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HAIL: three stories
An Exploration of Femininity, Divinity, and Hunger

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Abstract

Hail: three stories

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By Julia Byrne

This paper includes an original script for a one-woman play that consists of three monologues from the perspective of three characters: the goddess Persephone from Greek mythology, the Virgin Mary from Christian mythology, and a fictionalized version of the author during her experience with Anorexia Nervosa. The play connects self-denial as a feminine virtue in ancient religious texts with modern obsessions with achieving feminine perfection through self-denial. The script is annotated with scholarly information from historical, sociological, feminist, and religious studies research that supports the artistic choices in the script.

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Introduction

This thesis contains the script for a one-woman play entitled *Hail: three stories* as well as explanations and research that back the artistic choices and arguments made in the script. The play itself is broken into three monologues by three different characters, each of which are performed by the same actor. The first two monologues are rewritten versions of mythical, religious stories surrounding two women. The first is Persephone, the Greek goddess of spring, flowers, the seasons, and queen of the underworld. The second is the Virgin Mary, the Christian figure credited with the virginal conception and birth of Jesus Christ. Aside from the plotlines provided in the original myths, I have emphasized themes of self-deprivation, femininity, constraint that strengthen their connection to the third monologue. The third monologue is a mythologized version of my own experience with anorexia in which the speaking character (Joules) both worships and believes that she is a divine manifestation of feminine perfection. This belief and the pursuit of perfection nearly disintegrate her.

I performed *Hail: three stories* for three nights on February 24, 25, and 26, 2020 in room 205 of the Rich Building on Emory University's main campus. All three of the thesis committee members attended one of these nights, as did many other friends, family members, and Emory faculty. In each of the three performances, I selected three audience members to portray additional characters in the show. Those characters included the Mother (Demeter) and the Husband (Hades) in Part One, and the Fiancé (Joseph) in Part Two. I provided these audience participants with scripts for their lines and cues for when I would speak with them. Though I was prepared for difficulty, almost every one of the participants took it in stride and played without a hitch.

My goal in writing this piece was to connect how ancient religions sanctified deprecation, deprivation, and objectification as female virtues with how women today seek to meet social standards and become 'enough' by deprecating, depriving, and objectifying themselves.

Pre-Show

(On stage there is a door with a mirror on the back, a dress form, a blanket, and a block. On the block is a blanket, a pomegranate, a bunch of grapes, and a paring knife. On the floor are six scripts. Three are full scripts for Part One, Two, and Three, and the others are specific part scripts for audience members.)

(During pre-show, the actress enters and takes off her shoes. At a gentle pace, she fixes her hair and puts on eye liner in the mirror, and cuts up the pomegranate into sections. She notices the scripts and investigates them. One at a time, she quietly approaches three members of the audience with a script.

(For Demeter)

Hey, are you my mom?

Are you sure? She knows all the flowers and keeps things from changing.

Well if you're not her, could you be? Just for a little while.

Great! Thanks, mom. I'm gonna want to talk to you later. So when I say, 'And then she said,' and I'll look right at you, that's when we'll talk, okay?

(For Hades)

Hey, are you my husband?

Are you sure? He has very cold skin and likes to follow the rules.

Well if you're not him, could you be, just for a little while?

Great! Thanks, dear. I'm gonna want to talk to you later. So when I say, 'And then he said,' and I'll look at you, that's when we'll talk, okay?

(For Joseph)

Hey are you my fiance?

Are you sure? He's got big hands and he's very forgiving.

Well if you're not him, could you be, just for a little while?

Great! Thanks dear. I'm gonna want to talk to you later. So when I say, 'And then he said,' and I look right at you, that's when we'll talk, okay?

(She gives out the scripts. Music plays.

The show begins when the music fades and she gets curious about the first script. She goes to investigate it, and becomes the character as she reads the first few lines.)

Part 1: Persephone

I didn't know I was a girl until I was taller than the wheat. Golden and spindly, all stalk and no chaff.

And what a ~discovery!~

I still remember it.

Every morning, in the early morning, when the sun was a pink line, my mother walked barefoot in through new-tilled earth. In the prints where her feet left the ground, a tiny shoot would poke its nose out in the air. Which I promptly crushed, trying to step exactly where she had. I'm sure they grew back.

But as we walked our walk that morning, there was a strange cramp in my back. When we were finally finished, I plopped down under a pomegranate tree.

(She sits to eat the pomegranate. She eats with such vigor that she makes a mess. The actress places a small chunk of pomegranate under her skirt so it will stain as she sits.)

She started telling the story of the fastest girl who ever lived –that's a really good one– and on the road behind me, someone must've passed.

She paused, flickered from them to me. I figured it was cause the story was a secret. I expected her to start again, but she said,

(Gesture to and make eye contact with the audience member playing the mother.)

Mom: Dear, you shouldn't eat like that when men are around. **(1)**

Persephone: Like what?

Mom: With your tongue. With your lips.

Persephone: How do I eat without lips?

She showed me how to pluck a seed one by one and place them in my mouth discretely.

Mom: And even then, they can still put – well, maybe just don't take anything they give you. But don't be rude. You're a lady.

Persephone: What does that have to do with it?

Mom: If you eat like that, they'll think it's something else.

Persephone: What else?

Mom: *(Say whatever you think the something else is.)*

(Respond to whatever it is she says. Find a reason to stand and discover the

stain.)

Persephone: Whoa – hey, I’m bleeding – (2)

Mom: Oh. Well. I guess, you’re growing up...!

Persephone: Why doesn’t it hurt?

Mom: It will later.

Persephone: What? What does it mean?

Mom: It means, you can have a baby now, if a man puts one inside you.

Persephone: How would he do that?

Mom: Well, all you need to know is babies hurt a lot coming out, so don’t let a man put one in you.

She taught how to look at myself through other people’s eyes, smiling when they passed, whispering when they were gone.

“Don’t attract too much attention, put your napkin in your lap, let them pull a chair out for you, but don’t let them to touch you, don’t be alone with anyone, just come find me, don’t do anything that might make them want to –“ (3)

But why? Why bother with all these precautions when she wouldn’t even tell me what the risk was? Other than babies. And babies are so cute!! The way they toddle around...!

Though now I think maybe she was right. Maybe it was better to squirm under constraints I didn’t understand than to understand that at so young an age. Or worse, to not know and have somebody –

Whether or not she was right, I pulled at the reins. Wandering farther every day, reaching, wheedling to prove my independence and responsibility! Of course I could bring a far-off orchard to bloom on my own –

(Stop short. Hide behind the dress form like a tree.)

There was a man. In the clearing.

Grey eyes. Grey cheeks. Grey clothes. And a pink flower in his fingers. And the flower shriveled up in his hand. A crinkled brown husk. And he said,

(Gesture to and make eye contact with the audience member playing the husband.)

Hades: Hello.

Persephone: What are you doing to the flowers?

Hades: It’s their time.

Persephone: Time for what?

Hades: To die.

Persephone: You can't make dye out of those. Marigolds maybe, but not those.

Hades: If you're making a joke, I'm afraid I'm not very good at them.

Persephone: You. You, you're making some kinda joke here, and it's – this isn't – things. don't. do. that. here.

Hades: Then...I expect someone's been keeping them young past their time.

Persephone: What do you mean?

Hades: *(Say whatever reason you think someone would try to stop death.)*

(Respond to whatever he says.)

He placed the dried thing on the ground, and it sank effortlessly into the dirt. (4)

*(She looks up to ask him about it, but he's not there.)
A feeling that the world is very big and less familiar. Walk a path through the forest, examining the surroundings as if really seeing for the first time.)*

They were the exact same blooms on the exact same trees. Not different flowers regrown from the same stem, the exact same ones. She was the only one I knew with the kind of power to keep the same flowers. The same youth. The same bloom. Forever. Why would you do that? And she said,

(Gesture to and make eye contact with the audience member playing the mother.)

Mom: Well, I just like them so much, I want you to have them forever!

Persephone: But isn't it natural? Some things decompose to start new growth. That's when they reproduce, and that's good.

Mom: Well, it's good for flowers. People can feel pain.

Persephone: It's painful?

Mom: Yes.

Persephone: Which part? Which part is painful, the decomposition, or the reproduction? Or both? Wait, are they always the same?

Mom: Let's talk about something else. (5)

And for the first time I didn't trust her. She had me. And she wasn't a crinkled brown husk like the flower. She was vibrant. And she...she did...love me. She couldn't regret it that much, cause she got me...right?

That night, I laid still until I could hear her breathing even next to me.

(She sneaks out the door and clears a place on the ground to listen to the floor.)

Roots. Obviously. I know their sounds. Their properties, their use. What could be below? What music is down there, where the remains of the flower went?

I pulled the earth like a blanket that was too small. Roots ripped and flew until there were no more so deep.

(Lying down in the hole she has made.)

I pulled the dirt blanket over me and found it was plenty big. And plenty dark. As I sank, slowly, decomposing myself. Down. Down. Like a sigh.

(As if she has fallen asleep. She starts awake sharply and coughs up dirt.)

There was a cavern, glittering...darkly, like oil or a beetle's shell. And stretching forward from where I'd fallen, a long, long line. Twiggy silhouettes shifted in and out of my eyes, stretching into the dark like a river. A river of sticks. Walking slowly on.

(Turning and startling when she notices Hades standing right there.)

AH—you're here. Sorry. And he said,

(Gesture to and make eye contact with the audience member playing the husband.)

Hades: Are you dead?

Persephone: Am I?

Hades: How did you get here?

Persephone: A hole in the ground. I'm sorry to intrude, I know it's an imposition, I just wanted to know.

Hades: Know what?

Persephone: What's down here.

Hades: When people find out, they usually wish they hadn't.

Persephone: I guess I won't know until I know.

Hades: Would you like to join me for dinner?

I let him pull out my chair for me at a great stone table and platters of meat spread before me like a sea. Which I didn't touch. For all my rebellion, I still remembered what my mother said. "If you eat in front of them, they'll think it's something else. But don't be rude." Napkin in my lap. Good posture. He piled his plate and I watched as he began to eat.

(Sit there awkwardly. For quite some time.)

And he said,

Hades: What's wrong?

Persephone: Nothing.

Hades: Oh! You're vegetarian, of course. My apologies. *(snaps fingers)*

The meat disappeared and was replaced with bowls of grapes, cut oranges, thick bread. She said not to be rude! It would be rude to refuse, right? So,

(She takes a grape and puts it in her mouth. She does not chew. Take more and more grapes very seriously, checking in every so often to see what Hades thinks, until no more can fit. Spit them all back out into the bowl and stuff them under the block.) (6)

I slept that night on as small of a fraction of his bed as I could fit onto. He wasn't even there, he stayed on the couch without mentioning it.

In his house, in his bed, at his mercy.

But if I went back now, I'd lose every bit of freedom I'd ever scrounged up. Maybe that's nice. No. I just have to stay out his way.

The next morning, I sat with him politely at the table. We put things in our mouths, he swallowed, I did not.

That evening, he tried sea food. Shrimp, fish, mollusks, but I didn't swallow. The next, nuts and berries. The next, all sweets, after that, only soups, then raw meat, burnt bread, ambrosia, and on and on without the slightest bit passing my throat. So many times, I put a bite in my mouth, aching for its warmth to be mine. But there was some change in consuming, in letting something go inside of me. And he said,

Hades: Are you happy here?

Persephone: I didn't answer. My brain wasn't moving fast enough.

Hades: Do you want to go home?

Persephone: I'll go, if I'm bothering you. I don't want to bother you.

Hades: No, you're not. This isn't good for you. It was selfish of me to keep you here this long.

Persephone: ...selfish?... You like me.

Hades: You...keep many secrets. But you will not be nourished here. I'll escort you home tomorrow evening.

I was dumbfounded.

(Stand and pause mid-sentence to recover from a headrush.)

Why would he want me gone? I'd stayed out of his way, I didn't eat, I didn't promise him anything. Why would he be mad?

(She spots herself in the mirror on the door.)

Oh.

I couldn't die, but I could waste. Shriveling, shrinking just like the flower. But it wasn't his kingdom, it wasn't him that was draining me, it was...it was me. It was me trying to shrink away. To take up no space.

I woke up the next morning and went out to the same scene as always.

(Stand, stare directly into Hades' eyes, and take a huge bite out of the pomegranate. Chew deliberately. Swallow.)

Hands, lips, teeth, tongue, throat. With every swallow, my eyes cleared. The juice dripped down my arm to the floor and stained my name on the stone. An inscription of the space I demand.

I ate, and did not make him think it was anything other than a promise. Not to him. Not to anyone but me. I took his hand and left a red stain on his mouth. I left a lot of marks that night. It was good!!! It was good! It didn't change me— I'd already done that. (7)

(Laying down on his chest, peacefully dozing. Scratch the floor with one nagging finger. A mocking voice.)

“Baby...baby...it hurts to have a baby...don't let them put one in you...the old you couldn't die, but you're not her anymore, you can have a baby, you can hurt, you'll die —“

(Sit up, take a walk to clear the fear. It doesn't work.)

Oh ho ho, the remains of our meal. Everything so ripe, fruitful, ready to burst with new life that I'd let in my body! Everything - ! But the husk...the part that was dead...

Fruit and seeds full of new life, some I wanted, some I didn't, now swirling inside me. Live fruit. It only made sense that the rind...hard. Bitter. Contained. Protection.

(She eats a piece of the pith.)

Something new to eat.

When you're a girl, a bud, every mother is a gardener, vigilant for frost. Death. But as you grow you must become the gardener of your own blooming. And suddenly you know more about you than her. Than anyone. When did I become the authority on the subject?

But the risk is gone. And I'm finished denying myself things I want. (8)

And...I want to see my mom.

He didn't believe me when I said I would come back. And as I sank back up through the rocks to the dirt to the roots to the air...I almost didn't know when I arrived. It was...cold. She'd let things die.

(Looking around a little shocked, then stop at the sight of Demeter, the mirror.)

"Mom?"

The world around us exploded. Pollen shot from her fingernails and the soil moaned as stems hauled upward at unnatural speed. Clouds were vaporized by the sheer heat of her voice.

(She pulls the dress form down on her.)

She collapsed on me, weeping, as the spores settled around us. But it didn't last long.

(Gesturing to the woman playing the mother.)

And normally I would've talked to her. But she was barely talking to me. Just spitting wads of words to herself, words like 'abduction' and 'innocent' and 'never hurt you again.' Smashing me to her chest to I could hardly breathe.

And I didn't stop it. Because only then did I understand.

It didn't matter if that had happened to me. Cause it happened to her. Someone had done that to her. This was the story before I was a part of it. This is how I became a part of the story. She'd never said anything.

And she'd never say it any other way.

How was I supposed to correct her, without sounding like whoever she told the first time and shut her up forever? I don't think she would've heard, even if I had tried to explain. (9)

So, um. I just nodded.

Didn't say much.

I stayed a long time. Let the world settle green again. I was her daughter, again. Doting and young. That wasn't true anymore. I missed my adult self. But I couldn't look her in the eye and say it.

So, again, it was night and again I waited for her breath to slow and even out. I waited to leave the same way as last time. I waited to be a coward.

(She gets up to sneak out, but notices the pomegranate by the door. She examines it.)

My name was carved in tiny letters, and a message below.

“Be safe.” **(10)**

She always knew.

(Exit through the door joyfully. Lie down.)

I buried myself with it, and a tree sprouted from that grave.

(Waking up back in the underworld with a jolt. Gesture to and make eye contact with the audience member playing the husband.)

Persephone: Hey. Have you ever been buried? And he said,

Hades: You came back.

Persephone: I said I would. Have you though? Been buried?

Hades: I guess not.

Persephone: It's...weird. People could probably use a better welcome after that experience. Well, better than standing in a giant line. I think...I'd like to make some changes around here. I think I'd like to be queen of this place. Is that okay with you?

Hades: *(Answer honestly.)*

The first time I trusted myself in straight-shooting youth, I found someone cold but kind. And he's warmed to me now that I ask for warmth. You could call it good judgement, but...I was lucky. Astronomically.

I know it now, because I've seen the unlucky ones. They come into my palace every day. Lines and lines of girls like me, like my mother. And she was right, some of them come cause of babies. Some of them bring the babies with them. But more of them, many more...just met some man at the wrong time. Like I could've.

I have safety. I have power. I have a queendom. What would I use it all for, if not to give it to them?

I take their hands and I say what I say when I rest my head on my husband's shoulder. When I visit my mother and she cries.

(Laying her head on the dress form's shoulder.)

“Let us rest together as the world grows.” **(11)**

(End of section.)

(1) Mom: Dear, you shouldn't eat like that when men are around.

This is the first time we have the introduction of the mother character. Those who know their mythology will know that the mother is Demeter, but I chose not to use her proper name and just refer to her as 'mom' in the audience's copy of the script for several reasons. Firstly, I did not want to exclude those who are not well-versed in Greek mythology. Secondly, it is much more personal to ask an audience member to portray and act as my mother than as a goddess they might remember from school.

To begin the discussion of the mother character's regulation of her daughter's eating habits, I want to establish the relationship between food and femininity. Eating disorder expert Susan Orbach wrote *Hunger Strike*, a book about how cultural standards and social pressures around gender relate to the prevalence of eating disorders in America. Orbach refers to food as "the medium through which women are addressed."¹ Food is the specific realm of women in traditional femininity and is tied tightly to sexism; we need look no further than jokes about how women should "get back in the kitchen." The objectification of women that is so typical of this sexism means that physical appearance (including conformity to whatever fickle beauty standard is currently in vogue) is extremely important to a woman's perceived value. Physical appearance is affected by food, so women are encouraged to monitor what and how they eat to increase their sexual and social desirability to men.

Food has connections with sexuality as well as gender. Aristotle wrote that both eating and having sex were subject to "excess, deficiency, and temperance in between."² In the case of women, temperance is even more important, for too much or too little of either food or sex could

¹Susie Orbach, *Hunger Strike: the anorectic's struggle as a metaphor for our age* (New York: Avon, 1988): 3.

² Charles M. Young, "Aristotle on Temperance," *The Philosophical Review* 97, no. 4 (1988), 524.

decrease their desirability. From a heterosexual woman's point of view, both eating and having sex involve taking a foreign substance into her body. In the case of a pomegranate, eating straight from the rind can also resemble kissing, a resemblance I purposefully played up in my performance to underline the closeness of these two sensual experiences.

My intention was for the audience to watch me act sensually, feel a bit uncomfortable or amused, and more or less agree with Demeter: it is not polite, clean, usual, etc. to eat like that. Then, the more questions Persephone asks, the more the audience is confronted by its own reasoning for believing it is impolite, dirty, or strange. I believe I succeeded in evoking this in my audience. I gauged my success by how the audience member playing the mother responded to the request for their own answer on the bottom of the first page. The first night, when I asked what the 'something else' was that men would think, the audience member responded "something seductive." She obviously got the message of sensuality.

The following night, the audience member hesitantly said "bananas. Just...bananas." I cannot know exactly what she meant by this. I interpreted it to be a hint that if I ate a banana in that same manner in front of a man, it would be very suggestive, so I should just avoid eating any fruit, phallic or not, so sensuously in front of men. This may sound like a stretch, but I remember in middle school learning from friends and even memes on the internet that if I wanted to eat a banana at school, I should break off pieces with my fingers rather than put a phallic object anywhere near my mouth in the presence of boys my age.

(2) Persephone: Whoa – hey, I'm bleeding –

Marguerite Rigoglioso, a scholar of ancient Mediterranean mystery religions, refers to the Persephone myth as surrounding "the maidenly transition to menarche and sexual initiat[e] – both

of which are associated with bleeding”³. Persephone’s period, a sign of puberty and growing into adulthood, comes at the same time that she is first exposed to the expectation of adult women to perform differently in the presence of men, showing how her psychological experience of growing up is tied to the physical. Additionally, in my performance, the pomegranate, an “oozing, blood-red, seed-filled interior [that]...is an obvious menstrual image”⁴ both inspires the conversation about how to act around me to ensure safety and creates the purple-red stain on the back of her dress.

(3) Don’t attract too much attention, put your napkin in your lap, let them pull a chair out for you, but don’t let them to touch you, don’t be alone with anyone, just come find me, don’t do anything that might make them want to –

Women feel the need to control our actions and image to avoid unwanted sexualization. W. E. B. Du Bois wrote extensively about “double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on”⁵ in relation to the struggle of Black Americans. Writer Eliza Shaw applies the same concept to the ways in which women “act...a certain way around men in order to remain safe”⁶ specifically on college campuses, but in the world beyond as well. Demeter want her daughter to

³ Marguerite Rigoglioso, “Persephone’s Sacred Lake and the Ancient Female Mystery Religion in the Womb of Sicily,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, vol. 21, no. 2 (2005), 15.

⁴ Rigoglioso, “Persephone’s Sacred Lake,” 15.

⁵ W.E.B. Du Bois, “Strivings of the Negro People,” *The Atlantic*, August 1897, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1897/08/>.

⁶ Eliza Shaw, “How Women Are Subject to Unjust Double Consciousness,” *Her Campus*, <https://www.hercampus.com/school/bu/how-women-are-subject-unjust-double-consciousness> (accessed October 9, 2019).

be safe above all else, and she has feminine experience in the world that Persephone has not yet been exposed to. Demeter is not giving Persephone these instructions to build respectability or impose a certain image on her or any other frivolous reason. She is trying to save her daughter from having to learn these lessons the hard way. Thus, these messages are perpetuated not only from a patriarchal outside force, but from within support systems between women.

(4) He placed the dried thing on the ground, and it sank effortlessly into the dirt.

The decay of this flower is Persephone's first exposure to death as well as her first meeting with her future husband. Death and sex are intrinsically related in her story. Flowers are commonly symbols of youth, vaginas, and virginity, all of which apply to Persephone. Seeing one shrivel and die for the first time raises frightening question about her own mortality.

Additionally, a withering flower is the star of one of the most notorious abstinence-only sex education exercises. The instructions for the exercise are detailed in Choosing the Best PATH, one of the more popular abstinence-centered education programs in the country. The program instructs each student in the room "pulls off a petal...until there are no more petals. [The teacher then asks,] of what value is the rose now? ...The rose represents someone who participates in casual sex"⁷. The intended lesson is that every time a person (probably a woman, considering the associations of flowers with femininity) has sex, they degrade in some way until they are completely worthless. However, there is a counter-reading to this exercise that applies beautifully to Persephone's journey to maturity.

⁷ "Danger, Do Not Enter," *Mother Jones*, March/April (2005), <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2005/03/danger-do-not-enter/> (accessed October 9, 2019).

In order to get the message of abstinence across with this exercise, the teacher relies on the students to agree with the implication that a dead rose is worthless. A rose without petals is dead, but it can still have purpose and value. It decomposes and contributes to the growth of something new. Obviously, a person who has sex with multiple partners is not then meant to die and disintegrate, but giving value to the dead flower gives value to the person it represents in the teacher's metaphor. If one holds onto a belief in the intrinsic value of a person's life regardless of what state or stage it is in, then neither sex nor death can devalue it. We can think of sexual maturity and maturity of age in the same way: as natural progressions with value at every stage, even though transitioning between those stages is frightening and warned against. Neither death of the body nor death of virginity are cause for disrespect or indignity. This, I believe, is the core of Persephone's story as I have written it. She must grow and explore maturity despite the fear instilled in her by outside forces.

(5) Mom: Let's talk about something else.

In her essay on communication between mothers and daughters, clinical psychologist Janet Surrey shows that openness about sex provides a "conflict...between protectiveness and authenticity"⁸ for a mother. Refusing to discuss sex openly can serve many purposes for a mother, especially for Demeter. It allows her to ignore and remove herself from her own traumatic sexual experiences and create a life with her daughter that is separate from that past. It also allows Demeter the feeling that she is protecting her daughter from "the pain, or the

⁸ Janet Surrey, "The mother-daughter relationship: themes in psychotherapy," In *Daughtering and Mothering*, ed. Janneke van Mens-Verhulst, Karlein Schreurs, and Liesbeth Woertman, (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 113.

intensity”s of sexuality by limiting her knowledge of it. Limiting a child’s knowledge of sex to hints at scary, painful consequences seems to ensure that the child will abstain through choice (for fear of pain) as well as through ignorance (they cannot do it if they don’t know what ‘it’ is). Demeter believes that perhaps, if they do not talk about the possibility of pain, no pain will happen. This ultimately comes from the fact that Demeter does not have a “context which allows [her] to know and to act on [her] own painful feelings”s and process them in a healthy way.

(6) *Spit the all back out in my hands and stuff them under the block.*

Here we see the results of Persephone’s half-knowledge. She follows her mother’s instruction to avoid eating in front of men, but does not know that Demeter was referring to eating in a specific way that men may see as an advance. Demeter never explains why this advice is relevant because she refuses to discuss the realities of sex, so Persephone completely misses the point and interprets it as an instruction not to perform the action of consuming food. In an attempt to follow the instruction and also avoid making Hades uncomfortable (though she definitely makes him uncomfortable anyway), she settles on the compromise of putting food in her mouth without actually consuming any.

Other fictional works on the importance of reproductive education have shown misunderstandings like this one. In Frank Wedekind’s 1891 play *Spring Awakening*, Wendla Bergman believes a woman can only become pregnant by loving her husband. Because she and her love interest are not married, she has no idea that their relationship could result in pregnancy. Though Wendla’s story ends horrifically and Persephone’s finds a calm resolution, the core message is the same: clear factual information about sex is safer and more useful than euphemisms.

Persephone's refusal to eat in front of Hades also relates a female experience of eating disorders. Sarah Benesch, a scholar of language, emotions, and power, reports that even women without eating disorders "avoid eating in front of men because it is 'unfeminine' behavior and therefore unattractive"⁹. Dinner dates are almost omnipresent in American culture, and it is tragic to me that a woman exploring romance might occupy her mind with how her partner might judge her appetite. Not only that, but how disturbing that the potential partner might not notice, or at worst, find it attractive or appropriate. Benesch reported that during a class discussion of a book about anorexia, male students complained that women they dated were "all on diets...[and] all they order[ed wa]s diet soda,"⁹ but affirmed that "they could lose a few pounds"⁹ in the same breath. Dismissal of the choice to limit food, desire for a change in the woman's physical appearance, and lack of further thought into the woman's motivations all demonstrate a general lack of concern for the woman's mental state. Even if a change in diet was a positive change for her, she would find no support from someone who takes no time to think about them.

If I wanted a content resolution and a positive sexual relationship for Persephone, it was critical that Hades not be this kind of partner. The reason he does not immediately question Persephone about her strange behavior around food is not because he believes it is normal, acceptable, or a good idea, but because he believes he has not provided her with the right food. He devotes thought and time to figuring out what he could provide that she will not refuse, progressively trying stranger and stranger things in an effort to discover what she needs. Neither of them know that what she really needs is to accept that she is a sensual being – one needing

⁹ Sarah Benesch, "Anorexia: A Feminist EAP Curriculum," in *Adult ESL: Politics, Pedagogy, and Participation in Classroom and Community Programs*, ed. Trudy Smoke (New York and London: Routledge, 1998), 108.

food, desiring sex, and unashamed of either. However, when she continues to refuse food and he can see the damage of starvation on her body, he arranges for her to go back to an environment that he believes will be healthier for her. Hades demonstrates that he wants the best for Persephone, even if that means she cannot stay in his kingdom, which he believes is causing her to waste away.

(7) It was good! It was good! It didn't change me– I'd already done that.

Persephone's decision to eat – to go against her mother's instructions, to choose to take up space, and to stop denying herself what she desires – must be the turning point of her story, not her first sexual experience. She must change, and because of that change, decide to have sex. Any other possibility invites the notion that something else has acted upon her and caused the change, and above all, I want her to have agency. She is the narrator, the main character, and the focus of my study; it would be unjust and counterproductive to hint that a different character was responsible for Persephone's watershed decision to take charge of her own destiny.

Yet, many interpret the story in just this way. Most scholarship on the Persephone myth that I read and researched in preparation for writing Part One fell into two main patterns. The first portrays Hades as a kidnapper and rapist. Indeed, the original source of this myth supports this view down to the title: "The Rape of Persephone." Scholars that take this side interpret the story as an example of how patriarchal influence normalizes stories of rape. This narrative is all too familiar in current media, where "the absence of the mother [frequently due to abduction, rape, or death] is often the catalyst for the post-feminist heroine's narrative"¹⁰. Some writers take

¹⁰Alison Horbury, *Post-Feminist Impasses in Popular Heroine Television: The Persephone Complex*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 25.

Persephone's queendom after her rape as "a lesson in overcoming one's victim status"¹¹.

However, in my opinion, a hopeful outlook on a story of rape does little to mitigate the fact that it is a story of rape. There are an overwhelming number of rape narratives flooding modern media already; *Game of Thrones*, one of the most popular television shows in recent history, features seventeen instances of rape in its full run¹². That's roughly one in every four episodes. I do not want to add my play to the count of narratives driven by assault, regardless of how the original story is written.

The second pattern that I noticed much of the scholarship on Persephone frames Hades as the sexual liberator that frees Persephone from "the castrating mother produced by patriarchy who sabotages the daughter's adjustment to adulthood"¹³. It is true that "part of [the] process of inner separation from the mother is the ability to develop a sense of one's own body, including sexuality",¹⁴ but it seems unlikely that a sexual partner could single-handedly break the bond between a mother and daughter, let alone that it would be a heroic act.

Neither of these readings of the story prioritize Persephone as the main agent in a story that primarily surrounds her maturation. Both frame Hades as the main agent, either a rapist or a hero. The only difference is how Persephone and Demeter feel about his actions: either both

¹¹ Horbury, *Post-Feminist Impasses*, 20-21.

¹² Sara David, "Counting Every Instance of Rape, Death, and Nudity on 'Game of Thrones,'" *Vice*, Sept 7, 2017, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/qvvx83/game-of-thrones-by-the-numbers (accessed March 18, 2020).

¹³ Horbury, *Post-Feminist Impasses*, 26.

¹⁴ Karin Flaake, "A body of one's own: Sexual development and the female body in the mother-daughter relationship," in *Daughtering and Mothering*, edited by Janneke van Mens-Verhulst, Karlein Schreurs, and Liesbeth Woertman, (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 10.

horrified, or one horrified and one happy. Regardless, Persephone takes little to no action herself; she merely receives and reacts to the actions of her husband and mother. If she is to be the main character, she must make choices. She must be agentive. She must experience transformation and self-discovery independent of others. This is why it was so important that a decision about her own wellbeing be the transition as opposed to sex. No character but Persephone has claim to the way her life changes.

(8) But the risk is gone. And I'm finished denying myself things I want.

The risk mentioned here is the risk of pregnancy. Until this point in the play, the pomegranate has represented fertility and sexuality, which reflect its classical representations as “the shedding of hymeneal blood”¹⁵. This is usually in reference to the flesh of the fruit, which is “oozing, blood-red ... [and] seed-filled”¹⁶. The skin is a different matter. John M. Riddle has researched many methods of historical birth control, their efficacy, and their cultural meanings. In his book *Contraception and Abortion from the Ancient World to the Renaissance*, he shows that of several ancient “suppository recipes, five...use pomegranate peel or rind...[which] is recognized as an abortifacient in ancient...literature”¹⁷. Using it as such allows Persephone to control her fertility and the threat of pregnancy and death that has held her through the story. She learns that part of becoming an adult is taking control of one's own bodily capabilities, including sex, reproduction, health, and eating, into one's own hands. This insight expands the meaning of

¹⁵ Kathie Carlson, *Life's Daughter/Death's Bride*, (Boston and London: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1997), 34.

¹⁶ Rigoglioso, “Persephone's Sacred Lake,” 15.

¹⁷ John M. Riddle, *Contraception and Abortion from the Ancient World to the Renaissance*, (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1992), 25.

the pomegranate as a symbol as well. It is a fruit like those that her mother cultivates as well as a form of death, which is Hades' purview. The pomegranate holds both fertility and sterility, nourishment and poison, life and death, which encapsulates the balance that Persephone strikes, holding parts of her mother and her husband, but independent of both.

(9) How was I supposed to correct her, without sounding like whoever she told the first time and shut her up forever? I don't think she would've heard, even if I had tried to explain.

This line serves to fit my version of the story with the traditional version as told in the "Homeric Hymn to Demeter" and other ancient sources. Audience members who are familiar with classical mythology may know a much more violent version of Persephone's descent to the Underworld. Though I am writing in the opposite direction, I wanted to acknowledge a connecting between my version and the original myth. Demeter, like the audience members, has a pre-constructed version of Persephone's story. Unlike the audience, however, she does not get to see Persephone's perspective. Out of sadness and shock at realizing her mother has experienced exactly this kind of assault, Persephone lets her mother tell whatever version of events she chooses. I imagine that in this expansive fictional world, Demeter's version of events spreads and perpetuates, eventually becoming the "Homeric Hymn," in which Hades "seized [Persephone] against her will, put...on [Hades'] golden chariot, /...[as] She cried with a piercing voice."¹⁸

¹⁸ Gregory Nagy ed., "Homeric Hymn to Demeter," Center for Hellenistic Studies, (Harvard University 2018), lines 19-20, <https://chs.harvard.edu/CHS/article/display/5292>, (accessed October 7, 2019).

(10) “Be safe.”

The fundamental advice on sex from a parent to child. Normally it might be met with an eye roll, but in Persephone’s case, every other conversation with her mother has been about avoidance – either strategies for avoiding male attention or avoidance of the subject entirely. This is the only time Demeter has ever acknowledged the fact that Persephone is going to pursue and consent to sex. And the acknowledgement comes with a pomegranate, the symbol for fertility and the source of birth control all in one. Though she does not say it out loud, Demeter is recognizing Persephone’s autonomy and sexuality through a small gift, just in the way that a modern parent might give a child going to college a box of condoms. It is an acknowledgement that, whatever the parent has taught the child, they are now making their own decisions for better or for worse.

(11) “Let us rest together as the world grows.”

All this new-found power and maturity comes to Persephone with the realization that not everyone gets this far. Plenty of girls who explore a strange place away from home in the middle of the night find men who are far less respectful than Hades. What can she offer women who met their ends in the same way she met her new beginnings? A safe place to rest after death, a sanctuary from the harm they have encountered, and the hope that with the passing of all the natural cycles of which Persephone is a part – birth and death, menstruation, the seasons – the frightening, dangerous parts will soon fade and be replaced.

Part 2: Mary

(She lies on her back, head to the audience, knees up.)

Um.

Okay.

I'm...I'm ready? If...you are.

Um.

I just wanted to ask, like, I haven't done this before, and – I mean obviously you know that, but like, is there...anything I should do?

Like do you need me to do anything? Or want me to?

Cause, it might be better. If you ask me to do something, I can make it better. For you. (1)

(Beat.)

I can just be here too, I don't have to do anything if you'd rather. I can just kinda stay still. That's good too.

-Not that I would know. Obviously.

But, um.

I thought we were gonna do it last night, actually? Not that I was looking forward to it.

I mean, I wasn't not looking forward to it. Obviously, I am so, so grateful. I just meant, I thought, cause of the message, the messenger, yesterday. Sorry, I talk a lot when I'm nervous.

Not that you're making me nervous. Just normal stuff, just wedding night jitters.

Um.

Actually, I meant to ask. When I – when it happens, when I start, you know, showing and getting close to time...are you gonna tell anyone? Are you gonna tell anyone that it's yours?

There was this girl I knew a few years ago who got it. Got pregnant I mean. She tried to hide it, but everybody found out and her parents threw her out.

I didn't even like her, really. We're not, I'm not like that. But, I just wanted to know...what I should tell people?

I mean, I'll tell them that it's the son of God. I want to tell the truth. But, people have said that before. And sometimes people believed it, but not – I mean obviously, they were liars, you're the only, I'm the only...

There's something I should probably tell you, before – just, yesterday. When I found out this was gonna happen, I...I wanted to know if it was going to hurt or not, so I touched. Myself. Just, to stretch it, feel if it...I'm sorry. The point is, I'm sorry, it wasn't for *that*. You know, of course, I just don't want – I'm sorry.

(trying to lighten the mood) You know my mom, my aunties, they always said, you can dream all you like, but when it comes to it, just lie there and let 'em! Ha. Of course, I don't dream about it. And I'm not *letting* you do anything, you can do whatever you want. You can do anything. You could have anyone.

And you chose me.

I always...kind of hoped I was different. Than other girls.

I could tell they wanted it. And I never did. And I figured, one day, someone handsome would see me and...just know I never wanted it. He'd want me 'cause I was different. And I'd turn him away, obviously, but he'd keep coming back and coming back and chasing me until I finally couldn't escape him anymore and I had to give in. And then – (2)

(Suddenly, she jerks from the hips, and cries out surprised.)

AH –

(The lights go very bright. Mary goes very blank. A high buzzing sound that could be singing or could be radio static. She stands quickly and picks up the blanket. She rolls it up, and slides it up her dress to be a pregnant belly. She poses like a dramatic painting. (3))

(Suddenly, the lights are back to normal, and so is she. We are at a different point, farther along in the story. She is in early stages of active labor, for the purposes of a condensed timeline. She is flustered, trying to get herself and her things together.)

We gotta go. Okay, alright. Time to go.

Please don't think I'm –

I can't travel alone. I need a husband, I'm very pregnant. At least a fiancé. Does anyone want to be my fiancé? Does anyone know what to say? And he said,

Fiancé: I do.

Mary: Oh! That's perfect. Thank you. Can you propose real quick? You don't have to mean it.

Fiancé: *(Do whatever you think a fake proposal looks like.)*

Mary: Thank you!

You know, actually, you're – don't take this the wrong way – you're pretty old. People might think I'm your daughter. It might actually be better to pretend you're my dad and we –

(Doubles over in a contraction.)

Ooh! Oooh, we're okay, it's fine.

(to audience) They're not that far apart, don't worry.

(to fiancé) Okay, we need to get packed. There's, uh...there's – we don't have anything. There's nothing to pack! Great! One less thing. So let's just get on the way –

(She walks to the door to leave the original location, but stops in pain.)

Oooh, ooh, oh, walking. Walking is not – not gonna happen right now. Can...could you carry me? Or, find someone or something that can?

(Either they carry her, or find someone from the audience.)

Are you sure you're strong enough?

(She directs the carrier to take her around the audience's backs.)

I have to pee so bad.
Don't go too fast, I might throw up. God, I have to pee –

(Contraction)

AHhhh – mmmmmm
oh.
Oh no. I...I just had an accident.
You can put me down.
I am so, so sorry. (4)

(She tries to dry the carrier off some.)

I'm so sorry – oh. That's not pee. That's water, that's my water. My water broke. That's fine, okay– *(to the fiancé)* Where are we going? I need to get inside.

(There is no line for this answer.)

You don't know? I thought it was your – where are we gonna stay?

(There is no line for this answer.)

Fine – *fine*, just go find a midwife, and I'll – I'll find somewhere, just hurry.

(Go to the door and knock.)

Hello?
Hello! Hello!

(Move past the door and begin knocking on the walls, slowly more and more exhausted. It's really starting now.)

Hello, hello, hello, hell, hail, hail, hail, hail, hail Mary full of Grace, the Lord is with thee. I'm so full of grace. I'm so full it's going to rip me in two, the Lord is with me, the Lord is in me, the Lord was in me – AHHHHH

(The lights go very bright. A high buzzing. Mary goes blank. No pain. No expression. Looking straight ahead, she methodically pulls the blanket out from under her shirt, unfurls it, folds/swaddles it into a baby, and poses like a dramatic painting. (5)

Without warning, the lights are back to normal and so is she. She slides down to sitting again holding the baby she did not feel the delivery of. Shock.

She feels between her legs.)

There's no blood.

Where's all the – sorry. Sorry. I shouldn't be complaining, just – they told me there would be a lot. Guess that's...one of the perks.

It's just, they also said there'd be blood when...

(She gestures awkwardly to indicate sex/conception.)

I never bled, actually. All the other girls got it and I never did. That's why I was so surprised when – I didn't think I'd ever be able to. It's our punishment for carnal sin. But! It turns out He made it so I'd stay pure. And, I guess, no one else could've had me. Or would've wanted me. He's smart like that. (6)

(To the baby)

Sorry, I don't mean to talk about you like you're not here. Are you here? Are you...in there? ...Father? Sorry, I don't know who I should talk to...?

(She looks between the sky and the baby.)

Your eyes are...very open. That's nice, you can look right at me. Not even like a baby's eyes, so alert.

(An uncomfortable pause. She leans down and whispers to the baby.)

Um. You're – you're supposed to cry.

(Instantly and unsettlingly the sound of a baby crying fills the room. She jumps.)

Yeah! Yeah, that's more...that's good.

(We spend a moment listening to the crying as she bounces him, can't get him to settle.)

You don't have to do it like all the time –

(Instantly and unsettlingly, the crying cuts off.)

We'll...work on that.

(Too much nodding.

To an audience member. Note: if that audience member doesn't want to, find someone who does.)

Do...do you want to hold him?

Have you ever held a baby before? Do you know how to do it? I mean, I barely know how to do it, but if you don't then...

(Hand him over to someone in the audience. Through these next few lines, back away gradually.)

You seem pretty good with him. Yeah, um. You know what babies need? Cause he's like, he's an important one, so...he really needs it. Needs someone who knows what they're doing.

You don't know where I'm from do you? My name?

(If they say they don't) Good.

(If they do) Um, no. No, you're wrong. That's not – who's that???

Um, anyway, could you just hold him for a minute longer, I gotta go do – gotta go.

(She goes through the door and slam it behind her.)

Beat.

The lights go very bright. A high buzzing. She walks back in through the door in the same blank state as before. She picks up the baby from the audience member and goes to sit down back where she was before she tried to pass him off.

Abruptly, she is back. The lights are back to normal.)

Please don't tell anyone about that.

I can do it. It won't be forever. I mean, he's already born. Sooner or later, it'll be about Him, right? And Him (*God, above*). Why would I still have to be a...be different, now that he's born. I can just...be a mom. A wife.

Maybe even have another kid at some point. Give you a brother. Feel it next time.

(Standing, unfurling the cloth from a baby to a sheet again. She folds and unfolds it repeatedly and rhythmically. A shadow of daily life work.)

Months followed. There was finally a better roof, and then strangers with gifts I couldn't identify, but we could sell. I sat quietly, while they bowed and touched and kissed and prayed. But months and months later, we were finally home. And, I tried it. I put the baby down for the night. Put on my good dress.

(to Fiance) Hey. I'm sorry I kind of lost touch with you in the chaos. And he said,

Fiancé: It's good to be home again.

Mary: Yeah. And I was thinking, you know, I know it was complicated. But, we're settled now. We could really make a life here.

Fiancé: What did you have in mind?

Mary: Maybe...we get married? If you want. We could have another kid?

Fiancé: What about Him?

Mary: I won't love Him less. It could be good for him.

Fiancé: You want to have a real relationship?

(Just as she's about to respond, the lights go very bright, and Mary goes blank again. A high buzzing. She walks over and lies the dress form down in his place. The lights go back to normal and so does she.)

I don't remember anything after that. But he wasn't the same after that. He started sleeping in a different room. I'm sorry. And he said,

Fiancé: I am the servant of the lord.

Mary: I didn't mean to overstep. I thought...I don't know.

Fiancé: I am the servant of the lord.

Mary: Look at me.

Fiancé: I am the servant of the lord.

Mary: Will you stop – sorry. Sorry. (7)

(She checks to see if he really can't see or process her, and leans down to whisper in his ear.)

I should – I didn't say no.

But of course, I wouldn't. I wasn't made that way. In His infinite wisdom designed and created to say yes when He asked. Actually, it was statements. An answer was not requested. (8)

(Begin the next passage focused and inquisitive, but slowly get dreamier. She is slowly losing feeling in her life.)

Do you think He made extras? In case I was corrupted somehow and couldn't be the one. Or maybe I'm the extra. Maybe there's a girl out there who saw what I saw. Eyes and wheels and feathers and words inside my tissue to say

(In a grotesque angel voice.)

“d o n o t b e a f r a i d .”

And somehow, she pried her jaws open and screamed. And ran. And married. And had a real...

Of course, she does not exist. I was made to be incorruptible. Impenetrable.

(Very softly, the high buzzing begins in the background. It slowly gets louder through the end of the play. She lifts the blanket over her head as the classic blue veil. She is becoming the version God wants her to be and we know her as. A stiff ballerina doll)

And, of course, I do have a family. My lover is my father who is my son, who impregnated me with Himself. I gave Him new life. He gave Himself me. He gave me betterness. I was destined to rise above want and sensation, I will lead the great example of holy deprivation.

It is a blessing not to shit anymore. It is a pleasure to emit from my body only milk from my breast and, yes, salt water from my eyes, as the divine plan of which I am a part draws the end of its golden arc across the sky. Beneath which, upon two lines that intersect is my son who will take several days to die of several causes.

I look on as a painting, posed in anguish. But it is curious. The first thing I gave Him was my body. The second was His body. And now He is abandoning my gift. I cannot help wondering, if he's really going to leave it, does that mean my job will be done? I should perhaps have some reaction to this thought. Shame, likely. Or hope. But I do not feel.

From where I sit at the edge of the crowd for newcomers to take interest in, I see a shadow behind a tree. His friend. His dear friend who he kissed so many times. Hiding at the back so no one will strangle him. I pause my very lovely tears which I cannot feel on my face.

(Extending a hand to an audience member who is now Judas.)

“Do not be afraid. You have played your part. Do you really think God didn't know you would do this the moment you were born?”

He ran away. They say he killed himself. That was his part, too.

We all have our parts to play. It is holy of us to play them, and I have played mine well.

I am not a goddess. If I were, I would not need such close supervision from my maker. If I were a goddess, I would feel nothing but pride for the holy people to come after me, and indeed I do feel nothing. But there is no pride for Agatha whose breasts will be slit, Lucy who plucks her own eyes, (9) all the dozens that starve and starve to holiness for my father son lover. (10) If I were a goddess, I would appear to them, as they lay prepared to die at the hands of those who worship others, and I would say,

(Pulling back the veil and stepping off the plinth.)

“My child, your sacrifice is valiant. but why would you have to prove yourself to me? I know your true heart. And I command you to spit on my name, and save your own life.”

(Release them. Replace the veil.)

If I were as God is, and you were as I am, I would tell you to let Him in and you would. You would let Him into you, let Him in, let him in, let Him in, be his vessel, let Him in. And no one else. Not ever. Let Him overcome and overshadow you. Do not feel when He enters you. Do not enjoy or fear or hate or experience it, and blessed be the fruit of your womb. Rise above your selfish body and serve you lord. Do not feel, do not sin, anymore.

(The buzzing cuts off.)

It is better not to feel. **(11)**

(End of section.)

(1) Cause, it might be better. If you ask me to do something, I can make it better. For you

This line is intended to indicate that Mary is much more concerned with God's experience of the conception than her own. She repeatedly gets embarrassed when she accidentally implies that she might know something about sex (how to make it good, when it's supposed to happen, what it feels like, etc.). This is a reflection of how she is used in Christian teachings.

Mary is characterized as “the Church's female paragon, and the ideal of the feminine personified”¹⁹, and used as an example for what Christian women should strive for. Unfortunately, in many ways, Mary is a completely unachievable ideal. Without divine intervention, no woman can make her “virginal flesh def[y] common laws of physicality and sexuality [in order to] remain... a virgin even after childbirth”²⁰. Mary achieves the two female roles that are traditionally most valued by patriarchy— virgin and mother – simultaneously. Her fidelity and purity are certain, but she can still produce heirs. The great miracle of Jesus' conception is that God eliminates the mutual exclusivity of these roles, which gives way to the perfect woman.

How can average women seeking to live up to the Mary's ideal follow her example? Short of artificial insemination, the best a woman can do is to separately fulfill both roles, virgin and mother, to the absolute best of her ability. This means guarding her chastity until marriage. But even after marriage when sex is an important and expected part of life, women can find instruction in the lack of feeling Mary experiences during the conception of Jesus. In the

¹⁹ Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), xxiv.

²⁰ Mary F. Thurlkill, *Chosen Among Women: Mary and Fatima in Medieval Christianity and Shi'ite Islam*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 44.

sixteenth century, Christian philosopher Francisco Suarez claims that “The Blessed Virgin in conceiving a son...[did not] experience...any venereal pleasure...[because it was] without any cause or utility to produce such an effect, or to excite any unbecoming movement of passion.”²¹

The lesson is clear: a woman’s sexual pleasure is improper and unnecessary. In most cases, a male orgasm is necessary to conceive during penetrative sex, and a female orgasm is not.

Therefore, prioritize the sexual needs of your husband and actively ignore and efface your own.

This will make you more like Mary. This will make you closer to God. And probably less happy.

(2) And I’d turn him away, obviously, but he’d keep coming back and coming back and chasing me until I finally couldn’t escape him anymore and I had to give in. And then –

The imaginary story Mary is recounting here is a complicated one. Her hope for a future relationship with a man is that he notices her, somehow knows that she does not want to have sex, and pursues her tirelessly until she gives in. This is not a happy story. What does it say about Mary that in her own fantasy, she does not prioritize her own consent? That being said, I purposely performed it to seem as though Mary is not afraid, but genuinely excited by the idea of being pursued, of being picked out from a crowd as special and desirable.

In analyzing twenty studies of sexuality done over the last fifty years, psychologists Joseph W. Critelli and Jenny M. Bivona found that “a range of 31% to 55%” of women had sexual fantasies that involved being “overpowered or forced”²². Most researchers reject the idea that this fantasy indicates to a desire to be raped in real life, but instead “what is ‘wished

²¹ Francisco Suarez, *The Dignity and Virginity of the Mother of God. Disputations I, V, VI from The Mysteries of the Life of Christ*, Trans. Richard J. O’Brien, S.J. (West Baden Springs: Edwards Brothers, 1954), 41.

²² Joseph W. Critelli, Jenny M. Bivona, “Women’s Erotic Rape Fantasies: An Evaluation of Theory and Research,” *Journal of Sex Research* 45, no.1 (Feb 2008).

for'...[is] a powerful and attractive selected male and a sense of danger, excitement, and passion"¹⁸. However, in a culture that prizes purity and effacement of female sexuality, these actual wishes are shameful. They cannot be acted upon for fear of social ruin, and perhaps cannot even be fantasized about without feelings of anxiety and embarrassment. Therefore, fantasies arise in which "force combined with...nonconsent allows her to...reduce guilt and shame, and therefore enhance sexual gratification"¹⁸. Mary envisions a scenario in which she cannot be blamed for expressing her sexuality because her partner has all but forced her to do so.

I included this here to make it clear to my audience that, at least in my version, Mary the mother of Jesus is a sexual being just like anyone else. She is nervous, repressed, ashamed, and desirous, and none of that is unusual or sinful. This makes it all the more abrupt when her contact with the divine does not show her how to rise above her shame, but rather echoes her fantasy in a cold, harsh, decidedly unsexy way by yanking her up by her hips and blanking out her consciousness.

(3) The lights go very bright. Mary goes very blank. A high buzzing sound that could be singing or could be radio static. She stands quickly and picks up the blanket. She rolls it up, and slides it up her dress to be a pregnant belly. She poses like a dramatic painting.

The Bible itself says next to nothing about the actual event of the conception of Jesus. In the gospel of Luke, the angel says "the power of the Most High will overshadow"²³ Mary so she will conceive. We can infer that the event "[took] place in the interval between the annunciation to [Mary] and her visit to Elizabeth, who blesses the fruit of Mary's womb"²⁴.

²³ Luke 1:35 New Oxford Annotated Bible.

²⁴ Jane Schaberg, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus: A Feminist Theological Interpretation of the Infancy Narratives*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 88.

However, Christian thinkers have expressed strong opinions and interpretations (motivated in part by anxiety, I believe) about what did and did not happen during the conception. As I mentioned before, “The Blessed Virgin in conceiving a son neither lost her virginity nor experienced any venereal pleasure”²⁵ according to Francisco Suarez. Some scholars believe the conception itself occurred “at the moment of Mary’s consent”²⁶, meaning it would have happened during her conversation with the angel and went seemingly unnoticed.

What purpose does it serve to say that Mary did not notice the conception? Firstly, the term ‘overshadow’ “in the...Hebrew Bible...often has overtones of terror, alarm, flight, and anxiety”²⁷. The angel’s message that godly power will overshadow Mary could convince a reader that the conception of Jesus was divine rape. It is in the best interest of the religion for theologians to assuage this anxiety. If Mary has no reported physical experience of the event, they can use that to support their claim that she was not harmed. Unfortunately, absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. It seems possible to me that a young girl would not have spoken publicly about a supernatural sexual experience whether it was painful or pleasurable. And if she did not speak about it, it did not become part of the circulated story. Even if she had spoken about it, especially if she spoke negatively, there is no guarantee it would have been included.

Just as it is important to deny that God caused Mary pain, it is critical to deny that He caused her any pleasure. The most important thing about Mary is her virginity. Without that, there is no miracle in Jesus’ birth, no symbol of perfect purity and femininity. Therefore, a hint of even a positive sexual experience, even with the one who is meant to be Jesus’ father, is a

²⁵ Suarez, *The Dignity and Virginity*, 41.

²⁶ Schaberg, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus*, 88.

²⁷ Schaberg, 89.

threat to her value as a symbol. According to Suarez, it would have been “without any cause or utility to produce such an effect, or to excite any unbecoming movement of passion”²⁸. Suarez was not the first or last person in history to consider female pleasure to be “without...utility.”²⁸ Catholic views of sex maintain that it should be first and foremost for the purpose of reproduction, and only between a husband and wife. Since female orgasms are not necessary for becoming pregnant, they can be placed in the category of sex for the sake of sex, which is lustful and sinful. Lust and sin can never be allowed to apply to such a pure figure as Mary, so she must not experience a sexual act, even if it is holy.

This lack of feeling presents a worrying dilemma for considering consent. If God really did eliminate sensation from her body, even only for short periods of time, I would venture to say that made Mary much easier to control. Physical feeling is a large part of bodily consent. Pain and pleasure give a person information about how to respond to the stimuli around them and whether they should allow those stimuli to continue or not. If those signals are cut off, a person may consent to things they normally would not, or even be unaware of what is happening to them. Supernaturally deadening sensations that inform personal boundaries in this way is similar to using alcohol to ease an uninterested or ambivalent person into sex. If they aren't fully aware of what is happening or being asked of them, they are less likely to say no. And if it comes to it, they are less capable of fending off the other person – or in Mary's case, completely incapable, since the one doing this to her is not a person at all, but an all-powerful force.

Setting aside what God may or may not have done, the claim by Christian fathers that she felt nothing provides cold comfort. Saying she felt nothing, especially when they cannot agree when the actual moment of conception was, is adjacent to saying Mary did not know it was

²⁸ Suarez, *The Dignity and Virginity*, 41.

happening. A person cannot consent to an act if they are unaware it is happening. The hints and anxieties about the possibility of divine rape are not easy to erase.

All this analysis presumes that a literal virginal conception occurred historically, but even if it did not happen and Jesus was conceived in another way, it is still relevant and important to consider what value exists in perpetuating the story of a virgin conception. Especially, what purpose does it serve to include many details about what the angel said, where the encounter took place, and more, and leave out details about what Mary experienced? It could be that though her symbolism and archetypal role are extremely important to the story and Christianity at large, supposedly impure, feminine processes have no place in a sacred story.

(4) I just had an accident. You can put me down. I am so, so sorry.

Of the three stories in this play, Part Two is the one an average audience member will probably know best. Christianity is currently practiced and categorized as a religion, as opposed to ancient Greek mythology or the psychologically disordered worship of beauty. For these reasons, I expect the changes I am making will be the most obvious and possibly the most controversial. It is a more delicate affair to alter and riff on a character that people in my audience may personally hold sacred.

Therefore, I wanted to incorporate as many comedic elements as I could without sacrificing my message. Incorporating humor lets a performer put on a “play face” or a lighter, less serious mood, “to signal that this is mock aggression”²⁹, not an actual attack on their beliefs. I believe this effort succeeded. Part of the success is due to the awkward silliness generated when I asked an audience member to join me on stage. Having audience members play different parts

²⁹ Bryan Boyd, “Laughter and Literature: A Play Theory of Humor,” *Philosophy and Literature* 28, (2004), 8.

for me already disrupts the normal actor-audience contract, but in the first story, the audience actors could stay in their seats. Bringing the actor playing Joseph onstage further disrupts and changes the relationship between the audience and the actor. The audience laughs in sympathy with the audience actor, because they know it could just as easily be them in that difficult position of being peed on by an incredibly pregnant woman. Intensity without preparation is either tragic or funny, and the fact that the audience knows the pregnancy is not real and the stakes are, for all intents and purposes, artificial, gives them the freedom to laugh.

(5) No pain. No expression. Looking straight ahead, she methodically pulls the blanket out from under her shirt, unfurls it, folds/swaddles it into a baby, and poses like a dramatic painting.

According to the apocryphal Protevangelium of James, when Joseph witnessed the birth of Jesus “a great light appeared...[and his] eyes could not bear it. A short time afterwards that light withdrew until the baby appeared, and it came and took the breast of its mother Mary.”³⁰ Writers such as St. Bonaventure take this to mean that it happened “without a murmur or lesion”³¹ – a painless childbirth. It is the second instance of Mary’s removal from physical experience. Where her lack of experience of the conception requires investigation into her consent, her lack of experience of the birth requires investigation of her humanity. Pain is human; after the fall from grace, humans live “in toil...all the days of [their] life”³². Pain is also feminine; God set on Eve and all her female descendants the “pangs in childbearing”³³ as

³⁰ Protevangelium of James 1:19 NRSV.

³¹ St. Bonaventure (attrib.), *Meditations on the Life of Our Lord*, Trans. Isa Ragusa, eds. Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green, (Princeton: 1961), 32-33.

³² Gen. 3:17 NRSV.

³³ Gen. 3:16 NRSV.

punishment for original sin. If pain is the punishment for sin and Mary is exempted from pain, Mary is different and separate from those whom God holds accountable, meaning all humanity. She has moved beyond sin and beyond humanity. In my version, that is because her volition is slowly receding and she is becoming a puppet for God to control. But if Mary is no longer capable of experiencing pain or sin, is she even human? If she is not, then what is she?

She is not a goddess. Though many worship practices and much of her imagery is adapted from the worship of non-Christian female deities,³⁴ even those who held her incredibly sacred were careful not to “exaggerate...her standing and raise her to the rank of a goddess, as worshipped by the heathen”³⁵. Whereas Christ is both human and divine, Mary is neither human nor divine, “a creature belonging both to earth and heaven”³⁶, which I imagine to be exceedingly lonely.

Mary was a person who lived and breathed. She is more and less than that now, because she is a symbol. Thus, her behavior, thoughts, and desires must be fitted to the moral teachings she represents. She needed to be perfect. She needed to have been perfect. And she was perfected. In my script, it is God who exercises his will to make her the symbol he needs. In reality, many people played a part: the writers of the Bible, the writers of the Apocrypha, painters, those who wrote and acted in medieval morality plays, those who claimed miraculous intercession, and many more. This section is the story of how a human woman is made into an ideological tool, told as if it happened through the course of her lifetime.

(6) He’s smart like that.

³⁴ Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, 206-209.

³⁵ Warner, 65.

³⁶ Warner, xxii.

There is no biblical mention of whether or not Mary menstruated, but the wealth of hypotheses and passionate arguments about her life provide speculation. Most of these speculations vehemently defend Mary's physical purity, from her immaculate conception by Anna to her bodily ascension into heaven in place of a mortal death. With all of this glorification and separation from normal human experience, medieval historian Charles T. Wood theorizes that "most simply put, the specifics of Marian theology would seem to deny the very possibility of a regular menstrual cycle...she was not subject, presumably, to the curse of Eve"³⁷.

In my script, Mary took this to mean that she was infertile. As she discusses, if she did in fact show outward signs of infertility, this was not accidental but designed by all-powerful God. Perhaps, as Wood posits, God is symbolically separating her from impurity by exempting her from punishment for original sin. Or perhaps He would do this to ensure that no one else could've gotten her pregnant or would have viewed her as a viable wife – that is, to ensure her virginity. Indeed, if God planned for Mary to be the mother of Jesus, it would be "unnecessary [for her] to procreate"³⁸ otherwise.

The less philosophical reason for why she may not have menstruated is that she had not yet completed puberty. The Protoevangelium of James, Mary was betrothed to Joseph when "she was twelve years old in the temple of the Lord" and needed to be removed "lest she defile the temple"³⁹ by unexpectedly having her first period inside. In Jane Schaberg's investigation of Mary, she outlines the common marriage practices of this point. Marriage occurred in two stages: the "engagement or betrothal...for about a year...[and then] the marriage proper, the transfer of

³⁷ Charles T. Wood "The Doctor's Dilemma: Sin, Salvation, and the Menstrual Cycle in Medieval Thought." *Speculum* 56, no. 4 (1981), 718-19.

³⁸ Wood, "The Doctor's Dilemma," 719.

³⁹ Protoevangelium of James 8:2, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, Oxford Biblical Studies Online.

the girl to her husband's home"⁴⁰. Mary and Joseph were engaged, but not yet married, so the conception of Jesus would have taken place within this year. Mary was between the ages of twelve and thirteen when she conceived, and between the ages of twelve and probably no older than fourteen when she gave birth. It is entirely possible that she could have been a somewhat late bloomer and not yet have gotten her period before the nativity.

In my performance, I tried to portray Mary as well past puberty age, mainly for two reasons. Firstly, I wanted to provide contrast between this section and Part One, in the first half of which I portrayed Persephone as quite young. Secondly, I wanted the audience to relate to my performance through the ways that they may have seen Mary portrayed now. She is rarely discussed, painted, or sculpted as a preteen, but as a kind-faced young woman in blue whose age is ambiguous. My goal was not to destroy that image, but to make the audience consider and question how this image came to be.

(7) Fiancé: I am the servant of the lord. Mary: Will you stop – sorry. Sorry.

One would think that after the birth of Jesus, Mary's virginity would not be important. Indeed, in the book of Matthew, Jesus is identified by his siblings as much as by his parents: "Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters with us?"⁴¹ This would imply that after Jesus, Mary and Joseph continued their life as an engaged and eventually married couple, had sex, and had children. However, some were not comfortable with the idea of Mary living as a normal mortal woman at any point, and in apocryphal additions to the Bible, these other children

⁴⁰ Schaberg, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus*, 43.

⁴¹ Matt. 13:55 NRSV.

are explained away. The Protoevangelium of James refers to Joseph as one of the “assemble[d]...widowers of the people”⁴² who says of himself, “I have sons and am old”⁴³. He does not take Mary as a sexual partner, but “receives her as his ward”⁴¹.

The miracle of Jesus’ virgin conception and birth is not enough; his mother must remain a virgin her entire life. Her story must be rewritten so that she is never touched by carnal sin.

Not only did this purification impulse influence the story of her later life, but the lives of her parents and her own conception. In fact, the phrase ‘Immaculate Conception,’ which is often misattributed to Jesus’s conception by Mary, actually refers to Mary’s own conception by her mother Anne. Mary is so holy, so perfect, and so removed from sex that she “was given a special grace which preserved her from the stain of original sin from the first instant”⁴⁴ of her life.

(8) I wasn’t made that way. In His infinite wisdom designed and created to say yes when He asked. Actually, it was statements. An answer was not requested.

In writing this entire section, I was reminded frequently of sexual harassment cases that erupted from relationships steeped in an imbalance of power. There is no greater difference in power that I can imagine than that between an all-powerful God and a mortal that He created. I have spoken many times in this analysis about Mary’s consent. It is in question due to her lack of feeling during the events, the angel’s use of statements instead of questions, and her sexual immaturity. All of these are worthy and complex topics to investigate, but the conclusions to these lines of questioning seem pointless when faced with the fact that God created Mary. If we take the belief that God creates all people and apply it as a fact to the circumstances in which this

⁴² Protoevangelium of James 8:3.

⁴³ Protoevangelium of James 9:2.

⁴⁴ Sarah Jane Boss, *Mary*, (London, New York: Continuum, 2003), 139.

story takes place, God created Mary to be the way that she is. So, even if she did consent to the conception of Jesus and was “humble and obedient”⁴⁵, or had the “submissive, deferential, or shy behavior”⁴⁶ that women in unbalanced relationships often have, God chose for her to be that way. I do not believe Mary is truly capable of giving consent if God “predestined [her] to such great grace and glory”⁴⁷. He constructed her to agree, and if for some reason she did not, He could change her mind for her.

(9) But there is no pride for Agatha whose breasts will be slit, Lucy who plucks her own eyes,

Saint Agatha, or Agatha of Sicily, was a twenty-year-old nun who infuriated a politically powerful admirer by refusing to marry him. In revenge, he “tried torturing her into submission by ordering her breasts to be cut off”⁴⁸. She still refused to give up her vow of chastity, and for that she is a holy martyr. There are several famous paintings of her, including *Portrait of a Young Woman as Saint Agatha* by Cariani, in which she holds her decapitated breasts on a plate. Saint Lucy’s story is very similar. She was determined to devote her life to Christ. A ruthless suitor “insisted that [her eyes’] beauty allowed him no peace”⁴⁹. Finding no other way to escape his obsession with her, Lucy “plucked out her eyes and sent them to”⁴⁷ him. Francisco de

⁴⁵ Warner, 185.

⁴⁶ John A. Bargh, Paula Raymond, “The Naïve Misuse of Power: Nonconscious Sources of Sexual Harassment,” *Journal of Social Issues* 51, no. 1 (1995), 86.

⁴⁷ Suarez, 23.

⁴⁸ *National Galleries Scotland*, <https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/5747/portrait-young-woman-saint-agatha> (accessed March 18, 2020).

⁴⁹ National Gallery of Art, <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.12209.html> (accessed March 18, 2020).

Zurbaran's portrait *Saint Lucy*, like many depictions of her, shows her with a pair of eyes on a plate.

I mentioned these figures in particular because I find them the most visceral feminine stories I have heard in the Christian canon. Not only are they incredibly graphic, but the violence in both stories is the direct result of male sexual aggression against the women's wishes. Mary says that if she were a perfect holy figure, she would be proud of them, and indeed they are commemorated for their bravery and devotion. But just as the adoration of Mary's purity feels problematic to me, this commemoration feels hollow. Bravery and devotion have nothing to do with the fact that they were preyed upon by male authorities. If their consent had been respected, perhaps they would not have become saints, but their lives would have been less torturous.

(10) all the dozens that starve and starve to holiness for my father son lover.

In addition to such extreme forms of injury, other forms of "self-abnegation"⁵⁰ and "ascetic heroism"⁵¹ – denial or pain for the sake of holiness—are common throughout Christianity. Specifically, chastity and fasting are extremely common, and frequently linked. Both are concerned with discipline, purity of the body, and patriarchal constraints on women's desires. As I said in the script, many Christians have turned to compulsive, extreme fasting in an effort to be closer to God. Historian Rudolph M. Bell, who coined the phrase 'holy anorexia' notes that of "the 261 holy women officially recognized by the Roman Catholic church as saints...who lived between 1200 and the present...about one-third...display clear signs of

⁵⁰ Thurlkill, *Chosen Among Women*, 44.

⁵¹ Thurlkill, 45.

anorexia”⁵². Eating disorders often involve a warped sense of morality in which eating food requires atonement such as starving or purging, similar to how Christians view “fasts...a[s] the means of attaining sanctity”⁵³. Moreover, “fasting, like chastity...has a particular character in women that enhances the symbolism of wholeness and purity. Amenorrhea...develops rapidly”⁵⁴ and erases “the curse of Eve”⁵⁵. This is frighteningly close to the moral code that anorexics often associate with their diets, in which “the damage done to the individual’s body can almost become a marker for success to the disordered mind”⁵⁶. The obsession with purity and atonement that creates the basis for eating disorders is reflected and reinforced by the same priorities in Christianity.

⁵² Rudolph M. Bell, *Holy Anorexia* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), x.

⁵³ Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, 75.

⁵⁴ Warner, 74.

⁵⁵ Wood, "The Doctor's Dilemma," 719.

⁵⁶ Courtney Howards. “Anorexia Nervosa: How is the Feeling of Starvation Ignored?” *Eating Disorder Hope*. Accessed Nov 30, 2019. <https://www.eatingdisorderhope.com/blog/anorexia-nervosa-starvation-ignored>

Part 3: Joules (1)

There's a new goddess rising. And like a block of marble incubating a statue, the only question is what I need to carve away to bring my pure form to the light. This woman I will be. This goddess.

I discovered I was the chosen one at nine years old. I sat in class in a short-sleeved shirt, unaware of the conversation around me, until a boy reached over and dragged a finger through the fat on my arm. It jiggled. "See?" he said to his friend. "All girls have that." (2)

And like a turning mirror, I could suddenly see. Girls. Wobbling stacks of jelly relying on other people's mercy. That's the first thing to go. I will not be like other girls. I will not suffer the humiliation of weakness. (*about her arms*) And until these are invulnerable, they will not be exposed. I didn't wear a tank top for the next eight years.

Soft surfaces in general are out, and fervent purpose bloomed in me as I sang this edict: legs, arms, butt, stomach all go.

It's easy to see what they're made of. Milk. Honey. Bullshit. The cream off the top of a bloated, blathering country poured into my gurgling throat before I could even judge. (3) Drowning me in this detestable gluttony, but when I am Her – no, not Her, me. Who's she? Who's her? Just me.

When I am whole, we-I- will be beautifully clean.

Beautiful in a way that says 'I am the best thing anyone has ever seen. I am discipline and excellence incarnate. And you, you will never, ever touch me. I am unfuckable. You *cannot* fuck with me. I will never let you see a part of me that I do not control in every possible fucking way.'" (4)

I know what you're thinking. "Won't it hurt, won't it be hard, feel bad?" Uh, yeah! It's only hard, because I'm weak! And the more I can take, the stronger I am.

You think love is easy? You think righteousness is easy? Divinity doesn't take breaks. Doesn't slow down, doesn't take cheat days. You want to become the goddess you worship? Commit. Live it. Breathe it. Do not fucking eat it.

This is love we're talking about! This is hard, cold love for yourself, for Her –no, for who you will be. Hold yourself so tightly, so fucking tight, you squeeze the evil out of you. Just you and Her – just you, inside your bones.

(Tone switches from the intense, angry commitment to an apologetic, patronizing manner. She grabs the pomegranate.)

Do you want some? It was in my lunch but I'm pretty sure if I eat it I'll be in Hell. It's fine for you though. Different rules. Who am I to force God onto others? Mediocrity is...fine. For other people. That's what mediocrity means. But I'm not other people. Sometimes sacrifices need to be made in the pursuit of higher things. Not everybody understands.

And no *body* understands. This big idiot. It's already started trying to rebel against the crackdown. (*baby voice*) It would perpetuate barbarically, pushing itself towards material continuance like a bug to dung. Divinity cannot inhabit a selfish vessel. I'm better than that. It's that simple. I'm better. I'm higher, stronger, holier.

And people love it! They love me. Girls' eyes go bright and round over my naked form in the dressing room. And in those same dressing rooms, I watched a boy and girl play-wrestling,

and thought to myself how badly I would like to be stronger than a man. How fucking good that insurance would be.

But my thoughts were interrupted when a boy walked by and said to the girl, “Close your legs, it smells like fish.” In the silence and then laughter that followed, I noted that if amenorrhea set in, I’d be one step closer to no one ever being able to criticize me again. And that would, in some way, provide me armor against boys like that. Even if I couldn’t arm wrestle them.

This is beauty! And beauty is god. And I am god. And I am not sick, I am success.

I say, as my hands tremble at the sight of a yellow brown sliver of fat-drenched starch. Repulsive. Her hands fold inside my chest in prayer and my eyes shut to join Her – to join myself. Why do I keep saying Her?

But in that second of vulnerability, a mutiny. My hands reach out of their own accord to the poison and stuff it in my mouth before I can open my eyes to see. Then another, and another as I wrestle to regain fucking CONTROL. NO –

Repent.

I don’t want to be soft, I can feel it in me, I can feel the oil in me, it’s moving, inflating me, I hate it, I hate it, I ate it, I ate it, I hate it, I ate it, Get it OUT.

(In desperation, she raises her arm and bites the fat on the underside of it viciously. She pulls back panting.)

That’s nice. That’s...that’s something.

I wish it would come off. My teeth aren’t strong enough to cut it.

(Bend at the feet of the dress form, praying.)

I pray to Her to grant me a long neck, teeth as sharp as needles, and flesh as cool as clay. I pray to bend my head over this form and rip the off the fat in my beautiful jaws. I think I just miss the feeling of something between them. NO. I pray for it to strip off in thick, jelly strips and when it is gone and my pain subsides, to finally finally finally be worthy of your form.

Your form. Her form.

(Sitting up, noticing the dress form.)

Ah. It’s you. Her. Of course. You’ve been here the whole time. (5)

A line.

A shape.

Angle. Form. Construction.

Density. Strength, tensile, sinewy.

Sewn? Imperfect, quirky, haha.

Contained. Insubstantial. Dainty. Delicate, carefully, cupped, held, loved, needed, gracious, humble, giving, generous, devoted, unselfish –

Unselfish.

Needless.

Greedless.

Untaking, incorporeal.

Unbodied, soul, spirit, spiritual, holy, transcendent, heaven, ascending,
God.

You.

Are my God.

You have sprinkled your seeds inside me and grown the roots of your passion in my empty guts and I will. I will be you. I will be the goddess and give movement to your perfection.

'I can't give you sharp teeth' is all she says. They would be ugly.

But there are other ways to break us out of the prison of fat.

When I was fourteen, I saw this movie. Back when I let myself sit down long enough to watch movies. It was about a man named Rocky, and no part of him squished when fingers ran over him. And how did he get it? How was his body impenetrable? He tensed his abs, and let his coach punch him, over and over, while he did not breathe.

(Punching in slow rhythm.)

It hurt, but not as much as it would to hate myself. Devotion. Loathing. Perfection, hand in hand. Hail me, full of shame, blessed is the fruit of thy fist. It was the one true edict of my beautiful religion: pain is weakness exiting the body. Cure yourself against the world in the cleansing properties of ache. The more you can stand, the stronger you are.

Until I went shopping for a homecoming dress with my mom, and she unexpectedly came into the dressing room. And saw me black and blue all down my torso. On the drive home, she very calmly asked if someone had done that to me, and I thought, "aw ssshit, she's gonna think I'm getting beat up at school or something." So I had to tell her, no, it wasn't anyone else.

And in the very early morning before school, I allowed her to feed me spoonfuls of her oatmeal, like a priest's immoral indulgence, like an overgrown bird, because she was my mother. I could not make my own bowl. I could not resist the nourishment.

But I could hear Her within me.

(As she speaks, she compulsively runs her hands almost sensuously over the body of the dress form.)

"Yeah, it starts off small. Little slips here and there. Then what happens? Have you forgotten the feel of our ribs beneath our skin like a drum? Of our collar bones that could hold a pool of water for a fish to breathe? Of our hip bones jutting like half-moons. Have you forgotten how badly you want me? Look at yourself."

(She grabs herself by her hair and pushes herself into the mirror.) (6)

"LOOK."

I can't, I can't, I hate it.

"Don't just stand there. Do something. Everything."

I plunged, finally, into the cold water of unbridled abstinence. It felt good to have something in my stomach, even if it was in my lungs, too.

There is no holy consumption. There is no sinful denial. There is only holy abstinence. Only those who abstain are worthy of indulging. And those who are worthy, never will. Swallow water to feel the cold line going through your center. That's how you know your stomach is empty, here for Her and Her alone to fill.

I don't think anyone finds me pretty any more. I'm balding. And growing light fur, my body's last attempt to keep me warm. Like a premature baby, except my womb is drying up, too.

Now nothing taints the pure water. No smell but the sweat from sit-ups on my bedroom floor, after my parents go to asleep. And what a smell. What a high.

As I float in the water, I know vaguely that I am breathing not-air, and that will make me dead. But if I fail to become a goddess, it wouldn't be so bad to be a martyr. A sacrifice to the goddess I want to become. Like eating the skin on the inside of my cheek. I am my own god. I die, She dies. But if I die, She wins. Wait.

(She is suddenly longer suspended, but on dry land, coughing up water. She struggles to sit up. She pauses. Breaths. She sees the dress form.)

Were you there, my lady, when this body was short and new?

When pictures danced across my screens and in them, I saw a breath of you. A kiss.

Did you know?

Did you see me too?

A seed of your future servant. And you prayed on it?

I'm sorry. I didn't die for you.

I guess you'll have to die for me.

(In a sudden move, she grabs the paring knife and stabs the dress form. Slashes it, cuts off chunks, does her best to destroy it.

When it is finally done, she breaths for a moment.)

Fuck, that just made Her skinnier.

Is that what you wanted? (7) This whole time? Someone to hurt you? To hurt with?

That's...that's really selfish. But I guess you knew that.

Heh. I'm not even better than you. Look what I did to these people. Well. I guess, nothing you hadn't already done.

I can't stay with you. Not even half the year.

We are made in the image of god? No. She is made in ours. And it...it is an ugly image.

(8)

Ugly. I hate that word. Childish and womanly and meaningless and too fucking important. You're very sad. You are evil.

And I loved you. I craved you, I snorted you, I worshipped you. Who I thought you could make me. I wish there was another way to be that, without you. Maybe one day I'll stop wishing that. Maybe one day you'll...I don't know who you are, really. Or what. If you're not torturing somebody. Maybe one day you'll find out. And maybe one day you'll understand that...that's what I have to go find out.

I can't get better than this. Even if it's not great. It has to be this one. This body. If I let it be anyone else, I'll...well. I guess you know. It's just, being a disciple of self-control is awfully convenient for a world that wants me controlled anyway. (9)

You can...I guess you can stay here. As long as you want. If you need to figure anything out. But I guess, it's not like you have no place to go. Your scripture is sold in check-out lines. You'll find a new disciple, a host soon enough. It's...a really efficient system you have, here. Wish I could take a knife to your business, haha.

I'm not sorry.

But fuck, it feels like a loss, doesn't it? Cause you're the only one who's ever known what it was really like between us. And I want someone who knows.

But I also want thick bread. And fruit. And blood. And sex. Maybe a baby. I want to feel all of it, and...don't try to bargain, I know you won't let me. I know –

(Covers her own mouth to stop the words, tries to yell at the dress form.)

It's coming from my mouth. Have you –?

Say something.

Come on, say something cruel. Say I'm unlovable. Say...say I'm a coward. A...a bitch. A fucking failure with no control –

Oh, my God, it's me.

It was me all along. How – you're a piece of plastic.

It would be so much easier to be possessed. (10)

(Picking up the pomegranate and eating a little.)

Do you want some?

You know, it tastes really good.

So.

So, I guess that's it. I'm gonna...go sin. (11)

(She sets down the script and grabs her shoes. On the way out, pause when opening the door. Look in the mirror one more time. Unhook the mirror and turn it around. She exits out the door and out of the theater.)

Black out. End of play.)

(1) Joules

I chose to give the character in this monologue something slightly different than my own name to provide some distance between me and the story. Audience members who know me well will know that I am mostly basing this story on my own experiences, but future iterations of this play may be performed by someone other than me, or even by me in places where no one in the audience knows me well. I want the story to stand on its own apart from me.

Additionally, the story I am telling is not exactly what happened in the life of Julia Byrne as an objective history would tell it. Some parts of it are rearranged, simplified, expanded, or abstracted in order to improve the storytelling. All parts of it are subject to my imperfect memory and my desire to make narrative and significance where life may or may not provide it. It is the essence of my subjective experience, but it is not necessarily hard fact.

Once I had settled on using another name in this section, it was not hard to decide on Joules. Since I was very young, my family and friends have lovingly nicknamed me ‘Jules.’ When I became sick in my sophomore year of high school, I went to stay in a treatment center many states away where we were not permitted to use social media, have personal phones, or use computers outside of a few specific hours each day. I and my dear friend from home wrote letters to each other every week, and in one of those letters, she suggested changing my nickname from ‘Jules’ to ‘Joules,’ like the scientific unit of energy. I took this in stride and used it to convince myself that I could not be run down or exhausted even by the extreme stress I was going through. To me, ‘Joules’ is the name of a person who is fighting her way out of an incredibly hard place.

(2) It jiggled. “See?” he said to his friend. “All girls have that.”

This was my first memorable encounter with a concept with which I later became intimately involved: the value of the opinions of strangers. At the height of my eating disorder, I found it extremely difficult to settle on a consistent mental image of myself. Body dysmorphia, which according to the National Association for Anorexia and Associated Disorders frequently plays a part in the “obsessive thoughts, negative mindsets and low self-esteem”⁵⁷ of an eating disorder, warped my imagined appearance depending on any passing feeling. I was distrustful of the opinions of people close to me because they all knew about my struggle with body image. They would tell me I look lovely in varying degrees no matter what. An unbiased account of how I actually looked, I believed, could only come from someone with no reason not to lie: a stranger.

This, of course, is absurd. There is no such thing as objectivity, especially not in matters of beauty, which is famously in the eye of the beholder. Every person’s aesthetic likes and dislikes are different. On top of that, there is no guarantee that strangers would not edit their opinion to spare a person’s feelings, even if they were not acquainted. My search for an unbiased opinion, though much less destructive than other disordered behaviors, was yet another manifestation of my desire for perfection.

The young boy in my fifth-grade class was a virtual stranger. I did not solicit his opinion about my body, but once he had assessed me, casually and with vague dissention, I could not stop caring about his opinion, or the opinion of anyone else. I took it as the truth. If he thought I was weak and flabby and would say so as if it were obvious, perhaps everyone thought the same and I was just slow to catch on. Perhaps I had everything to prove to everyone I met.

⁵⁷ “Body Dysmorphic Disorder,” *ANAD.org*. National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders, 2020, <https://anad.org/education-and-awareness/about-eating-disorders/eating-disorder-types-and-symptoms/body-dysmorphic-disorder/> (accessed March 23, 2020).

At the time that the young boy in my fifth-grade class poked my arm, I was not remotely anorexic, but I include this story in the script because (in my imperfectly remembered timeline) it marks the first time I felt intense negative feelings about my body. My eating disorder would not begin in earnest until four years later, but in hindsight, my willingness to accept one stranger's opinion of my body as the truth shows the roots of a problem.

Additionally, what does it say about me now that I still remember a seconds-long event from elementary school? When I think back to it, I do not need to vent anger. I once thought back to it and felt envy, wishing I could go back and begin starving myself even sooner. I once thought back to it and felt sadness for the young girl who had no idea that the shame she felt would return a thousand times in the future. Now, I feel none of those things. I have gained control of my disordered impulses and processed the emotions therein. All that is left when I think back to it now is a strong desire to say what happened – to articulate and understand the events and what they mean, to present them to other people and ask what they think. The stories and events remain long after the shame has gone away, and it is a new, strange experience to talk about them without feeling the pain I felt at the time. This, I believe, is partially why I have written Part Three. It has allowed me to examine and share parts of my life that feel as if they happen to a completely different person, and have also made me the person I am today.

(3) The cream off the top of a bloated, blathering country poured into my gurgling throat before I could even judge.

One of the incredible ironies of eating disorders is that this horrible condition necessitates privilege. The definition of anorexia specifies that “victims...voluntarily starve themselves”⁵⁸,

⁵⁸ Bell, *Holy Anorexia*, 2.

meaning food is available and they refuse it. On the other hand, more than 800 million people around the world go hungry involuntarily according to the World Health Organization⁵⁹. It would make perfect sense for someone starving due to famine to be outraged by the concept of anorexia. And wouldn't they have a right to be?

Unfortunately, the very privileges of countries with this kind of stability may be the reasons that eating disorders have become so rampant. Sociologist C. G. Banks has done several studies on the intricacies of anorexia, and frames the disorder as “a Western culture-bound syndrome.”⁶⁰ Food security offers Americans the privilege to think of body weight as more than a part of survival, and to develop “a cultural focus on dieting and ideals of thinness for women.”⁶⁰ This cultural focus, as Banks puts it, is so wide-spread that “research indicates that the majority of non-anorectic women in the United States are preoccupied with body weight and dieting.”⁶⁰ When a culture establishes that it is perfectly normal for a woman to worry about weight and food, when a culture almost unanimously celebrates any form of weight loss, it becomes even harder for those with eating disorders to understand that their behavior is unhealthy. The more the baseline for what is normal skews towards disordered habits, the more people with problems will get no treatment.

(4) I am unfuckable. You *cannot* fuck with me. I will never let you see a part of me that I do not control in every possible fucking way.

⁵⁹ “World hunger is still not going down after three years and obesity is still growing – UN report” World Health Organization, July 15, 2019, <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/15-07-2019-world-hunger-is-still-not-going-down-after-three-years-and-obesity-is-still-growing-un-report> (accessed March 22, 2020).

⁶⁰ C.G. Banks, “‘Culture’ in culture-bound syndromes: the case of anorexia nervosa,” *Social Science and Medicine* 34, no. 8, (1992): 867.

‘Unfuckable’ is a complicated and made up word. To understand it, one must first understand the idea that a person can be ‘fucked,’ since that is the root. This can mean several things. To be fucked can mean to be penetrated during sex, to be thrown off course by an unwanted twist of fate, and to be fucked *with* means to be the target of someone’s manipulations. All meanings apply to my usage of the term.

The key goal of my eating disorder was to eliminate weakness from my body and mind. Perfection was so important to me that criticisms and insults became the absolute truth that I stoically accepted and tried to correct, no matter how indignant they made me. Except, of course, when the criticisms were about my disordered behaviors. Eliminating weakness meant two things: becoming physically perfect so that no one would have a good reason to criticize me, and becoming emotionally armored by the knowledge that I was achieving perfection. With this knowledge, I could stop agonizing over criticisms. In short, I wanted to master my body, mind, and heart with complete power. In doing so, I believed I would become ‘unfuckable’ – I would be too perfect to be overpowered by a man, by a manipulation, or even by fate. However, until I achieved ‘unfuckability’ through sheer power, I categorized myself as ‘unfuckable’ in the sense that I considered myself disgusting. I restricted food for many, many reasons, but it is undeniable that one of those reasons was my desire to be more attractive to men.

These opposite extremes – powerful and weak, perfect and disgusting, beautiful and hideous – are typical of eating disorders. I wanted to evoke that sense of extremity and intensity in the use of the word ‘unfuckable,’ because it feels both obscene and ridiculous, as does self-starvation.

(5) Ah. It’s you. Her. Of course. You’ve been here the whole time.

The dress form has been present through the entire play. It has represented Demeter, Joseph, and Hades at varying times, and at this late point in the show, I am just now giving it a more permanent characterization: a literal dress form. To make sure the audience is with me, it is important to acknowledge that, yes, it has been here all along, but it is now serving a new purpose.

Additionally, what it represents – the specter of disordered eating, toxic standards for women, and self-regulation by women in order to conform to the patriarchal beauty standards – has indeed been present the entire play. I do not mean to imply here that the characters Persephone and Mary should be canonically interpreted as anorexic. I mean that the cultural foundations that fertilize eating disorders are so old and so deeply ingrained that they affect stories about women from thousands of years ago. The specifics of rules for women are different in every culture, but what persists across borders and decades is that women are taught to limit their own behavior and experiences in ways distinct from how men are taught. Often these limits are learned so early and so frequently that they feel compulsory. In my play, the compulsion to conform and fear of what a person becomes if they do not obey is what leads Persephone to starve and Mary to vanish.

Whether I was aware of these rules of beauty or not, I cannot remember a time when I did not know how to follow them. Even if I actively resisted following them, I knew what they were. In that sense, I believe that she – the dress form and all she stands for – has been present not only for the whole of the play, but the whole of my life.

(6) Have you forgotten how badly you want me? Look at yourself.” *(She grabs herself by her hair and pushes herself into the mirror.)*

According to F.E.A.S.T.E.D., a resource for parents of children with eating disorders, externalizing an eating disorder, or “separating the child from the disease”⁶¹, can help patients think of their disordered behaviors as “symptoms of the disease”⁶¹ instead of part of their identity. The names ‘Ana,’ ‘Mia,’ and ‘Ed’ are commonly used “to personify anorexia [bulimia, and eating disorders respectively]...making it easier for people to talk more openly”⁶². I was taught this tool during my recovery, and the more I pictured my eating disorder as a separate entity lodged inside my head, the more that entity seemed like an abuser. A parasitic other that was using me for its own ends. I had been absolutely infatuated with it, but I began to see its venom.

I wanted to add this element of infatuation with a toxic character in order to further complicate the concept of an ‘other’ later. Here, it is very clear that the character is being controlled, insulted, and hurt by the eating disorder character embodied by the dress form. However, it is soon revealed that both characters are one and the same. The revelation that she has been doing this to herself is made far more impactful by this section, in which the treatment and situation is so bad that, surely, no one would submit to it voluntarily.

(7) Fuck, that just made Her skinnier. Is that what you wanted?

Ironically, the speaker has just triumphed. The actress has violently, vehemently attacked the embodiment of the malicious disorder in a moment of strength and resistance. The problem is, by the logic of an eating disorder, a dress form that has had pieces ruthlessly hacked off only

⁶¹ “Eating Disorders Glossary - Externalization,” *feast-ed.org*. FEAST, 2020, <http://glossary.feast-ed.org/5-psychology-and-therapies/externalization> (accessed March 22, 2020).

⁶² “Eating Disorder Glossary – Ana,” *feast-ed.org*. FEAST, 2020, <http://glossary.feast-ed.org/7-non-clinical-slang-terms/ana> (accessed March 22, 2020).

becomes a more perfect dress form through this destruction, because it becomes skinnier. Skinniness is godliness, no matter what the cost. In fact, enduring pain and violence for the sake of skinniness is even better; it evokes feelings of honor and martyrdom similar to how Saints Agatha and Lucy endure tortures to become closer with God. Even when an eating disorder is externalized and embodied in a physical object such as a dress form, it is not possible to do it physical harm, because eating disorders love and thrive on pain. It only invites the punishment. The only real way to hurt an eating disorder is to treat the body and the mind very, very kindly.

(8) We are made in the image of god? No. She is made in ours. And it...it is an ugly image.

Scholar of mythology Robert Calasso believes that “[i]t is naïve to pretend to interpret...myth, when it is the myth itself that is already interpreting us”⁶³. Mythic stories reflect the desires, fears, and hopes of the people who tell them. However, designating a certain narrative as sacred can “empower, subvert, or oppress”⁶⁴ just as easily as it can reflect, honor, and elevate. When we make the cultural agreement to sanctify narratives in which women are honored for being submissive, silent, and self-denying, we are not following a dictate from heaven but our own cultural values. When we agree to attach mythical, moral meaning to thinness and engage in a culture of competitive self-denial and superficial beauty, this is not an implicit part of human health, but a chosen, cultivated practice. From this perspective, it is not a god that makes us what we are, but we who make ourselves and we who make gods. What we worship is what we are. If we seek personal or cultural change, we must closely examine what is

⁶³ Roberto Calasso, *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony*, (New York: Vintage International, 1994).

⁶⁴ Eric Avila, *American Cultural History: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2018): 5.

sacred to understand what is valued, who is in power, and how we engage in those choices every day.

(9) It's just, being a disciple of self-control is awfully convenient for a world that wants me controlled anyway.

When I was following disordered impulses, I thought they were my own creation, but those ideas came from somewhere. Or, rather, they came from everywhere. Every part of the culture I was raised in, from children's movies to advertising billboards, had taught me to pursue beauty. Why? Because I am a woman, and for hundreds of years of my culture's history, attractiveness to men has been a woman's most important trait.

Different varieties of women's bodies go in and out of style over centuries and decades with flippant speed, but at the time that I became obsessed with the worth of my beauty, the consistent standard was thinness. In my pursuit of that standard, I performed perfectly for the patriarchy. I only thought about my physical appearance and sacrificed less important, less feminine priorities like strength and intelligence. I became a waifish, dependent, weak person. How convenient for the forces of sexism that I was no longer resisting, but diving in with full force.

In part, this entire investigation of femininity and sacredness has been a way to grapple with and articulate how I lived for so long with a voice in my head that, in hindsight, is so clearly an amalgamation of different forms of sexism. The best answer I have is that I believed in many ways that I was an exception. Conceptually, yes, I believed that the diet industry, Photoshop, advertisements, the fashion industry, celebrity culture, and many more sources manipulated women into believing that they could only be valuable if they met a specific beauty standard, but

that did not apply to me. Yes, I believed that it was cruel and ridiculous to value women only by their attractiveness to the male gaze, but that did not apply to me. Yes, I believed humans must eat to survive, but that did not apply to me.

The message of this line is that none of us are exempt from the cultures in which we live. In order to understand the ways in which patriarchy and sexism move in the world, I must acknowledge and confront the ways they move in me, and the ways in which I still engage with them. In order to defeat my eating disorder, I must understand the ways in which it is a useful to those who wish to suppress my strength. Writing this play and this reflection has been a major step forward in that confrontation.

(10) It was me all along. How – you’re a piece of plastic. It would be so much easier to be possessed.

While writing Part Three of this play, I hesitated over the decision to characterize the eating disorder in the dress form. Externalization has been a very useful tool for my recovery, but I have long been resistant to treating my eating disorder as completely separate from my true self. It exists within my brain. If I am not my brain, what am I? The same work ethic, self-discipline, and creativity that make me so successful in starving myself also make me successful in so many other areas of my life. They are the same traits that have allowed me to complete this thesis. I have no desire to separate myself from those parts, only to manage and heal this unhealthy manifestation of my personality.

I led the audience to believe in the power of this dress form as a representation of the perfection I worshipped. I led them to believe in the power of physically attacking and defeating it. In this line, I take responsibility for the fact that there is no actual monster for me to attack

with a paring knife. It would be easier to have someone specific to blame, and I fully support any anger that audience members feel after watching Part Three. If this play sparks further criticism of sexist, disorder-promoting entities like the diet, fashion, or modeling industries, I will happily join in. However, despite patriarchy, beauty standards, and the meaning I have imposed on the dress form, the victim and the perpetrator of the violence of my eating disorder are both me. I must take responsibility for healing and for preventing future wounds.

(11) So, I guess that's it. I'm gonna...go sin.

As the last line of the play, this represents not only the ending message of Part Three, but of the entire piece. All three stories have revolved around gendered rules that alter and constrain women's minds, bodies, thoughts, and actions. These rules demarcate what is acceptable and what is not, what is pure and what is sinful. It is a struggle simply to recognize that these rules exist and to understand why. It is an even bigger task to break them knowingly. To break these rules, whether they are imposed by other women, by men, by gods, or by oneself, offers the opportunity to reexamine and reassign labels of purity and sin, to define for oneself the meaning of the words in a personal way, and to release guilt for doing things that these received rules do not condone. Persephone sinned by choosing her happiness over her mother's, Mary would have sinned by choosing her freedom over holiness, and I sin every day that I choose eat three healthy meals with a smile on my face. Rebellion against the system we find ourselves inside may be categorized as sin by that system, but by releasing guilt and shame for those choices, we pave the way for more questioning, more self-knowledge, more confidence, and a new meaning to goodness.

The following pages include the materials that were in the scripts given to audience member who played the Mother (Demeter) during the show.

Thank you for agreeing to be my mother!

You'll have **lines in the first section of the show**, and I will signal to you when your lines begin by **looking directly at you** and saying '**and she said...**'

We will talk two separate times, so just be on the lookout for our next conversation.

In some places, you will be asked to come up with your own answers to certain questions. Just do your best, mom. You always have.

1. I figured it was cause the story was a secret. I expected her to start again, **but she said...**

Mom: Dear, you shouldn't eat like that when men are around.

Persephone: Like what?

Mom: With your tongue. With your lips.

Persephone: How do I eat without lips? She showed me how to pluck a seed one by one and place them in my mouth discretely.

Mom: And even then, they can still put – well, maybe just don't take anything they give you. But don't be rude. You're a lady.

Persephone: What does that have to do with it?

Mom: If you eat like that, they'll think it's something else.

Persephone: What else?

Mom: *(Say whatever you think the 'something else' is.)*

Persephone: Whoa – hey, I'm bleeding –

Mom: Oh. Well. I guess, you're growing up...!

Persephone: Why doesn't it hurt?

Mom: It will later.

Persephone: What? What does it mean?

Mom: It means, you can have a baby now, if a man puts one inside you.

Persephone: How would he do that?

Mom: Well, all you need to know is babies hurt a lot coming out, so don't let a man put one in you.

(End.)

2. The same youth. The same bloom. Forever. Why would you do that? And she said...

Mom: Well, I just like them so much, I want you to have them forever!

Persephone: But isn't it natural? Some things decompose to start new growth. That's when they reproduce, and that's good.

Mom: Well, it's good for flowers. People can feel pain.

Persephone: It's painful?

Mom: Yes.

Persephone: Which part? Which part is painful, the decomposition, or the reproduction? Or both? Wait, are they always the same?

Mom: Let's talk about something else.

(End.)

The following pages include the materials that were in the scripts given to audience member who played the Husband (Hades) during the show.

Thank you for agreeing to be my husband!

You'll have **lines in the first section of the show**, and I will signal to you when your lines begin by **looking directly at you** and saying '**and he said...**' The line leading up to that is also listed. We will talk four separate times, so just be on the lookout for our next conversation.

In some places, you will be asked to come up with your own answers to certain questions. Don't stress about it, hon. You're smarter than you give yourself credit for.

1. And the flower shriveled up in his hand. A crinkled brown husk. **And he said...**

Husband: Hello.

Persephone: What are you doing to the flowers?

Husband: It's their time.

Persephone: Time for what?

Husband: To die.

Persephone: You can't make dye out of those. Marigolds maybe, but not those.

Husband: If you're making a joke, I'm afraid I'm not very good at them.

Persephone: You. You, you're making some kinda joke here, and it's – this isn't – things. don't. do. that. here.

Husband: Then...I expect someone's been keeping them young past their time.

Persephone: What do you mean?

Husband: *(Say whatever reason you think someone would try to stop death.)*

(End.)

2. AH—you're here. Sorry. And he said...

Husband: Are you dead?

Persephone: Am I?

Husband: How did you get here?

Persephone: A hole in the ground. I'm sorry to intrude, I know it's an imposition, I just wanted to know.

Husband: Know what?

Persephone: What's down here.

Husband: When people find out, they usually wish they hadn't.

Persephone: I guess I won't know until I know.

Husband: Would you like to join me for dinner?

[I let him pull out my chair for me at a great stone table and platters of meat spread before me like a sea. Which I didn't touch. For all my rebellion, I still remembered what my mother said. "If you eat in front of them, they'll think it's something else. But don't be rude." Napkin in my lap. Good posture. He piled his plate and I watched as he began to eat.]

And he said,

Husband: What's wrong?

Persephone: Nothing.

Husband: Oh! You're vegetarian, of course. My apologies. (*snap your fingers*)
(*End*)

3. But there was some change in consuming, in letting something go inside of me. And he said...

Husband: Are you happy here?

Persephone: I didn't answer. My brain wasn't moving fast enough.

Husband: Do you want to go home?

Persephone: I'll go, if I'm bothering you. I don't want to bother you.

Husband: No, you're not. This isn't good for you. It was selfish of me to keep you here this long.

Persephone: ...selfish?... You like me.

Husband: You...keep many secrets. But you will not be nourished here. I'll escort you home tomorrow evening.

(End.)

4. Hey. Have you ever been buried? And he said...

Husband: You came back.

Persephone: I said I would. Have you though? Been buried?

Husband: I guess not.

Persephone: It's...weird. People could probably use a better welcome after that experience. Well, better than standing in a giant line. I think...I'd like to make some changes around here. I think I'd like to be queen of this place. Is that okay with you?

Husband: *(Answer honestly.)*

(End.)

The following pages include the materials that were in the scripts given to audience member who played the Husband (Hades) during the show.

Thank you for agreeing to be my fiancé!

You'll have **lines in the second section of the show**, and I will signal to you when your lines begin by **looking directly at you** and saying **'and he said...'** The line leading up to that is listed.

We will talk two separate times, so just be on the lookout for our next conversation.

In some places, you will be asked to do some physical labor. If you don't think you can, we can find someone to help. We're always looking for help, you and me.

1. Does anyone know what to say? **And he said...**

Fiancé: I do.

Mary: Oh! That's perfect. Thank you. Can you propose real quick? You don't have to mean it.

Fiancé: *(Do whatever you think a fake proposal looks like.)*

2. Hey. I'm sorry I kind of lost touch with you in the chaos. **And he said...**

Fiancé: It's good to be home again.

Mary: Yeah. And I was thinking, you know, I know it was complicated. But, we're settled now. We could really make a life here.

Fiancé: What did you have in mind?

Mary: Maybe...we get married? If you want. We could have another kid?

Fiancé: What about Him?

Mary: I won't love Him less. It could be good for him.

Fiancé: You want to have a real relationship?

(pause)

Mary: I don't remember anything after that. But he wasn't the same after that. He started sleeping in a different room. I'm sorry. And he said,

Fiancé: I am the servant of the lord.

Mary: I didn't mean to overstep. I thought...I don't know.

Fiancé: I am the servant of the lord.

Mary: Look at me.

Fiancé: I am the servant of the lord.

Mary: Will you stop – sorry. Sorry.

(End.)

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