The Meek Shall Inherit

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The Meek Shall Inherit

(TITLE)

BY

Chris Houchens

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Arts in English

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

2011

YEAR

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The Meek Shall Inherit was first inspired by Neil Gaiman’s *Anansi Boys*. In his novel, Gaiman weaved a modern story with fables, putting his characters into a world inhabited by the original animals: tiger, spider, etc. When I wrote the original scene that sparked this entire play, the idea of Gaiman’s animal characters came to mind and I created the scenario in which Monkey steals and wears Lion’s mane. The play then expanded into an examination of governments, leaders, and the flaws found within both. Monkey and Lion grow into their own distinct leadership styles as the kingdom begins to break apart as change in government comes closer to fruition. I chose to deal with these topics with animal characters because I was still fascinated with Gaiman’s work, but also because I had grown frustrated with the modern use of talking animals and the stigma around them: If a story has talking animals for characters, then that story is for children. Gaiman’s use of animals was in a young adult novel, but he used them in mature ways, and when I started to read Orwell’s *Animal Farm* and Adams’ *Watership Down*, I saw the range animal characters can have. When it comes down to it, this play features animals for characters because I want to remind people that talking animals are not exclusively for children, and if parents were to bring their children to a production of this, they would have to explain why certain characters were being killed. Along those lines, I refused to give my characters human names. I simply call them by what animal they are. I did this because a named talking animal is seen to be even more for children. Even though *The Meek Shall Inherit* started out as a comical scene involving two talking animals, it found itself turning into a four-act tragedy that watched Monkey, Lion, and all of the animals...
struggle to grasp what they want or what they once had, and doing anything that was needed to obtain their goals.

In the early developmental stages of the play, I had Monkey pinned as the knowledgeable, yet inexperienced, leader and the initial generator of the idea to change the kingdom from a monarchy to a democracy. The problem which arose from this was that such a characterization of Monkey creates a different reading of how Monkey stole Lion’s mane. If Monkey is indeed the generator of these democratic ideas, then his theft seems pre-engineered, becoming more similar to the story Vulture constructs for Lion in his attempts to deceive and control the mane-less king. Thus, Monkey became less of the generator and more of the means in which this change could occur. Yes, Monkey does come up with the initial idea to change the laws to better the kingdom by protecting the weaker animals, but it is Gazelle who constructs the democracy. Gazelle was created to be the true generator of the democratic ideas in the play, leaving Monkey as the simpleton that happened upon the throne and power.

Gazelle is constructed as the voice of unadulterated reason and is constructed in this way so that he is the “purest” of all of the main characters. He must work against both internal and external forces that are trying to influence Monkey. Gazelle’s struggles to be the positive influence for Monkey are designed to showcase the pressures a new leader will be under. Monkey is unable to discern the motives behind other animal’s actions, and is thus convinced to make questionable decisions. This is specifically done by Vulture, who was constructed in a way to showcase the problems of democracy found in Alexis de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*:
When citizens are all almost equal, it becomes difficult for them to defend their independence against the aggressions of power. As none of them is strong enough to fight alone with advantage, the only guarantee of liberty is for everyone to combine forces. But such a combination is not always in evidence. (60-1)

Vulture’s technique to disrupt Monkey’s plans is based on the idea that the more voices a government has, the more problems that government will have. I do not write this as an attack on democracy. I simply want to expose the foolishness in the idealistic thinking that everyone will simply agree and collaborate, which Monkey does believe. Gazelle tries his best to influence Monkey, trying to convince him that collaboration is possible, but as long as people continue to think, they will continue to disagree.

Monkey’s confidence steadily increases throughout the play and he begins to believe he is meant to lead the kingdom to the new golden age, but he is not the leader that he portrays himself as. When first developing this play, I stated that “I want the critique of leadership to be focused on what causes leaders and their governments to be successful and, more importantly, what causes them to fail.” The ideas in this statement morphed into an examination of how leaders portray themselves and affect their governments through their public identities. Monkey is not the strong, intelligent leader he wants the other animals to believe he is, and Lion is certainly not the leader the desert animals believe him to be. I constructed Monkey, Lion, and their audiences in this way because I want the play’s audience to think of how these two leaders are barely questioned in their decisions.

In terms of the theatrical devices at my disposal, I chose to leave many of them undefined. I left the descriptions of the costumes vague because the design would be
controlled by the budget a production has. If the production has a large budget, they can
deck out their actors in expansive, life-like costumes and makeup. On the flip side, if the
production has a small budget, they could simply use white t-shirts and write the
character’s name on the shirt; either approach would be valid with this script. This
situation would not necessarily arise if the play featured humans. I would be able to give
a description (Jack, wearing a red flannel shirt and blue jeans) that would not depend on
the production’s budget.

Along with the costumes, I left the set description vague. I did give the base needs
for the set and some suggestions on lighting, but I wanted to leave it open to
interpretation. The set design would need to correlate with the costumes to create a
unified production. Giving a detailed set design with vague costumes seemed as if it
would hamper each production; either they would follow the set design and make
costumes to go with it or not go with it, or they would ignore the set design and do what
they wanted. The lighting suggestions were given to help emphasize the specific settings
(the throne and the desert) while also helping separate those two settings from the
indiscriminate location. I left out any description of music to be played in correlation
with this production for the same general reasons as the lighting and set. Everything
needs to work together, so I decided it would be best to keep everything vague, following
Aristotle’s thought that “the production of spectacular effects depends more on the art of
the stage machinist than on that of the poet” (64).

The bottom line of this work, while exposing the validity of animal characters, is
about power and change and all of the struggle and strife that surrounds them. I wanted to
showcase the struggles that a changing government faces from both internal and external
forces, while bringing out the horrors that those seeking power are willing to commit. It is my hope that the audience will be both fascinated and horrified by the human qualities found in these animals, forcing an introspective glance at themselves and the world they live in.

Works Cited:


The Meek Shall Inherit
Setting:
The setting is divided into three locations within the kingdom. The first being the throne, the second being the desert, and the third being an indiscriminate location.

The throne is set in the savannah and will have a tree in the back which will be the throne. The tree must be sturdy enough for actors to climb upon and have means of doing so on both the front and the back. Next to the tree should be a few rocks that can serve as tables and chairs. Green and yellow lighting can be used to help emphasize the savannah setting.

The desert setting will also have the tree on the stage as well as the rocks to be used as chairs. Red and orange lighting can be used to help emphasize the desert setting.

For the indiscriminate location, the majority of the stage will be kept in the dark, including the tree. Some instances will supply the means to help identify where in the kingdom the scene is taking place.

Characters:

**LION**
He is in his mid-to-late twenties. He speaks with authority and arrogance. His mane is removable and when it is removed, he is bald.

**MONKEY**
He is in his early thirties. He speaks and moves quickly. He has a removable tail and gloves in which he can stick twigs into to resemble claws.
ELEPHANT
She is in her upper sixties and speaks slowly as if carefully choosing every word.

She walks with an ivory staff that she can use to lean on as well as a weapon.

RHINO
He is in his upper fifties and speaks very quickly with violent gestures. He carries a curved sword in a sheath.

GAZELLE
He is in his late teens or early twenties and is very skittish. His strength in speech and physical presence will increase throughout the play.

VULTURE
He is in his upper sixties and carries a messenger bag that contains several items (a stick, an apple core, a wooden knife, etc.).

LIONESS
She is in her mid-thirties. She speaks with arrogance and disdain for other animals.

ZEBRA

CROCODILE

ASP
ACT I

SCENE 1
(Scene opens with LION lounging in front of the throne. LION acts as if he is extremely bored. ZEBRA enters. She is carrying a leaf that is full of grass and fruit. She is terrified to be here by herself.)

ZEBA

Sir?

(LION slowly lifts his head towards ZEBRA.)

ZEBA (cont’d.)

Sir, I brought you some of the best food the savanna has to offer.

(ZEBRA, taking one step at a time, slowly reaches over and sets the leaf on the rock next to LION. When it is set down, ZEBRA steps back to a safe distance.)

ZEBA (cont’d.)

I hope it pleases you.

(LION slowly picks through the contents of the leaf. He picks up a piece of grass and sniffs it then sets it back down in disgust.)

LION

What is this garbage?

ZEBA

Sir, it is the best we have to offer.

(LION slowly looks ZEBRA up and down.)

LION

Well, I do see something that peaks my interest.

ZEBA

I...I...I have to go now sir. My family is waiting. I hope these offerings please you.

(ZEBRA quickly turns and walks to the side of the stage.)

LION

Hold right there, Zebra. When was the last time your clan made a real sacrifice?

ZEBA

Sir...a real sacrifice?
LION
It has been such a long time since I had enjoyed having one of you clan here for dinner.

ZEBRA
I thought that such sacrifices had been banned by your father.

LION
Perhaps I need to reinstate them. Who among your clan would you sacrifice?

ZEBRA
You cannot ask me to choose who in my clan should die.

LION
Last time I checked I was king and could do what I wanted.

Please sir, my family is waiting.

LION
If you do not choose, then I will choose for you.

ZEBRA
I cannot choose. I cannot doom someone to death.

LION
Then I request that you bring your family here for me to . . . inspect.

ZEBRA
Sire! Please reconsider.

LION
Reconsider? Why should I reconsider?

ZEBRA
Please have mercy. I brought you the best fruit we could collect.

LION
BEST? You call this your best!

(LION picks up some of the fruit and throws it at ZEBRA.)

LION (cont’d.)
This is garbage!

ZEBRA
Sir . . .
LION
I want you to go back and talk to your clan. I want a sacrifice from you and I want you to choose who it shall be. When you have decided who will please me most, and I do not want to see some old, stringy zebra, then you can accompany that animal to me. Do you understand?

ZEBRA
Ye...yes sir.

(ZEBRA quickly turns and runs off stage.)

LION
I can barely even remember what zebra tastes like. I can barely remember what meat tastes like! I am sick of trying to force down grass and fruit.

(LION knocks the rest of ZEBRA's offering away.)

LION (cont'd.)
I want meat! Fresh meat, dripping warm blood.

(LION slowly rises to his feet. He begins to pace around the stage. While his back is turned, MONKEY appears from behind the tree and picks up ZEBRA's offerings.)

LION (cont'd.)
I cannot imagine what possessed father into banning sacrifices.

(MONKEY goes back behind the tree just before LION returns, retaking his spot on the ground. LION, while rubbing his stomach in hunger, stretches out for a nap, lowering his head. GAZELLE enters. He slowly walks towards LION and stops a safe distance away.)

GAZELLE
M...My liege, I was um maybe wondering, if that maybe you could, if you want, help me get a drink, from the...from the river. Becauseumm every time, I...I try to take a drink um Crocodile tries to eat me.

(LION slowly picks up his head and glares at GAZELLE.)

LION
Go away. What do I care if Crocodile eats you? Let her. It will be good for you.

GAZELLE
But sir, I'm dying of thirst. There is no other water hole in the area. My family is dying. Please help us.
LION
Why are you still here? I thought I told you to let Crocodile eat you. Now just go walk into the river and wait for her. She won’t take long.

GAZELLE
Sir...please...

LION

GAZELLE
Sir, I would be most grateful.

LION
Can I hold your gratitude in my hands? Can I tear into it with my teeth? Can I taste it? What else would you offer?

GAZELLE
I will scour the plains for the best grass in the entire kingdom for you.

LION
Grass? You would offer me grass? Oh how wonderful that would be. I could use that grass to clean my teeth.

GAZELLE
Yes . . . yes. The grass is very good for that.

(LION shakes his head at GAZELLE in disgust.)

LION
What would you say if I requested a sacrifice?

GAZELLE
Sacrifice? I . . . thought sacrifices were banned by your divine father.

LION
Yes, yes I am quite aware of that. But what if I reinstated the sacrifices? Would you be the one to decide who in your clan would be sacrificed?

GAZELLE
Sire . . . I do not know.
LION
Though my tongue has long forgotten the taste of meat, I can still remember the disgust I had with your clan. But I am very hungry, so I suggest you leave before I decide I can get over the rancid taste of your flesh.

GAZELLE
But sir, I am so very thirsty. I cannot—

LION
You are thirsty? Well, I am hungry! And it seems for the time being, neither of us can have what we want. So why don’t you go be thirsty somewhere else!

GAZELLE
Yes . . . sir.

(GAZELLE drops his head and turns away. He begins to sulk away. As he does so, MONKEY appears at the top of the tree and throws a branch at GAZELLE. The branch misses GAZELLE, who thinks LION threw the branch. He turns and glares at LION, who does not notice. GAZELLE then quickly picks up the branch and throws it at LION and runs away. LION becomes furious, leaping to his feet and chasing GAZELLE. Both run offstage. MONKEY sits on the tree and watches the two run offstage, stifling his laughter. The stage goes dark.)

SCENE 2
(Setting is at an indiscriminate location. ELEPHANT and RHINO enter.)

RHINO
He won’t listen to us.

ELEPHANT
We are his advisors. Of course he will listen to us.

RHINO
When was the last time he listened and took our advice? This uprising must be tended to.

ELEPHANT
It is not an uprising. The animals are just . . . unhappy about their current situation.

RHINO
They are unhappy about their king. They’re dangerous.

ELEPHANT
It is only dangerous if their discontent spreads out of the desert. We will not let that happen.
RHINO
We should kill the lot of them. If they want to cause problems for the kingdom, then the kingdom would be better without them.

ELEPHANT
We need to be diplomatic.

RHINO
Stop being weak.

(LIONESS enters. ELEPHANT and RHINO do not notice her.)

ELEPHANT
Wanting peace is not a form of weakness.

LIONESS
Of course it is.

(ELEPHANT and RHINO turn to see who spoke. Upon seeing LIONESS, ELEPHANT and RHINO bow.)

ELEPHANT
Your Majesty, I did not notice you.

RHINO
Your Majesty.

LIONESS
Wanting peace is most certainly a form of weakness.

ELEPHANT
I am afraid I do not follow your reasoning.

LIONESS
It is simple. The weak want peace because they know they cannot fight, while the strong can take whatever they want.

(LIONESS walks up to ELEPHANT and takes ELEPHANT’s staff and walks around with it.)

LIONESS (cont’d.)
See? I am strong and I wanted your staff, so I took it. You, wanting peace, became weak and let me take it. Do you follow my reasoning now?

ELEPHANT
Ah, yes. I see it now, Your Majesty.
LIONESS
I'll show you again just to make sure you understand.

(LIONESS tosses the staff back to ELEPHANT.)

LIONESS (cont’d.)
Take Rhino for example.

(At hearing his name, RHINO stiffens and places a protective hand on his sword.)

LIONESS (cont’d.)
Say I want his sword. I just go take it because I am strong.

(LIONESS tries to pull RHINO’s sword out of its sheath, but RHINO keeps his hand on the hilt and holds in place.)

LIONESS (cont’d.)
See, Elephant. Are you paying attention?

(ELEPHANT smiles and nods.)

LIONESS (cont’d.)
Rhino, like me, is strong and he is not going to let someone take something that is his. He is willing to sacrifice peace in order to preserve what is his.

(LIONESS suddenly grabs RHINO’s sword and tries to pull it out of its sheath. RHINO never removed his hand and continues to hold it in place.)

LIONESS (cont’d.)
You see that, Elephant? Even against surprise attacks, Rhino is strong.

ELEPHANT
I understand, but without those striving for peace, we will be in constant turmoil and war.

LIONESS
We would be if it wasn’t for me. An animal above the law who is able to make sure there is as close to a balance between the strong and the weak as possible, but it wouldn’t be my fault if the strong take advantage of the weak.

RHINO
It is the king that ensures the balance between the weak and the strong.

LIONESS
The king and I help ensure the balance, Rhino.
ELEPHANT
Of course you are part of that, Your Highness.
(Glaring at RHINO.)
Rhino meant no disrespect.

LIONESS
You’re such a good little peacekeeper, Elephant. I know Rhino didn’t mean to offend.
Isn’t that right, Rhino?

RHINO
I would never think of it, Your Majesty.

ELEPHANT
Speaking of the king, I am afraid we must be on our way. We need to have a conference
with him.

LIONESS
Oh, you’re on your way to see my husband? So am I.

RHINO
There are urgent matters we must discuss with him.

LIONESS
I’m sure there are, but I need you two to do something for you.

ELEPHANT
We are your servants, Your Highness.

LIONESS
Good. I need you two to wait here for a messenger that should be along shortly. When
you get the message, bring it to me. I will be with my husband.

ELEPHANT
Unfortunately, we are in a bit of a rush. The matters we need to discuss are very
important and cannot wait. I am sure the messenger will come to the throne.

LIONESS
I am sure your matters are important, but so is my message, and, unfortunately, the
messenger is supposed to meet me here. So I want both you to wait for it and bring it to
me when you get it.

RHINO
What animal will bring the message?
LIONESS
Oh, I can’t remember. Just ask animals as they pass if they have a message for me. You’ll find him or her eventually.

ELEPHANT
Your Majesty, I cannot stress the urgency of our discussion.

LIONESS
And I cannot stress the urgency of my message. So you two shall stay and wait for it. Understand?

ELEPHANT
We—

RHINO
Must speak with the king.

LIONESS
You can speak to him after I get my message.

(LIONESS exits.)

RHINO
That damn succubus! I am not some messenger!

ELEPHANT
Neither am I, but she is the queen and we must obey.

RHINO
We won’t get a word in with the king if she is still there. We should go now before she can get her claws into him.

ELEPHANT
We must wait. We were given an order.

RHINO
You know as well as I that there is no damn messenger coming!

ELEPHANT
We cannot be sure of that. We must give it some time.

RHINO
If we give it time, there will be no chance of speaking with him.

ELEPHANT
We have no choice.
SCENE 3

(Setting is at the throne. LION enters from the same direction he left chasing GAZELLE. He walks over to the tree while kicking the ground.)

LION
That little bastard. He thinks he can just get away with this.
(LION sits at the tree.)
I’ll get Rhino to teach him a lesson.

(LIONESS enters. LION does not notice her.)

LION (cont’d.)
Rhino will show him not to treat his king in such a way.

Show who?

LIONESS

LION
(Startled at LIONESS’ appearance.)
What? Oh, no one. Forget it.

(LIONESS sits down on a rock and begins examining her claws.)

LION (cont’d.)
So, where have you been all day?

LIONESS
I was just enjoying a stroll through the kingdom.

(LIONESS sits down on a rock and begins examining her claws.)

LION (cont’d.)

I do not appreciate being lied to.

LIONESS
I was chasing antelopes and scaring water buffalo.

LION
And why do you find it necessary to torment my subjects?

LIONESS
Are they not my subjects as well? Am I not your first wife and rightful queen?
LION
That does not mean you can do whatever you want.

LIONESS
I think it does. Just sit down and relax.

(LIONESS takes hold of LION’s hand.)

LIONESS (cont’d.)
You are too tense. A king should not be so tense.

(Sitting back down.)
Perhaps you are right.

LIONESS
I know I am right. Now just sit here and relax. There is nothing that pressing to deal with.

(LIONESS begins running her fingers through LION’s mane.)

LIONESS (cont’d.)
That’s better. You are too stressed lately.

LION
Yes, I have been very stressed today.

LIONESS
I bet, running an entire kingdom is not easy.

LION
No, no it isn’t.

(ELEPHANT and RHINO enter. They walk together and at the same pace. They quietly bicker as they approach. They stop talking and walking a distance from the tree.)

ELEPHANT
Sire.

(RION does not look up. He sits there with his eyes closed, enjoying LIONESS’ caresses.)

RHINO
Sire.
LIONESS
Well, do you two have my message?

ELEPHANT
I am afraid your messenger never came.

LIONESS
You did not wait long enough.

RHINO
We did not have the time to stand around and wait for your message.

LIONESS
I gave you an order.

RHINO
We must speak with the king.

LIONESS
I am sure your matters can wait; however, my message cannot. Go back and wait for the messenger.

ELEPHANT
We can get another animal to wait for your message.

LIONESS
No other animal will do. It is very important. I need both of you to get it for me.

RHINO
We will not go! We must speak with the king.

LIONESS
Well the king is very stressed and is trying to relax. He does not need you two pestering him every time you feel like it, so come back another time.

RHINO
We do not come to discuss petty matters! What we have come to discuss has the potential to change the entire kingdom!

LIONESS
What could be so pressing that it must interrupt the king in his time of relaxation?

RHINO
There are problems in the desert and they require the king’s attention.
LIONESS
I speak for the king while he is resting. You can discuss these problems with me.

RHINO
These are problems for a king not a queen!

(LIONESS stops caressing LION and stands up to face RHINO.)

LIONESS
Are you saying that I am not qualified to voice my opinion, Rhino? Need I remind you of the sway I hold in this kingdom?

ELEPHANT
Why no, my queen. He meant no such disrespect.

(LION realizes that LIONESS is no longer caressing him and opens his eyes.)

LION
Ah, Elephant and Rhino, when did you two arrive?

(LION notices the friction between LIONESS and RHINO.)

LION (cont’d.)
Sweetheart, what is wrong?

LIONESS
Why nothing my king. I simply did not want your relaxation to be interrupted.

LION
But you know that when Elephant and Rhino come it is to discuss important matters.

LIONESS
Yes, I know. I was just simply concerned about your happiness.

LION
Ah, you see Elephant, Rhino. Now this is a loving wife and a worthy queen.

(LIONESS sits back on the rock next to LION.)

LION (cont’d.)
Now, what is it you two need to discuss with me?

RHINO
There are problems in the desert.
LIONESS
The desert? Hmmph nothing but vultures and hyenas.

LION
That may be but it is still part of my kingdom. What kind of problems?

ELEPHANT
There has been talk of possible upheaval.

RHINO
They plot a revolution! We must act!

ELEPHANT
It is still not known what they plot.

RHINO
Don't be a fool! They build an army while we sit here and talk. My king, give me the order and my brethren will ravage all of these would be usurpers!

ELEPHANT
We need further investigation.

(LIONESS begins to run her fingers through LION’s mane and whispering into his ear while glaring at RHINO.)

LIONESS
Send them away my sweet. You need rest.

(LION begins to yawn and stretch as he succumbs to LIONESS’ caresses.)

LION
Yes, I am very tired.

(ELEPHANT and RHINO glance between each other as they witness LIONESS take back control of their king. LIONESS smirks at them as she does this.)

LIONESS
Send them away for now.

LION
Yes, yes. Elephant, Rhino come back later. We will discuss this and any other problems then. I need to rest right now.

ELEPHANT
Yes...sire.
(ELEPHANT and RHINO turn and exit.)

LIONESS

Bye-bye, Rhino.

(RHINO glances back at LIONESS and continues to exit.)

LIONESS (cont’d.)

That’s better. Now you can rest my love.

LION

Yes, this is better.

LIONESS

I wanted to ask you if I could be given permission to deal with a certain water buffalo.

LION

Water buffalo?

LIONESS

Yes, there was a particular one earlier that was bothering me.

LION

How so?

LIONESS

He was very rude, very disrespectful.

LION

Disrespectful?

LIONESS

And I was hoping it would be all right with you if I dealt with this very disrespectful buffalo.

LION

Yes, yes. Of course. Teach them respect my love.

LIONESS

Thank you my king. I will deal with him immediately. You just lie back and relax.

(LIONESS stops caressing LION, stands up and exits. LION continues to sit there stretching and yawning.)
LION

Yes, I will relax. Don’t kill the buffalo though.

(Pause.)

I know that makes you angry, but I cannot deal with the water buffalos causing problems.

(Pause.)

Just scare him a little.

(Pause.)

I know you are angry. I am sorry for that.

(Pause.)

But you cannot kill animals for disrespecting you.

(Pause.)

You need to simply teach them not to be disrespectful. Scaring them, making them think they are about to lose their life is the only way to get through to them.

(Pause.)

Come now. Don’t give me the silent treatment.

(MONKEY appears at the top of the tree, peering down at LION. MONKEY looks around for who LION is speaking to. MONKEY then disappears and a few seconds later appears from behind the bottom of the tree. He slowly climbs up and squats down on the rock that LIONESS sat on.)

LION (cont’d.)

I can hear you breathing my dear. Don’t ignore me.

(MONKEY looks around to see if LION is talking to someone else. He slowly reaches out and begins running his fingers through LION’s mane and massaging his head.)

LION (cont’d.)

Ahhh there you are. I knew you couldn’t stay mad at me.

(MONKEY continues to massage LION’s head while looking around. MONKEY suddenly realizes that he has found something and starts clearing the hair in the mane, and carefully pulls out a bug.)

LION (cont’d.)

Oh thank you dear. That has been bothering me all week.

(MONKEY shrugs and eats the bug. He then examines the mane closer, looking for more bugs. After a few seconds, he realizes that there are no more bugs. He begins to pull his hands away but one is caught in the hair and the mane moves a little on LION’s head.)

LION (cont’d.)

Oh, careful dear.
(LION reaches up and readjusts the mane. MONKEY is shocked at this and begins looking at the mane in a new way. He places both hands on the mane and quickly pulls it off of LION's head. LION's eyes suddenly bolt open and his hands go up to his bald head. He starts muttering when he turns around and sees MONKEY sitting on the rock staring back at him. MONKEY yelps and jumps behind the tree. In a few seconds, MONKEY reappears at the top of the tree holding the mane.)

LION
Give that back you miscreant!

MONKEY
No. I don't want to.

LION
I said give that back!

MONKEY
Why? What is so important about it? It's just a clump of dirty hair and there aren't any more good bugs in it.

LION
It is my crown! The beacon of my right to rule and I demand you return it!

MONKEY
Why don't you come get it if it means that much to you.

(LION tries to climb the tree but cannot. He continues to fall after the first step.)

MONKEY (cont'd.)
What's the matter? Poor lil' pussy cat can't climb the tree?

LION
When I get a hold of you I will tear you limb from limb.

MONKEY
Well I guess I better not let you get a hold of me then.

LION
Give me back my mane! I am the king of this land and I demand that you return my mane!

(MONKEY begins to hand the mane down to LION. Every time LION jumps or reaches for the mane, MONKEY pulls it out of his reach. This continues throughout their conversation.)
MONKEY
I don't know. What will you do for me if I return it?

LION
(Pacing around the bottom of the tree.)
I'll consider not killing you.

MONKEY
No...I don't think that will be good enough. This seems pretty important to you. What if you were to grant me control over the entire jungle? You can keep everything else, but I get the jungle.

LION
NEVER! I will give you nothing. If you are lucky, I will just banish you from my land.

MONKEY
But that's the thing. It's not really your land. Not anymore that is. Without your mane I bet no one will even recognize you. Without this beacon, you no longer rule. I bet if I start wearing this mane, everyone will think I am Lion. Then I will control everything.

LION
The creatures of this land are not as gullible as you take them. They will know at the first sight of you that you are Monkey.

MONKEY
Are you sure about that? I bet I can change a few things and no one will be able to distinguish me as Monkey.

(MONKEY begins breaking small twigs off the tree and sticks them in his gloves to look like claws. He sits there for a few seconds swiping at the air to practice using his new claws.)
How about that? Now I have claws just like you.

LION
The only difference would be that my claws are real and they are capable of tearing into weak, soft flesh. Flesh covered in brown fur, kind of like yours.

MONKEY
That’s true, but how often do you actually use your claws. I can’t even remember the last time you hunted. Not since you father banned sacrifices and you were just a child when he did that. Though, you could count that little chase with Gazelle, but I’m guessing that since you came back in such a bad temper, you didn’t catch your prey. Besides, as you have said multiple times before:

(MONKEY straightens up a little and puts his hand on his chest to better mimic LION.)
MONKEY (cont'd.)

“I am king of this land! Food shall be brought to me. I do not have the time to worry about what I shall eat when I am solving the problems of the kingdom.”

LION

Shut your wretched little mouth!

MONKEY

Why? I thought that was actually a pretty good impression.

LION

I promise you. I will get my mane back and you will suffer.

MONKEY

But until then, I’m going to enjoy myself. But the claws aren’t enough. Let’s complete this little ensemble.

(MONKEY brushes off the mane and places it on his head.)

LION

Take it off!

MONKEY

No. You don’t give orders any more. You are no longer king. I am. So piss off!

(LION tries to climb the tree again. At the first step, LION is able to keep his grip and hold on. MONKEY becomes agitated at LION’s progress. On the second step, LION loses his grip and falls. At this sight, MONKEY begins to laugh hysterically.)

LION

Stop laughing!

MONKEY

Why should I? I’m king now. What do you say we make a deal? If you start to behave and call me king, I won’t have you banished. Instead, I’ll make you my jester. You’ll be well-fed for keeping me well-entertained.

LION

I will never be demeaned like that!
MONKEY
It wouldn’t really be demeaning though. Just think, you get all the food you can eat and you get to stay here and do nothing, except for entertaining me of course. Nothing about your life would really change. In fact, it would probably be better. You wouldn’t have to make decisions or worry about other animals’ problems. I’ll take on all the responsibility and all you will have to do is live the life of luxury. You can just sit under this tree and nap, much like you were, but now the animals won’t come and wake you up.

LION
I won’t have to decide disputes between the other animals?

MONKEY
Not a single one. You won’t even have to hear them argue. I’ll give you a separate area to relax in where you won’t be bothered by the other animals.

LION
No! I will not give up my birth right to rule this land! You may have my mane but it is only temporary. I will regain my heritage and the tallest tree in the jungle won’t be big enough to keep you safe.

MONKEY
But just think of it. I will give you the most beautiful and attractive Lioness. I will give you all of the Lionesses in the land. They will surround you, feed you, and pleasure you to your heart’s content.

LION
All of them?

MONKEY
Every single one.

LION
No! I have that now!! There is nothing you can offer me that I do not already have.

MONKEY
Are you sure of that? Without this wonderful mane, you don’t really have anything.

LION
That mane is mine!

MONKEY
Possession represents ownership. I believe you mandated that yourself.

LION
That didn’t mean anything of mine.
MONKEY
And I shall quote you again.
(Stands up straight again and places hand on chest.)
“No creature, big or small, is above the law.”

LION
But I am above the law! I am the law!

MONKEY
No. You were the law. Now, I am.

LION
You’ll never be able to enforce it.

MONKEY
I control every lion and lioness in the land. They will be my army! I will have them hunt
down my enemies. They will bring you back to me so I can watch you weep and kiss my
feet, begging for mercy.

LION
I am the strongest lion in this land. No one will be able to capture me like that!

MONKEY
That is why I will send every lion against you. I will enlist all of the great hunters in this
land to help capture you.

LION
No one can unite all of the animals!

MONKEY
NO! You could not unite them! You could not unite the Gazelles and the Crocodiles. But
I will. I know both. I can unite them. You turned Gazelle away without even listening to
his problem. What do you think will happen if all the Gazelles die from thirst? Half the
food you eat is gathered by them. Of course you probably didn’t even know that. If all the
Gazelles are dead, who shall bring you your food?

LION
Nothing that you say can possibly be true.

MONKEY
Just like no one could possibly steal your mane?

LION
I’ll kill you!
MONKEY
I don't think so. Hmm, I guess there is one more thing I do need to do.

(MONKEY stands up and reaches behind him. With a swift pull and a slight squeal of pain, he rips off his tail. He stands there looking at it for a second before he tosses it down to LION.)

MONKEY (cont'd.)
There you go. Keep that as a souvenir. You could even start wearing it if you want. It always served me well.

(LION catches the tail and throws it away in disgust.)

LION
Why would I possibly want that ratty thing?

MONKEY
It may look ratty but it is actually quite useful. I might actually miss it.

LION
Then why don’t you keep it and give me back my mane!

MONKEY
Nice try, but no.

LION
You have to come down sometime, and when you do. I will kill you.

MONKEY
Oh really? Look who is coming. It is your wife, Lioness. Let’s see who she thinks is the true king of this land.

(LIONESS enters. She stops at the tree and looks between MONKEY and LION.)

LIONESS
Darling...why are you in the tree?

LION
I am your—

MONKEY
(Facing LION.)
Shut your mouth you bald-headed freak!
MONKEY (cont’d.)

(Facing LIONESS.)
I’m sorry for that my dear. I am simply up here because I wanted a new view of my kingdom.

LION

Don’t listen to him! I am Lion! I am your husband!

LIONESS

(Stepping towards LION and staring at his face.)
I don’t know what you are getting at, but I don’t know you.

LION

How can you not know who I am? I am Lion!

LIONESS

You are not Lion
(Points at MONKEY.)
That is Lion. Do you not see the mane?

LION

But he took that from me.

MONKEY

Enough! I am tired of hearing this freak squabble about being Lion. Get rid of him.

LION

You just can’t get rid—

(LIONESS begins pushing LION away from the tree.)

LION (cont’d.)

Stop pushing me!

(LION tries to stand his ground but LIONESS is able to continue pushing him away.)

LIONESS

Go away. You are not wanted.

LION

I will not go!

LIONESS

The king has ordered that you leave his presence.
LION

Then I defy the king!

(LIONESS gasps in shock at this and slaps LION across the face.)

LIONESS

No one defies the king! If you continue to stay here I will personally see to it that you are skinned and quartered and fed to the hyenas. Now leave.

(LION, shocked from being slapped, glances between MONKEY and LIONESS.)

LION

(Glaring at MONKEY.)

Do not think this is over. I will get back what you have taken and you will be punished.

(LIONESS steps in front of LION, blocking off the line of sight to MONKEY.)

LIONESS

Go. Now.

LION

Fine.

(LION turns around and exits. LIONESS returns to the tree.)

LIONESS

He did seem familiar though.

MONKEY

He was a nobody. Just a nut that wandered here.

LIONESS

I’m sure you’re right.

MONKEY

I am. So how is your friend the water buffalo?

(LIONESS sits on one of the rocks next to the tree. She looks up at MONKEY who is now sitting at the top of the tree with his legs hanging down the front. He is looking around the area, scanning and taking in his new realm.)
LIONESS
What buffalo? Oh you mean that dead one I happened to come upon in the field? It was a sad sight. It looked as though some vicious panther attacked it. Is everything alright? I don’t think I’ve ever seen you just sit in a tree. It is not very lion-like.

MONKEY
Ah, my precious, little, naïve thing. I am not just a Lion. I am a king. I must be able to occupy any space so that I can better understand the creatures of my kingdom. If I can understand them, I can help them.

LIONESS
So what creature are you trying to understand now?

MONKEY
What creature? Why all of the animals that live in the trees. But, if I had to pick a specific one, I would have to say Monkey.

LIONESS
Monkey…such pathetic creatures. They are always stealing things and throwing things and causing problems. I swear this kingdom will be better without them.

MONKEY
Shut your stupid, little trap.

(LIONESS gasps as MONKEY climbs down the tree. When he is down, he begins pointing his finger at LIONESS and walking around her.)

MONKEY (cont’d.)
I will not have you speak like that. I will not have you disrespecting my subjects.

But—

LIONESS

MONKEY
Don’t even try and take your words back. If I hear you speak like that again, I will have you banished from this land.

LIONESS
I’m sorry—

MONKEY
I bet you are. Now go away. I cannot even look at you right now. And I pray that you do not happen upon any more dead animals. If I hear about you “finding” more dead animals, there will be hell to pay.

(LIONESS stands and walks to the side of the stage.)
LIONESS

(Glancing back at MONKEY.)
What has gotten into him?

(LIONESS exits.)

MONKEY

Are monkeys that hated? We were just always having fun.

(ELEPHANT and RHINO enter. They approach MONKEY and they stop and wait for MONKEY to acknowledge them. ELEPHANT continuously glances between RHINO and MONKEY. Neither notice her doing this.)

MONKEY (cont’d.)

Yes, what is it?

ELEPHANT

We...

RHINO

(Glancing at ELEPHANT, waiting for her to speak.)
We have come for council.

MONKEY

Council? Why would we hold council? We are not in any war. There is no major famine. What matters do we have to discuss?

ELEPHANT

Sir... we have come back as you ordered.

MONKEY

Ordered... of course, I ordered you to return... for council.

RHINO

Then we are to have council?

MONKEY

Yes, yes.

(MONKEY climbs the tree, ELEPHANT stands to the left of the tree and RHINO stands to the right of the tree.)

MONKEY (cont’d.)

So, what do we need to discuss?
ELEPHANT
There is the problem with the animals of the desert we mentioned earlier.

MONKEY
Yes . . . I was a little distracted earlier. Recap that problem for me.

RHINO
The animals of the desert are plotting to rise up and overthrow you!

ELEPHANT
That has not been proven.

RHINO
My sources say it is! And my sources have always been reliable.

ELEPHANT
I remember an incident involving the mountain goats that went a little . . . awry.

RHINO
Of course you bring that up! You never let that go!

MONKEY
Please. I feel that we need more information. Continue with both of your sources and send animals into the desert to get information if you have to. What else is there to discuss?

ELEPHANT
There is a problem with the water buffalos. It seems that the queen has been bothering them.

MONKEY
Has she? Well I believe that problem will get worse. I have reason to suspect that my . . . wife, has killed one of them.

ELEPHANT
This could be a very big problem.

MONKEY
What do you have to say, Rhino?

RHINO
I . . . respectfully hold my tongue on such matters.

MONKEY
What? Come now, tell me what you think.
RHINO
Your wife is a menace! She does nothing but cause trouble! She should not be queen! You need to detach yourself from her immediately! She will be the cause of your downfall if you don’t.

MONKEY
What do you think about that, Elephant?

ELEPHANT
This is one thing that I agree with. Detach yourself before it is too late.

MONKEY
Then it is settled. She will no longer be my wife or queen.

(RHINO and ELEPHANT look at each surprised in this sudden change in their king.)

MONKEY (cont’d.)
What else is there going on in my kingdom?

ELEPHANT
I’ve noticed a growing situation with Crocodile. She has not been letting certain animals drink from the river.

MONKEY
And how do you think we should handle this?

(RHINO suddenly steps forward.)

RHINO
We must show her what happens when she acts like this. We must attack, punish, and perhaps even kill her.

(ELEPHANT sits down on a rock and leans back.)

ELEPHANT
I think that such a tactic would be a little rash.

RHINO
Rash? There is nothing rash about this! We must act now. We must make an example of her. Give me the control of this and I promise that no animal will dare try such a thing again.
I don’t think that is necessary.

Necessary?

Enough! Rhino, sit down and calm yourself.

(RHINO grumbles and sits down on a rock.)

Now, Elephant, what would you suggest?

I think we need to talk to Crocodile.

Hmmph! Talking, that is all you ever want to do! This calls for action!

Hold your tongue or I will cut it out and hold it for you!

As I was saying, if we could learn the source of this problem, then we could fix it.

Then we must go to the river and speak with Crocodile.

We should have her come here.

I agree. She can be temperamental and extremely dangerous in her environment.

But I fear that forcing her here will lead to her not cooperating. We must show respect to receive respect. We shall go to her.

(MONKEY climbs down the tree and stands between ELEPHANT and RHINO.)

Also, send for Gazelle to meet us at the river.
RHINO

Why would we want Gazelle?

MONKEY

Just do it.

ELEPHANT

As you command, sire.

(ELEPHANT stares at MONKEY and raises her hand; a prop bird comes down from the top of the stage, hovering over ELEPHANT.)

ELEPHANT (cont’d.)

(To the prop bird.)
Tell Gazelle to meet us at the river.

(The prop bird rises offstage.)

MONKEY

Off to the river then.

(MONKEY exits. RHINO and ELEPHANT follow. The stage goes dark.)

SCENE 4

(Setting is at an indiscriminate location. LIONESS enters.)

LIONESS

How dare he speak to me like that? I am his queen. I deserve respect.

(LIONESS paces around the stage, kicking the ground. ZEBRA enters.)

ZEBRA

Oh, Your Highness. I did not mean to disturb you.

(LIONESS approaches ZEBRA and puts her arm around her shoulders and guides her around the stage. ZEBRA is terrified but allows LIONESS to guide her.)
LIONESS
And why has the king requested you come to the throne?

ZEBRA
Well...he...was not happy with my offering.

And what did you offer him?

ZEBRA
A selection of grass and fruit.

LIONESS
Grass and fruit! That sounds lovely, but you say he wasn’t pleased? What were his orders
to rectify this situation?

ZEBRA
Well...he um wanted me to go back to my family...

And?

ZEBRA
And we were to pick one of us to be a...a sacrifice.

LIONESS
A sacrifice?
(Speaking more to herself than ZEBRA.)
But those are forbidden....

ZEBRA
I know! I tried to tell him, but he wouldn’t listen!

(LIONESS gives ZEBRA a surprised look. ZEBRA realizes what she said and
who she said it to and becomes very timid.)

Oh...which is his prerogative of course.

LIONESS
Of course. So, you were picked to be the sacrifice then?

ZEBRA
Not exactly...I couldn’t bring such news to my family. So I didn’t go to them. I decided I
would be the sacrifice.
LIONESS

So noble.

ZEBRA

I just couldn’t put my family through that. Picking one of us to die is unthinkable.

LIONESS

Of course, of course. You did a good thing.

(ZIONESS pats and rubs ZEBRA’s shoulders. ZEBRA stands up straight and seems a little braver.)

ZEBRA

I have to do my duty to my family.

LIONESS

Which is why I will help you.

ZEBRA

You will? Oh thank you! Thank you!

LIONESS

I give you my word. You will not be the king’s sacrifice.

(On the verge of tears.)
Thank you.

LIONESS

Now, let’s go have a talk somewhere a little more private.

ZEBRA

Yes. Of course. Whatever you want.

(LIONESS leads ZEBRA offstage. The stage goes dark.)

SCENE 5

(Setting is at an indiscriminate location. MONKEY, RHINO, and ELEPHANT enter. On the opposite side of the stage, green and blue lighting can be used to show a river.)

ELEPHANT

Sir, how are you planning on handling Crocodile?
MONKEY
Don’t worry about it. She will cooperate.

ELEPHANT
Crocodile is not exactly known for her willingness to help others.

MONKEY
Which is why we are going to have a talk with her and show her that things around this kingdom need to change.

RHINO
Then why did you send for Gazelle? She’ll try and eat him.

MONKEY
When Gazelle kneels down and drinks from that river,
        (Points to the lighted side of the stage.)
Crocodile will see that this kingdom is changing. And then word will spread. It will be a chain reaction.

RHINO
We don’t need change.

MONKEY
Oh yes we do. And Gazelle will become the symbol of that change. I just hope he comes.

ELEPHANT
What would stop him?

MONKEY
I... threw a stick at him earlier and then he got chased off.

RHINO
(Laughing.)
Is that all? I thought you were about to tell us you killed one of them.

MONKEY
What do you mean “Is that all”? I disrespected him.

RHINO
It’s Gazelle. He doesn’t deserve respect!

MONKEY
Yes he does! All animals do!
        (Sticking his finger into RHINO’s chest.)
And it’s animals like you that are destroying this kingdom.
ELEPHANT

Sir.

MONKEY

Be quiet, Elephant.

(Turning back to RHINO.)

I will not have you disrespecting other animals.

(GAZELLE enters. He stands directly behind RHINO and is not noticed.)

MONKEY (cont’d.)

Understand?

RHINO

Yes.

(GAZELLE gives a soft cough. MONKEY leans to the side and peers around RHINO.)

MONKEY

Hello, Gazelle.

(ELEPHANT and RHINO turn to face GAZELLE.)

GAZELLE

(Keeping his gaze on the ground.)

You wanted to see me, sir?

(MONKEY walks over to GAZELLE. GAZELLE glances around him and looks as if he is about to run away. MONKEY places his hands on GAZELLE’s shoulders. MONKEY stands there staring at GAZELLE until GAZELLE looks up at MONKEY.)

MONKEY

I am sorry for how you were treated. I promise you that it will not happen again.

(MONKEY leads GAZELLE closer to ELEPHANT and RHINO.)

MONKEY (cont’d.)

Now, tell us why Crocodile will not let you drink.

GAZELLE

I don’t know! It has been so long since I had water. Every time I try and drink from the river, Crocodile tries to eat me.
How did you offend her?

I did no such thing! I swear.

Perhaps Crocodile has simply lost control.

Yes! She’s lost control!

It did take a long time for the meat eaters to gain control of themselves. I guess we will have to just get her out here so we can all have a chat.

Get her? But she’ll try and eat me!

No such thing will happen here. If she tries, I will let Rhino deal with her.

Well then, let’s hope she tries.

(MONKEY laughs off this comment as he walks over to the river bank. He places one foot in the water and begins splashing it around.)

Crocodile! Get out here now!
(Continues to kick water.)
Get out here! I know you can hear me!

(MONKEY stands there and waits. CROCODILE enters stage from the river. She stays away from the shore.)

What?

What? This is how you address your king?

Come into the water and we’ll see who is king.
(RHINO charges from the river bank. MONKEY lifts up his left hand to stop RHINO, who slides to a stop at the water’s edge.)

RHINO
How dare you be so insubordinate to the king! How about if I come in there? You can try your death roll on me.

CROCODILE
(Opening her arms in a movement of invitation.)
I will gladly show you the bottom of the river, Rhino.

MONKEY
Enough of this! Rhino go back with Gazelle and Crocodile, come out of the water. We need to have a talk.

CROCODILE
I think I will stay right here.

MONKEY
Defy me and I will see to it that this river dries up, and when it does, I will let Rhino show you how to survive out of the water.

CROCODILE
Fine. I will come out and talk.

(CROCODILE walks out of the river and follows MONKEY. MONKEY stands between ELEPHANT and RHINO. GAZELLE keeps ELEPHANT between himself and CROCODILE. RHINO positions himself behind CROCODILE.)

MONKEY
Now, Crocodile. Why will you not let Gazelle drink from the river?

CROCODILE
Gazelle is welcome to drink anytime.

GAZELLE
(Hiding on the other side of ELEPHANT.)
That’s not true! Every time I try to drink, you try to eat me!

CROCODILE
Such is my right.

MONKEY
That has not been your right for years.
CROCODILE
I've decided that it is once again my right. I control the river. If clans want to drink, then they will need to offer something in return.

MONKEY
No. You will let any animal drink from this river and you will not harm a single one.

CROCODILE
Are you trying to tell me what to do?

MONKEY
You're damn right I am. Rhino.

(RHINO quickly reaches out and grabs CROCODILE by the arms. RHINO stands there holding CROCODILE as she struggles to break free.)

CROCODILE
Let me go!

MONKEY
You will not be released until you understand how things are going to be run in this kingdom. Now, Gazelle, go get yourself a drink.

(GAZELLE glances between MONKEY and CROCODILE. Finally, he steps out and walks a long way around RHINO and CROCODILE towards the river. The stage goes dark.)

END ACT I
ACT II

SCENE 1
(Setting is at the desert. LION enters and walks slowly across the stage, quietly muttering to himself.)

LION
How could they do this? That god damn Monkey! I will get him back and I will get my mane and I will make all of them pay.

(LION paces back and forth before sitting under the tree. He stretches out and falls asleep. VULTURE enters. He slowly walks over to LION and examines LION before walking behind the tree. After a few seconds, VULTURE appears at the top of the tree and looks down at LION.)

VULTURE
Hey, guy. You gonna die? Hmm?

(LION rolls over and begins to snore. VULTURE starts digging through his bag, pulling out a stick. He holds the stick in the air and against the light to examine it. VULTURE shrugs and looks down at LION. He aims and drops the stick on LION.)

LION
What? Who was that?

(LION searches around the tree. When he looks up, VULTURE hides so he is not seen. While LION continues to search around the tree, VULTURE goes back into his bag and pulls out an apple core. He sniffs the core and takes a tiny bite out of it. He reacts with disgust and throws the core to the side of the stage. LION charges the apple core, picks it up, and sniffs it.)

LION (cont’d.)
Where the hell did you come from?

VULTURE
It came from my bag, but before that it came from a pile of trash, and before that I don’t really know. I assume a tree. I don’t know what I was thinking when I decided it would be nice to have.

LION
Who... who are you?

VULTURE
That isn’t important right now. Are you going to die soon?
What? No, I am not going to die.

Oh....are you sure? It’s just that....well....I’m kind of hungry.

You want to eat me?

Maybe...

(LION charges the tree. He does not attempt to climb it, but just prowls around the bottom. He throws the apple core at VULTURE, but misses horribly. VULTURE does not react to anything LION does.)

I will destroy you! You do not speak to me in that way!

I can speak any way I choose. You don’t exactly have power anymore.

What?

Power. You no longer have it. You did, but then you lost it.

I did not lose anything.

What happened to your mane then?

It was stolen.

Likely story, you were probably out for a stroll and got it snagged on a bush or tree and just kept going and now that you know that it is gone, you can’t remember where you were walking. I mean, as king, you could go anywhere in the kingdom.

Wait...you can...recognize me?
Of course I can.

Who am I?

Why, you’re the commandeered king, the misplaced monarch, the bygone baron, the departed duke, the pre-Monkey-Lion Lion. Well, technically you’re the post-Monkey-Lion Lion. But, you get my point.

How is it you recognize me? All of the others thought I was some filthy commoner.

The other animals choose what they see. They see a chance to gain a new ruler and get rid of you. They might not realize they see this, but deep down they know.

You must help me. You can convince them that I am the rightful king.

The rightful king…

Yes, I am the rightful king and as king I order you to help me.

Order. Strong word for a commoner.

How dare you speak to me with that insolent tone!

Regaining your throne will not be as easy as exposing Monkey.

Of course it will. Once the animals see that I am the rightful king, they will ostracize Monkey.

I doubt that.

Why?
VULTURE
As I said, I’m sure some animals can recognize you. They just took this opportunity to replace you. They’ll fight to keep you out.

LION
How can that possibly be true? I am their king. They love me.

VULTURE
Love isn’t exactly the best word to use when describing the animals’ opinion of you. Hate would probably be more appropriate.

I refuse to believe that.

LION
Suck it up and accept it. They hate you and were salivating at the chance to get rid of you. I even heard a bunch of animals talked Monkey into stealing your mane.

VULTURE
Conspiracy….no, it cannot be true.

LION
But the laws were created generations ago. They serve a purpose and cannot be changed.

VULTURE
They have control of Monkey and that means they control the kingdom. They won’t allow you to return.

LION
Who are the ones that control the kingdom? I will attack the problem at the source.

VULTURE
There really is no way to tell, but if they are organized enough to plan such a coup, then they are very dangerous.

LION
What do you know?

VULTURE
Well, I have heard that this group is made up of some powerful animals throughout the kingdom, and that they control almost everything, and I guess now that they have the throne, they do control everything.
LION
Tell me who is a part of this.

VULTURE
No one knows. Very secretive. Very cloak and dagger. But, they’re powerful and aren’t to be messed with. Remember what happened to Ox? It was always rumored they were behind that.

LION
Ox? I do not remember anything about Ox.

VULTURE
They had her killed because she spoke about their dealings. In fact, I’m not saying anymore. They have agents everywhere. We’re probably on their hit list already.

LION
That is ridiculous. Tell me more about them.

VULTURE
Shhhh! They’re probably listening.

LION
Do not shush me! Now talk!

VULTURE
I wouldn’t be surprised if they had an assassin on the way.

LION
I do not care. I will regain what is mine and destroy any that stand in my way.

VULTURE
They’ll have an army. You’ll be by yourself.

LION
I…You….You must help me fight.

VULTURE
I’m no fighter. I scavenge. I reap the benefits of other’s fights. See?

(VULTURE holds up the messenger bag for LION to see.)

LION
I will need help to reclaim my throne.
VULTURE

You’ll need an army.

LION

Where can I possibly get an army?

VULTURE

The animals in the desert aren’t too happy. I bet a good king like you could rally some
troops out of them.

LION

Where can I speak to them?

VULTURE

I can probably organize a general meeting. It might take a little while.

LION

Do it. I will have my army and then I will retake my kingdom.

Do you hear that?

VULTURE

What?

LION

What?

VULTURE

It sounds like someone is coming. It must be the assassin.

(VULTURE digs into his bag and pulls out a sharpened stick that resembles a
knife. He dramatically brandishes it to signify that he is ready to defend himself.)

You need to hide. Get behind the tree. I’ll try and get whoever it is to leave.

(ELEPHANT enters and walks over to the tree.)

ELEPHANT

Hello... Vulture.

(After waiting for a response, ELEPHANT knocks on the tree with her staff.)

VULTURE

Wha... Who’s there?

ELEPHANT

Hello... Vulture.
VULTURE

Oh, it's you. What do you want?

ELEPHANT

Do not speak to me like that.

VULTURE

Yeah.

(ELEPHANT begins searching through his bag, ignoring VULTURE.)

ELEPHANT

Where is he, Vulture?

(VULTURE keeps his head down and searches in his bag. ELEPHANT hits the tree with her staff.)

VULTURE

(Looking up.)

Oh, you're still here. What?

ELEPHANT

Vulture, I know that you and I have had our...differences. But—

VULTURE


ELEPHANT

I can see why you would call it that. But—

VULTURE

Well, as long as you can see.

ELEPHANT

I need your assistance at the moment.

VULTURE

And why should I give you my assistance? I can almost recall swearing to get revenge against you. But, you are the one with the good memory. Did I swear revenge against you?

ELEPHANT

You did.
Interesting.

VULTURE

Lend me your assistance and I will leave.

ELEPHANT

What do you want?

VULTURE

I am looking for Lion. Where is he?

ELEPHANT

Lion? Why would I know where the king is? Shouldn’t he be at his throne, being pampered by countless servants?

VULTURE

Do not play dumb.

ELEPHANT


VULTURE

My scout saw Lion under this tree no more than five minutes ago.

ELEPHANT

I don’t know what you’re talking about.

VULTURE

Do not hide him, Vulture. I need to speak with him.

ELEPHANT

I don’t see why he would be here. Lion never comes to the desert. Go back and check the throne.

VULTURE

I know that you are fully aware of the current situation.

ELEPHANT

Situation?

VULTURE

You have your feathers in everything that occurs in the kingdom. Do not pretend you are not aware of the actions of Monkey.
VULTURE
Oh, yeah. I did hear something about Monkey and Lion having a little societal swap.

ELEPHANT
Then you know how dangerous this situation can be.

VULTURE
Dangerous? I don’t see how it can be dangerous.

ELEPHANT
I must find Lion. I fear he will do something rash.

VULTURE
What ever could you mean?

ELEPHANT
Lion has a temper and such usurpation will set him off.

VULTURE
Well, wouldn’t you be angry if someone stole your life? I know I was.

I did not steal your life.

VULTURE
Then what do you call it?

ELEPHANT
I was better qualified for the position.

VULTURE
Better qualified? I had been the king’s advisor for generations.

ELEPHANT
I have a better grasp on things.

You pretentious bitch.

ELEPHANT
No matter what you think. I am better qualified, and the king chose me.

VULTURE
Now I remember why I swore revenge.
**ELEPHANT**
You and your petty revenge are not my concern. Lion is my concern.

**VULTURE**
Well you better be off then because he isn’t here.

**ELEPHANT**
I know you are hiding something. I will find out what.

**VULTURE**
You know, I’m not at all surprised you let Monkey keep the throne. I mean, after all, weren’t you the originator of the usurpation technique?

**ELEPHANT**
I need not explain my motives to the likes of you.

**VULTURE**
Motives? Let me guess. You put Monkey up to stealing Lion’s mane and when all the other animals were banishing the real king, you sat back and let it happen. With Lion gone and an easily manipulated replacement, you finally have control of the kingdom. Your coup was a success. That is, until Lion comes back.

**ELEPHANT**
I do not have time to deal with your nonsense.

**VULTURE**
Well, it isn’t like this is the first time you would have started a coup to obtain a position of power.

**ELEPHANT**
I will find Lion and you will be punished for this transgression.

Good luck with that.

(ELEPHANT exits. After a few seconds, LION reemerges from behind the tree and stares after ELEPHANT.)

**LION**
She knew...She knew the whole time.

**VULTURE**
Of course she did.

**LION**
How could she let this happen?
She was behind it.

I cannot believe that.

You heard our conversation. I accused her and she didn’t deny it.

You mentioned being the advisor to the king. When?

Long ago. Before you were born.

I would have heard about that.

After overthrowing me and getting herself appointed to the position of advisor, Elephant had it erased from history, which was surprisingly easy since she controlled the history books. She didn’t want knowledge of her thievery getting out.

How did she overthrow you?

She managed to convince the king that she would be a better advisor and had me exiled to the desert.

Why?

She’s power hungry and now it would appear she has done it again.

What is she planning? Why did she even come here?

Isn’t it obvious what her visit means? (VULTURE climbs down the tree and sits on one of the rocks.) She came to make sure you would not go back and retake the throne. She came to kill you.
LION
Kill? No, she is not a murderer.

VULTURE
Which is exactly why she would be the one to do it, no one would ever suspect her.

LION
I still cannot believe she would want to kill me.

VULTURE
Let me ask you something. Who took your throne?

LION
Monkey.

VULTURE
No, Monkey is just a puppet. He doesn’t know what he’s doing. Someone is pulling the strings.

LION
Suppose you are correct and that Monkey is just a puppet. You do not have proof that Elephant is the one behind it.

VULTURE
You don’t have proof that she isn’t behind it. The only thing you know for sure is that Elephant is well aware of who is wearing the mane right now, and that she hasn’t done anything to put things back to the way they were.

LION
She betrayed me.

VULTURE
She took your throne and then came to kill you.

LION
She will be punished.

VULTURE
She committed treason. She must be killed.

LION
I must retake my throne.

VULTURE
But what will you do?
LION
I will destroy those that oppose me. Elephant’s death will be one of the many that will become the foundation of my kingdom.

VULTURE
One of the many?

LION
Call for that meeting. I will raise an army.

(The stage goes dark.)

SCENE 2
(Setting is at an indiscriminate location. MONKEY and GAZELLE enter. GAZELLE, still nervous around MONKEY, continuously tries to fall back as they walk, but MONKEY keeps them at the same pace.)

MONKEY
It’s simple, Gazelle. I want to change the laws, and I want your help.

GAZELLE
But how can I possibly help you, sire?

MONKEY
You know firsthand how wrong some of the laws are.

GAZELLE
Shouldn’t you be speaking to Elephant? I mean, Elephant helped shape the laws. She would be most qualified to reshape them.

MONKEY
No, Elephant won’t be able to help.

GAZELLE
But, sire.

MONKEY
Gazelle, you and yours have been mistreated by this kingdom for years. Things were supposed to get better when sacrifices were banned, but they just got worse. You deserve better.

GAZELLE
We are simply here to serve.
No! You should not be here to serve.

Sire?

Look at these laws!

(MONKEY pulls out a scroll and unrolls it. He looks over the scroll before handing it to GAZELLE. GAZELLE stops to read the scroll.)

I don’t understand.

(Snatching the scroll back.)

Look at these laws! No savannah animal is allowed to challenge the actions of another. If such a savannah animal were to challenge the actions of another, then that savannah animal would face the penalty of death or banishment.

Yes.

No desert animal is allowed to relocate its home within other parts of the kingdom. If any desert animal is found outside of the desert for more than a day, then that desert animal would face the penalty of death or banishment.

Yes.

No jungle animal is allowed to leave the jungle without the permission of a member of the royal family. If a jungle animal is found outside of the jungle without permission, then that animal faces the penalty of death or banishment.

Yes.

No animal in the entire kingdom is allowed to challenge, dispute, or disagree with the decisions or actions of the royal family and their constituents.

Yes. That is the most sacred of the laws.
MONKEY

Don't you see that it is wrong?

GAZELLE

Wrong?

MONKEY

Yes! Wrong! What happens if I decide that you are no longer allowed to eat? What would you do?

GAZELLE

I would...stop eating.

MONKEY

Then you would die.

GAZELLE

If I am to die, then I am to die. It is your decision.

MONKEY

Wouldn’t you be upset? Wouldn’t you want to argue with my decision?

GAZELLE

But as you said, I am not allowed to argue.

MONKEY

(Tearing the scroll into pieces and throwing the remains into the air.) Forget those laws! Those are the old laws and they are gone. We will make new laws; laws that will actually help all of the animals in this kingdom.

GAZELLE

I still think Elephant would be most qualified for this.

MONKEY

No! Elephant has been an advisor to the royal family for so long that her people are practically part of the royal family and have never been negatively affected by the laws, but you and your people have. You know what it is like to have the laws work against you.

GAZELLE

I still—
MONKEY
I have come to you for help because I realized how poorly you were being treated. But, I am not ordering you to help me. I am asking you. Will you help me change the kingdom for the better? Will you help me right the wrongs that have been perpetrated against those that cannot defend themselves?

GAZELLE
Sire...

MONKEY
Will you help me?

(MONKEY claps GAZELLE on the back and exits. The stage goes dark.)

SCENE 3
(Setting is at the desert. VULTURE enters and is followed by ASP.)

VULTURE
Is everything ready?

ASP
Yes, all the animals are here.

VULTURE
Good, now go join the others.

ASP
Hold there, Vulture. You didn’t expect me to forget the little deal we struck, did you?

VULTURE
I haven’t forgotten. You just make sure that the other animals cheer and I’ll put in a good word for you when we take over.

ASP
A good word was not what you promised me.

VULTURE
Take it or leave it, Asp. I don’t have time for this.

ASP
I think I’ll leave it.

VULTURE
Fine. You’ll get your position of power once we’re in control, but you have to make sure the other animals join the cause.
ASP
Oh, they’ll join, but what’s the point? This army will never match the king’s.

VULTURE
And what is it about the king and his army that makes them so formidable?

ASP
Oh, you mean their size, strength, numbers, and strategy?

VULTURE
Yes, I mean that. But they are not invincible. We can defeat them.

Sure we can.

The king is not as strong as you think.

ASP
He might not be, but his army is. And they still have their size and their strength and their numbers and their strategy.

VULTURE
Their physical qualities are useless without a strong, well-laid strategy, which they won’t have. We will defeat them because we will have the better plan.

ASP
And how are we going to have a better plan?

VULTURE
The animal that is about to speak is trained in war. He can lead us to victory, but the animals must follow him. If the army isn’t formed, we will have no chance to take the throne.

ASP
And that is why you came to me.

VULTURE
The desert animals can be easily swayed. If they start to turn against him, you must use your influence to get the other animals to join in. If we can raise the army now, then nothing will be able to stop us from taking control of the kingdom.

ASP
What about Elephant?
VULTURE

I have a plan for Elephant.

(LION enters. He is silently rehearsing a speech to himself as he walks to the tree.)

VULTURE (cont'd.)

He’s here. Go join the others and make sure they join.

(VULTURE pushes ASP towards the side of the stage as he turns to LION. ASP exits.)

VULTURE (cont’d.)

Well, if it isn’t the once and forgotten king. Are you ready to speak to your soon-to-be followers?

LION

I am ready.

VULTURE

Good. We will need a name for you to go by. Lion isn’t exactly a well-received name in these parts.

LION

Call me Asad.

VULTURE

What the hell does that mean?

LION

Do not worry about that. Just go introduce me so I can form my army.

VULTURE

(Guiding LION towards the front of the stage.)

Okay, okay. You just get them to join our cause and we will be one step closer to gaining back the throne. I’ll warm them up for you and when they’re ready, I’ll give you the signal to step in and take control.

(VULTURE steps to the very front of the stage and addresses the audience. All sounds of applause and commotion over the intercom will be animal noises.)

VULTURE (cont’d.)

Animals of the desert! You all know who I am, but you do not know why I have called you all here.

(VULTURE pauses for commotion over intercom.)
VULTURE (cont’d.)
I have summoned you all here today to listen and to learn. For generations our kind, the desert kind, has been subjugated by the throne. But to this I say, no more!

(VULTURE pauses for applause over intercom.)

VULTURE (cont’d.)
No longer will we allow ourselves to be used by the throne!

(VULTURE pauses for applause over intercom.)

VULTURE (cont’d.)
No longer will we allow the throne to dictate how we live our lives!

(VULTURE pauses for applause over intercom.)

We will fight back!

VULTURE (cont’d.)

VOICE (Over Intercom)
What about the king?

VULTURE
We need not worry about the subjugator! He is weak! Now is the time to launch our assault.

VOICE (Over Intercom)
How can we hope to defeat the king’s army?

VULTURE
The animal I bring before you knows more of warfare than the subjugator ever could. He will be able to lead us and guide us on our victorious campaign against the throne!

VOICE (Over Intercom)
Who is this animal? Why have we never heard of him before?

VULTURE
He comes from another kingdom. He has come to us because he was banished from his land.

VOICE (Over Intercom)
If he is so great and was still banished, how can he possibly help us?
VULTURE
He was banished because he was too dangerous. He knew too much and the king was scared of him. With his leadership, we will be able to overthrow the monarch!

(VULTURE pauses for applause over intercom.)

VULTURE (cont’d.)
Now, good animals of the desert! I bring to you the animal that will lead us from our desert shackles! I bring you: Asad!

(VULTURE steps back from the stage and pats LION on the back. LION steps up to front of the stage and waits for applause to die down before speaking.)

LION
Animals of the desert, hear me! The so-called king, the subjugator, has made a mockery of all that is right.

(LION pauses for applause over intercom.)

LION (cont’d.)
He thinks he can take whatever he wants and no one will stand against him. Just because he wears the mane does not mean he is invincible. He has spread the lie of his strength for years. Where I come from there is a saying that if you tell a big enough lie and tell it frequently enough, it will be believed. I am here to tell you that this lie can no longer be believed. I am here to tell you that he can be stopped. He must be stopped.

(LION pauses for applause over intercom.)

LION (cont’d.)
He and his kind just take and take and do not care what others think! He thinks he is better than me, better than you, better than everyone! He is wrong.

(LION pauses for applause over intercom.)

LION (cont’d.)
They are destroying this kingdom, and it is up to us to save it. The doom of this kingdom can be averted only by a storm of flowing passion. If we become strong in spirit, strong in will, strong in endurance, strong to bear all sacrifices, we can win!

VOICE (Over Intercom)
The king was trained in war!

LION
He knows nothing of war! He has not been trained for anything. He projects himself to be powerful, but in reality he is weak. He can be defeated.
VOICE (Over Intercom)
If the king is so weak, why don’t you just go take the throne? Why do you need us?

LION
The subjugator is weak, but he still has an army. I cannot defeat an entire army on my own. If you join me, I guarantee victory.

(LION pauses for commotion over intercom.)

LION (cont’d.)
I am trained in the aspects of war. If you join me, I would lead the army against the subjugator and we will defeat the king’s army and take back the kingdom.

(LION pauses for applause over intercom.)

LION (cont’d.)
When we have taken the throne, I will make sure each and every desert animal is given what they deserve!

(LION pauses for applause over intercom.)

LION (cont’d.)
Will you join me? Will you join the army that is going to overthrow the subjugator and gain the kingdom back for who it rightfully belongs to?

(LION stops speaking as the applause slowly diminishes into silence. The stage goes dark.)

SCENE 4
(Setting is at an indiscriminate location. MONKEY and GAZELLE enter.)

MONKEY
If this new system is to work, I need to ask one thing of you.

GAZELLE
Sir?

MONKEY
You must be completely honest with me at all times.

GAZELLE
I’m not sure I understand.
MONKEY
I do not want you to sugarcoat things or be afraid of being punished. I will not punish you for speaking your mind.

GAZELLE
Sire—

MONKEY
Be brutally honest with me, Gazelle. At all times. If I am being a fool and blind to obvious truth, tell me.

GAZELLE
I would not want to offend.

MONKEY
You would be offending this entire kingdom if you let me make decisions that are not fully thought out.

GAZELLE
I will do my best.

MONKEY
Do not be afraid to speak honestly. You will not be punished. I promise you.

GAZELLE
Yes, sir.

(LIONESS enters.)

MONKEY
(To GAZELLE.)
We must make the correct decisions.

LIONESS
Of course you will, dear. You are the king. Every decision you make is the correct one.

Hello, Lioness.

MONKEY
Hello, dear. Hello, Gazelle.

LIONESS
Hello, Lioness.

GAZELLE
(Stepping behind MONKEY.)
Your Highness.
LIONESS
And what are you two up to?

MONKEY
We are making arrangements for the future.

LIONESS
The future? And what exactly about the future are you arranging?

MONKEY
Important changes for this kingdom. And actually, I'm glad you're here. A decision was reached earlier that you need to know about.

Oh, and what's that?

You are no longer my wife or queen.

What? You can't be serious.

(MONKEY does not move or react.)

LIONESS (cont'd.)
You are serious, aren't you?

Yes.

LIONESS
You can't just do that. I am your queen.

MONKEY
I can do as I wish. Or have you forgotten who actually has the power? It has been determined to be the best thing for the kingdom.

LIONESS
Best thing for the kingdom? And who the hell put this idea into your head.

(Pointing at GAZELLE.)
Was it him?

(GAZELLE shrinks behind MONKEY.)
(To GAZELLE.)
I’ll tear your heart out, you little—

MONKEY
Enough! It was not Gazelle’s idea or decision. It was mine. After your little stunt with water buffalo—

LIONESS
No one knows about that!

MONKEY
Everyone knows! You killed another animal. You brought this upon yourself.

LIONESS
The water buffalo was just a peon. What does it matter?

MONKEY
It matters because you abused the power you were given. Animals with power must use it to protect those without.

LIONESS
Protect those without? Really? Is that why you ordered Zebra to return with a sacrifice?

MONKEY
I did no such thing.

LIONESS
Oh you didn’t? Then why did I run into Zebra on her way back to you, preparing to sacrifice herself?

GAZELLE
Sir, is this true?

LIONESS
Yes, tell us the truth.

MONKEY
I…I did it to prove a point. I never intended for Zebra to die. I was—

LIONESS
What point? The fact that every other meat eater in this kingdom want the sacrifices reinstated?

MONKEY
Never! The sacrifices are to stay banned.
GAZELLE

What were you trying to prove, sir?

MONKEY

I was trying to show that the king has too much power.

LIONESS

What?

MONKEY

It’s true. The monarchy has too much power. You killed a fellow animal and thought you could get away with it. The monarchy can no longer be an absolute power. That is what Gazelle and I have been preparing for.

LIONESS

You can’t.

MONKEY

I can. I am king and I have the power to do as I wish. Even if that is to dismantle the throne.

GAZELLE

Sire—

MONKEY

Come, Gazelle. We have more details to iron out.

(MONKEY and GAZELLE begin to exit. MONKEY turns back to LIONESS.)

MONKEY (cont’d.)

And since you are no longer the queen or my wife, you are no longer welcome at the throne, that is, for the remainder of its existence.

(MONKEY and GAZELLE exit. The stage goes dark.)

END ACT II
ACT III

SCENE 1
(Setting is at the throne. ELEPHANT and RHINO enter.)

ELEPHANT
There is no question now. The desert animals do plot a rebellion.

RHINO
As I've told you this entire time. We must mobilize.

ELEPHANT
You know that such an act cannot be done without the king’s consent. Besides, I hope to find a peaceful solution to this matter.

RHINO
You and your peace. It’s—

ELEPHANT
We must avoid open war. We need to send delegates to the desert to discover what it is they want. Without knowing that, there would be no way to start negotiations. Ending this turmoil peacefully would be for the best.

RHINO
Eradicating those that oppose the will of the throne is for the best. The sure way of protecting the throne is to kill everyone that would see it destroyed.

ELEPHANT
An animal that can rally others in such a manner could be very useful to this kingdom. If we could find out who their leader is, the matter at hand would no longer hinge on what the entirety of the desert wants. It would be a matter of what their leader wants.

RHINO
It is clear from his actions what he wants. He wants to meet his end at the tip of my blade.

ELEPHANT
Your blade has seen too much blood as it is. Perhaps it is time for your blade to be retired.

RHINO
(Drawing his sword.)
The only way this blade will stop is when I am dead.

ELEPHANT
You are getting up in age. What is the life expectancy of a Rhinoceros?
RHINO
Longer than an Elephant’s. That I assure you.

ELEPHANT
(Walking away from RHINO.)
Stop with this foolishness. We are both after the same thing.

RHINO
It isn’t wise to turn your back on me, or is your memory finally slipping?

ELEPHANT
Watch yourself, Rhino.

RHINO
Come now, Long Trunk. Is that all you have to say?

ELEPHANT
Long Trunk…reverting back to tribal names then.
(Turning back to RHINO.)
But of course you are. That is what you wish everything was still like. The different tribes segmented across the kingdom and then the Rhinos would be back in charge. You don’t care about preserving the kingdom. You care about preserving your right to kill.

RHINO
I care about preserving the strong. It would do the realm good to go back to those days. The strong can take what they want and the weak can cry over their dead.

ELEPHANT
(Brandishing her staff towards RHINO.)
Choose your words carefully, Stone Foot.

RHINO
Still trying to be diplomatic and find a peaceful solution, Long Trunk?

ELEPHANT
I’m quickly realizing these negotiations are becoming futile.

(MONKEY and GAZELLE enter.)

MONKEY
What is going on here?

ELEPHANT
Just a disagreement, your majesty.
RHINO

(Sheathing his sword.)
I’m glad to say that Elephant finally seems to be learning the value of violence.

MONKEY

Well, hopefully Elephant’s lesson can be put on pause. Violence is not what we need right now.

Sir?

MONKEY

This kingdom is broken. Those in power have been abusing the other inhabitants and it must stop. For this reason, I have appointed Gazelle as my personal advisor.

Your personal advisor?

RHINO

Advisor of what?

MONKEY

Advisor on what the conditions of life are truly like in this kingdom.

I am only here to serve.

GAZELLE

ELEPHANT

Sir, we have been your advisors since you became king. We are more than capable of advising you on ways to better the kingdom.

You are? I question that now. Look at the state of the kingdom. Everything is wrong. The strong get stronger and the weak get weaker. That—

RHINO

Is the way it should be! That is the way it has been for generations.

MONKEY

Rhino, if you interrupt me again, I will have you banished. Are we clear?

Sir—

RHINO

Are we clear?

MONKEY
Yes, sir.

MONKEY

(Sitting down at the throne.)
Good. Now, Gazelle, tell them what you were telling me.

GAZELLE

(Sitting down on one of the rocks next to the throne.)
Well, I was saying that—

(RHINO and ELEPHANT position themselves on either side of GAZELLE, towering over him. With each question they ask or statement they make, they lean in a little more.)

RHINO

Speak up. I can’t hear you.

GAZELLE

I was saying that the savannah animals—

ELEPHANT

I assume your expertise is restricted to savannah animals, yes?

GAZELLE

Well, yes, but as I was—

ELEPHANT

How would you advise the king to react to the uprising in the desert?

GAZELLE

Desert? Well, I—

RHINO

Come on now, speak up.

ELEPHANT

Yes, please advise the king on how to quell the rebellion that threatens his throne.

GAZELLE

Well, I—

RHINO

Come on. What is your military strategy?
GAZELLE

Military strategy... I would—

ELEPHANT

Who would you send as a delegate to the desert?

GAZELLE

For the delegate, I think—

RHINO

Advise already.

MONKEY

(Suddenly standing up.)
Both of you stop.

(MONKEY moves ELEPHANT and RHINO away from GAZELLE.)

MONKEY (cont’d.)

Give him a chance to actually speak and then maybe you will start to understand why I appointed him to be my advisor.

ELEPHANT

Sire, we were simply asking questions.

MONKEY

I am tired of your questions, and I am quickly growing tired of you. Let Gazelle speak.

GAZELLE

Thank you, sir. As I was saying, many of the savannah animals feel as though they do not matter to this kingdom, and I’ve heard of similar feelings throughout the rest of the kingdom, which I would guess is one of the main reasons for this uprising in the desert you mentioned.

ELEPHANT

Perhaps.

GAZELLE

So what I was thinking was that the animals could elect representatives to be advisors to the king, allowing new ideas and thoughts to be raised.

RHINO

We can come up with our own ideas. We don’t need help.

MONKEY

Be quiet, Rhino.
GAZELLE
This would also help ensure certain communities do not feel neglected. They would all be able to vote on the representative that would advise the king.

ELEPHANT
And how many of these representatives would there be?

GAZELLE
I suppose one from each region. I bet if the desert animals had a representative advising the king to better the conditions of life in the desert, this uprising would not be occurring.

RHINO
And what happens when these animals stop advising for the sake of their communities and start advising the king to better their own situation.

GAZELLE
There can be regular elections, so the animals can elect new representatives. This would help ensure such selfishness would not occur. Those elected would know they would have to answer to their communities after their term was up.

ELEPHANT
How will the king know who to listen to if there is a disagreement between advisors?

MONKEY
I have managed to handle you two well enough. I think I can handle a few more.

ELEPHANT
Of course.

MONKEY
I think this new system should be put into place as soon as possible. I want the word put out that each region shall elect a representative to be one of my advisors. Gazelle, you are automatically one of my advisors and shall remain at my side. As for you two, it is time you both learned some humility. You shall be allowed to sit in at the advising sessions, but you are not to speak. You shall simply observe.

RHINO
Sire?

MONKEY
I also want the two of you to spread the word of this new system. Elephant, you shall inform the wetlands and the jungle. Rhino, you shall inform the savannah and the desert.
GAZELLE
Sir, do you think it wise to send someone as rash as Rhino to the desert? They could take his approach as a sign of war.

MONKEY
Hm, okay. Rhino, I expect you to be civil. You are acting as a delegate from your king. If I learn that you act or speak in a hostile manner towards any animal, I shall have you executed. Understand?

RHINO
Yes, sir.

MONKEY
Elephant, the same goes for you.

ELEPHANT
Sire.

MONKEY
Now go. Spread the news and have the elected animals come directly here.

(ELEPHANT and RHINO exit. The stage goes dark.)

SCENE 2
(Setting is at the desert. LION and VULTURE enter and sit under the tree.)

LION
The majority of their army won’t be hard to defeat. They don’t have many warriors. Elephant and Rhino will be the most troublesome.

VULTURE
What about the other lions?

LION
They are followers. They will be following the strongest one among them, which happens to be the queen. I can defeat her. I’ve done it before.

VULTURE
With the lions joining us, we will truly be formidable.

LION
But even with their strength, getting past both Rhino and Elephant will prove extremely difficult. I can’t take the throne as long as they stand in my way.
VULTURE
What if we used the snakes? They could poison them.

LION
No, the snakes would be trampled before they could get a bite in. This is why I never feared an uprising in the desert. All of the animals are so weak, so pathetic.

VULTURE
They aren’t pathetic.

LION
Yes they are. They have no warriors. They have Sneaks and scavengers. The desert itself is more of a threat. You all just let the thirst kill for you.

VULTURE
If only we could bring the war to us.

LION
If only, but no. I have to find some way to lead this band of miscreants to war against a much stronger force.

VULTURE
We will figure something out.

LION
Of course I will figure out how and I will win. Don’t be such a fool as to think that I won’t come up with a plan.

VULTURE
I wouldn’t—

LION
Silence. Someone is coming.

(RHINO enters.)

VULTURE
What does he want?

RHINO
I have come in the name of the king.

LION
King? Ha.
RHINO

Show respect, Rat.

LION

(Leaping to his feet.)
Rat? You think I am Rat!

RHINO

Be quiet. I have brought a message from the king.

VULTURE

(Standing and placing a hand on LION's shoulder.)
Let's hear this message then.

RHINO

The king, in hopes of better unifying the kingdom, has called for each region to vote on a single representative, who will become an advisor to the king.

LION

(Shrugging off VULTURE's hand.)
What?

RHINO

I am not finished. This representative will hold this position for an allotted time and when that time is up, the region will be able to elect a new representative.

VULTURE

Why has the king ordered this?

RHINO

He feels that by allowing each region to voice their thoughts, the kingdom will have a period of peace.

VULTURE

And how do you feel about this?

RHINO

My feelings are not important in the matter.

VULTURE

But surely you have opinions.

RHINO

They are not important. Just tell the other desert animals and vote on a representative, and then have that animal go to the throne.
(RHINO turns to leave.)

VULTURE

Just hang on a second. I need to talk to Rat real quick.

(Motioning to the side of the stage.)

Oh Rat, could I have a word?

(LION and VULTURE walk to the side of the stage. RHINO stands impatiently.)

LION

How dare you call me that.

VULTURE

Calm down. Calm down.

LION

I should kill you.

VULTURE

I couldn't exactly call you Lion, could I?

LION

What do you want?

VULTURE

Rhino doesn't seem happy with this new plan.

LION

Why should he be? He has lost power and has been turned into a messenger.

VULTURE

We can use that. You said we can't take the throne as long as Rhino and Elephant stand in our way. Well, what if Rhino was standing with us?

LION

I would be practically unstoppable.

VULTURE

Okay, I am going to head to the throne while you work on Rhino.

LION

And what will you be doing at the throne?

VULTURE

Just causing some problems for the enemy.
RHINO
What is taking so long?

VULTURE
(To RHINO.)
One second, sir.
(To LION.)
So you think you can turn him?

LION
No one knows Rhino as well as I do. It will be quick work.

VULTURE
Good.

(VULTURE turns back to RHINO.)

VULTURE (cont’d.)
I shall take your message to the other animals and our...what was the word?

RHINO
Representative.

VULTURE
Ah yes, thank you. Our representative will head to the throne.

RHINO
And why did you ask me to stay?

VULTURE
I just wanted to make sure we understood your message and wanted to be able to ask you questions if we got confused.

RHINO
Hmph.

VULTURE
Well, I'm off to spread the word.

(VULTURE bows to RHINO and exits. RHINO turns to leave.)

LION
(Nonchalantly walking around the stage.)
I never thought I would see the day you would be turned into a messenger.
What did you say?

You. A messenger. Never would have thought it. The great Rhino demeaned to the job of a peasant.

I am not a messenger, Rat.

Why did you come to the desert?

To deliver…to do the bidding of the king.

Which was to deliver a message.

I am not a messenger, Rat.

I am not Rat!

Then who are you?

That…doesn’t matter. I’m just still surprised of your current position.

I am still advisor to the king and general of the army.

And yet here you stand, delivering messages that will make you even more useless to the king.

What do you mean “useless”?

Well, with each advisor the king adds the less of a voice you have. Let’s see. One from each region, right? Plus Elephant. That is five voices. Five opinions you have to deal with.
(To himself.)
And Gazelle.

**LION**
Gazelle? What does Gazelle have to do with this?

**RHINO**
The king appointed Gazelle as his personal advisor. It was Gazelle that came up with this new system.

**LION**
Six voices you will have to fight through. Your title of advisor has little meaning now. And say goodbye to the army too.

**RHINO**
What about the army?

**LION**
Well, like you said, this is a strategy to bring peace to the kingdom. There will be no need for the army.

**RHINO**
There are still outside forces that threaten—

**LION**
There are no outside forces, and everyone knows it. I wouldn’t be surprised if one of the first acts this new council does is to disband the army. Then what are you left with?

I…

**LION**
Just your messages.

**RHINO**
It won’t happen. The king won’t allow it.

**LION**
The king has shown no inclination that he will keep the army or you. But of course, you could try and stop this from happening. You could ensure the survival of the army.

**RHINO**
How would I do that?
LION
Join the rebellion and—

RHINO
The rebellion! I would never do that. I would never betray the king.

LION
Why? He has betrayed you. In this new system of his, the strong get weak and the weak get strong. Your degradation is proof of that.

RHINO
I must be loyal to the king.

LION
The king is a fraud.

RHINO
(Drawing his sword.)
That is treason and punishable by death.

LION
I would rather be dead than live in a kingdom that is run by peasants like Gazelle.

RHINO
Gazelle does not run the kingdom.

LION
Everything you have told me says otherwise. Somehow he convinced the king to appoint him as a personal advisor. Then he comes up with this new idea on how to run the kingdom. And what does the king do with this new system? Question it? No! He demands its immediate implementation, eliminating all need of you.

RHINO
That isn’t true.

LION
Prove me wrong then. Explain how the king’s actions protect you. Explain to me how Gazelle is not running the kingdom.

RHINO
I...

LION
Can’t? Face the facts. Gazelle is in charge, and when this new system is fully put into place, there will be no need for animals like you.
RHINO
Be quiet.

LION
Join me.

RHINO
No...

LION
Help me overthrow this weakling that sits on the throne.

RHINO
That is treason...

LION
Sitting back and letting that pathetic excuse for a king destroy this kingdom is treason. Letting a miscreant such as Gazelle create a system that eliminates the strong is treason. Your duty is to the preservation of the kingdom and they are destroying it.

RHINO
The king knows best...

LION
Help me keep the strong strong and the weak weak.

RHINO
I must protect the king...

LION
Help me ensure the continuation of the army.

RHINO
You have no proof...

LION
The king is weak and must be replaced. Help me replace him and save the kingdom.

RHINO
No...

LION
(Turning away from RHINO.)
Then go on delivering your messages and watch this kingdom crumble.
(LION begins to exit. RHINO motions to say something but stops himself. LION glances over his shoulder at RHINO and a grin spreads across his face. LION exits. RHINO stands, staring after LION. The stage goes dark.)

SCENE 3
(Setting is at an indiscriminate location. ELEPHANT enters.)

ELEPHANT
I was a fool to let this happen. He honestly believes it will work. Democracy is beautiful in theory, but in practice, it is a fallacy. But it is too late now.

(LIONESS enters.)

LIONESS
Why so glum, Elephant?

ELEPHANT
Hello, Your Majesty.

LIONESS
You can drop the act, Elephant. I know I am no longer queen.

ELEPHANT
Well then. Hello, Lioness.

LIONESS
What happened to Lion?

ELEPHANT
I do not know what you mean.

LIONESS
You damn well know what I mean. Something has changed. Suddenly he cares about the other animals. He’s taking advice from Gazelle. He’s dismantling his own throne!

(ELEPHANT sighs and leans more on her staff.)

LIONESS (cont’d.)
You do know something.

ELEPHANT
I am aware of the change in the king. I let it continue because I thought this would help Lion become a better king, but I never expected it to go this far.
LIONESS
You could have stopped this?

ELEPHANT
Yes, I could have, but at this point, there is no going back. We must accept the king for who he is and follow his word.

LIONESS
But his word hurts him. Aren’t you sworn to protect the king even from himself?

ELEPHANT
We are past the point of changing Lion’s mind.

LIONESS
So you’re just going to give in and help him destroy the monarchy?

ELEPHANT
My oath has changed. I am sworn to protect the kingdom, even if it is from the king.

LIONESS
Do you honestly believe this new system will work?

ELEPHANT
I must. I do not have a choice.

LIONESS
You need to help me, Elephant. I will not survive in this new system. I don’t exactly have a good relationship with the other animals.

ELEPHANT
Perhaps instead of thinking about protecting yourself, you should be thinking about what you can do to better your relationship with the others.

LIONESS
Yes, of course. Just tell me what to do.

ELEPHANT
(Begins to walk away from LIONESS.)
The desert animals have a leader that is pushing them to war. If you kill him, you will guarantee war does not come to this kingdom, and the other animals would be grateful.

LIONESS
How will I know which animal is their leader?

ELEPHANT
You’ll recognize him when you see him.
(ELEPHANT exits. The stage goes dark.)

SCENE 4
(Setting is at the throne. MONKEY and GAZELLE enter.)

MONKEY
We are doing great things, Gazelle.

GAZELLE
It would not be possible without you, sir.

MONKEY
I do not want credit for this. You came up with an idea on how to better this kingdom. An idea that will change how animals interact with each other.

GAZELLE
It is your power, your influence, your desire to better the kingdom that makes this possible.

MONKEY
I would not have thought of such an innovative way to save the kingdom.

GAZELLE
I don’t think it saved the kingdom.

MONKEY
It did. I promise you. This kingdom was gorging on itself, dying from the inside out. It takes new ideas, new ways to rule to save it.

GAZELLE
You would have saved the kingdom whether I was here or not.

MONKEY
No. I am not some divine being or all-knowing creature. I am just an animal, like you.

GAZELLE
Sire, you are not as low as I am. You have royal blood.

MONKEY
Royal blood is nothing. Royal blood and this entitlement will soon be a thing of the past.

GAZELLE
But the royal blood is what makes a king.
Exactly. We need these elections to work. If they do, then those elected will elect a leader among them. That animal will be the one in charge, but its power will be limited. A king that isn’t a king.

But what of you?

I will just be another animal.

Such a thing—

Would be glorious.

(VULTURE enters.)

Someone is here, sir.

Oh. Hello…

Vulture.

Yes, Vulture. How can I help you?

I am the desert’s elected official. I was told to report to you immediately.

Ah, yes! Welcome. Come and have a seat.

(MONKEY guides VULTURE to the throne. VULTURE and GAZELLE sit on the rocks and MONKEY sits at the throne.)

Thank you, sire.

This is Gazelle. He is also an advisor.
GAZELLE

Hello, Vulture.

VULTURE

The advisor for the savannah?

GAZELLE

No. Actually I’m—

MONKEY

Gazelle has a special appointment given by me.

VULTURE

Interesting.

GAZELLE

What is?

VULTURE

I’m going to have to tell the desert about this. I don’t think they will be happy.

MONKEY

Won’t be happy about what?

VULTURE

Well, if Gazelle is not the savannah representative, but is still an advisor, that means that region has two voices speaking for them while others only have one.

MONKEY

I did not think of that.

GAZELLE

I promise you, Vulture, I am here to help better the situation of all animals.

MONKEY

Yes. I can vouch for him.

VULTURE

I am sure you will start out even and will try and help all animals, but when a decision is hinged on helping the savannah or helping the desert, I simply assume you will choose the savannah, since it is your home. The savannah representative will also choose the savannah, automatically putting me at a disadvantage.

MONKEY

That would be a problem.
GAZELLE
Sire, I swear my judgment—

VULTURE
Would always be skewed towards helping your home. No one would blame you for it. It is just the nature of every animal.

MONKEY
But how can we fix this?

(VULTURE stands up and begins pacing around the stage. MONKEY stands up and follows VULTURE. GAZELLE reluctantly stands and follows MONKEY.)

VULTURE
(Turning to MONKEY.) Increase the number of representatives so it will be even.

MONKEY
Yes. We must. So two animals for each region?

GAZELLE
I think that would be the maximum you would want.

VULTURE
What about Elephant and Rhino?

GAZELLE
What about them?

VULTURE
Are they still advisors?

MONKEY
Well, technically yes.

VULTURE
They would also favor the savannah in their decisions.

MONKEY
So, four elected animals from each region.

GAZELLE
But that also means the savannah only elects one of its officials.
MONKEY
Hmm, how do you think we should fix this then?

GAZELLE
I think the early incarnation of this new system should be simple. Stick with one representative for each region.

VULTURE
Then I demand that either Gazelle, Rhino, or Elephant be the savannah’s one advisor and that the other two leave.

MONKEY
They must all stay. They are all needed.

VULTURE
(Turning away from MONKEY.)
My constituency will not be happy about this.

MONKEY
We will figure out how to keep all parties happy.

VULTURE
I do not see how. I am already outnumbered by three. Not to mention the size difference.

The size difference?

GAZELLE

VULTURE
(Turning to MONKEY.)
Many of the animals of the desert are small. Do you really think Elephant and Rhino will care about the small animals of this kingdom? They elected me because I understand their plight and will fight for them. I can’t imagine the other advisors caring about small animals.

MONKEY
This council will be for all animals and all animals shall be helped by it.

GAZELLE
Well said, sir.

VULTURE
You say it now, but just wait. You’ll see. This council will be for the large animals and large animals shall benefit from it.

MONKEY
Well, what would you have me do?
(VULTURE smiles and places his arm around MONKEY's shoulders.)

VULTURE
Give voices to all those animals lost in Elephant's shadow. Give each animal type a representative.

GAZELLE
There would be too many advisors.

VULTURE
(Guiding MONKEY away from GAZELLE.)
It is the only way to keep the council equal. It is the only way to guarantee that this council is actually for all animals.

(GAZELLE follows and tries to separate the two.)

GAZELLE
It would be chaos.

VULTURE
It would be just.

MONKEY
It must be done.

GAZELLE
Sire, I advise you not to do this.

(VULTURE uses his free arm to push GAZELLE away from MONKEY behind MONKEY's back as he continues to guide MONKEY around the stage.)

VULTURE
Of course you do. You're losing your savannah advantage with this change.

GAZELLE
That is not why I object.

MONKEY
This kingdom must be run to benefit all animals, and this council will be proof of that.

VULTURE
Yes.

MONKEY
I want a representative for every animal type.
GAZELLE

How will you manage all of these advisors?

VULTURE

He will figure it out.

GAZELLE

Sire, I implore you. Start simple. Start with one representative and see how it works, and then you can begin to increase the number of representatives.

VULTURE

That approach would take years to be fully put into place. Change must happen now. We cannot wait.

GAZELLE

Patience is the only way to ensure this will work.

MONKEY

The animals of this kingdom need change. If we wait, we will fail.

VULTURE

Every animal deserves a voice and a chance to use it.

(MONKEY steps away from VULTURE and walks to the front of the stage, staring out.)

MONKEY

Yes! This council will be a collaboration, connecting all of the kingdom in ways never imagined before.

(GAZELLE tries to join MONKEY, but VULTURE holds him back.)

GAZELLE

Sire, I fear this plan will fail.

MONKEY

It can’t fail. It won’t fail. It will be—

VULTURE

Glorious.

(The stage goes dark.)

End ACT III
ACT IV

SCENE 1
(Setting is at the throne. ELEPHANT and GAZELLE enter. Over the loud
speakers, the noise of a large crowd is heard. This noise will increase and
decrease throughout the scene.)

ELEPHANT
How could you let this happen?

GAZELLE
How can I control the king?

ELEPHANT
It is not a matter of control. You simply convince him it is a bad idea.

GAZELLE
I tried. Once his mind was set, there was nothing I could do.

(Motions to audience.)
ELEPHANT
Look at all of them. A representative for every animal type. How does he expect to keep
order?

GAZELLE
He thinks they will just come together and collaborate.

ELEPHANT
Where is Rhino? We could use his help to keep order.

GAZELLE
Glorious? He thought this would be glorious? This is chaos!

ELEPHANT
(Turning away from GAZELLE.)
I should never have let this happen in the first place. I should have stopped this charade at
the start.

GAZELLE
I did my best to advise him. I did not think it would cause this.

ELEPHANT
I chose not to expose the truth and now the kingdom suffers.

GAZELLE
I might not have been born an advisor, but I don’t think I was awful.
I was only trying to help him learn.

To not pick wrong advisors, right?

(Turning back to GAZELLE.)

What?

Teach him the lesson to not pick up strays as advisors. Are those the things our king learns from you?

(Looking at GAZELLE as if for the first time.)

Oh, yes. You should never have been made an advisor.

(MONKEY enters.)

Is everyone here?

Yes, sire. A representative for every animal type.

Good.

We are missing Rhino.

He will show up.

We might want to wait for him to arrive before we begin.

Why would we do that?

We might need his help to control this rather large group.
MONKEY

Nonsense. They will work together.

(MONKEY walks to the front of the stage, and addresses the audience.)

MONKEY (cont’d.)
Animals of the kingdom, I am sure you are all wondering why you are here. Well, we are going to implement a new system of advisors.

(The noise grows louder.)

MONKEY (cont’d.)
This new system is designed to ensure that every animal is included in the decisions that affect the kingdom. Now, I realize there are many of you and all of you need a chance to speak, so I have devised a plan. I want everyone to lineup from largest to smallest.

(The noise breaks into cries of anger and frustration. MONKEY speaks over the noise.)

MONKEY (cont’d.)
Hold on, I’m not done. Calm down. That was only the first part.

(The noise quiets.)

MONKEY (cont’d.)
After the line is formed, I want it to fold and mesh together, so the order should be big, small, big, small, and so forth and so on. This will make sure that neither the size of the animal nor the home of the animal influences it’s time of speech or opportunity. Now, start doing that.

(The noise increases. MONKEY continues to stand at the front of the stage and directs the other animals with his hands. A prop bird lowers down and hovers above ELEPHANT.)

ELEPHANT

(To prop bird.)
What... war? Are you sure?...Okay, good work. Keep me posted.

(The prop bird rises off stage.)

MONKEY

That’s it. Biggest to smallest.

ELEPHANT

Sire, I need to speak with you.
(To ELEPHANT)
About what?
(To audience.)

ELEPHANT
We should speak where the other animals cannot hear us.

MONKEY
Just tell me what you want.

ELEPHANT
(Speaking softly.)
The desert animals have opened war. They are marching across the savannah and are headed here.

MONKEY
What do you mean war?

ELEPHANT
I am not mistaken, sire! War has begun.

MONKEY
(Facing the audience, yelling over the noise.)
Calm down. Everyone calm down. Listen to me!

MONKEY (cont’d.)
This council was made so all animals would be equal, and I want to be honest with all of you. It does appear that the desert animals are rebelling.

MONKEY (cont’d.)
We must work together to come up with a defensive strategy. We must collaborate!

ELEPHANT
We need Rhino. We need the army.
MONKEY

We need each other!

(ELEPHANT exits.)

MONKEY

Gazelle, tell me what I should do.

GAZELLE

I...I don’t know.

(The noise silences and the stage goes dark.)

SCENE 2

(Setting is at an indiscriminate location. LION enters and begins to walk across the stage. LIONESS enters opposite side.)

LIONESS

So it was you.

LION

What?

LIONESS

You’re the leader of this rebellion.

LION

That I am, Lioness.

LIONESS

Well now that I’ve finally found you, I am going to kill you and squash this uprising.

LION

You are going to kill me?

LIONESS

That’s right, and then I’ll be back in the good graces of the kingdom. They’ll have no choice but to accept me back. I will have saved them all.

LION

(Laughing.)
The good graces of the kingdom? You’ll never be accepted by them. You’re royalty. They despise you.
LIONESS
Even if that is true, I will still have saved the king and his throne.

LION
His throne? That pathetic miscreant doesn’t deserve the throne. He stole it and now I am taking it back.

How dare you?

(LIONESS lunges at LION. LION steps to the side and avoids her attack.)

LION
How dare I? I dare because I am the king! It is my birth right.

(LIONESS lunges at LION again. LION does not step out of the way. Instead, he catches her arms and throws her to the ground.)

Give up.

LION (cont’d.)

LIONESS
As long as I breathe, I shall try and kill you.

So be it.

(LIONESS lunges at LION. LION catches her. With one hand, LION holds back her arms. The other hand clamps upon LIONESS’ throat.)

Wait, please.

LIONESS

LION
Begging? You’re begging? Go on then. Beg for your life.

LIONESS
Please don’t kill me. I can help you. I can give you things.

LION
What could you possibly offer me that I cannot take?

LIONESS
Zebra! I can give you Zebra!
And how will you give me Zebra?

LIONESS
I killed her and hid the body. There is at least half left. If you let me live, I will show you where she is.

LION
Oh how nice of you, but I will not need your scraps after I take the throne.

Please.

LION
You were an awful queen and an even worse wife. I must choose better next time.

LIONESS
...Lion?

(LION smiles as he tightens his grip upon LIONESS’ throat. When LIONESS is dead, LION drops the body to the ground and stands straight. He stares at the body for a few seconds before turning around and exiting. The stage goes dark.)

SCENE 3
(The setting is at an indiscriminate location. RHINO enters.)

RHINO
The king is weak and must be replaced for the good of the kingdom?
(Shakes his head and walks around the stage, eventually stopping and staring off into the distance.)
The king is weak and must be replaced for the good of the kingdom...

(ELEPHANT enters.)

ELEPHANT
Rhino, finally. The rebellion has begun. You and your army are needed. We must protect the king.

RHINO
The king is weak and must be replaced for the good of the kingdom.

What?
RHINO
You heard what I said, Long Trunk.

ELEPHANT
You don’t mean it.

RHINO
I do. The king is weak. He must be replaced.

ELEPHANT
We need to talk about this.

RHINO
Talk. That is your solution for everything. No more. You have talked this kingdom into ruin and now I am helping make it right.

ELEPHANT
How? By tearing it down?

RHINO
Putting it out of its misery. Now you can join me in creating a new kingdom or you can die.

ELEPHANT
This kingdom is not perfect, but it is better than what you are trying to build. I will not let you succeed.

RHINO
(Drawing his sword.)
I was hoping you would say that.

(RHINO attacks ELEPHANT. RHINO attacks by putting all of his strength into each broad stroke of his sword. ELEPHANT moves quickly and smoothly and is able to block each attack with her staff.)

ELEPHANT
You cannot believe that this is right.

RHINO
You are so wrapped up in your never-ending quest against wrong. It’s pathetic.

ELEPHANT
Why is it pathetic to strive to better the king and the kingdom?
RHINO
Because a true king does not need to be better. A true king is perfect and every action he takes is the correct one.

ELEPHANT
There is no such thing as perfection.

RHINO
Only the weak would say such a thing.

ELEPHANT
Stop attacking me and talk!

RHINO
Fight me! Perhaps you need motivation. Is that it, Long Trunk? Maybe I should go kill some of your brethren, then after a few weeks of crying over their bodies, you’ll be ready to fight.

ELEPHANT
Do not threaten my family, Stone Foot.

RHINO
Finally some emotion out of you. And it only took threats to your kin. Say, how long do you usually cry over your dead? I was just wondering so I would know when you’ll be ready to fight. A week per body?

ELEPHANT
I’m going to kill you, Stone Foot.

(ELEPHANT goes on the offensive. Like her defense, ELEPHANT moves quickly and smoothly with each attack. RHINO is able to block each of her attacks with his sword.)

RHINO
You had better kill me. If you don’t, I promise my next stop will be to see your family.

ELEPHANT
I’m going to kill you to protect my family, to protect my kingdom, and to protect my king.

(RHINO begins attacking with a new vigor and his attacks become more intense with each sentence.)

RHINO
Your family is weak. Your kingdom is weak.
(RHINO slashes downward, cutting ELEPHANT’s staff in half.)

Your king is weak.

(RHINO stabs and kills ELEPHANT)

And you must all be replaced.

(ELEPHANT falls to the ground, the split staff still clutched in her hands. RHINO sheaths his sword and exits. After a few seconds, VULTURE steps out of the shadows.)

VULTURE

I’ve got to admit something to you.

(VULTURE examines ELEPHANT’s body.)

VULTURE (cont’d.)

When I swore revenge, I never actually thought I would get it. I definitely never thought I would get it by watching Rhino cut you down. This has just been a wonderful day.

(VULTURE picks up the top half of the staff, forcing it out of ELEPHANT’s hand.)

VULTURE (cont’d.)

I did always admire your staff. It was your symbol of power. You don’t mind that I take it do you?

(VULTURE pokes ELEPHANT with the staff.)

VULTURE (cont’d.)

No? Well thank you. I truly mean that, Elephant. Thank you for your staff. Thank you for letting Monkey take the throne. Thank you for failing.

(VULTURE hits ELEPHANT with the staff. VULTURE laughs and exits. The stage goes dark.)

SCENE 4

(Setting is at the throne. MONKEY and GAZELLE enter.)

MONKEY

What are we going to do? The council didn’t work.
GAZELLE

We need Elephant and Rhino.

MONKEY

They wouldn't work together. If they would have just worked together, we could have gotten past this.

GAZELLE

We need Elephant and Rhino.

MONKEY

Where is Elephant? She knows strategy. She should be here saving the kingdom.

GAZELLE

Don't you know any strategy?

MONKEY

Me? No, I don't know any battle strategy.

GAZELLE

But I thought all kings were taught war strategy at an early age.

MONKEY

You thought wrong. Now help me think of a way to save the kingdom.

GAZELLE

We could get the other lions to help.

MONKEY

The last report said they turned. The leader of this rebellion killed Lioness and now they follow him.

GAZELLE

We need Elephant.

MONKEY

We need Rhino.

(RHINO enters.)

GAZELLE

Rhino!

(MONKEY and GAZELLE run up to RHINO.)
The kingdom is under attack and desperately needs your help.

Where is the rest of the army?

What are your ideas?

Say something!

(LION enters opposite stage.)

Hello.

(MONKEY and GAZELLE turn to face LION.)

It’s you...

(RHINO grabs MONKEY and hold his arms behind his back.)

I told you I would be back.

Rhino, why are you holding the king?

The king is weak and must be replaced.

(GAZELLE panics and runs offstage. LION chases him. Offstage, GAZELLE screams and LION roars.)

Why are you doing this?

You’re weak and your plans of collaboration will ruin this kingdom. I’m doing my duty to protect the kingdom.

I was trying to help. I didn’t know.
RHINO

Exactly. You didn’t know. A true king would know. A true king would have seen what would occur.

MONKEY

I’m sorry.

RHINO

More proof that you are a fraud.

MONKEY

Just let me go. Please. Let me go and you will never see or hear of me again. I swear.

RHINO

You’re pathetic.

MONKEY

Please. I’ll do anything. Just let me go before he gets back.

RHINO

No. You must be made into an example. Your blood will help create the foundation of a great kingdom. A kingdom where the strong remain strong. A kingdom where the weak and the pathetic do not belong. A kingdom for the pure.

(LION enters. His mouth and chest are covered in blood. He is picking his teeth with a piece of grass.)

LION

He was right after all.

MONKEY

Please let me go.

RHINO

Shut up.

LION

I told you I would be back. I told you I would make you pay.

MONKEY

Please forgive me.

LION

I have been trying to decide how I want to kill you. Should I strangle you, choking the life out of you like I did Lioness? Should I let Rhino trample you? Should I tear into you like I did Gazelle? I just can’t decide.
MONKEY

Please.

LION

See, the problem is that I want to kill you in every way possible, but I only get to do it once. But the other day I had an epiphany. Do you want to know what it was?

(MONKEY begins to whimper.)

LION (cont’d.)

I realized that I can have Rhino tear down the jungle and catch all of the monkeys.

(MONKEY begins to cry.)

LION (cont’d.)

Then I can kill each one in a new way. It will become part of my daily ritual. I’ll kill every single monkey and imagine it’s you, but first, I need to take back what’s mine.

(LION gingerly removes the mane for MONKEY’s head.)

LION (cont’d.)

Ugh, it’s infested with fleas.

(LION beats the mane against MONKEY like a rug.)

LION (cont’d.)

I guess it will do for now.
(Stands straight and places the mane on his head.)
That feels so much better.

(MONKEY falls to his knees. LION kneels down in front of him.)

LION (cont’d.)

Look at me…look at me!

(MONKEY lifts his head.)

LION (cont’d.)

I want you to know what your actions have caused. I want you to be well aware of how many deaths you have brought about. You will not be the only one to die from this. I am going to kill your clan. I’m going to erase them from this kingdom, and I’m going to cherish every single death.
(Stands and walks to the throne.)
Where is it? I know you kept it.
(Searches around the base of the tree.)
Here it is!

(LION pulls out MONKEY's tail from behind the tree.)

LION (cont'd.)

I knew you would keep it. Rhino, bring him over here.

(RHINO pulls MONKEY off the ground and drags him to the tree.)

LION (cont'd.)

Hold his hands up to that branch.

(RHINO forces MONKEY's hands into the air against a branch. LION ties MONKEY's hands with the tail.)

MONKEY

Please don't do this.

LION

I've decided to leave you for last. I am going to make you watch as I kill every single member of your clan. And then when you are the only one left, I'll decide how to dispose of you.

(LION turns away from MONKEY.)

LION (cont'd.)

How does it feel to help create a new, perfect kingdom, Rhino?

RHINO

Glorious, sir.

LION

This kingdom will not tolerate weakness.

RHINO

Yes, sir.

(VULTURE enters, walking with ELEPHANT's staff.)

VULTURE

Well done, the both of you. The kingdom is ours.

LION

And where were you during the fighting?
VULTURE
As I told you when we first met, I am not much a fighter.

RHINO
Nice walking stick.

VULTURE
Oh, thank you. And I should be thanking you for finally getting rid of Elephant. She was—

RHINO
Noble and strong and a good warrior.

LION
It is a shame she would not see things my way. I will have to make sure to raise her clan in the new way. They will prove useful.

VULTURE
Yes, of course. Of course. We will teach them.

(VULTURE walks over to MONKEY.)

VULTURE (cont’d.)
So you let him live.

(VULTURE lifts MONKEY’s face with ELEPHANT’s staff.)

LION
I have plans for him.

(VULTURE continues to examine MONKEY. LION nods to RHINO, who positions himself behind VULTURE.)

LION (cont’d.)
You are weak, Vulture.

VULTURE
What?

LION
You are weak and a coward.

VULTURE
We did this together.
LION
You keep using the word “we” as if you and I are equals.

VULTURE
You were just a sniveling freak when I found you.

RHINO
(Drawing his sword.)
You will show respect to the king.

LION
You thought of me as how I wanted you to think of me. You thought we were equals.

(LION walks up to VULTURE.)

LION (cont’d.)
You thought you could use me to reclaim your lost glory and get revenge on Elephant.

(LION tears ELEPHANT’s staff away from VULTURE.)

LION (cont’d.)
I know that you were once advisor to the king and how Elephant took that position from you. She was able to take it because she was strong. She deserved the position. You on the other hand. You are weak and have no place in my kingdom.

VULTURE
Lion—

LION
(Turning away from VULTURE.)
Rhino, kill him.

(RHINO approaches VULTURE.)

VULTURE
Hold on. I can still be useful. I helped you plan this rebellion. I can still help you.

LION
You were simply a tool that I needed at the time, but your usefulness has been spent.

VULTURE
Rhino, don’t do this. You don’t have to do this.

RHINO
Yes I do. You need to die to protect the kingdom.
VULTURE
Please don’t do this. I’ll go back to the desert.

RHINO
The weak always beg for mercy.

(VULTURE tries to run from RHINO, but RHINO is able to get in front of VULTURE. RHINO stabs and kills VULTURE. MONKEY begins to sob.)

LION
Don’t worry, Monkey. You’ll get used to seeing death soon.

(LION turns back to RHINO.)

LION (cont’d.)
Rhinoceros, I have another task for you.

RHINO
(Wiping his sword on VULTURE’s messenger bag.)
I live to serve.

LION
Before I came to the throne, I sent message to all of the desert animals, telling them to gather in the south ravine. I told them to face the west cliff, and that I would appear there to address them on this victory.

RHINO
South ravine, facing west. They’re facing away from the entrance.

LION
I will not be appearing there to address them. I want you to gather your brethren and go to the south ravine. Kill all of them. Do not leave a single desert animal alive. They are weak and pathetic and this kingdom will be stronger when they are dead.

(RHINO
(Turning to leave.)
Yes, sire.

LION
(Sitting down at the throne.)
Oh, and Rhinoceros.

RHINO
Yes, sir?
LION
Make it quick. We have a jungle to destroy.

(RHINO exits. LION sits at the throne, back straight, surveying the stage. MONKEY continues to sob. The stage goes dark.)

END