

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Postcolonial Hybridity, Literature of Trauma and *The Vilkas Sisters*

by

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF MASTERS OF FINE ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF DRAMA

CALGARY, ALBERTA

SEPTEMBER, 2009

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Abstract

The following manuscript and accompanying artist's statement examine the process of creating and developing the play, *The Vilkas Sisters*. The artist's statement explores how postcolonial hybridity may be used as another lens through which to view childhood sexual trauma and how this interpretation of hybridity may fit within literature of trauma.

Acknowledgements

I'd like thank Clem Martini for his infinite patience in guiding me through this challenging process. I would also like to thank my family and friends for their encouragement during this long journey—especially my mother, Irene Bruzga, and my amazing friends, Jeff Burnell and Rita Cormier. I also owe a big thank you to my partner and best friend Todd Luchak—your strength and unwavering belief in me saw me through to the end. Lastly, I'd like to thank my colleagues at the Graduate Students' Association—especially Val McGillivray. They say theatre is a collaborative art form; my experience in writing this play was the same, for without the support of all these people, I couldn't have completed this project.

For the three Gs.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND PROCESS

Vagis - vilko brolis (Thief is a wolf's brother)

-Lithuanian Proverb

Introduction

The creation of *The Vilkas Sisters* was a long process, fraught with struggles on a personal and academic level. I will explain how I utilized my research to overcome these challenges in the subsection titled "Process." Within this section, I will also illustrate how Paula Vogel's *How I Learned to Drive* and Neil LaBute's *In a Dark, Dark House* provided examples of how to dramatize sexual trauma. I will also explore what elements of playwriting I focused on as I completed *The Vilkas Sisters*.

After highlighting my course of action in creating this work, I will deliver a more in-depth analysis of how postcolonial hybridity influenced my work. In Chapter One, I will illustrate how postcolonial hybridity inspired me to view childhood sexual trauma differently as I explored character development. Chapter Two will highlight my exploration of literature of trauma and how this affected my methodology of character portrayals. Chapter Three will present a brief analysis of an earlier version of my play, *Vilkas*, which received a staged reading. I will then explore in greater detail why I chose to retain certain elements from *Vilkas* as a foundation for *The Vilkas Sisters*. It will also highlight how my experience of traveling to Lithuania informed the writing of my play. My conclusion will explore what I learned on a personal and an academic level, and summarize how this process affected me as a writer.

Process

When it came time to create my full-length play, I struggled to find a story. When starting a new project, I normally work from a catalogue of ideas, but in this case all my ideas for plays were comedic. One of the reasons I chose the MFA Playwriting program was to stretch myself as an artist. As such, I wanted to challenge myself by writing a drama—a genre in which I had never written. At the time, I was intrigued by the idea of writing about the shared history and secrets that exist in a family. I recognized this instinct was planted in dramatists long before me. The Greeks, Shakespeare, Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee—many playwrights have written about the secrets within a family. I began to ponder what new aspect I could contribute to this “conversation.” While I followed my usual story development process of writing brief synopses, creating character sketches and writing character monologues, I found it difficult to create a believable plot with complex characters. As I endeavoured to further develop my play, major changes occurred within my personal life.

After years of struggling on my own and in counselling, I revealed I was a survivor of childhood sexual abuse to my family and friends. Confronting this past trauma was a huge step toward healing and, as such, remained at the forefront of my mind while I continued to develop my play. As I considered this, I analyzed my past successes in writing. I came to realize my best plays were those based on events I had witnessed or experienced—essentially, my writing was most effective when I had a personal stake in it. I began to wonder if there was a way to explore this confrontation of a past trauma within my own work.

While I was tempted by this idea, I had concerns. First and foremost, I worried about my family. Would they be embarrassed by my exploration of something so personal? Would they worry about public perception if this play was produced or received a reading? What if people made negative assumptions about them? I had many years to accept what happened to me, but my family was still reeling—was it all too soon? I decided to ask for their blessing to proceed. I was taken aback by their compassion and understanding—they encouraged me to write about the topic, especially if it would help me on a personal level. As liberating as it was, this freedom proved a little intimidating.

Although I received my family's blessing, I was still daunted by the subject matter. Childhood sexual abuse is a loaded subject. I was all too familiar with the awkward silence that follows mentioning it, let alone that it happened to you. The idea of writing a full-length play around this issue seemed too challenging; how could I dramatize such a story without completely alienating the audience? The most logical answer was to search for examples of dramatic works that successfully dealt with this subject matter. By analyzing other plays, I reasoned I would gain insight into how to approach my own work.

This first step in my research proved more difficult than anticipated. Initially, I only located one play that tackled this issue boldly: Paula Vogel's *How I Learned to Drive*. In the play, driving lessons are the means through which Uncle Peck isolates his niece, Li'l Bit, and commits incestuous acts. Despite the delicate subject matter, the play was popular with audiences and critics—it won the 1998 Pulitzer Prize for drama. This play gave me a confidence boost in that it illustrated how one could broach this subject matter

without alienating an audience. Ironically, it was only at the end of my research process, as I approached the final rewrite of my play, that another useful example was published: Neil LaBute's *In a Dark Dark House*.

I was particularly intrigued with LaBute's work because he wrote it from a very personal place. In his preface he states: "... did I have a bad childhood? I think so. Was I ever abused? As a matter of fact, yes. Is it all behind me now? On a good day" (LaBute xiv). He never reveals how much of his play is fiction or truth, but that is not as important to me as his admission that he still struggles with his past—as do his characters.

LaBute's play centres around the estranged relationship between Drew and his older brother, Terry. Placed in a psychiatric facility for court-ordered observation after abusing cocaine and totalling his car, Drew calls on Terry to substantiate his claim that he was sexually abused as a child. Drew hopes to illicit sympathy from the court by proving childhood sexual abuse fuelled his current self-destructive behaviour. The reunion between the brothers is tense and illustrates the difficulty of coming to terms with a shared history of abuse. While LaBute's play did not receive the same critical attention as Vogel's, *In a Dark Dark House* aptly illustrated the lasting negative effects of childhood sexual abuse.

As I began to write, I chose to map out the play as a series of flashes between present and past in order to create a mystery that would engage the audience. I felt this structure would accurately portray how victims of childhood sexual abuse can repress the past, only to remember certain details of their childhood at seemingly random times. I wanted

to demonstrate how memory can be mutable—one's perception of an event may not be the same as what actually happened. Without accurately remembering, victims may not understand their motivations toward self-destructive behaviour, low self-esteem or their gravitation toward abusive relationships. I was confident that in playing with memory and perception, I could create a successful play. However, as I began to delve into creating characters and a plot, I found myself reluctant to proceed.

In order to write the play truthfully, I had to tap into feelings and emotions I didn't want to touch. The more I tapped into these feelings and emotions, the more it paralyzed me as a writer. I was trapped in a paradoxical situation and as a result, my writing stalled (it took over two years to complete my first draft). How does an author get beyond the grip of their own emotions to write a play without losing the authenticity these same emotions provide? I couldn't answer that question and, as a result, I felt like a complete failure. Strangely, it was this failure that liberated my thought process.

I was trying to write about an important social issue which caused me to feel overwhelmed. To remedy this, I went back to my research to look for some inspiration or guidance. It was in re-reading Vogel's play that I understood my mistake. I was so busy concentrating on how to incorporate this social issue into my play, that I lost my focus on basic playwriting elements like character and story. I realized that I needed to treat my play as I would any other writing project. I had to identify the elements of a good play and make sure these elements were realized within it. After all, *How I Learned to Drive* was successful because it was well-written. It was new and exciting in the way it tackled Li'l Bit's journey through life as a series of driving lessons. The characters had clear

desires and goals, and the chorus worked effectively to provide secondary characters and commentary on the story as it unfolded. Best of all, the play was full of revelations and surprises for the audience—because of this, it engaged the audience from beginning to end.

Bearing this in mind, I began to think about my characters: what were their struggles, their dreams, their desires? I knew my protagonist's present-day troubles would be a result of past trauma, and that reconciling this would be her challenge. While people rewrite their own history all the time—either by suppressing it or inventing it—I wanted my protagonist to remember the truth about her past. I knew from my own experience that only through admitting what has happened, can one reconcile their past with their present life. As this process was fraught with difficulty for me, I thought it would make for interesting drama. I began to map out my protagonist's character with reference to the pain that occurred in her life. How old was she when it happened? Who was she before this happened and who did she become after? How would she come to accept that the event really happened? In performing this type of character exploration, I began to view this trauma as a historic event—an invasive act that forever changed her. The more I thought about sexual abuse as an unwanted invasion of body, mind and soul, the more my previous studies in postcolonial literature came to the forefront of my research.

Postcolonial literature is a broad and evolving field of study, and much debate surrounds what can be classified as postcolonial. At the time I performed this aspect of my research, however, I was specifically captivated by Homi K. Bhabha's idea of postcolonial hybridity. To understand Bhabha's theory, one needs to understand that the traditional

relationship between colonizer and colonized was one of subjugation and dominance. Because a colonial invasion is a historical event, it's tempting to view cultural identity within subjugated cultures as being divided into pre-contact (before the invasion) and post-contact (after the invasion). While many in a postcolonial culture struggle to return to a state of pre-contact purity, Bhabha suggests the only way to escape this binary relationship of colonizer versus colonized, dominant versus dominated, is through creating a new identity. This is achieved through hybridization—the process of incorporating events and information from pre and postcolonial times.

In his essay, “Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority Under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817,” Bhabha discusses the notion of disavowal and hybridity as a different way of understanding a colonized culture. Bhabha argues the disavowal of cultural colonialism is not dependent on a binary relationship of cultural identity, where one chooses between “the mother culture and its bastards, the self and its doubles,” but is instead more successful “where the trace of what is disavowed is not repressed but repeated as something different—a mutation, a hybrid” (Bhabha 111). Bhabha suggests that resistance to cultural dominance comes in the form of recognizing the ways in which the colonial culture is expressed alongside the original culture. Only when the dominated colonial culture is “repeated as something different” can it escape this hegemonic relationship.

As I continued to develop my protagonist, I began to shift my perception of childhood sexual trauma. In framing childhood sexual trauma as an un-welcomed colonization of the body, a binary relationship could be identified between the perpetrator and the victim

of sexual abuse, where the perpetrator is dominant and the victim is subjugated. If one applies this to victims of child abuse, perhaps freedom from this trauma comes in acknowledging the historical implications of this colonization in the first place.

Hybridization would then incorporate the identity of the victim pre and post-trauma, therefore allowing the victim to forge a new identity “where the trace of what is disavowed is not repressed but repeated as something different—a mutation, a hybrid” (Bhabha 111). With this, I began to better understand my character’s journey; in order to heal from the abuse, she needed to acknowledge the abuse as part of her history. She needed to forge a new identity where she was no longer identified only as a victim, but was also identified as a survivor. If her journey was one of acknowledgement and healing, then perhaps accepting the trauma as being a historical fact within her life could be the mechanism through which she healed. As I reframed my thinking of trauma, I was amazed to find an entire base of study within literature called trauma narratives or literature of trauma.

Literature of trauma includes narratives that explore violent acts like sexual assault, abuse or murder, whether they are fictional representations or autobiographical testimonials.

This diverse body of work overlaps all genres of writing and seeks to examine the psychological consequences of violent acts against a person—essentially any non-consensual act perpetrated against another. While dramatic literature is not explored within Laurie Vickroy’s book *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*, her theories can easily be applied to this genre just as any other critical theory. She aptly defines trauma narratives as such:

Trauma narratives—fictional narratives that help readers to access traumatic experience—have taken an important place among diverse artistic, scholarly, and testimonial representations in illuminating the personal and public aspects of trauma and in elucidating our relationship to memory and forgetting within the complex interweavings of social and psychological relationships. (1)

As a writer, I wanted to illuminate “the personal and public aspects of trauma” to raise awareness in those who may see my play, and to achieve a greater level of understanding on a personal level. Perhaps in discovering my protagonist’s journey of healing, I too would heal.

It was around this time, in the summer of 2005, that my brother and I visited my father’s homeland of Lithuania. During this visit, I learned about the rich and distinct folk history of the country. While my inability to read Lithuanian proved a barrier to my research on this subject (and remains so), I was able to secure an English translation of Norbertas Velius’ *Lithuanian Mythological Tales*. Reading these stories, I became fascinated with the various mythological beings (which I will discuss in further detail within chapter four). It was, however, the pathetic and terrifying *vilkas* (wolves/werewolves) that most struck a cord.

The *vilkas* stories fascinated me because of the complexity of the wolves’ origin and desire. They were often cautionary tales about the dangers of trusting the ever-dangerous wolves, whose true nature often remained hidden until it was too late. I began to see the

possibility of using *vilkas* within my play as a metaphor for sexual predators. Like *vilkas*, these predators hide their true nature in order to trick children into trusting them, and then exploit that trust. I immediately began to work on a play called *Vilkas*.

While it was a challenge, I eventually managed to complete a draft and hold a staged reading in April of 2007. Unfortunately, I was very dissatisfied with the results of my efforts (which I will discuss in chapter four). While the staged reading supplied me with valuable feedback, I felt as though I had lost my way as a writer. I made a bold decision: I would write a new play based upon the platform I had built with *Vilkas*. I would use the research and positive elements of *Vilkas*, and reformulate them into a new venture called *The Vilkas Sisters*.

In reworking *Vilkas*, I knew I wanted to keep one of my characters, Marija, as well as the *vilkas* stories she told. However, I invented a new protagonist called Mary and her best friend, Jane, who would be like sisters to each other. I felt good about my new characters and the elements I had retained, but I did not want to repeat the same mistakes I had made with *Vilkas*. I decided that before embarking on *The Vilkas Sisters*, it would be in my best interest to review the basic elements of playwriting in order to stay focused, and execute the story I wanted to tell.

In my past work, I had enjoyed success in creating realistic dialogue, but had faltered in creating action. To ensure that didn't occur this time, I reviewed Aristotle's *Poetics* in order to reflect on the importance of action. Using the example of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Aristotle argues that plot should "imitate a single, unified action—and one that is also a

whole. So the structure of the various sections of the events must be such that the transposition or removal of any one section dislocates and changes the whole” (8). I needed to ensure that every beat of every scene was vital to the overall story, and that the action within one scene would lead directly to the next. At the same time, I wanted to ensure the actions of my protagonist seemed authentic—as though her choices were exactly “in character.”

Although I felt I had some previous success in creating interesting characters, I began to look for sound advice regarding building characters. During this process, I discovered Lajos Egri’s *The Art of Dramatic Writing*. Whereas Aristotle argues for the supremacy of plot, Egri argues that any action a character takes is an extension that character. Rather than conceding fate or action caused Oedipus’ downfall as Aristotle asserts, Egri argues that it is his very make-up which causes his tragic downfall:

If Oedipus had been any other type of man, tragedy would not have befallen him. Had he not been hot-tempered, he would not have killed a stranger on the road. Had he not been stubborn, he would not have forced the issue of who killed Laius. With rare perseverance he dug out the smallest details, continuing because he was honest, even when the accusing finger had been pointed at him. Had he not been honest, he would not have punished the murderer by blinding himself. (Egri 95-6)

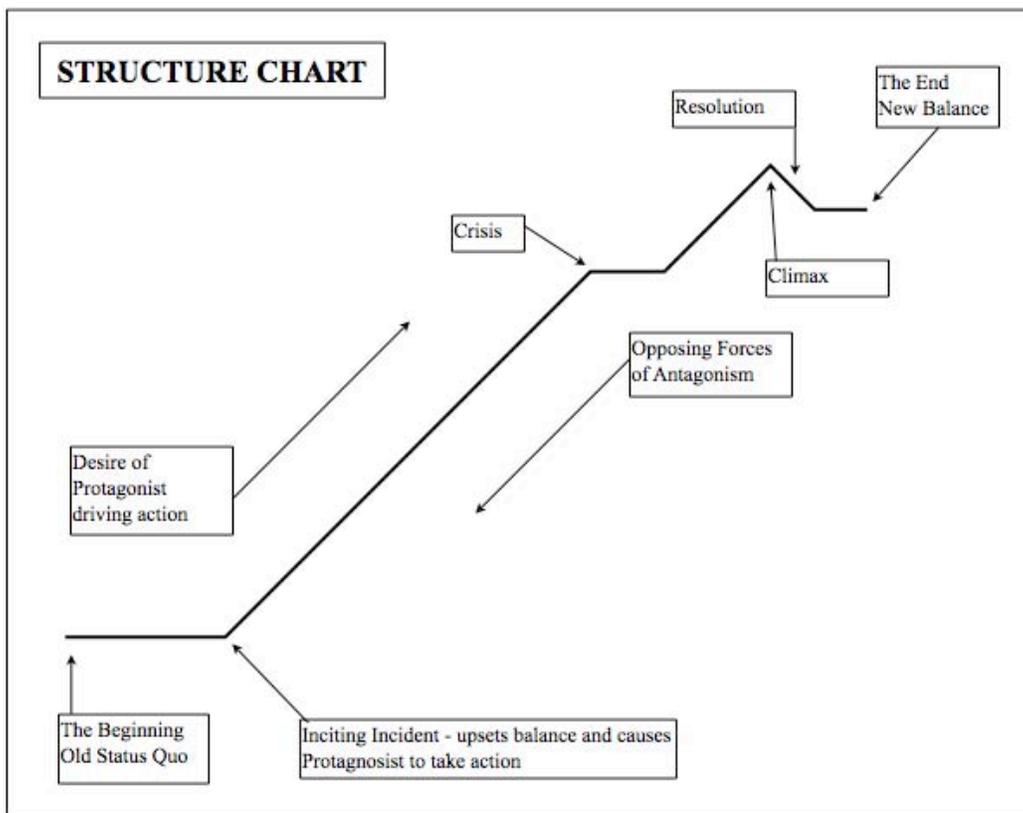
The action in *Oedipus Tyrannus* comes from Oedipus' character; his desire to discover the truth leads to his tragic downfall. This highlighted the need to carefully consider my characters' psychological make up: what were their conscious/unconscious desires and goals; what were they willing to do in order to achieve them?

Lastly, I looked for help in overcoming another problem I'd encountered in the past: creating rising action within a play. To give myself a visual aid and remind myself of the overall structure of a play, I referred to Clem Martini's *The Blunt Playwright: An Introduction to Playwriting*. In particular, I honed in on the Structure Chart to remind myself of how the elements of plot and character needed to be fused within the overall structure of a play (see Figure 1.1).

Within Martini's Structure Chart, one will note the majority of the play occurs between the inciting incident and the crisis. This middle part of the play is "characterized by complication" (30) and revolves around the protagonist's journey as he or she attempts to gain what is desired. Each time the protagonist pursues a "course of action" based on desire, he/she should "encounter an unexpected reaction" (30). Martini asserts that "the reaction will be stronger than anticipated, or different than anticipated, and it will compel the protagonist to take stronger, or different action. So the action moves from simple and direct to more complex and intense" (30). As he points out, it's human nature to start with the easy solution before pursuing "solutions that require more energy, effort and thought" (30). The complication ends when the protagonist encounters the crisis—the point at which the protagonist "is forced to chose one final course of action" (30). The climax follows.

From reviewing the Structure Chart, I gleaned some important insights. Once I understood my protagonist's desire or goal, I needed to map out (within increasing intensity) what she would do in order to achieve this end. I needed to ensure that each choice she made was a logical step toward her goal, and that with each choice, she risked more and was placed in greater jeopardy. If I could do this, my character would be propelled forward and my play would sustain my audience's attention. Armed with these new insights, I set about writing my play *The Vilkas Sisters*.

Figure 1.1: Structure Chart¹



¹ Clem Martini, *The Blunt Playwright: An Introduction to Playwriting* (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2006) 30.

CHAPTER 2: POSTCOLONIAL HYBRIDITY

I have briefly touched upon how postcolonial hybridity reframed how I viewed childhood sexual trauma and helped me to better understand my protagonist's journey. In this chapter, I will further illustrate how postcolonial hybridity exposed the historical implications of childhood sexual trauma and furthered the research for my play, *The Vilkas Sisters*.

To better understand the binary opposition on which Bhabha builds his argument for hybridity, one needs to understand Edward Said's landmark book *Orientalism*. In it, Said defines Orientalism as a "Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Said 3). He attempts to "show that European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (Said 3). As Lois Tyson explains in *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*, what occurs is the "othering" effect—a relationship in which the "other" is different and, therefore, devalued (Tyson 367). Childhood sexual abuse also involves power and control, and victims often feel as though they are the "other"—the inferior for being dominated.

As I thought about character, I began to question: in what ways could I illustrate how this othering effect shaped Mary and Jane's choices? How would always feeling like the other shape their identity? My goal with Mary was to show the audience that she was moving toward healing and accepting her past trauma. To do so, I needed to psychologically move her beyond the point of viewing herself as a victim. For this, I returned to postcolonial hybridity.

As previously stated, Bhabha argues for a less polarized relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. As Gilbert and Tompkins point out in *Post-Colonial Drama: Theory, Practice and Politics*, Bhabha “maintains that the colonized is never *always* impotent; the colonizer is never *always* powerful” (Gilbert 6). In “Signs Taken for Wonders,” Bhabha asserts that hybridity allows a “form of subversion, founded on the undecidability that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention” (Bhabha 112). Hybridity affords a dominated culture the ability to resist colonial power by using, in part, the very mechanisms and discourses that repress them. However, this is not to say that hybridity “resolves the tension between two cultures” (113), but can instead be pictured as a “war like strategy whose aim ‘is rather a continued agony than a total disappearance of the pre-existing culture’” (114). Rather than being crushed under the weight of the hegemonic forces of the colonizer, the colonized can usurp these hegemonic forces by incorporating elements of the pre-existing culture into their hybridized identity. Applying this to childhood sexual trauma, I do not believe hybridization completely resolves the tension between perpetrator and victim, but it does allow escape from the binary label of always being the victim of childhood sexual abuse. It identifies the historical traumatic incident as one part of a larger whole—only a piece of who you are as opposed to your entire identity. If I wanted Mary to be set upon the road of healing by the end of the play, she would have to accept the trauma as a historical fact.

In his essay, “Hybridity and Cultural Rights: Inventing Global Citizenship,” David Huddart speaks to importance of history in understanding hybridity. He states:

Bhabha's work is closely identified with the position that contemporary cultures are hybrid. However, this position does not imply that cultural difference simply blurs into 'indifference.' Instead, cultures should be seen as *retrospective* constructions, meaning they are consequences of historical process. (Huddart's emphasis, 21)

Huddart furthers, "... when we study hybridity, we do not start with two or more cultures, and then trace their historical movements of hybridization. In the colonial situation, the production of culture is an inevitable consequence of contested authority" (22). Hybridity is a result of a historical act, not the beginning. In the same way, the present identity of a victim of childhood sexual trauma is the result of a historical incident—a trauma. Perhaps, for abuse survivors, identity becomes an acknowledgement of who they were before and after the incident.

Bhabha insists that hybridity "terrorizes authority with the *ruse* of recognition, its mimicry, its mockery" (115) and may involve using what Bhabha terms "inappropriate signifiers" such as stereotypes, jokes, mimicry, as well as multiple and contradictory beliefs (120). This process leads to the creation of a separate space that is neither dominated by colonialists or nationalists, where "discrimination turns into the assertion of hybridity, [and] the insignia of authority becomes a mask, a mockery" (120). In using the very mechanisms that oppress, a dominated culture can resist oppression and, in doing so, invite the possibility of change. To see how this applies to childhood sexual trauma, one can examine Paula Vogel's *How I Learned to Drive*.

In Vogel's play, Uncle Peck uses driving lessons as a means to commit incest—the car is literally the vehicle through which sexual abuse is carried out. The metaphor of driving lessons is consistently used through the play, including a voice that announces titles of scenes as though they are clips from an old driving instruction video. Yet the driving is what she uses later in life to try to escape the past. In the scene “Shifting Forward from First to Second Gear,” Li'l reveals her alcoholism is what resulted in her being kicked out of school. In 1970, she struggles to find a job and a place to stay, admitting the following:

What I did, most nights, was cruise the Beltway and the back roads of Maryland, where there was still country, past the battlefields and farm houses. Racing in a 1965 Mustang—and as long as I had gasoline for my car and whiskey for me, the nights would pass. Fully tanked, I would speed past the churches and the trees on the bend, thinking just one notch of the steering wheel would be all it would take, and yet some... reflex took over. My hands on the wheel in the nine and three o'clock position—I never so much as got a ticket. He taught me well. (Vogel 21)

No matter where she drives, she cannot escape her past relationship with Uncle Peck because it has shaped her current identity. Never is this more evident than in the ending of the play.

As Li'l Bit prepares to drive off, she again takes us through the ritual of getting ready to drive. She tunes her radio and in doing so, silences the Greek Chorus that represents voices from the past:

Ahh... *(Beat)* I adjust my seat. Fasten my seat belt. Then I check the right side mirror—check the left side. *(She does)* Finally, I adjust the rearview mirror. *(As Li'l Bit adjusts the rearview mirror, a faint light strikes the spirit of Uncle Peck, who is sitting in the back seat of the car. She sees him in the mirror. She smiles at him, and he nods at her. They are happy to be going for a long drive together. Li'l Bit slips the car into first gear; to the audience:)* And then—floor it. *(Sound of a car taking off. Blackout).* (92)

The rearview mirror is a symbol of Li'l Bit's past, which is why the shade of Uncle Peck is revealed upon adjusting it. While the exchange of a smile and nod may seem terribly ambivalent, I believe Vogel is trying to show some acceptance of what has happened. Li'l Bit's love of driving and the fact that she does it so well comes from Uncle Peck, and no matter where she drives off to, he's always there in the rearview mirror.

If we consider the driving lessons as the mechanism through which Li'l Bit was abused, this same mechanism by the end of play no longer has the power to trap her. Li'l Bit's driving skill becomes a source of pride infused within her identity. I believe this to be analogous to the concept of postcolonial hybridity; she cannot edit out the historical

implications of her past or her enjoyment of driving, even with Uncle Peck's ghost in the car. I believe this illustrates a certain level of acceptance of the past.

In turning to my own work, I began to apply the idea of hybridity in my character development. In what ways might Mary and Jane use jokes or contradictory beliefs as a coping mechanism for what happened? How might they incorporate the sexual trauma on a conscious or subconscious level in order to resist an oppression of body and soul? Would this represent an accurate reflection of life? At this time, I began to work on my characters' life history—essentially a timeline of what happened to them and what choices they made at different times in their lives. Strangely, it was only at this point I recognized that this type of oppression cannot be measured as a temporal value (i.e. as a series of dates and times) because once you are colonized like this, in some ways, the occupation never ends. In fact, in order for a new hybridized identity to emerge, one must remember the occupation of the body and reincorporate that as a part of one's historical identity. Essentially, one can never go back to a time where this did not happen—resistance comes through remembrance.

In *The Empire Writes Back*, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin dismiss the notion of a colonized culture returning to a pre-contact purity because it dismisses the “historical implications” of colonialism (Ashcroft 221). Pre-contact purity denies that colonialism ever happened, whereas hybridity treats colonialism as a historical fact. Is that not the struggle abuse survivors endure? While it's tempting to imagine a life in which the abuse never occurred—to go back and recapture one's pre-trauma identity and innocence—doing so only ignores the historic reality of one's identity. Having tried to do this myself,

I would argue it is futile. It is only through using this version of hybridity—incorporating events and information from before and after—that one can usurp the domination of this trauma. In understanding this, I came to understand the journey of my protagonist.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE OF TRAUMA

While hybridity helped enormously in understanding my protagonist, I began to wonder if there were other, more direct ways in which I could understand and represent trauma. This is when I discovered literature of trauma—narratives that explore violent acts that are either fictional representations or autobiographical testimonials. These narratives often tackle larger issues such as war, poverty, the Holocaust, colonization or domestic abuse on a personal level.

In her book *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*, Laurie Vickroy suggests that “trauma narrativists endeavor to expand their audiences’ awareness of trauma by engaging them with personalized, experientially orientated means of narration that highlight the painful ambivalence that characterizes traumatic memory and warn us that trauma reproduces itself if left unattended” (3). In writing a story about what a particular character endures, the writer takes a large social issue like domestic violence and personalizes it for the reader—the end goal being a change in perception about trauma and its effects. Vickroy states: “Despite the human capacity to survive and adapt, traumatic experiences can alter people’s psychological, biological, and social equilibrium to such a degree that the memory of one particular event comes to taint all other experiences, spoiling appreciation of the present” (11-12). Exploring and understanding this “tyranny of the past” (12) is another way in which a victim may overcome it, whether they are the author or reader. But as Vickroy points out, other scholars working in this field, like Kali Tal, advocate for trauma narratives written by actual survivors over non-survivors who may have “other agendas” (6).

In *Worlds of Hurt*, Tal asserts that first-hand trauma narratives—testimonials—are the key to social change:

Bearing witness is an aggressive act. It is born out of a refusal to bow to outside pressure to revise or to repress experience, a decision to embrace conflict rather than conformity, to endure a lifetime of anger and pain rather than to submit to the seductive pull of revision and repression... The battle over the meaning of a traumatic experience is fought in the arena of political discourse, popular culture, and scholarly debate. The outcome of this battle shapes the rhetoric of the dominant culture and influences future political action. (7)

Tal further argues that allowing anyone other than true survivors to control the interpretation of trauma allows a dominant culture—or dominating force—to appropriate the trauma, codify it in its own terms, thus reinforcing the status quo rather than changing it (7). Tal is not only exclusive in terms of defining trauma literature, but in terms of who can correctly read trauma literature as well.

According to Tal, only someone who's experienced trauma can understand and process the images associated with trauma literature:

... the ability to 'read' words like *terror* may extend *across traumas*, so that the combat veteran of the Vietnam War responds viscerally to the transformed signs used by the

survivor of the concentration camp since they mirror his or her own traumatic experienced, while nontraumatized reader will come away with a different meaning altogether (Tal's emphasis, 16).

Her solution to this problem is a multi-step approach on the part of the critic to contextualize not only the author's identity, but that author's particular survivor community, the community of perpetrators, the relationship between the survivors and perpetrators as well as the current social, political and cultural location of the survivor community (17). While I understand Tal's point of view, I have some reservations regarding her approach.

As an abuse survivor, I find it strange that someone would seek to dictate the way in which anyone writes about this subject—even if they are a sexual abuse survivor like Tal. It seems counter-productive to limit discourse on subjects like incest and sexual abuse if the end goal is social change and greater awareness. Also, this type of thinking negates the possibility that someone who doesn't identify as an abuse survivor can still make a contribution to this discourse. For instance, Paula Vogel never identifies her motives for writing *How I Learned to Drive* as relating to any kind of personal experience with sexual abuse, but rather describes her influences as “not only *Lolita* but also Michel Tremblay's *Bonjour, La, Bonjour* and Louis Malle's *Murmur of the Heart*” (Savaran 273). As someone who identifies as an abuse survivor, it was only through reading Vogel's play that I felt “free” enough to consider dramatizing childhood sexual trauma. As for Tal, I am truly bothered by her insistence that only through this multi-step

contextualization of the author's identity can literature of trauma be correctly perceived. Part of the joy of reading literature is bringing your own interpretation to a work. While I do believe that contextualizing an author can lead to a productive critique, it is by no means the only way to read a text. More than that, Tal's need to control all aspects of trauma literature, from defining author identity to how to read a text, doesn't sit well with me as an author. In not identifying the story as autobiographical, the story itself becomes more malleable. This kind of anonymity grants one the ability to alter events and reshape the outcome—a process which may contain a degree of healing as well. While Tal doesn't consider these possibilities, Vickroy offers up a much simpler and straightforward approach to examining literature of trauma.

Rather than using only the contextualization of author identity as a means of critique, Vickroy examines how the author brings the reader into this weighty material (7). As she states, "an important indicator might be the kind of resolutions (if any) that are offered to traumatic circumstances and to what degree of optimism they are offered" (7). She investigates the way in which these texts "employ elements of testimony" and "attempt to draw readers into the more complex and painful social and personal implications of trauma" (7). As well, she studies "the self-reflective, uncertain, ambivalent aspects of these works and how they are often subversive in challenging oppressive practices and relations" (7). Essentially, Vickroy examines the text itself as an indicator for what the author attempts to say in regard to trauma, despite whether the author is writing an autobiographical account or fiction.

However, I must acknowledge that my play has a deeper meaning for me because of my personal experience with this subject matter. While I never consciously intended this project to be therapeutic, I came to understand that in retelling my story in this fictional play, perhaps I would find a measure of healing as well. This realization came in part by reading Ellen W. Kaplan's essay, "Going the Distance: Trauma, Social Rupture, and the Work of Repair."

While Kaplan specifically speaks to her experience with collaborative creation and performance in dealing with social trauma, I found her assertions about the power of theatre to release oneself from a past trauma to resonate with my work. Kaplan aptly asserts:

Making theatre from individual life stories can be a powerful tool for shaping understanding. Refracting through 'the optics of theatre,' a story may make visible something larger than itself... The fluidities and instabilities of performance permit playful interventions that counter the reification of experience. The frozen moment of trauma, in particular, can become unstuck.

(Kaplan 171)

Rather than simply reflecting on a particular moment in time, one event, one image, theatre allows writers and performers to play with a multitude of possibilities, without being locked into that "frozen moment of trauma." Obviously, I am not using a group of actors/creators who switch roles to explore a traumatic event. Instead, as the author, I

play a variety of roles in creating character; in doing so, I may better understand a traumatic event from my past.

Kaplan's ideas about the healing power of theatre are influenced by philosopher Susan J. Brison's book, *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self*. Within Brison's autobiographical account of surviving rape and attempted murder, she explains how rape victims may benefit from taking self-defense courses even after the rape has occurred:

In learning self-defense maneuvers and imaginatively reenacting the traumatic event, in space as well as in the imagination, with the ability to change the ending, a survivor can gain even more control over traumatic memories. In recovering from trauma, a survivor may be helped not only by telling the story, but also by being able to rewrite the plot and then enact it. (Brison 76)

By physically reenacting a scenario, one in which this time the victim emerges the victor, a survivor can regain control not just over her physical body, but her mental state as well. Brison believes this victory, even if it is fictitious, helps to counter the helplessness victims often feel after rape. Kaplan takes this idea of a fictitious victory and applies it to theatre.

For Kaplan, theatre allows a "productive dialogue in which trauma is reimagined but not relived" (172). She explains:

In original theatre work, we may rely on the efficacy of *telling* to reframe and reformulate the past... the performer,

acting as if the experience is in the present, takes charge and acts upon the context of the performance, transmuting what was ‘there and then’ to ‘here and now.’ This transformative moment occurs in a liminal space, one enriched by the productive distance between performer and audience, between the raw material of the story and the actor who embodies it. (172)

Again, she speaks of collective collaboration and performance, but I believe her arguments can be applied to my project. Because I am writing a fictional story based on a personal experience, I am reframing and reformulating my past to suit this play. While I’m not acting on stage or collaborating with others, I am trying to “transmute” the past into the present for the sake of understanding. As for the productive distance between audience and performer to which she refers, my productive distance occurs between what happened to me versus what happens to my characters. Inspired by Kaplan, I began to see links between hybridity and literature of trauma.

If postcolonial hybridity allows for the historical implications of a traumatic event to shape identity, then literature of trauma is the means through which this may be accomplished. In a way, the very act of recording and exploring a traumatic event allows one to express identity in a new way, “where the trace of what is disavowed is not repressed but repeated as something different—a mutation, a hybrid” (Bhabha 111). This is very similar to Kaplan’s notion that theatre allows one to transmute a past event into the present and in doing so, reframe the past as to understand it in a new way (Kaplan

172). It is this type of work that Susan J. Brison also believes is necessary to process the past.

In an earlier essay called “Trauma Narratives and the Remaking of a Self,” Brison states:

I argue that working through, or remastering, traumatic memory (in the case of human-inflicted trauma) involves a shift from being the object or medium of someone else's (the perpetrator's) speech (or other expressive behaviour) to being the subject of one's own. The act of bearing witness to the trauma facilitates this shift, not only by transforming traumatic memory into a coherent narrative that can then be integrated into the survivor's sense of self and view of the world, but also by reintegrating the survivor into a community, reestablishing connections essential to selfhood. (Brison 39)

This is the same process that occurs within my interpretation of hybridity: in acknowledging the mechanism of oppression, one usurps the oppression that can dominate identity. Only through this process can one avoid the binary label of always being identified as “victim” and create a new sense of autonomy, where the traumatic event is but one part of a person.

As I set about working on *The Vilkas Sisters*, I reviewed my previous research on hybridity and literature of trauma. I began to think about the power of storytelling—especially in telling one’s own trauma narrative, which is the essence of literature of

trauma. Perhaps the biggest challenge for my protagonist Mary would be telling her own story or even allowing for the possibility to do so.

CHAPTER 4: *THE VILKAS SISTERS*—THE JOURNEY OF A PLAY

Written over many years, my play went through numerous rewrites and incarnations before I reached my final product, *The Vilkas Sisters*. As such, I've divided this chapter into three segments: The Lithuania Experience and How It Informed My Writing; *Vilkas* and the Need to Start Again; and *The Vilkas Sisters: An Analysis*. Utilizing these sub-headings will make it easier to understand my play in its various stages and allow me to incorporate further research I performed along the way.

The Lithuania Experience and How It Informed My Writing

As I stated in the introduction, I visited my father's homeland of Lithuania in 2005 and not only met my father's family for the first time, but discovered a rich, pagan heritage. While the country is now primarily Catholic, it was a strong hold of pagan faith in European country until it converted to Christianity at the end of the fourteenth century (Turiene 1). This late conversion to Christianity is the most likely reason elements of pagan faith can still be detected in some Catholic religious practice. It is also important to note that Lithuania was illegally occupied by the Soviets until 1991. This occupation left a lasting imprint on the country not only in terms of easily identified elements, like architecture, but in the need for Lithuanians to reclaim aspects of their culture and religion they lost under Soviet rule. I witnessed not only the reclamation of churches, but a celebration of their pagan heritage and history as well. During my time in Lithuania, I participated in one particular blending of pagan ritual and Christian celebration—a hybridized event called Saint Jonas Day.

Saint Jonas day occurs during the summer solstice to honour the apostle John.

Lithuanians refer to the holiday as *Jonines* or, as I later learned, *Rasos*, which is the old pagan name for the solstice celebrations (O'Connor 97). My family's Saint Jonas Day consisted of feasting, gathering flowers to make wreaths for our heads, playing games and singing for hours by a giant bonfire on the family farm. As the vodka flowed, my brother and I were encouraged to leap over the fire for luck—which we did, a few times. I later discovered the fires were held to not only drive away bad luck, but were based in a pagan belief that jumping over the fire guaranteed prosperity, ensured a good harvest and drove away mischievous spirits (98). This event was of particular significance because older relatives began to tell folktales about spirits, like the *velnias* (devils), that still trick people today. I was completely engrossed in the tales—although the language barrier left me a little confused. On my last day in the city of Kaunas, I was fortunate enough to discover Velius' *Lithuanian Mythological Tales* in English translation.

Velius' text assembles hundreds of oral mythological legends that were either previously recorded or that Velius recorded himself. In his introduction, Velius argues that mythological legends are superior to fairy tales because their structure is less formulaic:

In fairy tales, real-life experiences are transformed in such a way as to look fantastic, unusual, and magical, which is not so in real-life. Legends transform elements of everyday life while retaining a sense of reality. Unlike fairy tales, legends have no traditional formulas for the beginning and ending, which serve to separate strictly the artistic image

from reality. Their beginnings are simple, mundane—as if segments from the reel of life were cut out and placed in an artistic image. (Velius 11-12)

On first reading, the mythological tales prove jarring because of this difference; the reader expects a neat and tidy ending, and rarely receives one. The line between reality and fiction is further blurred because the setting of the legends are “similar to that of the listener (in a house, by a river or forest, in a field, in a barn)” and “take place in the near past—yesterday, the day before yesterday, last year” (12). As a result, the stories have a sense of immediacy and intimacy—these are not events that happened a long time ago in a far away land.

Velius’ characterization of humans versus mythological beings also proves fascinating. The humans are usually “commonplace” (farmers, wives, servant girls, etc.) and are less archetypal than those heroes found in fairy tales: “In legends, characters of a similar type can be rich in one legend and poor in another, generous or miserly, brave or cowardly, knowledgeable or not in dealing with mythological beings” (13). What’s more, they are changed for the better or worse after directly encountering a mythological being: “fear, surprise, insanity, illness, or even death are sure to follow” (13). The beings, however, are usually painted in much more detail, even if those details prove slightly horrific at times:

Simple, peasant *laumes* (witch-pixies) and their large-headed, big eyed children, the calm hunter *Perkunas* (god of thunder) and fiery, flying *aitvarases* (wealth-carrying spirits), earthly wizards and the *velnias* (devil) of a hundred

faces. They pass before our eyes as if frozen models, but mystical and elusive at the same time, (13).

However, the creatures that stood out to me the most were the *vilkas* (wolves). I was intrigued by the fact that these creatures could hide their true nature from humans until it was too late. There was also an air of mystery as to how these creatures came to be.

In some tales, it's not known how or why humans are transformed into wolves. In others, humans are changed into wolves by wizards for no explicable reason. In some tales there is no cure for the *vilkas*; in others a kind of "cure" for being a werewolf is demonstrated. For example, in "The Father Werewolf", a father-turned-werewolf returns to play with his children (233). He is chased away by villagers. As the wolf rises and jumps over a stump (presumably to get away from the villagers), the wolf's skin snaps in two, revealing a naked man (223). In other stories, it's simply accepted that werewolves are dangerous beings with the ability to hide their nature to the untrained eye. Consider the tale of "The Deadly Gathering" recorded in 1968:

Once there was a husband and his wife and they set off for a wedding. The daughter stayed at home. Some girls gathered at her place to spend the evening spinning. Many young men came—the house was full. Those men were sitting next to the girls, having a good time. One girl's spindle came off. She bent down to take it and saw that there was a tail under the bench. She was scared stiff, realizing those men were werewolves and not young men.

In olden times, they would use burning chips of wood to light apartments. The chips of wood were stuck in the chip-holder. She blew the flame out and ran away into the woods. She escaped.

She returned the next morning—all the girls had been killed, their breasts gnawed out with teeth. (238)

As in other mythological tales, the setting is a normal part of every day life; the spinning party is believable since Lithuania is renowned for its linen and weaving. The story itself is a didactic tale of what can happen when a young girl invites strange men into her house while her parents are away. Her quick action in blowing out the flame allows her to escape safely into the woods, but unfortunately, it doesn't save the other girls. I believe this is done intentionally to show the ramifications of having strange men in the house—only with the graphic death of the girls is the danger truly illustrated.

When I read these tales, it struck me how different they were from the Americanized version of European stories I was told as a child. For example, *Cinderella*, *Snow White* or even *Little Red Riding Hood* are all predictable and simplistic in that good triumphs over evil, and everyone lives happily ever after. In comparison, the *vilkas* tales seem more antithetic. Werewolves in these tales are cunning—they can trick you into trusting them and then dispatch you just as easily. The more I read these stories, the more I saw the possibility in using *vilkas* as a metaphor for sexual predators. Sexual predators, like *vilkas*, fool victims into trusting them and use that trust to violate them.

I was so inspired by this correlation between sexual predators and *vilkas*, that I settled on *Vilkas* as a title for my play. I felt using this foreign word would immediately create some intrigue for the audience—what is a *vilkas*? After viewing the play, the audience would then come to understand the importance of this term as a metaphor for sexual predators. However, using *vilkas* in the title was not enough for me—the *vilkas* stories needed to be integrated into the body of the play. The question was, how would I do this when my play was set in Canada? I realized I would have to create another character—someone who could link these old world ideas with modern life.

Because these *vilkas* tales are based in an oral tradition, I believed it would be most realistic to create an elderly character, Marija, who would be the keeper of wisdom and stories. As I started to write preliminary monologues for Marija, I chose to model her speech patterns after my elderly relatives—all of whom spoke broken English with thick accents. While other people found it difficult to understand my relatives, I always found their way of speaking to be economic, even haiku-like, in that they could say so much using so few words. As I applied this speech pattern to Marija's dialogue, I was pleased that her character successfully took on the old-world authenticity for which I had searched. Inspired, I began to write my play, *Vilkas*.

***Vilkas* and the Need to Start Again**

Vilkas centered around a set of dysfunctional fraternal twins (Gwen and Gavin) who eventually discover the truth about the sexual trauma they endured as children. Gavin, having just attempted suicide, doesn't remember anything about his life prior to waking up in the hospital. Gwen, who still hates her brother for past transgressions, informs him

that he survived an attempted suicide and is facing charges for the sexual molestation of a minor. Over the course of act one, the audience learns that Gwen not only dreamt of Gavin's attempted suicide, but was actually drawn back to him by a reoccurring dream she felt only he would understand. Between moments of present tense revelation, there are a series of flashbacks that give the audience insight into the people Gwen and Gavin were. Most importantly, these flashbacks introduce the character of Marija, their nanny and only real parental figure, who Gwen claims sent her the initial dream about her brother's death. Marija is also the one who tells them the werewolf (*vilkas*) stories in these flashbacks.

In act two, the twins arrive at their family home in an attempt to locate important family documents that have gone missing—in particular, the documents concerning Gwen's trust fund. Gwen has no luck locating her trust fund, but does locate documents she believes confirm her brother's innocence as well as hint at the possibility of their deceased father having orchestrated the charges. Gavin and Gwen discover a map to an old, decrepit gardening shed on their family's estate. They locate the gardening shed and upon entering it, the floor collapses revealing the cellar below. Pre-occupied with finding a way out, Gavin doesn't notice the old toys and pictures in the cellar. Gwen sees the pictures she drew of her grandfather which she titled "*vilkas*" as a child; this triggers the twins' memory. They remember that their grandfather took them to the shed on a regular basis and molested them. In the course of trying to escape, a fire breaks out. Gwen remembers the cellar was their secret hiding place, recalls there is another exit and the two flee out of the cellar. In the blackout, the audience hears the crackle of fire and the

distant howl of the wolf. This was the play presented at my staged reading in April of 2007.

The audience comments from the staged reading were invaluable to me as a writer. The audience asked about the nature of twins, and honed in on plot and structure. I had always viewed *Vilkas* as a memory play that required a certain amount of set up before I got to the action. After the staged reading, I realized there was not enough action in act one. Comparatively, act two incorporated lots of action, but the action was difficult to follow because the revelations that led characters to make certain choices were not clearly explained. In order to leave the audience in suspense, I had cut extraneous dialogue from act two, but it became clear that I had cut too much. As a result, it was difficult to understand the history of my characters and what brought them to the last scene. There were also far too many fantastic elements. The supernatural can be a fine element to use, but I never clearly defined for myself the rules of the supernatural within the play and so this aspect was also confusing. Fundamentally, I came to realize that I didn't understand my characters' desires or the world they inhabited—without that understanding, I didn't have much of a play.

I reflected as I attempted to rewrite *Vilkas*. Initially, I had been very conscious of creating emotional distance between my experience and the play I wrote. At the time, I told myself this was necessary because I didn't want to deliver an autobiographical, emotional rant. In reality, I was scared to tap into my own feelings. I had created such a huge expanse between my own experience and *Vilkas*, that the play lacked emotional truth, a clear story and believable characters. After many failed rewrites, I knew I couldn't fix all

the problems within *Vilkas*. I was bogged down in disappointment and failure. How could I make my play more realistic without going back to feeling like a victim? Once again, I returned to my research with the hope of finding a solution. As I re-read Brison's *Aftermath: Violence and the Re-making of a Self*, I was drawn to her assertion about self-defence classes for rape victims. She argues that these classes empower victims by enabling them to re-enact an attack scenario in which they emerge as victors, rather than victims. If I re-enacted my experiences and re-shaped them within my play, would I emerge victorious? In freeing myself from that label, could I deliver a more realistic account of how childhood sexual trauma affects survivors?

In moments of despair, people can latch on to the simple advice that clichés provide. My mind kept revisiting the old adage: “write what you know.” Gwen and Gavin's world was so far outside my realm of experience, I never understood them. For example, I had no idea what it was like to be rich or to be raised by a nanny. However, I knew what it was like to find a kindred friend when you have none. I knew the power of sharing a deep, dark secret with her. I also knew the disappointment of not preventing that friend from making bad choices because of that secret's hold. So, as Mary and Jane would say, I granted myself a “do-over” and began working on *The Vilkas Sisters*.

The Vilkas Sisters: An Analysis

In the opening scene of *The Vilkas Sisters*, Mary has a dream about her grandmother, Marija, that's interrupted by a phone call. It's a nurse from St. Mary's hospital informing Mary that her best friend Jane is in intensive care. At the hospital, Mary learns that Jane is brain dead—though from the audience's perspective, it's not clear how this happened.

In accordance with Jane's living will, it is Mary's decision to determine whether Jane will be taken off life support and her organs donated. As the initial shock wears off, Mary sits by her friend's side trying to retrace the course of events that led to this tragedy. The audience begins to see the history of events unfold from Mary's perspective.

The play charts significant past events within the relationship between Mary and Jane, as well as between Mary and Marija, from Mary's perspective. Intermittently, the play cuts back to the present as Mary wrestles with her decision regarding Jane under the guidance of Sister Elizabeth—who is with the hospital's chaplain office. As the play progresses, the audience learns of the sexual abuse that Mary and Jane suffered as children and how this abuse affected them in various aspects of their lives. The initial mystery as to how Jane ends up on life support is gradually revealed as the audience learns of Jane's engagement to an abusive man. At the same time, the audience watches Mary deny the reality of her grandmother's increasing frailty. In recognizing Marija's need for full-time care and in learning the truth about Marija's past, Mary is given the courage to convince Jane to leave her fiancé. At this moment, it becomes clear to the audience that Mary ultimately fails.

In the final scene in the present day hospital, Mary accepts the truth about her friend: she didn't save Jane because she acted too late. Being able to admit Jane will never wake up, Mary decides to sign the waiver for organ donation. In finally processing what happened to Jane, Mary also recognizes her need to make peace with her past, with her *vilkas*, in order to avoid Jane's fate. One gets the sense that Mary has started upon a journey of

reconciling the past—a large step for someone who has hidden from that truth for most of her life.

From this synopsis, one can ascertain I kept certain elements from *Vilkas*. I wanted to retain the importance of *vilkas* as a metaphor for sexual predators so I reincorporated it into the title. Since this would be a story about two sister-like friends, I settled on calling the play *The Vilkas Sisters*. As the most positive feedback from the staged reading was about Marija, I decided to preserve her character as I also thought she was unique and compelling. However, since I was proceeding with a more realistic approach to writing, I chose to include Marija within Mary's family unit as the grandmother. I reasoned this relationship as grandmother would tie Marija into the story more intimately and open up the possibility of utilizing family dynamics. In this version, Marija would act as a moral compass for Mary and use her *vilkas* stories as didactic tales to reinforce concepts of right and wrong. While I felt very optimistic about these decisions, I was still wary of not repeating previous mistakes. As a result, I kept searching for other examples of how childhood sexual trauma could be dramatized. Fortunately, Neil LaBute's *In A Dark Dark House* was published at this time. While Vogel's play was more polished, and received more acclaim, LaBute's play offered a gritty examination of how victims reconcile past trauma.

LaBute's play opens in a psychiatric hospital as Drew awaits a court-ordered assessment from doctors. He has called upon his brother, Terry, to provide confirmation of the sexual abuse he suffered as a child. Drew hopes this confirmation will excuse his reckless behaviour and keep him from going to jail. While Drew's life may be on the line, the two

brothers can't even make small talk without fighting. It takes a full nineteen pages of sparring before Drew reveals it was a drifter, Todd Astin, that abused him. Terry's initial reaction is one of anger:

I warned you about that guy, like, a *billion* times, I told you that you needed to stay away from him and you said, "Don't worry, he'll never come near." You said that to me—said it over and over and *over*. (*Beat.*) Now, was that a lie or not?" (LaBute 20)

The anger persists until Drew explains the abuse occurred before Terry warned him. Even then, they continue fighting until Terry confesses he wished he had known "back in the day... when I could've done something about it. / Saved you" (21). The brothers' shared history is riddled with pain and secrets, so much so, it's often hard to know who is being truthful. It is this tension that propels the play to its conclusion.

LaBute's play provided a good model of dramatic tension and increased my awareness of the need to create strong characters with distinct desires. Unlike LaBute's play, however, much of *The Vilkas Sisters* would take place in the past. As such, I would need to show how their desires and goals evolved as they matured. For example, Mary and Jane's plan to go to the University of Toronto to get their MBAs would change as Jane grew up and chose another path: dropping out of university to go to Europe. However, I would also need to solidify Mary and Jane's sister-like relationship to make the play believable—for this, I returned to my Lithuanian experience.

At this point, Lithuanian culture already played a significant role for Mary because of Mary's cultural heritage and Marija's *vilkas* stories. In order to make the *vilkas* stories significant to both girls, I had to find a way for Mary to share these stories with Jane early in the play. I did not want this to be a simple regurgitation of Marija's tales, rather I wanted the *vilkas* stories to propel the girls into action. As I thought about my time in Catholic junior high, I remembered an incident when a girl was suspended for presenting a racy skit that was likened to the Stephen King movie, *Carrie*. From this, the bloody *vilkas* puppet show was conceived. Using the *vilkas* puppet show would not only place honour roll student Mary in jeopardy, but would provide Jane with an early introduction to the *vilkas* stories. It would also give Jane an opportunity to help her new friend out of a trouble and strengthen their friendship. Most importantly, it would lead to one of the most significant scenes in the play, "The Vilkas Sisters' Pact."

In developing the story, I knew it would be necessary to create a scene where the girls would feel safe enough to reveal the truth about their respective childhood trauma. I remembered the high drama of leaping over a large bonfire in the middle of the night in Lithuania. As this was a ritual meant to chase away bad spirits, I began to wonder what would happen if Mary and Jane tried to recreate this solstice ritual. A scene like this would be engaging and provide these characters a means through which they could reveal truths. As I erected barriers to their success, such as not having matches to build a fire, I created ways for them to improvise on the ritual. This improvisation would lead them to become blood sisters by the end of the scene. As the play progressed, I knew this ritual would bond the girls through the rest of the play. However, even though the play would

examine the demands and rewards of friendship, Mary was still the protagonist. Since her choices and actions would be the backbone of the play, I needed to understand her journey.

I assessed my goal of placing Mary on the road to healing by the end of the play. Through hybridity, I understood that Mary could escape the binary label of “victim” by admitting her historic realities. Likewise, through literature of trauma, I understood the power of telling one’s own story. I needed to demonstrate Mary’s emotional difficulty in attempting to tell this narrative. As the play already explored storytelling through Marija’s *vilkas* tales, I began to play with the notion of Mary trying to tell her own *vilkas*-like tale to Marija. This would provide an opportunity for role reversal in Mary and Marija’s relationship as well: the story-teller would become the listener, and *vice versa*. Showing Mary’s difficulty in sharing a fictional account of what happened to her would underscore her inability to admit her historic reality. As I began working on the scene “The Story of a Girl Who Can’t Tell A Story,” I realized I had to strike a delicate balance. Marija was clever and I needed her character to understand that Mary wasn’t ready to tell her narrative yet. If I allowed Mary to linger too long within her fictional story or to share too many details, it would force an immediate confrontation; Mary couldn’t tell her story at this point.

As an adult, I knew Mary would avoid confronting truths—especially about her past trauma. If the goal of the play was to move Mary to a point where she could incorporate events and information before and after her trauma, I needed to understand the turning point that would make her do so. Essentially, I had to find the moment that Mary could

no longer hide from reality. I knew that my “B” plot of Mary and Marija’s relationship needed to be incorporated into the “A” plot of Mary’s overall journey. I also knew that Mary’s great comfort as an adult would be living with Marija. On the surface, living with Marija would be a logical decision as it would delay the need for Marija to move into a nursing home. However, it would also place Mary in a state of suspended animation; in living with Marija, she wouldn’t have to progress as a person. It would be a convenient means for Mary to hide from her failed career and failed marriage. It became clear that the only way I could make Mary face her reality as an adult would be to take away the mechanism for hiding from it—Marija. Showing Marija’s increasing frailty in act two and Mary’s failure to address this would further illustrate Mary’s denial. Act two would need a crisis significant enough to force Mary out of her comfort zone. If I created an accident that sent Marija into a nursing home, I reasoned that Mary would be forced to face the consequences of avoidance. In turn, this would open up the possibility of Mary confronting other issues, such as Jane’s abusive fiancé. While I felt that moving Marija into the nursing home would impact Mary, I felt as though she needed more motivation to make a lasting change.

As I worked through the scene “The Truth Finds Mary,” I began to focus on Marija: what could she say or do that would guarantee Mary would take action regarding Jane? While Marija usually used her *vilkas* stories to guide Mary, using a *vilkas* story at this point would be too repetitive. Still, they were a significant part of Marija’s character. I began to question whether the *vilkas* stories had some greater significance to Marija beyond her desire to pass on an oral tradition. At the same time, I considered how much Mary

admired her grandmother as well as the similarities between these two characters. What if Marija had also suffered a trauma she was unwilling to share? What would it take for her to divulge this to Mary? Within this scene Marija would already be emotionally stripped, having come to terms with her age and her inability to go home. If this was Marija's crisis point, then perhaps it would be the time for her to admit other truths. What if Marija's real reason for telling these stories was because she had encountered her own *vilkas*? From this exploration, I created the story of Marija's abusive first love. Sharing this secret would allow Mary to recognize that trauma didn't solely define her grandmother as a victim. It would also create a strong desire for her to prevent Jane from suffering like Marija.

At this point, though I felt I had a good grasp on the play's action and story, I realized I needed someone at the hospital with whom Mary could interact. While I felt that a doctor or nurse would be too busy to give Mary emotional support, I began to think about adding a character from the chaplain's office named Sister Elizabeth. This character would tie into Mary's Catholic upbringing and make it easier for me to illustrate Mary's struggle with saying good bye to Jane. While I didn't want to open up a theological debate, at the same time, I wanted Sister Elizabeth to help Mary move forward. I went back to my Catholic education, specifically, C.S. Lewis' *A Grief Observed*. In having Sister Elizabeth share a striking passage from that book, Mary would be provided with an alternative way of viewing a person in crisis. I hoped this would enable Mary to examine her own inability to see the available help around her. With the characters and story reasonably established, I turned my attention to the ending.

Initially, I was unsure if Jane would live or die. I carefully studied my characters and plot outline in order to come to a decision. One of Mary's key traits was her ability to avoid reality until absolutely necessary. For example, it took Marija landing in the hospital before Mary would recognize her frailty. While Marija's hospitalization and narrative trauma would provide enough motivation for Mary to meet Jane's abusive relationship head on, I felt I needed a stronger impetus for Mary to deal with her own abuse. If Jane got better, Mary would not witness the most severe consequences of inaction. I was still debating Jane's fate when I remembered Laurie Vickoy's warning: "trauma reproduces itself if left unattended" (3). I felt this resonated with the journey of Mary, and Jane. I realized that if Jane lived, Mary would continue down a reactionary path—she'd never learn to initiate confrontation before it was too late. In many ways, Mary would need to be dragged into action. What if Mary convinced Jane to leave her abusive relationship, only to have Jane dismiss this advice, sneak back to her fiancé and die as a result? This would be tragic, but ultimately, that tragedy would motivate Mary to initiate change in her own life. In many ways, Jane's death would permit Mary's rebirth.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Ką veiki? (What are you doing?)

Pradėta baigiu. (I am finishing something that has been started)

-Lithuanian Proverb

One of my goals in writing *The Vilkas Sisters* was to expand my capabilities as an artist. I believe I'm a much stronger writer than when I started on this project because I've learned so much about the process of playwriting. While there were stumbling blocks along the way, I discovered how in-depth research could lead to new discoveries and possibilities within character and story—even if that research didn't seem directly related at the time. For example, at the time I studied hybridity, I never thought it would influence my creative work. Years later, I would see a correlation between hybridity and childhood sexual trauma.

Through this project, I also learned to establish a more methodical approach to writing. Prior to *The Vilkas Sisters*, I had approached my plays in a haphazard fashion. For instance, with the early version of this play, *Vilkas*, I wrote some monologues, drew up a some basic character sketches, and then dove into writing dialogue. At the time, I didn't understand that without having well-established characters and plot, I was essentially driving without a map. As a result of this, *Vilkas* failed on many fronts. However, it was this failure that taught me the most about writing.

My lack of success with *Vilkas* forced me to try harder as a writer—it compelled me to review what I thought I already knew. In performing research to reconnect with the basics of writing, I came to understand how plot needed to be infused with character for a

play to succeed. I finally appreciated the amount of preparation and effort a playwright needs to exert before writing a single line of dialogue. I believe this kind of work is reflected in the quality of *The Vilkas Sisters*.

While I acknowledge *The Vilkas Sisters* would benefit from a staged reading and further development, I feel the characters have distinct desires and their differences help fuel the play's action. I think the plot is more realistic than *Vilkas* and that the plot points force the characters to struggle in order to achieve their goals. While I used too many elements of the supernatural previously, the only supernatural elements in *The Vilkas Sisters* are the *vilkas* stories and they augment action within the play. The overall structure of this play also flows more logically. Book-ended by present-tense scenes, the audience sees the chronology of Mary and Jane's lives. I believe this results in a better understanding of the effects of childhood sexual trauma over time, which was an initial goal of this project. However, I would be remiss if I didn't mention that I achieved another, unexpected, success: I was transformed.

Looking back, I now realize that in telling Mary's story, I was also telling mine. In allowing Mary to understand the implications of a past trauma, I better understood the implications in my own life. As I worked to free Mary from the binary label of victim, I granted myself some measure of freedom as well. Only at the end of this process can I now appreciate the power of telling my own trauma narrative through this play. As Susan J. Brison explains in her book, *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self*: "saying something about a traumatic memory *does* something to it (Brison's emphasis, 56). The ability to tell your story enables you to push aside the feelings of victimization. Through

Mary, I've learned that taking control of your own narrative allows you to take back a part of your life.

I struggled with this project for five years—an enormous amount of time to everyone except me. During this process, I felt like I was performing explorative surgery: probing further and further, cutting into layers of myself in order to bring emotional truth to the play. Initially, I thought if I dug enough, I could cut out my trauma, place it on a page and make it all a piece of fiction. Working with Mary's character made me realize the only way to escape the label of victim, was to admit that I was one. Like Mary, only in confronting my trauma, could I learn to live with my "*vilkas*." When I reflect on my identity now that I've completed this project, I can see that I am both the girl before the trauma and the woman left to deal with it. I can also accept that separating one aspect from the other is no longer necessary—I have found some measure of peace.

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APPENDIX A: THE VILKAS SISTERS**ACT ONE****THE DREAM**

Off to the side of the stage, there is a woman (MARY) lying on a bed, asleep.

Lights up on an elderly woman (MARIJA) sitting in a chair. Mary gets out of bed and sits in a chair across from Marija. Mary has a hand-held camera.

MARY

I wish you would let me record you.

MARIJA
(in a Lithuanian accent)

I no like camera.

MARY

It's important to make a record.

MARIJA

You wanna pass 'em on, you keep 'em telling stories.

MARY

Just one story?

MARIJA

Jesus Maria.

MARY

Come on. For the sake of your future great grandchildren. Pleeeease?

MARIJA

Turn it off... or you go now.

MARY

Grandma, don't be silly... Grandma... You're not going to talk to me? Really?... Fine. I'll put it down and shut it off, okay?

Beat.

It off?
MARIJA

Yes.
MARY

You sure?
MARIJA

Yes!
MARY

Well, maybe I don't feel like tell 'em story.
MARIJA

Grandma.
MARY

He, he. I pull 'em you leg. Which story you want 'em? Oh, I know.
MARIJA

In old country, one night, when I was young, I was at first party at the church.

I love this one.
MARY

MARIJA
It was first time father let me go, alone. Boy from other village ask me to dance. Very handsome. Very tall. Oh, we have such fun. At end of dance, he ask 'em to walk me home. I like 'em, so I say "yes." But just before we leave, he turns to get 'em coat; I see something out of corner of my eye.

A tail.
MARY

MARIJA
Not just any tail—a *vilkas* tail. I tell 'em you, wolves so quick, so crafty—they can hide true nature. Only sometimes, out of corner of you eye, you see. And I did. I see 'em tail. I say, "I must wait 'em for *teva*." My daddy. But boy, he get 'em angry. And that's when I see 'em. I look 'em his eyes.

His blue eyes?
MARY

MARIJA

Cold and blue. Like young wolf. They so dark in centre. I tell you, I so scared, I wait 'em for *teva* to walk 'em me home.

Next day, I learn my friend Ona walk 'em with boy. They find her body in ditch by road.

MARY

She was killed.

MARIJA

Vilkas ate her. She only thirteen. And that phone 'em? That phone 'em for you.

MARY

What phone?—

Cue a phone loudly ringing. Lights shift.

Mary is in bed again and fumbles for the phone, half asleep.

MARY

Hello?... What?... Yes. This is she... What? What do you mean?... I'll be right there.

Mary disappears.

Lights up on a woman lying in a hospital bed. Cue the sound of a respirator.

Mary appears, but watches from a distance, very upset.

A woman (SISTER ELIZABETH) approaches Mary.

SISTER ELIZABETH

Hi. My name is Sister Elizabeth. I'm with the Chaplain's office. The doctors thought I should come by to see how you were doing.

Mary doesn't respond.

SISTER ELIZABETH

The last thing I want to do is pressure you.

Mary doesn't respond.

SISTER ELIZABETH

But, they wanted me to see if you had changed your mind about donating. Three people would have their lives changed today, because of her.

MARY

It's only been an hour.

SISTER ELIZABETH

With this kind of severe head trauma—

MARY

You said she was awake. Awake enough to make me her next-of-kin.

SISTER ELIZABETH

There was a clot.

MARY

Miracles happen. Don't they?

SISTER ELIZABETH

She'd create three of them.

MARY

She was mistreated in life; I won't see her mutilated in death.

SISTER ELIZABETH

I understand.

MARY

You do.

SISTER ELIZABETH

I'm here for you. I'll make it clear to the doctors.

MARY

Well... good.

SISTER ELIZABETH

Is there anything else I can do? Anyone you'd like me to call? Some family?

MARY

I'm all she's got.

Lights shift.

THE LOCKER ROOM

There is a curtain closed over a change room stall. One can see the lower half of Jane huddled down on the floor. She's wearing socks.

Mary walks in. She hears Jane crying.

MARY

Hello?

The crying stops. Behind the curtain, Jane goes still.

Mary peers and sees Jane's feet. She knocks on the frame of the change stall.

MARY

Hey, are you okay?

There's no response.

MARY

I can totally see your feet.

Jane tries to shrink away. Mary sits down on the floor, outside the change stall.

MARY

I'm Mary.

Jane doesn't respond.

JANE

Just leave me alone.

MARY

Well, if you need to talk or something—

JANE

As if you don't know why.

MARY

I have no idea what—

JANE
You're, like, all the same at this school.

MARY
Hardly.

JANE
As if.

MARY
Phys-ed finished, like, ten minutes ago. You're going to be late for class.

JANE
I'm not going anywhere.

MARY
No skin off me. But Mr. Finch is totally mean. He'll give you detention—big time.

JANE
Good.

MARY
Whatever.

MARY goes to a locker and opens it. She begins to grab some books.

JANE
As if you didn't come back to just rub my face in it.

MARY
I'm getting books.

JANE
Sure.

MARY
What's your damage?

JANE
You know what you did.

MARY
Skipped phys-ed so I could take extra credit?

JANE

What?

MARY

I don't go to gym on Tuesdays and Thursdays. I'm in the gifted program.

Look, I've gotta go, so if you wanna come with, you better hurry.

JANE

I can't.

Jane pushes her socked-feet out of the stall.

MARY

Someone stole your shoes?

JANE

That really tall—

MARY

Stephanie Drewers.

JANE

She stole both pairs of my shoes, and—

MARY

And she said if you told anyone, she'd pound you, right? Well, she totally will.

Jane wails at that.

MARY

Only if you tell.

JANE

If I go to class with no shoes on then Mr. Finch will know and... my life is over!

MARY

Just wait. What size are you?

JANE

Nine.

MARY

I'm a ten cause I'm like a hobbit, but you can totally borrow my gym shoes if you want.

Really?

JANE

Ya, I hardly use them anyway.

MARY

How do I know this isn't a—

JANE

Because. I know how it feels.

MARY

As if.

JANE

I hate Stephanie. She's a total Amazonian monster.

MARY

Mary passes her gym shoes to Jane under the curtain. Jane remains silent.

MARY

What's wrong?

JANE

Jane remains silent as she puts on the shoes.

MARY

Let me guess, she stole your bra too, right?

JANE

How did you know?

MARY

How do you think?

JANE

You too?

MARY

Worse.

JANE

What could be worse then—

MARY

She threw back the curtain of my stall. Hauled me out, half naked, in front of the whole locker room. And then she pointed at my hips and my boobs—

JANE

Then she got everyone to chant "boom, boom, booby girl"?

MARY

Then she stole your bra, right?

JANE

Ya.

MARY

God, she sucks.

JANE

I can't go to class without a bra—I'm too big.

MARY

I don't have an extra one. And the bell's gonna ring, like, any minute.

JANE

If I get detention, my parents will totally kill me.

Jane wails.

MARY

Well, could you walk a little hunched over?

JANE

I'm a C.

MARY

Me too!

JANE

Focus.

MARY

Right. Okay. Do you have a sweater?

JANE

No. You?

MARY

No. Okay. Think, brain, think... Hey, maybe there's something in the lost and found. Gimmie a sec.

Mary goes racing out. She comes back in a few minutes carrying a roll of athletic tape.

MARY

Um...

JANE

Let me guess, nothing. Just my stupid luck.

MARY

Not exactly.

Mary rolls the tape into the stall.

JANE

Tape?

MARY

I know. Totally MacGyver. But there's nothing else—swear to god.

Jane picks up the tape. We hear her ripping off some chunks.

JANE

You're totally messing with me.

MARY

Why would I?

JANE

To spread it around school?

MARY

Even if I tried, nobody talks to me anyway.

Beat.

JANE

I can't do this.

MARY
Well then, you think of something better.

JANE
No, I mean I can't do this, by myself.

MARY
Oh. You want me to...?

JANE
No.

The school bell rings.

JANE
Two minutes to class? I'm totally dead.

MARY
What if I promise to completely not look?

JANE
This so isn't happening.

MARY
It's this, detention, or getting pounded.

JANE
Fine. Just do it.

Mary enters the stall. We hear tape being ripped, general commotion, etc.

The two girls emerge from the stall. Mary gives Jane a once over.

MARY
MacGyver would be proud.

JANE
We should totally write him.

They both burst out laughing, grab their stuff and hightail it out of the change room.

Lights shift.

THE LIBRARY ZONE

On the other side of the stage, the lights slowly grow to reveal Jane, who is filing books on a library cart.

Mary walks toward her.

MARY

You didn't tell me you were volunteering.

JANE

You were right. I do a shift here and I don't have to take the bus with Stephanie.

MARY

I knew you were a nerd—this is so awesome!

JANE

I'm not a nerd.

MARY

I used the word Amazonian to describe Stephanie and you didn't even flinch. Knowing big words equals nerd.

JANE

Just because I like to read—

MARY

Liking to read also equals nerd at this school. You don't happen to watch Star Trek?

Jane bows her head.

MARY

I rest my case.

JANE

Whatever. Riker's cute. And just because I want to believe in a future with peace and—

MARY

Nerd. Nerd. Nerd.

JANE

Well, it wasn't like that at my old school.

MARY

Well your old school didn't have Stephanie Drewers and her minions.

JANE

This place sucks.

MARY

It's going to suck even more.

JANE

Why?

MARY

I think I saw your gym shoes in Stephanie's locker.

JANE

What?!

MARY

I was passing by her locker and I saw a pair of gym shoes. And I only stopped for a minute, because one of them was facing backward.

JANE

Red Adidas?

MARY

Ya. And I saw your initials, I think, on the tongue of the shoe.

JANE

What a jerkwad.

MARY

What are we going to do about it?

JANE

I have to finish sorting these books—my bus comes soon.

MARY

My god. It's too late. They've already sucked you into the...

(gasps)

library zone.

Mary dramatically faints. Jane keeps working for a few moments. Mary doesn't get up.

JANE

Are you okay?

MARY

Fine. Fine. The library zone had me there, but I'm okay now.

JANE

Library zone?

MARY

Like the twilight zone, but in a library. See sorting books and getting movies ready for classes can zap away your will to do anything else.

JANE

Ha, ha.

MARY

Now, what are we going to do about Stephanie?

JANE

Nothing.

MARY

I saw other pairs of shoes in her locker too.

JANE

If we say anything, she'll pound us.

MARY

Break into her locker?

JANE

Like we can just steal the master key.

MARY

That's an awesome idea!

JANE

No, it's a stupid one. Think about it. How would we get the keys away from the Principal?

MARY

I don't know. Pretend Stephanie's locker is my locker and have him open it up?

JANE

Cause he wouldn't check which locker is assigned to you.

MARY

She should have to pay for what she did.

JANE

It's just some shoes and a bra.

MARY

It's not right.

JANE

There's no way to tell on her without getting pounded.

Beat.

MARY

Did you see Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade?

JANE

Duh.

MARY

Okay, remember when that old guy in the tank squirts ink in the Nazi's face, and then the tank crashes?

JANE

You're going to squirt ink at Stephanie's face?

MARY

No! After that, he says, "the pen is mightier than the sword."

JANE

O-kaay.

MARY

We could write a letter, like totally anonymously, to the Principal and.... and all the teachers.

JANE

I thought you said the Principal was Stephanie's uncle.

MARY

Which is why we're writing to all the teachers too. If they all start talking about it—

JANE

Then they'll have to do something!

MARY

The pen *is* mightier than the sword.

JANE

You know what? We should also write the father at St. Gerard's.

MARY

Oooh, then they'll *really* have to do something. And if we type it, they won't be able to identify our handwriting.

Mary sits down at a type-writer and begins to, painfully, type out a letter.

MARY

"Dear sir/madam. I am writing to express my concerns"—

JANE

Are you trying to get us killed?

MARY

What? That's how my mom starts off all her letters, and she writes everybody: newspapers, government—

JANE

You said big words equals nerd.

MARY

It does, but—crud, they'll know it was us.

JANE

We have to sound average. Maybe misspell a couple of words, that kind of thing.

MARY

Okay, you better do it because I just, I can't.

Spell words incorrectly?

JANE

It's just wrong.

MARY

Mary steps away from type writer. Jane sits down and starts typing like a professional.

MARY

Where did you learn to type like that?

JANE

I took typing for extra credit at my old school.

MARY

They don't offer typing until grade seven here.

JANE

I know. This school is waaaay behind.

Mary seems upset.

JANE

What if we write like girls do in YM Magazine? "Dear YM, I have a friend with a problem..."

MARY

You read Young Miss Magazine?

JANE

Sometimes I don't want to think.

Jane bows her head.

MARY

I read it for the quizzes—even though they're kind of lame.

JANE

Totally! Anyway, we could write it like we're one of Stephanie's drones, but we just can't take it anymore. It'll totally throw them off.

MARY
Total Masterpiece Theatre.

JANE
I love Masterpiece Theatre.

MARY
Of course you do.

Jane begins typing while they talk.

JANE
Okay, so, we have to make her sound guilty.

MARY
Ya, she's confused because what she's doing is a sin.

JANE
Like that?

MARY
Ya. She should feel sorry for all the girls who have had their shoes and bras stolen.
(Jane keeps typing.)

Ya, that's good.

JANE
And scared. Oooh, and that every time she even walks by Stephanie's locker, she feels guilty.

MARY
Like *The Tell-Tale Heart*.

JANE
I totally love Poe. He's so dark.

MARY
But don't type that cause I'm pretty sure we're not supposed to read Poe until high school. Oh, and she should be really scared of what will happen to her if Stephanie knew she was writing this letter. That's why it's anonymous.

JANE
Got it... Alright. Here it is.

Jane pulls the new letter from the typewriter.

MARY

"Dear Principle,"
Ooh, that's good: c-i-p-l-e instead of c-i-p-a-l.

JANE

Keep going.

MARY

"I'm really confused about what to do about this problem because it's really hard for me to know what I'm supposing to do."

Nice run on.

"I have this friend who does bad things to lots and lots of kids but they can't say nothin' cause she'll beat them up. You know her. But I just did my first confessional and what the priest said made me think about my sins. I don't want to go to hell. It's really hot and I like skiing. So I'll write so you will see Stephanie Drewer's locker and all the shoes she steals from kids who don't do nothin'.

Every time I see her locker, I want to puke. Not cause I think I'm fat, but cause I feel bad for them even though they're losers.

PS. She steals bras too. Some girls really need bras. Stephanie doesn't. You gotta stop her know."

Wow.

JANE

Totally legit.

Beat.

MARY

In Ed Plus, they're always talking about risk-taking. Smart-risks versus stupid risks and—

JANE

You're scared.

MARY

Well duh.

JANE

Well, me too. So... what would Mr. Spock do?

MARY

No emotion?

JANE

Live long and prosper.

MARY

Make a bunch of copies and put them in the teacher's mail boxes after the secretaries go home.

JANE

Exactly. It's Friday—no one's here.

Jane drags Mary out of the library zone.

Cue the sound of a photocopier making copies.

Lights shift.

THE TELL-TALE HEART

Mary and Marija sit at a kitchen table. Mary isn't touching her food.

After observing for a moment, Marija speaks.

MARIJA

What? My cooking no-good-nik?

MARY

I'm not hungry.

MARIJA

You miss 'em mama and daddy. They be back from trip in two days. Not so long.

MARY

Can I be excused?

Cue the phone ringing.

I get 'em.

MARIJA

No, I will.

MARY

Mary runs to answer the phone and is immediately agitated.

Stop phoning. I don't wanna talk!

MARY

Mary hangs up the phone.

You have something to tell grandma?

MARIJA

Can I be excused now?

MARY

What you do?

MARIJA

I don't want to talk about it.

MARY

We have no secrets.

MARIJA

I'm not a kid anymore.

MARY

Pause.

I'm just having a fight.

MARY

With new friend?

MARIJA

Yes.

MARY

MARIJA

Why you two fight 'em? I like her. She good at gin-rummy.

MARY

This is why I didn't want to say anything.

MARIJA

She take 'em your boyfriend?

MARY

We don't have boyfriends.

MARIJA

That's good. You have 'em more time than money.

Mary sits in silence.

MARIJA

She turn 'em like *vilkas*? Liar in friend's clothing?

MARY

She doesn't gossip.

MARIJA

Then, what you have to fight about?

MARY

I said I don't want to talk about it.

MARIJA

We sit here until you do.

MARY

Grandma.

MARIJA

I have more time than money.

They sit in silence. Mary glares at Marija.

MARIJA

Germans and Russkies didn't scare grandma. You think that face will?

They sit across from each other.

MARY

Fine. But you can't punish me.

MARIJA

Of course I can punish. I you grandma.

MARY

I mean, you can't tell anyone what I'm going to tell you. You have to swear.

MARIJA

I swear nothing.

Mary sighs.

MARY

Fine. You know that girl Stephanie Drewers?

MARIJA

Didelis ir blogai?

MARY

Big and mean. Well, she stole Jane's shoes and bra in gym class.

MARIJA

What she do?

MARY

She's big and mean.

MARIJA

You tell 'em teacher.

MARY

Stephanie would beat us up.

MARIJA

Tell 'em Principal.

MARY

He's Stephanie's uncle.

MARIJA

I never like 'em no how.

MARY

Me neither. Anyway, last week, I saw Jane's shoes in Stephanie's locker. Jane and I figured if we wrote an anonymous letter and sent it—

MARIJA

What anonymous?

MARY

Unsigned, so there'd be no way to tell who wrote it. Anyway, if we sent it to all the teachers, they'd have to do something about it.

MARIJA

Well, that seems—

MARY

Like a good plan.

MARIJA

No. Like coward, this plan 'em.

MARY

I didn't want to send it and Jane—

MARIJA

Send 'em anyway.

MARY

Not exactly. She convinced me. And now Stephanie got suspended for a week.

MARIJA

You feel 'em guilt.

MARY

Yes.

MARIJA

But Stephanie is mean to many?

MARY

Lots of kids.

And now kids get 'em shoes back?

MARIJA

Yes.

MARY

So bad guy get 'em punished.

MARIJA

Yes.

MARY

So why you upset?

MARIJA

Because. I didn't think I'd feel guilty. If Jane hadn't pushed me—

MARY

No one make 'em you do nothing, no how.

MARIJA

But—

MARY

You should have march 'em up to teacher and tell 'em what happen.

MARIJA

But Stephanie would have—

MARY

You grandpa and me could still be in *Leituva*. Sure, if we be quiet and agree with Russian occupation. But we not *avele*. Sheep. Instead, we fight 'em Russians. It wrong what they do. You know what happen then? We get 'em blacklist to Siberia. Then, we make 'em hard choice. We leave 'em farm, family, everything behind and come here.

MARIJA

This isn't—

MARY

Do 'em what right, never easy. If easy, probably not right thing to do.

MARIJA

I know, but—

MARY

I think 'em you jealous.

MARIJA

Of what?

MARY

Of Jane. Many time you talk 'em about Stephanie. Jane make you do 'em something. I think it make you mad.

MARIJA

I have homework to do. Can I be excused now?

MARY

You do 'em what you like 'em.

MARIJA

Mary exits.

Marija sits at the kitchen alone for a while.
She begins to play solitaire.

Mary enters the kitchen.

MARY

Grandma?

Beat.

MARY

I phoned her.

(pause)

I'm sorry. I was a jerk.

MARIJA

It's okay. I be jerk many times when I you age.

MARY

That's hard to believe.

MARIJA

When you old like me, you learn 'em to keep jerk inside.

Lights shift.

MARY GETS SUSPENDED

Mary runs back to the library cart. She's crying. She throws down a puppet, which looks like a gnarled old woman.

Jane runs in, relieved to find Mary.

JANE

Are you okay?

MARY

They said it was un-Christian, anti-Catholic.

JANE

Whatever. It was so—

MARY

Evil?

JANE

Realistic. Everybody loved it. Even Stephanie Drewers. When that blood splattered out into the audience? And the look on Mrs. McMillan's face? I thought she was going to have a seizure. How did you do it? Squeeze bottle?

Mary nods.

MARY

My life is over.

JANE

It's going to be okay.

MARY

My parents didn't know, about any of it.

JANE

The unit was on folk tales. This was a folk tale, just with a much bloodier ending.

Mary starts to cry again.

JANE
The puppets looked really good.

MARY
My grandma helped.

Mary picks up the puppet.

JANE
That's practically like getting parental consent.

MARY
My mom hates these stories.

JANE
Cause of the blood?

MARY
More like the endings—they're not really happy.

JANE
I get it. It's like the parents who got mad as Miss Everette for showing that video. The girl takes angel dust and thinks she can fly and then jumps out a window.

Mary is silent.

JANE
Not that yours was like that. I mean...

Beat.

MARY
My mom thinks these stories give me nightmares. She told my grandma to stop telling them to me. Now...

Beat.

JANE
Do they?

MARY
What?

Give you nightmares.

JANE

I'm not a baby.

MARY

I didn't say that.

JANE

Beat.

MARY

I've always had them.

Beat.

What was your worst?

JANE

They're all my worst.

MARY

You know what I mean.

JANE

Well, it's usually the boogey man, werewolves—just bad things.

MARY

I have dreams too.

JANE

Beat.

JANE

Mostly about my mother. My mother is pulling out all my teeth. I'm losing all my teeth because my mother is around.

MARY

Cool.

Jane glares at Mary.

MARY

That you dream about somebody you know. I never do.

JANE

Not even Keifer Sutherland? He's a hot vampire.

Beat.

JANE

Why does she tell you the stories?

MARY

She says they're lessons to help me.

JANE

Did they?

MARY
(hesitates)

When I was dreaming, I could remember the lessons.

JANE

What kind of lessons?

MARY

Ways to defeat wolves and wizards. Stop devils in their tracks.

JANE

Devils?

MARY

Never mind.

Beat.

JANE

What do you do to beat the devil?

MARY

You have to be crafty and trick the *velnias*, the devils.

JANE

What if you can't out trick him?

MARY

Grandma says that there's a bunch of other gods, like God's big Lithuanian brothers and sisters. Anyway, you can pray to the god *Perkunas*, the god of thunder. His job is to

fight the devils. Grandma says God wouldn't mind cause Perkunas is fighting evil and they're all related anyway. Besides, she's *really* Catholic.

Beat.

JANE

What if the devil already got you?

MARY

On the longest day of the year, you can jump over a huge bonfire to chase away the devil's hold on you. It's supposed to bring luck too. Grandma says we're going to build one this summer.

JANE

Really?

MARY

We have to find a place away from the city, so we can get the fire really going.

JANE

Do you think if I'm in town, I could come?

MARY

Sure. But I don't know if it'll work. I don't even know if there is a devil.

Beat.

JANE

I've seen him.

MARY

Really?

Sound cue: "Will Mary Dundulis please report to the Principal's office? Mary Dundulis."

MARY

What am I going to do?

JANE

Fall on their mercy?

MARY

The Principal has no mercy. I need a plan. One that won't get me or grandma into trouble.

They sit in silence for a moment.

Sound cue: "Will Mary Dundulis please report to the Principal's office? Mary Dundulis."

MARY

I can't think under pressure.

JANE

Got it. Totally got it. I just read it in a periodical. There's a total movement to ban violence on TV and put warning labels on tapes that have bad language.

Jane grabs a magazine and hands it to Mary.

MARY

How does this help me?

JANE

Tell them you got the idea from MTV. Everyone's doing it.

MARY

We don't get MTV. Just lame Muchmusic.

JANE

Tell them you watched it at my house. We have satellite.

MARY

Then my mom won't let me go to your house anymore.

JANE

Tell them... oooh, I know. The Power Hour.

MARY

What?

JANE

That show on Muchmusic with all the metal and head banger stuff. Tell them you were watching that.

MARY

They won't let me watch Muchmusic anymore.

JANE

You can watch it at my house.

Sound cue: "Will Mary Dundulis please report to the Principal's office? Mary Dundulis, immediately."

MARY

All right. I'll just say I was inspired—

JANE

No, no, no. Big words—that will give away the lie. Just say that you thought it would be cool, like how it is on TV.

Mary begins to walk away.

JANE

And cry while you say it.

MARY

That won't be hard.

Sound cue: "Mary Dundulis. To the Principal's office. NOW!"

Lights shift.

MARIJA'S FIRST VILKAS STORY

Mary sits down on her bed, totally depressed. A knock is heard.

MARY

Who is it?

MARIJA (O.S.)
(in a Lithuanian accent)

It's grandma.

Grandma!

MARY

Mary leaps to answer the door.

Come in. Come in!

MARY

MARIJA

Daddy phone 'em me. He very worried. He say you get 'em big trouble today. For puppet show.

Beat.

MARIJA

About *vilkas*.

MARY

I didn't say anything about the stories, I swear. I said it was just Little Red Riding Hood.

MARIJA

Little Red Riding Hood; *vilkas*; all same. You should never swear.

MARY

No, not like that. I—

MARIJA

I know what you really do. You blame TV rather than blame grandma. Very smart. But still, you lie.

MARY

If mom and dad found out they'd—

MARIJA

You do 'em to protect me. But I old lady. I know how to protect 'em myself. And now, for one whole day, you no allowed to go to school. What you do?

MARY

I was only trying to—

MARIJA

God see 'em everything. He watching.

MARY

Did you tell them the truth?

MARIJA

I no want bigger trouble for you. But you must to think. Every choice you make 'em has, how you say?

MARY

Consequences?

MARIJA

Once, there was girl in my grandma's village. Very much like you. One day, she wake 'em early and can't think of nothing but to pick 'em *grybu*—mushroom, you call 'em. Now, as you know 'em, best time to pick 'em is first thing in morning, before they get wormy. But this girl's *teva* tells her she cannot go in forest alone. So, this girl, she wait 'em and wait 'em for daddy to wake up, until she not wait 'em no more. All she think 'em about is *grybu*, and how she surprise family with mushrooms. She go into forest alone.

(pause)

What happen to girl?

MARY

Vilkas?

MARIJA

All they ever find 'em was bucket, half-full of *grybu*. She only 12 years old.

MARY

That doesn't make me feel any better.

MARIJA

Now you see how big trouble can happen. Ne?

MARY

Cause she got caught alone.

MARIJA

She no *think* about what happen if she get caught alone.

MARY

I shouldn't have disobeyed.

(pause)

I shouldn't have lied to you.

And now, you pay price, ne?
MARIJA

Yes.
MARY

I'm glad you see. Now, get 'em you coat. We go to confess today. You for you lie. Me for mine.
MARIJA

But God already knows I'm sorry. I don't need to talk to Father Molnar about it.
MARY

Secrets have power—you speak 'em, they release you. That why we go to Father Molnar.
MARIJA

Okay.
MARY

And then, maybe, we go to Dairy Queen on way home. Ice cream have power too.
MARIJA

Lights shift.

THE VILKAS SISTERS' PACT

Lights up on Mary and Jane. They are lying under sleeping bags, pretending to sleep.

You ready?
MARY

Ya. Got the flashlight?
JANE

Check.
MARY

It's almost midnight.
JANE

Mary and Jane get up and walk into the woods.

Mary reaches into her backpack and pulls out a small axe.

MARY

I'll start chopping wood.

JANE

Does it have to be a fire?

MARY

A bonfire.

JANE

Do you have a lighter?

MARY

My parents don't smoke. It was your job to get the lighter.

JANE

My mom took her lighter into the camper. I didn't want to wake her up.

MARY

How do you build a fire without a lighter? Grandma says you have to jump over a fire.

JANE

What's more important? The fire or the jumping?

MARY

Both.

JANE

Maybe we can just leap through the air or something?

MARY

Maybe it's more about courage, a test or something. Isn't heart basin by here? We could jump from the ledge into the water.

JANE

In the middle of the night.

MARY

Brave, huh?

JANE

I'm scared of heights.

MARY

We've got to do something. A sacrifice or something to ward off bad spirits.

JANE

I'm told you, I'm a vegetarian now.

MARY

Not that kind of sacrifice. Like the wafers in church—they're not actually the body of Christ.

JANE

I think we're supposed to believe they are.

MARY

Oh. Well, I mean a symbol of sacrifice, not a real one.

JANE

Like Lent.

MARY

Lent is all about sacrifice. I gave up chocolate for forty days—

JANE

Plus Sundays.

MARY

There's only ten minutes until the end of solstice!

JANE

I totally have it. Remember that stupid short story Miss Grier made us read last month?

MARY

Flowers for Algernon?

JANE

No.

MARY

The cheese stands alone.

JANE

That was *I am the Cheese*. And no. The one where there's the two guys who are best friends and they decide to become blood brothers because one of them's moving away?

MARY

Um, ew.

JANE

Ya, but—

MARY

Isn't that how we get the AIDS?

JANE

Didn't you see that after school special movie about that kid who had AIDS, but it was okay to touch him?

MARY

What if it's more than touching?

JANE

I thought they did the sex talk before I moved here.

MARY

I had chicken pox that day.

JANE

Well, only someone with AIDS could give you AIDS. You have to have sex or share needles—total fluid transfer. But I haven't ever had full on sex or something.

Beat.

MARY

What if someone did?

JANE

The person you had sex with had to have it.

MARY

But what if you don't know if they do?

JANE

You've never had sex.

Beat.

MARY

What if I did?

JANE

You're a total prude.

Mary is silent.

JANE

Really?

Mary is silent.

JANE

Was it romantic?

MARY

No.

JANE

Was it Stephen Jacobs?

MARY

It wasn't anybody you know.

JANE

Then why won't you tell me?

Beat.

JANE

It's not a sin if you loved him.

MARY

I didn't even want it!

Beat.

MARY

He said never to tell.

JANE

I won't tell. I promise.

He lives in a house, one street over and—

MARY

Sometimes you still see him.

JANE

Mary nods.

JANE

Your heart starts beating fast, you can hear it thudding in your ears. But you can't move. Can't breathe. You're just, frozen. Like before.

Beat.

JANE

My grandpa.

MARY

No.

JANE

I said I'd seen the devil.

MARY

But he's your grandpa.

JANE

You think I don't know? It's sick.

Beat.

MARY

You never told?

JANE

Told my mom when I was six. She told me to stop being a little a slut.

Beat.

MARY

Did he ever stop?

Beat.

JANE

When I was ten, he said I was too old.

Beat.

MARY

He said the police would take me away. My nightmares were so bad after, I'd crawl into my parents' bed so they couldn't get me.

Beat.

MARY

Mom still thinks it was grandma's stories.

JANE

I used to have nightmares too. But when I tried to crawl into their bed, Mom would yell at me to go back to my room.

Beat.

JANE

Sometimes I wonder if he did it to her too. Maybe that's why she's so mean.

Beat.

JANE

When did he stop with you?

Mary is silent.

JANE

I told you everything.

MARY

I know.

JANE

He's still doing it?

MARY

No! When was six, that's it.

Beat.

MARY

He was five years older. I wanted him to be my friend.

JANE

He used to call me his best girl.

Beat.

MARY

I didn't even know it was wrong. Then one day, he comes back. With his best friend, Murray, to show him.

JANE

Did they...?

MARY

No. Murray gets really mad. Calls him a sicko. They start fighting. I ran. I never played with him again.

Beat.

MARY

Sometimes I wonder if God was mad at me.

JANE

This wasn't the work of God.

MARY

The devil. In Lithuanian, he's called *velnias*.

JANE

Which is why we have to make a sacrifice to chase him away.

MARY

This was a stupid idea.

Jane grabs Mary's backpack.

MARY

What are you doing?

JANE

We need a knife.

MARY

I'm not allowed to have a knife unless we're *grybu*—I mean, mushroom picking.

JANE

How else are we going to become blood sisters?

MARY

You still want to?

JANE

Why not?

After a moment, Jane grabs the axe from the backpack.

MARY

The axe?

Jane tries to slice her finger open on the axe.

MARY

Too dull?

JANE

Put your hand down on the rock and I'll—

MARY

Chop my hand off?

Jane rummages in the backpack to find something with which to cut themselves.

JANE

Bash a finger open with a rock?

MARY

Piano lessons?

Jane checks her watch.

JANE

Five minutes until midnight.

They both start to rummage in the backpack.

MARY

My earrings.

JANE

We're running out of time.

Mary pulls out one of her earrings and stabs her finger.

MARY

Ow!

JANE

Maybe this was a bad—

(Mary grabs Jane's hand and stabs a finger)

Ow!

Mary presses the fingers together.

MARY

Now we're sisters.

JANE

Now what?

MARY

Grandma would make a toast and say, "*I sveikata*"—that means to your health.

JANE

Do we have anything to toast with?

MARY

You were supposed to sneak an extra pop.

JANE

Sorry for sucking, but—

Jane hands Mary a carton of soy milk.

MARY

What's this?

JANE
Soy milk.

MARY
What's soy milk?

JANE
It's milk, only made from soy beans.

MARY
When did you start drinking this junk?

JANE
I'm a vegetarian now.

MARY
It's not like soda has meat in it.

JANE
Soy is healthier.

Mary shoots Jane a look as she opens the carton and pours soy milk into two plastic cups. She gives one to Jane.

MARY
Now raise your glass and repeat after me: *I sveikata*—

JANE
Wait, wait, wait. Shouldn't we make a wish or a vow or something?

MARY
An oath?

JANE
Like the Apostle's Creed.

MARY
Okay. Um. I believe in our friendship and our right to be bffs.

JANE
Me too. And to never let anybody get between us—

MARY

Especially boys—

JANE

Or Stephanie Drewers.

MARY

That we'll only use our brains for the good of mankind.

JANE

You seriously watch too much Star Trek.

MARY

Reiker's cute.

JANE

You're wrecking the oath. We should say something about the devil.

MARY

And that the devil won't be welcomed in our lives anymore.

JANE

And that all bad spirits and feelings are chased away.

MARY

Forever.

JANE

Forever.

Beat.

MARY

And that someday, I'll marry Westley from *The Princess Bride*.

JANE

He's not even a real person.

MARY

He could be.

JANE

Fine. And that we'll always be sisters.

MARY

Sisters. Always. Now, raise your glass and repeat after me: *I sveikata.*

JANE

I sveikata.

They drink the soy. Mary gags.

Lights shift.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

SIMON THE SAFETY. BEAR

Cue the sound of a classroom bell. Mary is hard at work in the library filing books and locating DVDs.

Jane enters.

MARY

Have you seen the copy of *The Miracle of Life*? We have to get it cued for fifth period.

Mary keeps working, but finally looks up at Jane.

MARY

What's wrong?

JANE

This world is fucked.

MARY

What happened?

JANE

I'm doing Simon the Safety Bear.

MARY

Usual rock star response from the kids.

JANE

A kid told me her mommy lets her boyfriends touch her. Down there.

MARY

What did you do?

JANE

I just hugged her. She started crying. Finally, the constable came over, but she wouldn't let go of me. So doing my best bear voice, I tell her that he's my friend and that she should tell him what she just told me.

MARY

Did she?

Jane nods.

Beat.

JANE

They should have the fucking death penalty for perverts—just string 'em all up.

MARY

I don't know about that.

JANE

How can you say that? You were just forced to go to the wedding of your pervert.

MARY

My parents didn't know.

JANE

They wouldn't have dragged you to that wedding if they did.

MARY

I don't want to talk about the wedding.

JANE

Have you even slept since then?

Mary doesn't respond.

JANE

They made you dance with him. His mom was laughing in the background because when Mary Dundulis was five, she told everyone she would marry Erich Warner.

MARY

I didn't have a choice!

JANE
You could have told your parents.

MARY
I won't let him hurt my parents too.

JANE
But you want me to tell my dad.

MARY
To protect your cousins. It was your grandpa. Not some random neighbour.
(pause)
I don't even know why he invited us to the wedding.

JANE
He got off on watching you squirm.

MARY
Ever since you've been back from spring break, you've been a bitch.

JANE
Takes one to know one.

MARY
I just want to move on with my life.

JANE
It's never over.

MARY
Look, I'm trying to get scholarships and you keep bringing this shit up.

JANE
You run from it.

MARY
Stop picking the scab.

JANE
He died over spring break.

Beat.

JANE

I never got the chance to look him in the eyes and say, I remember. I know what you did.

MARY
(hesitates)

God knows what he did.

JANE

Why didn't God stop him?

Mary doesn't respond.

JANE

Why were we molested? What part of God's plan was that?

MARY

I never said there was a plan.

JANE

That's what we're supposed to buy into.

MARY

I still believe in God.

JANE

What did that little girl do? What did we do? Nothing.

Mary tries to console Jane.

MARY

I think we got dropped off by some shuttle service to earth. Whatever happens while we're waiting to get picked up again—it just happens. Otherwise, there can't be a God, can there?

JANE

Or He's just really shitty at His job.

MARY

You're never gonna win the religion award with that attitude.

JANE

I was so in the running.

Beat.

JANE

I'll probably have to testify when it goes to court. Will you come?

MARY

I'm there.

Lights shift.

PAGING DR. FREUD

Mary is at a desk, with piles of books and papers. Jane enters, just as Mary groans in frustration.

JANE

Um, slept much?

MARY

No. We're were studying *Hamlet* and I was supposed to analyze it using Freud's Oedipus Complex. Stupid honours English. Anyway, I handed in my paper and Mr. McGavin gave me an 89.

JANE

Wow, only an 89?

MARY

Please—that paper deserved a 95. Anyway, when I ask him why I got an 89, he asks me if I read the play *Oedipus Rex*. I tell him the truth: no. And he says if I read the original play and incorporate it into my essay, he'll re-evaluate the grade. But now, I can't find the play anywhere.

JANE

Probably because I filed it correctly—it's actually called *Oedipus Tyrannus. Rex* is actually the Roman name for king. And since the Romans loved to rip off the Greeks... anyway, it's a common mistake.

MARY

Did you just go old school intellectual on me?

JANE

Only for special occasions.

Jane begins to look for the book. Mary stares dumbfounded.

JANE

Here.

MARY

Thanks. You don't happen to remember anything about—

JANE

Are you trying to cheat?

MARY

No more than Cole's Notes will allow.

JANE

It's kind of disgusting, actually. Oedipus tries to avoid this prophecy that says he's going to sleep with his mom, have kids with her and kill his dad.

MARY

Does he?

JANE

It's a tragedy. Of course not. The big finale comes when he actually realizes he slept with his mom and plucks out his own eyes.

MARY

First, ew. Second, now I get it. Freud thinks boys secretly want to displace their dads and be with their moms—hence the Oedipus Complex.

JANE

I think it's just like in Bio. Boys are all about competition and getting their sperm into as many things as possible.

MARY

So he's right—everything is about sex.

JANE

Sex can fun, with the right kind of guy.

MARY

Blaine Richardson is not the right guy.

JANE

He's Mr. Right Now, which is good enough, for now.

MARY
No it's not.

JANE
Mary, are you ever going to just suck it up and lose it?

MARY
When I meet someone I love.

JANE
You know that to meet boys, you actually have to talk to them, right?

MARY
I talk to boys.

JANE
The Mathlete guys don't count.
(putting on a bad German accent)
Sprechen sie Deutsch, Mary?

MARY
You're hilarious.

JANE
Come Mary. Lie down on my couch. Relax.
Mary plays along and lies across the desk.

MARY
That's a horrible German accent, you know.

JANE
Why? Why must you be so defensive?

MARY
It's just the way I am. And you're beginning to sound like the Count from Sesame Street.

JANE
Do you secretly want to have ze sex with ze Count?

MARY
No.
Jane pauses to scribble something down.

JANE

I see. Do you secretly want to have sex with your daddy?

MARY

No.

JANE

Very abnormal. Do you secretly feel like killing *ze Mutter*?

MARY

Not really.

JANE

How strange. Let us talk about *ze* childhood Mary. Is there something about *ze* childhood? Hmm? Something you repress?

MARY

Knock it off.

Mary gets up off the table.

JANE

It was joke.

MARY

I don't want to have sex—that doesn't make me a freak.

JANE

A guy can't get two words out before you shoot him down.

MARY

So? It's just going to lead to the same thing: eventually they'll want sex and I won't. So, why bother?

JANE

Because it's fun. Because we're teenagers. Because—

MARY

How can you let someone, you know?

JANE

No.

You don't get, weirded out?

MARY

Do you?

JANE

I'm a virgin.

MARY

Jane stares in disbelief.

MARY

That stuff doesn't count. It wasn't consensual.

JANE

Fine. But you've made out before.

MARY

Once. With Mitch Ladner.

JANE

You said you liked it.

Mary looks down.

JANE

You didn't like it?

MARY

I just felt really, trapped.

JANE

Did he try to force you?

MARY

God no! He was really nice. I couldn't handle the touching, and stuff.

JANE

How come you never told me?

MARY

Cause you're more experienced.

JANE
Are you calling me a slut?

MARY
No. You don't seem to have a problem—

JANE
Acting like a whore.

MARY
No! You just don't seem to freak out like me.

Beat.

JANE
I just don't let it get to me.

MARY
Do you ever get creeped out?

JANE
Sometimes.

Beat.

MARY
Doesn't it bug you? That you have to try so hard to like it?

Beat.

JANE
I cried, the first couple of times.

MARY
Why didn't you tell me?

JANE
I didn't want to scare you into permanent prudeness.

MARY
Why push it on me when you know it sucks?

JANE
Only the first couple of times. Then you learn to zone out, not think about it.

Gee, that sounds fun.

MARY

It gets better.

JANE

Beat.

MARY

I still don't get it.

JANE

Mary, we're in grade 12. You want to keep your boyfriend, you have sex.

MARY

I don't want a boyfriend.

JANE

Do you want him to win?

MARY

Him who?

JANE

Him. Having sex is normal; not having sex is abnormal. I'd rather be a little messed up the first couple of times then let him ruin me forever.

Beat.

MARY

Do you ever remember *him*, while you're doing it?

JANE

No. Do you?

MARY
(hesitates)

With Mitch.

JANE

Did you tell him?

MARY

No way.

Beat.

MARY

If I loved somebody, maybe it'd be different.

JANE

The only guy who's ever loved me is my dad.

MARY

Hello Freud.

JANE

You're hilarious. I mean, my dad's the only guy who's ever loved me no matter what.

MARY

Too bad he loves your mom more.

JANE

Hey, that's not for you to say.

MARY

You say it all the time.

JANE

Well I'm allowed to. He's my dad.

MARY

How is it any different?

JANE

It just is, okay?

Beat.

JANE

It's okay. I know he loves her more than anyone. That's *real* love.

Mary is silent for a moment.

JANE

What?

MARY
(hesitates)

Do you really want that kind of love?

JANE

Who wouldn't?

Beat.

MARY

I don't think it's right to love somebody more than your kid.

JANE

He loves me.

MARY

He could stand up to your mom more.

JANE

Take it back. My dad is a good dad.

MARY

Forget what I said. Your dad is a really good dad. He always picks us up from movies, takes us camping, doesn't complain when we ask to go to the mall. And he really, really loves you. I know he does.

Beat.

MARY

We cool?

Beat.

JANE

Don't look so sad. I'll still help you.

MARY

Really?

JANE

There were a bunch of secondary sources Mr. O'Brien gave us for drama class. I'll get them from my locker. But you owe me.

MARY

Eternal gratification.

JANE

You're coming to grad with me and Mr. Right Now. We're getting a limo with a bunch of his friends.

MARY

How many secondary sources?

Jane smiles as she waltzes out of the library.
Mary groans again.

Lights.

THE STORY OF THE GIRL WHO CAN'T TELL A STORY

Mary is sitting on her bed. Marija knocks at the door.

MARY

Come in.

MARIJA

I come especially for you.

MARY

You didn't have to.

MARIJA

How was prom? I see Jane leave as I come. She say you have big fun last night.

MARY

Jane always has a good time.

MARIJA

You look 'em pretty last night.

MARY

Whatever.

MARIJA

I no understand. When you little, you think 'em you can do anything. Now you grow up, you think 'em you can do less and less. What happen?

Beat.

MARY

Too many *vilkas*.

MARIJA

What kind of *vilkas*?

MARY

All kinds. Stephanie Drewers and her squadron of idiots. All the boys who only care about one thing.

Beat.

MARY

Maybe there is something wrong with me.

MARIJA

Did I ever tell you story of the man who forget 'em who he is?

MARY

Never believe you are what someone tells you.

MARIJA

What about the girl who think she's an ugly duck—

MARY

That's a children's story grandma.

MARIJA

Well, then, maybe you should tell 'em story.

MARY

I don't know any.

MARIJA

Everybody have 'em story.

MARY

I can't tell a story.

MARIJA

Maybe that you story.

MARY

A story about a girl who couldn't tell a story?

Mary contemplates this for a moment.

MARY

This is stupid.

MARIJA

Go on. Once, there was a girl.

Mary stays silent.

MARIJA

You must be first girl in family who can't tell story. Jesus Maria.

MARY

Fine. Once, there was a girl—

MARIJA

Don't forget. Who tell 'em you this story? Where this girl live? People need 'em details or story seem, how you say 'em, baloney?

MARY

Do you want me to tell this story or not?

MARIJA

I helping you.

MARY

Okay, I tell this to you as my grandma tell to me.

MARIJA

I no tell you this story.

MARY

Grandma!

MARIJA

Relax. This is big fun, ne?

MARY

I tell this to you as my grandma told to me. Once, there was a girl. A girl who'd lost, who'd lost the power to tell stories.

Beat.

MARIJA

Wizard cause 'em?

MARY

No. Not a full-fledged wizard. More like an apprentice.

MARIJA

What apprentice?

MARY

He sort of has power, but he's still learning. Practicing to become an evil wizard.

Beat.

MARIJA

Then what happen?

MARY

He put a spell on the girl.

Beat.

MARIJA

That's it?

MARY

Yes.

MARIJA

How he put spell? How they meet?

MARY

Well, she was playing alone in the park. I mean, the woods.

MARIJA

Like the girl who picked *grybu* alone.

MARY

But this girl wasn't disobeying or anything. These were safe woods, right by her house.

MARIJA

Sometimes woods that seem most safe, have most danger, ne?

Sometimes.

MARY

Beat.

MARIJA

Tell 'em how she meet this young wizard?

MARY

He lived nearby, but nobody knew, that he was an apprentice. He seemed, really nice.

MARIJA

Like *vilkas*. Seem nice, but really something else.

MARY

It was just like that. He kept saying how he wanted to be her friend. He even invited her to his fort.

MARIJA

Fortus?

MARY

Ya, a small one. Not big, or nice.

Beat.

MARIJA

What happen in *fortus*, Mary?

MARY

She tried to get away, but he was stronger. He cast a spell on her.

MARIJA

If so close to home, why she no call for help?

MARY

He said he would lock her away.

MARIJA

Why she no tell?

MARY

I don't know—I just made it up.

Beat.

MARY

Grandma I was just trying to make you happy.

Beat.

MARY

Hey, I never said I could tell a story.

MARIJA

True. Your ending need work.

MARY

You tell lots of stories that end unhappily.

MARIJA

Maybe I like this girl. Maybe she deserve better ending, ne?

MARY

I'll work on it.

Lights shift.

JANE'S SORROW

Mary and Jane sit on a bed.

JANE

How does it feel to be a woman?

MARY

Totally not appropriate.

JANE

Spill it.

MARY

We just came from your dad's funeral.

JANE

It's called distracting myself? Hello.

MARY

It was fine.

JANE
Did you enjoy yourself?

Mary scowls.

JANE
Told ya.

MARY
It was a drunken mistake.

Beat.

MARY
I think he's gay. He cried when he, finished.

JANE
Probably made him the perfect lover. Tender. And nice.

MARY
We weren't in love—it was a waste.

JANE
You can have sex without being in love.

MARY
Never again.

JANE
My grandma used to say the only way to get over a man is to get under another.

Mary stares in disbelief.

MARY
What?

JANE
We should go out.

MARY
What?!

JANE
I don't want to be here, with her.

MARY
We could go to my house. Rent a movie or something.

JANE
I want to go out. Out out.

MARY
Tonight?

JANE
What of it?

MARY
I guess my family just deals with this stuff differently.

JANE
Cause you all love each other.

MARY
Your mom—

JANE
Save it. I'm leaving.

MARY
Okay. Just not too late.

JANE
I'm leaving for Europe in two weeks.

MARY
Study abroad?

JANE
I dropped out of my classes.

MARY
What are you talking about?

JANE
I need to get out of here.

MARY
Our plans? We can't go to U of T to do our MBAs, if you don't get a BA.

JANE

I used my tuition refund to pay for a ticket to Europe.

MARY

What are you going to do for money?

JANE

Dad left me money.

MARY

For school.

JANE

To be happy. And, anyway, I have a work visa for England.

MARY

How long have you been planning this?

JANE

A few months.

MARY

And you kept it from me.

JANE

Because you'd talk me out of it.

MARY

We're best friends.

JANE

Which is why you should be a little bit excited.

MARY

If you don't get a degree, you'll end up—

JANE

Sometimes you have to live it to learn it.

MARY

Oh ya. I hear only the best waitresses go to the school of life.

JANE

Being here with her: it's killing me.

MARY
 You can move into my brother's old room.

JANE
 The ticket is non-refundable.

MARY
 Non-refundable?

JANE
 Don't tell me the practical argument wins out.

Beat.

MARY
 You'll be back by fall?

Jane nods.

MARY
 You're sure?

Jane nods again.

MARY
 You just better send me some post-cards. And phone me. And, you better miss me.

JANE
 It'll be as painful as an amputation. Come with me. Seriously.

MARY
 I've got school.

JANE
 It's only six months. I'll be back before you know it.

Lights shift.

THE HOSPITAL

Mary wanders over toward Jane lying in the hospital bed. Sister Elizabeth approaches, carrying rosary beads.

The father was here.

SISTER ELIZABETH

Good.

MARY

Are you sure there's not someone I could phone?

SISTER ELIZABETH

No.

MARY

I could run to the gift shop. Buy something for you to read.

SISTER ELIZABETH

Mary doesn't respond.

Would you like me to pray with you?

SISTER ELIZABETH

I just want to be left alone.

MARY

Sister Elizabeth gives Mary some space.

How can you be sure?

MARY

Faith.

SISTER ELIZABETH

Even when you see things like this?

MARY

I pray because I don't understand, with the hope that someday I might.

SISTER ELIZABETH

Mary contemplates this.

When I was little, I thought I could talk to God.

MARY

And then?

SISTER ELIZABETH

I grew up.

MARY

You went to Catholic school, right?

SISTER ELIZABETH

Scars are that obvious, huh?

MARY

Did you ever study any C.S. Lewis?

SISTER ELIZABETH

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe.

MARY

A Grief Observed.

SISTER ELIZABETH

We read some of his religious stuff—

MARY

SISTER ELIZABETH

Lewis compared a person in crisis to a man drowning in water. While he struggles to keep his head above water, he fails to notice the rope that's been thrown from the shore.

Sister Elizabeth exits.

Beat.

MARY

I'm drowning.

Lights shift.

THE REUNION

Mary sits at a cafe table sipping coffee. Jane comes in looking around before spotting Mary. Ten years have passed since they've seen each other.

JANE

Mary? Oh my god! Mar!

Jane runs to Mary and ambushes her with an uncomfortable hug.

MARY

Jane. You look amazing.

JANE

Amazing what some Lasik and hair extensions can do, huh?

MARY

I barely recognize you. I didn't really have time to get ready after work.

JANE

It's good to see you.

MARY

Ya.

They sit in awkward silence.

MARY

I'm really tired. How about we rain-check this?

Mary starts to leave.

JANE

Don't go.

MARY

Ten years, and nothing.

JANE

I'm sorry.

Mary gets up from the table.

JANE

Then why'd you come?

MARY

I wanted to see if you were okay. You're okay.

Mary starts to walk away.

JANE

You deserve to know what happened.

MARY

I deserved a best friend that didn't fall off the face of the earth. Good bye, Jane.

JANE

I'm a drunk.

Mary hesitates and looks around the cafe.

MARY

You don't need to make a scene.

JANE

I ended up in Amsterdam. I hit rock bottom two years ago.

MARY

Why didn't you call me?

JANE

Because I figured you probably had your shit together.

Mary continues to exit.

JANE

I was working in pubs—it just snuck up on me. I wanted to call you, but the more time passed, the more embarrassed I got. Can't we just have a do-over?

MARY

We're not kids anymore, Jane.

JANE

We're already here.

MARY

Not good enough.

JANE

You always said to leave the past in the past.

MARY

If you're not going to level with me—

JANE

I was trapped. No job. No money. No friends. So I did what I had to do to get by.

Beat.

JANE

I was prostitute.

Mary is stunned.

JANE

Gonna be okay?

Mary nods.

JANE

I tried saving money, but, my pimp was a pimp. And then one day, there was this college kid from the states. He was really rough. Beat me nearly to death before he passed out in bed.

MARY

I don't need to know everything.

JANE

After he passed out, I pulled out his wallet to get my money—I wasn't sticking around. Except his wallet was full—travellers' cheques, plane ticket, and lots of money. I took 600 bucks and left Amsterdam the next day.

Beat.

JANE

It's a lot to take in.

MARY

A lot to live through.

Beat.

JANE

I'm not looking for you to be my therapist—I already have one, plus AA meetings. I just want a fresh start.

Beat.

MARY

Why didn't you call me once you got to Canada?

JANE

Honestly? I had to get the courage to face you.

Mary laughs.

MARY

I'm not perfect.

JANE

As if.

MARY

I work at a temp agency.

JANE

Well, that must be—

MARY

Pretty much like it sounds.

JANE

It must feel good, helping other people.

Mary just stares Jane down.

JANE

Or not-so-much with the good?

MARY

I have an MBA in Business from U of T. And I'm living with grandma.

JANE

Oh.

MARY

She would have had to go into a nursing home otherwise. But things just didn't jive with my job at the time.

Beat.

JANE

I'm getting married.

MARY

Wow. That's great. Someone who loves you the way your dad loved your mom.

JANE

What?

MARY

When we were little, you used to say—never mind. Congratulations.

JANE

It gets better. I want you to be my maid of honour.

MARY

Oh. Jane. I don't know. That's a—big commitment.

JANE

You're an overachiever.

MARY

Reformed.

JANE

We'll have some laughs, mock the ugly dress I make you wear, and—

MARY

What about your cousins?

JANE

I don't talk to them anymore. And mom's gone. Cancer. Six months ago.

MARY

I'm sorry.

JANE

I think we made our peace. She was so hopped up on pain meds at the end, she thought I was her mother. She told me she loved me and was sorry for disappointing me. Then she asked me to look after her little Jane.

(pause)

I think with someone like that, it's as good as it gets.

Beat.

JANE

So, you'll be my maid of honour?

MARY

Jane—

JANE

I only need three things. Throw my bachelorette party—since I don't drink, I'm thinking one of those pottery studio parties would be fun. Help me with the very few invitations I have to send out. And help me write my vows.

Beat.

JANE

I don't have anyone left but you.

Mary groans.

JANE

It's four months away. If it turns out you can't stand me, you can quit.

MARY

Can't I just come to the wedding?

JANE

Need I bring up the vow?

MARY

I'll help you write your vows.

JANE

No, *the* vow.

It takes Mary a few moments before it clicks in.

MARY

Oooohhhh...

JANE

Yeeesssss... It was a blood oath. On solstice.

But—

MARY

We promised to be sisters.

JANE

It takes a Catholic to guilt a Catholic.

MARY

So you'll do it.

JANE

I'll try.

MARY

Jane ambushes Mary with another hug.
Mary is more receptive this time.

Lights shift.

WEDDING DRESS SHOPPING

Mary rushes in. Jane is in a dressing room changing.

MARY

Sorry I'm late. Traffic sucked.

Mary begins to look around. She seems a little anxious.

JANE

No worries. It's only a final fitting.

Jane comes out from the dressing stall with flourish. She's wearing sunglasses.

MARY

Wow! You look great, but what's with the shades of rock star?

Jane takes the glasses off.

JANE

We got rear-ended. The stupid air bag didn't deploy. I look like Sloth from the Goonies.
What am I going to do?

Eye patch?

MARY

Jane glares at Mary

MARY

The wedding is two weeks away. It'll clear by then.

JANE

You're probably right. Now, be a good bride's wench and help me get this veil on.

Mary does as she's bid. They look at Jane in a mirror.

MARY

You look just like a bride should look, except for the black eye.

JANE

Here, try one on.

MARY

No, that's okay.

JANE

It'll be good practice for when you get married.

Jane refuses to listen and pops a veil on Mary. Mary rips the veil off her head and throws it to the ground.

Mary starts to have a panic attack.

JANE

Mar, are you okay?

MARY

I'm not ready for this.

JANE

Don't get all worked up.

Mary is hyper-ventilating.

JANE

Someday, you'll meet someone who sweeps you off your feet. Then it'll be your day.

MARY

I already had my day!

Jane is stunned.

MARY

And my divorce.

JANE

This was a fresh start. No secrets.

MARY

It was a huge mistake. I like to pretend it never happened.

Jane's cell phone rings.

JANE

It's Ian.

MARY

Take it.

Mary begins to rummage around her purse for a pill box. She tries to hide this from Jane.

JANE

I don't need to take it.

MARY

You should because I don't want to talk about this.

Jane's cell phone starts ringing again.

JANE

It doesn't matter. I wouldn't have made you be part of this if I—

MARY

Look, it's totally okay. The future Mr. Jane Moss is waiting.

Mary moves away from Jane. Mary tries to

hide the fact that she's taking a pill box out of her purse. Jane answers the phone.

JANE
(on the phone)

Hey babe. Sorry, in the middle of my fitting. Yes.

Mary pops the pill under her mouth. While finishing her call, Jane catches her.

JANE
(on the phone)

Okay. I'll be home as soon as I can. But... but... fine. I don't know, a hour? Look, I've got. Not now, okay? I'll talk to you soon.

Jane hangs up.

JANE

What is going on with you?

MARY

I get panicked. These help.

JANE

Why didn't you tell me?

MARY

There's nothing to tell. I met a man and got married. He turned out to be a selfish child and we got divorced. The end.

JANE

Oh, that old story.

MARY

Talking about it isn't going to change what happened.

Beat.

MARY

I'm over it.

JANE

Pop another pill.

MARY

My doctor prescribed them.

Jane stands firm with expectation.

MARY

When it became clear that grandma needed extra help, I suggested that we move in. Look after her.

Beat.

MARY

That was just the deal breaker. Things had been falling apart for a while. Then one day, I got up and he was gone.

Beat.

JANE

How did your family take it?

MARY

They're Catholic. The only one who didn't mind was grandma. She always said I had picked a "no-good-nik."

(pause)

I was such an idiot.

JANE

You were in love.

Beat.

JANE

Have you tried seeing a therapist, maybe instead of the pills?

MARY

When do I have time? I work 40, 50 hours a week. Look after grandma. I just have to plug through.

JANE

Does grandma know you're taking these?

MARY

Don't we have an appointment with the florist?

JANE

I can take care of it.

MARY

I love flowers. Besides, I can pick up something for grandma.

Jane nods and heads back in the stall to change. Mary pops another pill.

Lights shift.

THE BACHELORETTE PARTY

Mary tries to come quietly into her home.

It's smoky. A fire alarm goes off.

Mary runs into another room. We hear the commotion of pots and pans being overturned.

Marija enters the room with her cane.

MARIJA

Who there? I old lady, but I still fight 'em.

She waves her cane in the air and almost hits Mary as she enters.

MARY

Grandma, you left the stove on again.

MARIJA

I no use stove.

MARY

I made sure everything was off before I left for the party.

MARIJA

I no use stove.

MARY

Your teapot's sitting next to the stove. It has an unused tea bag in it.

It do? But I don't—

MARIJA

It's fine. We're all okay.

MARY

Jane with you?

MARIJA

Let's just get to bed.

MARY

Mary tries to guide her out of the kitchen.
Marija stands firm.

MARIJA

Always, I have to pull 'em teeth with you.

MARY

Ian stormed into the pottery studio, demanded that Jane come home.

MARIJA

I think 'em rule was no men at bachelor party.

MARY

Bachelorette party. And yes, that's the rule.

MARIJA

This first time he do 'em like this?

Mary shakes her head.

MARIJA

What he do?

MARY

I don't know, for sure. She just seems to have a lot of accidents. If I confront her, I'm scared she'll—

MARIJA

Truth always find you.

MARY

If I kill this for her—

MARIJA

What if he kill 'em first? *Vilkas* can't hide true nature for long.

MARY

I know.

MARIJA

The only cure for *vilkas* is death.

MARY

I can't kill him.

MARIJA

No! Kill love. Maybe only way to save 'em.

Mary is silent.

MARIJA

No more we talk 'em like two witches in night. It bad luck. We will pray for God to find a way.

Lights shift.

THE TRUTH FINDS MARY

Marija is asleep in a hospital bed. Mary comes in with a box. She begins placing objects around the room.

MARIJA

Mary. What you do?

MARY

I brought some things in to cheer you up.

MARIJA

Did doctor say when I go home?

Mary grabs a picture frame.

MARY

Remember this? When we went to Buchart Gardens?

Mary continues to fumble in the box.

Mary, when I go home?

MARIJA

You should talk to dad.

MARY

I talk to you.

MARIJA

Beat.

MARY

Grandma, you shattered your knee cap. And the physio—it's not working like they thought.

MARIJA

I try hard to walk 'em.

MARY

No one's saying you're not, it's just not helping you heal.

MARIJA

I be fine when I go home.

MARY

Grandma, you're not going to be able to walk again.

Beat.

MARIJA

I know that. I get one of those, electric chairs.

MARY

A scooter?

MARIJA

Yes. Like on TV.

MARY

The house is really old, grandma. A wheel chair or a scooter wouldn't fit.

MARIJA

We hire construction man.

MARY

Grandma, you need someone to care for you. To help you change and wash.

MARIJA

You help 'em.

MARY

I try. But when I'm not there, sometimes you forget things. You let that man into the house.

MARIJA

He say he from phone company.

MARY

If I hadn't come home when I did—

MARIJA

We get nurse.

MARY

We can't afford a nurse, even for while I'm at work.

MARIJA

You saying I no go home.

Beat

MARIJA

This why you bring me my things. So you finally get 'em what you want. You get house to self.

MARY

We have to sell it.

MARIJA

Sell? You grandpa and me work whole lives for that house.

MARY

Right now, because you're hurt, the government pays. But soon, they won't pay anymore.

MARIJA

I have old age pension.

MARY
It won't be enough.

MARIJA
I can be better.

MARY
Grandma, please. I don't want this either.

MARIJA
If you had taken grandma to bank when she ask 'em, none of this happen.

MARY
You're right. I should have taken you when you asked.

Mary breaks down.

MARIJA
Shh. Shh. I not mad at you. I mad at grandma.

MARY
I should have phoned dad to take you.

MARIJA
I could do same. You and me, we like two peas. We no want to see truth, until too late.

Marija continues to soothe Mary.

MARIJA
It not you fault. I like mad woman. Stay home all day. All I think 'em go to bank, go to bank.

(pause)
I always say you can't hide from truth. I should know better.

Beat.

MARIJA
Did I ever tell 'em story of my first husband?

MARY
You and grandpa met in your village.

MARIJA
Not grandpa.

MARY

Seriously?

MARIJA

It so long ago, sometime I think it just another story.

MARY

Dad's never said—

MARIJA

Daddy don't know. I never tell 'em no one. Except you grandpa and my daddy.

MARY

But you married grandpa when you were eighteen.

MARIJA

He called Ericus. Very handsome. But my daddy, he no trust 'em. So, we run away together.

Mary nods.

MARIJA

Ericus and I never marry in church—I only 17. So, we move to Kaunus and pretend. At first, we so happy; then one day, I burn some soup.

I laugh. But Ericus no think it funny. He slap me for wasting food. And then, nothing I do is right.

One day, on street, I see one of my cousins Vyteutus. He tell 'em me my *teva* very sick. I tell Ericus. He say my job to look after him, not *teva*.

I don't know what to do. I so shamed. I pray so hard. I ask 'em God, forgive me. I beg 'em to give me chance to get away.

But Ericus knows I want to leave 'em. He watch me, all times. But one night, God grants my prayer. Ericus pass 'em out—vodka. I sneak away, like *vilkas* in night.

I walk 'em miles and miles. I cry so much. My feet bleed 'em, and blister, but I no stop.

When I reach village, I see *teva*. Jesus Maria, he so thin. Weak.

I kneel 'em beside him. I cry 'em. I beg 'em to wake up. And then, God give 'em miracle. *Teva* feel my tears. He open his eyes. Squeeze 'em my hand. *Teva* so happy to see me.

Beat.

MARIJA

I meet grandpa after. He chase 'em me for months. He love me so much, I no want secret between us. I decide to tell 'em truth about Ericus, even if it make 'em love me no more.

MARY

What did he say when you told him?

MARIJA

He very sad for me. But he say he love me. He ask to marry and promise to be good husband. He was.

Beat.

MARY

And you never said anything to anyone?

Marija grins.

MARIJA

Where you think 'em *vilkas* stories come from?

Lights shift.

WRITING THE VOWS

Jane is at the kitchen table with various books spread out.

Mary enters.

JANE

Is everything okay? You said you were just popping over to the hospital, and you've been gone for—

MARY

I told her.

JANE

How'd she take it.

MARY

Bad, at first. Then she came around.

JANE

Listen, I've pretty much got the vows written, so I should be heading home.

Mary blocks her path.

MARY

I had a conversation with her. I don't want you to marry Ian.

JANE

Get out of my way.

MARY

My timing is for shit, but I can't pretend everything is okay. It's not.

JANE

I'm not listening to this.

MARY

I don't want any more bad things to happen to you.

JANE

What's that supposed to mean?

MARY

He hits you.

JANE

No. He doesn't.

MARY

Not on purpose, anyway.

JANE

I push him, when I should leave him alone. I know better.

MARY

He should know better.

JANE

He's been seeing a counsellor.

Mary exposes Jane's bruised collar bone.

It's working like a charm.

MARY

He doesn't mean to.

JANE

Yes, he does.

MARY

When I had my relapse, he was there.

JANE

You caught him screwing around—he practically caused your relapse.

MARY

Who are you to judge?

JANE

I'm a mess. But I'm trying do better. I'm trying to tell you the truth.

MARY

Beat.

JANE

I can't just leave him at the alter.

MARY

We'll make a plan.

JANE

This isn't like when we were kids. We can't just dork out a plan and make it happen.

MARY

Why not?

JANE

It's not that easy. It's Ian's place, Ian's car—

MARY

Stay with me. Take grandma's old room. Borrow her old car.

JANE

The wedding's tomorrow.

MARY

I can start texting right now. They'll know by morning.

JANE

I have to tell him first.

MARY

Text him.

JANE

He deserves more than that.

MARY

We'll get the police to go with you tomorrow. Stay here tonight.

JANE

That'll just make it worse.

MARY

It'll make it safe. Come on, you were Simon the Safety Bear.

JANE

This is nuts.

MARY

Marrying him—that's nuts. We just need to follow the plan.

JANE

Stay with you tonight; get the police to escort me back there tomorrow.

MARY

Exactly. We'll get your stuff and get out.

Beat.

MARY

Were you strong enough to sober up?

JANE

Yes.

MARY

Then this should seem easy.

Beat.

I'm sick of being a failure.

JANE

MARY

This is succeeding.

JANE

I don't know.

MARY

You said you wanted someone to love you as much as your dad loved your mom. Is Ian really that guy?

Jane reluctantly shakes her head.

Beat.

JANE

Sometimes, I feel like, like *he* won.

MARY

Sometimes, I think about who I'd be, if it had never happened.

JANE

Except it did.

MARY

I know.

Beat.

JANE

You've never told anyone?

Mary shakes her head.

JANE

Maybe it's time.

MARY

Maybe.

Beat.

MARY

We should try to sleep. We'll get up early. Get a police escort lined up. I'll start texting guests tonight.

JANE

Tomorrow morning. I don't want him getting wind of this before then.

MARY

Good idea.

Beat.

MARY

Everything's going to be alright.

JANE

I know.

Lights shift.

THE GOODBYE

Jane is lying in bed. Sister Elizabeth joins Mary.

MARY

She's not going to wake up.

Sister Elizabeth shakes her head.

Beat.

MARY

It's my fault.

Beat.

MARY

I tried to get her away from him. I thought I had.

Beat.

MARY

She snuck out while I was sleeping. I didn't know until I woke up to a phone call and, then, it was too late.

The devil you know.

SISTER ELIZABETH

Beat.

MARY

She didn't deserve this.

SISTER ELIZABETH

No one does.

Beat.

MARY

I want to sign those papers.

SISTER ELIZABETH

You don't have to.

MARY

She'd want to make a difference. It's just—I don't know if I can let her go.

SISTER ELIZABETH

She's your sister?

Mary nods.

SISTER ELIZABETH

You'll find a way.

Sister Elizabeth guides Mary over to the hospital bed. Mary sits down. Sister Elizabeth gives Mary some privacy.

MARY

Half of me keeps thinking you'll just get up, like Lazarus.

Mary looks for some sign from Jane.

MARY

But that was just a story, right?

We had a plan. You should have just stuck to the plan.

You deserved a mom that loved you. You deserved a grandpa that was kind. You deserved, to live.

I've been thinking about grandma's stories today. About *vilkas*. She always says that once you're bit, you need to keep an eye on the wolf inside—keep it from clawing its way out.

But it's not enough, to watch. You have to make peace with the wolf. That's the only way.

Mary leans down and kisses Jane on the forehead.

MARY
(to sister Elizabeth)

I'm ready.

Lights out.

THE END