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Everymans Argot

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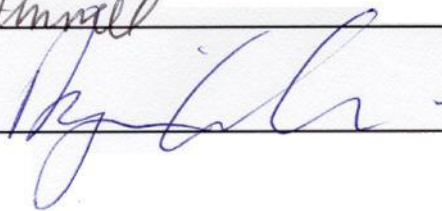
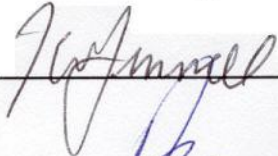
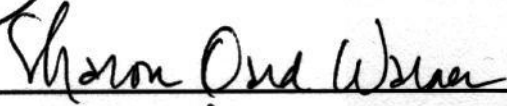
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Chairperson



EVERYMAN' S ARGOT

BY

KAMARIE CHAPMAN

B.A., Arts, Western Washington University, 2006

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

**Master of Fine Arts
Dramatic Writing**

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

May, 2009

DEDICATION

For Bryan, Brian, Jim, Doctor Deb, and Mr. Lortz. Amazing people that not only educate a student but teach a human how to become a person.

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There are so many times a person needs guidance not only as a student but as an artist seeking to find a voice that can feed the needs of the community they are submersed in. Dr. Brian Herrera is one of those exceptional people that has always given guidance when asked for, even if it wasn't what I wanted to hear at the time. He taught me to see what kind of artist I really was, and to embrace that. I will always take his teachings with me wherever I wind up in life.

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Doctor Deborah Greer is one of the first women I looked up to in awe as an artist, an educator, a feminist, and a scholar in my adult life and I only hope to one day be as great a teacher and mentor as she has been to me.

The Greeks say that siblings are closer than anyone else in family because they are made of the same blood. I believe this more and more as my siblings and I grow older together. To Kris, Erik, and Spuddy (especially) our childhood memories are often what I think is where I find the magic in the worlds I create. For Cody, John, Jared, and Hailey every time we spend more time together I see myself in you and that's a bond that can never be broken.

They (who ever "they" is) also say that it takes a village to raise one child. I am no exception there and would be amiss if I did not thank each one of the five people who have raised me, that I know as a parent. Each of you in your own way has provided me with the attention and care I needed at different times and has lent me a shoulder to cry on when needed.

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Last I would like to thank the spirit of a young woman who is not with us today, but if she were, I believe would have been showing us all a thing or two. To Sophie Large and her wonderfully amazing family; you have taught me that family is where you look for it. (Even in a barn in Chacombe) And though it seems so very far away from where I am at now, it always close at hand whenever I close my eyes. To everyone else I've met or will meet, thank you for teaching me the stories that need to be told.

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses different methods and theories in playwriting, specifically the importance of dramatic structure and the value of cultural awareness as a playwright. Many of the theories discussed range from Aristotle to more contemporary feminist theorist such as Marie Irene Fornes. It is followed by the play *Deception Pass: An American Story*, one of the plays discussed within the essay.

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Everyman's Argot

One of the best parts about being a playwright is taking the time to constantly rearrange the world as we know it through a different lens. Because we are in charge of the structure, we are in charge of the point of view within our story. And with each story varying so much, writing for the script is like going on a different journey every day. Sometimes the waters are calm and the winds keep the sails full, other times the sea of structure can throw you around and toss you overboard when you try to fight against it. That is the privilege of being the playwright.

The challenge is to stand on a moral ground. I remember one of the first things I learned about playwriting was to ask myself, "Why is this all happening today? What's so special about today that it belongs on stage?" Now that I have a couple years of writing under my belt, I feel like that question is deeper than it appears. It is not just about why the story, but it is about why the reason behind the story? Is this being written for your own edification or is there a higher purpose? Are you a bad playwright if you cannot answer that right away?

I don't know the answers to those questions. I only know that it torments me that I have beliefs I feel must be

addressed in my art, and I don't know how to make that happen. But I do know that the sea of theory and theatre is wide and awesome and to be able to grasp on to just a handful for even a moment within a script is an amazing thing, because with each new handful brings new discovery of a different outlook on life. A different way to communicate my argot with the Everyman.

Communication is the key to almost everything we do in life, and also in this article. To better understand the concept of the language I speak it seems appropriate to explain my background and view on how theatre works in my world.

Ever since I can remember, theatre has been a part of my existence. Not that my parents took us to see lots of plays or performances, although we did go to some, but looking back I realize that the way I function in society has always been theatrical in nature. Like a vessel being thrown around in a sea of unpredictability, whether playing Robin Hood in the back yard with my brothers and the neighbor kids, or writing poems of professed love and heartache as a teenager in junior high school. (Oh David Ives, you beautiful trumpet player, where are you now?)

Because the art of theatre is about being alive and living life in whichever way you decide best, it is an art that pays homage to humankind and the privileges and trials that go along with it.

Being a member of the human race can be an overwhelming task. It really depends on which route you decide to take. Walt Whitman chose to take the road less traveled as do many modern-day philosophers. I consider a philosopher of humankind to be a person who spends a lot of time thinking and studying people and their actions. Some of these philosophers never leave their home-town for their unconscious research, while others travel and study abroad taking in every aspect of new culture they can.

I am not sure if I began my philosophies consciously, but I suspect not. I spend a lot of time watching and listening and living. I try and make note of things and often in recounting they become more of a story and less of a fact. I suppose that is why I'm a story teller by nature.

One thing I have noticed throughout my travels and studies is that most people quickly adapt and assimilate into any given, social situation. Even if that means hanging out in the back corner and observing their surroundings until they feel comfortable enough to move in

on a conversation or even smile at a another person from across a busy room. Some people jump right in with both feet and never look back, while others mingle and blend into their surroundings like a chameleon.

Whichever move each individual makes in various social situations requires communication of some sort. Whether through physicalities or words each situation requires a quick adaptability and smooth transition to be accepted (or not) by the people in your surroundings. In my opinion this is a form of communication slang that we all naturally know or quickly learn the basics to. An **argot** to life.

Because each moment in life requires all our natural instincts to be at full-alert, this argot varies greatly depending on every possible aspect you could think of. Theatre tends to be the same way, as an art form.

I would like to generalize this observation in order to clarify the point. When boarding a boat or ship you enter a new world. In any language there are new words used and etiquettes unspoken that must be adhered to in order to order fit in.

A window is not longer a window, it is a "porthole." The floor is called the "deck" and the doors are called "hatches." You won't hear directions given in terms of left

and right because they are now "port" and "starboard." (A handy way to remember the difference is that port and left have the same number of letters, so they are the same direction) Until you gain your "sea legs" you may find yourself succumbing to nausea and if someone tells you the Captain or First Mate has given you a direct order, you will absolutely do what they say or else you may find yourself locked up in the brig for treason.

It is a different world. Most people find it difficult to even know what time it is because on ship they use the twenty-four hour time system. (4:00pm would be Sixteen Hundred Hours) It's not that ships don't allow just anyone to board, it's actually quite the opposite. Cruise liners and ferries are good examples of ships that anyone can board as long as they pay for the ticket. Their purpose is to facilitate and move the people.

The theater is no different. The purpose of theatre is to transport the audience to a different place and time using their natural "suspension of disbelief"¹ to be entertained by performers on stage telling a story.² And

¹A term believed to be coined by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in the late 18th century in his book, Biographia Literaria.

²Because so many things can be considered theatre, which we will go into later, for now a very broad definition will suit our purposes best.

like being on a ship, there are many rules and guidelines to follow and help you through the process that is theatre. Many of these are acquired naturally (unlike boarding a vessel) because so much of theatre is an imitation of life.

Every individual involved in the process of creating a theatrical production is an important part of the system. The director is the captain, and has a first mate; the assistant director. From there it goes to the lieutenant, the stage manager, and so on.

There is also language used in the theater that can sound foreign and be a little confusing if you don't know what it means. The basic directions alone will make you question your left and right. I actually have found that upstage and downstage can be really confusing for the novice actor! The world will shift again when you go from audience member to cast and crew. And yet, it is so important to make it not seem foreign to the people supporting it. Is it possible to bridge the gap? Or to open the lid on the vessel?

Aboard ships that are for transporting people, there are often signs to help explain where the heads (toilets) are and the basic rules of being onboard. If a passenger is given an order from the captain on a cruise ship, it will

most likely be in a life-threatening emergency, and rarely do the crew expect travelers to know where the starboard-front life crafts are. In theaters we do not expect the audience to know that actors are moving up stage left and in a Bogart-style spiral pattern. The director does not usually address the audience during a production and it is unlikely that anyone might be held in treason if they do not applaud. (Or will they?)

The above examples are how we make the experience of traveling on a ship or going to watch a performance at a theater a journey just about anyone can take if they are willing and can pay for a ticket.

But should an art form that relies so very much on the concept of humankind be so unattainable to the masses? Should only the privileged few that study theatre be able to label what it is and who's allowed to make it? On a ship this makes sense. If you're not on the crew, it's best just to stay out of the way or you could endanger the lives of a lot of people. But in the theater, the experience we try to give the audience should not be limited in any way because having the audience there is a major part of the process. In a way, taking a ride on a ship is very much like going to

see a production. Where you, as the passenger, are the audience.

Because almost everything we do in life, especially in repetition, becomes a sort of theatre I believe very much that it is the job of theatre practitioners to make the art accessible for all people across all divides.

In an endeavor to create theatre that exemplifies an accessibility for all people, I like to use the term "Everyman's Argot" whenever creating theatre of my own. This literally means "universal slang" which I find appropriate because of our natural instincts to be-- well, to be human! And in trying to create a theatre that follows the rules of Everyman's Argot, I continue to find that I am constantly breaking my own rules because the greater force of creative art dictates its needs and I cannot disobey. This conflict, while theatrical in itself, is the crux of this article and the everyday struggle I face as a new playwright and theatre practitioner in this amazing time to be alive and making art.

How the Everyman Becomes the Wright

Making art can also be tricky. The temptation to create "something new" that no one has ever seen before can

be a force that drives you mad. It³ has all been done before. However, it has not all been done in the way that the time and place of now dictates it must be done. Art becomes new when it is seen through different eyes during a different time. Mainly now.

One of the most habitual forms of artistic expression is through storytelling. It is how we know our history and how we believe in our existence on this planet. It is how we teach and learn at the same time. It can be said with thousands of words or with a single picture or gesture. Storytelling is the basic nature of theatre. Because storytelling is the basic nature of theatre, I believe theatre is an artistic expression that passes through every culture in some form or another.

Because theatre passes through every culture everywhere, it belongs to all people. Not just **some** people, but **all** people. All people includes all colors, all religions, all sizes, all ages, all languages, all abilities, and all genders. (And everything else in between) I truly believe in the ownership of all and I also consider theatre to be an art bound by all the cultures

³“It” meaning, that thing that you are artistically trying to create for the first time ever!

making up humankind. Because theatre belongs to everyone, creating **rules** is even more difficult than creating the art itself. But breaking them is so much fun.

Yet rules exist and often are meant to be broken or rediscovered throughout the process of making theatre. That is the main idea. We have discussed why the argot, now the theory behind the idea needs to be explored in order to understand the scripts to be discussed later, as examples.

The life of your typical theatre person tends to take many twists and turns. Most directors have been actors or stagehands at one point. A lot of the technical crew have tried their hands at writing, and many of the playwrights never dreamed they would be anything but an actor at one point or another. (Of course these are all statements that could easily be countered) Traveling through the various aspects of the art is not uncommon and I will use my own history as a case in point to better understand how practitioners become theorists.

For many people the desire to be on stage is a driving force in becoming interested in theatre. I absolutely fall into that category. Throughout my childhood and early adulthood I acted in several community theatre productions. When I got to college it was time to get serious about what

I was going to do, and though I tried to resist, I ended up taking a course of study within the arts. Theatre arts, specifically.

The study of becoming an actor tends to engross you in being interested in people. You start watching the way people walk and the hand gestures they use while talking. How their non-verbal language around different crowds and how age makes the body move in a much different manner than in youth. I think many people go through a phase of hating everyone and questioning how we are all so horrible. Then later on comes an unparalleled admiration for our race, at least, this was the journey I took.

Over the course of seven years I studied acting dutifully. I was educated in Stanislavski, Brecht, and Bogart. I learned about Suzuki and Boal. Things finally started to click for me. Understanding acting became a way for me to interpret the deepest part of my core. A way for me to understand how the world looked through my eyes by trying to imagine how it looked through the eyes of others.

There was only one problem. I didn't understand who those others were. I felt trapped by the characters I was being asked to portray. They were women (mostly), of varying ages with different backgrounds, and some of them I

could relate to on a certain level. Most of them I just didn't get. I'm sure I felt this way because most of the plays I was acting in were written by men who had all died before I was born. Or it could be that most of the plays were "classics" with "stock" characters. If it is a stock character, it is going to be a stereotype. So finding the truth in that person can often be difficult. There could also be myriad of other reasons, but any way you broke down the structure of the character, it wasn't working for me.

Frustrated and confused at this point in my education, I thought it would be a good idea to take a class in playwriting. (It also happened to be a requirement for my liberal arts degree.)

It was almost instantaneous that a spark of understanding the whole acting thing and the possibility to write great roles took place at the same time. Why shouldn't an actor be a writer? Wouldn't they understand the characters best? And (oh my God) that must be what all my teachers meant when they said I was so close to being the character, but that the transformation hadn't fully taken place. I understood now.

My teacher and mentor, Bryan Willis, told me on his first day of teaching our class that playwright is spelled

similarly to shipwright because it is the process of building something with structure.⁴ It makes such perfect sense that the vessels of the ship and play have to have a creator. Someone who builds them from the ground up and knows every knot in the wood that holds them together. I knew when I heard this that I wanted to be a playwright.

Theories That Bind the Structure

It was so easy to say, "I wanna be a playwright." I had no idea the challenges that lay ahead. The challenges that are still there, and the ones that are lurking around corners in the dark.

Some of playwriting can be taught. Structure is a difficult thing to understand, especially when it seems to come somewhat naturally to a person. When you don't know what you're doing right it makes it more difficult to understand why things don't always work. The easiest way to understand this dilemma is by accepting that no two plays are alike and each will dictate its own process.

⁴In a lecture on 18 November 2004, in an undergraduate/graduate course in playwriting, Bryan Willis (founder of Northwest Playwrights' Alliance, Playwright Extraordinaire, Mentor, and graduate of New York University's Dramatic Writing Program) gave the class this definition when he started teaching classes at Western Washington University. I know this because I still have my spiral notebook with his words of wisdom scratched down!

The next challenge is to establish yourself as the playwright. It is very difficult to accept each play for what it is when you are unaware of your job.

I believe the job of the playwright is to serve the art of theatre. That is Art with a capitol A. Harkening in Dionysius, if you will⁵. And that is where the theories come into play.

There are hundreds of ideas about how theatre should work. Antonin Artaud believed that the only way to reach an audience was utilize a technique that was a sort of language "halfway between gesture and thought".⁶ Gordon Craig believed that it was easier to get rid of actors and just create "Über-Marionettes" so that the frailties of humans would not misinterpret the play.⁷ Everyone has their take on how theatre ought to be and I am no different.

It is at this point that I need to decide who my theatre is going to be for. From an actor's perspective I

⁵ Jim Linnell, Associate Dean of The Fine Arts at The University of New Mexico, Playwright, and Professor is currently working on an untitled book about playwriting that elaborates this concept with much more eloquence than I'll ever be able to assert.

⁶ Artaud, Antonin. *The Theatre and Its Double*. New York: Grove Press Inc. 1958 (Translated by Mary C. Richard) (pg. 86)

⁷ Gerould, Daniel. *Theatre/ Theory/ Theatre: The Major Critical Texts From Aristotle to Zeami to Soyinka and Havel*. New York: Applause Cinema and Theatre Books, 2000. (pg. 390 - 398)

want anyone to be able to play the roles I write. I don't care how old they are or what kind of body type they have. I don't care what their skin color is or if they're disabled. I want everyone to have access to my plays. As I understand it, acting is basically embodying the spirit of a character. No matter who or what that character is. So any skilled actor should be able to play any role. No?

Because my plays are going to be for the people, I want them to feed the needs of my community. Of any community. But since I can only write from my perspective, they will most likely come from a place of need within my culture that can (hopefully) be translated anywhere by anyone.

I realize that I am not going to solve world hunger with my plays, but these are the ideals I try keep in mind while writing. And because I have worked really hard on educating myself, I want for my plays to have a way of naturally educating anyone who performs in them or watches on of the productions. I want for the people involved in one of my productions to take away something they will always remember, even if that something is very small and might be forgotten.

I want my stories to linger in the back of people's minds. That's my job as the playwright. And I think that

everyone else has a job too. The actors, director, and stage hands have a job of supporting the script. Supporting the story. They need to tell the story in a way no one has done before while still honoring the vision of the playwright. The way a crew would support the ship so that she stays seaworthy.

This whole idea may sound playwright-centric, there's no denying that. But having been on several ends of the spectrum⁸ I feel like I have come to this reasoning very systematically and with justification. If the playwright is doing their job to serve the art, then the collaboration process that happens from page to stage should be an exciting voyage that everyone involved takes together.

At least that is my dream. If I could make art like that, I could die a happy woman. So many things are easier said than done because it's not just about paying homage to the art or the creator or the structure set forth by the wright, but it's about being of service to humankind and the culture you (I) come from.

If theatre is this sacred vessel created to serve the human race and the cultures it embraces so wildly, then is

⁸I have also spent a lot of time directing, producing, creating sets and props, and running boards. I am NOT a good lighting designer!

it not also the job of the practitioners to open the lid and let the people look inside? In what I could only imagine a perfect theatrical world being, the answer would be yes. Now to put it to the test.

A Play's The Thing!

Holding true to all my ideals and a pocket full of research, I have attempted to emulate my theories in my writing. It is through this process that I have come to understand that ideals are much easier to state than to put into action.

There are two plays that I am currently working on that I would like to discuss. The reason for choosing these two plays is that they have the same problems, but they have been approached from two very different angles. As I have mentioned before, every play has its own process that very seldom will let you, the playwright, dictate what it will be. These two plays are no different. As a matter of fact, they are perfect examples because they both reveal the weakness in the structure of the ship. Just because I build it, doesn't mean it is always seaworthy.

So why even bother? If the project at hand does not do what you want it to do and only makes you seem like an

idealist with no method, what's the point in laboring over it? Well, that is the part of paying homage to the art. Letting Dionysus take you where he wants you to go and not letting your own, mortal self get in the way. I know this sounds lofty, but it's the only way to describe the job of the playwright. The script starts to become a living being with each character and conflict you write. And it is easy to let it weigh you down if you try and fight the direction the script wants to go.

The first play is called, *Deception Pass: An American Story*. It is a play about a small island I grew up on (in the Puget Sound) and this ominous bridge that connects the island to the mainland. It is a play about homecomings and reconciliations, and about taking the sins of our fathers and carrying them forward.

I found myself in a precarious position of **having** to write *Deception Pass*. I had become absolutely obsessed with the world I was creating, unable to function until the story was out of my head and on the paper. Part of the process of being obsessed includes waking up in the middle of the night or the wee hours of the morning to the sound of characters' monologues in my head. They would not let me sleep until I would finally get up and record the things they were saying.

I find that this process of writing happens to me more often than not, but usually the characters are not all speaking from the same story. Often they'll be totally disconnected and seem satisfied once their short story or idea has been written down. *Deception Pass* was not (and still is not) satisfied until everyone in the play has had their say on the matter.

Having so many characters that were already connected to a story in my mind was an odd experience because the whole thing usually begins with one. And I suppose this script did, but I think it was just because she was the first in line. The character's name is Ebey (pronounced Eee-bee). She is a seventy year old woman on the sand flats off Whidbey Island digging for clams with her granddaughter, Prudence. All she wanted to do was recount a scene (similar to my own life) of a woman teaching a child the ways of the Island.

I did not know her name at first, but within her first few words I knew exactly what she looked like. I knew how her voice sounded and even knew that all her life she had worn hats but still had freckles on her face. I found this odd because usually I engage in a process I call talking with my character. I will let them roam around the stage

and ask them questions. Big questions like, "What's your first memory?" Usually, they don't have one until I make it up for them. But Ebey seemed to arrive already equipped with everything she wanted me to know.

I spent hours just writing down monologue after monologue of Ebey's and with each monologue came another story about another character. First it was her granddaughter then her husband. Then her son and so on.

By the time Ebey had exhausted all her stories the other characters were taking her place with stories of their own. Some of them came from events that actually took place. One, for example, was from the true story that a man chopped his wife up, put her in a suitcase and threw her off Deception Pass Bridge. Others are stories from the veterans my grandfather and father knew. One thing I knew, was they were all having a common theme. I felt like I was recounting the story of *Our Town* but in a way it has never been told. And I began to love the story of a simple family gone epic, gone mythic. (How very Greek!)

This script would tell the stories of humankind, especially of this particular part of the country, so I was happy about that, but it was also a story that required very specific casting of gender, age, and even certain races.

Two of the characters are Chinese immigrants who died many years ago from being thrown over the side of a ship. They haunt the pass. This play is being produced in New Mexico, and finding two Chinese actors to play the roles has been challenging (to say the very least). And I have been standing a firm ground on not just casting anyone Asian. (Finding any Asian actors available in Albuquerque is not the easiest task either.) My solution to the problem? Cast the best actors possible and pay homage to the memory of the characters. I will not have them dye their hair black and I will not ask for them to have makeup giving them an illusion of being Chinese. I will probably use masks in vibrant colors to honor the culture.

The other characters in the play are very specifically arch types (not stereo types) of a family of veterans. A Korean War vet, a Viet Nam vet, and a current active duty member of the Air Force. The two vets are men. The Grandfather and Father of the active duty member, Prudence. I chose a woman to play the Airmen for a very specific reason. This play is my comment on the current wars America is engaged in and the fact that we are running out of our young men to send into slaughter.⁹

It was not a script that any actor could be in. They must absolutely to be right for the part. Also, seeing as I currently reside in New Mexico, I have had a lot of guilt about writing a play that takes place in the Pacific Northwest part of the country. How was this serving the needs of my community? How does this speak to the people that live here?

The second play is one I'm currently calling *Blinded*. This title stems from the term Gender Blind and I distinctly remember the day the concept was borne.

Originally this process began with the hopeful possibility of creating a play in which gender would not be a consideration for casting. At first it seemed the easier way to write the story was to make each character androgynous. I wasn't overwhelmed by the thought of this new way of thinking because I had written several ten-minute plays that had characters with no gender. The problem came in writing characters (specifically human characters) with no gender in consideration, they seemed to lose their personalities because they were being **written** androgynously.

To clarify more, here is the definition of androgynous:

⁹As a veteran of the U.S. Marines, I have a lot of thoughts about women being in combat.

Androgynous:

1. being both male and female; hermaphroditic.
2. having both masculine and feminine characteristics.
3. having an ambiguous sexual identity.
4. neither clearly masculine nor clearly feminine in appearance: the androgynous look of many rock stars.
5. Botany. having staminate and pistillate flowers in the same inflorescence.

The quagmire the definition poses is if someone is androgynous they have the characteristics of both (or all) sexes. This method may sound like a good way to go about writing a character that any actor can play, but from a playwright's point of view, the character can get lost. How is the character supposed to know who they are, if they playwright doesn't?

Already the difference in writing this play compared to the other would probably have most people thinking it's two different playwrights. I feel like two different people when I sit down to write these plays.

See, I did not know who the characters were in *Blinded*. Every time I sat down to work on the script I had a different idea of what they looked like or who they were with every line they said. They didn't have one story because they had the stories of a hundred other people all

rolled up into one. I didn't understand them or what they wanted.

That would not have been such a big deal except that there was no good way to create conflict. Uncle Aristotle says that one of the fundamental basics in designing plot is make up some conflict.¹⁰ A handy trick for creating conflict is to not let your characters have what they want. This all comes back to, if you don't know your characters then how do you know what they want, and how can you possibly not let them have it?

I decided a completely androgynous play was not the wisest approach. I was getting close though.

I have been asking a lot of questions about gender lately. I mean, what is it? I know that there are sexes (biologically speaking) but what has that got to with gender? Does every little girl born have to like wearing pink? Is every boy that comes into this world going to love baseball? And if he doesn't, what does that say about his sex? Should a woman be labeled a lesbian because she likes softball and Patsy Cline? What connection does gender have

¹⁰ Aristotle. Translated by Mary C. Richards. *The Rhetoric and Poetics of Aristotle (Modern Library College Editions)*. New York, Random House Inc., 1954.

with sexual orientation? How does this effect a character and is it the playwright's job to explore and figure out the answers to these questions?

I believe it is my job, as the playwright I want to be, to ask these questions and at least answer them for myself so I can ask them of my audience. Like so many other voices out there, people trapped by the idea of gender should be represented too. Over the last twenty years there have been a lot people (not just theatre practitioners) trying to figure out the answers to the questions above and many more. So I turned to my research.

An idea that really stuck with me (and pretty much started the need to write this play in the first place) was that gender is actually a performance having nothing to do with sexual identity. Judith Butler affirms this in an article she wrote titled: "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory". Butler suggests that gender is not an expression of identity but rather a performance taught to us throughout our lives. Butler says, "Gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the

extent that it is performed."¹¹ This makes sense to me. Because gender is a performance, it cannot dictate anything about our sexual orientation or have any predetermined ways of doing things "right." The problem lies within society and thinking that there are gender norms and that they should always be adhered to.

Legally, society says there are two genders. Male and Female. You either identify as one or the other according to the letter of the law. Occasionally there are exceptions made for someone that is intersex (formerly and incorrectly known as hermaphrodite) being able to identify with the sex that they seem to have been identifying with, but in general our laws only allow for two sexes. Two genders.

The confusion starts when people are told that your sex not only determines your gender but also who you are as a person. And we begin to put people on one side or the other. So what happens to all those that don't want to be on the side chosen for them, or that just want to be somewhere in the middle? There are no bathrooms labeled for a "Person". (Although there are some labeled with the

¹¹ Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory". *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Dec. 1988), pg. 524

unisex sign, and that is at least a little more sensitive than the standard)

So with all these new ideas crammed in my mind, I began to see that my challenge with *Blinded* was not just in casting a play that anyone of any gender could be in, but to write a play that tackles the concept of Gender Blind. It is like saying you're "Color Blind." Once you say it, race is the only thing you can think about. Every word that comes out of your mouth is all of a sudden loaded with the possibility of not being a pure, colorless comment on who you are as a person. The same thing happens when we say we are "Gender Blind." The minute we think it, it's the only thing we can think about at all.

Now my goal was to figure out how to translate this concept into a script, that deals with domestic issues (because that is usually what all the fuss is about when it comes to making laws that omit entire cultures from basic human rights), that an audience can grasp onto without being experts in queer or gender theory?

Going back to the characters, I realized they had to be assigned sexes in my mind so that I could create a person with a name and a face and a story. If I don't have that bit of vital information, then I can't write the script.

In a much different approach I decided to create the play out of a cast with two people that identify as male and two that identify as female. Throughout the play the only thing that defines the character is a piece of costuming. One of the characters always wears a bathrobe, another a flannel shirt, another chunky glasses, and the fourth a leather jacket. Each actor must be able to embrace each character. They have to bring to life the spirit of the story and person they are portraying by only being given a simple clothing item. Almost like a puppet, only this one doesn't always look the same.

With the actors constantly changing character and perceived sex, the play takes a new twist on itself every time a scene gets acted out. In one scene Charlie and Shannon are sisters, in a another they are siblings of opposite sexes. Sometimes Shannon is in a straight relationship with lover Casey, and other times it is a gay relationship. The characters are all dealing with love, babies, marriage, and death. Issues that affect every one of us in our own very personal ways.

The tough part here is that this play doesn't hold up my theoretical ideals either. By forcing the cast to be of two distinct sexes I have basically cut out the idea of

having folks that tend to be more on the androgynous side in the play. I want to use the stereotypes of what is considered gender to ask the tough questions of the audience and myself. I've also created a play that is very much for thirty somethings to be cast in. Certainly within the script no one is over forty. And finally, am I really creating a script that is accessible to everyone? Or do you need to be a gender theory expert to "get" what's going on? Can your average theatre-going audience appreciate the play and just let the concept wash over them?

The Rub

It may seem fairly obvious to an outside observer that these two plays have very similar problems. To fix them has required two very different paths. It all lies in the structure. When I build a play, I build a world. Sometimes it's seaworthy and sometimes it's not. The real question is, what is seaworthy?

A play can be entertaining, and that can be enough. A play can have characters that we absolutely love but a story that is completely unmemorable. And sometimes that floats. I don't want to start naming productions, but if you've never been to one that made you wonder how it ever made it

as far as it did, I'm sure you will eventually (most of us have this experience in the movie theater).

Where I stand now with my craft and what I want to do with it is a whole different level than where I was six years ago, or even three. I find myself on a different level than I was last year at this time. The challenge I find now is making my art work for my theory. But also being aware that it may not do what I want it to. That I may just be the middle man for a story that needs to be much bigger than me or any part of me, which may sound a little strange, but really isn't. With any story the characters live on beyond the confines of their structure or the creator. A good story is designed to be that way.

I have learned that many people have a lot of good stories to tell. When I tell people that I'm a playwright after being asked, "So, what exactly is it you do?" I can almost guarantee that 90% of the time someone will respond back with, "What you ought to write a play about is..." Truthfully, I probably ought to. I ought to write about a lot of things that sometimes get pushed to the wayside.

That is the really amazing thing about being a playwright. I get to build the next world that I want to live in for a while. I get to put the structure to the

voices. Then see if it's a vessel that can sail over the test of time, or maybe it never leaves the dock. And with each script carefully structured from the ground up maybe I'll get closer and closer to that perfect play. The one that sails off into the beautiful, red sunset.

Deception Pass: An American Story

A Play By: Kamarie Chapman

Revised: 04/12/09

Deception Pass: An American Story

By: Katarie Chapman

CAST

Prudence..... In her thirties. Of the Island.
Ebey Prudence's grandmother. In her seventies.
Of the Island.
Young Ebey Played by same actor as June.
Dave Prudence's father. Of the Island.
June Prudence's Mother. Of the Pass.

John Prudence's Godfather. Of the Pass.
Hap A retired Naval bomb specialist.
Prudence's Grandfather. Of the Pass.
The Moon Sisters The ghosts of two Chinese immigrants
left to wander the shores of the Pass.

Act One, Scene One:

The lights illuminate a large, metal and cement bridge. It hovers above the stage and looks as though it's being held up by the thick fog surrounding it. From behind the bridge, Madrona trees can be seen in the moonlight, their graceful arms poised against the night sky, out of the rocky points they grow from.

The sound of the ocean.

The sound of a coyote in the distance.

Then silence.

EBEY, a woman in her seventies rolls up the cuffs on her jeans and steps into a pair of clogs. SHE gets a bucket and a shovel.

She steps to the front of the stage and begins digging for clams.

Across the back of the stage (over everything) a movie image of a young girl running around in the water along the sand flats flickers.

EBEY speaks to the little girl as though she is actually there.

PRUDENCE sits on the opposite side of the stage fastened in a row of airplane seats. She looks out the window.

PRUDENCE

Going back is always stressful. It's not like you can just fly into Seattle and head to Grandma's. You have to get to the Island.

EBEY

See? Now this is a perfect spot, Prudence. There's lots of rocks and we're on- kind of- a little sand island.

PRUDENCE

To be perfectly honest, I hate flying.

EBEY

See how the water up there flows right along here?

PRUDENCE

No matter how many times I do it.

I wish that trains could go faster. If I could take a train instead, I'd never fly.

EBEY

That's what you want, and nice flow. Then you can make the water do the digging for you.

PRUDENCE

It got even worse after I joined the service. They didn't tell me about all the traveling you do, and that the Air Force prefers to go by plane when they travel.

I'm seriously thinking I should have joined the Army.

The plane lurches and PRUDENCE grabs onto anything tighter.

EBEY

That's just right.

PRUDENCE grabs the barf bag she has kept close by.

PRUDENCE

One time, when I flew with Ebey, she made one of these barf bags into a puppet.

EBEY

Those are mussels. We'll grab some of those before we leave. For now let's just dig some clams.

PRUDENCE draws a face on the bag with a pen. She then demonstrates how the puppet works.

PRUDENCE

My name is flight attendant Jane.

EBEY

And now you start digging. Be kind of gentle because you don't want to crack the shells. Then they're not any good...

PRUDENCE

My family all live by Penn Cove. Famous for mussels and pottery. And the best sunsets you'll ever see.

EBEY

That's it. Now look at what you've dug up. Are there any clams in there? Oh! Here's one! But look... it's not the right kind. It's a cuckold. Those aren't even good for chowder. So, what you do is toss that one back into the ocean.

EBEY tosses the small clam into the ocean.

PRUDENCE

Flying is such a strange sensation.

EBEY

And make sure you throw them far enough so that the seagulls go over there and leave us alone.

PRUDENCE

Sometimes when I fall asleep at the window I wake up and completely freak out. Especially if it's a clear day and I can see everything below.

EBEY

Good. Now, look at how we've dug along here? See the water pulling through it like a stream?

PRUDENCE

It's kind of like in my sleep I had blocked out that I was on a plane, and when I wake up I'm falling out of the sky.

EBEY

Put your shovel in there and gently scrape along the bottom and see what you get.

PRUDENCE

And then for just a moment, a single moment, I can look. Through the desert the lines are flat and stretch on for miles and miles. Like a grid system. Then when you get into the mountains they wind and twist around. And that's when I see all the lines that connect. That bring us home.

EBEY

Look! There's a whole bunch of them! One, two, three, four, five! Five good ones.

PRUDENCE

This part is the worst. I really hate landings.

PRUDENCE takes the barf bag and begins breathing hard into it. In and out. In and out.

EBEY

Now let's get some mussels and go home. Try to pick the ones that are big and have small beards. Yes that's the scraggly stuff holding them on to the bunch. See?

PRUDENCE

I figure if you have to crash, it's best to do it over the water. I think it would feel like a pillow. An icy pillow and then you would just be gone.

The plane lurches again and PRUDENCE continues to breathe into her barf bag.

EBEY

They just kind of pull away.

PRUDENCE

It's probably just a matter of timing. I suppose a massive explosion into the side of the mountain would be just as quick. Maybe quicker.

PRUDENCE braces herself and breathes hard into the bag.

EBEY

And when we get home we'll let them just kind of sit in the water. Then they suck it in, then out. That's called purging. It gets all the sand out from the inside. But you just have to let them be for a while... They have a funny way of doing exactly what we want them to do when we just leave them alone.

The projection across the screen stops. The plane has landed. PRUDENCE takes the barf bag and turns it back into a crumpled puppet.

PRUDENCE

On behalf of our airline, the Captain and crew would like to thank you for not dying with us today. We hope you enjoy your stay in Seattle, or wherever your ground travel takes you, and hope to see you again soon.

A gong sounds. The sound of wooden blocks beating quickly together can be heard. (Much like in a performance of Beijing Opera.) PRUDENCE and EBEEY exit.

Two figures enter the stage dressed as Chinese immigrants from the turn of the century, their faces painted or masked in a version of a Beijing Opera Mask.

These are THE MOON SISTERS.

THEY enter the stage gracefully. Mechanically. THEY move along the bridge steadfast, the daunting height does not bother them.

MOON SISTER #1

Deception Pass Bridge is one thousand, four hundred and eighty seven feet of steel and concrete connecting Whidbey Island to Fidalgo Island.

MOON SISTER #2

The bridge spans twenty eight feet across with two eleven foot lanes of roadway going in each direction, flanked by two three foot lanes of sidewalk.

MOON SISTER #1

Deception Pass Bridge is actually a deception in name.

MOON SISTER #2

The bridge consists of two bridges joined together by a tall island in between.

MOON SISTER #1

The northern section of the bridge spans over Canoe Pass and ends at Pass Island.

EBEY enters on stage below the bridge. SHE moves between the SISTERS to a different beat.

EBEY

This took 460 tons of steel from The Wallace Bridge and Structural Co. in Seattle, Washington. The Canoe Pass Bridge stretches over five hundred and eleven feet with three hundred and fifty foot high arch. The bridge section stretching over the Deception Pass, from Pass Island to Whidbey Island, is nine hundred and seventy six feet long.

MOON SISTER #1

Deception Pass Bridge holds the record for most photographers taking pictures to the east or west at any given time.

ALL face random directions and mimic taking a snapshot.

Act One, Scene Two

*The gong sounds again.
They year is 1968. A small group
of TEENAGERS run onto the center
of the bridge. They laugh
excitedly passing a bottle and
sipping on cans of Rainier.*

JOHN

No really! This is where he's gonna do it!

DAVE

John, you seriously believe everything he's told you?

JOHN

He's your Dad, Dave.

DAVE

That doesn't mean that I believe everything he says.

JUNE

Are you sure we didn't miss it?

JOHN

Don't worry. He said nine thirty... it's just nine thirty now.

DAVE

Probably won't even happen.

JUNE

What? Why?

JOHN

It'll happen. Give your Dad a break Dave, will ya?

JUNE

So what is this thing again?

JOHN

It's called a photo flash bomb- or something like that-

JUNE

What's it for?

JOHN

He said they take them and drop them like bombs in areas that they need more surveillance in-

JUNE

Oh, I remember! That's those things we saw in the garage...

DAVE

When were you in the garage?

JUNE

A while ago. We- John and I were waiting for you.

DAVE

Where?

JOHN

At the house. You were still getting off work.

JUNE

And we were just sitting on the porch swing waiting... And Hap came home. He needed some help getting some wood.

DAVE

Oh.

JUNE

And we saw them in the garage. He has a couple of them.

JOHN

Yeah! That's the day you stepped in the drip pan and fell over.

JUNE

Hey! I still have a battle wound from that fall.

SHE shows them a small scar on the back side of her arm. JOHN grabs her.

JOHN

Ah. Poor baby! You want me to kiss it and make it better?

JUNE giggles and pulls away. She bumps into DAVE while escaping JOHN'S grip.

DAVE

I can take care of that.

HE very gently kisses the spot on JUNE'S arm.

JOHN

Right. So I just asked him about them- the bombs- you know? What they do and what they're for...

DAVE

-And he just reveals all this top secret information to you?

JOHN

What does he care? It's probably not all that top secret if he's got them in the garage.

DAVE

Wow. He never told me anything...

JUNE

Soooo does it blow up the place they drop it on?

JOHN

No. It takes a gigantic picture of the whole area and then it blows itself up.

DAVE

If it blows itself up, how do you get the picture?

JOHN

I dunno. Hap says it takes the picture and then the film pops out of the side. Then they go find it.

DAVE

Well it sounds like a load to me. How are they supposed to find a tiny thing of film from a blown up bomb?

JOHN

I dunno. Hap didn't say. That's probably the top secret part... Just cause you never asked about it before, doesn't mean that it's a load.

DAVE

How do you know?

JOHN

Cause I believe Hap. When I asked him about what they were, he explained it all- better than I can do- and that's when he said I could meet him here to see how they work. Besides, why would he make something like that up?

HAP crosses onto the bridge where the group of teens are at. HE is clean-cut with salt and pepper hair and walks in confidently. Over his shoulder, he carries a duffle bag.

HAP

I wouldn't make anything up.

The TEENS are shocked at the undetected entry.

JOHN

Oh hey, Hap.

DAVE

Hi- Dad..

HAP

I see you brought along some witnesses.

JOHN

I just figured it was going to be quite a sight.

HAP

Should be.

HAP looks at DAVE.

HAP

You got quiet all of a sudden...

DAVE

Uh- yes Sir- I was just waiting to see what happens.

HAP

Probably best you do, so I don't have to hear you talking about how I'm full of it anymore.

DAVE

Dad, I didn't mean it-

HAP

I said, put a lid on it.

DAVE

Yes, Sir.

A moment of awkward silence.

JUNE

So these things are really used to take giant pictures?

HAP

Yup.

HAP unzips the bag. Something glows inside.

The TEENS all Oooooo and Ahhhhh appropriately.

HAP pulls out the "bomb" from the bag. It is smaller than expected.

HAP

John, I told your folks you were out here. Didn't want nobody getting in trouble.

JOHN

My folks don't ever worry when we're out with you.

JUNE

Is it gonna blow anything up in the water?

HAP

Nope.

JUNE

Are we gonna get in trouble with the government?

HAP

Let's hope not.

JUNE

But won't they know?

HAP

It's not top secret information or anything... It's just-classified.

DAVE

Classified? That's just like top secret, isn't it?

JOHN addresses DAVE wide-eyed.

JOHN

Don'tcha want to see what happens?

DAVE

Yes.

JOHN

Then quit asking questions.

HAP

The explosives inside the photo flash bombs aren't any more powerful than a firecracker. They won't do any damage at all.

Car lights flash behind the crowd dangerously close as a car crosses the bridge.

JOHN shouts after the car.

JOHN

Hey! Slow down, you jerk!

JUNE

I hate it when they go so fast.

HAP

Someday someone's gonna drive themselves right off the edge into the pass...

A moment of silence as HAP's words echo in their ears.

The SISTERS enter on the stage below the bridge.

The gong and blocks clank appropriately as they slink their way directly under the group on the bridge.

JUNE

It's getting late. I told my parents I'd be home by ten. This gonna take much longer?

JOHN

Oh come on! It's not that late.

JUNE

Just feels like it.

HAP

That's okay, this'll only take a few seconds.

HE begins to fiddle with the bomb and it glows more intensely. The TEENS step back a bit afraid.

HAP

Now I've set this thing to go off exactly fifteen feet under the water.

DAVE

What'll happen then?

HAP

Not sure. I just made them... never got to see them go off.

HAP stands squarely up to the railing of the bridge. He holds the bomb over the edge in his extended arms.

HAP

Count of three...

ALL

Three.

Two.

One.

JOHN

Geronimo!

Hap drops the bomb.

The sea wakes suddenly.

The SISTERS watch it fall and catch it in a black bag.

A long pause as everyone continues to watch the bomb fall down the long, long distance.

DAVE

Nothing happened. It's a dud-

Then a loud rumbling sound and a bright green light flashes up from the waters above onto the faces of all watching.

They freeze in time.

Act One, Scene Three:

EBEY sits in the middle of the stage under the bridge. Next to her is a stack of several newspapers. They are all the same. SHE opens each one tenderly and then cuts out the exact same article.

The MOON SISTERS watch from the side.

Ritualistically, each article she has cut out is laid in front of her in a perfect line.

PRUDENCE enters. EBEY looks at her for a moment and then returns to cutting articles.

PRUDENCE

Hello Ebay.

EBEY sings slowly, and softly in response. The song is continuous with PRUDENCE'S questions overlapping in the natural breaks.

EBEY

***Dear Prudence,
Won't you come out to plaaa-aaa-aaa-aaay?***

PRUDENCE leans over to see what the article is that EBEY cuts out so meticulously.

PRUDENCE

I brought you something back from New Mexico.

RUDENCE hands EBEY a Guadalupe Ornament made of glitter and tin.

EBEY

*Dear Prudence,
Greet the brand new daaaa-aaa-aaa-aaaay.*

PRUDENCE

How many copies of the paper did you get?

EBEY

*The sun is out,
The sky is blue,*

PRUDENCE

One for everyone?

EBEY

*It's beautiful,
And so are you.*

PRUDENCE

Did you write up the obituary?

EBEY

*Deeeeeaaaaar Prudence,
Won't you come out to plaaaaay?*

PRUDENCE

And that's when the sad guitar starts.

EBEY

Yes. It reminds me of raindrops. When they drip off the leaves in the sunlight after a heavy storm.

PRUDENCE

It reminds me of the ocean. When the tide is pulling out.

MOON SISTER #1

What did you find this morning?

MOON SISTER #2

Something of use.

*MOON SISTER #2 rummages through
her satchel.*

EBEY notices PRUDENCE'S suitcase.

EBEY

Are you staying here?

PRUDENCE

I was hoping that'd be okay.

EBEY

Not at your Uncle John's?

PRUDENCE

...Ebey, I don't even have anything over there. It's not my house.

EBEY

I know. All your things are here. Down in the basement.

PRUDENCE

Only five boxes.

Besides, I'm sure Uncle John's parents want to go through all that stuff.

PRUDENCE delicately picks up one of the articles and begins to read it.

MOON SISTER #2 pulls out a spool of thread.

MOON SISTER #1

Mmmmmmm. Anything else?

MOON SISTER #2

How else you gonna mend a broken heart?

EBEY

Maybe you should help them? So, no, you can't stay here.

PRUDENCE is distracted from reading.

PRUDENCE

Oh c'mon, Ebey! You don't want to be alone do you?

EBEY

I'm alone all the time.

And that's Grandma to you.

PRUDENCE

Whatever.

I worry about you.

EBEY

I think right now, I'm more worried about you.

PRUDENCE

Ebey, if you're worried about me, then let me stay here.

EBEY

Well, maybe it's better you stay with your father.

PRUDENCE

What? Jesus! I'm not staying over there! This is ridiculous! Just because his place is bigger? You have two extra rooms! I don't want to stay there!

EBEY

Settle down.

MOON SISTER #1

What else you got in there?

PRUDENCE

Settle down?!?! How the crap does that work, Ebey? My Dad dies, and you want me to stay with your son?

EBEY

My son is your actual father.

PRUDENCE

Could have fooled me!

EBEY

That's not why I want you to stay there.

PRUDENCE

Well forget it. I'll just call a cab and stay at the motel. I really don't need this shit today.

PRUDENCE can no longer hold in her tears.

MOON SISTER #2 pulls some dried herbs out of the satchel.

MOON SISTER #2

Got some lavender.

MOON SISTER #1

From where?

MOON SISTER #2

From Ebey's gardens.

MOON SISTER #1

That will work.

PRUDENCE crumbles up the article and picks up her suitcase as if to leave.

MOON SISTER #2 puts the lavender in EBEY'S pocket.

EBEY holds up the tin Guadalupe.

EBEY

This is really pretty. Thank you.

PRUDENCE looks back in disbelief.

PRUDENCE

That's all you can say?

Ebey look, I'm just asking you if you'll let me stay here? C'mon. Don't make me beg.

EBEY

That's "Grandmother" to you.

PRUDENCE

Grandmother, please?

EBEY

Well, if you stay it's not because I don't want to be alone. Your father checks in on me.

PRUDENCE

How thoughtful of him.

EBEY

But he could use a friend right now too.

PRUDENCE

I'm sure he could. I could use a father. I don't want to talk about this anymore. Can I stay here or not?

EBEY

I'll put this in the kitchen window. I like the way the light makes it sparkle.

PRUDENCE

Great. I'm so glad you enjoy it.

PRUDENCE puts her jacket on and turns to leave again.

EBEY

You can stay.

PRUDENCE

Thank you.

PRUDENCE produces a hanky and wipes away the running makeup. As she does, she rediscovers the wadded up newspaper clipping.

*She reads through the article
falling to her knees. Holding
back tears is difficult. EBey
strokes her hair and holds her.*

*EBey begins to sing again,
continuous as before, with
PRUDENCE'S words in the natural
breaks.*

EBey

***Dear Prudence,
Open up your eye-ahhh-ahhh-eyes.***

PRUDENCE

That's a really pretty obituary.

EBey

***Dear Prudence,
See the sunny sky-ahhh-ahhh-ies.***

PRUDENCE

I think he would have liked it.

EBey

***The wind is low
The birds will sing,***

PRUDENCE

Poor Uncle John.

EBey

***That you are part
Of everything.***

PRUDENCE

It doesn't seem real.

EBey

***Deeeeeaaaaar Prudence,
Won't you come out to plaaaaay?***

Sad guitars.

PRUDENCE

Raindrops.

EBEY

Pulling tides.

MOON SISTERS

*A moment of long silence as
PRUDENCE reads.*

I didn't know it was an aneurism. I mean someone told me, but it
didn't process-

PRUDENCE

Your Dad wrote it.

EBEY

That would make sense.

PRUDENCE

You got that thread handy?

MOON SISTER #1

*MOON SISTER #2 hands the thread
to her sister, who begins to
thread it on a needle.*

*The lights fade down leaving the
two in a spot, for a moment, and
then darkness.*

Act One, Scene Four:

The lights come up on a different section of the stage. It's 1983. DAVE sits in a ratty recliner. HE stares out into nothingness. JOHN enters. HE picks up a couple pieces of clothes off the floor and drapes them over the back of DAVE'S chair.

JOHN

So, I think I'm gonna take Prudence home.

DAVE

Okay?

JOHN

Just until you figure out what's going on.

DAVE

How am I supposed to know what's going on, John?

JOHN

I didn't say you did.

DAVE

It's like everyone's accusing me, you know? And I don't have a damn clue.

JOHN

I wasn't accusing you of anything.

DAVE throws a beer can at him.

DAVE

Then what the hell are you doing here?

JOHN

I'm here to save you from losing the one thing June cared about more than anything else in the world.

DAVE

What do you know? Prudence is fine.

JOHN

Dave, you haven't talked to her at all since it happened... It's only been a week! She's just as messed up as you are. You can't just ignore a kid when her mother- her mother is gone.

DAVE

John, she's six. She has no idea what she's talking about-

JOHN

Well, it seems like right now you're not in the right frame of mind to be dealing with a six year old daughter.

DAVE

June always kept Prudence's stuff in line. I don't know how to do all that stuff.

JOHN

I know you don't.

DAVE

So what makes you think you can figure it out? You're not married.

JOHN

No, I'm not. But I work from home, so it'll be easier for me. Besides, I've got a little sister. I know how to take care of a little girl.

DAVE

That'll come in real useful.

JOHN

Just until you feel better. That's all.

What's this?

JOHN picks up a shoebox and pulls and old letter from it.

DAVE

That's mine! Don't you ever-

JOHN

I didn't mean to intrude.

DAVE sinks back down into his recliner holding the shoebox close.

DAVE

They're my letters. From June.

JOHN

Maybe- maybe that's something you want to share with Prudence?

DAVE

Where's she gonna sleep? You don't have a room for her there.

JOHN

It's only gonna be for a little while, Dave. She can sleep on the couch til you're ready. No big deal.

Why don't you and Ebey come over and have dinner with us?

DAVE

Maybe some other time.

JOHN

Okay? I'm just gonna go get that stuff for Prudence, okay?

DAVE

You know, she looks exactly like her mother.

JOHN

I know she does.

DAVE picks up a bottle of whiskey off the floor and drinks from it. HE leans back in his chair and begins to stare out into space again.

JOHN

Is there anything she needs? Like a doll or- or I dunno..

DAVE

She likes her green blanket... And her black, patent leather shoes her Mom got her for her birthday.

JOHN

Can you help me find that stuff?

DAVE

It's in her room.

DAVE takes another swig from the bottle.

JOHN

You sure you're gonna be okay, Man?

DAVE

I'm just great.

JOHN

You want me to call someone? Before I go? Ebay'll be by later. Make something to eat, you know...

DAVE

Mmm-hmm. Super. Now my Mommy can come over and make me dinner.

DAVE takes a long swig from his whiskey.

JOHN

Well somebody needs to be with you.

DAVE

Don't worry. I don't think I've been alone since it happened.

JOHN

Do you want me to at least turn on some tunes?

DAVE

Yeah. Why don't you turn on some tunes before you go?

JOHN almost hesitates before leaving, but changes his mind.

DAVE

Yeah. What we need right now are some tunes, some booze, and some blues. Oh look, it's all already here.

JUNE enters the space as DAVE unfolds a letter. SHE reads it over his shoulder.

JUNE

December 2nd, 1970.

Dear Dave,

I'm sorry I missed a couple days of writing letters. I guess I'm not as good as keeping an everyday schedule like I thought I'd be. So I'll make this one as long as I can before mom says I have to finish my homework.

Ever since you left I can't remember dreaming anymore. It's like at night my mind just goes to black and I wake up not really knowing where I am. That's why last night was so strange.

I had a dream, finally. It's hard to remember everything exactly, but I remember there was a coyote. He was under the bridge and it was foggy, like it always is in the fall. He didn't growl at me or scare me. He came up to me and laid down in front of me. So I sat next to him and then he put his big head on my lap and went to sleep.

I was petting him along his head and sides when I felt this wet stuff. It was blood. He was bleeding from his belly. And I didn't know what to do. So I called for help. But nobody came. And I kept shouting into the night, but it was like the ocean swallowed the sound of my voice. And then the coyote looked at me and he howled right at my face. And then I woke up.

Mom says I have to finish my English report now. I have to go. But I love you and I hope that you are safe. I miss you every minute of every day.

Hugs and kisses,

June Bug

As the lights fade, the sound of something like Leonard Cohen's "Lady Midnight" cues up, and Dave sings along with it til there is darkness.

Act One: Scene Five

A loud GONG and the clacking of wooden blocks bring the lights back up on stage.

AS the MOON SISTERS speak, a projection image of various angles of Deception Pass Bridge flicker across the stage.

MOON SISTER #1

Deception Pass Bridge is one thousand, four hundred and eighty seven feet of steel and concrete connecting Whidbey Island to Fidalgo Island.

MOON SISTER #2

This took one thousand, six hundred and ten men working sixty hours a week less than a year to construct.

MOON SISTER #1

What kind of men?

MOON SISTER #2

Strong men.

MOON SISTER #1

Chinese men. Strong, Chinese men.

PRUDENCE enters, she is dreaming.

PRUDENCE

How many deaths?

MOON SISTERS

Don't know.

MOON SISTER #1

You know.

MOON SISTER #2

You know the whole story. The one they don't talk about.

PRUDENCE

Just east of the bridge spanning over Deception Pass is Ben Ure Island. Ben Ure and his partner Lawrence "Pirate" Kelly were infamous for illegally smuggling Chinese immigrants to Whidbey Island for local labor.

MOON SISTER #1

Bad, bad mans.

MOON SISTER #2

Never seen eyes like that on a man before.

MOON SISTER #1

Smelled like rotten fish.

MOON SISTER #2

Smelled like death.

PRUDENCE

Ben Ure would store the immigrants on his island and then his wife would signal him at night from Strawberry Island, on the west side of the pass, and he would know it was clear to come into the straight and smuggle the immigrants.

Over the next, SISTER #1 helps SISTER #2 into a burlap sack and ties the top shut.

PRUDENCE

Ure would tie the immigrants into burlap sacks with pieces of driftwood that were supposed to help them float. Then he'd dump them over the side of the boat when signaled, and the tides would carry the bags to either Whidbey or San Juan Island.

MOON SISTER #1

How many?

PRUDENCE

I don't know.

If the immigrants survived the float across the straights, they would usually end up as slave labor for the fishermen or farmers off of San Juan Island.

MOON SISTER #1

Tsk! How many dead?

PRUDENCE

I don't know!

MOON SISTER #1

How many bodies?

PRUDENCE

I said I don't know!

Many of the burlap sacks drifted straight over to Whidbey Island where they would collide with a wall of jagged rocks. If they were alive up until that point, they were usually killed by the impact.

Those rocks overlook what is known today as Dead Man's Bay.

SISTER #1 unties the bag and let's sister #2 out. They sit next to PRUDENCE almost comforting her.

PRUDENCE

My mother was found in Dead Man's Bay. After the tide was out. They found her in the fall after my fifth birthday. She was- She was cut into pieces and put into a suitcase. Someone threw her off the bridge.

MOON SISTER #1

Add another one to the list.

PRUDENCE

They never figured out who did it.

For a while they thought my Father did it.

MOON SISTER #2

Just another name to a long, long list.

PRUDENCE

But it wasn't him. My Dad was a hero. He came home with two purple hearts. He was stuck over there, in Vietnam, when people were killing all those babies and women. When the protectors had become the enemy. The killers. And he even saved civilians too. My Dad was a hero.

MOON SISTER #2

Hero is a big title to wear.

PRUDENCE

Hero's don't murder their wives.

MOON SISTER #1

Daughter's don't abandon their fathers.

PRUDENCE

I don't remember much about my Mom's murder. I remember the funeral. My Dad wasn't there. But I do remember he loved her. He loved her more than anything else in the world. More than his mother and father. Even more than me. She was the one and only thing he could not live without.

MOON SISTER #2

But he still lives.

PRUDENCE

He's alive, but he doesn't live. He only leaves the house because every now and again, you have to... He lives in the past. Doesn't even care about what's out there or what could be.

MOON SISTER #1

A coyote under the bridge.

PRUDENCE

He never even tried. He just left me and never came back.

MOON SISTER #2

You left him.

PRUDENCE

But he could have come and got me. All I wanted was for my father to save me. To be **my** hero. But he never came. He just left me there to fend for myself. He's my Dad. He could have come.

MOON SISTER #1
Heroes are for fairytales.

PRUDENCE
So are coyotes.

MOON SISTER #2
How many deaths?

PRUDENCE
At least one.

MOON SISTER #1
Another name to the long, long list.

PRUDENCE
At least one.

*PRUDENCE exits. SISTER #2 hands
SISTER #1 a dream.*

SISTER #2
Do you remember this one? One of my favorite dreams.

SISTER #1
Hm. How long you been holding that? Looks more like a
hallucination! Should just throw that one back into The Pass.
It's fish food now.

SISTER #2
But this one was his. His dream.

SISTER #1
It's forgotten now.

SISTER #2
But what if he didn't lose it on purpose? What if it just slipped
away? Like a day dream?

SISTER #1
What's gone is gone. Add another one to the list.

SISTER #2

That list is too long.

SISTER #1

So is the other one. Toss that thing back in the water. And don't interfere.

SISTER #2

I'm gonna hold it. Just in case.

SISTER #1

It's just another one on a long, long list.

*The lights fade down as SISTER #2
puts the dream back in her
satchel.*

Act One, Scene Six:

The lights come up on the bridge. The waves splash playfully below. Tourists look off the edge of the bridge in ponchos as the rain drizzles down. It is the fall of 1993.

PRUDENCE runs out fast along the bridge. SHE laughs and turns around. DAVE stands at the edge of the walkway frightened.

PRUDENCE

Oh c'mon! It's as sturdy as a rock!

SHE jumps wildly on the bridge.

PRUDENCE

It's not going anywhere!

DAVE

That's okay. I'll just wait for you here.

PRUDENCE

Ahh... What are you, chicken?

DAVE

No.

PRUDENCE begins to cluck like a chicken.

DAVE

I've been on the bridge a million times. This is your thing. So go do it. I can see just fine from over here.

PRUDENCE

But Uncle John said you would. It's my sixteenth birthday. It's my right of passage. You told Uncle John you would.

DAVE

And I am.

PRUDENCE

You're gonna make me walk all the way to the center by myself.

DAVE

It's not that far.

PRUDENCE

But you're supposed to do it with me.

DAVE

That's not how it works. It's your birthday. You have to spit for yourself.

One of the COUPLES looking out over the bridge turns around. The gong sounds and the blocks clank. The MOON SISTERS take off the parkas.

MOON SISTER #1

Always slippery out here on days like this.

PRUDENCE

C'mon Dad. I only turn sixteen once.

DAVE

I think you've got this one on your own.

MOON SISTER #2

The wind makes the bridge rock. Back and forth. Back and forth.

PRUDENCE

But you have to! Uncle John said you do!

DAVE

It's not going to work, Sweet Pea. Just go do your thing so we don't have to stay out in the rain all day.

PRUDENCE

Okay, fine. We'll just go home then.

*PRUDENCE begins to huff past
DAVE.*

PRUDENCE
Another wonderful memory of my father, ruining another special occasion...

DAVE
Prudence. I'm not trying to ruin anything, I'm just-

PRUDENCE
I hope you're fully prepared to pay for all the therapy I'm going to need.

MOON SISTER #2
It's so hard to be young.

MOON SISTER #1
No interfering!

PRUDENCE
I can't wait to tell Uncle John what a great birthday I had.

DAVE becomes visibly enraged.

DAVE
Jesus Christ! Will you listen to yourself?

PRUDENCE
Will you listen to yourself?

*PRUDENCE tries to push past DAVE,
but he grabs her arm and holds
her steady.*

DAVE
You know, everything in this world is not all about you! The way you act, you'd think you don't care about anyone else.

So I don't want to walk out to the middle of the stupid bridge with you and spit. Who cares?

PRUDENCE
I just thought-

DAVE

You just thought that making fun of me and humiliating me would be a good way to get me go out there with you?

DAVE grabs PRUDENCE in a fireman's carry and begins to carry her out to the middle of the bridge. PRUDENCE flails and screams.

MOON SISTER #2

Oh! Is he gonna drop her?

MOON SISTER #1

I dunno. No one sees the future.

PRUDENCE

Stop it! Stop it! PUT ME DOWN! NOW!

DAVE

If you keep kicking like that I'm going to throw you over.

PRUDENCE immediately wraps herself tightly against her father's shoulders and refuses to kick.

MOON SISTER #2

But she's so scared!

PRUDENCE

Please Dad! Please put me down! I'm scared!

MOON SISTER #1

No interfering! Once is enough.

DAVE

You weren't so scared a minute ago. Didn't you say it was as sturdy as a rock?

PRUDENCE

I SAID PUT ME DOWN!!!!

DAVE

Jesus! Stop making such a fuss!

DAVE puts her down. PRUDENCE gets down on her knees and begins crying, refusing to pull her head up.

PRUDENCE

You're such a jerk! I can't believe you did this to me.

DAVE

I- I just wanted you to get to do exactly what you wanted.

DAVE realizes he's on the bridge. He grabs onto the railing noticeably frightened.

DAVE

It's your birthday..

PRUDENCE

I wanna go home right now!

DAVE

John won't be back until Tuesday, so you're stuck with me until then.

PRUDENCE

Take me home right now!

DAVE

Well, to get home, you're going to have to walk to the car, and the only way to do that is to walk back over the bridge.

PRUDENCE

I'm not walking anywhere.

DAVE

What other options do you have?

PRUDENCE

Go get the car and come and get me.

That'll take forever.

DAVE

I'm not going anywhere.

PRUDENCE

Jesus Christ! Get up, Damnit!

DAVE

PRUDENCE screams loudly as DAVE tries to pull her to her feet but is unsuccessful.

Fine, have it your way. You can sit there all day for all I care.

DAVE

DAVE manages to wobble off the bridge. The MOON SISTERS sit next to PRUDENCE trying to comfort her. SHE takes no notice of them.

A man sees death once, and never wants to return.

MOON SISTER #1

I hate him. I hate him. I hate him so much!

PRUDENCE

If he sees it twice, he thinks his turn is next.

MOON SISTER #2

PRUDENCE sits as far away from the edge of the railing as she can without going into the middle of the car lanes. She sobs loudly.

A real dad would never do that to his daughter! Never!

PRUDENCE

The SISTERS continue to try and comfort PRUDENCE as the lights fade to black.

Act One, Scene Seven:

The SEA is calm and the lights illuminate the past. HAP and YOUNG EBEBY stand on the bridge looking out to the west (toward the audience). HAP wears his Navy Blues and wraps an arm around YOUNG EBEBY. It is summer, 1948.

HAP

It'll all happen when I get back.

YOUNG EBEBY

What if you don't come back?

HAP

Not possible.

YOUNG EBEBY

Anything's possible.

HAP

Ebey, look. We've got control over the Communists over there in Korea. Haven't you been listening to the news?

YOUNG EBEBY

They said we had control before, and that was a lie.

HAP

No we did. And then we lost it. But we've got it this time... we really do. My Commander explained it all to me.

YOUNG EBEBY

I don't care what your Commander says!

HAP

I'm not even going over to the war zones! I'm gonna be on a ship! In the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

YOUNG EBEY

For at least a year.

HAP

Not even. They said I'd be home for Christmas. Those guys in the Army and Marines? They're the ones that are on the front lines.

YOUNG EBEY

So?

HAP

They're the ones that are already married with kids, and aren't coming home.

YOUNG EBEY

But Hap, I don't care!

HAP

They're the ones you pray for.

YOUNG EBEY

What about you?

HAP

I'm coming home.

YOUNG EBEY

What happens if they change your orders-

HAP

Dangit Ebey!

The wooden blocks clank with the sound of the gong. The MOON SISTERS enter and surround them.

HAP

Can't you see past this island and your little life for one minute?

YOUNG EBEY

Hap! I- I didn't mean anything by it-

MOON SISTER #2

Look what I found this morning!

HAP

You just don't understand!

MOON SISTER #2 hands MOON SISTER #1 a very intense dream.

MOON SISTER #1

Oh! It's so bright and strong.

YOUNG EBEBY

I understand a lot! I understand that the man that asked me to marry him is leaving for a war that will probably get him killed.

HAP

No Ebey!

MOON SISTER #1

I don't think this one is going to fade.

HAP

I'm leaving to go deliver supplies to troops that have been out in the field for months. Troops that have been in the dang **combat zone** for years.

YOUNG EBEBY

In the middle of the worst war known in the whole world!

HAP

YES, God Damnit!

MOON SISTER #2

No. I don't think it was lost for very long either.

MOON SISTER #1

We better make sure he takes it.

MOON SISTER #2

Give it to me! I want to give it to him. I found it!

HAP

It's the worst war we've ever seen. Those guys out there, they die because the Korean's poison the air. They poison the air! It makes you get blisters all over your skin and in your lungs!

MOON SISTER #2

Let me have it!

HAP

Or they get shot and have to rot on the battlefield for a week before they finally get the luxury of dying!

YOUNG EBEBY

That's not true!

HAP

Maybe not according to the news, but that's what Tom and Dan wrote to me about before their mother's got the letters.

MOON SISTER #1

Wait just a minute. This is getting interesting.

HAP

And that's not all. It's not just happening to the soldiers! It's happens all over the land. The children, and mothers.

YOUNG EBEBY

I never thought about that-

HAP

The old people too. People that never did nothing to no one!

MOON SISTER #2

Wonder where all **those** dreams go?

HAP

Did you know that Joe is out burying the bodies of the civilians? Did you? That's his job! Burying the bodies of the innocents!

HAP almost sobs.

MOON SISTER #1

The hopes and wishes never seen.

YOUNG EBEY

What does that have to do with us?

HAP

Don't you think I could do something? Anything?

YOUNG EBEY

Because they say you have to?

HAP

I'm volunteer Reserves! I'm here cause I wanna be!

I just wanna help. That's what being American is all about.

MOON SISTER #2

Dreams don't just die with the body.

YOUNG EBEY

I still don't see what that has to do with you and me.

MOON SISTER #1

No. They fade.

HAP

Maybe if you don't understand this, you'll never understand me.
It's just something I have to do.

MOON SISTER #2

Yes. Sometimes they fade so much, you can't even recognize them.

YOUNG EBEY

What are you saying?

HAP

I dunno.

MOON SISTER #1

I always recognize them.

YOUNG EBEY

Look. If this is something you have to do. Something you can't
live without doing, then go.

MOON SISTER #2

You didn't see this one!

HAP

I wish it wasn't this way. But I do have to.

YOUNG EBEY

I know that now.

It's just that, I love you so much. And I dunno... you just- you make everything better. Everything. Even french fries taste better. And I just can't even imagine what this world would be like without you.

HAP

I just need to help. In any way I can.

HAP kisses YOUNG EBEY sweetly.

HAP

As soon as I get back..

YOUNG EBEY

I don't need a big wedding.

HAP

Then we'll have a big honeymoon in Hawaii.

MOON SISTER #2

Let me have it so I can give it to him now.

SISTER #2 gives HAP his dream.

YOUNG EBEY

Waikiki?

HAP

Where else?

YOUNG EBEY

Just make sure they send you back.

HAP

I will.

YOUNG EBEY

In one piece.

HAP

Yes, Ma'am.

*THEY embrace again and walk off
the bridge.*

MOON SISTER #2

You think once you get the one thing you want more than anything
in the world, you're satisfied?

MOON SISTER #1

Impossible. Even when it seems you have everything you need, you
will still always want more.

MOON SISTER #2

Now what?

MOON SISTER #1

Wait and see. Like always. Wait and see.

The lights fade down.

Act One, Scene Eight:

PRUDENCE stands on the stage under the bridge. She listens to the waves all around and watches them gently crash onto the rocky shore.

PRUDENCE

My Grandma says there's lots of ghosts here. Under the bridge. They wander the shores of the Pass. That's why it gets so foggy, especially in the fall right before winter.

JOHN enters on the bridge carrying a bundled baby. It's 1977. He stands in the light of the sunset.

PRUDENCE

When I was born, my parents made my Uncle John my Godfather. They weren't real religious or anything, it's just what you do for babies... get them baptized and give them Godparents.

JOHN

Right here. Right here is where the world ends and begins. Did you know that?

PRUDENCE

When I was just starting to talk, Uncle John told me to call him the Godfather, like the way Marlon Brando talks in the movies...

PRUDENCE imitates Marlon Brando.

PRUDENCE

I am the Godfather.

JOHN

And this is going to be our spot. Right here. Post number thirty two. This is where we'll come to watch the sunsets.

PRUDENCE

He's not really my uncle. He just grew up next door to my family all his life... Then he worked for Grandpa Hap.

JOHN

This is where we'll come when you have boy troubles.

PRUDENCE

I've only actually been on the bridge, like actually walked on it twice. Once when I was a baby and once when I was sixteen.

JOHN

And sometimes we'll come here to sneak a smoke. Or just to stand in the rain and watch the water below.

PRUDENCE

Uncle John was the first person to ever take me out to the middle. At post number 32.

The gong bangs and the wooden blocks clack. The MOON SISTERS enter with their usual flair.

MOON SISTER #2

Oh! A baby!

MOON SISTER #1

You know what that means?

JOHN

This spot. Post number 32. I'm claiming it as ours. Yours. And then someday, when you have your own babies, you can use the same spot on the bridge.

MOON SISTER #2

It means there's another cute, little baby on the island!

MOON SISTER #1

It means there's another poopy diaper on the island.

PRUDENCE

It really was a strange day... I can't imagine how either of us survived.

JOHN

And nothing, nothing bad, can ever happen on this exact spot.

PRUDENCE

I don't have any memory of my grandfather, just remnants... the smell of pipe tobacco and gin martinis.

MOON SISTER #1 cocks her head and listens to the wind.

MOON SISTER #1

Did you hear that?

PRUDENCE

My Uncle John raised me. He never did get married- had some girlfriends here and there...

MOON SISTER #2

Hear what?

PRUDENCE

I swear there was an angel of some kind that day... Watchin' over me...

JOHN

And today it all starts. With our first sunset in October.

JOHN turns the baby as best he can so she can see the sunset.

PRUDENCE

I think I remember that day... I know it's not possible, but I think I do.

MOON SISTER #1

Shhhhh. Listen.

PRUDENCE

It was cold and clear. The winds had just picked up.

The baby cries softly.

JOHN

Oh shhhhh. Sweet Pea here- let Uncle John bundle you up.

JOHN takes his jacket off and swaddles the baby tighter.

PRUDENCE draws in the sand with a stick.

MOON SISTER #1

See? There it is again.

PRUDENCE

And the sky was turning bright red- that happens a lot in the fall.

MOON SISTERS

Red sky at night...

PRUDENCE

I remember yawning and closing my eyes. Letting the last beams of daylight wash over my cold cheeks.

JOHN

I promise I will always watch over you.

Never let you down.

JOHN kisses the BABY's head softly. As he does the sound of screeching tires can be heard and headlights seem to head right for post 32.

The person in the car is honking wildly and screaming at JOHN and the BABY.

A projection of a car running itself right off a bridge flickers across the stage in loop.

HAP walks up to JOHN and the BABY yelling. He holds a steering wheel.

HAP

What the hell is wrong with you, kid?

JOHN

I just- I don't know!

HAP

Move out of the God damned way! Don't you hear the horn?

MOON SISTER #1

That! You hear it now!

MOON SISTER #2

Move! You have to move!

MOON SISTER #2 realizes that JOHN cannot hear her and begins making her way toward him.

PRUDENCE

I remember the loud sound of Grandpa Hap's car. The sound of screeching tires still makes my hair stand on end.

HAP

I can't stop this thing! You'd better move!

JOHN

What? I can't! I can't!

MOON SISTER #1

What are you doing?

PRUDENCE

I started crying.

I didn't know what else to do. I hadn't been around long enough to even imagine wanting to go.

MOON SISTER #2

Can't just let him go! He's got the baby!

HAP/JOHN

Ooooooh Shhhhhiiiiiiiiitttttt!

MOON SISTER #2 pushes John out of the way. He rolls on top of the bridge as HAP and MOON SISTER #2 go flying off the side. (More of a choreographed tumble than anything else.)

JOHN is lying on his back with the BABY held close to his chest. The projection stops.

PRUDENCE

I remember this face.

MOON SISTER #1

What were you thinking?

HAP dusts off and helps MOON SISTER #2 to her feet.

PRUDENCE

The face of a lady. I see her in my dreams sometimes. Her and her sister. I talk to them. But only in my dreams.

JOHN

Ohmygod Ohmygod Ohmygod!

The BABY cries softly on his chest.

JOHN

Are you okay?

HE sits up cradling and rocking the BABY. The crying stops.

MOON SISTER #1

You interfered. Why? Now we have to wait even longer.

PRUDENCE

It was like-

JOHN/PRUDENCE

Someone was watching over us.

MOON SISTER #2

Sometimes interference is necessary.

HAP

I'm glad someone did.

PRUDENCE

And I guess that's why I like to come down here. To visit all of them. My Grandpa...

MOON SISTER #1

Necessary for who?

MOON SISTER #2

Necessary for that baby. It wasn't her time.

PRUDENCE

My Mom...

*JOHN looks down over the bridge.
He holds the BABY close.*

*A moment passes as he seems to
really realize what's just
happened. He runs off the bridge
shouting for help.*

PRUDENCE

And now my Uncle John.

HAP

It's a strange feeling knowing you're going to die.

MOON SISTER #2

I wouldn't know.

MOON SISTER #1

Me either.

HAP

But, we are all dying. Even as we live.

MOON SISTER #1

Living is not the same as death.

HAP

No. But it's taking one step closer. With every second. Isn't it?

SISTER #1 pushes him away.

PRUDENCE

Later when Uncle John found out that the guy that almost killed us was Grandpa Hap, he wouldn't go back on the bridge.

Yep. You can feel them all around down here.

HAP

Right as the rain.

MOON SISTERS

Right as the tide.

PRUDENCE

Wandering the shores of the pass. All of them.

Lights fade.

Act One, Scene Nine:

DAVE and JUNE are on the beach below the bridge. JUNE'S belly is very pregnant. DAVE embraces JUNE from behind, swaying back and forth to the sound of the waves. It's 1977.

DAVE

Any day now, huh?

JUNE

Any day!

DAVE

So what do we think? Boy or girl?

JUNE

Hmmm. I think a little boy. The baby's always kickin' me in the middle of the night and I swear I've never liked spicy food before!

DAVE

Could be a feisty little girl.

JUNE

Oh God, let's hope not. I'm not sure I have the energy for all that!

DAVE

And let's definitely hope that baby looks like Momma.

JUNE

Papa's awfully handsome.

DAVE

Used to be...

JUNE

Still are. Just a couple new scars.

JUNE kisses his face tenderly

DAVE

Do we have some names picked out?

JUNE

Couple. How about you? Did you settle on any?

DAVE

I was thinking of Hap for a boy.

JUNE

After your father?

DAVE

Yeah.

JUNE

I love the story of how he got his name.

DAVE

Hap was the first baby born that year in his small down. Came out the chute one minute after midnight, so my grandma named him Happy.

JUNE

Well, we already know that won't happen with this baby.

DAVE

I was thinkin' Whidbey would be a good name if it's a girl.

JUNE

Whidbey? Oh Dave, that's a terrible name.

DAVE

What's wrong with it?

JUNE

You wanna name our daughter after this Island?

DAVE

Why not? This Island was all I could think about while I was away.

JUNE

I know it was. Maybe we can use something like that for a middle name? But imagine going to school on this Island with a name like that?

DAVE

Like what?

JUNE

Like Whidbey, or Dugwalla, or Juan De Fuca?

DAVE

I just thought it really sounded like a pretty girl's name.

JUNE

It is. And if the baby fits the name, it'll be perfect.

DAVE

I just want to make sure that the baby will always know where it comes from. I guess it doesn't matter. As long as its healthy.

JUNE

Your mother says by the size of my stomach, this baby's gonna be more than healthy!

DAVE

That's my boy!

JUNE

Or girl...

DAVE

Maybe we won't name the baby right away. Maybe it'll take some time. I mean, that baby's gonna have some personality. I just don't want to get it wrong.

JUNE

Exactly. You've got to have a name to hold you down on this Earth. It's really all you've got when you think about it.

DAVE

Especially when they can't find your body...

JUNE

That'll never happen with our baby.

*DAVE tucks his face into his
JUNE'S shoulder, weeping softly
in the fading light.*

Act One, Scene Ten:

The sea moans angrily under the bridge. Winds whip the Madrona trees around wildly. Once again the scene is drenched in clouded moonlight.

1983. A DARK FIGURE crosses onto the bridge. He drags with him a very heavy and large suitcase.

He pulls the suitcase to a spot over the water and falls to the ground.

He stands and throws the suitcase over the side of the bridge.

The sisters catch it.

Before leaving THE DARK FIGURE hesitates at the top of the bridge. Straining in the night to see if the case made it to the water.

It's too dark to see.

The SISTERS play with the suitcase and bring it to the shore safely.

MOON SISTER #1

Ooooo! Inside here is precious cargo!

MOON SISTER #2

Too precious to throw over the side.

MOON SISTER #1

You wanna see?

MOON SISTER #2

Yeah I wanna see!

The SISTERS go to move the suitcase. It's so heavy it won't budge.

MOON SISTER #2

That's funny. Didn't seem that heavy on the water.

MOON SISTER #1

Things are always lighter when they float.

THEY unzip the suitcase. THEY lift the lid away from the audience.

MOON SISTER #1

Oooooo! Someone gonna be in big trouble.

MOON SISTER #2

Big, big trouble.

MOON SISTER #1

At least the water washed it clean.

EBEY enters the stage. She looks out over the water from the bridge. Sunrise has come. The stage burns bright red.

EBEY

Red sky in the morning...

MOON SISTER #2

The ocean washed it clean, and now bleeds.

MOON SISTER #1

Bad, bad mans.

EBEY

Storms are coming every day now. Gonna ruin the fall harvest...

MOON SISTER #2

Bleeds for the family.

SISTER #2 pulls a severed arm from the suitcase. It hangs stiffly from her hand and she swings it around.

MOON SISTER #1

Don't lose that! She's gonna need that.

EBEY

Guess we'd all better purge before the winter.

EBEY tosses a pebble down over the bridge. SISTER #1 catches it.

MOON SISTER #2

Yup. Gonna be a long winter.

SISTER #2 puts the arm back in the suitcase and zips it back up.

MOON SISTER #1

Longer than you even know.

EBEY crosses back to her side of the bridge and the lights become so bright they hurt our eyes.

Then blackness, except for a spot on the suitcase.

End Act One.

Act Two, Scene One:

Moonlight washes over the front of the stage. The ocean is heard in the distance.

The gong and wood blocks clacking accompany the MOON SISTERS as they dig for clams in the sand.

PRUDENCE enters sleepy, in her jammies, wrapped in her quilt. SHE watches the SISTERS as they dig. PRUDENCE is dreaming again.

PRUDENCE

No, no. You're doing it wrong. Let me show you.

You have to make the water work for you.

SHE begins to carve a path in the sand, when she looks up and realizes who her beach companions are.

PRUDENCE

Oh. Uh- Hello?

The MOON SISTERS bow in response.

PRUDENCE

I feel like it's been a long time since I saw you last. But I know that's not true.

MOON SISTER #1

Just the other night. Remember?

PRUDENCE shakes her head, somewhat upset that she can't remember.

MOON SISTER #2

Everyone forgets dreams.

PRUDENCE

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to-

MOON SISTER #1

We know. You were a little sad last time.

PRUDENCE

I'm still sad.

MOON SISTER #2

Of course you are.

PRUDENCE

Maybe I can forget some of this sadness?

MOON SISTER #2

You do. A little every night. It just doesn't feel like it because your pain is so great.

PRUDENCE looks at the clams the SISTERS are harvesting. SHE shakes her head.

PRUDENCE

You have to throw those ones back. They're too small.

SHE throws two small clams back into the ocean.

MOON SISTER #2

Just like Ebey.

MOON SISTER #1

Just like her father.

PRUDENCE

What? I'm not like my father!

MOON SISTER #1

How would you know?

There's only cuckolds at this spot. Let's dig someplace else.

PRUDENCE

Give it time. They'll come to you.

MOON SISTER #2

The tide only stays out so long.

PRUDENCE

Long enough.

*A coyote is heard in the
distance.*

PRUDENCE

I don't remember so many coyotes here when I was little. Now it seems like they're everywhere.

MOON SISTER #2

They starting to take over. Whole island.

MOON SISTER #1

Used to be no coyotes.

MOON SISTER #2

That was a very long time ago! You're getting old!

MOON SISTER #1

Only one year ahead of you...

PRUDENCE

How did they ever get here?

MOON SISTER #1

They brought them in to take care of the rabbits.

PRUDENCE

The rabbits?

MOON SISTER #2

Yes. They brought the rabbits in because- well, they ate a kind of weed.

PRUDENCE

Like the blackberries or the thistles?

MOON SISTER #2

Mmmmm a different one... It's not such a problem anymore. But the rabbits started- they started multiplying. You know, like rabbits?

The MOON SISTERS giggle.

PRUDENCE

Ha! See? Now they're starting to come out in the water. Look at all of them!

The MOON SISTERS start to pull clams out of the stream and drop them into their buckets.

PRUDENCE

So they brought the coyotes in because there were too many rabbits?

MOON SISTER #1

Exactly, but they didn't anticipate that coyotes would start multiplying too.

PRUDENCE

Like rabbits?

MOON SISTER #1

Not like rabbits, like bad dreams.

MOON SISTER #2

The coyotes you make for yourself.

PRUDENCE

I don't understand.

MOON SISTER #2

Like shadows. You hide everything with them. Wishes, hopes... Covered with coyotes.

MOON SISTER #1

Coyotes stop you from living.

PRUDENCE

I don't have any coyotes.

Everyone has coyotes.

MOON SISTER #2

Especially in your family.

MOON SISTER #1

My father.

PRUDENCE

Don't blame him.

MOON SISTER #2

No. He is a coyote. That was his company mascot. The Fighting Coyotes.

PRUDENCE

A moment.

Can I ask you something?

PRUDENCE

You just did.

MOON SISTER #2

The MOON SISTERS giggle.

Have you seen him?

PRUDENCE

Who?

MOON SISTER #1

Uncle John.

PRUDENCE

We can't answer that.

MOON SISTER #2

You probably have.

PRUDENCE

So you already know the answer to the question? Why ask it?

MOON SISTER #1

PRUDENCE does not respond. The SISTERS rinse their shovels off in the water and pick up their buckets.

PRUDENCE watches as the SISTERS leave and picks her quilt up. SHE wraps it back around her shoulders and goes back to bed.

Act Two, Scene Two:

The lights reveal the past. YOUNG EBEY holds a crying baby. She rocks the baby and tries to comfort it, but nothing works. The sea splashes and the wind whips around HER. SHE holds the already bundled baby closer.

YOUNG EBEY

Oh, Sweet Boy... I know it seems scary, but it's just the wind. Your father is almost done.

YOUNG EBEY looks around for HAP and becomes nervous when she can't find him.

YOUNG EBEY

Hap? Haaaaaap? HAP?

HAP strides in with a large piece of driftwood.

HAP

What's wrong?

YOUNG EBEY

The wind has really picked up and David is cold.

HAP

This won't take much longer.

YOUNG EBEY

We can come back another time... The beach isn't going anywhere.

The gong sounds and the blocks clank. EBEY and the MOON SISTERS enter onto the bridge. EBEY sneaks a smoke and looks down on the past as though she can see it.

*The SISTERS stand on either side
of her.*

SISTER #1

There are places we go to when we feel lonely.

SISTER #2

Sometimes memories can be comforting.

HAP

Let me just get the rest of the wood. You want a fence don't you?

YOUNG EBEY

I do, but I don't need one today. It can wait.

HAP

Today's all we have. I've got to go in a few days.

YOUNG EBEY

I know. So let's go home and we can all crawl into the bed and get warm!

HAP hands HER a flask.

HAP

Here. That'll keep you warm til I'm finished.

YOUNG EBEY

Hap! What about the baby?

*The wind whips by stronger and
the first drops of rain start to
flicker down out of the sky.*

YOUNG EBEY

See? Now it's starting to rain!

HAP

Hold on. I'm trying to think.

YOUNG EBEY

Think about what? It's raining. Let's go!

HAP grabs YOUNG EBEY by the shoulders and shakes HER. SHE holds the baby closer.

HAP

Now just stop it! Stop it! Can't you see I'm just trying to do everything you asked me to do while I'm home?

YOUNG EBEY speaks through her sobs.

YOUNG EBEY

I didn't mean to upset you. I just want to get the baby out of the cold rain and go home.

HAP

Stop crying! You need to hold it together. This is what's going to happen...

HAP snatches the flask from HER and takes a long, long swig from it. HE hands it back to her.

MOON SISTER #1

So many women carry the burden of society.

MOON SISTER #2

The price of war is never cheap. Not even in memory.

HAP

You're going to take this and the baby and go wait for me in the truck. I need about ten more pieces of wood--

YOUNG EBEY

--I'm not going to leave you out here--

HAP

--Then you can have one of those pretty driftwood fences just like the neighbors. And then when I'm on duty, I won't have to hear about it for the next six months.

YOUNG EBEY

Hap, you really don't have to! I can build the fence--

HAP

-- And that's what's going to happen. Do I make myself clear?

YOUNG EBEY

Yes.

HAP

Give me the baby.

YOUNG EBEY

What?

HAP

Let me hold our son.

THE BABY, who has been steadily crying, makes no sound as HE is passed off to his father.

HAP

Now you listen to me little David. You need to get some thicker skin. This rain is something that's not going to go away.

YOUNG EBEY

Alright. I'll take him now-

HAP

And you need to just learn that you can't always have whatever you want in life. It doesn't work that way.

HE grips the BABY tighter and almost shakes him.

HAP

So when your mother says to be quiet, you'd better be quiet!

YOUNG EBEY wrenches the BABY from HAP's grip. The BABY shrieks in fright. SHE exits hurriedly through the brewing storm. HAP picks up the driftwood and his fallen flask off the beach. HE takes another long swig before exiting in search of more wood.

EBEY throws her cigarette on the bridge. MOON SISTER #2 picks it up. EBEY exits.

MOON SISTER #1

What? You gonna save that too?

MOON SISTER #2

How else you gonna get smoke in the jar? Got to have enough fog to last the whole fall...

The lights fade down and the cigarette ember dies too.

Act Two, Scene Three:

PRUDENCE sits next to EBHEY while she continues cutting her articles and placing them in envelopes. PRUDENCE flips through a photo album.

PRUDENCE

And this was you?

EBHEY

You've seen that a hundred times.

PRUDENCE

You looked so different then...

EBHEY

You looked a whole lot different fifty years ago too.

PRUDENCE

It was sixty years ago.

EBHEY

Who's counting anymore?

PRUDENCE flips the pages back.

PRUDENCE

There's some new pages in here...

EBHEY

Yep. Didn't want to lose them.

PRUDENCE

There's your mom... She was so pretty.

EBHEY

That's the day before her wedding.

PRUDENCE

She doesn't look old enough to get married.

EBEY

Didn't have to be that old to get married then...

PRUDENCE

Ebey, she's like twelve in this picture.

EBEY

She's seventeen. And that's Grandma to you.

PRUDENCE

And that's your mother's mother? My great, great granma?

EBEY

Yes.

PRUDENCE

Was she- Is she Native?

EBEY

No.

PRUDENCE

I don't look much like her.

EBEY

No, you look like the Dutch side of the family. Like my father.

PRUDENCE

She had such pretty black hair.

EBEY

That's because she was Chinese.

PRUDENCE

Chinese?

EBEY

You seem so shocked.

PRUDENCE

I knew we were mutts, but I didn't know we were Chinese.

EBEY

Looking at you, you'd never know.

PRUDENCE

So, how did they get here?

EBEY

Her mother's mother, my great grandma was a transplant back before they even built the bridge. Before anything was really here.

PRUDENCE

How come she came here? I mean, of all places in the entire world to go to...

EBEY

Everyone has their own dreams. I guess hers was to come to the land of opportunity.

PRUDENCE

Did she come as a slave?

EBEY

No. She came as a mail order bride.

PRUDENCE

So, a slave... What was her name?

EBEY

Mingzhu.

PRUDENCE

Mingzhu.

Why am I just hearing about all this?

EBEY

You never asked before.

PRUDENCE

Who did she marry? I mean, do we have family on the island I never knew about.

EBEY

She married an angry Dutchman. That's pretty much the only people that were here.

PRUDENCE

That's still the only people really here!

EBEY

He was very old. Like my age, when they got married.

PRUDENCE

Wow.

EBEY

Right. Then my mother married into one of the Irish families from the south end of the Island.

PRUDENCE

And you met Grandpa.

EBEY

Yes. And that family is from Ohio.

PRUDENCE

The Isaacs.

EBEY

Bunch of angry Welshmen.

PRUDENCE

What's the difference between angry Dutchmen and angry Welshmen?

EBEY

The Dutch drink their beer and the Welsh drink their whiskey... and beer.

PRUDENCE

What about the other families? Are they still around?

EBEY

Probably. Who knows? That's just a bunch of ancient history.

PRUDENCE

So I guess we really are from here. Like really, really from here.

EBEY

That's right. And don't let the Van Smits tell you otherwise. Think they run this damn place just because they own most of it...

PRUDENCE

At least that explains the physical family traits.

EBEY

Just you really. Tall and blonde. Got so many different veins of blood running through you, you never know what your babies will look like.

PRUDENCE

Hopefully like their father... much easier to explain.

EBEY

Yes, I suppose it would.

PRUDENCE

Don't worry, I'm not gonna make you a great grandma any time soon.

EBEY

Whenever you're ready.

Lights fade down.

Act Two, Scene Four:

The waves crash and the Madrona trees flicker. The fall sun is starting to set.

JUNE and HAP stand on the rocks behind EBEBY, PRUDENCE, and DAVE. The living have all just left the funeral.

The MOON SISTERS emerge with the usual sound effects and entrance dance. This time they hold a large piece of the sea. They dance through the waves carrying their piece back and forth between the engulfing sea.

PRUDENCE walks to the water's edge letting the tide run over her feet. She empties the contents of a small bag. (JOHN's ashes) EBEBY throws rose heads into sea behind HER.

The sound of the ocean and clanking of wooden blocks dies down. Music swells. As the SISTERS dance in the waves JOHN emerges from the folds of the water. The SISTERS seem to bring the life back into his rag-doll body.

JUNE and HAP walk to the water's edge and help JOHN to the beach. The SISTERS exit with the current.

HAP

Careful with him. This is gonna hurt!

As THEY step out of the water onto the beach JOHN begins to cry/scream. HAP and JUNE try and comfort him with words as they pull him out of the water's reach.

JUNE

Shhhh. John just take it easy.

HAP

It'll be over before you know it.

JUNE

Was I this bad?

HAP

Worse.

A moment passes and JOHN sits up slowly looking at his beach companions.

JOHN

I've never felt anything like that.

JUNE

And you never will again.

JOHN

I'm not sure I can describe it. Like I was being ripped apart and sewn back together at the same time.

HAP

The worst part is the salt.

JOHN

Is that what that was?

JUNE

Well, you leave one place and get pushed into another, and the water is what brings you through... So yeah. It was the salt.

JOHN looks around. He does not notice the funeral party and does not recognize HAP or JUNE.

JOHN

Where am I? I feel like I should know this place, but I don't. Like I've seen it in a dream or something...

HAP

It'll take a while. But don't worry, you've got all the time in the world.

JOHN

The last thing I remember- I was running. Through that abandon field with the old farm house? And I looked down to the shore and there was an eagle.

JUNE

Just before twilight is when they come out.

JOHN

I could see the lines in the hay from the field next door. It was just mowed. And then the eagle just came speeding down toward the ground- like a dive bomber- and then there was a loud squealing sound. I think he got a rabbit.

But then there was nothing. No sound. No light. No dark. Just nothing.

HAP

Not a bad way to go at all.

JOHN

To go where?

HAP

Here.

JOHN

But I don't know where this is.

JUNE

Give it some time. All things take time.

Some longer than others.

HAP

What do you mean?

JUNE

When you first got here, I think it was days before you could even see me. You had it the worst.

HAP

I don't remember...

JUNE

JOHN slowly stands up. HE walks over by the funeral party, almost like he can see them.

There's something very familiar about this spot. I don't know what, but I'll figure it out.

JOHN

How long did it take you, Hap?

JUNE

Probably years.

HAP

Hap? Hap died a long time ago. Is your name Hap?

JOHN

Yes, my name is Hap.

HAP

JOHN studies his face a moment trying to remember. HE turns to JUNE.

What's your name?

JOHN

JUNE hesitates to answer.

Well I- I have lots of names... You know nick names?

JUNE

HAP

Don't worry about that right now, John. Why don't you come over here and sit-

JOHN

How do you know who I am?

DAVE

When there's places like this, it makes me wonder why anyone ever buries themselves in the ground.

PRUDENCE

So there's something to remember them by.

DAVE

They've never been down here, along The Pass then. Feels like someone else is always here with you.

JOHN hears something.

JOHN

What was that?

HAP/JUNE

It's just the wind.

PRUDENCE

You think Uncle John found them?

EBEY

Yes.

PRUDENCE

They'll show him the ropes?

EBEY

I'm sure they will, what else have they go to do?

JOHN

That's not the wind. I know that- it's voices. Voices I should know. Can't you hear them?

HAP

Probably from the other side of The Pass.

JOHN

No. It's like they're- they're under water.

DAVE

All the time you could ever want. I'd love to have that kind of time.

EBEY

Don't say things like that! No one wants you gone!

PRUDENCE

May as well go. It's not like you're around much anyhow.

DAVE

You're probably right. I should just go.

Not like I'm of much use around here anyhow...

PRUDENCE

Dad, this isn't your pity party. You think this isn't hard enough?

DAVE

It's hard on me too-

PRUDENCE

Then stop it. Just show him a little respect.

JOHN

Prudence? That's Prudence. Where is she?

Prudence! Sweet Pea! I'm right here!

HAP

She can't hear you.

JOHN

Sure she can. I can hear her!

Prudence!

HAP sits on a nearby piece of driftwood. HE pulls his flask from his pocket and sips on it. JUNE sits next to him.

HAP

So much for taking our time. It's coming.

JOHN runs around wildly looking for the voices he hears.

PRUDENCE

Why did you come? If you don't want to honor him, why did you bother?

DAVE

I wanted to say goodbye. The way we say goodbye on The Island.

PRUDENCE

You didn't for Mom.

DAVE

I couldn't.

EBEY

Why didn't you?

DAVE

I just- I couldn't even breathe. I didn't want to say goodbye. Still don't.

EBEY

I know.

DAVE

What would you know? You don't understand a damn thing. You don't even talk to me. Treat me like I'm some kind of criminal.

Well screw this! I don't need this shit from either of you.

JOHN has been listening to the voices.

JOHN

Dave... That's- that's Dave.

JUNE

Oh John-O. I'm so sorry.

DAVE

I just wanted- I just needed a friend. Because my only one is gone now.

DAVE hesitates a moment then leaves. The WOMEN stay behind watching the tide pull back.

JOHN

Wait... June? June!

JUNE

Hi John. Long time no see.

JOHN

You and Hap- you just- you were just here, and then- NO! I was jogging! I saw the eagle! I saw it! And you can't just-

PRUDENCE

I think it's time for me to go.

PRUDENCE and EBEBY walk off the stage.

JOHN

No! Don't go! I don't want to be alone!

HAP places a hand on JOHN'S shoulder.

HAP

You're not alone. June and I aren't going anywhere.

JOHN

But I'm not ready. I still have things to do! You can't just take me away when I still have so much to do.

HAP

Shhhh. Just be still.

JOHN sits back on some driftwood.

HAP

Be still.

The lights fade.

Act Two, Scene Five:

The lights come up on the past. It's 1983 in the middle of the night. The sea could not be any calmer.

DAVE leans on the railing drinking from a brown paper bag. THE MOON SISTERS enter with their usual flair down below.

JUNE watches him from a short distance. HE does not notice her. HE finishes the contents of the bottle in the paper bag and throws it over the edge of the bridge. MOON SISTER #2 catches it and sniffs it.

MOON SISTER #2

Whew! This is the stuff that smells like paint thinner!

MOON SISTER #1

Better save it. Never know when you're gonna need to clean the water.

DAVE climbs up onto the railing and hooks his feet in. He bends over the edge, arms outstretched, almost upside down from the waist.

JUNE screams and runs over to him grabbing his belt. The suitcase she was carrying gets throw on the bridge.

JUNE

I've got you. You're not going to fall!

DAVE

What the hell is wrong with you?

JUNE

Just please! Don't do this. You don't have to do this.

DAVE

What?

HE leans back and shakes free of her then jumps back onto the ground of the bridge.

DAVE

What? You think I was gonna off myself?

JUNE

I didn't know.

DAVE

You'd really like that, wouldn't you?

JUNE

Dave, I would never-

DAVE

Well you're not getting off that easy. If you wanted me gone why didn't you just say so?

JUNE

I don't want you gone. I want you to be happy. To be able to fix yourself.

DAVE

Fix what? Don't you love me for who I am still?

JUNE

You're not who you were. You're someone different. And I need my Dave back. The one I married.

DAVE

Ain't gonna happen! I got too much invested into feeling this good.

JUNE

Just listen to me Dave, please?

*DAVE begins to storm off, but
JUNE grabs his arm.*

JUNE

It's not your fault. A lot of guys are dealing with it.

DAVE

Let go of me!

HE throws HER off of him.

JUNE

Don't you remember Joe? Joe had to bury all those people. All those people that had nothing to do with it. He's dealing with the same thing.

DAVE

Screw Joe! He has no fucking clue! He's just hauled up there with all the rest of the damn crazies.

JUNE

They're not crazies! **THEY'RE VETS JUST LIKE YOU!**

*HE sweeps her up and leans HER
back over the bridge holding her
by her neck.*

DAVE

I have told you before and I'm only gonna say it one more time. Don't interfere.

*JUNE squeaks a terrified
response, neither affirming or
denying the statement.*

DAVE

This is my thing. I am working this shit out. I am dealing with it. I'm not going to go see my mother's God-damned shrink and I am not going to stop drinking. I am sick and tired of you trying to get in my head. Trying to make things worse.

You don't know what the hell you are talking about! **DO YOU HEAR ME? LEAVE ME THE HELL ALONE!**

DAVE pushes HER away as she gasps for air. SHE stands sobbing.

JUNE

If that's really what you want.

SHE grabs her suitcase. HE notices it for the first time.

DAVE

Where the hell are you going?

JUNE walks past him trying to cross to the other side of the bridge.

JUNE

I'm gonna walk to the other side. Then I'm probably gonna thumb a ride to Seattle. I'm gonna stay with my sister.

I'll be back for Prudence in a couple days. She's at Ebey's now. Just let her stay there. Let her rest.

DAVE

Don't be ridiculous. You can't just leave like this-

JUNE

You said it yourself!

SHE imitates DAVE.

JUNE

LEAVE ME ALONE!

So I am. I'm leaving it all. Because that's what's best for you! Because I only ever wanted to do the things that would make you happy.

And when I get Prudence, you won't have deal with us anymore. We won't be a burden to you ever again.

DAVE

June, Damn it, knock it off!

JUNE pushes past him.

JUNE

And since you've invested so much into feeling "that" good, you obviously don't need a wife who cares any more. Or a family for that matter...

DAVE chases after her for a moment, but is distracted by car lights and loud honking. He screams at the car.

DAVE

Watch out where you're going! Asshole!

After the car passes, he looks up and around for JUNE. SHE is gone. Nowhere to be seen. The rain starts coming down full force.

DAVE

God-damnit! I'm not playing this game, June! Get back here!

DAVE runs after her.

MOON SISTER #2

Look at this.

SHE hands her sister a black, shiny rock.

MOON SISTER #1

Black agate. You know what that means.

MOON SISTER #2

It means nothing. Just a black rock.

SHE snatches it back from her sister and throws it back into The Pass.

MOON SISTER #1

Just 'cause you throw it back in there doesn't mean it's gone.

A coyote barks in the distance.

MOON SISTER #1

Gonna be a long, long winter.

The lights fade to black.

Act Two, Scene Six:

PRUDENCE lays her head on EBHEY'S lap. EBHEY pulls the quilt up over her.

PRUDENCE

I got a phone call this morning.

EBHEY

Oh? From who?

PRUDENCE

My Staff Sergeant. I have to leave tomorrow afternoon.

EBHEY

Why so soon? Did something happen?

PRUDENCE

My unit is being shipped out.

EBHEY

Shipped out? Where?

PRUDENCE

Pakistan.

A moment hangs in the air with sound of the tide's pull.

EBHEY

That's a long way away from home.

PRUDENCE

Long way away from the ocean.

EBHEY

And the rain.

PRUDENCE

And you.

EBEY

Yes. I know.

JUNE and DAVE stand on the bridge, DAVE wears his Marine Corps Alphas. It is 1968.

DAVE

It'll all happen when I get back.

JUNE

What if you don't come back?

DAVE

Not possible.

JUNE

Anything's possible.

EBEY

But I'm tough. I've been through this before.

PRUDENCE

Couple times now, Ebay.

EBEY

Yes. And it's not any easier with experience.

DAVE

June, look. We've got control over the Vietcong now. Haven't you been listening to the news?

JUNE

They said we had control before. And that was a lie.

DAVE

No we did. And then we lost it. But we've got it this time... we really do. My Gunny explained it all to me.

JUNE

I don't care what your Gunny says!

While everyone else will be dancing with their boyfriends on prom night, I'll be crying in my bed because we get a letter.

DAVE

You're not going to get a letter. You watch, I'll be back in time for your prom anyhow. You don't graduate for another two years, and by then my tour is over.

JUNE

If you survive.

PRUDENCE

I'm not even sure how I feel about the whole situation. I'm not really leaving anything behind.

EBEY

You always leave something behind.

PRUDENCE

I wish it could be the coyotes.

EBEY

The coyotes?

PRUDENCE

Shadows...

DAVE

Besides, President Johnson's got it. He wants out of there before he leaves office.

JUNE

What does that matter to me? You're going to go over there, get dropped off on some rice paddy, and come back in a box.

EBEY

Hmmmm. Sometimes I think that's the only thing we take with us.

PRUDENCE

There's one that won't let me leave til I find out.

EBEY

Find out what?

DAVE

I'm not even going to be on the front lines. I'm Rear Area Security. That means I hang back.

JUNE

No one hangs back over there. I read the papers.

PRUDENCE

Find out what really happened to my mother.

EBEY

You know what happened to her.

DAVE

It's not like I have a choice. It's a draft, June. That means I'm going whether I want to or not.

JUNE

I heard this kid at school, said his brother got out of it because he said he was a fag. You could tell them that! Or you could go up to Canada. I'll go with you.

PRUDENCE

I want to hear it from him.

EBEY

You want to ask your father?

DAVE

It's a little late for that. I've already been through training.. I was only here to rest a few days. You know that.

EBEY

Is that what you want?

JUNE

I know. I've already missed you so much, and now it's like a cruel trick.

DAVE

I'm only here for a few more hours. Can we just enjoy what time we have left together?

EBEY

Answer me.

DAVE

After that I'll only see you in my dreams and hug a letter every night.

JUNE

I'll write every day. I promise.

DAVE

I know.

JUNE

And then, when you come back?

DAVE

We'll get to the church as fast as we can.

JUNE

I wish we could now.

DAVE

Your Dad says you have to graduate first. And I agree.

DAVE kisses JUNE softly.

PRUDENCE

Yes. That's exactly what I want.

EBEY

How could you?

PRUDENCE

I want to know from my father what happened. I want him to tell me everything.

EBEY

Why would you want to do that to him?

DAVE

C'mon. It's time to go.

JUNE and DAVE scamper off the bridge in a bittersweet moment.

PRUDENCE

Because I have a right to know.

EBEY

You know what? No. You are not going to go over there now, after God knows how long, and rip open all those old wounds.

PRUDENCE

I'm not trying to rip open wounds. I'm trying to find out why I don't have a father.

God-damnit, Ebey! I don't know what's going to happen after I get over there. In case you didn't realize, we're in the middle of a war, and I don't care if they want to call it that or not. I don't know what I'm going to see or how long I'm going to live, and I don't want nightmares anymore. Nightmares of my mother being ripped apart by a coyote under the bridge. Like she was just another kill.

EBEY

Why would your father know anything?

PRUDENCE

Didn't you ever wonder?

EBEY

Wonder what?

PRUDENCE

Wonder what really happened? No one seems to know!

EBEY

Now just stop! One thing you should never ever do is question your own blood. If your father had done it, they would have found out. But he didn't.

PRUDENCE

How do you know?

EBEY

Because I was- because I know.

PRUDENCE

That's just not good enough for me, Ebey.

EBEY

Why not? Why is none of it good enough for you?

PRUDENCE

It's not that it isn't good enough; it's that there's no explanation there!

EBEY

Really? What's not there? A family who misses you and prays for you? A grandmother who does everything she can to heal your wounds? Wounds that seem to never heal.

And all you do is sit in your self-pity for the things you never had, instead of being thankful for what you have had all along.

PRUDENCE

If you didn't have the same doubts, you wouldn't be defending him with statements you can't back up. Because I said so, isn't gonna cut it anymore. There are doubts.

EBEY

And what if there are? They're in the past. There's nothing you can do to change them. Nothing I can do. So you may as well keep moving on! Pull yourself up by your bootstraps and keep marching. You can't just live in the past forever.

PRUDENCE

You've always been fine with doing it!

EBEY

Well we all have a cross to bear, don't we?

PRUDENCE

Ebey, I didn't mean to-

EBEY

And the fact that you can't even address me by Grandma. Is it too much to ask you to show me the same respect I show you?

A long, awkward moment passes.

PRUDENCE

Grandma. I am so sorry. I never meant to insult you.

EBEY

What time does your flight leave tomorrow?

PRUDENCE

Four thirty in the afternoon.

EBEY

Well, it sounds like we'd better have clams for dinner then. The tides are just out now. If we get going, we'll still have a good hour and a half of time-

PRUDENCE

I still need to ask him.

EBEY

I know you do.

PRUDENCE

I'm not doing it to hurt him.

EBEY

I hope not.

EBEY strokes PRUDENCE'S hair one last time. She pulls something out of her pocket. The lavender. She examines it and looks around over her shoulders. No one else is there.

SHE shakes HER head and gives the lavender to PRUDENCE. The lights dim.

Act Two, Scene Seven:

PRUDENCE sleeps under the moonlight and the sound of the waves surround her. A GONG sounds and PRUDENCE wakes to find the MOON SISTERS on either side of her. SHE is dreaming once again.

MOON SISTER #1

So many great things have happened.

MOON SISTER #2

Still happening.

PRUDENCE

Not really.

MOON SISTER #1

What do you know?

PRUDENCE

I guess nothing.

MOON SISTER #2

People always think everything is about them. Great things have happened for you.

MOON SISTER #1

But **many** great things have happened for mankind.

PRUDENCE

All the good stuff happened a long time ago.

MOON SISTER #1

Not true! There's telephones, and art, and musics...

MOON SISTER #2

And internets!

MOON SISTER #1

Oh! I like the internets!

Spaceships?
Yes!

PRUDENCE
MOON SISTER #2

SISTER #2 puts her arms out and makes spaceship noises.

MOON SISTER #1
Other things too. Things that have to do with you.

PRUDENCE
Me?

MOON SISTER #2
Yes! This morning we found it!

MOON SISTER #1
I found it!

MOON SISTER #2
Makes no difference who!

MOON SISTER #1
But I want to give it to her. I found it!

PRUDENCE
Found what?

The SISTERS pull a dream from their bag.

PRUDENCE
What is it?

SISTER #2
It's yours. You lost it.

SISTER #1
Long time ago.

PRUDENCE
But what is it?

PRUDENCE moves to touch the dream.

SISTER #1 snatches it away.
SISTER #1

No! Not yet!

PRUDENCE
You said it was mine, whatever it is, and I want it.

SISTER #2
Careful what you ask for.

PRUDENCE
Please?

The SISTERS swing the dream back and forth between them over the next.

SISTER #2
Once upon a time...

SISTER #1
No, not like that.

SISTER #2
Okay. How about, A long, long time ago?

SISTER #1
How about I tell it?

PRUDENCE
Just tell me!

SISTER #2
When you were small you had a dream. Well, you had lots of dreams, but this one in particular was special.

SISTER #1
And a little while after your mother died, you lost it. Not right away, but slowly.

SISTER #2

And then it faded, and you couldn't see it anymore.

SISTER #1

But today, for some reason, it was just there. Floating in the pass.

SISTER #2

And so we caught it.

SISTER #1

I caught it.

PRUDENCE

And you brought it here.

SISTER #1

Of course. Where else we gonna take it?

PRUDENCE

Can I have it?

SISTER #2

Yes. But not yet.

SISTER #1

Who made you the boss?

PRUDENCE

Yeah!

SISTER #2

You'll know when you have it. You'll know it was yours all along.

Before PRUDENCE can say anything else, the SISTERS quiet her and lay her back down, sleeping.

JUNE enters. SHE watches her daughter for a moment then looks up to the bridge as DAVE enters.

HE walks along cautiously. From his pocket he pulls and old, crumpled letter.

JUNE

Dear Dave,

I remember the first time I met you. My sister brought me along to a party at Cranberry Lake. There was a bon fire. And you were sitting across from me. In the firelight you looked like a god of some kind.

I was so scared to talk to you. Like I might say something stupid.

And then you came up to me right before we were leaving and kicked the dirt like Charlie Brown. I didn't know then that you would be the love of my life, which is why it's so hard for me to write this letter now.

Dave, I'm leaving you.

I'm going to take Prudence with me. You need help and it's not the kind of help I can offer. I don't know what to do any more, but I know that I don't want our daughter to be raised in fear by people who do nothing but fight.

People who do nothing but say stupid things to one another.

I believe it takes courage to commit yourself to one other person for the rest of your life. I believe it takes courage to survive a war and raise a daughter. And I believe that in my own way, I am surviving a war that never ended.

I also believe it takes courage to pack up your life and start all over again. And that's what I'm going to do. And I hope you'll do the same, because it takes even more courage to survive a loss.

I love you and always will.

June

Dave begins to tear up the letter and lets the pieces fall from the bridge into the ocean.

DAVE

I'll miss you, June Bug.

JUNE

I'll miss you too, Dave.

Dave exits. JUNE looks to the SISTERS.

JUNE

I still think it takes a lot of courage to survive a loss.

SISTER #1

Nah. The dead have a way of never leaving!

The SISTERS giggle and exit with JUNE. The lights may linger on PRUDENCE for a moment, but then darkness.

Act Two, Scene Eight:

As the lights come up, PRUDENCE enters the stage in her BDU's. DAVE is sitting in a chair, blue lights from the television flicker across his face. DAVE is unaware of his daughter's entrance.

PRUDENCE

Dad?

DAVE

What? Oh.

PRUDENCE

Sorry, I knocked and the door was open...

DAVE

I wasn't expecting-

PRUDENCE

I'm sorry. I knew this was a bad idea. I'll go now.

DAVE

No! Wait! Just hold your horses. It's really fine.

PRUDENCE

Okay?

DAVE

Is your Grandma here?

PRUDENCE

In the garden... pruning your rose bush. Apparently it's completely out of control and you were supposed to call her back in March to take care of it.

DAVE

Yeah, I guess gardening isn't really my forte.

PRUDENCE

Amongst other things.

DAVE

I guess there's no reason to be civil when there's so much anger in the air.

PRUDENCE

Who said I was angry?

DAVE

That uniform suits you. I've only seen it in pictures.

PRUDENCE

Yeah, well, it's not like I like to put on a dog and pony show all the time.

DAVE

Why are you here, Prudence? Did your Grandma make you? I don't want you here because you were forced.

PRUDENCE

I'm- I came to ask you a question.

DAVE

What's that?

PRUDENCE

Did you-

DAVE

What?

PRUDENCE

Why- why did you let Mom name me Prudence?

It's a beautiful song, but a horrible name. Why would you let my mother do that to me?

DAVE

She didn't name you. And that's not what you came to ask.

PRUDENCE

Who did then? And- and yes it is.

DAVE

You should really just say what's on your mind.

PRUDENCE

Okay.

DAVE

Okay.

PRUDENCE

I want to know- I want to know if you did it. If you killed my Mom. If you cut her up into pieces and put her in a suitcase and threw her off the bridge.

DAVE

...

PRUDENCE

Because if you did--

DAVE

I don't know.

PRUDENCE

--Because if you did. I could never, ever forgive you.

DAVE

I said, I don't know.

PRUDENCE

What? How could you not know?

DAVE

It's hard to explain.

PRUDENCE

Well try.

DAVE

When I used to drink. A lot back then- and I would black out. That night, we had a fight- which I still don't remember much of- I- woke up over by Pass Lake. I was naked and muddy. A couple guys who were up fly fishing loaned me some clothes and gave me a ride back.

PRUDENCE

I don't want to know anymore.

DAVE

Just listen. Please.

PRUDENCE listens reluctantly.

DAVE

I carry this with me every day.

PRUDENCE

What about me? You're telling me that you fight with my Mom and you don't remember. Then she ends up in a suitcase! What do you think I'm carrying with me right now?

DAVE

When we found her- I just wanted to rip my heart out so I couldn't feel the pain anymore. I still don't know what happened. I still don't know if I did it or not.

PRUDENCE

You left me. And all I wanted was my Dad.

DAVE

And all I wanted was to feel anything else but what I was feeling.

I thought I was putting you first by letting you go. I didn't trust myself. Like I might do something horrible to you and then really lose you forever.

Like I might hurt you.

PRUDENCE

Thank you. For telling me the truth.

I- I have to go.

DAVE

I understand.

PRUDENCE

No Dad. I'm leaving the country.

DAVE

When?

PRUDENCE

I just got recalled. Probably in the next day or so.

DAVE

Well, I didn't assume you'd have much time off- but I figured a couple extra days...

When will you be back?

PRUDENCE

I don't know.

DAVE

Will you be gone a long time?

PRUDENCE

I don't know.

DAVE

Overseas?

PRUDENCE

Pakistan.

DAVE says nothing. HE lowers HIS head.

PRUDENCE

It's not so bad. Just working with the planes. You know? Someone has to flag them in.

SHE begins to slowly walk out.

DAVE

When you were born, it was the most perfect day. The beginning of May and the sun was just shining.

PRUDENCE

Dad, I really have to go.

DAVE

This won't take long. Please?

PRUDENCE nods.

DAVE

Your Mom was working in the garden all day- God knows she wouldn't want her gardens to look out of sorts for the new baby coming... She was standing by the sweet peas. She looked so beautiful with her big, round belly and the sun just starting to set made her look all golden. And then she said, 'It's time to go'.

PRUDENCE

You don't have to talk about this, if you don't want to.

DAVE

Don't you want to know how you came into this world?

PRUDENCE

I never thought about it.

DAVE

Everyone should know where they came from.

PRUDENCE

I suppose that's true.

DAVE

It was time to go, so we went. And we fought the traffic all the way through town; honking and flashing our lights, trying to get around all the Sunday drivers... And we finally got there, but you were already crowning.

DAVE (Cont.)

It was all your mother could do to hold you in. Finally the nurse found a young doctor and said, 'You sit there and watch!' And out you came.

She just had to have a doctor to witness you come into the world.

PRUDENCE

I guess I was in a hurry.

DAVE

Your whole life. When you started walking, you didn't just walk, you got up and ran!

PRUDENCE

I should really get going.

DAVE

Thought you wanted to know where you got your name?

PRUDENCE

Are we getting there?

DAVE

We're there.

When I looked at you, and you had this little curl on the top of your head I knew that you were your mother's Sweet Pea. But I didn't know what the P. stood for, so we took you home without a name. "Baby Isaac" your name tag said.

And I was holding you a couple nights later and the song came on the radio, and that's when it took. You were a little Prudence and there was nothing you could do about it. And when the sad guitars play in that song, anytime, I always think of that moment. My one, pure moment with you.

PRUDENCE

I've got to- I have to go.

I have to catch a flight.

DAVE

I know. You asked me, so I thought it was the least I could do.

Take- take care, Dad.

PRUDENCE

PRUDENCE begins to exit and DAVE stands. THEY look at each other for an awkward moment, and PRUDENCE exits silently.

DAVE sits back down and the television lights flicker over his face one last time as tears roll down his cheeks.

The lights fade.

Act Two, Scene Nine:

PRUDENCE is flying to Pakistan. DAVE stands at the top of the bridge with EBEBY. THE MOON SISTERS move around the stage freely. The wooden blocks clank and the gong occasionally underlines a point.

PRUDENCE

Take offs and the landings are the parts I hate the worst. My ears have never grown accustomed to the pain. Most people outgrow it, but it still hurts me as much as it did when I was little.

DAVE

I said goodbye.

EBEY

To John?

DAVE

No. June.

PRUDENCE

It's always the worst at night. I'm already tired and cranky, and I just want to go home.

DAVE

Right before Prudence left.

EBEY

Took long enough.

PRUDENCE

I wonder if the plane did go down, or even if it was just my time, would I have anything to take with me.

DAVE

I've never seen you say goodbye.

EBEY

You know... it's not goodbye. More like, see you around.

MOON SISTER #1

What do you take with you when you go?

PRUDENCE

Like any kind of life accomplishments? I don't have any legacies.
Or is that all lived on through your children?

DAVE

I hope so. Cause the thought of just going and then there's
nothing- just no one- I don't know that I can believe that.

EBEY

Me either. I'm sure there's something.

MOON SISTER #2

There's always something.

MOON SISTER #1

Has to be! Nothing gets you nothing!

EBEY

It's getting cold.

DAVE

You go along. I'll catch up with you in a minute.

*EBEY gives DAVE a kiss on the
cheek and exits.*

PRUDENCE

At least I have my name. That you can always take with you.

MOON SISTER #1

Til it's been so long that even your name leaves you!

MOON SISTER #2

Then you just make another one up!

The SISTERS giggle.

*DAVE pulls a black rock from his
pocket. He holds it up to the
sun.*

DAVE

I found this a couple days after the funeral... It's been over twenty years. Don't find black agates around these parts very often.

MOON SISTER #2

Thought we got rid of that!

MOON SISTER #1

I told you. Just 'cause you throw it away doesn't mean it won't come back to you!

DAVE

Thought it was some kind of sign or an omen. I dunno. But it seemed connected, somehow. Like if I held onto it, it was part of her. Of you.

PRUDENCE

So I guess if you take your name, then you'll always be able to find your way home.

DAVE

I think it's time to give it back. I don't want it.

PRUDENCE

And then you can leave everything else you don't need behind.

*side of
not try*

*DAVE tosses the agate over the
the bridge. The SISTERS do
and catch it.*

MOON SISTER #1

Thought you would want to keep that.

MOON SISTER #2

No. That belongs to no one. Just a black rock. What am I gonna do with a black rock?

MOON SISTER #1

Make stone soup?

*The SISTERS giggle. DAVE sighs
and starts to leave.*

MOON SISTER #2

Can we give it to them now?

PRUDENCE

What else could you possibly need?

MOON SISTER #1

No time like the present.

MOON SISTER #2 digs through her satchel and gently hands DAVE a dream. It seems to wash over him. HE stops and looks out over the ocean.

DAVE

It's not goodbye. Just, see ya around.

End of play.

Pronunciation Guide

1. Ebey: *Eee-bee*
2. Whidbey: *Whid-bee*
3. Ben Ure: *Ben Yer-eee*
4. Dugwalla: *Duh-gwal-ah*
5. Juan de Fuca: *Wan-duh-Few-ka*

**Accents are similar to a standard, west coast, American.*

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