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**37 Page Excerpt of:**

**The Master and the Magician**

(A Comedy in Two Acts)

by

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CAST (in Order of Appearance)

- Kavernia**.....female: Dalmandia's servant; plain of appearance, formerly of minor nobility, but now downtrodden. However she possesses hidden talent and strength.  
(mid 20's to late 30's)
- Merchand**.....can be played by a male or a female: a magician, though not old, s/he appears to be aging.  
(i.e. an old 40 year-old or a very young 60 year-old)
- Daufon**.....male: a Prince, handsome and intelligent but ineffectual; apparently destined for Dalmandia.  
(mid 20's to late 30's)
- Dalmandia**.....female: a beautiful, ambitious, vain member of the merchant class with designs on ruling the crown.  
(mid 20's to late 30's)
- Kester**.....male: an angry, brutish - but capable and intelligent - member of the underclass.  
(early 20's to early 30's)
- Precia**.....female: Kester's lover – attractive, clear of soul, but *too* resigned to her fate.  
(early 20's to early 30's)
- Glimm**.....can be played by a male or a female: a capricious spirit, who is both Merchand's antagonist and his/her Familiar.  
(mid-20's to mid-30's)

Setting: a fairy tale place where magic can and does occur.

Number of Acts: two.

Number of Scenes: 12

Cast: 3 – 5 female actors and 2 - 4 male actors (a total of 7 actors)

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**\* - IMPORTANT NOTE regarding the character naming convention:**

This play uses a plot device of soul transference, i.e., a magical body swap; these swaps become quite frenetic as the narrative reaches its climax. From Scene iii onwards, one will see, centered in capital letters above the dialogue, the following pattern:

“(Name A in) **NAME B**”

For example: (Precia in) **DALMANDIA**

This would mean that Precia’s soul and personality have magically been placed within Dalmandia’s body. Thus, the audience would see Dalmandia’s physical body and hear her voice, but the personality would now be changed to that of Precia’s, along with any signature gestures or behavioral traits.

Thus, each of the four actors who play the lovers will in essence get to play all four parts.

At the time of each soul transference, I suggest that a consistent sound and/or lighting cue be established. More importantly, each character should have a recognizable physicalization that can be “passed” along from actor to actor.

**SCENE I:** *five different locations as below:*

*The stage is dark. We hear, but do not see, Kavernia playing the mournful "Hymn to St. Wenceslas" on a wooden flute.*

*Lights up, tightly, on Dalmandia. She is in her chamber, brushing her beautiful hair, looking into an unseen mirror in the direction of the audience. She puckers her lips. She tries on various expensive pieces of jewelry ... then as the lights fade to half on her.*

*Lights up, tightly, on Daufon. He is looking into a primitive telescope. With a feather pen, he jots a note into his notebook, looks into the telescope and then makes another note. Lights fade to half on him.*

*Lights up, tightly, on Precia. She is on her hands and knees, scrubbing a floor in the palace. She lifts herself up from the floor, wipes the sweat from her weary face. Lights fade to half on her.*

*Lights up, tightly on Kester. He is tossing hay in a stable. He is the John Henry of hay balers and moves like an angry machine.*

*Lights return to full on all four of the lovers, but half up on Kavernia playing her flute but with her back turned to the audience. A kind of quintet emerges between the flute player, the scraping of the shovel, the sloshing of the water and rag, the scratching of the pen and the tinkle of jewelry, all forming a musical cacophony. Blackout.*

**SCENE II:** *a rich lady's garden.*

*Lights up now, cool and grey, on Kavernia is dressed in fine servant's garb, who is now facing the audience and the only one visible on stage.*

*The stage is filled with uneven, raggedly stacked, columns of books – like so many Celtic cairns or the remnants of the Roman Forum... or under different lighting - the trunks of magical trees.*

*(Note: these book columns are functional as Kavernia is revealed to be sitting on top of one stack.)*

*With her/his face hidden by a pilgrim's cloak, Merchand the Magician<sup>1</sup> hurries across stage, even though s/he walks with a staff. However, s/he suddenly stops, teeters, grabs hold of a column of books to steady herself. S/he pulls the hood down and tries to catch her/his breath. Kavernia stops playing.*

**KAVERNIA**

Traveler, are you ill? Can I assist you?

**MERCHAND**

No, no I'm fine. Thank you. These attacks are far too regular now to tut about. I just need... a moment. I have... much...to do. And so little...time.

*(Kavernia approaches her.)*

**KAVERNIA**

Stop pretending you're more than human. Sit down on this tree trunk and rest.

**MERCHAND**

No, I... I must...be off...

**KAVERNIA**

Good person!

*(S/he has attempted to move on, but nearly faints. Kavernia grabs hold of her/him and leads her/him back, where they sit.)*

**KAVERNIA (cont'd)**

There..... Isn't that better?

**MERCHAND**

My Master... won't... wait. I must play a –

*(Merchand again tries to move, but can hardly breathe.)*

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<sup>1</sup> Note to the actor playing Merchand, you should have a different posture and physicality, perhaps even a slightly different vocal quality or accent as the "pilgrim" than when s/he is revealed in full glory as a magician in the Scene 2. Ditto the same note, whenever Glimm also impersonates someone else.

**KAVERNIA**

Play?? A musician? What instrument do you play? I don't see –

**MERCHAND**

Oh I...

*(Merchand snaps her/his fingers, and magically, in her/his other hand, s/he reveals a wooden chess piece – the Queen.)*

**MERCHAND**

I play chess. Or rather, I'm a master carver. This Queen is the last piece for a game that is being played today.

**KAVERNIA**

She's beautiful. May I? *(Merchand hands her the piece.)* Your work is exquisite.

**MERCHAND**

It is nothing.

**KAVERNIA**

It *is* something

**MERCHAND**

Believe me, it was *nothing* before you had the need to see it.

**KAVERNIA**

*(Handing her back the piece.)* You should not undervalue yourself. That is more than honest work. Crafts wo/man, this is art.

**MERCHAND**

You are kind. And with that, I must take my leave. I have recovered enough and I cannot keep my Master waiting any longer. *(Bowing.)* Thank you for the use of your stump.

**KAVERNIA**

For the stump, you should thank my lady Dalmandia, for it is ... her garden now. *(aside)* I almost to this stranger let my bitterness show. But w(ith) generosity 'tis best to deal with one's woe. *(She reaches into her satchel. Then, to Merchand:)* You can thank me, good wo/man, by taking this bread.

**MERCHAND**

There is no need –

**KAVERNIA**

Yes, there is. For your strength. That is plain to see.

*(Merchand takes the bread.)*

**MERCHAND**

I shall repay you as best I can --

**KAVERNIA**

Then, it's not a gift if you do.

*(With a nod, Merchand places her/his hand across her/his heart, and turns away.)*

**KAVERNIA (cont'd)**

Farewell, traveler.

*(A bird chirps insistently.)*

**KAVERNIA (cont'd)**

*(To the bird)* Yes, yes. I hear you. Be patient.

*(Merchand slows down. She plays her flute again. The bird quiets immediately. Merchand straightens up higher, turns and listens; s/he looks up into the trees)*

**KAVERNIA (cont'd)**

Is something wrong again?

**MERCHAND**

The bird stopped singing as you played.

**KAVERNIA**

Oh, he is sad and not up to any duets this morn.

**MERCHAND**

How do you know that?

**KAVERNIA**

He told me so. *(A beat.)* Well, I imagined he told me so –

**MERCHAND**

Is it that Cardinal - there - who spoke to you?

**KAVERNIA**

How did you know?

**MERCHAND**

He is a Familiar...uh, bird to me.

**KAVERNIA**

Well, yes! That cardinal is oft' my accompaniment.

*(The cardinal trills.)*

**MERCHAND**

Please, play. He asks - does he not?

**KAVERNIA**

But I thought you must go –



**MERCHAND**

That was before – now to discover such talent, my Master must wait. Tis only a bored game of abstract war, (*Indicating the bird*) but we both need to hear your sweet notes soar.

*(She places the flute to her lips. Suddenly, she is interrupted as we hear Dalmandia calling from inside her chateau.)*

**DALMANDIA (offstage)**

Kavernia! Where are you, you lazy creature! I need you now!

**KAVERNIA**

Oh, I must go –

**MERCHAND**

Play till she comes? Please. We (*indicating the cardinal*) both need your music, (*placing his/her hand over his/her heart*) our souls to keep.

*(Kavernia tentatively begins to play again, eventually falling into a deep concentration. Dalmandia begins to speak again offstage, louder as she is coming closer, and just enters onto the stage when....)*

**DALMANDIA (offstage, then onstage)**

Oh, there you are you (*uhhggh*) –

*(Merchand, without looking at Dalmandia, has held up his/her hand in a “Stop” gesture. Dalmandia’s words immediately AUDIBLY get CAUGHT IN HER THROAT with an “uhhggh.”*

*Merchand then jerks his/her hand the way a puppeteer controls the strings of a marionette.*

*Simultaneously, Dalmandia’s head jerks to one side in response and her face goes blank. Then as Merchand moves her/his fingers, Dalmandia spins around in that awkward way a puppet does. Her leg lifts up large, and she lurches forward and off the stage.*

*Kavernia has not seen any of this and has continued to look up at the bird while she played. Merchand is enraptured by Kavernia’s music,*

*and more. Lights fade off. The Hymn continues in the dark. Silence again.)*

**SCENE III:** *a magical forest, the next day.*

*(A tight spot of glowing light on Merchand. S/he has taken off the cloak of the traveler, and reveals her/his odd garb and accoutrements of magic – bones, charms and other dried creepy things. Slowly, by the end of the next speech, s/he is also revealed to be standing upon two unevenly stacked book columns. A cock crows.)*

**MERCHAND**

No rooster, it is not yet dawn so your crow has no power over me. I know full well my choices have left me a wo/man alone, bestride nothing but knowledge. But with my few hours left, I shall use that fragile power to its fullest...

*(S/he pulls out a pocket watch that had been hanging over her/his heart, and kisses it.)*

**MERCHAND** *(cont'd)*

My Love.

*(S/he opens the watch, but very deliberately does not look at it. Instead, s/he presses her/his finger into the open watch. As s/he removes her/his finger, s/he ceremonially reveals that it is covered with gray ash. S/he then smears this ash under her/his cheeks and eyes making them look even more hollow. S/he carefully closes the watch and holds it against her/his heart and continues addressing the watch though not actually looking at it – being too painful emotionally to do so.)*

**MERCHAND** *(cont'd)*

I almost discovered this flautist too late before I come to join you, my Love. If I fail with Kavernia, all I have learned at such a cost will disappear with my dust. Yet I still have this one last night to conjure a step-child. So to aid me in this birthing, a suggestion I have whispered into the ears of two sets of lovers to come this way – But wait! I hear them approach. I must make myself blend and so hide in open sight.

*(S/he waves her/his hand before herself and the lighting changes – as s/he now loses her/his otherworldly glow. Immediately thereafter,*

*coming down the aisle on the audience left are Daufon, then Dalmandia.)*

**DAUFON**

It is only just ahead! An uncommon grove of trees – so rare, dare I say – almost, enchanté.

**DALMANDIA**

Prince! You're moving far too fast for a fine lady such as I... KAVERNIA!

*(Dalmandia turns back, waiting impatiently for her maid; the Prince tries to stay lost in the magic of the woods. Meanwhile Kester has entered, striding forward with manly vigor down the audience-right aisle. He turns back)*

**DALMANDIA**

*(simultaneously)*

Hurry up! you're making us wait.

**KESTER**

*(simultaneously)*

Hurry up! you're making ME wait.

*(Kavernia enters on the left, dragging a large travel chest with intense effort, huffing and puffing. Then Precia enters on the right.)*

**KAVERNIA**

M'lady, the ground is not friendly.

*(Precia calls to Kester as he steps partly back toward Precia. Kester shout whispers. They overlap exactly on the word "has".)*

**PRECIA**

Kester, what idea has –

**KESTER**

Shh– the King has spies everywhere.

**PRECIA**

*(Quietly.)* What wild idea has sprung in your head that must be unburdened so secretly out in the dark wood?

**MERCHAND**

I must prepare the space quickly.

*(Merchand points her/his staff toward the ground. Downstage, light spreads out, like a puff of breath, revealing a blanket and upon it, a banquet of sweet fruits and rich foods.)*

**MERCHAND** *(cont'd)*

For the lovers –  
Right  
And Left.

*(Daufon, Dalmandia, Kester and Precia have all reached the stage.)*

**MERCHAND** *(cont'd)*

Rich,

*(Merchand freezes Dalmandia and the Prince.)*

**MERCHAND** *(cont'd)*

And Poor.

*(He freezes Kester and Precia in place.)*

**MERCHAND** *(cont'd)*

But following all,  
She whom I am most  
In thrall,

*(Kavernia makes it to the stage, to have a bare second of wonder before she is frozen by her/him as well.)*

**MERCHAND** *(cont'd)*

The one who has taken a fall.

*(Unseen to Merchand, Glimm, a very changeable fairy spirit, enters stealthily. Merchand moves the watch in a large circle.)*

**MERCHAND** *(cont'd)*

Now is the time to wind the clock,  
Set it in motion –

*(Glimm bursts forth. Merchand quickly returns the watch to its safe place - by her/his heart.)*

**GLIMM**

No!  
Now is the time to wind the cock,  
Thrust it in motion,  
Because a vessel  
Needs to be broken.

**MERCHAND**

Ah, my fairy fiend. Bored again?

**GLIMM**

Your pompous ass blew wind and summoned me hither. You've crossed every "ex" and arranged all the why's, but I crave to dither and damnify.

**MERCHAND**

Can't you allow me this concluding illusion, unimpeded?

**GLIMM**

Maybe if you weren't so late for yesterday's Game. I won by forfeit! THAT was *bor-ing*.

**MERCHAND**

But tonight is different from all other nights. You know best of all that at dawn with the chanticleer's last crow, my time here is over.

**GLIMM**

*(Sarcastically)* Oh, that's right! I forgot. You are mortal.

And just because of that, you think I'm supposed allow you some perfect piece of geometry? And thus, violate the nature of things? Has it ever been so that fate scraps and bows?

**MERCHAND**

*(A beat.)* No.

**GLIMM**

Then why ask now?

**MERCHAND**

Perhaps my looming death makes me sentimental.

**GLIMM**

Don't try to husband me, magician. I am your Master.

**MERCHAND**

And without cud such as me, you'd have nothing to chew on.

**GLIMM**

*(With grand theatrical dignity.)* What sarcastic chips have become mountains on your shoulders! What stones are in your gall...What! What...! *(All of a sudden.)* Ah! Ya' know I'll really miss you.

*(Merchand makes a friendly gesture of solidarity – perhaps slapping Glimm on the back or the like.)*

**MERCHAND**

Seriously, my little daemon, what will you do when I'm gone?

**GLIMM**

*(A beat – Glimm doesn't like this question.)* Only a human would ask such an inane question.

**MERCHAND**

Ah! So fate doesn't know its own fate!

**GLIMM**

*(Dismissing her/him)* Now that the preliminary insults are done - shall we play a last game?

**MERCHAND**

We can... but as you know, the condemned are due a last request.

**GLIMM**

But that's only in the last milliseconds of breath!

**MERCHAND**

I get to set the rules this time.

**GLIMM**

Absolutely not!

**MERCHAND**

Then I don't really need to play. It's *over* for me, after all. And I'm tired.

*(Merchand unfreezes all of the lovers. They look around dazed.)*

**GLIMM**

What!? No, no, no!

*(With a wave, Glimm re-freezes them.)*

**GLIMM (cont'd)**

Extortionist!

**MERCHAND**

I've never known you to compliment me so!

**GLIMM**

Well, we do comPLEMENT each other so well. So, I'll you make the laws.

**MERCHAND**

*(Merchand smiles, pleased.)* We can use these lovers as pawns...but not pell mell....  
Maybe break their hearts, but *not* their minds.

*(Glimm is not pleased.)*

**GLIMM**

Oh come now! What is love without a little madness?

**MERCHAND**

Shush!!! We shall have order: one spell at a time, first me, then you, back and forth, through this day and night till that cursed cock crows. Now swear.

*(Glimm bleats twice in protest.)*

**MERCHAND**

Swear!!

**GLIMM**

Dull!

**MERCHAND (cont'd)**

A challenge!

**GLIMM**

*(After a beat.)* I swear.

**MERCHAND**

And no transformations into birds, rocks or bees.

**GLIMM**

Oh, come on!

**MERCHAND**

On my last night, I want to stay close to humanity.

**GLIMM**

Arrrrgh! *(Reluctantly.)* Well, there is still some joy in trying to undo all of your good intentions. *(Glimm unenthusiastically holds up his right hand.)* I swear.



**MERCHAND**

Love will triumph.

**GLIMM**

Ha, human beings are too shallow for such deep roots to take hold.

**MERCHAND**

And Spirits such as you?

**GLIMM**

My roots are in the air. I grow up, not down. Love is far beneath me.

**MERCHAND**

Yet, it seems to me that you've settled by my side, little bee.

**GLIMM**

An illusion of the Familiar. Sadly, your flower has no pistil, which is like a stigma with no style! <sup>2</sup>

**MERCHAND**

Oh, you'll see how fecund I can be. But be off, I need priv-a-cy <sup>3</sup> to prep the court for the first volley.

**GLIMM**

Then let the surface be hard with lots of bounce. I predict a score of Love, Zero.

*(Glimm laughs and exits.)*

**MERCHAND**

I know my magic exists because you exist my capricious Familiar. But you won't win as completely as you think. *(Going towards the frozen characters on the stage.)* Since I

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<sup>2</sup> If Merchand is cast as male, then replace this botany joke ("Sadly, your flower...") with this one: "I don't pine for your kind of wood."

<sup>3</sup> Pronounce "privacy" in the English way, not the American way.

**MERCHAND** (*cont'd*)

have no natural child, my greatest fear has been to pass on without passing on my gifts. Between these two pairs of lovers is this maligned serving one, whom I suspect has even greater talents than I. So, I'll distract Glimm by waving the red cloak of love. That puckish sprite will charge by, giving me the time and freedom to transmit what matters most to she who needs it most. (*Gently touching Precia...perhaps Daufon and the others*) I know it seems cruel to use these young lovers so, but I have faith, during their assignations they will discover secrets within, well worth knowing.

*(Merchand waves her/his wand and unfreezes Prince Daufon, Lady Dalmandia and her servant, Kavernia.)*

**DALMANDIA**

You are brilliant, Prince. Simply brilliant. I must admit that your invitation to dine in this purlieu nonplused me some, but you *have* led me to a most magical grove.<sup>4</sup> Only a babbling brook is needed to make the setting complete.

**DAUFON**

There is a slight stream up yonder, m'lady.

**DALMANDIA**

*(She takes a step upstage.)* Oh, how...near-perfect

**DAUFON**

*(To Dalmandia)* Lady it took no genius on my part to find this place, but simply the good sense to match beauty with beauty.

**DALMANDIA**

My Lord Prince is too charming. I don't deserve such approbation. *(Aside)* Nor do you deserve mine, but queen I will be.

**DAUFON**

*(Aside.)* As for "my" invitation, I would say it was you who so brilliantly arranged it.

*(They smile at each other falsely.)*

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<sup>4</sup> *purlieu* = a forest, typically at the outskirts of a city

**DALMANDIA**

Kavernia, fetch my fan, I feel a sudden rush of heat. *(She reveals a bit of cleavage.)*

**KAVERNIA**

Yes, my lady.

*(Kavernia rummages through the chest removing many useless items that have been brought along for the picnic.)*

**DAUFON**

Are you well, Dalmandia?

**DALMANDIA**

My constitution is so weak.

*(Dalmandia smiles coquettishly at the Prince.)*

**DAUFON**

*(Aside.)* How strange that a merchant's daughter can manage the court so well. It has only been a year since her family bought their title, yet she is so much better equipped for palace intrigue than I, who was born to it.

*(Kavernia returns with a fan.)*

**DALMANDIA**

You stupid girl, how ugly. Fetch me another.

**KAVERNIA**

But m'lady, this is the one you chose for today.

**DALMANDIA**

I won't touch it. You fan me. No, stand behind me. I don't want to see you.

**DAUFON**

Please, I find your outburst...so ...so...disagreeable.

**DALMANDIA**

I apologize, but Daufon - may I call you Daufon? You are a man, and you are accorded the respect of your sex and rank. I have only my own soft feminine heart to blame for my temper. You see, I took Kavernia on as a favor to her father.

*(Kavernia stops fanning as she lets her hatred show through. Dalmandia turns to look at her. Kavernia smiles falsely and resumes her task.)*

**DALMANDIA** *(cont'd)*

That is why she was never properly trained in the service arts. Let me be your mirror so that you may accurately perceive your own importance.

**DAUFON**

Uh - we have flowers here, but no roses. *(Aside)* Yee gods, deliver me from this thorny bush before I bleed as much as her poor hand maid.

*(The Prince rises. Merchand produces a rose. Daufon "plucks" it from his hands, smells it but does not return immediately.)*

**DALMANDIA**

*(In a stage whisper)* Embarrassing me before the Prince! A whipping for you later. You useless lump! *(Sincerely exasperated)* Why I ever agreed to your slavery.

**KAVERNIA**

Yes, my lady. *(Aside)* Oh, if only fate and justice sprung from the same root.

*(Daufon returns.)*

**DALMANDIA**

What lovely cherries, so sweet. Come Prince, come Daufon, let me feed you.

*(Daufon lets the rose fall to the blanket and he sits with his mouth open, ready to receive a cherry. Merchand waves his wand at the picnic party; they freeze and are then covered by darkness. Merchand then releases the other couple: Kester paces while Precia sits.)*

**PRECIA**

Bles-sed are we, Kester. Any common folk would crave a place in the palace.

**KESTER**

Bles-sed! As a force-fed goose. (*She is about to respond.*) Enough.

**PRECIA**

But... (*Kester silences her for a moment with a look.*) Let me feed you.

**KESTER**

Ah! Plain food. Peasant food. Don't you want meat stewed in oriental spice?

**PRECIA**

Why dream dreams? I'll never be a lady.

**KESTER**

Take my hand. What do you feel?

**PRECIA**

I feel your strength.

**KESTER**

Is that what you love about me?

**PRECIA**

That. And more.

**KESTER**

Take my hand to your face.

**PRECIA**

I smell an honest smell. Sweet grass.

**KESTER**

Sweet horse shit. I stink of my service to the king.

**PRECIA**

You smell of an animal that hates you not.

**KESTER**

*(Pulling his hand away.)* If I were allowed to own just one animal, that served me!... Then... I... I... would... would... *(He falls into sullen silence.)*

**PRECIA**

Can nothing I do please you? I let you take me without the proper sacrament. It won't be long before my belly grows.

**KESTER**

You talk like I would let my son die in your womb. Mark me. Soon, my toil will be my own.

**PRECIA**

What do you mean?

**KESTER**

*(A beat.)* I've changed my mind. You don't need to know. It would only worry you.

**PRECIA**

Why can't I make you see the nub?

**KESTER**

Have you forgotten the story? My innocent father tortured then hung by order of our "good" King who needed any commoner for an example. Because we don't have titles to make us human beings!

**PRECIA**

But they say Prince Daufon is different from his father. That *he* is good and just. You know that until he came of age, he was locked away in the tower with only women as his guides.

**KESTER**

What of it? He's still his father's son. All women are but vessels through which men pass. *(Relenting, taking her hand.)* I know a good lass always fears for her man. But you also must protect him from your doubt. I ... uh... he needs that.

*(She nods.)*

Am I not most rare?

*(She nods.)*

What other serf has taught himself to read? And taught you. Most say education is wasted on a woman. But not I.

**PRECIA**

You are he.

**KESTER**

*(He grabs her by the waist and pulls her toward him. She faintly resists.)* Am I not a man to you anymore?

**PRECIA**

I am yours. That is plain.

**KESTER**

Then why so cold?

**PRECIA**

You misread me. I... I simply wasn't ready for you.

*(Roughly kissing her neck and groping her.)*

**KESTER**

Then be ready now.

**PRECIA**

*(Making an excuse)* Kester... no, not... I'm... later... I... I'm unclean. I'm unclean now.

*(He stops abruptly and pulls away.)*

**KESTER**

What?

**PRECIA**

I'm unclean.

**KESTER**

When?

**PRECIA**

This morning.

**KESTER**

But how can that be. Are you not with child?

**PRECIA**

*(A beat.)* Uh... uh... old woman will say that when the moon is full... uh, the strongest seeds can cause one last bleed because it anchors in the womb. AND... uh, great harm can come to the child-to-be if it over-disturbed by... plunging.

**KESTER**

I've not heard of any of this... These old peasant beliefs, just like my mother would tell me - as if witches and magic were real! *(Trying to convince himself)* I... am not afraid. I am not afraid. *(He forces a laugh.)* Ha. Ha.

*(His body straightens - **this time** he does not grab her.)*

**PRECIA**

You are right to laugh at the old wives' tales. There's a stream up the ridge. I will go wash.



**KESTER**

Good. *(Calling after her.)* But don't take so long that my lust begins to cool!

*(Precia heads offstage to go to the stream. Lights fade out on Kester. Merchand frees the royal party. Dalmandia tries to stuff a cherry into Daufon's unenthusiastic mouth.)*

**DALMANDIA**

You haven't had the best of my fruit yet, my lord.

**DAUFON**

*(Choking on the cherry)* Excuse me, Dalmandia. My head is suddenly flush. I need to cool myself in the brook up yonder.

*(Daufon exits offstage.)*

**DALMANDIA**

How did this tepid man gain the repute of a reckless womanizer? Oh, he needs me, Kavernia. He needs me.

*(The light fades out on the two women. A pool of blue light marks the stream that Precia approaches. She kneels down unhappily. A second pool of light appears. Daufon re-enters. He kneels and looks at his face in a stream eddy.)*

**PRECIA**

Good spring water, you touch so softly.

**DAUFON**

What a greyhound I was at the gate...until my body betrayed me. *(Letting the "water" run down his arms over his body.)* If only this water could pierce my skin and course through my veins to make me clean again.

**MERCHAND**

Two streams bricked apart,  
Time to brook these sad hearts.

*(Merchand is about to wave his wand when Glimm suddenly appears.)*

**GLIMM**

And when they're wet up to here, (*S/he swivels his hips.*) they'll sing moo moo. You know that a love spell is the weakest magic of all. To hang a story on what never lasts is so...*human.*

*(Merchand silently shushes Glimm. S/he waves her/his wand and the two pools of light are joined.)*

**DAUFON**

Maid, I beg your pardon. I didn't see you there. You needn't be afraid.

**PRECIA**

What strange chance.

**DAUFON**

I would say, what pretty magic.

**PRECIA**

Am I dreaming, or are you my Lord?

**DAUFON**

I am a man.

**PRECIA**

*(Almost to herself)* Or a devil in the handsomest form I ever saw.

**DAUFON**

*(Coming closer)* Then perhaps, you are not a maid, but a wood daemon wearing the mask of an angel.

**PRECIA**

Only the devil would see an angel in a maid who cleans piss pots.

**DAUFON**

Were I such shiny metal able to hold your reflection.

**PRECIA**

I think now that you *are* a man. The devil would not suffer so much water for so little shine.

**GLIMM**

*(Snapping his/her fingers, freezing them.)* Now, my turn on this ronde. Let us say, Merchand, that this body of water is not far but near: right between these two hostile camps.

*(Glimm flicks her/his hand and the entire stage is lit.)*

**DAUFON**

That shine is amplified ten-fold by your grace.

**DALMANDIA**

Oh, I think I hear the Prince speaking about me, Kavernia.

**KAVERNIA**

My lady, there is – *(Kavernia gasps never saying “the prince” upon seeing Daufon and Precia.)*

**DALMANDIA**

What is the – *(She gasps upon seeing them, never saying “matter with you?”)*

**KESTER**

Where is – *(He gasps never saying “she?”)*

**DAUFON**

I know I know you not...*(He holds her cheek.)*... but, I do love you.

**PRECIA**

But I cannot hope for my better.

**KESTER**

Shall I beat him and kill her? Or, should I beat her and kill him?

**PRECIA**

If you are the Prince indeed, then you shall have me, but I shall not have you.

*(Kester's advance is struck still by the word "Prince." Meanwhile, Precia looks down. The Prince has moved close and tenderly lifts her chin so that they are looking into each other's eyes – their lips so near.)*

**KESTER**

Not the Prince! *(Kester remains strangely frozen by this realization.)*

**DALMANDIA**

That thick boned, misshapen wench has him smitten.

**DAUFON**

This is most difficult for me...

**KESTER**

Why am I frozen? He's there. I could break his neck.

**DAUFON**

Since I love you, I cannot have you...

**GLIMM**

Eh?

**MERCHAND**

This is going well.

**DAUFON**

I have only lately re-discovered purity. If our joining were a cold political alliance, I would not fear my effect on your well-being.

**PRECIA**

No, it is I who deceives you. I am a maid who has been...well used. *(She looks down in shame.)*

**DAUFON**

The difference between us then, is that your sins have left you sad, while mine have left me polluted. Farewell, sweet maid.

*(Daufon kisses her on the forehead and walks back toward Dalmandia in a daze. Precia watches the Prince.)*

**GLIMM**

I meant for the gent to make a dent;  
Instead, I have a sense of sentiment.

**MERCHAND**

Love is not so simple to lead awry, little bee.

**KESTER**

Precia!

*(Precia is disoriented, seeing Kester now so near when he had been so far. Meanwhile the Prince approaches Dalmandia and Kavernia.)*

**DALMANDIA**

*(To Kavernia)* Don't look at him. Act as if you saw nothing.

**KESTER**

*(To Precia)* So, you were clean enough to want a Prince....

**PRECIA**

What? I walked so far...

**DALMANDIA**

Are you feeling ... refreshed, my lord?

**PRECIA**

...He was the Prince.... Could I forbear him and keep my life?

**DAUFON**

Oh...uh, yes. Yes, I am.

**KESTER**

Want ME girl.

*(Kester grabs her and pulls her toward him.)*

**DALMANDIA**

You seem distracted.

**PRECIA**

I do.

*(Kester crudely kisses her. He picks her up and then lays her on the ground.)*

**DALMANDIA**

My liege?

**DAUFON**

I feel I have flown too close to the sun.

**DALMANDIA**

Flown?

**DAUFON**

*(Giddy and even giggling.)* Oh. I.. I am...in a fever. Oh, excuse me. I... perhaps... to the carriage? Yes. Yes. To the carriage.

*(Daufon exits.)*

**DALMANDIA**

Well, Kavernia, it seems my dreamer is dreaming the wrong dream.

**KESTER**

*(Momentarily halting his ravishing of Precia.)* I'll take my revenge on him yet.

**KAVERNIA**

Don't worry m'lady. The affairs of court will suffocate this infatuation. *(Aside)* But how I hope not!

**DALMANDIA**

No! I'll take the ruby glow off those milky cheeks myself.

**KESTER**

*(Suddenly looking up.)* He will suffer.

**DALMANDIA**

I'll have her sent to serve the palace guard. That should use her up.

**KAVERNIA**

But what if the Prince is drawn not by her body, but by a beauty of a different sort?

**DALMANDIA**

Of course, *you* would dream such a fairy tale.... A woman is tied to her body. If it is used often enough, it becomes broken, and then so does she. But I swear, Kavernia, I and only I will draw from my body, and only in the most exact measure. Look at her. *(Indicating Precia.)* Pathetic. He leads her solely to his own pleasure.

**KESTER**

I'll dig out his heart like a sugar beet.

**DALMANDIA**

Hmmm. But I like his look. Go interrupt them, Kavernia.

**KAVERNIA**

What? Me? But... but...

**DALMANDIA**

Do it. Go.

**KAVERNIA**

What do I say?

**DALMANDIA**

I don't care what you say. I want to give him some useless command.

*(Kavernia tries to jump across the stream but instead wets her feet.)*

**KAVERNIA**

Aaagh! *(Then to Kester.)* Hel-lo. Excuse me. Pardon me. Hello, you two.

*(Precia looks up at her while Kester continues his ravishing.)*

**PRECIA**

Kester.

**KAVERNIA**

I'm sorry, but you see my lady would like - she... Hey, you!

*(Kavernia kicks Kester in the ass.)*

**KESTER**

What the !? You foul porcupine. Can't you find your pleasure, peeping elsewhere?

**KAVERNIA**

I would gladly, but my lady wants you across the stream. Now!

**KESTER**

Oh Really? Your lady *commands* me? I'll go to her - to string her neck. *(He advances toward her.)* What a vision!



**KAVERNIA**

Mind if I sit?

*(Precia nods ascent. Kavernia sits on a stack of books and empties her shoe of "water.")*

**DALMANDIA**

Please carry these things to our carriage.

**KESTER**

For you lady, I would pull the carriage.

**DALMANDIA**

Thank you, but we already have a horse. *(Aside)* This is a stud I'd want in my stable. Pity I have to keep my affairs to the whelps at court.

*(Kester picks up the trunk easily and Dalmandia leads him off.)*

**KAVERNIA**

Here's your chance, sweet maid. Run home before the brute returns.

**PRECIA**

What choice do I have? I am his and he wants me now.

**KAVERNIA**

The trick is to learn to time his wants to yours.

**PRECIA**

He does have a heart underneath.

**KAVERNIA**

We all do, but a pump is not enough.

**PRECIA**

At one time, just one look of him made me burn.... But now he wears me out with his constant needs. *(A beat.)* Tell him where I've gone so he won't be too angry?

**KAVERNIA**

Don't fear.

**GLIMM**

*(Running forward.)* Oh, that's a nice turn, old alchemizer. What delicious heartbreak! In an honest world, these two couples should be cleft and rejoined with the other.

**KAVERNIA**

So true.

**GLIMM**

Of course, it isn't an honest world. *(S/he laughs.)*

**KAVERNIA**

Not at all.

*(Suddenly, they do a slow double take and look at each other. Then they both scream.)*

**GLIMM**

You shouldn't be seeing me.

**KAVERNIA**

I don't want to see you. Help! A wood demon! Heaven help!

*(Kavernia runs into Merchand – one of her/his skull ornaments is right in her face.)*

**KAVERNIA (cont'd)**

A wizard/ess! Oh, merciful God, they're trying to trap me here. Give me strength, by Mary.

**MERCHAND**

Wait. Stay! Now that you know, we must talk...

*(Screaming, Kavernia turns from Merchand and in a panic shoves Glimm out of her way and runs offstage. Glimm and Merchand look at each other. The lights cross fade as the scene shifts.)*

*SCENE IV: a room in the castle.*

**GLIMM**

I don't think that was very funny of you - letting her see; they are meant to be the fools not me.

**MERCHAND**

She has the talent.

**GLIMM**

If she has it, then why didn't she see us before?

**MERCHAND**

We don't always see what we can see.

**GLIMM**

Eewww. Must you blatter out every bit of farina your mind cooks up?

**MERCHAND**

You foul mushroom cap. I tell you, I had nothing to do with it.

**GLIMM**

If you didn't, you should have, and so it counts. That's that. Now be off. My turn.

**MERCHAND**

Oh!! You have to cheat at least once every game. Why should tonight be any different?

**GLIMM**

It shouldn't. No, go take a nap so you can make it through the night.

**MERCHAND**

*(Aside)* It's best I placate her/him now, so that s/he doesn't change her/his focus from these lovers to Kavernia. *(To Glimm, grandly)* Glimm, I will cloister myself for your convenience.

**GLIMM**

Duh. Go!

*(Merchand exits. Glimm is surprised and barely steps out of the way to hide as Precia barrels by, looking quite flushed and agitated. She is carrying a slop bucket.)*

**PRECIA**

If I pace here long enough, the Prince is bound to pass. The palace is not so grand that he can avoid this hall. *(She paces some.)* Oh, what a fool I am! If he sees me with this piss pot, he will completely turn his mind against his heart. As he should. Who am I to dream against fate? Yet, I long to see his sad eyes once more...even if he must hold his nose.

*(She paces off to one side of the stage. Dalmandia and Kavernia enter from the opposite side.)*

**DALMANDIA**

Never ask me "why" again - you are not my equal anymore. You are now as insubstantial as my shadow.

**KAVERNIA**

But m'lady, you won't need me once you are dressed for the Ball. I beg your mercy so I can visit my parent's graves –

**DALMANDIA**

Why? They won't know you're visiting? *(Reacting to Kavernia's facial expression – even though Kavernia tries to hide her hurt.)* Uggh! Fine! I will give you this last satisfaction of knowing "why" I cannot allow you to leave my side. And then no more kindness on my part.

**KAVERNIA**

Yes, m' lady. Thank you.

**DALMANDIA**

When I am troubled, I need to know I can always turn and see you. Then. Then - my confidence is renewed. See? You are indispensable to me. *(Suddenly.)* There is that shrew who bedevils my prince.

**KAVERNIA**

*(Aside, curtsying)* I think you must be looking at a mirror my lady.

*(Precia has sighed and begun to walk toward center stage.  
Dalmandia heads toward her.)*

**DALMANDIA**

You with the piss pot. Keep your place.

**PRECIA**

Forgive me lady, I.... *You* were at the stream today.

**DALMANDIA**

What insolence! Kavernia, do you hear this wretch? *(To Precia)* Purloining pupfish, you dare to spread yourself before our great prince. <sup>5</sup>

**PRECIA**

What can I say, lady, I am no match for you. You outrank me in both position and purulence.

*(Dalmandia gasps.)*

**KAVERNIA**

*(Aside)* Pus! Ha, that's a good one. It seems that sticky love for two flawed men leads to an even stickier hate between two women.

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<sup>5</sup> **purloining** = stealing; *pupfish* = a particular species of the small killifish

**DALMANDIA**

*(Recovering.)* Impudent wench! *(Aside)* How does a maid learn such words? There is something unnatural here. Her ambition is too like mine. I must snare this hare before she becomes rabidly aware.

*(Glimm, giggling, runs forward from his/her perch of books. S/he taps Kavernia on one shoulder while passing her on her other side. Glimm then snaps his/her fingers, locking the other two women in frozen antagonism.)*

**KAVERNIA**

*(Turning to her left.)* Who did that? *(Turning back, and swinging her fist quite late at Glimm...)* Oh, it's YOU! You, slimy snig.<sup>6</sup>

**GLIMM**

I'll take these two brains and swirl them around,  
but leaving the same two bodies on the ground

*(S/he makes a spinning motion with his/her hands and Dalmandia and Precia's bodies twirl around.)*

**KAVERNIA**

Away from here, you...you forest rodent.

**GLIMM**

And a spang for the shabby tabby.

*(Glimm kicks his/her foot slightly back – a sound effect occurs – and an invisible jolt is sent into Kavernia's stomach. She reels back, across the stage.)*

**GLIMM**

And one headache times two for the dullards.

*(Dalmandia's and Precia's heads knock together.)*

**GLIMM**

When you both awake, see things with the other's eyes.

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<sup>6</sup> *snig* = eel

*(Glimm laughs and runs offstage. However, s/he immediately sticks his/her head through the masking to continue observing.)*

**KAVERNIA**

*(To Dalmandia.)* My lady, are you all right? That foaming kelpie – <sup>7</sup>

*(Dalmandia in)* **PRECIA**

*(She screams.)* What vile waters I hold! Kavernia, take this from me.

*(Reflexively, Kavernia turns toward the new Precia and almost follows the order.)*

**KAVERNIA**

Oh, no. I am beaten, but not that beaten; I get orders enough from above to take them from below.

*(Dalmandia in)* **PRECIA**

Have you gone mad?!

*(Precia in)* **DALMANDIA**

I feel rather strange... like I don't know myself at all.

*(Dalmandia in)* **PRECIA**

I am telling you, I will not hold this foul water any longer.

**KAVERNIA**

Do with your water what you will. Let it run down your legs for all I care. *(Kavernia returns her full attention to [Precia in] Dalmandia.)* M'lady, let's go back to your chamber.

*(Dalmandia in)* **PRECIA**

How could you deny me – *(Her rage toward Kavernia is distilled into clarity when she looks at her former body.)* You! You have stolen my beauty. Sorceress. Evil mawkin! <sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> **kelpie** = in Scottish legends, an evil water spirit, usually having the shape of a horse, rejoicing in or causing drownings.

*(Kavernia, understanding the danger, grabs Dalmandia and pulls her offstage.)*

**KAVERNIA**

Hurry, m'lady. Before...

*(Dalmandia in)* **PRECIA**

I will stink you with this piss, bloodworm.

*(Precia chases them offstage. Glimm falls forward onto the stage, laughing. Lights crossfade.)*

**SCENE V:** *Lady Dalmandia's chamber. Kavernia and "Dalmandia" run on.*

**KAVERNIA**

We are safe now.

*(Precia in)* **DALMANDIA**

*(Looking in a mirror.)* I'm so pretty.

**KAVERNIA**

Yes, my lady.

*(Precia in)* **DALMANDIA**

My hands are so soft. My waist so narrow.

**KAVERNIA**

I know my lady. *(Aside)* I think she has fully recovered.

*(Precia in)* **DALMANDIA**

These breasts are so much... So much!

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<sup>8</sup> *mawkin* = usually kitchen maid, but also a cat or a loose, low woman



