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ONE PLUM

by

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February 15, 2010

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There came a time when the risk to remain tight
in the bud was more painful than the risk it took
to blossom.

Anais Nin

CHARACTERS

MARY: In her 30's.

ADAM: In his 30's. MARY'S husband.

THE WAY OF THE WILD: A shifting composite non-gendered force rather than a character, fulfilled by a minimum of 5-6 actors/dancers/performers, 3 female and 2 male, or 4 female and 2 male actors. The role amplifies through sound and movement the process/nature of weeds, insects, animals, the elements, and a plum tree as well as human and AUDIENCE "nature." Multiple actors fulfilling the role of WAY OF THE WILD will allow for "the spirit of the hive" or idea of a "super-organism" to be present in the work. The actions should illustrate text only obliquely or energetically rather than striving for realism. The AUDIENCE behavior is characterized as belonging to the domain of WAY OF THE WILD. The actors inhabiting all these roles may fluctuate, and function as constituent parts of each life form. The play will begin and end with the weeds, those of which were before us and will be here after us.

CHARACTER BREAKDOWN

All roles are non-specific with regards to ethnicity or body-type, but the roles should preferably be balanced to represent ethnic diversity so that "nature's" own creative variety is represented.

Total cast: 8 actors will be optimal, 3 male actors and 5 female actors

1 female actor, 30-40 years of age

1 female actor, 20-25 years of age

2 female actors-40-50 years of age

1 female actor, 60-70 years of age

1 male actor, 30-40 years of age

2 male actors, 40-60 years of age (If a cast of 7 is used, only 1 male actor, 40-60 will be needed.)

SETTING

The home and backyard of MARY and ADAM. The modular stage platform is raised so that the audience gaze rests fifteen inches above the platform, and so that the audience may take in the view beneath as it occurs to them to look. The yard platform is broken into units that can be removed as the world of insects or humans is disturbed or rearranged. Three benches were used in workshop as mobile set pieces in a variety of scenes: WAY OF THE WILD, enacting Weeds, positioned themselves beneath, hands, arms, feet appearing above. At another point benches were up-ended by the beetles, signaling a disturbance in the yard, and replaced when calm was restored. The benches also became trees when rested on their ends. The platform should have irregular edges, indicating a single yard broken away. This is open to interpretation. It might be a jigsaw puzzle or more rough, organic cross-section of earth. Audience seating may fit around its edges, which might be covered with sod so that audience views each other from the neck up across the lawn, and smells the dirt and grass, and so there is a subterranean effect. Somewhere in the platform is an opening, so the characters may access the area below the stage platform, and enter and exit. There is the shadow of a plum tree.

SCENES:

Hot Summer

Short Autumn

Warm Winter

Early Spring

Hot Summer

Autumn

MARY and ADAM are distracted from listening and looking for so long. Their senses are stretched. They are preoccupied. There are long delays between responses, as though ADAM and MARY barely catch the ball before it touches the ground. Sometimes they miss and the other person has already moved on. It is possible they only have a vague recollection of what has been said since it was so long before.

*The insects are on alert,
communicating to each
other, each with their
distinct movements and
sounds, positioning.*

*The beetles encounter
obstacles, a clod of dirt,
another insect. Nothing
impedes them in their
determination.*

*Another season announces
itself.*

HOT SUMMER

*MARY has returned
from work.*

*In the shadow of the
plum tree, MARY
removes her dress,
crumpling it into a ball.
She tosses it into a far
corner of the yard. She
pulls on a pair of pants
and puts on her
gardening gloves.*

*The eyes of THE WILD,
peer out from above and
below.*

*MARY yanks at some
Weeds.*

*Weeds reach into the
space above, growing.
As MARY touches the
Weeds they disappear
below.*

Again!

Another yank.

*More Weeds appear from
below.*

How?

Another yank.

*With each yank,
The weeds grow in
abundance despite
MARY'S efforts to
eradicate them.*

A hard yank.

That's what.

Over the line.

Go.

*The weeds are introduced.
Rough non-melodic tones,
almost indecipherable.*

Bristly mallow.
 Buttonweed.
 Pennywort.
 Lespedeza.
 Plantain.
 Nettle.
 Wild violet.
 Clover!

*Each time MARY pulls
 one, another weed
 replaces it.*

You'll take over.

You're choking the
 others.

*Mary pulls hard and
 falls backward.*

*The weeds claim their
 ground solidly.*

*MARY pulls more
 Weeds with more vigor.*

Milkweed!

*Creatures are disturbed. A
 fluttering. Flashes of
 color. Bright sounds of
 names flash, dart and
 swirl sporadically.*

*These are the exclusive
 messenger- pollinators.
 Butterflies! Moths.*

Swallowtails...
 Whites...
 Sulfurs... monarchs...
 pearly crescent-spot...
 spring azure...
 gray hairstreak.

Oh!
MARY yanks.

*The weeds claim their
 ground, asserting their
 names in flat nonmelodic
 tones, barely
 decipherable.*

Aster!

Brambles. Stickers.
 Prickly. Burrs. Out.

MARY yanks.

*More creatures are
 disturbed. Flashes of
 color. Names burst in
 sporadic, bright tones.
 Butterflies. Moths.*

Whites... sulfurs... pearly
 crescent-spot ...
 Caterpillar...
 checkered skipper...
 goldenrod sulfurs...
 monarch...
 gray hairstreak...
 giant swallowtail...

*MARY yanks somewhat
 less energetically.*

*More weeds emerge from
below replacing pulled
weeds. A flat, unmelodic
assertion.*

Clover!

*More creatures are
disturbed. Colors. Names
flash in bright tones.
Butterflies and moths.*

Tiger swallowtail... black
swallowtail... sulfurs...
Caterpillars...
gray hairstreak...
silver-spotted
skipper...
checkered skipper...

*MARY slumps, takes off
her gloves and gives up.*

*MARY wipes her
forehead and lies in the
grass under the tree.*

*MARY recalls names she
has memorized.*

Amber. Astrid?
Aurora...

*MARY and ADAM sleep,
one leg touching.
Accidentally.*

*Mary mumbles from
sleep.*

No.

She's mumbling./She's
turning. This way. Now
the other./Is she asleep
or is she awake.

*After a time, it is
Morning. After a time,
ADAM rises and grooms
for work. His
movements resemble an
insect's. ADAM is cold.*

*ADAM pulls his pants
back on. He struggles
with his shoes, lying on
his back. Adam tries to
pull a sweater over his
head but it becomes
stuck.*

*ADAM bends and bends,
but this is not the right
action. Finally he is able
to pull the sweater over
his head. Now ADAM is
hot.*

*SOUNDS of cicadas
predominate. A dramatic
finale.*

*The butterflies rise. The
Moths float elsewhere.*

*When the workday is
done, ADAM wanders
back to his home,
talking to himself.*

This day reminds me of
an afternoon in Tijuana.
Un-budging.

*ADAM is stalked and
clasped like prey by
WAY OF THE WILD.*

*ADAM seems unaware
of danger.*

*The functions of the tree
are spoken singly by WAY
OF THE WILD, yet
comprise the efforts of
the tree in its entirety.*

Things are in motion.

Even before the end of the
growing season, before
their foliage dies down,
the trees must produce
buds for the next spring.

While they still have
energy. While you are
hanging about, the tree is
creating its next season.

*He struggles to remove
his tie unsuccessfully.
He turns it around to the
back.*

*ADAM struggles with
his shoes. He unbuttons
his shirt. His struggles
Resemble an insect's.*

I'm home. It's autumn,
I'm told.

*Another season announces
itself.*

WARM WINTER

Stirring in her sleep.

Mmm...

MARY is half-asleep.

No. It's already Winter.
I went to sleep. I said
now I'll sleep. I'm so
tired.

And I woke up. My
alarm didn't go off.
Is it Tuesday?

*Mary falls back into a
sleep*

ADAM Listens.

Winter's begun just
now?
It's darker than I
remembered.

Autumn is gone.

Haven't you heard the
announcement from the
trees?

*The parts of WAY OF
THE WILD are spoken
singly, yet comprise the
efforts of the tree in its
efforts to withstand the
chill.*

The bark chills.
Our roots contract,
refusing moisture.
How do you suppose
we survive?

The evaporation of
moisture prevents
breakage of our limbs.

Were we to grow heavy
and freeze, we would
break. Shivering!
If you only knew that the
Snow cover keeps
everything warm beneath.

The mammals stir.
They root in the
disappearing moist
pockets of soil and seek
the tenderest of the
cold roots, one last time.

ADAM listens.

The wind.

MARY turns over.

Would you mind
terribly.

*ANIMALS are curled
together, as always, on
alert. They breathe.
Tiny gestures at low
volume.*

Sleepily.

She always cries at
night.

The rabbit listens and
breathes. Its ears hear.

Mary.

*ADAM moves toward
MARY.*

*ADAM and MARY lie
feet to feet, their
position resembling that
of an insect's.*

ADAM listens.

Mary?

*WAY OF THE WILD is on
high alert.*

An owl is heard by
someone, but not
everyone.

I know.

ADAM sleeps.

*ADAM wakes up
suddenly.*

Have you noticed?

Why is it that
coincidence is so
satisfying?

Yesterday I noticed that
everything I had to do
began with a B?

Book

Bell

Bank

Birthday card.

Sleepily.

I don't know why.

*ADAM turns to MARY
almost touches her face
but she turns over in her
sleep.*

MARY dreams of names

Brett? Brice...

*WAY OF THE WILD on
high alert.*

The rabbit has not escaped
notice of the owl. Its
shape appears upon the
snow.

Why is it that sometimes
someone smiles at you
for no reason.

My teeth aren't white.

I said... Oh, never mind.

*ADAM rolls over again
and sleeps fitfully.*

*Night sounds. Insects on
alert. Strange, unknown
sounds.*

*The Audience feels their
internal organs
warming them.*

Spoken from sleep.

It will come again.

Spoken with alertness.

Upon the spring of the
rabbit's foot, the owl has
plunged.

From sleep.

So quickly.

Happy Birthday.

Mary?

ADAM can't sleep.

Have you heard of the
twenty-five hundred
pound snake? Forty-five
feet long? That's no lie.

Sixty million years ago.

That's not an
exaggeration. Have you
heard of the super-
volcano?

We were already extinct
once for two hundred
thousand years. I'm not
kidding.
Have you heard how
bacteria can seed
rainfall?

I can't sleep.

From sleep.

To her, time seems
slow.

*The audience wonders.
Is she dreaming?
She's tossing and
turning.*

ADAM sits up abruptly.

Have you heard about
the tenderness of chimps
to other chimps?

About a chimp named
Knuckles? With cerebral
palsy?

None of the other
chimps were seen acting
aggressively toward
Knuckles due to his
disability.

Even the dominant male
showed gentleness,
helping groom
Knuckles.

Have you heard about
the discovery of a new
planet three hundred and
ninety light years away?
It's smaller than the
earth. Have you.

ADAM sleeps fitfully.

*ADAM hears something
unknown and starts. He
listens.*

Not entirely.

Did you know...

*A Bird sound.
It is still dark.*

*ADAM hears something.
He yawns.*

Birds.

*ADAM falls into a deep
sleep, finally. Morning
arrives.*

He's sleeping./He's not
awake./He's still asleep.

*MARY stirs, hearing the
birds.*

Mmmm...it's coming.

APPENDIX

Suzuki exercises are recommended for use in order to create a state of constant urgency and readiness.

1. "Hive Mind" exercises help establish an ensemble dynamic, in which *WAY OF THE WILD* continually re-establishes a leader.
2. A sound/body journey through space, performers crawling and vocalizing, then traveling along a wall to explore kinesthetic connections between voice and body will help performers to establish comfort with sound experimentation. They might be called to consider how the pressure of their body against the wall might alter their voice.
3. Establishment of individual gestures can be created through viewpoints exercises, such as "statues" and developed as follows:
 Gestures by tempo: slowed, sped up
 Gestures by volume: magnified, diminished
 Gestures paired with sound
4. Listening to real nature sound recordings, performers can pick an individual voice and track it. It need not be realistic or a facsimile of real nature. A chorus can then be created, with the use of various directions:
 Performers call to themselves, varying volume, tempo and pitch.
 Performers respond to each other by slowing, speeding up. It need not be in sync. The tempos might vary along with the qualities of each sound.
5. Viewing videotapes of insect behaviors, such as eating, mating and building can help performers identify industrious movements based on these activities, and help the human characters identify repetitive motions that resemble those of insects.
6. Passages of *WAY OF THE WILD* speech may be explored, with each ensemble participant taking up parts of a body and ascribing a different function to the part, allowing both stimulus and response in relation to other parts to inform the movements. The text might be broken and spoken by various body parts, for example the passage spoken by *WAY OF THE WILD* on pages 62-63, beginning with "The insects recoil" and page on 64, beginning "The animals lap and lick to cool and soothe their fur." These passages might be divided into functions-brain, appendage, eyes, antennae and ears. Performers might circle words that apply to their part or sense. This will form a ragged whole, for example, the brain may speak text throughout, but will be prompted first by senses.
7. Experiments with powders for the festival of pollination allow for exploration of mutual relations between insects and flowers and what this might look like.
8. Research Materials might be distributed to the ensemble or viewed by the group.

RESOURCES

1. Charlton, Noel. *Understanding Gregory Bateson; Mind Beauty, And The Sacred Earth*. State University of New York Press; Albany, 2008.

A discussion of ecology as mental process.

2. Attenborough, David. *The private life of plants*. Princeton University; Princeton, 1995.

A glimpse into evolutionary biology with photos of “creative” adaptations.

3. Ennos, Roland & Sheffield, Liz. *Plant Life*. Wiley-Blackwell; Oxford, 2002.

In-depth descriptions of survival adaptations of plants.

4. *Nature’s services*. Gretchen, Ed.; Daily Island Press; Washington D.C., 1997.

Essays about services nature provides for human life.

5. Weisman, Alan. *The World Without Us*. St. Martins Press; NY, 2007

A proposal for the lasting effects of humans to the planet, and recovery of the planet upon the extinction of homo-sapiens.

6. Hoyt, Erich & Schultz, Ted. *Insect Lives; Tales of mystery and romance from a hidden world*. First Harvard University Press paperback edition, 2002.

A compendium of writing on insects reveals human opinion of insects, as much as the secret activities of insects themselves. Useful for identifying detailed behaviors.

7. Wilford, John Noble. *Almost Human and Sometimes Smarter*. NY Times Science section.

<<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res+990DE4DA113FF934A25757C0A9619C8B63&sec+&spon+&pagewanted+2>>

Research on Chimps.

FURTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

Additional materials may be useful for establishing movement vocabulary. Any videotaped performance by the Open Theatre, including documentation of their process will be useful, as well as an exploration of Butoh.

BIO

Lisa Leaverton, Playwright, Collaborative Artist, Activist is from Brooklyn, NY and runs a collective (*inquire within*) devoted to ephemeral theatre of the everyday. Lisa began collaborating as a performance artist at the 14K Cabaret in Baltimore while studying violin at the Peabody conservatory and took up playwriting. Lisa is working on *Life's Course; for the worms*, a full-length play about genetic warfare and seed homogenization.

One Plum, Iowa Center for Human Rights Playwriting Award, (2009), a full length experimental theatre work, is in process in ensemble workshop with director Katie Pearl. It was performed in its first incarnation as a one-act at Eclectic Theatre Company Hurricane Season Playwriting Festival, August, 2009. Eco-drama, *the sea cares nothing* will have a reading at Seattle Rep and tour with Northwest Play Alliance in June 2010. "PERHAPS," one act (2008) was performed by The Living Theatre for the National Free Night of Theatre in Oct 2009, and at CSPS, Cedar Rapids in 2008. *How Catherine D_____ Got Her Expression*, a one-act, exploring how one reclaims expression after trauma of violence, was performed in December 2009 at University of Iowa. *WHY LOVE DOESN'T RECOGNIZE ITS NAME*, Richard Maibaum Award (2008) a comedy about euphemistic speech, had a staged reading at Portland Center Stage, NOW HEAR THIS! New Play Series, June, 2008. *A Blue We All Know* (2008), about the loss of "space" for humans and whales was featured in a Gallery production at University of Iowa, Oct. 2008. *Theatre of The Body* (2001), a series of lecture demonstrations created in collaboration with choreographer Katharine Livingston was sold out nightly at Philadelphia Fringe with seating in a traditional dissection theatre for 12 audience members. Since graduating from Peabody Music Conservatory, Lisa has costumed Theatre and Dance companies, including Headlong Dance and Pig Iron Theatre Co. Lisa participated in foolsFURY Suzuki and Viewpoints intensive and Goat Island Performance workshops, and KCCTF, 2007. Recipient of a Felton scholarship, and Jean Schaal Scholarship, Lisa is a candidate for the MFA in playwriting at University of Iowa. Lisa won first prize in Arts and Research in the Jakobsen Conference on Civic Engagement.

