

THE MONKEY QUEEN

A short play, in shadows

by

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THE MONKEY QUEEN

Characters

TONI, 14 years old
MICHELLE, 11, her sister
DANETTE, Michelle's age, their cousin
TWO HANDS, Toni's alter ego
BARBIE, Michelle's alter ego
MONKEY QUEEN, Danette's alter ego

Place

A campsite at night, with a single tent.

Time

Last summer.

Notes on the Production

The three actors speaking for TONI/TWO HANDS, MICHELLE/BARBIE, and DANETTE/MONKEY QUEEN are miked offstage. Three or six actors may be cast as puppeteers. The puppeteers are backlit by two small, mobile "flashlights" and a single, stationary "lantern" that throw shadows on the side of the tent.

The set is raised to hide the puppeteers below the illuminated tent wall. The puppeteers mime the action, creating their characters with the shadows of their bodies and props and of the alter egos, which are stylized hinged puppets in the "wayang kulit" style of traditional Javanese theatre (see discover-indo.tierranet.com/wayang.html).

In silhouette, the puppeteers first mime DANETTE and her stuffed monkey doll, MICHELLE and her Barbie doll, and TONI. Eventually, the shadow puppets MONKEY QUEEN, BARBIE, and TWO HANDS replace the girls. Ideally, the transition from miming the action using bodies and props to manipulating the jointed two-dimensional alter egos should be so subtle that the audience will be unable to recall precisely when it happened. In rehearsal, the puppeteers should explore the full range of expressive and evocative shadow effects matched to the characters' lines. A cast of six puppeteers may make this easier to do.

For their part, the three actors voicing the six roles should be able to switch tones and subjects quickly, from serious to silly, with the fits and starts of seemingly random conversation and play. The girls' voices start in whispers, but at TONI's line "Maybe it's a bear...", their self-absorption leads them to they speak in conversational tones. The voice of each alter ego should be a subtle variation of her original character.

THE MONKEY QUEEN

A campsite at night, with a single dark tent on an otherwise empty and moonlit stage. The sound of crickets fades to an almost subliminal effect. At the first loud cough from the audience...

DANETTE

What was that? *(Urgent whisper in the dark.)*

Toni. *(Beat.)*

Toni. *(Beat.)*

TONI

Mmmm... *(Beat.)*

A "flashlight" goes on, casting DANETTE's shadow on the tent wall SR.

DANETTE

You hear that?

TONI

(Groggy.)
Aw, not again. You and sauerkraut--some day somebody's going to set your butt on fire.

DANETTE

That wasn't me...It's outside.

A second flashlight casts MICHELLE's shadow SL of DANETTE's.

MICHELLE

(Frightened.)
What's outside?

DANETTE

Something. A noise. I just heard it.

MICHELLE

What is it?

TONI

Nothing. Danette, Michelle--both of you turn out the lights and go to sleep.

DANETTE

Could be the wind. Or a squirrel.

TONI
 Maybe it's a bear.

MICHELLE
 Oh no.

DANETTE
 There bears here? You never said anything about bears, Toni.

The "lantern" comes on, casting TONI's shadow SL of MICHELLE's.

TONI
 Geez, you guys, there aren't any bears, OK? Just a couple of pre-pube psychos.

DANETTE
 You don't know that. About bears, I mean.

MICHELLE
 And stop calling us pre-pubes.

TONI
 Michelle, pick a number between four and six.

MICHELLE
 No.

TONI
 Pick.

MICHELLE
 Come on, Toni, no.

TONI
 OK, five.

TONI makes a bird's head with her hands, stabbing MICHELLE's head five times with its "beak."

TONI (CONT'D.)
 Caw, caw, caw, caw...caw.

MICHELLE knocks the "bird" away with her Barbie doll.

MICHELLE
 Cut it out.

TONI
 Then don't be stupid.

MICHELLE

Do that again, I'm telling Mom.

TONI

She won't do anything--she's busy.

MICHELLE

Sleeping.

TONI

(Ironic.)

Right.

(Snide.)

You see the way Uncle Mark kept looking at our mom during dinner? The way they kept hinting we should go to our tent?

MICHELLE

So?

TONI

So maybe they don't want to be brother-in-law and sister-in-law anymore.

TONI taps the fingertips of both hands together, with kissy noises.

MICHELLE

Eww--shut up.

DANETTE

You think so?

TONI

Just 'cause they each put up a tent doesn't mean they'll use 'em both.

MICHELLE

You're sick.

TONI

What's the matter, Michelle--scared?

MICHELLE

I just think you're disgusting.

TONI

No, disgusting is a gas attack.

TONI squeezes her cupped hands together to make raspberry sounds.

MICHELLE

Now who's being stupid?