

Script Excerpts



*four one-act musicals
based on classic American short stories*

book by Scott Guy
music by Clay Zambo, Ed Martel, Nick DeGregorio and Bill Johnson
lyrics by Clay Zambo, Kellen Blair, Scott Guy and Bill Berry

Act One

The Ransom of Red Chief by O. Henry
Dr. Heidegger's Experiment by Nathaniel Hawthorne

Act Two

The Tell-Tale Heart by Edgar Allan Poe
The Mysterious Stranger by Mark Twain

A note about the cast: Each of the four musicals in *Twice-Told Tales* features a cast of one woman and three men. Two of the stories have alternative casting of a ten-year-old boy.

The Ransom of Red Chief

a one-act musical based on the story by O. Henry

book by Scott Guy
music by Ed Martel
lyrics by Kellen Blair

CAST:

Bill
Sam
The Kid
Ebenezer Dorset

TIME:

Summer, 1885

PLACE:

Summit, Alabama
a cave, a front porch, a bend in the road

MUSICAL NUMBERS:

What in the World Could Go Wrong?..... Bill, Sam
The Ballad of Red Chief.....Kid
Partners..... Bill, Sam
Horsie..... Bill, Sam
Partners (Reprise)..... Bill, Sam
LegitimateBill
VacationDorset

Scene One

In front of a cave in the low hills above Summit, Alabama, 1885, two conmen count a rucksack full of money. They are BILL and SAM.

BILL

Bingo! Never will I forget the look on that bingo dame's face. "G-23" she says and I up and says "Bingo!" and she's all knockback "Five outta five!" Two dollars I won ourselves, Sam! Just by riggin a bingo card!

SAM

Congratutations, Bill.

BILL

Bingo! Two dollars! Wuz that bring our rucksack o' cash up to, Sam?

SAM

Six hundred and two dollars.

BILL

Six hundred and two dollars! Attaboy! Bingo! Whatsamatter, Sam?

SAM

Aw, come on, making money two beans at a time, that's for suckers.

BILL

It is?

(SAM throws his arm around Bill. **What in the World Could Go Wrong?**)

SAM

WE BEEN RIGGIN' BINGO CARDS FER LONG AS I RECALL,
BUT NOW IT'S TIME TO MAKE A BIGGER SCORE.
SO I GOT US A SCAM,
A SCAMMIER SCAM
THAN ANY SCAM I EVER SCAMMED BEFORE.

BILL

"G 23" AND THEN I SAYS "BINGO!"
"G 23" AND IT BEGINS!

SAM

Are you listening?

BILL
FIVE OUTTA FIVE I UP AND YELLS "BINGO!"
FIVE OUTTA FIVE AND WE UP AND WINS.

SAM
WILL YOU SHUT UP ABOUT YER DUMB "BINGO!"
I'M GETTIN' SICK A' THAT ROUTINE!
I GOT A SCORE
UNLIKE BEFORE
AND WITH A LOT MORE
DOUGH THAN YOU EVER SEEN!

BILL
BUT NOBODY BEATS ME WHEN I PLAY BINGO!
OUR STREAK A' LUCK IS GETTIN' LONG.
LET'S KEEP RIGGIN' CARDS AND WINNIN' BINGO GAMES.
WHAT IN THE WORLD COULD GO WRONG,
SAM,
WHAT IN THE WORLD COULD GO WRONG?

SAM
Cheese up a second, willya, and hear what it is I'm scheming.

BILL
I'm cheesed up.

SAM
I got my eyes up north. Ellinoize, Western Ellinoize. Big tracks
a land with lots a big city patsies smelling around 'em. Now this
scheme involves buying up some property liens and then issuing
out some fraudulatin promissary notes to go with them.

BILL
Promissary notes? That like C notes?

SAM
Tell you what, Bill. You leave the details to me. All you gotta
know is we need two thousand more dollars cash to convince up the
Western Ellinoize patsies to give us the real dough. An I'm
talkin more lettuce you can ever eat, more green than all alfalfa
in Alabama.

BILL
I KINDA LIKES IT WHEN WE PLAY BINGO.
WE GOTTA GAME THEY'LL NEVER BEAT.

SAM
Will you stop with the bingo?

BILL
TRICKIN' THE CHUMPIES WHEN WE PLAY BINGO.
AIN'T VERY TRICKY WHEN YOU CHEAT.

SAM

WE'LL NEVER MAKE IT IF WE PLAY BINGO,
THINK OF HOW LONG IT'S GONNA TAKES.
LIKE IT OR NOT
WE MIGHT GET CAUGHT
OR GOD FORBID, SHOT.
SOMEDAY THEY'LL SEES WE'RE FAKES.

BILL

THEY'LL NEVER CATCH US IF WE PLAY BINGO,
WE'RE DOING WELL AND GOIN' STRONG.
WHY TURN OUR BACKS ON WHAT WE DO SO GOOD?
NOTHIN'LL EVER GO WRONG,
SAM,
NOTHIN'LL EVER GO WRONG!

SAM

Willya just listen for a second and I can tell you how we're gonna get ourselves two thousand more smackers all in one fell swoon. We're gonna kidnap ourselves someone rich. Someone worth a two thousand dollar ransom.

BILL

Who, Sam?

SAM

A boy. Young filly kid of a son of the local bank president.

BILL

You sure you thought this through? What boy's gonna have two thousand dollars cash in his pockets?

SAM

You don't gotta do no more thinking; that just hurts both of us. So, Bill. I got it all worked out. We kidnap the boy, wait up in this cave here till morning, deliver a ransom note to his father with illicit instructions to leave two thousand dollars in a sack in the hollow of the lightning filled tree close to the bend in the road.

BILL

WE COULD DO THAT OR WE COULD PLAY BINGO,
STICK TO A SYSTEM THAT WE KNOW.

SAM

I had about enough of this, Bill.

BILL

AIN'T GOIN' HUNGRY WHEN WE PLAY BINGO,
WHAT DO WE NEED WITH LOTS A DOUGH?

SAM

THERE'S MORE TO LIFE THAN JUST YER DUMB BINGO,
RICHES LIKE YOUZE OF NEVER KNOWN.
WITH LOTS A DOUGH
THEN YOU COULD GO
AND BUY A BINGO
PARLOR TO CALL YOUR OWN.

(A thoughtful pause.)

BILL

WE'LL KIDNAP THE KID AND HOLD 'IM HERE.

SAM

BINGO!
GLAD THAT YOU CHOSE TO COME ALONG!

BILL

I'LL HAVE A PARLOR OF MY OWN ONE DAY.

SAM

JUST DON'T COUNTERDICK ME EV'RY WORD I SAY.

BILL

WHAT IN THE WORLD COULD GO...

SAM

WHAT IN THE WORLD COULD GO...

SAM / BILL

WHAT IN THE WORLD COULD GO WRONG!
BINGO!

(Blackout. Lights change to:)

Scene Two

The front porch of Ebenezer Dorset's home. On the porch steps sits a freckle-faced KID, playing with some imaginary toy Indians.

The Ballad of Red Chief.

KID

RED CHIEF CATCHUM EIGHT LITTLE BANDITS,
EIGHT LITTLE BANDITS LATE ONE DAY.
HE SCALPUM HALF, WITH A GREAT BIG LAUGH,
BUT FOUR LITTLE BANDITS RAN AWAY.
WIGGA WAGGA WIGGA WAGGA WIGGA WAGGA TUM
WIGGA WAGGA WIGGA WAGGA TUM PUM PUM
WIGGA WAGGA WIGGA WAGGA WIGGA WAGGA TUM,
BANGUM ON THE INJUN DRUM.

WOO-WOO-WOO-OO!

RED CHIEF CATCHUM FOUR LITTLE BANDITS,
FOUR LITTLE BANDITS LATE ONE DAY.
HE SCALPUM HALF, WITH A GREAT BIG LAUGH,
BUT TWO LITTLE BANDITS RAN AWAY.

(BILL and SAM approach the porch. BILL carries a burlap potato sack.)

SAM

That's the mark. Preparete your kidnap sack.

BILL

Fancy mansion! We should ask for three thousand.

KID

(in an "Indian" voice)

Hey! You gettum off reservation of Red Chief!

(The KID throws a rock; it hits BILL.)

BILL

Ow! Four thousand.

KID

My father's not home right now, so I'm protecting the reservation.

SAM

Hey, little apache, want some candy?

KID

Candy? No! My father says -- Wait a minute. Is it licorice?

SAM

Sure, licorice. Why not?

(The KID runs off the porch and dashes right over to SAM. SAM rummages in a leather knapsack, giving BILL the chance to sneak up behind the KID, readying the potato sack.)

KID

'Cause licorice is my favorite. I like the really black kind, especially the kind that twists. How do they get it to twist? Does it grow on the tree like that?

(SAM hands the KID some yellow candy.)

SAM

Here.

KID

Hey, this isn't licorice, it's lemon drops. You lied to me.

SAM

Waa-waa and good night.

(BILL drops the potato sack over the KID's head. But the KID squirts away like a wet watermelon seed, and scampers back up to the porch.)

KID

Isn't nice to lie, y'know.

(BILL dashes around to the side of the porch, and during the following sneaks over the railing and approaches the KID from the back.)

SAM

Yeah, heard it, liars pave the road to good intentions, but it ain't like that. I just grabbed the wrong bag of candy, that's all.

KID

Really?

SAM

Not all men is liars, kid. Look, see? I got licorice right here.

(SAM pulls out a stick of twisted black licorice.)

KID
Honest Injun?

SAM
I came prepared.

KID
Cross your heart with a tomahawk?

SAM
I'll cross it with whatever you want.

KID
Really! Would you make a real cross in your flesh, wouldja? My father's gotta bowie knife in the barn, would you actually scrape a cross over your heart if I --

(BILL gets a clear shot on the KID, and covers him head-to-knee with the potato sack.)

BILL
Got him!

(From inside the sack, the KID whoops loudly, like an Indian, alarming Sam.)

KID
Woo-hoo-hoo-ooo!

SAM
Gag him, gag him first!

(The KID starts to kick blindly, catching BILL in the knees.)

BILL
You gotta tie his legs!

(The KID punches blindly, and catches BILL in the abdomen.)

BILL
Or his arms.

SAM
Gotta better idea.

(SAM runs over with the licorice and sticks it up under the potato sack. Instantly, the thrashing inside the sack recedes. Loud, happy smacking sounds from inside the sack.)

BILL

How'd you know that would work?

SAM

It was either that or konk him one. C'mon, let's get outta here in case of all that caterwauling.

BILL

Caterwaulen? I thought it was licorice.

SAM

Just pick him up, willya?

(BILL picks up the sack and flings it over his shoulder. HE and SAM flee the scene. Blackout.)

Scene Three

The cave. An hour later. BILL and SAM are scouring the horizon in every direction, on the lookout. The KID has submitted and is now motionless, with the potato sack still over him.

SAM

Cheese, you'd think there'd be a desperado rescue party a hundred men long with all that war-whooping. Must not've heard it and it gettin near sunset now, I gizzard to guess we is gotten away with it.

BILL

Must've lost 'em cutting through the backwoods like we did. So. How long we wait before going back down with the ransom note?

SAM

At least morning.

BILL

He gotta stay with the sack on his head all night?

SAM

Yeah, better, with that whoop of his.

BILL

I don't know. He's been pretty quiet-like. Think he might be sufferaging or something. I'm gonna take off the sack. Okay? Okay, Sam?

SAM

Yeah, I guess. Just don't want him running away, that's all. For us, that's the little Injun that could.

BILL

Okay, here goes.

SAM

Watch your shins.

BILL

One. Two -- you sure you don't want to do it?

SAM

Flipping derbies, do it or don't!

Dr. Heidegger's Experiment

a one-act musical
based on the story by Nathaniel Hawthorne

book by Scott Guy
music and lyrics by Clay Zambo

CAST:

Dr. Heidegger
Andrew Killigrew
Weston Gascoigne
Clara Wycherley

TIME:

Winter, 1837

PLACE:

Dr. Heidegger's study in Boston

MUSICAL NUMBERS:

<i>Experiment</i>	Heidegger
<i>Gentlemen</i>	Heidegger, Killigrew, Gascoigne
<i>Such Faded Beauty</i>	Company
<i>This Rose</i>	Heidegger
<i>Observations</i>	Company
<i>So Many Yesterdays</i>	Company
<i>Valse Jeunesse</i>	Company
<i>Experiment (Reprise)</i>	Heidegger

Dr. Heidegger's Experiment

Dr. Heidegger's study: cobwebs; dust. Around the walls stand several oaken bookcases, the lower shelves of which are filled with rows of gigantic folios and black-letter quartos, and the upper with little parchment-covered duodecimos. Between two of the bookcases hangs a looking-glass, presenting its high and dusty plate within a tarnished gilt frame. The opposite side of the chamber is ornamented with a full-length portrait of a young lady, arrayed in the faded magnificence of silk, satin, and brocade, and with a visage as faded as her dress, and near her is a sideboard, a decanter and some glassware. At a central table, suitable for serving tea, but used at the moment for papers and books is DR. HEIDEGGER, with spectacles, scribbling in a quarto.

Experiment.

HEIDEGGER

EXPERIMENT.
THE TWENTIETH OF MARCH.
THE QUESTION HAS BEEN STATED,
MATERIALS GATHERED,
PROCEDURES DEFINED.

(HEIDEGGER re-reads what he's written, is satisfied, looks up in thought.)

HEIDEGGER

WHEN INQUIRY IS SUITABLE,
CONCLUSION IS IMMUTABLE.
(returns to his notes)

HEIDEGGER (cont'd)

HYPOTHESIS!
A FRAGRANCE FROM THE PAST
CAN CAUSE THE SUBJECT
A PHYSICAL REACTION,
A CHANGE DEEP WITHIN.

(A doorbell rings.)

HEIDEGGER

WE BEGIN.

(HEIDEGGER puts his pen in its holder, closes his journal, takes a look around the room to see that all is ready. With one final look around, HE draws a calming breath. ANDREW KILLIGREW enters to him, noticeably limping with gout.

Killigrew, in Hawthorne's words, "has wasted his best years, and his health and substance, in the pursuit of sinful pleasures, which had given birth to a brood of pains, such as the gout and divers other torments of the soul and body.")

DR. HEIDEGGER

Killigrew! As I live and breathe!

KILLIGREW

Dr. Heidegger!

DR. HEIDEGGER

How long has it been? Months!

KILLIGREW

Ah. Not paying attention to time, old man. Spring of '36 it's been.

DR. HEIDEGGER

Hasn't!

KILLIGREW

Has.

DR. HEIDEGGER

Surely not.

KILLIGREW

Surely so. Last invitation I received from you was for that examination of a cobweb under...what did you call that thing?

DR. HEIDEGGER

Microscope.

KILLIGREW

Yes, extraordinary evening that was.

DR. HEIDEGGER

This evening's experiment will surpass the microscope, I assure you.

KILLIGREW

What is that, a book of magic?

DR. HEIDEGGER

Magic? Nothing of the kind. Science, my dear Killigrew, always science. Though today's science is merely yesterday's magic explained.

KILLIGREW

Explaining magic takes the romance out of it.

DR. HEIDEGGER

Ah, romance is it? No longer for the likes of you and me, I'm afraid.

KILLIGREW

Well, nonetheless I thank you for your invitation. Always exceedingly curious.

DR. HEIDEGGER

Perhaps you won't be so thankful once I tell you the names of the other two guests I've invited to join you this evening. You've not spoken to either of them in years.

KILLIGREW

(bristling)

You didn't.

DR. HEIDEGGER

Yes, I'm afraid I did. But I have my reasons. Ah, here's Gascoigne now.

KILLIGREW

Gascoigne! The very name...!

DR. HEIDEGGER

The very name, the very person.

(GASCOIGNE enters; "a soured man, a ruined politician, a man of evil fame, or at least had been so, till time buried him from the knowledge of the present generation and made him obscure instead of infamous." Note: His name is Americanized: Gas-GOYNE.)

GASCOIGNE

Dr. Heidegger, this had best involve either political intrigue or a good snifter of cognac. I'm not sure which I'd --

(HE spies Killigrew and his temperature rises.
Gentlemen.)

GASCOIGNE

Killigrew. What the devil, Heidegger?

DR. HEIDEGGER

Now, now, gentlemen, shake hands.

(THEY don't.)

Come now.

YOU RAISE YOUR ARM,
HE LIFTS HIS.
SIMPLE AS CAN BE, IT IS.
GENTLEMEN.
HAVE YOU NOT A WORD TO SAY?
IT MAY WELL BE THIS WAY.
GENTLEMEN.

It will improve my experiment to have your rivalry thus frozen in time. 'Tis good you will not forgive each other. Now, gentlemen --

GASCOIGNE

GENTLEMEN? HE IS NO GENTLEMAN!

KILLIGREW

GENTLEMEN? HE IS NO GENTLEMAN!

GASCOIGNE

NO GENTLEMAN BEHAVES AS HE HAS DONE.
FORGIVE HIM? NO! NOR APOLOGIZE.

KILLIGREW

NO GENTLEMAN BEHAVES AS HE HAS DONE.
OH, I'D NOT ACCEPT HIS APOLOGY.

GASCOIGNE

IT WAS YOU WHO EXPOSED A PRIVATE AFFAIR
AND MY COUNCIL CAREER WAS ENDED.

KILLIGREW

THE LEDGER'S NOT CLOSED.
THAT "PRIVATE AFFAIR" THE YOU SPEAK OF
WAS WITH MY INTENDED!

HEIDEGGER

GENTLEMEN!

GASCOIGNE/KILLIGREW

MARRY YOU? SHE'D NEVER MARRY YOU!

GASCOIGNE

NO MORE THAN SHE WOULD EVER MARRY ME!

KILLIGREW

RIDICULOUS!

GASCOIGNE

YOU DON'T KNOW HER, THEN!
SHE'S THE KIND OF WOMAN
WHO'D WILLINGLY DOTE
OVER WATCHING A SUITOR
SLASH ANOTHER'S THROAT!

KILLIGREW

I COULD HAVE DONE!

GASCOIGNE

I SHOULD HAVE DONE.

HEIDEGGER

GENTLEMEN!
YOU TAKE THAT SEAT.
YOU TAKE THIS.
STEP BACK FROM THE PRECIPICE.
CIVILIZED, RESPECTABLE,
GENTLEMEN.

KILLIGREW/GASCOIGNE

Humph.

(THEY do not sit.)

HEIDEGGER

There's to be a third guest. You have already undoubtedly
figured out who she might be.

GASCOIGNE

I'll not stay if it is.

DR. HEIDEGGER

(hearing her arriving)

Clara Wycherley....

(CLARA WYCHERLEY arrives. "Tradition tells us she was a great beauty in her day; but, for a long while past, she has lived in deep seclusion, on account of certain scandalous stories which have prejudiced the gentry of the town against her.")

CLARA

Can't I for once be hosted in your sunny parlour instead of this dim old-fashioned chamber, festooned with cobwebs and besprinkled with antique dust? Is it too much to....

(SHE trails off when she sees the two men. Her hand immediately goes to her face. SHE has a slight tremulousness in her hands. **Such Faded Beauty.** *This is a moment out of time; a reverie, for all four in the study this evening.*)

CLARA

(lapsing into French; a habit)

Sacrement....

KILLIGREW

(under his breath)

Clara.

CLARA

Oh no.

GASCOIGNE

Weston Gascoigne at your service, Lady Clara.

CLARA

No, you mustn't see me like this. Dr. Heidegger, how could you?

DR. HEIDEGGER

Now, Clara, we are all "like this." All melancholy old creatures whose greatest misfortune is that we are not long ago in our graves.

CLARA
(doesn't recognize him)
And that can't be....

KILLIGREW
Andrew.

CLARA
It isn't!
LOOK AT HIM?
I DARE NOT.
OH, THE DAMAGE TIME HAS WROUGHT.
SUCH FADED BEAUTY.
A TEMPLE IN RUINS.
IF HE SEEMS THUS TO ME,
WHAT A SHAMBLES HE MUST SEE.

KILLIGREW
SUCH FADED BEAUTY.

CLARA
WE FALL TO PIECES.

GASCOIGNE
A TOPPLED DIANA.

CLARA/KILLIGREW/GASCOIGNE
WHO CAN BEAR TO LOOK UPON
THE MIRROR ON THE WALL?
ALL SO WRETCHED,
HOW FAR WE FALL.

KILLIGREW/GASCOIGNE
LOOK AT HIM. LOOK AT HER.
NOT AT ALL AS ONCE WE WERE.

HEIDEGGER
LOOK AT THEM. LOOK AT HER.
MISSING WHAT THEY WERE.

KILLIGREW/GASCOIGNE
HOW CAN SUCH A CHANGE OCCUR?

HEIDEGGER
MOURNING.

ALL FOUR
SUCH FADED BEAUTY!

HEIDEGGER

A TREE BARE IN WINTER.

CLARA/KILLIGREW/GASCOIGNE

FEEBLED STANCE, WIZENED BROW.
PUNISHMENT FOR EVERY SIN,
FOR EVERY BROKEN VOW.
DEATH WOULD BE A PLEASURE!
CAN ANY GOD ALLOW
SUCH DESOLATION
TO BE DISPLAYED?
HOW CAN SUCH BEAUTY FADE?

DR. HEIDEGGER

My gravest apologies, Clara Wycherley, and I would understand if you or these gentlemen never spoke to me again after this evening, but as long as you are here, may I beg your scientific indulgence for one brief experiment.

CLARA

Hang your experiments, Dr. Heidegger. I will not stay after being so humiliated.

KILLIGREW

Clara, I ask that you would stay. If only for an hour. I've so much I would have said to you all these years, had you answered my letters or my rappings at your door.

GASCOIGNE

Clara, let us dine at the Waterfront Hotel now, this very moment, let us be alone.

KILLIGREW

Please, Clara. Remember how we would observe Dr. Heidegger's experiments, then retire to your boudoir on Beacon Hill to "discuss" them.

(CLARA lifts a trembled hand to her lips.)

KILLIGREW

Please, I didn't mean to make you blush. One more evening in your presence, let the gout take me, and then it will no longer matter.

GASCOIGNE

What do you mean? It will always matter! Clara, be with me again. Leave this place; dine with me.

(KILLIGREW pulls a chair out for CLARA. SHE hesitates, contemplates, then sits in the chair.)

CLARA

I will stay if we confine our discussion to the experiment.

KILLIGREW

Thank you, Clara.

(KILLIGREW sits. GASCOIGNE sits.)

GASCOIGNE

(to Heidegger)

Did you say yes, you have cognac?

(HEIDEGGER places in front of each a small blank duodecimo of parchment, and pen and ink.)

DR. HEIDEGGER

No. No drinking tonight. I need you to remain clear-eyed and impartial. I have notebooks for you all. And the object of your scrutiny is to be...me.

(HEIDEGGER hobbles across the chamber and returns with a ponderous folio, bound in black leather. He undoes its silver clasps, opens the volume, and takes from among its black-letter pages a rose, or what was once a rose, though now the green leaves and crimson petals have assumed a brownish hue, and the ancient flower seems ready to crumble to dust in the doctor's hands.

This Rose.)

DR. HEIDEGGER

NIGH ON FIFTY YEARS AGO
THIS ROSE BLOSSOMED RED,
THIS FADED, CRUMBLING FLOWER HERE IN MY HAND,
NIGH ON FIFTY YEARS AGO,
WHEN I WAS TO BE WED
TO QUITE THE FINEST BEAUTY IN ALL THE LAND.
Sylvia Ward, whose portrait hangs yonder.

SHE GAVE THIS ROSE TO ME
TO WEAR IN MY LAPEL
THE NEXT DAY AT THE ALTAR BY HER SIDE.
BUT SYLVIA FELL ILL
AND I PRESCRIBED A CURE.
SHE SWALLOWED THAT ELIXIR,
BUT SHE DIED.
THE NIGHT BEFORE OUR WEDDING, SHE DIED.
NIGH ON FIFTY YEARS AGO.
THE DATE IS DRAWING NEAR.
I FEAR THAT TO RECALL IT
WILL BE MY DEATH.

BUT I HAVE KEPT HER ROSE
PRESSED WITHIN THIS BOOK SINCE THEN.
I CANNOT BRING HER BACK TO ME
BUT CAN I FACE THE MEMORY?
AM I STRONG ENOUGH TO SEE
THIS ROSE BLOOM AGAIN?

HEIDEGGER

So I would ask each of my esteemed guests to observe any physical changes in me as I resuscitate one small aspect of that evening -- this very rose, which I intend to make bloom again before your very eyes.

GASCOIGNE

Hah. This is how we are to waste a precious evening of our rapidly foreclosing lives?

CLARA

(hiding the tremulousness in her hands)

Indeed. You might as well expect an old woman's wrinkled face to bloom again.

(DR. HEIDEGGER uncovers the decanter, pours some liquid into a shallow bowl, and throws the faded rose into the water. **Observations.**)

GASCOIGNE

I think not, Dr. Heidegger, so if you will thus excuse the lady Clara and myself...oh my....

(The crushed and dried petals stir, and assume a deepening tinge of crimson, as if the flower were reviving from a death-like slumber. The slender stalk and twigs of foliage become green; and in the bowl there is a rose of half a century, looking as fresh as when Sylvia Ward had first given it to her lover. It is scarcely full blown; for some of its delicate red leaves curl modestly around its moist bosom within which two or three dewdrops sparkle.)

CLARA

AH!

KILLIGREW

AH!

DR. HEIDEGGER

Pray you, keep your eyes affixed on me, as I would like your scientific observations of any dangerous physical changes in --

KILLIGREW

THE STEM IS TURNING GREEN!

CLARA

THE PETALS GROWING MOIST!

KILLIGREW/CLARA

THE GREY IS GROWING CRIMSON!

GASCOIGNE

A trick!

DR. HEIDEGGER

Nay, not so. The liquid in this decanter was shipped to me at great expense from off the southern part of Florida, not far from Lake Macaco, by an explorer friend who has located the waters which once fed the fabled *Fontaine de la jeunesse*.

GASCOIGNE

In English, please.

CLARA

Jeunesse. Youth. The fountain of youth. It's absurd.

KILLIGREW

It's remarkable.

DR. HEIDEGGER

The experiment! Eyes on me as I smell the rose and am reminded of my poor trusting Sylvia.

(looking into a small table mirror next to him)

ANY FLUSHING OF THE CHEEKS?

TREMOR IN THE EYES?

I fear the observer's effect disallows me any objectivity inspecting mine own --

CLARA

What if I were to drink it?

DR. HEIDEGGER

Now, now, drinking is not part of the experiment. I have provided you journals in which --

CLARA

If it's merely water from near Lake Macaco it can't harm me. But if it truly flowed from *la fontaine de la jeunesse*....

DR. HEIDEGGER

No, not from the fountain. From the source which is said to have fed the fountain.

A SHORTENING OF BREATH....

(As HEIDEGGER watches himself in the mirror, CLARA grabs the decanter, pours some of its liquid into a glass, and drinks it herself.)

DR. HEIDEGGER

(not yet noticing Clara's actions)

The observer, you see, cannot be objective enough to filter reality from what he hopes to be reality.

(CLARA's eyes widen; her neck visibly lengthens.
Her tremulousness ceases utterly.)

DR. HEIDEGGER

What is that fragrance?

CAN IT BE THE ROSE?

IT MUST BE THE ROSE!

KILLIGREW

No, Dr. Heidegger. It is Clara. She has drunk of *la jeunesse*. I believe that fragrance is the fragrance of youth. Clara, your youth and beauty have returned.

CLARA

I do not believe you.

KILLIGREW

See for yourself.

CLARA

(gasping)

Ah, je respire!

(SHE runs to the full-length mirror.)

DR. HEIDEGGER

Observe her, observe her!

THE COLOR OF HER CHEEK,

THE LIGHTNESS OF HER GAIT!

Do you see, Killigrew, how quickly she moved across the room!

KILLIGREW

THE SMOOTHNESS OF HER SKIN!

HOW SUPPLE IS HER SPINE!

GASCOIGNE

This is all nonsense. Some cruel game the three of you have concocted at my expense.

(KILLIGREW pours himself a drink from the decanter.)

KILLIGREW

And what, d'you wager, will it do for my gout?

The Tell-Tale Heart

a one-act musical
based on the story by Edgar Allan Poe

libretto by Scott Guy
music by Nick DeGregorio

CAST:

Edgar
The Old Man
The Accomplice
The Tell-Tale Heart

TIME:

nearing midnight, winter, 1843

PLACE:

within and without an old man's bedroom

The Tell-Tale Heart is through-sung.

Scene One

A bedroom; night. An OLD MAN lies in bed, sleeping. EDGAR, maniacally nervous, slips in at the door, a covered lantern in his hand. HE creeps towards the old man, breathing desperately shallowly, desperately slowly.

NOTE: Lyrics are indicated by *italics*. Spoken dialogue remains unitalicized.

EDGAR

Whsst!
Asleep?
Asleep, old man?
Nearly midnight.

(HE leans down towards the old man's chest, to listen for breathing. Instead of breathing, however, HE hears the throbbing of the old man's heart. There appears a figure in the room, unseen by EDGAR: an anthropomorphism of the sound of the old man's heart: the TELL-TALE HEART. EDGAR leaps backwards, startled.)

TELL-TALE HEART

(throbbing of the old man's heart)

(EDGAR withdraws from the bed, and gasps for breath. There appears a second figure in the room, also unseen by EDGAR: an anthropomorphism of Edgar's conscience: the ACCOMPLICE. Throughout the piece, the ACCOMPLICE will address either the audience of Edgar directly; EDGAR can make eye-contact with the ACCOMPLICE, but does not make physical contact. EDGAR cannot at any point, however, see the TELL-TALE HEART.)

ACCOMPLICE

Nervous.

EDGAR

True. Nervous.

ACCOMPLICE

Very dreadfully nervous I had been.

EDGAR/ACCOMPLICE

And am.

EDGAR

*But why will you say that I am mad?
The disease had sharpened my senses
Not destroyed,
Not dulled them.*

(EDGAR approaches the man's bed again, again to listen to the man's breathing.)

ACCOMPLICE

(while Edgar approaches)
*Above all was the sense of hearing acute.
I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth.*

TELL-TALE HEART

(sounds)

(EDGAR steadies his nerves, trying to listen calmly to the man's breathing.)

ACCOMPLICE

I heard many things in hell.

EDGAR

*How, then, am I mad?
I love the old man.
He has never wronged me.
He has never given me insult.
For his gold I have no desire.*

EDGAR/ACCOMPLICE

*How, then, am I mad?
I love the old man.
He has never wronged me.
He has never given me insult.
For his gold I have no desire.*

(The MAN suddenly opens an eye at stares at EDGAR. Edgar startles, not expecting it.)

TELL-TALE HEART

(sounds more shrill than before; sounds of the Evil Eye)

*Are you watching me?
Do you watch me each night?*

OLD MAN

He had the eye of a vulture.
A pale blue eye, with a film over it.

ACCOMPLICE

*All is well.
Sleep.
Sleep, old man.*

EDGAR

How long?
How long since I have been an invalid now?

OLD MAN

Nearly a month.

EDGAR

*You are good.
You are good to me.*

OLD MAN

He had the eye of a vulture.

ACCOMPLICE

*EDGAR
All is well.
Sleep.
Sleep, old man.*

*OLD MAN
You are good.
You are good to me.*

*ACCOMPLICE
Whenever his eye fell upon
me*

My blood ran cold.

ACCOMPLICE

*The disease had sharpened my senses
Not destroyed,
Not dulled them.*

EDGAR

EDGAR/ACCOMPLICE

And so by degrees
Very gradually
I made up my mind
To take the life of the old man.

ACCOMPLICE

And thus rid myself of the eye forever.

TELL-TALE HEART

(beating calmly, reassuringly)

(EDGAR backs out of the room. Lights change to:)

Scene Two

Without the bedroom. EDGAR calms his shaking hands, and prepares several items, including a sack, a bedsheet, and a crowbar. During Edgar's preparation, the ACCOMPLICE addresses both EDGAR and the audience. The TELL-TALE HEART stays within the bedroom, and can no longer be heard.

ACCOMPLICE

*Now this is the point.
You fancy me mad.
Madmen know nothing.
But you should have seen me.
You should have seen how wisely I proceeded.
With what caution,
With what foresight,
With what dissimulation I went to work!
It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain.
But once conceived...
It haunted me day and night.*

EDGAR/ACCOMPLICE

*Object there was none.
Passion there was none.*

EDGAR

*I loved the old man.
He had never wronged me.*

ACCOMPLICE

*He had never given me insult.
For his gold I had no desire.*

EDGAR

*I think it was his eye!
Yes, it was this!*

ACCOMPLICE

*He had the eye of a vulture
A pale blue eye, with a film over it.*

EDGAR

Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold.

EDGAR/ACCOMPLICE

*I made up my mind to take the life of the old man
And thus rid myself of the eye forever.*

EDGAR

On the twenty-third day....

ACCOMPLICE

On the twenty-third day....

EDGAR

About midnight

ACCOMPLICE

About midnight....

EDGAR

I turned the latch of his door and opened it

ACCOMPLICE

Oh so gently!

EDGAR/ACCOMPLICE

Oh so gently!

ACCOMPLICE

*And then, when I had made
An opening sufficient for my head,
I put in a dark lantern,
All closed, closed, that*

EDGAR/ACCOMPLICE

*No light shone out.
No light shone out.*

ACCOMPLICE

And then I stepped back into his room.

(EDGAR enters the bedroom again. Lights change to:)

Scene Three

Inside the bedroom. ACCOMPLICE and EDGAR are silent as EDGAR approaches the bed with the crowbar, but the TELL-TALE HEART beats with increasing volume and alarm the closer EDGAR approaches.

TELL-TALE HEART

(sounds)

(Suddenly, the OLD MAN sits up in bed.)

OLD MAN

Who's there?

(EDGAR does not move.)

OLD MAN

*Is it Death come for me?
Stalking with your black shadow before you?
Enveloping me?
The mournful influence
Of the unperceived shadow.
No.
It is nothing.
Nothing but the wind in the chimney.
A mouse crossing the floor.
A cricket.*

ACCOMPLICE

*Now you may think that I drew back
But no.
I kept quite still and said nothing.*

OLD MAN & TELL-TALE HEART

(sounds of fear; and continuing throughout below)

ACCOMPLICE

*It was
The groan of mortal terror.
The low stifled sound that arises
From the bottom of the soul
When overcharged with awe.
I knew the sound well.*

EDGAR/OLD MAN/ACCOMPLICE

*Many a night
Just at midnight
When all the world slept
It has welled up from my own bosom
Deepening, with its dreadful echo,
The terrors that distracted me.
I knew it well.
The groan of mortal terror.
The groan of mortal terror.*

ACCOMPLICE

*When I had waited a long time,
Very patiently,
Without hearing him lie down,
I resolved to open a little crevice in my lantern.
So I opened it
You cannot imagine how stealthily,
Until, at length a simple dim ray,
Like the thread of the spider,
Shot from out the crevice
And fell full upon the vulture eye.*

TELL-TALE HEART

(sounds)

ACCOMPLICE

*Have I not told you that what you mistake for madness
Is but over-acuteness of the sense?
There came to my ears a low, dull, quick sound.
A low, dull, quick sound
Much such a sound as a watch makes
When enveloped in cotton.*

EDGAR

*I knew that sound.
It was the beating of the old man's heart.*

TELL-TALE HEART

(sounds)

ACCOMPLICE

*Do you mark me well
I have told you that I am nervous: so I am.*

TELL-TALE HEART

(The sound of the old man's heartbeat grows louder, obsessive, and frightening.)

EDGAR

*And now at the dead hour of the night,
Amid the dreadful silence of that old house,
So strange a noise as this
Excited me to uncontrollable terror.*

ACCOMPLICE

*Yet, for some minutes longer I refrained
And stood still.*

EDGAR

*But the beating grew louder, louder!
I thought the heart must burst.*

ACCOMPLICE

*And now a new anxiety seized me
The sound would be heard by a neighbor!*

EDGAR/ACCOMPLICE

The old man's hour had come!

(EDGAR flings open the lantern, drags the Old Man out of bed to the floor, and beats him to death with the crowbar. The TELL-TALE HEART dissipates. A sudden calm comes over EDGAR, as HE wraps the man's body in the sacks and sheets, pries open the floorboards, and hides the man and the crowbar underneath. EDGAR replaces the floorboards and sits in a chair, spent.)

EDGAR/ACCOMPLICE

*An Eldorado. Oh, an Eldorado!
Shrouded forms that start and sigh
As they pass the wanderer by.
White-robed forms of friends long given,
In agony, to the Earth and Heaven.*

*For the heart whose woes are legion
'Tis a peaceful, soothing region.
For the spirit that walks in shadow
'Tis - oh, 'tis an Eldorado!
But the traveler, traveling through it,
May not dare to openly view it!
Never its mysteries are exposed
To the weak human eye unclosed.
An Eldorado. Oh, an Eldorado!*

(There is a knock at the door. EDGAR, confident and calm, opens the door to admit a POLICE OFFICER, vaguely reminiscent of the Old Man, but a younger version.)

The Mysterious Stranger

a one-act musical
based on the story by Mark Twain

book by Scott Guy
music by Bill Johnson
lyrics by Bill Berry

CAST:

Theodore
Nicholas
Lisa
The Stranger

TIME:

May 1876
And thirteen days later

PLACE:

Maple Hill, New Hampshire

MUSICAL NUMBERS:

Life Is Whatever You Want It to Be Theodore, Nicholas, Lisa
Allow Me Stranger
Making Dirt People Company
Thirteen Days Theodore, Nicholas
Christmas Dress Lisa
Fight Song Theodore, Nicholas
Safe in the Arms of an Angel Stranger

Scene One

Three fresh-faced apple-cheeked youths are fishing off the banks of a cheery lake in Maple Hill, New Hampshire. They are on the verge of adulthood, but not quite there yet and still retain the innocence of youth. They are: LISA, NICHOLAS and THEODORE.

Next to Nicholas is a small freshly-dug hole.

THEODORE

I wish you could find fatter worms in that mud-hole, Nicholas, so we'll catch fatter fish!

LISA

I'll be happy with any size fish.

NICHOLAS

You're unbelievable, Theodore.

THEODORE

What?

NICHOLAS

You've got the whole future all mapped out for you, even down to the size of the fish you're going to catch. You have it made!

(NICHOLAS reaches and pulls out a thick earthworm and affixes it to a fishhook. **A Life is Whatever We Want it to Be.**)

NICHOLAS

AT LAST! SCHOOL'S OVER! AND SUMMER IS HERE!
AND THEODORE'S FUTURE IS ALREADY CLEAR
A CARPENTER'S PROGRESS IS CERTAIN AND SURE:
APPRENTICE TO FOREMAN TO MASTER!
A HIDY HI-LO AND
A HIDY HI-LEE
A LIFE IS WHATEVER WE WANT IT TO BE!

THEODORE

Don't talk about the future, Nicholas, you'll scare the fish!

NICHOLAS

I thought you *wanted* to be a carpenter.

THEODORE

Well, I *do* but....

ALAS I'M GIVEN NO CHOICES BECAUSE
I'LL FOLLOW THE PATH EVERY CARPENTER DOES
WHILE YOU WILL BE SAILING OVER THE WORLD
YOUR COMPASS ALIGNED WITH ADVENTURE!

THEODORE/NICHOLAS

A HIDY HI-LO AND
A HIDY HI-LEE
A LIFE IS WHATEVER WE WANT IT TO BE!

NICHOLAS

Then come be a sailor with me, Theodore!

THEODORE

Just looking at a painting of a boat makes me seasick.

NICHOLAS

Well, there you go, you've made your choice right there, you land-lubber! Lisa, what about your future?

LISA

IF I AM A SEAMSTRESS, TEACHER OR NURSE,
OR WIFE TO A SAILOR, FOR BETTER OR WORSE
THE LORD WILL DECIDE IT, AND I WILL OBEY
FOR HIS IS THE WAY I SHALL FOLLOW.

ALL

A HIDY HI-LO AND
A HIDY HI-LEE
A LIFE IS WHATEVER WE WANT IT TO BE!

(Some trick of the light catches our eye, and we notice for the first time a mysterious STRANGER who has been leaning against a tree this whole time, watching the youths. HE is wearing a suit; impractical at a lake's edge. NOTE: This role is written for a middle-aged man to play, but might benefit from being played by a preadolescent 10-year-old boy.)

ALL

A HIDY HI-LO AND
A HIDY HI-LEE
A LIFE IS WHATEVER WE WANT IT TO BE!

THEODORE

(grouchy)
There's no fish today!

NICHOLAS

C'mon, Theodore, let's have a smoke.

THEODORE

Now you're talking.

(THEODORE and NICHOLAS pull pipes from their
bags, and rummage for flints.)

LISA

Or maybe my husband'll be a doctor, or a deacon. Though I don't
think I'd mind being the wife of a sailor.

NICHOLAS

(Ignores her)
Hmmm. I didn't bring my flint.

THEODORE

I thought I had mine. Oh. I don't want to walk all the way back
home to get it.

STRANGER

(without moving from the tree)
Here.

(The STRANGER gestures from afar, and both pipes
light. NICHOLAS and THEODORE leap to their feet.
LISA startles and her pole drops into the water.
All three flee. **Allow Me.**)

STRANGER

ALLOW ME TO LIGHT YOUR PIPES FOR YOU.
PLEASE, NO NEED TO RUN.
I MEAN YOU NO HARM
LISA! NICHOLAS! THEODORE!
COME BACK!

(At the sound of their names, THEY all stop.
THEY stare a little fearfully of the Stranger.)

STRANGER

Although knowledge is not good for everyone, as it can make you discontented with the lot which God has appointed for you, I shall help you with your fishing at least.

(busy with the fishhooks)

THE FISH YOU SEEK WILL NEVER BITE
A HOOK SO BIG AND ROUND.
THE SMALLER ONES ARE JUST THE SIZE
FOR THE LITTLE NIGHT CRAWLERS NICHOLAS FOUND.

THEODORE

HOW DID YOU KNOW OUR NAMES?

NICHOLAS

HOW DID YOU KNOW THEY WERE MY WORMS?

LISA

HOW DID YOU DO THE TRICK WITH THE FIRE?

STRANGER

Trick? Lisa, just because you encounter something outside of your limited experience doesn't mean it is a trick.

THINGS I DO YOU MIGHT SAY ARE MYSTERIOUS,
BUT ONCE YOU KNOW I CAN DO THEM
THEN YOU'LL KNOW THEY CAN BE DONE.
I'M NO STRANGER TO ANYTHING AT ALL.

DON'T STAND SO FAR AWAY, MY FRIENDS!
YOU STILL LOOK SO AFRAID.
COME CLOSER NOW AND TAKE A LOOK
AT THE BOTTOM OF THE HOLE THAT NICHOLAS MADE.

(THEY draw closer, curiosity having gotten the better of them, as the STRANGER points to the bottom of the hole.)

STRANGER

You see? It's just water. But from this water I can, if I wish, draw up some in my hands and turn it to ice. Watch.

(The STRANGER cups his hands into the hole, pulls up some water in his hands, and the water freezes in his hands. HE shows them the resulting ice.)

STRANGER

Frozen solid. Or, look in your right pocket, Lisa, and Theodore in your left. I think you'll find an orange and an apple that weren't there before.

(LISA looks in her pocket and is astonished to pull out an orange. THEODORE pulls out an apple.)

NICHOLAS

What about me?

STRANGER

What about you? What do you want?

NICHOLAS

I don't know. Grapes?

STRANGER

Left pocket.

(NICHOLAS pulls grapes from his left pocket.)

THEODORE

It's incredible!

STRANGER

Incredible? No.

WHAT I DO IS NOT AT ALL INCREDIBLE,
FOR ONCE YOU KNOW HOW TO DO IT
THEN YOU KNOW IT CAN BE DONE.
ANGELS SIMPLY KNOW ALL THERE IS TO KNOW.

LISA

Did you say angel?

STRANGER

I did.

THEODORE

You're an angel.

STRANGER

I am.

NICHOLAS

But you're so....

STRANGER

Young? I know. I'm only sixteen thousand two hundred and eight years old, but I can do practically everything a thirty-thousand-year-old can do.

(The YOUTHS come closer to the Stranger, who is eyeing their bags, poles and pipes.)

NICHOLAS

I don't believe you. You're just some traveling magician, and you're going to ask us for some money to see some more tricks.

STRANGER

I was merely trying to do you a favor and light your pipe. If you'd remembered where you left your flint, I might not have bothered. Ah, yes, now you remember, Nicholas, you put your flint on your nightstand last night.

NICHOLAS

I -- I didn't say that.

STRANGER

No, but you thought it, and that's the same thing. Yes, Theodore, I can read minds. All angels can, though some are better at it than others. Nothing goes on in the skull of man, bird, fish, insect, or other creature which can be hidden from me. You humans are quite interesting to me, notwithstanding you're so ignorant and trivial and conceited. And so diseased and rickety and dull. In fact, such a shabby, poor worthless lot all around.

THEODORE

That's not very polite.

STRANGER

Polite? Why, it's merely the truth. And truth is good manners, isn't it? Your doings are of paltry poor consequence. But, after all, it is not all ridiculous; there is a sort of pathos about it when one remembers how few are your days, how childish your pomps, and what shadows you are! Oh, Lisa, you're so impatient, wondering what other tricks I can do. Very well. I can change the weather. I can take you to ancient China or Rome. Can I, what, can I make people?

LISA

I didn't say --

STRANGER

Well, mankind is God's domain. But I suppose I can create little people out of dirt.

LISA

Oh, yes, I was just thinking that! Nicholas, he is an angel!

NICHOLAS

I'd still have to see it.

STRANGER

Yankee skepticism. What mutton you humans are, and how ridiculous! Very well.

(The STRANGER sits down near the hole and scoops out some moist dirt, molding it quickly.)

THEODORE

I think...we should just go back home. Get our own flints.

STRANGER

Really, there's nothing to be afraid of, Theodore. Look, see! A man made of dirt. Now I'll breathe on him and --

(THE STRANGER sets the dirt man inside the hole.
Making Dirt People.)

LISA

HE MOVES!
NICHOLAS, LOOK!
OH MY!
THEODORE, WAIT!
THE ANGEL HAS MADE A MAN!

STRANGER

Merely animated dirt, nothing more....

LISA

HE MOVES!
LOOK AT HIM MOVE!
HIS FEET
LOOK AT HIM NOW!
HE JUMPED TO THE GROUND AND RAN!

STRANGER

IF I GAVE YOU THE CHANCE
WOULDN'T YOU LIKE TO TRY IT TOO?

LISA

(withdrawing)

Oh....

STRANGER

HERE, GIVE ME YOUR HAND
YOU'LL UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU CAN DO
NOW DON'T BE SHY

LISA

BUT HOW CAN I?

STRANGER

YOU'LL NEVER KNOW 'TILL YOU TRY

(Stranger blows on LISA's hand.)

STRANGER

Go on!

(LISA begins to model the dirt, fascinated.)

LISA

IT'S WARM!
WHAT SHOULD I MAKE?
I KNOW!
HE NEEDS A WIFE
A WOMAN TO KEEP HIM CALM

IT MOVES!
NO, I MEAN "SHE".
SHE'S WARM!
I DON'T BELIEVE....
SHE'S WIGGLING IN MY PALM!

THEODORE

Not a good idea, Lisa.

NICHOLAS

Something's not right here.

THEODORE

Maybe it's time for us to go.

STRANGER

I understand your fear, gentlemen. But...here. Perhaps this will assure you I mean no harm. Open your hands. Go on, open them.

(THEODORE and NICHOLAS open their hands to find a silver dollar for each of them. THEY look at each other with amazement.)

STRANGER

That's a dollar each. And I've conjured twenty more dollars into the church's box for the poor.

IF YOU WANT MORE YOU'LL HAVE IT.
I ASK NOTHING IN RETURN.
I TRULY MEAN NO HARM AT ALL.
I'M SIMPLY HERE TO LEARN

LISA

NOW I UNDERSTAND
WHAT GOD AND MOTHER MUST FEEL
FROM MY HAND
A TRUE MIRACLE
PRECIOUS AND REAL!
Look, Nicholas, I just made them a baby!

STRANGER

A baby of dirt.

LISA

But a baby she loves. Theodore!

NICHOLAS

CAN WE GIVE IT A TRY

THEODORE

IT WOULD BE NICE IF I COULD MAKE A HORSE

NICHOLAS

I'LL MAKE A DOG

THEODORE

AND THEN OF COURSE A BONE TO CHEW!

(the STRANGER blows on their hands.)

THEO

IT'S REALLY TRUE!

NICHOLAS

MINE'S MOVING TOO!

STRANGER

THAT'S ALL THAT THEY'RE MEANT TO DO

LISA

OH NO! LOOK AT YOUR HORSE!

HE FELL!

LOOK AT HIS LEGS

THEY'RE EACH OF A DIFFERENT SIZE!

THEODORE

NO!

NICHOLAS

LOOKIT, YOUR HORSE HAS JUST TRAMPLED A CHILD

LISA

YOU HEAR HOW THE FAMILY'S CRIES!

STRANGER

Children, Children!

A MAN'S MADE OF DIRT

AND I SAW HIM MADE

AND EVERY MAN BEGINS AND ENDS AS DIRT

LISA
PLEASE! DO SOMETHING NOW!

THEODORE
WHAT DO YOU WANT?

LISA
THEY'RE SUFFERING!

LISA
PLEASE DON'T LET THEM CRY

THEODORE
BUT WHAT CAN I...?

NICHOLAS
TRY ANYTHING!

STRANGER
You're not listening.
MY FLESH IS NOT REAL, BUT FIRM TO TOUCH
FOR I AM BUT A SPIRIT OF THE EARTH AND SKY!

LISA
PLEASE! DO SOMETHING NOW!

THEODORE
WHAT DO YOU WANT?

LISA
THEY'RE SUFFERING!

STRANGER
EARTH AND SKY!

LISA
PLEASE DON'T LET THEM CRY

THEODORE
BUT WHAT CAN I...?

NICHOLAS
TRY ANYTHING!

STRANGER
EARTH AND SKY!

LISA
STOP IT RIGHT NOW!

I'M TRYING! THEODORE

THEODORE NOW! LISA

EARTH AND SKY! STRANGER

THEY'RE CRYING! NICHOLAS

ANGEL, MAKE IT STOP! LISA/THEODORE/NICHOLAS

(The STRANGER reaches into the hole, pulls out the dirt family and squashes and pinches them to oblivion.)

STRANGER

There. They're not crying now.

THEODORE

What did you do?

LISA

Oh, how awful!

STRANGER

Don't cry. They were of no value.

THEODORE

But without their last rights they have gone to hell now!

STRANGER

Oh, it is no matter. We can make plenty more.

(LISA runs off, weeping.)

NICHOLAS

Lisa!

(to Theodore)

Watch our fishing poles.

(NICHOLAS runs after Lisa. THEODORE stands to go after Lisa as well, but the Stranger holds up his hand.)

STRANGER

No need for you to go as well, Theodore. Lisa's tears will be dry when twenty-nine seconds from now she'll see a mother rabbit and seven adorable bunnies.

(fussing with the dirt men again)

And seventy-three seconds from now she and Nicholas will be laughing when he trips over a tree stump, and a hundred nineteen seconds from now in the middle of the lake a fish will jump, and the men of dirt will be forgotten.

THEODORE

(tries to form a response; flabbergasted)

STRANGER

Well, of course we can, Theodore. All angels can tell the future. Four minutes from now -- There, I've made you a new dirt horse -- four minutes from now Lisa will return with Nicholas, and tomorrow Lisa will find two-and-a-half yards of calico to begin a new dress which, alas, she will wear only once, for thirteen days hence, Lisa will drown in the lake. And now a whole new dirt family. They all have very large ears, don't they?

THEODORE

Did you say she will drown?

STRANGER

Who? Lisa? Yes. Thirteen days from now. I could make their ears a little smaller.

THEODORE

Can't you stop it?

STRANGER

Stop what?

THEODORE

Can't you stop her from drowning?

STRANGER

Oh. If you wish.

(waves his hand)

There. She will no longer drown.

THEODORE

Thank you.

STRANGER

Nicholas will rescue her and she won't drown in the lake, but a few years from now instead will meet a terrible man, dooming her to a life of shame, depravity and crime, leading inevitably to the executioner. Yes, the smaller ears look better.

THEODORE

Executioner! Oh, find her a different fate! Please!

STRANGER

(peering out)

Mmmm....I'm looking at all her possible fates.

THEODORE

Yes? And?

STRANGER

It seems they're all of them tragic and filled with sorrow and pain. All but one.

THEODORE

Ah, let her have that fate, then.

STRANGER

But you said -- well, all right.

(waves his hand)

It is done. I have changed her fate back to the one with the least suffering, and so she will drown thirteen days from now. All other fates are unhappy.

THEODORE

This is awful! I thought angels were supposed to be benevolent and kind.

STRANGER

Surely I'm being benevolent and kind sparing your Lisa years and years of suffering. Though the smaller ears on the horse look like --

THEODORE

Will you stop playing with those dirt people and -- who are you? What do you want from us?

STRANGER

Who am I? I told you that I am an angel. You mean my name? My name is Satan.

THEODORE

Satan!

STRANGER

What's the matter now?