

KALI DANCES

A Drama in Twenty-Three Scenes

by

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SYNOPSIS

When a music teacher is found at the church organ with her throat slit, her lesbian lover, the pastor, and his young daughter confront one another with their grief and anger. The investigating detective interrogates each of them as a suspect, though the homicide may be a hate crime. The terrifying Indian Goddess Kali, challenges them all to come to terms with her. Although at its most superficial level, the play is a detective story, at its heart it is a mystery play—exploring the intersection of Hindu and Christian beliefs regarding death.

CAST OF CHARACTERS (7 actors, 1 dancer)

Kali, Black Goddess of India, Creator-Destroyer of the Universe, played by a dancer who does not speak

Maya Prasad, 15, American, of Indian heritage, bright, impressionable, a singer

Father Prasad, early 40's, American, of Indian heritage, a priest, serious, disciplined but passionate

Detective, middle-aged African-American man, intuitive, determined but not insensitive

Joseph Snyder, 70's, church sexton, respectful, affable

Sheila Dunn, 30's, a lively and likeable music teacher. Actor should have some dance skills.

Artemis Callas, 30's, Sheila's lover, a museum curator, articulate, intense, but with a sense of humor. Actor should have some dance skills.

Medical Examiner, any age, any race, either sex, curious, clever, helpful. Actor may be wheelchair-bound.

SETTING

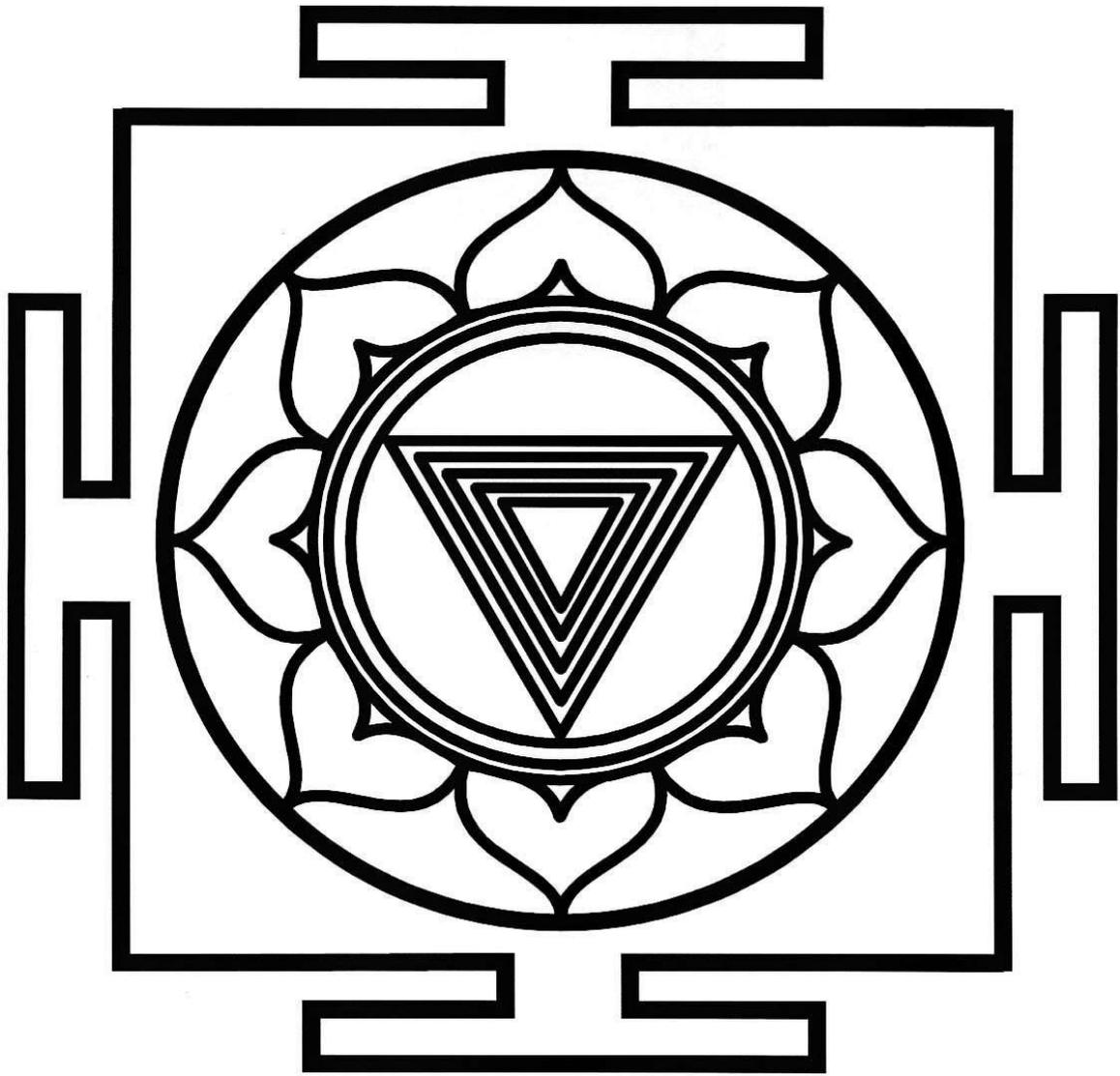
U.S.A. The present.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Slides called for are available from author. See appendix for list of images.

SCRIPT HISTORY

Based on submission of the script's first draft to the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, the author was awarded a fellowship. Based on submission of a revised script, the author was awarded residencies at the Millay Colony for the Arts in New York and at the Djerassi Resident Artists Program in California. The script was a finalist in the Bay Area Playwrights Festival and a semi-finalist in the National Arts Club (NYC) Playwrights First Award. It was given a professional reading at the Abingdon Theatre, NYC and subsequently revised as reflected in the present script, which was a finalist in the New Harmony Project and received honorable mention for the Jane Chambers Award.



Kali Yantra

KALI DANCES

SETTING:

The set suggests the Kali yantra. At CS, a low (possibly raked) equilaterally triangular platform with base US and apex pointing DC. One or two steps lead up to it on all three sides. Small backless benches are on the R and L edge of the platform. The points of the triangle are joined by a line that forms the circumference of a circle painted on the floor. This circle forms the center of a lotus whose eight petals emanate from it. Enclosing the lotus is a square. The action is played on this triangular platform as well as in the areas on either side. Just US of the platform is a tall rectangular arch with decorative lintel and column-supports. Within this arch hangs a screen on which the audience views slides.

Scene 1

AT RISE:

In the dark, we hear the loudly amplified sound of exaggerated, deep, slow breathing. Then unrealistic lighting fades up slowly on KALI, the black Goddess of India. Her very long hair is luxuriant and disheveled. With her whole body she breathes. As she inhales, the lights dim; as she exhales the lights brighten. Slowly, Indian music fades in as breathing sound fades out. She begins to dance. She is at once comforting and menacing. She gives birth, then devours her offspring. She battles demons and slays them. She makes love to her consort, then devours his entrails. During this dance, we become aware of MAYA lying on the floor, asleep. KALI dances around and over her. The dance comes to a climactic close as the music ends abruptly with a loud dissonant organ chord. KALI freezes. MAYA springs up to a sitting position, screaming.

MAYA

Ma! Ma!

(Louder.)

Maaaaa!

(Lighting changes. KALI backs off as FATHER enters and crosses to MAYA. He wears a black sweater and clerical collar.)

FATHER

Maya! What is it?

MAYA

(Still screaming.)

Ma!

FATHER

(Shaking her.)

Maya, wake up! You're dreaming—you're having another nightmare.

MAYA

No, Father! She was here. She danced me. I could feel her.

FATHER

Who?

MAYA

Kali.

FATHER

Kali?

MAYA

The Goddess. She dances me!

FATHER

What do you mean?

MAYA

She's inside me. She...

FATHER

She what?

MAYA

She...urges me.

FATHER

To what?

To *feel*. MAYA

To feel what? FATHER

Things I shouldn't. MAYA

What things? FATHER

No! MAYA

You can tell me Maya. I'm your father. FATHER

(She catches her breath, then again, and again until she is hyperventilating. FATHER pulls her to him and rocks her. Over his shoulder she screams.)

Maaaaa! MAYA

(Crossfade.)

Scene 2

*Lights up on ARTEMIS, presenting a lecture.
Slides are projected for the audience to see.*

ARTEMIS

(Slide 1.)

And here we have the Indian Kali Ma, the Black Goddess who embraces all that is.

(Slide 2.)

Kali has a trinity of incarnations: Creator, Preserver, Destroyer, represented here by the trident. She was worshiped by India's dark-skinned Dravidians—long before the Aryans invaded and their priests assigned her functions to male gods, naming Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver, and Shiva the Destroyer.

(Slide 3.)

One myth has Kali dancing with Shiva, Lord of the Cosmic Dance. The two grow wilder and more competitive until the world shakes itself to pieces.

(Slide 4.)

In another myth, Kali is the fierce, emaciated hag

(Slide 5.)

whose primordial hunger feasts on animals and men to replenish the energy that drives the universe.

(Slide 6.)

Thus she slays demons on the battlefield...and drinks their blood.

(Slide 7.)

Drunk with slaughter, she dances on them, thrilled to feel the lifeless flesh beneath her naked feet.

(Slide 8.)

Gradually she realizes it is her consort Shiva under her and she is dancing him to death. She slows at the awareness, but is destined to resume the dance that will end the world.

(Crossfade.)

Scene 3

Lights up on DETECTIVE and JOSEPH.

Mr. Snyder—

DETECTIVE

Joseph.

JOSEPH

DETECTIVE

Joseph. What time do you usually lock the church doors on nights the choir rehearses?

JOSEPH

Ten-thirty, eleven, I guess.

DETECTIVE

You guess?

JOSEPH

Between ten-thirty and eleven.

DETECTIVE

The choir rehearsed that late?

JOSEPH

No. She—Miss Dunn—usually let them go around nine. But then she liked to stay on—play the organ.

DETECTIVE

So...how would you know...when she was finished playing the organ?

JOSEPH

I'd wait.

DETECTIVE

You'd sit in the pew downstairs and wait till she was finished?

JOSEPH

Yes.

DETECTIVE

Did you enjoy her playing?

JOSEPH

She was very good. Accomplished.

DETECTIVE

Would you say you're a connoisseur of fine music.

JOSEPH

Don't know about that. But Joanna—that's my wife—we go regularly to the organ concerts in the cathedral. We like to hear a good organ well played.

DETECTIVE

So on the night of the murder, were you sitting in the pew downstairs waiting for her to finish playing?

JOSEPH

No. It wasn't ten-thirty. I never went over before ten-thirty.

DETECTIVE

But you were there when I got there at ten-fifteen.

JOSEPH

We were all there then—Joanna and me, Father Prasad and his daughter. Everyone heard the blare of the ambulance siren and came running to see what had happened.

DETECTIVE

So you live close by?

JOSEPH

A few houses down.

DETECTIVE

Where were you before you came running to see what had happened?

JOSEPH

Watching television with Joanna.

DETECTIVE

And when you came running to the church, did you see anyone leaving it?

JOSEPH

No. But there are lots of doors—on three sides of the building.

DETECTIVE

How long have you been the sexton at St. Mary's?

JOSEPH

Since I retired from managing the hardware store. Going on five years now.

DETECTIVE

And your wife works here as well.

JOSEPH

She's the sacristan. Sets up for mass, arranges the flowers, keeps the altar clean, takes care of the vestments.

DETECTIVE

So you two must know the parishioners pretty well.

JOSEPH

Some of them.

DETECTIVE

How long have you known Ms. Dunn?

JOSEPH

Since she came—four years ago.

DETECTIVE

How closely did you and she work together?

JOSEPH

I cleaned the church, including the choir loft, but she was never there when I did it. One time an order of new hymnals came in and I helped her carry the boxes up. Mostly I saw her at staff meetings.

DETECTIVE

How did she get along with the other staff?

JOSEPH

Fine.

DETECTIVE

Can you think of anyone who would want to hurt her?

JOSEPH

She was very well-liked. Especially by the choir girls.

DETECTIVE

Did you like her?

JOSEPH

Me? I thought she was...charming.

DETECTIVE

But someone wasn't charmed. Or stopped being charmed. Do you have any idea who that someone could be?

Sorry...no.

JOSEPH

Did you know she was a lesbian?

DETECTIVE

Not at first.

JOSEPH

But then...?

DETECTIVE

People sort of figured it out.

JOSEPH

Probably quite a few people would have disapproved of that.

DETECTIVE

Probably.

JOSEPH

Did you?

DETECTIVE

Well, I'm a good Catholic. So yes, I did. But...

JOSEPH

But what?

DETECTIVE

Well...if Father Prasad...if he didn't do anything about it, well then...

JOSEPH

Did he ever preach on the subject?

DETECTIVE

He said we should hate the sin and love the sinner. He said homosexuals should pray for the grace to give up their life of sin and God would provide it.

DETECTIVE

But Sheila Dunn didn't.

(JOSEPH shrugs.)

I guess someone got tired of waiting.

JOSEPH

I guess.

DETECTIVE

Who among the parishioners would be that impatient? Any idea?

JOSEPH

No. I'm sorry. I'm sorry I can't be more help.

DETECTIVE

So am I.

(Crossfade.)

Scene 4

Lights up on ARTEMIS, continuing her slide lecture.

ARTEMIS

(Slide 1.)

In her role as Creator, Kali is the divine Shakti, the energy without which the male god Shiva cannot live. Her breathing is the pulse of the universe. When she opens, she gives birth to Ultimate Reality; when she closes, she gathers all into the generative darkness, the seed state.

(Slide 2.)

In her role as Preserver, she protects her children in time of flood and earthquake, famine and drought.

(Slide 3.)

In her Destroyer role, she is the very earth in which all things decay, the devourer of dead bodies.

(Slide 4.)

In some depictions, her consort Shiva is in a state of sexual arousal

(Slide 5.)

and Kali is squatting over him, devouring his entrails, the guts strung from the corpse to her mouth like an umbilical cord, while her *yonis*—her sacred vulva—devours his lingam, his penis.

(Slide 6.)

Kali is sexually voracious and thus dangerous. She represents freedom from society's norms, one who is beyond convention, full of powerful energy.

(Crossfade.)

Scene 5

Lights up on DETECTIVE and FATHER.

DETECTIVE
Did you ever kill anyone?

FATHER
Of course not.

DETECTIVE
Could you?

FATHER
I don't need to, Detective. I have you and the justice system for that.

DETECTIVE
Begging the question.

FATHER
Could you?

DETECTIVE
Have done. Once. In the line of duty, of course.

FATHER
Of course.

DETECTIVE
You haven't answered.

FATHER
You're very observant.

DETECTIVE
And persistent.

FATHER
I...I don't know. Probably not. At least I hope not.

DETECTIVE
Not even if your life were threatened?

FATHER
My life is threatened every day. I drive a car. I eat red meat. I drink tap water. *I breathe.* Anyway, in my profession, one is supposed to be prepared to die.

DETECTIVE

Do you think Sheila Dunn was prepared to die?

FATHER

Who can know the state of another's soul?

DETECTIVE

Her confessor.

FATHER

We don't do much of that any more.

DETECTIVE

So she wasn't a parishioner you knew very well?

FATHER

I didn't say that.

DETECTIVE

Was she?

FATHER

She was music director for our school. Played the organ for Sunday masses, conducted the choir. Helped to plan the liturgies. She was good at it—very talented.

DETECTIVE

So you saw a lot of her?

FATHER

The parish will miss her very much.

DETECTIVE

And you personally?

FATHER

Yes. She was a generous parishioner, a trusted colleague, a friend.

DETECTIVE

Did you know, when you hired her, about...her lifestyle?

FATHER

No.

DETECTIVE

And would you have—

Probably not.

FATHER

So you disapprove?

DETECTIVE

My Church disapproves.

FATHER

And you?

DETECTIVE

I...prayed for her.

FATHER

Doesn't that seem a bit hypocritical—coming from a Catholic priest with a daughter?

DETECTIVE

I was not a Catholic priest when my daughter was born.

FATHER

Oh? Tell me about that.

DETECTIVE

Is my personal history part of your investigation?

FATHER

Everything is part of our investigation. And your daughter is involved, remember.

DETECTIVE

How could I forget?
(Beat.)
 There were many British missionaries in India and the one in my parents' village was quite persuasive. After they converted from Hindu to Episcopal, they moved here to the States. I was baptized, confirmed, married and ordained in the same church. My father was grounds keeper for the cemetery behind it—where they are buried.

DETECTIVE

And then...?

FATHER

My wife died. I raised my daughter. I became a Catholic.

DETECTIVE

Why?

You are nosy.
FATHER

Humor me.
DETECTIVE

Apostolic succession.
FATHER

Pardon?
DETECTIVE

The Pope is the direct successor of Saint Peter.
FATHER

Pure blood lines?
DETECTIVE

Only without the blood.
FATHER

If you don't count the Medicis. Or the Inquisition.
DETECTIVE

Even popes are only human.
FATHER

There must have been something else, something more...personal.
DETECTIVE

Do you moonlight as a therapist?
FATHER

Don't have to. I see a lot of human nature in my day job.
DETECTIVE

More than you want to, I'd guess.
FATHER

So what was the something more personal?
DETECTIVE

Perhaps it was the asceticism that appealed to me. Offering liberation from this life of suffering. It's a lot like Hinduism in that respect.
FATHER

DETECTIVE

Ironic, eh?

FATHER

God's little joke.

DETECTIVE

What about doctrinal differences? Any bones to pick with the Episcopal hierarchy?

FATHER

I'm sure ministers in every denomination have things they don't see eye-to-eye on with their bishops.

DETECTIVE

But most don't leave to join another. What was it exactly you didn't see eye-to-eye on? Obviously not the married clergy thing.

FATHER

Obviously.

DETECTIVE

What about women clergy? Do you approve of ordaining women?

FATHER

No. I don=t.

DETECTIVE

What else?

FATHER

Isn't that enough?

DETECTIVE

You might as well tell me. If there were other reasons, I'll find out.

FATHER

I...I didn't think the church should be giving its blessing to homosexual unions.

DETECTIVE

So you jumped ship.

FATHER

I decided I would be more theologically at home in the Catholic church.

DETECTIVE

That's quite a journey.

FATHER

Not as exciting as yours, I'm sure. Or perhaps you come from a long, unbroken line of police officers?

DETECTIVE

My parents were anthropologists. When we were living with the Yoruba in Nigeria, there was a raid on the village. They were both killed.

FATHER

Oh. I'm sorry. How old were you?

DETECTIVE

Fifteen...Maya's age.

FATHER

Did they find who did it?

DETECTIVE

No.

FATHER

What a devastating experience for a young boy. It must have seemed like the end of the world to you. How did you...manage to...?

DETECTIVE

The Yoruba taught me how to grieve. How to make an ancestor shrine...and masks. So that my parents would not simply dissolve into ghosts, but would be able to go on loving me and protecting me.

FATHER

And have they?

DETECTIVE

As best they could.

FATHER

A parent's protection is important.

DETECTIVE

And what if your daughter's life were threatened?

FATHER

Excuse me?

DETECTIVE

Could you do it then?

Do what?

FATHER

Kill?

DETECTIVE

Perhaps.

(Beat.)

FATHER

(Crossfade.)

Scene 6

Lights up on SHEILA, coughing, with books and sheet music spread out on the floor. ARTEMIS enters with a mug in each hand and a metal case under her arm. SHEILA gets her cough under control.

SHEILA

(Taking one of the mugs from her.)

Ah—my Love Slave appears! Thank you.

ARTEMIS

Honey.

SHEILA

Yes?

ARTEMIS

I put honey in your tea—maybe it'll help. I'm worried about that cough, She.

SHEILA

Colds always get worse before they get better. What've you got there?

ARTEMIS

Slides for my lecture on the Asian Goddesses exhibit.

SHEILA

How'd they turn out?

ARTEMIS

Some better than others.

SHEILA

Have you finished your research?

ARTEMIS

I'll never finish.

SHEILA

Here we go again.

ARTEMIS

How can a Westerner ever really understand? It's presumptuous.

SHEILA

So what's the alternative—don't even try?

ARTEMIS

(Shrugs. Then puts slide case down and looks over SHEILA's shoulder.)

What are you working on?

SHEILA

Planning my funeral.

ARTEMIS

Oh? Is there a deadline I should know about?

SHEILA

It's this week's assignment—for the Death and Dying seminar.

ARTEMIS

So what's it going to be like?—not that I'll be around to see it.

SHEILA

Are you planning to desert me in my last days?

ARTEMIS

I intend to die first. It's only fair. You deal better with grief.

SHEILA

Virtue is ever rewarded.

ARTEMIS

There is no cosmic justice. We know that. Anyway, if you die first, there'll be no one to sing at *my* memorial service.

SHEILA

That's just what I was working on.

ARTEMIS

Finding me a new girlfriend?

SHEILA

Picking the music for my funeral.

ARTEMIS

How about something from "Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band"?

SHEILA

I was thinking more along the lines of Fauré's "Requiem."

ARTEMIS

Too predictable. Trite.

SHEILA

I'm not competing for an originality award. I'm just trying to...to...
(Coughs, takes a sip of tea.)

ARTEMIS

Trying to what?

SHEILA

To comfort my loved ones...to get me through my last rite of passage.

ARTEMIS

The big one.

SHEILA

Yes.

ARTEMIS

Passage to what? heaven?

SHEILA

Eternal life in God.

ARTEMIS

You still believe that?

SHEILA

You have a better idea?

ARTEMIS

But that's the point. Isn't it just an idea? Something a bunch of people made up because they needed to. Because otherwise this life—with all its random cruelty—is senseless and unbearable.

SHEILA

And the alternative?

ARTEMIS

Well, let's see...the Hindu alternative would be *samsara*.

SHEILA

Samsara?

ARTEMIS

Transmigration. The idea that after death, the soul leaves the body and is reborn in the body of another person—

SHEILA

(Interrupting.)

Reincarnation.

ARTEMIS

—or animal or vegetable or mineral.

SHEILA

Mineral?

ARTEMIS

Only if you've behave very wickedly in this life and accumulate a lot of really bad karma. If your behavior is "B-" to "B+," you come back as a person—but of a lower caste. A "C" would bring you back as, say, a dog. If "C+," perhaps you'd have a doting mistress who spoils you with liver snaps and long walks. Give a "D" performance in this life, and you end up with roots instead of feet in the next. An "F" transforms you into rock. That part puzzles me. How could they think a human being is a higher life form than an oak tree? Or a mountain? Personally, I'd put cockroaches at the bottom. But I'm not the one who made up this system.

SHEILA

Possibly your explanation is oversimplified?

ARTEMIS

Hey! I'm giving you the Power Point version.

SHEILA

What happens if I get an "A"?

ARTEMIS

Don't worry about it. That very question proves you have too much pride and ambition to get an "AA."

SHEILA

Okay, what happens if *one* gets an "A"?

ARTEMIS

One's soul is released from *samsara* and united with...

(Gestures with a beckoning motion to indicate SHEILA should know this part from a previous "lesson.")

SHEILA

(Delivering.)

Brahman.

ARTEMIS

The universal soul.

SHEILA

Like going to heaven.

ARTEMIS

But—and here’s the rub for Westerners—your soul isn’t really *you* anymore. No more individual. No more ego. And Brahman isn’t a personal deity who listens to prayers or doles out rewards and punishments.

SHEILA

Brahman is...?

ARTEMIS

The soul of all that is.

SHEILA

The soul of mountains and trees and cockroaches?

ARTEMIS

Of course.

SHEILA

Then how are you better off?

ARTEMIS

Because now you have...awareness?

SHEILA

So there it is!—even the Hindus have a version of our heaven.

ARTEMIS

I suppose you could put it that way...if you were a racist, colonialist pig. Or...you might say it’s another example of a bunch of people making up something to believe in because they needed to. Because otherwise this life—with all its random cruelty—is senseless and unbearable.

SHEILA

And hasn’t just about every bunch of people in history done that? Doesn’t that evidence suggest a sort of universal truth to you?

ARTEMIS

Oh yes. The universal truth is that people faced with a frightening reality create an illusion to make it bearable.

SHEILA

And the alternative to creating these belief systems that you dismiss as illusions is...?

ARTEMIS

To accept that this life—however cruel and senseless it may sometimes be—is all there is. Embrace it, live it, let go of it.

SHEILA

And you can do that?

ARTEMIS

I'm working on it.

SHEILA

How's it going?

ARTEMIS

It's uphill. I'm still in the embracing stage.

SHEILA

Need some help?

(Embraces ARTEMIS.)

ARTEMIS

She...I know you have a good reason for taking this class. But it depresses me, all this preoccupation with death.

SHEILA

Isn't it better to think about it now...to plan for it even? I mean none of us knows what state we'll be in when...when the time comes.

ARTEMIS

I guess.

SHEILA

So it's good to think it through...to write down what we want.

ARTEMIS

And you've done that?

SHEILA

Can I count on you?

ARTEMIS

You know you can. So long as it doesn't have to happen for another fifty years.

(Kisses SHEILA.)

(Crossfade.)

Scene 7

Lights up on DETECTIVE and MAYA.

DETECTIVE

Maya, do you remember what time it was when you found...the body?

MAYA

Ms. Sheila.

DETECTIVE

Yes.

MAYA

That's what we called her—I mean in grade school.

DETECTIVE

She was your teacher?

MAYA

Some teachers went by last names. Like Mr. Cameron. But she told us to call her Ms. Sheila. Later, when we weren't children anymore, she told us we could call her Sheila—you know, without the title.

DETECTIVE

And when was that?

MAYA

Two years ago—when I graduated from eighth grade.

DETECTIVE

A rite of passage?

MAYA

No. I had that earlier.

DETECTIVE

Oh? When?

MAYA

When I got my first period. My menarche. There was a ritual.

DETECTIVE

Did Ms. Dunn have anything to do with the...ritual?

MAYA

Oh yes, she and...Artemis planned it.

DETECTIVE

Artemis?

MAYA

Ms. Callas. Like the Greek singer. Only Artemis...isn't the singer. Sheila is. Was.

DETECTIVE

Tell me about the ritual.

MAYA

Why?

DETECTIVE

I'm interested.

MAYA

Well, there was singing, naturally. And readings from the Book of the Goddess.

DETECTIVE

Which goddess?

MAYA

There's only one—the Great Mother Goddess—with many names. But we read the myth of Persephone because she's the one who leaves her mother to go into the underworld. It's a coming of age story. Greek. You know it?

DETECTIVE

I do.

MAYA

And prayers to Kali.

DETECTIVE

The Indian goddess?

MAYA

Kali is "the primal deep, the menstrual Ocean of Blood that gives birth to the world."

DETECTIVE

Quite a role model.

MAYA

That's the idea, really.

DETECTIVE

That you would give birth to the world?

MAYA

(Reprimanding his flipness.)

No.

(DETECTIVE gestures an apology.)

That we would see our menstrual cycle, our “power to give life”—if we decided to have babies when the time came—that we would see our power as something sacred.

DETECTIVE

“We”?

MAYA

There was another girl.

DETECTIVE

Who?

MAYA

Susan—the daughter of one of their friends.

DETECTIVE

Who was invited to this ritual? Only women?

MAYA

Of course. It was a ceremony of initiation. Welcome into the community of women. I wasn't a little girl anymore, you see. But...one of them.

DETECTIVE

And were your female relatives invited?

MAYA

I don't have any. Well, I mean, my mother died when I was born...giving birth.

DETECTIVE

I'm sorry.

MAYA

And my grandmother—my father's mother—she died when I was ten. He didn't have any sisters.

DETECTIVE

What about your mother's family?

MAYA

They live far away.

DETECTIVE

And did your father know?—about this ritual?

MAYA

Ms. Sheila said to ask his permission. But...

DETECTIVE

You didn't.

MAYA

I didn't think he'd let me.

DETECTIVE

Why not?

MAYA

He's having a hard time dealing with my "budding sexuality."

DETECTIVE

Really?! Did he tell you that?

MAYA

Of course not. But a lot of fathers do. And his situation is much more...difficult than most. Well, I mean, think about it.

DETECTIVE

Tell me more...about the ritual.

MAYA

They gave me a sash...

(SHEILA & ARTEMIS enter. They re-enact the ritual. MAYA interacts with them, but continues to interact with the DETECTIVE as well.)

SHEILA

(Putting a white sash over MAYA's shoulder.)

White for the Maiden.

ARTEMIS

(Putting a red sash over the white one.)

Red for the Mother.

SHEILA

And many years from now...black for the Crone.

ARTEMIS

The three faces of the Goddess.

MAYA

(To DETECTIVE.)

Crone is the wise old woman. “She who understands and counsels.”

DETECTIVE

And do they have a rite of passage for that too?

MAYA

Oh yes. Artemis had a croning ceremony for one of her old teachers.

DETECTIVE

I see.

MAYA

Do you?

DETECTIVE

Yes. I do. Getting back to *your*...ceremony...

ARTEMIS

Come, let us gather round the table and celebrate the life-blood that surges in Susan and Maya!

MAYA

(To DETECTIVE.)

There was special food that everyone brought. A lot of it was red—I remember laughing when I saw all that red on the table.

SHEILA

Let us give thanks for chili and lasagna and tomato bread and cherry pie!

ARTEMIS

For strawberries and raspberries, for apples and watermelon and for the juice of the pomegranate!

MAYA

Even the tablecloth is red and white!

ARTEMIS

(Addressing the imaginary guests.)

Sharing time!

SHEILA

Yes, time for stories!

ARTEMIS

Our “oral history.”

SHEILA

Tell us what happened when you got *your* first period!

MAYA

(To DETECTIVE.)

And there were presents too! Some of them were funny—

ARTEMIS

(Pulling a tampon puppet from her pocket and making it dance for MAYA.)

A puppet made of tampons.

DETECTIVE

Did Ms. Dunn give you a present?

MAYA

(To DETECTIVE.)

Two.

(Taking the CD that SHEILA hands her. To SHEILA)

It’s an opera!

SHEILA

Lakmé. It’s about a beautiful Indian girl who falls in love with a dashing English officer. Of course her father disapproves and she poisons herself in the end. Very sentimental, but the music’s great.

ARTEMIS

(Snatching it away playfully.)

A prime example of colonialist mythologizing. Asian women going ga-ga over Western men even though they are the enemy. Like *Madame Butterfly*.

(SHEILA and ARTEMIS laugh, slide the sashes off MAYA, and exit.)

DETECTIVE

And the other present?

MAYA

A pair of earrings with tiny garnets in them. It’s my birthstone.

(She holds her earlobe to display it.)

The color of blood.

DETECTIVE

They're very nice.

MAYA

Yes. She has—she had—a talent for that. Saying the right thing. Giving the right gift.
(She starts to cry quietly. DETECTIVE gives her a handkerchief.)

DETECTIVE

Do you need a few minutes?

MAYA

No, I'm all right.

DETECTIVE

What time was it when you found her?

MAYA

I'm not sure. About ten, I guess. Choir rehearsal always let out at nine.

DETECTIVE

Why did you go back to the church?

MAYA

I forgot my umbrella. I took it to choir because it looked like it might rain again. But it didn't. So I didn't think of it when I left.

DETECTIVE

What made you think of it an hour later?

MAYA

I was packing up the stuff I would need for school the next day. It had been raining all week.

DETECTIVE

So when you went back to the church, the door was still unlocked?

MAYA

Yes.

DETECTIVE

Did you see anyone else in the church?

MAYA

No. But I wouldn't have. I went right up to the loft because of the noise.

DETECTIVE

The noise?

MAYA

The organ. It was making a terrible sound. A loud discord. Like all the wrong notes being held forever.

(She fights for control.)

DETECTIVE

I know this is hard, Maya.

(She nods.)

Can you describe what you saw when you got to the loft?

MAYA

She was slumped over at the organ. I thought maybe she had passed out. But when I got closer, I saw all the blood. Her head was on the upper keyboard. Her hands, on the lower one, with her chest pressed against them. There was blood all over the place...dripping from the top keyboard to the bottom one, making the crevices between the keys seem deeper. Her white sweater was soaked red. But not her hair. It was clean and shiny like nothing was wrong. I could see the blood was coming from her neck...that her...

(Touching the side of her throat.)

that her throat had been cut.

DETECTIVE

What color was the blood?

MAYA

Color? What do you mean? Red, of course.

DETECTIVE

Bright or dark?

MAYA

Bright. ... Like my sash.

DETECTIVE

And was she still bleeding?

MAYA

I...I don't know.

DETECTIVE

What did you do?

MAYA

I think I screamed. I don't remember. The organ was shrieking. Such an ungodly noise.

DETECTIVE

Then what did you do?

MAYA

I...ran to get help.

DETECTIVE

Did anything unusual happen at choir practice that night?

MAYA

Unusual?

DETECTIVE

What kind of mood was Ms. Dunn in?

MAYA

We were learning some medieval chants by Hildegard of Bingen. At first she seemed excited.

DETECTIVE

Excited by medieval chants?

MAYA

You wouldn't understand.

DETECTIVE

And then?

MAYA

And then *what?*

DETECTIVE

You said she seemed excited "at first."

MAYA

Well, she had a bad cold. You could see she was tired and miserable—like we all get when we're sick. She probably should've canceled rehearsal, but she never would do that even if she was dy—

(Catches herself.)

It made her impatient...off her game.

DETECTIVE

What do you mean?

MAYA

Well, when she tried to demonstrate a phrase of music, to sing it for us, she couldn't. Her voice broke. Because of her cold, I guess.

DETECTIVE

Anything else?

MAYA

As rehearsal wore on, she got pretty sharp in her corrections.

DETECTIVE

Of whom?

MAYA

Of whoever sang a wrong note.

DETECTIVE

Did she argue with anyone? Anyone come late for practice?

MAYA

Mr. Cameron came late—he's the science teacher at the school. He's always late. Usually she just gives him a look that says she is immensely disappointed in him.

DETECTIVE

But this night?

MAYA

She made a snide remark—something about needing to upgrade his time-management skills.

DETECTIVE

And what did he say?

MAYA

Nothing. He just turned red.

DETECTIVE

Embarrassment?

MAYA

More like he was annoyed.

DETECTIVE

Do you remember if anyone lingered when choir let out?

MAYA

I don't know. I left right away—I still had homework to do.

DETECTIVE

Maya—I want you to think real hard. Put yourself back in the choir loft. You enter the church and hear the deafening noise. You bound up the steps, through the door to the choir

DETECTIVE (*Cont.*)

loft. You see her slumped over the organ. You go to her. Your eyes take in the terrible scene. They move downward. You notice her head, her hands, the blood on the keys. Do you see anything else?

MAYA

Anything else?

DETECTIVE

The weapon used to kill her. Did you see a knife? Near the organ pedals maybe...or on the floor?

MAYA

(Beat.)

No. I'm sorry...

(Begins to cry.)

(Crossfade.)

Scene 8

Lights up on ARTEMIS, continuing her slide lecture.

ARTEMIS

(Slide 1.)

Kali's *yantra* is the inverted pyramid, symbolic of the sacred pubic triangle.

(Slide 2.)

When we construct it, we invite the deity to come to us.

(Slide 3.)

The *yantra* symbolizes the life force. The dot in the center is the *bindi*, the seed of life.

(Slide 4.)

Sometimes this life force is depicted as Kali dancing on the cosmic couple, whose desire brings all of creation into existence.

(Slide 5.)

Another popular image is that of Kali as the Ocean of Blood from which the universe emerged and into which it will return. In some villages, her statue is covered with bloodstained clothes during a part of each month imagined to be her menstrual period, and these garments are then prized as potent medicine.

(Slide 6.)

In her temple at Calcutta, animals are "sacrificed" to the Goddess, a ritual enacted in gruesome filth.

(Lights out on slide screen.)

The preferred method of sacrifice is beheading

(Beat.)

because when the throat is slit... the blood drains quickly.

(Beat.)

(Crossfade.)

Scene 9

Lights up on DETECTIVE and ARTEMIS.

DETECTIVE

Did she have any enemies?

ARTEMIS

Let's see...conservative Republicans, the Religious Right, Jewish orthodoxy, the Catholic Church, the Mormons, the Muslims, the Christian Coalition, the Ku Klux Klan, the National Organization for Marriage, Focus on the Family, the Family Research Council, Concerned Women for America, the Eagle Forum—and all the people who believe them. Shall I go on?

DETECTIVE

So you want to think it was a hate crime?

ARTEMIS

Want to think? No! I don't *want* to think about it at all. But, as you can imagine, that's not easy.

DETECTIVE

Yes. I'm sorry.... Did you ever hear Father Prasad preach against it?

ARTEMIS

Against murder?

DETECTIVE

Against homosexuality.

ARTEMIS

Ah—the greater sin. No. I never heard him preach.

DETECTIVE

You never went to church with Sheila?

ARTEMIS

I'm not Catholic. But you must know that from your...background check.

DETECTIVE

But she was...her choir—you never heard them sing?

ARTEMIS

For special occasions...I went to final rehearsals.

DETECTIVE
But not to the services.

ARTEMIS
No.

DETECTIVE
Was religion a source of tension between you?

ARTEMIS
Is that any of your business?

DETECTIVE
So it was.

ARTEMIS
Look, once in a while we argued about whose turn it was to fix dinner or take out the trash or mow the lawn. Maybe we disagreed about whether we should get the Verizon package or how much we could afford to spend on a vacation and where we should go. We fought about the same things other couples fight about—money and work and...

DETECTIVE
Other women?

ARTEMIS
Am I a suspect here?

DETECTIVE
Only if you behave like one.

ARTEMIS
And if I were the bereaved *husband*...?

DETECTIVE
Do you know the percentage of murders committed by husbands, boyfriends—

ARTEMIS
I'm *not* a boyfriend!

DETECTIVE
—mistresses, live-in lovers—

ARTEMIS
Partners! We were life partners!
(*Beat.*)

DETECTIVE
How long?

ARTEMIS
Ten years this May.

DETECTIVE
I'm sorry. I really am. I know what it's like to lose a loved one to violence.
(*Beat.*)
Can you think of any of her colleagues who had any reason to kill her?

ARTEMIS
Reason? No.

DETECTIVE
How about a jealous ex?

ARTEMIS
He's been happily married for ages.

DETECTIVE
He?

ARTEMIS
It happens.

DETECTIVE
A student disappointed with his music grade?

ARTEMIS
It's an *elementary* school.

DETECTIVE
Your point being?

ARTEMIS
She made music fun—the kids loved her.

DETECTIVE
It only takes one who didn't.

ARTEMIS
There may have been fifty—not every kid is willing to risk making a fool of himself. But I don't know of any who would kill her for making him sing. I'm telling you she loved those kids.

Equally?

DETECTIVE

What do you mean?

ARTEMIS

With all that “love” going around, there must have been some jealousy?

DETECTIVE

Oh please. You really think this was a crime of passion committed by a twelve-year-old?

ARTEMIS

What about *former* students?

DETECTIVE

The high school kids were welcome in the adult choir.

ARTEMIS

Where everyone was “equally” loved.

DETECTIVE

Where everyone loved singing.

ARTEMIS

What was she doing in the church that late?

DETECTIVE

The church was only across the street. She often stayed after to practice the organ. We have a piano at home, but it’s not the same. She always said.

ARTEMIS

But she was miserable with a cold. Wouldn’t she want to get home?

DETECTIVE

You’re obviously not a True Believer. There is no misery that playing the organ can’t make better—at least for a little while.

ARTEMIS

And...where were you that night?

DETECTIVE

Home.

ARTEMIS

Alone?

DETECTIVE

ARTEMIS

No, I was entertaining a trio of kinky leather dykes. They can all vouch for me.

DETECTIVE

You know, I'm not the enemy here.

ARTEMIS

Then why are you treating *me* like one?

DETECTIVE

I have to do my job.

ARTEMIS

Yeah, you cops are a dedicated lot. Like the ones in the All-American town where I grew up. The ones who ignored the pleas of the lesbian being stalked, who were busy looking the other way while she was cut up and raped.

DETECTIVE

(Shouting.)

I'm not those cops! Look at me! You think I don't know what prejudice looks like? What it feels like to be despised? You think you've got a corner on discrimination?

ARTEMIS

At least you've got civil rights in every state . You've got—

DETECTIVE

I've got a black face. No law is going to protect me from a bigot's hatred.

ARTEMIS

It'll make him think twice before he acts on it.

DETECTIVE

Listen to me. What I do is more than a job to me; it's a mission. I am trying to find this murderer and bring him to justice

ARTEMIS

How can you believe in justice? Don't you live in the world? Are you blind and deaf? Don't you see how innocent people suffer? There is no cosmic justice. Justice is just a category we've created. An idea we made up.

DETECTIVE

Which some of us try to implement—

ARTEMIS

—in a world that's basically unjust.

DETECTIVE

What's the alternative?
(Beat.)
 I really am on your side.

ARTEMIS

Are you?

DETECTIVE

Let's get back to you. I thought you said you weren't religious?

ARTEMIS

I said I wasn't Catholic.

DETECTIVE

Then why did you spend six months living with...
(Checks notes.)
 the Carmelite nuns in Avila?

ARTEMIS

For the same reason I spent six months with the Buddhist nuns in Kyoto and a year in the ashram in Calcutta. Oh, yes, and I ate a little peyote in Mexico and smoked a little dope in L.A. Whoops! Now you know—guess I'll never be able to run for president.

DETECTIVE

So it was research?

ARTEMIS

I was a graduate student. Writing my dissertation on "Images of the Divine in 18th-century Art." My roommate—a psyc major—was reading William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. Know it?

DETECTIVE

Afraid not.

ARTEMIS

James looks at the writings of mystics—people who claim to have had direct encounters with God and notices that their descriptions of these ineffable experiences are uncannily similar. They're from all different religions, believe in different deities; yet the psychological *experience* is the same.

DETECTIVE

So you decided to test this out.

ARTEMIS

Why not? I was young. My adviser knew how to get grant money.

DETECTIVE

And did you find God?

ARTEMIS

Oh yes. God was in the passion of the seekers—even the ones who sought to be without passion.

DETECTIVE

And did you have any mystical experiences?

ARTEMIS

Only while studying the art.

DETECTIVE

Ah.... God works in mysterious ways.

ARTEMIS

So she does.

DETECTIVE

(Consulting notes.)

You're a museum curator. Were you always...on the administrative side of art?

ARTEMIS

You mean have I always been a pathetically uncreative bean counter?

DETECTIVE

Your words.

ARTEMIS

I started out in art restoration. Still do a bit of it from time to time. Quite therapeutic. Meditative, really. Some might say another kind of "religious experience."

DETECTIVE

Tell me about your...rituals.

ARTEMIS

You've been talking to Maya.

DETECTIVE

An impressionable girl.

ARTEMIS

And a very intelligent one.

DETECTIVE

How did Ms. Dunn reconcile being a practicing Catholic with...the goddess business?

ARTEMIS

She had a big heart—room enough for all. But if you want more specific details on how that's done, you could ask the nuns in our group. Sister Trinitas is organizing the solstice celebration. Would you like to come?

DETECTIVE

You said you didn't go to Catholic services with Sheila.

ARTEMIS

That's right.

DETECTIVE

But surely you went to services when you lived with the Carmelites.

ARTEMIS

That was a long time ago.

DETECTIVE

Perhaps your heart has shrunk since then?

ARTEMIS

Or my tolerance for intolerance.

DETECTIVE

How much intolerance did Sheila encounter at work? Was she "out" there?

ARTEMIS

"Out" is a relative term. It's not like we had a church wedding.

DETECTIVE

But people knew.

ARTEMIS

Not because she told them.

DETECTIVE

What about you? Are you out at work?

ARTEMIS

In the art world, pink triangles are part of the uniform.

DETECTIVE

But Sheila had to be more...discrete?

ARTEMIS

You could put it that way.

DETECTIVE
How would *you* put it?

ARTEMIS
Sheila had to be more dishonest.

DETECTIVE
In what way?

ARTEMIS
Pretending. Pretending she wasn't in a committed relationship. Pretending she had no one who cared for her the way the other teachers' spouses cared for them. Pretending she was just "too busy" to go out with the eligible men they offered to introduce her to. Pretending she was satisfied with a celibate life—that she was "married" to her music, that I was a friend she shared a house with because it was cheaper and safer than living alone. Pretending to be somebody she wasn't.

DETECTIVE
And was that a problem?

ARTEMIS
What do you think?

DETECTIVE
Who knew?

ARTEMIS
Our families. Though Sheila's would have preferred not to.

DETECTIVE
What about her employer, Father Prasad?

ARTEMIS
Don't ask, don't tell.

DETECTIVE
But he knew.

ARTEMIS
He figured it out.

DETECTIVE
And the neighbors?

ARTEMIS
Some didn't know—the ones who are deaf and blind. Some knew and acted like they didn't.

ARTEMIS (*Cont.*)

A few knew and let us know it was okay. And a few...

DETECTIVE

Let you know it wasn't.

(*ARTEMIS nods.*)

What form did this...disapproval take?

ARTEMIS

Mostly snubbing. You'd say good morning and not get an answer. Our house would be skipped when someone was collecting for the Heart Fund or giving out flyers for the block party. A parent wouldn't let a daughter come to our home for her piano lesson.

Occasionally, our newspaper would disappear before we had a chance to bring it in. One Halloween, we got "Lezzie Bitches" soaped on the window.

(*She hesitates.*)

DETECTIVE

Go on.

ARTEMIS

When Sheila got her new car, someone scratched "Dykes die" just beneath the handle on the driver's side. Not big enough that anyone would notice when you drove by. Just big enough that every time she opened the door, she would be reminded that someone hated her for no good reason.

DETECTIVE

Why didn't you tell me this before?

ARTEMIS

I tried to. You went on your Blacks-suffer-more-than-Queers rampage.

DETECTIVE

Were there other things...like that?

ARTEMIS

There might have been. I don't know.

DETECTIVE

Wouldn't she have told you?

ARTEMIS

I got so angry about the car business. I wanted her to report it to the police. But she wouldn't.

DETECTIVE

Why not?

ARTEMIS

She said it would only stir up trouble—neighbors being questioned. She thought everyone's knowing what had been done would be worse than just having it done.

DETECTIVE

Was she scared or ashamed?

ARTEMIS

Maybe both.

DETECTIVE

Can you give me names—of these disapproving neighbors and parents?

ARTEMIS

The snubbers? Sure. But that's not a crime, is it—to ignore people you don't like. And the piano students' parents would never admit their real reason. The other damage was all conveniently anonymous.

DETECTIVE

If it *was* a hate crime...why kill Sheila and not you?

ARTEMIS

The very question boring a hole in my brain.

DETECTIVE

And the answer?

ARTEMIS

Maybe I'm next.

(Crossfade.)

Scene 10

Lights up on MAYA at funeral. She sings the “Pie Jesu” from Fauré’s Requiem. She struggles to get through it without breaking down; with great effort and control she manages to do it. Crossfade to FATHER, keeping low light on MAYA.

FATHER

(Delivering the funeral oration.)

“O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! For who has known the mind of God?”

My friends in Christ, it is not ours to know the mind of God, but to have faith in his wisdom and justice. Abraham did not know the mind of God when he was asked to sacrifice his only son; yet he took Isaac up the mountain and raised his knife in obedience. Moses did not know the mind of God when he was sent to Pharaoh; yet he defied Rameses and led his people into the wilderness. Job did not know the mind of God when he was stripped of his family, his goods, his health; yet he continued to praise God, saying “The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” Our Blessed Mother Mary did not know the mind of God when she saw her son hanging on the cross; yet she did not despair.

Much as we would rage against the dying of the light of one we held dear, much as we would decry this grotesque, violent death of one we believed had still so much joy to give, so much life to live, much as we would, with our human limitations, question the reason for this terrible tragedy, I beg you: do not. The ways of God are, as St. Paul reminds us, inscrutable. The divine plan must be a mystery to us. It is not ours to understand or to question, but to *accept*, with faith in the ultimate benevolence of our God.

(Beat.)

For if we do not...if we will not, then we will go mad. In the face of a godless, meaningless universe, we will be as mad as the insane creature who committed this unspeakable murder.

Of him I say this: though our hearts cry out for vengeance against him, I beg you to forgive him. Whoever he is, he was surely driven by demons we cannot comprehend and is desperately in need of our compassion and our prayers.

Let us pray....

(Crossfade to MAYA as FATHER joins her.)

MAYA

Father, why didn’t you say anything about resurrection—about how Christ rose from the dead and so will she?

FATHER

The liturgy speaks of it. I didn't see the need to repeat it.

MAYA

The liturgy speaks of the mysterious ways of God too. Yet you repeated that.

FATHER

I had to focus on something.

MAYA

Do you believe she went to heaven?

FATHER

Maya, only God knows who goes to heaven.

MAYA

But she was a kind and generous person.

FATHER

Yes.

MAYA

And she was in the state of grace.

FATHER

Only God can know that.

MAYA

I saw her in church that afternoon—coming out of your confessional. So she must have been...ready to die. I mean, her sins would have been forgiven, right?

FATHER

One always gets absolution for a good confession.

MAYA

What do you mean?

FATHER

Just what I said.

MAYA

And she made a good confession, right?

FATHER

Maya... you know I'm not free to talk about—

MAYA

She confessed...*all* her sins. She got absolution. And she came to choir rehearsal that night in a state of grace, ready to...to meet her God...our God...who is good and who understands all hearts and who is merciful. Right?

(Near screaming.)

Our God *is* merciful, isn't he, Father? Isn't he?!

FATHER

Yes, Maya, our God is merciful.

MAYA

And what about Kali? Does she disapprove?

FATHER

Disapprove of what?

MAYA

Of...of people who...people like...Sheila and Artemis.

FATHER

Kali is a mythological figure, Maya...a metaphor for life...both kind and cruel...sometimes rewarding us, sometimes punishing us, but always beckoning us to embrace her.

MAYA

And must we do what she tells us? Must we let her dance us?

FATHER

Come here, Maya.

(Takes her by the hand.)

Will you pray with me?

(They kneel.)

(Crossfade.)

Scene 11

Lights up on DETECTIVE and MEDICAL EXAMINER, who is in a wheelchair.

DETECTIVE

So where are we?

M.E.

Get anything from the neighbors?

DETECTIVE

Not really. It was clear some disapproved. They were grateful the two women “kept to themselves.” Ironic, isn’t it? What the couple considered “snubbing,” the neighbors justified as a respect for their privacy.

M.E.

The ones who disapproved—enough to kill her?

DETECTIVE

Hard to say. Nobody confessed to harboring any grudge or admitted knowledge of anyone who did. But then he wouldn’t would he—the killer?

M.E.

And the parents of her music students?

DETECTIVE

Agreed she was a good teacher. And very charming. A little too charming for some.

M.E.

Meaning?

DETECTIVE

A few felt the charm was nervous, even phony. A couple others saw it as inappropriately seductive.

M.E.

Really? Those would be the ones who insisted the lessons be at the school?

(DETECTIVE nods.)

What about parishioners?

DETECTIVE

I’ve directed the priest to make an announcement at all the masses asking anyone with information to come forward. Meanwhile I’ve questioned other staff—the office administrator, who was out of town the night of the murder, the sexton and the sacristan, Joseph and Joanna, a retired couple who volunteer their services.

M.E.

Is that usual?

DETECTIVE

No. But this is a very devout pair, according to their boss. Both seem to have regrets about not entering religious life when they were young and consider their childlessness God's punishment. I think they're trying to make up for it with free labor now.

M.E.

Do they have alibis?

DETECTIVE

Mutual. They were home together that night.

M.E.

And the choir members?

DETECTIVE

Are all in a state of shock. None of them can imagine who would do such a thing.

M.E.

What about her colleagues at the school?

DETECTIVE

Apparently she didn't socialize with them much. Oh—but one of them—who's also in the choir—had dated her some years back.

M.E.

Really?

DETECTIVE

(Checks notes.)

A Jack Cameron.

M.E.

How many years back?

DETECTIVE

Ten or twelve. He's been married a while.

M.E.

Happily?

DETECTIVE

Nobody's saying otherwise. What've you got for me?

M.E.

(Hands folder to DETECTIVE.)

Here's the preliminary report. Lab work's still out. Time of death between nine and ten. Fits in with the girl's story.

DETECTIVE

The fatal wound?

M.E.

Left side of throat slit.

DETECTIVE

Only left? Why not finish the job?

M.E.

Who knows? Killer imagined hearing someone coming?

DETECTIVE

Come on—one more second. Isn't it a gesture that begs for completion?

M.E.

A lot of blood. Not for the squeamish. Or maybe the victim's expression caused immediate remorse. The murderer had second thoughts.

DETECTIVE

What about the weapon?

M.E.

A clean, sharp blade.

DETECTIVE

Not your common kitchen knife?

M.E.

Sharper. Killer must have come up behind her at the organ, pulled back her head—

(Makes the cutting gesture.)

lets the head go—it falls onto the keyboard.

DETECTIVE

Lets the head go—but doesn't push it?

M.E.

No. Not enough bruising to support any additional force than the weight of the head.

DETECTIVE

A gentle killer.

M.E.

A careful one, anyway.

DETECTIVE

Right. No murder weapon found.

M.E.

And no prints out of the ordinary at the crime scene.

DETECTIVE

None?

M.E.

Well, the organ is full of them—half the people in the choir for starters. But why wouldn't it be?

DETECTIVE

I suppose the prints don't matter anyway. A careful killer would have worn gloves.

M.E.

Surgical gloves to handle that clean, sharp blade.

DETECTIVE

A scalpel? A straight razor?

M.E.

Want to check the parish roster for surgeons and barbers?

DETECTIVE

Or I could just start at the top.

M.E.

You don't have enough to get a warrant.

DETECTIVE

Maybe I won't need one. People are eager to cooperate when the press is at their door.

M.E.

Eager to demonstrate their own innocence.

DETECTIVE

Right. By the way, do biology teachers still dissect starfish and frogs?

M.E.

Cameron?

DETECTIVE

Worth a look. But his wife says he was home by nine-thirty.

M.E.

Does he live half an hour away?

DETECTIVE

No, but he stopped at the office supply store to get some yellow pads.

M.E.

And the receipt says...?

DETECTIVE

Nine-twenty-one.

M.E.

And the store is...?

DETECTIVE

Eight, ten minutes from the church?

M.E.

So...a minute to find the pads once he gets there. Another minute to check out. That gives him ten minutes.

DETECTIVE

He browsed—at the store.

M.E.

And the clerk remembers seeing him browse?

DETECTIVE

Of course not. The clerk was on the phone with her boyfriend.

M.E.

Means and opportunity. What about motive?

DETECTIVE

He wasn't getting along with his wife, so—

M.E.

The one who happily provided his alibi.

DETECTIVE

—so he went back to Sheila Dunn and she didn't want any part of him. Unrequited love—the oldest motive in the book.

M.E.

So...why didn't he kill her when she rejected him the first time?

DETECTIVE

Oh, he felt bad about that, but he didn't know back then she was rejecting him for another woman. It rankles, you know.

M.E.

You have a perverted fantasy life.

DETECTIVE

Jealous?

M.E.

Bring me the dissecting tools. I'll run a blood match.

DETECTIVE

Why do they want to do that anyway—dissect helpless animals? I mean is it worth it? Couldn't the kids just look at a picture or something?

M.E.

Well, I'm sure it'll warm your wussie heart to know they're starting to do it with computers now. Won't have to use real specimens any more. Virtual frogs are all the rage. But the rage probably hasn't yet reached low-budget parochial schools.

DETECTIVE

I'll check it out.

M.E.

It doesn't have to be a man, you know. Didn't take brute strength. The murderer had the advantage of surprise. She wouldn't have seen or heard anyone approaching.

DETECTIVE

True. Could have been any of them. They all knew her habit of staying on alone in the church and practicing.

M.E.

All the murderer needed to do was wait till the last choir member left.

DETECTIVE

But it didn't have to be one of them. It could have been someone else who knew her schedule.

M.E.

Or someone who didn't. A passerby who saw the light in the loft and heard the music from outside...a stranger who approached the church and found the door open...

DETECTIVE

And who happened to be carrying a scalpel? What's the motive?

M.E.

They didn't like the song?

DETECTIVE

They didn't like the singer. Or her life style.

M.E.

Or they were just having a bad night.

DETECTIVE

What?

M.E.

You think acts of cruelty are committed only by angry lovers or jilted suitors or crazed bigots? What about the gods?

DETECTIVE

The gods?

M.E.

A losing roll of the divine dice...

(Mimes rolling dice.)

A flick of the chromosome, and you're a psychopath...

(Beat.)

or a cripple.

(Crossfade.)

Scene 12

*Lights up on FATHER, kneeling in prayer.
ARTEMIS storms in carrying a package: a
printed document wrapped around a large box
of wooden matches.*

ARTEMIS

You hypocritical bastard, you killed her!

FATHER

What are you talking about?

ARTEMIS

I'm talking about you and your murderous church! That pathetic excuse for Christianity!

FATHER

Look, I don't know what you want. But this is a house of God and—

ARTEMIS

I want your head!

FATHER

—and in a house of God, respect should be—

ARTEMIS

Should be shown for Life! for human beings and ways they choose to love!

FATHER

Perhaps...perhaps not all choices are...acceptable.

ARTEMIS

Acceptable to you?

FATHER

To God.

ARTEMIS

And who are you to judge?

FATHER

We have the scriptures. The teachings of the Church, the—

ARTEMIS

(Waving the document.)

The "Letter to the Bishops on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons"?

FATHER

Where did you get that?

ARTEMIS

Where indeed?

(Unwraps box.)

No doubt from one of your “concerned” parishioners who stuffed it in my mailbox wrapped around this box of matches.

FATHER

Did you report this to the police?

ARTEMIS

Never fear. They’ll be here in a few minutes.

FATHER

Here?

ARTEMIS

I thought they might want to ask you about it?

FATHER

I can’t be personally responsible for—

ARTEMIS

Can’t you? Isn’t that what it means to be a leader? a priest? To be *responsible*?

FATHER

—for the erratic behavior of every parishioner who misinterprets a church document.

ARTEMIS

Misinterprets? *Misinterprets*?

FATHER

That letter is a call for compassion. It deplores violence or malice of any kind against homosexuals.

ARTEMIS

I guess your “erratic” parishioner missed that part.

FATHER

It addresses a political—a legal—issue. Yes, all right, it opposes some “rights” for gay people. But that doesn’t mean it condones violence against them.

ARTEMIS

I guess *you* missed *that* part.

ARTEMIS (*Cont.*)

(Waving box of matches at him.)

But my “inflamed admirer” was good enough to underline it for me.

(Reads.)

“When civil legislation is introduced to protect behavior to which no one has any conceivable right, neither the Church nor society at large should be surprised when other distorted notions and practices gain ground and irrational and violent reactions increase.”

(FATHER looks away.)

Did you read this from the pulpit?

FATHER

No.... We were directed to “publicize” it.

ARTEMIS

And how exactly did you do that?

FATHER

I..I posted it in the church vestibule. On the message board.

ARTEMIS

Yeah. Well.

(She thrusts matches into his chest.)

Somebody got your message.

(Crossfade.)

Scene 13

Lights up on FATHER and SHEILA.

FATHER

(Looking at résumé.)

Your musical training is quite impressive, Miss Dunn.

SHEILA

Thank you, Father.

FATHER

With these credentials you could be applying for a much more prestigious position. Why do you want to teach at Saint Mary's?

SHEILA

I want to work with children. But I also enjoy conducting an adult choir. I thought this would give me the opportunity to do both.

FATHER

And a lot more, I'm afraid.

SHEILA

Oh, I don't mind work. When there's music involved, it doesn't seem like work. Sometimes I've actually thought it isn't fair to get paid for something I enjoy so much.

FATHER

You'll get over that—especially when you hear how little you'll get paid.

SHEILA

I don't suppose you're kidding.

FATHER

Unfortunately not.

SHEILA

Why do we think that, I wonder—that work should be hard...unpleasant, the opposite of enjoyment, and that somehow we have to earn the right to play?

FATHER

Lent before Easter.

SHEILA

Advent before Christmas.

Adam and Eve, I guess. FATHER

God made us to play, and we screwed up? SHEILA

So to speak. FATHER

Doesn't seem fair, does it? SHEILA

That's what heaven's for. FATHER

To right all wrongs? SHEILA

To reward all suffering. FATHER

I was hoping for a few rewards on earth. SHEILA

Then it's good your specialty is music, not theology. FATHER

For me they're the same. God is the music.
(He seems stunned, distracted.)
Did I...did I say something heretical? SHEILA

No. It isn't...I...you took me by surprise. FATHER

Surprise? SHEILA

My...my wife used to say that. She was a singer. "God is the music." She used to say that. FATHER

Your wife? SHEILA

I'm a widower. I was married...before I... FATHER

SHEILA

I'm sorry. About your wife.

FATHER

My daughter is a sixth grader. You'll like her. She has her mother's genes. Now she wants to play the organ. Is that something you'd—

SHEILA

Of course. I'd love to teach her.

FATHER

There'll be others too. You can count on piano and organ lessons to supplement your salary.

SHEILA

What's your daughter's name?

FATHER

Maya. My mother chose it. It's the name of the Indian Goddess Kali in her virgin form—creator of the material world...which the Hindus believe is illusion, relative reality. Real to us, until...until the veil is lifted with the dawn of our becoming one with—

SHEILA

Brahman.

FATHER

You've studied Hinduism?

SHEILA

Only vicariously. My roommate Artemis has a passion for religious art.

FATHER

Art and music. A match made in...graduate school?

SHEILA

Not quite.

(Changing the subject.)

So, do I get the job?

FATHER

I'm afraid it's only a one-year contract to start.

SHEILA

And if I continue to commit the crime of enjoying my work?

FATHER

You'll get a life sentence!

(Crossfade.)

Scene 14

Unrealistic lighting on SHEILA, ARTEMIS, and MAYA dancing to the “Viens, Mallika” duet from Delibes’s Lakmé. The dance is innocent and playful at first. Then SHEILA and ARTEMIS focus more on each other and their dancing becomes more energetic, intense. MAYA tries to be a part of their duet but cannot. It is not that they rebuff her—just that their focus is so exclusively on each other that they are no longer aware of her. The duet becomes erotic. MAYA goes from trying to join in to trying to stop it. As the dance/dancers come to a climax, we hear a loud dissonant organ chord, as in Scene 1. SHEILA and ARTEMIS freeze. MAYA falls to the floor, crying out.

(Blackout.)

Scene 15

Lights up on MAYA, standing C. DETECTIVE stands very close to her, holding a straight razor in front of MAYA's face.

Do you recognize this? DETECTIVE

A straight razor? MAYA

Whose? DETECTIVE

My father's? MAYA

With your fingerprints on it. DETECTIVE

We share a medicine cabinet. MAYA

Do you share this razor? DETECTIVE

No. MAYA

What did you use it for? DETECTIVE

Use it? MAYA

How did your prints get on it? DETECTIVE

I guess I moved it...to get something behind. MAYA

It's a very well organized medicine cabinet, isn't it? DETECTIVE
(No response.)

DETECTIVE (*Cont.*)

On the bottom shelf—within a child’s reach—toothpaste, lotion, band aids. On the second shelf...moisturizer, makeup, nail polish, hair spray. On the top shelf...Mennen’s deodorant, Old Spice lotion, shaving cream, and...this razor.

MAYA

I guess my father must have accidentally put it back on the wrong shelf and—

DETECTIVE

Put it with your lipsticks.

MAYA

(*Ignoring this.*)

—and I moved it back to his.

DETECTIVE

Did you...ever open it up—just to have a look?

MAYA

I might have.

DETECTIVE

And on the occasion when you might have done that, what might you have noticed about it?

(*Hands it to her.*)

MAYA

That it’s old. It was my grandfather’s.

DETECTIVE

What else?

MAYA

(*She opens it slowly, speaks slowly.*)

That it’s hard to open. There’s a...resistance...that you have to overcome.

DETECTIVE

A resistance? Really?

MAYA

Well not a mechanical resistance, like a penknife has. But the way it’s made...the weight of the blade...it can’t be opened accidentally. You have to *want* to open it.

DETECTIVE

Go on.

MAYA

That it's longer than a penknife or a paring knife...and the blade has a different shape. It's wider, straighter. And much sharper. You can see where it's honed to an edge...an edge that's excruciatingly fine. So fine you want to touch it.

DETECTIVE

And do you?

MAYA

No! It would hurt.

DETECTIVE

So what do you do?

MAYA

You lift it up and look more closely at the blade.

(She does this.)

DETECTIVE

And what do you see?

MAYA

Yourself. Not your whole face. Just your eyes.

(Beat.)

Your three eyes.

DETECTIVE

Three?

MAYA

(With the blade, she points to the place in the middle of her forehead, just above her brows.)

The eye of knowledge.

DETECTIVE

What is it you know when you look at the blade?

MAYA

That we all must die.

DETECTIVE

But not violently. Not by the blade.

MAYA

By the blade or some other way. It doesn't matter.

DETECTIVE

It matters to me!

MAYA

Because, unlike Kali, you don't yet have the third eye.

DETECTIVE

(Takes the razor from her.)

It must be confusing for you sometimes—an Indian girl living in an American culture.

MAYA

No more confusing than it is for you—an African man in an American culture? Aren't we both Americans?

DETECTIVE

To the extent we are allowed to be.

MAYA

Or choose to be.

DETECTIVE

What do you choose?

MAYA

Father says it's only right for us to think of ourselves as Americans—we were born here. It's not our adopted country, it's our native country. But we should honor our Indian heritage. No different from the German- or Irish-Americans who honor theirs.

DETECTIVE

But, unlike yours and mine, the German and Irish traditions do not include brown skin and a pantheon of deities. It makes it a little more challenging to...assimilate, don't you agree?

MAYA

Not for me.

DETECTIVE

Good.... Tell me...to whom do you pray?

MAYA

I pray to...to all the deities

DETECTIVE

Is that what your Catholic Father taught you to do?

(She looks away.)

He doesn't know, does he?

(She looks alarmed.)

DETECTIVE (*Cont.*)

Don't worry. It's not my place to tell him. So when you pray...to Christ and Kali...who answers?

MAYA

Jesus answers my prayers in church....

DETECTIVE

And Kali?

MAYA

In dreams. Kali dances me in dreams.

DETECTIVE

She is a very sexual and violent goddess, isn't she?

MAYA

Sometimes.

DETECTIVE

Does she—in your dreams—encourage any sexual or violent behavior?

MAYA

(Uncomfortable.)

No.

DETECTIVE

Where did you first hear of Kali—from your Father?

MAYA

From my grandmother.

DETECTIVE

But your grandmother was a Catholic too, right?

MAYA

Yes, she converted when my grandfather did, but she didn't seem happy about it. I think she was always a Hindu at heart.

DETECTIVE

And what did she tell you about Kali?

MAYA

That homage must be paid to her. Pūjās—offerings of flowers or incense, chanting, sacrifices.

DETECTIVE
What kind of sacrifices?

MAYA
Food mostly, fruit and stuff.

DETECTIVE
And you still do these things?

MAYA
Sometimes.

DETECTIVE
But your grandmother died when you were...

MAYA
Ten.

DETECTIVE
And Sheila Dunn became your music teacher when you were—

MAYA
Eleven.

DETECTIVE
It must have been a great relief to find someone else who...revered the goddesses.

MAYA
Yes.

DETECTIVE
Did having that bond with her make you feel very close?

MAYA
Of course. But what made us feel closest, I think was...

DETECTIVE
What?

MAYA
Music. We both loved music. Lived in it really.

DETECTIVE
Lived together in the music?

Yes.

MAYA

DETECTIVE

Would you say she was...like a mother to you?

MAYA

I don't know. I never had a mother.

DETECTIVE

Like a grandmother, then.

MAYA

Oh no. She was much too young and beautiful to be a grandmother.

DETECTIVE

I suppose you're right. One of the parishioners I spoke with described her as "seductive."
Would you agree?

MAYA

I...I can see why someone might say that.

DETECTIVE

Did *you* find her seductive?

MAYA

What do you mean?

DETECTIVE

Did she ever try to...seduce you?

MAYA

Why would she do that? She already had...someone.

DETECTIVE

Did you...did you ever wish *you* could be her someone?

MAYA

What would be the point of being jealous of Artemis? Who could compete?

DETECTIVE

Did you ever...have a crush on her?

MAYA

Lots of us choir girls had a crush on her. And maybe the boys too, I guess. Even Father said she was..."charismatic." Is that another word for "seductive"?

DETECTIVE

Maya, I have to ask you this: did Sheila Dunn ever...touch you?

MAYA

Sure. She was always jabbing us in the diaphragm when we weren't breathing properly.

DETECTIVE

I mean...touch you...with affection.

MAYA

She was big on hugs. We liked that about her.

DETECTIVE

Maya. Did Ms. Dunne ever touch you in a way she shouldn't have?

MAYA

No.

DETECTIVE

Would you tell me if she had?

MAYA

No.

(Crossfade.)

Scene 16

Lights up on DETECTIVE and FATHER.

DETECTIVE
What is it you want?

FATHER
I want to confess.

DETECTIVE
To what?

FATHER
To murder. I killed Sheila Dunn.

DETECTIVE
Oh?

FATHER
I slit her throat with my straight razor.

DETECTIVE
I see.

FATHER
I knew she stayed after choir rehearsal to play the organ. That she wouldn't hear me climbing the stairs or coming up behind her.

DETECTIVE
What was she playing?
(FATHER looks puzzled.)
On the organ? What piece of music?

FATHER
Bach.
(DETECTIVE looks at him.)
"Jesu Joy of Man=s Desiring."

DETECTIVE
That's not what was in front of her.

FATHER
She knew it by heart!

DETECTIVE
Is that so?

FATHER
You have my prints on the razor and on the organ. What more do you need?

DETECTIVE
Motive.

FATHER
You've already guessed that.

DETECTIVE
Confirm my suspicions.

FATHER
She was a threat to Maya. And the other girls.

DETECTIVE
You feared sexual abuse?

FATHER
The seduction was of a much more dangerous kind.

DETECTIVE
Why didn't you just forbid Maya to have anything to do with her?

FATHER
You've never had a teenage daughter.

DETECTIVE
So fire the woman. Send her packing.

FATHER
To where? Is there a place where children are safe from such an influence?

DETECTIVE
So you decided to play god.

FATHER
I don't expect you to understand.

DETECTIVE
Help me.

FATHER
Look. I committed a crime. I am prepared to pay for it.

DETECTIVE
 What took you so long?

FATHER
 What?

DETECTIVE
 Why didn't we find you at the scene, razor dripping blood, hands extended for the cuffing?

FATHER
 I...I panicked.

DETECTIVE
 And from then till now you've been panicking?

FATHER
 I've been...praying.

DETECTIVE
 Ah. And what if I don't buy it? Your "hate-crime" motive.

FATHER
 Why wouldn't you?

DETECTIVE
 Because you loved her.

FATHER
 What makes you think that?

DETECTIVE
 Intuition.

FATHER
 What if I did? What if I loved her fervently? Desired her physically? What if I loved her and she didn't—wouldn't—love me back? Crime of passion.

DETECTIVE
 So what you're saying is I can take my pick of motives: fear or desire, hate or love?

FATHER
 You don't have to choose between opposites. None of us do.... My mother told me stories of the Goddess Kali who is at once a creator and a destroyer. She dances with joy on the corpses at cremations, gathering up the souls to be seeds for new life.

DETECTIVE
 The Yoruba say wherever there is violence, there is the Goddess Oya. She is the tornado that

DETECTIVE (*Cont.*)

tears down trees, the earthquake that swallows houses, the force that makes the River Niger flood. She is the purifying wind and fire, the insatiable, frenzied dancer on the threshold of life and death who carries off corpses and delivers newborns.

FATHER

I've read that some of the more extreme practitioners of Tantric Hinduism have been known to taste excrement or eat the flesh from burning corpses in order to conquer their attachment to the body and to this life of illusion. Rather than block out the unpleasant aspects of life, they sit among corpses, and thus are better able to transcend the "pairs of opposites"—good and bad, love and hate, life and death.

DETECTIVE

Sounds pretty gruesome, disgusting really.

FATHER

Ah, but that's just the point. *We* think of these things as polluted or forbidden because our consciousness is so limited. We have divided reality into categories according to our ego-centered ideas of how the world should be. For Kali, there are no such categories. She is outside the order imposed by us and laughs at our petty conventions. She is naked, with untamed hair and lascivious lolling tongue, intoxicated from drinking the blood of her victims. She invites us to be open to all that is, to dare to taste even that which disgusts, to dare to *do* even that which appalls—in order to experience the underlying unity of all things, which is the Great Goddess herself.

DETECTIVE

And would you accept that invitation? Do you want to be part of such a life force?

FATHER

Do we have a choice?

DETECTIVE

You seem to have chosen...differently.

FATHER

Ah. Yes, my church is the Queen of Categories

DETECTIVE

And for you, that is—?

FATHER

Comforting.

(*Crossfade.*)

Scene 17

Lights up on DETECTIVE and MEDICAL EXAMINER.

M.E.

Any of the parishioners come forward to identify a possible suspect?

DETECTIVE

No. Or so the priest says.

M.E.

Would he lie?

DETECTIVE

He would conceal the truth if it were told him in the confessional.

M.E.

You think our killer's the one who sent the matches to the lover?

DETECTIVE

Could be. Or could be they're two different perps, and the second one is somebody who was emboldened by the first one's getting away with murder.

M.E.

Maybe not.

DETECTIVE

What?

M.E.

Maybe the murderer's not getting away with it.

(Hands papers to DETECTIVE.)

The lab reports.

DETECTIVE

(Takes a moment to peruse them.)

Can this be right?

M.E.

Does Science lie?

DETECTIVE

It's hard to believe...

M.E.

Life is full of surprises...curve balls...mean tricks...

DETECTIVE

But she was...so...

M.E.

So young. So healthy. So strong. So good. So old, so sick, so weak, so wicked. So inescapably, irreversibly human. So goddamn *mortal*.

DETECTIVE

But this...this changes everything. Do you suppose she knew?

M.E.

Find out. Employer's records should list an HMO.

DETECTIVE

And if she did...if she did know...could she have...?

M.E.

It's possible.

DETECTIVE

Is it? Is it really possible? I mean physically possible?

M.E.

The head fell forward. *Fell*. Without being pushed. And only the one side was cut.

DETECTIVE

But the hands—both hands were on the keyboard.

M.E.

Where else would they be?

DETECTIVE

They were found palms down.

M.E.

Or put that way.

DETECTIVE

By?

(*M.E. shrugs.*)

And the weapon?

M.E.

Fell out.

DETECTIVE

Into a black hole?

Onto the floor. And taken away.

M.E.

By?

DETECTIVE

By whoever found the body?

M.E.

Or by whoever wanted it to look like something else.

DETECTIVE

The girl, Maya—she went for help, right?

M.E.

Yes, it was her father who called us.

DETECTIVE

But did she go to him first?

M.E.

Who else? The partner?

DETECTIVE

You said they lived close by.

M.E.

But the girl would have seen her take the weapon and—

DETECTIVE

She wasn't there. She was running home to her father.

M.E.

She would have remembered seeing it in the beginning.

DETECTIVE

Would she? A small blade on the floor...in the shadow of the great organ. Her dead teacher's red blood encroaching on the white keys.

M.E.

But how would Artemis have got...what would she be doing with the straight razor?

DETECTIVE

Read on.

M.E.

DETECTIVE

(Reads, then.)

No blood at all on the blade?

M.E.

Not a powdery drop.

DETECTIVE

Not even his own?

M.E.

Apparently the good Father is a fastidious shaver.

DETECTIVE

So we don't have the weapon.

M.E.

We don't have *evidence* that his razor was the weapon.

DETECTIVE

What about Cameron's scalpel?

M.E.

Lots of animal tissue. None of it human.

DETECTIVE

The victim's throat was cut with a fine sharp blade.

(M.E. shows a paper with drawings on it.)

What's this?

M.E.

I've been doing some Internet research.

DETECTIVE

(Looking at the sheet.)

On art restoration?

M.E.

These are pictures of the tools used in restoring damaged paintings.

(DETECTIVE studies the tools. M.E. points.)

I'm particularly fond of this one.

(Crossfade.)

Scene 18*Lights up on DETECTIVE and ARTEMIS.*

I don't believe it!

ARTEMIS

It's hard to argue with an autopsy report.

DETECTIVE

No. It's impossible.

ARTEMIS

Why was she taking the Death and Dying seminar?

DETECTIVE

She worked with grieving families in the parish to create funeral liturgies. She thought it would help her to understand what they had to—look, she would have told me. We didn't keep secrets. Certainly not ones like this.

ARTEMIS

Perhaps she...wanted to spare you—

DETECTIVE

Like I wouldn't have found—

ARTEMIS

—for the time being.

DETECTIVE

But I would have *known*...I mean the symptoms...

ARTEMIS

Are not all that frightening or unusual in the beginning. Coughing...a little chest pain... tiredness. What most of us would put down to stress...or even a lingering cold.

DETECTIVE

And in the end?

ARTEMIS

Without surgery, lung cancer is incurable.

DETECTIVE

And with surgery?

ARTEMIS

DETECTIVE

Only twenty-five per cent of tumors can be successfully removed. Maybe she knew hers couldn't.

ARTEMIS

And if it's not removed?

DETECTIVE

It spreads to other parts of the body—liver, kidneys, bones, brain, larynx.

ARTEMIS

Larynx...

DETECTIVE

The lungs collapse. The fingers become club-shaped.

(ARTEMIS looks at her hands.)

It's excruciatingly painful. Survival rate after five years is less than ten per cent.

ARTEMIS

She would have believed she was in that ten percent. She was...a passionate believer...in life.

DETECTIVE

And what would have been left of her?

ARTEMIS

What are you saying?

DETECTIVE

It seems that she had a strong motive for suicide.

ARTEMIS

Suicide?! Are you crazy? Sheila was a practicing Catholic.

DETECTIVE

Also, apparently, a practicing Pagan.

ARTEMIS

"Thou shalt not kill!"

DETECTIVE

"Thou shalt have no other gods!"

ARTEMIS

You don't know Sheila Dunn! To you, she's just another case...another corpse...another step towards Mission Accomplished. You don't understand! I do. I *know* her. She was my lover, my best friend, the person I shared my life with. And I am telling you Sheila did not commit suicide!

DETECTIVE

There is another possibility. That she was spared the pain...by someone who loved her.

ARTEMIS

By someone who...

DETECTIVE

Loved her.

ARTEMIS

Me?

DETECTIVE

Who is there that loved her more?

ARTEMIS

Kill Sheila?

DETECTIVE

Did she ever make a living will?

ARTEMIS

Yes. We both did.

DETECTIVE

And medical power of attorney?

ARTEMIS

We designated each other.

DETECTIVE

So she gave you the right to pull the plug.

ARTEMIS

Taking someone off life support when she's brain dead is not the same as slitting her throat while she's happily playing the organ! Or are you too insensitive to know the difference?

DETECTIVE

"Elvira Madigan."

ARTEMIS

What?

DETECTIVE

The classic movie. The young Swedish couple who knew they were going to die. Don't you remember the last scene? They go out into a beautiful meadow and hold each other close. Then she chases a butterfly in the tall grass, and when he's sure she's happy in the moment...

DETECTIVE (*Cont.*)

he shoots her. The frame freezes. We hear another shot. And the credits run.

ARTEMIS

I could never kill Sheila! Do you hear me?—never! This is not the movies! This is real life! Her life! My life! Our life together! *Life!*

DETECTIVE

And death.

ARTEMIS

And...death. Yes...it...it really is, isn't it...?

(She visibly falters.)

Final...inevitable...irrevocable...death. The end.

DETECTIVE

And the beginning?

ARTEMIS

Oh, how I wish...

(Wanting to believe it.)

How do we know?

DETECTIVE

We don't.

ARTEMIS

Some people believe.

DETECTIVE

Do you?

ARTEMIS

I'd like to. But is that enough? Wanting to.

DETECTIVE

Maybe. If it's all we can do.... Just keep on wanting....

ARTEMIS

Keep on searching...

DETECTIVE

Asking the questions...

ARTEMIS

Like a good detective?

DETECTIVE

Like a good artist?

ARTEMIS

Yes.

DETECTIVE

I remember after my first unsolved homicide, I looked up the word “mystery.” Wanted to get at the “root,” so to speak. It’s Greek. *Must \square ri \square on*. Means “secret rites,” “to initiate,” “to close the eyes or mouth,” “to keep a secret.”

ARTEMIS

So...the one being initiated...discovers the secret?

(DETECTIVE shrugs.)

You can’t give up. Find out who sent me those matches.

DETECTIVE

I will. I promise.

(Blackout.)

Scene 19

Lights up on JOSEPH, waiting, holding a bible. FATHER enters.

FATHER

Good evening, Joseph. You wanted to see me?

JOSEPH

Yes, Father. I want...I need the sacrament of Penance.

FATHER

Now?

JOSEPH

Yes. It's important. Would you hear my confession?

FATHER

Well, I...yes, if you.... Would you like to go over to the church?

JOSEPH

We can stay here.

(FATHER sits, gestures for JOSEPH to sit, but he kneels and waits for FATHER to bless him with the sign of the cross.)

Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. I have terrible doubts. It's hard for me to have faith.

FATHER

We all have doubts sometimes, Joseph. Especially during these trying times when the will of God seems so harsh. But he understands our doubts.

JOSEPH

I don't believe God understands mine.

FATHER

What is it you have doubts about?

JOSEPH

I have doubted the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit told me what I was to do. And I did it. But only part. The Holy Spirit trusted me, but I can't go on with...my mission. How can God forgive me for that? I can't forgive myself.

FATHER

How...how exactly did the Holy Spirit tell you...what you were to do?

JOSEPH

The same way he tells you, Father—through the scriptures and the teaching of the Church.

(Opens Bible to 1 Corinthians and recites from memory.)

“The unjust will not possess the kingdom of God...neither fornicators, nor adulterers, nor the effeminate, nor sodomites....”

FATHER

(Alarmed.)

And...what does this have to do with y—

JOSEPH

(Flipping a few pages back to Romans and pointing at the text, while looking at FATHER.)

“They dishonor their own bodies...their women have exchanged the natural use for that which is against nature...doing shameless things!”

FATHER

Joseph—what do you think the Holy Spirit told you to do?

JOSEPH

(Flipping to Leviticus, holding the bible out to FATHER.)

“If a man lies with another man as with a woman, both of them shall be put to death for their abominable deed; they have forfeited their lives.”

(FATHER takes the bible, closes it, puts it on the seat next to him)

FATHER

You killed Sheila Dunn, didn't you?

JOSEPH

She forfeited her life. So did the other one. But I didn't kill her. I doubted. It was so clear, the calling. And yet I doubted, even as I was...there was so much blood...and her eyes—full of surprise...and hurt. I panicked, I ran. I couldn't do it again. I just couldn't. I've betrayed God's trust. I need absolution, Father.

FATHER

You have committed murder. You have killed another human being! *That* is what you must be sorry for.

JOSEPH

(Stands.)

How can you say that? You—a man of God. Holy Scripture—the word of God—is clear. They have forfeited their lives!

FATHER

Listen to me: you have done a terrible thing. It may be that you didn't understand what you were doing at the time, but you *have* done a terrible thing and—

JOSEPH

You won't tell—the police, I mean. Will you?

FATHER

No, I won't. I mustn't. But *you* must. You must go to the police and tell them—

JOSEPH

I only did what any god-fearing Christian who takes the Scriptures to heart would do—what righteous people everywhere should be doing before—

FATHER

Go to the police tell them what you've done.

JOSEPH

And be punished for doing the will of God?

FATHER

And get a psychological examination. You're...you're not well, Joseph. They'll be able to see this. You'll get help.

(Stands.)

I'll go with you.

JOSEPH

I'm not going any place! I don't need "help." God needs *my* help and I've given it. But not enough. I wasn't able to finish...I doubted.

FATHER

Don't you see—? That doubt is a good thing. It's your conscience.

JOSEPH

(Pushes FATHER back down.)

I came here for absolution! You have to give it to me.

FATHER

And I will. As soon as you show me you are sorry for killing Sheila Dunn.

JOSEPH

I'm not! She was committing sacrilege over and over. Polluting our church, our organ, our children's minds with her filthy sinfulness. I'm not sorry I killed her. I only wish I'd had the courage to kill the other one too. You shouldn't be sorry either. The fewer of them left in the world, the safer good people will be.

FATHER

Did you...did you take the bishops' letter off the message board? Did you put the matches in the mailbox?

JOSEPH

The bishops understand the situation. Those perverts are breaking God's law—they don't have "any conceivable right" to protection. Righteous people are bound to react.

FATHER

That's not what the bishops said.

JOSEPH

You should have read the letter from the pulpit.

FATHER

I'm sorry now I even posted it.

JOSEPH

What kind of a priest are you?!

FATHER

That doesn't matter. What matters is that you get help before you hurt someone else.

JOSEPH

I don't want help—I want absolution!

FATHER

I've told you: you have—

JOSEPH

I have betrayed the Holy Spirit!

(Grabs the priest by the shoulders and shakes him.)

You have to forgive me for that!

FATHER

*(Breaks JOSEPH's hold and grabs him by the wrists,
Then, shouting into his face.)*

God. Is. Merciful!

(JOSEPH is momentarily shocked into stillness.)

Come...please—kneel down and pray with me.

JOSEPH

(Pulls away, backs off slowly, incanting.)

"And thou, O Lord, hast known me, thou hast seen me and proved my heart with thee. Gather them together as sheep for a sacrifice, and prepare them for a day of slaughter."

(Takes a straight razor from his pocket and opens it.)

FATHER

Please—no. There has been enough slaughter. This is not God's will.

JOSEPH

St. Paul understood—why can't you? "Without faith..."

(Breaks down, then gathers intent.)

"Without faith it is impossible to please God."

FATHER

No!

(Blackout.)

Scene 20

Lights up on DETECTIVE and FATHER.

DETECTIVE

I didn't believe your last confession. Why should I believe this one?

FATHER

Because the body of a man with his throat slit is in my office.

DETECTIVE

And it wasn't self-defense?

FATHER

Joseph would never attack me.

DETECTIVE

Why then?

FATHER

I can tell you nothing of what he said or did. You understand that. What I can tell you is that I am responsible for this death.

DETECTIVE

Well, Father, the way I see it, there are three possible scenarios.

Number One: He comes to you for absolution but you won't give it because he doesn't really repent. So he lashes out at you in anger, but you're able to overcome him and, much to your dismay, you kill him in self defense.

Number Two: He confesses, but no matter how much you try to convince him that his sin is pardonable, he can't bring himself to believe it. Despairing, he takes his own life.

Number Three, the least likely, is your version. Since you won't—sorry, are forbidden to—provide any details, I am forced to imagine them. He comes to you, as in the earlier versions, confessing the murder. But try as you will, you cannot persuade him to feel any guilt about the slaughter he has committed or the one he is about to commit. Fearing yet another murder—for surely it was he who sent the matches—and desperate because you can neither turn him in nor convince him to turn himself in—you execute him yourself.

My money's on Number Two—the suicide.

FATHER

Why would I lie?

DETECTIVE

Because you *feel* responsible for both Joseph's derangement and Sheila's murder. Because you publicized the letter the killer used to justify his violence. Because you preached against homosexual behavior—probably citing those very biblical passages this madman had underlined in his bible. And you may indeed *be morally* responsible. But I don't think the law will see it that way. You did not wield the razor, in either case.

FATHER

I think you'll find my prints on the one in my office—and I won't plead self-defense.

DETECTIVE

No doubt you did a noble job of planting them there. But did you do an accurate job? And when we look closely at that razor—at Joseph's razor—won't we recognize it as the one used to murder Sheila?

FATHER

I am guilty—I must be punished.

DETECTIVE

Is that the Hindu or the Catholic speaking?

FATHER

It is the voice of one who seeks justice.

DETECTIVE

Well, you'll have to work that out with your god. Or goddess. The law can't punish you for a crime you didn't commit.

FATHER

What about provoking criminal acts? Isn't that something the law punishes?

DETECTIVE

You mean the "intent to incite violence"?

FATHER

Yes.

DETECTIVE

And did you have such an intent?

FATHER

My words...

DETECTIVE

Your words?

FATHER

The words of my Scriptures...my bishops....

DETECTIVE

So must we lock up all clergy who have spoken out against homosexuality? Or just the ones who feel guilty enough to present themselves as sacrificial lambs?

FATHER

Don't mock me.

DETECTIVE

Have you thought about what would happen to your daughter if you went to jail?

FATHER

I'm sure her mother's sister would take her in. She'd probably be better off in a normal family anyway. They live in Montana.

DETECTIVE

And there are no homosexuals in Montana.

FATHER

Stop it! I have confessed. You must accept my confession.

DETECTIVE

Not if the evidence shows someone else did the killing.

FATHER

The only other person in the room is dead. You have to take my word.

DETECTIVE

It's not my job to soothe your conscience for the sins of your church. You want to be made a spectacle of? Fine. Go to the media. Find a publisher. Out-confess Augustine in a torrent of *mea culpas*, then donate your massive royalties to Gay Pride Week.

FATHER

I want to—

DETECTIVE

I don't care what you want. Two people are dead that didn't have to be. You want your own personal justice for your role in that, great, then get square with your god, if you can manage that. But don't screw up the *human* justice system with false testimony.

FATHER

That's your god isn't it?—the human justice system.

DETECTIVE

From where I stand at this moment, it looks a lot more honest than yours.

(Crossfade.)

Scene 21

Lights up on ARTEMIS, continuing her slide lecture.

ARTEMIS

(Slide 1.)

Kali *sees*—far beyond where our vision ends. Her intoxication—with wine or blood—implies an altered, liberated consciousness.

(Slide 2.)

The death imagery that surrounds her suggests that Kali may be the guide who can dance us from one state of being to another...even from this world...to...another?

(Slide 3.)

In her destroyer mode, she may well be our worst nightmare—our own terror of annihilation.

(Lights out on slide screen.)

Primitive peoples seemed to understand that life and death are the same. The paradox was somehow made bearable for them through ritual resolution, ritual expression of the fury. For us, the paradox remains *unbearable*...unless we can come to know—come to *feel in our flesh*—that Kali's dance is not a funeral dirge, but a birthing frenzy, a reel of perpetual regeneration.

(Crossfade.)

Scene 22

Lights up on ARTEMIS and MAYA.

MAYA

You were at the service.

ARTEMIS

Yes.

MAYA

I was afraid you wouldn't come.

ARTEMIS

I made an exception...just this once. You sang beautifully.

MAYA

Thank you.

ARTEMIS

Must have been hard. How did you get through it?

MAYA

It's a prayer. "Blessed Jesu, I pray in thy mercy grant her everlasting rest." I thought if I could sing it—if I could make myself get through it, she would get it. Everlasting rest. Heaven. I know...it's silly...to think we could have that much power.

ARTEMIS

Where did you get the idea that someone's eternal happiness might depend on your ability to control your grief?

MAYA

Father gives hundreds of eulogies and he never cries—even when the person's a friend.

ARTEMIS

And you...admire that?

MAYA

I think it's harder when you're singing though. There's something about music that...it puts you...closer to the edge...

ARTEMIS

The edge of conscious control?

MAYA

The edge of...our world. And on the threshold of the next...of the other world.

ARTEMIS

What do you see when...when the veil between is lifted?

MAYA

It's not seeing; it's feeling.

ARTEMIS

What do you feel?

MAYA

Bigger. Bigger than my self.... And safer.

ARTEMIS

Why safer?

MAYA

I feel safe in the music. Inside the sound. Sometimes my mother is there.

ARTEMIS

And does she comfort you?

MAYA

I don't need her to, there. Because there I *am* her.

ARTEMIS

It doesn't seem fair, does it? That you've lost another mother.

MAYA

Fair?

ARTEMIS

A cruel injustice—that you're made to suffer it yet again.

MAYA

Perhaps less cruel than to inflict it on someone who hasn't had the practice.

ARTEMIS

You don't have to hide your grief from me, you know. I'm not your father.

MAYA

It would be...self-indulgent. Yours is...so much greater.

ARTEMIS

It's not a contest.

What should I do?

MAYA

Find her in the music. In the singing.

ARTEMIS

And what will you do?

MAYA

I don't know.

ARTEMIS

What will you do without her?

MAYA

I can't be without her.

ARTEMIS

Then where will you find her?

MAYA

Perhaps...I'll find her in the searching.

ARTEMIS

(Crossfade.)

Scene 23

Music. ARTEMIS and MAYA watch as unrealistic lighting comes up on KALI, as in Scene 1. She stands with one foot on SHEILA's prone body. She holds this pose for a moment, then begins to dance slowly, ritualistically, around and over the body. Gradually the dance becomes more excited. She bends over SHEILA, breathing into her face, her arms extended like wings, her body contracting and expanding. Slowly SHEILA stirs, sits up. Slowly KALI pulls her up. They dance, slowly at first—an awakening—then gradually more and more joyously, ecstatically.

(Lights fade out.)

End of Play

See below for slide list. (Slides available from playwright.)

SLIDES

Scene 2:

- #2-1 “Kali Astride Shiva’s Body.” Bengal, late 19th century. British Museum, London. In Bonheim, p. 148.
- #2-2 “Bhadrakali against Trident.” India, State of Nadu; Chola period, 11th century. Bronze. In Dehejia, p. 292.
- #2-3 “Dance of Kali and Shiva” India, Punjab Hills, Guler, ca. 1780. Opaque watercolor and gold on paper. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond. In Dehejia, p. 235.
- #2-4 “Chamunda.” Nepal, 14th century. Copper, gemstones, traces of pigment and gilt. Los Angeles County Museum of Art. In Dehejia, p. 233.
- #2-5 Detail from “Kali on the battlefield fighting Chanda’s and Munda’s armies,” from *Devi Mahatmya*. India, Punjab Hills, Guler, ca. 1780. Opaque watercolor on paper. In Dehejia, p. 36.
- #2-6 “Kali Drinks the Blood of Raktabija,” from *Devi Mahatmya*. India, Punjab Hills, Guler, ca. 1780. Opaque watercolor on paper. In Dehejia, p. 237.
- #2-7 Detail from “The Gods Pay Homage to Bhadrakali.” Folio 42 from the *Tantric Devi* series. India, Punjab Hills, Basohli, ca. 1660-70. Opaque watercolor, gold, silver, and beetle-wing cases on paper. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution. In Dehejia, p. 127.
- #2-8 Full version of #7.

Scene 4:

- #4-1 “Kali.” India, 16th century. Copper. Government Museum and Natural Art Gallery, Madras, India.
In Graham, *Goddesses in Art*, p. 33.
- #4-2 “Kali.” India, n.d., Indian Museum, Calcutta, India.
In Graham, *Goddesses*, p. 64
- #4-3 “Bhadrakali, Destroyer of the Universe.” Folio 47 from the *Tantric Devi* series. India, Punjab Hills, Basohli, ca. 1660-70. Opaque watercolor, gold, silver, and beetle- wing cases on paper. Howard Hodgkin Collection, London.
In Dehejia, p. 269.
- #4-4 “Kali dancing on the dead Siva.” India, ca. 1800.
In Leeming and Page, p. 23.
- #4-5 “Kali seated in sexual union with Shiva as a corpse.” Rajasthan, Mewar, 18th century. Transparent and opaque water-based pigment on paper. Subhash Kapoor.
In Rossi, p. 174.
- #4-6 Detail: “Raja Surma Sen (r. 1781-88) and His Attendant Nagatu in Worship of the Goddess.” Himachal Pradesh, India, 1785. Opaque watercolor on paper. Los Angeles County Museum of Art.
In Graham, *Goddesses in Art*, p. 33.

Scene 8:

- #8-1 “Kali within her yantra.” Contemporary lithograph.
In Kinsley, p. 77.

- #8-2 “Devi yantra.” India, state of Uttar Pradesh, Varanasi, early 19th century. Opaque watercolor on paper.
In Dehejia, p. 257

- #8-3 “Kali yantra.” 18th century. Gouache on paper. Pajasthan, India.
In Gadon, p. 18 and Harding, p. 80.

- #8-4 “Kali Ma.” Photo by Max Maxwell. Courtesy of Ajit Mookerjee. Kangra.
Himachal Pradesh, India.
In Austin, p. 79.

- #8-5 Detail: “Kali.” Temple of Dakshineswar.
In Harding, cover.

- #8-6 Full version of #11, p. 2

Scene 16:

- #16-1 Detail: folk painting of Kali. India, state of Bihar, Mithila region, 20th century.
Opaque watercolor on paper.
In Dehejia, p. 180.

- #16-2 “Goddess Kali.” 1954, by Sudha Mookerjee. Tempera on paper. Priya Mookerjee.
In Graham, *Goddesses*, p. 65.

- #16-3 “Kali.” ca. 1980, by Tyeb Mehta (Indian, b. 1925). Oil on canvas. ACSAA Color Slide Project., University of Michigan.
In Dehejia, p. 206.

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