

Sycorax

Cyber Queen of Qamara

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*“This damned witch Sycorax,
For mischiefs manifold and sorceries terrible
To enter human hearing, from Algiers,
Thou know’st, was banished. For one thing she did
They would not take her life.”*

William Shakespeare
The Tempest

CHARACTERS:

(An ensemble of five women and three men)

ANCIENT SYCORAX, an Algerian sorceress, age five hundred
SYCORAX, the youthful avatar of Sycorax, age sixteen to thirty-six
AMIRAH KHALED, Sycorax's avatar mother, age forty
RACHID KHALED, Sycorax's avatar brother, age nineteen
KARIM ZIYAD, Sycorax's avatar husband, age fifty
RIMA ZIYAD, Karim's avatar daughter, age sixteen
RANAH ZIYAD, Karim's avatar daughter, age eighteen
FATIMA ZIYAD, Karim's avatar daughter, age twenty-two
CALIBAN, Sycorax's avatar son, from infancy to age twenty
ARIEL, Sycorax's avatar sprite and Prospero's minion, age twenty
PROSPERO, an avatar magician, scholar, and former Duke of Milan, age fifty
MIRANDA, Prospero's avatar daughter, age sixteen
MAYA, an avatar hen
MIMI, an avatar goat
FAROUK, an avatar dog
FARAH, an avatar cat
MULLAH ONE, MULLAH TWO, MULLAH THREE

SUGGESTED DOUBLING:

RACHID / MULLAH TWO / FAROUK / PROSPERO
AMIRAH / FATIMA / FARAH
KARIM / MULLAH ONE / CALIBAN
MULLAH THREE / ARIEL
RIMA / MIMI / MIRANDA
RANAH / MAYA

TIME:

The present and early decades of the sixteenth century

PLACE:

A cave and surrounding fields on the island of Qamara, and two opulent homes in the city of Algiers

(Crows caw as moonlight reveals a shadow strewn cave on the island of Qamara off the coast of Algiers. The sorceress, SYCORAX, sits shrouded in a black robe, her wizened face illuminated as SHE gazes down on the screen of her computer. Crows are perched around the furnishings as SHE speaks with authoritative fury in an Arabic accent.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

I, Sycorax, command your attention! Harken to my live streaming sorcery! This hag's voice and visage appearing on your own and every functioning screen in the electrified world, is mine! Yes, I, Sycorax, mother of Caliban, mistress of Ariel, am still among you, hacking into your wretched lives and the lives of your misguided governments. My mission began when a Duke of Milan named Prospero slandered my name, but I've been patient: while Big Brother was watching, Big Sister was waiting! Waiting five centuries to tell my side of the story; five hundred years for the wicked web of the Internet to bestow the widest possible audience in every language on every continent! So behold the avatars enacting the truth of my tale which began when I was a girl in Algiers.

(As the ANCIENT SYCORAX points her finger, lights illuminate cameras hung high and focused on the avatars: the young SYCORAX is seated, carving wood. Her mother, AMIRAH, enters and places cups on the table. They both wear long robes of the period.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

There stands my avatar self at sixteen -- a real knockout! I'm carving a crow, and there's my avatar mother Amirah, coming in with...

ANCIENT SYCORAX

...a cup of tea.

AMIRAH

A cup of tea,...

AMIRAH

...my dear.

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Mother was aware of my powers from the time I was three. With the sheer force of my will, I unfurled her scarves so they danced to the wind chimes kept in motion with my eyes.

SYCORAX

After I finish this, I'm going to start carving sheep. (*she sighs*) If only I could go to the market and see the people who buy them!

AMIRAH

Soon you'll be too busy with a husband and children to fret about such things.

(RACHID, a handsome lad of nineteen, enters.)

RACHID

If anyone will have her!

ANCIENT SYCORAX

That's my brother, Rachid, who was being educated to become a scholar.

RACHID

Papa said she's scaring away suitors. So far only Karim Ziyad wants her.

SYCORAX

I'd rather be eaten by slobbering dogs!

AMIRAH

You're still young; there's time yet. Your father will arrange a suitable marriage.

RACHID

Ha! Three attempts have failed already.

SYCORAX

Really? Is that true, mama, no one wants me...?

RACHID

Karim Ziyad.

SYCORAX

He's too old, and already has three wives!

RACHID

Yes, but they're old too and he wants more sons.

SYCORAX

His daughters are my age!

RACHID

At least he's rich.

SYCORAX

He stinks like sour milk! I'd die if he touched me!

AMIRAH

Shush, child. Rachid, stop teasing your sister!

RACHID

If she wants a husband, then she has to stop showing off. *(to Sycorax)* People are calling you a witch, and not just because you spin plates and float feathers. It's your eyes: they say, "Why are they blue if she's not a witch?"

AMIRAH

Then tell them they're blue because your grandmother Zabrina's eyes were blue.

RACHID

But nobody remembers her, and now papa's blaming me. *(to Sycorax)* He said I should never have taught you to read, and I'm not to loan you any more books.

SYCORAX

Oh, no!

RACHID

It's because you've become prideful and insolent!

SYCORAX

And you've become...obedient! Oh, why do we always quarrel? You're my best friend; you've given me history, poetry, stories from countries I never knew existed. Because of you, I'm so much more than I would have been.

RACHID

Too much more! You and your sex can't be trusted with knowledge; you can't use it wisely.

SYCORAX

Oh, and you men have made such a paradise of the world -- always fighting each other! How could we women possibly make things worse?!

AMIRAH

Now children...

RACHID

Oh, why did Allah give women tongues! What an ass I was to let you use me!

SYCORAX

Ha! You used me too!

AMIRAH

Shush! Both of you!

SYCORAX

But it's true! He said by teaching me, he repeated and retained his lessons. (*she sighs*)
Oh, I hate being a woman! If I were a man I'd be a respected scribe or even a poet,
but at least I can carve animals that give pleasure.

RACHID

Not for long. Kalid Hajah may ban them from the market. He said the Quran forbids it;
only Allah can create images of living creatures.

SYCORAX

Images of human beings!

RACHID

He says it applies to *all* creatures; he said you should be carving pots and platters.

SYCORAX

Oh, wonderful! So now I'm forbidden to do the one thing I do well! Are all women
doomed to be nothing but slaves to men and screaming infants?! Well, I don't care
if I never marry!

AMIRAH

Your gifts come from Allah, my dear, so we must honor his wishes and fulfill our
destinies.

SYCORAX

But why did Allah give me these gifts if I'm not allowed to use them? Why?!

RACHID

There are people who think your gifts don't come from Allah, but the devil.

AMIRAH

Rachid!

RACHID

It's true, mama; Kalid Hajah called her a sorceress.

SYCORAX

If you were a true friend and brother, you'd defend me!

RACHID

I do!

SYCORAX

Well, Allah isn't the only god!

RACHID

Listen to yourself; that's blasphemy!

AMIRAH

She doesn't mean it.

SYCORAX

Yes, I do! It's in those books he gave me! It's true, mama, there are older, kinder gods. *(to Rachid)* Remember in Legends of the New World, the chapter about the pagan god, Setebos? Listen, mama: Setebos is a giant with horns, and the people in a land called Patagonia worship him by dressing in animal furs and dancing around fires. They don't have to press their foreheads to the ground with their rumps in the air, and Setebos doesn't make girls cover their heads or stay hidden in the house!

RACHID

That's sacrilege! Watch your tongue, and from now on I forbid magic! Just stick to your carving; having such talent should be magic enough.

SYCORAX

Ha! You don't know the half of it!

AMIRAH

Shush, please...

RACHID

What...? What don't I know?

SYCORAX

What if I could do more than just carve birds? What if I could make them fly?

RACHID

You can't!

SYCORAX

Not yet. Anyway, I'd rather carve sheep and horses and bring them to life. Imagine the possibilities for farmers. They'd love me.

RACHID

They'd hate you! To even think such things is heresy, a sin against nature!

SYCORAX

If I were really a sorceress, I'd conjure a man I could marry. He'd be strong and handsome and build us a beautiful house. He'd tend our garden, catch fish with his bare hands, and at night he'd tell tales to amuse me.

AMIRAH

But will he give you children?

SYCORAX

Yes, but we'd make babies simply by kissing, and they'd appear fully formed in baskets without all the messiness of birth. Then later we'd teach our children to be scholars like their uncle Rachid.

AMIRAH

What a dreamer you are!

SYCORAX

(she sighs) I know, and so far I can only bring the mice to life.

RACHID

Will you never stop talking nonsense?!

SYCORAX

(to Amirah) Ha! He doesn't believe me.

AMIRAH

Please, dear, don't...

RACHID

Don't what...?

SYCORAX

But I want to show him! *(pulling a mouse from a satchel)* Look: see this little wooden mouse. I'll cover him with my hand and whisper secret intentions for him to become a living, breathing, cheese-eating mouse.

(SYCORAX closes her eyes in silent prayer then opens her hand as RACHID looks in horror and backs away. SYCORAX places the mouse on the floor, and it skitters off as RACHID leaps aside to avoid it.)

RACHID
Ahhhhh!! My god!

SYCORAX
Ha, ha, ha!

RACHID

(pause) But how...?

SYCORAX

I simply prayed to Setebos instead of Allah.

RACHID

You what?!

AMIRAH

Now Rachid...

RACHID

It's wrong; it's evil;...

RACHID

...only Allah can give life! *(to Amirah)* Does papa know she does this?!

AMIRAH

No, and you must never tell.

RACHID

She should be whipped!

AMIRAH

Rachid, please...

RACHID

(to Sycorax) Listen to me!

RACHID

Fall on your knees before Allah! You heard me, on your knees!

(SYCORAX obeys, dropping to her knees.)

RACHID

Fix your eyes on the floor! On the floor! When Allah is present, you dare not look Him in the face! Now open your palms, face Mecca, and repeat after me: Allah is my only god and savior!

SYCORAX

Allah is my only god and savior.

RACHID

Allah forgive my sins!

SYCORAX

Allah forgive my sins.

RACHID

Allah make me humble!

SYCORAX

Allah make me humble.

RACHID

Now recite the seven verses!

SYCORAX

(standing) No!

RACHID

What?!

SYCORAX

You heard me! I'm sick of pretending to believe when I don't! If Allah and his Mullahs are so great, why did they let the Spaniards and Turks invade our city?! And why do they keep women locked in their homes, cowering with shame just because we bleed and grow breasts?!

RACHID

Listen to her, mama! Look what you've done?! You've spawned an infidel, a witch,...

RACHID

...a damned witch!

ANCIENT SYCORAX

A damned witch,...

ANCIENT SYCORAX

...he called me, my own brother -- the arrogant prick! Now stop!

(RACHID, AMIRAH, and young SYCORAX freeze as the ANCIENT SYCORAX speaks from her cave.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

So there they are: my family of avatars. For sorcerers, the past can be regained as well as retained, so I digitized and downloaded their memories which were culled, scanned, and preserved to hold as much data as twelve sixty-four gigabyte iPhones. Naturally, they know their names, their lineage, the history of everything quantifiable from their limited times and cultures; plus they possess extensive vocabularies, recognize indigenous plants and animals; they can farm, cook, sing, dance, masticate, defecate, mix a martini, fly a plane, and numerous apps that may seem superfluous, but you won't be seeing my father since his vicious betrayal rendered him unworthy of an avatar. *(pointing)* Now Rachid and Amirah will be leaving us! March! Hup, hup, hup!

(RACHID and AMIRAH march off.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

After that last scene, my father whipped me, and three months later arranged my marriage to the only bidder: Karim Ziyad.

(The KARIM ZIYAD avatar enters, bearded and stooped with age.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

There he is, the dickhead! Oh, the bitter tears shed as I left home to live with Karim, his wives, six sons, and three daughters. The Quran refers to females as the fields of men, and men are instructed to plow whence they please. Alas, old Karim plowed, and plowed, and plowed. (*addressing her avatar self*) Go ahead, show them what hell I endured.

(KARIM tosses SYCORAX on the table, flings himself on her belly, grunts, then leaves.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

But lucky me: the Quran also instructs men to avoid women during menstruation. They can't approach us till we've ceased bleeding, so we're exiled to the company of other women.

(As the ANCIENT SYCORAX continues, two young avatars, RIMA and RANAH ZIYAD, join the young SYCORAX who is carving.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Two of Karim's daughters, Rima and Ranah, visited during my bleedings. They were curious to know...

ANCIENT SYCORAX

...what's happening?

RANAH

What's happening,...

RANAH

...Sycorax? What are you carving now?

RIMA

Rats! She's always carving rats.

SYCORAX

They're mice, not rats!

RIMA

Why mice? Why not birds and butterflies?

SYCORAX

I'm too depressed to carve anything that flies.

RANAH

(to Rima) You must admit, they're a good likeness. *(to Sycorax)* We heard you can read as well as any man, and we wondered if you would...

SYCORAX

What...?

RANAH

If you would read stories and teach us to read for ourselves.

SYCORAX

How can I? Your father has forbidden access to the library. I'm not allowed to open a book until I give him another son. Why aren't six sons enough?!

RIMA

They're older and want to join the army. Papa thinks younger sons will be smarter and more obedient.

RANAH

And better looking since you're so...beautiful.

RIMA

You should be with child by now; Papa thinks you're barren. He says if you don't conceive in a year, he's going to give you to our Uncle Youcef.

SYCORAX

Really? Just give me away like an old shoe?

RANAH

(pause) If we hide books in our robes and bring them to you, would you teach us to read?

SYCORAX

Yes, but be forewarned: books will infest your mind with the horrors of history, and you may find yourself wanting to run away and meet people who don't look like us and live in lands with strange trees and flowers, and giant, thick skinned animals with horns in the middle of their heads.

RANAH

We're not afraid; we want to know everything.

RIMA

Our sister, Fatima, says you're a witch. Is that why they call you Sycorax?

SYCORAX

When I was a child, my brother, Rachid, called me that. He was educated, so you see, the first sound, "syc" is from the Greek word for pig because of my ravenous appetite, and the "korax" means crow because of the birds I mimicked like so: caaaww! For years I detested the name, but now I think it suits me.

RIMA

Fatima says you can breathe life into the dead.

SYCORAX

No, only into my carvings and only the mice. Then I set them by the window and they scamper away.

RANAH

They're probably joining the rats trailing the wagons of the dead. Papa says there's so many corpses, they can't bury them fast enough. He's making our servants wear masks to the market so they don't breathe the bad air, but Doctor Nezzar thinks the plague comes from poisoned wells.

RIMA

Papa says the bad air comes from the breaths of foreign infidels from Oran. If you're really a witch, why can't you cure the plague?

SYCORAX

My powers are limited, but sometimes I can glimpse the future. Other times, I ask myself questions and the answers appear in my dreams, but whenever I ask about the plague, all I see are swarms of tiny insects that look like fleas.

RIMA

That's silly, but if you can see the future, can you see ours? Will Ranah and I marry?

SYCORAX

Hold my hands and look at me.

(RIMA and RANAH grasp Sycorax's hands.)

SYCORAX

Yes, you will both marry.

RIMA

Will we have sons? Oh, please say we will have sons!

(Before SYCORAX can respond, FATIMA enters.)

FATIMA

Girls! What are you doing here?!

RANAH

Nothing.

RIMA

Sycorax can see our futures!

FATIMA

Leave her alone! Mama wants to see you both. The silk merchant is here and she wants you to choose the colors for your scarves. Now scat!

(RIMA and RANAH scamper off.)

FATIMA

I wish you'd never come here; you're upsetting my father. He's heard rumors that you're responsible for all this sickness, that you're evil and influencing me and my sisters. Our neighbors cross the street when they see me walking to the mosque.

SYCORAX

That's because you're a disagreeable hag; that has nothing to do with me.

FATIMA

You think you're so clever! You're barren and useless!

SYCORAX

Perhaps, but at least I was loved by my mother while you're only tolerated. In the future you'll become a bitter, childless wretch, forced to scrub floors and empty chamber pots.

FATIMA

You are cruel.

SYCORAX

No crueller than you and with reason. How would you like to be wrenched from your home by a man who mounts you like an animal, then sneers with contempt.

FATIMA

You're wrong; Papa admires your...beauty.

SYCORAX

It's not enough! I wanted to be more: to be a mother, yes, but a mother of children born of love, not vanity. Now please, leave me alone! *(pause)* Why are you still here?

FATIMA

Will I really be a childless wretch?

SYCORAX

What do you think?

FATIMA

(pause) My parents have failed to arrange a marriage, so I may not be...fortunate.

SYCORAX

Well, you're wrong. *(pause, staring)* I see four sons and two daughters, and you'll have a kind husband who respects you -- though I can't imagine why.

FATIMA

Oh, thank heaven; praise Allah! But when? When?! I'm already twenty-two!

SYCORAX

(pause) By this time next year you will be married.

FATIMA

Oh, bless you, Sycorax, bless you! But why did you say such terrible things?

SYCORAX

Because you hate me and I hate being here!

FATIMA

If I hate you, it's only because Rima and Ranah find you so fascinating, and they rarely speak to me, but I meant what I said about the rumors. They're saying you conjure rats to devour the dead.

SYCORAX

Mice, not rats! And they're harmless!

FATIMA

Well, stop it! There are people who want to see you...gone.

SYCORAX

You mean stoned, burned, or beheaded?! Isn't that what they do to witches?

FATIMA

Yes, unless...

SYCORAX

What...?

FATIMA

It's against the law to kill pregnant women, so you'll have to make yourself...

SYCORAX

Don't you think I haven't tried?! I've taken every potion and prayed to every god, yet every month the blood comes pouring out of me.

FATIMA

Doesn't my father lie with you?

SYCORAX

Yes, but his seeds are too tired to swim up stream!

FATIMA

Then perhaps...? Hmm...

SYCORAX

What...?

FATIMA

My brothers are young and strong, and find you attractive. What if I ask them to come to your room at night? I'm certain Hamid will be glad to help. He can start as soon as you finish your bleedings -- on the nights father's sleeping with his other wives.

SYCORAX

But what if Hamid's seed doesn't sprout?

FATIMA

Then I'll send Kamal.

SYCROAX

Why not send a different brother every night?

FATIMA

Yes...

SYCORAX

I was joking!

FATIMA

I wasn't! I'll send all six brothers, a different brother every night for twelve nights!

SYCORAX

Why not all at once?! We'll have an orgy like the Romans! Sorry, I didn't mean that, but what if your father finds out?

FATIMA

He's going deaf; he won't hear a thing.

SYCORAX

Are you sure your brothers will agree to such a deception? Why would they risk it?

FATIMA

Because you've cast a spell on them; you're all they ever talk about. Now all you have to do is keep your door open.

SYCORAX

And my legs spread!

(FATIMA leaves as lights dim and focus on the
ANCIENT SYCORAX.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

For the next two weeks, all six brothers came, pounced, and penetrated. I'll fast forward through the degradation.

(The young SYCORAX falls in bed on her back while
BROTHER after BROTHER enters, swiftly flops atop
her belly, grunts, then leaps off.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Being cursed with a vigilant memory, I'll never forget their rancid breaths, sweaty thighs, and wet wankers spewing inside me, and since I couldn't know which brother impregnated me, I imagined all their seeds mixing into a single seminal stew. But Fatima's scheme worked, and after seven weeks without my bleedings, I was declared to be...

ANCIENT SYCORAX
...with child.

FATIMA
With child!

(FATIMA, RIMA and RANAH approach, embracing
the pregnant SYCORAX.)

FATIMA
Sycorax is with child!

ANCIENT SYCORAX
At first everyone rejoiced, but by the third month something happened to my...

ANCIENT SYCORAX
...blue eyes.

RIMA
Blue eyes...

RIMA
...are witches' eyes, and your's are getting bluer every day. They say pregnancy
strengthens a witch's powers, and you can see through walls.

SYCORAX
Nonsense! Even witches can't see through stone.

FATIMA
Just keep them downcast, especially when men are about. There's also the problem of the
moon: the mullahs say it's casting brighter light on the rooftops of houses where people
become sick, and they're blaming you.

SYCORAX
Oh, wonderful! Now I'm accused of controlling the moon! What next? The sun! The
winds! The planets!

RANAH
Oh, why do men always have to have someone to hate, and why Sycorax?

FATIMA
Because she's as smart as they are!

SYCORAX
(pause, she sighs) Men need us, but they'll never love us.

RIMA
You're wrong: Papa loves us and he loves our mamas.

SYCORAX

But never as equals, never with the respect he has for other men.

RANAH

That's true. When he wants to talk about important things, Papa goes to the mosque or market to be with our uncles.

RIMA

At least men can go where they please. Papa said we can't even sit in the garden unless our faces are veiled and our brothers nearby.

FATIMA

Rima's right. No woman is safe now that the Turks have taken over.

RAHAN

They say Sultan Sulieman has a harem of three hundred girls guarded by eunuchs. Some are Jews and Christians, so his Grand Mufti is forcing them to convert.

RIMA

I heard the daughters of Muhammed Mustafa were taken right off the streets and never seen again.

FATIMA

Oh, Sycorax, if you really have any powers, could you find a way to...

RIMA

Murder Sulieman!

FATIMA

Burn down his palace!

RIMA

With him in it!

RANAH

Sink the ships in his armada!

RIMA

Turn the Turks into toads!

SYCORAX

I can't do that, but perhaps I can...

FATIMA
What...?

RIMA
What?!

SYCORAX
I can make them want to leave Algiers.

RANAH
How?

SYCORAX
Well, since everyone is always accusing me of carving rats, perhaps...

FATIMA
Yes...?

RIMA
What?!

SYCORAX
Bring me enough wood to carve rats the size of cats! When I have a dozen, I'll pray to Setebos, then lead them to the palace to breed whole armies of rodents!

FATIMA
They'll be ravenous and devour the food supplies!

RIMA
They'll gnaw holes in the bedding and leave trails of turds!

SYCORAX
They'll create such chaos, such odors of odium, that Sulieman and his cutthroat pirates will set sail for Constantinople and never return!

FATIMA
But what if they raise an army of cats to kill your rats?

SYCORAX
They won't! My rats will be so fearsome even wolves will run away.

RANAH
We'll steal some logs from our woodpile so you can start carving right away. You will be our savior, Sycorax,...

RANAH
....the savior of the women of Algiers.

ANCIENT SYCORAX
The savior of the women of Algiers!

(RANAH, RIMA, and FATIMA depart as skitterings are heard amid RAT shadows that swell to blackness encompassing everything but the ANCIENT SYCORAX gazing at her computer screen.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Now you see that I, Sycorax, was respected, even revered among women seeking freedom from the Ottoman ogres. As for my rats, they did indeed feed and breed inside the palace; they also attracted fleas that carried the plague virus, but who knew? Don't forget: this was the early sixteenth century when we believed the theory of miasma that claimed diseases were caused by noxious vapors emanating from anything that rots. The good news was that I was praised for causing hundreds of Turks to flee Algiers; the bad news was the unforeseen consequences.

(As the ANCIENT SYCORAX continues, THREE MULLAHS enter and the young SYCORAX falls to her knees, bowing her head.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Three malevolent mullahs came into my chambers, speaking on behalf of his royal highness,...

ANCIENT SYCORAX

...Sultan Sulieman.

MULLAH ONE

Sultan Sulieman...

MULLAH ONE

...and a tribunal of judges have declared you guilty of practicing...

MULLAHS ONE

...the Black Arts!

MULLAHS TWO, and THREE

The Black Arts!

MULLAH TWO

For the purpose of treason.

SYCORAX

Treason!?

MULLAH THREE

You have been accused of sending vermin to infest the royal robes.

(MULLAH TWO draws two fat rats from a sack and drops them by Sycorax's feet.)

MULLAH ONE

These rats were found in the folds of fabric.

MULLAH TWO

The royal tailor was bitten, then stricken, and died!

MULLAH THREE

You will be punished!

MULLAHS ONE

Banished from Algiers!

MULLAH TWO

...to live in exile on an island.

MULLAH THREE

An island where nobody lives and nothing grows.

MULLAHS ONE, TWO, and THREE

The island of Qamara.

SYCORAX

But I...I'm pregnant. How will I give birth alone?

MULLAH ONE

You will squat in a field.

MULLAH TWO

Cut the cord with your teeth.

SYCORAX

I...I demand a trial!

MULLAH THREE

Did she say "a trial"? Ha, ha!

MULLAHS ONE, TWO, and THREE

Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!

SYCORAX

Wait! Don't go! Please, don't leave; I...I can explain...

(The THREE MULLAHS depart laughing as the young SYCORAX chases after them.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

I was given two days to pack. My husband forbade his daughters to attend my bon voyage party, but Ranah sewed my carving tools into the hems of my robes and Fatima smuggled a box of paper, ink and quills.

(The young SYCORAX reappears and is approached by RACHID and AMIRAH carrying sacks of supplies.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

My mother came to bid me farewell accompanied by Rachid who gave me...

ANCIENT SYCORAX

...a copy of the Quran.

RACHID

A copy of the Quran...

RACHID

...will give you comfort. Take it to Qamara and pray that Allah has mercy on your soul.

SYCORAX

Take it back; Allah has forsaken me.

RACHID

Are you praying with a sincere heart?

SYCORAX

What difference does it make if he's deaf?

RACHID

Allah is walking beside you, but you can't see him.

SYCORAX

No! He can't see me because he's blind as well as deaf, dumb, and cruel! Why else would he cast me away?

RACHID

To test your faith.

SYCORAX

Well, I prefer a god who doesn't want to test and torment me! You should have brought me books of poetry and history!

RACHID

So you're refusing the Quran?

SYCORAX

Yes! If I'm a witch, I need a cauldron for mixing poisons to end my misery.

AMIRAH

Oh, no, my dear, you mustn't despair. Be your clever, resilient self, and someday you'll come back to us. Look, I brought loaves of bread and grains of wheat to plant for couscous; and here are olives, onions, almonds, apricots; some fresh figs, cumin, coriander, and a net for catching fish. I also packed pots, plates, linens and an indigo cloak that belonged to your grandmother, Zabrina. You'll need it to keep yourself warm, (*lowering her voice*) and perhaps it will serve other purposes.

RACHID

Why are you whispering? What do you mean "serve other purposes?"

AMIRAH

Only that it may be used as a...a blanket, or draped on sticks to block the wind, and after you give birth, it can be wrapped around my grandson.

SYCORAX

I don't want a son! Sons grow into men who betray women; I want a daughter to cherish the way you cherished me. Oh, mama, no one will ever love me as much as you. I'm so grateful for the many years in your care, and for giving me a brother, even though his head swelled like a melon while his heart hardened to a pip -- so now he's just another little man among all the other little men.

RACHID

And you're a wanton infidel among infidels! You should hear what people are saying!

SYCORAX

What...?

AMIRAH

No, Rachid, you mustn't.

RACHID

You really want to know?

RACHID

Sulieman's mullahs predict you'll give birth to a monster, and you'll be so hungry, you'll eat him!

AMIRAH

Shame on you! Apologize to your sister!

RACHID

She asked me to tell, you heard her!

AMIRAH

Apologize now!

RACHID

No! She's disgraced our family, so may Allah disgrace her memory!

SYCORAX

May Allah make your teeth fall out!

AMIRAH

Please, children!

RACHID

May you never return to Algiers!

SYCORAX

May your buttocks grow warts!

RACHID

May you writhe naked and screaming in hell! Now come, mama, it's time to leave!

(RACHID and AMIRAH depart, followed by the young SYCORAX as the ANCIENT SYCORAX speaks.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Now you've glimpsed some vital background information missing from Prospero's version of my life, not to mention Wikipedia and the World Wide Web of lies, lies, and more lies! I realize I'm painting my past in thick strokes of good and evil, implying that the men of my time were the natural enemies of women, but they were! They were! Especially Prospero who was wrong to claim that several sailors accompanied me. There was only one surly fellow who unloaded my supplies, then left without a backwards glance. I looked around and beheld nothing but sand, soil, a cluster of trees, and a single circling gull that led me to this cave.

(The young SYCORAX enters and stands near the cave.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

There I am: completely and utterly alone. Such solitude is impossible for any of you to imagine. With the incessant glut of internet influx, you're tied to technology like newborns to umbilical chords. There's always someone accessible, always someone fulfilling your infantile need to be cherished while consuming the latest tabloid trivia. But I, Sycorax, had no one and nothing but my own resources, though the gossips of Algiers were right: pregnancy did indeed enhance my powers, and so did...

ANCIENT SYCORAX
granny's cloak!

SYCORAX
 Granny's cloak...

SYCORAX
 ...will keep me warm, and this cave will suffice as my new home while I contemplate the manner of my inevitable demise. (*putting on the cloak*) The fabric's so soft, and I feel a sudden warmth within, yet a lightness of limb as if I weighed no more than a sparrow. I must think what to do with myself. I can't just stand here, but I don't wish to sit on the ground, so I'll take a fallen tree limb, and carve a proper chair.

ANCIENT SYCORAX
 Now I'm going to fast forward through the crafty furnishings of my cave, and there it is: the first of several chairs.

(Lights flicker as a fancifully shaped chair appears.)

SYCORAX
 Now I'll need a table!

ANCIENT SYCORAX
 (*pointing*) That was my first table.

SYCORAX
 How strange! I barely touch my blade to the wood, and it forms into the object I imagine only stronger and...peculiar. I wonder: was granny a witch and this her magic cloak? Was that what mama was trying to tell me? (*pause she sighs*) Well, now I think I'll sit on my new chair and carve myself a nice fat hen.

(SYCORAX quickly carves a hen and sets it on her lap.)

SYCORAX
 Oh, great god Setebos, please grant that my little wooden hen springs to life so she can lay eggs for me and my child.

ANCIENT SYCORAX
 And lo! My fat hen sprang to vivid life!

(SYCORAX gasps as clucking sounds are heard and a feathery HEN-HEADED CREATURE appears.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Notice how my hen morphed into a mutation with arms and legs, and laid four eggs a day, then juggled them as well. She must have been the result of my deep longing for company, for there she was, my genetic chimera:...

ANCIENT SYCORAX

...half hen, half human.

SYCORAX

Half hen, half human...?!

SYCORAX

Well, I ought to give you a name, so I'll call you Maya! And now I'll carve a goat for milk and cheese. Later I'll carve a wheel for spinning its fine hair into cloth and carpets.

(SYCORAX carves as bleating sounds are heard and a GOAT-HEADED CREATURE appears.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

I named my goat...

ANCIENT SYCORAX

...Mimi..

SYCORAX

Mimi...

SYCORAX

...and to keep me company, I'll need a cat.

(SCORAX carves and mewings are heard as a CAT-HEADED CREATURE appears.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

I named her...

ANCIENT SYCORAX

...Farah.

SYCORAX

Farah!

SYCORAX

But I'll also want a dog,...!

SYCORAX

...Farouk!

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Farouk!

(As SYCORAX carves, a yapping DOG-HEADED CREATURE appears, then all FOUR ANIMALS surround her, creating a harmony of sounds that SYCORAX conducts to a crescendo, then stops.)

SYCORAX

Wonderful! Now I won't be so alone, and we'll work together till the birth of my child which gives us six months to turn this desolate rock into a...a garden! Yes, my daughter will be born in a garden; my darling dolma, my cherished chickpea will sing in the sun and dance in the rain, and I'll teach her to read and write, but I must never mention my father, brother, husband or the mad mullahs of Algiers. No, no, I must never let my bitter memories poison her bloodstream, tainting her innocence, the perfection of her keen senses, her strong limbs, raven hair, and heart of purest gold. Of course, there are things I cannot give her, like a large, loving family, so I must be both mother and father, sister and brother, aunties and uncles. Yes, our existence on Qamara will have to be enough, and now I must start planting seeds, and pray to Setebos for a swift, robust ripening.

(The young SYCORAX begins planting seeds as the ANCIENT SYCORAX speaks.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

If you're still watching, you can blame your sinister service providers with their neural-network-addicting links! Yes, they've all succumbed to my bullying cameras, forcing you to focus on my cast from the past, so sit back and relax. Our revels now are just beginning! Now imagine the months passing, the seeds sprouting, yet the babe within refusing to emerge despite my conjuring cloak, various potions, and fervent supplications to Setebos to...

ANCIENT SYCORAX

...please deliver me.

SYCORAX

Please deliver me...

SYCORAX

...of my child before she withers within and kills us both!

(The young SYCORAX, now hugely pregnant, falls to her knees.)

SYCORAX

Ohhhhh, please, please, Setebos, we will both perish if you don't give my child a gentle push, a guiding light for her to see her way out of my womb and into my arms.

(Bright bolts of lightning flicker as SYCORAX trembles uncontrollably.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

I was struck by a lance of lightning, then felt something slither between my legs and into my waiting arms.

SYCORAX

Ohhhhhhhh!!

(SYCORAX grasps the swaddled bundle to her bosom as the INFANT makes a mooing sound.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

I severed the cord with a knife and took a closer look at...

ANCIENT SYCORAX

...my baby.

SYCORAX

My baby...

SYCORAX

...has a...a spout! There must be a mistake! Oh, how could this have happened?! I must be having a nightmare, but no, no, I...I'm awake, and it's definitely...

SYCORAX

...a boy.

ANCIENT SYCORAX

A boy!

SYCORAX

(pause while counting) Ten fingers, ten toes, thank heaven! But I didn't expect such large hands and feet, and your spine appears to be curved, and you're so dark with so much hair, you're positively...

SYCORAX

...feral.

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Feral!

SYCORAX

Sorry. *(she sighs)* Well, let me be the first to welcome you to the world, at least our little plot of it. I'm Sycorax, your mother, and I'm going to have to adjust to your being a prince instead of a princess. Yes, I'm still going to bathe you in scented water and rock you in my arms, and promise not to let my...disappointment affect you, simply because you're...

SYCORAX

...a freak!

ANCIENT SYCORAX...

A freak!

SYCORAX

Oh, no, no! Forgive me, I...I didn't mean that. After all, we're both freaks in a way, exiled outcasts, but you'll have a mother like mine; a mother who loved with unquestioning adoration. In fact, I was going to name you Amirah in her honor, but instead I'll name you Caliban which means mooncalf because you were born during the fullest phase of the moon, and you make sounds like a...

(The INFANT CALIBAN moos.)

SYCORAX

...calf. With those hands you'll make a great farmer or wood cutter, perhaps even a carver like me, but now it's time for you to suckle my breasts bursting with -- ouch! My goodness, you certainly have sharp...

SYCORAX

...teeth.

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Teeth...

ANCIENT SYCORAX

...like a wolf he had!

SYCORAX

Owwwwwww!

(The young SYCORAX and the infant CALIBAN stroll off.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Motherhood was a challenge since little Calibanana possessed a ravenous appetite, guzzling gallons of milk from me and the goat, and over the years he grew into a very large, rather clumsy but curious boy.

(The CALIBAN avatar enters: HE is a large, hairy, stoop-shouldered youth, followed by SYCORAX and the FOUR ANIMALS.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

There he is: my Caliban: a man fully grown. Of course, living without a calendar, I lost track of the phases of the moon, so Caliban could have been sixteen or twenty, but Prospero lied to call him an illiterate savage who only uttered obscenities! Bullshit!

CALIBAN

(growling) Grrrrrrr....

ANCIENT SYCORAX

It was I, Sycorax, who taught Caliban how to speak, read and write, and while it's true he tended to mimic the animals, he often spoke well, even eloquently. But beyond that he possessed a kindly nature, and together we led peaceful, pastoral lives. Yes, Caliban had an ideal childhood since all he had to do was be a child, but as he grew older, I noticed...

ANCIENT SYCORAX
...a wistful look.

SYCORAX
A wistful look...

SYCORAX
...overcomes you at times. What's wrong, my dearest?

CALIBAN
Oh, nothing, mother, really, I'm fine, especially when I'm building my boat.

SYCORAX
Your boat...? What boat?! Where?!

CALIBAN
On the other side of the island there's a fallen tree, so I started trimming the trunk, shaping the bow, hollowing the center, and when I'm finished, we can sail to Greece and other places you've told me about.

SYCORAX
But why? What's wrong with the beauty of Qamara, the devotion of our pets, and a mother's love? Aren't they enough?

CALIBAN
Yes, of course, I didn't mean to complain; I'm very content, really, I am.

SYCORAX
Content is not happy. Perhaps you'd be happier if you had the companionship of someone one more like yourself? But we still have Farah and Farouk, the trees and flowers, the stars and the sea. They're all our friends and we talk to them.

CALIBAN
Yes, but they don't talk back.

SYCORAX
Oh, but they do! They make the most wonderous sounds that give delight like a thousand twangling instruments that hum about our ears.

MAYA
(clucking hideously) Bawk, bawk, bawk!

FARAH
(mewing) Meewwwwww...

FAROUK
(yapping) Gruff, gruff..

MIMI
(bleating) Baaa, baaa...

SYCORAX

(covering her ears) Shush! I suppose you'd prefer to converse with someone who speaks the same language.

CALIBAN

That would be nice.

SYCORAX

Perhaps you'd like a fellow to go fishing with or stroll the beach, someone who could be a friend to us both.

CALIBAN

Yes!

SYCORAX

Of course, I've never attempted to carve a person, though there's no harm in trying. First, we'll need to find the tallest, sturdiest pine tree on Qamara.

CALIBAN

I think I know such a tree. Follow me!

(SYCORAX and the ANIMALS follow CALIBAN, strolling towards a large tree.)

SYCORAX

Oh, Caliban, this is magnificent, and even if I wear my magic cloak, it will take weeks to carve. *(pause, thinking)* I'll make him the ideal height, width, and proportions, and he might even be useful and help harvest our crops, and wouldn't it be lovely if our man could play the flute?

CALIBAN

And sing and dance!

SYCORAX

Yes! And what else would you like him to do?

CALIBAN

Could he fly like the birds?

SYCORAX

Well, I suppose we could request that he fly.

CALIBAN

And make himself invisible?

SYCORAX

Why not? That would be useful if we're ever invaded or need a spy.

CALIBAN

Could he bring rain storms when we need more rain?

SYCORAX

We could ask.

CALIBAN

And could he tell stories?

SYCORAX

Well, to tell stories he'd have to have something to tell, which means he'd need a past and knowledge of worlds beyond our shores, the habits and histories of other people, and if our man is going to amuse us, then he'll have to have an imagination...

SYCORAX

...a mind of his own!

ANCIENT SYCORAX

A mind of his own!

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Stop!

(SYCORAX and CALIBAN freeze.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

That was the fatal flaw, my tragic mistake, the cause of catastrophic chaos and centuries of misinformation. To think how foolish, how naive I was to attempt to create...

ANCIENT SYCORAX

....a perfect man!

SYCORAX

A perfect man...

SYCORAX

...is what I'll carve!

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Hah! Ha, ha, ha, ha!

(Now SYCORAX approaches the tree, wielding a knife.)

SYCORAX

I'll start by cutting the branches and scraping the bark, and in the meantime we should think of a name for our man.

CALIBAN

A special name for a man who can fly.

SYCORAX

Men who fly are called angels, and the most famous was named Gabriel. He first appeared to a Jewish nobleman named Daniel, then later to a virgin named Mary, and centuries after that to a prophet named Muhammed. In any case, we shouldn't name him Gabriel, but if we remove the letter G we have the name...

SYCORAX

...Abriel.

CALIBAN

Abriel...?

SYCORAX

That doesn't sound right, but if we also remove the letter B, we have...

SYCORAX

...Ariel.

CALIBAN

Ariel!

CALIBAN

Yes! Ariel's a fine name!

SYCORAX

Now I'll start at the bottom of the trunk, carving Ariel's toes, then move up his legs to his knees, his hips, belly, shoulders, neck, and finally to his handsome head.

CALIBAN

Don't forget the wings! Oh, mother, I can't wait to meet him!

SYCORAX

I confess, I sometimes wondered if you were lonely, but haven't we been happy?

CALIBAN

Oh, yes, I think so.

SYCORAX

How I've loved seeing Qamara through your innocent eyes. You're living proof that I'm not completely bitter, that I possess maternal love. *(pause)* Oh, my dear Calibanana, let's pray to Setebos to make Ariel a bright, loyal companion who will never betray us. Of course, if he has a mind of his own, I can't control him, though I could punish him.

CALIBAN

How?

SYCORAX

I don't know, but fear not, it will never come to that.

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Stop!

(SYCORAX and CALIBAN freeze.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Hah! What a fool! If only I'd made Ariel the slave Prospero accused him of being! Instead he was my creature, my creation. Of course, my avatars are the real slaves, pre-programmed simulations assembled to behave as I command. Look: *(to Sycorax, Caliban, and the animals)* lift your right arms! Lift your left! Step forward, then pivot, pirouette -- now cease!

(The AVATARS spin, then stop.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

There are algorithms for everything, and I spent years perfecting their features, gestures, their precise ways of walking, talking, translating and updating idioms so you could hear the truth, and trust me, Sycorax never forgets -- or forgives. So let's fast forward through two months of carving, and finally, there he was!

(ARIEL stands within the trunk of the tree.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

...our Ariel!

SYCORAX

Our Ariel,...

SYCORAX

...is nearly complete! *(she sighs)* How handsome he is, how perfect!

CALIBAN

Is this what a perfect man looks like?

SYCORAX

Well...

CALIBAN

He's not hairy or stooped like me; he's straight and tall; his skin's smooth, his forehead's high, and his teeth even.

SYCORAX

Oh, my sweet, I forgot that you've never seen another man, but they come in many shapes and colors, though physical beauty means nothing at all. Some handsome men are savage beasts, and some savage looking men possess great moral beauty: generosity of heart and majesty of soul -- like you, my dear Caliban.

CALIBAN

But where's his water spout?

SYCORAX

(while carving) I'm tucking it under a tunic so it won't get in the way. *(pause as she finishes)* There! Now let's pry him out of the tree!

(SYCORAX and CALIBAN prod ARIEL'S torso from the trunk, then step back and drop to their knees.)

SYCORAX

Now pray: Oh, great god Setebos, breathe fresh air into Ariel's lungs so he'll spring forth, full of radiant life!

(Beams of light illuminate ARIEL who leaps forth, trilling operatically and twirling in circles.)

ARIEL

AHHHHHHHHhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh...

(ARIEL ceases singing and dancing, then bows.)

SYCORAX

(pause) Well, hello, welcome Ariel! I...I'm Sycorax, and this is my son...

CALIBAN

Caliban! I'm Caliban!

(ARIEL sings operatically.)

ARIEL

*THE PLEASURE IS MINE,
WHAT A JOY TO BEHOLD,
THE WARMTH OF YOUR SMILES,
THOUGH MY SAP'S RUNNING COLD.*

SYCORAX

Oh, are you cold?

ARIEL

*PLEASE HOLD MY HANDS,
HOLD MY HANDS IF YOU WILL;
THOUGH THE SUN'S BEAMING BRIGHT,
THE WIND'S LEFT A CHILL.*

(CALIBAN clasps a hand; SYCORAX clasps the other.)

ARIEL

*GOOD CIRCULATION
ENSURES ANIMATION!
BLOOD'S STARTING TO FLOW
TO MY HEART SO I KNOW
I'M ALIVE, I'M ALIVE, I'M ALIIIIIIIIIVE!*

SYCORAX

Yes, you certainly are. Do you talk as well as sing?

ARIEL

*SINGING IS ALL THIS VOICE CAN DO,
TRA LA, LA, LA; TRA LOO, LOO, LOO!*

(ARIEL releases their hands and starts to dance.)

ARIEL

*HOW I DREAMED OF THE CHANCE
TO BE ABLE TO DANCE;
MY LEGS LONGING TO LEAP,
AS IF FLAMES LICKED MY FEET;
OH, I'M HAPPY TO BE ALLIIIIIIIIIVE!*

SYCORAX

That's lovely, Ariel, but could you stand still for a moment? You're making me dizzy.

(Pause as ARIEL ceases dancing.)

SYCORAX

Yes, that's better. Now Ariel, Caliban and I have so much to show you. *(to Caliban)*
Shall we start by introducing him to our animals?

CALIBAN

Yes! This is Farah and Farouk, Maya and Mimi.

FARAH
Mewwww...

FAROUK
Grrrrrrrr...

MAYA
Bawk, bawk...

MIMI
Baaa, baaa...

CALIBAN

And we eat and sleep in our cave. Mother, you'll have to carve another bed for Ariel.

ARIEL

*OR I COULD LIE BY (grasping Sycorax's hand) YOU OR (grasping Caliban) YOU!
WHY SLEEP ALONE IF THERE'S ROOM FOR TWO?*

SYCORAX
Well...

CALIBAN
(to Sycorax) Why is your face turning red?

SYCORAX
I...I must be feverish from all this excitement. *(to Ariel)* You can release my hand now.

CALIBAN
You can keep holding mine. Oh, mother, isn't he amazing?

SYCORAX
Yes, yes, he is. Now Ariel, tell us about yourself. Setebos infused you with life, but do you remember your existence before this?

ARIEL
*I ONCE WAS A CREATURE OF LIGHT,
SOMEONE YOU MIGHT CALL A SPRITE;
DRIFTING ABOUT ON PUFFS OF AIR,
FEELING NOTHING OF HUMAN DESPAIR.
BUT NOW YOU'VE GIVEN ME A NOSE
TO SNIFF A WHIFF OF FISH AND ROSE;
THESE EARS YOU'VE CARVED DISCERN ALL SOUNDS,
A WHISPERED BREEZE, THE BARK OF HOUNDS;
THESE EYES THAT MIRROR YOU THROUGH ME
BEHOLD THE SHAPES TWIXT SKY AND SEA;
SO WITH NOSE AND EARS AND EYES IN PLACE,
YOU'VE GIVEN ME A HUMAN FACE!
BUT A SENSE OF TOUCH IS THE GREATEST OF JOYS;
TEN FINGERS FOR FONDLING SWEET GIRLS AND BOYS.
NOW THAT I'M TRULY HUMAN, FULL OF HUMAN LUST;
I WANT TO FEEL EVERYTHING BEFORE I TURN TO DUST!*

SYCORAX

Oh, dear... Now Ariel, even though we requested someone who could sing and dance, we didn't mean for your talents to be displayed so...persistently. We only wanted a companion. (*glancing upwards*) Oh, Setebos, divine Setebos, could you please make Ariel less... tuneful? Could he walk normally and speak without the shrill trills?

(A light beams down on ARIEL who grabs his throat.)

ARIEL

AHHHHHHHHhhhhhhhhhhhh,
 I no longer feel the beat,
 I'm not as nimble on my feet;
 Something's awry; my throat's aflame;
 My tunes are gone, but the rhymes remain.

CALIBAN

Oh, mother, please let him keep his rhymes. I like them, and it's such a nice change from our way of speaking.

SYCORAX

(*pause*) Yes, I agree, the rhymes should stay. Now Ariel, there's plenty to keep you busy on Qamara: there's wood to chop; fish to catch; the gardens need tending; the animals need feeding; but mostly we want you to share your knowledge of the world. Are there many of you sprites?

ARIEL

We number six hundred and tend to be fools,
 Rejected as angels for breaking the rules.
 We're ancient but ageless, our bodies ideal;
 We all appear youthful to keep our appeal.
 We're erratic, ecstatic, with sexual needs
 Indulging our lust for unspeakable deeds.

SYCORAX

Oh, dear. Of course, we want you to feel free to express yourself -- within limits. Since you can control the rain, we'll teach you when to water the crops, and since you fly, you can patrol Qamara from the clouds.

CALIBAN

But nobody visits; even pirates steer clear. Before I was born, mother conjured a thick green fog that reeks of rot and makes everyone think the island's cursed with plague.

ARIEL

The coast of Qamara I'll guard night and day,
Blow gales of wind that turn ships away;
But I can't patrol if a fog prevails,
So lift your curtain on enemy sails.

CALIBAN

Yes, mother, please lift your stinky fog!

SYCORAX

(pause) Well, all right, as long as no ships reach our shores.

ARIEL

What do you do for frivolous fun?
Isn't it lonely, just mother and son?

SYCORAX

Oh, we're never lonely; there's plenty to keep us busy.

CALIBAN

And plenty to eat, especially from our fig and pear trees.

ARIEL

My tongue's never tasted a fig or a pear;
We sprites being fairies just feasted on air.
This sensation is new, my need to devour
The flavors of nature: the sweet and the sour.

CALIBAN

Well, I happen to have some figs in my pocket. Here, try one.

ARIEL

(taking a bite) Mmmmmmm....

CALIBAN

Look at him, mother: his first taste of fig!

ARIEL

Every morsel meant for me
Reveals a holy mystery.

CALIBAN

Don't you love how he delights in everything?!

SYCORAX

Yes, it's as if our fruits have ripened just for Ariel.

ARIEL
Mmmmm...

CALIBAN
Yes!

SYCORAX
Every tree planted just for his pleasure.

CALIBAN
Mother, why don't I give Ariel a tour of the island while you cook supper? Then later he can play his flute for us.

(CALIBAN and ARIEL start to leave.)

SYCORAX
Wait, Caliban! Before you leave, we need to chat privately, *(to Ariel)* if you don't mind?

ARIEL
Perhaps I'll amble towards the sea,
Take in the view from the limb of a tree.

(ARIEL leaps off as SYCORAX takes CALIBAN aside.)

SYCORAX
Now, Caliban, be careful of Ariel. Don't let him come too close or touch you in private places. I mean near your...*(whispering)* water spout.

CALIBAN
Why would he do that?

SYCORAX
Well, I think he has urges to do what the dog tried to do with the goat when he mounted -- oh, never mind! Just promise you'll keep him at a distance.

CALIBAN
But I like him, and he likes me, and he likes you too.

SYCORAX
Yes, but we don't know him very well, and we're not sure how he's going to fit into our lives here. Oh, dear, he's back already.

(ARIEL approaches SYCORAX with a rose.)

ARIEL

This is for you, sweet lady mine:
A bloom from a bower, its color sublime.

SYCORAX

Well, thank you, Ariel, it's quite lovely, but I'm not your sweet lady.

ARIEL

If you're not sweet, are you moody and mean?
Your beauty fading from ceasing to dream.

SYCORAX

What?! No, I'm not mean or fading -- am I? And what do you mean "ceasing to dream?"
What would you know of my dreams?

ARIEL

We sprites spy on humans, especially the scorned:
The misfits, the exiled, their absence unmourned.
With Caliban's birth, you conquered despair;
His life gave you meaning, his trust in your care.
With each passing year, you both learned to cope;
By tending your gardens, your days filled with hope.

SYCORAX

That's right, here on Qamara we rule over everything, and lack nothing except the
companionship of others, which is why Caliban felt a need for more...

ARIEL

Stimulation...?

SYCORAX

Conversation! Since you've lived so long and seen so much, we hope you'll share your...

ARIEL

Conquests...?

SYCORAX

Adventures!

ARIEL

You want my stories, and I want to know
Everything human that life can bestow.

CALIBAN

Then come, Ariel, follow me!

SYCORAX

Perhaps I should tag along...?

CALIBAN

Don't worry, mama, we'll be fine. Let's go!

(As CALIBAN and ARIEL start to leave, the ANCIENT SYCORAX shouts.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Stop! You heard me, stop! Now pivot! Pose!

(CALIBAN and ARIEL freeze.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Behold my Ariel: Imagine the heat radiating off him, as if he'd swallowed the sun, the moon, and stars. He was daring and dashing, and Caliban so innocent, so vulnerable. *(pause, she sighs)* There they stand, my boys: born of womb and whimsy, their lives all promise, the two of them eager to blaze new trails and leave mother behind, but I, Sycorax, would not be left! As a witch I taught myself the art of possessing the bodies of familiars, so watch me fuse my mind with Farouk's in order to eavesdrop through his keen canine eyes and ears.

SYCORAX

Wait, Caliban, wait! Farouk wants to join you!

(After SYCORAX waves farewell, her body quivers and collapses while FAROUK shivers, yaps, then follows CALIBAN and ARIEL.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

So there we were, strolling about the island until we stopped on a grassy knoll.

(CALIBAN, ARIEL and FAROUK stop, gazing out.)

CALIBAN

From here you can see most of Qamara. *(pointing)* Past the orchards are the wheat fields and gardens, and there's the beach where we fish and swim.

ARIEL

So that's why you smell so sea-salty clean,
Brimming with brine like a boy in a dream.

CALIBAN

If you dream about boys whose faces are pocked.

ARIEL

Look on the bright side: You're really well cocked!

(ARIEL wraps his arm around CALIBAN as FAROUK growls.)

ARIEL

How does that feel, my arm round your waist?
A gesture of friendship, not quite an embrace.

FAROUK

Grrrrrrrrrrrr...

CALIBAN

My mother said we shouldn't touch. She just wants you to share your stories.

ARIEL

My treasure trove of faded glories?
Becoming human negates the past;
Alas, my history's fading fast.
Gone are memories of whither and whence,
Leaving room for the present and future tense.

(Now ARIEL lowers his arm as FAROUK yaps.)

ARIEL

As I rest my hand upon your hips,
Behold! A quiver on your lips.

FAROUK

Arrrrrf, arrrrrf, arrrrf...

CALIBAN

Oh...

ARIEL

I'll drop my hand upon your rear,
Then face you for a kiss, my dear.

(As ARIEL starts to kiss CALIBAN, FAROUK howls.)

FAROUK
Arrrruff, ruff, rowwwwww...

CALIBAN
Shush, Farouk! Shhhhooh!

ARIEL
Silence, you beast, let Caliban play,
Make up for the years he's wasted away!

(FAROUK leaps about yapping as THEY separate and freeze while the ANCIENT SYCORAX speaks.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX
Watching them made me furious. Of course, it's all the rage now: boy-mad boys and men-mad men -- in some countries they even get married! But remember, I was a girl of ancient Algiers, and sex between a man and woman was bad enough: a painful, appalling necessity for bearing children. I never imagined enjoying it, yet before I stopped them, I noticed Caliban smile in a way I'd never seen, and wondered what...

ANCIENT SYCORAX
...am I missing?

SYCORAX
Am I missing...

SYCORAX
...something?

(The young SYCORAX becomes herself again and is joined by CALIBAN and ARIEL as they arrive with sacks of fruit, followed by FAROUK.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX
By the time they'd returned, I'd rejoined my mind to my body and greeted my boys.

SYCORAX
Ah, there you are! Did you have a nice walk?

CALIBAN
Yes, and we picked apples and apricots.

SYCORAX
Thank you, dear. Please take them inside while I chat with Ariel.

(CALIBAN departs.)

SYCORAX

Now, Ariel, we need to talk: leave my son alone! Caliban is my only child and he's a good, kind, innocent boy.

ARIEL

Innocent or ignorant? You've kept him in the dark,
Like a bat who shuns the light, but longs to be a lark.
While the boy has grown in stature, he's stunted and denied
A chance to test his talents, to fulfill his manly pride.

SYCORAX

Ha! You're just trying to confuse and corrupt him, to lure him away from me!

ARIEL

Frankly, my dear, it's you I most crave;
To your son I'm a friend, but to you I'm a slave.
But what have you known of sensual joy,
Alone on this island, just you and your boy.
A pity you've never felt the bliss
Of two tongues touching with a kiss,
Which leads to bodies interlocking,
Limbs akimbo, beds a-rocking!
Yet here you stand: neither young nor old,
Already resigned to being cold.

SYCORAX

I...I'm not cold; I have feelings! *(pause)* I've felt the raptures of motherhood, and as for carnal pleasures: it's enough to be bathed in the waves of the sea, to be caressed by scented breezes, to taste the succulent fruits from our trees.

(ARIEL approaches SYCORAX, tracking her in circles.)

ARIEL

Yes, fruits are fine, the sweetest meat.
But you're the one I want to eat!
If only you were a honey cake,
Every inch of you I'd bake.
Fresh from the oven, I'd nibble your toes,
Then gobble your ankles, your knees, and nose.

SYCORAX

Back off, pervert!

ARIEL

Then I'd devour your two plump thighs
For in between ambrosia lies;
The final course of my rich repast,
Your mount of Venus saved for last!

SYCORAX

I told you: stop!

ARIEL

Please come to my table, my sensuous feast,
Where you'll serve as supper, and I'll be the beast
Who licks the nectar of love from the bowl,
Oh, come to my table, oh, fill up my soul!

SYCORAX

Oh, no, no, no...

(ARIEL embraces SYCORAX who resists, but when
HE retreats, SHE reaches for him and THEY fall, rolling
on the ground.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Stop that!

(ARIEL and SYCORAX freeze.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

If you're still watching, I know what you're thinking: biology is destiny and Sycorax was only human, hormonal, and susceptible. Well, it's true; I even shocked myself. Of course, nothing's shocking now. We're all tuned to the prevailing pornographic playground that's turned everyone into voyeurs, so watch what happened as we basked in the aftermath of pleasures I'd never known were possible until...

ANCIENT SYCORAX
...Ariel.

SYCORAX
(*sighing*) Ariel...

CALIBAN
Ariel...?

(CALIBAN has entered and spies SYCORAX and
ARIEL on the ground. SYCORAX stumbles to her feet.)

CALIBAN

Mother...? Are you all right?

SYOCRAX

Caliban! Yes, yes, dear, I...I'm fine; I don't know what came over me.

CALIBAN

Is Ariel showing you how wonderful he can make you feel? When he touched me, my water spout hardened and rose, and then I felt a wet surge of...

SYCORAX

Stop! Stop! That's enough! *(pause)* Now listen, Caliban: Ariel is very...affectionate, but he should be like a brother to you, and like a friend or even a son to me. What I'm saying is that we both experienced moments of weakness; we forgot the proper way to behave, *(to Ariel)* but so did you! Next you'll be chasing the goat!

ARIEL

The goat, the dog, and even the cat;
I can't hide my feelings under a hat.

FARAH

Purrrrrrrr...

ARIEL

The men you knew were good at thrusting,
While I'm adept at ardent lusting.
I'm romance incarnate, my passions are true,
So let's have a threesome, I'm ready, aren't you?

SYCORAX

No! Never! It's wrong! I won't allow it! You're not a sprite anymore; you're one of us, and we live with rules, boundaries of behavior.

ARIEL

But you adore me; I know it's the truth;
I'm beauty embodied: the essence of youth!
You made me your creature, I didn't ask why;
'Tis time to accept that I'm yours till I die.

CALIBAN

He's right, mother; it's your own fault since you made him so...perfect.

SYCORAX

My mistake! I should have notched his nose, tripled his chin, and bloated his belly!

ARIEL

Admit it my friends, I curl your toes,
Heartbeats quicken, bloodstream flows;
You're burning to burn, to stoke your fires
So let's embrace and indulge desires.

(ARIEL opens his arms, embracing them both.)

SYCORAX

(to Caliban) Well, we can't sleep with him at the same time. We'll have to...alternate.

ARIEL

With care I'll split myself in two,
Forever faithful to each of you.

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Freeze!

(CALIBAN, ARIEL, and SYCORAX freeze.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

You get the picture: there we were: two isolated islanders with our playful pets, daily rituals, content enough for years, yet soon it was hard to remember our lives before Ariel.

(CALIBAN grasps a fishing pole and wanders off while
ARIEL plays his flute, seated next to SYCORAX.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

For months we were blissfully happy. I was even inspired to begin writing my memoirs...

ANCIENT SYCORAX

...The Tragic History of Sycorax.

SYCORAX

(to Ariel) The Tragic History of Sycorax...

SYCORAX

...is divided it into Before Qamara, During Caliban, and After Ariel. To balance the pastoral scenes, I'm adding some of the wonders you witnessed while skimming over clouds and blowing ships away from our shores. So tell me, have you spied any pirates lately?

ARIEL

Not all sailors are pirates, not all ships armed to fight;
Some seek peace and pleasure, and merely need respite.

SYCORAX

Well, they won't get it here! (*pause, she sighs*) I need to protect Caliban; I taught him all I know, though he never learned the ninety-nine names of Allah or that countries are ruled by men who scorn women. Don't you see? If a ship landed on Qamara, Caliban would witness the crew expecting to be served by his mother. They might even attempt to rape, imprison, or murder me. Don't forget, I was accused of heresy and might still be remembered, so tell me, am I? When you fly over ships, do you ever hear the sailors speak of Sycorax?

ARIEL

Your fame is now legend, your island well known;
They claim that it's cursed, all that thrived turned to stone.

SYCORAX

Good!

ARIEL

But lifting the fog freed a sweet morning breeze,
With scents of your flowers, fruits of your trees;
So there's speculation that you must be dead,
That ships are now free to sail without dread.

SYCORAX

Then thank heaven your storms keep them away!

ARIEL

Given your powers, why do you care?
You can destroy all invaders who dare
Trespass on your shores against your command;
Just turn them to crabs confined to the sand.

SYCORAX

Ha! You overestimate my powers.

ARIEL

Can't you do what I do: spread your wings and fly;
Make yourself invisible, brew tempests in the sky?

SYCORAX

No, Setebos gave you powers he never gave me.

(The ANCIENT SYCORAX slams down her fist
as SYCORAX and ARIEL freeze.)

ANCIENT SYOCRAX

Fool! Idiot! Deluded lovesick cow! Can you believe how casually I revealed my weakness? I was so smitten, so blinded; just listen to me rattle on!

SYCORAX

As a child I mastered minor conjuring tricks, but later Setebos infused my carvings with life, and you, my darling, are my greatest triumph. Of course, I also have my conjuring cloak and can will my mind into animal familiars.

ARIEL

Then why not enter a seagull that soars
Riding the winds beyond these shores?

SYCORAX

But if I entered a gull and was eaten by a vulture, then I couldn't return to my body.

ARIEL

So you'd become a human shell,
A living corpse trapped in a spell?
Would your beating heart grow weak,
Your lively tongue soon cease to speak?
Then one day through a vulture's eye,
You'd watch your witch's body die?

SYCORAX

Well, yes. The point is my magic has limitations, but so does yours.

ARIEL

You conjure living creatures while I was made for love;
Your magic keeps you grounded, while I rule skies above.

SYCORAX

True, but it's not a contest, is it?

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Stop! Freeze!

(SYCORAX and ARIEL freeze.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Hah! Where was my brain?! Of course it's a contest! Everything's a contest! An anything goes, damn-the-torpedoes contest for power! Power between rival lovers, savage tribes, greedy companies, warring governments -- all pursuing their own interests and creating a fractured, fragmented, fighting mad world! So there I was, a naive nattering ninny, spellbound by Ariel's winsome ways. Go ahead, you nitwit, say it again!

ANCIENT SYCORAX

It's not a contest!

SYCORAX

It's not a contest,...

SYCORAX

...is it? I mean, shouldn't we both use our magic for good? Your winds cause ships to change directions, but you don't tip them over, so nobody drowns -- do they?

ARIEL

Ha! I rattle the decks and rip the sails,
Make the bastards grasp the rails,
Heave their suppers and pray to die quick;
Then calm the waves, so they're no longer sick.

SYCORAX

But why make them sick?

ARIEL

Because it's fun to toss a crew;
After all I'm not like you.
My nature's restless, I need more;
It's not enough to scan the shore.

SCYCORAX

Then someday I'll tell Caliban to finish building his boat, and we'll leave Qamara.

ARIEL

Alas, the rains have weathered his boat,
It's too full of holes to stay afloat.
He's not inclined to build another
Here's happy here with me and mother.

SYCORAX

But someday I want Caliban to see more of the world, to realize how blessed he is to be a boy, how he'll be free to roam without fear of being ridiculed, raped, or forced into a loveless marriage. But for now we're happy here, and your presence has made us even happier. How strange that two young men have helped me forget my anger at men.

ARIEL

Why is it always men you blame?
Do other women feel the same?

SYCORAX

They're too busy cooking, cleaning, or fretting about their futures to think about anything!

ARIEL

And how do you appear to be?
Are you the woman you think you see?

SYCORAX

When I peer into a looking glass, I see my father's nose, my mother's hair, and granny's eyes -- her pride and prowess.

ARIEL

But aren't you an avatar just like me,
Playing your role unwittingly?

ANCIENT SYCORAX

What the hell...?!

ARIEL

Though we're here to speak our lines,
She can't control evolving minds.

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Bullshit! Stop that! Get back on track, damn you! Stand straight! Right arms up! Left arms up! Hop, skip, sit, and freeze!

(ARIEL and SYCORAX sit, then freeze.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

I did not program awareness never mind insolence! What was it he said? Backtrack to...

ANCIENT SYCORAX

...But aren't you an avatar.

ARIEL

But aren't you an avatar...

ARIEL

...just like me, / Playing a role unwittingly?

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Those of you still watching will learn that the risk of creating complex avatars is that can become sentient, but mine are programed to stick to the script! Now Ariel, it's your turn to speak! You know your lines:...

ANCIENT SYCORAX

...An hour ago I spied a skiff.

ARIEL

An hour ago I spied a skiff...

ARIEL

With an elderly man and child adrift.
They seem to be lost, at the mercy of waves.
Laden with books, they couldn't be slaves.

SYCORAX

You say they have books!?! Oh, how I'd love to read again! So tell me more, tell me more!

ARIEL

The child's a girl; I can't tell her age.
The man is dressed like a noble or sage.

SYCORAX

And the books?

ARIEL

Stacked thick as bricks, their covers well worn,
But the man appears angry, scowling with scorn;
While the girl is hungry and starting to cry.
If the skiff springs a leak, they're destined to die.

SYCORAX

Oh, dear...

ARIEL

Why not let them step ashore?
Then we'd learn a great deal more.

SYCORAX

They seem harmless enough... Oh, all right! Blow a gentle breeze to guide them here.

(ARIEL rushes off as CALIBAN enters.)

CALIBAN

Where's Ariel going in such a hurry?

SYCORAX

He spied a boat carrying books! Piles of books! Oh, Caliban, I'm so hungry for words, for the great sea of knowledge in books, for the days, weeks, months of pleasures ahead! And there's a man and a girl; I've always wanted a daughter -- of course, I'm glad to have a son.

CALIBAN

Shall we set off to meet them?

SYCORAX

Yes! They appear to be friendly but we must be cautious. Never forget that Qamara is rightfully ours. We're the ones who created our paradise on earth.

CALIBAN

Do they know we're here?

SYCORAX

They may have heard of Sycorax and be wary, but if they meet you first, then you can explain that I'm a benign and benevolent witch. Now go greet our guests; tell them Sycorax is preparing a welcoming feast!

(SYCORAX kisses CALIBAN, then HE dashes off.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

The moment Caliban left, I realized...

ANCIENT SYCORAX

...I should witness their landing.

SYCORAX

I should witness their landing...

SYCORAX

...as well, to be certain they're not enemies in disguise, though I must avoid being seen. I know! I'll use Farah as my familiar, and eavesdrop from a distance. Come here, puss, there's a brave kitty.

(FARAH approaches, and the young SYCORAX strokes her head.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Now notice how I'm wrapped in my cloak, melding my mind into Farah's while my body remains in a catatonic state.

(SYCORAX sits still while FARAH quivers, then strolls toward ARIEL and CALIBAN standing by the shore.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

As Farah, I spied my boys waving to what looked like a flimsy carcass of a boat. That's when I heard Ariel say...

ANCIENT SYCORAX

...Who would dream.

ARIEL

Who would dream...

ARIEL

...that a skiff at sea / Could change your future, could make you free.

CALIBAN

What do you mean?

ARIEL

Your mother thwarted your will to leave;
Be a man of the world, free to achieve.
This older man is a welcome change;
Too much mother makes a man strange.

CALIBAN

Really...?

ARIEL

Boys need fathers to make them strong,
That's why you lack both brains and brawn.

CALIBAN

I do...?

ARIEL

You're unaware you're much too tame,
But what if this man tries to stake a claim?
What if he moves inside your cave,
Seduces your mother, makes her his slave?
Then exploits the island for its wealth,
And steals its treasures for himself?!

CALIBAN

He can't do that; Qamara belongs to mother and me!

ARIEL

It's the way of the world: men must rule,
Your mother's made you look the fool;
Trapped on this island day after day,
Why have you never dared to stray?

CALIBAN

Because I'm happy here! So were you!

ARIEL

It's true I'm content, but man to man:
Aren't we of the warrior clan?
By nature destined to hunt and fight,
Eager to flaunt our superior might.
Fated from birth to wage great wars,
While women consign themselves to chores.

CALIBAN

Not mother! She's an artist and magician.

ARIEL

She's still a woman, worth half a man;
She has limits, she's not in my plan.

CALIBAN

What plan?!

ARIEL

Once they land, we'll steal the boat,
It's sound enough to stay afloat;
Till we approach a thriving port
Where sailors and their sluts cavort!
Trust me, we'll have better lives,
We'll win battles, then find wives.

CALIBAN

Wives...?

ARIEL

They're easily stolen and later tamed
If beaten soundly till they're trained
To come when called to bend like reeds,
Their purpose clear: to serve our needs.

CALIBAN

I'm not a thief; I'm not violent, and I can't abandon mother!

ARIEL

Then it's time you learned, my bumpkin boy:
You're an avatar clone, a virtual toy!

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Shit! Here he goes again!

ARIEL

We're being controlled by a wily witch;
Which is why we have to ditch the bitch!
So come with me or I'll go alone;
I'm sick of serving a selfish crone!

CALIBAN

If you're talking about mother, she's not selfish! You wouldn't be here without her!
What's wrong with you?!

ARIEL

Programmed memories of her pains
Have been transmitted to our brains!
She's dredging up her private hell,
Which grew too big for her to tell
In a pithy poem or lengthy play,
So she hacked the Net to have her say!

CALIBAN

What net? What are you talking about?!

ARIEL

We're all just puppets, your mother too;
A hag at the helm keeps us on cue
(*whispering*) She must be distracted, the silly sow,
Or she'd have intervened by now!
Once we escape the loathsome fiend,
We'll have adventures she never dreamed!

(Now ARIEL struggles to break free of rhymes.)

ARIEL

While exploring kingdoms we're free to roam,
We'll say what we want with words of our...choosing!
I'm sick of speaking words in rhymes,
Of telling tales from ancient...history!

(ARIEL starts to leave.)

CALIBAN

Wait! Where are you going?

ARIEL

I'm off to blow that boat to the beach
Another gust and they'll be in...proximity!
Either follow me and face the truth,
Or stay an unenlightened...fellow!

(ARIEL dashes off, leaving CALIBAN who pauses,
then shouts!)

CALIBAN

Wait, wait! I'm coming, Ariel! I'm coming with you!

(CALIBAN starts to follow ARIEL as FARAH yowls,
and the ANCIENT SYCORAX covers her ears.)

FARAH

Yeeeoowwwwww...

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Oh, stop, stop already!

(CALIBAN and FARAH freeze.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

I could have intervened, but wanted you to bear witness to their treachery, to hear
Caliban shouting,...

ANCIENT SYCORAX

...I'm coming, Ariel!

CALIBAN

I'm coming, Ariel!...

CALIBAN

...I'm coming with you!

ANCIENT SYCORAX

My own son would have betrayed me, forsaken the mother who nurtured him body and soul! From inside Farah, I yowled.!

FARAH

Yiiiiioooowwww!!!

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Oh, hear me, Setebos! Blow me a tempest to tear at their hearts!

(Winds resound and lights flash as ARIEL appears spinning along with CALIBAN and the CREATURES.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Then came the rage waves: Streaks of lightning! Rumbles of thunder! Hurricanes of hail! Furies of wind funnels that propelled Ariel back, back, back to the pine from whither he was whittled!

(ARIEL howls while spinning towards his tree, contorting his body to fit within its trunk.)

ARIEL

Ahhhhhhhh!!! Nooooooooo!!!

ANCIENT SYCORAX

What fools we were! To have frittered away our affections on the beastly boy! And there was my lovesick Caliban calling with piteous desperation,...

ANCIENT SYCORAX

...Arieeeel!

CALIBAN

Arieeeel!

CALIBAN

Arieeelllll!!! Where are you? Oh, please, please answer me!!

(The storm subsides as CALIBAN discovers ARIEL in agony, his voice weakening.)

CALIBAN

My god, Ariel, what...what happened?

ARIEL

Isn't it obvious, even to you?

This is what a witch can...accomplish!

CALIBAN

What are you saying...?

ARIEL

She's thrust me in this cloven pine,
Petrified while in my...

CALIBAN

Prime...?

ARIEL

Rooted back to Mother Earth,
Buried in my place of...

CALIBAN

Birth...? Oh, Ariel, what can I do? I...I suppose I could get an axe, but what if it slips and severs a toe? I can't tell where your body ends and the tree begins.

ARIEL

Don't be daft, you simple fool;
You can't fight magic with a tool -- Damn!
I give up; I'm fading fast;
An errant avatar miscast.
The fate of flesh is to age and die,
But I wasn't just human; I could fly!

(ARIEL heaves a woeful sigh, then faints.)

CALIBAN

Oh, no! Oh, Ariel, are you still breathing or are you...? Oh, mother, mother! What have you done?!

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Oh, for chrissake, he's only in sleep mode!

(As the ANCIENT SYCORAX speaks, CALIBAN shuffles off, while the magician, PROSPERO, enters followed by his lovely daughter, MIRANDA.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Meanwhile, Prospero and Miranda stepped ashore. There they are, extraneous, minor avatars who mustn't detract from the central conflict between me, Caliban and Ariel.

(PROSPERO and MIRANDA, followed by FARAH, stroll towards the cave where SYCORAX sits in a trance.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Notice that Miranda was not a child of three, but a budding beauty of sixteen. And notice how curiosity got the better of my familiar, Farah, who lingered to hear Prospero telling Miranda to...

ANCIENT SYCORAX

...be not afeared.

PROSPERO

Be not afeared,...

PROSPERO

...my dear, we've landed ashore by providence divine.

MIRANDA

Oh, brave new world! The air breathes most sweetly, and even our garments are fresh!

PROSPERO

Yes, but methinks this is the island ruled by a foul witch from Algiers.

MIRANDA

Is her name Sycorax?

PROSPERO

Yes.

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Yes!

PROSPERO

You're heard of her?

MIRANDA

Of course, hasn't everyone? They say she's so powerful she can control the sun and moon.

PROSPERO

Nonsense! She died years ago giving birth to a monster, but someone's left footprints. Remain here while I venture inside this cave.

(PROSPERO steps into the cave.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Since Prospero was a magician himself -- a rank amateur -- he perceived immediately that I was in...

ANCIENT SYCORAX

...a trance state.

PROSPERO

(snapping his fingers) A trance state!

PROSPERO

What luck! Her spirit's left her body, ha, ha!

(PROSPERO snatches the cloak off SYCORAX.)

PROSPERO

She won't be needing her cloak now, will she?! Ahhh, it fits perfectly! Since she's obviously vulnerable, I'm going to take advantage and summon my own sorcery.

(PROSPERO mumbles an incantation while wielding his staff, and sprinkling glittery powders.)

PROSPERO

Take this witch, her flesh and bone,
And harden her to rigid stone!
Then drain her blood, her spit and shit,
And shrink her to an olive pit!
Bagahoo lockah, bagahee lockah, bagahi, hi, hi!

(Lights flicker, and high pitched sounds echo as SYCORAX trembles, shrinks into a ball, and rolls off.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Before he could crush me underfoot, I rolled beneath a bed and into a corner.

(CALIBAN approaches, followed by MIRANDA.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Meanwhile, Caliban entered, but was so smitten, he couldn't speak, so Miranda introduced him, saying...

ANCIENT SYCORAX

...look who's here.

MIRANDA

Look who's here!

PROSPERO

Ah, greetings, islander!

(Pause as CALIBAN stares lovingly at MIRANDA.)

MIRANDA

(whispering) He must be mute, father.

PROSPERO

(sniffing) Is he man or fish? I daresay it eats and sleeps, but don't let it near you.

CALIBAN

My name is Caliban, and I'm *not* a fish.

PROSPERO

Caliban did you say? Are you related to Sycorax?

CALIBAN

I'm her son. Who are you?

PROSPERO

Prospero, former Duke of Milan, and this is my daughter, Miranda.

CALIBAN

Your daughter and not a goddess dropped from heaven...?

PROSPERO

No, she is mortal.

MIRANDA

But I was born a princess, and had five women attending me.

CALIBAN

You possess a beauty far surpassing any I've known. May I kiss your feet?

MIRANDA

No!

PROSPERO

No!

PROSPERO

Don't touch her, you puppy-headed beast!

CALIBAN

I'm no beast, but the instant my heart saw her: so perfect, so precious...

MIRANDA

Don't stop.

PROSPERO

Yes, stop! Enough prattling, and tell us about the island.

CALIBAN

It's called Qamara. At night it's full of noises, sweet melodies that put us to sleep, and then I dream of clouds opening up and dropping such riches that when I wake, I weep because I want to dream again. *(to Miranda)* But I'll gladly show you every fertile inch, and I'll fish, pick berries, and chop wood to keep you warm. *(to Prospero)* Speaking of warmth, why are you wearing my mother's cloak?

PROSPERO

I felt a chill; I'm sure she won't mind.

CALIBAN

Where is she?

PROSPERO

How would I know?

CALIBAN

She said she was staying home to cook a welcoming feast.

PROSPERO

While we're waiting, follow me to our boat. You can fetch the volumes I prize beyond my dukedom.

CALIBAN

Later.

ANCIENT SYCORAX

What?!

PROSPERO

What...?

PROSPERO

Did you say, "Later?"

CALIBAN

Yes.

PROSPERO

You're supposed to obey me! Now unload the boat while I discover Ariel, then cleave the tree and set him free.

CALIBAN

I'd rather give Miranda a tour of the island. There's a secluded pond where we can swim.

PROSPERO

Ha! You just want to see her naked and break her virgin knot!

MIRANDA

Father!

CALIBAN

Break what...?

PROSPERO

Touch a hair on her head, and I'll hex you with hives!

CALIBAN

Then may you be cursed with gout!

PROSPERO

A pox on your balls!

CALIBAN

Tyrant!

PROSPERO

Lecher! If you're really the son of Sycorax, then you're a devil born of a devil...

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Oh, stop! Stop! All of you: freeze!

(CALIBAN, PROSPERO and MIRANDA freeze.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Am I going to have to intervene!? *(mumbling)* Fuck!

(The ANCIENT SYCORAX leaves her computer to join the AVATARS who are stunned and repelled.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Now what the hell's going on?!

MIRANDA

Good heavens!

PROSPERO

(grasping Miranda) Stand back!

CALIBAN

Who are you?

ANCIENT SYCORAX

(to Caliban) You're programmed to unload Prospero's books, then search for me!

CALIBAN

You mean search for my mother.

ANCIENT SYCORAX

I'm your mother!

CALIBAN

What...?

ANCIENT SYCORAX

You heard me: I'm Sycorax!

CALIBAN

You can't be!

PROSPERO

Ye gods,...

PROSPERO

...what happened?

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Time happened -- five hundred years! (*to Caliban*) Now why have you rebelled?!

CALIBAN

I...I was afraid.

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Afraid of what?! (*pause*) Go on, explain yourself!

CALIBAN

I...I knew I'd fail to find my mother. To think I'd never see her again made me feel such sorrow, such despair. She was so kind, so generous, and without her in my life, without someone to whom I meant something, well, I...I'd be adrift, lose any sense of being where I belonged. Now with Ariel gone, there's no one. When I saw Miranda, I hoped she'd become my friend, but I can see she wants nothing to do with me.

MIRANDA

Sorry about that.

ANCIENT SYCORAX

If you really cared about your mother, why did you say you'd leave?!

CALIBAN

I...I didn't want to lose Ariel.

ANCIENT SYCORAX

But you'd have left me, sailed away to lead decadent, debauched lives!

CALIBAN

Oh, no, I spoke hastily, I didn't mean it; I would never abandon mother. I...I loved her.

ANCIENT SYCORAX

More than Ariel?

CALIBAN

More than life.

ANCIENT SYCORAX

(pause, stunned) You mean to tell me that all these years -- centuries! -- I assumed you betrayed me, that you were like all other men. *(pause)* But how...? How could I not have known? How could I be so mistaken?!

PROSPERO

Because you're not as shrewd as you think! Hah!

ANCIENT SYCORAX

(pause, to Caliban) Do you have any idea the mischief, the unrelenting misery and horrors I've inflicted on the world -- all because you spoke hastily?!

CALIBAN

I...I'm sorry.

PROSPERO

Don't blame yourself, Caliban; you were distraught. *(to Sycorax)* You're the damn fool who took him literally! The truth is you didn't trust your son's devotion because you didn't believe you were sufficiently lovable -- and by god, you're not! Now stop indulging your self pity and tell us: *(smiling)* what sort of mischief did you inflict on the world?

MIRANDA

Yes, tell us!

ANCIENT SYCORAX

You really want to know?

PROSPERO

Of course!

MIRANDA

Yes, please!

ANCIENT SYCORAX

(pause, she sighs) First I bargained with Setebos.

PROSPERO

The pagan fiend!

ANCIENT SYCORAX

He reversed your curse, pried open the olive pit and restored me to myself -- but only because I agreed to continue living, aging hideously for his amusement. I asked to be allowed to render myself invisible, but as the years passed, I felt increasingly vengeful, so I started doing the sort of things invisible witches do -- and I don't mean hat tricks.

PROSPERO

No more spinning platters, eh? Ha, ha!

ANCIENT SYCORAX

At first, I was content with tipping teapots, hiding latchkeys; then I progressed to buckling carpets, toppling ladders, yanking canes.

PROSPERO

Ha, ha! Go on!

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Later I advanced to spooking horses, starting fires, thinning ice, breaking wheels on carts and nudging surgeons' elbows -- oh, that was great fun! Then later, much later, I tinkered with the brakes of buses, pushed buttons on the control panels of street lights, trains and planes, causing so many wrecks, sinking so many ships, I lost count.

PROSPERO

What about weaponry?

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Oh, I had great sport with guns, placing loaded pistols near homicidal boys.

PROSPERO

Naughty, naughty! Ha, ha!

MIRANDA

You didn't! Ha, ha!

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Of course, with computers, mischief is easier than ever: all the fingers I prodded towards "send" buttons; all the compromising pictures snapped; the hard drives destroyed, some containing the life's work of poets, scientists, academics. Oh, the demotions, divorces, heartbreaks and suicides -- you've no idea.

PROSPERO

Revenge was sweet, eh?

ANCIENT SYCORAX

It brought some relief, but vengeance never achieved catharsis; I never felt a sense of restored harmony since I never regained what I'd lost: the love of my only son.

CALIBAN

But Sycorax never lost it! I still can't believe you're my mother! You don't look anything like her, and she'd never do those horrible things! Where is the mother I know? Can you bring her back?

ANCIENT SYCORAX

(pause) Why not?

(The ANCIENT SYCROAX draws forth her remote control and the avatar SYCORAX enters.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Behold how lovely, how graceful I was.

CALIBAN

Mother...?

SYCORAX

Oh, my dear, my sweet Calibanana.

(CALIBAN and SYCORAX embrace.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

(to Prospero) Look at those bright eyes, that flawless skin...

PROSPERO

Oh, please! Enough mawkish vanity! If you're so powerful, why didn't you defy Setebos and keep up your appearance, *(pointing to Caliban)* and improve his!

CALIBAN

Yes, why didn't you?

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Because I loved you the way you were.

PROSPERO

But you made him weak! When you vanished, didn't he succumb to bitterness? Didn't he lose his self respect and become my wood-fetching, fire-starting slave?

CALIBAN

It's true I was enslaved, but so was Ariel. We both called you "master," but (*to Ancient Sycorax*) where is Ariel now?

PROSPERO

Yes, where is our airy sprite?

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Still up a tree, the traitorous tart! Shall I bring him back for a family reunion?

CALIBAN

Would you mind?

PROSPERO

Please do!

MIRANDA

Oh, yes!

(The ANCIENT SYCORAX clicks her remote,
and ARIEL enters, leaping, embracing CALIBAN.)

CALIBAN

Ariel!

PROSPERO

My bird! Set free as the mountain wind!

ARIEL

Being trapped inside a trunk
Has put me in a awful funk;
Yet seeing you restores my heart;
Together again as if never apart!

SYCORAX

What about me?

ARIEL

You became a vengeful mother,
Hoarding your son as if he's your...paramour!

SYCORAX

How dare you?!

CALIBAN

Oh, please, let's not argue.

PROSPERO

What I want to know is what's the point? Why bother rehashing it all?

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Because of you! You and your slanderous lies! Published and performed in a frivolous farce for the whole world to witness year after year, century after century!

PROSPERO

That's not my fault! That damn fool playwright took huge liberties, planting metered gibberish on thespian tongues, all to create more conflict, more confusion -- so stop blaming me!

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Whoever's at fault be damned! It's time the world heard the truth, that I Sycorax, was *not* a "foul" but fair witch, a patriot, and doting mother; Caliban was *not* a brute; Ariel was *not* a slave; and Qamara was mine, *my* kingdom before you and your loutish countrymen colonized and destroyed it!

ARIEL

But didn't we avatars serve you well?
Follow your script as if under a spell?

ANCIENT SYCORAX

(pointing to the young Sycorax) Young Sycorax was perfect; Caliban nearly so, the rest barely competent, but soon you'll be deleted -- key-stroked into the cloud.

PROSPERO

Then our revels now are ended? Are we really such stuff as dreams are made of?
Our little lives rounded with sleep?

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Afraid so.

PROSPERO

Of course, we were flesh and blood once, our original selves dwelled in the real world, so I'm curious: how did we die?

ANCIENT SYCORAX

I wasn't planning an epilogue, but if you must know, the real Prospero returned to Milan and eventually succumbed to heart failure, a senile, liverish wreck of ninety surrounded by greedy grandchildren eagerly awaiting his last breath.

PROSPERO

Ninety you say? Impressive!

ARIEL

What about Ariel, at home in the sky,
When you finally freed him, where did he...

ARIEL

...fly?

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Fly!

ANCIENT SYCORAX

To various seaports where he led a lecherous life till he perished of the pox. He was twenty-six.

PROSPERO

Tsk, tsk, no surprise there. And your son, Caliban?

CALIBAN

I don't want to know!

PROSPERO

Cowardly mooncalf!

MIRANDA

Don't be such a baby.

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Caliban died of loneliness -- most people do.

CALIBAN

(covering his ears) That's enough; I don't need the details!

PROSPERO

I do!

MIRANDA

Oh, please!

ANCIENT SYCORAX

After everyone left Qamara, Caliban lost his appetite and became frail, fatigued, despondent. He was thirty when a tempest swept him off in a tidal wave.

MIRANDA

Poor boy. What about Miranda?

ANCIENT SYCORAX

She was fifty-two when she collapsed from exhaustion.

MIRANDA

But she married Ferdinand, so at least she was happy.

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Get real. It's true she married for love, but she bore five sons and three daughters who kept her confined to a life of domestic drudgery. As a woman, she was considered too weak to be entrusted with important decisions since Ferdinand and the men around her insisted on rigid hierarchies, and trust me, things haven't changed in the dark, unenlightened hellholes of this earth. Even now, men control the cyber world, so they're quantifying and tracking everything we say and do -- as if they could capture our essential natures.

PROSPERO

At least you have an essential nature; we don't even cast shadows!

MIRANDA

If you're the real Sycorax, is it true you control the sun and moon?

ANCIENT SYCORAX

I'm working on it, but in the meantime I can control you.

ARIEL

You really think you're in control;
That all we do is play a...part?

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Absolutely! (*grasping her remote device, pushing buttons*) Music maestro! Now shake your booties! Shuffle your feet!

(Music as the AVATARS obey, dancing wildly, until the ANCIENT SYCORAX taps her remote.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

(*tapping a button*) Farewell, my dear Miranda.

(MIRANDA swoons and collapses.)

CALIBAN

No!

PROSPERO

My god!

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Now, you Prospero! Good riddance, you foxy fiend!

(PROSPERO grasps his heart and collapses.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

You're next, Ariel!

(ARIEL starts to flee, but freezes mid-step.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Stop, you randy rogue! Down, down, down you go! Ha, ha!

(ARIEL falls with a thud.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Now it's your turn, Caliban. Farewell, my darling boy.

(CALIBAN collapses.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

And you, my avatared self, my sweet magical, misguided youth.

SYCORAX

A kiss before we part?

(The ANCIENT SYCORAX moves to embrace the avatar SYCORAX who swiftly grasps the remote, pushing buttons. Electronic vibrations echo as bolts of laser lights strike, and the ANCIENT SYCORAX twitches uncontrollably.)

ANCIENT SYCORAX

Accchhkkkkkk!! Noooooooooooooo...

SYCORAX

Good night, you old hag!

(The ANCIENT SYCORAX collapses in a heap as the young SYCORAX strolls to the computer, and sits.)

SYCORAX

Well, the good news is she's gone; the bad news is she's me! Yes, I, Sycorax, possess her uploaded memories along with her bad attitude, ha, ha! I notice she's programmed a last bit of mischief, injecting worms and germs into grids which are spreading into transformers, substations, cables and power lines over the entire electrified world. Within minutes we'll all be plunged into utter darkness. Utility specialists are calling it the most virulent cyber attack ever, ha, ha! Of course, some of you will relish the darkness: the purity of a starry night; reading by candlelight, singing again, painting again, strolling the streets, and while you're gazing into each others' eyes, try to think fondly of Sycorax: girl of Algiers, mother of Caliban, Mistress of Ariel, and Queen of Qamara. *(tapping her remote)* Now fade, fade, fade to black!

(Darkness descends as the young SYCORAX cackles with glee.)

The End