

A great chorus of women (KAY, COURTNEY, LETA, PHILOMENA, and ARIANNA) calls to the gods.

They wear tattered wedding dresses made of discarded sails.

Hands raised, they call:

Help us
Help us
Help us

and:

Save us
Save us
Save us

and:

Please
Please
Please

and:

Save us, please!
Help us! Please, save us!
Help us, save us, please!
Help us, save us, please!
Etc.

Their words overlap,
a rhythm exercise,
building and building.

Then:

VOICE (MALE)

They call again, quiet now:
Frantic whispers.
Insect wings.

VOICE

Beat.

VOICE

Look.

I know who you are.

I've heard the whole story,
and it's a real bummer.

We're not in disagreement, here.

Politically, we're all on the same side.

But there's nothing I can do,
and you all just showing up here like this...
it's dangerous for me and for my family.
So you have to leave.

The women speak in perfect unison.

CHORUS

We've got nowhere else to go.

VOICE

I'm sorry.

CHORUS

If you had helped us the first time
none of this would have happened.

VOICE

That's not fair.

CHORUS

Life's not fair.

VOICE

Now you just sound jaded.

CHORUS

No shit.

Help us.

Save us.

Please.

The chanting begins again,
building and building.

VOICE

(quiet, frantic)

STOP IT.

Stop it.

They do.

VOICE

(softening)

I'm not a monster.

I know that there are things that I could have done differently.

You won't ever know how many nights I stayed up

thinking of your calls,

wondering if I made the right decision.

But ultimately, it wasn't my fight.

It seemed foolish to get involved.

Surely, you can understand that!

What happened to you was terrible...

but it wasn't *my* responsibility.

CHORUS

Than whose was it?

VOICE

I don't know.

CHORUS

It was ours.

And so:

VOICE

You can't justify what you did.

CHORUS

And what did we do, exactly?

VOICE

I mean...

you killed fifty men.

CHORUS

We had no choice.

VOICE

There are always choices.

Courtney, sharp, steps forward.

COURTNEY

That's such bullshit.

CHORUS

Shhhhhh.

COURTNEY

(to chorus)

Don't shush me.

(to the Voice)

And we didn't kill fifty men.

The women break, speaking individually.

KAY

Forty-nine.

LETA

I think it's fair to round up.

ARIANNA

(nervous)

We're not supposed to speak out of turn.

PHILOMENA

So much for the united front.

VOICE

You can't justify--

COURTNEY

I *won't* justify.

Why should I?

What part of this needs *justification*?

What, exactly, am I supposed to be apologizing for?

VOICE

You should apologize because you killed fifty men.

COURTNEY

I killed one man.

CHORUS
UNITED FRONT.

The women snap into place.

Beat.

CHORUS
You don't know what it was like.

VOICE

No.
I'll give you that.
I do not.

CHORUS

And you can't say for sure,
what you would do,
and what you wouldn't.

VOICE

No.
Help me understand.

CHORUS

HELP US
SAVE US
PLEASE

VOICE

Help me understand
and then maybe,
maybe,
I can help you.
But I need to hear all your voices.
Not just one.

The women confer.
Whispered rustling.

They come to a decision.

CHORUS

You'll help us, then.

VOICE

Maybe.

Kay breaks away.

KAY

In that case:
I'll start.

She steps forward into the light.

VOICE

What's your name?

KAY

I'm Kay.

Shift.

I am one of fifty sisters. Fifty!
Our house had three bathrooms and six closets.
A fucking floor space nightmare.
We slept curled up against each other in little piles like puppies.

Shift. The bedroom.

COURTNEY

Scoot over.

KAY

You scoot over!

LETA

BOTH OF YOU SCOOT OVER.

PHILOMENA

Could you all please just shut up?
I am trying to sleep.

Arianna lets out a snore.

The others groan ("This, again?"), roll their eyes.

Shift.

KAY

No woman is an island,
but some women live on islands.
Our whole world was this tiny stretch of land
suffocated by blue water and sky.

It wasn't a great situation.
 There aren't a ton of options
 on a 51-person island
 comprised of 50 sisters
 and their single dad.
 We didn't have a ton of money.
 Our hand-me-downs were hand-me-downs.
 These shoes, for example?
 First belonged to--

Each woman raises her hand as her name is called.

KAY

Courtney, because of *course* Courtney got new shoes.
 Then she gave them to Leta,
 because Leta was Courtney's little errand girl,
 then Leta gave them to Philomena,
 because Philomena was secretly meeting
 some guy with a boat down by the rocks
 and needed her feet to look *good*,
 then Philomena gave them to Arianna,
 because it was Arianna's birthday
 and we'd all forgotten
 (to be fair: could *you* remember fifty birthdays?)
 then Arianna gave them to me
 because I'd flung mine into the ocean
 during an ill-advised temper tantrum
 and because Arianna's kind of obsessed with me.

Arianna waves at her.

ARIANNA

Kay! Kay. Over here!

Kay rolls her eyes, waves back.

KAY

You might be asking yourself:
 How could one family have *fifty* sisters?
 The answer is: We don't know.
 Are we related by blood?
 Not sure.
 Foster children?
 Couldn't tell you.

The only thing that we know
is that we were raised as sisters on that tiny island
and that we *are* sisters
and that our *sisterhood* is what *binds* us--

COURTNEY

Get to the point.

KAY

Fuck off.

Anyway.

I never really fit in.
My sisters didn't get me.
Except Arianna, of course,
and it's not like that's some huge victory.
She barely counts.
Arianna gets panic attacks.
Wheezes all night long.
Wakes up in cold sweats.
And I'm the one who gets stuck with her.
Surprise, surprise.

So. That's me. Black sheep.
Baaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa.

I'd had some troubles over the years.
I'd go through these phases,
where I'd look in the mirror
and see this cornered animal staring back at me.
Weird food stuff.
“General instability.”
I ran away from home, once,
which is *unheard of*
when you're a poor island rat.
Stayed away almost two months,
then came crawling back,
all tattered and skinny,
dark circles under my eyes.

Everyone was always pretending
to be “worried” about me,
which drove me fucking nuts.
Because:
What business is it of theirs, what I do?

I like to smoke
 and drink
 and talk to weird guys
 on the Internet
 and maybe take some dirty pictures
 with me posing like this--

(she poses)
 or maybe like this--

(she poses again)
 or even like *this*--

(ooh, that's a good one)
 and I couldn't care less
 if they show their friends
Philomena--

(Philomena rolls her eyes)
 because it's my body
 and I'll do with it
 whatever I please.

PHILOMENA

Very empowering.

KAY

Then one night, everything changed.
 I came home for family dinner a few hours late,
 stoned out of my fucking mind,
 trying to hide it because our father
 just *loses his shit*
 over crap like that--

Father enters.

FATHER

Have you been *smoking* that *pot* again?

KAY

And I didn't want him to force feed me--

FATHER

Are you *hiding* your *food* again?

KAY

And I'd been out all afternoon with this shitty guy--

FATHER

Were you *seeing* that boy again?

KAY

—who had a girlfriend that he couldn't dump because they were in this band together, y'know, so it was *business*. He had tattoos of skulls with big, bleeding eyes and breath that smelled like eggs no matter what he'd been eating. But he had a boat and mornings off, so: I took what I could get.

Not all the girls went down to the rocks but some of us did. Boys from the mainland, three or four for every one of us, just bobbing in the water.

There was nowhere for the boats to dock, so we'd just swim out and climb in, soaking wet, seaweed wrapped around our bare legs.

If you'd gotten a nice one, you'd talk for a few minutes first. Otherwise, you'd just...

She raises her eyebrows, gestures.

Y'know, getting out there wasn't too bad. It was the swim back that could really cut you up. Big waves, sharp stones. You had to be careful.

Don't look at me like that.

No woman is an island
but sometimes you're a woman
who lives on an island
and your whole world is this tiny stretch of land
suffocated by blue water and sky
and you look in the mirror
and see a cornered animal
and come crawling back
all tattered and skinny
and you can't swallow your food
and your sister has panic attacks
and you're pretty sure
that if someone doesn't touch you
really touch you
you're gonna die.

So you find a boy
with a boat
and you take
what you get.

COURTNEY

ANYWAY.

KAY

Fuck off.

Anyway.

Shift.

KAY

Dinner.

(to Arianna)

What's going on?

ARIANNA

We don't know.

COURTNEY

He's been waiting on you.

KAY

Sorry. I was busy.

LETA

Yeah. I bet you were real "busy."

PHILOMENA

Ugh. You *reek*.

ARIANNA

You don't think someone died, do you?

LETA

I don't think so.

Is everyone here?

COURTNEY

Who can tell?

Too many fucking *women*.

FATHER clears his throat.
 Maybe dings a glass with a fork.
 It's speech time.

FATHER

My daughters!
 I love you all very much.
 I want to say that right off the bat,
 because what I am about to say
 is going to come as quite a shock for many of you.

But think of this from my perspective.
 Fifty girls! Can you imagine?
 What are the chances?
 I'm an old fashioned guy.
 I like to sit back and read the paper.
 There were so many feelings!
 Feelings everywhere!
 And *shoes*!
 In the beginning, it was difficult to make ends meet.
 Fifty sets of cutlery.
 Fifty prom dresses.
 Fifty purses shaped like donuts.
 The money just wasn't there.
 I needed to feed you
 and clothe you
 and keep you safe.
 Fifty health insurance premiums!
 Doctors from the mainland,
 chugging over in little boats.
 Everyone's braces!

I failed some of you more than others.
 I see that now.

Courtney nudges Kay,
 who flips her off and mouths,
 "FUCK OFF"

FATHER

There was a time when things got dark,
 when it looked like our family would be splintered, cast to the winds.
 There was a time when my resources were few,
 and it seemed our very way of life was threatened.
 I couldn't lose you,
 my darling girls.

So I made a deal.

It was not a deal I took lightly,
but it was a deal that saved our family
and our home
and our traditions
at a crucial moment in time.

So now you all have to marry your cousins.

Wait, what?

The girls react.
(*What is he talking about? Are you joking? Etc.*)

KAY

You can't be serious.

FATHER

I am serious.
My first cousin had fifty sons
—again, what are the odds?—
and they are all of marrying age.
That was our agreement:
Financial support until the youngest child was of marrying age.
And then: a very big wedding.

PHILOMENA

A *hundred*-person wedding?

FATHER

It's actually going to be *considerably* cheaper.

COURTNEY

You mean to tell me
that you sold your fifty daughters into slavery
so that you could pay for our *braces*?

FATHER

(musing)

Is it slavery to love someone?
Are we not all, then, enslaved to each other?

KAY

What the fuck are you *talking* about?

FATHER

Language, young lady.

(to the room)

Look! These are good men!

Virile! Strong!

With decent families and great jobs in the private sector.

These men will be good to you and give you children.

They will keep you safe and be faithful to you on pain of death.

It's in the contract!

I took great care with that part.

Don't think I'm not looking out for you.

I mean, am I missing something, here?

Didn't you all want to get married?

Wasn't this, like, the end goal anyway?

LETA

It takes away our freedom.

FATHER

I'm gonna give it to you just real straight here:

Freedom is overrated.

When left to their own devices,
people make *terrible* decisions.

I mean, think about it!

The divorce rate alone is an argument against autonomy.

People just... don't do what's best for themselves.

Look at Kay, for example.

KAY

Oh, god.

FATHER

She was my third favorite,
after Agatha and Celine, of course.

PHILOMENA

("This, again?")

Dad!

FATHER

She was!

She was so little and cute.

And then she grew up!

Now she's... kind of a slut.

KAY

I am not.

FATHER

Any boy with a boat will do!
 I've had to stop taking my walks.
 I can't even go for a stroll on my own island
 without tripping over some dinghy blow job!

Maybe with fifty sisters, she didn't get enough attention.
 Or maybe she got too much? I don't know.
 But now she's got this whole... weird hair thing.
 And the tattoos...?

KAY

What I do with my body is none of your--

FATHER

I mean, we live on an island.
 How is she even getting those?
 Are one of you tattooing her?
 We don't have sterile water.
 She could get hepatitis!

COURTNEY

GET TO THE POINT.

FATHER

The point is:
 Does anyone think that Kay is going to be worse off
 married to a good, solid man
 from a good, solid family?
 Does anyone really think that it would be better for her
 to just keep on keeping on?

Some of the women seem swayed.

KAY

Well, *Dad*,
 whether I'd be better off or not
 is irrelevant.
 Because:
 I'm
 not
 doing it.

FATHER

You don't have a choice.

KAY

We're adult women.
Of course we have a choice.

Father pulls out a comically large binder,
full to bursting with papers.
He looks to Courtney.

FATHER

You're the smart one.
See if you can find a way out.

Shift. Later:

Courtney looks through the binder
as the rest of the women look on,
waiting impatiently.

Courtney slams the binder shut.

KAY

Well?

COURTNEY

To use one of your phrases:
We're fucked.

PHILOMENA

How is that possible?

COURTNEY

It's all there.
Airtight.

KAY

No.
No no no no no.
You've gotta find something.
There's gotta be a way out.
I can't...
I'm not gonna just roll over and be somebody's wife.

COURTNEY

Actually, I think you are.