

Two Heads of a Hydra

By Darby Sherwood

WHY I LIKE IT: *Drama editor JANET COLSON writes:*

Two Heads of a Hydra is an epic extravaganza with elements of epic theatre itself. The play is a Greek tragedy told through the lens of ancient Greek mythology that takes us from Prometheus getting his heart pecked out by an eagle to the Salem witch trials to the anti-gay purges in modern day Chechnya as if they were all happening in the present. The play is both timely and timeless. It's an actor's feast with opportunities to dig down deep and play double and triple roles. It's expert storytelling and great theatre.

It's also f-ing brutal.

Thanks to the gods and to playwright Darby Sherwood for giving us a Greek chorus of nine muses who bring their own baggage into the mix and help us sort through ours. The muses bear the responsibility of witnessing history repeat itself while questioning the horror perpetuated by gods and mortals alike. They also tell us stories, such as the one about the hydra:

THALIA

And what about the hydra?

CALLIOPE

Every time one head got cut off, another one grew back in its place.

The play is about the power of stories, how they work on us at a conscious and unconscious level. These stories offer us insight, but give us no closure. And they exist beyond the realm of theatre, provoking us to take action.

MELPOMENE

Do you ever wonder why the gods seem so concerned with repetition?

URANIA

They watch history repeat itself.

Day-in and day-out, they witness as humankind makes the same mistakes.

So I guess the worst punishment is to see everything

And yet be powerless to do anything

May the gods take heed.

Five stars.

(Spacing and font size are playwright's own.) Eds.

Two Heads of a Hydra

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SYNOPSIS

Two Heads of a Hydra is a story that spans continents and centuries, featuring dual storylines in modern-day Chechnya and 1692 Salem, Massachusetts, as well as intervention from the Muses. It follows parallel Greek tragedy structures to discuss the ways that inequalities are propagated when they're mourned and then forgotten.

CHARACTERS

Chechnya	Salem	Greek Chorus
Kesira	Verity	Calliope
Raisa	Rachel	Clio
Keram	Jonas	Erato
Malika	Ethel	Euterpe
Pyotr	Abigail	Melpomene
Police Officer	Temperance	Polyhymnia
Taxi Driver	Dorothy	Terpsichore
	Chief Magistrate Stoughton	Thalia
	Newton	Urania
	Executioner	

DOUBLING

Characters can be doubled in a variety of ways. The current format is optimized for these doublings:

1. Kesira/Temperance/Melpomene
2. Raisa/Abigail/Thalia
3. Keram/Newton/Erato
4. Malika/Verity/Clio
5. Pyotr/Taxi Driver/Chief Magistrate Stoughton/Terpsichore
6. Police Officer/Jonas/Euterpe
7. Rachel/Urania
8. Ethel/Polyhymnia
9. Dorothy/Calliope

SETTING

Chechnya, 2019 and Salem, 1692

NOTES

- Each scene should flow as seamlessly as possible into the next

PERFORMANCE HISTORY

METEA VALLEY THEATRE (February 2018) - Directed by Darby Sherwood and Abha Naik

Stage Managed by Truman Mitchell

Cast - Michael Miller, Maya Williams, Annie Sweeton, Alyssa Livorsi, Emma Carlson, Roger Valdez, Jordan Mamon, Macy Margherio, Alexis Bass

NOW HERE THIS SEATTLE (June 2019) - Directed by Megan Brewer

Stage Managed by Sandra Bobman

Cast - Arika Matoba, Hannah Kathline, Frank Sun, Carolynne Wilcox, Andrew Forrest, Nathan Drackett, Kayleah Lewis, Alexandria Stevens, Aimee Decker

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON SCHOOL OF DRAMA CABLAB (March 2019 - performances cancelled due to COVID-19) - Directed by Darby Sherwood and Sha Ritoch

Stage Managed by Brittany Thomas and Raina Sadhan

Cast and Crew - Natalie Modlin, Kendra Kolasinski, Elliott Chinn, Spencer Goodin, Darby Sherwood, Sagen Berry, Jaime Dahl, Ryn Paris, Megan Darby, Alaina Moretti, Alexandra Cotutiu, Tina Rajabi, Isaac Afolayan

Prologue

CALLIOPE

Have you ever heard the story of Prometheus?

CLIO

He molded mankind out of clay.

ERATO

And then brought them fire.

CALLIOPE

And all of this made Zeus very angry.

So, he chained Prometheus to a stake and set an eagle to eat his heart every day.

After the eagle had eaten all but the smallest piece, it became whole again

And the eagle began to eat it again and again and again.

EUTERPE

And Sisyphus?

MELPOMENE

He was forced to roll a gigantic boulder up a hill

But every time it reached the top,

The boulder would go tumbling down again

And Sisyphus would push it all the way back

Until it came tumbling down once again.

THALIA

And again and again.

POLYHYMNIA

And do you remember the story of Danaus and his daughters?

TERPSICHORE

Each of the daughters killed their husband.

URANIA

As punishment they were forced to carry water to a bowl until it could be filled to the brim.

And yet, as much water as they brought, it would never be full.

CLIO

Because of the holes in the bottom.

EUTERPE

Why didn't they ever think to patch the holes?

ERATO

They were told to carry the water, not patch the holes.

CALLIOPE

I suppose it seems easier to keep carrying the water than to go through the whole ordeal of changing the bowl.

MELPOMENE

Do you ever wonder why the gods seem so concerned with repetition?

URANIA

They watch history repeat itself.
Day-in and day-out, they witness as humankind makes the same mistakes.
So I guess the worst punishment is to see everything
And yet be powerless to do anything.

THALIA

And what about the hydra?

CALLIOPE

Every time one head got cut off, another one grew back in its place.

This is the story of the hydra,
Or pieces of it.
It's not finished yet,
But it keeps turning over and over.

Scene One: Chechnya, 2019

KESIRA

Mama, is this what we're walking to?

MALIKA

Yes.

KESIRA

I don't understand. It's just a couple of trees between empty fields.

MALIKA

It's a graveyard.

KESIRA

What?

MALIKA

See the way the grass grows differently over there?

It's the edge of a trench.

Two - three hundred bodies down there.

KESIRA

Oh my god.

MALIKA

Your great grandfather is buried here somewhere.

My mother used to point to the exact spot,

But I think she pointed somewhere different every time.

KESIRA

I had no idea this existed.

MALIKA

It becomes easy to forget.

(A moment of silence. MALIKA gazes at the tree as KESIRA walks around the field.)

MALIKA *(continued)*

Your great grandfather fought with the Red Army in World War II,
Helped push the Nazis all the way out of Malgobek.
Nohkcho Tsatsarov, one of many heroes.

KESIRA

I know that. Papa talks about him - and Keram, too.

MALIKA

Do you remember how the story goes after that?
After the glory of war?

KESIRA

No.

MALIKA

He got his leg blown off. He had to come home.
It was right around the start of the deportations.
Stalin's soldiers started pillaging the country, forcing all the Chechens out.
They wanted everyone to walk to Kazakhstan and your great grandfather couldn't walk anymore
So they shot him in his good leg.
You don't die immediately from a shot in the leg.
So there must've been... moments,
I don't know how long it takes,
Where he saw the people he'd fought alongside
Destroying everything he'd ever known.
And that's how his story ended.
Nokhcho Tsatsarov, for all his medals and sacrifices and honor,
Is now a stranger, lying forgotten in a mass grave.

KESIRA

Do you think he would rest easier if it had been a real grave?

MALIKA

Maybe.
There used to be a plaque.
Right here.

KESIRA

I can feel it.

MALIKA

People forget but there's something in the universe that never does.

KESIRA

What happened to all of it?

MALIKA

It was torn down by the police
Who were told to by the government.
It used to be lovely, in a tragic way.
After the Chechens were allowed to come back,
There was a whole group of women who built a memorial to their husbands and fathers and sons.
There were flags and plaques and headstones.
And the ground was alive with flowers.
For years, one person or another would always remember to replace the flowers.

KESIRA

And now it's all gone.

MALIKA

Even the remnants of dead flowers.

KESIRA

All of this suffering...

MALIKA

Quieted.

KESIRA

It's awful.

MALIKA

I wanted you to see this place before your father dies,
Because it's not us who die, Kesira.
The women live to tell their stories
And put headstones on their graves.

ERATO

Chechnya, 2019.
Its own Greek tragedy set on the southern tip of Russia.
After fifteen years of war, cities were reborn and rebuilt

URANIA

Which doesn't stop them from decaying on the inside.

ERATO

Like flowers on graves.

URANIA

It's always baffled me,
The way they put flowers on graves.
As if there aren't already enough dead things in a cemetery.
Before long the color fades from the petals as they separate from the stems,
As they age decades in days.
Until there's just enough left to resemble ashes.

MELPOMENE

Not even a corpse.
Not enough to bury
But, still, something once living is now dead.
Do they know that flowers die too?
Or did they forget because it was convenient?

Scene Two: Salem, 1692

EUTERPE

And this is Salem, 1692.

The Salem Witch Trials.

Less than twenty years after the start of the witch trials, the Salem legislature formally apologized and restored the good names of all those accused and tried.

A lot of good that does a corpse.

ABIGAIL

Good afternoon, Lieutenant Governor.

CHIEF MAGISTRATE STOUGHTON

Hello, Abigail.

My, my, with all this witch business, I thought everyone would have forgotten what my real purpose here is.

ABIGAIL

You've been doing a fine job of leading those trials.

Chief Magistrate suits you.

CHIEF MAGISTRATE STOUGHTON

All for the good of the town.

ABIGAIL

Certainly.

I should think this whole sordid ordeal is, grim as it may be.

CHIEF MAGISTRATE STOUGHTON

I agree completely.

Always nice chatting with you, Abigail.

I best get back up to the courthouse,

We've got another trial today.

*(TEMPERANCE enters and approaches ABIGAIL,
STOUGHTON exits.)*

TEMPERANCE

If you had to guess, who would you say is going to be tried next?

ABIGAIL

Why, for witchcraft?

TEMPERANCE

What do you think?

ABIGAIL

Could be anyone, really.

TEMPERANCE

It really could be anyone.

ABIGAIL

In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if it's that spinster, Verity Underhill.

TEMPERANCE

Seems well within the realm of possibility.

ABIGAIL

Something's very off about her.

TEMPERANCE

Well, as they say, it could be anyone.

Scene Three: Chechnya, 2019

RAISA

Have you heard from Ruslan?

PYOTR

No.

I don't expect to see him again.

He must've been seized by the police.

RAISA

I guess I shouldn't be surprised.

PYOTR

It's getting worse.

There have been whispers about it for awhile.

Novaya Gazeta just published an article telling the rest of the world that Kadyrov's been setting up concentration camps and abducting gay men to fill them.

RAISA

Well, that's got to change something.

PYOTR

Who's going to care?

RAISA

Someone's got to.

PYOTR

I don't see anyone volunteering.

Besides, everything run by the government denies that gay people even exist here at all.

RAISA

(Scoffing) We know that's not true.

PYOTR

Once you have enough power, you don't have to care what's true.

RAISA

What's the point, then?

PYOTR

You still have to be careful, Raisa.

Knowing the world doesn't make you immune.

RAISA

Heeding the world may kill me first.

(A buzzing noise from RAISA's phone. She checks it.)

RAISA *(continued)*

My family. They want me to come home.

PYOTR

Don't underestimate survival, Raisa.

Scene Four: Salem, 1692

*(VERITY is cleaning up the house as JONAS enters and
knocks on the door. VERITY crosses to open it.)*

JONAS

Verity.

VERITY

Why, Jonas Bishop, what are you doing here?

JONAS

Had some extra bread, figured I'd drop it off here.

VERITY

Now, Jonas, I don't need charity.
Rachel and I get on just fine by ourselves.

JONAS

Came to see you, too, Verity.

VERITY

You should call me Miss Underhill.
I'm older than you. And a mother, you know.

JONAS

No husband.

VERITY

You volunteering?

JONAS

I told you, I'll run away with you.

VERITY

I'm sorry to say, that's not how things work.
Besides, Abigail would come after us all.
I already do whatever I can to avoid that woman.

JONAS

Aw, my mother wouldn't do anything.

VERITY

Have you met her?

JONAS

(Defensively, daftly) Yes.

VERITY

What I mean to say is that you're already married to that girl your family picked.

JONAS

Don't love her, though.

VERITY

People rarely do things for love.

JONAS

I love you -

VERITY

Don't be foolish, you don't know what that means.

JONAS

I know what I can promise you, Verity.
A good life.
A loving husband.
And I can be a good father, too.

VERITY

Jonas.

JONAS

I'm serious.

VERITY

You'll make a loving husband for Ethel.
You can be a father to your own children.

JONAS

I want to be with you.

VERITY

Jonas Bishop, I need you to stop pretending I even could say yes to any of these things you're proposing.

JONAS

I'd like you to.

VERITY

Then you're a fool.
Our lives are set.
I'm going to be a spinster for the rest of my days.
You've got a future ahead of you -

JONAS

I don't want that future.

VERITY

Well, you're not in a position to refuse it.
None of us are.
We're always judged by our decisions
But, in truth, there's barely any we really made ourselves.
Now, I'd appreciate it if you could stop humoring me, Jonas.

JONAS

You'll change your mind, Verity.

VERITY

Out, now.
Rachel will be home any minute.

JONAS

I'll be back soon.

VERITY

Goodbye, Jonas.

(JONAS exits. He passes RACHEL, who is heading towards the house, on his way.)

JONAS

Morning, Rachel!

RACHEL

Afternoon, Jonas.

(RACHEL enters the house.)

RACHEL *(continued)*

Good afternoon, Mama.

VERITY

How was school?

RACHEL

Good.

VERITY

Wash up, we're about ready for supper.

RACHEL

Mama, I'm nearly fifteen now.

VERITY

I know that.

RACHEL

I'm getting older and I want to know more about this world.

VERITY

(Scoffing) What made you decide that?

RACHEL

I think that this town is too small for me.

These people are too small for me.

VERITY

Rachel -

RACHEL

I should like to travel long enough and far enough away so that I can know the whole world and not feel too big or too small anywhere.

VERITY

Rachel, the world is vast.

RACHEL

And this corner of it is small and cramped.

VERITY

It does well enough.

RACHEL

All I know about the rest of the world is that it's different and I'd like to know how.

VERITY

Perhaps it's worse.

RACHEL

Why do you say that?

VERITY

If living in one town were so bad, more people would leave.
So it could be that people find it's not worth the cost or the strain and that they're hardly any happier than they were before.

RACHEL

Well then, do you know what else I've realized?

VERITY

What?

RACHEL

I've lived in Salem all my life and some days I barely know it at all.

VERITY

Really?

RACHEL

And the people in it.

VERITY

What are you trying to say, Rachel?

RACHEL

I want to know about my father.

VERITY

Rachel.

RACHEL

I'm almost fifteen.

VERITY

You think I forgot?

RACHEL

I think it's right for me to know.

VERITY

Don't ask me now.

RACHEL

It's been fifteen years.

VERITY

I'm tired.

RACHEL

If you won't tell me, I'll run away.

VERITY

Don't say things like that.

RACHEL

I'm serious.

I'd rather see what I can find on my own if my only other choice is living half in the dark.

VERITY

Rachel.

RACHEL

Mama, please.

VERITY

Fine.

Sit down.

(RACHEL sits down and looks at VERITY expectantly.)

VERITY *(continued)*

It's a long story. Are you sure you wouldn't rather hear another?

RACHEL

Yes.

VERITY

Well, Rachel,

They say "God is faithful;

He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear

But when you are tempted,

He will also provide a way out so that you can endure it."

And... God knows we're strong.

He knows that we don't need some of the things other people do.

RACHEL

What does that mean?

VERITY

It means God knew I wouldn't need a husband

So he gave me a daughter instead, knowing that she, too, would be strong enough to face the world unafraid.

So I don't have a father at all?

RACHEL

I... yes.

VERITY

Because we're too strong.

RACHEL

... Yes.

VERITY

Well... alright.

RACHEL

That satisfy your curiosity?
Come now, we'll make supper.

VERITY

Scene Five: Chechnya, 2019

(RAISA enters and knocks quietly on the door. KESIRA answers it.)

KESIRA

(Whispered) Raisa! You were supposed to come hours ago.

RAISA

I tried to. I got held up.

KESIRA

Well, you can't just show up here without warning.

RAISA

You said your parents were in Grozny.
They're still there, aren't they?

KESIRA

Yes, but Keram's here.

RAISA

We won't wake him.

KESIRA

(Softly) Raisa, this isn't a good idea.

RAISA

But you still want to see me.

KESIRA

Well, we have to be quiet.

RAISA

I know.
How are you?

KESIRA

I'm tired.

I didn't know what to think when you didn't come earlier.
I thought maybe something had happened...

RAISA

I'm sorry. I wasn't trying to scare you.

You said you had something to tell me?

KESIRA

Let's not talk about it now.

RAISA

What should we talk about?

KESIRA

I don't know.

Nothing.

I just want to be with you.

POLYHYMNIA

Time is the most precious thing we'll ever hold
And yet we can never possess it or tame it.
You would think that knowing life is short would make people kinder and more considerate
But life is also long.

RAISA

What is it?

KESIRA

A couple more seconds.

RAISA

Until?

KESIRA

A couple more seconds.

(KESIRA inhales, closing her eyes; RAISA watches closely.)

KESIRA *(continued)*

...until it feels like reality again.

RAISA

Oh.

POLYHYMNIA

So what do you do with time?
What can you?
Is anything worth spending a life on?

KESIRA

(With her eyes still closed) Nothing's real yet. Maybe it doesn't have to be
If I can keep my eyes closed and my feet on the ground.

RAISA

Open your eyes. Let's be together.

KESIRA

(Opening her eyes) No, that's the problem.
We can't be together in reality. I can't see you again.
This only works if nothing's real -

RAISA

Then nothing's real.

KESIRA

I can't see you again.
This has to be the last time I ever see you.

RAISA

Kesira.

KESIRA

This is too dangerous.
I don't know why it took me so long to realize.

RAISA

We've always known it's dangerous.

KESIRA

But we didn't think about it.

RAISA

Or we didn't care.

KESIRA

We didn't want to.
And I don't want to.
But I can't ignore it any longer.

RAISA

What's the point of existing then?

KESIRA

Don't ask me that.
Do you think I want to be saying this?

RAISA

Would you rather survive or die in pursuit of something to live for?
Because there's a difference between surviving and living.

KESIRA

I have my family. I need to worry about them.

RAISA

We're our family.
Your family would kill you the moment they knew who you were
And mine would do the same.
All we've got to live for is each other.
Otherwise we're alone.

KESIRA

Don't you get it? The real problem is that no one's ever alone.
The world has never been just us
And there will never be a time when it could be.
Don't make me the villain in this. I don't want it any more than you.

RAISA

Then close your eyes again.
And I'll close mine.
And then we'll never see each other again after tonight
But maybe tonight will never end.

KESIRA

Raisa.

RAISA

Try it.

KESIRA

Don't pretend it's romantic to live in delusion.

RAISA

Then I'll think of something else.
(*After a moment*) Come outside with me.

KESIRA

Why?

RAISA

Because I love you
And I want a sweeter last moment than this.

KESIRA

Raisa.

RAISA

For love?

KESIRA

For just a second.

(*They go outside and look at the stars.*)

RAISA

They're beautiful, aren't they?
Like cracks in the world.
I think it's easy to get stuck looking at these walls with your feet on this ground and forget that there's anything else at all.
But then, if you find the place and the moment, you can see the entire vastness of the universe.
And then you can look -
Are you looking?

KESIRA

I'm looking.

RAISA

We're not of this earth.
We exist above it or just on top of it.
We're not bound to the walls or the ground.
We're not a part of it like we're a part of each other.
You're real
And I'm real
And nothing else has to be.

KESIRA

Nothing else?

RAISA

Not a damn thing.
We're like lost stars
Who've been lost almost long enough to forget they ever were stars.
Don't you see that now, Kesira?
All people are stars, really.
All stars are lovers.

KESIRA

I can't do this.
Raisa, I wish just as much as you that metaphors could solve reality
But they can't.

RAISA

Perseus loved Andromeda.

KESIRA

We can't stay out here.

RAISA

Perseus loved Andromeda so much that he killed a great sea monster to save her.
They loved each other so much that their entire beings are immortalized in the stars.
Do you love me like that?

KESIRA

Raisa, don't ask me that.

RAISA

Tell me you don't and I'll leave.

KESIRA

You have to leave.

RAISA

Not if you still love me.
Go on, tell me you don't.

KESIRA

I don't want to do that either.

RAISA

Then tell me you do!

KESIRA

It's not that simple!

RAISA

Then just say something!
Stop whispering! Stop just standing there!
Stop letting the world destroy you!
Be a goddamn person and not just a decoration -

KESIRA

Stop being so rash!
You pretend that danger is noble without even considering that survival could be too!

RAISA

You're a doormat!

KESIRA

You don't know what you're talking about.

RAISA

You don't know what matters.

KESIRA

At least I can see the world as it is.

RAISA

You can't see any farther than the confines of your misery.
I can see the world that could be better.

KESIRA

And isn't yet!

RAISA

And won't be if we just wait for it.

KESIRA

Do you love me?

RAISA

Of course I do.

KESIRA

Do you love me or do you love the thought of me?

RAISA

I love you. What's that supposed to mean?

KESIRA

It means I love you but sometimes you scare me.
Sometimes I'm scared that you'll fly too close to the sun
And burst into flame.
And maybe you just don't want to burn alone.

RAISA

Is that what you're worried about?

KESIRA

Yes!

RAISA

You're right, in a sense.
Sometimes I ignore all the things I'd rather forget
But that's only for the love of you.
And you're wrong, in a sense, too.
I see the world, I just see through the walls and beyond the stars
Because I see all that this world could become.
I can see the danger but I don't dwell on it
Because no matter what I could survive,
I couldn't live without you.

KESIRA

I love you.
I love you, but I can't live like this.

KERAM (*from offstage*)

Kesira?

KESIRA

(*Hissing whisper*) Get out of here!

(*RAISA exits hurriedly. KERAM enters.*)

KERAM

Kesira, what are you doing out here?

KESIRA

I was looking at the stars.

It's past midnight. KERAM

I couldn't sleep. KESIRA

Thinking about Papa? KERAM

Yes. KESIRA

He's sick. KERAM

I know. KESIRA

He's dying. KERAM

I know. KESIRA

It's feels so much heavier when you say it rather than think it. KERAM

He's dying. KESIRA

I don't even know how to think about it.
(*A pause.*) And the inevitability of it. KERAM

What do you mean? KESIRA

He's dying
Faster and faster than before.
But I'm dying too.
We're all dying before it starts to show. KERAM

What's the point of existing then? KESIRA

KERAM

Maybe it's leaving behind some part of you that will stay alive
Or being sure to die in a right way.
Or maybe it's not about that at all.

KESIRA

I don't know.

KERAM

I wish I knew if I'd notice the moment I die.
You know?
Like, maybe it'll be this sudden rush of nothing.
Or there'll be this tearing sensation.
Or what if there's something eternal that stays intact
And it takes me a long time to even realize I've died?

KESIRA

Some people say there's people living up there in the stars.

KERAM

Do you think that?

KESIRA

I don't like to concentrate so much on what comes after life.
I suppose I've got to concentrate on living for now.

KERAM

You're probably right.
Yeah, you're probably right.

Scene Six: Salem, 1692

(ABIGAIL joins DOROTHY and TEMPERANCE. They are working on their sewing throughout the scene.)

ABIGAIL

Good morning, Dorothy. Good morning, Temperance.

DOROTHY

Abigail, have you heard the rumor that Jonathan Huxley's been "visiting" with that Catherine Barrows?

ABIGAIL

What's he been doing on these visits?

DOROTHY

Nothing that would please Mrs. Huxley.

TEMPERANCE

Nothing pleases that woman anyway.
She does nothing but complain.
And they've been fighting for years.
One can hardly blame Jonathan.

ABIGAIL

And what about the other girl?
She can't be much older than Jonathan's daughter.

DOROTHY

That's what makes it so scandalous, isn't it?

TEMPERANCE

Well, there's another scandal going on in our little town.

ABIGAIL

Do tell.

TEMPERANCE

Well, my daughter came home the other day and I asked her about school as usual. And she had a very interesting story to tell me.

DOROTHY

Go on.

TEMPERANCE

She said that Verity's little girl told her the - apparent - reason why Verity doesn't have a husband.

DOROTHY

Go on.

TEMPERANCE

She said that Verity told her that God blessed Verity with a daughter because she was too strong to need a husband for that.

DOROTHY

Like some new age Virgin Mary!

ABIGAIL

My, my. Isn't that just all kinds of odd?

TEMPERANCE

I certainly thought so.

ABIGAIL

The kind of thing that could brand someone a witch in this town.

TEMPERANCE

Are you suggesting...?

ABIGAIL

It should certainly be considered.

DOROTHY

Now, I'm not so sure.

ABIGAIL

And why do you say that?

DOROTHY

I just mean, it's starting to get out of hand, isn't it?
People being accused left and right.

TEMPERANCE

But the lists of incidents and grievances are growing as well.

DOROTHY

Well, of course,
It just seems like a comment from her daughter doesn't warrant a whole witch trial.
It at least encourages pause.

ABIGAIL

Well, to add to the list of grievances, I think you should be concerned for your own daughter,
too.

DOROTHY

What are you on about, Abigail?

ABIGAIL

I should hope to assume she's but an innocent victim in all this.
As my son is, of course.

DOROTHY

Well, what's this?
Your Jonas is married to my Ethel.

ABIGAIL

I know that.
Seems Verity's the one that needs to be reminded.
Haven't you seen how often she's with Jonas?

TEMPERANCE

Oh, I've noticed that.

ABIGAIL

And you've seen the looks she's given him.

TEMPERANCE

And the looks he's returned.

ABIGAIL

Temperance!

All in all, it certainly makes one question.

Aren't devil women always trying to destroy our proper little families?

If I were Ethel, I'd worry my husband was being possessed by her.

And, as a mother, of course, it's my responsibility to ensure my child's safety and sanctity.

Unless, of course, safety and sanctity are of little concern to you, Dorothy?

DOROTHY

Well, when you put it like that...

ABIGAIL

It's a small price to pay for preserving life and liberty.

DOROTHY

Yes.

ABIGAIL

I'm glad we see this the same way.

Good afternoon, girls. Always a pleasure.

Scene Seven: Chechnya, 2019

KERAM

He was dying and now he's dead.
He was dying and, logically, the next step was for him to die.
You're not supposed to just die.
There's supposed to be something bigger attached,
Something otherworldly or eternal or powerful to turn death inorganic.
So we can forget that it conquers even the good and the weak and the insignificant.

*(A knock on the door. KERAM answers and the
POLICE OFFICER enters.)*

POLICE OFFICER

I need to speak with the man of the house.

KERAM

My father's dead, Officer.

POLICE OFFICER

Congratulations.

KERAM

What?

POLICE OFFICER

Condolences, of course.
I just mean to say, you're the man of the house now, are you not?

KERAM

I am.

POLICE OFFICER

So, congratulations.

KERAM

What are you here for?

POLICE OFFICER

Lots of responsibility, isn't it?

KERAM

I - yes.

Ever had to be a real man, son?

POLICE OFFICER

What?

KERAM

Are you military?

POLICE OFFICER

No. My father was.

KERAM

Which side?

POLICE OFFICER

Ours.
Kadyrovtsy. Both wars.

KERAM

Enough glory for the both of you, I suppose.

POLICE OFFICER

I was too young to join.

KERAM

And now?

POLICE OFFICER

(Firmly) What are you here for, Officer?

KERAM

It was just a bit of a joke.
Can you take a joke, son?

POLICE OFFICER

Don't call me that.

KERAM

Wasn't too funny, I guess.

POLICE OFFICER

It's been a long day, Officer. If you're just here to -

KERAM

POLICE OFFICER

Straight to the point. No messing around.
I like that.
Suppose a man like you could pull the trigger.

KERAM

What are you here for, Officer?

POLICE OFFICER

You would've made a good soldier.
If you hadn't been scared...

KERAM

Officer -

POLICE OFFICER

Your sister's head.

KERAM

What?

POLICE OFFICER

On a platter.

KERAM

I think you need to leave.

POLICE OFFICER

Come on, we're just starting to have fun.
I think you want to keep me on your side.
I think you want to listen.

(A tense moment of silence.)

POLICE OFFICER *(continued)*

Your sister's a homosexual.
She's a threat to the peace and the public
And as such, it's your responsibility to kill her.

(Another moment of silence.)

POLICE OFFICER *(continued)*

To the point enough for you?

KERAM

I can't.

POLICE OFFICER

If only that were an option.
See, I told you you'd want me to like you.
Because I can make your life hell.
And I will.
But only if I need to.
You've got your chance to do the right thing.
The thing a good soldier would do.

KERAM

Officer -

POLICE OFFICER

No more small talk.
This is your war.
Have a good night, now.

Scene Eight: Chechnya, 2019

(The street in town. There's just a couple people milling about. RAISA and PYOTR are standing farther away, trying not to be noticed.)

PYOTR

You shouldn't be out here, Raisa.

RAISA

I'm leaving Chechnya.

PYOTR

Excuse me?

RAISA

Kesira and I are leaving.
I saved up money, I'm buying the tickets.
We'll go to Moscow first and then somewhere else.

PYOTR

(Dismissively) Good for you.

RAISA

I wanted you to know.
So that when you hear I'm gone you won't have to worry.

PYOTR

Ruslan came back.
They were keeping him locked in a basement.
They were electrocuting him,
They were kicking him with steel toed boots and beating him with pipes.
And all that time, they never touched him.
They're the fucking government.
They were the ones holding the goddamn pipes and they were afraid to touch him.
Then they dropped him on his doorstep, all bruised and bloody
And he couldn't take it anymore.
Ruslan came back but a part of him had already died.
So he shot himself and the rest of him died too.

RAISA

I'm so sorry.

Yeah? PYOTR

This is why we have to get out. RAISA

You're too naive. PYOTR

If it's about money, I can help you,
Once we're settled, I can send - RAISA

No one wants refugees, Raisa.
Chechnya's burning but so is the rest of the world. PYOTR

So you're just gonna watch it? RAISA

From the comfort of my own home. PYOTR

Ruslan wouldn't want - RAISA

Don't tell me what the fuck Ruslan would've wanted. PYOTR

He would've wanted to be safe.
That's all any of us want. RAISA

Good luck with your plans. PYOTR

(PYOTR exits.)

Scene Nine: Salem, 1692

ETHEL

Another woman's to be hanged as a witch this afternoon.
And there are more to be accused, my mother's been telling me.

JONAS

It's utter hysteria, isn't it?
It's madness, Ethel.

ETHEL

I agree.
No one ever has much evidence and yet the woman's always convicted.

JONAS

Madness, that's what it is.

ETHEL

One certainly starts to worry that it can befall anybody.

JONAS

One certainly starts to doubt the motives of those accusing.

ETHEL

I'm glad we can talk about these things in our house.
I'm glad we're not one of those newly married couples who don't share anything.

JONAS

Me, too.

ETHEL

My mother's miserable.
Growing up, I watched her get more and more sad.

JONAS

Your mother seems fine.

ETHEL

She's tired.
And no one listens to her,
So she's stopped saying things she wants people to hear.

JONAS

Oh.

ETHEL

My father isn't like that.
He's tired too but he speaks very loud.

JONAS

He does.

ETHEL

I don't want to scream.

JONAS

I'd appreciate if you didn't.

ETHEL

I don't want to scream to be heard.

JONAS

I see.

ETHEL

I'm not foolish, Jonas.
And I'm not naive.

JONAS

I know.

ETHEL

We're not in love.
And I don't mind it.
I'd rather we be friends anyway. Confidantes.

People who can make each other less lonely.

JONAS

Yeah?

ETHEL

All I want is someone to talk with and stand by.
We don't need to pretend we're in love with each other
And that you don't like flirting with other women.
But so long as it stays this way, with you by my side,
I'd like to be a rather more casual pair of companions.
What do you say to that?

JONAS

That sounds like a good idea.

ETHEL

I'm glad we agree.

JONAS

I am, too.

ETHEL

I think that the reason why so many marriages become miserable is because people have this
outlandish expectation of love.
Or even of reasonable love to stay reasonable.

JONAS

I think you're right, Ethel.

ETHEL

It could be that we'll grow into it.
But maybe it'll just be that we develop a fond respect for each other
And I believe that would serve quite as well.
I should only like to not be alone.

JONAS

I promise you that.
'Til death do us part.

ETHEL

Amen.

Our mothers stopped by earlier, while you were out.

JONAS

What were they here for?

ETHEL

More gossiping as usual.

JONAS

(Scoffing) Then I don't need to know.

ETHEL

You'd find it interesting.

JONAS

How come?

ETHEL

They're accusing a woman of witchcraft.

JONAS

My God. Who?

ETHEL

Verity Underhill.

JONAS

What?

That can't be.

ETHEL

They're just waiting until the Magistrate issues an arrest warrant.

JONAS

I have to go tell her.

Immediately.

ETHEL

Go on, go.

Although I fear there's not much that can be done.

Scene Ten: Chechnya, 2019

(A soft knock on the door. KESIRA moves to answer it and finds RAISA there.)

KESIRA

Do you have a plan?

RAISA

Yes.

KESIRA

What is it?

RAISA

Moscow and then further on.
Stockholm, maybe. Or Tallinn.

KESIRA

Leaving?

RAISA

Just imagine it.
We could forget we were ever here.
Years from now, we could be sitting on the porch in our house by the water in Stockholm or Tallinn,
As if no one existed but us.

KESIRA

It sounds lovely.

RAISA

It'll be amazing.

KESIRA

Shh.

RAISA

I'm sorry. I'm just excited.
I didn't know if you were going to say yes.

KESIRA

I haven't.
I -
It sounds lovely and tempting and amazing
But I don't know if I can leave my family

Especially not so soon after my father's death.

RAISA

Do you want this?

KESIRA

Yes, I do.

RAISA

You deserve a life worth living just as much as anyone.

More.

You're a good person, a truly good person, and that's rare.

KESIRA

I love you.

And I want to be with you.

RAISA

I love you and I want to be with you, too.

Nothing else has to matter.

KESIRA

What about the rest of the world?

RAISA

What about it?

KESIRA

I can't forget it.

The world never really disappears.

Saving ourselves won't stop this world from destroying other people.

RAISA

And what does staying do for them?

KESIRA

I don't know.

I don't know, it's just -

Doesn't it make me a horrible person to forget about everyone else?

RAISA

No.

KESIRA

You're so angry at the world all the time.

Is it because you never expect it to change?

RAISA

I hope it will, but I can't change it alone.
And until then, I still have to live in it.
Where did this come from?
You were so content to lose yourself here before.

KESIRA

What if we need to exist for something bigger?
Maybe our happiness can't be enough.
What if we have to sacrifice to be good people?

RAISA

There's nothing tragically heroic about giving up your life.
Once we're safe and gone, then we'll care about the rest of the world.
But just for now, we can be the most important things.

KESIRA

Okay,
Theoretically.
How do we do it?

RAISA

Getting out of here?

KESIRA

Please tell me there's a plan.

RAISA

There is.

KESIRA

Yeah?

RAISA

First, we've got to get to Moscow.
We'll go by taxi, it'll be the easiest.
Then, once we're in Moscow, we'll figure out what's next.
I've got some money saved up, we could hop a flight anywhere.

KESIRA

And this'll work?

RAISA

I promise.

Don't make promises you can't keep.

KESIRA

This is something I intend to keep.

RAISA

(RAISA and KESIRA kiss. KERAM has been eavesdropping just long enough to see this.)

Okay.

KESIRA

Okay?

RAISA

Yes.

KESIRA

Yes!
We've gotta move fast. I'll put everything in motion.
You just have to be ready, okay?

RAISA

Okay. Yes.

KESIRA

(They embrace before RAISA leaves. KERAM ducks out of the way so that KESIRA can exit further into the house without KERAM being detected. After KESIRA exits, KERAM enters. He is silent for a moment before speaking.)

In my house.
Not only does she break the law and risk everyone in this family
She does it in my house.
So that I can't even pretend to ignore it.

KERAM

What is war to this? Strangers to family?
"A man like you could pull the trigger."
A man like you could pull the trigger.

It's my duty, not my choice.
Nothing's ever anyone's choice.
We're not gods in our own right.

We're not given the power to hold the rising sun
Or place the stars in the sky.
We're interred in other people, reliant on them.
We carry out pieces of the highest vision
And hope that someone knows what we're creating.

(KERAM exits.)

MELPOMENE

Have you ever heard the story of Lotis and Priapus?
Lotis was a nymph and Priapus was a god of fertility.
Late one night, Priapus secretly found Lotis's forest bed and was intent on raping her while she slept.

TERPSICHORE

Silently, he approached her but to his surprise, she awoke.
In her haste and terror, she turned herself into a lotus tree for protection.

POLYHYMНИЯ

Rebirth.

TERPSICHORE

Have you ever heard the story of the lotus eaters?
Odysseus happened upon them while on his journey home.
The people ate the lotuses and then fell victim to their sweet taste,

POLYHYMНИЯ

Becoming distracted and disinterested in everything in the outside world.

MELPOMENE

Apathy.

POLYHYMНИЯ

Rebirth and apathy,
One to comfort the other
But neither to save us from anything.

MELPOMENE

This is the way the world is.
Too ephemeral to be meaningful.

Scene Eleven: Salem, 1692

(JONAS knocks feverishly on VERITY's door. VERITY answers it.)

VERITY

Jonas!
What in the hell are you doing here?
It's already dark out.

JONAS

I know, I know.
I got something to tell you, Verity.
It's real important.

VERITY

It wouldn't be proper to let you in so late.

JONAS

You're being accused of witchcraft.

(VERITY pushes JONAS inside and shuts the door.)

VERITY

What's this?

JONAS

I don't know much.
Ethel told me that they're waiting on an arrest warrant.

VERITY

My God in heaven.
This can't be happening.
I don't even know what to do.

JONAS

We'll run away.
For real, Verity.
You've got no reason to say no this time.

VERITY

I haven't got the money.
I couldn't survive anywhere else.

JONAS

I've got money left from the wedding.
I can get us far enough out of town.

VERITY

You best be serious about this, Jonas.

JONAS

Completely.
I love you.

VERITY

Then can I ask one more thing of you?

JONAS

Anything.

VERITY

If this... plan doesn't work, will you still protect Rachel?

JONAS

Of course.

(RACHEL enters groggily.)

RACHEL

What's going on?

JONAS

I'll go get the money and then I'll be back.

VERITY

Thank you, Jonas.

JONAS

Goodnight, Rachel.

(JONAS exits.)

RACHEL

Mama, what's going on?
What's Jonas doing here?

VERITY

Sit with me a moment.
And breathe.
Rachel, you know I love you more than anything else in the world.

RACHEL

I love you, too.

VERITY

I want you to remember that always,
No matter what.

RACHEL

Mama, what's wrong?

VERITY

God doesn't give us more than we can handle.
He doesn't ask us to lift more than we can bear.
Our earth was designed by the same craftsmen who made the stars
With the kind of beauty that can only be understood from far away.
We can see meaning in the constellations that would be impossible to see if we were standing
upon Orion himself.
So perhaps Orion can see our path,
The way it tangles and winds and draws us to heaven in the end.

RACHEL

What do you mean?

VERITY

I thought I knew this world
Or at least this corner of it.
I thought I could see our lives and futures as clear as day
But every layer of this world is more murky and disguised.
So knowing it only leaves more to be known.
Truth is not a privilege nor a right, but a punishment.

RACHEL

I don't understand.

VERITY

You are my blessing, Rachel.
But you weren't given to me by God alone.

RACHEL

I still don't understand.

VERITY

Before anything else comes to pass, I need to be completely honest with you.
Do you remember when you asked about your father?

RACHEL

Yes.

VERITY

There was a man
Who I was in love with but shouldn't have been
Who was in love with me but not for quite long enough.
And then there was a child, you.
And even though I was without him,
I realized that the love I had for you was so much more pure and unconditional than the kind I'd
shared with him.
It was true in a way, what I said before.
God knew that you would be more than enough to make me happy.

RACHEL

Why didn't you tell me that from the start?

VERITY

It's a blessing to live in a world without evil.

RACHEL

Just because we can't see evil doesn't mean it doesn't exist.

VERITY

And so much evil lurks just beneath the surface, unheard and unseen.
I'm being accused of witchcraft.

RACHEL

No!

VERITY

We've got a plan, Rachel.
We're going to go away with Jonas.
You'll finally get to explore.

RACHEL

And you'll be okay?

VERITY

I truly hope so.

Scene Twelve: Chechnya, 2019

(RAISA is speaking on the phone with KESIRA.)

RAISA

Kesira?

Kesira?

Yes.

One of my friends is pulling everything together.

We'll take taxis to the airport - separately.

And then we'll meet up there.

Sound good?

Okay. Love you.

Scene Thirteen: Salem, 1692

(JONAS looks for the money amongst other possessions within the house. Before too long, ETHEL hears him and enters.)

ETHEL

Jonas, come to bed.

JONAS

I can't.

ETHEL

Then at least stop banging around.

JONAS

Ethel, where's the money?

ETHEL

What are you talking about?

JONAS

I need it to get Verity out of Salem.

ETHEL

And you weren't going to tell me?

JONAS

We're running out of time.
I need to be gone as soon as possible.
Where is it?

ETHEL

You're leaving too?

JONAS

This is life and death.

ETHEL

Not for you.

JONAS

I promised her I'd -

ETHEL

And what did you promise me?

JONAS

Ethel.

ETHEL

Get up.

Stand up and look me in the eyes and at least pretend to have the kind of dignity a husband should have when he's telling his wife he's leaving her.

JONAS

Ethel, don't.

ETHEL

It wasn't even worth a discussion?

What was I supposed to do when I woke up to find my husband gone?

Were you going to leave a note

Or was I just supposed to worry?

JONAS

Ethel.

I need to get back to Verity's.

We have to be gone before they come to arrest her.

ETHEL

Let's see.

How would I do it, if I were leaving my wife for my lover?

JONAS

This isn't a time for -

ETHEL

"I know we just got married

And we've just recently agreed upon so few very simple guidelines for our relationship."

(JONAS finds the bag of money.)

ETHEL *(continued)*

“And, dare I forget, I’m also robbing you of all of our money.”

JONAS

I’m sorry.
I need to go.

ETHEL

Maybe she is a witch.

JONAS

What?

ETHEL

Could be that *she*’s possessing you.
She’s making you abandon me when that was truly the only thing I asked you not to do.

(JONAS and ETHEL look at each other silently for a moment. Then JONAS leaves quickly.)

Scene Fourteen: Chechnya, 2019

(KERAM is holding a gun, fiddling with it shakily and turning it over. KESIRA approaches the door and enters. KERAM quickly hides the gun out of sight.)

KERAM

Kesira!
I didn't realize you were here.

KESIRA

I just got back.

KERAM

I didn't expect you to be home yet.

KESIRA

I always get home around this time.

KERAM

Then it must be that I'm usually gone.

(KESIRA nods and starts to exit further into the house.)

KERAM *(continued)*

Wait.

(KESIRA stops, turning to face him.)

KERAM *(continued)*

Sit down for a second.
We're hardly ever both home at this time.

KESIRA

Okay.
What do you want to talk about -

KERAM

You know how Papa was in the military?

KESIRA

Yes.

KERAM

And our grandfather and his father...

KESIRA

What about them?

KERAM

They had to kill people.

They had to hold a gun to someone's back and squeeze the trigger and fucking shoot.

KESIRA

I guess.

KERAM

Do you think they murdered people?

KESIRA

I don't know -

KERAM

It's not murder if it's during a war, right?

Because it's what they had to do.

They pulled the trigger but they didn't choose where the gun was aimed.

Because it was to create a better world.

So, it can't be murder then, can it?

It's killing but it's not murder.

KESIRA

What's the difference?

KERAM

Killing can be forgiven.

KESIRA

Then there's no difference for whoever dies.

KERAM

Do you remember when we were kids?

KESIRA

Which part?

KERAM

Eid. When the whole family would go walking down the streets to admire the lanterns that lined the trees.

I held your hand. I protected you.

KESIRA

I remember.

KERAM

One year, I was so distracted I let go of your hand and within minutes, you'd wandered away.

KESIRA

And you came to find me.

KERAM

A lot has changed since then.

KESIRA

It's been years.

KERAM

I'm the man of the house now.

KESIRA

Mama will need you.

KERAM

When your father dies, you don't immediately think
"I'm the man of the house now"

You're lost somewhere between yourself and the other person

Until you're reminded that death is just as practical as it is spiritual.

KESIRA

What does that mean?

KERAM

Death is something like betrayal.

KESIRA

I miss him, too.

KERAM

It's not just that.

(KESIRA moves to comfort him. KERAM recoils.)

KERAM *(continued)*

Don't touch me.

KESIRA

(Surprised) I'm sorry.

KERAM

I know what you've been doing -
Who you've been seeing.

KESIRA

What?

KERAM

It's disgusting.

KESIRA

Keram, I don't know what you're saying.

KERAM

The police want you dead.

KESIRA

Keram -

KERAM

They want me to kill you.

KESIRA

Kill or murder?

KERAM

(Holding out the gun to her) Take this.

Give me this one thing.

You can die with honor, Kesira.

There's only one way.

KESIRA

I can't believe this.

Kill me yourself if you want, I won't do it.

Scene Fifteen: Salem, 1692

(JONAS runs onstage to find RACHEL, distraught.)

JONAS

Where's your mother?

RACHEL

They took her!
As soon as the sun started rising, the police were here
And they took her away.

JONAS

I can't believe this.

RACHEL

She's not a witch.
I know it, I know she's not.

JONAS

I know it, too.

RACHEL

What do we do now?

JONAS

I... don't know.
I wish I knew.

Scene Sixteen: Chechnya, 2019

KERAM

Poison is so easy to come by.
Pour anything into something else
Or remove a label
Or just forget to look.
And you can be dead just like that.
Without ever knowing what happened.
And then it's not murder.
It's not killing.
It's just death.
People die every day.
Young and old, remembered and forgotten,
It's not altogether out of the ordinary.

(KERAM exits.)

CALLIOPE

There's something viscerally important about stories and legacies.
They're what survive of those who don't.
Just like the lives they recount, they can so easily die or become corrupted.

We're all blind in different ways,
Our perception distorted so that we can all look to the same place
And yet see different incarnations of anything.

Perhaps there's only ever been one story
And we've all been struggling to tell it.

Scene Seventeen: Salem, 1692

CHIEF MAGISTRATE STOUGHTON

The Court of Oyer and Terminer is now in session.
Verity Underhill stands accused of witchcraft.
I, Lieutenant Governor William Stoughton, stand as Chief Magistrate
With Thomas Newton serving as Crown's Prosecuting Attorney.

NEWTON

Pleasure.
To begin this trial, we will hear the testimony of Miss Underhill's neighbor, Mrs. Temperance Abbott.
Mrs. Abbott, will you please present your evidence against this woman?

TEMPERANCE

I would like to preface this by reminding the court of a certain passage in the Bible.
"Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" -

CHIEF MAGISTRATE STOUGHTON

That's one of my favorites, too, Mrs. Abbott,
But we'd rather hear your testimony, if you please.

TEMPERANCE

Of course, Your Honor.
I simply mean to say that Verity Underhill is undoubtedly a witch.
Have you ever wondered why she has no husband,
Why she lives on the edge of town with hardly anything to her name except that daughter?
It's because she's a souvenir of Verity's wicked nature.
Verity was weak, easily taken in by the Devil.
Even her daughter knows it.
My girl heard Verity's daughter saying that Verity didn't use a man to create her.
So, I ask this court:
Doesn't this evidence point to Verity's having intimate relations with Satan himself?

RACHEL

That's not true!

VERITY

(Whispered) Rachel!

CHIEF MAGISTRATE STOUGHTON

Silence!

Mr. Newton?

NEWTON

Thank you, Chief Magistrate.

And thank you, Mrs. Abbott.

You may sit down now.

TEMPERANCE

Thank you, sir.

CHIEF MAGISTRATE STOUGHTON

Your next witness, Newton?

NEWTON

I'd like to call up Mrs. Dorothy Shepard.

DOROTHY

Well, I'm happy to be here, helping with the judicial process and all.

NEWTON

We appreciate your time.

Mrs. Shepard, do you believe that Verity Underhill is a witch and a menace to Salem?

DOROTHY

Yes, yes, on both counts.

She's doing harm to more than just her daughter.

I have reason to believe that she's possessing that boy, Jonas Bishop,

And trying to make him fall in love with her.

She's using her devious tricks against my daughter and her husband

And I won't stand for it.

NEWTON

Thank you, Mrs. Shepard.

Now, I'd like to call up Miss Ethel Shepard.

CHIEF MAGISTRATE STOUGHTON

Go ahead.

NEWTON

Ethel, is there truth to your mother's claim that your husband, Jonas Bishop, is being possessed by Miss Verity Underhill?

ETHEL

I can't find any other explanation for it, truly.
I'm not one to believe in these trials or even the superstition
But I have to say that it makes sense.
The most sense of anything going on right now.
My husband, Jonas, has been acting odd - erratically - lately
And... there can be no other explanation for it.
Verity Underhill must be a witch.

NEWTON

Thank you for your candor, Miss Shepard.

ABIGAIL

That means it's my turn now, right, Your Honor?

CHIEF MAGISTRATE STOUGHTON

Mr. Newton?

NEWTON

I - yes. Mrs. Abigail Bishop -

ABIGAIL

I'm sure I can take it from here, Attorney.
Your Honor, late one night, I was asleep when Verity's spectral form appeared to me in a dream
Like wisps of energy, not fully visible but clearly malevolent.
And those wisps - Verity - they started chasing me
And she - her voice - told me she was coming to hurt my son
And to hurt this entire town
And that there was no earthly force that could stop her.
And this, right here, is exactly where the law must come in
And where godliness must come before evil.
Thank you, Chief Magistrate, Crown's Attorney, Jury. I'm sure you'll make the right decision.

CHIEF MAGISTRATE STOUGHTON

We will take a brief recess.

Jury, please take the time to come to your conclusion.

*(CHIEF MAGISTRATE STOUGHTON and NEWTON
exit. TEMPERANCE exit.)*

RACHEL

Mama, what's going to happen?

VERITY

I don't know, Rachel.
I wish I knew.

RACHEL

I'm scared.

VERITY

But you remember our plan, Rachel?

RACHEL

Yes.

VERITY

You have to go with Jonas even if I can't come with you.

RACHEL

I don't want to leave you, Mama.

VERITY

I'll always be with you, Rachel.
I promise.

JONAS

Ethel, how could you do this?

ETHEL

Jonas, there's nothing else to say.

JONAS

What a sick, horrible way to get revenge on me.

ETHEL

Stop assuming I do everything solely for you.
Maybe I'm worried about our town being overrun with witches.

JONAS

You're not naive.

ETHEL

I can only hope that you are.

*(CHIEF MAGISTRATE STOUGHTON
reenters.)*

CHIEF MAGISTRATE STOUGHTON

Order, order.

The Court of Oyer and Terminer is once again called to order.
I have spoken with the Grand Jury and am now prepared to announce the verdict.
For the charge of witchcraft, Verity Underhill has been found guilty
And is sentenced to death by hanging.

Scene Eighteen: Chechnya, 2019

KESIRA

I wanted to say goodbye.

KERAM

What?

KESIRA

I'm going away.
I'll leave as soon as Mama gets home.

KERAM

No, you can't...

KESIRA

I have to talk to her before I go, I don't want her to worry.

KERAM

Kesira...

KESIRA

Don't.
Not when I've made this so easy for you.

KERAM

You're supposed to be dead.

KESIRA

Not for lack of trying.

KERAM

Don't talk to me like that.

KESIRA

I know you tried to poison me.

KERAM

What you're doing is against the law.

KESIRA

And what you're doing isn't?

KERAM

No. It isn't.

KESIRA

Who was I hurting?

KERAM

It's against the law.

KESIRA

So that's all there is.

KERAM

The entire family.

That's who you're hurting.

You know they'll kill you someday

Your only choice is who else you'll hurt.

Can you imagine what people would say at our father's funeral?

His legacy would be destroyed.

KESIRA

The rest of him already is.

KERAM

I didn't choose this.

KESIRA

But you chose to poison me.

Because that was the only way that you could do it without looking me in the eye.

(KERAM pulls out a gun, though he is obviously uncomfortable with it.)

KERAM

I have other ways.

KESIRA

You would shoot me?

KERAM

I don't want to.

KESIRA

Then don't.

KERAM

I didn't want any of this.

This is war and I'm doing what I can.

KESIRA

What kind of world is that,

Where your soul is the sacrifice for your body?

How can you live with yourself?

KERAM

This isn't my world to change.

KESIRA

But it's your place to decide who lives or dies?

Listen to me. It's your hand on the trigger, no matter who told you to put it there.

And it's you who chooses to end a life, no matter who told you that you have to.

Right now, it's just you and me.

We're the only ones in the world.

KERAM

I'll arrange a funeral.

I'll preserve your honor.

KESIRA

I'll walk out this door

And then we can both sleep at night.

(KESIRA starts to leave. KERAM stands, his hand on the trigger of the gun.)

KERAM

Don't move. Don't fucking move.

KESIRA

You're gonna shoot me?

KERAM

You wanna be more fucking careful what you say to a man with a gun?

KESIRA

This is murder, Keram.

This isn't death, this isn't killing.

This is unforgivable.

You're a heartless coward!

(KESIRA turns to leave. Before he realizes what he's doing, KERAM shoots her.)

Scene Nineteen: Salem, 1692

ETHEL

It's morbid, isn't it? These damn executions.

DOROTHY

I've never had the stomach for it.
Is Jonas gone?

ETHEL

It doesn't feel right.

DOROTHY

It's not supposed to.

ETHEL

He left earlier.

DOROTHY

I'm sorry, honey.

ETHEL

It doesn't feel right.

DOROTHY

At least that witch got what was coming to her, dear.

ETHEL

A woman is dead.
That makes it better?

DOROTHY

I don't know.

ETHEL

Sometimes I think they play God with too much certainty.

DOROTHY

That's not for us to decide.

ETHEL

What if it's not for them to decide either?

DOROTHY

Well, we all die anyway.

ETHEL

But at whose hands?

There's a difference between death and murder.

DOROTHY

Need I remind you that you testified against her, too?

And keep your voice down, we don't need any more trials.

ETHEL

I wasn't thinking when I did that.

I was just angry.

DOROTHY

Do you think we're not all angry?

Well, tell me, what does anger - even righteous anger - do to help anything?

Right and wrong don't matter when it's life or death.

So what if we're weak?

There's only weak and defiant.

The weak live in peace.

What do you suppose happens to the defiant?

Scene Twenty: Chechnya, 2019

(RAISA sits on the bench with her bag, waiting for her taxi to come.)

RAISA

Goodbye, Chechnya.
I'll miss very little of you.
It's a better world beyond here.
They don't kill people for being different in other places.
So we're going to one of those other places.
Kesira and I will meet in Moscow
And then we'll live actual lives
Like actual people.

(The TAXI DRIVER enters.)

TAXI DRIVER

Airport in Grozny?

RAISA

Yes, thank you.

TAXI DRIVER

I can take your bag.
Car's just around the corner.

RAISA

Thank you.

TAXI DRIVER

Where are you off to?

RAISA

Moscow.

TAXI DRIVER

What for?

RAISA

I'm meeting my... fiancé there.

We're going to live a whole new life.

Scene Twenty-One: Salem, 1692

(VERITY stands by the tree. There is a noose hanging from it and a stool nearby.)

VERITY

Gallows Hill.

I suppose it's better than a prison.

Could be that everything's some sort of dichotomy between suffering and ceasing.

And we tend to choose suffering because at least it's the evil we know.

But it could be that there's some sort of beauty in letting go,

In falling.

Maybe the sensation of colliding with the earth never hits the dead.

Perhaps death is hardly an evil at all.

(RACHEL and JONAS enter. RACHEL hugs VERITY, while JONAS stays at a respectable distance.)

RACHEL

Mama, I'll miss you.

VERITY

I love you, Rachel. So much.

RACHEL

I love you.

VERITY

Thank you for doing this, Jonas.

JONAS

Glad to.

Would you believe me if I said I loved you now?

EXECUTIONER *(from offstage)*

To Gallows Hill!

JONAS

We should be off.

VERITY

I love you, too, Jonas.

JONAS

We'll see you again soon.
Come on, Rachel.

RACHEL

See you again soon, Mama.

VERITY

See you again soon.

(RACHEL and JONAS exit.)

VERITY *(continued)*

So that's what keeps us tethered
And struggling within ropes and nooses.
(A beat.)
Goodbye, world.
What an awfully sunny day you chose to be my last.

Epilogue

(KERAM, MALIKA, RACHEL, and JONAS place lotuses at the base of the tree. When they're finished, they exit and rejoin the CHORUS. The CHORUS looks on.)

CALLIOPE

Perhaps there's only ever been one story
And we've all been struggling to tell it.

TERPSICHORE

Flowers on graves.
It says something about immortality
People suppose that nothing beautiful can wilt
So they abuse and exploit it.

CALLIOPE

Could be that time has made me melancholic
Or memory ruined me.
But I can't help seeing every bud as the dust it'll come to be.

MELPOMENE

Some people don't do that.
They don't see that.
They live, and in doing so, become distracted.

POLYHYMNIA

Is anything worth spending a life on?

MELPOMENE

They don't see the patterns of this world that exist in a never-ending circle.
They just cover death with more death.

EUTERPE

Have you ever heard the story of humanity?
It's long and winding and I don't know how to tell it.
I don't know how it ends.

URANIA

Let me sit beneath a lotus tree
And hug the stars all into me
And watch them again every night
And feel them still in the morning light
For, no matter what, they're still with me
As I wait for you by the lotus tree

CLIO

Two - three hundred bodies down there...
To be mourned and then forgotten and then joined.

MELPOMENE

Knowing the world doesn't make you immune.

CALLIOPE

Heeding the world may kill me first.

URANIA

I'd like to be a star
They've got so much more time.

CLIO

We can see meaning in the constellations that would be impossible to see if we were standing upon Orion himself.

CALLIOPE

We're all blind in different ways.

EUTERPE

Have you ever heard the story of Prometheus?
He molded mankind out of clay
And then brought them fire.

ERATO

Have you ever heard the story of Sisyphus?
He was forced to roll a boulder up a hill

POLYHYMNIA

Have you ever heard the story of Danaus and his daughters?

ERATO

Again and again.

POLYHYMNA

They were forced to fill a bowl with water

ERATO, POLYHYMNA

Again and again and again.

URANIA

I don't know if there's truly a lotus tree
If death brings us joy and sets us free

THALIA

I wonder why the gods are so concerned with repetition.

CLIO

Have you ever heard the story of the Salem Witch Trials?

EUTERPE

Less than twenty years after the start of the Salem Witch Trials, the Salem legislature realized they fucked up.

CLIO

Two hundred bodies too late.

POLYHYMNA

What does righteous anger do?

CALLIOPE

Have you ever heard the story of the hydra?

MELPOMENE

Hercules was assigned to kill it as the second of his Twelve Labors.

ERATO

He was shocked to find that every time he cut off one of the hydra's heads

URANIA

Another grew back in its place.

CLIO

If hatred is a hydra, ignoring or mourning without taking action is like cutting off a head just to watch it grow back again.

TERPSICHORE

Hercules and his nephew, Iolaus, were determined to defeat the hydra.

EUTERPE

So the next time, Hercules cut off each head and Iolaus cauterized the wounds left so that nothing could grow there ever again.

URANIA

We watch history repeat itself.
Day-in and day-out, we witness as we make the same mistakes.

MELPOMENE

Again and again

MELPOMENE, EUTERPE, TERPSICHORE

Again and again

ALL

And again and

THALIA

Have you ever heard the story of Chechnya?
It's happening today.

EUTERPE

As we speak, people in Chechnya are being murdered and tortured and captured and disowned for being gay.

THALIA

Again and again.

CALLIOPE

This is the story of the hydra,
Or pieces of it,
It's not finished yet.

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS:

At its core, I wrote this play because I wanted to bring attention to the ongoing gay purges happening in Chechnya, Russia. This was the first play I ever wrote. I wrote the first version that was performed when I was 17, in my senior year of high school. Through trial and error, this play taught me what words and stories can be. Through three years, three rehearsal processes, and three casts, this play has been expanded and revised and performed numerous times. It is fundamentally about storytelling and perspective. One of the things I deeply believe about humans is that we all act reasonably given our circumstances, but there are always circumstances we can't see from where we're looking. If we saw the whole picture, everything would look different; however, we only ever see the full picture after the fact. This play asks us to consider how we can use history to broaden our perspectives and practice our empathy.

This play was rehearsed and performed by Metea Valley Theatre (2018), NowHereThis Seattle (2019), and University of Washington School of Drama CabLab (2020 – performances cancelled due to COVID-19)

AUTHOR'S BIO:

Darby Sherwood (she/her) is a rising junior at the University of Washington. Her play *Two Dinosaurs Under the Sun* will be published by Smith & Kraus Publishers, Inc. in *Laughter is the Best Medicine: Forty-Five 5 Minute Plays in the Time of Coronavirus*, coming out this December. She recently participated in the New South Young Playwrights Festival at Horizon Theatre in Atlanta. Recent playwriting credits include *Two Dinosaurs Under the Sun* (NSYPF), *Cause for Celebration* (NSYPF), *Two Heads of a Hydra* (UW CabLab, NowHereThis Seattle, Metea Theatre), and a new adaptation of Chekhov's *Three Sisters* (UW School of Drama). This year, Darby has been commissioned to write a new play for the UW School of Drama, thanks to a grant from the Floyd and Delores Jones Endowed Fund for the Arts. www.darbsherwood.wixsite.com/site