

THE DUCHESS

THE SERPENT

AND

THE CROW

*A Play By
Harald Octavia Toksværd*



THE DUCHESS, THE SERPENT AND THE
CROW

An Allegory of An Allegory

by

Harald Octavia Toksværd

Characters

THE CROW: is a creature of unidentifiable age or gender, other than vaguely young and vaguely masculine (at least in dress). They embody the traveler; wearing a dusty black suit jacket over a dusty black vest and a wrinkled white button-up shirt, dusty boot-cut jeans, cowboy boots, and a dusty old black hat. The only thing they carry with them other than their clothes is a dusty black guitar case. THE CROW can be played by several different actors between scenes, ideally changing the gender and stature of the character without losing its core identity. THE CROW is an amnesiac and a prophet; a force of unreality travelling endlessly along the back of THE SERPENT. Akin to The Mole and Prince Myshkin, they display a kind of fundamental naiveté, like they were just born, like an alien. They have a past, but it is disjointed and fragmented, with no real linearity. They have no name other than the title they bestow on themselves in the first scene. They have no future other than THE PARTY. They know certain facts about themselves, but they are always negations; THE CROW learns about themselves along with the audience. THE CROW is always curious, inquisitive and mild, but never harmless; their questions have barbs and are never without reason. People's lives and fantasies fall apart with THE CROW present.

THE RUN-AWAY: is a young woman in a tattered and dirtied wedding gown, holding a veil in one hand. She speaks quickly and sharply, not paying much attention to those around her. She is always in a hurry, always a couple of sentences further into the conversation than her partner. Her body language speaks of equal parts drive and fear - she is running away but is sure there's a good reason for it. We never see her betray any real emotion. She speaks in a mid-atlantic accent, akin to Audrey Hepburn or Elizabeth Taylor, a 50's Hollywood starlet.

THE PROSPECTOR: is an old man wearing worn and dirty prospector's clothes and a lamp on his forehead. He does not speak and does not face the audience, simply digs endlessly in the dirt using only his hands.

THE GIANT: is a broad-shouldered, well-kempt man, short-haired and dressed in jeans, suspenders, an undershirt and an open button-up. He's boisterous, always smiling and speaks with almost comical self-confidence. As he speaks to THE CROW, he keeps picking up his pickaxe and going for a swing, only to put it down again as he thinks of something important to say. He speaks in a Texan drawl, like his eponymous Rock Hudson character.

THE SINNER: is a bank-robber and a scoundrel. He is drunk, wearing a blue workman's shirt, slacks and suspenders. He laughs at almost everything, an almost manic but honestly joyful laugh. He speaks deliberately, clearly, but as if he's playing the part of himself, acting the sinner. He is having

fun. He is Clyde Barrow and D. B. Cooper, speaking like an East Coast gangster or a fast-talking 40's journalist.

THE ROADSIDE DEVIL: is androgynous, with sharp, feminine features but dressed in a three-piece pin-striped suit. Slicked back hair, sharp nails, piercing eyes. When they're in their ace, they're fast-talking and alluring, all charm and wit - but when they lose their cool, they suddenly seem tired, done with it, like a diva exiting the stage after a long night. They speak somewhat like the cliché of a silver-tongued film agent. They move like a leaf on the wind, sexual and fluid.

THE MOLECHILD: is a naked child wearing a tan cowboy hat. He is matter-of-fact and straightforward, rarely looking his counterpart in the eye. Instead, he studies his feet as he squats, or one of his two toys. He doesn't necessarily speak with the cadence of a child, or at least, his language isn't that of one. He is broken, and so speaks with little emotion. He sees clearly and is among the only characters to not recognize THE CROW as a man.

THE PREACHER: is a man in black robes and white collar, holding a tattered, black book. He speaks in a high-minded Kentucky drawl, obviously a wordsmith and proud of it. Charming but grave, he fluctuates seamlessly between sorrowful contemplation and fire-and-brimstone pontificating.

THE KILLER: is dressed in a bloodstained white t-shirt and jeans, his hair wild and unkempt, his skin dirty and bloodied. He speaks in an Appalachian dialect, clearly working class, and cries with obviously exaggerated dramatics.

THE WAGONEER: is an older lady, perhaps a drag queen, dressed like an aging cabaret star. Corset, boa, feathers, countless rings and armbands, thick and dramatic makeup. She rides a covered wagon made of interconnected human bodies crawling in formation along the floor, grunting and heaving as they move, while she plays the mandolin, leaning back in her seat of human flesh. She has the motherly but savage cadence of a queen, a jazz singer, a circus director, reminiscent of Dorian Corey.

THE OLDTIMER and THE NEWCOMER: are, respectively, an old man and a young girl. THE OLDTIMER is identical in costume to THE PROSPECTOR, while THE NEWCOMER wears either a white cotton dress or overalls. THE OLDTIMER speaks in a heavy Western accent, like an old Montana gold digger. THE NEWCOMER speaks naively and childishly, perhaps akin to Laura Ingalls. He is wizened and calm, yet enthusiastic, she is excited and curious.

THE DUCHESS: is grand, self-indulgent and entirely self-confident. She is decidedly feminine, but tends to androgyny, like a Dr. Frank'n'Furter or Luciferian character. Can be played by any and all genders, as long as she is feminine and imposing. Her costume is left up to direction, but it should

be grand, elegant and recognizably Victorian. She speaks like a cabaret star, like Oscar Wilde, like a killer and a hostess. THE DUCHESS does not move while she speaks, and she stands only in poses - for each of her lines, she should switch her pose, like if she was vogueing, taking a step closer to THE CROW as she does, robotic but elegant, inhuman but graceful.

SCENE

The back of the Serpent, an endless highway stretching through the desert. This image can be made as clear as direction wishes - either a fully recreated highway running across stage from left to right surrounded by desert sands, or a bare blackbox. There may be a sign by the side of the road that changes between scenes. There should be a few rocks or a barrier that can be sat on, stood on and otherwise interacted with.

SOUND

A riff or theme of heavily reverbed, possibly echoed, lap-steel guitar, perhaps accompanied by mouth harp - the piece should be recognizably Western and quietly eerie, reminiscent of Morricone or Bacalov. How far this is implemented, and whether scenes should be accompanied by ambient sound is left up to direction.

ACTORS

The play can technically be performed by as few as 4, or as many as 12 players, but should ideally be somewhere between 4 and 6. Most of the characters are gendered, but this has no bearing on casting; it would be perfectly beholden to the play's spirit to have every character played by someone of a different gender to how they are written, if deemed necessary or practical.

SCENE 1: THE CROW enters

An endless highway stretches through the desert. Dusty, worn grey, set against stark yellows and browns. Lit as if by a deep, red-orange sunrise, the road sits eternal here. There may be a sign by the side of the road, stating its name or speed limit; either way, the sign changes and cannot be trusted, just as the road stays the same. A moment. Then, the sound of soft whistling; a melody vaguely Western in origin, but unidentifiable. It is the kind of whistle one makes when alone and worried about nothing. Enter from right, THE CROW: whistling, one hand carrying the guitar case, one hand in their pocket, walking without a care. They walk to center stage, where they hesitate. They stop, take a breath, put the guitar down so they can lean on it. They look towards the audience.

THE CROW:

It's a long way, you know. A really, really long way. It has to be. Otherwise, there'd be no point. Not much meaning in a road that ends. Roads have to be endless. That's their romance. And so the journey must be as well. But I get tired, sometimes. I used to have a horse, I'm pretty sure. Don't know where it went. Maybe they couldn't afford it. They do shit everywhere. And they're huge. So it's just me and the road, now. Road, road, road.

(Pause, as they see something off stage to the left.)

There's a crow here, though. Just over there. Crows are very important. They talk a lot. They mean a lot of things, but no one is really sure what. But they're black and proud and pretty, in a scoundrel-ish sort of way. Tricksters. I think I'm a lot like a crow. They'll write a lot of songs about me, but I won't care. I just sit there, by the side of the road on a fence post, meaning things. Delineating time, or grief, or something. Maybe I'm a bad omen, I don't know. Maybe I'm the crow. Maybe. Oh well.

SCENE 2: THE RUN-AWAY

THE CROW squats down by the side of the road, laying down their guitar case flat, like they're about to open it. Enter stage left, *THE RUN-AWAY*. Looking back over her shoulder, stumbling, bewildered. She doesn't see *THE CROW* until she trips over their guitar case, falling down and breaking a heel. Before she acknowledges them, she swears loudly, tearing off her shoes and throwing them angrily off stage. She puts her face in her hands. *THE CROW* watches her with inquisitive surprise, forgetting their guitar.

THE RUN-AWAY:

FUCK! Fucking shit. I needed those. Bullshit fucking heels.

(She turns to THE CROW.)

And where do you get off sitting in the middle of the road like that? YOU

(She points an accusatory finger.)

owe me a pair of shoes. I needed those.

THE CROW:

What for?

THE RUN-AWAY:

For running, you nitwit. Maybe walking someday. Perhaps even a leisurely stroll, if I'm lucky. That's what shoes are for, isn't it?

THE CROW:

I suppose.

THE RUN-AWAY:

Well, you owe me a pair.

THE CROW:

I don't have any. Other than the ones I'm wearing. And they're boots, not shoes.

THE RUN-AWAY:

I don't want your crusty old boots. Fuck you, you know that. Wait.

(THE RUN-AWAY gets up suddenly, pointing down towards THE CROW. THE CROW instinctually gets up with her, taking a step back, mirroring her)

you're him!''

THE CROW:

I don't think so.

THE RUN-AWAY:

Yes, yes! You're him! The stranger!

THE CROW:

The stranger to whom?

THE RUN-AWAY:

Oh, quit your quarreling. I went to a fortune teller. A good one, a real one, not one of those quacks selling two-bit prophecies on the side of the street. And she told me that I would meet a dark stranger, a tall and handsome man.

THE CROW:

I'm not a man.

THE RUN-AWAY:

(Not listening.)

She said that he would sweep me off my feet and make me real, really real, that he was everything I was looking for, and GOD have I been looking.

THE CROW:

Is that why you ran away?

THE RUN-AWAY:

Ran away? What do you mean, ran away? Why do you think I've run away?

(A pause, as they both look down on her wedding gown.)

Oh, this? I always wear this.

(It is unclear if she is lying.)

Just in case, you know.

THE CROW:

In case of what?

THE RUN-AWAY:

Well, in case of YOU, of course!

THE CROW:

I don't think I'm a stranger. Well, I don't think I'm YOUR stranger.

THE RUN-AWAY:

(Looking them over.)

Come to think of it, you're not that tall, are you?

(She touches their face.)

Kind of pale, too. Maybe you aren't him.

THE CROW:

I'm sorry.

THE RUN-AWAY:

(Suddenly emotional, a tinge of desperation.)

Would you like to be?

THE CROW:

I'm sorry.

THE RUN-AWAY:

Oh well, it doesn't matter. You owe me a pair of shoes, though.

THE CROW:

I'll see if I can find some.

THE RUN-AWAY:

Fine, fine. Well, alright. You going somewhere?

THE CROW:

Yes.

THE RUN-AWAY:

Good. Good. It's very important to be going somewhere. Real life-changing stuff. Otherwise, you're going nowhere, of course, and that won't do at all. It's tedious, is what it is, just tedious. Speaking of, I really gotta run.

(THE RUN-AWAY leans in and kisses the crow briefly on the cheek. She pauses for a moment, lost in thought.)

No, no, not right at all. Not right at all.

THE CROW lifts a hand hesitatingly in goodbye, as THE RUN-AWAY hurries off-stage right. They pick up their guitar case and start walking off toward left of stage. Lights.

SCENE 2.5: THE ROAD.

THE CROW strolls alone from stage right to left. A spring in their step, whistling again. As they leave stage left, they immediately appear from stage right. This happens a few times, as heavily reverbed guitars play. At one point, they stop, seemingly spotting something in the dirt. They squat down and pick it up, polish it on their lapel, hold it up against the light. They get up and take a wary look around, before pocketing it. But before they leave stage left again, they change their mind, pull it out of their pocket and throw it back in the sand with a little shake of their head.

SCENE 3: THE GIANT & THE PROSPECTOR

Enter THE CROW, stage right. By the side of the road are two men, THE GIANT and THE PROSPECTOR. THE GIANT, broad and proud, wields a pickaxe that he swings into the ground rhythmically and deliberately. THE PROSPECTOR squats next to him with his back to the audience, digging with his hands. THE CROW begins to walk past them, watching curiously, when THE GIANT speaks, not looking at them.

THE GIANT:

Play us a song, won't ya, boy? Nothing like a song to get the day's work started!

THE CROW:

(Looks down at the guitar case as if surprised it's there.)

I don't think I know any.

THE GIANT:

(Still swinging.)

Oh, I'm sure ya do. Everyone knows a song or three. Something your mother sang for you as a babe.

THE CROW:

Everyone might, but I don't. What're you doing?

THE GIANT:

Digging, boy!

THE CROW:

Digging for what?

THE GIANT:

Why, digging for oil, of course! The blood of the earth, we maim her for our pleasure!

THE CROW:

Both of you?

THE GIANT:

*(Looks down and over at THE PROSPECTOR,
as if just realizing he's there. A laugh.)*

Well, I don't rightly know what this old coot's digging for. But he's been at it a long damn time, I can tell you that much. He's got spirit, no doubt about that! Not finding much, though, I don't think. But me, I'm digging for oil!

THE CROW:

What do you need oil for?

THE GIANT:

*(Stops his swinging, sets down the
pickaxe, looks at THE CROW.)*

Why, to run the machines, of course! Big, hulking, black machines, fat as a mountain, far as the eye can see, that's right! I'm a do'er, you see. A man of action! Always have been.

(Pause.)

Are you a man of action, boy?

THE CROW:

I'm not a man.

THE GIANT:

You're not a lout, are ya? A no-good lay-about visionless wastrel?

*(He moves closer to THE CROW as he
speaks.)*

An idler, a rake, spendthrift, squanderer, vagabond, vagrant, profligate waste of space and air? Are ya? Huh?

THE CROW:

I'm going to a party.

THE GIANT:

HA! A party. Now ain't that something.

(Half speaking to himself.)

Going to a party. I went to parties once, you know! Real proper shin-digs. Even threw one or two myself - good ones, too! But I'm a man of action, now, a do'er. I realized there ain't no sense in wasting your life going to parties, when you could be digging for oil.

THE CROW:

Maybe you're right.

THE GIANT:

You know, boy, you start digging now, you might be just in time for the gusher!

THE CROW:

And when's that?

THE GIANT:

Ah, any moment now. But that's the magic of it, the real crux! No one ever knows. Might be just this moment, might be a thousand years from now. But it'll come, it will! And when it does, I'll be a giant.

THE CROW:

You want to be a giant?

THE GIANT:

Well, that's all a man can do, isn't it, boy? Grow himself as large as he can, big as a mountain! Imma be a million feet tall one day, ten million, looking out across all the world - and they'll all say 'that there, that's a giant. A real man of action.' And they'll be right, too! That's the secret boy.

Ya gotta grow, big as you damn well can. You're born a louse,
but you die a monument. That's living!

*(He turns around and starts swinging
again, as if inspired.)*

THE CROW:

I don't think I'd like to be all that big. There's this party
I have to go to.

THE GIANT:

(Not listening.)

Play us that song, now, won't ya, boy? A working man's song,
something that'll get the blood boiling and the oil gushing.

*THE CROW looks down at their guitar case
and over at THE GIANT, realizing that he's
not paying attention. They start whistling
and walking off stage to the left while THE
PROSPECTOR digs and THE GIANT swings.
Lights.*

SCENE 3.5: THE ROAD.

THE CROW repeats their walking cycle from right to left. At some point, they stop, as if seeing something off stage right.

THE CROW:

See? There it is. When you see a crow perched on a fence post, you want to believe it will follow you. Hop from post to post and croak at you from time to time. But it almost never does. The crow is not your friend. There. It flies away, and you are no richer than you were - just as alone as ever. You and the road. Road road road.

Exit stage left.

SCENE 4: THE SINNER

Lights. THE CROW enters from stage right. By the side of the road sits THE SINNER by a picnic table. On the table sits a Tommy Gun and a bottle of whiskey. THE SINNER has his hand on the gun, and regularly drinks from the whiskey. Next to the table is a comically large hemp sack with a dollar-sign painted on. As soon as THE CROW enters, THE SINNER lifts up the gun, pointing it at THE CROW.

THE SINNER:

STICK 'EM UP, PAL! THIS HERE'S A ROBBERY!

(THE CROW slowly, confusedly sets down the guitar case and lifts their hands in the air innocently.

THE SINNER starts laughing and puts the gun down, but keeps it pointing toward THE CROW, with his hand on it.)

Ah, I'm just kiddin', pal, sorry about that. I'm a joker, it's what I do. Got me into a lotta trouble, but it's all in good fun. Come on, sit down, get comfortable.

THE CROW:

(Hesitantly walks over and sits down by the table.)

I really can't stay long. There's this party-

THE SINNER:

Yes, yes, we're all running from time, pal, that's just the way it is. Now, give me your name.

(He aggressively points his gun at THE CROW, then realizes his mistake and offers his non-gun-holding hand in greeting instead.)

THE CROW:

I.. don't think I have one.

THE SINNER:

Oh boy, I should've known! My apologies, I did think I recognized you from somewhere! You're The Man With No Name!

THE CROW:

I'm not a man.

THE SINNER:

You say that, but I see it clear as day. Look at that scowl, those haunting eyes! Real killer with a heart of gold.

(Suddenly aggressive, paranoid.)

You have killed before, I take it?

THE CROW:

I wouldn't know how. What's your name, then?

THE SINNER:

In my business we go by titles, pal, never by name. They call me The Sinner of Saint's Road - or the Saint of All Sinners. That part's a matter of perspective, really.

THE CROW:

Pleasure to meet you.

THE SINNER:

The pleasure's all mine.

(Again, he suddenly turns aggressive.)

ALL pleasure is *all* mine. Tell me, pal, are you a sinner or a saint? A creature of the night, or a goody two-shoes bastion of truth, justice and the American way?

THE CROW:

I'm not sure. Haven't really had time to figure that out yet.

THE SINNER:

Time's got nothing to do with it, pal. Just a true sense of unrefined gusto and/or gumption and the will to shape your destiny by hand - or by violence, if required.

THE CROW:

Is it a very important thing to know?

THE SINNER:

Only thing that's important is to *move*, pal. But one day or the other the question is gonna ask itself, and it won't be as handsomely charming and benevolent as I.

(Points the gun at THE CROW aggressively.)

Gun to your head - sinner or sinnée, victim or violator?

THE CROW:

I.. I don't know. I don't know how I'm supposed to know.

THE SINNER:

(Suddenly jovial again.)

That tracks, pal - busy makin' friends and gunning down enemies, I'm sure. I do recommend the path of sin, though, but I am, of course, slightly biased in these matters. Then again,

(he slaps the bag of money.)

I am now filthy, stinking rich, so no reason to play favorites anymore. What kind of a creature are you, anyhow, Man With No Name, who is no man and gives no name?

THE CROW:

Just a character, really. I'm playing a man, I think, but that seems to be more of a question of aesthetics. I'm going to visit The Duchess.

THE SINNER:

Never heard of her, and let me tell ya, pal, I know EVERYBODY. I'm sure you'll have a grand old time. And so you travel the mighty back of the Serpent, looking for meaning, truth and whiskey.

(He offers the bottle.)

Whiskey?

THE CROW:

(Drinks.)

I don't know much about snakes.

THE SINNER:

(Aggressively takes back the bottle.)

Not a snake, pal, the Serpent. And of course you know him, you're standing on him! Right here, on the great gray back of the great gray beast. Crusher of mountains, cleaver of oceans, choking the Earth in his concrete embrace, poisoning each of us in each of our ways! Consumer of aluminum and blood and flesh, vast and grand and terrible! Gotta love him, can't kill him, but he'll eat a shrimp like you right up. Then again, them's the stakes and we're the chips, no point pontificating further. Whiskey?

THE CROW:

(Drinks.)

Alright then, I guess I am. I have a long way to go.

THE SINNER:

(Aggressively takes back the bottle.)

I'd say you and me both, pal, but I'm done running! I'm a man of means now, done being mean, more man than ever. Well, you take this, then -

(offers the whiskey)

where I'm going, I won't need it.

THE CROW takes the whiskey and walks off stage left. Lights.

SCENE 4.5: THE ROAD.

THE CROW enters from stage right, guitar case in one hand and whiskey bottle in the other. They walk wantonly across stage and take a deep swig right before exiting and entering again from stage right. They walk, drink, walk, drink. Their steps get more unsure, they stumble. There is a little dance between the bottle and THE CROW - they look not exactly elated, not exactly sad.

THE CROW:

(Swinging bottle, slurring.)

Whiskey is a symbol, of course. Not a drink at all. It is a tool -

(Hiccup.)

of narrative. Were it any different, it would be very dangerous -

(Hiccup.)

indeed.

They sit down heavily and drink.

THE CROW:

(Pointing an accusatory finger at the bottle.)

You -

(Hiccup.)

are a tool!

Over the span of a minute, they finish the bottle, throwing it off stage. For a moment, it seems they are about to get up, but they collapse again, and fall asleep. Lights.

SCENE 5: THE ROADSIDE DEVIL

THE CROW enters from stage right. By the side of the road stands THE ROADSIDE DEVIL, half-leaning on a guitar case very much like THE CROW's. They're snapping a slow rhythm, looking out across the distance. When they see THE CROW, they jump, lose their cool for a second, and scramble to regain a nonchalant posture, testing out a few, pretending not to see them, and - finally finding one - addresses THE CROW.

THE ROADSIDE DEVIL:

Hey there, kid.

(THE CROW does not hear them, lost in thought.)

Hey, hey kid.

(They snap at THE CROW.)

THE CROW:

Hello.

THE ROADSIDE DEVIL:

How's it goin', kid?

THE CROW:

I'm going to a party.

THE ROADSIDE DEVIL:

Oh, a party, huh? Ain't you just top of the walk. Real risin' star, I can tell.

THE CROW:

I don't know about that. Maybe I am.

THE ROADSIDE DEVIL:

Oh, you are, not a doubt in my mind, kid.

(They take several quick steps forward,

*take THE CROW's empty hand, studies it,
sniffs it.)*

You're a bonafide old time guitarman, aren't ya?

THE CROW:

Not a man.

THE ROADSIDE DEVIL:

Oh you are, I can tell, kid. But it's a hard walk out there, real school of hard knocks. Ain't easy being a small fry in a house full of double bacon cheeseburgers, is it, kid? You walk the walk, talk the fame and eat the pussies, but none of it's ever good enough, is it, kid? Not good enough for them, not good enough for you, it's a circus out there, too many clowns and not enough acrobats, isn't that right, kid? Life's a highway, not a roundabout, and you been running on fumes, cuttin' the brakes, drivin' blind. But kid,

(pause.)

baby,

(pause.)

don't you worry that pretty little head of yours; do I have a proposition for you.

THE CROW:

You're the Devil, aren't you?

THE ROADSIDE DEVIL:

What? What-

*(they look down, suddenly seeing the
guitar case THE CROW's carrying.)*

Oh, you GOTTA be kiddin' me.

*(They take a couple angry steps away from
THE CROW, their hand on their forehead.)*

DAMN IT. Do you KNOW how long I been standing out here, like a post in a pond? Do you know? FOREVER, that's how damn long. And you've already been snatched like a stalk of fine corn, swept up like a goat in a twister. Damn it.

(They put their hands on their hips, look

tired into the middle distance.)

A devil, by the way. Not THE. I don't run the place; I just work here.

THE CROW:

I met one of you, once.

(Gestures towards the guitar case.)

They gave me this.

THE ROADSIDE DEVIL:

Yes, well, I can tell. Now, tell me, what the hell do I have to do to score one lousy little soul in this lousy old desert, huh? I used to BE someone, you know, big and starlight glittering, real important-like. Not anymore, I say. Not anymore.

THE CROW:

What do you need souls for, anyway?

THE ROADSIDE DEVIL:

Well, that's the job, isn't it? Ya catch some poor lout workin' his way down the highway, ya cut a quick deal, ya take the soul. For gambling, what else? Gotta gamble. Give 'im the golden hands, the touch of pure hellfire in his step, and he goes off and gets good and big and fat to eat. That's the job.

THE CROW:

For the devil, you sound a lot like a Protestant.

THE ROADSIDE DEVIL:

A devil, kid, not THE. And I am, of course - we all are. What else? Wouldn't be a filthy Catholic, that's for sure.

THE CROW:

I'm sorry I don't have a soul to give you. Don't think I would if I did, either way.

THE ROADSIDE DEVIL:

That's fair, kid, that's fair. Now, what's this party you're on about?

THE CROW:

I'm going to see The Duchess. I was invited, I think.

THE ROADSIDE DEVIL:

(Their eyes go large, something sinister plays about their face.)

The Duchess, huh? Now ain't that something. You really are special, kid. Not a lotta invites go out from that party, you know. Lord knows no one ever invited me.

THE CROW:

Maybe I am.

(Looks down at themselves.)

I don't feel very special, though. Why wouldn't she invite you?

THE ROADSIDE DEVIL:

You don't get it, do you, kid? You have a certain something that those of my persuasion.. lack.

THE CROW:

What's that?

THE ROADSIDE DEVIL:

(It seems there is something they are not saying.)

In a word, kid - *plasticity*. You ever open that case?

THE CROW:

No. I've never tried.

THE ROADSIDE DEVIL:

I figured. Straight as an arrow, thick as day-old molasses, aren't you. Well, try this:

*(They put down their guitar case flat
on the ground.)*

Open it for me, will you?

THE CROW:

*(Gets down on a knee, but they struggle
with the clasps of the case.)*

It doesn't open.

THE ROADSIDE DEVIL:

Not for me, it doesn't. Yours will. That's the difference. Careful not to lose that little bit of self out there on the road, kid. It's a very long walk to where you're headed.

THE CROW:

I think I'd have to find it to lose it.

THE ROADSIDE DEVIL:

You would think that.

THE CROW:

I.. think I should go.

THE ROADSIDE DEVIL:

Oh, you go on, kid. Go right on, and don't stop for no one. I'll be here, waiting for a sick old soul to flit on by.

*They blow a kiss to THE CROW and get back
into their original posture, leaning on the
guitar case.*

THE CROW exits from stage left. Lights.

SCENE 5.5: THE ROAD

THE CROW walks a round or two. As they walk, they look suspiciously over their shoulder, as if to check that no one is watching. Then, they stop to pose like *THE ROADSIDE DEVIL*, putting on exaggerated cool airs. They snap a slow rhythm in the air and start moving around stage awkwardly imitating *THE ROADSIDE DEVIL*.

THE CROW:

Hey kid. You got the goods. You know what I mean, kid? Kid. Lemme have your soul, why don't ya? You weren't using it, kid. Hey, kid. Hi there. Don't you look lost like a.. like a mole rat in a maze. Sad like a.. sad little guy. You just come with me, huh, and I will show you the goods. That you have. You are the one with the goods, kid, and I will show them. To you. Kid.

With a despondent shake of their head, they give up and start walking.

SCENE 6: THE MOLECHILD

THE CROW enters stage right. On the road sits a naked child wearing a tan cowboy hat. In front of him is a broken hand mirror and a very worn teddy bear. The child is squatting, shielding himself from the sun, looking down sorrowfully at his belongings. He may be sobbing. THE CROW walks up.

THE CROW:

You're a child.

THE MOLECHILD:

I'm a man, now. I killed my mother and buried my toy in the sand.

THE CROW:

You don't look like much of a man.

THE MOLECHILD:

Neither do you.

THE CROW:

I'm not. Just an image, sort of. Kind of a wanderer, you know. I'm going to this party.

THE MOLECHILD:

I don't think I'm going anywhere.

THE CROW:

What are you doing all the way out here?

THE MOLECHILD:

My dad left me here. He was a cowboy, kind of. And a killer. He dressed in black, just like you, and shot people when he wanted to.

THE CROW:

Why'd he leave you?

THE MOLECHILD:

That's what fathers do.

THE CROW:

So where is he now?

THE MOLECHILD:

Out saving the world, I think. Or gaining enlightenment. It's kind of vague. He had to die first, and then dig all the way into the center of the earth, and find the mole people there, and dig his way out again, to save them. But they all die in the end. It's all very self-indulgent.

THE CROW:

He sounds like an important man.

THE MOLECHILD:

(Studying the broken hand mirror.)

He is, to some. But mostly a product of his time, I think. Doesn't matter, anyhow. I don't think I'll be able to kill him in the end.

THE CROW:

Do you have to kill him?

THE MOLECHILD:

That's what sons do.

THE CROW:

I don't think I'd like to kill anyone.

THE MOLECHILD:

You're lucky you don't have a father, then.

THE CROW:

I used to have a horse.

THE MOLECHILD:

(Not listening.)

You have to kill your father or it won't be cyclical. The story has to be a circle or it's not going anywhere. Either that or it goes too far. It's one of those two, I can't remember. Anyways, it was very popular at the time. Lot of religious stuff as well, but not in a serious kind of way.

THE CROW:

The road isn't a circle, is it?

THE MOLECHILD:

No, but it ought to be. All good roads are, and all good stories. You know, the Serpent is supposed to bite its own tail. Otherwise, it's just a snake. Do you have a gun?

THE CROW:

No.

THE MOLECHILD:

And no horse either. You wouldn't make a very good dad.

THE CROW:

I think you're right.

THE MOLECHILD:

Well, can you bring me along anyways? I'm scared, and cold. I don't want to die out here.

THE CROW:

I don't think I can, I'm sorry. I only have the one invitation.

THE MOLECHILD:

That's okay. I won't die, anyhow. Just sit here for a bit, and then go off into the sunset. You have to, too, you know.

THE CROW:

Have to what?

THE MOLECHILD:

Have to go off into the sunset. Like a cowboy. If you don't have a gun and you don't have a horse, you can at least do that. You kiss me on the forehead, and don't say anything, and then go off into the sunset.

THE CROW:

It's not night yet, though.

THE MOLECHILD:

It will be. Just a second.

The light turns from bright to a deep orange.

Now, see?

THE CROW nods understandingly and leans down, kissing THE MOLECHILD on the forehead, and, after hesitating for a second, walking off stage left. THE MOLECHILD sits back alone, picking up the teddy and looking at it intently before throwing it away. Lights.

SCENE 6.5: THE ROAD.

THE CROW comes walking across stage as they find the discarded teddy bear. A moment of confusion, as space and direction seem to lose their coherence. Then, they lean down and pick it up, looking at it intently before stuffing it in their jacket and walking on.

SCENE 7: THE PREACHER AND THE KILLER

On the stage are two people: THE KILLER, sitting on his knees sobbing over a pile of assorted bones on the road, and THE PREACHER, pacing back and forth with a black, leatherbound book held in front of him, mumbling verses.

THE CROW enters from stage right, and as THE PREACHER notices them, he stops his pacing, immediately standing himself in between THE CROW and THE KILLER, and then takes a few steps forward, his hand raised in warning.

THE PREACHER:

Stop right there, my son! A man's salvation is a rather private matter.

THE CROW:

(Looking over at THE KILLER, past THE PREACHER.)

He doesn't look very saved.

THE PREACHER:

Well, it's a process. He's repenting.

(Shouting back towards THE KILLER.)

Aren't you, my son?

THE KILLER:

(Crying, holding up a pair of random bones.)

YES, YES, I REPENT!

THE PREACHER:

(Addressing THE CROW again.)

There, you see? He's repenting.

THE CROW:

Well, what's he repenting for?

THE PREACHER:

It is a sad tale, a real calamitous series of just gravely miserable events, my son. Nothing you want any part of. And it is, as I will underline once more, a private matter.

THE CROW:

I didn't mean to snoop. I'm just travelling through.

THE PREACHER:

Yes, yes, I'm sure you are. That's what they all say, isn't it? All these gawkers and rubbernecks, all clamoring for a taste of the awful and mad. Sounds like you have a bit of repenting to do yourself, child.

THE CROW:

I have nothing to confess.

THE PREACHER:

Ah, no one cares a bit about their immortal soul anymore, that's the truth of it.

(Pointing back at THE KILLER.)

But he does! Don't you, now?

THE KILLER:

YES, YES! PLEASE, SAVE MY PITIFUL, DAMNED SOUL!

THE PREACHER:

I will, I will, in due time. I always do.

(He starts to turn, but then looks back at THE CROW conspiringly.)

He killed his wife, you see. Killed her dead.

THE KILLER:

I KILLED HER, THAT'S RIGHT! KILLED HER DEAD!

THE PREACHER:

Terrible state of affairs, really. They were very happy, as all onlookers would gladly bear witness to.

THE KILLER:

I LOVED HER, DAMN IT!

THE PREACHER:

But you know how these things happen.

THE CROW:

I really don't.

THE PREACHER:

Oh, you know how it goes. One thing leads to another. All it takes is a soul black as peat, and one bad night.

THE KILLER:

MY SOUL! MY SOUL! MY POOR, PITIFUL SOUL!

THE CROW:

I'll take you on your word, then.

(They try to get around THE PREACHER as if they were moving on, but THE PREACHER jumps back and gets in front of them again.)

THE PREACHER:

Nothing to be done for her now, the poor girl. So pretty, too, a real looker. And sweet as apple pie. But alas, I must do my work, reaping the harvest of sin and all. It is what I was called to do.

THE KILLER:

REAP ME, PLEASE!

THE CROW:

Okay, then.

*(Again, THE CROW tries to move on,
but THE PREACHER gets in front.)*

THE PREACHER:

Why, you don't happen, as things are, to be a righteous
wringer of balladry, do you, my son?

THE CROW:

I doubt it.

THE PREACHER:

Oh, well, yes of course you are!

(Looking THE CROW up and down.)

I recognize you, don't I? From every grand stage and ol' opry
in this here land. Why, you're the Man in Black!

THE CROW:

I'm not.

THE PREACHER:

Sure y'are! Look at you!

*(THE CROW looks down at themselves and
up at THE PREACHER.)*

A dead ringer. Well, not as dead as this here murderous
monstrosity's wife, but dead enough! See, I was just
wondering-

THE KILLER:

PLEASE, PLEASE, ABSOLVE ME!

THE PREACHER:

Not now, damn it. Darn it, I mean.

(Addressing THE CROW again.)

See, it is my clear and conscientious professional opinion,
as a chosen saver of souls appointed by the powers that be -
and they do be, let me remind you of that - that what would

truly salve this man's poor blackened soul is a sort of narrative bow, if you know what I mean. A storied ending. A little lyrical je ne sais quoi to wrap things up all neat and pretty.

THE CROW:

I don't know.

THE PREACHER:

I think it would help not just this man accept and repent for his crimes, but the whole local community -

(gestures out towards nothing.)

if there was a sort of easily accessible musical shorthand to make sense of it all. A folksy little dirge, you understand? A verse of god and death and country music. A.. murder ballad, if you will.

THE CROW:

I'm not much of a songwriter, I'm afraid. Sorry about that.

(Again, THE CROW tries to remove themselves, but this time, THE KILLER jumps up, spilling bones everywhere, holding a pair. He jumps in front of THE CROW, grabs their collar.)

THE KILLER:

PLEASE, SIR! Just a little song to make sense of it all! To give her some peace! It- it don't even have to be a song, just a verse! A poem! Barely a stanza would be plenty! For my soul, sir!

THE PREACHER:

Come now, look how he grovels, look how he begs! Can you truly refuse this man's salvation?

THE CROW:

(Pulling themselves violently from the hands of THE KILLER.)

I really have to go, I have a previous engagement.

(They pull the teddy bear out of their coat and push it on THE KILLER as they push him away.)

Maybe try a twelve bar, huh!

THE CROW exits hurriedly stage left. THE KILLER and THE PREACHER are left, looking despondent and angry, respectively.

SCENE 7.5: THE ROAD.

THE CROW walks a few rounds across stage, stopping to look back over their shoulder, and out across the horizon. In their pocket, they find that the bottle of whiskey from *THE SINNER* has magically reappeared. They drink and walk and slowly - barely a whisper at first, but then with increasing confidence - they begin to sing.

THE CROW:

I'm just walking down that track,
I've got tears in my eyes,
Trying to read this letter from my home.
And if this train runs me right,
I'll be home tomorrow night,
'Cause I'm 900 miles from my home.
I am a poor wayfaring stranger,
Just travelling through this world of woe,
Yet there's no sickness, toil or danger,
In that bright land to which I go.
She's got a face like the side of a mountain,
Bright star shining in her hair,
Eyes going deeper than hell,
And a rattlesnake glare,
The ground where she treads,
Turns to gold and the flowers to ash,
From her footsteps,
The sky rips asunder and tidal waves crash,
Oh Diana,
Take me home.

Lights.

SCENE 8: THE WAGONEER

Lights. THE CROW stands mid stage, at the edge of the road, hitching for a ride. From stage right emerges the sound of multiple grunts, bare hands and knees colliding with the floor. A strumming mandolin, and song. THE WAGONEER enters from stage right, sitting atop a wagon made of nude human bodies, slowly inching forward. She sings BLUE MOON discordantly along with her mandolin. When the wagon reaches THE CROW, she stops playing, pulling on the hair of one of the bodies, and it stops moving.

THE WAGONEER:

You there, child! Where're you headed?

THE CROW:

Headed west.

THE WAGONEER:

Aren't we all, child? You're a long way from home, aren't you?

THE CROW:

I don't know. I might be.

THE WAGONEER:

Well, well. You a friend of the Serpent?

THE CROW:

I'm not anyone's friend. I met a child, a while back. I could be his friend.

THE WAGONEER:

Yes, yes, I saw the child. Pitiful thing. Should've put him out of his misery, you should. Nothing to do about it now, I suppose. A comrade of children and thieves, then?

THE CROW:

I met the Saint of All Sinners. And a man looking to make himself a Giant.

THE WAGONEER:

Looking to make themselves rich, more like, I imagine?

THE CROW:

The Sinner had managed. He seemed very happy.

THE WAGONEER:

Let me tell you one of the grand old secrets that come with grand old age, child. Any man seeking to make himself rich is afraid, not of poverty, but of death. He believes, always, that the cold, imperishable padding of hard cash can protect the soft, giving flesh beneath it. Of course, it never does. Your sinner is no different; some men are born afraid of death, while others learn to know it later. But they all seek riches, riches, riches. Money does not die, it does not rot. Money is life made permanent, tangible. If it cannot sustain life, it can create it, perhaps preserve its image. Death is all-powerful, so they must counter it with the most powerful thing they know. Mammon is not a demon of greed, child. He is lord of fear. But -

(*pause.*)

you have not answered my question - are you friend, foe or lover of the great gray thing upon which we ride these wild winds? That's the only thing that matters.

THE CROW:

He tolerates me, I think.

THE WAGONEER:

He *tolerates* everyone, dear. Does he love you?

THE CROW:

He's brought me this far.

THE WAGONEER:

(Suddenly cold.)

That was a trick question. The Serpent doesn't love anyone. Have you given to him in sacrifice?

THE CROW:

I had a horse, once.

THE WAGONEER:

I suppose that's good enough. And now I suppose you want a ride?

THE CROW:

I'd like that. I've come a long way.

THE WAGONEER:

Well, as you can see, my vehicle really only accommodates one. Though I suppose we could become as one, and then it would be all the same, if you'd like.

THE CROW:

I think I'd like to stay myself, if that's alright.

THE WAGONEER:

(Laughs harshly.)

Yes, yes, that's the problem with all of them, isn't it? No sense of identity, really, no sense of drama. An everyman, dead and empty and so busy being everyone he ends up a nobody. All self and no sensation, you know? Now, tell me, you wouldn't happen to be going to the Party, would you?

THE CROW:

Yes. I got an invitation, I think.

THE WAGONEER:

Well, they'll just invite anyone these days, won't they?

THE CROW:

Do you know The Duchess?

THE WAGONEER:

Know her?! I would count her as nothing less than a close, personal friend. A compatriot, even! A dear and more-than-passing acquaintance. Oh, how many nights I've spent lounging in her boudoir, how many days in her luscious gardens! I miss her every day, child. But tell me -

(Pause.)

how do YOU know The Duchess?

THE CROW:

Well, I'm not sure, actually. I'm supposed to go to this party-

THE WAGONEER:

Yes, I understood as much. A blind invitation, then. Isn't that something? How times change. No standards anymore. And how do you plan to get there, if I may ask?

THE CROW:

Well, I was hoping for a ride. But I guess I'll just walk it. I have good boots.

THE WAGONEER:

And not much to carry either, I suppose. Barely a past, pathetic little smear of a future, and whatever you think that is.

(She gestures to the guitar case.)

I'm sure you think that's going to be very important later on, don't you? Well, I'll tell you a secret - nothing's very important, dear. It's all cabaret, or whatever it is they say. C'est la vie, Sisyphus is as happy as a happy little clam. Just gotta *sell it*, that's the real kicker. Sell it to them wholesale and all neatly wrapped up, dressed in starlight and jazz, and you have yourself a show. That's it. On this road of roads, we all walk alone, child. Except, of course, for those of us who ride. You have a good trip, now.

(Pause, as she pulls on the hair of

one of the bodies and the wagon starts moving.)

Perhaps I'll see you tonight.''

THE WAGONEER exits stage left with her wagon, as *THE CROW* puts up their thumb again, only to give up rather quickly. Once again, they set down their guitar case and sit down on one knee, as if about to open it. They unlatch two clasps, but then hesitate, shake their head, close the clasps again. They get up and start walking stage left.

SCENE 9: THE OLDTIMER AND THE NEWCOMER

In the middle of the stage stands an old, bearded man, THE OLDTIMER, with his thumb out, smiling, an old banjo by his side. THE CROW enters from stage right, and THE OLDTIMER immediately takes this thumb down.

THE OLDTIMER:

There y'are, kid! I been waiting for.. well, forever. Delineations of time are getting a little hazy in my autumn years. Well, let's be honest, it's practically midwinter.

THE CROW:

(Looking up and around.)

I think it's supposed to be Summer. Maybe Spring.

THE OLDTIMER:

It's a metaphor, kid. So as we don't have to say the D-word - get's spookier by the year, you know.

(Laughs. Walks up to THE CROW, puts a hand on their shoulder.)

Either way, it's about time.

THE CROW:

You know me?

THE OLDTIMER:

Well, of course I KNOW you!

(Leaning in conspiratorially.)

You're sort of the main character 'round these parts, you know. Though I'm not supposed to say.

THE CROW:

Then you probably shouldn't say.

THE OLDTIMER:

Ah, well, they're used to it. The borders of narrative cohesion get a little.. soft all the way out here. Come now, I'll show ya.

(THE OLDTIMER takes THE CROW by the elbow and leads them out stage left.)

See, as it is, I'm a symbol of age and the road, a sort of wizened scholar of the Serpent.

(The two exit stage left and immediately enter again from stage right as the lights go up and down quickly; THE CROW now played by another actor, and THE OLDTIMER replaced by THE NEWCOMER, carrying a lyre. She continues speaking as if she was the same person.)

But look at me now! I'm a symbol of innocence and purity - it's a little lazy, honestly, but you work with what you have, isn't that right!

THE CROW:

This seems unnecessarily confusing.

THE NEWCOMER:

Hey, you're the one who walked all the way here. Should've stayed backstage if you weren't looking to get walloped!

THE CROW:

I don't think that was really an option. Is there a point to all this?

THE NEWCOMER:

Sure, of course! Well, no, but that really isn't dependent on us. It's all egregious - that's a five-dollar word, by the way, both terribly bad and entirely outstanding. Either way, we have a little further to go.

(THE NEWCOMER once again leads THE CROW out through stage left, and once again they reemerge from stage right, as the original THE CROW and THE OLDTIMER.)

THE OLDTIMER:

Wait, no, this ain't right. Just a minute.

(He backs up, pulling THE CROW with him out through stage right. The lights go down, and they enter again as the lights go up. There are now two THE CROW's accompanied by both THE OLDTIMER and THE NEWCOMER, and a picnic table in the middle of the road. On the picnic table is a pile of bones, a broken hand mirror and a high heeled shoe. The two THE CROW's speak and act in unison, but THE OLDTIMER and THE NEWCOMER switch in between and in the middle of sentences.)

THE OLDTIMER and THE NEWCOMER:

Much better! Now things are really getting too strange for comfort.

THE CROWS:

(Obviously uncomfortable.)

This doesn't seem right at all.

THE OLDTIMER and THE NEWCOMER:

Ah, but if you hope to make it to your fated destination in one piece / you gotta split up real good first. Them's the rules / we don't make them / we just act our part.

THE CROWS:

Okay, then. What now?

THE OLDTIMER and THE NEWCOMER:

Now, we talk. You're right on the cusp, kid. You keep talking about this marvelous party / but you don't seem too sure of what you're getting yourself into.

THE CROWS:

I guess I'm not. It's just that you need *some* kind of destination. If you are to be a wanderer, that is, a traveler. Otherwise, it all seems kinda silly.

THE OLDTIMER and THE NEWCOMER:

It does / and it is! But there could still be a point to it.
The Duchess / what do you know about her?

THE CROWS:

Nothing, really. She's supposed to be very pretty. And very important.

THE OLDTIMER and THE NEWCOMER:

That's right / that's right. Now, you take that guitar case there and set it up on the table. Go on!

(THE CROWS hesitatingly lift up their guitar cases, as THE OLDTIMER and THE NEWCOMER dramatically sweep off the bones, the hand mirror and the shoe. THE CROWS look at each other, realizing the table doesn't fit their two cases. THE OLDTIMER and THE NEWCOMER also realize; THE OLDTIMER scratches his beard while THE NEWCOMER scratches her head.)

Alright, maybe that was too much of the good stuff.

(Addressing one of THE CROWS.)

You there / you go on ahead. They'll catch up in due time.

(One of THE CROWS confusedly picks up their guitar case and walks off stage left with a hesitant little wave. THE CROW that is left also waves nervously.)

Now, the case.

(THE CROW places the guitar case on the picnic table. They hesitate.)

Go on. Open it up.

(THE CROW opens the clasps and opens up the case so the lid obscures its contents to the audience.)

THE CROW:

It's a guitar.

THE OLDTIMER and THE NEWCOMER:

That's right, it's a guitar. But they don't know that. Less'n you play it. Not much point in a guitar that ain't ever played. Do you see?

THE CROW:

I guess so.

THE OLDTIMER and THE NEWCOMER:

(Closes the lid of the case again, to the surprise of THE CROW.)

Good / perfect! Then you're ready. Just a moment, now.

(THE OLDTIMER and THE NEWCOMER walk to the back edge of stage left, and are each handed a spear and a helmet, which they wield and wear, suddenly standing like two royal guards at each side of the stage left exit. THE NEWCOMER lifts up her helmet, winking at THE CROW.)

There's a test, you see.

THE CROW:

(Picking up their guitar case and walking over to stand opposite the two guards.)

What's the test?

THE OLDTIMER and THE NEWCOMER:

(Now speaking very solemnly, officially, with mock affectation.)

Questions! The test is questions!

THE CROW:

Alright.

THE OLDTIMER and THE NEWCOMER:

Now! Are you true of heart and soul?

THE CROW:

No.

THE OLDTIMER and THE NEWCOMER:

Are you filled with love for your fellow man?

THE CROW:

Not really.

THE OLDTIMER and THE NEWCOMER:

Have you travelled to the very edges of the world and seen all there is to see, becoming as much of a person as you possibly could along the way?

THE CROW:

I've just been on this one road, really.

THE OLDTIMER and THE NEWCOMER:

(Moving to the side so THE CROW can step through.)

Good enough! Safe travels, traveler.

THE CROW exits stage left. Lights.

SCENE 10: THE DUCHESS

THE CROW enters from stage right to an empty road, in much the same way as in SCENE 1. Whistling, walking to the middle of the stage and leaning on the guitar case.

THE CROW:

It is a very long way. All roads are endless. That's their romance. Road, road, road. You have to keep travelling, that's what the traveler does. But I get tired, sometimes. I miss my horse, sometimes. My home, and my parents, if I ever had any. But it is the way it is. Just gotta keep walking.

(THE DUCHESS enters, either carried by a stagehand or wheeled in on a little cart, perhaps accompanied by a tinny, dissonant fanfare. She is in pose like the Venus of Arles, not moving. THE CROW sees her and looks distressed. A pause.)

THE DUCHESS:

(Her head turning, but staying in pose.)

Why hello, darling. You finally made it.

THE CROW:

Who are you?

THE DUCHESS:

The Duchess, of course. Pleased to make your acquaintance.

THE CROW:

You can't be The Duchess.

THE DUCHESS:

I think I would know if I wasn't, darling.

THE CROW:

You're not supposed to be here.

THE DUCHESS:

Why, of course I am. It is, after all, my party, and you who have deigned to finally show up - late, might I add.

THE CROW:

(Visibly distressed, shaking their head.)

No, that doesn't make sense. You're not supposed to be shown. You're a figure of speech. A narrative tool.

THE DUCHESS:

(Condescendingly.)

A destination?

THE CROW:

Yes, right. A destination. But the road is endless.

THE DUCHESS:

All roads end, darling. Otherwise, they'd be roundabouts.

THE CROW:

But I'm the wanderer, the traveler. The-

THE DUCHESS:

The Crow, yes, of course. You're the Crow.

(As THE CROW is mentioned, a stuffed crow is tossed haphazardly onto stage. It lies motionless and dead. Both THE CROW and THE DUCHESS look down on it.)

THE DUCHESS:

See? There it is. There you are.

THE CROW:

*(Carefully kicks the stuffed crow,
disappointed.)*

But if they see you, then you're real. I'm not supposed to get this far. I'm supposed to be an image, you're supposed to be a story.

THE DUCHESS:

Oh, supposed, schmupposed. Does it matter? You were going, now you went, here you are. Isn't it wonderful?

THE CROW:

But you're not a person.

THE DUCHESS:

What a perfectly rude thing to say. Neither are you, if you hadn't noticed. And honestly, darling, at this point it should be obvious to everyone that we are one and the same. It's trite, but it's true - as true as anything gets out here, anyway.

THE CROW:

I guess that makes some kind of sense. What about the Serpent? What about biting its own tail? It's all got to circle in the end, right?

THE DUCHESS:

You're getting caught up in details, darling. Can't you just enjoy the party? The Serpent will be here soon enough.

(A toy stuffed snake is tossed onto stage.)

See? There he is. Grand and great and terrible.

THE CROW:

*(Picks up the Serpent and looks it
in the eye, pitifully, then at
THE DUCHESS.)*

This is it?

THE DUCHESS:

That's it.

THE CROW:

(Looking down at the Serpent, and up again, tossing it aside.)

So what now?

THE DUCHESS:

Now, darling, you play a song.

THE CROW:

(Looks down at the guitar case.)

I don't think I know how.

THE DUCHESS:

Sure you do. You just put your lips together and blow. Something like that, anyway. This is your moment.

(As she speaks, her poses start breaking quicker, and she walks up close to THE CROW, finally standing behind them, hands on their shoulders, and looking out towards the audience.)

Your grand debut. You've taken the long road, walked the desert, went from home and out and home again, broken bread with the natives and seen all there is to see. You've done your part as bit player, made it worth their while, impressed all the people who needed impressing, and now, finally, all eyes are on you and no one else. You wrap it all up, as all things need wrapping. You make it real, because now, pause you ARE. You pick up that little guitar and play it like there was nothing else in the world you could ever do.

Darling,

(pause.)

baby,

(pause.)

kid,

(pause.)

it's time for your big monologue.

THE CROW looks out at the audience, still and confused and terrified. A long moment passes.

Lights.

CURTAINS.