

A Hole for That: Developing the Language of Abjection in *I With Things New Born*

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Process Summary

In May of 2019, I directed a student production of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* on a stage with two levels of playing space. In the middle of the production's first act, I placed King Leontes on the higher level to accuse his queen of infidelity through Shakespeare's famous "I have drunk and seen the spider" soliloquy. On the lower level, I placed Queen Hermione, her ladies-in-waiting, and her midwife. Underneath Leontes' poetry, the women maintained a gentle chorus of unintelligible whispers, and Leontes' strongest statements were punctuated by visceral cries from his laboring queen—he spoke of burning her alive while she gave birth to their daughter in prison.

A friend drove into town to see the production, and afterwards, he reflected on this sequence. "At first," he said, "I was upset that her screams were interrupting his speech. I love that soliloquy." He went on, "Then I thought to myself: why am I choosing to listen to another one of his speeches while this woman in front of me is suffering?"

My friend's reflection gratified me as a director, as it outlined the exact thought process that I intended audiences to follow. Moreover, I would add: "Why am I choosing to listen to another one of his speeches while this woman in front of me is 1. advancing the plot 2. facilitating seismic shifts in the world of the play 3. performing what is arguably the most fundamental, vital, and universal act of human existence?"

In June of 2019, I decided to write a play about the women who bear children in Shakespeare. I knew it would be called *I With Things New Born*—an excerpt of a line from *The Winter's Tale*. I completed the first draft in early September, and it was a sprawling script with dozens of characters, full scenes of Shakespeare's text, a two-act structure, and five loosely interrelating storylines: Helena of *All's Well That Ends Well*, the Lady of *Macbeth*, Thaisa of

Pericles, Hermione of *The Winter's Tale*, and Juliet of *Measure for Measure*. I organized two readings of the draft: one with a group of friends in my apartment and the other with a group comprised of friends and strangers in an empty black box theatre. For each, I conducted short discussion sessions, asking participants: "What is the play about? What about the play intrigued you? Confused you? What did the play remind you of—other theatre or art you've read/witnessed/consumed, stories in the news, personal experiences, etc.? What do you wish there were more of in the play? What words or images stay with you?" I recorded the readings and the discussions so I could return to them and take more notes on what I learned.

I learned that the play was bold and unlike anything its first, small audiences had ever borne witness to. I learned that the birth scenes I wrote could be gripping, visceral, and dangerous, as well as near-unbearably tender, intimate, and peaceful. I learned that the script was unfocused, too broad in its scope, and too heavily reliant on both Shakespeare's text and potential audiences' familiarity with Shakespeare's text. I learned that Juliet—a peripheral character from *Measure for Measure* who had served humbly as the play's through line—had emerged as the character with the most distinctive voice. She was my protagonist. *I With Things New Born* was her play—and if I zeroed in on the specificity of her story, the play would find its universality.

I completed the second draft in December and restructured the script completely in the process. The new script was leaner in its scope and deeper in its thematic commitments. I centered Juliet as the protagonist and kept Hermione and Thaisa as supporting figures, specifying the worlds they belonged to and their relevance to Juliet's journey. The story became less of a map of "Shakespeare's Greatest Hits: Birth Edition" and more of a Russian nesting doll with Juliet at its crux, inspired as much by what I know of the concentric circles of premodern English

cosmology as by Juliet's process of reaching out to other women in the Shakespearean universe and then returning to herself at center. I organized another reading and discussion session. Some of the artists who had read the first draft returned, and I also brought a few new peers into the process. I recorded this reading and discussion, as well. The artists were articulate about the themes that they perceived were emerging, and this discussion was pivotal for me in terms of understanding my work. We spoke of the creation of history—how documents become monuments—and I spoke of how I intended *I With Things New Born* to be, in part, “the plays that Shakespeare didn't know he wrote.” We spoke of pain, of sound and silence and various ways of being silenced, of gender and of power and of sanctity. Once I'd found solid ground thematically, I immediately knew that the themes could be sharper, the characters more precisely sculpted, the Shakespearean text pared down further, and the message made clearer. I wanted more specific feedback before I began that work.

I began the next phase of the process by identifying a group of readers and sending them the script via email. I sent the script to theatre artists—actors, directors, playwrights, and designers, both student and professional—to Shakespearean scholars, to medical professionals (midwives and nurses), and to parents. I asked for: 1. Their gut reactions as humans. I asked: “What's the play about—what's the *stuff* of it? What words and images stick with you? What personal connections did you make, if any?” and 2. Their responses from their area of expertise. I asked the theatre makers how the play functioned—its structure, its language, its characters, potential staging challenges, etc. I asked the medical professionals about the play's physiological accuracy and about the actions and demeanors of the midwife characters. I asked the parents how the play resonated with their experiences. I ended up obtaining six detailed, very different responses from readers, who reflected on everything from the play's water motifs and

generational dynamics to its potential shock value and the logic of its direct address. I was told that my depiction of physiological labor was sound—more so than the majority of fictional birth stories that the medical professionals had been exposed to—and that the characters were compelling. I was encouraged to sharpen Juliet’s evolution and clarify her relationships to the other women in the play. Much of the feedback I received was highly specific and did not signify that the play needed another structural overhaul. I also rarely heard something from my readers that was exactly what I needed to hear; rather, the feedback provoked further introspection, from which I emerged with new ideas for what the play needed—ideas that could have only come from me as the writer.

In late December, I began a third draft, this time with a finer-toothed comb. I solidified the ending and the beginning and began to work through the play to make its logic, its characters, and its relationships more precise, and to deepen its themes. At the same time, I was beginning the production process and having to shift daily between my roles of writer, producer, and director. I was recruiting the production team, holding production meetings every other week, and making both practical and artistic plans. Back in October, between the first and second drafts, I had spent a considerable amount of time securing a performance venue, and I had signed a contract to rent the Off-Leash Art Box, a small black box theatre in Minneapolis, for a two-week run. Opening night was set for May 1st. Rehearsals were set to begin in mid-March. I decided that I needed to complete the “production draft” by February, and that I would not make major changes to the script after the actors’ agreements were signed. Though I considered using the production’s rehearsal process as additional development time for the script—I know that many professional premieres of new work make edits well into preview performances, and that actors are capable of adjusting—I didn’t want to ask that of the artists. I also didn’t want to force

myself to create and analyze at the same time when tasked with directing and producing the play that I had written. Once rehearsals began, my “writer self” needed to be able to step out of the room.

In February, I completed the production draft and cast the play. I also selected a scene from the script to present as part of a short works’ festival in March and April. Theatre Unbound, the women’s theatre of the Twin Cities, had planned an event called “Girl Shorts,” and an excerpt from *I With Things New Born* was to be featured alongside other female-focused work in rotating repertory style at the Gremlin Theatre in Saint Paul. In March, I began rehearsing with the actors who would be featured in Girl Shorts. We completed two weeks of rehearsals, and then we parted ways for spring break. After spring break, rehearsals for Girl Shorts were to continue, and rehearsals for the full production were to begin. The first full read-through of the production draft was to be held on Tuesday, March 17th. Unfortunately, I made the decision to suspend the production process due to the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic before the whole cast and crew could gather together for the first time. I have not yet heard the production draft read aloud.

I With Things New Born has been rescheduled to open at the Off-Leash Art Box on December 4th, 2020. We do not live in a world of guarantees. I trust that the production will move forward when the world is ready. I will likely have ample time for further revisions of the script before then, and for that I am grateful. However, I’ve decided that out of respect for the playwriting process that has thus far worked for me and for the production that was not to be, I will not make any edits to the production draft until a group of theatre artists can safely convene in person and read it aloud. Until then, it can rest.

Since the production was postponed, I've received multiple surprising requests from strangers to read and discuss the script—one graduate student is even writing an extended paper on it. So, the story is alive and well and will come to fruition. The labor will just be long, with surging and stalling and questions of, "Will this ever even happen? And if and when it does, will it be worth it?"

From what I understand, it always is.

Preface

A Hole for That: Developing the Language of Abjection in *I With Things New Born*

Before the play text of *I With Things New Born*, I've included a quote from Clarice Lispector's 1973 novel, *Agua Viva*: "I lose the identity of the world inside myself." I selected this quote because of its two possible readings, which resonate in the world of the play and the odyssey of my protagonist, Juliet. The quote could refer to the action of losing "the world inside oneself"—the loss of the self, manifested as a whole world residing within the body that slips outside through some corporeal opening. The quote could also refer to the loss of an exterior world—the action of losing the surrounding world when engaged in rigorous introspection. This interpretation identifies the self as a site where the loss of an entire world can occur—as if the world outside could be subsumed, compacted, and then misplaced inside of one microcosmic body.

I With Things New Born is a play about birth, so it may seem strange to include an inscription about loss. Loss does have its role to play in the script, however, and it is also pertinent that the title of the play is an incomplete line from Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*; the full line reads: "You met with things dying, I with things new born" (3.3.119-120). Likewise, I'd argue that any tale of birth is also a tale of death, any transformation involves loss, and as Hermione states towards the end of *I With Things New Born*, "There is always a death...because what has been before cannot be" (p. 76). Birth, like loss, is a life event that results in cellular alteration, and during the act of birth, death plays a role not only because childbirth carries risk, but because the inevitability of death is what makes human reproduction a necessary act.

Julia Kristeva introduces her concept of abjection in *Powers of Horror* using death as a central illustration. Kristeva describes abjection as that which "disturbs identity, system, order"

(4). That which is abject exists between the self and the other; abjection is a transgressive force that threatens the corporeal boundaries of the subject (Schippers 51). This is the horror that fills the subject's moment of hesitation when they look upon a corpse—a body that once housed a subject and is now abject in death. Confronting death reminds the subject of their own mortality—a reality they had previously rejected from their everyday consciousness alongside the “filth” of being-in-the-body, including everything from daily excrement to giving birth, which Kristeva describes in *Powers of Horror* as “the height of bloodshed and life, [a] scorching moment of hesitation between inside and outside, ego and other, life and death” (155).

This moment of hesitation, this laboring state, this liminal space that Juliet occupies is the landscape I sought to explore in *I With Things New Born* by developing a “language of abjection.” It is important to note that the concept of abjection is complex and contested; it has been explored by many post-structuralist scholars and has been applied to literary critical theory, social critical theory, and psychotherapy. Kristeva's work in *Powers of Horror* draws on psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan and Sigmund Freud and engages with modern novelists such as Louis-Ferdinand Céline; Kristeva argues that the abject is connected intimately to art. I chose to work specifically with Kristeva's concept of abjection because it resonated with my artistic objectives, and the development of what I term my “language of abjection” in *I With Things New Born* has been highly personalized. I sought to articulate an experience—childbirth—that has long since been forsaken by the theatre, deemed unfit to mine for potential representational practices. The newness of this endeavor demanded a new vernacular: the Juliet of *I With Things New Born* could not use only Shakespearean poetry, nor could her experience be fully articulated using only contemporary prose. My task as an artist was to honor the premodern world from which my protagonist originated, situate her in our modern world, and

then liberate her voice from the constraints of both worlds by giving her a unique linguistic footprint.

Juliet is an abject figure in the world of the play for which she was originally created, Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*. Her pregnant body is not only unlawful but intolerable in the theatrical space. After the Duke of Vienna appoints a temporary deputy, Angelo, to address his city's impropriety by reinforcing neglected laws on sexual behavior, Juliet's visible, illegitimate pregnancy is a crime that condemns her fiancé to execution and she to prison (to spare the life of the unborn child). As the play's first conflict and the catalyst for its action, Juliet's pregnancy—her very bodily presence—serves as a visual representation of the city's corruption. The notion of pregnancy as a grotesque consequence of unregulated sexuality pervades the play's linguistic structure, and the words spoken about Juliet, both in her presence and absence, far outnumber the words she speaks herself. Juliet is introduced silently at the beginning of the play, when she and her fiancé, Claudio, are publically humiliated—marched through the streets on their way to prison to serve as an example and a warning. Claudio explains that he and Juliet were keeping their sexual activity a secret and that their current predicament is a direct result of the visibility of Juliet's pregnancy. "The stealth of our most mutual entertainment," he laments, "with character too gross is writ on Juliet" (1.2.151-152). Later, Angelo is asked what should be done with the "groaning Juliet," as she is laboring in her prison cell and is "very near her hour" (2.2.21-22). The pious Angelo replies: "Dispose of her to some more fitter place, and that with speed" (2.2.23-24). The disposal of Juliet—who has not yet spoken and is already offstage, becomes a dramatic priority due to the abject nature of her body, its imminent action of giving birth, and the danger it poses on multiple sensory levels. "See you the fornicatress be removed," Angelo reiterates. "There shall be order for it" (2.2.32-34). Juliet is

then granted a single speaking scene, during which she confesses her sins to a friar while awaiting transport. After this scene, she disappears from *Measure for Measure* to give birth, and this is where *I With Things New Born* begins.

The Juliet of *Measure for Measure* runs out of text in just two pages, and the Juliet of *I With Things New Born* uses a composite of Shakespeare's poetry, contemporary poetry, contemporary prose, and wordless vocalizations to re-conceptualize herself. After she finishes her allotted Shakespearean text, the presence of the audience confounds her. Juliet hadn't anticipated her sudden promotion to protagonist. Shame, anticipatory grief, and uterine contractions leave her "stunned, bleary-eyed, pried open" (p. 7). She is bewildered inside her body and has no idea how to be a subject, rather than an object. As she faces the imminence of giving birth, Juliet is like the narrator of Lispector's *Agua Viva*: she is on the verge of losing the world inside herself, on the verge of destruction and transcendence, and struggling to articulate all of this in words.

Lispector's narrator identifies herself as a painter by trade, and the words of the novel are her first attempt at articulating something—"the thing"—using language as her artistic and communicative medium. She labors to grab hold of what is "beyond thought," to seize her "is," and she labors both with the written word and in spite of the written word, performing a "deconstructive meditation on the word and the reality that exceeds words, the 'instant-now' of time, the breath as flesh" (New Orleans Review). The writer is unstuck in time, uncertain as a writer, and simultaneously desperate to be understood. Yet "you don't understand music, you hear it," she insists (Lispector 4). "So hear me with your whole body."

Juliet is similarly a figure unstuck in time: she is both specific to and abject from Shakespeare's premodern England and our 21st century American theatre. She is exiled from the

dramatic world of *Measure for Measure* and from her embodied self—via the ferociously contracting womb that steals her breath, mangles her voice and renders her unable to articulate herself. The moment of hesitation in which she is suspended throughout her labor—traditionally relegated to the offstage realm of the abject—is capacious, unexplored, and rife with dramatic potential. This new “thing” coming into being can be understood not only as Juliet’s child—a new human being with a new body—but also as a new relationship between two bodies, a new way of being-in-the-body for Juliet, a new iteration of the self, a new self with new knowledge. That knowledge is born, in part, from a new awareness of death. “Is it enough to feel it?” she asks her midwife (p. 34). “Can they feel it?” she asks, re. the audience. “What *isn't* yet, what’s *yet* to be? Can they smell it on me—the things that I can’t say? Sister, can they smell the death I’ve made?” The act of giving birth, like Kristeva’s example of the act of viewing a corpse, is a reckoning with mortality, and that reckoning carries questions, namely: who am I?

If Juliet were a real person who lived in Shakespeare’s England, she would have been identified not as a “self,” per se, but via her “office,” or her divinely ordained purpose on the earth, which was tied to her social status. The question of “being” in premodern England was just as much teleological as ontological, if not more so (Lewis 153). The universe was ordered. Its terrestrial and celestial locations were illustrated as perfect concentric circles, with the center representing the fallen earth and the outermost layers representing the divine, immutable heavens. Each of its creatures was situated specifically on the Chain of Being, with humankind existing between the angels and the beasts—peasants below kings and women below men (Lewis 175). These hierarchal positions corresponded to individuals’ “offices,” which were undertaken not for the benefit of the individual, but because they had been prescribed as part of a larger order by a perfect God. Today’s notion of the bounded, punctuated self did not exist in the same

way in this period, because the self existed only in relationship to the divine whole. Queen Hermione of *The Winter's Tale*, for instance, bears her children because it is her office as a queen, as a wife, and as a Christian woman. As Hermione explicates in *I With Things New Born*, she does not see childbearing as a selfish nor a selfless act, because “There is no self here” at all. “This is a task that is mine,” she says, “a task I was given—my body is not chaos” (p. 74).

The discourse surrounding “office” and womanhood at this time was not uniform by any means, and it often held multiple truths at the same time. Women were “saved through childbearing” (Aughterson 32), but this redemption was necessary because of sin—the uniquely female sin of Eve, for which pain in childbirth was punishment. The female body was seen as uniquely polluted and polluting, and rhetoric such as what follows below circulated not as what we would now call hate speech, but as scripturally-driven invective:

[Woman,] you live here on earth as the world's most imperfect creature: the scum of nature, the cause of misfortune, the source of quarrels, the toy of the foolish, the plague of the wise, the stirrer of hell, the tinder of vice, the guardian of excrement, a monster in nature, an *evil necessity*, a multiple chimera, a sorry pleasure, Devil's bait, the enemy of angels.

(Jacques Olivier, “An Alphabet of Woman's Imperfections,” Aughterson 30)

The popular treatise excerpted above was republished over and over again throughout the first forty years of the 17th century (Aughterson 30). The emphasis on *evil necessity* is my own; this is the phrase I find most salient, because it likely refers to women's reproductive capabilities. Of all parts of the woman's profane body, the womb attracted the most attention in this period (it later became a focal point of modern anatomical science in the next two centuries) and its influence was so profound that it was thought to define much of the female body's functioning in humoral medicine. The female body was seen as untrustworthy not only due to its differences to the male body (Aristotle's idea of woman as mutilated man was still very much in play), but also due to

its “difference to itself” in a way that, at its most perilous, “threatened contamination” of self and potential fetus (Paster 173). The womb was seen as an independent agent—heavy with responsibility, capricious in its wanderings, devastating in its danger, and resistant to knowledge. Such a singular enigma was the womb that if it could be known, argued premodern thinkers, it could probably be known more completely by men than by women. Though a woman’s womb was tied inextricably to her office—thereby defining much of her premodern “selfhood”—it was thought to contain secrets that baffled even the most learned of men. A premodern woman was designed to remain a mystery to herself.

It is this preclusion from self-actualization that the Juliet of *I With Things New Born* develops heightened, sardonic awareness of and then begins to resist. Like the earth’s position as the innermost concentric sphere of the premodern English universe and the womb’s position at the center of the body, Juliet finds herself at the center of her play, in the crucible of her “crime,” her shame, and her labor. It is not an empowering position. The earth is fallen and profane, the womb is polluted and polluting—not to mention near-unknowable—and Juliet judges herself with much of the same harshness. She discerns that her exile from *Measure for Measure* is purposeful, claiming: “Everything that’s wrong in this city is my body” (p. 8). She connects her unsuitability for heroism to her perceived lack of mastery over language, identifying both Claudio and Claudio’s sister, Isabel, as superior dramatic heroes because of their language skills (Claudio and Isabel are both granted extended verse speeches in *Measure for Measure*). As the world of the play expands to include *Pericles* and *The Winter’s Tale*, Juliet escapes to these fairytale plays to cope with her pain and quickly situates herself beneath Thaisa, a princess, and Hermione, a queen. Despite her midwife’s insistence that Thaisa is “just a girl,” Juliet replies: “If

she is a girl, then I am a cockroach” (p. 29), and shortly afterwards begins to lose her voice to a contraction throughout the following exchange:

JULIET: I’m getting another one.

ow

FRANCISCA: You want touch?

JULIET: uh huh

FRANCISCA: Can you get onto your knees?

Juliet rolls onto her hands and knees. Francisca places her hands surely on either side of Juliet’s hips, squeezes to relieve some pressure.

JULIET: uuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuh

FRANCISCA: Good. Good work.

Juliet buries her face, muffles her moans until the contraction eases.

Juliet’s body is both wrung out and full to quivering and she can’t grasp at language, can’t communicate, who is this person I am with?

(p. 29-30)

This passage is a prime example of Juliet’s “abject” language in *I With Things New Born*. As her body pulls her deeper into the act of giving birth, her lines lose punctuation in the script, and then she loses words, and then the sounds she emits in the theatrical space are consigned to stage directions, rather than lines of dialogue. Juliet is cognizant of this slippage and the extent to which it renders her unfit for a traditional protagonist role. She cannot conceptualize herself as a character who can reach their audience and communicate human experience through the limited power of language. She contrasts herself with Shakespeare’s “first” Juliet—of *Romeo and Juliet*, a play Shakespeare wrote before *Measure for Measure*—as she recounts the knowledge that has come to her as if she’s “swallowed a planet” (p. 33) between sleep and waking. This knowledge cannot, she insists, be communicated via soliloquy, and as Juliet explicates this, it’s as if she can sense herself becoming the heroine that the play intends her to be. “It’s not words,” she says. “It’s *weight*...is this a kind of knowing?” (p. 34). As Juliet moves through the grueling “transition” stage of labor, she searches through Shakespeare’s canon for words that will express

the magnitude and specificity of her experience, grasping at *Measure for Measure*, *Othello*, *Titus Andronicus*, and *Macbeth*, all the while punctuating the appropriated lines with guttural groans, short phrases of contemporary prose, and occasional profanity. It's as if she imagines that the celebrated voices of our culture—those of royalty, those of men, and those we've recognized as capable of encapsulating life's deepest and most universal profundities linguistically—will serve as surrogates for the yet-unarticulated sanctity at her center. However, the stage directions that precede this section of the script explain how Juliet is “between worlds, slipping in and out of what we will recognize as coherent thought and speech...we need to stay with her. We do not need to understand” (p. 62).

I With Things New Born, like Clarice Lispector's *Agua Viva*, both employs the written word and demands that audiences engage with their whole bodies. Though much of the embodiment that is made theatrical in *I With Things New Born* falls into the realm of abject material, the choice to stage it—and Juliet's decision inside the play to emerge from the shame of it—challenges the audience to open their bodies and minds to a new realm of human universality in the theatre. The final line of *I With Things New Born* is “let her be.” Francisca, Juliet's midwife, says this to Claudio; Claudio looks on as Juliet introduces herself to their newborn daughter. Francisca understands that Juliet is part of a whole—that she will be reunited with her child's father and in some way returned to the world she comes from. The midwife also knows that Juliet is coming into being in this moment—that she is, in Lispector's words, seizing her *is*. Juliet knows she is holding something unspeakably precious: from a center that was once only profane and a passage that was once only shameful, she has given birth to—in her own words—a brand new girl.

The artistic and academic process of developing *I With Things New Born* was an exercise in alternating creativity and analysis. The dialectical tension between Shakespeare's premodern world and our modern world lent itself to nuanced explorations of selfhood as a constantly evolving notion. The transgressive possibilities of childbirth as dramatic action consistently called habitual practices of theatre making into question. I argue that it is essential to the disciplines of both theatre performance and theatre criticism to consistently engage with new ways of writing for the stage and being-in-the-body onstage while simultaneously asking why it is that these new ways have never been explored before. The active creation of art and the rigorous study of it can often be two disparate pursuits conducted in the separate edifices of theatre practice and academia. By positioning my work in both the artistic and academic spheres, I aim to engage meaningfully with both.

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I With Things New Born

by Madeline Wall

“You met with things dying, I with things new born.”

-Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*

“I lose the identity of the world inside myself.”

-Clarice Lispector, *Agua Viva*

Notes on Text

Text from the 16th and 17th century is typed in this font. Text from the 21st century is typed in this font.

The 16th and 17th century text is taken from the plays of Shakespeare and a treatise by Jacques Olivier called *An Alphabet of Women's Imperfections*.

In the 21st century text, many of the questions Juliet poses to Hermione were taken from or inspired by Carmen Winant's *My Birth*.

In the 21st century text, punctuation (as well as italicized and all-caps dialogue) is used to indicate delivery and emphasis and not necessarily to adhere to grammatical conventions. The distinction between poetry and prose can be slippery in this play. If you find a rhythm to follow, trust it.

This – indicates an interruption of a thought (usually by another character). This ... indicates thought trailing off.

Dialogue written in parentheses is usually the second portion of an interrupted thought and need not be fully voiced/heard aloud in performance. Actor's/director's choice.

Characters

JULIET, of *Measure for Measure*. Big-hearted. Unapologetic and deeply apologetic. Scared shitless. In labor.

FRANCISCA, Juliet's midwife. A grounded and grounding presence, alternately giving and withholding with mathematical precision.

CLAUDIO, Juliet's fiancé. A good Catholic boy. Loves Juliet plenty. Most sentences he forms in his head have the word *provide* in them.

THAISA, of *Pericles*. A lovely girl, a princess much beloved, hasn't quite found the words with which to articulate herself.

PERICLES, Thaisa's brand new husband. A heroic type, a dreamer, bound by duty, not yet aware of his own ignorance.

LYCHORIDA, Thaisa's nurse, the woman who raised her. The oldest presence onstage. Warm, smothering, sometimes cries herself to sleep at night out of pure love for Thaisa.

HERMIONE, of *The Winter's Tale*. A figure of unshakeable conviction and impossible restraint; a queen, a dream, a sculpture.

LEONTES, Hermione's husband, a king. At his best, exceptionally loving. Authoritative, explosive, often wrong.

PAULINA, Hermione's fiercest advocate. At her best, exceptionally loving. Authoritative, explosive, usually right.

And a friar, a jailer, a lady-in-waiting, some sailors, etc.

I WITH THINGS NEW BORN

A prison. A hallway. Juliet. A bed at the center of the performance space—wrought iron, austere, papery sheets.

Juliet is a young, self-conscious soul, shoved uncomfortably into a very pregnant body. She knows we're watching her. She'd like to melt into the wall.

Francisca waits on the edges of the performance space. Francisca is a nun. She's not our lead, and throughout the play, she ensures that our attention is placed correctly.

A contraction begins, creeping in at first, then tightening its grip. Juliet fists her way through it.

FRANCISCA

likely to one of us, not to Juliet

Unclench your jaw.

As the contraction eases, a friar appears.

FRIAR

Repent you, fair one, of the sin you carry?

JULIET

I do; and bear the shame most patiently.

FRIAR

I'll teach you how you shall arraign your conscience,
And try your penitence, if it be sound,
Or hollowly put on.

JULIET

I'll gladly learn.

FRIAR

Love you the man that wrong'd you?

JULIET

Yes, as I love the woman that wrong'd him.

FRIAR

So then it seems your most offenseful act
Was mutually committed?

JULIET

Mutually.

FRIAR

Then was your sin of heavier kind than his.

JULIET

I do confess it, and repent it, father.

FRIAR

'Tis meet so, daughter: but lest you do repent,
As that the sin hath brought you to this shame,
Which sorrow is always towards ourselves, not heaven,
Showing we would not spare heaven as we love it,
But as we stand in fear—

JULIET

I do repent me, as it is an evil,
And take the shame with joy.

FRIAR

There rest.
Your partner, as I hear, must die tomorrow,
And I am going with instruction to him.
Grace go with you, Benedicite.

JULIET

Must die tomorrow. O, injurious love,
That respites me a life, whose very comfort
Is still a dying horror.

FRIAR

'Tis pity of him.

The friar exits.

Juliet is stunned, bleary-eyed, pried open. Should I mourn for my lover now or tomorrow? She could break down in this moment, but we are here, so she swallows the impulse. She closes her eyes and wills us to disappear.

Francisca moves into the performance space.

JULIET

They're still here. I feel it. Are they lost?
Why are they here? I don't have things to say.

Beat.

I'm in labor.

FRANCISCA

I'm Sister Francisca. I'm—(here to help.)

JULIET

So I don't need eyes on me.
Give me something to bite on, I will squat in the corner. Everyone can go. I don't think I hate myself.
Are you going to chain me to the bed?

FRANCISCA

No, Juliet.

JULIET

You're a nun. I'm a *fornicatress*.

FRANCISCA

You're in pain. I'm a midwife.

JULIET

I'd be dead if it weren't for this. My...

FRANCISCA

Claudio.

JULIET

—will be dead in a matter of hours because of this. The city is my body. Everything that's wrong in the city is my body. That's why I'm in this tiny room without windows. Right?

contraction begins

You're looking at me. Isn't there bile rising in your throat?

Francisca chooses not to answer, instead moves closer to Juliet, holds space as the pain intensifies.

FRANCISCA

Don't hold your breath.

JULIET

don't tell me what to do

Juliet grinds through the contraction, speaks as she feels it ebbing.

JULIET

What time do they do executions?

FRANCISCA

I don't think there's a—(specific time)

JULIET

Does *tomorrow* mean the stroke of midnight? Does it mean dawn? Is there an appointment? Is it whenever the block's available?

Will they execute him alongside murderers or is there a separate time and place for expectant fathers of bastard children? One expectant father of a single bastard child—will it be public? The execution? He said they're making him an example. He sent his sister to talk to the Duke's

deputy, to try and reason with him—do you know anything about this man is he someone she will be able to convince that Claudio doesn't deserve...she's good with words. She's a nun, like you. She can make a theological argument.

FRANCISCA

I'm sure Isabel will do her very best.

JULIET

Oh, she will. She's a regular heroine. We went to school and church together. We're all Catholic, she and Claudio and I. Confirmed. And she was going to be my sister-in-law, there was going to be a wedding, but Claudio and I don't have the money for a wedding, the kind of wedding we—(want.)

FRANCISCA

I don't need you to justify anything to me.

Beat.

Isabel will have time between acts three and four. I can try to get a message to her.

JULIET

And what?

FRANCISCA

And she can come be with you.

JULIET

Isabel doesn't even know about this.

FRANCISCA

I think it's safe to assume she does now.

JULIET

She hasn't seen me.

FRANCISCA

It wouldn't be a terrible shock.

JULIET

It wouldn't be shock, it'd be disdain. Written all over her. She'd try to hold my hand and she'd give me some of it. I don't want that.

re us

They're still here.

FRANCISCA

They'll be gentle. Just talk to me.

JULIET

The people at the market when I first started showing, and the people who caught Claudio staring at their babies for too long, and the people on the streets this morning when the officer took us away—they were not gentle. I could tell it was all they could do to resist putting their hands on me, squeezing my breasts to test for milk. It was the women, Sister. I was most afraid of the women. They wouldn't look me in the eyes. I haven't been outside in months. I haven't even gone to confession. I've just been sitting. And expanding. And panicking. It's not a secret I can keep, it's right here on me *in* me, it's right here and it *is* me, and until this morning no one had been arrested for sex since either Claudio or I could remember but the law was still on the books, and the word was still God, so I stayed inside and we told no one. Claudio kept saying he'd tell Isabel for me, and that she wouldn't be mad, because I was too nervous to tell her and scared shitless to tell anybody else and Claudio kept saying it would be fine. He kept saying I was doing an amazing thing for the both of us, and that when the time came he was going to watch me do it, see it with his own eyes. And hold whatever body part he was asked to hold. And so many times I tried to tell him it was *not fine*. I told him: I want the midwife to be someone that I know, I want to *know* the person who is going to excavate my insides before I'm in so much pain that I can't speak, and he kept saying he would be there—*here*—and he said I know you're uncomfortable, I can rub out the knots tonight when I get home from work but I have to go to work now you know I have to go—but I said *I want to squirm out of my skin and I cannot even go outside*. I can't go outside because of what's underneath my clothing because of what we both did—I was so angry with him I didn't even let him touch me. And there were so many knots I couldn't reach. *contraction begins* And then the next morning—this morning—there was an officer—at our door—*contraction intensifies* I can't—

Juliet cuts off, breathing heavily.

FRANCISCA

You can't speak?

She can't. This is terrifying.

May I touch you?

Juliet nods, make it stop, make it stop.

Francisca touches Juliet's abdomen, feeling the intensity of the contraction. This is the play's first touch.

Release your shoulders, here.

Francisca touches Juliet's shoulders.

Try to relax around the tightness. It's not in your whole body. Deep breath in through your nose.

Out through your mouth.

Good.

Here's the worst of it.

Juliet whimpers as the contraction peaks.

Coming down now.

Deep breath in.

And out.

And again.

Once more.

The contraction is over. Juliet detaches herself from Francisca, takes a moment to recover.

FRANCISCA

Is this happening earlier than you'd anticipated?

JULIET

Few weeks.

FRANCISCA

And when did the pains start in earnest, would you say?

JULIET

They've been off and on for days. But I woke up at dawn and they were worse. And the pressure is just...I feel like it's sitting on my—

FRANCISCA

All right.

JULIET

And pulling my hips apart.

FRANCISCA

It's all right.

JULIET

I'm going to make a lot of sounds.

FRANCISCA

Sounds are great.

JULIET

I don't know how to do this.

FRANCISCA

You don't need to know how to do this.

JULIET

What's your name again?

FRANCISCA

Sister Francisca.

JULIET

Is that your name or your nun name?

FRANCISCA

You can call me Francisca.

Or you can just squeeze my hands and tell me what you need.

Or if you can't speak, I'll try to guess. All right?

Have you been able to rest at all today?

JULIET

The officer walked us through the streets all morning. Said it was a special charge from the deputy. For as many people to see us as possible. Made the pains come faster. And then my water broke in the cell. And then he brought me here.

FRANCISCA

So no rest?

JULIET

Not really.

FRANCISCA

Since dawn?

They both eye the bed in the center of the room.

JULIET

How many people have given birth on this?

FRANCISCA

It's clean.

I can't promise comfort, but it won't break.

Francisca helps Juliet lower herself onto the bed.

I'd like to examine you. Check the baby's position. Is that all right?

Juliet nods. Francisca palpates Juliet's abdomen. Juliet turns away and winces.

Am I hurting you?

JULIET

No.

It's really...

FRANCISCA

Low. You're right.

Head's down.

Francisca touches Juliet's knee.

May I take a look?

Juliet lets Francisca open her legs. Francisca helps Juliet remove undergarments. Juliet might cry as she does this. She does not know this person.

JULIET

Am I bleeding? There was blood earlier. Last night.

FRANCISCA

How much?

JULIET

Just a little.

FRANCISCA

And since then?

JULIET

I don't know, I haven't looked.

FRANCISCA

I'm not concerned, but we'll keep an eye on it.

Juliet.

Francisca makes eye contact with Juliet.

Is it all right if I feel inside of you?

JULIET

Just do it.

Francisca places her fingers inside Juliet to estimate the dilation of her cervix. Beat.

FRANCISCA

All done.

Francisca wipes off her hand. As Juliet asks the following questions, she becomes more and more anxious and distraught.

JULIET

Can you see it?

FRANCISCA

Not yet.

JULIET

When will this be done?

FRANCISCA

You're well on your way.

JULIET

I love him.

FRANCISCA

Rest.

JULIET

And I want it, I do. But we did something bad. I think I hate myself a little. Is that good? I did something very, very wrong, didn't I?

FRANCISCA

Not now.

JULIET

Can you see it? Can you see it on my face?

FRANCISCA

Rest now.

JULIET

What's wrong with me? What's wrong with my body?

FRANCISCA

Absolutely nothing is wrong with—(you or your body.)

JULIET

He can't die tomorrow.

Please get it out of me before he dies.

FRANCISCA

Close your eyes.

JULIET

They're going to kill my Claudio. They're going to cut my Claudio's head off.

I can't do this.

FRANCISCA

with touch—grounding, succinct

You're doing it right now.

Juliet sinks into the mattress.

Francisca considers Juliet, considers us. Makes a decision.

FRANCISCA

to us

She needs some time without eyes.

Blackout.

Juliet's breath slows and deepens.

Francisca lights a candle, maybe to look at Juliet, maybe to look at us.

She's sleeping.

Quiet. Darkness.

A figure enters and climbs into bed with Juliet.

Soft breath, panic rising. Juliet and Claudio, months ago.

CLAUDIO

Okay.

Okay.

JULIET

What?

Beat.

Shit.

Beat.

CLAUDIO

Are you crying?

Long beat. Muffled crying. Juliet cries into Claudio's chest.

Right thing. Wrong time.

JULIET

Claudio.

CLAUDIO

It's okay.

Beat.

JULIET

I can't possibly—(do this.)

Beat.

CLAUDIO

Do you want me to...

JULIET

What?

CLAUDIO

I'm sure Lucio knows someone. Or knows of someone. Who'd—

JULIET

Someone he hands his many girlfriends off to in a dark alley every other month?

CLAUDIO

I'd make sure it was safe, Juliet.

JULIET

Your sister would murder us with her bare holy hands.

CLAUDIO

This isn't about my sister.

JULIET

I don't want to lie.

CLAUDIO

It wouldn't be lying. It's privacy. Isabel doesn't need to know everything about our lives anymore.

JULIET

It's wrong.

CLAUDIO

My sister is not the moral center of the universe—

JULIET

To get rid of it. Wouldn't be right.

Long beat.

Please do not run numbers in your head right now.

CLAUDIO

I'm not. (*he is*)

JULIET

You're doing calculations in your head right now.

CLAUDIO

I promise I'm—(not.)

JULIET

And the answer you're looking for is *no*. We can't. It's not possible.
We're stupid.

CLAUDIO

We're not stupid.

JULIET

We're idiots.

CLAUDIO

It's okay.

JULIET

We thought we were invincible, didn't we?
It had just gotten so good.

CLAUDIO

We're okay.

Beat.

So little.

JULIET

Uh huh.

CLAUDIO

So big.

JULIET

Yeah.

I could be massive.

I'm going to be *enormous*.

CLAUDIO

Well, you're a big deal.

Beat.

It's not my worst nightmare.

JULIET

I know that.

CLAUDIO

I'd love to—(raise a baby with you.)

JULIET

I know, love.

You'd be good at it.

Long beat. Juliet cries.

CLAUDIO

Can I do anything?

Long beat. Crying.

JULIET

Do you have any. Idea. How many times. I've vomited. Today.

CLAUDIO

I'm sorry, love.

JULIET

You'll be so good at it. Shit.

Oh God. Oh God Shit Holy Mother of God—

CLAUDIO

Hey.

Hey.

You're brilliant.

You're brilliant.

Long beat.

JULIET

Isabel will kill us.

CLAUDIO

She loves kids.

JULIET

Really?

CLAUDIO

She'll love ours.

JULIET

I'll try to make a good one. I'll try to eat the right foods and think the right thoughts so I don't fuck it up.

CLAUDIO

I love you.

JULIET

I know.

CLAUDIO

Thank you.

JULIET

No problem.

CLAUDIO

We're okay.

JULIET

I'm fine.

It's fine.

I'd really like one. A good one, that is. A small one, so I'm not destroyed from the inside out. A smart one, preferably. A healthy and safe one. Really warm on my chest.

Don't kiss me right now. I smell like vomit. Don't be a saint, please.

Francisca hands Claudio the candle. Juliet and Claudio's faces are faintly illuminated. He kisses her, maybe not on the lips.

JULIET

Goddamn it, be careful, Claudio.

Please don't set me on fire.

The candle goes out. Claudio is gone.

A few moments as the actor exits and Juliet returns to us. She dozes until a contraction pulls her awake. Francisca goes to her.

Juliet's breath starts to catch. She doesn't want to make noise, but she's struggling.

JULIET

tell me what to do
I need you to—(tell me what to do)

FRANCISCA

Let it happen. Deep breath in.

Juliet inhales

And out.

Juliet exhales

And in.

The contraction worsens, and Juliet breathes fast, whimpering

I know. Try.

Francisca pivots.

Let your voice out.

JULIET

Juliet snatches the opportunity. The darkness is freeing.

Oooooohhhuuuuuuuuuuuuuuoooh

FRANCISCA

Nice and low.

JULIET

Uuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuugh

FRANCISCA

Good. Few more seconds.

JULIET

uuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu

uuuuugh

uuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuh

A moment to recover.

FRANCISCA

Your hips still bothering you?

JULIET

yeah

FRANCISCA

I can do some counter pressure during the next one, if you'd like.

JULIET

If it'll help, do it.

Beat.

FRANCISCA

You're doing well.

Juliet airs no protest. She settles into the solace of Francisca's presence. Trust is percolating in.

We hear rustling—is that giggling?—and then feet dancing across the stage. The lights slowly rise to reveal two figures behind Juliet and Francisca—young, clean, shining. They are bidding each other a reluctant goodbye.

JULIET

hearing their breath, but not seeing them

Who is that?

Who is that?

FRANCISCA

It's all right. They're not looking at you.

JULIET

breathless

How many? I don't believe you. Who are they?

FRANCISCA

Just two. They're from *Pericles*.

JULIET

Oh. A late play. The one with the pirates.

FRANCISCA

Yes.

JULIET

Where?

FRANCISCA

Pentapolis.

JULIET

Too many countries in that play.

FRANCISCA

This is a good one. They're between acts two and three.

The figures sway in a makeshift dance, smiling coyly at each other, laughing at and with each other, still uncovering new mysteries on each other's skin.

JULIET

They're lovely.

FRANCISCA

agreeing

Mmm.

JULIET

Wedding night?

FRANCISCA

Early morning.

JULIET

After?

FRANCISCA

Yes.

JULIET

And it was good?

FRANCISCA

Tentative, sometimes. Silly. Confusing. But very good.

JULIET

He's leaving. Pericles.

FRANCISCA

Briefly.

JULIET

Why?

FRANCISCA

She just needs an hour to gather herself. Her nurse will come in and help her dress.

JULIET

Ah. Royals.

FRANCISCA

Exactly.

Pericles manages to pull himself away from his bride.

They'll see each other shortly. But it'll feel like a long time.

Pericles is gone.

JULIET

What's her name? I always forget the princess's name.

FRANCISCA

Thaisa.

Thaisa alone.

Thaisa is a yearning, learning presence. Very pleasing on the outside, could be vapid if she chose. Often swallows complex truths on accident before they can make it across her tongue.

JULIET

So many vowels. That's a *pretty* fucking name.

FRANCISCA

So is Juliet.

JULIET

The *t* is what makes it. Plus, it's recycled. Hers is nowhere else in the canon. Say it again.

FRANCISCA

Thaisa?

JULIET

Yes, that. Her.

Juliet absorbs the name like a balm, uses its tune to lull herself towards sleep.

Thaisa traces herself lightly with her fingertips. Her skin is singing. Her nurse, Lychorida, enters. Lychorida is a warm, smothering woman, the oldest one onstage, sometimes cries herself to sleep at night out of pure love for Thaisa.

LYCHORIDA

Did he hurt you?

Thaisa shakes her head no. That was it, that was the thing, that was every single thing.

LYCHORIDA

You're whole and beautiful?

Thaisa nods, laughs, cries, levitates. Lychorida eyes Thaisa like a piece of rare art.

LYCHORIDA

Oh that's a glow. That is a glow; I wish you could see yourself, baby.
But you're all right? Are you sore at all?

Thaisa asks her body the question, isn't sure what the answer is yet.

LYCHORIDA

Well, go easier tonight if you are. Just tell him. And if he has a problem with that, he can answer to me. A little sore is fine though; that's how you know it was good.
The bedding ceremony played beautifully, by the way. You were a vision. The whole court's enchanted.
How does a long and fragrant bath sound?

That sounds wonderful, everything is wonderful—Thaisa is so overcome, she can't articulate it.

All right, sweet one. I want details while I draw it about what happened once we all left. I want precision and I want exaggeration; I want tall tales of glorious love. I knew the moment I saw that man, I told you he was a fine specimen. And noble to a fault. He is not just another pining knight—I said that, didn't I? But you knew too, you clever girl you leading lady you. You knew the hero when you saw him. You chose the title character out of a lineup and oh the adventures you'll have I'm just so proud of you I could burst—I'll stop speaking now but one more thing: by all the gods I swear:

re Thaisa's abdomen

that baby will be beauteous.

Thaisa's eyes go wide, she hadn't even gone there yet, but—

Oh, yes, lovely. Yes. Most definitely. You should see yourself.

Thaisa opens herself to that newness and it fills her completely; she brims with it as Lychorida leads her out of sight.

JULIET

A girl like that can't possibly shit. Do you think she even has a hole for that? Do you think she eats?

FRANCISCA

She's just a girl, Juliet.

JULIET

If she is a girl, then I am a cockroach.

FRANCISCA

I'm not going to give any energy to nonsense like that.

Juliet stirs, grimacing.

JULIET

I'm getting another one.

ow

FRANCISCA

You want touch?

JULIET

uh-huh

FRANCISCA

Can you get onto your knees?

Juliet rolls onto her hands and knees. Francisca places her hands surely on either side of Juliet hips, squeezes to relieve some pressure.

JULIET

uuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuh

FRANCISCA

Good. Good work.

Juliet buries her face, muffles her moans until the contraction eases.

JULIET

thanks

FRANCISCA

That was better?

JULIET

helped

FRANCISCA

I'll do the same thing for the next one. And then if you want something different, just talk to me, all right? Or move my hands.

Juliet's body is both wrung out and full to quivering and she can't grasp at language, can't communicate, who is this person I am with?

Pericles close by, with a letter. Lychorida and Thaisa clutch each other and spy on him as he reads. His eyes go wide. He's a Shakespearean hero and he has no words; he blinks like he's just landed on a new planet: too beautiful, is there anything here that could kill me?

Thaisa inches toward him, effervescent, and then he is on every inch of her, clasping her face in his hands, kissing her hands and her neck and her belly. We hear Thaisa laughing, and she nods to him—yes, really!—locking eyes with Lychorida, who beams in the corner.

JULIET

So no vomit? God, I can still taste the vomit.

FRANCISCA

Wait. Let her be.

Pericles and Thaisa's joy carries them out of sight, but Lychorida stays, another letter in her hands. She reads. Sinks. Pericles enters with a different energy—he seems suddenly a little older. Weighted.

LYCHORIDA

It will make no difference to her if her father forbids it. You are her king now. And...
handing him his letter back

...actually a king. Who knew. Congratulations, sir.

You'll have to tell her she can't go with you. You'll have to order it. Do you understand?

She'll think you can just hop onto a ship and sail away together. But you will not reach Tyre before your baby comes.

I nursed that girl in the night while her mother was sleeping. Slept next to her for a year after her mother was gone. She doesn't even remember that woman—I am the only...(mother she knows.)

And yet she will not listen to me. Do you have any idea how infuriating—(that is?)

You don't. Of course not. That's fine. The point is: You have to help me protect her.

Once she and the child are both strong enough, I will put them on a ship and send them straight to you. And until then, you'll rule wisely on your own. And she will write.

I'll take care of her, Pericles.

Pericles nods.

Pericles and Thaisa with the letter. Thaisa stands resolved: she will be getting on that ship with him. He tries to placate her with poetry, but she won't budge, and as he rhymes, he breaks down at the thought of so much distance. She barely works to convince him.

PERICLES

If the dull substance of my flesh were thought,
 Injurious distance should not stop my way;
 For then despite of space I would be brought,
 From limits far remote where thou dost stay.
 No matter then although my foot did stand
 Upon the farthest earth removed from thee;
 For nimble thought can jump both sea and land
 As soon as think the place where he would be.
 But ah! thought kills me that I am not thought,
 To leap large lengths of miles when I am gone,
 But that so much of earth and water wrought
 I must attend time's leisure with my moan,
 Receiving nought by elements so slow
 But heavy tears, badges of either's woe.

She whispers to him in an embrace—I'm going, and we'll both be fine, she's saying. Lychorida sees and sighs. They turn to her.

LYCHORIDA

even though she's already lost

No.

PERICLES

Please. It could be years.

LYCHORIDA

You two—

PERICLES

We should rule side by side.

LYCHORIDA

Reckless.

PERICLES

We can sail fast. We can make it before the baby comes; it's possible.

LYCHORIDA

Reckless adventurous love.

Beat. The lovers beg her with their eyes. She's defeated.

a condition

I'm going with you.

And they all celebrate. Thaisa kisses her nurse's cheeks. A ship on the ocean! A hero's journey! They put all the risks out of their minds.

JULIET

What must it be like to be the reason for your lover's death?

FRANCISCA

Thaisa boarded that ship of her own volition. She knew the risks as well as he did.

JULIET

But did she *know*? Did she know in the way that I've swallowed a planet and know things now? Things I don't know how to say? Like when...

Juliet tenses. She looks to Francisca.

FRANCISCA

Yeah?

JULIET

Yeah.

Francisca immediately uses the same technique to comfort Juliet as for the previous contraction. Juliet is shaking.

It's not as bad.
yes it is

FRANCISCA

Big, deep breaths.

JULIET

I'm trying, stop telling me what to do
uuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuugh
harder

Francisca applies more pressure to Juliet's hips. Juliet moans as the contraction peaks, then regains some of herself as it begins to ebb.

Why am I shaking?

FRANCISCA

Most everybody shakes. It's normal.

JULIET

These are so fast.

FRANCISCA

They are. It's good. This one's almost over.

*Juliet breathes deeply until it's gone. That one lasted longer than the others.
As she emerges from its fog, her hands flutter on her downstage hip.*

JULIET

Here...right here...

Francisca moves to reapply pressure, thinking Juliet's referring to pain. Juliet swats the midwife's hands away.

No. Not now. But sometimes. Between sleep and waking. There's someone...sitting here. Or resting on my chest. Little head on my shoulder. Light. Heavy. Who is this? Not a lover, not a friend, smaller than me, but a person, not a person, right here, not here yet, fits in my arms, molds to my skin, slips through my fingers—who is this?—I have wracked my brain, my memory. I've tried to see it and describe it and speak it into being—who is this? I've tried to put it into poetry—I can't. It's not words, it's *weight*, it's...is this a kind of knowing?

That question is suspended in the air for a beat.

The first Juliet had premonitions, didn't she? Colors and faces and her lover in a tomb. And the words so graceful—have you heard Claudio's speech about death in act three? The language. The imagery...and I can't even...I can't speak. I can't see. How can I possibly...? Is this a kind of...(knowing?)
I'm still shaking.

FRANCISCA

You're all right.

JULIET

Is it enough to feel it? Can they feel it? What *isn't* yet, what's *yet* to be? Can they smell it on me—the things that I can't say? Sister, can they smell the death I've made?

A sea change beginning. All of the actors appear onstage, moving parts, surrounding the scene, transforming the space into something older, wider, higher—we burn people here. They come with words as weapons.

VARIOUS

What shall be done with the groaning Juliet? She's very near her hour
 The stealth of our most mutual entertainment with character
 too gross is writ on Juliet See you the Fornicatress be removed
 Dispose of her to some more fitter place Tis pity she's not
 honest honorable I had rather my brother die by the law than
 that my son should be unlawfully born She's an Adulteress a
 Traitor a Bedswerver Stirrer of hell Guardian of excrement She
 that you wronged see that you right her She should shame to know
 herself a Monster in nature an Enemy of angels a Thing which
 I'll not call a creature

*And then there is Hermione. She is a figure of conviction and impossible restraint.
 She is a body swarmed with mythos: regal, captivating, pregnant.*

JULIET

wonder

Oh.

Oh, God.

Hermione.

Am I leaving my body?

FRANCISCA

to Juliet

You're approaching transition.

to us

Hermione of *The Winter's Tale*. A great bewitching romance. Less countries than *Pericles*. But more time.

LEONTES

Tongue-tied, our queen? Speak you.

HERMIONE

There's some ill planet reigns:

I must be patient till the heavens look

With an aspect more favorable.

PAULINA

to Juliet

You feel it? The tugging towards? The shrinking down?

FRANCISCA

to us

Paulina. Hermione's fiercest advocate. May or may not be a witch.

PAULINA

She has that effect, doesn't she? She just obliterates you.

LEONTES

She's an adulteress.

My wife's a hobby-horse, deserves a name
As rank as any flax-wench that puts to
Before her troth-plight. Say't and justify't.

JULIET

Is she going to burn?

SOMEONE

I would not be a stander-by to hear
My sovereign mistress clouded so.
Good my lord, be cured
Of this diseased opinion, and betimes,
For tis most dangerous.

JULIET

He can't possibly burn her.

PAULINA

He can.

LEONTES

To prison with her!
He who shall speak for her is afar off guilty

But that he speaks.

SOMEONE

I cannot
Believe this crack to be in my dread mistress,
So sovereignly being honorable. I have loved thee—

LEONTES

Make that thy question, and go rot!

JULIET

Has Leontes ever burned anyone?

PAULINA

No. But he can.

SOMEONE

This jealousy is for a precious creature; as she's rare
Must it be great, and as your person's mighty,
May it be violent—

LEONTES

Cease; no more.
You smell this business with a sense as cold
As is a dead man's nose: but I do see't and feel't
As I feel doing thus; and see withal
The instruments that feel.

SOMEONE

If it be so,
We need no grave to bury honesty:
There's not a grain of it the face to sweeten
Of the whole dungy earth.

SOMEONE

For her, my lord
I dare my life lay down and will do't, sir,
Please you to accept it, that the queen is spotless

I' the eyes of heaven and to you; I mean,
In this which you accuse her.

LEONTES

Hold your peaces.

SOMEONE

Be certain what you do, sir, lest your justice
Prove violence.

*Bodies scatter, leaving Hermione with Juliet. Francisca stays, on the perimeter,
and nudges Juliet with her gaze.*

FRANCISCA

Talk to her.

*They sit in tense silence, Hermione waiting, placid, Juliet swallowing all the
questions she thinks to ask. Juliet and Hermione lock eyes.*

JULIET

Was it a bed like this one?

*Before Hermione can respond, Paulina enters with a gentleman, played by the
same actor who plays Pericles.*

PAULINA

The keeper of the prison, call to him;
let him have knowledge who I am.

Exit Gentleman

Good lady,
No court in Europe is too good for thee;
What dost thou then in prison?

Re-enter Gentleman, with the Jailer, played by the actor who plays Claudio.

Now, good sir,
You know me, do you not?

JAILER

I know you for a worthy lady, and one whom much I honor.

JULIET

Claudio. Claudio—

Juliet recognizes the actor, and she doubles over in pain. Francisca goes to her. Paulina checks in with Francisca—should we keep going?—and Francisca nods. Juliet manages to stay attentive to the scene while working through the contraction.

PAULINA

Pray you then, conduct me to the queen.

JAILER

I may not, madam:
To the contrary I have express commandment.

PAULINA

Here's ado,
To lock up honesty and honor from
The access of gentle visitors!
Is't lawful, pray you,
To see her women? any of them?

JAILER

bending a rule for her
I must be present at your conference.

PAULINA

Well, be't so, prithee.

One of Hermione's ladies-in-waiting enters the scene, played by Francisca. She might begin the scene while Juliet works through the end of the contraction, focus split evenly. Throughout the scene, Juliet listens, but her eyes are trained on Hermione: examination, analysis. Hermione listens, breathing steadily, opaque.

Dear gentlewoman,
How fares our gracious lady?

LADY

As well as one so great and so forlorn
May hold together: on her frights and griefs,
Which never tender lady hath born greater,
She is something before her time deliver'd.

JULIET

What? Wait.

PAULINA

A boy?

LADY

A daughter, and a goodly babe,
Lusty and like to live: the queen receives
Much comfort in't; says 'My poor prisoner,
I am innocent as you.'

PAULINA

I dare be sworn
These dangerous unsafe lunes i' the king, beshrew them!
He must be told on't, and he shall: the office
Becomes a woman best; I'll take't upon me. Pray you,
Commend my best obedience to the queen:
If she dares trust me with her little babe,
I'll show't the king and undertake to be
Her advocate to the loud'st.
I'll use that tongue I have: if wit flow from't
As boldness from my bosom, let 't not be doubted
I shall do good.

LADY

Now be you blest for it!

PAULINA

Leontes.

And then he's there, fuming, the rest of the actors hovering at a safe distance.

Good my liege, I come;
 And, I beseech you, hear me, who profess
 Myself your loyal servant, your physician,
 Your most obedient counsellor, yet that dare
 Less appear so in comforting your evils,
 Than such as most seem yours: I say, I come
 From your good queen.

LEONTES

Good queen!

PAULINA

Good queen, my lord, good queen; I say good queen;
 And would by combat make her good, so were I
 A man, the worst about you.

LEONTES

Force her hence.

PAULINA

Let him that makes but trifles of his eyes
 First hand me: on mine own accord I'll off;
 But first I'll do my errand. The good queen,
 For she is good, hath brought you forth a daughter;

And the infant is in Paulina's arms.

Here 'tis; commends it to your blessing.

JULIET

WHAT. WAIT.

LEONTES

This brat is none of mine;
 It is the issue of Polixenes:
 Hence with it, and together with the adulteress
 Commit them to the fire!

PAULINA

She is yours.

LEONTES

I'll have thee burnt.

PAULINA

I care not.
 It is an heretic that makes the fire,
 Not she which burns in't. I'll not call you tyrant;
 But this most cruel usage of your queen,
 Not able to produce more accusation
 Than your own weak-hinged fancy, something savors
 Of tyranny and will ignoble make you,
 Yea, scandalous to the world.

LEONTES

We will summon a session so that we may arraign our most
 disloyal lady, for, as she hath
 Been publicly accused, so shall she have
 A just and open trial.
 I dispatch'd in post two messengers
 To sacred Delphos, to Apollo's temple. Now from the oracle
 They have brought all; whose spiritual counsel had,
 Shall stop or spur me. Have I done well?

HERMIONE

Well done, my lord.
 How will this grieve you when you shall come to clearer
 knowledge.

*Hermione stands as if to begin her trial. Juliet appeals to Francisca, who pauses
 the action.*

JULIET

Go back. Tell them to go back.

FRANCISCA

satisfied that Juliet has made a demand

To where?

JULIET

When the lady-in-waiting first speaks to Paulina.

PAULINA

How fares our gracious lady?

LADY

As well as one so great and so forlorn
 May hold together: on her frights and griefs,
 Which never tender lady hath born greater—

JULIET

That. What does that mean?

Juliet looks around for an answer. Anyone?

Did she scream?

Juliet looks to Hermione.

You gonna talk to me?

emotional, a deep need

What was it like? The birth in the prison?

HERMIONE

Do not weep, good fool. There is no cause.

JULIET

Could you have imagined it?

Have you ever been that vulnerable?
 Has there ever been so much unknown?
 Can you describe the quality of pain?
 Was there fire like they say there is fire?
 Were you in control?
 Has there ever been so much known?
 Did you feel yourself opening?
 Did you feel hate for him?
 Did you fear for your life?
 Were you ever at ease?
 Was it a sacred experience?
 Did you feel like an animal?
 Did you feel like your body was working against you?
 Did you ever leave your body behind you?
 What do you regret?
 The anger. Were you ever afraid it would tear you apart?

HERMIONE

I am not prone to weeping, as our sex
 Commonly are; the want of which vain dew
 Perchance shall dry your pities: but I have
 That honorable grief lodged here which burns
 Worse than tears drown: beseech you all, my lords,
 With thoughts so qualified as your charities
 Shall best instruct you, measure me.

JULIET

Tell me. Please.

hardening, demanding

Show me.

Hermione moves slowly, maintaining eye contact with Juliet. She does not need to prove anything; she's just doing what has been demanded she do. She stands tall and stoic and grips the bed frame, goes deep inside herself, listens, and the labor floods in.

Everyone who stood poised for her trial is watching her silently. Hermione knows they are watching, and she pours everything she has into her composure. Hermione is in a great deal of pain. This is not easy for her. What she's demonstrating is exemplary endurance, patience, acceptance.

A slight crack—a wince, maybe, a miniature lurching motion, an extra grip on the bed frame. Hermione shakes. Someone tries to touch her and Hermione shrugs off the touch. Her breath quickens, she might scream, she might lose it, and then—

HERMIONE

Since what I am to say must be but that
Which contradicts my accusation and
The testimony on my part no other
But what comes from myself, it shall scarce boot me
To say 'not guilty.' Mine integrity,
Being counted falsehood, shall, as I express it,
Be so received.

Hermione widens her stance. She needs to push; she knows it. Her composure is intact.

But thus: if powers divine
Behold our human actions, as they do,
I doubt not then but innocence shall make
False accusation blush and tyranny
Tremble at patience.

JULIET

This is the speech from the trial.

Hermione's body pushes. The people around her start to realize what is happening.

She pushes. She brings a hand between her legs, feels the baby's head.

HERMIONE

My past life
Hath been as continent, as chaste, as true
As I am now unhappy—

FRANCISCA

It's what she's got.

HERMIONE

—which is more
 Than history can pattern, though devised
 And played to take spectators. For behold me,
 A fellow of the royal bed, which owe
 A moiety of the throne, a great king's daughter,
 The mother to a hopeful prince, here standing
 To prate and talk for life and honor 'fore
 Who please to come and hear.

The baby has descended and then slightly receded in between pushes. Hermione breathes. Pushes again. Then speaks. She is both birthing her child and standing trial.

For life, I prize it
 As I weigh grief, which I would spare: for honor,
 'Tis a derivative from me to mine,
 And only that I stand for.

JULIET

Jesus Christ.

The head is crowning.

I appeal
 To your own conscience, sir, before Polixenes
 Came to your court, how I was in your grace,
 How merited to be so; since he came,
 With what encounter so uncurrent I
 Have strain'd to appear thus—

The head is out.

JULIET

For the love of God—

HERMIONE

If one jot beyond
 The bound of honor, or in act or will
 That way inclining, harden'd be the hearts
 Of all that hear me, and my near'st of kin
 Cry fie upon my grave.

Hermione prepares for the birth, takes a breath in, and then—

JULIET

Bullshit. Fuck are you made of?

And the costume piece that simulated Hermione's pregnancy is removed. The trial continues, leaving Juliet flummoxed.

LEONTES

I ne'er heard yet
 That any of these bolder vices wanted
 Less impudence to gainsay what they did
 Than to perform it first.

HERMIONE

That's true enough;
 Though tis a saying, sir, not due to me.

LEONTES

You will not own it.

HERMIONE

More than mistress of
 Which comes to me in name of fault, I must not
 At all acknowledge.

LEONTES

You knew of Camillo's departure, as you know
 What you have underta'en to do in's absence.

HERMIONE

Sir,
 You speak a language that I understand not:
 My life stands in the level of your dreams,
 Which I'll lay down.

LEONTES

Your actions are my dreams;
 You had a bastard by Polixenes,
 And I but dream'd it. As you were past all shame, —
 Those of your fact are so—so past all truth:
 Which to deny concerns more than avails; for as
 Thy brat hath been cast out, like to itself,
 No father owning it,—which is, indeed,
 More criminal in thee than it,—so thou
 Shalt feel our justice, in whose easiest passage
 Look for no less than death.

HERMIONE

Sir, spare your threats:
 The bug which you would fright me with I seek.
 To me can life be no commodity:
 The crown and comfort of my life, your favor,
 I do give lost; for I do feel it gone,
 But know not how it went. My second joy
 And first-fruits of my body, from his presence
 I am barr'd, like one infectious. My third comfort
 Starr'd most unluckily, is from my breast,
 The innocent milk in its most innocent mouth,
 Haled out to murder: myself on every post
 Proclaimed a strumpet: with immodest hatred
 The child-bed privilege denied, which 'longs
 To women of all fashion; lastly, hurried
 Here to this place, i' the open air, before
 I have got strength of limit. Now, my liege,
 Tell me what blessings I have here alive,
 That I should fear to die? Therefore proceed.
 But yet hear this: mistake me not; no life,

I prize it not a straw, but for mine honor,
 Which I would free, if I shall be condemn'd
 Upon surmises, all proofs sleeping else
 But what your jealousies awake, I tell you
 'Tis rigor and not law. Your honors all,
 I do refer me to the oracle:
 Apollo be my judge.

Shift. A storm brewing. The Winter's Tale stays, but Pericles moves slowly into focus as Paulina speaks. Thunder, rain, and Thaisa on the deck of her husband's ship, listening.

PAULINA

You feel it, don't you? The tugging towards, the shrinking down—what she does to you when she speaks, and when she doesn't.
 The sluggish pulse of fear in the air—can you hear it?
 The viscous red of her leaving—can you smell it?
 All the time you're swallowing, Hermione—can you taste it?
 Can you feel yourself smoothing over, sculpted and placed and written onto, disappearing and emerging in the shape of tragedy? Can you feel *becoming* in your breath, Hermione?
 Do you know the monument you'll be?

PERICLES

searching the ship frantically

Thaisa! THAISA!

finding her

What are you doing, my love? Come down below please it's too dangerous up here.

Thaisa pays no attention to him, she's breathing through terror and pain. Pericles calls for the nurse like a child calling for his mother.

Lychorida!

Lychorida enters, goes immediately to Thaisa.

LYCHORIDA

Gods have mercy, child, you might have killed us all.

to Pericles

What are you whining about?

back to Thaisa, realizing

Oh, sweetheart. Oh, sweetheart.

Pericles is hit with a gust of guilt and panic.

PERICLES

She's in—(labor)

LYCHORIDA

She is. She's fine.

to Thaisa

Come out of the rain. We won't have a baby up here; I say nay to that.

PERICLES

Too early.

LYCHORIDA

No, I could've predicted this. Your baby's big and healthy, she's just eager, it's all right.

PERICLES

an old argument

Why are you so convinced it's not a boy?

LYCHORIDA

I explained this to you, sir, it's the way she's—(carrying)

Thaisa moans.

Oookay. Lean on me, lovely.

to Pericles, as she starts to lead Thaisa away

Soon enough, we'll see.

PERICLES

What should I what can I do?

LYCHORIDA

You rally your boys and get this ship under control and if anyone is unoccupied, they're praying. I'll take her below.

PERICLES

Do you need anything?

LYCHORIDA

A smoother sail would be helpful. That you can work on. I'll send news when I have it.

PERICLES

kissing Thaisa

You're brilliant. You're brilliant.

LYCHORIDA

Go.

Pericles runs off.

Lychorida takes Thaisa below the deck, into a space that is cramped and dark.

LYCHORIDA

Easy now. Easy does it. Here we are, sweet one. How quick are the pains?

Thaisa moans. She grasps at anything, probably Lychorida. Lychorida rubs her back, kisses her hair, speaks to her tenderly.

Ooookay. Okay baby. Okay baby. Slow your breath down. Deep breaths. Slow breaths. Sssssshhhh. Good girl.

The contraction eases.

Why didn't you come get me? How long have you been hurting this bad?
Can you talk to me? Catch your breath and then tell me what you're feeling so I can help.
We went over this, remember? I can help ease it but you have to tell me what you need.

Thaisa can't respond.

You're all right, my sweet. You're all right. What have I always said to you?

You come get me. Bad dream, you come get me. Cramps hurt, you come get me. That boy tries anything with you when you don't want it, you come get me. You know that.

You're about to have a baby and you go up to the deck to be with the ocean? What's that about, Princess? Since when?

This is all new, I know. All right.

Let's get you out of those wet clothes, shall we? How does a fresh nightgown sound? I'll get one for you. Stay where you're at and think about where you want my hands, all right?

Lychorida detaches herself from Thaisa's body and begins to move away, but Thaisa reaches for her, gasping. The ship is being tossed mercilessly in the sea and the pain is surging again. Thaisa shakes violently.

Allrightallrightallright. Here I am. Right here. I know it's hell, baby—I'd take it for you if I could.

Thaisa moans.

That's right, baby girl. Make noise if you need to. Make as much noise as you need to. Good girl.

Lychorida comforts Thaisa until the contraction ebbs.

And done. That one's done. You did so good.

Thaisa starts to break down. This can't be happening here and now, I'm not ready, we swore we'd make it to land, etc.

It's all right, lovely. It really is. Here's as good a place as any. It was gonna be you and me no matter where it happened, right?

Breathe, baby. Breathe how we talked about. Come on.

Think of the story you'll tell her. Think of the intrepid adventurer she'll have to be, given this beginning. You'll have to name her something ocean-related.

getting Thaisa laughing

Hey, you're obligated. I don't make the rules.

We'll be sure to embellish the story when we tell it to her, won't we? We'll have a few years to workshop it while she learns to comprehend language. It's gonna be glorious, and I'll tell you a secret are you ready here it is: it does not matter how you cope down here tonight. We're going to paint you in heroic strokes no matter what.

Maybe that's sacrilege, I don't care, I give the gods no credit for these kinds of miracles. It's called labor. And you understand why now, don't you?
If you need me to stop talking, just say so.

Thaisa manages to shake her head. Lychorida is concerned at her silence, but she takes that as a signal to keep talking.

Of course your lord will have his own version of the story. Of whatever heroics he's performing at this poor boat's expense. He looked white as a sheet just now; I don't think I've ever seen a man so terrified.

Could've given him more assurance, I suppose.

Thaisa is lost, she doesn't seem to register what Lychorida is talking about.

Your husband, lovely. Pericles, King of Tyre?

The room is rumbling with an aggravated sea. Thaisa is nauseated, on top of all else. She cries out as if the sound is being yanked from her body, clutches Lychorida.

Okay. Here we go. Okay baby. You just dive in and feel it and hold onto me. Oh, sweetheart. You're breathing too fast. Slow it down.
Look at me. Breathe with me.

Lychorida guides Thaisa by breathing slowly with her. Thaisa makes sounds with each exhale, sounds that would split the fissures of the earth. Lychorida is trying not to be swept away by sympathetic pain.

Gooooood. That's my girl. There you go. That's a good girl.

Pericles, above.

PERICLES

Thou god of this great vast, rebuke these surges,
Which wash both heaven and hell; and thou, that hast
Upon the winds command, bind them in brass,
Having call'd them from the deep! O, still

Thy deafening, dreadful thunders! O, how, Lychorida,
 How does my queen? The seaman's whistle
 Is as a whisper in the ears of death,
 Unheard. Lychorida!—Lucina, O
 Divinest goddess, and midwife most gentle
 To those that cry by night, convey yourself
 Aboard our dancing boat; make swift the pangs
 Of my queen's travails!

LYCHORIDA

Can you keep that breath going? Yeah? You keep breathing just like that and I'm going to have a feel, all right? I need to feel between your legs now, baby, you know I do. You keep breathing and I'm just going to check where we're at.

Lychorida slides a hand between Thaisa's legs to feel for the baby. Thaisa seizes at the touch.

Sssshhhh, it's just me, baby. It's just me. Stay still for me.

Lychorida feels the baby's head. She's overcome—these moments are terrifying, but they are also joyous

Oh, there she is. Her head's right there. Can I get you onto your bottom?

Thaisa, you can't lean on me. I need my hands. And you're shaking, so I'm going to lean you up against the wall, all right? Work with me here.

Lychorida tries to move Thaisa's body so that she is leaning against a wall. Thaisa is difficult to move, and the walls themselves move to precarious angles as the ship is tossed in the sea. Thaisa vomits.

Oh, my sweet, sweet girl. That's all right. It happens. You feel horrible, I know. This is happening so fast. Can you keep your head still for me? I need to make sure you don't breathe it in.

Lychorida quickly wipes Thaisa's nose and mouth. There's still vomit everywhere. She tries to clean it up as she speaks.

It's a nasty business, I know. We're gonna bring you through it. And Pericles is gonna lead us through the storm. And the gods will protect us, loveheart. They will. We're gonna tell a great story to this little daughter of yours.

Lychorida realizes she can't address all of the vomit now. She refocuses.

Legs wide apart for me, sweet one. I know. I know but it's just me looking, and you're beautiful, and you're doing this beautifully.

looking between Thaisa's legs

Okay. Is there so much pressure, baby? Yeah. Go ahead and bear down if you need to. It's like a bowel movement, same muscles, remember what we talked about? You can do it.

Thaisa tries to say Lychorida's name amidst tectonic sounds. They're not necessarily just the sounds of someone laboring anymore. They're more precisely the sounds of someone who does not know what is happening and knows exactly what is happening and does not want to die.

Lychorida is woozy and terrified. She's trying to split her attention equally between soothing Thaisa and preparing to catch the baby, and she feels like she's failing at both.

Oh, beautiful, beautiful work, you are made for babies. Good girl. Can you pant for me now? We're going to try and slow her down just a little bit, I don't want you to tear, lovely.

Thaisa expels a deep, throaty cry, and Lychorida lurches to her, smooths her brow, misplaces her fear.

Sssssshhhh. We'll handle it if you tear, baby. It's not the end of the world. You just breathe and let her come now. Let her come. You don't need to do anything.

Thaisa is still trying to say Lychorida's name. She might try to get "mama" out as well, but she seems to have no command over her voice.

Mama's here, little love. Mama's here. Look right at me. This is gonna be over, I promise. You're gonna do it and it's gonna be done.

between Thaisa's legs

Good girl. Good girl, perfect, yes. Here's the sweetest little face—Thaisa, you're doing it. You're doing it. I have never seen better, sweetheart. Beautiful. Now take a couple breaths—deep breaths, baby girl—and then we're going to get her shoulders out, and then good riddance. Almost done. I know. Worst is over, baby, worst is over. I know it hurts you're doing so good, you're so close I'm so proud of you sweetheart. That's it. That's it.

Thaisa's daughter is born into Lychorida's hands.

Here she is—hi, little girl! The King of Tyre will eat his words: what did I say? Oh, she's precious, sweetheart. Big and healthy and perfect—I'm going to get a good cry out of her and then I'll hand her right to you, okay? Breathe for me, baby.

As if on cue, Thaisa fades. Francisca might be inching closer to the scene, might be involved as Thaisa loses consciousness fast. Simultaneously, we key back into Hermione, standing at her trial. Hermione draws a hand from between her legs. It is stained with blood.

LYCHORIDA

Thaisa.

You're okay. You're okay. Stay with me.

Breathe for me, baby. Sweet good strong clever girl, breathe. No No No please breathe. Thaisa.

Not this way, sweetheart, please breathe. Thaisa. Thaisa.

Oh, my girl. My girl.

Lychorida starts to tumble down a mountain of grief. Francisca goes to her and holds her as it happens. Francisca whispers to Lychorida, and we don't need to hear all of the words. We mostly hear the storm thundering and the waves crashing, and the cries of Thaisa's new daughter join the cacophony.

FRANCISCA

whispering to Lychorida

(You cut the cord. You wrap her up. You pick her up. You take her to Pericles.)

Lychorida tries to shake her head in refusal, but she knows. Lychorida eyes Thaisa's daughter. The gods have made an exchange. The gods do this. There is a chilling, stilling yes.

Hermione is a statue.

Lychorida cuts the cord. She swaddles the baby. She picks up the baby. She stands.

JULIET

And she's alive?

Francisca nods.

PERICLES

Now, Lychorida!

LYCHORIDA

Here is a thing too young for such a place,
Who, if it knew the world, would die, as I
Am like to do: this is the only piece
Of your dead queen.

PERICLES

How, how, Lychorida!

LYCHORIDA

Patience, good sir; do not assist the storm.

PERICLES

O you gods!
Why do you make us love your goodly gifts,
And snatch them straight away?

First Sailor

What courage, sir? God save you!

PERICLES

Courage enough: I do not fear the flaw;
It hath done to me the worst. Yet, for the love
Of this poor infant, this fresh-new sea-farer,
I would it would be quiet.

First Sailor

to his second sailor

Slack the bolins there! Thou wilt not, wilt thou?
Blow, and split thyself.

Second Sailor

to first sailor

But sea-room, an' the brine and cloudy billow kiss
the moon, I care not.

First Sailor

Sir, your queen must overboard: the sea works high,
the wind is loud, and will not lie till the ship be
cleared of the dead.

PERICLES

That's your superstition.

First Sailor

Pardon us, sir; with us at sea it hath been still
observed: and we are strong in custom. Therefore
quickly yield her; for she must overboard straight.

PERICLES

As you think meet. Most wretched queen!

LYCHORIDA

Here she lies, sir.

PERICLES

A terrible childbed hast thou had, my dear;
No light, no fire: the unfriendly elements
Forgot thee utterly: nor have I time
To give thee hallow'd to thy grave, but straight
Must cast thee, scarcely coffin'd, in the ooze;
Where, for a monument upon thy bones,
And e'er-remaining lamps, the belching whale
And humming water must o'erwhelm thy corpse,
Lying with simple shells.

*And then Pericles can't speak anymore. Juliet approaches the tableau cautiously,
speaks to Pericles right next to him, far away.*

JULIET

What's wrong with you, Pericles? What's wrong with your body?
 Little girl in your arms.
 Brand new girl in your arms.
 You're getting her all wet, Pericles.
 You're making her cold, Pericles.
 What did you do, Pericles? What's wrong with you?
 You're drowning your girl in your tears.

Thunder and waves crashing. The sailors fear a shipwreck.

SAILORS

SHE MUST OVERBOARD!

The storm crescendos. A coffin is heaved into the sea and carried away.

Darkness, and then blinding light, in which we hear:

PAULINA

I say she's dead, I swear't.

and we see Hermione's statue.

PAULINA

If word nor oath
 Prevail not, go and see: if you can bring
 Tincture or luster in her lip, her eye,
 Heat outwardly or breath within, I'll serve you
 As I would do the gods.

Darkness, in which we hear:

FRANCISCA

Transition. Is awful. You are coping fine.

and then blinding light, in which we hear:

PAULINA

tumbling down the mountain

the love I bore your queen—
the sweet'st, dear'st creature—

Weren't you supposed to be the one who was complete, my lord?

Didn't you know that she was weak, my lord?

Forgive me but I think you should have known, my lord. Weren't you closer to the angels than she?

Why is it a problem that she's gone, my lord? She's given you exactly what you need.

And she was always going to be a little gone, my lord. A little more gone each time she gave a little more than what she had and did so without questioning what kind of love it was. A love that saves your spirit and destroys your bodily form. A yielding kind of love, *it's all worth it* kind of love, *I'll forget the pain* kind of love, *do away with me* kind of love, *there never was a me* kind of love—and your daughter, Leontes? The one who was born in the prison you made—the one you'll see again when she's sixteen?

Hermione named her Perdita. It means *lost*.

And then darkness, from which we hear:

THAISA

Where am I? Where's my lord? What world is this?

and then blinding light, in which we see Thaisa, a specter, on the foot of Juliet's bed, soaking wet.

Darkness. Bodies disperse. Juliet emitting deep, guttural groans, reaching a limit.

When the lights rise, we are with Juliet and Francisca in the tiny room in prison, and Juliet is shaking fiercely, her whole body tense. She shakes her head at the midwife.

FRANCISCA

Yes. Yes.

JULIET

I—(can't)

FRANCISCA

You can.

JULIET

hurts

FRANCISCA

This is the worst part. It's also the shortest part. You've made it here and you're going to make it out of here.

JULIET

I don't want it—I don't want—ow ow uuuuuuuggggghhhhhh

FRANCISCA

We're going to breathe in and out and we're not going to think.

JULIET

I'm going to Hell for not wanting it

FRANCISCA

That would be an example of thinking.

JULIET

I wanted it yesterday. Is it tomorrow?

Juliet lurches with another round of pain.

need Isabel call for her

FRANCISCA

You do not need Isabel.

JULIET

is it tomorrow? is he dead is it tomorrow?

FRANCISCA

Juliet.

Juliet breathes on her own for a few moments, a brief reprieve, and then thunder starts to roll in her again.

JULIET

O God, I have an ill-divining soul
 methinks I see thee
 as one dead in the bottom of a tomb
 methinks I should know you
 methinks I should know
 to die, and go we know not where;
 To lie in cold obstruction and to rot;
 This sensible warm motion to become
 A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit
 To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside
 In thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice;
 To be imprison'd in the viewless winds,
 And blown with restless violence round about
 The pendent world; or to be worse than worst
 Of those that lawless and incertain thought
 Imagine howling: 'tis too horrible
 O injurious love that respites me a life whose very comfort is
 still a dying horror
 horror
 tongue cannot conceive nor name thee
 uuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuugh GodShitFuck

Juliet collapses into Francisca's arms. Francisca is exhausted. Juliet seems to return to herself.

Beat.

JULIET

I'm sorry.

FRANCISCA

No, lean on me. I won't break.

JULIET

I'm heavy.

FRANCISCA

You should be. It's fine.

Juliet breathes, squirms, tries to find a way to situate her body against Francisca's so that she isn't hurting either of them.

Don't worry about me; I can take it. Give me your weight.

Juliet gives in, leans on the midwife's body, listens for signals inside hers. Things are changing rapidly. Juliet shakes her head. Francisca nods. Juliet shakes her head. Francisca nods. They are in earnest now.

JULIET

quietly

Sister.

I feel like I need to—(go to the bathroom).

but it's not...

That's the baby, isn't it?

Heaven help me.

Juliet pushes, not quite on purpose.

Is this okay?

FRANCISCA

It's fine. Just keep it gentle.

Juliet pushes until the urge subsides.

Did it relieve some pressure?

JULIET

Yeah. Felt better.

I feel like it's right there but I don't know. I don't know.

Can you feel? I don't know.

Francisca slips her hand between Juliet's legs.

Is it close?

FRANCISCA

It's close. You're not crazy.

JULIET

Oh God.

FRANCISCA

Listen: this could happen fast from here or it could take a while. And either way is fine. Just keep talking to me. Okay?

JULIET

Okay.

I don't really feel like talking, though.

FRANCISCA

That's fine too. You're the expert here.

Juliet nods, might smile, might laugh.

They hang in the air together in silence for a long moment, two bodies intertwined. And then Thaisa is there observing them: stunned, bleary-eyed, pried open. She watches with a deep need to understand.

THAISA

That I was shipp'd at sea, I well remember,
And I was near my time; but whether there
Deliver'd, by the holy gods,
I cannot rightly say.

JULIET

You don't remember the—

THAISA

Birth. No. Nothing.

But I swear my bones are different.

Do you feel like an entire person?

A coffin washed ashore and I was in it. And I was alive, but there was no someone in me.

And I don't remember...(*laboring? dying? anything?*)

My organs are swimming in all different places. Sloshing. Gaping. So much room.

I was so swollen. I was so uncomfortable. Lychorida made fun of the way I walked. Pericles was afraid to touch me for wonder, and I was so smug in the wide-awake night, I couldn't wait, I thought, *I am about to be so much.*

There is so much empty now.

Why wouldn't he have laid the child to rest with me? In my arms? At my feet? By my head?

There must have been a corner where it could fit. They wouldn't have kept a child-sized coffin on the ship. Did they?

Is it swimming still? Is it washed up on another shore? Is there flesh of my flesh decaying in the sand somewhere, in an unmarked grave? It is at the bottom of the ocean? Or floating at the top like the world's smallest island. Bobbing in the sea.

FRANCISCA

She's alive, Thaisa.

Lychorida is raising her, just as she raised you.

THAISA

Lychorida thinks I died.

She thinks she watched me die.

There was no explanation for my stillness, was there? No possible cause of death. No flood of bleeding. No violent seizing. I was gone before I fully knew that she'd slipped out of me. And then I woke up, and the play was happening in a different country.

Nothing torn or ruptured. Nothing retained.

Except...

You know, the man who revived me on the shore, and the priestesses of Diana who took me in, they wouldn't have known I'd had a baby, except that there was an organ in the coffin with me. Fell out of my skirts when I stood. Slimy cord curling onto the sand.

The afterbirth escaped while I was at sea.

Groggy awakening. Return to virginity. Temporary enclosure. No one touch me again. I'm going to a convent now, because there's nowhere else for me to go. I'm rambling, forgive my voice. I suspect I'm hoarse from screaming though I don't remember screaming and there's a lot I don't know how to say. I won't have poetry again for fourteen years.

Thaisa turns to go, but then

There's also these.

Thaisa reveals wet stains on her clothing. Her milk has come in.

Everything is empty. Except for these.

FRANCISCA

Do they burn at all?

THAISA

Ache.

FRANCISCA

You can express some milk to ease the discomfort, but only a little. More will trick your body and make you keep producing—

THAISA

Can a body be tricked?

FRANCISCA

Just be careful. Don't bind them too tightly. And if you feel any lumps or burning or you start to feel feverish, please say something. They should dry up in a few days.

Thaisa nods, and exits. Before she goes:

THAISA

I thought I was...

I thought I was going to be...

I didn't know her. I miss her. Who is she?

Thaisa is gone.

JULIET

Is it over? The worst part you talked about?

FRANCISCA

Transition? Seems to be.

JULIET

So...what is this?

I feel...better. Fine. Not fine but...what is this?

FRANCISCA

“Rest and be thankful.” Is what some people call it. Or my personal favorite is “quietude.”

Doesn't happen for all. But when it does, it's a kindness.

JULIET

Act four. Is that where we are?

FRANCISCA

Yes.

JULIET

Things always get weird in act four.

FRANCISCA

That they do.

JULIET

This would be a good time for a soliloquy, wouldn't it?

I've already given a soliloquy, haven't I?

Oh God.

I went insane.

FRANCISCA

I suggest you rest.

Juliet doesn't have the energy to press. She nods. She walks gingerly back to the bed. Francisca helps her find a bearable position to rest in. She drowzes, and when her eyes close, the lights go out.

Paulina, with a candle. The statue of Hermione, faintly illuminated. Juliet, Paulina, and Francisca gaze at the statue.

PAULINA

I like your silence; it the more shows off your wonder.

JULIET

Is that really her?

PAULINA

That's her.

Juliet approaches the statue with the intention of touching it.

PAULINA

No touch. You'll ruin it.

JULIET

There's too much fabric, I want to see her skin.

PAULINA

Look at the lines in her face. There's time there. Evidence. Is that what you're looking for?

Juliet takes a closer look.

JULIET

Sixteen years. Is a long time. To be not quite alive.

a slow articulation

I feel like I'm living in anticipation of absolute ruin.

I want her innards. I want her guts. Why didn't you write a book?

PAULINA

Wasn't my book to write.

JULIET

Wasn't your body to sculpt.

PAULINA

Hermione belongs to everyone.

Untouchability is part of the magic. It's direct opposition to the nasty things he said about her.

We have to work in extremes.

I understand why you want her guts.

But this is what she is now.

JULIET

I feel ashamed for asking her all those questions. For asking them when I did. I was selfish. I asked out of fear. And I could feel that her response was: *your fear is showing*.

I want to ask because her answers matter. Not because they matter *to me*.

I can't be selfish now. I have to beat the selfish out of me.

Beat.

PAULINA

You're living in anticipation of ruin?

JULIET

I think so.

PAULINA

I think the word you're looking for is change.

JULIET

Maybe. But something is ruined every time something is made.

There's only so much a body can be.

You think I'm young and stupid. You think I don't know anything.

PAULINA

I think you know plenty. And I think you're going to evade catastrophe. Because you know you're young and stupid. You know that.

And when you get to the other side of ruin:

Queen Hermione will be waiting for you.

Lights up in the prison. Paulina is gone. Hermione stays. Juliet turns a key into a lock in her body.

JULIET

I need to—(push)

FRANCISCA

Go for it. Can I see?

Juliet nods, pushes. She does so on an exhale, and the push is brief, but steady and strong. She pushes again, similarly, and then a third time.

FRANCISCA

That's great, Juliet.

JULIET

Jesus Christ.

Did that do anything?

FRANCISCA

Slow and steady is fine. Easier on both of you, actually.

JULIET

Okay.

Juliet lets herself rest, conserves her energy.

Feels like vomiting. The urge of it. Like...that involuntary heave, you know? Except all of me. A full-being vomit.

FRANCISCA

I believe it.

Juliet rests for a moment. Then she tenses.

FRANCISCA

Yeah?

JULIET

Yeah.

Juliet pushes hard, two in a row, breathing heavily in between.

FRANCISCA

Easy.

JULIET

can't

FRANCISCA

Slow and steady.

JULIET

hurts not to

FRANCISCA

Gentle.

Juliet pushes hard.

JULIET

aaaah

Juliet pauses, takes a few deep breaths, looking towards Francisca. Francisca nods to her. She pushes again.

JULIET

It's moving?

FRANCISCA

You tell me.

JULIET

Is that a trick question?

FRANCISCA

Not at all.

JULIET

I think it's moving.

FRANCISCA

I think so too.

JULIET

Good. Great.

Beat.

Juliet tenses. She and Francisca don't speak, they just nod to each other. Juliet pushes once, silently. She pushes again, grunting. She pushes again and groans.

JULIET

fuckfuckfuck

Juliet squirms. Francisca reassures her with touch, and Juliet clutches Francisca as she pushes again. Juliet is straining, near-breathless.

It went back up. It came down and then went back up.

FRANCISCA

That's all right. It's all right.

Juliet breathes. She allows her grip on the midwife to soften. In the calm, Thaisa appears and approaches, and as she grows closer, Juliet tenses again. She pushes.

Thaisa watches the scene, and recognition rises in her. Vivid sensations return, blurry pictures, and then what's rising is a newly articulated rage, and it spills out of her body.

THAISA

It was storming, and I vomited, and Lychorida kept saying to me, “Good girl, good girl” and I made sounds that scared me—what animal were they coming from?

Juliet groans.

Who let this animal on the ship?

“Baby,” she kept saying—who is the baby?—“Sssshhh okay baby. Okay baby. It’s all right, lovely. It really is”—what is all right about this and what is lovely? I am not lovely, nothing is lovely, even the way you’re touching me—are you trying to confuse me? “Baby girl”—who is the girl?

HERMIONE

There is no self here.

THAISA

Old wives’ tales, she’d predicted my baby was a girl. And I believed her. I believed everything she said, had always believed her—

HERMIONE

There is no chaos here.

THAISA	HERMIONE
<p>“It’s all right, baby. We’re going to bring you through this. My girl. Sweet good strong clever girl, breathe. Oh, my girl. My girl. Good girl. Good girl.” And I was hearing her but I knew so acutely that <i>this is the thing</i>, good girl, <i>the thing behind my eyelids</i>, good girl, <i>between breathing and speaking</i>, good girl, <i>the thing I could never fathom</i>, good girl,</p>	<p>This is a task that is mine, a task I was given—my body is not chaos. I am meticulously made.</p>

the thing I've always known, good girl, the thing we don't write down, good girl, the thing that will send me to heaven, good girl, the warrior's burial, good girl, this is the only grown-up thing I've ever done the only grown-up thing I'll ever do, Mama—CALL ME GOOD GIRL ONE MORE TIME I am two becoming one, and I am one becoming two, and don't forget I am the queen of you don't tell me what to do "I have to feel between your legs now, baby, you know I do"—this is a thing much weaker women do—

this is a thing you endure, not a thing you do "breathe for me, baby" I am becoming I am about to be I AM ABOUT TO BE—

"That's right, baby girl. Make noise if you need to"—A BABY GIRL IS A TINY THING and I am about to be cast away at sea because my body's bad omen fills the air that we all breathe and GODDAMNIT THIS IS NOT THE PLAY I THOUGHT THAT I WOULD LEAD but it's going to take three men—three grieving, heaving men—to hoist my body overboard. I am no one's *little love*.

I was about to be someone's—

I was about to be—

It was drowning and burning at once. How could I breathe? Swallowing me. Fire between my legs. I was about to be—

Oh.

Oh, no.

This is a thing you endure, not a thing you do.

Oh, yes. I understand.

<p>Now I see. I am the thing that is lost.</p> <p>I don't know her. I miss her. Who is she?</p>	<p>I am the thing that is lost.</p> <p>I am an installment in a long history of <i>yes</i>. This is another moment when the only way out is through. So I close my eyes. I don't fight to keep my body. I burn instead of weeping. There is always a death here, because what has been before cannot be. <i>Receive. Carry. Love. Breathe.</i> We can't control the ways in which we change. <i>Endure. Surrender. Yield. Breathe.</i> We can't control the way blood moves through veins. This is a kind of knowing. This is a kind of choosing. This is a kind of triumph, and a kind of learning, and a no-longer-clutching, and—</p> <p>And a letting go.</p>
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Thaisa and Hermione might exit, might stay, but it doesn't matter, because Juliet has gone completely internal and no one else is there. She listens. Listens. Stirs with an impulse and then follows it, shifts onto her knees and leans forward onto the bedframe. She listens. Pushes. Listens, a questioning look on her face.

FRANCISCA

You want to feel? Feel for yourself.

Juliet shakes her head.

JULIET

you do it

Francisca slips a hand between Juliet's legs, feels the baby's head.

FRANCISCA

Good move.

Juliet nods. She knows.

Listening.

Juliet pushes.

Listening.

FRANCISCA

Unclench your jaw.

Juliet pushes, releasing a low moan.

JULIET

If I shit, don't tell me.

FRANCISCA

I would never.

Juliet lowers herself onto her heels and rests. Suspension.

JULIET

I'm okay.

FRANCISCA

I know.

Juliet's eyes are closed. She's ultra-sensitive, reactive, but also serene. An anticipatory stillness, some final vital listening.

JULIET

It's coming.

FRANCISCA

Brilliant.

Juliet rises off of her heels, readies herself. As the head crowns, she might make noise, or her breath just might quicken, but either way, there's no shame.

FRANCISCA

Great work. Let her come herself.

Juliet lets out a noise of strain and relief as the head is born.

Juliet reaches down and feels.

JULIET

Oh my God.

FRANCISCA

Wild, isn't it?

JULIET

The sacred and profane.

FRANCISCA

You ready for this?

JULIET

Uh-huh.

FRANCISCA

Right onto your chest?

JULIET

Yes.

FRANCISCA

You'll have to catch her then. Can you do that?

JULIET

Her?

FRANCISCA

A hunch.

JULIET

Bullshit.

I can catch her.

re us

They're still here?

FRANCISCA

They're all still here.

JULIET

in anticipation of triumph

Good.

A moment suspended. Hermione and Thaisa connected by a sinewy something in the air—the same something that keeps them from colliding into a single being. They breathe like they are near drowning, near collapse, near a person they were torn away from years ago.

THAISA	HERMIONE
Marina.	Perdita.
That's your name?	That's your name?
And you're fourteen.	And you're sixteen.
And I'm your—	And I'm your—
Oh.	Oh.
Oh for the love of—	Oh for the love of—
You look...	You look...

THAISA

Are you an entire person? Do you think?

HERMIONE

You look how I must have looked. Before the idea of you was inside of me.

So little.

THAISA

So big.

Do you feel like a whole person?

THAISA	HERMIONE
I think maybe I should apologize. For something over which I had no control.	I think maybe I should apologize. For something over which I had no control.

HERMIONE

I won't do that.

THAISA

Should I do that?

I don't know why I'm asking you—do you feel like you lost something? Do you feel like I'm something you lost?

HERMIONE

Is there something you've been hoping I would tell you? Is there something you need me to say? Do you need me to be something to you? Or are you just visiting the end you started from?

THAISA

Is there something broken here? Or just something absent?

How much does it matter, that I was the one who carried you?

HERMIONE

It only matters because you're here, I think. I did what I had to do.

THAISA

You don't have to thank me.

HERMIONE

Don't apologize to me. You were always going to grow more on the outside. That I knew.

THAISA

We had time together.

HERMIONE

We had time that I remember. I know you don't remember, but I do.

THAISA

And maybe I should have been more careful
And stayed away from rocky waters
And eaten better foods

HERMIONE

And maybe I could have been calmer

THAISA

and wiser

HERMIONE

and more faithful

THAISA

and more grateful

THAISA	HERMIONE
Maybe I could have made sure I stayed with you.	Maybe I could have made sure I stayed with you.
But if there was a room Where all the decisions were made Then we were not in that room.	But if there was a room Where all the decisions were made Then we were not in that room.

Leontes and Pericles enter and go to their wives. During the following dialogue, Pericles embraces Thaisa.

THAISA

You say your heart leaps to be gone in mine. I say you're blessed, and mine own.

And your father says:

PERICLES

Flesh of thy flesh, Thaisa;
 Thy burden at the sea, and call'd Marina
 For she was yielded there.

THAISA

And then he tells me we will rule one kingdom, and you, alongside your husband, will rule another, across the sea.

Yielded.

Yield.

Marina.

It's hard for me to know

What is sacrilege and what is sanctified

About the way I feel when I see you.

Glad to have met you. Glad you seem capable. Glad I love your father still. Fourteen years of study and fasting, contemplation and confrontation and dream interpretation

Have yielded desperate hope that the gods and my body will allow me try this all again.

I'll try not to be angry anymore. But that day—and I have to say it—the day that you were born...

That was a hard day for me.

Pericles and Thaisa leave us.

Hermione and Leontes, together again.

LEONTES

O, she's warm!

HERMIONE

If I were a real woman, I would have torn. Third degree, maybe fourth. One gaping, leaking hole. Stains on the prison floor. I might have died of infection. Too much force from the inside out, and no one to hold me back, to slow her entrance. That small sweet scorching skull of hers: if I were a real woman, the perimeter would still burn.

I am a sculpture, but if the sculpture was flesh, I would be just as still, love, because I would be clenching all my muscles, to keep my organs in, trying not to take a step. *Maybe*, I'd reason,

maybe if I never moved again, it would stop stinging. Because every step, love, would sting if I were a body emerging from a sixteen-year confinement, bleeding still—asking why am I needed again? Why, when I made someone to carry things on for me? Don't they understand my girl will carry things on for me? If I were a real woman, oh. Oh, love. If I weren't a public dream.

LEONTES

Tongue-tied, our queen? Speak you.

HERMIONE

I will tell you that this was no Hamlet-in-training with a pillow underneath a musty dress. It was skin flexing off bones, sinews reaching, a heart climbing up into a throat as a mouth forms into a yes. I'm here now as I have been for too many years to be alive anymore, with my hands my breasts my belly my voice-no-voice, all carved into a shape of *I forgive you*.

LEONTES

What you can do, I am content to look on. What to speak, I am content to hear.

HERMIONE

And I open, pores to air, blood escaping, loving. This will hurt, enduring the unendurable again. That is a truth and a ground that I stand on. They will exalt me for it in one century and fault me for it in another, but I will make beginnings, and I will make endings, and I will love you. That's why I was made.

Leontes and Hermione embrace in whatever way they can in this moment, and then they leave us.

Juliet, with a small bundle. Francisca is giving her space. Juliet stares at the bundle for a long while, unable to speak, unable to tear her eyes away. She is raw and exhausted. Every part of her aches towards a someone she does not understand.

JULIET

Is it tomorrow?

Francisca nods. This means that Claudio must be dead.

JULIET

to her baby

You and me then, huh?

long, full silence, and then

Hi.

Hi, little love.

Oh, you're weird-looking. You look kind of elderly, all scrunched up like that. Why are you so big and so little?

Hi.

Did you get all wizened in there? Is that why you're so scrunchy?

Did you find some wisdom in me?

Claudio, on the periphery, very much alive.

FRANCISCA

Act five?

CLAUDIO

Yeah.

FRANCISCA

And you need her?

CLAUDIO

Final tableau.

FRANCISCA

I see.

Remind me—it's textual? Her entrance?

She needs to rest, that's my only—(issue.)

CLAUDIO

The Duke references her.

FRANCISCA

Right.

Baby is healthy. Ten fingers, ten toes.

Nursing can be a trial. Remind her that she can reach out to me, will you?

Claudio nods.

Wake up with her. Don't let her breastfeed in the dark by herself.
She has a few stitches. She'll try to do too much. You'll need to watch her closely.

CLAUDIO

Okay.

FRANCISCA

Would your sister come help?

CLAUDIO

Maybe. She's—

FRANCISCA

Ask.
Please.

CLAUDIO

I'll ask.
Is she all right?

FRANCISCA

It's a wound. All of it. She may or may not want to tell you the story. And it might come back to her in pieces.

She'll be all right.

Beat.

Nice that you weren't executed.

CLAUDIO

Yeah.
You were with her?

FRANCISCA

The whole time.

CLAUDIO

emotional, but trying to be a grownup

Thank you.

Big deal.

FRANCISCA

She'll want you there for the next one.

Claudio takes that in. The next one—what? He's partly devastated that he missed this one, partly guilty, partly relieved.

JULIET

Hi, little girl.

Hi, brand new girl.

You look a little skeptical. Are you skeptical? Yeah, me too. How can I possibly? I know.

It's probably really bright out here for you. And I'm sure I seem younger and sillier out here than I did from the inside.

But I still smell like home, don't I?

I'm here. I'm here with you.

I don't know what that means.

I'm tired. I'm sorry. I love you. I know. Hi, baby.

I'm okay. It's okay, isn't it? Yeah. We're going to see, I think, won't we?

Hi.

Claudio and Francisca, apart from this. Claudio feels compelled to go to Juliet and their child and also compelled to watch for a little while longer. Francisca reads the conflict on his face.

FRANCISCA

Wait a moment. Let her be.

END OF PLAY