

THE DESCENDANTS

A Play in One Act

by

Terence E Jackson

Cast of Characters:

RIVER MAN	African-American male in his early 20's. A former slave, his clothing appears to be very worn.
TRAVELER	Light skinned African-American male in his mid 20's. A former slave owner, he is well dressed in a suit and long dress coat. Now that the war is over and the slaves are free, he is neither wealthy nor poor.
WOMAN/SLAVE II	African-American female in her late 30's A former slave, she is dressed in a once beautiful white dress.
OVERSEER	Caucasian Male. Should be played by the same actor as the Traveler with mask or white face paint.
SLAVE I	African-American male. Should be played by the same actor as the River Man.
SLAVE II	African-American female. Should be played by the same actress as the Woman.

The clothing worn by all the characters in the play should be contemporary with accessories used as a link to the of late 1800's attire such as a lace handkerchief, a hat, etc.

Historic facts pertaining to the play:

The average life expectancy of a slave in late 1880's America was 36 years.

President Abraham Lincoln was shot on April 14, 1865.

General Edmund Kirby Smith, commander of the last Confederate Army surrenders on June 2, 1865, bringing a formal end to the American Civil War.

Anansi (/əˈnɑːnsi/ ə-nahn-see) the trickster is a spider, and is one of the most important characters of West African and Caribbean folklore.

Mawu is the supreme African god of the Fon people of Abomey (Republic of Benin). She is associated with the Moon and clay.

An agogô (Yoruba: agogo, meaning bell) is a single or multiple bell now used throughout the world but with origins in traditional Yoruba music and also in the samba baterias (percussion ensembles). It is used in the ceremonial music of religions in Yorubaland as well as in their new world practice, which are based on beliefs brought by slaves from Africa such as candomblé

Time

One hundred days after the end of the American Civil War.

Scene

Summer in the Deep South. The wee hours of the morning.

The Set

Upstage a large scrim that will act as a projection screen running the entire length of the stage.

Stage left and stage right are covered with overgrown foliage. The floor area in between represents the river and downstage a river bank clearing where the action takes place.

A few non-descript items can be seen lying about. A few lanterns are visible hung on poles in an attempt to help light the clearing.

Emotions appear in the form of colors that are used to tint the deeper black and white visual memories (images) of the characters on the scrim (known here after as the projection screen) throughout the course of the play.

Overall, the atmosphere is somewhat expressionistic and ephemeral.

Video/Audio

Ideally the images on the projected screen should serve to create a visual continuum within the running time of the play. The images may also be shot as live action film for greater effect should budget allow.

When colors are used on the screen they should subtly reflect the emotional state of actors onstage ; The frequency of its use should be left up to the discretion of the director unless noted in the script.

Audio has only been indicated where vital. In general, scenes should be accompanied by sound and or music in order to help maintain the oppressive nature of the play as well as to create the feeling of continuity as the play moves from one scene to the next without having to lose its emotional grip on the audience.

SCENE 1

SETTING: We are at a river bank which rests at a clearing in a thicket somewhere on the outskirts of town.

AT RISE: A full moon can be seen off in the distance. A man made wooden raft can also be seen, resting on the river's bank. The river is unseen although the audience can see a large pole sticking out of the water next to the raft. It is getting very late and the sounds of nature can be heard all around us.

(LIGHTS slowly fade out)

In the dark, the moon shines brightly.

Andy Bey's version of RIVER MAN by Nick Drake begins to play.

We begin to see projected on the screen black and white images of American slavery. The final image as the song begins to come to its conclusion is that of a classic antebellum mansion surrounded by forest.

(LIGHTS rise again)

As this scene slowly begins to fade, and the clearing is once again lit, we are left with only the image of the forest in the distance projected on the screen and the full moon.

Out of breath, the RIVER MAN rushes in. He looks about, as if something or someone might have been following him.

He falls down at the edge of the river bank weeping. Stopping, he rubs water over his head and face.

Sitting up, he quietly turns and faces the audience listening to the sound of the night.

THE RIVER MAN

(Catching his breath)

The rain has stopped. Maybe it is a sign? Yet I fear it is nothing, for what good has it brought me to hope? Nothing... For there is nothing to be found here, except pain and darkness. The never ending darkness clinging to the insides of our mouths and like the air, it is thick and heavy. There is nothing here for this life from which my father and his father and his father's father sprang. We... A people bound by the pain only the Gods can heal. Maybe the Gods have awakened from their sleep on a night like this, when one is alone and filled with the dread of having to face the pain that comes from being empty inside. Yes, maybe the Gods have awakened from their sleep in order to remember how they came to be. How they allowed them to inspect us. To remember how they allowed them to commit their crimes against us. This, that is never ending. The crimes. No, there is nothing and the Gods have turned away in their weakness; Just as this is true of all men. The Gods have turned away as they beat us... Rendering us unable to forgive them. Leaving us unable to forget the atrocities that have been done to we. *(Pauses)* Yes, the Gods may awaken but cannot be forgiven for closing their eyes to the pain that cuts through the flesh. That damages the soul. Must we continue on this path of nonexistence? Must we forever remain invisible? Lost... Oh, the pain of it all. The never ending pain.

(Falls silent)

THE TRAVELER

(From offstage)

I thought I heard weeping. You there...

(The TRAVELER enters from out of the thicket)

Are you the one they call the river man?

(Met with silence)

I say, are you the one they call the river man?

(The TRAVELER turns to go stops and returns.)

Yet, I turned and turn again. The damned fool, I see this is not getting me anywhere and I have been wandering around this forsaken place for hours now. Perhaps I am wrong?

(Looking back towards the direction he has come from. The screen projects images of the TRAVELER making his way through the dense forest.)

THE TRAVELER con't

I shall never find my way. If I am indeed wrong, I shall never find my way back out of this forest. I am lost...

THE RIVER MAN

(Slaps the back of his neck with the palm of his hand.)

Dead!

THE TRAVELER

Has something hurt you?

THE RIVER MAN

(Looks down into his palm.)

Nothing.

THE TRAVELER

My good sir, let us forget that sort of talk. I have business to attend to. So, might you be the one they tell of? Might you indeed be the river man?

THE RIVER MAN

Aye sir, I just might be. Yes, I do believe I be the one they talk of. The one some call the river man.

THE TRAVELER

Very good then. You see, I have been wondering about for quite some time no was not sure if I had taken a wrong turn or not. After all, we seem to be so far away from any living soul. And just when I was about to give up hope I thought I heard what sounded like weeping.

(The RIVER MAN just looks at him.)

Well, it doesn't now. I have found you and we are not lost.

THE TRAVELER con't

(The RIVER MAN turns back to gaze across the water.)

Sir, I am in need of crossing.

THE RIVER MAN

Crossing? Is that so?

(Slaps his neck again and once more looks into the palm of his hand.)

Nothing... Always nothing.

THE TRAVELER

Yes crossing and there will be someone else with me, a woman.

(The RIVER MAN still examining his palm turns to face the TRAVELER but doesn't seem to be paying attention. Projected on the screen we once more see the TRAVELER, two hands exchanging money and The TRAVELER and the WOMAN fleeing the city. Then the screen returns to images of the dense forest.)

Did you hear what I just said? I said there will be a woman traveling with me. Quite mad the woman. Quite mad I'd say. That is all I can tell you of her and her lot. We have been traveling for some time now and yet that is all I know of her. Do you think that strange?

(The RIVER MAN just looks at the TRAVELLER without responding.)

She says she is searching for the truth. Now that is what I would call preposterous. The time of truth has long since come and gone in this God forsaken country and Lincoln has seen fit to free the lowly. There are many such as I who have lost their land and that way of life for the sake of progress. But I do not blame him for plummeting us into this darkness. I am sure he as only done what he feels must be done. Who am I to pass judgement on a dead man? We are merely men and I have never seen a man who could do battle with destiny and win. After all, we all get what we deserve in the end.

(The TRAVELER'S words sting the RIVER MAN.)

THE RIVER MAN

The Gods are indeed cruel, sir.

THE TRAVELLER

The Gods are powerful but it is fate which is cruel. One has to believe that the Gods actions surely are not without cause. Surely that is the reason we find ourselves here where we are Aimlessly wandering in the wilderness?

THE RIVER MAN

Shall we die here? Shall we never celebrate with our loved ones in our own homeland again? Why must we lay immobilized by forces greater than ourselves? We are not cowards and yet so much darkness lay all around us. Oh, the Gods are indeed cruel. So in my lamentation shall I not complain or pass judgement against these Gods who seem hell bent on never allowing us to see our homeland again?

THE TRAVELER

But this is our home. This is our land. Why not allow your spirit to take root in such fertile soil? I say glory be to the Gods. Besides where would you have us go?

THE RIVER MAN

(Agitated)

Ahhh! I do not know. I do believe I heard the voices of our ancestors crying out from within the breeze. We have turned our backs on our own Gods. That is why we must remain here. Already I can feel the chambers of my heart closing. Oh that we might return or be allowed to go down into the warm red clay we may come to call our graves. Nothing good shall come of us being here. Abandoned here as it were. Lost...

THE TRAVELER

Sir, come, look at the beauty around us. This is our destiny. Surely the Gods know what is best? See how perfect the world does seem tonight. Let us not lean into melancholia, for the day has passed and soon we shall see another. Please, let us get down to the business at hand? As I was saying earlier, there is a woman who will be traveling as well. They have told me she is quite mad. They tell me she likes to make false claims of motherhood. They tell me she clings to dreams that have practically faded to nothingness. From what I can gather from her rambling is that she used to be a mammy before this blasted war came along and changed everything and everyone. But again what do I know in my ignorance? As I have said before, we have been traveling for some time now and yet that is all I know of her.

(To himself)

How strange indeed?

THE RIVER MAN

A mammy you say? False claims..? Motherhood? Eenie-Meenie-Minie-Moe step on a crack and ye break po' mammy's back. Now if she holla, let her go, E-I-E-I-O, Catch a nigger by his toe, and if he holla make him pay, fifty dollars every day...

(Laughs to himself but quickly grows silent.)

THE RIVERMAN

But what of the darkness? This never ending darkness. It is coming closer I tell you. Waiting and watching us from there in the trees. *(pointing)* Please, let us speak for once in truth for even you have come to inspect us. To commit the same crimes upon us... You, who are cut from the same cloth as we. Where does it end? The sex of it? The violence of it? You who inside are no different than me. Tell me, what shall we do with it this ugly bale of anger that is following we every move. Watching and waiting... Stinging our nostrils with the release of its foul stench. Covering us with its seeping pus as it waits and watches from there in the trees. Tell me sir, what shall I do with it?

(The TRAVELER frightened doesn't wish to hear anymore.)

THE TRAVELER

I warn you sir, let us not speak of these things. Why it were as if the very words you are so set on speaking have already begun to penetrate the very marrow within my bones... So let us not speak of such things again. You know, shortly after my education at college was finished, Father allowed me to travel to Paris with an English gentleman. Have you ever been there? Paris I mean. No, no, why of course you haven't.

THE RIVER MAN

(Sarcastically)

Why of course you haven't.

THE TRAVELER

We were both young men then. You probably won't believe me but back then I sort of lived a rather wild life. You know, before settling down and taking a wife.

THE RIVER MAN

Yes, they take and you take our women. Black nipples raising... Bellies swelling until the tits produce the milk... Suckled by the white... Suckled by the lightest mouths.

THE RIVERMAN con't

(A slow mist begins to roll in off the water. Startled the RIVER MAN jumps to his feet. Thinking that he hears someone coming through the thicket.)

Aye, who goes there?

THE TRAVELER

(Spooked by the RIVER MAN'S action.)

Where?

THE RIVER MAN

There in the thicket. Is it she that comes?

THE TRAVELER

Where? I hear nothing turning about.

THE RIVER MAN

(Images of a wild animal in the forest are projected on the screen.)

Quiet sir, I fear there is a restlessness creeping about. We are lost as long as we stay here. Turning... Oh, how long have I waited for a peace that I know will never be granted? Why did the Gods have to open these eyes that were once happy being blind? Why?

(Groans and then once again grows silent.)

THE TRAVELER

Why must you continue to unleash this poison upon us, upon the land? Why not extinguish this flame that burns so fiercely within your heart? Surely no good will come of it. For there are some things not even man can control... Why it was you that I heard weeping earlier wasn't it?

(Pauses)

Why do you suddenly stare at me with hungry, superstitious eyes?

THE RIVER MAN

Yes, I was the one you heard weeping. How clever thy tongue does speak to me. You ask why I stare upon you nut dare not ask what I see within you?

THE TRAVELER

(Wishing to change the subject.)

Look at the fog. How slow, almost timid like she comes to dance round us.

THE RIVERMAN

I stare at you because people such as yourself make me uneasy. But again, that is not entirely true. No it is not true at all. The reason I stare at you is because I loathe the way in which you and your kind move about the earth in your regalia of entitlement. Clamoring about to and fro...

(The TRAVELER is taken aback.)

How insensitive you and your kind are to the unhappy memories you have visited upon me.

THE TRAVELER

I propose we leave until it is time to cross. Until it is time to cross over. Why not amuse ourselves by sojourning idling about some neighborhood. Yes, we should take our leave for amusement's sake, until we are unamused any longer. Just for the moment, let us throw off our ghastly responsibilities. Your stare is making me uneasy. For heaven's sake man, let us go.

(The RIVER MAN has been eyeing the TRAVELER. He gets up and walks behind the TRAVELER who stands frozen. Slowly the RIVER MAN starts remove the TRAVELER'S coat.)

THE RIVER MAN

Uneasy, why should you be uneasy? Your face seems filled with anguish. ... Why should you be dressed so completely? I mean, on a night like tonight. Look how you stand before me sweating like a damned hog. Surely you most know that that world as we now it has come and gone. Besides, it's too warm and peaceful a night for one to try and conceal himself. The world has become silent to the ways of men. Having always lived in a time of unrest let us be easy, for the air grows thick and dull.

THE RIVER MAN con't

Let us take refuge in the twilight of the evening, far from the depressiveness of the revealing sunlight. Besides, why should I make you uneasy? Promises broken are the only things that linger uneasily in the air. Are you looking for promises? Is that why you wish to cross over?

THE TRAVELER

No. No. The war is over my brother. These things we dare not speak on have been done in the name of progress. Let us now rejoice and make merry for even though Lincoln is dead he has granted you your freedom. Can't we now let that which has become the past continue to lie in the past? Let us go somewhere. Let us go to a house where they do not mind a man with a ragged shirt or a man with no coat.

(Having removed the TRAVELER'S coat and dropping it to the ground, the RIVER MAN undoes the TRAVELER'S tie and unbuttons his shirt. The RIVER MAN begins to massage his chest but the TRAVELER does not move. His breathing becomes excited as his chest rises and falls.)

THE RIVERMAN

Again I ask you, why you should feel uneasy?

THE TRAVELER

Sir you are right.

THE RIVER MAN

Are not all men created equal? Is it not I who should be afraid. Knowing what you and your kind have done to We. True, me and my kind may seem to be blackguards, but you and others of your respectable class like you are something worse.

THE TRAVELER

My brother, forgive me. We need not go. For here indeed is just a place before us. A place that is as blackguarded as anyone could possibly wish to see.

(The forest scene projected on the screen begins to slowly glow blood red.)

THE RIVER MAN

I thought as much. You know, someone like you could never imagine what you've done to me. Deplorable things... Sick perverted things. You know, it seems to me that the contentment you so lean towards only breeds sadistic behavior. Surely you know the horror I've felt having to live through this tragedy that has been forced upon We due to the nature of our skin. Look at the color of this skin. Why in my homeland it was greatly desired, but here..? In this land, it renders me unable to find a single place of refuge away from the thin, haggard, long haired men, whose sunken fiery eyes fiercely watch over our every move. This is why I have wildly plunged my hand into your shirt. Touching the honey-dewed skin, I am attempting to feel the heap of gold you believe to be your heart.

THE TRAVELER

Your hand is hot and calloused. It feels as if it was made of leather and yet it is heavy as if it were made of lead. But I must admit my mind brings me back to that which is normal. Not abnormal. Man must do what he feels is best for the advancement of the whole. Let us not talk of such things. Those things that did happen... Take the woman I spoke of earlier. She is quite mad I say.

THE RIVER MAN

How I would like to suck the very breath from you.

(Pulls the TRAVELER'S head back towards his mouth)

At this very moment, let us stand together lost the both of us, together in our corroding passion. Let us stand for once as equals against nature for my only desire now is to feel your body shrivel up and grow small in my hands.

THE TRAVELER

(Pulling away The TRAVELER falls to the ground. He quickly redressing. The forest projection slowly begins to return to its natural darkness as if a fire had been put out. The moon slowly fades away.)

No! No I tell you! Look! The shame. The shame.

(Pointing towards the sky)

The moon! Why she has hidden her face. A sign... This world is not built on equality. You must know this? The world has always been one large asylum for the Gods mistakes. We are all lost and this damned war has brought about the ending of time's existence as we know it.

THE RIVER MAN

Still you wear the coat to hide your shame. To hide your secrets within.

THE TRAVELER

Why is there no moon in the sky? Have I been mistaken? Is it not yet night?

THE RIVER MAN

Perhaps she was luckier than I to have found a lover who was willing to satisfy her needs.

THE TRAVELER

Strange that even at night the sun should bake us. Let us end this destructive talking I pray you. Surely nothing good can come of it..? When shall we cross?

THE RIVER MAN

Soon!

THE TRAVELER

Soon?
What of the time?

(Reaching into his pocket for his watch to check the time.)

I must have lost it...

THE RIVER MAN

What have you lost?

THE TRAVELER

My watch.

THE RIVERMAN

Where?

THE TRAVELER

There in the thicket. I must go and retrace my steps before someone comes upon it.

THE RIVER MAN

It is getting late. See how the stars shine on the river's back.

THE TRAVELER

...And what of the fare?

THE RIVER MAN

Enough.

THE TRAVELER

I carry nothing smaller than a ten.

THE RIVER MAN

Then that will do.

THE TRAVELER

Very well then, but we must cross tonight.

THE RIVER MAN

Yes, tonight. We cannot afford to wait until daylight. Besides, I always cross at night.

THE TRAVELER

I shall go then quickly and retrieve it as well as the woman. We shall return together. Prepare yourself for our arrival. Until...

THE RIVER MAN

Aye, until...

(Both men pause staring at one another.)

THE TRAVELER

The moon... The Moon.

(Checks one more time for his watch before heading off.)

Lost... What have I done? What have I done?

(The TRAVELER slowly walks off disappearing into the thicket.)

THE RIVER MAN

(In the silence, the RIVER MAN slaps his neck again.)

Ahh!

(Looking down once more into his palm)

Nothing... Always nothing.

(Fade to black)

END OF SCENE 1

(Sound or musical INTERLUDE I)

SCENE 2

Dream Prequel. It is a sunny southern day.
We are at the Plantation Corporation of America.

On the screen is projected the images of slaves
toiling in the distant fields. They are dressed in
ragged business attire.

(LIGHTS slowly face up)

Upstage we can see two desks stacked up with
white papers and two chairs.
The stage itself is covered with endless piles of
white paper that stops just short of the thicket
till visible on each side of the stage.

The OVERSEER enters. He has a WHIP in hand.
He is followed by two SLAVES who immediately
Go and sit down at the two desks. Each SLAVE
has a briefcase handcuffed to their wrists.
The two SLAVES begin the processing of the
paperwork found on their desks.

THE OVERSEER

Alright you niggers, you heard the man. Let's get to work. You two didn't get this position because of your looks. We're going to need six months of business reports in just three weeks. Which means, we are going have to work ten times harder this year if we hope to get ourselves ahead of the rainy season this year which begins next month.

SLAVE I AND SLAVE II

Yes sir!

*(The OVERSEER turns and walks down center stage
towards screen in order to better supervise the
SLAVES we see projected in the distance. Occasionally
he cracks his whip in an attempt to get the other SLAVES
to work faster. The OVERSEER can be seen pantomiming
his duties. His back is to SLAVE I and SLAVE II.)*

SLAVE I

Well looks like we made it. I don't know about you but I feel pretty good, considering I ain't never traveled this far across the Atlantic. The first thing I'm gonna do when I get my check is get me one o' dem nice houses I hear tell of in a good white neighborhood. Yes sir'ree just 35 more years before before I am looking at retirement. Yes, believe you me, when dat day comes, I'm gettin' my ass away from all those lowlifes.

SLAVE II

Yeah, I hear ya! I just enrolled my kids in dat new Catholic colored school.

SLAVE I

(Laughing)

A Catholic colored school? Lord!

SLAVE II

Yeah chile, we decided to give dat Baptist shit up. The Catholics worship wit more class. Dey don't have no niggers screamin' an hollerin' up and down dey aisles. Yes sir, we done finally made it I'd say and Massa is sho nuff pleased. Why you shoulda seen dat man grinning from ear da ear when I's told 'em.

(Looking around)

But listen, was you able to get me dem blue contact lens I ask you 'bout?

SLAVE I

My buddy was all out o' da blue kind so I got you a green pair. Besides, dey was five dollars cheaper.

(Looks around to make sure no one is looking them slips them to SLAVE II.)

OVERSEER

(Turning back around. Walking back upstage.)

Hey what are you two niggers talking about over there? I done told y'all we ain't got no time for loafing about.

OVERSEER con't

(Addressing audience)

This was a really good idea I had. I mean, all it takes is for one of them to think they have been noticed by one of us and hell the rest will follow. Instead of one we promoted two. How brilliant and idea was that? Now we're thought of as champions of the cause. Promoters for the race!

(Laughing)

An equal opportunity employer..! (Pauses) We'll never have to hire another spade for years to come.

SLAVE I

(Interrupting)

Boss man, do you think I'll be able da get off early on Friday? Ya see my baby girl is graduatin' high school on Friday.

OVERSEER

I'm afraid not Freddie. You see, Jonathan the new overseer, well he's got a baseball game on Friday. Maybe next time...

SLAVE I

Oh, ok boss!

SLAVE II

Well I tells you what, I can't wait for t'morrow...

(Very animated)

Cos' I gets to see my man dis weekend down at ole Massa George's place. Heeey!

(The OVERSEER over hears them talking.)

OVERSEER

Oh Bertie, about this weekend. It must have slipped my mind seeing how we've been working so hard. But Master James is going need you to stay behind and draw up a productivity report for the Ferguson Plantation this weekend.

SLAVE II

Oh dem ain't due for another two months or so. I can get dem done in plenty o' time when I's get back. Dat ain't nuttin' fo Massa James ta worry his pretty lil' head over.

OVERSEER

Well Bertie, I just can't let you go. Now I'm sorry. You're just going to have to do them this weekend and have them on my desk first thing Monday morning. Besides, you know how Master James only likes the way you do the reports.

SLAVE II

Yeah I know but... Massa James promised me I could...

OVERSEER

(Getting angry)

Are you trying to imply that I don't know what I am talking about Bertie?

SLAVE II

(Afraid she might have upset the OVERSEER)

Oh not sir. I... I... Beggin' pardon sir. I didn't mean to...

OVERSEER

Why Bertie, you do like your position here don't you?

SLAVE II

(Timidly)

Why yes sir. It's just that...

OVERSEER

*(Cutting her off. He walks over to her desk.
Grapping hold of her chin to look her in the eyes.)*

Now you listen here missy. I say when you can and cannot take off.

OVERSEER con't

(Menacing)

Master James may own this plantation but I run this motherfucker and nigger, don't you forget it.

(Lets her go of her chin.)

SLAVE II

Yes sir.

*(The OVERSEER composes his self but
SLAVE I and SLAVE II remain frightened.)*

OVERSEER

(Calmly)

Besides Bertie, what have I told you time and time again? You can always count on me to see to it that your needs are being taken care of while you're here? Besides, you can go see that no good nigger husband of yours next year.

(Walks back over to SLAVE II and whispers slyly)

Meet be down by the briar patch in ten minutes.

(Back to his old self)

Alright you nigger, enough with the small talk... Let's get back to work!

(Cracking his whip)

SLAVES I

To work... To work...

OVERSEER

Produce!

SLAVE II

To work

OVERSEER

(Overlapping)

Produce! Produce!

SLAVE I AND SLAVE II

(Overlapping)

and work and work and work...

(Fade to black)

END OF SCENE 2

(Sound or musical INTERLUDE II)

SCENE 3

The river bank.

(LIGHTS slowly fade up)

The River Man is fast asleep. It is clear from his movements he is having a bad dream. On the screen is projected images of lynching's and riots up to present day. The fog continues to roll in.

THE RIVER MAN

(Violently awakens from dreaming)

Ahhh! No more! Oh, the pain... The pain.

(Looking down at his hands)

What am I to do with these? Nothing? What good do thee, when you are unable to protect them or me. Oh the Gods are cruel to give us dreams. How this place does kill.

THE WOMAN

(From offstage)

Are you the river man?

(The WOMAN enters. The two stare at one another.)

You are the river man aren't you?

THE RIVER MAN

Aye madam, are you in needing of cross?

THE WOMAN

Are you psychic? I've never met one of them before. But you know, you really shouldn't be so quick to show off your talent. I don't know about here but in Salem they burn people like you for having such powers.

(A rustling is heard in the thicket. The WOMAN screams throwing herself onto the ground in fear. Slowly she lifts her head.)

THE RIVER MAN

It is nothing. Do I make you uneasy?

THE WOMAN

Uneasy? Good heavens no. They say it's my nerves. They have been shattered as if they were nothing more than broken pieces of glass. My life has been fragmented into a million tiny shards by the things I done seen.

THE RIVERMAN

Most people throw away broken glass.

THE WOMAN

You speak the truth, no?

THE RIVER MAN

What good is a shattered window if it not be repaired before winter come? Are you the mad woman they speak about?

THE WOMAN

Some have said that but I cannot say that I believe myself to be. Their systems fail to recognize the fact that we are different people. After all, what causes one man to breakdown may not have the same effect on another. Wouldn't you agree with me? Am I mad? No sir, I would not say that I am. Just tired... For I am a woman. I am a black woman and they have taken my children away. They have taken them both from out of my hands before they were warm so that I might give them my milk. My precious milk that I had created for my suckling babes. How can I hope to go on knowing my babies are out there somewhere? I tell you, the system has taken them and I can see no way of breaking these chains that have bound me to this place. That was why I screamed... The light of the lanterns is deeming. Perhaps you have some candles we might use. Not because I am mad but because of the night. Because a dark night such as this one must surely be the carrier of many secrets.

(Pointing towards the sky)

Look, even your moon hides her face in shame. For that is not Mawu.

THE WOMAN con't

Even she knows what men can do to womenfolk. Yes, the night often leaves traces of the things that they have done in the dark. The groping fingers around the waist. Why tonight even the air seems filled with the smell of being taken. They have turned me into the thing before you and they have taken them away like Moses was taken through the rushes. They have taken them like the rushing of the wind takes the falling leaves. For it was mine eyes indeed that were forced to watch as tiny pieces of myself fell away only to be lost in the darkness with each powerful thrust of their hips. Oh, feet please do not fail me. I have been running for so long. Lord, surely you will give me the strength to cross this black river. You know I have run all the way here. My eyes have not betrayed me in finding this place so I have to believe that the Gods will help us find a way out of this misery. But we shall need more light I tell you, if we are to find the truth.

(The WOMAN laughs savagely)

THE RIVER MAN

Woman, Be still!

THE WOMAN

But what have I done that the moon should hide in shame? Let me cross for surely the gods have not ruled so unfairly to allow me to die here?

THE RIVER MAN

The gods are cruel to have taken us so far away from our homeland.

THE WOMAN

But what of my children? What have you done with my children?

THE RIVER MAN

Your children. You liar! You had no children. You were merely mammy to the white ones.

THE WOMAN

No, liar..! Lair..! Oh, go far away from me so that I may die in peace.

(The RIVER MAN pulls out a dagger and rushes towards the WOMAN who screams hysterically before fainting. Realizing what he has almost done, the RIVER MAN runs to the waters edge and throws the dagger into the water. Silence)

THE RIVERMAN

What magic is this that Anansi plays upon me? I wait, yet receive nothing. I have struck the water with the butt of the dagger and yet she refuses to speak.

(A bird is heard calling in the distance. The RIVER MAN covers his ears. The sound of cattle bells and rattling beaded calabashes can be heard coming closer and closer.)

Be still..! Be still..!

(Everything once again falls silent except for the natural sounds of nature.)

Oh, cruel Gods, I know it is you that have come in the hopes of wreaking havoc upon us. Who refuse to adorn ourselves with the marks made by the earth's cool grey.

(Turns and looks at the WOMAN lying unconscious on the ground)

Forever... I fear we are lost because we have hidden ourselves away from our way.

We are lost... We are lost...

(Runs off into the thicket)

(Fade to black)

END OF SCENE 3

(Sound or musical INTERLUDE III)

SCENE 4

The dense thicket.

On the screen is projected the images thunder and storm clouds. Occasionally the sky is illuminated by the flash of lighting. The rumbling of the clouds can also occasionally be heard off in the distance.

(LIGHTS slowly fade up)

THE RIVER MAN

(In a state of hysteria)

Ah, how my heart is beating fast. Tonight I have heard the rustling as they passed through this land of the living. The mist tonight comes not from the water but from the realm of the ghost world. *(The sound of thunder)*

There... The cracking will surely open the heavens and cleanse us.

(Holds out his hands)

Nothing... Oh cruel Gods, who's hearts have become hardened like stones. Will you not take pity upon us and allow your teardrops to fall?

(Nothing happens)

Is there no one to help me? Is there not one who can remove this smell... This awful smell that lingers upon the skin. It is the scent of a decay. A people decaying.... Lost... Oh if only I could hold on a little longer.

(Looking around startled)

Who is there? Is there someone there, talking in the distances.

(Pauses)

I must be still. *(Listening)* Nothing... There is only darkness and tonight the air is so thick that it feels as if my very breath were is being taken from me. God, what great madness have you brought before my eyes. But is this madness? How can that be when they know what they have done. Therefore this must be a dream or some sort of grand illusion from which I dare not wake.

THE RIVER MAN con't

(Addressing the heavens)

Is it destiny that wills this? Oh great Mawu, will you not even look upon me? I must be still. ...
And what of the darkness? This never ending darkness. I'm ashamed... Ashamed.

*(Becomes quiet as he takes out a necklace that
He has been concealing underneath his shirt.)*

The key to a broken memory. A broken past. Try and remember... Nothing. Yet I cling to it so
dearly, my little broken memory. You are all that keeps me bound to the past. It is getting late. It
is getting very late. Back. Yes, I must go back.

(Placing the necklace back inside his shirt)

One must go on... Oh, but the stench of it... It is getting late... Everywhere... The stench.
The stench of it...

(Fade to black)

END OF SCENE 4

(Sound or musical INTERLUDE IV)

SCENE 5

The clearing at the river bank.

On the screen is still projected the images
thunder and storm clouds.
Occasionally the sky is still illuminated by
flashes of lighting. The rumbling of the
clouds can also still be occasionally be
heard off in the distance.

(LIGHTS slowly fade up)

THE WOMAN

How strange I should have fainted. I am grateful that you came along and found me. The Mawu, where do you suppose she has gone?

THE TRAVELLER

(Gently)

Why I suppose she has gone off searching the back alleys tonight. Perhaps she is looking for someone who will never come or simply out searching for something she has lost. The nature of which is a stranger to me. It is getting late.

(Growing a bit agitated)

My God, where on earth do you suppose that damned river man is? Surely he can see the hour is getting late? Why should we because bound here by the hand of time because he has decided to act in haste?

THE WOMAN

Yes, it is getting very late and I would agree that the hour is upon us. But is it not in reality the illusion of time that often binds us together? *(The rumbling of thunder is heard)*

The Gods must be very hungry tonight. Listen how their stomachs growl like that of baby birds squawking for their mother's return. Let us not speak of such things for the follie of the Gods is at once simplistic and complicated. No, let us listen quiet like in spirit for his footsteps. Surely, he will be coming soon from there in the distance. There, I think I hear him now.

THE TRAVELER

I am afraid your imagination is preying upon you tonight. No one is there. Listen and you will hear the stillness the night.

THE WOMAN

Twinkle, twinkle, little star. How I wonder where you are. Up above the world so high.
Like a diamond in the sky. When the blazing sun is gone. When he nothing shines upon.
Then you show your little light. Twinkle, twinkle, all the night.

Then the traveler in the dark. Thanks you for your tiny spark. He could not see which way to go.
If you did not twinkle so...

THE TRAVELER

(To himself)

The poor ole fool. Life is hard enough as it is. But for you, how will the night end? Will you ever be restored to sanity?

THE WOMAN

In the dark blue sky you keep. Often through my curtains peep. For you never shut your eye.
Till the sun is in the sky. And as your bright and tiny spark. Lights the traveler in the dark.
Twinkle, twinkle, little star. Though I know not where you are. How I wonder where you are.

THE TRAVELER

What say you?

THE WOMAN

Nothing more than a gift to my children long ago. How strange that I have found myself here.

THE TRAVELER

(With genuine compassion)

Why not rest gentle woman? Yours has indeed been a long journey.

THE WOMAN

How very kind you care. It is indeed getting late and I have died in a real way. So you see, it no longer matters. After all, I have been dead for quite some time now. This is merely my soul you see searching now. For someone such as I, there is no longer a difference between what you call the day and the night. Gone are my children and I shall never know them again. My sweet little babies taken from me before my hands had even grown cold. I am too far away from where I originally began for them to ever find me. I have grown weary of it all. The running about to and fro. The present always one step ahead of the past... Tonight I shall freely cross over and I won't be back. Not again. Not anymore. I am tired and they are gone. Taken from me...

THE TRAVELER

Have care. We will be on our way soon enough, so why not rest until?

THE WOMAN

I don't like care for him very much.

THE TRAVELER

Who?

THE WOMAN

This river man..! I've got a brilliant idea. Why not let us take the raft and be on our way? Wouldn't that fix his wagon?

(Laughing to herself)

THE TRAVELER

(Had been looking into the thicket)

I'm sorry. What was that you say?

THE WOMAN

Nothing... It was nothing. After all, what can a dead woman really say that hasn't already been said by the living?

(The TRAVELER thinks he has heard something.)

THE TRAVELER

There!

THE WOMAN

I hear nothing.

THE TRAVELER

There in the water. That slithering sound.

(Goes to gaze into the water)

How strange, first the moon now the water. Why should it be so still? Come see, it casts no reflection. It is as still as a corpse. But how can that be? Look at how the trees do sway to the rhythm of the approaching storm.

(The WOMAN goes over to take a look.)

THE WOMAN

Surely this is a sign. It is so dark and murky that not even the paleness of your skin is reflected. Come, let us go please. Let us go.

THE TRAVELER

But why?

THE WOMAN

Because I fear we are lost and I'm afraid. I'm afraid of this place. This water... Come, we shall find no rest here. Mawu has gone away.

(Grabbing hold of the traveler's arm)

Let us leave here quickly before he returns. Before it is too late...

THE TRAVELER

I beg of you have care! Have care!

(A bolt of lightning crashes through the night sky just as The RIVER MAN is coming out of the thicket.)

THE RIVER MAN

I have returned!

(Startling the WOMAN and the TRAVELER. The WOMAN collapses into the arms of the TRAVELER.)

(Fade to black)

END OF SCENE 5

(Sound or musical INTERLUDE V)

SCENE 6

The raft. We are crossing. A gently rain has begun to fall. Faint drumming can be heard coming from off in the distance. A lantern is attached to the front of the raft. The fog has grown thicker.

The WOMAN can be seen lying next to the TRAVELLER who is sitting down.
The WOMAN is covered by a blanket.
The RIVER MAN stands at the other end of the raft slowly pushing a pole in and out of the water.

THE TRAVELER

How I wish they would stop that damned mambo jumbo. It makes me uneasy. It is unnatural I say. That sort of primitive behavior... I tell you it makes me uneasy. It always has. What do you suppose it means? Nothing..?

(The drumming suddenly stops and a bell is heard off in the distance.)

THE RIVER MAN

The slaves are ringing the agogô, in hopes of summoning the Gods of our homeland.

(The bell stops ringing and for a time all is silent. The RIVER MAN eventually looks over at the TRAVELER and the WOMAN.)

She should be locked up once we get to the other side.

THE TRAVELER

I guess... I mean, who are we to judge? Her intentions are good. She claims to have had children. Claims they were taken from her when they were born. We both know that wouldn't be far from the truth. I mean we both know it wouldn't be unbelievable. I sold children off to pay my way. That was how it was. That was the business at hand. You yourself have said that the world has become silent to the ways of man. That there are things we dare not speak on that were done in the name of progress. Surely you, being one of her kind must be able to find sympathy for her position in life.

THE RIVER MAN

The Gods are indeed restless gods. Why else would the planets need to spin other than to amuse them as they play out endless games with the souls of men. Trouble has always come for me. Born to no mother or father, you are right, who am I to question the Gods? Certainly not a poor creature such as myself or that woman lying there? No, I shall sit back and shut-up. Let those who would know better dictate the course of our existence. Well we have done as you have asked and now, we are unable to remember the days of our youth. Rendered impotent, we are left spitting nursery rhymes to the moon.

(The drumming resumes again.)

THE TRAVELER

Why does the drumming begin again?

THE RIVER MAN

The Gods are coming. The Gods are coming to descend upon their children tonight. They are coming all the way from Africa drawn by the sound of drumming and the dancing of their children. Libations have been poured and ancient symbols have been drawn in the very earth to act as beacons for the summoning of the spirits of the ancestors. The ancient ones from whom we are descended. They are beating the drums because their rhythms are giving life to the Gods and in return the Gods shall give them strength to carry on in this forsaken place.

THE TRAVELER

Have you no relations to bind yourself to?

THE RIVER MAN

None sir. Only a necklace that has been around my neck since the earliest time I can remember being sent to the block.

(The RIVER MAN takes the necklace from underneath his shirt and shows it to the TRAVELER.)

Where I got it from, I couldn't rightfully say. It's just something that has been with me my whole life. To tell you the truth, I would have to say it was the only thing I ever really owned.

(The TRAVELER is silent. He looks down at the WOMAN then back at the RIVER MAN.)

THE TRAVELER

My God, what a fool I have been. A fool...

THE RIVER MAN

I say, what are you mumbling about?

THE TRAVELER

I must talk with you.

THE RIVER MAN

Well if you ask me, seems like all you do is talk. Let us be still a while. The air grows heavy and I feel as if I can hardly catch hold my breath. It always gets like that at this point in the journey.

THE TRAVELER

But I must talk to you. I must! For a great truth hovers about us waiting to be told.

THE RIVER MAN

A truth..? Sir there is no truth. Not in this world. There is only nothingness.

THE TRAVELER

No, you are wrong. You see this woman...

THE RIVER MAN

Yes I know. She has been awfully quiet. We will be across soon. We should wake her so she is not startled by our arrival.

THE TRAVELER

Yes! You are right but perhaps...

(Tries to wake the WOMAN.)

Ahhh! She is cold. She is so very cold. She must have taken ill?

(The RIVER MAN puts down his pole and goes over to the WOMAN.)

THE RIVER MAN

No... She is dead.

THE TRAVELER

The poor soul. I am already dead she said.

(The RIVER MAN grabs hold of the WOMAN.)

Wait... What are you doing?

THE RIVER MAN

We must go on. What use is she to you anymore? Besides, the weight slows our crossing. Sir, just look at her, who would come looking for the likes of she?

(The RIVER MAN pushes her body off the raft.)

THE TRAVELER

Oh God, no. No... I think I am going to be sick.

*(The TRAVELER vomits into the water.
The RIVER MAN leans over the other side of
the raft to watch the body of the WOMAN sink.)*

THE RIVER MAN

Look... See how slowly she sinks. Already she fades from my memory. Sir, believe me when I say that she shall linger in our minds no more than it takes us to cross over. I can still see her... There... There.. Nothing. There is nothing.

(The RIVER MAN rises and resumes paddling the raft. Silence.)

Sir?

THE TRAVELER

Yes.

THE RIVER MAN

What was it you wanted to talk to me about back there?

THE TRAVELER

I... I... Nothing. It was nothing.

THE RIVER MAN

Nothing! Always nothing... We will have crossed over soon.

THE TRAVELER

Will we..? That's good I suppose. Twinkle, twinkle, little star. How I wonder where you are. Up above the world so high. Like a diamond in the sky. When the blazing sun is gone. When he nothing shines upon... Then the traveler in the dark. Thanks you for your tiny spark. He could not see which way to go. If you did not twinkle so.

*(Both men are lost in their own reverie.
Addressing the blackness of the night,
their words start to overlap.)*

THE RIVER MAN

(To himself)

Darkness... Never ending dark.... Coming closer... Closer... Closer.

THE TRAVELER

In the dark blue sky you keep... Lights the traveler in the dark. Twinkle, twinkle, little star. Though I know not where you are. Though I know not where you are.

*(The beating sounds of the drum
become louder and louder.)*

(Fade to black)

THE END