Don Zolidis
donzolidis@gmail.com

The Brightest Thing

(Or, The Squonk Play)

A one-act fantasia by Don Zolidis

©2022 Don Zolidis ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Copyright Protection. This play is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America and all countries with which the United States of America has reciprocal copyright relations, whether through bilateral or multilateral treaties or otherwise, and including, but not limited to, all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention and the Berne Convention.

Reservation of Rights. All rights to this play are strictly reserved, including, without limitation, professional and amateur stage performance rights; motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video, and sound recording; rights to all other forms of mechanical or electronic reproduction now known or yet to be invented, such as CD-ROM, CD-1, DVD, photocopying, and information storage and retrieval systems; and the rights of translation into non-English languages.

Performance Licensing and Royalty Payments. Amateur and stock performance rights to this play are controlled exclusively by Don Zolidis. No amateur or stock groups or individuals may perform this play without obtaining advance written permission from Don Zolidis.

Restriction of Alteration. There shall be no deletions, alterations, or changes of any kind made to the play unless directly authorized by Don Zolidis. The title of the play shall not be altered.

Author Credit. Any individual or group receiving permission to produce this play is required to credit Don Zolidis as the sole and exclusive author of the play.

AI training. For avoidance of doubt, Don Zolidis reserves the rights in any manner for purposes of training artificial intelligence technologies to generate text, including without limitation, technologies that are capable of generating works in the same style or genre as the play.

Full-Length Comedy/Drama
15-30+

An American Fable that's tinged with sadness about a girl's imaginary journey in a hot air balloon to rescue her mother.

Cast of Characters

EMELIA – a curious girl.
FATHER – her father. Very busy.

BIG FAIRY – a large fairy working for Amazon. Tiny wings. Maybe a tutu? Male-identifying.
THE SQUONK – a mythical furry beast with self-esteem issues. The Squonk can look like anything, but very weird, covered in warts or hair, and usually frightened or sad. Female-identifying.
THE BALLOONIST – a man of industry. Top hat. Spiffy vest. Perhaps a handlebar mustache. Played by the actor who plays Father.
THE JACKALOPE – a mythical creature with antler horns and an attitude. Aggressive and small.
MANNY THE MANATEE – a Manatee. Female-identifying. (played by the actor playing Mother.)
SAM – a mean alligator, any gender
CLIVE – a mean alligator, any gender
BEETLEJUICE – a red giant star, any gender
SIRIUS – the dogstar, any gender
POLARIS – the north star, any gender
MURDER HORNET – a very large hornet. Not friendly.

GEESE

SNOWBEARD
PIRATES

MOTHER

MAGIC – this is the Chorus and consists of as many actors as necessary. The MAGIC can also double as all the other characters except BIG FAIRY and EMELIA.

Note on Magic – For scene changes, and other magical effects in the play, Magic enters and performs the various changes. Magic can look like anything, but I imagine it shimmering or brightly colored. Magic is playful, fun, and the individual actors playing the roles have different personalities, intentions, and characters. They are encouraged to annoy, flirt, tease, and pester as they perform their magic. It is perfectly fine that some magic can get upset, or even sad, or refuse to do what it's supposed to do.

Gender of the characters: Although I've listed suggested genders for some characters, any of the characters may be any gender. Please shift pronouns accordingly. Perfectly fine for "Father" to be a mother as well.

America.

A very nice house.

FATHER is working in his office. He is working very hard. Many facts and figures are being calculated.

EMELIA enters, flounces, sits downs. There's nothing to do. She sighs. She sighs LOUDER, looking over at her Father, who ignores her completely.

She cautiously enters his office. SIGHS. He keeps working.

EMELIA

Dad?
Dad?
Dad. Daddy.

FATHER

Go play honey.

She doesn't.

EMELIA

Daddy. Daddy. Daddy? Dadddddy? Daddydaddydaddydaddydaddy.

He ignores her.

Emelia starts making funny voices.

<high pitched>

Daddy. DADDDDDy.

<low pitched>

Daddy.

<evil elf>

Daddy. Daddy. Daddy!

<the devil>

DADDY.

He finally turns around.

FATHER

What is it?

EMELIA

I'm bored.

FATHER

Then go play with your puzzles. I'm working.

EMELIA

Why.

FATHER

Because I need to work.

EMELIA

Why.

FATHER

So I can make money and afford this house.

EMELIA

That's dumb.

FATHER

That's not dumb –

EMELIA

Just my opinion. You can't disagree with an opinion.

FATHER

Go work on your puzzles or use your imagination.

EMELIA

Can we get a dog?

FATHER

No.

EMELIA

Can we get six dogs?

FATHER

Why would we get six dogs?

EMELIA

So we could have a dog in every room. Then you'd open the door to any room and you'd be like yay a dog is in here!

FATHER

They – dogs move around.

EMELIA

I think that's a good thing. But the dogs could be friends. Or we could attach them to a sled. We could attach them to a sled and I could sled around the house.

FATHER

I don't – I don't think it's a good idea to dogsled inside the house.

EMELIA

Have you tried it?

FATHER

No.

EMELIA

Then how do you know?

FATHER

I need to work, Emelia.

EMELIA

Why do dogs sniff each other's butts?

FATHER

That's what they do.

EMELIA

I think it's rude.

FATHER

They're dogs. They enjoy butts.

EMELIA

Why don't cats sniff each other's butts?

FATHER

Cats aren't interested, honey. Please – I need to work. Do your puzzle.

He tries to go back to work.

EMELIA

You always work. When is Mom coming back?

Father stops.

FATHER

We don't know that, honey.

A moment.

He turns back to work.

Emelia leaves.

She enters the living room. She sighs, then takes out a very large puzzle of America.

EMELIA

All right America, let's put you together.

She picks up a piece and mimes taking with it.

`I don't want to be on the bottom!'

Shh Florida that's where you belong.

`No you can't make me!'

She picks up another piece and attacks the first piece with it.

`I'm New Jersey and I'm going to eat you! I am a big mouth!'

The lights flicker.

EMELIA

What's that?

Everything darkens. Perhaps smoke billows out. Ominous music.

And then –

SNOWBEARD the pirate, with an eyepatch and ski gear, leaps out from behind something. He has a hook for a hand.

SNOWBEARD

Yar! I be looking fer Emelia!

EMELIA

That's me!

SNOWBEARD

Ho ho ho.

EMELIA

Santa?

SNOWBEARD

No. I don't look anything like Santa.

EMELIA

You said ho ho ho.

SNOWBEARD

I'm a pirate. We also say ho ho ho. It's our thing.

EMELIA

It's really more of a Santa thing, actually.

SNOWBEARD

Did I come down a chimney? Do you hear reindeer? Santa is a good person bringing joy and presents –

EMELIA

Where?

SNOWBEARD

No he's not here! I'm just describing him! Can you let me finish what I was saying? Sorry hold on I'm off me whole rhythm now, can I make another entrance please?

EMELIA

Sure.

SNOWBEARD

All right.

He hides behind a chair.

Ominous music again. He leaps up.

Yar! I be looking fer Emelia!

EMELIA

You already know who I am.

SNOWBEARD

My name is Snowbeard – ha ha ha ha. I am a pirate, as you may have deduced from me eye patch and other accoutrements.

EMELIA

Are you wearing a snowsuit?

SNOWBEARD

I am a skiing pirate. Me and me crew spend a lot of time at resorts in Colorado. Sweet powder there.

EMELIA

Oh I like skiing –

SNOWBEARD

BUT I AM NOT HERE TO TALK ABOUT SKIING! No – I am here because…

He pauses dramatically –

Continues to pause.

EMELIA

Why.

SNOWBEARD

This is normally when my parrot interjects, but I was not able to bring her because there are limitations to my hologram technology – so ye have to imagine her cackling and saying *because*… I HAVE KIDNAPPED YER MOTHER HA HA HA YARRR!

EMELIA

NO!

SNOWBEARD

YES! HA HA HA!

MOTHER enters, perhaps in a pool of light, separated.

MOTHER

Emelia! Help me! Helllp!

EMELIA

Mommy!

Emelia reaches out for her.

SNOWBEARD

She is also a hologram. Just in case ye were wondering. And ye'll never get her back! Ha ha ha ha!

He pauses.

That's what I came here to say. Peace out.

He turns to look backwards.

All right cut the transmission please. I have made me dramatic pronouncement!

EMELIA

You'll never get away with this!

SNOWBEARD

Isn't somebody supposed to be working the hologram machine? Hey. HEY I'M STILL PROJECTING TO THIS GIRL'S HOUSE, STANDING HERE LIKE A GOOFBALL! All right I'm revoking all chair lift privileges for the lot of ye!

EMELIA

Wait, where are you Mommy?!

MOTHER

Asp—

Lights go down, cutting her off.

EMELIA

Asp? Asp?! What is Asp?

She spins around.

Dad! Daddy! Daddy!

The sound of WIND CHIMES in the breeze, then -

*WHUMP.**

**If you're able to have a window, it would be great to see BIG FAIRY fly smack into it. Otherwise this can be an off-stage noise.*

EMELIA

What was that?

BIG FAIRY *(in pain)*

Ohhhhh…

Big Fairy stumbles in, or climbs in, rubbing his face. He wears tiny wings and an Amazon delivery outfit. He carries a package.

Oh man I thought that window as open. I'm like flying all gracefully or whatever, and WHAM. Aw jeez my face. I need to sit down.

He sits.

EMELIA

What are you?

BIG FAIRY

What does it look like? I'm a fairy.

EMELIA

You're very large for a fairy.

BIG FAIRY

WHOAH. That is a STEREOTYPE. Not all fairies are little, okay? Some of us… are more generously proportioned. And I work for Amazon. Are you Emelia?

EMELIA

Yes?

He tosses the package at her feet.

BIG FAIRY

Package for you.

EMELIA

You're a delivery fairy?

BIG FAIRY

Amazon wanted to create a fleet of flying drones, but apparently that was "expensive" or whatever, so now they just hire a bunch of fairies to deliver everything. Most of the time we're invisible.

EMELIA

Wow.

Emelia opens the package.

Look at this!

There's a backpack inside. Powerpuff girls or My Little Pony.

It's a backpack! It's a sign!

BIG FAIRY

No it's a backpack.

EMELIA

A sign of what to do! What goes in backpacks? Things.

BIG FAIRY

Among other things.

EMELIA

Things for journeys. This is a sign I need to go on a heroic journey! To save my Mommy. YES.

She begins digging in it.

BIG FAIRY

Good times.

Emelia starts putting the puzzle pieces of states into the backpack.

EMELIA

I'm gonna need this – and this – and this – maybe some food, maybe some weapons. You don't happen to have a grappling hook, do you?

BIG FAIRY

Not on me. All right kid I gotta bail. Lots of packages to deliver. They got like a homing beacon implanted inside in my skull. If I don't get my deliveries done, *p-choo!*

Makes a sign of his skull exploding.

EMELIA

Your skull explodes?

BIG FAIRY

No it's just bad.

EMELIA

Wait a minute! I need a guide! I can't go on a heroic journey all by myself! I'm going to need a supernatural advisor. Like a fairy god…

Big Fairy belches.

God-uncle! The one who still lives with his parents.

BIG FAIRY

I still live with my parents.

EMELIA

You're perfect! Come on! I have recently received a communication from a group of skiing pirates located in Colorado. They think that just because they're thousands of miles away they're safe but oh ho do they have another thing coming! This is gonna be EPIC!

She paces, plotting.

With this map, I will be able to figure out how to get to Colorado!

BIG FAIRY

All right look kid, if I'm gonna be your supernatural helper or whatever, you need to understand a few things.

EMELIA

Shoot.

BIG FAIRY

One, I'm super lazy. So you're gonna have to do it largely yourself.

EMELIA

Sweet, what's the next one?

BIG FAIRY

That's it. I don't have the energy to make a longer list.

EMELIA

I can work with that. Hold on one second.

She runs in to her Father's office.

Hey Dad I'm going to Colorado with a big fairy to rescue Mom who's been kidnapped by ski pirates. Kay bye.

She exits. He doesn't notice.

EMELIA

All right I'm ready! LET'S DO THIS.

BIG FAIRY

Sure thing.

He waits.

She waits.

EMELIA

Are you planning on doing anything?

BIG FAIRY

Are you?

EMELIA

You're the fairy! Don't you have magic?!

BIG FAIRY

Again, STEREOTYPES hurt. The magic is inside of you. You just have to believe in here.

Points to her head.

Also, I'll chant a super awesome magic spell while you believe.

EMELIA

How do you believe?

BIG FAIRY

Well, believing and magic are basically the same thing. You have to imagine that things are better than they are.

EMELIA

Things are pretty bad.

BIG FAIRY

But maybe they can get better. If you imagine it.

EMELIA

All right. I'll try.

She grits her teeth.

BIG FAIRY

No no no you gotta close your eyes. You gotta see things differently. Can't do that with your eyes open. Scrunch `em up tight. Then… let go.

She closes her eyes and stands very still.

Sound of wind chimes.

Big Fairy begins chanting and a super awesome magic spell and dancing around.

BIG FAIRY

CHONGA CHONGA CHONGA CHONGA WHOOP-WHOOP WHOOP-WHOOP SU-EEEE! SU-EEEE!

Big Fairy dances around and makes more and more weird noises The actor can ad lib as much as they want. This should be funny and weird.*

As BIG FAIRY is dancing and chanting, a Chorus of MAGIC enters.

MAGIC begins picking up furniture, starting to rearrange things – dancing and playing while it does it.

EMELIA opens her eyes and MAGIC FREEZES.

BIG FAIRY

HEY! What did I say about the eyes?!

EMELIA

Oh. Sorry.

She closes her eyes – MAGIC starts moving again –
She opens them again. MAGIC FREEZES again.

BIG FAIRY

Seriously!

MAGIC creates a glowing MAP of the United States – shows a light moving towards Pennsylvania.

EMELIA *(eyes still closed)*

Where are we going?

Upstage, a forest forms.

BIG FAIRY

All right now you can open them.

Emelia looks around.

EMELIA

Wow. We're in a forest.

BIG FAIRY

Looks that way.

EMELIA

I don't think this is Colorado.

BIG FAIRY

It's an epic journey. You can't just get there in one step.

EMELIA

Right. I wonder where we are?

A sign that says "CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA" waves from off-stage.

BIG FAIRY

Ooh I know!

EMELIA

Central Pennsylvania!

She takes a puzzle piece of Pennsylvania out of her backpack.

There's a lot of natural gas in this area!

BIG FAIRY

Sorry.

EMELIA

And corn and soybeans are the most important crops.

BIG FAIRY

Yeah I don't see any of those. I say we find a way outta here.

The SQUONK enters, and hides behind a tree, watching them.

Emelia starts walking.

EMELIA

Maybe there's a magic road or something.

BIG FAIRY

The interstate?

EMELIA

You know, this is just like my Mom: she's always going on adventures and getting kidnapped.

BIG FAIRY

Moms are like that.

They head off-stage, and then right back-on-stage.

EMELIA

I keep telling her to carry a sword, but she won't do it.

BIG FAIRY

Right. That's just being reckless.

EMELIA

Have we been here before?

BIG FAIRY

No idea. I'm just following you.

EMELIA

Let's go that way.

She heads off in another direction, followed by Big Fairy.

Returns almost immediately.

We're totally going round in circles!

BIG FAIRY

Could be squares.

EMELIA

It's not squares. It's circles!

BIG FAIRY

Well I don't know, you're the mathematician.

EMELIA

Can you fly me up to the top of the trees so I can look around?

BIG FAIRY

Do these look like load-bearing wings to you? I'd get ten feet in the air and my little wings would be pumping and then I'd be like, `ah I can't do it any more I don't have the strength I can't do it Mama!' and you'd be like `I believe in you' and I'd be like, `I'm gonna try harder Mama!' and then we'd get like fifty feet in the air and my wings would give out and we'd all DIE.

EMELIA

Argh! Then how do we get out of here?

She throws something, nearly hits the SQUONK.

SQUONK

Aaaaaah!

EMELIA

Aaaaah!

SQUONK

Don't look at me!

EMELIA

I'm not!

SQUONK

You're looking at me right now! Turn around!

EMELIA *(turning around)*

I'm not I promise!

SQUONK

This always happens! I try not to be seen and then someone SEES me!

Squonk starts crying.

EMELIA

Sorry I didn't mean to see you!

SQUONK

But you did!

She cries more.

EMELIA

It's not a big deal. Why don't you want people to see you?

THE SQUONK

Isn't it obvious? Because I'm so ugly! I was born this way, and then… I got even uglier as I grew up.

She cries again.

EMELIA

No you're not.

SQUONK

How would you even know that unless you looked at me?! Which means, you OBSERVED me, which means you saw how terribly horribly hideous I am.

She cries more.

EMELIA

Whoah whoah whoah. Hey calm down.

BIG FAIRY

If it makes you feel any better, lotsa people are supes ugly.

EMELIA

Not helpful, Big Fairy.

SQUONK *(through tears)*

That's why I live in the forest. So people won't see me. Because I have skin problems. And my face is weird, and I've got very unattractive fur.

EMELIA

It's okay. What's your name?

SQUONK

I'm known as The Squonk.

EMELIA

I'm Emelia.

SQUONK

See your name is even prettier than mine! "Emelia" It's like a summer breeze through flowers. My name is Squonk.

BIG FAIRY

It sounds like you stepped on a goose.

SQUONK

I know!

The Squonk is about to cry again.

EMELIA

Don't cry!

SQUONK

Now I'm disappointing you by crying! That makes me even more sad. Sad enough to –

Emelia turns to the look at The Squonk.

EMELIA

It doesn't matter what you look like on the outside.

SQUONK

That's not true according to studies.

BIG FAIRY

You ever hear the story of the Ugly Duckling? There was a swan that got kidnapped by a bunch of ducks and got brainwashed into thinking he was a duck.

EMELIA

That's not how that story goes.

BIG FAIRY

A bunch of criminal ducks kidnapped a baby swan and forced it to do chores. Moral of the story: Avoid ducks. Also, turns out if you're a duck you're hideous. BUT – After the swan grew up he realized he was like four times as big as the ducks, so he learned karate and came back and beat them all up. You ever fight a swan? They are MEAN. They will tear your face off. Violent, violent creatures. Moral of the story: Revenge will be yours.

SQUONK

But I'm not even as cute as a duck.

BIG FAIRY

True.

SQUONK

Aaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhh you're right!

The Squonk wails in sadness and dissolves into a puddle of tears.

EMELIA

She's gone!

BIG FAIRY

Whoah.

EMELIA

She just dissolved into a puddle of tears.

BIG FAIRY

That's not my fault. I'm just being honest.

EMELIA

Sometimes honesty can be cruel.

EMELIA pokes among the tears.

Miss Squonk? I don't know if you can hear me since you're a puddle of water at this point, but… I could really use some friends right now. We're going on an epic quest. And I sure could use a Squonk to help me.

The Squonk returns.

SQUONK

Really?

EMELIA

I thought you dissolved?

SQUONK

It's a trick. I make you think I turn into tears and then I hide behind a tree and cry some more. You're going on… a quest? And you need my help?

EMELIA

Yes. To save my mother.

SQUONK

Why do you need my help?

EMELIA

Because um… we're sure to face dangers.

SQUONK

Dangers?

The Squonk is about to cry again –

EMELIA

And you seem really brave.

SQUONK

You think so?

BIG FAIRY

Well…

EMELIA

Big Fairy! Shush!

He mimes zipping his lip.

I bet you know the way out of these woods. I bet you know all kinds of things from watching so much. Can you come with us?

SQUONK

Okay.

EMELIA

Maybe you could show us the way out of here?

SQUONK

Sure! Hold on one second.

She HUMS. (If possible, the SQUONK has a beautiful singing voice.)

MAGIC enters – lights appear on the trees, lighting a path through the woods.

EMELIA

Wow.

SQUONK

You just need to know the right place to look.

BIG FAIRY

Sweet.

SQUONK *(to BIG FAIRY)*

What are you supposed to be?

BIG FAIRY

I'm a fairy. Look at my little wings.

SQUONK

You sure are a beautiful fairy.

She heads off-stage.

Big Fairy feels pretty spiffy about himself.

BIG FAIRY

All right I'm glad she's coming with.

They head off-stage.
Music. More wind-chimes.
The Forest transforms to a small dirt road with an old-fashioned stand.
The BALLOONIST (played by the same actor who played Father) stands on a small box and calls out as his servants (could also be played by MAGIC) set down an enormous wicker basket behind him.

THE BALLOONIST
Step right up! Step right up and witness the stupendous flying balloon of Doctor Ambrose McGillicutty! MARVEL at this fantastical flotation! BEHOLD its burgeoning glory! Have you ever wished to soar like an eagle?! Hum like a hummingbird?! Dance about on the wind like a mosquito? Step right up and be amazed!
Emelia, Big Fairy, and the Squonk enter.

EMELIA
Wow!

THE BALLOONIST
You there, little girl and… strange people! OBSERVE this fantabulous floating colossus! Guaranteed to revolutionize travel in these United States and every locale on the planet!

BIG FAIRY
Meh.

THE BALLOONIST
If this balloon were a legally defined human being I would marry it!

SQUONK *(hiding behind BIG FAIRY)*
Don't let him look at me!

EMELIA
Excuse me, mister?

THE BALLOONIST
Doctor. I didn't attend balloonist school to be addressed as a lowly… mister.

EMELIA
Do you think your balloon could fly all the way to Colorado?
He chuckles.

THE BALLOONIST
Ha ha ha. OF COURSE. Balloon travel is the wave of the future! Imagine it: Thousands of enormous balloons traveling across this great land, taking people wherever they want to go in unimaginable comfort! You want to go in San Francisco? Of course! Only fourteen days in my remarkable flying balloon and you shall be there before you know it!

EMELIA

But – if it takes fourteen days to get there, what will you eat?

THE BALLOONIST

You are silly. Where will the balloon be?

EMELIA

In the air?

THE BALLOONIST

And what else lives in the air?

EMELIA

Swarms of hostile insects?

THE BALLOONIST

Birds, my dear, birds. We shall fish for birds like sailors fish for fish. I believe we shall call it birding. Merely drop a line over the side of the marvelous balloon, wait for a nibble from a flying beast, and presto! Dinnertime. We shall eat them raw of course, but our stomachs will adjust happily. I, for one, long for the taste of raw crow.

EMELIA

That sounds great, then! Can you take us to Colorado? We're on a quest to save my mother from ski pirates.

THE BALLOONIST

I *could* take you to Colorado, but what will you give me?

EMELIA

Um.

BIG FAIRY

Just take us, dude!

THE BALLOONIST

That is doctor dude to you, large winged person.

BIG FAIRY

My name is Big Fairy. Get it straight.

THE BALLOONIST

I am a man of industry. A capitalist. If you wish to ride on my stupendous flying balloon, I require payment at fair market rates. It's the only way to assure efficiency in the system. And I adore efficiency.

EMELIA

Okay, hold on.

She huddles with her friends.

Did anyone bring any money?

Big Fairy searches his tutu.

BIG FAIRY

No.

THE SQUONK

I don't have any money. I tried to get a job one time, but they didn't want to hire me. Because I'm hideous.

She starts to cry.

EMELIA

It's okay, hey –

THE SQUONK

That's why I live in the WOODS! I've got nothing!

EMELIA

You're gonna be all right.

THE SQUONK

Except for these valuable truffles I've been hoarding.

Produces a sack of truffles.

BIG FAIRY

Ew. Mushrooms.

EMELIA

Nobody's gonna trade anything for ugly mushrooms. Let me try something else.

She returns to the Balloonist.

Excuse me Mister –

THE BALLOONIST

Doctor –

EMELIA

This is an amazing balloon.

THE BALLOONIST

Quite right. You are a young lady of taste and judgment.

EMELIA

But you're sitting out here in the middle of the woods with it. How are people going to know how amazing it is?

THE BALLOONIST

Go on…

EMELIA

What if – we took a ride to Colorado on your balloon and paid you… in *exposure*?

THE BALLOONIST

What is this *exposure* of which you speak?

EMELIA

People will look up at the balloon and think, `Wow! What a marvelous flying balloon!' And then they'll give you their money to make more balloons and take more trips! Soon you'll be rich!

THE BALLOONIST

That sounds fabulous and logical! And I am nothing if not logical. Very well! I shall gain this *exposure* and soon the money will roll in! Everyone shall see us and marvel! Climb aboard!

The Big Fairy climbs into the balloon, with difficulty.

BIG FAIRY

Hold on. Little help here.

The Squonk comes forward.

THE BALLOONIST

My goodness what is that?!

SQUONK

Oh no!

EMELIA

This is the Squonk. She's really unique and special.

The Balloonist is hesitant to take her onboard.

She'll give you even more exposure. Look it's a flying Squonk!

SQUONK

Where?!

THE BALLOONIST

Brilliant! Climb aboard and prepare yourselves mentally, physically, and spiritually for the ride of your lives!

Everyone gets in the basket.

BIG FAIRY

Nothing's happening.

THE BALLOONIST

It takes a bit.

The Balloonist fires the balloon.
Wind chimes.
MAGIC enters, showing the balloon lifting into the air.
MAGIC pulls down the trees, brings in clouds.

EMELIA

We're going up!

THE BALLOONIST

Of course, my dear!

MAGIC forms the glowing MAP.

Where to?

EMELIA *(pointing)*

That way!

THE BALLOONIST

Say no more!

MAGIC forms a glowing pulse in the map, moving west.

EMELIA

This is amazing!

THE BALLOONIST

What did I tell you? STUPENDOUS!

The Map separates.
GEESE enter, flying past them.

GEESE

Honk honk! Honk! Honk!

SQUONK

Look, geese!

THE BALLOONIST

We shall eat well tonight!

He casts a fishing line for a goose.
A GOOSE looks at it. Ignores it.
The Balloonist casts again.
A Goose takes the line, pulls the fishing pole out of his hands and tosses it off-stage.

GEESE

Honk!

The Geese look at Big Fairy, honking to themselves.

Honk honk honk. Hee hee honk.

BIG FAIRY *(responding to the Geese)*

Hey that's not nice!

GEESE

Honk! Hee hee honk.

Big Fairy takes a swing at a goose flying by.

EMELIA

Stop it!

BIG FAIRY *(to the goose)*

I don't appreciate that tone from you!

GEESE

Honk! Honnnnnnnnk!

BIG FAIRY

Oh yeah?! My Mama gave me these wings!

Big Fairy leans over the edge of the balloon, tipping it.

THE BALLOONIST

Sir! Stop! You are driving us off course!

BIG FAIRY

At least I don't have to migrate in the wintertime you chickens!

THE SQUONK

Aaaaah!

MAGIC shows the balloon careening –
Tree branches flash past.

THE BALLOONIST

Prepare for impact!

WHAM! The basket of the balloon lands heavily.
The Map disappears.
Everyone falls out.
MAGIC brings in flowers – huge, enormous, beautiful flowers.

Dash it all!

BIG FAIRY

Did we land on a witch at least?

THE BALLOONIST

We did not.

They look around.

SQUONK

Where are we?

Emelia takes a few steps.

EMELIA

Judging by these flowers, I'd say we're in… Florida.

SQUONK

Flo-Rida? Sounds scary.

Emelia takes a Florida puzzle piece out of her backpack.

EMELIA

It's not. It's the Sunshine state and its signature product is citrus.

Squonk shivers.

SQUONK

Terrifying. I love the flowers, though. It's so beautiful.

She takes a moment.

Not like me. Maybe I don't belong here.

She starts to cry.

EMELIA

Oh Squonk, it's okay. Sometimes everyone feels that way.

THE BALLOONIST

Of all the rotten luck! My balloon is damaged!

BIG FAIRY

Don't look at me! It's not my fault! I'm not responsible for my actions!

THE BALLOONIST

Who is then?

BIG FAIRY

…Birds.

EMELIA

Can't you fix it?

THE BALLOONIST

My dear, I am a balloonist. I am skilled at the art of balloon navigation. I am not a balloon mechanic. I'm afraid I cannot repair our craft.

BIG FAIRY

Bummer.

THE BALLOONIST

Yes it is a bummer you overgrown moth!

BIG FAIRY

I have friends who are moths and they are NOT NICE, so take that back!

THE BALLOONIST

Never! This is all your fault!

BIG FAIRY

Oh sure let's ignore the role the geese played!

EMELIA

Stop it! We're only going to get out of this if we work together. Can you do that?

BIG FAIRY

I guess.

THE BALLOONIST

Very well.

SQUONK

I've always wanted to work together. Usually people don't let me.

EMELIA

Let's see if we can find a solution.

They move around, poke at the flowers. The Squonk picks some and drapes herself in them. The Balloonist takes out a magnifying glass. Big Fairy steps in something and shakes it off his foot.

During this, MANNY (the Manatee, played by the actor playing Mother) enters, keeping low to the ground.

MANNY is pretty chill.

MANNY

Hey there.

EMELIA

Oh I didn't see you there!

MANNY

Not many people do. I'm a manatee. We usually float just below the surface of the water. Which is the best spot. Oh man. Nothing better than letting your back just ease out of the water a bit, and then having a bird land on it with their little feets. Goodness. So much goodness. Sometimes you gotta just let life happen, know what I mean?

MANNY smiles.

EMELIA

That's a very interesting personal philosophy for a manatee.

MANNY

Oh yeah. That's why we smile all the time. Everything is cool.

We hear loud noises of joy-riding off-stage.

SAM *(off-stage)*

Woo hoo! Got one!

CLIVE *(off-stage)*

You sure did!

MANNY

Except for the speedboats. But what are you gonna do?

EMELIA

What's wrong with speedboats?

MANNY

Well… Sometimes, when I'm just resting below the surface of the water, minding my own business, contemplating the warm embrace of the sun… VROOM – they run over my back.

EMELIA

What?!

MANNY

Yeah. See all these scars?

She points to her back.

Those are from speedboats. Hurts like the dickens when a speedboat runs over ya.

SAM *(off-stage)*

Aim for that Sea Cow!

CLIVE *(off-stage)*

Woo hoo!

MANNY

VROOM right over my back. Almost makes me stop smiling. Almost.

EMELIA

Have you ever tried talking to them?

MANNY

They just make fun of me. Call me names. Say I'm not an important member of the ecosystem because I mostly consume submerged vegetation. Have you tried submerged vegetation? A-mazing. Nothing like a good wad of turtle grass.

EMELIA

Well I think that's ridiculous! I'm going to give those speedboaters a piece of my mind!

MANNY

I don't want to give anyone a piece of my mind. I did that before and I didn't get those pieces back.

EMELIA

You stay right here!

MANNY

I don't really go places anyway. Mostly just float along.

Emelia stomps off-stage.

Yup. Just floating along, observing the crashed hot air balloon. Remembering my days as a hot air balloon mechanic… minding my own business.

The others hear her.

SQUONK

Hold on. You can fix our balloon?!

MANNY

Oh sure.

SQUONK

Oh my goodness! Will you help us?

MANNY

Sure.

THE BALLOONIST

Excuse me. You are a mechanic?

MANNY

Yup.

THE BALLOONIST

For hot air balloons?

MANNY

Sure.

THE BALLOONIST

Just to clarify: You, a manatee, a herbivorious underwater mammal, are a licensed balloon mechanic for a stupendous flying machine?

MANNY

Yup.

BIG FAIRY

I say we let her try to fix it. What's the worst that could happen?

THE BALLOONIST

My balloon could be rendered inoperable!

BIG FAIRY

It's already that, so.

SQUONK

I trust her.

THE BALLOONIST

You live in the woods!

THE SQUONK

Sometimes you have to take chances on people.

MANNY

Lemme just take a look-see.

Manny moves very slowly towards the balloon.

THE BALLOONIST

We are in a hurry, ma'am.

MANNY

Oh sure.

Manny continues to move slowly.

But you can't rush good service. If you do a job too quickly, then you don't get to savor doing the job.

She reaches the balloon.

Ohhh. Oh this is nice.

She rubs her face against the basket.

I like this. Mmmmmm. Bassss-ket. Oh yes. Basssss-ket.

THE BALLOONIST

Um…

MANNY

I'm having a moment. Shhhh.

Elsewhere two alligators, SAM and CLIVE, are sunning themselves near their speedboat. They might have fishing poles.

CLIVE

So the dog just kept barking at me, right?

SAM

No he did not!

CLIVE

And I'm like, check out these teeth little doggo! I've eaten like thirty or forty dogs in my time. I'll eat you too.

SAM

Darn skippy.

CLIVE

Heh heh heh.

Emelia approaches them.

EMELIA

Are you guys alligators?

SAM

Are you serious right now?

CLIVE

I am a crocodile. People mix us up all the time.

SAM

Rude.

CLIVE

Totally rude.

EMELIA

I'm sorry – crocodiles –

CLIVE

I'm just kidding ya, I'm an alligator!

SAM

Girls can't tell the difference! Good one, Clive!
The laugh and laugh. High-five.

CLIVE

Does this snout look V-shaped to you?! It's a U! My teeth are INSIDE MY MOUTH!

EMELIA

Okay –

SAM

You can't help ignorant people, Clive.

CLIVE

I know it.

EMELIA

I come from a friend who's a manatee –

CLIVE

Sea COW.

EMELIA

She prefers the word manatee.

CLIVE

Okay, Sea Cow.

SAM

We get to call her whatever we want. Freedom! Sea Cow!

CLIVE

First amendment!

EMELIA

She would like you to stop running her over with your speedboat.

SAM

Listen, little girl. You don't understand. Our freedom to run people over with a speedboat is more important than other people's health.

CLIVE

How do you not get that? LOL. That's the way it's gotta be. FREEDOM.

They high-five each other.

EMELIA

You guys are just bullies! You don't think about anyone but yourselves!

SAM

Who else am I gonna think about?

EMELIA

Well I don't think it's nice or fair!

CLIVE

What are you gonna do about it?

SAM

Ha ha ha ha.

CLIVE

You wanna fight? When we have disagreements we fight people!

SAM

It makes us feel good about ourselves! Har har har!

EMELIA

I'm getting my friends!

She storms off.

The alligators follow, laughing and high-fiving each other.

Manny is still having a moment with the basket.

MANNY

This is nice right here. Mmmm…

THE BALLOONIST

My dear aquatic mammal, we are in need of haste. My *exposure* will not create itself.

MANNY

Yup.

Emelia bursts in, upset.

EMELIA
Some alligators don't even care about other people!
The alligators are right behind her.

CLIVE
Oh sure run to your friends!

SAM
Hey look it's a sea cow!

MANNY
My proper name is manatee.

CLIVE
Sure thing, Sea Cow!

SAM
Sea Cow! Mooo!

CLIVE *(like he's underwater)*
Mooooo!

BIG FAIRY
You guys are mean!

CLIVE
Hey look it's an Air Cow!

BIG FAIRY
Where?
They laugh at Big Fairy.

SAM
You're different so we're laughing at you to mask our insecurities! Har har har!

THE SQUONK
You need to stop!
They spot the Squonk. Burst out laughing.

CLIVE
WHAT IS THAT?!

SAM and CLIVE
Ah ha ha ha ha ha!
The Squonk sniffles and starts crying.

Oh look we made it cry! Ha ha ha ha!

Manny rises out of the water. She's very imposing.

MANNY

That is ENOUGH! I was pretty relaxed when you guys were just bothering me, but now you've threatened my friends!

SAM

What are you gonna do?

Manny grabs two flowers.

MANNY

I hold in my paws two ancient Vizindia flowers. Do you know what they do?!

CLIVE *(terrified)*

No!

MANNY

Do you want to find out?!

SAM *(terrified)*

Not especially!

MANNY

Rarrr!

Manny lunges forward with her flowers.

The alligators scream and flee.

Manny watches them go. Then rubs the flowers on herself.

Ohhhhh.

EMELIA

Wow.

THE BALLOONIST

I had no idea of the power of those flowers.

MANNY

Oh they just smell nice. I guessed they wouldn't know. The meanest people are usually the most ignorant. Maybe that's what makes them mean.

SQUONK

You're right. And I didn't dissolve! Because I had you guys.

EMELIA

Aww.

BIG FAIRY

Big hug!

EMELIA

Thank you for helping us.

MANNY

To be honest, you guys helped me, man. Usually I get by by just grinning and bearing it, but maybe it's more important to stand up to the bullies.

EMELIA

I wish I could do that.

MANNY

Of course you can do that, man. I stood up and I don't even have feet.

THE BALLOONIST

Can I buy some of these really threatening flowers?

MANNY

They're free.

THE BALLOONIST

I don't understand.

MANNY

Welp. This balloon is fixed. Ohhh yesssss.
Manny rubs her face against the balloon.

BIG FAIRY

You did it!

MANNY

Yup.

EMELIA

Would you like to come with us? We're on a quest to save my mother from pirates. I could really use someone like you.

MANNY

I know. I know you could.

EMELIA

So will you come with us?

MANNY

I think your journey might have to be without me.

EMELIA

Oh.

MANNY

Just remember: you don't have to let people run you over.

EMELIA

Thanks.

THE BALLOONIST

Whew! I'm not certain we would have enough ballast for your bulk. We've already got the large fairy.

BIG FAIRY

WHOAH. Check yourself.

THE BALLOONIST

These are facts.

MANNY

Make sure to take some flowers with you. And think of me when you see them.

THE SQUONK

Oh did we need to ask for these?
She's covered in flowers.
Everyone gets in the basket.

THE BALLOONIST

Tally ho!
MAGIC lifts the balloon off the ground.
Manny waves at them from her spot.

EMELIA

Thank you for everything!

MANNY

Thank you – for everything.
MANNY rubs herself against something.
Ohhhhh. Right there. Yeah.
Lights change.
MAGIC forms the MAP.

A light shows them moving northward.

THE BALLOONIST

It is a long journey to Colorado-land. I suggest we avail ourselves of some rest.

The Squonk is already sleeping. And snoring.

I see. Yes that's remarkable. But –

Big Fairy is sleeping too. He's snoring even louder.

Quite. I suppose – I will also – attempt to sleep.

He tries. Squonk snores in his ear. He adjusts. Big Fairy rolls near him and snores even louder, throwing an arm over him.

I see.

He hangs off the edge of the balloon and falls asleep.

The lights fade. MAGIC brings in stars.

Big Fairy is snoring loudly.
The Squonk is snoring in a high-pitched way.
The Balloonist is asleep at the wheel.
Emelia looks over the side of the balloon.

EMELIA

Hey guys look at all the stars! It's like we're swimming in them!

She looks over and realizes everyone is sleeping.

Oh. That's all right. Hey does anyone know if we need to steer or anything?

She tries the steering wheel.

Cool, cool. I'm sure nothing can go wrong with me as the only pilot. Which way to go, though? If only I had someone to guide me.

A SHOOTING STAR shoots past her.

Whoah.

A second STAR flies past her, and hovers for a moment.

Oh that one's even closer!

A third STAR zooms past, then stops right in front of her.

BEETLEJUICE

Superstar!

The other two stars return.

POLARIS

Oh stop it. Be serious.

SIRIUS

I'm actually Sirius.

EMELIA

Oh my goodness. Are you guys stars?

BEETLEJUICE

You know it.

BEETLEJUICE takes out a phone and photographs itself.

Gotta take one for the Insta. I am the biggest star, actually. Hashtag bigstar.

POLARIS

Beetlejuice, cut it out.

Beetlejuice poses again.

BEETLEJUICE

This one is for all my followers. Hashtag Follow your dreams. Hashtag shinebright. Hashtag biggeststar. Hashtag biggerthantheotherstars.

EMELIA

Maybe you can help me. It's very dark and I can't see my map. Can one of you show me the way to Colorado?

BEETLEJUICE

I can show you the way to anywhere.

POLARIS

Don't listen to him. He just likes to brag.

BEETLEJUICE

Cause I'm AWESOME.

POLARIS

I am Polaris, the North Star. I've been guiding sailors FOREVER.

Beetlejuice scoffs.

I will show you the way.

SIRIUS

Oh please.

POLARIS

I'm serious.

SIRIUS

I'm Sirius!

EMELIA

What's your name?

SIRIUS

I'm Sirius.

EMELIA

About what?

SIRIUS

My name.

EMELIA

Which is what?

SIRIUS

Sirius! Arrrgh.

Beetlejuice takes a picture of Sirius.

BEETLEJUICE

Hashtag dumbstar.

SIRIUS

This is why I've changed my name to Dogstar.

POLARIS

You can't be Dogstar!

SIRIUS

Watch me. *Dogstar!* WOOF.

EMELIA

And your name is Beetlejuice? Didn't they make a movie about you?

BEETLEJUICE

Without my permission.

POLARIS

You'll have to forgive Beetlejuice, he's got problems.

BEETLEJUICE

I'm a RED GIANT, y'all. None of you are red giants. BOOM. Hashtag redgiant.

POLARIS

He's only 10 million years old. Kind of a big child.

BEETLEJUICE

And I'm gonna live forever!

POLARIS
Actually, if you google yourself, the first question is…
Beetlejuice looks at his phone.

BEETLEJUICE *(reading)*
How long does Beetlejuice have left? What? What does this mean?

POLARIS
I didn't write it.

BEETLEJUICE
Are you serious?!

SIRIUS
I keep telling you I'm Sirius.

BEETLEJUICE
I'm gonna… die?

POLARIS
Someday. All things die.

EMELIA
Even stars?

POLARIS
Even stars. And you know something? When a star dies it becomes the brightest thing in the entire sky.

BEETLEJUICE
That makes me feel a little better.

EMELIA
That's sad.

POLARIS
Well – if you think about it, you wouldn't be here if the stars didn't die. Every atom in your body that isn't hydrogen or helium – you know where they came from? That were made when a star exploded billions of years ago. Everything you see… everything is stardust. Act like it.

EMELIA
So will one of you show me the way?

POLARIS
One of us. But only one of us will show you the correct way. Which one will you choose?

SIRIUS

Dogstar! WOOF.

BEETLEJUICE

Stop it, you're Sirius!

SIRIUS

Not anymore. Call me Dogstar from now on. WOOF.

BEETLEJUICE

Oh stop it.

SIRIUS

You know what's even more popular than stars on Instagram? DOGS.
Takes a photo of himself.

BEETLEJUICE

Little girl, you should obviously pick me. First of all, I'm a red giant. Think about that: RED. GIANT. I'm BIG. If I was in the solar system, I would stretch out past Mars, that's how big I am! These other stars are like dinky stars. You don't hitch your wagon to a dinky star, that's what my Mama always told me.

SIRIUS

You didn't have a Mama.

BEETLEJUICE

Don't you talk about my Mama!

SIRIUS

I can't, because she didn't exist! You're just a collection of gas!

BEETLEJUICE

You're a collection of gas!

POLARIS

Stars. Please.

SIRIUS

Emelia. I'm the nearest star. I'm loyal. I'll never leave you. That's why they call me the dogstar.

BEETLEJUICE

You call you the dogstar.

SIRIUS

BECAUSE I'M JUST LIKE A DOG!

SIRIUS gets control of himself.

You need to put your faith in things that put their faith in you.

EMELIA

You have faith in me?

SIRIUS

I'm a dogstar. I love you unconditionally.

EMELIA

Whoah.

SIRIUS

As long as you feed me.

EMELIA

What do stars eat?

BEETLEJUICE

EVERYTHING.

POLARIS

You're thinking of black holes.

BEETLEJUICE

Man I feel like I have a black hole inside of me.

POLARIS

Not yet you don't. But eventually.

BEETLEJUICE

Sweet.

EMILIA

What about you, Polaris? What do I get if I follow you?

POLARIS

People have followed me forever. I am constant. I am unchanging. I am the north star –

BEETLEJUICE

Hashtag old. Hashtag played.

POLARIS

If you value tradition and dependability, follow me.

SIRIUS

If you choose love, follow me.

BEETLEJUICE

If you choose… really exciting cool stuff, I am your star.

ALL THREE

CHOOSE.

The stars shine brightly.

EMELIA

I'm doing this for love.

She chooses Sirius.

SIRIUS

Dogstar!

SIRIUS shines brightly. Beetlejuice and Polaris fade. A path of stars lights up the sky.

Follow me!

POLARIS

Very well. You have chosen.

BEETLEJUICE

Big mistake!

Polaris and Beetlejuice exit.

SIRIUS

Let's go let's go let's go let's go let's go!

Sirius jumps up and down in excitement.

EMELIA

Wait up! We can't go that fast we're in a big balloon!

Sirius zooms and zooms.

Come back!

He's gone already.

Darn it.

She takes out a ball and throws it unhappily.

Sirius returns momentarily with the ball (or stick) in his mouth.

Oh!

She ties a rope to him. Throws the ball.

The whole balloon moves.

Magic creates the MAP.

The glowing dot heads west.

Sunrise.
The Balloonist wakes up first.

BALLOONIST

Behold my flying conveyance! Look upon me citizens of America! A revolution in travel! Just fourteen days of near freezing conditions and you shall be whisked from New York to Los Angeles!

He looks about.
Magic shows clouds moving past them.

I am not seeing the throngs of slack-jawed gawkers I'd hoped for.

EMELIA

They're probably just gawking quietly.

Squonk wakes up.

BALLOONIST

Ahh!

SQUONK

What you do stop doing that?

THE BALLOONIST

There are days I believe I must have dreamt you. And then I wake up.

SQUONK

Where are we?

EMELIA

Let me check my states…

She starts looking in her backpack.
Big Fairy yawns, stretches and wakes up.

THE BALLOONIST

It is quite plain. There's almost nothing of interest.

Magic rolls out a carpet to show a vast plain.

EMELIA

Do you know where we are?

BIG FAIRY

The Great Plains. Where nature ran out of ideas.

EMELIA

It's really plain.

BIG FAIRY

Oh yeah. The plainest.

SQUONK

There's nowhere to hide! Everyone will see me!

She starts to cry.

EMELIA

Squonk, it's okay.

SQUONK

I feel exposed!

THE BALLOONIST

I want to be exposed and yet there is nothing to be exposed to!

SQUONK

And now I'm crying again! And making you all feel sorry for me! I shouldn't cry but I can't help myself!

EMELIA

It's okay to cry. Those are just emotions leaving your body. It's better to feel things than not to feel things, isn't it?

SQUONK

But what happens when you can't stop crying?

EMELIA

You just have to remember that people love you.

SQUONK

Do people… love me?

EMELIA

I love you.

SQUONK

But you just met me.

EMELIA

I love you because I've cried a lot too. I know what that's like.

THE SQUONK

Oh. Is it okay to cry from happiness?

EMELIA

It's always okay to cry.

Squonk cries. Emelia hugs her.

BIG FAIRY *(wiping a tear from his eye)*

Now I'm gonna cry. Which reminds me… does anyone want snacks?

THE BALLOONIST

Do you have snacks?

BIG FAIRY

No. That's why I'm asking. I'm hungry.

THE BALLOONIST

Excellent! I shall procure us some fresh birds! I have developed a new, even more efficient birding pole!

He takes out a new birding pole.

Here birdy birdy birdy!

A BIRD flies in. Observes him.

Yes. You are intrigued. Welcome to my lair said the spider to the fly –

The Bird approaches, snatches the birding pole out of his hand and whacks him with it.

Ah!

The Bird takes the birding pole and whacks the side of the balloon.

BIG FAIRY

Run!

EMELIA

How?!

BIG FAIRY

Figure it out!

Big Fairy tries to run, flails about.

THE BALLOONIST

Sir! Cease your wiggling at once!

BIG FAIRY

You need to cease trying to catch birds with a pole cause it's dumb!

EMELIA

Guys, I see a store down there!

A person waves a sign saying "WALL DRUG" near the edge of the stage.

It seems to be the only thing around here.

More signs for Wall Drug pop out of the wings.

They really want us to visit.

THE BALLOONIST

A capital idea! I shall set us down at once.

He pulls the cords to the balloon. Magic enters.

I said let us go down.

Magic tries to figure out how to show them descending.

Finally Magic lifts the blanket and raises it up towards them.

Nicely done.

THE SQUONK

That's the first time we haven't crashed.

THE BALLOONIST

Everyone out. We shall acquire snacks, and then continue our journey to Colorado-land.

They get out of the balloon.

Emelia fishes in her backpack and takes out a South Dakota puzzle piece.

EMELIA

If we are near Wall Drug, we must be in South Dakota! Top crops include corn, soybeans, and hay. State Motto: Land of infinite variety!

They look around.

BIG FAIRY

It says land of infinite variety?

EMELIA

Yeah.

SQUONK

Is that a misprint?

THE BALLOONIST

I think it's meant to be sarcastic.

BIG FAIRY

Maybe they mean it in comparison to North Dakota.

The JACKALOPE enters, with a threatening broom.

JACKALOPE

Stop right there! Interlopers!

SQUONK

Aaaaa!

The Squonk dissolves into a puddle of tears.

JACKALOPE

I seen ya comin! And you aren't interloping in these here parts! Not while I defend it!

EMELIA

What are you?

JACKALOPE

I'm yer worst nightmare!

The Jackalope attacks with his broom. He's very bad at it.

Stay in one spot so I can git ya! Yer movin! That's cheatin!

THE BALLOONIST

Please avoid damaging the balloon. We just got it fixed.

JACKALOPE

I'll damage whatever I want! This is my territory and I'll be darned if any murder hornets are going to take it over! I'll take all of ya! You ever heard of muy thai? Hoo-ah! Hee ya! Fa-sha-baba!

EMELIA

Murder hornets?

JACKALOPE

You can't fool me, murder hornets! I seen yer wings!

BIG FAIRY

These are fairy wings, dude.

EMELIA

We're not murder hornets!

Jackalope stops.

JACKALOPE

Yer not?

EMELIA

No. I'm a girl.

JACKALOPE

Checks out. What about that thing that dissolved?

The Squonk returns.

SQUONK

That's me. I'm a Squonk. I do that sometimes.

JACKALOPE

I see. You sure yer not murder hornets? I been hearin' lots of stories. And I'm ready for `em! We Jackalopes defend these here parts.

EMELIA

You're a Jackalope?

JACKALOPE

The Jackalopiest. I also sell snacks in my gift shop as well as some cheese from Jackalope milk.

EMELIA

Where do you get the milk?

JACKALOPE

DON'T ASK!

THE BALLOONIST

Not to fear, my good creature. I have great experience in the world, and I am certain that murder hornets do not exist.

JACKALOPE

Then what's that?

MURDER HORNET enters.

The Murder Hornet makes as grand an entrance as possible – MAGIC assists him with providing billowing smoke, making terrifying choir sounds, flickering the lights. Murder Hornet should appear to be as close to Darth Vader as possible.

MURDER HORNET

(terrifying voice of doom, perhaps with an echo effect from a microphone)

FEAR ME, MORTALS. I AM THE MURDER HORNET.

JACKALOPE

Stay back, y'all! I'll take `em!

He feints with his broom and the Murder Hornet snatches it out of his hand and throws it off-stage.

MURDER HORNET

I HAVE COME TO CONQUER YOUR PUNY PLANET.

JACKALOPE

We're doomed!

SQUONK

No! I know how to stop him!

EMELIA

What?

SQUONK

The only way to stop a murder hornet… is with love.

BIG FAIRY

I don't think so! I think that's totally wrong. I think he's gonna rip your head off!

SQUONK

Mister Murder Hornet? I know what it's like to be judged by your appearance, and also by your funny name. Can I hug you?

MURDER HORNET

…HUG ME?

SQUONK

Yes.

MURDER HORNET

NO ONE'S EVER ASKED TO HUG ME BEFORE. OKAY.

SQUONK

Everybody? I think we should all hug the murder hornet.

Emelia, The Balloonist, and the Jackalope tentatively come forward.
Big Fairy holds back.

Big Fairy? We need your hugs most of all.

BIG FAIRY

This is super weird but all right.

They all surround the Murder Hornet and hug him.

MURDER HORNET

OH THIS FEELS GOOD. IT'S REALLY WARM. ACTUALLY TOO WARM. OH MAN. OHHHHHHHH….

The Murder Hornet dies.

SQUONK

Got him!

JACKALOPE

He's dead?

SQUONK

Yep! Our group hug raised his internal temperature too much and he cooked to death in his own skin!

Short pause.

What?

BIG FAIRY

No that's cool.

SQUONK

I read it in a book.

JACKALOPE

Well I can't thank you enough, interlopers. You can have all the jackalope cheese you want.

He produces Jackalope cheese.

EMELIA

No thanks.

THE BALLOONIST

I will not be partaking.

BIG FAIRY

Oh gimme some of that.

He starts eating the Jackalope cheese.

Where'd you say this came from again?

JACKALOPE

…Jackalopes. I also have Jackalope oysters, if you'd like some.

BIG FAIRY

Hook me up.

THE BALLOONIST

Mr. Fairy, I'm not sure I would trust oysters… grown in South Dakota.

BIG FAIRY

That's the difference between you and me. I take foolish chances.

The Jackalope hands over some Jackalope oysters.

JACKALOPE

These belonged to my cousin Fred.

BIG FAIRY

Oh he owned them?

Short pause.

JACKALOPE

Sure.

Big Fairy starts eating the oysters.

What brings you to these here parts?

EMELIA

We're on an epic quest to save my mother from ski pirates.

JACKALOPE

An epic quest?! I haven't been on an epic quest in years! Who's yer lead warrior?

EMELIA

Um…

She looks at her companions. The Squonk is putting flowers on herself. The Balloonist is inspecting a pocket watch. Big Fairy looks a little sick from the oysters.

We're hopefully not gonna need warriors.

JACKALOPE

Not gonna need warriors?! Fer ski pirates?! They're mean as buzzards. On skis. With lift passes. Tell ya what: you helped me with the murder hornet, I'll help you with yer pirates. I am FEARSOME.

He picks up his broom again.

Look at these moves! Hi ya! Woo pah! Sha-ba-baba!

He hurts himself.

Ow. Hold on. Tweaked my back just a bit. I'm gonna need ya to stretch me out – just take a pull on one of my antlers.

Emelia pulls one on of his antlers.

Other one.

Emelia pulls on his other antler.

Oh that's better. Oh yeah. Impressive, ain't I?

SQUONK

I think you're impressive.

JACKALOPE

Thank you. Well what are we waiting for? Let's git!

BIG FAIRY

Hold on. My stomach is doing some unfortunate things.

JACKALOPE

That just means the oysters are working.

They climb into the balloon basket.

How's this thing work?

THE BALLOONIST

My dear rabbit –

JACKALOPE

Not a rabbit –

THE BALLOONIST

Prepare to be amazed by the stupendous flying balloon of Dr. Ambrose McGillicutty. A revolution in travel! A marvel of the modern world!

He releases the cord.

JACKALOPE

Is something supposed to be happening?

THE BALLOONIST

Any moment.

Wind chimes.

MAGIC creeps in.

Goodbye South Dakota! We shall not meet again!

JACKALOPE

So yer not givin' me a ride back?

THE BALLOONIST

We shall meet again once!

MAGIC lifts the balloon off the ground.

MAGIC rolls up the carpet and pulls it away from the balloon.

Clouds pass by.

MAGIC creates the MAP. A light moves closer and closer to Colorado.

MAGIC creates mountains in the distance.

EMELIA looks out with BIG FAIRY.

EMELIA

There they are! Mountains!

BIG FAIRY

Pretty big.

EMELIA

I've never seen the mountains before.

BIG FAIRY

You haven't?

EMELIA

My Mom loved skiing. Loves skiing. She was planning on taking me when I got big enough.

BIG FAIRY

Oh. Maybe you can go skiing after we rescue her from the pirates.

EMELIA

Right.

Short pause.

I'm scared.

BIG FAIRY

Why?

EMELIA

This feels like a big thing. What if they won't let us have my mother?

BIG FAIRY

It's important to try, isn't it?

EMELIA

I suppose.

BIG FAIRY

What happens if we don't try?

EMELIA

Nothing, I guess.

BIG FAIRY

So it seems to me it's better to try to do something than not try to do something. Especially with snacks.

EMELIA

Sometimes I remember I'm a very small person and this is a very big world.

BIG FAIRY

Yup. I mean I'm not as small as you, but in the grand scheme of things, I'm pretty small too.

EMELIA

So what do you do about that?

BIG FAIRY

Well – I just remember that everyone feels small sometimes.

MAGIC brings in snow.

EMELIA

Ooh it's getting c-c-c-cold….

The Squonk puts her arm around Emelia

THE SQUONK

Luckily my furry coat protects me from the cold.

Wind chimes.

A sign comes in that says Aspen.

EMELIA

I think we're here!

MAGIC lowers the balloon to the ground.

They get out.

Colorado!

She takes a puzzle piece out of her backpack.

Home to 2.8 million cattle.

She looks around.

They must be behind the mountains.

JACKALOPE

All right point me to these pirates! I say we charge in, beat `em up, rescue yer Mom, and ske-daddle.

BIG FAIRY

I'm not a ske-daddler. Sorry.

JACKALOPE

All right new plan. Everybody gets on Big Fairy – we ride him into their midst like a big ol' flying bomb. Boom. I leap out. Fight `em. Win. Take the lady. Simple.

THE BALLOONIST

First we must find these crafty pirates. They are most likely hidden.

Someone brings in a Jolly Roger flag with skis instead of bones.

EMELIA

Or not.

Another sign unfurls that says Pirates (the Skiing Kind)

They're more organized than I thought they'd be.

BIG FAIRY

Dude.

The Skiing Pirates enter. They wear large snowsuits – possibly with ski masks with eye patches over them. They brandish ski poles dangerously.

SNOWBEARD enters majestically, accompanied by LUCKY, a parrot (played by an actor in a parrot costume.)

SNOWBEARD

Ho ho ho.

EMELIA

Santa?

SNOWBEARD

NO.

LUCKY

No! Squawk.

SNOWBEARD

Ye have found our secret lair at last.

BIG FAIRY

It's not really all that secret with the sign and everything.

SNOWBEARD

Yar. I knew that sign be a mistake.

LUCKY

Big mistake!

SNOWBEARD

Shut yer beak!

LUCKY

Shut yer beak!

SNOWBEARD

You shut it!

LUCKY

You shut it!

Snowbeard tries to strangle Lucky, but SKI PIRATE 1 leaps in to hold him back.

SKI PIRATE 1

Remember yer blood pressure, brah.

Snowbeard sighs.

LUCKY

I'm a valued member of the team.

SNOWBEARD

You're a rat with feathers.

LUCKY

You're a rat with feathers.

Snowbeard is about to strangle Lucky again.

SKI PIRATE 1

Brah.

Snowbeard takes a moment and calms himself.

SNOWBEARD

Namaste, dang it. Namaste.

EMELIA

I bet you never thought I'd make it here. But here I am. And I'm not leaving without my Mommy.

LUCKY

Mommy!

SNOWBEARD

Ye can't have her! We kidnapped her fair and square!

All the pirates cheer and laugh.

EMELIA

GIVE ME BACK MY MOMMY!

SNOWBEARD

No! Yar har –

Jackalope leaps in.

JACKALOPE

GIVE US MOMMY!

SNOWBEARD *(confused)*

Who are you supposed to be?

JACKALOPE

MOMMY NOW!

SKI PIRATE 1

What is that thing?

JACKALOPE

I heard enough! EXECUTE PLAN ALPHA!

Nobody does anything. Jackalope turns to Big Fairy.

This is where I ride ya into battle.

BIG FAIRY

I never agreed to plan alpha!

JACKALOPE

I agreed for ya!

BIG FAIRY

These are not load-bearing wings!

JACKALOPE

Well gol dang it, it's time to improvise!

Jackalope charges. Everyone else watches. He takes a ski pole and duels with Ski Pirate 1. Additional ski Pirates leap from the wings, also carrying ski poles.

They fight.

Jackalope is defeated.
They hit him with ski poles.

JACKALOPE

Ow! Ow! Ouchy! Stop it.

He whimpers and retreats.

THE BALLOONIST

Excuse me, perhaps there's a way we could do this without violence.

SNOWBEARD

I'm all ears.

PARROT

All ears!

THE BALLOONIST

A *financial* arrangement could be reached. I am a man of business. I have a business proposition for you. Name your price.

SNOWBEARD

Yarr, bra. What could you possibly offer us? We ski all day. We have no need of finances.

The other pirates cheer.

SKI PIRATE 2

We're a Utopian society that has progressed beyond the need for money! Yar.

THE BALLOONIST

Surely with the proper amount of capital, we could fix this.

SKI PIRATE 1

No way bra!

THE BALLOONIST

Perhaps you're not hearing me correctly. I am a man of science and business and there must be a way to spend enough money to bring her back. I can learn about your ways, I can offer you a stake in my stupendous flying machine business, surely that will convince you –

SNOWBEARD

Yarr, we find your corporate presentation underwhelming!

PARROT

Underwhelming!

The other pirates cheer.

THE BALLOONIST

You're not hearing me! I have money! I can research your condition I can –

SNOWBEARD

We don't want money yarr.

THE BALLOONIST

You have to listen to me!

Emelia puts a hand on the Balloonist's shoulder.

EMELIA

It's okay.

THE BALLOONIST

I can fix this. Let me fix this.

EMELIA

Money can't solve everything.

The SQUONK comes forward.

THE SQUONK

Excuse me, Mr. and Misses Pirates?

They look upon her.

SKI PIRATE 2

Dude, whoah.

THE SQUONK

I know that I probably look pretty ridiculous to you.

SKI PIRATE 1

Yup.

THE SQUONK

And sometimes I feel really bad about myself. And before I met this girl I used to cry all the time. I still cry a lot. More than most people. But I'm not afraid of that anymore. And I'm not ashamed of myself anymore. And now I can stand in front of you – and let you see me. That's because of Emelia. She's been a friend to me. I didn't even know what that word meant before I met her. And she didn't get anything in exchange for that. I didn't have to fight her. She just did it out of the kindness of her heart. So I'm asking you, if maybe you could be kind to her too.

EMELIA *(touched)*

Oh, Squonk.

The Squonk cries.

THE SQUONK

I'm glad you saw me.

She cries more.

SKI PIRATE 2

That's so touching!

SKI PIRATE 2 cries.

SKI PIRATE 1

I feel really sad about my life choices!

PARROT

Mommy!

All the pirates are crying now.

THE SQUONK *(through tears)*

Please can you give her Mommy back?

SNOWBEARD

That be a very beautiful story even though you are not a traditionally attractive creature.

THE SQUONK

I know.

SNOWBEARD

But the answer is still no.

THE SQUONK

What?!

SNOWBEARD

We've repressed a lot of our feelings. That's why we're pirates. We didn't have good role models.

SKI PIRATE 1

I did. I'm just rebelling.

SKI PIRATE 2

I'm just here cause the skiing is profound.

SNOWBEARD

So no we're not going to give ye the Mommy for your tears.
To the Balloonist
Or for yer money.
To the Jackalope
Or no matter how much ye fight.

EMELIA

It's okay, Squonk.

THE SQUONK

I thought they would listen.

EMELIA

Maybe they will.
EMELIA steps forward.
All of my friends have tried, so I guess it's my turn. I can't fight, or bargain, or cry, so I'm going to ask you very nicely. Please. I don't know why you've taken my mother. I don't know if there's any reason for it at all. But I love her very much, and I would like her to be home safe with me.

SNOWBEARD

I believe you.

EMELIA

You do?

SNOWBEARD

But we can't give her back.

EMELIA

Why not?

SNOWBEARD

Because she's not ready.

SKI PIRATE 1

Yarrr.

EMELIA

I don't understand.

SNOWBEARD

Yer young.

Lights change. SQUONK, BALLOONIST, JACKALOPE, and BIG FAIRY move apart.
MOTHER appears, in the distance, in light.
The pirates move to the side, and slowly transform.
Wind chimes.
And a soft beeping noise in the background. The hum of ventilated air.

MOTHER

Emelia?

EMELIA

Mommy!

She takes a step towards Mother, but Mother doesn't move.

I've come to rescue you!

MOTHER

Oh.

EMELIA

I flew here in a giant balloon and we scared off some alligators and then I followed a dogstar and hugged a murder hornet! It was pretty sweet. And now I'm going to defeat these ski pirates and take you home.

MOTHER

I don't think I can go home, honey.

EMELIA

We can break you out of here.

Elsewhere, the ski pirates are huddling together.

MOTHER

I don't think that's a good idea.

EMELIA

I know the jackalope doesn't seem like a good fighter, but he's got a lot of spunk. And maybe we can come up with an idea no one's though of before.

The eye patches on the pirates now look more like masks.

MOTHER

Sweetheart.

EMELIA

You have to fight!

MOTHER

I am fighting. I'm fighting as hard as I can.

The pirates' snowsuits look more like scrubs now.

You know I'm fighting.

EMELIA

Then why can't you come home?

Beeping intensifies.

MOTHER

I'm here to get better. You know that. You have to let them do their work.

The doctors have huddled around a bed upstage. There's no one in it.

EMELIA

But… when are you going to be better?

Mother comes downstage to Emelia.

MOTHER

I don't know that.

EMELIA

Will you get better?

Silence.

But they're doctors. And they know all kinds of things. And I have magic. And all kinds of friends.

She takes a stuffed manatee out of her backpack.

I talked to a manatee.

She takes out flowers.

She was a really good mechanic.

She takes out a jackalope figurine

Remember when we went out west? I thought these guys were really funny. And next time we were gonna go skiing? We'll go skiing sometime, won't we?

MOTHER

I don't know.

EMELIA

But that's not how this is supposed to end. I'm on an epic quest… The epic quest always succeeds… I did everything right…

MOTHER

Sometimes – you can do everything right – and it's not enough.

EMELIA

Why?

MOTHER

I don't think anybody knows that.

EMELIA

That's not fair.

MOTHER

I know. I'm glad you like the backpack.

EMELIA

You sent this to me?

MOTHER

I thought you mind need it. In the future. I think your journey might have to be without me.

EMELIA

What happens if you're not with me?

MOTHER

Well I'm already in here, aren't I? In your heart.
She points to Emelia's heart.
That's who you've been talking to. I'm really over there.
She points to the bed where the doctors are working.

EMELIA

Are you always gonna be in my heart?

MOTHER

Always.

EMELIA takes a balloon out of the backpack – it's identical to the large balloon she's been flying in.

EMELIA

Take this, please. So I can see you.

Mother nods and takes the balloon with her.
She walks upstage and gets into the bed, attaching the balloon to the foot of it.
Emelia sits downstage. She turns away.

Lights change. Emelia sits in her own light.

BIG FAIRY *(off-stage)*

First you have to imagine things can get better.

VOICE

Can they get better?

BIG FAIRY *(off-stage)*

Depends on you.

The Squonk sits down next to Emelia

EMELIA

What happens when you can't stop crying?

SQUONK

You just have to remember people love you.

End of Excerpt.
To purchase this play, visit www.theatricalrights.com