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## The Folklore Muse

Frank de Caro

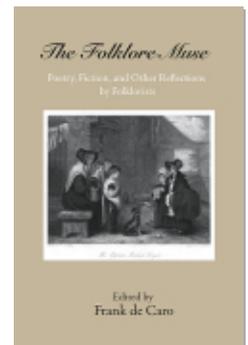
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# Legend and Myth

Legends and myths, especially those well known from classical literature or art, have had fantastically wide appeal to writers, including modern writers. One need only think of Joyce's *Ulysses* or Auden's "The Shield of Achilles" or even Giraudoux's *Elpenor*. It's hardly surprising that, in writing poetry or in other creative genres, folklorists—often professionally engaged in the study and teaching of these genres and so particularly involved in their nature—might turn to such "master stories."

Mary Magoulick's poem "A Cosmology of Women" actually came out of a course she taught on narrative. Along with Magoulick's, other poems grapple with those ur-stories, myths, and classical legends. In "Absent Gods" Carrie Hertz uses figures from classical mythology (for which she had a childhood love) to frame "a variety of male/female (power) relationships" but from female perspectives. Paul Jordan-Smith's poems "Glaukos" and "Shadow" are from a cycle on the Theseus legend, the first a telling of the story of Glaukos, the son of King Minos, brought back from death and taught the knowledge of divination by a seer, who, when banished, takes away that knowledge by having the boy spit into his mouth, and the second a "meditation" on the monster—the Other that is the Minotaur.

Danusha Goska turns to Indian mythic narrative, however, in her play "The Ramayana . . . as if Sita Mattered" to turn a "master narrative" on its head and play with its possibilities. However, Goska works not merely from a master narrative (the story best known from the Hindu epic, the Ramayana, is in fact a complex of mythic stories) but specifically presents her material as a script for the shadow puppet plays that are a staple of folk performance in several Asian countries—notably Indonesia—and which often do use the Ramayana as a basis for plot. The puppets, made of buffalo hide, are held on sticks behind an illuminated screen and "projected" through the screen by a *dalang*, a puppeteer of great skill, who manipulates figures, produces their voices, forwards the narrative, and directs the *gamelan* orchestra (gamelan music being the traditional type which accompanies the performances). Goska (who studied this folk form at Berkeley with former *dalang* Amin Sweeney) imagines the parts in her play being played by the puppets, which traditionally represent certain characters. As such, they often represent stereotypes, and Goska uses those stereotypes (giving some of her characters stage dialect, because traditionally the puppet characters often use forms of exaggerated speech) to further the larger purpose of her social critique. "ALL of the characters are meant to be stereotypes," she comments, "and, indeed . . . stereotypes on top of

stereotypes. . . . I am trying to put these stereotypes *in the dock*, as it were. To force audiences to question why we consider it okay to entertain this stereotype.” So her version of the Ramayana presents intense criticism of our social norms, notably directed at issues of class and gender.

Of course, whether folklorists use such stories in ways that other writers would not is a more complicated question to ponder.

## Mary Magoulick

### A Cosmology of Women

The World is Made of Pieces of Women  
So the *Enuma Elish* records  
    Marduk slashed Tiamat  
    His Consort, Mother, Corpse  
    Used to piece together the Heavens and the Earth  
Our World Made of Her

All Our Ancestors knew this story or another  
Of the slashing and piercing and piecing  
    Of Bodies Of Women

Long strings and stories of fertile ancestors  
    Lived out pain  
    And spun and wove  
    Threads and scraps and worlds  
Generations of texts and textiles  
Pieced like puzzles

Stories of Suffering and Survival pounded into Stone  
Of bodies caressed and torn whimsically  
    Like the trees that Gilgamesh ripped from the Gods' Grove  
    To show he could  
    To be a name remembered on slabs  
Proud Destroyer with pieces to clutch  
    Like the clutch of love or birth or death  
    In cold stone

Even Hardest Stone  
    Dissolves  
Faster than mimickers of estrogen  
Plastic Provides  
    More Pieces  
        Of Women  
        Parsed to  
    Remake our World  
Our End

We imagine newly beyond stone tablets  
In synthetics and new syntax

Still seeking continuity and saving ripped pieces

We Lean Toward Life at All Costs  
In love or violation the sharp stab settles into us  
The rip and pull parsing and piecing us all  
    Back together

Creating and Mending  
Coming closer to life's code  
We find our world and our selves  
    Full of ever more complicated Junk

Scientists say our universe is more Chaos than Cosmos  
Stars colliding in unimaginable violence and moral neutrality  
Only fragments of the genetic code we carry make us

Mirroring the universe  
We are mostly Chaos within  
    Ever seeking Cosmos  
Racing to decode DNA and hidden protein pieces  
We list again—TAG GAG ATTAC  
Finding our selves within “junk code”  
Bits of Endless Lists  
    Like in Myths  
Restraining order from pieces  
    In Infinitely Riddled Patterns  
From mostly scraps  
    Like old Quilts in Us

Cosmological strings speaking life  
Echoing  
Oldest stories and earliest cells

Cut Up  
    Pieced Together

To Visions of Order

We Weave the World

Absent Gods

I. Venus

Another man, a sweet man  
sitting across the table is pushing his last crab leg  
through the slicker of creamy butter sauce  
left on his plate. He is paraphrasing  
lame Neil Diamond lyrics at me  
and I am bored.  
I scour the restaurant for the waitress,  
“check please.” She has written  
her phone number on the back:  
*you're pretty. I get off at 10. please call me.*  
I can't help think: if my father  
had never screwed my mother  
I wouldn't have this problem.  
Tomorrow I'll go to Saks and buy myself something pretty.

II. Artemis

I like to spend my Friday nights  
at the gay bar on College and South.  
I can wear whatever I want,  
smell, act, dance however I want.  
Men don't ask me what kind of car I drive,  
or my favorite movie, compliment  
various parts of my body.  
They stay away.  
You see, I'm no Hippolyta, no Josephine;  
I'd rather watch a man  
torn apart by his own dogs  
than quiver like a deer at his charms.  
And the lesbians, I don't mind so much.  
A woman is soft, but she has hidden talents.

III. Hera

My husband's car broke down,  
for a week I picked him up  
from his job at Indiana University.  
(He works for the Kinsey Institute;  
spends long hours in the office.)  
Every evening he stood at the corner,  
a new intern, student, co-worker  
pretty in her tight angora sweater  
talked enthusiastically with her shoulders.  
I watched him, stout as a bull, shaking  
his hair, worn too long for his age,  
as if it was a shower of gold.  
But he always got in the car  
and placed his hand on my knee.

IV. Pandora

I roll over when I hear the door clap,  
stuff the 50 dollars from the night  
stand in the pages of the Gideon  
sleeping in the drawer —it's safe there.  
I have twenty minutes before the next;  
will he nervously scratch at 313B  
or fist the door like a satyr?  
It's a gamble. But now  
I must shower, powder, perfume  
all the pressure points. Wrap myself  
up like a present. This week, a new surprise:  
I think I have a flair-up of herpes.  
But no use in warning this one; to him,  
like the others, I'm just a box to be opened.

V. Ishtar

At 23, I look 16: my greatest asset  
as a stripper. Men want what they can't have,  
the danger and redemption of youth. They enter  
the club like a shrine, their pockets full  
of paper sacrifices. They search for revelations  
at the bottom of whiskey glasses and from the promise  
of my sweet lips and twisting thighs.  
Their brief prayers flicker and hush  
like the restless neon lights. Spilled libations, sticky  
crystal slickers make the stage flash like lapis, an altar  
built before them out of shadow and light.  
Together we are travelers, moving  
like cage-muscled lions. Our lives crumble, fade away.  
The world ends when I dance.

VI. Isis

I dreamt I was making love to you.  
Then awoke, remembered: you are dead.  
The beginning of another sad poem, the endless  
unrequited love song I've hummed now  
for two years. And I look twice  
at every stranger on the corner,  
every punk on the street. Who's responsible?  
I still wear my wedding ring. Everyday  
I expect to see you. I want to dig you up  
from the hard ground, sew the slack  
mouth of your wounds, and lay you out  
beside me. But when I wake,  
I want you to still be here  
breathing.

## *Paul Jordan-Smith*

### Shadow

"I know you," said the Hero.  
Said the Other, "And I you,  
and why you came" (smiling  
in sole possession of that truth).

Useless, the argument's bright edge:  
it can't cleave a shadow.  
Prowess-proud the Hero  
ascends along the knotted cord.

The Other is forgotten,  
save for a slight suspicion  
arising when sunlight strikes  
that unstained blade,  
casting a long shadow.

Why else return except to find  
new evidence of victory?  
Why else celebrate in dance  
all but the unstruck blow?

The shadow meanwhile turns its gaze  
to bright-edged towers rising,  
temples, memorials, monuments,  
and their long fall.

## Glaukos

Your gray-green child, now quick again,  
Still sticky, like bloom, with tears and honey,  
Crawls from the mouse-hole once his tomb.  
The shape-shifter adds another herb  
To his pannier and contemplates  
Your herds of cattle and mulberries,  
While you, horn-haunted, shamed  
By a darker birth, take hope.

You make promises and break them,  
Time and again, O King, yet only  
Betray yourself. This child you place  
Under the seer's tutelage will in time  
Learn much,

spit once,

lose all.

The Ramayana . . . as if Sita Mattered

(Gamelan music. After some moments, one instrument pounds out  
“New York, New York”)

Dalang: A tycoon lounges; his shoulders are massaged by a Swedish  
masseuse. Above him hang oil portraits.

(First puppets visible: Harlow [represented by the traditional puppet  
for Sita’s father]; Helga, a masseuse [traditional servant puppet].)

Harlow: I have so much to be proud of.

Sam: Yes, suh, you sure have so much.

(A bar, heretofore unlit, is illuminated; behind it, Sam [traditional  
puppet: Semar] is polishing glasses.)

Harlow: Look out those windows, Sammy, my boy. The Harlow Tower.  
We own one hundred percent of that. The Mercury Building.  
Sixty-five percent of that is ours. And over there, the Empire  
State Building—

Sam: We don’t own dat one, do we, suh?

Harlow: Talk to my lawyers after dinner. I just may have it for dessert.  
Look up there, Sam! (Gestures to portraits.) Pettibone “Bucks  
for Flesh” Harlow. The first to make the name famous. He cre-  
ated this empire—the Harlow empire.

Sam: Help me to remember, suh. He was in de Triangle Trade, ain’t  
dat so?

Harlow: Exactly. I think he even gave it the name.

Sam: De Triangle Trade. Molasses, to rum, to—

Harlow: Guest Workers. And there! Karl “Cartel” Harlow.

Sam: Teddy Roosevelt considered him de greatest—de greatest—  
what was it, suh?

Harlow: The greatest? Of course, he was the greatest! He wouldn’t have  
been a Harlow if he had been second greatest!

Sam: “The greatest robber baron.” Dat’s what TR said. Now I remem-  
bers.

Harlow: And “Ballistic” Bob Harlow, my personal favorite. When those  
inscrutable, slanty-eyed Japs were a threat, he pounded down  
every door in Washington warning the country to arm for war!

Sam: He knew better than those wimp pacifists!  
Amen, suh! He knowed cause he's de one who sold dem slanty-eyed Japs all de scrap metal to make all dose big ol' guns!

Harlow: It's called "foresight," Sammy. But as great as those men were, I have matched them. My ancestors have good reason to be looking down on me with pride.

Sam: It's often thought dere's plenty good reason to look down on you, suh!

Harlow: There. At the end. The empty frame.

Sam: Dat's Sita, ain't it, suh?

Harlow: Yes. No. That's just her frame. We haven't gotten her painted yet, just framed. That's quite enough, Helga, you may go. I have an appointment with my doctor.

(Helga departs. Harlow stands. A buzzing sound is heard.)

Voice: Dr. Feelgood is here to see you, chief.  
Harlow: Send him right in, Miss Cuticle.

(Dr. Feelgood [traditional puppet: Sengkuni] enters.  
He jogs throughout the following.)

Harlow: Ah, Dr. Feelgood. Wonderful to see you. Well, what's the good word?

Doctor Feelgood: I've been running steadily for the past forty days, minus sleep, of course. I've got my pulse down to forty BPMs. I trounced Deepak Chopra in the Men's Invitational Meditation Biathlon, and Shirley Maclaine says I was an Aztec God King in a former life.

Sam: I thinks Mistah Harlow be asking about his las' check up.

Doctor Feelgood: Sorry! Of course! You're dying.

(Harlow hits chair with a thud.)

Harlow: Omigod!

Doctor Feelgood: It's what we call multilateral-sclerotic-cardio-psyche. You've got very little time.

Harlow: Don't try to be kind. How much time?

Doctor Feelgood: Pay me now, or I'll bill your estate.

Harlow: (Grabs his chest.) Please! Sam!

(Gamelan plays Jimmy Cliff's "The Harder They Come.")  
(Scene two. Several aides [traditional puppets representing royalty] sit around a table. Sam is in the corner, polishing glasses.)

Harlow: Has everybody got it straight?  
Aide #1: I've got it, chief, but what about her?

- Harlow: She'll do it. Believe me.
- Aide #2: How can you be so sure? After all, she is an independent human being (all the others stare at him), sort of.
- Harlow: (Looms over others.) Look. I'm not a Harlow for nothing. We have foresight! Take everyday and don't live it. Live ten, twenty years in the future and plan for that!
- Sam: Dat's right! Y'all listen to Mistah Harlow. He ain't here now with y'all gentlemens. He already ten years in de futcha! He already daid!
- Harlow: Exactly. So years ago, after I had that unfortunate accident which guaranteed that I could never have a son—
- Sam: It was mighty white of you to forgive the late Mrs. Harlow for dat, suh.
- Aide #1: Heh, heh, heh! I remember how hard it was to keep that little operation off the front page . . . One tryst too many in that Hoboken love nest, eh, sir? And Mrs. Harlow let you have it!
- Harlow: Dr. Feelgood is the best surgeon in the country. He stitched little Harlow back on in no time. Bonded and secured. Just lost his aim, is all. So no son. To the matter at hand. I let Sita know that captaining a business empire requires a man's killer instinct, his fire in the belly. I built up in her a sense of pride and importance in our heritage. I—
- Sam: Cut a deal.
- Harlow: Exactly.
- Aide # 3: What kind of a deal?
- Harlow: Sita loves—fluffy blather. Beauty, harmony, nurturing, domesticity—folderol that has never earned anyone an honest dime. And she loves . . . how to put it. . .
- Sam: Having a roof over her haid.
- Harlow: You know how women are.
- Sam: Dey particulah bout dat. Specially in de wintertime.
- Harlow: So I let Sita indulge, but I *never let her forget* that sharing in the Harlow fortune had a price. She'd marry, someday, the next helmsman of the empire.
- Aide #4: But how do we find the man?
- Harlow: Simple, my lads. A contest.
- Aides, in unison: I like it! Intriguing! Hmhm!
- Harlow: The announcement must be handled delicately. Hallmark doesn't exactly make a card for this.
- Sam: So you slipped the contest announcement into de screen crawl on Bloomberg Financial Television.
- Harlow: Exactly. The challenge? The contestant who wins Sita will be the first to outsource forty companies that hire working-class

Americans.  
Aids: Bravo! Touchdown! The master at work!  
#1: What if he gets busted by Paul Krugman?  
Harlow: He's forfeit.

(Gamelan plays "How to Handle a Woman" from Camelot.)  
(Scene three.)

Dalang: Baby blue, daffodil yellow, pink pastels adorn gingham comforters and dust ruffles. Our nostrils twinge against the odor of paint squeezed from tubes. Artists' easels lazily lean. A girl clad in lilac and fawn ballet leotards sits quietly on the floor. Her maid Angela speaks; is that her voice, or the sound of her fingernail file scraping against her nails?

Angela: I'm sooo envious. I can't believe you get ta wear that incredible dress with twelve yahds of satin! When I saw that, all I could think was, what if she gets huh periot?

(Sita is silent, head on her folded arms.)

Angela: Ya know, you're the only goil I know who can legitimately wear white on her wedding day. That's a real accomplishment. Whaddya think he'll be like?

Sita: What difference does it make?

Angela: What difference does it make—sheesh. (Looks at nails.) I tell ya, these nail extensions are the greatest invention of mankind. You should get some. It'll turn him on like crazy! I can take ya to this salon in Joisey—Unless he's the natural type. A hiker or a camper. Ya need more makeup to look natural for them types than for a regula guy! Hey—maybe he'll be an officer, and, if you're lucky, no gentleman!

(Sita jumps.)

Sita: Angela, how can you even suggest that? After I organized the campus last semester against the war—

Angela: That was school, honey. This is the real woild. Your daddy's been payin' for everything in your life until now, and you gotta do what he says, and like it.

Sita: I'll do what he says.

Angela: And *like* it. Look, Sita, I don't get what you're mopin' faw. I don't wanna break yaw haht, but there is no over the rainbow. That whole business of love and happily ever afta—it's a load of crap, honey, just like Santy Claus, something ta tell the kids so's they won't sniff glue.

Sita: Angela, I'm not as naïve as you think. I've studied hard, and

- Angela: there's my volunteer work with the inner city children—  
Tell me about it.
- Sita: Daddy says I don't have what it takes to run Harlow Enterprises . . . but those kindergarten kids loved me . . . that must be good for something!
- (Angela rubs her two fingers together.)
- Angela: Ya know what I'm doin'? Playin' the world's smallest violin. Yaw fatha's money has protected you, Sita. As for men? They're all alike—plumbing! Ya might as well get one that can make some dough so's you can afford to get appliqué's on yaw fingernails and all those things us gals like.
- Sita: I want to fall in love, Angela. First, I want to fall in love with me. I'm just a teenager! This guy can already outsource forty industries. My favorite meal is cookie dough! I've never worked for pay or—
- Angela: Ya don't have to. All ya gotta do is look pretty, and the younger you are, the prettier you are, so now's when ya gotta get married. Statistics prove that a woman over forty is more likely to find a human finger in a Coke can than to get married. And for every college degree she gets, she becomes less likely to land a man. PhDs are lucky to marry some serial killer on Death Row. Sita, have you been hanging around with feminists? Look out for them feminists, Sita. They think so much it's no wonda they're unhappy!
- Sita: Angela, for once, I want to take the initiative! I want to say, "Hey there, big guy, come over here and satisfy me!"
- (Dorcas [traditional puppet: Durga] enters.)
- Dorcas: Nu, I'd love to, but somehow I don't tink you're my type.
- Angela: You! Mister Harlow has given strict instructions—
- Dorcas: Never to function as his daughter's psychotherapist again? But my dear, that was years ago, and she's been seeink me for weekly appointments ever since. Except this past week.
- Dalang: The old woman turns the weary and yet lovely eyes of age, softened with crow's feet and compassion, toward the younger, whose face is unlined by either wisdom or time.
- Sita: I think you can go, Angela.
- Angela: I'll go! Straight to Mr. Harlow—
- Sita: If you breathe a word of this, I'll tell your husband everything you just told me about men being nothing but plumbing!

(Angela skulks out.)

Dalang: The older woman and the younger, a mirror reflection warped by time, stare at one another. Sita runs into Dorcas's arms, which are open to her.

Dorcas: My little stuffed cabbage.

(Sita falls to the floor. Dorcas begins to make tea.)

Dorcas: Nu, should I believe what I saw on the cover of *People* magazine?

Sita: Mm hm.

Dorcas: It's mad and passionate love.

Sita: Yup.

Dorcas: Between him and your father.

(Sita laughs.)

Dorcas: Between him and his conquest.

(Sita laughs and cries.)

Dorcas: Fight, Sita.

Sita: Don't make fun of me.

Dorcas: If I were making fun, I'd say, "Mazel Tov" and start scanning eBay for a bargain-priced, luxury wedding gift, still in the original packaging.

Sita: Let's not go into it.

Dorcas: Paper it over? Feh. My life experience has taught me never to do that. Sita, you're not struggling to save your life now because you have no life. This sheltered harem isn't life. You've got the world inside you, Sita, that's why you need to create. That's why you need to nurture. But for life to be born, blood has to be spilt. You can't teach those kids you love until you learn something yourself. And look at your canvases. They're like the wallpaper in a child's bedroom—

Sita: Sometimes I think my daddy's right! You are evil!

Dorcas: I'm not evil; the truths I'm speaking are. I have nothing left to lose. The world needs people like me, to provide captions for the pictures. When are you going to do the choosing, Sita?

Sita: I—have my art.

Dorcas: Cause daddy lets you have it. How many pathways have you never explored because daddy lifted an eyebrow or daddy turned down a corner of his mouth when you took initiative? When you ran fast as a child and won, when you got dirty, did daddy make a face?

Sita: Stop it!

Dorcas: Here. Drink some mint tea. It's good for the tummy.

- Sita: (Muffled, high pitched.) Thank you. (Pause.) Daddy loves me. He would never choose somebody wrong for me.
- Dorcas: Nu? Tell me.
- Sita: Everybody does it, Dorcas. There is no over the rainbow. All men are alike. Nobody really marries for love, or stays in love, anyway. . .
- Dorcas: Deep wisdom you're passink along, Sita. I wish I had a tape recorder.
- (While speaking, Sita has worked her way over to Dorcas and now has her head in Dorcas's lap.)
- Sita: Well, it's true!
- Dorcas: It's not true. I've been in love with the same man most of my life.
- Sita: Why won't you ever at least tell me this mystery man's name?
- Dorcas: Look, if everybody doesn't marry for love, they marry for their own reasons, which maybe aren't love, but did you ever tink how different somebody's life would be if they lived with their own mistakes rather than somebody else's? Is this why we marched and picketed and circulated petitions?
- Sita: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Baby Boomers saved the world. Everything was settled right around Woodstock! Look at Paris Hilton, Dorcas. Her daddy is almost as rich as mine and the best thing she can do is a soft porn TV ad for some greasy spoon hamburger chain. Be real. Two percent—*two percent*—of Fortune 500 companies are headed by women. Everybody hated Hillary Clinton when she was a smart woman trying to get health care for the poor, but boy, did they love her when her husband publicly humiliated her. Half the girls in my class are anorexic or self-mutilators or dating a bastard. And there's no solidarity among women. You saw how ready Angela was to rat me out. She's my friend—but she wouldn't so much as break a fingernail for me. Thanks but no thanks. I'd rather be Doris Day.
- Dorcas: You're selling your birthright for a mess of pottage! You're gaining the world but losing your own soul!
- Sita: I never know what you're referring to . . .
- Dorcas: You damn secular humanists! You're single-handedly assassinating the allusion as a viable literary form!
- Sita: I don't have any skills, Dorcas. Every time I tried to learn something useful, daddy told me it wasn't ladylike. Would it be better for me to be harassed in the office by some stranger or at home by someone I know and can manipulate better?

- Dorcas: (Holding door open.) There's only one way to find out.  
Sita: You're just a malcontent because you're old and fat and not pretty—  
Dorcas: You tink I was born this way, maybe? Lemme show you a photo taken before—so many tinks. (Dorcas reaches into her purse, pulls out a photograph, hands it to Sita.)  
Sita: My gosh! You looked just . . . like . . . *me!*  
Dorcas: We're so much alike, Sita. You don't know that yet because I'm further along the trail. I can look back at your twists and turns, but you see only the trail immediately ahead of you.  
Sita: I don't want to hear it. I'm beautiful! He'll put me on a pedestal! Won't he?  
Dorcas: Sita, you're livink in a fool's paradise. The contest winner is Ram, the hedge fund prince, and he has about as many scruples about whom he sleeps with as a bedbug.  
Sita: Dorcas, I want you to go.  
Dorcas: Right. I was out of line. Nu, this tea is hot. All right, Sita, it's time for me to take my own advice. I quit.  
Sita: What?  
Dorcas: Yes. I've been sayink to you that one mustn't shrink from the difficult thing. It's time for me to follow my own advice. I love you, Sita, but I can't watch you do this.  
Sita: Dorcas! You're my strength!  
Dorcas: Feh. You're your own strength, Sita. Maybe you'd see that more clearly without me around to be your alter ego. I remember you when you were eleven, twelve. You were curious, vital, sometimes outrageous. I'd like to see *that* girl grow up. But I guess I never will. Goodbye, Sita.

(Dorcas leaves. Sita is left standing alone on stage, trembling.  
Gamelan plays the 1977 Charlene hit, "I've Never Been To Me.")  
(Scene four.)

- Dalang: Ram and Sita's Wedding! Nothing can compare. Jay Gatsby's Jazz Age soirees? Mere bagatelles! Dennis Kozlowski's two-million-dollar birthday fête? A snore-fest! Liza Minelli's nuptials—Please! No expense has been spared for this, the crime—excuse me—the wedding of the century! Somewhere, Princess Di is thinking, if only Charles and I had thrown a bash like this, we'd be living happily ever after! In a wheelchair sits the impresario who oversaw every last carved ice swan and champagne fountain, Wilson Harlow.  
Harlow: Sam!  
Sam: Yes, suh.

Harlow: Sam, you go on over to Ram and see if he needs anything. I'm on my way out. It's time you go to your new boss.

(Sam finds Ram and Sita posing for photographers.)

Ram: Honey, that white dress.

Sita: Yes?

Ram: White reflects so much. It'll make me look washed out. I don't suppose you could slip into something, oh, brown?

Sita: Dear, it's sort of considered traditional for women to wear white on their wedding day. . .

Ram: Oh, yeah, right! With the excitement of winning the contest and all I sort of forgot that you were the prize . . . hey, baby, tonight's gonna be great, huh? Ya know, among my Skull and Bones brothers, I was considered quite the chick magnet.

Sita: Ram, should it, you know, concern me that lots of *frat boys* consider you sexy?

Reporter: Hey, Ram! Tell us again how you outsourced industry number forty!

Ram: Sure thing!

Dalang: Sita tries to stay pretty even though no one sees her any more. She wanders off into the night, seduced by the scent of flowers in the darkness, by the serenity of a deserted corner of vast gardens. She sits in the twilight, alone but for the moths and bats. (A puppet covered with a bag [traditional puppet: Ravana] approaches Sita.)

Raveneau: You're lonely, you're sad, and you're wondering if you did the right thing.

Sita: What? Who are you?

Raveneau: Someone who can read your thoughts and cares about you too much to waste time with small talk.

Sita: You look . . . you *sound* like somebody famous.

Raveneau: Like . . . Spike Lee?

Sita: Oh! Daddy said he'd invited you. But you look . . . so much bigger! Why are you wearing a bag?

Raveneau: Method Acting. I'm playing The Elephant Man in a new production.

Sita: Cool! Will you be directing as well?

Raveneau: Don't do that, Sita. Don't make small talk with me. There is so little time.

Sita: For what?

Raveneau: For the things that matter, once we figure out what they are.

Sita: Why are you talking to me this way?

Raveneau: Because I want to blow a wind through your mind that wipes

- everything clean and allows for the truly new shoot to take vital root in place of the old, the fixed, the hopeless, and the ragged.
- Sita: (Flabbergasted, laughs.) You ask a lot.
- Raveneau: It's not anything you haven't done for me already, with your beauty.
- Sita: I? How? But, pooh. They say every woman is beautiful on her wedding day.
- Raveneau: You did this for me years ago, and it wasn't your beautiful face, Sita, though I'm sad to say it wasn't, your face is so very beautiful. It was your art. I saw that show you mounted in the Bowery, and I never forgot it. When Ram, who is . . . how to put this . . . a competitor of mine, won you, I knew I had to meet you in person before he claimed you as his forever.
- Sita: You saw my exhibition? You didn't find it . . . it wasn't like . . . the wallpaper in a child's bedroom?
- Raveneau: That was part of its charm.
- Sita: (Plainly disappointed, but bouncing back.) Oh. Well, I guess it's quite the compliment to hear a famous director talk about my art that way.
- Raveneau: What if I weren't a famous director? What if I were just a common, simple—oh, just some monster?
- Sita: I'd still be thrilled, I guess. But you do feel it's too naïve?
- Raveneau: Your art could grow from your growing. (He has found his ploy.) Sita, what if I offered you that?
- Sita: What?
- Raveneau: Experience? A deepening of your art?
- Sita: That's the thing that's most important in the world, to me, I guess, the only thing I'm close to, now. Would I take what you offered? Of course.

(Without hesitating, Raveneau holds a handkerchief over Sita's face. She passes out. He jumps over a wall with Sita in his arms. Sam enters.)

- Sam: Mistah Ram! Mistah Ram!
- (Gamelan plays Adagietto from Krzysztof Penderecki's "Paradise Lost.")
- (Scene five.)

- Dalang: The scene before us is Dali-esque. Stacked tires rise in weird spires like skewed, profane parodies of the steeples of Gaudi's Sagrada Familia church in Barcelona. The hulks of junked cars gape and yawn, the upholstery ripped open like a torn dress,

- bleeding stained cotton and foam. Huge rats and haggard men, equally squint-eyed, have set up housekeeping within. Refrigerators not in vogue since the Eisenhower administration lie on their sides and are transformed into makeshift bathtubs. Effluvia of more recent vintage—potato peels, hairballs, molding pudding cups, dot the landscape. Garbage-hungry gulls twist and veer through air so filthy it billows like smoke. What's this? A smile? No, it's the silent snarl from the carcass of a dead mongrel. Raveneau is watching Sita sleep. As if she were a butterfly wrenching free from the strands of the web of a deadly spider, Sita shakes off the drugged stupor.
- Sita: Wh—wh—who are you?
- Raveneau: I am Raveneau.
- Sita: (Aghast) Aaa! I've seen you on the news! You're the notorious underworld kingpin, mastermind of a ten-pronged criminal empire—drugs, gambling, gun running, terror . . . But the last thing I remember, Spike Lee—
- Raveneau: That was I.
- Sita: But you said you were—
- Raveneau: I said I *sounded* like—
- Sita: What?
- Raveneau: A disguise.
- Sita: (Gasps, shrinks back.) I demand to know how I got here!
- Raveneau: You chose to come. Here is the price tag of your paradise. To keep your tiny percentage of the world so perfect, you have to dump all your garbage somewhere. Here is that where.
- Sita: Scoundrel! Ruffian!
- Raveneau: That's the best Wilson Harlow's Harvard-educated little girl can do? For *me*? You make me wanna cry. Babycakes, I am civilization's archenemy. I am the foiler of the man's best laid plans. I am the fly in every ointment, the worm in every apple, the snake in every green and dewy paradise. I, I will have you know, am Raveneau, infamous criminal mastermind. The *New York Post* calls me the "Ten-Headed Demon!" But what I said at the party was true. Unlike your daddy's precious Ram, I intend to let you do exactly as you like.
- Sita: Is that so? Then let me go!
- Raveneau: You're on a floating island in New York harbor. We can get you a boat and there's an A train on shore. Want a MetroCard?
- Sita: I'm leaving right now!
- Raveneau: (Reclines on a car seat ripped from a Jaguar.) Bye!
- Sita: I demand to know what's going on!
- Raveneau: All the facts you need are as apparent to you as they are to

me.  
Sita: There's something out there, some trap. . .  
Raveneau: Admittedly.  
Sita: Then remove it!  
Raveneau: It's not my trap. Hungry? I'm sending out for pizza.  
Sita: No anchovies.  
Raveneau: Chillin'.

(Scene six. Ram, Harlow, Sam.)

Ram: You simple-minded shortcut on the evolutionary tree! You believer in global warming! You New York *Times* reader! You're fired!  
Sam: Yes, suh. (Slumped, he leaves.)  
Harlow: Ram, think of what you're doing! Sam's the most loyal—  
Ram: Loyalty has no market value! I told him to check on Sita!  
Harlow: He did!  
Ram: Too late! I'll get Sita back if it's the last thing I do!

(Scene seven. Sita is pacing and eating pizza. Raveneau is watching a big screen color TV.)

Sita: I've got it!

(Using the remote control, Raveneau turns off the TV.)

Raveneau: Is it contagious?  
Sita: I walk out of here, free as a bird . . . So my new husband says to me, "Where'd you go on our wedding night, wifey dear?" And I say, "Why, the lair of a notorious crime lord, honey, who just happens to be six feet tall, black as the ace of spades, and with a long, prominent (they stare at each other) nose. And I left. No scratches, no bruises. . ."  
Raveneau: Word up. Now think like a man. What's the one thing you know about Ram?  
Sita: That he won me in a contest. He entered a contest. He likes competing, and he likes winning.  
Raveneau: You wanna keep your man, woman? You just better sit tight and wait for him to rescue you.  
Sita: I understand.  
Raveneau: Like I tole you. Pizza feeds your brain. Eat s'mo.  
Sita: Hey, thanks. We almost never have pizza on Park Avenue. Daddy says the two things a woman should never be are old and fat. I think that's why he hates Dorcas so much. She's both.  
Raveneau: Well, I ain't one of your sorry excuse white boys. Gimme a woman who feels like a woman.

Sita: (Sita stares at the pizza.) Raveneau, just how long do you think it will take before Ram rescues me?

(Gamelan “When the moon hits your eye  
like a big pizza pie, that’s amore.”)

(Scene eight. Ram is talking on five telephones simultaneously.)

Ram: I want all outgoing planes searched. I want every woman passenger publicly felt up by an overzealous security guard. I want a SWAT team member down every manhole, shouting, “Hut, hut, hut!” just like they do in the movies. I want someone to explain to me why SWAT team members shout “Hut, hut, hut!” I want all the hospitals combed, and their cooks lead off in chains. I want the libraries cased, ACLU be damned. I want to know who’s got overdue fines, and I demand to know just exactly who are these alleged adults who read Harry Potter books. Inspect the brothels. Which women are the most beautiful and the best bargains? Come to think of it, I’ll personally carry out this aspect of our investigation. I hear that that Madame Surpanakha is pretty hot . . . send her straight to my penthouse.

(The puppet Hanuman enters.)

Hannah: Hannah Omanio at joor service, chefe!

Ram: Who the hell are you?

Hannah: Hannah Omanio, subcomandante and generalísimo of the Spanish Harlem chapter of the Guardian An-HHels, chefe! We’re here to help joo rescue Sita.

Ram: Guardian Angels, huh? I fail to see what you can do that I, the FBI, the CIA, and agencies too shadowy to mention can’t.

Hannah: We’re willing to ride the subways.

Ram: Hmmm. Let me see your badges.

Hannah: We don’t need no stinkin’ badges. We got a message for joo from our crime-fighting psychic, Dorcas Westheimer.

Ram: Give me a break!

Hannah: Is about someone name Sam.

Ram: Sam? What’s the message?

Hannah: Joo must contact him.

Ram: The last thing I need is some little girl who can’t pronounce the word “joo”—I mean “you”—telling me that some old woman named Westheimer wants me to contact an old ni—. I mean “n word.” I mean African American. Get out of my way!

(Scene nine. Back on the island.)

Sita: Raveneau! It's been two weeks, and I think something is happening.

(Raveneau merely turns down, rather than off, his big screen color TV. He doesn't turn around.)

Raveneau: You talking to me?

Sita: Your floating island is so rancid and grotesque—

Raveneau: Well, I like that.

Sita: This is exactly what daddy threatened me with. That if I didn't have a man, I'd end up someplace like this. Well, now I *am* someplace like this, and . . . what's more, I've eaten *all the pizza I wanted*, and gained weight! I'm poor. I'm fat. I've survived my two worst nightmares! Maybe I'm not as empty as Daddy says. You know, he's right about one thing. I *don't* have a man's killer instinct. But I *do* have energy, a *woman's* energy. I loved working with those inner city kids. . .

Raveneau: Wow. Fascinating. Now could you wind this up so I can get back to the game?

Sita: I *don't* need a man. Realizing that, I'm outraged! It's not just the past two weeks I've been hostage. It's my whole history. Pretending I'm helpless so some man can look heroic. Every time I see my face—my *fat* face—in your fly-specked mirror and I don't see daddy looking over my shoulder, it's like I'm seeing me for the first time. *I'm* ready to take the initiative, to do things I'd always been afraid to do before! Forbidden things. Wild things! (With a growl, she jumps at Raveneau. He collapses beneath her assault, and her caresses.)

(Gamelan plays Helen Reddy's "I Am Woman.")

(Scene ten. Wilson Harlow is in bed. Ram attends him, along with Hannah Omanio.)

Dalang: Beep, beep, beep. (The sound of a heart monitor.)

Harlow: Ram. The time is growing short. You've got to find my daughter before I—

Ram: Don't say it, chief! You'll make me cry! You taught me all I know about reducing my opponent to an insolvent hulk!

Harlow: Ram, listen to Hannah.

(Ram turns to Hannah.)

Hannah: It's like I said, chefe. Every An-HHel is on the case. Joo oughta check out this Sam lead.

(Scene eleven. Sita is in front. Raveneau is reclining on a couch

in the background. There is wonderment in Sita's voice.

Gamelan plays, "I Feel Pretty")

Sita: I did it. I took the initiative. I've got to spread this feeling!  
Raveneau! I have an idea!

(Raveneau snores loudly.)

Sita: (She shakes him by his lapels.) Raveneau! Wake up!

(Scene twelve.)

Dalang: Again, we enter the tense, clinical air of a dying man's hospital room.

Ram: All right, if it's the chief's last request, I'm ready to allow Sam to rejoin our team.

Sam: D'you call for me, boss?

Ram: Sam! It's you! Standing right behind me, polishing glasses!

Sam: Hopes I didn't disturb you, suh.

Ram: We need to talk about your wandering off . . . but right now we have more urgent business! Sam, do you have any notion as to where Sita might be?

Sam: Well, suh, dere's some things I know dat you ought to know dat once you'd knowed 'em, you might not want to know.

Ram: This is no time for a display of your flair for Ebonics!

Sam: De story goes back quite a ways. . .

Ram: Yes?

Sam: Yes, suh. You wouldn't remember dose times, suh. Everything so much better, now. But can you believe it, dere was a time in dis country when a fella couldn't get ahead if'n he was black? Yep, it seemed like all de good qualities only white folks had, and black folks, well, dey was everything bad. Stupid, dumb, ugly.

Ram: I don't need a lecture. . .

Sam: I fell in love with a white girl. She got pregnant with twins. We knowed what we had to do. Either we was gonna have two chillun who'd both be halfway between us, light brown color, who'd get some hardships in dey life cause how dey looked, or we'd have to get ourselves a conjure woman to make it so at least one of our chillun could have all a de good things in life.

Ram: I can't believe the excuses you people come up with to air your grievances at every opportunity. . .

Hannah: I think I see where Sam is heading. Chefe, where'd joo grow up?

Ram: I grew up in Kennebunkport. My parents found me there,

actually . . . I was washed ashore in a great nor'easter. They say I must have been jettisoned from a sinking yacht.

Sam: Tweren't no yacht, Mistah Ram.

Ram: Are you still here? What were you saying?

Sam: Jest dat. Since you come out first, we was gonna name you Sam, after me, but my darling wife she say no, de white man's always gotta come first, so we name you Ram, cause "R" come before "S" in de alphabet. Dat conjure woman hoodooed and voodooed over yo' mama's belly, movin' all my dark skin over to Raveneau's side, and yo' mama's white skin over to yo' side. We name him Raveneau cause we know he gonna spend his whole life ravenous for what you have dat he'll never get.

(Ram goes to strike Sam.)

Sam: Hit me if'n you want, suh. But I'll tell you, you gots a birthmark shaped like a watermelon on yo' behind, and it's black as de ace of spades. And Raveneau, he gots an Oreo cookie birthmark on his behind, and dat dere kosher crème filling be lily white. Dat ol' conjure woman left does dere as a callin' card, 'cause we couldn't make de final payment. I'm sorry, son, but you ever try to find forty jars of mosquito hearts in Harlem?

Ram: To think, all the things I've said—you tolerated—as a servant would tolerate a master—though in fact, you were my father? Sam, you're an exceptional human being!

Sam: Thank ye kindly, suh. T'was you masters taught me all I knows.

Ram: How?

Sam: I hear you all saying, "Dem servants! Dey so lazy!" Though I gets up before you, goes to bed afta you, and am working de whole time. So I say to myself, "I ain't never gonna judge nobody." And you say, "Dey got nuthin' so they got no worries!" And dat astound me so much I say, "I ain't never gonna be so insensitive." You say, "Dey so paw! Why do they have chillun?" And dat hurt me so much, I say to myself, "I ain't never gonna say such hurtful tings to nobody." Ya'll drownin' in your riches and you don't appreciate 'em. I enjoys a glass of water better than you do your hundred years old wine.

Ram: (Turns to Harlow) See that, chief, I told you we were good for these people.

(Scene thirteen. Gamelan plays "There Is Nothing Like a Dame.")

Dalang: Raveneau's lair now looks like a glorious spread from the pages

- of Martha Stewart Living! There are flowers growing from junked cars! The garbage is in neat recycling bins! And Sita is at the center of the scene, on five telephones at once!
- Sita: No, I don't want the Texas Board textbooks. They're racist and sexist. There's a company in Berkeley you should contact. *Plane Geometry as if the Wretched of the Earth Mattered* . . . You sent the wrong uniforms. Half of them were to be for young girls . . . I'm sorry if you've never heard of girls playing football, but that's what they voted to play . . . All right, the flavored ones, do they contain sugar? They're meant for teenagers, you see, and I wouldn't want to give them anything that would be harmful to their teeth. Well, I don't see what business it is of yours how old the customers are for your condoms! . . . We absolutely do not want the ROTC on our campus. . .
- Raveneau: Sita!
- Sita: Yes, dear?
- Raveneau: Do you think you could show your man a little attention?
- Sita: How about a quickie? I've got fifteen minutes until my meeting with the writer ghosting my memoirs.
- Raveneau: Do you know how long it's been since I've had a home-cooked meal?
- Sita: Since you fired the maid, dear. But I have enough money to pay union scale and provide dental benefits—
- Raveneau: Makes no difference! While you're with me, you don't need your own cash.
- Sita: Of course I do, dear. For the school, and—
- (Raveneau hits Sita.)
- Raveneau: Don't you sass me!
- Sita: Because you look different, I thought you might be different from daddy and Ram—(Raveneau hits her again.) But I see that you're just the same.
- (Gamelan plays The Who's "meet the new boss, same as the old boss.")  
(Scene fourteen.)
- Dalang: Ram sits alone in Harlow Enterprises' executive suite. Sita's empty frame, he feels, glares down on him mockingly, accusingly. What's that? A noise?
- Ram: Who's there? I have a black belt in karate, a Colt Combat Commander, the best lawyers, and all the tabloids in New York.
- Raveneau: Chill out, bro. I come to make deals, not crack heads.

Ram: Raveneau?  
Raveneau: Can I sit down? Scaling a skyscraper ain't easy when you get to be our age.  
Ram: Wait—  
Raveneau: What?  
Ram: Could you drop your pants?  
Raveneau: What they say about you white boys is true.  
Ram: The birthmark—  
Raveneau: So the old man told you.

(Ram and Raveneau circle each other. Gamelan plays "Mack the Knife.")

Raveneau: We're twins. Deal with it. Now let's talk turkey.  
Ram: I demand Sita!  
Raveneau: Fool, she's yours.  
Ram: Huh?  
Raveneau: All those homeboys I had dealing crack? She's got 'em in ballet class. Girls I was pimpin' as hos? Fillin' out applications to go to NYU.  
Ram: But, capital—  
Raveneau: She's bleedin' it from you and Harlow Enterprises. Some computer scheme—  
Ram: Now it all makes sense! The Pettibone Harlow Third World Plantation Workers' Pension is exhausted. The Ballistic Bob Institute for the Advancement of Limited Nuclear War is laid waste. The Kartel Karl Fund for the Equitable Distribution of Toxic Chemicals is poisoned!  
Raveneau: Rescue her. And make it look hard on me. Gotta protect my reputation.  
Ram: Do I want to? I've got it sweet, brother. Old Man Harlow's about to kick off, and I inherit everything. If I take this new Sita back, I'm giving myself jock itch. Would someone please rid me of this troublesome wife?  
Raveneau: We could solve this very neatly.  
Ram: Are you saying what I'm thinking?  
Raveneau: We're not twins for nothing.  
Ram: I don't know. . .  
Raveneau: She's fat, man.  
Ram: Anorexic Sita?  
Raveneau: Pizza. And she starts every sentence with, "Yes, but. . ."  
Ram: Bullets stray in rescue missions. Fire can be very indiscriminate . . . Feasible—  
Raveneau: For a price. Look, you got uptown; I got downtown. I say we

- join forces and make this whole city ours.
- Ram: You're on, brother. (They shake.)
- Raveneau: Now that's what I call affirmative action.
- (They leave. Sam appears. He's been in the darkened corner this whole time, polishing glasses!)
- Sam: I can't believe dem boys is my sons! Hannah! Time to get your Angels in gear!
- (Scene fifteen. Hannah, the Guardian Angels, Sam, Angela, and Dorcas.)
- Hannah: Concentrate, Dorcas. We've got to find her.
- Dorcas: I'm tellink you. I think I'm too attached.
- Hannah: Like Jennifer Lopez says, don't fight joor emotions. Let them take joo to Sita.
- Dorcas: All right, already with the naggink . . . I see an island . . . and Sita! She's all tied up! She's bruised. She's cryink. But, I've got to say, she's lookink very well fed.
- Hannah: Pull back. Keep Sita in the picture, but pull back. What do joo see in your crystal ball?
- Dorcas: A bridge. The Brooklyn Bridge!
- Hannah: Joo heard her! *Ándale!* (Everyone runs.)
- (Scene sixteen. Helicopter sounds. Gamelan plays "Riders on the Storm.")
- Dalang: Holy Shiva! That helicopter is shooting fire! The office, the recycling bins, burst into flames! And Sita! She's tied up and can't dive into the river! What's this? She's jumping toward the fire! Behind her back, she's holding her wrists over red and yellow licking flames! The pain is exquisite as the fire scorches her delicate skin, so close to her veins! She winces! But the bonds singe. She struggles. Sita is free! Onshore, Hannah studies the scene through binoculars.
- Hannah: *Yemaja!* We must form a human chain to the island! *Todos!* Dive, dive, dive!
- Dalang: Without hesitation, Angels dive into the East River. Tall, short, skinny, fat, white, black, and brown kids from New York's mean streets struggle to hold together. Muscle-tensing effort exhausts them. Their limbs tremble against the cold sting of the water. Finally, they are five feet from the island!
- Dorcas: Sita! We're rescuink you!
- Sita: I don't want to be rescued. I feel like a tennis ball, knocked back and forth! I'm going to swim to shore myself.

Dalang: The helicopter lowers. Its blades roil a current that drives the human chain away from the island.

Angels: Help! *Nos ayuda!*

Dalang: It's a Cuisinart down there! The rescuers are being forced under!

Dorcas: Sita! Don't you see this whole megillah?

Angela: The chain needs another link, or we all go under! I broke my nails doin' this fo' you!

Sita: Angela! *You broke your nails for me!*

Dalang: Sita rushes to the shore and anchors the chain. Up above, Ram and Raveneau, seeing their plan foiled, fly off. The East River calms, and the human chain reels itself back to Manhattan.

(Scene seventeen. The sound of water dripping.)

Sita: My husband and my lover just tried to kill me. Why? Did I injure them, defame them, take their love and twist it around? No. They wanted to kill me because I made my own choices.

Angela: And because you porked out.

Sita: Yes. I can't go on. I'm going to jump into the fire of yonder homeless men.

(Sita moves toward the fire. Dorcas sneezes loudly.)

Dorcas: Just one minute, young lady.

Sita: Dorcas, you can't tell me what to do. You're my therapist, not my mother.

(Angels loudly gasp. A tenor begins singing "Ave Maria" softly in the background.)

Dorcas: Sita, it's time I dropped my mask of the mean old woman who says tinks you don't want to hear.

Sita: Whatever can you mean?

Dorcas: I was young. So young. There was a man, on the other side of the world, who really wanted to learn, so he came to one of the best universities, in Kraków. Sita, I was as sharp and quick as the kick in a shot of vodka. He was noble and handsome and when he looked at me across the old town square we waltzed toward each other. We didn't speak each other's language. It was as if we were in love before we'd ever met. Decades before the Nazis had marched into Kraków. They drew a line. You—you look like this, you come over here. You, you look like that, you go over there. That worldview is not entirely dead. My lover was on a different side of a line that had been invisible to me, but that suddenly became very apparent. He left. I drifted for

- a long time. One day, I was in New York, workink at a kosher delicatessen, when a man got a cravink for the foods he ate the last time he was in love. I looked up, and came to life again.
- Sita: Dorcas, I—
- Angela: Shh, honey, shh.
- Dorcas: He said that he was married and couldn't divorce her, he'd be ruined. I understood. They would raise you and give you all the advantages I couldn't.
- (Music swells, then fades slightly.)
- Sita: But! Daddy hates you! The things he says about you! Dorcas—whoever you are—he calls you a man-eater! He says that you'd like to have a chain of skulls to wear around your neck!
- Dorcas: What's your point? He's said all those tinks to me, and worse.
- Sita: He talks to you?
- Dorcas: We meet weekly in a Hoboken love nest. And not to discuss the weather. Sita, once he had walking pneumonia, but he took the train out there for my chicken soup. He can't make a business decision without me, 'cause I got instincts, he says. I call it intelligence. He calls it instincts. I could draw a map of the moles on his back, I've rubbed it after so many bad days at the office. That's why he can't let you know about me, Sita. He can't let himself know. I represent the side of him that's vulnerable.
- Sita: (Highly outraged, accusatory.) Then, you *love* him!
- Dorcas: As much as you can love a man who abandons you to the Commies—by then it was the Commies—and then has illicit sex with you in Jersey once a week, which, as it happens, is quite a lot.
- Sita: But you were my mother! Why didn't you raise me?
- Dorcas: He could give you everytink. I was a penniless outcast. And I was a wreck. I had to get my life together, go to school, figure out who I was—
- Sita: That's so selfish! You're the same as he! You've been trying to steer me without admitting who you are! You've been demanding that I accomplish what you never have! What kind of a role model are you?
- Dorcas: One who loved. So many times in that hotel room, I'd say to myself, Dorcas, figure out what he has that brings laughter more readily, that makes your cheeks glow and your heart beat quicker. Maybe it's some chemical that's also found in papayas or herring. But you know, after all these years, I have to keep goink back to the man to get more.

(“Ave Maria” reaches a crescendo.)

Dalang: A limousine screeches to a halt beside the group on the shore.  
A man jumps out.  
Harlow: Sita!  
Sita: Father!  
Hannah: *Madre de dios!* Joor supposed to be dead!  
Harlow: Dr. Feelgood had the wrong patient! It was really Donald Trump! He has a terminal condition rooted in his hair. It becomes more lethal every time he marries a younger woman. He’s now on life support!

(Angels cheer.)

Harlow: Sita, can you ever forgive me? Dorcas, you’ve told her everything?  
Dorcas: As usual, it’s Mr. Sherlock Homes.  
Harlow: To the moon, Dorcas! I’m gonna punch you so hard—  
Sita: Shut up, both of you! You’ve done enough to be ashamed of for a cycle of Greek plays! I’m so confused.  
Homeless man: Hey, lady! We can throw some more tires on the fire for ya!  
Sita: Shut up! Everybody, just, just, shut up. It’s my turn. Anything that drives mothers apart from their daughters, that drives men apart from their own vulnerabilities, anything that reduces a young girls’ life to a marketable product and drives her apart from her own best self until she is no longer young and needs to develop a skill to survive, anything that glorifies the murderous instincts of young men and never demands that they discipline themselves and learn to service some higher good, anything that decrees that a black man or a Jewish woman or anyone, because of how they look, must content themselves with anything less than the full range of human possibility, is wrong, and that’s all that I’ve inherited from you.  
Sam: You sure dat’s all, Miss Sita?  
Dalang: Why, there’s Sam, polishing glasses in a corner!  
Sam: Now, I may be jest a servant, but seems to me dat dere was also some people sayin’, “Let me see what I can do for dat person over dere.” We didn’t wait for de perfect world to come. We did what we could in the world we found ourselves in.  
Dalang: Why, there’s Ram and Raveneau! Perp-walking in handcuffs, ducking their heads as photographers flash!  
Ram: There was beauty, Sita. Beauty to transport you momentarily away from the rude, indifferent chaos, tedium, and heartbreaking ephemeracy of life.

- Raveneau: There was adventure, Sita. It made you feel alive. You loved it, and you were always ready to reach out for more.
- Angela: And like I said, there's this fantastic nail salon in Joisey. After everything's squared away here, I'll take ya there, I promise!
- Hannah: There was heroism, and cool uniforms! Although we do have to get to work on getting some badges.
- Angels: *Olé!*
- Harlow: (Clears his throat.) Harrumph, well, there was tradition, the known and familiar, in a changing world. And a home. I provided you with a roof over your head, Sita. With cost to myself, I might add.
- Dorcas: Very touchink, papa bear. You got an itemized bill for her, maybe?
- Harlow: Dorcas! Harrumph, I tried, Sita. There was great effort.
- Dorcas: There was love, Sita. And whatever has love will always draw you, no matter its imperfections. Where there's love, not everytink is perfect, but sometink in there is. Generation after generation, we've all been looking for it, and we all tink we've found it, but our kids come along and tell us we have not. So you can dive into the fire or you can do your job. Dive into the tink that has love and search! Exhaust all of your senses in searchink, for the jewel in the lotus, the kingdom of Heaven.
- Sam: When the words is wrong, try jes' listening to the music.
- Sita: I don't know. All I know is I can't take the injustice in what I used to think was completely beautiful. I have to find the better way. (Sita walks into a fire—the sun rising over the East River. Everyone follows. Gamelan plays the U2 Song, "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For.")