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## The Night Long Dance

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**The Night Long Dance**

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Languages and Literature  
of Bard College

By Anna Laura Grace Falvey

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May, 2020

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to my mama, who gives very good advice. Thanks for being my first, most important teacher, and for showing me what it means to live and love fiercely, without abandon. Love you.

I am so deeply grateful for my advisors, Ann Lauterbach and Lauren Curtis. For their thoughtfulness, understanding, and immense support, I will be forever grateful. Your guidance and belief in my work means a great deal to me.

To Bard College, I owe the entire world. I am filled with so much love and gratitude for this institution and all it has taught me. Thank you for providing me with the tools I need to step out into the world. At Bard, I have been taught to think critically about how I conduct myself in the world, and to find a personal stake in all of the work that I do. At this wonderful place, I have learned that the work that I do matters. For that I am absolutely indebted. A huge thanks to my professors, especially Professor Phillip Pardi (who, I believe, is in very close contact with the muses), and to Professor Thomas Bartscherer (I tried to narrow it down -- truly for everything). To my friends, who bring such light and joy, and with whom I am so excited to leap into the world. To Maya, my greenhouse in lightland. Thank you.

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## PRELUDE

Though none of the following should be taken as autobiographical by *any* means, my mother *has* always told me, “You’ve got to pick your gods.” She has said it to me well before the pandemic, she’s said it to me during the crisis, and I suspect she will still say it long after this moment has passed into history. All of this is to say, this play has helped me to understand the *Bacchae* as well as myself in many new ways, and I am deeply proud to say that I am looking forward to working on it, long after this project is due. The theater is the world that I belong in, the god that I choose, and the community I have been most eager to take part in when all the world seems to have stopped.

I was once told that everyone has their own “universe work;” the piece of writing, or film, or painting, or whatever it may be that, for them, contains the entire universe. As the individual’s understanding of *their* universe expands, so does their understanding of the “universe work.” The work becomes a spectre and a friend; a guiding light; an anchor and a center around which to ground one’s thinking. Euripides’ *Bacchae* is mine. Everywhere I turn, my thoughts always seem to return to this play. So, naturally, steeped in the fear, uncertainty, and strangeness of this moment, the *Bacchae* remained a constant.

It had already been there, it was the focal point around which my project was already centered before the crisis. But in the unfamiliar, hazy light of the new normal, the play too took on new shapes, crystalized new thoughts. When the world came abruptly to a halt, the play

revealed itself in new slants. It was suddenly abundantly clear to me that I wanted to write a play. I wanted to write a play simply because the theater is where I feel the safest, the most at home, at a time when my sense of home and my sense of safety have been severely disrupted. I wanted to write about a moment of crisis, and its aftermath; about the pain of feeling the need to grow up, to take control of your life and your emotions, and the confusion and dissatisfaction with not knowing how to do that; about someone who doesn't yet know herself and is stuck in a perpetually liminal space. I looked for all of those things in the *Bacchae*, my "universe work," particularly in the Choral ode at line 865, where I began this project in September, and I found them. When the world seemed to be ripping apart, my relationship to this text, and to the theatrical community itself, shifted and deepened.

With these thoughts, and the uncertainty of the current moment in mind, I found myself drawn to new parts of the *Bacchae* -- things which I hadn't considered before. How would it look to bring the outside in -- to move the action of a play which relies so heavily on open space, on escape, on the difference between Pentheus's repression and constriction and the freedom that Dionysus offers, into an enclosed space, into a single room? What does it really mean to find catharsis? Does a cathartic release have to mean closure, an ending, or might it be a beginning? A launching point into the next phase? Is it the answer that matters, or is it the act of questioning?

Euripides' *Bacchae* is a play of urgency -- an urgency which permeates all aspects of its production, from the thematic content of the play, to the language, to the action, to its physical

presence on the stage. But in my mind, the key to understanding the urgency of the *Bacchae* is not necessarily in these moments of climax, but in their aftermath. When the deer stills in the clearing; after Agave's eyes have cleared and she understands what she has done to her son, Pentheus. So, I wrote a play that takes all of these things into account. It takes place in the aftermath of a climax, and is, in large part, extremely climactic, but is really about taking responsibility, about finding your voice. To write this play, I have utilized the interdisciplinary skills I have cultivated throughout my time at Bard, but, most importantly to me, I have written something that I am proud to say feels true to myself as an artist, a poet, and a scholar.

Appropriately, the perfect closing to this prelude and to my time at Bard College seems to me the opening line of the *Bacchae*: ἦκω! I come!

At some moment will I dip my foot into  
the chaos dance; tossing skin  
in the dew-thin air like a Fawn  
frisking meadow green pleasures  
after she escapes from the hunt's guard,  
over his nets, woven thick  
while the hunter, shouting, directs  
the dogs as she leaps the river  
bed with the volant tension of her tempest?  
She stills in a clearing, safe  
from bodily harm and the shadowhair wood.

What is wisdom?

What better divine grant is there among us  
than holding an edge to those who mean harm?

This is both beautiful and also true.

Divine power moves forward truly,  
however slowly. It governs  
both those taking care and those not.

The strength lies long in kaleidoscope  
hiding, waiting and watching for the lost.

At what moment does one need  
to know and respect a higher law?  
Whatever this is, how much will it cost  
to discern whose hands hold it?

What is wisdom?

What better divine grant is there among us  
than holding an edge to those who mean harm?

This is both beautiful and also true.

Blessed: one reaching the harbor  
in seawreck, but still it is reached.

Blessed: rising above this difficulty,  
transcending all those thick with their tension.

People are many, hope is infinite,  
though some end, others spark further desire.

The answer: Whosoever contents  
in their everyday, this is who I consider blessed.

EURIPIDES' *BACCHAE* Interlude III, Line 865

Translation by Anna L. Falvey

## THE NIGHT LONG DANCE

### Characters

LYDIA, a girl of maybe 16.

CORRINNE, her mother.

THE GOD, Dionysus. Gender neutral.

DR. TERESI (voice), Lydia's Therapist and Psychiatrist; voiced by the same actor who plays

The God.

DR. MEDINA (voice), Lydia's Pediatrician.

Speech written between “/ /” indicates overlapping speech.

“The Night Long Dance” is performed without an intermission.

*[SETTING: A living room at dawn. The largest room in a very small house. The front door in the back of the space stands wide open, revealing the suggestion of the street, quiet and unmoving. Next to the door is a hat tree, piled so thick with coats, hats, and scarves that it looks vaguely like a multi-armed creature. Perhaps even an umbrella jutting out or a purse hanging limp on a long strap. The rest of the space is filled with similarly strange shadows. Light filters in from the door as well as from four sheer-curtained windows on the back and right walls. All of the furniture is slightly too large for the size of the room: a desk, a couch, assorted chairs, draped with shawls and blankets, a piano (out of use, perhaps there was once the intention to learn but it has since become more of a decor item). There are precarious-looking piles of books and papers on every flat surface. Scattered around the space there are a plethora of assorted knick-knacks ranging from commonplace to decidedly out of place. Really, the only object of importance is an orange ceramic bowl which sits on the piano.]*

*[LYDIA sits on the floor in the center of the room. She's surrounded by a number of assorted food items: a can of Quaker oats, a carton of peach-grape juice, an empty bottle of coffee creamer, a bag of dried chickpeas, a box of English breakfast tea, clementines, a can of unground coffee beans. All of these are in various states of disarray: the chickpeas might be open and sprawling, the teabox crumpled and open.]*

*[LYDIA starts to make music using the objects around her. Drumming her fingers on the plastic carton, shaking the can of oats, sifting her fingers through the coffee beans, moving the teabox back and forth on the carpet. It begins slow, stable. After experimenting for a while, she falls into*

*a rhythm she is comfortable with. From time to time maybe she pops a coffee bean into her mouth. Maybe it is a tear in one of the tea bags, maybe one too many coffee beans, but her movements become more exaggerated and ferocious. She digs her fingers into the teabags, rips open the chickpeas, and sends them sprawling across the room. She slams the juice carton into the ground with her fists.]*

*[When she exhausts herself, or perhaps runs out of things to rip, her movements become more staccato. It is as if her whole body is filled with tension and she grinds to a halt. Almost seamlessly, she begins to straighten up, holding the same tension in her body. She painstakingly picks up all of the chickpeas, collects the scattered coffee beans, bends her nose close to the ground to sweep up the loose tea leaves. She piles all of the items in a compressed accumulation in the center of the room. When she is done, the pile in the middle of the room should look something like a little altar or offering. After she has methodically reordered the space, she steps away for a moment. Almost immediately she wheels around, whips open the teabox and takes one of the teabags (perhaps there is some tea falling out of it). She grabs one of many empty mugs from atop a table or the piano and drops the tea bag into it. After one more beat she slumps onto the couch, gazing straight out in front of her.]*

*[CORRINNE enters from the front door. She flicks the lightswitch and the overhead lights come on. Her knees are covered in dirt as are her hands, which are covered by a pair of bright orange garden gloves. She carries a stack of mail which she tosses on to her desk.]*

CORRINNE: *[Surprised to see her daughter.]* Lydia, love! You're awake. I'm so sorry, if I'd known you were up I would have made coffee - This is the earliest I've seen you in - *[She smells it from the kitchen]* Did you make coffee?

*[LYDIA nods. She still appears to be in a bit of a resting trance. CORRINNE kicks off the sandals or whatever garden shoes she's wearing, picking them up and putting them by the door.]*

CORRINNE: How are you feeling today? Did you sleep well?

*[No response from LYDIA. CORRINNE removes her garden gloves and sets them on the desk, picking up the stack of mail. Each envelope contains a bill.]*

CORRINNE: Tomorrow if you're up early enough, maybe you could help me out there. All that rain last night... the weeds sprouted up like crazy overnight.

*[Silence again from LYDIA. CORRINNE turns to her.]*

CORRINNE: Lydia. Are you alright? What's-

*[She sees the altar in the middle of the room. She has seen things like this before, but was not expecting it today.]*

CORRINNE: *[Quietly. Stunned, a bit alarmed.]* What is that? *[Louder.]* Lydia, what is that?

*[LYDIA shakes her head as if waking up from a dream. She looks rattled.]*

LYDIA: What...

CORRINNE: Today? After all this, all the planning, you choose *today*?

LYDIA: *[Looking down at the pile with surprise.]* Mom...No, I didn't choose-

CORRINE: Oh, Lydia...

LYDIA: Mom, really I don't know how I-I'm so sorry I didn't-

CORINNE: *[Not angry, just tired seeming.]* I don't ask for much, Lydia. Really, I don't. I'm trying so hard here. If you're not appreciating my efforts-...if you can't just *be okay* you can easily just go someplace / else. You can go back to- /

LYDIA: No! No, mom, I'm sorry I swear I didn't-

CORRINNE: Didn't what, Lydia? Didn't do it?

LYDIA: ... No, but-

CORRINNE: Lydia, there's no one else here. Of course you did it. You did. And this is really the issue. You can't take any *responsibility*-

LYDIA: But Mom, I really don't remember -

CORRINNE: *[Holds up her hand in exasperation. Lydia is silent. With difficulty, Corrinne composes herself somewhat]* Just-... just clean it up, okay? It's fine, just clean it up. Put everything back in its place. I've asked you before, Lydia. I'm trying so hard, *so hard* to make sure that *our* house is clean and calm and safe for you. I've told you before just keep everything *in its place*. Keep it balanced. For both of us. Just put it all back in its place. Have it all away by the time I get home tonight. Please. *Please*.

*[CORRINNE exits to the kitchen.]*

CORRINNE: *[With an air of forced lightness which she eventually transforms to real lightness.]*  
Coffee in the pot?

LYDIA: *[Strained, visibly upset with herself.]* Yes.

*[Sound of cabinets opening and closing as CORRINNE pours herself a cup.]*

CORRINNE: *[from off]* Hm. It's a bit strong for me.

*[LYDIA rolls her eyes, staring at her altar with a look of combined dismay, confusion, and frustration. She laughs a bit, trying to smooth the tension.]*

LYDIA: Yeah, well I'm sure it'll be fine once it's mostly creamer.

*[CORRINNE pokes her head out of the kitchen, holding out a bottle of coffee creamer and pouring a large amount into a coffee mug.]*

CORRINNE: Right you are.

*[CORRINNE exits, putting away the bottle. LYDIA sighs, relieved.]*

*[CORRINNE re-enters, standing in the doorway holding a mug of coffee. Maybe with some cliché'd quote printed on it: "There is nothing permanent except change." or "ad aspera per astra." She is noticeably lighter, with an air of necessary calm.]*

CORRINNE: Beautiful grey day out. The kind of day you can get absolutely lost in -- ...

*[Slight pause. She stands next to the piano and the orange bowl.]*

How are you feeling? Did you do...*[with the same forced lightness]* It's Monday! Start of a new week! You know what that means!

*[CORRINNE touches the orange bowl for a moment and bangs her hand briskly on the piano. She then travels over to her desk where the mail sits. As she talks, she examines the stack of letters on the table, tossing certain ones aside and tucking a few in her pocket.]*

*[CORRINNE is a nervous talker. Aside from being a relatively sullen teenager, LYDIA is generally a girl of few words, which only highlights her mother's excessive, awkward chatter. She is already nervous, this episode has put her on edge, and the bills are only making her more tetchy.]*

CORRINNE: You know, for me, it's been a really great morning so far. One of those days you know you feel like you've been shot up and out into the day like an arrow. Before the sun even came up I already started three new poems as I was working in the back. I only got the first few feet of the garden done. It's just so awful out there, like a damn *forest*....oh, I- [*laughs nervously*] That storm yesterday really did make a mess of things. Loose branches, garden statues toppled, the flowers uprooted. I mean it was already bad enough as it was. But really, when is there time to worry when there's so much to do? I just don't have the strength, or frankly the patience to do it for more than a few hours and even then I can't even seem to make a dent there's just so much work that needs to be done.

*[CORRINNE uses poetry to soothe herself. While Lydia's poetry comes to her intrinsically and naturally, Corrinne's is more carefully calculated.]*

CORRINNE: There's one poem I think you'll like called "Alice at the Waverly" where Alice in Wonderland falls into Greenwich Village in 1969. I was toying with Alice running off...to-go-live in Central Park [*high laugh that almost rings manic*] but Washington Square just seemed more right more... oh... what's the word... not *cozy*, but...

LYDIA: Secure.

CORRINNE: Yes! Secure! Yes. And anyway I've always thought that Alice would really love the grilled cheese sandwiches at Washington Square Diner you know almost soggy with butter you know like you used to have when you were little and how I used to tease you and tell you I couldn't understand how you could eat them it just seemed so *strange* to me but then you were always strange to -... [*more laughter, definitely manic. Takes a moment to compose herself before*] And then I've *also* been thinking of my friend Genie who used to play on the tennis team

and how I was always so envious of her legs in her little white tennis skirts and how clean she always kept her little white tennis shoes -- you have to remember to take your-- *[she glances at the orange bowl on the piano]*...did you put the laundry in?

*[LYDIA nods. LYDIA's daily tasks are regimented and, though mundane, they are highly specific. Whenever CORRINNE asks LYDIA whether she has "done" something, it should sound slightly robotic, as if she is reading the task off of a checklist in her brain.]*

Two scoops detergent, capful of bleach and up to the two line fabric softener?

*[LYDIA nods, dutifully.]*

*[with apparent relief]* Good! That's- that's good! And you were careful- you were careful of your leg when you went down the stairs, weren't you?

LYDIA: *[Touching her right shin.]* Very careful.

CORRINNE: You used the railing?

LYDIA: I used the railing.

*[CORRINNE looks at her for a beat longer, as if silently asking her to do something. In response, LYDIA hoists her leg up and rests it on the ottoman in front of her, beginning to do a series of well-practiced PT stretches which she continues to perform as her mother talks.]*

CORRINNE: And you'll remember, when I go today, when you go down to move along the laundry, the lint- you have to clear the lint out of the dryer *[her grip tightens on the letters]* if you don't there could be a *fire* and-

LYDIA: *[With an air of reassurance, bent over her leg.]* Mom, I know. I know.

CORRINNE: Right. Right, of course you know.

LYDIA: *[Continuing her stretches.]* The shoes, Mom? Your friend Genie's shoes.

CORRINNE: Right. So I thought it might be nice to start a poem with a description of one of Genie's tennis shoes.

*[CORRINNE retrieves a yellow exercise band hanging from the coat rack near the door and drops it in LYDIA's lap. LYDIA continues to do the series of stretches with the band.]*

CORRINNE: It's been so long but I feel like I'll always be able to describe them in perfect detail and there's something so good sounding and delicate about the phrase *tennis shoes*. I think of them, out on the lawn... and they look like... like-

LYDIA: Like seeds. Like seeds you're tending to.

CORRINNE: *[She looks warmly at LYDIA.]* Right. I was thinking of writing to her today and maybe sending her the beginning of that poem I wrote about her shoes. You know her daughter plays tennis, too, just like her mother. Honestly I'd rather you write poems that no one reads like me than to play tennis anyhow but -- you know, you've got to pick your gods, Lydia. Your gods and your avocations. Genie's daughter plays tennis and you-...*[she laughs]* you-...Lydia. *Please* put it down.

*[LYDIA has abandoned her stretching and taken the smashed juice carton and is attempting to reshape it back into something that resembles the original. She very slowly puts it down in front of her and continues with her stretches.]*

CORRINNE: *[CORRINNE exits to the kitchen.]* That reminds me, there are two carpenter's bags of weeds outside that you can move to curb for the garbage men to take.

*[LYDIA's head shoots up. This is very surprising.]*

CORRINNE: *[She re-enters the living room with a medical ice pack which she is wrapping in a dish towel. Breezily.]* What is it? ... yes, they're just out on the lawn. *[she gestures with her hand and LYDIA lifts her leg. CORRINNE puts the ice pack underneath her leg and LYDIA puts her leg down.]* I couldn't quite lift it myself, they're like, oh, what's that word? Slant rhyme with David and Goliath?

LYDIA: Behemoth?

CORRINNE: Yes! Behemoths! I thought you might be able to drag them to the curb.

LYDIA: *[after a pause, slightly wary.]* You couldn't lift it? Are you sure I should -- ?

CORRINNE: Good coffee. I've got to get some writing done today when I get home.

Maybe-...Lydie, maybe we could do something together when I come back tonight? Maybe we could write. I haven't seen you writing since- ... well... I just think it might be nice *[gently, almost pleading]* make coffee, talk... it's just, you know *[the same slightly manic laugh]* you have such a- such a *literary* life, Lydia *[she cuts herself off]* Some *quality* time together. Not just in and out, dancing around each other. Together -- we could write together.

*[LYDIA is bent over her leg, fixing the ice pack, avoiding her mother's eye.]*

CORRINNE: All I have are ideas. A pile of beginnings with no ends or even middles in sight.

There's nothing concrete / *She exits.* / about anything I do anymore.

*[Calling back.]* I'm going to shower!

*[Sound of the bathroom door closing and the shower turning on.]*

*[LYDIA's gaze turns to the open door. THE GOD steps into the doorway of the kitchen, sipping a cup of coffee.]*

*[NOTE: When Lydia and The God are talking there is always the same lighting shift. All of the artificial light in the space dims to nothing and the room is filled with only natural lighting.]*

*[During this exchange, LYDIA passes THE GOD all of the items on the ground making up the altar, which THE GOD then replaces in the kitchen. This should be like a dance, some kind of understood ritual between the two.]*

THE GOD:

Dawn-makers are never quiet. Sure  
as a poet is tight-lipped and full of flexible light  
or one who crushes fruit between their toes to soak in  
sunlight and cook into clear elixir, but never considered

quiet. Agave rests  
in a rainstorm of her own making,  
dog-earing a thick book  
of photographs saturated  
envy green. She whispers  
in the deaf ear of the child  
by her side: this year  
spring will be long  
and wild shades will come

together in tones of brilliant red  
and together, together,  
we resolve to write more  
and re-evaluate the way  
we make our morning

LYDIA:

coffee. Cups of wine  
shoot splashless in the sea

their contents spilled out  
and stretched into fabric

woven together between  
braids of yearning woman

hair. If I come into my own  
here, there will be nothing

left to do but weave, thought  
every Classical woman in all

THE GOD:

the cannon. I have

come to realize, is something

to be mindful of.

*[While THE GOD speaks this last line, they move to sit in the rocking chair opposite her, rocking back and forth jovially.]*

THE GOD: I'm completely without worry.

LYDIA: I'm not. What's that? *[She gestures to the altar next to her.]*

THE GOD: *[Shrugs.]* How should I know? It's *your* music. *You* made it.

LYDIA: *[She squints at them.]* There are less destructive ways to make music.

THE GOD: You sound like your mother.

LYDIA: *[Mock hurt by this.]* I do *not*!

THE GOD: *[Mocking Corrinne.]* What the *fuck* is that? Lydia, what the fucking fuck *is* that?

LYDIA: *[Laughing.]* She didn't curse like that! You always make her sound so much whinier and *meaner* than she actually is.

THE GOD: *[Still in a squeaking, poor imitation of Corrinne.]* I'm trying so hard, *so hard* to make sure that *our* house is a clean and calm and safe *prison cell* for you. I've told you once and I'll tell you again, unless you want to go back to-

LYDIA: Come on, stop it. She means well. She just doesn't know what to do. With me. Or how to talk to me.

*[THE GOD scoffs. LYDIA looks at the spot on the floor where the altar was.]*

LYDIA: God, I just don't *remember*-... Whatever. I know what I need to do. I just need to be *calm* today. I just have to get through today without issue and it'll all be fine.

THE GOD: *[Shrugging.]* Well then, I'm completely without worry.

LYDIA: So am I.

THE GOD: Well, that's a change.

LYDIA: *[More playfully.]* When is there time to worry when there's *so much to do*.

THE GOD: *[Laughs.]* There's one more thing on your checklist, Prometheus. *[They shake the orange ceramic bowl, which is filled with pill bottles.]* Time for music!

*[Lydia exits into the kitchen and immediately returns with an empty weekly pill organizer. She retrieves an armload of orange pill bottles from the orange bowl and sits on the ground next to her pile of instruments.]*

THE GOD: Something while you work?

*[During this exchange, LYDIA methodically sets up the pills for the week, placing one from each bottle into the pill organizer and snapping each lid shut.]*

THE GOD:

Long-haired Dionysus sits with legs splayed out  
in perspectival slant, upright bass in hand, plucking  
steady, mooded, sweat beading his pulsed temple,  
beating in dissonant tones that wrap deftly over,

around his triple knotted fingers, dotting on the  
wide frequency which sounds through the black  
as one would on the brow of a lover. He has  
just lost his girl, and so he lilt, jaw cutting sound

*[The shower can be heard shutting off.]*

LYDIA:

into resounding patterns of the whole: whole;  
half; quarter; eighth; sixteenth; thirty second;  
sixty fourth; one twenty eighth... and on he goes,  
pulling time so thin and sound so distant that

there opened a new tilt in the night sky, like  
a sloe eye, into which one would find, if one stepped,  
that glass could be blown from the wind  
and that birds always look black and clear

THE GOD:

and slow against a perpetual orange. And through  
this tilt a sister, Artemis, rubbing her strong jaw,  
the same as his, stepped, and placed a cooling hand

on his shoulder. She sang low and calm, steady

and strong, and he heard her from the tips  
of his hair to the strings of his upright bass.

As she sang, his notes grew longer, vowel  
sounds beginning to reappear in place of

*[THE GOD disappears into the kitchen]*

LYDIA:

the staccato shrieks of false love. As she  
sang, the lines of the harmony fell together  
like the closing of a drawbridge at day's end  
and the two sang, in cadence old and immutable.

*[CORRINNE re-enters, dressed and made up for work. She crosses to the lightswitch and flicks it  
so that the artificial lights come flooding back on. She takes stock of the room, sees that  
everything has been put away.]*

CORRINNE: Oh... oh good you... *[notices the filled pill organizer in Lydia's lap]* Oh... oh!

Oh, good. Good. I'm glad you. Yes, well you know. You know you have to...you have to...

*[Lydia hastily scoops up the pills in the MONDAY compartment and shoves them in her mouth.]*

*Corrinne winces.] Good! I'm-...good. Yes. Well. [she puts on her heels by the door and picks up a briefcase.] Well! I'll be... Lydia. You know where I'll be if you need me.*

*[LYDIA nods.]*

And...and you know that Dr. Teresi is going to call you. You know. At one. To check in. Like we talked about.

*[LYDIA nods.]*

And I'll be. I'll be home. Soon. I love you. *[She very quickly exits, as if not to give herself the chance to look back.]*

*[LYDIA remains seated on the floor looking at the empty doorway. Light shifts as THE GOD sneaks up behind her, smacking her lightly on the back of the head. She shrieks, laughing, spitting out all of the pills in her mouth.]*

THE GOD: There you go!

LYDIA: *[Catching her breath, still laughing.]* What the hell was that?

THE GOD: What?

LYDIA: I was going to swallow those!

THE GOD: Oh..but I / thought /

LYDIA: What?

THE GOD: you had / already /

LYDIA: What?

THE GOD: swallowed them.

LYDIA: Well... I didn't. *[after a pause, a bit defiantly]* I was going to.

THE GOD: Okay... well then...

*[THE GOD crouches on all fours and sweeps the pile of pills into their hands. They make a big show of searching the carpet in order to locate them all. Kneeling in front of her, they present them to Lydia. She doesn't make any move to take them.]*

THE GOD: Here you go.

LYDIA: I...

*[THE GOD sticks their hand slightly closer to her, gaze unwavering.]*

THE GOD: Go on, *take* them. You *need* them. *[this should be delivered with the utmost sincerity.]*

*[LYDIA winces, looking warily at their hand.]*

LYDIA: I don't... I don't *need* them. They just *help*... I mean, I guess... I don't really know what they...

THE GOD: *[snatching their hand back, examining the pills in their palm with visible skepticism]*

You mean to tell me that you don't know what any of these *do*? You put them in your body blindly, without any sort of desire to know / what they're for? /

LYDIA: *[Hurt.]* I-...no! Don't make it sound that way! They *gave* those to me. They said they're supposed to make me-

THE GOD: What? Better? Calmer? Quiet the body, quiet the mind? Sleep for a very very...very long time?

LYDIA: No. Yes. I don't know, stop it.

THE GOD: *[Amusing herself with scaring her.]* Or, or, maybe...maybe they're making you *see things*. Funky things like... like your morning toast singeing holes in your hands when you pick it up. Books with a thousand tongues in place of pages.

like voices hanging like dried fruit from the dead  
and dying willow trees. Voices rising in vapor from the gaping mouth  
of your front door.

LYDIA: *[Laughing uneasily, shaken.]* Stop it.

THE GOD:

Teeth grow from the wood molding  
and your house becomes a shrieking creature with  
a bull head's and the eyes of a fly  
and a tongue patterned like a putrid,  
dust colored shag rug.

Or maybe...*[laughing]* maybe they're just making you see *me*.

*[A pause before LYDIA snatches the pills from THE GOD's hand and crams them all into her mouth. THE GOD waits expectantly for her to swallow them.]*

THE GOD: Need some water? *[Moves to go get some from the kitchen.]*

*[LYDIA shakes her head.]*

THE GOD: Well? Go on, then.

*[LYDIA spits them into her hand.]*

THE GOD: Lydia? Lydia. You should take them. I was just fooling around. *Take* them.

*[LYDIA shakes her head.]*

THE GOD: Why not.

LYDIA: I just...I will. I will. I just need some time. Just a minute. I will after I eat lunch or something. I haven't had breakfast yet anyway, and it's probably not...I probably shouldn't take them on an empty stomach so it's probably best not to...

THE GOD: Right.

LYDIA: Right.

THE GOD: Right.

*[LYDIA rises and empties the pills in her hands into one of the empty coffee mugs, setting it down on the table. After a moment she reconsiders, picking the mug with the pills back up along with the pill organizer, still lying on the floor, and places them both on the piano next to the orange ceramic bowl where the pill bottles live. THE GOD watches her, amused, meandering around the room and playing with various decor items. LYDIA wheels around, glaring at THE GOD.]*

LYDIA: Alright, listen. Listen.

THE GOD: *[holding up one of the curtains to their body like a kithara, posing]* Yes?

LYDIA: No, I'm serious. *Listen.*

*[THE GOD holds their hands up in mock surrender.]*

THE GOD: Listening.

LYDIA: Today is important. It's different. I *have* to be okay today.

THE GOD: And so you will be. How could you not be, when there you have so many *responsibilities* to get you through the day? [*gestures out the door to where the bag of weeds sits*]

LYDIA: Stop it! That's a big deal. She didn't have to let me do that. It's been, what, like two months since anyone's let me outside on my own?

THE GOD: Well, who's stopping you?

LYDIA: [*After a pause.*] No one, I guess...

THE GOD: No one?

LYDIA: No, no! I am! I'm stopping me. I'm not going outside by myself because the last time I did I- well, you know.

THE GOD: But you're not right now.

LYDIA: What?

THE GOD: You're not stopping yourself right now.

LYDIA: You're right. I'm not.

THE GOD: [*Mocking her.*] Because your mama *told* you that you could go outside. Just for a little bit. And then scurry on back inside where you're safe.

LYDIA: That's not...

THE GOD: You're being *stifled* here. You're fine! You're healthy! It's *them*. They're convincing you that you're sick. That you need to be coddled and taken care of like some newborn deer.

*[She starts backwards, stunned. The phone rings.]*

THE GOD: See? There's mama, now!

*[The landline is hanging on the kitchen wall, right next to the door to the living room, so that it is visible to the audience. Staring back at THE GOD, LYDIA walks over to the phone and picks it up, standing in the kitchen doorway as she talks.]*

LYDIA: Hello?

*[CORRINNE's voice on the phone can be heard by the audience.]*

CORRINNE: Hi, baby it's me. I'm just checking in.

*[LYDIA winces. THE GOD doubles over in silent laughter.]*

LYDIA: Hi, mom... you didn't need to call. You left like, what, twenty minutes ago?

CORRINNE: I know, I know I was just calling to let you know I got to school okay, and I wanted to make sure you saw my class schedule that I left on the desk for you so you know where I'll be and when I'll be done today. And I also wanted to let you know that Mrs. Euriel and everyone in the office knows the / situation /

LYDIA: / Mom, you didn't have to tell them- /

CORRINNE: / and they say to call / the main office at *any time* and they'll come and get me from class, alright? There's a sub on standby to take over my classes if need be. And I told Mr. and Mrs. Cohen next door and Karen / Delmont across the way so /

LYDIA: / Are you *serious*? /

CORRINNE: Just don't *worry*, okay? Call me anytime.

LYDIA: [*Gently.*] Mom, I think you're the one who's worried, not me.

CORRINNE: [*A pause on the other end.*] Right. You're completely right. You're fine.

LYDIA: Yes. Completely.

CORRINNE: Right. Well. I'm going to head to class now. I'm going to check in again during my lunch break, okay? And maybe one more time when I'm monitoring the study hall.

LYDIA: Okay, mom.

CORRINNE: Okay. Okay. I love you, Lydia.

LYDIA: Love you too, mom.

*[Over the course of the conversation, LYDIA's physicality has become progressively uncomfortable as she feels warmer and warmer, as if the house itself is heating up. The line clicks dead. LYDIA hangs it up.]*

THE GOD: Stifling.

LYDIA: [*Taking off her sweater and setting it down on the couch.*] It's just hot in here.

*[THE GOD watches as LYDIA walks around the room, opening all of the windows. The curtains blow softly in the breeze. She speaks as she opens each window.]*

LYDIA:

Close kept as skin to muscle,

the bedrock peels her ice. Clean

air rolls the cold beneath her tongue,

lightly dusting the candid striations,

aged and geometric. Mottled and shining,

THE GOD:

the bedrock maps her frozen sorrow  
through veins, glowing and slick  
as memory or faded longing, lost  
under years of thick, strong laughter:  
far off, but close kept as skin to muscle.

THE GOD: Better?

LYDIA: Yes. No. I don't know.

THE GOD: You won't be *better* until you *change* something. Until you step into your nature.

*[Slowly and deliberately, in contrast to her normal way of moving, LYDIA turns and walks out the front door. She is gone for a few moments before she returns with two large black carpenter bags filled with foliage. One after the other, she dumps the contents of each of the bags onto the living room floor.]*

*[During this next exchange, LYDIA takes armloads of leaves and dirt from the pile on the ground and scatters them around the room so that the carpet and tables are hidden under them. When this is complete, she goes to a cabinet, opening one of the drawers and pulling out a stapler. She pulls the stapler open, and begins taking weeds and flowers from the pile and stapling them to*

*the walls around the room. The branches she perches on the tables and other flat surfaces around the room. If all of this takes longer than the exchange, THE GOD silently watches LYDIA*

*continue to work.]*

LYDIA:

My mother always tells me, *you've got to pick your gods.*

She says this, leaning at a crow's angle over a cup of coffee,  
a glass of wine; through the oiled steam of a stirfried dinner;

from under the tumble of her quilted bedclothes,  
voice muffled behind a peeling murder mystery;  
shouted out the back door to the forest before the dead bolt

THE GOD:

has been undone. *If you worship false gods, she says,  
your bones and your eyes and your mind will brittle  
and fall away into nothing.* I imagine her sometimes,

tending a garden of nothing, the grave keeper  
of false god worshippers: either with her hair gray  
and middle parted, short and severe, lips pursed

LYDIA:

in a respectful red line as she tends, or with a long  
white braid down her back that persists, swinging  
over her shoulder and into the earth. Here, she weeps

and laughs and the weeds tremble. She salts the garden  
which burns through the molten remnants.

She says, through the acid hiss of pain dissolving,

*[When she has finished her work, LYDIA surveys and considers the room around her, breathing  
heavily. THE GOD considers with her.]*

THE GOD:

*you've got to pick your gods.*

LYDIA: *[Looking around the room.]* Oh god... what did I do? *Why* the hell did I do that?!

THE GOD: *[Holding back laughter.]* I couldn't tell you.

LYDIA: My mom... she's going to murder me. God, why did I *do* that? *[She turns her gaze  
sharply on them.]* You made me do that. Why. *Why* did you make me do that?

THE GOD: You're pent up! You felt angry, you felt upset, you felt --

LYDIA: No, no I didn't. I really didn't. I just felt... nothing.

THE GOD: Nothing?

LYDIA: Nothing. *[She laughs.]* I'm a pile of beginnings with no ends or even middles. There's nothing real about anything I do anymore. I see everything through others.

THE GOD: When was the last time you last time you felt something? Some catharsis?

Anything?

*[LYDIA thinks for a moment, though she immediately knows the answer. She exits swiftly to the kitchen and re-enters with a large kitchen knife. In a frenzy, she hacks holes in all of the furniture, the chairs, the paintings, the couch, taking the remaining branches, weeds, and other plants and sticking them inside of the furniture so that the greenery appears to be growing out of it. When she has exhausted herself, or maybe when there is no foliage left to place, she collapses to her knees in the center of the room, dropping the knife in front of her, exhausted.]*

THE GOD: *[Sings, almost like a lullaby]*

She is as unlike the wood  
of a writing desk as a body  
could be, he tells her. She was  
a case full of porous stone,  
cold, colder than the shock  
of fingers stained outside  
even when inside air

is warm, too warm. She is  
a palmful of sap plunged  
in river water she says she will be  
a light bulb under an unfocused eye.

You're running towards something, Lydia. Full tilt. The finale is inevitable. Everything leads you back to that night. Is pulling you towards release. Towards freedom. You have to complete the ritual. This destruction is part of the celebration.

*[LYDIA is silent, too exhausted to answer.]*

*[The slash that LYDIA has made in the painting leaning against the wall on CORRINNE's desk has revealed a thickly packed manilla folder poking out from behind it. THE GOD walks over to it, pulling it out from the slash in the painting. When they pull out the one, another one tumbles out behind it. THE GOD yanks them all out, one by one, like scarves out of a magician's sleeve, ending up with a stack piled on the desk. THE GOD turns to LYDIA, gazing down at the pile of folders.]*

LYDIA: What's that?

THE GOD: I don't know. Buried treasure.

*[LYDIA looks at the pile warily.]*

LYDIA: What is it?

THE GOD: Why don't you take one and find out?

*[She does.]*

LYDIA: *[Reading the tab on the side of the one of the folders.]* "CHRISTOPHER, LYDIA. Medical Record, 2006-2008."

*[Stunned, she looks up at the slashed painting.]*

THE GOD: Medical history /

LYDIA: No.

THE GOD: / like a history book /

LYDIA: No.

THE GOD: / or epic poem /

LYDA: No.

THE GOD: / The fable of your body. How fascinating.

LYDIA: No. I can't read this. I can't. I can't read this.

THE GOD: What? Why not?

LYDIA: Why not?

THE GOD: Yes, why not? You found it, fair and square.

LYDIA: Why not...? Because I don't want to know.

THE GOD: What? You don't want to know?!

LYDIA: No, I don't.

THE GOD: That's the entire history of your body. Right there, in your hands.

LYDIA: I know, but I don't-

THE GOD: That your mother hid from you.

LYDIA: What?

THE GOD: She *hid* it from you.

LYDIA: I'm sure she didn't mean-

THE GOD: Have you ever seen this before?

LYDIA: Well I'm sure I've *seen* it

THE GOD: But do you know what's *inside*?

*[LYDIA opens the folder, flipping to a random document and reads:]*

LYDIA: "July 22nd, 2008. Christopher, Lydia D. 4 years old. Badly scratched by 'neighborhood cat' on the stoop in front of her home. The patient seems badly shaken but otherwise responded well to treatment. One-inch horizontal stitch received across the bridge of nose and two inch horizontal stitch received below the eye to the temple. Patient was released within two hours of the administration of the stitches."

*[Lydia laughs, touching the bridge of her nose.]*

That cat still lives somewhere on this street... I've avoided him since I can remember.

*[Now curious and slightly nostalgic, she closes the folder, picks up another one, and begins to read:]*

"April 18th, 2010. Christopher, Lydia D. 7 years old. Tripped and fell while disembarking the school bus in the afternoon and fell onto a three-inch nail lying upright on the sidewalk. When the nurse attempted to give her a sedative shot, the Patient kicked her in the stomach. The Patient

was subsequently given pentobarbital orally and subdued. Stitches administered to close the wound on both the anterior and posterior sides of the palm and a tetanus booster shot.

“April 30th, 2010. Christopher, Lydia D. 7 years old. Rupture to the posterior stitches on the left palm administered twelve days prior while Patient was writing.”

*[Aside, laughing]* I was writing my *novel!* It was called “Queen Tough and the Bottle Rockets.” I worked on it for like, three years or something...

*[THE GOD watches her intently as she reads. After a long pause, LYDIA keeps flipping through the pages. She moves on to another folder, this one much thicker than the last.]*

LYDIA: 10 years old. Patient experienced a seizure-like episode and fell off the top of a jungle gym at Magnolia Street Park. Emergency paramedics on-scene immediately sedated and stabilized the patient on the way to the Emergency Room. Patient given an IV drip for hydration and tested for several immune-deficiencies and for symptoms of Epilepsy. Results inconclusive. Patient kept overnight for further testing. Patient released when test results all came back negative. Diagnosis inconclusive...

*[LYDIA looks up at THE GOD.]*

LYDIA: Ten years old. That’s about when I met you, isn’t it?

THE GOD: *[Watching her.]* See, isn’t this fun?

*[She keeps flipping through the pages.]*

LYDIA: “June 14th, 2013... experienced seizure-like symptoms... no visible connection to... negative... Diagnosis inconclusive...”

“June 28th, 2013. Seizure-like symptoms... no visible connection to previous... Diagnosis inconclusive.

“August 6th, 2013. Seizure-like symptoms. Calling out nonsensical verbalizations... sedated... tested again for schizophrenia... all results are negative. Diagnosis inconclusive...

*[Her movements become more and more frantic. She throws down the folder, picking up another one and flipping through several pages.]*

“September 15th, 2016... Diagnosis inconclusive.

*[Several more pages]*

“December 24th, 2017. *Diagnosis inconclusive.*

*[She keeps flipping, until arriving at]*

LYDIA: “March 18th, 2019.” I-...I can’t read this.

THE GOD: Yes you can. That’s what you said about the rest of it. But I just *heard* you-

LYDIA: No. All of that wasn’t really what I couldn’t read. This is really what I couldn’t-...read.

THE GOD: *[mocking her being tongue-tied]* Well *this is really what I call* being cowardly. Read it. Don’t you want to *know*?

LYDIA: I don’t-

THE GOD: *[They approach her slowly, moving closer over the next few lines]* You don’t *remember* it, do you? You don’t *remember* what happened?

LYDIA: No, I don't and I don't- ...

THE GOD: Want to?

LYDIA: Right...

THE GOD: *[Moving closer to her]* This is becoming something of a pattern today, isn't it?

*[They snatch the file out of her hands. LYDIA's voice is drowned out and THE GOD's voice is amplified. Stepping up onto one of the chairs downstage like a soapbox, they hold the file up in front of them and read it out loud. The words are over pronounced and projected out to the audience, like a speech being announced to a court. It is like the speech of the Messenger reporting the violence that has occurred in a Greek tragedy.]*

*[As THE GOD flips through the files, they perform three different personas, The God as DOCTOR (buttoned up and serious. Think Anthony Hopkins in The Elephant Man), The God as SHERIFF (small-town big boy. Think John Wayne in True Grit but without the accent), and The God as PSYCHIATRIST (high falutin and pedantic but well-meaning. Think Richard Burton as Martyn Dysart in Equus.) When they begin reading, LYDIA snaps to attention and begins to perform what is being read, using the now forested living room as her set. She uses her whole body, her movement quality should invoke that of the dance she performed at the top of the play. The lights dim and soften on stage so that there is a dream-like quality to LYDIA's dance, and a dim spotlight on THE GOD as they read the files.]*

THE GOD/DOCTOR: "March 18th, 2019. Christopher, Lydia D. 16 years old.

THE GOD/SHERIFF: “Report filed 0500 hours 3/18/19. 10:65; 10-33; 10-57; 10-43

THE GOD/PSYCHIATRIST: “Morning of the 18th of March, 2019. Patient name, Lydia D. Christopher.

*[THE GOD splits into three. The actress playing CORRINNE should take over as PSYCHIATRIST, and the actor playing DR. MEDINA should take over as DOCTOR. THE GOD should keep going as SHERIFF. All three of these actors should be in masks of some kind, indicating the different characters that they are embodying, but their costuming should resemble that of THE GOD's. In essence, these three become a Chorus of sorts. Their movements should be exaggerated and very intentional, as should their intonation.]*

THE GOD/SHERIFF: “Myself and officers 216, 344, 192, and 102 left the station at around 1100 hours in response to a 10-33 call received regarding the ongoing missing person case of Lydia Christopher. The caller reported the faint sounds of a young girl screaming in the woods 6 miles north of Larchmont town center. We took two patrol cars up to the woods and went to look on foot. Though sounds of the screaming and what sounded something like singing of a female person were apparent to the officers and I as soon as we stopped the car. It took well over two hours for the officers and myself to locate the unknown person who we later identified as the missing adolescent, Lydia Christopher. When we saw her, we immediately called in a 10-43

DR. MEDINA/DOCTOR: “The call from the officers to the hospital came in at around 2:15 a.m. and we immediately sent out a team of paramedics. The ambulance arrived at the edge of the woods at 2:35, but it took paramedics until 3:26 a.m. to locate the site

THE GOD/SHERIFF: “In the meantime, the officers tried to subdue the perpetrator/victim who was

DR. MEDINA/DOCTOR: “When found, the patient was nude, despite the below-freezing temperature and her body was covered in a layer of dark mud. She was

THE GOD/SHERIFF: Dancing. I guess you could call it that. It was dark, we couldn’t see that well with our flashlights. Just shadows in the dark and she would suddenly pop up out of nowhere in a patch of moonlight. Like a madwoman. Or a wolf. All blood and hair and teeth and leaves. And the whites of her eyes...

*[As the story progresses, each performer sinks deeper and deeper into the roles that they’re playing and into the mania and momentum of the drama.]*

DR. MEDINA/DOCTOR: The patient was experiencing the symptoms of a seizure-like episode.

THE GOD/SHERIFF: I just remember the whites of her eyes...

DR. MEDINA/DOCTOR: The patient was lying on her back, blood flowing freely from an open wound located on her left tibia.

THE GOD/SHERIFF: We tried to call out to her. To talk with her. She was speaking in some sort of language. In tongues. She couldn’t-... wouldn’t understand us. I tried reaching out my hand to her. I don’t know if I was even aiming to grab her, maybe just to wave her down or something but it... she...

DR. MEDINA/DOCTOR: Two of the emergency responders present immediately tended to one of the police officers, later identified as Sheriff Jim Mendes, who was bleeding profusely from his right shoulder, holding a jacket to the wound to stop blood flow.

CORRINNE/PSYCHIATRIST: It is difficult to imagine a girl of Lydia's size and stature achieving violence of this caliber...

DR. MEDINA/DOCTOR: it was later determined that the patient had bitten through the officer's coat and shirt and taken off a chunk of flesh when the officer had attempted to approach her.

*[At this line LYDIA launches herself onto an armchair, pouncing, slashing at it with the kitchen knife, still in the room, and violently rips out the stuffing.]*

CORRINNE/PSYCHIATRIST: ... attacking a man the size of Sherif Mendes

DR. MEDINA/DOCTOR: This was when Officer Tom Doherty shot her in the leg in order to subdue her.

THE GOD/SHERIFF: Tom went and shot her in the leg to get her off of me. She fell off of me and into the lake, stream kinda thing we were next to, but- ...

*[LYDIA punches a hole into the wall. A pipe bursts and a slow trickle of water pours out and streams down the wall.]*

DR. MEDINA/DOCTOR: Upon their arrival, paramedics reported that the police officers present were 'stunned and terrified.'

CORRINNE/PSYCHIATRIST: The pain she must have been in...

THE GOD/SHERIFF: Never seen anything like it before...

DR. MEDINA/DOCTOR: Before the paramedics arrived-

THE GOD/SHERIFF: She kept running. Laughing her damn head off, running through the trees screaming and wailing and just laughing like a damn banshee for what seemed like hours

*[THE GOD scatters the papers from Lydia's medical files everywhere.]*

DR. MEDINA/DOCTOR: until her tibia shattered completely and she collapsed to the ground where she was recovered by the paramedics

THE GOD/SHERIFF: eyes rolled back to the whites and was foaming at the mouth.

CORRINNE/PSYCHIATRIST: Hands, mouth, body covered in blood and *screaming* and *laughing* still

THE GOD/SHERIFF: I don't remember this too well. I was a little hazy from the blood loss. But I remember that girl dragging herself over to the meds like a goddamn zombie and one of them *stabbed* her

DR. MEDINA/DOCTOR: with a powerful sedative. Reserved for the most sensitive cases. No one, of course, was planning to have to use it.

THE GOD/SHERIFF: That's about when I passed out.

*[LYDIA wraps her arms around herself as if restrained by a straitjacket]*

DR. MEDINA/DOCTOR: But it only appeared to subdue the patient enough for the medics to restrain her, cover the wound, and place her onto the gurney.

*[During this next section, LYDIA moves blindly around the perimeter of the room as best she can, her arms still 'bound' around her. When she comes upon a curtain, she takes it in her hand and rips it down off the wall, spinning around and letting it tangle around her body.]*

DR. MEDINA/DOCTOR: It took the team of paramedics until 4:12 a.m. to exit the woods with the patient. The medics were prepared (see police report) to administer preliminary emergency hypothermia treatment on the patient but this proved dangerous after initial testing showed the patient's temperature to be at 105 degrees Fahrenheit and heart rate of 145 BPM. Paramedics arrived in the Emergency Room at 5:26 a.m.

CORRINNE/PSYCHIATRIST: But interestingly, when she exited the woods,  
THE GOD/SHERIFF: She stopped fighting.

*[LYDIA collapses to the floor in the center of the room.]*

DR. MEDINA/DOCTOR: Collapsed onto the gurney and fell almost completely catatonic.

CORRINNE/PSYCHIATRIST: Couldn't speak a word for three days.

DR. MEDINA/DOCTOR: Upon arrival at the hospital, the patient's bloodstream was tested for traces of methamphetamines, amphetamines, cocaine, crack-cocaine, heroin, natural hallucinogenic drugs, chemical hallucinogenic drugs, and rabies.

*[at each item on this list, LYDIA moves on the ground as if being prodded.]*

CORRINNE/PSYCHIATRIST: And she slept for a full 24 hours.

DR. MEDINA/DOCTOR: All test results were negative.

*[Over the course of the next few lines, LYDIA slowly rolls herself out of her entanglement with  
the curtain.]*

CORRINNE/PSYCHIATRIST: I visited her every day, just to talk.

DR. MEDINA/DOCTOR: She wouldn't talk to anyone.

THE GOD/SHERIFF: The next day the investigation of the scene started. The scene was a lot easier to find in the light of day. And let me tell you...

DR. MEDINA/DOCTOR: It took hours to pluck out all of the splinters from her body,

THE GOD/SHERIFF: It was fuckin' weird.

DR. MEDINA/DOCTOR: from her hands.

*[LYDIA hazily begins to examine her hands and the bottoms of her feet, as if checking them for  
splinters]*

THE GOD/SHERIFF: You ever seen *Blair Witch*?

CORRINNE/PSYCHIATRIST: It is truly difficult to believe that her brain chemistry was not altered in any way.

THE GOD/SHERIFF: Trees were ripped apart. *Ripped. Apart. By hand.* And there was a kind of... *altar?* Made of stones...

DR. MEDINA/DOCTOR: And the blood...

CORRINNE/PSYCHIATRIST: When she finally spoke, three days later, her hands were still stained red...

THE GOD/SHERIFF: There was blood everywhere. Blood on the trees, on the ground, blood on the-

DR. MEDINA/DOCTOR: We of course had to do a thorough examination of the blood on her body...

THE GOD/SHERIFF: All that blood...

DR. MEDINA/DOCTOR: And some of it... some of it of course was hers. That gunshot wound.

CORRINNE/PSYCHIATRIST: No wonder she couldn't speak for days...

DR. MEDINA/DOCTOR: And some of it belonged to Sherif Mendes. But most of it...

THE GOD/SHERIFF: And that's when we found-

*[LYDIA breaks free from the marionette-like trance she's been in and tackles THE GOD off of the chair and to the ground. DOCTOR and PSYCHIATRIST disappear offstage and THE GOD's mask is ripped off and thrown to the ground. LYDIA looks wild and manic but very firm in her conviction for the first time.]*

LYDIA: NO! NO-... NO. I WON'T LET YOU. I DON'T WANT TO HEAR IT. I CAN'T HEAR IT. [*Soothing herself*] I'm *healing*. I'm in the process of *healing*. That... *that* wasn't *me*. That... that *thing* that they're describing, that wasn't-

THE GOD: [*Not in character anymore, back to neutral. Laughs harshly.*] Of course it was you! It was all you. It was you in your purest, freest form. It was you unleashed. Uncontrolled. Liberated. You *felt* something.

LYDIA: *That* wasn't liberation. That was violence. And pain. I need- ... I *want* to keep myself grounded.

THE GOD: You're not controlling yourself right now! You're being controlled! By your mother and by these *doctors* and by-

LYDIA: [*A slow and careful understanding. She's almost amazed she hadn't seen it before.*] No. I'm not. I'm being controlled by *you*. *That* [*she gestures to the ground where the Sheriff mask lies*] was a scene that you created. This is *all* just a scene that you created. I'm *not* being stifled. These people aren't trying to *control* me. /

THE GOD: [*As if about to try to talk her down*] / Lydia / Lydia what are you talking about? I've been trying to *save* you. *I speak your language*. No one else understands / you /

LYDIA: / They're trying to *help* me. They're trying to keep me grounded. To keep me *alive*. Unlike you.

[*This is a realization.*]

You're trying to rip me apart. To take me out of the world. You're trying to kill me.

*[A long silence as they regard each other.]*

LYDIA: *This* is the world I belong in. I can't complete your ritual. I can't live in chaos. I have to heal. I don't want you anymore.

*[The phone rings. They still stand staring at each other. THE GOD takes a step back, eyes still on her, and walks out the open front door. Once THE GOD has disappeared, LYDIA lets out a swift sigh of relief and darts to pick up the phone.]*

LYDIA: *[breathlessly]* Hello?

CORRINNE: Hello? Lydia?

LYDIA: Mom. Mom, hi.

CORRINNE: How are you doing over there, sweetie? You don't- ... you don't sound too good. Have you had lunch yet?

LYDIA: No, not yet. I'm-... I'm waiting. You're supposed to wait several hours before you- you know, after you take pills-

CORRINNE: *What?* What are you talking about? After you take *pills*? You sound strange. Are you-

LYDIA: *[high laugh that almost rings manic]* Mom! Mom, I'm okay. I really am. I wasn't. I really wasn't. And I'm so so sorry. But I'm okay now, I think. I feel better. I feel good.

CORRINNE: You do? You do! Well!

*[Stunned silence at her daughter's forthcomingness on CORRINNE's end.]*

LYDIA: And... *[she looks outside the open door]* and I could help you in the garden. Tomorrow morning. I could help you weed before you go to work.

CORRINNE: Yes. I would love that.

LYDIA: Okay, well... I'll let you go back to your lunch. I love you, mom.

CORRINNE: I love you too, Lydia. I'll see you soon.

*[LYDIA hangs up the phone.]*

*[LYDIA wades through the detritus which covers the house to the orange pill bowl sitting on the counter. She picks up the pill organizer and looks down at it and then around at the destroyed room, now completely unrecognizable as her living room. She grips the pill organizer tightly.*

*She looks at the open front door, moving towards it slowly as she speaks.]*

*[LYDIA's calm, measured memory of this night should contrast THE GOD's chaotic performance of the events.]*

LYDIA: *[As if recalling from memory.]*

I make my dinner in and of the fields I scrape  
the dust from my skin, the dust and dirt  
and good thick pollen they are kindling  
for a fire a fire on which to cook my dinner  
which was the dust from my skin the dust  
the dirt and the good thick pollen...

LYDIA: One night I was sleeping and then I woke up. I really *woke up*. *[here she reaches the front door and delivers the rest of the speech standing within the door frame.]* The moment I left my room, left the house, left my street, I lost track of the time. I lost language, even. *This is joy,*

*this is joy this is joy* over and over in my ears, in my heart. It was the only thought I had, the only sound I heard: *This is joy, this is joy this is joy*. I found my way somehow to the woods. I remember feeling that they were familiar somehow -- some memory of a swimming hole and a clearing in the summer. But this, really, was my last memory. I'm not even sure if it was a real memory or if I had so strongly envisioned the clearing that suddenly I was there. And I was. I was there. In the clearing, at the swimming hole. I lost myself, but somehow I built a world. Of leaves and stones and wooden wands and song and *joy*. The blue... recalls turquoise... There were... There were so many deer, I remember. Three days. They told me I was missing for three days. It might as well have been fifteen minutes or an entire lifetime.

*[Soothing herself with the poetry. The light shifts here to mimic the light in the forest: dim, cool, calming. Maybe the pattern of sunlight through the trees mottling the ground.]*

The swimming hole  
might as well have  
been a concrete-floored  
puddle in noon light.

Noon light is best,  
not as warm as 3 p.m.  
But an exciting briskness  
which belongs to morning.

Late at night, so late

it might yet be morning,  
the pool fills with river  
water from upbank.

It is too late to see,  
too cold to swim,  
but each night a  
white tail deer will

stand in the pool, quiet  
as it fills, as the water  
line rises, up its legs,  
torso, neck, motionless

and the night walks on still around it.

*[From nowhere, the sound of THE GOD laughing loudly.]*

THE GOD: Lydia, you're missing something!

*[LYDIA looks around wildly.]*

THE GOD: Lydia, you're missing the part where you /

LYDIA: *[screams]* / STOP! /

THE GOD: *[Gleefully.]* ripped apart the body of the deer with your bare hands!

*[LYDIA runs around the room, swinging at the air with the pill organizer as though it is a spear or a staff.]*

THE GOD: *[In a dreamy, sing-songy way.]*

After a time, the cool skin of her face hardened  
into a mask.

*[LYDIA screams in pain and ducks down. When she stands back up, her face is covered in a Greek theater mask. During this speech, LYDIA stumbles around blindly, swiping at the air, as if she can hit The God's voice.]*

She woke up one morning,  
a thick morning in mid-March when the trees  
seemed to give way in a long, continuous exhale.  
She sat up in bed and turned to look into the mirror  
on the back of her door. The carefully cut eye holes  
swam back at her, swelling and ebbing as she stared.  
She swung a leg over the side of her bed and pressed  
her feet into the floor. The pad of her soles  
against the cool tile echoed long  
and sketched in her ears.  
As she stepped forwards towards the mirror,  
particles of air burst and pooled like starlings,  
and she lifted her hands to her mask.

*[LYDIA touches the mask.]*

THE GOD:

She hooked her fingertips around the mask edge  
and pulled

*[LYDIA pulls.]*

THE GOD:

softly.

*[LYDIA pulls hard. The mask comes off her face. She throws it to the ground. THE GOD is now standing in the front doorway. LYDIA, enraged, runs at THE GOD and out the door. It sounds as though Lydia, in her rage, is killing The God (not an easy thing, to kill a god). After a long while, LYDIA re-enters the living room. Her hands and body are covered in blood. In her hands she holds the mangled body of a cat. She is shocked and horrified, realizing what she had done.]*

*[The phone rings, loud and shrill. LYDIA shoves the body of the dead cat into one of the empty carpenter bags somewhere on the floor. The voice on the other end of the phone can be heard by the audience as if coming through the receiver. After letting it ring three times, LYDIA walks over to pick it up. She stands in the kitchen doorway during her conversation.]*

*[NOTE: the voice of Lydia's therapist, DR. TERESI, should be voiced by the same actor who is playing THE GOD, though at the beginning of this conversation, that fact should not be clear to the audience. Over the course of this conversation, the voice should become more and more tonally recognizable as that of The God.]*

LYDIA: Hello?

DR. TERESI: Hello, Lydia!

*[LYDIA stares blankly into space.]*

DR. TERESI: Lydia, this is Dr. Teresi calling.

LYDIA: Doctor / Teresi /

DR. TERESI: Yes, that's right! You remember we had a check-in call scheduled for one o'clock today.

LYDIA: One o'clock...is it one already?

DR. TERESI: *[Laughs.]* Yes, indeed it is! I suspect that means you've been keeping busy?

LYDIA: Oh, I-...

DR. TERESI: Because that would be wonderful! I know you have that notebook you picked out, I hope you've been using it. For your daily *reflections*. You have such a way of thinking, Lydia, such a way with words. Tell me, how is your *constitution* today? On a scale of one to ten, one being *ugh!* and ten being *yeah!* how are you feeling?

LYDIA: *[Response is robotic, it is her usual answer, whether it is true or not.]* Six. I am doing well. There's not much to report.

DR. TERESI: And your physical state. How are you feeling in your body?

LYDIA: I'm fine. I'm- my head feels a little heavy... and my leg feels a little weak but I think I'm fine.

DR. TERESI: Well, that's to be expected.

LYDIA: Right. I'll... I'll drink some water or something. And I'll do my stretches again.

DR. TERESI: Good. Wonderful! ... But you know, it would be equally wonderful if you've been doing absolutely nothing at all! It's so important that you be *gentle* with yourself during this time, Lydia. This is the work, Lydia. *This is the work.*

LYDIA: Right. Thank you.

DR. TERESI: You don't need to say thank you, Lydia. This is *your* time. Tell me, why do you feel the need to respond with an expression of gratification? Tell me more about that impulse.

LYDIA: [*Agitated.*] I'm not-...I was just responding to what you said.

DR. TERESI: Yes. And you gave a passive response rather than an active one.

LYDIA: Well I just-... I feel like I should be grateful for this time. To...work...on myself.

DR. TERESI: Mhmm. You do?

LYDIA: I-...

DR. TERESI: Yes?

LYDIA: [*Reluctantly.*] No, I guess that's what my mother says...

DR. TERESI: [*Quick, pouncing on her response.*] She does?

LYDIA: Yes.

DR. TERESI: And you're echoing your mother's thoughts on your own situation as though they are your own. Say more about that.

LYDIA: I'm not! I'm just not -... I'm not feeling stifled / or /

DR. TERESI: Stifled? I didn't suggest that. You're feeling stifled? By your mother?

LYDIA: No! No. The opposite -

DR. TERESI: Yes? You feel abandoned?

LYDIA: No!

DR. TERESI: The opposite of stifled might be abandoned. It was just a / suggestion /

LYDIA: No. No, I'm not saying that. She's been great. She's doing her best to make a home for me that is comfortable and safe. She's trying to talk to me, trying to share things with me. She just-...sometimes it's hard to share my language with her-...

DR. TERESI: Hm.

LYDIA: I guess.

DR. TERESI: Hm. Yes, well...

*[A pause on the line while DR. TERESI writes in his notes. Maybe pencil scratches are heard through the phone. LYDIA visibly rolls her eyes.]*

DR. TERESI: I wanted to pick back up where we left off last week and talk about *channeling*. Hold space for yourself to be in your process and *do the work*. I want to know if you've thought anymore about what we discussed last week and started writing down your feelings, your experiences.

LYDIA: I don't... have anything to write down. My brain is completely blank.

DR. TERESI: That's perfectly wonderful! That's a beginning, in and of itself.

LYDIA: No. It's not. It's an ending. It's where I am now. There's no place to move forward, it's all fog. Static.

DR. TERESI: *[Gently.]* Lydia. If you don't start acknowledging the past, acknowledging your *pain*, there's nothing I, nor your mother, nor anyone else can do to help you.

LYDIA: *[Becoming increasingly flustered.]* But I've told you. I've told you a thousand times. I don't remember anything. I don't remember the woods, or how I got there, what happened, being

found, anything. I don't remember anything. I barely even remember what happened yesterday. It's just not there. It's not there.

DR. TERESI: Lydia, we will keep working through this. You are resistant to aid because of the *pain* that you *endured*.

LYDIA: But I don't / remember /

DR. TERESI: And this pain is *real*. It is real *because* your mind is *keeping* you from remembering it.

LYDIA: [*Exhausted by this.*] Yes... yes. I will keep working.

DR. TERESI: Good. Wonderful! And, I assume that you've been keeping up with your routine? Your chores to keep you on track and responsible? Keeping your pill organizer filled for the week?

LYDIA: My mother saw me fill it up and take them before she left this morning.

DR. TERESI: [*Quick to pick up on the strangeness of this response.*] Oh? Say more.

LYDIA: Yes, I...yes. I'm just...I'm just letting me know that she saw me take them. This morning.

DR. TERESI: But that was the first response you gave. Why?

LYDIA: [*Frustrated both by his tone and also that he's dwelling on the subject.*] I-I don't know...maybe it's because I'm desperately seeking my mother's approval, or maybe it's because I'm trying to tell you implicitly that I need the aid of the adults around me because I'm a helpless little *psychotic* who can't be left alone. Or maybe I just wanted to let you know I have a fucking *witness* so that you'd *back* the fuck *off*.

*[A couple of beats of silence on the other end of the phone. LYDIA grips the kitchen door frame.*

*She knows that this was a mistake. A short sigh from DR. TERESI can be heard on the line.]*

DR. TERESI: *[Very measured in tone.]* Lydia. I'm hearing a lot of things. I'm hearing that you're feeling dysregulated. That the disruption to your routine was jarring given the difficult circumstances of the past few months and that you're at your threshold of / tolerance. /

LYDIA: Yes, I'm so / sorry /

DR. TERESI: I don't need your apology, Lydia. I just need you to *trust* me. I need you to trust that the adults in your life: myself, your mother, everyone around us, we're all trying to keep you safe and well, here with us. It is very dangerous indeed to be cavalier with your *[God's voice slips in]* medication. If you don't start taking this seriously, we're going to have to bring you back here again to ensure that you do.

LYDIA: No-...yes, I know and I'm so / sorry /

DR. TERESI: / Now, / I'm sorry I can't be there with you right now, but I'm going to ask you to ground your feet on the floor, paying attention to where the four corners of your feet are connected to the earth. Take a deep breath with me *[he takes a slow, audible breath]* and count to ten.

*[As DR. TERESI counts to ten, the environment of LYDIA's house comes alive. This can be done using shadows to make it look as though the furniture, windows, and doors are moving, as though there are small animals scuttling across the floor, through the air. The curtains flail with gusts of wind. The fireplace glows as though it is the gateway to the pits of hell. Overlain with DR. TERESI's counting is a soundscape of the forest, of wind howling, trees rustling, distant*

*screaming, the sounds of animals, of insects. These sounds should not overpower the sound of the counting but rather the counting should become a part of the cacophony.]*

DR. TERESI: *[Very very slowly.]* One...two...three...four...five...six...seven...eight...nine...ten.

*[By this time, LYDIA has sunk to the ground with her knees to her chest, the phone receiver cupped in desperation to her ear. She is crying.]*

*[DR. TERESI's voice is completely recognizable by this point as the voice of THE GOD]*

DR. TERESI: And now, Lydia, I'm going to ask you once again. Did you take your medication this morning?

LYDIA: Doctor... Dr. Teresi... would you tell me... what... do the pills do?

DR. TERESI:

Clozapine to unhinge the water gate

to turn your teeth to almonds

better for the gnashing

better for the Prozac stitched

into pillow inseams shredded to pulp

by tablets of Brexpiprazole whittled to talons

fluvoxamine to slide it down your throat

set your insides on fire to soothe

the talons in your cheek, talons in the soft skin

of your diaphragm, smiles in your eyes,

blind Buspirone in my fingers, and a scream

and we are a pool and the floor comes

steaming like a train isocarboxazid  
 to forget to be blind to forget  
 but we are stronger we are crawling  
 we are crushing we are light we are joy  
*this is joy this is joy this is joy*

*[LYDIA screams. All of the sounds of the house go quiet and the lights neutralize. At the next line, DR. TERESI's voice is back to neutral.]*

DR. TERESI: Alright Lydia, that's time. I'm glad to know you seem to be making steady progress. I'll see you on Thursday at Edgewood Psychiatric for our regularly scheduled appointment.

*[The line clicks dead and the dial tone sounds.]*

*[LYDIA slowly moves to the center of the room and sits. THE GOD enters through the front door and sits cross-legged in the doorway, facing her. LYDIA looks at them.]*

LYDIA: Why. Why is it me?

THE GOD: You think this is just you? No, Lydia. I'm so sorry to inform you that you're not terminally unique. Not chosen.

*[LYDIA blinks.]*

THE GOD: Everyone sees me. I come to them in their own way. Your mother sees me in her garden, in her poetry, just like you do. I come to allow them to release their pain, their energy,

their longing, their fear. I can help you. I can help you abandon this world of fear and to seek pleasure, to avoid pain.

LYDIA: Why do I have to abandon one world to be free? Why can't I have both? All?

THE GOD: Because if you pick too many gods, they will rip you apart.

LYDIA: But *why*-

THE GOD: [*Gnashing their teeth.*] Limb from limb. They'll tear off / your- /

LYDIA: I'm not afraid. You can't scare me anymore. Just tell me why-

THE GOD: Why do you keep *questioning*, Lydia?

LYDIA: There isn't any answer, is there?

THE GOD: What? Answer to what? Of course there is!

LYDIA: There's nowhere to go, is there? I keep going, I complete whatever your version of *ritual* is, and then what? Where do I go? What is the answer?

THE GOD: ... What? Okay, There's no answer! There is none. Just give *in*. Choose me-

LYDIA: There's no answer. This-... [*she gestures around to the house.*] The house. And the woods. And the deer... the *cat*... there's no answer.

THE GOD: No! Now, if you'll just listen to me-

LYDIA: [*Laughing.*] There's no answer.

THE GOD: Lydia-

LYDIA: No. No, I'm sorry, I don't need you to tell me how to fall apart. I don't need my mother or the doctors or *anyone* to tell me how to stitch myself back together. I can do it on my own. *I don't need you.*

[*THE GOD stares at her.*]

LYDIA: For as long as I can remember, I've been looking to you, to others, to teach me. To tell me what to know, *how* to know, how to find my voice, to teach me what and how to feel. To *teach* me how to be alive. But I don't *belong* to you, I don't belong to anyone. I can learn for myself. I can question on my own. It has to come from me. *I don't want you here.*

*[The phone rings. LYDIA picks it up. When she turns back around, THE GOD is gone.]*

LYDIA: Hello?

DR. MEDINA: Lydia! Hello!

LYDIA: Dr. Medina?

DR. MEDINA: Yes, hello! I hope I'm not disturbing you.

LYDIA: No... No, not at all...

DR. MEDINA: I'm calling because I received an invoice from Dr. Teresi a little while ago saying that you had some questions about your vitamin prescriptions, is that right?

LYDIA: Vita-... Yes... yes it is.

DR. MEDINA: Well I thought, alright, I've got a few moments to spare, so I figured I'd give you a call. I've got your most recent prescription file right here in front of me. Maybe we could talk through it together quickly.

LYDIA: Thank you so much, Dr. Medina.

*[LYDIA grabs the orange bowl from down off of the piano. She sits down on the ground, dumping the bowl's contents on the floor. She presses a button to put the phone on speaker and sets it on the ground next to her. The bottles tumble out in front of her, She picks one up and examines it.]*

DR. MEDINA: Vitamin B6. To help build proteins in cells.

*[She laughs, picking up the rest of them one by one, reading the names on each of them as DR.*

*MEDINA goes down the list.]*

DR. MEDINA: *[This is read almost like a poem. It is meant to contrast the one which THE GOD speaks in the previous scene. This quotidian, comprehensible language to contrast the bizarre whiplash of The God's.]* Folic Acid Supplement, to help metabolize amino acid and build protein... pantothenic acid and Biotin to aid in the production of energy... Vitamin B12 to help with the multiplication of cells... Vitamin C, to help your wound heal. Also to strengthen the bones in your leg as they heal... Vitamin B, helps to release energy from the food that you eat... Extra Vitamin A, D, K, and Calcium in order to help along the healing of that leg. Iron, to ferry oxygen around the body... Potassium, to help stabilize the protein structures and balance the body's water content, Zinc, to bolster the body's immune response...

*[As DR. MEDINA continues down the list, LYDIA laughs silently with relief. She is crying.]*

DR. MEDINA. *[He laughs good-naturedly.]* As you can see, this is essentially the make-up of a daily multivitamin, plus a little extra, in order to help out that leg of yours. After our discussion last week, and some further checking in with Dr. Teresi and your mother, I thought it might be good for you to begin taking your vitamins individually, as an exercise in maintaining a regular weekly schedule. We will check back in at the end of the week -- if you're finding this upkeep too flustering, we can always prescribe you a regular multivitamin.

LYDIA: There's nothing... nothing stronger?

DR. MEDINA: Stronger? Oh, you mean *medication*? No, Lydia! No, you would absolutely have been consulted before any decision like that was made. If, when we check in next week, you

want to have a conversation about Prozac or the like, we can definitely loop in Dr. Teresi and talk about it-

LYDIA: Thank you-... I don't know if that will be necessary, but thank you.

DR. MEDINA: It's important to remember that nothing will be given to you to take without your explicit consent. You have *complete control* of your own recovery, Lydia. You always have.

LYDIA: Thank you, Dr. Medina. Thank you so much.

DR. MEDINA: Alright, Lydia. Please don't hesitate to call if you have any questions, any at all.

LYDIA: Thank you. I definitely will.

DR. MEDINA: Bye, now.

*[The line clicks dead.]*

*[LYDIA is finally completely alone onstage for the first time.]*

LYDIA: *[She laughs.]* My God... I never thought to look. I never thought to *ask*. To question the god, to question anything. Now, all I see are questions. A pile of beginnings with no middles or ends in sight.

*[LYDIA walks to the open front door and sits in the doorframe.]*

LYDIA: One night I was sleeping and then I woke up. I really *woke up*. I felt, I felt what I knew I was *supposed* to feel, in a way. I stood up, out of my bed, and I let my clothes drop to the floor. I stood in my room for a few moments, feeling carefully what it felt like to be naked in my bedroom which, really, I hadn't ever done before. And I thought, *this is joy this is joy this is joy*.

At some moment I will dip my foot into

the night-long dance. I'll toss my skins  
in the dew-thinned air like a Fawn,  
frisking meadow-green pleasures  
when She escapes (finally) the hunt's guard,  
vaulting his nets, woven thick.

The hunter, shouting, directs  
his dogs as She leaps the river  
bed with the volant tension of Her tempest.  
She stills in a clearing, safe  
from bodily harm and the shadowhair wood.

What is wisdom?

What better divine grant is there among us  
than holding a hand over those who mean harm?

This is both beautiful and also true.

Divine power moves forward truly,  
however slowly. It governs  
both those taking care and those not.

The strength lies long in kaleidoscope  
hiding, waiting and watching for the lost.

At what moment does one need

to know and respect a higher law?

Whatever this is, how much will it cost

to discern whose hands hold it?

What is wisdom?

What better divine grant is there among us

than holding a hand over those who mean harm?

This is both beautiful and also true.

Blessed: one reaching the harbor

in seawreck, but still it is reached.

Blessed: rising above this difficulty,

transcending all those thick with their tension.

People are many, hope is infinite,

though some end, others spark further desire.

The answer:

**END**