

THE WAVES

by

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**A Thesis
presented to
The University of Guelph**

**In partial fulfilment of requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts
in
Theatre Studies**

Guelph, Ontario, Canada

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ABSTRACT

THE WAVES

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University of Guelph, 2016

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The Waves is a two-woman play based on three generations of birth stories exploring taboos about the laboring female body, and the silence and isolation many women experience post-partum. The play explores birth and early motherhood through text, movement, and a vocal score that stretches the boundaries of conventional vocal expression (talking, whispering, screaming, singing) into territory that is familiar but not often heard on stage: grunts and growls, broken clicks and howls, sighs, screams and operatic song.

The Waves is dedicated to my husband Michael Hopkins, and my daughters Maewyn and Eden Quigley-Hopkins.

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CHAPTER 1

Woman Must Write Herself

Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies-for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text-as into the world and into history-by her own movement (Cixous 875).

I want women to learn the 'ugly' in their voices, give them permission to scream. I want us to decomodify our bodies and souls and sounds, consciously identifying with the full range of our music making, from beautiful to terrifying. I want us to no longer have to please or to be our own lovely product (Krucker).

As long as birth...remains an experience of passively handing over our minds and our bodies to male authority and technology, other kinds of social change can only minimally change our relationship to ourselves, to power, and to the world outside our bodies (Rich 185).

During the first encounter with my midwife she told me that women are very quiet when they give birth in hospital. I told her that I am a performer and voice teacher and that I would use my breath and my voice to help me through labour. After giving birth to my daughter, I discovered the truth of what she claimed and was shocked. Why was it so quiet in the labour ward? Where were the laboring women's voices?

I am interested in bringing voice to that which is unuttered including taboos about the laboring female body, and the silence and isolation I experienced during the first few

months after the births of my daughters. I am interested in how and why women's voices are missing from the labour ward and how this silence sometimes persists throughout early motherhood and beyond, a silence that can be inherited for generations by daughters and granddaughters. What does the silence into which my daughters were born say about the world they are inheriting? What does the isolation I experienced say about the value of mothering in our society? What would I teach my daughters about being a woman, about their sexuality, and about the power of their bodies and voices?

For my masters thesis project I created a play that investigates these questions through text, movement and sound, and a vocal score that stretches the boundaries of conventional vocal expression (talking, whispering, screaming, singing) into territory that is familiar but not often heard on stage: grunts and growls, broken clicks and howls, sighs, screams and operatic song. Entitled *The Waves*, the script follows the story of the main character Lise, from the birth of her two babies through the tedious detail of one day in her life as a new mother. The play includes the internal structure of Lise's day, from the routine of changing diapers and preparing food contrasted with external influences such as her relationships to her mother and her husband, the daily news, and even the weather.

My creative methodology included an exploration of what might be buried beneath the surface of speech through sounds made by the human voice. With *The Waves*, I wanted to write a feminist play that did not follow a masculine structure. My approach was to move away from language and into the world of sound. Where words

can sometimes fail to express the depths of an emotion, or the subtext behind a big thought, the voice can express layers of meaning and can indicate a person's musicality, culture, history, and pre-verbal origins (both the human baby, and also other early evolutionary beginnings such as chimps and bonobos, for example). "The voice is a holistic imprint of a person's biology, personal history, culture and environment" (Overland).

As an actor, singer and voice teacher, my professional development over the past decade has included in-depth study in a variety of approaches to voice, including the work of Roy Hart (student of Alfred Wolfsohn whose interest in the voice was sparked when he heard the sounds made in the trenches by dying soldiers in Nazi Germany), Catherine Fitzmaurice (who's focus has been to explore ways of reducing tension in the body in order to find greater expression in the voice) and Fides Krucker (whose approach is rooted in classical opera training including Bel Canto). For *The Waves* I approached my writing as an extended vocal exploration that allowed me to go beyond what words can do into territory that has the ability to explore a more expansive representation of a woman's experience of labour and early motherhood through the character of Lise.

1. Roy Hart / Alfred Wolfsohn

“When I speak of singing, I do not consider this to be an artistic exercise, but the possibility, and the means to recognize oneself, and to transform this recognition into conscious life” (Wolfsohn).

Alfred Wolfsohn believed “that man had within him all the elements of male and female, ranging from the highest heights to the deepest depths in colour and expression...he believed that a person could have a voice unrestricted by particular registers that could express all human emotions” (Günther).

Wolfsohn’s approach included the exploration of an imaginary life or the singer’s own dream world as a way to connect with sound. For example, while a singer might be engaged in matching pitches produced by a piano, she would also actively imagine that she was five times bigger than her actual size. This imaginary exploration would enable the singer to sing as though it was a creative and embodied exploration as opposed to an intellectual exercise (wherein a singer would hear a pitch produced by a piano, think the pitch, and then match the pitch).

In this way, throughout *The Waves*, I have interwoven a true story wherein I nearly drowned, about 10 years ago off the coast of Mexico. The story itself provides a rich metaphor for becoming a mother: labour is like being swept up in a riptide, an inescapable force pulling at the body where no amount of will or strength can save the swimmer, the only option being to surrender. I used imagery from the drowning story in improvisational vocal explorations to create some of the soundscape. Extended experimentation in this vein led me to explore sounds a swimmer might hear

underwater, including the calls and songs of subaquatic life. Whale sounds emerged as a productive sonic metaphor throughout the piece. When words fail her, Lise's text breaks into whale clicks and broken sounds, and by the end of the play, she finds herself seduced by the song of imaginary whales which threaten to lull her to sleep and abandon her babies on an icy beach.

2. Fitzmaurice Voicework®

“As your voice vibrates more fully through your whole body, it involves more of you and it impacts more of the hearer's body. Just as two strings of the same length that are next to each other can impact each other. If one is made to vibrate, the other will also vibrate. It's called sympathetic vibration. So, if your body is vibrating everywhere, the audience will, in hearing it, vibrate sympathetically or, rather, empathetically, with you. That's a key, key thing in voice work. And it's why people love working in live theatre and why people love to go to live theatre. Because when the voice is not amplified, and the audience doesn't have to hear it through a square box, where the vibration would be limited, they can hear your body by feeling your body's vibrations. You emit sound vibrations towards the audience and that touches them, literally” (Fitzmaurice Interview 3).

Fitzmaurice Voicework® is a somatic approach to voice exploration that includes the inducement of tremors: uncontrolled shiver-like oscillations through a practitioner's body. This tremor work, called destructuring in Fitzmaurice Voicework® arouses the Autonomic Nervous System that heightens a person's self-awareness and intensifies

physical sensations while encouraging whole-body oxygenation, improved vocal production, and inspired imagination. Destructuring is useful as a whole body vocal warm-up for actor preparation, and it can also be used in the creation of text as the practitioner becomes more deeply connected to the subconscious. Vibrant imagery and poetic text are often produced by a trembling body.

As a part of my writing process, I wanted to develop a daily physical practice that would enliven the body so that the writing was not just a conscious emptying of my brain, but a practice in embodied listening that could include an exploration into the subconscious mind. I used Destructuring both as a daily warm-up to bring my whole self into the room while writing, and I also used some of the tremor positions to create text for *The Waves*. The majority of text that made it into the thesis draft of the script includes broken poetic language, repeated text, and vocal sound-scores. For example, I wanted to find a way to describe what it might sound like in the womb. I explored an ‘open-book’ tremor position. Lying on my back with a zafu-pillow under my pelvis so that my pelvic floor is slightly elevated, and my legs extended in the air, slightly tilted toward my head, falling on either side of my trunk. In this position there is significant energy in the chest because the internal organs are slightly pushed in that direction, and it becomes easier to feel the sensation of the heartbeat through the chest, and even sometimes the pulse of the heartbeat in the throat. From this position, with an awareness of muscular release into gravity, and paying attention to an opening of the throat, I played with externalizing the internal sensations and sounds the tremor

induced. I recorded the process on video, and from the recording I built a simple vocal score that repeats throughout the play.

LISE: The sound of my heartbeat

she makes the sound of her heartbeat on a 'ha—ha" sound

LISE: Our breath in unison

she makes a voiced inhale

She makes another voiced inhale followed by the sound of a heartbeat "ha-ha" for a few moments (Waves 7).

3. Fides Krucker

I want women to taste the fineness of their nervous systems by giving voice to moan, groan, sigh whisper, whine, screech, holler. Women singing from upper and lower mouth; these mouths making us real in this world...staking territory, calling for a mate, protecting offspring, sounding alarm, singing for the sake of song making, thriving creatively, working meaningfully, migrating, making community. What a fine weave it takes to yield and to aggress. Would we hold duality more easily if we had the temerity to be more animal than domestic?
(Krucker)

I studied Bel Canto singing (operatic singing) with Fides Krucker for more than eight years. Her approach to sound making is deeply ingrained in my body, and in the past few years, Fides' writing has also profoundly influenced my own work as a performer and voice teacher. Teaching mostly women, Fides actively seeks to unbind cleaned-up 'pretty' sounds by seducing the whole voice into the room: the messy, ugly, ecstatic, angry, soft and beautiful sounds that make-up the female human voice.

A person's voice is emotion laid bare. Coming from the Autonomic Nervous System, it is the perfect instrument of self-betrayal, of exposure. Women come to me every day for singing lessons, some have lost their voices through tension or the desire to do well, the need to measure up or to become someone they are not. Some no longer feel any pleasure when they sing and some have never sung but always wanted to and had a hunch they could. Some even say they want their voices to stop betraying them! So strong are their social instincts that they would rather disguise the truth and fit in (ibid).

My impulse to look at silence in the labour ward shifted when I began to play with song and sound during improvisations for the character of Lise. I discovered that offering the audience silence in labour might not be as effective as offering sound - big, 'ugly', full sound. Instead of staging 'what's so', I wanted to offer a 'what if' with the character of Lise. What if a woman could be powerful during labour, through sound.

She has a building strong contraction – she makes cracking “ah” sounds, and voices fricatives ‘th’ and ‘f’; she moans deep throated vowels like oh’s and ee’s.

She becomes a wolf perhaps. She pants and growls and licks herself.

Silence.

A final contraction that turns into a sustained high pitched scream. A clear unbroken sound. She falls to the floor.

Silence (Waves 4).

As a mother of two small children, I am parenting during a time of so-called

'crisis in modern parenting'¹. While social media can sometimes provide a sense of connection, through direct advertising on social media sites it also inundates with advice from self-styled experts who claim that I've got it all wrong and am ruining my children's futures. Through the voice of Lise, I wanted to bring to the stage a raw representation of an overwhelmed, isolated, and uncertain mother. The long tones of a lonely whale echo-locating her pod, contrasted with the screams and wailing of Lise's children provides a tension that permeates the text.

LILA: Ruby is

RUBY: cryyyyyyyyyiiiiing.

LISE: Roooooooby.

RUBY: Whaaaaaaaaaaaaa!

LISE: We're cooooooooooming.

RUBY: Whaaaaaaaaaaaaa!

LISE: Ruuuuuuuuuuuuuuuubeeeee here we come!

RUBY: Waaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!

LISE: I try to set Lila on the ground but she hangs from me.

RUBY: Whaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!

LISE: I pick Ruby up out of the crib -

RUBY: Whaaaaaa-

¹Jenner
Senior
Gulli

LISE: Her crying stops immediately (*Waves* 8).

...

Silence. Waves much louder. LISE becomes a whale. She sings a whale song. It becomes operatic. Haunting. Otherworldly. Her sounds can include the sound of building waves, the sound of screaming under water, the sound of water being pulled from the sand. Acoustic instrumentation could be used to accompany, but the waves might also be enough and should be played throughout. By the end of the wordless opera the sound should be almost deafening, so that when the sound goes out she stops singing the contrast of silence and stillness is substantial.

Silence. Stillness. High pitched sound.

LILA: *escalating whispers* Mama. I'm cold. It's cold mama (*Waves* 27).

4. Birth / Motherhood / Oral Traditions

the desecration of women indicate(s) the failure of human beings to honour and protect life and this failing, if we d(o) not correct it, ...will be the end of us all. I do not think I am being extreme. When you rape, beat, maim, mutilate, burn, bury, and terrorize women, you destroy the essential life energy on the planet. You force what is meant to be open, trusting, nurturing, creative, and alive to be bent, infertile, and broken (Enslar xxxii).

I spoke with my mother and my grandmother before writing the character of Mother for *The Waves*, to have their perspectives on how institutional births have changed over the past sixty years and to flesh out the Mother's birth story. I wanted to

provide an actant that would contrast and put into question Lise's insistence that she knew what she was doing, that she wanted a natural childbirth, and that she could do it on her own. I did not expect the details my mother shared with me.

Over the years my mother has told me bits and pieces of all of her stories of giving birth. She's told me about her water breaking, about cleaning her floors in labour, and about my father being able to be in the room for my birth after being forbidden to attend to her for her other three deliveries. When we sat down to record what she could remember, she shared as many details as she could, and she told her stories with a calm, matter-of-fact delivery. We laughed as she told them. When I later transposed the stories onto paper, I was shocked by the words she used to describe her experience. It occurred to me that my mother's birth stories were not unlike a description of a violation, of rape. It is true that she agreed to be in the hospital and cared for by her doctors, but she wasn't asked if she wanted medication, if she consented to an episiotomy or to be shaved. She was never asked if her baby could be taken from her after the birth, and brought back to her only for feedings a few times daily. She was never asked how she wanted to deliver her baby, or who she wanted in attendance.

LISE: They shaved you

MOTHER: Yes

So they could see

LISE: *shakes her head.*

MOTHER: The doctor needed to see!

So I was in stirrups

on my back

legs straight in the air for all the world

And then they flipped me right over

For the epidural

LISE: Did they ask you if you wanted any of that?

MOTHER: of course not.

You didn't ask questions

They'd flip you over and even though you'd be having a strong contraction

They'd put that needle in your spine

And you would lie there perfectly still and take it because it was the best way

(Waves 11)

...

MOTHER: Yes. They always did that

A routine, they said.

A routine cut.

From the vagina almost to the anus.

I remember the big round mirror on the ceiling

Looking up and watching

The scalpel

Cutting

a straight long line

so much blood

But I didn't feel it

Because

the epidural

And I remember feeling this foreign feeling

Because I was bleeding but I couldn't feel anything (12)

With Lise's mother's death, I wanted to highlight the lack of multigenerational involvement in the birth process and in early motherhood in this country. The birth industry in Canada has changed significantly over the past century. At the beginning of the 19th century, labour became a medical condition for which women were treated. Medical crisis can certainly occur during the birth process, but birth itself is not a medical condition. And though there has been considerable change in the birth process in the past sixty years, we still have a long way to go to ensure that women have a voice in the labour ward. Most women have not heard the details of their mothers' birth stories and mothers and grandmothers are often not present to support, encourage or counsel daughters and granddaughters during labour and birth (as they would have been a little more than a century ago). For a variety of reasons, women are often isolated and uninformed when making decisions about the birth process and early motherhood and this has not changed in sixty years.

Women need advocates during the birth process, support after they give birth, and we need to be educated about the history and current standards for hospital vs. home births. What I hope to achieve with *The Waves* is straightforward: to encourage women to speak about their birth stories so that we can learn from one another; to

unearth taboos and give voice to a laboring female body and a struggling new mother; to highlight the effects of isolating, infantilizing and desexualizing mothers, which can have grave consequences both for mothers and their children.

LISE: What were your births like?

MOTHER: For your brother, I remember I craved oranges

It's the only time I can remember having a real craving

So your father bought me a whole bag full

All the way from China

And I ate them all up!

He didn't go to China

The oranges

Singing Suzanne takes you down

So when he came home from China

I was washing the kitchen floor

I knew we'd have guests,

people would want to see

the baby

And I wanted a clean house.

Can you believe it? Who cares? But that was me.

So I was on my hands and knees

And every once in a while a strong contraction would come

She lets out a low moan in imitation of a contraction and the moan sound bleeds into the following text until I knew it was time to go to the hospital (11).

THE WAVES

LISE. Thirties or forties.

MOTHER, MIDWIFE and RECEPTIONIST played by one actor.

RUBY and LILA's voices can be done by the actor who plays LISE and sometimes the actor who plays MOTHER.

The actor playing MOTHER might be on stage throughout the whole piece until the very last scene.

Baby blankets and clothes and socks cover the floor completely. LISE can be folding these throughout the play. Ruby and Lila can sometimes be actualized by holding the blankets like babies or with a piece of clothing.

The scene changes are often dramatic and quick, moving the piece in time and space.

Sound, both recorded and vocal are critical actors in the play.

SCENE ONE

Sound of waves. First in darkness. Soft, quiet. The sound builds and lights slowly come up on Lise.

LISE: I am standing at the shoreline.

Waves reaching no further than my mid-thigh.

I'm shocked by the strength of the ocean

The push and pull of the waves

Each rush

weightlessness

And release

gravity

And suddenly

I'm pulled right off my feet.

I stand up.

Do it all over again.

Waves up to mid-thigh.

Right off my feet.

Stand up.

Off my feet.

Up.

Off.

She falls to the floor.

SCENE TWO

LISE: David. Wake up. The baby.

Wake up, David! I'm having contractions!

She pants. A small contraction.

Pause.

LISE: I haven't told you this,
But

I've been
making
trips.

In secret.

Pause.

To the park.

And the community centre.

To watch them.

Pause.

David,

These mothers are not what you would expect.

You see them and you overlook them.

You see them and you think

Oh

there is a gentle mother

with her gentle baby

doing gentle things

But it's not like that.

A building contraction throughout the following:

These mothers

Could tear you apart limb by limb

If you threatened what's theirs.

Like Artemis

Warriors.
 They would stand in the way of a speeding train
 split the ocean in two
 To defend
 To Protect
 Their offspring.

These mothers
 are
 Superhuman.
 Giants.
 Their bodies stretched
 a whole universe
 for another human being
 Their bodies house and feed and shelter.

They
 are Athenian.
 Engineers
 Builders
 Weavers
 Of nests.
 on sidewalks, in parks, in cars, airplanes elevators
 public toilets
 Wherever they might find themselves, home.

Their strollers
 Chariots
 Pulled *contraction crescendo* by white geeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee

Silence as contraction subsides, stillness.

These mothers
 Are Graces.
 Their love is
 Boundless.
 Deeper than the ocean's floor
 More profound than
 the unending
 depths of the earth

She has a building strong contraction – she makes cracking “ah” sounds, and voiced fricatives ‘th’, ‘f’; she moans deep throated vowels like oh’s and ee’s. She becomes a wolf. She pants and growls and licks herself.

Silence.

A final contraction that turns into a sustained high pitched scream. A clear unbroken sound. She falls to the floor.

Silence.

SCENE THREE

Tinny piano music. She sings and hums along from time to time. Birds might chirp. Lighting should be fresh and lovely – pinks, maybe. Warm. She has a blanket in her arms: a baby. She sings funny Valentine to her baby like a lullaby.

LISE: My funny Valentine
Sweet comic Valentine
You make me smile
With my heart

Your looks are laughable
Unphotographable
Yet you're my favourite
Work of art

Is your figure less than Greek
Is your mouth
A little weak
When you open it to speak
Are you smart

Don't change a hair for me
Not if you really care for me

Stay
little Valentine
Stay

Each day is valentines
Day.

Music off.

Hello little Lila.
Hello. Hi! Hello.
Oops! Spit up. *She laughs a Snow White laugh. Wipes the baby's face.*

LISE: What if the ba-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-

MOTHER: Lise, there must be a broken connection.

LISE: What if I c-c-c-c-c-c-c-c-c-c-c-c-a-a-a –

MOTHER: Lise. I'm sorry. Hang up and I will try again. I can't be there -

LISE: What if it co-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-

The screen goes blank.

LISE: Mum. Mum. Mama –

SCENE SIX

Sound of waves.

The current is strong
And each time a wave pulls away
My legs give out
I stay close to the shoreline
But I cannot resist the pull.

Falls to the floor.

Waves off.

SCENE SEVEN

Silence. LISE lays on the floor, on blankets. The voices of Ruby and Lila can be done by the MOTHER if she is onstage, or by the actor playing LISE.

LISE: *Loud whisper.*

This morning I wake up at 4am.
This is the last time the baby nurses
Then Lila comes into my bedroom
at 6.
She wiggles around until we are as close as possible,
her forehead on my chin.
She's twitchy and awake while I nod in and out of sleep.

Pause

Ruby is on the other side of me
I'm in a twist.

Boob in Ruby's mouth
 the rest of me
 stretching toward Lila.
 Her arm up my sleeve so she can stroke my skin.

Pause.

We lie like this for what feels like
 Hooooooooooooooooours
 She's awake
 But so quiet and still
 I wonder if there is some part of her
 That remembers
 The sound of my heartbeat – *she makes the sound of her heartbeat on a 'ha—ha' sound*

Our breath in unison *she makes a voiced inhale.*

She makes the sound of an inhale followed by the sound of a heartbeat (ha-ha) for a few moments.

And then the baby makes a
(she makes the sound of the noise as she says the word noise) noise
 And I realize she isn't beside me
 Where's Ruby?
 and Lila shoots up

LILA: "Mama, Woobee *needs* you".

LISE: Ruby is still in her crib. Lila –
LISE tries to get out of bed. The actor becomes LILA pulling at LISE's blanket to pick her up.

LILA: Mama, MAMMA Mamma MAMMA *(She becomes LISE again when she is standing up, and the blanket becomes LILA in her arms).*

LILA: Ruby is

RUBY: cryyyyyyyyyiiiiing.

LISE: Roooooooooby.

RUBY: Whaaaaaaaaaaaaa!

LISE: We're cooooooooooming.

RUBY: Whaaaaaaaaaaaaa!

LISE: Ruuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuubeeeee here we come!

RUBY: Waaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!

LISE: I try to set Lila on the ground but she hangs from me.

RUBY: Whaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!

LISE: I pick Ruby up out of the crib -

RUBY: Whaaaaaa-

LISE: Her crying stops immediately.
her twenty something pounds substantial
and so warm against my chest

But then she throws herself sideways so that she can get at milk.
Sometimes she does this so quickly that I almost drop her.

Pause.

We're downstairs and I try to set someone down
because my back,
because I need coffee,
but no one wants to be put down
and when I try they're both clinging to my neck,
legs wrapped tightly around my waist.
I manage to set them both on the countertop.
I need to reach around and into the fridge
They've been fasting
Overnight
They are starved and needy and clinging.
Smoothies.
I reach behind me,
one hand lightly touching Ruby because if I hold her firmly she will scream at me or start to cry
and when she cries it is like

A silent physicalization of the following: every nerve in her body is on high alert and she almost can't breathe.

I wonder if we're wired this way.
If our bodies won't calm
until the babe is in our arms nursing.

I wonder this because when I have a let-down of milk it's like
A silent physicalization of the following: that euphoric rush of endorphins during hard exercise, after orgasm.

She wants breakfast and she wants me but I am the only one who can get her breakfast so we compromise.

A light touch.

And each time I turn around I hurry to get
 the blueberries,

and then the almond milk

and then the yoghurt and even though I do everything not to imagine it I see

She does a slow-motion quiet open-mouthed high-pitched scream while she watches the babies fall to the floor.

But they manage to stay put and I manage to get them everything they need.

I throw frozen bananas and blueberries

Into the blender

And hold their ears in my hands

I press the little orange button

(She makes the sound of the bananas smashing against the blender, and the motor of the blender – the sound is almost intolerable)

Both babies scream on cue

They pull at my body

My hips in the crooks of their knees

Foreheads press into my jaw

Little hands with little fingers pull at my shoulders, my neck, my hair

I don't like for them to be afraid

But I love this moment

Their trust in me undoes a part of my heart

I didn't know was locked

And I am instantly reminded of my mother.

SCENE EIGHT

Mother enters. She is frail, perhaps she uses a cane. Perhaps she wears a headscarf. She and LISE are in the middle of a conversation.

MOTHER: Your meme taught me how to bind my breasts

She used towels and pillowcases

anything we could find

to bind me

I remember the safety pinssz

pulled tight

it took a few days for the milk to dry up
I remember they were very hot

LISE: Your breasts?

MOTHER: Yes.

LISE: You became a man when you became a mother.

MOTHER: Why do you say things like that?

LISE: Because it's true, in a way.

MOTHER: Well it was just what you did.
they said formula was better.

LISE: I want you to be there. For this baby. For the birth.

MOTHER: You will have many babies, and I will be there for all of them.

LISE: Mom.

MOTHER: I will! They say they can't do anything else, but I can!
First Stomach,
Then oesophagus,
Then throat.
I will vomit this cancer out!

LISE: Mom.

MOTHER: I will be there.

Silence.

LISE: What were your births like?

MOTHER: For your brother, I remember I craved oranges
It's the only time I can remember having a real craving
So your father bought me a whole bag full
All the way from China
And I ate them all up!
He didn't go to China
The oranges
Singing Suzanne takes you down

So when he came home from China
 I was washing the kitchen floor
 I knew we'd have guests,
 people would want to see
 the baby
 And I wanted a clean house.
 Can you believe it? Who cares? But that was me.
 So I was on my hands and knees
 And every once in a while a strong contraction would come
She lets out a low moan in imitation of a contraction and the moan sound bleeds into the following text until I knew it was time to go to the hospital

When we got there
 Your father parked the car and then smoked cigarettes
 He wasn't allowed in
 No smoking in the hospital room
 And men needed to smoke in those days.
 So your dad was the Marlborough man in the waiting room
 And I was like a little girl.
 They shaved me.

LISE: They shaved you

MOTHER: Yes
 So they could see

LISE: *she shakes her head.*

MOTHER:
 The doctor needed to see
 So I was in stirrups
 on my back
 legs straight in the air for all the world
 And then they flipped me right over
 For the epidural

LISE: Did they ask you if you wanted any of that?

MOTHER: of course not.
 You didn't ask questions
 They'd flip you over and even though you'd be having a strong contraction
 They'd put that needle in your spine
 And you would lie there perfectly still and take it because it was the best way

LISE: Did they give you any other medication?

MOTHER: Yes, for you.
Just before you born
I knew you were coming and I told them so
They didn't believe me
The Doctor wasn't in the room
And I was supposed to wait until the doctor was there

LISE: You were supposed to wait

MOTHER: Wait. Yes. For the doctor.

And I told them you were coming
And sure enough, there you were, your crown!
So the anaesthetist anaesthesiologist whatever – the needle man
He caught you

But just before that
He gave me a mask full of ether
And I passed out
And the next thing I remember you were all wrapped up and lying next to me

I was in pain
From the episiotomy

LISE: Episiotomy

MOTHER: Yes. They always did that
A routine, they said.
A routine cut.
From the vagina almost to the anus.
I remember the big round mirror on the ceiling
Looking up and watching
The scalpel
Cutting
a straight long line
so much blood
But I didn't feel it
Because
the epidural
And I remember feeling this foreign feeling
Because I was bleeding but I couldn't feel anything

When it was all over
 Because it was all over suddenly
 a baby appeared in my arms
 And then they took you and washed you and wrapped you up in pink
 And told me you were a girl
 And I looked at you and you looked just like your
 Dad's dad.
 Grampy.
 I thought
 Should we call her Ken?

There was a big window so that dads could walk up and see which baby was theirs
 Like window shopping
 And all the babies were wrapped up tightly in blue or pink
 Boys and girls
 Crying
 or sleeping

And sometimes I'd get to hold you
 And feed you
 With one of those huge glass bottles
 And that big thing of formula
 In a plastic container
 And I'd burp you
 And you were so quiet
 Except for the huge burps
 Such loud burps!
 And then they'd roll you right back to the nursery

LISE: I was alone in a nursery most of the time.

MOTHER: Not just you. All the babies.

LISE: *she shakes her head no.* No.

MOTHER: They did their best.
 They did what they needed to do.
 They didn't coddle us.

LISE: They should have asked the mothers.
 They should have asked permission.
 For the needles. The drugs. The cutting. The shaving. The separation.
 They should have asked that's not coddling.

MOTHER: It wasn't like that then.

Pause.

And now? Have things changed? Will you be asked?

LISE: *she shakes her head no.* I don't know.

SCENE NINE

LILA: Breakfast number two.
 Cheerio's or store bought banana muffins.
 I opt for the cereal,
 fill Lila's bowl
 set it on the table.
 Lila climbs onto her chair with her baby and kitchen towel.

LILA: Can I watch something?

LISE: She sits in front of the small iPad screen,
 engrossed,
 watching octonauts
 dripping milk from her mouth with every bite,
 wiping her face and chin on the arm of her pj's.

*Recorded Octonauts song plays:
 Sound of clapping)
 Creature report, creature report.
 Belugas don't like strange loud sounds
 They're the shyest whales around
 Beluga whales sleep in icy seas
 But they still need air to breathe
 As belugas swim along
 They Like to chirp and sing
 And make beluga song*

Fast break

*Go belugas
 Go belugas
 Go belugas*

*Creature report
 Creature report*

We're done with our mission

*Octonauts at ease
Until our next adventure!*

RUBY: Screeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeaaaaaaaaammmmmmm!!!

LISE: Ruby?! What happened?!
Her finger is caught in a drawer.
She's closed it on herself and I think
SHIT David
SHIT
I ASKED you to put a safety on that
and pick up the screaming baby and hum with her as she cries.

Oooooooooooooohhhhhh ohhhhhhhhhhhh ohhhhhhhhhhhh sweetheart and I feel a sympathetic
tightness in my chest
and vagina.
Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhh baby.
Oh sweetheart.
You're ok.
Mama's got you.
Did you hurt your fingers?
Poor babe.
You're okay my love. But her screams are still loud and I know she really hurt herself so I sit on
the rocker and let her nurse thinking
these few minutes are going to make us late for the drop-in

She rocks and nurses the baby

Last time at the drop-in
I hoped I didn't look as strung out as I felt.
I wore blush.
And held tightly to my coffee.
Life boat.
I made a joke with one of the moms about sleep deprivation being used as a method of torture.
Prisoners of war. She laughed. Did she understand?

A kind of giddy happy I told her about being angry. I didn't mean to, but suddenly I was telling
her about how I was losing my shit. Like, all the time. Not at the kids, but at David. Because why
didn't he notice how much I do - the house and the kids and FOR HIM
and the safety latches for the kitchen
because the dishwasher soap looks a lot like candy and
WHY do they make it that way?
And the windows
in her room

it's too cold
 she's going to freeze at night
 And I am so tired
 I haven't slept
 in months
 and lonely.
 And I'm crying.
 In the middle of that too-loud room
 full of tired moms and cranky babies.
 She nods her head and shrugs her shoulders and I realize that I feel even lonelier now that I've
 told her.
 She tells me she needs to leave and she gathers her things and sits by the rack of coats and
 wrangles her kids and puts on their hats and their mitts and snow pants and boots and I am
 exhausted watching her routine.

When I arrive home, I google sleep deprivation and read about my symptoms: memory loss,
 speech impairment, anxiety, hallucinations.

SCENE TEN

A doctor's office. A receptionist enters.

LILA: Two weeks ago I went to the Doctor to talk about my anxiety. And inability to sleep. And
 anger. David's mother came to watch the girls – I told her the appointment was a post-baby
 check-up. She called me three times while I sat in the waiting room. The baby won't stop crying
 Lila fell down can she give them some milk from the fridge. Between phone calls I pretend I am
 at the spa because this is the first time I have been alone in three years.

So.

It's basically the same thing.

*She flips through pages of a magazine. Becomes women in the magazine – she rearranges
 herself so that, while she flips through the pages, she takes on the form of various images she
 sees in the magazine. Her face should remain hidden.*

I wonder when, exactly, my girls will start to believe that they will need to disappear
 themselves if they want to be loved.

I pick up my phone. Dial my mother's number.

*Recorded or Mother can speak the text: we're sorry, the number you have dialled is no longer in
 service.*

And then I remember.

She puts the magazine down. Finds an old newspaper. Hides behind it. It shakes. Falls into sections. She spends time managing the paper. She should land on something by finding physical stillness and a heightened embodiment of articles she stops to read. She should make sound that matches some of the articles. The sounds should be trapped inside of the trapped physical positions.

Throat closing.

Lungs on lockdown.

I cannot inhale and I cannot exhale.

Heartbreak.

And also shame.

I stand on weightless legs

and float to the receptionist.

I can't wait anymore. I need to leave.

RECEPTIONIST: It won't be long. One other patient -

LISE: My daughter fell. At home. She's with my mother in law. I need to leave.

RECEPTIONIST: I understand. Let's reschedule.

LISE: I'll call, I lie.

SCENE ELEVEN

Sound of waves build.

LISE: I wade in.

Waves up to mid-thigh

Pulled right off my feet.

Each time I stand up I look back

A woman is standing

At the top of a cliff

My mother

her flowered shawl flapping hard in the wind

I call to her

A silent scream MOOOOOOOOOOM. Waves. Loud.

But she is oblivious

statuesque
While I flail about in the ocean.

She waves hard to her mother. No response.

The sound of a big wave. She falls to the floor. Waves off.

SCENE TWELVE

High pitched sound but quiet, throughout the following scene. She sets babies down to sleep.

At night
When the babies are finally asleep
I try to talk to David
I have nothing to say
But I want to connect.

I try words.
But what I really want
Is to hear the sound of his voice
To feel the sound of his voice
in my body
Any words would do.

We should go for a walk to the beach
This weekend
His eyes are already almost dreaming.
His day the opposite of mine
Too many words
Too full of meaning making
He needs sleep.

I tell him about
The kitchen drawers
Dangerous
Need childproofing
I tell him about
the kids
You should have seen Ruby

Silence.

What did you –

Pause.

What was your -

Pause.

Did your baaaaa –

Was the o-o-o-o-o-f-f-f-f-f-f-f-f-f-f –

(Her words morph into clicks and high pitched broken whale sounds as she tries to communicate, begs to be spoken to)

He is asleep.

I put a pillow between my legs.

Roll over.

Click on the lamplight

Settle in for night feedings

And read about whales.

High pitched sound off.

SCENE THIRTEEN

Sound of waves.

All of a sudden I can't touch the bottom

It's the wildest thing because I remember being careful to stay right at the shoreline.

One cannot trust the ocean, my mother taught me.

Waves only up to mid-thigh.

But suddenly they aren't.

Suddenly there is no ocean floor.

Suddenly I'm swimming.

I wave to my mother.

She waves back,

her shawl flapping hard in the wind.

Is she smiling?

I think she's smiling!

She insisted on swimming lessons.

She is proud.

I am swallowing water.

I always thought of myself as a good swimmer, but this is different.

Pause. Waves off. MIDWIFE enters.

MIDWIFE: Your body knows what to do. It will be quick.

LISE: How do you know?

MIDWIFE: It's always that way with the second baby. Will your mum come for the birth this time?

LISE: My mom can't travel.

MIDWIFE: I see. How is she?

LISE: Okay. She's okay. *Pause.* She is not okay.

MIDWIFE: I see. Will you have help?

LISE: David will take a few days.

MIDWIFE: Two babies at home. It's not the same as one. It's a lot of work.

LISE: I know what I'm doing.

MIDWIFE: Maybe your head knows, yes, but your body will be tired. *Pause.* Lise, many women who deal with depression after the baby have recently experienced loss.

LISE: I haven't experienced a loss.

MIDWIFE: Of course. I'm sorry.

LISE: You don't need to be sorry.

MIDWIFE: I'm just concerned.

LISE: thank you for your concern but it's misplaced.

Silence.

MIDWIFE: So what's the plan this time?

LISE: What do you mean?

MIDWIFE: The birth plan.

LISE: I don't know. No drugs. But in the hospital.

MIDWIFE: Hospital? A hospital is a terrible place to have a baby.

LISE: Thank you for your opinion but we've made our decision.

MIDWIFE: Of course. *Pause*. But you had Lila at home.

LISE: On the birth certificate they made us put the address of the hospital as place of birth for Lila.

MIDWIFE: But she was born at home!

LISE: The placenta was delivered at the hospital. I guess the placenta is more important than the baby according to the government.

Lying on my bed after having just given birth and the house stormed by firemen and ambulance attendants all those heavy boots on those narrow wooden stairs so crowded in our little semi I couldn't breathe. If anything goes wrong this time I –

MIDWIFE: Nothing will go wrong.

LISE: You don't know that.

MIDWIFE: No, I guess not.

LISE: So many things could go wrong. The cord could be wrapped around the baby's neck.

MIDWIFE: Nothing is going –

LISE: the cord could be too short and every time the baby descends into the birth canal blood and oxygen could be cut off and her heart could stop.

MIDWIFE: I don't think it's –

LISE: I could bleed out. Haemorrhage and die. The baby could decide it doesn't want to breathe. I could have a heart attack, the baby could have a heart attack we could both die DEATH is in the ROOM when you have a baby I don't know why you're pretending that isn't the case.

Silence.

MIDWIFE: I don't think I am being rash by suggesting that you might want to speak to an OBGYN for the delivery.

LISE: *calm* I don't want to be medicated
 I don't want to be cut open
 I don't want my belly ripped up and my baby pulled from my body
 I don't want to use forceps or a vacuum
 I don't want to lie down on a hospital bed with no feeling in my body and my legs splayed wide
 strapped up
 labour chemically sped up and slowed down timed with the schedules of the on-call staff
 bed positioned perfectly not for my comfort or so that I can use gravity heaven forbid
 but to the height of the OBGYN on duty.
 Why do I feel like I have to choose between two extremes?

Pause.

MIDWIFE: Because that's all there is.

LISE: Well that's my birth plan. That was the list.

SCENE FOURTEEN

Sound of waves.

The waves keep coming. I am swimming, hard, but it makes no difference. Some of the waves
 pull me under. I get confused about which way is up. I swallow more water.
 I realize
 suddenly
 that I am never going to make it to shore.
 I scream -

Sound off.

MOOOOOM! Mom! I look to the table where Lila has spilled her entire bowl of cereal. A milky
 mess all over the table, the floor. The computer's keypad! Lila! What did you do?! And I set
 Ruby down and she screams but I have to save the computer. I grab the towel that's covering
 Lila's baby. Mama! That's baby's blanket! I know Lila, but I need to clean the mess. What did
 you do?! And Ruby is at my feet pulling at my pant leg to pick her up, upset because I am upset.
 Maaaaammaaaaa!

I haven't had a shower in three days!!!

I am a mess of unwashed hair and stains and ratty bed clothes. Everything I own is stretched at
 the chest, where it has been pulled down around my breasts for the past three years.

I need to get out.

I need to get out.

The following should be done while circular breathing. Nonstop repeated text for a sustained amount of time. It should build in pace until it's as fast as the actor can say the word.

Out.

She falls to the floor.

Fast text no punctuation. I use baby wipes to clean myself and change my underwear and find a sweater with milk stains and is that soup It doesn't smell I wrangle the girls out of pj's and sippy diapers that thunk to the floor heavy with pee I stuff them into whatever I can find that's clean They are a mess of polka dots and flowers and mismatched socks and bright colours but it's charming and crafty I have Ruby on my lap pulling on her boots her hat her mittens her coat She is whining and swiping at the air clearly mad that I have disturbed her moment with her baby gorilla whom she was feeding with a pink tea cup I ask Lila four times to put on her boots but she sits next to me picking up salt from the front hall mat Lila How many times have I told you not to touch that It isn't salt Lila it's poison It could make you sick!

Lila is running away from me Ruby's on the floor whining because she is unable to walk in her snow pants and boots Too big for her hand-me-downs but we can't afford new -

Lila!

Running Reaching for her.

Lila!

Running, reaching.

we need to go.

Running, reaching.

Lila -

She roars a Lion's roar STAHHHHHHP!

Stops running.

Lila you either come here right now and put on your boots or it's time out.

This works.

She goes back to the mat,

puts on her boots

and I scoop her up and put on the rest.

Ruby has been crying

this whole time

Lila, look at me please - did you eat any of that stuff?

She shakes her head no

And I have to believe her

because what else can I do?

We make it out the door

Ruby in the stroller

Lila on the back.

A rush of cold air hits hard

and I almost can't

breathing in cold air

We head down the sidewalk

And I hear my mother calling me.

LIIIIIIISE, she says.

LIIIIISE.

LISE: Lila

LILA: yes mama?

LISE: did you hear that?

LILA: what mama?

LISE: my name.

Silence.

We keep walking,
but instead of going left
toward the drop-in
We head downhill
toward the beach.
I need my mom.
I need to swim.

I need to swim! I tell Lila.

Ruby is already asleep,
warm enough in her snowsuit.
But it won't last long.
Minus twenty with the wind chill.

LILA: where are we going mama?

LISE: for a walk.

LILA: Mama?

LISE: Yes, Lila, what?

LILA: I didn't eat any.

LISE: Ok sweetheart. It's okay.

LILA: mama?

LISE: yes, Lila?

LILA: turtles need air but fishies don't

LISE: oh yeah?

LILA: yes

LISE: what about whales? Do they need air?

LILA: mama?

LISE: yes

LILA: mama?

LISE: yes, Lila, what is it?

LILA: mama

LISE: yes, Lila

LILA: it will be sunshine at the beach and I will play in the sand.

SCENE FIFTEEN

Waves.

I look on the beach for my mother.
 But she's too far away from me
 standing on the edge of a cliff,
 flying her shawl like a kite.
 I want to tell her that I am drowning
 That I love my babies
 But that I can't breathe
 I want her to tell me that it will be ok
 That this was the hard part
 The isolation
 My marriage
 That I will make it
 But she doesn't look down

I am under water
 I open my eyes and see sand and grit through shafts of light
 I hear the water rush
 So deep and enveloping
 I want to sleep.

There is another sound too.
 Something warm and far away
 Like song
 A high pitched sound
 A whale
 Measuring the time it takes for her sound to bounce
 Off of some faraway object
 Back to her throat
 Maybe she is locating me

I see sand and grit through shafts of light
 So deep and enveloping
 I want to sleep.

Silence. Waves much louder. LISE becomes a whale. She sings a whale song. It becomes operatic. Haunting. Otherworldly. Her sounds can include the sound of building waves, the sound of screaming under water, the sound of water being pulled from the sand, the sounds made by the motor of boats underwater. Acoustic instrumentation could be used to accompany, but the waves might also be enough and should be played throughout. By the end of the wordless opera the sound should be almost deafening, so that when the sound goes out and she stops singing the contrast of silence and stillness is substantial.

She makes the sound of an inhale followed by the sound of a heartbeat (ha-ha) for a few moments.

Silence. Stillness. High pitched sound.

LILA: *escalating whispers* Mama. Mama. I'm cold. It's cold mama.

Pause.

LILA: It's too snowy. It's not sunny mama.

Pause.

LILA: I want to go home. Mama.

LISE: I look back to the cliff.
 I do not see my mother.
 Only a crooked juniper tree
 It's roots weaving
 Through the cracks and joints in the bare rock
 Exposed and vulnerable
 But somehow still drawing life
 Surviving.

LILA: *high pitched* MAMA!!!!

LISE: *gasps for air as if she just emerged from being underwater. High pitched sound off.* Ok, Lila. Ok.

I carry Lila the whole way up hill,
 pushing the stroller with my other hand,

She makes the sound of an inhale followed by the sound of a heartbeat (ha-ha) for a few moments.

Just before bed, Lila pulls all of her pillows and blankets onto the floor and asks me to join her. She looks up at the ceiling and points out Mars and the moon and the stars and then she says “goodnight mama. I hope you stay with me in my dreams.” *Sound of waves.*

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