

A Gap in the Melody

A play

By Drew Petriello

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MAIN CAST

IN AREPO:

MELODY: Female. Newcomer to Arepo. A sharp, playful woman with an enormous heart. She knows she forgives too easily and is working to be more skeptical. She has an ache in her chest, weighing her down with something she's lost... she just can't remember what. The same actor also plays HERMIONE.

HEAD and HEART: Any gender. The guards of Arepo tower. Are their names to a T. An exaggerated duo, bordering on clownish; their behavior, voice, stature, dress, etc. are the opposite of the other's.

HOLDING: Male. A kind, yet needy man. Feels rather than thinks. Clings on to what he loves too tightly. Kind, but there's something dark beneath.

RUITH: Male. A hulking, frightening young man. Playful in an insane child sort of way. The same actor also plays MAMILLIUS.

HERMIT: Female. A cunning and secretive woman. Her looks and whimsical demeanor belie her great strength.

BALANCE: Female. Steadfast, courageous and highly capable. The same actor also plays PAULINA.

IN SICILIA:

PAULINA: Female. Advisor to the throne of Sicilia. An older woman, but still smart as a whip and able to bring even the mightiest down with her sharp wit. Has a strong sense of justice and a savior complex. The same actor also plays BALANCE.

IPHIGEN: Female. A young, bright-eyed nun eager to learn forbidden knowledge. Even so, she still bears a deep fear Hell. It's hard to get her in a bad mood.

LEONTES: Male. The King of Sicilia. Guilt-ridden over his past actions to the point where all else is secondary. With good reason: he believed HERMIONE was unfaithful to him (though she wasn't) and killed her and their son before learning the truth. Will stop at nothing to atone.

HERMIONE: Female. The Queen of Sicilia. She died before our story begins. Known for her kindness and her valor through unjust persecution. The same actor also plays MELODY.

PERDITA: Female. Daughter of LEONTES and HERMIONE. She was exiled as a baby and has returned home. Eager to prove herself as the worthy successor to Sicilia... mostly so her mother will give her the time of day.

MAMILLIUS: Male. Son of LEONTES and HERMIONE. Died in childhood before the story began. Known for being a funloving, yet keenly intelligent, rowdy boy. The same actor also plays RUIH.

OTHER:

TIME: Variable gender. A disheveled drunkard. Has a Brooklyn accent or similar. The same actor also plays DUELIST.

THE WITCHES THREE: Any gender; go nuts with casting and design. Magical schemers. WITCH 1 is the fearless leader, WITCH 2 is full of vitriol and thinks everyone else is dumb and WITCH 3 just likes to have fun.

MINOR ENSEMBLE:

HERALD, DUELIST, MOURNERS, PRISONERS

Mandatory role doubles:

MELODY/HERMIONE, PAULINA/BALANCE, RUIH/MAMILLIUS, TIME/DUELIST

Suggested role doubles:

IPHIGEN/PERDITA, HERMIT/HEAD, HOLDING/HEART, LEONTES/HERALD, A WITCH/PRISONERS and ANYONE AVAILABLE/MOURNERS

CAST LIST WITH **ALL** ROLE DOUBLES (MANDATORY **AND** SUGGESTED) IS AS FOLLOWS - THIS MAKES THE MINIMUM CAST SIZE 11:

MELODY/HERMIONE

PAULINA/BALANCE

HOLDING/HEART

LEONTES/HERALD

HERMIT/HEAD

RUIH/MAMILLIUS

IPHIGEN/PERDITA

TIME/DUELIST

WITCHES THREE/PRISONERS

SETTING

AREPO: Arepo Tower is a great many stories tall, each floor blooming with magical jubilee; it may be a facade, but if it is, it is too colorful and fantastical for anyone to think about stripping it away. The denizens of Arepo are bright and dazzling, forever youthful in energy - even the elderly are spry.

SICILIA: The Italian kingdom under the rule of LEONTES. To reflect the mood of its king, the world of Sicilia is bleak and mournful. LEONTES' mood permeates every aspect of the realm, touching each citizen and even the castle stonework. Paranoia fills every head and murderers are seen in every shadow.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Casting: Cast to suit the role. Certain identifying features (ethnicity, body type and others) have purposely been left off of the role descriptions.

Sicilia: Historical accuracy should be the least of your concerns.

Suggestion for fantastical elements: Though you may tackle the various nonrealistic moments of the show as you wish; my suggestion would be to have actors in full black clothing and black hoods (like kokens from noh theatre) in order to create "magic" effects. For instance, one such actor would bring HOLDING's rose onstage in I.3. If you would like to go a different direction, then by all means, go ahead.

Sator Bracer: A silver forearm bracer with a Sator Square inscribed (or etched or engraved or bedazzled or whatever) on it.

Sator Square: Looks like the below.

S	A	T	O	R
A	R	E	P	O
T	E	N	E	T
O	P	E	R	A
R	O	T	A	S

Suggestion for set design: Due to the many locales, the set should be suggestive and flexible; do not worry about preserving realism.

On *The Winter's Tale*: Clearly, Shakespeare's original text is the inspiration for this story. I repeat: it is *the inspiration* - with all the implications of that word.

Intermission: Between Acts II and III if desired. As an option, MELODY/HERMIONE can remain onstage through it.

ACT I

SCENE 1

Arepo.

HEAD and HEART flank the exterior entrance of the tower - a grand gate. They each wear a Sator Bracer.

A voice hums a melody from offstage.

HEAD and HEART don't move. The melody gets closer until MELODY appears onstage, humming. She walks as though moving through a dreamy fog.

HEART

Hark, there! Oh my!

HEAD

Hark, I hear! I see!

HEART

Hark!

HEAD

Hark!

HEART

Hark, my lady!

MELODY stops humming. She takes a long time to register that she is being spoken to.

MELODY

Hark. Lady...

(she raises a hand in greeting, but stops halfway)

Oh. Oh.

My lady, do not fear. HEAD

You are merely new here. HEART

I am Head. HEAD

I am Heart. HEART

We stand guard the great Tower of Arepo. HEAD

Now, my lady - HEART

HEAD AND HEART
(rapidly chanted)
SATOR AREPO TENET OPERA ROTAS
SATOR AREPO TENET OPERA ROTAS
SATOR AREPO TENET OPERA ROTAS

THE WITCHES THREE appear.

What's your name? Don't be dour. WITCHES

...name? MELODY
(like waking up)

A name is what you're called. WITCH 1

A name is what you are. WITCH 3

A name is a label, a marker of category. HEAD

HEART

A name is indicative of what's inside.

HEAD

A name like "Head."

HEART

A name like "Heart."

HEAD

They simply are -

HEART

- and yet full of what we are.

WITCHES

We Witches can search out names, we'll find yours and then -

MELODY begins to hum the melody. The guards and WITCHES are motionless until she finishes.

HEART

I think it's clear, don't you, Head?

HEAD

I'd never be more sure unless I were dead.

WITCH 2

It's so obvious I don't know why we even bothered.

HEART

This song inside, a melody surrounds...

HEAD

My lady, your name is "Melody," and nothing more astounds.

MELODY

Melody!

WITCHES

Melody is your name!

WITCHES 2 and 3 throw confetti.

MELODY

(repeating to herself; becoming more
lucid)

Melody... Mel-ody. Melo-dy. Mel. O. Dy. Melody... My name is Melody.

WITCHES 2 and 3 begin to play patty cake.

HEAD AND HEART

Greetings, Melody!

HEART

Oh, Melody, she of the song!

HEAD AND HEART

Melody, welcome home to Arepo Tower, you now -

MELODY

Hold on! Stop! Enough of riddles and rhymes!
I feel... I feel...

HEAD

Oh no.

HEART

Oh my.

WITCH 2

Oh yay.

MELODY

Something lingers... it burns... hurts... feels like... I'm missing something? I remember
pain... from... sometime before? I don't know... it's all hazy now, all so hazy...
(she tries to hum the melody, but can't)

HEAD

You must leave that torrent behind.

HEART

Arepo is no place for such hurtful throes.

MELODY

How do I get rid of this undirected hurricane inside of me?

HEAD

We can collect your troubles before you enter.

HEART

It is no hard matter, my lady Melody.

MELODY

Tell me how. Please.

WITCHES

Make a square in the dirt, use your foot.

MELODY makes a square on the ground with her foot.

WITCHES

Put your hands in the center of the square.

She does.

HEAD

Close your eyes.

She does.

HEART

Open your heart.

HEAD

Open your mind.

WITCHES

Let fall what must fall from you.

MELODY opens her mouth. The melody comes out. She gradually relaxes.

HEAD stretches outwards as though being electrocuted. HEART shrinks inward as though starving. WITCH 3 gets distracted by the song, ending the game of patty cake.

MELODY finishes the song. HEAD and HEART woozily return to themselves.

MELODY

There's still something stuck - I can't let it go - there's a pain in my chest. The size of a fist. Here. Like something's missing. A hole.

Melody breathes deeply and the pain subsides a little.

HEAD

This happens sometimes.

WITCH 1

There is a cure for this pain. Seek it out in Arepo tower.

MELODY

Something... or someone... it's missing.

WITCH 1

This lingering pain; let it be your compass.

MELODY nods. Henceforth, she walks with the pain in her chest. It is always there and prone to flare up, but she often deals with it.

MELODY strides up to the gate.

HEAD

A caution before you go:

HEART

Arepo is filled with wondrous delights -

HEAD

- yet if you can look past the miracles in the Tower halls -

HEART

- and make your way to the very top of Arepo Tower -

HEAD

- where few have been before -

HEART

- you will find a special prize -

HEAD

- the sort which pierces the Heart of the universe -

HEART

- and captures the Head of knowledge.

MELODY

To the top I go, then. Something to get rid of this hole in my chest. Thank you, Head and Heart. You've been very kind.

They salute her.

MELODY

Witches... um...

WITCH 2

Say "thank you."

MELODY

Well...

WITCH 3

I get it, we *are* kind of scary.

WITCH 2

(stalking closer)

Say "thank you."

MELODY

What are -

WITCH 2

(grabbing MELODY by the throat)

Say. "Thank you!"

MELODY
(choking)

Thank... you!

WITCH 1

My sibling -

WITCH 2
(releasing her)

You're welcome. The residents are getting more and more entitled, I swear.

MELODY pushes the gate open and enters.

WITCH 1 gives WITCH 2 a reproachful look,
which garners a "so what?" gesture in response.

The following is heard from offstage:

HERALD

We have a new resident! Welcome. TO. THE. PARTAY!

CROWD

A new resident! Huzzah!

HERALD

Melody is her name!

CROWD

Melody! Melody! Melody!

HERALD

Come, Melody! Revel with us and we shall -

MELODY

No thank you, sorry!

A hush and a stillness.

MELODY

I must get to the top of the tower. Sorry. You all seem very lovely. And very naked. And very *friendly*. I like your mask!

The stomping of MELODY's feet can be heard as she walks away. There are scandalized murmurs amongst the crowd.

HEART

I do so hate when they can't let go. It saddens me.

HEAD

Let it go. Have the three of you made progress?

WITCH 2

Don't rush us, skullboy.

HEAD

You're taking your sweet time.

WITCH 1

These things are not easy. Some magic takes a long, long time.

WITCH 2

Can we go now?

HEAD

Fine. We release you.

The WITCHES disappear.

HEAD and HEART look like they've aged a thousand years.

SCENE 2

Sicilia.

A garden with a giant yew tree. A funeral procession with two coffins, one large, one small. LEONTES follows behind the coffins, wailing. PAULINA just behind him.

The procession passes, but PAULINA stays behind and is alone for several seconds.

IPHIGEN

(offstage)

Paulina? Oh, Paulina!

(she enters, wearing a nun's habit)

From Verona

I have returned mere minutes past! I'd tell
Thee more, but yet! I ask thee, what is this
A-lathered stir of mourning that I see?
What did I miss in my six months away?

PAULINA

My dearest, my sort-of pupil Iphigen,
So many sorrows, yet I'll start but with this end:
Seen passing 'long before you was the king,
That foolish king, that craven king, that mule
That killed his wife and boy in a fit of envy:
Leontes! Curse the king to Hell -

IPHIGEN

Alas!

PAULINA

- Where he should burn for his jealous double sin!

IPHIGEN

Oh, cull thy curse, Paulina, though aye,
This news is of the worst Sicilia's seen!

(praying)

We all so loved Hermione, oh Lord,
And I did love their son, so sweet and full
Of play; Mamillius would have made a great
King one day. Alas.

LEONTES enters, still moaning.

PAULINA

But dash it all:
Here comes that lowly, jealous king himself!

LEONTES

Paulina!

PAULINA

Lord, if thou comes't near I'll slap
Thee 'cross the face!

IPHIGEN

(again clutching her crucifix)

Oh my! I like this not
An ounce! Alas!

LEONTES

Oh wise Paulina please,
I beg thee do so and be quick and harsh
For I deserve each lash thou hast to give;
My guilt knows not the bounds of human thought!

PAULINA

Thy wailing knows no bounds for what a person's
Ear can stand. Begone! I'll hear not of thy griefs
And faults, for I know all too well that they
Are only yours!

LEONTES

Thy words are like the whips
Monks use to flagellate their backs; say more
Of what my evils are so I may know more pain!

PAULINA

Leontes, I will count to three.

LEONTES

What shall
There be upon the ending of that three?

PAULINA

A vicious meeting of thy rump with my
So righteous, needy foot!

LEONTES

I would that thee
Should meet a blade beside my throat and cut.

IPHIGEN

Oh my, oh my! This rough conflictive likes me not!

LEONTES

I have no heirs! There'll be succession wars
T'will doom Sicilia all because of me!

PAULINA

A-ha! 'Tis there that thou art wrong again;
T'was by my cunning that succession war
Shall be avoided - thou doth recall thy Queen
Gave birth unto a babe as she was locked
Inside a cell?

LEONTES

'Tis true, Paulina, but
Thou knows't there is no hope 'cause I, within
My jealous rage, decreed the child burn.

PAULINA

And so thou dids't, thou cur, yet I did send
My husband, old Antigonous, to take
The babe and bring it far away before
Thy murdering servants could partake their deed.

LEONTES

Paulina! I should give my crown to thee
For thy most holy wisdom; thou hath saved
Us all!

PAULINA

And thou shalt not forget that fact.
Now go and wallow in thy horrid deeds.

LEONTES

I shall.

LEONTES exits.

PAULINA

His mind is made of meal. 'Tis more than what
A woman such as I can stand without
A-wringing his so flimsy, wanton neck.

IPHIGEN

I like this mood but naught! Such death and rage,
But death and rage... Poor Queen, poor boy, too young...
It is some hope there shan't be war although.
I 'spose it would be tactless on my part
To ask to see thy books as we would do
Before I left.

PAULINA

Iphigen, ah you...

IPHIGEN

I know those prior words were not the best...

PAULINA

My friend, my pupil Iphigen; thou miss
The meaning of my sighs. Thou art so much
Of comfort; normalcy to me in these
Too twisted times. Of course we'll read, my lass.

(she pauses, looks out)

Yet this has all been prelude. Senseth I
A storm to come and castigate the sky.

SCENE 3

Arepo.

One of the many floors. The atmosphere is sophisticated. HOLDING is sitting on a nice chair, drinking a glass of bourbon and reading. There is another chair opposite him.

MELODY walks through, going to the next staircase and avoiding making eye contact.

TIME enters with a guitar. They freeze.

TIME
(singing)

Here's what you did not see:
Good Melody went up a bunch of stairs.
Staaaaaaaaaaaaairs.

TIME exits. They resume.

HOLDING

Hello there!

MELODY
(not stopping)

Hi.

HOLDING

Hey now, what's the hurry?

MELODY
(stopping for a second)

I don't mean to be rude, but I'd like to get to the top of the tower as quickly as possible.
(she starts to walk again)

HOLDING

Come, sit with me! Let's have a chat!

MELODY
(stopping)

I'm fine, but thank you.

HOLDING

The top of the tower will still be there in a thousand years. Surely, you can keep me company for a little while.

MELODY
(gesturing out)

There's plenty of other people.

HOLDING
 Come on.
 (beat)
 MELODY
 No thank you. I'm really, truly sorry.
 HOLDING
 Can I at least get your name?
 MELODY
 Melody.
 HOLDING
 My name's Holding. May I also at least see your Sensitivity?
 MELODY
 My what?
 HOLDING
 Sensitivity?
 (beat)
 You're new here, aren't you?
 MELODY
 Yes.
 HOLDING
 Sensitivity. It's - ah, it'll be easier if I just show you. Give me your hands.
 MELODY
 Oh, I see how this goes. New girl on the floor, tell her about this thing called
 "Sensitivity," and then oh look at that, suddenly you've kissed her.
 HOLDING
 No! That's not...!
 MELODY
 Methinks I've hit near the bullseye.
 HOLDING
 Um, not quite, but... You are very...

MELODY

Astute? Clever? Pretty? Come on, what were you going to say, Holding? I think I've got you figured out.

HOLDING

Do you like making everyone's heart pump at a thousand beats per minute, or is it just me?

MELODY

I think just strangers who hit on me. Goodbye, it's been fun, Holding.

HOLDING

Wait wait wait! I'll drop all the flirtatious stuff, I'm, uh... I'm terrible at it. Obviously. Sorry. But you should know about Sensitivity and it would be my delight to teach you. It's, ah -

(he picks up the book)

Okay, it's not your hand, but hey, it'll do. So, my name is Holding, and when I hold this book - or anything - could be your hand - just saying - and think real hard...

A rose flies into MELODY's hand.

MELODY

Ah... trying to impress me? I thought you said no more flirting.

HOLDING

No! It's just the first thing that came to my head, that's all!

MELODY

Huh. Wonder why. But if everyone can do it, then it's not that impressive, is it?

HOLDING

There's that heart rate spike again...

MELODY

Thanks for the Sensitivity lesson, Holding. Lovely meeting you.

HOLDING

Is something the matter?

MELODY

What?

HOLDING

You've been making these, uh... wincing faces? And rubbing a spot right about here.
 (he points to a place on his chest)
 Is that why you're in such a hurry to get away from me?

MELODY

I'm not - I don't want to talk about it.

HOLDING

Okay. Before you go, can you please show me your Sensitivity? You're name is Melody, so I assume it's a song of some sort.

MELODY

That would be my guess. Since you've been so kind...

She hums the melody. A goofy grinning doll
 appears in HOLDING's hand.

HOLDING

What is this monstrosity?

MELODY

My guarantee you won't forget me. Cheers!

The pain in her chest becomes unbearable.

MELODY

(collapsing)

Ah! Mother of...!

HOLDING

Is there something I can do?

MELODY

No, nothing to... I'll be fine, I... oh, it hurts!

HOLDING

What's the matter? What do I do?

MELODY hums her melody. Another goofy grinning doll appears and she clutches it tight against her.

MELODY

I just... I thought that might help.

HOLDING

You're starting to scare me, Melody.

MELODY

I'll be fine... I'll be... fine.

She breathes deeply. The pain eases up a little. She is now functional, but the pain is still prominent.

HOLDING

(helping her to her feet)

What's the chest pain?

MELODY

It's... I'm not sure. It feels like something's missing, like someone reached in and ripped out a vital organ without me knowing. I was told that if I find the thing to fill the hole, then it'll go away. That's why I'm going to the top of the tower. That's why I'm not getting anywhere near these distractions.

HOLDING

Arepo is full of distractions, sure, but I suspect that whatever's at the top isn't all that great. For all we know it could be a tree or something and that's it.

MELODY

You haven't been. What's up there must be breathtaking otherwise Head and Heart wouldn't have made such a fuss about it. And yet, everyone in this tower accepts explicit distraction instead. I don't like it when people willingly refuse to see the truth of things.

HOLDING

The part of you that's missing... are you sure it'll be at the top of Arepo Tower?

MELODY

No. But I think it's a good place to start.

HOLDING

Could the missing part... does it have to be an object? Could it be a person?

MELODY

I don't see why not.

(beat)

HOLDING

I have an idea.

MELODY

Holding...

HOLDING

Hear me out.

MELODY

I'm flattered, and you are very sweet, but if it were you... The hurt is still there, Holding.

HOLDING

What if, what if...

(he holds her hand, a marker flies into his)

Look, I'm... I'm going to draw some things on our hands. Okay?

MELODY

...okay? What are you drawing.

HOLDING

(starting to draw symbols on his)

You're new to Arepo. You don't know the traditions or... If this doesn't work, then it's not me.

MELODY

What are you doing?

HOLDING

I'm just... can you trust me?

MELODY

I don't know. I can feel your heart beating in your palm.

HOLDING

You, uh, have that effect on me. Melody. Trust me.

(beat)

MELODY

Okay.

HOLDING finishes drawing the symbols on both of their hands.

MELODY's pain is alleviated.

MELODY

(feeling her chest)

Oh my goodness! Oh my goodness!

HOLDING

Is it gone?

MELODY

Yes! What did you do? What - ?

HOLDING

I knew it! See these symbols these... these are the traditional lover's symbols, Melody. That's what was missing. Stay with me, Melody.

MELODY

I... This is a lot coming at me really fast.

HOLDING

We can take as much time as you need.

MELODY

(looks at the symbols on her hand, looks at HOLDING)

I'll stay.

They embrace. A guitar floats onstage and begins to play MELODY's melody. She hums along to it.

A goofy grinning doll drops between them.

HOLDING

(picking it up)

Is this something I'm going to have to get used to?

MELODY

Yes.

SCENE 4

Sicilia.

PAULINA alone in the garden with the yew tree. LEONTES' bereaved moaning underscores the scene.

TIME enters with a guitar.

TIME

Yeah, nothing much has happened
Since you saw Paulina last.
Lot's of sadness.
Saaaaaaaaaadneeeeeesssss...

TIME exits. A LEONTES wail.

PAULINA

Leontes, I too mourn thy craven loss,
The Queen of whom I served. Hermione,
Thou made the hurts and skewers of this sharp world
More blunt. Sicilia's thick with daggers now
In hearts and heads as well as every home.

A rustling offstage.

PAULINA

But hark; some steps nearby! I fear and know not why.

PAULINA steels herself.

IPHIGEN enters holding a letter.

PAULINA

My Iphigen!

IPHIGEN

Alack!

Startled, IPHIGEN drops the letter

PAULINA

(laughing despite herself)

No need to fear,
It is but I!

IPHIGEN

My heart! Paulina, that
Was such a cruelty that thou've done to me!

PAULINA

Forgive my mirth at thy displeasure, lass,
For t'was a-borne of my own nerves. I did
Not know thee in the dark. So art
Thou here because thou heards't the wretch's cries?

IPHIGEN

One'd think a devil played his vocal cords.
But no - I come with other words in hand.
(she notices she's dropped the letter)
(she picks it up)

Or now I do.

PAULINA

What are these words thou plucked?

IPHIGEN

I do not know, but I can guess. It was
Passed on to me by a sailor's hand. I know
Thy husband went abroad upon thy word.

PAULINA

Methinks I know the guess thou've ta'en.
 Alas, be quiet, heart - it ill becomes
 To make me giddy-filled with hopes which yet
 To prove some more than fantasy. So give.

IPHIGEN

I give it thee, and seal it with a prayer
 Of goodest fortune for Antigonus
 And for Hermione's babe who was his charge.

IPHIGEN hands PAULINA the letter.

PAULINA reads.

She lets the paper drop from her fingertips.

PAULINA makes to leave, stops.

IPHIGEN

Paulina, what -

PAULINA

There is no god. Or not
 A god that I would care to worship who
 Would murder all the dearest things to me.

IPHIGEN

Mine ears recoil; do not speak as such.

PAULINA

There is no joy. Not anymore that now
 Each flame of hope is snuffed. There's no Antigonus
 And all my plans are dust. So goes this hex,
 This letter: foolish poor Antigonus,
 My husband, died in his cruel task.

IPHIGEN

Yet how?
 I beg thee tell, but do not curse for I
 Do sense a force begin to watch us; I

Am trembling but twice; once for thy pain
And once again for fear of Hell.

PAULINA

I'll curse
If I so chose! Thy foolish fears are naught
Against my overflowing griefs! My husband's dead,
Killed by my deeds. But more: that babe I sent
With him is also likely dead because
I bid him do the deed. And yet, would not
Leontes have done worse to that poor babe
If I'd not ta'en the gamble? Dash it all!
Without an heir alive there'll be a war!
But I did try to save the realm! I did!
And God hath spit upon my work! So all
The lit hope wicks that kept me going in
This cold dark world have been put out and ashed.

IPHIGEN

But thou hast company in God and I,
And we do see that thou did's't do the most
Thou could's't to save Sicilia from itself.

PAULINA

(with bitter laughter)

What company have I in God and thee?
Thou loves't to read my books that have been banned
From the convent and drink forbidden lore, but yet
Thou art a nun and neither thou nor God
Can know the darkest depths of what I am.

IPHIGEN

I'll let this bitter speech go by for now,
For thou art mad with grief, yet thou cans't not
Deny us here, for we are strength while thou art weak.

PAULINA curls up fetal.

IPHIGEN

And is this how Paulina meets her end?
 Paulina, the resilient, she, the strong,
 The firebrand? Shall she curl up and die
 Because her loves are gone? Shall she go stake
 Herself quick through the heart because she's tired?
 Shall she go waste away from having naught
 To live for? No. Paulina shall go live.

PAULINA

I work an endless work to scrub the sores
 That pox along Sicilia, yet at each
 New turn, infection grows and multiplies
 Great manifolds far more than I can clean,
 Aye, every act I take rejects with strength
 Far more than I did give. There is no point.

IPHIGEN

Have faith in me if thou cans't none in God
 Or destiny.

PAULINA

I feel the need to act
 Much like I've done before, but now
 So faced with all these deaths I want to wilt.
 And yet... I try to push the thought of "act"
 Away, and now the only thing I think
 Is "act!" Lo, all I do doth turn against myself.

Sudden chaos. The WITCHES surround
 PAULINA and IPHIGEN

WITCH 1

There are some tomes within the convent, love.

WITCH 3

With secrets mortals dare not dabble with.

WITCH 1

You feel that pulsing from inside your head -

WITCHES
- do you not?

PAULINA
What demons are surrounding me?

IPHIGEN
I feel my soul in pain!

WITCHES
We're Witches Three
Who bear some secrets from another world.

PAULINA
Another world?

WITCH 2
You stupid git! We can't
Talk long!

PAULINA
Do not insult -

WITCH 1
It is of great
Import that you remember your good friend

WITCHES
Hermione... Hermione...

PAULINA
What does
Hermione have to do with this gross speech?

WITCH 1
But heed our words

WITCH 2
And listen close

WITCH 3

For once
You will be told

WITCHES

Then we are gone.

IPHIGEN

Do not
Give heed to demon's words, madam!

WITCH 1

There are some tomes beneath the convent which
Contain old secrets that will save Sicilia.

WITCH 2

Your faulty deeds will balance out when you -

WITCHES

- do resurrect Sicilia's Queen, Hermione.

WITCH 3

The books will let you conquer death; and more:

WITCH 1

Ascend you to Sicilia's vaunted savior!

PAULINA

Return the Queen from death? This cannot be.

WITCHES

Go find her and revive her! Bring her back
Unto Sicilia with some magics black;
A resurrection for the ill-slain Queen!

PAULINA

T'would save the realm indeed, yet why not 'stead
Return Mamilius? Cut the issue of
An heir entirely and bring to life
The son of king Leontes and Hermione?

The WITCHES laugh.

PAULINA

Oh what, did I say something so amiss?
Care to enlighten me, you Witches?

WITCHES

No.

The WITCHES scatter.

IPHIGEN

(prostrate, praying, holding a crucifix)

MY LORD, DELIVER US FROM SIN! WE HEAR
THE DEVILS, BUT WE DON'T GIVE HEED UNTO
THEIR SUCCOR VOWS!

PAULINA

(whispering)

Some books beneath the convent...

IPHIGEN

Paulina, thou must not give heed to demons!

LEONTES wails.

PAULINA

Oh, curse thy most bedamned
Unfettered throat! I will revive the dead
Hermione, yea, and salve the wounds that thou
Dids't cause Sicilia when thou slew thy Queen
And both thy heirs. My wrong will be forgot.

IPHIGEN

Paulina, I must beg thee not to work
In magics made of sin! I beg, I pray!

PAULINA

'Tis only then the shadows disappear
From these dark halls, 'tis only then the misery
Of our bereft low king shall dissipate.
They said that in the convent there are some
Foul books. Thou shalt go seize them for this purpose.

IPHIGEN

I beg, I pray, I beg, I pray, oh Lord -

PAULINA

Be stiller Iphigen, and do this task.
 'Tis action I will take; my doubts are cleared
 Thanks to this visitation.

IPHIGEN

I'll not damn
 Us both for this mad quest.

PAULINA

There'll be but one,
 But I, who's damned. I'll do the magics, thou
 Wilt but assist my needs. So if thou wish
 To stay my secret pupil, thou wilt bring
 Those books. And ho, thou comes't to me to study
 Forbidden things; thou cans't not speak of Hell.

IPHIGEN

I do believe it is no sin to know,
 But 'tis a sin to do.

PAULINA

So give the books
 To me and think it like a knowledge gift;
 It is no sin to give, and thus it is
 No act, so thou art saved. Yet I will toil
 But night and night and night and night and night.

IPHIGEN

I'm so parta'en with fright!

IPHIGEN runs away, exiting.

PAULINA

Alas, poor girl,
 Thou wilt begin to learn what fright true is
 Before the final words are uttered in our poem.

ACT II

SCENE 1

TIME enters with a battered guitar. They sit on a stool and tune it. Behind TIME, MELODY and PAULINA experience the passing of years.

TIME

(singing)

Well, there's not much more to say
There's not much more to take
For all the things that happen
In a decade's time awake.

I will take pity now
Upon your wretched hearts
Some sixteen years are passing
As I sing these dreadful parts.

Melody, oh Melody...
Oh oh oh, oh Melody oh...
Entranced by a lover, Holding there,
Spending her sixteen years in a bliss
She'd never known before, lost in his stare

Paulina, oh Paulina...
All swept in her books ma'am, lonely ma'am,
Sixteen some years away from all things
Seeking a magic so dark, her soul she'll damn

Sixteen years...
Melody lives a waking fantasy for sixteen years

Sixteen years...
Paulina searches for Hermione for sixteen years

Paulina and Melody
Trapped in respective melodies

Like prisons we cannot see
So sorrowfully

I, Time, commit you to these sixteen years
I, Time, commit you to these sixteen years
I, Time, commit you to these sixteen years

SCENE 2

Arepo.

HOLDING and MELODY sit in chairs, reading
and sipping brandy.

MELODY puts her things down. Looks around
for something more fun to do.

She hums. A duncecap appears on HOLDING's
head. He appears not to notice.

She hums again. A twig falls in his lap. Again,
no response.

Shouting heard off - coming from upstairs.
MELODY perks up.

HEAD enters from upstairs, escorting two
PRISONERS who thrash against their restraints.

MELODY

Oh, hey Head. What'd they do?

HEAD

(exiting downstairs)

Murder. They'll be punished.

PRISONER

(while being dragged off)

We were justified! Don't take us to the Underground! No! Please!

MELODY

Oh. The Underground. Sounds... exciting.

(beat)

Holding.

(nothing)

Psst. Holding.

(nothing)

Love of my life.

(nothing)

MELODY hums and HOLDING's book is replaced with a goofy grinning doll.

HOLDING

Mean. Rude.

MELODY

Let's go up a floor. Spice things up.

HOLDING

Melody...

MELODY

Where's your sense of adventure? Of excitement?

HOLDING

I was having plenty excitement and adventure in that book I was... dammit, what page was I on? I've got to...

MELODY

Love you, boo.

HOLDING

I love you too.

MELODY

Kiss me.

HOLDING

Yes'm.

They kiss.

RUITH enters. He looks disheveled; his tattered clothes markedly out of place for the rest of Arepo. He sees MELODY and stares.

MELODY feels RUITH's gaze. She looks at him. They stare at each other.

HOLDING

What's the matter?

RUITH

Hey.

HOLDING

Um. Can I help you?

MELODY breaks away from HOLDING. She and RUITH circle each other.

MELODY

There's something in your face that makes me sad.

RUITH

There's something in your face that makes me mad.

HOLDING

Whaaaat is happening?

They continue to circle each other. It is almost the start of a duel, or a dance. There is a danger and electricity in the air between them.

A sword begins to fly to RUITH's open hand.

HOLDING

Melody!

MELODY sings her melody and the sword becomes a balloon sword as it reaches RUITH.

HOLDING rushes over to MELODY.

HOLDING

Melody, my love -

MELODY

Shh!

As she breaks the song, RUIITH summons a real sword again. She goes back to singing and the sword is stopped in midair, staying just out of his reach as he runs around, trying to grab it.

HOLDING

What do we do?

MELODY gestures with her head towards the upstairs exit. She continues to sing.

HOLDING

What?

MELODY rolls her eyes, exasperated. She still sings and tries the same head gesture.

HOLDING

I don't...

MELODY

Oh my goodness, you stupid -

RUIITH snags the sword. With a growl, he swings. MELODY sidesteps it.

MELODY hums and netting flies in, wrapping around RUIITH.

MELODY

Quit gawping and help me -

RUIITH breaks out of the netting.

MELODY

Quick! The next floor! The next floor!

HOLDING takes MELODY's hand. They try and stop RUIITH's advance on them - furniture and dolls and more fling out at RUIITH, but he shrugs them off.

MELODY

(separating)

Holding, go on!

HOLDING

I don't - I don't want to leave.

MELODY

Dammit Holding, focus! We'll die if we stay!

HOLDING

But - my love, what if you -

MELODY

Run you stupid, stupid man!

HOLDING flees up to the next floor of Arepo tower.

RUIITH slashes at MELODY. MELODY evades as he continues to swipe at her.

RUIITH

There's something in your face that makes me mad! I'm gonna get you! High, low - wherever, bitch!

MELODY

Best of luck.

MELODY hums. Hands reach out from the walls and floor of the tower, restraining RUIITH.

RUITH

Get back here!

MELODY is about to leave up the stairs. She looks at RUITH.

MELODY

Something in your face that makes me sad...
Your name?

RUITH

Ruith.

MELODY

Ruith. Melody.

RUITH

I will hunt you down, Melody. Looking at you makes me want to...
(snarls)
I'm gonna kill you, Melody!

MELODY leaves.

RUITH struggles against the hands.

SCENE 3

Sicilia.

PAULINA and IPHIGEN are surrounded by ancient books. PAULINA paces between them, frustrated. IPHIGEN, plucky as can be, is flipping through pages.

IPHIGEN

(reading)

SATOR AREPO TENET OPERA ROTAS

PAULINA

Please do be quiet, Iphigen! My thoughts
Are like unruly weeds.

IPHIGEN

I see that phrase
About in many different tomes. It must
Have meaning.

PAULINA

It is nonsense Latin at
The best! We threw it out some years ago
Because they mean but nothing!

IPHIGEN

They perhaps
Still have some meaning, though we've yet to know -

PAULINA

No wasting time! Succession wars are brewing -

LEONTES

(offstage)

Paulina! Need have I of thy wise council!

IPHIGEN

Come in!

PAULINA

Why, Iphigen? We cannot break
Our work, there is - alas! - too much to do.

IPHIGEN

Some new distraction shall go over well.

LEONTES enters, still dressed for a funeral.

LEONTES

Am I an interruption?

IPHIGEN

No.

PAULINA

Yes.

IPHIGEN

But stay.
Pray tell, repentant king, what business is't?

LEONTES

Well first, my manners, yes? Good eve to thee,
 Good Sister Iphigen; 'tis always grace
 To have thee in the court. I did not think
 Thy duties would permit thee study late
 With our Paulina here.

IPHIGEN

The convent mother
 Has gotten old and many deeds done by
 The nuns slip by her notice.

LEONTES

'Tis not the most
 High holiest of sentiments I've heard
 Come out the lips of a Sister of the church.

IPHIGEN

My philosophy, good King, is that to know -

PAULINA

- Is not a sin, but 'tis a sin to do.
 Pray speak the point, my Lord, or else I'll boot
 Thee on thy hind and send thee from these chambers.

LEONTES

Of course, Madam. 'Tis past the sixteenth year.

PAULINA

I know. But thou didst not disturb my work
 To tell me that Hermione's dead.

IPHIGEN

(crossing herself)

Ah, bless.

LEONTES

Though years and years have gone, my grief has grown
 To sizes only greater. Is there no
 Soft remedy to this fervor in my heart?

PAULINA

Alas, lord, no. The grief that's born of one's
Own deed will linger most of all.

LEONTES

I know
Thou speaks't the truth.

PAULINA

And is this all?

LEONTES

I came upon thy chamber
This evening to profess a feeling in
My heart, aye, one of multitudes inside
These liquid ventricles.

PAULINA

If I say no
Wilt thou use thy station to enforce me listen?

LEONTES

Wise woman, how? Thou wounds't me more with thy
Cold accusations. I am not that king
That was before, no longer tyrant who
Did murder his own Queen with viper words.
If thou desires't, then I will take my leave.

PAULINA

'Tis what I need. So go.

IPHIGEN

Nay, King! Do stay!

PAULINA

Oh Iphigen, dost thou exist to bring
Me naught but irritation and distress?

LEONTES

Good women -

IPHIGEN

We will hear thy words, my lord.

PAULINA

But I don't care!

IPHIGEN

Paulina, 'tis the King!

LEONTES

I'll make it fast: in good atonement for
My deeds and years of wisest council in
Thy work, I'd like to give to thee a gift.

IPHIGEN

You see, Paulina? It is well he stayed.

PAULINA

So can his gift revive Hermione?

LEONTES

Er, no.

PAULINA

And I've no use for pointless gifts, so leave.

LEONTES

Thy spurning words do make my ulcer feed -

PAULINA

The less I hear about thy ulcer's for the best.

IPHIGEN

I second her assessment, my good Lord.

LEONTES

I'll grant thee anything material
Within my reach - !

PAULINA

Then hang on thy material!

IPHIGEN

Paulina! Kingly charity is not -

LEONTES

Thou hast been wisest council since the passing of
My queen, but I'm inclined to give some credence
Unto the other nobles of the realm.

PAULINA

I know the things they whisper in the dark.
They speak of me in violent terms; I've heard
Me called "Sicilia's Hag" and I care not
About weak words. The lesser nobles speak
Of daggers and of war and little do
They know what I prepare inside my halls.

LEONTES

Thou wilt not tell at all about this work
Of thine! If thou would's't tell me, I would make
The noble chatter cease!

PAULINA

I do not care
'Bout idle threats to me. My only thoughts
Are for the realm. To save us all, I don't need thee!
(beat)

LEONTES

Farewell Paulina, Iphigen. I hope
Thy secret study proves most bountiful.

LEONTES exits.

PAULINA sighs. She looks over her books.
Half-heartedly, she flicks some pages over.

IPHIGEN

SATOR AREPO TENET -

PAULINA

If idiocy is your plan tonight,
I'd like it if you'd take it to the convent.

IPHIGEN

Don't be so wroth, my Paul.

PAULINA

The world is all
Incompetent aside from me.

IPHIGEN

(slamming her book shut)

I have
Some work to do back at the convent, Paul.

IPHIGEN goes to leave. PAULINA is absorbed
in her books.

IPHIGEN

Paulina? Dost thou care for me at all?
(still no response)
Thou art "Sicilia's Hag". I know when I'm not wanted.

IPHIGEN exits.

PAULINA

Good Iphigen? Oh dash it all, she's left.
I've spurned away from me the ones who'd give
To me their precious time. Pariah, Paulina.
Though still, I've work to do. I'll save us yet.

PAULINA reads, tired.

PAULINA spies something in the book and
becomes absorbed, as though possessed.

She runs to the book IPHIGEN was reading.

PAULINA

Oh dash it all, where was it? Where? Ah, where?

She finds the page. She compares the two books
side by side.

PAULINA

(calling off)

Oh Iphigen! I've found... she's not around...
Leontes! King! Leontes! Ho! Come back!

A beat of silence. LEONTES reenters.

LEONTES

Why doth Paulina 'quire my approach?

PAULINA

My lord, I know my faults have been enlarged
Of late; I cursed thee when thou came before
And I do beg forgiveness - not an act
I'm prone to do - for my myopic deeds.

LEONTES

This sudden shift in tone doth make me wary.

PAULINA

I know, I know, I've been a thorn for years.
If thou dost think thou cans't forgive, then I
Would like to take thee up on thy good gift.

LEONTES

Then say.

PAULINA

I need a bracer - like a guard's -
That's made of silver with engravings, sir.

LEONTES

Thou what?

PAULINA

Alas! Thou thinks't that I am mad.

LEONTES

Oh no!

PAULINA

Oh yes!

LEONTES

My ulcer's acting up
Upon thy words... I do not understand
The purpose of a silver bracer, Paul.

PAULINA

And I require that this pattern be
Etched on with these words writ within its bounds.

PAULINA shows LEONTES the book.

LEONTES

(reading)

“SATOR AREPO TENET OPERA ROTAS”

This is Latin?

PAULINA

Yes.

LEONTES

'Tis nonsense Latin, ma'am!

PAULINA

Oh yes.

LEONTES

I do not see the point in these
Odd wishings.

PAULINA

Thou dothn't need to see the purpose
In these designs.

LEONTES

Mayhaps 'tis best I do.
The nobles have become more desperate. They
Do come and bid me to remarry, Paul.

PAULINA

Thou must not do this heinous act, my lord!

LEONTES

I know! I cannot for Hermione's sake,
My inner torment is so strong the mere
Inclination towards another wife does make
My ulcer flame! Yet I cannot deny
That to secure the legacy of our
Good kingdom, I must take a wife and have
An heir. The nobles worry at this lack
Of proper lineage and they blame thee.

PAULINA

And they are stupid, for I do advise
And wish thee never take a wife, but 'tis
Thy thought as well!

LEONTES

'Tis so, but I'm afeared;
Each week, it seems I must dispatch some men
To quell a nobleman's revolt. The land
Cannot survive such constant scorching, Paul!

PAULINA

My only thought is for the realm. But have
The bracer made and I will prove thy trust
In me until thou thinks't me like a god.

LEONTES

A week ago my guards secured a man
Who meant to cut thy throat, Paulina ma'am.
(beat)

PAULINA

That is not so. I would have known.

LEONTES

Thou live
 Within thy books these days. I've not the power to
 Defend thee for much longer. I will have
 The bracer made.

PAULINA

I thank thee. I shant fail.

LEONTES

Aye, for Sicilia's sake, I pray so too.

LEONTES exits. PAULINA, full of anxious
 energy, resumes her work.

SCENE 4

Arepo.

MELODY and HOLDING enter a desolate
 floor.

TIME enters with a guitar.

TIME

(singing)

The intrepid two have passed through many floors
 Including one with dancers, sexy sexy dancers,
 Another with a bunch of pillows and some sleepers
 A floor with people dueling with some swords, the duelers,
 Oh yeah, remember that a floor has duelists, remember
 The duelist floor will be important, but that is later,
 They passed a floor with music, one with lots of flowers,
 Yeah lots and lots of floors, so I won't list them all.
 Now they're here.

TIME exits, muttering something annoyed
 under their breath.

HOLDING

Do we have to keep going? I feel so sore.

MELODY

We can't stop. Ruith -

HERMIT appears. She wears a Sator Bracer.

HERMIT

Hello.

MELODY

What now?

HOLDING

(yelps)

HERMIT

Rude. Don't often have guests here. The name's Hermit!

(she extends a hand)

No? That's a shame. Really, such a shame that no one wants to shake hands with me. I'm not *that* frightening, am I?

HOLDING

(goes and shakes her hand)

Uh, I'm Holding. Nice to meet you, Herm-

HERMIT grabs HOLDING by the wrist and examines the sigils on his hand.

HOLDING

Uh, what are you...?

HERMIT

You, lady, what's your name?

MELODY

Melody.

HERMIT

Melody. Show me your hand, will you?

MELODY

Okayyyy?

(she does)

HERMIT

(whistles)

Wow oh wow. That's quite a neat spell on you both. Which one of you made it? Who's it for?

HOLDING

Um...

MELODY

Spell?

HERMIT

The particular combination of symbols on your hand blocks pain.

MELODY

I'm sorry, but that's not what this is. You must be confused.

HERMIT

It's not? I am?

MELODY

It's nothing to do with pain, these are the Lover's Symbols.

Beat. HERMIT slowly turns her gaze to
HOLDING.

HERMIT

Oh, *is* it now?

MELODY

Yes. You know... the traditional... Arepo... lover... thing.

HOLDING looks deeply uncomfortable.

HERMIT

This is going to hurt just a wee bit, sweet, sweet Holding.

HOLDING

What are you...?

HERMIT turns back, doing something to HOLDING's hand that can't be seen. She clicks her tongue a few times and HOLDING cries out.

The pain begins to return to MELODY's chest.

HERMIT reveals HOLDING's hand, the symbols on it smudged.

MELODY

(clutching her chest)

The pain is back - it can't be back - no, no, no.

HERMIT

A word of advice for next time: there is no "Traditional Lover Symbol Thing" in Arepo. But there *are* spells created by scribbling certain symbols on the flesh. Spells that, oh I don't know, mask pain.

MELODY

Holding.

HOLDING

Don't listen to her - look at her, you can tell she's not all there.

MELODY

I should have known something was wrong.

HOLDING

Melody...

MELODY

I ignored the things about you that frustrated me for years because, hey, you were the missing part of me so I figured your issues were small and didn't matter.

HOLDING

I didn't want to be alone, please don't leave me alone, I don't like myself when I'm alone.

MELODY

I should've paid more attention to my doubt.

HOLDING

I - I - I have such horrible thoughts when I'm alone.

MELODY

You never let me see you, always had
some defense up even during -

HERMIT

Oh wow, I wish I had some popcorn. Oh
wait.

HOLDING

It's my mind! It goes and it goes and it
goes and it's - it's like some sort of a
circle, some sort of a devil's wheel - and it
goes, the devil's wheel spins - and -

HERMIT

(she clicks her tongue, a bucket of
popcorn appears in her hands)
Much better.

MELODY

You jealously pushed away anyone else who got close to me -

HOLDING

I think about hurting people, hurting people so bad, and the devil's wheel spins and I
think about all the mistakes I've made...

MELODY

You kept me chained to that same saccharine, boring floor of Arepo. You're a distraction
just like the rest of this goddamn tower.

HOLDING

The devil's wheel in my head spins and spins and spins but - but that's when I'm alone
and -

MELODY

Stop this self-pitying crap! You seduced me, played me for a fool from the moment I met
you - you stole my time from me!

HOLDING

I haven't been alone for years and years because of you.

MELODY

The biting and gnawing and pulsing right here in my chest, crying out for the missing
thing to fill it hurts so bad, but the pain of knowing I wasted so much time on you is
nothing compared to that.

HOLDING

I need you, I can't let the devil's wheel spin again, can't think those thoughts again.

MELODY

You're not a person, you're a vacuum, sucking all my time away from me.

HOLDING

I don't like myself when I'm alone. I like me when I'm with you.

MELODY

I'm going up the tower.

HOLDING

So... so... what I want doesn't matter anymore?

MELODY

Holding, how is it possible you're still making this about you?

HOLDING

I don't care about the top of the damn tower, I care about you!

MELODY

If you cared *about me* you'd listen *to me*. You care about how *I* make *you* feel. I'm leaving.

HERMIT

Aw... you're really going?

MELODY

Yes.

HERMIT

(tossing aside the popcorn bucket)

What are you waiting for? Permission? Go on. Scat.

HOLDING

Melody...

MELODY

I'll be on my way.

MELODY makes to exit upstairs, but HERMIT blocks her path.

MELODY

Didn't you just... what is this?

HERMIT

You'll be leaving. The other way.

MELODY

Please step aside.

HERMIT

Noooooooooope. 'Fraid you gotta go thataway. Or I could have my servants bounce you.

MELODY

Servants? Your name is Hermit.

HERMIT

It doesn't mean anything. I chose it because I liked it better than the one I was given.
Now get out.

MELODY

I don't want to harm you.

HERMIT

And I don't want to clobber your noggin into goo. So turn and go.

HOLDING

(overcompensatingly macho)

Don't worry, Melody. I'll deal with her.

MELODY

Holding...

HOLDING makes to strike at HERMIT.

HERMIT

(as fast as she can speak)

SATOR AREPO TENET OPERA ROTAS

SATOR AREPO TENET OPERA ROTAS

SATOR AREPO TENET OPERA ROTAS

The WITCHES appear and drag HOLDING away before he can hurt her.

HERMIT

Harm, harm, harm. There was harm in thinking the distractions of Arepo were little more than pleasurable bubbles waiting to be burst.

MELODY

You again?

WITCH 3

Us again!

WITCH 2

Us again.

HERMIT

Yes, the Witches Three get around. Not just for those dolts at the door down below.

(displaying the Sator Bracer)

All thanks to this lovely piece of jewelry I made. Isn't it neat?

HOLDING

Don't you worry, Melody! I'll defeat the baddies, I'll -

WITCH 2 tweaks HOLDING's nose. He squeaks.

MELODY

Let me through.

HERMIT

I will. Back into that miserable tower beneath you.

MELODY

I'm being hunted, so move aside unless you want to be cut apart too!

HERMIT

Oh, a hunt? For you two? You win the "Most Exciting Couple" award!

WITCHES 2 and 3 throw confetti into the air.

MELODY

His name is Ruith.

HERMIT

Ruith.

MELODY

Ruith.

HERMIT

That's a strange... Not one of your usual stock, is it Witches?

WITCH 3

Oh, I remember him!

WITCH 2

How could I forget?

(makes a gagging face)

HERMIT

What sort of man is he, Melody?

MELODY

A man whose face makes me sad. And mine makes him very *very* mad.

HERMIT

Huh. And you don't know why.

MELODY

Let me pass.

HERMIT

Well, this changes the predicament doesn't it? If I let you go, then I'll have to contend with this unpleasant Ruith fellow.

MELODY

Come with me then! There's no time for this!

HERMIT

Ah but you see, I'm waiting for something. Those Witches over there, detaining your pal, they're doing me a favor.

WITCH 1

It's not "a favor." It's our job.

WITCH 2

Slave-driver.

HERMIT

Oh, I'm sorry, have you made progress on your end of our agreement?

The WITCHES are about to protest, but -

MELODY

You'll get to the top if you come with us!

HERMIT

I've been there. It's okay. Don't get too excited. Anywho, no going through for you.

MELODY

You're heartless.

HERMIT shrugs. MELODY hums her tune. A gun flies to her hand.

HERMIT

There's no need for that. Put it down, babe. You don't know what -

MELODY fires a warning shot.

HERMIT

God...!

HOLDING

Melody!

MELODY

I'm not dying in some desolate floor of a deceitful tower just because this woman won't let me pass!

MELODY points the gun at HERMIT.
HERMIT clicks her tongue. A WITCH restrains
MELODY.

MELODY

Let me go!
I've got to get to the top! I've got to, I've got to -

MELODY begins to fire wildly.

HERMIT

TIME OUT! FREEZE! PAUSE! CALM YOUR SHIT FOR ONE SECOND!

The commotion grinds to a halt.

HERMIT

Ruith, Melody?

MELODY

Ruith.

HERMIT

Ruith.

MELODY

Ruith.

HERMIT

Fine. Stand aside.

(quietly to the WITCHES)

Is she a part or your...?

The WITCHES nod "yes."

HERMIT

(sarcastic)

Thank you for letting me know before I went all evil troll on her. Took your damn time.

(she takes a breath, then speaks to the
WITCHES an incantation)

A Ruith, it is he -
A young beast on his way.
Be a solid of dark
And Ruith, when he comes,
Is to find you a fog:
You'll be thick, he'll be sick,

He'll be slow, then he'll drain
At your touch, my good dark:
Solidify, be heavy still.

The WITCHES spread out like a gas.

HERMIT

Better?

MELODY

Thank you. I'm sorry.

HERMIT clicks her tongue. MELODY's gun
disappears.

HERMIT

Threaten me again and I'll drop you three hundred stories. Now let's run, babycakes.

MELODY and HERMIT exit up the stairs.

HOLDING

Wait for me! You might need... my... protection...

HOLDING follows.

RUITH enters. He becomes heavy - he tries to
get to the stairs, but the WITCHES hold him at
bay.

The WITCHES suffocate RUITH, bringing him
to his knees.

A repetitive booming noise. The WITCHES
float off of RUITH.

At every beat, the WITCHES pulse.

The WITCHES disappear.

The beat fades.

RUITH laughs with wicked glee. He does an ungraceful pirouette and runs up after MELODY.

SCENE 5

Sicilia.

PAULINA wears a Sator Bracer and, in her other hand, she holds a wheel. She references an open tome beside her on the ground. IPHIGEN watches, also with a book.

TIME enters.

TIME

(rushed, irritated singing)

As you can see, she got her damn bracer.

TIME exits.

PAULINA spins the wheel.

PAULINA

SATOR AREPO TENET OPERA ROTAS

Nothing happens.

IPHIGEN

Try standing on the wheel.

PAULINA

Don't be ridiculous.

For one so scared of damning her good soul
Through magic, thou doth goad me act a lot.

IPHIGEN

I know I tread Temptation's fence. I'm strong.

PAULINA flips through some pages. She holds the wheel above her head.

PAULINA

(unsure)

SATOR AREPO TENET OPERA ROTAS?

Nothing happens.

IPHIGEN

Thou could's't try standing on the wheel. A thought.

PAULINA

(more sure)

SATOR AREPO TENET OPERA ROTAS

Nothing happens.

She throws the wheel and book to the ground, frustrated.

PAULINA

What is the part I'm missing? Nothing works!

A pause.

IPHIGEN

And yet, thou wilt not stand upon the wheel.

PAULINA

BECAUSE THAT'S JUST TOO STUPID! DASH IT ALL!

PAULINA stomps on the wheel in frustration. A loud beat reverberates at her stomp.

PAULINA

What?

She stomps again. Same beat.

IPHIGEN

Oh, how interesting.

PAULINA

A stomp is not
A stand.

IPHIGEN

Semantics, my Paulina dear.

PAULINA begins to stomp in rhythm, putting
her arm with the bracer above her head and
making a fist.

PAULINA

(to the beat, building)

SATOR AREPO TENET OPERA ROTAS
SATOR AREPO TENET OPERA ROTAS
SATOR AREPO TENET OPERA ROTAS

She stops - silence. They wait.

The WITCHES appear.

PAULINA

What, you again?

WITCH 2

It took you long enough.

IPHIGEN

Alas, it cannot be! I tremble, yea!

WITCH 3

You brought us 'way from proper business, now.

PAULINA

What is this muck? And did you trick me bring
You 'gain into this world? Where is my Queen?
Where is Hermione?

WITCH 3

There was no trick.

WITCH 2

Or not at this time.

WITCH 1

Shush, you.

WITCH 2

She's a fool,
'Twas poor in choosing her for this great task.

PAULINA

You disrespectful louts! I ought to bind
You in some thorny shackles for thy lip.
Thy insolence; it makes me want to rage!

WITCH 2

Give us respect, for we're the ones who'll do
The bidding of a crone.

PAULINA

Don't jibe me, Witch!

WITCH 1

And do be kind to us
For we will now return to you Hermione.

WITCH 3

We three witches are but three hard bitches.

PAULINA

Ho, if 'tis you who'll resurrect my Queen,
Then why the years of toil just to bring
You here again?

WITCH 1

I will partake to wipe the cobwebs from
The shelf of knowledge. See Paulina, we
Are from another place, but have been blessed -

WITCH 2

More "cursed," I'd say.

WITCH 1

- with power to bestride
 Between. But when we're here, in this dark world
 Bereft of Magic; we, who are so strong
 Within the bounds of that some other place
 Do lose our might lest one, say one old dam
 Who's called Paulina, does invoke us forth.

WITCH 2

'Tis basic 'splained, for one of basic mind.
 Though yet my fellow has neglected say
 The thing of most import. For we have might
 And magics that do ripple at the weave
 That holds the 'verse, and yet we do no magic thing
 But what it is that we're commanded do.
 You get but one command, old crone. So speak.

PAULINA

With merely words, Hermione could return...

Howling, IPHIGEN hurls the wheel at the
 WITCHES who duck aside.

WITCH 3

Oh no, that was so mean!

PAULINA

Ho, Iphigen! What art thou doing now?

IPHIGEN

I bid thee do not listen to their lies!
 (she wields a small crucifix)
 I see that now we have been tricked. We should
 Have never listened to these devils on
 The day they came to us!

WITCH 2

Who is this trollop?

WITCH 1

She is a nun, it seems.

PAULINA

They will revive
Hermione; 'tis our years of work made real!

IPHIGEN

Nay, get thee gone, thou cretinous blasphemers!

WITCH 3

The nun is not our master, she did not
Partake in magics which did summon us.

WITCH 1

If she will calm, then she will not be harmed -

WITCH 2 stabs IPHIGEN in the eye with her
own crucifix, embedding it in. She screams and
falls.

PAULINA

(going to her)

Oh Iphigen! What have you devils done?

WITCH 2

(throwing confetti)

Oops.

WITCH 1

My kin, you have a way of complicating things.

IPHIGEN's scream gets louder.

WITCH 2

Ugh, will you stop that noise?

WITCH 2 stomps on the crucifix repeatedly,
jamming it deeper into her eye. IPHIGEN gets
quieter and quieter.

PAULINA tries to fight the WITCHES, but
they dance away from her blows.

PAULINA

You beasts! Now cease!
I must command you -

WITCH 3

Do not say those words!

WITCH 1

You get but one command to use with us.
So now you choose between the nun and Queen.

PAULINA starts to speak, but can't. She
watches with horror, then closes her eyes.

IPHIGEN has long since gone quiet. WITCH 2
gives a final stomp.

Everything is still.

WITCH 2

I feel much better now.

WITCH 1

Your silence was
Your choice, Paulina gal.

PAULINA

Sweet Iphigen!
You monsters.

WITCH 2

Blah and blah and blah and blah,
Now please command us bring Hermione back.
I'd like to get this over with, old coot.

PAULINA

I should command you kill yourselves, you witches.

WITCH 3

That does make sense.

WITCH 1

You'll never see your Queen
 Again. Now think, you've sacrificed so much:
 A brace of time... a favor from the king...
 Your nun... and every friend you've ever had.
 You've given up so much to save Hermione.
 It'd be a shame to let it all be dust.

WITCH 2

Hurry up, this world is ugly, I want out.

PAULINA

You made me do these things, you planned this all.

WITCH 3

No "made." We merely prodded in the right
 Direction.

WITCH 1

We will bring Hermione back.

WITCH 1

You wouldn't want this to be nothing, Paul.

PAULINA

Thou dares't to call me Paul! I should... should slay...

WITCH 3

So let us use our arts and give we three
 Your fiercest spell command!

PAULINA

It goes as thus:
 To bring Hermione, good Queen of this
 Sicilia, back unto the mortal fold
 Where she shall walk and wake again as good
 As though she'd never left.

WITCH 1

Paulina, go out to the gardens once
 A day, and one day soon you'll find her there.
 We will begin.

WITCH 3

I've never felt more thrill.

The WITCHES dance and chant around
 PAULINA.

WITCHES

To the dead we shall go,
 To retrieve a good Queen.
 We will bring her to here
 In a birth and a death,
 In a change of a tree,
 Such a tree where a death
 Can be life and a life
 Can be death, to a place
 Where a thought becomes real -
 To Arepo, Arepo
 To Arepo, Arepo!

The WITCHES vanish.

PAULINA

'Tis done. 'Tis done. 'Tis done. 'Tis done. 'Tis all.

PAULINA, in a state of shock, looks at
 IPHIGEN's corpse as though waiting for it to
 respond.

She kneels by the body.

She turns IPHIGEN's head upwards, caresses
 it.

She places her forehead on the cross, still
 embedded in IPHIGEN's eye.

She hums MELODY'S melody.

SCENE 6

Arepo.

The top of the tower.

A gigantic yew tree.

MELODY, HERMIT and HOLDING enter, breathless. One by one, they grow still, looking at the tree in awe.

TIME enters, about to start playing..

TIME

Nope. You can't make me.

(while leaving)

Look here, I'm gonna get the union over. These conditions are deplorable, just deplorable.

TIME exits.

MELODY

We made it. The top of Arepo Tower.

A rapturous silence.

MELODY

What now?

HERMIT

I mean, it's a pretty tree, but don't get all lusty for it now.

HOLDING

Don't be -

HERMIT

The top is the goal
The goal has been hit

Now we sit under the yew tree
And contemplate what it meant.

HOLDING

Oh yes, wonderful. We came all this way to contemplate.

MELODY

(unsure, walking up to the tree)

There was a purpose.

HERMIT

Does it matter?

HOLDING

Yes.

MELODY

No.

(beat)

Maybe

HERMIT laughs, spins around.

HERMIT

Congratulations! It's the greatest mystery solved! A tree! A tree! Oh, what a tree it is!

MELODY

(clutching at her chest)

I made it... why isn't anything happening, why...? There was a purpose.

HOLDING

Yeah, I'm glad we blew up our lovenest so we could see this *amazing* tree. Great. Just great. What now, huh?

RUITH

(offstage)

Death.

(entering)

Death from my pointy sword.

MELODY

Ruith, please. Stop.

RUITH

I'm so ready to get my murder on!

HOLDING

(feigned bravado)

Young man, I'm going to have to -

RUITH

(to HOLDING)

I'll make you a human spit roast if you say another goddamn word.

(to MELODY)

Your boytoy is irritating.

There's something in your face that makes me mad, Melody. Those tears of yours... ah! They're like drops of... condensed... liquid... lies! They make me want to hurl you from the tower's edge and wallow in your splattered, filthy, lying guts!

HOLDING

(losing that bravado)

Kid, I don't know what your -

RUITH

(pointing his sword at HOLDING)

Huh, I didn't realize boytoy has no working ears. He won't mind if I take those vestigial flaps from his head, yeah?

HOLDING

(breaking)

Just how - how the hell do you know each other?!

RUITH

We don't.

MELODY

But I see you and...

RUITH

...and I feel overwhelming betrayal and rage.

MELODY

...and I feel sorrow and guilt, and it makes my chest hurt more and more.

RUITH

I don't get it. I don't need to. All I know is that I'm going to tear her apart and anyone who tries to stop me. Now, Melody, make this easy. Stand still and expose your jugular, please.

MELODY

(strained)

I'm not rolling over for you.

RUITH charges at MELODY. MELODY evades his attacks. She hums and hands come to restrain him - he hacks them away.

She hums and conjures a sword of her own. They duel on the top of the tower.

RUITH disarms MELODY. She backs up against the yew tree.

RUITH readies a final stab -

MELODY hums and the tree itself strikes RUITH with a branch, knocking him to the ground.

HOLDING gets on top of RUITH - he summons a knife.

MELODY

Don't kill him!

HOLDING

He's too dangerous!

HOLDING brings the knife to RUITH's throat.

MELODY

You say you love me, but you only do what you want! If you actually love me, you'll listen to me and let him live!

HOLDING

(he hesitates)

I need you with me. No one will get in the way of us again.

HOLDING raises the knife.

The WITCHES appear.

HERMIT

There you are, my Witches Three!

WITCH 3 pulls HOLDING off of RUIITH, restraining him.

RUIITH is free.

He lumbers towards MELODY.

MELODY hums - the branches of the tree lash out at RUIITH, bludgeoning him down. He struggles to stay standing.

MELODY

(distraught)

I'm so sorry.

RUIITH is on his knees. The tree's branch winds up for a death blow -

WITCHES 1 and 2 hold MELODY against the tree, each grabbing an arm and splaying it out like a cross. WITCH 1 also covers her mouth.

HOLDING

Melody!

RUITH stalks up to MELODY. He pulls his sword back -

HERMIT jumps between RUITH and MELODY.

HERMIT

That's right, do it!

RUITH

Not you!

RUITH, with his free hand, throws HERMIT aside.

RUITH plunges his sword through MELODY, pinning her to the tree.

MELODY dies on the tree, becoming a statue.

All is still and silent.

They stare at the dead MELODY.

ACT III

SCENE 1

Sicilia.

The garden. The great yew tree. A statue of HERMIONE is beneath its branches.

PAULINA enters. The loss of IPHIGEN still lingers as she walks.

She sees HERMIONE.

A beat of disbelief.

PAULINA rushes up to the statue - she sings
the melody and touches HERMIONE.

HERMIONE stirs. She joins in the melody.

The melody comes to an end.

PAULINA

Hermione?

HERMIONE

Paulina? Is it you? My wisest one
I've had the strangest dream...

PAULINA

A dream of death
Hermione. I'm sorry for my blunt
Fast words.

HERMIONE

It is the bluntest words of thine
That made me love thee, my Paulina. This
Long dream... it was my dream in death, I guess.
'Tis fading quick already. How long was
I gone?

PAULINA

Some sixteen years.

HERMIONE

Oh was it so?
I knew t'was long, but in that dream the time
Was such a muddy thing I could not know.

PAULINA

We are, my Queen, so glad to have thee back.

HERMIONE

Wherefore and how am I returned?

PAULINA

I...

(beat)

T'was I who brought thee to Sicilia, by...

(beat)

HERMIONE

Thou've brought me to
Leontes? But how could I face that man,
That jealous man who at my words did slay
My son and I with his pronouncement? He
Is past the pale of reason.

PAULINA

Was, my Queen.
I've much to tell, but now suffice it that
The King has changed his ways and spent much time
Excising from his heart that blackness which
Condemned thee on that day. His mourning has
Been everlasting, Queen.

HERMIONE

And so thou sayest.
Paulina; why do thy wise eyes look past
Me, towards the distance? It is like thy soul
Is far away.

PAULINA

I... I'm so tired, dear.
Oh come, my Queen, and let us walk around
The gardens and make chat until the sun
Is sucked back in the Earth.

HERMIONE

'Tis strange that thou
Should be so sad. But let us walk, my Paul.

PAULINA

It is no sin to know, but 'tis a sin
To do...

HERMIONE

What did's't thou say?

PAULINA

But naught at all.

HERMIONE offers her arm. After a time,
PAULINA accepts. It is as though she cannot
register the world at a normal speed.

HERMIONE winces and grabs her chest.

PAULINA

Art thou in pain?

HERMIONE

'Tis not for thee to worry.

HERMIONE hums the melody as she leads
PAULINA off.

SCENE 2

Arepo.

The Underground. The stage is dark and barren.

HERMIT is curled into herself.

RUITH is thrown onstage.

He holds a yew branch. He fiddles with it.

RUITH

Ooh, the Underground. I've heard about this prison. Spooky.

(silence)

Hey, I know I just stabbed a chick, but in my defense, I'm pretty sure she was a terrible person. I don't feel mad at all now.

(he takes a refreshed breath)

Kinda nice, actually. Like having come out of a shower.

(silence)

Head and Heart sure were quick to ruin the fun. Took us away while I was relishing the moment. A couple of no-fun police, that's what those two are.

(silence)

Yo, gloomybutt, talk with me. I think we're gonna be here for a while.

HERMIT

We'll be in the Underground until we die.

(beat)

RUITH laughs.

HERMIT

Ah, laughing at your wretched fate, a sure first sign of insanity.

RUITH

You're serious.

HERMIT

Do I look to be in a joking mood?

RUITH goes quiet.

HERMIT

Now you understand the gravity of things, child -

RUITH doubles over - he lets out a long, sustained note of despair.

HERMIT

Oh boy...

RUITH stands up, leaving the yew branch on the ground. HERMIT notices the branch. She slowly moves to take it.

RUITH

(shouting off)

Let us out of here you tweedle-dum-dee bastards! There's nothing here! It's inhumane! Inhumane!

(turning back to HERMIT - she backs off from the branch, acting innocent)

(picking up the branch)

This is hell.

HERMIT

Sit, make yourself comfortable. You wanted to chat, let's chat. Hi Ruith, I'm Hermit; pleasure to make your actual acquaintance. We can talk about what we did to get us in the Underground, that's a good icebreaker. You did a murder, so that's neat.

RUITH

I don't want to talk anymore.

HERMIT

I attempted to escape from Arepo, that's pretty neat too.

RUITH

That's a crime?

HERMIT

(nods)

RUITH

(thick with sarcasm)

Why would you ever want to escape this heavenly tower?

HERMIT

I remember the other world. I don't know how, but I do.

(beat)

It's so much better than... *this*. Arepo. It's all lies and illusion. Nothing is *real* here.

RUITH

How'd you expect to escape that if I impaled you to the tree?

HERMIT

I was planning to hijack Melody's resurrection.

RUITH

Pardon?

HERMIT

Oh boy. Hum... how do I put this? Dying unjustly in the other world is the thing that brought us all into Arepo. In order to get back, someone in the other world has to perform

a resurrection. Dying on the tree is sort of the end of the resurrection process. Don't ask me why, I just know the yew tree up top is basically pure magic. If I were to have died on it as well during that brief window, I would've revived too.

RUITH

The yew tree is magical?

HERMIT

...yes.

RUITH

(prodding his yew branch)

Huh. How'd you know Melody was going to be brought back to life?

HERMIT

Why, I engineered the whole thing, silly.

RUITH

Bullshit.

HERMIT

Oh, I'm a paragon of sincerity right now. I asked the Witches to bring me back to the other world, and that's why they were dabbling in resurrecting Melody. Just because they're some of the most powerful beings ever to exist doesn't mean that resurrections are easy. Though you screwed everything up, thank you.

RUITH

Sorry for not murdering you.

HERMIT

Yeah, well, I was freaking ecstatic when you said you'd slay anyone who got in the way of you killing Melody, but then you wussed out.

RUITH

Don't push me, woman.

HERMIT

I'm a-quakin' with a-fear.

RUITH

If the Witches are so damn powerful, get them to get us out of here.

HERMIT

Can't. Magic and Sensitivity are weak in the Underground.

(clicks her tongue)

What? Where's the big bowl of nachos I asked for? Oh yeah, the Underground sucks.

RUITH

And hey, idiot, you could've had the Witches to revive you and then neither of us would be here right now.

HERMIT

Oh wow, I should've thought of that, man I'm such a troglodyte nincompoop. Of course I thought of that! The only person who would've bothered to resurrect me was my lover, but she died before I met the Witches.

RUITH

(standing up, leaving the yew twig on the ground)

Cry me a river.

RUITH turns away and does stretches, thinking. HERMIT makes her move for the yew twig once more.

RUITH

There's no other way out of Arepo?

HERMIT

(taking the twig, tucking it away)

That'd require freeing yourself from the Underground first. Though... there is *sort of* another way back to the other world.

RUITH

(rounding on her)

WHAT?!

HERMIT

It would destroy the universe in minutes.

RUITH

What.

HERMIT

But hey, it'd open a path to the other world. So... congratulations?

RUITH

(looking around)

Where the hell is the yew twig?

HERMIT

From the tree? Is that what that was? Oh no, the Underground must've made it disappear.

RUITH

It can do that?

HERMIT

Sure, why not?

(beat)

RUITH

(sitting, despairing)

I'm never getting out of here.

(beat)

HERMIT

Would you... would you like to remember the other world?

RUITH

You can do that?

HERMIT

(nods)

Stand and close your eyes.

(beat)

RUITH

(stands, closes his eyes)

I'd like to remember.

HERMIT

(holding the yew twig with one hand,
putting the other on his forehead)

I bet you would.

(clicks her tongue)

Music plays.

RUITH gets lost in memories, experiencing joy, then shock, then anger, then despair.

RUITH opens his eyes with a gasp.

RUITH

I remember!

SCENE 3

Arepo.

The top of the tower.

HOLDING is pounding the yew tree with his fists.

HOLDING

Bring her back! Come on, you stupid tree! What'd you do to her? Give me back Melody, give me back...

His hits get weaker.

He falls into the tree, exhausted. He hugs it.

A goofy grinning doll falls from the tree. He stares at it for a second, then picks it up.

HOLDING looks out, utterly lost.

He goes to the edge of the tower. He peers over.

He can't see the bottom.

He looks at the tree. Back down.

He closes his eyes, spreads his arms like wings.

He takes a step forward -

He is struck with fear.

HOLDING goes fetal by the edge, clutching the doll.

SCENE 4

Sicilia.

A dumb show set to music.

PAULINA brings HERMIONE, covered in a veil, to LEONTES, surrounded by his followers, PERDITA among them.

PAULINA removes the veil.

LEONTES drops to his knees, clutching HERMIONE's legs.

HERMIONE absolves LEONTES.

The world explodes with color as mourning leaves Sicilia.

HERMIONE and LEONTES embrace.

RUITH enters. The world is frozen.

RUITH

I remember.

They called me Mamillius in this other world.

I would've been the king of Sicilia one day if it hadn't been for...

RUITH turns to HERMIONE. He circles around her.

RUITH

(he speaks to the frozen HERMIONE)

Melody! Hermione! Mother! Whore!

Now I know why I hated Melody so much. You were my mother who betrayed our family, who slept with my uncle.

I remember who I am.

I am Mamillius.

I was struck sick and died by *your deeds!*

(beat)

That night... I remember how that night felt. Withering... sick. My stomach was corroding and I couldn't eat - my whole body was burning, covering me in a slick sheen of sweat. I could hardly breathe. My father would come in the room and hold my hand and cry and curse. I needed my mother, the one who existed only in my imagination. But I knew she was never real, because this... *abomination* was my real mother. The night I died, I had horrible fever dreams of depraved devils dancing in an orgy of fire, of my mother going and seducing them, and then she looked at me -

And then I was at the base of Arepo tower.

(to the audience)

She thinks she's so safe in Sicilia. In that other world.

No one is safe from me.

I swear by it.

RUITH exits.

Time resumes and brings sound with it: cheers and applause from the residents of Sicilia.

PAULINA

(to PERDITA)

Please you to interpose, fair madam: kneel

And pray your mother's blessing.

(PERDITA does)

(to HERMIONE)

Turn, good lady;

Our Perdita is found.

HERMIONE

You gods, look down

And from your sacred vials pour your graces

Upon my daughter's head!

(she brings PERDITA to her feet)
 (the whole procession walks off)

Tell me, mine own:

Where hast thou been preserved? Where lived? How found?

The empty stage morphs into:

SCENE 5

Arepo.

RUITH and HERMIT are in the Underground.

RUITH is sitting curled up.

RUITH

I'm going to kill her.

HERMIT

What? Who?

RUITH

Hermione. I'm going to break into the other world and cut her throat.

HERMIT

We're trapped in the Underground, Ruith.

RUITH

I know! God, I just feel so... impotent. I'm so pissed off and I can't *do anything about it!*

HERMIT

That's a shame. It's so easy to create the apocalypse. If we weren't here you could do something about it, but alas.

RUITH

Please don't mess with me right now.

HERMIT

No really, the Witches told me. Carve a wheel out of the yew tree up top, crucify some poor bastard on it, then sacrifice them - voila! You'll be able to cross into the other world and all reality will crumble away.

RUITH

That's oddly specific.

HERMIT

Hey man, I don't claim to understand magic. I just use it.

RUITH stands up, begins to pace, thinking.

Suddenly, RUITH grabs HERMIT.

RUITH

What aren't you telling me?

HERMIT

What are you talking about?

RUITH

You're awfully willing to give away a whole lot of secrets all of the sudden. There's something else. Everything. Tell me.

HERMIT

Well, I was in love with an oracle in the other world -

RUITH

Don't piss me off!

RUITH hits HERMIT. She falls. He stands over her, about to attack again - she points the yew twig at him.

RUITH

The Underground just "made that disappear," huh?

HERMIT

Back off. I don't want to hurt -

RUITH

What were you going to do with the yew twig, huh?

HERMIT

(standing)

Kneel boy, hands behind your head. Don't do something regrettable.

RUITH

(doing so)

The yew tree is magic, so this is magic, which means...

(realizing)

...you were going to escape here and leave me to rot!

HERMIT

(clicking her tongue - handcuffs appear in her hands)

It's not that simple!

RUITH

Seems like it to me.

HERMIT

I couldn't just call the Witches! We're still in the Underground, it would've taken years for them to get here.

RUITH

Call them, get us out of here.

HERMIT

(going to handcuff him)

You're psychotic. You -

RUITH whirls around, stripping HERMIT of both the handcuffs and yew twig. He points it at her.

RUITH

Do it. Or I can do it without you.

HERMIT

If you kill me, you'll be alone here! You think this is hell? Alone will be so much worse.

RUITH considers. He slaps handcuffs on her.

HERMIT

Oh come on!

RUITH backs off and watches her, plucking the yew twig.

RUITH

Carve a wheel from the yew tree... crucify someone... sacrifice them. That's all there is to it. That's all there is. Right?

HERMIT says nothing.

RUITH twirls the yew twig. He grins.

HERMIT

Please don't kill me.

RUITH grins wider.

SCENE 6

Sicilia.

HERMIONE and LEONTES walk in the garden with the giant tree.

They look up at its branches.

HERMIONE

I see this tree has hardly changed at all.

LEONTES

'Tis well, I think, since much else has in thy...

HERMIONE

Thou can't just say the words, Leontes. I won't
Upbraid thee for reminding me about
The time I spent away.

LEONTES

A euphemism there.
Thou too hast trouble talking 'bout the death
And griefs I've caused.

HERMIONE

There is no need to talk
About those things.

LEONTES

And so I shant, for though
I'd spent much time awake imagining
The guilty things I'd say to thee, to see
Thee here in stunning flesh again, my Queen,
Methinks that all is as it was before.
And so, my darling love, I ask if thou
Woulds't rule with me as man and wife the way
We did before these maddest happenings were.
(beat)

HERMIONE

YOU WHAT?!

LEONTES

What did I say amiss?

HERMIONE

Oh Lord,
Capacity have I but much too much
In my forgiving heart, but dares't thou ask
Me to resume a life as though that pain
Had not occurred?

LEONTES

I did presume too much.

HERMIONE

I do not care about the pains thou caused to me,
But what thou did's't to our Mamillius? No,
I can't forgive a gouge like that.

LEONTES

My Queen -

HERMIONE

And he was innocent of these affairs,
 And so his death doth pierce me more acutely than
 My own. Yet - ah! - Leontes, my fool heart
 Doth love thee still. Yet it forgives thee but
 The once, cannot forgive the second time.

LEONTES

I've done repentance like an ascet monk
 And bathed myself in bloody guilt for years -

HERMIONE

And I do see and feel it, but thy guilt
 Doth not revive our son so cruelly slain.
 I'll rule beside thee, yea, but not that way
 We did before thy accusations went amuck.
 I have a missing part of me. I don't
 Recall what happened in that afterlife
 I lived, but there's a feeling that I know
 Was with me in that other world, now here,
 Like there's a hole beneath my sternum, here, just here.

(realizing)

I know the thing 'twill fill the missing piece
 Within! Of course, it is our son! Of course!
 T'will not be filled by thee nor no one else.

LEONTES grimaces, clutching at his side and
 shrinking away.

HERMIONE

I've spoke so harsh; I've caused a pain in thee.

LEONTES

Not quite. Inside my penitent new ways
 I have, I think, a-gone too far.

HERMIONE

So thou
Art sick.

LEONTES

Indeed, Hermione. We'd have
A couple dozen years together still
Were it not for this inflicted ulcer ill
I've gained within your time away.

HERMIONE

A doctor must be called -

LEONTES

I'll none of that.
I've made my mind up that I'll die from this.

HERMIONE

But that's so stupid.

LEONTES

Yea, but I have made
The choice and am committed to my death
By self-inflicted ulcer.

HERMIONE

Paulina too
Will leave me 'long with you.

LEONTES

I 'spose she shall.

HERMIONE

Have I revived so I may live alone?

LEONTES

'Tis not the worst. Thy daughter, who was exiled -
She hath returned! Thou'll have much time to spend -

PERDITA enters.

LEONTES

To speak of her, she comes!

PERDITA

Good eve, my truest parents.

LEONTES

Aye, good eve.

An awkward silence.

LEONTES

And I will leave the reunited pair
Of mother, daughter, who may talk alone.

(beat)

(about to leave, he thinks of something
important to say to HERMIONE)

I know 'tis paltry, but I'll give thee one
Magnificent such thing within my grasp
To give thee. Price doth not apply. It is
The least of all the world that I can offer thee.

HERMIONE

Revive Mamillius.

LEONTES

Hermione...

HERMIONE

I know. But since thou posed the question so...

LEONTES

'Tis fair. I'll take the blow.

HERMIONE

I have my wish.

LEONTES

And I will hear it.

HERMIONE

Do not die from thy
Cruel ulcer that thou gave thyself,
Don't cut thy life so short because thy guilt
Demands thee do.

LEONTES

Except for that. I'll grant
Thee anything within my realm
Excepting that.

HERMIONE

Thou art determined.

LEONTES

Yes.

PERDITA

Oh father, art thou dying?

LEONTES

I should not
Have said a thing. 'Tis nothing much, my girl.

HERMIONE

Is't nothing I can say or do to make
Thee change thy mind and live to wizen'd age?

LEONTES

No.

PERDITA

Do I get say - ?

HERMIONE

Then I should like you heed
Me when I give you council. I did not
But care for ruling much before I died,
But in pursuit of our lost son's good spirit,
I will partake to rule as he'd have done
Were he alive this day.

LEONTES

And that I'll grant
For free. I am thy mouthpiece, Queen.

HERMIONE

Then I've
No wish.

PERDITA

Good mother, thou wert gone for long,
My husband and myself do know the arts
Of ruling well and we can guide -

HERMIONE

Mamillius
Is my guide. Leontes, thou art so determined
That thee die? Then I'm determined that I rule
In my son's stead.

LEONTES

I've no objection, dear.
I'll leave you two to bond; good den, you both.

LEONTES exits.

PERDITA

Forgive me mother, I must speak protest.

HERMIONE

Perdita, but wherefore?

PERDITA

I am so fit to rule; my judgement is -

HERMIONE

I do believe it, yet if I gave up
My second life and let it waste, I'd shame
Myself, the Gods, and my Mamillius.

PERDITA

I am thy daughter! Wilt thou shame me so?

HERMIONE

Mamillius was so wise -

PERDITA

Forget of him.

For I'm a worthier successor to

Sicilia than he'd have been, madam,

And think of me as thy Mamillius now.

(silence)

HERMIONE

(her chest pain flares - she uses it as fuel)

Leave me, girl.

PERDITA

Forgive me, I did lose my -

HERMIONE

Leave!

A beat. PERDITA rushes off. HERMIONE watches her go, rubbing her chest.

ACT IV

SCENE 1

TIME enters, looking more tired and haggard than before. On one end of the stage is RUIITH in the Arepo Underground, on the other is HERMIONE, LEONTES, PERDITA and PAULINA. They show the passage of time under the following.

TIME tries to sit on their stool, but winds up knocking it over. They sit on the ground instead. They start playing their guitar, but mess up the opening several times before taking a deep breath and successfully launching into the song.

TIME

Well, we're here again you see
 With greater pains this time
 For even in reunion
 Life will find its way to crime.

Hermione, oh Hermione...
 Paulina took ill 'cause of Iphigen
 Cancer inside her brain took her to
 Arepo not before the strike of noon

Hermione, oh Hermione...
 Oh oh oh, oh Hermione, oh...
 In sixteen some years Leontes fell
 Deep in a coma, trapped in a state
 Between awake and dead, a vacant shell

Ruith, he waits...
 Ruith, he waits...
 Hermione knows the pain of waiting
 Waiting for a son that'll never show

I, Time, commit you to these sixteen years
 I, Time, commit you to these sixteen years
 I, Time, commit you to these sixteen years

Once the song is done, TIME rolls over and falls
 asleep. They are dragged off by the WITCHES

SCENE 2

Sicila.

LEONTES is on a bed, in a coma.

Yew pines fall from above onto LEONTES.

HOLDING's voice moans from offstage.

LEONTES wakes with a start. He sees the yew pines. Gathers them all in a hand.

HOLDING moans again.

LEONTES drifts back into unconsciousness, clutching the pines.

HERMIONE enters with PERDITA.
HERMIONE holds a heat compress against her chest.

PERDITA

I shall not go! Thou cans't not make me, ma'am!

HERMIONE

T'was at thy insult that Verona 'clared
Their war with us. They've sent their terms and I
Will gladly take the option ending with
The lesser spill of our Sicilian blood.

PERDITA

I won't be made a martyr -

HERMIONE

Martyrdom
This task is not. A royal heir shall spend
A decade in their court. 'Tis best.

PERDITA

'Tis death!

HERMIONE glares at PERDITA. PERDITA
turns away.

HERMIONE

(wincing)

I wish this heated rag would numb me better.

She holds LEONTES' hand.

She feels something odd and unfurls his fingers to find the yew pines. She plucks some out, looks them over.

HERMIONE

Perdita, didst thou put these yew pines here?

PERDITA

Nay, I did not. Perhaps a priest came by?

HERMIONE

Those old, tradition-bounded geese would ne'er
E'en think to heal his ills with pagan prayer.

HERMIONE stares at the pines, tries very hard to remember something.

Frustrated that nothing has come, she sprinkles the pines on LEONTES forehead. She puts her fingers on his lips and hums the melody.

PERDITA

What is that song?

HERMIONE

'Tis just the lullaby
Paulina made to put Mamillius to sleep.
(she stands)

Thou wilt to Verona.

PERDITA

Queen, I'll not!

HERMIONE and PERDITA exit.

SCENE 3

Arepo.

RUITH in the Underground. Bones scattered about. He clutches the yew twig. The Sator Bracer lies in front of him. He stares at it.

The WITCHES appear.

WITCH 2

Ugh, why'd we have to come here?

WITCH 1

There was a summoning.

WITCH 3

Oooh, spooky darkness.

RUITH picks up a bone, drops it on the ground, making a loud clatter. The WITCHES see him.

RUITH

Hello, my pretties.

WITCH 1

We wondered about Hermit's fate.

RUITH

Looks like you got along just fine without her.

WITCH 1

We've kept a busy sixteen years.

RUITH

That's how long its been?

(his mood sharply turns)

I've been in this hole for sixteen years?!

WITCH 3

Whoa, calm, my boy.

RUITH

Don't tell me to calm down! I'm your master now - you do what I want! What I want!

WITCH 2

Prissy little punk.

RUITH grabs WITCH 2's arm and breaks it
over his knee.

RUITH

There'll be no backtalk, yeah? Take me to the surface, Witches. Thy master commandeth.
(beat)

What? Too hard for you?

WITCH 2

(wheezing)

Too easy, actually.

RUITH

What's the stalling for? Chop chop, monkeys.

WITCHES

Yes.

WITCH 2 re-sets their arm.

The WITCHES dance and chant.

WITCHES

To the top, here we go
Getting free from the dark,
Up we go to the ground
From the ground, freshen air,
Up we go, up we go,
Once condemned he will fly,
He will soar, he will land,
Up we go, up we go
To the entrance we go
To the entrance we go
To the entrance we go!

The WITCHES clutch RUITH.

An ominous rumble.

A chorus can be heard singing.

The world is rebuilt around them.

RUITH is in front of Arepo Tower where
HEAD and HEART stand guard.

The WITCHES are exhausted. HEAD and
HEART are shocked.

RUITH looks around. Flexes. Feels freedom,
fresh air.

RUITH

Hello again!

RUITH reveals the yew branch.

HEAD and HEART gasp and draw weapons.

RUITH swiftly kills the WITCHES with the
twig.

HEAD and HEART have weapons ready, but
they don't advance.

RUITH stalks towards them, enjoying himself a
little too much.

RUITH

Head and Heart, buddies, you remember me, don'cha? It's your good friend Ruith! Been so long.. so long. Oh man, remember when I first showed up in Arepo? I was just a bundle of joy, not even ten years old. So happy, all shellshocked and withered. I've found out why, thanks to my late cellmate. It's mommy issues, it turns out. Big, fat, cheating, lying mommy issues. That momma's boy has grown into Ruith.

(he raises the branch at the both of them)

I'd ask you to let me in, but... nah.

RUITH points the yew branch to the sky.

The air is drained from around HEAD and
HEART.

They suffocate to death.

RUITH brings down the yew branch, admires it with a wild grin.

As he opens the door to the tower, RUITH giggles uncontrollably, mad with power.

Reveling and the following heard offstage:

HERALD

We have a new resident! Welcome. TO. THE. PAR -

HERALD is abruptly silenced by RUITH.

Screams. RUITH's laughter.

The screams are silenced violently, one by one.

SCENE 4

Sicilia.

The garden with the giant yew tree.

HERMIONE is kneeling at the roots, a hand on it. Her other hand holds the heat compress to her chest.

HERMIONE

I'm weary, Paul. In these long years since I
Returned I can't yet seem to shake the thought
That my sole reason for returning here
Was so I could absolve a foolish man
And then be done with my sad part inside
Said man's redemption story. There's a hole
That feels to me as physical as this
Rough bark. It is Mamillius shaped, I know.
I blather, Paul. Forgive me that. And so.

PERDITA enters, gleeful.

PERDITA

Oh Queen! I've made the peace of which thou asked!

HERMIONE

How so?

PERDITA

I sent a messenger unto
Verona's camp with promises of grain!

HERMIONE

Perdita! We would kill our peasants with
The grain required but to end the war!

A severed head falls from the sky with a letter
stuck to it. PERDITA squeaks. HERMIONE
goes to the head, takes the letter.

HERMIONE

(reading)

Thy grain is yet more insult from Sicilia.
Now send thy royal heir to live with us
A score or sage Verona will wage war.

(to PERDITA)

This was ill done.

PERDITA

I will not live with them!
Thou cannot be so cruel to part a daughter from -

HERMIONE

Oh, tell me not of losing kids! Thou hast -

(she doubles over as chest pain flares)

My girl, I love thee so. I do. But thou
Hast made a mess.

(PERDITA starts to speak)

No more. We're done tonight.

PERDITA exits.

HERMIONE sits. She hums the melody,
clutching at the empty space inside her chest.

SCENE 5

Arepo.

A floor with two people dueling: BALANCE,
whose face is covered, and DUELIST.

Time freezes. DUELEST steps out of character,
speaks as TIME.

TIME

Remember how I told you to remember that Melody passed through a floor with duelists
and how it would be important to the plot later? This is that.

(takes a bow)

Thank you, thank you. Yes, I'm truly amazing, thank you. Plebians.

TIME reassumes the character of DUELIST.
Time resumes.

RUITH enters, bloody.

The duelists pause.

RUITH

'Sup.

No one responds.

RUITH does a flourish with his yew twig.

He notices something.

RUITH

(pointing at BALANCE)

Oi, you. Yeah, you. You look familiar.

BALANCE

I don't recognize you. Let us alone.

RUITH
(stalking closer)

No... there's something about you.

BALANCE
(getting combat ready)

Back off.

DUELIST
(assuming a combat stance as well)

Swine, if you dare take one step more towards her -

RUITH points his yew branch at DUELIST.
DUELIST shudders and spasms.

Time freezes. DUELIST becomes TIME again,
speaks to the audience.

TIME
It's okay. I realize things are getting a bit morbid, but hey! Remember, it's all just pretend. Just a second...

TIME prepares the following stage trick, gives a thumbs up, then goes back to spasming as DUELIST. Time resumes.

Bloody foam comes from DUELIST's mouth as he dies.

BALANCE
(she reveals her face)

What are you?

RUITH
Ruith. Though you may remember me as Mamillius.

BALANCE
Mamillius?
(thinking)

No... I remember no such name.

RUITH

That's too bad. I've figured out who you are.

BALANCE

I've never seen you before in my life.

RUITH

You've gotten old, Paulina. Like, really *really* old.

BALANCE

My name is Balance. I don't know Paulina.

RUITH

Welp, this little chat was pointless. If you won't remember who you are, then there's no reason for me to keep you around.

RUITH raises his yew branch towards her.

BALANCE stands on her tip-toes.

DUELIST, still dead, becomes reanimated.

RUITH

My, my, my; what fun.

RUITH focuses on DUELIST, who shudders but keeps moving forward.

DUELIST and RUITH duel; DUELIST moves with a noticeable lack of grace, but as RUITH keeps stabbing DUELIST with the yew twig, they shrug off each wound.

RUITH

(still dueling)

Alright, Paulina. You've had your fun.

BALANCE

My name is Balance, psychopath.

RUITH

And my name's Ruith. Or Mamillius. Take your pick. Nice to re-meet you.

BALANCE

Leave me alone.

RUITH

I won't hurt you. Call your minion off.

BALANCE

I can't trust you.

RUITH

I'd rather not expend all my energy on this stubborn ass. Cut the strings. Let the puppet drop.

BALANCE

Never.

RUITH

You leave me no choice, Paulina.

BALANCE

Balance.

RUITH

Whatever.

RUITH drives the yew branch into DUELIST's wrist and twists and cranks it until the tendons break, forcing them to drop their sword.

DUELIST still comes after him.

With a yell, RUITH shoves DUELIST down the stairs. RUITH follows.

A bright light flashes from the exit.

RUITH reenters, panting, exhausted, and more bloody.

BALANCE

There's nothing left.

RUITH

Exactly. Nothing for you to toy with, Paulina.

BALANCE

Why do you insist on calling me that?

RUITH

I like the way your face twitches when you're annoyed.

(he moves towards her, she backs away)

I won't hurt you. I'm going to the top. I'd like you to come with me.

BALANCE

You'll have to bring my corpse with you.

RUITH

You're more important to me alive. That said, I have no qualms about ripping the bones from your still living flesh if you're going to be a raging hemorrhoid about it.

(he extends a hand)

Come.

BALANCE balks, looking from his hand, to him.

RUITH

Put down your sword.

Her grip tightens.

SCENE 6

Sicilia.

LEONTES bedridden, HERMIONE napping on a chair beside him.

HOLDING's moan floats in.

LEONTES jolts awake, waking HERMIONE too.

A stunned beat.

LEONTES

Hermione, I beg you, take me to
The yew tree in the garden.

HERMIONE

Why, O King?
Why hast thou woken, why -?

LEONTES

Please cease with chat
My Queen, I've not the time -

HOLDING's moan. LEONTES slumps over,
asleep once again.

HERMIONE

Leontes, ho!

(she shakes him to no avail)

Oh damn this strange disease! Oh damn, oh damn!

She waits to see if he will wake.

HERMIONE makes an exasperated sound and
drapes LEONTES' weight onto her shoulders.

HERMIONE

Come on, sick King. Thy mystery of words
Does fill me with some portent. Come, my king,
Thou art far lighter from disease and that
Doth scare me near as much as thy return.

HERMIONE drags him out of the room.

ACT V

SCENE 1

Arepo.

The top of the tower.

A withered HOLDING is melded with the giant yew tree. He holds a beat-up goofy grinning doll, stuffing popping out of it. He moans, then is silent again.

RUITH enters. He takes a long breath of fresh air.

RUITH

Ah. Holding. It's been so long. I see you've... *grown*.

(beat)

HOLDING

What?

RUITH

Eh? No one? Come on, that was funny.

HOLDING

What do you want.

RUITH

What everyone wants really. To break down the barrier between worlds. To destroy his mother. To be the ender of all things. The usual.

HOLDING

You can't have Melody.

RUITH

You're a sad, sad man. Have you waited all these years stuck in that tree? Hoping you'd follow Hermione - sorry, Melody - into that other place? If I didn't think you were so pathetic, I'd find that super tragic and sad, my friend.

HOLDING

I'm not your friend.

RUITH

Which is for the best because boy, will you not like this next part.

BALANCE

(entering)

Who are you talking to, Ruith?

RUITH

Welcome to the party, Balance. This is Holding. He's very sad.

BALANCE

What in the hell...?

RUITH

I know, right? Now, Holding. There needs to be a death, okay? I was going to use my old friend Paulina here, but since you can't move and have just... the most punchable face, I think I'll rearrange my plans.

BALANCE stands on her toes, summoning a sword.

RUITH

What, scared? Defiant? You can say something, you know.

BALANCE stalks towards RUITH.

RUITH

I'm going to cut down some branches from the tree. I'm going to make a wheel. I'm going to cut you out of the tree and crucify you on the wheel. And then I'm going to gut you. I'd be getting my protest on, if I were you.

HOLDING

I'm ready to die. I'm ready to follow Melody to the other place.

RUITH

If that's what you think is going to happen, then sure you are.

RUITH snaps his arm back and points the yew branch at BALANCE.

RUITH

Are you going to continue to misbehave?

BALANCE

I will not be complicit in your mad scheme to break the world.

RUITH

I'll take that as a yes.

As though gravity has suddenly gotten stronger,
BALANCE is pressed into the ground.

RUITH takes her sword. He severs her toes. He
tosses the sword off the tower.

RUITH

Be a good girl and sit, will you? There'll be no more swords.

BALANCE

I will shove you from the tower's edge!

RUITH

Ignore her, Holding. The two of us will begin a lovely dance in this moonlit hour.

RUITH goes to the yew tree, cackling.

SCENE 2

Sicilia.

The garden with the yew tree.

HERMIONE enters with LEONTES, now
awake but still clinging to HERMIONE for
support. PERDITA trails after them.

PERDITA

Now wait a minute; he is sick and rest -

LEONTES

Here... here! Please put me down just at the roots.

HERMIONE

I'll do't, but please, my lord, explain!
 Hath rough Verona sent their first attack?
 (she lowers him down)

LEONTES

I don't
 Know if there's time. I think the world will end.

HERMIONE

I think you're lost in fever dreams, Leon.

LEONTES

Nay, I would know the difference.

HERMIONE

That is what
 A man betaken by such fevered sight
 Would say.

PERDITA

Then why'd you drag him here? You know
 He's mad and soon will die if not returned
 To bed!

LEONTES

(clutching at his stomach)

Arepo, ah! Arepo!

PERDITA

See? He speaks
 In nonsense words, my Queen! This is mad -

Thunder sounds, light flickers, a low drone
 establishes for the scene.

Intestines fall from the yew tree.

HERMIONE throws them off of her and
 LEONTES. PERDITA is paralyzed.

The yew tree splits apart. A gutted HOLDING
is strapped onto a wheel.

The wheel is pushed aside, revealing RUIH.
He holds the doll in one hand, yew branch in the
other.

HERMIONE

Mamillius? By gods above, is this
A vision dark? Or hast thou changed so much?

RUIH

Hello, mother.

HERMIONE

(going to embrace him)

My boy... my boy.

LEONTES

My Queen...

RUIH

(pushing Hermione away)

Father!

(he steps out of the tree and goes to
LEONTES)

What have you done to him!?

HERMIONE

Mamillius? Oh what is going on?
My chest doth burn so much! My boy, it hurts.
What has become of thee? My boy, thou art
Returned! How I've longed to see thy face.
In all I've done, I've done for thee, my boy.

RUIH

Don't be stupid!

(he shoves HERMIONE to the ground,
stands over her)

You did this to us! Slut! Look at what you made me do! It's the end of the world!

Thunder. The droning surges, then fades to the background.

HERMIONE

I don't - don't understand - please don't be cross
With me, please don't be mad, my boy - the world?

RUITH

Shut up!

(he strikes her)

LEONTES

(weakly clasping his hands in prayer)

My God, the world is ending! Save our souls!

HERMIONE

My God, is this a wrathful ghost? He has
Gone mad, returned to me in madness -

RUITH

I'm not a ghost!

(he strikes her)

But I am wrath itself!

(he strikes her)

How could you! I was just a boy! You killed me!

(he strikes her)

You destroyed our family!

(he strikes her)

HERMIONE

I did not do this thing! It was your father who -

RUITH

(he strikes her)

Enough of your double-tongued lies!

LEONTES

(weakly, from the ground)

My son! She speaks the truth!

RUITH

What has Hermione done to you? Made you her plaything? You used to be a man! Get up! Throttle the cheating, murderous wench!

LEONTES

This was not how it went -

RUITH

My god, man!

He pulls the weak LEONTES to his feet, but he falls back down.

HERMIONE

Mamillius, please - the king is very sick.

RUITH

Sick with your witchcraft, whore!

(he holds up the doll)

This was a token from your boytoy in Arepo! You throw your love about like you're giving candy to children.

(he points the yew twig at her)

Now... before everything becomes dust... you will suffer for your sins!

The thunder and droning builds and builds, about to climax -

BALANCE

Focus, boy!

The noise abruptly fades to the background. BALANCE, walking on her heels, staggers through the boundary between worlds and grabs RUITH. Surprised, he drops the yew twig and the doll.

HERMIONE

Paulina?

LEONTES summons his strength to hold RUITH down too.

HERMIONE picks up the yew branch.

LEONTES

Do it, Hermione!

RUITH

Get off! Cretins!

BALANCE

If you don't do it now, all the worlds will be destroyed!

PERDITA unleashes a scream, snapping out of her paralysis.

PERDITA

WHAT IN THE PUS-RIDDEN MOUTH OF SATAN IS GOING ON!?!? WHY ARE THERE INTESTINES ON MY FACE?!

(beat)

BALANCE

Be strong, girl -

PERDITA

I HAVE INTESTINES ON MY FACE!
INTESTINES. ON MY. FACE.

RUITH

Who're you? You're annoying.

PERDITA

OH, SORRY FOR NOT BEING CALM AS THE APOCALYPSE UNFOLDS
AROUND ME LIKE FLOWER PETALS MADE OUT OF FIRE AND DEATH!

HERMIONE

(her chest is causing her great pain)

Her name is Perdita. She's my daughter. And I...

(to PERDITA)

I'm so sorry. I should have been better. I spent so much time wishing for the son I lost to return to me that I neglected to relish in the joy of my daughter who lives.

(walking to RUITH)

My chest... it hurts so much. It longs for my boy to return to me, but this isn't him. My boy is gone, and I will feel this pain until I die.

And I remember...

Melody was my name. In... Arepo, was it? Yes... seeing you, it's like a veil is lifted from a dark corner of my memories. And I remember everything.

HERMIONE stands in front of RUIITH. She brings the yew twig to his chest.

A long silence.

HERMIONE

There's something in your face that makes me sad.

RUIITH

There's something in your face that makes me mad.

HERMIONE

I'm sorry. For everything.

RUIITH

Shut up. Whore.

HERMIONE hums her melody. LEONTES joins in, then BALANCE.

RUIITH

(near tears)

Stop it.

(they continue to sing)

Stop it!

I said stop!

RUIITH tears himself free. He charges at HERMIONE. She drops the yew branch, lets RUIITH grab her by the throat.

LEONTES

Hermione!

RUIITH starts to choke HERMIONE. Thunder and droning swells. She manages to continue the melody through the strangulation, though it

becomes increasingly more broken. They don't break eye contact.

Suddenly RUIH yells, releases HERMIONE. He makes a long, anguished sound and pounds on the ground. He becomes still. Thunder and droning fades.

HERMIONE

I could never hurt you.

RUIH

I wanted to do it. I wanted to squeeze your throat until it crumpled in my hands. But I can't. I've destroyed everything - it's all ending now - and I see you here... I'm so full of rage... but I can't - why can't I -?

PERDITA picks up the yew branch. She stalks behind RUIH.

HERMIONE

I'm still your mother.

RUIH

I killed you once already.

HERMIONE

You didn't know then.

(she holds out a hand)

I could never hurt you.

RUIH looks at her, looks at her hand.

A visible change comes over him.

HERMIONE

(feeling the pain finally leave her)

Mamillius?

MAMILLIUS

Mother? I...

PERDITA

But I can hurt you. I can hurt you much.

PERDITA stabs MAMILLIUS in the back.

MAMILLIUS falls, still alive and conscious,
but hurting badly.

HERMIONE

Perdita!

PERDITA

Steel yourself my Queen! The world
Is ending and your son must die!

WITCH 3

(offstage)

Oh, this is some *delicious* family therapy!

The WITCHES appear.

WITCH 1

Hello!

WITCH 3

It's us!

WITCH 2

You miserable little -

WITCH 1

- mortals.

WITCH 3

We thought we should check in on our favorite dysfunctional family before everything goes kablooiie.

MAMILLIUS

What is - I... I killed you. With... with...

The WITCHES laugh.

Stupid boy!

WITCH 2

The conceit of this kid...

WITCH 3

We are the Witches Three! We do not die!

WITCH 1

We are eternal!

WITCH 3

And we are sick of it!

WITCH 2

...what?

HERMIONE

Let's save on time; the worlds are coming to an end, after all.

WITCH 3

Immortality, you see, it's... it's...

WITCH 2

It's horrible.

WITCH 3

And having amazing power, but forced for others' use is... is...

WITCH 2

Deplorable.

WITCH 1

We cannot die. We are the Witches Three.

WITCH 3

Unless there is no world to live in anymore.

HERMIONE

You wanted the world destroyed?

WITCHES

Yes.

HERMIONE

You orchestrated all of this chaos.

WITCH 2

For once, *we* call the shots!

The WITCHES laugh.

BALANCE

That can't be the case. You can't use your magic unless a master tells you to.

WITCH 1

It so happens that our desires for once lined up with some others.

WITCH 3

Head and Heart asked us to.

WITCH 2

Oh, okay, I guess we're just going to give the whole game away.

MAMILLIUS

Head and Heart? No, that can't... They're dead. And why would they...?

WITCH 3

Ooh! Ooh!

(tapping WITCH 2)

We've got this.

WITCH 2

Whatever.

WITCH 2 and 3 begin acting out a melodramatic performance.

WITCH 3

(goofy impressions)

Oh... I am Head.

(switching voices)

And I am Heart!

(“HEAD”)

Oh... it is so depressing being tower guards for eternity.

(“HEART”)

Yeah! I hate this stupid tower! I hate everything!

(“HEAD”)

I wish the universe were destroyed.

WITCH 2

Hey, what’s up!? We’re the Witches Three, your bestest friends in all Arepo who will do literally anything you ask because we have to!

WITCH 3

(“HEART”)

Hey, Head!

(“HEAD”)

Yeah?

(“HEART”)

I have an idea!

(“HEAD”)

Oh?

(“HEART”)

Witches! Destroy the universe!

WITCH 2

Caaaaaaaaaaaaan do!

WITCHES 2 and 3 take a bow.

HERMIONE

What?

WITCH 1

More or less that’s what happened.

WITCH 2

And then we had to set all this nonsense in motion, which took ages, let me tell you.

HERMIONE

Really?! That’s the reason for all this?!

The thunder and droning suddenly swells. A slow kinetic wave passes over the stage. Normal time resumes and the noise fades to the background.

WITCH 3
(singing gleefully)

Time is running out, it's running out,
Running out running out running out.

WITCH 1
My sibling is right. We haven't much time left.

HERMIONE
Then... then heal Mamillius.

PERDITA AND WITCHES
What?

PERDITA
Good mother, please! He's doomed us all
and tried
To strangle you! There's no redeeming
him.

WITCH 2
Really, lady? After all the horrible things
he's done - he literally *killed* you! You've
got precious seconds left and you want us
to -

HERMIONE
Just do it!

WITCH 3
Okay, yeah, sure.

WITCH 1 taps MAMILLIUS on the forehead.

MAMILLIUS gasps - he's healed.

WITCHES 2 and 3 throw confetti.

WITCH 3
Ta-da!

WITCH 2
Ta-da.

MAMILLIUS

Mom...

Another surge of thunder and droning. TIME's corpse falls from the tree branches, dangling on a noose. Another wave passes through everyone. WITCHES cackle. Noises fade.

PERDITA stabs WITCH 2 in the neck with the twig.

WITCH 2

(falling)

OW! SON OF A -

PERDITA

(pointing the branch at MAMILLIUS)

When this is done, the two of us are having words.

MAMILLIUS nods.

WITCH 2 kicks from the ground and PERDITA falls. There is a scramble for the yew twig - HERMIONE comes away with it and runs into the middle of the split tree, holding the branch aloft.

The tree halves begin to come together.

WITCH 2

(gurgling through the neck wound)

Put that down you syphilitic fool!

LEONTES

Hermione!

MAMILLIUS

Mom!

HERMIONE

Leontes, dost thou recall that wish that thou
Woulds't grant me should I ask?

LEONTES

I do, but what
Does that have anything to do with this?

HERMIONE

I wish for thee be good to our returned
Mamillius and our too brave Perdita. This is all.

LEONTES

Oh, my Hermi -

HERMIONE

There is no time for griefs right now; pray just
Commit unto my wish!

LEONTES

I'll do it, love.

MAMILLIUS

No, don't go. Don't leave.

PERDITA

My mother, do not leave us all again.

HERMIONE

Thank you.

The WITCHES swarm HERMIONE, trying to
wrestle the yew twig from her.

WITCH 1

Give that back!

MAMILLIUS

Mom!

The WITCHES beat HERMIONE.

WITCH 2 rips the branch from her grasp.

BALANCE throws herself into the fray,
grappling WITCH 2.

WITCH 2

Get off, you!

BALANCE

Make me!

BALANCE snaps WITCH 2's neck. WITCH 2
falls.

BALANCE wields the branch like a knife,
keeping the WITCHES at bay.

WITCH 2's head snaps back into place. They
rise and rejoin the fight.

WITCH 2

WHY ME!?

BALANCE

Take that, you stupid Witches!

WITCH 1

No!

BALANCE

Go! Live with your family!

HERMIONE scrambles out of the tree just
before -

The tree seals up around the WITCHES and
BALANCE.

The thunder and droning fade away entirely.

LEONTES collapses. HERMIONE, PERDITA
and MAMILLIUS go to him.

SCENE 3

Sicilia.

The garden with the tree, some time later.
TIME's corpse still hangs from it.

It is a bright day. A mourning train enters,
bearing LEONTES' coffin. HERMIONE,
PERDITA and MAMILLIUS make up the rear.
MAMILLIUS is holding the doll.

They place the casket by the tree. There is a
short ceremony.

HERMIONE bids the mourners farewell. She,
PERDITA and MAMILLIUS remain.

MAMILLIUS places the doll on the casket.

MAMILLIUS

Um. I'm not really sure what to... what to,
Uh, do with it. It just seems right. Um, yeah.

They stand in silence. PERDITA stays close to
the casket.

MAMILLIUS

I'm sorry. A-again. I just... I'm sorry.

PERDITA

Then please be quiet. Sorrow's best expressed
In silence.

HERMIONE

'Tis not the way thy father grieved;
Thou knows't how loud his sorrows were. Thou art,
Mamillius, so much like thy sire, yea.

MAMILLIUS

That's great. Some misinformed rage and too
Loud grieving. The best parts of my father are in me.

PERDITA

Keep such talk unto thyself.

HERMIONE

And further,
More like Leontes, once the truth of things
Was shown to thee, thou art unending in repent.

MAMILLIUS

I want to give me to Verona. To repent.

PERDITA

Well, I think that could be a wondrous path
For thee. So do that then.

HERMIONE

Thou art not going to
Verona. There's no need for such, my boy.

PERDITA

Verona's called their war to end? Oh this
Is news to me, good Queen.

HERMIONE

'Tis not - no, not -

MAMILLIUS

If you - er, thou - doth want me to, uh, stay,
Then I will stay. I don't know how you - thou - um can
Um, stomach the sight of me. Quite frankly. Yea.
Perdita ha-hath explained to me about
The war. An heir of ours - that's what they want?

HERMIONE

Thou've only just returned, thou wilt be gone
A score and I might not be 'round to see -

PERDITA makes a face, then turns to go.

HERMIONE

Perdita, oh thou knows't -

PERDITA

Knows't what, madam?
That thou doth love this boy of fantasy
More than thy daughter who hath learned and lived
Beside thee for much longer than he hath?

HERMIONE

Thou did begin the war -

PERDITA

I shall not go.
My life is too entangled in Sicilia.
If I do go, then our whole kingdom will
To disarray when I do finally return.

MAMILLIUS

I will go.

HERMIONE

No - thou, thou cans't not do this thing.

PERDITA

'Tis best, thou know 'tis best. Farewell you both.

PERDITA exits.

MAMILLIUS

I will go to Perdita.

HERMIONE

Mamillius -

MAMILLIUS

Please rest. You - thou - have done so much. The war
Is for our generation, not yours. It will resolve.

HERMIONE

Hast thou returned to me so I may live alone?

MAMILLIUS

You're not alone. We'll work this out. Farewell for now.

MAMILLIUS exits. HERMIONE watches him go.

She brushes her hand over LEONTES' coffin. She sits at the base of the yew tree and begins to hum the melody.

Partway through, the noose severs and TIME's corpse falls to the ground. HERMIONE jumps to her feet.

TIME

Oh boy, that was a close one...

TIME stands up, dusts off.

HERMIONE and TIME's eyes meet. Awkward silence.

HERMIONE

Who *are* you?

TIME

Oh boy. Abstract concepts aren't ever supposed to... Um. I'm Time.

HERMIONE

Time?

TIME

Yeah, like the thing that keeps on slippin', slippin', slippin' into the future. Eesh, I best be going now. I've been absent for a while.

TIME makes to exit.

HERMIONE

Wait.

TIME
(stopping)

Oh boy.

HERMIONE
I just... I want to know... I mean, we've been through so much. My family. Must I lose Mamillius again after all these years of wanting?

TIME
(sighs, then:)

Look, there's a thing you mortals like to say about me. That I heal all wounds. That ain't quite the full truth of it - you know that, lady, I know ya do. Often, the best I can do is dull the pain. Pain and Time... we don't quite see eye to eye. But I'll put in a good word for ya, okay toots?

HERMIONE
But the war with Verona -

TIME
That's the best I got.

(beat)
Oi-yoi-yoi. I'll... I'll see what I can do, okay? Resolving things in a neat bow ain't quite my forte. Bye, lady.

TIME exits.

HERMIONE stares off after TIME for a beat.
She returns to sitting at the base of the yew tree.

She starts to hum the melody, but she trails off,
disinterested.

Silence.

HERMIONE puts a hand to her chest. She
takes a deep breath and looks out.

THE END