

DOWN

A FABLE

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CHARACTERS

SUE	F23	An Insomniac
JIM	M28	Her Brother
MOM	F50	Their Mother
GOOD MONKEY		Her Monkey Friend
BAD MONKEY		Her Monkey Friend's Bad Twin
HORNED MAN		Lord of Down
THE ANIMALS		Civilized Wild Animals

ABOUT THE MONKEYS

GOOD MONKEY and BAD MONKEY may be played by actors or through the use of puppets. I am inclined to recommend actors.

SETTING

The living room in MOM's home. There is a window, there is a door, and there is a pull-out sleeper couch.

The summer solstice.

SCENES

ACT I	ACT II	ACT III
Snakes & Ladders	Going Down	The Solstice

HISTORY & DEVELOPMENT

DOWN: A FABLE was first drafted in the fall of 2009 with support from the Playwrights' Center in Minneapolis through a Jerome Fellowship. An excerpt was developed and presented as part of Red Eye's 2010 Works in Progress Series in June of 2010.

You must really conquer your vile taste for A. de Musset, Esquire. He is a bad egg, one of the very worst, a pretty detestable specimen. I am bound to admit, natheless, that he, and even the man Racine, did, each of them once in his life compose a line which is not only fairly rhythmical but has also what is in my eyes the supreme merit of meaning absolutely nothing.

- Proust

ACT I

SNAKES & LADDERS

ACT I
 SNAKES & LADDERS

THE ANIMALS are enjoying a civilized cocktail party, with insect music. THEY seem to be making educated small talk. A pig discusses foreign policy with a rabbit. A cheetah flirts harmlessly with a raven, talking about some pleasant and forgettable play THEY saw recently. This continues for a time, until the cheetah grabs the raven by the wrist, lifts her skirt, and starts to sodomize her. SHE enjoys this. The pig and the rabbit watch until the rabbit gets randy and joins. This leads to a further piling of bodies until all the animals are engaged in a brutal orgy of masks and limbs and moans.

As this happens SUE sleeps fitfully on a pull-out couch in her family's living room. It is dark but for the blinking of the lights on a Christmas tree at center, under which sits a rather conspicuously large present and no others. A big yellow star rests prominently atop the tree. HORNED MAN stands over SUE, watching her sleep. HE is a man with giant antlers of a deer, the larger the better. These may be so large that two people are required to hold them erect. These may be two of the aforementioned ANIMALS. If it is awkward for HORNED MAN to move with such enormous horns, these ANIMALS serve as his "hands," responding to his whims and gestures.

The lights on the tree blink. Blink. Blink. SUE awakens. SHE sits up and stares at the HORNED MAN, who has begun to peel an apple with a small knife. SUE stares at him, peeling. Blink blink blink. Peel peel peel. When HE finishes peeling the apple, HORNED MAN sets it on SUE's head and goes to stand by the tree. SUE takes the apple from her head, stares at it, and throws it at the HORNED MAN. It bounces off him dully.

SUE
 (screaming)

Oh this is great! You again. This is just perfect. Listen to me: I know you're not real!
 And that's not a real apple!

This disrupts THE ANIMALS' orgy. THEY vanish one by one, slowly like at a good party that's suddenly gone horribly sour after somebody overdoses in the upstairs toilets and word trickles through the party-goers that an ambulance is on the way. THE ANIMALS remain at the corners of the scene, peering in at the conversation.

Every night! Every night you peel that fucking apple, and every night you put it on my head, and every night I throw it at you, and every night you are not not not not real!

HORNED MAN takes the apple and bites into it. HE spits it out. HE bites into it. HE spits it out. He does this a third time, then places the apple beneath the tree.

SUE
(cont., quieter)

Not not not not real. Go away. Go away, scary man with horns! Go! Shoo!

HORNED MAN

If I am not real, why do you talk to me?

SUE

Who *are* you?

HORNED MAN

I am the Lord of Down.

SUE

What?

HORNED MAN

I am the Lord of Down.

SUE

Were those your *animals*? In my *dream*? Fucking?

HORNED MAN

I'm afraid I don't know what you're talking about.

SUE

I'm dreaming again. This is a night terror. I am going to wake up any second. I really am. Really really am/

HORNED MAN

I am that which draws, pulls, sucks at the three roots of the world tree Yggdrasil: the well of the heavens, the cold source of the frozen rivers, and Mimir's well from which the god Odin once drank. I am the serpent gnawing on the root. Yea, I am the unmaker, the very/

SUE

What are you doing in my mom's shitty little rambler then?

HORNED MAN

I am come to this "rambler" because you have called me, you stupid little worm of a girl, as you do every night, in your fitful sweat-sleep. Now let's dispense with/

SUE

But I didn't call you!

HORNED MAN

Nay, you have. You did! Thrice upon thrice you have called me, and I have answered bedecked in this dismal garb of flesh.

Which I *loathe*, but for these horns, which are perfect. Dead and hard. Do you see them?

SUE

I see them.

HORNED MAN

You call, and I come. I am obliging.

SUE

But I *didn't*! I would have remembered calling you. I am trying to sleep. I *need* my sleep. I was *almost* there. Fuck fuck fuck fuck! I was. God, I was very, very close. Do you know what that's like?

HORNED MAN

Nay, worm-girl, I sleep not.

SUE

No, you wouldn't.

For an insomniac, the moment before sleep is is is better than an *orgasm*. But you don't/

HORNED MAN

Nay, worm-girl, I orgasm not.

SUE

Of course.

HORNED MAN

But I do *suck*.

SUE

Not the same.

HORNED MAN

My sucking is not like your sucking, if you can follow me through a finer distinction with your small worm-brain.

SUE

You are really a charmer, aren't you?

HORNED MAN

Oh come: if you want to sleep, then sleep, little worm. Close your eyes and sleep sweet gray nothing, and I will keep watch over the pitch dark that becomes your inner self. I will guard your fourblown corners and destroy any lingering iniquities or floating hypnagogia for you. This I will do as a display of my terrible, implosive mercy.

SUE

Great. Thanks.

SUE turns over and tries to sleep. The lights blink, blink, blink. SHE covers her head with her down pillows. SHE twists and turns. HORNED MAN stares.

I can't.

HORNED MAN

Of course you cannot. As you yourself said, you are an "insomniac." And I frighten you. I see your fear.

SUE

You're right. I am an insomniac. But you don't scare me. I don't feel much of anything right now.

See, I took a pill. I think I took a pill. Yes. But I'm still not asleep. Goddamnit. I hate taking those pills. They make me loopy. But I need pills to sleep. But I'm not asleep!

Doctor Patterson says I need to get regular, restful sleep. FOR MY NERVES!

I get panic attacks when I don't sleep. And when I get panic attacks I get insomnia. And one or the other happens every week and

I am just so entirely fucked! I hate it. I'm trying to concentrate.

I need to *graduate*...

Why am I telling you this? You are just an imaginary horned man with a suspicious vocabulary.

HORNED MAN

I am here, and it is Christmastime. Tis a time for sharing amongst you worm, and I know I appear to be a worm in this suit of woe, so it's only natural for a little worm like you to slip into such insipid, rote behavior.

SUE

I am not a little worm. Stop calling me that! You're really a *dick*, aren't you? Anyway, it's not Christmas! I just know it's not. It's too warm to be Christmas.

HORNED MAN

Why then is this fine-looking tree erected in celebration of the old gods?

SUE

Christ. Christ Mass. We celebrate Christ, not old gods. I think. Yes. With that tree, *you dick*.

HORNED MAN

What has a tree to do with that Hebrew worm Jesus?

SUE

I don't know. That's not my *job*. But we don't worship old gods. My family.

HORNED MAN

Ahh, but perhaps you do worship the old gods and you don't know. Imagine! That would be awkward.

Tis a fine, sturdy tree.

SUE

Huh. Yes. Look at that tree. It is a nice looking tree, actually. Ungh. I love that smell. But it's not Christmas.

Is it Christmas?

HORNED MAN

It is always Christmas.

The present shakes underneath the tree. THE ANIMALS freeze as one, then peer toward the tree. They do a strange dance while SUE watches. SUE rubs her eyes as if THE ANIMALS might be spots SHE could will away. THEY return to their poses, peering into the scene.

SUE

Oh for the love of God please don't say that. Don't say "It's always Christmas." I hate Christmas, and I hate categorical statements. Are you trying to be mysterious?

SUE can't sleep, and HORNED MAN isn't leaving, so SHE talks.

SUE
(cont.)

God. The “holidays.” All that horrible, kitschy music. Rudolph. Drummer Boy. A whole twisted menagerie of pain. Blah. Not knowing what to get anyone. Never getting what you really want. All that rich food. Indigestion. Midnight Mass. Consumer culture sucking at the tit of religious feeling. The mythical birth of God in man made into a fucking capitalist expression of... Whatever.

You know the most suicides happen around the holidays? They say it’s the winter – seasonal affective disorder. I say it’s the fucking *music*.

Ba rum ba ba bum. Ba rum ba ba bum. Ba rum ba ba bum. Rudolph the red nose ba rum ba bum bum... me and my/

HORNED MAN

Stop.

SUE

Ba rum ba ba/

HORNED MAN

(louder)

I do know about the suicides. I am very busy round that time of year. Sucking, sucking, sucking, sucking, sucking, sucking.

SUE

I hate the holidays.

HORNED MAN

Then we have something in common.

SUE

What’s that?

HORNED MAN

We share a loathing of the Yuletide. I despise it because of my increased workload, you because of your dislike of the innumerable, foully catchy traditional worm-songs.

SUE

But you do like trees, don’t you?

HORNED MAN

Inspid little worm-girl! I told you! I am that which is beneath the very root of the world tree Yggdrasil! I am the very sucking, gnawing, chewing at the root of the/

SUE

Yes. Fuck, I heard you the first time! I didn't ask for your goddamned resume.

HORNED MAN

Of course I *like* trees. I clutch at the world-tree Yggdrasil. I am its dark undoing and shall be the savior of the manifest from its own gaudy, banal, sickly wriggings. What a stupid question!

SUE

I wish you'd shut up or go away or something. I can't sleep with you *looming*.

HORNED MAN

I will leave when you show me proper respect, for you *need must* respect me, little worm: I that am beyond even that which is below.

SUE

Fuck you. Go away. I'm going to sleep. This is crazy.

SUE covers her head with her pillow.

You're not leaving! Why aren't you leaving?

God damn it, why don't you leave?

Take a hint. Scat! You're worse than that scrawny neighbor kid who used to lurk around outside. With his binoculars. Trying to see my *vagina*.

HORNED MAN

You invited me here.

SUE

I did not!

HORNED MAN

You just don't remember. Your worm-brain is addled with booze and pills. Not remembering is not the same as not happening. I believe you call that phenomenology. Or ontology? Your terms baffle me. What is being but phenomena? What are phenomena if not being? Your species puts such an emphasis on *consciousness*.

Little worm-girl, you/

SUE

I am twenty-two years old! I'm in *university*. I'm a *senior*. You need must respect *me*, fucker!

HORNED MAN

...let me explain something: many humans of your era think magically. Many believe irrationally that if they *will* something hard enough, it will become so. They are mistaken in this belief. They believe *wrongly*. This is not how the world works. The world is not here to satisfy your human will. The world is the world, and you are a part of the world.

You humans are not the world.

The present shakes a second time, this time more fiercely. THE ANIMALS do another dance. Again, SUE rubs her eyes, and THE ANIMALS return to their poses, peering in on the scene.

SUE

But maybe I am the world. Or maybe I am my own world. Maybe when I close my eyes everything vanishes, truly. Maybe when I die the world winks out.

There's nothing wrong with a little positive thinking, especially around the holidays!

HORNED MAN

What then of opposing wills? I shall tell you what: conflict. The world is not a peaceful place. You invited me with nine sharp cries, but you do not remember that you did! But I know. I know because I was invited, or I would not have come. For me it is not a matter of before or after, but of now. Always now. Now. Now. Now. See? So your not remembering is not enough, you frail little impotent thing.

SUE

Fine. Fine fine fine. I don't remember. I don't care. I want to sleep. I'm dying to sleep here. Please, just close the door on your way out. If it's Christmas it's cold outside, and my brother hates open doors.

HORNED MAN slides out the conspicuously large present. It shakes a third time, this time, crazily, and again THE ANIMALS begin a dance. This time THEY are interrupted by SUE, who does not rub her eyes this time.

Stop. Just stop right there. You can't open that. It's night, which means it's not Christmas *morning*. We don't open our presents on Christmas Eve. That's not how we do it.

HORNED MAN begins to open the present.

Oh man, Mom is going to get so pissed.

SHE sits up in the bed-couch.

What is it?

SUE

HORNED MAN reveals what is underneath. It is a cage on wheels large enough for an animal, obscured by a red velvet drape. It is eerily still now.

What's in there?

HORNED MAN rolls the cage to the foot of the bed. SUE crawls away up the backside of the bed and peers at the cage.

Open it.

HORNED MAN

No.

SUE

You must open it.

HORNED MAN

No. I don't want to.

SUE

But tis your Christmas present.

HORNED MAN

Who from?

SUE

From yourself.

HORNED MAN

Shut up.

SUE

Tis true.

HORNED MAN

That is so much bullshit.

SUE

Nay, I speak truth.

HORNED MAN

SUE

Well nay, it's Christmas Eve! We don't open our presents on Christmas Eve. I'll get in trouble. And besides, I don't buy myself presents. I'm not that pathetic.

HORNED MAN

Aren't you at all curious?

SUE

Sure.

HORNED MAN

Then satisfy your curiosity. That is, after all, what it means to be *human*, isn't it?

SUE

No. That's not at all what it means. That's just one part of it. And a small part.

HORNED MAN

Bigger than you think. Here.

HE takes her hand and sharply pulls the velvet from the cage. Underneath is BAD MONKEY, which is a kind of simian homunculus with beady red eyes. Immediately upon seeing BAD MONKEY, SUE collapses to the bed and arches her back. SHE would like to scream but cannot. Her breath comes in enormous, heaving gasps. HORNED MAN opens the cage and releases BAD MONKEY, which steps forward and perches atop SUE's chest. SHE calms, but her eyes remain wide open, and SHE stares in impotent horror at the squatting creature above her. HORNED MAN closes the cage.

HORNED MAN

Merry Christmas, you horrible little worm-girl. Next time, remember to respect your betters, and it will go easier upon you.

We shall meet again when the great plenitude of stars wink out forever, and together we shall gorge ourselves upon the very darkness. We shall suck and suck and suck and have our fill upon all that perfect nothing, and our sucking will dismantle the multiverse, revealing a thin shadow upon which we will dwell: I a crowned king of gloaming, thou and princess of the shade. And your royal screams will pierce the air. Until then...

HORNED MAN exits, taking the cage.

BAD MONKEY

Oh good. Good good good good good!