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Dreams and Stories of the Common Child

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Dreams and Stories of the Common Child

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Arts
of Bard College

by
Evan Pallor

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
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who always asked how senior project was going,
even when I was trying to avoid the topic.

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Introduction

This is a play about two people, a mother and a daughter. It derives from some of the most famous stories to come out of Western culture. The story of Persephone is repeated over and over. As I have been taking it apart I have started to find elements of it scattered here and there in places I had not thought to look. What speaks most to me is the relationship between parent and child, one that is a powerful part of a huge number of people's lives, from both directions. I hope that I have done it justice.

Dramatis Personae

Ella / Daughter: A child struggling with her relationship to her mother. The stories speak about her.

Mother: Ella / Daughter's mother.

Father: Daughter's father.

Stranger: A fluid character who represents different things in different scenes, but is always outside and unfamiliar.

Young Mother: Teenaged Mother

Grandmother: The mother of Mother, and grandmother of Ella.

Act 1

Scene 1

(A bed in a room. ELLA sits in the bed. Her MOTHER sits on the bed next to her.)

MOTHER

Did you brush your teeth?

ELLA

Yeah.

MOTHER

And flossed?

ELLA

Yes, mom.

MOTHER

Did you wash your face?

ELLA

Yes, mom.

MOTHER

Okay good. Well then, It's time for your bedtime story then.

ELLA

Mom I don't want-

MOTHER

(Talking over ELLA) I've picked out a good story for tonight. I think you'll really like it. Here we go, I hope you're ready. Once upon a time...

Scene 2

(Continuing from previous scene. As MOTHER speaks the scene is changing.)

MOTHER

...there was a girl. She had a mother and a father, and they loved her very much, but they were very poor. Her father would often go away on business trips to try and provide for the family, so when the girl heard he was going to come back she would go out to the meadow behind their house to pick him some flowers. One day when her father was due to come home she went out back. At the same time not very far away, her father met someone by the roadside...

(The side of the road, twilight. FATHER walks along. STRANGER waits for him.)

STRANGER

Hello my dear sir. Do you happen to have the time?

FATHER

Oh yes. It's just after six.

STRANGER

Thank you kindly, sir. You look to be having some sort of trouble yourself. Is there any way I can assist you, you having so generously enlightened me as to the hour?

FATHER

Oh no, I'm just walking along. I've got to get back to my family. It's been awhile since I've seen them you know.

STRANGER

A family man, I commend you sir. There are many without the fortitude to raise a family. It is an expensive matter, is it not? Children always are.

FATHER

Ah well you know, mustn't complain.

STRANGER

Don't fret about it, I understand. And I believe I can help your financial woes. You see I am myself quite well endowed financially. I've always tried to keep an eye on those less fortunate than I. I like to think of myself as a sort of philanthropist for the poor, and as your conversation has proven so scintillating I would be delighted to help you with your current shortfall of funds.

FATHER

Oh really? Well that would be great.

STRANGER

(Speaking over FATHER) However it is part of both my personal philosophy of business and of general good sense never to give anything for nothing. So I think it would be to our mutual benefit if we worked out a deal that engaged both of our interests.

FATHER

Um, I guess.

STRANGER

(Continuing to speak over FATHER) Well I am delighted we are in concurrence. Now as to the specifics of our business. There is a meadow behind a house not far from here where there grow flowers in great abundance. Do you know the place?

FATHER

Well yes, that's my house actually. In front of the meadow.

STRANGER

Fantastic. Now, in that meadow grows a flower most precious and rare. I have desired it for some time. It has no true monetary value, but to a collector such as myself, it could be considered... priceless. If you obtain that for me, I will give you money beyond your wildest dreams. We have a deal.

FATHER

Oh. Well sure. *(They shake)*

STRANGER

Then I'll be by to pick up what's owed. *(He disappears.)*

Scene 3

(Behind the house. DAUGHTER is picking flowers. Suddenly there is a rumbling and STRANGER springs out of the earth.)

DAUGHTER

Who are you?

STRANGER

I'm here for the most beautiful flower in the garden. Your father was kind enough to make a deal you see, and now I shall pluck the fairest blossom to grace this hovels lawn.

DAUGHTER

Oh well. The roses are very nice. I planted them with mom.

STRANGER

I think you misunderstand my intentions. You are the flower I shall commandeer from the premises. You shall brighten my underground halls for forever and a day.

DAUGHTER

What, no!

STRANGER

When you make a deal with the devil, my dear, people sometimes get hurt.

(STRANGER grabs her and pulls her underground.)

Scene 4

(Inside the house. MOTHER is there. FATHER re-enters, carrying a sack of money.)

FATHER

You'll never guess what just happened to me. *(puts down sack)* Where's Ella?

MOTHER

Gone. Our precious flower is gone.

FATHER

Oh.

MOTHER

I watched as some cretin pulled her down into the earth. I saw them head down to Hell. I heard him say something about a deal.

FATHER

Oh.

MOTHER

Well what are you going to do about it?

FATHER

I uh.

MOTHER

(Cutting across him) Oh you're useless. I guess I'll have to go rescue her myself.

FATHER

But dear it'll be much too dangerous.

MOTHER

How can you think of danger to yourself at a time like this? Our child, the only copy of us in this world, has been taken by the ultimate evil, and you sit there and worry about yourself? How can you call yourself a parent? Any true parent would go beyond the ends of the earth for their child.

FATHER

But dear-

MOTHER

No buts! I'm going to get her, even if you're too frightened to.

(MOTHER walks out, leaving FATHER standing behind, still holding the sack of money.)

Scene 5

(The underworld. DAUGHTER is chained to a chair. STRANGER stands nearby.)

STRANGER

Do you know where you are, miss?

DAUGHTER

No, where am I? Let me go! Why do you have me here?

STRANGER

Such strong demands from such a young girl. Don't you know that I've done you a great favor by bringing you here today? But of course there's no thanks for me. What is it they say, no rest for the wicked? And of course I have to be the wicked one. Who prays for me? Nobody, that's who. And here I am, doing you a great favor, and your reaction is to yell at me.

DAUGHTER

How are you doing me a favor?

STRANGER

Tell me young lady... what's your name again?

DAUGHTER

Sadie.

STRANGER

Yes, Sadie, tell me... do you feel free in your life?

DAUGHTER

Not right now certainly.

STRANGER

Oh well let me help you with that. I have your word you won't run off of course.

(STRANGER unties DAUGHTER)

There you go. Now we were talking about how you don't feel free in your life up above on the surface. You feel as if your parents aren't there for you, are holding you back. I can take you away from all that. Get you away from all the drama, from the man who would sell you for a bag of gold. Oh? Didn't you know? That is what happened. Your father, the man who is supposed to protect you, sold you for a little monetary remuneration. How does that make you feel? Who is protecting you?

MOTHER

(From offstage) I am. *(Walks on)* I will come for you and protect you and keep you safe no matter where in the world you may be. No person or creature will keep you from me. And nothing that harms you will be safe from a mother's rage.

Scene 6

(The bedroom. MOTHER is still sitting on ELLA's bed. ELLA is uncomfortable)

MOTHER

...and the mother took her daughter back from the underworld, and brought her home safe and sound. And they all lived happily ever after. The end. There wasn't that a nice story, Ella? I'll see you in the morning. Did you like it?

ELLA

It was okay.

MOTHER

Just okay? That's one of my favorite stories you know.

(ELLA doesn't respond. MOTHER kisses ELLA on the forehead. She gets up and walks out, turning the light off as she exits.)

ELLA

All right. Time to sleep. Sleep, Ella, sleep. Sleep.

Act 2

Scene 1

(Dark in ELLA's room. A light appears on stage. In the light appears STRANGER, wearing a MOTHER mask.)

STRANGER

Ella. Ella wake up.

(ELLA stirs.)

It's time to go Ella. *(Pause. STRANGER pokes ELLA.)* Up and at 'em girl.

ELLA

(Waking up as she's poked.) All right, I'm getting up. I'm getting up.

STRANGER

Come on Ella. We've got to get going.

ELLA

Mom?

STRANGER

Don't believe faces too easily girl. *(The mask warps)*

ELLA

Who are you? Where are we going?

STRANGER

I'm the devil. You're staying by my side forever and ever.

ELLA

No. I don't want to.

STRANGER

(Grabbing her.) We're leaving Ella. Don't fight. It will be better if you don't. You'll see.

ELLA

(Resisting) No! I'll call my mom!

STRANGER

Your parents gave you to me. I'm your rightful guardian now.

(He drags her off-stage)

Scene 2

(The underworld. STRANGER sits on a throne, no longer wearing the mom mask. ELLA beside him.)

STRANGER

How are you doing, Ella?

ELLA

Don't talk to me.

STRANGER

Okay then.

(They sit in silence for a little while. STRANGER gets up and walks over to a fruit tree and picks one of the fruits growing from it. He offers it to ELLA.)

Here, you look hungry.

ELLA

I don't want your food.

STRANGER

Don't be stupid. I'm not going to poison you. It's just some fruit. No strings attached.

ELLA

I'm not stupid you know. I know where this leads. If I eat that, I won't be able to leave.

STRANGER

Ella. I have you here. You can't leave. I don't need to play tricks on you. Take the fruit. Nothing bad will come of it, to anyone. You have my word. And I always keep my word to the letter, I'm famous for it.

ELLA

You took me once. How can I ever trust you?

STRANGER

You don't have to trust me. Trust yourself. How can eating a fruit bind you to me? How can it make your plight any worse than it is right now? If I wanted you dead, you'd be dead. I won't poison you. There's no magic in this. It's just fruit.

ELLA

(Taking the fruit, but not eating.) If it's just fruit why do you want me to eat it?

STRANGER

You look hungry. It's yours. You can eat it or not, I don't really care.

ELLA

(ELLA hesitates, then takes a bite out of the fruit. There's a pause while she chews.) Why did you kidnap me?

STRANGER

I was curious.

ELLA

Curious?

STRANGER

There's magic in love Ella. And in happiness. I'm not a good person. Or a happy one, or one who is loved. I have had friends in the past, and I have always used them in one way or another. I saw the love you had for your mother, and the love she had for you. It was... beautiful how strong and how corrupt it is. I couldn't bring myself to try to understand something perfect, but I thought it might be within my power to understand something flawed. After all, flaws are what make things interesting.

ELLA

I'm flawed?

STRANGER

Of course! Isn't that a comfort? If you're perfect you can never be anything but. But if you're flawed everyone remembers the one perfect thing about you.

ELLA

Mother has a lot to say about being perfect. She thinks you- one should always be as perfect as possible. Always do the right thing.

STRANGER

She's not the only one to think that. She thinks she knows what perfect is. She thinks she can control what perfect is. She's wrong. There is no perfect. That's why these perfect people, and people who want perfection are always disappointed. That's what I mean when I say her love is corrupt. She loves you as perfect. She thinks her love is perfect, and won't take anything else. It eats away at the real bond between you. Because she strives for the impossible and can never

quite achieve it. And my view is, why waste your life searching for the, nonexistent, perfect apple when the one in front of you is perfectly delicious.

ELLA

(Laughs and takes a bite of the apple) I get what you're saying.

Scene 3

(The Underworld. ELLA sits with a fruit from the tree. She is happy. There is a faraway disturbance but she ignores it. MOTHER stalks on, wearing a mask. She looks a lot like the STRANGER did in the first scene. This scene begins fairly realistically but becomes increasingly warped as it goes on.)

ELLA

Oh, hey there.

MOTHER

Ella! What are you doing here?

ELLA

Mom? What are you doing here?

MOTHER

What have I told you about running off without telling me where you're going? Did you even think once about what I was going through? I promise you young lady you are never going to be allowed to leave the house again!

ELLA

(Trying to interject but failing) But it wasn't- I didn't mean-

MOTHER

Don't even try to make excuses for yourself. You know that I know best for you, and that you should never try to leave without my permission. Now you will come with me right now and don't even think of refusing or things will go even worse for you than they already are going to.

ELLA

Wait I just need to-

MOTHER

No!

(STRANGER walks out to see MOTHER dragging ELLA off. ELLA has dropped her piece of fruit. STRANGER leaves, leaving only the fruit. Blackout.)

Scene 4

(ELLA's room. ELLA wakes up. It's dark. She panics and runs to the light switch.)

ELLA

Mom! Mom!

(MOTHER comes running into the room)

MOTHER

Ella! What's wrong?

ELLA

It was awful. I was someplace... It was safe and warm and there was someone there... a friend. And then someone else burst in and dragged me out and I couldn't do anything.

MOTHER

Hey, come here. *(Gives ELLA a hug.)* Don't worry too much about it. I'm here. And you're a strong young woman. Right?

ELLA

(Unconvinced) Yeah...

MOTHER

So can you tell me more about what happened?

ELLA

I... this person. Someone I knew took me. Stole me. But then... they weren't who I thought they were. They were nice, they were safe. And then someone else... or maybe it was the same person... came and took me back.

MOTHER

Do you know who these people were?

ELLA

I think... It was you.

MOTHER

Of course. Don't worry. It's okay. I'm not upset. It's okay. Here, let me tell you a story I know from when I was your age. I guess you could say it's a story about me. It might help explain some things. Once upon a time...

Act 3

Scene 1

(The woods and a populated area, a city or large suburb. YOUNG MOTHER is returning from school. She is a high school student, on the cusp of adulthood. She looks a lot like ELLA, especially in the way she is dressed. She waits on line at a baked goods stand with GRANDMOTHER. GRANDMOTHER is looking suspicious of those around. STRANGER in its guise as the friend waits on line behind her. He is about the same age as YOUNG MOTHER.)

STRANGER

(To GRANDMOTHER) Hello there, ma'am.

(GRANDMOTHER does not respond directly but pulls YOUNG MOTHER closer to her.)

STRANGER

Hey there to you too, Chloe. How was school today? Long enough for you?

YOUNG MOTHER

Pretty good. *(She smiles at him)*

GRANDMOTHER

Don't talk to him.

YOUNG MOTHER

Sorry.

STRANGER

I do apologize as well. Have I somehow given offense? I assure you, that was not my intention by any means. I have nothing but the friendliest of purposes for you madam, and your lovely daughter. I merely wished to engage in conversation as a fellow captive on this interminable queue.

YOUNG MOTHER

(Glancing at GRANDMOTHER) Yeah, I think that's not such a great decision.

STRANGER

And why not? I promise, I'm harmless. The world would be a better place with a little more trust in it, you cannot deny that.

YOUNG MOTHER

I'm all for trust I assure you. In the right time and place.

GRANDMOTHER

I said don't talk to him. *(To STRANGER)* Leave my daughter alone, do you hear me? *(To YOUNG MOTHER, but very conscious of STRANGER hearing it.)* We're leaving. You can have your cake tomorrow.

YOUNG MOTHER

Oh. Fine...

(GRANDMOTHER steers YOUNG MOTHER out.)

Scene 2

(YOUNG MOTHER and GRANDMOTHER are standing in living room. GRANDMOTHER is wound up, but it is out of concern rather than out of genuine rage. YOUNG MOTHER is nervous but firm.)

YOUNG MOTHER

Mom, please, it means a lot.

GRANDMOTHER

I just don't get how you could not think of the danger to yourself! Especially at a time like this, when that creep just came up and started talking to you like he had the right to your time and attention and respect. You are my child, my only one, and I cannot even think of letting you be hurt by anyone. I swear I would go to the ends of the Earth to protect you, as should any person who is proud to call themselves a parent. And that includes protecting you from yourself, and your audacious ideas of independence. None of us are truly independent. I wish I could have someone with me when I go out. Don't be so quick to leave the nest dear; all the world is someone's nest, stay in the part that's ours.

YOUNG MOTHER

But mom, I don't need you perched on my shoulder. I'm grateful for your protection, but nests don't exist so that we can stay in them forever. Isn't it better to peek outside the nest before I leave it forever? Get a taste for what it's like so that I won't be overwhelmed by the flavor when

I finally do go forever? I won't be here forever. I need to learn how to take care of myself, at least a little.

GRANDMOTHER

I cannot promise this will go well for you.

YOUNG MOTHER

Isn't that the point? *(beat)* I promise that I will take care of myself. I'll be careful. I'll come straight home. But I'll be the one bringing me straight home. I'll be acting out my own version of independence. If I can't ever be truly alone, then doesn't it make sense for me at least to know how to stand up for myself no matter who is around?

GRANDMOTHER

(Pause) I'll give you one day. If all goes all right, and you come straight home, we'll talk again about it. But I don't want you going alone. Will you walk with a friend?

YOUNG MOTHER

Sure mom. I'll find someone to walk home with. Thanks.

GRANDMOTHER

That's my girl. Be safe.

Scene 3

(YOUNG MOTHER wait on line from yesterday. STRANGER is with her, in the guise of the Friend.)

STRANGER

So is my understanding that your mother is not accompanying us for our walk today correct?

YOUNG MOTHER

Yeah. She let me go out without her for once.

STRANGER

Well that's just fantastic! If you'd like we could head on back to my house, hang out a bit, I've got a new game I've been meaning to play, but it needs two players. My parents aren't around right now either, so we could do just about anything we wanted to.

YOUNG MOTHER

I did tell my mom I would come right back...

STRANGER

But I bet you had to say that, right? She wouldn't let you ever be out just being you out on your own without her being there to stand by your side, hold your hand, and generally treat you like a toddler: just about able to walk but not well enough to be trusted out of her sight for a minute. Now you've gotten out for once in your life; are you going to go back to her and crawl for the rest of your days, or stay out here in the sunshine, able to truly go where you will for the first time?

YOUNG MOTHER

She's not going to keep me there forever. She just wants me to be safe, and the world can be dangerous. She said that if today went well she would let me walk home alone in the future, no questions asked.

STRANGER

Do you really think she'll believe all went well? You know your mother better than anyone, can you honestly say that you think that she will believe that nothing went wrong? She always thinks something went wrong. She always wants to believe the worst. Especially where you're involved. Picture it, you walk back through her front door. What do you think is going to happen next? She'll ask you where you've been, how it went, something like that, and because you won't have done anything on the way home you'll give some vague noncommittal answer, because what is there to say, really? You didn't go anywhere. But she won't be satisfied with that. She'll niggle away at those minutes between school ending and you arriving home, wondering what you could have been doing, what troubles could have befallen you. It's not that she means ill, it's just what she does, how she cares. But it will backfire on you, because she will eventually decide that you might not have come straight home, that you might be getting mixed up with the wrong crowd. Wouldn't it be better, for her peace of mind, if she knew where you had been? And better for you too; if she knows you were with me, if you have a witness, she won't be able to make those false suppositions.

YOUNG MOTHER

So instead of just thinking that I went where I wasn't supposed to, she'll know it?

STRANGER

She won't care about you being here with me, she cares about you ending up in some stranger's house, or crying in some alleyway because you went to an unsafe place. Coming with me is neither of those. In fact, it's safer than the alternative. I'm sure she would appreciate you thinking of your safety first, and that more than anything else you could do would be enough to convince her that you're ready to look after yourself.

YOUNG MOTHER

Well... I guess? I mean why not, after all. I'll just call to let her know once we get to your house, all right?

STRANGER

Sounds fine to me.

Scene 4

(Interior of STRANGER's apartment. YOUNG MOTHER is on the phone leaving a message. STRANGER waits for her.)

YOUNG MOTHER

(Hiding her nervousness) -so I just thought I should stick with a buddy who I trusted, because I thought that's what you'd want me to do. So, if you could pick 'me up soon, I would really appreciate that, but there's no real rush. See you later! Bye. *(She hangs up the phone)*

STRANGER

That wasn't hard.

YOUNG MOTHER

No, I guess not. It's always easier leaving messages though.

STRANGER

True enough.

YOUNG MOTHER

So... you mentioned a new game?

STRANGER

Yeah. I did. Here sit down.

YOUNG MOTHER

All right. *(She sits down)*

STRANGER

Why don't you take your jacket off? We're going to be in here for a while, I think.

YOUNG MOTHER

I guess.

STRANGER

Why not? Make yourself at home. *(Helping her remove her jacket.)* There.

YOUNG MOTHER

Um, thanks?

STRANGER

(Sitting down next to her) I don't believe I've told you recently how beautiful your eyes are.

YOUNG MOTHER

(Looking away) Where's the game? Aren't you going to go get it? What game is it anyway?

STRANGER

It's my favorite game. And I wouldn't worry about me going to go and get it. Everything I need to play is right here.

YOUNG MOTHER

You know I think I've changed my mind, and I will go home after all.

STRANGER

Go home? Why leave? You told your mother you would be right here, safe with me. You wouldn't lie to her, would you? She wouldn't like that, you know, she has a tendency to overbear always wanting to know where you are, what you're doing.

(He begins to slowly move closer to her, getting in her personal space, dominating her in a very intimate, invasive fashion.)

I'm sure she has your best interests at heart, but really, you can move beyond of those artificial, childish barriers put in place simply to limit you. You're an adult now, obviously. Stay, and prove that you don't need to run to your mother. Prove to everyone you are capable of being out on your own. That's what today was all about, right? Proving that you don't have to be attached to your mother at all times?

(She doesn't respond)

You just want to be independent, right? I understand that. I feel the same way a lot of the time. That feeling is a lie. None of us is really, truly, independent. We just choose who we attach ourselves to. But there are ways to be strong, to be free, even when you still are attached to others. You have to make bold decisions sometimes. Not the safe ones.

(He stares at her, very close. Then he lunges forward and kisses her forcefully. She struggles and pushes him away, but he doesn't back away. A knocking comes from offstage.)

GRANDMOTHER

Chloe? Are you there? Chloe?

(Blackout)

Scene 5

(ELLA's room. MOTHER and ELLA are physically closer than before.)

ELLA

Did that really happen to you?

MOTHER

Well time passes and memory fades. I've always avoided telling you because I was scared. For you, and of your reaction. But now I wanted to tell it to you because I thought you'd appreciate it.

ELLA

I did. Thanks for telling me mom. That gave me a lot to think about.

MOTHER

I didn't want to scare you Ella. I just want you to understand, why I might sometimes be scared for you. But you're strong and beautiful, and tomorrow you will get up and make the world a better place again. Now sleep well dear.

(MOTHER kisses ELLA gently, a complete opposite from the kiss STRANGER gave YOUNG MOTHER, then exits, turning off the lights as she goes. BLACKOUT.)

Fin

Artist's Statement

Initial idea:

The world of fairy tales is linked in the modern world with thoughts of childhood; we see this in the prevalence and popularity of “Disney princess movies” and also in the marketing of the fantastic towards children in guises as various as Halloween costumes and young adult adventure fantasy video games. How exactly these ideas are linked in the common mind is a mystery for a sociologist to investigate, however as an artist this link between childhood and these strange tales that have become integral to Western culture intrigued me.

I began with the idea of taking a single fairy tale and turning it into the central idea of my project. I was interested in seeing how I could take a fairy tale, probably from Grimm's, and change it so that it not only held its deep ingrained social context, but had roots in my own experience and my experience of the world at large. One of the key, and most emotionally powerful ways that I experienced fairy tales in my own childhood was through the medium of bedtime stories. Returning to that point of genesis felt right for a project that even in its early stages felt to me as if it was about the boundary between the space of story and the space of childhood. The structure of the play came from this

The characters of the piece sprang from various places. Some are based my life, others come straight from the myths that inspired me. The setting and other aspects of the piece similarly have mixed roots, with specific examples including the character of The Stranger, who derives straight from fairy tale and was adapted to the situation I was endeavoring to develop,

and the setting of the bedroom, which was developed from my own personal experiences and understandings of the world.

Process:

When I began work on my senior project my idea of how I would work out my ideas of fairy tales were rather vague. The first step therefore was to go to the source material. I read a number of fairy tales, primarily those collected by the Grimm brothers. Selections read include but are not limited to *The Girl with no Hands*, a story deeply involved in piety and the machinations of the devil, which influenced the final product through the introduction of the character The Stranger. It also influenced the relationship between the Mother and Daughter. One of the major themes of *The Girl with no Hands* is the purity of the protagonist (in an explicitly Christian sense) and in many places in the story that translates into innocence, which is expressed through the titular girl's relationship to childhood. Despite obviously having at least one foot in the world of adulthood (she marries and has a child) she is treated as pure, to the degree that her perfect piety even allows her hands to grow back after they are cut off.

A second story I read was *The Musicians of Bremen*, a fairy tale based around the misadventures of some animals journeying to be musicians in the city of Bremen. The story revels in its ridiculousness; for example the idea of a donkey saying "I'm going to play the lute- it doesn't look very difficult," is obviously ridiculous to any human reader with the slightest idea of what both a lute and a donkey are, as they are obviously physically incompatible. This story has less impact on the layout of my story but rather on the specific aura of storytelling, such as

the use of the fantastic and the ridiculous. While in my play itself I attempted to turn this to a more sinister bent in *The Musicians of Bremen* it is used in a light-hearted manner.

While still continuing to read fairy tales I began to free write my own stories influenced by these fairy tales. After writing three short stories and plays I quickly reached the realm of dreams and nightmares. My first exploration of this realm set a mother (the source of *The Mother*) as the embodiment of nightmares. This idea was the first that stayed in a more than thematic or tonal way, and it launched the beginning of the writing of the actual project. As I was writing the myth of Persephone's capture by Hades made its way into the story, as it spoke to me as being about a relationship between a mother and her daughter.

Once I had begun writing the main body of my work I developed a structure of a three-part story structured as a framed narrative. The first part consists of a bed time story told by the mother to her reluctant daughter. It was written with the mother's point of view in mind, showing how the mother views the daughter as someone who needs to be protected, and that the mother is the one who's duty it is to do that. The second piece takes the form of a dream had by the daughter and is intended to show how she feels smothered by the mother's protection. The third act takes the form of another story told by the mother, this time a story of her past explaining why she feels the need to be so protective of her daughter. Each section is bridged by a smaller section involving the mother and daughter, which gives the context for the piece as a whole and is intended to glue the pieces together, so that rather than simply three thematically similar pieces, they are part of a larger arc of character growth and relationship change.

The first section deals with the type of hero complex the mother has. When the daughter is carried off, the mother, who is shown to be the voice in the scene at the very beginning, is the only one who can rescue her. She comes in with fire and fury. The mother sees this as an act of

ultimate love, a sacrifice for one's child that any quality parent should make, and the way she tells the story makes that evident. The Stranger's role in this story is one of

The retelling that happens in the second section takes the same story, but puts a new spin on it. Because it is happening in the subconscious, dreaming mind of Ella, the daughter, it has a more surreal air to it. In her dream the Mother is transformed into a monster who wrests her from a place of rest, comfort, and honesty, without any regard for Ella's wishes. The Stranger is Ella's friend in her dream, not as someone who is unrealistically perfect to her as her Mother wishes to be, but as someone who treats her as more a person, someone to be talked to rather than at, to be offered options rather than told what to do, or if being told what to do, not pretending that it is a favor. The distinction between Ella's previous life where she feels like a prisoner, and her literal imprisonment in Hell, where she feels relatively free, is very important here, because it emphasizes her distancing from her mother, whose space is the house and safety she provides, and how Ella does not feel like that is also her space.

The third act is different in kind from the other two. It does not focus on the Persephone myth, but rather on a tale inspired by Little Red Riding Hood, and rather than focusing on the present world of Ella and her mother in an allegorical sense, it goes back in time to the mother's teenage years in a more realistic setting. Having given a fairly solid perspective on why Ella feels the way she does the intention of the third act is to do the same for the Mother. The Stranger takes the role of a sexually aggressive and emotionally manipulative 'friend' who scars the Young Mother deeply, and it is only because of her own mother coming to her rescue that she escapes the situation. This places the mother in the role as protector in her mind, leading to her smothering tendencies.

Writing of the Play:

The process of creating this project was a larger process than any I have been this involved with in the past. When I began, I was overwhelmed with the amount of work that I had to do in totality, and did not really believe I could do it all in somewhat less than a year. I learned quickly however that steady work yields results. While many issues got in the way of timely progress, most relevantly mental health related ones, when I did manage to work regularly I found that I was able to make good progress. In terms of the actual writing process I found that for developing characters it was amazingly helpful to think about their backstories, where they came from and how they live, much in the same way that one does when acting. This thinking even became the eventual impetus behind the third act. In conclusion however, I have learned again what I am constantly learning and always tell myself I need to take more to heart: constant work, concentration, and revision allow for a work to become more polished and my ideas, which I believe to be inherently strong, to become more formed and better articulated on the page.