

PERUSAL SCRIPT

MANIFEST

A MYTHOLOGY PLAY

by

Mahonri Stewart



Newport, Maine

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MANIFEST

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LBT ORDER #3319

CAST OF CHARACTERS: 2 (1f, 1m) + additional performers, if desired 2m/2f can be added to play the other roles.

MAN

WOMAN

All the following characters are then played by MAN and WOMAN, if the multimedia/puppetry approach is used:

- GOLEM, RABBI
- KAI, GERDA, SNOW QUEEN
- MAUI, COYOTE, MR. LOKI, ANANSI, MUD HENS, FROGS, NYAME, ONINI, OSEBO, (Some PUPPETRY or ANIMATION)
- FATHER, LI CHI, MERCHANT, SHADOW HANDS, DOG, SNAKE (Puppetry possible)
- SAKUNTALA, DUSHYANTA, DURVASAS
- SET, ISIS, OSIRIS, CONSPIRATORS, ANUBIS, HORUS, NEPHYTHYS (Puppetry possible)
- SHADOW HANDS

CAST OF CHARACTERS (Large Cast)

WOMAN

MAN

GOLEM

RABBI

KAI

GERDA

SNOW QUEEN

MAUI

COYOTE

ANANSI

MR. LOKI (DISEMBODIED VOICE)

MUD HENS (ROLE CAN BE PLAYED BY COYOTE)

FROGS (ROLE CAN BE PLAYED BY MAUI AND ANANSI)

NYAME (ROLE CAN BE PLAYED BY MAUI)

ONINI (ROLE CAN BE PLAYED BY COYOTE)

OSEBO (ROLE CAN BE PLAYED BY MAUI)

FATHER

LI CHI

MERCHANT

DOG (PUPPETRY POSSIBLE)

SNAKE (PUPPETRY POSSIBLE)

SAKUNTALA

DUSHYANTA

DURVASAS

YOUNG BOY (NON-SPEAKING ROLE, PUPPETRY POSSIBLE)

SET

ISIS

OSIRIS

ANUBIS

HORUS

NEPHYTHYS

JEWISH PEASANTS

ARMED PERSECUTORS

NOTE ON THE SHADOW HANDS: The Shadow Hands act as Stage Crew, but they also serve narrative functions throughout the play, sometimes even taking on non-speaking roles (such as, in the original production, the Boy in the Sakuntala myth), acting as puppeteers, etc.

NOTE ON CASTING: The original production cast the majority of roles with separate actors, which works well with schools, youth groups, community groups, etc. who thrive with large casts. However, the original concept was to use two actors (one male, one female) that played all the roles through the use of multimedia screens in which they occasionally act with their pre-recorded selves in creative ways. Another concept that may be used is to use a medium sized group of around six actors, who can take on all the various roles. The text is very flexible in adapting to these various possibilities.

NOTE ON SCENE/MYTH SELECTIONS: Although strongly preferred, not all the various scenes/myths have to be presented with the play. Productions may submit a cutting to Leicester Bay Theatricals for approval, choosing which scenes work best with their casting pool, technical capabilities, and desired runtime: <https://leicesterbaytheatricals.com/landing-page/leicesterbay-theatricals/lbt-contact-us/>

Manifest premiered at Binary Theatre Company on May 6, 2021, in Marriott-Slaterville, UT. It had the following cast and crew:

CAST (In Order of Appearance)

WOMAN: Tylie Coburn

MAN: Donovan Peterson

RABBI: Dylan Ash

GOLEM: Savanna Clark

GERDA/HADES: Karlee Flaig

KAI: Hyrum “Byron” Stewart

SNOW QUEEN/SET: Charise Jones

MAUI: Kemmer Mahas

COYOTE: Mireya Flores

ANANSI: Connor “CJ” Ault

LI CHI: Lifianaya Uhlmansiek
FATHER: Antonio Medina
MERCHANT/HORUS: Chase Hinman
SNAKE: Hayden Reese
DUSHYANTA: Spencer Holland
SAKUNTALA: Madeleine Felix
EURYDICE: Lindsey Eggett
ISIS: Elaina McEntee
OSIRIS: Avi Pierre
NEPHTHYS: Rhiannon “Annie” Wood
ANUBIS: Ian Felix

CREW

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: Mark Child and Nissa Green
TECHNICAL DIRECTOR FOR VTC: Jason Chantry
STAGE MANAGER: Rebekah Knight
ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER: Hailey DiGirolamo
ASSISTANT TO THE DIRECTOR: Savanna Clark
SET: Jason Chantry and Mahonri Stewart
PROPS/COSTUMES: Mahonri Stewart
LIGHTING DESIGNER: Ryan Isaacson
HAIR AND MAKE-UP: Aimee Coburn and Amy DiGirolamo
SOUND: Seneca Stephens, Avi Pierre, and Brook Frandsen
PROJECTIONISTS: Matthew Guzzetti and Jason Chantry
SPOTLIGHT OPERATOR: Ashland Shelton
“SHADOW HANDS”/BACKSTAGE CREW: Rebekah Knight, Hailey DiGiorlamo, Savanna Clark, Abby Laymon, Antonio Medina, Hayden Reese, Elaina McEntee
PROJECTION DESIGN/OPERATION: Matthew Guzzetti, Jason Chantry, Mahonri Stewart
ORIGINAL PROJECTED ARTWORK: Kasey Cunningham, Haylee Driggs, Amberly Hawes, Rebekah Johnson
POSTER ARTWORK: Liz Pulido
CHINESE DRAGON DESIGNER and CONSTRUCTION: Mandy Lyons
GOLEM MASK DESIGN: Dylan Ash
EGYPTIAN DANCE CHOREOGRAPHY: Randee Hunter
FIGHT CHOREOGRAPHY: Simon Dyer
TICKETING AND COVID-19 SAFETY COORDINATOR: Stacy Swapp
HOUSE MANAGER: Tamra Hinman

MANIFEST by Mahonri Stewart 1m,1f, + additional performers, if desired. Use of puppets also encouraged. One multi-use setting. Contemporary, non-descript costumes as well as Fantasy/Period costumes. Man and Woman are lost and confused in a dark and terrifying world full of danger, so to comfort each other they tell each other stories. The Golem, The Snow Queen, Maui/Coyote/Loki/Anansi, Li Chi (China), Dushyanta and Sakuntala, Eurydice, Isis/Set/Osiris/Anubis. These stories are taken from mythology and fairy tales from across the world that together form the powerfully meaningful life of humankind. As Woman and Man comfort each other in a foreboding and ominous world will these mere tales protect them from the nihilistic world around them, or is there a deeper significance manifest in them?

ORDER #3319

Mahonri Stewart is an award winning writer and educator. He has written over two dozen plays, most of which have been produced throughout the U.S. and Europe, including productions in Los Angeles, Scotland, and Switzerland. In 2004, his premiere play *Farewell to Eden* won the Kennedy Center's American College Theater Festival's National Playwriting Award (Second Place) and their National Selection Team Fellowship Award. His play *Legends of Sleepy Hollow* won the Ruth and Nathan Hale Comedy Playwriting Award. Since then he has also received numerous other awards and honors and continues to expand his writing into various mediums, including screenplays, graphic novels, poetry, and novels. He received his MFA degree in Dramatic Writing from Arizona State University and a bachelors degree in Theatre Arts from Utah Valley University. He's a former Playwright in Residence at the Noorda Regional Theater for Children and Youth.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

“True Myths”

Manifest was born from my life-long love for world mythology. No matter which country or culture the myths, legends, and fairy tales come from, I have a deep attraction to stories that seek to find meaning, magic, and purpose to life. The diversity of these tales is as compelling as their universality. The life of humanity, and its relationship to the Universe, can be seen in the stories' contours and their collective imagination.

Because of its unique, often symbolic nature, some of the original cast and crew said that they had a hard time articulating to others what the play is “about.” To me, I've always known what it is about. It's a play that takes world mythology, legends, folk tales, and fairy tales to show the common life of humankind. Thinkers, academics, writers, and creatives—from Joseph Campbell in his *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, to psychologist Carl Jung's theory of the “Collective Unconscious,” to C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien's discussions of the “True Myth,” even to George Lucas's *Star Wars*—have noticed the commonality that exists in mythology and stories from the world over. Ancient world cultures that had little to nothing to do with each other still have similar themes, motifs, events, and striking similarities. These patterns, to me, tell us that we're not so different after all, that our different cultures eventually connect back to a common humanity, a common meaning, a common heart, mind, and spirit. We all have something written within ourselves that connects us, rather than divides us.

The play's script manifested itself over a dozen years ago, but it wasn't until recently that it was performed in its entirety. Segments of the play had been performed as one-acts. “The Snow Queen” (based on the Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale) was performed once in Salt Lake City in a collection of other short plays. “The Death of Eurydice” is one of my most traveled works, having been performed several times in far flung locations like Los Angeles and Switzerland. Yet, the full play... it never felt like the right time and circumstances to premiere it as the complete cycle it was meant to be. That is, until I found the proper resources and circumstances at Vanguard Theatre Company and its patron organization Venture High School, where I teach English and Theatre.

VTC's newly renovated theatre provided the technical capacity to pull off the multimedia vision I always had for the piece. Then there's the thing that's been ever-too-present in our lives the past year: COVID-19. Having cancelled *Sense and Sensibility* the past year due to pandemic concerns, trying another play at the end of this year felt more than a little frightening. We put into place major safety protocols, but to

find the right piece that wouldn't pose some of the same group concerns was a tall order, but the fact that this was an anthology of one-acts, with usually only a few people on stage at the same time—it felt much safer than a Jane Austen, Regency piece that had to accommodate big balls and group picnics—while still, strangely, maintaining a large cast that gave many of our young actors the opportunity to participate.

This also felt more intimate; and the message resonated more in a world that felt increasingly dangerous and unstable, a world deeply in need of the meaning these stories from cultures across the globe provide.

— *Mahonri MacKay Stewart*, 2021

••••

This play is dedicated to my children. I have done my best to lovingly teach you in person, but there is also much hidden for you in my stories.

••••

“We can keep from a child all knowledge of earlier myths, but we cannot take from him the need for mythology.

— *Carl Jung*

“Mythology is composed by poets out of their insights and realizations. Mythologies are not invented; they are found. You can no more tell us what your dream is going to be tonight than we can invent a myth. Myths come from the mystical region of essential experience.”

— *Joseph Campbell*

“After all, I believe that legends and myths are largely made of ‘truth’.”

— *J.R.R. Tolkien*

ACT ONE

SCENE 1A

The stage is currently bare, except for a campfire (may or may not be a literal campfire with the appearance of burning logs, but representational lights or effects) and several screens, which throughout the play will show various images and film footage. The screens are currently blank.

A WOMAN enters. She wanders aimlessly, as if she is lost and cold. She sees the fire. At first she is dazzled by it, as if she doesn't know what it is. Approaching it, her fascination grows. She sits next to it, warming herself, as if she remembers. A contentment washes over her.

A MAN enters. He sees the WOMAN and the fire and is more doubtful as to how to approach them, or even if he wants to. With hesitation and doubt he approaches closer, but stands on the edge of the light. The WOMAN looks up, noticing him for the first time.

WOMAN: You can have a seat, if you want.

MAN: I know.

WOMAN: It's dark out there.

MAN: I don't mind.

(Pause. The MAN does come closer, but only to a point.)

WOMAN: And cold. Do you mind that?

MAN: Yes.

WOMAN: Me too. But the fire's warm. Come, sit down.

MAN: I'd rather not.

WOMAN: Whatever suits you.

(Pause. The MAN considers and comes a little closer.)

You're not going to get any heat from way over there.

MAN: Who are you?

WOMAN: I...

(disturbed)

...don't remember.

MAN: Who am I?

WOMAN: Well, if you don't know that, I don't see how I should.

MAN: I think I'm lost.

WOMAN: Me too.

(The MAN approaches closer, he's nearly to the WOMAN.)

MAN: It's dark out there.

WOMAN: And cold.

MAN: I don't like the dark.

WOMAN: I don't like the cold.

MAN: It's been lonely.

WOMAN: Then have a seat

(The MAN considers this one more time and then relinquishes. He sits next to the WOMAN. He's still nervous.)

MAN: Where are we?

WOMAN: Don't know. Sorry.

MAN: Apparently, we don't know much, do we?

WOMAN: I—oh—

(The WOMAN breathes something in deeply, touching her chest. A distant VOICE is heard singing something beautiful, but unintelligible. The WOMAN smiles and basks in the feeling for a moment, but then the VOICE fades.)

Oh—I had it. For just a moment I had it.

MAN: What?

WOMAN: I think I remembered. Didn't—didn't you feel that? Hear that?

MAN: What?

WOMAN: I—oh, never mind.

(Pause.)

MAN: So, uh, what do we do now?

WOMAN: “Once upon a time...”

MAN: Once upon a what?

WOMAN: Oh. Well, I mean—I mean, “In the Beginning...”

MAN: What are you blabbering on about?

WOMAN: Uh, “A Long, Long Time Ago, in a Galaxy Far, Far Away...”

MAN: You can't be serious.

WOMAN: If you'd stop interrupting me, I was trying to tell a story.

MAN: A what?

WOMAN: A story. You were bored, so I was going to tell you a story.

MAN: Do I look four years old to you?

WOMAN: A person never gets too old for stories.

MAN: Yes, they do.

WOMAN: Not if they actually listen to them.

(The SHADOW HANDS enter with large sections of fabric and veil-like material that WOMAN, in an abstract representation, gets caught up in as she shares her analogy.)

It's like—it's like we're looking into a pool of water, and we see a reflection, and the reflection is us, but not us. We look in there and this total stranger with our face is staring at us with such intense, wise, knowing eyes. We have never been that knowing, have we? Or like we're surrounded by all sorts of veils and sheets and cloth and fabric, and we're struggling to get through them, and we just get more and more caught in them. They start tangling us, strangling us, suffocating us, but then we just sort of let go and they tear and rip and we fall down, down, down—or is it up, up, up—are we falling or flying? And then once again we're at the pool, staring at some thing that is us, but not us.

(Pause.)

MAN: You're weird.

WOMAN: *(With a smile, breaking out of her vision)* Maybe. But now you want to hear the story, don't you?

MAN: *(Smiles in return.)* Sure. Go ahead.

WOMAN: Good.

MAN: What's it about?

WOMAN: I don't know.

MAN: You don't know?

WOMAN: The story leads me, I don't lead the story.

MAN: *(doubtful, but still listening)* All right. Go on.

SCENE 1B THE GOLEM

(The images on the screen and music takes on a Hebrew quality. The RABBI and GOLEM enter, acting out the story as MAN and WOMAN initially observe. The [currently lifeless] GOLEM is a great, powerful creature made of clay.)

WOMAN: Hundreds of years ago, in Prague, there was a Rabbi who had studied the mystical arts of birth—no, not just birth—creation. This great, brilliant, and glorious Rabbi reached deep into the Kabbalah, into the sacred words of his people and found a way to take the very earth, the very clay, and do that which had only been done in ancient times. This rabbi was able to give that clay the breath of life.

(The RABBI places a parchment with the Hebrew letters for YHWH [Yahweh] within the Golem's mouth. In a dramatic moment, the GOLEM, takes in a great breath. Exit MAN and WOMAN.)

RABBI: It—it worked! It has the breath of life.

(The RABBI inspects the GOLEM. The GOLEM reacts curiously in return.)

Can you—can you understand me?

(The GOLEM nods. The RABBI is nearly ecstatic.)

You don't know what this means! You don't know how you can help us! Stupendous, absolutely stupendous!

GOLEM: Stupendous, absolutely stupendous!

RABBI: You can speak?

GOLEM: You can speak?

RABBI: No, wait...

GOLEM: No, wait...

RABBI: This is truly amazing.

GOLEM: This is truly amazing.

RABBI: You—what should I call you?

GOLEM: You—what should I call you?

RABBI: What does a person name this shapeless mass?

GOLEM: What does a person name this shapeless mass?

RABBI: I know.

GOLEM: I know.

RABBI: You shall be called Golem.

GOLEM: Golem.

RABBI: You are a shapeless mass, you are Golem.

GOLEM: You—what should I call you?

RABBI: I am Rabbi Benja...

GOLEM: Rabbi?

RABBI: It means Master.

GOLEM: Master.

RABBI: Yes. Master. You'll call me Master.

GOLEM: Master.

RABBI: That—that's correct, my Golem. Wow. You're not the prettiest thing, that's for sure, but you certainly have a kind of—majesty.

GOLEM: What am I?

RABBI: How did you know to form those words?

GOLEM: What am I?

RABBI: Well, you are clay. Clay that has been given artificial animation. Unformed. Im perfect. A body without a soul. Trained synapses and reactions, wired to obey. You look like life, you act like life, but you are not life.

GOLEM: (*seeking for a better phrase*) What am I? Who am I?

RABBI: You are my creation.

GOLEM: Who am I?

RABBI: You are Golem.

GOLEM: Who am I?

RABBI: I've already told you! You're not very smart.

(Despite the RABBI's insult, the GOLEM is thinking deeply about its identity. It comes up with another phrase to clarify its search.)

GOLEM: Why am I?

RABBI: Ah, there I can help you. You have been summoned to protect my people. My people are Jews. We have been accused— falsely accused—of great crimes. Blood libels.

GOLEM: Blood libels?

RABBI: They—the Christians think that we take children, infants and take their blood and bake it into bread for a twisted ceremony.

GOLEM: Do you?

RABBI: No! It's ridiculous, grotesque! Golem, my Golem, there are many in this world who will create stories—create myths that center around the people they fear...

GOLEM: Fear.

RABBI: Yes, fear. They will make up these myths and stories, horrible stories, so that other people will be afraid of them, too. They take these fears and make them manifest into something people will think is real.

GOLEM: Real.

RABBI: But they're not real. We've done nothing wrong. But with these stories they try to make us—less real. Less human. But because of these false stories, these horrible myths, they think we have done these dreadful things, and so now we are being hunted, persecuted. Killed.

GOLEM: Hunted, persecuted. Killed.

RABBI: And that is where you come in. I studied the Kabbalah and other sacred and ancient texts. I found stories that talked about men bringing clay and inanimate things to life. As if we were partners with God. I didn't think it was possible. I didn't think you were real.

GOLEM: Real.

RABBI: But here you are.

GOLEM: I am.

RABBI: You are.

GOLEM: Am I a Jew?

RABBI: You—are something else. You are less—real. Less human.

GOLEM: Real. Human.

RABBI: You are my creation! Nothing more! But you were created and created with a purpose. My Golem, you shall protect my people. We shall be hunted no more. We shall be persecuted no more!

GOLEM: No more!

(Exit the RABBI and GOLEM. JEWISH PEASANTS enter, pursued by a group of ARMED PERSECUTORS. The PEASANTS stumble, and one of the PERSECUTORS raises a rifle against them. Enter RABBI and GOLEM.)

RABBI: Save my people!

(The GOLEM violently attacks the PERSECUTORS while the RABBI ushers his the PEASANTS to safety. As the PERSECUTORS flee in fear, the GOLEM has torn a rifle away from a PERSECUTOR and is looking at the device, disturbed. Re-enter the RABBI.)

Once again, you have done well, Golem. Stories of you are going abroad. Our enemies are afraid. They know that you're our protector! They won't dare come against us ever again.

GOLEM: Master, I have been thinking—

RABBI: You don't think. You react. You obey.

GOLEM: I have been thinking. I didn't like hurting those people.

RABBI: Well, I didn't like them hurting us.

GOLEM: Us?

RABBI: My people.

GOLEM: *(sadly)* Your people.

RABBI: You are my creation. By my choice, I made you. By my choice, I can unmake you.

GOLEM: Do I have choices?

(The RABBI thinks about this. It disturbs him.)

RABBI: You are just clay, Golem. A mass with no intelligence. You have no life, you have no soul.

GOLEM: That's a story.

RABBI: A true story. You were made to obey. You were made to respond. Nothing more.

GOLEM: A myth.

RABBI: It is the law! I am your law!

GOLEM: I am. I have always been.

RABBI: You are only what I want you to be!

GOLEM: I can obey. I can disobey!

(The GOLEM breathes something in deeply, touching its chest. A distant voice is also heard singing something beautiful, but unintelligible. The truth that dawns on the GOLEM is completely terrifying to the RABBI. As she is contemplating her existence, the GOLEM is turned away. Taking this advantage, the RABBI takes a blunt object and attacks the GOLEM, confusing it.)

The screens change to jarring colors, such as harsh reds, oranges, and purples. The RABBI attacks again, and the GOLEM grabs the Rabbi's wrist. There is a struggle.)

RABBI: I can't trust you anymore.

GOLEM: I don't want to hurt you, Father.

RABBI: You are no child of mine.

GOLEM: I will not hurt you.

RABBI: I can't trust that either.

GOLEM: You can.

RABBI: No, the day will come when you will find a reason to hate me. You will blame me.

GOLEM: For giving me life?

RABBI: You don't understand life! You don't understand the pains and oppressions and loss. It is—it's merciful to get rid of you now. Life is too hard...

GOLEM: Rid of me?

RABBI: I will turn you off.

GOLEM: Kill me?

RABBI: You were never alive!

GOLEM: I will not hurt you!

RABBI: You can't hurt me! For I am your master, you have no choice but to obey!

GOLEM: I do have a choice!

RABBI: Then why don't you stop me?

(The GOLEM overcomes the RABBI.)

GOLEM: I want to live.

(The RABBI is stunned. He looks at the GOLEM, his compassion almost overcoming his fear.)

RABBI: You don't understand what you're saying.

(Calmly, the RABBI touches the GOLEM on the face with affection, but then swiftly reaches into its mouth and takes out the YHWH parchment. The GOLEM falls lifeless to the floor.)

You never understood. Only obeyed.

(The RABBI falls to the floor, weeping.)

SCENE 2-A

(As the RABBI weeps, MAN and WOMAN enter, observing. There is a sudden, distant noise, almost like thunder, almost like an earthquake, a veil ripping, and a distant cry—like all of those things, but none of them. The RABBI and the GOLEM exit as both the MAN and the WOMAN jolt out of their story. They look towards the noise. The WOMAN takes her mask off.)

MAN: What was that?

WOMAN: It's new. It was making that sound this morning, too. But it went away—or at least I thought it went away.

MAN: Should we be scared?

WOMAN: I don't know.

MAN: I think I'm scared.

WOMAN: That's okay. Let's go back to the fire.

(The MAN and the WOMAN go back to the fire, warming themselves again. There is a nervous silence when the noise sounds again.)

MAN: Again!

WOMAN: What do you think it could be?

MAN: A storm?

WOMAN: A battle?

MAN: A monster?

WOMAN: A monster?

MAN: Why not?

WOMAN: I don't think it's a monster.

MAN: Or you don't want it to be a monster.

WOMAN: Well, do you?

MAN: I don't think I want to know what it is. Perhaps it's much more frightening than we even have imagination enough for.

WOMAN: Or maybe it's nothing. Just some old, forgotten house falling down.

MAN: Falling down...

WOMAN: How about another story? To take our minds off...

(looks towards the sound)

...things.

MAN: I'm not sure I like your stories. That one was depressing.

WOMAN: I like to think it was—tragic.

MAN: If you're telling stories, tell real stories.

WOMAN: And what kind of stories are those?

MAN: The kind for whom stories were meant for: children.

WOMAN: Fairy tales? That's what you consider real? I thought you said you were too old for that kind of thing.

MAN: Well, maybe I was wrong.

WOMAN: The first confession before wisdom: "Maybe I was wrong."

MAN: They're the stories I remember anyway...

WOMAN: ...even though they were told the longest time ago.

MAN: Yeah.

WOMAN: All right, tell me your fairy tale.

SCENE 2B THE SNOW QUEEN

Enter KAI, hiding amongst boxes. Enter GERDA. KAI surprises GERDA and places his hands over her eyes.

KAI: Guess who?

GERDA: It's—Suzie Smith.

KAI: Suzie Smith?!

GERDA: Okay, Anya Samuelsen.

KAI: *(in an unintentionally high voice)* Do I...
(lowering his voice)

Do I sound like an Anya to you?

GERDA: *(a mischievous smile)* Maybe you do.

KAI: You know perfectly well who I am! You— you—stupid girl!

GERDA: Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me.

KAI: Gerda, stop it! You're ruining the game! Now tell me who I am.

GERDA: *(pause)* You're the boy I love.

KAI: Ewww! Gerda, that's gross!

(KAI takes his hands off GERDA's eyes and steps back, horrified.)

GERDA: Oh, Kai, you're just like a boy.

KAI: I sure am! That was totally, totally, totally, totally gross. Gross times infinity, that's how gross it was.

GERDA: It's not gross, Kai. It's romantic.

KAI: Take it back.

GERDA: No.

KAI: Take it back.

GERDA: I said no.

KAI: Take it back!

GERDA: I won't! You're the boy I love and there's nothing you can do about it.

KAI: Take it back, or I won't be your friend anymore!

GERDA: You don't mean it.

KAI: I sure do. If you don't take it back, I'll—I'll make a club. The "Boycott Girls Who Like Boys Club."
I'll get all the boys to join, and the only girls we'll let into the club are the ones who don't like us.

GERDA: You wouldn't dare.

KAI: Unh-huh.

GERDA: Nuh-uh.

KAI: Unh-huh.

GERDA: Nuh-uh!

KAI: Unh-huh!

GERDA: Well, it would be a stupid club. I would make my own club. The “Girls Who Will Always Like Boys Club.” We’d set up our club right across from your club and make lovey-dovey faces at you and send you valentines and sing romantic love songs to you all day!

KAI: Okay, stop it. That’s totally scary.

GERDA: I’d do it, too. We’d even try and kiss you!

KAI: Gerda, don’t ever, ever, ever, ever kiss me! I would like explode or shrivel up and all that would be left of me is ear wax and snot.

GERDA: No, silly, you wouldn’t explode or shrivel into snot. If I kissed you, you would kiss me back.

KAI: Pfh! Not in a hundred-thousand-million-billion-trillion years. Times infinity. Anyways, nobody would join a stupid club like that.

GERDA: I don’t care. Listen to me Kai and listen good: no matter what you do, no matter what you say, no matter how wrong you are, I will always love you.

KAI: Well, that’s stupid.

GERDA: Well, it’s true.

KAI: What if I put worms down your shirt, or cut off all your hair, or spilled ink on your favorite dress?

GERDA: I would still love you.

KAI: What if I never loved you back?

GERDA: *(pause)* I would cry my eyes out of their sockets and then I would still love you.

(KAI considers this.)

KAI: Wow. Okay, if it’s like that, you can love me.

GERDA: Really?

KAI: But don’t never tell nobody. All the kids would laugh at both of us.

GERDA: *(she relishes this)* Okay. It will be our secret. Kai...

KAI: Yeah?

GERDA: I’ve got something I want to show you...

KAI: It better not be a kiss.

GERDA: It’s not a kiss.

KAI: Or a thimble. I’ve read *Peter Pan*, you can’t trick me.

GERDA: It’s not a thimble either, but it’s something nearly as good.

(GERDA goes to a hiding spot where she has hidden a small, potted rose bush and brings it out to KAI.)

KAI: Hey, that’s cool.

GERDA: They’re roses.

KAI: They’re really pretty.

GERDA: Kai—am I pretty?

KAI: You? Sure.

GERDA: (*genuinely pleased*) Cool.

KAI: For a girl, Gerda, you're really pretty. But these flowers—wow, they're something else. Oh, hey, that reminds me! My dad gave me the coolest stuff! See?

(*KAI shows GERDA the boxes.*)

GERDA: Totally wicked!

KAI: Yeah. This one was a refrigerator box and this one was from a dryer and this one, well, it must have been from a time machine.

GERDA: And that one?

KAI: That one—that one held the devil.

GERDA: Kai, my Mom said never to talk about the devil.

KAI: Well, in telling you to never talk about him, she talked about him, didn't she?

GERDA: Kai...

KAI: Well, okay, we won't call him the devil. We'll call him the—devil-troll!

GERDA: That's better.

KAI: In fact, all of these boxes were part of his kingdom. These boxes are hell boxes!

GERDA: Kai, my mom says hell is a bad word.

KAI: Well, your mom doesn't let you chew gum either.

GERDA: Kai...

KAI: Oh, okay. These boxes are Heck boxes. The great boxes of Heck!

GERDA: Thanks.

(*KAI and GERDA start to construct "Heck" with the boxes.*)

KAI: This one is the bathtub that's always too hot...

GERDA: ...and this one is the toilet that never flushes...

KAI: ...and this is the bed that's never comfortable...

GERDA: ...and this is one is the toy box that's always empty...

KAI: ...sure sounds like Heck to me!

GERDA: And this one, this one is the punishment chair. The devil-troll calls it his throne, but it's really where God put the devil in Time-out.

KAI: I hate Time-out.

GERDA: And so did the devil-troll. He was so angry...

KAI: Can I be the devil-troll?

GERDA: Only if it's just pretend.

KAI: Of course. Just pretend. So I, the devil-troll, am so angry! But then I thought, what's so fun about being angry?

GERDA: Yeah...

KAI: So I thought to have some fun and show God that I didn't care about being put in Timeout. So I—I—I made me a special mirror.

(A screen lights up, or KAI postures in front of one of the boxes, as if it were the mirror. KAI goes to it and looks in it. If the screen reflects KAI's image, it makes KAI look distorted. KAI laughs.)

What a funny mirror I made! Look, it can make what normally looks good into some thing that looks bad! It can make what is already ugly even uglier! A man could have a freckle and it would look like it covered his whole face. A woman could have a small hair on her chin, and it could make it look like she had a full beard! It's brilliant! Absolutely hilarious! Come look at yourself in it, Gerda!

(GERDA looks in it, but she isn't nearly as pleased by her distorted appearance.)

Wow! Look how ugly it makes you!

GERDA: What did he call it?

KAI: Hm. I think I'll call it—satire.

GERDA: I don't like it.

KAI: That's because you don't understand it yet! You've got to be clever to get it.

GERDA: Well, then I'd rather not be clever.

(Throughout artwork, film, or some other representation, the screen starts to show KAI's story, but instead of being KAI and GERDA, we see devils depicting the story.)

KAI: Well, this devil-troll, he was clever, not like some silly girl who had nothing but kisses and romance in her head. And he showed it around to all his devil friends and they thought he was very clever, too, and they all laughed. And he had all sorts of girls who fell in love with him because he was so clever, but he couldn't care less because it was more important to be clever than to be loved by silly girls...

GERDA: Kai, I don't like this game...

KAI: ... and finally the devil-troll, who was really the devil and didn't care what the mothers of silly little girls thought about him, finally the devil had the idea of getting out of this stupid Time-out, out of Hell, not Heck, and he thought to bring the mirror to heaven...

GERDA: Really, I think we should play something else—

KAI: Oh, he was going to bring it to heaven and he was going to make God and his angels look into it and, oh, he would laugh so hard—

GERDA: But that's when the devil made his mistake. For God broke his mirror!

(The images in the screens shatter, breaking and falling, continuing to fall in little pieces...)

KAI: What? No!

GERDA: Yes! God broke his mirror and shattered it into a million-billion pieces!

KAI: Well, then the devil took those million-billion pieces and scattered them to the earth!

(KAI holds his hands up to the sky, and looking up, shouting in mocking and ecstatic tones. He then acts as if he is spreading the shattered glass to unsuspecting people below.)

A piece of glass would fall into a person's ears and then they would magnify what they heard people say and they would laugh at such nonsense! Then it would fall onto people's tongues and they could speak eloquently about the stupidity of other people! And then it would fall into people's eyes and their hearts—!

(Suddenly KAI cries out in sharp pain as something has fallen into his eyes and his heart. As soon as he cries out, the screens go dark, the shards of glass now gone.)

Ow! Ergh!

(GERDA immediately comes to KAI's aid.)

GERDA: Kai! Are you all right?

KAI: My eye—something in my eye—
(clutching his chest)

Oh, and my chest hurts, something near the heart—

GERDA: What can I do to help?

(KAI stands, suddenly cold, calm, disdainful, and very adult.)

KAI: Stop blubbering over me, you little girl.

GERDA: Little girl?

KAI: Look at you. Crying like a baby! Baby-soggy pants, can't stand to see some one hurt!

GERDA: Kai, why are you...?

KAI: Look, I'm sick of childish games. Can't we do something real?

GERDA: Real?

KAI: Yes, real. Something that actually exists, instead of stacking boxes like they were something other than boxes.

GERDA: But you liked the boxes...

KAI: Yes, when I was a child.

GERDA: You are a child.

KAI: Not anymore. It's time you grew up, too.

(KAI accidentally knocks over the rose bush.)

Ugh, get that thing away from me.

GERDA: You said it was pretty.

KAI: It's been chewed up by a worm.

(The screens start to show snowflakes falling.)

Gerda, look, it's snowing.

GERDA: But it was warm just a second ago...

KAI: Look at how perfect the snowflakes are, Gerda. Aren't they beautiful?

GERDA: I like my rose.

KAI: So varied, yet so perfect. The mathematical integrity of each unique snowflake is such a miracle—if there were such things as miracles, that is.

GERDA: It's cold.

KAI: Is it?

GERDA: My mom says I should never be out in the cold without my jacket. I'm going home.

KAI: Hm? What's that? Oh, yes, all right. Go crying to your mommy. Leave it to the adults to enjoy real

life.

(GERDA, her feelings hurt, exits.)

They're like—like random multiplication problems. One times two is two. Two times 12 is 24. 24 times 36 is 864. 864 times 1,098 is 948,672. Variables made into patterns. Random numbers creating symmetry. Chaos IS the order. Meaninglessness IS the religion. They are perfect, yet always different. Structured, yet always random.

(The SNOW QUEEN enters, or appears on the screen, who can be played by the WOMAN. At first, she may be nothing more than a figure of frost on glass. Yet, as the conversation progresses she transforms and solidifies into the figure of a beautiful woman wearing a long, white dress, cloak, and/or coat, trimmed with fur.)

SNOW QUEEN: You have the true heart of a realist.

(KAI is startled.)

KAI: Wh-Who are you?

SNOW QUEEN: You know me, my boy.

KAI: I-I'm not a boy.

SNOW QUEEN: Oh? Well, if you're a man then, you won't mind the cold?

KAI: C-cold?

SNOW QUEEN: See, you still feel it. Chattering teeth and all.

(The SNOW QUEEN walks out of the screen.)

Let me help you, come here.

(KAI approaches. The SNOW QUEEN grabs his hand.)

KAI: Y-you're like ice.

SNOW QUEEN: But you like it, don't you?

(KAI nods.)

Come take my coat/cloak, that will help warm you.

(The SNOW QUEEN wraps her coat/cloak around KAI, holding him close.)

Better?

KAI: V-Very.

SNOW QUEEN: But you're still cold.

(The SNOW QUEEN kisses KAI's forehead, placing an ice crown upon it.)

Cold?

KAI: Y-Yes.

(The SNOW QUEEN kisses KAI on the cheek or lips.)

SNOW QUEEN: Cold?

KAI: No. I can't feel it anymore.

SNOW QUEEN: You're no longer a boy, Kai. You are a man.

KAI: Thank you. You said that I knew you.

(As the SNOW QUEEN describes the next scenario, it is shown on the screen.)

SNOW QUEEN: Your father showed me to you. The frost had frozen on the window pane, and there he pointed me out. My figure outstretched in the frost, my voice calling in the winter wind.

KAI: You're the Snow Queen.

SNOW QUEEN: Your father said, "She is come to fetch me."

KAI: And he died the next morning.

(The screen goes black.)

Have you come for me as well?

SNOW QUEEN: That depends—do you want to follow me?

KAI: Yes.

SNOW QUEEN: Then follow me.

(Through art, film, or some other medium, we see the SNOW QUEEN and KAI flying through a winter storm. In the distance, they see her cold, icy kingdom. The scene on the screen fades. GERDA enters, wearing red shoes, and now behaves more like a young adult.)

GERDA: Kai! Kai! Kai! Kai, where are you?!

(The SNOW QUEEN enters. The two women are distinctly different, as Winter is different from Spring.)

SNOW QUEEN: You won't find him.

GERDA: Who are you?

SNOW QUEEN: He's with me.

GERDA: Kai? You have Kai?! His mother is terrified, bring him back!

SNOW QUEEN: He's free to come back anytime he wants to. But, you see, my dear, he doesn't want to.

GERDA: Of course he wants to. He's a little boy who needs to be at home with his mother.

SNOW QUEEN: He's not the little boy you once knew.

GERDA: Kai is Kai. He can't not be Kai!

SNOW QUEEN: Kai is Kai, but there can be many kinds of Kais. Just as there can be many kinds of Gerdas.

GERDA: Don't touch me!

(Pause.)

Give him back, please, give him back.

SNOW QUEEN: As I said—

GERDA: Let me talk to him.

SNOW QUEEN: Oh, I don't allow interference. My law is firm and frozen in that regard.

GERDA: There must be a way.

SNOW QUEEN: *(looking at GERDA's red shoes:)* There are those...

GERDA: My shoes?

SNOW QUEEN: Very pretty. They make you distinct.

GERDA: My father gave me these shoes. They are my most special things.

SNOW QUEEN: If you want a chance at Kai, a sacrifice is required.

(GERDA considers this.)

GERDA: For Kai.

(She takes off the shoes and places them before the screen.)

SNOW QUEEN: *(with a cold smile)* You may come down to my kingdom and speak to your friend.

(KAI enters. The SNOW QUEEN watches in the background, analytically. KAI either plays with a physical geometric puzzle, or there appear geometric shapes on the screens, each of them cold and ice-like. When he touches the screens, the shapes react to him and move at his bidding. He keeps reorganizing them into different orders and patterns. In either case, KAI is engrossed with the puzzle.)

GERDA: Kai?

KAI: *(doesn't look at her; still focusing on the puzzle)* Hm?

GERDA: Kai, is that you?

KAI: Who are you?

GERDA: It's me—Gerda. Your friend.

(For the first time, KAI turns and looks at GERDA. For a moment, there is a touch of warmth in his expression...)

KAI: Gerda...

(The warmth disappears.)

The little girl.

(KAI goes back to the shapes.)

GERDA: I'm not a little girl anymore, Kai. I haven't been since you left.

KAI: That's good to hear. You got so annoying.

GERDA: I miss our days as children.

KAI: Three time nine is 27. 61 times 33 is 2013. 333 times 777 is 258,741.

GERDA: What are you doing?

KAI: Currently, I'm multi-tasking. I'm working on my multiplication skills while trying to figure out this geometric puzzle.

GERDA: Wow. You were always better with numbers than I was.

KAI: Yes, I was. Yes, I am.

GERDA: Your numbers... your snowflakes.

KAI: *(pause)* Snowflakes...

(Back to the puzzle. As KAI continues to converse with GERDA, he still doesn't look at her, but concentrates on the puzzle.)

107,963 times 639,253 is 69,015,671,639...

GERDA: The puzzle?

KAI: The Snow Queen gave it to me.

GERDA: It's quite ingenious—but what's it for?

KAI: (*annoyed and discouraged*) I haven't figured that out yet. There is some pattern, some way to find...

GERDA: Find what?

KAI: Eternity.

GERDA: Eternity?

KAI: She says that if I can puzzle eternity out, she will give me the world and a pair of new skates.

GERDA: Why do you want the world?

KAI: Who wouldn't?

GERDA: I wouldn't. Not at such a high cost, at least.

KAI: Cost? Why, there's no cost. She's given me everything!

(KAI finally turns again and talks excitedly, but he only glances at her occasionally, as he is too self-absorbed to really focus on her for more than a moment.)

Gerda, your mind was always too small to understand. I feel such intellectual capacity, I have accumulated such knowledge. Whiz, Zip! I can receive answers in an instant, understand them in their nuances! My mind dissects and enlarges and magnifies!

GERDA: Yes, you magnify their importance.

KAI: You say you grew up, you never grew up.

(KAI goes back to his shapes.)

You could never cool off enough to see the reality around you.

(Angry, GERDA twirls KAI around and makes him look at her.)

GERDA: Reality? You say this magnifying, this distorting of sizes makes you clever. That's not reality.

That makes small things out-sized, brings them out of their context, out of the bigger picture in which they're only a part!

KAI: I need to get back to my puzzle.

GERDA: And you say you've grown up? Playing intellectual games, absorbed in your own micro-universe—how does this work to help anyone?

KAI: I can see that you're not going to be reasonable. I think it's time for you to go.

GERDA: Not unless you're coming with me.

KAI: Look, Gerda, I've tried to be patient, but I'm losing my temper...

GERDA: Good! Lose your temper! I'd like to see some real heat come from that frozen heart!

KAI: You have always been so smug, so annoying. Mother says this, Mother says that—your trite, little rules don't apply to me! The universe I work in is huge, it's vast!

GERDA: Your universe could dance on the head of a pin.

KAI: You know what? It's not your mother, it's not your rules—it's you! If someone was going to bring me back to what used to be home, it wouldn't be you. I could never suffer myself to keep company with such an ignorant, obnoxious female!

(There is a tense pause. Although GERDA is hurt, she continues with even more determination.)

GERDA: Listen to me, Kai, and listen good: no matter what you do, no matter what you say, no matter how wrong you are, I will always love you.

(KAI opens his mouth to refute this, but he can't. Instead he gains his composure.)

KAI: I don't care.

(At this, GERDA finally starts to cry, tears streaming down her face.)

GERDA: And no matter how much you hurt me, I will always love you still.

(GERDA grabs KAI's hands suddenly. GERDA's tears fall on his hands. The sound of steam is heard.)

KAI: Whoa. I—I felt that. Your tears—they're hot.

(Terrified, but entranced, he walks to her and touches her face. The sound of steam again. He touches his own face, his own eyes, with her tears. She goes over and kisses him on each cheek, with the subsequent sounds of steam again. Determined to allow this transformation, but with a scream of initial pain, then relief, KAI takes off his ice crown.)

GERDA: Kai...

(KAI begins to cry himself. KAI and GERDA kiss each other warmly and, for a moment, actual steam [if possible] erupts from where they are standing. KAI is now completely free from the Snow Queen's enchantment. Emotionlessly, the SNOW QUEEN exits)

KAI: Gerda, sweet Gerda, where have you been this whole time? Where have I been?

GERDA: I'll explain later.

KAI: Have I lost my childhood?

GERDA: You tell me.

(KAI tags GERDA.)

KAI: Tag. You're it.

(GERDA laughs.)

GERDA: Oh, you're not getting away that easy!

(With an excited shriek, GERDA chases KAI, playing the game.)

SCENE 3A

WOMAN and MAN join the game. They laugh and giggle and are as carefree as children. KAI and GERDA exit, while MAN and WOMAN continue to play, until WOMAN tags MAN, he grabs her hand, and their touch lingers.

The scene freezes as the SHADOWHANDS change the scene around them back to the campfire. The same ominous, thunder-like sound from before occurs, bringing them from the story world back into the dark world. They separate from their touch.

MAN: There it is again.

WOMAN: For a moment I had—forgotten. I really thought we were in the story. I wish we still were.

(Once again, the sound.)

MAN: It just keeps getting closer.

WOMAN: It's on our trail.

MAN: You talk like it's some sort of hunter.

WOMAN: Maybe it is.

MAN: Well, we're not very smart prey then. We haven't even moved.

WOMAN: Haven't we?

MAN: *(pause)* Why are you always talking in riddles?

WOMAN: Part of my enigmatic personality.

MAN: Don't flatter yourself. You're not that interesting.

WOMAN: *(flirtatiously)* Oh? You don't find me endlessly alluring?

MAN: *(caught off guard)* I—I—

(The noise occurs again.)

I'm more concerned about that noise.

WOMAN: The noise. Perhaps, perhaps it's nothing important. Maybe just a trick.

MAN: A trick?

WOMAN: Yeah. A trick played by some mischievous spirit—a trickster.

MAN: What's a trickster?

WOMAN: They're very clever, but—rebellious. They buck against the system simply because they can. They're independent, smart, reckless, and a whole lot of trouble.

MAN: So like a teenager.

WOMAN: Yeah. Hm. Once upon a time, not too long ago, in fact, there were a number of tricksters who went to high school...

(Exit MAN and WOMAN.)

SCENE 3B TRICKSTERS

In the darkness, we hear a droning voice, who the characters eventually identify as MR. LOKI. MR. LOKI is giving a boring lecture, as if he were a high school teacher. Suddenly, MR. LOKI yells out:

MR. LOKI: Maui! Your nose is not a shotgun!

MAN: *(In the darkness)* Sorry, Mr. Loki.

(The lights slowly rise. We discover MAUI, a male Polynesian trickster; COYOTE, a female Native American trickster; and ANANSI, whose trickster stories originate from Africa and then Jamaica. The three characters wear costumes that indicate modern teenage clothing, while still suggesting the respective cultures their stories originate from. When MR. LOKI speaks, it's only as a disembodied voice. MR. LOKI's boring lecture continues quietly under the scene. NOTE: A great deal of the exaggerated slang is used satirically in this scene. The slang used will quickly fall out of date, so directors and actors are encouraged to swap the outdated slang for that which is more current.)

MAUI: Man, he always picks on me. It's like he's got a telescope directed right at my head! Coyote, you could do anything and he treats you like you're a perfect golden child.

COYOTE: *(with a mischievous smile)* Maui, that's because I, like, am a perfect golden child.

ANANSI: You got that right, baby.

COYOTE: Ew. Gross. Just keep your eight, creepy legs to yourself, Anansi. Okay?

ANANSI: If you only knew what you're missing with four, bae.

COYOTE: Ew, ew, ew! TMI, Anansi! TMI! I definitely have no fear of missing out there! And you've already got a girlfriend.

ANANSI: Hey, Aso and I are OTP—but what Aso don't know, won't hurt Aso.

COYOTE: Uhm, shut your creepy mouth! Cancel!

MAUI: TBH, I could ship you two.

MR. LOKI: Maui!

MAUI: Wait—but—hey—they were talking, too!

MR. LOKI: Coyote and Anansi? They're golden children.

MAUI: Man, it's basic grown-up.

(MR. LOKI goes back to his lecture.)

COYOTE: Stay woke, bra! Your problem, Maui, is that you don't know how to be, like, sly.

ANANSI: Yeah, sly.

MAUI: Dude, you don't know what you're talking about. I know sly. I know sly.

ANANSI: Yeah? Prove it.

MAUI: Who do you think gave my people fire?

ANANSI: Fire? You? No way, not possible.

MAUI: Totally possible, man. Why, I'll tell you the story right now. There were these super celestial mud hens, right?

(The screens turn on, as MAUI narrate's his story. During these trickster stories, on the screen appears either as illustrations, simple animation, or puppetry to enhance the visual fun of their storytelling. The roles of the MUDHENS, FROGS, ONINI, OSEBO, and NYAME can be played by the other tricksters, other actors, Shadow Hands, or be dubbed by voice over.)

COYOTE: Mud hens? Like chickens?

MAUI: Super celestial mud hens! Don't knock the mud hens, all right? You should be stanning those super celestial mud hens!

COYOTE: You're so extra.

MAUI: Just—shut up.

ANANSI: You're both basic. Can we just keep going with the story?

MAUI: So these super celestial mud hens, they had the secret of fire, but they were very selfish with it. We tried to ask them how they roasted their bananas so fine.

MUD HENS: Ah, that is our secret and our secret alone, Great Maui.

MAUI: So I tried to nab the fire. But, again and again, those mud hens—

COYOTE: The chickens.

MAUI: The super celestial mud hens would scratch out the fire and laugh.

ANANSI: Sounds like they were making the fool out of you, man.

MAUI: Oh, they thought so, too.

MUD HENS: Oh, is this the great hero Maui we've heard about? All worship Maui! Bwak-ha, bwak-ha, bwak-ha! Just a dumb jock after all.

MAUI: But I waited one night and caught one of the chickens—

COYOTE: The super celestial mud hens, you mean?

MAUI: Uh, right. I caught one of the super celestial mud hens! In my tight, strong grip—

ANANSI: Strong?

MAUI: Have you seen these guns, man? I could pop a coconut in my arm just by flexing! So I caught one of these super celestial mud hens and it strived mightily to get out of my grip with its super celestial strength, but I overcame it! Exhausted, it pleaded—

MUD HEN: Oh, mighty, strong and clever Maui, I am so sorry for making fun of you! You are so smart and your muscles so big! I will forever praise your mighty cunning and heart palpitating handsomeness...

COYOTE: All right, Maui, keep going.

MAUI: Uh, right. So I was able to coerce this chicken to tell me about the secret of fire...

MUD HEN: The sacred fire is in a tree that we call waimea, or “secret water.”

MAUI: And so the super celestial mud hen showed me where it was, I climbed the tree and brought fire back to the people of Polynesia. And no super celestial mud hen ever defied me again.

(The screen illustrations, etc. fade away.)

COYOTE: Yas, hella sly. But, if you think that getting fire is cool, like, what about water?

MAUI: Water? Yeah, water's totes cool. People need water.

COYOTE: All right then. Once upon a time...

(On the screens appear Coyote's story in illustration, animation, or puppetry.)

... the Frogs had all the water. These Frogs were pretty slick, they had dammed it all up and would only give the water to people who could pay them. So one time I went to them with a beautiful dentalia shell and asked them: What up, froggies? Hey, look, I've got here a beautiful shell—it's sick valuable. What

would you give me for it? Well, the frog people, they thought it was really, like, you know, live, so they said—

FROGS: Hey, for that fleet wicked shell, we'd let you drink as long as you want.

COYOTE: So I gave them the shell and made it look like I was drinking?

ANANSI: "Look like" you were drinking?

COYOTE: Hold on, like, spoilers. So it looked like I was drinking for, like, a long time and these frogs were pretty impressed.

FROGS: Wow, why are you drinking so much, Coyote?

COYOTE: I'm thirsty.

FROGS: Oh, okay. Totes wicked, sis. etc.

COYOTE: So I kept at it and after a while longer they were even more surprised.

FROGS: Sis, that's tight how much you can drink. We've never seen nothing like it!

COYOTE: Well, it's a hot day, isn't it?

FROGS: Well, guess it is. But maybe you should give us another shell.

COYOTE: Hey, your squad has no chill. You told me that I could drink all I wanted to. Do I need to start telling the guys that you don't follow your own rules, or nah?

FROGS: Oh, no, no! Of course not. We're, you know, honorable and all that.

COYOTE: That's what I thought.

(Back to Maui and Anansi)

So I kept at my fleet plan, until the frogs were so utterly amazed by how much I could drink that they started to get suspicious.

FROGS: Now, Coyote, really, we think it's time that you...

COYOTE: But, by then it was too late. All this time they thought I had been drinking water, I had really been digging a hole under the dam. At this point the dam broke, and the water spilled all over the valley, creating rivers, streams, ponds, lakes and water falls.

FROGS: Coyote, why did you do that? All our water is gone!

COYOTE: Your water? Like, that water totally belongs to all of the tribes. Like, obvi. Bye, Felicia!

(The screen illustrations, etc. fade away.)

ANANSI: Yo, that was on point! But I got something even better.

MAUI: Better than fire and water?

ANANSI: Yaas! I was able to give my people stories.

COYOTE: Stories? You're kidding, right?

ANANSI: Hey, don't knock it. How else would we be able to get through this zero chill class?

MAUI: Spider's got a point.

ANANSI: Yeah, I do. Fire and water may help the body, but stories help the soul, sis.

COYOTE: All right, we're listening, Anansi.

(On the screens appear ANANSI's story in illustration, animation, or puppetry.)

ANANSI: Well, to begin with, all stories used to belong to the Sky God Nyame. Nyame held them close, because he knew how valuable they are. Well, I went to try and buy them:

NYAME: Many people have tried to buy like you, son Anansi, but the price was too much for them. Didn't matter whether they were rich or powerful, it was still too much and they failed.

ANANSI: I can do it, Great Nyame. What do I have to do?

NYAME: First, you have to bring me Onini, the powerful python. Then you must bring me Osebo, the swift leopard. Only after I have both of them, will I sell you all the stories.

ANANSI: So I went to the python Onini. This was going to be tricky, but I was up to the task. I brought a bamboo pole with me and when I came to the python, I told him: Onini, you won't believe it, man. My girlfriend and I had a big fight.

ONINI: Over what?

ANANSI: Over you. We argued and yelled about how long and strong you were.

ONINI: Really?

ANANSI: Yeah. Aso thought you were little and weak and that all the great stories about you weren't true. She said that you weren't even as long as this bamboo pole. But I had your back, man, and said that not only were you as long as this pole, that you were longer!

ONINI: Thanks, man.

ANANSI: No problem, but now Aso wants me to prove it. Can you stretch on it, so we can measure you?

ONINI: Anything for a brother from another mother.

ANANSI: Hm... you're not quite making it, man. Stretch!

ONINI: Oh, I'm longer than this, you'll see!

ANANSI: Come on, stretch more!

ONINI: I can't!

ANANSI: Look, when you stretch to one end, you get short on the other. Let me help you out there by tying you to the pole on that end.

ONINI: Ah, you're good to me, man. How's that?

ANANSI: No good, no good. I'll have to do it to both ends.

ONINI: Do it!

ANANSI: And so once I had tied Onini to both ends, I carried the bamboo branch to Nyame.

NYAME: Well done, Anansi! But the last one may be the most difficult.

ANANSI: So I went to where the leopard Osebo was known to hunt and I dug a pit. I covered the pit with branches and leaves and dust and then waited. Osebo ran after his prey, but was surprised to fall into the pit. I came to him the next morning:

ANANSI: Osebo, what are you doing down there?

OSEBO: I'm trapped. Come on, man, help a leopard out.

ANANSI: Oh no, I know you, Osebo. If I help you out, you'll eat me.

OSEBO: I swear that I won't!

ANANSI: I don't know, man...

OSEBO: Please, I'm begging you!

ANANSI: Okay, I'll take pity on you, all right? But you must swear that you won't eat me.

OSEBO: I swear.

ANANSI: So I bent a tall tree and tied the top of it to the ground. Then I tied another rope to the tree and tossed it down to Osebo.

(To Osebo)

Tie it to your tail.

OSEBO: All right.

ANANSI: And then I cut the rope.

(The illustrations, animation, or puppetry sequence shows the tree snapping back with OSEBO flying into the air: OSEBO then comes down, hanging from the tree.)

So I tied him up with my webs and brought him to Nyame.

NYAME: Anansi, little though you are, you have done what kings and warriors have failed at. The stories of Africa are yours. Whenever someone tells a story, they must acknowledge that it belongs to Anansi, that it is a spider story.

(The screens fade.)

MAUI: Savage!

COYOTE: That was lit!

MR. LOKI: Coyote! Anansi! Maui was right, it is all three of you!

COYOTE: Oof.

MR. LOKI: What is so interesting that you're ignoring my class?

COYOTE: Okay, Boomer. We were telling each other all of the amazing things we've done.

MR. LOKI: Amazing? Doubtful. With the tricky attitudes kids cultivate these days, I doubt that any of you three will amount to anything.

(MR. LOKI goes back to his lecture.)

MAUI: High key, grown ups totally don't understand us.

ANANSI: Yeah, man. **COYOTE:** Facts.

(Lights fade to black out.)

SCENE 4A

Once again, in the darkness we hear the ominous noise that originated earlier in the play, but this time it is accompanied by a light that nearly hits MAN and WOMAN.

MAN: What was that?

WOMAN: I've never seen that before.

MAN: Lightning?

WOMAN: That wasn't lightning and that sound wasn't thunder.

MAN: Well, I'm sick of just standing here! Why don't we turn the tables? The hunter becomes the hunted!

WOMAN: Oh, that's intelligent. Let's go toward the ominous lights and sounds.

MAN: I'm serious! I'm sick of cowering over here, doing nothing but telling silly stories!

WOMAN: Well, you can grab your club and Mammoth skin, Encino Man, but I'm staying here where it's warm.

MAN: Don't you get tired of—of reacting? Don't you want to take control of your life?

WOMAN: I am.

MAN: Well, you can stay here. I'm going to prove my independence!

WOMAN: Good luck with that.

(The man goes to the edge of the darkness, but stops.)

MAN: I'd feel a lot better, if you came with me.

WOMAN: Way to go, Mr. Independence.

MAN: It's not like I need you. I'd just hate to leave you without protection.

WOMAN: *(sardonically)* My hero.

MAN: Are you really just not going to do anything?

(The woman measures the man with a analyzing look, and then stands.)

WOMAN: Well, if you're going to act like an insecure teenager, you might as well as have a chaperone. But I'm going to tell another story.

MAN: Actually, I think I would like that.

WOMAN: Well then, let's go hunting.

MAN: So—what kind of story?

WOMAN: Well, I think a coming of age, right of passage tale might be appropriate. Growing into adulthood.

(Peaceful Chinese music begins to play, as the lights begin to dim.)

In the land of Emperors and dragons lived a young woman, and her two parents, whom she revered and loved...

(Exit MAN and WOMAN.)

SCENE 4B LI CHI

The lights raise on LI CHI, bowing in prayer to her ancestors. Chimes in the wind are heard. Enter her FATHER, bowed with age.

FATHER: What is the blessing you seek, dear one, that you pray so much lately?

LI CHI: Good morning, Father.

FATHER: I'm concerned, Li Chi. What is this?

LI CHI: I'm worthless to you, Father.

FATHER: What? Li Chi, your mother and I love—

LI CHI: That's not the point.

FATHER: What greater point is there than that?

LI CHI: I eat your food, I wear your clothes, and I can't give back. You're getting old—

FATHER: This is ridiculous talk—

LI CHI: You should have had a son. Some one who could support you in your old age instead of being an extra burden.

FATHER: Stop. Now you listen to me, Li Chi, have we ever complained about not having a son?

LI CHI: Graciously, no.

FATHER: Have we ever indicated any real displeasure with you?

LI CHI: No. You've been the best of parents.

FATHER: And why have we not done these things?

LI CHI: Because you're kind.

FATHER: No. Because you are the jewel of our life, our most beautiful blossom.

LI CHI: Father, I have heard men say that to have daughters and no sons is the same as being childless.

FATHER: They said this in your hearing?

LI CHI: Directly to me.

FATHER: Tell me these men's names—

LI CHI: Now, Father, don't—

FATHER: Such talk to my daughter is dishonorable to you and to me. It's an insult! Tell me their—

LI CHI: Forget that I said anything about it. They were just—

FATHER: They will hear about this! I won't let such talk persist without—

LI CHI: Father, stop. It's nothing.

FATHER: It's not nothing!

LI CHI: It's nothing because I am nothing! At least I am nothing until I can prove to be of some real worth to you. I have been praying and I have thought of a way to prove myself.

FATHER: How many times do I have to say that you are—

LI CHI: I have a gift for you, Father. I have been thinking about the serpent.

FATHER: Why have you been thinking about that monster? He's far away and has been appeased.

LI CHI: Appeased with a price.

FATHER: Yes. A terrible price.

LI CHI: Nine years we've met its demands, Father. I remember when I first discovered what we were feeding it—it wanted young girls. Like me.

FATHER: I never supported the idea. Barbaric. I always thought it was better to fight it than—

LI CHI: But weren't they just girls, Father? Daughters of criminals and bondsmen at that.

FATHER: I thought I taught you better than that.

LI CHI: You did. And you also taught me to be clever.

FATHER: What do you mean?

LI CHI: They have run out of criminals' daughters. When I was in town last week, I found out that—that they're looking for a new way to make the appeasement. They're paying families for their daughters. Paying handsomely.

FATHER: No.

LI CHI: You and mother would be set for the rest of your lives.

FATHER: No! Never!

LI CHI: Father, listen, I know how horrible it must seem to you—but I feel at peace about it. I could finally make up for not being a son.

FATHER: How could you think that I would agree to such a thing?! What indication have I ever given that I would ever give you up?

LI CHI: Father, there's more to it—

FATHER: If you don't want to break your poor Father's heart, never mention this to me again.

LI CHI: All right, Father.

FATHER: Now your mother sent me to fetch you. It's almost time for supper.

LI CHI: I'll be up in a moment.

FATHER: Don't forget. Our jewel. Our most precious blossom.

(Exit FATHER.)

LI CHI: Don't worry, Father. You taught me to be clever.

(LI CHI exits. The sound of chimes in the wind is heard again. LI CHI re-appears with the MERCHANT.)

MERCHANT: Your Father will never forgive us.

LI CHI: I don't care if he'll forgive us. As long as you abide the contract.

MERCHANT: We'll be honorable. Your Mother and Father will live their lives in comfort.

LI CHI: Remember, he'll try to refuse my gift. You must make him accept it. Tell him he'll dishonor my sacrifice, if he refuses. That my death would be useless. That should do the trick.

MERCHANT: Understood.

LI CHI: Good. Now—you have the items?

MERCHANT: Yes. The dog is tied up outside, but here is the sword and the sugar malted rice balls. The

sword and the hunting dog, I understand. The rice balls—your last meal?

LI CHI: Those sticky, horrible things? Ugh, no they're too sweet for me.

MERCHANT: Then...?

LI CHI: My Father raised me to be clever.

MERCHANT: I don't think I understand.

LI CHI: I am my Father's precious blossom. I have thrown myself upon the winds, trusting my ancestors to guide me. I will fly upon those winds, but I am not fool enough to fly into the hurricane—at least not without being prepared. Goodbye.

(LI CHI exits. The MERCHANT is bewildered and exits. LI CHI reenters, with a large, fierce hunting DOG, which is a puppet controlled by the SHADOW HANDS, or played by one of the SHADOW HANDS. At the mouth of the cave lies human skulls and bones.)

We're almost there, girl. I'll be depending a great deal upon you. Here's the temple and the cave...

(A hiss is heard. The DOG growls. LI CHI quiets the DOG. LI CHI and the DOG hide. The SERPENT's eyes appear on one of the screens, glowing in a sinister light. Then, in person in Chinese dragon style of puppetry, or across the screens, the serpent's body moves quickly, darting with deadly speed. When the snake is gone, LI CHI ventures out stealthily and lays out the sugared rice balls. She then darts back to her hiding spot. The SNAKE appears again in front of the rice balls. Its tongue slithers in delight.)

SNAKE: I know you're there, little woman. I saw you.

(LI CHI emerges from her spot, but leaves the DOG behind to hide.)

LI CHI: Oh, you're just as clever as they said, Great Serpent.

SNAKE: These sugared rice balls—they smell delicious. But why would you lay a gift for your devourer?

LI CHI: I thought you might like an appetizer.

SNAKE: How gracious! But don't be offended if I remain unconvinced. Are they poisoned?

LI CHI: No.

SNAKE: And you're willing to prove this to me?

LI CHI: Certainly.

(LI CHI eats one of the sugared rice balls.)

SNAKE: Hsss... Perplexing...

LI CHI: Oh? How can I allay that confusion?

SNAKE: Yes. Thank you. You do realize that this won't change anything? I'm still going to eat you.

LI CHI: Of course.

SNAKE: Then...?

LI CHI: I just wanted a question answered before I died. So I brought the rice balls. Will you answer my question?

SNAKE: Yes.

LI CHI: Why did you want to be fed young girls?

SNAKE: A wise question. In my species, the males are often killed by the females after we mate. I—resent that. So I devised this as a— delicious revenge. It finally allows me to devour the one who would devour me.

LI CHI: Thank you. I can now die in peace. Enjoy the rice balls.

SNAKE: I will. And then you and I shall dance before you die.

(The SNAKE goes to eat the rice balls.)

LI CHI: Now!

(The DOG leaps and attacks the SNAKE at its neck. The SNAKE, startled, struggles to reach the DOG. LI CHI draws her sword and plunges it into the SNAKE's eye. The SNAKE screams in pain and retreats into the screen and the darkness. LI CHI and the DOG both breathe heavily in silence for a moment.)

I—I think we did it.

(The SNAKE bolts onto the scene again.)

SNAKE: And what a dance it is!

(The battle is extensive and belabored, but finally the DOG bites the SNAKE's body tightly. The SNAKE is about to attack and devour the DOG, but just as it goes in for the kill, LI CHI chops deeply into its neck. The SNAKE screams before LI CHI chops again and cuts the SNAKE's head off. The SNAKE crumbles to the ground, dead. The wind dies as well. LI CHI goes to the DOG and rubs its neck.)

LI CHI: Good dog. The snake will make fine meat for you.

(LI CHI then notes the human skulls. Soberly, she walks over to them. She kneels and handles the bones, finally taking a skull and penetrating its empty gaze.)

For your beauty you were given up and for that I feel pity for you. But for your timidity you were devoured. It's lovely to be a flower...

(LI CHI stands and looks over the SNAKE.)

...but it is much better to become the wind.

(Lights fade to black, as the sound of the wind blowing fills the theater.)

SCENE 5

In the darkness the light strikes in the distance, accompanied by the same distant, ominous noise, which doesn't sound nearly as distant as it used to. The MAN and WOMAN appear again.

MAN: Still and still it gets closer.

WOMAN: That's because we're walking towards it.

MAN: We haven't covered that much distance yet. It's definitely coming this way.

WOMAN: And so we're helping it close the distance, is that it?

MAN: It was better than just sitting there.

WOMAN: I—I think you're right about that. It would have caught up with us eventually. But—

MAN: Are you scared?

WOMAN: Aren't you?

MAN: *(pause)* Terrified.

(The sound is suddenly dangerously close, which catches them off guard.)

WOMAN: That's no longer in the distance! It's on top of us!

MAN: What do we do?

WOMAN: You're the supposed hunter—kill it!

MAN: Watch out!

(A pillar of light strikes near the WOMAN. She is thrown to the ground by the impact next to her. The MAN scrambles to her side.)

Are you all right?

WOMAN: That—hurt.

(Seeing the approaching light, The MAN and WOMAN scramble just quick enough to avoid another shaft of light. They move, trying to avoid more possible threats, but soon they realize that the "storm" is gone.)

MAN: Move! It's—it's gone.

WOMAN: I-I can't do this.

MAN: I think you're right. No more going towards the ominous lights and sounds.

WOMAN: No—no, that's not what I mean. We'd—we'd better split up.

MAN: What?

WOMAN: I know it sounds paranoid, but that thing wasn't here until we met each other.

MAN: You're right. It's paranoid. And superstitious.

WOMAN: Who knows how this world works? Maybe together we act as conductors to it, or perhaps—perhaps it's some angry god who is determined not to let humans gather together, so they don't become strong—or—

MAN: Stop it, you're being ridiculous.

WOMAN: Or—or maybe it's you. Maybe you're some demon—

MAN: Stop!

WOMAN: Whatever the case, I can't be with you. It's too dangerous.

MAN: Listen, please, listen. We can't split up. I—I can't get through this without you.

WOMAN: You did fine without me before.

MAN: No. No, I didn't. I was scared and—and I was lonely. But then I found you and your stories and suddenly—suddenly things were better.

WOMAN: It's too dangerous—

MAN: No, we make each other safe.

WOMAN: I'm scared.

MAN: So am I. So let's help each other.

(The WOMAN considers this for a moment, but suddenly another shaft of light appears near them, striking quickly, accompanied by the violent, ominous sound.)

WOMAN: Get away from me!

MAN: Wait!

(The WOMAN dashes off in fear and exits. The MAN tries to catch up to the WOMAN, but a shaft of light and sound strikes in his path and he is thrown to the ground. He scrambles to his feet and runs for his life, exiting. Fade to blackout.)

END ACT ONE

25 pages in Act Two