRE. Well, we can discuss your varied preferences
over wine tonight?
EMILIE. Monsieur, you're very charming, but you don't get
to know my preferences until I know yours. What do
you think of Descartes?
VOLTAIRE. A...revolutionary mind.
EMILIE. Leibniz?
(EMILIE turns to us, furious.)

EMILIE. But it doesn’t. Easy is ignorance, is a myth. That the greatest thinkers were ever remotely, even for a second satisfied, is mythology. Newton was not content, he was ravenous, he was wracked, he was not done, and I’m sure he was furious on his deathbed because of it. Because the only thing that lasts — the only thing that you can count on to be there for you? Not people, not love…Physics.
That’s the only thing that works like God is supposed to: Fair and constant.
Let’s move on.

(Pause. Nothing happens.)

Please?

(Nothing.)

EMILIE. (cont.) The scene in which Emilie gets a break? Or a friend?

(he approaches her cautiously. She sighs, to us…)

Of course, physics often promotes circular behavior…
here I go again.

VOLTAIRE. Marquise. It’s been too, too long. Months without a word…

EMILIE. (totally dying) Has it been? Hadn’t noticed. So busy with the Newton.

VOLTAIRE. (trying to apologize sincerely) Yes. Well. Emilie. I came here to — to tell you — to ask you if you could — we could…have each other again.

EMILIE. Oh, V, I’m done with “having.”

VOLTAIRE. I don’t mean — I mean that I need you. Extensively. And I know that I was, on occasion in the past, unthinking.
But I’m broken open, empty without you. You are my…buoyancy. Without you I sink.

EMILIE. You sank yourself.

VOLTAIRE. I know I did. And it wrecked me. Please. Take me back.
EMILIE. The world can't go back, it'd be rude if we did.

VOLTAIRE. Then forward. As friends.

EMILIE. (scoffs) Friends?

VOLTAIRE. Eventual friends?

(beat)

Because you love me.

(She glares.)

Eventually?

(Beat)

EMILIE. The Marquis and I have been invited to Luneville.

VOLTAIRE. Luneville? Ugh. Dreadful place –

EMILIE. The Duke's a fan of your work.

VOLTAIRE. – with surprisingly good taste.

EMILIE. My husband will come later, but you're welcome to join me. If you won't be a pain.

VOLTAIRE. I suppose I could summon up my best behavior.

EMILIE. That won't be any fun.

VOLTAIRE. There's my girl.

EMILIE. Not yours. But glad you're back.

(to us)

And part of me thinks that Physics has some heart after all.

(VOLTAIRE smiles, ushers her into…)

The scene at a new court, with old friends made new.

(The royal court of Luneville. MADAM, SOUBRETTE, GENTLEMAN (as Saint-Lambert), create a tableau of the court.)

(VOLTAIRE and EMILIE are greeted with applause and they each are separated for conversation – EMILIE with SOUBRETTE and MADAM; and VOLTAIRE with GENTLEMAN.)

MADAM. It is very special of you to join us, Marquise.

SOUBRETTE. We've all heard of you, it's true.

EMILIE. We're so honored to be here.
(SOUBRETTE enters as Gabrielle, Emilie's daughter.
Young but regal.)

EMILIE. (cont.) She is all woman, and will have a much
easier life for it. She is loyal, demure, and...entertain-
able. She is marrying a prince today.

The scene in which –

SOUBRETTE. The scene in which the daughter is seen and
finally heard. On her wedding day.

SOUBRETTE. I wanted to be like you. I still do.

EMILIE. No you don't. Your life will be much better than
mine. Marrying royalty makes you –

SOUBRETTE. Just another wife.

EMILIE. It makes you queen. And everyone wants to be
queen.

SOUBRETTE. Everyone wants to choose to be queen. Why
don't I get a choice?

EMILIE. Because you don't need one.

SOUBRETTE. You got one.

EMILIE. I'm an exception. And being exceptional is ex-
hausting. You don't want that.

SOUBRETTE. How do you know?

EMILIE. Didn't those nuns teach you to respect your
mother?

SOUBRETTE. My mother is a picture in my locket. I don't
know you. You shipped me off to a convent. Now you
marry me off to a prince. I don't have a mother, and I
don't have a life that's mine, and that's your fault.

EMILIE. My fault that you have a future? You should be
grateful that your father and I arranged for such a –

SOUBRETTE. Bargained. You bargained me for such a life.

EMILIE. Gabrielle, there are so many other girls who
would've begged –

SOUBRETTE. But I'm not other girls. I'm your girl. Your
girl.
EMILIE. And that makes you lucky. So live your lucky life. It will be easier, by far—

SOUBRETTE. You keep saying easier. I don’t want easier. You didn’t care what was easy. You wanted what you wanted, and you gave me up for it.

EMILIE. I didn’t. I didn’t give you up.

SOUBRETTE. You chose books over me. I want a choice. Your choice.

EMILIE. You don’t want—

SOUBRETTE. I do.

EMILIE. You don’t want my life.

SOUBRETTE. You never gave—

EMILIE. You want an easy life.

SOUBRETTE. Never gave me—

EMILIE. A good life.

SOUBRETTE. A chance. You got one. And you could’ve given me mine. Instead. You gave me what every other kept woman gives her stupid daughter. Instead of what you know, here’s what I know...

(SOUBRETTE changes her tone.)

SOUBRETTE. A girl does not slouch. Does not speak in excess. Does not question or laugh loudly. She marries rich. She obeys. She submits. And she—

EMILIE. I’m sorry.

SOUBRETTE. She has—

EMILIE. I’m sorry.

SOUBRETTE. And she has an easy life. Good luck with yours.

(SOUBRETTE starts to leave, then comes back for a harsh hug. The lights crackle and plummet out to blackness.)

(Immediately the lights rise. SOUBRETTE is gone. EMILIE is alone.)

EMILIE. And I see what I missed: myself in her. What have I done? What any thoughtless man would do. I assumed and missed a woman of my own...element.

I’m sorry. I am so sorry.
VOLTAIRE. How's the book coming?
EMILIE. Excellent. How's the play?
VOLTAIRE. Marvelous.
EMILIE. Good.
VOLTAIRE. I just love it here.
          Don't you just love it, Monsieur?
GENTLEMAN. Oh. Yes. Quite.
VOLTAIRE. Good boy. Heel.
EMILIE. Coming to cards?
VOLTAIRE. I look forward to losing.
EMILIE. Maybe you'll get lucky.
VOLTAIRE. Maybe I will.
          The Duke calls you, boy. Wouldn't dally.

(V exits.)

GENTLEMAN. I adore you.
EMILIE. I can tell.
GENTLEMAN. This is the most astonishing –
EMILIE. Astounding –
GENTLEMAN. Complete surprise.
EMILIE. I didn't expect.
GENTLEMAN. I can't resist.
EMILIE. I hope you don't.
GENTLEMAN. Everyday.
EMILIE. Yes.
GENTLEMAN. Forever.
EMILIE. God yes.
GENTLEMAN. You are...You are...
EMILIE. Speak, soldier-poet.
GENTLEMAN. The surprise of my life. The hope of my heart.

(SOUBRETTE runs on and takes EMILIE's place as they kiss. GENTLEMAN and SOUBRETTE exits.)

(EMILIE makes many marks under LOVE.)
EMILIE. (cont.) But I want to go where science is done –
which is not in courts or academies, but in The Café
Gradot – an all-male, all-night establishment wherein
my sex is restricted to various services unbecoming of
my class. And my patience.
So we do what we must.

(EMILIE sends SOUBRETTE through the doors.)

(EMILIE marks under PHILOSOPHY.)

Women determine the fate of great nations, of the
human race itself, but for us there is no place where we
are trained to think, much less to think for ourselves.
And if we insist, we are mocked, scorned –

(Just as SOUBRETTE is kicked out again. SOUBRETTE
exists. EMILIE erases the mark under PHILOSOPHY.)

(GENTLEMAN appears through the door.)
The men of letters laugh, the men of court frown.

(MADAM appears.)
And the women...oh they of much gossip and little
substance. They are the vipers and hate me because I
dare to ask “why” and, more dangerously, “why not?”

But court is essential. So I spend all of my time plea-
ing those whom I don’t even like. I am rich, secure,
and...painfully bored. And court couldn’t care less.

(MADAM, GENTLEMAN scoff at her and exit.)

Then. I meet V. Who cares.

(Enter VOLTAIRE. She underlines the v in F=mv².)

V for velocity. That sounds about right. Monsieur
Velocity.

His reputation hits first. Bard. Bastard. Rebel poet
twice locked in the Bastille, always exiled somewhere,
and still the toast of Paris.

(V sees EMILIE, likes what he sees.)

A chance meeting, but these things are always chance.
Until they aren’t.
EMILIE. “But sometimes truth is snuffed out by bombast. Like the essay by Monsieur Mairan, current secretary of the Academy, denouncing force vive with unfounded proofs.”

VOLTAIRE. Emilie...

(V tries to stop her from saying this last bit, but...)

EMILIE. “He is a course in how not to proceed through your studies.”

VOLTAIRE. That’s a mistake.

EMILIE. What?

VOLTAIRE. That last part? You just insulted the secretary of the Academy.

EMILIE. He’s an idiot.

VOLTAIRE. And the secretary of the Academy.

EMILIE. Then he’ll understand it’s just friendly critical discourse.

(As EMILIE goes to put a mark under PHILOSOPHY...GENTLEMAN, still as Mairan and quite upset, turns.)

GENTLEMAN. Madam Marquise,

Though you somehow found yourself published on the topic of Force Vive, you rush to judgment like any woman confronted with ideas beyond her skill. My dear, you simply did not understand my mathematics, nor did you properly read my own writing as you misquote me throughout. I would be happy to guide you through my reasoning, if you would permit me at your little Leibniz academy in the fields. But as my equations prove there is no need to square force: Newton is right, Leibniz is wrong, and you, my dear, are out of your element. All you need to do, Madam, is to read, and reread, and perhaps you could bring us something worth our time.

(A moment for his own satisfaction)

EMILIE. (to us) It is an honor just to merit a response. But I’ll break him anyway.
EMILIE. These rules will make you happy, she'd say.

MADAM. A girl does not slouch, does not speak in excess, or laugh loudly attracting negative attention. Do not look your betters in the eye. Do not read in public.

MADAM. Take a man's right arm, not left.

MADAM. When introduced to him, smile, bow, and repeat his name. In that order.

EMILIE. Happily.

MADAM. Do not take cheese at dinner parties. Powder your wig persistently. Display your bust enthusiastically. Be demure.

MADAM. Do not question. Comment, only.

MADAM. This is how things are.

MADAM. The proper technique of fanning! Hold away from one's face, snap the wrist, raise the arm, and flap like a bird.

EMILIE. So I play peacock?

MADAM. Emilie.

EMILIE. You just said!

MADAM. You'll never marry.

EMILIE. Then I can stop all this.

MADAM. The mouth should be kept closed when...thinking.

EMILIE. Why?!

MADAM. No questions!

EMILIE. But the world is bigger than this!

MADAM. Not for you. So follow the damn rules.

It's easier. And easy makes us happy.

(MADAM exits.)