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Language & Physicality: Form & Inquiry: How & Why I Work

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Language & Physicality: Form & Inquiry: How & Why I Work

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For my family and my friends who quite literally mean the world to me.
For Ryan Martin who makes patience look easy.
And for Jason Tremblay, who convinced me to apply again.

“What you risk reveals what you value.” – Kirk Smith
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Language & Physicality: Form & Inquiry: How & Why I Work

by

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I write plays to probe, not to satisfy, my curiosity. While my questions live in the now, my plays use the past as a launch pad; I am fascinated by the holes in history and I bridge these gaps through inquiry instead of answers. An intimate connection to content determines my approach, and, in the generative phase of my writing, my relationship to content evolves, and defines the structure of the final product.

In this thesis, I will look at three plays I’ve written in my time at University of Texas: *Poor Herman, Catalina de Erauso* and *Slumber Party* to interrogate how I employ language, physicality, and inquiry to craft and form my work.
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OPENING

I see my life as a quest to make meaning through community and this thesis is a part of that journey. Typing words and making sentences isn’t inherently valuable to me; I need an exchange with others to make this document worth reading- and writing. I write to forge a connection; if I were only to write for myself, my thoughts would remain obscure and convoluted. The aim to communicate gives me purpose. I have no idea what this thesis will become or how many times it will change, but I know its value lies in making my thoughts and feelings articulate and resonant. My Thesis Committee will be my community and I will work to make meaning for and with you. I will write slowly even though I’m on a hard deadline. I will edit the majority of these sentences countless times. I’ll rewrite whole sections before I defend this document. Then I will incorporate new feedback and try to strengthen what I’ve made through further revisions. I want this document to evolve through mutual rigor and generosity. I could not do it alone and I would never want to. What would be the point? Without a meaningful exchange, my ideas would remain nebulous and vague. I would be typing away into the void.

I am a teacher, which means I get to build community both for and with my students. By exploring different disciplines, I find hybridity and fluidity between discrete fields. Whatever I read, write, observe, feel or experience makes its way into my classes. Teaching is a two-way street; receiving others’ experiences broadens and deepens my appreciation of what is at work in the world. It is not enough to have a stagnant body of knowledge growing obsolete inside me; technique, ideas and experiences are made to be
shared. Teaching serves as a conduit between myself and others; it is an exchange of insight through a ritual of reflection. Without such a path, I would be lonely for good company and void of intention. I love finding ways to make information active and applicable to an entire class so that each student feels connected to content and a part of the conversation.

The theatre is the way I formally study human experience. I make theatre as a writer, actor and director. Playwriting lets me explore my biggest questions and offer my findings to collaborators and audiences. Acting gives me access to a play through process and performance; I find my way through the circumstances inside of and surrounding the play. I try to see what the playwright intends, what the director sees and what’s driving my character. Directing offers me a journey toward a live exchange between collaborators and audiences. Each allows me to author experience through others and for others. These three disciplines are my holy trinity; they are distinct parts of my collective expression.
SECTION 1: LANGUAGE & VOICE

A PROLOGUE TO LANGUAGE

Growing up, my first experiences of performing were reciting poems, sonnets and soliloquies my dad taught my siblings and me. It was a game in our family: who could say Hamlet’s “To Be” speech the loudest? Who could make it all the way through “The Highwayman” first? I grew accustomed to internalizing language I didn’t consciously interpret. I couldn’t speak about what something meant but I knew what it felt like to say the words, how the rhythm of the speech could transport me like a rock skipping across a creek. These words took on a life inside me while creating ritual in my family. It was both a personal and shared experience that reflects how I feel about the theatre today.

Language is both an endoskeleton and exoskeleton of my plays, functioning as the spine of the experience and the outer layer that both collaborators and audiences first encounter.

Language holds a specific power for me in scripted work; it is intangible, ephemeral, and yet enigmatically enduring. It gives rise to everything else that manifests onstage. Like a catapult, it launches meaning into an audience. It is how I as a playwright transmit the essential tone and texture of my play. It is the currency that I as a performer exchange onstage to make moments come alive. As a director, it is my blueprint to the three-dimensional rendering. It is the primary source material that all other theatrical elements use to create a unified expression for an audience. Directors, designers and actors all
experience the language in a play directly and personally; it lands uniquely with each collaborator while putting everyone in the room on the same page.

Language acts as my bridge between the personal and public aspects of performance. When I act, I spend countless hours alone with a script outside rehearsal building an intimate relationship to the play. Similarly, when I write I often spend years with the text before anyone else reads it. I read the lines aloud over and over to myself. These practices are similar in that they both craft language through private and personal investigation. I start out flying solo. As an actor and playwright, my first pass at the play is always alone. Then I share my findings with collaborators and later audiences. Working in the theatre mandates collaboration, but it also leaves room for internal revelations. I write and act to be seen and heard by others, but these practices also keep me in dialogue with myself about what matters to me most here and now. In both disciplines, I come to fundamentally know the play in solitude. Long before it is ever a public event, it is a meditation for me. I embed the play inside myself to find how I want it to land with an audience.

As a playwright who has acted for twenty years, I most often lead with language when I write. I build story, world, and characters from the inside out. As text guides the physical experience of the actor, the words themselves lead me to the play, spurring me onward moment by moment as I write. I play with language like a kid with a basketball; I spend hours alone tossing words toward the net, hoping to make a basket, but missing more
often than not. In the early stages of a play, it’s hard to tell an air ball from a slam dunk; It’s as though I’m running plays with my eyes closed. When I hear a line land in the net, I type the words into the play. While a script is a bound static stack of paper, writing and acting are both kinesthetic journeys. When I act, a discovery in performance can stop my heart. When I write, a necessary revelation will give rise to goosebumps. I have spoken so many lines onstage that language intuitively leaps into my body as I write. I feel the play inside me as I generate and revise. At first, I think very little about literal meaning; I am driven by gut. Does this line make me laugh? Do I want to keep writing? Is it time for a song or dance yet? These questions determine my approach, which is decadently inefficient; it’s playtime for me. I only consider consciously where I’m headed when the time is right. In this way, I write my way in.

LANGUAGE IN POOR HERMAN

“My writing lies stuck inside me. I can’t see my inner forest through the smog of this city. Like a corseted woman at a banquet, I am starved, squished and bound too tight to even taste a morsel.” - Poor Herman

Language was the driving element that led me to write Poor Herman. When I first tried to read Herman Melville’s, Pierre or the Ambiguities, I got lost in its density, so I searched for ways to bolster my comprehension. Eventually, I started writing an adaptation of the book as a play while I was reading it. I needed a process to keep me invested, because the plot moved without any discernible logic. Full chapters were dedicated to the description of a field or a feeling. Tangential events that had nothing to do with the story occupied much of the novel’s real estate. While some of the book was
lost on me in the first reading, I nevertheless found the language itself very moving. The book was filled with elegant descriptive passages and profound articulations of the most peculiar- yet deeply familiar- thoughts. Melville takes his time describing a meadow, endowing it with sights, sounds, textures and allusions to other magical spaces. He goes on for pages offering philosophical poetics on the enduring nature of true love, the hypocrisy of Puritan Christianity and democratic ideals at work in the young American republic. He describes every character vividly, depicting the breadth of their inexpressible interiors. Language in the book generated intimacy for me; in *Pierre*, Melville reveals himself through such obsessive detail that I felt close to him. I hoped that trying to put his words into my own would let our instincts mesh so that I could find for myself the essence of this story. I began conjuring a character of the author writing this novel; I imagined him laboring over a chapter title or laughing aloud to himself over a joke. My imaginary Herman Melville and I began building a world around the play adaptation of *Pierre*.

The second time I read *Pierre*, I didn’t think about the book as a play. Instead, I highlighted specific sections that spoke to me and took notes about what I loved. When I got lost or bored, I would read aloud to myself. While the book could be difficult to digest silently, it felt fantastic to say out loud. I could imagine Melville in his study one hundred and fifty years before, reading to himself his most recent pages. I began to superimpose my own writing process onto Melville; I imagined him sitting alone lost in word and thought, going over his work line by line. Picturing Melville writing *Pierre*
kept me writing *Poor Herman*. How did to feel to be utterly in love with language?

Words and ideas drove him like drugs to ecstasy and madness. Reading to myself, I could feel Melville’s addiction to quill and ink. I could see how his obsession consumed every other aspect of his life; to the exclusion of almost anything else, he read and wrote for fifty years in solitude. He experimented with every form of literature from short stories to epic poems. He could not help himself. And in the end, it cost him everything. Respect. Money. Family. Health. His love of language was omnipresent throughout *Pierre* and it helped me find the heart of *Poor Herman*.

I tried to adapt *Pierre* into a play a third time, but this time I didn’t read the text. Instead, I wanted to see what would emerge if I never directly quoted the novel but rather took what had stuck with me, letting memory and impulse drive the adaptation process. With this approach, I finished the first complete draft of the adaptation of the novel, which ultimately became the 2nd Act of the play. It served as the palette for Acts 1 and 3. I continued to find the rest of the play through an intimate and ongoing relationship to the language of *Pierre*. I absorbed the patterns and style of 19th century speech, adding new language to my own lexicon, which gave rise to the characters’ voices. It felt as though I was channeling the language, not writing it myself; it came barreling out of my fingers, and propelled me toward a complete first draft. I started imagining how many actors it would take to perform the novel, and I began see correlations between these characters and the people in his actual life. In this third attempt, I was on a roll with language; I didn’t care or know if it was good or not; it was what it had to be. Through this
experience, I found Poor Herman’s central question: what compelled Melville to write the single-worst reviewed novel in the history of American literature?

Of the thousands of pages I read to write this play, the only direct quotes I used were from reviews of Melville’s work written by his contemporaries. It broke my heart to see him so thoroughly judged and condemned by these fierce critics that I had to put their exact language into the play. These men destroyed Melville personally and professionally by putting his sanity and integrity on trial in publications throughout New England and Great Britain. I put these same words into the mouth of Melville’s idol, Nathaniel Hawthorne, in the climax of Act 1. Hawthorne delivers a litany of these critiques as music swells violently, which sends Herman home with his tail between his legs. This humiliation devastates Melville; he returns to his writing desk and begins working furiously on Pierre. The fact that his writing life cannot satisfy or reward him is the very reason he can’t quit writing. He is so driven to win back approval from the reading public, he proves all his critics right. I understood this drive; I knew how it felt to throw myself wholeheartedly into my work with the hope of finally being appreciated and respected, only to receive tough criticism, or worse, a lukewarm response. The poor reception of my work is a deeply painful experience. I hate watching a critic or a fellow theatre-maker scowl skeptically at my play. I loathe the sound of a snoring audience member as they snooze through my best jokes in my favorite scene. As a writer, I hunger for engagement and recognition; I want to be felt, seen and understood by an audience. I’d give almost anything to be able to reach everyone in room. This understanding made
me put Melville’s writing obsession front and center at the end of Act 1. Melville was
hanging to a false hope that he could be respected and admired as he had been in his
youth. He forfeits financial stability, his family and his sanity to play a game a he can’t
win; I was fascinated by his irrational drive to make a comeback.

LANGUAGE IN CATALINA DE ERAUSO

Language also served as the primary engine in my play Catalina de Erauso, whose
namesake was another historical character I felt the need to bring to life. Catalina’s words
took root in me after reading her autobiography in a Conquest Literature class a decade
ago. As with Herman Melville, I was drawn to her iconoclasm, but, unlike Melville, I
found her way with words to be borderline repellent; her tone was rough, rude and wholly
unsympathetic. Like Pierre or the Ambiguities, Catalina’s autobiography took serious
effort to slog through but for the exact opposite reason; this terse text was wholly void of
word play or any other literary technique. Catalina’s autobiography left so much to be
desired, I desired to write it myself.

Catalina was not a writer, and thus the language in her autobiography was inconsistent
and unrefined. She does, however, maintain an unfailingly offensive and egotistical tone
that kept me perversely engaged. I imagined Catalina as someone totally hell-bent to
satisfy her hedonistic appetites. I was taken by how desperately she desired the reader’s
attention, but wholly lacked the skills to capture, let alone maintain it. The lack of nuance
and the gaping narrative holes in the text poised so many dramatic possibilities. Who was
Catalina: a wayward nun? A blood thirsty soldier? An overlooked revolutionary? Hell on hooves? Why did this mercurial chameleon want her life written down? How can her every escapade result in the same predictably triumphant outcome? According to Catalina, she always narrowly escaped death unscathed, and I felt her story suffered as a result. Each event grew less and less eventful. I took this structural flaw in the text as a challenge; how could I color and give life to this flat character while maintaining her flippant and unsympathetic nature? Could anyone care about someone like her?

I was drawn to Catalina’s voice but I couldn’t imagine how an audience would receive her. Even I myself saw Catalina as an unreliable narrator, so would anyone else take her seriously? In her own words, her selfish motivations, violent impulses, and shameless cruelty defined her point of view. Without any formal skills or natural knack for storytelling, Catalina recounts her life like a braggart on a barstool recalling story after story of stealing money and horses, duel upon duel, while playing other women like poker. And basically, that’s all the she has to report. No great epiphanies. No transformative conclusions or outcomes. The threadbare tale felt full of possibilities to me. I wanted to figure how out to make Catalina’s story theatrically viable; I saw the hint of something peculiar and I wanted to bring it to life.

While I enjoyed the strangeness of Catalina’s language, I knew it would not sustain as two-act play. I challenged myself to find what was left unsaid in her autobiography: what truths exist in this embellished account? I wondered how to make this resonate with an
audience. I wanted to make this anti-heroine into an every-woman. Her story trades in identity, so I needed to invest in who she was to me: why was she trying to change herself? What was she running from? Was her self-aggrandizement an act to mask vulnerability? I had to fill in these blanks with my own fears and anxieties to bring her hubris down a notch: why do I pretend that I’m tough enough to overcome all adversity? Why do I cast myself as the lead in my life? Why do I doggedly pursue getting what I want when I want? Catalina and I share an affinity for instant gratification. To understand Catalina, I had to give her pages from my own book. As I continued to adapt her story, I found that I had to dig deep into my own autobiography to hear how Catalina’s voice overlapped with my own. This wasn’t easy for me; I prefer to disguise my egotism and purport as virtuous and humble. I had to expose my vindictive side and deviant impulses to make Catalina’s voice ring true; she and I are one in the same.

The source material of this play was Catalina’s language, thus all of the others characters took on aspects of her voice: unapologetic, inappropriate and irreverent. In the original text, Catalina’s gritty tone colored the language of the land; each new character came to me filtered through her point of view, which meant they each sounded like her. They all were grotesque as though they were embodied by impenetrable rubber, which led me to hear the play as a spoof on historical fiction wherein none of the characters is emotionally accessible; they are cartoons that have come to life. I created distinct masks for each character through language. The Mean Nun unloads an arsenal of insults as she beats Catalina bloody with a bullwhip. The Old Man stutters and sputters out alliterations
between gasps for air. The Muleteer has a sharp tongue and delivers the cold hard facts of life. I endowed them all with a Monty-Python-like capacity to comment on themselves and their circumstances. I hoped a farcical approach would create a way in for an audience; Catalina comes to life through comedy; her irreverence is part of her charm. I began to imagine a commedia-style ensemble embodying these folksy and familiar archetypes, which helped me offer my perspective on the time period. These bold and bawdy characters could say and do anything. As sixteenth century Spain was ripe with misogyny, bigotry, exploitation and violence, I could use humor to address the inarguable horrors of the Golden Age. Just as Catalina did, I could offer my own point of view through the risky words I put in their mouths.

LANGUAGE IN SLUMBER PARTY

*Slumber Party* came to me without any source material; nevertheless, language served as a driving force in my generative process, and ultimately it took my thinking in a new direction. I began writing the play in Steven Dietz’s first-year workshop. In class, we were introduced to the concepts of “motion” and “escalation” in language as a mechanism driving our plays. I latched onto these ideas; I grew curious about how to generate momentum in a story through the energy of the text. How could brevity simultaneously make space for an audience’s imagination while rewarding their attention at the same time? Working this way, I pushed myself to edit ruthlessly, cutting anything that felt extraneous. In my revisions, I privileged language that moved the play forward. I was surprised and horrified by the daringness of each character; Betty, Betsey, Beth and
Ben moved toward darkness at a rate I could not have generated without trying to push the envelope in this way. These characters created friction in the moment, not from their backstories. I made them up the ante beat by beat, which propelled the play into uncharted territory. It prescribed impossibility. I almost feared where Slumber Party was headed because I didn’t know how to write this play’s inevitable conclusion.

After writing many drafts focused on story, I began using the language of persuasion to move the story forward. Ben needed to convince Betty that their relationship was special and worth the pain it caused her. Beth and Betsey needed to prove to Betty that existence was meaningless and death was her only way out. Ben oscillated between overt begging and total obliviousness; he is tender and reconciliatory in one moment but irate and punishing in the next. In contrast, I tried to build persuasion more stealthily with Betsey and Beth; I wanted the audience to see that they were up to something sinister but to still be uncertain of their plan and motive. I wanted one seemingly innocent thought or suggestion to lead to another until the three girls arrived inevitably at the edge of cliff at a primitive campsite. I needed Betty on board with the choice to die. Betsey’s and Beth’s language needed to work magic. They had to seduce Betty with a scathing critique of life while generating a fascination with the unknown. They had to fabricate their own mythology based on fragments of other religions, philosophy and fairytale to justify their cause. They had to manipulate Betty with hijacked words of wisdom, exhausting her resistance until she has no choice but to go along with their plan.
The language of my teen-age years emerged as an energy system in this play. When I was Betty’s age, my friends and I had to tackle adult problems with very little life experience. We tried to keep our troubles hidden from actual adults, so the older or wiser rarely knew what was going on with us. I wanted *Slumber Party* to reflect our struggles: pregnancy, depression, anxiety, drugs and unrequited love. Just as we did, I wanted Betty to deal with her problems alone. Ben tries but fails to help her because he’s just a kid too with his own unmanageable needs and circumstances. Betty feels isolated around other people, but crowded and unruly inside herself. Without a way to reach out, she invents Betsey and Beth to help her organize her thoughts and beliefs. But instead of appeasing Betty, these imaginary friends push her towards greater extremes until the argument in her head grows so loud, it drowns out everything else. Like the wind in a canyon, I allowed Betty’s mind to be pushed and pulled erratically by an invisible force until it inevitably blows her away.

In *Slumber Party*, language became a tool to make the impossible possible. Words allowed me to actualize Betty’s illusory circumstances. Through the revision process, I hungered to make the play a reflection of Betty’s mind. Imaginary characters had to make a strong enough argument for suicide that would convince Betty to jump off a cliff. Then I had to find a way to show an audience that her life was flashing before her eyes; they had to understand that she had moved into a liminal space on a bare mattress and found her version of the afterlife- all of these events only exist through words. Through revisions, I found Betty’s vision; I discovered that the play world materialized through her beliefs and subjective experience of reality. I worked towards letting language give
voice to Betty’s point of view; it is irrational and distorted, but also truthful and authentic. *Slumber Party* became Betty’s singular existential crisis born of her own volatile mind. She escalates so quickly there’s no time for retrospection until curtain call. In the end, she forfeits her life and dares to seek out the other side because her inner turmoil wears her down.

I worked to make language a weapon that Betty uses to inflict self-harm. At a primitive campsite, she is wholly alone; no one can overhear her, so her words cut deeper and echo louder than ever before. As no one is around to argue with her, this vacuous environment magnifies her inner struggle. Time and space allow her thoughts to grow exponentially more dangerous. At first, Betsey and Beth playfully hint at suicide through games and ritual, but their insinuations taunt Betty and back her into a corner until she has no choice left but to jump. Through the externalized sides of herself, I gave voice to her crisis of faith through this penetrating eerie language, provoking irreconcilable doubt in Betty until she can no longer stand to keep living. These dark words push her over the edge, and once she jumps, there is no coming back.

In generating *Slumber Party* through UTNT, I learned how much more work the language of this play still needs to do. I discovered the difficulty in externalizing an internal argument onstage; how do I create forward motion when the question stays the same? Betty’s spiritual crisis kept her in a single oscillation; do I jump from this cliff or not? While this is the play’s central question, its importance waned through narrative and
dramatic repetition. I put the crisis so early in the play, I found it difficult to up the stakes later on; I kept circling back to the same point over and over. In addition, it was a significant challenge to create flesh and blood characters from another character’s mind. Because Beth and Betsey’s sole purpose was to manipulate Betty, I struggled with keeping these characters active for the entirety of their stage time. It was also difficult to convince the audience that these girls were imaginary; as Betsey and Beth were introduced as real, audiences took that information at face value. Since I had initially conceived of these characters as real, I never found the means to make clear that these three girls were in fact part of the same person. I had discovered this piece of the play through rewrites but I didn’t adequately establish this convention into the play; I assumed it was obvious when it was not. The play was built conceptually from this idea, and if audiences never understood this piece of the puzzle, the bigger picture would be lost on them. In my next revision, I want to embed stronger signals into the language to communicate this idea. I want Betty to meet Betsey and Beth on the mountain side so the audience sees them first as strangers to her. If their all of their interactions are new, I believe I will be able to conceive of more ways to clearly establish that Betsey and Beth are figments of Betty’s mind.
SECTION 2: Physicality

Why should I move? To move
Befits a light desire. 
The sill of Heaven would founder,
Did such as I aspire.
- Richard Wilbur

I have an instinct to make moments come alive onstage through the body. Many of my potent memories from childhood are physical experiences and sensations. I would hold contests with myself to see how many cartwheels I could do in a row. I taught myself the splits and I would do them on the back of my neighbor’s horse as we rode through the pasture, finding obstacles to jump with only halter and lead rope knotted into a makeshift bridle. My body has always been a vehicle for thrilling feats and big discoveries. Action verbs are my best friends. To this day, I don’t go a day without running or biking or rehearsing, or teaching yoga or Pilates. Gerunds get me through life. I live in the present progressive. What act am I enacting? How does it feel to take action? How does it feel to be in action? Physicality feeds the way I write. I write inside my body. I write from my body of work and my body of play. My writing lives in conjunction with a myriad of other practices that make up my life. I don’t write sedentary characters trapped around the dinner table because my own cells seek to scatter like dandelion blow balls across a field. When I write, I crave movement. As I sit and type my mind scans for motion. How does this text live and breathe in space and time?
PHYSICALITY: TEACHING & PRACTICE

For ten years, I have taught yoga and Pilates, and the thousands of hours I’ve spent teaching reflect the same pursuit I strive for as a theatre artist. For over twenty years, I have gone to the mat, the writing desk and the theatre on a quest for meaningful engagement and community. I practice what I teach; I don’t simply practice for myself alone. I do so to communicate personal insights to others in hopes that they will find value in my experiences. My classes reflect the hybridity of my personal practices; in the studio, I use the performance skills of humor, intensity and specificity to keep a class energized. I hope to open participants to new sensations that they can carry with them off the mat and into their lives. I craft explanations of poses from my writer’s brain; I consider what is important about a particular sequence of asanas, which I try to effectively impart to both longtime practitioners and total novices. In the theatre, I find similar circumstances; I never know who sits in the dark waiting to receive my work. I believe plays come to life inside the audience. They live and breathe when perfect strangers unite and share a collective experience. It is through the time I’ve invested in this work that I understand how it has value for me; the more I teach, write, and make theatre, the more enriching these experiences become. The more I work to articulate my intention, the more that purpose manifests in my work.

People enter both the theatre and a yoga class with individual expectations. As a theatre artist or a teacher, I inevitably disrupt or satisfy these expectations. As I consciously redefine form in the theatre, I intentionally challenge preconceived notions (even my
own) of what a yoga class should be like. Some people are receptive to my reinterpretation and others are not. My work in either context never engenders a universal response. I work in mediums where no one is obligated to be there, nor required to stay. I receive plenty of immediate feedback. I’ve had participants walk out in the middle of the class; perhaps they were befuddled by me, or maybe their real lives usurped their free time. I’ll never know why. As a teacher and theatre artist, I have to recognize that my work won’t always speak to everyone; my reach will always exceed my grasp. In either pursuit, I hope for a symbiotic exchange where everyone feels included and significant. I want to bring students and audiences back for more. However, I also try to acknowledge that all people come with discrete tastes that I cannot change or control.

Teaching and theatre-making both generate reciprocal exchanges of offering and receiving; I hope to create experiences that engage my community and I hope to be fed in return. In both contexts, I’ve learned to invest heavily in my own creations. I try to make an audience member feel as palpably invested in a scene as the yoga student bending their knee to ninety degrees in Virabhadrasana One. Likewise, I want a yogi to see that same pose as symbolic of human vitality, not merely part of their workout. I want both the patron and the student to develop a greater capacity for reception and engagement through a live experience. I want us all energized by a desire to connect through community. In the studio, the classroom or the theatre, showing up matters but being present to one another matters more. Some work I respond to without thinking; perhaps the artist and I share an aesthetic or an intention. It takes conscious effort from me to
fully appreciate the abundant and diverse contributions of work and insights that come from all of my colleagues, collaborators, students and teachers. I am trying to learn how to authentically invest myself in work that I don’t immediately appreciate. Both the theatre and yoga ask me to give as generously as I receive. I believe we have to train ourselves to seek and receive meaning. Being present and open is practice; the desire is inherent in us, but the skills don’t come naturally. I do the hardest work of being a teacher or theatre artist when I am a student or in the audience.

I believe showing up in life teaches me to show up in my writing. A practice of being present is not always pleasant. There are days when I, like Herman Melville’s Bartleby, “would be prefer not to.” Sometimes, when I bike to school and the wind blows so hard that it feels like I’m pushing my pedals through quicksand. Sometimes, that wind is inside me. As much as I am fed by community, I am also a sluggish, worn out, unmotivated homebody. Stress, injury, exhaustion or a badly wounded ego conjure fantasies of calling in and staying in bed for the rest of my life. But for better or worse, I never skip class. Perhaps I just show up out of habit, like a mule broken and bred to plough a field. Or maybe the reward of human company outweighs the effort it takes to put on my shoes, wash my face and make it out the door. Whatever the drive may be, I treat my writing like my job. When I am writing well, I wake up every day at the same time and type as though I am my own secretary. Like a slave-driver, I demand that I am punctual and focused; I know how badly my attention wants to rebel. Sometimes my brain is like a kindergartner at the opera. I writhe in my seat and scratch phantom itches.
that move mercurially to the most inconvenient parts of my body. Thus, I create imaginary deadlines for myself when I know in truth that I am writing on my own time and dime with the hope that years from now some stranger in the dark will lean forward and laugh at my joke. I am investing in my future, home alone with my laptop in my pajamas.

PHYSICALITY AS PERFORMANCE
Throughout my life performing in the theatre, I’ve acquired a physical vocabulary, built through the work I’ve made, which I now employ in every play I write. In Steve Moore’s Not Clown, my character was tied to a chair by the rest of the cast and forced to watch clowns perform lazzi based on the cruelties inflicted by a fictional regime. From this play I learned that gesture and physicality can be as essential to a narrative as dialogue. In Dan Dietz’s Americamisfit, we choreographed swing dance numbers to rockabilly music performed live throughout the play. Our flips, twists and turns were used to underscore the story with a vibrant and reckless Americana vibe. This taught me that theme can manifest in the bodies of the performers. In Ruth Margraff’s The Cry Pitch Carrolls, we employed stylized performance techniques to create a world occupied by ancient widows surviving a nuclear winter in a fictional town. The nativity in front of their church comes to life and the baby Jesus is reincarnated as their dead husbands. The other actresses and I performed this entire play on our tip toes, singing arias at the top of our lungs and so high in our registers that our voices could have broken glass and possibly patrons’ eardrums.
Working on this play showed me how caricature and hyperbolized physicality can also elicit as raw an emotional impact as any traditional drama.

While the theatre is an ephemeral art form, the work we make feeds our next creation. Every play I’ve made stays with me. As an actor, I cut my teeth on experimentation and experiential approaches to theatre-making. In addition to performing in more traditional works like *The Star-spangled Girl* or *Present Laughter*, I spent countless hours honing slapstick comedy, dancing the tango, and standing on my heading reciting the ABCs backwards. Performance is a kinesthetic experience; the amalgamation of language, gesture and story converge inside me and bubble up as I write. I write from sense memory; my body is my canon. Physicality is my currency; I spend now what I’ve saved over the years.

**PHYSICALITY IN POOR HERMAN**

Finding the physicality of *Poor Herman* was essential to making the play fit together as three distinct parts of a unified whole. This was one of the most significant challenges in the work. In developing this piece with my company, Paper Chairs, we had to find and define how bodies onstage expressed themselves differently within the specific confines of each act. From the beginning of our process, we strategized how to physically show our hand to the audience, in order for our theatrical conceits to enchant instead of confuse. We wanted the physicality to help an audience make the necessary big leaps to stay with the narrative: they first experience a struggling family in Act 1, an adaptation of
a failed novel in Act 2, and a metaphysical funeral in Act 3. We had to create a unified stylistic approach in each act to signal to the audience what kind of play they were watching; we hoped we could show them that these three disparate pieces ultimately belonged together.

In establishing our physical approach to *Poor Herman*, we first labored at length to choreograph “the misplaced prologue,” which falls after the first scene between Lizzie and Herman happily married in New York City, and before the audience encounters the entire family in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. Both of these initial moments served as precursors to the rest of Act 1. By placing the prologue not first, but second, we created as a physicalized bridge between New York and Massachusetts. The first scene offers a few corporal clues about how the play will operate: a woman is playing the literary icon, Herman Melville, and her characterization is clownishly broad. The “prologue” established clearly all of the devices we were going to employ throughout the play; it gave us the opportunity to explicitly state our intentions before introducing the audience to Act 1. One actress sung directly to the audience: “We will use real names and pretend that we are men.” Another actress chimed in: “We will take liberties. So many liberties and not tell you what is true and what is not.” The prologue employed a playful and frivolous tone while setting up how the play would work; it indicated that we sought to disrupt a traditional historical fiction. We showed that the elements of this play would be conjured whimsically, not depicted realistically. We communicated that we would build fiction from facts. We stated that this was our irreverent interpretation of these characters
and incidents, and it should not be taken as “historically accurate.” We also showed how
the five-woman ensemble would take turns playing Melville by passing off his costume
from one actress to another. We employed roguish physicality: the women bounced in
unison together, performed Broadway-style dance moves, and executed tiny precise
movements with their pinkie fingers. This movement illustrated that we sought to create a
spirited and physicalized theatrical expression that could only be experienced in three
dimensions; Poor Herman would never work as film or novel. It demanded live bodies
giving their all to every gesture from head to toe.

On a practical level, devising the prologue with the cast gave us the opportunity to start
working together on our feet to find the physicality for the rest of the show. We needed to
work through everyone’s questions to make this piece communicate our intentions, and
this work provided a palette for process and lexicon; it let us encode the ensemble into
the DNA of the play. We built each moment through gesture and movement, and from
the actors’ impulses and instincts. Much of the movement was performed in unison, thus
we had to find physicality that everyone could execute. We had established a way of
working together. By the time we opened, the prologue served as a physical meditation
for the ensemble. We used it as a warm-up before each performance; its athleticism and
specificity helped the actors get their blood going while also sharpening their focus. It put
everyone’s head in the same game. It served as a ritual they could perform together to
generate the essential ensemble energy demanded of them night after night. If Poor
Herman was not rooted in the body, the play fell flat.
We built the kinesthetic life of Act 1 to reflect the stifled lives of the Melville family. We needed to use an expressionistic approach to physicality to show that these characters were failing at belonging to the buttoned-up, tight-laced world of 19th century Puritan America. Their family home, Arrowhead, had to feel as though it were bursting at its seams and that its every occupant was desperate to escape. Act 1 takes place inside two rooms: the downstairs and the upstairs. Downstairs, we staged most of the action literally on top of itself. We needed to show Melville’s problems were imaginary while everyone else’s were palpable and real. Lizzie, Malcolm, Stanwix, Augusta and Maria are trapped inside themselves as well as in the house; their anxieties consume the space and leave one another without breathing room. They pace, pray, play, argue and dream of a better life that will they never find, stuck as they are between those walls. They each subsist on too little food, air and privacy. The upstairs is Melville’s private study where he keeps himself sequestered in pursuit of his literary ambition; he has ample space and seclusion, as the rest of the family is forbidden to enter without his permission. He puts physical distance between himself and everyone else, so he doesn’t see how his family suffers. He is the only character who has space to move and think freely, yet his doggedness keeps him as penned in as the rest of them.

We wanted the audience to understand that Melville was both absent and omnipresent in his family’s life. In Act 1, the women who played the characters in the family took turns playing Melville, by putting on a beard and a jacket over their costume. Melville, the
man, was never represented by one performer; we wanted his shape to shift and the burden of his role to be shared by the cast. In Act 2, we see these same five women try to stage the entirety of an epic novel themselves. In Act 3, we encounter the same performers again at Melville’s grave. He has just passed on and his family awaits the delivery of his body. Melville, the title character, is always missing from the action; his pervasive presence is deeply felt, but not fully seen. In Act 1, we only witness a fragment of Melville, and then he is physically nonexistent from the rest of the play. Though he may have become immortalized through his literary legacy, his actions irreparably broke him off from his family forever; he left them to recover in his wake while he was left adrift without one loving memory in their hearts. We employed this approach to show the audience that Melville was complicit in his fate. We needed them to see that he abandoned his family and that their hard feelings were just and deserved.

We knew that the tone and texture of each act needed to feel intentionally distinct from one another. Our playful adaptation had serious work to do; it needed to show how readers at the time received *Pierre* and why Melville was ostracized from the literary scene for the rest of his life. Act 2, as an adaptation of Pierre, it needed to take on an entirely differently physical life than the cramped quarters of Act 1. While Act 1 almost exclusively took place in Melville’s home, Act 2 sprawled across the stage. During the transitions between scenes, the ensemble danced with the simple scenic elements, conjuring the whimsy and flurry of Melville’s words. Instead of the uniformly strained characterizations in Act 1, the ensemble borrowed physicality from a variety of
performance styles: commedia dell’arte, opera and melodrama were all in play. These choices matched the grotesque and hyperbolic language of the adaptation. Our broad strokes served to distort the audience’s experience so that we could theatricalize how it felt to read *Pierre*. Although this act was funny and frivolous on the surface, we wanted the audience to know that this novel destroyed its author personally and professionally. We needed this context to ground the outrageous tone of Act 2, so that the work felt equal parts heartbreaking and hilarious.

The plot of the novel reads like a melodrama: Pierre’s father had an affair with an immigrant woman who gave birth to illegitimate child, Isabel. A decade after his father’s death, Pierre discovers his half-sister who has lived as an outcast in the shadows of society while he has enjoyed a privileged upbringing. In a rash instant, he decides to leave his finance Lucy and marry Isabel to save her from poverty and shame. But this choice costs both of them everything. Pierre’s mother disowns him and leaves his inheritance to his cousin Glen. He and Isabel run away to seek refuge in an abandoned church. Glen then becomes engaged to Lucy, and Pierre’s mother dies of grief. Lucy leaves Glen and takes up residence with Isabel and Pierre. Glen comes looking for Lucy, but Pierre’s kills him in a fit of rage. Lucy discovers that Pierre and Isabel are brother and sister, and she dies of shock. Then Isabel and Pierre kill themselves in a suicide pact. We wanted to infuse our adaptation with the simultaneously abrupt and exaggerated quality of the novel.
We hoped to turn Pierre’s literary shortcoming into a theatrical vocabulary. The book is full of elegance and nuance, but the plot is disastrously convoluted; the timeline of events is never clear. The overwrought emotions and the characters’ erratic actions tread into dangerously campy territory; these flaws offer a strange delight which we wanted to capture through performance. We sought to physicalize these manic qualities through a mishmash of performance styles. In a breakfast scene, Pierre and Lady Glendenning sang select lines of their dialogue as though they were instantaneously thrust into an opera. Lucy performed ballet as a signature move every time she entered, exited and crossed the space. Pierre always rode an imaginary horse between scenes. Isabel danced the tango and mimed playing flamenco guitar. The stylistic approach to Act 2, needed to further indulge the hyperbolic content; it called for levity and absurdity so that the audience could enjoy the story that brought Herman Melville down. We needed the audience to find value in its failure. A well-made adaptation of Pierre would have defeated our purpose. We did not want to fix what was broken; we wanted to relish in its calamity.

The physicality in Act 3 shifted abruptly from the wild abandon of Pierre to a stark and still Woodlawn Cemetery in 1891. We needed a naturalistic approach to create the gravity and sincerity intentionally absent from Act 2. Melville’s grave has been dug and his wife, Lizzie, and his daughters, Fannie and Bessie, await the delivery of his body; he is to be put in the ground between his deceased sons, Malcolm and Stanwix. Decades have passed since we last encountered the Melvilles, and in that time, Lizzie gave birth to two daughters, endured the death of both her sons, and is now finally laying her husband
to rest. This attempt to bury the past called for somber physicality. We worked to create space, stillness and silence to experience these characters’ mourning. The performers stood motionless and looked out to the audience; they could barely acknowledge one another. Bessie and Fannie speak openly for the first time in their lives; they feel finally free of their father’s tyranny, though still resentful of their brothers who abandoned them. In her grief, Lizzie breaks the stillness, and turns to her daughters, begging them to see the merit in her late husband; they turn away, dismissing her as sentimental and misguided. Then Malcolm and Stanwix inexplicably materialize, resurrecting themselves to avoid an eternity next to their father. Here again, we showed the audience that the entire family is tangibly present; all but Melville. This is a visceral echo of Act 1.

I took one final step to shape the physicality in *Poor Herman*. After this final terse and distant scene between the estranged family members, I wanted the play to cover impossible ground; I, as the playwright, came out of the audience to talk to my dead relatives onstage about their loss. I wanted to use the “suspension of disbelief” to make an impossible leap through time and space. After years of work on this play, I had an irrational desire to show my long-lost relatives that Herman Melville made history. He had failed them as a father and husband, but his life’s work was not in vain. This was a physically unachievable act and I sought an equally unattainable resolution; I wanted the family to know how far and wide Melville’s legacy had traveled. Although they could never know what I know, I tried still tried to reach them, but I could never really do this. In this way, I had failed just like Melville. In addition, this move shattered the theatrical
space. The physical act of standing and speaking up from the house broke the play to pieces- it also transported an essential fragment offstage and into the audience. I wanted to show my hand explicitly. Poor Herman may have been an absurd rendering of facts and history. It may have struck some people as an irreverent treatment of a significant American icon. I’m sure many scholars would have baulked at my interpretation of him. Nonetheless, I made space to be honest and to be clear about an ache and an absence in my life; I long for this family I’ll never know. I had to make them real for myself. I had to exploit the artifice of theatre and then let it fall away. I wanted to physically embody my point of view, and in so doing, own my individual vantage point of a significant figure in American history.

PHYSICALITY IN CATALINA

Although I have not yet produced Catalina, while I am writing the text I’m constantly considering how physicality will manifest in performance. The play is a quest narrative adapted from Catalina’s autobiography, but it is also an ensemble driven experience. I imagine a commedia-style company propels her journey. Stock characters that embody specific physical qualities will provide a necessary foil to Catalina’s mercurial nature; these characters know their place in society while Catalina tries to discover her own. The Mean Nun is unreasonably cruel and violent as the incarnate representation of the infamously unjust Catholic church. She is larger than life, brandishing a bullwhip and foaming at the mouth as she flogs our heroine. In contrast, The Old Man, whom Catalina next encounters, is a withering widower with a spine shaped like a candy cane. Though
diminished and defeated, he is still lecherous and needy. Under his tutelage, Catalina grows bigger and stronger by performing pushups, handstands and other feats of strength in a self-improvement montage. Now she can easily defend herself against this atrophying sparring partner. While The Mean Nun physically overpowers Catalina, The Old Man’s weakness builds her confidence to continue venturing forth into the unknown world. Everyone else Catalina encounters matches these broadly drawn archetypical characterizations to provide contrast to her struggle: who does she want to become? How in the world will she become it? Their size and scope play against her; either she can conquer others or be conquered herself. Characters in this world create visceral physicality in their overt sexuality or their penchant for egregious violence. Each altercation brings out a different side in Catalina; she either rises to the occasion, or falls to her knees, begging God mercy. These characters’ robust physicality is more significant than simply colorful characters of the Spanish Golden Age; their fixed physical identities represent what Catalina has yet to become.

I’ve intentionally written Catalina to experience a physical journey; she is a peripatetic chameleon trying to discover her true self and her place in this world. She tries on role after role, disguise after disguise, on a quest to find the skin that fits. This notion manifests throughout the play; at the end of the first scene, she turns her habit into a cap and some trousers while asking the audience if she is invisible. She needs to be certain that she is physically present in this world and ready for action. We see her train her body and study algebra to physically and mentally toughen up under the tutelage of the Old
Man. At every turn, Catalina actively seeks to change herself, but the world’s cruelty imposes this transformation upon her through misfortune and horror; when she meets her own father in the streets, he does not recognize her, leaving an open wound in her heart. She is raped nonchalantly by Don Juan de Idiaquez in public, which forces her to cover her shame and fear-and to commit violence against others. Physical encounters traumatize and transform her. By the end of the play, Catalina experiences a miracle; her transgressions are pardoned by the pope and she receives his blessing to continue living as a man for the rest of her days. I wanted to merge the inner and outer parts of Catalina; she goes from being a young woman in the old world to an old man in the New World. By creating this inversion, I made Catalina’s physical journey come full circle. When she is granted the freedom to live in her body, she can feel whole. I wanted her to experience a tangible miracle that changes her life forever.

PHYSICALITY IN SLUMBER PARTY

I had many ideas about how Slumber Party would physically materialize, although not all of them landed effectively in production. Having recently finished our UTNT showcase production, I am still trying to find how physicality serves this play overall. Is there some specific aesthetic that should be applied to the text as I’m exploring with Catalina de Erauso? Are there distinct physical vocabularies that apply to the three parts of this play as we discovered in Poor Herman? Does the play require an intimate setting so the actors can make small and simple choices? Should I as the playwright introduce more ways for the characters to interact with the environment? I was interested in a spare, bare play.
world where the actors would work to generate the physical action moment by moment through the rehearsal process. I prescribed very little physicality in the script. I wonder now: was this a mistake?

I plan to do a revision of the text that focuses specifically on the environment. Our two locations were a driveway and a mountainside; I had hoped these simple sites would provide a host of possibilities for the actors, and see now that I can lay more groundwork to support this exploration. I want to push the extremes these locations could provide. Who might overhear Betty and Ben’s fight in front of her house? How do Betty, Beth and Betsey grow wild through their experience of the natural world? Some of the strongest moments in the production were rooted in the environment; when the girls see a mountain lion, they cross slowly down center stage without taking their eyes away from it. This movement stopped time and allowed the audience to focus exclusively on the performers’ physical experience. More physical stimuli could serve to activate the story, the characters and the space.

I’d like to write another draft of this play that specifically follows Betty’s point of view through her physicality. How does her internal struggle manifest in the world around her? When she is with Ben, how does she hide her emotions in her body? How do these emotions get the best of her? How does her physicality change when she is supposedly alone on the mountain side? I want to create a greater physical contrast between Betty and the other characters in the play. I want the audience to receive stronger signals that
this play is her version of her story; I want the surreal and expressionistic choices to
support this interpretation, that these qualities are always externalized manifestations of
Betty’s inner turmoil. Hopefully such changes will situate the play inside Betty so that
the audience understands that everything they experience comes from her perspective.

I have worked harder to find the physical life of this play than with others. Typically, the
dialogue and physical style emerge simultaneously when I write. But *Slumber Party* was
more mysterious to me. It was more ambiguous in its treatment of time and reality. I
never fully understood its style: was it a black comedy? A tragedy? As an author, I
wasn’t sure how to put my perspective into the piece. In my writing process, the play
changed radically from draft to draft, which signaled to me that I was really struggling
with what I had to say and how to say it. This is nothing new; I get stuck often. I have
failed in my experimentation more than I found what is effective. I thought *Slumber
Party* would be different; I had assumed the structural simplicity would have made the
creative process easier, but instead, it has made the work more challenging. The flaws in
the writing cannot be masked in the hustle and bustle of a wild ensemble. I haven’t given
up on strengthening this play; the challenge to create a simple, spare expression excites
me. This play’s questions compel and horrify me. With all its complications, I want to
find out how *Slumber Party* works in time and space, through revisions on the page.
What work have I not yet done on my own that will make this script stronger for
collaborators?
This process also taught me that I want to keep learning how to engage in best practices when I collaborate. Working as a playwright, director and actor can pose ample possibilities in making meaning; I can generate ideas from different points of view. I can think broadly about how to author action onstage through both language and physicality. But it can also confuse when and how to address moments that are falling flat. It is difficult to know which tool to use when something’s elusively amiss. It also can create a dynamic wherein I feel responsible for all aspects of the production; I want to fix every problem myself so that the creative team will trust me. Not only do I feel personally responsible for the script, I feel as though I have to have all the answers at all times.

When I write and direct, I can be obsessive. The project consumes me and this isn’t healthy for the collaboration; this kind of thinking can shut everyone else down and out. I’m realizing the need to make room in the room for the actors and designers. I need to remind myself that authorship isn’t ownership; I want everyone to feel invested in the process. I need to put my questions and struggles in the hands of my collaborators. I have worked on plays as a performer where I felt excluded from the generative process; it is difficult and unrewarding. I aspire to be a collaborator who can give their all to their work, but who also makes space for others at the table. I want to invite my collaborators to a potluck, not host the dinner party myself. Through this process, I have learned that I want to let designers, actors and directors bring themselves to the experience to find more inventive solutions than I ever could think of alone.
SECTION 3: INQUIRY INFORMS FORM

My curiosities outside the theatre propel what I put onstage. I conceived of *Poor Herman* out of a passion for literature and a deep desire to connect to my ancestry. I learned about *Catalina de Erauso* in a colonial literature class over a decade ago. In my first play, *Murder Ballad Murder Mystery*, I took legendary figures from folklore, generating a cyclic narrative which interwove song and dance into an existential whodunit. Big and burning questions keep my mind on fire and fingers typing. I don’t intend to answer these questions; instead, I use guides for exploration. Reading and researching are, to me, as rewarding as writing the play. Inquiry keeps me invested in the process of generation.

I most often use history as a palette for my plays because the past presents a particular set of queries that I cannot resist. How does history come to us? Who gets to tell their story? How does a particular narrative manifest today? Through these questions, the elements of a play emerge. Sometimes a character surfaces whom I cannot stop thinking about. Maybe a specific time period draws me in. History provides me with the source material and impetus to retell a story; I can only understand the past through my perspective today. I am inspired to cover that distance when I write, to put myself inside circumstances I can imagine but that I don’t fully grasp. I am motivated to work backwards; I start my plays from what I don’t know. When I look back at the past I know what I want to uncover but I never know what I’ll find. It makes writing feel like a search party and I love a big adventure.
THE AMERICA PLAY

Suzan Lori Parks’ *The America Play*, had a tremendous impact on me long before I ever wrote my first play. I saw this production at least ten times in the late nineties. I kept going back because the play made meaning like a kaleidoscopic and in each viewing, a whole new picture was revealed to me. In this one work, Parks provides such abundant layers of language, imagery, metaphor and character, all converging to generate an epic meditation on black identity in a mythic America. Rooted in one black man’s calling to impersonate Abraham Lincoln to make a meager living, the “Foundling Father” takes an audience through an account of his personal failures. Formally, a grave digger by trade, he leaves his wife and child to go out west to find his fortune in show business with a spot-on impersonation of Lincoln. But people don’t want to pay him well for his talent; instead he sets up a booth where folks can come in, pay a penny and shoot The Great Man just as John Wilkes Booth did in the Ford Theatre. In the final moments of Act I, The Foundling Father is killed by his career. He can no longer go on.

For me, the power in this play comes from how many narratives are simultaneously at work inside the “great hole of history,” the amusement park where the Foundling Father sets up his booth. The story on the surface serves as multiple allegories: it is the story of a young nation fraught with a violent history trying to survive when its ideals are so conflicted; it chronicles families who have to fend for themselves after having been abandoned by their fathers. But ultimately, it is the story of man trying to find his place without a hero to guide him. He is cast out and invisible; it is not enough to be himself.
His dreams are unattainable, so his history is buried like his corpse. The people who love him, his wife and child, have to go on without him. In America, there is not enough “greatness” to go around.

The America Play remains the palette for my writing today. I am driven to make myth and legend come alive in my work from an individual perspective: what current understanding do I have now that makes this piece of the past significant? As I wrestle with history, characters come to me as mentors that guide me or ghosts that haunt me; they give me cause to follow to their footsteps. I have to shamelessly put my perspective front and center in my work, not because I privilege my own beliefs or narratives but rather the subjective act of authorship gives me a way into history as a whole. My plays offer me journeys underground and back through time. Curiosity leads me to the play. I use the fundamental questions that lead me to write a play as the architecture of the piece. My queries serve as a quest to turn form into content.

HOW QUESTIONS FORM CHARACTERS
I needed to write Poor Herman to go out on a limb of my family tree. Herman Melville was my great-great-great grandfather, and as far back as early childhood, I have memories of his presence in my life. When I was five, we attended a Melville family reunion in Boston and visited the Arrowhead Museum, the Melville’s historic home in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. On a tour through the old house, a guide scolded me for sitting on the furniture. I was startled by her reproach because I thought this was our family’s
home; I thought I had a right to rest on that parlor sofa. In our own living room, we had a
framed array of stamps that bore Meville’s portrait; I remember staring at his bearded
face and melancholy eyes for hours wondering what it would have been like to be him.
As a teenager and young adult, I read the Melville classics, Moby Dick and Bartleby the
Scrivener, but I felt more kinship with Steinbeck and Salinger than I ever felt with
Melville. When I was seventeen, I played Ishmael in Kirk Smith’s adaptation of Moby
Dick at the Vortex Theatre, and the text hit me in a way it never had before. That same
year, I met the storyteller Bobby Bridger, who told me about Pierre or the Ambiguities; it
was his favorite book and Melville’s forgotten masterpiece. I filed that information away
for years. All these small connections I made to Melville throughout my life made me
want more. This feeling grew larger as I got older. I wanted to swing from the branches
of the family tree and pick the fruit off the ground below. I wanted to assemble an
imaginary photo album so that I could put a name to each of their faces in my mind and
heart. Poor Herman was my excuse to indulge the desire to unearth my long-lost
relatives.

My investigation did not reveal the man I imagined was on that stamp; a more
complicated picture began to develop. I read many more of Melville’s books, biographies
and personal letters to Nathaniel Hawthorne. I returned to Arrowhead to see what that
space held for me nearly thirty years after my first visit. The more I invested in Melville’s
life, the more complex he proved to be. Melville was an antihero: a failure on all fronts.
He was believed to be abusive to his wife and children. Some scholars say he was an
alcoholic, and others, a repressed homosexual with bipolar disorder who terribly mismanaged his wife’s security by leveraging her wealth and good name for his own gain. His entire extended family believed him to be insane and dangerous. I started to question how I would tell his story in an authentic way. Was it wrong to celebrate a relationship to such a controversial person? How mad would I make my family if I created an unflattering depiction of American icon from whom we were descendants? If he was an utter failure, why bother with his story? Was this whole play really a research project? How could I make resurrecting my dead relatives interesting to anybody else? How embarrassed was I to drag these skeletons out of the closet and put them on display?

I didn’t want to write a domestic drama starring Herman Melville as a Willie Loman-style patriarch. I didn’t feel distanced enough from the material to write a straight narrative play; I knew my perspective as his descendant was somehow significant. I wasn’t interested in a realistic portrait of this man; hunting for the right actor with the perfect balance of self-loathing and hyper-masculinity to play this literary giant seemed beside the point. I wasn’t after authenticity because it did not exist; Melville’s life would inevitably be subjected to my interpretation of him, so I chose to embrace my point of view. I didn’t want to gloss over his unsavory side, even though my mother, aunts, uncles and Melville scholars might strongly disapprove. He was a complicated man with a questionable history; I didn’t want to confirm or deny his critics or his fans. Fundamentally, I wasn’t interested in judging or championing the quality of his character. I wanted to make him omnipresent in the story, just as he had been in my life. I also was
more interested in the impact of his relentless ambition on his family; I wanted to give voice to their perspective. I decided that the cast needed to take turns in playing this legendary character. I wanted to make Melville both physically present, but never really there, so that the production acknowledged that he was absent and yet pervasive in their lives.

After I decided that Melville would be played by multiple characters, I realized that the cast should be an all-female ensemble. Melville was survived by the women in his life. They endured his personal and profession failures: his mania, his crushing reviews and devastating financial uncertainties. These women took hold of my imagination. I wanted to see their domestic and quotidian struggle. I wanted to imagine what tactics they employed to live with Melville and the daily difficulty of raising children and keeping the family together with next to nothing. In this way, piece by piece, Poor Herman unfolded for me. Like a puzzle, specific pieces began to form a picture depicting Melville’s compounding failures. I found a three-part structure to work like a tryptic; it took distinct but interrelated acts to tackle Melville’s life, death and the legacy of his work.

My questions about Catalina’s relationship to autobiography and identity also informed how I structured the play. For Catalina, revealing her identity is both a truth and a lie, and thus, I wanted the play to operate in a similar style; how does deceit become a more authentic expression of the truth? As a woman who transgresses societal norms in the 16th century, how does Catalina use mistaken identity as a means of survival? If Catalina
could not exist freely trapped in the convent, how does liberty pose an even greater threat to her in the world outside? If the real world is such a dangerous place for a woman alone, how does Catalina protect herself? On the surface, deceit is her conceit, but Catalina’s disguise provides a sexual awakening; dressed as a man, she desires to become one. Her masculine side seeks cheap thrills in form of lies, violence and sexual prowess. However, when an enemy poses an eminent threat, she reveals that she is a woman with the hope they will spare her. The play world needed to serve as Catalina’s slippery slope; it needed to disguise and dismantle itself, just as she had repeatedly done. In order for the play to be a true autobiography, its actual structure needed to reflect Catalina’s trajectory. For these reasons, I chose to break the play apart just as Catalina is about to be caught by her enemies and sentenced to death; the actors decide the play is over, take an impromptu curtain call and perform an onstage intermission. We hear the cast speak as themselves about their personal motives in making this play. They argue about Catalina’s historical significance until a scholar appears as a plant in the house who leads a Q and A with the audience. Wine and snacks are wheeled center stage. The whole downward-spiraling spectacle reflects Catalina’s self-deconstruction; she chooses to forfeit her born identity to become a more authentic version of herself. The play needed to do that too.

Both Herman and Catalina were transgressors who disrupted form and tradition to leave their mark on history. They both abandoned the trappings of their formative years and traveled the world in search of adventure. They didn’t lead lives that followed traditional heroic arcs. They were iconoclasts who dared to alienate the readers of their day to find
their own authentic style. While they longed for recognition, neither would achieve fame in their lifetimes. They both died in total obscurity. In different ways, I see myself in both of these characters. I don’t make sound decisions about what kind of plays to write. I cannot “calculate for popularity” as Nathaniel Hawthorne could. With Herman and Catalina, I felt a distinct kinship; they were compelled to make the flawed and messy work they had to make. They both defied traditional approaches to writing, and thus a traditional play about their lives would have been insufficient to tell their stories. I wanted my plays about their lives to reflect their unique experiences, their distinct roles in history and my own personal understanding of their legacies.
CLOSING

I don’t choose what I write about; curiosity finds me and stops me in my tracks. When I’m out running alone, talking to a friend or seeing a performance, an impulse will begin to stir. I cannot resist a good question even though I know what it will mean for me: up at 6am to write before work and school. It will mean reading a rough and raw first draft in front of people I respect and whose respect I want to earn. It will mean years of having my ass handed to me publically and privately, all because some nagging question comes along and sinks its teeth into my life.

I don’t adhere to a refined process. My work doesn’t take root in a tidy and well-kept garden bed. Inspiration lives in me like weeds growing rampant and wild, covering every square inch of available soil. I can’t plant beautiful ideas that I bring home from the nursery; I have to tear through the dirt and dig up worms and rocks to find a single sprout that holds promise. I never know if it will be worth the effort to keep it alive. If it grows at all, it will subsist on miracles or some inexplicable force of will. I do my best to tend to my seedling’s survival. I will try to keep it alive through the dead of winter and searing of summer. Maybe, against all odds, this mysterious sprout will keep living and growing. It will inch up from the ground to stand tall in the open air. It will endure hard wind and rain to find its tiny and fleeting place in the world. Making a play from scratch feels that fragile. I want to make space for my play to grow, and then I want to till more soil and start again.
I do not consciously set out to make a play in a particular style. Form finds its way through the questions that arise, and these questions come in all forms. Some are open and invite a host of possible answers. Some require one finite response. Some I act on immediately. Others I sit with for decades. Inquiry defines my approach to making the work. With each a play I write, I inevitably reinvent the form for myself. It is through this work that I find what a play can be.

How I live determines how I make work. Each day, I try to hold space for generation and observance. Each day is a search for what I want to make next. Sometimes it is an active hunt; I put my ear to ground and sniff out possibilities. Other times, the target sits far off in the distance, and I have to move closer to get a better view. Regardless, the quest comes in the form of questions. The discipline of revisiting them is its own form of freedom. There is harmony in the dance between novelty and repetition. It is only through practice that anything in my life comes to fruition.

While I love that my work is personal, sometimes I take my work too personally; I struggle to take criticism in a healthy way. One of my biggest challenges as a teacher and an artist is to receive feedback effectively, so that it strengthens my work instead of bringing me down. Active listening and observation require more effort than leading. I often know what I want to do or say; more often I struggle with letting go and letting others in. I want to accept these challenges as part of my ongoing artistic practice. I want
to work through them on a daily basis without fear of failure. I want to discover what it truly means to embrace my shortcomings and to learn from my mistakes.

I had high hopes in writing this thesis. I imagined it coming easily to me. I envisioned long hours where I wrote myself into an ecstasy of thought and revelation. I imagined the countless days I would have to devote to writing it until it was a perfectly sequenced and wonderfully worded document. But instead of living up to my idyllic dreams, it has materialized just as everything else I’ve ever made. Parts were written in a rush. There are structural flaws that I lack the insight to fix without making some other part worse. It has been fraught with grammatical errors and typos by the truckload. I recognize that I am not finished writing it and I likely won’t be finished by May 2017. I want to be like Herman and never tire of writing- no matter what I happen to be writing. I want to be like Catalina and truly believe that my story is significant and worth reading even with its imperfections. I want to be strong enough to hear the response of my Thesis Committee and muster the courage to make this document more articulate and resonant. I want to dare to write to the finish even when it hurts, and to stretch beyond my current limitations even when I don’t know how to forge further connectivity in the world around me.
POOR HERMAN
By Elizabeth Anne Doss
PART ONE: HERMAN MELVILLE CRAZY!

5 WOMEN PLAY:
HERMAN MELVILLE: a beard, spectacles and a cane, played alternately by different members of the cast.
NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE: Herman’s idol: a long coat and a wig played by the actress who plays Malcolm.
LIZZIE MELVILLE: HERMAN’S WIFE: a captain, determined.
MALCOLM: HERMAN’S SON: poker-faceless
STANWIX: HERMAN’S SON: slippery, plotting
AUGUSTA: HERMAN’S SISTER: anxious, underused
MARIA: HERMAN’S MOTHER: 18th Century incarnate, a puritan

PLACES:
An apartment New York City
ARROWHEAD, in Pittsfield, Massachusetts

PART TWO: PIERRE OR THE AMBIGUITIES (LOOSELY)

CHARACTERS
MRS GLENDENING: coy, outrageous. (played by Maria)
PIERRE: robust, vigorous (played by Stanwix)
LUCY: innocent, determined (played by Lizzie)
ISABEL: dark, mysterious (played by Augusta)
GLEN GLENDENING: cocky, conniving (played by Malcolm)

PLACE:
High-brow New England: a mansion on a meadows and a farmer’s market
Low-brow New England: an abandoned church and a dirty street

PART 3: A GRAVESIDE SÉANCE

CHARACTERS
LIZZIE MELVILLE: worn
BESSI MELVILLE: sick
FANNIE MELVILLE: fed-up (played by Maria)
MALCOLM MELVILLE: deceased
STANWIX MELVILLE: deceased

PLACE:
Woodlawn, Cemetery, The Bronx
MUSIC:
The play should be accompanied by a live musician and an original score which includes sounds and songs etc. created during rehearsal. The musician is onstage for the entire play. Canned music is a less magical option.

SCENE 1: Let’s move to the country
LIZZIE sits in her rocking chair darning an undergarment. HERMAN is first played by the performer who will play MARIA, who sits at his desk. At first, he is still and then suddenly writing furiously with quill and ink. He stops, stands and paces and then sits again as LIZZIE speaks:

LIZZIE:
Dearest Step-mother Hope,
Allow this letter to mitigate your misgivings toward Herman. Trust he does his best to be a good man. Still a sailor in his soul, Herman lives by non-negotiable routine. After breakfast, he insists on a walk around Manhattan. So we do, traveling clockwise until we reach the harbor where the pigeons scatter beneath our feet while we take in ships passing through the morning light. Back home, Herman writes while I darn, and I before I can ever adequately patch a hole in anything, it’s lunchtime, which is promptly followed by reading the newspaper until 4:00 sharp when again, we walk. But this time, we travel counter-clockwise and on different streets as Herman cannot stand to repeat anything more than once day. At five o’clock sharp, we dine as Herman prefers meals in daylight-to save candles. So, after dinner, by one lone candle, I read to him. At 8 o’clock, our day is done.

LIZZIE blows out the candle next to her. Blackout.

Perhaps Herman is a godless man, but when the lights are out... I relish the space doubt leaves in him. In darkness, we are finally together; alone in vacancy in a void no faith can fill.

HERMAN climaxes loudly violently. LIGHTS. LIZZIE & HERMAN in bed together.

HERMAN:
I just had a dream with the ANSWER in it. WE MUST MOVE TO THE COUNTRY!

LIZZIE:
You love New York!

HERMAN:
Love cannot be felt (or smelt) as the stench of sewage clogs the nostrils!

LIZZIE:
You’d prefer a head full of pollen and a rear full of pine needles?

HERMAN:
Too many people make god-awful noise! Spewing nonsense from their blowholes such that I cannot think straight!
LIZZIE:
Without stimulation, what will you write about?

HERMAN:
My writing lies stuck inside me. I can’t see my inner forest through the smog of this city. Like a corseted woman at a banquet, I am starved, squished and bound too tight to even taste a morsel.

LIZZIE:
Your career-

HERMAN:
I killed it with the last book.

LIZZIE:
But you are still Herman Melville, author of Typee! Omoo! Who will ask for your autograph in the country?

HERMAN:
My signature is but an old hat worth nothing now. Just ask my publisher.

LIZZIE:
If the Harper Brothers forget you, who will publish you then? The field mice or the summer squash?

HERMAN:
Nathaniel Hawthorne does fine for himself without pounding this Manhattan pavement like a draft horse at death’s door.

LIZZIE:
Oh, you wish to be Nathaniel Hawthorne?

HERMAN:
Would you still love me?

LIZZIE:
Just when I started to love New York-

HERMAN:
You can love New York in Massachusetts.

LIZZIE:
We just left Boston. Everyone will think you can’t hack it here.
HERMAN:
Hack it here? I was born on this island and I’ll come and go from it as I please.

LIZZIE:
Just as soon as I take root, you pluck me up.

HERMAN:
What good are roots that keep you stuck? Far better to COVER ground than to be buried in it. I’ve sailed, swum and searched this earth to its antipodes! Encountering people and islands, and island people enough to snap a stick in the mud in two. My dear Lizzie, we may share a bed and a roof, but as you put down roots, I put up sails.

*LIZZIE addresses the audience.*

LIZZIE:
Dear Step-Mother Hope,
It’s true that when Herman’s wild hairs stand on end, he won’t mince words. He says white New England women too often have the arms of spiders and the little faces and little bones of birds. But his dear Lizzie has the face of a bulldog and the shoulders of a sailor. So fate will have us arm-wrestling forever. You can’t love him but I can’t stop.

*LIZZIE turns back to HERMAN.*

If we are to make due, you must make ends meet. We can’t go now.

HERMAN:
I’ve already borrowed the money from your father as a loan against your inheritance.

... I’m writing a light-hearted take on the whaling industry. How can it not sell?

LIZZIE:
How much do you already owe the Harpers for advances never recouped?

*HERMAN looks out at the audience.*

HERMAN:
No answer. Herman knows Lizzie’s faith can be tried and her patience tested.

Here I write in great haste dizzied by distraction. In the country, I will write in slow motion. In a farmhouse just outside Pittsfield, Mass, not six miles from Nathaniel Hawthorne’s little red cottage. There, my Lizzie, I’ll write something worthy of your struggle.

*LIZZIE looks out at the audience.*
LIZZIE:
With his last words, I am ousted from the argument before I can tell him he’ll soon need to write for three.

...

Dear Step-Mother,
This maybe my last letter for some time.

HERMAN:
Take that Big Apple! I’ll be back with a book that rivals anything yet put to page! Stand back, Dante! Watch out, Milton! Ho there, Shakespeare! A promise is a promise.

*HERMAN sheds his skin. The performer who will play STANWIX takes up the role of HERMAN. He speaks while dressing.*

HERMAN:
As you can see, I have not been myself of late. And by of late, I mean not ever. I may be too much for you. Myself is too much for myself.
The cast of five women are in a library performing research.

ALL:
If the past is a prologue, what does that make a history museum?
If libraries house books, are historical museums home to the prologue?
If history repeats itself, and we have already asked three rhetorical questions,
Do you now know where we are going with this? If each subsequent question is
structured in a similar style, will we bore you or satisfy your expectations?

Please accept our humble disclaimer
For we do not accept responsibility for the things we say or see
For there is no such thing as historical accuracy

We will wear fake beards and pretend that we are men.
We will use real names from 1850 through 1891
We will take liberties, so many liberties
And not tell you what is true and what is not

Cause the past is in pieces and what’s done is done
Call this historical fiction! Good old historical fiction!
Comprised of old-fashioned diction and hijacked from facts!

The ensemble begins to transform the space from the Melville House in New York to
Arrowhead in Massachusetts.

Go to the library for research!
Go to the encyclopedia if you like dates covered in dust!
No one here need read biographies!
No one plays trivia HERE!

Then ensemble is now set up for top of show.
BLACKOUT
SCENE 2: FAMILIAL INTRODUCTIONS IN DIRECT ADDRESS

In the upstairs of an old farmhouse, HERMAN is writing with quill and ink. When he powders the page, puffs of particles dance in the air. Through spectacles he squints, writes feverishly, then pauses, stands and paces. On the floor below, LIZZIE works. For a while, LIZZIE & HERMAN work. MALCOLM enters played by a performer pretending to be small boy. She kneels and waddles about the parlor on the floor as LIZZIE keeps up unaware.

MALCOLM:
Call me …a good fetus. Never once kicking my mother in the uterus. Call me…the firstborn to those two and to this house… Call it, Arrowhead. Call me the only child alive as my father tore his (HERMAN yells) squeezing out a white whale. Call that book blasphemy as it was called by the Boston Post. Call us… proud paupers subsisting on charity.

Call me dead at 18 by a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head.

LIZZIE looks up as if in a moment remembering. She mimes holding baby MALCOLM as HERMAN pretends to stare down at his firstborn.

LIZZIE:
You see, he’s a fighter. A strong boy! Gnawing at my nipple ‘til it bleeds.

As though HERMAN were over her shoulder, she looks up at him:

Forget your Pierre and his Ambiguities: Write: My Firstborn, The Vampire.

HERMAN:
A cannibal just like his father.

MALCOLM:
I had no business being seed from HIS loin.

MALCOLM wails.

LIZZIE:
There, there Malcolm.

Wail grows louder.

HERMAN:
Clog his mouth!

LIZZIE:
He’s teething!

MALCOLM:
Teeth were tearing through me all right.

LIZZIE:
Let him cry. A child must learn to soothe himself.

HERMAN:
Self soothe? While the rest of us go mad?

MALCOLM’s cries grow while HERMAN beats the floor with a walking stick.

Silence.

MALCOLM claps his hand over his own mouth. He stands, now more grown.

MALCOLM:
He teaches me to keep it, but I’ll let loose every demon through the hole in my head that takes my life.

That’s some years from now.

Some years go by and then Stanwix comes along and shares the crib with me. Kicks me all night. Drools on my face.

Stanwix? Stanwix?

Where are you? It’s time to take trinkets out of this miniature cabinet, put them on the floor and pretend that they are real. We will make sounds: shrill squeals and then grunts.

He demonstrates the sounds lackluster-like.

Childhood is the sweetest time in one’s life. And just like a child, it’s all too short.

Stanwix?

STANWIX does not appear.
Maybe one of my many aunts who live with us knows where he is. You will see one now. Call her Augusta.

_AUGUSTA enters._

MALCOLM:
Auntie Augusta, where’s my brother Stanwix?

AUGUSTA:
I am MY brother’s keeper. You must keep your own brother.

MALCOLM:
Easy enough to be HIS keeper. YOUR brother holes himself up in a study all hours of the day. MY brother is always prowling, perpetually on the loose.

_LIZZIE calls from offstage:_

LIZZIE:
Time for the boys to begin their studies.

AUGUSTA:
You heard your mother. Take out your tablet.

MALCOLM:
I won’t start until Stanwix does too!

AUGUSTA:
What if your brother never comes back? Guess how many times I lost my brother?

MALCOLM:
How many?

AUGUSTA:
You will have to learn to multiply. Add. Divide. To conceive in exponents. Before you begin to understand the losses of my life. So study now, and study hard.

_HERMAN bangs his walking stick on the floor. AGUSTA shouts up at HERMAN:_

AUGUSTA:
You are not alone in this house!

_HERMAN bangs his stick again._
AUGUSTA:
The more you bang, the more I YELL!

MALCOLM:
Still I shirk my studies and keep playing with toys right next to the chimney. On the floor. For hours. ‘Til grandmother kills the quiet.

*MARIA enters singing a hymn.*

MARIA:
Call me kept in the dark.

MALCOLM: (whispering)
Call you histrionic!

MARIA:
Call me the mother of one onerous child who insists that we starve while he writes himself into oblivion.

*AUGUSTA reenters.*

AUGUSTA:
Call me only like myself.

MARIA:
At the mercy of torrential forces. Call me that.

AUGUSTA:
Call me like Malcolm called me: the incarnate representation of Herman’s many sisters crowding this house.

The house erupts with chaos and chatter. MALCOLM plays loudly with his toys. MARIA sings a hymn at the piano. HERMAN scribbles. AUGUSTA rattles teacups. A kettle whistles. There is carrying on until MALCOLM throws a trinket smashing a teacup. LIZZIE enters looking wrecked. Stillness. Silence. She surveys the room and moves slowly to her knees and begins to clean up the broken glass.

LIZZIE:
Call me formerly at peace in Manhattan. Call me holding down the fort. Call me married to a man who keeps no promise he hasn’t made to himself. Call me pregnant again.

HERMAN:
There is a world beyond these walls. Get ye from this house, family of mine. Take to the sunset and into the fields. Where you will find pumpkins, corn, and apples. Harvest these low-lying fruits and LET ME BE.

SILENCE

Has anyone come to call?

MARIA:
No, Herman.

HERMAN:
No letters have arrived? Not a word from Nathaniel?

AUGUSTA:
Perhaps he was delayed?

LIZZIE:
Enough! Your brother, your son, your father and my husband must WRITE!!! He must put prose on THAT table so that dinner will be on ours! If this family is to survive-

MALCOLM:
Survive? Don’t you know that Stanwix is missing?!

LIZZIE:
Stanwix?

STANWIX?

MALCOLM:
But perhaps you don’t need him anymore, since you’re going to have another baby.

The entire cast circles the stage saying these things:

EVERYONE:
Suddenly today contains another serious problem. And our Stanwix has gone missing AGAIN! It’s easy to lose ourselves in this house so full of nooks and crannies! And just beyond those walls, THE GREAT OUTDOORS! Call Stanwix missing! MIA. Call him
stuck in something’s jaw. Someone get the grizzly a toothpick and scrape the remnants of Stanwix from between her teeth.

*Everyone keeps moving. They open windows and doors searching far and wide. Silence. Stillness.*

**HERMAN:**
Herman rises from his desk, accidently spilling his ink. He resists the urge to throw the well at the portrait of his wife. He grins and bears his anger leaving his characters to fend for themselves.

Fie Pierre! Lucy! Isabel! Lady Glendenning! Domestic duty calls me from this writing desk! STANWIX? Where’s my Moses-like walking stick?

*The ensemble watches an invisible HERMAN walk out the front door slamming it. They wince when his passes. The actor playing MELVILLE removes the HERMAN costume. He steals HERMAN’S pages from the desk and burrows down beneath it. Now he is playing STANWIX. FOLLOWING her sixth sense, LIZZIE climbs the stairs. This alarms the ensemble.*

**ALL:**
NO!

**AUGUSTA:**
Not the to the study!

**MARIA:**
No one but Herman the Heathen can enter! It will unleash the beast!

**MALCOLM:**
Mother! I am ill. Come look at my tongue. Instead of climbing those stairs!

*MALCOLM sticks out her tongue. LIZZIE turns back to face them:*

**LIZZIE:**
Every square inch of this house is my house. You all reside on my father’s dime.

**AUGUSTA:**
You mean my brother’s loan?

**LIZZIE:**
You mean your brother means to pay my father back?
MARIA:
Like his father, my son is without means.

*MARIA shakes her head in disappointment.*

LIZZIE:
Say what you will, I go where I please.

*LIZZIE enters the study and eyes the boy beneath the desk.*

AUGUSTA:
You were to be watching Stanwix.

MARIA:
Stanwix requires more watchful eyes than I can spare.

*On the other side of the room, MALCOLM prays with his eyes closed.*

MACOLM:
Dear father in heaven, please let my mother leave my father’s study unscathed.

MARIA:
At least Herman has left that wretched desk. Perhaps he’s found his boy and the two are together in the GREAT OUTDOORS chasing foxes through the pines.

AUGUSTA:
Or disguised as a scarecrow fending off threats to our harvest?

MARIA:
What harvest? Herman never leaves that room long enough to pull the plow! Instead he pens that blasphemy even as every critic harpoons him! Did he truly believe good puritans could stomach Moby Dick? That book was his last chance to win back readership and he blew it harder than any sperm whale’s blowhole. And what blows up comes down broken. Herman’s hell bent to shatter us all.

*MALCOLM continues to pray:*  

MALCOLM:
I know father knows no God and I’m awash in his original sin.
MARIA:
How he persists at that writing desk! Unleashing his rancor on our poor alphabet all day in dismal delusion! Pretending he’s still got a following? Like he doesn’t OWE his publishers this house and home we don’t even OWN!

It’s that nasty Nathaniel Hawthorne egging him on. So long as he strokes Herman’s plumes and sings his praises, he’ll never quit. Too much like his father, he is. Watch him! He’ll die of madness too! Buried in debt so great, three generations of high-achieving fortunate heirs won’t ever repay it! His children. His children’s children. His children’s, children’s, children’s children will live effaced in this family’s legacy of misfortune!

Oh, how I miss fortune! Father in heaven, why I am destined to be destitute? Left hanging by a husband and dangling by a son? Was I not of noble birth? Did my grandfather not perfectly powder his wig? Was Father not a hero in the American Revolution? On this native soil upon which I now rot like compost.

Oh earth, ferment me! Turn me to dirt! It’s not too late for an early grave. Inside which I could jump for joy. Instead of these endless hours crawling toward my tomb! How I have been socked away! Held captive in this Berkshire shack bursting at its seams.

MALCOLM cries out:

MALCOLM:
Grandmother, conjure God! Sing a hymn to us?

MARIA:
Heavens, child! This is no time to sing. It’s time to beg for mercy. For all we know, your brother is dead and how I am wont to join him!

AUGUSTA:
Calm yourself, mother!

MALCOLM:
Dear Heavenly father,
Too many times, I wished my brother dead, that unborn baby dead. Every day, I try to kill myself. How can I help but hate my life since you made it so horrible?

AUGUSTA:
Mother, desist with hyperbole! All will be well soon enough.

MARIA:
Does soon mean a week, a year, or one hundred hours from now? I have lost track of soon. I can’t keep counting the minutes we endure these dire straits.
MALCOLM:
But I repent this misanthropy!

AGUSTA:
YOU lift a pen! Turn your misfortune into OUR great fortune!

MALCOLM:
I cannot endure this house alone! I need my brother back.

MARIA:
So that I too am seduced by the very insanity that hounds poor Herman ‘til his fingers bulge, and his squint absconds with his eyes. Let’s bar the door to his study!

AUGUSTA:
NO! He must bounce back from that Moby Dick flop else the lid be nailed on all our coffins!

MALCOLM:
I’ll let him have the pillow.

MARIA:
Oh, that room, haunted by his depraved preoccupations. Your brother has turned into the most maniacal monster.

AUGUSTA:
This new book is a ROMANCE mother! Written in the style of the Bell brothers’ *Wuthering Heights* or *Jane Eyre*! Perhaps all will go well and Herman will find a whole new audience!

MALCOLM:
He’s all I have.

MARIA:
Don’t you know good spirits are futile? He’s taken out another loan in secret! He’d need write a hundred best sellers to save us now.

AUGUSTA:
How do you know this?

MALCOLM:
I repent everything.
MARIA:
These walls have ears that listen to him and mouths that talk to me.

AUGUSTA:
Does Lizzie know?

MARIA:
She’d toss us to the dogs if she knew, don’t you know?

_AUGUSTA paces._

MARIA:
What are you doing?

AUGUSTA:
Pacing.

MARIA:
What good does that do?

AUGUSTA:
It pumps blood to my brain so I can think.

MARIA:
Why think?

AUGUSTA:
So that I might take action that is thought out.

MARIA:
Is your thought out action the act of pacing?

AUGUSTA:
No. This action drums up the thinking that will lead to a great action.

MARIA:
And what will this great action be?

AUGUSTA:
I haven’t thought of it, yet.

_AUGUSTA continues to pace. Meanwhile, LIZZIE is upstairs._
LIZZIE:
Stanny. Put those pages back on the desk exactly as they were. Climb out the window. Go hide.

STANWIX:
Let him find me.

LIZZIE:
Those words in your hand are our daily bread. I need your father sane enough to finish that book. And I need you in one piece.

STANWIX:
He teaches me nothing so I will learn myself.

LIZZIE:
You don’t know where his footsteps go. What do you want to be?

STANWIX:
A frontiersman. I want to go west.

LIZZIE:
If you wish to live that long, you’ll keep your hands and eyes to yourself.

STANWIX:
Father needs a tablet too. His penmanship is too poor to read one word.

LIZZIE:
There’s a story inside those scrawls. He knows what he means.

STANWIX:
But no one else does.

LIZZIE:
We came to Pittsfield, so that he could make a comeback but no comeback has come. None of us can stand in his way.

STANWIX:
Then let’s get out of it and go away altogether!

LIZZIE:
Go out the window and up the apple tree. Let him find you there.

STANWIX:
And if I do what you say?
LIZZIE:
I will have handed you your hide my son, now get thee gone.

STANWIX goes. LIZZIE puts on the HERMAN costume, looks out the window. The cast watches an invisible HERMAN climb the stairs again. The imaginary slams. They startle.

MARIA: (Calls to the study)
Did you see your son, my son?

HERMAN:
If he wants to be gone, let him go.

MALCOLM: (whispering)
Oh, Stanwix.

AUGUSTA: (whispering)
Oh, Stanwix.

HERMAN:
Outside the window, old Mount Greylock. How that mountain embeds into sky congealed through cloud and fog. And I keep an eye peeled for my Hawthorne, days overdue to see me. Perhaps, he’s rethought his praise of Moby Dick and now he too fixates on its flaws!

Eyes fixed out the window. He catches sight of Stanwix.

Stanwix? Why, the boy hangs in the apple tree!

Calling out the window

Stanwix, you’ve the turned the house upside down.

STANWIX:
I’m running away!

HERMAN:
Come in at once child!

STANWIX:
I have set my sights on the horizon. Away I go!

HERMAN:
Go on then! Leave us and I will set fire to your every trinket in my most beloved chimney!
STANWIX:
Go ahead!

HERMAN:
I’ll burn up every story I ever wrote about you!

STANWIX:
I’ve snooped through your stories! None of us are in them!

HERMAN:
Everything I write is writ in your name. I keep your stories stashed somewhere so secret a sneak like you could never find them.

STANWIX:
There are not walls enough for secrets in this house.

HERMAN:
Secrets play hide and seek. Go back and find them.

HERMAN looks out to the audience:
Stanwix begins to climb down from the tree. Herman is pleased with his parenting. Maria’s sixth sense tells her that Herman is about to smoke.

MARIA:
There will be no smoking in this house!

HERMAN:
YES MOTHER!

HERMAN lights his pipe and blows smoke out the window. He puts down his pipe.

HERMAN:
Oh Nathaniel, just the thought of you spruces up these doldrums. But I quaff you too quickly and I’ve drained the bottle.


HERMAN:
Did I manifest your rapping at my chamber door?

Knock. Knock. Knock. HERMAN throws open the door. AUGUSTA enters.
HERMAN:
Is Arrowhead on fire?

AUGUSTA:
Not that I smell.

HERMAN:
Then shut that door with you on the other side.

AUGUSTA:
Oh, you’re not drunk enough to frighten me. Give me a page.

HERMAN:
A page from what?

AUGUSTA:
Your book, you fool. Your family cannot sit by while you write at your leisure as our stomachs growl and thumbs twiddle!

HERMAN:
Then cook a meal instead of spying on me!

AUGUSTA:
I do not COOK. That’s what cooks are for. But we can’t afford to keep a cook because you lollygag in daydreams and indulge artistic whim. I’d rather return to New York and die of typhoid than carry on cramped into Pittsfield.

HERMAN:
Why don’t you enlist yourself in this cause? Seduce a country gentleman!

AUGUSTA:
What few gentlemen there are in these parts see me, and go running. And the even fewer still that dare approach our premises, you insist on sequestering and distracting with cigars and brandy.

HERMAN:
I need the occasional company of my own sex!

AUGUSTA:
I need the occasional company of my opposite sex!

HERMAN:
You are too severe and too demanding for any man I know!
Do I want you to be happy? Or is it that I want you to leave me alone.
AUGUSTA:
Everyone leaves you alone but I won’t any longer!

* A U G U S T A  p i c k s  u p  a  p a g e  o f  H E R M A N ’ S  w r i t i n g .

HERMAN:
Put that down.

* H E R M A N  r e a c h e s  f o r  A U G U S T A .

AUGUSTA:
I know about the loan.

HERMAN:
So I borrowed from Lizzie’s father to put a roof over your head.

AUGUSTA:
I know about the other loan that keeps this roof afloat.

HERMAN:
You’ve spied on me?

AUGUSTA:
These walls have ears that listen to you and mouths that speak to mother and she has the biggest mouth in the world.

HERMAN:
You want to be my ghostwriter?

AUGUSTA:
I’ve read Wuthering Heights backwards and forwards. Let me help you find an audience of thousands.

* H E R M A N  l o o k s  o u t  t o  t h e  a u d i e n c e :

HERMAN:
Herman is silent for a long moment considering what his sister has put forth.

* T o  A U G U S T A  r a t h e r  q u i e t l y :

You may make verbal suggestions only to me in private. Make mother and Lizzie believe you are acting as my copyist and nothing more.
Rather loudly, Herman addresses the house and home:
Alright Augusta. But you will not punctuate one sentence as my copyist. I will dot each
“I” and identify every semicolon. Deal?

AUGUSTA:
Certainly. Until you change your mind and I am back to starvation and drawing blood
from my cuticles.

HERMAN:
Mark my words, Augusta, one day there will be a mansion on the hill built from my
rendering of the alphabet. I sit each day staring out to the highest point in Massachusetts.
At the feet of the zenith, in the grasses of greatness. Oh, I have set high my sights. Soon,
we will find ourselves atop them.

AUGUSTA:
Oh, please. Put a pipe in your mouth and smoke your dreams. My soul must wrestle with
an actual tomorrow.

LIZZIE takes off the HERMAN costume and hands it to AUGUSTA and exits. AUGUSTA
puts the costume on.

HERMAN:
Herman keeps writing. There is another knock. He throws a temper tantrum. He yells,
“Now what Augusta?” Then, he opens the door. On the other side is Nathaniel
Hawthorne.

Played by the performer playing MALCOLM:

Herman stares long and hard at his idol.

You’ve come back.

NATHANIEL:
Yes.

HERMAN:
How was Boston?

NATHANIEL:
You know how it is. I’ve brought you the Post.

HERMAN:
No reviews now. Let the Pequod sink. Oh, I had pretty much made up my mind to be
annihilated, but you’re here.
HERMAN extends both hands to HAWTHORNE.

NATHANIEL:
What would I do without your enthusiastic greetings Herman?

HERMAN:
It’s you that titillates me ‘til I am a giddy schoolgirl.

NATHANIEL:
Shall I carry your books for you as we stroll?

HERMAN:
Like the day we met hiking in the Berkshires? That fated date that brought me here to live a stone’s throw from you. And now, only old Mount Greylock stands between our two abodes. Oh, how I love to watch you come down the mountain, but today your descent eluded me.

NATHANIEL:
And how I came day after day as you made for me one Moby Dick-

HERMAN:
You, my audience of one, while your Scarlet Letter gleans glorious responses from every critic at large.

NATHANIEL:
With so few copies sold, so what if a few stuck-up noses snotted out a rave or two?

HERMAN:
Forget Boston. That’s why we reside in Berkshire. So that we might write wicked books that need not be laced with rose petals. Let Hawthorne’s potpourri bewilder the stuffy stodgy one-thought thinkers of Boston’s upper echelon.

NATHANIEL:
You are my lifeboat when I’ve walked the plank.

HERMAN:
Speak not another word until I light your pipe.

HERMAN puts a pipe in the mouth of Nathaniel Hawthorne. Nathaniel puffs.

Only true genius enjoys the privilege of misunderstanding.
NATHANIEL:
Is that what you believe or what we like to tell ourselves?

HERMAN:
My dear Hawthorne, I cannot bring myself to write novels that speak to the “general public” for the “general public” thrives on general generalities! So what if they can’t fathom my Moby Dick? Their blasphemy is my poetry.

NATHANIEL:
You could bring them round to your way of thinking.

HERMAN:
It only matters to me what you think.

NATHANIEL:
Herman, open your mind to fill your bank account.

LIZZIE and MARIA are downstairs.

MARIA:
Who’s in there with him?

LIZZIE:
It will freeze tonight. I could use a hand hauling firewood.

MARIA:
How will he ever finish even a page-

LIZZIE:
Everyone must pitch in. If this house-

MARIA:
Charity case I may be but I will not tolerate your tyranny.

Make this your last baby.

LIZZIE:
Take your foot from your mouth, Maria.

MARIA:
If I take my foot from my mouth, I throw caution to the wind when you need it most.

Somewhere in the house STANWIX yells.
STANWIX:
Mother, I filled the chamber pot!

LIZZIE:
NOT NOW STANNY!

MARIA:
Herman is the man of both your family and mine, and his lifeline is far more tenuous than you realize. A mother knows.

LIZZIE:
I too am a mother. And while you may know him, you do not know me.

MARIA:
Except you have no poker face, my dear.

LIZZIE:
Perhaps not. But this is MY house of cards.

MARIA:
And your abode stands to fall the moment the wind blows.

*The wind blows. Whoosh! HERMAN & HAWTHORNE upstairs in the study:*

NATHANIEL:
You befuddle the reading public but I shall win them over. Public approval means the endless hours at my desk will turn a profit, thus my time well spent.

HERMAN:
Did not your Scarlett Letter receive high praise, and how little has it sold so far?

NATHANIEL:
Precisely why I want more than critical approval. If I dull down these hifalutin tendencies, the layperson may burrow their nose between my pages and feel right at home. I am too old for your literary acrobatics. I will rest at night when my family is fed and my books find favor in the public eye.

*HERMAN and HAWTHORNE stare at another.*

HERMAN:
I, too, want to feed my family.

NATHANIEL:
So sell yourself.
HERMAN addresses the audience:

HERMAN wonders if it’s time to tell Hawthorne about his new book. *How Pierre Or the Ambiguities* is his chance to calculate for popularity while unleashing himself into every page.

Hawthorne, I, too have been writing a romance, not unlike your *Scarlett Letter*.

NATHANIEL:
Like my Scarlett Letter? Have you any pages completed?

HERMAN:
Plenty.

NATHANIEL:
To share?

HERMAN:
Only if you have pages from your “Blythsedale Romance” up your sleeve…

NATHANIEL:
Right then. I’ll show you mine if you-

HERMAN:
Deal.

NATHANIEL:
Protagonist?

HERMAN:
Protagonist.

NATHANIEL:           HERMAN:  
Miles Coverdale      Pierre Glendenning

NATHANIEL:
A wishy-washy man, whose wishy-washiness evokes philosophical conundrums.

HERMAN:
A youth whose dead father keeps a ghastly secret.

NATHANIEL:
Antagonist?
HERMAN: Antagonist.

NATHANIEL: Professor Westervelt
HERMAN: Glen Glendinning

NATHANIEL: A devilish man who uses his super-naturality for evil.

HERMAN: The boyhood cousin of our young hero whose greed gets ugly.

NATHANIEL: Setting?

HERMAN: Setting.


NATHANIEL: A farmhouse occupied by transcendentalists devoted to self-improvement through the “agrarian lifestyle.”

HERMAN: A sprawling Manor replete with an army of servants and surrounded by meadows, springs, etcetera.

HERMAN: Leading lady?

NATHANIEL: Leading lady.

NATHANIEL: Zenobia and Pricilla
HERMAN: Lucy and Isabel

NATHANIEL: Two leading ladies?
HERMAN: Two leading ladies?
NATHANIEL:  
You’ve stumped me, my dear Herman. Why do you go from the whale with no ladies to two leading ladies?

HERMAN:  
It could be argued, my dear Hawthorne, that are three or even four leading ladies in my Pierre.

NATHANIEL:  
Why so many women, Herman? For in our every encounter, you’ve indicated to me your interest in men?

HERMAN:  
Fear not, my dear Hawthorne, for my interest in men has not waned, it is simply accompanied by additional “curiosities.”

NATHANIEL:  
Care to elaborate on these “curiosities?”

HERMAN:  
Satisfy a curiosity for me. I suspect these Blythesdale pages reside in the front pocket of your coat, my dear Hawthorne?

NATHANIEL:  
Wouldn’t poor Herman love to know? Put a hand to my breast to find out.

HERMAN:  
Say no more.

NATHANIEL:  
But first, I must see the stack of pages on your desk. Then you may come raise the hair on the back of my neck by breathing too close to me.

HERMAN:  
We must go back to your place.

NATHANIEL:  
So gather your pages and that Brandy. Tonight’s the night.

*The actresses shed their costumes. Through the eyes of the rest of the cast, we watch HERMAN and NATHANIEL exit. They wince when the front door slams.*
MARIA:
Like father like son, Melville men disappear. Like black and magic, those two equal tenfold greater the evil.

LIZZIE:
Oh, say something for once I don’t know you’re thinking.

MARIA:
Herman’s borrowed another two thousand dollars in secret.

AUGUSTA enters holding pages of PIERRE.

AUGUSTA:
These pages are sickening. If this book makes it to the Harper Brothers, they’ll have him committed.

LIZZIE:
He always writes first into the void! His hands and feet have taken him places, thus his fingers follow suit. He will make the necessary revisions-

AUGUSTA:
No one could revise this!

MARIA:
Don’t you see? You can’t in good conscience keep popping out his progeny!

LIZZIE:
Give them to me.

MALCOLM & STANWIX.

MALCOLM:
Where do you go when you run away?

STANWIX:
Does it matter?

MALCOLM:
You can’t make mother worry so when she is with child.

STANWIX:
So let her lose it.
MALCOLM:
Pray instead of saying such things.

STANWIX:
I have nothing to pray for, to, or about.

MALCOLM:
It’s the only way we’ll save ourselves.

STANWIX:
I’ll find my own way out.

MALCOLM:
Through the woods?

STANWIX:
I’m scouting a path that will take me west.

MALCOLM:
Let’s find father and bring him home.

STANWIX:
You’d die if you knew what he was up to.

MALCOLM:
Do you know?

STANWIX:
Don’t ask.

MALCOLM:
Is he going to leave us?

STANWIX:
I wish he would.

MALCOLM:
Let’s grow up to be good men.

STANWIX:
Or let’s burn this homestead down. Put an arrowhead in his heart. Leave him ashes to poke about in. He can scrawl out his life story with sticks and dirt.
MALCOLM:
What will happen to his books?

STANWIX:
Paper makes a mighty fine fire starter.

MALCOLM:
We could run away instead. Together. Wrap up a hatchet in a blanket. Light our own little fire contained by a ring of rocks and darkness.

STANWIX:
You’re scared to see it go up in open flame?

MALCOLM:
They’d all be out a house and home even mother and the baby.

STANWIX:
It’s a girl.

Meanwhile in the other room, the women confer:

AUGUSTA:
I cannot.

LIZZIE:
Those pages are our daily bread!

MARIA:
Augusta can replace them with new ones. Or you write your own book. We’ll come up with a pen name! Hubert…Belville? Poor Herman has lived too long at the mercy of himself. A mother knows when her child is slipping into darkness. She should never listen to a daughter-in-law.

LIZZIE:
Herman has a vision.

MARIA:
Of madness.

LIZZIE:
How can a few pages reveal the entirety of his intent?
AUGUSTA:
If these get out, they’ll ruin what little is left of his reputation. If you thought Moby Dick had sunk our ship, you have no notion of what it coming with Pierre!

*From the other room, the children plot. Dialogues overlap:*

STANWIX:
There are always hot coals in the fireplace upstairs. Tonight, while everyone sleeps-

AUGUST:
Lizzie, it pains me to speak ill of my brother.

STANWIX:
I will sneak into the study-

AUGUSTA:
But I fear this is the beginning of the end.

STANWIX:
I will take a shovel-

AUGUSTA:
Or better yet, a trip to more southerly seas will clear his head and warm his soul.

STANWIX:
Coax a few coals out and onto the hearth-

AUGUSTA:
OR perhaps an institution could make him well again.

STANWIX:
And as the first few flames arise, we make a run for it.

MALCOLM:
No!

LIZZIE and MARIA:
No!

STANWIX & AUGUSTA:
Then what?

EVERYONE ELSE:
STOP TALKING!
LIZZIE:
As long as the deed to this house is in my father’s name, you will occasionally feel the force of my iron first. BEDTIME!

*Everyone immediately falls asleep except for the LIZZIE. She sits alongside the chimney in her rocking chair. LIZZIE sits up and waits for HERMAN. STANWIX stops fake snoring, picks up a shovel and tiptoes to the chimney.*

LIZZIE:
What now, Stannie?

STANWIX:
Won’t you go away?

LIZZIE:
Never.

STANWIX:
Then I will hurt you.

LIZZIE:
First let me hold you.

STANWIX:
That girl baby usurps your lap.

LIZZIE:
If you burn our house down, you’ll wish to return to the womb. Come here. You need to sleep.

STANWIX:
No.

LIZZIE:
Well consider this night a standoff. I will not shut an eye, not even to blink. I love you and these walls. I will protect my life with my life.

STANWIX:
Why do you stand guard when I could set us all free?

LIZZIE:
You may know emptiness but you don’t know loneliness. When you do, it will change you. Come here.
You will catch a chill if you do not put something on.

*HAWTHORNE & MELVILLE in HAWTHORNE’S HOUSE*

**HERMAN:**
Your copy of Moby Dick?

**NATHANIEL:**
The one you signed for me the night you showed me the dedication.

**HERMAN:**
My Moby Dick was always yours.

**NATHANIEL:**
Herman, your speech is slurring. Perhaps you ought stay the night?

**HERMAN:**
I can’t sleep between these walls.

**NATHANIEL:**
We don’t have to sleep a wink.

…

**HERMAN:**
I must ask you-

…

When all was writ, did Moby Dick speak to you?

**NATHANIEL:**
I’d love anything you dedicate to me.

**HERMAN:**
Nathaniel, I’m fishing with my white whale.

**NATHANIEL:**
Fishing for what?
HERMAN:
Say you love it.

NATHANIEL:
Moby Dick?

HERMAN:
Yes.

NATHANIEL:
I love that you write. That you do it for your own joy, and to the ends of your contemplation.

_NATHANIEL pulls out a newspaper._

But Herman your book is...A poetic romp...A meander... A collage of mishaps ... A slough of metaphysical speculation... An incoherent hodgepodge... ...a mass of incongruities... a pyramid of nonsense... the pinnacle of insanity... an emanation from a lunatic hospital... sad trash in conception, execution, and sentiment... A leering demoniacal spectra... Unparalleled for earnest absurdity... the craziest fiction extant... You ought have kept Moby Dick in your napkin. You must know it’s a bit much.

HERMAN:
But YOU said I could have gone further? That Moby Dick was an allegory for mankind?

NATHANIEL:
Because you wanted me to. You speak to yourself, but your words are lost on the rest of us.

HERMAN:
Which is why I’m going down a different road with Pierre!

NATHANIEL:
Tell me, is romance actually in you?

HERMAN:
I am trying something new.

NATHANIEL:
You talk down to everyone.

HERMAN:
You haven’t even read these pages.
NATHANIEL:
I cannot sip brandy and smoke cigars stifled by your desperation. Let’s be men about this.

HERMAN:
I can’t be a man.

...

NATHANIEL:
Herman, we’ll leaving Berkshire by month’s end. My family and I have outgrown this place.

HERMAN:
I came here for you.

NATHANIEL:
Now, you’re on your own.

HERMAN:
Herman staggers to the door, unable to say good-bye. With sagging shoulders and his tail between his legs, Herman heads home.

HERMAN returns to his writing desk, slumps into his chair. LIZZIE knocks at the door of the study HERMAN does not answer. LIZZIE enters staring at the back of the chair holding HERMAN’S pages.

LIZZIE:
Listen,
I’ve decided to take the children
To Boston
For a few days
Or longer

HERMAN stands and moves closer to the chimney.

however long you need to be alone.

...

Augusta and your mother will stay with your brother back in New York.

...

Your mother told me about the loan.

....

Augusta showed me your pages.

...
A romance between brother and sister? Herman, the world will eat you alive. From white whales to incest; I cannot even begin to guess what keeps you up at night.

_Herman stokes the fire._

Every book takes it out of you. Don’t kill yourself over nothing.

_HERMAN throws a log on the fire but does not turn to face his wife._

HERMAN:
Don’t leave me.

LIZZIE:
You leave me no choice.

Dear Step Mother Hope,
Please prepare a wing of bedrooms as the children and I are coming home indefinitely.

_LIZZIE exits._

HERMAN:
Herman sits down to his writing desk. In a reckless fury, he writes *Pierre or the Ambiguities* to prove everyone wrong. Instead, he proves them right. End of act 1.
BREAKFAST WITH THE GLENDINNINGS

*LADY GLENDINNING awaits PIERRE in the dining room. He enters.*

LADY GLENDINNING:
Good morning, Pierre.

PIERRE:
You finished your toilet early, Mother.

*LADY GLENDINNING clears her throat.*

LADY GLENDINNING:
You tossed about in bed all night. Was it the birds a-chirp beneath our casement?

PIERRE:
I heard them not.

LADY GLENDINNING:
Tell me why your eyes glisten like meadow dew?

PIERRE:
They are filled with the sleep I long to return to.

LADY GLENDINNING:
I have already ordered that our bed be made.

PIERRE:
Oh, sister, who is actually my mother but who I call sister because you are young and so beautiful! I have but one great ‘cause to engulf my head eternally in the crown of down I call my pillow!

LADY GLENDINNING:
Pierre, speak with less exasperation, for no coffee have I had.

PIERRE:
It is love for the fair Lucy who lives across three meadows.
LADY GLENDINNING:
You equal her in looks, age and breeding! Why, she is your de facto betrothed. You need not dream of her.

PIERRE:
But as of late, Lucy’s changed. Her hair an erupting halo. A woman has usurped the girl and I am overcome.

LADY GLENDINNING:
Now how falls your affection for me?

PIERRE:
At the foothills of my heart. The novelty of someone new could never dull my ardor for you, but I will kiss you now to be sure.

PIERRE kisses LADY GLENDINNING.

Indeed, you keep me aflame.

LADY GLENDINNING:
Let this always stay the same.

PIERRE:
But as of late, these dreams of Lucy... In the darkness of our chamber, I close my eyes and form her figment. All night, it tortures me with its intangible nature.

LADY GLENDINNING:
No chimera is she. Traverse three meadows and there you will find her flesh and blood.

PIERRE:
I cannot face her face!

LADY GLENDINNING:
Indulging such notions will leave you lethargic! Love ought be a call to ACTION stirring you from slumber. Go PROCLAIM your love to her! Very little comes of dreamers, brother.

PIERRE:
What spawns this injurious talk? Stealth desires cling to your tongue?

LADY GLENDINNING:
Perhaps lack of sleep arouses your suspicion. Pierre, I have always known you would awaken to...new sensations. Hear me when I say, it is time that you eat. Your quail is almost cold.
PIERRE:
Come, look at yours, the one I killed for you.

*PIERRE removes the lid where within sits a perfect breast of quail.*

You will see that I went straight for the heart but missed the breast. Just the way you like.

LADY GLENDINNING:
Come sit with me then.

PIERRE:
I cannot stomach sustenance.

LADY GLENDINNING:
I insist that you taste a morsel and then venture forth to sweet talk Lucy!

PIERRE:
A motherly tone you’ve taken.

LADY GLENDINNING:
Halt your tongue.

PIERRE:
As you insist, mother.

LADY GLENDINNING:
Address me as I insist you do.

*PIERRE approaches her.*

PIERRE:
Forgive me, my sister.

LADY GLENDINNING:
Sit down, Pierre.

*PIERRE sits at the table. LADY GLENDENING places a dog collar attached to a chain around his neck. She holds out a scone.*

LADY GLENDINNING:
Would you also care for coffee?
PIERRE:
As you wish.

LADY GLENDINNING:
I’ll pour.

*LADY GLENDINNING pours coffee and sits atop the table straddling PIERRE’s chair. She breaks off a piece of scone and holds in her palm.*

LADY GLENDINNING:
Open, brother.

*PIERRE opens his mouth. LADY GLENDINNING drops a bit of scone into his mouth.*

LADY GLENDINNING:
That is to your liking, is it not?

PIERRE:
A return to quotidian reality. Did father take his breakfast this way?

LADY GLENDINNING:
It is not meadow dew but the ghost of his gaze glistening in your eyes. I conjure him like you do Lucy.

PIERRE:
Like champagne bubbles in your mouth?

LADY GLENDINNING:
And beneath your mouth?

PIERRE:
Butterflies.

*LADY GLENDINNING leans forward, closer to PIERRE in his chair.*

LADY GLENDINNING:
You believe you are now a man? What do you want Pierre? Men don’t mince words.

PIERRE:
To be masterful in all fashions like your late husband.

LADY GLENDINNING:
Can you even remember your father’s face?
PIERRE:
He was a great man and I must be like him, so I must begin life with a great wife.
A woman, I handpick from heaven.

LADY GLENDINNING:
So go to her.

PIERRE:
Undo me so that I may.

*LADY GLENDINNING undoes Pierre’s dog collar.*

LADY GLENDINNING:
I will prepare this house for emptiness.

PIERRE:
Sister-

LADY GLENDINNING:
Leave me. Alone with the scones.

*PIERRE false exits.*

LADY GLENDINNING:
Go.

*PIERRE climbs on his imaginary horse and exits. He rides around the stage at a full gallop while LADY GLENDENNING sings.*
LADY GLENDINNING opens the curtains of the dining room muttering beneath her breath and between tight lips. She reveals a portrait of her dead husband. From a drawer, she pulls out a monocular.

LADY GLENDINNING: (SINGING)

Sir Glendinning, see now your son
Growing a hunting dog’s snout
Pawing down little Lucy
And tearing my heart right out.

He’s leaving his mother alone!
With hands empty and grasping
But tied behind my back
Sorrow’s prisoner everlasting

The winter of your death,
His carriage I did lug
Round and round the nursery
‘Til its wheels wore holes in the rug.

How he lingered when we bathed
And burrowed between my thighs.
Moving closer in the bed
We were the hands of a clock striking midnight

The clock strikes midnight.
LUCY AND PIERRE

PIERRE dismounts and stands beneath LUCY’S balcony.

LUCY:
Pierre?

PIERRE:
What glows golden from your casement?

LUCY:
What ever do you mean?

PIERRE:
You answered my question with a question?

LUCY:
Beg pardon?

PIERRE:
Answer me THIS, Lucy. Hath ye stolen the sun to sleep with?

LUCY:
Certainly not.‘Twould have kept me awake all night.

PIERRE:
Ah, so heaven shines from within you?

LUCY:
The only light in here spills in from where you are.

PIERRE:
Then your chamber is a mine and I have struck gold?

LUCY:
Pierre.

PIERRE:
Lucy.

LUCY:
It’s too early for poetry and grand gestures.
PIERRE:
But I spent the night longing to see you.

LUCY:
Oh, if I was once gold, now I am bright red.

PIERRE:
Like fall leaves, how I would love to watch you change color beneath me.

LUCY:
Oh, now I am beet red, Pierre.

PIERRE:
Lucy.

LUCY:
Close your eyes.

PIERRE:
I will.

LUCY:
Keep them tight.

*LUCY steps out onto the balcony.*

Hand me your hand.

*PIERRE does. LUCY takes his.*

PIERRE:
You are asking for my hand?

LUCY:
Aren’t you asking me for mine?

PIERRE:
Now it is I who blushes. This must be your pulse?

LUCY:
Yes.
PIERRE:
How strong it is. A match for my own.

LUCY:
Let me feel.

She feels his pulse.

LUCY:
Indeed.

PIERRE:
Feel this.

He blows on her hand.

LUCY:
How warm it is inside you.

He kisses her hand. They stay frozen together holding hands.

PIERRE:
Lucy.

LUCY:
Pierre.

PIERRE:
I DO NOT WANT MY HAND BACK!

LUCY:
We cannot stay like this forever.

PIERRE:
Then wear this ring.

PIERRE places a ring on LUCY’S finger.

LUCY:
Pierre.

PIERRE:
It is me, forever embracing you.
PIERRE cartwheels.

PIERRE:
I’ll go tell sister.

LUCY:
No.

PIERRE:
No?

LUCY:
Let’s surprise everyone with a banquet!

PIERRE:
Sister never takes kindly to surprises.

LUCY:
Your MOTHER will know all about us in good time.

PIERRE mounts his imaginary horse and rides home.
PIERRE AND LADY GLEN DENNING IN TOWN- MEET COUSIN GLEN- PIERRE SPIES ISABEL IN THE WINDOW

PIERRE:
Have we not seen it all today?

LADY GLENDINNING:
Speak for yourself, I am still feasting my eyes.

PIERRE:
Man and his goods bore my eyes to tears.

LADY GLENDINNING:
A shame you cry instead of looking about. How I love shop windows: My reflection superimposed atop beautiful trinkets.

PIERRE:
I love Lucy’s window not for what is atop it but for what lies within.

LADY GLENDINNING:
Or rather, you want to lie atop what lies within. Help your sister select a trinket.

GLEN approaches.

PIERRE:
Ah, cousin Glen. Why hello cousin. You look well, indeed.

GLEN:
Don’t we all look well, Pierre?

LADY GLENDINNING:
Hello, Glen. Your presence delights us. What brings you to market?

GLEN:
I come in search of exquisite company and now I’ve found it.

LADY GLENDINNING:
Is it not possibility that entices? In the market, I am reminded that anything I desire can be mine.

PIERRE:
‘Tis true for those of us with means to pay.
GLEN:
Agreed. Provisions provide, no doubt.

PIERRE:
But what good are we to anyone but ourselves?

LADY GLENDENING:
Is brother cranky for wont of sleep? Glen, I’m afraid we must bid you ado.

GLEN:
If you bid me ado, I will bid you two, ado too.

LADY GLENDENING:
Pierre has fallen in love and it keeps him up at night.

GLEN:
Sounds exhausting. Let me not keep you then another moment.

LADY GLENDENING:
I do hope we meet again soon, cousin.

PIERRE:
Yes, cousin. Do not be a stranger.

GLEN:
I will or I won’t. Who knows what the future holds?

*With one eyebrow raised, GLEN exits.*

LADY GLENDENING:
Perhaps Glen would like to be my brother when you leave me for Lucy?

PIERRE:
I shall pierce his heart with an arrow and gouge out his eyes with a lance if you take up with him.

LADY GLENDENNING:
You belong to me, Pierre. ‘Tis not the other way around. And should a fellow want for my company, I shall prefer his company with two eyes and one beating heart. **Do you hear me, Pierre?**

*Inside a shop window, PIERRE’S eyes find Isabel.*
PIERRE:
No.

LADY GLENDENING:
Now, you’re transfixed on your own reflection.

PIERRE:
**Someone else has caught my eye.**

LADY GLENDENNING:
Who?

PIERRE:
Through the window.

*ISABEL appears in the window.*

LADY GLENDENNING:
Where?

PIERRE:
Who is she?

LADY GLENDINNING:
That peasant?

PIERRE:
Has she worked for us?

LADY GLENDINNING:
No.

PIERRE:
How do I know her?

LADY GLENDINNING:
You are seeing things.

PIERRE:
No. I am feeling things.

*ISABEL begins to do an interpretive dance in the window. PIERRE swoons. She dances into darkness.*
PIERRE:
Come back!

LADY GLENDINNING:
Forget her and remember your fiancé and your sister. **Your hands are both full and tied.**

_They exit but PIERRE’S exit is a false exit. He returns immediately._
MYSTERY OF ISABEL

Again, the clock strikes midnight and PIERRE is in the town square performing a dance solo that conveys strong emotions and how enigmatically yet magnetically drawn to ISABEL he feels in this moment. Then ISABEL appears in the darkness. She dances and plays a guitar that expresses exactly what PIERRE feels in this moment. Then, their eyes lock and PIERRE offers ISABEL his hand. In his hand she places a letter. PIERRE takes the letter. They both walk backward, straight away eyes locked.
ISABEL’S LETTER

PIERRE falls to his knees while reading ISABEL’S letter. ISABEL’S voice reads her letter. She dances around him strumming her guitar.

My Dearest Pierre,

You must have sensed that we were not strangers when my gaze stopped your tracks. It is time you know the truth. Ignorance has protected you while this secret has kept me in the clutches of emptiness. If this letter could end our suffering, yours unfelt, and mine, the insipid ache of ongoing melancholy; it would be worth every year, every hour, all the minutes I’ve endured thus far.

One day, you will stand close enough to me to see your own image etched in the contours of my face. When you take my hand, your fingers will graze the veins in my arms, and sensing the current of familial blood, your hands, now holding my letter, will touch the truth.

We share a father.
Now you know.
I am yours.

Yours,
Isabel
ISABEL and PIERRE alone in the street at midnight the next night

PIERRE:
There you are.

ISABEL:
You read my letter?

PIERRE:
Give me your hand.

ISABEL:
I should not have come.

ISABEL gives PIERRE her hand reluctantly.

PIERRE:
Do you remember him? Was he kind to you?

ISABEL:
As kind as he could be and what I recall of his face, I now see in yours. Now, I must away.

PIERRE:
No.

ISABEL:
Our acquaintance will most certainly-

PIERRE:
You will not leave my side.

ISABEL:
I was born in ruin and I will only bring you down.

PIERRE:
You will not share blood with me and shiver penniless in the streets.

ISABEL:
’Twas only my wish to see you once. I could die happily as no cold can touch me now.

PIERRE embraces ISABEL.

PIERRE:
Still soft you are after so many years suffering.

ISABEL:
This secret must stay between us.

PIERRE:
But you must have what is yours by birth.

ISABEL:
But your mother-

PIERRE:
We will go away.

ISABEL:
Where would we go?

PIERRE:
You will be my wife.

ISABEL:
Yours?

PIERRE & ISABEL:
Oh Oh oh Oh! OHOHOHOHOH! Oh.

*PIERRE places a finger over ISABEL’s mouth. He leads her away into the darkness.*
PIERRE at his Mother’s House

We see the silhouette of LADY GLENDINNING in the front window. Her shadow’s body language implies worry. PIERRE stops Isabel at the threshold of his mother’s house. PIERRE enters the house. We see now also PIERRE’S silhouette. PIERRE’S silhouette gets down on his knees in front of LADY GLENDINNING’S silhouette. LADY GLENDINNING emits an eardrum stinging scream and PIERRE heads quickly for the door. PIERRE & ISABEL continue through into the dark night.
LUCY & LADY GLENDINNING

LUCY ARRIVES at LADY GLENDINNING’S door. LUCY knocks. No answer.

LUCY: 
Lady Glendinning, where’s Pierre?

LADY GLENDINNING comes to the door with bloodshot eyes and tear-stained cheeks

Pierre, are you in there?

LADY GLENDINNING: 
You dare call for Pierre?

LUCY: 
Your- 

LADY GLENDINNING: 
Speak no more that name!

LUCY: 
Something sad is stuck in your eyes. What has past to elicit such haunting?

LADY GLENDINNING: 
You can see for yourself my empty nest. That is part-one of my pain.

LUCY: 
Pierre’s gone?

LADY GLENDINNING slaps LUCY, but LUCY does not notice.

LUCY: 
How has he dropped from the earth? Just yester-morn, he tickled me pink beneath my casement!

LADY GLENDINNING: 
I banished him.

LUCY: 
Fear not, Pierre for here I come for you.

LADY GLENDINNING: (not believing it) 
I banished him.
LUCY:
Good-bye, Lady Glendinning. Be more merciful to yourself. I will bring him home.

LADY GLENDINNING:
I banished him.

*LUCY exits.*
PIERRE & ISABEL AT GLEN’S FRONT DOOR

PIERRE & ISABEL bang on the door. There is warmth inside glowing out from the windows.

PIERRE:
Glen! GLEN! GLEN!

The door opens. GLEN’S face appears before the warmth and merriment. Indoors, there is a wild party.

PIERRE:
GLEN.

PIERRE makes a move to come indoors, but GLEN punches PIERRE in the face. PIERRE somersaults backward. ISABEL screams. GLEN slams the door. PIERRE and ISABEL are back in the cold. With their arms around one another, the slink away into the darkness.
LUCY & GLEN

LUCY bangs on GLEN’S door.

LUCY:
Good evening, Glen Glendinning.

GLEN:
Lucy, from which celestial creature do you emanate?

LUCY:
I emanate from myself and I am from earth. Three meadows that way. Where’s Pierre?

GLEN:
Pierre has made like thin air.

LUCY:
If you choose to be no help, I will hunt him down myself.

GLEN:
You can’t hunt what’s been caught.

LUCY:
I can catch creatures in the dark. As I am as white as the moon, so I will light the night and find Pierre agleam in shadow.

GLEN:
I could help you lay eyes on him.

LUCY:
You would lay HANDS on him. Who needs you?

GLEN:
You do.

LUCY:
I have eyes and hands. Glen, what is that on your shirt?

LUCY points to an imaginary speck of something on GLEN’S shirt.

GLEN:
What? Where?

GLEN looks down. LUCY flicks him in the face and runs away.
GLEN & LADY GLENDINNING

GLEN knocks on LADY GLENDINNING’S door. She opens it.

GLEN:
I’ve come for you. Look, you always knew I would.

LADY GLENDINNING:
You’ve come too late for I have died of grief.

GLEN:
Hark! Let me resuscitate you.

LADY GLENDINNING:
I am already in the tomb.

GLEN:
Let me resurrect you.

LADY GLENDINNING:
Go to Lucy.

GLEN:
Lucy is but a girl. I want a woman.

LADY GLENDINNING:
This woman is but a ghost.

GLEN:
Oh, what you do to my wilting loins.

LADY GLENDINNING:
Marry Lucy and I leave the family fortune to you.

GLEN:
You will will it to me?

LADY GLENDINNING:
My ghost will.

GLEN goes and the ghost of LADY GLENDINNING turns to the portrait of her late husband.
LADY GLENDINNING:
Look what you’ve done to us! Look what you’ve done!
LUCY AND GLEN

Glen throws rocks at LUCY’S casement window.

LUCY:
Pierre! Oh, it’s Glen again! Leave me in peace!

GLEN:
None of us are at peace any longer. Poor Pierre is dead.

LUCY:
No!

GLEN:
‘Tis true I fear and, poor Mrs. Glendinning is dead too. And as I am an only child and his orphaned cousin, I am heir to a fortune I can’t keep for myself. For Pierre’s sake, marry me Lucy. Tongue-kiss me and taste the resemblance. Perhaps Pierre has gone, but I am the next best thing.

…

You are too young to mourn for yester morn. Pierre has past but your future has not.

…

This silence breeds suspense and it’s killing me.

LUCY:
Show me his body.

GLEN:
By dead, I mean dead to me.

LUCY:
You mean he’s missing?

GLEN:
Lucy, he’s taken a wife and they’ve run away. So if you want to be a Glendinning, my hand is all that’s left for the taking.

LUCY turns away from GLEN and takes the ring from Pierre and tucks it into her bosom.

LUCY:
Glen will think me his betrothed, but my hand he won’t have long. Pierre, wherever you are, I will come for you!
LUCY turns to GLEN who gets down on one knee. He slides a ring on her finger.
ISABEL & PIERRE AT THE CHURCH OF THE APOSTLES

ISABEL & PIERRE squat among some ne’er-do-wells in an abandoned church. Isabel strums her guitar. PIERRE enters with a loaf of bread. He looks long at ISABEL.

ISABEL:
I could warm it once we get a fire going.

PIERRE:
No. Stale bread suits this hovel.

ISABEL:
Now that you’re a juvenile author of literature in America with two mouths to feed on words alone, what pressure you must feel to produce new pages daily. What will you write today, brother-husband?

PIERRE:
Whatever I can muster. The critics have raked my latest opus o’er the coals! They called my story a “crazy rigmarole.” A “literary mare’s nest!” A “dead failure.” I dare not venture forth to learn what new slander they’ve slewed. Best to hole up in this vile church of the apostles and forget I ever was a writer. But the only way I know to distract myself is to keep writing. Offer me fresh diversion. Hark, what strum you now?

ISABEL:
A song.

PIERRE:
Sing it to me.

ISABEL:
It’s not finished. It’s the story of our mothers and our father.

PIERRE:
You must cease to write that song.

ISABEL:
We cannot forget who we are.

PIERRE:
I must forget how far I’ve fallen.

ISABEL:
In this dank and dark church of the apostles, we must conjure fond memories. With a present so bleak it can only promise an unbearable future.
PIERRE:
Come hither. I will comfort thee, my wife.

ISABEL:
Do not forget what else I am.

PIERRE:
Stratus clouds drop torrents of doubt upon me!

ISABEL:
You doubt I am your sister, Pierre?

PIERRE:
There is no proof to authenticate your claim.

ISABEL:
You no longer take at me at my word? Don’t let doubt make a lie of our lives.

PIERRE:
But if I take you at your word, you’re still only my half-sister at best.

ISABEL:
So?

PIERRE:
So I’m of two minds about you. Take my hand.

ISABEL:
One action always leads to another.

PIERRE:
So, you’re entertaining the thought?

ISABEL:
The thought is entertaining me.

PIERRE:
Then let’s make hay by rolling in it.

ISABEL:
Like pigs?
PIERRE: Indeed.

*PIERRE moves toward ISABEL.*

ISABEL: On your knees.

*PIERRE moves to his knees.*

ISABEL: Crawl to me.

Put your snout at my throat.
I will stay motionless beneath you.
‘Til you stop my heart.
And then when you are sure,
There is no life left inside me.
I want you to have your way with me.
Play with my head.
Kick my limbs about.
Ravage me in the dirt.

*Before PIERRE or ISABEL notice, LUCY is in the room with them. She clears her throat.*

PIERRE: Lucy!

LUCY: Cousin, Pierre.

ISABEL & PIERRE: Cousin?

LUCY: I bear a letter. Read it hastily.

*LUCY hands the bewildered PIERRE the letter. She speaks aloud her letter:*

Oh Pierre, I no longer wish to know why you left, but I cannot live without you. So you and your new wife must learn to live with me. FYI: I married your cousin, Glen Glendinning, but I cannot keep on with him, as his sight and smell are close, but not the fine cigar that is Pierre. Tell your wife that I am your cousin, a nun on the run, with nowhere to go. I will live the rest of my days in your proximity working in the medium of
self-portraiture, so perhaps one day I might recapture the girl I was before you tore apart my happy life.

PIERRE sets fire to the letter.

PIERRE:
Isabel, meet my cousin, Lucy. She is a nun and a little unconventional. Our family too threw her to the streets so she’ll take up room and board here and start anew as an artist of self-portraiture.

LUCY: (maybe an accent)
Have ye any charcoal in this hellhole for I must begin my sketches.

ISABEL:
We’re fresh out.

LUCY:
Make space for me to sleep. I will go into the street to hunt for supplies. When I return some cranny in this place, I will call home sweet home.

PIERRE:
You look well, Lucy.

LUCY:
Don’t we all look well, Pierre?

LUCY exits.

A silence between ISABEL & PIERRE.
LUCY & ISABEL & PIERRE in the Church of the Apostles

The three are alone in the church. Pierre is writing, Isabel noodles on her guitar and Lucy is sketching a self-portrait.


LUCY coughs. ISABEL & PIERRE startle.


ISABEL mutters song lyrics to herself.

LUCY & PIERRE look at her quizzically.


PIERRE slams his head into the desk in irritation.

LUCY & ISABEL turn to him.

PIERRE stands and paces. He peers over LUCY’S shoulder. He is amazed at what he sees. ISABEL begins to hum and strum loudly. PIERRE looks at her a moment before returning to his desk. ISABEL & LUCY startle.

PIERRE:
WHAT?

ISABEL & LUCY:
A RAT!

PIERRE:
WHERE?

ISABEL & LUCY:
It crawled back into the wall.

PIERRE:
You’re dreaming!

ISABEL & LUCY:
In broad day?
PIERRE: 
Broad day it isn’t. My mind plays on tricks on me. Go back to bed.

ISABEL & LUCY: 
I can’t sleep.

PIERRE: 
Then be silent, at least. I must write.

ISABEL & LUCY: 
A nightmare rattles within me.

PIERRE: 
Sleep it off! No good will come if I cannot write!

ISABEL & LUCY: 
Hold me Pierre!

PIERRE: 
An impossible task to hold you both! Let me work!

ISABEL & LUCY: 
Please Pierre.

PIERRE: 
I cannot manage this. I now have what I want, which is both of you but I cannot take you two at a time. Or can I?

ISABEL & LUCY: 
You cannot! NEVER! NEVER! NEVER!

_The women thrash as though possessed! Yikes!_

PIERRE: 
YOU DRIVE ME INTO THE STREETS!

LUCY & ISABEL: 
Go then! Go then! GO then! GO! GO! Leave me Pierre!

_LUCY and ISABEL collapse. The walls of the apartment collapse. Pierre is alone in the night._
PIERRE:
I go into the night.
Wandering high on the silence
With no desk before me
No quill in hand
My feet barely felt
Sinking in snow
Frozen

(more)

With my head on fire
I go like this ‘til dawn
And at dawn
Day breaks
A familiar figure in the distance
Comes toward me
And I cannot decide whether I should rejoice or revolt
Now the figure has a face
Maybe you can see him coming?
I see him coming.
And like day all around me
I break too
I extend my hand.

GLEN approaches.

PIERRE:
What now cousin?

GLEN:
Ah, my poor Pierre. You’re so ghostly you camouflage with the snow. I thought you might be a bunny, but no! ‘Tis only a cousin bounding about. A wretch. A waste. One who’s blood I’d rather spill than share.

PIERRE:
You come for me, like a banshee
For what little I have left
After absconding with my inheritance
Taking up with my betrothed
This breath is what remains

PIERRE puffs his breath from deep in his lungs, so that the cold air is visible.
GLEN:
Your mother gave to me what you left behind. Now, I believe you have something that
belongs to me.

PIERRE:
How dare you speak this to me now?

GLEN:
With tongue and cheek, you bastard!

PIERRE:
Did you not first learn of another’s tongue and cheek through me, cousin? Did I not whisper secrets to you when we were young, and did not my tongue occasionally slip from my mouth and into your ear?

GLEN:
Bringing up the past illuminates nothing new, Pierre. I don’t forget anything. Especially when I have misplaced my wife. So I say again, I believe you possess something that belongs to me.

PIERRE:
What’s mine is mine, and while what was once mine was once yours, it is now mine again.

GLEN:
So by your logic, when I have you by those balls, they will be mine too, together with your great fortune? I like the thought of this lump sum.

PIERRE:
You’ll never have your hands in my pants again, Glen.

GLEN:
You speak so soon cousin. And with such certainty.

PIERRE:
I am a man of my word, not yours.

GLEN:
Of your word, perhaps, but of very few remaining breaths. Show me to my wife or I will pull out your heart and stomp it into the snow.

PIERRE:
You HAVE forgotten how brawny I am. My heart is buried beneath sinew thick as thieves and hard as brass. Touch me once and you will taste my hefty knuckles.
GLEN:
For a moment, I am almost sad that so much stands between us now and our jovial beginning. Do you see our footprints? We come from two different places now and when we go from here, only one set of feet will travel on-

*PIERRE takes a dagger from his coat and stabs GLEN, who falls dead in the snow.*

PIERRE:
There now cousin. See, what a fluffy bed I’ve made for thee.

*PIERRE weeps softly as he strokes GLEN’S brow.*

(more)

And what bed have I made for me? AHHHHHH!!!! I am full of apologies and sorrows! And nowhere to go.

*PIERRE surveys the horizon.*

Deaf ears as far as the eye can see! And a terminal ache to accompany this emptiness!

*PIERRE falls on the corpse of his cousin. LUCY & ISABEL approach.*

LUCY:
Pierre!
Are you?
What has?
Glen?
No.
Yes.
How!
Ye gods!

LUCY throws herself at PIERRE but her body ricochets off his brawny frame. PIERRE is as hard as stone. LUCY throws herself at PIERRE again. She takes his arms and wraps them around her. PIERRE’S eyes are vacant. LUCY cups his face in her hands.

LUCY:
I shouldn’t have come here… But I couldn’t go on without you.

PIERRE:
My dear Lucy, how I destroyed you and us. I will go on forever steeped in sorrow. To love a sister, takes one’s whole life.
PIERRE looks at ISABEL who has quietly watched from the sidelines.

LUCY:
Sister? Sister?
Say
no
more.

LUCY dies of shock in PIERRE’S arms. PIERRE gently sets her body down on top of his cousin.

PIERRE:
No chance we can return to the church?

ISABEL:
The walls fell down around us. And the world we ran away from came running toward us. And now we’ve run out of world, you and I.

PIERRE:
So where do we go from here?

ISABEL hands PIERRE a vile of poison.

ISABEL:
Far from here.

PIERRE:
Oh. And not a moment too soon. For I cannot go on.

ISABEL:
You don’t have to. Drink up.

PIERRE:
Kiss me first. Once. Fully.

ISABEL shakes her head. She puts a finger on PIERRE’S mouth.

ISABEL:
I’ll go wherever we are destined to go together. And there, we will find what has always been destined between us.
PIERRE:
Don’t you want to know what it could be like? ‘Til death do us part?

ISABEL:
No, Pierre. Not until death do we unite. Pour out a drop into my palm.

*PIERRE does.*

Say when.

*PIERRE pauses for a moment.*

PIERRE: *(whispers)*
Now.

*They drink.*
*They die.*
*Blackout.*
*End of Act II.*
LIZZIE and BESSIE are in the Woodlawn Cemetery preparing the family plot for Herman’s casket. The modest headstones of MALCOLM and STANWIX sit side by side. LIZZIE holds a copy of the New York Day.

LIZZIE:
Hubert Melville? Born August 1st, 1819, died last Monday shortly after midnight September 28, 1891.

BESSIONE:
Hubert?

LIZZIE:
They couldn’t even get his name right.

BESSIONE: (points to the graves below)
Not so loud.

LIZZIE:
He died a no one. Not even a laughingstock. They should know their father’s fate.

BESSIONE:
Destitution runs in the family.

RUSTLE

They’re late with him.

LIZZIE:
We’re further from the chapel than you’d think.

BESSIONE:
It’s going to be dark soon.

FANNIE approaches and calls out from afar.

FANNIE:
Bessie, it’s too cold for you out here! Your joints will stiffen like cement.

LIZZIE:
Let me mother Bessie and you mother your own daughters.
FANNIE:
Aren’t you my mother too?

LIZZIE:
So do as I ask.

FANNIE
LIZZIE

FANNY peers into HERMAN’S hole.

FANNIE:
Looks too shallow.

LIZZIE goes back to looking at the paper.

LIZZIE:
A final humiliation. Before he’s even in the ground.

FANNIE:
They could have called him worse than Hubert. A curmudgeon. An ego-maniacal lunatic-

LIZZIE:
Forego the litany.

BESSIE:
How will the ground stay put with these three stuck together side by side?

LIZZIE:
You know, the young man who runs the bookstore around the corner from us spoke so highly of your father. Herman gave him his every penny, but he did come by the house to pay his respects…He might be the only one on earth who remembers your father fondly.

You’ll want to prepare some final words.

FANNIE:
Our father, who art in his coffin, I’ll never speak to you again-

RUSTLE. All three look to the ground.

LIZZIE:
Have groundhogs taken up in our burial plot?

…
What I’d give to see your brothers again.

FANNIE:
How about flowers?

BESSIE:
I’ve snuck a biscuit in my handkerchief.

LIZZIE:
Please.

…

Leave space for me alongside him.

FANNIE:
Planning your own funeral now?

LIZZIE:
Don’t you owe me better than this?

BESSIE:
What?

LIZZIE:
What do you mean, “what?”

BESSIE:
What do we owe you?

LIZZIE:
A proper good-bye to your father.

BESSIE:
We’ll get proper when he gets here.

FANNIE:
How are we to know improper from proper? It’s the first time we’ve lost our father.

LIZZIE:
Remember your brothers’ funerals?

FANNIE:
Who could say anything in earshot-
LIZZIE:
You can’t blame everything on him.

FANNIE:
Malcolm could. Couldn’t you Malcolm?

No answer.

LIZZIE:
Your father kept on living.

BESSIE:
You call that living?

LIZZIE:
You know, he was working on something-

FANNIE:
Not another “poem” I hope.

LIZZIE:
No. In the end, he even quit poetry. He started a new book.

BESSIE:
I want -

…

Space when I die.

FANNIE:
I want peace.

LIZZIE:
Fannie, your own daughters adored Herman. Sometimes someone’s goodness is in pieces. Time breaks them down. Eleanor and Frances knew a kind man. Let them remember your father fondly, even if you cannot.

FANNIE:
The littler they know the better.

LIZZIE:
You two must outlive me. I can’t put in another headstone.
BESSIE:
Who will look after me?

FANNIE:
My daughters would.

BESSIE:
Please, god, don’t let me live that long.

LIZZIE:
Be thankful you’re alive.

BESSIE:
Give thanks for these gnarled limbs that swell after a heavy rain? I’ve been an invalid since the day I was born. And for fifty years, I listened to that man rage like his suffering trumped anything else on earth. While my mother, who could have set us free, kept us caged.

LIZZIE:
I tried to leave. When I was pregnant with you. I took us away but... Would you have preferred that I had Herman committed? What if I had thrown you out with your rheumatoid arthritis? I’ll give you that Herman could be hell on earth. But parting ways? It’s true he failed as a father, a sailor, a novelist, a lecturer, a poet, a husband. A man in pieces, you can’t toss away the whole of him. You didn’t know him before the books did him in. With every publication, I parcelled out my mourning losing my husband bit by bit, and now what’s left, all at once.

BESSIE:
I’ll outlive you mother.

LIZZIE:
That’s all I ask.

*Rustle. Rustle. Did the ground move? Yes it did. Stillness. MALCOLM comes out of the ground.*

MALCOLM
FANNIE
BESSIE
LIZZIE

FANNIE:
You’re late.
MALCOLM:
For what?

FANNIE:
For Stanwix’s funeral. But you’re just time for Herman’s.

MALCOLM:
It was too histrionic overhead.

BESSION:
Well, we’re in mourning.

MALCOLM:
For poor Herman?

LIZZIE:
Malcolm?

MALCOLM:
Hello mother.

FANNIE:
Do something about that mess. People will think we dug you up.

BESSION:
That there wasn’t plot enough to bury us all.

MALCOLM:
Oh, we’ll make room for him. Won’t we, Stanwix?

STANWIX climbs out the ground.

MALCOLM
BESSION
STANWIX
FANNIE
LIZZIE

STANWIX:
Excuse us. We were just leaving.

FANNIE:
You both look alive.
STANWIX:
It’s just the tint of your rose-colored glasses.

FANNIE:
I feel nothing akin to nostalgia now.

MALCOLM:
Well, we died young, hence the hue.

FANNIE:
Go back to where you came from.

LIZZIE:
No! Wait. Let me look at you all at once. My children, all together.

BESSIE:
The carriage comes!

STANWIX:
No way in hell I’ll lie in peace next to him.

LIZZIE:
You have nowhere to go.

STANWIX:
I’ll haunt this cemetery.

FANNIE:
We dealt with him for decades, now it’s your turn.

MALCOLM:
Let’s be on our way, Stanwix.

LIZZIE:
Not yet! Make peace with him!

STANWIX:
We have nothing more to say.

FANNIE:
Well, I haven’t said my piece. You shot yourself in the head right across the hall from me.
MALCOLM:
I was no match for Herman. Stanwix could have protected you.

BESSION:
Stanwix lived with his tail between his legs. Running off every chance he had.

STANWIX:
Were you really such damsels in distress? Father hardly raised his voice to either of you.

MALCOLM:
Was it not a mother’s job to protect her lot?

LIZZIE:
Who ever protected me?

FANNIE:
Your father and his bank account!

LIZZIE:
And your husband provides for you!

FANNIE:
I still have to live with the past.
LIZZIE:
Don’t we all?
I was tasked to look after the man I married.

STANWIX:
Even after he proved a monster?

LIZZIE:
His father’s death haunted him.

MALCOLM:
So, that’s why he slugged me?

STANWIX:
Threw me into the poster bed?

BESSION:
Called me a cripple.

FANNIE:
Me a whore.
STANWIX:
And in the name of words on a page.

BESSIE:
Call me unimpressed.

LIZZIE:
He’s sorry.

MALCOLM:
How do you know?

...

LIZZIE:
Well, what’s you’re excuse?

MALCOLM:
I was a child.

FANNIE:
You were 18.

MALCOLM:
And?

LIZZIE:
Death makes life lonely for the living.

STANWIX:
What do you think it does to the dead? The mother I knew-

LIZZIE:
Time changed her.

STANWIX:
Into what?

LIZZIE:
A tear-stained old woman.

MALCOLM:
But you’re free now.
LIZZIE looks at the ground.

LIZZIE:
Who will stand here a hundred years from now?

FANNIE
BEssie
STANWIX
MALCOLM

FANNIE:
My children’s children’s children’s children.

MALCOLM:
You think a lot like us could keep on like this?

BEssie:
You think the human race can survive itself?

The family watches the carriage pass.

STANWIX:
Someone else must have died today.

MALCOLM:
Good day for it.

MALCOLM
FANNIE
BEssie
STANWIX

LIZZIE:
Oh, you see that tombstone? He ought have one like that with a scroll on the front.

FANNIE:
Too fancy.

LIZZIE:
He earned it.

FANNIE:
You could write your own manuscript instead of editing his.
LIZZIE:
That’s what he lived for.

BESSIE:
What do you live for?

LIZZIE:
You.

Music starts

They’re coming finally.

FANNIE:
You two should make like burrowing mammals.

BESSIE:
Else we’ll look like grave-robbers.

STANWIX:
If we can resurrect ourselves, what’s to keep him comatose?

FANNIE:
Who could stomach a full-on family reunion?

A voice (call her Liz) speaks up from the audience.

LIZ:
I could.

STANWIX:
What was that?

BESSIE:
I didn’t hear anything.

LIZ:
Over here.

LIZZIE:
What do you want?
LIZ:
Just to… say hello.

FANNIE:
Excuse me?
…

LIZ:
Is this… cathartic?

STANWIX & LIZZIE & MALCOLM & BESSIE & FANNIE shake heads.

LIZ:
Sorry. I- should have… done more research on time machines… I’m not sure how to-
…

Does anyone… want to hug?

…

Sorry…. I’ve just… seen his funeral play in my mind ever since I came here to the
Woodlawn Cemetery after Hurricane Sandy.

…

You’re putting him in his grave thinking he’s a complete failure.

LIZZIE:
That’s what you think we think?

LIZ:
Well, I know the rest of the world forgot about him. But in about thirty years, Fannie
you’ll be around for this, Herman’s legacy takes a turn for the better.

FANNIE:
I think you mean Hubert.

LIZ:
No, not Hubert. See, that tidbit? About newspaper getting his name wrong? I read it in a
two thousand-page biography about Herman. Right now, in my play, it’s 1891. Malcolm
and Stanwix are long dead and Herman’s just died- They’ve dug the hole and everything,
which naturally “brings up the past” …figuratively… ghosts …You see, so much
speculation lives on about what kind of man Herman was. An alcoholic? An abusive
husband?
LIZZIE:
What business is it of yours?

LIZ:
Well, the family tree keeps growing. Fanny, you’re going to have more two daughters.

FANNIE:
I already have two daughters.

LIZ:
Right. Two more. Frances, your namesake, will give birth to three children too, and one of them, Walter will have three children and one of those children, Barbara will have six children and I will be the third of those six children. Herman was survived by you, his wife and daughters, so I wanted you all to tell his story, you know, unabridged ... except by me and my friends like [insert name of collaborator] here tonight in the [Insert Name of Theatre]… the rest is history… or the future… or just what’s happening.

...I’m sure I’ve gotten a lot wrong. But I know that you all died never knowing that Herman made history. Moby Dick and Bartleby and Billy Budd are very famous.

STANWIX:
So?

LIZZIE:
What about Pierre?

LIZ:
General consensus says that Pierre is pretty much unreadable. But I read it! Twice.

...

I’ll never know how hard it was to be his wife or child. I won’t ever know what kind of man he was: perverse, manic-depressive, self-involved, spiritually impoverished-

LIZZIE:
He was NOT that.

LIZ:
For what it’s worth, he became celebrated, in a large part, for all the reasons he failed you. But one hundred twenty-five years after he died, he taught me that genius and achievement live next door to delusion and failure. I didn’t write this play to put him into words… I wrote it because I couldn’t help myself.
BESSIE
LIZZIE
STANWIX
MALCOLM
FRANCES
LIZ

LIZZIE:
Would you be so kind as to end this?

LIZ:
Sure. I already wrote “end of play”, back in April. So now it’s time for the stage manager to hear her cue and push a button. And then there’ll be a blackout. And this will be all over. Are you ready?

*The cast nods with enthusiasm.*
*Liz looks to the booth and nods.*

*End of play.*
Catalina de Erauso
By Elizabeth Anne Doss
Dedicated to Jaime Nicoloplis, who died a few years ago of heart disease, but who used to live in the jungles of Mexico, study corridos and who taught classes on the literature of the conquest of New Spain.
CHARACTERS:

Catalina
A Mean Nun, her aunt
An Old Man, a teacher
God
Don Juan de Ideaquez
Muleteer
Catalina’s Father
Catalina’s Brother
Sailors
Maria
The Priest
The Sheriff
El Cid
Scene 1: The Great Escape

It’s midnight in a convent in San Sebastian, Spain. CATALINA DE ERAUSO wears one giant frozen scowl in a long vacuous hallway. She’s decked out in a nun’s habit twirling a set of keys on her index finger.

CATALINA:
Who here would challenge me to a…?

She pretends one key is a sword. She swings at the air.

Who will say hello to the pointy part of my sword?

Swing. Swoosh.

Who hankers to be cut in half?

Swing. Swoosh.

Chop! Chop!

Who dares to be finger free?

She tosses the keys in the air, catching them with her other hand.

Guess what? I’m fourteen today. In this convent that means two things: either someone’s gotta marry me or I gotta marry God. So my aunt tried to make an honest nun of me. But see these keys? They deadbolt the door to a musty chapel where I was to tie the knot with the Lord! Guess what else? They also open the doors to freedom! Have you heard of freedom? Well, I have and I want some. I am nun on the run to the GREAT OUTDOORS. And I am also ON TIPTOE!

CATALINA tiptoes.

SSSHHH!

CATALINA whispers:

Once I bust loose from this convent, my whole life is ahead of me. By filling you with my adventures, you will become my autobiography.

CATALINA grins and nods and bows to the crowd.
By the time, you, my book, are writ, your greatness will be on par with your own source material! So you can autograph your own program, and rub elbows with yourself! 

_A loud thud. Footsteps. CATALINA stuffs the keys into her underwear. Another nun enters, pulls out a bullwhip, and begins beating CATALINA._

NUN:  
I will beat your incarnate flesh until it tenderizes!

_To the audience:_

CATALINA:  
This is the aunt I told you about. Cover your face with your hands and watch this bit through your fingers.

_Catalina covers her face with her fingers and encourages the audience to do the same._

NUN:  
I’ll take back my keys, Catalina.

CATALINA:  
What, why- I- Uh-Ahem- Uh- no –ehh-keys?

_The nun begins beating CATALINA with a bullwhip._

NUN:  
Shame on my brother alive and well in the New Spain for having burdened me with the abject beast called Catalina de Erauso.

_CATALINA cowers beneath the beating. The beating becomes background noise. Beneath the beating, Catalina whispers to the audience._

CATALINA:  
Soooo…I hope you like historical fiction ‘cause that’s the genre you’ll be. Personally, I am on the fence about it. It’s weird. People from one time and place, in another time and place, and speaking in the contemporary language of the latter time and place?

NUN:  
CONFESS your sin and return my keys before these lashes leave you bereft of both hide and hair. It’s now or never, heathen!

CATALINA:  
How can I confess as this beating ties my tongue?
The NUN stops beating CATALINA for a moment but she keeps her bullwhip poised overhead ready to deliver another blow.

Set me free and your pocket will again with jingle from the clink of your keys.

NUN:  
Let you loose to wreak havoc in the world?

CATALINA:  
To find my long lost family.

NUN:  
They said to the hell to with you ten years ago.

CATALINA puffs up.  

CATALINA:  
Well, I haven’t said to hell with them. I am made of iron, horns and very sharp teeth!

Beating again.

NUN:  
You are nothing but a blithering blob beaten bloody by my bullwhip!

CATALINA:  
So spare me. As I look out the window, the world is at my fingertips! But I want it in the palm of my hand!

The nun stops beating CATALINA.

NUN:  
How’s your summersault?

CATALINA:  
So-so. Why ever do you ask?

NUN:  
I’m about to turn your world upside down!

The NUN cracks her whip again and CATALINA starts somersaulting. The NUN comes toward CATALINA and freezes (a soft freeze).

To the audience:
CATALINA: Is anyone here gallant?

*Maybe someone stands up, but then CATALINA says:*

Wait! If you save me now, how will we go down in history? I must fend for myself. Maybe something’s up my sleeve? Aha!
*CATALINA falls to her knees.*

Our father, who art in heaven, I need a miracle. I don’t want to die in a dungeon or at the end of a bullwhip or married to a man or to you. Take me from my troubles! Give me the gumption that leads to redemption!

*Suddenly, the heavens shine on CATALINA. The convent fills with rainbows.*

CATALINA: Wow! This must be the grin of God.

*CATALINA’S chest swells as she turns back to the nun.*

I’ll take your summersault and raise you a cartwheel. Goodbye tyranny! Hello freedom!

*CATALINA turns cartwheels down the hall of the convent while her open wounds splatter the walls with blood.*

Who needs a home? The convent is colder than any snow! Damper than any rainy day! Big wide world replete with dangers and strangers, you’ve met your match!!! Here cometh Catalina!

*The doors to the massive hallway open on their own. The Nun is frozen stiff as a statue.*

NUN: Please, Catalina, my keys!

*CATALINA cartwheels to freedom. She stops in the doorway.*

CATALINA: It’s my turn to lock you up.

NUN: Please…

*CATALINA tosses the keys to her aunt.*
CATALINA:
God showed me mercy, so I can spare some for you. Especially as I am now good as gone.
SCENE 2: A Stop at Death’s Door

The convent walls vanish and become dark alleys. Alone, CATALINA clears her throat:

CATALINA:
Hello? (echo, echo, echo)

Here I am big, wide world!!!

She her arms out into the thin air.

Can anyone hear me?

Answer from the ensemble:

No (echo, echo, echo)

She addresses the audience:

What? Am I invisible?

She flails and flares and sends off smoke signals.

Answer me big, wide world? (echo, echo, echo)

No answer.

How will I ever find long my lost father and twin as a mere fly on the wall?!

Catalina tears off her habit:

One day, this suffering will make a good story. But until I’m eliciting thoughtful nods and wistful smiles, I better do something.

CATALINA begins dressing herself in her new outfit. From her refurbished habit and gown, she makes a cap and trousers.

How do I look big wide world? Ready for action?

CATALINA runs, jumps and strikes a pose:

YIKES! I am too gaunt to jaunt as I have not eaten in three days. Holy smokes! A sky full of stars usurps my frontal lobe.
CATALINA staggers.

I am falling to pieces

CATALINA collapses.

My quest has met with an early death!
SCENE 3- An Education

*The door opens and an OLD MAN appears. He smells CATALINA and immediately exits. He renters holding his nose.*

OLD MAN:
You smell of death’s door!

CATALINA:
Is this the afterlife or is this just fantasy?

OLD MAN:
How many odors can emanate from one thing?

CATALINA:
Are you there, God? It’s me, Catalina.

OLD MAN:
I know what I’m NOT. Now what are you?

CATALINA:
Are these not the pearly gates?

OLD MAN:
Indeed not! My threshold is angel-free!

CATALINA:
Then I’m still alive and you must be a wise old man!

OLD MAN:
How do you know I’m wise?

CATALINA:
The length of your beard gives your wisdom away.

OLD MAN:
You are right that I am old, and thus I must cherish my few remaining breaths with solace and solemnity. Excuse me!

*He slams closed his door.*

CATALINA:
Come back, for I am wholly alone in the world!
From inside his home:

OLD MAN:
Not compelling.

CATALINA:
I have a long lost twin.

OLD MAN:
So do I.

CATALINA:
I am one-half man, I think!

OLD MAN:
And one-half what else?

CATALINA:
Adolescent nun!

OLD MAN:
Keep talking, but speak up! These here are deaf ears!

CATALINA:
I’ve run away from the convent where I was well-educated but cruelly beaten.

OLD MAN:
Is that where you learned this English we’re speaking?

CATALINA:
No. I am channeling it through a mystical force.

OLD MAN:
Mystical force?

CATALINA:
It’s called historical fiction through a feminist lens. This is the 17th century. You and I are in Old Spain speaking Spanish.

OLD MAN:
I know where I am, but not what you’re doing here!

CATALINA:
If you let me in, restore my health, teach me everything you know, grooming me to become an exceptional author, but then you discover that you feel romantically toward me causing you to make a move on me that I reject because you’re too desperate to love, which makes you throw me back out into the streets, then you get to be in my autobiography.

OLD MAN:
It’s quite a stretch to think that I, an elderly but dignified widow-

CATALINA:
Would you like to see all the hair I am growing on my chest and under my arms?

... 

Then take me in.

OLD MAN:
Geez! Enough! All right! But you must convalesce quickly! I have cats at home.

**CATALINA tries to stand but cannot.**

On two feet now, you feral thing. Now show me those hairs.

CATALINA:
Make me some soup first.

*The OLD MAN lets CATALINA in. They enact a wellness regimen montage. The OLD MAN makes soup and CATALINA slurps soup. CATALINA bends over and the OLD MAN beats on her back as she coughs up terrible things. Then they enact a teaching montage. THE OLD MAN takes out stacks of books and writes down prepositional phrases and CATALINA copies them down nodding intently. CATALINA’S convalescence and scholarly training is through before we know it and she is on her way to health and genius.*

CATALINA:
Thanks, old man for these good times and all this thick and thin. Now I must away.

OLD MAN:
You can’t leave now with no good reason.

CATALINA:
Here’s two good reasons: 1. I am well enough to resume my quest to find my family. 2. I’m tired of all this textbook learning! It makes me zone out.
OLD MAN:
Zoning out is your mind genuflecting to the cosmos!

CATALINA:
Oh puke on that, sir, old man, sir. The nuns taught me ample nonsense such that I cannot buy that baloney. Greatness doesn’t come from Latin conjugations and algebraic equations rattling in my thinking cap! Now, give me all your money.

OLD MAN:
You can’t have my money. It was left to me by my dead wife.

CATALINA:
Listen here, I feel an arm wrestle coming on. Wager your inheritance on yourself, so I can beat you fair and square.

OLD MAN:
You cannot call the shots, you broad-shouldered, barrel-chested, grapefruit-fisted she-nun!

CATALINA:
Watch yourself, old man, else I use these grapefruit fists to beat you into a bloody pulp!

CATALINA throws her dukes up. She turns to the audience.

I am almost certain that this is a bad idea.

CATALINA rolls her eyeballs up to look at her brain.

Imagination? Are you in there?

CATALINA rubs her temples.

Do something!

CATALINA rubs harder!

THINK!

CATALINA gets an idea.

GOOD THINKING! I’ll pray.

CATALINA falls to her knees.
Heavenly father, if you were me, and you just wanted what you wanted when you wanted it, but you didn’t know what it was that you wanted, what would you do to get your way and have everything you want all at once?

VOICE OF GOD: *(Sounds like a choir)*
Catalina?

CATALINA:
Is that finally you, father?

VOICE OF GOD:
Good question, Catalina.

CATALINA:
This means I am the… “chosen one?”

VOICE OF GOD:
When I look down on earth, I love to watch folks flail, and, frankly, your floundering is unmatched.

CATALINA:
So help me, God.

VOICE OF GOD:
Didn’t I just perform a miracle for you?

CATALINA:
Thank you, sir. May I have another?

VOICE OF GOD:
You need a future you don’t see coming.

CATALINA:
No! I need to find the meaning of life.

VOICE OF GOD:
No Catalina. It’s Opposite Day.

CATALINA:
No! If I am to keep on, I demand divine intervention. Get me out of this old man’s abode and back on the road to adventure and mayhem.
VOICE OF GOD:
I can’t make false promises. Have faith, my child.

CATALINA:
I can’t go on faith alone.

VOICE OF GOD:
Aren’t you alone in your faith now?

CATALINA:
You’re here.

VOICE OF GOD:
Because you’ve led yourself astray.
CATALINA:
Then where do I go? What do I do?

VOICE OF GOD:
Have faith, I said. I know someone who you will meet somewhere someday who will tell you something. Go to him. It might take awhile.

CATALINA:

VOICE OF GOD:
Are you questioning me?

CATALINA:
Don’t ask!

VOICE OF GOD:
Good call.

VOICE OF GOD GOES AWAY.

CATALINA:
Oh, that cagey maker. What a waste of a prayer!

CATALINA climbs off her knees.

OLD MAN:
Fine Catalina, we’re through. Gather your things and be gone.
CATALINA:
You can’t throw me out!

OLD MAN:
You and I are lost on one another. Go find some other place in history!

CATALINA:
Oh, how I long to suck the end of my index finger, stick it your ear and rub it around! Fine! I’ll leave this house empty-handed! But you’ll miss my shenanigans when they aren’t keeping you up all night. You’ll sleep yourself to death. OR, you’ll live out your days alone drinking tea and tickling the underside of your cats until they put little knicks in your hands.

CATALINA starts to go.

I have nothing. So if I have nothing, nothing is keeping me here. But if I have nothing, I have nothing to go on. Awe, well here goes nothing.

OLD MAN:
Oh Catalina, you remind of someone whom I’ve forgotten because my memory fails me. Oh, wait. It’s me. I was just like you when I was young.

CATALINA:
What did you do with yourself?

OLD MAN:
I became an old man, but, Catalina, you could become more than that. But you must go, since being an old man is all I know now.

CATALINA:
You know more than that.

OLD MAN:
The world will show you who you are. Take my old boots stacked with my inheritance and you may take some little pants and a billowing blouse. I am old. I can get by on air and ideas. I can live on pipe dreams but you need the real world. This is me showing you kindness. Don’t ever forget it.

CATALINA looks to the sky.

CATALINA:
So you do work in mysterious ways after all.
She shakes the OLD MAN’S hand. He hands her his boots and clothes. She addresses the audience while she dresses in the old man’s outfit.
SCENE 4: More and More Mules

_CATALINA addresses the audience._

CATALINA:
Come along. Time to keep on. Next time I get somewhere, I can’t show up half dead and still dying.

_Rustle. Cough. Throat clear. CATALINA ears perk up._

Who said that?

_A muleteer enters, driving a heard of ancient mules, so skeletal they look like mules dressed up like mules on Halloween._

MULETEER:
You, there.

CATALINA:
Yes?

MULETEER:
You’re blocking the road. Move along before these mule hooves tromp you down and trample your flesh.

_CATALINA throws out her hand to the MULETEER._

Which way you headed?

MULETEER:
Valladolid. To the mule market. This pack is so old. I’ve been driving them since I was a boy of fourteen. It’s time to sell their hides. See the looseness of their skin? How it falls from their bones? This pack here will make superb boots or money pouches. And their meat will be cured in salt. After I sell their hides and live off their flesh, I will finagle a new pack of mules. Such is the life of the muleteer. Mules and more mules.

CATALINA:
Might I accompany you to Valladolid?

MULETEER:
These mules are all I need for company.

CATALINA:
Give me a ride on a mule and I’ll give you a ride on the coattails of my good fortune.
MULETEER:
Me and my mules can do without good fortune.

CATALINA:
Perhaps, then just good company?

MULETEER:
The only company I keep is mules.

CATALINA:
I would keep quiet. Pretend to be the ghost of myself?

MULETEER:
Hmm. I could stand a little haunting to accompany this arid land, steely sky and the soft plodding of these hooves against the ground. You can ride with us to Valladolid if you promise to aid in the skinning of my pack as payment for this journey.

CATALINA:
Is skinning a mule much like peeling a mandarin?

MULETEER:
More like a blood orange.

CATALINA:
And how do you kill them?

MULETEER:
Bullets. Are you a good shot?

CATALINA:
There’s a good chance I am a good shot, but I have never shot anything alive to death.

MULETEER:
A lad who doesn’t shoot?

CATALINA:
I’ve led a sheltered life.

MULETEER:
Shelter impedes the growth of guts.
CATALINA:
Add me to your beasts of burdens and I will muster guts enough to take the life of many a mule.

MULETEER:
Mount away.

CATALINA joins the MULETEER and the skeletal mules. Resounding silence. CATALINA begins to say something but holds her tongue. The MULETEER wears the same expression all the way to Valladolid.

MULETEER:
Here we are in Valladolid. Soon, we will be in the mule market. Prepare your finger for firing the trigger and your shoulder for shouldering the musket. Because either you or they will die today.

To the audience.

CATALINA:
Muleteers are nothing like shepherds who peacefully guard their flocks in fields of soft grass beneath the sun and stars. I had assumed keepers of animals too kept kindness in their hearts but this hardened muleteer proved me wrong. By the time we made it to Valladolid, I had grown too fond of those mules to keep my word.

CATALINA look at the MULETEER

Stranger, here our paths uncross. An old man gave me money. You may have half and may we never see one another again.

MULETEER:
The world confounds the young because you do not know your place and you cannot conceive of dying in the streets. Nor do you know the taste of your blood in your mouth. I am humoring your loose tongue ‘cause you do not yet know that such tongues leave you face down in the dirt choking on crickets. Silence will keep you alive. Silence is keeping your word and killing my mules. Kill my mules with me and life will not elude you here and now.

To the audience.

CATALINA:
There is urine on my thigh and I am squeezing up and tight between number one and number two.

CATALINA looks back at the MULETEER.
CATALINA:  
What if you were in my shoes?

MULETEER:  
I have been in your shoes. I’ve killed more mules than you can count.

*Giant tears spill from CATALINA’S eyes.*

CATALINA:  
But I am not as I purport! You see, a bosom grows beneath my tunic.

*MULETEER looks hard at CATALINA.*

MULETEER:  
Let’s forget you spoke. You’ll fair far better as an obedient boy. A girl I could kill alongside my mules. What are you running from in such a shabby disguise?

CATALINA:  
Unfairness, cruelty and boredom.

MULETEER:  
You are on the wrong planet.

*CATALINA looks up at the sky.*

CATALINA:  
Please? Divine intervention?

…

Give me the musket.

*One by one CATALINA shoots down the mules.*

MULETEER:  
You gave yourself something you can’t buy. You gave yourself what you deserve. So, I will give you freedom from the skinning. Because I flourish in the skinning. So I will save the best for last and the last for me. Be on your way to set your own deathtrap for I have mule jerky to cure.

CATALINA:  
Farewell.
MULETEER:
But before you go, punch me as hard as you can.

CATALINA:
Where?

MULETEER:
Take your pick.
CATALINA socks the MULETEER in the stomach. She cries out and pulls back a fist of bloody knuckles.

MULETEER:
See, I saved the best for last for you too. Some men are made of stone.

CATALINA:
Oh autobiography. I might omit those last few pages. Not all men are made equal and that one made a fool of me.
SCENE 5: A Page for the King

Church bells ring from the cathedral.

CATALINA:
A sound for sore ears. Wait. No. God abandoned me, so I’ll steer clear those church bells. Here I am once again on empty with nowhere to turn! What would a Saint call up when without any hope? Ah ha! Blind faith.

CATALINA closes her eyes and stumbles blindly. DON JUAN DE IDIAQUEZ enters wearing the most exceptionally elaborate outfit. He sports a thick accent. He spies CATALINA. He sticks out a foot and trips CATALINA.

CATALINA:
Not face down again!

DON JUAN:
Stand up and let me assess you.

CATALINA stands and DON JUAN looks her up and down like the Spanish are wont to do. Even grandmas.

You make me sick. Keep your distance stranger.

CATALINA:
You’re too far away to see how special I am.

DON JUAN circles CATALINA.

You wish to rise up from foolishness and poverty?

CATALINA:
You mistake me for an ignorant pauper, but I have money in my pants and an expensive education under my belt.

DON JUAN:
In these rags you sport, you look like a vagrant on vacation, but your outerwear could reflect your inner light as long as you change clothes.

CATALINA:
Where can I buy a hat and boots like you?
DON JUAN:
I can outfit you in my image but you must do my bidding. I need a page. I work for the king. I spread his word around. Carry out his proclamations. I am an assistant in need of an assistant.

CATALINA:
I am authoring an autobiography and my source material is flagging.

DON JUAN:
So, let’s amplify your stakes.

CATALINA:
Yes, stakes!

*DON JUAN looks CATALINA up and down again.*

Strip down.

CATALINA:
Into what?

DON JUAN:
Show yourself. If you want to be my page, you must become an open book.

CATALINA:
But… what if I am not what I say I am?

DON JUAN:
You’re afraid?

CATALINA:
How would you feel were you forced to show yourself bare?

*DON JUAN takes off his magical outfit and stands in beautiful underwear.*

DON JUAN:
I am Don Juan de Idiaquez and I have nothing to hide.

CATALINA:
I am Catalina de Erauso and I am withering in shame.

*CATALINA strips down revealing her magically womanly figure.*
DON JUAN:
Catalina, you are full of surprises.

CATALINA:
I’m a fraud.

DON JUAN:
You’re against the law.
CATALINA:
I’ll be on my way.

*CATALINA turns to go.*

DON JUAN:
Stop. Catalina, you are a treasure chest not yet looted. I want to drag you up from the ocean floor and pop your lock.

CATALINA:
I am nothing so deep or mysterious as that.

DON JUAN:
You don’t look half as heinous naked as you did robed in rags. Broad-shouldered. Big through the middle but still kind of hippy. Yippy for me that I like to see you naked.

*DON JUAN looks her up and down again.*

Wouldn’t you like to be lucky?

CATALINA:
Yes.

DON JUAN:
Then you ARE in luck. I will give you clothes, a job as my page, and a roll in the hay.

CATALINA:
I have never rolled in hay before.

DON JUAN:
Dressing as a man is punishable by death. I will keep your cover top secret if you-

*The up and down look again.*

How old are you Catalina?
CATALINA:
Fourteen.

DON JUAN:
And never at the hands of a man?

*VOICE OF GOD enters. It sounds more womanly.*

VOICE OF GOD:
NO CATALINA!
CATALINA:
Where were you when I was killing mules?

VOICE OF GOD:
I can’t come every time you call, but I can spare you now.

CATALINA:
You sound strange.

VOICE OF GOD
Yes. This is “my wise woman voice.” Hark, you’re about to be violated.

CATALINA:
Violated?

VOICE OF GOD:
Place a hand between your legs.

*CATALINA does.*

VOICE OF GOD:
Now deliver yourself the finger. The middle one.

*CATALINA gives herself the bird.*

CATALINA:
What? Here? No. I don’t. NO!

VOICE OF GOD:
Hark again. You wanted into the great wide world.

CATALINA:
But if Don Juan-
VOICE OF GOD:
You have more middle finger than he has manhood.

CATALINA:
So I can hide things in me?

VOICE OF GOD:
If the shoe fits, shove it up. But from now on, let no one poke too deep. Keep your secrets stay safe.

CATALINA:
I don’t want to be a woman among men. I want to be a MAN among men.
VOICE OF GOD:
Well, you’re… uni-sexual. You’re a… rainbow of true colors inside letting only one at a time shine through.

CATALINA:
?

VOICE OF GOD:
You are a hawk flying high above land and your destiny is a mouse in the valley down below. You must hunt from a great distance. You are still leagues away from the rest of your life.

CATALINA:
???

VOICE OF GOD:
The world will open up for you-

CATALINA:
So long as I spread my legs?

VOICE OF GOD:
I’m sorry Catalina.

DON JUAN takes CATALINA from behind. CATALINA screams. DON JUAN covers her mouth, finishes and stands in his magnificent underwear. CATALINA cowers. Blood drips from between her legs.

DON JUAN:
These clothes are not enough. You’re going to need a name. I will call you Francisco de Loyola. Get up and get dressed. Messages do not deliver themselves.
DON JUAN exits in his underwear leaving CATALINA his magnificent outfit. Full of shame, she dresses.
SCENE 6: Destiny MANifest

CATALINA starts to address the audience but then stops short. She yells at the sky:

CATALINA:
I don’t know where you are God, but don’t you ever speak to me again!

She snaps at the audience as though someone had just tried to comfort her:

Just so you know, I love cruelty, so don’t feel sorry for me. That’s all I’ve ever known. So if you feel sorry for me... stick your nose in Don Quixote instead. Call me Francisco. Call me Francisco de Loyola.

Slowly, she practices bowing. It’s painful at first as her body is wrecked, but then she get used to it.

I am Francisco de Loyola. Francisco at your service.

CATALINA continues practicing her new name. From off-stage, a voice calls out.

CATALINA’S FATHER:
DON JUAN DE IDIAQUEZ!

Calling back:

CATALINA:
YOU CALL FOR MY MASTER?

Still offstage:

CATALINA’S FATHER:
I yell at you from a great distance as I approach because I have no time to lose!

CATALINA’S FATHER appears. She is stunned.

CATALINA:
FATHER?! At last, you’ve-

CATALINA’S FATHER
Your father? No. My son has a charter to a colony in New Spain. And my daughter, his twin, now belongs to God in a convent in San Sebastian.
CATALINA:
Of course. My father has the same hat you as you, and he trims his beard in just the same fashion, so naturally I thought you he from far away.

CATALINA’S FATHER:
Naturally.

CATALINA:
And naturally, my master must know the nature of this business before I can pass on your message.

CATALINA’S FATHER:
My son is in grave danger and he needs help from the King.

CATALINA:
Your son in danger?

CATALINA feels sympathy pains.

CATALINA’S FATHER:
I need Don Juan de Idiaquez to persuade the king to send an army of men to our charter in Peru. The new world cannot be conquered by a few spare Spaniards lodged in its remotest pockets.

CATALINA:
Your son must be a soldier then?

CATALINA’S FATHER:
My son, Francisco de Erauso, is a general, but still he must fight on the front line for there is only a front line in Cuzco.

CATALINA:
I will take your message to Don Juan de Idiaquez who will notify the king, and we will collect an army ripe and ready for action! Perhaps your daughter might be notified? Could we enlist her in the cause to save her brother’s life?

CATALINA’S FATHER:
I gave my daughter to God so long ago she would not know me now.

CATALINA:
But were she able to see you again-

CATALINA’S FATHER:
You say you will help me and I take you at your word.
CATALINA:
Give me your word and my word I’ll keep.

*CATALINA’S father nods and exits. Immediately, she starts doing pushups.*

CATALINA:
Now is no time for weakness as I prepare for the fight of my life. Don Juan, you are deader to me than God, for across the ocean, duty calls me to my brother’s side.

*Performing Roman soldier drills:*

Oh brother! How I have longed to reunite with you. I remember how soft and sweet the top of your head smells!

*She pumps her biceps up and kisses them. She swings at the sky:*

Take that, God! Look how strong I can make myself. I never needed you. My destiny has never been but a stone’s throw from where I stand.

*CATALINA’S pelvis gyrates as if moving by itself. A tentpole appears in her pants.*

Oh, what have we here?

*CATALINA’S voice drops. She feels her pants and quivers a little.*

Oh, boy! My missing piece at last!

*The bulge begins to guide CATALINA much like a divining rod. She speaks to it:*

TAKE ME TO THE OCEAN!

*CATALINA follows her new penis in the direction of the ocean. A giant ship appears. She looks tiny next to it.*

CATALINA:
Here I come to save the day! In the New World, they have mountains full of silver. How I long to stick my head inside one and go hog wild in a world of raw metal.
SCENE 7: Crossing the Ocean

A chorus of sailors appear. Their bodies board the ship and their voices becomes the sea. They make ocean sounds with words like splash, whoosh, and wind. CATALINA stands in the center waving a giant Spanish flag.

SAILORS:
Viajamos por cuatro vientos sobre el oceano que cubre el mundo.
Somos marineros volando como gaviotas sobre la mar.
Persuigiendo nuestro destino colectivo,
Capturando nuestro momento en la historia!

¿Cuál hombre entre nosotros puede sobrevivir el oceano solo?
No hay nadie.
La fuerza existe entre nosotros
Por los brazos, piernas y dedos.
Estos cuerpos en este barco forman España.
Somos España!
Traemos España por todo el mundo.
Traemos con nosotros nuestras lenguas.
Traemos con nosotros nuestras espadas
Entre los días
Por la noche
hasta llevamos a nuestro destino colectivo

The ship disappears. The sailors become a rowdy crowd of soldiers and prostitutes.
SCENE 8: Perdido en el Nuevo Mundo

CATALINA is alone in the new world.

CATALINA:
I came here to make waves, but the tide drags me under.

CATALINA approaches a swirling stranger:

Excuse me, stranger?

_No reply. Just ruckus._

Where do I enlist in the-

_The stranger ignores Catalina. The chaos and confusion keep growing._

Excuse me, has anyone seen the general, Fransisco?

_More ignoring._

Excuse me, I thought these shores glistened with treasure? Where’s the gold and precious jewels I’ve heard so much about?

_Extra ignoring._

What happened to my manifest destiny?

CATALINA looks down at her pants.

Wait!

_The tent pole is gone._

No! No! No! My manhood has abandoned me!

_She falls to her knees assuming the prayer position but immediately stands again._

NO! NO! NO! No more hours of need! I’ll never ask God again for anything else. Oh, new world! I thought you had met your match but no. I’ve met mine. I came to the New World to fend for myself, but my sword falls flat like a limp blade of grass. Maybe I ought lie atop it.

_A stranger places a hand on her shoulder and she pulls out her sword._
FRANCISCO DE ERUASO:
Got anguish?

CATALINA:
Stand back stranger!

CATALINA swings her sword at him but catches only air.

FRANCISCO:
I recognize that tongue. You’re a Basquero fresh off the boat, and I am homesick. Tell me of my home sweet home.

CATALINA:
Homesick?

FRANCISCO:
For my twin sister. All my life, I’ve longed to reunite with her. When we were small, I would rest my head on her stomach and listen to its gurgling sounds. They were like lullabies to me.

To the audience.

CATALINA:
It’s him all right.

Back to him:

Oh, Francisco!

She starts to remove her disguise but stops short.

FRANCISCO:
You know my name?

CATALINA:
Your name echoes the world over. Back in old Spain, I learned of your dire straights and how you needed men. I am your man.

FRANCISCO:
I need a man like you, who arrives packing loyalty. Join my rank.
CATALINA:
I’ll sign my name in blood.

FRANCISCO:
You remind of someone I must have loved.
*CATALINA and FRANCISCO turn to the audience.*

CATALINA:
Oh, to reunite with better half was the best fate that could have befallen me. Just one day with him and I was more myself than ever.

FRANCISCO:
As soon as I befriended him, my luck began to turn.

CATALINA:
We tore the New World a new one.

FRANCISCO:
Conquering village after village.

CATALINA:
That we pillaged and pillaged.

FRANCISCO:
That Basquero was a natural.

CATALINA:
The adventures we did have: drinking, gambling, brawling: those things that coagulate the common man.

FRANCISCO:
We held each other up as we stumbled home.

CATALINA:
Francisco had his way with many women and I was not ashamed to go second.

FRANCISCO:
Oh, to have someone at my side who always had my back!

CATALINA:
Almost always.

*It turns into a dark night. Two cloaked strangers appear. The four enact the following scene:*
You see, I made other friends besides Francisco, and in the new world, friends turn on you on a dime. One night, I was alone with a friend who in a flash became my enemy over a hand of cards gone wrong. My new enemy challenged me to duel. So I met him late in a patch of moonlight ready to have his hide. But he was not alone. He was flanked by two cloaked strangers. But by this time, I was masterful with my sword. Soon, the three were dead and I stooped to pick their pockets when I saw-

\textit{Francisco falls to the ground.}

Drowning in a pool of our very own blood.

\textit{Catalina squats and rolls over the corpse of her dead brother.}

No, brother! This cannot be! Please speak!

\textit{Francisco stays motionless.}

Come back to me, brother before you are long lost again.

\textit{Francisco's ghost rises from his corpse.}

\textbf{Francisco:} \\
Brother, did you say?

\textbf{Catalina:} \\
You came back?

\textbf{Francisco:} \\
Were I more than thin air, I’d bear hug you.

\textbf{Catalina:} \\
How I’d see your bear hug, and raise you a French kiss.

\textbf{Francisco:} \\
Twins don’t French kiss, Catalina.

\textbf{Catalina:} \\
So, you see me now for who I am?

\textbf{Francisco:} \\
You’re disguise was always thin.
CATALINA:
I wanted you to see through it.

Don’t leave me.

FRANCISCO:
One of us must carry on. You cannot go before time is through with you.

CATALINA:
Oh brother, I have only wanted to be at your side.

FRANCISCO:
Take all of my belongings and dispose of what remains of my remains.

CATALINA:
I cannot.

FRANCISCO:
In this way, I will always be with you. Our civilization needs your strength.

CATALINA:
But I have nothing left to live for.

FRANCISCO:
Remember our father still lives. Reunite with him.

CATALINA:
How will he ever forgive me?

FRANCISCO:
You must forgive yourself.

FRANCISCO dresses CATALINA in his coat and exits.

CATALINA:
Well, all’s well that ends-

CATALINA’S FATHER enters.

CATALINA’S FATHER:
Francisco!

CATALINA:
Father.
A big embrace. CATALINA melts.

CATALINA’S FATHER:
You’re still alive.

CATALINA:
You could say that again.

CATALINA’S FATHER:
You’re still alive.

CATALINA:
Did you miss me?

CATALINA’S FATHER:
Not a day goes by that I did not worry for your future out here in the wilderness at the very edge of civilization. But my son, you are born and bred from the bravest stock there is and I have faith that you will carry out the destiny of our great nation. By your very nature, you are hero. All of Spain stands behind you!

CATALINA:
With my father at my side where couldn’t I go?

CATALINA’S FATHER:
My son, we’ve lost your sister-

CATALINA:
Catalina’s dead?

CATALINA’S FATHER:
I received word from my sister at the convent that she disappeared on the eve of her marriage to God.

CATALINA:
Perhaps our maker took her soon?

CATALINA’S FATHER:
And so we can only hope that she sits in heaven holding hands with your mother and smiling down on us.

CATALINA:
Then this battle we are about to fight, and every other battle I’ll fight for the rest of my life, I fight in her name. Catalina will be my mascot, my angel. Enemies beware.
CATALINA’S FATHER:
And so the battle begins!

SOLDIERS enter and stand by behind CATALINA.

CATALINA:
Choose your battles wisely for the enemies are EVERYWHERE.

***They begin battle for a long with their invisible enemy until is defeated. This is gruesome. Irrational. Victory. Celebration ensues.

CATALINA:
The enemy has been conquered! Let us celebrate by drinking this fermented corn!
THE MEN:
Francisco, our hero, you’ve done it again!

CATALINA:
Who me? This old general? You make me blush.

CATALINA and the SOLDIERS drink. A host of beautiful women enter. They say nothing without a smile. One exceptionally beautiful woman spies CATALINA. They make eyes. A mating ritual begins.

CATALINA:
I think you must mean me?

MARIA:
Have I ever had eyes for anyone else? Tonight, we celebrate you, Francisco. Your victory for the viceroy is yet another feather in your cap.

CATALINA:
All these plumes will carry me away.

MARIA:
And then what would I do without Francisco?

CATALINA:
I love to keep you guessing.

MARIA:
That you do indeed. Let’s go find our dark corner.
CATALINA:
Not tonight.

MARIA:
You’ve put me off too long.

CATALINA:
These hands…have forgotten how to be gentle.

MARIA:
All more the reason to touch me now.

CATALINA:
Touch you where?

MARIA:
You pick.
CATALINA:
Ok. Roll over.

MARIA:
Like how.

CATALINA:
Play dead. And I’ll touch you wherever I feel like touching you.

MARIA:
You spoil me Francisco. This is my favorite game.

*MARIA rolls to the ground. CATALINA nuzzles her.*

MARIA:
I am made of tiny animals and I am crawling all over myself.

*CATALINA looks down at her pants, expecting the phantom tent-pole to rise but her pants are flat. MARIA is getting excited.*

MARIA:
I want to taste the air. To feel it inside my body!

*MARIA takes to writhing. She reaches out for CATALINA’S body but CATALINA grabs her hand.*
CATALINA:
You must not touch me.

MARIA:
You cannot call every shot Francisco. I want to put my hands places.

CATALINA:
I have wrestled you to the ground and now you will to do as I say.

MARIA:
You are not yourself tonight.

CATALINA:
I am never myself. Let that be a lesson to you.

*MARIA breaks her hand free from CATALINA’S grasp. She reaches for her manhood but finds nothing.*

MARIA:
We have fallen on hard times. It is not the same between us now.

CATALINA:
Times are hard and we have fallen into these times.

*CATALINA grabs MARIA and puts her mouth on MARIA’S mouth. This is a long and awkward kiss. It keeps going. MARIA keeps trying to touch FRANCISCO and CATALINA holds MARIA’S arms behind her back. MARIA pulls her mouth away from CATALINA’S.*

MARIA:
That’s all I get?

CATALINA:
For now.

*MARIA stands, pulls herself from the floor and almost exits. She stamps her feet and throws back her head, a flamenco style tantrum. She exits.*

*To the audience.*
CATALINA:
I don’t know how that went. I wonder how it feels to be that woman right now. I am also wondering what her name is.

This New World is a spicy place and I am growing a taste for it. It seems I was made for battle and seducing women and stealing. My hands smell like blood and money. At first, I was afraid my fraudulence would be found out, but when you are hero like my brother Francisco, people only view you from a distance. They never get too close so they never see you clearly. Now, I get away with everything. I am Catalina disguised as Francisco posing as hero, but making secret deals as a devil.

An ensemble lines up before CATALINA.

Before I know it, I go from man to monster.

An innocent man stands before her and CATALINA kills him.

I do whatever I want and for no reason at all.

A woman stands before her. CATALINA slaps her hard across the face.

Most of the time, I don’t recognize myself.

A violent tango begins with another woman. CATALINA begins to force herself upon a woman. The woman protests but CATALINA persists. CATALINA’S FATHER appears before her.

I could go on like this forever.

CATALINA’S FATHER:
Francisco?

CATALINA:
Father?

CATALINA’S FATHER:
You are not my son. I didn’t raise a demon. Look me in the eyes. What are you?

CATALINA:
It’s me father. Here am I.
CATALINA’S FATHER:
The body of my boy washed up on the shore. You pose as my son but you are the devil in
disguise. You deserve a slow death for murdering and impersonating my last remaining
heir.

CATALINA:
Father! It was a mistake. Look at me. Don’t you see-

CATALINA’S FATHER:
I’ll show you mercy by killing you quickly.

CATALINA’S FATHER draws his sword and sticks the blade at CATALINA ’S jugular.

CATALINA:
It won’t be that easy.

In a flash, CATALINA sticks her sword at her father’s jugular.

You won’t live to see your revenge.

CATALINA’S FATHER:
You’ve taken the last thing I lived for so what I do I care?

CATALINA:
You’re foolish to tempt me for I have many a bone to pick with you.

CATALINA kicks her father in the stomach. He ricochets back.

CATALINA’S FATHER:
I’ll be back with squadron ripe and ready to rip you to pieces.

CATALINA’S FATHER exits.

VOICE OF GOD:
Catalina?

CATALINA:
Stay away from me.

VOICE OF GOD:
This is what you do with your time on earth? Pillage? Steal? Exploit?

CATALINA:
I also hide out, elude death and go unpunished.
VOICE OF GOD:
You cannot keep running forever, Catalina.

CATALINA:
You can’t stop me.

VOICE OF GOD:
The acreage of earth is not limitless. One day, the thin ice you’re on will become thin air.

CATALINA:
Is that where you’re keeping Francisco? Give him back to me.

VOICE OF GOD:
He is safe from harm now. You saved him.

CATALINA:
You let Don Juan take my virginity. You took my brother from me. You’ve turned my father against me? I’ve got no greater ‘cause than to self-destruct.

VOICE OF GOD:
What about your autobiography?

CATALINA:
You write one.

VOICE OF GOD:
You can’t keep up like this.

CATALINA:
You made me like this.

VOICE OF GOD:
Don’t you want to change?

CATALINA is still and quiet for the longest moment in the play.

CATALINA:
I am so lonely on your planet earth.

GOD stands before CATALINA on the desert.

There you are.
GOD:
You don’t have to be alone.

CATALINA:
Oh. I want to be empty and I am running over like a waterfall. Take me. All these disparate parts, I surrender to you. Salvage these bits and make a better life from them.

CATALINA lies down in the grass.

Do with me what you will. I am leaving myself for dead.

GOD sits down next to CATALINA and places her head her lap.

GOD:
You are forgiven.

CATALINA:
I don’t deserve it.

VOICE OF GOD:
You know where to find me.

CATALINA:
I am a failure. I disgust myself.

VOICE OF GOD:
Return to church.

GOD continues to stroke CATALINA’s head and she falls into a deep sleep. Once GOD is sure CATALINA is asleep, she slips from beneath CATALINA’s head and slowly stands with her eyes on CATALINA. GOD begins to tiptoe out across the prairie, but CATALINA stirs, so GOD runs back to CATALINA’s side and pats her back until CATALINA is asleep again. Quietly, GOD exits. Time passes. It is now daylight on the prairie and CATALINA opens her eyes, squints, and yawns.

CATALINA:
Time to say good-bye, Autobiography. I am taking a candle to you and torching the past. I have been saved from earthly pursuits. I will return to the house of God cleansed of sin and conscience clear ready to spend the rest of my life genuflecting before my maker.

CATALINA waves good-bye and exits into a giant church. SHERIFF and EL CID enter. They peer at the horizon.
EL CID:
Which way you say?

SHERIFF:
Yonder.

EL CID:
Yonder?

SHERIFF:
Yonder.

EL CID:
He’ll come FROM yonder OR he went OVER YONDER?

SHERIFF:
He will come from where he went. FROM OVER yonder.

_The SHERIFF tosses his head in the direction of yonder._

EL CID:
He will come to where he goes, which is where we wait right now.

SHERIFF:
So yonder is as yonder was in either case. You follow?

EL CID:
Yes. Everywhere is yonder.

SHERIFF:
You do follow.

EL CID:
I do.

SHERIFF:
Your comprehension wins you a place at my side. I now pronounce you my official sidekick.

EL CID:
Your sidekick? I thought I was El Cid, the mountain o’er your valley? Your boulder of a bodyguard?
SHERIFF:
You’re my BACKUP.

EL CID:
Backup?

SHERIFF:
But I keep my backup on hand just in case of a misstep or a misfire, or anything else that goes amiss. I will need you at my side.

EL CID:
How can I be your backup, a sidekick and El Cid all at once? I’d like YOU to be MY backup too.

SHERIFF:
I’ll never be your backup. I am the official long arm of the law. The FRONT MAN for the viceroy. You must be MY back-up.

EL CID:
Well, I want to be the front man.

SHERIFF:
You cannot be the FRONT MAN any more than I can be your back-up.

EL CID:
But-

SHERIFF:
No BUTS, you hulking heap of hired help.

EL CID:
Fine. JEEZ! I’ll die for you.

SHERIFF:
We’ll no sooner die than God abandon us. You see, we are God’s back up, sidekick, front line and man all at once. We are tasked with ridding the new world of sinners. Beginning with this imposter sure to find himself any moment now on death’s door with you and me at the threshold.

*EL CID puffs up his massive self.*

EL CID:
I just want to kill him so bad. It’s no secret how I hate horse thieves, womanizers and con artists who disguise themselves as heroes. Who DOES he think he is?
SHERIFF:
Who do YOU think he is?

EL CID:
That I cannot say but I can say that man is no Francisco de Erauso. Even his lovers will
tell you that.

SHERIFF:
Have you been his lover?

EL CID:
Of course not but a few of his lovers have become my lovers because he refuses to satisfy
them.

SHERIFF:
You have bedded his bedfellows?

EL CID:
If you bed anyone these days you’re bedding his bedfellows. The whorehouses reek of
him. He is the stench smelled the New World over. But strangely, he beds his bedfellows
fully dressed. He touches them but is untouchable himself. 
And the whores find this untenable.

SHERIFF:
He will be touchable soon enough. In my company, he will know no such thing as an
arm’s length. He will die at my hand almost here and now.

EL CID:
You aim to touch him?

SHERIFF:
I wish to probe into his corpse before it rots and get his innards beneath my fingernails.

The SHERIFF grins big and slow and then his face grows stern.

I wish to tear asunder such a man to ensure it never grows back.

EL CID:
That’s wild.

The SHERIFF perks up.
SHERIFF:
What was that? Hooves? Footsteps?

EL CID:
Both. Let’s hide out and await our prey.

*EL CID and the SHERIFF hide out. CATALINA’S FATHER enters along with the PRIEST.*

CATALINA’S FATHER:
Are those his tracks?

PRIEST:
God only knows.

CATALINA’S FATHER:
Maybe we ought stop and pray to remind our heavenly father that he is on our side?

PRIEST:
Don’t let’s bother God now. We will bow down and give thanks when the imposter posing as your son is brought before God and served rightly his punishment.

CATALINA’S FATHER:
You are both holy and wholly correct, your grace.

*EL CID sneezes. The SHERIFF thumps EL CID. CATALINA’S FATHER hears EL CID’S Sneeze.*

CATALINA’S FATHER:
You heard that?

PRIEST:
I heard what you said but not what you heard to make you say: “you heard that?”

CATALINA’S FATHER:
Footsteps. Hooves. He is coming now. We must hide if we plan to ambush him.

PRIEST:
Indeed, we will ambush him.

*CATALINA’S FATHER and The PRIEST decide to hide in EL CID and the SHERIFF’S hiding spot. A scuffle ensues. More footsteps and hooves.*
PRIEST:
Excuse me.

SHERIFF:
Excuse me.

CATALINA’S FATHER:
Excuse me.

EL CID:
Excuse me?

ALL simultaneously sneeze.

ALL:
Excuse you.

SHERIFF:
And WHO might you be?

PRIEST:
I am a man of god. And who MIGHT you be?

SHERIFF:
I am a man of the law. Who GOES with you?

FATHER:
I am father to the brutally murdered Spanish hero who has an imposter posing beneath his cloak and dagger. And who goes with YOU?

EL CID:
I am back-up slash sidekick slash front man on hand for the frontline.

PRIEST:
God has united us on our mission and has offered us strength in numbers to defeat a force of darkness. Lucky are we to find an auspicious sign here before the house of the Lord. Now we know our demon here awaits us.

ALL shakes hand and ALL pat backs. There are congratulatory chortles.

SHERIFF:
Hold. Hark. Do you not hear footsteps? And hooves? I am sure our enemy approaches. And we must crouch and hide if we wish to ambush him.
PRIEST & EL CID & FATHER:
And ambush, we shall.

_The four hide out and wait for CATALINA. Hooves. Footsteps. MARIA enters. She tours the stage traveling near and far. Her searching vacillates between vigorous and half-hearted. She is sure and doubtful at once._

MARIA:
Come out Francisco. I know you’ve changed but there is no shame in change. It’s fine by me if you prefer strange finger games instead of bonafide love-making. I know you’re now a man of the lord, but what is eternity without spooning? God, will never touch you like I do. And I can never touch myself like you touch me even when I pretend that I am you touching me like only you can. ALAS, touching myself takes too much from me. I am weary of my own fingers. I ache in your wake. And as time lapses, my memories of you grow shorter and shorter in supply. Longing dismantles me.

_The four men stand and move toward MARIA._

Don’t you wonder what might have been if you could have both God and sin?

_The four men grab MARIA._

SHERIFF:
A decoy in broad day? Yet another sign thrust our way from heaven!

MARIA:
Your decoy? I hunt the same man as you. Francisco is a man unto himself and would never risk his hide on my behalf.

CATALINA’S FATHER:
Don’t you know foolish woman, my son, your Francisco is dead and an imposter hides beneath his cloak?

MARIA:
Wrong. I know Francisco to the bone and back.

CATALINA’S FATHER:
I looked the imposter in the eye.

MARIA:
You’ve never shared a bed with him.
SHERIFF:
We know all about your current bedfellow’s busybody bedding style.
That impotent imposter aims to lay claim to Francisco’s rightful conquests, but he lacks the anatomy.

MARIA:
Fling your falsehoods from your face and they will boomerang about.

EL CID:
Whores need not believe what wise men say.

PRIEST:
Help us catch the outlaw and you can be absolved of your sins. God will make room for you in heaven.

MARIA:
Oh, tell Father, how many men might I bed in heaven on a good day?

SHERIFF:
It is time we gag you. Have at her, sidekick slash back up.

EL CID:
Oh goody.

MARIA:
You dare bind me before the house of God?

CATALINA’S FATHER:
Decoys are far more effective alive than dead, so we will spare you for now.

MARIA:
Don’t think it’s the first time four men have tied me up at once.

PRIEST:
We'll ensure you take no pleasure in it.

MARIA:
In my mind, your testicles are in my mouth and his mouth too.

MARRA gestures toward EL CID.

PRIEST:
Gag her now.
The men bind and gag MARIA.

Now we wait.

They return to their hiding spots. MARIA protests through her gag, moaning and making garbled sounds without the use of her tongue. She wriggles and writhes everywhere she is not bound. She keeps it up. EL CID comes out of hiding.

EL CID:
Stop.

MARIA does not stop.

EL CID:
Shut up.

MARIA does not shut up.

EL CID:
FINE. No one cares about you! You can’t stand in our way.

EL CID returns to hiding. MARIA doesn’t quit. EL CID stands.

EL CID:
SHH!

MARIA grows louder, her gyrations more dramatic.

EL CID:
SHH!!!

EL CID stands.

EL CID:
I’m warning you!

EL CID rapidly approaches MARIA and raises a fist. She is relentless, unafraid. He begins pounding himself on the side of the head.

EL CID:
STOP! STOP! STOP! STOP! STOP! STOP! STOP! STOP! STOP! STOP!

EL CID continues shouting stop. THE SHERIFF comes out of hiding.
THE SHERIFF:
Enough.

*Neither EL CID nor MARIA stop.*

ENOUGH I SAID.
*There is no stopping them.*

I SAID ENOUGH.

*The cacophony grows.*

DO YOU HEAR ME?

*They do not hear him. They go town on themselves. CATALINA’S FATHER comes out of hiding.*

CATALINA’S FATHER:
They cannot persist like this! Such chaos will alert the imposter to our presence here and our cover will be blown.

THE SHERIFF:
Short of killing them, what do I do? They appear possessed. And to think, possessed before the house of god. The devil is everywhere. Get the priest.

*EL CID keeps hitting himself. He turns colors brighter and brighter. MARIA keeps speaking in tongues through the gag and moaning. Drool runs from her mouth. The gag is soaking wet.*

CATALINA’S FATHER:
Father!

THE PRIEST comes out hiding.

CATALINA’S FATHER:
You must do something father. These creatures are possessed and I fear they will alert the imposter to our presence here.

THE PRIEST:
Their madness is outside my realm of expertise. We need an exorcist.

THE SHERIFF:
How does one find this sort of fellow? Where does he reside? Find him quickly.
THE PRIEST:
Give me a minute. In my mind, there’s an oracle and I am consulting it.

*THE PRIEST rubs his temples and begins speaking in tongues.*

THE SHERIFF:
What does it say? ANSWER ME!

*The PRIEST speaks in tongues.*

I feel myself slipping.

*THE SHERIFF begins to slide as though the heads of his femurs have come loose from his hip sockets. He slides and falls to and fro like a drunkard in a mosh pit.*

THE SHERIFF:
No! Now, I am coming apart! Not now. Please god! I am on a mission.

*CATALINA’S FATHER grabs THE PRIEST by the collar as he continues to move deeper into himself.*

CATALINA’S FATHER:
What says your mind’s eye now? For no reason, our allies have come off the rails with our enemy so close I can smell him.

*CATALINA’S FATHER sniffs the air.*

DO SOMETHING! DO SOMETHING! DO SOMETHING!

*CATALINA’S FATHER continues repeating himself. He gets down on his knees. He squeezes his hands together so firm in the prayer position that his knuckles go white while his face turns red as he sweats and shakes. THE PRIEST clears his throat. He shakes his head violently. Music. Everyone freezes and then strike a pose. THE PRIEST begins to sing.*

THE PRIEST:
We are made from fool’s gold
We cannot do what we’re told
We wrestle with facts
Get caught in the cracks
While our enemy escapes tenfold

No one knows how to play fair
I turn and see no one there
No one will cut to the chase
No one can keep a straight face.
While our enemy dances on air.

ALL make faces.

ALL:
Our play is getting away
Come back another day
We’ll get the facts straight
We’ll play it first-rate
And give you a reason to stay


THE PRIEST:
Thank you so much for coming tonight. This has been… My God. I wish a had planned a speech…Does anyone else? We…umm… decided collectively backstage to put the ending in a new place. And we’re not sure it works where we put it but…Um

CATALINA’S FATHER:
Let’s put it to you all…Were you expecting an ending…there?

EL CID:
Considering that is was rough. Totally new material for us.

MARIA:
I think we held it together.

EL CID:
Yeah, I’m not sure that was exactly the right spot.

CATALINA’S FATHER:
That’s what I was trying to say.

EL CID:
We’ve really struggled with telling a story that reflects the real Catalina-

THE PRIEST:
Why don’t we direct our questions to the audience? What was your experience? Who thought Catalina was a work of fiction? Had you assumed we made her up?

Before anyone can answer, CATALINA’S head comes out of the church.
CATALINA:
Um. Guys? What’s going on?

THE PRIEST:
Sorry. Did we do curtain call with out you? I am SO sorry! Around of applause for our Catalina.

*THE PRIEST indicates that the audience ought applaud for CATALINA.*

CATALINA:
Are we not going to finish?

CATALINA’S FATHER:
The ending hasn’t been...working and we have the scholar from Latin American Studies here tonight-

CATALINA:
The play wasn’t over.

CATALINA’S FATHER:
We’re still in previews. It’s a work in progress.

*Crickets.*

THE PRIEST:
Can someone turn the houselights on?

CATALINA’S FATHER:
Things weren’t really landing… where ... Like… For example, that moment when God-
God, can you come back out here for a moment.

*God reenters.*

GOD:
What?

THE PRIEST:
We need to talk about your exit. I think you’re taking WAY too much time. Oh and Maria,

MARIA:
What?
THE PRIEST:
Were you adding pauses or did you go up on your lines? Your speech was too long.

MARIA:
I always take several beats in there. I’m authoring silence.

THE PRIEST:
Well, you lost track of time.

MARIA:
You can’t direct me from inside the scene.

THE PRIEST:
It’s gotten longer and longer every night.

*MARIA mimics the priest.*

MARIA:
That’s all I’m saying.

GOD:
Should I get out of costume?

CATALINA:
No. We can’t end now.

CATALINA’S FATHER:
Front of house is already bringing in snacks and wine.

*FRONT OF HOUSE enters with snacks and wine on rolling trays. The trays are brought onstage.*

People need wine and snacks to think straight.

CATALINA:
So let them have snacks and drink wine. We can keep going. My best stuff is coming.

CATALINA’S FATHER:
We’re exhausted. Can’t you be happy to be done for the night?

EL CID:
Aren’t you starving? I knew we should have had an intermission.
THE PRIEST:
Maybe an intermission goes right here? We have to stay open to what the play is
becoming.

*EL CID turns out to the audience.*

EL CID:
Actually, the whole rehearsal process has been a bit of bitch. Cause um I’ve been on this
ketogenic diet. I had epilepsy when I was kid and I thought it was gone but when
rehearsals started, I had this one grand mal …It was really bad. I was in the ambulance on
the first day of rehearsal. And ever since then, I’ve had to eat exclusively medium chain
fatty acids, which is basically coconut oil. Doctor’s orders. I’ve been living on coconut
oil for three weeks. It’s made for some very strange bowel movements. I bet it’s hard for
you to imagine what all is trapped inside you and how much of it. If you think you’re
regular, think again. If you think you drink plenty of coffee and that everything you
consume is making it’s way out, think again. And again. And again. A week on coconut
oil will reveal a whole other gastrointestinal reality. As it turns out, my guts were loaded
with sewage. Digestive upset is the modern plague. We shit in water and flush that shit
and then later drink that same shitty shit water. It incredible how dirty it is inside us.
Unbelievable textures. Colors not in the rainbow were up my ass.

*EL CID wells up.*

I had no idea what was inside me. Making me sick. All this time. So my energy has been
off at rehearsal. I haven’t brought my best self. I’ve snapped at people a lot. Slept through
notes more than once. I’ve been alienating everyone.

I have to go to the bathroom.

*MARIA puts an arm around CATALINA.*

MARIAB: How you feeling?

CATALINA: Confused. Did you know-

MARIAB: I couldn’t talk them out of it.

CATALINA: This is like an actor dream.
MARIA:
They were right. The play is too long.

CATALINA:
But the story has to-

MARIA:
Does it?

CATALINA:
I need an arc. A point A and A point B.

*MARIA lights a cigarette.*

How can you smoke if you’re vegan?

MARIA:
There are no animal products in tobacco and organic tobacco is a really sustainable crop. And it helps keep the pounds off.

CATALINA:
Sometimes I feel like only one not on a diet. All the other actors keep talking about what they eat and what they don’t-

MARIA:
You were definitely a little thicker when rehearsal started.

CATALINA:
It’s not a diet. It’s called CHARACTER RESEARCH. How many days do you think Catalina spent starving? I’m trying to build empathy for her. Oh I forgot. You didn’t go to college. You’re a… raw talent.

MARIA:
Don’t confuse method acting with an eating disorder.

CATALINA:
I want my art to impact my experience in a real way. Why else are we doing this?

MARIA:
That kind of thinking makes me hate acting. Just see a therapist-

CATALINA:
With what money? My stipend for this show?
MARIA mimics CATALINA. And then thinks for a moment.

MARIA:
Seriously, does acting make you stupid? I mean, it’s stupid to choose a hard life and to be poor for no reason.

CATALINA:
I think it makes you self-involved and it changes your priorities.

MARIA:
Like a good role is more important than a healthy lifestyle?

CATALINA:
And what gets you a good role anyway? I got cast ‘cause I have a more androgynous look than the other actresses.

MARIA:
And I got cast ‘cause I’m a woman of color.

CATALINA:
No you’re not.

MARIA:
I am too. I’m half Mexican. On my mother’s side.

…

CATALINA:
Well, you’re so good in this. I learn so much from being onstage with you.

MARIA:
Thanks. You’re great too.

CATALINA:
I’ve felt so lost. I still feel so confused by so many moments and the tone. I don’t know what we’re after yet.

MARIA:
Keep it in perspective. It’s… community theatre.

MARIA is quiet for a moment.
MARIA:
Lower the stakes and you’ll relax.

CATALINA:
But if the stakes aren’t high, couldn’t I be at home painting my nails?

MARIA:
Have you ever spent a whole night alone at home by yourself? It’s so sad and boring. And I’m too broke to entertain myself the way I would like to be entertained. And all my friends are always at rehearsal rehearsing something. And I’m single ‘cause none of these losers are worth going out with. ‘Cause they can’t wine and dine me like I wanna be wined and dined. Thus, I have no creature comforts. So I’m wasting my life in this warehouse.

*MARIA puts out her cigarette and exits. CATALINA is alone onstage with the audience for a moment. She looks up.*

CATALINA:
Um. If you guys have any feedback, I’d love to hear it.

*JAIME NICOLOPUS is a plant in the audience. He raises his hand.*

JAIME:
Tengo algunas sugerencias si quieres escucharme un ratito.

CATALINA:
Sorry, I tried to learn Spanish for the role but-

JAIME:
Aye perdón! Let’s speak English then.

CATALINA:
Where’s your accent from?

JAIME:
California. But I lived in the jungles of Mexico for quite some time. I forget that I’m American.

CATALINA:
What brings you to theatre?

JAIME:
I lecture on literature from the conquest. I’m the guest for the Q & A.
CATALINA:
GOD! Where were you like six weeks ago when we started rehearsal?

JAIME:
Well, I’m here now.

CATALINA:
I don’t know what to ask an expert.

JAIME:
Why not?

CATALINA:
Don’t you know a lot about Catalina?

JAIME:
What do you mean by a lot?

You might be the person on earth who knows the most about Catalina.
Right now. You are playing Catalina, not reading about her. Not writing a dissertation.
You tell me what there is to know.

CATALINA:
She’s come clean with God but she hasn’t made peace with her fellow man. She feels that
being forgiven in a divine way is not enough. We as humans have to come to terms with
our lives on earth.

JAIME:
I think you just finished the play.

CATALINA:
No. We have to fulfill this desire onstage. What would bring her peace? How will she go
on living?

JAIME:
That is the question. Take a bow.

JAIME begins to applaud. The other actors enter the space.

MARIA:
We got an idea.
CATALINA:
What?

GOD puts down a tarp in the center of the stage. CATALINA’S FATHER, THE PRIEST and EL CID surround CATALINA. On the count of three, they ambush CATALINA. They pin her to the tarp center stage.

CATALINA:
What the fuck you guys?

MARIA unscrews the lid of the jar of coconut oil and takes a handful. She smears CATALINA with it. She takes out another handful and smears herself with the oil. The rest of the cast forms a ring around the two women.

MARIA:
We are going to make physical the questions Catalina wrestles with!

CATALINA:
Can’t we just?...I’m tired. I want to go home. I don’t care anymore.

CATALINA’S FATHER:
Didn’t you say the show must go on? Then let’s go.

ALL: (except Catalina)
NOW IS NO TIME TO BE LAZY!
NOW IS NO TIME TO BE LAZY!

The cast begins to sing and dance around CATALINA.

ALL: (except Catalina)
Just kidding
We were only kidding.
We wanted you
To have something at stake.
To truly partake.
In our revelry.

The cast begins to guide the audience back to their seats while continuing to sing.

So please a take seat.
You’ve had something to eat.
And a bit to drink.
The intermission.
Of intermissions.
Was an expedition.

So the show must go on.
We aren’t fucking with you.
Or manipulating you.
This is our idea.
Of a good time.

Please have a good time.
Do have a good time.
The very best time of your life!

Big finish. The cast clears the tarp, the wine, and the oil from the stage. From within the church, CATALINA calls out to the rest of them. EL CID holds MARIA with her mouth covered. The men bang on the door of the chapel.

CATALINA:
Knock for forever if it suits you for your knocking cannot touch me. For now I am a little kitten in the house of God warming my paws over a big bright candle at the alter of the Lord. Alone in prayer and licking my wounds.

The men keep MARIA’S mouth covered. They exchange glances and change tactics.

THE PRIEST:
My child, we only wish for a word with you.

CATALINA:
By all means, come on in.

THE PRIEST eyes the other men.

THE PRIEST:
No one can touch the imposter in the church ‘else we ourselves go to the devil.

EL CID:
What then?

SHERIFF:
Brandish the decoy.

Calling to CATALINA:
THE PRIEST:
Out here, in the open air is the only true place to absolve yourself of sin. Come out and make peace with us. Someone here wishes to see you.

CATALINA:
I know you’re holding my Maria captive so that you can lure me out and take my life.

_The men exchange more looks while MARIA screams._

THE PRIEST:
Don’t you wish to save her?

CATALINA:
I want to make true peace with you all, but you want to kill me. So, how can I come out to you? Will it make the world any better to let you have at me? When I open these windows, sunshine enters. I see birds and trees. And when I close them, I say good-bye to rain and cold. For the first time in my life, I am safe. And I wish all people could feel as I do now.

THE SHERIFF:
You can’t know peace-

EL CID:
Else you’d be ready to die as punishment for your sins.

CATALINA:
We’re all sinners and if I give myself up, I make you even guiltier.

THE PRIEST:
Heaven promises a world without end. Aren’t you ready to rest?

CATALINA:
Heaven is right here.

CATALINA’S FATHER:
Give yourself up and we spare this woman.

CATALINA:
Maria, do you wish to go on living?

MARIA:
Not without you.
CATALINA:
Speak the truth Maria, for they will kill us both no matter what.

EL CID:
The sooner you give yourself up, the quicker your death will be.

MARIA:
I want only to see you once in daylight. That is my dying wish.

CATALINA:
Here goes something and nothing all at once.

*CATALINA jumps out the window. CATALINA'S FATHER catches her.*

CATALINA’S FATHER:
At last, I have you in my clutches.

*CATALINA’S FATHER begins choking CATALINA.*

CATALINA:
I was destined to die by my father’s hand.

CATALINA’S FATHER:
You dare call me father?

THE PRIEST:
You can’t kill him now. We need a confession first.

EL CID:
I aim to hang her from that there steeple.

CATALINA:
You’re finishing the job your sister started back in the Basque country.

*CATALINA’S FATHER stops.*

CATALINA’S FATHER:
Who are you?

CATALINA:
Your daughter.

CATALINA’S FATHER:
That cannot be. My Catalina is dead.
CATALINA:  
Not yet. She is dying in your arms like her brother died at her sword.

THE PRIEST:  
A woman?

SHERIFF: *(Seething)*  
He lies.

EL CID:  
Only one way to find out. Who’ll do the honors?

*SHERIFF grabs CATALINA.*

CATALINA’S FATHER:  
How could you have killed him?

CATALINA:  
It was an accident.

CATALINA’S FATHER:  
Well, this is not!

*CATALINA’S FATHER socks CATALINA in the stomach as SHERIFF pins her down.*

THE PRIEST:  
Don’t break her jaw or her hands for her confession must be spoken and signed.

CATALINA:  
Stay strong Maria.

MARIA:  
You’re not Francisco.

CATALINA:  
Only his twin sister. I tried to live up to his love of you.

EL CID:  
In my back pocket, there’s a noose with your name on it.

SHERIFF:  
I know how to get you to talk.
THE SHERIFF pulls down CATALINA'S pants. MARIA cries out!

CATALINA:
You’ll let them do this, father?

THE SHERIFF thrusts himself into CATALINA! MARIA cries!

CATALINA’S FATHER:
How can I save you now?

THE SHERIFF flips CATALINA over on to her belly. He drags her pelvis up until she is on all fours. He grabs some hair on the back of her head.

SHERIFF:
But it don’t look like a woman.

EL CID:
But how does it feel?

SHERIFF:
Like any other.

EL CID:
Don’t matter how they look. Just close your eyes. They’re all the same inside.

To the audience:

CATALINA:
I’m sorry you’re seeing this. What I’d give to have made it up but this isn’t fiction…I just couldn’t write it down.

THE PRIEST:
You must confess.

MARIA:
Don’t give them what they don’t deserve.

CATALINA:
Oh my Maria, sweet lover to both my brother and me, these men can’t touch us. Our truest parts will stay immaculate the way they came. Shall we just agree to meet again in heaven?

MARIA:
Or to exchange brimstones somewhere else in the afterlife?
CATALINA:
Whichever the case, I’ll go there with you.

To the men:

CATALINA:
I will confess because I relinquish all ties to earth and to this flesh before God and man.

THE PRIEST:
Get down on your knees.

She does. A breath. A look.

CATALINA:
It was quite some time past when I awoke one day with nothing to lose.
And I thought, the world is at my fingertips but I want it in the palm of my hand.
But the world was cruel to me, so I thought my life was meaningless. I thought myself a joke.
Because I was a woman
Then I wasn’t
I was a man
Then I wasn’t
Then I was a monster
Then I was saved.
I went looking for family and I found God instead
And we hobbled through land covered by dark clouds
And over stormy seas.
Miracle after miracle made the wide world open even more.
Now, the tide of time has washed up my many parts
But still I am not the sum total of myself.
I go to the light on one leg.

CATALINA’S FATHER:
Don’t mince words daughter. The devil took hold of your soul and turned you into a thief, a villain, and a murderer.

THE PRIEST:
I deem this confession complete. We have ample cause to carry out a death sentence.

Thrusts a confession before her.

Sign here Catalina.
She does.

SHERIFF:
Make ready the noose.

EL CID:
Should we hang this witchy woman from the steeple so she may serve as a beacon? Like butterflies to nectar, her floating corpse would bring to us the very worst in human kind and we could keep murdering murderers forever.

CATALINA:
Good-bye Maria.

CATALINA turns the audience.

We made it to the shore again. With no surprises or unlikely conclusions but still we close like curtains.

SHERIFF:
String her up to the steeple.

EL CID:
Strip her naked first.

MARIA:
She will be cold.

CATALINA’S FATHER:
Good-bye Catalina.

CATALINA is stripped naked. She does not fight. The captors place a rope around her neck and string her up. EL CID shoves CATALINA and her body drops and dangles.

EL CID:
What about the other woman?

SHERIFF:
There’s a river about one league west of here. We’ll drown her there.

THE PRIEST:
Let me baptize her first.

SHERIFF:
Come on then.
SHERIFF:
You can find a big rock and smash her head in first.

CATALINA'S FATHER nods.

THE SHERIFF:
Will you still be able to baptize her with her head smashed in?

THE PRIEST:
Wouldn’t be the first time.

EL CID:
It takes a village to properly execute a sinner.

The men begin to exit with MARIA as she speaks to the swinging corpse of CATALINA. They freeze.

MARIA:
There are no words that equal good-bye, so I’ll refrain from uttering another.

MARIA looks at her captors.

EL CID:
To your death then.

They exit. The stage is silent for a moment. CATALINA’S body swings back and forth. CATALINA’S FATHER returns to the stage for a moment to look at his daughter’s body hang in the breeze.

CATALINA’S FATHER:
Good-bye Catalina.

CATALINA’S FATHER starts to exit again but he notices something falling from between CATALINA’S legs. It is a scroll.

CATALINA’S FATHER:
What’s this?

He wants to look away but he can’t. He wants to exit but he can’t. He just can’t. He takes a deep breath. He takes hold of the scroll between his daughter’s legs and pulls the rest of it out of her with one sharp tug. He opens the scroll. What beautiful calligraphy.
CATALINA’S FATHER:
Word from the Pope:

The pope?

“May this decree ring loud and clear the old and new world over. The one we call Catalina de Erauso may be made of questionable anatomical structures. He or she may comprise parts unknown to us. But the Lieutenant Nun has proven herself heroic in battle and a true force for the good of mankind. Thus, she has gained official permission from the holy and catholic church to live peacefully the rest of her natural days dressed in the garb of a man or however else may please her. Any man who challenges this decree will be punished by death.”

CATALINA’S FATHER looks at his daughter.

I will cut you down.

CATALINA’S FATHER cuts her down and CATALINA’S body falls. CATALINA’S body lays lifeless on the ground.

CATALINA’S FATHER:
Catalina?

CATALINA does not stir.

Are you still in there?

CATALINA does not move.

I deserve this.

CATALINA’S FATHER sits on the ground.

Your mother didn’t want to send you away.

Grass moves. Wind blows. CATALINA does nothing.

But I insisted that we were well represented in the house of God. I wanted a limb of my family tree to stay behind in the Old World while we sought our fortune in the new one.

I wanted our blood spread far and wide. But by the time we finally came to the New World, there was no going back for what we left behind.

Birds. Breeze.
Then your mother was taken from us. How I wanted to go back for you but by then, you were a stranger I couldn’t take in.

CATALINA’S FATHER stands.

You must know now.

CATALINA’S FATHER looks around.

How wide the world is.

CATALINA’S FATHER looks at CATALINA’S unmoving body.

Or perhaps you now see it small now. Maybe it is a pea to you. It is still too much for me.

CATALINA’S FATHER looks up to the sky.

In any case,

If you see

your mother

or

your brother

Come find me

In a heartbeat

CATALINA’S FATHER takes a giant stone and raises it over his head. He drops it on his own head. Nothing. CATALINA’S FATHER stands and scales the wall of the chapel. He jumps off the chapel but lands on his feet.

CATALINA’S FATHER:
I must go on I guess. Good-bye daughter.

CATALINA’S FATHER kisses his daughter good-bye.

A few moments pass.
CATALINA’S FATHER exits.

CATALINA’S FATHER reenters and scales the side of the chapel and jumps once again. He finally exits.

Stillness.

CATALINA begins to move ever so slightly. She rolls a little and then rises slowly.

CATALINA: What is it like to digest a whole human life in an hour and twenty minutes?

Thank you for coming all this way with me.

I am so close to saying good-bye to you for good.

Autobiography, how do you feel about Mexico?

‘Cause that’s where we are now

And I am a very old man.

Everyone here calls me Antonio.

If anyone ever questions me, I have one trusty document, a decree from a Pope, which lets me be free.

I found it by my side when I rose and stumbled blindly north.

I have been alone for a very long time.

A mule appears.

Another mule appears.

Another mule appears.

A few more mules appear.

Then we see some mules.

Mules enter from the lobby.
Out of the corner of every eye, there are more and more mules.

CATALINA:
You see, I had to keep going.

I found my future when I faced the horizon.

The mules slow dance.

The mules nuzzle one another’s withers.

The mules find grass on the ground.

The mules make soft noises with their hooves.

The mules make soft noises with their mouths.

CATALINA:
I grew curious about the pit in my stomach.

Was there missing part of me making itself manifest?

A part of me even God never spoke of?

Why

had I so stubbornly decided to be something?

That my life amounted to adventures?

Did I just want to have something to say when someone spoke to me?

Or was there something the world needed to know about me?

Was there a moral to my story?

On the longest leg of my journey to Mexico.

I asked myself just these kinds of questions.

Every day

Every day
Every day

Every day

Thousands and thousands of hours I account for in questions.
With only one actual question.
Regarding regret,

What, if anything, was my true regret in life?

**CATALINA searches the face of everyone in the room for a bit of wisdom.**

It was wrong to kill those mules.

So now I keep all the mules I can.

I keep them close.

I brush them.

I never make them carry anything.

These mules are my best friends.

I love them.

It feels good to love them.

And to rarely talk to people

Why would I when I am writing your sequel?

Called my whole life ahead of me.

Dear sweet you, Autobiography.
You and these mules are my very best friends.

END OF PLAY
SLUMBER PARTY
By Elizabeth Anne Doss
CHARACTERS:
BETTY: 16
BEN: 15
BETSEY: 16
BETH: 16

PLACES:
Betty’s driveway
A cliff side primitive campsite
PROLOGUE

BEN and BETTY are in BETTY’s driveway. BEN’s backpack and guitar case are on the ground. We find them deep inside an awkward pause. Ben halfheartedly rides the skateboard. He turns to BETTY and looks at her a moment before saying:

BEN:  
Your hair is getting long.

BETTY flicks her hair over her shoulder and looks away.  
BEN rides around some more.

BEN:  
Got a new skateboard.

BETTY:  
New as your new girlfriend?

BEN looks down at his shoes.  
He flips the board with his feet.

BEN:  
How was your birthday?

BETTY:  
Before or after you broke up with me?

BEN:  
Mostly, I meant… after.

BETTY:  
Well, it was totally whatever and awful.

BEN:  
Sorry.

BETTY:  
My step-mom made me a Smurf cake just to spite me. She “just hates that I’m growing up soOOOOOOOOO fast.”

BEN:  
You are.

A look from BETTY.
We ALL are.

BETTY:
Shut up, brown-noser. There’s no adult ass to kiss around here.

*Ben looks around and then to the ground.*
*More skateboard emotional avoidance.*

We got cable. That was my birthday present.

*Ben starts to say something optimistic but Betty shuts it down with a cold hard glare.*
*More silence.*

They didn’t even sing me “happy birthday”, so I got “emotional.” Then the Step-mother called me “a spoiled little princess” and banished me to my bedroom.

Dad brought me the cake for a midnight snack. But then I ate the whole thing… so I spent the night spewing blue barf out my bedroom window and onto the herb garden, which earned me a twenty-minute tongue-lashing for “ruining the parsley.”

BEN:
You’re too old for Smurfs.

BETTY:
Duh.

*Ben shrugs helplessly.*

‘Twas a typical evil Step-mother humiliation tactic. To conjure nostalgia when I’m already weak. She knows smurfs alone are my only happiness now, so she rubs my face in them when I’m blue.

BEN:
Bet she was trying to make you feel better.

BETTY:
Yeah, right.

BEN:
You told her about our… separation?

BETTY:
I don’t tell her shit.
**BETTY** pulls a cigarette from her pocket and lights it. She blows smoke awkwardly at **BEN**.

**BEN:**
Where’d you get those?

**BETTY:**
Beth’s foster sister, Betsey, has a fake ID.

**BETTY inhales and exhales a little too expertly.**

**BETTY:**
I’ve gotten really good at smoking. I don’t even cough anymore or anything.

**BEN:**
That’s awesome since you hate your life.

**BETTY:**
I hate my life NOW!

**BETTY glares at BEN.**

And who’s fault is that?

**BETTY keeps glaring at BEN.**
Then she looks away.

I told my dad to take that job in Texas.

**BEN:**
WHAT?
Why?

**BETTY:**
Will you marry Eliza if I move away?

**BEN:**
WE’RE going to get married.
I just need to experience another woman first.

**BETTY:**
While I wait around?
BEN:
You can mess around too. But just only fingering. Just third-base only. You’re not ready to-

BETTY:
How far have you gone with her?

BEN:
That’s personal.

BETTY:
DOUBLE STANDARD!
Answer me.

BEN:
Betty, she’s… like her body is… you know. She’s like a woman already.

*BEN gulps.*
*Tears well in BETTY’S eyes.*

Hey, I never wanted to hurt you.

BETTY:
Well, I’ve already gone so much farther than third.

BEN:
I’ll kick his ass!

BETTY:
You don’t know HER and you wouldn’t believe how beautiful SHE looks naked.

BEN:
Hey!

*BEN eyes get big.*

I’ve seen Eliza naked!

*BETTY’S eyes grow wide and her mouth gets big.*

BETTY:
You haven’t even seen ME naked!
BEN:
You don’t have pubes yet!

BETTY:
They’re blonde, asshole.

BEN:
Well, you’re like a total prude.

BETTY:
EXCUSE ME?

BEN:
‘I had to beg you for that hand job.
And you acted like it was a punishment.

BETTY: (incredulous)
It WAS.
I lost that round of truth or dare.

BEN:
Well, Eliza like hands jobs AND blows jobs.

BETTY:
Because SHE’S the biggest SLUT in New Mexico!

BEN:
You’re the biggest LESBIAN in New Mexico!

BETTY:
You wish that were true.

BEN:
I get that you’re mad, but Texas does suck!
So don’t move there!

BETTY:
End it with her!

BEN:
I CAN’T.
She calls me every day totally freaked out!
SOMEONE duct-taped a dead rat to her locker.
SOMEONE stuck cow testicles in her backpack.
She wants my dad to investigate.

BETH:
Sounds like SOMEONE has a mental problem.

BEN:
You would know.
You’re the insanity expert.

*BETTY grits her teeth.*
*Her eyebrows go crazy.*

Believe me, I’m more pissed at myself than you are at me.

BETTY:
You don’t know shit about how much I hate you.

BEN:
Leave Eliza alone.

BETTY:
You leave Eliza alone.

BEN:
I can’t.

BETTY:
Cause you’re a third-base fiend?

BEN:
It’s… complicated.

BETTY:
Excuses.

BEN:
Is that a poem in your pocket?

*BETTY glares at BEN.*

BETTY:
No.

BEN:
Betty.

BETTY:
NO!

BEN:
You know I know it is.

BETTY:
Go away.

BEN:
Read it to me.

BETTY:
So you can jack-off to it?

BEN:
Because I love your poetry!

BETTY puts out her cigarette.

BETTY:
You aren’t worth it.

BEN:
Come on.

Outrage from BETTY.
Again, indignant eyebrows.
Silence.
Stillness.
BETTY pulls the poem out of her pocket.

Second grade’s
slings and arrows
Came from the arms
of an army of cupids.
Open heart punctures
Poured out a sea of our blood.
Upon which we sailed for seven years.
Until our ship hit rock bottom.
Irrevocably smashing my treasure chest
Infinitely wrecked I was
the day I swam to shore.
And saw your hand
in her bathing suit.

_BETTY wads up the poem and then tears it up._

_BEN:_
What does the ship symbolize?

_BETTY:_
Our love, you shit fountain.

_BEN falls to his knees._

_BEN:_
Our love is not a shipwreck, Betty. I just started loving Eliza too. And you and I were broken up the week / she and I-

_BETTY:_
WE WERE WHAT?

_BEN:_
Come one, we have been on again off again since the second grade!

_BETTY:_
NEVER FOR MORE THAN A DAY OR TWO!
Until NOW.
Now, it’s off for good.

_BEN:_
Don’t say that.

_BETTY:_
You can’t stop me.

_BEN:_
You said you wanted an open relationship-

_BETTY:_
When I was like 10-

_BEN:_
You can’t do this to us.
BETTY: 
There is no “us” ‘cause there is no YOU. YOU were my “boyfriend” but now you’re “no one”.

BEN: 
BETTY!

BEN: 
What we have is special. 
What we have is forever.

*BETTY makes an “oh yeah” face at BEN.* 
*BEN makes a “yeah” face back.* 
*BETTY furrows her brow.* 
*BEN kicks the ground.* 
*BETTY kicks the skateboard.* 
*BEN looks away from BETTY.*

BEN: 
Even if you don’t believe me, I am sorry.

BETTY: 
If you were sorry, you’d fix it.

BEN: 
Eliza’s pregnant.

*A flash of something across BETTY’S face.* 
*She begins to ramble.*

BETTY: 
So anyway, I’m spending the weekend with Beth. We’re going camping. Maybe we’ll meet some wild hot mountain men.

BEN: 
She’s been with, like, a lot of other guys, so she doesn’t know if it’s mine.

*BETTY speaks even faster.*

BETTY: 
Betsey’s coming too. You know, she’s 17 and emancipated now? They’ve been planning this trip for their entire lives and they invited me along. As the extra special guest. Also, they’ve been planning a ritual and supposedly the ritual has a surprise ending.
BEN:
You can’t tell anyone.
Her dad is a total asshole.
He’ll kill her.

BETTY:
It’s gonna be amazing! I just don’t know what to wear! I hate camping clothes.

BEN:
I’m going to give her a ride to the clinic once it’s far enough along to-

BETTY:
Maybe they’re going to bring mushrooms, which I’ve never done, but I’m so ready for something psychedelic. You know, they were using Peyote in mom’s treatment, so I think it might be really good for me to try it too. But don’t say anything. That was totally hush hush and it must stay hush hush forever. ‘Cause what if my Mom gets out one day? She’d be SO embarrassed if she knew all the things people say about her. But I’ve only told Betsey and Beth ‘cause I tell them EVERYTHING. And they were a little impressed ‘cause they haven’t DONE peyote yet ‘cause they heard it makes you SICK. And they only like drugs that make them feel GOOD. Shrooms can make you REALLY sick too, so maybe that’s NOT the surprise they’re planning? Maybe we’ll do ecstasy!

BEN:
Those girls are freaks.
Don’t go with them.

BETTY:
You don’t even know them!

BEN:
But everything you say they say creeps me out!

BETTY:
Do not talk shit about the only two people in the world that love me!

BEN:
They don’t even go to school.

BETTY:
Beth home schools and Betsey is emancipated.

BEN:
Weirdos!
BETTY covers her ears.

BETTY:  
I can’t hear you!
I can’t hear you!

BETTY starts singing.

la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la

BEN takes BETTY’S hands from her ears and holds them for a moment.  
BETTY is quiet.  
They look for a long time into one another’s eyes.  
BEN picks up his guitar.

BEN:
I wrote you a song.

BETTY:  
So?

BEN:  
So can I sing it to you?

BETTY:  
Since when do you care if I care?

BEN sings:

BEN:  
We are just kids  
There on the park bench  
Eatin’ popcicles  
Freckled by sun  
And just when  
The lifeguard whistled  
We jumped in the deep end  
One by one

We are just kids  
Down in the creek bed  
Slippin’ on rocks  
All covered in moss
Playin’ guitar
Swingin’ from ropes
I carved your name in my car
You blew smoke down my throat

*BETTY looks at BEN, her heart in her eyes.*

**BETTY:**
What are you gonna name it?

**BEN:**
She’s not gonna have it.

**BETTY:**
You can still name it.

**BEN:**
Betty.

**BETTY:** *(softly)*
Just get out of here.

**BEN:**
Betty no.

**BETTY:**
Shush!

**BEN:**
I’m sorry.

**BETTY:**
Too late.

*BETTY begins shoving BEN.*

**BEN:**
Betty! Stop!
It’s not a shipwreck!

*BETTY takes BEN by the arm and hurls him off of the curb, which is really the front of the proscenium of the stage.*
BEN:
NOOOOO!!!!!
It hurts.
Stop. Stop. Stop.
Watch your temper.
See what you did?
I’m dead now.
Owwwwww!
Owwwwww!!!
OWWWWWWW!
Ouch.

*BEN continues to yell all the way down as he stands just in front of the audience. BETTY stands frozen making a grotesque face totally absorbed in her fantasy.*

*Silence.*

*Ben stands on his skateboard.*

Seriously, watch it.
You’re a mess these days.

BETTY:
Goodbye Ben.
BEN:
I’ll call you later.

BETTY:
Don’t call me ever again.

BEN:
Whatever.
I’ll call you tomorrow.
Take like a hot bath or something.

*BEN skateboards away on his skateboard.*
*BETTY glares in the direction BEN left as tears fill her eyes.*
*She chokes on a sob when BEN reenters.*

BETTY:
I thought I told to/ leave me alone.
BEN:
I forgot.
I got you something.

Ben tosses a wrapped present to Betty

BETTY:
I don’t want it.

BEN:
Yeah, you do.
Open it.

BETTY:
Fuck off.

BEN:
Open it.

Still pissed, Betty opens the present.
It’s a copy of Rapunzel.

BETTY: (softly)
Rapunzel.

BEN:
Yeah, you know.
Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your…

BETTY:
It was my/ favorite-

BEN:
But then your dog... (insert nasty thing that the dog did gesture.)
Didn’t y’all her bury like under that tree?

BETTY:
Didn’t I kick you off my private property?

BEN:
Don’t you want to read to me?

BETTY:
I’m getting my twenty-two, dirt bag.
BEN:
Must be hard.

BETTY:
What?

BEN:
To haul around that heart of stone.

BETTY:
GET OUT OF HERE!

BEN:
I’m going.
GEEZ!
Happy 16th!!!

_BEN skates away humming the tune of the song he sang._
_BETTY stares at her Rapunzel._
_BLACKOUT_
BETSEY, BETH and BETTY stand at the edge of a cliff. Each wears an identical handmade “friendship” necklace. BETH has a satchel around her waist that holds THE GREAT BOOK. It’s looks like NEW MEXICO in maybe 1996: a primitive camp site in a national park. Layers of rock stack sky high. A bright colored tent sits behind them. With eyes closed, they stand at the edge of a cliff with a two-hundred-foot drop. They hum a hymn. BETH & BETSEY hum with their eyes locked on BETTY between them.

BETSEY:
It’s almost

BETH:
time!

BETSEY:
The time is almost-

BETH:
now!

BETSEY:
It’s almost-

BETH:
Time now

BETSEY:
To

BETH:
Go

BETSEY & BETH:
Back in time!

BETSEY:
To

BETH:
find
BETSEY & BETH:
Everything we’ve lost.

BETSEY:
When we were born-

BETH:
When the birth canal stole our holy molecules from the cosmos.

BETSEY:
And made us FLESH!

BETH:
Flesh made BORING.

BETSEY and BETTY:
Flesh made FLESHY.

BETTY:
By, by too much TV!
And, and being grounded too much.

BETH & BETSEY look at BETTY:
That’s not part of the chant.
BETTY opens her eyes, aware of the abrupt stop.

BETTY:
But, but, but we will never be grounded again!

A look from BETSEY and BETH but they keep going.

BETH:
Betty, that’s not how it goes.

BETTY:
But that’s how I remember it.

BETSEY:
Then you remembered it wrong.

BETTY:
So show me the words.

BETH pats THE GREAT BOOK in her satchel.
BETH:
No Betty.
Not now.
Just listen
 to us.

*BETSEY and BETH take a big deep breath.*

BETSEY & BETH:
Instead, we will rise like ash
Like dust in the wind
And shoot like stars
From this lame-ass earth into oblivion-

Suddenly, BETTY snorts violently making the trio stagger too close to the edge.
*BETSEY and BETH instinctively fall backward.*

BETSEY:
Betty, what the fuck?

BETH:
Are you possessed?

BETTY:
A bug flew up my nose.

BETH:
So shut your mouth/ if you

BETTY:
It went up my NOSE-

*BETTY chokes.*

BETH:
To make it fly out.
Like you’re gonna blow a snot rocket.
Like-

*BETH demonstrates.*
*BETTY snorts forcefully but the bug doesn’t budge.*
More panic.
BETSEY:
Stand still!

BETTY: I’m trying!

BETH: Let me see.

BETSEY:
Betty.
Just take a step back.
You’re gonna/ fall

*Betty stumbles precariously close to the edge. Looking down brings more panic.*

BETH:
Betty!

BETTY:
I can’t breathe.

BETH:
Calm down.
It’s just a bug.

BETSEY: (to BETH)
You looked at the sun lately?
It’s almost too late.

BETH:
We have time.

BETSEY:
Our rites and rituals are rapidly becoming fun and games!

BETTY: (between gasps)
Hey, I’m not having FUN! I’m not / playing anything!

BETSEY:
It’s not supposed to be FUN! It’s supposed/ to be

*Betty sneezes.*
BETTY:
Oh, it's gone. Finally.

*BETTY takes a deep breath and exhales.*

Then why do people go camping?

Silence

If not for fun.

*Some more silence.*

Did we bring s’mores?

Little
more
silence.

Where are we going to build a fire? Is there like burn ban or something? Cause that would suck. I’ve been dreaming of spending the night by a campfire. I wanna wake up tomorrow smelling like smoke.

BETSEY:
There’s no burn ban, Betty. Not that it matters. That’s why we picked a primitive campsite. So we can go wild.

*BETSEY goes wild.*

BETTY:
I’ve never been so far out in my whole life.

BETH:
Happy belated Birthday Betty.

BETSEY:
For she’s a jolly good Betty.

BETH:
For she’s a jolly Betty.

BETH & BETTY:
For she’s a jolly good BETTY. Which nobody can deny.
Which nobody can deny.

*Maybe they repeat this a few more times?*

**BETTY:**
After today, I’m like 85% nature lover.

**BETH:**
And what else Betty?

**BETTY:**
15%...heartbroken.
still.

**BETSEY:**
Should I cast a spell on your broken heart?

**BETTY:**
You should put a cast on my broken heart.

**BETSEY:**
I could kill Ben.

**BETH:**
Betsey.

**BETTY:**
From up here?

**BETSEY:**
Sure.
I’m like a witch.

**BETTY:**
You do like…Black Magic?

**BETSEY:**
Yeah.

**BETH:**
It’s not really black/ magic.

**BETSEY:**
It’s pitch black magic.
BETTY:
Could you kill Eliza too?

BETSEY:
I can make it can it all go away.

Silence.

Beth has to help though.
She has all the spells written down.

BETTY:
He’s just confused.
He didn’t mean to / ruin everything.

BETSEY:
Sure he didn’t.
I’m sure he loves you more than you’ll ever know.

BETTY:
We hit a rough spot/ but I think

BETSEY:
Yeah.
You’re probably right.

BETH looks at BETSEY.

Forget I said anything.
Right now.
Poof.
Thought of killing Ben be gone!

BETSEY does a magical gesture laughing loudly.
Her laughter echoes across the canyon
BETH creeps closer to BETTY.

BETH:
Well, we lucked out that he’s such an uber-loser.
‘Cause we get you all to ourselves now.
BETH throws her arms around BETSEY.

Your hair has grown so much.
BETH begins playing with BETTY’S hair.
She puts it in a braid.

BETTY:
I’ve been washing it in that stuff you gave me.

BETH:
It’s an original recipe for the one and only Betty the croc…ker.

BETH laughs hard at her own joke.

Kidding.
I put parsley in it. It’s like an herbal infusion.

BETTY:
I always hated parsley but it’s growing on me now.

Silence.

I don’t know what I’d do without you two.

BETSEY:
I know what you’d do.

BETTY:
What?

BETSEY:
Never get out of bed.

BETTY looks away ashamed.

Hey.
That was a joke.

BETTY: (softly)
Ha ha ha

BETSEY:
I get it.
I used to be sad.
Beth too.
Right Beth?
Remember how sad we were?

BETH:
Yep.
Real sad.
We were like clowns who got fired from the circus we ran away with.

BETSEY:
We were like a sorrow factory.

BETTY:
I don’t believe it.

BETSEY:
BELIEVE IT!
BELIEVE IT, believe it, believe it echoes across the canyon.

Silence.

BETTY:
Okay.
Yeah.
Totally, I get it.
But now you’re so…

BETSEY:
What, Betty?

BETTY:
Umm

BETSEY:
I know what you are but what I am?

BETTY:
Strong.

BETSEY smiles.
BETSEY:
I know what I am but what are you?

BETTY:
A mess.

BETH:
Don’t be down on yourself.

BETSEY:
Beth, what does THE GREAT BOOK say about sadness?

*BETH flips to page 10 of THE GREAT BOOK.*

BETH:
Sadness sucks balls.
Crystal balls that only show
A world of woe.
And woeful and weary are the weak
So we all must shun sadness
To have a good time.

*BETH looks out over the cliff.*
*She gasps.*

Hey, that’s mountain lion.

BETTY:
Oh my god, where?
Oh shit.
Holy shizzle.
I’m gonna piss myself.

BETSEY:
Don’t freak.
I speak mountain lion.

*BETSEY roars frightening at the mountain lion.*

BETH:
Oh my god, look!
She loves you!
BETSEY:
Yeah, she does.

*BETSEY keeps speaking mountain lion.*

BETTY:
You think it smells us?

*The mountain lion runs away.*

BETSEY:
Betty, you scared it.

BETH:
Shit, she ran away.

BETSEY:
Betty scared it with her fear.
It’s more afraid of you than you are of it, you know.

BETTY:
It could have killed us.

BETSEY:
But what a way to go!
In a belly of a beast!

BETH:
Are you afraid to die?

BETTY:
Isn’t everyone?

*A little silence*

So how do I get not sad?

BETH:
You mean like happy?

*BETSEY looks at BETH.*
*BETH nods.*
BETSEY:
It’s simple.
You just… change.

BETH:
Change yourself.

BETSEY:
It’s like you’re an orphan toddler and you’re wearing a shitty diaper and you gotta potty train yourself baby! No one else can do it for you. Right Beth?

*BETH opens THE GREAT BOOK to page seven.*

BETH:
Change comes from within.
You can have a change of heart or you can change your mind.
Or a change of heart can make you change your mind about something.
But to make change stick, you have to stick to your guns.
You have to hold your ground.

*BETH closes the book.*

BETTY:
That’s it?

BETSEY:
What else do you need to know?

*BETH closes the book and looks at BETTY.*

BETH:
So, how do you make change Betty?

*BETTY attempts to make change. It goes badly.*

BETTY:
Um.
Well.
I broke up with the butthole.

BETSEY:
Really?
BETH:
‘Cause I’m pretty sure the butthole broke up with you, Betty.

BETTY:
Well, I broke it OFF with the butthole.
Like any further contact.

BETSEY:
But you think about that butthole all the time.

_Little silence_

So… nothing’s really changed.
You’re still sitting in your own dookie, Betty.

BETTY:
I made friends with you two.

BETH:
That’s not how it happened.
We made friends with you that day at Tom Thumb.

BETSEY:
You put that eyeshadow in your purse and winked at the security camera.
THAT was bold Betty. Fearless. A girl like that could do anything.

BETTY:
So…
Who cares?

I don’t know how to
...

change.

BETSEY:
Well, the first step is admitting you have a problem.

BETTY:
But I’ve got every problem in the book.

BETH:
That’s why we have a book.
It’s for problem solving!
BETSEY:
We call it self-help biatch!

BETH:
We all need guidance.

BETSEY:
And TLC!

_BETSEY and BETH hold hands._

BETH:
Come here, Betty.
Let us hold you.

_BETTY gives a hand to BETSEY and BETH._
_The trio exchange glances. A smile creeps across BETTY’S face._
_They begin to laugh. BETH and BETSEY tickle BETTY. She squeals and tickles back._
_Now a full tickle fight keeps going until the three exhaust themselves. It could take a while._

BESTEY:
How about we go to bed early?

BETTY:
It’s broad day.

BETSEY:
But don’t you want to relax?

BETTY:
I want to watch the sunset.

BETH:
Oh yeah, the sunset!

BETSEY:
But after the sunset, it’ll all be over.

BETTY:
What will?

_BETSEY smiles._
BETSEY:
The day.
The day will be done.

BETTY:
And then we can tell ghost stories all night.

*BETSEY makes ghost sounds. BETH speaks in a British theatre voice.*

BETH:
What would you do if you were to die today at a minute or two ‘til two?

BETTY:
Dunno… Prolly… go camping with you two!!
I’d spend the rest of my life out here if I could.

BETH:
And you can.
You will.

BETTY:
You’re like a fortuneteller.
Am I gonna be a park ranger when I grow up?

BETH:
No Betty.
You’ll never be a park ranger.

BETTY:
Fine!
Their outfits suck anyway!
...

What will y’all be when you grow up?

BETSEY:
We’re not growing up.
Fuck the future!

BETH:
Look at us! Does it look we want jobs?
BETSEY:
Thirty year mortgages?

BETH:
Doublewides full of dust bunnies?

BETTY:
Oh my god!
Is the fountain of youth out here?

_BETSEY looks to BETH._

BETSEY:
Hell yeah it is and we’re lappin’ it up like old ladies at a day spa.

BETH:
Like cougars on the hunt for flesh and BONE!

BETTY:
Yall brought ecstasy!
I knew it.
I freakin’ knew it.

BETSEY:
Woah there, cowgirl.
We’re straight edge.

BETTY:
Baloney!
Since when?

BETH:
Straight and narrow.

BETTY:
Oh my god!
Did we take them already?
Did you put a tab in my thermos?
I just thought I had altitude sickness!

BETH:
Of course, we didn’t.
We’re so high that we’re high!
BETTY:
Yeah, we’re high...on height!

BETH:
It’s all you’ll ever need now.

BETH looks at BETSEY.
BETSEY nods.
BETH opens THE GREAT BOOK to page 11.

BETH:
At great height
Easy and light
Take a breath
And then take flight

BETTY:
That’s really beautiful.

BETH:
But what does it mean Betty?

BETTY:
Anything I want.
It’s poetry.

BETH:
It’s not poetry.
It’s prophecy.

BETTY:
Prophecy?

BETH:
100% divine.

BETSEY:
So, what does it mean, Betty?

BETTY:
Hell if I know.

BETH:
Think about it.
BETTY
It means… you can teach yourself to fly if you really, really try?

BETSEY makes a wrong buzzer sound.

... It means… Whatever… I give up. I’m not like a riddles person.

BETSEY:
No you’re not.
Your more like a… hmmm…
I can’t put you into words, Betty.
Beth, what is Betty like?

BETH looks BETTY up and down.

BETH:
Well, she’s very… uh

BETSEY:
Scratch that.
What could Betty be like if she got better?

BETTY:
Better?

BETSEY:
You know, if she got like big boobs and bloody panties… a good attitude… Straight As… Perfect attendance… A hot haircut… a sultry singing voice, bedroom eyes?

BETH:
Oh, Betty would be the best! She’d be the talk of the town. The belle of the ball. The maiden fair. She’d be princess material. A true specimen of happily ever after.

BETH kisses BETTY’S hand.
Like three times.

Oh my God.
Let me read your palm!

BETH studies BETTY’S palm intently.
She looks up and gasps.

It’s today.
You’re gonna… prick your finger on a…
No wait.
gasp
You’re gonna eat a poison apple from a…
gasp
No you’re gonna get trapped in a tower by a witch and never be able to escape.
And your hair will grow ‘til it touches the ground and the witch / will climb up it and

BETTY:
Oh my god! I’ll get to be Rapunzel. I’ve been growing my hair out. Like my room is on
the second floor and at night, I used to hang a sheet out my window for Ben and he’d
come climb up it and we’d play scrabble and tell knock-knock jokes ‘til dawn. ‘Cause
‘cause… well our love was always unconsummated ‘cause, ‘cause well I was… a late
bloomer… But one day I will be in full bloom, I will have a full-blown cherry and I will
live in a tower where no assholes can tell me what to do, and Ben can climb up my long
ass hair and put a baby in me instead of Eliza. But then, then my step-mom will find out
that we’ve been up to and she’ll throw him out and he’ll go blind and she’ll cut off my
hair and I’ll throw myself from the tower. But I’ll still have Ben’s baby. Not just one
baby, baby! Twins! Two little girls. I’ll give birth in a cave and two years later he’ll hear
us all singing together way deep in the wilderness. And he come to me crawling and hold
me like there’s no tomorrow and I’ll cry into his eyes and my tears will restore his sight
and he’ll see for the first time for who I am really am. And he’ll take me back to his
house and we’ll raise our girls together. And we’ll name them Betsey and Beth after my
two best friends. And we’ll live happily…

*BETH holds BETTY’S palm.*

BETH:
But Betty.
Look at your lifeline.
It ends here.

*BETH touches a distinct spot of BETTY’S palm.*

Today

BETTY:
Does not.

*BETTY stares at her palm.*

Where does it say that?
BETH:
Right there.
It’s just like mine.

BETSEY:
And mine.

*BETH and BETSEY hold out their palms.*

BETH:
Told you it was prophecy:

At great height
Easy and light
Take a breath
And then take flight

Everything in this book comes true.

BETSEY:
Betty, you are the one.

BETTY:
The one what?

BETSEY:
The one we’ve been waiting for.

BETTY:
But I don’t want to die today.
I wanna…. do ecstasy and have another tickle fight.

BETSEY:
Are you sure?

BETH:
If not now, when?

BESTEY:
And why not now?

BETTY:
Uhhh…I’m… uh too young?
BETH:  
You’re never too young to die.

BETSEY:  
You won’t go alone.

BETH:  
We’ll be right beside you.

BETSEY:  
And none of us will ever be lonely again.

BETTY:  
Hey.  
Stop.  
Stop it.  
This isn’t /fun-

BETSEY:  
It’s NOT?

BETTY:  
Funny.  
It’s not funny.  
It’s sad.

BETH:  
No one’s being funny.

BETTY:  
Well, stop talking about it.  
Didn’t we bring girl scout cookies?

BETSEY:  
They’re for our last supper.  
Just before sunset. Just before we go down in history.

_BETSEY opens to edge of the cliff._

BETTY:  
You’re scaring me!

BETSEY:  
You want to be found dead covered in piss and vomit on the canyon floor?
BETH:
Get a hold of your reflexes, Betty.

_Silence_

BETTY:
I wanna go home.

BETH:
Do you Betty?

_BETTY nods._

BETTY:
Don’t y’all?
I mean, we’ve seen like ten tarantulas today and that mountain lion / and my feet hurt and this sucks.

BETH:
Betty, listen to yourself.

BETSEY:
I can’t believe what I’m hearing!
You’re like the biggest puss alive.

BETTY:
Well, what’s wrong with that?

BETSEY:
Beth, what does THE GREAT BOOK say to do with fear?

_BETH turns to page twenty of THE GREAT BOOK._

BETH:
Fear is for the fools who need a future to fall back on.

BETTY:
Let me see the book.

BETH:
No.
BETTY:
Let me see.

BETH:
I’m the orator.
This is the oracle.

BETTY:
I just want to look-

BETH:
It’s written in code.
You wouldn’t understand.

BETTY:
Who wrote the great book?

BETH & BETSEY:
WE WROTE IT.

_WROTE IT, wrote it, wrote it echoes across the canyon._

BETTY:
Why?

BETSEY:
We had our reasons.

BETH:
And they’re all GOOD.

BETTY:
I’m gonna go.

BETSEY:
You can’t.

BETTY:
Watch me.

_BETTY exits._
_BETSEY and BETH look at one another._
_Time passes._
_BETTY renters._
BETH:
It’ll be really beautiful when we all go together.
Imagine three fair maidens glistening in the morning dew.

*BETTY’S eyes well up.*
*She sits still as statue.*

BETTY:
I want my mom.

BETSEY:
What for?
She’ll know you went to a better place.

BETTY:
Will she?

BETH:
She’ll want you to rest in peace.

BETTY:
Will I?

BETH:
Look what your dad did to her.

BETSEY:
There’s no telling what he’ll do with you.

BETH:
You need to be saved.

BETSEY:
You need like divine intervention.

BETH:
So did we.

*A beat.*

BETTY:
I want my dad.
BETSEY:
You want your old dad back, but he’s never coming back.

BETTY:
He probably called the police looking for me.

BETH:
Did he? You’re know you’re off his radar.

BETSEY:
‘Cause he’s gotta pay bills to pay for that evil step-mother! He’s gonna sign a contract with that oil company in Texas. They’re probably talking to realtor today. Getting your house appraised. /Some new girl will get your room. Prolly paint it pink or some-

BETTY:
How did you know about that?

BETSEY:
Do you have amnesia? You’re like world’s biggest blabbermouth!

BETTY:
He’ll know something’s up if I don’t come home tonight.

BETSEY:
He won’t even notice. He’s gonna pass out in his lazy boy in front of the football game! That’s what dads do!!

BETH:
Seriously, who in the world gives two shits about you?

BETTY: (eyes welling up)
I thought you two did.

BETH:
Of course, we do Betty. That’s why we’re here. And that’s why we’ll leave together. Don’t you see? It was written in the stars.

BETSEY:
Deaths come in threes Betty. They always do.

Silence
BETTY:
Won’t they miss us?

BETSEY:
Sure.

BETH:
We’re teaching them a lesson they’ll never forget.

BETSEY:
How could they forget the headlines? Our picture on the front page. Remember the lady who jumped off the Empire State Building? The limo she landed on cratered but she looked like a fallen angel. Her death made the cover of Life: America’s most beautiful suicide.

BETH:
And we’ve got her beat by a landslide. Just look at how beautiful it is out here. What a sight to behold.

BETSEY:
And we brought very amazing outfits.

BETTY:
If we do it, we’ll be sorry. We’ll go to hell.

*BETH turns to page 23 of THE GREAT BOOK.*

BETH:
To find the truth, you must FORGET REGRET!

*REGRET, REGRET, REGRET echoes across the canyon.*

*BETH closes the book.*

BETSEY:
Look around Betty. Up here. Right now. Look at the view. Have you ever been so high in your whole life?

BETTY:
I just see white.

BETSEY:
It’s only panic.
It passes.
BETH:
You’re getting closer to the light.
It’ll feel good soon.

Silence passes.
A hawk flies overhead.
The three girls look up.

BETH:
Red tail hawk.

BETSEY:
Another good omen.

BETH:
An arm’s reach away.

Silence.
A look to BETTY.

BETH:
It’s almost time to… change.

BETTY swallows hard.

BETSEY:
There’s nothing to be afraid of.

BETTY:
You don’t know that.

BETH brandishes The Great Book.

BETH:
Doubt is only a crisis of faith.

BETTY turns to BETH.

BETTY:
Gimme the book, Beth.
BETH:
You already know everything in it.
Now you have to believe.

Silence.

BETH:
If you want to be one with everything, you have to take it all in and let it go.

A beat.

BETTY:
Let me go home, please.

BETSEY:

BETH:
But we found the most beautiful place on earth to give ourselves back to the universal fold. Imagine how free our souls will be. This is no way to live and there’s only one way out.

BETSEY:
We are giving our bodies back to Mother Nature. This is for you Mother Nature.

BETSEY blows a kiss to Mother Nature.

BETH:
Imagine our bodies after the impact. Mangled overs rock but with the innocent faces of angels. Ripe and ready for resurrection.

BETSEY:
We made our whole world with our own bear hands.

BETH:
Just like genesis. I said let there be light.

BETSEY:
And I was like let there be dark. And we saw that

BETSEY & BETH
It was good.
BETSEY:
Especially the dark.
Cause anything can happen in the dark.

BETTY:
Like what?

BETH:
Like whatever you want ‘cause the unknown is at your fingertips.

BETSEY:
But if you fear the unknown, you’re not lost in it, it’s lost on you.

BETH:
If you fear the unknown, you have to wait for someone else to tell you what to believe.

BETTY:
I believe in God.

BETH & BETSEY:
YEAH RIGHT!

*RIGHT, right, right echoes across the canyon.*
*BETH & BETSEY cross themselves in unison and fall to their knees.*

BETH:
Jesus, can you please addict the whole wide world to miller light and menthols?

BETSEY:
I wanna join the ranks of your chosen ones! Make me fat, old, give me cancer and a coffin to rot in.

BETH:
I wanna beg and plead at your pearly gates while you tell me there’s no room at the inn!

BETSEY:
No. No. No. Fuck that. Fuck all of that. This is how WE make change Betty.
No one tells us what to believe. It’s time to take our shitty lives into our own hands!
That’s why we wrote our own Great Book. If you teach yourself to confront fear, you never have to be afraid.

BETH:
We came up here to say goodbye to hail Marys and holy water.
BETSEY:
Real belief takes guts, not cowering before the bible on bended knee.

BETH:
No way we’ll beg God for a spot in heaven after we’ve seen what he’s done to this planet earth. Look around you Betty, the whole world was once just like this. Open terrain. Not the trashed-out terrarium we’re stuck inside of.

BETSEY:
OUR Great Book says no more.
OUR great book fuck no to suffering.

BETH:
And life is suffering.
Just ask the Buddha.

BETSEY:
Hell is right here, burning us to bits as we live and breathe. Just ask Jean Paul Sartre. Don’t you want to make a statement Betty? To go down in style Betty on your own terms?

BETTY:
You mean your terms.

BETH:
If we knew you were gonna blow it, we would have found someone else.

BETTY:
You two don’t need me. You could jump right now if you wanted to.

BETH and BETSEY look at one another.
I don’t need you! I could jump now.

BETTY pretends like she’s gonna jump.

BETH & BETSEY:
STOP!!!

STOP, STOP, STOP echoes across the landscape.

BETSEY:
Only a trinity is holy.
BETTY:
But, but I don’t know what time it is China and I don’t know what 23 million times 437 thousand is and, and what if the unknown is still right here all around us?

_Suddenly, BETSEY and BETH are silent._

_BETH picks up THE GREAT BOOK._

BETH:
If the inner circle comes undone,
All hell will break loose.

_BETH closes the book._

BETSEY:
What if hell breaks loose Betty?

BETTY:
Beth.

BETH:
Betty?

BETTY:
Show me the book.

_BETH looks hard at BETTY._
_She pulls out empty page after empty._
_Well, their blank pages scattering on the breeze._

BETH:
You can’t see what the pages say because you don’t believe in anything.

BETTY:
But I want to believe in SOMETHING!

_SOMETHING, something, something echoes across the canyon._

_Silence_

_BETSEY and BETH smile._
BETSEY:
Go to the tent, Betty.
We made the best outfit for you.
We can’t wait for you to see it.

BETH:
For once, the world will see how beautiful you are.

BETSEY:
If you want to find freedom, you have to have the guts to let go.

BETH:
Go change, Betty.

*BETTY swallows and walks back to the tent.*
*BETH and BETSEY begin a sort of low hysterical speaking in tongues. As BETTY begins to unzip the tent, BEN jumps out with his skateboard.*

BEN:
Betty, there you are!
We’ve been looking all over for you.

BETTY:
You haven’t.
You’re just saying that.

BEN
Your dad called my house like twenty times.
Don’t worry. I covered for you. I said you’d be home before dark.

BETTY:
I’m so sure.
What a pal you are.

BEN:
Listen, I broke it off with Eliza today.
It’s over between us.
She like… miscarried.

BETTY:
Like like I care.
BEN:
I told you not to come here, Betty.
Let’s go to my place and play backgammon.
I’ll get my mom to make us pancakes.

*BETSEY and BETH hum and chant in low tones.*

BETTY:
I love pancakes.
Here before too long, I’m gonna be flatter than a pancake.

BEN:
You’re already are pretty flat Betty. Kidding!
Don’t worry. One day, your Aunt Flo will show up and we’ll get down to business.

BETTY:
Shut up about my Aunt Flo, you fool!

BEN:
It’s fine. I’ll be patient.
I got my yayas out with Eliza.
I can wait ‘til you’re ready.

BETTY:
I was born ready.
Ben, I want you to take me.
Take my virginity right now.

BEN:
Uh

BETTY:
I wanna get it over with.

BEN:
But-

BETTY:
This is my dying wish.

BEN:
Betty, it’s not great timing.
BETTY:
What do you mean?

BEN:
Well, I am, uuhhh, not actually here.

BETTY:
What?

BEN:
I’m at home.

BETTY:
WHAT?

BEN:
I just got the new Mario Brothers and my beanbag chair is like the best.
I’m sorry, Betty.
I’m the world’s shittiest boyfriend.
I’m was supposed to be divine intervention right now but I kinda suck at it.

BETTY:
Don’t I know it.

BEN:
But I believe one day I’ll be better.
One day, I’ll be different.
You have to believe me.
You have to.

BETTY:
Why’s that BEN?

BEN:
‘Cause you’re about to do something really, really stupid.

BETTY:
You know what I’m about to do?
What I shoulda done a long time ago.
Ben, come with me.
I want to show you the most amazing view.
BEN:
Come on Betty.
I’m not falling for that.

BETTY:
Yes you are, Ben. You are falling for it!
Just like I fell for you! But it’s my turn to take you down.

*BEN slowly walks toward BETTY.*

BEN:
Don’t do this Betty.
We have our whole lives ahead us.

BETTY:
No, we don’t.

BEN:
Imagine how your mom will take it.

BETTY:
Serves her right for giving birth to me.

BEN:
Betty, don’t this.
Our love is not a shipwreck.

*With one hard shove BETTY sends BEN off the cliff.*
*Again, he goes off the front of the proscenium.*
*BEN is through falling.*
*He walks away down the center aisle.*

BETTY:
Good-bye Ben.

*BEN says nothing.*
*BETTY goes to the tent.*
*BETH and BETSEY continue to chant.*

BETTY:
I couldn’t find the dress so I thought…
BETSEY:
That’s it, Betty.
You don’t need anything else.

BETH:
You’re stunning.

BETSEY, BETH and BETTY stand at the edge of the cliff.

Silence

BETTY:
Look at that sunset.

BETH:
Our very last one.

The tent behind them begins to rise.
The girls prepare to jump.

BETTY:
In three, two, one.

BETH:
Wait.

BETSEY:
Let your hair down, Betty.

BETTY:
I almost forgot.

A deep breath.

Now?

BETSEY & BETH:
Now.

They jump.

Life flashes before their eyes.
BETH:
Oh, there I am, at my first ballet recital.

BETTY:
Your mom drew whiskers on your cheeks?

BETH:
And put lipstick on my nose.

BETSEY:
Oh, my god.
There’s me in the flower garden.
That’s the first dress I ever remember wearing.

BETTY:
You were blond as a kid?

BETSEY:
I started dying my hair when I was twelve.

BETTY:
You look good with a bob.
Oh look, that Fourth of July picnic.
Before dad moved Mom into the motor home behind the house.

BETH:
What a shitty motor home.

BETTY:
That was before the real estate boom.

BETH:
And there’s your step-mom.

BETTY:
Long commute, huh?

BETH:
Talk radio was her one true friend.

BETSEY:
Rush Limbaugh?
BETH:
And Chardonnay.

BETTY:
And Jerry Springer.
I’m gonna miss Jerry Springer.

BETH:
I forgot that Dad had seven bathrobes with the days of the week monogrammed on the back.

BETTY:
He looks like an overgrown gnome…

BETSEY:
All guys did in the eighties.

BETH:
Oh, wow!
There’s Pixies vomiting on my baby blanket.

BETSEY:
Bad doggie! Bad doggie. Bad doggie.

BETTY:
We thought she ran away but then we found her in the brush behind the house.

BETH:
Oh look!

BETTY:
There’s Ben.
On his first skateboard.

BETH:
He’s not really that cute.

BETSEY:
And he’s too short for you anyway.

BETTY:
And we never got to…
BETSEY:
Who cares?

BETH:
That means you’re immaculate.
You’ll be very pure in the afterlife.

BETSEY:
A mythical creature in heaven.
Like a unicorn-angel.

BETTY:
Are we headed to heaven?

BETSEY:
Hell if I know.

BETH:
Oh, Betty.
Look!
You’re carving our real name on the side of the slide at Trinity Park!

BETSEY:
The old Father, son and Holy Ghost land.

BETH & BETTY & BETSEY:
Episcopalian?
Yep.
Isn’t everyone?

The girls cross themselves.
A bright light flashes across the stage.
A mattress drops out the sky.
The girls begin jumping on it.
BETTY, BETSEY and BETH see the light.
*Only BETTY is seen and heard in this final scene.

BETH:
Oh, wow wow wow… I’m walking on sunshine or dancing on air.

BETSEY:
My arms are like feathers.
BETH:
Mine are like wings.

BETTY:
I am made of cotton candy.

The girls laugh hysterically.

BETTY:
If your parents die, you’re an orphan.
If your husband dies, you’re a widow.
If your wife dies, you’re a widower.
But what are you called when your child dies?

BETH:
The one you gave birth to or the one inside?

BETSEY:
Wid orphaners?

The girls laugh hysterically.
They bounce and bounce.

BETTY:
I’m going to pee myself AGAIN!

More laughing

BETH:
You already peed yourself?

BETTY:
Just a “wee” bit.

Even more laughing

BETSEY:
I dare you to do it.
Lose control of all bodily functions!
Who cares anymore?

BETTY:
What will you give me if I do?
BETSEY:
A manicure.

BETH:
Do they HAVE nail polish in hell?

They laugh hysterically.
They laugh and laugh until the laughing turn to belly-ache.

BETTY:
Will hell suck?

BETH:
Betty, don’t be afraid anymore.
No one knows what’s going on!
We don’t have to know if no one else does!

BEN enters dressed as a waiter or a butler carrying a stack of books.
BETTY doesn’t recognize him.

BETTY:
Oh, look!
Room service!
I think we DID make it to heaven after all!!!
Hallelujah!

BEN says nothing.

BETH:
So, do we get menu?
And are French fries on it???

The girls laugh again.
BEN does nothing.

BETSEY:
Cat got his tongue!
Poor, poor fellow!!!

BETH:
Maybe you run out of things to talk about in the afterlife?

BETSEY:
Yeah, right!!! Like that would ever happen.
BETH:
Yeah, never.

BESTEY:
ever

BETH:
Never

BETTY:
Yeah.

BETH:
Yeah.

BETSEY:
Yeah

At beat.
BEN hands the girls the books.
He exits.

BETH:
Oh, look! These are for us!
I was starting to worry that we’d run out of fun.
And now look, entertainment.
What will we read first?

BETH takes the book and places it on her head.

BETH:
I don’t feel like reading yet.
What you about you two, you two?

BETTY:
I don’t know what to do!

BETSEY:
Me neither!

BETSEY winks at BETTY and throws her arms open wide.

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BETH:
Me beaver!

*BETTY AND BETSEY keep hugging.*
*BETH clears her throat.*

BETH:
Who likes dancing?

BETSEY:
ME!

BETTY:
ME!

BETH:
Bring it.

*BETTY and BETSEY place books on their heads.*
*They begin performing a bar routine.*
*Demi-plie, grande plie with portabra.*
*Pa de chat, etcetera*

BETTY:
Raise your hand if you forgot how to be a little girl.

*All three hands go up.*

BETTY & BETSEY:
I did.

BETH:
Me too.
Once upon a time, nothing made me happier than a tutu.

BETSEY:
A pink one.
With pink tights underneath.

BETTY:
Or a tea party.
Or my little pony.
Or my sprite doll.
Or my jellies.
Or my slap bracelet.
Or my friendship bracelet.
Or drawing pictures of horses,
Or fairytales.

*BETH stops dancing and removes the book from the top of her head.
She studies its cover.*

BETSEY:
Is that Sleeping Beauty?

BETH:
Guess again.

BETTY:
Snow white?

BETH:
No way.

BETSEY:
Cinderella?

BETH:
Hell no.
IT’S RAPUNZEL!

BETSEY:
Fuck yeah!

BETTY:
I love Rapunzel!

*BETH and BETSEY finally stop bouncing.*
*They lie down on the mattress.*
*BETTY stands now aware that she’s alone.*
*BETH and BETSEY drift into sleep.*
*BETTY sits and looks at the sky.*

END OF PLAY
Works Cited:

