

I. PRELUDE

II. THE VIRTUOUS WOMAN

Cotton Mather: The virtuous woman counts the best female favor to be deceitful, the best female beauty to be vain. By favor is meant a comely presence, a handsome carriage, a decent gesture, a ready wit agreeably expressing itself with all other graceful motions. The virtuous woman is willing to have this favor so far as is consistent with virtue; she counts it a favor of God for one to be graced with, but still she looks upon it as a deceitful thing. She is careful that she does not hereby deceive herself or be contemptuous towards others. Careful she likewise is, lest hereby she deceive unwary men into those amours which bewitching looks and smiles so often betray the children of men.

The fear of God is that which the heart of a virtuous woman is under the power of. The female sex is naturally the fearful sex; but the fear of God is that which exceeds (and sometimes extinguishes) other fears in the virtuous woman. It may then be said of a virtuous woman that she is a religious woman; that she has bound herself to that God, whom she has by the sin and the fall of her first mother, Eve, departed from; she has a love which does not cast out the fear that is no fault, but confirms and settles her in that fear of God; that all Righteousness and Godliness are visible to her in her whole Behavior; and that she does Justice, loves Mercy, and walks Humbly with her God.

III. 7:00 PM – RUMOR

Mary Webster:

Rumor was loose in the air,
hunting for some neck to land on.
I was milking the cow,
the barn door open to the sunset.
I didn't feel the aimed word hit
and go in like a soft bullet.
I didn't feel the smashed flesh
closing over it like water
over a thrown stone.

I was hanged for living alone,
for having blue eyes and a sunburned skin,
tattered skirts, few buttons,
a weedy farm in my own name,

Oh yes, and breasts,
and a sweet pear hidden in my body.
Whenever there's talk of demons
these come in handy.

IV. PSALM NO. 3

Chorus:

I layed me down and slept;
I layed me down and slept; I waking rose;
For me Jehovah firmly up did bear.
For thousands ten of folk I will not fear,
Which me besetting round about inclose.
I layed me down and slept;

V. 8:00 PM – THE ROPE

Mary:

The rope was an improvisation.
With time they'd have thought of axes.
Up I go like a windfall in reverse,
a blackened apple stuck back onto the tree.
Trussed hands, rag in my mouth,
a flag raised to salute the moon.
The rope was an improvisation.
With time they'd have thought of axes.
The men of the town stalk homeward,
excited by their show of hate,
their own evil turned inside out like a glove,
and me wearing it.
The rope was an improvisation.
With time they'd have thought of axes.

VI. INTERLUDE NO. 1

VII. A VERY DAMNABLE WITCHCRAFT

Cotton Mather: Wherefore the Devil is now making one attempt more upon us; an attempt more difficult, more surprising, more snarled with unintelligible circumstances than any that we have hitherto encountered; an attempt so critical, that if we get well through, we shall soon have the vultures of Hell trodden under our feet.

We have now with horror seen the discovery of such a witchcraft! An army of devils is horribly broke in upon this place, and the houses of good people are filled with the doleful shrieks of their children, tormented by invisible hands, with tortures altogether preternatural.

These our poor afflicted neighbors, quickly after they become infected and infested with these demons, arrive to a capacity of discerning those which they conceive the shapes of their troubles. And many of the persons thus represented have been convicted of a very damnable witchcraft. The devil has made a dreadful knot of witches in the country, and by the help of witches has dreadfully increased that knot.

If the Devil now can strike the minds of men with any poisons of so fine a composition and operation that scores of innocent people shall unite in confession of a crime which we see actually committed, it is a thing prodigious beyond the wonders of the former ages, and it threatens no less than a sort of a dissolution upon the world.

VIII. 9:00 PM –THE BONNETS

(The women of the chorus slowly walk to the hanging tree, and surround Mary.)

Mary: The bonnets come to stare,
the dark skirts also,
the upturned faces in between,
mouths closed so tight they're lip-less.
I can see down into their eyeholes
and nostrils. I can see their fear.

Help me down? You don't dare.
I might rub off on you,
like soot or gossip.

In a gathering like this one

the safe place is the background,
pretending you can't dance,
the safe stance pointing a finger.

(The women begin to walk back to the church.)

I understand. You can't spare
anything, a hand, a piece of bread, a shawl
against the cold. Lord
knows there isn't much
to go around. You need it all.

IX. PSALM NO. 34

Chorus:

Who is the man that life doth will,
That loveth days, good for to see?
Refraining keep thy tongue from ill,
Thy lips from speaking fallacy.
Do good and evil quite eschew,
Seek peace and after it pursue.

Who is the man that life doth will,
That loveth days, good for to see?
Refraining keep thy tongue from ill,
Thy lips from speaking fallacy.
Do good and evil quite eschew,
Seek peace and after it pursue.

X. 10:00 PM - GRACE

Mary:

Well, God, now that I'm up here
with maybe some time to kill
away from the daily
fingerwork, legwork, work
at the hen level,
we can continue our quarrel,
the one about free will.

Is it my choice that I'm dangling
like a turkey's wattles from this tree?
If Nature is Your alphabet, what letter is this rope?

Does my twisting body spell out Grace?

I hurt, therefore I am.
Faith, Charity, and Hope
are three dead angels
falling like meteors across
the profound blank sky of Your face.

XI. PSALM NO. 42

Chorus: Like as the deer for water-streams
Doth bray desirously,
Ev'n so desirously, O God, my soul to Thee.
For God, ev'n for the living God,
My soul it thirsteth sore;
O when shall I come and appear
The face of God before.

XII. 12:00 AM – PRAYER AND PSALM NO. 51

(Mary "walks" in a hallucination to the church and sits among the chorus. Cotton and chorus begin reciting Psalm 51 quietly, as if praying, while Mary begins singing. She moves among them while singing, but they do not acknowledge her.)

Cotton Mather: Have Mercy upon us, Oh God
Chorus: According to your loving kindness.
Cotton Mather: According to the multitude of your tender mercies,
Chorus: Blot out our transgressions.
Cotton Mather: Wash us thoroughly from our iniquity,
Chorus: Cleanse us from our sin.

(Chorus and Cotton Whisper the Psalm)

Mary: Out of my mouth is coming, a thin gnawing sound
which you could confuse with prayer but
praying is not constrained.

Maybe it's more like being strangled
than I once thought. Maybe it's
a gasp for air, prayer.
Did those men at Pentecost
want flames to shoot out of their heads?
Did they ask to be tossed
on the ground, with their eyeballs bulging?

As mine are.
There is only one prayer; it is not

the knees in the clean nightgown
on the hooked rug,
I want this, I want that.
Oh far beyond.
Call it *Please*. Call it *Mercy*.
Call it *Not yet, not yet*,
as Heaven threatens to explode
inwards in fire and shredded flesh, the angels caw.

XIII. INTERLUDE NO. 2

XIV. 2:00 AM – DESPAIR

Mary:

My throat is taut against the rope
choking off words and air;
I'm reduced to knotted muscle.
Blood bulges in my skull,
my clenched teeth hold it in;
I bite down on despair.

Death sits on my shoulder like a crow
waiting for my squeezed beet
of a heart to burst
so he can eat my eyes

or like a judge
muttering about sluts and punishment
and licking his lips

or like a dark angel
insidious in his glossy feathers
whispering to me to be easy
on myself. To breathe out finally.
Trust me, he says, caressing me.
Why suffer?

A temptation, to sink down
into these definitions.
To become a martyr in reverse.

To give up knowing.
To give up pain.
To let go.

XV. THE DEATH OF EVERY SIN

Cotton Mather: What must you do to be saved? That is the question. You must feel the burden of your sin, lying on you, and you cry out, Oh! 'Tis a heavy burden, too heavy for me! You must see God angry with you, sin binding of you, Hell gaping for you; and utterly despair of helping yourselves out of the confusion that is come upon you.

What must you do to be saved? That is the question. You must be filled with sorrow for what you have done; with horror at what you are exposed to. You must be no stranger to such soliloquies as these; I have sinned; I have sinned, and, woe is unto me, that I have sinned. Lust enchants me, enslaves me; Satan tyrannizes over me. I am in fear of eternal banishment from God, into outer darkness, into the place of dragons. Oh! wretched man that I am, I can do nothing to deliver myself. I will perish.

What must you do to be saved? That is the question. First, this must be done: you must heartily and bitterly bewail all your sins. Your original sin, your actual sin, the monstrous aggravation of your sin, you must be convinced of it. You must mourn for your sin, and mourn for the offense given to God by your sin, as well as for the mischief done to yourselves: mourn, mourn, and never count that you have mourned enough.

What must you do to be saved? That is the question. First, this must be done: every way of sin must be abhorred, must be avoided, must be forsaken. And, this must be done: you must lively pursue the death of every sin. This must be done. You must lively pursue the death of every sin.

XVI. 3:00 AM – NIGHTBIRDS

Mary:

wind seethes in the leaves around
me the trees exude night
birds night birds yell inside
my ears like stabbed hearts my heart
stutters in my fluttering cloth
body I dangle with strength
going out of me the wind seethes
in my body tattering
the words I clench my fists my lungs
flail as if drowning I call
on you as witness I did
no crime I was born I have borne I
bear I will be born

this is a crime I will not
acknowledge leaves and wind
hold on to me I will not give in

XVII. PSALM NO. 136

Chorus:

Confess Jehovah thankfully,
For he is good, for His mercy
Continueth for ever.
To God of gods confess do ye,
Because His bountiful mercy
Continueth for ever.
Confess Jehovah thankfully,
For he is good, for His mercy
Continueth for ever.
To God of gods confess do ye,
Because His bountiful mercy
Continueth for ever.
Unto the Lord of lords confess
Because His merciful kindness
Continueth for ever.
To Him that doth Himself only
Things wondrous great, for His mercy
Continueth for ever.

XVIII. INTERLUDE NO. 3

XIX. 6:00 AM – THE GOSPEL

Mary:

Sun comes up, huge and blaring.
Time is relative, let me tell you
I have lived a millennium.
I would like to say my hair turned white,
overnight, but it didn't. Instead it was my heart.
This is what happens when you drift in space,
listening to the gospel of the red-hot stars.

At the end of my rope, I testify to silence.
Don't say I'm not grateful.
Most will have only one death. I will have two.

Words boil out of me, coil after coil
of sinuous possibility.
The cosmos unravels from my mouth.