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# Theatre/Games: The Poetics, Ludology & Narrative in Video Game and Dramatic Structure

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**THEATRE/GAMES:  
THE POETICS, LUDOLOGY & NARRATIVE IN  
VIDEO GAME AND DRAMATIC STRUCTURE**

**BY**

**MATT DIEL**

B.A., English, Webster University, 2004

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**Master of Fine Arts  
Dramatic Writing**

The University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

**December, 2008**

DEDICATION

For Inky, Blinky, Pinky, and Clyde

**[THEATRE/GAMES:]  
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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the potential avenues of relationship between interactive media, particularly video games, and more traditional forms of theatrical production. It looks at the major theoretical paradigms of game structure in comparison to Aristotle's *Poetics* to find points of overlap between these two seemingly divergent entities, video games and theatre. As a specific point of reference, it also examines how my own artistic work has roots in both these worlds, and how the deepened understanding of their structures might contribute to my own artistic development.

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**ACT 1: THEY MEET** ..... **1**

    Introducing the Work ..... 1

    Ludology v. Narratology ..... 9

**ACT 2: THE CHASE** ..... **15**

    Aristotle's *Poetics* in Relation to Games ..... 15

        Plot ..... 16

        Character ..... 22

        Reasoning ..... 24

        Diction ..... 26

        Song ..... 28

        Spectacle ..... 29

**ACT 3: JUNIOR** ..... **35**

    Synthesis: Looking Back, Looking Ahead ..... 35

**JOURNEY TO ONI CRAG** ..... **47**

## **Act 1: They Meet**

### **Introducing the work**

Theatre. Video games. Two things not often thought of in combination. As a playwright and a scholar, I am often confronted with by discussions about media and their relationship to my chosen craft—film and theatre, television and theatre, YouTube and theatre—but rarely do I see a discussion of video games, or interactive media, and theatre. This is unfortunate, since video games have become so prevalent throughout not just American culture, but the entire developed world, East to West. While theatre practitioners often still talk about how to compete against the movies, the video game industry is challenging film as the most profitable entertainment business around. So the question looms: why don't people in the theatre, particularly writers, think about games more? As my own creative process is informed both by my interest in the formal structures of drama, as well as my lifelong relationship to computers and their attendant subcultures, this seemed like a potentially fruitful and illuminating issue for me to engage.

A major focus of this project is to examine the ways in which new forms of interactive media, particularly video games, and theatre can be viewed in relation to one other,

both structurally and aesthetically. I want to pull apart, so to speak, games in and of themselves, their formal structures of gameplay and their narrative constructions, as well as look at the ways in which ideas about theatrical performance can be expressed, modified, or exploded by using the context of video games. In short, I will see if they are two great tastes that taste great together. To accomplish this, I will first discuss some of the key concepts in game studies, and offer a synthesis of the two competing theoretical paradigms within the field. Once this theoretical base has been established, I will place it in relation to traditional theatrical forms, utilizing a vocabulary and analytical framework based on Aristotle's breakdown of drama, expressed in the *Poetics*.<sup>1</sup> Finally, armed with this knowledge, I hope to (at least partially) explicate my own writing process and aesthetic ideas, past present and future, as they relate to the material at hand, and show how the engagement with these ideas has facilitated my understanding of my own artistic impulses as they have developed.

First things first. When I talk about structure and aesthetics, I am not only speaking of formal nuts-and-bolts structure, but also the ways in which games (and dramas) are artistically conceived, particularly (but not

exclusively) in a narrative sense. To clarify, I define a 'narrative' to mean a story arc, or a plot. Whether narrated or enacted (i.e., whether epic or tragedy), it is the presence of a traceable storyline that I am interested in. There are games that do not contain such a structure—or at least not to any appreciable degree—but such games are, in the main, outside the purview of this essay. This includes "open box" worlds<sup>2</sup> and user-driven games such as MMOs (Massively Multiplayer Online games), as well as games like *Tetris*, which have no discernible internal narrative.

The primary building blocks for much interactive media, video games in particular, can be generally understood through the idea, described by interactive media researcher Craig Lindley, and later expanded by designer/theorist Douglas Brown, of *narrative* and *gameplay gestalts*.<sup>3</sup> Following these, I define the narrative gestalt as the collection of discrete actions and events that compose the story arc, and the cognitive processes that allow the player to understand these discrete aspects as a unified whole. The gameplay gestalt is a similar process, encompassing the technical components of player/game interaction, such as control, rules, and visual/world construction (including physics and other object-oriented concerns) and the player's cognitive process of

synthesizing them. Lindley's analysis tends to set the gameplay above the narrative, asserting a competition for the player's cognitive facilities that sets the two gestalts up as antagonistic. This is a limiting view, however, and I think Brown's expansion is more productive, focusing on seeing the ways in which the gestalts work, not in opposition, but in creative tension with one another, a construction which he terms "authored gestalt interplay" (Brown 58). This tension is a give and take between the two, very often seen as one or the other gestalt emerging as the more dominant cognitive concern for a time, then receding or being modified by the other. The mechanics of solving a puzzle, or executing a complex series of maneuvers, for example, might assert themselves as the primary concern of the player ("okay, I have to press up, up, down, down, left, right, left, right, B, A, start"), but the motivation for this execution will be woven into the narrative arc ("I need to enter the correct code sequence to release the imprisoned Undersecretary of the Interior"). Here, gameplay is both enhanced and submerged by narrative. This concept of interplay, of creative tension, is the basis for my own analysis of games as well as dramatic structure, both generally and specific to my own work. I follow Susan Sontag's rather prescient

articulation, expressed in her 1966 article "Film and Theatre," that art, no matter what kind, is first and foremost a mental act on the part of the audience—and particularly apropos to interactive media, that "Each subject of an aesthetic experience shapes it to his own measure" (Sontag 31). As artists we create structure, but the interpretation of that structure rests with the audience (or player).

Another important idea, and a common thread between games and dramatic works, is that of *immersion*, the ability of a story to engage its audience, to make them feel as if they are a part of the fictional world. And while the aim of immersion is common to both arts, the means differ. Whereas theatre and other traditional narrative forms seek to engage the audience as a spectator, by drawing them in as observers to the event, games engage the audience (player) through *agency*—that is, the sense of participation that a player feels, that his/her decisions and actions create or move the story. In games, however, this agency is, in an important sense, illusory. The player advances the story, but does not fundamentally create it. His/her various actions, no matter how tangential or creative they may seem, inevitably feed back into the core narrative/story—the player is, to a large degree, running

on a limited set of rails. The player normally can't change the basic story, only his/her particular path through it. Techniques like multiple endings and adaptive A.I. aim to move the player closer to true agency, but really, the key thing to remember is that the player must *feel* as if they are affecting the story, whether or not they actually do so. Much like the "willing suspension of disbelief" of theatre audiences, game players understand that their agency is an illusion, but as long as the illusion is well constructed, they don't much care. In this we can see a microcosmic display of the tension between gameplay and narrative gestalts—the mechanics of interactivity give the player the means for agency, but the immersive world that draws the player in is a narrative construction.<sup>4</sup>

And so, we have the central ideas—gameplay and narrative gestalts, immersion, (illusory) agency. We'll hold on to these core concepts as we look to Aristotle's *Poetics*, for they will help us to shed some new light on games and theatre, and perhaps give us some new avenues, some new ways to think about how we create effective games—as well as effective drama.

Before we move on, there is one more thing to consider related to the concerns of narrative gestalt, and its

tension with gameplay: the design aesthetic, or the conceptual palette, if you will. Obviously, design involves gameplay concerns, but the aesthetics tend to tie in more closely with narrative—the value of the avatar/character Lara Croft may be, to some theorists, no different than that of Pac-man, but the story of *Tomb Raider* is intimately tied to 'who' she is. The interplay between design and story is notable, an area where we can find connections between games and dramatic form, where plot and character are woven together, much as they are in Aristotle's analysis, as we will see later. But more modern, even abstracted aesthetic ideas can be seen, as well. Particularly in the small-studio, 'indie' game market, narrative and design concepts that have a distinctly theatrical sensibility are finding articulation, bringing us games like *Braid* and *Katamari Damacy*, which have a more expressionistic and less strictly realistic aesthetic in their story and visuals,<sup>5</sup> a choice akin to contemporary theatre's use of more abstracted set and lighting design. Games such as these use aspects like shape and color, light and shadow in ways not unlike traditional visual arts, to convey impressions or serve as metaphors, as subtext. Lest we get ahead of ourselves, though, we must acknowledge the continuing dominance of

'realistic' games. Consumers are most familiar with these—the blockbuster, 7-11-tie-in games, the FPS (first-person shooter) games, the sports games and racing games, the Halos and the Maddens that are the cornerstones of the mainstream video game industry. These games most often act as simulations, mirroring the 'real', i.e. physical, world, focusing on verisimilitude, on realistic physics and character action, even in games set in realms of the fantastic (*Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* is a good example of this<sup>6</sup>). The drive toward greater graphical sophistication is a large part of what pushes game technology forward, but often at the cost of narrative sophistication<sup>7</sup>— as evidenced by the many, probably *too* many, games that revolve around simplistic themes of misogyny, violence, and other hallmarks of the adolescent male world. Undoubtedly, these games will continue to be made, and will be profitable, and undoubtedly, the debates for and against them will rage on. For our purposes, however, the notable thing is the argument often used by gamers and designers that "it's just a game." This argument is, whatever its politics, an essentially ludic one; it seeks to minimize the importance of narrative to game design and emphasize gameplay structures. But this is not the only *weltanschauung* that exists among the creators

of these games, and one way to explore these differing worldviews is to explore how their proponents view the formal properties of games in relation to the narrative traditions that form the backbone of dramatic writing.

### **Ludology v Narratology**

“Examining games solely as items of gameplay is as useless as trying to assess them using only the tools available to literary theorists.” (Brown 59)

While video games are not the only variety of interactive media out there, they have become perhaps the most important and widespread example of interactivity in new media, and also one of the most complex. Perhaps the clearest sign of this complexity is the video game’s generally murky, highly debated relationship to narrative. The structure of an interactive novel, for example, is obviously narrative at its core, but games are not always—some would say never—decipherable in this way. As the field of game studies has grown, so has the divide between the two major theoretical paradigms: narratology and ludology. A full reckoning of these (allegedly) opposing paradigms is beyond the scope of this paper, but a basic outline of their foundational tenets will be useful to us as we seek to analyze games using a decidedly theatrical vocabulary.

It has been proposed that games are not stories (i.e. narratives), and that to think of them as such is problematic. This statement is a rather simplified, and inflexible, interpretation of the theory of *ludology* (from the Latin for 'game,' *ludus*). The term ludology was originally used in the context of more traditional games, such as board games. It privileges the formal analysis of games *qua* games, understanding them primarily through their rules and structures of play rather than through any narrative properties. The strictest ludic acolyte would claim that narrative is at the least irrelevant, and at worst, outright harmful to games.

On the other side, ludology is opposed (in some minds) by *narratology*, proponents of which see games as simply a new form in the larger tradition of narrative structures, such as fiction and film. The narratologist theory of games is an expansion of the one that scholars in film, dramatic and literary theory have utilized for decades, defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as:

"The study of the structure and function of narrative, esp. (in structuralist and post-structuralist theory) as analogous to linguistic structure; the examination and classification of the traditional themes, conventions, and symbols of the narrated story."

This oppositional construction is, in some ways, an arbitrary one—many so-called ludologists, for example,

acknowledge the presence and use of narrative elements in games, even if they do not primarily value narrative analysis. Arbitrarily constructed or not, however, the positions that the terms, at their extremes, demarcate serve as useful boundaries, within which a lot can happen.

The fundamentalist ludic position is hard to refute on a certain level. Semantically, it's true—games are *not* stories. But the problem with this setup is that it creates, or at the least implies, a binary opposition of game and narrative. The formal structure of games does differ from traditional narrative and storytelling forms in some vital ways, true, but the construction "game is not story" puts us in a context that tends to preclude narrative. It is clear that these two terms are not fundamentally oppositional,<sup>8</sup> for while a game may not intrinsically be a story, it certainly could contain a story, or possibly even *depend* on a story for its context and resolution. And if narrative can potentially play such a pivotal role in the construction of a game, a narratologist might argue, could not such a game be understood as a narrative form?

The short answer from our strict ludologist would be, of course, "no," precisely because narrative is not a precondition for a game to exist—the existence of *Tetris* is

his proof. But just because one *can* create a game not predicated on narrative doesn't mean that all games are so constructed. In fact, many of the games mentioned so far were designed from the first to include a narrative arc. And in real terms, even 'hardcore' ludologists like Gonzalo Frasca, who is credited with the first use of "ludology" in the context of video games, don't deny the potential value of narrative study<sup>9</sup>. So the question remains: how has such an oppositional relationship between game and story, ludology and narratology, developed?

Perhaps most importantly, because games are fundamentally interactive, while stories are not. Stories are something we as the audience listen to, or read, or watch. They are transmitted to us—we do not actively create them as they are told. The delineation between storyteller and audience is clear. In games, however, as was mentioned, the player has agency (illusory though it may be)—s/he has direct influence over the progress of the game. To look at it another way: when you start a movie, it will continue until its end, whether or not you are there to watch it. If you walk out of a cinema, the film keeps rolling; the story unfolds for the empty air. Its story has, in a way, already been told long before you started it. By contrast, when you begin a game, it cannot

and will not progress unless you play it. The story hasn't yet been told—it requires an actor (the player) to move forward. Games theorist Jesper Juul, arguing for a ludic view (or more accurately, *against* a narratological one), proposes that this *synchronicity* of story time and narrative time is unique to games, and is opposed to traditional narrative forms in which the two are separate. The presence of a narrator necessarily creates both a passive audience (expressed by Plato and Aristotle as *diegesis*, as opposed to *mimesis*) and a story that has already happened: “This means that *you cannot have interactivity and narration at the same time*” (Juul 2001). The impossibility of a diegetic form, claims Juul, makes it impossible to define games using traditional narrative frameworks. As laid out, this is true, but as we have discussed, gestalt interplay and the illusory nature of player agency takes care of this apparent disjunction—the player knows s/he is following a prewritten/programmed sequence, but immersion in the game world removes, or at least minimizes, this as an obstacle.

So here, then, we have the essence of the games-are-or-aren't-narrative argument. But when it's all said and done, the question to ask is, “of what value are these distinctions?” Both ludic and narratologist definitions

leave a great deal to be desired, to be sure—honestly, it says something when it's difficult for even the participants to tell who is on which side. But still, the two positions on each side of this "argument" offer solid rhetorical pillars, from which a more robust understanding of games, their construction and operation, can be built. We can then use this understanding, along with Aristotelian theory, which we will discuss next, as a basis for examining games' relation to dramatic structures, and more specifically, to gain a better notion of my particular dramaturgical and creative processes.

## **Act 2: The Chase**

### **Aristotle's *Poetics* in relation to games**

The Aristotelian model of dramatic structure, as laid out in the *Poetics*, has stood as the foundation of "Western" dramatic storytelling traditions for much of the last two millennia. Speaking generally, most forms of Western dramatic narrative can be divided into one of two categories: the followers, who adhere to the Aristotelian model, whether explicitly or implicitly, and the opponents, who most often explicitly refute or challenge the Aristotelian model. Whether it's French Neoclassicism or Berthold Brecht's epic theatre, Aristotle's analysis has largely set the terms of the debate for over two thousand years. The novel was probably the first narrative form to think outside the Aristotelian box, as it were, with its ability to range in time like epic, and its focus on internal character exploration over character action. And as new methods of storytelling based on new technology have developed, new structures have developed to exploit them. Film and television have been the major players in this, and for good reason—the technology and fundamental process of film differs in many ways from the dramatic traditions on which it built its initial identity, and the central

importance of technological innovation to the mediatized forms of performance gave rise to a different way of thinking about the dramatic structure of narrative. Yet, despite the incredible changes wrought by film and television, they share one quality with other traditional dramatic forms—they are *passive*. As noted earlier, this means that (in general) the older mediatized forms are transmitted to an audience that absorbs the narrative (via the performance) but does not shape it. But this is where the realm of interactive and game narrative exists—in the world of (to use Roland Barthe's term) intertextuality, of audience authority, of player power. In a game, the player expresses a feeling of agency and a sense of authorial power. Anyone who has played a video game on a Nintendo Entertainment System (NES), or any other home game console, has experienced such a feeling, that they decide the outcome of the story, even if the agency is illusory.

So the question stands: how useful are the traditional paradigms of narrative discourse in the context of new media forms such as video games? From a narratologist standpoint, the utility is apparent—if games are just another form of narrative, then the traditional tools should work just fine. A ludologist would of course see the opposite. But since games are, as we have seen, a

hybrid typology, one that contains both narrative and ludic elements (its double helix, to use Douglas Brown's phrase), then a reexamination of the 'original' narrative theory may provide us with a new lens through which to view their operation, as well as a potentially provocative and productive method for thinking about theatrical narrative and its construction.

With all these things in mind, let's look at the six elements of Aristotelian drama—how they operate in their original context, and also how they can offer a vocabulary for understanding the narrative aspects of video game construction. I will take each element as a (largely) discrete section, organized by their original order of importance. There will of course be some amount of overlap, in particular when dealing with plot and character, but we'll endeavor to note these imbrications and make them as clear as possible.

A final note: I use the term 'drama' here as a general substitute for Aristotle's term 'poetry', as the six elements apply to both tragedy and comedy.<sup>10</sup>

## **PLOT**

The most important structural element of poetry—what we call drama these days—in Aristotelian analysis, plot is

indispensable. There is not, Aristotle claims, a drama that lacks plot. Plot is action, characters *doing* things, and without action there is no drama (Janko 9). You can forgo every other aspect of drama, but you *must* have plot. This is true of tragedy and epic, as well as comedy. This basic breakdown of the Aristotelian principle of plot also describes a key principle of the building blocks of game design in both the narrative and ludic gestalts. Games, in both aspects, are based upon action. For example, the most tangible ludic aspect is the player's physical input. In nearly every game, the input from the player is directly represented by action—avatar movement, attack, object or resource use, etc. And as we determined earlier in our discussion, game narrative is only pushed forward through the actions taken by the player. (In many games, if the player simply lets the avatar sit idle, they will begin to show signs of boredom or irritation, subtly reminding the player of the need to take action to progress!)

Aristotle's analysis of plot, however, is far more detailed, and reveals many of the fundamental differences between traditional and interactive narrative structures. To begin, the best plot is, in Aristotelian terms, *linear*. Actions should occur in order—beginning, middle, and end; they are defined by their relation to other actions in a

clear cause and effect manner, according to probability and necessity (10-11). Beginning a story *in medias res*, or at a random point, is a less effective method in Aristotle's analysis. This view is not universally accepted in any new media, as film's development evidences, but games and interactive media really underline how much technology has changed the way artists are able (and willing) construct plot. Nonlinear hypertext fiction uses experimental plot structures to change the audience experience, and video game plot, mediated so much by user agency, has from early days utilized nonlinear, player-driven narrative (the text-based *Zork* series is a classic example), as well as game worlds and narrative not dependent on any kind of linear design at all, such as the generally 'open box' world of *Elder Scrolls 4: Oblivion*, which acts as an open storybook, within which the player can opt to follow the designed narrative, or simply explore the world of the game.

Now, having said that, it must again be noted that the majority of game narratives are basically linear. As discussed earlier, the game needs the player to play, as it were, but the agency is illusory—the player's decisions don't really determine *how* things run most of the time, just whether or not they do. Much of game narrative design still revolves around a small number of choices—branching

possibilities—that inevitably run back into the backbone, the main story thread. The player is in a slot car—every decision will ultimately lead down the same road to the same end. You can fight an enemy or avoid him, you can take the left fork or the right, but you end up in the same spot afterwards no matter what. Of course, this is not true of all games, and it is becoming less and less true as games become more narratively sophisticated, but it remains the general rule.

There is also the issue of scope, or magnitude. Bigger is better, says Aristotle, as long as the whole is still comprehensible (11). Setting aside the neoclassical guideline that drama must represent a single day's action, the point is that magnitude of plot must be manageable. Make it too big and the audience loses the narrative arc. Like the blind men with the elephant, there will be too much to take in.<sup>11</sup> This is true of both 'whole', or linear plots, as well as episodic plots like Homer's epics (7, 11). In terms of most single-player video games, this principle holds—if a designer gives the player too many possibilities, too many branching choices, the player will most likely lose track of the central thread and get lost, and eventually frustrated or bored. This is not always true, of course—as mentioned above, *Elder Scrolls IV*:

*Oblivion* is an example of a game specifically designed to allow unlimited player action, with no central narrative that *must* be followed. But for the most part, games limit the player's choices so as to keep things manageable (if only just). And going back to Aristotle's idea of action being whole—that is to say, related to the main plot through probability and necessity—we can see another striking difference. Video games, as well as other forms of new media, employ tangential actions in a variety of ways to increase player interest and engagement. Easter eggs, achievements, side missions, embedded mini-games, optional "bosses"—none of these things are valued in the Aristotelian model. The existence of such tangential material is acknowledged by Aristotle, but he views them as distractions, markers of an inferior dramatic work (12). Looking at such devices from the perspective of game design, they are undeniably superfluous—one could play a game from beginning to end and completely ignore them, and suffer not one whit for it—but they are important, both for the way in which they deepen the immersive world and thus foster a sense of player agency, as well as the basic "fun" value of solving a puzzle or finding a hidden item. This value is evident, whatever paradigm one follows, and reinforces the hybrid gestalt nature of games.

## **CHARACTER**

Second in importance to plot is character. While one can technically have plot without character, as Aristotle states, such a work would probably not be very engaging or enjoyable (this connects to *catharsis*—an audience would be hard pressed to experience pity and terror with no characters). Moving from this, character is also not about categorically *good* or *evil* people, but people not unlike ourselves, people possessed of both qualities, which is what allows us to identify with them and their decisions. Character, the types of people represented, are defined by their action, claims Aristotle (Janko 19). In short: people make decisions, and these decisions identify their character. Man, woman or slave, noble or ignoble, a character is not what s/he says, but what s/he does. As long as the character's decisions/actions are appropriate—that is, according to probability and necessity—believable, and consistent, it is well-drawn (19). Now in a strictly Aristotelian sense, character is defined as action, or decision, but the usage of the word within theatre has changed over the centuries, and so bears clarifying. Particularly in the modern era, 'Character' has come to mean more than just the active decisions represented. It

now encompasses the internal life, as well, which incorporates Aristotle's idea of Reasoning (more on this shortly). It is both the actions *and* the thoughts of the person.

From a design point of view, character is as vitally important to games as any other medium—or at least it should be—but there is a long-standing tradition of character development getting short shrift in video games, which would seem to point to a lack of concern among game designers regarding narrative. This is unfortunate, because in the use of character we can see perhaps the best illustration of the dynamic tension of authored gestalt interplay, that pull and push between narrative and gameplay gestalts in the creation of good games. When primacy is given to the gameplay gestalt, narrative depth is often sacrificed, which is seen most clearly through the lack of sympathetic engagement with the protagonist and other characters—a rather simple example is the character of Mario in *Donkey Kong*, whose quest to rescue his special lady friend is forgotten beneath the mechanics of gameplay. Conversely, where narrative is the primary focus, we may see a great deal of nuance and depth of character, but there is the threat of diminishment in the player's engagement with the game itself (the extreme of this would

be interactive fiction and hypertexts, which offer no gameplay as such, other than, perhaps, the interactivity of a mouse click). The most compelling games are those designed to utilize both gestalts in tandem, which create engaging characters in engaging narratives that increase immersion and, in turn, reinforce the player's sense of agency through the process of gameplay itself. The driving force behind this is to increase the player's active engagement with the game—a purpose not too different from a dramatist's goal of audience engagement with the questions and story of a play.

#### **REASONING (THOUGHT)**

As we mentioned, this component has become conflated with character over time, but as Aristotle treats them as separate qualitative parts, I will do the same. In Aristotelian terms, reason works in a similar manner to character, but with different aim. Character is what people say, and the decisions they make—if you make a long speech with no decision in it at all, it does not have character. Reasoning, on the other hand, is the means through which characters make statements about the world, how they “demonstrate that something is or is not” (Janko 9-10). Where character is concrete decision, reasoning is

abstract thought. Both of these ideas are tied to appropriateness—characters must be appropriate in their reasoning and action, as we mentioned, which means that both what they do (decide) and think (reason) must fit with who they are as a person/character (citizen, orator, woman, slave, etc).

Reasoning, in this use, is important to game design for much the same reason that it's important in drama—it is how we learn about the intangibles of the authored world, and a large part of how we perceive characters, particularly the ones that we encounter through the avatar. Building such elements of reasoning into a game world and its characters serves to deepen the player's engagement with other characters, so long as it is appropriate. If a character gives a view of the world, or demonstrates that something is/not, but it isn't appropriate—if it has no 'truth'—for that character, it breaks the immersive trance, creates a sense of disjointedness. The audience/player must then attempt to cognitively assimilate it, usually as a mechanic of gameplay ("That must mean I need the red key to get to level five"), which destroys the harmony, the creative tension between the gestalts. Reasoning's primary value is in helping to define the world of the game, the frame within which the narrative exists. Through reasoning

and character, the designer creates the structures that order the game world. If the player can't understand what "is or is not" in the world, even if it's an ambiguous state of affairs, s/he will lose interest in it. Again, this is not too far afield from the principles of the dramatist—pushing the audience to question the way things work, why things are the way they are, to *reason*, is one of the goals of theatre, but like games, there must be a kind of understanding between play and audience. Break the immersive trance by forcing the audience to assimilate that which cannot be assimilated, and you lose their attention—and once lost, it is very difficult to get back.

## **DICTION**

Diction is "communication by means of language." In the strictest sense, it's the formal construction of the language, be it in prose (what we usually think of as dialogue), verse, or song (think "Oh What a Wonderful Morning" in *Oklahoma!*). Aristotle discusses diction in very formal terms, breaking down the constituent parts of the language syntax, from individual sounds and letters to their combination into words, sentences, thoughts. He explicitly removes the form of diction, or the manner in which the language is communicated, from his analysis,

placing it within the art of delivery. Whether something is spoken as a command or a request is outside the art of poetry (Janko 26). It is, more than anything, a breakdown of grammatical structure.

This analysis, with its focus on spoken language, needs some expansion. As human-computer interactivity pioneer Brenda Laurel has pointed out, nonverbal communication such as sign language falls under the heading of diction, communicating "in a way that takes into account the sensory modalities available to the audience," as do many forms of human-computer interaction (Laurel 56-7). This is worth noting in a game design context, as these choices of verbal and nonverbal language clarify character thought and appropriateness. The manner in which a character speaks has become much more important to dramatic narrative over the years, as writers have built ambiguous diction—and in defiance of Aristotle, ambiguous delivery of diction—to complicate character. Writing a line of lament that clearly reads as a command gives a sense of depth, of the internal character lurking behind the outward appearance (when done well, anyway). In an interactive context, this can serve to make the player's interaction with the game characters via the avatar more complex, and therefore more immersive (the game *Mass Effect* is a good

illustration of this principle). If the player/avatar interacts with a computer character who complements you, but with delivery that implies a request, or in a way that suggests an insult, this introduces a new set of choices and a different range of responses, a clear application of the narrative gestalt that enhances the gameplay, which in turn makes the player experience that much richer.

### **SONG**

Song is... well, it's just what it says. In Aristotelian terms, songs are a part of drama and are duly acknowledged, but Aristotle allotted little importance to the "embellishments" of song and spectacle; he devotes only a handful of lines to song (or melody, as it is sometimes translated) in *Poetics*, essentially saying that the definition of song is self-explanatory and moving on (Janko 8). The embellishments are sometimes read as the auditory (song) and visual (spectacle) components of drama, facets not tied to the art of the poet, just as delivery of diction is not, but however they are interpreted, it is clear that Aristotle did not think them very important to his study.

In the realm of games and interactive media, song/melody has corollaries. Some games use rhythmic and

melodic constructions to serve similar functions, as evidenced by rhythm-based games and games like Rock Band and Guitar Hero—these two in particular use song as the central conceit of the game, if not necessarily as narrative. Since most video game and new media narratives are based on a non-musical sensibility, however, song remains exactly what Aristotle described it as: an embellishment, to be used sparingly, like a seasoning for food (which is, in fact, the literal meaning of 'embellishment', a metaphor which Aristotle took from cooking) (88).

### **SPECTACLE**

This is where we see the biggest difference between Aristotelian and interactive/video game narrative structure. Aristotle acknowledges spectacle, but he sees it as the least important aspect of drama, from the standpoint of the poet. It's the showy things, the dragon chariots, the things that dazzle the audience but don't help them understand what's really important. Spectacle is therefore placed in the realm of the designer, the builder of masks and costumes. Aristotle does admit that the visual aspects of drama have value to the performance, to

the theatre event as a whole, but they are not part of the poet's art, and so not a part of his study (Janko 10).

Given the dual nature of interactive media and games, however, spectacle becomes perhaps the most intriguing entry point for analysis. It encompasses the gameplay gestalt at the heart of games; it is all the non-narrative, ludic parts of game design, there whether or not narrative aspects are present. The idea of spectacle covers just about everything that differentiates games from traditional narratives. It is gameplay, level design, puzzle construction, et al. Making the player press a button to make the protagonist jump, or inputting a sequence of keystrokes to initiate an action? It doesn't get more "art of the designer" than that. Spectacle is (and I suspect always has been) technology-driven, both in games and drama. New technologies in hardware and software are developed, and the spectacle is refined more and more as designers are able to utilize a wider spectrum of tools. And these, at least potentially, can be used to further immersion in the world and support the narrative gestalt as it works dynamically with gameplay.

At its core, spectacle is primarily the visual elements of drama. The most obvious element of spectacle, and the one especially important to the newest generation

of games, is graphics. For many game designers, graphics capability is what pushes game design, both ludically and narratively, forward—if you can fit more explosions on screen, if you can show a tie fighter in a dogfight with an x-wing, you can (some believe) give the player far more of the game world than you can if Donkey Kong looks like a fudge brownie.<sup>12</sup> The importance of graphics illustrates particularly well how game design theory integrates the idea of spectacle into what we can view as a specific notion of *mimesis*.

As outlined in the *Poetics*, *mimesis* is a representation of the world (or a world, as the case may be), as in a painter's landscape, an imitation through which we (the audience) can recognize some aspect of our own world. The drive in games toward ever more believable character motion, detailed game worlds, and real-world physics aims at a sense of visual verisimilitude that will ideally make the game world a believable representation of a "real" world, whether it be a verdant jungle or a distant, rugged planetscape. This, in turn, reinforces the player's immersion in the game. *Mimesis* is not, however, just graphics. A well-designed puzzle, for instance, serves the same purpose of immersion and agency, and should make sense, both visually and conceptually, within the game

world. Having a caveman make a cell phone call in Victorian London would create a jarring inconsistency, the disjointedness that threatens the immersive state. Likewise, *mimesis* is not expressed only through the backdrop of the world, but is interpreted in both ludic and narrative designs, and is often a point of imbrication between them, reinforcing the interplay of narrative and gameplay in games. An entire segment of character design, as we just mentioned, strives for realistic movement and visual appearance, including facial expressions. This, in turn, gives designers additional ways to deepen immersion in the game narrative. For example, designing a character that shows evasive body language when he is lying adds a level of depth and complexity that affects the narrative direction. Also, increasingly complex narrative structures can create new possibilities in the ludic arena: using the example above, well-written dialogue, working in tandem with visual body language cues, can shape a player's reaction, and determine which one of a number of choices s/he decides upon. While spectacle may not have been very important to Aristotle's dramatic theory—though he did value the pleasure derived from visual spectacle—it is perhaps the most influential aspect of game design, giving

body and shape to the narrative structures, as well as the player's relationship to the game world.

Hopefully, this breakdown of Aristotle in relation to games has given us yet more tools in our critical belt, and a vocabulary based in a common narrative history, reapplied to a truly new and different form. Combined with our earlier discussion of ludic and narratological paradigms, we have been able to look at games and drama side-by-side, to view each with an eye to the forms and structures of the other, and we've found some common ground between them. We can see in common an impetus to forge a connection with an audience, to engage them both viscerally and critically, to immerse them in a created world. We can also see some of the concerns of each, some potential stumbling blocks and imbalances. And while a common—and valid—criticism of video games is that they do not often attempt (and rarely succeed in) critical engagement with players, do not make them think about or question anything except how to 'win,' there is something important in that critique that dramatists can learn from, for it can be fairly said that theatre tries too hard to make audiences think, that it too often attempts critical engagement without visceral engagement—that as dramatists, we forget that theatre is also about entertainment.

Now, to entertain—that is the goal that permeates my own work as a playwright (though whether or not I have thus far succeeded is another matter). Even more than critical engagement, my own dramatic impulse has always been toward visceral engagement, and the simple desire to tell a good tale. I want my writing to spur audiences to think critically, of course, but I believe that the message must be in service to the art. And given my proclivity for formalism in both scholarship and creative work, it can be fairly said that the art has been, for me, rooted in the rigorous construction of narrative. The formal analyses of Aristotle are, as we have seen, of great interest to me, and they have influenced nearly every piece of drama I have created. I am likewise fascinated by the new mediums of storytelling that this wondrous age has developed, and their capacity to expand narrative possibilities for me as a writer. As my knowledge of these forms has increased, I have been able to expand my reach, so to speak, as a writer, using the formal structures as my springboard. Above all, I think, developing this understanding of different narrative forms and models has helped me to understand my own work, and my own creative impulses and process.

### **Act 3: Junior**

#### **Synthesis—Looking Back, Looking Ahead**

Finally, now that all the fun heavy lifting is done, we come to it—the reflective critical examination. The question at hand—how does all this critical analysis, all this ground we've covered help in the understanding of my work as a playwright? What can we glean as regards my past dramaturgical choices, creative inspirations and future goals?

Well, I think there are a couple of ways to approach that question—looking at the work that exists, and the process of creative development that has accompanied it, for one, is necessary. But just as important, I think, is to look at where I am now, what are my ideas and impulses going forward, and how my research and background in technology continues to shape my view of, and approach to, the craft of writing. Since we've invested so much in it, let's approach in truly Aristotelian fashion, and look at this as a whole action with magnitude, starting with where I've been.

As I discussed at the outset, my critical purpose has been to make a comparative, formal study of dramatic and game structures. This was not, I suspect, a surprising endeavor—as anyone who has encountered my work in the

academy can probably attest to, I have long been a devotee of formalist and structuralist paradigms, and rarely stray too far afield from them in my own scholarship. Likewise, my creative work has historically turned upon a formal understanding of the workings of dramatic plot. The first play I wrote at UNM, *Thorn In My Side*, was explicitly conceived and executed to follow a Neoclassical model (English Restoration comedy, to be exact). I have always felt that if one is going to be a writer of plays, one should have an understanding of the ways in which plays are constructed. To restate a phrase I first learned from music theory: you have to know the rules inside and out before you can effectively break them.

(Curiously, *Thorn in My Side's* original draft contained the only example of interactivity to ever appear in my stage work—a multi-path, “Choose Your Own Adventure”-style ending, in which the audience voted to decide the final, climactic decision of the protagonist.)

The other side of my particular coin is, of course, my lifelong connection to computers and technology. Many people have found it odd that someone with such a close relationship to technology could also devote himself to the rather “artsy,” and comparatively low-tech, world of the theatre. When one looks at my formalist tendencies,

however, this relationship makes a kind of sense. And while I have not until now really explored the connections between theatre and other, technology-heavy forms of narrative, I've applied concepts rooted in my second life as a computer professional to my creative process as a writer. For example, a variation on the idea that Aristotle expresses as "appropriateness": in the context of both playwriting and my other life in technical support, I think and talk in terms of logical flow, or internal consistency, something I use often in the context of technology. The information given must be appropriate and consistent, but only to its own processes. A computer operates logically, all ones and zeroes, according to determined rules; when something doesn't follow the rules, the computer crashes. In a dramatic context, I take this to mean that the story has to follow the rules it sets up from the outset, else it loses the audience-the immersive trance is broken. When the audience has to reconcile a disjointed narrative, or when they have to cognitively determine how something can happen, they are taken out of their immersion, just like the game player given an inappropriate narrative clue.

All of this points to my core belief in the meticulous construction of plot. My work throughout the years has

always been plot-oriented, often to a fault—when developing ideas for my second full-length play, in fact, Elana Greenfield expressly forbade me working on any play that I had conceived plot-first. This led to *J&E*, a play that forced me to reevaluate many of my ideas about narrative. Just as the narrative gestalt of video games works in tension with the gameplay gestalt, so too, I found, does the development of fully-developed character exist in a give and take with plot construction: focus too much on one, and the other suffers for it. Because *J&E* was based on the Biblical tale of Jacob and Esau, I felt I could focus on the character development exclusively, and largely ignore plot—after all, the story was already sketched out for me. But by ignoring it, I ended up with a plot that was flat and not engaging at all, a story that was anything but immersive for an audience. And as I have stressed throughout this essay, engagement is the keystone, the ultimate goal, for theatre as well as games—only the means to that end differ.

Understanding that audience engagement is the aim of any play, any film, or any game, we are able to methodically break down the ways in which these media work toward that goal, and again, by looking at them formally, we can gain a sense of what properties they share. As I

developed *The End of the End of Autumn*, my adaptation of Aristophanes' *The Frogs*, I likewise looked at the structure of the Greek text in relation to the Vaudevillian structures that I wanted to play with. Armed with what I had learned from *J&E*, I focused my attention on what made the original so engaging after more than two millennia, as well as the qualities of Vaudeville performance that resonated with me from an audience standpoint. This was invaluable in the process of creating what I believe is possibly my most unified and consistently engaging work to date (although *Journey to Oni Crag* is, I believe, a more sophisticated play overall).

The real kick in the proverbial pants, though, is the sure knowledge that all the theory and all the critical analysis can't, at the end of the day, actually *write* a play. As writers, we study the theories, the structures, the ideas that underlie all these plays and stories, in an effort to add tools to our creative belts, as it were—but this always carries with it the threat of getting overwhelmed by it all, of not being able to synthesize all that we've learned. We get lost in trying to figure out which tool to use. At some point, we have to pick up the hammer and go to work, and see if what we build stands up. This principle (sans carpentry) effectively describes the

development process behind my thesis work, *Journey to Oni Crag*. *Oni Crag* was originally written at the request of the then-literary manager for the Organic Theatre Company in Chicago. She asked me if I'd like to write a play for them, possibly for young audiences, and suggested a "green" theme; this was the sum of the material I had to work with. While I was at first excited by the seemingly infinite possibilities this offered, I quickly got bogged down trying to determine how exactly I would write the thing. After much frustration and zero production, I asked the literary manager for clarification—what, exactly, did she like about my plays? Essentially, I asked her to show me what tools to use. Once I had a clear direction, I was able to set aside those things that I didn't need and come up with a play concept that she loved, which became *Journey to Oni Crag*. As I mentioned above, while *The End of the End of Autumn* is probably my most unified play from front to back, *Oni Crag* is the most sophisticated play I've written to date, and this is because as I developed *Oni Crag*, I gained a confidence in my writing, a familiarity with all the tools at hand, that allowed me to identify and use what I needed to create the play and set aside the things I didn't. It's still a work in progress, of course, as *Oni Crag* shows—I'm not a master craftsman yet. There

are things I tried to do that don't quite work, that need refinement, but my increased confidence in my own instincts allowed me to create a work that approaches, more than any other play I've written, the kind of story I really want to tell—the engaging and immersive kind.

Trying things you're not sure of, combinations that might not fit, is one of the most important, and daunting, things a writer can do, but that risk taking is what makes memorable theatre (as well as memorable games) possible. And if all my study of drama and film and games, of formal structures and gender issues, has shown me anything, it is this—that we always, whether we know it or not, write what we know. Not what we've directly experienced, but what we know about how things work. How the world gets through each day, how people relate to one another. How we *engage* one another, day in and day out, with stories and gestures and yes, games.

This is where I sit in my creative development, knowing far more than I did when I began, but still learning how to use it all. The question remains only half-answered: having looked at where I've been, can I now see where I'm going?

Obviously, the foundations of the ideas that I've explored throughout this project have been with me in some

form for a while now. Aristotle has always been a large part of both my critical and creative development, and my background with computers has informed much of my worldview generally. Looking ahead, it is unlikely that their influence on my process will disappear. Technology will enmesh itself in human culture more and more, becoming even more part and parcel of our daily lives, and whether or not my future as a writer lies in theatre, or perhaps in games, the principles that I've explored here—immersion, narrative structure, interactivity, the interplay of man and machine—will continue to play an important role in my dramaturgical and creative process. After all, at the end of the day, theatre is about people and how they understand the world around them. With technology becoming one of the defining aspects of human existence, I'll have lots of stories to tell, and lots of interesting tools to tell them with. With any luck, I'll be engaging to boot.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Brenda Laurel's *Computers as Theatre* for another excellent, and in-depth, discussion of Aristotle in relation to computers.

<sup>2</sup> I borrow performance theorist Derek Burrill's term "open box" here to describe specifically non-narrative-driven worlds, and games that allow the player to freely explore without the need to follow a specific storyline.

<sup>3</sup> For more on this, see Lindley, "Narrative, Gameplay, and Alternative Time Structures for Virtual Environments," and Brown, "Gaming DNA—On Narrative and Gameplay Gestalts."

<sup>4</sup> For example, while there is agency in Tetris—the player decides where and how to place every block—there isn't really a narrative world for the player to get immersed in. Janet Murray, in *Hamlet on the Holodeck*, argues that Tetris has "clear dramatic content," calling it "a perfect enactment of the overtaken lives of Americans in the 1990s" (Murray 144). While I don't dispute the validity of this assessment, the fact remains that this is not a part of the game design itself—it is a narrative context laid atop a structure that has none of its own.

<sup>5</sup> Both of these, it should also be noted, have very simple control mechanisms and rules. For example, *Katamari Damacy*'s controls are a nearly unembellished tank-style, using the left and right analog sticks, and its rules are likewise simple—roll up everything you can, relative to your katamari's size, which is the game's primary limiting factor (along with time limits).

<sup>6</sup> In this game series, the player controls the titular Prince, who can, among other things, run along walls and perform incredible acts of acrobatics. The rules governing these actions, however, are based on real-world physics—the laws of gravity, for example, prevent the Prince from running along a wall indefinitely.

<sup>7</sup> This seems to be changing, however, as an encouraging number of games are utilizing advances in hardware and software to help deepen narrative sophistication and player immersion. Even games in the traditionally narrative-averse First Person Shooter genre are making strides, as can be seen in *Half Life 2* (2004) and *Bioshock* (2007), both award-winning FPS games praised for their strong storylines as well as their gameplay.

<sup>8</sup> The OED definition of story is "A Succession of incidents, 'plot' (of a novel, poem, or drama)," while the definition of game is "A diversion of the nature of a contest, played according to rules, and displaying in the result the superiority either in skill, strength, or good fortune of the winner or winners."

<sup>9</sup> See Frasca, "Ludologists Love Stories, Too: Notes from a Debate That Never Took Place."

<sup>10</sup> Poetics, of course, deals only with tragedy, but surviving fragments of other works by Aristotle indicate that he used the same framework to analyze comedy. See Richard Janko's translation of Poetics, which includes a reconstruction of these fragments, for more.

<sup>11</sup> This analogy, curiously, is a good illustration of the design impetus behind the Alternate Reality Game (ARG)—a structure intentionally made so large that it takes the combined efforts of a huge number of people—all the blind men working together, so to speak—to decipher it.

<sup>12</sup> The 'brownie' Donkey Kong references the Atari 2600 version of the game, sometimes poked fun at for its primitive graphics.

JOURNEY TO ONI CRAG  
or,  
The VALLEY OF WALKING DREAMS  
an adventure

© 2007

## CAST

SIR IAN CALDECOTT. Adventurer extraordinaire.  
GUY FROMAGE. Caldecott's former friend, turned nemesis.  
MABEL. Caldecott's sister. Courted by Guy.  
The STORYTELLER. A Mysterious figure.  
WORTHINGTON. Caldecott's butler.  
YURI. Concierge at the Refined Gentlemen's Club, London.  
The ONI. Guardian of the Crag.  
BABA YAGA. Ancient, wise, and just a bit cranky.  
FENGHUANG. Empress of birds.  
NAGA. Guardians of forests & rivers. Two of them.  
KITSUNE. Fox-people. Three of them; two women, one man.  
SERVANT. One of Guy's household.  
YETI, aka FRANK.  
MORDECHAI.  
STANLEY!

## PLACE

All over the world! England, Russia, China, Japan... we're globetrotting, folks.

## TIME

Once upon a. More specifically, the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## Prologue

(The stage is empty and dark. Then, a single spot on an area off to one side, just outside the play's world. Here sits the STORYTELLER.)

STORYTELLER

In days long past, when the world was young and filled with glamour, the creatures of myth and legend lived alongside the young races of man and beast.

(His hands move; a Minotaur, Cúchulainn, and a young FENGHUANG appear.)

Back then, magic infused the earth, flourishing in the wild, untamed places of nature. It sustained the legendary races, and they settled in every corner of the world.

(The three explore the world, carving out their places.)

But these days of peace were not destined to last, and as mankind multiplied, the glamour of the earth began to fade. The races of man grew and spread, while those born from the primal magic of the earth found themselves dwindling.

(The three seem to shrink, as if they were being surrounded.)

Some of these creatures were hunted by man, driven from their dwellings, or vanished, never to be seen again.

(The Minotaur shrinks into itself until it vanishes.)

Others, the most ancient and proud, resolved to hold on to their place in the world, summoning all their strength to carve safe havens for themselves, far from the prying eyes of these men.

(Fenghuang puffs up and summons her magic, repelling the invisible forces. She settles in, defiant, and vanishes.)

STORYTELLER (CONT)

Still others accepted their inevitable destiny and became part of mankind's world, dwindling along with the ancient magic of the earth, until they were merely shadows of their former nature.

(Cúchulainn looks around, sets down his heroic gear, puts on a jacket and glasses, and picks up a briefcase. He heads to the office, looking depressed.)

But as the last days of magic approached, and the last of the mythical creatures fought their doomed battle for survival... hope came to them. A man, one not of their kind, became their champion.

(CALDECOTT appears, surveying the play world; a spot shines on him, the set around him is dim.)

Against the rising tide of modern man, he fought to save them. But he was not without enemies. And the bitterest of these was once his best friend.

(Opposite Caldecott, GUY appears. He carries a rifle. Guy looks around and stalks off, hunting.)

This is the story we now unfold—how these two men, Ian Caldecott and Guy Fromage, battled to determine their fates, and the fate of all creatures of magic on earth.

(Caldecott leaves the spot; two chairs and a small table appear. He sits in one. The spot and the Storyteller vanish, with a grand flourish. Lights up on Caldecott.)

Scene 1

(We are at the Greater Upper London Refined Gentlemen's Club. Ian Caldecott sits in his chair, reading the newspaper. YURI, an

elderly Russian man, approaches  
with an envelope.)

YURI

A letter for you, Mr. Caldecott. From your lovely sister,  
I think. Give her my best wishes.

CALDECOTT

(taking the letter)

Thank you, Yuri. I will.

(Yuri exits; Caldecott examines  
the handwriting on the envelope,  
and his face breaks into a smile.  
He opens the letter. As he pulls  
it out, Mabel appears opposite.  
While he reads silently, she  
speaks the letter aloud.)

MABEL

Dearest Ian,  
I hope this letter finds you exceedingly well, and I hope  
that your trip to the Americas is a productive one. Oh,  
how I envy you your travels! I do wish you would let me  
come along one day. It would be ever so much fun, and I  
grow so weary of life here on the estate. I always feel as  
if I should be elsewhere, as if I'm somehow missing out on  
something. I'm sure you would tell me that it is only my  
"woman's childish nature" getting the best of me.  
Which reminds me—I do wish you wouldn't call the women in  
my weekly salon "crackpot hens," at least not to their  
faces. You really can be a chauvinist boor sometimes, Ian.

(Caldecott snorts derisively at  
this. Mabel shoots a glare at  
him, then continues.)

When you return home from your expedition, I shall endeavor  
to enlighten you regarding the suffragist movement and its  
necessity to a just world. One day, Ian, you may awaken to  
find a woman wielding the reins of power in England—and I  
do hope I can see your face on that day!

(Mabel starts to speak, but can't  
remember what she was going to  
say.)

MABEL

Do... uh, I-no, not I. Er...

(Caldecott is confused, looking at the letter. Mabel sputters for a moment, then walks over to Caldecott and reads the letter over his shoulder.)

MABEL

(scanning the letter, finds her place)  
Ah! "Do come back soon."

(Mabel returns to her spot and resumes.)

Do come back soon, dear brother. Despite myself, I am saddened by your absence. You are a boor, but I love you dearly. Until then, I remain your devoted sister, Mabel.

(Mabel starts to exit, but remembers the postscript.)

MABEL

Oh! Postscript. I would also like to assure you that at no point during your absence have I been entertaining your mortal enemy, Guy Fromage, in our sitting room. In no way whatsoever. And anything you may hear to the contrary is a vicious lie.

(Mabel exits, glancing at Caldecott as she goes to see if he believed that last bit. He sighs and shakes his head; she grimaces and exits. He puts the letter away. Meanwhile, Guy Fromage enters the room; Guy is very dapper, very civilized and has a luxurious, curling moustache. He approaches Caldecott.)

CALDECOTT

(unaware of Guy)  
Silly girl. You had better not be entertaining that scoundrel while I'm away.

GUY

Scoundrel? That's not very charitable, Ian.

(Caldecott stiffens but does not turn around.)

CALDECOTT

Not the worst thing I could call you, Guy. What do you want?

GUY

Tsk... no offer of a chair for a fellow club member? I expected better of you.

(Guy sits in the empty chair.)

GUY

I took the liberty of getting us drinks. I hope you don't mind.

(scanning the newspaper)

"J.P. Morgan buys out Carnegie, forms U.S. Steel." I tell you, America never ceases to amaze. Such industry, such inexhaustible drive.

(beat)

Well? Not even a civil greeting?

CALDECOTT

You and I are not friends, and I have no desire to be civil to you. Just being this close to you makes me feel ill.

GUY

You wound me, Ian. And after all we've been through together.

(relaxed)

So! How is Mabel?

CALDECOTT

She is well. That is all you need know. I hope for your sake that you have had no contact with her.

GUY

Ever the protective older brother. Admirable, though you are perhaps... overzealous at times. Still it is nice to know you care for her nearly as much as I do.

CALDECOTT

Enough. I don't believe for a moment your feelings for her are genuine. You simply find it amusing to infuriate me.

GUY

You misjudge me. She is an exquisite girl, and you do her a great injustice by keeping her caged. She is not some bauble to be displayed.

(beat)

And please, just to infuriate you? Don't inflate your own importance, Ian.

CALDECOTT

If I cannot save any other creature from you, Guy, she I will keep safe, at least. It pains me to see her unhappy, but far better that than the heartbreak when she realizes what you are.

GUY

(piqued)

And what am I? Are you so blind? You act as if I am to blame for every creature's demise on this earth, but for every one that I hunt there a dozen killed by other men—not evil murderers, but men bettering their world, as is their right. Is that wrong? Who are you to call them evil?

(beat. sympathetic)

The truth, my friend, much as it pains you, is that there is not room for both. Man has outgrown the old stories and the old ways—we are simply removing that which impedes progress.

CALDECOTT

Call it what you will, it is murder. It is greed. And I will not allow it.

GUY

You can hardly stop it, Ian. It is the future. Your sister understands—

CALDECOTT

My sister understands nothing, least of all you!

GUY

She, most of all, is the thing you cannot control. She will choose her own destiny, be it me or—

CALDECOTT

Not you, Guy. Not so long as I live.

(Silence. The two face each other.)

GUY

One day you will see. You cannot stop progress. You will only be left behind, a relic of the past.

(Guy heads for the door; YURI enters carrying two scotches. Guy exits. Caldecott sits, furious, but his anger gives way to depression.)

CALDECOTT

The devil take him, he's right.

(Yuri walks over to Caldecott and hands him one of the drinks.)

CALDECOTT

Oh, thank you, Yuri.

YURI

Mister Caldecott.

(beat)

What is the trouble?

CALDECOTT

Hm? Oh, nothing. Only Guy, as always.

YURI

The fire is gone from your eyes. You are feeling hopeless.

CALDECOTT

I don't know, Yuri. But Guy is winning, and I don't know how I can stop him.

YURI

You must fight, sir. I know the old world. I have spoken to the wild things, and they must have hope if they are to survive. You are their hope, Mister Caldecott.

CALDECOTT

Mean hope for them, Yuri. I am failing.

YURI

You are not failing, as long as you do what is right.

(beat.)

I had a cousin, in the motherland, who spoke of a woman she once met many years ago in Moscow, called Vasilissa. You have heard of her?

CALDECOTT

Yes, of course. Vasilissa the Beautiful. But I always thought she was fiction.

YURI

No. Much exaggerated, but very real. My cousin asked her if the stories of her were true. Vasilissa, she laughed and said there was not enough time in one life for all the adventures she was said to have had. But she said one story was very much true—the story of Baba Yaga.

(Caldecott shivers at the name.)

YURI

You know of her?

CALDECOTT

I do. I met her once, long ago.

YURI

Vasilissa claimed that the tales of Baba Yaga are only the tenth part of the truth, that the crone is wise beyond measure. Perhaps she could help you.

CALDECOTT

Meeting Baba Yaga was a... difficult experience, Yuri. I do not speak of it for a reason.

(pause)

But you may be right. It may be time for me to find her again.

(almost to himself)

As she said I would.

(Caldecott pulls the letter out, handles it gently while he thinks. Finally, he makes his decision.)

CALDECOTT

Yuri, have a wire sent to my estate telling them I will be

CALDECOTT (CONT)

away longer than expected.

(beat)

I must go to Russia.

(Caldecott exits, followed by Yuri. As they exit, Guy enters from the opposite side. He watches them, then raises his arm and snaps his fingers. Mordechai and Stanley enter.)

GUY

Follow him.

(Mordechai bows and exits. Stanley stands there, looking a bit confused. Beat. Mordechai returns, grabs Stanley by the collar and drags him off.)

Scene 3

(Lights down on stage. The spot on the Storyteller returns.)

STORYTELLER

And so Caldecott journeyed to the Empire of Russia, and with no small amount of fear. For the last time he journeyed there, his life had been changed forever. Now he returned, as it had been foretold, in search of one of the greatest of all the creatures of magic—Baba Yaga. The ancient crone, powerful beyond measure, source of a hundred legends, as many speaking of her cruelty as her wisdom.

(Lights up, dim, on stage. We are in a forest. Caldecott enters, wrapped in a cloak, searching. He looks weary, but determined.)

STORYTELLER

For weeks, Caldecott searched the wild places, the hidden corners of the Russian Empire. And he was not alone.

(Mordechai and Stanley appear, lurking behind Caldecott.)

STORYTELLER

From St. Petersburg to the frozen steppes, he searched, asking every creature he met along the way. Then, in the deepest forests...

(The spot fades; lights up on stage. The faint sound of a wailing wind is heard. The noise increases, building to a screaming howl, and the forest comes alive with a vortex of sound and light. Through this, an ancient and powerful voice stops Caldecott dead. Mordechai and Stanley hide behind a conveniently placed bush (or tree, rock, whatever).)

BABA YAGA

You who seek the ancient crone, beware! For I appear!

(The lights become blinding and the sound of wind overwhelms Caldecott. In an instant, all is back to normal. BABA YAGA stands facing Caldecott. She is ancient and terrible, her white hair spilling madly over her shoulders.)

BABA YAGA

Once again we meet, adventurer. As it was foretold, so must it be.

CALDECOTT

Though I wished not to search you out, Baba Yaga, I have come. Your wisdom I do now seek.

BABA YAGA

(beat)

"Your wisdom do I now seek?" What are you doing, Shakespeare? Speak like a normal person.

CALDECOTT

Oh. Sorry, I thought you wanted to—

BABA YAGA

I'm ancient and wise. I can speak however I want. When you do it, it just sounds ridiculous.

(beat)

WHAT DO YOU WANT?

CALDECOTT

Well, I... erm...

(Caldecott looks disappointed.)

BABA YAGA

Oh, all right.

(She gets into character.)

What would you ask of me, mortal? Speak.

(Caldecott brightens.)

CALDECOTT

Thank you. Is there a way to save your brethren, the creatures of legend? I fear that despite all I try, it is not enough.

BABA YAGA

(suddenly serious)

So. The time has come at last... There is a way, though at the end you will not wish it so.

CALDECOTT

But they can be saved? Guy can be stopped?

BABA YAGA

It may be that you can save those creatures who wish to be saved, but you cannot stop Guy, or mankind, from their advance. The earth does not have room for both us and them, much as we would wish otherwise.

CALDECOTT

(despairing)

If I cannot stop Guy, then everything I've done is for nothing.

BABA YAGA

Stop whining.

(beat)

BABA YAGA (CONT)

This is the beginning of the end, adventurer. The final, foretold time is upon us. The old magic vanishes, and the creatures born from the glamour of the ancient days must surely perish. But all is not lost—there is one last hope left to us.  
Listen well.

(The spot rises on the Storyteller, sitting on his familiar seat, watching the action. The lights dim on stage; Baba Yaga and Caldecott's conversation continues, but it is not heard.)

STORYTELLER

And listen he did. For Baba Yaga told him of the beginning and the ending, the first and the last.

(Caldecott is motioning to Baba Yaga that he can't hear her. Baba Yaga speaks louder, indicates that she can't hear him either. She looks to the Storyteller and yells something. Mordechai and Stanley are also silenced and confused. Stanley produces an ear horn, puts it to Mordechai's ear and yells into it. Mordechai slaps him away.)

STORYTELLER

The ancient and powerful crone spoke of the wondrous beginnings of all the creatures of legend and myth, and of—

(Baba Yaga walks over to the Storyteller and smacks him in the head.)

BABA YAGA

Do you *mind*? I'm trying to be mysterious and oracular here!

STORYTELLER

Oh, come on! I'm the storyteller, this bit is tailored for me!

BABA YAGA

If you had your way, the whole thing would just be you talking. Stop overdoing it.

(The spot fades on the Storyteller, who sits and pouts. Lights return to normal. Baba Yaga returns to her original spot. Mordechai and Stanley hide.)

BABA YAGA

Now, where was I...

CALDECOTT

Final hope.

BABA YAGA

Oh, right. The final hope for my kin born of magic. Listen well, Caldecott.

(Beat. The ear horn appears from behind the bush, listening intently. Stanley holds the ear horn while Mordechai scribbles notes.)

In the first days, all the creatures born of magic lived together. Our home was a valley, high in the frozen mountains of the distant east, hidden from the eyes of the mundane creatures of the earth. It was a place of primal magic, connected to this world but set apart, guarded and protected by the Oni, the oldest and strongest of the legendary peoples. But we left the valley to explore, to find our places in the

BABA YAGA (CONT)

young world, leaving it empty until the day of our return. So it was foretold by the Oni. So long ago was this, even the stories of the valley have been forgotten by all but the eldest of our kind. And now, the time of return is upon us—for a man, one not of our kind, holds the key to the Valley, and our return.

CALDECOTT

But where is this valley? Surely you, of all creatures, must know the way.

BABA YAGA

This wisdom I cannot give you, adventurer. I was the first to leave the valley, first to break the seals between your world and ours. For this, I was cursed by the Oni, that I should never find my way back, never return, until the last days.

CALDECOTT

That's no good.

BABA YAGA

You're telling me.

(foreboding)

You hold the key, Caldecott. But you must yet find the way alone. Go east, adventurer. Your destiny lies at the door of the dawning sun.

(Behind the bush, Mordechai writes intently, while Stanley looks befuddled by the metaphor. Mordechai exits; Stanley, however, forgets that he has the ear horn, and trips over it as he turns. Baba Yaga and Caldecott look at him. He waves sheepishly.)

STANLEY

Um... hullo.

CALDECOTT

Stanley!

(Stanley scrambles offstage. Baba Yaga incants, and a flash of light appears from his direction. Stanley yelps.)

BABA YAGA

That'll teach him to eavesdrop. Now, you have much to do, Caldecott. Go, and may your journey be successful. We will not meet again, unless the valley is found.

CALDECOTT

But the key-

BABA YAGA

No more questions, Caldecott. You must find the way.

(beat)

Now, shoo! Get going!

(Caldecott gets going. He exits, following Stanley. Baba Yaga, with a flourish, exits the way she entered, in a whirlwind of light and sound. Lights fade on the area after she is gone.)

Scene 4

(As lights fade on Baba Yaga, they come up on Mabel and Guy, in a sitting room at Caldecott's estate. They are holding hands and being in love.)

MABEL

Oh, this is unbearable, Guy. We can't keep being secretive like this. Ian must understand, he simply must!

GUY

I fear he won't. You underestimate his enmity toward me.

MABEL

But if you two were so close, how can he hate you now?

GUY

That was a long time ago, Mabel. Much has changed since then.

MABEL

I simply cannot believe Ian would be so heartless. When he returns, I shall speak to him about us. I will tell him in no uncertain terms that we are in love, and nothing he does can change that. He'll have to relent.

GUY

I wish I had your faith, Mabel. And perhaps you're right.

(standing)

But for now, things will have to remain as they are.

(Guy checks his fob watch; Mabel stands.)

MABEL

Must you go?

GUY

Yes. Don't worry, I will call again soon. Chin up, my dear.

(Guy leans down and kisses her gently.)

MABEL

I shall miss you every moment you are away, Guy. And I will speak to Ian when he returns. I'll make him understand.

GUY

(smiling)

I pray you succeed. I will see you soon.

(Guy bows to her and exits. Mabel watches him go. She continues to watch long after he is gone. Caldecott enters the room; Mabel is lost in thought and doesn't notice.)

CALDECOTT

Daydreaming again, Mabel?

(Mabel jumps, startled.)

MABEL

Ian! What are you doing here?

CALDECOTT

Well I do own the place.

MABEL

Can't you knock, for heaven's sake? How long have you been standing there?

CALDECOTT

Not long. I've missed seeing you, little sister. I wanted to come and say hello.

CALDECOTT (CONT)

(beat)

You're awfully jumpy today.

MABEL

Yes. No! Of course not. That is, I'm glad to see you, too.

(She gives him a kiss on the cheek.)

Welcome home, Ian.

CALDECOTT

It's good to be back.

(sitting)

So how have things been here at the estate? Have you been keeping busy?

MABEL

Oh, you know me, Ian. I have my books and my salons, and my writing.

CALDECOTT

Good for you. Exercise your mind, it's the greatest asset you have—aside from your natural charm and beauty, of course.

MABEL

You are a terrible flatterer, Ian.

(Mabel sits next to Caldecott, steeling herself.)

I want... that is, we should speak, Ian.

CALDECOTT

Yes, absolutely. I wanted to speak to you, actually. I know I've just returned home, but this is only a short visit.

MABEL

You're leaving *again*?

CALDECOTT

I know, but it's extremely important, Mabel. I would stay if I could, believe me.

MABEL

When?

CALDECOTT

Immediately. My things are being sorted now.

MABEL

But why so sudden? Can't you stay just for a bit?

CALDECOTT

I know you're disappointed, Mabel, but time is pressing, and it's a long journey east. I'm sorry.

(beat)

And I know I don't have to tell you, Guy is not allowed on the estate.

MABEL

(uncomfortable)

Well, naturally. But I want to talk to you about that.

CALDECOTT

We've already discussed it. And the answer is no. It's for your own good, Mabel. And since I know that you haven't been disobeying my instructions...

MABEL

Well... yes. Yes, of course. But Ian-

CALDECOTT

He hasn't been here. Correct?

MABEL

Yes. I mean no! I mean, he hasn't.

CALDECOTT

I see... very well. Then perhaps you can explain this.

(Caldecott pulls a monogrammed hankerchief from his pocket. The letters "GF" are printed in gold leaf on it. Mabel gets up, nervous.)

MABEL

I... haven't a clue. What is that? A hankerchief? How fascinating. I wouldn't know anything about it.

CALDECOTT

G. F. I know this monogram, Mabel. Now, the truth.

(Mabel is caught, and she knows it. She stalks the room, defiant.)

MABEL

Yes, fine! Guy was here. He paid me a visit, or perhaps two, and he was a perfect gentleman. He is everything I could want in a man—and what's more, he loves me! You must see that, Ian!

CALDECOTT

I thought I had made myself clear, Mabel. You are not to speak to Guy. You are not to exchange letters with him. You are not to have any contact with him at all!

MABEL

Why do you persecute him, so, Ian? He says you were once like brothers. How can you be so cruel to one you held so dear? And how can you be so cruel to me?

CALDECOTT

It is not your place to question my decisions. Suffice to say that I have my reasons. Guy Fromage is a vile, underhanded snake, and I will not allow you to be seduced by his cunning words or his curling moustaches!

MABEL

You cannot stop me from seeing him, Ian. I am, as you have so often told me, my own woman. And I shall see who I like.

(beat)

So there! And a fig for your tyrant nature!

(Caldecott sputters in indignation.)

CALDECOTT

You insolent girl! I'll... I'll... Well, you'll soon see what I'll do!

(He spins and exits, bellowing as he leaves.)

CALDECOTT

Worthington! If Guy sets foot on the estate, I want him shot!

(Beat. Mabel gives him another fig.)

MABEL

Rotten, beastly... brother!

(beat.)

I'll make you see.

(Strains of music fade in; a soft light shines on Mabel. She begins to sing.)

MABEL

*When I look out of my window  
At the world outside—*

(WORTHINGTON, the butler, enters the room. The music cuts off raggedly; Mabel is thrown off-balance.)

WORTHINGTON

Sorry to interrupt, Miss, but I've been instructed to tell you that you're not to leave the estate until Master Caldecot returns.

MABEL

What? But that's... that's kidnapping, is what it is! He has no right to keep me in!

WORTHINGTON

Sorry Miss, but those were the instructions. And if I may, he is still your guardian.

MABEL

Oh, curse his cruel, black heart! I shall never speak to him again!

WORTHINGTON

Yes miss. If you'll excuse me.

(Worthington bows and exits.  
Mabel spins in a huff and looks

plaintively to the skies. The music fades back in, and she picks up her song.)

MABEL

*When I look out of this window  
At the world outside these walls  
I wish that he could see—*

(Worthington enters again. The music cuts off again; Mabel nearly falls over this time.)

WORTHINGTON

Pardon, Miss, but Master Caldecott also left specific instructions. There are to be no musical numbers while he's away.

MABEL

AAAAGH! The pox take him!

(Worthington bows and exits in a hurry. Mabel gives up on the song. She mopes.)

MABEL

He may as well lock me up in a tower, just like Rapunzel!

(beat)

Well fine, she doesn't actually live in a tower, she owns a coiffure shop in Paris, but she used to live in one!

(Mabel fumes. She paces the room, thinking of horrible things that could happen to her brother. She stops, sneaks to the door and peeks outside.)

VOICE

(off)

Yes miss?

MABEL

Oh-oh, nothing.

(She slams the door.)

MABEL

You think you can keep me shut in here, do you? Well I'll show you what a woman can do when she applies herself!

(looking around)

Now where is my hat?

(She rummages around for her hat. Doesn't find it.)

I'll never get out of here!

(She starts pacing again.)

Come on Mabel, you're a clever girl. Think! There has to be a way out.

(She thinks. And paces. And thinks. There is a knock on the door, then a wizened old servant enters with tea. It is Baba Yaga in disguise.)

BABA YAGA

Begging pardon Miss, but I thought you might want some tea.

MABEL

Thank you. Just put it down.

(Mabel continues pacing. Baba Yaga sets the tea down and waits.)

MABEL

(noticing her)

Thank you.

(beat)

Is there something else?

BABA YAGA

Well, Miss, I couldn't help but overhear you talk about a way out of here. And Master Caldecott is being very unfair to you, if I may say so.

MABEL

Yes, he is! He is a tyrant, and I hate him!

BABA YAGA

Yes, Miss. And if you're willing, I think I can help.

MABEL

Really? You have a way out?

BABA YAGA

Well, I have this... trinket, you see, given to me a long, long time ago.

(She pulls a small, carved wooden box from her uniform and hands it to Mabel.)

I helped someone once when I was a young girl, and they gave me this as a sort of thank you. But I'm too old to make any use of it now, so I thought it might be of some help to you.

MABEL

... A box. This is supposed to help me escape?

BABA YAGA

So I was told. They said it would help me out of a place I didn't want to be.

MABEL

How does it work? I mean, what does it do?

BABA YAGA

Well, Miss, it's difficult to say. They weren't too specific. Something to do with the want, or the need to get out, and being in tune with the box, like reaching out to it. You can, well, *feel* that need in a way.

MABEL

I think... hmm...

(She traces the patterns on the box, closes her eyes; a glow surrounds her.)

Yes. Yes, I can feel it! Like it's pulling at me.

(Mabel becomes distant, connected to the magic somehow; the glow intensifies. Suddenly, Mabel snaps out of it. The glow vanishes.)

MABEL

(exhilarated, frightened)  
Where... who gave this to you?

BABA YAGA

Well you might think I'm daft, Miss, but... it was one of the Fair Folk gave it to me. Creatures of powerful magic, they are.

MABEL

I don't... maybe I shouldn't use this.

BABA YAGA

Well, Miss, you know best. It's your choice, of course. But if it's not too bold—you're your own woman. There's not another like you in the wide world, if I may say so. Master Caldecott's not a bad man, but he seems too protective of you. You need room to spread your wings, so to speak.

MABEL

You're right. I need to show him that I'm not just a helpless girl. We are stronger than they believe.

(Mabel traces the designs again, thinking. Beat.)

MABEL

I'll show him.

(Mabel concentrates on the box; the glow returns. It builds to a blinding intensity, and when it fades, she is gone. Baba Yaga smiles.)

BABA YAGA

Go, child. Fulfill your destiny. For all our sakes.

Scene 5

(Crossfade. A single spot up on Mabel, on the opposite side of the stage; she is standing just as we last saw her, surrounded by the

box's glow. Her eyes are closed, and she seems otherworldly. The glow fades; lights up on. Mabel is now at Guy's estate. There is a single chair. She opens her eyes and exhales sharply, returning to reality.)

MABEL

... WOW.

(A SERVANT enters on some errand, and stops short, baffled, at the sight of Mabel.)

SERVANT

Uhh... miss?

(Mabel nearly jumps out of her skin.)

MABEL

AAGH! What do you think you're doing, sneaking up on me like that?

SERVANT

Er, sorry, miss. It's just... how did you get in here?

MABEL

Well, it's... complicated.

(beat)

Where exactly *am* I?

(The servant is thrown off by this.)

SERVANT

Uh... you're at Guy Fromage's estate. In Mister Fromage's *private* study.

MABEL

Guy's estate... it worked! The magic box worked!

SERVANT

Magic. Box.

(He understands now—the girl must be a bit soft in the head, so to speak. He speaks slowly, and a bit too loud.)

SERVANT

Um, is there anyone looking for you?

MABEL

Looking for me? What on earth are you talking about?

(Mabel suddenly gets it—this servant, poor man, is a bit slow. She starts speaking loud and slowly, just like him.)

I am here to see your... master. Could you fetch mister Fromage for me, please?

SERVANT

Ah, you came to see mister Fromage.

(looking around)

...Do you have a chaperone somewhere, miss?

MABEL

(stamping her foot)

Why does everyone think I'm incapable of looking after myself?

(again slowly and loud)

No, I am here alone, thank you. Would you please tell mister Fromage that miss Caldecott is here to see him?

SERVANT

Yes. Of course. Just... wait here. I'll be right back.

(The servant heads off, keeping an eye on Mabel.)

Now don't wander off, miss.

(to himself)

Poor girl...

(He exits. Mabel shakes her head, sympathetic.)

MABEL

Poor man...

(She looks around, then sits in the chair. She reaches up to adjust her hat, then stops and grimaces, cursing. She waits. Lights dim on her.)

Scene 6

(Once again, the spot returns, the storyteller sitting at the ready.)

STORYTELLER

Little did Caldecott know of Baba Yaga's designs, or of Mabel's escape. For he had immediately set out for Tibet and the frozen heights of the Himalayas to seek answers.

(Lights up, dim, on the other half of the stage. Caldecott enters, bundled up against the cold of the Himalayas. In the distance we can see the outline of a monastery. He trudges onward. Meanwhile, Mabel sits in the chair, bored and fidgety.)

STORYTELLER

He first sought the counsel of an ancient order of monks.

(Caldecott has reached the monastery. A monk appears; the two exchange formal bows.)

STORYTELLER

But they could not help him in his quest.

(The monk shrugs helplessly. Caldecott shows "aw, shucks" disappointment. Caldecott trudges off.)

And so he searched on.

(The monastery vanishes, and we are left in the mountains.)

STORYTELLER

But word had spread among the mythical beings, and many had passed along what they knew, in the hopes of assisting Caldecott in his quest.

(Caldecott enters again, still searching. He crosses the stage; as he is about to exit, a Yeti enters, chasing him.)

YETI

(roaring)  
HEY!!!

(Caldecott nearly jumps out of his skin. Mabel, who is starting to glaze over with boredom, starts in her chair and looks around, confused. Caldecott suddenly recognizes the yeti.)

CALDECOTT

Frank! Hello!  
(appraising)  
How have you been, my friend? You look like you've gained some weight.

YETI

Yeah, still working off the holiday pounds. You know how I love pie.

YETI

I've been trying to track you down for days.

(Mabel starts humming/whistling softly to herself.)

YETI

Everyone has heard about your... search for the valley. I've been getting dozens of messages about it.

CALDECOTT

You know? But how? I learned of it from Baba Yaga no more than two scenes ago.

YETI

She must have spread the word during transitions.

YETI

(beat)

In any case, there is a great deal to tell.

(The lights dim, and the spot on the Storyteller returns.)

STORYTELLER

Frank the Yeti told Caldecott of the many messages he had received, many tales and legends of the Valley, sent from the four corners of the earth.

(Just as before, Caldecott and Frank can't hear one another. Mabel can't hear herself whistling, either. She is very confused.)

STORYTELLER

Many stories of the Valley still existed among the legendary creatures, but few still contained much truth. Still, every story pointed like an arrow in one direction.

(Mabel is weirded out, trying to whistle, yell, anything. Caldecott and Frank try yelling, but nothing doing. Frank gives up on talking and reaches into his coat and pulls out a stack of letters. Baba Yaga appears behind the Storyteller as Caldecott looks through the stack.)

STORYTELLER

Caldecott realized that he would have to—

(Baba Yaga taps him on the shoulder.)

BABA YAGA

What did I tell you about overdoing it?

STORYTELLER

But—

(Baba Yaga smacks him on the head again.)

BABA YAGA

Shut it!

(The Storyteller looks sour and pouts in his chair. The spot fades; lights back to normal.)

CALDECOTT

(screaming)  
WELL IT SEEMS I MUST—

(Frank claps his hands over his ears; Mabel falls out of her chair. Caldecott cuts off raggedly, clears his throat.)

Ahem. Sorry.  
(beat)

It seems I must continue east and seek the Naga.

YETI

I hope some of that information will prove useful.  
(musing)

It's hard to believe the Valley really exists. But if anyone can find it, it's you.

(Mabel gets up and dusts herself off.)

Good luck.

CALDECOTT

Thanks, Frank.

(Caldecott bundles himself up and heads off. He crosses into Mabel's area, stops, looks around, realizes his mistake and hustles the other way, exiting. Frank watches him go as lights fade.)

Scene 7

(Lights up on Mabel pacing in the room, anxious, smoothing her dress

and occasionally grimacing over  
her lack of hat.)

MABEL

What is taking him so long? I know that servant was a  
bit... dense, but that's no excuse for a poor work ethic!

(The servant enters, keeping a  
close eye on Mabel.)

SERVANT

(loud and slow, as before)  
Mister Fromage is on his way, miss. You just be a good  
girl and he'll see that you're taken care of.

(He exits.)

MABEL

I'll have to speak to Guy about finding him some less...  
taxing duty.

GUY

(offstage)  
In my *study*? And none of you fools saw her enter? I  
should have you all dismissed.

(Guy enters, obviously in no mood  
for this nonsense.)

GUY

Now, miss, if you'd,  
(seeing her)  
care to... explain...  
(beat)  
Mabel! It's you!

MABEL

Well of course, it's me, you silly man. Didn't they tell  
you?

GUY

Yes, but I couldn't believe it was true. But why all this  
sneaking into my house?

MABEL

It's a long story.  
(holding out the box)

MABEL

I used this. I don't know how to explain, other than it's... well, a magic box.

GUY

Magic. Box.

(shrugging)

If you say so. I've seen stranger things. But surely your esteemed brother did not consent to this visit.

MABEL

Well, no...

GUY

Nor, I imagine, would he let you use a... magic box for the purpose.

MABEL

No, he didn't. And I don't care! He is an unbearable tyrant!

He had the servants lock me up at the estate, like Rapunzel in her tower!

GUY

Doesn't she run a coiffure shop now?

MABEL

The idea stands! He is a horrible, evil man, and I hope something terrible happens to him!

GUY

You go too far now, Mabel. Lord knows your brother is infuriating, but do not wish ill towards him. He cares for you a great deal.

MABEL

Cares for me, pah! Cares enough to lock me up like Rapunlike a bird in a cage. He certainly doesn't care about my feelings, or he wouldn't try to keep us apart.

(leaning on his chest)

Oh, Guy, I love you so...

GUY

And I you, Mabel. Now that you're here, I'll never let you go.

(Mabel sighs against his chest.  
He strokes her hair, smiling.  
It's adorable. Beat.)

GUY

Where is your hat?

(The servant enters, pulling up  
short at the sight of the two,  
embarrassed.)

SERVANT

Uh, sir?

GUY

(irritated)  
Yes, what is it?

SERVANT

Mordechai and Stanley have returned, sir.

GUY

Ah, excellent. Tell them to meet me here.

SERVANT

Yes sir.

(The servant exits in a hurry.  
Guy disentangles himself from  
Mabel.)

GUY

I must attend to this. Please, make yourself comfortable.

(Mabel sits. Guy paces. Lights  
dim on the room.)

Scene 8

(Again, the spot, the storyteller,  
and dim lights on Caldecott's side  
of the stage. Caldecott stands  
facing two Naga. One Naga's dress  
marks him/her as the leader.  
Baba Yaga stands at the edge of  
the spot light, watching the  
Storyteller. As he is about to go

into his spiel, he looks around and sees her. He scowls and pulls out a script, reads from it.)

STORYTELLER

(sullen, mechanical)

Meanwhile, in India, Caldecott sought out the Naga, the clan of snake people who long ago swore an oath to protect the wild places of that land.

(Caldecott bows to the Naga; they bow back, sinuous and graceful.)

They could not tell him where the valley lay, but they told him how to find another that possibly could—Fenghuang, the Empress of Birds, who lived deep in the forests of China.

(beat)

There, happy?

(Baba Yaga nods, satisfied. The Storyteller scowls some more. The spot fades, lights up.)

NAGA

We are sorry that we cannot assist you more in your quest. Find Fenghuang—if any creature can give you the knowledge you seek, it is her.

(Guy perks up, as if barely hearing something. He walks to the border of the stage separating him from Caldecott and presses his ear against the edge of the light.)

NAGA

Now, please, be our guest for a few days, rest and regain your strength. Your journey, we fear, will be long and difficult from here.

CALDECOTT

I thank you for your hospitality, but I must press on to China immediately. Can I not persuade you to come to the valley, should it be found?

(Mabel, curious, walks over to Guy and listens at his shoulder.)

NAGA

Your concern touches us, Sri Caldecott. But our duty is to the forests and rivers. If we abandon our charge, it would shame us forever.

(grinning)

This world may simply be illusion—*maya*, as the Buddhists claim—but it is the illusion we have sworn to protect. Fear not for us, wanderer. Our *atman* is merely a drop, one piece of Brahman. We shall join our brothers and sisters in time.

CALDECOTT

May the Naga live in peace forever.

(Caldecott bows deeply; the Naga return the bow. Mabel gives up on listening and pulls Guy away from his eavesdropping.)

NAGA

May you find what you seek, Sri Caldecott. And remember, you must recognize the *atman* in all. Only with knowledge and acceptance of the true self can you succeed.

(Caldecott exits. The Naga watch him go, serene. Beat.)

NAGA

Ten bucks says he pulls it off.

NAGA 2

(considers)

You're on.

(Lights down on the Naga.)

Scene 9

(Lights back up on Guy's study. There is a knock, then Mordechai enters. He is sour-faced, as always.)

GUY

Ah, Mordechai. At last.

(beat)

Where is Stanley?

MORDECHAI

He's... well, I left him outside, sir.

GUY

What? Why?

STANLEY

(offstage)

Mordechai! Hullo? Where are you?

(Stanley enters. He now has a pig head. Guy and Mabel stare at him, slack-jawed. Mordechai pointedly looks everywhere but at Stanley.)

STANLEY

There you are! No one would tell me where you went. Actually, everyone sort of ran away when I tried to talk to them.

(noticing Guy and Mabel)

Oh! Hullo, sir! I didn't realize you had company. How do you do, miss.

MABEL

I... er...

(to Guy)

He's a pig.

STANLEY

(hurt)

I was just saying hello...

GUY

No, Stanley, she means... you're a pig.

(beat)

What happened to you?

STANLEY

What do you mean?

MORDECHAI

Baba Yaga's doing, sir. The fool let himself be seen.

(beat)

It doesn't seem to have sunk in yet.

GUY

Baba Yaga? Why in Hades were you anywhere near Baba Yaga?

MORDECHAI

Caldecott, sir. That's where he went, straight to Russia. He knew what he was about, for certain. Seemed as if they knew each other already.

GUY

But why? What did they talk about?

MORDECHAI

Lot of mumbo-jumbo, sir, about ancient days and legends and such. A hidden valley, where all the blasted creatures came from. Ancestral homeland of some sort, sounds like.

GUY

Ancestral homeland... Ian, you cunning old devil. You're trying to hide them from me.

(beat)

Where is this valley?

MORDECHAI

No idea. She couldn't tell him. But she told him to head east.

(pulling the notebook out)

To the door of the dawning sun. Whatever that means.

GUY

Are you sure that's what she said?

MABEL

Ian said he was traveling to the east, Guy. Before... well, before I came here.

MORDECHAI

"Door of the dawning sun" is what she said, sir. And a fat lot of nonsense about him holding the key.

(sour)

I don't know why we couldn't just take care of the old hag. We'd have gotten the truth out of her.

GUY

You two, take care of Baba Yaga? Be glad you didn't try. I think Stanley is evidence enough that it would have ended poorly for you.

STANLEY

(confused)  
Eh? How's that?

MORDECHAI

Oh, shut up.

GUY

(thinking)  
If he's looking for it in the Orient, he'll have to stop in a city to get supplies.

(beat)  
Mordechai, make immediate preparations for Shanghai.

MORDECHAI

Yes sir.

(Mabel is disappointed by this news.)

MABEL

Well that's it, then. I suppose I'll have to return to the estate. So much for my grand escape to a new life.

GUY

Return? Why would you do that? Mabel, my darling... would you like to accompany me to China?

MABEL

Truly? Oh, Guy, you're wonderful!

(Mabel throws herself at Guy, wrapping her arms around him. They are just too cute for words. Mordechai scowls. Stanley smiles as much as his pig head will allow. Lights down.)

Scene 10

(Meanwhile, the Storyteller appears, while lights come up on a

stand of bamboo; a tall wooden mailbox with the name "FENGHUANG" on it stands nearby. Caldecott enters in a rickshaw. The rickshaw drops him off and exits.)

STORYTELLER

After a long and arduous search, Caldecott came upon the hidden dwelling of...

(Noticing the scene in front of him)

Oh. Well, nevermind. Arduous journey, my foot.

(The Storyteller fades; Caldecott reads the mailbox and heads off to find the Empress of Birds. Lights dim.)

Scene 11

(Lights up; we're in Shanghai, at the harbor. A sign reads "CHINA WELCOMES FOREIGN DEVILS". Guy and Mabel enter, followed by Mordechai, who carries some bags and scowls at everyone. Stanley, a hat semi-covering his pig-head, struggles with a large trunk.)

GUY

Well, Mabel, my dear, what do you think?

MABEL

It's beautiful, Guy. So... exotic!

(looking around)

Ian often spoke of Shanghai. He said it was one of his favorite cities. I can see why.

(beat)

And he would have kept all this from me, kept me locked away from the world. Ooh, it makes me furious to think about it.

GUY

Then don't. No talk of your brother. He's not here, and we're together. Let's enjoy it, all right?

MABEL

You're right. I just want to forget him completely.

(Mabel laughs and dances about,  
ecstatic.)

This is amazing! I've never felt so free, so alive!

(taking his hands)

So happy.

(Guy smiles, bright and warm, and  
laughs, spinning Mabel around.  
Mordechai scowls. Stanley grins.)

GUY

Mordechai, Stanley, make sure everything is brought to our  
rooms, then meet me there in an hour. And be ready to  
hunt.

MORDECHAI & STANLEY

Yes sir.

(Mordechai and Stanley head off  
with the luggage.)

GUY

Well I'm parched. Would you like to get some tea?

MABEL

Ooh, I've always wanted to see a real tea house. Yes,  
let's!

(They exit. Lights down.)

Scene 12

(Meanwhile, lights up on  
Caldecott, who now stands face to  
face with Fenghuang, Empress of  
Birds. She is truly magnificent,  
covered in bright feathers, and  
has the bearing of an empress.)

CALDECOTT

And that is why I have sought you out, Empress. You are  
among the eldest of your kind, and I need knowledge of the  
earliest times. Only you can help me.

FENGHUANG

Baba Yaga... I am not surprised that she is at the center of this. Always a troublemaker, that one.

(beat)

Well do I remember the ancient days, traveler. The valley is a distant memory now, but the final words of the Oni are burned into my memory.

CALDECOTT

The prophecy.

FENGHUANG

That we would not return until the final days were upon us. And now, it seems the time has come.

CALDECOTT

I fear that it has.

FENGHUANG

But much has changed since then, for both our peoples. Mankind is more than it once was, true—they have become great, in their way. But we have grown mighty as well, far mightier than we were in the old times. I have no fear of your kindred, human. Let them come, these men with their pop-guns and their machines. They cannot withstand me.

CALDECOTT

I beg you, do not underestimate them. They are far more dangerous than you believe. Even you, as powerful as you are, cannot hold them forever.

(Fenghuang puffs up, angry, proud and beautiful. Caldecott takes an unconscious step back.)

FENGHUANG

Do you think so lightly of my abilities, Caldecott? Of all humans, you should understand best the power that my kith possess. We are more than a match for you! Worship us, venerate us, leave us in peace if you will, but dare not threaten us!

CALDECOTT

I am sorry, Empress. I did not mean to offend. I am simply concerned for your kin. Few are as ancient or as powerful as yourself, and many have already been overwhelmed.

(Fenghuang's anger subsides.)

FENGHUANG

True. I know your intentions, Caldecott. Your deeds ring throughout the world of myth. And you are right—many creatures of magic lack the strength to resist. For them, I will help you as I may.

(Fenghuang conjures. The image of an island, covered with forest and mountains, appears. It wavers, insubstantial.)

FENGHUANG

There. Your journey is not yet complete, Caldecott. Further east lies the door of the dawning sun. Not even I can tell you more than that.

CALDECOTT

(amazed)

But... what is this?

FENGHUANG

You see the deepest shadows of my memory.

(Fenghuang concentrates; the image stabilizes.)

This was the last time I saw our ancient home. It was beautiful, beyond anything you could imagine...

(focusing her power, straining)

FENGHUANG

North of the Oyashima. Beyond Yamato. Seek the valley there.

(Fenghuang sags, tired. The image vanishes.)

It is done. The memory will fade now, until it is gone forever.

(smiling)

But it was good to see it again.

CALDECOTT

I... I'm overwhelmed, Empress. Thank you.

FENGHUANG

It was done for their sake, not yours, human. Now, go. Your time grows short, I think. And the Oni will not be easy to find.

(Caldecott bows to Fenghuang; she nods in response.)

Do not return here, Caldecott. My abode shall never again be open to man. From this day forth, any human who dares to invade my forest will be shown no mercy. Tell your people.

CALDECOTT

As you command. Farewell, and may you live in peace for another thousand years.

(Caldecott turns to leave. As he is exiting—)

FENGHUANG

Remember that those you protect live for themselves, Caldecott. Some may not want your protection. You must respect that.

CALDECOTT

... I will remember.

(Caldecott bows once more, then exits. Fenghuang sits, savoring her fading memory. Pause. Mordechai and Stanley appear, creeping toward Fenghuang silently, carrying a strange-looking rope. They position themselves on either side of her, then in a swift motion wrap it around her. Fenghuang screams in pain and anger and tries to free herself, but she cannot. Mordechai and Stanley are scared silly, but hold their positions.)

FENGHUANG

You dare lay hands on the Empress of Birds, humans?! You will suffer for this!

(Guy enters, casually.)

GUY

Oh, I doubt it, Empress.

(to Mordechai and Stanley)

Hold her still.

(Guy smiles. Fenghuang struggles.  
Dark.)

Scene 13

(Lights up on Mabel, sitting at a tea house in Shanghai. A sign above the door says "SHANGHAI TEA HOUSE." Below that, a sign reads "TODAY'S SPECIAL: HOT WINGS". Mabel sits, people watching and sipping her tea, happy as can be. A waiter approaches her.)

MABEL

For the last time, no. Thank You. I would not like to try the hot wings.

(Guy enters, carrying a hat box. He puts the box down and sits next to Mabel.)

GUY

Hello, my dear. Are you enjoying your tea?

MABEL

There you are! I wondered where you'd gotten to. Yes, I'm having a wonderful time.

(The waiter reappears; Mabel sees him immediately.)

MABEL

No hot wings!

(The waiter slouches off. Mabel pours Guy some tea.)

He's not left me alone about those all day. Now, what was this business you had to run off and attend to? You took me out here and then left me all alone.

GUY

I'm sorry. It was unavoidable. The world waits for no man, you know. But I did bring you something to make up for my absence.

(Guy produces the hat box. Behind them, Caldecott enters. He stops dead when he sees them.)

MABEL

A present!

(Mabel removes the lid and pulls out a magnificent feather-adorned hat. The feathers are Fenghuang's.)

MABEL

A new hat! Oh, It's beautiful! Guy, you shouldn't have!

CALDECOTT

I agree.

(The pair turns and sees him. Mabel's face drains of color; Caldecott's face is crimson with anger.)

What in Hell do you think you're doing with my sister, Guy? Have you stooped to abduction now?

(Mabel is trying to sink into the floor, but Guy recovers quickly.)

GUY

As surprising as it may seem to you, Ian, Mabel came with me of her own free will.

CALDECOTT

Will. Yes, my sister seems to have far more will than she has intelligence.

(beat)

Was I not clear enough, Mabel? Or do you simply delight in

CALDECOTT (CONT)

causing me pain?

(Caldecott notices the hat. The sight of the feathers stops him dead.)

No. It can't be...

GUY

Do you like the hat, Ian? There's not another one like it on earth. But I'm sure you appreciate that fact.

CALDECOTT

You vile, murderous...

MABEL

Ian! That is uncalled for!

CALDECOTT

Was that for progress, Guy? Or was it simply fun for you?  
(staring at Guy)  
Mabel, you will come with me. Now.

MABEL

What? No! You can't make me.

GUY

You see, Ian? I told you, you cannot control her.

(Caldecott take a step toward the table; Guy stands up, moves between him and Mabel.)

GUY

And you certainly can't move me easily.

(Beat. Without a word, Caldecott punches Guy in the gut, folding him in half. Guy crumples to the ground fighting for air. Mabel is aghast.)

CALDECOTT

Now, Mabel.

(Caldecott steps forward and grabs Mabel by the wrist, pulling her away from the table. She hangs on to the hat as he drags her offstage.)

MABEL

Let me go! Let me go this instant! Guy!

(They exit. Guy drags himself slowly to his feet, coughing and gasping for breath. He stares after them.)

GUY

I won't... give her up... that easily, Ian.

(Guy heads offstage. Lights down on the tea house.)

Scene 14

(Lights up on a tiny rail station in northern Japan; Caldecott and Mabel sit on a steamer trunk. Mabel's hat no longer has its feathers. Mabel is furious, and Caldecott isn't much better. Long, tense silence.)

MABEL

... I detest you, and I shall never speak to you again.

CALDECOTT

(entirely too controlled)

That was certainly a lovely train ride. Very picturesque, I thought.

MABEL

You are a reprehensible monster. Never again, not one word.

CALDECOTT

Come now, you got the adventure you so desperately wanted. I'd think you would be happy. Not many people get to see Japan, you know.

MABEL

(looking around, Noel Coward)  
Very small, Japan.  
(beat)

MABEL (CONT)

I swear, silence from this moment forth, until the end of  
my days.

CALDECOTT

Good. That means I won't have to deal with those crackpot  
hens in your salons any more.

MABEL

You horrible—  
(beat)  
No. I'm not speaking to you. Never ever.

CALDECOTT

...

MABEL

Mute. Completely.

CALDECOTT

...

MABEL

And you ruined my new hat.

CALDECOTT

...

MABEL

Are you listening to me?

CALDECOTT

... I was just thinking about something I was told in  
China.

MABEL

Very large, China.  
(beat)  
I'm telling you that I'm never speaking to you again.  
Don't you care?

CALDECOTT

It was something Fenghuang told me—she was Empress of Birds, you know. I don't know if Guy mentioned that. One of the most incredible creatures in existence. Ancient, and majestic, and so very beautiful.

(beat)

And now...

(Caldecott's anger and sadness threaten to overwhelm him. Mabel reflexively reaches out to comfort him, before remembering she's supposed to be angry.)

CALDECOTT

He just destroys, and no matter what I do, I cannot stop him. I can't protect them. I couldn't even protect you.

(beat)

Is this all there is to his progress, to his grand vision of man's future? Is his future simply this pillaging and death?

(A woman, dressed in traditional Japanese garb, approaches the pair. Her eyes are downcast; she appears shy, somewhat hesitant. She speaks in Japanese. This is AMI.)

AMI

<Excuse me. I would be honored to speak to our young sister, if I may.>

MABEL

(shrugging)

I'm sorry, miss. I don't...

(to Caldecott)

I believe I heard "pardon me." Did you understand her?

CALDECOTT

Not really, no. Something about speaking, I think.

AMI

<We have been following you since we sensed our Sister's presence in Yamato.>

(to Mabel)

<Sister, may we ask why you have come to us here?>

MABEL

Um... *Wakari...masen?*

AMI

<Oh, I see... Something is... amiss, Sister. Why do you not understand?>

(Mabel gets a sense of what the woman just said, but shrugs helplessly.)

CALDECOTT

Sorry, but we can't understand you at all. Can you speak English, perhaps?

(The woman's demeanor shifts; she looks at Caldecott and sighs.)

AMI

<We know you, traveler. But we had hoped for... more. If we may?>

(The woman walks to Mabel and faces her. Mabel is wary, but stays still.)

AMI

(smiling)

<Please relax, Sister. This will allow us to speak more easily.>

(Mabel smiles back, relaxing. The woman takes Mabel's hands; for a long moment, the two just stand, breathing, until they are completely in sync, eyes closed.)

AMI

<Open yourself, Sister...>

(A glow surrounds them, just like before with the glow of the box. It is warm, and brightens, pulsing in time like a heartbeat.)

AMI

<That's it... can you feel us, now?>

MABEL

Yes, I can.

(in Japanese)

<It is wonderful.>

(Caldecott is getting concerned; he moves toward them, but stops at the edge of the light as if encountering resistance.)

AMI

(in English)

Do not worry, traveler. We are well.

(The light gets brighter, still pulsing. Caldecott is pushed back as it expands. It reaches a crescendo, then fades. Mabel and the woman open their eyes, smiling at each other. The woman steps back and bows. They both seem a bit drained.)

MABEL

*Dōmo arigato gozaimasu.*

CALDECOTT

Mabel? Are you all right?

(to the woman)

What have you done?

AMI

She is well, Caldecott. We have opened paths once closed in our Sister. We can now... communicate.

CALDECOTT

*Our sister...*

(wary)

How do you know my name? Who are you?

AMI

All know your name, traveler. All have heard of the great deeds you have done on our behalf.

(beat)

AMI (CONT)

Though I expected you to be somewhat more... impressive.  
But such is the nature of all legends, I suppose.

(laughing)

We should know that better than any, should we not?

(The woman calls out, a strange and high-pitched keening, almost a howl. From the trees, two creatures come bounding out. They are humanoid, but with the features of foxes; a man and a woman. They scamper to the woman, playful, stopping on either side of her.)

AMI

These are my... family, I think is your word. We are of the Kitsune.

(all three bow.)

KITSUNE 1 & 2

(in unison)

*Hajimemashite.*

AMI

Our true names are impossible to relate. For now...

(motioning to the male)

You may call him *Otōto*.

(to the female)

And her, *Imōto*.

(smiling)

As for myself, you may call me... Ami.

MABEL

A beautiful name. My name is Mabel. I gather you already know my brother.

AMI

Your brother?

(to Caldecott)

How is this possible, traveler?

(Caldecott is uneasy about explaining this.)

CALDECOTT

That is a long tale, one that I cannot tell now.

MABEL

What? How do you mean, a long tale?

(piqued)

I'm quite old enough to know about the birds and the bees, Ian. I'm not a child, you know.

OTOTO

(in Japanese)

<I do not understand, *oneesan*. How can he be brother to her?>

IMOTO

<He clearly can be no such thing. It is very odd, *oneesan*.>

AMI

... Very well, Caldecott. I will not press. But you must explain this to us later.

CALDECOTT

As you wish.

AMI

Now, tell us—why have you traveled to our tiny island? The stories of you say you only appear when the matter is of grave importance.

CALDECOTT

I seek the Oni, and the Valley.

(At the mention of this, the Kitsune become very agitated; Ototo and Imoto begin chattering rapidly in their native tongue. Mabel takes an unconscious step back.)

MABEL

Well that certainly made an impression.

(Ami gathers herself and quiets the two.)

OTOTO

<But *oneesan*, the Oni! He cannot!>

IMOTO

<It is forbidden!>

AMI

(angry)

<Quiet, both of you!>

(Ototo and Imoto shrink, cowed,  
but obviously not happy.)

AMI

To speak of the ancient one is forbidden, traveler. What  
you seek is impossible.

CALDECOTT

Then you know how to find the Oni. I beg you, for the sake  
of all your kind, tell me!

AMI

No!

(beat)

Not even others of the tribes of myth know of the ancient  
one. And our sister certainly could not have knowledge of  
this. How is it that you know of the Oni?

CALDECOTT

Baba Yaga. She told me to seek the Oni.

(This sends the Kitsune into a  
twitter again.)

AMI

<Quiet!>

(beat)

Baba Yaga set you on the path... then the prophecies are  
true, and the final time is upon is.

(Ami makes her decision.)

Very well, Caldecott. If you speak the truth, then I will  
help you all I can. Please, follow.

(Ami barks at Ototo and Imoto;  
they start to argue, but she  
silences them. They scamper off.)

AMI

They will inform the others of your arrival. It has been long since one of the human tribes have visited us, and never before one of your... complexion.

(smiling)

Your name is legendary, Caldecott, but your face... well, that is something different.

(motioning)

Please, follow me.

(Ami exits, followed by Caldecott  
and Mabel.)

Scene 15

(Guy, Mordechai and Stanley enter.  
Guy immediately starts looking for  
signs of Caldecott. Mordechai  
stands guard; Stanley, still pig-  
headed, admires the scenery.)

GUY

Damn! We missed them. But they definitely came this way.

MORDECHAI

Can't imagine where they'd go, sir. There's nowhere to go, unless they went into that infernal wilderness. This is the last stop on the line.

(A young woman enters, carrying a large bundle; she limps slightly and has a hump. She doesn't notice the three at first. They all turn to face her.)

GUY

You, girl!

(The girl stops dead and stares at the three, scared out of her wits. She takes a step back and starts looking for an exit.)

GUY

Yes, you. Come here, girl.

(The girl is terrified and does not move. Mordechai slides around her, preventing her escape. This does not assuage her fear.)

GIRL

(in Japanese)

<Who are you? Demons? Please leave me alone!>

(Guy motions for her to approach; she shakes her head and tries to back away.)

MORDECHAI

I hate this country. These people are ignorant. Like children, scared of everything.

(beat)

You heard him, you stupid girl! Now move!

GIRL

<I have nothing to offer you, devils. Leave me alone, I beg you!>

(The girl falls to her knees, almost crying. She folds to the ground and stays there.)

GIRL

<Please.>

MORDECHAI

You see what I mean? Ignorant fools.

(beat)

Get up, idiot!

(Mordechai is about to just cuff the girl when Stanley intervenes.)

STANLEY

Wait a moment, Mordechai. Let me try.

MORDECHAI

With that face? She'll probably faint. But maybe they

MORDECHAI (CONT)

worship pigs here. Wouldn't surprise me.

(Stanley kneels in front of the girl.)

STANLEY

<I'm sorry if we frightened you. Please, get up.>

(Guy and Mordechai stare at Stanley, astounded. The girl looks up; his face doesn't faze her at all.)

GIRL

<Who are you? Are you going to kill me?>

STANLEY

<No, we aren't going to kill you. I promise, we aren't demons.>

GIRL

<You look like a demon.>

STANLEY

(smiling)

<This isn't the face I would normally choose to wear, no. We are gaijin, travelers from another land. We won't hurt you. Please, stand up.>

(Stanley helps the girl to her feet. She is wary, but seems to trust Stanley.)

MORDECHAI

What the... you didn't tell us you speak Japanese!

STANLEY

You never asked, Mordechai. Didn't I ever tell you about my father? He was with Admiral Perry, you know, when they sailed to Japan. He taught me. My father, not Admiral Perry. A great proponent of learning, my father was. He used to tell my brothers and I, during lessons, he'd say, "Boys, be ambitious."

(beat)

Never quite sure what he meant by that. I think he just liked the sound of it.

GUY

Now, girl. Have you seen two others recently? A man and a woman?

(The girl doesn't understand, and is rather frightened by Guy.)

MORDECHAI

(beat)

Well? Speak!

GIRL

<I don't understand anything he's saying. Why is he shouting?>

STANLEY

<He is always grumpy. He looks like a fish when he gets angry.>

(The girl giggles; Mordechai scowls, which makes her giggle even more. Stanley laughs with her.)

MORDECHAI

What are you saying, Stanley?

(beat)

What's so funny?

(beat)

Stop it!

(The giggles subside.)

STANLEY

<Did you see two people come past here? A man and a woman, they would have looked like us.>

(beat. grins)

<Well, not quite like me.>

GIRL

<I... think so. I saw three people walking into the forest earlier. One was very tall. I was afraid they were spirits, so I hid from them.>

STANLEY

Three people heading into the forest, one very tall.

GUY

Excellent. He's found a guide. Ask her if she can show us where they went.

STANLEY

<Can you show us the way they went?>

GIRL

<I don't... No, I have to bring this to my village. They will be waiting for me.>

STANLEY

<Don't worry. It won't take long. If you could just show us where they went, we would be indebted to you.>

(beat)

<Please. Fish face will be upset otherwise.>

(She has to stifle her giggles again.)

GIRL

<Well... all right. I'll show you. My name is Maiko.>

STANLEY

<Nice to meet you. My name is Stanley. This is Mordechai, and this is my... leader, my *oyabun*, Guy.>

(The girl bows to each in turn.)

She says she'll show us the way.

(She motions for them to follow, then exits, followed by Stanley and then the other two. Lights down.)

Scene 16

(Caldecott and Mabel, led by Ami, enter a bare, open area in the wilderness. Ototo and Imoto are there, but no one else. Ami seems a bit put off by this, and barks at them. Ototo answers in a curt manner.)

MABEL

(to Caldecott)

Apparently, the others weren't too keen on meeting foreign devils. Or so Ototo says. I don't think he trusts us at all.

CALDECOTT

How do you know that's what he said?

MABEL

Well, I... I don't know. I just... do.

AMI

It is the pathways opening in you, sister. Although I am surprised that you understand our native language.

MABEL

Why do you keep calling me sister? What pathways? What is happening to me?

(Ami looks at her, quizzically,  
then turns to Caldecott.)

AMI

I do not understand, Caldecott. Why is she so confused?

CALDECOTT

It is difficult to explain, Ami. I am bewildered myself.

MABEL

What are you talking about?

CALDECOTT

Baba Yaga is the only one who knows the full truth of it.

OTOTO

Baba Yaga!

AMI

The ancient crone. This grows stranger by the moment.

MABEL

Ian! What is it? Why is this happening?

(beat)

Ian, please!

CALDECOTT

Mabel. Sit down.

(She does so.)

You are my sister, Mabel, and I have always tried to be truthful with you. But I made a promise to Baba Yaga to keep this secret, even from you.

(beat)

You and I... we are not related by blood.

MABEL

What? Don't be absurd.

CALDECOTT

I'm sorry, Mabel. I didn't want to deceive you.

MABEL

Stop it. You're having a joke at my expense, Ian, and I don't think it's funny.

CALDECOTT

I only wish it were. But it's the truth.

MABEL

I'm... an orphan? I'm adopted?

CALDECOTT

Yes, and no.

MABEL

What is that supposed to mean?

(beat)

... Who am I, then?

AMI

You are who you are. You are unique.

CALDECOTT

Whatever else is true, Mabel, you are, and will always be, my sister. But you should know the truth.

(Caldecott gathers himself.)

Long ago, when I was much younger, I traveled to Russia with Guy. We were still very close back then, and often

CALDECOTT (CONT)

went on expeditions together. But this one would be the last.

(beat)

Guy was always more... aggressive than I. Harder. Because of his background, I think. He built his fortune from nothing, just sheer force of will. That endless drive was always what I admired about him, but it was ultimately what ended our friendship.

(Lights shift, dimming slightly except for a spot on Caldecott. The Kitsune look around, slightly confused.)

CALDECOTT

We were both hunters then, after adventure. Two young men exploring the vast world. And it was there that we first encountered them—the creatures of myth.

MABEL

You were a hunter? But you abhor hunting.

CALDECOTT

Ever since that trip. But not then. Back then, I was just another fool, eager to prove my mastery over nature.

(The Storyteller's spot appears, but dim; he leans in to listen, rapt.)

CALDECOTT

We were hunting bear. It was early autumn, I remember—the trees were beginning to change, the green just starting to fade. We found some tracks, unlike anything we'd ever seen, and followed them. We didn't know it then, of course, but we'd stumbled across a group of Leszi.

MABEL

Leszi?

CALDECOTT

Woodland creatures. They are friends and protectors of the forests there. We were both dumbstruck, of course—it was fiction come to life before our eyes. We heard them speaking to one another, though we couldn't understand

CALDECOTT (CONT)

them, and I decided to try talking. Guy agreed to let me try—I should have suspected something. I was a fool.

(We hear the echoes of Caldecott's memory as he speaks. The voices of the Leszi float across the scene; one voice carries over the rest.)

The Leszi were frightened by my appearance, but did not run. One of them approached me—and in that moment, Guy fired.

(The voice of the Leszi is cut off by the report of a rifle. Caldecott flinches as he hears it. The others are jarred by the sound.)

All he saw was a trophy, one more thing to conquer... I was horrified, tried to help the creature, but I could do nothing. The Leszi panicked, and began to call out.

(Beat. The voices of the Leszi become the familiar sound of the whirlwind.)

Then, she came. Like a whirlwind, Baba Yaga appeared. I am not sure what happened, but one moment, Guy was leveling his rifle, and the next... he was gone. And I was alone, face to face with Baba Yaga, cradling the dying Leszi in my arms.

(A spot opposite Caldecott appears; Baba Yaga stands in it. He seems to speak to her.)

And I begged her to save the Leszy's life. "Take mine in return if you must," I said, "but please, save this creature." And in that moment, the Leszy vanished from my arms.

BABA YAGA

It will be done, adventurer, but not without cost. Do you agree to pay the price?

CALDECOTT

Yes.

BABA YAGA

So be it.

(Baba Yaga holds a wrapped bundle out, as if giving it to Caldecott.)

The fulfillment of prophecy has begun. Into your care do I place this child. Tell no one of its true origin, not even the child itself. This is the price of life.

CALDECOTT

I accept.

(The spot on Baba Yaga fades. Lights return to normal.)

CALDECOTT

She would tell me nothing more—only that we would meet again someday.

(Mabel just sits, unable to comprehend what she's just been told.)

MABEL

I'm... a foundling...?

(Suddenly, the howls of Kitsune cut through the silence. Ami looks up in alarm; Ototo and Imoto tense, ready.)

CALDECOTT

What is it? What's wrong?

AMI

Strangers. Three, like you.

(beat)

It is him.

OTOTO

You have brought him here, human! I said we should not trust you!

(Ototo and Imoto move to protect Mabel; Ototo tosses Caldecott aside with a snarl.)

IMOTO

Protect our sister!

(At this moment, Guy, Mordechai and Stanley burst on the scene. The Kitsune circle Mabel, ready to kill.)

GUY

(spotting Mabel)  
There she is!

(Guy pulls a pistol from his jacket. Caldecott leaps toward him, wrestling the gun away. Mordechai and Stanley grab Caldecott and pull him off of Guy; as they do so, the Kitsune escape, taking Mabel with them.)

MABEL

Guy!

GUY

No! Get her, you fools!

(But it is too late. The Kitsune are gone. Their howls fade away as the humans stare after them. Long silence. Caldecott turns to face Guy.)

CALDECOTT

All you do, Guy, is bring misery to the world. Wherever you step, destruction follows.

GUY

(beat)  
If they harm her...

CALDECOTT

Oh, shut up, Guy! Enough of your idiotic machismo! This

CALDECOTT (CONT)

is *your* fault, it is *your* doing! Charging in, without any thought except to kill! They are not the danger, you are! Do you delight in your demented hunt so much that you would risk Mabel, just to add a piece to your collection?

GUY

Is that what you think this is about? I love her, Ian, I would never put her in danger!

CALDECOTT

And what exactly would you call this? Is shooting at everything in sight keeping her out of danger?

(Guy wants to retort, but he knows Caldecott is right.)

GUY

You were the one who brought her to Japan.

(Caldecott laughs, bitter.)

CALDECOTT

A schoolboy response. Sometimes I wonder if you were ever any more than that.

(Pause. The two hold eye contact for a long moment, then Guy looks away.)

GUY

We have to find her, Ian. I have to make sure she is safe.

CALDECOTT

Yes, we do. But not your way, Guy. I will not have any more deaths.

(Beat.)

GUY

... Very well.

(Guy hands his pistol to Mordechai.)

MORDECHAI

Sir?

GUY

You two head back to the village with the woman. Ian and I will handle this alone.

MORDECHAI

But sir—

GUY

Do it! Wait for me there.

(Mordechai hesitates, then heads off. Stanley lingers for a moment.)

STANLEY

Sir? Good luck.

(Stanley exits. Silence.)

GUY

All right, Ian. What now? We can track them, but we can't fight them.

CALDECOTT

We don't have to fight them, Guy. That's always been your problem—you rush to embrace violence. Domination is all you know. *When* we find her, I'll handle it. Now help me find their trail.

(Caldecott and Guy find the trail and head off, following it. Lights down.)

Scene 17

(Once more, the Storyteller appears. He makes a quick check for Baba Yaga and turns his attention to us.)

STORYTELLER

And so the two men once more hunted side by side, as they had done so long ago. But this time, the stakes were much higher—even higher than they knew. For wheels had been set in motion, endgames begun which none could foresee.

(Lights up on the Kitsune and Mabel, in a hidden glade in the mountains. It is just before dawn. The Kitsune guard the entrance, while Mabel sits in the middle, despondent.)

MABEL

This is awful. You must take me back.

IMOTO

That would be madness.

OTOTO

Imoto is right, sister. The hunter wants only to destroy our kind.

MABEL

I am *not* your kind, and I am not your sister! Just because I was a... foundling, does not mean I'm not human! I am Mabel Caldecott, and I am a normal woman, not some... beast!

(Ototo shrinks as if struck. Ami speaks quietly to him, then sits next to Mabel.)

AMI

I know it is hard, sis-Mabel. And it is true, you are not one of us. But neither are you simply human. You can *feel* it now—the connection to the magic of the old world. That is your true nature.

MABEL

No! I don't believe you! I don't want it!

(beat)

I want to be happy, with Guy. I just want to be normal...

AMI

You are what you are, Mabel. And you are unique. Your brother knew this. He tried to protect you, as he does for all of us. That is why he was here, searching for the ancient one.

OTOTO

He should not even know of the ancient one! His presence threatens all of us. You have seen that already, *oneesan*.

AMI

You are still all but a child, Ototo. You cannot see beyond your own nose. Things are happening beyond our understanding, I can feel it. And whatever they are, I think they will change our world forever. Baba Yaga, the traveler and the hunter, the Oni... and your presence here, Mabel.

MABEL

But who is this ancient one? The Oni. And why is Ian searching for him?

AMI

The Oni is the eldest of the mythic races, and the protector of secrets. He is a legend, even among our people. Few believe the ancient one exists—even his name is unknown to all but the Kitsune.

IMOTO

He has protected us since the first days. It is said that he will guard our secrets until the last days, when the opener of the Path will appear and lead us Home.

OTOTO

Bah. None know the true meaning of that tale, Imoto. This is our home, it has always been so. The ancient one guards us, he keeps mankind from our mountains.

IMOTO

But all these strange happenings... it makes me afraid, that the last days are upon us.

MABEL

Please. I know you're just trying to protect me, but... I want to return. Guy and Ian must be going mad with worry—they're probably killing one another right now because of this.

AMI

Do not worry, Mabel. Despite Ototo's concern, I think you would be safe, but... I feel you should stay. There is something, in the wind. Can you feel it?

MABEL

I don't want to feel it. Please, Ami.

IMOTO

Oneesan is right, sister. I feel it also.

(Mabel closes her eyes, and opens herself up.)

MABEL

Something... I think...

(almost trancelike)

The ancient one. He says to wait for them, they will come to us. They will soon reach the door of the dawning sun.

(Mabel snaps out of it. The Kitsune all look at her in wonder, and not a little fear.)

OTOTO

Impossible...

AMI

I think we should heed the Oni's words.

(A faint howl is heard; the Kitsune tense.)

AMI

They are coming. The hunter and the traveler, together...

(beat)

As it was foretold.

(Another Kitsune's howl is heard, then Caldecott enters, followed by Guy. They approach the group. Ototo coils, ready to attack. Caldecott stops, holding his arms out, palms up.)

CALDECOTT

I do not come to fight. You know that.

(to Mabel)

Are you all right, Mabel?

MABEL

Yes, I'm fine, Ian.

OTOTO

You travel with the Hunter. Why? You are enemies.

(Guy holds his arms out, like Caldecott.)

GUY

I only came to see that Mabel is safe.

(beat)

You should not have kidnapped her.

OTOTO

We protected her, Hunter. From you.

GUY

You will return her to us. Now.

OTOTO

(growling)

You threaten us? Unarmed, here?

CALDECOTT

Guy! That's enough. Ototo, please. We came here openly and in peace.

(Ami puts her hand on Ototo's shoulder; he backs down.)

AMI

The ancient one has spoken to Mabel, Caldecott.

(beat)

I am afraid. I do not know why, but I am.

CALDECOTT

What? When?

MABEL

Just now. He told me... that you were coming.

GUY

What is this nonsense? I don't know what you've been doing to her, Kitsune, but I will put a stop to it.

AMI

This is not our doing, Hunter, but I do not think even you can stop it now.

GUY

We'll see about that.

(Guy drops his hands and he shifts his weight. Ototo moves likewise, ready for attack; they are two animals, ready to kill one another.)

CALDECOTT

Both of you, stop! There is no need for this!

(Caldecott turns to pacify Guy; Ami does the same with Ototo. Throughout this, Mabel has slipped back into her trancelike state. The familiar glow of magic is faint around her.)

MABEL

The ancient one approaches. He comes to the door of the dawning sun!

(Everyone stops and looks to Mabel. Guy takes advantage of this distraction, pulling a hidden pistol from his jacket. He levels it at Ami. As he does, Mabel's eyes snap open, wide.)

MABEL

NOOOO!

(Guy fires. The glow surrounding Mabel explodes. Time slows to a crawl. The explosion fades, and there is Mabel, suffused with energy, floating above the ground. A pair of wings made of pure light spread out behind her.)

MABEL

THIS WILL END!

(The gun melts, falling from Guy's hand. Pause. Mabel looks around, then at herself.)

MABEL

What... is happening?

ONI

(offstage)

You have finally embraced your true nature.

(The ONI appears. He is immense, towering a foot above everyone, and wears an elaborate kimono. Two short horns protrude from his forehead. He is terrible to behold, but the wisdom of millennia shines from his eyes.)

ONI

And about time, if I may say so. This is who you are, Mabel.

(He strolls in casually, acknowledging the Storyteller in passing. He walks around and surveys the scene.)

My, my. The fulfillment of prophecy is never neat and clean, is it... Oh, come down from there, my dear. I hate talking to people when they're hovering.

(Mabel descends. Her wings fold up and disappear as she comes back to earth.)

That's better. Now, before we deal with all of this... let me get a look at you.

(examining her)

Well you're certainly the loveliest thing I've seen in... well, in a great long while.

MABEL

You... you are the Oni?

ONI

Well of course I am. Who else were you expecting?

MABEL

You spoke to me...

(beat)

MABEL (CONT)

You know what is happening to me, don't you?

ONI

I told you, you've embraced your true nature. In both worlds, there is not another like you, Mabel. You are the key.

(He turns his attention to Caldecott.)

MABEL

The key?

ONI

So this is the great Traveler, Ian Caldecott... I expected him to be taller.

MABEL

Please, the key to what? ...My god, what am I?

ONI

You, my girl, are the walking, talking fulfillment of the oldest prophecy of our kind.

(beat)

I think this needs to be heard by everyone. Now, let's see...

(The Oni looks at the frozen scene, then plucks Guy's bullet from the air. He squeezes it to dust. He gestures, and the scene starts moving again. Everyone pulls up short, staring at the empty space where Mabel was before. Guy looks at his empty hand, confused.)

ONI

Your weapon has been disposed of, Hunter.

(Everyone is shocked to see the Oni.)

AMI

Ancient one!

(The Kitsune drop to their knees and bow, heads touching the ground.)

ONI

Now, now, that's enough. Get up.

(They do so, but stand with eyes averted. Guy starts to reach down to his boot; the Oni gestures, and Guy is forced back upright, arms locked at his sides.)

ONI

I will not tolerate violence. Now, promise to be civil and I might just let you go.

(Guy nods stiffly. The Oni gestures again and Guy's body is released.)

ONI

Thank you.

(beat)

The fulfillment of prophecy is upon us. The key is arrived at the door to the dawning sun.

CALDECOTT

But... I don't understand, ancient one. Where is the key? And what is it?

MABEL

I think... I am, Ian.

CALDECOTT

You?

GUY

Balderdash. You are no such thing, Mabel.

ONI

Be silent, Hunter.

(beat)

Listen closely, all of you.

(Lights dim; the Storyteller's spot brightens.)

STORYTELLER

And listen they did, in wonder. The Oni, guardian of secrets, told them of the ancient prophecy, and-

(The Oni looks over to the Storyteller and sighs. He gestures, and the lights come back up.)

ONI

Thank you, but I think we can skip that.

STORYTELLER

Oh.

(disappointed)

Well, I'll just be here if, you know... you need me for anything.

ONI

(sighs)

Oh, for pity's sake... Tell you what, you can lead me into it.

STORYTELLER

Really? You don't mind?

ONI

Just get on with it. And don't step on my lines.

STORYTELLER

Right.

(beat)

Listen they did, in great wonder, for the tale was incredible. The Oni, most ancient and powerful of all creatures, the guardian of secrets, told them of the Valley of Walking Dreams, and of the first prophecy.

ONI

In days before memory, all the mythic creatures lived in the Valley, hidden from the eyes of normal men and beasts. The Valley was... a place apart. Connected to the mundane world, but outside of it. We were sealed away, bound by tradition to never cross the threshold into the world of mankind. And my kind, the Oni, were the guardians of those seals.

MABEL

Your kind? I thought you were the only one.

ONI

I am the last. My brothers have all returned to the magic from whence they were born.

MABEL

Oh. I'm sorry.

ONI

Don't fret, my dear. No creature is immortal, not even the Oni.

(smiling)

We are powerful, but not that powerful.

(beat)

Not everyone was content to live in the Valley, however. The call to explore a new world was irresistible to some—something I think both the Traveler and the Hunter can understand. And so a great debate arose among the legendary peoples. My kind stood apart, concerned only with guarding the seals. Perhaps this was our undoing, for we never suspected that anyone would try to take them.

CALDECOTT

Baba Yaga...

ONI

Yes, Baba Yaga. I always said that woman was too crafty for her own good. She was young and impatient, and knew that the debate would never end. So she tricked my brothers into leaving the seals unguarded, for just a moment. And in that moment, she broke them, crossing the threshold into the world of man. And once the seals were broken... well, end of debate. The call to adventure was too much to resist for most, and so they flooded out of the Valley, eager to make their way in this new world.

(beat)

All things must change, I suppose... After the seals were broken, my brothers worried that the Valley would become overrun by man. So they gave themselves to reseal what had been broken. Baba Yaga was cursed to forget the way to the Valley, so she could not break the seals again. And the first great prophecy was spoken—that the Valley would remain hidden until the last days, when one not of our kind would bring the key to the door of the dawning sun. The

ONI (CONT)

prophecy said that the key would be neither of our world, nor of the mundane world. "With an eye of magic and an eye of man, thus will stand the key."

(The Oni looks at Mabel.)

ONI

And now, the key stands at the door.

MABEL

I don't... you can't mean me.

ONI

You, Mabel. You are the opener of the Door, the last hope for the legendary peoples. You alone have the power to unlock the seals and save our kind from destruction.

MABEL

But how can I break the seals?

(The Oni looks at her, sad.)

ONI

It's never neat and clean, my dear. You must give yourself, as my brothers did.

MABEL

Give myself? You mean I have to...

(Guy and Caldecott both step forward.)

GUY

No! I will not allow it!

CALDECOTT

Nor will I. This is not right, Oni. There must be another way.

ONI

It is not your decision, Hunter. Nor is it yours, Traveler. It is hers alone.

GUY

I cannot stand by and witness this!  
(pleading)

GUY

Mabel... I love you. If you die, I have nothing.

MABEL

Guy...

(to the Oni)

Isn't there some other way? Please!

ONI

Take heart, Mabel. The opener of the Door will not die, but will become Guardian of the Valley.

MABEL

But... that's you.

ONI

My time is almost done, Mabel. When the seals are broken, I will use the last of my power to hide the Door from the eyes of man. But the new Guardian must remain in the Valley.

GUY

I would come with you, Mabel.

ONI

You cannot. There is no place for man in the Valley.

MABEL

I... I must do it, Guy. I cannot sentence them to death.

(crying)

I love you. I will miss you terribly.

BABA YAGA

(offstage)

Wait!

(The familiar whirlwind starts to blow, and Baba Yaga spins in.)

ONI

Ah, Baba Yaga. Hello. I was wondering if I'd see you before the end.

BABA YAGA

(looking around)

After so many years, finally... home.

(beat)

BABA YAGA (CONT)

There is a way, Oni, is there not? There is always another way.

(to Mabel)

Good to see you again, dear. I told you, there's not another like you in the wide world.

ONI

As you say, there is another path.

(beat)

You may save yourself, Mabel. But only at the cost of another.

MABEL

I don't understand.

ONI

If someone is willing to take your place as Guardian, you can invest them with your power. But it must be given freely, and you will be forever cut off from the Valley, from half of who you are. And they must remain, and never return to the world of man.

MABEL

I... I can't ask that of anyone. I won't ask anyone to do it.

ONI

If you will not, then your path is set. Will anyone speak for you?

(Silence.)

So be it. Say your farewells, my dear.

STORYTELLER

Just a moment!

(The Storyteller gets up from his stool and approaches the scene.)

STORYTELLER

I will take her place.

MABEL

You? But, why?

STORYTELLER

Because I like happy endings.

(beat)

Besides, the chance to live every day surrounded by the most fantastic of my tales? That's too much to pass up.

ONI

Mabel? Do you accept this offer?

(Mabel leans over and kisses the Storyteller on the cheek.)

MABEL

Thank you.

(beat)

I accept.

ONI

Then take his hands, and give your power to him.

(Mabel and the Storyteller grasp hands. They begin to glow, the magic flowing from her to him, getting brighter and brighter, until it is blinding. Then-it vanishes.)

ONI

It is done.

(Mabel turns and grabs Guy, hugging him fiercely, then does the same with Caldecott. The Storyteller is in awe, feeling his new powers.)

BABA YAGA

(to the Storyteller)

Just promise me you'll try to let someone else talk sometimes, all right?

ONI

The Valley is opened. Come. You will be the only humans to ever gaze upon the Valley of Walking Dreams.

(beat)

It is time to rest.

(The Oni gestures. Lights dim, and the image of a breathtaking mountain valley is seen. Lights down; the image of the Valley lingers for a moment, then dark.)

## Epilogue

(The Storyteller's spot comes up; Baba Yaga sits on the stool.)

BABA YAGA

And so the story ends. The hunter and the traveler were united as friends once more, and the creatures of legend were saved.

(A spot comes up, revealing Stanley and the Japanese woman, holding hands. Stanley is normal again.)

Stanley stayed in Japan, having fallen in love with the young woman who had guided them.

(beat)

I changed him back—he deserved it.

(The spot fades on the trio.)

Oh, one more thing. If you should encounter any creatures of myth, do me a favor—tell them the Door is open, and they can come home.

(Lights fade to dark.)

.....

end of play.

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