

THE STORY OF A MOTHER

An ensemble work  
created by the company  
At the Foot of the Mountain  
and written by  
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A1. THE BIG MOTHER

C. ENTERS AS THE BIG MOTHER (ON P'S SHOULDERS). SHE WALKS DOWNSTAGE. SHE SPEAKS.

C: Hello! Is anybody home?

SHE LISTENS. THERE IS NO ANSWER. SHE REMOVES HER BIG MOTHER COSTUMES, COMES DOWN OFF P'S SHOULDERS AND CURLS INTO A SMALL CHILD-LIKE POSITION.

A2. THE DEAD MOTHER SINGS

R: Oh, Lord,  
I've seen my Mama die!  
Lying in the blood  
Right in front of my eyes,  
I've seen my Mama die.  
Oh, Lord,  
I can't live without her  
And I can't live with her.  
Oh, Lord,  
I've seen my Mama die.

A3. THE MOURNERS CHORUS

P: She died washing the dishes.  
M: She died hanging out the laundry.  
J: She died mashing the potatoes.  
P&M: She died flushing out the diapers.  
P&J: She died lying on her bed.  
J&M: She died playing solitaire.  
P&J: She died standing on her ear.  
P&M: She died reaching out for love.

A4. THE DAUGHTER AT THE GRAVESIDE

C: I told them don't open the coffin. That's the only thing you've got to promise me. Do you understand? For God's sake, don't open the coffin! I'll take care of everything. I'll phone the minister; I'll order the flowers; I'll choose the music; I'll invite the guests; I'll even bury her, I said. I'll dig up the cold ground with my own hand if I have to, I'll bury her! But don't open the coffin. I can handle anything but that; for god's sake, anything. Just don't open the coffin. I don't want to see her. Do you understand? I don't want to see her.

Oh, Mama! Oh, Mama! I would have done anything for you. I would have done anything! I'd have fed you, dressed you, taken you to the movies. U'd have held you at night. I would have, Mama; I'd have held you all night in my arms if you had wanted that. If only you could have looked at me. Just once, Mama, Just one time. If only you could have seen me. (PAUSE) Oh, god, it isn't finished with you, Mama. I told them don't open the coffin and it isn't finished. Why did you do it? Why did you close your eyes? Why did

you? Why did you Mama? Why did you die? I'm not done yet, Mama! Look at me! For god's sake, Mama, tell me: why did you close your eyes?! Look at me!

R: (IN HOARSE WHISPER) Don't open the coffin. I don't want to see her. For god's sake, don't open the coffin.

C: (FOR A LONG TIME SHE LOOKS AT HER MOTHER) I love you, Mama.

#### A5. MOTHERLESS CHILD.

FIRST M SINGS ALONE, THEN ALL SING:

Sometimes I feel like a motherless child.  
 Sometimes I feel like a mother less child.  
 Sometimes I feel like a motherless child.  
 A long way from home.  
 A long way from home.

#### A6. IMAGES OF LOVING AND FIGHTING.

C: Oh, look! There's a big storm coming!

P: Isn't it beautiful?

C: Those clouds look scary.

P: They won't scare us.

C: It's going to rain buckets.

P: We'll be safe inside.

C: It's going to hit down trees...

P: We'll light a fire...

C: ...and be very loud!

P: ...and drink cocoa.

C: Oooooo! Did you see that?

P: Of course. It's the magic show! I ordered it specially for you. Do you like it?

C: Oh, Mom, you're so silly!

P: I inherited it.

C: What?

P: Being silly.

C: From who?

P: From you.

J: Hi, Mom, did you get my blouse at the cleaners?

R: I didn't get around to it. Sorry.

J: What? But you promised, Ma. You just ruined my whole day! What were you doing all day?

R: What are you talking to me like this for? I don't have to tell you what I've been doing.

J: You were lying around on your bed.

R: I was doing what had to be done.

J: Are you mad at me? Is that why you didn't pick up my blouse?

R: This is a stupid argument! I don't want to talk about it any more!

J: All right. I just wanted to know why. Ma?

P: Did you like the game?

C: You were wonderful. The way you caught that ball that was flying through the air was wonderful!

P: I know. That was a good one.

C: I'm so proud of you.

P: That's cause you're my mom.

C: You like playind, don't you.

3.

P: I like throwing the ball. I like hitting it. I like running fast. I love playing on the team.  
C: I could tell.  
P: I love you, Mommy.  
C: I love you too.

R: I'm home...Mom, are you home?  
J: 'Course I'm home. Wad'ya think?  
R: You've been drinking.  
J: I haven't been drinking.  
R: What's that?  
J: Gingerale.  
R: Let me have some, then.  
J: Don't touch it. "Smine.  
R: Why do you do it, Mom?  
J: Do what?  
R: Drink.  
J: Leave me alone.  
R: What's the matter, Mom?  
J: Nothing's the matter. Leave me alone!

P: I have a secret.  
C: What is it?  
P: It wouldn't be a secret if I told.  
C: Whisper it.  
P: Promise not to tell?  
C: I promise.  
P: I love you.  
C: Everybody knows that!

A7: THE CHANT

EVERYBODY SINGS.

I.  
I am calling  
I am calling for you, Mother  
I am calling you forth  
from the womb  
from the blood  
from the eyes of the dead  
from the edge of the world where you  
have remained after walking  
away from yourself.  
I am calling you back.

(WHITE SOUND. INHALE, EXHALE.)

II.  
I want to see you  
I want to see you, Mother  
I want to see you  
come on the blood-rush, woman  
come in, sister  
lean on my breast  
I will sing you a song  
more ancient  
than the song  
of my birth  
It is too late  
It is too late, my mother, my sister  
It is too late  
Not to surrender



(WHITE SOUND. EXHALE.)

III. I see you  
I see you  
still  
you are still  
I see you still

(FAST, BITTER, BUILDING)

don't go away  
don't go away before I get it all out  
get it all out  
all out in front of me  
in front of my eyes  
in front of your eyes  
which are also my eyes  
my eyes which are burning  
my eyes which are  
burning with heat  
burning with oils  
medicianl oils  
burning with oils  
which you have poured into my eyes  
endlessly poured  
into my eyes  
your way of doin  
your way of seeing  
your way of seeing it all  
which ended up hurting  
in fact almost killing  
not healing  
my eyes  
Mother!

Listen to me now  
Look at me now  
See me now  
Don't lose sight of me  
I am coming into your way  
I am coming into your space  
I am coming into your skin

Let me in  
Let me in, Mother,  
Let me in

Let me in  
Let me in, Mother  
Let me in

A8. THE CALLING FORTH OF THE MOTHERS (RITUAL #1)

M: (SPEAKS TO THE AUDIENCE IMPROVISATIONALLY FROM THE FOLLOWI  
OUTLINE)  
Be aware of your breathing, just breathe.  
Call for your mother, whatever name would use, until appea  
See her in front of you. Notice age, standing or sitting,  
what wearing, how hair is, hands, all physical charac  
teristics, what doing.  
Approach her or let her approach you. Look at her, speak,  
touch.  
Ask her: can I enter you?

Slowly enter in whatever way right for you. Turn around.  
 Fit feet, legs, thighs, genitals, pelvis, hips, stom  
 spine, chest, breasts, shoulders, arms, wrists, hand  
 fingers, neck, head, chin, cheeks, mouth, nose, fore  
 head, eyes, skull, into hers (one at time)  
 Be aware of self: what doing, where live, how feel, etc.  
 When ready open eyes, see world as she saw it.

M ASKS EVERY WOMAN IN ROOM TO INTRODUCE SELF BY SAYING:

The name of the daughter is.....(HAVE LISTS OF NAME OF  
 EVERY WOMAN PRESENT AND CALL OUT THESE NAMES ONE AT A TIME  
 The name of the mother? (AT THE END OF THE LIST, M INTROD  
 HERSELF AS HER MOTHER.)

M: There were certain things which I always said over and  
 over again. Are there things that you always said that  
 you would like to say again now?

THE MOTHERS SHARE THEIR OFTEN SPOKEN WORDS BEGINNING WITH THE  
 PHRASE:

I always said...

M: (WHENEVERYONE HAS SPOKEN)  
 Close your eyes.  
 Get in touch with that part of you which is not your mother  
 Leave her in the same way that you entered her.  
 See yourself as separate from her.  
 You might want to tell her what it felt like to be her.  
 Say goodbye.  
 When ready open eyes, see the world again as you see the  
 world.

B1. HIDE AND SEEK

ALL: Not it! Not it!  
 .(THEY RUN HIDE. SILENCE. COUGHS, SHUSHING. GIGGLES)

P: Ouch!  
 C: My throat hurts.  
 J: Someone's at the door.  
 R: I hit my sister.  
 J: Do you like my hair?  
 P: Hey, Ma...you playing or not?

R: Are you mad at me?  
 P: What's the matter?  
 C: Don't cry.  
 J: Did you have a nice day?  
 P: Is something wrong?  
 R: I'll be good.  
 C: Please, Ma.

P: Hey! I'm over here!  
 C: Where are you?  
 R: What are you doing?  
 J: What do you want?  
 R: Don't go away!  
 J: Say something!  
 C: What's the matter, Ma?

P: Hey, Ma!  
 R: Ma!  
 C: Mommy!  
 J: Mom!

B2. THE MOTHER'S LIST OF THINGS TO DO

ALL: (SING, FROM CHANT)  
 I want to see you, I want to see you, Mother.  
 I want to see you.  
 Come on the blood-ruch, woman  
 come in sister  
 I will sing you a song  
 A song more ancient than the song of my birth.

R: (SITS IN ROCKER)  
 clean the house  
 call doctor about measles shot  
 make casserole for dinner  
 In a minute!  
 shop for: chicken, orange juice, bread, milk, toilet paper,  
 cream cheese, shampoo, popsicles  
 make dentist appointment for Daniel  
 cancel hairdresser  
 enroll Rachel in ballet class  
 In a minute!  
 give Jennifer a bath  
 soak beans  
 water the plants  
 buy birthday present for Paul  
 find time to play with Robyn  
 In a minute!  
 fold the laundry  
 write to Aunt Rose  
 send flowers to Helen  
 find time to play with Robyn  
 In a minute!  
 take chair to upholsterer  
 put up storm windows,  
 get driver's permit for Curtis  
 call furnace cleaner  
 In a minute!  
 take Ruffy to vet  
 make costume for Christmas pageant  
 tell Robyn I love her....

J: A minute's up!

R: (HUGS J) I love you to pieces!

B3. THE CALLS FOR DINNER

R: Robyn! Dinner!  
 C: CC! Dinner!  
 J: O.k., kids, dinner time.  
 C: Everything's getting cold on your plate!  
 J: Jay, go get Shelley. I'm not going to chase half way  
 around the block for her.

R: Robyn!  
J: O.k., everybody. Sit.

(AS J SETS THE HIGH CHAIR, THE CHILDREN SPEAK.)

R: I got here first!  
C: Dibs on this seat!  
R: Chicken again?!  
C: Milk!!  
R: I'm NOT eating spinach!  
C: Do I have to do clean-up?  
R: The toast is burnt!  
C: I hate this vegetable crap. Daddy says crap!  
R: I tasted it last time.  
C: Two bites is all!  
R: How come we never have kids' suppers.  
C: I'm allergic to beans!  
R: What's for dessert?  
C: Fruit?!

#### B4. BABY FEEDING

J PICKS UP P AND CARRIES HER TO STOOL, PUTS ON BIB, GETS BOOK.

M: (SINGS IMPROVISATIONALLY DURING THIS.)

J: (READS BOOK, PEELS BANANA AND GIVES TIP TO P.)

P: (SHUTS MOUTH, WON'T BE FED.)

J: O-pay-yo-mao.

CHO:	<u>M</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>R</u>
	O-pay-yo-mao		
	O-pay-yo-mao	O-pay-yo-mao	
	O-pay-yo-mao	O-pay-yo-mao	O-pay-yo-mao

P: (EATS, ENJOYS IT.)

J: (READS BOOK.)

P: (BANGS PLAYFULLY AT J.)

J: Do-doo-da-na

CHO:	<u>M</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>R</u>
	Do-doo-da-na		
	Do-doo-da-na	Do-doo-da-na	
	Do-doo-da-na	Do-doo-da-na	Do-doo-da-na
		Do-doo-da-na	Do-doo-da-na
			Do-doo-da-na

J: (FEEDS P BANANA.)

P: (OPENS MOUTH.)

J: At-sa-gu-grr.

CHO: (LOW, DYING DOWN) At-sa-gu-grrrrrrrrrr.

P: (MUSHES BANANA.)

J: Kay-fu!

CHO: (LOUD, QUICK.) KayOfu!

J: (READS BOOK.)

P: (TOUCHES J'S FACES, FEEDS HER.)

J: (LAUGHS)

CHO: (LAUGHS, WITH HUM. SEVERAL TIMES.)

J: (FEEDS P.)

J: Suts-za-pri-ti-grr.

CHO: (IN CORD, HARMONICS) Suts-za-pri-ti-grr.

P: (BITES J'S FINGER.)

J: Ow!

CHO: (TOGETHER) Ow!

J: (READS BOOK.)  
 P: (THROWS BANANA ON FLOOR.)  
 J: Na-na-na-na-na-na!  
 CHO: (IN VARIED SCALES) Na-na-na-na-na-na-na-na!  
 J: (PICKS UP BANANA, READS BOOK. BRUSHES OFF BANANA, FEEDS TO P  
 P: (SPITS IT OUT.)  
 J: Wa-dam-es!  
 CHO: (LOW, HEAVY)

	<u>M</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>R</u>
Wa-			
dam		Wa-	
es...		dam-	Wa-
		es...	dam-
			es...

P: (GRABS BOOK, RIPS OUT PAGES.)  
 J: (PICKS UP BANANA. SEES P, GRABS BOOK. ) O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O!  
 CHO: (BUILDS TO CACAPHONY) O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O! Kay-fu! Wa-dam-es!  
 Do-doo-da-na! Na-na-na-na-na-na-na! At-su-gu-grrr...  
 P: (BEGINS TO SILENTLY WAIL.)  
 CHO: (WAILS.)  
 P: (FALLS ASLEEP SUDDENLY.)  
 CHO: (SUDDENLY STOPS.)  
 J: (CHECKS BOOK, PICKS UP P, CARRIES HER OFF.)  
 M: (SINGS IMPROVISATIONALLY.)

B5. "IT SAYS IN THE BOOK."

J PICKS UP MESS. SITS.

C: (WAILS.)  
 J: It says in the book not to pick her up when she's crying.  
 C: (WAILS.)  
 J: It says in the book that crying develops her lungs.  
 C: (WAILS.)  
 J: It says in the book that crying is natural.  
 C: (WAILS.)

SILENCE.

C: (WAILS.)  
 J: She'll learn that you don't get your way in this world  
 by crying.  
 C: (WAILS.)  
 J: oh, God! Oh, Jesus! I don't want a spoiled child!  
 C: (WAILS.)  
 J: She'll be happier if I don't pick her up.

SILENCE.

C: (WAILS.)  
 J: Bear it! Just bear it!

J EXITS. DOOR SLAMS.

B6. CLOSED DOORS

R IS ALONE, DOWNSTAGE. J,C,P ARE AWAY FROM HER.

J: (WHISPER TENSELY, EXCITEDLY.)

C: (MUFFLED ANGER, ON THE PHONE.)  
 P: (SOBBING, STIFLED.)  
 M: (SEXUAL SIGHS AND GROANS, LAUGHTER.)  
 R: Ma?

MORE SOUNDS.

R: Ma? (P ENTERS) What's going on?  
 P: It's nothing.  
 R: (HIDES BEHIND HER HAND.)  
 P: Where's Robyn? Are you hiding? (TAKES DOWN ONE FINGER AT A TIME) Is it sister? Are you Ruffy? Are you Daddy? Are you Mommy? (ROBYN KEEPS ANSWERING "No".) Are you Robyn? (RELIEF. SHE HOLDS ROBYN, CRADLING HER.)

### B7. GOODNITE RITUAL

P CRADLES R UNTIL HALF WAY THROUGH WHEN THE ROCKING GETS LARGER AND MORE OPEN.

M: (SINGS) Wa-na-sa-la.  
 P: (WHISPERS.)  
 C: Good night.  
 J: Sleep tight.  
 P: (WHISPERS.)  
 C: Don't let the bed bugs bite.  
 M: (SINGS) Wa-na-sa-la, Wa-na-lee-sa, Wa-na-lee-sa-wa-na, Wa-na-sa-la.  
 J: I love you.  
 C: A bushel and a peck.  
 P: (WHISPERS.)  
 M: (SINGS) Wanna-sa-la, Wanna-lee-sa.  
 J: Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep.  
 P: (WHISPERS.)  
 C: Good night.  
 J: I'll be here all night.  
 M: (SINGS) Wanna-lee-sa-wanna, Wanna-sa-la.  
 C: Yes, I'll leave the hall light on.  
 J: No more water.  
 C: Good night.  
 M: (SINGS) Wanna-lee-sa-wanna.  
 J: No more kisses now.  
 C: Go to sleep.  
 M: (SINGS) Wanna-sa-la.  
 J: I'll be here all night.  
 C: Now go to sleep.  
 J: Good night.  
 C: Good night.

P LETS GO OF ROBYN WHO FALLS BACK. P STIRKES HER IN ANGER.

### B8. THE HEALING (RITUAL #2)

M BRINGS A BOWL OF WATER AND WASH CLOTH TO P.  
 M: (CHANTS) The mother sasy to the daughter....  
 P: (SAYS SOMETHING TRUTHFUL TO DAUGHTER AND WASHES HER.  
 J AND C ALSO DO THIS. M INVITES THE AUDIENCE TO SPEAK AS MOTHERS OR BECOME THEIR MOTHERS AND SAY SOMETHING TO THE DAUGHTER. BEGINNING WITH THE PHRASE: "I want you to know." P WASHES R IN RESPONSE TO EACH ONE WHO SPEAKS.



C1. THE DADDY JIG

- M: Bow to your partner  
Give your corner a doce-do
- J: Go to your father and say hello
- M: Balance your neighbor and give her a swing
- C: Men don't feel the same way about thing.
- M: Now all join hands and circle to the west.
- P: Go ask your father, dear, he knows best.
- M: Pick up your neighbor; lift those gams,  
Down the road go dippin' for clams.
- R: Of course your father wanted a son,  
But when you were born he sure had fun.
- M: Right hand star if you don't mind the bother.  
Left hand star,
- C: You're just like your father.
- M: Move to the center and give me a shout,  
All: Your father won't like it!  
M: Now move on out.
- M: Allimand left, give your partner a touch.  
R: Your father loves you very much.  
M: Keep on movin' with a right and left grand,  
J: Sometimes I wish I'd been born a man.  
M: Promenade home.  
ALL: Whoooo-eeeeee!
- P: (FALLS INTO ROCKING CHAIR) I've been tired ever since I  
married your father.

C2. THE RAPE DREAM

- M: (OLD RECORD, "IN THE GLOAMIN") Yu-yu-yu-yu-yu-yu-yu-yu.
- C: (LIES DOWN AT MOTHER'S FEET. SUDDENLY SITS UP.) I am  
in my grandmother's house and my mother is down in the  
kitchen. My mother is cooking. I can smell the fried  
chicken smell and the sweet sweet smell of blackberry pies  
in the oven. I lie on the bed with my sister.

Suddenly I see the face of a man, leaning against the  
window, the pimply face of a man, a thin young man  
wearing a heavy, purple cape, made of velvet. And he  
hates me.

I run out of the room. I run past my mother. I run  
out of the house. The sky is heavy with orange light.  
And he follows. His cape blows out from the shadows and  
he carries a sword. He carries a long sword, pointed up  
to the sky. He is coming to kill me! And he follows!



I run and he follows! Mother! He follows! He follows!  
Mother! Everything is torn at the root!

P: It's all right, dear. It's only a dream. (SHE COVERS C WITH HER APRON.)

M: Yu-yu-yu-yu-yu-yu-yu...

### C3. THE SHAMPOO

(R WASHES J'S HAIR.)

#### PREPARATION:

R: Upsee-daisy. (SHE IS THE MOTHER OF A 5 YEAR OLD.)  
P: Your hair is a mess. It's all matted. (SHE IS MOTHER OF 9 YR)  
C: Pull it back. (SHE IS MOTHER OF 18 YR OLD.)  
R: We'll make you all pretty for Daddy.  
M: Leave your hair alone; it looks fine. (SHE IS MOTHER OF 13 YR)

#### WETTING:

R: The water is not too hot.  
P: Nobody likes a dirty child.  
C: Guys want to respect you.  
M: You look pretty enough without doing all that stuff to your hair.  
R: When we're all done, we'll put a bow in it for Daddy.  
P: You look like a sheep dog with all that hair in your eyes.  
C: It is not sexy. It's stringy.  
M: What kind of junk are you putting on your hair? It stinks.

#### SOAPING

R: No, I won't get soap in your eyes.  
P: It does not look pretty. It looks scuzzy.  
C: A man wants someone he can respect.  
R: Such a grand lady. (SETS HER UP TO LOOK IN MIRROR.)  
C: You're not going to wear your hair like that are you?  
M: You primp in front of the mirror entirely too much.  
P: Are you brushing every day?

#### RINSE:

R: You have such pretty hair. I'll brush it for you afterwarrrds  
M: You brush your hair too much.  
R: You're gonna look very pretty.  
M: I don't like it.  
C: You're such a good-looking girl. It's a shame to wear your hair like that.  
P: Your father doesn't like it when you look so bedraggled.  
R: Daddy won't recognize you because you're so clean and sparkling.  
M: Boys, boys, boys! That's all you every think about.  
C: You know, I'm just trying to be your friend.

### C4. MAKING UP

P,C,M:(SING, FROM CHANT)  
I see you. I see you still.  
You are still.  
Your way of doing.  
Your way of seeing.  
Your way of seeing it all.

R DRIES AND COMBS J'S HAIR. THEN CHECKS HERSELF IN MIRROR.

J: Are you going out?  
 R: Uh-huh.  
 J: Where're you going?  
 R: Oh, just out.  
 J: Can I watch?  
 R: Sure you can watch. (TURNS AWAY. PUTS ON MAKE-UP.)  
 J: (PUTS ON MAKE-UP) What dress are you wearing?  
 The one that's low in back?  
 When you die can I have it?  
 Why are you putting that cream on?  
 Will it wash off?  
 What's that blue stuff for?  
 Can I have some?  
 Does that thing really make your eyes curl?  
 Ick! What'd you do that for?  
 Is it supposed to be lumpy like that?  
 Why don't you ever wear that lipstick around the house?  
 Why are girls' lips supposed to be red?  
 What's in the bottle?  
 Can I smell it?  
 Is that ring real?  
 Did Daddy give it to you?  
 When you die can I have it?  
 Does Daddy love you?  
 Are all mothers as pretty as you?  
 (SHE TRANSFORMS INTO THE MOTHER.)

C5. "YOUR FATHER IS A WONDERFUL MAN"

THE MOTHER DESCENDS THE STAIRS. SHE SEES THAT HER HUSBAND IS NOT THERE WAITING AS SHE HAD EXPECTED. HER DAUGHTER WATCHES TV. SHE FUTTERS WHILE TALKING.

J: Your father is late.  
 (PAUSE)  
 He's a wonderful man. Your father is a wonderful man. I wouldn't have come home from that hospital if it hadn't been for him. I told him to forget it. I wasn't going to make it.  
 (PAUSE)  
 He said, of course you'll make it! He was right, I guess. Here I am!  
 (PAUSE)  
 He always is. Right I mean.  
 (PAUSE)  
 He has a wonderful sense of humor. Your father is a very funny man. How he teases your Aunt Helen! She got so mad at him one day she chased him around the kitchen with a frying pan!  
 (PAUSE)  
 Well, it seemed funny to me.  
 (PAUSE)  
 When I fell off the ladder and broke my hip, he called the doctor right away. He said, What the Hell's going on in here?! And then he called the doctor right away.  
 (PAUSE)  
 You're a lucky girl to have your father for a father.

(PAUSE. SIGH)

I could fill a whole book with things you don't know about your father that I could tell you about him.

C6. MENSES IMAGE

C THROWS BLOODY BANDAGES TO J WHO CATCHES THEM.  
J CROSSES TO C.  
J SLAPS C'S FACE.

C7. MENSTRUATION SCENE

R HANDS BANDAGES TO P. PWRAPS FACE IN BANDAGES DURING SCENE.

P: What did you do today, dear?

R: Nothing.

P: Where did you go?

R: No place.

P: Who did you see?

R: No one.

P: Your father's not home yet.

R: It started.

P: What?

R: It.

M: (BREATHES IN, LONG WHITE SOUND. C AND J WHISPER.)

C: The curse!

J: Menses!

C: On the rag!

J: The curse!

C: Aunt Mary's come to visit!

J: Periods!

C: The curse!

J: Falling off the roof!

C: The curse!

J: Regulars!

C&J: The curse!

C: OTR!

C&J: The curse!

The curse!!

P: Wait till I tell your father.

R: Don't.

P: He'll want to know.

R: I don't want you to tell him. (LIES DOWN ON FLOOR, SUDDENLY, AS IF DEAD.)

P: Are you having cramps?

R: I hate you, mother.

P: Curl your knees up to your chest.

R: Did you hear me?

P: I said curl your knees up to your chest.

R: I feel awful.

P: Don't talk about it. Just rest.

R: I think I am dying.

P: It always feels like that the first time, dear.

R: I think I am going to scream.

C8. THE WORDS NEVER SAID. (RITUAL # 3)

M: The mother said to the Daughter...

(C AND J, AS MOTHERS, SAHRE THINGS NEVER SAID, BEGGINNING WITH

THE PHRASE: "I never said..." OR "I, too, wanted to scream."  
 M INVITES THE AUDIENCE TO SPEAK AS THE MOTHERS THEY ARE, OR  
 TO BECOME THEIR MOTHERS AGAIN AND SAY SOMETHING THEY NEVER SAID  
 OR TO SCREAM.

WHEN IT IS FINISHED, P SPEAKS FROM BEHIND THE BANDAGES:

P: I've been bleeding my whole life for you kids.

R STIFLES HER FROZEN SCREAM WITH HER HANDS.

## D1. THE "DO YOU LIKE YOURSELF?" CLICHES

ALL: (SING FROM THE CHANT)

I am calling you forth: from the womb,  
 from the blood,  
 from the eyes of the dead,  
 from the edge of the world,  
 where you have remained after walking away from yourself.

C: Do I like myself? I gained ten pounds, can you tell? Can you tell?

R: I'm a do-nothing. I'm one big do-nothing.

J: Do I like myself? Well, I wish I didn't take myself so seriously.

P: Your father has the most gorgeous legs.

C: Oh, if only I could get rid of these wrinkles and this damn double chin.

R: Do I like myself? I'm not buying a stitch until I lose weight.

J: Well, I never went to college.

P: When you're an adult you don't need anyone to take care of you.

C: Well, I'm not proud of myself if that's what you mean.

R: I'm not good at figuring things out.

J: I like myself as much as anybody does, I guess. I don't think about it much.

P: I did my best.

C: I do like myself...but no one else seems to.

ALL: (LAUGH)

## D2. THE HYSTERIA TRANSFER

C: I hate this chair.  
 I hate this place.  
 I hate the cold.  
 I hate the winter.  
 I hate the weather.  
 I hate the dishes.  
 I hate the cleaning.  
 I hate the laundry.  
 I hate the cooking.  
 I hate my husband.  
 I hate my daughter.  
 I hate my mother.  
 I hate my eyes.

P: Your eyes are beautiful

C: I hate my hair.

P: Your hair is beautiful.

C: I hate my skin.

P: Your skin is beautiful.

C: I hate my breasts.  
 P: Your breasts are beautiful.  
 C: I hate my legs.  
 P: Your legs are beautiful.  
 C: I hate my mouth.  
 P: Your mouth is beautiful.  
 C: I hate my hands.  
 P: Your hands are beautiful.  
 C: I hate me.  
 P: You're beautiful.  
 CL I hage myself.  
 P: Look at yourself, silly.  
 C: Don't call me silly.  
 P: It's silly to talk like that.  
 C: I'll talk any way I want.  
 P: You sound carzy.  
 C: I feel crazy.  
 P: You're acting crazy.  
 C: Don't call me crazy.  
 P: You are crazy.  
 C: You are crazy.  
 PL Don't call me crazy.  
 C: You're acting crazy.  
 P: I feel crazy.  
 C: You sound crazy.  
 P: I'll talk anyway I want.  
 C: It's silly to talk like that.  
 P: Don't call me silly.  
 C: Look at yourself, silly.  
 P: I hate myself.  
 C: You are beautiful.  
 P: I hate me.  
 C: Your hands are beautiful.  
 P: I hate my hands.  
 C: Your mouth is beautiful.  
 P: I hate my mouth.  
 C: Your legs are beautiful.  
 P: I hate my legs.  
 C: Your breasts are beautiful.  
 P: I hate my breasts.  
 C: Your skin is beautiful.  
 P: I hate my skin.  
 C: Your hair is beautiful.  
 P: I hate my hair.  
 C: Your eyes are beautiful.  
 P: I hate my eyes.  
 I hate my mother.  
 I hate my father.  
 I hate my sister.  
 I hate my friends.  
 I hate my homework.  
 I hate the cleaning.  
 I hate the dishes.  
 I hate the weather.  
 I hate the winter.  
 I hate the cold.  
 I hate this place.  
 I hate this chair.

C: You take things entirely too seriously.

D3. CHICKEN MONOLOGUE

R: I was sitting at the dining room table. Mom said, "We're going to have another war. That ass hole in the white house doesn't know what he's doing." Dad said, "What do you know about that?" There was chicken. I love the way Mom makes chicken. Mom said, "I know." Dad said, "You don't know anything." Mom said, "Balls." Dad said, "You shut up!" Mom didn't say anything. (GAGGING) The bone! I swallowed...I...ca-n't...spe...ak...can't ...breathe... Mom!"  
 (SHE LURCHES AS IF SLAPPED ON THE BACK. SHE LANDS ON THE GROUND IN A FROZEN, CONTORTED BODY POSITION.)

D4. LICKING SCENE

J COMES TO R LIKE AN ANIMAL MOTHER COMING TO HEAL HER WOUNDED OFFSPRING. SHE LICKS HER ALL OVER. R RELAXES AND IS HEALED.

D5. THE LIGHTING OF THE CANDLES

P, AS THE BIG MOTHER, LIGHTS THE SIX CANDLES WHICH R HAS SET OUT.

J: (SINGS)  
 M is for the million things she gave me,  
 O means only that she's growing old,  
 T is for the tears were shed to save me,  
 H is for her heart of purest gold,  
 E is for her eyes with lovelight shining,  
 R means right, and right she'll always be,  
 Put them all together, they spell MOTHER,  
 A word that means the world to me.

D6. THE WORDS NEVER SAID (RITUAL #4)

R AND J, AS DAUGHTERS, SHARE THINGS NEVER SAID, BEGINNING WITH THE PHRASE, "I never said...." THEY PLACE RIBBONS ON THE BIG MOTHER

M: (TO THE AUD) Is there something you want to say to your mother?  
 R: You can say something to her and dress her yourself... (OFFERS THE RIBBONS)  
 J: Or you can say something to her, and I will dress her for you.

WHEN IT IS FINISHED, P SPEAKS AS THE BIG MOTHER.

P: I lit the candles for you. And he always said....  
 C: What-cha lighting the candles for? What a dumb thing to do to light the candles.

R, J, AND P QUICKLY BLOW OUT ALL THE CANDLES.

E1. PLATE SCENE

ALL: (SING FROM CHANT)  
 Listen to me now,  
 Look at me now,  
 See me now,



Don't lose sight of me.  
 I am coming into your way.  
 I am coming into your space.  
 I am coming into your skin.

TABLEAU OF ANGRY MOTHER (MAKING ANGRY SOUNDS: Pffft! Hah!) AND  
 NEEDEY MOTHER (WHINING) PULLING ON MOTHER.

THEY COME DOWN STAIRS AND SURROUND C AT TABLE. P (MOTHER) HAS  
 6 PLATES: R (ANGRY MOTHER) HAS 9 PLATES: J (NEEDEY MOTHER) HAS  
 NONE.

C: What's for dinner?  
 P: Toast. (PUTS ONE PLATE DOWN.)  
 C: Toast?  
 R&P: Toast. (EACH PUT ONE PLATE DOWN.)  
 C: It's burnt.  
 J&P: I know it's burnt. (EACH PICK ONE PLATE UP.)  
 C: I don't like burnt toast.  
 R&P: It's what there is. (EACH PUT ONE PLATE DOWN.)  
 C: Why are you so angry?  
 J&P: I'm not angry. (J PICKS UP ONE PLATE, P PUTS ONE PLATE DOWN.)  
 C: Are you angry at me?  
 R&P: I am not angry. (EACH PUT ONE PLATE DOWN.)  
 C: You sound angry.  
 R&P: Eat your toast. (EACH PUTS ONE PLATE DOWN.)  
 C: what's wrong?  
 J&P: There's nothing wrong. (EACH PICKS ONE PLATE UP.)  
 C: You act like there's something wrong.  
 R&P: Everything's wrong! (R PUTS ONE PLATE DOWN, P PICKS IT UP.)  
 C: I'm sorry.  
 J&P: It's not easy to be a mother. (EACH PUTS ONE PLATE DOWN.)  
 C: Don't cry.  
 J&P: I'm not crying. (EACH PICKS ONE PLATE UP.)  
 C: You act like you're about to.  
 RJP: I am not crying! (J PICKS ONE PLATE UP, P & R EACH PUT  
 ONE PLATE DOWN.)  
 C: Did I do something wrong?  
 R&P: Eat your toast. (THEY EACH PUT ONE PLATE DOWN.)  
 C: What'd I do?  
 R&P: Nothing! (THEY EACH PUT ONE PLATE DOWN.)  
 C: Don't yell at me.  
 J&P: I'm not yelling. (THEY EACH PICK ONE PLATE UP.)  
 C: You were yelling.  
 RJP: I am not yelling! (J PICKS ONE PLATE UP, P & R EACH PUT  
 ONE PLATE DOWN.)

PAUSE.

C: Thanks for the toast. It's good.  
 J&P: It's burnt. (THEY EACH PICK ONE PLATE UP.)  
 C: I like it that way.  
 R&P: You do not like burnt toast! (THEY EACH PICK ONE PLATE UP.)  
 C: What's wrong, Ma?  
 RJP: Nothing! (P PUTS HER WHOLE STACK DOWN, TURNS UPSTAGE, COVERS  
 HER EARS AND SHUTS HER EYES. J AND R DIVIDE THE REST AND  
 PICK THEM UP.)  
 C: What do you want??  
 J: (SHE CAREFULLY PUTS HER PLATES DOWN ONE AT A TIME. C PICKS  
 THEM UP, TRYING TO HELP, HOLDING THEM CLOSE TO HERSELF.)



Why do I always have to ask? Why don't you ever just see I need help and help? Do you think I'm a slave? Is that what you think? Hired help? I don't do this for pay. I do this for love. And you take it out of my blood, drop by drop by drop. Nobody cares about me. Nobody cares what I feel. Who am I? I am nobody. That's who I am. Nobody like me. Nobody even notices me.

R: SHE PUTS HER PLATES DOWN ONE AT A TIME, LIKE PUNCTUATION MARKS. C PICKS THEM UP, TRYING TO HELP; HOLDING THEM CLOSE TO HERSELF.) Why do I always have to ask? Why don't you ever just see I need help and help? Do you think I'm a slave? Is that what you think? Hired help I don't do this for pay, I do this for love. And you take it out of my blood, drop by drop by drop. Nobody cares about me. Nobody cares what I feel. Who am I? I am nobody. That's who I am. Nobody likes me. Nobody even notices me.

THERE IS THE SOUND OF A PLATE BREAKING. R AND J BOTH FIND BORKEN PIECES OF PLATE UNDER THE TABLE. J SLOWLY TURNS ON HERSELF WITH THE SHARD AS IF TO SLIT HER OWN THROAT. R TURNS ON C WITH HER SHARD, PULLING HER HEAD BACK, AS IF TO SLIT HER THROAT.

E2. LENA

BY SPEAKING P BREAKS UP THE KILLING IMAGE. R AND J LEAVE.

P: It's not easy to be a mother. Believe me, I know. I did the best I could. I raised her in the best way that I knew how. And what good is it?

C: (ALL OF HER RESPONSES ARE WHISPERED.) What good is it?

P: I spent 18 years raising her and all I get for it is a letter once a month.

C: I did the best I could.

P: Sure I would sometimes get angry at her. Ask any mother if she strikes her child. Of course she does.

C: I would sometimes get angry at her.

P: A child doesn't understand language sometimes. But I never put her in the hospital. Every parent makes mistakes sometimes.

C: Everyone makes mistakes sometimes.

P: I wish we didn't get upset and then hit.

C: I wish we didn't get upset.

P: Do you know what it means to grow up in a country and never have anyone who means anything to you except your children?

C: Do you know what it means?

P: I certainly know I made mistakes. I'm not perfect. I'd certainly like to be perfect, but I don't think I am. My work is less important than what the president of the United States does, but somebody has to cook. She has to clean. I mean, people have to eat!

C: I'm not perfect.

P: For 25 years I did that work. It's just the way life is.

C: It's just the way life is.

P: You can't change certain things so you accept the way they are. I had my days when I complained. But you can't wake up every morning and complain.

C: You can't complain.

P: You just can't do it.

C: You just can't do it.

P: You put on the coffee, you make the beds, you cook the meals  
you clean the house, you watch after the kids,...

C: You just can't do it.

P: ...and you say your prayers. Who has time for complaining?  
(PAUSE)  
Someday she'll appreciate that she had a family. Someday  
she'll be alone and not have a family. And it'll be too  
late.

C: Someday it'll be too late.

P: And I'll be dead.

C: And I'll be dead.

P: That's the bed she's making for herself. I am very upset  
of all this. Digging up all these old things from the  
past.

C: That's the bed that's being made.

P: People were meant to stay together. That's the reason  
this country is so crazy.

C: Crazy!

P: People don't have families.

C: Look at me!

P: Look at me!

C: Look at me!

P: You come into this world alone...

C: Look at me!

P: ...and you leave it alone.  
(PAUSE)

C: (SINGS)  
Jesus helps us shine with a pure, clean light...

P: I taught her that song. (SHE GOES TO HER AND REMOVES HALF  
OF THE PLATES FROM HER ARMS. THEY MOVE INTO SEPARATE  
SIDES OF THE STAGE.)

C: (CONTINUES TO SING)  
Like a little candle, burning in the night.  
In this world is darkness, and so we must shine.  
You in your small corner, and I in mine.

### E3. THE BIG MOTHER WEEPS

R COMES OUT AS THE BIG MOTHER. SHE WALKS SLOWLY TO THE CENTER.  
SHE TAKES THE LARGE RED TEAR DROPS OFF OF HER FACE AND SLOWLY  
DROPS THEM TO THE FLOOR.

### E4. THE BIRTH SCENE

J IS BORN, OUT FROM UNDER R'S SKIRT.

J: Breathe me, Mama.  
I'm coming out.  
Breathe me very careful, Mama.  
I am...transparent.

### E5. THE LULLABIES

J ROLLS BACK INTO R'S LAP. R ROCKS HER.

M: (SINGS)  
Go to sleep, baby child,  
Go to sleep my little baby.

When you wake, you shall have  
 All the pretty little horses.  
 P&C: (SING)  
 Wish I may, wish I might  
 Have the wish I wish tonight.  
 M: (SINGS)  
 All the pretty little horses.  
 R: (SINGS)  
 Sleep my child and peace attend thee,  
 RPCM: All through the night.  
 Guardian angels God will send thee,  
 All through the night.

E6. ACKNOWLEDGING THE WOMAN HATING

P: (IN ROCKING CHAIR. TO J:) What do you want from me?  
 J: I wish I had your hair, Mom.  
 P: My hair? Ha!  
 M: Said the mother.  
 P: When my hair was black, they used to say I was a tease, that  
 I was trying to seduce them! I was a Jezebel. Just like a  
 woman, they said.  
 M: Just like a woman.  
 P: But once I started getting these grey hairs, I was a use-  
 old hag, not worth bothering about. (SHE LEAVES CHAIR,  
 J GETS IN.)  
 M: Just like a woman, they said.  
 J: (TO C:) What do you want?  
 C: I want hands just like yours.  
 J: My hands won't do you much good.  
 M: Said the mother.  
 J: Whenever I reached out to touch people, they said I was  
 acting needy, or that I was an easy catch. Just like a  
 woman, they said.  
 M: Just like a woman.  
 J: But if I kept my hands to myself, they said that I was cold,  
 touch, probably frigid. (SHE LEAVES CHAIR, C GETS IN.)  
 M: Just like a woman, they said.  
 C: (TO R:) What do you want me to give you?  
 R: Your eyes!  
 C: My eyes? You don't want em!  
 M: Said the mother.  
 C: Whenever I close my eyes, shut out the world, you know?  
 They say, "What a dumb broad!"  
 M: Just like a woman.  
 C: Yeh, just like a woman, they said. But whenever I keep  
 my eyes open and look and see what's really going on - and  
 I do see what is really going on - they said: "Jesus!  
 She's crazy! She's looney! Stay away from her! Don't  
 believe her!" God-a-mighty! If we lived a few centuries  
 back, they'd have tied me up to a stake and burned me! Now  
 they just lock me up in their insane asylums.  
 M: Just like a woman, they said.  
 C: Yeh, right! Just like a woman they said!  
 R: Who said?  
 C: Fathers said. Teachers said. Priests, bosses, husbands  
 said. Lovers said. Doctors, lawyers said. All of them  
 said it. "You're just like a woman."

M&C: Just like a woman, they said.

R: Why?

C: Why? Why? How should I know why? To keep us apart I suppose.

M: aid the mother.

C: To keep us away from each other. (SHE LAUGHS. R AND C EMBRACE.) You and me! That's why they said it! To keep us away from each other! (PAUSE) I'll tell you what - I'll give you my arms. They're damn strong. They've carried laundry and groceries and suitcases and dirty diapers and boxes of books and wastebaskets full of cat shit and all my sleeping children upstairs and down. And they're very very soft. They've held all of the people I've loved, sometimes all night long.

MPJ: Just like a woman, she said.

### E7. THE BIG MOTHER'S FINAL SPEECH

J BECOMES A CHILD CURLED UP ON THE FLOOR AND THEN GROWS INTO THE BIG MOTHER. (THE REVERSE OF THE OPENING IMAGE.)

J: How could anyone tell this story? It's too long. It's hundreds of thousands of years long. It's been writing itself since the world began - every day of every year and every minute of every day. I mean, history is so much simpler than this story of a mother. (PAUSE) We've survived. That's something to tell. Through the dirty dishes and the children sitting on our laps and the men leaning on our arms and the tyranny of their myths and their movies and their songs, we have survived. And who could say what it is like? In the end the only thing to say is that we go on loving - with all of our beings we go on loving. And the entire planet depends upon our ability and our willingness to do it.

### E8. THE SONG OF THE MOTHER

(RITUAL #5)

R, J, C AND P CARRY BREAD TO THE AUDIENCE. THEY GIVE SOME TO EACH MEMBER OF THE AUDIENCE SAYING SOFTLY TO EACH:

— EITHER: Nurture yourself with this food.  
OR: . Let the mother within feed the daughter (child) within.

M: (SINGS)

We will walk through the streets of this city which sleeps,  
which sleeps, my daughter,  
you and I.  
You carry the bowl,  
I'll bring the grain,  
on this parade through the city.

We will walk through the streets of this city which sleeps,  
which sleeps, my daughter,  
you and I.  
I'll take the ashes,  
you bring the jonquils, daughter,  
on this parade through the city.

We will walk through the streets of this city which sleeps,  
 which sleeps, my daughter,  
 you and I.  
 You carry my heart,  
 I'll carry you, my little daughter,  
 on this parade through the city.

E9. THE INTRODUCTIONS

- C: I am Cecilia, daughter of Margaret.
- P: I am Phyllis, daughter of MaryJane.
- J: I am Jan, daughter of Marilyn.
- R: I am Robyn, daughter of LelahMae.
- M: I am Martha, daughter of Mary.
- A: (FROM THE AUD.) I am Aurora, daughter of Lena, etc.