

In Search of Persephone

By Kathleen Coudle-King

At rise:

DEMETER is at her car, which is parked just beyond the following dialogue by HERMES. She gets out of her car, wearing a nice blouse but yoga pants. She goes to the back door, opens it, opens a suitcase, and finds a skirt. She pulls the skirt on over yoga pants, then removes the yoga pants and folds and puts in suitcase. She takes out a pearl necklace and puts it on. Zips it closed. She takes out a pair of low heeled pumps. She closes the back door and opens the passenger front door, sits, removes her running shoes and socks, put son the pumps. She stands, closes the front door, opens the rear, puts the sneakers in the back. Closes the door and uses the window to check out her appearance, straightening her skirt and blouse, etc. She should do her best not to draw too much attention to herself, but she act unaware of the audience listening to Hermes behind her.

Simultaneously, HERMES, sits on pedestal of sculpture wearing running clothes and sneakers. Perhaps he plays a recorder or penny whistle. PERCY enters, wearing backpack, his clothes worn but clean, and rummages through a nearby trashcan, searching for anything eatable.

HERMES

I begin to sing of Demeter, the holy goddess of Spring, and her daughter, Persephone, too. The one with the delicate ankles, whom Hadês seized. She was given away by Zeus, the loud-thunderer,

(smashes a metal trash lid with a stick)

--the one who sees far and wide.

PERCY appears. When Hermes mentions flowers, Percy holds up trash he finds in the garbage.

HERMES

Persephone was picking flowers: roses, crocus, beautiful violets, And the narcissus, which was grown by Gaia to entice the flower-faced girl, all according to the plans of Zeus. Persephone was filled with a sense of wonder, and she reached out with both hands to take hold of the pretty flower.

PERCY plucks a "flower" out of the garbage, smiling at someone off stage.

HERMES

And the earth, full of roads leading every which way, opened up under her.

PERCY nods to unseen people and runs out of sight.

HERMES

It happened on the Plain of Nysa, the prairie of North Dakota, the streets of big cities in the east and the west, in hollers and valleys of the south and the desert of the south west. It happened -- all over the earth where children, loved ones, walk away into the mist.

There on the plains of Nyssa it was that Hades

Seized Persephone against her will, put her on his golden chariot,

And drove away as she wept. She cried with a piercing voice,

calling upon her father, Zeus, --

(bangs on trash lid)

But not one of the immortal ones, or of human mortals,
heard her voice. -.

Except -- for Hekatê, with the splendid headband.

And the Lord Helios heard it too. They heard the daughter calling . . .

The FURIES enter: One actor with two sock puppets.

The sock puppets should appear to have been made from recycled materials found in the trash

FURIES

A Bum diddee bum, diddee bum, bum, bum

A bum dideee bum, diddee bum, bum, bum

FURY 1 - TESS

They arrive in car, on a bus, or are home grown.

FURY 2 - MEG

They have a home, but they are home less and less.

FURY 3 – ELECTO

Maybe he left because Daddy was rough.

FURY 1 - TESS

Maybe she left because Daddy,

FURY 2

-- or brother --

FURY 3

-- or uncle, --

FURY 1

-- or Mommy's new boyfriend

FURIES – ALL

--was too touchy.

FURY PUPPETS grope FURY 1/ACTOR

FURY 1

Quit! Stop! Don't! (and finally screams) NO! They stop.

FURIES

A bum diddee bum, diddee bum, bum, bum,
A bum diddee bum, diddee bum, bum bum . . .

FURY 1

Maybe she left because Mommy was a drunk or an addict --

FURY 1

Too controlling, or –

FURY 3

Maybe he left because he couldn't stand one more day --

All Furies

--“under their roof” .

FURY 3

So, --

FURY 2

So –

FURY 1

So on a warm spring day after school, she didn't get on the school bus. Maybe he caught a ride with this older guy he'd met online who thought he was hot, and he went To –

FURY 3

Somewhere Else.

FURY 2

Or --maybe one day, he simply – “poof” – disappeared.

They giggle annoyingly and move off behind trees to watch.

HERMES

Demeter sped off like a bird, soaring over land and sea, looking and looking. But no one was willing to tell her the truth, not one of the gods, not one of the humans, not birds, messengers of the truth. or nine days did Demeter wander all over the earth, holding torches ablaze in her hands.

DEMETER enters with fliers of PERCY. DEMETER is dressed like a “lady”: Nice blouse (but it’s inside out so the label is in the front) nice skirt, panty hose, sensible pumps or flats, pearls, nice hair do, full but modest make-up, carries a nice handbag. She hands a few out to people in the audience.

DEMETER (Georgian accent)

People don’t just disappear. First, they go missing. And, if something is missing, it’s much better than disappeared, because we can find missing. Your keys are missing. They turn up. You’re missing an earring; it shows up under the dresser when you move it. Missing means there’s hope you’ll find it – find them. But disappeared? Disappeared is dark and unreachable. Much further than Lost. An unreachable place. People who disappear never come back. So, my daughter? My daughter’s missing. And I won’t rest, until I find her.

(to audience member)

Excuse me, have you seen this girl? Her name is Persephone. Sometimes she calls herself “Percy?”

HERMES

Not once did Demeter take of ambrosia and nectar, sweet to drink,
in her grief, nor did she bathe her skin in water.
But when the tenth bright dawn came upon her,
Hekatê came to her, holding a light ablaze in her hands.

HEKATE enters pulling a cart behind her stuffed full with empty soda and beer cans. Hekate wears a flashlight headband, layers of clothing, worn rain boots. She is disheveled.

DEMETER

(approaching, tentatively)

Excuse me, I’m looking for my daughter. Have you seen this girl?

HEKATE

(taking flier, holding up close to her eyes)

Hmm... I –

DEMETER

Yes?

HEKATE

Hmm . . . I might –

DEMETER

Yes? Yes?

HEKATE

I didn’t see her.

DEMETER

Oh. Thank you.

(turning awa

HEKATE

But I think I heard something. You know Sonny?

(Demeter shakes her head “no”.)

Come. I heard him talking about a girl fits this description. Follow me.

FURIES step out from the trees.

FURIES

A bum diddee bum, diddee bum, bum, bum . . .

A bum didde bum, diddee bum, bum, bum . . .

FURY 1

I really don't see the point of this play. Like, I mean, we don't have a homeless problem in this town. There are, like, actually five people in town who are homeless.

FURY 3

That can't be! She's (gestures to other Fury) homeless.

FURY 2

So are you!

FURY 3

Liar! You slept on her couch last night.

FURY 2

In the apartment her family shares with you!

FURY 1

Mi casa es tu casa! And tu casa, and tu casa, and tu casa . . .

FURY 3

Eh, eh, eh! What about the people at the mission, hmm? It's a homeless shelter!

FURY 2

Yeah, what about that, huh? There's more than 5 people there.

FURY 1

Exactly, they have shelter, duh, so they're not homeless. Sometimes these two can be so dumb.

They run ahead, laughing, hide behind trees and watch.

HERMES

They came to Hêlios, the seeing-eye of gods and men.

HEKATE AND PERCY arrive before a man sleeping on a bench.

Rise and shine, Sonny! The day's a wastin'!

HEKATE

SONNY pulls his hood down over his face.

Sonny, you lazy sun-

HEKATE

I don't know about this –

DEMETER

You want to find out about your daughter, don't you? Sonny, wake up and smell the coffee!

HEKATE

She removes a thermos from her cart, unscrews the lid and waves it under his nose, he rouses.

Damn, woman, I was having a fine dream – I was on a beach, and people were in the ocean and –

SONNY

Drink.
(removes a crushed used coffee cup from her cart, pours)

HEKATE

Don't mind if I do.
(sits up, removes bottle from a pocket)

SONNY

(takes a slug)

Drink.
(pushes coffee at him, he takes it, sips, eyeing DEMETER)

HEKATE

You from social services? 'Cause I already told them I don't want to go to the shelter.

SONNY

Unless you dry out, they won't have you at the shelter.

HEKATE

There's that, too.
(laughs until he starts hacking)

You got a cigarette?

SONNY

DEMETER

I don't smoke.

SONNY

Me neither, I guess.

(sips coffee while eyeing Demeter)

So? You a social worker? You got my check?

DEMETER

Uh, no, I'm from Athens -- Georgia. I'm looking for my daughter. This lady said you might have seen her.

(shows him the flier)

SONNY

(takes flier)

Huh. Yeah. Yeah. I seen her.

DEMETER

Oh, my god! Thank you, thank you! Where can I find her?

SONNY

(coughs, spits, sits up, he seems to be channeling a different person)

You shall know the answer, for I greatly respect you and feel sorry for you as you grieve over your child, the one with the delicate ankles. No one else among all the immortals is responsible except the cloud-gatherer Zeus,

(Hermes hits trash can lid)

who gave her to Hadês as his beautiful wife.

And Hadês, heading for the misty realms of darkness, seized her as he drove his chariot and as she screamed out loud.

But I urge you, goddess: stop your loud cry of lamentation: you should not have an anger without bounds, all in vain. It is not so terrible to have, of all the immortals, such a son-in-law as Hadês.

He is the brother of Zeus, --

(Hermes hits trash can lid)

--whose seed is from the same place.

Hades dwells with those whose king he was destined by lot to be.

(he stands)

I gotta take a piss.

(grabs his blanket and exits)

DEMETER

What was that gibberish?

(shouting after him)

Where is she? Where did you see her?!

(turning to Hekate)

Is he out of his mind?

HEKATE

Well, yeah. But he sure sounds like he knows something, don't he?

DEMETER

He reeks. He slept out here last night, didn't he? He;s a drunk, a bum!

FURIES step forward

FURIES

A bum diddee bum, diddee bum, bum, bum . . .

HERMES

Not now, Furies.

They step off, glumly.

HEKATE

'suppose he did. Sonny is what some like to call "shelter insecure": He's got a sister. She takes him in until he gets on her nerves, which takes about a week. Then he's back out here.

DEMETER

And you? Are you -- ?

HEKATE

A drunk? A bum?

DEMETER

No, I'm sorry, I meant are you home-- uh, shelter in-insecure?

HEKATE

Me? Hekate? The goddess of the hearth?

(laughs)

Nah. I've got a roof over my head at night.

DEMETER

Oh, good!

(wipes off the bench with a tissue from her purse)

These people, they're so --

HEKATE

So what?

DEMETER

(looks around to see if anyone is listening)

Pathetic. I mean, get a life, right? Have some self-respect. Get a job. Everywhere you look there are help wanted signs. I mean, there are no excuses. They just don't want to work. Lazy. That's what they are: lazy. What? Why you looking at me like that?

HEKATE

I had a trailer -- over on Columbia? It was real cozy. Kitchen, small but perfect for me. Bedroom, living room -- had an authentic Thomas Kincaid picture right over my sofa. I loved that picture. Little cottage in the woods. Cobblestone path, right up to the door. (smiles at the memory) I loved my little trailer. Didn't have no cobblestone path, but I owned it. It was mine. For 20 years. Then they raised the rent on the lan, year by year. Cost of living they say, but my hourly wage didn't go up that much, and my Social Security check didn't go up that much. Their cost of living got so high, I couldn't afford to live.

DEMETER

So, what did you do? Did you move your trailer? You can do that, right?

HEKATE

Tried to find a cheaper trailer park, but the insurance company said they wouldn't insure it if I moved it on account of it being 20-years old. I ended up selling it for what I could get, which wasn't near what it was worth to me but . . .

(shrugs)

DEMETER

Where did you go?

TERESIAS enters using a cane while she's talking and takes a seat u.s.r. He removes his backpack and places it between his crossed legs on the ground. He wears dark aviator sunglasses.

HEKATE

(deep breath)

Let's see, I got an apartment, but they raised the rent on that after a couple years. So, I got a roommate. But that didn't work out too well. Two old gals both set in our ways of doing things, you know. Then . . . I bumped into someone I knew from working at K-mart. They said they had a spare room, so that's where I am now. I just gotta hope she don't sell the house and move out. I don't know what I'd do then. . . I'm in the basement. Kind of hard going up and down them steps with my arthritis, but . . . Managed to hold onto that Thomas Kincaid picture! It's number, you know. 289 out of 500. Sometimes, I just lay in my bed before going to sleep and look at it, imagine I'm walking over that little stone bridge, then up that cobblestone path, petting the cat waiting for me next to the door where there's a pot of pink geraniums. When I close my eyes I can just 'bout smell 'em. So, am I homeless? Nah. I got a home. Got a real nice one. Right up here.

(taps her temple)

Good luck. I hope you find your daughter.

Hekate gets up with some trouble, then pulling her cart after her, she exits. Demeter stares down at the flier in her hand, begins to cry. Then she wipes her nose, throws her shoulders back and rises off the bench. She exits.

DEMETER

Excuse me, have you seen my daughter? She's about 5' 6"? Blonde, well, she was blonde, but she might have dyed her hair. She does that. Black, red, pink, blue – I don't know what crazy color it is now. But this is what she looked like six months ago. Her name is Persephone. Sometimes we called her Percy.

(beat as she stares at the flier)

The police looked, so they say. After 2 months, I couldn't stand sitting around doing nothing, so I've hit every major town between Athens and here. I'll go up into Canada if I have to. Somebody has seen her.

(noticing Teresias)

Excuse me, have you seen this girl?

TERESIAS

Nope.

(props up sign: "Blind Vet, Anything Helps.")

DEMETER

Oh, pardon me!

WOMAN out jogging stops and stares at them.

WOMAN

Is this man harassing you, ma'am?

DEMETER

No, I was just asking him --

WOMAN steps to the side, takes out her phone. Dials.

WOMAN

(turning away from audience, trying to be discrete but is loud)

Hello, yes, I am at University Park, jin the rock garden---

TERESIAS

You didn't notice. People often don't.

WOMAN

-- and there is a man panhandling! *In University Park!*! I can't believe my eyes!

TERESIAS

She doesn't want to see me. Isn't that a pisser?

(points)

I ain't been here two minutes, and she's already calling the police. Get this: She finds me an eyesore!

(laughs)

WOMAN

People are out trying to enjoy their day and he's here – *begging*. It's just disgusting.

TERESIAS

Funny, ain't it? Got any change?

(shakes a cup at her)

DEMETER

Uh, sure, but shouldn't you get going? I mean if the police are on their way –

TERESIAS

Panhandling ain't a crime here. Oh, they might move me along, but it's not like they're gonna arrest me.

(shakes his cup at her)

DEMETER

I don't have any change.

TERESIAS

I take dollars, too. No debit or Apple Pay. Yet.

DEMETER

Oh. Yes. Sure.

(she digs in her purse and puts a dollar in cup)

TERESIAS feels in the cup, takes out the dollar.

TERESIAS

What is this?

DEMETER

Money.

TERESIAS

I know it's *money*. But how much is it?

DEMETER

It's a dollar, it's all I --

TERESIAS

(he folds a corner of the dollar down)

A whole dollar, huh? I go to war for my country, lose my vision, and all you can spare is a lousy dollar?

(dripping sweetness)

"Thank you for your service".

DEMETER

I'm sorry, um, here, (loudly) here's, here's another dollar.

TERESIAS

I'm blind, lady. Not deaf.

DEMETER

Sorry. Was it a bomb? One of those, what do you call 'em?

TERESIAS

IEDs?

DEMETER

Yes, I read about them! Did you lose your sight when an IED went off?

TERESIAS

I didn't say I lost my sight in combat.

DEMETER

You most certainly did!

TERESIAS

I said I went to war for my country. I said I lost my vision. You connected the two things. Not me.

DEMETER

I stand corrected. How did you lose your sight?

TERESIAS

I went to war.

DEMETER

And you lost your sight!

TERESIAS

I went to war. I came home. I drank. I had diabetes. But I saw some shit. Sometimes you see shit you can't unsee, so I drank some more. Sometimes the booze helped me forget. Washed it away. Sometimes. Doc at the V.A. warned me, though. Said it wasn't helping my diabetes none. But the doc? He hadn't seen what I seen. If he had, he'd be drinking, too. Eventually, the world got darker and darker. Funny thing is: Even in all this darkness I can still see what I wish I couldn't.

DEMETER

But if you're a Veteran, don't you get benefits?

TERESIAS

(laughs)

Oh, yeah, I get benefits. Loads of benefits! I'm rolling in the dough. Got me a penthouse and a pony.

DEMETER

Wait, are you homeless or not?

TERESIAS

Well, it's not actually a penthouse, but I got a couch to lay my head. Until my buddy's wife kicks me out. Do you want me to be homeless?

DEMETER

No, of course not, I –

TERESIAS

Would you give me money if I held up this sign:

INSERT: Hi, I'm Teresias, and I'm a drug addict. If you give me money, I will go buy some drugs. If I don't get a high in a couple of days, I'll start to get a headache, my palms will start to sweat, I'll feel both restless and exhausted, and then I'll start to feel nauseous. I'll puke. I'll start to shake. By about the third day, my blood pressure will spike. I might even have a seizure right here on the sidewalk, or I might get delirious, disoriented, and my heart rate may alter. Yes, I have tried to quit. I've been in detox and rehab 7 times. I've prayed. Hard. I've been to AA. I tried to quit for my wife and my kid. I tried to quit. But the stuff in here (taps head) never quits. So, can you help me? Please. My name is Teresias and I need a fix bad.

Do you think this would be more effective?

DEMETER

Stick with the other sign.

He flips sign over.

DEMETER (CONT.)

I just thought that people who beg on the street must be homeless.

TERESIAS

It's not a pre-req, lady. Besides, I got a futon in a buddy's apartment. I wouldn't exactly call it a "home."

DEMETER

But you have a roof over your head at night. And you get a check from the government, right? Disability? Veteran? Surely, you could save up for a place of your own?

TERESIAS

Geez, y, you're nosy! I bet you were all up in your daughter's business, too.

DEMETER

It's a mother's job. Yes, I checked her cell phone. And her laptop. And her room. I monitored who her friends were, who she wanted to date, and who she *could* date. That's just what a good parent does. Am I right?

TERESIAS

You're asking the wrong guy. My kid refuses to see me.

DEMETER

That must be painful.

(TERESIAS waves his hand as if to wave it away)

So . . . you, um, make a lot of money doing this?

TERESIAS

What are you, the IRS?

DEMETER

Just wondering. People say --

TERESIAS

“People say,” “people say,” people can suck my left nut!

DEMETER

If you’re going to get vulgar –

TERESIAS

Oh, I see, you’re looking to make a career change!

DEMETER

I’m *looking* for my daughter. I was just curious. Sheesh! Maybe Persephone is out here somewhere with a sign, begging strangers for money.

TERESIAS

She better not be! This is my spot! Ralph’s got his over by DeMers. Jason’s got 32nd Ave. We don’t take kindly to poachers.

DEMETER

What do you do to them?

TERESIAS

Let’s just say, this cane is multi-purpose.

DEMETER

I see!

TERESIAS

Good for you. Can you give me a hand?

She helps him up and he slings his arm around her neck. Feels the label on back of her shirt. She reacts to all this – homeless dude touching her.

Demeter

Where are you going? I thought you said the police won’t arrest you.

TERESIAS

I need more shade. By the way – your shirt’s on inside out.

DEMETER

What? How could you know?

TEREISIAS

Label is on outside.

DEMETER
(feels for the label)

Oh, my God!

TERESIAS

Dressed in a hurry, did you?

(chuckles and starts to move off)

DEMETER

Wait, do you have any idea where I should look for her?

TERESIAS

How long you say she's been missing?

DEMETER

Thirteen months.

TERESIAS

And you tried the mission?

DEMETER

It's the first place I go in every town. It's how I followed her this far. She stayed in one in Sioux City. But Fargo's was full, so they thought she might have come here. No one at the mission saw her.

TERESIAS

(whistles between his teeth)

You might want to go see Charon. He's lives down by the river. Here –

(digs in cup, and takes out a quarter, puts it in her hand.)

DEMETER

No – I –

TERESIAS

You gotta give him a coin. Take it. Tell him Teresias sent you. I hope you find who you're looking for.

DEMETER

Thank you. I – I – hope you find peace.

(He bursts out laughing as he makes his way off. Maybe he uses his cane, maybe not.)

WOMAN

He's on the move! He's headed west!! Don't worry, I won't let him out of my sight!

(she follows Teresias)

FURIES jump out.

FURIES

A bum diddee bum, diddee bum, bum, bum

A bum diddee bum, diddee bum, bum, bum

See ya! Wouldn't wanna be ya!
FURY 2

A good thing we're not addicts.
FURY 1

Oh, please that would never happen to us!
FURY 3

Right? Or like anyone we know.
FURY 1

Totally. So sad.
FURY 2

FURIES – ALL
So sad.
(they pout, hold it, then --)

Hey, I'm starving! Let's go get some of those mini donuts!
FURY-2

Oo,, with lots of sugar and cinnamon!
FURY 1

Do you think they sell lattes? I am like, so addicted!
FURY 3

They run off.

HERMES appears, playing his recorder and leads
DEMETER and audience.

HERMES
And so the distraught mother proceeded, down to the River Styx where the ferry man awaits all souls.

At riverbank. CHARON, an old man stands with a long
beard and an oar. He wears a backpack.

HERMES
There Charon stands, who rules the dreary coast –
A sordid god: down from his hairy chin
A length of beard descends, uncombed, unclean;
His eyes, like hollow furnaces on fire;
A girdle, foul with grease, binds his obscene attire.

CHARON is looking down at the river, mumbling to
himself.

DEMETER
Excuse me, are you Charon?

Charon looks up with a start. Tries to hide behind a tree.

DEMETER

Please, Teresias sent me. He, uh, he thought you might be able to help me.

CHARON squats behind tree but looks out at her.

DEMETER

Wait, I, uh, I have a quarter for you?

(she digs it out of her purse and extends it to him)

CHARON slowly comes around the tree, holding the oar out in front of him. He gets close enough to snatch the coin from her hand. DEMETER digs in her pocket for her -- tissue, wipes her hand as Charon looks at the coin, then puts it in a small pouch that hangs from his waist. He walks around her holding out his pole.

DEMETER

(Pulls out the flier of Percy to show him)

Excuse me. I'm looking for my daughter, Persephone. Teresias said you might have seen her?

Charon is hesitant, pulls back.

DEMETER

Please, if you could just take a look at her.

CHARON

(leaning in to take a look)

Is she dead?

DEMETER

Oh, God, no! I hope not!

CHARON

(sniffing at her, puzzled)

Are you dead?

DEMETER

Sometimes I wish I were.

CHARON

(he pokes her with oar)

DEMETER

Ouch!

CHARON

You're not dead. (sniffs) Close. But not dead. Not yet.

DEMETER

Please, could you take a closer look? Maybe she was down here.

CHARON

(keeping his distance, he snatches the flier from Demeter and stares at it)
Your *daughter*?

DEMETER

Yes.

CHARON

Have I seen her?

DEMETER

Yes, have you seen her?!

CHARON looking closely at flier. Slowly, during the following, Charon tears strips of the flier off, dropping them, so that eventually all that is left is a face – no hair, no words, just a round face.

DEMETER

She's about 5'6". Weighs about 165 pounds, or she did. She was a ballerina. Danced on point! Oh, she was beautiful. In 8th grade she was the class president. Confident. Good student. The teachers always said, "You must be so proud." Then when she entered high school . . . I don't know. She shut down. Her grades dropped. She spent all her time in her room. Stopped dancing. It broke my heart when she quit. She burned her costumes in the barbeque pit. Nothing left but melted sequins. Really. Oh, I was furious. Do you have any idea how much those costumes cost? What was she thinking? She wouldn't tell me. Were the girls bullying her? no. She said the tutus, the recitals, it just wasn't "her." What did that mean? Of course it was her? Who else would it be? She'd danced since she was three! (beat) We fought. We fought a lot. I used to say, "Honey, you can tell me anything. Talk to me, baby." Then, one day, she tried to tell me. (beat) What did I do? I dismissed her words. She was being silly! It was a phase. Then she just stopped talking to me. Started wearing *black. She traded toe shoes for combat boots*. I sent her to see our pastor for counseling. But that didn't help. She started – hurting herself. Cutting they call it. Where was my little girl who loved pink and purple? Where did she go? I told myself it was a phase. She'd grow out of it. But she seemed to, I don't know, grow deeper into it. I couldn't reach her. I lost my little girl. Have you seen her?

CHARON

(holding up round flier, now just a face)

I've seen her.

DEMETER

Oh, my God! I knew she was alive! I knew it!

CHARON

(presses the remains of the flier on DEMETER'S chest)

Lisssssten! Persephone is dead.

DEMETER

What? No! No! No! You're wrong! You're insane! You should be locked up! Living down here like an animal! Threatening people with that oar. What was I thinking? Coming down here? Expecting to find answers from, from you *people*!

(she crumbles the round flier of Percy into a ball and throws it at Charon)

CHARON

I'll show you. Come.

(points over the bridge)

DEMETER

I'm not going anywhere with –

CHARON

Don't you want to see for yourself?

(picks up flier and pops into mouth and chews)

CHARON leads way, exits.

On the other side of the bridge SONNY, TERESIAS, HERMES, AND PERCY gather with cardboard signs the hold up.

DEMETER

(to audience)

I don't believe him. But I also don't not believe him. He's insane. Right? But am I really all that different? Every day I get a little closer to being like all of them.

I hear her voice in my head. She's yelling, I'm yelling, then she's slamming the door.

(she takes out a pint of vodka from her purse)

Surprised? Do you blame me? It began as a way to get to sleep at night. That panhandler back there said he drank so he couldn't see the past. I drink so I can't see the future. The one where I get a call. They've found my baby. They need me to identify her. I drink so I can stop this scene from playing out in my head: Her body beneath a crisp white sheet on a stainless steel table.

(shakes her head, takes a long sip)

And that woman with the shopping cart? I get it. I've been living in my car for the last month. I used all my savings to hire a private detective to find Persephone. I've just about tapped out my credit cards looking for her. Hotels, gas, food, it costs money. I have to save the little bit left for gas, bread and peanut butter. Me! What would the ladies who lunch say?

(gives a small laugh as she fingers her pearls)

Know anyone who wants to buy some pearls?

DEMETER (CONTINUED)

Persephone's father? Pff. He's never been in the picture. My so-called family? They won't give me any more money. They think I should give up. "Persephone's gone," they say. If she were, I would know. I would feel it in my bones.

(She looks off to where Charon exited.)

if I leave now, I'll always wonder. Was I so close to finding her, but too afraid to look? I won't stop looking. What mother would?

She crosses bridge. Audience follows. Perhaps there's a clearing Perhaps there's a tent.

FURIES enter, sharing mini-donuts.

FURIES

A bum diddee bum, diddee bum, bum, bum

A bum didde bum, didde bum, bum, bum

FURY 1

She's close now!

FURY 3

Gonna get an answer, whether she likes it or not.

FURY 2

Hey, we never told them our story!

FURY 1

Sure we did.

FURY 3

(munching on donut)

Uh uh.

FURY 1

No? Okay, I'll go first.

FURY 2

No, me!

(shoves her)

Okay, so, I got into a little trouble back when I was young and impressionable. Had this boyfriend –

FURY 3

He was hot!

FURY 2

He was. He was also a meth head. Not when I met him, of course. It was a gradual process. He was 19, I was 16, and I was a 4.0 student.

FURY 1

She was not.

FURY 2

Was so! Anyway, one thing led to another, he went to jail, and I started dealing I guess I had a talent for it, next thing I know I get busted next thing I know I'm wearing a wire – seriously. I never thought I'd be a snitch, but I was looking at 10 years. I ended up getting 6. Long story, short: I get out and I go live in this halfway house.

FURY 3

'Cept she gets asked to leave.

FURY 1

On account of her temper.

FURY 2

That's not why!

FURY 3

Uh huh.

FURY 2

I don't got a temper! Anyway, I leave, and well, I go to the mission, but this chick she gets all up in my grill and next thing you know, I'm being asked to leave. The rest is history.

FURY 3

My turn. So, like, I didn't have any Brady Bunch family growing up. As soon as I'm 16, I started living with my best friend, Things are cool. I finish high school. Gonna go to college. We move in together. Then her boyfriend moves in. Right away, there's trouble he tells her I made a move on him. Like I would actually do that? Dude was ugly! I had just given them all my money for rent, and they kick my ass out on the street. Now, I got nowhere to go. go home? That's not happening. So now I'm couch surfing: one night here, one night there. The rest is history.

(they look at Fury 1)

FURY 1

What? I got a home.

FURY 2 & 3

Please, bitch!

FURY 1

I choose not to live thereAs soon as I save up enough money for a deposit and 1st month's rent, I'm outtathere. (here)

FURY 2

And how long you been saving up?

FURY 1

Shut up. All you moochers drain me dry! I'm too nice. Sure, I done things I'm not proud of. We all have.
(They look away.)

Come on now! You know it's true.

FURY 2

Do what you gotta do to get by.

FURY 1

Exactly.

(They walk away)

But it's not just me, anymore. I gotta start looking out for this one.

(rubs her belly)

I lost three others. But this one, this one is gonna make it. She's strong. Like me. Feel.

(takes someone's hand)

Feel her kick?! Yeah, this one and me, we gonna make it. You'll see.

TERESIAS

Welcome to Homeless 101.

(holds up cardboard sign: Lesson #1 - Travel Light)

You want a couple changes of underwear, an extra shirt, a second pair of socks. Don't forget toothbrush, toothpaste, and deodorant. If you start to stink, you're just going to create more problems for yourself. Remember, you have to carry it all day. Some folks out here are hoarders. You've seen them. More is not better. More to watch, more to haul, more for others to steal. Keep it light.

Okay, what to wear: You want to dress in layers. A sweatshirt. A hoody is a must in case it rains, or it's cold. Shoes that are comfortable. You're going to be doing a lot of walking.

SONNY

Basically, my day starts with foraging.

(Holds up a sign: Lesson #2 - Food)

There's plenty out here. Mission will feed you twice a day, whether you stay with them or not. And if you go behind the fast food restaurants you can find lots to eat. Once you get over the fact you're looking through the trash, you'll be eating like a prince. You wouldn't believe the amount of food they throw out. It's perfectly fine, but they got rules..

Then there are what I like to call the Good Samaritan restaurants. At the end of the night, they'll meet us at the back door and give us the left over meals. They're not supposed to, I -. Again, rules. Those folks save us the trouble of dumpster diving. You'll meet a lot of nice people out here. 'Course there are real assholes, too. But that's true anywhere, right?

PERCY

(Holds up sign: Lesson #3 – People)

You need someone to have your back. And if you're a woman, cozy up to the biggest, ugliest mother you can find out here. You need protection if you're gonna stay put for a while. I haven't been here that long, but I live in a family. We look out for each other. Young ones take care of the old ones. Share what we got. It's easy to be generous when you got a lot. Try it when all you have is carried on your back or a couple of grocery bags.

Somebody's got a bottle, they share it. Somebody's got a little weed, we pass it. But if it's not yours, be sure to pass it back to the owner for that last toke. (laughs) Learned that the hard way. (rubs back of head) Same with cigs. Share and share alike. Don't got any? That's okay. I'm the youngest, so they

usually send me out “snipe hunting,” that’s what we call looking for cigarette butts. You’ll find plenty in front of the bars the morning after. People can be such pigs, am I right?

People just more accepting of each other out here. Not everyone, but most. If you’re little like me or a girl, you best find a protector. Sure, protection might cost you, but it’s better than trying to go it alone. Tried it. Didn’t like it.

CHARON

(Holds sing: Lesson #4 – Shelter)

Where you gonna sleep? Personally, I like to be under the bridge near the river, so people can’t see me from the trail. Cops see you, they’ll make you move. The mission in this town is pretty good. Women bunk with women, guys with guys. No kids. It’s clean and pretty safe.. You can’t be high or drunkr, and they’ll give you a small chore to do. There are rules, though. They can search you or your stuff at any time. You don’t get a bedtime story, but you do get a breathalizer at night. You can see how that’s not gonna fly with some of these characters. So . . .

There are plenty of good hidey holes out here to sleep in. Know those tube slides at the park? Yeah, real cozy. But be sure to move by sunrise or you might get a ticket. Homeless or not, you can still get a citation. And those citations can add up and before you know, there’s a warrant out for your arrest. Wild, right? Some people turn themselves in on cold winter nights so they can sleep in a cell. Winters here are brutal. One chick told me a friend locked her in his storage unit just so she could stay warm. She started a fire in there. Don’t worry! She didn’t die or nothing. Like I said, she told me the story.

Back in February, that week it was really freezing, me and a friend were this close to drinking a pint of vodka and checking into Detox just to get off the street. We were wondering what the hell we were going to do when we walked by this office building. Bingo! We scored an elevator. Yeah. We went in around midnight and pulled the stop button. It had a nice warm air blower to keep us toasty all night. We just beat it out of there before people started coming to work. Hung out in the lobby of the Mission until the library opened, then crashed there for the day. I read more now than I ever did in college.

(look at someone in audience)

Yeah, I went.

Oh, and a good blanket is your most valued possession. One night, it was so cold four of us piled our blankets on top of all of us under the bridge. You learn real quick who snores, who talks in their sleep, and who pees the bed!

But, hey, good luck to you. Everybody deserves a place to call home.

(exits)

HERMES enters – swiftly.

HERMES

Demeter! Zeus

(crashes the garbage lid)

summons you to come to that special group, the company of the immortal gods.
She said that she would never go to fragrant Olympus,
that she would never send up the harvest of the earth,
until she saw with her own eyes her daughter, the one with the beautiful ankles.

But when Zeus, --

(crashes the garbage lids)

--the one who sees far and wide, heard this,
he sent me to persuade Hadês
to allow holy Persephone to leave the misty realms of darkness --
(he takes a breath)

The others start to move away, but when he continues
to speak, they freeze.

HERMES

-- and be brought up to the light in order to join the gods in Olympus,

The others start to move away, but when he continues to
speak, they freeze.

HERMES

--so that her mother might
see her with her own eyes and then let go of her anger.

The look to see if he's going to finish.

HERMES

I did not disobey, but straightaway headed down beneath the depths of the earth,
Until I found the Lord inside his palace.

We move to a grove of trees. HADES and his entourage lounge in the middle: SONNY, TERESIAS, HEKATE, THE FURIES. PERCY SITS FACING AWAY FROM AUDIENCE. He is feeding HADES French fries. The others are passing a bottle and/or a joint. Maybe one is reading a book. Another sleeping with their head covered. HADES is dressed in black leather jacket, or trench coat, or maybe an army jacket, camo pants, boots. He has a cigarette behind his ear. DEMETER hangs back.

HERMES

Hadês! King of the dead!
Zeus,
(crash the trash can lids)
orders that I have splendid Persephone
brought back up to light so that Demeter
may see her with her own eyes and let go of her wrath and terrible vengeance

For Demeter is performing a mighty deed,
to destroy the s humans, causing them to be without *spring*,
by hiding the Seed underground—and she is destroying the world

.

Charon and Demeter enter. Charon gives a whistle.

HADES

Approach.

CHARON

P-p-pardon me. She's looking for someone.

HADES eyes Demeter, reaches behind his ear and gives Charon the cigarette. Charon exits. Hades' "harem" circles around Demeter, touching her clothes, maybe mocking them, touch her hair.

DEMETER

(reaches into her purse, removes a new flier)

Excuse me, I'm looking for my daughter. Have you seen her?

One of the Hades' people hands him the flier.

HADES

(takes flier, reads it)

You're from Athens?

DEMETER

(clutching her purse to her)

Yes, sir.

HADES

I was at Fort Benning.

DEMETER

Really? I have a cousin who works there

HADES

It was a long time ago. So? What can I do you for?

DEMETER

Well, that – she, he said my daughter – they said that she might be –

(thrusts out flier)

-- have you seen her?

HADES
 (affirmative) Umm.

DEMETER
 What? Is she still --

HADES
 Seen someone who looks a lot like her.

DEMETER
 Where? When? Tell me, please! Oh, my god!

HADES
 Yes?

DEMETER
 Oh, my god!

HADES
 Yes?

DEMETER
 What? I – I – I – Where is she?

HADES
 Why don't you have a seat? Water?
 (he snaps fingers, SONNY gives her a bottle of water, she hesitates)

SONNY
 It hasn't been opened.

DEMETER
 I'm sorry – I --

HADES
 Sit. Have you been looking for your daughter a long time?
 (Demeter sits on a tree stump, takes a long drink)

DEMETER
 12 Months, 27 days. The last confirmed sighting was in Fargo. That's when the trail went cold. I figured she wouldn't stay long in any of those small towns, so I stopped in every mid-size one I came to hoping she hadn't headed to Minneapolis, or gone west. She always talked about Canada, so I thought . . .

HADES
 Why not Grand Forks?

DEMETER
 Exactly. And you say you've seen someone who looks like her?

HADES

I think I have. If it's who I'm thinking of – your *child* has become like family.

DEMETER

But this is no life for her!

(EVERYONE BUT HADES hisses at her)

I mean, I'm sure it's fine, if you don't have a family.

HEKATE

We are a family.

DEMETER

Well, sure, but I mean a real family.

SONNY

We are a real family.

TEREISAS

He's like the father I never had.

DEMETER

Okay, fine, but Persephone has a blood family. And she has a home. Or we did. And we will again. She doesn't need to live on the street.

HADES

Who says we live on the street?

DEMETER

(Looks around)

Don't you?

HADES

Sometimes. Sometimes not. Our housing situation can change month to month

HEKATE

-- week by week --

SONNY

Day to day!

(they all laugh, pass the bottle)

HADES

if we bring – *refreshments* -- sometimes we can crash at someone's place. We can stay as long as we can keep 'em high. Or maybe it's cold, we can get a hotel room, quadruple occupancy. If it's really cold, maybe we get drunk and see if they'll let us into Detox. But not too drunk or they'll send us to the ER. But that's a last resort. Drunken Disorderly and a night in county is better. Or maybe you turn yourself in because you got a warrant for unpaid tickets. Three squares and a cot looks mighty fine in February.

DEMETER

But I can give Persephone a permanent home.

HADES

Athens, Georgia is a long way from home.

DEMETER

She – we – we had issues. Nothing that can't be worked out. I love her. Please, I beg you: Tell me where my daughter is!

PERCY enters.

PERCY

Your son?

DEMETER sees PERCY, runs to him, gathering him in an embrace. At first, PERCY is stiff and does not embrace her in return. Then, slowly his arms come around DEMETER.

HADES

(dipping a nugget in sauce)

Heartwarming, ain't it?

DEMETER

(Stepping back from PERCY, but still holding his hands)

You look so – different.

(she touches his short hair)

Persephone --

PERCY

It's Percy, Mama.

DEMETER

Persephone--

PERCY

Persephone is dead! I am Percy.

DEMETER

Fine, call yourself whatever you want, but come with me now.

PERCY

I'm not the same person who left Athens 13-months ago.

DEMETER

It's okay. It doesn't matter.

PERCY

It matters to me. Will you accept who I am?

(he turns slowly)

Not the idea of who I am that lives in your head, but who I really am? Can you welcome your son and say good-bye to your daughter?

DEMETER

(she goes to embrace him but Percy hold her off)

PERCY

I asked you a question? I need to hear an answer.

DEMETER

My daughter, my son, what does it matter?

PERCY

It shouldn't matter. But when I tried to get you to understand, you told me it was a phase and to pray. You told me to tone it down and you prayed. And when I started to drink because I needed to dilute the hate I felt for myself – my self, Mama, you took me to rehab. And when you left me there, do you remember what you said, Mama? You told me to pray harder! So, I guess it matters, doesn't it, Mama? Doesn't it?

DEMETER

Just -- come home, baby, please?

PERCY

Go home and what? Pretend to be someone I'm not? Do you know how exhausting that gets? You call me a child, but back there I felt so old. Ancient. But out here? It's hard, don't get me wrong, I've

(glances away)

-- done some things I'm not proud of, but back home it was like I was dragging this heavy trunk around – on the playground, inschool, in recitals, even at home, especially at home. Once I hit the road I finally let go of the handle. And, Mama, I felt so light! Light enough to float up like a balloon in the sky! If you have never known the weight of someone else's expectations, you probably can't understand the lightness I feel now.

DEMETER

I am a Southern, upper-middle class woman. Picture perfect house, perfectly manicured lawn, lipstick on, every hair in place. "Don't raise your voice, don't frown it causes wrinkles, don't be too bossy, or too smart, or too – *too!*" Bite your tongue until it bleeds and "bless her heart". -- Yeah, I might have some idea of the weight of other's expectations.

(beat)

Maybe we could – I don't know – just go for a walk?

Percy turns away.

HADES goes to PERCY.

HADES

go, to your mother, the one with the dark robe.
 Have a kindly disposition and compassion in your breast.
 Do not be too upset, excessively so.
 I will not be an unseemly husband to you, in the company of the immortals.
 I am the brother of Zeus the Father.

(HERMES goes to crash lids – HADES HOLDS UP A HAND AND STOPS HIM)

--If you are here,
 you will be prince of everything that lives and moves about.

PERCY kisses Hades's hand.

HADES

But first, eat. I never see you eat.

PERCY

I'm not hungry.

HADES

Just one? For me?

Hades feeds him a French Fry.

DEMETER

Please, I'd like to get to know – my son.

PERCY

You've known me all my life. I just need you to see me.

DEMETER turns him around.

DEMETER

I see you, Percy. I see you.

She extends a hand. Percy looks at the others.
 Everyone but Hekate shakes their head. Hekate wipes
 her eyes with a tissue. Hades shrugs.

PERCY

turns to

Demeter and takes her hand. They exit.

HADES

He'll be back. Just watch.

(eats a French fry)

Epilogue

The Furies step forward.

FURY 1 - TESS

I'm furious.

No, I'm furious.	FURY 2 - MEG
We're all furious.	FURY 3 - ALECTO
Are you ready to be judged?	FURY 1 – TESS (to audience)
They wouldn't be here if they weren't.	FURY 2 - MEG
Step forward.	FURY 3 - ALECTO
It's okay, we won't bite.	FURY 1 - TESS
	(they all laugh)
Make yourself comfortable. You could be here for a while.	FURY 2 - MEG
	They walk around the audience.
We are the ones who exact punishment.	FURY 3 - ALECTO
A bunch of things can piss us off – murder,	FURY 1 - TESS
Disrespecting parents –	FURY 2 - MEG
Big one, considering how we came to be –	FURY 3 ALECTO (nods)
Lying –	FURY 1 - TESS
Disrespecting elders –	FURY 2 - MEG
But today we're focused on --	FURY 3 - ALECTO
Hospitality.	ALECTO, MEG, TESS

FURY 1 - TESS

Does that amuse you? Consider this:

FURY 3 - ALECTO
(to PEDESTRIAN/HEKATE)

Excuse me, could you spare some change for something to eat?

FURY 2 - MEG
(to OFFICIAL/TERESIAS)

Excuse me, could you put me up for the night?

OFFICIAL/Josh

Move along.

FURY 1 - TESS
(shivering)

If I could just warm up in your lobby . . .

BUSINESS OWNER/SONNY

Get out or I'm calling the police.

HERMES

But you might ask, who are they to judge? Who is anyone?

FURY – 2 - MEG

Uh, excuse me?

FURY -3 – ALECTO

We're like, the Furies.

ALL FURIES

It's our job!

(HADIES steps forward and cracks a whip, everyone scatters)

END PLAY.