

HER STORY IN BLOOD

A play in one act

By Meghan E. B. Lin

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CHARACTERS

WOMAN 1/ KRISTIN	Teen. Any race. Smart and nerdy.
WOMAN 2/ MARIA	50's, Hispanic. Speaks with a slight accent.
WOMAN 3/ EMILY	Late 20's, early 30's. Any race. Crisp and professional.
WOMAN 4/ CLARECE	30's. Any race. Tough, charismatic, aggressive. A panhandler.
WOMAN 5/ RUTH	50's or 60's. Could be black or white, but should speak with a deep Appalachian or Southern accent.
WOMAN 6/ JO	Late 30's, early 40's. Any race. Soft-spoken.
WOMAN 7/ JAIRUS	Any age, any race. Can play JAIRUS in multiple iterations or only with CLARECE.
WOMAN 8/ NINA	Early 20's. MARIA's daughter.
SCREEN*	Optional, but recommended.

*Author's Note: "SCREEN" indicates a projection screen US which periodically displays quotes and facts in dialogue with the action of the play. The screen is technically optional but highly recommended. If the director feels that having the texts play during the action is disruptive rather than supportive, I recommend at least having relevant text scrolling before and after the action of the play, when the audience is at their leisure. For formatting purposes, the screen is treated as a character in brackets, indicating its silent and optional nature, because I thought that would best suggest the kind of timing and commentary intended. I have placed the SCREEN suggestions where I think there are natural breaks and beats, when the text might add nuance without intruding too much upon the actor's moment. This placement is subjective and can be modified or eliminated as the director sees fit.

SETTING

First century Judea, various contemporary locations.

TIME

First century C.E., present day.

ACT 1

(ENSEMBLE dispersed about the stage, standing, facing audience. Alternatively, poised for action. Woman 7 has the rabbinical stole. There may be some simple arrangements of props along the US wall, but the rest of the space should be unadorned – the staging of the actors should create the depth, levels, and visual interest.)

{SCREEN

“Blessed are you, God, King of the Universe, Who has not made me a Gentile.
Blessed are you, God, King of the Universe, Who has not made me a slave.
Blessed are you, God, King of the Universe, Who has not made me a woman.” –
Jewish prayer, 2nd century CE}

WOMAN 1

When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake.

WOMAN 2

Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet,

WOMAN 6

pleading with him to come to his house because his only daughter, a girl of about twelve, was dying.

WOMAN 4

So Jesus went with him.

WOMAN 5

A large crowd followed and pressed around him. And a woman was there-

WOMAN 2

A woman was there-

WOMAN 3

A woman was there-

WOMAN 5

And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years.

WOMAN 6

She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had-

WOMAN 3

Yet instead of getting better she grew worse.

WOMAN 8

When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak,

WOMAN 1

because she thought,

WOMAN 2

If I just touch his cloak –

WOMAN 4

If I just touch his cloak

WOMAN 2

I will be healed.

WOMAN 8

Immediately, her bleeding stopped,

WOMAN 5

and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.

WOMAN 7

“Who touched me?”

WOMAN 4

Jesus asked. When they all denied it, Peter said,

WOMAN 8

“Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you.”

WOMAN 4

But Jesus said,

WOMAN 7

“Someone touched me. I know that power has gone out from me.”

WOMAN 5

Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it.

WOMAN 6

Then the woman-

WOMAN 3

Then the woman-

WOMAN 1

Then the woman-

WOMAN 6

Seeing that she could not go unnoticed,

WOMAN 2

Came trembling and fell at his feet.

WOMAN 1

In the presence of all the people-

ENSEMBLE

All the people-

WOMAN 1

In the presence of all the people,

WOMAN 5

she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed.

WOMAN 6

Then he said to her-

WOMAN 3

Then he said to her-

WOMAN 8

Then he said to her-

WOMAN 7

Daughter, your faith has healed you.

ENSEMBLE

Go in peace.

(Beat.)

{ SCREEN

“Anything she lies on during her period will be unclean, and anything she sits on will be unclean. Whoever touches her bed must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be unclean till evening. Whoever touches anything she sits on must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be unclean till evening. Whether it is the bed or anything she was sitting on, when anyone touches it, he will be unclean till evening.” – Leviticus 15:20-23 }

(ENSEMBLE moves to tableau of crowd scene. WOMAN 1 stands apart as Narrator. ENSEMBLE pauses here for a beat until WOMAN 1’s narration signals the resuming of action, and ENSEMBLE mimes the action as WOMAN 1 narrates. WOMAN 7 retains rabbinical stole, plays Jesus. WOMAN 2 plays bleeding woman.)

WOMAN 1

A large crowd gathered around Jesus while he was by the lake. Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet, pleading with him to come to his house because his only daughter, a girl of about twelve, was dying. So Jesus went with him. A large crowd followed and pressed around him. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years.

(ENSEMBLE moves across stage, forms crowd tableau, but WOMAN 2 falls behind, steps forward, becomes MARIA. Speaks to audience.)

MARIA

My bleeding started when I was 34. It took me a while to know that something was wrong. At first I thought maybe I had miscarried a very early pregnancy. I had miscarried once, so I know how much blood you can lose. And then when the extra bleeding returned the next month, I thought, I'm getting older, maybe this is part of the process, getting irregular. But after a few months, I was bleeding more days than not, and the pain was getting worse.

(WOMAN 8 steps forward, becomes NINA. She also speaks directly to the audience.)

NINA

I remember going with her to the doctor. I remember I didn't want to, because it was boring, but I was too young and there was no one to watch me.

MARIA

Nina would have been 8 then.

NINA

The only part I really remember from that visit is the doctor saying that mama needed surgery, because that scared me. I was old enough to know that surgery is scary.

MARIA

I was scared. I didn't want to have surgery. That doctor was very pushy and thought I was being stupid. He didn't say it, exactly, but I could tell. He was frustrated with me. But the more frustrated he got, the less I wanted to let him perform a surgery on me. You have to be very careful about doctors. Not all doctors are healers. A lot of them are more interested in your disease than they are in you. He wasn't listening to me. Finally he said that if I wouldn't have the surgery, the only thing I could do would be to go home and take advil and keep extra sanitary napkins around.

NINA

And for a while that worked out okay. Dad maybe grumbled a little about how much we were spending on female products, but that was all. It wasn't for another, what, six months? Something like that? That mom had to leave one of my track meets early because she'd bled through both her overnight pads, and I had to get a ride home with Candace - after that, it started getting worse and disrupting things. There were a lot more near-misses, and finally,

MARIA

Well, finally, I just didn't go out at all.

NINA

She stopped teaching Sunday school. She stopped volunteering at the mission. She stopped coming to all of me and Frankie's games and meets. I don't know what she traded for all that carpooling.

MARIA

I should have been there for my family, I know, and I'm sorry. I regret that. I was embarrassed. I shouldn't have let that interfere with my family, but a woman's cycles are private. You don't talk about it. You make it invisible. And my body was getting too visible. It was making my private things public. I still shouldn't have let it take over me, but I didn't know what else to do. It made Alberto very frustrated.

NINA

She and dad started to fight all the time.

MARIA

He wanted me to get the surgery. He said I was being silly and superstitious and making us look uneducated. He kept saying that America is famous for having the best doctors in the world, that it wouldn't be like my sister, but I was stubborn. I reminded him of Sierra, and asked him where his heroic American doctors were when she nearly died in childbirth in a shiny American hospital because they clipped her artery during the C-section. That would stop him for a little while, but he wouldn't let it go.

NINA

It was a big strain on everyone. There was this heavy weight pressing on everything, every day, and sometimes they would just shout at each other for hours.

MARIA

There were other things too.

NINA

I overheard their last fight. I was back from break, they thought I was asleep. It was really scary.

MARIA

I told him if his needs were burning such a hole in him, then he could get them met as he saw fit and I would look the other way.

NINA

Dad wouldn't have it. It's the closest I've ever been to hearing him cry.

{ SCREEN

"If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her,...he writes her a certificate of divorce..." – Deuteronomy 24:1 }

MARIA

Ah, Alberto. He said he didn't need another woman, he just wanted his wife back. And then the very next day, Marisol brought Lila over.

NINA

Thank God for Lila.

MARIA

It was like God just knew that I was ready, that I'd had enough, it was time, and He sent me an angel.

NINA

Lila showed Mom the way out. She'd had fibroids too, but she'd had a much more understanding doctor, and she was the one who told Mom about the newer, less invasive procedures.

MARIA

She even went with me when I went to have my procedure.

NINA

And we still haven't stopped giving Mom a hard time because she had the easiest recovery ever.

MARIA

It's true! I thank God every day for bringing Lila and showing me this way to healing. I have my life back. Thank God for Lila.

NINA

Thank God for Lila.

MARIA

And laparoscopy.

(NINA and MARIA step back into crowd tableau, narration and action resumes.)

WOMAN 1

And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She said to herself,

MARIA

“If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed.”

WOMAN 1

Jesus turned and saw her.

WOMAN 3

Take heart, daughter, your faith has healed you.

WOMAN 1

And the woman was healed from that moment.

(ENSEMBLE moves to reset scene; WOMAN 3 passes stole to MARIA/WOMAN 2, who plays Jesus in the next enactment. WOMAN 5 steps apart as Narrator, WOMAN 1 plays bleeding woman. You are encouraged to vary the blocking in these

reenactments to both offer visual diversity and selective emphasis for each scene – the crush of the mob, the urgency of the errand that the bleeding woman interrupts, etc. Also, as the beginning narration of the scene is truncated, the action should similarly be truncated. Here the segments should still have a brief sense of movement, but by JO’s scene, they should almost be tableau snapshots. The effect should be swift and impressionistic, not humorous.)

{ SCREEN

“As regards the individual nature, woman is defective and misbegotten....” – St. Thomas Aquinas, 13th century C.E. }

WOMAN 5

The crowd welcomed Jesus. Jairus’s daughter lay dying. As Jesus was on his way, the crowds almost crushed him. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, but no one could heal her. She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped.

WOMAN 2 (MARIA)

Who touched me?

WOMAN 5

When they all denied it, Peter said,

WOMAN 8

Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you.

WOMAN 5

But Jesus said

WOMAN 2 (MARIA)

Someone touched me. I know that power has gone out from me.

(Pause)

{ SCREEN

“If men could menstruate...clearly, menstruation would become an enviable, boast-worthy, masculine event: Men would brag about how long and how much....” – Gloria Steinem, 1978. }

(WOMAN 1 steps forward, becomes KRISTIN. Speaks to audience)

KRISTIN

You know, I should've known this morning when I felt so blah, but with yearbook and Math Bowl and debate nationals coming up, I just figured I was tired. God. Not so much. Instead, halfway through seventh period I shifted in my seat and realized I was...sticky. And I could feel the dread settle in my stomach, and I didn't want to look, because sticky is so very, very bad. It's even more bad when I'm in my sparkling white summer skirt, which did I mention is *white*, and also doesn't have sufficient fabric between my skin and the seat to provide any real protection in the event of a surprise. And what a surprise! A full week early, surprise! A red freaking banner smeared across my seat – surprise! And I was utterly unprepared. So I start trying to signal Ashleigh to hang back after the bell because I'm hoping I can borrow her hoodie to tie around my waste while I make a break for the ladies'. I'm also hoping she'll have a tampon on her, obviously. I would have texted her, but like an idiot I let my battery die, so I was sort of waving at her, but of course she doesn't see me because she's engrossed in facebook, but Vesper, God bless her, does see, and, of course, Vesper still hasn't forgiven me for beating her in the fourth grade spelling bee, and her hand shoots up and she tells Mr. Carter that my socializing is interfering with her concentration. And Mr. Carter asks me the classic question – “If it's so important, why don't you share it with the class?”

And if I had just stayed quiet, or made up something dumb, all of this could have been avoided, but no, me and my big fat debate-trained mouth says the first smart-ass thing that pops into my head – “I decline to answer on the grounds that I might incriminate myself,” which was appropriate since he'd been droning on about the Fifth Amendment for half an hour already, and if this were ANY OTHER teacher, I might have gotten a laugh and maybe even a bonus point for being clever and paying attention, but this is Mr. Dead Body Carter, of the legendary B.O., whose personal stench apparently makes him so lonely and miserable that he must spend his time making everyone ELSE miserable, so that's not how it went. No, D. B. Carter needs to make an example of me for being more interesting than his lecture, so he writes me a detention. And he asks me to come to the front of the class and retrieve it. And I say, “No, thank you,” which I was going to follow up with “I don't want to waste more of the class's time, why don't I pick it up on the way out?” But I don't get a chance because it gets another laugh from the class, so now ole D.B. is going purple in the face, and he starts spitting into the first row about how he's writing me another detention for “giving him lip,” and I just want it to be over, but Derek, who really means well, decides to be all chivalrous and holds his breath and goes up to get the detention slip for me, but that just makes D.B. more mad, so then he starts writing out a detention for Derek. Well, if Derek's involved, then Kayleigh's involved, because she's been trying to get his attention all year, so she pipes up about how unfair it is for Mr. Carter to give Derek a detention just because I was being sulky, and Mr. Carter starts writing her a detention. Actually, I think by that point he was threatening to put the whole class in detention - and this is where Frankie got involved and it really started to go downhill, because of course this is Frankie's

idea of FUN. The rest of us are trying to de-fuse, but Frankie feels left out. So Frankie actually stands up and starts giving this speech, I swear to god, I don't know if he needs his meds adjusted or what, but he starts giving this speech about how the disciplinary systems in the school are antiquated and feed the power of petty tyrants while interfering with the education of already over-burdened young minds, and the more Mr. Carter tries to talk over him, the louder Frankie gets, like he was giving a freaking campaign speech, and if I hadn't been the one who started it, I would have found it extremely entertaining. But I was the one who started it, so it wasn't so funny when Frankie's speech drew such a crowd from the hallway that Principal Richter got called in to restore order, and she gave everyone a week's worth of detentions. And then asked to see me, Derek, Kayleigh, and Frankie in her office. And of course I still have my original problem and it's even worse now because in addition to my entire AP government class, the freshman history class is lining up at the door because the bell rang, and the janitor and the mascot stopped by to take a look too, and I will do just about anything to avoid standing up, so I try asking if Ms. Richter will come close so I can tell her something in her ear, but she's all pissed off and says I can tell her in her office, and I am freaking out and starting to shake and I tell her I can't tell her in her office, and she says I can tell her in her office or face suspension, and ...

(starts to break)

...and if I get suspended, I'm disqualified from nationals. So I get up, and I hang my backpack from my elbows so it hangs low, but that doesn't hide the blazing red streak on my seat. God, why is being a girl so gross? Anyway. There was mostly horrified silence, but I did hear Sean Frederickson make this gagging noise. Sean will make poop jokes at lunchtime and fart noises in class and fall over laughing at himself, but somehow my period is grosser than gross, beyond the line of approachable humor. Not that humor would have necessarily been better.

(beat)

Mom says I can't be homeschooled if I want to go to nationals, but she won't make me go to school the rest of the week. I haven't had the courage to check facebook. I heard Vesper got photos.

(KRISTIN steps back into tableau, action resumes)

WOMAN 5

Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at his feet. In the presence of all the people,

WOMAN 7

all the people-

WOMAN 6

all the people-

WOMAN 5

In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed. Then he said, to her,

WOMAN 2 (MARIA)

Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace.

(ENSEMBLE resets to beginning of scene as WOMAN 2 passes stole to KRISTIN, who will play Jesus in the next scene. WOMAN 7 steps aside to narrate, WOMAN 3 plays bleeding woman.)

{ SCREEN

“I fail to see what use woman can be to man, if one excludes the function of bearing children.” – St. Augustine of Hippo, 4th century CE }

WOMAN 7

A crowd. Jairus’s daughter. Jesus on his way. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, but no one could heal her.

(ENSEMBLE freezes, WOMAN 3 steps forward and becomes EMILY. Speaks to audience.)

EMILY

Normal menstrual cycling in a healthy woman happens over a span lasting from 21 to 28 days. In anticipation of the release of an oocyte, the uterine wall thickens, weaving a dense web of nutrients and blood in preparation for the arrival of a zygote. When an egg is released but not fertilized, and no zygote is formed, the layer of nutrients and blood, called the endometrium, is strangled, cut off from its blood supply until it dies, and is then shed over a span of 3 to 8 days, and then the cycle begins again. This experience of shedding the endometrial lining is what is commonly known as getting your period. The length of the full menstrual cycle may vary between women, and even within an individual woman’s calendar year, but normally lasts from 21 to 28 days. It is normal to experience occasional irregularity or the odd bit of spotting, but there are also many different ways for this complex endocrine system to malfunction. Excessive or atypical menstrual bleeding in a woman may be caused by vaginal tearing-

(all of the following in rapid fire)

WOMAN 2

Endometriosis-

Fibroids-	WOMAN 1
Fistula-	WOMAN 4
Pregnancy-	WOMAN 6
Miscarriage-	WOMAN 2
IUD-	WOMAN 8
Birth control pills-	WOMAN 4
And uterine-	WOMAN 5
Or cervical-	WOMAN 6
Cancer.	WOMAN 5 and WOMAN 6 together

EMILY

Lack, or cessation of bleeding also has its causes. Pregnancy, for example. Pregnancy was my first thought when I finally noticed that I hadn't had a period for three months. I know it's kind of disgraceful for an ob/gyn to take three months to notice that she's skipping periods, but... I'm busy. I was really nervous taking the test, because even though Mark and I wanted – want – children, the gap between wanting children and accidentally making one is considerable. I wasn't pregnant. I hadn't really thought I was – I'd had no other symptoms, but you never know. Some pregnancies are like that. I was actually kind of let down – part of me wanted to have that accident, to start that part of my life whether I was ready or not, because let's face it, a high achiever with perfectionistic tendencies like myself is never really going to be ready. But I wasn't pregnant. No great cause for alarm, I'd been irregular before. Figured it was stress. At worst, it might be PCOS, and that's not a tragedy for someone with my resources. The months continued, and I knew I should get checked out, but I had this unending spate of complicated births, one right after another, and before I knew it, six months had gone by, and I started taking a calcium supplement to counter the possible bone loss, but I didn't actually get in for an ultrasound and some bloodwork until eight

months had gone by. I was still sure it was PCOS. Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome – one of the most common causes of irregular or absent periods. But the ultrasound was clean, and my androgen levels and insulin sensitivity came back normal. So we dug deeper. Ran the blood again, and this time we checked for everything – prolactin, TSH, FSH, LH, estradiol. I was really hoping it was my thyroid. Or maybe my pituitary. Pituitary is harder to deal with, but it’s still actionable. But my TSH and prolactin levels were totally normal. What was ab-normal was, one, my estradiol levels, which were bottomed out, but I was kind of expecting that since I hadn’t had a period in 9 months, and, two, my FSH, which was high. Really high. Post-menopausal high.

Primary Ovarian Failure, more commonly, and less accurately, known as early-onset menopause, affects about 1% of women, and has many known causes, but in more than half of cases, it is idiopathic. Which is doctor-speak for “Hell if I know.” It’s effects on osteoporosis and heart disease can be mitigated with hormone replacement therapy, but its effects on fertility remain largely untreatable.

(beat)

The bottom line is that if we want to have children, Mark and I need to start looking into adoption, now. Or we can try an egg donor. An egg donor. All my life I’ve wanted babies. I wanted babies so much, I surrounded myself with other women’s babies, to hold me over until I could have my own babies. Maybe I secretly thought all that fertility would karmically rub off on me. I don’t know what I thought. But it didn’t. And now that I’m already surrounded by other women’s babies, I don’t really want another one of those strangers inside my body. I want my babies. And I know this is the twenty-first century, I know that I am more than just my womb or my ovaries or my breasts, I took a lot of women’s studies classes in undergrad, but – it doesn’t matter. I have always, always, always envisioned myself with a family. My family. And I know how medieval this is going to sound, but I can’t help it – I’m not sure how to see myself as a whole woman if I can’t have children.

{ SCREEN

“[Rachel] said to Jacob, “Give me children, or I’ll die!....Here is Bilhah, my maidservant. Sleep with her so that she can bear children for me and that through her I too can build a family.” – Genesis 30:1-3 }

(EMILY steps slowly back into tableau, and action resumes with narration by WOMAN 7)

WOMAN 7

Immediately she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. Jesus turned and saw her.

WOMAN 1

Take heart, daughter,

WOMAN 7

He said,

WOMAN 1

Your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.

(ENSEMBLE resets scene; WOMAN 1 passes stole to EMILY, who will play Jesus in the next scene. WOMAN 4 steps aside to Narrate, WOMAN 6 plays the bleeding woman.)

{ SCREEN

“You are the Devil’s gateway: You are the unsealer of the forbidden tree: You are the first deserter of the divine law: You are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God’s image, man. On account of your desert even the Son of God had to die.” – St. Tertullian, 2nd century CE }

WOMAN 4

Crowds. Jairus. Jesus. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse.

(ENSEMBLE freezes again in tableau, WOMAN 6 steps forward, becomes JO)

JO

Jess was so beautiful. She had this short, punky hair that she would spike up with gel so it laid kinda crazy on her head. And she had Sarah Crewe eyes. When I was little, my favorite book was *A Little Princess* by Francis Hodgson Burnett, and the main character has these deep grey eyes that can look through you, and that’s what Jess’s eyes were like. She had old eyes, the kind that can see your soul, and... and I always felt safe when she looked at me. The most beautiful thing about her, though, was her laugh. It was this god-awful donkey-bray dog-bark kind of laugh, you could hear it from all the way on the far side of a chainsaw demonstration, it was so loud, and sometimes people stared, or shushed her in movie theaters, but man, I loved her laugh, cuz you knew it was real. There was no way you could fake a laugh like that, it just escaped from her soul.

I lived to make Jess laugh. I made it my business to make Jess laugh. For ten amazing years. And then she started getting sick, and it got harder to get her to laugh, cuz she was in pain all the time. I told her to go to a doctor as soon as the bleeding started, but she wanted to wait because she didn’t have insurance, and mine wouldn’t cover her, and she didn’t want to create a pre-existing condition by going to a doctor before she was insured. So we waited a month to see if it would

stop on its own, and then we waited another month, and then she got a second job at Starbucks so she could get health insurance that way, but that was really hard for her, the extra shifts, because she was already tired from her other job, which we couldn't really afford for her to quit because my job was going through round after round of cut-backs, I could have been let go any day, lots of good people were getting laid off, and with the bleeding and everything, it just ran her down, and she started getting these fevers. And she went to work with those fevers for 3 months so she could go to the doctor insured, and when she finally got there, they told her the cancer was at stage 3.

I did everything I could. I took over every domestic chore, I made sure everything was disinfected, I tracked her medicines, I had a whole binder devoted to articles and research and test results and inspiration and schedules and statistics. Everything we needed to believe that we might be able to control this thing. We still couldn't really afford for her to quit both jobs, though, because I could still be laid off at any time, and no one was hiring, there's a reason they call this the Rust Belt, and we had to make sure she'd have some kind of medical coverage, so she stayed at her day job all during radiation, and they let her do some telecommuting while she was recovering from surgery, and we paid COBRA on her Starbucks insurance because it was still better than paying out of pocket. Thank god her parents helped out, or we'd have been so far over our heads there'd be no clawing our way out in this lifetime. We ended up maxing out our allowance for the year and went an extra \$20,000 in the hole anyway, but it was worth it for those six months of remission. For six beautiful months, I got to have my Jess back, the one who laughed. And she was so beautiful. So beautiful. And then the cancer came back and took her in three weeks. Three goddamn weeks. Three weeks, and another \$50,000, and it wasn't enough. It wasn't enough to buy back my Jess. I cashed in my 401(k) in order to be able to take off those last two weeks with her, as soon as we put her in hospice, and her parents let me stay by her side. I fed her broth until she couldn't swallow anymore, and then I just held her hand, and we put on her favorite music, and we waited. Her parents wouldn't let me scatter her ashes in Mill Creek Park like she wanted, though. They insisted on a burial in the family lot. They let me come though. I tried not to think about the if-only's but you can't really keep them away. I think you just kind of have to embrace them as friends. The if-only's are the part of you that knows what's fair and true and better than this hell. In some ways, the if-only's are how I know that I'm still sane.

{ SCREEN

“Better is the wickedness of a man, than a woman who does good.” – Ben Sira 42:14, 2nd century BCE }

(Slowly, JO turns back to the tableau, hold for a beat, then action resumes with narration):

WOMAN 4

When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd, because she thought,

JO

If I just touch his clothes, she will be healed.

WOMAN 4

At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked,

WOMAN 3 (EMILY)

Who touched my clothes?

WOMAN 7

You see the people crowding around you, and yet you can ask, "Who touched my clothes?"

WOMAN 4

But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth.

WOMAN 2

-the whole truth-

WOMAN 4

He said to her

WOMAN 3

Daughter, your faith has healed her. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.

(ENSEMBLE slowly resets the scene as WOMAN 3 passes stole to JO, who will play Jesus in the next scene. WOMAN 8 steps apart as Narrator, WOMAN 7 plays JAIRUS. It should be indicated through accessories and mannerisms in this iteration that JAIRUS is clearly a very important person - perhaps another cast member follows him around taking his picture. A celebrity. Throughout this scene, when he is not frozen, JAIRUS should show signs of visible impatience. The contrast is between JAIRUS, an important person, a leader whose name was worthy to be recorded, who is forced to wait to hear the story of a nameless, outcast woman. WOMAN 4 plays the bleeding woman.)

{SCREEN

“If they [women] become tired or even die, that does not matter. Let them die in childbirth, that’s why they are there.” – Martin Luther, 15th century CE}

WOMAN 8

When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him. Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came there. Seeing Jesus, he fell at his feet and pleaded earnestly with him,

JAIRUS

My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live.”

WOMAN 8

So Jesus went with him. A large crowd followed and pressed around him. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought,

WOMAN 4

If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.

WOMAN 8

Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd

(On “turned,” ENSEMBLE freezes and turns as a group toward where WOMAN 4 is trying to quietly escape. She also looks around with the crowd. It can be humorous, but should feel a little tense. ENSEMBLE freezes here, WOMAN 4 steps forward, becomes CLARECE)

{ SCREEN

As the climbing up a sandy way is to the feet of the aged, so is a wife full of words to a quiet man.” Ben Sira, 2nd century BCE }

CLARECE

You got any superpowers? You? No? How about you? Don’t nobody else got no superpowers in here? Am I the only one? I read skepticism in your expression. I’m too sexy, is that it? Think a girl can’t have both brains and beauty. You people, always judging by appearances. Look, I’ll unsexify myself.

(Puts on costume glasses, which she pulls from a pocket. She looks a little nutty.)

See, incognito, just like Clark Kent. Now I look like I could have a superpower, right? You ready to hear about my superpower? I'll tell you all about it. For five bucks. C'mon, I know you got five bucks on you. Nobody comes out to the theater with no cash. You paid to be here, why not buy the VIP treatment? It's a bargain - five bucks, that's all I need, and you can have a full-blown super-power demonstration.

(CLARECE can approach different audience members and/or add business with ensemble members.)

How bout three bucks? Three bucks, that's clearance price. How often in your life you gonna see a genuine superpower on display? Two bucks? Man, nobody got no interest in anybody anymore. I bet when you walk outta here, all y'all gonna be making googly eyes at your smarty phones, crooning to your bejeweled, bedazzled, angry bird solitaire decks, making love to your technology, but don't nobody ever have the courage for a living breathing person right in front of him.

(intensely)

It's the mind-control they put in the technology – they're watching, they're always keeping an eye out, the skywatchers, they look inside your mind, feeding off your thoughts, making you think what they want you to think. One day, you see, one day, they'll be coming for you.

(beat)

Nah, I'm just messing with you.

(laughs)

Really had you going there for a minute, didn't I? Nah, I'm not a paranoid, although with the NSA reading everybody's tweets, maybe we should all be a little more paranoid. Yes, I read the news. I'm assistant manager at a Conway down in Baltimore. Or I was until I couldn't make rent because of my medical bills. Endometriosis. It got really bad and I missed a lot of work, and then I needed surgery, and then there were complications with the surgery, and yadda yadda, it's a tale like many others, and I'm lucky because at the end of it, I actually don't have any more endometriosis. But neither do I have a home or a permanent job, so now I have bleeding feet instead. I was raised in the foster care system, see, nobody to fall back on. Too much bad happens at once, and then there's this gap you just can't cross. To get a job, you need an address. To get an address, you need a job. And by the time you've jumped through enough hoops that you're approved for temporary housing, how do you explain that two-year hole in your resume? So, you know, this isn't the easiest way to support a meth habit, but a girl's gotta do what a girl's gotta do.

(laughs)

I'm just messin' with you again.

(beat)

Seriously, never do meth. That shit will Fuck. You. Up. I got stories.

(beat)

How bout a dollar? Anybody got a dollar to spare? For a dollar, I won't demonstrate my superpower, but I can tell you about it. It'll still be worth your

trouble, it's a good one. You can tell all your friends you met a superhero. No? Not even a dollar? Fifty cents?

(a cast member hands her 50 cents, returns to tableau)

Now you're talking. Now you gonna get something special, see, because my superpower goes thus: whenever I find myself in the vicinity of respectable people, I completely disappear. It's magic - like I don't even exist. You can see me now because you paid to look at me, so now you gotta look at me, or you won't have had your money's worth. But with a regular non-paying crowd of respectable people? Poof. Now, just to be clear, non-visual existence isn't as exciting as you might think. I'm a great spy, don't get me wrong. Mind like a steel trap. But invisibility is harder to control than you might think. It turns on and off unexpectedly. When I'm hungry, or cold, and I need a little lift, won't nobody see me, but as soon as I'm settling in for a little me time, along comes Officer Friendly telling me to move along, or some gang of young punks think I'm fair game for a little sport, or one of my esteemed acquaintances coming by to see if there's anything I can do for them. Did you know a homeless woman is 8 times more likely to be assaulted than a housed woman? I made that statistic up, but I did read something like that in an article somewhere, but it's not like someone needed to tell me - everyone on the street knows it in their bones. There are moments I'd gladly turn the invisibility up, way up. And there are lots of other times I'd rather turn it off. Because what is the point of spying out all these secrets if no one ever wants to hear what you got to say?

{ SCREEN

“Men should not sit and listen to a woman...even if she says admirable things, or even saintly things, that is of little consequence, since it came from the mouth of a woman.” – Origen, Theologian and Greek Father, 2nd-3rd century CE }

(CLARECE turns back to the tableau. Hold for a beat, then action resumes):

WOMAN 6 (JO)

Who touched my clothes?

WOMAN 1

You see the people crowding against you,

WOMAN 3

and yet you can ask, ‘Who touched me?’

WOMAN 8

But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth.

WOMAN 2
The whole truth.

WOMAN 5
The whole truth.

WOMAN 1
The whole truth.

WOMAN 8
Then he said to her,

WOMAN 6 (JO)
Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.

(Long beat)

{ SCREEN
“...the birth of a daughter is a loss.” – Ecclesiasticus 22:3 }

WOMAN 8
While Jesus was still speaking, someone came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler.

WOMAN 5
“Your daughter is dead,”

WOMAN 8
he said,

WOMAN 5
“Don’t bother the teacher anymore.”

WOMAN 8
Hearing this, Jesus said to Jairus,

WOMAN 6 (JO)
“Don’t be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed.”

WOMAN 8
When Jesus entered the ruler’s house, he saw a commotion with people crying and wailing loudly.

WOMAN 6 (JO)
 “Stop wailing,”

WOMAN 8
 Jesus said

WOMAN 6 (JO)
 “She is not dead but asleep.”

WOMAN 8
 They laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. But he took her by the hand and said,

WOMAN 6 (JO)
 “My child, get up!”

WOMAN 8
 Her spirit returned, and at once she stood up. Then Jesus told them to give her something to eat. At this they were completely astonished.

(Beat. ENSEMBLE resets action as WOMAN 6 passes stole to CLARECE who will play Jesus in the next version. WOMAN 3 steps apart to Narrate, WOMAN 5 plays bleeding woman.)

{SCREEN
 “Contact with [menstrual blood] turns new wine sour, crops touched by it become barren, grafts die, seed in gardens are dried up, the fruit of trees fall off, the edge of steel and the gleam of ivory are dulled, hives of bees die, even bronze and iron are at once seized by rust, and a horrible smell fills the air; to taste it drives dogs mad and infects their bites with an incurable poison.” – Pliny the Elder, Roman author and naturalist, 1st century CE}

(Silent action. Then:)

WOMAN 3
 And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years.

(WOMAN 5 steps forward and becomes RUTH. She speaks to the audience.)

RUTH
 When Samson first got sick, he told me it was cancer. He started living on pills and I nursed him. Kept working so’s we could have the insurance, and I did all the cooking and cleaning about the house, and told him not to worry, because I was gonna take care of him. Proverbs 31 wife, that’s me. And we had everyone over

to pray for him , and Pastor Bill and the elders come out to lay hands on him, for healing, but he hadn't told us what he really needed healing for, because he was ashamed. Of course, it all came out in the end, as it does, how he had debased himself, doing things the Bible says is shameful, and he repented, he did, and he might've meant it when he said it, too, only the Lord can judge his heart in that, but when I tested positive, he got real, real drunk, and then the next day he was gone. Just like that. I think it was the HIV and the shame and the guilt all together that cut his hair and sapped all his strength, and he didn't have none left for me. And may God forgive my hard and unforgiving heart, but I was nothing but relieved when he left. I pray every day for God to give me the heart of Jesus to forgive my husband, but I nursed him when he was sick, and I didn't press charges for non-disclosure, even though I was told that I could do that, and that will have to suffice. I get by. My doctor says it ain't no death sentence no more, and I'm respondin' well to the drugs. I praise God that I'm healthy enough to keep working and that we never had no kids to pass this on to.

(beat)

The only thing as really gets to me is not being touched, because once the full scope and nature of Samson's sins come out, didn't nobody ever want to touch me again. And I want to tell them it's not contagious like a cold, you can't get it from no handshake, but it don't make no difference, it's still like the plague in these parts, and don't nobody want to even talk about it, lest they bring the taint down on themselves. So between having no husband and being the town leper, having my blood drawn at the clinic is about the closest I get to human contact, even though they wear gloves. It's been three years now of no touching, and I'm starting to have these real vivid dreams of being wrapped in skin. I thought about maybe moving someplace where nobody knows me, maybe one of the cities where people's more liberal, but how'm I gonna leave my sisters and go someplace big and fancy? I ain't never wanted to live nowhere but this town, with my sisters and my church. They might not want to touch me, but they know this was laid at my feet from Samson's sins, not mine. And if they ever forget it, I'm gonna be reminding a few people what the Bible said about taking care of widows. But some won't need reminding. Annie won't, and Leah, and the rest of my sisters, so at least I won't be alone if things go bad. If I move away, I got nobody. So I just keep on keeping on, praying for the strength to carry my cross. And you know, I just saw online the other day that they cured a baby of HIV with bee venom, so you never know. I might even get a miracle one of these days.

(RUTH steps slowly back into tableau. Instead of continuing the previous action, each woman steps out of the scene to deliver her line directly to the audience, so that at the delivery of the full-ensemble line "Go in peace," the women are in the original tableau. The exceptions are RUTH and WOMAN 4/CLARECE/JESUS, who continue to say their lines looking at one another, and are the last to leave the tableau and face the audience, so that only the final line is given as a benediction to

the audience. Or, RUTH and CLARECE/JESUS may continue facing one another, and on the last line, the entire company turns toward them, so that the whole company delivers the final benediction to RUTH.)

WOMAN 3

And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years.

WOMAN 6

She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse.

WOMAN 1

When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought,

RUTH

If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.

WOMAN 7

At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked,

WOMAN 4

“Who touched my clothes?”

WOMAN 8

“You see the people crowding against you,”

WOMAN 2

and yet you can ask, ‘Who touched me?’”

WOMAN 1

Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at his feet. In the presence of all the people,

WOMAN 7

all the people-

WOMAN 8

all the people-

WOMAN 6

In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed.

WOMAN 8

Then he said, to her,

WOMAN 7

Then he said to her,

WOMAN 1

Then he said to her,

{ SCREEN

Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace. }

WOMAN 4 (CLARECE/JESUS)

Daughter-

(rapidly, overlapping)

WOMAN 6

Daughter-

WOMAN 2

Daughter-

WOMAN 3

Daughter-

WOMAN 1

Daughter-

WOMAN 7

Daughter-

WOMAN 8

Daughter-

WOMAN 4 (CLARECE/JESUS)

(beat)

Your faith has healed you.

ENSEMBLE

Go in peace.

(FADE OUT. CURTAIN)