

# WOMEN OF STONE

By Alan Haehnel

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## CHARACTERS

AGATHA – The outcast. Late 40s.

CLARA – AGATHA’s niece. 16.

AVAERIL – Last man of the tribe. 17.

CLAUDIA – Leader of the chorus. Mid 40s.

ERMENTRUDE – Sister to CLAUDIA. Chorus member. Early 40s.

UNA – Chorus member.

GERTRUDE – Chorus member.

FIONA – Chorus member.

VIVIEN – Chorus member.

AUDREY – Chorus member.

CELIA – Chorus member.

NOTE: In the script, individual chorus members are given specific lines at certain times and required to speak in unison at others. The overall effect of the chorus moving and speaking as one unit should be maintained, however.

“Women of Stone” was originally produced as “Agatha” by Hartford High School Drama, Hartford, Vermont, March 4, 1994, with the following cast:

Agatha	Cynthia-Mary Ayres
Clara	Jessica Raymond
Claudia	Heather McNally
Ermentrude	Jennifer Adams
Averil	Matthew Paronto
Chorus	Jaime Kolenda, Rachel Hauck, Jennifer Rataj, Melissa Zoerhide, Bethany Lane, Nichole Bedell
Director	Alan Haehnel
Technical Director	Kevin Campbell

## **WOMEN OF STONE**

by  
Alan Haehnel

*(The curtain opens to a rugged, cold landscape. The light is dim, shadowy, pushing its way through the mist hanging in the air. The predominant colors are not colors at all, but shades of gray: black rocks dusted with snow; a bare, scraggly tree; an overcast sky in the background. Mid stage right is a large rock, part of which is obstructed by the curtain. Carved into it is the entrance to a cave just large enough for a person to enter standing upright. There is a hollow filled with water in the downstage portion of the rock; a trickle of water comes out of the rock and into the pool so that it maintains a constant level. Offstage, we hear the sound of female chanting cadenced by the low pounding of a single drum. Eventually, as the voices get closer, the words become clear: "We bear the hero, the hero of our tribe. Vengeance is his; the dragon will die." The women enter, a CHORUS of ten wearing heavy robes, hooded and lined with fur. They carry on their shoulders a platform; on the platform, a MAN. HE is seated, straight-backed, clad in heavy armor; beside him on the platform are his large shield and sword.*

*The women stop in front of a boulder to allow MAN to easily get off the platform. HE stands on the rock, shield and sword in hand, listening to the women as they recite. HE breathes in deeply as they continue their ceremonious cries, inspiring himself with their encouragement. The rhythm of the chant changes when MAN stands on the boulder. Instead of being entirely in unison, CHORUS is now led by two women, the sisters CLAUDIA and ERMENRUDE.)*

CLAUDIA: As the dragon has slain, it too will be slain.

CHORUS: Kill the dragon! Kill the dragon!

ERMENRUDE: And we have borne the conqueror here,  
A man on the shoulders of women.

AUDREY: This man to kill the dragon!

CLAUDIA: He takes into the dragon's den the memory

Of our screams over children torn from us,

Of our wails at finding old parents snatched in the night,

Of our funeral drums at the pyres of our husbands.

Take our woman's sorrow with you, oh selfless man!

VIVIEN: Take with you our sorrow, oh man!

CLAUDIA: May our tears add iron to your shield

And bite to the edge of your sword, our fearless champion.

ERMENTRUDE: Use our woman's sorrow to kill the dragon.

CHORUS: Kill the dragon!

ERMENTRUDE: We will remain and pray.

CHORUS: **(sinking to its knees)** We will pray.

ERMENTRUDE: Pray that your strength will prevail.

CLAUDIA: Pray that your courage will screech in the black cave  
And shrivel the dragon's dark intention.

ERMENTRUDE: Pray that the steel of your sword and the steel of your  
heart

Will flash out together and slash the dragon's scaly throat!

CHORUS: We will pray! We will pray!

CLAUDIA: **(crossing to the pool in the rock)** A stream runs through the  
dragon's lair.

In deepest winter it does not freeze,

Warmed by the hot body and awful flames of the beast.

**(to MAN)** Pray that the dragon's purple blood will flow freely  
From this hole, and not your own crimson river.

By this we will know the battle's outcome. We will pray.

CHORUS: We will pray.

ERMENTRUDE: Go to, man; you are our final hope.

If you fail, we are left alone:

Helpless women tending fragile children

And frail old parents.

We will have only this left:

To lie in our beds and wait for the dragon

To crush our skulls and drink our blood.

CLAUDIA: Go to, man! You will not fail us! Go to! Go to!

Slay the scaly devil! Slit his awful belly!

Kill the dragon!

CHORUS: Kill the dragon! Kill the dragon! Kill the dragon!

**(MAN raises his sword and the women grow quiet.)**

MAN: **(whose voice reveals HE is actually little more than a boy)**

I take with me the cries of our women,

But nothing more.

No woman's frailty,

But the strength of a man!

No woman's cowering in the face of evil,

But a man's faith that he will overcome!

These I take: I am armored within and without.

The dragon, a mere beast, is no match for a man!

FIONA: Listen; it comes!

***(There is a roar, a flash of light as if from flame, and smoke pouring from the mouth of the cave. The armored boy backs up, cowering along with CHORUS.)***

CLAUDIA: It comes for the last time,  
About to fall to the sword of a valiant man!

ERMENTRUDE: You will be our champion, our savior, our deliverer!  
Go to, man, and kill the dragon!

UNA: Go to, man, and kill the dragon!

CHORUS: Kill the dragon!

***(Another roar from the cave silences CHORUS.)***

MAN: I go, to return a victor or to die  
An honorable, manly death.  
Dragon, prepare to return to the hell  
Where you were spawned!

***(HE strides into the cave. A tremendous roaring emanates from the cave along with smoke and fiery lights and the sound of metal striking against stone.)***

CELIA: Listen! He swings his sword with the fury of thunder!

***(MAN yells as if attacking.)***

AUDREY: His battle cry holds the promise of victory at last!

***(The dragon roars, wounded and enraged. CHORUS moves to the pool; a trickle of thick purple liquid comes out of the opening in the rock.)***

VIVIEN: It bleeds! The dragon bleeds!

CLAUDIA: But yet not enough.

The blood of the defeated will spill freely inside that cave  
And pour from this hole.

This pool will proclaim the victor without doubt.

UNA: What does the silence mean?

ERMENTRUDE: Perhaps our hero circles around the beast,  
The beast around him,  
Each enemy searching for the moment when flesh is exposed,  
When the sword is lagging or the claw is not ready.

They rest as they move slowly in the death dance  
Gathering strength for the final charge,  
For the last coming together  
Which will leave only one with his chest still heaving,  
The other lifeless at his feet.

GERDA: Oh Mother Earth, slow the dragon's feet;  
Dull his claws, take the heat from his breath.  
Our man must be the victor!

***(After another moment of silence, the final furious sound comes with roaring and smoke and flame and the clash of metal. It ends with the MAN's painful shriek. The women stare intently at the hole in the rock. When red blood gushes from it, they turn away and then begin to wail, one CHORUS member after the other crying out in lament.)***

FIONA: This is the color of our death; this is the end of us. Our final warrior is fallen now, fallen to blackened claws.

GERDA: Our last hope is consumed in the dragon's fire. This is the end of us.

CELIA: We will mourn our final valiant one.

VIVIEN: We will send him off with the wails a hero deserves.

AUDREY: We will light fires in the hills to honor his brave name.

FIONA: We will send cries into the air and tears into the ground so the sky and earth will remember his deeds.

GERDA: And then...

CELIA: And then...

UNA: And then...

CLAUDIA: And then we, women without men but for our feeble fathers

And our dying grandfathers,

We will sleep with painful dreams and wait.

Our men have done what they could. It is finished.

ERMENTRUDE: We will lie in our fitful beds,

Pull our children close to our breasts,

And wait for the ground to heave beneath us,

Wait for the floor to give away,

Wait for the last sounds we will hear in this world,

The sounds of the dragon, our awful conqueror.

AUDREY: The dragon will come. We will wait for it.

It is the only duty left for us.

VIVIEN: If only there were one more able man!

If only we could hasten the growing of our boys!

CELIA: We could surrender to another tribe,

Ask for the merciful strength of their men...

GERDA: But recent wars have made our neighbors our enemies.

Surrender is dishonorable, impossible.

They would slay us for the sake of their slain.

FIONA: There is nothing for us now.

Only to wait for the dragon.

CLAUDIA: But shame, my sisters; our fate is decided,

Yet our final hero goes still unmourned.

He died defending us; we owe him our thanks.

UNA: A cry to the skies for a great man now dead!

A moan for his terrible passing.

AUDREY: Never again will such a one tread the stones...

***(Suddenly, a new voice breaks through the keening. It comes from a "rock" on the top of the cave which is actually a woman crouched, her back to us, wearing a coarse black cape that blends in with the surrounding landscape. This is AGATHA.)***

AGATHA: Oh, for the sake of sanity, will you girls please stop?

CLAUDIA: Avert your eyes, sisters! It is Agatha the Outcast. To look on her is to turn to stone.

AGATHA: ***(rising)*** Oh, bless my ears, I wish you had averted your voices before you got here. My meditations had almost become a nap until you came.

ERMENTRUDE: Turn away! Do not allow yourself to be caught in her gaze! She is outcast; one look will freeze your blood.

AGATHA: That's right, girls; turn away. I've heard that one look at me could turn your face to rock. Of course, that would be an improvement for you, Ermentrude.

CLAUDIA: You dare mock us, you miserable hag?

You dare mock us even in this moment of honor and grief?

AGATHA: Dare? I can't help myself. I used to feel the same way when I walked into the hen house and saw all the foolish chickens pecking away at one another. Except *they* never threw their last young rooster to the wolf, I must admit.

CLAUDIA: Is it any wonder that such a harsh soul

Could possess the outcast's curse?

She is worse than dead; she is dishonored;

Her spirit is as dead as the stones around us.

Her eyes will fill you so with dread that you will be as stone.

AGATHA: That might be best, Claudia, to have your body match your heart. Consistency is admirable.

GERDA: Outcast!

AGATHA: A wonderful title.

CELIA: Evil-doer.

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AGATHA: Tsk, tsk. Such flattery.

VIVIEN: Sorceress!

AGATHA: But what is the source of my sorcery?

FIONA: Witch!

AGATHA: Witch? Who? Why? Where?

UNA: Dragon lover!

AGATHA: Hold a minute; this is new.

GERDA: In league with the dragon, she is!

AGATHA: In league... hold a minute, I said!

AUDREY: Here we find her, crouched on the dragon's lair.

AGATHA: And why not? The rock is warmed by the fire of its breath, but I am not...

VIVIEN: She speaks to the dragon!

AGATHA: Hold your tongues. Outcast or no, I won't have you saying that I...

CLAUDIA: Some say they have seen her at night,

A shadow sliding between the huts.

Silent and black as the otter on ice.

She stands and points her horrid finger at a door.

And then later that night, the dragon comes,

Slinking in its dank tunnels under our homes

Until it has reached the place she has chosen.

AGATHA: Claudia, you are a bored and evil woman to come up with such ridiculous lies.

CLAUDIA: It bursts through the dirt floor,

Devouring the poor inhabitants of the house.

Who knows how they may have offended the Outcast?

But she chooses and the dragon comes,

Cracking the brittle bones of our parents,

Bathing in the blood of our babies.

AGATHA: I recognize the tale now, Claudia, as nothing more than the rantings of a jealous woman.

CLAUDIA: There are those who would even swear

She invited the dragon

To her own dwelling.

AGATHA: Claudia, amuse yourself in any sick way you choose, but I warn you...

CLAUDIA: Not only did she point out the way to the dragon,

But when it burst through the floor

And when the dirt settled,

She continued to point.

AGATHA: You have gone too far, Claudia! Do not mock anything about that night when you know nothing!

CLAUDIA: She pointed.

The dragon turned away from her and instead...

AGATHA: **(Breaking into the circle of women who crouch and cower from her, all but CLAUDIA, who simply keeps her back to AGATHA.)** Claudia, if you dare to mention...

CLAUDIA: And instead it devoured her two small children bones and all. Some say she smiled as the dragon slithered away.

AGATHA: **(Screaming and leaping at CLAUDIA, grabbing her roughly. CLAUDIA, when SHE is turned to face AGATHA, has her eyes closed.)** No! You cannot say these... open your eyes! Stop this! You, barren as a dried stick, dare speak of my children? Is this what you've done to me, made me out not just as a witch, but as the murderer of my own... Look at me! I'll prove you wrong. Look at me, Claudia. I swear I will rip your eyelids off and make you look at me. Your lies will be revealed; I am no witch; I have no power to turn anything into anything; and I loved my children more than life. Open your eyes now or I swear I will claw away the lids and you'll never close them again!

CLAUDIA: My sisters, if I look on the Outcast, I will turn to stone. Then you will know that all I have said is true.

ERMENTRUDE: Claudia, we believe you now. There is no need to prove the truth to us.

AGATHA: Do it, Claudia... let them see that you are nothing but a vengeful liar, a bored old woman with nothing to do but spin tales out of jealousy. Open your eyes, Claudia!

CLAUDIA: I will turn to stone and will remain as stone forever unless the Outcast dies before the next moon rises.

AGATHA: Before the next moon? More lies! Look at me, Claudia, for the last time I am telling you, or you will feel my nails at your face. I said look at... **(CLAUDIA's eyes open wide. SHE stares at AGATHA, unblinking, unmoving.)** There. There, you see? She's not turned to stone; she is still flesh. And I am no witch. I am merely cast out. And I fought the dragon, from the moment it came through my floor, I beat against its scaly back! When its terrible head turned toward the room where my children were, I went mad! I hurled everything in my house I could pick up, but the dragon slapped me with its tail. I fell. I fell into darkness. When I woke, it was quiet. No dragon's roar, no wind of its flames, no shrieks of fear from my children. My children...

FIONA: **(regarding CLAUDIA)** She has not moved. Look how she stares like a statue.

AGATHA: What? Oh, for sanity's sake, Claudia, stop this nonsense. Not another charade!

UNA: Our selfless sister!

She opened her eyes to the Outcast  
For the sake of truth.

AGATHA: For the sake... You ignorant, chattering women! Look at me! I am no witch! Are you going to let Claudia make you look like fools again?

ERMENTRUDE: Claudia, your courage is almost that of a man's.  
You faced the sorceress and now stand  
A solemn sentinel, a witness against evil.

AGATHA: Evil is the laughter inside her breast at you gullible women!

UNA: Sorceress!

VIVIEN: Witch!

CELIA: Outcast!

GERDA: Haven't you done enough?

Stand aside and let us take our sister away from here.

FIONA: Turn your eyes away and allow us to take her home.

If you still know what decency is, Outcast,  
Let us take her home.

AGATHA: Oh, by all means, take her away. If she is going to persist in this lunacy, I certainly don't want her near me. Take her!

UNA: (*as CHORUS carries away CLAUDIA's stiff form*) Poor sister, your sacrifice is great.

AUDREY: Our poor sister, now a woman of stone.

VIVIEN: Hail Claudia, courageous woman.

CHORUS: Hail!

AGATHA: Hail, Claudia, teller of lies, fooler of foolish women, hail! Just roll her down the hill, ladies; make your job easier. But certainly, get her stiff body away from here! I can think of nothing more frightening to leave standing around in the wilderness than a statue of Claudia. Leave her outside--she'll be good for hanging clothes to dry! (*CHORUS has left. SHE crosses to sit near the pool of water*) Hail, hail, Claudia. Who would have thought you could still accomplish anything with your mouth shut? (*addressing the pool, which is still red with blood*) The last man. What took you so long? I should think their cackling would have driven you here sooner. No matter. You're here now. Would you like to meet my children? (*SHE takes two smooth stones from the folds of her clothing*) This is Gerold and his sister, Fiona. Gerold, Fiona, the last man of the tribe. Oh, I know what they really are--two pretty pebbles I got from the stream bed--but you get desperate for company up here. I chose them carefully. Gerold, here, tried to run away when I reached to pick him up... now that, that is Gerold. And Fiona was hiding behind two other stones. I barely saw her color peeking out from behind them, just as she used to hide under the blankets when I would come to

wake her in the morning. And listen, last man of our tribe, if you stroke these pebbles, there's not a blemish on them that you can feel. I keep them in my clothes so they're warm when I take them out, and if you stroke them with the back of your hand gently, you could almost imagine you were touching your child's skin. Almost. They're getting cold. I'll put them to bed. **(SHE puts them back in her clothing)** If you should happen on them in your travels, last man, tell them I still see them in dreams, I still hold their warm bodies until the cruel morning wakes me. Tell them I have no joy since they, since... Oh, curse you, dragon! Curse me for not walking into your cave and killing you myself! The courage of a man is nothing compared to the sorrow of a mother! If I were a witch, dragon, I would curse you with children and a heart to love them with and then I would take them from you, let you die that death, no easy one at the point of a sword. **(SHE turns from the cave entrance and notices something offstage, as if SHE is looking out in the distance)** What is this, more of them? No! Not this time; I want to be alone. **(SHE climbs to a higher vantage point, begins shouting down to those SHE sees)** You! You two down there! Stop! Go back! There is nothing here for you; go back! Are you deaf? I am Agatha the Outcast. I'll turn you to stone if you come up here. Now go away! Go... **(SHE looks more closely)**. Oh, now this is the height of idiocy. A blindfold! Oh, that is excellent, blind yourself and try to find your way through the rocks. What is so attractive that you insist on coming up here? The dragon has already eaten the last man; you're too late if that is what you came to see. Go away! Oh, you are a stubborn fool.

**(A blindfolded young woman enters carrying a staff which SHE uses to tap the ground in front of her. AGATHA watches silently for a moment as the woman taps her way on stage and then stands, hands outspread, not sure where to go next. This is CLARA.)**

CLARA: Hello? Are you still there? **(AGATHA is moving off of her high perch, watching CLARA, circling around to the other side of the stage.)** Is that you? Would you speak? Outcast, I was betrothed to Averil, the last man of our tribe who bravely sacrificed his life. It is my duty to join him in death, to honor his memory by following him to the dragon's cave. Do you hear? I want to go to the dragon! I expect, from what I have heard, that you would take delight in leading me to the entrance.

AGATHA: Why don't you take off your blindfold and lead yourself?

CLARA: Oh, there you are. I was following your voice before; when you stopped speaking...

AGATHA: Answer me! Why are you blindfolded?

CLARA: So I won't look at you and be turned to stone.

AGATHA: Which, from what you have heard, would *also* delight me?

CLARA: I don't...

AGATHA: So, if I would be delighted by feeding you to my pet dragon, yet I would also be happy to turn you into a rock, then I have, from what you have heard, a dilemma, don't I? What would the Outcast rather do, enjoy the screams of some ignorant girl as her flesh is ripped by the dragon or tear off the girl's blindfold and pry open her eyelids so that she is forced to become an unfeeling rock? Are those my choices, from what you have heard? I suppose I could always turn you to stone first and then roll you into the dragon's lair so the beast could gnaw on you like a dog on a bone, eh? From what you have heard, wouldn't that cause me the most delight? These are the things the Outcast concerns herself with, from what you have heard? Consider this, then, my lovely stupid chicken: I won't lead you to the cave and I won't turn you to stone and I won't behave according to anything you have heard!

CLARA: You won't help me, then? Have you no woman's sympathy left in you? I only want to fulfill my duty; is that so foreign to you? **(AGATHA stands silently.)** All right, then: I will rely on the spirits to guide me. My purpose is right and true, therefore I call on all good spirits to lead my steps!

Mother Earth, may the ground incline in the direction of my duty.

Father sky, guide me with a helpful breeze.

Oh, Averil, I was born to be your wife;

If your spirit lingers, let it hold my hand.

**(As SHE has chanted, CLARA has walked and tapped to the point that SHE is about to fall off the stage.)**

I feel my mother with me, her spirit urging me on.

Mother, dear Ulaleme, lend me your sight...

AGATHA: Stop. Was that your mother who came half-way up the hill with you?

CLARA: The Outcast wants to stop me; I must be near my goal now! Oh, spirits...

AGATHA: Take another step and you'll be a spirit yourself.

CLARA: I don't believe you.

AGATHA: **(coming up behind CLARA)** Fine. Continue then. Let the spirits take you.

CLARA: I go to fulfill... **(SHE steps out into space at the edge of the stage and screams as SHE begins to fall. AGATHA catches her, pulling her back to safety. They both fall down together.)**

AGATHA: There. Now sit there a minute, will you?

CLARA: Why did you? I thought you didn't care what I did.

AGATHA: Your mother is Ulaleme, daughter of Rothulf?

CLARA: Yes, but...

AGATHA: How old are you?

CLARA: Why do you ask me these things?

AGATHA: How old are you?

CLARA: Why do you ask me these things?

AGATHA: **(roughly pulling CLARA up and moving her toward the edge of the stage)** Stand up. I should never have kept you from flinging yourself off this cliff. Here, I'll help you; you're so intent on killing yourself.

CLARA: No! I'm sixteen! I'm sixteen.

AGATHA: **(pulling CLARA back, looking at her face)** Clara. I should have noticed before.

CLARA: What?

AGATHA: The family resemblance. In the chin, probably around the eyes, though I can't see them. Hold out your hand. Yes, yes: long fingers and a short life line.

CLARA: What are you saying? Who am I related to?

AGATHA: Welcome to my abode, Clara, daughter of Frederick and Ulaleme.

CLARA: You know my mother?

AGATHA: Niece of Agatha. The Outcast.

CLARA: Niece? You're my aunt?

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