

(Lights come up a soft silver, so the whole stage is coated like the surface of a mirror. US center, a single beam of white light illuminates the Adult Bernadette. She lifts her face to the light. Her hair hangs down her back; she wears a saint's plain shift, but in a clinging silver material, sensual. She is clearly braless—saint, goddess, commanding, only a hint of vulnerability. Slowly, she looks toward the audience. She walks to the edge of the stage, still in a single beam of light. When she lifts one arm and points at Agnes, the beam of light splits and a second spot falls on Agnes, who sits in the audience, dressed also in a saint's shift, but of plain cotton and covered by a much worn 70's spring coat. Under it, she wears a silver cross around her neck. Her hair is pulled severely off her face. In spite of this, her likeness to Bernadette is marked. Pause. Agnes stands, unwilling, her bearing upright and proper. She comes to the stage, and stands in front of Bernadette. Agnes' coat falls from her shoulders. Light pours over them like water. Liturgical music begins. Bernadette takes a step forward and kneels down, face lifted to heaven and to Agnes (who takes the Virgin Mary pose)—Saint Bernadette in the grotto, praying to Mary. Bernadette cups her hands, lifts them, offers the imaginary water inside them to her mother. Face lifted, she is beatified by light. Agnes does not look at her, does not drink. Bernadette gets up, kneels down again, takes her pose, gets up, then stands and looks at Agnes. Pause. Agnes slowly falls to her knees and reluctantly, as if compelled by a force beyond her control, assumes the Bernadette pose. Bernadette becomes the Virgin Mary. When Bernadette moves, Agnes moves with her—they trade places, moving in tandem. They change roles, again and again, Agnes kneeling, Bernadette becoming Mary. The postures can change—Mary can become compassionate, Saint Bernadette more pleading, all in iconic poses that become a fluid and shifting dance. As this continues, the tempo picks up, becomes more frantic. Their rhythms come closer to matching and the iconography blurs until they are both one icon, then the other, flailing in and out of the dance. They stop suddenly. Then they begin to circle each other, slowly, eyes locked, their movements gracefully, mesmerized. They are twinned. They gesture at the same time—a hand stretched out to the other, a moment of iconography, a sign of the cross. Each touches her own lips, between her own breasts, drawing a line down their own bodies as if they are suddenly aware they have bodies. They stare at each other. Bernadette reaches out, takes her mother by the shoulders, physically propels her toward the 1974 living room.

Agnes' housedress lies across a couch that has been reupholstered twice, and could probably use it again. Children's toys lie on the floor. Outside of this, the room is extremely neat. A braided rug lies on the floor in colors that don't show dirt. Bernadette brings Agnes her dress; Agnes puts it on over her saint's shift and begins straightening and organizing the toys. Bernadette turns toward the bedroom. She opens a hand and...)

Scene 2

(A single shaft of light from heaven falls on Teen Bernadette who is on the bed, the bedspread pulled over her head like a saint's robe. Though dressed in culottes and a T-shirt, she is in the Bernadette of Lourdes position—on her knees, face and hands lifted.

Bernadette

Dear Jesus,

I just want you to know I could be strong. I mean, if you want to test me, I'm ready.

You could even treat me like a saint. If you want to cut out my eyes like Saint Lucy...Jesus, you can have my eyes. I'll give them to you. And I would be faithful like her even with a sword in my heart. I would keep praying to you.

(Lights go to normal. Bernadette throws off the bedspread and pose of supplication. The monologue is directed toward Agnes, and should be said loudly in her direction.)

My mother says I never stop talking anyhow, so that shouldn't be a problem. She says if you're named after a saint, you should act like one. And I'm trying. But Jesus, it's not easy when you're named after a saint like Bernadette that's so quiet and good. If I was named after a louder saint like Joan of Arc...you know, a hero. That would be better. Then I could lead an army of men and show that girls can do everything they can. No offense to Bernadette, of course. I mean, she's not that bad a saint. After all, your mother picked her for the vision, right? And it must have been really hard for Bernadette when even her own mom didn't believe a word she said...about seeing the Lady, I mean, the Virgin Mary. Everyone thought Bernadette was crazy but I would have believed her. I mean, I like Bernadette. I like girls. I like them a lot, Jesus. And that's the truth. I mean, I love your mother. Hail Mary Full of Grace, Blessed Art Thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death, amen. See?

Agnes

(From the living room.)

Bernadette? Bernadette? Come here, please. I need your help.

Bernadette

(Bernadette begins to speak louder.)

Jesus, about my mother. Do you think you could make it so she likes louder saints? She doesn't have to not like the quiet ones. She could like both. It's just, I'm better at dying at the stake or getting eaten by lions or even helping the Indians than being like Bernadette, waiting until the waters come and suffering silently.

Agnes

(Approaching.)

Bernadette, I'm calling you.

Bernadette

No offense to anyone, I mean I know those waters Bernadette found in Lourdes helped a lot of people.

Agnes

(Entering.)

Bernadette Eileen O'Malley, what do you think you're doing?

Bernadette

Jesus, please let my mother know that it's okay for me to be loud. Not that I'm telling you your job or anything. Sister Theresa in seventh grade said we should pray for your will and to know what it is. And I think you definitely made me this way. So I should be appreciated for it, right?

Agnes

Bernadette, I need help with the kids. They've been running around like crazy since school let out for the summer—

Bernadette

Liking girls and being loud in your service forever and ever. Amen.

Agnes

Are you listening?

Bernadette

I'm coming, Mom.

Agnes

Now. You need to change your brother's diaper. You know what to do if he starts crying.

Bernadette

Burp him. Then sing.

Agnes

And then you can help your sister make cupcakes. Use the Easy Bake oven, she always likes when you help her with that.

Bernadette

Anything else?

Agnes

(Beat.)

Are you being smart with me?

Bernadette

No.

Agnes

Because Bernadette, you know your father's away on business for the third time this month and you're all I've got. I have that job interview tomorrow at the school and the twins are fighting again and--

Bernadette

And if I wasn't so selfish—

Agnes

Don't you dare make fun of me. I need this job.

Bernadette

I know, Mom.