

THE MOTHERLINE

A play by  
Chantal Bilodeau

### SETTING

The set should be on two levels. On the stage is reality as we know it. On a platform above the stage is a part of heaven--the transitory place for souls waiting to be born. There are two ways to access this platform. One is a crude metal ladder, similar to fire escapes in New York City. The other is an unfinished staircase, which should be the most beautiful piece of the set.

### TIME

The present.

### CHARACTERS

CLAIRE..... An unborn soul.

HOLLY ..... Claire's mother. Mid-thirties.

RHIZA ..... Holly's lover. Mid-thirties.

MOSS..... Rhiza's brother. Late twenties.

MINOU ..... A big, cheerful cat.

BOOK-ON-TAPE

### NOTE

This play can also be performed without a platform by having heaven "out there" instead of "up" and by finding two different ways for the characters to go from one reality to the other.

FALL

1

Darkness. The sound of a  
heartbeat.

CLAIRES

Imagine a seed... A single, lonely dot on the surface of the planet.

A ray of light reveals the seed  
of a redwood tree.

CLAIRES (CONT'D)

Imagine a life. Vibrating. Pulsating. Palpitating.

A hand reaches for the seed.  
Lights up on Claire.

CLAIRES (CONT'D)

Imagine a soul anxiously waiting to inhabit this life, a soul waiting to grow its own roots.

Lights up on Rhiza. She's  
planting a young tree into the  
ground.

CLAIRES (CONT'D)

Roots are the parts of a plant that usually grow below the ground. They are responsible for drawing water and nourishment from the earth, and for holding the plant in position.

Music fades in. Lights up on Moss. He's playing an upright bass with a bow.

CLAIRES (CONT'D)

In music, the root is the basic tone of a chord on which the chord is constructed. A root can also be a person that has many descendants or ancestors, or it refers to the close ties human beings form through birth, upbringing, or long associations.

Lights up on Holly. She's working  
on a sculpture.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

My name is Claire. I'm a writer... Well, not yet because I'm not born but when I get my life, I will be a writer. (*Pause.*) In its intransitive form 'to be rooted' means to become fixed, settled, or to begin to grow by putting out roots...

Lights up on Minou.

MINOU

Being a cat is so... tedious. Eat the crunchy stuff, poop in the box. Eat the crunchy stuff, poop in the--

He loves bites Holly.

HOLLY

Minou! Bad cat! Bad, bad cat!

Minou runs away.

CLAIRE

Look at you, you're so beautiful. You have this big love that you carry with you all the time. It sparkles. There are \*  
chunks in your pockets. Little bits behind your ears and \*  
between your toes. Filaments twisted in your hair... And no matter how much of this love you give away, there always seems to be more. (*Savoring the sound.*) Holly... It sounds like Christmas. Like music and bells and roasted chestnuts. Holly... You don't know me yet but I've chosen you to be my mother.

Claire climbs the ladder up to the platform.

2

Minou sits on Holly's jacket,  
meditating.

MINOU

Nothing... Nothingness... The Great Void... A vast expanse of... Pizza... Anchovies... Tuna juice from a can...

He chases the intrusive thoughts away and concentrates again.

MINOU (CONT'D)

Nothing... Shrimp... Nothingness... Chicken liver... The Great... The Great...

HOLLY

Minou...

Minou flops on his back and opens his legs for a belly rub.

HOLLY (CONT'D)

Minou, you slut!

MINOU

Oh, yeah...

HOLLY

Nice kitty cat.

MINOU

Please don't stop.

HOLLY

I need my jacket now.

MINOU

Rub me, touch me, pet me, stroke me, caress me...

HOLLY

Off the bed!

MINOU

Feel me, squeeze me, fondle me, tickle me, massage--

HOLLY

Are you hungry?

MINOU

Do you think I'm that shallow?

HOLLY

Come here, I'll give you a treat.

MINOU

A good Buddhist must resist temptation. Or was it Christ who said that?

HOLLY

You know you like it...

MINOU

Meditation is food for the soul.

Holly shakes the can of treats.

MINOU (CONT'D)

Nothing...

HOLLY

I got your favorite kind...

MINOU

Nothingness...

HOLLY

Beef candies with salt.

MINOU

Fuck it!

He jumps off the bed. Holly gives him the treats.

HOLLY

Good cat!

Holly picks up her jacket. Claire appears on the platform, holding a book. \*

CLAIRE

Holly, I'm ready! All you have to do is have sex, OK? Because it says here in this book--babies are not flown in by big birds with long beaks, they're not found in patches of cabbage. Babies come from sex! Did you know that? And sex is... \*

She flips through the pages.

C LAIRE (CONT'D)

Well, it's--

Holly exits.

C LAIRE (CONT'D)

Remember, Holly! You have to have sex!

Lights out on Claire. Minou  
finishes the treats.

MINOU

Now...

He picks up his book-on-tape.

MINOU (CONT'D)

Talk to me, O Book-On-Tape.

BOOK-ON-TAPE

The Buddha defines karma as the moral choices that a person makes and the actions taken as a consequence of these choices.

MINOU

Aha! Karma!

BOOK-ON-TAPE

Good karma is a kind of spiritual capital--like money in the bank--to be used as deposit on a better rebirth. But what makes an action moral?

MINOU

Tell me, brother.

BOOK-ON-TAPE

It is largely a matter of intention and choice. Actions motivated by greed, hatred and delusion are bad.

MINOU

Bad greed. Bad, bad greed.

BOOK-ON-TAPE

Actions motivated by non-attachment, benevolence and understanding are good.

MINOU

I'm on it!

3

Holly enters Moss' apartment.

HOLLY

Moss?

MOSS

Holly!

HOLLY

Hi.

MOSS

It's so nice to see you.

HOLLY

I'm glad you called. It's been a long time...

MOSS

Just a few months.

HOLLY

More like a few years. The last time I saw you, you couldn't even grow a beard.

MOSS

Coffee? It's from that place on the corner.

He hands her a cup.

HOLLY

Thank you.

She takes a sip.

HOLLY (CONT'D)

You still remember?

MOSS

Special blend. One cream, two sugars.

HOLLY

I should have married you.

MOSS

It's not too late.

HOLLY

You're not my type anymore.

They smile.

HOLLY (CONT'D)

How are you?

MOSS

You look great.

HOLLY

(Teasing.) I wish I could say the same about you.

MOSS

My Mom is sick. I've been spending all my nights at the hospital.

HOLLY

Oh, I'm sorry...

MOSS

Cancer. She's lost all her hair. Her weight is down to ninety pounds and her liver has swollen her stomach to the size of a beach ball. She looks like she's ready to give birth. Ironic, isn't it?

She reaches for his hand.

MOSS (CONT'D)

How's my sister?

HOLLY

She's doing well. (Pause.) She started her own business, did \* you know?

MOSS

I heard.

HOLLY

You should reach out to her.

\*

MOSS

She didn't exactly leave the door open.

\*

HOLLY

That was a long time ago.

MOSS

Still.

HOLLY

Sooner or later, you'll have to talk to each other.

\*

MOSS

Actually...

HOLLY

Yeah?

MOSS

I was hoping you could talk to her.

HOLLY

Me?

MOSS

For my Mom.

HOLLY

No, don't ask me--... I don't want to be caught between--

MOSS

She always listens to you.

HOLLY

But it's you who should--

MOSS

Please, Holly.

\*

HOLLY

How long does your Mom have?

MOSS

A few days. A week at the most. She's holding on in the hope that she'll get to say goodbye to Rhiza.

HOLLY

I'll try.

MOSS

Thank you.

A beat.

HOLLY

Are you hungry?

MOSS

I'm starving.

HOLLY

How about dinner at our old favorite joint?

MOSS

Just the two of us?

HOLLY

Uh, huh.

MOSS

You're spoiling me.

4

Claire flips through a book. \*

CLAIRE

(Reading.) Sex: Anything connected with sexual gratification or reproduction. Usually accompanied with vocal expressions of pleasure. \*

Moaning and heavy breathing is heard.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Is that it? \*

The intensity increases.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

(Reading.) May contain occasional plea to God...

HOLLY

Oh, my God...

CLAIRE

That's it!

\*

HOLLY

Oh, my God...

CLAIRE

That's it!

\*

HOLLY

OH--MY--GOD!!!

CLAIRE

Come on, Holly!

She rushes to the unfinished  
staircase, ready to come down.  
Climax. A beat.

\*

\*

\*

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

I'm still here. Holly, it's not working!

\*

Cross-fade to Holly's bed. Holly  
emerges from under the covers.

HOLLY

Phew!... Where did you learn to do that?

\*

She looks under the covers.

HOLLY (CONT'D)

Are you there?

Rhiza emerges at the other end of  
the bed.