

A working script

Elektra

by Faith Hart

adapted from Sophocles' classic

lights up, violently– it feels like someone sucked all the air out of the room that was there moments before, as people chattered and made their way to their seats. she sits, looking forward– it almost feels like an interrogation room in this moment. we stand outside of time, outside of ourselves.

I have wanted to leave. I have.

I have wanted, even begged for... release. resolve. relief.

but I was a child when I begged for those things.

and I am not that.

I have been here. I will be.

I have been so hungry that I tasted the acid of my stomach lining in my mouth.

I have lived days on that taste alone.

I have chosen that for myself.

it has sometimes chosen itself for me.

I have willed locks into places where there are none.

I have told myself a story over and over again, until that story was all I knew. all I ate, all I drank, all that sustained me. I have wanted a better story.

time thrashes / things change. (light change) Elektra wails, painfully, melodically. it takes a long time.

blending in with the wailing, a track of Elektra's own voice plays, maybe multiple times-

take no weapons.

no shield.

no army.

go alone– a hand in the night.

snare them.

we are lost in a dark, festering void. she mutters, thrashes, snarls, scratches.

slaughter them.
you have the right.

morning comes, somehow.

oh divine light. consecrated morning! you come again. unrelenting.
you hear the wailing. the blows.
as you arrive each morning, again and again,
you know I must wail again.
each of us– as we must be.

the darkness only watches, sets the stage for the voices. as I sit, all night, I mourn. violently. I watch–
the absence. the nothingness. no resolve.
sometimes in that cycle, I find a strange peace. the gears turn and I know what I am. what I must be.
you, though. you light. you interrogate me, casting expectations.
you begin the blood runs as the night shrinks away.
you ask me what I could be, illuminating all beyond this place. beyond this feeling.
but I can't believe such a life exists.

so daylight, I perform for you, waiting for the day I win.
and I continue to bang, scratch, and throw my body at these walls. I don't hide it just for the night.
I don't rest, I don't relent. never let silence fall here.
I shake these walls. I'm expectant of a day when they will crumble.

how they surround me. mock my memory– of days of laughter, days when I would have called this
place my home. once a bedroom, now a cell. I detest this place.

she screams.

I do! I detest it.

she whimpers.

it's all I have.

dear light, I ask you. genuinely.
how many times can a heart break?
how many times can a horror replay in my head?

how can the numbness set in for others, while I am locked in constant, cyclical memory?
dear light, please answer.

numbness is something I don't know. I'm always feeling all of it.

my father. sweet father. good father.

(with searing pain) how I ACHE when I think of your demise. how it defiles me, enters my body,
takes me prisoner. I FEEL it. feel the blood spilling from your ears and your eyes and your mouth. see
the wound replacing your crown with a ring of blood. every time I think of it, the gash is new. it stings
fresh.

living when you are gone hurts. my chest aches. my heart feels like a towel waiting to be wrung. my
skin burns. blood like acid.

I scratch myself for release. the brief flow telling me I've got a chance at living without all this poison,
all this pain. temporary wooziness feeling like love and peace. euphoria and rapture. just floating away
from myself. the emptier I am, the lighter I get—

and no one! no one. has pity for these things. no love like mine.
my body tells the story. this is how I have loved you.

love for you is all I have.

grief is love unable to be expressed.

death is a distance I cannot cross to tell you of my love.

I rage at death, rage at distance

rage rage rage white hot flaming rage wet rage humid sticky rage like sin rage consumes wet rage I
swallow it. I swallow it I swallow thick and hot and white and silent silent silent always silent. rage at
Aegisthus rage at my mother rage I spit. rage I spit in their faces because I don't want to be silent. I
won't be silent. rage at unkindness making me all the more unkind rage. rage making me
unrecognizable rage. because I feel like I was robbed. because I felt that I was owed something/ no one
ever told me I deserved something so I don't know why I rage. all night long I rage. I want to leave I
want to run I don't want anyone to carry me no chariot no chariot I want my feet back thick calloused

running feet I lost them when you went I just stayed. I stayed here and I wept just loss after loss after loss and my feet turned pink and appropriate not like when we used to run and you would chase me I was screaming in pure joyous delight and our feet were brown with caked mud and blades of grass between our toes and you would scoop me in your arms and I would scream and I felt like a baby bird in your hands waiting to be free just on the edge of it and then you went. she took you. you went like white smoke and I just tumbled to this floor and just sat. lost. and my feet changed shedding memory and every trace of you vanished. the servants came. day after day they changed me clean and appropriate changed my clothes washed my body and wiped wiped wiped while I cried kept crying never stopped crying just cried for you. I cried like Moses in the desert for you just wandering and crying cried just as long as him wanted a promise just as bad. you. I wanted you so bad wanted to be with you always watch time dance its way across your face. I want you back so bad my skin rejects this vile living every morning every morning I get sick wake up and spit bile. rage. rage I want you so bad. I rage rage rage pray every day to leave this earth. would crawl the underworld to find you that's it that's just it I don't know where to find you I keep trying to find you I tried to run but they stopped me they stopped me they keep stopping me and they clean my feet they stopped me they don't care no one cares but I won't rest. I would crawl into your coffin just to hold you again I would die I wish I could die die so willingly die die and find you die for you make it enough what is enough I would give it. I would give it. rage rage rage with all my force until I'm weak. weak and sad. inappropriate. wildly feeling. I miss you.

she gathers dirt from the floor with her hands. she spits in her hands to make the dirt sticky. she does her best to cake the dirt to her feet. they're not as dirty as they could be. she looks at them, fascinated with revulsion.

dirtiness is something like freedom. as a girl, I would dig in the dirt as deep as I could, watching the life wriggle beneath me. I would lodge it up my fingernails. to know that it was happening beneath the palace— life abundant, life repulsive, life covered in filth— that it was tiny but unstoppable, was intoxicating. I got drunk on the feeling of my mother shrieking at me to wash up, found her repulsion delightful. that I was dirty and I came from inside of her was proof that her cleanness was a facade. that, always, it was a sheath of dishonesty.

she stole life from another. one she was supposed to love. VILE BITCH!

I don't show up to meals. I don't leave my quarters. she doesn't visit— she can't look at me.

but sometimes I miss her. the only time I leave is to watch outside her window. it's weakness. I know that. I'm going to stop.

I see her sitting at her vanity. so much vanity. removing her makeup. letting her hair down. clean. pure. everything she hates about herself- the only things I still manage to find beautiful. watching her like this reminds me of childhood. of one time, when she took the four of us down to the stream and we were laughing and splashing each other and suddenly Iffy got pulled by the current. she was swirling down and we were losing her and mother... she swam furiously, still holding the other three of us on her hips. Iffy was the baby. the most vulnerable. Mama loved her so much. mother would never let anything happen to her. anyway. she caught Iffy and we all came up crying, mother was panting and her bathing suit had contorted itself around her body. we saw her, all of us. all of her. the scars and the marks of child-carrying and the sagging she normally held tightly, protecting herself. she looked the way a wild animal does defending its young. her hair was a mangled nest and she didn't fix any of it, just held us against her skin on the bank. crying, whispering that nothing could ever take us from her. she said NEVER will anyone hurt you. NEVER will anyone take you. my face cradled against her body for the first time since I was an infant. some part of me remembered its comfort. some part of me longs for it still.

sometimes when the light is right, I strip these rags and look at my body in the windowpane. I see the same frame she reviles when she looks in her mirror. I feel it, too, that hatred. revulsion. trained for it. but I won't cover it in powder or jewels. I know what I am.

shame I do feel. destruction is all I am- but she's a destroyer too. just won't wear it. I'm the shape she made me. my revulsion is an honest thing.

hunger pains. she challenges them.

grief is a lot like hunger. empty throbbing. sometimes those two feelings want to sit together. the two throbbings become one and it feels- not right, but... just. it feels like justice, not to fill the absence. to let it gape. my father told me justice wins. he told me it wins.

so I don't eat. I let it gape. for him. for justice.

I forfeit the sweet air of spring, to sit in this staleness, never moving. I forfeit the food they leave outside the door, taking only the scraps I need to survive. I forfeit anything I do not need to survive. I forfeit the touch of another, if only to know the sharp absence of your hand.

never will I let up from my lamenting. never. as the ocean crashes to meet the shore, summer comes despite the freezing, clouds dance, thunder rolls– I will love you, father. as you loved me. you loved me. more than anything. more than Iphigenia. we had an understanding, you and me. no one understands it.

people were visiting for a while. friends from school, family members, noblewomen. eventually, I told them all to leave. it was a waste of time, discussing things they couldn't understand. I told them: fine. if I'm going mad, allow me to go mad my own way. they'd all been telling me the same things, all saying "Elektra, you can't allow grief to eat away at you like this." or "you're melting your life away with all this mourning, Elektra". always painting me as someone who is shrinking, getting smaller.

I think maybe I'm growing. I keep learning things, building my resistance, becoming more sure of myself. I'm getting stronger on less and less. the less I eat, the less I need, the less I depend on anything but me. the hunger, it hurts but it's mine I made it for myself no one delivered it to my door it's all mine. it's taking me where I need to go. preparing me to do what I never had the strength to do before.

to kill.
snare.
slaughter.

remember this, I do feel shame. don't think I don't. but I must do this.

death has become the purpose of my life.
avenging his.
plotting hers.
savoring mine.
I know this.

I see the trap– its metal jaws, ever clamping around my throat. I see it closing.

I know what I am. this body is all I own– the pulsing fist in my gut, the acid, the blood. an irreversibly tangled knot. an adding machine. a blade and a sharpener. I know what I am made of.

skin. bones. empty space. bruises, by my own hand. I'm forgetting how to touch myself kindly, what it's like to hold a hand that isn't just my squeezing will somebody show me will somebody touch me hold my hand hold me touch touch me please please please please

I am a beast, but I am human. I'm trying to do it right. she's a liar a fucking liar murderer adultress I can't stand the thought of her how could she how could she betray us betray all we had all we were

for Iffy, I KNOW, for Iffy

but

he didn't want to do it. he didn't want to kill her. it wasn't his fault.

this is the story.

this is the story I have been told. this is the story. why Artemis stopped the winds at Aulis. my father, one day, was out in the grove of the goddess. his heavy steps startled a hidden stag. he killed it. he killed it and let out a boast. all men boast! we know this. this is not news!

but Artemis raged for the life of the creature. she trapped my father and his men. she demanded an exchange— precious life for precious life. she demanded that my father should yield up the life of his own child. Iphigenia. my sister.

thus, she was sacrificed; since my father Agememnon and his army had no other release. it was for that cause, with much pain and reluctance, that he slew her— not for the sake of any but Artemis.

that is the story, the whole of it!

the irony of it! Artemis demanding death for the loss of the creature my father trading death for death Clytemnestra demanding death for the loss of her daughter she and Aegisthus exacting revenge trading death for death and now I demand their deaths, to pay the price and even the scores

sometimes I do wonder where it ends

I see it ends alone with just me

but it must be this way!

the track plays—

right and wrong. it's as simple as that, it has to be.

they tell me to move on, forget about it– how can that be? it defies my instincts, all understanding I have. all ethics! all I have been taught. right. and wrong. how can I know pleasure, warmth while my father lies in the cold without honor?

the track plays–

Aegisthus will be punished. if a man can enter another's home, bed his wife, and kill him in cold blood and there is NO consequence– there is no shame left in this world! his own cousin. oh, incestuous bed, vile earth– something strange and terrible is growing. I watch it, day by day. the roots of this tree are severed and dying, the fruit will certainly rot. it is rotting. things cannot work this way. order must be restored. the voices say it they say it must be they say it must be blood for blood. it is the only way to be right.

I WILL MAKE IT RIGHT
I WILL KILL AEGISTHUS
I WILL KILL CLYTEMNESTRA
THE TIME IS COMING
I WILL MAKE IT RIGHT
I WILL KILL MY MOTHER
AVENGE MY FATHER
I WILL MAKE IT RIGHT

the track plays–
take no weapons
no shield.
no army.
go alone– a hand in the night.
snare them.
slaughter them.
you have the right.

exhausted from the screaming, thrashing, wailing, she collapses to the floor.

she sleeps violently.

she whimpers.

she wakes.

her body is screaming for food. the hunger is all-consuming.

she eats ravenously.

her body rejects it. she vomits.

they keep bringing it. what do you want from me?

she eats slowly, piece by piece. she vomits.

no eating. it isn't time yet. it hasn't been earned.

be good. I've been so good.

never eating.

no eating.

she cries.

she pours water for herself. it is a sacred ritual, perhaps there is some cleansing. she drinks. little by little.

mother. sometimes I want my mother. miss when I was sick as a child and she would hold a cold rag to my neck. hold my hair. hold my trembling body as I expelled whatever needed to be expelled. I would feel her warmth. feel her breast.

she laughs.

I hate that word I'm trying to get over it but I really hate it I don't know why. it's weird. breeeeast. I don't know why I just think it's gross I always have I used to want to peel my skin off when mother said it to me. so shameful. breast. funny I never minded the school yard words tits boobs whatever. never hated the boy words dick cock WHATEVER you call it even if it has so many C sounds it could slice your fucking ear off I'll say any of it. breasts. is just gross. too soft. you can hear the milk leaking out of the word. I hate these. I hate these stupid fucking appendages never done anything good for me, only for men only weighed me down only hurt my back. they are not utilitarian, they are a nuisance.

they could mean something. they could be something good but they won't be I know they won't be.

this body is a drain a doom tunnel a rat trap a ball of chains. no life will come from it. no pink babies will suckle here. nothing good will come from this I could never nourish you I am dry dry dry desert dry empty I know that I am I am nothing good nothing good lives here. Venus' monthly blood letting is a cruel joke a formality at this point I know I could never have a baby it's just a joke there's nothing in here. if I had a baby I would take out the trash and clean up and brush my hair and I would trim my nails I would not scratch you you you you could there be a you? would you love me I would love you I would trim my nails and I would try I would hold you like a bird give you a bath run with you restart the story even the score I would love you I would never ever ever let you out of my sight I would squeeze you I would never never lose you I can't lose you please come please don't leave I love you I love you I love you I love you I love you please please please

she holds a baby that isn't there. mourns its possibility.

(she laughs wildly, unsure why) what am I doing?

more wild laughing.

delirious joy sometimes. I don't understand it. this life— ridiculous. I feast on air. the very act of breathing. the very gift of life. ridiculous gift. I do not take it for granted. the silliness. the time passing. memory.

(giggly) I liked a boy one time. he lived near the palace. it was stupid. it was not utilitarian. it was childish. he was stupid. I mean he was actually not bad he was fine he liked me he said I was smart I would race him after school I was faster he didn't care. and that was cool actually it was cool. but also stupid. one time we raced and I was laughing calling him slow and laughing and he just grabbed me and kissed me it was gross but cool. I could feel my cheeks get hot suddenly feeling redness all the sweat smell my armpits suddenly. I don't think he cared what I looked like I don't think he ever said anything about it he might not have even known what I looked like but suddenly I cared. I would stand here. I would put on makeup and add layers to my skin and rip hair out of my body it's not that he expected it it was just that I didn't know how to say I liked him or that it was cool that he let me be faster than him and wasn't embarrassed and I felt gross it was gross and I wanted it to be beautiful. mom and dad I think were beautiful. once. stupid too in their own way but beautiful. I tried to change my body, make it beautiful. I wanted to be a part of it the beauty I wanted to complete it be inside of it know what it felt like. I don't know what happened to us time goes by he was gone one day it didn't matter it was stupid it never happened again

I mean, things happened again. but not him. not the warm or the kiss or the beauty

I wonder if he would still want to touch me. I'm always sweaty. I think I smell. I can't tell.

[something snaps.]

touch me touch me touch me touch me I think about it. all the time I think about it think about it all the time. I used to not. well, I did but I would think about kissing and racing home from school and lace underwear that is NOT what I think about now. now I feel like a beast I am a panting hairy disgusting pulsing beast I don't shower I don't sleep I don't eat I just throb throb all day touch me touch me sometimes I fuck myself for hours coming coming coming trying to find somebody. the smell breaks through the cloud. pink the only color I get to see.

pink was beautiful once.

the walls vibrate echoes of just me and my howling. I hope you hear it I hope you do I hope my mother does too. sex sex sex sex devoid of all romance all kissing all slowness all whispers just the fucking. I just want the fucking. no pink. I used to hate all those men in the street who would stare with their eyes their yellow eyes it was offensive I wanted to rip them from their centers but now now I miss having somebody see me. just see me and think about me what I could do what it would feel like. it made me feel small small and powerless but now now now I would welcome the attack I would welcome the bruising eyes I would howl like I'm howling you would hear it you would see me you would feel it.

does anybody hear it
does anybody feel it

my brain rattles. my mind wanders. what was I saying.
I like to keep the pieces separate because I don't know if they would fit together.

hunger pains.
hunger pains.
hunger pains.
she can't ignore them.

fuck this I want to eat. I think of nothing but it. that's the truth. I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry voices sorry father sorry I want to be full of something good. I want room for other things I don't deserve this why should I hurt not my fault not my fault every day I don't throw the fist, I swallow it. I'm so tired of swallowing it

it's time
I've got to go

(with desperation, unanswered)

voices
guide me
tell me
take no weapons
no shield
no army

go alone
hand in night
snare them
slaughter them

I have the right
I have the right
right?

father father father I don't hear you I can't find you can't find you anywhere I've been trying I am
tired father I can't help but wonder why'd you do it? I'm so tired why'd you kill her we wouldn't be
here why'd you take her? Iffy Iffy Iffy Iphigenia my sister I do miss you I never say that. you were a girl
just a girl so little he shouldn't have taken you there could have been another way father did you love
her father do you hear me father do you love me did you love me did you really

at the end of the day, could it have been me? at the end of the day, if Artemis asked you...

NO NO NO he loved me he was right he was right it had to be that way
mother killed him Aegisthus killed him they were wrong they were evil
I am good trying to be good trying to make good
I must take them

voices help me
voices help me

I'm so confused
I feel so trapped
I've got to get out
got to end this
got to kill
got to kill
got to kill

she roars.

she runs to the door, ready to leave the room and take her revenge.

with a mighty slam, a force stops her in her tracks before she reaches the door.

she falls.

she gets back up again.

she tries again.

she falls.

she gets back up again.

she tries again.

she falls.

she screams.

it's not working it isn't working I can't do it I can't do it still not strong enough why am I failing why can't I do it when I know it is time

because I don't think it will help
it won't fix it won't bring you back

all of this

all of this pain

was it doing anything

all the acid in my throat the wailing the beating on walls I didn't know what else to do I wanted to be utilitarian I always wanted to be like you father logical methodical calculated wanted to achieve an end wanted to find you get you back bring you here put you in your bed let you sleep sit across from you at the table in the morning even if it's silent that's the end. that's everything. I just wanted you back. still want you back. but I don't recognize you. the story is failing I'm not sure if it is true. not sure what I was to you, if I was different, if you would have taken me like Iffy. she shouldn't have had to go. I wanted to be like you but I've got to be different. I don't want the blood on my hands.

I'll admit there are times times too frequently when I have thought of you scooping me like a bird and sometimes I think that if you came home I would ask to stay in that bed with you. sometimes I think I would ask you to brush my hair. I cry when I think about it it's stupid stupid so stupid you have never brushed my hair a world in which you brush my hair is mythology this is not mythology this is real. this is the story the true story the only story I know the story I must keep telling but I keep forgetting keep wanting more. but I think about it. the hair brushing. it's stupid. invention. loneliness. stupid stupid not worth saying I'm sorry if you can hear me just know. I won't make you brush my hair. that would be stupid. just come back and get in your bed and go to sleep and I will see you in the morning. order.

invention. I've made a ridiculous invention.

you can't hear me.

fuck I really don't know if you can don't know if I'll ever be able to know

but if you can, you can't answer.

so the last thing I'll say is this. if my voice found you– through the lawless void. if it did and you chose to listen. I am sorry for all the rambling. you know that I have never been succinct. if you are: all I've been trying to say is this. you deserved to die under the sky. surrounded by poppies, in bloom, clothed in honor. or in your bed, neatly tucked, kissed cheeks, loved. you deserved a proper burial. a funeral. for us to mourn for you. for your wife to wait for your death to pass before bedding another. for her not to have orchestrated your slaughter. time should have swept you away– would have swept you away. and the pain would surely be here, but it would be right. natural. this pain defies what has been known before, its grossness mangling the scene of my body. rendering me unrecognizable. sorrow takes the shape of a parent: we all need someone to guide us.

Iffy you deserved a life. Father you deserved better choices.

you were so young. so bright and sweet and wild. you didn't need to die shouldn't have had to die anyway.

I miss you. both of you. you deserved a good end. we all do. living is hard enough– death should be sweeter.

maybe living can be sweet too.

maybe I'll see you one day. hold the both of your hands.

it won't be here.

nothing can make it so.

not my trying, my wailing, my pain

more blood is just more blood

I'm learning that. just learning.

human, trying.

I end the cycle. choosing something else

let light in

I'm going to eat now, okay?

she breaks bread.

she eats.

LIGHTS OUT