Animal Acts

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Audience members buy tickets from box office workers who wear half-monkey masks, cut so the lower jaw is the human face. The house opens twenty minutes before the hour. An audio jungle loop plays low. The sounds include monkeys, apes, lions, wolves, whales, cows, chickens, pigs, crickets—the audio montage builds absurd combinations of creatures that would never occur in the wild.

Stage right is a huge old television (seventies or eighties) on a black cart decorated with jungle kitsch. The television screen rolls slowly with static. A sparkly silver floor sweeps to the ceiling upstage. Two old-fashioned blackboards (the kind that can be flipped over to write on both sides) sit end-to-end, parallel to the audience at center stage. Stage left of the chalkboards is a MONKEY-WOMAN (the same half-monkey mask as the box office workers, brown corduroy pants, brown sweater, brown Vans shoes). She plays a monkey in a zoo, in a confined space, watched by an audience. Her behavior ranges from boredom to rage.

A MONKEY-MAN (the same half-monkey mask, “gorilla paw” gloves, oversized “ape” slippers, brown corduroy pants, brown sweater) carries and studies a clipboard in front of the two chalkboards. One at a time, the MONKEY-
**MAN** writes the names of primate species on the chalkboards. After each primate is listed, an educational voice reads the name that was just written over the PA. Periodically, the **MONKEY-MAN** looks the chalkboards over, picks up an eraser, and erases one of the species (the most critically endangered primates). A bell sounds with each erasure.

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**BOOTH TECH A** *(on microphone):* Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the Station Theatre. Please turn off your cell phones and anything that beeps. In the unlikely event of a fire—step away from the fire. Thank you for coming. And now we will start **MONKEY.**: Go.

**MONKEY-MAN** *(in monkey outfit/mask, behind old television/rolling cart/lectern):* Good evening. Tonight you’re going to hear some stories. They’re all a little bit different but they’re all a little bit the same. I guess you could say they’re related. Let’s start with some pictures. *(A blackboard is flipped by the **MONKEY-WOMAN**, images projected on the flipped blackboard. **MONKEY-MAN** gives PowerPoint lecture)*

- The mouse lemur from Madagascar: possibly the smallest of all the primates—fits in the palm of your hand.
- Human being, *Homo sapiens*: five-foot-eleven, weighs 185 pounds, we don’t know when he’ll die, but on average he’ll live to be about seventy-five.
• Gorilla: this one weighs nine hundred pounds, and, as you can see, it takes twenty-one men to carry him.
• Howler monkey: almost entirely arboreal, the loudest animal in the New World.
• Hanuman: an incarnation of Shiva, Hanuman was a magic monkey who could make himself smaller than a mouse lemur and thousands of times larger and stronger than the biggest gorilla.
• The Monkey King: born out of rock. Trapped under a mountain for five hundred years. Able to transform himself into seventy-two different creatures. Traveled with a monk, a pig, and a sea monster into the West.
• Many primates learn by watching and imitating. Monkey see, monkey do. A network of tiny electrodes was implanted into the motor cortex of a monkey’s brain. With the monkey’s own arms restrained, the monkey was able to control a robotic arm and feed himself. Monkey think, monkey do.
• Tools can be thought of as extensions of the body. Tools make you stronger. Tools make you faster. Early humans used complex tools made of stone, bone, antler, and ivory. They wore personal ornaments. They buried their dead with rituals. They played bird-bone flutes. They were avid hunters who could take down large and dangerous game.
• Sometimes humans used monkeys as tools. During the Southern Song Dynasty, in a battle between rebels and the Chinese Imperial Army, monkeys were clothed with straw, dipped in oil, set on fire, and released into the enemy’s camp. The panicked monkeys, burning alive, set tents ablaze and drove the camp into chaos.
• “See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil.” The three wise monkeys are Mizaru, who sees no evil; Kikazaru, who hears no evil; and Iwazaru, who speaks no evil. Sometimes a fourth monkey is depicted with the three others. Shizaru does no evil. He is shown covering his crotch.
• During the era of the big warships, the days of sails, cannons, and scurvy, they had to find a way to stack their cannonballs so they wouldn’t roll overboard. A device known as a “monkey” was invented. The monkey was a flat, square tray made of brass, set right into the deck of the ship. Indentations held the balls, which were stacked in a pyramid. At times, naval strategy required the ships to sail through arctic waters. At forty, fifty, sixty below zero the world changes. Trees steam. Spit freezes. Everything is white. And metal
contracts—some metals more than others; the brass of the monkey would contract more than the cannonballs and the balls would roll overboard. And the sailors would say to each other, “Arrrrrrr. Shiver me timbers, it’s cold enough to freeze the balls off a brass monkey.” (End PowerPoint. MONKEY-MAN steps out from behind television/lectern.)

How about another story? Here’s a story about traps. There are all kinds of traps. Booby traps. Deadfall traps. Mouse traps. Sand traps. Speed traps. Welfare traps. Sometimes you don’t even know you’re in a trap. And then, if you finally figure it out—it’s probably too late. How about a monkey trap? Here’s the basic idea: a hunter digs a hole. The hunter puts something delicious in the hole. Something the monkey can’t resist. Monkey smells the delicious thing. Finds the hole. Knows the irresistible treat is in the hole. Reaches into the hole and grabs the treat. But here’s the deal: when the monkey tries to pull his fist out of the hole—he can’t. The hole is too small, his fist is too big. So the monkey has to make a choice.

Wherever you find monkeys you find this sort of trap. All over the world. You got the South Indian monkey trap, the Malaysian monkey trap, monkey traps on the Congo River, monkey traps on the Amazon River. The treat in the trap might be sweet rice, fruit, a nut, something shiny. The trap itself might be a hole in the ground, a gourd, or a wooden box. The monkey might be a spider monkey, a howler, or a macaque.

But that’s just monkeys, right? I mean, sure, as far as animals go, they’re pretty smart. Opposable thumbs. Some have prehensile tails. Kids hang out with the moms for a long time. But they’re not apes. Now, apes . . . Apes are smart. With apes you got gorillas, orangutans, bonobos, and chimpanzees. You and I—us humans?—we share 99 percent of our genetic material with chimpanzees. Apes can learn language. Apes can use tools. Apes are really smart compared to monkeys. Apes are supermonkeys. And humans are superapes. And gods are superhuman.

I like to think that most of us aspire to the superhuman end of the scale, but everybody’s got their monkey moments, and this is why the monkey-trap metaphor is used all over the world. The person using the metaphor might be an investment banker, a priest, a shrink, a military analyst, or a philosopher. The moral of this story, this story told all over the world, this story with its interchangeable but basically similar components—the moral of the story is this: Don’t be greedy. Open your hand. Let go of the treasure. You can’t have it all.

VIDEO ON OLD TV (Wild Kingdom opening, followed by Marlin Perkins play-
“Hello, welcome to Mutual of Omaha’s Wild Kingdom. The ways of the wild may seem strange to us because we’ve never seen them before, or because we don’t understand them, or because they’re so odd that we can scarcely believe them. Now, would you believe, for example, that a chimpanzee such as Mr. Moke, star performer of the chimpanzee show here at the St. Louis Zoo, is, uh, ticklish? And will laugh out loud?”

VIDEO continues, Marlin tickling the chimp. It goes on too long, hard to tell if it’s painful or if chimp enjoys it. MONKEY-WOMAN flips the second blackboard, the back of both blackboards becoming projection screens for video. PROJECTED VIDEO of Marlin tickling/torturing the chimp starts to come up on both blackboard-projection screens. The image on the old television fades to black. PROJECTED VIDEO continues into a sequence of chimps becoming very upset, attacking each other, the audio increasing to chaotic, frantic chimp screams, then a rapid sequence of historic pop-culture monkeys/apes (Planet of the Apes, The Wizard of Oz, The Land That Time Forgot, etc.), the sound becoming a haunting audiomontage of howler monkeys. The video images shift back and forth between SCREEN A and SCREEN B. Finally, Kong on his volcano island, Kong being attacked—in three different movies—on various buildings. Then it turns to shots of chimps being trained for space travel, a cartoon sixties rocket launch, then . . .

VIDEO SCREEN B: Space/NASA shot of Earth. Ejected circular rocket stage flames toward Earth.

VIDEO SCREEN A (graphic text): “It was Joseph and Etienne Montgolfier who stumbled on the fact that hot air rises and produced the first true flying device—a hot-air balloon. The first public flight famously carried a sheep, cockerel, and duck in September 1783. The Montgolfiers immediately saw military potential. Joseph supposedly claimed that the hot-air balloon experiments might lead to an aerial assault on Gibraltar being possible.”

From John Buckley’s Air Power in the Age of Total War

VIDEO SCREEN A: Fades to black.

VIDEO SCREEN B: The falling, flaming circular rocket stage becomes an animated circle that hovers over the Earth below. The circle fills with images/symbols—British/US/Iraqi flags, maps, dates, silhouettes, satellite photographs—illustrating recorded voiceover:

AUDIIO VOICEOVER: Once upon a time, there was an army of monkeys. They were known as the Barbary apes, but in truth, they were macaques, a type of monkey. Their faces are pink. Their fur is brown. They live to the age of twenty-two. They make their home in Morocco, the Atlas Mountains of Algeria, and Gibraltar. Like Gibraltar, these monkeys exist between worlds,
balanced on the cusp of the East, the West, and Africa. Legend has it that as long as the Barbary apes roam the Rock of Gibraltar, the territory will remain safely under British rule. In 1944, with British morale battered by the war and the Rock's monkey population dwindling, Churchill took no chances. He ordered a shipment of Barbary apes from Morocco, a short hop across the strait.

In 2003, Britain, the United States, and a coalition of nations were poised to invade Iraq. The Kingdom of Morocco allegedly supported the coalition by offering two thousand Barbary apes trained to defuse landmines. These fearless monkeys . . . dwelling between night and day at the edge of the world, the stuff of prophecy . . . an elite army of magic monkeys. And magic they must be—only two thousand Barbary apes remain on our planet, yet every single one of them volunteered to serve in this primate army. Where does their power come from? Who is their leader? (Video of white dot/satellite slowly orbiting Earth continues through next section.)

MONKEY-WOMAN enters without her mask, wearing silver space wig (part monkey, part space-prophet, part woman-from-the-next-section). Dance/movement. Sound is repetitive, electronic (from Fripp and Eno’s Swastika Girls). PROJECTED VIDEO image of white dot/satellite orbiting the Earth. During MONKEY-WOMAN dance, MONKEY-MAN changes costume to STORYTELLER, stage left. End dance/movement/video. MONKEY-WOMAN takes seat just off stage right. Puts on mask. Reenters midmonologue, punctuating the story with small toys, movement, etc.

STORYTELLER: Once upon a time there was a woman. She would see amazing things on television. Some things seemed strange to her because she'd never seen them before or because she didn't understand them or because they were so odd that she could scarcely believe them. She would read about incredible things in books. She was boundlessly curious. Fascinated by anything and everything. She read about the North Pole. She went there. She read about pear tarts. She made some. She read about existentialism. She went there. She prepared a syllabus and taught a class. She arranged lectures, debates, panel discussions, and symposia. She questioned, she doubted, she prodded, she poked. She wanted to know. She wanted to be clear. And she saw things, everyday things that took her breath away. She loved the world.

One day she read about orangutans. The word “orangutan” means “old man in the forest.” They weigh around one hundred pounds; the big ones get up to three hundred pounds. They are shaggy. They are orange. They
are incredibly strong. In the wild they live in special jungle preserves on two Indonesian islands—Borneo and Sumatra. As far as homes go, that’s it for the orangutans. She decided she wanted to see a wild orangutan before they disappeared. She flew to Borneo. She hired a guide. They trekked into the jungle. Every night, they would set up camp. The guide would smoke and she would go on short hikes by herself. The jungle was hot, so humid that she felt like she was swimming in the air. The trees were thick, old, enormous, covered with hanging moss and vines. The leaves were huge. There was water everywhere. Everything was green. Well, they’d been out for a week and they still hadn’t seen an orangutan. Finally, it was their last day. She was trying not to be disappointed. They made camp. Her guide smoked. She hiked. She came to a stop. It was very quiet. And then, something picked her up and lifted her into the tree.

The next thing she knew she had been gently plunked down on a branch—right next to an orangutan. The orangutan had lifted her up like a ragdoll. The shaggy three-hundred-pound ape gazed at her, its eyes like deep brown lakes. She stared back. They were both perfectly still. The two of them sat in the tree for a very long time.

On the flight home she was so excited she couldn’t sleep. She’d begun to form the idea that the world was not comprised of a random series of events. She KNEW that everything fit together. Sure, maybe it wasn’t obvious at first. Actually, it probably wasn’t obvious at all—in the larger scheme of things, who knew why she was lifted into THAT tree by THAT orangutan on THAT day. But she was convinced that everything had a purpose. That there was a reason—even in the face of horror and violence—a reason for warmth. A reason for sympathy and empathy and care and kindness. She knew that there was a reason for love.

One day she got married. Not because she loved the guy or anything. She got married because she read about it and . . . well . . . the idea of the thing seemed so good to her. Not the government part or the religious part but . . . well, the part where you rub his feet, he rubs yours. You surprise each other. You trust each other. You take care of each other. You watch bad movies and hold hands. This sort of thing. It just seemed so hopeful. Not that she had a lot of NEED for hope. She wasn’t against hope. But she was so immersed in the fire of the moment that she never felt the NEED for hope. She had a job—a good one. She had food on the table. She had an education, so she didn’t feel trapped. She felt like there was meaning in the world and in her life. She’d even been lifted into a tree by an orangutan. She thought that hope seemed to be about something that wasn’t there. Hope was about another place and another time.
She read about the Holocaust. She read about Cambodia. She read about all the battles in World War One. Then she read about World War Two: Stalingrad, Leningrad, Dresden, Tokyo, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki. She read about Rwanda, the Congo, and the American West. She read about the Lost Boys in Sudan. Now, there was a great place for hope. She read about long lines of eight-, nine-, ten-year-old boys walking in the desert through the bush. She read about them walking hundreds of miles. Naked. In the desert. To get to safety. Because they were being hunted. They heard that they needed to find and cross the river. Then they would be in Ethiopia. They would be safe in Ethiopia. She read about men on horses and jeeps. The men had guns and machetes. The men were trying to kill the little boys. But these men were just one of the boys' problems. Sometimes a lion would eat a couple of the little boys. Just snatch them right out of the line. So, you'd be walking along and—your best friend—eaten by a lion—right in front of your eyes. Eaten by a lion.

Finally the boys came to the river. But they could see the crocodiles push off the riverbank and slip beneath the brown water. They could see the men on horseback with the machetes. They could see the men in the jeeps with the mounted machine guns. There were lions, machetes, machine guns—all on their side of the river. There were crocodiles IN the river. And, maybe, safety on the other side of the river. So . . . what did they do? They swam. Or they tried to swim. These boys grew up in the desert. They didn't know how to swim. So. Some drowned. Some boys were eaten by crocodiles. Some boys made it to the other side of the river.

The woman read about this. This happened in this world. This world that you and I are sitting in—right here—this world. She thought to herself that if she lived there, with the machetes and the crocodiles, the lions . . . hope would be a good thing to have. Nobody wants to live in fear. Nobody wants to worry about getting eaten or chopped to bits by machetes. Of course you want to be in a better place. A better time. Of course you would.

Well, okay, if everything has a purpose, how about suffering? What's the reason for these boys to wander through the desert? Or torture—a reason for torture? Really?

Did it help to use a broader, wider lens? Don't look at a month or a year or even a decade. Don't look at lifetimes or generations. Look bigger, step back, look at the ocean and the planet in its orbit. Don't even look at one hundred years or two thousand years—look at ten, twenty, fifty thousand years—a million, two million, look at the life of the planet: 4.6 billion years. Look at the solar system. The galaxy. The stars. Light years—how many miles can light travel in a year?
But . . . still. C'mon . . . why torture? Why suffering? A loving God? Where? How? A just god? For who? You? Or you? For some people? Were there two active forces—the Devil and God? Or was it one force—the two faces of one coin? And the challenge is to hold the contradictions in your hands and see if you’re strong enough to understand that this “just god” allows suffering. Or maybe there is no god? Free will. Cause and effect. Our lives determined by chemistry and held together by ethics. If a butterfly flapping its wings in the Sudan can cause a hurricane in Florida—killing fourteen elderly croquet players—what about the pillage, rape, murder of one, two, three, four, five, six million? What kind of hurricane is genocide? What kind of butterfly starts that kind of hurricane?

Action. Reaction? Mary. Jesus. Lakshmi. Allah. Diana. Buddha. Divine Watchmaker. Karma. Whatever. She’d get to a certain point and realize the complexity. Vast. So many layers, reflecting off of each other. It was disturbing. So upsetting that some nights she couldn’t sleep. Like she couldn’t turn off her head. Other people must have this thing. Maybe somebody knew what to do. So, she started reading. She read that some people called this thing “monkey mind.” Some nights were really bad, and the sun was coming up. Damn, where did the night go? She read that when it was really bad people described it as if their mind was a drunk monkey, playing with a loaded pistol, being stung by a bee. It felt kind of, uh, you know, dangerous. What do you do about this? Somebody had to know. She read about monks and mystics and gurus in caves. Maybe they knew. And . . . they did. She learned how to calm down. And one day, as she sat, watching her breath, a question popped into her head—a little voice—“Do you see?” “Yes,” she said to herself. “Yes. I see. I don’t understand, but I see.” And then the voice said, “Lift yourself up.”

The swirling cream in your coffee causing an avalanche in the Himalayas. It’s not a joke. No. Everything is connected. But . . . what about the other way? Practice random acts of kindness and senseless acts of beauty. A bumper sticker? Would she give up her life for a bumper sticker?

She decided she would. Why not? She would be a butterfly. She would intend her actions to be kind. She would do very basic things. She would comfort people. She would feed people. She would listen to people. That’s what she would do. She wouldn’t think about the butterfly effect or the cream in the coffee or the ripples, the unfathomable ripples echoing out of her body, from every move she made, every step, every flex of a joint, tightening of the jaw, blink of the eye. Every single tiny thing she did affecting the world in ways that she had absolutely no control over—god . . . no. She wasn’t going to think about it. She would stop talking. She would smile.
She would try to be a good person. It sounds simplistic, but seriously, c’mon: what else are you supposed to do? (STORYTELLER and MONKEY-WOMAN start simple semisynchronized choreographed movements.)

One day her husband came home. He’d been away for a week. She kissed him on the cheek. She went to bed. And when she woke up, she was floating two feet above the mattress. She wasn’t not surprised to be floating two feet above the mattress. When she got down, she needed to jump. A little hop down to the floor. Not a big deal. But for her husband—it was a big deal. He was upset. He didn’t know what to do. He was especially upset when she didn’t say anything. She smiled, she kissed him, she walked out the door.

She walked down to the corner to catch the bus. She saw a beagle walking into the street. And, as she watched this little dog, something shifted. The world slowed down. The sun got brighter. The leaves got greener. She smelled everything. She heard everything. The moment crystallized. She decided she would pay attention. She watched the blue car turn the corner. She watched the beagle look in the other direction. She watched the beagle go under the blue car. She watched the blue car drive away. She saw the dog lying in the street. She saw the pool of blood. She heard the dog howling.

And she knew what to do.

She knelt next to the dog. She put a hand on the dog’s side, the other hand cradled its head. The dog calmed down. She held the dog. The dog stopped howling. She breathed in through her nose and out through her mouth. The dog breathed easier. The bleeding stopped. The bones that were broken were healed. And then, the beagle got up and trotted away.

As she watched the dog, the woman began to grow. She thought to herself, “I think I’m getting taller.” The woman decided she wouldn’t go into work that day. (Blackout with sharp, loud recorded drumming.) PROJECTED VIDEO starts with male figures running into the distance, stark contrast image of running on the beach toward the ocean. Drumming ends.

AUDIO VOICEOVER: They ran . . . and ran . . . and ran. For months they ran. They looked everywhere. They searched the forests, the mountains, down to the rivers and the deserts. And finally an old eagle told them that she had been taken over the sea to an island hundreds of miles away. The king of the bears, the army of magic monkeys—they stood on the beach, staring at the edge of the world. What could they do?

Yeah. Of course. I know, I know. They were magic monkeys. But this was too much.

A few of them could leap the hundreds of miles over the sea. But who
among them could jump the sea, find the princess, and jump BACK to safety? Only one of them could do such a thing. One of the magic monkeys was the Son of the Wind. He could do it. When he was two days old, this young monkey jumped a million miles into the sky and swallowed the sun—like it was an orange. The world went dark. Completely powerful, completely confident, this little monkey could do anything.

Well, the gods were angry. They didn't like the darkness. They didn't like some little monkey swallowing the sun. So they cursed this young monkey to forget his strength. They cursed him with doubt. They cursed him to forget his name. And now, when he was needed most, he couldn't remember who he was. He sat on a rock, hanging his head, while the army polished their boots, stared out to sea, and wondered if the Son of the Wind could get it together and be who he was supposed to be.

The king of the bears slowly stroked the back of the young monkey's head. The bear whispered into the magic monkey's ear, “My fearless, wonderful friend . . . it's all true. I'm going to tell you your name.”

As the bear spoke, the monkey began to lift his head. He remembered. He remembered his name. He smiled. And then . . . something happened. He began to grow. Ten, twenty, thirty . . . one hundred . . . five hundred feet tall. He grew into the sky. Fangs bared. Unbelievably strong. Roaring. The army of magic monkeys trembled with fear and hope. At last! Here was the Son of the Wind! He would jump the ocean. He would find her. He would strike the demon down. He was the invincible one. He could do anything. With clouds at his shoulders, the sun as his mane, a mountain under each foot, the colossus swayed in his father's happy gusts. And slowly, the titanic monkey crouched, readying himself to leap across the deep dark sea. (End video, business with the screens/blackboards.)

HUSBAND: I’m at the airport. I’m traveling. I’m in sales. I used to work the desk. Answer the phone. Make the coffee. Now I travel. Big whoop. I watch the game. Get drunk. Get laid. Pretty much whatever I want. But then, right behind every little thing I do is this voice, “Hey buddy, what's it all about? What's it mean, asshole? Figure it out. How much time you got?” Like. Jesus. Who’s saying this stuff?

Did I already say I’m at the airport? I’m at the airport. My flight's delayed. What a surprise. Killing time. Watching all these folks with their hats and their special shoes. What are they thinking? Like, these get-ups are . . . I dunno . . . makin’ ‘em appear adventurous? C’mon, what do we got here? Batman? Superman? Indiana Jones? Gimme a break. These idiots with all this shit strapped on their belts. They got phones. Here's some guy
from the dark ages—he’s got a pager. Some cameras. What else we got, special ropes with anchors on ’em so they can climb up the sides a buildings or something? Dildos? Never know, right? Dental floss? Toothbrush or something? Listen, please, somebody shoot me if I start carrying a bunch of crap on my belt. Seriously. You know what I’m saying? I mean, I got other things on my mind. Anything. Like plumbing. Or pilot lights! Jesus. Scary, right? Pilot light goes out in the oven. There’s gas. You can smell it. You know? Is it a big deal or a small deal? Do you relight it yourself or get out of the house and evacuate the neighborhood? Run for your life! It’s a pilot light!

So I come home. Long day, right? Peck on the cheek, “G’night honey,” and that’s it. Pretty normal. I mean, I love her. Actually, truth be told I would be lost without her. Fucking l-o-s-t. Very much. But I guess it’s just pretty comfortable. So we don’t need to say too much. Like, uh, you know, it’s understood. She gets it. I get it.

So. She’s out like a light. But me? I can’t sleep. I’m tossing. I’m turning. Ach. I get up. Make myself a sandwich. Watch Animal Planet. I like it. It’s good. You know? Chimpanzees. Bonobos. They call the bonobos “the left bank chimp.” Figger they’re gonna be wearing berets and talking all frenchy and shit. But no, they’re not. They say the chimpanzees are like us. They got murder. They got robbery. They got murder. They get gangs together and go to war on each other. They’re just like us, yeah, we should be so proud, right? Chimpanzees resolve sexual issues with power. But the bonobos—matriarchal society, right?—the bonobo resolves power issues with sex . . .

Very interesting.

Huh. And the chimps and the bonobos are apes. They don’t got tails. This got me thinking . . . like, just for instance . . . what if I had a prehensile dick? You know, so I could control it . . . and, uh, make it go around. And then, what if I had like . . . uh, I don’t know, like a . . . a nose penis. And then, like, penises growing out of my palms. And then, what if my sweetie had extra vaginas, like one in her forehead and in her palms and . . . but, uh . . . the prehensile penis can pretty much go anywhere, so . . . And we could you know do it with the nose penis and the forehead vagina and . . . then . . . ah Christ. The sun was coming up.

So, I go upstairs. And—see this is where everything changed. My wife. She’s asleep. But she’s not in bed. She’s, uh . . . floating. Above the bed. In the air. Two feet above the mattress. Ghostbusters, or, uh, The Exorcist, or some shit. Sigourney Weaver, right? But, see here? She is not evil. She is good. It’s like, uh, GOOD levitating. Like a happy Jesus or some wise maharishi, bodhisattva sort of return from the brink of nirvana to help the rest of
us poor fucks. That kind of levitating. Like she’s levitating for peace. Ah Christ, I know, that sounds cheesy, but I don’t know how else to describe it.

I’m not taking it at face value. I do some wake-up checks. I’m slapping. I’m pinching. I’m awake. I’m not dreaming. I mean, besides the floating everything is pretty normal—no glowing light, no unearthly breeze. Regular. Sort of. Then she wakes up. I say, Careful honey . . . you’re floating. She looks around real slow. She smiles. And she’s acting like it’s no big thing. I say, You okay? She just smiles. Doesn’t say a word. She does this little hop down to the floor. She walks downstairs. I say, Honey? Nothing. I . . . Honey? Hey, sweetie? Can we . . . can we talk about this? But she’s not saying anything. She pours a bowl of cereal. Eats a piece a toast. I’m . . . uh . . . you know . . . getting a little . . . “Sweetie? C’mon now. Don’t do this. Could you . . . just say something? Please?” She smiled, she kissed me on the cheek. She walked out the door. (Walk to stage left. MONKEY-WOMAN hands HUSBAND hot cup of coffee.)

She’ll be back. I . . . she loves me. She’s fine (drinking coffee). It’s my day off. I make some breakfast. Figure I’ll watch a little TV. Hope that, uh, by paying attention to the, to the . . . to the TV . . . that, like, you know, everything’s gonna be okay. And by “okay” I mean everything is going to be like IT’S SUPPOSED TO BE. NORMAL. REGULAR.

But apparently, this is not going to be a normal day. They interrupt the programming. This just in. Breaking news. All that shit. I hate it when they do that. It’s hard to understand what’s on the screen. I mean, there’s the usual reporter with the usual microphone, but, see, here she’s got this big smile on her face and it’s not one of those fake TV smiles. It’s a real smile. And she’s at an old folks home. But . . . they’re not acting like old people. They’re singing. They’re dancing. They’re laughing. Did I say they’re singing? They’re singing. There are empty wheelchairs, nobody’s using their walkers. And the reporter keeps using words like MIRACLE, and, uh, she keeps talking about some, uh, giant woman.

Then they got footage of some giant woman! She’s eight, nine, ten feet tall walking down the street. It’s like some crappy camera-phone footage of a lady yeti. An old man’s shouting, “She touched me!” An old lady’s choking on tears, “She told me to lift myself up.” And . . . and they’re so happy. Like, they can barely speak.

Then it’s a hospital. The reporter’s talking about a fifteen-foot-tall woman. He’s using words like HEALER and SAINT. Doctors and nurses hugging each other. Terminal cancer patients skipping out the door. The TV people don’t know what to do. They’re stammering. They’re getting weepy. Like, they can barely speak.
I can’t take it. I turn off the TV. The doorbell rings. I answer the door. Nobody there. I shut the door. Doorbell rings again. “What!”

“Yes, excuse me. Down here. Good afternoon. Is your wife in?”

I . . . I don’t know what to say . . . it’s a beagle. Talking. Speaking English. With its mouth. And I’m listening. “Sorry to disturb you, old chap. I thought I’d pop by to wish her the very best of luck. She saved my life! I must say, I’m rather grateful. Please do remember to pass along my thoughts to her. Cheerio!”

Dogs? Now it’s talking dogs? This is how it’s gonna be? Ringing the bell and talking? What do you do when dogs start talking? I paced. I paced in the living room. I made some lunch. Tried to, uh, take care of some paperwork. You know, not too much, cause it’s my day off and all. Check some email. Regular. Normal. Right? Wrong. The earth is moving. Earthquake? Here? Really? Then it stops moving. What the fuck? There’s a knock on the door. And I’m nervous, cause, you know, what if it’s a cat this time.

But it’s not a cat. It’s her. She’s twenty-five feet tall. I say, “Can you come inside?” She smiles no. I say, “Please? Honey?” She touches my cheek. And that’s when I see the people. Hundreds of people. On the lawn. In the driveway. Down the street. Hushed. Smiling. Watching her. I’m like, “Come inside,” even though, you know, even I know she can’t fit in the house. She walks to the park. Everyone follows her. She lies down. She falls asleep in the park. The crowd watches her sleep. They’re watching her breath. These people look all peaceful and hopeful, you know? But, fuck! Why did she have to get so big? Why couldn’t she just come inside and . . . and . . . you know . . . sleep in the house? I mean, I slept in the house.

Just before dawn, I went out to the park. She was fifty feet tall. I lay down next to her nose and touched her lips. I could feel her smile. She whispered to me. She says, “Honey, are you going to keep me all tight in your fist? Or are you going to let me go?”

I say, “Will you take me with you?”

And she says, “Of course, my sweet husband.”

She picked me up and put me on her shoulder. The sun was coming up. I rested in her hair, behind her ear. She was one hundred feet tall. I watched the people, I saw their faces. They just seemed so, I don’t know, like, relieved. Like they’d been scared for a long time and now they knew everything was going to be okay. Every step she took was half a city block. I looked down on the tops of trees. Hawks circled her head. She strode out of town into the fields. The people tried to follow, but she was picking up speed. She had made a decision. She was moving with purpose. She broke into a jog.
As we passed out of the flatlands into the rolling hills she got even bigger. By the time we got to the Mississippi she was two hundred feet tall. She stepped into the river and headed south. Now, I'm not sure how to explain this . . . it's just a feeling I got, but when she stepped into that muddy water I felt like she'd stepped straight into the bloodstream of . . . I don't know, like . . . you know . . . the bloodstream of the whole planet or something. She breathed in—the world breathed in. She breathed out—the world breathed out. By lunchtime, we were in Memphis. She was three hundred feet tall. She kept walking. All afternoon. The banks of the river were lined with people. Nobody made a sound. All the way down to New Orleans. She was five hundred feet tall. She was colossal. She grew into the sky.

With her thumb and forefinger, she lifted me out from behind her ear. I lay in her palm. She held me up, took a long look at me as the sun set in the Gulf of Mexico. And as I lay there, her breath warmed my body. I felt the change. She breathed in the fear, the sadness, the death. She breathed in the hate, the sickness, the rancor of the world. She breathed out peace, love, hope, goodwill, confidence, caring, trust, happiness. It was her breath. She set me down on the beach. The moon came up. She fell asleep just off the coast—the river rose three feet all the way up to Lake Itasca. In the moonlight, I coulda sworn she was, uh, you know . . . like . . . an island lying there in the ocean. And when she died? In her sleep? The temperature dropped ten degrees. The clouds disappeared. All you could see were the stars. The moon. Then, her body split open—and, just for a moment, you could see her organs, organs covered with tumors, tumors bloated with the disease and pain of the people she'd seen and heard and touched. And then, thousands of fish fed on her cancerous body, the ocean, the fish stripped the flesh and all they left was bones. These enormous bones. And as I sat there, watching her huge bones sparkling in the moonlight, I got it. I saw. I understood.

End.