

Rufus, and rulers of the like:
A one-man show (with puppets)
By Sterling Melcher

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Setting: A blank stage. The play was thought in a structure of three-quarter thrust with a deep backstage. Preferably an intimate black-box space.

Time: Now

Characters:

RUFUS – Dressed in tattered military garb, full of medals and tassels, his face is calcified and withered, yet there is a strong liveliness to his character.

LIONESS – A puppet lioness (rod or marionett); operators should be in bunraku black

THREE LIGHT BULBS – Three light bulbs with harsh, unfiltered lighting.

STAGE HANDS – They throw stuff onstage

*She should have died hereafter;
There would have been a time for such a word.
Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury
Signifying nothing.
Macbeth (Act 5, Scene 5, lines 17-28)*

RUFUS sits in a white chair just left of center. His face is weathered, almost calcified. He is dressed in a tattered military uniform with tassels and medals. The light creates a fuzzy circle of space. There is something behind him that cannot be seen.

Three by three they come and go the wind of summer freezing cold. Three by three the runners fall for tumble stream of crimson tide. tide. tithe. three tithe tide of boys for men and capsulated minds gone white from too much milk and early separation. three by three the ants of all go down the hill to kingdom come, for all the souls of trinity. three by three four by four no...three by three. Four would be a massacre. I couldn't handle it.

a lightbulb flickers in the distance, far, but not far stage right. RUFUS creaks over to look and creaks back.

Animals.

The light flickers again. He wips around and runs at it like a dog.

Woooooof woof woof woof . grrrrrrrr. you fucking grrrrrrrrr. raghr. rrrrrrrrrrr.

the light is done. He sits. He stretches, stands up, and takes a powerful stance. Something unexpected from his previous demeanor.

Who wants to fight!?!

BLACKOUT

spotlights up almost instantaneously on the other side of the stage.

Ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to tonight's show! (applause) We have for you this evening a daring feat from our world class juggler. Everybody put your hands together for.....(Drumroll) Rufus the Knife-wielding Bastard!!!!

RUFUS tiger leaps across the stage to and catches three limp fish. He looks at them for a second, and then proceeds to juggle, walking around the stage.

I want to give a quick shout out to my die-hard fans in the audience tonight. I couldn't do this without you. You keep me going everywhere. Where are my Rufaloes tonight!?!?

The audience does something

Well, you're all drug addicts and sex fiends anyway. Get outta here.

he stops juggling.

No really. leave. get out. I don't wanna see your face.

If no one starts leaving he should usher a group of them out.

Come on, get your ugly mug outta my house. I don't like you and you shouldn't have come. See ya, ya bastards.

the actual usher ushers anyone who left back to their seats.

Welcome, welcome young children. So happy to see new faces. Welcome to the spectacular of spectaculars, where dreams become nightmares and nightmares become real. Don't cry kid. Here. Watch this. Next!

he throws the fish off stage right and catches three oranges from stage right. He juggles, does some tricks, schmoozes the audience, and then comes in from stage left. he tries to keep them up, but ends up *an apple* *dropping everything.*

Heh. Woops. umm...next?

An apple is thrown across the stage from stage right.

Hey, watch it you jackass!!!

A bushel of apples come from all directions, and RUFUS runs for cover, but can't escape the light.

I can't believe this. Do you know who I am? I can cut your throat like a watermelon you ungrateful piece of

The lightbulb comes on and is the only source of light. Marching is heard. The circle reappears and RUFUS is marching in place.

Hup two three four, hup two three four, hup two three four, I can't hear you, hup two three four, hup two three four, hup two three four, hup. You. You, you. You, you, and....you. Attention!

In the prison cell I sit,
Thinking Mother dear of you,
And our bright and happy home so far away,
And the tears they fill my eyes
Spite of all that I can do
Though I try to cheer my comrades
and be gay.

Chorus:
Tramp! tramp! tramp!
The boys are marching
Cheer up comrades,
They will come.
And beneath the starry flag
We shall breathe the air again
Of the free land in our own beloved home.

In the battle front we stood
When their fiercest charge they made,
And they swept us off a hundred men or more;
But before we reached their lines
They were beaten back, dismayed,
And we heard the cry of vict'ry o'er and o'er.

CHORUS

So within the prison cell
We are waiting for the day
That shall come to open wide the iron door;
And the hollow eye grows bright
And the poor heart almost gay
As we think of seeing home and friends once more.

If you don't keep in time I'll squeeze you like a lime!

*RUFUS must get these people
around the circle, but not let them in, and
he can't get out.*

Readyyy, march! Hup two three four,
hup two three four, hup two three four,
halt! Fix that circle over there. No
slacking or I break your legs. Attention!
Readyyy, march! Hup two three four,
hup two three four, hup two three four,
and sing with me!
*RUFUS hands out lyrics to the
participants.*

Now, for the chorus!!!

I can't hear you you lazy bastards!!! With
spirit!!

TRAMP!

Alright, back to your posts men. We'll resume drills at O-five hundred sharp. Quickly! With gusto!!!

BLACKOUT (ten seconds)

Spotlights return, and RUFUS cautiously enters the light.

Sorry about that folks. We had a little technical difficulty. With the war going on I can hardly believe this tent is still around. Am I right!?! haha, ha ha..ha...ha ha. Huh.

A gun is fired and RUFUS is shot from the light. three seconds. he returns.

Caught it you sons of bitches!!! HA HA! Try harder next time when dealing with RUFUS the knife-wielding bastard!!! NEXT!

A trapeze drops from the ceiling.

Nope.

A lion roars in the background.

Whoa, not yet.

A second. In comes a small pool of water and a ladder.

Ah. There we are. Now for my next trick ladies and gentlemen, I give you, the Disastrous Dive of Death!!! Drumroll please.

A trumpet fanfare.

Close enough.

he climbs to the top of the ladder and prepares to take his dive.

Small disclaimer. I am a professional, and no one should try this at home. Especially you. Now, for the air tumbling, outrageous acts of adventure! Everybody, help me count off. On three. One...two...three

He goes to jump off, but at that moment the lights change to the lightbulb and the circle. A string comes from the darkness and attaches to RUFUS, stopping him mid-preparation. Another one comes, then another, then another, until he is a human marionette. he fights his way down the ladder as the strings attach to him (this can be done with all black and masks)

No, no NO!!! not again. You can't do this to me. I've done my service, I've finished my deployment. You can't make me go back, this is inhuman! This is torturous. You can't...ah!...No, you won't take me alive!

He starts clawing at the strings, trying to take them off, but failing. They eventually pull him up and lead him to his chair. The strings get tighter, drawing him into himself.

Three by three they come and go and the light goes out. Three by three they all go away, go away go away go away!

Next!

A pair of scissors fly from upstage in front of him. He stares at them.

Will anyone cut me loose?

BLACKOUT

If people want to help him get out, he must not let them. Circle Light up after ten seconds and we see RUFUS asleep in the chair. The strings are loose. They tighten and he is pulled up to a crooked sitting position.

Don't worry ladies and gentlemen. The show will continue in just a few minutes.

Struggle.

And now for my next trick, I will pull a mind-bending escape from these ties. Now, everyone must close their eyes, and on the count of five I will disappear. Ready, close your eyes. One, two, three, four...five!

He has not escaped.

I thought I had escaped you, you treacherous fiends. No more worries, no prophecies, no calamitous mistakes. (Something he longs for) House on a hill, no fence, no trees, just a view of the sea and a porch on the side. Days go by with the blowing of the wind, no time left to cross the bows of warriors and horses dying in the fields. Just poppies, and tulips, and brush to pick berries. But no, you trap me again for the wills of your ways and the percussive sounds of fear.

The light bulb flickers.

What do you want from me?

another lightbulb flickers, deeper in the rear.

No no no no no no no no. Get the fuck away. I will be released and the vengeance will be the least of your worries.

he struggles, and a third light flickers.

Three by three just don't bring the fourth. The orders. The orders. The orders.

The lights flicker in Morse code, as the three fates with one eye.

Affirmative. Right away.

The strings start to loosen, and the strings start to lightly control RUFUS.

He starts to round up the apples.

Hup two three four hup two three four, everybody please follow me. This way, this way. No stragglers. Hup two three four, hup two three four. Stand up straight. No one must move from these spots. Now, what we have here is orders just orders. This is not a drill. Do not take this personally. There is nothing personal about it at all. Now, don't move.

He waits for a second, then starts to stomp on the apples, methodically crushing them into an apple sauce. More Morse code.

Next!

a pack of paper bowls is thrown onstage. RUFUS starts to fill the bowls with the applesauce and hands them out to audience members.

Ringeingringringringring. Dinner time! No one goes without a meal. In war we have no time to go hungry. Eat up or die. That's the way of the world. You're gonna complain about it? Deal with it. No soldier goes un nourished! Mind, body, nation. That's the way of the world! We want everything to be ready for when the emperor comes around. Any slackers will get a week in the box. Nobody likes the box, so nobody should be a slacker.

One for the strings droops and he drops a bowl.

I would at least appreciate a little consistency here, sir.

The string tightens again.

Thank you, sir! Does everybody have a bowl? Don't start early.

The next part starts when all the bowls are out.

And, on three, we eat. One, two, three.

RUFUS shovels the applesauce into his mouth. When done, he throws the bowl back and howls like a wolf.

And now for the cheers! Everybody sing along! You know the lyrics.

RUFUS should work hard to incite an intense pride and patriotism in the crowd.

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord; He is trampling out the vintage where grapes of wrath are stored; He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword, His truth is marching on.

CHORUS: Glory, glory, hallelujah! Glory, glory, hallelujah! Glory, glory, hallelujah! His truth is marching on.

I have seen Him in the watchfires of a hundred circling camps; They have builded Him an altar in the evening dews and damps; I can read His righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps, His day is marching on.

--CHORUS

I have read a fiery gospel writ in burnished rows of steel: "As ye deal with My contemners, so with you My Grace shall deal; Let the Hero, born of woman, crush the serpent with his heel, Since God is marching on."

--CHORUS

He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat; He is sifting out the hearts of men before His Judgement Seat. Oh! Be swift, my soul, to answer Him, be jubilant, my feet! Our God is marching on.

--CHORUS

In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea, With a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me; As he died to make men holy, let us die to make men free, While God is marching on.

--CHORUS

Good.. Good. You're getting the hang of this. I can almost see soldiers in every one of you. The time is coming where I will no longer hold you by the hand, and lead you through the battlefield

on a leash. You make me proud to be a Scotsman. But don't get cocky, or I'll have to break you again. Attention! And, break.

BLACKOUT

The circle light comes back up after three seconds with RUFUS in the chair, slumped over and loose.

Come again, come no more, come some time when rains don't pour, the creatures of the night come forth with wings of black and faces of radiant beauty, nothing can be done to stop their siren call, a tune so melodic and dissonant the trees lose leaves in summer evergreen through death and bone. Three by three they come and go, returning wherever comes the winter wind that bites the cheeks of old man snow. Old man. Old soul. No more death for fear of own. Yet there must be more for fear of own. Quite the conundrum, without moral ambiguity.

A lion roars.

Is that...can it be...returned to me for fear of own? Come my lovely, come my darling, come close to me and rest your weary head! You humble servant rest here fore fear of yours, and in wait of your warmth.

A lioness enters from the darkness. She spots RUFUS, stops, purrs, and comes up to nuzzle up against his leg (the lioness should probably be a puppet, rod or marionette). RUFUS pets it.

I made you some food, look, it's your favorite. Soldier. See, you don't even have to chase it down.

She eats some of the applesauce. It drips from her whiskers. She stalks the grounds, looking at the audience.

I knew you'd come back to me sooner than later. I missed you. Oh I missed you dearly. Did you miss me?

No response.

Of course. I should have known. How was your mother's house?

No response.

I'm glad to hear that. Oh, and I have news for you, too. Ready?

No response.

I've been promoted! We have a new house in the north, and I'll be the leader of ten thousand more men. I knew you'd love it. It's located high up on a hill, with nothing but forest to surround. Oh, and the birds in the morning, they sing like angels on the clouds. It will be great for when the Emperor comes to visit!

She walks up to RUFUS and tugs on the strings on his body, unable to release him.

Oh, these? Don't worry. I'll be fine. They won't interfere with my work. If anything, I feel stronger, and more confident with them around. They invigorate me in a way.

A lightbulb flickers.

No. Run along now. I'll catch up with you soon. Go. We'll talk later.

She doesn't move.

I don't want you around when they come back. They don't take kindly to...beauty. My dear, please leave me. Leave! Go, for Christ's sake!

The three lightbulbs come on and the lioness is torn away. The strings tighten, and the circle light becomes stronger. More Morse code.

Debriefing. The herald is dead, the traitors are dead, the troops are fed, the Emperor is safe, the land is safe, and the war is ready. Orders, orders, orders.

Morse code.

No. The enemies have fled and the flowers are in bloom.

A medal drops from the ceiling at the feet of RUFUS.

Thank you m'ladies. This is a great honor. You make me feel like a right good man.

The strings make him pick up the medal and pin it to his chest.

Mind, body, nation. The fight is a good one, and no traitor goes unpunished. Three by three you make me whole, three by three I follow forth. Orders.

Morse code.

Thy will be done. I look forward to his arrival. She will be with me at my side.

One of the strings is released.

Thank you. (salute)

BLACKOUT

Ten seconds, and the spotlight comes on. RUFUS is up and about.

Come one, come all to the feast of feasts!!! Welcome to my humble home on haunted hill. Well, not haunted, but glorious in its gothic architecture. Just look at those buttresses. It's always great to move into a new home. The smell of history and potential. Come, help me set the table for the Emperor. Everyone who gives a hand will receive my thanks and gratitude, and a seat at the table. Next!

A disassembled table is rolled into the space. It should be able to sit ten people, but only two feet high so people must sit on the ground. RUFUS barks orders on assembly.

Now, we don't have much time. His eminence is on his way, and if we are not complete by then, there will be consequences.

A light flickers.

He is just minutes away.

Another flickers.

Hup two three four, hup two three four, hup two three four, He is almost here!

The last light flickers and a fanfare is heard.

Everyone, to your places! I'm sorry, but there are only nine of you allowed at the table. Everyone else will receive a nice gift basket on their way out. Servant, please take down the names of those returning to their posts.

The usher can do this if they want while the rest of the action happens.

Is everyone ready? Quiet!

Rufus sits near the head of the table, and stares into the darkness. One flicker. Two flickers. A small burst. The light flickers grow in rapidity and frequency until it's the end of a fireworks show. At the peak the circle light comes back as well as a top light on a clay, cracking crown in up-center stage.

Your Emperor, your holiness, your all-encompassing wisdom, the light of the world, the ruler of all, I kneel before thee in humble service for the sake of the world. Mind, body, nation, mind body, nation.

A chant is started. RUFUS cuts it off.

Please, come into my home. I will break bread with thee. We will drink wine, and be merry for what better occasion than the death of traitors!!! Quickly, two of you must help our lord to hiss eat. Don't be rude. Quickly!! I'm sorry for their insolence my lord. They are newly arrived to my service and are not used to the quick-paced needs of higher beings. Please, have a seat next to me.

RUFUS directs the crown to the left of his seated position.

Lords and ladies, and servants and ruffians, raise your glasses for a toast to the Emperor. The savior of our people and the moral compass for our lost souls. To the Emperor! May he live forever in our hearts and the mind-body of our nation. Huzzah!!!

A flicker and the spotlight returns. The strings tighten.

Please return to your seats, ladies and gentlemen. For my next trick I will perform the infamous wheel of death. I will wait until you have firmly planted yourself at a safe distance. This is not something to get in the middle of.

The patrons return to their seats.

BLACKOUT

Three seconds, and a knife has appeared, stuck into the table. There is a battle between string and man.

I will not. I will come nowhere close to his majesty with such vile an object. Enough. I quit. Do you hear me? I will release myself.

The strings make him clutch the knife and thrust toward the crown. RUFUS stops the blow just before it hits and goes for the string. They fight on the table and around the circle.

You will have no more power over me. Do you hear? Three by three they slice and dice, yet three by three I stop the vice. No death can come when will let not, and power comes from those who will it so. Back, back you black hearted harlots, for the death of kings will not be on my conscience. No, nonononoo. Release me!

The lioness roars and bounds at the string, taking three in her mouth and tearing them from RUFUS' body.

Arghhhaahahahahahaha. You can't kill us both! Welcome back my deary! It's always good to see some blood in your mouth. To the death.

The string tries as hard as it can to make RUFUS touch the crown.

Don't touch it sweetie! We can save it together! No need to poison our minds. Mind, body, nation!

Rufus cuts string away, until only his arm and back are controlled.

Rufus the knife-wielding bastard will win again! You see, you monstrous hags!!! No, no no!

The lioness, instead of grabbing the strings, grabs his arm, and forces it toward the crown.

What are you doing? I thought we talked about this. I thought you didn't want this. I thought you wanted to retire? What happened to the house with the poppies, away from all of this nonsense, this blood, this terror!?!

She growls.

Really?!?

The strings moves him a little forward. He is on his hands and knees with one arm almost touching the crown.

I don't know if I can.

She growls.

No. I am not a coward. I have never been a coward. I have fought on the field of battle, and taken down all of my enemies with honor and valor!

Growl.

Of course I do. Just not like this! Hold!

There is a pause. RUFUS looks at the lioness. He looks at the strings. He reaches up cuts one. Cuts two. The one on his back is still attached but he doesn't seem to notice it.

Is this what you want?

She releases his arm.

Okay. What you will.

Lights flicker and stay on. Pause. He stares at the crown. He inches forward, crouches down, and touches the crown. The light bulbs go out. His posture strengthens. The lioness creeps into the darkness. He stares. He picks up the crown, walks to his chair, sits down, and raises the crown to his head, not putting it fully on.

At last, my love has come and gone.

BLACKOUT

Circle lights come up after five seconds. RUFUS is sitting in a chair with the lioness sitting beside him. There is still one string attached to his back. He stares at the audience.

Welcome. Welcome all to our court. We thank you for coming and sharing this glorious day with us! The battle is done and the boys are home, the mothers are happy, and the fathers are getting fatter by the minute. Our kingdom will flourish in this time of peace! Mind, body, nation! (waits for a response) Those of you that helped in this battle against the evil warmongers of the north will be rewarded with riches beyond your belief. We promise to keep this kingdom safe against all that would take our freedom away from us. Mind, body, nation! (another response. First I would like to congratulate my comrades in battle for their valiant effort in war, by jumping right into the line of battle. You, come forth.

He points at a person in the audience. A medal drops from the ceiling.

Come forth and receive your reward. For your courage and quick wit, we award you the Medal of Valor. A high honor in the face of your king. Kneel.

When the audience member has knelt, the lioness walks to them and knights them with her tongue.

You, next! Don't be shy. Shyness makes us suspicious.

Another audience member. Another medal.

For your great strength and ability to lead young men into battle, we award you with the Medal of Will. An equal to those that would give their life for this glorious cause. Kneel.

Another knighting.

Next!

Another medal. RUFUS gets up and retrieves it.

This one is for someone special.

He approaches another audience member.

Stand. For not only protecting the king, but also giving great guidance that led to many victories on the field, we proudly welcome this member of our kingdom to be the first in a great line of men and women that have served their kingdom without selfishness nor questioning. Welcome to the Order of Rufus. Kneel. It is our great honor to bring you under our wing.

He pins the medal on their clothing.

May I have our three heroes up here beside us?

The three make a line with RUFUS and the lioness on either side of them.

Sing with us our great and glorious anthem!

Oh, say can you see by the dawn's early light
What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming?
Whose broad stripes and bright stars thru the perilous fight,
O'er the ramparts we watched were so gallantly streaming?
And the rocket's red glare, the bombs bursting in air,
Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there.
Oh, say does that star-spangled banner yet wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?

MIND, BODY, NATION, MIND, BODY, NATION, MIND, BODY, NATION!!!

You can return to your seats. My darling, my life, we have done it. There is no one now to stand in our way. No rebels, no useless patriarchs, no old men to run this country into the ground. We have gained our rightful place at the head of this nation. And I owe it all to you my sweetie. If it weren't for you I would never have grown the spine to do what I knew was right. For years I had seen that crown, and watched the man beneath it decay, taking everyone down with him. But as

we sit here, watching over the land, we will have a thousand years of peace in our heads to combat the years of torture under his ruinous rule. Thank you for giving me the courage to guide myself to triumph.

The lioness come up to RUFUS and licks his cheek.

Not here, not in front of the commoners.

She does it again.

Oh. Hehe. I see now. Well, if you run along I'll be with you in a bit and we can talk some more about your plan.

The lioness stalks into the darkness.

Three by three the days go by, with peace and harmony in our clear blue sky. Three by three I turn and turn the nights surround with every haunt and trial I've been through, the horrible life of a knife-wielding bastard. As King I see a light go by, the times of caress, the days of yellow feverish patience, a sitting sickness of wait and decay. No wonder the previous did all to fight and struggle, only through this can we go forward and juggle the pains of pressure so heavy a crown lies.

RUFUS stares at the ground. Shuffles around a bit. A glance.

Off with peace. I'll take over the world.

He walks off into the darkness. Five seconds.

BLACKOUT

Spotlight comes on a map being held in the air.

For everyone that has been spending their night in my tent of wonders, I invite you to gaze upon something never seen before. Over the past years I have been training my body, sculpting it to achieve a feat beyond feats. I have chosen you, my beloved fans, to debut this spectacle. Brace your eyes for The Conqueror!

Circle light pops up. RUFUS throws the map to the floor.

Where should we start, where should we star, where should we start...ah. India! The curry, the palaces, and let me tell you, the beaches. Oh what a beautiful country. I could have full time cooks and fatten myself up. No worries in the world. The birthplace of peace. So we'll start

with the east and move... Where should we go? Anyone, name somewhere. Where have you always wanted to live?

Someone shouts out a country.

There!?! No no no no. That won't do. They're so, unattractive. I would much prefer...

He moves his finger around blindly and lands on

France! Oui oui, ohgh hagh hagh! I could take those little frogs and rip off their legs! Fry them in a nice rosemary olive oil and presto! We have a meal there. Onward! Who wants more? Where in the world has Rufus not conquered? Namibia? Poland? Czechoslovakia, or the Czech republic now I guess. So many name changes. It'll be easier when it's all under the reign of the Kingdom of RUFUS! I'll work on the name. Doesn't have quite the right ring to it. Next!

A pair of scissors flies onstage.

Oooooo. There's a good point. I could cut the world in two. I could rule this part and you (audience) could rule the other half.

He takes half the map to someone in the audience.

We could rule the world together you and me. We could fly anywhere we want and see the stars. Come on. What do you think about that? Queen regent of the land and you can have anything you want. Anything in the world, except my half of course. That's for me to rule and you to not touch. On second thought, I'll take them both. I'm the rightful King anyway.

He takes the map back to the center.

But I will need an army, and servants. Lots and lots of people. We can start with what we have here, but we have to recruit. Who wants a medal? I'll give one to the first person that recruits for the Royal Guard.

A light flickers.

Not now. I'm busy. I'm a king now, and a King can't just give up his duties for a call from an old friend.

Two lights flicker.

Stop this at once. I have no more ties to you. I don't have to take orders from an insignificant. If you don't leave at once I'll have to send my bodyguards after you.

Three lights flicker and the string on RUFUS' back gives a solid tug and he is lifted slightly from the ground for a moment.

What!? What is this nonsense? I thought I got rid of you devils. You must've come to me in my sleep. Guards!!! I'll have you hanged for this.

The lights flicker violently until RUFUS is on his knees, being supported by the string.

What do you want? I've done everything you've asked of me. I've killed my own father, I've murdered the king for my own success, I've even stopped my child from being born. All for you and your all-seeing gaze you pernicious crags! LET GO OF ME!!!

He rips the string from his back and the lights flicker angrily. He bleeds from the back. The lights calm down, and pulse at a low glow.

Just let me lie here. Just for a bit. I'll get up soon. I promise.

He breaths five breaths, starts to get up, slips a little, gets to his knees, and straightens himself out.

I'll make a deal with you. As you now see I have no more collection to you and your powers. I could take this advantage and destroy you, OR, or we can make a deal. I will rule over my kingdom, here in my land. Expand, prosper, and live a long happy life. Now, here is your end of the bargain. You get to keep them. Yup, that's right. All of them. Everyone under my kingdom will have a one-stop ending to you. Do you like that? How does that sound? Fair?

Nothing for five seconds. One of the lights flickers and they go out.

Three by three souls fly up toward wonder round the sundrous clouds. Thank you for your contribution to the Kingdom. You will all be greatly rewarded in the afterlife.

BLACKOUT

Spotlight. RUFUS walks out of the darkness into the light. A durge.

Mind, body, nation. That is the law of the land. I am the law of the land. Tonight we have caught those who would ruin this lovely event with their thoughts of treason and villainy. As I have said before, we are in a time of peace, a time of prosperity, a time where our numbers are growing and our wealth is distributed among the masses. We have become the new superpower of the world you and me. We have liberated the peoples from the slavery of their own tyranny, and are on our way to free those who are not yet enjoying the glorious sunshine of our age. Have I not done what I have promised? Have you not been entertained? Are we not enjoying the

peaceful rest of this evening now? I can have the seats changed if you want. Just say the word and it I done. Just wait a few minutes. On the topic of treason. Treason is any act in opposition to your King, the ruler and protector of the land. Those that have been brought here today are guilty of not only going against the wishes of the King, but creating the potential of harm to the people of this land. They have plotted to kill me and my followers in an attempt to thrust their own views upon the people, those of a state ruled by thieves and murderers. Do you want to be ruled by the likes of these scum? I thought not. I am sure you feel the same betrayal as I do, and it saddens my heart that it must come to this, that they have driven me to end this wondrous time of peace for such an insignificant cause. Please, those of you that can watch, lay witness to the travesty that is their execution. It will be difficult, but in order to learn from their mistakes, they must be made example of. I do not relish in their death, but it must happen for our own lives to prosper. The sooner we dig up the root, the better chance we have of fending of the weedful infestation of evil. Bring on the prisoners!

An apple is thrown onstage. RUFUS catches it in his hand. The three light bulbs start to glow.

For crimes against the crown, against the safety of this nation, against humanity as a whole, for treason of the highest degree, I sentence thee, to death by execution from the King himself. Do you have any last words? So be it. Drumroll please.

A drumroll. RUFUS holds the apple high up, holds, and crushes it in his hand. The light bulbs pulse.

Next!

Another apple. A drumroll. He crushes it. A pulse.

Next!

Another apple. A drumroll. He crushes it. A pulse.

Next!

A head of lettuce. A drumroll. He rips it apart. A pulse.

Next!

Another head. A drumroll. He rips it apart. A pulse.

Next!

A coconut.

You. Of all the people to betray me, this one saddens me the most. You broke my heart, and now I have to break your skull. I am sorry, dear friend, that you chose the path of evil over the path of goodness. I will miss your spirit. Hammer!

A hammer comes onstage. RUFUS picks it up, and at first methodically hammers away at the coconut, building to a violent attack on the fruit until it breaks open and the milk flows freely.

Thank you all for coming here today. This shows me the strength of this nation, and I salute you in your loyalty to the crown. As I am not a man without forgiveness and honor, we will stand and commemorate these brave soldiers for the time they served loyalty to the crown, before the poison infested their hearts. Maestro!

Taps is played as RUFUS stands at attention in the spotlight. The song ends.

Please excuse me as I take leave and feast with my wife. A day like this makes a man surprisingly hungry.

BLACKOUT

RUFUS enters as the circle light comes on. He looks around, snaps, and the house and work lights come on. He sits down in the chair. Everything is visible. He takes his crown off, and lays it over his knee. Five seconds.

I didn't grow up with a normal childhood, playing in the fields or building forts with my friends. My family had a house with a forest in the back, but I was never allowed there. It was the king's forest. That was where he hunted his deer. Anyone found in there would be captured and taken to the palace for sentencing. The king loved his deer. They were almost like children for him. Well, at least until he shot them. He had one child, a little brat if you tell me. Oh, what was his name, he isn't around much anymore, but, oh yes; Mark. Little Markie and I would play occasionally. He would come over to my house because his father didn't want him around that much, so he would waddle on over and we would go play knights and thieves with the other royal boys. He would always cheat, that little bastard, so I stopped wanting to hang out with him. We fell apart. Now, those were the only friends my father would let me have, and on top of that he would only let me play for an hour a day. The rest of the time I would be training. My father had this complex about raising our house stature to that of the great houses. We were in the middle house-range, but he wanted to be great, and he thought the best way for that to happen would be if I were a great warrior. So I trained. Nine hours a day. Breakfast, three hours, lunch, three hours, an hour break, dinner, three hours, and time in the evening to study and rest. Now this is the childhood I grew up in, always knowing where I was going. It never occurred to me that I could have been a politician, or a doctor, of course, look at where I am now, and all because I stayed on the path my father laid for me. He would not be proud, don't get me wrong,

and that is why I continue. That is why this nation, this Kingdom of greatness must be at the top, the paramount example of progress. Now, however, little Markie has grown up, and he isn't too happy about what happened to his father. I have tried to tell him that it was not my fault, that I am not to blame, that the health of the nation was my only interest, but he has never listened to reason. I just wanted to tell you, my people, not to be afraid. He has challenged me, and you all must be the witnesses to this for the sake of tradition, but you must not fear. If you have faith, I will succeed. The only way that I can win is if every single one of you wishes so, and if I happen to lose, which is not likely, then the world will fall into turmoil as it tears itself apart. Brother will fight brother as warmongers rise to take control of large amounts of land that is not theirs, and no one here will be safe in the wake of this coming storm. So, as we continue, I invite you to wish my success, as yours is fatally tied to mine. And now, a moment of silence as I prepare myself for the oncoming trials.

He hangs his head in silence. He looks up and smiles. The circle light snaps on and the light bulbs Morse code.

How are you enjoying your feast? Are you hungry or something? You seem agitated.

More morse code.

I know, I know. They've been a little unsettled, but it's nothing I can't handle. You know, I mean of course you know, but we took Holland last week. Now they're living free, just like you and me.

Morse code.

He has returned? I knew he had emerged somewhere in the south, but I had no idea he was so close. Well, I thank thee for telling me such news. He will be vanquished soon enough. A small army cannot take down the Kingdom. We are too powerful. They won't stand a chance.

Morse code.

I don't take orders from you anymore. You know that. We have an agreement.

Morse code.

Yes yes, I will do tht right away, but only for the safety of myself. You have nothing to fear. You can't be harmed by mortal men. Trust me, I have tried. Goodbye.

The light bulbs go out.

Three by three the days go by, and nothing will stop our advancement. Who would like a show? What do you want to see me do? It has been so long since I performed. I might be a little rusty, but I will entertain you none the less. Anything for my loyal subjects. Now let's see...the

unicycle? No. Elephant riding!. No, that won't do. I know it! You want to see the daring feats of the high flying trapeze! Next

A trapeze is lowered. Spotlight.

Gather round for the fleeting stunt of the high rise trapeze. Swinging from side to side, your heart will race as I flip and twirl among the stars, an attempt to touch the moon! Drum roll!

Drumroll, and RUFUS goes to prepare for the stunt. As he touches the handle, a gunshot and a howl, circle light.

Sweetie? Sweetie! Where are you!?! Come to me!

The lioness limps out into the circle, bleeding.

Oh no, my darling, my life. Who did this to you? You bastards! YOU COWARDS!!! Come back here you fucking cunts! I will destroy you and burn the ground you walk upon! I will kill your families and feed them to the pigs! Oh no. My darling. Come here come here come her.

She limps over and falls into his arms.

Shhhh shh shhhhhhh. Don't move. I'll take care of you. Doctor. Doctor! DOCTOR!! Where the fuck is he oh no oh no oh no. Pressure. Just some pressure and you'll be good in no time.

He rips a sleeve off of his uniform and wraps it around her wound. She tries to bite him.

It's okay it's okay. Don't bite. It's me Rufus. Your husband. It's me. Don't you recognize me?

She struggle to get out.

Stop. Stop moving. You'll only make it worse. The doctor is on his way. I promise. He'll stitch you right up and you'll be hunting zebra in Africa sooner than you know. Shhhh shh shhhhh. It's alright. Everything will be alright. Just calm down.

ROCKABY BABY
ON THE TREE TOP
WHEN THE WIND BLOWS
THE CRADLE WILL ROCK
WHEN THE BOW BREAKS
THE CRADLE WILL FALL
AND DOWN WILL COME BABY
CRADLE AND ALL

She growls.

I know I know, not the best song for now, but I couldn't think of anything else.

She struggles again, biting at his arm.

Stop! I won't hurt you. I promise! Just stop!!

She bites harder and gets loose, running off into the darkness.

NOO! Come back! Come back my baby! Come back my love! You can't get through this without me! I will take care of you!!! LADY!!!

He collapses. He makes his way to the chair, hoists himself up, and slumps in, unable to do anything.

Three by three the sons of mother will drop the rain of fire will fall on the heads of those responsible for this travesty. No places to hide for the yellow backed frights of night time fairy tales. No place to run but into the bowels of the beast mouth wide open to greet the treacherous fiends who gain pleasure from this act of violence. No mercy for all. TO WAR!

BACKOUT

Hup two three four hup two three four hup two three four attention!

Spotlight.

We are at war. There is no denying it. The rebel forces have infiltrated the city walls and are making their way to the palace as we speak. For those of you who wish to run and hide, and try and save your own asses, you can do so through the exits now. However, your best chance of survival is here with me within the safety of the palace and its guards. It could take them weeks to even make a scratch on the outside, so don't worry. You are safe with me.

Yells are heard and the stamping of feet starts along with military rums in the distance. They grow louder and louder as the scene goes on. Circle light.

Ah, the glorious symphony of war. How I missed it so. You know you don't really understand the loss of something until it's thrown back into your face full force. The smell of steel, and the gorgeous sound it makes in battle. It's the little things. Oh, do you hear them now? The violin sounds of bows being prepped, and...released. Ah.

Cannon fire.

That' the signal they've breached the inner wall. Well, I guess it's time to prepare. My Armor! Quickly! I must prepare.

He begins to take off his uniform, until he is just wearing his underwear.

No man has the balls to really kill a man who goes into battle prepared. And the only way to enter is with everything showing. The enemy must see your strength, see your structure, be able to see every move the muscles make until they are struck with fear from your impeccable form. Only this way will you win. Only this way will you cut them down three by three and rest at the end of the day.

The yells are getting louder. A letter flies in.

Ah, the report.

He opens it and reads aloud.

The rebels have breached the outer walls, stop. They have hoisted ladders to the palace, stop. A few have scaled the walls, stop. We are outnumbered, stop.

He tosses the letter behind him.

Well, they may be outnumbered, but I am not. Next!

A sword comes into the space.

My friend. You come at last. Man the doors! Line the walls! Let no one live to see tomorrow. Tomorrow we will be done with this infestation! Tomorrow nothing short of freedom!

The light bulbs come on.

Not now you hags. Leave me to my work. I have no need of your help.

Lights come on in the back, revealing three heads of lettuce.

Charge, you bastards! Kill the traitors!

He rushes back and starts chopping the lettuce until it is all over the ground.

You want to kill me? Throw me everything you have. Leave nothing back!

Apples are thrown at him and he slices them away one at a time. If he is hit, nothing happens to him. He crushes anything that lands on the ground. The marching sound gets louder and louder. He is stomping around the floor crushing all in sight. A gunshot. He disappears, and reemerges with a bullet in his hand.

And you thought that would work the second time!?! Fools! Give me a challenge! I will end everything that gets in my way!

Carrots are thrown at him like arrows. They all miss. He rushes back and breaks them like limbs.

Send me Marcus!! Send me your greatest or send me your heads!!!

Everything stops as a spotlight shines on nothing in the back. RUFUS tries to enter the light, but it evades him.

At last, you show your face again, you murderous fiend. You will pay for your crimes against me and my wife. Mind, body, nation! Three by three the cuts will fall upon your head. Do you have any last words or an apology to the people you have betrayed? No? Then to the death we fight.

They fight. RUFUS fights an invisible opponent. They exchange blows, each gaining on each other. RUFUS receives a slice to the leg. He stumbles, but fights more. Eventually RUFUS is thrown to the ground, exposed. The light bulbs come on.

Finish it. Do what you have come to do, but know that by killing me you are killing millions. From my death will come the collapse of our great Kingdom, everything that we, your father, and I have fought for. The laws will go to the wind and nothing will be safe in the wake of your single action. Killing a king is not an easy thing. It will haunt you for the rest of your life. Just know what you do.

A moment.

At least remember me for what I am. Rufus. A warrior, a husband, a leader of men. Don't miss.

RUFUS takes his sword and tries to thrust forward, but he misses and the sword falls on him, stabbing him in the stomach. He controls the sword that Marcus kills him with. All around the stage is heard the marching of feet. Small feet, big feet, crooked feet. Yells and cheers and boos start to rise. RUFUS is being killed by Marcus. A mix of pounding and sloshing fills the room as the final chorus of Tramp! Tramp! Tram! Fills the air. Flags blowing and buildings falling. The

world is being torn away and rebuilt with the speed of a thousand souls. Silence. Circle light only. RUFUS rises, bloody and covered in food.

I have this small house on a hill near these cliffs that look out over the ocean. Each morning my wife and I sit on the porch, watching the wind blow the waves backward and forward from our home. Our children play in the yard as the day slugs on, and in the winter time we huddle by the fire as we read from the tales of old. I only wanted peace in my life, but look where that has gotten me. Please, follow me to the exit. Your journey home will be free from harm, so you don't suffer the same fate as I. Please. Follow me home.

The light bulbs shine, the house lights come up, and RUFUS leads the audience to the exit, watching everyone leave, and closing the doors after the final soul is free from harm.

END OF PLAY