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of the Beast

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of the Beast
A play

An Honors Thesis

presented by

Leila Rose Teitelman

to

The Department of Theater

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

Honors in the major field

Advisor: Kenneth Prestininzi

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of the Beast

A play by: Leila Rose Teitelman

The People:

Leigh: A mother. Leigh is young, fierce but fearful. Strong-willed. She wears combat boots to keep her safe.

Sonya: A mother. Sonya is airy, forgetful, dreamlike. She has lots of answers, but doesn't know if they are the right ones.

Daniel: A father. Daniel is aloof. He runs from what frightens him.

Marta: A mother. Marta abandoned her child. She feels trapped.

Darya: A Mother. Marta's mother. An immigrant. She has faith in rules.

Kid eating ice cream: A kid who eats ice cream.

Notes: — indicates a pause or an internal thought: an unvoiced response. Length of dash indicates relative length of pause.

The Play:

Scene 1.

A hospital room. A birthing room. There are posters of scantily clad men, movie stars and rulers of foreign countries lining the walls. There is one bed, white sheets, tiled floors. It is uncomfortably sterile. The entrance of the room is SL. SR acts as a sort of abyss. Perhaps it is a bathroom. We see Marta onstage wearing a nurse's uniform. An apron. She is carrying a sheet in the shape of a baby. We hear Leigh from off:

LEIGH

SHHHHHIIITTTT!

MARTA

I forgot her once. In a grocery store. Just once.

LEIGH

NOOOOO!

MARTA

I was walking around the aisles looking for chocolate chips. We were going to make cookies. We were traveling up and down each row like—two fish swimming upstream. I was frustrated because I couldn't find the chocolate chips, and I told my husband they would be there when he got home from work. I don't know why I couldn't find them. I'd found them so many times before. It was me. I was just being stupid. ——

LEIGH

(Groans audibly.)

MARTA

And she was right next to me, holding onto the cart. She was there and then she was gone. And I went all the way through the checkout, not realizing she was ever with me. Forgetting I had even brought her to the store at all. And as I was loading the groceries into the car, I saw her booster seat in back and realized what I'd done. And of course when I went back inside she was at one of the checkout counters, crying and snotting all over. Gaping at one of the employees. And everyone stared at me like... like I was this horrible person. Like I had abandoned my kid. They shook their heads. And I could just tell the employee thought he should call the police or something; that this child was in danger because I had forgotten. For one *second* I forgot that I had a kid.

LEIGH

Stop! Stop!!

MARTA

And she was *fine*. She was just upset.

—
We went home and we made cookies.
But the thing is. Sometimes I think I realized she wasn't with me.

LEIGH

Are you kidding me?!

MARTA

And then I know that I deserved those stares. Because when I was leaving that store, somewhere in the back of my head I thought: Just go. You don't have to do this anymore. Just go.

Darya, also in nurse's attire, enters SR and coughs in her throat.

Sorry, Mother.

Marta shakes the baby sheet out and starts folding it.

Scene 2.

We hear a horrible scream from offstage.

LEIGH

(From off) AHHHHHHHHHH

Leigh is wheeled on by Daniel. She is very pregnant. She wears a hospital gown and combat boots. She continues to scream.

LEIGH

NONONONONONONNONOOOOONONONONO

DANIEL

Leigh. Come on.

LEIGH

I'm not done. FFUUUCCK THIS!

Daniel wheels Leigh off stage right. She continues to swear. He walks back on. Daniel plays with some of the hospital gear. Ends up knocking over a jar of q-tips. Leigh lets out a large scream, Daniel yells to her:

DANIEL

This is embarrassing.

LEIGH

Don't. Just stop talking.

DANIEL

What if the nurses hear us... or our kid. What if the first thing our child hears is (*whispering*)
Fuck.

LEIGH

Then it will know how much it fucking hurt me! FUCK.

Ok I'm done. Wheel me back on.

He does. Leigh takes out a cigarette and puts it in her mouth.

DANIEL

What the hell are you doing?

LEIGH

Oh this? I know. I know! It says on the pack you're not supposed to smoke while you're 'with child.' so don't worry.

DANIEL

Are you trying to kill our child? People end up with deformities from mothers like you.

LEIGH

Don't look at me like that. It just feels good sometimes—in my mouth. That's all.

DANIEL

There are certain things you're not allowed to do.

He takes the pack of cigarettes.

This is for your own good.

LEIGH

Can I get up and walk around? Am I allowed to do that?

DANIEL

I'm going to find someone. You should probably have someone here.

LEIGH

Are you leaving?

DANIEL

I'll come back.

LEIGH

But what if I'm alone and it comes out? It'll be gross and bloody and I won't know what to do with it.

DANIEL

Just follow your instincts.

LEIGH

My instincts?

DANIEL

Yeah. You're supposed to have instincts. Like... female instincts. You know?

LEIGH

What if my female instincts never come?

DANIEL

They're instincts. They're already there...

LEIGH

I just think that maybe I was born without them. Is that possible?

DANIEL

Mothers always know what to do.

LEIGH

—

DANIEL

—

LEIGH

Fuck. I need a drink.

DANIEL

Ok that's definitely not allowed.

LEIGH

Yeah well maybe if I had FEMALE INSTINCTS I would know that!

DANIEL

Dude. You need to chill out. You want to practice breathing or something?

LEIGH

I don't think I can do this.

DANIEL

Of course you can. Women have been pushing out for like...*(counts on his fingers)* years.

LEIGH

No. I mean. There will be a baby after this, and I will be in charge of its LIFE. What are we supposed to do with a baby?

DANIEL

Well it's a little late to discuss this.

LEIGH

Yeah it's way too late. It's too late and here I am in the fucking hospital about to push a rugby ball out of my uterus and who thought of this method anyway? I mean who is sitting up there going "hmmm I think it's a great idea to have a female incubate this tiny, gross alien child for nine months and then push it out of a small orifice." That's maybe the worst idea I've ever heard. My body isn't ready for this. Nine months ago...Once I snorted Adderall instead of drinking coffee. Do you think the baby can feel that? I've never exercised a day in my life. Daniel!

DANIEL

I'm going to get someone.

Daniel exits SL. Leigh yells after him:

LEIGH

Seriously though. I would really appreciate a drink.

Marta joins her onstage. She is watching.

LEIGH

Or some advice.

MARTA

You're a very brave girl. ———*(Excited to help)* I have some advice. Always separate whites and colors. Don't mix—

Darya enters and coughs in her throat.

Sorry, Mother.

Scene 3.

LEIGH

Mom... Momma? No. Mom. Mommy? Ugh so weird. Mother. Fuck.

Leigh looks around. Leigh sees a mirror and screams at her own reflection. She lays a white sheet over the mirror. Marta looks back at Leigh.

Mom?

MARTA

Sing a lullaby. It's the only thing I ever did right.

LEIGH

So baby it's just you and me... I guess.

MARTA

Children always remember lullabies.

LEIGH

What do you want? You can't talk. Right. Might be a while before that happens. What do I want? God why am I talking to you? — sorry.

MARTA

Remember my lullabies?

LEIGH

I can't sing. Shit out of luck.

Leigh starts breathing through the pain. She walks into the curtained room to have a contraction. Marta starts humming a song. Marta joins Leigh, pulling back the curtain that obstructs her.

LEIGH

Stop singing.

MARTA

(Continues to sing. Louder even)

LEIGH

It hurts my ears. I don't like the sound.

MARTA

I thought it would be nice.

LEIGH

Well it's not nice. You always sing and I hate it.

MARTA

You shouldn't be rude when someone is trying to do something good for you.

LEIGH

Singing should be illegal like Brussels sprouts.

MARTA

I'm sorry. I'm doing the best I can.

LEIGH

—

MARTA

—

LEIGH

We could make a song together.

MARTA

We could try.

Leigh hums a little ditty. Marta joins in the second time. Leigh wonders out of the room.

LEIGH

I wish I remembered that song.

MARTA

If I sang now could you hear me?

Marta begins the melody again.

LEIGH (*singing*)

Close your eyes. No keep them closed.

Say goodnight. Now count your toes.

LEIGH (cont)

*And pray my child. Pray for your foes.
So in the light. Forget your woes.*

LEIGH and MARTA

So in the light. Forget your woes.

MARTA

I never said sorry.

LEIGH

I hate that song.

MARTA

To you or your father.

LEIGH

(Getting into bed) Don't come yet. I'm not ready.

MARTA

But after everything. I couldn't go back.

Darya comes on and coughs at Marta.

Sorry, Mother.

LEIGH

I'm sorry... Mother.

Scene 4.

*Sonya enters in some sweats. She is eating red jello. Leigh sees her and screams.
Sonya screams back.*

SONYA

Oh. Hi. I thought this was my room. Is this my room—?

LEIGH

I don't think so.

SONYA

Oh wow. You're huge.

LEIGH

Thanks. That's just what every woman wants to hear.

SONYA

No that's not what I meant. I meant...

LEIGH

It's gross.

SONYA

It's beautiful. Really. How far along are you? Is that the right way to say it? Far along?
(laughing) Sounds official.

LEIGH

The entire way, I guess. I thought it would take longer for some reason.

SONYA

Health teachers really are getting shittier and shittier.

LEIGH

No. It felt like. It all just happened very fast.

SONYA

—

LEIGH

I'm in labor. Right now. I haven't had a contraction in a while but—

SONYA

Oh my god. You look so calm.

LEIGH

Oh don't worry. I can feel my insides and... I know I'm doomed.

SONYA

Have I seen you here before?

LEIGH

No. This is my first.

SONYA

I'm sorry. I shouldn't be here. I'll leave you alone.

LEIGH

No please! —————

I didn't know that when your water breaks it's so... messy. ———I mean— I'm scared. I would love to have someone here.

SONYA

Well sure. I can wait with you until. Your mother comes or—

LEIGH

She's not coming.

SONYA

I'm sorry. Is she dead?

LEIGH

No. I don't know, actually. She's gone. What I mean is... she's not coming. She doesn't even know I'm pregnant.

SONYA

Oh.

LEIGH

I think maybe I forgot too. Until right now. —

Nine months seems like a long time until it's over. And then you realize that it's not *just* nine months but the rest of your lifetime. — I'll never not be a mother again.

SONYA

I know. It's a trip, right?

LEIGH

—

SONYA

How old are you?

LEIGH

25.

SONYA

You look really young.

LEIGH

I am really young!

SONYA

It's the *glow*. I'm 28.

LEIGH

I used to tell people I was going to get married when I was 28. I thought it was the perfect age. But I don't think that's going to happen.

SONYA

No one?

LEIGH

Eh... I have someone. Not one I'm gonna marry.

SONYA

I know that feeling.

LEIGH

You know?

SONYA

Oh yeah. 28. One kid. That's it.

LEIGH

You have a kid?

SONYA

I do. People don't expect it from me.

LEIGH

How old?

SONYA

One day.

LEIGH

So that's why you're here?

SONYA

Yeah. I had my first kid yesterday. Go me.

LEIGH

But yesterday was Sunday.

SONYA

I know. It's bad luck, I think.

LEIGH

Monday's not much better, I suppose. Well you look good. For just being in labor, you look good.

SONYA

Thank you. I don't feel the same. Remember how you feel today because you'll never feel this way again.

LEIGH

I don't want to feel this way again.

SONYA

I keep looking in the mirror and pretending to be my old self, but it's not working. So I took a walk and found you.

LEIGH

Where's your baby?

SONYA

I don't know.

LEIGH

—

SONYA

But as long as I'm in the hospital, I feel like he's safe.

LEIGH

Really?

SONYA

—

LEIGH

Hospitals scare me. Everything's too white.

————— Oh shit. Will you roll me off so I can scream again?

Another contraction?
SONYA

I think so.
LEIGH

Sure.
SONYA

Sonya rolls Leigh off and we hear her screaming violently from off. A kid eating ice cream walks in from the other door.

What's that sound?
KID

She's having a baby.
SONYA

Gross.
KID

The kid continues to eat ice cream and exits the stage.

This may be the wrong place for you.
SONYA

Why?
LEIGH

This hospital is just—well it's too late now.
SONYA

OWW. What's too late?
LEIGH

I'm sorry I shouldn't have brought it up. You want to hear a story?
SONYA

(From off) Sure.
LEIGH

SONYA

They told me I would never have kids. From the time I was 12. They said it was impossible. Something with my uterus. I had these huge cysts all over my organs. But doctors, they don't know anything. And so I walked into this bright room with, like, those dentist lights all over and some plaques covering the walls and this man. This white man, obviously, was sitting at this white desk with a white coat. You know you're right. About all the white. Anyway. He was there, holding a pretty official looking clipboard, ready to break this news to me. I think they wait for these moments. To break horrible news to little girls. Like they're role-playing themselves.

LEIGH

SONYA

SONYA

Yeah?

LEIGH

Can you bring me back?

SONYA

Sure.

She does.

Did you just call me Sonya?

LEIGH

You look like a Sonya.

SONYA

I like it.

LEIGH

What do I look like?

SONYA

A... Leigh?

LEIGH

I am a Leigh.

SONYA

Perfect.

LEIGH
What happened?

SONYA
What?

LEIGH
In your story. What happened?

SONYA
I had a kid.

Scene 4.

Leigh lies on the hospital bed. Marta is onstage folding hospital sheets. Darya enters and stands next to her doing the exact same motion.

MARTA
My husband sent me out here. To fold sheets. But I'm going to help you.

DARYA
No you're not.

MARTA
Sometimes I like folding clothes. Making cakes. Things of that nature. It's the only way I can think of creating. I can create a cake, or this wonderful fold. Because women die. But cakes have lived forever. White sheets last centuries. My mother brought these over from Europe—after the war. My mother is FUNNY. She truly believed in mortality. She used to tell me:

DARYA
You meet a nice man. You have beautiful children. You feed them. You hear me Marta. I am old. I will die before I see babies again. But this you need to know.

MARTA
And so I did. I did just what she told me to do. *(to Darya as if hard of hearing)* You hear that, mom?! I'm so very lucky. Some women can't find men. I pity those women. I really do.

DARYA
And some women can't keep men. I pity them.

They continue folding. Marta walks into the hospital room and lays a sheet over Leigh. Darya coughs in her throat.

Sorry mother.

MARTA

Darya exits.

So now I'm here.

SONYA

Mothers.

MARTA

I've been trying to leave, but they won't let me out.

SONYA

We have to take care of someone.

MARTA

I'm gonna be sick.

LEIGH

Leigh runs offstage and we hear puking from the SR area. A curtain opens up to reveal Leigh. She starts crying. Marta joins her.

It's ok honey. You want some ginger ale?

MARTA

No.

LEIGH

Some crackers?

MARTA

No.

LEIGH

You need to eat something.

MARTA

I can't.

LEIGH

MARTA

Why not?

LEIGH

Because I had a bad dream and now I'm too scared to eat.

MARTA

Bad dreams aren't real.

LEIGH

Well they feel scary. — I want to sleep with you.

MARTA

You can't sleep with me, honey.

LEIGH

Why not?

MARTA

Because you're not a baby anymore.

LEIGH

But my bed is full of dreams.

MARTA

What was this dream about?

LEIGH

I don't want to tell you.

MARTA

Why?

LEIGH

Because what if it comes true?

MARTA

It's all in your head.

LEIGH

I had a dream that our house was burning down and daddy and I ran out but you walked right into the fire and you were gone forever.

I'm sorry. MARTA

I don't want you to leave me, Mommy. LEIGH

I'll try not to. MARTA

The curtain closes and Leigh walks out into the room.

Scene 5.

Are you feeling any better? SONYA

For now. LEIGH

— SONYA

I wonder how I don't puke up the baby. — LEIGH

You taking drugs? SONYA

Not yet. LEIGH

You should. Think about it, I mean SONYA

Were you? LEIGH

No. *Whispers:* they advised me not to. SONYA

Why? LEIGH

SONYA

Thought it was a bad idea. For me. And there was no one to administer them anyway.

LEIGH

What did it feel like?

SONYA

I don't remember.

LEIGH

It was yesterday.

SONYA

That just seems so far away. A lot has happened since then.

LEIGH

I was hoping it might give me some comfort.

SONYA

It's just. Well it's horrible. I remember it being horrible. Like worse than when I got my chest tattoo, and I cried for hours when that happened. Then after it's over you feel like you were just struck by lightning. Your body aches like a wrestler, but you don't remember how it became so sore. It's not so bad. When you think about it.

LEIGH

Why?

SONYA

There are just worse things. That's all.

LEIGH

Right.

SONYA

Are you going to have this baby alone?

LEIGH

—

SONYA

I like that you're alone. Just like I was.

LEIGH

It makes me nervous.

SONYA

But I feel like a freak show when there's people gawking. Step right up and witness the expanding vagina! It's a personal thing.

LEIGH

Even doctors.

SONYA

Yeah.

LEIGH

I think all OBGYN's should be women. Why would a man go into that field? I'm sure it's medically fascinating, but men don't understand. The pain. It just feels natural to be surrounded by friends. Friendly faces. Friendly, female, faces.

SONYA

Have you ever even looked at yourself?

LEIGH

No—it freaks me out.

SONYA

Why?

LEIGH

I don't know.

SONYA

—

LEIGH

You?

SONYA

Not specifically.

LEIGH

Is that wrong?

SONYA

Sure. We should all know more. But women's bodies just want to be secret.

LEIGH

What do you mean?

SONYA

For men it's all out there. Hanging out so everyone knows what's going on.

LEIGH

(laughing) That's kinda... ugh.

SONYA

Yeah. Ew. But for us—Women need to use a mirror to even see our lady parts and most people would rather just be in the dark anyway.

LEIGH

Should I feel bad?

SONYA

That's up to you.

LEIGH

Someone's living inside of me.

SONYA

—

LEIGH

This fetus knows my insides.

SONYA

—

LEIGH

But I don't.

SONYA

Has anyone ever told you?

LEIGH

Told me what? I've gotten X-rays before.

SONYA

No I mean has anyone ever told you what you look like?

LEIGH

I don't want you to think of me as this dumb girl.

SONYA

It's not too bad.

LEIGH

It's just all so...

SONYA

Bloody?

LEIGH

Yes! All so bloody and hairy and—I'm being ignorant.

SONYA

No... no!

LEIGH

I don't want you to think of me like that.

SONYA

I don't.

LEIGH

I think it's supposed to give you power. — It doesn't for me.

SONYA

Because it's out of your control.

LEIGH

And I hate that.

SONYA

I know.

LEIGH

Of course you know.

SONYA
Because we're women.

LEIGH
Exactly.

SONYA
—

LEIGH
I'd rather keep my eyes closed.

SONYA
But if you have this baby and it's a girl... you can't keep your eyes closed to her.

Sonya kisses Leigh's stomach. Leigh closes her eyes.

LEIGH
What was that?

SONYA
Maybe the reason you're afraid is because you don't want to be in this alone.

LEIGH
Maybe.

SONYA
But there are a lot of us out there.

LEIGH
Let me keep them closed. Just until the baby comes.

SONYA
I shouldn't tell you what to do. I'm being intrusive.

LEIGH
I'm glad you're here.

SONYA
Do you want me to rub your head?

LEIGH
Would you like to?

SONYA

It seems like a comforting thing for me to do. Something a mother does?

LEIGH

(Laughing) You're following your female instincts.

SONYA

You think we have those?

LEIGH

Someone once told me we do. But I don't feel mine.

SONYA

You have beautiful hair.

LEIGH

—

SONYA

Rubbed or scratched?

LEIGH

Somewhere in between.

*Sonya climbs into bed and puts Leigh's head on her lap. She starts rubbing it. Silence.
Sonya pulls Leigh's hair. Leigh screams.*

LEIGH

What?!

SONYA

Yes?

LEIGH

Did you just—?

SONYA

I don't think so.

LEIGH

—

We've been here for days.

SONYA

Only a couple minutes... actually.

LEIGH

Huh.

SONYA

I'm hot.

LEIGH

You can take this thing off.

SONYA

Sonya tries to remove Leighs gown. Leigh screams.

No!

LEIGH

—

SONYA

(Calming herself) No it's ok.

LEIGH

Where's my baby?

SONYA

I don't know.

LEIGH

Sleeping. Right. I should check him.

SONYA

Sonya runs off.

Wait! Where are you going?

LEIGH

Scene 6.

Marta comes on with a suitcase. She opens it up and starts packing the sheets she was folding.

Where are you going?
DARYA

Try to be a good person. Try!
MARTA

Shit.
LEIGH

Leigh sits back on the bed. Covers her whole body with sheets.

How am I supposed to fight back? You're right. I can't help. I'll leave. That's how things work. It gets hard and I leave. Sometimes that's all you have.

You can't leave.
DARYA

— (Hums the same song.)
MARTA

Where are you going?
DARYA

Nowhere, mother.
MARTA

Why would you pack a suitcase to go nowhere?
DARYA

It keeps me calm sometimes.
MARTA

You know Marta, you have responsibilities.
DARYA

I know.
MARTA

DARYA

It's not always easy being a woman. We have to stay. Stay and smile and feed our children. It can feel like a sentence but it's our responsibility.

MARTA

Yes, mother.

DARYA

I didn't come here. TO AMERICA— so my children could run away.

MARTA

I know, mother.

DARYA

What a disappointment.

MARTA

Why must life pick on me like this?

DARYA

There are much worse things. One day all of your eggs will be gone. And you will feel what's worse than being a woman. Being absolutely nothing.

Darya exits. Marta stays.

Scene 7.

Sonya rushes on and shakes Leigh in bed.

LEIGH

Stop. What? What is it?

SONYA

Nothing. I thought you were dead.

LEIGH

Who's dead?

SONYA

No one. It's fine. I just don't want to lose anyone.

LEIGH

Have any doctors come?

SONYA

There's no one around. I think they're on lunch.

LEIGH

Did you find your son? Check up on him?

SONYA

Yeah he's great. Just hanging out in that big room full of babies down the hall.

LEIGH

I want to see him.

SONYA

I don't think that's a good idea. Babies need a lot of sleep. That's what I hear anyway.

LEIGH

I can look at him while he's asleep.

SONYA

I don't want him to wake up. I—let's do something to distract you.

LEIGH

From what?

SONYA

I want to make you feel better.

LEIGH

—

SONYA

Let's go on a walk.

LEIGH

Where?

SONYA

Around the room?

LEIGH

I don't want to be rude to someone who's doing a good thing for me.

It's fine. SONYA

But I don't know you. LEIGH

Oh. SONYA

I want to know you! LEIGH

I can leave. SONYA

You just got back. LEIGH

You want me to leave. SONYA

That's not what I meant. LEIGH

No no no. My mother told me not to talk to strangers. SONYA

I'm not a stranger, I'm Leigh. Remember? LEIGH

I think I remember. SONYA

So who are *you*? LEIGH

I'm Sonya. SONYA

Anything else? LEIGH

SONYA
What are you trying to get out of me?

LEIGH
Nothing.

SONYA
Why are you here anyway?

LEIGH
To have a baby.

SONYA
There must be something else. What did you do?

LEIGH
What's wrong with you?

SONYA
You just said. You don't even know me.

LEIGH
I'm trying.

SONYA
Why?

LEIGH
Because I want to care for someone. — I want to know what it's like.

SONYA
You think you could care for me?

LEIGH
You're keeping me intact.

SONYA
Well you are being very optimistic.

LEIGH
Sometimes it helps.

I'm always scared.

SONYA

Me too.

LEIGH

I hate being scared. Makes me feel weak.

SONYA

— Anything else?

LEIGH

—

SONYA

My friend and I. Well it wasn't really a choice, at first. And then after. — I guess after that there were a lot of choices. And I just made some. Maybe I was wrong.

LEIGH

What are you doing?

SONYA

I thought I would tell you...How I got here.

LEIGH

You can change things, if you want.

SONYA

What do you mean?

LEIGH

Well you can always go back. Try things over again.

SONYA

I don't have anyone to go back to.

LEIGH

No family?

SONYA

Well my father is dead. Heart attack. I never had any sisters. But I always dreamed about braiding people's hair and those plastic ponies.

LEIGH

SONYA

What about your mom?

LEIGH

I never really knew her. She ran out on me when I was like... five. — I'm sorry. This is probably more than you want to know.

SONYA

Do you think people look down on you?

LEIGH

From heaven?

SONYA

Or wherever it is we go.

LEIGH

Like my father?

SONYA

Sure.

LEIGH

No. I don't really believe in heaven.

SONYA

Oh.

LEIGH

Not to say you shouldn't believe in it. It's nice to believe.

SONYA

Yesterday. I tried to think my mom could see me giving birth.

LEIGH

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to say that. I'm sure your mother is watching us right now.

SONYA

I know it seems silly.

—

I hope my mother can see me. I think she would have been proud.

LEIGH

I think so.

SONYA

I hope she would be proud of me. To see me have a child. That's something to be proud of.

LEIGH

It is.

SONYA

That doesn't happen often.

LEIGH

Almost never.

SONYA

But it does feel nice.

LEIGH

— When it does happen.

SONYA

I guess that's how the world turns.

LEIGH

I'm proud.

SONYA

Me too.

LEIGH

OWWW. I wish it would stop for a couple minutes.

Leigh holds her stomach in the fetal position. Daniel enters. He is wearing hospital scrubs and holds a balloon and a large stuffed animal.

DANIEL

Who are you?

SONYA

I'm Sonya.

DANIEL

Interesting. I would have guessed Gertrude.

SONYA

Who are you?

DANIEL

I'm the father. — There's no one out there, Leigh.

LEIGH

What do you mean?

DANIEL

There doesn't appear to be anyone working at this hospital.

SONYA

They come and go.

DANIEL

So I brought you this. *(He hands her the animal and balloon)* I thought it might help.

LEIGH

How would this ever help?

DANIEL

Now don't be ungrateful. *(He snatches the balloon back. To Sonya:)* I think maybe you should leave.

SONYA

Maybe I should.

DANIEL

She seems to be in a bad mood. That could only be because you're here.

LEIGH

I don't think so. I think maybe you should stay.

DANIEL

This is not an event to attend, Leigh. It's the birth of our child.

LEIGH

Sonya just gave birth.

DANIEL

I've seen movies (*He breathes in a stereotypical way*) Heehee HooHoo, HeeHee HooHo. See I know!

LEIGH

Ok, ok. Can you please go get me some ice, Daniel? I would love some ice.

DANIEL

Oh right. ICE. Pregnant women love ice. You must admit, I'm doing very well under pressure.

LEIGH

Thank you. You're doing a great job.

DANIEL

Also there's this crazy open heart surgery happening on the second floor. Gertrude, you should take a look when you get a chance. So much blood! (*Blows Leigh a kiss and exits.*)

LEIGH

I'm sorry.

SONYA

It's not your fault.

LEIGH

How many babies do you think are mistakes?

SONYA

Most.

LEIGH

I wish there was a handbook on this somewhere.

SONYA

Oh there are. Lots of handbooks.

LEIGH

Who writes them?

SONYA

Most people think they're experts.

LEIGH

I've never been good enough at anything to write about it.

SONYA

We're all good at something.

LEIGH

What're you good at?

SONYA

Well I used to be good at... never mind.

LEIGH

What?

SONYA

It's embarrassing.

LEIGH

There's no one around. Say something interesting.

SONYA

(Laughing) I don't think I've ever said anything interesting before.

LEIGH

Me neither.

SONYA

Boiling eggs. I used to be good at boiling eggs. And painting faces. Sometimes I was a good kisser.

LEIGH

Did you ever write a book about it?

SONYA

There are lots of good kissers. They don't need my help.

LEIGH

What else?

SONYA

Um... wearing hats. Holding hands. And shooting up. I was really good at that.

LEIGH

Oh.

SONYA

I never wrote about any of it. Maybe I should — What're you good at?

LEIGH

I don't know. I never thought about it.

SONYA

Well think about it now! You have to be good at something.

Marta runs onstage.

MARTA

I want to play!

LEIGH

Um... I'm good at smoking. Taking pictures of people I don't know. Pretending to be on my phone at restaurants.

MARTA

I'm good at being dull. Pinning hair.

LEIGH

Actually... wait. Yes. I'm good at—

MARTA

Baking.

LEIGH

(Getting louder and louder) Riding in the front seat. Rubbing feet. Drawing skulls!

MARTA

I'm good at—

LEIGH

Keeping a straight face. Ordering food via telephone.

MARTA

I'm good at... *(searching)*

Sensing sarcasm!

LEIGH

Yes!

SONYA

Nothing.

MARTA

I guess that's it.

LEIGH

Nothing.

MARTA

We should write a book.

SONYA

It'd be pretty useless. I need one about mothering.

LEIGH

You learn by just growing up.

SONYA

Growing up without a mother is different.

LEIGH

Sorry... I forgot.

SONYA

I should go back inside.

MARTA

Marta leaves the stage.

They keep one in the desk, you know.

SONYA

What?

LEIGH

A handbook.

SONYA

Leigh looks in the side desk and pulls out a book that says "Mothering 101" on the cover.

LEIGH

Rule 1. You have to want this baby.

Rule 2. Even if you don't... It's coming.

—

Huh.

—

Are these real rules?

SONYA

It's a very lonely thing, growing another person.

LEIGH

(Leigh looks down at her stomach and screams.) Shit. That always scares me.

SONYA

All people are lonely. It is fed to us through our umbilical cords.

LEIGH

Sad.

SONYA

It's only sad if we stop smiling.

LEIGH

Would you like me to rub your head?

SONYA

—

LEIGH

—

SONYA

I don't want to be the first person to see your baby.

LEIGH

Why not?

SONYA

I'm not important enough for that.

You're my only friend here.

LEIGH

What about your friend?

SONYA

Oh yeah. I guess he's my friend too.

LEIGH

Why isn't he here?

SONYA

It's easy to leave when you're a father.

LEIGH

I really don't know any fathers.

SONYA

Your father?

LEIGH

Nope.

SONYA

Your baby's father?

LEIGH

Sonya shrugs.

Not at all?

LEIGH

Hardly caught his name.

SONYA

He's good. My friend.

LEIGH

He tries very hard.

That's—good.

SONYA

LEIGH

I couldn't think of a nicer man.

SONYA

Nice. —Nice is nice.

LEIGH

Sometimes I hope that's all you need.

SONYA

Sometimes I think it's the best you'll get.

LEIGH

Is your baby nice?

SONYA

I don't know. I've barely met him. Fuck. I'm supposed to be looking out for him, aren't I? For some reason I just feel it's pointless. Eh. Maybe I can just have another one. Second time's the charm. No... I'll go.

LEIGH

Should I go with you?

SONYA

No! I mean—he's not going anywhere. Right?

LEIGH

Are you alright?

SONYA

What a dumb question.

LEIGH

What? OWW!

SONYA

Are you alright? That's a dumb question. No! I just remembered that I'm not alright. None of us are. Ask anyone here. Oh wait. There is no one here!

MARTA

Don't call her dumb.

OOWWWW. STOP.

LEIGH

It's not going to stop you know.

SONYA

I know!!!!

LEIGH

You have to stop it yourself.

SONYA

What?

LEIGH

Leave her alone!

MARTA

Right. Sorry.

SONYA

—

LEIGH

It's the hormones.

SONYA

Leigh goes to the bed. Wraps herself up in a sheet and turns away from Sonya.

Boy or girl? Yours.

SONYA

—

LEIGH

That way you can pick out the colors.

SONYA

—

LEIGH

SONYA

For the bedroom. The nursery. The onesies.

I'm sorry.

LEIGH

I'm Jewish. We don't find those things out.

SONYA

Why not?

LEIGH

The Midrash.

SONYA

I don't know what that means.

LEIGH

It's just tradition.

SONYA

LEIGH

You're supposed to conceal certain things.

SONYA

Like some sort of decency?

LEIGH

Sure. Yeah. People aren't supposed to know everything. Like the day you die. Or your child's sex.

SONYA

Ugh. I wish I was Jewish.

LEIGH

(Leigh unwraps herself.) Why?

SONYA

I wish I was anything.

LEIGH

It's fine.

SONYA

I'm glad we get to make our children whatever we want. — Basically like starting all over again.

LEIGH

I don't think that's how it works.

SONYA

That's too bad.

LEIGH

I do hope it will be a boy.

SONYA

I have a boy.

LEIGH

I know.

SONYA

He's beautiful.

LEIGH

And he'll never have to know what it's like to be — a woman.

SONYA

Never know any pain. —

LEIGH

DAMNIT. I'm having another contraction! SHITT NO. No no.

SONYA

This is not the time.

LEIGH

Why does it hurt so much?!

SONYA

Your baby's trying to escape. He'll roll right out of this hospital if he finds the chance.

LEIGH

I should have gotten cut open. Removed this thing with forceps.

SONYA

Don't ever let it out. Keep it inside as long as you can!

LEIGH

I can't.

SONYA

It will run away as soon as it's born.

LEIGH

It won't!

SONYA

It's so tiring. You have to watch it. With both eyes. Every day.

LEIGH

Why don't you just leave. I don't want you to see this! OWW.

SONYA

(Sonya yells at Leigh's stomach.) STAY INSIDE! STAY INSIDE!

LEIGH

Stop!

SONYA

I'll walk you off.

LEIGH

Thank you.

Sonya walks Leigh off.

SONYA

What an adventure!

LEIGH

—

SONYA

I thought once I would go to India. Have you ever been there?

LEIGH

No.

SONYA

Neither have I. I haven't been anywhere. It's a failure. Right? You're supposed to do these things. Before you have children. You're supposed to see what's in this world. I can't teach him anything if I don't know anything.

——
It's all my fault.

LEIGH

Let's take comfort in blaming God.

——
I think I'm done.

SONYA

How far apart are the contractions?

Leigh comes back onstage.

LEIGH

How far apart are they supposed to be?

SONYA

They're gonna get closer. Chase you.

LEIGH

I went to New Zealand once. It was green. Very green everywhere.

SONYA

See that's very adult of you. Traveling.

LEIGH

Well not really. I was alone the whole time. I carried one big backpack. I knew I was supposed to be loving it, but the whole time I was just thinking about home. Thinking about drinking with my friends. We're all ungrateful, I guess. But there's no use forcing yourself to be an adult. I never really wanted it.

SONYA

This baby?

LEIGH

I don't know. It's just like New Zealand. I'm thinking about all the stuff I'm missing. So when I have this baby. — I'm not alright. Damn Daniel. You know it's not his fault, but I always say it is. I'm just. I'm 25. You know that. I've only seen five concerts. Ever. And I haven't had beer in nine months! Beer is my favorite. I will probably never sleep again. For the next 18 years at least and I'm bad at taking care of sick people. I don't even like to see any sort of feces. Ugh I'm gagging now thinking about it. I was going to audition for one of those reality television shows. I hadn't decided which one. Now I can't. Now I'm going to be one of those women who people laugh at in public places. One of my tits hanging out. Milk all down my shirt. I don't have my own apartment. And now I'll definitely have to be an adult.

SONYA

You know, you didn't have to keep it.

LEIGH

I did.

DARYA

Of course you have to keep it.

MARTA

Mother!

DARYA

There aren't many more of us.

MARTA

I thought it was my choice.

DARYA

It is for God to decide.

SONYA

What about Daniel?

LEIGH

He wouldn't have let me give it up. Or take it out or...

MARTA

It's not my responsibility to repopulate our people.

It is all our responsibility.

DARYA

Is this why you had me?

MARTA

You're shameful.

DARYA

I've had a couple. If it makes you feel better.

SONYA

Babies?

LEIGH

Abortions.

SONYA

You don't have to tell me this.

LEIGH

It's silly to pretend like they don't exist.

SONYA

I guess I'm just jealous.

LEIGH

—

SONYA

That you felt like you could.

LEIGH

I had to.

SONYA

Why did you have this one?

LEIGH

I was bored.
—You still have time.

SONYA

LEIGH
What are you talking about?

SONYA
I'm going to go feed my son.

LEIGH
Can I come?

SONYA
No.

LEIGH
But I hate the loneliness.

SONYA
You'll be fine for awhile. Anyway... you're not exactly alone.

Sonya exits. Leigh walks around. She looks in a mirror at herself. Her stomach.

LEIGH
Wanna play a game? What kind of game, you ask? I don't know. I guess cards probably won't work. There's 20 questions. No. You definitely know what I'm thinking. What about house? Have you ever played house? I don't suppose you have. House. That's the name of the game. I used to play when I was younger. Pretend I had a mom... you know. But now I can play the mom. And you can be... well you can be the baby. Makes sense. I've never played the mom before. What should I do? Call you in for dinner? I guess you're already in. Is this weird?

Daniel enters the room. He is wearing the same scrubs but they are splattered in blood.

DANIEL
I heard you were playing house.

LEIGH
Not really. Just me and the baby.

DANIEL
You can't do that.

LEIGH
Why not?

DANIEL

Because when you play house. You have a mother and a father.

LEIGH

I know that.

DANIEL

Right. And I'm the father.

LEIGH

I know that.

DANIEL

So you can't play house without me.

LEIGH

It won't make me feel better to play with you.

DANIEL

This is not fair! You've been quite neglectful of me all day. I really don't appreciate it.

LEIGH

You forgot the ice.

DANIEL

I couldn't find the machine. I would ask someone but...

LEIGH

They haven't come back?

DANIEL

Not yet. They must be taking an awfully long lunch break.

LEIGH

I can't do this. I can't have my baby here. With you.

DANIEL

I'm only trying to help.

LEIGH

If you want to help you should stand there. Stay in this room and watch me scream!

Don't be gross.

DANIEL

Are you afraid of my body?

LEIGH

Of course not. You wouldn't be pregnant if I was.

DANIEL

You touched me but you never looked at me.

LEIGH

It was dark.

DANIEL

With any sense of beauty.

LEIGH

You exaggerate.

DANIEL

I'm not a child.

LEIGH

I've been good. You know I've been good this whole time.

DANIEL

I know.

LEIGH

I've gotten you things during the night. I've rubbed your feet. I'm trying to learn.

DANIEL

I'm giving you a chance, Daniel.

LEIGH

I've never taken care of a baby before.

DANIEL

Neither have I.

LEIGH

DANIEL

But you're the mother.

LEIGH

You could at least try to understand.

DANIEL

Would you like me to leave until you feel a little better?

LEIGH

It's just. You always leave. And I know I'm supposed to feel connected to this thing. But I feel like I'm talking to air. I can't touch it or taste it. It's just air.

DANIEL

It's my baby too.

LEIGH

We don't even know what we're going to name it.

DANIEL

Well how can we? It looks like nothing.

LEIGH

But what if it doesn't know it exists?

DANIEL

Does it?

LEIGH

It has to.

DANIEL

Well fine. We can name it after me, if you don't mind.

LEIGH

What if it's a girl?

DANIEL

A female Daniel is kinda cute.

LEIGH

What about me?

DANIEL

It's coming out of your body. The least you could do is name it after me. Do you even know what Leigh means?

LEIGH

No.

DANIEL

Exactly. I'm not naming my baby that.

LEIGH

Our baby.

DANIEL

What?

LEIGH

Nothing.

DANIEL

Daniel is a nice Jewish name.

LEIGH

I didn't know you were Jewish.

DANIEL

God is my judge.

LEIGH

How did I not know you were Jewish?

DANIEL

That's what it means.

LEIGH

I don't like that.

DANIEL

What a blasphemous thing to say.

LEIGH

Do you believe in God?

DANIEL

Of course I do!

LEIGH

Why?

DANIEL

Because—well. That's what I'm supposed to do.

LEIGH

When have your prayers ever been answered?

DANIEL

That one time. The time I passed my geology class. — Also when I met you.

LEIGH

When you met me?

DANIEL

Sure. You were so beautiful. And no one had ever talked to me like that.

LEIGH

Like what?

DANIEL

You would only focus on one body part at a time. Like you needed to get a message to my foot directly.

LEIGH

So what was your prayer?

DANIEL

I would've died without you, I think. I just wanted someone who was special to me.

LEIGH

But here I've turned into this—mother. How typical.

DANIEL

When all women are supposed to be special, they don't seem very special. — I still love you, you know.

LEIGH

So that's why you never wanted to give it up? God?

Because it's wrong.

DANIEL

You never answered my question.

LEIGH

What question?

DANIEL

Are you afraid of my body?

LEIGH

Men really aren't supposed to be afraid of anything.

DANIEL

You're all cowards.

LEIGH

Well then yes! Is that what you want me to say? I'm disgusted. Kind of repulsed. You look like a snake that swallowed a mouse. It's bloated and leaky and what am I supposed to do with that?

DANIEL

You're supposed to be my companion.

LEIGH

That's what babies are for.

DANIEL

What if I don't even like him? What if I'm stuck with someone my whole life who I don't love?

DANIEL

I just told you I love you. That you were everything I ever wanted. Isn't that enough?

LEIGH

No—

DANIEL

Then I better leave.

LEIGH

Will you come back?

DANIEL
Maybe when it's all over.

LEIGH
It'll never be over.

DANIEL
Good luck. Remember your breathing.

Daniel kisses her forehead and exits. Leigh screams at her stomach.

LEIGH
Leave me alone!!

Scene 8.

Marta enters. She speaks to Leigh. Leigh doesn't seem to hear her.

MARTA
You were born on a Sunday. Bad luck from the start. Would you like to see pictures? I would show you but I don't have any. Are you listening to me?

LEIGH
I don't remember being born.

MARTA
They say you don't remember being born because it's too traumatic.

LEIGH
It's like wanting everything —

MARTA
It's hard. That's what I remember.

LEIGH
and wanting nothing for this child.

MARTA
But all mothers would take that pain away if they could.

LEIGH
Where have you been?

MARTA

I've been waiting for you.

LEIGH

Why haven't you showed me anything?

MARTA

I was going to come back.

LEIGH

That's your job, isn't it?

MARTA

But I ran too far away.

——
I did what I could.

LEIGH

Are you playing hide and seek now? I think we used to do that.

MARTA

No Leigh. I'm not hiding I'm right here.

Leigh runs into the curtained room. Starts counting.

LEIGH

48. 49. 50. Ready or not here I come!

—— Mom? Where'd you go?

Some time passes. Some more "Mom?"s. Leigh suddenly panics. Leigh begins frantically looking around the room. Under pillows and sheets. Tearing things off the wall. Marta avoids her.

LEIGH

This isn't funny anymore.

Marta joins Leigh in the room. Leigh begins to cry.

MARTA

What's the matter?

LEIGH

I thought you left me forever.

MARTA

I was just playing.

LEIGH

But I couldn't find you anywhere. I don't want to play anymore.

MARTA

We don't have to play.

LEIGH

It's not fun when you're gone. I felt really scared. In my chest.

MARTA

You have to remember that even when you can't see me I'm still here.

Marta walks out of the room. Leaving Leigh to cry alone.

MARTA

I'm still here.

LEIGH

I can't see you. And I'm scared.

MARTA

I just couldn't play anymore.

LEIGH

I'm afraid this baby can hear my thoughts. Feel my feelings.

————
They haven't all been nice.

————
That it knows. It already knows and it will hate me from birth.

MARTA

It was never you.

LEIGH

And I try to think that it's not your fault.

MARTA

It was me.

LEIGH

But why didn't you want me? Where were you?!

Sonya enters with the kid eating ice cream.

SONYA

I'm right here!

LEIGH

Sonya!

SONYA

It's a mess in here. Have you been looking for me? That's sweet.

LEIGH

Yes. That's what I've been doing.

SONYA

Well don't worry about it. I'm back. And I brought my son! See?

LEIGH

That's not your son.

SONYA

How do you know? I see a resemblance.

LEIGH

Your son was born yesterday.

SONYA

You're right. He did grow quite fast.

LEIGH

No. That's not him.

——
That can't be him.

SONYA

Oh. Right. Just joking.

LEIGH

(To the kid) What's your name? Do you need any help?

KID

Gross.

SONYA

I brought him here so we could play house. So you could get some practice.

LEIGH

I already tried that.

SONYA

But now we have a real kid.

LEIGH

You should bring him back to his parents.

SONYA

They're not here. There's no one here, remember?

LEIGH

Then how're you here?

SONYA

Something else. We could play birth. I used to play that when I was small.

LEIGH

How do I do that?

SONYA

I will hide under the covers. You just pretend that I'm in your womb. You start screaming bloody murder, and then I will pop out. Oh wait—there was another part. Fuck. What am I forgetting? There are people. Oh doctors. There are doctors. And you ask me where the doctors are and I scream from inside your stomach, I scream "They're all dead!"

LEIGH

Is that really what it's like?

KID

Gross.

LEIGH

I don't want to be the mom. I want to be the kid.

SONYA

Wait, I have another one.

LEIGH

I'll hide in your womb.

SONYA

No this one's good. I would run into the street.

LEIGH

I'm not in the mood for games.

SONYA

Listen. I would run into the street, and my mother would run after me. Chase me down the street, pregnant. No shoes on.

LEIGH

You want me to chase you down the street?

SONYA

With no shoes on.

The kid runs out of the room.

LEIGH

Where is he going?

SONYA

He's playing the game. Quick take your shoes off!

LEIGH

I'd rather not.

SONYA

It's part of the game. He's getting away.

LEIGH

What if he gets hurt?

SONYA

You better chase him.

Leigh runs out. Sonya watches from the door.

SONYA

You're supposed to catch him!

Sonya runs after.

Darya enters. She places an "It's a boy!" basket on the table. She exits.

After a while the kid runs back into the room followed by Leigh.

LEIGH

Kid! Wait kid. Where are you going?

KID

I don't know.

LEIGH

Will you slow down?

KID

You're not a very fast runner.

LEIGH

Well I've got a little bit of extra...weight...if you haven't noticed.

KID

Is that really a baby in there?

MARTA

That's not polite to ask.

LEIGH

It really is. I think. I haven't checked, but I don't see what else it would be.

KID

That's gross.

LEIGH

I know.

KID

I've never seen a baby.

LEIGH

Well you were one once.

KID

No I wasn't.

LEIGH

We all were.

KID

I don't remember it so how you can you prove I was?

LEIGH

I can't.

KID

Maybe I'll remember your baby. If you have a boy it would be cool cause boys get to run around a bunch and play in the dirt. But if you have a girl that would be cool too because girls have prettier faces than boys and are better at hopscotch. But having any baby is gross. But also cool because when the baby grows up it can eat ice cream like me. I guess it can do that if it's a boy or a girl. Or nothing. It could be like those big teddy bear stuffed animals they have in the gift shop with the big bows and then you can squeeze it really hard all night and it won't even explode or anything. There was one time when I squeezed a frog too hard and the guts kinda came squirting out of it. But I think it was fine. I gave it some ice cream afterwards because I felt bad. I can keep running if you want to chase me. It's fun having someone to play with.

LEIGH

Are you alone?

KID

No. I have some lady who gives me ice cream, and I think it's to make me quieter, but it doesn't matter because there's no one here to talk to. But also it's fine because I like ice cream.

MARTA

Shhh. I told you not to tell.

LEIGH

Do you have a mother? Or father?

KID

Not yet. I'm kinda stuck.

LEIGH

Is there someone I should call?

KID

One time I sharpened a rock really sharp and used it to stab a caterpillar. But then I learned that caterpillars turn into butterflies and I felt bad because I wanted to see the butterfly. Do you think caterpillars know that they're gonna be able to fly around someday? Cause what if I am supposed to turn into a butterfly and I don't know yet? Or what if your belly is just like a big chrysalis and a caterpillar crawled up there to become a butterfly? HI BUTTERFLY!

LEIGH

OOWWW

KID

AHHH stop! That's gross.

LEIGH

I can't help it!

KID

I'm gonna run away again.

LEIGH

Let's both run away.

KID

No thanks.

LEIGH

I'm gonna take that trip. You can be my son and we can go to India.

KID

You'll have to catch me first! Come on baby butterfly!! Chase me!

LEIGH

Don't! Come back. (shit) Wait! Tell me your name!

KID

(from off) I'm just the hospital kid.

They both run off again. Sonya runs on. You hear Leigh have another contraction from off. Leigh runs back on.

LEIGH

I lost him. I'm afraid he ran into the street.

SONYA

Of course he did. It's part of the game.

LEIGH

(Flustered, almost in tears.) He was running so fast.

SONYA

Only as fast as your kid would run.

LEIGH

This isn't a very fun game. I don't think your mother enjoyed this, Sonya.

SONYA

Of course she did. I was laughing the whole time.

Sonya runs around the rooms laughing.

LEIGH

Stop! Stop this. OWWWWW. Ow it's happening again. Please. SONYA!

Marta enters the scene. Picks up some bedsheets.

LEIGH

I don't like this place. I'm getting out of here.

SONYA

(Stops running and laughing.) What do you mean?

LEIGH

I'm going to find that kid. And we're leaving.

SONYA

I knew this would happen.

LEIGH

—

SONYA

It happens to all of us.

Leigh looks around the room.

LEIGH

All of us?

SONYA

Mothers. We have to take care of things around here.

LEIGH

I deserve a little break. After all of this.

SONYA

What about Daniel?

LEIGH

He won't know until it's over. Please.

SONYA

Where would you go?

LEIGH

Wherever I'd like.

SONYA

I've always wanted to wash my underwear in a stream. Learn another language.

LEIGH

Yes exactly. Wouldn't that be lovely? I should go now. I don't want to be here. I want to have my baby holding a tree. Squatting, like a normal woman. *(To the baby)* Let's pack.

Leigh begins folding white sheets just as Martha and Darya do. She piles them up. Takes some posters down. Puts them in a pile. Marta joins her. Starts packing. She takes "Mothering 101" in her suitcase.

SONYA

Where are you going?

LEIGH

Where are you going?

Nowhere.

MARTA

Why're you packing to go nowhere?

LEIGH

Mommy's going on a little trip. That's all.

MARTA

I'm coming too?

LEIGH

Not now, honey. It's a trip just for Mommies.

MARTA

I don't want you to leave!

LEIGH

You have to be strong, honey. Just for a little while. Be strong and take care of Daddy.

MARTA

I don't want Daddy. I want you.

LEIGH

I'm gonna be gone for a little while.

MARTA

Will you come back?

LEIGH

I love you so much. So much. I'll miss you.

MARTA

But you'll come back.

LEIGH

I'll see you soon.

MARTA

Leigh finishes packing her suitcase. She goes to the door. Drops the suitcase as she has another contraction.

SONYA

It's just a game.

LEIGH

No Sonya. This is real.

SONYA

No. Us women. We dream things up. We make plans and we never follow through. Like our games. Like my baby. You're never going to leave.

LEIGH

But you just said. You said it would be beautiful. That I could wash my underwear. You just said that.

SONYA

Sure. I say a lot of things.

LEIGH

What do you mean?

SONYA

I want to help you.

LEIGH

Then let me go.

SONYA

You can't leave.

LEIGH

It's my choice.

SONYA

Stay.

LEIGH

That'll be much worse.

SONYA

You're running away.

LEIGH

I'm not strong enough for this.

SONYA

Then let me help you.

LEIGH

What do you mean?

Sonya pulls out a knife. She approaches Leigh.

SONYA

You can't go on a trip. You can't really do anything. Not with a baby.

LEIGH

What are you doing?

SONYA

You don't want this baby. You told me yourself.

LEIGH

—

SONYA

You'll hate him. I know you will.

LEIGH

You don't know that.

SONYA

Yes I do. I'm a mother too!

LEIGH

—

SONYA

You'll be disappointed in yourself.

LEIGH

I don't understand.

SONYA

You'll look at him and see your entire world in one small mound of flesh and you'll fall in love and then the next day, or maybe the day after that, your eyes will grow foggy and you'll start

SONYA (cont)

seeing yourself. Like looking at some gross mirror. And you'll hate him. You'll end up hating him.

LEIGH

Don't hurt my baby.

SONYA

It's like when you thought something blue was actually grey. How horrible discovering something is grey.

LEIGH

Grey can be a beautiful color.

SONYA

It's shit.

LEIGH

Maybe it'll be good. Yeah. Maybe they'll go through life with lots of love. Feeling sunshine on their fingertips and eating ice cream.

SONYA

But they won't. And it'll always be your fault.

Daniel enters. Still in scrubs. He doesn't seem to notice the knife in Sonya's hand.

LEIGH

Daniel! You have to help me!

DANIEL

She's still here?

SONYA

I'm always here.

DANIEL

I just came to tell you. On my way out. Well... Some kid just got hit by a car. Outside in the street.

LEIGH

What?

DANIEL

I don't know. He was eating ice cream and not paying attention and... I looked down at the radio.

LEIGH

You hit him?

DANIEL

I'm sure he'll be fine. He hasn't moved in a while. But he'll wake up eventually.

LEIGH

This is my fault.

DANIEL

I mean... sure you upset me.

LEIGH

No. He was running in the street waiting for me to run after him.

Sonya laughs.

DANIEL

Oh so it wasn't my fault. In that case, I'll be off.

LEIGH

Can't you help me?

DANIEL

You'll be fine. I'm going to go check on that kid.

LEIGH

No Daniel don't go!!

DANIEL

Alright. Goodbye then.

Daniel exits.

SONYA

You know. You and me. We're exactly alike. Both selfish

LEIGH

You can't tell me these things. You've never been anywhere. You don't know the world like the rest of us. You're a mother. You're supposed to be supportive. Holding my hand. Letting me breathe. This will never happen again. I will never get to feel pain and joy simultaneously. Isn't that worth something? Wouldn't you have wanted someone there for you yesterday?

SONYA

You killed that kid.

LEIGH

—

SONYA

I told you it was hard. You killed him. Just like my baby.

LEIGH

What are you saying?

SONYA

My baby's gone.

LEIGH

Where?

SONYA

Gone.

LEIGH

Then we should go get him.

SONYA

We're not leaving this room until I help you.

LEIGH

I don't think I want your help anymore.

SONYA

But we named each other. I'm basically your mother.

LEIGH

I just met you.

You can be my new baby.

SONYA

—

LEIGH

You never had a mother. It's me.

SONYA

I wanted to trust you so badly.

LEIGH

There's still time.

SONYA

You're not my mother.

LEIGH

We can play house.

SONYA

I have a mother.

LEIGH

We can play birth.

SONYA

You're no mother.

LEIGH

—

SONYA

Did you even have a baby?

LEIGH

Of course I had a baby.

SONYA

You don't know anything about it!

LEIGH

No one knows anything about it!

SONYA

Mondays are bad luck.

LEIGH

Sundays are worse.

SONYA

Where is he?

LEIGH

He's GONE!

SONYA

Leigh covers her ears with her hands and begins humming her song loudly.

Look at this book. It tells you. Look right here.

SONYA

Sonya pulls out Mothering 101.

Rule 3. This is not a dream.
Rule 4. Be supportive. Even if they aren't
Rule 5—

SONYA

Shit. I've broken all the rules.

What's rule 5?

LEIGH

I'm a rule breaker... the worst kind of person.

SONYA

What's Rule 5?

LEIGH

Leigh grabs the book from Sonya.

Rule 5. Try not to run away.

SONYA

I've done everything wrong.

LEIGH

Try not to run away.

SONYA

But look at us. We both broke rule 5.

LEIGH

(Clutching her stomach) OWWW. Somebody please save me.

SONYA

The doctor told me not to have kids. I did it anyway. My parents told me not to do drugs. I did them anyway. I betrayed everyone. — But now I can help you.

LEIGH

Your son!

SONYA

Forget it.

LEIGH

We can save him.

SONYA

We're the only people here!

LEIGH

—

SONYA

I tried to save him. Like a good mother.

LEIGH

Breaking rule 5—
OWWW.

SONYA

Just like your mother. We do what we can to survive.

LEIGH

I'll find him. I'll be his mother.

I've been trying to tell you. He's gone.

SONYA

Gone?

LEIGH

Dead.

SONYA

What?

LEIGH

I loved him so much.

SONYA

What did you do?

LEIGH

You let that child run into the road.

SONYA

That's not the same thing!

LEIGH

But he was so loved.

SONYA

DANIEL?

LEIGH

The men tend to disappear when we need them most.

SONYA

—

LEIGH

I'm not going to heaven.

SONYA

All you have to do is read the book. Follow the rules.

LEIGH

SONYA

You're just as scared as me!

LEIGH

You can fix this!

SONYA

I don't want to fix it. I don't want him back.

LEIGH

How did he die?

SONYA

I was all alone. Just like you are. I didn't even really know what afterbirth was. I didn't use drugs. Because I had done that for too long. And I wanted my baby to be perfect. — I knew he would be the most perfect. I lost everything before I found him. He was the most beautifully curved thing I'd ever seen. He was. He was a fully formed human. And I had made him.

LEIGH

And then you killed him.

SONYA

Do you remember the most perfect moment in your life? A moment when you were utterly loved?

LEIGH

No. I don't know if I have a moment like that.

SONYA

Yes you do. It's birth.

LEIGH

But what about the rest of his life?

SONYA

I let him live the most holy moment. I let him experience—I spent a whole hour looking at his tiny hands and toes and eyes. And then I did the kindest thing I could think of. I put a pillow in his face.

LEIGH

What about being a mother?

SONYA

I don't know what that is.

LEIGH

What about your female instincts?

SONYA

He'll never know pain. Never know what it's like to be dumped. Never have to experience the death of a loved one. Terrorist attacks. Poverty. Famine. AIDS. He won't know any of that.

LEIGH

Oh no. It's coming. It's coming.

SONYA

I want to help you through this.

LEIGH

You can't be here.

SONYA

I'm going to save you from this baby. From all the responsibility. Look you can go on your trip. Drink beer. Sleep.

She approaches Leigh with the knife.

Our lives become sad and lonely and dull. I'm not happy. You're not happy. He wouldn't be happy. And it would be my fault.

LEIGH

I'm fine. I'm going to have this baby. And it will be fine. OWWW. I think it's happening! I can feel it.

Sonya stabs Leigh in the stomach. Leigh flinches. Screams. Sonya rips the hospital gown open and feathers come flying out. Sonya reaches into the ripped gown and grabs out a pillow.

Marta enters.

Leigh seizes all parts of the pillow. Holds them in her hand and cries.

LEIGH

My baby!

SONYA

—

LEIGH

You killed me! My baby!

SONYA

It's never going to end.

LEIGH

How do you know?!

SONYA

Because you're a mother.

—

You just said. Your baby will be fine. You're fine.

LEIGH

GET OUT OF HERE. Leave me alone!

SONYA

See you next time.

Sonya exits. Leigh picks up the pieces of the pillow and shoves them back into her shirt.

MARTA

I have you.

Marta takes her place behind Leigh. Leigh whimpers. Darya enters and coughs in her throat.

MARTA

Go away, mother.

DARYA

Finally

Darya exits.

LEIGH

I ruined it.

MARTA

—

LEIGH

I wanted to be a better mother than you.

MARTA

You are.

LEIGH

I'm sorry. I know you did the best you could.

MARTA

I didn't.

LEIGH

Tell me it will be fine.

MARTA

It won't. But sometimes, when you think something's grey, if you look hard enough, you can see blue.

It's a beautiful discovery.

LEIGH

Sometimes I think the most tragic thing is not dying.

MARTA

That's rule number 6.

LEIGH

What if my baby never forgives me for breaking the rules?

MARTA

We all break a lot of things.

LEIGH

But it'll be ok?

MARTA

Would you like to play birth?

LEIGH

Yes.

You can be the baby.

MARTA

I'm never the baby.

LEIGH

You're my baby.

MARTA

Can I scream now?

LEIGH

As loud as you'd like.

MARTA

Leigh puts her weight into Marta. You see her scream.

End of Play.

Honors Research Reflection

Theatrical texts often explore motherhood, though it is rarely the central focus of the work. The intersecting issues of abortion, classism, violence, access and feminism go far beyond the topics I have included in my honors play and instead beg the question “who is a mother?” and “who has the right to define motherhood?” The dictionary defines mothering as “to give birth or to give rise to someone or something; to treat someone with care and protection, especially exclusively so.” This definition includes women who choose to adopt children but excludes women who have to give children up for various reasons. This also excludes mothers who raise children with little care and protection. Do abusive or absent mothers not fit into society’s definition of motherhood? What about mothers who have their babies taken away against their will? Do these women not feel the jolt of motherhood, if only for a moment?

These questions are what began my journey into my honors research. They also defined the subject and structure of my play. In this reflection, I hope to help the reader better understand my thought process; how I, as a writer, completed a theatrical text and how my research informed the work. This research, writing, and rehearsal process allowed me to question my own understandings of motherhood, investigating how expectations of mothers can both hinder and assist the individual mother/child relationship. My research often addresses these issues but cannot provide answers in a definite or clear manner. Writing a play is an undefined balance of personal experience, research and instinct. As a playwright, I feel it is my job to create a playground for questions and open discussion rather than provide answers. I have a limited relationship with motherhood and thus must continue to familiarize myself with the stories of

others, allowing my assumptions to seep through in order to address personal and societal expectations.

I struggled with the correct way to begin research for this play. I still struggle with the idea of combining scholarly and creative research in a cohesive context. This being said, I let research and real images ground my writing and inform it. I familiarized myself with constructions interior to the realm of theater including the reoccurring role of wife and mother. I latched on to both early and contemporary theatrical texts that explore “the female” as subject, allowing me to grasp a sense of how female characters have changed onstage and how female playwrights have started re-defining those roles.

The female body and motherhood was a topic often scrutinized in Greek Tragedy. Medusa, for example, is the epitome of the monstrous woman. Through her anger, rage, and uncontrollable body, she turns men into stone. Medusa then gets her head chopped off as a sign of male control over the scary female body. The 1993 play *Mary Medusa* by Shawna Dempsey takes that myth and tries to reunite the female body with the female mind in a world where the two are often perceived as separate. A woman is controlled by “hormones” and is labeled “hysterical” as opposed to genuine. Shakespeare, on the other hand, often cuts mothers out completely. While canonical texts such as *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Doll’s House* touch on the subject peripherally. In many of these texts, motherhood is presented as an expected female experience, and one that all women crave. As Jodi Vandenberg-Davis writes in *Modern Motherhood: An American History*, women have been told by media and religious figures alike that pregnancy is “the first privilege of the sex.” (Vandenberg-Davis 123) I tried to create a contemporary text in direct juxtaposition with this concept. I used these perceptions of mothers

as a background for my piece while presenting a woman experiencing birth instead of being defined by it.

I read many essays on both stereotypes of mothers onstage and how theater feeds into those stereotypes to break them down and challenge them. The most noted of these stereotypes is the “monstrous mother.” Anna Andes and Beth Osnes state in their collection of essays that “Monstrosity has often been linked to the scary fertile bodies of women”(Andes, Osnes 54). This is why the innocence of a woman is transformed into angst after she menstruates for the first time. This is also why society is squeamish about something as natural as menstruation. These monstrous mothers are often in contrast with their innocent, infertile daughters. This results in the image of the mother daughter relationship as often violent and agitated. The daughter is a presentation of the mother before she became monster. Marianne Hirsch argues that the “bond between mother and daughter must be broken before the daughter can become a woman” (Hirsch 33). Theater has explored this idea of volatile female relationships, specifically maternal ones, and angry female bodies for centuries.

My research uprooted not only the monstrosity of motherhood but the innate violence in birthing and raising a child. Violence, death, and disease plagues the act of childbearing. The medical inclination for a safe and clean birth, flawed as they are, are also modern and have only developed in the last couple decades. Essays describe the physical and psychological agony of giving birth. Beyond that agony, though, is the violent relationship mothers have with their children. It starts with conception and the choices women have to make in regards to protecting their life and reputation. *Fuckin A*, by Suzan Lori Parks, revolves around an abortionist, touching on both the issue of women’s individual rights and the problem of access based on social

economic standing. Many other plays including *Top Girls*, *The American Dream* and *'Night Mother* balance the mother child relationship with violence and point to a maternal impulse to murder or hurt one's own children.

This recurring theme feeds directly into the public's expectations of a maternal figure. These expectations often exclude violence. Violence is a natural impulse, especially when something is threatening your private existence. Instead of accepting that all relationships include violence, society condemns this animal violence and believes that women should always put a child's life before their own. This violence manifests itself in society's polarized views on abortion. When is abortion violence and when is it just removing fertilized eggs? Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* addresses these issues in the form of a large dinner party with various historical female figures discussing the abandonment of children for success or protection. Women's success and the need to give up— or change societies definition of—motherhood for this success is the exact impulse that lead me to my play.

Motherhood itself is both a universal and very personal experience in that all humans must be born from a female body, but the individual relationship to that body is vastly different. It is hard to extract any information about motherhood without the understanding that every being has a very personal relationship with it. There are archetypes in place, of course. The Madonna, in art and culture, expresses motherhood as sacred and epitomizes the role of mother as holy. But while the Madonna represents creation without defilement, most women have to balance the holy with the monstrous.

What I found quite interesting about the idea of “the mother” is that female playwrights are unable to define it for themselves. Both onstage and in life, women are constantly struggling

to embrace and control the role of motherhood. American motherhood, though innately female, has been defined by the patriarchal system America upholds. The mother often introduces the child into culture, controlling religious and moral influences. America, though, stems from a Puritanical society in which the mother has “no place in spiritual education” of the child. Whatever the role of “American mother” has become, it was formed according to laws and rights written by men. Women are more often than not used as a vessel until the birth is complete. This role has been constantly scrutinized and criticized by feminists.¹ The problem with the feminist spectator is that the female does not yet have a non-patriarchal vocabulary. When trying to express the individual’s experience with motherhood, the artist uses a personal gaze. According to Jill Dolan, all women were raised on a male gaze and thus the female gaze has yet to be defined.² Similarly, when writing about the struggles of modern motherhood, playwrights often prescribe to the ideologies already implicit in the idea of motherhood. While American plays and novels provide a ground for mothers to speak openly, they often use a patriarchal system, and American aesthetic, to do so. As Alissa Solomon discusses, theater uses an established structure to comment on the opposition innate within that structure.³

Should female playwrights prescribe to the style of the masculine canon in order to expose the general public to a female voice? If a play with a pure feminine gaze was written, it wouldn’t fall into what our society has deemed “important” or “educational” and thus would get passed over. Female writers are being taught by example, and the examples are overwhelmingly

¹ Jill Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (New York: Methuen, 1984) 1-56

² Ibid. Chapter 3

³ Alisa Solomon, *Re-Dressing the Canon: Essays on Theater and Gender*. (New York: Routledge, 1997) 1-60

middle class, white, and male. I will not claim to have put a dent in the patriarchal influence onstage. One of my personal goals as a playwright is to examine why I write the way I write. What combination of experiences, lessons, aesthetics and relationships have come together to form my personal voice, and in what way is that voice feminine or masculine?

The idea of the monstrous mother and the condescension of the female voice pushed my writing. I, as a woman, have often been identified as monstrous when stepping out of a comfortable position of submission. I can thus relate to the ever changing, ever scrutinized female body. I am inspired often by images of women, specifically pregnant women. I am fascinated by the use of female bodies as a source of strength, but also by how our bodies betray us. I pushed myself to explore the obscuring of the female body in theater and how I could both reveal and veil the female as beast.

What could not be answered in scholarly research was explored personally and creatively. For as many books as I read, the creative research was as, if not more, important to the development of my play. To manifest my research in a palpable way, I had to write my stories. I wrote numerous short plays, poems and monologues in response to prompts I received from my advisor as well as personal inspirations. I looked at my own vivid mother memories, absent mothers in Shakespeare, online blogs, T.V. shows and films that all influenced my initial ideas of what a “good” mother was. These stories turned into many scripts that eventually paved my path to the final performance.

I first explored motherhood and career by writing a play in which a very pregnant rockstar continues touring despite the obvious physical struggles. This first iteration included a mother figure who corrected the rock star when she did anything unsavory such as smoke, cuss

or pee onstage. This fear of both the physical mother and the state of motherhood inspired me to concoct my latest draft in which a woman in labor fears the birth of her first child.

In *of the Beast*, the story focuses on Leigh, a pregnant woman who visits an unattended hospital in order to have her baby. In the process she meets Sonya, a stranger who gave birth the previous day. Sonya and Leigh find both friendship and fear in their intimate relationship, discussing the ways in which motherhood has affected them. Leigh's mother and grandmother also appear in the hospital and lament about their upset expectations of motherhood. This play has been written in combination with many creative people who sparked ideas and questions to excite me. Hearing actual people read the words I wrote adds a whole new layer to the research I did. It suddenly becomes beautifully human and points loudly to moments that fumble. Now, seeing the play as a staged reading, I can insightfully deduce which theatrical moments work emotionally and poetically and which are overwrought or false.

As a didactic playwright, I tend to write statements of great weight in a lighthearted way. If something dips into prescription of how the audience should feel or reiteration of something that is already clear, it becomes boring. My first draft tended to do this. I was so excited by the research I did and the ideas that I had that I let too much of my personal intentions bleed into the script. Discussing this with the director and witnessing the play in a stripped down performance helped me to realize that a few words could speak a great deal.

My research doesn't stop here, but will continue to inform my decisions while editing this show. I believe playwrights have an obligation to be part of the conversation in an active way. I choose to do this by taking a topic that is concurrently personal and universal and adding a unique voice. The more we talk about motherhood as women, the closer we are to finding our

voice and redefining roles for ourselves. The control of women's bodies, the expectations and exploitation of women and the safety of women are issues that cannot be dismissed. We must embrace a new age of feminism and work to create a world for all voices to be heard clearly.

Epilogue

I was entirely heartened by an audience who listened intently and engaged in critical feedback. My play became a piece of theater when the final element of audience interaction fell into place. It was difficult for me to gauge the audience's impressions of the show. This could be because I was myself part of this audience or because it was difficult for me to pay attention given my nerves. Still, there were a few surprises and many enjoyable moments.

The audience spoke briefly of their journey while watching the play, the moments that jolted them and what they were attracted to. Many spoke of the journey as one from child to mother and alternately from traditional to absurd. The moments that clued the audience into the absurdity of this world were placed strategically enough that it was a slow drip of understanding instead of a sudden revelation. Many people also stated that it seemed absurd to have such serious topics discussed in a humorous manner. This juxtaposition of human truths and satirical telling is what attracts me to playwriting, and what I believe the play succeeded at approaching.

Finally, I was relieved to learn that I encapsulated some sense of the birthing experience as many have witnessed and lived through. I heard feedback from mothers, father and grandmothers who told me it forced them to relive the experience. I believe my play focussed on women in a nonsexualized and unique way, creating a story that was both relatable and odd. I am pleased to find that this play succeeded on its own terms. It set up a world with rules and existed in that world for an hour, and engaged an audience emotionally, intellectually and unpredictably.

Annotated Bibliography

Albee, Edward. *The American Dream*. New York City, NY: Penguin Books, 1997. Print.

One of Edward Albee's earliest one-act plays, *The American Dream*, satirizes American family life and the pitfalls of idealizing "The American Dream." The script plays with the stereotypes of a dominant mother "Mommy," an emasculated father "Daddy" and the wise, snarky grandmother. The play reveals that Mommy and Daddy had adopted a child some years back and continued to painfully punish the child until his eventual death. They are then presented with the chance at a second child, the literal twin of the first, and take the opportunity to regain what they once had. This second boy is not so subtly dubbed "The American Dream" as a comment on the idea of The American Dream as a false and empty reproduction of the couple's initial, and unrealistic, expectations. The couple had what society would dub "The American Dream" when they adopted their first child, but slowly killed that dream in selfish and hateful acts. In the preface Albee states that this play is "an examination of the American Scene, an attack on the substitution of artificial for real values in our society, a condemnation of complacency, cruelty, emasculation, and vacuity; it is a stand against the fiction that everything in this slipping land of ours is peachy-keen." This relates to parenting as it's own form of The American Dream. The idea that parenting should be a joyous and celebrated part of one's life is devaluing the other, more painful, aspects of a role as caregiver. I used this text as an example of absurdism in theater and how that can translate to the topic of family. This ideal state of parenting fueled my writing of Marta's character and what she ran away from as a wife and mother.

Andes, Anna, and Beth Osnes. *Essays and Scripts on How Mothers Are Portrayed in the Theatre: A Neglected Frontier of Feminist Scholarship*. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2010. Print.

This book examines how mothering stands in the theatrical cannon. It covers the topics of Hispanic mothers onstage, monstrous girls and their monstrous mothers, the erotics of stepmotherhood, Italian mothers, Catholic mothers and the musical theater mother. One of the strongest sections spoke about the female body as monstrous and why mothers are often grouped in that category. It discusses the myth of the monstrous woman including the Goddess Kali and Medusa who froze men with her eyes. "Monstrosity has often been linked to the changing, scary bodies of fertile women." This idea is what makes the mother daughter relationship so volatile and splits women into an older group and a young group; women before they go through puberty and women after. The book uses the plays *Coyote Ugly* and *Mary Medusa* to comment on

performances highlighting violent relationships between mothers and daughters as well as women and bodies and the female grotesque. This example tries to join the female body with the female mind although they have often been separated in western culture.

It is an interesting phenomenon that women are supposed to be weak, but mothers, because they have done something horrific with their bodies, become fierce. The playing of daughter against mother is exactly what I feel is wrong in representing female relationships onstage. Though it is somewhat familiar territory in my reality, the image of the bleeding body is really what bonds these women while making them fearful to behold. The author argues: “Bodies that defy social norms and properties of size, smell, dress, manner, or gender conventions; or lack of proper decorum about matters of sex and elimination; or defy bourgeois sensibilities by being too uncontained and indecorous-these bodies seem to pose multiple threats to social and psychic orders.” This book is incredibly helpful in identifying stereotypes in motherhood and discussing not only their origins but how they connect to feminism in the current cannon. I used these stereotypes to try and thwart the typical portrayals of motherhood in theater while leaning heavily into archetypes in order to satirize them.

The Babadook. Dir. Jennifer Kent. Perf. Essie Davis. Causeway Films, 2014. Film.

This film chronicles the relationship of a mother and son after the death of her husband. The father/husband character dies in a car accident driving his pregnant wife to the hospital while in labor. It is at the moment of the husband’s death that the child is born. Some years later the mother finds a children’s book entitled The Babadook and reads it to her son. It describes a dark figure that knocks three times and haunts whoever reads the book. The mother does not believe this story until it comes to life and possesses her to hurt her own son.

This film is an example of the manifestation of grief. The mother, unintentionally, blames her son for the death of her husband. She works very hard to provide for her family and protect her son but the authorities threaten to take him away. The character of the Babadook deters the mother from sleeping, eating and taking care of herself. This is a representation of grief, but also of motherhood. The mother and her child are the only people who can witness this manifestation of grief and so it is them who are haunted. The end of the film shows the mother vomiting up black slime and thus cleansing herself of her anxiety and grief. The Babadook then lives in the basement of the home, being fed by the mother regularly. While this is not a typical horror movie ending, it shows that one cannot completely banish one’s grief but has to live with it and nourish it regularly.

This movie focuses on the blame and contempt a mother has for her child. A mother’s life is never the same after she gives birth. This is something I discuss a lot in my play. This film helped me visualise that contempt through a lens of horror.

Cassatt, Mary. *Mother and Child*. 1905. Oil on canvas. National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

Mother and Child is an oil painting rendered by Mary Cassatt in the early 1900's depicting a mother and daughter sitting together looking into a mirror. The daughter is naked and placed on the mother's lap, with the mother guiding the young child to look into a small hand mirror. This painting brings to light the narcissism and focus on outward aesthetics that affects young women at an early age, usually encouraged by the mother. It leaves the child in a naked innocence while the mother is covered in layers of yellow fabric with her hair done up. This painting shows the clear and specific relationship that mothers and daughters share with a focus on how they are visually represented to the world. The softness of the painting is representative of a woman's body and how women are supposed to interact with children, though the relationship is not always so soft in reality. It has been informative to research specific artistic representations of motherhood through the years and how art depicting mothers and children have grown or changed with the mediums and politics surrounding them. Impressionist painters often use pastel colors to depict the light and beauty of the mother child relationship. Medieval and Renaissance art, on the other hand, uses darker, more saturated hues and paints the child as a thing of holiness, much like the baby Jesus. This idea that mothers are lesser than the thing they have just created is often a theme in Renaissance art while more modern artists tend to focus on the body of the women and how the maternal body interacts with a newborn child.

This sense of the female body was something I explored greatly in writing my play. These depictions help me categorize the particular artists feelings towards the mother/child relationship. While the art of Mary Cassatt may be the more dreamlike representation, I leaned into the eeriness surrounding the Renaissance and Medieval depictions.

Churchill, Caryl. *Top Girls*. London: Methuen, 1984. Print.

Top Girls begins by bringing together famous women throughout history while placing them at a dreamlike dinner party. Themes at this dinner party include the struggles of women throughout history, the concealment of women by dressing up as men, and the choice to give up a child for the greater good and personal ambitions. This play focuses on what it means to be a successful woman and mother, not only in our modern world, but throughout history. These themes are then reflected in the following two acts as we join Marlene, a career woman who felt the need to give up her child in pursuit of a successful career as a female. It begins with characters from the past and leads to a specific time in England's history when Margaret

Thatcher was prime minister. This juxtaposition exemplifies just how the struggles of motherhood have remained at the forefront of female ambition.

This play draws on comparisons between American feminism, focussing on individual success, and British feminism focusing on socialism and the betterment of a group. This portrayal of feminists as cold and unfeeling argues against the female becoming adjusted to the patriarchy and instead urges women to try and establish a new norm where nurturing is key to success. The idea of volatile female relationships can be witnessed throughout as we become familiar with a child-like friendship focussed around the idea of killing one's mother. This idea of killing is connected to a woman's relationship to blood and menstruation. This play also opened up possibilities of the fluidity of time-space. I write with a certain disregard for linear time. This is a style that Churchill also employs. It helped me open to who and what can be onstage at concurrent moments. *Topgirls* also introduces a question of what women talk about when they're alone. This is a large theme of my play, as Leigh has never had this opportunity and suddenly finds herself alone with another woman.

Crane, David. "Friends/ "The One With the Birth"" *Friends*. NBC. Burbank, California, 11 May 1995. Television.

In this episode, Ross' ex wife Carol goes into labor with their first child. The "friends" join the parents in the hospital and get into their own quirky story lines involving separate patients in the hospital. *Friends*, as a series, really embraced the idea of unconventional parenting. Phoebe gives birth to her brother's children and must give them up while Monica and Chandler are not able to get pregnant together and must adopt. This series is one of many 90's sitcoms to create strong, single female character who choose to have children.

In this particular episode, Joey ends up meeting a single pregnant woman and is the only person available to help her give birth. This episode, while highlighting women in birth also puts the audience in the predicament of focussing more on men in the birthing process than women. It presents the audience with Joey as savior, condemning the single pregnant women for being alone in the hospital without any male assistance.

I felt this episode connects to my play in the character of Daniel. Daniel, like Joey, has no clue how to handle the birth of a child, but feels he is necessary in the birthing process. The "sitcom" style of comedy fascinates me, and helps me find satirical conversations of humor within the play.

Dolan, Jill. *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research, 1988. Print.

This book discusses the problem in theater addressing the male spectator as the active subject and encouraging him to identify with the male hero. This puts the woman in the place of either subscribing to the patriarchy and identifying with weak characters or identifying with male characters and becoming part of their own objectification. It discusses the differences between Liberal Feminism, Cultural Feminism and Materialist Feminism while questioning the importance of the theatrical canon as it stands based only in masculine works. It questions the importance of creating a separate canon for feminist pieces or whether females should try and infiltrate the canon as it currently is presented. It also discusses the female body in performance as a sexual act, and act that garners opposing positions on the function of pornography within feminist culture. It uses cultural feminist performance art to showcase how the naked female body can communicate a universal meaning to all women. This use of the female body attempts to fulfill l'écriture féminine's proposal that women can articulate their subjectivity by writing with their bodies. These shows were meant as an antidote to female oppression under the patriarchy. It goes on to cover Materialist feminism in performance, pointing out the problems with the Cultural feminist approach. "This femininity is purely a representation, a positionality within the phallic model of desire and signification. It is not a quality or property of women." The materialist feminist project is then to disrupt the gender narrative as it is constructed and to "demystify the workings of the genderized apparatus itself."

It would be hard to identify the practical use of this book in my construction of the play. I used this book as a text on the female voice as it stands in theater. I was ignorant to the construction of feminism and how feminist theater manifests itself in our current environment. It raised my personal awareness of how I write as a woman and encouraged me to explore my purely female instincts. I then actively tried to make the female experience the focus of this play.

Green, Sharon L. "What does it Take to be a "Good Mother?": Contemporary Motherhood Ideology and the Feminist Potential of Lisa Loomer's Dramaturgy." *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 28.1 (2013): 5-22. *ProQuest*. Web. 14 Nov. 2014.

This article covers two recent plays by Lisa Loomer, *Living Out* and *Distracted*, which are set in a cultural moment in which a specific and patriarchal definition of a "good mother" has become public discourse and opinion. *Living Out* follows the parallel stories of two women juggling work and motherhood; a wealthy suburban lawyer, and the Latina nanny she hires to care for her baby. The article discusses Loomer's use of overlapping scenes to highlight the mothers similarities while also drawing attention to their cultural and monetary discrepancies and

how that affects their individual motherhood. In *Distracted* a professional mother tries to balance her marriage and job while resisting her son's ADD diagnosis, balancing the suggestions she receives from friends, family and neighbors with her own instincts. This essay argues that Loomer's plays do a disservice to one another. While she puts the struggles of 21st century mothering onstage, she also prescribes to the ideologies and stereotypes already implicit in the idea of motherhood. While they provide ground for mothers to discuss issues in the light of the stage, it uses patriarchal terms of good mothering to do so.

I read *Living Out* in order to grasp further the points of this particular article. This play reminded me tonally of *In the Next Room*, for it is discussing how mothers care for their babies and the shame mothers feel in never being good enough. While the play did little to inform my piece, this article really helped me understand the pitfalls one can encounter when discussing motherhood. Motherhood is a very individual experience. If engaged in this experience, it is easy to fall into stereotypes when writing about it. Writers often pull from the larger experience and forget to draw on minute or personal moments in their struggle. I believe Green points to this in Loomer's plays.

It is important for me to understand the innate problems in discussing motherhood considering stereotypes are the majority of my experience with this topic. I have not mothered and thus I am liable to fall into the same pitfalls as Loomer.

Hirsch, Marianne. *The Mother/daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*.
Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989. Print.

This book begins with an analysis of the myth of motherhood within Greek literature including alternative mythologies and counterparts to Oedipus such as Electra and Antigone. It also highlights Persephone and Demeter as representations of family romance not between a son and mother but rather a daughter. The first section is entitled Female Family Romances, observing through literature the bond between mother and daughter that must be broken for the daughter to become a woman. The author chooses to follow maternal representations in classic novels to plot the repression of maternal bonds in favor of paternal ones including dead mothers in *Emma*, *Persuasion*, *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*, comic mothers in *Pride and Prejudice* and silenced mothers in *Mansfield Park*. She discusses Victorian ideologies explaining the conjunction of the maternal with silence by invoking what she calls a "myth of language: language and culture depends on the death or absence of the mother and on the quest for substitutes for her..." She takes a close look at the heroine's motherlessness in comparison to the hero's, and what it means for a daughter to be motherless. The book touches on the monstrous mother and how a mother can transmit not only power but rage, competition and frustration. Many novelists writing about the silencing of mothers lost their own mothers at an early age.

This explains how “creative writing emerges from dissatisfaction and lack of fulfillment.” She describes the second stage of family romance as “children’s play and day-dreaming” “governed by the desire to replace the biological parents with others of higher stature.” Another element of this second stage is the realization of the differences between father and mother. In the books Hirsch is discussing, the mother becomes merely an instrument in the central drama between father and son. Stories told from the daughter’s perspective is located between repetition of past female plots and the possibility of transformation.

I have looked at motherhood in theater so deeply that peering into other forms of literature was refreshing. It is this repetition of the monstrous female body in my research that drew me so intently to childbirth. I grew up with a mother who wanted her children to be exposed to the idea that childbirth was beautiful. But this beautiful thing is a point of contention with many women and men alike. It is this creation and the overcoming of it that introduces drama to the changing states of the female body. Like Adam and Eve, Hirsch argues, that one must resist their creator to truly find a singular voice. This is why mothers are so often silenced in books and why I played with the silencing and obscuring of the female body in my own story.

Useful quotes: “I am inclined to believe there is no such thing as repetition.”

The Hours. Dir. Stephen Daldry. Perf. Meryl Streep and Nicole Kidman. TF1/Miramax, 2002. DVD.

This movie follows the stories of three women who feel trapped in their roles as female. It is centered around the women all preparing for separate parties while using the book *Mrs. Dollaway* as a source of power within each story. This movie demonstrates the struggle of women and their interaction with suicide over three generations, indicating that the feeling of entrapment, for women in particular, never vanishes. It points to motherhood as a public action and how all women need a separation of discrete life and motherhood. This movie was a large jumping off point for me, studying how women have been able to take control of their lives even through death and in using the role of woman as one of both joy and pain. It discusses the ability to be a mother and how that role is one of love but can also lead to feelings of loathing and disgust with oneself. It uses the structure of time to show “a woman’s whole life in a single day.” It focuses on the female relationship to men and how women feel they need to complete tasks for men to show their love. The three women in the movie do things such as making cakes, buying flowers and even moving locations in order to please their male counterpart. It discusses men coming home from war and the men deserving these women because of what they’ve been through. I used this movie to outline the relationship of three generations of women and how they may each take on their separate but similar roles as mother.

Useful Quote: “I don’t think you can call yourself a woman until you’re a mother.”

Martin, Carol, ed. *Sourcebook on Feminist Theatre and Performance : On and Beyond the Stage*. London, GBR: Routledge, 1996. ProQuest ebrary. Web. 14 November 2014.

“The Theory of Total Blame: Motherhood According to Karen Findley” written by Lynda Hart explores Karen Findley as a performance artist and her subversion of iconic femininity in her performances. Her performances ironizes the unclean improper body of women. The essay discusses motherhood as the “most hotly contested site for women both inside and outside feminist theories.” *Total Blame* is set inside a living room, making it recognizable as a family drama. Findley plays Irene, “an alcoholic whose pussy stinks.” The play confronts the maternal body as the primary site of patriarchal fear and loathing. This “theory of total blame”, is the blame we place on the mother as the individual who initiates the child into culture. Theater has only perpetuated this female blame. Sue Ellen Case argues: “the violence released in the continual zooming-in on the family unit, and the heterosexist ideology linked with it’s stage partners, realism, is directed against women.” Family Dramas, while trying to shed light on family as a unit unintentionally blame the mother for the child’s shortcomings.

Findley uses food as a troupe representing motherhood and connection with the female body. Displaying this body as “always, already a mother.” Irene eventually rejects this sense of total blame, claiming that her children’s problems and shortcomings are not her fault. *Blame* points to the historically “dirty work” left to women: cleaning up vomit, excrement, preparing bodies for burial. Findley was banned from performing in London under a law that forbids women to be onstage nude and speak at the same time proving that “the female body with an active tongue is still, evidently, a violation.”

Motherhood becomes a disturbing combination of shame and rehabilitation. People have often stated that having a child has the ability to turn women’s lives around and promotes a sense of responsibility. While I believe this is true, if this rehabilitation does not happen, a sense of disapproval is unavoidable. This book, and particularly this essay, highlighted this losing situation in motherhood. We must blame our mothers for our own missteps. Even as adults, there is a possibility that something our parents did still haunts us. It was this theory that really informed the relationship between Leigh and Marta for me.

Norman, Marsha. *Night, Mother: A Play*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1983. Print.

This play addresses the volatile relationship between mothers and their daughters. It follows Jesse and her mother, Thelma, on the day of Jesse’s planned and confessed suicide. The

play is set in a small living room/kitchen on an isolated country road. It reveals the struggles Jesse has faced not only in her home life, but also in her medical troubles. This play deals with themes seemingly integrated into many books on femininity: food and death. Jesse's choice to commit suicide comments on her inability to take control of her life thus far, and the finality of her last act as a personal sense of control. Thelma threatens to call her brother, insinuating that men can and will put a stop to women's hysteria. This play comments on a woman's instinct to care for others and nurture them. The role of mother and daughter is reversed as Jesse is the one taking care of Thelma. There is discussion of a father in the play, but he is never seen. This discussion brings to light the idea and hope of parents being "in love." paired with the intense hope that your daughter will be married. This symbolizes how love of a man, rather than the mother daughter dynamic, is the most sought after form of companionship. There is an idea within this play that your parents remember you before you remember you. Does this make your parents more knowledgeable about your personal needs?

This play opened up questions of how a mother daughter relationship can and cannot satisfy a person. Jesse is all Thelma has. Thelma relies on her daughter and finds joy in their relationship. For Jesse, her relationship with her mother doesn't satisfy her enough to sustain life. The themes of child breaking from parent are prevalent in much of my research; The idea that a person is made out of other people and cannot become truly liberated until they break from those genetic ties. My play toys with this idea through Marta trying to break from Darya and Leigh eventually breaking from her childhood to become a mother.

Useful Quotations "If you've got the guts to kill yourself, Jessie, you've got the guts to stay alive." "You are my child." "I am what became of your child." "Family is just an accident, Jessie."

Parks, Suzan-Lori, and Nathaniel Hawthorne. *The Red Letter Plays: Fuckin A*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2001. Print.

Fucking A explores the loss of a child through Hester's profession as an abortionist as well as an estrangement to her son, Boy. The Mayor's threats to leave his infertile wife comment on the importance of the ability to be a mother. When the First Lady finds that she is pregnant, it is clear that it is the man's infertility. Still, blame is given to women. It is explained that before Hester's son was separated from her, she bit him. This marking of a child is symbolic of how a mother can influence a child from an early age and even if she grows not to recognize that child, leaves a scar no one can shake. Women in this play, when talking about topics specific to their sex, use a different language. This is another example of how women talk to each other when they're alone or how the experiences of a woman are so unique that they can only relate to one

another. This play points to the animal instinct of protecting your child through Hester's plan of revenge. Not only is Hester willing to kill another for her child, to enact the same pain she felt, but at the end is willing to kill her own child to keep him from the pain of torture. Class structure is a large theme in this play. It clearly discerns the hierarchy of class and who has the right to be a mother. Hester, though a working woman, never has enough money to free her son from jail. She has her right to be a mother taken from her while she performs elective surgeries on richer women who can afford the choice of motherhood.

Lori-Parks does a beautiful job in both connecting all women and separating them based on privilege. Privilege is an important discussion to have and one that affects parents more than anyone. Women who are able to care for their babies have a certain privilege in doing so. While someone may look down on Hester for separating from her son and helping others in separating from motherhood, it is not for lack of work ethic or desire on Hester's part. I discuss both abortion and the secret language of women in my play. These are both themes explored in *Fucking A*. I felt the issue of abortion is one that had to be discussed, even if briefly. It is a point of great contention in our current political state and has been for quite some time. This idea of women having a secret language also applies to Leigh and Sonya. Leigh feels she has missed out on having a relationship with women and in finding Sonya finds someone to share this language with.

Ruhl, Sarah. *In the Next Room, Or, The Vibrator Play*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2010. Print.

In the Next Room deals with the invention of the modern vibrator and its use in curing women of "hysteria." This play draws a line between the sexes and what they are allowed to see or know. Mrs Givings' husband gives women multiple orgasms daily but is unable to please his own wife. The women in this play display an urge for sexual pleasure and a sense of fulfillment from their somewhat clueless husbands. Elizabeth is a wet nurse who takes care of the Givings' child and explains the sexual pleasure she derives from her own husband. This classism divides women who are able to forget appearances and live a sexually fulfilled life with those who must listen in the next room. Mrs Givings makes a speech about her experience with motherhood. "I want another child and my husband desperately wants another child, but I'm afraid of another birth, aren't you?" She speaks about women as being food. How women make their bodies into food for other beings, like Jesus. She expresses her feelings of inferiority as a mother because she cannot produce milk for her child. This play then raises the questions of qualification. How do you qualify a mother? Is it through physical interaction, attention, love, actual birth or something else?

The idea of food is one that has always been interesting to me. Mothers are associated with nurturing their children through the act of cooking. This idea has become stereotypical, but it comes from the privilege of being able to produce milk and feed a child. The association with this ability is then forgotten in lieu of a more negative association; one that paints the woman as servant rather than caregiver. This play lets the audience see Mrs Givings feeling left out of her own life. She's not able to satisfy her husband or her child in the way she hopes. This is how I interpret Marta to feel. Though Marta made the choice to leave her life as wife and mother she did so because she felt unable to satisfy the roles.

Solomon, Alisa. *Re-Dressing the Canon: Essays on Theater and Gender*. New York: Routledge, 1997. Print.

This book discusses how minorities must deal with theater as a male dominated institution while using the structure to create new voices. Western drama from the Greeks to present day has been dominated by the patriarchy, and yet, has created a space to question it's own failings. The theater then uses it's established structure to comment on the oppression innate within that structure. It is the goal and responsibility of the feminist and queer artists to find the break in that structure and redefine the cannon for their own stories. This book offers an approach to "a feminist way of reading plays." Instead of trying to change the establish Western theatrical canon, one must be taught to understand the staging of gender. Solomon presents essays as a feminist but also clearly states that the theater not try to equalize men and women onstage but rather free all humans from the constraints of gender. Theater makes "the accomplishments of gender" very visible. In short, theater uses conventions of gender to create stories. Solomon uses the play *Thesmophoriazusa* as example of how tragedy, female impersonation and relationship to spectator are all related to gendered theater.

I create gendered theater. After reading this book, it was clear to me that established gender roles play a large part in my creative construction. In pointing to those roles, I am trying to question their use. Solomon suggests lifting gender constraints. My plays are about those constraints, and I feel strongly that my writing lives within our gendered society.

Woolf, Virginia. *To the Lighthouse*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1927. Print.

This book is not blatantly about the struggles or themes of motherhood though there are many indications of family roles and how the writer feels about personal duties to the family unit. Mrs Ramsey affirms traditional gender roles by indulging in being a hostess, paying particular attention to her male guests whom she believes to have "delicate egos." Mr. Ramsey,

being the father of the family is portrayed as a tyrant. The theme of mother-son eroticism is clear in the relationship between Mrs Ramsey and her son James. James loves his mother dearly and often feels murderous tendencies towards his father. Eventually James grows into a moody likeness of his father in a comment on our natural roles and the superfluous desire in resisting them. Mrs Ramsey provides unity to the family in the time of war and monetary imbalance. This unity is something typically maternal and is grasped onto by others in the time of her death. The lighthouse represents a lack of attainability in all the characters lives. Mr. Ramsey, throughout the book, is intent on hearing his wife say that she loves him. This lack of love between husband and wife is a much explored theme and is why the women in this book try to show affection by their (mostly unappreciated) gestures. Lily, a painter, tries to paint a portrait of Mrs. Ramsey, but never completes it. She is constantly hassled by the men who disapprove of female artists.

The juxtaposition between Lily and Mrs Ramsey calls attention to the mother vs the artist. These roles are both in search of creation, but the artist is free to create while the mother is trapped in her creation. Both women fear that their work lacks worth. This is common in most female characters I have encountered. I believe that most of the female characters I wrote possess this same fear while my male character knows that his work has worth.

Thomson, Virgil, Maurice Grosser, and Gertrude Stein. *The Mother of Us All*. New York: G. Schirmer, 1947. Print.

Mother of Us All follows Susan B Anthony, one of the major influences in the fight for women's suffrage in the United States, through a non-linear meditation. Susan B Anthony and her companion Anne are shown at home doing typically female activities (knitting, etc...) Susan B. Anthony debates throughout the show with men about the role of the female and the rights of women, comparing them to the rights of black men. This is juxtaposed by a wedding at which Susan explains what marriage can mean to a woman saying "if no one marries how can there be women to tell men, women to tell men?" There is an issue about Indiana taking her husbands last name. Daniel Webster blesses the couple and Susan B. proclaims that in the future all children men and women will have the right to vote. In Act 2 Susan B. is doing housework when she is asked to address a political meeting. Politicians, afraid of women's suffrage after Susan's speech, write the word "male" into the constitution, making it impossible for women to vote. Equality then comes when Indiana and Jo exchange last names.

Gertrude Stein has a way of confusing the reader with poetics while highlighting clearly the issues at stake. *Mother of Us All* questions the power of women and whether the mother is the person who gives us individual power. What sort of power are we allowed and why is it important? Is it politicians who give us this power and where do we find it? When Leigh finds her own personal power it is through her stripping herself of other influences. Marta, Leigh's mother, isn't exposed until Leigh finds that power within herself.

Useful Quotations: "we cannot retrace our steps. Going forward may be the same as going backwards"

Vandenberg-Davis, Jodi. *Modern Motherhood: An American History*. Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2014. Ebook Library. Web. 16 October 2014

In 1795 *New York Magazine* told American mothers that “The reformation of the world is within your power.” Child rearing mattered not only in the development of children’s character but the preservation of civil and religious life. This book begins with examining republican moral motherhood as early American middle class ideals. Nineteenth century America became fascinated with maternal health and the maternal body. Ideas of mothers as moral guardians only emerged after the American Revolution. The Puritans, as well as most other religions, believed mothers had no place in spiritual education of children. Colonial family life had the goal of “breaking a child’s will” thus making them easier to control and put to work. Children were considered economic assets in the colonial world. The socialization was not a duty specifically assigned to mothers. Ministers told women that pregnancy was “the first privilege of the sex.” The birthing process in Postmodern America was a dangerous ordeal. Typical New England white women spent 20-25 years pregnant or nursing babies. In the first half of the nineteenth century women found that considerable anxiety was connected to changing motherhood ideals. These changing ideals included female reformers financing orphanages for birthing women in the Nineteenth century. In the 1830’s and 40’s female antislavery activists pushed “moral motherhood into social justice.” *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was written, sharing the pain of an infant’s death in minority communities. Women’s involvement in anti-slavery lead to the women’s rights convention.

What Vandenberg-Davis tries to relay in this sturdy book on motherhood is: Motherhood is adapting strategies for survival. This applied more aptly to minority mothers, but all mothers organized their lives around providing for their children. There is no body of historical literature on motherhood or it’s resilience and thus it can be left out of the spotlight. My intention in writing this play was to expose a small amount of this history and whet the appetite of the audience. Women are often left out of U.S. history while they are the ones populating the growing country. It is these changing, but ever unrealistic expectations, that fueled my play. Have the expectations of women actually changed in all this time? The tasks women do are somewhat different, but the expectations of pregnancy and responsibility seem oddly familiar. Useful Quotations: “Great was my pain when I bred you. Great was my care when I fed you.”

Vecelli, Tiziano. *Judith with the Head of Holofernes*. 1570. Oil on canvas. Detroit Institute of Arts Museum, Detroit.

The beheading of Holofernes by Judith is the subject of more than 114 artistic renderings. In the story, Judith is able to enter the tent of Holofernes because he desires her. While The General is overcome with drink, Judith enters his tent and decapitates him before he can destroy the city she calls home. Titian’s oil on canvas portrayal of the story shows Judith quite calm as

she holds the head of Holofernes. It is also one of the only depictions without blood. Judith is pristine in all white, keeping her sense of feminine innocence even after this deadly act. There is a black woman in the background acting as her slave and cleaning up the mess she's made. This shows her dominance not only over the man but over the black servant, making her the complete power within the image. Everyone in the painting averts their eyes from the audience, showing a sense of either guilt or secrecy about the recent murder. I have witnessed many paintings of this subject and found them all to be a clear image of woman in power in a time when women had very little.

This image is included because of its monstrous subject matter. In my research, it seems depictions of women in art are either subservient or monstrous. The female body is many things, but the cultural trajectory declares a woman innocent or fearful. Judith then becomes the latter version of this adjacency. I want to reveal both innocence, monstrosity in my play but add to it the many other forms the female body can take. By creating a piece where women can be innocent and fierce at the same time, it is erasing the fear of bodily intelligence.