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Dramatis Pupae: The Special Agency of Puppet Performances

Casey Mráz

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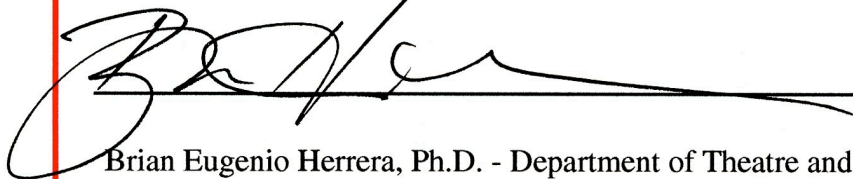
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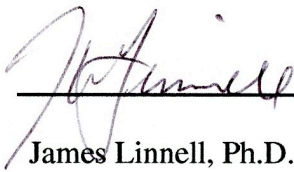
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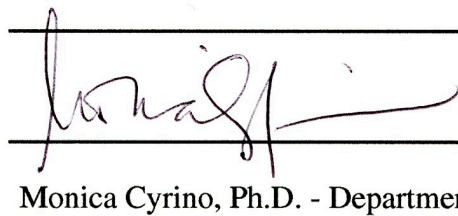

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THE SPECIAL AGENCY OF PUPPET PERFORMANCES**

BY

CASEY MRÁZ

B.U.S., University Studies, University of New Mexico, 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

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ABSTRACT

Puppets have been used in performance by many cultures for thousands of years. Their roles in performance are constantly changing and evolving. Throughout the twentieth century there has been much contention between performance theorists over what defines a puppet. I aim toward a definition that emphasizes the puppet/audience and puppet/puppeteer relationship:

Puppet: Any performing object that mechanizes human facial/bodily structures and features through movement and animates emotion.

Puppets make us laugh because they are larger than life, playful and tend to employ comic mannerisms. Therefore, performing their sexuality, gender or race and placing them in violent situations magnifies their comic potential. Puppets, like comedy, possess the power of subversion. This is their special agency in performance. They distance us from reality through performance at the same time they reinforce a suspended reality. Puppets also perform an imitation of an imitation of life rather than the direct imitation of life itself.

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I. Introduction to Puppetry

When I returned to my third year of graduate studies in the M.F.A. program for Dramatic Writing at the University of New Mexico I was surprised to find that I had, somehow, garnered a reputation as being a playwright who writes plays for puppets, or plays that use puppets as characters. At first I didn't understand how I had gained this reputation and even wondered if the reputation was warranted, or even wanted. I had never even designed or built a puppet and, with no formal training, certainly did not consider myself to be an expert in the field. In fact, it seemed more appropriate to state that I had not written plays for puppets, but rather that puppets were employed as a means to solve production problems in the scripts I had written.

However, as I began to look back at my own work it occurred to me that I had, indeed, used puppets, masks and had employed puppetry principles, not only in my plays, but in many of the productions I had designed sets and props for throughout my career in the theatre. I also began to see many recurring trends in the plays I had written. Most specifically, my characters were often liminal beings, or possessed attributes of both human and divine, or human and animal. What, I wondered, had influenced me to write

characters like bulls, mermaids, orcas, centaurs, birds, deer, bears, etc? In one of my plays I had even created a Dramatis Pupae page that succeeded the Dramatis Personae page. The Dramatis Pupae page differentiated those characters that were to be played by actors from those to be enacted by puppets. Did my vision of these characters begin as puppets? Or did puppets merely become a theatrical, and perhaps (dare I say), conventional way of rendering these characters on stage in a performance? Whatever the case, I suddenly felt somewhat enlightened by recognizing and appreciating the fact that I was beginning to develop my own theatrical aesthetic. As I looked through my arsenal of plays, and my background in design, I found that I had much more experience in the art of puppetry than I had ever given myself credit for.

I discovered that by examining puppets through the principles by which they operated, (i.e., the mechanization of an object in performance), I saw puppets nearly everywhere throughout my experiences in theatre. I began to wonder, how had my experiences in scenic and props design, much of which had relied on the use of these puppetry principles, influenced my writing? Was I writing for puppets because I believed them to be inherently theatrical, or was I exploring something deeper about puppets in performance? How do

puppets inform a performance in a different way than actors?
The fundamental question became simply: why puppets?

All of these questions and self-evaluations of my role as a puppet artist has led me to what I have come to define as a puppet or a puppetry principle in performance. After defining the puppet for myself I found it important to understand how puppets and masks have been used throughout time and across cultures in performance. It is not a surprise to learn that nearly every culture in the world throughout time has used puppets/masks in one way or another. How has the puppet changed throughout time from culture to culture, and how does it continue to change?

I will begin with my own experiences in writing plays for puppets where it all began, my productions at UNM. No doubt, to write certain types of liminal characters on the page raises many issues when that play goes into a production. I will examine how these issues were treated from production to production. Then I will explore what puppets tell us about race, gender and sexuality. How do puppets, (objects that are seemingly void of race, gender and sexuality), deal with these issues in performance? Next I will examine how puppets and comedy work together. How do puppets create comic impulses, and more importantly, what is the use of comedy in a puppet performance? Next I will trace

the role of masks in Greek tragedy and attempt to understand how masks affect a performance. I will examine several theories about how masks were used in Greek tragedy. Then, I will show how this has led me to write my next puppet play, where I intend on exploring the ideas covered in this document. And finally, I will use the information covered in the body of the document to analyze what I am calling the 'special agency' of puppet performances. The 'special agency' relates to three elements of a puppet performance: 1) Puppets mechanize human movement and emotion, 2) they perform an imitation of an imitation of life, and 3) they simultaneously disconnect and reconnect a suspended reality in performance.

II. Defining a Puppet

Within the realms of puppet performance theory there is a contention between different theorists over what defines a puppet. Some seek tighter definitions that encourage strict criteria for constituting a puppet, thus, limiting what can be properly considered to be a puppet. Often these definitions will attempt to define a puppet by what the very materials it is made out of. Less traditional definitions allow for broader interpretations of puppets, or aim to eliminate definitions of puppets altogether, in order open up the field of puppetry performances to include a larger array of performances.¹ I fall into the latter group. Perhaps it is my aesthetic as a theatre artist, or perhaps it is because of my lack of formal training in the field. Regardless, I am much more interested in definitions that are malleable and always open for revision and reevaluation as performance traditions evolve.

Twentieth and twenty-first century theatre, film and media have opened up possibilities that are unprecedented in the realms of theatre and performance. Many performance theorists have encouraged a broader definition of what

¹ For a detailed analysis of puppet definitions see Steven Tillis, *Toward an Aesthetic of the Puppet: Puppetry as a Theatrical Art*. (Greenwood Press: New York), 1992.

constitutes performance.² Likewise, puppets deserve a broader definition. I find that strict, traditional definitions of puppets are counterproductive in the modern arena of performance, which relies so heavily on technology. Modern performance has grown beyond what was technologically possible in previous centuries. We are living in a different artistic landscape in the modern era, and thus, our assumptions about puppets and their roles in modern performance must be reflected in any and every medium of performance respectively.

Taking this into account, my definition of puppets is simple and straightforward:

Puppet—A performing object that mechanizes human actions and emotions.

This definition is quite loose and can include a wide array of performances that are not traditionally thought of as puppet performances, like animated characters. Animated characters, therefore, become puppets when they are in action and exhibit emotion. The basic rule is that a puppet is not a puppet until it moves. My definition emphasizes the features of the object and motion/emotion and its relationship to the puppeteer and audience. I am not

² For a detailed analysis of 20th century performance traditions and definitions see Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction*. (Routledge: New York), 1996.

interested in the materials a puppet is made from or the traditions that define the art of puppetry, but rather the principles by which a performing object operates.

A drawing of a character works off these puppetry principles only when it is animated in performance. Likewise, this is the difference between a puppet and a doll, or a performing object as opposed to an object. A doll may possess features of a living being but cannot be a puppet until it can successfully mechanize the action and emotion of a human being. When the doll is in the hands of a puppeteer who operates its limbs and puts it into action, it then becomes a puppet.

Many puppets are not human characters at all but are rather animals or other non-specific creatures. However, the only way a non-human puppet can successfully perform emotion is by humanizing itself for an audience. For instance, a real fish may possess actions that are human actions, (such as eating, sleeping or swimming etc.) but displays no active emotions. Therefore, a fish is a fish. However, if a fish is manipulated by a human puppeteer it can then embody actions and emotions through the human puppeteer and thus, become human itself by displaying human instincts and human desires. The fish then becomes a puppet, an imitator of life.

When I was in middle school my father would frequently take me fishing at Bear and Blue Lake in southern Colorado. On one occasion, after catching two brown trout early in the day I decided to stage a play with them. I cut the head off of one of them, got my dad's video camera and set up the scene. The first fish, who still had its head appeared on screen. Then the headless fish entered and said, "what's up, Chuck? How are you doing?" The first fish responded with, "Good. Hey, Larry, where's your head? It's gone!" At this point the headless fish looked around and began to freak out, not knowing what happened to his head. He exclaimed, "Oh my god! Where is my head? AHHH!" I bring this anecdote up only to affirm that, though the fish were fish when they were in the lake, they became puppets when they got into my hands where and when I gave them human emotion and behaviors for the purpose of performance.

In addition, puppets that do not represent human characters and are not gender specific still communicate human emotions and human sexuality to an audience. For example, audiences may question if Elmo, (from *Sesame Street*) is a boy or a girl, based on his/her size, voice, disposition, etc. In the end, audiences may have differing interpretations and may have more questions than solutions. However, by the very questioning of gender they have already

endowed it with human actions, emotions and human attributes, though clearly Elmo is not human. People are trained to watch a character in performance and relate to him/her/it. We do it instinctively. When watching a performance of a non-human character we instinctively negotiate its human qualities, because, after all we are humans and interpret the world through the lens of humanness. Examining the humanness in a puppet can become confusing, and perhaps dangerous, when it comes to race, gender and sexuality. Many plays, television shows and films have exploited this aspect of puppet performances. Some recent examples are *Avenue Q*, *Greg the Bunny* and *Team America* all of which use puppets to tell stories that deal with issues concerning race, gender and sexuality.

III. My Beginnings in Puppet Plays

I have always been scared of puppets. In my experiences in working as a scenic designer, props designer and technical director in the theatre I, up until recently, have always been fearful when puppets are brought into a production. I have always considered puppets to be a highly skilled and sophisticated discipline of theatre, one that surpassed my training and background. When I designed the set for *Little Shop of Horrors* in the summer of 2008 I wanted to stay as far away from the puppet plants as possible. These puppets were very elaborate, very intricate and very large. The last thing I wanted was the responsibility of maintaining them or performing any sort of repairs on them out of fear of ruining them.

When I worked as the scenic designer and props designer on *Love & Beauty*, produced by Tricklock Theatre Company in Albuquerque, New Mexico, I became very nervous when puppets were introduced in a production meeting. The two writer/directors of the piece, Shenoah Allen and Mark Chavez had built several rod puppets to represent the puppet versions of four of the characters in the play. Because I was a skilled scenic painter, they asked me if I would paint their faces to look like the actors. As I transported them from the theatre to the shop I treated them with the utmost

care as if they were living beings, fragile and sensitive to mishandling. I put them in a wooden box for fear that they might be damaged if I carried them in a bag. And at the shop I handled them as delicately as I possibly could while I meticulously painted their faces and gave them skin-like shading and tones.

The puppets themselves were nothing elaborate. Their heads were styrofoam balls with clay molded over them to give them facial features. The balls were then attached to robes of fabric which had arms and rods sewn onto them. In retrospect, I wonder why had I treated them so preciously when they were so cheaply made and designed? I can only imagine that it is because they were puppets. That was something new, exciting and perhaps, mystical to me at the time.

When I came to UNM as a graduate student in the fall of 2006 my first involvement in a production in the Theatre department was as the scenic designer for the Tricklock/UNM joint production of *Candide*. The script was a newly adapted version of Voltaire's classic novel written and directed by Joe Feldman. *Candide*, being the adventure story that it is, takes the characters on a wild journey around the world. The real test of the design was to create a set that could

quickly transform from one location to another at rapid speed so as not to lose the pacing of the story.

Throughout the show there was a total of thirty-six locations. Upon first reading the script it seemed as though the design could be either very simple, or incredibly complicated and elaborate. Sure enough, it became the latter. Through the process of defining and designing the respective thirty-six locations it began to appear as though the theatre would itself operate like a large puppet. The locations were established using rolling wagons and trucks, hand held jungle flats that moved and danced to musical numbers, painted backdrops that flew in on fly lines, flats that folded out from both sides of the proscenium and miscellaneous set decorations that hung from the jungle gym set that stayed stationary on stage throughout the entire show. It had been, by far, the most challenging set I ever designed, but it taught me many lessons in transforming the space of a theatre to isolate multiple locations. When my plays started receiving productions it seemed only natural that they presented sets that were constantly transforming. These plays presented many challenges to designers and directors. Likewise, the characters themselves in the plays raised issues in production.

In the spring of 2007 I wrote an adaptation of a children's story written by my father, David Mráz, titled *Rosario & the Bull*. After completing the first draft I submitted it to the department to be produced in the department's Outreach Theatre Company, which picked one script every year to be produced and toured around the city to elementary schools in the spring semester. The shows were performed on Tuesday and Thursday mornings in places like gyms and cafeterias. There were no stage lights and no access to wing space or any other features usually built exclusively for theatres.

Immediately in production meetings with the director, Erin Phillips, the issues over how to deal with many of the aspects of the story and characters came into question. For instance, the script, (which was a fantastical children's tale), included characters such as spiders, scorpions, donkeys, beasts, and a bull that catches fire. Immediately, Erin suggested the use of puppets and masks. I agreed, knowing nothing about construction of these puppets or masks. After all, I was the playwright. I figured I would not be in charge of building them or designing them.

Erin had a lot of great ideas and I was amazed to see how creatively she was able to stage moments such as the bull catching fire by using strips of red, orange and yellow

fabrics that would be pulled from the costume of the actor. However, as the show got closer to opening it became clear that much help was needed in finishing these puppet and mask elements. After all, we were all students and this was merely one of many productions we were all currently involved in that semester.

So I jumped in and agreed to build the bull mask. Many years earlier I had worked on a production of *Midsummer Night's Dream* in which a donkey mask was designed and built by the costume designer, Kent Parker. While I was working in the scene shop on props and other scenery he had come in occasionally to use the shop's contact cement and other various tools and materials. I watched him out of the corner of my eye and studied how he used upholstery foam to cut into patterns, which he then glued together with the contact cement. The malleability of the foam allowed the mask to be shaped and formed to fit the contour of a donkey's head.

So I began work on the bull's head by finding all of the scrap pieces of upholstery foam that were lying around in the shop, bought a can of contact cement and set to work. After the first couple of patterns were glued together the director, Erin, came over to inspect my work. "I don't see it", she said to me. I asked her to trust me and confidently claimed that, "I knew what I was doing". Upon completion she

admitted that she didn't understand how the upholstery foam could make a bull's head, but was thoroughly impressed with my work. In fact, it was such a hit during the show that when we performed at the schools students always wanted to touch it and see it and wondered how it had been built. Being the first mask that I have ever built I was very proud of it. I have since hung it up in my son's bedroom.

In the fall of 2007 I began writing a play called *Dioscuri & Armchair Warrior*. The play was about an adolescent boy, Jason, who spends all of his time playing a fictional video game, "Roman Centurion: Conqueror of the World". He becomes oblivious to the outside world and so completely consumed by the game that he sees himself as a centurion, adorned with the full outfit, including a gladius and a helmet with a peacock plume. In the beginning of the play he is visited by the Greek/Roman twin warrior gods, the Dioscuri, (Castor & Polydeuces). His girlfriend is a Mermaid who wants to be a real woman and undergoes a surgery that gives her legs and a vagina. In the course of the play Jason and his girlfriend are visited by her sister, Dancing Bear, (a sex addict stripper), Tree Climber, (a poetic elf whose forest has been cut down), and Hurricane Ted, (a three thousand year old centaur with a large phallus who is followed by hurricanes wherever he goes). Jason's father,

Dr. Beaver, dies in the first act and the dramatic question becomes who was going to inherit the land and become the new hero of the modern era.

The play was staged for an Advanced Directing Class at UNM in May of 2008, directed by Stefanie Shahvar, a particularly ambitious undergraduate theatre student. Once again, in meetings the questions of how to render these characters on stage was conveniently solved by puppets. The Dioscuri were turned into hand and rod puppets, which I labeled as *dramatis pupae*, (puppets of the drama) in the following draft. The mother of the actor playing Mermaid (Daniel Garcia) designed and built a puppet vagina for the Mermaid, which then gave birth to a smaller puppet baby in the course of the play. I designed and built a large foam phallus for Hurricane Ted and a large foam squid costume for the production. Tentacles were made out of egg foam and were operated by concealed stage crew on opposite sides of the stage to give the illusion of the squid's enormous size.

The one-night only performance was a great success and attracted a much larger audience than anyone anticipated. A week after the show I got a call from the Artistic Director of the Albuquerque Little Theatre, Becca Holmes. She had seen my work on *Rosario and the Bull* and *Dioscuri and Armchair Warrior* and asked if I would be interested in

designing and building puppets and masks for their upcoming production of *The BFG: (Big Friendly Giant)*, an adaptation of the book by Roald Dahl. Suddenly I found myself moving from a position of not knowing anything about puppets and masks to being someone who was considered a skilled artist in the field. I no longer have that fear of working with puppets, and though I have a lot yet to learn and training to seek, I knew more about puppets and masks than I had ever given myself credit for.

IV. Race, Gender and Sexuality in Puppets

Puppets, because they mechanize human emotions and actions like actors, establish or reinforce preexisting social values and norms through coded markers of race, gender and sexuality. In terms of sexuality and gender, several puppet performances throughout the 20th & 21st century have emerged that seek to call into question issues of race, gender and sexuality through puppets. Some examples are *Meet the Feebles*, *Crank Yankers*, *Wonder Showzen* and *Avenue Q*. These shows channel the child's imagination of puppetry while evoking themes, issues and comedy that is, in no way, meant for children. These performances raise many questions concerning the complicated relationships puppets have with their respective sexualities, genders, races and how that informs audiences, and more broadly, society in general.

Could these performances have been made without the use of puppets? What is the significance that puppets bring to these types of performances? What does this say about us as a society, and more specifically, as a society informed and shaped by entertainment? Why do we get such a big kick out of seeing puppets have sex, or tell dirty or racial jokes, or use curse words or commit violent acts? Is this intention innate in humankind and performance traditions or do we

acquire such tendencies through society?

Many people can probably recall the day when they stripped the clothes off of Barbie and Ken dolls and made them make out and have sex with each other. Perhaps there is something to be said about the power we possess when we have a puppet in our hands. My son went through a period when he was two to three years old in which he kept a Princess Jasmine Barbie doll close by him day and night for several months straight. He called the doll his "lady". At night when he was going to sleep he routinely took the doll's clothes off and put her to bed, tucking her in and kissing her goodnight. Perhaps, this three-year old boy, who warrants very little control over his own life and is always being cared for, needs something in return to control and care for because he learns through imitating others, most directly his parents. Maybe this holds some truth to the tradition of puppets. Humans can become difficult, if not impossible, to control. Puppets, however, are lifeless objects until given animation and thus, significance through complete human manipulation. Giving life to an otherwise inanimate object can have a profound effect on sex and gender in a performance.

In Ancient Greece the phallus served as a type of puppet in performance. Aristotle, in his Poetics, claimed that

tragedy came "from those who led off the dithyramb", and comedy, "from those who did so for the phallic performances" (Else 22). These *phalloi* were large stuffed props that would hang from the actor to portray a flaccid penis, or they might be stiffened through the use of a mechanical device to portray an erection. Both uses were employed depending on the comic scene. However, the convention of the stylized phallus is not exclusive to comedy and satyr plays of Ancient Greece. It is a device still utilized in modern performance, whether it is through dildos and sex toys, or with guitars, microphone stands and drumsticks in a rock music performance. The phallus, as used in performance, would not communicate social values of masculinity, maleness or sexuality if it were not in the form of an over-exaggerated puppet. If the male actor exposed his own genitals for the sake of a performance it would not have the same effect for it would be no different than a human actor in action expressing emotion. Instead, a large flaccid or erect phallus distances the audience from reality while at the same time, reinforces a hyperbolic reality of masculinity and grotesqueness of masculinity. The puppet holds a mirror to an audience without violating the senses of that audience.

What does this tell us about how we, as a society, view male gender and male sexuality? How do puppets reinforce

these social norms of gender and sexuality? How do they revise them? How is gender manipulated in puppets?

I recently took my son to see *WALL-E*, the Pixar animated movie, and was, before even walking into the theatre, interested in how they humanized robots and brought emotional life to otherwise, mechanical machines. In terms of comedy it has always struck me how we, through performance, are able to bring emotional human qualities to inanimate objects, or even how we are so easily able to humanize animals and, through performance, make them behave, mechanically, as if they were humans themselves. Mechanical and human features of action and emotion work hand in hand in a performance. It is the mechanical aspect to human nature that comically depicts us all as machines, working off of impulses and signals as a machine does. Henri Bergson, in his essay, "Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic", writes, "The attitudes, gestures and movements of the human body are laughable in exact proportion as that body reminds us of a mere machine" (Bergson 29). Puppets themselves operate mechanically like machines through human manipulation.

In the movie we see *WALL-E*, (which is an acronym for Waste Allocation Load Lifter Earth-Class), and the other characters act not as robots would but as humans. As I watched the film I was struck by how the film rendered gender in inanimate

objects and endowed these mechanical robots with sexual identity and heterosexual relationships. The main character of the movie, WALL-E, is a short, dirty, rusty, self-sufficient robot whose only objective in the beginning of the story is to clean up the mess that the humans have left on Earth. In doing so he collects objects from the world and keeps them in his abode, a metal box. From the very beginning of the movie we know, as an audience, that WALL-E is a young man of a working class background. He is dirty but cute, short and built like a box, hard-working and naïve, and booming with personality.

His female counterpart is a flying robot named EVE, (which stands for Extra-terrestrial Vegetation Evaluator). She is shiny, curvy, white, with blue eyes and a female robotic voice. Like WALL-E, from her first appearance on screen, we know that she is a girl, young and beautiful, and the model of American femininity. She embodies the typical Hollywood representation of the female lead role. She is delicate yet strong, vulnerable yet tough, possesses the perfect fit and is destined to fall in love with her male counterpart, WALL-E.

These representations reinforce what we, as a society, value in male-female heterosexual relationships. The robots themselves, needless to say, are sexless, i.e., they possess

no sexual organs that distinguish them from being either male or female. There is nothing sexually specific about them, yet they fully embody male-female heterosexual attitudes, and we, as an audience, are never meant to call that into question. However, we might find it more difficult to identify with EVE as the female protagonist if, instead of being curvy, white and blue-eyed, she was angular and black with red eyes. The film, through animating these characters as objects that mechanize human emotions and actions, reestablishes the traditional, model social norms: males are angular while females are curvy, males are rough and females are smooth, and both are white.

An episode of *Wonder Showzen*, (the children's puppet show not intended for children), depicts the number 8 as a PLO terrorist and the letter J as a young Jewish girl who fall in love, have explicit sex and, in the end, disclose their love for each other to their comrades in hopes to bring peace.³ However, this is *Wonder Showzen* and does not have the *Romeo & Juliet* ending of quelling the long-standing feud between the two groups. The numbers and letters, in their rage about the relationship, agree to unite with each other and riot, vandalize and destroy everything and everyone else

³ *Wonder Showzen*, (MTV2) 2005-2006, Episode 4, "Diversity".

in the city. These puppets are endowed with race, gender and sexuality, almost in excess. Yet it is a direct reflection of the already existing norms of the world in which we live.

Likewise, *Greg the Bunny*, the puppet sitcom that aired on Fox and IFC, used puppets, in one episode, to tell a story about racial prejudices in the work place.⁴ The episode begins with Greg, the show's puppet protagonist, who writes a joke on the bathroom wall that uses the derogatory term "sock" to refer to a puppet. The joke reads, "Greg the Bunny is a dirty sock who should die". The cast accuses Junction Jack, a human actor, of writing the racial slur and, although he denies it, Jack does, indeed, exhibit some anti-puppet sentiment. In the course of the episode, we find out that Jack, in his childhood, discovered his mother cheating on his father with a puppet with large bobbling "googley-eyes". Jack's mother left his father for the puppet and Jack has long since carried a burning hatred for puppets. The episode ends with an intervention by a well-known Puppet Anti-Defamation public speaker teaching the cast and crew about social inequality and social injustices against puppets. The episode treats puppets as if it were its own race, different than human. Even though puppets do not live in the real

⁴ *Greg the Bunny*, (Fox) 2002, Season 1: Episode 12, "Sock Like Me".

world, the sense of racial awareness among different groups effectively reflects the society in which we live.

Underlying all of these puppet performances is comedy. We laugh at their, all too human, qualities. We enjoy their complicated relationships and their consistent failures to achieve their ultimate goal. Comedy, it seems, is inherent to any puppet performance.

V. Puppet Performances & Comedy

In the spring of 2008 I took a Comedy Writing class at UNM and at the beginning of the semester we were all asked to briefly talk about what types of comedy we were influenced by. I could have given an extensive list of all the types of comedy that inspired me over the years, but instead, I searched back to my childhood and the first influence in comedy I could remember, *The Muppet Show*. Being too young to recall the show when it first aired, my own experiences of *The Muppet Show* were reruns at 7:00am every morning, over a bowl of cereal, before school. To me, there was nothing funnier than *The Muppet Show*. The relationships that developed between the puppets and humans were new and exciting to my child's imagination. I was inspired by the wackiness and the spontaneity of the show. I even felt enlightened, like I had an insight into life that only these furry creatures could give me. *The Muppet Show* was special. It was different than anything else I had ever seen or experienced.

Perhaps, like comedy, puppets have the ability to distance us from reality enough to explore issues and themes in ways different than other types of performances. Perhaps this is why so many recent performances in theatre, film and television have chosen to place puppets in adult related

scenarios and situations that are usually reserved for scripts written exclusively for human actors.

Tony Kushner, in his foreword to *The Mystery of Irma Vep and Other Plays* by Charles Ludlam, (the founder of the Ridiculous Theatrical Company), wrote that Ludlam knew life was, "a comedy for those who think/a drama for those who feel" (Kushner xvi). Comedy has the ability to effectively probe into the heart of real social issues while maintaining its emotional distance from the audience through laughter. Comedy can offer a new reality while simultaneously providing a filter through which to view that reality. It, however, is a double-edged sword. The drawback is that audiences may be so overwhelmed with laughter and entertainment that they miss the point entirely, or disregard it as simply meant for laughs, and not meant to be taken seriously.

Puppets and masks possess a similar quality of subverting reality. They distance us from reality at the same time they reinforce that same reality. When we look back into the origins of theatre we find these traditions and customs being employed in performance for similar reasons. Puppets and masks provide a buffer for which to view an imitation of life.

VI. The Greeks & Their Masks

Much scholarship and debate between classicists throughout the twentieth century attempts to explain why the Greeks used masks in theatre. I will make no attempt to define exactly what the Greeks aimed at accomplishing through the use of masks in performance for it is not the purpose of this essay. And furthermore, masks were used in different ways, depending on the specific region or *polis*, at different times throughout the history and landscape of Ancient Greece. To track their uses over time is a study that reaches beyond this research.

I will however, say that the use of masks for the Greeks manipulated sight, sound and ritual of performance. They were not used solely to provide a practical solution of amplifying the voices of the actors. They may have served that function but the amplification of the voices, through the built in megaphone, provided characters with a unique quality of voice more than simply volume of voice. Dario Fo, a contemporary Italian theatre artist and playwright who is known for his work in *Commedia dell' Arte* performance styles, explains that this feature of the mask served to provide a certain musicality to an actor's voice. Fo writes, "Every mask is a musical instrument that possesses a unique resonance" (Wiles 153). Every mask was unique and had the

capability to distort a voice, or deepen it, or give it extra reverberation, or any other quality specific to the character it was portraying.

No masks from Ancient Greece survive in the modern era so it is difficult to make any assumptions about their appearance and overall function. Most of what we know about masks come from either vase paintings or written documents of the period. However, we do know a few things about how masks were used in Ancient Greece, even if it does not fully explain the purpose or aesthetic.

Masks possessed the power of transformation. Any actor, (male, of course) could personify an old man, a woman, a God, or any other being in any state of emotion. P.E. Easterling writes, "the mask enables individual performers to assume multiple identities: each actor will play different roles from one drama to the next" (Easterling 51). In a theatre festival a single actor could play three different roles and a satyr in the satyr play that followed the three tragedies. Through masks men could also portray female characters without having to attempt to play a female. The theatrical convention of the masks allowed for these transformational qualities.

Masks were also built asymmetrically in order to portray a character in motion. Although the mask, unlike a puppet,

is static and does not possess the ability to move and mechanize facial or bodily gestures and movements, it did possess the illusion of movement in its design. Many masks embodied emotion in their appearance and thus exhibited a character in a state of movement. Easterling goes on to write, "the masks themselves, fixed and unchangeable, are a visible reminder to the audience of the fictive nature of dramatic events." Yet because they embodied emotion in their design they did indeed "create the illusion of facial movement and fluidity of expression" (51). In performance, illusion is everything.

When discussing performance and theatre in Ancient Greece we must also remind ourselves that this was a polytheistic society that promoted appreciation of multiple deities and spiritual relationships to the world. After a performance, the masks were retired and dedicated to the Gods that they portrayed. It was believed that through performance the masks had the ability to conjure the spirit of the Gods and that at that moment they were no longer an instrument of music or performance but were rather sacrosanct and needed to be treated like a sacred object. J.R. Green comments on modern performances in Bali and claims that "actors still make offerings to their masks as supernatural powers". They are to be worshipped, just as a deity is, and

are not to be taken out into 'normal society' (51). For the Greeks there was little difference between theatre and ritual. Theatre, for the Greeks, was a ritual that summoned deities and supernatural powers.

One of the reasons that masks were not used in performance in post-Roman Europe, (at least to the degree that they were used in Ancient Greece), was that they were seen as pagan, or as objects that conjured the unholy. David Wiles, in his book, Masks and Performance in Greek Tragedy, writes that early Christians aimed at eradicating the mask because it became "obsessed with laying bare the human soul" (Wiles 67). The mask obstructed man's spiritual relationship with God. It became "an emblem of the devil, and Harlequin began as Hell's King, licensed to commit diabolic mischief" (67). For the Greeks the world was in constant transformation, and one can find this all throughout their literature and performance. "Transformation was a property of Greek political systems, and also of the Greek polytheistic system with its fluid boundary between human and divine worlds" (67). Masks provided the appropriate theatrical convention to display divinity in performance.

VII. Sharkey & Me: A New Puppet Play

In the fall of 2008 a package arrived at my parents' house. It was from my sister and was addressed to my son, Max Mráz. It contained a large stuffed shark, approximately 30 inches from nose to tail with two sets of rubber teeth and a hand hole in its belly through which one can manipulate its mouth and eyes. My son loved the puppet upon first seeing it, and he immediately named it Sharkey.

A week or two later we were playing in his tent and he brought the stuffed creature inside. I stuck my hand inside its mouth and begin to talk to Max with the Shark. I gave the Shark a voice that somewhat emulated a cross between Kermit the Frog and the character of Barney from *The Simpsons*. I gave the Shark the motivation of always wanting to eat everything, even including Max. He thought it was absolutely hysterical. From that day on, Sharkey has, in many ways, become Max's best friend.

I quickly observed three modes of behavior between Max and Sharkey. 1) Max understands that Sharkey cannot talk without my hand inside him. When Max wants to play with Sharkey he will hand me the puppet and say, "make Sharkey talk". However, Max does not think of Sharkey as a puppet who is being controlled by an operator. On one occasion I made this mistake and encountered severe hostility to the

word "puppet" from Max who shouted, "Sharkey is not a puppet!" 2) When I am operating the puppet Max talks almost exclusively to Sharkey. Every once in a while he will address me, "Papa", but it is rare. He does know that I manipulate the Shark and give him a voice, however, he delineates between the two of us. Sharkey is Sharkey and Papa is Papa. In fact, when anyone else tries to "make Sharkey talk" he becomes very frustrated and says, "that's not Sharkey's voice!" 3) Max looks to Sharkey for approval in his actions and confides in him. He frequently looks to the shark and not me (the father), to communicate his desires and needs when he is around him. Max has even discussed his relationship with his mother to the stuffed animal. Indeed, Max refers to Sharkey as his "best friend" and looks to Sharkey for friendship since he does not have daily interactions with other children his age.

Max has been through a lot in his life. His mother and I split up when he was two and it has been a rough and rocky road, to say the least, ever since. This anxiety has taken a toll on Max's mental and psychological health and he is keenly aware of the conflict between his parents. However, I will say that he is loved and adored by both parties, despite the discord between his mother and father.

As I observed my son's interactions with the puppet I began to question whether this was a healthy relationship or not. What does the puppet have that I don't? Is the puppet simply a playmate for my son, or is there something else going on here? Indeed, Max will even discuss his frustrations with his mother to the puppet. No doubt, he voices these frustrations to me as well, but the puppet serves as a third party (seemingly outside the struggles of daily life in two households). The puppet perhaps even serves as a comic buffer to the conflict.

Is the relationship between Max and the puppet similar to that of a child with an imaginary friend? Is it different? Is it possible that this relationship may have repercussions that I am unaware of later on in Max's life? Perhaps because I am the father I can't help but worry. After all, I am controlling the puppet's actions and dialogue and Sharkey is not entirely out of Max's imagination.

However, I can't help but wonder when this relationship between a person and a puppet might go too far. Steve Tillis, in his book, Toward an Aesthetics of the Puppet, tells a story in which Bart Roccoberon, Jr., the director of the Puppetry Program at the University of Connecticut, went to visit a famous American puppet-artist. Bart was greeted at the door by the puppeteer's most beloved puppet. As the

puppet and the artist were showing off the artist's collection of puppets the artist and the puppet began to get into an argument about what to do with the evening. The artist argued that they should drink and dine with Bart, while the puppet argued that they should get some rest and be left alone. "Roccoberton was astonished to hear the artist reluctantly agree with the puppet" (Tillis 33). After this, Tillis explains, Bart was "shown to the door, with the artist apologizing for the puppet's moodiness" (33). One might argue that this type of behavior cannot be healthy for an individual. However, it might make for a good play.

This tension of the relationship between puppet and human has inspired me to write my next puppet play. However, this play will be different than other puppet plays I have written in that it will be the first that deliberately uses a puppet as a character, rather than using puppets simply to solve technical problems in production. I must say that, although this play was indeed inspired by events in my life, it is not an autobiographical piece. The events that are from my life are small pieces of information and not the driving force of the story. Because I have not written the play yet, and only recently have been inspired by the idea, the story is subject to change and revision.

The play, *Sharkey and Me* (working title) is the story of the reintegration of a son into his father's life after many years of separation. The young boy, upon returning to his father immediately becomes obsessed with a shark puppet that the father buys him as a 'welcome home' gift. The young boy then begins to develop an intimate relationship with the puppet that is manipulated by his father. The boy then begins to communicate his frustrations with his mother and even begins to threaten her life. Thinking nothing of it, the shark puppet plays into the boy's desires through joking and laughter. Then, when the threat of the boy being taken out of the father's life again, returns the shark begins to manipulate the boy. In the end, the boy tries to cut his mother with a knife and the blame filters down to the puppet shark, through the father and the son.

Though the story is not all the way thought out yet, I envision the themes of trust and perception to be strong in the relationships between the father, son and shark. The boy trusts the puppet in ways that he cannot trust humans. He communicates his deepest, darkest secrets to the puppet and wholly believes everything the puppet says to him. The boy looks to the puppet for spiritual and psychological guidance. This is where the play begins to get dangerous. Puppets, because they are outsiders in the world, can easily earn our

trust. It is as if they observe our world with objective eyes and innocent hearts and offer us a special insight into ourselves.

VIII. The Special Agency

The word *mimesis* comes to us from Ancient Greek to describe theatre as an imitation of life. Puppetry performances, because they are one step removed from the human actor, but still mechanize action and emotion are therefore, an imitation of an imitation of life. Puppets possess this special agency for performance. They are given a freer range for performing actions and emotions of gender, sexuality, race and even violence. We can watch them behave this way because we are not fooled in any way that they are not real people.

One might argue that gender, sexuality, race and violence are features of almost any performance, no matter if it is made up of human actors or puppets. However, like comedy, puppets can 'get away with it' because they physically embody all pretenses in their performance without trying to hide the fact that this is, after all, performance, and not life. Consider the plot of a Punch and Judy performance. Punch accidentally kills his baby and then proceeds to eliminate the entire community, including the Devil. In the end, when the crocodile finally eats Punch he then admits to the audience that "he might let him out for the next show" (Bell 22). In other words, "Punch gets away with it all" (22). Punch and Judy performances were highly

popular throughout Europe and America for centuries and attracted audiences of all ages.

I highly doubt that such a plot would be acceptable to audiences if it had been done with human actors. We can witness the harshest of realities through the performances of puppets: an imitation of an imitation of life. This is a special agency that puppets have. They aren't just funny, or cute, or cuddly, or aesthetically pleasing. They have the ability to solve problems in performance because of their disconnection and simultaneous reconnection with reality. They are a well-established convention of performance and can literally do anything they want without going too far because of their inherently innocent qualities of animating the inanimate. They present a hyperbolic reality that informs the viewer that this performance makes no attempts to imitate the real world, but is indeed imitating the imitation.

It is important to observe the relationship that a puppet shares with the puppeteer and its audience because only then can we learn what puppets have to tell us about ourselves. They animate the inanimate and therefore what they say and do can only last as long as the performance. They have been used in cultures around the globe and across a broad array of performance that range everywhere from theatres, rituals, court houses, films, etc. They are the

divine beings conjured up, as Gods were in Greek Tragedy.
They are liminal creatures that offer a glimpse between the
supernatural world and the real world. This is their special
agency of performance.

The Big Come

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Dramatis Personae

JASON - A virtual Roman centurion.

MERMAID - His girlfriend and hopeful mother.

DANCING BEAR - Mermaid's sister. A sex-addict stripper.

TREE CLIMBER - Bear's friend. Female. An elf.

HURRICANE TED - Bear's friend & Jason's half brother.
Centaur with large organ.

DR. BEAVER - Jewish Cowboy Sex-Change Doctor.

ZOE - The daughter of Jason and Mermaid with wings. Power of
Dreams.

Dramatis Pupae

BABY ZOE - Newborn Daughter of Mermaid and Jason. Puppet.

THE BIRD - Large bird with damaged wings. Puppet.

TIME: Postmodern.

PLACE: A Mythological Landscape.

SYNOPSIS:

Dr. Beaver spent his life acquiring the largest cattle ranch in America and making a name for himself as the world's most prolific sex-change surgeon. Now his life is ending and he struggles to decide who will inherit his acres of land, his cattle, his money and his legacy. His son Jason is a lazy, virtual Roman centurion who spends his time playing video games. As Dr. Beaver prepares to deliver his will, Jason's girlfriend, Mermaid, invites her sister Dancing Bear, a sex-addict stripper, to stay with them until she straightens her life out, (only under the agreement that she comes alone). Instead, Dancing Bear brings her friends Tree Climber, a poetic elf whose forest has been cut down, and Hurricane Ted, a centaur and Dr. Beaver's three thousand year old long lost son, who is followed by hurricanes wherever he goes. This unlikely group of sexually charged mythical and fantastical outcasts find solace in smoking dope and playing video games and card games while Ted's apocalyptic hurricane destroys the house and all of the inheritance.

ACT I

SCENE: Jason sits alone on a couch in the living room, playing a video game, "Roman Centurion: Conqueror of the World". Triumphant video game music comes from the TV screen. A voice from the TV.

TV VOICE

Honos habet onus, centurion! You have defeated the Latins at the great battle of Lake Regillus. All celebrate your victory. You are Roman Conqueror!

JASON

I am Roman Conqueror ...

TV VOICE

You will win control over the entire ancient world and spread your power over the land through your heroic deeds and good fortune. However, you must heed this one warning: *Sic transit gloria* ... Your glory is fading. One day you must pay the ultimate sacrifice for your people and the fate of your country. *Carpe Diem. Bona Fortuna!*

JASON

This is the best day of my life!

Mermaid enters.

MERMAID

Hey, Jason ... Are you hungry?

JASON

Guess what I did today.

MERMAID

Did you find a job?

JASON

I conquered Italy. I am Roman Conqueror.

MERMAID

I'm so proud of you, baby.

JASON

This is the best day of my life. I want to celebrate.

*Jason grabs Mermaid and
kisses her. He bends her
over the couch.*

MERMAID

Oh, Jason, you are so sexy. Oh, Jason ...

Jason fucks her from behind.

MERMAID

Oh, Jason!

JASON

I love bending you over the couch, babe-

MERMAID

Oh, I love it when you bend me over the couch, baby!

JASON

I love being behind you-

MERMAID

I love it when you're behind me, and you bend me over
and fuck me on the couch, baby!

JASON

I love slapping your ass-

He slaps her ass.

MERMAID

I love it when you slap my ass and fuck me from behind
on the couch and bend me over, baby!

*Jason's centurion helmet
falls off.*

JASON

I'm going to come!

MERMAID

Come, baby! I love you, baby!

JASON

I'm coming!

MERMAID

Come! On the couch! Bend me over! Slap the ass! Like it? I love it! Sweet bloody Va-Jesus! Jason!

JASON

OOOOHHHHHHHHH!!!!

Jason freezes in orgasmic ecstasy. A moment.

JASON

I am ... Roman conqueror ...

She kisses Jason.

MERMAID

Do you love me, baby?

JASON

Life is great.

MERMAID

I love you too. I love how you make sweet love to me.

Jason puts his helmet back on. He goes back to playing the video game.

MERMAID

Jason ... Jason ... Jason?

JASON

Hold on a minute.

Pause. Video game war sounds.

MERMAID

Jason ... Jason, I have to tell you something. I wanted to ask you if it is okay that my sister comes to stay with us for a while. She's having a hard time right now

and she needs a place to stay so that she can get back on her feet and get a lawyer and go back to court and get custody of her son back again. You remember her son right? Well, she doesn't have anywhere to stay right now, and I told her that she could stay with us until she ... Well, she's my sister. I have to help her out. She's going through a tough time right now, and I know that she'll straighten her life out. It's only her. And she won't be here long. Just long enough to get her life back together. Jason?

JASON

Okay.

MERMAID

You're the best. I love you.

Doorbell rings.

MERMAID

That's her!

JASON

Just her, right?

MERMAID

Right.

JASON

She's not bringing anyone else over, right?

MERMAID

No, of course not.

JASON

And it's only for a little while, right?

MERMAID

Right. I gotta help her out. That's why she's my sister.

Doorbell rings.

MERMAID

Thank you for understanding. We'll stay out of your way. I promise. And we still have our plans for this afternoon. I'm so excited, I can't wait.

JASON

Okay ... Plans?

*Mermaid opens the door.
Dancing Bear enters
accompanied by Tree Climber
and Hurricane Ted. Tree
Climber enters like he's
never seen a house before.
Hurricane Ted enters like an
old man who has returned to
the home of his childhood.*

MERMAID

Sister!

DANCING BEAR

Sister!

They embrace.

MERMAID

It's so great to see you, sister!

DANCING BEAR

It's so great to see you, sister.

MERMAID

How have you been?

DANCING BEAR

I have had a hard life, sister. Well, I've made a hard life for myself, you know, 'cause that's the only way life is worth living. You gotta make things hard. I mean, if your life isn't hard then you gotta make it hard. That way you deserve it. That way you wake up every morning and you know that you gotta struggle through the day and night and you may not make it out alive. It ain't gonna be easy. It's gonna be rough. And people are gonna knock you down. And you gotta keep getting up or they are just gonna keep knocking you

down. I like the hard way. You know me. Where's the fridge? I got addicted to crystal meth when I was fifteen. When I turned sixteen I fucked every guy I met. And I hated it. I hated it while it was happening, but then later I would get that feeling, you know like I felt free. I felt free from all of the bullshit in the world. From all the bullshit our parents told me when I was growing up. All the times mom told me that one day I would meet a nice boy who would sweep me off my feet and tell me that I'm beautiful. I *am* beautiful. I don't need nice boys to tell me that. I don't want to be swept off my feet by nice boys. Nice boys wouldn't know what to do with me. Nice boys are gross. I want a man. I want a man to throw me over his shoulders like he's Tarzan and take me into a bathroom, or the back of a pickup truck, or a movie theatre and pull my skirt up and take me. I want it to be hard. You know me. I lost my kid. My son. I left town 'cause I found work in the city. There's a lot of work in the city for girls like me. I left him with his father and told him I would be back. And, when I got back, you know what that worthless deadbeat of a father told me? He told me he had already got full custody of my son. So I followed him. And I told him he better give me my son back. Then he told me he would call the cops if didn't leave him alone. He doesn't scare me. I'll get my son back. I'm his mother. I'm his fuckin' mother! They can't take a boy away from his mother. Fuck that. That's bullshit! I need a place to stay. I'll only be here for a little while, until I can get a job and find my own place. I knew my sister would help me out. That's what sisters are for. For helping each other out when hard times come. This is my friend, Tree Climber.

TREE CLIMBER

I hatched from an egg on a branch from a tree.

DANCING BEAR.

He's lost. Where I go, he goes. He came all the way from the rainforest.

TREE CLIMBER

From a seed to a sprout,
From a tree I was born.
From a tree, in a breeze,

High in the sky.
From my tree—I was torn.

From my mother to my younger brother,
We would swing from branch to branch—
In the trees, in the breeze,
Hiding in the leaves,
Never looking down, never touching land.

One day we heard the sounds
Of destruction and destroying,
In the trees, no more breeze,
No place to hide,
But in the leaves.

Our branches stayed strong,
But the tree tumbled down.
And we could not swing on branches
That fell flat on the ground.
And the tops of trees met the land.

Tree Climber is my name,
And I have lost my home.
I roll from place to place,
And I come from town to town—
Tree tops are lost and cannot be found.

MERMAID

A friend of my sister's is a friend of mine.

TREE CLIMBER

I have lost my home!
I wander from place to place,
And I go from state to state—
Looking for tops of trees
Or some place to stay.

DANCING BEAR

And this is my other friend, Ted. He followed us here.
We call him Hurricane Ted.

HURRICANE TED

Name's Hurricane Ted, used to be Hurricane Joe.
Hurricanes follow me wherever I go.

MERMAID

Make yourselves at home. Jason, we should get going.

JASON

Where are we going?

MERMAID

Upstairs. To our appointment. With the doc.

JASON

Who?

MERMAID

Dr. Beaver. Your dad.

JASON

Why? What's wrong?

MERMAID

We talked about this. I want to be a real woman. I need legs ... and a real vagina. So I can have orgasms, and periods, and babies.

JASON

Why do I have to go?

MERMAID

This is for both of us.

JASON

You're the one that wants to come and have babies.

MERMAID

We agreed to do this together.

JASON

I'm busy. I'm conquering the world.

MERMAID

It's always about you! When are you going to do something for me? When are you going to support me?

JASON

Life is too short to support anyone but me.

MERMAID

Fine! I'll do it myself! Just once, Jason, I would like it if we did something together. For once!

JASON

We do things together all the time! We have sex. That's together.

MERMAID

No. You have sex while I live my life for you. You're selfish and self-centered. When are you going to grow up and do something real for a change?

JASON

Life is too short to grow up.

MERMAID

I'll say 'hi' to your father for you.

Mermaid leaves. Silence.

HURRICANE TED

This is a perfect place here to start a new life. I feel like I've been lost for all my life, and I've finally come home.

Mermaid enters Dr. Beaver's office/bedroom upstairs in the house. Dr. Beaver wears his silver lab coat and writes his will.

MERMAID

Dr. Beaver? It's me ... I'm here.

DR. BEAVER

How are you, Mermy?

MERMAID

I'm good. And you? How are you, Dr. Beaver?

DR. BEAVER

I'm dying, you know. I ain't gonna be around much longer. I'm working on my will as we speak. I am pleased to tell you that I'm leaving you a very generous inheritance.

MERMAID

Really? Me?

DR. BEAVER

I've lived a long life. I've been to a lot of places. I've done a lot of great stuff. And you know what? I don't regret a damned thing because I did what I wanted to do, my way. When I wanted something I went and I got it. When I saw something for the taking I took it. I never doubted myself. And when I took all there was to take, I gave it back to the world. By healing people in need. And I see it in you. You're a giver, like me.

MERMAID

I want to live without regrets.

DR. BEAVER

All you gotta do is keep going. Never look back. Something good will happen to you, it always does.

MERMAID

Everyone will be so sad when you're gone.

DR. BEAVER

I don't regret dying, because I don't regret life. Anyway, that's enough ramblin' ... You have come for a-

MERMAID

Legs! And a vagina! I want to have orgasms and periods and babies. It's always been my dream. To be a real woman.

DR. BEAVER

You know what you want.

*Mermaid lies down on
operating table.*

DR. BEAVER

Let's see here ... This looks like a good spot.

*Dr. Beaver pulls a scalpel
from his medical kit and
makes an incision down her*

lower body. He sings to himself.

DR. BEAVER

Okay. Get rid of these fins to make way for the legs. Pop! Choo, choo! A tunnel. Little bit of this. And a little bit of that. Got some eggs. Gotta have eggs. Eggs with tubes and veins, and a bubble in a box! Little bit this. Little bit of that. Some powder, and some glue and a little bit of magic. And the finishing touches ... Poof! There we go! Brand new genitals.

MERMAID

You've changed my life. It kinda hurts.

DR. BEAVER

It'll do that for a couple minutes. Now take these antibiotics for ten years, and these pills for the pain.

MERMAID

I feel like a whole new person. I wish Jason were here.

DR. BEAVER

Don't let him bring you down. Don't let him infect you. You do what you wanna do, when you wanna do it.

MERMAID

Yes, doctor.

DR. BEAVER

And you tell him that I'm working on my will right now. If he don't go out and make something with his life, then he ain't gonna inherit jack-shit from me. When I'm gone I ain't gonna care nothing about this world. He can't depend on me no more.

MERMAID

I'll tell him.

DR. BEAVER

Do you remember the day I found you?

MERMAID

You were on your boat, fishing in the lake. I was only a few years old and had lost my family ...

DR. BEAVER

No more than six inches, just a little thing ...

MERMAID

I had never seen a boat before, so I got really close and you pulled me out of the water ...

DR. BEAVER/MERMAID

Just before you [I] were [was] torn to shreds by the propellers.

They share a laugh.

DR. BEAVER

I thought you were the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. So I put you in the aquarium at the office and everyone fell in love with you ...

MERMAID

Especially Jason ...

DR. BEAVER

He called you his little boo-fish. Look at you now. I love you like you were my own daughter.

MERMAID

I better get going. I can't wait to show everyone. Thank you and good luck with your will.

DR. BEAVER

I don't need luck. I'm good at everything I do.

She exits. Jason plays video games. Bear, Tree and Ted watch. Mermaid enters.

MERMAID

I'm back! Dr. Beaver gave me legs and a brand new vagina! It does everything. I'm a real woman now!

JASON

Soon the world will be mine!

MERMAID

I feel like a whole new person. So fresh and so alive!
Let's do it!

(to Bear, Ted and Tree)

Do you guys mind excusing us so we can have some private time? This is special.

DANCING BEAR

No, not at all. Can we watch?

HURRICANE TED

I wouldn't mind watching.

TREE CLIMBER

What are you going to do?

MERMAID

It's my first *real* time. I'd rather be alone.

DANCING BEAR

Let's go, guys. Let's go scope out the place.

*Bear, Ted and Tree exit.
Mermaid humps Jason while he
plays.*

MERMAID

Oh, Jason ... Now I can really feel you inside me ... It feels like ... Oh, Jason! I want to do it all!

JASON

(To the TV screen)

Curses! Damn you, Hannibal! I will not yield to your suicide elephants!

MERMAID

I'm going to be such a great mom ... You watch me. I'm going to be the best mom in the whole world ...

JASON

You too, Hamilcar Barca, you bearded devil! You will not defeat me with your evil schemes.

MERMAID

You're going to be such a great father. I can just imagine you ... teaching our little boy how to be a man.

JASON

Send two cohorts to reinforce the left flank! We're losing time! Catch that shaggy terrorist!

MERMAID

There's no one else I would rather do this with than you ... Jason! ... JASON! COME!

JASON

I will stick my gladius up the asses of those two-faced Amazonian bitches! I'm coming world! I'm coming!

MERMAID

JASON!

JASON

Persia, Egypt, Arabia! I'M COMING!

MERMAID

COMING!

She freezes. A moment.

MERMAID

Okay, that was good. I love you, Jason.

Mermaid exits humming a song from The Little Mermaid.

JASON

Veni, Vidi, Vinci, bitches!

Mermaid enters.

MERMAID

Jason, I'm pregnant!

JASON

Evil Apes!

MERMAID

I think ... I think I'm in labor. Jason, he's coming!

JASON

The die is cast! This means WAR! Attack!

MERMAID

AAHHHHH!

A baby pops out. It has white wings. Mermaid cradles it.

MERMAID

He ... She ... it came. Jason, you're a father. I'm a mother. We have a baby. A baby. A baby. A baby ...

JASON

What?

MERMAID

A baby girl. She's beautiful. She's special.

JASON

No. No. No. No-no-no-no-NO!

MERMAID

What?

JASON

I said NO! Put it back!

MERMAID

Back? Jason?

JASON

Now!

Mermaid stuffs the baby back into her body while Jason plays his video game.

MERMAID

Uhhh ... Uhhh ... Uhhh ...

JASON

Silence!

MERMAID

It hurts!

JASON

Stop it!

MERMAID

AHHH!

The baby pops out again.

MERMAID

I think we have to keep it.

JASON

No. I don't think so-

MERMAID

No, Jason! We're keeping it! I'm keeping it. Her. You know what your dad said to me this afternoon? He told me to do what I want when I want, and not to let you bring me down.

JASON

Whatever.

MERMAID

He wanted me to tell you that he's writing his will, and unless you get a job and do something with your life, you're going to be left out of it.

JASON

I don't need him. I don't need you. All I need is myself.

MERMAID

I'm taking my daughter and I'm leaving ... Jason, I said I'm leaving ... Do you want to be with me, or not?

Dr. Beaver enters. Jason plays the video game.

DR. BEAVER

Howdy, y'all ...

MERMAID

Hi, doc. Would you like to see your new granddaughter?

She hands Dr. Beaver the baby.

DR. BEAVER

She's got the rest of her life in front of her and she doesn't even know it.

(to the baby)

Bless you, child. You will bring great joy and wonderful dreams to this house.

He hands the baby back to Mermaid.

DR. BEAVER

I am going to die tonight. Jason! Do you hear me?

JASON

Yeah, dad. I hear you.

DR. BEAVER

Good. Listen closely.

He pulls out his will.

DR. BEAVER

I, Dr. Sam Beaver, have lived a long and prosperous life. I have been around the world and have healed many men and women. I built this house with my bare hands just as I have built my life with courage, determination and good 'ol fashioned hard work. Tonight the sun sets on my own time on this earth. And with the sun setting comes the question of a new generation. I see a new world coming, unlike my own and I must go. The world is an ever-changing, ever-evolving and transforming plane of existence. Who will be the spirit of the time that comes ahead? Who will carry my legacy through this new world that moves so fast? My world was apple pie and Grandma Jone's farmhouse by the lake ... and that is where I will rest my eternal soul.

To Mermy, a woman who knows what she wants in life, a woman who has taught this old, hardened soul how to love without guilt and shame ...

I leave the green blades of grass, the snow-capped mountains, the pebbles on the hills, the cows in the

meadows, the straw in the barn, the panes in the windows, the nails in the hardwood floors, the hardwood floors, the bricks of the chimney, the knives in the drawers, the plaster on the walls, the curtains and the shades, the barbed wire around the posts and the posts, the dishes in the cupboard, the goose-down blankets and feather pillows on my bed, the stairs in the house, the magnets on the refrigerator, the hinges on the doors, the oatmeal in the pantry, the ice trays in the freezer, the tile on the kitchen floor, the rails on the stairwell, the carpet in the living room, the cement on the driveway, the fish in the pond, the back of my horse, the coins in my pocket, the numbers in my books, the light of day and the tranquil night, and the structure of my foundation ...

All stare at Dr. Beaver.

DR. BEAVER

To Jason, my lonely soul, I leave my faithful medical kit, and the greatest gift of all: The chance to build your life with your own bare hands just like I have done. That is all ...

He hands Jason the kit.

JASON

What am I going to do with this thing?!

DR. BEAVER

Someday you might find out.

JASON

What is going on? I'm supposed to inherit everything!

DR. BEAVER

I have made my decision and it's final.

JASON

I'm your son!

DR. BEAVER

You're a waste of a son. Look at you. All you do is sit there, playing these childish games with yourself. You've never lived a day of your life. Why should I give you anything? You'll only waste it.

JASON

I conquered the world today.

DR. BEAVER

With those hands? Your hands are as soft as a baby's ass. How can you conquer anything with those hands?

JASON

You don't get it, dad. I am Roman Conqueror.

DR. BEAVER

Then you can make it on your own. Goodbye ...

*Dr. Beaver exits. Jason
throws the kit across the
room.*

JASON

(To Mermaid)

What is this all about? What have you done to me?

MERMAID

I didn't do anything, Jason.

She exits.

JASON

FUCK!!!

*Jason sulks. Outside, Dr.
Beaver admires his ranch.*

DR. BEAVER

Goodbye, ranch. Goodbye, sweet ground that bears the weight of our feet. Goodbye, sun that blinds our eyes ... Goodbye ...

Hurricane Ted enters.

HURRICANE TED

I've come home ...

DR. BEAVER

Ponyboy Joe. I always knew that before I left this earth I would see you again.

HURRICANE TED

I have traveled across this world for three thousand years in search of you. I have come home, father.

DR. BEAVER

There is nothing for you here.

HURRICANE TED

My entire life I dreamed to seeing you. Meeting you again. Father.

DR. BEAVER

You poison everything you touch. Just like your mother.

HURRICANE TED

I was only a small pony boy when she took me away.

DR. BEAVER

This is how the world works. I am not your father. You don't have a father. You have been doomed to roam the earth, forever searching for something that you will never find. This is your punishment. Your mother has given you misery and I will give you nothing. Get lost in the universe.

HURRICANE TED

I am not leaving.

DR. BEAVER

Have you brought the weather with you?

HURRICANE TED

It follows me wherever I go.

DR. BEAVER

Good. I will leave tonight. Do what you will. My punishment is that my time is ending. Yours is constant and always fading.

HURRICANE TED

You don't know what you are saying.

*Lightning & Thunder. Dr.
Beaver exits. Ted exits
opposite stage. Dr. Beaver*

*enters his office/bedroom.
Cows moo in the distance.
Dr. Beaver lies on the couch.
He turns on the TV and closes
his eyes.*

TV VOICE

... We are asking everyone to stay at home tonight. In their homes tonight. This is going to be the biggest storm in Colorado history. Meteorologists are claiming that this will be the first hurricane to come to Colorado. It will be very dangerous outside. Keep your children and pets indoors. We are asking everyone to stay at home tonight. In their homes tonight. This is going to be the biggest storm in Colorado history. Meteorologists are claiming that this will be the first hurricane to come to Colorado. It will be very dangerous outside. Keep your children and pets inside ...

Dr. Beaver falls into a deep sleep and dreams. Music. A Bird flutters around the stage. It begins to dance with Dr. Beaver. He dances with it. The Bird floats around the Doctor. As Dr. Beaver touches the Bird it loses a wing and crashes to the ground. It screams. The doctor picks up the wing and ties the wing back onto the Bird's body. Squawking. The Bird flaps its wings. It flies, but once again the wing falls off and the Bird crashes into the ground. It screams. The Doctor picks up the wing and reattaches it again. Squawking. The wing falls off. Bird crashes to the ground. Screaming and squawking.

DR. BEAVER

No ... Fly! Bird. You're supposed to fly. God-damn bird! Fly away from here. Stop your god-damn screaming

and a' squawking! Fly. You're a bird. You're supposed to fly. Fly! FLY!

The Bird and the Doctor fall onto the couch. They die.

TV VOICE

... Are asking everyone we to home at stay tonight. Their homes in tonight. Going this is be to the biggest Colorado in storm history. Hurricanes are first that this will be the Colorado claiming to come to meteorologists. It dangerous be very outside will. Keep indoors and children your pets. Asking to are tonight everyone to we home at stay. Tonight their homes in. To this going be the storm biggest is history in Colorado. That this claiming will the Colorado be first meteorologists are to come to hurricane. Dangerous will very it outside be. Pets and indoors ... your children keep ...

*Bird squawks one last squawk.
Music fades.
Thunder/Lighting. Jason plays video games. Bear, Tree enter and lounge around the house. Ted enters alone and sulks. Mermaid enters with Zoe, who has grown to a young girl.*

DANCING BEAR

Sister, your baby girl is growing up so fast. What's her name?

ZOE

Zoe:
I call myself Zoe:
Life's eternal, innocent wisdom.
Only in my childlike existence,
I bring gifts of great dreams,
In words and sounds from soft, pink lips.

DANCING BEAR

You are cute. Where did she learn to talk like that?

MERMAID

I don't know. Kids say such mystical things.

ZOE

The Dancing Bear:
Hard is the word compressed in your feet.
You will walk through this great big maze,
Lost, when it helps you find,
Some solace and brilliance to come,
Behind your masks of pride.

DANCING BEAR

Wow. Should I write that down?

ZOE

Written words:
Words will mean nothing tomorrow,
For the shadows of ink
Are only memories of a place
That speak the truths of a time
That no longer remains.

DANCING BEAR

You are beautiful!

HURRICANE TED

I have never seen what is beautiful. I am beautiful!
Why doesn't anyone ever say that to me?

DANCING BEAR

Ted, don't make a fool of yourself.

Hurricane sounds.

MERMAID

We better stay in tonight.

DANCING BEAR

Let's have a party and play a card game!

TREE CLIMBER

I'd love to! I've never played a card game before!

HURRICANE TED

Games are a good way to pass the time before death.

DANCING BEAR

You're so weird, Ted.

*Mermaid, Bear, Tree and Ted
gather around a table in the
middle of the room.*

MERMAID

Jason, we're going to play a card game. Wanna play?

Zoe approaches Tree.

TREE CLIMBER

Is the little one going to play with us?

ZOE

Tree Climber:
Your dream is a body that grows strong
Planted from a hole in the ground.
And all will have shade,
For the world shall need
Shelter under your branches.

TREE CLIMBER

What is a world with no branches to swing?
No fruit to eat?
No berries and leaves?

ZOE

A world without trees
Has no quiet and no peace.

TREE CLIMBER

You're good at this!

ZOE

Dreams:
They are my gift to bring the world,
And one day they will be gone.
And I will find new thoughts
That are not so sweet
Or soft like wings.

DANCING BEAR

What do you wanna play? How about a drinking game, like
Dirty Jacks!

HURRICANE TED

I didn't bring anything to drink. I have nothing!

DANCING BEAR

That's okay. I have a little booze. I have vodka. And Tequila. And jungle juice. And wine, both red and white and blue. And malt liquor. And some rum. You can have some of my vodka.

MERMAID

How do you play?

DANCING BEAR

It's so easy. You'll love it. If you draw a two then you have to tell a secret and drink. If you draw a three then you tell your most amazing sexual experience and drink. A four then you say something that you've never done before and everyone at the table who has done it has to drink. Then you drink. If you draw a five you say a name of a body part and everyone has to touch each other with that body part and drink. A six is opposites six. You say a word and the person next to you has to say the opposite and then drink. If you draw a seven then you make a rule for the game, like you have to play the rest of the game with no pants, or something. Anyone who breaks that rule has to drink. An eight you tell a sexual fantasy and then drink, and if anyone at the table has the same fantasy then they drink. A nine then everyone writes out their worst sexual experience and you put them into a hat. Then you guess whose were whose. If you're right they drink. If you're wrong you drink. Tens is community cheers. Everyone pours some of their drink into the cup in the middle and then drinks. Jacks is Dirty Jacks! Everyone yells, "Dirty Jacks!" Then you have to say a dirty word like shit, or fuck or pussy and then drink. You keep going around the circle until you're out of dirty words. Queens is the pussy card. You pour some of your drink on someone's pussy in the room. And then drink. Kings is the cock card. You pour your drink on someone's cock in the room. And then drink. And Aces is everyone drink! It's fun.

*She deals the cards.
Hurricane sounds.*

DANCING BEAR

I'll begin ... Six. Ready?

MERMAID

Wait. What's six?

DANCING BEAR

Opposites six. I'll go. Rough.

TREE CLIMBER

Smooth. Uhmmm ... Heaven.

MERMAID

Hell. Fish Sticks!

HURRICANE TED

Horse shit. Misery, desolation, anguish ...

DANCING BEAR

Lip stick. Good job, guys! Everyone drink!

They drink.

DANCING BEAR

You're turn, Tree.

TREE CLIMBER

Seven.

DANCING BEAR

Rules.

HURRICANE TED

I'm going to the pisser.

TREE CLIMBER

No one can get up to pee until the game is over.

HURRICANE TED

Of all the days of all the three thousand years I have lived, this is the worst one ever.

Victory music from the TV.

JASON

This is the best day of my life! I am Roman Conqueror!

TV VOICE

Veni, Vidi, Vinci ... Roman Centurion: Conqueror of the World! Kill your enemy before he kills you and you will rule the world.

ZOE

Hear the Talking Box talk:
The day will come when your voice is not heard.
And your memory will die with no power to supply
Your limitless task of delirium.
Your only pain is an impulse.
How will you survive when there is nothing to receive?

JASON

Babe, I think she's hungry!

MERMAID

Zoe, come here. Don't bother your father. He is conquering the world.

ZOE

World:
There will be no world to conquer,
No land left for hopes.
Only one small spot
Where time will stop
And no feet will walk.

DANCING BEAR

Sister! You're turn.

MERMAID

Jacks. What's Jacks again?

DANCING BEAR

DIRTY JACKS! Say a dirty word! This is the most funnest part of this game!

MERMAID

Okay. Uhmmm ... nipple.

DANCING BEAR

What? Nipple? Nipple is not dirty. Round over.

TREE CLIMBER

Lame Game.

MERMAID

Sorry. I'll get better when I'm drunk.

DANCING BEAR

You're up, Ted.

HURRICANE TED

Kings! The tables have turned.

DANCING BEAR

You just want us to pour drinks on your horse cock.

*Hurricane Ted presents
himself. All pour.*

HURRICANE TED

What about you, little girl? You wanna pour some of your drink on big me?

MERMAID

That's my daughter you're talking about! She doesn't drink! Come here, Zoe.

*Hurricane sounds. Power goes
out, then comes back on.*

JASON

Fuck! No! No! No! NO!

MERMAID

What's wrong, Jason?

JASON

Power went out! I had Canada in my hands! Now I gotta start all over!

MERMAID

You'll get it again.

JASON

What kind of conqueror loses Canada? Fuck! I'm gonna make a frozen pizza.

Jason exits.

DANCING BEAR

I'm next. Four. I've never had sex with a horse.

Ted drinks.

DANCING BEAR

Gross! You had sex with a horse?

HURRICANE TED

We were stuck in the desert for two hundred years. You don't know what it's like to be me. No one knows.

DANCING BEAR

Gross.

TREE CLIMBER

My turn. Queen.

DANCING BEAR

We all know what that means! Who shall it be?

TREE CLIMBER

I pick Mermy!

MERMAID

Wait, what happens? What's queen?

DANCING BEAR

Queen is the pussy card! We all pour a drink on the chosen pussy. And you're chosen.

MERMAID

But it's brand new.

TREE CLIMBER

That's why we have to bless it.
Like rain on wildflowers ...

MERMAID

Really? Really? Really? Alright.

They lie her down and pour.

HURRICANE TED

Now we lick it up!

Ted licks it up.

MERMAID

Stop! It burns! Oww!

HURRICANE TED

It's the burn that keeps you alive!

DANCING BEAR

Don't worry, it's good for it. Kills bad stuff.

Zoe approaches Mermaid.

ZOE

Mother:

It hurts to give birth to new life.
But it brings more pain to see your child
Grow beyond its youth,
Like a flash before your eyes
With pain of memory and truth.

MERMAID

Thank you, dear. That was very sweet.

DANCING BEAR

You're up, sister.

MERMAID

Three. What's three again?

DANCING BEAR

Most amazing sexual experience.

MERMAID

Okay. Well, one time Jason and I went for a hike and we wandered off the path and I gave him a ... blowjob.

DANCING BEAR

That's it?

TREE CLIMBER

Lame Game.

DANCING BEAR

What's yours, Ted?

Ted masturbates.

HURRICANE TED

The horse. Sadie was her name. It was two thousand years ago. I remember it like it was the day before yesterday. Sadie, you whore of a horse. You were my one true love, and you did me wrong! Look at me now! Sadie, you were there for me, but that was so long ago ... You were great. It's all gone.

Ted sulks.

DANCING BEAR

Gross. Mine is the President.

MERMAID

Really? The President? The real President?

DANCING BEAR

Yeah. The President. At least he said he was the President. Tree?

TREE CLIMBER

I've never had sex.

DANCING BEAR

Gross. Tree Climber! Are you kidding?

TREE CLIMBER

No. Yes. Wait. What is sex?

DANCING BEAR

You've never had sex? Sex is the sense of all being!

TREE CLIMBER

I'm only two years old.

DANCING BEAR

Tree, every part of this game, every part of life, every part of this world is about sex. How can you play if you've never had sex?

TREE CLIMBER

I don't know.

DANCING BEAR

This sucks. You're up, Ted.

HURRICANE TED

Nine.

DANCING BEAR

Worst sexual experience. You guess whose is whose.

*All write on a scrap of paper
and give them to Ted. He
reads them.*

HURRICANE TED

"One time Jason was too drunk to get it up. And we got into a big fight." The Mermaid!

Ted eats the paper.

HURRICANE TED

"What is sex?" Tree!

Ted eats the paper.

HURRICANE TED

"I had sex with the President. At least that's what he said." My sister, Bear.

Ted eats the paper.

MERMAID

I thought you said it was your most amazing sexual experience.

DANCING BEAR

He had a third nipple. It was weird. My turn.

*Hurricane sounds. The roof
of the house is blown off.*

DANCING BEAR

Holy shit on a dick!

MERMAID

Jason! The roof blew off!

DANCING BEAR

I never should have brought you, Ted!

HURRICANE TED

You want me to leave, then I'll leave! I'll see you all in hell! I'm going to take a piss.

TREE CLIMBER

No one can leave to pee until the game is over!

HURRICANE TED

Fine! I'll piss where I stand, right here on this cheap, phony linoleum floor. Watch me!

Ted relieves himself.

DANCING BEAR

Ted, stop it. Let's just play the game.

Jason enters eating chips.

JASON

What the hell happened?

MERMAID

The roof blew off! Do something!

JASON

What do you want me to do?

MERMAID

I don't know. I'm scared.

A bell rings.

JASON

Pizza's done.

Jason exits.

MERMAID

We're all gonna die and you're making a pizza? This is the end!

*The storm grows louder and
more violent. Pause.*

ZOE

The end:
The winds will blow where they will blow,
This is not the end it seems.
The real test will come when the winds stop
And all is dark,
And time stands still.

HURRICANE TED

Come play this game with us. Have some fuckin' fun in
your life for once!

MERMAID

Zoe, go to your room. This is a big person game.

Zoe exits.

DANCING BEAR

I'm next. Jacks! DIRTY JACKS! Bleeding-cunt!

HURRICANE TED

Assfuck! Shitface! Dicklard! FUCK!

TREE CLIMBER

Sploodge!

MERMAID

Sploodge? I don't know. Poop!

DANCING BEAR

Poop? Sister, you're terrible at this game!

TREE CLIMBER

Lame game!

MERMAID

Maybe we should go to the basement where it's safe.

DANCING BEAR

You are such a nerd, sister.

HURRICANE TED

Let's keep playing! This is the best fuckin' game I've ever fuckin' played! I'm gonna win this one!

DANCING BEAR

Ted, there's no winner. Whose next?

TREE CLIMBER

Me. Ten.

DANCING BEAR

Community Cheers.

All pour their drink into a glass. Ted slams it.

DANCING BEAR

Ted!

HURRICANE TED

You won't forget this night! No one will.

DANCING BEAR

Now we gotta refill the glass and do it again.

MERMAID

Sister, I don't want to get all fucked up.

DANCING BEAR

Sister! The whole point to this game is to get fucked up. How can you play if you don't want to get fucked up? This is the worst round of Dirty Jacks ever!

Hurricane sounds. A wall of the house breaks away.

MERMAID

I'm going to find the doctor! Jason!

Mermaid exits. Zoe enters.

ZOE

Dr. Beaver:
The doctor with the magic in his hands,
Will pass this gift to another.
As he falls to the fates of time

A new face will arise
A new gift will bless the earth and sky.

HURRICANE TED

What is she talking about?

DANCING BEAR

I think she's giving out dreams.

HURRICANE TED

Where is my dream? She's told everyone in this house their dream except me! She even told the fuckin' TV a dream! What's your big uncle Ted's dream?

ZOE

I see nothing when I look at you.

HURRICANE TED

Come here!

Zoe runs. Ted chases her.

HURRICANE TED

I've been searching this entire universe for a dream! What is existence without a fuckin' dream! Come here! I'll tell you a dream.

DANCING BEAR

You're up, Sister! Sister, where are you?

TREE CLIMBER

Lame game! Lame game! Lame game!

DANCING BEAR

Fine! Aces! Cheers!

Bear and Tree drink. Another wall breaks down and floats away. Mermaid pulls Jason onstage. Zoe picks up the medical kit and approaches Jason.

MERMAID

Jason, what are we going to do? Look!

JASON

As long as that wall holds, we'll be fine. It's all up to that wall ...

ZOE

My Father:
My only father in the world.
You are the core of the earth to me.
I see the world through your eyes.
I have a question to ask:
Why do I bleed down there?

JASON

Bleeding? Ask your mother.

MERMAID

I've only had the thing for like half an hour.

JASON

It's because you're ... you're ... really special.

ZOE

The walls of the house will fall on you, father.
And you are here to rebuild
The faith that will be broken.
Only you have the power.
Only you have that special dream.

JASON

Dream? Me?

ZOE

This is your gift:
To bring gifts to others.
The gift of healing,
Our suffering is truth
And our pain is learning.

JASON

Look at you ... I can't believe I ...
(To Mermaid)
She's really a special girl. We've made a really
special ...

*Jason picks Zoe up and kisses
her cheek.*

JASON

Thank you, my little angel. I can't believe we made her. I want to be the best father in the world. I want to teach her how to ride a bike. To memorize her time tables. To read and to write. I want to be there the day she learns how to drive. I want to teach her about boys and STD's. I want to be there. I want to buy her a balloon and a cake for her birthday. To teach her how to use power tools and make paper airplanes. To teach her how to smile and laugh and cry and to love. I want to teach her how to conquer the world ...

MERMAID

She's our special angel. I'm so happy for us, Jason.

JASON

Let's go find my dad. I want us all to be together. Maybe he'll know what to do.

MERMAID

I'm coming with you. C'mon, Zoe!

Jason exits. Mermaid grabs Zoe's hand and runs off. Zoe loses Mermaid's hand and approaches the game.

DANCING BEAR

Two. Secrets! I always wished I was a man.

TREE CLIMBER

I lied ... I did have sex once ... with a bush.

DANCING BEAR

Gross!

HURRICANE TED

I have a secret. I have a secret to share with all of you freaks. Dr. Beaver is my father from long ago when this land was an empty prairie. My mother took me away when I was a young ponyboy. I have been searching the entire universe my whole life for him. Three thousand worthless years. I thought I would be welcomed back home. Instead, I am rejected. How's that for fuckin' agony? He-he-he-he-he-he-he-he-he! You should all know

that you will all die in the storm and the flood that's coming! And only I will survive. Today is the day I will find my home in this world. I'm not leaving. That's my secret ...

Diabolical laughter.

DANCING BEAR

You're crazy, Ted.

HURRICANE TED

Come here, little bird ...

ZOE

What are you playing?

HURRICANE TED

Just a game. You can be on my team.

Mermaid enters.

MERMAID

Zoe, you stay away from him!

HURRICANE TED

Have some fun, you're going to die anyway!

Mermaid tries pulling Zoe away. Ted holds her tight.

DANCING BEAR

Tree, you're up.

TREE CLIMBER

Five.

DANCING BEAR

Body Parts.

TREE CLIMBER

Ear.

DANCING BEAR

Tree!

TREE CLIMBER

What? What's wrong with ears?

DANCING BEAR

Ears are boring! It's supposed to be sexual!

TREE CLIMBER

I like ears. They're sexual to me.

DANCING BEAR

Fine ... Ears!

*They touch ears. Hurricane
sounds. The last wall breaks
and floats away. Water
floods the house.*

MERMAID

Jason! The house is flooding! Help!

Mermaid exits.

HURRICANE TED

What is *your* dream? I will listen like it's the last
voice on earth.

ZOE

Me?

I cannot tell my own destiny,
Only where there is light.
My eyes are only witness
To beyond what cannot be seen.
I bring great dreams for all but you and me.

HURRICANE TED

We are both in need of a dream. You are the dream that
guided me here. A dream of love.

ZOE

You don't know love. Only the idea of loving.

HURRICANE TED

How about a ride? Little girls love rides on horsies.
Because horsies are free to take them to places they've
never gone before.

ZOE

I've never had a ride on a horsey.

HURRICANE TED

Now is the time ...

*Ted pulls Zoe on his back.
Jason and Mermaid enter.*

MERMAID

Zoe, what are you doing? Jason, do something!

JASON

Let her go! That's my daughter! My angel!

HURRICANE TED

I'm taking her for a ride. That's all. Just a ride!

ZOE

It is only a ride, father. You must not fear.

JASON

Let her go!

MERMAID

Jason! He's taking my baby! Stop him!

*Jason lunges at Ted with his
game controller but is thrown
back. He drops the
controller. Ted and Zoe ride
around the stage.*

JASON

My gladius! My sword!

TREE CLIMBER

Eight!

JASON

I'm nothing without my weapon!

DANCING BEAR

Sexual Fantasy! Go, Tree!

MERMAID

My baby! Come back! Come!

ZOE

It is only a ride, mother. I will return.

TREE CLIMBER

Sex with someone or something or anyone.

HURRICANE TED

So long miserable world! A new life is coming!

DANCING BEAR

My fantasy is like sex with a movie star, or a rock star, or another President, or someone famous ...

JASON

That's my girl! Angel, come back!

TREE CLIMBER

I think I'm drowning! I need to find land! Or a tree! Or something! Help!

MERMAID

I can't swim! Please, Jason stop him!

JASON

I'm trying! I'm ...

Jason and Mermaid struggle to stay above water.

MERMAID

No! Jason! Please, help!

HURRICANE TED

Here I come, new world! Hear me COME!

DANCING BEAR

This is the worst round of Dirty Jacks ever!

Ted vanishes with Zoe. A tsunami crashes into the house. Jason and Mermaid sink. Bear and Tree sink. Water floods the stage,

swirling back and forth.
Darkness.

End Act I.

Act II

Jason and Mermaid lie in the middle of the rubble that was once the house. A large tree stands in the center. Jason crawls over to Mermaid and shakes her.

JASON

Wake up, babe ... Babe?

He shakes her. Nothing.

JASON

Are you alive? Dead?

He inspects her. He blows into her mouth. She vomits on his face.

JASON

You're alive!

Mermaid strokes her hair and caresses her skin.

JASON

Are you okay? Babe, say something to me.

Mermaid stares blankly.

JASON

Say something to me!

MERMAID

Gaya-zing-doo-dee ...

JASON

Everything is going to be okay.

Mermaid stands and falls.

MERMAID

Wee-o-tay!

Jason catches her.

JASON

Sit down. Can you speak? Who am I? What is my name?
Who are you?

Long silence.

JASON

I ... am ... Jason ... Jason ...

MERMAID

Jay ... so ... na ...

JASON

Jason. You are Mermy ... like Mermaid.

MERMAID

Meer-mee ... Meer-mee-ah ...

JASON

You are my girlfriend. We are together ... like love ...

Jason holds her close.

MERMAID

La-va ... La-va ...

JASON

No. Love. Did you forget everything? The storm ... Do
you remember the storm?

Jason points to the sky.

JASON

Storm!

*He makes thunder sounds and
imitates a storm.*

JASON

Storm! Up there! The rain! The sky! Flood!

Jason imitates a flood.

JASON

Flood! Flood! AHH!

Mermaid laughs.

JASON

Yeah! Yeah, do you remember now? The storm!

MERMAID

Stoh-rom. Ahh!

JASON

Right! Do you remember?

Nothing. Jason shakes his head. Mermaid imitates.

JASON

Oh no ... What is happening? Are we dead?

MERMAID

Dead? Dead?

JASON

Death is what happens when there is nothing left.

He imitates death. Mermaid laughs.

JASON

No. No, no, no, no, no. It's not funny. Death isn't funny.

Ted enters. He wears Dr. Beaver's silver lab coat, cowboy hat and glasses. No phallus. Zoe rides on his back. She is a teenage girl. No wings.

HURRICANE TED

Not dead. Death is the absence of life. If one has no sense of life then how is one to determine death?

JASON

What are you doing here?

HURRICANE TED

I own this land. I own everything from Ghost Horse Road to the White Mustang Hills.

JASON

Zoe. My little angel.

HURRICANE TED

I protect her and provide for her. She loves me and her allergies have cleared up because of me. She won't know who you are. You are nothing to her.

JASON

Come to me. Don't listen to this man.

ZOE

Who are you?

JASON

No. Zoe, you know who I am.

HURRICANE TED

You have nothing to worry about. I keep her safe.

JASON

I am your father. Don't you remember? Zoe ...

HURRICANE TED

Her name is not Zoe. She is Horse Rider.

JASON

Mermy, this is your daughter ... daughter ...

MERMAID

No. No. No. No. No—

JASON

It is! You gotta remember *her*!

HURRICANE TED

She doesn't remember anything?

JASON

This was my father's house. It never belonged to you.

HURRICANE TED

Things have changed. This is my land. If you wish to stay then you will work. Clear this rubble. Clear the land.

JASON

I am not going to work for you.

HURRICANE TED

You can stay here where you'll be safe, or leave.

JASON

I'd sooner leave. And I'm taking Zoe with me.

HURRICANE TED

She won't go. She is happy with me. Besides, there is no food in the outside world. It's all been destroyed. There is nothing there out there.

JASON

I'm not doing anything for you.

HURRICANE TED

Then you don't eat, you don't drink, and you will die.

JASON

This was not supposed to happen this way ...

HURRICANE TED

You're wasting daylight. You had better get to work.

(to Zoe)

What would you like to do, my little angel?

ZOE

I want to ride horses!

HURRICANE TED

Did you finish planting the seeds in the garden?

ZOE

Yes.

HURRICANE TED

Then we will do whatever you desire.

ZOE

Let's go! Hurry up!

HURRICANE TED

Hold on tight! It's a rough ride through the forest.

ZOE

Now! Now! Now!

HURRICANE TED

You know the magic word.

ZOE

Do I have to say it?

HURRICANE TED

Yes.

ZOE

I ... love ... you ... daddy.

HURRICANE TED

That's my little angel.

ZOE

Let's go! NOW! Hurry up!

HURRICANE TED

Giddy-up we go!

*Ted gallops offstage with Zoe
on his back. Jason works.
Mermaid imitates.*

JASON

Work ... This is work.

MERMAID

Work?

JASON

It means we have to pick up this rubble and clear it
from the land ...

MERMAID

Clear the land?

JASON

Yes. All of this. This is all land.

MERMAID

Work and land the clear.

JASON

No. Clear the land.

MERMAID

Yes.

JASON

Right.

MERMAID

Clear the work. Work the land. Land the clear.

JASON

No ... Never mind ...

Jason picks up his video game controller.

JASON

I once conquered the whole world with this.

MERMAID

Con-cleared the world?

JASON

Conquered. Now it's useless. It's nothing.

MERMAID

What it is nothing?

JASON

Nothing is ... I don't know ... nothing is nothing.

Mermaid laughs.

JASON

It's silly. Don't worry. One day this will be better.

*He puts his arm around her
and kisses her. She spits.*

JASON

It' a kiss. That's what you do with someone you love.
You kiss them so that they know that you love them.

MERMAID

You lava kiss me? What it is this?

JASON

These are letters and words. Can you read? Look.
Roman Centurion: Conqueror of the World.

MERMAID

Ro-man-cen-tur-ee-on ... Con-ker-ov-the-wor-eld ...

JASON

Letters stand for sounds and when you put them together
they make words that mean things.

MERMAID

Why words mean things?

JASON

I don't know, because they help us understand.

MERMAID

Understand what?

JASON

I don't know ... life?

MERMAID

Why life? Do I have life?

JASON

Life is what we are doing ... living. Together.

MERMAID

Mermaid. Lava. Jason. Kiss. Life.

JASON

Yes. Right now work. Work so we can eat and drink.

MERMAID

Eat and drink. What is it that?

JASON

You have to eat and drink ... to live ...

MERMAID

I don't understand.

JASON

You will. Just work for now.

*They work. Mermaid finds Dr.
Beaver's will.*

MERMAID

Look! Words! I find them!

JASON

That's my father's will. He left that when he died.

MERMAID

Read! Look. Ranch ... House ... Land ... Sky ... And world!
Mermy. Mermy. Me! Right?

JASON

Yes. This land belongs to you and me.

MERMAID

No. Mermy. Me!

JASON

Right. You. It's yours. Yes.

MERMAID

These words mean things. I understand life because
words mean things. I tell him. Mermy land.

JASON

We can tell him, together. When the time is right.

MERMAID

I lava you?

JASON

Yes.

MERMAID

Kiss?

They kiss. She spits.

JASON

He is coming. Hide the will.

MERMAID

No, I tell him. Show him.

JASON

No. We wait for when the time is right.

*Mermaid hides the will.
Ted enters with Zoe, who is
now a young woman.*

HURRICANE TED

It is time to eat and drink. My lovely wife will administer the milk and crackers.

ZOE

Yes, honey.

HURRICANE TED

Thank you, my dear.

(to Jason and Mermaid)

Please, have a seat. Eat. Drink. Relax.

*Ted kisses Zoe. Mermaid
pulls out the will.*

MERMAID

I found this. Read it.

HURRICANE TED

What is it?

JASON

It's nothing.

MERMAID

This is my land. All of the land.

JASON

Not now, babe. Please, put it away ...

MERMAID

It is mine. The words say it. Ranch, house, land, sky, world ...

HURRICANE TED

Give this to me!

Ted grabs the paper.

HURRICANE TED

These words don't mean anything.

MERMAID

Words and letters and sounds that mean things ... to understand the world and ourselves ...

HURRICANE TED

There will be no more milk and crackers. Dear?

ZOE

Yes, honey.

Zoe pulls the crackers and milk away from them. Ted pulls a branch off of the tree. The tree moans.

MERMAID

What was that sound?

HURRICANE TED

That sound was pain. Do you know pain?

MERMAID

Pain?

He whips the ground with the branch.

HURRICANE TED

These words don't mean anything.

(to Jason)

What did you tell her?

JASON

Nothing. I didn't tell her anything.

HURRICANE TED

You believe the land is yours because the paper says so?

MERMAID

Yes.

JASON

Stop. She doesn't know what she's saying—

HURRICANE TED

I am not talking to you!

MERMAID

The ranch, the house, the land, the sky, the world ...

HURRICANE TED

What do you know about the world? Or yourself?

MERMAID

I can speak and read and I know—

HURRICANE TED

Tie her up to the tree!

ZOE

Yes, dear.

Zoe ties her to the tree.

MERMAID

What are you doing?

JASON

What are you doing to her?

HURRICANE TED

You have no sense of what is yours and what is not.
Someone must teach you about your self and this world.

(to Zoe)

Take this.

He hands the branch to Zoe.

JASON

What are you doing to her?!

HURRICANE TED

There is only selfishness and selflessness. We are born in a natural, neutral state of existence.

JASON

Untie her! You're hurting her!

HURRICANE TED

We enter the world with bodies and minds. In the beginning there is no self. The self is shaped and molded through experiences of love and pain.

(to Zoe)

Dear ...

Zoe whips Mermaid. She screams.

MERMAID

No! Jason, please ...

JASON

I won't let you do this!

Jason throws himself in front of Mermaid.

HURRICANE TED

Then I will teach both of you.

JASON

I am not afraid of you ...

Zoe whips Jason. He screams and collapses.

JASON

No, stop ...

HURRICANE TED

Have you had enough?

*Zoe whips him again. Jason
crawls away in agony.*

HURRICANE TED

Selfishness is seeing what you want in life, pursuing it and getting it ... doing what you want, when you want. You can only view the world through selfish actions. Jason, as you can see is not willing to suffer. This is a selfish action. He is learning.

MERMAID

Stop ... Please ...

HURRICANE TED

Selfish actions lead to a prosperous life. If one does not act then one has fallen into selflessness. This is seeing the world through others. One is selfless when one does not know the self.

(to Zoe)

Dear ...

Zoe whips her. She screams.

MERMAID

Jason, help me ...

HURRICANE TED

I have given you a carton of chocolate milk and a cracker. If I do this everyday you will believe that everyone deserves a carton of chocolate milk and a cracker once a day. I am bigger, stronger, wiser. When you have one, I have two. And this act is both selfish and selfless.

Zoe whips her. She screams.

MERMAID

No more ...

HURRICANE TED

Selfishness is the belief that by benefiting the self, the self, in turn, benefits the world. By providing myself with all that I deserve, I will provide for others. Through selfish acts I can make the world a better place, a healthier and cleaner place, and so on. To be selfish is to be selfless. And to be selfless reaps no benefits at all. I do not believe the world

owes anything to me. I owe myself the world. That is all. Are there any questions?

Zoe holds the whip to Mermaid, preparing to whip her.

HURRICANE TED

Any questions?

MERMAID

No ...

JASON

I'm sorry ...

HURRICANE TED

Knowledge is pain. Being sorry will get you nowhere.

Ted rips the paper. Mermaid blacks out.

HURRICANE TED

Thank the world for your pain and your humility. It's the only way you know you're alive at all.

Ted hands Jason an axe.

HURRICANE TED

Chop down that tree.

JASON

Yes ...

HURRICANE TED

Make sure it's gone by the time I come back.

JASON

Yes ...

HURRICANE TED

Thank you, dear. What would you like to do?

ZOE

I want to go and sit by the lake and drink cocktails.

Zoe hops onto Ted's back.

HURRICANE TED

What's the magic word?

ZOE

Til' death do us part.

HURRICANE TED

Giddy-up and go!

*Ted gallops offstage with
Zoe. Jason unties Mermaid
and drags her away. He
swings the axe into the tree.
The tree moans.*

TREE CLIMBER

Pain ... Oh, the pain!

JASON

Who said that? Who's there?

*Nothing. He swings the axe
into the tree.*

TREE CLIMBER

Pain, pain, pain!

JASON

Who are you?

Tree appears in the tree.

TREE CLIMBER

Stop! Please cease.

Why do you swing your blade
And cut me into pieces?

Swing on my branches instead,
And you will find them more sweet.

JASON

What are you doing here?

TREE CLIMBER

I am Tree Climber,
I once roamed from place to place,
I once swung from town to town,
But now have found my space,
Here in the solid ground.

JASON

What do you want from me?

TREE CLIMBER

Not to cut me down!

JASON

It is my job.

TREE CLIMBER

Who, I ask,
Would give such dreadful orders,
With no respect for what is there,
And no regard for where I stand.
This is not fair.

JASON

Give me fruit from your branches and I will not cut you
down.

TREE CLIMBER

I cannot give you fruit to eat,
For my branches are bare.
But don't forget your special gift,
The power to heal
What is broken and split.

JASON

What gift?

TREE CLIMBER

Your father's faithful kit
Can heal broken bones
And mend broken skin
That is what is in the ground.
Ask, and it shall be found.

JASON

My father? Where is he? I want to see him.

TREE CLIMBER

Stand strong.
 The ground will shake,
Do not tumble down.
 Hold on to yourself,
Do not let go, or else!

*The ground shakes. The roots
of the tree grow from the
ground, holding Dr. Beaver's
dead body, with the kit in
his hands.*

TREE CLIMBER

It is as he said:
 This kit holds the gift of healing.
There is more to life,
 Than what you can see,
Or what you can buy.

*Jason grabs the box. Dr.
Beaver slaps his hand away.*

JASON

Hey!

*He tries again. Dr. Beaver
slaps his hand away.*

JASON

Father, it is me!

TREE CLIMBER

Dead man, wake up!
 The one you have dreamt for is here!

Dr. Beaver rises.

DR. BEAVER

Jason. What the hell do you want from me? I'm dead!

JASON

I need your help. The medical kit ... I need it.

DR. BEAVER

You need to figure it out! Just like I have done. Stop being so god-damned lazy and work for once.

JASON

It's my kit! You gave it to me!

DR. BEAVER

Here is your damned medical kit! Here!

Dr. Beaver pulls a scalpel from the kit and sticks it into Jason's ribs. He moans.

DR. BEAVER

For god's sakes let the dead sleep! It's the only peace I ever had! Go away!

JASON

Why did you do this to me?

Jason slumps down on the ground, holding his side.

DR. BEAVER

Take me back underground, god-damnit!

The roots of the tree lower Dr. Beaver underground.

JASON

Why? Father ...

TREE CLIMBER

Pain is life,
All feel the sharp blade of death
Before they die.
Only some feel the sting of healing
Through faith and time.

JASON

Don't leave me like this ...

Tree disappears. Jason curls up on the ground near Mermaid. Bear enters.

DANCING BEAR

I have returned. Sister, how are you? You're bleeding. You look awful.

Bear embraces her.

DANCING BEAR

Everything has been real hard. But here I am.

MERMAID

Who are you?

DANCING BEAR

What? I'm your sister!

MERMAID

Sister?

DANCING BEAR

Jason doesn't look so good.

Bear inspects Jason's body.

DANCING BEAR

Here's the problem. He's got this knife in his gut.

MERMAID

I hope he is dead.

DANCING BEAR

What's going on? Are you guys fighting again?

Bear removes the knife from Jason's side. He moans.

DANCING BEAR

Get up, Jason. What's going on here?

JASON

I can't move.

DANCING BEAR

We need to figure out what to do.

MERMAID

There is nothing we can do.

DANCING BEAR

There is always something.

JASON

Mermy ... I'm sorry ...

DANCING BEAR

What happened?

MERMAID

Stay away from me.

DANCING BEAR

Won't someone tell me what the hell is going on?

*Ted enters, carrying the sick
body of Zoe. She is an
elderly woman.*

HURRICANE TED

My mother is dying. There is no fruit. And we are
starving to death. That is what is going on.

JASON

What is wrong with her?

HURRICANE TED

She is sick. She is infected with a strange disease.

JASON

You poisoned her.

HURRICANE TED

We will all die if we don't eat something. We must eat
my mother's body.

JASON

She's my daughter. We can't eat her!

HURRICANE TED

Her life is over.

JASON

No one is eating her!

HURRICANE TED

We have no choice!

JASON

You'll have to kill me first.

HURRICANE TED

Then we will all starve to death!

DANCING BEAR

Wait! We could play a game. A game to decide who we eat. Have you guys ever heard of Craving Eights?

JASON

No more games!

HURRICANE TED

How do you play?

MERMAID

What is a game?

DANCING BEAR

It's easy. Each player is dealt five cards. You take turns and you pick a card from someone else's hand. And it's all about eights. If you draw an eight from that person then you eat a part of their body. Like, if you draw an eight of clubs then you eat one of their fingers. If you draw an eight of diamonds then you eat their foot. An eight of spades and you eat their hand, and if you draw an eight of hearts then you eat their heart. And if you get a heart drawn from your hand that's when you lose, cause you would die. And if you don't draw an eight then you discard and that person draws a card from the pile so that everyone has five cards at all times. It's fun! I mean, if there's nothing else to do.

JASON

Have you ever played this game before?

DANCING BEAR

Once. I won.

MERMAID

This game is cruel.

DANCING BEAR

So is life.

HURRICANE TED

I am hungry! Let's play.

DANCING BEAR

Okay, I'll deal them out. Ready?

Bear deals the cards out.

DANCING BEAR

I haven't eaten anything since before the storm. That feels like years ago. I'm so hungry.

JASON

She doesn't remember anything.

DANCING BEAR

Doesn't remember? No memory? That's kinda cool if you think about it. Not remembering. Go, sister, you're first. Pick a card from someone.

MERMAID

Jason ...

JASON

Why me?

DANCING BEAR

He's nervous. That means he has an eight.

Mermaid draws. Discards.

MERMAID

Queen.

DANCING BEAR

You're up, Ted.

HURRICANE TED

I will draw from Jason's hand as well.

Ted draws. Discards.

HURRICANE TED

Three.

DANCING BEAR

My turn. I pick Jason.

JASON

Why does everyone want to eat me?

DANCING BEAR

Maybe it's a compliment.

She draws. Discards.

DANCING BEAR

Damn. Two.

JASON

Ted.

Jason draws. Discards.

JASON

King.

MERMAID

Jason.

JASON

Pick someone else! Please!

DANCING BEAR

She can pick who ever she wants.

She draws and discards.

MERMAID

Nine.

DANCING BEAR

Ooo ... close, sister.

HURRICANE TED

Okay, I'll switch it up a bit. Mermy.

He draws. He discards.

JASON

Wait! What did you draw?

HURRICANE TED

I'm not telling you.

JASON

You have to. I want to know what you drew.

HURRICANE TED

I don't have to tell you what I drew.

JASON

I want to know what cards are being played!

DANCING BEAR

He's right. He doesn't have to tell what he drew.

JASON

Fine! Then I won't tell you what I've drawn.

DANCING BEAR

It doesn't matter anyway.

JASON

Of course it does! I want to know the odds!

DANCING BEAR

He's getting nervous. That means he has an eight. I pick Jason.

She draws. She discards.

DANCING BEAR

Seven. So close.

JASON

I pick Bear.

He draws. He discards.

MERMAID

Jason.

JASON

Please, stop, baby ... Pick someone else.

HURRICANE TED

It's her pick. Leave her alone!

DANCING BEAR

He's getting nervous cause he has an eight.

JASON

Stop that! I don't have a fuckin' eight!

DANCING BEAR

See what I mean? Sister, why don't you draw from my deck? Here ...

Dancing Bear raises one of her cards from her hand.

HURRICANE TED

She's cheating!

DANCING BEAR

Shut up, Ted. She's my sister. She needs my help or she'll die. Look at her. She looks terrible! Go on, sister draw from my deck.

Pause. Mermaid draws the card that is sticking out from Bear's hand. Silence.

DANCING BEAR

What did you get?

HURRICANE TED

What is it?

Mermaid shows the card.

MERMAID

Eight of clubs ...

DANCING BEAR

That's what sisters are for ... Besides, it's just a finger. I got like ten of them. How do we do this?

JASON

I have a scalpel.

HURRICANE TED

I have an axe.

DANCING BEAR

I'll go with the scalpel.

MERMAID

I can't ...

DANCING BEAR

Sister, you must eat. Do it.

HURRICANE TED

If she can't do it then she can't eat it.

DANCING BEAR

I'll do it.

*Bear sets her hand down and
holds the scalpel above it.*

DANCING BEAR

I hate this part of the game.

HURRICANE TED

It's about time. One down, three to go.

*Bear cuts the finger off. She
screams.*

DANCING BEAR

Eat it.

MERMAID

This is terrible.

DANCING BEAR

Eat. It's good for you.

*Mermaid chews the finger.
She throws it up.*

MERMAID

Disgusting.

DANCING BEAR

Fuck, that hurt. Who's next?

HURRICANE TED

Well, I doubt the Bear has anymore eights ... And Mermy is enjoying her meal ... So I'll pick from Jason ...

Ted draws. He discards.

DANCING BEAR

Alright Jason, I'm going after you.

She draws.

JASON

Fuck! Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, FUCK!

DANCING BEAR

Eight of spades. I knew it. That's a hand. Good hand!
Ha!

JASON

Not my hand. I conquered the world with these hands.

HURRICANE TED

Not anymore.

JASON

You can't take my hand! I need my hand!

DANCING BEAR

You had a choice! You didn't have to play!

JASON

I'm not playing anymore!

HURRICANE TED

She drew the card.

JASON

Stay out of this!

DANCING BEAR

I lost a finger.

JASON

A finger is different than a hand.

HURRICANE TED

Two down. Two to go.

JASON

I can't believe this. I hate you. I hate you all.

Jason rests his hand down.

DANCING BEAR

Scalpel or axe?

JASON

I don't know ... Will a scalpel cut through a hand?

DANCING BEAR

I think we better go with the axe.

MERMAID

I can't watch.

DANCING BEAR

What did you expect, sister?

MERMAID

What is this life? Is everything terrible and miserable and painful?

DANCING BEAR

Pretty much.

JASON

Someday things will be better. It will all be better.

MERMAID

What is better? What does better mean?

DANCING BEAR

Better is what you say when you have to give yourself hope for the future. It doesn't mean anything, but it helps you get through the day.

MERMAID

Then why do we have hope? If it doesn't mean anything then what good is it?

JASON

Don't listen to her. It will get better than this. It has to get better than this.

DANCING BEAR

Are you ready?

Bear chops Jason's hand. He screams.

DANCING BEAR

This will be great.

She sets it down.

HURRICANE TED

Eat it.

DANCING BEAR

I'm not an animal. I'm gonna cook it. I'll wait till the game is over.

JASON

I conquered the world with that hand.

HURRICANE TED

It is one thing to conquer the world, and another to keep control of it.

JASON

Bear.

Jason draws. He slams the card face up on the table.

JASON

Eight of diamonds! Hell yeah! What's diamonds again?

DANCING BEAR

My foot.

JASON

Give me that fuckin' axe!

DANCING BEAR

It's gonna suck having only one foot.

JASON

Look whose got all of the eights!

*Jason chops down on Bear's
foot. Screaming.*

JASON

I'll wait to cook mine too. I'll save it for later.

HURRICANE TED

Three down, one to go.

MERMAID

I would rather die than play this game.

HURRICANE TED

Existence in this world is all a game. A terrible
fuckin' game ...

DANCING BEAR

I think I'm going to die from loss of blood.

MERMAID

Jason.

JASON

Pick someone else. I just lost my hand! Pick Ted!

DANCING BEAR

That means he has the last eight. You know what that
means.

JASON

I want you to know that I still love you. We will make
it. Someday.

DANCING BEAR

How sweet. He's got an eight.

JASON

I have cared for you when you had no one else. Don't you remember?

She draws. She discards.

MERMAID

Jacks.

DANCING BEAR

Dirty Jacks! Just kidding. Your turn, Ted ...

HURRICANE TED

I pick ... Mermaid. She hasn't lost anything yet.

Ted draws. He shows the card.

MERMAID

Oh no ... Oh no ...

DANCING BEAR

Sister.

JASON

Babe ...

HURRICANE TED

Eight of Hearts. I've waited all game for this one. It doesn't get any better than that, does it?

Long silence.

MERMAID

This is it. Death. When there is nothing left.

HURRICANE TED

Shall I chop off your head? Stab you in the chest? Carve your heart out? How shall we do this?

DANCING BEAR

I'm so sorry, sister. I was really hoping you wouldn't die.

MERMAID

It's better this way. If this is life, I don't want to live anyway.

JASON

It's not better this way. I don't want to lose you.

DANCING BEAR

I will see you again, sister. Maybe in another life.

HURRICANE TED

Just think that you are sustaining existence. You will die with reason and purpose.

Ted grabs the axe.

HURRICANE TED

Let's get it over with.

Ted holds Mermaid down and raises the axe. Jason throws himself in front of Mermaid's body.

JASON

Wait! You'll have to kill both of us!

HURRICANE TED

Fine. More meat to eat.

DANCING BEAR

Jason, stop. Those are the rules!

JASON

I won't let you!

Jason wrestles the axe from Ted.

HURRICANE TED

Give me the axe! These are the rules! And I won!

JASON

I don't care about the rules anymore!

HURRICANE TED

Why do you care? We will all live.

JASON

I would sooner starve to death than let you kill her.

HURRICANE TED

I need something to eat! What am I supposed to do?

JASON

Take my other hand. Or my foot. Anything but her.

HURRICANE TED

A foot is not enough for me. I want the whole thing!

JASON

This is not fair.

HURRICANE TED

Nothing is fair! That's the way the game goes.

JASON

You can't do it!

HURRICANE TED

Fine. Then I will eat her ...

Ted points at Zoe.

HURRICANE TED

I will spare your sweet girlfriend ... It's your choice.

JASON

She's my daughter.

HURRICANE TED

She's already dead. Your choice.

JASON

Fine ... You can eat her. But you must share with us.

HURRICANE TED

Okay ... I'll share. But I get half.

JASON

Fine ... You get half. But no one eats her heart, or her head.

HURRICANE TED

Okay ... No heart. No head. But I get everything from the waist down.

JASON

Fine ... You get the waist down. No one eats her raw.

HURRICANE TED

Okay ... We cook the meat. But you build the fire.

JASON

Fine ... I build the fire. But after we are done we must bury her in the ground and give her a proper funeral ceremony.

HURRICANE TED

Okay ... We sing praises. But you must kill her.

JASON

Fine ... But I use the scalpel and I will keep her hair.

Jason moves Zoe's body into the center. He takes the scalpel and cuts Zoe's hair. He slices Zoe's throat. Flesh falls off.

ZOE

I can't breathe ... help me ...

JASON

Oh my ... I'm sorry ... Please forgive me ...

Jason cuts away her flesh. It falls to the floor. As her thick, wrinkled skin is cut off she regains her innocent child-like appearance.

JASON

Zoe?

ZOE

Mother, Father:
I remember the day I was born.
Calm and tranquil,
Before the storm.
With wings of an angel,
And the faith of morning.

MERMAID

I am a mother. A mother.

HURRICANE TED

What is she doing?

MERMAID

My daughter ... It's you.

HURRICANE TED

What's going on? Why isn't she dead? What did you do to her?

DANCING BEAR

Sister, she's gorgeous.
(to Zoe)

Hi, little one ... I'm your auntie. Auntie Bear!

Mermaid embraces Zoe.

JASON

How do you remember her?

MERMAID

She is my little angel.

JASON

I can't believe it.

HURRICANE TED

I am hungry! I haven't had anything to eat!

Ted grabs Mermaid and tries to force her to the ground.

HURRICANE TED

We played the game and you lost!

JASON

Let her go!

Jason tries to stop Ted.

MERMAID

No, Jason. Stop!

Mermaid breaks from Ted's hold. She forces Ted back.

MERMAID

(to Ted)

There is nothing for you here. I leave you the darkness of the cave, the dead, dry rivers, the empty howl of the wind ...

HURRICANE TED

I only want what was promised to me! I must eat too ...

MERMAID

... The puss of the sore, the smoke of the fire, the callous of the stone, the cold under ground, the breath of hell, the chill of shade, the shadow of the mountain, the hole in the leaf ...

HURRICANE TED

You will regret these words ...

MERMAID

I leave you the loss and the pain, the solitude of the abyss, the permanence of time, the decay of the body, the vice of immortality, the loneliness of night and the distress of day ...

HURRICANE TED

I will return ... someday, I will return ...

*Ted fades into darkness.
Silence.*

DANCING BEAR

Wow, sister. That was amazing. What do we do now? There is nothing here. No food, no shelter. We need to leave. We'll find a new life somewhere else.

Mermaid crosses to Zoe. She caresses her.

MERMAID

No. We stay. And we heal.
This will be better.
Today will be our gift.

... When darkness comes,
The stars blind our eyes.
And the light of our time
Will carry our pain away.
There is time.

Time will come,
When we are reborn.
When the trees will bear fruit again.
And we won't be hungry,
Or lonely, or lost.

We will find our dream,
We will find happiness.

Mermaid picks up the kit and Jason's hand, which lies on the ground. She takes them over to Jason.

MERMAID

Your father's gift is yours, Jason.
We must heal.

Darkness.

End Play.

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