

THE MONKEY QUEEN

A short play, in shadows

by

Philip Heckman

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701 Panther Trl.
Monona, WI 53716
608-221-4087
pheckman02@gmail.com

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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?

DANETTE

You think they're going to get married?

MICHELLE

Never.

TONI

Why not?

MICHELLE

Mom doesn't need to. She's perfectly happy now.

TONI

You got that right.

DANETTE

What do you mean?

TONI

(The familiar chant.)

...K-I-S-S-I-N-G--

MICHELLE

--Stop it, Toni. Stop it!

TONI

You think I'm kidding?

MICHELLE

I'm not listening.

TONI

Go on, find out. I dare you. All you have to do is sneak over there and see if they're in one tent or two.

MICHELLE, still holding her Barbie doll in one hand, covers her ears as she obscures the end of TONI's line.

MICHELLE

--La-la-la-la-la...

DANETTE

You don't need to treat her like that, Toni.

TONI

Aw, she'll get over it. I did.

DANETTE

Don't be upset, Michelle.

TONI

She has abandonment issues. That's what our therapist says.

MICHELLE
(*Matter-of-fact.*)

I hate you.

TONI

Admit it, Michelle. You don't even remember Dad. He died when you were a baby.

MICHELLE

Shut up, Toni.

TONI

That's good, coming from you. When the doctor wanted us to write a pretend letter telling Dad goodbye, you had nothing to say.

MICHELLE

I just didn't want to. It's private.

DANETTE

She shouldn't have to say anything. It's her choice. I don't talk about my mother either.

TONI

That's because she ran out on you.

DANETTE

She didn't run out. She just...went to Branson and got all country religious.

TONI

Whatever you say.

MICHELLE

You're mean, Toni.

TONI

Just being real.

TONI makes the bird head "speak."

TONI (CONT'D.)

Caw, caw.

DANETTE

Know what, Michelle? My dad's your dad's brother. He marries your mom, it'd be like getting your father back.

MICHELLE

That doesn't make any sense. You only get one father.

TONI

Besides, Mom's not looking for a dad now, is she?

MICHELLE

It's not like that! Talk about something else.

TONI

Hey, could be worse. Uncle Mark's not a complete loser.

DANETTE

What do you have against my dad?

TONI

Doesn't matter what I think. Our mom just likes bald guys, I guess.

MICHELLE

Don't listen to her, Danette. Toni's always saying dumb stuff.

TONI

It's called "getting a grip." You should try it, Michelle.

A stick snaps loudly. DANETTE yelps and MICHELLE pulls her sleeping bag over her head. TONI laughs.

TONI (CONT'D.)

You should see how you look.

MICHELLE uncovers her head.

MICHELLE

I'm not scared.

TONI

'Course you are. You're scared of the dark.

MICHELLE

Am not.

TONI

Scared of the woods.

MICHELLE

No way.

TONI

You're even afraid of Mom and Uncle Mark getting together.

MICHELLE

That's not true.

DANETTE

(Beat.)

So. You think my dad and your mom are...you know...in love?

TONI

What would you know about "in love?"

DANETTE

Lots. My dad goes on dates. He had a bunch of girlfriends.

TONI

Some girlfriends. Remember the one always wanted to shop for clothes with you?

TONI snatches Barbie from MICHELLE.

MICHELLE

Hey!

TONI

Just a minute.

(Assuming the doll's voice.)

Hello, I'm Danette's new best friend, Wallpaper-Design-Peasant-Dress Barbie.

MICHELLE

Stop, you're holding her wrong.

TONI

(Her own voice.)

Oh, and what about the one who picked her nose when she thought you weren't looking?

(Doll's voice.)

Hi, I'm Digger's-Hotline Barbie.

MICHELLE

You're messing her hair. Give her back.

TONI

(Holding her off.)

One more, one more. This one's your favorite, Danette.

DANETTE

Oh, yeah, the farm vet.

TONI

(Doll's voice.)

Hello, I'm Going-To-Tell-You-Everything-Gross-About-A-Cow's-Insides Barbie!

MICHELLE

Toni, come on.

TONI

Here. What a twerp.

TONI tosses Barbie to MICHELLE.

TONI (CONT'D.)

Did any of Uncle Mark's girlfriends stay overnight?

DANETTE

How would I know. What do you think I am?

TONI

A pre-pube psych--

MICHELLE

--Toni! I told you...

TONI

Down, girl.

TONI makes a dog's head with her hands.

TONI (CONT'D.)

Ruff, grrr...

MICHELLE

Anyway, our mother's nobody's girlfriend.

DANETTE

Maybe my dad thinks different.

MICHELLE

You're crazy.

DANETTE

Not. I heard them on the phone before we left.

TONI

And...?

DANETTE

He told her what he wanted her to pack.

MICHELLE

What?

As DANETTE whispers in MICHELLE's ear, the monkey and Barbie dolls in their hands also touch, and TONI leans in to listen. After a beat, MICHELLE springs back.

MICHELLE (CONT'D.)

To wear in the woods?

TONI

Why not? It's the original home of the birds and the bees.

TONI's fingers become a cloud of bees buzzing MICHELLE.

TONI (CONT'D.)

Bzzzzz...

MICHELLE holds Barbie like a shield.

MICHELLE

Get away. You're both wrong. Mom doesn't care about that.

DANETTE

Except, who wears makeup on a camping trip?

MICHELLE

That doesn't mean anything.

TONI

Yes it does. It's like painting your house so you can sell it.

MICHELLE

I don't want to talk about this any more.

TONI

So don't. But you still better get used to the idea.

TONI's hands make like bells as she "ding-dongs" the wedding march.

MICHELLE

That happens, I'm running away.

DANETTE

(Hurt, wary.)

I thought you liked me and my dad.

TONI

Michelle's in denial. She doesn't process change well.

MICHELLE

You sound like a stupid psychiatrist.

TONI

And you sound like a stupid patient.

MICHELLE

I don't see how you can say they're in love.

TONI

Hello? Ever notice how Mom leaves the room to talk when Uncle Mark calls. That's what you do when you're plotting something.

(MORE)

TONI (CONT'D)

(Taunting her.)

Something like a Conspiracy of Desire.

MICHELLE

For the last time, Toni, cut it out.

DANETTE

Well, it makes me happy to think about the two of them together.

TONI

Why do you care so much?

DANETTE

If they get married, then we'll be sisters.

TONI

Great. I'm just getting used to a monthly curse, I should get a daily one too.

DANETTE

Don't you want to be my sister?

BARBIE

I do. I'll be Twin-Sister Barbie.

TONI

That's pathetic. You two can't be twins.

DANETTE

Oh, yeah? Our dads were brothers, remember. Didn't you ever hear of fraternal twins?

TWO HANDS folds into praying position.

TWO HANDS

Lord, protect me from pre-pube--

DANETTE

--Why you always picking on us?

TWO HANDS makes fists.

TWO HANDS

Just trying to knock some sense--

DANETTE

--Well, stop it! Maybe we don't want sense.

BARBIE

Yeah, sense isn't always what's important.

TWO HANDS

You two don't get it, do you?

DANETTE

We get each other.

TWO HANDS

I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about play-acting. Trying to create some sort of fake family so you can pretend what happened didn't happen.

BARBIE

Why should we listen to you? What do you know?

TWO HANDS

I know that sometimes when people go away, no matter how they go, they go away for good.

MONKEY QUEEN

(Beat.)

I'm not going anywhere.

BARBIE

Me neither--I'm Twice-a-Week-Therapist Barbie.

MONKEY QUEEN

And I'm her assistant. Telling you it's time to get in touch with our feelings...

MONKEY QUEEN turns her back on TWO HANDS and bends over.

MONKEY QUEEN

...and I feel like sauerkrauting you.

MONKEY QUEEN voices raspberries while TWO HANDS grabs MONKEY QUEEN's tail.

TWO HANDS

Watch out. I got matches. You'll look funny with your tail on fire.

A small branch falls on the tent, sliding down the front wall. All three puppets take cover, their screams changing to nervous giggles, then genuine laughter. One by one MONKEY QUEEN, BARBIE, and TWO HANDS reappear.

MONKEY QUEEN

Go ahead. Light my tail. I'll be a bottle rocket.

MONKEY QUEEN flies around overhead.

MONKEY QUEEN (CONT'D.)

I'll be fireworks at a wedding.

BARBIE opens her arms in welcome.

MONKEY QUEEN (CONT'D.)

The wedding of the Mom-Who-Still-Has-Her-Looks-At-Age-Forty-Four...

MONKEY QUEEN moves into BARBIE's embrace and they sway together.

BARBIE

...and the Bald-Headed-Dad-Who-Gave-Up-Girlfriends.

MONKEY QUEEN

Two families getting married. In a stained-glass-window church with the sunlight coming through making everyone look like they're covered in jewels.

BARBIE

I'll be a flower girl in a white dress.

TWO HANDS

I thought you said you wouldn't go to any wedding.

MONKEY QUEEN

She can change her mind if she wants.

TWO HANDS

Oh yeah?

BARBIE

Yeah, and there'll be white lillies and a million zillion red, red roses.

MONKEY QUEEN

And music too.

Gamelan music starts quietly. MONKEY QUEEN and BARBIE separate.

MONKEY QUEEN (CONT'D.)

Bells and chimes... and a choir big enough to fill the whole church. Hundreds of singers in blue satin robes.

TWO HANDS

Sure, and a real band, I bet.

MONKEY QUEEN

Why not?

BARBIE

A real band for the best celebration ever.

MONKEY QUEEN

A party for a brand-new family.

BARBIE
And sisters forever and ever.

TWO HANDS claps.

TWO HANDS
Well, congratulations. You two are a perfect match.

MONKEY QUEEN bows to BARBIE.

MONKEY QUEEN
May I have this dance, Miss Barbie?

BARBIE
Certainly.

MONKEY QUEEN and BARBIE embrace and twirl, then...

TWO HANDS
Hey, wait, you forgot something.

BARBIE
Rice?

TWO HANDS
Something else.

MONKEY QUEEN
I know--the preacher.

TWO HANDS
Besides the preacher. Doves.

BARBIE
To sing?

TWO HANDS
To sing and to fly. A wedding needs a flock of white doves. It's the most important thing. Doves flying overhead mean good luck for everyone...

MONKEY QUEEN and BARBIE make loud kissing sounds at each other under TWO HANDS' fluttering bird. Cheers, cooing, laughter, and gamelan music at full.

THE END