

Cast in order of appearance

NOTE: Many roles can be double or triple cast. Below are suggestions for role doubling, but the director has great latitude in deciding the roles each actor will portray.

Duke/Announcer/Madame LeFett..... A white male in his early thirties.

Ina Gada DiVida, Queen of Harlem.. A heavy set black woman, late fifties. She is the domineering matriarch of the Royal Family

Jester..... A black male early thirties

The Shiffons

Marlene/Moisha(Beggar)

Princess Ariel..... A black woman, in her twenties

Darlene/Cobra(Beggar)

Minster of Gramercy Park..... A white female in her early thirties

Charlene/Geraldine(Beggar)/

Voice Three,

Soothsayer, Solider..... A black female in her twenties

Eron/Dijon MonteCarlo/Voice One... A male in his late twenties

Peter/Janitor/Voice Two..... A black male, early thirties

Mr. Plaveton/Big Daddy/Judar..... A large, black man in his late forties

Time: The distant future, after a great catastrophe of some kind has left the civilized world in ruins.

Place: Harlem, New York City. Action takes place in and around the ruins of the Apollo Theater, one of Harlem's landmarks.

Setting: The set consist of a series of odd shaped ramps and platforms. Rubble and the remains of a once great city can be seen everywhere. There are some structural remnants of a theater: partial walls, box office, and theater seats. A large throne chair sits on the up right center platform with a series of steps leading up to it. A marquee attached to one of the partial walls stage right reads, "Apollo". Other letters hang haphazardly or have fallen completely off the marquee. Upstage left is a platform with small proscenium and a scrim that serves as a stage curtain. Projections can be shown on the scrim and scenes can be played behind it. Downstage is a large mound of trash that a group of beggars periodically scavenge through.

PROLOGUE

A trash heap somewhere in Harlem

ACT I

Scene 1: Throne room of the House of Apollo

Scene 2: The backstage/stage of the Apollo Theater in an earlier time

Scene 3: Throne room and shifting to the Apollo Theater in earlier time

ACT II

Scene 1: Somewhere in Harlem

Scene 2: Throne room

Scene 3: Throne room

Scene 4: Apollo Theater in an earlier time

Scene 5: Somewhere in the palace

Scene 6: Throne room

Prologue

Lights rise on several beggars/rag pickers searching through a trash heap downstage.

MOISHA

There ain't shit worth shaking out in here.

COBRA

Girl, you got to dig deep to find the gold.

MOISHA

Only gold I've found is a can of Gold Star Tuna.

GERALDINE

Speak for yourself. I found something.

(GERALDINE holds up a cell phone. The others gather round for a closer look.)

COBRA

Whoa! Will you look at that?

MOISHA

What in the world is it?

(DUKE OF BEDSTYLE ENTERS looking very much like a pimp, dressed in eye-popping clothes. He wears a flashy suite, matching shoes and derby hat.)

DUKE

That, my little social rejects, is a device used by the ancients to communicate with their homies.

COBRA

Hey, it's the Duke. What's happening, man?

DUKE

Ain't nothing going on but the rent.

MOISHA

You got it, man. (*Admiring the DUKE'S outfit*) Check out them rags.

GERALDINE

I see you got every colors of the rainbow on yo' back.

DUKE

I only wear the best, baby; know what I'm saying?

COBRA

(To the DUKE)

Is it worth anything?

DUKE

That thing? Only to a few collectors of obscure antiquities.

GERALDINE

Damn!

DUKE

What ya'll doing out here collecting trash anyway? Ya'll ain't got no J-O-B?

GERALDINE

Whoa! Didn't even think he could spell the word.

COBRA

Not much work since the war started. Got to make a living somehow. Ain't found no moneybags that fell off a Brinks truck.

MOISHA

Or a rich man with them deep and generous pockets.

DUKE

Yo, yo, yo, check it out. Life is like a bowl of cream - the best is skimmed off the top. You know what I'm saying? Ya'll missing the big picture, the greater scheme of things. Those on the top eat, while those at the bottom are consumed by the man.

GERALDINE

What do you know about the man? The man got you in his back pocket. You smelling his stanky ass. You just a high society pimp.

DUKE

Don't hate the player, baby, hate the game.

GERALDINE

Why don't you get yo' jive ass out my face.

DUKE

You is tripping, girl! What's up with that? Know what I'm saying? I'm gonna let you slide, girl, 'cause you done been to the other side, and saw worlds collide, and contemplated suicide, but took it all in stride. Now you're open-eyed..

GERALDINE

Oh, shut up!

DUKE

Word up! *(Beat)* Yo' yo' yo', check it out! Got to get tight and gotta get smart; you know what I'm saying. Let me pull yo' sleeve.

(The DUKE looks up stage. Big Daddy Master D ENTERS upstage and crosses to a beat up mixing table.)

DUKE (CONT'D)

You ready to turn this sucker out Big Daddy Master D?

(BIG DADDY nods that he's ready to begin to scratch and spin.)

DUKE (CONT'D)

Hit it!

(A driving rift in heard and the DUKE begins to rap and the beggars act as his back up.)

DUKE (CONT'D)

I GOT GOLD CHAINS HANGING 'ROUND MY NECK.
I GOT DIAMOND RINGS ON ALL FIVE FINGERS.
I WEAR A PLATINUM ROLEX WITH THAT BLING, BLING.
GOT MONEY IN MY POCKET, CHA CHING, CHING.

CHECK OUT MY THREADS, THEY'RE MADE IN CHINA.
I'M DRESSED TO KILL, AIN'T NOTHING FINERA.
I GOT ALLIGATOR SHOES ON MY SEXY FEET.
KEEPS ME STEPPING TO THAT FUNKY BEAT.

MY RIDE IS FIERCE; IT WILL ROCK YOUR WORLD.
CATALAC ESCALADE, DON'T YOU WANT TO KISS ME GIRL.
AT NIGHT I CRUISE THE NEON STREETS.
I'M A NIGHT STALKER, BABY, THERE'S NO RETREAT.

IF YOU AIN'T GOT GAME, IT AIN'T NO SHAME
BETTER WISE UP, OR YOU GOT YO'SELF TO BLAME
GET UP OUT OF THAT TRASH, CREATE YO' DESTINY
THE BEST THING IN LIFE AIN'T FOR FREE

DUKE (CONT'D)

I'M A PLAYER
NOT AN INSTIGATOR
GOT MY FINGER ON THE TRIGGER
AND MY EYE ON THE PRIZE

I'M A PLAYER
NOT A PERPETRATOR
I WAS THERE WHEN TIME BEGAN
WITNESS THE BEAUTY
PARTOOK OF THE SIN
SAW THE FUTURE IN THE EYES OF A CHILD
EMBRACED THE MOMENT, WALKED A MIRACLE MILE
IT'S YO' CHOICE, BE A SLAVE OR RUN FREE
DON'T SETTLE FOR LESS, BE ALL YOU CAN BE

I WAS ONCE LIKE YOU, WITH MY CUP IN HAND.
DOWN ON MY KNEES, SUPRESSED BY THE MAN.
THE RICH THROW CRUMBS FROM THEIR WELFARE TABLE.
DON'T WANT NO SCRAPS, GONNA DINE LIKE CLARK GABLE

I'M A PLAYER
NOT A COMPLICATOR
GOT MY FINGER ON THE TRIGGER
AND MY EYE ON THE PRIZE

I'M A PLAYER
NOT A NEGOTIATOR
I WAS THERE WHEN TIME BEGAN
WITNESS THE BEAUTY
PARTOOK OF THE SIN
SAW THE FUTURE IN THE EYES OF A CHILD
EMBRACED THE MOMENT, WALKED A MIRACLE MILE
IT'S YO' CHOICE, BE A SLAVE OR RUN FREE
DON'T SETTLE FOR LESS BE ALL YOU CAN BE

NEW YORK IS FRACTURED, A CATHEDRAL OF GLASS
A TINY PEABLE COULD MAKE IT ALL PASS
INTO TOMORROW, BUT TOMORROW NEVER COMES
IN A WORLD OF PLENTY, YOU'D BETTER GET YO'SELF SOME

AND BE A PLAYER
NOT A VACILLATOR
GET YO' FINGER ON THE TRIGGER
KEEP YO' EYE ON THE PRIZE

DUKE (CONT'D)

BE A PLAYER
 NOT A PROCRASTINATOR
 I WAS THERE WHEN TIME BEGAN
 WITNESS THE BEAUTY
 PARTOOK OF THE SIN
 SAW THE FUTURE IN THE EYES OF A CHILD
 EMBRACED THE MOMENT, WALKED A MIRACLE MILE
 IT'S YO' CHOICE, BE A SLAVE OR RUN FREE
 DON'T SETTLE FOR LESS BE ALL YOU CAN BE

MOISHA

That was hot!

COBRA

Tight as hell.

DUKE

I am the master Rapper, baby, and the booty tapper; you know what I'm saying?

(Something off in the distance gets GERALDINE'S attention.)

GERALDINE

(*Pointing.*)

Hey, what with all the flags flying over the House of Apollo?

DUKE

You been hiding under a rock, girl? Tomorrow they are crowning a new king of Harlem.

MOISHA

Yeah, I heard something about that...Eron Motown is gonna be the new king.

DUKE

He's the biggest crook in Harlem. I'm on my way over there now. I got to run some errands first.

MOISHA

You mean run some numbers.

DUKE

Why you getting all up in my grill, girl? You wouldn't want me to put that smack-a-lack on ya!

MOISHA

And that will be yo' last smack-a-lack, cause I will go postal all over yo' ass.

COBRA

Let's keep it cool now.

GERALDINE

I've heard of strange happenings in the House of Apollo.

DUKE

Did you hear it through the grapevine?

(SINGING)

OH I HEARD IT THROUGH THE GRAPEVINE. OH AND I'M JUST ABOUT TO LOSE MY MIND. OH YES...

GERALDINE

Will you shut the fuck up!

DUKE

You must have flunked out of charm school, 'cause you is rough as gravel road.

COBRA

I've heard that rumor too, girl.

(DUKE tries to make a move on the BEGGARS.)

DUKE

Ain't nothing wrong with a girl with a few rough edges. You know what I'm saying? No restriction. No inhibitions. Get all freaky and naaasty. If a rough girl gets hold of you, you better watch out! You girls are bootylicious!

(Area lights up on the BEGGARS/Greek chorus. THEY put hand held mask made of pieces of trash to their faces.)

DUKE (CONT'D)

Whoa! What you girls into? Now that is some freaky shit. *(Beat)* Hey, I can get into some kink; you know what saying? I'll turn down the lights, put on some romantic music, rub baby oil all over...

(Music plays as BEGGARS speak as a Greek chorus.)

BEGGARS

The House of Apollo
Has stood throughout the ages
Stood proud and strong
Through famine, plague and as war rages

BEGGARS (CONT'D)

In the House of Apollo,
Conspiracy lurks and disaster looms.
Most ominous in the this web of tears
Is the rift in time and impending doom.

Let us pray that Apollo
Rules another day
For the fate of Harlem
Is held in sway
Sho Op, Sho Op, Sho Op, de Bop
Sho Op, Sho Op, Sho Op, de Bop

DUKE

Damn! These Harlem girls have got it going on!

(There is a series of distant
explosions. Lights cross fade into
the next scene.)

ACT I

Scene 1

AT RISE: The sound of explosions continue as lights rise on INA GADA DIVIDA, the queen of Harlem, heavily made up, dressed in layers of glittering fabric, standing near the throne, up right. The JESTER sits down, right. He is dressed in rags with cans, hubcaps, and various oddities tied with coarse string to his body. On his head is a large and equal absurd hat. He plays with a string of bells sewn to his clothing and occasionally strums on a beat up guitar. The sound of distant bombing fades.)

It's getting closer?

JESTER

What's getting closer?

QUEEN

The shelling?

JESTER

I didn't hear anything.

QUEEN

You're telling me that you didn't hear that explosion?

JESTER

QUEEN
(Angry)

How dare you contradict me! (Beat) Whatever it was, it wasn't any explosion. Bombs falling this close to Harlem? Ridiculous! It could have been a car accident...a drive by shooting...a political assassination. Who knows? Who cares? Whatever it was it's none of our concern.

I can still hear it echoing--(pointing)--There! Over there... Listen! Don't you hear it?

JESTER

There is nothing to hear that would be of...

QUEEN

(JESTER points to the audience)

JESTER

It's hovering over by the balcony.

QUEEN

The royal gallery!

JESTER

The sound of...

QUEEN

Why are you being so persistent?

JESTER

It's curled around that pillar and faded.

(The QUEEN holds up her scepter.)

QUEEN

I'm gonna curl this around your head, if you don't learn your place.

JESTER

Yes, my Queen. *(He bows low before the QUEEN)* It's been quiet. Just the rustle of cobwebs on the grand chandelier. The scurrying of a roaches here and there. A leaf falling in the distance as the summer recedes into fall, the fluttering..

QUEEN

Silence!

(THE QUEEN sits on the throne and the JESTER starts to play with things he pulls from a large bag.)

QUEEN (CONT'D)

(Suddenly agitated)

Where in the hell is that man?

JESTER

What man, my queen?

QUEEN

Was I talking to you?

JESTER

Well, I'm the only one here.

QUEEN

I was talking to myself, jackass.

JESTER

Fool, my Queen. Jackass is such a derogatory term.

QUEEN

Don't be impertinent my little guttersnipe. There is no difference between fool and ass.

JESTER

Oh, but I assure you there is.

(Pause)

QUEEN

Okay, I'll humor you. What's the difference? Enlighten me on the distinction.

JESTER

Some say Fool. Some say Jester. We are both honorable.

QUEEN

Oh, don't make me laugh. You make mockery of the word, honorable.

JESTER

The noble jesters have graced the courts of kings and queens throughout time. Indeed, some thought them wise: they were the power and brains behind the throne, but wise enough not to let their masters know. A little dexterity for juggling, a sense of comic timing, passable musicianship, even a little magic - these all cloaks the Fool's real role: to persuade a monarch's mind and thereby manipulating the course of history.

(The JESTER performs a simple magic trick.)

JESTER

Voila!

QUEEN

Apollo, who gives life to us all, has bestowed you with the gifts of mirth resilience, and perpetual optimism. Although, you can be morose, disagreeable and capricious at times, you are well suited to your station.

JESTER

And for those not so suited?

QUEEN

They choose professions that reflect their higher station in life.

JESTER

I say not.

QUEEN

You say not?

JESTER

Fools are found in all professions. Even in yours, my Queen.

QUEEN

Be careful of your words. Choose them wisely.

JESTER

I didn't mean to offend my illustrious Queen. (*Beat*) Shall I entertain you now?

QUEEN

No, no finish what you were saying.

JESTER

Your family was given the divine right to rule by the Great One.

(He points to the sign above.)

QUEEN

Hail, Apollo

JESTER

Yes...Hail, Apollo. However, we are all born of flesh into an imperfect world and are all subject to the incongruity of life. There are so many...

QUEEN

What did you just say?

JESTER

You mean we are all born in...

QUEEN

Not that, you idiot.

JESTER

Fool, your majesty.

QUEEN

The word "incongruity." That word is beyond your station.

JESTER

Station and class are such divisive...

QUEEN

Where did you learn that word?

JESTER

Incongruity? Well...ahhh...

QUEEN

Where? Answer me!

(The JESTER hesitates.)

QUEEN (CONT'D)

Out with it, or I'll have you thrashed within an inch of your life!

JESTER

At the great library. I was there reading the ancient texts...

QUEEN

It is forbidden! It is forbidden to enter the great library without proper credentials or the correct pedigree. The wisdom and the knowledge of the library is restricted for a reason. An unprepared mind would be thrown into turmoil.

JESTER

Oh, the house of the ancient wisdoms sits so majestic on the avenue. Its lions still gazing dutifully and defiant over the city's ruins. I wanted to learn words of the ancients...

QUEEN

How did you get in?

(The JESTER is reluctant to answer.)

QUEEN (CONT'D)

Who let you in?

JESTER

I told them that I was...well, that I was your cousin.

QUEEN

You did what?

JESTER

I do share the Motown resemblance after all.

QUEEN

I could have your head on a pike for that.

JESTER

No...no, forgive me, my queen. I curse the demon that possessed me that day. I'm deeply remorseful.

QUEEN

Remorse is cheap, when the disobedience is so grave. *(Pause)* I will overlook your transgression this time, but there will be no mercy in the future. That was a serious breach of the laws and wishes of Apollo.

JESTER

A thousand pardons, my Queen.

(THEY both sit quietly for a moment. The JESTER gently strums on his guitar and hums. The sign of Apollo hanging above flickers and goes out. The QUEEN suddenly rises alarmed.)

QUEEN

Why is it so dim in here?

(The QUEEN looks up and notices the sign isn't lit and panics.)

QUEEN (CONT'D)

My God, the Royal emblem isn't lit. Do something. Somebody do something! The generator must have stopped. Quickly, fool, run!

(The JESTER runs off stage.)

QUEEN

If the light of Apollo is ever extinguished, it will mean the fall of Harlem. Long ago, Apollo's anger brought darkness to the world, when an instrument of good was used for evil.

(The Apollo sign sputters to life. The JESTER enters and crosses back to his place and sits.)

QUEEN

Who's responsible for this?

(JESTER jumps to his feet and appears apprehensive.)

JESTER

I didn't have anything to do with it. The generator ran out of fuel, that's all.

QUEEN

They're all plotting against me. I hear their whispers in the night.

JESTER

(Aside)

Whispers in the night? Classic symptom of paranoid schizophrenic.

(JESTER picks several balls out of his bag and begins to juggle.)

QUEEN

Scheming to get my throne.

JESTER

What would Dr. Freud say? One, two, three potato..

QUEEN

Deviants, spies, conspirators..

JESTER

Penis envy I suspect. Four, five, six potato

QUEEN

Usurpers, traitors, terrorists. No one will encroach on my divine right. No one!

JESTER

Castration the only answer. Seven, eight, nine potato, feed the hungry children.

(The QUEEN becomes aware of the JESTER'S juggling and is furious.)

QUEEN

What do you think you're doing?

(The JESTER drops his balls. They roll about the stage and he chases after them.)

QUEEN (CONT'D)

Why? Why? Why is everyone trying to provoke me? *(Beat)* Dear Apollo, have Mercy on your poor servant. I have tried to do my best in raising this...this ingrate!

JESTER

I thought you loved my juggling. Relished the balls in orbit. You used to tell me to juggle all the time.

QUEEN

It was the king who liked your god awful juggling--not me!

JESTER

Hour after hour, juggling until my fingers were blistered...

QUEEN

It was the King!

JESTER

...blood oozing from my fingertips and still you cried, "More, more, sweet Fool!"

QUEEN

It was the king, not me. The king who liked you inept juggling!

JESTER

Ahhh, the king. *(Pause)* The king is dead. I remember now. Struck down on the battlefield.

QUEEN

I warned him that his reckless pursuit of the southern strategy would be his undoing.

JESTER

A valiant warrior to the very end.

QUEEN

He was an incompetent, arrogant, pigheaded idiot!

JESTER

What a fine funeral he had, all dressed up in his black suit.

QUEEN

Blue! It was a blue pinstripe suit!

JESTER

It was black; I assure you, and red and gray cravat. I do have an extraordinary memory if I say so...

QUEEN

It was blue. I picked the suit out myself and sent it over to the Good Body Funeral Home, with a gray tie--not a cravat.

JESTER

And his hat with a glorious fuchsia plum. Aahhh, to see the king all laid out in his corrugated, cardboard box; it was a fashion tour de force.

QUEEN

He hated hats. He loathed anything that concealed his illustrious mane. Never understood the bother. It was a toupee after all.

JESTER

His laughter made this hall bearable. Now that the king is dead, I'm afraid the laughter will stop, and the merriment banished. I miss him so. *(He dries his eyes)* What will become of Harlem? What will become of me?

(THE QUEEN is noticeable shaken by the question.)

QUEEN

You and I will go on somehow. Harlem will continue as she has since the dawn of time.

JESTER

But without him to head the campaign, the war is surely lost.

QUEEN

Nonsense! What do you know of war?

JESTER

Oh, I've heard what goes on. Yes, I have. I listen and observe. I'm an astute Fool, my Queen.

QUEEN

You really do grow too bold. Boldness and ingratitude will be the death of you.

JESTER

I overheard them at the market...

QUEEN

How reliable is second hand gossip from drunks and two bit camp followers?

JESTER

Oh, no, they were soldiers...very foul smelling soldiers, just back from the battlefield.

(QUEEN crosses downstage to the JESTER.)

QUEEN

You don't truly know about war, until you've sent young men off to battle, knowing that some will never return. You don't fully comprehend until you've heard the weeping, women wailing when their husband or son comes home cold and lifeless. Their cries rising up in crescendo to my door, "Why, why, why did he have to die?" *(Beat)* I have no answers, no justifications, only false comfort, and well-worn platitudes to serve them. There are always the official report to be filled out, flags and metal to be presented, accolade of valor to be heralded but no effective comfort. "It is Apollo's way" is the universal panacea, which must soothe and satisfy. *(Beat)* Don't speak to me of war, my Fool, until you truly understand the meaning of the word.

(The sounds of distant explosions are heard. The QUEEN and JESTER stand transfixed. The sound fades and the QUEEN crosses to the throne and sits.)

QUEEN (CONT'D)

What in the world could be taking him so long? He knows time is of the essence.

JESTER

Who, my Queen?

QUEEN

The Duke you idiot! I'm expecting the Duke of Bedstye.

JESTER

Ahhhhh, the Duke. And, why is he coming?

QUEEN

To sharpen the executioner's axe, so jovial heads can roll.

(JESTER shudders at the thought.)

QUEEN

If only the legend of the Staff of Apollo were true.

JESTER

The Staff of Apollo?

QUEEN

It has nothing to do with you.

JESTER

I love the stories of the ancients. Will you tell me the tale my illustrious Queen?

(Pause)

QUEEN

It was in the time before the great cataclysm, in the place we now dwell, the angels of Apollo once graced this hall with singing and dancing that delighted Apollo. They were most beautiful, ethereal creatures with voices of sweet songbirds.

(Lights slowly fade on the QUEEN and JESTER. We hear the driving rhythm of the intro for "YOU'RE NOT WELCOME HERE ANYMORE." Voice of an announcer over loud speakers.)

ANNOUNCER

Ladies and gentlemen, let's give a warm, welcome to the dynamic, the sensational, the scintillating Shiffons!

(The up left curtains part and THE SHAFFONS; DARLENE, CHARLENE, and MARLENE moves forward in unison and begin singing "YOU'RE NOT WELCOME HERE ANYMORE.")

SHIFFONS (MARLENE sings lead)

YOU BEEN KISSING ME
 YOU BEEN HUGGING ME
 YOU BEEN WISPERING SWEET NOTHING IN MY EAR
 CALLING ME TURTLE DOVE
 WE WERE SO IN LOVE
 BUT THINGS AIN'T AWAY AS THEY APPEAR

I FOUND SOME ELSE'S LIPSTICK ON MY PILLOW
 WHOSE HIGHHEEL WAS ON MY STAIR
 THAT'S NOT MY PERFUME I SMELL ON YOU
 I THINK IT'S TIME WE CLEARED THE AIR

WHO'S BEEN SLEEPING IN MY BED, MY BED
 WHO YOU BEEN TAKING OUT ON THE TOWN
 I CAUGHT HER IN YO' ARMS, YO' ARMS
 AND YOU SAY SHE'S JUST A FRIEND

YOU'D BETTER PACK YOUR BAGS
 AND GIVE ME BACK YOUR KEY
 WALK OUT THAT DOOR
 I'M TIRED OF ALL YOUR LIES
 AND YOU CHEATING ON ME
 YOU'RE NOT WELCOME HERE ANYMORE

SHIFFONS (CONT'D)

DON'T CALL ME ON THE PHONE
 'CAUSE I'M MOVING ON
 I GOT A NEW MAN IN MY LIFE
 THAT WANTS TO MAKE THIS GIRL HIS WIFE
 HE'S A GOOD MAN,
 HE'S A TRUE MAN
 TREATS ME LIKE A QUEEN
 AND I'LL NEVER HAVE TO SAY

WHO'S BEEN SLEEPING IN MY BED, MY BED
 WHO YOU BEEN TAKING OUT ON THE TOWN
 I CAUGHT HER IN YO' ARMS, YO' ARMS
 AND YOU SAY SHE'S JUST A FRIEND

YOU'D BETTER PACK YOUR BAGS
 AND GIVE ME BACK YOUR KEY
 WALK OUT THAT DOOR
 I'M TIRED OF ALL YOUR LIES
 AND YOU CHEATING ON ME
 YOU'RE NOT WELCOME HERE ANYMORE

(THE SHIFFONS complete the song and acknowledge the thunderous applause. They step back behind the curtain, and the curtain closes behind them. Light rise briefly on the JESTER and QUEEN.)

QUEEN

The Shiffons. Yes, they were heavenly creatures, but all was not bliss. Apollo had entrusted the Staff of Apollo to his most beautiful angel, Marlene.

JESTER

What is the Staff of Apollo?

QUEEN

The staff was forge on Mount Olympus of the finest silver - a magnificent gift to his favorite singer, a symbol of His power, glory and everlasting love. Unfortunately, she fell in love with an unscrupulous man and foolishly gave the Staff of Apollo to him.

JESTER

Oh, my!

QUEEN

There were sinister elements afoot that would ultimately destroy her.

(Lights rise on the SHIFFONS standing down stage.)

CHARLENE
(To MARLENE)

What was all that adlibbing about, Marlene? That's not the way we rehearsed the damn song!

MARLENE
Spicing things up a bit.

CHARLENE
If we need some spice, we'll order Thai food, okay? (Beat) You get one jive ass nigga interested in you, and you think you're Ms. Diva.

MARLENE
If the diva fits, wear it.

CHARLENE
You know, you ain't all that.

MARLENE
And you ain't nothing without me!

CHARLENE
I've taken all the bullshit I'm going to take from you. You think you're so tough...

(DIJON MONTECARLO ENTERS. He is a dapper dresser wearing an expensive suit, hat and carries a walking stick [The Staff of Apollo.]

DIJON
Ladies, ladies, ladies.

CHARLENE
(To DIJON)
Say! You better keep yo' bitch in line.

MARLENE
Who you calling a bitch, bitch?

CHARLENE
Girl, don't mess with me; I will smack you into yesterday's news.

MARLENE
You lay one hand on me and you'll be pulling back a nub..

DIJON

Let's everybody just calm down, okay?

CHARLENE

It's "The Shiffons," not "Marlene and her backup singers." Try to remember that.

(CHARLENE storms off the stage.
DARLENE looks at Dijon, narrows her
eyes and EXITS.)

DIJON

(To MARLENE)

You can really piss people off. You know that?

(He takes MARLENE in his arms and
tries to kiss her.)

MARLENE

(Turning aside his kisses)

I've just about had it with Ms. Charlene. The girl don't know her place.

DIJON

You'll have your moment. Just bide yo' time, baby. Keep your wits about you and your temper in check. (Beat) I'm working behind the scenes, getting everything in place.

MARLENE

When? You've been singing that same damn tune for months now. I want to see some action. I'm carrying the damn act now.

DIJON

Patience, my little songbird. (Beat) Come here.

MARLENE

Don't try to sweet talk me.

DIJON

Ahh, come on, baby.

(DIJON crosses to MARLENE, takes her
in his arms and they kiss.)

DIJON

I'm gonna be meeting with Maxwell Plaveton tomorrow.

MARLENE

Is that the concert promoter?

DIJON

Maxwell Plaveton owns Dewop Records. And maybe The Shiffons is going to be signed up tomorrow. And if that happens then maybe there's going to be a special clause: Marlene gets to do a solo album in 12 months.

MARLENE

(giddy)

Really? A solo album?

DIJON

Told you I'm looking out for you, babe.

MARLENE

Don't bullshit me. Is he signing us?

DIJON

Now, you just leave everything to old Dijon...

(DIJON and MARLENE kiss.)

MARLENE

You certainly know to make a girl's engine purrrrrr.

DIJON

I've been known to rave an engine until it blows a piston. And you've got a couple hours before the next show. You want to blow a few pistons?

(MARLENE laughs coquettishly. Dijon nuzzles her ear.)

DIJON

Humm? That's what you want from old Dijon?

(SHE giggles as they join arms and cross left. A JANITOR ENTERS left sweeping with a push broom.)

MARLENE

You look so dapper with the walking stick I gave you.

DIJON

I've turns a few heads when people see me with my silver cane gleaming in the sun.

(The JANITOR accidentally bumps into DIJON.)

DIJON

Hey, watch where you're going, you old fool. I just got this suite cleaned and pressed. You want me to knock some sense into you?

(DIJON waves the cane at the JANITOR in a threaten manner.)

JANITOR

Excuse me, sir. I'm so sorry.

DIJON

Stupid ass.

(DIJON and MARLENE exit. The JANITOR continues sweeping as lights fade on him. Lights rise on the QUEEN and JESTER in the throne room.)

JESTER

I think the House of Apollo is haunted.

(The QUEEN scoffs.)

JESTER

It stands to reason, with all the people that have occupied this house throughout the ages; and all the sad and tragic tales that have originated here, there's bound to be some residual effect. I've heard strange voices in the night. I even saw a phantom race down a corridor and go right through a wall.

QUEEN

It is true that sometime a spirit is unable to have a natural rest. The legend of the Staff of Apollo has a whirlwind of misery swirling around it; sucking so many lives into its tempest that even now when the wind whistles through the hall, one can feel the suffering. *(Beat)* It is said that the Staff lies hidden somewhere in this very house. Many have sought it, but none have succeeded. Because whoever...

(ERON ENTERS carrying a newspaper and crosses to the QUEEN.)

ERON

(briskly)

"Whoever possesses the Staff of Apollo shall rule Harlem. For only the pure of heart shall harness its power." You're still spinning that old yarn, Mother?

QUEEN

You have no respect for the legends of the ancients.

ERON

I have respect for things I can feel and touch.

QUEEN

What does my viperous son want of me today?

ERON

I've just picked up the morning edition of the Daily Informant.

JESTER

All the news that's fit to distort, fabricate and manipulate.

ERON

There's bound to be a major spread on my coronation.

(ERON opens the paper and the QUEEN and JESTER gather around for a look over his shoulder.)

ERON

Now where am I?

JESTER

Why don't you try the weekend calendar under events to be missed?

(JESTER snickers; ERON give him a withering glance, and begins flipping through the paper. The JESTER and QUEEN interrupt him to read headlines and articles they find interesting.)

JESTER

Hold it. Wait a minute. Peaches are on sell for seventeen dollars a pound. Peach cobbler sounds mighty tasty.

QUEEN

Don't be ridiculous. Peaches are already out of season.

JESTER

All you do is soak 'em overnight in a bit of sugar water with a pinch of nutmeg and...

ERON

Will you two shut up?

(ERON continues to leaf through the paper.)

QUEEN

Will you look at that? Queen Michelle of Brooklyn is having a sacrifice and the Rites of Spring party, and I wasn't invited.

ERON

Mother, have you forgotten that we are at war with the Federation of New York, and The Kingdom of Lower Brooklyn is part of that?

QUEEN

Still, there are common rules of etiquette. Send the invitation and give me the choice of declining or accepting.

JESTER

(Reading the paper)

Five thousand men lost at the battle of Wall Street. Such depressing news.

QUEEN

Turn the page.

ERON

Why are you so squeamish? It's you and papa's war, Mother.

QUEEN

It was a conflict thrust upon us by the...

ERON

By your insatiable thirst for power. I will remedy the crisis with a few clever diplomatic moves!

(ERON continues flipping through more pages.)

ERON

Why am I not on page one? This is ridiculous.

JESTER

"Ninety year old virgin gives birth to triplets" is a far more interesting story.

ERON

Here it is on page 4D of the social section.

QUEEN

At least you made the social column.

(JESTER begins reading the newspaper)

JESTER

Social divas, red light mamas, debutante wanna-to-bes, the social event of the year is gonna be the Royal Coronation of Eron Electra Motown.

(ERON shuts the paper in a fury.)

JESTER

(*Aside*)

They misspelled his name. Ooops! (*Snickers*)

ERON

The idiots! The morons! They can't even get the spelling correct. It's Electro not Electra. She did it on purpose.

JESTER

(*Aside*)

Excuse me while I slit my wrist. (*Snickers*)

ERON

I can't believe this.

JESTER

(*Aside*)

He's acting like there's just been a preemptive strike on Madame Wong's House of Pleasures. (*Snickers*)

ERON

How would like me to cut out your tongue, you impertinent Baboon?

QUEEN

Let's hear the article.

(ERON opens the newspaper and begins to read. Lights rise on MADAME LEFETT who continues the article.)

MADAME LEFETT

In recent years, the House of Apollo has lost its glitter, its charm, and its view of the East River. It is no longer the ultimate place to be and be seen. Once the site of divine opulence and tasteless excess; it has fallen on hard times and is only a fleeting shadow of its former brilliance. In a year devoid of real substance and that certain *Je ne sais grois*, the coronation of a minor ruler in a third rate kingdom is the best this social columnist can offer. Check it out.

MADAME LEFETT (CONT'D)

Come as you are. Thursday, October 23 twelve noon, at the royally misdecorated House of Apollo. 125th and Lenox take the A train. That's all for now my little party babushkas. Ciao. Madame LeFett.

(Lights fade on MADAME LEFETT)

QUEEN

The nerve of some people.

ERON

This will not be tolerated! I will have Madame LeFett's head.

JESTER

I'm sure she'd be willing to give all the head a stud like you desires.

(ERON attacks the JESTER violently choking him.)

ERON

I will not tolerate your insolence.

JESTER

Please...please...let me go.

QUEEN

Eron, stop it.

JESTER

I can't breathe.

QUEEN

Eron, that's enough. Let go of him! You'll kill him if you don't stop.

ERON

That's the general idea.

QUEEN

Leave him be!

(ERON releases the JESTER, and he falls to the floor gasping for air.)

ERON

(To the QUEEN)

Such compassion for a fool and so little for your own children, Mother.

QUEEN

I don't have children. I bore two creatures most foul. *(Beat)* Well, there is my little Princess, Ariel, the light of my life.

ERON

There will be changes around here once I'm king!

(Points to the JESTER)

ERON *(CONT'D)*

The clown is going to be the first to go.

QUEEN

Amongst others?

ERON

Ahhh...you catch on quickly. Well, enjoy this day before my coronation, Mother.

QUEEN

I plan to, my dear boy.

(The QUEEN speaks to the JESTER who is coughing, gagging and crying.)

QUEEN *(CONT'D)*

Will you stop it? Stop it. Stop it do you hear me. I won't tolerate that kind of behavior as long as I rule.

ERON

That's right as long as you rule. Your disastrous rule will end tomorrow at noon.

QUEEN

What are you going to do? Execute all who will not bow down and worship you.

ERON

What a brilliant idea! I'll declare a royal execution day to celebrate my coronation. I feel a royal decree coming over me. Hear ye, hear ye! All the busy bodies, dilatants, terrorist, and purveyors of mirth will have their heads removed promptly after the coronation ceremony. *(Beat)* Do you think we could get the Central Park sector to set up the guillotine and concession stands?

QUEEN

You're going to make a fine sovereign.

ERON

Anything would be an improvement over the reign of King Alfred.
(*Beat*) Do try to get a proper outfit for yourself, mother. You look like a two bit streetwalker. Tu ta lu.

(ERON EXITS)

JESTER

AAAAAAHHHHHH...OHHHHH...

QUEEN

Stop that! I can't bear to see a grown man cry. Get up off the floor.

(SHE crosses to the JESTER and takes him gently in her arms.)

QUEEN (CONT'D)

Get a hold of yourself. You should know by now not to incite my sons. Look at you. What kind of Jester is this in such torment?

(QUEEN begins to tickle the JESTER.)

QUEEN (CONT'D)

Coochie coochie coo, coochie coochie coo...

JESTER

Stop that. (*Laughing*) Stop it.

QUEEN

I used to tickle you to cheer you up, remember?

(QUEEN stops tickling the JESTER.)

JESTER

I remember. (*Beat*) Why does he hate me so?

QUEEN

Some people are born with acrimony coursing through their veins, resentful of the very air that you breathe.

JESTER

I have done nothing to engender such rancor.

QUEEN

I know. Life is not always reasonable.

(The sound of tap dancers on stage is heard. On the scrim upstage a projection of tap dancer from the waist down dancing rapid fire.)

Do you hear that?

JESTER

What?

QUEEN

I'm not sure.

JESTER

QUEEN

Don't start with the bombs falling and the war approaching nonsense again. Your ears must be ringing from Eron choking you. He cut off your oxygen.

JESTER

It's beautiful

QUEEN

What?

JESTER

The sound.

QUEEN

You're hearing things.

JESTER

So rhythmic.

QUEEN

The royal apothecary warned me of strange side effects from your mood enhancement medication.

(The dancing images on the scrim begin to be intercut with images of soldiers marching.)

JESTER

It's changing.

QUEEN

What's changing?

JESTER

Rhythmic taping and click turning into the thrashing, pounding like defiant horses.

QUEEN

Get up. Get up!

(The JESTER stands up, still intensely listening to the sound.)

QUEEN

I don't know how much longer I can protect you. You'll have to try to please him; after all, tomorrow he will be king.

(The clips of soldiers marching in formation dominate the images on the scrim.)

JESTER

I'm so tired of war.

QUEEN

We're all tired of war. Apollo knows this war has taken an enormous toll on us all.

(The lights on the scrim, the sound of marching fade out.)

QUEEN

War is a natural part of life.

JESTER

It's stopped.

QUEEN

Do you feel better?

JESTER

No. No, I don't feel better. I feel inadequate.

(The QUEEN crosses upstage to the throne, and sits.)

QUEEN

You must learn your place, fool; purge yourself of any thoughts of a better life, a more equitable existence. It will only bring you much misery. Apollo has cast you in a difficult role as our servant. Horrible as we are, it's still your fate. With your role come certain adversities and certain rewards. It is Apollo's way. *(Beat)* Now, stand up straight, wipe your face, and prepare for what may come.

(JESTER rises, wipes his face, and regains his composure. THEY both sit quietly for sometime.)

QUEEN

I can't understand what's keeping him.

JESTER

Keeping who?

QUEEN

The Duke.

JESTER

Ahhhhh... yes the Duke.

(The sound of bombs exploding)

JESTER

They're getting closer.

QUEEN

Yes, I know.

JESTER

Do you think the lines will hold?

QUEEN

Apollo willing.

JESTER

I've heard that Harlem is losing the war.

QUEEN

(Angry)

Lairs! Filthy, defeatist liars, harbingers of despair and doom; media maggots, propagandist, socialist...anarchist. People who see catastrophe around every corner. They delight in our failures.

(PETER enters and crosses to his mother. He walks with a slight limp.)

PETER

There's nothing like the ravings of a woman about to lose her grip on power. Well, what word, Mother?

QUEEN

Whatever happened to the common courtesy of being announced before making an entrance?

(A fanfare of trumpets sounds. The JESTER stands at attention and announces PETER.)

JESTER

(In a most grandiose manner)

His Royal Highest Peter Aristo Motown the second, requests an audience with Queen Ina Gada Divida of Harlem.

PETER

Get out my way, you stupid ass.

(HE pushes the JESTER aside.)

JESTER

(Under his breath)

Fool, or profession entertainer to you.

QUEEN

Ahhh... for a return of gentle protocol--

PETER

What did the Minster say?

QUEEN

He can do nothing.

PETER

Nothing?

QUEEN

Yes, nothing.

PETER

Why not?

QUEEN

The king had every right to do what he did.

PETER

Every right? Do you know what they called father on the street? The Mad King Alfred.

QUEEN

His last will and testament is indisputable.

PETER

I'm the eldest; I should ascend the throne at his death!

QUEEN

I know, but the king had divine right, and eccentric ideas.

PETER

There are ways to maneuver around such obstacles.

QUEEN

Your father believed Eron best suited to rule in this time of turmoil.

PETER

You want what's best for Harlem, don't you? You want to keep Eron's ambitions checked? Join forces with me, Mother, and together we can nullify the decree and rule jointly.

QUEEN

I'd be lucky live one week with you on the throne.

PETER

Then the gloves are off. I will have what is rightfully mine.

QUEEN

There is nothing more we can accomplish by our feeble efforts. Quiet yourself. Bitterness will only breed discontent.

PETER

Bitterness? You act as if I'm unfamiliar with the word. Eron was always the light of you and father's lives. Peter was just something to be pitied, oh, the poor, poor cripple. I would never be as good as your perfectly formed son, your darling, your bouncing, baby boy. You've always underestimated me. You do so at your own peril this time.

(ARIEL, an adult woman, ENTERS wearing a ruffle dress, bobby socks and Mary Jane tap shoes - all suitable for a girl about seven or eight. SHE comes on, doing a clumsy tap routine. The JESTER tries to hide himself.)

QUEEN

Why, isn't it mama's little angel.

PETER

You should have the poor girl put down.

(ARIEL imitates PETER'S limp.)

ARIEL

Limp, gimpy
Peter wants to be the king
He's too shrimpy
That's what the people sing.

PETER

Why, I ought to...

QUEEN

Stop it, you two. She's just a child.

PETER

She's nearly twenty-two, and you keep her frozen at the age of seven.

QUEEN

(To ARIEL)

He's just jealous, sweetheart. You look so beautiful today. Come here and let me take a look at you.

PETER

The house has gone mad.

ARIEL

Thank you, Mother.

QUEEN

Why do you have on your clickety-clacks on, dear?

ARIEL

I feel like dancing, Mother!

(ARIEL does another flurry of bad tapping.)

QUEEN

Darling, mother is very busy with trying to save the world right now.

ARIEL

I want to play with the Jester.

QUEEN

No, darling, the Jester's on duty.

(JESTER backs away in terror and
ARIEL chases after him.)

QUEEN

You'll have to take that horseplay outside.

(ARIEL manages to catch the JESTER
and sticks a firecracker in his
jacket. It explodes with a bang.)

QUEEN

(Laughing)

That was very naughty of you. Naughty. Naughty. Naughty. You go outside and play, and for Apollo's sake, take those clickety-clacks off.

ARIEL

(Taunting PETER)

Limpy, gimpy
Peter wants to be the king
He's too shrimpy
That's what the people sing.

(ARIEL EXITS with a flurry of
tapping. PETER chases after her and
EXITS.)

JESTER

(Aside)

I'm supposed to be an entertainer and not the butt of other people's jokes.

(Canned laughter fades into the sound of distant bombing. The Apollo sign flickers on and off. The QUEEN and JESTER anxiously stare at the marquee. On the scrim upstage a flicking light of a projector, followed by images of cities being bombed. The images of destruction are inter-cut with performance footage of the Apollo Theater. The performance footage begins to dominate then suddenly stops. There is a drum role and the ANNOUNCER, looking a bit surreal, appears from behind the up left curtain/scrim.)

ANNOUNCER

(Voice over loud speakers.)

Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, players and lovers, the Apollo Theater is proud to present a comedian hailing from sometime in the future. Let's give a warm welcome to a comedian extraordinaire. The one, the only: the Jester.

(A spot light hits the JESTER. He stands frozen not knowing what to do. There is ambient audience noise. The crowd quickly gets restless.)

JESTER

Hello. Hello. Is anyone there?

VOICE ONE

You gonna perform or just stand there looking stupid?

VOICE TWO

Looking homely is more like it. Man, where in the world did you get that outfit?

JESTER

Who's out there? What do you want?

VOICE THREE

Get yo' jive ass off the stage, man.

(The crowd begins to boo. The JESTER steps forward and motions for the crowd to quiet down.)

JESTER

What is this place?

(Scattering of laughter. The JESTER feeds off the energy.)

VOICE FOUR

You're in the Apollo Theater. What you been smoking, man?

VOICE TWO

Whatever it is, I need to get me some.

(The audience roars with laughter.)

JESTER (CONT'D)

There's a lot of love in this place. I can feel it. Can you feel it? (*Audience responses positively*) I grew up in this very house. Well, we call it a palace now. My adopted family believed in the axiom: The family that plays together stays together. (*Beat*) Let me tell you about the time we went to Wolverine National Park. It's a lovely place full of wild and blood, thirsty animals. My family taught me a new game called hide and seek. Have any of you played it? It's a delightful amusement. First they blindfolded me; then they tied me to a tree, and finally, hung a pork chop around my neck. They told me that they were going to hide and would seek me out in a week or so. (*Beat*) I'm not sure if the wolves that showed up were supposed to be part of the game.

(Drum roll, the crash of a cymbal followed by canned laughter)

JESTER (CONT'D)

Oh, I can feel the love. Do you feel the love? Do you? Let me tell you about the Queen, the matriarch of the family. She told me on my eighteenth birthday, it was time for me to be a man, see the world and promptly marched me down to the nearest recruiting center. The war is only twenty blocks away, and I've already seen that part of the world, I said, and beside, I have a bad heart, flat feet, and I'm a latent homosexual. Her loving, heartfelt, response was, "If they don't ask, there's no need to tell."

(Drum roll, the crash of a cymbal followed by canned laughter)

JESTER (CONT'D)

Do you just feel the love? Do you? I once found an unexploded artillery shell in the neighborhood. My family told me that it was a good luck charm and that I should keep it in my underpants, sleep with it under my pillow. They even said it could be used as a life preserver in shark infested waters. Ahh, they really do so care about me.

(Drum roll, the crash of a cymbal followed by canned laughter)

JESTER (CONT'D)

Can you feel the love? Can you?

(The comedy act ends with the JESTER bowing to thunderous applause. Lights return the normal setting. The QUEEN is seated on the throne upstage. The JESTER continues his bowing and blowing kisses.)

QUEEN

What are you doing?

JESTER

I was there! I was there.

(JESTER crosses to the foot of the throne.)

QUEEN

What are you ranting about now?

JESTER

Oh, my Queen, I was there!

QUEEN

What are you talking about? You haven't gone anywhere.

JESTER

I was here but in a different time, a happier time, when laughter filled this hall. Instead of the roar of canon, there was the roar of laughter.

QUEEN

I have feared for your sanity for quite some time.

JESTER

It's all beginning to make sense: the singing, the dancing, the music. But it wasn't a Royal Hall then; it was a place where the invisible is made visible. *(Beat)* It was a theater.

QUEEN

What did you say?

JESTER

They called this place a theater.

(Lights fade on the QUEEN and JESTER and rises on the BEGGARS with mask downstage near the trash heap.)

BEGGARS

O' House of Apollo turmoil is at your gate
Brother betrays bother and mother denies her fate

The lowest man in the hall holds the key
But the opening of past world control their destiny

For tragedy of long ago can still hold sway
Over whether kingdoms thrive or simply fade away

Sho Op, Sho Op, Sho Op, de Bop
Sho Op, Sho Op, Sho Op, de Bop

(Black out on the BEGGARS. Area lighting comes up down stage on PLAVETON, an overweight black male in his late fifties sitting behind a desk. He is wearing an expensive suit, derby hat and is smokes a long cigar. He is talking to Dijon MonteCarlo.)

Plaveton

The theater is a cruel, unyielding place, Mr. MonteCarlo. Many sacrifices have to be made to get ahead. I should know. I gave up the best of years of my life struggling behind the footlights. I've paid my dues and then some. You come to me asking for my help, for me to open doors for you, and I ask you, have you paid your dues? Have you bled beneath the footlights? Have you survived on fried sugar and butter bread, and a copy of Variety? Have you walked the streets looking for the elusive break, until your shoes have holes? You come to me, a would-be promoter, and I ask you what have you promoted? Good looks and personality will only take you so far. *(Beat)* The world is a strange apparatus, Mr. MonteCarlo. In order to get what you want, you have to be willing give up something you want to hold on to.

DIJON

I know, Mr. Plaveton. The Shiffons have been performing to sellout houses for months now. They could blow the top off the record chart.

PLAVETON

This is all about Marlene, isn't it?

DIJON

She's got a lot of talent. I just want to give her a chance at a solo career.

PLAVETON

What do you have to give?

DIJON

You sign The Shiffons to your label and stipulate that Marlene gets to do a solo album in 12 months. I guarantee the deal will make you a very rich man.

(PLAVETON laughs at the suggestion.)

DIJON

What do you want then? Larger percentage...copyrights? You tell me, and I'll try to arrange something.

PLAVETON

Don't be careless with your words, or deeds; they may come back to haunt you.

(Lights rise on the JANITOR listening from a downstage corner.)

DIJON

Have you ever wanted something so bad you could taste it? I'll do whatever it takes to succeed in the business.

PLAVETON

Anything?

DIJON

Yes, anything, Mr. Plaveton!

PLAVETON

I want you, Mr. MonteCarlo.

DIJON

Me? I'm not part of the act.

PLAVETON

Oh, don't be naïve, my boy. I'm a man who has everything and always wants what is most difficult to possess. I don't care anything about that silly wench of yours. She sings well enough, and I could turn a pig's ear into a silk purse, but I need something to make the effort worth my while. A prize that makes the challenge worthy of the pursuit. *(Beat)* I want you to be my companion, Mr. MonteCarlo.

DIJON

Whoa! I ain't that way, Mr. Plaveton.

PLAVETON

And what way is that?

DIJON

Wait a minute. I'm not sure if I'm getting this right. You got me all confused, sir. You want me...you want me to be your lover?

PLAVETON

That is correct.

DIJON

What are you out of your mind?

(A tense pause)

PLAVETON

Some have thought so, but none have dared say so to my face.

DIJON

I'm sorry, sir.

PLAVETON

You let your heart react before your mind has time to consider. That might be why I'm offering you this deal, to make Marlene a star in exchange for being by my side.

DIJON

I can't do it. No, I can't do it.

PLAVETON

I assume you love the girl.

DIJON

Yes, very much.

PLAVETON

All kinds of sacrifices are made in the name of love.

DIJON

I'll find some other way.

(DIJON EXITS leaving his walking stick behind. PLAVETON notice the cane, rises, crosses to it and takes it his hand.)

PLAVETON

There is no other way, Mr. MonteCarlo.

(The JANTIOR has witness the whole scene, slyly slips into the shadows. Lights fade on PLAVETON and come up on the QUEEN and the JESTER.)

QUEEN

Theater! Where did you hear that word?

JESTER

It came to me in a dream. Maybe it wasn't a dream. Maybe it was...

QUEEN

You're a liar! An ungrateful upstart who doesn't know his place.

JESTER

They said this place...

QUEEN

That library is going to be the death of you. Who said? Who made that ridiculous, treasonous statement? Words have consequences. This is the House of Apollo where HE first blessed the Earth. *(Beat)* No common rabble has sat in those seats *(points to the audience)*; walk through our corridors...stood in this great hall.

JESTER

What does the word theater mean anyway?

QUEEN

Silence! Never use that word in the House of Apollo again. Do you understand me? Never, never use that word!

JESTER

Yes, my queen.

QUEEN

I should have never allowed you to learn how to read and write. Reading books fosters strange ideas, and ferments radical, revolutionary thinking. King Alfred fancied himself as an enlightened, benevolent, progressive ruler by teaching you how to read. He was just fomenting discontent. A mind with too much knowledge is a mind in conflict with itself. *(Beat)* Everything is moving too fast, spinning out of control. The Earth is losing its gravitational pull; soon we will all be as light as clouds and float into the stratosphere. *(Beat)* What time is it?

JESTER

I don't know. The sky is blackened with smoke drifting in from the south.

QUEEN

That can't be. The war is too far away.

JESTER

The smoke blankets the known world from Bayonne, New Jersey to Coney Island a black curtain is being drawn.

QUEEN

Why is everyone lying to me? I'm surrounded by nothing but lies and deceit.

JESTER

I'm telling...

QUEEN

I won't hear any more of your insane talk of war, smoke and theater. (*Beat*) Children are jumping rope down the street; I can smell the bread that just came out of the oven at Dickson's Bakery; a watermelon wagon is creaking along Lenox Avenue. Harlem is alive and functioning. (*Beat*) What time is it?

JESTER

I don't know.

QUEEN

Must I do everything myself? It just takes simple reasoning. We got up yesterday the same time we did today, right? Now, if we stay in this room till now, and yesterday, we stayed in this room till then, it will be the same time as it was yesterday this time. Now that I've done all the calculations, what the hell time is it?

(JESTER takes out pencil and paper and begins figuring.)

JESTER

I think it's--

QUEEN

Yes?

JESTER

Yesterday afternoon.

QUEEN

You idiot!

JESTER

Fool. I'm a Fool.

QUEEN

You are wearing my patience thin! (*Beat*) Where is that man?

JESTER

Who?

QUEEN

The duke! Can't you remember anything?

JESTER

Ahh yes, now I remember. Maybe he got mugged.

QUEEN

Shut up! Let me think!

(QUEEN paces in front of the throne for a moment and crosses downstage to the JESTER. SHE takes letters from her bosom.)

QUEEN (CONT'D)

Listen to me now. This is very, very important. I need you to take this letter to the headquarter of the Royal Commander of Harlem's army. He's a buffoon, but I'll need his support. And this one to the Duke of Bedstye; he runs his own little theftdom which may prove useful. This one goes to the Minister of Justice. I must try to end the war on favorable terms and the Prime Minister of Gramercy Park, aka the whore of Bayonne, holds the key. They must receive the letters tonight.

(SHE reaches into her bosom and pulls out a purse.)

QUEEN (CONT'D)

Here is five dollars for a cab. Bring back the change.

JESTER

Your generosity overwhelms me.

QUEEN

Your wit tires me. Before nightfall, so don't delay.

JESTER

I'm off and running. You can count on me.

(The JESTER EXITS.)

QUEEN

Apollo, help us. The fate of Harlem rest in the hands of a fool.

(The QUEEN EXITS. PETER ENTERS stage right, crosses to the throne and sits. JESTER enters in a hurry not noticing PETER.)

JESTER

You forgot to give me the addresses.

PETER

What address?

JESTER

(Aside)

Ahhh...an added complication.

PETER

You mentioned addresses.

JESTER

You are mistaken, sir. I said...accept...accept my humble presence.

PETER

You are a cunning fox in fool's clothing. I heard you say addresses.

JESTER

Poor elocution, sir, I assure you. My diction is terrible.

(JESTER takes a book and puts it on his head. He starts to walk balancing the book.)

JESTER (CONT'D)

I'm obviously and unfinished student of Lorraine Campbell's Finishing and Beauty school. The rain in Spain falls mainly on the plain. Well, sorry I can't stay and chitchat, but I must be on my way.

(He starts to exit. Peter grabs him by the collar.)

PETER

Where are you going in such a hurry?

JESTER

Nowhere, sir.

PETER

Why in such a hurry to get nowhere?

JESTER

I often am, sir. That's just the way we fools are. You know, up at dawn and racing here and there God knows why or where, until the day reaches the setting sun.

PETER

But is there a particular somewhere you must go now?

JESTER

Now, sir?

PETER

Yes, now fool!

JESTER

I kind of just like to go here and there, hither and yon, nowhere in particular.

(PETER strikes the JESTER.)

JESTER

Ooowww!

PETER

Drop the charade! I know you're up to something. Caring out some sinister plan my mother has concocted.

(HE takes letters from his pocket.)

Now, I'm content not to beat the truth out of you, but you must take these messages to the minister of Justice who will do anything for the right price. This one goes to the Royal Commander of the army who has been itching for coup d'etat ever since he got in office This goes to the Duke of Bedstye, who is a worthless piece of ghetto trash, but may prove useful in rallying the mass. The knives are out, and I shall play to win. They must be delivered tonight. Do you understand?

JESTER

Yes.

PETER

Yes what?

JESTER

Yes, my lord.

PETER

Here is five dollars take a cab. They concern the coronation tomorrow. So make haste!

(PETER crosses right and EXITS.)

JESTER

Your most royal cripple. Yes, my lord limpy. Who does he think he is pushing me around? I'll not have it. I'm a man. I'm not some dog to be kicked and cowed. I won't tolerate it! They don't know whom they're messing with.

(JESTER looks over the letters.)

JESTER (CONT'D)

Now let's see. This one goes to the Duke, this one to the Minister of Justice, this one the... Oh my God, no addresses, no one thinks to address their letters. And these creeps are supposed to be our lords and sovereigns.

JESTER (CONT'D)

What do they think: I'm a mind reader or something? If you need to know, call the Jester's Psychic Hotline.

(ERON enters and JESTER hides his letters.)

ERON

Ahhh. Just the person I wanted to see.

JESTER

I was afraid of that.

ERON

What was that?

JESTER

Nothing, my illustrious Lord.

(He bows very low.)

ERON

What are you doing? Get up you clown.

JESTER

I'm not a clown, nor ass, nor idiot. I am a fool F-O-O-L, or Jester.

ERON

Have you lost your mind? Who in the hell do you think you're talking to?

JESTER

Sorry, my lord. I have a touch of the Harlem fever, my lord. Makes me delirious. Forgive me.

ERON

Well, don't stand too close.

(ERON reaches into his pocket and pulls out several letters.)

ERON (CONT'D)

I have some...

JESTER

Letters for me to deliver?

ERON

How did you know that?

JESTER

Just a wild guess.

ERON

You haven't mastered the art of lying and deceit, so I wouldn't try it. I would take the time to beat the truth out of you, but I know that Mother and Peter are up to no good.

(ERON gives the letters to the JESTER.)

ERON (CONT'D)

Here are the letters. This goes to the Royal Commander who would do anything I say for a promotion and a bungalow on the Jersey Shore. This one to the Minister of Justice, which for the right price you can buy any justice you desire. And this one to the Duke of BedStye who may be of some use, I just haven't figure out for what yet. They must be delivered tonight. Here is three dollars. Remember: tonight.

(ERON exits. After a beat, we hear the sound of tap shoes approaching.)

JESTER

Oh, no! She's coming!

(The JESTER attempts to hide, but he's too late.)

ARIEL

Just the person I want to see.

JESTER

I'm warning you, stay away from me.

ARIEL

I'm sorry about the little gag earlier. Just keeping up appearance. Nothing personal.

JESTER

What do you want of me?

ARIEL

I need you to take this to the royal travel agent. I want to book a one-way passage on the *SS Gloria Gainer* to France.

(ARIEL hands the JESTER an envelope.)

ARIEL

Just between you and me, I've stolen enough of Mother's jewelry and pilfered enough of the royal treasury to live comfortably for the rest of my life. The situation in Harlem is hopeless, and I'm getting out while the getting's good. *(Beat)* You tell a soul, and I'll just deny everything, and whom do you think they'll believe? Make haste my fool; the warm beaches of southern France await!

(ARIEL EXITS. JESTER drops to his knees beneath the sign of Apollo.)

JESTER

Apollo, help me. Please...I pray to you for peace. In your light, I beseech you. I know I'm but a humble servant to your children. But Apollo, you've got to admit you've got some real monsters for Children. They must have sprouted from some vile beast you mated with in Hades.

(Light flickers on and off)

I'm sorry, forever me. I'm not saying you've been sleeping around with hideous creature or anything like that, but you have to admit you have done some real dogs.

(Lights flickers on and off)

Sorry, sorry. No...I mean. Well, there was that affair with Medusa, you old dog. Nobody wrote about the Medusa connection in your official biography.

(Lights convulsively flicker on and off with sporadic thunder.)

JESTER (CONT'D)

You know, if I had some children from demon seeds like the current bunch that runs your house, I would make a clean sweep; get someone in that could make some real changes before it's too late. I know it's hard to accept that when you tally up your assets and liabilities and the balance sheet called your earthly family turns out to be a big, fat zero. Sometimes the truth is like leftover meatloaf: it's hard to digest. So here under your warm and gracious light, I pray for a change. I pray for a better life for all us poor fools. I pray you see the disastrous course that the Motowns are steering Harlem and do something. Do something before it's too late. Hail, Apollo!

(JESTER moves downstage and holds up his hand to flag down a cab. A ragged dress old woman enters upstage and approaches him.)

SOOTHSAYER

You got any spare change, mister? A few coins would be much appreciated.

JESTER

I don't have much, but can spare a few coins from my meager allowance.

(JESTER searches into his pockets.)

JESTER (CONT'D)

You'll have to promise me that you'll use the money for food and not for cheap liquor.

(JESTER gives the SOOTHSAYER a few coins.)

SOOTHSAYER

Thank you, sir. You are a kind and generous man. A wise man, a courageous man...

JESTER

Excuse me, but I am in...

SOOTHSAYER

And you are of Royal Blood!

JESTER

It seem that you've already been at the bottle.

SOOTHSAYER

Let me see your hand.

(SHE grabs the JESTER'S hand and begins to read his palm.)

JESTER

I do live in the House of Apollo. I'm a professional entertainer. You might have heard of me, The Jester! Maybe some of the royalness has rubbed off on me.

SOOTHSAYER

(*Pointing to his hand*)

This line here indicates your destiny. You are to be king one day.

(HE snatches his hand away.)

JESTER

I see that you're in need of medication to calm your over active imagination. There's a free clinic around the corner that will dispense an ample supply of psychotic medication.

SOOTHSAYER

One shall defend the meek.
One shall heal the sick.
One shall feed the poor.
The one that holds my Staff,
Shall rule them all.

(SOOTHSAYER takes glittering dust and throws it into the JESTER'S face. He immediately goes into a trance.)

SOOTHSAYER

Behold what has been!

(Lights rise on MARLENE sitting at a making up table preparing for her next show. The JANITOR ENTERS and knocks on a door.)

MARLENE

It's open, come in.

JANITOR

Hello, Ms. Marlene.

MARLENE

Who the hell are you?

JANITOR

I'm the maintenance, cleaning man.

MARLENE

Well, you got some work you need to do in my dressing room?

JANITOR

No, ma'am.

MARLENE

What do you want then?

JANITOR

I've been admiring you for a long time.

MARLENE

Thank you, honey. Why, that's so sweet of you.

(MARLENE rises and begins to rummage through a pile of papers.)

MARLENE (CONT'D)

Here, let me give you an autographed picture.

JANITOR

I think you're one of the most talented and beautiful woman that has graced the Harlem stage.

(MARLENE finds the pictures and crosses to her make up table and sits.)

MARLENE

Who should I make it out to, honey?

JANITOR

James Beecham.

(MARLENE quickly signs the picture and hand it to him.)

MARLENE

Here you go. Hold on to that, it could be worth a lot money one day.

JANITOR

Thank you, ma'am. I really appreciate it.

(MARLENE goes back to putting on her make up and doesn't notice that the JANITOR is lingering.)

JANITOR

Ms. Marlene?

(MARLENE is startled and turns to the JANITOR.)

MARLENE

I thought you had left. You need something else?

JANITOR

I was wondering if you would...I want to know if you'd care to join me for dinner one night.

MARLENE

Oh, that's sweet of you, but I'm already spoken for. Mr. MonteCarlo is my boyfriend.

JANITOR

You deserve better than a man like Dijon MonteCarlo.

MARLENE

I don't think it's any of your business who I'm involved with. I think you should leave now.

JANITOR

I just thought that Mr. MonteCarlo and Plaveton were involved.

(MARLENE stops her activity and crosses to the JANITOR.)

MARLENE

What exactly are you saying, mister?

JANITOR

Just the way they act when they're together.

(JANITOR holds up DIJON'S cane.)

JANITOR (CONT'D)

And he gave him this walking stick he seemed to love so much.

MARLENE

What are you doing with that? How did you...?

JANITOR

You can never know what's in a man's heart. What thoughts fill his mind.

MARLENE

If you stole that cane, I will have you...

JANITOR

I assure you, ma'am, that I did nothing of the sort.

MARLENE

I gave that cane to him for his birthday

JANITOR

And he gave it to Mr. Plaveton to seal their perverse partnership.

MARLENE

What are you: some kind of con-artist?

JANITOR

I'm a man with your best interests at heart, ma'am. It's called being on the down low, but I call it being low down. Sneaking around behind yo' woman's back with another man.

MARLENE

You give me that cane!

(JANITOR hands her the cane.)

I don't know what you're trying to pull coming in here and telling me theses lies. You better watch out mister 'cause the wrath of a black diva is a terrible thing to experience.

(Lights fade on MARLENE and JANITOR and rise on the JESTER and SOOTHSAYER.)

SOOTHSAYER

He who posses the Staff of Apollo shall rule Harlem. It lies in the room of broken mirrors. Seek out the room of broken mirrors.

(SOOTHSAYER disappears in a poof of smoke. The JESTER comes out of his trances and looks around for the Soothsayer.)

JESTER

What? What happened? Oh, these strange matters of mind and circumstance do trouble me. Me, the king of Harlem? I would have them rolling in the aisles with that one. But, you know, I think I'd do a better job of ruling...ahhh, what a silly idea, me as the king.

(JESTER moves down stages and sticks out his hand for a cab.)

JESTER

Taxi! Taxi!

(A yellow rickshaw ENTERS being pulled by a man. JESTER gets into the cab.)

JESTER (CONT'D)

Take me to the Palace of Justice and step on it.

(The rickshaw with the JESTER EXITS. Black out.)

End of Act I

ACT II

Scene 1: A spot light hits the Duke, now dressed in a tuxedo looking like a crooner of the 30's. He steps forward and begins to sing into a microphone downstage.

DUKE

ROSES GOT THORNS TO HELP THEM SURVIVE
TORTIOUS' GOT SHELLS TO KEEP THEM ALIVE
HEART IN A CAGE IS DESTINED TO DIE
OPEN THE GATE, AND LET YOUR SOUL FLY
YOU GOTTA FIND THE SUNNYSIDE OF LIFE.

A BULLET PROOF VEST, IS PROTECTING YO' LIFE
UNDERGROUND SHELTERS WILL BLOCKS OUT THE STRIFE
PUT DOWN YOUR UZIE, HATE AINT THE WAY
THAT MAN IS YOUR BROTHER, DON'T BLOW HIM AWAY
YOU GOTTA TO FIND THE SUNNYSIDE OF LIFE

CIVILAZATION MAY COME AND GO

BACK UP SINGERS

AHHH OWWW AHHH OOOOO

DUKE

IT'S HUMAN NATURE DON'T YOU KNOW

BACK UP SINGERS

AHHH OOOO AHHH OOOO

DUKE

TO PICK UP THE PIECES
AND FIND A NEW WAY
WHEN THE FUTURE IS DOUBTFUL
RISE TO THE CHALLENGE, DON'T SHY AWAY
GOT TO FIND THE SUNNYSIDE OF LIFE

ARMIES ARE MARCHING, THROUGH STREETS OF FEAR
SHOULD BE DISARMING, AND DRYING EACH TEAR
WHEN RULERS FALTER, SHOULD GIVE THEM THE BOOT
WE HAVE THE POWER TO WEED AND UPROOT
GOT TO FIND THE SUNNYSIDE OF LIFE.

(JESTER ENTERS in the rickshaw steps out of the vehicle and listens closely to the last verse.)

DUKE (CONT'D)

ROSES GOT THORNS TO HELP THEM SURVIVE
TORTIOUS' GOT SHELLS TO KEEP THEM ALIVE
HEART IN A CAGE IS DESTINED TO DIE
OPEN THE GATE, AND LET YOUR SOUL FLY
YOU GOTTA FIND THE SUNNYSIDE OF LIFE.

JESTER

(Fighting back tears)

That was beautiful. So...so, beautiful, Duke. You got me all choked up.

DUKE

Thank you.

JESTER

Like the singing of Apollo's angels.

DUKE

Thank you very much, and who are you?

JESTER

Allow me to introduce myself. I'm the Royal Jester of the House of Apollo.

DUKE

Yeah, I remember you, man. You're King Alfred old fool. What can I do you for?

JESTER

The king is dead.

DUKE

Hey, I know, Fool. I'm deeply grieved by his passing.

JESTER

Such a kind monarch.

DUKE

Alfred was my dawg. We were tight as thieves at a convenience store robbery. We were booty calls commandos. He always had my back; know what I'm saying?

JESTER

The Queen sits on the throne now.

DUKE

Wasn't what's his name, the little, gimpy cat, Peter; that's his name; wasn't he next in line for the throne?

JESTER

Nothing is what it seems to be in the House of Apollo.

DUKE

I was just on my way to see the Queen. I got caught up rapping with my homies, taking care of business...

MOISHA

Yeah, that monkey on yo' back business.

DUKE

Hey, hey, hey, watch yo' mouth, girl. Don't be going all tabloid on me now.

(JESTER acknowledges the BEGGARS.)

JESTER

Hello, ladies.

(JESTER gives them a respectful bow. The BEGGARS giggle.)

BEGGARS

Delighted to make yo' acquaintance. (*To the DUKE*) He's a real gentleman.

JESTER

The Queen has directed me to deliver this message to you.

(JESTER reaches into his pocket and presents a letter to the DUKE. HE opens and reads the letter.)

DUKE

Her request is highly irregular.

JESTER

She said that a fool like you wouldn't understand the delicate balance of power, the intricate political nuances, the art of diplomacy and truce...

DUKE

What did you just say?

JESTER

You mean about understanding the delicate...

DUKE

Not that. The part about a fool like me not understanding.

JESTER

Maybe fool isn't the right word, she may have used jackass.

DUKE

Shit! Don't jive me, man. Look at me! Give to me straight, dawg. You my peep, right?

JESTER

The Queen thinks you're a fool that doesn't know his ass from a hole in the ground.

DUKE

That is cold, man!

JESTER

Cold as a Polar Bear eating a snow cone sitting on top an iceberg.

DUKE

Cold as a penguin drinking Ice-Tea in an Eskimo igloo.

(JESTER and DUKE do a complicated series of hands slaps, hip butts and other body contact as a sign of bonding.)

DUKES

You're alright, my man. I gave her respected. You know what I'm saying. She just wanted to use me to keep the throne.

(BIG DADDY D appears upstage and crosses to the beat up turntable, nods that he's ready, begins to scratch and spin.)

JESTER

Check it out!

THEY ARE USER
AND ABUSER
THEIR SMILE DON'T EVEN CRACK
AS THEY SLIP A KNIFE IN YO' BACK

DUKE

Not bad, my man. Yo, yo, yo, check this out!

DUKE (CONT'D)

THEY ARE LIKE LEECHES
GIVING SHEECHES
FROM BOTH SIDE OF THEY FACE
THEY LIE LIKE DOGS, IT'S A BIG DISGRACE

Hey you're cool, man, a fellow rapper. I'm gonna to make you part of my posse.

JESTER

Word up! You got it, dawg. Come with me back to Harlem and check it out. I'll make sure you get the real low down on the Children of Apollo, know what I'm saying?

DUKE

You know, you're okay, man. Give me some skin.

(The two slap hands and EXITS. Area lights come up on BEGGARS with mask.)

BEGGARS

What mischief does this fool have planned?
He takes the Duke with hat in hand

Conspiracy walks the palace halls
The knives are out as darkness falls

Apollo's light has lit Harlem's way
We pray a fool's ambition is kept at bay

Sho Op, Sho Op, Sho op, de Bop
Sho Op, Sho Op, Sho op, de Bop

(Black out.)

Scene 2: Lights rise on the Queen pacing in front of the throne.)

QUEEN

If the fool doesn't complete his mission tonight, my head will be the first to roll. Apollo, why me? Why must I bear such a heavy burden, protector of the faith, administer of Justice, and royal interior decorator. I ask you, all-powerful Apollo, for guidance in my hour of greatest need. I know I haven't been a perfect monarch; maybe I've been a bit hasty with ordering execution, but spare the rod, spoil the child. I've always been fair. I ask you have I ever once uttered those famous words - "Let them eat cake." Let them eat cheese! Let them eat good, government, Grade A cheese. My people love me. Whenever I'm out on the street they cry out. We love you Ina Gada Divida, baby. And why shouldn't they love me? I've given them visual and audio distractions, block parties, and an annual picnic with a giant ferries wheel. The people are like children, feed them, burp them, and hope they sleep through most of their lives. And theses wars. Tell me, what have I done to deserve such wars? It use to be when you had a war, everyone got dressed up in their Sunday's finest, went up on Sugar Hill and watched it across the East River. Now-a-days, everyone is complaining. My home was destroyed; my crops were burned; my family is dead. Well, excuses me, people, war is hell! *(Beat)* You know the other day a woman actual curse me for her son being killed in the war. Needless to say her head was promptly removed from her shoulders. I tell you Apollo things ain't what they use to be when you could issue an edit and no one would dare question you. They obeyed!

(HELENA, the Prime Minster of Gramercy Park, ENTERS.)

HELENA

Hello. Hello. Is anyone here?

QUEEN

Well, well, well, Helena of Bayonne.

HELENA

There was no guard at the door. I just walked in.

QUEEN

Good help is hard to find these days.

HELENA

Hello, Ina Gada. You're looking...regal.

QUEEN

You can cut the crap, sister. We both know that there's bad blood between us. My fool must have delivered you my letter.

HELENA

You're not still holding a grudge, are you?

QUEEN

It's hard to forget about your affair with my husband.

HELENA

We were immature kids. Alfred was a sweet boy and we both fell victim to our raging hormones.

QUEEN

Is that what they're calling adultery now-a-days a hormone disorder?

HELENA

I'm a respectable woman now, Ina Gada.

QUEEN

Yeah, I know, from Bayonne, New Jersey to the Prime Minister of Gramercy Park. Your rise must have required a considerable amount of time spent flat on your back.

HELENA

Oh, my dear, dear friend, you know how hard it is for a woman to get ahead these days. We do what needs to be done. You were born into wealth and privilege, and never had to elbow your way to the top.

QUEEN

I assume you've come to discuss a possible treaty to end this war.

HELENA

May I sit down?

QUEEN

(Shouting)

A chair! Her Majesty Queen Ina Gada DiVida orders that a chair be brought to the throne room.

(Long pause and no one appears. The QUEEN EXITS briefly and brings back a chair. SHE sits the chair next to HELENA to sit.)

QUEEN

The servants and guards have been conscripted into the service of the crown. I have to fix my own meals. The Royal chef was killed in the battle of Greenwich Village. There's a leak in the bathroom a drip, drip, drips that keeps me awake most of the night. The royal plumber has gone missing in action. The world seems to be shrinking around me. Where is the next generation to take their place?

HELENA

The world is changing and we must all learn to adapt. Resilience is the key to survival in these uncertain times.

QUEEN

I'll get right to the point. Now that Alfred is dead, I want out. Harlem has gone downhill as a result of this fiasco.

HELENA

The war has not gone well for Harlem. The United Federation of New York is winning the battle of Washington Heights. We are poised to march on Harlem. As a member of the United Federation, I've come to offer you an agreement that will make your inevitable defeat, humiliation, and war crimes tribunal unnecessary. The Federation is prepared to offer you generous surrender terms. We will guarantee you and your family safe passage to the forbidden zone, beyond New Jersey. You will be allowed to take two wagon loads of your possessions. You will abdicate the throne. Your family will relinquish any and all claims to it, and swear never to return to the Isle of Manhattan.

QUEEN

How dare you come to the House of Apollo and speak such words! My family founded this house. We discovered the sacred ruins in the days before time. We unearthed the ancient disc and found ways to hear the music and words. We restored the light of Apollo through Harlem. There is no power on this Earth that would make me abdicate my birthright.

HELENA

Suicide yourself. You could spare your people the needless death and destruction.

QUEEN

I will line up every man, woman and child in the street to stop you. They will fight you with whatever weapons they can muster. My people are willing to die in the defense of Harlem. I'm prepared to make your march to these walls, through the streets of Harlem, the bloodiest and the most destructive that the world has ever seen.

HELENA

For what? To save face? Then you have your wish and may your God Apollo have mercy on your soul.

(HELENA begins to leave. The QUEEN has a change of heart and is less deviant.)

QUEEN

No, Wait! The king made a terrible mistake invading your territory. Couldn't we just go back to the status quo?

HELENA

What has been done can't not be undo. The forces of change are marching as we speak. We either accept them or get crushed in the onslaught. Even your God Apollo knew when his time had come. Think about what I've said, and make a decision soon.

(HELENA exit. Lights fade on the QUEEN and rise on the BEGGARS.)

BEGGARS

The queen must play her final card.
With options few and all on guard

Her cunning will be put to the test
Prince and Queen pursue ambition's quest

But time may have the final say
When world collide, circumstance must obey

Sho Op, Sho Op, Sho Op, de Bop
Sho Op, Sho Op, Sho Op, de Bop

(Black out)

Scene 3: Lights rises on the throne room. The JESTER and the DUKE enter and cross to center stage.

DUKE

I don't know if this is such a good idea.

JESTER

Shhhh... There are eyes and ears everywhere.

DUKE

You're a paranoid little fuck.

JESTER

I have every right to be with royal monsters, spies, demons that inhabit the hall, you'd be paranoid too.

(JESTER grabs the DUKE and leads him upstage to the throne.)

DUKE

What are you doing?

JESTER

You ever wanted to be a fly on the wall, a witness to treachery.

DUKE

Maybe I should just get up in the Queen's grill...

JESTER

She would just deny it. Who me? She's a chameleon, you know, changing herself into what your mind wants to see.

(JESTER moves to a curtain behind the throne and pulls it back.)

JESTER

This was my secret hiding place as a child, and I've been using it to spy on them ever since.

(DUKE crosses to the curtain.)

DUKE

You really think this is gonna work?

(The sound of someone approaching the throne room is heard.)

Shhhh... Someone is coming.

JESTER

(The JESTER shoves the DUKE behind the current and pulls it shut.)

Stay there!

JESTER

(JESTER hastily moves downstage and makes an effort to look nonchalant. PETER ENTERS.)

PETER
(*Surprised*)

Fool! I didn't expect you back so soon. Did you deliver the letters?

JESTER

Yes, my lord.

PETER

Any responses?

JESTER

All said that they would need time to consider your request.

PETER

How much time?

JESTER

That they didn't say.

(PETER crosses to the throne chair and begins to rub his hands over it.)

PETER

You did well. I will not forget your service. (*Beat*) The crown is elusive impossible to hold.

JESTER

The Duke seemed doubtful that your claim to the throne would pass the stink test.

PETER

The Duke is ghetto trash, a parasite on the ass of society. The only way he's managed to get where he is today is through bribery, theft, intimidation and making juvenile rhymes to entertain his "homies." (*Beat*) You didn't open and read them, did you?

JESTER

No, my Lord. I was just repeating the Dukes comments.

PETER

The Duke can easily be taken care of, a gift certificate at one of those fringe clothing stores will make him cum all over his orange and green alligator shoes.

(The curtain behind the throne begins to rustle. The JESTER looks on trying to conceal his panic. PETER notices the change in the JESTER countenance.)

PETER (CONT'D)

You look like you've seen a ghost.

(PETER crosses to the curtain behind the throne.)

PETER (CONT'D)

Is there something troubling you? Like a well hidden spy.

(PETER pulls the curtain back revealing a wall. The JESTER breathes a sigh of relief. ERON ENTERS wearing a long robe made of feathers and a hat with a large plume.)

ERON

I wouldn't grow to fawn of it if I were you.

(PETER takes one look at ERON and burst out laughing.)

ERON (CONT'D)

What? What?

PETER

I'm sorry. You should be careful wearing that outfit. Someone might mistake you for a rare and exotic bird and fill your ass full of buckshot.

(ERON notices the JESTER..)

ERON

(To the JESTER)

You're back sooner than expected. *(Whispering)* Has the deed been done?

PETER

What deed is that?

ERON

This is none of your business.

PETER

What a marvelous game we play, three adversaries pretending to be kin. We smile to mask our contempt for one another, bide our time with idle chatter, and wait to plunge the dagger in.

ERON

My God, you are so fucking cynical.

(The QUEEN ENTERS.)

PETER

Now the triangle is complete.

QUEEN

Triangle? What are you talking about?

PETER

Oh, Mother, you wouldn't understand being nothing more than an innocent bystander, a witness to the collapse of civil society.

(The JESTER has slyly been looking around the stage trying to find out where the DUKE has hidden himself.)

PETER

He's been acting stranger than his normal bizarre self.

(The QUEEN crosses to the JESTER leads him a distance from her two sons.)

QUEEN

Did you complete your task?

JESTER

Yes, my queen.

ERON

What task was that?

QUEEN

Didn't your mother ever teach you not to listen to other people's conversations? *(Beat)* If you must know, my bathtub had a disgusting ring in it. Well, with all the servants on the battlefield, I had no other choice, but to have the Jester clean it.

PETER

That's a new one. The ring around the bathtub obfuscation.

(PETER and ERON have a good laugh.)

QUEEN

How dare you question me? I am the queen.

ERON

Not for much longer. You've got six hours and thirty-seven minutes left to your reign.

QUEEN

Please, excuse us.

(QUEEN moves the JESTER farther downstage.)

QUEEN (CONT'D)

What news?

JESTER

All the letters...

QUEEN

Keep your voice down.

JESTER

(Whispering)

I delivered the letters to the proper authorities.

QUEEN

Any indication of how long?

(DUKE appears upstage hiding behind some of the theater seats. JESTER is distracted.)

QUEEN

What's wrong with you?

I'm sorry.

JESTER

(DUKE is motioning for the JESTER to get the QUEEN to move closer.)

JESTER

You mind if we move over there. I'm feeling a bit of a draft.

(JESTER crosses and the QUEEN follows him.)

QUEEN

I don't feel a drift.

JESTER

You're wearing a heavy gown. I'm dress only in my thin Jester suit.

(Lighting shifts to ERON and PETER.)

ERON

What do you think she's up to?

PETER

She is definitely up to no good.

QUEEN

(To the JESTER)

This is not the time for your foolishness. The fate of Harlem rest in your hands. *(Beat)* Well, maybe that's a bit of an overstatement.

JESTER

They all seem favorable to your petition except for the Duke of Bedstye.

QUEEN

What did he say?

JESTER

He questioned the validity of your right to petition and appeal. He believes you should eat what you've been served.

QUEEN

The nerve of that ignorant, impudent gold tooth, street rapping fool.

(The theater chairs shake, and the QUEEN turns upstage.)

JESTER

I think he wants to do what's in the best interest of the people of Harlem.

QUEEN

The people of Harlem are none of his concern. Let him content himself with whoring, smoking that stuff, and shopping for his flashy clothes.

(The QUEEN crosses to ERON and PETER.)

QUEEN (CONT'D)

I wish I had the time to stay and make a family connection, but I have a million things to do before the coronation. Kiss, kiss.

(The QUEEN EXITS. ERON and PETER cross to the JESTER and both grab hold of him. There is a tug of war with the JESTER in the middle.)

PETER

I have business with the jester.

ERON

So do I.

PETER

I saw him first.

ERON

I will be King.

PETER

Don't be so certain of that!

ERON

I would rather split him in two than see him with you.

PETER

Then I shall fetch an axe!

JESTER

My Lords, my Lords, why don't you settle this like gentlemen?

PETER

Okay.

ERON

Okay, agreed.

You know the rules.

JESTER

(They release the JESTER and face each other fist clinched.)

Go!

JESTER

One, two, three.

PETER AND ERON

I win...I win. Paper covers rock. Nah,nah,nah,nah,nah.

ERON

(There's a very loud explosion followed by falling debris.)

That was close.

PETER

(ARIEL ENTERS.)

Just the person I want to see.

ARIEL
(To JESTER)

Not so fast, my little, demon seed.

PETER

The Jester is going with me.

ERON

One moment, my dear bother.

ARIEL

(ARIEL crosses to ERON and kicks him on the knee.)

OOOoowww!

ERON

I'll return his straight away.

ARIEL

(SHE leads the JESTER downstage.)

Did you get it?

ARIEL

JESTER
 Yes, yes, yes, I have it right here.

(JESTER hands her the ticket.)

ARIEL
 First class?

JESTER
 Best accommodations available.

ARIEL
 Good! (To PETER and ERON) He's all yours.

(ARIEL EXITS. ERON grabs the JESTER and leads him off stage. More explosions as lights fade to black. Lights begin to slowly rise and out of the shadows, we see various beggars. There is the sound of a snare drum keeping a military beat.)

THE CONSPIRATOR'S STEW

BEGGARS

CONSPIRATORS PLAN THEIR FINAL SHOW
 THE KNIVES ARE OUT FOR THE FINAL BLOW
 THE ASPS ARE LAID IN BED TO STRIKE
 THE POISION DRINK THEY WILL SIP TONIGHT
 A FAMILY THAT IS CLOSELY KNIT
 WILL SLIT YOUR THROAT AS THEY KISS YOUR LIPS

WE'LL STIR THE CONSPIRATOR'S STEW TONIGHT
 AND ADD A PINCH OF CONTEMPT AND LIES
 AND SMOTHER OUR MOTIVES IN DECEIT TONIGHT
 WE'LL TASTE THE DISH WITH SPIES
 SIT BACK, AND WATCH THE PLOT THICKEN

QUEEN
 A MATRIARCH'S WORK IT IS NEVER DONE
 FROM MORNING RISE TO THE SETTING SUN
 PLOTS TO WEAVE, THERE ARE TRAPS TO SET
 A SCHEME TO HATCH AND BLOOD TO LET
 A MOTHER'S LOVE LIKE CHERRIE WINE
 WON'T YOU TAKE A SIP, YOU SWINE

QUEEN (CONT'D)

I'LL STIR THE CONSPIRATOR'S STEW TONIGHT
AND ADD A PINCH OF CONTEMPT AND LIES
AND SMOTHER MY MOTIVES IN DECEIT TONIGHT
I'LL TASTE THE DISH WITH SPIES
SIT BACK, AND WATCH THE PLOT THICKEN

ERON, PETER, ARIEL

A FAMILY BOUND IS AN ACKWARD NOOSE
YOU ARE BORN WITH IT, YOU CAN'T GET LOOSE
AND IN THE END THE BOUND WILL KILL
YOUR EYES WILL BLUG, YOUR BLOOD WILL SPILL
YOU CHOOSE YOUR FRIENDS, BUT FAMILY'S HELL

(THEY all pull daggers out.)

WON'T YOU HOLD ME NEAR, TO THRUST THE DAGGER IN

WE'LL STIR THE CONSPIRATOR'S STEW TONIGHT
AND ADD A PINCH OF CONTEMPT AND LIES
AND SMOTHER OUR MOTIVES IN DECEIT TONIGHT
WE'LL TASTE THE DISH WITH SPIES
SIT BACK, AND WATCH THE PLOT THICKEN

JESTER

A ROYAL FOOL IS A NOBLE MAN
HE SERVICES WITH GRACE THE MASTER'S PLAN
HE BOWS AND SCRAPES; HE PLAYS THE FOOL
PERFORMS THE TRICKS, OBEYS THE RULES
BUT IN THE END THE TABLES TURN
I'LL SERVE MY VENGEANCE - STONE COLD!

JESTER AND COMPANY

WE'LL STIR THE CONSPIRATOR'S STEW TONIGHT
AND ADD A PINCH OF CONTEMPT AND LIES
AND SMOTHER OUR MOTIVES IN DECEIT TONIGHT
WE'LL TASTE THE DISH WITH SPIES
SIT BACK, AND WATCH THE PLOT THICKEN

(Lights fade on the COMPANY and come up on the Duke of Bedstye and JESTER standing down stage.)

JESTER

What an asshole. All he thinks about are the new palaces he will build once he's king. Then the Queen cornered me in the corridor to milk out every detail about my mission, and then she starts to ramble.

JESTER (CONT'D)

I was beginning to think that I would never get away from that woman. Blah, blah, blah... Blah, blah, blah... Ina Gada Divida, baby. Don't you know that we love you?

DUKE

Fool.

JESTER

She's losing it. Babbling on and on about how she was named after a relic disc. (*Imitating the QUEEN*) Let me play it for you on my phonograph. It's such a beautiful...

DUKE

Fool.

JESTER

The world is coming apart at the seams and she playing golden oldies on her...

DUKE

Chill out!

JESTER

Oh! I'm sorry.

DUKE

I couldn't believe that bitch ragging on me like that. I have a good mind to put a cap in her ass. Respect, that's what I'm talking about.

JESTER

The queen and her sons have only one concern and that is maintaining their grip on power. (*Beat*) My dear duke, if you only knew the trails and tribulations that a fool must suffer, you would weep for me. (*Beat*) By the way, have you ever heard of the legend of the Staff of Apollo?

DUKE

Yeah, I done hear about it. It's a bunch of bull if you ask me.

JESTER

This crazy street woman, she was probably high on something, but she showed me things from the past and predicated my future; things that were very unsettling.

(Lights fade on the DUKE and JESTER.
Lights on PLAVETON sitting at his desk downstage. MARLENE burst through the door.)

MARLENE

I want to know, what the hell is going on?

PLAVETON

Going on? Going on?

MARLENE

Don't play me for a fool, Mr. Plaveton. Mr. High and Mighty.

PLAVETON

I assure you I have no idea what you're talking about.

(MARLENE holds up the cane.)

MARLENE

Did he give this to you?

PLAVETON

Did who give me...?

MARLENE

Don't act like you don't know what I'm talking about.

PLAVETON

I assure you that I don't...

MARLENE

You're a liar! *(Beat)* I just want the truth. Did Dijou give you this cane, yes or no?

PLAVETON

Yes he did. I seem to have misplaced it. He give it to me as a token of his appreciation.

MARLENE

It can't be.

PLAVETON

What can't be? I'm not following you.

MARLENE

Are you two having sex?

PLAVETON

That's such a crude way of putting it, Ms. Marlene. *(Beat)* Mr. MonteCarlo and I have an understanding that involves companionship and intimate physical contact.

MARLENE

You disgust me.

PLAVETON

That's exactly how Dijon feels about you, my dear. You're such a pitiful little dreamer. Thinking that little squeaky voice of yours is going to carry you to stardom. My Dijon seems to feel the need of making a conquest of the opposite sex, so I accommodate his sexual ambivalence.

(MARLENE has begun to cry. PLAVETON hands her a handkerchief.)

PLAVETON (CONT'D)

Dry you're tears, my dear. Life can be a cruel affair. You'll still have your contract, your shot at fame. That's all you really wanted, isn't it?

(MARLENE storms out.)

PLAVETON (CONT'D)

Ahhhh, there is nothing like a life in the theater.

(Fade out on PLAVETON. Lights rise on the DUKE and JESTER.)

JESTER

Strange, isn't it?

DUKE

Yo, yo, yo, check this out, man.

(DUKE pulls out a document.)

DUKE (CONT'D)

The letters are all pretty straight forward clock and dagger stuff: wants to take control of the army, clamp down on freedom of the press, invalidate all past decrees of the king and declare marshal law, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera; but get this, there's a paragraph down here at the very bottom in very fine print that caught my attention.

(The JESTER pulls out a large magnifying glass and reads.)

JESTER

In the interest of state security all records concerning Dexter Gardner will be seal in perpetuity. *(Beat)* That's weird.

DUKE

Yeah, that's wacked, man. Like fuckin' screwball, you know what I'm saying?

JESTER

Why would she mention a commoner in a royal communication?

DUKE

Fool, do you know what your name is?

JESTER

My name?

DUKE

Yeah, what's your birth name?

JESTER

I don't remember.

DUKE

Think man.

(The sound of a delicate lullaby drifts through the air.)

JESTER

When I was very young, I vaguely remember my mother singing to me a lullaby at night. She would kiss me on the cheek and say... and say good night...good night my sweet, Dex.

DUKE

Damn, I'm good.

(DUKE does a little dance and extends his hand for a high five. The JESTER realizes his forgotten identity.)

JESTER

My name is Dexter Gardner. My name is Dexter Gardner! I remember she would sing to me at night. She smelled like summer flowers...summer flowers, what a wonderful smell.

(The JESTER is tearing up.)

DUKE

You okay, man?

JESTER

Yeah, I'm okay.

DUKE

You are what the Queen has being trying to keep undercover.

JESTER

Then I am the rightful heir to the throne.

DUKE

Hold yo' horses. You may be eligible for the role, but that don't mean you gonna get it. There is so much shit going down in the palace it would take a team of bulldozers to scope it all up. You gonna need more than being the legitimate heir to the throne to actual acquire the throne.

JESTER

It's all beginning to make sense now. That woman...that woman said I would be king. She said, that I need to find the room of broken mirrors and there the Staff of Apollo lies. There is a room in the abandon part of the palace that has never been opened. We've got to see what's inside that room.

(The JESTER and DUKE EXITS. Lights raise stage left. DIJON and MARLENE are backstage.)

MARLENE

You didn't think I'd find out, did you?

DIJON

Hey, baby. What are you talking about?

MARLENE

You're a lying, cheating dog.

DIJON

What's going on?

MARLENE

That's what I want to know. You didn't think I'd fine out about your affair, did you?

DIJON

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

MARLENE

You and Mr. Plaveton.

DIJON

What?

MARLENE

Admit it! You're having an affair with Mr. Plaveton.

(DIJON turns away from her.)

DIJON (CONT'D)

Yeah, me and that homo is getting on, baby. We be going at it day and night...

MARLENE

You filthy pervert!

DIJON

Why don't you stop acting like a fool and get ready for the next show.

(SHE hits DIJON with the cane over the back of his head. He turns and stares at her in disbelief.)

MARLENE

I'm never gonna to feel clean again.

(SHE continues to strike him; he falls against the makeup mirrors shattering them. He falls to the floor dead. MARLENE throws the cane down and exits. The room is cover with gauze material giving it the look of having been in disuse for many years. A door is moved into place with crime scene tap striping the door. The JESTER and DUKE ENTER.)

JESTER

I remember it being somewhere around here. This must be it.

DUKE

This place gives me the creeps.

JESTER

(*Reads tape*)

Crime scene, do not enter.

DUKE

Maybe we had better do with the message says, man.

(JESTER pushes the door and it opens. HE enters followed by the DUKE.)

DUKE (CONT'D)

This place is like a time capsule.

(THEY look around the room looking for the staff. The JESTER finds a stack of records.)

JESTER

The ancient disc.

DUKE

Those must be worth a fortune.

JESTER

(Reading the album covers)

Gladys Knight and the Pips. Martha Reeves and the Vandellas. Little Richard. Jim Hendrix. This place is the time before time. I wonder what destroyed it all.

DUKE

Greed and stupidity that's what destroys most things. Hey, let hurry up and see if we can find that staff and get the hell up out of here.

JESTER

If I were king, I'd be just and fair.

DUKE

Yeah, yeah, that's what they all say, until they sit their badunkadunk on the throne, then they get all drunk, psycho on power; know what I'm saying?

JESTER

What's that?

(JESTER moves to a pile of debris and shifts through it and pull out the Staff of Apollo.)

DUKE

Whoa! So the legend was for real.

JESTER

Behold the Staff of Apollo!

(The JESTER raises it high above his head. Black out.)

Scene 3: Lights rises on the coronation already in progress. Music plays, ERON enters dressed in his coronation robe. He is followed by the QUEEN, PETER, and other cast members will act as the courtier. JUDAR, Head of the High Council, is standing on the platform where the throne sits holding a crown in his hands. ERON crosses to the foot of the throne and kneels before JUDAR. JUDAR raises the crown above his head and is about to crown ERON king when the DUKE and JESTER rush in.

DUKE

(Out of breath)

Yo, yo yo! Hold on. You're crowning the wrong man.

JUDAR

Who dare interrupt the crowning of the King of Harlem?

DUKE

Hey, what's happening? I'm the Duke of Bedstye. Most of you..

QUEEN

You've brought news from the ministers?

DUKE

The coronation of Eron Motown has been deemed unlawful.

QUEEN

Thanks you Apollo.

ERON

(To DUKE)

What kind of foul trick is this? *(Beat)* Let me see your proof.

(DUKE crosses to ERON and gives him the documents. ERON scans them quickly and turns to the QUEEN.)

ERON

(To the QUEEN)

This is your doing? You and Peter have orchestrated this treachery...this villainy!

QUEEN

No, that's not true!

DUKE

The queen has done everything in her power to make sure yo' ass ain't ascending the throne. But her and Peter's effort were not the reason for the nullification.

PETER

Who has the Minister deemed to be the rightful heir to the throne?

(Sounds of explosion interrupt the proceedings.)

DUKE

The eldest son of the House of Apollo is gonna to be the next king of Harlem.

PETER

Then that's me. I am the eldest.

DUKE

Hold your horses, limpy. There's a fly in the ointment.

PETER

What do you mean there's a fly in the ointment? What kind of fly? I am the first born of the House of Apollo. Two years older than my bother, end of story.

DUKE

King Alfred fathered another child a year before your birth.

QUEEN

What treasonous bastard has put you up to this?

ERON

Mother, is this true?

PETER

The truth mother for once in your miserable life!

DUKE

The queen knew the truth and did everything in her power to conceal it.

QUEEN

Guards, guard! Where are those worthless guards when you need them? Guards! *(To the DUKE)* I'll have you in chains and hanged at sunrise.

DUKE

Did forget that yo' guards are at the front; your whole household is manning the frontline.

(Sounds of explosion)

JUDAR

I wasn't informed of any change in the coronation.

(The DUKE hands JUDAR the documents.)

DUKE

Here you go. The documents are hot off the press. (*Checking out JUDAR'S outfit.*) Where did you get those threads, man? They are off the chain!

PETER

Focus. Can we focus here?

DUKE

The queen made a mistake of drawing attention to her little deception by attempting to have the records of Dexter Gardner sealed in perpetuity.

ERON

What deceit is this, mother?

QUEEN

You two are my only sons, and I love you.

PETER

Spare us the insincere dramatics, will you?

DUKE

That much is true, but Alfred liked to tap a piece of ass now and then; you know what I'm saying?

PETER

Father liked to stick his royal dick into any warm blooded creature he could fine.

DUKE

Yo, Alfred was my dawg! He was a player and a fornicator, but got to give the man respect. Know what I'm saying? He was the best king he knew how to be.

ERON

Who is this eldest son of King Alfred?

DUKE

The king had an affair with a beautiful young woman. She was bright, buoyant, vivacious and from the wrong side of town. They fell in love, but couldn't marry..

ERON

Spare us the backstory, will you?

(The DUKE points to the JESTER.)

DUKE (CONT'D)

This is the next King of Harlem Dexter Gardner or from henceforth King Dexter the first.

(There is a stunned silence.)

ERON

Is this your idea of some sick, twisted joke? A fool the King of Harlem.

DUKE

Fools often become head-of-state.

PETER

You knew all along. Didn't you mother? Why did you allow him to live? A threat growing right before your eyes. Why didn't bash his brain in while he slept?

(The explosions grow louder and more frequent.)

JUDAR

The documents seem to be in proper order.

(To ERON)

I do think we should get on with the ceremony?

ERON

What do you mean get on with the ceremony? This thing is not going to be the next king of Harlem.

PETER

My brother's right. No one is going to take a bastard of The Mad King Alfred serious.

DUKE

Show 'em the trump card, Fool.

(The JESTER hold up the Staff of Apollo for all to see.)

JESTER

He who holds the Staff of Apollo shall rule Harlem.

PETER

You can pick those things up at any novelty shop.

JUDAR

May I see that?

(JESTER hands the staff to JUDAR.)

JUDAR

It is said that the Staff of Apollo was made of the finest silver, on it had was a cobra, with eyes of precious jewels, the symbol of Apollo, the golden lyre borders the top. This is that which the legend has foretold, and he is the rightful king of Harlem.

(ARIEL enters dress as a young woman caring two suitcases.)

ARIEL

Sorry, I'm late. I had a million things to take care of before I leave.

QUEEN

Leave? Where are you going? What have you done to yourself?

DUKE

Can this wait until...?

QUEEN

Stay out of this!

ARIEL

I'm leaving for France right after the coronation.

QUEEN

What are you...?

ARIEL

You've tried to keep me frozen in time, but time doesn't stand still for anyone. I'm a woman, mother; not a little girl, and I want to move on with my life and not live in the past. The past holds many lessons both good and bad, we hopefully learn from them and use it for making a better here and now.

DUKE

Listen up people, there's a new king in town, and you better start showing some respect.

(SOLDIER enters in a panic.)

SOLDIER

My queen, my queen, the lines have been broken. For your safety, you must evacuate the House of Apollo immediately.

QUEEN

This can't be. The generals assured me that the lines would hold.

DUKE

Welcome to reality sweet heart.

SOLDIER

You must hurry before all routes of escape are blocked.

DUKE

(To JUDAR)

Let's speed it up, oh wise one. I don't want to end up as collateral damage.

(The JESTER ascends the stairs and kneels before the JUDAR. The words JUDAR speaks are drowned out by the explosions and the scenes of war projected onto the scrim. The crown is placed on the JESTER head and he turns to face the audience.)

JUDAR

I crown you King Dexter the first, King of Harlem. Long live the King! Long live Harlem!

(JESTER holds up the staff in triumph.)

JESTER

People of Harlem as your new king I will do my best to bring peace and prosperity to Harlem once again. As long as the light of Apollo shines Harlem will remain...

(There is a series of explosion in rapid secession. Debris falls and certain set piece collapse. On the scrim, there are images of war, damaged buildings, soldier in trenches, soldier marching. The sign of Apollo begins to flicker and suddenly goes out completely. Everyone stares in disbelief. The sound and images of war increase in volume and intensity as the lights and sounds slowly fade away. Black out. After a moment, a military drum beat is heard. Lights rise on the BEGGARS upstage.)

BEGGARS

KEEP YOUR EYES IN FRONT
 KEEP YOUR FEELINGS ALL AT BAY
 THE WORLD IS IN A SORRY STATE
 THIS MUCH WE CAN RELAY
 THERE'S JUSTICE IN THE TRUTH
 SOME TRUTH IN EVERY LIE
 FIND WHAT'S REAL THAT'S IN BETWEEN
 AND LET YOUR SPIRIT FLY

FIND WHAT'S REAL THAT'S IN BETWEEN
 AND LET YOUR SPIRIT FLY

(Lights fade on the BEGGARS.
 JANITOR ENTERS sweeping. He puts his broom away and crosses to a switch box down stage and proceeds to turn off the lights on stage one area at a time until the stage is black.)

The End