

AROUND THE WORLD IN 8 PLAYS

A COMEDY BY

Patrick Greene and Jason Pizzarello

Cast of Characters

The Players:

BERNARDO
ISABEL
ILLIANA
PETER
NATASHA
BORIS
MARIA
THOMAS
JAKOB

The Crowd:

MAN
WOMAN
LITTLE GIRL
LOUD WOMAN
YOUNG BOY

Grandfather's Eyes:

OLD MAN
YANECHEK
GOATS
MAIDEN #1
MAIDEN #2
MAIDEN #3

The Lost Beads:

YOUNGEST SISTER
OLDER SISTER 1
OLDER SISTER 2
OLDER SISTER 3
WATER
OLD WOMAN
THE DIMO
VILLAGER

Prince Ivan, the Witch, and the Little Sister of the Sun:

QUEEN
KING
OLD CARETAKER (MOUSE)
PRINCE IVAN
DECREPIT WOMAN 1 (YOUNG WOMAN 1)
DECREPIT WOMAN 2 (YOUNG WOMAN 2)
TREE-ROOTER
MOUNTAIN-TOSSER

SUN'S SISTER
WITCH

My Lord Bag of Rice:

DRAGON KING
HIDESATO
CENTIPEDE
GRANDMOTHER
DRAGON FAMILY
PALACE GUARDS

The Story of the Yara:

ALONZO
JULIA
YARA

Prince Half-a-Son:

FAQIR
KING 1
HALF-A-SON
THREE QUEENS
YOUNGEST QUEEN
SIBLING 1
SIBLING 2
SIBLING 3
PIGEON
DEMON
SNAKE
KING 2
PRINCESS

The Little Owl Boy:

BOY
MOTHER
BIG OWL
FATHER
VILLAGER 1
VILLAGER 2

The Story-Teller at Fault:

STORY-TELLER
WIFE
BEGGAR MAN
LEINSTER
BAND
GUARD 1
GUARD 2

Production Notes

The stage directions throughout are merely suggestions and can be adjusted as you find necessary. Feel free to elaborate or cut. Simplicity, whether with staging, casting, costumes, or sets, will work best.

The Players are meant to be traveling street artists with only as many belongings as they can carry. The stories they tell, therefore, are meant to be told with only the props in the chest and the suggestion of the worlds they create. It's essential with the numerous locations and characters, that the scenes and transitions move swiftly.

In addition to the Stage Directions and Production Notes, the narration in each story guides the action. The Players should often times be performing what the narrators are saying, even if there isn't a stage direction.

Multiple casting is encouraged, but if you want to split up characters for a *really* large cast, that's okay, too. The Players, when not narrating, can play the other roles in the stories, or people in the crowd. So, it can even be done with 10 actors in this manner.

The eight stories included here can be cut down to as many as you wish to perform. If you cut out a story (or more), you're welcome to adjust the transitions to make it work. This piece is intended to be flexible. Have fun!

Original Source Material

Grandfather's Eyes is from *Czechoslovak Fairy Tales* by Parker Fillmore (Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York, 1919.)

The Lost Beads is from *Native Fairy Tales of South Africa* by Ethel L.M. McPherson (George G. Harrap & Co., London, 1919.)

My Lord Bag of Rice is from *Japanese Fairy Tales* compiled by Yei Theodora Ozaki (A. L. Burt Co., New York, 1905.)

Prince Ivan, the Witch, and the Little Sister of the Sun is from *Old Peter's Russian Tales* by Arthur Ransome (T. C. & E. C. Jack, Ltd., London and Edinburgh, 1916.)

The Story of the Yara is from *The Brown Fairy Book* by Andrew Lang (Longmans, Green & Co., London and New York, 1904.)

Prince Half-a-Son is from *Tales of the Punjab* by Flora Annie Steel (MacMillan and Co., London and New York, 1894.)

The Little Owl Boy is from *The Red Indian Fairy Book* by Frances Jenkins Olcott (Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1917.)

The Story-Teller at Fault is from *Celtic Fairy Tales* by Joseph Jacobs (David Nutt, London, 1892.)

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(A CROWD of people walk about the stage, as if on a busy street or marketplace. There may be a banker, a policewoman, a doctor, a farmer...whoever you would expect to see walking around a small town. As the CROWD goes about their day, BERNARDO, ISABEL, and the PLAYERS enter. They are dressed in garish clothes and they attract a few stares from people in the CROWD. Bernardo's garb is especially eye catching. Two of the PLAYERS carry a trunk, or chest.)

(Production Note: The trunk should contain all of the props and costumes that the PLAYERS will use throughout the play.)

(Two other players carry a small flat with a banner over it. The banner reads "Amazing Stories from Around the World." The PLAYERS place the flat upstage center and trunk slightly to the side of the flat. BERNARDO, the head of the group stands between the chest and the flat. ISABEL sits on the trunk. The PLAYERS sit about the stage around ISABEL and BERNARDO.)

BERNARDO. Stories for sale. Who wants a story? You, sir, would you like me to tell a story to you? (He reacts.) Ah, you wouldn't know a good story if it bit you in the ear. (To another passerby:) What about you, madam, care for a story? (He reacts again.) Ah, you don't deserve my stories, you ugly –

ISABEL. Give it up, Bernardo. You couldn't sell water in the Sahara.

BERNARDO. You ruin my business, woman. Keep quiet.

ISABEL. You couldn't sell a coat in the Arctic.

BERNARDO. Leave me alone. You stop talking and maybe I can sell my stories. (To a new passerby:) Excuse me, sir, can I interest you in a delightful story? (Reacting again.) Your mother was a donkey. Madam, for only a few coins, I will take you on a journey around the world. (Again reacting:) I will curse your children, you foul beast.

ISABEL. You couldn't sell –

BERNARDO. Enough!

ISABEL. You should let me try.

BERNARDO. Don't make me laugh. You couldn't sell gravity on the Moon.

ISABEL. That doesn't even make any sense.

BERNARDO. (Ignoring ISABEL:) Madam, may I interest you in the most amazing stories from around the world. (He spits on the ground.) I hope you fall in a river. (To another:) Sir, please, Sir, can I interest –

ISABEL. Do you want to hear a story?

MAN. Why, I'd love to. (He immediately pulls out a sack of coins.) Is this enough?

BERNARDO. (Swooping in and taking the money.) It's perfect. (He turns to the PLAYERS, clapping his hands.) Get in your positions. Costumes ready. Make sure you have your props. (The PLAYERS ignore him.)

(ISABEL claps. The players immediately come to attention. BERNARDO stands center stage and looks out at the audience. He is gathering the crowd.)

BERNARDO. Okay, sir, what kind of story do you want to hear? Something sad maybe, something funny, maybe a love story...whatever you want.

MAN. How 'bout a Western.

BERNARDO. A Western? What is it with this guy? We don't do Westerns, buddy. How about something more traditional, huh? With magic and witches and evil spells? Sound good?

MAN. Sure...I like magic... But I prefer Westerns.

BERNARDO. Perfect! Okay, gather around ladies and gentlemen and join me on a journey around the world. Our first stop will be Czechoslovakia. It is the story of a boy I once knew.

ISABEL. You didn't know —

BERNARDO. (Turns to ISABEL:) A boy I *once knew*... (And back to the audience:) a great friend of mine from childhood. His name was Yanechek. The story is called, "Grandfather's Eyes."

GRANDFATHER'S EYES

(Production Note: The OLD MAN, YANECHek, the MAIDENS and the GOATS can be played by any of the PLAYERS. At the beginning of the story, the PLAYERS who are performing should gather their costumes and props from the trunk. The costume changes can take place on stage, or behind the flat/banner. Props that are used in this story can be placed behind the flat or on the ground until they are needed. Remember, the PLAYERS are performing the story on the street, so they should not be going off stage to change costumes or gather props. The PLAYERS who are performing in the story should be acting out whatever BERNARDO and ISABEL narrate. They can do so amongst the CROWD, at center stage, or even amongst the audience. Whatever works best in your space.)

BERNARDO. Yanechek was a poor boy. His father and mother died when he was very young, so he was forced to start out alone in the world to make a living.

ISABEL. How sad.

BERNARDO. That's just how things were. For a long time he could find nothing to do. He wandered on and on and at last he came to a little house that stood by itself near the edge of the woods.

(Production Note: If you want to use props to represent the house and the woods, feel free to do so, but they aren't necessary. One idea would be to have cardboard cutouts of a house and trees on sticks that the PLAYERS can use as props. The same idea can be applied to later stories.)

ISABEL. An old man sat on the doorstep and Yanechek could see that he was blind, for there were empty holes where his eyes used to be.

(A blind OLD MAN sits. Two PLAYERS pretending to be GOATS are near him on all-fours. They make goat noises.)

OLD MAN. (To the GOATS:) You poor things, you want to go to pasture, don't you? But I can't see to drive you and I have no one else to send.

YANECHEK. (Approaching the OLD MAN:) Send me, sir. Take me as your goatherd and let me work for you.

OLD MAN. Who are you?

YANECHEK. My name's Yanechek. I'm just a poor orphan.

(OLD MAN inspects YANECHEK. He checks his arms, his teeth. He nods in approval.)

OLD MAN. Alright, it's a deal.

YANECHEK. Well that was easy.

OLD MAN. What can I say, I have a big heart. Call me Grandfather.

YANECHEK. Thank you, Grandfather, I will.

OLD MAN. Your first task is to drive the goats to pasture. But one thing, Yanechek: don't take them to the hill over there in the woods or the Yezinkas may get you! That's where they caught me!

BERNARDO. Now Yanechek knew that the Yezinkas were wicked witches who lived in a cave in the woods and went about in the guise of beautiful young women.

ISABEL. If these witches met you they would greet you modestly, and say something like "How do you do?" to make you think they were good and kind and then, once they had you in their power, they would put you to sleep and gouge out your eyes!

BERNARDO. Sounds like our wedding night...

(ISABEL hits BERNARDO on the shoulder.)

BERNARDO. Oww!

ISABEL. Back to the story...

YANECHEK. Never fear, grandfather, the Yezinkas won't get me!

ISABEL. The first day and the second day Yanechek kept the goats near home. But the third day:

YANECHEK. I think I'll try the hill in the woods. There's better grass there and I'm not afraid of the Yezinkas.

(BERNARDO and ISABEL shake their heads.)

BERNARDO. Luckily, before he started out he cut three long slender switches from a blackberry bramble, wound them into small coils, and hid them inside his hat.

(Production Note: This can be mimed and the blackberry bramble should be kept simple.)

ISABEL. Personally I would've carried mace. But maybe that's just me.

(YANECHEK leads the GOATS around and let's them feed on the nearby grass. Tired, he sits on the ground.)

BERNARDO. Suddenly, there before him, stood the most beautiful maiden in the world.

(MAIDEN #1 enters.)

Her skin was red as roses and white as milk, her eyes were black as sloe berries, and her hair, dark as the raven's wing, fell about her shoulders in long waving tresses.

ISABEL. Are you alright? Do you need to take a break?

BERNARDO. I'm fine.

MAIDEN #1. *(To YANECHEK:)* How do you do, shepherd boy?

YANECHEK. Uh, hi.

MAIDEN #1. *(Smiling, and offering YANECHEK a big red apple:)* Here's something for you that grew in my own garden.

ISABEL. But Yanecek knew that she must be a Yezinka and that, if he ate the apple, he would fall asleep and then she would gouge out his eyes.

YANECHEK. Tempting, but... No, thank you, beautiful maiden. I don't like apples.

(MAIDEN #1 looks disappointed and leaves.)

BERNARDO. A second maiden came, more beautiful, if possible, than the first.

MAIDEN #2. *(Entering, and holding out a lovely red rose:)* How do you do, shepherd boy? Isn't this a lovely rose? I picked it myself from the hedge. How fragrant it is! Will you smell it?

YANECHEK. Um... No, thank you, beautiful maiden. I smell roses all the time. To be honest, I find them boring.

(MAIDEN #2 shrugs her shoulders and disappears.)

BERNARDO. Then a third one came, the youngest and—

ISABEL. And let me guess most beautiful of them all.

BERNARDO. Jealous much?

MAIDEN #3. *(Entering, and offering a golden comb:)* How do you do, shepherd boy? *(Smiling:)* Truly you are a handsome young man, but you would be handsomer still if your hair were nicely combed. Come, let me comb it for you.

ISABEL. Yanecek said nothing but he took off his hat without letting the maiden see what was hidden inside.

(YANECHEK does and MAIDEN #3 comes up close to him.)

BERNARDO. But just as she was about to comb his hair, he whipped out one of the long blackberry switches and struck her over the hands.

(MAIDEN #3 is suddenly frozen, and unsuccessfully tries to get away.)

BERNARDO. She screamed and tried to escape but she could not because it is the fate of a Yezinka not to be able to move if a human being strikes her over the hands with a switch of bramble.

ISABEL. You forgot to mention that earlier.

BERNARDO. What do you mean? Everyone knows about bramble switches and witches. It's common sense.

MAIDEN #3. Help, sisters! Help!

(MAIDEN #1 and #2 run in.)

MAIDEN #1. Let her go, shepherd boy!

MAIDEN #2. We demand you release our sister.

YANECHEK. I will not be fooled; I know who you really are.

(MAIDEN #1 and #2 look at each other, and then run to help MAIDEN #3. YANECHEK whips them on the hands, which causes them to freeze in place. He binds their hands together.)

YANECHEK. Ha ha! Now I've got the three of you, you wicked Yezinkas! It was you who gouged out my poor old master's eyes, you know it was! And you shall not escape until you do as I ask.

(YANECHEK runs to where the OLD MAN is sitting.)

OLD MAN. What's all this commotion about?

YANECHEK. Come, Grandfather, for I have found a means of restoring your eyes!

(YANECHEK leads the OLD MAN back to the MAIDENS.)

YANECHEK. (To MAIDEN #1:) Tell me now where my master's eyes are. If you don't tell me, I'll throw you into the river.

MAIDEN #1. I don't know what you're talking about.

YANECHEK. The river it is.

(YANECHEK lifts up MAIDEN #1 and is about to take her off.)

MAIDEN #1. Don't throw me into the river, Yanecek, and I'll find your master's eyes, I promise you I will!

ISABEL. So Yanecek put her down and she led him to a cave in the hillside where she and her wicked sisters had collected up a great bag of eyes —

(Production Note: Again, don't worry about representing the cave or the hillside, although if you want to create something more visual, feel free to do so.)

(MAIDEN #1 grabs a lumpy bag or box. YANECHEK looks inside and grimaces.)

BERNARDO. All kinds of eyes were there: big eyes, little eyes, black eyes, red eyes, blue eyes, green eyes — every kind of eye in the world that you can think of.

ISABEL. That's so gross.

(MAIDEN #1 reaches into the bag and pulls out two eyes...)

MAIDEN #1. Here. These are his eyes.

(YANECHEK hands the eyes to the OLD MAN and he puts them in.)

OLD MAN. Ah! I see nothing but dark treetops with sleeping birds and flying bats! These are not my eyes! They are owls' eyes! Take them out! Take them out!

YANECHEK. That does it!

(YANECHEK takes MAIDEN #1 behind the flat. We hear a splash. YANECHEK comes back to MAIDEN #2.)

YANECHEK. Now, you tell me where my master's eyes are.

MAIDEN #2. Um... I don't remember. Sorry.

YANECHEK. Did you not just see the bit with the river?

MAIDEN #2. Well, I *heard* the bit with the river.

YANECHEK. Was that not good enough?

MAIDEN #2. Point taken. Two eyes comin' right up.

(MAIDEN #2 reaches in to the bag of eyes and pulls two out. YANECHEK hands them to the OLD MAN who puts them in.)

OLD MAN. Ah! I see nothing but tangled underbrush and snapping teeth and hot red tongues! These are not my eyes! They are wolves' eyes! Take them out! Take them out!

YANECHEK. You had your chance.

MAIDEN #2. But I can't swim.

YANECHEK. That's the point.

(YANECHEK takes MAIDEN #2 behind the flat, and we hear another splash. He then comes back to MAIDEN #3.)

YANECHEK. Now you tell me where my master's eyes are.

MAIDEN #3. Eyes, yes, I remember something about that.

YANECHEK. Let's just skip to the part where you pick out the correct eyes, okay?

MAIDEN #3. Fine, fine.

(MAIDEN #3 reaches into the bag and pulls out two eyes. YANECHEK hands them to the OLD MAN who puts them in.)

OLD MAN. Ah! I see nothing but swirling waters and flashing fins! These are not my eyes! They are fishes' eyes! Take them out! Take them out!

YANECHEK. (To MAIDEN #3:) Seriously? Have you learned nothing?

MAIDEN #3. Let me try again, Yanechek, and I'll find you the right eyes, I promise you I will!

YANECHEK. You better get it right.

(MAIDEN #3 reaches in and pulls out two more. YANECHEK gives them to the OLD MAN, who puts them in.)

OLD MAN. These are my own eyes, praise God! Now I can see as well as ever!

YANECHEK. Good job, Yezinka. You may go free. But never show yourself here again.

MAIDEN #3. I promise.

YANECHEK. That is, unless you wanted to permanently turn yourself into a beautiful maiden.

MAIDEN #3. I could. But I'd still have to gauge your eyes out.

YANECHEK. That's a shame.

MAIDEN. #3. Call me if you change your mind. Bye.

(MAIDEN #3 exits.)

OLD MAN. Yanechek, how can I ever thank you?

YANECHEK. I don't know, Grandfather, why don't you say we live happily ever after?

OLD MAN. Sounds good to me.

(YANECHEK puts his arm around the OLD MAN and they walk off.)

BERNARDO. And that's exactly what they did.

ISABEL. The end.

BERNARDO. Such a wonderful story. And completely true.

ISABEL. Ah, you never knew anyone named Yanechek.

BERNARDO. Quiet!

ISABEL. Every time you lie. Why can't you just tell the story?

BERNARDO. (To the audience:) Don't listen to her. She's...well she's crazy.

(ISABEL is about to speak. BERNARDO cuts her off with a wave of his hand.)

BERNARDO. Ah, now we must move on. What story shall we perform next?

(BERNARDO goes to a WOMAN IN THE CROWD.)

BERNARDO. Excuse me, Ma'am, you look like you have good taste. What kind of story do you want to hear?

WOMAN. Oh, well, how about a romantic-comedy.

BERNARDO. Perfect. Yes. A horrific-tragedy.

WOMAN. I said, 'romantic-comedy.'

BERNARDO. You got it.

(BERNARDO motions the WOMAN to pay. She hands him some money.)

BERNARDO. Okay... Something brutal, something terrifying. A story of revenge.

WOMAN. But...

(BERNARDO motions with his hand for the WOMAN to be quiet.)

BERNARDO. I've got it. Illiana. Peter. Come.

(ILLIANA and PETER, two of the PLAYERS, go to BERNARDO. They get into a huddle and BERNARDO whispers to them, motioning. PETER nods and smiles. ILLIANA is a bit hesitant; as if she's not sure she wants to tell this particular story. She takes a deep breath.)

BERNARDO. The next stop on our journey around the world... (Dramatic pause.) South Africa. Let the story begin.

(BERNARDO steps aside. ILLIANA and PETER take center stage.)

THE LOST BEADS

(Production Note: The THREE OLDER SISTERS can easily be expanded to as many as six. Also, feel free to use BERNARDO and ISABEL as actors in the story. As with many of the stories, you can represent things such as the river, and water visually with simple props and small set pieces. However, this is not necessary. The play works best when the imaginations of the actors and the audience are relied upon to fill in the blanks so to speak.)

ILLIANA. Once upon a time, a long time ago there lived four sisters. One morning, the sisters set out to the river to gather water for their village.

(THREE OLDER SISTERS and the YOUNGEST SISTER enter and go to the river. The YOUNGEST SISTER gathers water away from the other THREE SISTERS.)

PETER. But the youngest sister decided to move down the river a ways, to gather her share.

OLDER SISTER 1. Why's she all the way down there?

OLDER SISTER 2. She thinks she's better than us.

OLDER SISTER 3. Let's play a trick on her. We'll hide our beads.

OLDER SISTER 1. And we'll tell her that we have thrown them into the river.

OLDER SISTER 2. And when she comes back ...

OLDER SISTER 3. We'll tell her to throw her beads into the river.

PETER. So the three sisters hid their beads in the sand.

(THREE SISTERS hide their beads.)

ILLIANA. And they waited for their younger sister to return.

(The YOUNGEST SISTER comes down the river to her THREE SISTERS.)

OLDER SISTER 1. Sister, we have thrown our beads into the river.

OLDER SISTER 2. Now it is your turn.

OLDER SISTER 3. See what happens!

(The YOUNGEST SISTER throws her beads into the river. The THREE SISTERS quickly remove their beads from the sand.)

OLDER SISTER 1. Silly girl.

OLDER SISTER 2. You're such an idiot.

OLDER SISTER 3. Have fun searching for your beads.

(THREE SISTERS run off laughing.)

PETER. The young girl was so distraught at losing her beads that she went to the water's edge and cried...

YOUNGEST SISTER. Water, water, show me my beads, which I have cast into your depths.

PETER. And the water replied:

WATER. Move along!

ILLIANA. So the young girl moved on down the river and cried out once more...

YOUNGEST SISTER. Water, water, show me my beads, which I have cast into your depths.

PETER. But this time, the water answered...

WATER. Enter. Your beads are here.

ILLIANA. And with that, the young girl jumped into the river and beneath the surface she found land. And upon that land was a little hut.

PETER. Out of that little hut came an old woman with one leg, one arm, and her body was covered in sores.

(OLD WOMAN comes out of the hut. She's grotesque.)

ILLIANA. That's gross.

PETER. Well, that's how the story goes.

OLD WOMAN. (To YOUNGEST SISTER:) Why do you not laugh at me? Don't you see how wretched I look?

YOUNGEST SISTER. I am sorry for you. How horrible it must be to have one leg and one arm. Let me help you clean those sores.

OLD WOMAN. Such a kind young girl you are. I am not used to such kindness. Quickly child, come inside for you are in danger.

YOUNGEST SISTER. What danger?

OLD WOMAN. The Dimo hunts these lands. He is the one who has taken my arm and my leg. He keeps me alive, so that I may cook for him. Hurry! Inside! The wind is picking up and I feel a slight rain. These are the signs that he is near by. If he catches you, he will eat you.

PETER. So the old woman took the young girl into the hut and hid her.

ILLIANA. And sure enough, the Dimo soon returned to the hut.

(THE DIMO enters. As horrible a beast as one could imagine; red mouth, tusks like a wild pig, hungry. Production Note: This could be as simple as using a mask.)

THE DIMO. I smell a human, and it's not your foul stench.

OLD WOMAN. None but me in here. You can finish eating me if you like.

THE DIMO. Where is it? I can smell it.

OLD WOMAN. You're imagining the smell because you are hungry. Go to bed and you may hunt in the morning.

THE DIMO. Foul wench.

PETER. The Dimo thought better of eating the old woman, and he soon went to bed for the night.

ILLIANA. In the morning, the Dimo arose early and went off hunting.

(THE DIMO exits. OLD WOMAN brings the YOUNGEST SISTER out of her hiding spot.)

OLD WOMAN. The Dimo is gone, you must leave now.

YOUNGEST SISTER. Thank you for your kindness, dear woman.

OLD WOMAN. It is you who has been kind. Please, take these as a token of my friendship.

PETER. Out of an old chest, the old woman pulled necklaces, bracelets...

ILLIANA. Diamonds, brass rings, gold earrings.

PETER. She adorned the young girl in the gold and jewels and sent her back to her village.

ILLIANA. When she arrived at the village, there was great rejoicing.

(A VILLAGER and the THREE SISTERS enter and hug and kiss the YOUNGEST SISTER.)

PETER. The three sisters were overjoyed to find out that their prank had not caused their youngest sister's death.

ILLIANA. But when the sisters saw their young sister's jewelry, they became jealous.

OLDER SISTER 1. Brass rings!

OLDER SISTER 2. Diamonds!

OLDER SISTER 3. Gold bracelets!

OLDER SISTER 1. She doesn't deserve these fine jewels.

OLDER SISTER 2. How'd she get them?

OLDER SISTER 3. (To YOUNGEST SISTER:) How did a stupid little girl like you get diamonds and gold and brass rings?

YOUNGEST SISTER. A kind old woman who lives in a hut in the river saved me from the Dimo. She gave me these precious things.

OLDER SISTER 1. That's just her luck.

OLDER SISTER 2. I want diamonds.

OLDER SISTER 3. And gold.

OLDER SISTER 1. We should go to the river and find this old woman.

OLDER SISTER 2. And make her give us her finest jewels.

OLDER SISTER 3. Then we'll see who the prettiest sister is.

ILLIANA. So the three sisters set off for the river.

PETER. And they called out to the water...

THREE SISTERS. Water, water, show us the hut with the old woman.

ILLIANA. Sure enough, the water answered...

WATER. Enter.

PETER. And the three sisters entered the water and found the hut with the old woman.

(OLD WOMAN *enters*. THREE SISTERS *immediately begin to laugh and point at the OLD WOMAN*.)

OLD WOMAN. Why do you mock me?

OLDER SISTER 1. Look at yourself.

OLDER SISTER 2. You have only one leg.

OLDER SISTER 3. And one arm.

OLDER SISTER 1. And your body is covered in sores.

OLD WOMAN. Won't you come inside and help me clean my sores, dear children.

OLDER SISTER 2. Why would we help an old hag like you?

OLDER SISTER 3. Give us your jewels.

PETER. And just then a slight wind arose, and a soft rain began to fall, but the old woman did not warn the three sisters.

ILLIANA. Do we have to tell this part?

PETER. Yes, it's part of the story.

ILLIANA. But I don't like it.

PETER. The Dimo came home and saw the three sisters...

(THE DIMO enters.)

ILLIANA. The end.

(THE DIMO stops, looks confused.)

PETER. Cover your ears if you don't want to hear.

ILLIANA. You enjoy telling this part, don't you?

PETER. He saw the three sisters and...

(THE DIMO begins approaching the THREE SISTERS again.)

ILLIANA. Everyone was happy. The end.

(THE DIMO stops again.)

PETER. You're acting like a child. Now, these fine people *(Gestures to the audience:)* want to hear the end, so I'm going to tell it.

ILLIANA. Fine.

PETER. Fine.

ILLIANA. Fine.

PETER. The Dimo came home and he saw the three sisters...

(THE DIMO goes to the THREE SISTERS.)

PETER. And he took them prisoner inside his hut. And...

ILLIANA. Wait! *(She covers her ears.)*

PETER. And one by one, the Dimo ate the three sisters. The end.

ILLIANA. *(Uncovering her ears:)* Is it over yet?

PETER. Yes. *(He turns to the audience.)* Her mother was eaten by a Dimo. Very tragic.

(BERNARDO joins PETER and ILLIANA.)

BERNARDO. Okay. Very good. Very good. *(Turns to PETER and ILLIANA:)* Except for you two. Very flat. Try to pick it up next time.

(PETER and ILLIANA hang their heads. ISABEL joins them at center stage.)

ISABEL. Don't listen to him. He's just a...

(ISABEL whispers to ILLIANA and PETER. They all laugh. PETER and ILLIANA move aside.)

BERNARDO. I'm a what? What did she say?

ISABEL. Shouldn't we be moving on to the next story?

BERNARDO. What did you say?

ISABEL. Nothing, dear, nothing... Only the truth.

BERNARDO. Oh... Wait I'm confused.

ISABEL. So, what shall we do next?

(BERNARDO goes to a LITTLE GIRL. The girl is holding a teddy bear.)

BERNARDO. Tell me, little girl, what kind of story do you want to hear?

LITTLE GIRL. I want to hear a story about my Teddy.

BERNARDO. Of course you do. Do you have money?

(LITTLE GIRL hands BERNARDO some money.)

BERNARDO. You're in luck. I have just the story for you...The story of Prince Ivan.

ISABEL. Prince Ivan?

BERNARDO. Yes, Prince Ivan.

ISABEL. *(Softly, so the LITTLE GIRL can't hear:)* Prince Ivan doesn't have any teddy bears.

BERNARDO. I know. Let's just hope she doesn't notice... *(Turns to the audience.)* Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, we're off to Russia and the story of "Prince Ivan, the Witch Baby, and the Little Sister of the Sun." Here to present this story are the lovely Natasha and the not-so-lovely Boris.

(NATASHA and BORIS take center stage. BERNARDO and ISABEL step aside.)

**PRINCE IVAN, THE WITCH,
and THE LITTLE SISTER OF THE SUN**

(Production Note: BERNARDO, ISABEL, and the other PLAYERS can be used as in this story to play multiple characters. The pacing of the tale should be relatively quick.)

NATASHA. Once upon a time, very long ago, there was a little Prince named Ivan.

BORIS. He was a mute. Tell them how he was a mute.

NATASHA. Right, he had never spoken a word from the day he was born. And of course this was very troubling for his parents, the King and Queen.

(The KING and QUEEN enter.)

QUEEN. Oh, what sort of Tsar will our little Prince Ivan make?

KING. A terrible kind, that's what kind.

QUEEN. But what can we do?

KING. Nothing. There's not a single thing in this miserable world that we can do.

QUEEN. We can wish.

KING. That's true. We could wish.

QUEEN. (Wishing to above:) I wish that we could have another child —

KING. Any kind of child would be better than this tongue-tied brat who can't even say a word.

NATASHA. And for that wish they were punished, as you shall see.

BORIS. As for Prince Ivan, since his parents didn't pay any attention to him, he spent all his time in the stables, listening to the tales of the old, wise horse Caretaker. (To NATASHA:) I like the Old Caretaker.

(NATASHA *smiles politely.*)

(*The OLD CARETAKER enters, and bends down to speak with little PRINCE IVAN.*)

OLD CARETAKER. I am an old man, this you know. But I am wise and can predict the future. And I'm going to tell you a secret because I like you. You're mute, and your parents hate you, but I think you're a good kid, so here goes: today your parents gave birth to a baby girl — your new sister — but she's a bad egg. A witch she is, with iron teeth. She will eat up your father, and eat up your mother, and eat up you too, if she gets the chance. There's no saving the old people; but if you are quick, and do what I tell you, you may escape. Now you must go to your father and ask him for the best horse he has, and then gallop like the wind, and don't stop until you reach the end of the world. There you will be safe.

(PRINCE IVAN *nods and runs off. He finds his father with his mother, and a little baby girl in his mother's arms, screaming like a little fury.*)

KING. Well, she's not mute.

QUEEN. Certainly not.

IVAN. (Timidly approaching:) Father, may I have the fastest horse in the stable?

KING. Well, well, well. Look who's decided to speak.

QUEEN. Who is this little boy? I don't know him, do you know him?

KING. No, I don't think I do.

QUEEN. That's not our son, is it?

KING. Well, I believe it is. Take whatever horse you want, boy. See, you have a little sister; a fine little girl. She has teeth already. It's a pity they're black, but beggars can't be choosers.

IVAN. Black? Did you say black teeth?

KING. Why what's wrong with that?

NATASHA. And the little Prince had a flashback of what the old Caretaker said:

OLD CARETAKER. A witch she is, with iron teeth she will eat up your father, and eat up your mother. With her iron teeth...her iron teeth...iron teeth... (He slowly backs away in an awkward fade out.) ...teeth, teeth, teeth...

QUEEN. (To IVAN:) Yes, and what's wrong with black teeth?

IVAN. Oh, nothing...

KING. It's better to have black teeth than to be born mute.

(The KING and QUEEN exit with the baby.)

BORIS. And so Prince Ivan rode away on the finest horse there was. (To NATASHA:) I like horses.

(PRINCE IVAN gallops away.)

(Production Note: This can be suggested with a miniature toy horse or mocked with a broom handle...or with an actual horse, depending on the budget.)

(The OLD CARETAKER quickly reenters and waves, but PRINCE IVAN doesn't see him.)

OLD CARETAKER. (To himself:) Don't worry, old man, he'll be fine. He'll write to you I'm sure of it. Yes, of course he will. I'll go check the mail maybe he's written already.

(The OLD CARETAKER exits. PRINCE IVAN continues to ride.)

NATASHA. Prince Ivan and his horse leapt over rivers and streams and hills, and anything else that came in his way, until there were no houses or people anywhere to be seen.

IVAN. (Stopping and taking a breath:) It sure is a big place, this world; I wonder when I shall come to the end of it.

BORIS. Suddenly, on a wide, sandy plain, he saw two old women sitting in the road.

(TWO DECREPIT WOMEN appear, bent double over their sewing work. One and then the other breaks a needle, and takes a new one out of a box between them, and threads the needle with thread from another box, and continue on sewing and sewing.)

IVAN. Excuse me, little old women, is this the end of the world? Let me stay here and live with you, and be safe from my baby sister, who is a witch and has iron teeth. Please let me stay with you, and I'll be very little trouble, and thread your needles for you when you break them.

DECREPIT WOMAN 1. Will you give us baths, too?

IVAN. Uh...

DECREPIT WOMAN 2. She's just kidding.

DECREPIT WOMAN 1. No I'm not.

DECREPIT WOMAN 2. My dear, this is not the end of the world, and little good would it be to you to stay with us.

DECREPIT WOMAN 1. For as soon as we have broken all our needles and used up all our thread we shall die, and then where would you be? Your sister with the iron teeth would have you in a minute.

NATASHA. So, he rode on further over the wide world, the black horse galloping and galloping, and throwing the dust from its thundering hoofs.

BORIS. That sounds pretty.

NATASHA. Thank you. Finally he came to a forest of great oak trees and from it came a dreadful noise—the crashing of trees falling, the breaking of branches, and the whistling of things hurled through the air.

IVAN. This surely must be the end of the world.

NATASHA. Before him was a huge giant, Tree-Rooter, hauling the great oaks out of the ground and flinging them aside like weeds.

BORIS. — Which will be represented with this box of toothpicks.

(TREE-ROOTER comes forward with a box of toothpicks. TREE-ROOTER throws some in the air.)

TREE-ROOTER. Weeee...!

IVAN. Please, great giant, is this the end of the world? And may I live with you and be safe from my sister, who is a witch and has iron teeth?

TREE-ROOTER. My dear boy, this is not the end of the world, and little good would it be to you to stay with me. For as soon as I have rooted up all these trees I shall die, and then where would you be? Your sister would have you in a minute. And already there are not many big trees left. (Showing him the box:) See?

NATASHA. And the giant set to work again, pulling up the great trees and throwing them aside.

(TREE-ROOTER throws some more.)

BORIS. The sky was full of flying trees.

(TREE-ROOTER unenthusiastically throws the rest, then looks sad. He exits.)

NATASHA. Then Prince Ivan came among the mountains. And there was a roaring and a crashing in the mountains as if the earth was falling to pieces.

BORIS. One after another whole mountains were lifted up into the sky and flung down to earth, so that they broke and scattered into dust.

NATASHA. There stood the huge giant Mountain-Tosser, picking up the mountains like pebbles.

BORIS. — Which shall be represented by actual pebbles.

(MOUNTAIN-TOSSER comes forward carrying some pebbles.)

MOUNTAIN-TOSSER. (Tossing a pebble in the air:) Watch out! Ahhh...!

(He makes a crashing sound. Then stands up straight and wipes some sweat from his brow.)

IVAN. Please, great giant, is this the end of the world? And may I live with you and be safe from my sister, who is a witch with iron teeth?

MOUNTAIN-TOSSER. Good sir, this is not the end of the world, and little good would it be to you to stay with me. For as soon as I have picked up all these mountains and thrown them down again I shall die, and then where would you be? Your sister would have you in a minute. And there are not very many mountains left.

NATASHA. And the giant set to work again, lifting up the great mountains and hurling them away.

(MOUNTAIN-TOSSER *throws a pebble.*)

MOUNTAIN-TOSSER. (Feigning terror:) Ahhh...

BORIS. The sky was full of flying mountains.

(MOUNTAIN-TOSSER *drops the rest of the pebbles.*)

MOUNTAIN-TOSSER. (Sarcastically:) What a spectacle of flying mountains.

NATASHA. At last he came to the end of the world, and there, hanging in the sky above him, was the castle of the Little Sister of the Sun. Beautiful it was, made of cloud, and hanging in the sky, as if it were built of red roses.

BORIS. Which shall be represented by...our imaginations. Wowwww.

NATASHA. It's very beautiful. Trust me.

IVAN. Hello? Is anyone home?

BORIS. The Sun's little sister opened the window and beckoned to him.

SUN'S SISTER. (Carrying a window [frame], and sticking her head out:) Stay here and play with me.

BORIS. Merry and pretty was the Sun's little sister, and she was very kind to little Prince Ivan. They played games together, and had a great time. (To NATASHA:) Games are fun.

NATASHA. (Ignoring BORIS:) Until one day Prince Ivan climbed up to the topmost part of the castle. From there he could see the whole world. And far, far away, beyond the mountains, beyond the forests, beyond the wide plains, he saw his father's palace where he had been born. The roof of the palace was gone, and the walls were broken and crumbling.

BORIS. And little Prince Ivan came slowly down, and his eyes were red from crying.

IVAN. (Taking a tissue from her:) Was not.

SUN'S SISTER. My dear friend, why are your eyes so red?

IVAN. She has eaten them all with her iron teeth.

SUN'S SISTER. Who has eaten who?

IVAN. My little sister is a witch. I didn't tell you that?

SUN'S SISTER. No.

IVAN. Oh. I thought I told you that story.

SUN'S SISTER. I think I would have remembered.

IVAN. Well, anyway, she was supposed to eat my parents and then eat me. And that's why I came here.

SUN'S SISTER. That's terrible.

IVAN. Are you sure I didn't tell you that story? I tell everyone.

SUN'S SISTER. Nope.

IVAN. Strange. Anyway, maybe it's not too late to save them. I should ride back on my horse and double check.

SUN'S SISTER. Please don't leave me; I am lonely here by myself.

IVAN. I'll come back, I promise.

SUN'S SISTER. Okay, but at least take with you (Handing them to him:) this magic comb, this magic brush, and two apples of youth. These apples would make young once more the oldest things on earth.

IVAN. Thank you. I'm sure they each prove useful in three separate situations, and all involve incredible coincidences.

BORIS. So, Prince Ivan was on his way. First he reached the giant, Mountain-Tosser. There was only one mountain left, and the giant was just picking it up.

NATASHA. Sadly he was picking it up, for he knew that when he had thrown it away his work would be done and he would have to die.

MOUNTAIN-TOSSER. (Holding a single pebble in the air:) Well, little Prince Ivan, this is the end.

IVAN. No wait!

MOUNTAIN-TOSSER. What is it? I'm kinda busy.

IVAN. Let me just try something.

(PRINCE IVAN pulls out the magic brush and throws it on ground. Nothing happens. They both just stare.)

MOUNTAIN-TOSSER. I don't get it.

IVAN. Wait for it...wait for it...

NATASHA. And just as the little Prince threw his magic brush on the plain, the brush swelled and burst, and there were range upon range of high mountains, touching the sky itself.

BORIS. (Giving IVAN a handful of pebbles:) Here ya go.

(IVAN tosses the pebbles.)

NATASHA and BORIS. Wowww...

BORIS. Just beautiful.

MOUNTAIN-TOSSER. Why, I have enough gravel, I mean mountains now, to last me for another thousand years. Thank you kindly, little Prince.

IVAN. My pleasure. Farewell!

NATASHA. Next he came to Tree-Rooter, the giant. There were only two of the great oaks left, and the giant had one in each hand.

(The TREE-ROOTER holds two toothpicks out in front of him, one in each hand.)

TREE-ROOTER. Ah me, my life has come to its end —

IVAN. Here are plenty more for you, Tree-Rooter. (Pause. After clearing his throat, a little louder:) I said, here are plenty more for you!

(NATASHA nudges BORIS.)

BORIS. Oh, sorry.

(BORIS gives IVAN a box of toothpicks, which he hands to TREE-ROOTER.)

NATASHA. And as he threw down his comb, (IVAN throws it down.) there was a noise of spreading branches, of swishing leaves, of opening buds, all together, and there before them was a forest of great oaks stretching farther than the giant could see, tall though he was.

(TREE-ROOTER sets the toothpick box on the ground. Very anti-climatic.)

TREE-ROOTER. Why, here are enough trees to last me for another thousand years. Thank you kindly, little man.

IVAN. No problem at all. So long.

BORIS. Next he came to the two old women, who were crying their eyes out.

DECREPIT WOMAN 1. There is only one needle left!

DECREPIT WOMAN 2. There is only one bit of thread in the box!

DECREPIT WOMAN 1 **and** 2. And then we shall die!

IVAN. Before you use the needle and thread, just eat these apples.

(IVAN reaches in his bag, but only pulls out one apple. He digs around, but then notices BORIS who is about to take a large bite out the other one.)

IVAN. Excuse me!

BORIS. Oh, was this yours?

IVAN. It was in my bag wasn't it?

BORIS. I thought that was a...community bag.

IVAN. (Sticking out his hand:) No, it's not.

BORIS. (Handing it back:) Sorry.

IVAN. (Giving the two apples to the ladies:) Here you are.

(The TWO DECREPIT WOMEN each take a bite. They wait a moment, and then take another bite. As they chew it, the TWO DECREPIT WOMEN become YOUNG WOMEN.)

(Production Note: This can be accomplished by throwing off wigs, or the rest of the Old Women costumes to reveal skirts or other young women dress.)

YOUNG WOMAN 1. Thank you kindly, little Prince.

YOUNG WOMAN 2. We're hot, right?

YOUNG WOMAN 1. Oh, we're hot.

YOUNG WOMAN 2. You must take with you the handkerchief we have been sewing all these years.

YOUNG WOMAN 1. Throw it to the ground, and it will turn into a lake of water. Perhaps some day it will be useful to you.

IVAN. Thank you.

YOUNG WOMAN 1. Let's go find some dates.

YOUNG WOMAN 2. Definitely.

(The YOUNG WOMEN exit.)

NATASHA. He came at last to his father's ruined palace.

(IVAN tiptoes. The WITCH enters, dressed like a little girl. IVAN notices her and acts casual, as if just strolling by.)

IVAN. Oh, hello there.

WITCH. You must be my big brother Ivan.

IVAN. Indeed I am.

WITCH. I've heard all about you. Come inside.

IVAN. Okay...

WITCH. Well, brother, you play a song and amuse yourself while I get supper ready. But don't stop playing, or I shall feel lonely.

BORIS. That way she knew he wouldn't escape.

(IVAN plays some notes on a piano [fake knowing how to play, or maybe he begins to sing a song]. A MOUSE appears.)

MOUSE. Psst... Psstt... Hey little mute!

IVAN. Old Caretaker is that you?

MOUSE. Your sister turned me into a mouse. Run while you can. Your father and mother were eaten long ago.

IVAN. Oh, no.

MOUSE. Don't be upset; they deserved it. Be quick, or you will be eaten too. Your pretty little sister is putting an edge on her teeth!

IVAN. What about you?

MOUSE. Shh... Just do as I say. And this time when you reach the end of the world...

IVAN. ...Yes?...

MOUSE. Stay there!

IVAN. What about the song?

MOUSE. I'll handle that. Just go!

(The MOUSE begins to sing a song or play the piano [whatever Ivan was doing]. He is either amazing or terrible. IVAN runs off, gets on his horse, and rides away. We see the WITCH finish sharpening her teeth.)

WITCH. That shall do it. I'm sure he's tender anyway. (Re-entering:) Oh, brother Ivan... (Seeing the MOUSE instead:) Hey!

MOUSE. Whatsa matter, don't like my song?

(The WITCH chases the MOUSE away.)

WITCH. That's it, now I'm angry. No more Ms. Nice Witch.

(Production Note: The following chase should take place all around the stage. Keep it quick and fun. The PLAYERS can weave in and out of the CROWD and even through the audience if it works in the space.)

NATASHA. She might have appeared to be a little girl, but she could run faster than the black horse could gallop.

BORIS. Soon she was gaining on poor Ivan.

IVAN. I know what to do.

(IVAN pulls out the handkerchief and throws it on the ground.)

NATASHA. And as he threw down the handkerchief, it turned into a deep, broad lake.

IVAN. Enjoy your swim, sister!

(The WITCH approaches the "lake." The YOUNG WOMEN step forward. [If possible, dressed in lifeguard attire.] YOUNG GIRL #1 blows a whistle, or whistles loudly.)

YOUNG WOMAN 1. You there, no swimming in the deep end!

(The WITCH, slightly confused, moves to another part of the "lake." YOUNG WOMAN 2 blows her whistle.)

YOUNG WOMAN 2. No swimming in the shallow end either!

WITCH. It's just that I need to get to the other side, you see.

YOUNG WOMAN 1. Sorry, it's adult swim only.

YOUNG WOMAN 2. You'll have to wait one hour.

WITCH. Wait a minute, what am I doing?

(The WITCH kicks the handkerchief out the way and moves on.)

NATASHA. It took her a long time to get across, and all that time Prince Ivan galloped on, never stopping for a moment.

(The WITCH gets very close to IVAN.)

BORIS. The Witch would have caught poor little Prince Ivan too...

NATASHA. ...If he didn't have some help along the way.

(The TREE-ROOTER enters and throws down some toothpicks at the WITCH's feet.)

TREE-ROOTER. Take that!

(The WITCH slides on the toothpicks.)

IVAN. (Giving a thumbs-up:) Thanks, Tree-Rooter.

(The WITCH makes it through and gains on IVAN again. The MOUNTAIN-TOSSER enters and throws down some pebbles.)

MOUNTAIN-TOSSER. Here, try these on for size!

IVAN. Thanks, Mountain-Tosser.

MOUNTAIN-TOSSER. That oughta slow her down.

BORIS. But somehow, somehow, the Witch made it through still.

(The WITCH easily steps over the pebbles.)

NATASHA. Finally, little Ivan saw the cloud castle of the little Sister of the Sun, hanging over the end of the world and gleaming in the sky.

SUN'S SISTER. (Looking out the window:) This way Little Prince!

(IVAN gets off his horse and runs up to the castle.)

SUN'S SISTER. Here, climb up my hair.

NATASHA. And the Sun's Little Sister let down her radiant golden hair, which was so long it reached all the way to the ground.

IVAN. Don't you have a ladder?

SUN'S SISTER. No. Just this hair.

BORIS. Is this how the story goes? 'Cause I think you might be thinking of another story.

NATASHA. No, this is it. He climbs the hair.

WITCH. Give him up!

SUN'S SISTER. I will not.

IVAN. How did your hair grow so fast?

SUN'S SISTER. It's just a wig.

IVAN. Oh. Well, it was really helpful, thank you.

WITCH. Let me climb up your hair.

(The LITTLE SISTER OF THE SUN and IVAN laugh.)

IVAN. I think she's going to cry.

WITCH. Am not...

NATASHA. The Witch was so upset, as witches hate to be teased, that she started to cry and turned and went off, gnashing her iron teeth until they broke.

(The WITCH stomps away. We see PRINCE IVAN and the LITTLE SISTER OF THE SUN united in the castle.)

NATASHA. And ever since then little Prince Ivan and the little Sister of the Sun play together in the castle of cloud that hangs over the end of the world. They borrow the stars to play ball, and put them back at night whenever they remember.

BORIS. So when there are no stars?

NATASHA. It means that Prince Ivan and the Sun's little sister have gone to sleep over their games and forgotten to put their toys away.

BORIS. That's nice. I like that.

NATASHA. I thought you would.

(BERNARDO returns to center stage. NATASHA and BORIS step aside.)

BERNARDO. What a beautiful story. Am I right?

(LITTLE GIRL steps forward.)

LITTLE GIRL. But my Teddy wasn't in that story.

BERNARDO. Ahh, but there's a little bit of all of us in that story, even your Teddy.

LITTLE GIRL. I want my money back.

BERNARDO. Sorry, no refunds. Read the fine print.

LITTLE GIRL. Fine print?

(BERNARDO ushers the LITTLE GIRL aside.)

BERNARDO. Okay, on to the next story. Step right up, who's got a request? You, sir, what kind of story would you like to hear?

(A Man comes from the CROWD, it's clearly PETER in disguise wearing a hat and a fake mustache.)

PETER. How about a story from ancient Japan... Something with a brave warrior and dragons.

BERNARDO. (Hamming it up:) Hmm... Let me see... Yes! I've got the perfect story for you, good sir. One of my favorites.

PETER. I will pay money to hear your story.

(PETER takes off his hat and drops some money in. He passes the hat to the CROWD PERSON next to him. She gives him a curious look. PETER smiles. She puts some money into the hat and passes it along.)

BERNARDO. Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, dogs and cats, mice and...other rodents, presenting the story *My Lord Bag of Rice* are... Let's see here...

(BERNARDO scans the PLAYERS searching for the perfect pair to narrate the next story. Two of the PLAYERS, MARIA, and THOMAS, excitedly put their hands up and mouth, "Pick me." BERNARDO looks around some more.)

BERNARDO. How about...Maria and Thomas.

MARIA and THOMAS. (Very excited:) Yes!

(MARIA and THOMAS take center stage. BERNARDO steps aside.)

MARIA. I love this story.

THOMAS. So do I.

MARIA. The adventure, the suspense.

THOMAS. Dragon Kings, monsters, arrows flying everywhere.

MARIA. I wish I were in Japan right now.

THOMAS. Me too.

MARIA. This really is an awesome story.

(BERNARDO steps forward.)

BERNARDO. Do you maybe want to tell the story, huh?

MARIA. Oh, right.

THOMAS. Sorry.

MY LORD BAG OF RICE

(Production Note: Feel free to have PLAYERS play multiple roles within the story. GRANDMOTHER can easily be played by one of the PALACE GUARDS or even the DRAGON KING quickly putting on a wig. The PALACE GUARDS and the DRAGON FAMILY can be the same PLAYERS as well.)

MARIA. Long, long ago there lived, in Japan a brave warrior known to all as Tawara Toda, or "My Lord Bag of Rice." His true name was Fujiwara Hidesato, and this is the story of how he came to change his name.

THOMAS. Fujiwara Hidesato was always in search of adventure.

MARIA. One day Hidesato set out with his bow and his quiver of arrows and he traveled to beautiful Lake Biwa.

THOMAS. At that time, there was a bridge that crossed the lake, and upon that bridge laid a sleeping dragon.

(Production Note: The DRAGON KING need not be intricate. A simple mask should do.)

MARIA. Without hesitation, Hidesato walked onto the bridge and began walking across the great monster's back.

THOMAS. After only a few steps, Hidesato stopped when he heard a man calling from behind.

(The DRAGON KING removes his mask.)

DRAGON KING. Oh brave sir, won't you please help a poor old man?

HIDESATO. It depends on what helping you need.

DRAGON KING. I want you to kill my mortal enemy.

HIDESATO. Certainly. It would be my pleasure... Wait, what did you say?

DRAGON KING. I said, I want you to kill my mortal enemy.

HIDESATO. That's quite a favor you ask, old man.

DRAGON KING. I have lived now for many years in this lake and I have a quite a large family. For some time we have lived in terror, for a monster centipede has discovered our home, and night after night it comes and carries off one of my family. I am powerless to save them. If it goes on much longer like this, not only shall I lose all my children, but I myself will fall a victim to the monster.

HIDESATO. So you want me to kill a monster centipede?

DRAGON KING. Yes.

HIDESATO. (Thinks for a moment.) I will do it on one condition.

DRAGON KING. Anything.

HIDESATO. Tell me why you change yourself into a sleeping dragon.

DRAGON KING. I turn into a dragon in hopes of finding someone who will help me.

HIDESATO. That makes no sense at all.

DRAGON KING. I have waited on the bridge in the shape of the horrible dragon that you saw, in the hope that some strong brave man would come along. But all who came this way, as soon as they saw me were terrified and ran away as fast as they could. You are the first man I have found able to look at me without fear, so I knew at once that you were a man of great courage.

HIDESATO. Makes sense to me. So...where's this centipede?

DRAGON KING. He will come at night to claim his prey. I will take you to my home.

THOMAS. So the Dragon King parted the waters of the lake and led Hidesato into his palace.

MARIA. Soon night was upon them and everything was silent.

THOMAS. Suddenly, the palace began to shake as if a great giant were approaching.

(The PLAYERS shake, as if they are experiencing an earthquake.)

MARIA. Hidesato and the Dragon King ran to the balcony.

HIDESATO. Is this an earthquake?

DRAGON KING. No. The centipede approaches.

HIDESATO. I don't see anything.

DRAGON KING. Look! In the distance, do you see the two fiery balls?

HIDESATO. I thought you said I was going to fight a centipede.

DRAGON KING. Those are his eyes.

THOMAS. Hidesato looked closer, and beyond the fiery eyes he saw the long body of the centipede and its hundred legs.

(Production Note: One of the PLAYERS with a sock-puppet should suffice for the CENTIPEDE, but feel free to use a more intricate costume.)

MARIA. Hidesato showed no fear, but the Dragon King cowered in the corner, for he knew just how ferocious the centipede was.

HIDESATO. Fear not, Dragon King, I'll kill this monster. Bring me my bow and arrows at once.

THOMAS. The Dragon King quickly grabbed the bow and the quiver and brought them to Hidesato.

DRAGON KING. You have only three arrows in that quiver.

HIDESATO. In all my days, I have never met a beast that could not be brought down by three arrows or less.

DRAGON KING. The centipede is not your average beast. Aim between the eyes, and do not miss.

MARIA. Hidesato took aim with his first arrow and let fly.

(Production Note: For the arrow shooting sequence, one of the PLAYERS can carry the arrows across the stage towards the CENTIPEDE, as if they're flying through the air.)

THOMAS. The arrow hit the centipede right between the eyes, but glanced off without leaving a mark.

DRAGON KING. We are doomed. You've only made him angrier. He'll devour us all.

HIDESATO. Fear not, Dragon King. I still have two arrows left.

MARIA. Again, Hidesato took aim and let his arrow fly.

THOMAS. And again, the arrow hit the centipede between the eyes and glanced off.

DRAGON KING. You are a brave warrior, but your arrows cannot destroy the great centipede.

HIDESATO. I still have one arrow left, Dragon King. I told you I would kill your enemy, and kill you enemy is what I shall do.

MARIA. Hidesato watched as the great beast raced towards the palace, growing bigger and bigger with each passing second.

(Production Note: If you wish, you can use multiple Centipede sock-puppets, one larger than the next, as the CENTIPEDE gets closer.)

(One of the PLAYERS shines a flashlight on the CENTIPEDE.)

THOMAS. The fiery eyes of the centipede began to light up the palace and the waters around it. Hidesato could clearly see the hundred legs of the great monster.

MARIA. Just then, Hidesato remembered something his grandmother had told him long ago.

(GRANDMOTHER steps forward.)

GRANDMOTHER. The only thing that can kill a centipede is saliva.

(GRANDMOTHER steps back, or simply removes her wig.)

THOMAS. Hidesato drew his third and final arrow, but before he placed it on his bow, Hidesato put the end of the arrow in his mouth.

MARIA. He let the arrow fly once again, straight for the center of the centipede's head.

THOMAS. But instead of glancing off harmlessly as before, it went straight into the creature's brain.

MARIA. The centipede began to quiver and its eyes slowly dimmed.

THOMAS. And then, in a blinding flash, the body of the great monster disappeared.

(One of the PLAYERS [or more] shines the flashlight on the CROWD and the audience.)

DRAGON KING. Am I dead?

HIDESATO. You're saved. The centipede is dead.

DRAGON KING. Thank you, brave warrior. You have saved us all.

HIDESATO. Don't thank me, thank my Grandmother.

DRAGON KING. Your Grandmother?

HIDESATO. Never mind.

MARIA. The Dragon Kings family slowly came out from hiding and began to bow in front of Hidesato.

(A couple of PLAYERS step forward as the DRAGON FAMILY and bow.)

HIDESATO. My work here is done. I set out in search of adventure, and that's exactly what I got. It is time to return home.

DRAGON KING. You must allow me to show my gratitude.

HIDESATO. I did not kill you enemy in hopes of becoming rich.

DRAGON KING. Then I won't give you riches, simply a few humble gifts.

HIDESATO. Well, I guess that's okay.

THOMAS. The Dragon King clapped his hands and three palace guards marched out, each carrying a gift.

(Three PALACE GUARDS step forward with gifts.)

MARIA. The first carried bag of rice.

THOMAS. The second, a roll of silk.

MARIA. And the third carried a cooking pot.

DRAGON KING. Take these gifts as a symbol of my undying gratitude.

HIDESATO. Thank you.

THOMAS. Hidesato took the gifts and returned home.

MARIA. When he returned home, Hidesato decided to use the gifts he was given to cook himself a big meal.

(Production Note: The following should be mimed. No need to cook anything on stage.)

THOMAS. Hidesato poured the bag of rice into the cooking pot, but the bag remained full. No matter how much he poured, the bag never lost its bulk.

MARIA. And Hidesato found that the cooking pot was magical as well. Whatever he put in it was cooked to perfection without any need for fire to heat it.

THOMAS. The same went for the roll of silk. The more he pulled off, the more the roll stayed the same.

MARIA. Not having to ever spend money on rice, or silk, or firing, Hidesato became a wealthy man.

THOMAS. And the fame of his name spread all over the land.

MARIA. Tawara Toda, My Lord Bag of Rice.

THOMAS. The end.

MARIA. Such a good story.

THOMAS. So good.

(BERNARDO and ISABEL join MARIA and THOMAS center stage.)

ISABEL. I love that story, too.

BERNARDO. (With a sly smile:) The hero, he reminds you of me, eh?

ISABEL. (Bursts out laughing and then stops herself.) I'm sorry. Of course he does, my dear. You're my brave hero.

BERNARDO. And you're my precious centipede.

ISABEL. What was that?

BERNARDO. (To the audience:) Okay, well, I think it's time for us to take a short break. Our Players need water and a bite to eat. They've been working hard. If you don't have any coins to spare, maybe you have an apple or a sandwich.

(PLAYERS go into the audience and "take" donations.)

ISABEL. While we're on our short break, Jakob will provide the entertainment.

(Production Note: Feel free to let JAKOB do what ever you want: he can juggle [kittens?], or play the accordion, dance...it can be hilariously bad, or he can be very good. Whatever works for your group. Also, feel free to change JAKOB to one of the other PLAYERS, such as MARIA or BORIS.)

BERNARDO. Ladies and gentlemen, the Amazing Jakob.

(BERNARDO, ISABEL, and the PLAYERS exit. JAKOB begins his act.)

INTERMISSION

(ISABEL files back in with the PLAYERS. BERNARDO comes in last.)

BERNARDO. And we're back!

ISABEL. How was your nap?

BERNARDO. I was tired. You should buy a mule to carry this trunk if that's what you want.

ISABEL. Why would I buy a mule, when —

BERNARDO. — When you have me. Yes, yes, I get it.

ISABEL. I think we should shake things up a bit and share a story from a continent we haven't covered.

BERNARDO. Antarctica! Perfect choice, my love. (Starting into the story:) Well it all started with a dancing Penguin —

ISABEL. I was thinking somewhere a little warmer like...South America.

BERNARDO. But the dancing Penguin is so cute.

ISABEL. No dancing penguins, Bernardo.

BERNARDO. Fine. Don't listen to me. If you think these people don't want to hear about dancing penguins and a chorus line of baby seals, just ask them yourself. You'll see.

LOUD WOMAN. We don't care about penguins. We want romance...we want passion.

BERNARDO. Don't listen her. She doesn't know what she's talking about.

ISABEL. I think a love story is a wonderful idea. How about, *The Story of the Yara*? You remember that story, my love.

BERNARDO. Ahh, Yara, yes...I do remember...I remember that it has no cute dancing animals.

ISABEL. Bernardo!

BERNARDO. Fine, fine. If the people want passion and romance, then I can think of no better place to find it than in Brazil. Shall you and I tell this story, my love?

ISABEL. Certainly not. Knowing you, you'll try to add some juggling polar bears into the story... No, I think we'll let Natasha tell this story.

BERNARDO. Fine, fine. Natasha, Boris, come forward.

(NATASHA and BORIS step forward. BORIS grins widely.)

BORIS. I like romance.

ISABEL. Maybe not Boris for this story, huh?

BERNARDO. Good point. Boris, you're out. Peter, you're in.

(BORIS makes a sad face and steps back. PETER steps forward.)

PETER. Me? Well, I don't know. I mean I'm not very good at love stories.

ISABEL. You'll do fine.

NATASHA. Don't be scared.

(NATASHA winks at PETER who blushes.)

PETER. No...I'm...

NATASHA. I'll start then.

THE STORY OF THE YARA

NATASHA. It's Brazil. And it's hot. And everybody sleeps all day.

PETER. In a tiny town surrounded by a forest there was a young man...

(A PLAYER enters.)

ALONZO. My name is Alonzo.

NATASHA. And a young maiden...

(Another PLAYER enters.)

JULIA. My name is Julia.

ALONZO. Nice to meet you.

JULIA. Nice to meet you.

NATASHA. They fell in love right away.

PETER. Because they had to. Because this is a love story.

NATASHA. No. They fell in love because they were meant to. And every night Alonzo would find Julia and they would sit under the stars which looked so large and bright that they felt as if they could almost touch them.

JULIA. What did you do last night after you went home?

ALONZO. Just the same as I always do. It was too hot to sleep, so it was no use going to bed, so I went to the forest and bathed in one of those deep dark pools at the edge of the river. I've been going there for months, but last night a strange thing happened. I was taking my last plunge, when I heard—sometimes from one side, and sometimes from another—the sound of a voice singing more sweetly than any nightingale, but I could hear any words. I left the pool, got dressed, and searched everywhere, but nothing...anywhere. Isn't that strange?

(JULIA has become very frightened.)

JULIA. Alonzo, will you promise something?

ALONZO. What is it?

JULIA. I want you to promise... (She looks around before whispering:) ...never to bathe in those pools again.

ALONZO. But why not, queen of my soul; have I not gone there always, and nothing has harmed me, flower of my heart?

JULIA. No; but perhaps something will. If you will not promise I shall go mad with fright. Promise me.

ALONZO. Why, what's the matter? You look so pale! Tell me why you're so frightened?

JULIA. Did you not hear...the song?

ALONZO. So what?

JULIA. So after the song comes... HER...and after that— after that—

ALONZO. What?

JULIA. After that—death.

That's why you must promise me you'll never go there again; at least not until we're married.

ALONZO. And what difference will our marriage make?

JULIA. Oh, there will be no danger then; you can go to bathe as often as you want! Make it your second home. I don't care.

ALONZO. But tell me why you're so afraid?

PETER. You see, Julia knew something that Peter didn't...

NATASHA. She knew the song that Alonzo had heard was the (In a creepy voice:) *THE VOICE OF THE YARA*.

PETER. Julia also knew that the Yara was one of many terrible beings that lived in the forests and hid under the banks of the rivers, and could only be defeated by powerful charms.

NATASHA. And Julia also knew that the dreaded Yara preyed on young men on the eve of their marriage... Julia was a smart woman.

(JULIA starts to weep.)

ALONZO. Do not cry so, my angel, I will promise anything you please. Only let me see you smile again.

(ALONZO wipes away her tears.)

JULIA. Thank you for promising. But I know how strong the Yara is. So I want you to take this.

(JULIA takes out a shell and sings into it. She then gives it to ALONZO.)

JULIA. The moment you hear the Yara's voice put this to your ear, and you will hear my song instead.

NATASHA. Alonzo remained determined not to go to the pool for three long nights, but the Yara's song continued to ring in his ears and it grew louder with each day.

PETER. On the fourth night the attraction of the song grew so strong that neither the thought of Julia nor the promises he had made her could hold him back.

NATASHA. As he reached the pool, deep in the forest, the moon passed from behind a cloud and there she was: what appeared to be a beautiful golden-haired woman.

(A PLAYER enters as the YARA. She's dressed in all white, ethereal but beautiful.)

ALONZO. Hello...? Who — who are you?

PETER. The woman did not answer and Alonzo began to feel an awful fear take possession of him.

NATASHA. He tried to turn away from the woman, but it was no use; something stronger than himself compelled him to stay there.

(The YARA begins to move closer to ALONZO. She reaches for him with outstretched arms and a ghostly smile.)

(ALONZO tries to move but can't.)

ALONZO. Help! Help!... Julia!

PETER. Are you sure this is a love story? Seems more like a ghost story.

NATASHA. Wait for it, wait for it.

(ALONZO continues to struggle and the YARA is very close now. She begins to sing. ALONZO tries to cover his ears.)

JULIA. (In a whisper, from afar:) The shell, Alonzo, use the shell.

(ALONZO hears JULIA and struggles to reach for the shell. He's able to bring it to his ear. Now we hear JULIA sing. Her voice becomes stronger than YARA's.)

NATASHA. With the sound of Julia's voice singing in his ear, Alonzo found the strength to escape the powerful clutches of the Yara.

(After YARA has become weakened, she fades away. ALONZO is able to stand again and regains his strength.)

PETER. Now that's a love story.

(ALONZO and JULIA find each other and embrace.)

NATASHA. Oh, and they lived happily ever after. Can't forget that part.

PETER. And then every night on the eve of their wedding anniversary the Yara would wait outside their window for the perfect time to strike. But Alonzo and Julia's love never faded and the Yara was forever doomed to wander the river banks alone.

NATASHA. Okay, let's not overdo it.

PETER. I just thought...

NATASHA. I know. You're just a romantic.

(NATASHA winks at PETER, who blushes. BERNARDO and ISABEL step forward. BERNARDO wipes away tears.)

ISABEL. You're crying?

BERNARDO. I was just thinking how much better it could have been if there were dancing penguins in it.

ISABEL. Fine. You want a story with animals?

BERNARDO. Yes.

ISABEL. I can't give you penguins, but how about a pigeon?

BERNARDO. A pigeon, a crow, I'll take any bird at this point.

ISABEL. Then our next story comes from India. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Boris and Maria, who will present to you the story of Prince Half-A-Son.

(BORIS and MARIA step forward. BERNARDO and ISABEL step back.)

BORIS. (Big grin:) I like this story.

PRINCE HALF-A-SON

(Production note: The number of SIBLINGS, QUEENS, and mangos in this story is just a suggestion, feel free to use more if you wish. Also, feel free to have any of the PLAYERS play multiple roles. For example, KING 1 and KING 2 can be played by the same PLAYER.)

MARIA. Once upon a time there was a king who had no children.

BORIS. Hey! That's my line.

MARIA. You snooze, you lose. ...One day this king was sitting in his garden when an old faqir came strolling by. He saw how sad the king was so he asked him.

FAQIR. What troubles you my king?

KING 1. I have four wives but, alas, no children. It's a terrible fate for a king.

FAQIR. Is that all? That is easily remedied. Here, take this stick of mine, and throw it twice at that mango tree. At the first throw two mangoes will fall, at the second, two. So many sons you shall have, if you give each of your four Queens a mango apiece.

MARIA. (To BORIS:) Go on.

BORIS. I don't want to.

MARIA. Don't be a baby.

BORIS. I'm not a baby. You're a baby.

MARIA. Just tell the story.

BORIS. I forgot where we were.

MARIA. The king was so delighted that he took the stick and went off to the mango tree.

BORIS. Right... The king was so delighted that he took the stick and went off to the mango tree.

MARIA. Upon his first throw, two mangos fell, just as the faqir had said.

(Production Note: As with the arrows in "My Lord Bag of Rice," the thrown stick can be carried by one of the PLAYERS. The mango tree and the mangos, can be simple cardboard props held [and dropped] by another of the PLAYERS.)

BORIS. With the second throw, two more mangos fell.

MARIA. But the king was not satisfied, so he threw the stick a third time, hoping to get more children.

BORIS. But, to his surprise, the stick remained in the tree, and the four fallen mangoes flew back to their places, where they hung temptingly just out of reach.

(The PLAYER with the mango tree gathers the mangos up.)

MARIA. The king went back to the faqir and explained what he had done.

FAQIR. That comes of being greedy! Surely four sons are enough for anybody, and yet you were not content! However, I will give you one more chance. Go back to the tree; you will find the stick upon the ground; throw it as I bade you, and beware of disobedience, for if you do not heed me this time, you may lie in this garden with no children till doomsday for all I care!

MARIA. The king went back to the tree and found the stick. He threw it once more at the tree and four mangos fell to the ground. He quickly gathered the mangos and went to his palace to give them to his four wives.

(The KING hands the mangoes to THREE QUEENS.)

BORIS. But the youngest queen was not in the palace so the king put her mango in the cupboard to save it until she returned.

MARIA. The three queens ate their mangos with great relish.

(The YOUNGEST QUEEN steps forward and picks up a half-eaten mango.)

BORIS. When the youngest queen returned, she found her mango in the cupboard, half-eaten by a mouse.

MARIA. Not wanting to upset the king, the youngest queen ate the half-eaten mango.

BORIS. The months passed and eventually, all the queens bore a child.

(The QUEENS mime giving birth and then exit behind the flat/banner.)

But when the youngest queen gave birth, her child was different from the rest.

MARIA. He had one eye, one ear, one arm, one leg; in fact, looked at sideways, he was as handsome a young prince as you would wish to see, but front ways it was as plain as day that he was only half-a-prince.

(HALF-A-SON steps from behind the flat/banner.)

(Production Note: This should be relatively simple – dressed half in black, or maybe half of him is covered by a board of some sort.)

BORIS. That was a pretty boring story.

MARIA. That's not the end of the story.

BORIS. Oh...right.

MARIA. Half-a-son grew up in the palace with the other children, but they mocked him and made fun of him. Even the other queens played cruel jokes on the poor boy.

BORIS. One day, all of the children went off to play and their mother packed sweets for them to eat.

MARIA. But poor Half-a-son didn't have any sweets and the other children refused to share.

BORIS. When the children came across a melon field, they all wanted to eat the ripe fruit. But the field was fenced off and the only one who could fit through the gate was Half-a-son.

HALF-A-SON. (Eating melons:) These sure are the best melons I have ever tasted.

SIBLING 1. Throw some to us.

SIBLING 2. Open the gate from the inside so that we can come in.

SIBLING 3. Please, Half-a-son, share the melons with us.

MARIA. But Half-a-son did not forget how his brothers and sisters would not share their sweets with him, so he threw them rotten and sour melons.

SIBLING 1. This melon has worms.

HALF-A-SON. That's odd, mine are perfectly ripe.

SIBLING 2. This melon is sour.

HALF-A-SON. Strange. Mine are perfectly sweet.

SIBLING 3. We're gonna get you, Half-a-son.

BORIS. Full from the melons, Half-a-son left the field and went off to a well to fetch a drink.

MARIA. But the other children were still mad at Half-a-son for not sharing the melons, so when he went to a well, they pushed him in.

(HALF-A-SON *mimes falling into a well.*)

BORIS. Half-a-son soon found out that he wasn't the only creature at the bottom of the well.

MARIA. That well was the hiding place for three very strange and powerful creatures.

BORIS. A demon, a pigeon and a snake.

MARIA. Poor Half-a-son hid along the wall of the well and listened in on these strange creatures.

PIGEON. Well there Demon, why do you hide at the bottom of this well?

DEMON. I am a wanted man. I've put a spell on a young princess that makes her sick.

SNAKE. Why would you do such a thing?

DEMON. The princess's father once sold me a lame camel.

PIGEON. And?

DEMON. And nothing.

SNAKE. That seems a bit uneven.

DEMON. Well, I am a demon, aren't I?

PIGEON. I guess that's where we get the expression, never sell a lame camel to a demon.

DEMON. You got that right.

PIGEON. Why are you down here snake?

SNAKE. This is where I hide my treasures.

PIGEON. What treasures?

(SNAKE *reveals a chest of gold and jewels – or maybe just some money.*)

DEMON. Where did a snake like you get such treasures?

SNAKE. I was once a great king with land as far as the eye can see.

PIGEON. What happened?

SNAKE. I sold a lame camel to a demon.

DEMON. Don't look at me. I just make people sick.

SNAKE. For seventy years I must remain a snake, until I am finally made back into a human.

PIGEON. How much longer do you have?

SNAKE. Twelve years, six months, fourteen days and nine minutes.

DEMON. And what about you, Pigeon? Why are you in this well?

PIGEON. To store my dropping, of course.

SNAKE. Your what?

PIGEON. My droppings.

DEMON. That explains the smell.

PIGEON. I'll have you know that my droppings have the power to heal anyone who eats them.

(PIGEON shows the droppings [probably some type of candy].)

MARIA. Can I just interrupt for a minute? Did that pigeon just say what I think he said?

BORIS. He said anyone who eats his droppings will be healed. Wait, what are droppings?

MARIA. Never mind.

SNAKE. So why do you keep your droppings here?

PIGEON. The damp air keeps them fresh.

DEMON. I may be a demon, but that's disgusting.

MARIA. Night fell and morning came, and the pigeon, the demon and the snake left the well and went off to hunt and play.

BORIS. And none of them ever saw Half-a-son, who clung to the wall of the well.

MARIA. It wasn't long before a camel-driver came along and lowered a bucket on a rope to fetch some water from the well.

BORIS. Half-a-son grabbed onto the bucket, and was pulled out of the well.

(HALF-A-SON grabs the treasure and the, umm, droppings and mimes climbing out of the well. He puts the droppings in his pocket and hides the treasure behind the flat/banner.)

MARIA. Half-a-son soon made his way to the neighboring city where he was told that the princess was sick and anyone who cured her would be given her hand in marriage and would inherit half the kingdom.

BORIS. Half-a-son went to the king and said...

HALF-A-SON. I can cure your daughter.

KING 2. How can you cure my daughter, you aren't even a full person?

HALF-A-SON. I may only be half, but I have the power of healing.

KING 2. I've tried everything else, you can go to my daughter, but if you fail I will cut off your head.

BORIS. With that, Half-a-son went to the princess and fed her the pigeons dropping, which he had taken from the well.

(HALF-A-SON gives the droppings/candy to the PRINCESS who gives them a weird look before eating them.)

MARIA. That's disgusting. But, nevertheless, the princess was cured and plans were immediately made for the wedding.

BORIS. News of this spread around the neighboring lands and it wasn't long before Half-a-sons siblings found out. Filled with jealousy, the three siblings went to the king to try and put a stop to the wedding.

SIBLING 1. King, oh king, you can't let your daughter marry this half-a-son.

SIBLING 2. Your kingdom will become a laughing stock.

SIBLING 3. Their children will be deformed.

SIBLING 1. Your enemies will think you are weak.

SIBLING 2. Your kingdom will come into ruin.

SIBLING 3. And besides, this half-a-son is the child of peasants, not worthy of your princess.

BORIS. The king took their advice and banished Half-a-son from his kingdom.

MARIA. But Half-a-son pleaded to the king to allow him one day to prove his worth. He asked for nothing more than a mule and a cart.

BORIS. The King thought some more and decided to give Half-a-son the mule and the cart and one day to prove his worth.

(Production Note: The mule and cart can be puppets or toys that HALF-A-SON carries.)

MARIA. Half-a-son led the mule to the well where he took the Snake's treasures and loaded up the cart.

BORIS. When he returned to the city, Half-a-son presented the gold and jewels to the king and told him the story of how he became half-a-son and how his three siblings had been so cruel. The king announced that the wedding would go on that night.

MARIA. And the three siblings left the city in shame, filled with rage and jealousy. Their envy led them to the well, and they decided to throw themselves in, in hopes of finding treasure for themselves.

BORIS. But they found no treasure, and soon it was night and the demon, the pigeon and the snake returned to the well.

PIGEON. Someone has stolen my droppings!

SNAKE. Forget your droppings, someone has stolen my treasure.

DEMON. I smell the stench of humans.

MARIA. And the demon, the pigeon and the snake found the three siblings.

BORIS. The demon put a curse on the three siblings, turning them all into lame camels.

SNAKE. (To DEMON:) I thought you said you could only make people sick.

DEMON. I'm a demon. I lied.

MARIA. And the three siblings lived the rest of their days as lame camels.

BORIS. The end...right?

MARIA. Yes.

(BERNARDO and ISABEL step to center stage.)

BERNARDO. Fascinating story.

ISABEL. I always wondered what happened to Half-A-Son.

BERNARDO. I like to think he got married and inherited half of the kingdom.

ISABEL. And he had little half-children.

BERNARDO. And lived happily ever *halfter*.

ISABEL. I know you like that joke so I won't say anything.

BERNARDO. You are very kind. (Turns to the CROWD:) So, ladies and gentlemen, what story should we tell next?

(A YOUNG BOY steps forward.)

YOUNG BOY. All of your stories are boring.

BERNARDO. Excuse me? Did you say... Did he just say... What did you say?

YOUNG BOY. I said, 'Your stories are boring.' There's no car chases, no explosions, no robots.

BERNARDO. Robots?

YOUNG BOY. Yeah, robots and space aliens fighting on Mars. You should tell stories like that. And maybe add some special effects.

BERNARDO. You want special effects?

YOUNG BOY. Yeah.

BERNARDO. And explosions?

YOUNG BOY. And aliens.

BERNARDO. I got a better idea.

YOUNG BOY. I doubt it.

BERNARDO. How about we tell the story of a young boy. A boy much like yourself...no manners at all.

YOUNG BOY. Hey!

BERNARDO. For our next story, we shall travel back to the Americas, to the land of the Arapaho people.

ISABEL. "The Little Owl Boy"?

BERNARDO. You got it.

YOUNG BOY. That sounds weird.

BERNARDO. I think you'll like it. Thomas. Illiana. Please come forward.

(THOMAS and ILLIANA come forward. BERNARDO and ISABEL step back.)

THOMAS. Do you want to start?

ILLIANA. No, please, you can start.

THOMAS. I insist.

ILLIANA. I insist more.

(BERNARDO steps forward again.)

BERNARDO. Will one of you just start already.

(BERNARDO steps back again.)

THE LITTLE OWL BOY

THOMAS **and** ILLIANA. Long ago, out on —

(Pause. ILLIANA and THOMAS look at each other, each one waiting for the other to speak. Finally, ILLIANA begins to speak.)

ILLIANA. Long ago, out on the wide prairie, there was an Indian camp, and on the edge of the camp was a tepee, in which lived a man, with his wife and only boy.

THOMAS. Now the boy was quite misbehaved, and used to shout at his mother and refuse to gather wood and carry water from the spring.

ILLIANA. His mother scolded and pleaded, but all to no purpose, for the boy was worse than before.

THOMAS. One night, when every one in the camp was asleep, the bad boy began to shout:

BOY. La, la, la! La, la, la!

(The MOTHER barges in.)

MOTHER. Why are you shouting?

BOY. No reason.

MOTHER. If you do not stop, I will throw you out to Big Owl Owner-of-Bag, who hunts all night for naughty boys.

ILLIANA. Hold on. Did she say "Big Owl Owner-of-Bag"? My mother used to threaten me with that.

THOMAS. Big Owl Owner-of-Bag is the worst.

ILLIANA. I know, right?

THOMAS. Alas, the mother's threats did not work on the boy.

BOY. (Louder:) La, la, la! La, la, la!

MOTHER. All right! That's it! Big Owl, here is this foolish boy!

(The BOY just laughs, as his MOTHER throws him out of the tepee into the dark [off-stage].)

BOY. Ha! Big Owl Owner-of-Bag. There's no such thing!

(A giant owl, with a large bag stands beside him.)

BIG OWL. Good evening.

(The BOY turns around to the BIG OWL and screams. The BIG OWL can be wearing a mask, maybe some feathers. The BIG OWL throws a bag over the BOY and flies [or walks] away. The MOTHER listens at the door of the tepee, and hearing nothing shrugs her shoulders. The FATHER enters, rubbing his eyes.)

FATHER. What's all the commotion?

MOTHER. You never try to make him stop, even though he wakes every one in the camp. Well, this will teach him a good lesson.

FATHER. Who?

MOTHER. Our son!

FATHER. Now what did you do with him?

MOTHER. I gave him over to Big Owl Owner-of-Bag.

FATHER. Oh that old trick?

MOTHER. It's not a trick. For all we know, the Big Owl has already taken him away.

(The FATHER just yawns.)

FATHER. Alright. Good night.

(The MOTHER begins to pace.)

ILLIANA. The mother knew Big Owl, Owner-of-Bag was real, so she could not sleep, nor get the boy out of her mind.

(The MOTHER stands impatiently and stomps her foot.)

THOMAS. When daylight came, she hurried out, but did not see him anywhere. Then she rushed through the camp, from tepee to tepee, asking:

MOTHER. Have you seen my boy?

VILLAGER 1. No.

(Then to another VILLAGER:)

MOTHER. What about an owl? Have you seen a giant owl?

VILLAGER 2. A giant owl?

MOTHER. He'd be carrying a large bag with a boy in it.

VILLAGER 2. Are you okay lady?

ILLIANA. Days and weeks passed by, and the boy did not come back, so his mother grieved very much. At last she decided that she would go and search for him the world over.

THOMAS. But before she started, she sat down in her tepee, and made some magic garments.

ILLIANA. As is natural to do in times of grief.

(The MOTHER lays out each item as she describes it. It's not necessary for these pieces to match exactly with what is described. It can basically be a pile of clothes that loosely resemble the items.)

MOTHER. Two pairs of embroidered moccasins, trimmed beautifully with Porcupine quills... One pair of woman's leggings... One shirt ornamented with scalp locks. Three robes: one buffalo robe with colored fringe; another robe with pictures of eagles in each corner; and a shadow robe beautiful to behold. All decorated with porcupine quills dyed blue, green, and yellow.

FATHER. (Who has been watching.) Very nice. Why don't you try collecting some firewood?

(The MOTHER wraps the items in a bundle, and heads out the tepee.)

MOTHER. Farewell, I am going to find our dear child.

FATHER. Good luck. Don't forget the firewood.

THOMAS. So she started off at a steady pace, over prairie and through ravine, sorrowful and lonely.

ILLIANA. Soon enough she came in sight of a great river with a tepee standing by itself upon the bank.

(Out of the tepee runs the boy, now with wings like an Owl's.)

BOY. Mother!

MOTHER. Son!

(They embrace.)

MOTHER. Where did you get these wings?

BOY. I am Little Owl Boy now. Come in quickly, Mother, before Big Owl Owner-of-Bag gets home. He has gone after Buffalo meat.

MOTHER. We must leave then.

BOY. I know you've come to take me away, but Big Owl is very fierce, and he'll try and eat you.

MOTHER. Well that doesn't sound very nice.

BOY. Lie down here under this robe, so that he cannot see you when he comes.

BIG OWL. (From a distance:) Little Owl Boy! Little Owl Boy! Hoot! Hoot!

BOY. Quick, Mother, get under this robe! Don't you hear him coming?

(The MOTHER, with her bundle, hides under the robe, and the BOY covers her over, and spreads out some sticks on top.)

BIG OWL. (Entering:) Hoot! Hoot! My boy, I think your mother must be here, for I smell her footprints.

BOY. I don't know how you smell footprints, but she isn't here.

BIG OWL. I want you to take my bag, and go to the ravine and kill ten Buffalo for me. Open the bag, and they will walk right in.

BOY. Very well, but see that you do not touch my sticks while I'm gone. If you do, I will kill you.

BIG OWL. I sure hope you grow out of this violent phase.

ILLIANA. So the little Owl Boy flew away to the ravine, and shot ten nice fat Buffalo.

(Production Note: This can happen behind the flat/banner if you choose.)

THOMAS. However, he did not let them walk into the bag, but left them lying on the ground, and flew back to the tepee.

BIG OWL. Hoot! Hoot! My boy, where are the Buffalo?

BOY. I left them in the ravine.

BIG OWL. Why didn't you just bring them back here? I gave you the magic bag and everything.

BOY. They're too heavy for me.

BIG OWL. I do think your mother must surely be here, for I smell her robes.

BOY. Can't you just get the buffalo already, I'm getting hungry.

BIG OWL. Okay, but when I get back I know a little owl boy who's going to get a serious attitude adjustment.

BOY. Gee, I wonder who it could be.

(The BIG OWL takes the bag and leaves. The MOTHER comes out from under the robes.)

BOY. All clear.

MOTHER. Keep watch.

(The MOTHER unties her bundle, and takes out the two pairs of moccasins. She lays one pair inside the tepee, and the other before the entrance.)

BOY. What are you doing?

MOTHER. Haven't you ever seen magic moccasins before?

BOY. No.

MOTHER. Well, now you have. Big Owl won't be able to resist their powers of distraction.

(The MOTHER takes the BOY by the hands and runs off. They carefully watch around a corner as the BIG OWL returns.)

BIG OWL. Little Owl Boy! Little Owl Boy! Hoot! Hoot!

(No answer.)

BIG OWL. Little Owl Boy? I got the buffalo. I thought you were hungry.

(The BIG OWL sniffs in the air.)

BIG OWL. They're gone. I knew his mother was here! I'll catch up to them in no time.

(As the BIG OWL turns to leave he sees the magic moccasins.)

BIG OWL. Ah! Oh, no, magic moccasins.

ILLIANA. So before the Big Owl left the tepee he was forced to walk around each pair of moccasins and count every porcupine quill.

THOMAS. Those are the rules.

(The BIG OWL walks around the moccasins three times, and has to catch his balance.)

BIG OWL. Hoot! Hoot! Here I come. Not going to let a couple of moccasins stop me.

BOY. (To his MOTHER:) Oh, no, here he comes.

MOTHER. Don't worry, son. I've also got magic leggings.

BOY. If you say so.

(The MOTHER lays them down and then runs off with the BOY. BIG OWL comes to the leggings.)

BIG OWL. Not magic leggings, too! What will they think of next?

(The BIG OWL runs around the leggings three times.)

BIG OWL. (A little dizzy this time:) Hoot!... Hoot!...

MOTHER. Oh, forget it, let me just put all my magic garments down.

(The MOTHER lays down all the items from her bundle and then runs off with the BOY. The BIG OWL runs around the pile of garments, saying the name of each item and getting dizzier and slower and eventually sick.)

BIG OWL. The shirt ornamented with scalp locks... Hoot! Hoot... Buffalo robe with colored fringe... Hoot! Hoot...a robe with pictures of Eagles in the four corners...very nice... Hoot... Hoot...

(The BIG OWL now staggers round and round, running out of steam, and is so weak he no longer cry, "Hoot! Hoot!" The MOTHER throws in the final robe.)

MOTHER. This should finish him.

(The MOTHER and BOY run off, but watch from a distance, as the BIG OWL, flutters his wings and staggers along.)

BIG OWL. The shadow robe so beautiful to see...

(The BIG OWL begins to go collapses.)

ILLIANA. He was so dizzy and wild that he fell down, and burst into so many pieces that they could never be gathered together again.

BIG OWL. Ummm...

THOMAS. Or let's say he just went home and never bothered anyone again.

BIG OWL. Much better.

(The BIG OWL leaves, head in his hands [wings]. The MOTHER and BOY run back to be greeted by VILLAGERS and the FATHER. The VILLAGERS embrace them and shout: "Welcome back! Good job! Thanks for killing the giant owl!", etc...)

FATHER. (To the MOTHER:) No firewood?

(The FATHER smiles, then hugs the MOTHER and BOY.)

MOTHER. You can get rid of these now I think.

(The MOTHER takes off the BOY's wings and throws them away.)

FATHER. What are you doing! We can use those for kindling.

ILLIANA. And from then on, the Boy was always glad to bring in the firewood and carry water from the spring for his mother.

THOMAS. And he never again, in the middle of the night, cried, "La, la, la!"

ILLIANA. The end.

(BERNARDO and ISABEL step forward again.)

BERNARDO. Wonderful! Just wonderful. What did you think about that story, kid?

YOUNG BOY. It was okay.

BERNARDO. Maybe next time we tell it, we'll add an explosion, huh?

YOUNG BOY. Cool.

BERNARDO. Okay, well it's almost time for us to be moving on... I said we're going to be leaving soon... Come on people, at least pretend to be sad.

ISABEL. But we have time for one more story.

BERNARDO. Now they look sad.

ISABEL. What story shall we do?

BERNARDO. I think you should pick.

ISABEL. How about...

(ISABEL whispers into BERNARDO's ear.)

BERNARDO. You chose my favorite story. How sweet.

ISABEL. Our last stop on this journey around the world will be in Ireland to hear the story of...a story-teller.

BERNARDO. Ladies and gentlemen, the amazing Isabel and I present to you, "The Story-Teller at Fault."

THE STORY-TELLER AT FAULT

ISABEL. In the land of Leinster there once was a king who loved to hear stories. So much so that he hired a story-teller to tell him a new story every night before bed.

BERNARDO. This story-teller was the best there was and for years and years, he never failed at coming up with a new story for the king.

ISABEL. The years passed and the story-teller made quite a living spinning his tales for the king.

BERNARDO. He had his own land with his own horse and his own dogs. He lived a happy life, he and his wife, and every morning before breakfast, he would go into his garden to think up a story for that night.

(STORY-TELLER steps forward and sits.)

STORY-TELLER. What a lovely day it is today, for sure. The birds are singing. The smell of the echoing green is in the air. A finer day, I have not seen. What will be the story for this fine day?

(The STORY-TELLER takes on a "thinking pose." He adjusts and takes on another "thinking pose." He adjusts again and again until he finally stands up.)

STORY-TELLER. Blast this stinking day. I've got no story. Not a single tale to spin on this wretched day.

(The STORY-TELLER storms off into his home where his WIFE is waiting at the breakfast table.)

WIFE. Why such a long face on such a fine day, my husband?

STORY-TELLER. I'm doomed.

WIFE. Doomed he says. What's dooming you on this day?

STORY-TELLER. I've got no story for the king tonight.

WIFE. Eat up your breakfast and something will come. How are you to think with your stomach grumbling like that?

STORY-TELLER. Don't you see? I've never come to breakfast without a story. I'm doomed I tell ye.

WIFE. (Pointing outside to the road:) Not as doomed as that poor fella.

STORY-TELLER. (Looking outside:) Now, who be that?

WIFE. Looks like an old beggar man. We should bring him some breakfast.

STORY-TELLER. So be it.

(The STORY-TELLER and his WIFE walk to road where the BEGGAR MAN is sitting.)

STORY-TELLER. Who are you, my good man?

BEGGAR MAN. Oh, then, 'tis little matter who I am. I'm a poor, old, lame, decrepit, miserable creature, sitting down here to rest awhile.

WIFE. Will you have some breakfast?

BEGGAR MAN. None for me, if you please. What I'm really in need of is someone to wager with.

STORY-TELLER. What has a poor old man like you to wager with?

BEGGAR MAN. Why, I have one hundred gold pieces in this leather purse.

WIFE. Play with him, why don't ya. And perhaps you'll have something to tell the king in the evening.

BERNARDO. On his wife's insistence, the Story-Teller and the Beggar Man played a game of dice.

(The STORY-TELLER and the BEGGAR MAN roll some dice.)

ISABEL. And wouldn't you know it, the old Beggar Man won and before long the Story-Teller lost every penny of his money.

STORY-TELLER. A fine day indeed! Now I'm storyless and penniless.

BEGGAR MAN. Will you play again?

STORY-TELLER. Don't be a fool, old man. You've already taken all my money.

BEGGAR MAN. Haven't you horses and hounds?

STORY-TELLER. Well, what of them!

BEGGAR MAN. I'll stake all the money I have against thine.

ISABEL. So the two men played again.

(The STORY-TELLER and the BEGGAR MAN roll dice again.)

BERNARDO. And the old Beggar Man won again.

BEGGAR MAN. Will you play again?

STORY-TELLER. Are you making sport of me, man; what else have I to stake?

BEGGAR MAN. I'll stake all my winnings against your wife.

WIFE. Accept his offer. This is the third time, and who knows what luck you may have? You'll surely win now.

ISABEL. So the old men played again.

(The STORY-TELLER and the BEGGAR MAN roll the dice.)

BERNARDO. You can probably guess what happened. And no sooner had the Story-Teller lost than to his sorrow and surprise, his wife went and sat down near the ugly old beggar.

STORY-TELLER. (To his WIFE:) So it's as easy as that, is it.

WIFE. He won fair and square.

BEGGAR MAN. Have you anything else to wager?

STORY-TELLER. I have not.

BEGGAR MAN. I'll stake the whole now, wife and all, against your own self.

(The STORY-TELLER and the BEGGAR MAN roll the dice once more.)

ISABEL. We don't even have to say it, do we?

BERNARDO. He lost.

STORY-TELLER. You've won my whole self, now what do you want with me?

ISABEL. And with that, the Beggar Man waved his wand and he and the Story-Teller were whisked away to the castle of King Leinster.

(The BEGGAR MAN and the STORY-TELLER rush off to the other side of the stage.)

BERNARDO. The Beggar Man waited by the castle door, but the Story-Teller was made invisible, able to see all, but not be seen himself.

(Production note: The STORY-TELLER can use a white sheet, or something similar to be made 'invisible.' Throughout the following section the 'invisible' STORY-TELLER can be off to the side, 'observing'.)

(BEGGAR MAN knocks on the castle door. The doors open and BEGGAR MAN and the 'invisible' STORY-TELLER enter the castle. Sitting at the throne is LEINSTER.)

LEINSTER. Who are you? What do you want?

BEGGAR MAN.

I come from the outmost stream of earth,
From the glens where the white swans glide,
A night in Islay, a night in Man,
A night on the cold hillside.

LEINSTER. Come again?

BEGGAR MAN. Just an old traveler, come to entertain.

LEINSTER. Can you tell stories? My Story-Teller has gone missing and I need my nightly story.

BEGGAR MAN. I can't tell a story, but I can play the sweetest music your ears have ever heard.

LEINSTER. I have musicians, the finest in the land. I've no need for more music. A story is what I need.

BEGGAR MAN. The finest in the land you say? Make them play and let me be the judge.

LEINSTER. If you wish.

(LEINSTER makes a gesture and the BAND steps forward and begins to play. They should either be very good, or completely terrible. Feel free to use any type of instruments.)

BEGGAR MAN. Did you ever, O king, hear a cat purring over a bowl of broth, or the buzzing of beetles in the twilight, or a shrill tongued old woman scolding your head off?

LEINSTER. I certainly have.

BEGGAR MAN. More melodious to me were the worst of these sounds than the sweetest harping of thy musicians.

ISABEL. This made the musicians very mad and they picked up their instruments and charged at the Beggar Man.

BERNARDO. But the Beggar Man waved his wand and the musicians began to attack each other.

(The BAND members attack each other with their instruments.)

ISABEL. The king became furious and he sent for his guards.

LEINSTER. Guards, have this old man locked up.

(GUARDS enter and drag the BEGGAR MAN off behind the flat/banner. LEINSTER exits. BEGGAR MAN comes from behind the flat and sits on the King's throne.)

BERNARDO. But when the guards came back, they found the old Beggar Man sitting on the king's throne.

GUARD 1. Didn't we just lock you up?

BEGGAR MAN. You surely did not.

GUARD 2. Then who did we lock up?

BEGGAR MAN. I believe it was the King's brother.

GUARD 1. The King's brother?

BEGGAR MAN. And I've hidden the keys to his chains.

GUARD 2. We'll have to use extra chains on this one.

(The GUARDS once again seize the BEGGAR MAN and drag him off behind the flat. Quickly, BEGGAR MAN returns, followed by the GUARDS.)

ISABEL. Bust just as the first time, when the guards returned to the hall, the old Beggar Man was sitting again on the King's throne.

GUARD 1. I'm certain we locked you up that time.

GUARD 2. And with twice the chains.

BEGGAR MAN. And here I am, once again upon the throne.

GUARD 1. Well then, who'd we lock up this time?

BEGGAR MAN. I believe it was the Queen,

GUARD 2. The Queen?

BEGGAR MAN. And I've hidden the keys to her chains.

GUARD 1. The King'll have our heads for this one.

BEGGAR MAN. Do you wish to lock me up once more?

GUARD 2. Leave us be.

GUARD 1. You've given us enough trouble for one evening.

BEGGAR MAN. Now you're reasonable and since you've given up trying to lock up a stranger because he finds fault with your music, I don't mind telling you that if you go back to the dungeon you'll find your friends unchained and content as can be.

(The GUARDS go behind the flat.)

ISABEL. And again, the Beggar Man vanished.

(The BEGGAR MAN rushes to the other side of the stage, grabbing the STORY-TELLER on his way.)

BERNARDO. Taking with him the Story-Teller.

ISABEL. Back to the spot where the two men first met.

BERNARDO. Where his wife was waiting with the horse and the hounds.

(The BEGGAR MAN removes the 'invisible' sheet from the STORY-TELLER.)

BEGGAR MAN. (To the STORY-TELLER:) Now, I'll torment you no longer. There's your carriage and your horses, and your money and your wife; do what you please with them.

STORY-TELLER. For my horses and my house and my hounds, I thank you; but my wife and my money you may keep.

BEGGAR MAN. No, I want neither, and as for your wife, don't think ill of her for what she did, she couldn't help it.

STORY-TELLER. Not help it! Not help casting me off for the sake of a beggarly old...

BEGGAR MAN. I'm not as beggarly or as old as ye think. I am Angus of the Bruff; many a good story you've told of me to the King of Leinster. This morning my magic told me the difficulty you were in, and I made up my mind to get you out of it. As for your wife there, the power that changed your body changed her mind. Forget and forgive as man and wife should do, and now you have a story for the King of Leinster when he calls for one.

BERNARDO. And with that, the old Beggar Man disappeared.

(The BEGGAR MAN rushes off, or he can put the sheet over himself.)

ISABEL. And that evening, our brave Story-Teller went to the king and told him his tale of old Angus of the Bruff.

BERNARDO. And the king laughed for so long that he couldn't go to sleep at all.

ISABEL. And the king told the Story-Teller never to trouble for fresh stories.

BERNARDO. Every night as long as he lived he listened again and he laughed afresh at the tale of the old Beggar Man. The end.

ISABEL. I really like that story.

BERNARDO. Me too.

ISABEL. You do?

BERNARDO. Of course I do.

ISABEL. So...we agree.

BERNARDO. I guess we do.

(ISABEL gives BERNARDO a kiss on the cheek. BERNARDO smiles and blushes.)

BERNARDO. My work here is done.

ISABEL. What do you mean *your* work??

BERNARDO. I mean my work. What do you mean?

ISABEL. I mean we all know who did the heavy lifting.

BERNARDO. You are right, of course, my dear. — A hand for our players!

(The PLAYERS come out and bow. The CROWD applauds.)

ISABEL. Thank you. Thank you. You are very kind.

(The PLAYERS take down the flat/banner and carry the trunk away. They exit waving and blowing kisses. The CROWD slowly exits.)

BERNARDO. Good night.

ISABEL. Safe travels.

BERNARDO. Remember us always.

(And they're gone. A single coin remains. A PLAYER runs back on, grabs it, winks and runs off.)

(Lights out.)

End of Play

For Perusal Purposes Only