

The Witching Hour

An Anthology of Short Witch Plays
by
The Dog Ear Playwrights Collective

This material is copyrighted and is made available here for perusal only. For production rights contact the individual playwrights, who retain copyright to the plays herein.

Table of Contents:

Goody Fucking Two Shoes by Jennifer Maisel

The Marriage of Gawain by Wayne Peter Liebman

Diana the Throat Singer by Leon Martell

Essential Magick by Robert Fieldsteel

Layered Bob by Katy Hickman

Cause of Death by Bryan Davidson

Petrol by Mickey Birnbaum

Witch Trial by Joy Gregory

GOODY FUCKING TWO SHOES
(version 2.2)

by
Jennifer Maisel

Jennifer Maisel

jenmaisel@aol.com

theatre representation: Susan Schulman 212-713-1633 Schulman@aol.com

film representation: Ryan L Saul 323-857-4519 rlsaul@mta.com

copyright 2005

CHARACTERS:

ABIGAIL - 16, just beginning to understand her power over boys, over girls, over parents and teachers.

BET - 16, new, tentative, she's got to check in with Abigail that what's she's saying is cool.

MAN'S VOICE

SETTING:

Bet's Bedroom: a bed and packed boxes. School stage.

MUSIC – intense, frenzied. SPOTLIGHT slams on

ABIGAIL

“I am lost of God.”

MUSIC/LIGHTS SLAM UP TO REVEAL

Bet’s Bedroom. Abigail and Bet enter. Abigail glances at her script, throws it down, jumps on the bed and emotes. Overlapping slightly.

ABIGAIL

“The devil hath got hold of us.”

BET

This is really nice of you, Abigail.

ABIGAIL

“The devil hath got hold of us. I gave the devil my soul and my body.”

BET

I never even thought about going out for drama at my old school -
It totally sucks that my parents moved me mid year. Again.

ABIGAIL

BET

“I ate his red bread. I drank his wine.”

My dad’s company says jump and he
says how far would you like that transfer to go
up my ass

(a slight grin from Abigail. Bet is encouraged)

BET

I told them that this time I’m not unpacking –
(Abigail flops down on the bed on her back.)

ABIGAIL

(softly, to herself)

“The dark man carried me. The dark man carried me. The dark man carried me”

BET

No, I’m not because I swear to God the last two times the moment I got unpacked, the
moment I got comfortable, the moment I got – fucking – friends, that was it, pack it up
again, Betsy –

ABIGAIL

Betsy?

BET

Yeah, I just thought here, being called Bet...

(Abigail shrugs)

ABIGAIL

(softly, to herself)

“I gave the devil my soul and my body.”

BET

Betsy, Bet – you’ll like this new school better, less crime, higher median test scores, a better breed of kids.

ABIGAIL

“I know Goody Parker to be a witch. I know Goody Parker to be a witch. I know Goody Parker to be a witch. I know –“

BET

Breed – like cattle or dogs. They don’t understand that better breeds come from puppy mills and are like *(shouts out the door)* deformed in their perfection!

ABIGAIL

(whispers)

“I know Goody Parker to be a witch.”

BET

Anyway – it’s really nice of you. I mean today, today was the fourth day I walked into the cafeteria and walked out in a row. I don’t know, how am I supposed to know where to sit? How am I suppose to know what to order even? And carrying my tray and my books and then looking around, everyone knows when you’re looking around, don’t you think? And they look away, they just edge away in case you think they like you and there’s someone you always think is liking you and they’re really looking at the person behind you – so after-school special – and then you’re caught and you think if there is a god the - fucking - building will implode right that second and then the second after that with everyone still staring at you holding the stupid tray you’ve gotten confirmation that there is no god at all.

So which table do you sit at?

ABIGAIL

I smoke.

BET

I should smoke. That way when my mother says to me all you have to do to make friends is take up an activity I can say I did Mom, I smoke. That was great advice Mom. Watch her vegan facelift fall flat after that.

ABIGAIL

“The devil hath got hold of us. The devil hath got hold of us. The devil hath got hold of us. The Devil. Hath. Got. Hold. Of. Us.

BET

I figured if I just get to be a screaming girl or I like work the lights or something there'd be, I don't know...

ABIGAIL

"The dark man carried me. He whispered in my ear." He tempted me to sing for him.

BET

"He tempted me to write in his book."

ABIGAIL

What?

BET

"The dark man carried me. He whispered in my ear. He tempted me to write in his book."

ABIGAIL

" – to write in his book?"

BET

Yeah.

ABIGAIL

Are you sure?

(Bet tosses her the script. Abigail looks.)

What the fuck does that mean?

BET

I know.

ABIGAIL

I mean I get the whole, I gave the devil my soul and my body, definitely. I get the whole ate the red bread, drank his wine, oh lord comfort me crap – I mean I can get it even though I'm a Jew-Bu but he tempted me to write in his book? Big fucking deal.

BET

I know.

ABIGAIL

Hey, I'm Satan, don't you want to sign my yearbook? All the other kids are doing it.

BET

I know!

ABIGAIL

Fuck. I don't know why we couldn't do something good, like RENT.

BET

You should, you should tell them RENT.

ABIGAIL

But this is “historical”. Culled from actual transcripts. SALEM. Exclamation point. I mean, I like Mrs. Polk – she’s an OK history teacher - but she’s no Jonathan Larson. She’s not even Arthur Miller.

BET

(clearly not knowing who she’s talking about)

Right.

ABIGAIL

But this, god, with all the screaming, they’re just screaming. We have to scream at the audition. And have fits. And Goody this and Goody that. Goody Good. Please. I know Goody Fucking Two Shoes is a witch.

BET

I know!

ABIGAIL

Craig says –

BET

Craig?

ABIGAIL

Mr. MacNamara – some of us, who are you know, close to him, he told us that we can call him that. We’re not supposed to but he says respect doesn’t come with a mister –

BET

Or a Goody –

ABIGAIL

What? Oh.

So if like anyone else is around – you know – Maybe if your audition goes OK then you can call him - -

MUSIC/LIGHT SHIFT SLAM. TWO SPOTLIGHTS. THE AUDITION.

ABIGAIL/BET

“Oh, my heart will break within me. I am lost of God. The devil hath got hold of us. I gave the devil my soul and my body. I ate his red bread. I drank his wine. The dark man carried me. He whispered in my ear. He tempted me to write in his book. I have seen Goody Martin among the witches. I have seen Goody Proctor among the witches. Goody Cloyse and Goody Good were their deacons. Oh Goody Hoar do not kill me. She

ABIGAIL/BET

(continued)

bites...she bites! They will tear me to pieces!!! Oh lord comfort me and bring out all that are witches!"

ABIGAIL'S LIGHT GOES OUT.

BET

I am lost...of God.

LIGHT SHIFT SLAM. BET'S BEDROOM.

ABIGAIL

None of these girls – none of them have any backbone. They're just followers.

BET

I know exactly what you mean.

ABIGAIL

Except Abigail.

BET

Well Abigail.

ABIGAIL

She's got –

BET

I guess it's – it's...

ABIGAIL

It's power. She's found it. What everyone's scared of -

BET

Huh?

ABIGAIL

Teenage girls. Us. And that.

BET

What?

ABIGAIL

Power.

BET

Huh?

ABIGAIL

Why else would they care about what we wear? Why else would they talk about uniforms? Dress codes? Why else would they force us to do this play – long dresses, Goody this, Goody that, Sirs and whippings and screaming girls and God. Deciding what God says, what God wants, that couldn't – stop me –

BET

You?

ABIGAIL

Abigail.

BET

Oh, I didn't get, I just thought, you, me, Abigail, your name and hers, that's like destiny –

ABIGAIL

Meisner.

BET

What?

ABIGAIL

Sense memory. Trying to, you know, get into the part. To be the part.

BET

Wow.

ABIGAIL

What?

BET

You've got, like a technique.
If you hate the play so much then why...?

ABIGAIL

I'm an actress.

LIGHT SHIFT SLAM. A SPOTLIGHT ON EACH OF THEM

MAN'S VOICE

Whenever you're ready.
(Abigail and Bet each let out horrific, silent screams, sinking over-dramatically into the ground.)
Great. Let's try a little adjustment.

(Abigail and Bet each let out horrific, silent screams, sinking over-dramatically into the ground.)

And again

(Abigail and Bet each let out horrific, silent screams, sinking over-dramatically into the ground.)

THE SPOTLIGHT ON BET GOES OUT.

ABIGAIL shades her eyes against the spotlight's glare.

ABIGAIL

You have got to be kidding me.

MAN'S VOICE

Don't be this way.

ABIGAIL

You have got to be fucking kidding me.

MAN'S VOICE

There's a covenant I've made, Abigail.

ABIGAIL

Jesus.

MAN'S VOICE

I have to judge each audition solely on its individual merits. I must stay in the moment. I have to rate my emotional response, my visceral reaction, my gut feeling of which character suits each auditioner best –

ABIGAIL

She's the new girl.

MAN'S VOICE

Her Abigail was quite –

ABIGAIL

So what you're saying is, past performance doesn't count, Craig.

SLAM MUSIC AND LIGHT SHIFT. The TWO SPOTLIGHTS

MAN'S VOICE

And...go -

(Bet and Abigail each in their own light, each in a frenzied mad fit/dance, each transported with the music.)

THE SPOTLIGHT ON ABIGAIL GOES OUT

BET

Really?

MAN'S VOICE

Quite...um...moving.

BET

So there's a chance with you for me –

MAN'S VOICE

What?

BET

For a part.

MAN'S VOICE

Oh. Oh.

BET

I was just hoping to be able to speak. You know, on the stage...because these words are so...so...evocative –
(she touches her collarbone, arching her back slightly – provocatively? Purposefully? Or not.)

MAN'S VOICE

Oh?

SLAM LIGHT AND MUSIC SHIFT - Spotlight on ABIGAIL shading her eyes against the spotlight glare

ABIGAIL

Past performance doesn't count. Obviously. Craig.

MAN'S VOICE

Don't – You, of all students, Abigail. You believe in the power of theatre, you wouldn't want me to break the faith –

ABIGAIL

Break the faith –

MAN'S VOICE

That the other students have that they'll be judged on their merits only, fairly – and

ABIGAIL

Craig.

MAN'S VOICE

Don't –

ABIGAIL

Don't what? Don't do this?
(she begins to unbutton her shirt)
Maybe I need to audition again.

SPOTLIGHT ON BET AS WELL

ABIGAIL/BET

“Oh my heart will break within me. I am lost of God.”

ABIGAIL

“The devil hath got hold of us.”
*(Abigail unbuttons her shirt.
Abigail touches herself.)*

I gave the devil my soul
- and my body.

BET

It's so simple. It's so what
I feel right now.

I feel so lost. Of everything. Of everyone.

If I could get over that
feeling of being watched, of

needing, of needing, of wanting
just for someone to give me the –the -
do you understand? Somehow, I think you -

SPOTLIGHT ON BET

BET

Somehow I think you could help me...find myself.

MAN'S VOICE

(hoarse)

Find yourself?

BET

You know...as my director –

LIGHT SLAM – SPOTLIGHT ON ABIGAIL

ABIGAIL

“The devil hath got hold of us.” – That's pretty accurate, don't you think?

MAN'S VOICE

What are you -

ABIGAIL

“The devil hath got hold of me. I gave the devil my soul...and my body.”

MAN'S VOICE

What?

ABIGAIL

Wouldn't the faculty be stunned to hear that?

MAN'S VOICE

Abigail-

ABIGAIL

Wouldn't want it to get to the PTA. Did you know I'm editor of the paper?

BET'S SPOTLIGHT TURNS ON.

BET

“I am lost.”

MAN'S VOICE

Nothing happened.

ABIGAIL

Are you sure? There are different ways to touch, you know?

There are different way to interact.

After all, who controls that spotlight? I know the warmth is coming from you. I know the heat that is coming from you.

MAN'S VOICE

You...you wouldn't.

ABIGAIL

I felt his hands. I felt the warmth. I felt the heat. I felt it penetrate me and I couldn't look at him. I couldn't look at him in the eyes. He wouldn't let me. (*She stands, shirt unbuttoned.*)

You know there's a bunch of kids still waiting in the hall for their callbacks. Maybe I should go.

MAN'S VOICE

Abigail.

ABIGAIL

Yes. Craig?

MAN'S VOICE

You're...Abigail.

BET

"I am lost."

ABIGAIL

See you at rehearsal, Mr. MacNamara.

(She walks off the stage.)

BET

"I am lost."

MAN'S VOICE

Thank you – that was very...nice.

(Bet beams at him).

END PLAY

THE MARRIAGE OF GAWAIN

Adapted from Bullfinch

by

Wayne Peter Liebman

Copyright ©2004
by Wayne Peter Liebman
(Rev. 10/3/04)

1315 Malcolm Ave.
Los Angeles, CA 90024
310.475.5278
wpl@aya.yale.edu

Cast of Characters

<u>Arthur</u>	King of Britain
<u>Guinivere</u>	Arthur's Queen
<u>Gawain</u>	A knight of the court
<u>Sagramour</u>	A knight of the court
<u>Dame Ragnell</u>	A loathly lady
<u>The Foul Knight</u>	An obstreperous ruffian

The ensemble (minimum six--see below) also plays various town and country folk, knights and ladies of the court.

Scene

The English countryside. The court of King Arthur.

Time

Time out of mind.

Notes

The action of the play is continuous, without pauses or blackouts between scenes.

Accents: Dame Ragnell speaks with a Cockney accent. When she assumes her real identity, she speaks in standard English. The Foul Knight has a French accent.

Dame Ragnell mask: Dame Ragnell should be truly hideous: scaly skin, tangled hair with bald spots, hollow eyes, a gash for a mouth; this aspect must be capable of instant transformation to one of maidenly beauty.

Suggested Roles for a Cast of Six

Actress 1: Guinivere, Peasant #1

Actress 2: Dame Ragnell, Lady #1

Actor 1: Arthur

Actor 2: Gawain

Actor 3: Sagramour, Peasant #2

Actor 4: The Foul Knight, Lady #2, Old Woman

Scene 1

SETTING: King Arthur's court.

AT RISE: The cast in court finery, in frozen tableau around a banquet table.

GUINIVERE

(to audience)

There once was king named Arthur.

GAWAIN

Who had--

SAGRAMOUR

(elbowing in)

many brave--

(SAGRAMOUR and GAWAIN bow to each other.)

SAGRAMOUR
knights.

GAWAIN
knights.

ARTHUR

(to audience, imperially)

And whose castle was the seat of order, culture, and prosperity in the realm.

(A sudden burst of laughter as ENSEMBLE comes to life.)

SAGRAMOUR

(drunkenly)

Gawain! Tell the one about the sheep farmer and his three daughters!

GAWAIN

I can't tell that in front of the ladies.

SAGRAMOUR

Aw, go on! Don't be such a priss.

ENSEMBLE WOMEN

Yes, please, Gawain. Tell us. Do tell. Tell us. Etc.

GAWAIN

Well--

ARTHUR

It was apparent to all. Gawain had quite a way with the ladies.

GUINIVERE

He's very handsome, you must agree.

LADY #1

He can really tell a story!

LADY #2

Oh do go on, Gawain!

GAWAIN

It seems there was once a farmer who had--

(SOUND: **A sudden knock at the castle door.** Loud and ominous.
ALL freeze.)

GUINIVERE

What can that be?

ARTHUR

(majestically)

The door to Arthur's castle is always open.

(A tattered WOMAN rushes in
and throws herself at ARTHUR'S
feet.)

OLD WOMAN

Mercy, lord! Mercy!

ARTHUR

Up my good woman, up! What's the matter?

OLD WOMAN

(suppressing tears)

A foul knight is laying waste to our lands, killing all who
oppose him! Help us, sir. Send us one of your knights to
defeat him.

GAWAIN

I'll go! Let me
go, my liege!

SAGRAMOUR

I'll do it. Send
me, m'lord!

ARTHUR

All right. Sagramour... No, Gawain... Oh, I'll go myself.

WOMAN

Sire, it is a very dangerous knight. They say he possesses a
charm.

FOUL KNIGHT

You are my slave, King Arthur. Fetch wood for my fire and cook my supper.

(**ARTHUR'S** body moves jerkily.
HE fetches wood, cooks, feeds
the FOUL KNIGHT.)

ARTHUR

(to audience)

And so Arthur became the Foul Knight's slave. He cooked his meals, cleaned his stables, emptied his chamber pot. Until one day, Arthur could stand it no longer.

(to the FOUL KNIGHT)

Sir knight, will you not accept a ransom for my freedom?

FOUL KNIGHT

What use have I for money, pasty weed?

ARTHUR

Then tell me what you want. I will do anything if you let me go.

FOUL KNIGHT

Anything? Very well, then bring me the answer to a riddle within a year and a day. And if you bring none, then you answer with your life.

ARTHUR

Riddle? I love riddles. What is it? Tell me!

FOUL KNIGHT

It is this: what is it women most desire to have? Bring me the true answer, Arthur, or a year and one day hence, you forfeit your life.

(HE exits.)

Scene 3

LIGHT SHIFT. **ARTHUR wanders back to his castle.** His knights and ladies appear from all directions.

ENSEMBLE

Arthur! Thank heavens! You're safe. We were so worried. What happened? Tell us! Etc.

GUINIVERE

Are you all right, my husband?

ARTHUR

I must answer a riddle.

ENSEMBLE

Ohhh. Charades?

ARTHUR

What is it women most desire to have?

SAGRAMOUR

That's easy.

(HE makes an obscene gesture.)

A hard man is good to find, eh?

ENSEMBLE

No! Wrong! You're a pig. That can't be it. Etc.

LADY #1

I know. Children!

GAWAIN

A husband?

GUINIVERE

Respect?

SAGRAMOUR

Flattery!

LADY #2

Jewelry?

LADY #1

Happiness?

ARTHUR

Enough! I'm afraid none of these will satisfy the Foul Knight. And if I don't have the true answer in a year and a day, I forfeit my life.

ENSEMBLE

Ohhh!

GAWAIN

You must wander the kingdom in disguise, asking all you meet.

ARTHUR

You speak aright. Adieu, my queen. If I do not return in a year and a day, you are free to seek the hand of another, for I will be dead.

GUINIVERE

(stricken)

Arthur!

GAWAIN

I'll go with you, my king.

ARTHUR

Thank you, Gawain, truest of knights. I must go alone.
Farewell.

ENSEMBLE

Goodbye. Farewell. Auf weidersein. So long. Namaste. Das
vedanya. Etc.

Scene 4

Arthur dons a disguise. The ENSEMBLE
remove themselves. LIGHT SHIFT. ARTHUR
wanders. HE encounters a pair of
peasants.

ARTHUR

And so Arthur sought out the wisdom of his people.

PEASANT #1

Hello Ducky, what's this? Can you spare a tuppence?

ARTHUR

If you can tell me what it is women most desire to have.

PEASANT #1

Oh, that's a new one. What do you think, Bess?

PEASANT #2

I think he needs a bath. Ha ha!

PEASANT #1

Oh, be serious, Bess, can't you see he's a gentleman? All
right sir, I'll tell you. What a woman wants most is to be a
wife.

PEASANT #2

Or to be a widow, more like! Ha ha.

PEASANT #1

That is good, Bess, that is good. Touché, as they say.
Touché. Ah, fare the well, sir. No tuppence today, I can see
that in your eyes. Ah, well. Come along, Bess. We're not
wanted here.

(The PEASANTS exit.)

ARTHUR

(to audience)

And so it went.

ARTHUR(cont'd)

For a year Arthur wandered, and heard many an answer, that a woman most wanted fame, riches, wisdom, a son, a daughter and a thousand more things, but none satisfied. Until the king despaired of ever hearing the true answer, and knew he must forfeit his life. So with heavy heart he at last turned toward the Foul Knight's castle, and soon found himself in a dark wood.

Scene 5

LIGHT SHIFT to **night**. Branches of trees. Some mist would be nice. SOUNDS: Eerie music. Owl & other forest sounds. Distant thunder, rain. **A dimly lit figure appears.** SHE has beautiful, long blond hair, and seems to be looking upstage. LIGHT grows more brilliant on the hair. Is she humming to herself? ARTHUR approaches. He can't make out her face.

ARTHUR

Who is that there? I can't quite see you. Turn around and show yourself.

(The figure ignores HIM.)

Gentle woman, are you not afraid to be alone in these woods this night?

(The woman suddenly reveals the hideous countenance of DAME RAGNELL. SOUND: A sudden thunderclap, a shocking chord. A flash of lightening. The effect should be horrifying. RAGNELL speaks in an ancient, cracked voice, the voice of a sybil.)

DAME RAGNELL

And of whom should I be afraid, Arthur?

(ARTHUR turns away, breathless and reeling at her ugliness.)

Will you not speak with me?

ARTHUR

Most...terrible witch!

DAME RAGNELL

What's that you say?

ARTHUR

I said--

DAME RAGNELL

I thought I heard you call me witch. Think you I am ugly?

ARTHUR

Yes-- No-- Some would...find you pleasing.

DAME RAGNELL

A politician's answer. I have summoned you here. You have nothing to fear from me. Though you go to your death if you do not make true answer to a certain question. Am I not right? Speak!

ARTHUR

But how--

DAME RAGNELL

I have two ears. Now, Arthur, speak truly. What is it that women most desire?

ARTHUR

(racks his brains)

I cannot tell you.

DAME RAGNELL

Though I can tell you, if you grant my wish.

ARTHUR

You know the answer? Say it. Anything in my power. I grant it.

DAME RAGNELL

Come hither. Be quick.

(ARTHUR, barely containing his revulsion and fear, approaches her. Her odor is foul.)

Know this. What a woman most wants is her will. Nothing more nor less than to be sovereign to herself. As for what I desire, come closer.

(HE hesitates.)

Closer I say!

(SHE whispers in his ear.)

SOUND: Thunder. Lightening.)

Now go. You have an appointment to keep.

(SOUND: **Thunder. Lightening.**)

ARTHUR

Do not ask this of me!

(But **SHE has disappeared.**)

There's not a king in the world who could command such a thing. What have I done?

Scene 6

LIGHT SHIFT. Day. The storm has passed.
Bird song. **ARTHUR is at the FOUL
KNIGHT'S castle.** The FOUL KNIGHT
appears.

FOUL KNIGHT

So. You are back. You owe me an answer. Have you one?

ARTHUR

I have a thousand.

FOUL KNIGHT

Good, let's hear them all! I need a laugh.

ARTHUR

It's said what a woman most desires is a husband--
(The FOUL KNIGHT roars with
laughter.)

A child.

(more laughter)

Riches.

(more laughter)

Honor.

(more laughter)

Beauty.

(more laughter)

FOUL KNIGHT

So, you have no answer at all? Prepare to die.

ARTHUR

I have one more, though I am loathe to use it.

FOUL KNIGHT

Well?

ARTHUR

Know this: the thing a woman most desires to have is her
will. Nothing more nor less than to be sovereign to herself.

FOUL KNIGHT

What? Miscreant! It was my sister that told you this! Half-
faced strumpet! Fen-sucking dragon! I am undone! Aarrgggh!
(Exits shouting.)

ARTHUR

So it's true. You are no more undone than I.

(to audience)

It was not with a light heart that Arthur returned to
Camelot.

Scene 7

LIGHT SHIFT. ARTHUR'S castle. ENSEMBLE converges from all directions, surrounding ARTHUR.

ENSEMBLE

Arthur! King! You're back! We were so worried! We thought you were dead. We knew you could do it. Are you all right? It's been so long! Thank heavens. Etc.

ARTHUR

The foul knight's charm is broken. I found the riddle's answer. It was given to me by a...woman I met in the woods.

GUINIVERE

This is a day of joy. Why do you look so sad, husband?

ARTHUR

The cost is more than I can pay.

ENSEMBLE

Ohhh!

SAGRAMOUR

How bad can it be? Who is this woman? What's she like?

ARTHUR

She's the... It's difficult to describe.

(SOUND: **An ominous**, echoing **knock**. The ENSEMBLE freezes. DAME **RAGNELL enters wearing a veil**. Still ugly, the demeanor of the Sybil is absent; SHE'S girlish and cheerful. ENSEMBLE backs away.)

DAME RAGNELL

Anyone home?

ENSEMBLE

What is that? Get the Lysol. That smell! It's horrible! Etc.

DAME RAGNELL

So, Arthur, here I am as I said. Have you done as you promised?

ARTHUR

Not yet. Perhaps if you stayed a while at court your fine qualities would become apparent.

(**SHE lifts the veil.**)

DAME RAGNELL

Like this?

SAGRAMOUR

The nerve! Fly-bitten, ill-nurtured--

GAWAIN

Enough! Madame, we have no wish to shame you.

(HE replaces the veil.)

DAME RAGNELL

Ah, Gawain. Always the gentleman. And are you ready to redeem your king's promise?

GAWAIN

If it is in my power, of course.

DAME RAGNELL

There it is, Arthur.

GAWAIN

Gawain, the hag makes a demand--

DAME RAGNELL

For neither riches nor land nor title. But to be given in marriage to a knight of the round table.

GAWAIN

Marriage? To you?

(a sigh)

ENSEMBLE

Gawain, no! Say it isn't true! Don't be a fool! Think what you're doing!

GAWAIN

No. A wedding has been promised. A wedding there shall be. I'll have her.

DAME RAGNELL

And I'll have him.

ARTHUR

We must make...preparations.

GAWAIN

It must be now. We need rings.

DAME RAGNELL

I brought rings.

(SHE puts a ring on, gives one to GAWAIN.)

Now, Arthur, go ahead before he faints.

(ENSEMBLE reluctantly forms a wedding party. ENSEMBLE WOMEN weep.)

ARTHUR
Lady, do you take this knight for your--

DAME RAGNELL
Oh yes, yes I do! My heart's going like mad.

ARTHUR
Gawain, do you take this lady for a wife?

GAWAIN
(a beat)
I do.

ARTHUR
Then I suppose you're married.

Scene 8

SOUND: Mendelson's "Wedding March."
DAME RAGNELL is given a withered bouquet. She tosses it; all the women run away. A curtained bed is brought in, blankets and pillows laid out. The following dialogue is spoken to the audience as the ENSEMBLE scurries about.

SAGRAMOUR
It was what you call a shotgun wedding.

LADY #2
There was no feast.

GUINIVERE
They found them an old room in the castle for their wedding night.

LADY #2
We all left the party as soon as we could.

GUINIVERE
He's lost to us forever!

LADY #2
Oh, Gawain, I would have made you a good wife!

ARTHUR
Gawain, can you ever forgive me?

SAGRAMOUR

Ripping, old boy. Best of luck.

DAME RAGNELL

The lady and her husband were left alone to themselves.

(GAWAIN and DAME RAGNELL
remain in the wedding chamber.
ENSEMBLE exits to periphery,
listening. RAGNELL bounces on
the bed, behind the curtain.
GAWAIN stands as far from the
bed as possible.)

DAME RAGNELL

Well, here we are! I do love a bouncy bed. Husband? Oh, there you are. Don't be so stand-offish!

GAWAIN

I never expected I'd marry. At least, not for a while, not in such a rush. I'm nor sure what to do.

DAME RAGNELL

There's no hurry. Shall we play a game? To pass the time? You'll find me quite good at haves, I think. Won't you come a little closer?

GAWAIN

If you like.

DAME RAGNELL

Question and answer. But only answer the truth. Promise?

GAWAIN

All right.

DAME RAGNELL

I'll go first. Have you any complaints about your bride? The truth now.

GAWAIN

Pardon, Madam... you are somewhat older than me.

DAME RAGNELL

Old? Why Gawain, I'm surprised at you. With age comes discretion. You don't want some flighty bird do you?

GAWAIN

But madam... I am a knight of the round table. You are of low degree. Forgive me, I only say this because you asked.

DAME RAGNELL

Low degree? Tush! Poverty's an honest thing. Whoever is contented with her lot, I count her rich. What else?

GAWAIN

You're...

DAME RAGNELL

No beauty?

GAWAIN

Yes.

DAME RAGNELL

Ugly?

GAWAIN

Yes.

DAME RAGNELL

You wanted a pretty wife. But Gawain, that's the slightest thing of all. I know I'm ugly. But with an ugly wife, you'll never be a cuckold. Besides, gentility depends of character, not outward show.

GAWAIN

I like your wit.

DAME RAGNELL

Will you do me one kindness, now? Will you come here and give me a kiss. One kiss, it's all I ask.

GAWAIN

Very well.

(GAWAIN kisses HER. HE parts the curtain and/or lifts the veil. Sound: something magical. RAGNELL is no longer ugly, but a radiantly beautiful young maid. LIGHT fills the chamber. When RAGNELL speaks, it is in the voice of a young girl.)

GAWAIN

It's not possible!

DAME RAGNELL

Now that was a kiss.

GAWAIN

Who are you?

DAME RAGNELL

Your bride, of course.

GAWAIN

But you're not--

DAME RAGNELL

The old woman? Gawain, that wasn't my true form. It was a spell. And your kiss has broken half of it.

GAWAIN

You're so beautiful. Half? Half?

DAME RAGNELL

Now I can be myself either by day or by night. How would you have me? Beautiful when we are alone together in our chamber, or beautiful for everyone to see when we're at court?

GAWAIN

Must I choose?

DAME RAGNELL

Indeed you must.

GAWAIN

Well, by night then.

DAME RAGNELL

But would you have others still see me as ugly? I don't think I can bear it any more.

GAWAIN

Beautiful by day then.

DAME RAGNELL

And how will I feel when you turn to me in bed and I see revulsion in your eyes?

GAWAIN

This is impossible. You choose. Whatever you will I am content with.

(SOUND: Something wonderful.
RAGNELL leaps into GAWAIN'S
arms. ENSEMBLE cheers,
converges around THEM.)

DAME RAGNELL

Husband, you've broken the spell completely!

GUINIVERE

(to audience)

And then she told him how a wicked sorcerer had put a charm on both she and her brother, making her ugly and changing him into the foul knight. But now because Gawain had given her her will, they both were free.

FOUL KNIGHT

(rushing in)

I'm not nasty! I didn't mean a word of it! I take back everything I said!

ARTHUR

Then they had a real wedding,

(SOUND: dance music. ENSEMBLE dances.)

and a great ball with reggae music and a punch bowl that never ran dry.

SAGRAMOUR

There was roast pig and balloons and a bubble machine and souvenir matchbooks everyone wore funny hats and it all lasted three days.

(Balloons drop from above as ENSEMBLE dances off, leaving RAGNELL and GAWAIN in their chamber. RAGNELL pulls GAWAIN into bed.)

DAME RAGNELL

Then Sir Gawain and his new bride retired to their chamber which they didn't come out of for another three days, and lived happily ever after. Would that all sorcery were resolved by such clean magic!

(SHE kisses GAWAIN and pulls the curtains closed. MUSIC.)

BLACKOUT

END OF PLAY

Diana the Throat Singer

by
Leon Martell

Real Events

For
DOG EAR WITCH PLAYS

VERSION 4/11/05

AN INTIMATE RESTAURANT. A YOUNG COUPLE SIT AT A TABLE. SHE IS BEAUTIFUL IN AN ETHERIAL WAY. HE IS PRETTY AVERAGE. THEY STARE INTO EACH OTHERS EYES. AFTER TOO LONG, THE WOMAN AVERTS HER EYES. THE YOUNG MAN GASPS LIKE HE'S BEEN UNDER WATER TO THE POINT OF NEAR DROWNING.

LEONARD

(Still catching his breath.)

What was that?

DIANA

I don't know. It's something I can do... With some people.

LEONARD

It was (still gasping) like my skin was taken off and all my insides were pulled out. I just felt... Not bad.. Just like I was being.. Like my data was being gone over.

She shrugs.

LEONARD

I could see.. colored threads...

DIANA

Luminous fibers...

LEONARD

Yes! Coming out of my navel and going to you .. And back in a loop.

DIANA

Yes.

LEONARD

You never did that when we were in college. What was that?

DIANA

It's... It's just training. I can't really even do it right, yet. I just have the basics. You could do it.

LEONARD

When did you start doing... What is that?

DIANA

It's from singing. I don't know if you remember...

LEONARD

Right. You were a singer...

DIANA

Not all that good.

LEONARD

You were good, but I don't remember, "fibers".

DIANA

I hadn't experienced throat singing.

LEONARD

Is that, they make a couple of different pitches at the same time...?

DIANA

Yes! Yes. Parallel resonances. There is a group of throat singers in Portland.

LEONARD

Why are they in Portland?

DIANA

I never really asked. I went to a recital and I was just shaken, and after, one of them came right through the crowd, to me, and said, "Come sing," and I did. I quit teaching elementary school and just studied with the throat singers...

She freezes. He addresses the audience.

LEONARD

(Aside)

Fuck me, I'm on a date with a space alien Diana is a space alien! Or maybe this isn't her. Maybe it's like "the pod people", she's been taken over by a space alien. I didn't know her that well before but... I would have noticed if she was pulling out people's fibers... I would have heard about it if she ...

She unfreezes and he instantly returns his focus to her.

DIANA

... Of course Tommy doesn't understand any of this...

LEONARD

(Aside)

I'm on a date with a married space alien. Fuck!

DIANA

So I'm back here visiting Mom and Dad, they don't understand, and I saw your picture in the paper "Local actors returns to play Feste in 'Twelfth Night'."

LEONARD

(Aside)

I should have gone to West Virginia and done "The Hobbit."
No, I wanted to do Shakespeare again. Of course, I had to
play Feste, the fool.(Gasp) Maybe she "hears" all this.

Returning to her.

LEONARD

And. When you ... Did that... What did you see? Can you tell
what I'm thinking?

DIANA

(laughing)

No. It's not like that. It's in a different language. Like a
spectrum.

LEONARD

And?

DIANA

It's not "words". It's more like.. Music. I can see your
music.

LEONARD

And... Am I a polka or something?

DIANA

You're a good man. (Seductively) Let's go to the corn field.

He starts to quibble. She waves her
hand in an elegant gesture and they are
in transit. She sings something
beautiful and exotic. He talks to the
audience.

LEONARD

(Aside)

She must mean her parents corn field. They're from here.
Old New England family. Way old, pilgrims old, witch trials,
curses, Indian massacres old... from when spirits walked these
woods. Things that were driven out when they cut down the
old growth. Things that are angry...

With a gesture from her, they have
arrived. They are standing in the
middle of the corn. The sounds of
summer night. The rustling of the
corn.

DIANA

It's perfect, isn't it? Look at the stars.

LEONARD

I forgot about them. In the city, you don't even see them.

DIANA

(Reaching out toward them)

They are all radiating, vibrating at an individual frequency. Sending it out toward us. Not toward us, but we are part of where it reaches.

LEONARD

(Aside)

This is the part where the space ship descends.

DIANA

And the corn. Listen. The wind strokes each stalk into vibration. Plucks it like the string of a harp. We are in the middle of a chord being played. As the corn grows the pitch changes, and the whole field sends out its message. Can you hear the trees beyond? Oaks. Maples. Pines. (Turning to him) Let's join them.

She takes his hand and clamps it to the center of her chest. She puts her own hand on his chest. Transcendent music comes from her. It could be recorded sound or the actual voice of a wonderful singer or a mixture of the two. Whatever, it should be other worldly.

Leonard begins to shake. The music takes control of him. It should seem sensual but not comic; exciting, overwhelming, and clumsy, like sex the first time. The experience culminates with him singing as well, providing a bass chord to her soprano. They finish together. He's completely wrung out.

LEONARD

That was... amazing. I've never... That was heavenly.

DIANA

You could come with me.

LEONARD

As what? Are we... lovers? What about your husband?

DIANA

He doesn't understand. You have the gift. I saw it in your singing.

LEONARD

In the play?

DIANA

That's when I knew. You could make the leap.

LEONARD

The songs in the play are just little ditties.

DIANA

But the madrigals. You always loved singing madrigals.

LEONARD

I'm not a real singer like you.

DIANA

You just need to study, with the right teachers. And it's even better (She holds their hands up and intertwines fingers with him) if you have someone to study with.

LEONARD

I would really love to, but I have another job waiting for me, back in the city, as soon as the summer's done.

DIANA

In college, when you played Biff. I was doing props, you came off stage and said, "for a minute, I left the ground."

LEONARD

I was a pompous little shit ...

DIANA

No. This is a chance to leave the ground.

LEONARD

I can't. I'm just lucky to have another job. Acting... Right away. It's with a very respected director... Doing "Death Trap."

DIANA

(Letting go of his hand)

That's all right. It was just an offer. I don't know why I thought you'd want to come.

She kisses him in a very ritualized way. And exits. He addresses the audience.

LEONARD

I saw her once again, maybe a year later. She came to a play I was doing. She was with a dark man in white robes. She was warm and beautiful and wished me well. Then she disappeared.

Not in a puff of smoke, but, after that time, I couldn't find her. I tried, all the old places, all the old numbers, her parents, her ex-husband... She just wasn't... on this plane of existence any more. I'm still acting. Some T.V.. I'm seen over the shoulder of the lead detective, saying, "I'll call homicide." That kind of thing. Makes my family happy. "Look he's an actor, he's on T.V!!" I don't do musicals. The last time I sang on stage was that summer. "Twelfth Night". Most people play it like a broad comedy. That's what summer stock audiences want, but it's dark. Everybody gets married, blah, blah, blah, but in the end, Feste's alone on stage.

He sings:

When that I was, and a little tiny boy,
With a hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
A foolish thing was but a toy,
For the rain it raineth every day,
With a hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
The rain it raineth every day,...

LIGHTS FADE. THE END

ESSENTIAL MAGICK

By
Robert Fieldsteel

Copyright 2003

by Robert Fieldsteel

Characters & Setting

Characters

CLAUDIA late 30s-early 40s

BREANNA Claudia's daughter, age 13

Setting

A suburban home, present day. Breanna is in her bedroom, Claudia is in the "breakfast nook" area of a kitchen. The stage may be virtually bare, although a small night table with drawers is suggested for Breanna's "room". More set elements may be used to suggest other aspects of these rooms if desired, but the preference should be for enough openness on the set to allow for the feeling of a flow of energy from actor to actor.

Notes

Both characters are onstage throughout.

ESSENTIAL MAGICK

A suburban home, present day. CLAUDIA, late 30's-early 40s, is in the breakfast nook of her kitchen. BREANNA, age 13, is in her bedroom. CLAUDIA addresses the audience.

CLAUDIA

I still think it's good that she has her own room. But I worry. I know I can be prone to worry. But since she's become a witch, I do worry about her having her own room. It's not so much the witch part, I mean, her *being* a witch, that's my ... area of concern. I know that sounds strange, but, at least the way she explains it to me, a twenty-first century witch is relatively benevolent. I mean, nobody's cackling over a cauldron or anything. It's more a worship of the "aliveness" of nature. In everything. In the world.

(beat)

I know she'd say I'm not expressing it very well. But I think I've got the general gist. No, it's, it's not the witch stuff so much as all the time she's been spending alone in her room. With the door shut. Since around the time she *became* a witch. Jim says that's typical for a thirteen year old. But he doesn't know about the cutting. The cuts. I don't know why I haven't told him. One day, we had a little heat spell and he asked her why she was wearing long sleeves and she said, "Have you ever seen a witch with short sleeves?" and he laughed.

(beat)

The cuts have been going on for a while. Since before she became a witch. So they're not, y'know, part and parcel.

(beat)

I remember a joke she liked, it was written on one of those wax dixie cups at her Halloween party when she was ... nine. I still remember what the cup looked like, it was purple and there was this jack o' lantern with a skinny little body and he's talking to this witch, this kind of plump witch with green skin, and he asks, "What happened when the little witches ate all their witchtable soup?" And then you turn the cup, and he says, "They gruesome." And you see the witch's reaction, she's like:

CLAUDIA throws up her hands and puts on a horrified expression, cartoon style.

CLAUDIA (cont'd)

And Breanna ... Breanna ... just kept giggling. And saying, "That's so stupid."

(beat)

"That's so *stupid*, I love it."

(beat)

That was four years ago. Not even.

(beat)

Sometimes I go for hours thinking of nothing but her. The day slips by.

LIGHTS UP on BREANNA. Her speech is racing. Periodically throughout, she bangs her fist(s) on the floor, on her knees, etc.

BREANNA

So I asked David for a salt packet, a lousy salt packet, he had a bunch of them on his tray and I didn't want to go all the way up to the front, maybe lose my seat, I really did want the salt packet, a couple, it's not like we're strangers and that fucking Jessica --

(bangs her fist on the floor)

-- it's like a fucking fishbowl you can't do anything and I was so stupid to ask him, to sit there, I was stupid, I ask for a salt packet and she says,

(in a mocking voice:)

"Oh Davey, please give me..."

(Pause -- it's painful to get the words out.)

"Please give me ..."

(bangs the floor)

"... give me your crumbs."

(She hits herself.)

Stupid, stupid, stupid, stupid, stupid. Why did I sit there, why did I sit there?

(beat)

I could feel him across the table, I could feel him without touching, feel his skin against me again, our skin together, our skin is meant to be together, he treats me like a stranger, he gave me the salt like a stranger in public but I felt his skin against mine across the table with our clothes on I can still feel him and I know he has to feel mine, he has to feel mine again, he didn't have to give me the salt packet, that's why he didn't look at me, he couldn't look at me, because he felt us together, naked, across the table, if you gave a packet of salt to a stranger, you'd look at them, you'd say something, "Here", you'd say, but he felt me, melting into him, and I didn't leave, I didn't leave, I couldn't leave, I sprinkled the salt on the green beans and I tasted him and I heard them giggling, not him, the others, they giggled and I tasted him in the salt and they sounded so far away. I have to see the magick. I have to see the magick in it all. I'll die if I don't. I will die. They all want to calm me and they want to kill me. They'll kill me. I can't be calm. Not their calm. They want to leave me with myself. I can only be part of the all. Or I'll die. It's crazy to listen to them.

Beat.

CLAUDIA

Sometimes I find her embarrassing. And then I hate myself for that. I see her as a reflection of me and I shouldn't. No, that's not it, that's not it. She *is* a reflection of me. In some way. I'm her mother, for chrissake. I just shouldn't be embarrassed by her. Period.

(MORE)

(beat) CLAUDIA(cont'd)

I wish she was happier. Teens are very intense, I was very intense, if I look back, if I think back, if I feel back, I can feel back, it wasn't that long ago. Like all these different ethers and potions are pouring around inside of you, I'm not just talking raging hormones, I can remember sitting in class and feeling a blackness wrap around my brain like hot tar and I didn't even know why. No reason. And then, then, uh, conversely, conversely, coming out of class, another class, a teacher I had a kind of a crush on, he praised a paper of mine, I still remember, it was about the plumbing systems of the ancient Mayans, and the effect, the effect of indoor running water on their culture, and he said, "This is the product of a deep and probing mind." And I came out of that class and ran down the hall and kicked my feet up, way up on the wall so that I could see the footprints up there every day until I graduated.

(beat)

I just wish she had more friends. The last person she's going to listen to is her mother. I asked her, "Don't witches belong to covens?" and she says, "Some do and some don't" and shuts her door. And then I realize that I am actually wishing that my thirteen year old daughter would join a nice coven. I mean, it's amazing where life can take you. This is not what I would have predicted for myself. Off the charts. Sometimes I think that it's because I've become more open minded -- that, y'know, wanting my daughter to join a nice coven is due to some amazing growth process on my part. And then sometimes I think I've lowered my standards so much that it's finally come to this.

BREANNA

They say to me things that they don't know -- she, especially, the one downstairs, she thinks it's cute, she says, "Maybe you'll meet a nice Warlock" and I say, "Warlock means 'traitor', Warlock means 'oath-breaker', literally, look it up, mother, educate yourself, there are no nice Warlocks, the nice boys are witches, they're male witches, wrap your brain around *that* one." And then I say, "I've known a Warlock, mother, I've known a Warlock very well, " and as the words come out I know I'm wrong, I know this is where I'm fucking up because I know I drove him away. We found the witches magick, we found it together, "essential energy", "essential energy" they call it, not the other "they" but our "they", "they"-the-wise, of the energy that flows from the gods to the humans to the vines to the rocks and he brought it to me, we brought it to each other and inside me, him inside me, I changed to the energy, the incredible energy of us, from inside and out, from solid to liquid to air to all combined, flowing, not just *me*, so beyond *me*, and they, the other they, the common they, they say that boys just ...

(bangs her fist)

... they just ...

(bangs her fist)

... they just ...

BREANNA continues to bang her fist.

CLAUDIA

I read about a girl, a teenage girl in Vermont who killed her mother. With knives. I don't picture that happening in Vermont. Vermont's always seemed so peaceful. The last of the 50 states to open a Wal-Mart.

BREANNA

... they just *leave*.

(pause)

And that ... explanation ... is so *small*. He couldn't just leave because he's part of us and *I* didn't leave.

CLAUDIA

The policeman asked her how she could hate her mother so much. And she said, "I don't hate my mother. I love my mother. I wanted her to feel. I wanted to give her the greatest moment of her life."

During the following, BREANNA goes to a night table, opens a drawer, takes out a small box, and removes a pair of curved cuticle scissors.

BREANNA

They say it wasn't because of me, but I know it was me. I drove him away. Because of the need. I betrayed us. With the need. Because it was smaller than us. And that hurt him. And he went away. That's why.

CLAUDIA

And I keep picturing it in my mind. I saw her picture, the girl. She looked like a little girl. And the mother, I don't see her face, I see her torso and limbs. And they're in a woodsy kind of kitchen, homey, but dark. With a butcher block in the middle. A worn, wood butcher block.

BREANNA

I was selfish and stupid and we touched the magick of the highest creatures and I was stupid ...

SHE slashes the cuticle scissor in a straight line across her arm. CLAUDIA sits upright.

BREANNA (cont'd)

...and selfish...

(another slash)

...and needy...

(another slash)

...and small...

SHE continues to slash herself -- not constantly -- she may rest at times, then start again -- throughout the following.

CLAUDIA

I see the knife, a long knife, slash into her, the woman, into her waist. And again across her chest. And the top of her body, it opens up, it falls back, against the butcher block, exposing the muscle beneath, like slicing into a ripe, tropical fruit. And the woman's eyes, I see her eyes open wide, they're azure and the whites are veined like marble but I don't see her face. And the flesh, and the meat, the dark, red meat beneath the flesh, it's oddly beautiful. The muscles move, they twitch and they squirm and they flow into each other beneath that pale, pale flesh, it's like picking up a rock and finding shiny red bugs swarming beneath, beautiful and horrible and so terribly alive. And the force, the energy of that knife, the first time I imagined this, I couldn't be the girl, I could only be the mother and that frightened me because it was not because I'm a mother but because of who I am, I knew that was why, and that frightened me. And I pictured it again, and again, and again, I kept being drawn back to it, and more and more I felt myself as the little girl, going with the force of that knife, slicing into the mother again and again and I couldn't help but think ... I know this is awful, but I couldn't help myself from thinking ... what a remarkable little girl. That she didn't turn on herself. I know that's sick but ... Breanna ... I feel so helpless.

Silence. BREANNA is finished slashing.

BREANNA

I am still ... a part of the energy of the all ... despite my shortcomings ... and I will touch goodness in my life and bring goodness to life around me.

CLAUDIA

I mean, I know, in real life, there's a happy medium. It's not that I don't know that that little girl wasn't ... as misguided as can possibly be ... but several times in the article they referred to her, the experts referred to her, as "disconnected". And that didn't seem right.

During the following, BREANNA goes back to the night table and, from another drawer, takes out some powders and liquids. And what appears to be a kind of scrapbook. Almost with a sense of a weight having been lifted, her humor more good-natured than creepy, she mutters to herself:

BREANNA

"Are you a good witch or a bad witch?" Hee-hee-hee. "Oh, I'm a good witch." I am. IyamIyamIyam.

CLAUDIA

People call me a "soccer mom." *That* seems disconnected.

BREANNA

"Fur and feathers, scales and skin, Different without but the same within."

CLAUDIA

It's not a question of ... morality. I mean, it's obvious what she did was wrong.

BREANNA

Good thing I finished my homework.

CLAUDIA

But I think ... if I can see what that little girl did ... and still feel love for her ...

BREANNA

"Crone and sage, crone and sage, wisdom is a gift of age."

CLAUDIA

See in some way that she wasn't, you know, just evil ...

BREANNA lays the powders, liquids, and scrapbook in front of her, then squeezes some blood from her arm and paints it onto her face.

BREANNA

Waste not, want not. Hey kids, join the recycling drive.

CLAUDIA

Because I *can* go there. In some way. In my mind. I may not like to. But there is a part of me ... that keeps coming back to it.

Throughout the following, BREANNA mixes her blood with the powder and liquids, smears some on herself and on the scrapbook.

BREANNA

(chanting softly:)

"Lady weave your circle tight
Fill us with your holy light
Earth, air, fire, and water
Bind us to you."

CLAUDIA

Birth, you know, obstetrics, in the hospital, they try to make everything sterile.

BREANNA

"Oh Great Spirit,
Earth, Sun, Sky, and Sea,
You are inside and all around me."

CLAUDIA

And I was all for that. No crunchy granola clinic for me. I was into *clean*.

BREANNA

"Oh Holy Mother,
Earth, Moon and Sea ..."

CLAUDIA

But when I got there, you know, they try to prepare you, but you feel this pain, this pain of your body, stretching so far *beyond* ...

BREANNA

"You are inside and all around me."

CLAUDIA

I didn't even want them to mop me -- guaze and suction, away, away. The blood was warm and it bathed me as I screamed bloody murder.

BREANNA

"Air I am, Fire I am ..."

CLAUDIA

Screamed in the fourth hour, eighth hour, twelfth hour...

BREANNA

"Water, earth, and spirit I am..."

CLAUDIA

And only the human, the human head...

BREANNA

"Breeze I am, Sun I am ..."

CLAUDIA

Casing the brain, the bloated brain ..."

BREANNA

"Brook, Mountain, and Goddess I am ..."

CLAUDIA

Too big, too big for what we're built to be...

BREANNA

"Maiden I am ..."

CLAUDIA

Slice me open, that's what they wanted, to yank her out...

BREANNA

"Mother I am..."

CLAUDIA

But I screamed and pushed and shat and pissed and bled ...

BREANNA

"Sister, lover, crone I am."

Beat.

CLAUDIA

And then I heard a wail, the first wail of life and they
lifted her, bathed in blood ...

BREANNA

(another chant, quickly, almost
whispering)

"Deep in my bone, the Goddess is alive,
Deep in my cells and blood, the life force is strong ..."

CLAUDIA

... the cord uncut ...

BREANNA

"Deep in my spirit I believe I will heal,
My blood, my cells, and my body are healing now ..."

CLAUDIA

... bathed in my blood ...

BREANNA

"Abundant Life Forces flow in me, filling me with faith ..."

CLAUDIA

... and I was in rapture.

BREANNA

"The Goddess force is in me and healing me now."

Silence. BREANNA is smeared with blood and
powder, arms outstretched.

CLAUDIA

I was in rapture.

BLACKOUT

END OF PLAY

LAYERED BOB

by
Katy Hickman

CAST OF CHARACTERS

MEG, 20's, is a sunny, young hipster
hairdresser.

RITA, 40's, attractive, middle class
generalist.

TIME

The present.

We are in The Angela Carter Beauty Parlor

MEG, the hairstylist, sweeps up a bit of hair and drops a lock of it in a bowl on the counter in front of her chair.

RITA, the client, walks in with wet hair, a towel over hair-cutting gown, holding purse, keys awkwardly.

RITA

Where should I--?

MEG

Oh just put it right here is fine. Did you want something to drink?

RITA

No, I'm fine. Wait, you don't have a mirror.

MEG

It's being fixed, yeah.
So you had a layered bob thing, how's that working for you?

RITA

Why are you looking there - there's no mirror.

MEG

Oh my, I don't know it's just a habit! You didn't like that bob?

RITA

Not really. I don't really like any kind of bob, layered or not.

MEG

How'd you hear about me?

RITA

Um, Delia? Delia MacDougall?

MEG

Oh, yeah, Delia. Do you like her hair?

RITA

It looks good on her, I don't know if I could pull it off.

MEG

(thinking)

Okay...

RITA

I hope that's not conditioner.

MEG

It's not.

RITA

Conditioner just makes my hair flat, flat, flat.

MEG

Don't worry. How do you know Delia?

RITA

Smells good, anyway. She's the mother of one of the kids where my daughter goes to school.

MEG

You have kids?

RITA

Just the one. She's two. You?

MEG

Not yet.

RITA

You're too young.

MEG

I'm not that young! 'Bet I'm older than you!

RITA

No way. I'm at least ten years older than you.

MEG

I doubt it. How old are you?

RITA

Oh god, I don't want to say.

MEG

Bet I'm older!

RITA

That's very sweet.

MEG

How well do you know Delia?

RITA

Not hardly at all. She seems, I don't know, like she has it all together.

MEG

Isn't that how everybody else always seems?

I guess. RITA

You seem that way. MEG

I wish. Wait, we haven't talked about what we're going to do. RITA

Did you have something in mind? MEG

Did you? RITA

I know what to do. MEG

Oh, one of those. RITA

I know just what you need. MEG

Meg reaches into a big vat of gel and starts oozing it through Rita's hair.

What I need is to - RITA

(interrupting)
I know just what you need. MEG

Okay, okay! RITA

She continues to ooze the gel through Rita's hair. It drips on Rita's shoulders as Meg continues to spread it back on her head.

Cameche, Poopeche, Grimace and Snout,
Time for the worry warts to come out. MEG

Whoa-! RITA

Meg takes a butane lighter and sets the bowls on fire.

A blow dryer clicks on at the next station, which makes the lights flicker. The blow dryer continues humming as we hear loud drum music.

RITA

There's just like this constant, *constant* noise in my head. This hum of things gone wrong. Hundreds of things I'm responsible for that I've screwed up, or could have made better, or am just annoyed by.

By now, Meg has cut off most of Rita's hair.

RITA (Cont'd)

Oh, like I missed Julie's birthday. I say hurtful things to people I profess to like. I'm insensitive, I'm scattered, I'm fat, I'm lazy, and I avoid unpleasantness. Despite these qualities, I think I am better than everyone. Go figure. Of course, I'm incapable of change. I have a great wide, swollen river of hatred for others who *think* they are superior. *Especialy* religious freaks. I'm *swollen*, is what it is. Ultimately, I am too concerned about my own pleasure to contribute anything. Let's see, what else, oh, I gossip, I pollute. I pollute a lot.

Meg gas attached long strips of black cloth to Rita's hair, giving her an ugly headdress, of sorts.

RITA (Cont'd)

And there's this: I'm selfish about death. I care only for how death affects *me*. I'm just talking, now...I never tell the truth. I obsess about what others think of me. I make lousy food. I kill plants. This is for sure: I have no patience for mentally ill people who screw up their meds and make hostages of people in the library as they beg for understanding to your face. Why should librarians or anyone else have to put up with that shit?

Meg applies dark circles, lopsided eyes, and bumps and lumps all over Rita's face and neck.

RITA (Cont'd)

I don't visit old people. I'm spoiling my daughter. I let her do anything. I mean, I know I'd kill for her, but I'm pretty sure I'd kill anyway, I'm so damned annoyed by everything. It's my mother's fault, of course, my father's fault, proving how worthless and possibly damaging I am, because as responsible as I am for everything, I can still find someone else to blame. My husband doesn't fix it, I wouldn't let him anyway, because I'm a control freak, too.

(MORE)

RITA (cont'd)

There really is no end to the depths of my worthlessness, if that makes any sense. O! for a short life without doubt, a short clean natural life without doubt!

Rita looks at herself in the mirror-- she is absolutely hideous.

RITA

Wow.

MEG

You like it?

RITA

It's different.

MEG

No more layered bob.

RITA

Definitely no more layered bob!

MEG

But do you like it?

RITA

I do. It's me. It's me.

MEG

It *is* you.

RITA

It wasn't what I was expecting. It's perfect.

MEG

You needed something more *you*. I think it's great.

RITA

It *is* great. I just feel more myself.

MEG

Well it is more *you*!

RITA

Now, am I going to be able to do this at home?

MEG

(grabbing some samples)

If you want you can smear some of this between your legs, and sprinkle some of this on your breasts when you pass a church. Just make sure you're facing the church.

RITA

Any particular church?

MEG

Any old church. This'll just make it more shiny. Other than that, it should look fine for a while. I'll just see you in six weeks.

RITA

(laughing)

If I'm not dead.

MEG

(joining in the laughter)

"If you're not dead," oh that's funny!

RITA

What do I owe you?

MEG

Let's see, you said you had a two year-old?

RITA

(laughing)

Oh yeah. Shall I bring her by?

MEG

(joining the laughter)

I'd like to meet her!

RITA

Well, I'll bring her by. Here's something until then, anyway.

Rita puts some cash into a bowl on the table.

MEG

We'll see you soon.

Rita exits.

Meg takes the money and throws it on the floor. She sweeps up the money but picks up a bit of hair and drops it into the bowl.

Lights out.

Cause of Death

A short play by Bryan Davidson

Adapted from "The Black Hand"

By Zora Neale Hurston

Setting

1917. Port-au-Prince, Haiti:

A makeshift mortuary;

Mrs. Jackson's shanty hut; and,

The hills

Characters

KRIEGSMANN, a medical officer of the U.S. Marine Corps

CRAWFORD, a Marine Private

HAINES, a Marine Lance Corporal

DOCIA JACKSON, a young Haitian woman

MRS. JACKSON, her mother

MISTER MORGAN, Haitian, a *bokor* (a Voodoo priest who performs magic for pay)

Contact:

1423 Nadeau Drive

Los Angeles, CA 90019

Tel: 310-869-2847

bjdavidson@earthlink.net

1.

The Mortuary. On a table beneath a sheet lies a corpse, slightly obscured from view. A table with a scale. KRIEGSMANN holds a scalpel. CRAWFORD holds a notebook and pencil and tries not to wretch.

KRIEGSMANN. God damn it, son. Ain't you never seen a dead body before?

CRAWFORD. Yes, sir. My grandmother's funeral.

KRIEGSMAN. Your grandmother's funeral. Shit. How long you been in the Corps?

CRAWFORD. Six weeks, sir. Been in Haiti just nigh a week, though.

KRIEGSMAN. Well, you'll see plenty more what this one came from.

CRAWFORD. I'm sorry, sir. It won't happen again.

KRIEGSMANN. I don't mind smell of formaldehyde and I don't mind smell of dead bodies but the smell of puke makes me sick. You gonna puke, go outside.

CRAWFORD. It was just the scalpel. You know?

KRIEGSMANN. All right, let's go. He's not getting any younger!

Pause.

KRIEGSMANN. That was a joke. Son, you're gonna work with me, you gotta laugh at my jokes.

CRAWFORD. Yes, sir.

KRIEGSMAN. Jesus. All right.

(Throughout the following Kriegsmann conducts an autopsy, and dictates to Crawford, who writes.)

We've got a white male, appearing to be the stated age of twenty-three. Height is seventy-two inches; weight, 155 pounds. Scalp hair is blonde. Irises are green, and the sclerae are non-icteric.

CRAWFORD. What's that mean?

KRIEGSMANN. No jaundice in the eyes.

2.

Lights up on MRS. JACKSON, a black woman in her fifties. Her shanty.

MRS. JACKSON. White men only see with their eyes. If a white man don't see something, he don't believe it. We know different. We know there ways and things you can't see with just the eyes.

For instance. Ask a white person if Old Mister Morgan, the bokor in the hills, can kill a man without leaving his hut. And he will roll his eyes and laugh at the Negro superstition. But no black man in all of Haiti would laugh. They know.

Everybody knows after Teddy King got murdered, Mister Morgan had him buried face down, and the killer confessed that night. Everybody knows he wrote Esther Griggs' name backwards on an egg from a black hen, and she went mad. He caused Emma Taylor's teeth to fall out. He put the shed skin of a snake into Henry Brown's shoes and made him as the Wandering Jew.

So of course, when that soldier boy wronged my daughter, I knew there was only one man I could go to.

Enter DOCIA. Near tears.

MRS. JACKSON. Docia? What is it?

DOCIA. Oh, Mama.

MRS. JACKSON. What is it, Docia?

DOCIA. It's Andrew.

MRS. JACKSON. What he do—break it off?

Docia shakes her head.

MRS. JACKSON. What then?

DOCIA. I'm expecting.

Pause.

MRS. JACKSON. What he say?

DOCIA. I ain't told him.

MRS. JACKSON. Why not?

DOCIA. I'm afraid to.

MRS. JACKSON. Get up. It's time we go talk to this Mister Haines. Looks like we need to make some wedding plans.

3.

The autopsy continues.

KRIEGSMANN. Natural teeth are present. Oral and nasal cavities are not remarkable. Abdomen and external genitalia are not remarkable. A three-inch scar is noted at the right forearm. External evidence of recent injury. A slight abrasion, measuring one inch in greatest diameter, is noted to the rear of the head. A recent burn, one-half of an inch, is noted at the —

CRAWFORD. Is it there?

KRIEGSMANN. Huh?

CRAWFORD. The burn. They said he had a burn on his chest. They said--

KRIEGSMANN. Yes.

CRAWFORD. Lord allmighty. I heard —

KRIEGSMANN. I don't care what you heard. Understand? This is a medical examination. We don't truck in speculation and wild rumors.

CRAWFORD. Yes, sir.

KRIEGSMANN. A recent burn, one-half of an inch, is noted at the upper left quadrant of the chest. (*Turns and looks at Crawford.*) If I were asked, I would say that such an injury is not inconsistent with a cigarette burn.

CRAWFORD. You want me to put that in there?

KRIEGSMANN. I'm just saying. Just 'tween us.

4.

MRS. JACKSON *and* DOCIA *approach* HAINES, *a uniformed Marine at a bar.*

DOCIA. That's him.

MRS. JACKSON. Mr. Haines?

HAINES. Yes?

MRS. JACKSON. I'm Mrs. Jackson, Docia's mother.

HAINES. All right.

MRS. JACKSON. She has something to tell you. Go ahead, Docia.

DOCIA. Andrew? I'm pregnant.

HAINES. What?

MRS. JACKSON. So. Mr. Haines. What kind of wedding you like? I like a morning ceremony. We're not folks of means, but we'll do something nice.

HAINES. I don't know what you're talking about.

MRS. JACKSON. Now, let's do this without no trouble. It doesn't suit us to have talk around the town.

HAINES. I've never seen this woman before in my life.

DOCIA. Andrew? What're you saying?

HAINES. Oh, I get it. You see an American, you think he has money. You come up with this scheme. No way. No.

Haines starts to exit.

DOCIA. Andrew. Don't. You promised me.

HAINES. I don't know you, I don't know her. You must be crazy, or something.

MRS. JACKSON. Don't you walk away from this woman.

HAINES. You hear me? You're crazy. What would I marry a colored for anyway? Besides. I'm already married.

Haines exits.

DOCIA. Andrew? Don't.

Docia starts to go after him. Mrs. Jackson restrains her.

MRS. JACKSON. Come on, Docia. I'll take you home.

5.

The autopsy continues.

KRIEGSMANN. No internal evidence of recent injury is present.

KRIEGSMAN *removes the heart, places it on a scale.*

KRIEGSMANN. The heart weighs nine-and-a-half ounces.

He removes the heart from the scale, places it on the table. Cuts.

KRIEGSMANN. Right coronary artery shows minimal atheroma. Aha. Left descending coronary artery shows minor atheroma. Cardiac valves: normal, with delicate cusps and leaflets. Epicardial fat is firm diffusely. The myocardium is red-brown with a somewhat mottled appearance. The endocardium is white, with several petechiae.

Kriegsmann looks at Crawford, who is a bit shaky.

KRIEGSMANN. All right. I'm'a take a break. Why don't you go to the locker and get me his things.

Crawford exits. Kriegsmann watches him go, pulls off his gloves. Pulls out a flask. Drinks, pockets the flask.

Kriegsmann goes to the body. Attempts to pull off the wedding ring. It's stuck. Goes to the table, takes out a pair of shears. Clips off the finger, removes the ring. Lays the shears on the table.

Crawford returns with a small box. Kriegsmann rumages through the box. Finds an envelope, puts the ring in it. Puts the envelope in the box. Rummages. Finds a bundle of letters. Rifles through them. Pulls one out. Reads. Crawford comes and reads over his shoulder.

CRAWFORD. "I can't wait to go back to America with you. I love you, and I want us to be together always." Then it is true. What they sayin'. He was with a Nigger woman and when he broke it off —

KRIEGSMANN. You worse than the Niggers, you are. Superstitious. They cough, they say, the gris-gris got me. Get me to the Houngan. You got a light?

Crawford hands him a book of matches. Kriegsmann lights a match, sets the letter alight, holds it aloft until the flames take it and he lets go.

CRAWFORD. What you doing? You can't do that!

KRIEGSMANN. Ain't no kind of letter a widow should be getting with her husband's remains.

6.

Later. The woods. MRS. JACKSON alone. Carrying a bottle of rum.

MRS. JACKSON. I went to the hills to see old Mister Morgan. He lived by the side of a lake. The lake was dark and its surface moved like it was restless. The pounding of my heart was like a drum in my ears and my veins. He didn't want to hear my story.

We see the smoke of his cigarette before we see him. MORGAN enters.

MORGAN. What you bring me?

She gives him the bottle, and a roll of cash. He looks at it, nods. Takes a drink.

MORGAN. How you want him dead? By bullet, by blade, or by water?

MRS. JACKSON. By bullet. You going to shoot him?

MORGAN. No. You going to.

Morgan brings out a mirror covered in black cloth. Uncovers it. Blows smoke upon the glass. The face of CRAWFORD appears. Morgan hands Mrs. Jackson a pistol.

MORGAN. You can't shoot but once. Aim for his heart.

Mrs. Jackson aims and fires. Crawford disappears. Morgan covers the mirror.

MORGAN. Go home. You'll find everything all right.

7.

The autopsy continues.

KRIEGSMANN. Cause of death: Myocardial infarction, or heart attack. So, let's go ahead and stitch this boy back up.

CRAWFORD. What do I do with his heart and all?

KRIEGSMANN. Just go ahead and put 'em back in him.

CRAWFORD. Just -- ?

KRIEGSMANN. Yeah, just dump 'em back in. Family ain't never going to see it.

Crawford replaces the organs into the chest cavity. Takes a few long, deep breaths. Stills his guts.

CRAWFORD. Sir?

KRIEGSMANN. Yes?

CRAWFORD. You said his heart was normal.

KRIEGSMANN. No. I said there was minor —

CRAWFORD. If it's minor, then how he have a heart attack?

KRIEGSMANN. Why don't you leave the medicine to me? Huh?

CRAWFORD. Everybody's talking about, I mean, some people are of the opinion that —

KRIEGSMANN. Opinions're like assholes. Everybody's got one. This is a god-damned U.S. Marine, and by God I found that he died of a heart attack in the line of duty, serving his country. So it will be when his widow is comforted as she commits his remains unto the earth. Am I clear? There will be no talk of Voodoo or Houngon or charms or other nigger bullshit. This was a soldier, and he died a soldier's death. You understand me, Private?

CRAWFORD. Yes, sir.

KRIEGSMANN. Now go run the paperwork on over. I'm going to sew him up. That's actually your job, but I think your pussy ass has had enough for today. Go on.

CRAWFORD. Yes, sir.

Crawford exits. Kriegsmann takes off his gloves. Takes a drink from his flask. Looks at the body. With a gentle motion, closes its eyes. Brushes his hair.

KRIEGSMANN. Those green eyes of yours, I bet the ladies loved you. Well, I hope there's lots of tail where you're going.

He takes out a needle and thread. Begins to sew up the body. Whistles as he works.

KRIEGSMANN. The M.E. trained me said they was gentlemen used to do this work. Said the pathologists used to do a full autopsy in their tuxedos 'fore they went to the opera. Didn't even use an apron, and not a drop on them. I don't even see how that's possible. You cut open a body, you bound to get some blood on you.

8.

Later. MRS. JACKSON in her home.

MRS. JACKSON. Seems all of Port-Au-Prince heard what happened next. Haines was in a different bar, talking to a different Negro girl, drinking telling her he'd take her to America. And all of a sudden, he clutched his heart, and fell over, dead. They tried to revive him but he was dead. Everybody in that bar saw the burn over his heart.

Coroner called it a heart attack. But the Negroes knew. He who believes only what he sees is blind indeed.

End of Play

PETROL

Mickey Birnbaum
July 14, 2002

PETROL

by

Mickey Birnbaum

Characters:

IVAN: Russian soldier. 30s.

SERGEI: Russian soldier. 30s.

CHECHEN WOMAN: Of indeterminate age under her Burka

SCENE ONE.

The ruins of a city in Chechnya, just a jumble of bricks and abandoned belongings, really.

Two RUSSIAN SOLDIERS, SERGEI and IVAN, lie on the ground, cradling their guns, shivering against the cold. Shaved heads, gaunt, almost indistinguishable from each other.

SOUNDS of distant gunfire.

IVAN

Look what I got.

He takes out a shred of white lace.

SERGEI

Where'd that come from?

IVAN

Hanging from a tree. I was... *(Losing focus.)* Part of a bra... or maybe some little Muslim panties. *(Sniffs them.)* Doesn't smell like much. Well, smells like petrol. Usually, I can tell everything about a woman from the smell of her panties. You want it?

SERGEI

No, you have it. But, thanks. *(Pause.)* I think my eardrum's busted.

IVAN

(More to himself.) Panties for sure.

SERGEI

How can you tell?

IVAN

I got a nose for these things. Plus look: you can see right through it. Like it's made of glass.

SERGEI

Do you have any bullets left?

IVAN

Why do I need bullets?

SERGEI

Just trying to keep track.

IVAN

Of what?

Pause.

Blackout.

SCENE TWO.

SERGEI asleep on the ground, curled into a ball. IVAN shaking him awake. The gunfire is closer.

IVAN

Come on, come on...

SERGEI

Stop, stop, I'm not ready, I'm not ready... *(sees Ivan)*
Dreaming I was dead and you fucking ruined it, thumb-prick.

IVAN

Found another piece. Look. They fit together.

Shows Sergei another scrap of white lace, but Sergei's not interested.

SERGEI

Chechen fuck-pigs were cutting my throat... Wasn't so bad. Fuck, it was like having a tooth pulled. Great to get it over with.

IVAN

Just blew in on the wind. Look at the little white bow. *(Smells the scrap.)* This one smells good.

SERGEI

Let me smell.

He reaches for the fabric. Ivan pushes him away.

IVAN

[Get] the fuck off. *(He sniffs the fabric.)* I can tell you everything about a woman from the smell of her panties.

SERGEI

The fuck you can.

Ivan sniffs the fabric again.

IVAN

Black hair. Oily. All over her, like an otter. Even... a tiny moustache... sitting like a caterpillar on her sweet little lip.

SERGEI

(Sarcastic.) Astounding. Mesmerizing. The toast of Moscow.

IVAN

Okay, wait a minute. I'm getting more. *(Buries his face in the scrap.)* I'm getting... her favorite movie star... Jude Law.

SERGEI

[Who] The fuck's Jude Law?

IVAN

"Enemy in the Gates." *(Sergei shakes his head.)* World War two pow-pow. National hero, fucks the Jew-girl, goes versus Ed Harris.

SERGEI

Ed Harris. Hell of an actor. "My Beautiful Mind." He wasn't even real!

IVAN

No, Jude Law. "That Amazing Mister Ripley." "Artificially Intelligent." A robot, no less. *(Tries to stuff the new piece of fabric into Sergei's uniform pocket.)* You take it.

SERGEI

No, no, I don't want to, I ...

IVAN

I have one, you have one.

SERGEI

Stop, stop, stop.

IVAN

I have one, you have one.

SERGEI

Let me fucking go back to sleep. Why are you so mean?

IVAN

Jude Law. Artificially Intelligent. "A.I." (*Pause.*) A robot, can you imagine. (*Pause.*) "Hello, I am a Russian Soldier. Shoot me through the head, no problem, all parts are replaceable. And warranted. Plus, no sad feelings to fuck up superior killing functions. A-1 Robot. Made in America."

Glances over at Sergei, who has curled up in a fetal position.

IVAN

Sergei, do you have any idea where we are?

SERGEI

We're right here, Ivan.

IVAN

Maybe we should try to hook up with the regiment.

SERGEI

Well, that's not a bad idea.

IVAN

Like to see Black Tar and Fireball again.

SERGEI

Actually, Ivan, they're all dead.

IVAN

Dead?

SERGEI

I seem to remember a mortar.

IVAN

And we...

SERGEI

Ran.

IVAN

We didn't fight to the death?

SERGEI

Under the circumstances...

IVAN
We did our best?

SERGEI
A-number-one robots.

Pause.

IVAN
Okay, good night.

SERGEI
Good night.

Blackout.

SCENE FOUR.

SERGEI is asleep on the ground. GUNFIRE continues in the distance. IVAN now has five or six scraps of the PANTIES, which he's painstakingly re-assembled. The crotch and a couple of other pieces are missing.

IVAN
A-number-one Russian robot Ivan. Iron-skin, TV-brain, telephone-mouth, piston-dick. (*Mimicking an English language guidebook.*) "Hello. How are you. I am fine, thanks so much for inquiring. How about that wife of yours? Oh, she's good? That's good. How fine to be good."

As he talks, he moves the pieces around, trying to make sense of them.

The WIND RISES. The pieces scatter around the stage. In a panic, Ivan runs to collect them. He gets them all, and crouches down center, holding them protectively.

IVAN
(*Addressing God.*) Mine. Don't touch.

As if in response, a new piece of fabric comes floating in on the breeze - the crotch of the panties. Ivan goes to grab it, but it dances out of reach, floating in the air.

Ivan follows the crotch offstage, dropping some of the other pieces as he goes, a latter-day Hansel in the forest.

Some time passes. Sergei stirs and sits up, sleepy and disoriented, but newly cheerful.

SERGEI

Well, I dug a hole, and I made them all get in, even the children. They were smiling, and shaking my hand, and thanking me, and then they laid down. We poured a couple of cans of petrol over them -- yes, you actually helped me, Ivan -- and we set them alight. We even had a bulldozer. For once we didn't have to use shovels to fill in the hole. (*Yawns and stretches.*) I feel ... refreshed! What a beautiful morning. (*He looks around.*) Ivan?

He sees Ivan's gone, then sees the trail of torn panties leading offstage. He starts to follow them, picking up the shreds as he goes.

SERGEI

Wait for me, Ivan. Don't leave me here, you fuck-pig...

Blackout.

SCENE FIVE.

Ivan follows the floating scrap onstage, and with a desperate leap manages to grab it from the sky. He presses it to his face, sniffs it ferociously, then throws it on the ground in frustration.

IVAN

Nothing. PETROL! Everything in this goddamned country smells like petrol.

He looks up, and realizes he's facing a bombed-out house. Only the back wall's intact. Inside, on a BED, the only surviving piece of furniture, sits a CHECHEN WOMAN in traditional Muslim clothing, face veiled. A half-dozen ten-gallon plastic PETROL JUGS surround her, and she's soaked herself, the chair, the floor, and the remains of the house in petrol.

Ivan draws his pistol and approaches her.

IVAN

Hey, little Chechie. *[What]* the fuck you doing there?

She shakes her head.

IVAN

How about I shoot you dead?

She shrugs.

Ivan points his pistol.

IVAN

Ka-bang! Right through the head.

She doesn't flinch.

IVAN

Well, this is boring. *(An idea.)* Give me everything you have.

She reaches under her dress and brings out a loaf of flatbread. Offers it to Ivan.

IVAN

[What] the hell am I supposed to do with that? I haven't eaten for weeks. My stomach is a lump of coal.

She puts aside the flatbread, raises her skirt, exposing her knees. Ivan laughs.

IVAN

Hello, Julia Roberts. "My Good Friend's Wedding." You see that one? Five stars up. Hey, maybe tomorrow you go to America and be a big movie star. How about I go with you. We'll live in Miami and drink a margarita.

She lowers her dress. She reaches inside her dress, and comes out with a pack of CIGARETTES -- Marlboros, in the distinctive red and white box.

Ivan is awestruck.

IVAN

Oh, baby, now we can be friends.

She gestures to Ivan to come closer. He crosses the brick wall, starts to approach her, then gets suspicious. He raises his pistol again.

IVAN

Okay, human-bomb-honey, show me how much you love me.

She raises her dress, showing she's naked underneath, then lets it drop.

Ivan climbs onto the bed. She takes a cigarette out of the pack and passes it under his nose. He inhales the scent of tobacco.

IVAN

Oh, you love me so much.

She places the end of the cigarette in his mouth. He sucks it at like a baby at the breast, sinking into her embrace.

IVAN

Sweet bed. Feathers and silk. Big porno bed, baby. You live here with your husband? Did I kill him? Hey, if so, sorry. (Exaggerated.) "That's war, honey. People die." I'm Mel Gibson, right, right? "Lethal Weapons." That's me. (Sucks on the cigarette.) Jesus, this is driving me fucking nuts. You got a light?

She produces a CIGARETTE LIGHTER. Petrol drips from the end of her sleeve.

IVAN

Gonna get the stink of fucking petrol out of my nose once and for all.

She is about to flick the lighter when SERGEI enters, clutching the torn scraps of panties. He sees what's about to happen.

SERGEI

Wait!

The Chechen Woman stops, startled by his presence.

IVAN

Sergei. Come have a cigarette.

SERGEI

(to the Chechen Woman) Don't. What's the point? He doesn't know his ass from a rotting corpse.

The Chechen Woman hesitates.

IVAN

Sergei, what the hell you talking about? *(To the Chechen Woman, with some urgency.)* I need a light!

SERGEI

He used to cry when we set places on fire. Asshole was always crying so hard he couldn't fucking shovel dirt on the graves.

IVAN

(to the Chechen Woman) Light me, you bitch, I'm in agony.

SERGEI

(to the Chechen Woman) Me, I love setting little Chechies on fire. I dream about it every night.

IVAN

(to Sergei) What a fucking load of crap, Sergei! All you give a shit about is saving your own ass.

SERGEI

(To the Chechen Woman) You want me. I'll suffer more than him. I promise.

The Chechen Woman deliberates.

Blackout.

SCENE SIX.

SERGEI is in bed with THE CHECHEN WOMAN. Ivan is gone. She has her arm around him, dripping petrol all over Sergei. She lights the lighter. Quickly, he blows it out.

She lights the lighter.

He blows it out.

She lights the lighter.

He blows it out.

This cycle repeats a total of eight times.

SCENE SEVEN.

IVAN walks down a dirt road smoking a cigarette and taking bites out of the flatbread.

IVAN

A-number-one Russian robot Ivan feeling pretty good. Feeling Arnold Schwarzenegger Terminator big. Iron-skin, TV-brain, telephone-mouth, piston-dick. Watch out, Chechens, here comes Terminator vs. Predator-style justice. *(Takes a long drag off the cigarette.)* Feels good, like a man should. *(He starts to walk off.)* "Hello, good friend, how are you on this sunny day? Fine? I am fine too. Let us walk through the green hedge and enjoy nature together."

He marches off.

Blackout.

SCENE EIGHT.

SERGEI is now alone on the bed, holding the lighter.

He LIGHTS it, then quickly blows it out.

He LIGHTS it, then quickly blows it out.

He LIGHTS it, then quickly blows it out.

This sequence is repeated a total of eight times.

END OF PLAY.

WITCH TRIAL
by Joy Gregory

Characters:

MAN, late 30's, wearing a stained shirt and khakis. College educated. From Ohio. Manic depressive, insane.

WOMAN, 30's to 60's, doesn't matter. Dressed in some neutral professional attire. Sometimes she is Gail, Walter's wife, and sometimes she is Marie-Louise Von Franz, Jungian scholar.

PLAYWRIGHT, 30's, speaks as herself. Dressed in ordinary street clothes.

Darkness. The sound of evangelical preaching on a staticky radio rises. The voice is ranting. We hear, over this, an odd, strangled, bubbling sound.

Light rises on a man center stage, his head submerged in a bucket of water. His shadow looms large behind him. He is screaming into the bucket of water. Suddenly, as if wrenched by someone behind him, he throws his head back, his scream coming out fully. He dumps the water over himself and throws the empty bucket, his screams emptied out of him for the time being. The bucket rattles to a stop as we hear the last of the ranting Christian radio fading out. "Hallelujah, hallelujah, brothers and sisters..."

Lights fade.

Country music plays faintly in the background. Lights rise on the man, still dripping wet, standing with a plastic jug. He is in an odd daze. He speaks straight out, as if to a person standing before him.

Man: Excuse me. Do you have a personal experience with Jesus Christ?

After a pause, a woman's voice from the darkness:

Woman: What can I get you?

Man: I would like to buy some gasoline from a born-again Christian.

Woman (*exasperated*): Oh, Jesus...

Three small spots rise on four chairs down stage. Man sits stage right with an empty chair next to him. The Woman and the Playwright cross slowly forward into their light throughout the following incantation:

Playwright: A man and a woman were once making a hard journey through the bush.

Woman: A beautiful woman appeared at the home of a man who was grieving over the death of his wife.

Playwright: On the last day of April, a man saw three witches in the church at night, saying:

Woman and Playwright (whispering): “This is to cloud their joy and mirth. This is to kill the lambs at birth. This is to spoil the food in shops. And this is to burn and rot their crops.”

The Woman and the Playwright have arrived in their light. They sit in chairs with music stands in front of them. The Playwright, except where noted otherwise, always reads her text from a file folder of letters, newspaper articles and typed pages.

Woman (as Marie-Louise Von Franz): Witches have been a part of every known culture, casting spells, healing the wounded and spinning fate.

Playwright: Marie-Louise Von Franz, from “The Feminine In Fairy Tales.”

Woman: Whichever form she comes in, the witch is a woman who is true to herself, even if she pays heavily for it in the end.

Man (*to Woman*): Look in my eyes. Look at me.

Woman: Personally, I think most of these archetypal stories originate in some invasion of the unconscious, either in a dream or in a kind of waking hallucination. A rupture, if you will, which allows the archetypal content to break into an individual life. This is always a numinous experience.

Playwright (*reading, very dry*): A letter from my mom. November first, 1985. Dear Joy. Enclosed is a xeroxed copy of some shocking news. We’ll talk about it more when we visit, if you like. When we arrive in Evanston, we’ll call you from the Newmans’. If you don’t have a rehearsal Friday maybe we can go to dinner or, if you do, maybe we can eat together before the rehearsal. Anyway, we’ll call you. You would have loved The Flying Brothers Karamazov. They are five to six college-educated jugglers who also sing and play musical instruments. We got free tickets, but I’d go see them again. See you soon. Love, Mom.

Man: She had the devil in her.

Playwright: My uncle Walter was always strangely intense about anything he did, either making model airplanes or exploring the wilderness or writing poetry and subjecting us to it at impromptu holiday readings. Women didn’t much take to his odd intensity, so after he turned thirty we figured he’d finish out his life alone like a priest or a park ranger, married to his deep and solitary passions. Gail was the last thing he was intense about, that I was aware of. Gail and God. God was something the two of them shared.

Woman: Where were you going?

Man: We were going to Florida, we were driving down to see her parents.

Woman: And you were where?

Man: We were outside of Dalton. In Georgia. It was wet, but it wasn't cold. There's this sweet smell in the air, like licorice, but sweeter --

Woman: What happened before you ran out of gas?

Man: Something in her changed.

Throughout the following, the Woman gets up and sits next to the man. She becomes Gail as Gail is described.

Playwright: I don't remember when Gail first showed up, but I remember being scandalized that she was older than my uncle by several years. The papery skin around her eyes was already faintly wrinkled, and her voice even seemed a little quavery like an old lady's, as if long ago she had swallowed something and was having trouble keeping it down. There was the feeling about her of some distant disaster that required a lifetime of carefully maintained calm to overcome it. In any case, we all agreed that Gail and my uncle had found each other. And that that was a good thing.

The Woman is now sitting beside the Man.

Man: Say the Bible.

The Woman just stares.

Man (*fighting a rising panic*): Just say a verse. Any verse.

Woman: I think you should try to calm down.

Man (*voice rising*): You can't say anything from the Bible and you're calm as ice. What am I supposed to think about that?

Woman: Stop shouting.

Man: Why won't you just say it?

He looks at her, she doesn't respond.

Man (*a realization*): Oh, God, oh God, oh God...

Woman: Let's just pull over and get something to eat.

Man: Oh, Lord, preserve me. Preserve me from this woman who is possessed.

Woman: Just up there, there's a McDonald's. We'll get something to eat and we'll talk.

Man: I will not be fooled by you. I will not let the Devil fool me.

The Woman turns and looks at the Man, trying to instill calm. She touches his arm as gently as possible.

Woman: Walter—

But he jumps as if burned.

Walter: Jesus in heaven help me.

Throughout the following, the Woman gets up and crosses back to her chair centerstage.

Playwright: My mother was very hurt, I remember, that my uncle and his wife decided to get married alone and invited the family only to the reception afterward. It was out in the woods somewhere at a big cabin. I remember being disappointed when I saw Gail in her plain wedding dress. Television had led me to expect all brides to resemble Meredith Baxter-Birney. But she was just Gail in a stiff dress and a strained smile. I remember how uncomfortable she looked having cake put into her mouth, even by her new husband. After the wedding they went on a honeymoon in the woods for a long time. I know this because for many years afterward we watched the movies they made of their trip. Each time, when there was a shot of Gail trying to put her sock back on after wading in a stream, and she wobbled on one leg, my uncle would say, with tender sarcasm, "Look at that balance." He made this joke every time.

Man: She had evil in her. I beat it out.

Woman: You believe that you released her...?

Man: She wouldn't look at me.

Woman: And this is how you knew.

Man: I asked her to look at me and she wouldn't. That's how I knew. I got the devil out of her. I was battling Satan and we won.

Woman: This is what you believe?

Man: You don't see the devil here, do you?

Woman: No, I don't. I don't see your wife here, either.

Playwright: My uncle was diagnosed early in life with manic depressive disorder. Because this disorder had appeared before in the family, my mother's parents took quick steps to insure that their son live as normal a life as possible. At the time, this meant a constant low-dosage of Lithium. Perhaps his medicated state contributed to his deep and constant fascination with mechanical airplanes. He built them one after the other in a small room that smelled of glue and hot dust. Then he would take them to a miniature airfield to fly them. Sometimes we joined him. I remember watching my uncle standing in the middle of

a small concrete circle, flying his new model airplane around and around, a whining, mechanized moon to his still, concentrating form.

Woman: Why do you think she did not rise at dawn as you predicted?

Man: Because he won. Satan took her.

Woman: I see. She was led down—

Man: By the devil. Not me. I tried to save her.

Woman: But you failed.

Man: What happens now?

Woman: Well, Walter. It's a familiar story, isn't it? The daughter is led down by the man

—

Man (overlapping): By Satan.

Woman: Like Eurydice. Like Persephone. There is no end of heroines going down. We reenact the ritual at every wedding. The husband leads the daughter away and the mother grieves. Horribly, as the myth goes. As I'm sure Gail's mother must be grieving.

This strikes Walter for the first time.

Man: Will it become less horrible?

Woman: As time goes on.

Man: Will she ever forgive me?

Woman: What do you think?

Beat.

Man: I don't want to die.

Woman: So you're aware that you may be put to death. That there is the possibility of that.

Man: I didn't kill her. It was the devil.

Woman: You asked the police if the state of Georgia gave the death penalty for murder.

Man: If she didn't rise.

Woman: So you weren't sure. (*beat*) Walter. You weren't sure if she would rise?

Beat.

Man: Will you help me?

Woman: I am doing what I can. I will speak on your behalf. Unless, of course, I turn you into a pig while you sleep.

Man: What?

Woman: Nothing.

Playwright: At some point, my uncle and his wife became born again Christians. I knew very little about this period because they kept more and more to themselves, or spent time only with the people from their church. We heard occasional updates in letters from my aunt, who was also a born-again Christian. In one of her letters, she said that my uncle had experienced a breakthrough with his faith and now, the church told him, he no longer needed to take any kind of medication. Hallelujah, my aunt wrote.

The Woman crosses toward the Man again, casting a spell as she tells this story.

Woman: A man and a woman were once making a hard journey through the bush. The woman had her baby strapped upon her back as she walked along the rough path overgrown with vines and shrubbery. They had nothing to eat with them, and as they traveled on they became very hungry. *(to the Man)* There's a McDonald's. Why don't we pull over?

Man: Look at me. Look in my eyes.

Woman: Suddenly, emerging from the heavily wooded forest into a grassy plain, they came upon a herd of bush cows grazing quietly. *(to Man)* Why are you pulling over?

Man: Why won't you look at me?

Throughout the following, the Man and Woman act out the violence in stylized gestures which repeat.

Playwright: A letter from my mom. November 1, 1985. Dear Joy. I regret to have to tell you that, due to his manic-depressive illness, Walter has killed his wife.

The Man and Woman turn in their chairs to face each other. Lights shift on them, isolating them together.

Woman: The woman untied the baby from her back and put it upon the ground.

Man: Hair began growing upon her neck and body. A change came over her face. Her hands and feet turned into claws.

Woman: And in a few moments, a wild leopard was standing before the man, staring at him with fiery eyes.

Playwright: This happened Sunday or Monday, October 17 or 18. They were supposed to drive down to Florida for Gail's parents' fiftieth wedding anniversary celebration. Walter ran out of gas in Dalton, Georgia and was walking around at the exit. I don't know how exactly, but the police were called, came with gas, and drove Walter back to the car, where they discovered her body in the back of the car on the floor, covered over with a robe. Walter spoke of Satan at that time. He was taken to the Sheriff's office, gave a statement to the police in which he said he did it.

Man: If she doesn't rise at dawn, you can call me a murderer.

Playwright: Friday night of that week he was taken to Central State Hospital in Milledgeville, Georgia. He is to be there forty-five days, and if he improves enough, he will then stand trial for first degree murder. I can't believe they won't find him to be insane at the time he murdered her (one hundred blows to body, then strangled, or vice versa). He has been appointed a public defender from Dalton. I am taking this one step at a time and one day at a time. Religion did not cure Walter, as he claimed and believed. Mom.

The Woman returns to center stage. The Man is alone in his chair.

Woman: In fairytales which, in the main, are under the influence of Christian civilization, the archetype of the Great Mother, like all others, is split into two aspects. The Virgin Mary for example is split off from her shadow and represents only the light side of the mother image; this is why, as Jung points out, the time of Mary's prominence was also the time of the witch persecutions. Since the symbol of the Great Mother was too one-sided, the dark side got projected onto women, which gives rise to the persecution of witches.

Playwright: A letter from my mom. Friday, January 24, 1985. Dear Joy. I'm on the Greyhound bus today heading back to Cleveland from Dalton, Georgia. I have been here for four days for Walter's trial. The verdict of the judge is Guilty but Insane. This means life imprisonment with hospitalization before prison, if deemed necessary. Walter was not surprised by the verdict. I was quite shocked because Walter's lawyer was so confident that the judge would find him Not Guilty by Reason of Insanity. I testified as to Walter's background -- education, family facts, medical history. It was pretty scary, as was the entire four days for me. I feel older and wiser, but not worldly wise. According to the head doctor from Central State Hospital who testified, Walter was having a delusional compulsion at the time of the killing. He believed Satan possessed her, and that she would arise at dawn the next day. Everyone agrees Walter is mentally ill, but the judge decided Walter knew right from wrong because he wiped blood off the inside car windows, he changed his clothes and put them in a garbage bag and put other clothes on top of them, he asked which side of the car the police wanted him to get in on, and he asked the police if they give the death penalty for murder in Georgia. He told the police

Playwright simultaneously with Man: if she doesn't rise at dawn, they can call me a murderer.

The Man has another bucket of water. He blesses the audience with it, sprinkling it on them with his fingers.

Playwright: Walter wants to end up at the state hospital in Columbus, Ohio where he can perform miracles. He keeps giving away the socks I send him. He says he wants to be near his friends from church. I'm not happy about that. So what else can I say. I think I'm not quite the same person I was, having gone through this trial. Walter accepts whatever comes as God's will. If you want to write to him, send it to the address enclosed. Love, Mom.

The Woman now stands behind the man. He freezes, aware of her and terrified to look at her. He goes down on his knees with the bucket. She plunges his head into the bucket and he screams into the water. She pulls his head out of the water and his scream is released. She dumps the bucket of water over his head and throws the bucket aside. Lights change so that the Woman's shadow looms large.

The Playwright stands and speaks informally for the first time, not reading from any pages.

Playwright: When I received this letter in college, I didn't know what to do with it. My mother and I never really talked about it much. For some reason, I chose to write about it in my acting journal, where I was supposed to be noting examples of Masha's hands or Hedda Gabler's laughter. My acting teacher's notes, when I got the journal back, were polite but confused. Why did I write about it in such an inappropriate place? I think there was a compulsive element to it, an eagerness to make myself more interesting, to decorate myself with tragedy, so that in a way I was another type of bloodsucking hag feeding off the mutilated artery of disaster. Sort of like I'm doing now. Making stories out of blood is another kind of sorcery.

Sound of evangelical Christian radio rises again. All three rise slowly. Under the following, the Man murmurs the Lord's Prayer as all three exit:

Woman: When you have slain me, let two men take hold of my hair and draw my body all the way around a field. When they have come to the middle of it, let them bury my bones. Then they must come away. When seven months have passed, let them go again to the field and gather all that they find. Tell them to eat it. It is my flesh. You must save a part of it to put in the ground again. My bones you cannot eat, but you may burn them. The smoke will bring peace to you and your children.

Their shadows exit as the evangelical radio rises. "Hallelujah, brothers and sisters, hallelujah..."

Lights fade. The end.