

## SIDE A

Where did the male debater get his water? From a well, actually...

**JANINE.** Oh. Ha. That's funny.

...You know I was in the third class of women here. And the men couldn't decide whether they were *allowed* to argue with us. Or whether it was unchivalrous. And then if you argued with them they thought that meant you wanted to go out.

*(ZOE laughs a little, thinks about this.)*

**ZOE.** That must have been pretty crazy.

**JANINE.**

Oh it was.

You know when I found out I was having a boy I thought oh no. I was sincerely worried that I would impair my son in some way. / Hold him back. Because I don't want him to be president, or head of the history department, or CEO. I want that to be - well, you.

I wanted a daughter. I could have made her unstoppable.

I change my mind. I want you to keep your thesis.

But you'll need better research.

**ZOE.** What exactly does that mean, better research?

**JANINE.** The section on the white standard of living was great, it's very compelling. But many of the other paragraphs are - conjectures. You make huge claims about what *might* have motivated people. You cite - psychologists. *Bloggers*. But you offer no primary documents. No perspectives from people who were there about what they saw going on. You need to hit the library.

**ZOE.** The library.

**ZOE.**  
No...

**JANINE.**

Yes. The *library*. Go find some *books*. Big heavy books made of paper. / It's not always that easy, you can't always type a couple words in a box and know everything there is to know, sometimes you really have to work to get at the truth. John Adams hated Paris. You know how I know that?

**ZOE.**

That's not what I -

**ZOE.** ...From a book?

*(JANINE gets up, goes to the bookcases, looks for a book.)*

I believe you -

**JANINE.** Hmmm, I thought it was here...

*(JANINE looks in the wrong place at first; it takes a while for her to find it.)*

*(ZOE checks her phone.)*

I can never tell, whether my memory is going or whether I've lived through so many things that it all blurs together. I've lent so many - aha!

*(JANINE comes back with a heavy book.)*

*(She sees ZOE on her phone.)*

Well please, if I'm boring you -

**ZOE.** No, you're not.

**START** *(She sets her phone down.)*

**JANINE.** *(Colder now, more irritated.)* Look. Adams says it right here. In a letter to Abigail. And there's a footnote, where Hollings tells me, in case I don't believe him, I can go find the letter, at the Massachusetts Historical Archives, and I can hold it in my own two hands, and see where Adams signed it. *That's* how I know it's true.

## SIDE A

ZOE. But there won't be proof like that for a thesis like this.

JANINE. Not proof you can *google*, no.

ZOE. There won't be proof I can hold in my hand either.

No one writes down what they're actually feeling.

Like if someone emails you tonight and says how were office hours, you're not gonna write back, actually, this one student had some ideas about American history that made me uncomfortable -

JANINE. You haven't made me uncomfortable -

ZOE. You're gonna write "pretty good."

And if someone wrote a paper a hundred years from now on these office hours all they'd know is that they were "pretty good."

I'm not gonna find a diary entry where someone says, "June 10. Today I used racism to bond with the other delegates..." That piece of paper doesn't exist. But I know that's what happened.

JANINE. No - no - / you can't -

ZOE.

You can say what you want, but I know, I *know*, because I know how race affects people, I understand / how people work. I mean we don't have a bunch of letters by a bunch of slave women saying, "Hey, I hate being raped - / sometimes I think about killing myself, or him," but I *know* that's how they felt -

JANINE.

You can't just invent -

Actually we have those letters.

Read Harriet Jacobs.

JANINE. Wait a minute, were you - have you been raped?

ZOE. NO! I'm saying, I am a human being, I have *empathy*, and *experiences*, and I can tell how they must have felt.

JANINE. You may be right.

You're probably right.

About feelings that were there. It's possible you're right about the effects those feelings had.

But that isn't history.

ZOE. Yes it is history. It's a part of American history.

JANINE. I don't mean it's not important or it's not part of the American story. I mean, you're using your personal experiences to embellish on the past. That's historical fiction. It's not what historians do.

Historians sift through *evidence* - documents, objects, recordings - to draw informed conclusions about the past. That is our trade.

*Ordinary people* guess.

They tell themselves stories that seem to make sense and then because they seem to make sense they believe them.

"Women are naturally less intelligent than men."

"The sun goes around the earth."

"There are weapons of mass destruction in Iraq."

Those ideas *sound* convincing to some people, some people may "just know" they're true, but when you look at the *evidence*, they're false.

The entire point of a university is the idea of *expertise*. We are people who refuse to go with our feelings, our guts. We look at the evidence. And by doing that, we drive back ignorance.

ZOE. But if you say you need evidence...

You're excluding the people who couldn't leave evidence behind.

People who couldn't write. Anyone without money, or an education.

Anyone with no possessions for historians to dig up.

JANINE. Not *excluding*, no. There's archaeology. Court testimonies. The occasional stray magic letter.

But some stories are easier to tell than others.

It's an unfortunate consequence of sound methodology.

ZOE. "An unfortunate consequence."

JANINE. Yes. A very unfortunate consequence. It's still better than making things up.

END