Metamorphoses

Setting: an attic of an old house on a rainy day. Three siblings (characters one, two, and three) enter carrying boxes of items at which they begin to unpack.

ONE
What would you do with all the money in the world?

TWO
What a question.

THREE
I know what I’d do. Do you want to know what I’d do?

TWO
No.

THREE
I’d never do laundry again.

ONE
That’s it. That’s the big dream?

THREE
Among other things.

Two discovers a book at the bottom of her box. As she opens it, loud voices can be heard around the room. They are, in fact, character voices from the book. She immediately shuts the book as the three siblings stand startled...voices stop. She opens the book again and the voices resume. She drops the book on the floor and the voices stop as the book is now closed. The three are again startled but intrigued as they slowly come together and pick up the book again. Two slowly opens the book as all the voices ask in unison:

DO YOU WANT TO HEAR A STORY?

ONE
Do you want to hear a little story?

Two and Three nod yes slowly. One begins reading from the book. Throughout the rest of the play, the characters come to life before their eyes as they read through each story. At times, the three siblings become part of the stories as well.
ONE
There was a certain king, named Midas. Net worth: one hundred billion.

MIDAS enters. *As he speaks his DAUGHTER comes out, bouncing a red ball.*

MIDAS
Now, I’m not a greedy man, but it is an accepted fact – a proven fact – that money is a good thing. A thing to be longed for, a necessary thing. And my god, I have a lot of it! It wasn’t always this way with me – the boats, the houses by the sea, the summer cottages, the food and –

*To his DAUGHTER*
Honey, can you stop that now? Be still now. Daddy’s talking.

*She stops, momentarily. MIDAS turns back to the audience.*
Excuse me. The outrageous food and two hundred year old wine. I was born with a head for business and it’s always been as though everything I touched has turned to gold. Not literally, of course – wouldn’t that be something? Turned a profit, I meant. And –

*Again to his DAUGHTER.*
Sweetheart. Daddy asked you: Be still. Take it inside.

*She retreats but shortly reenters, jumping rope.*
All it takes is hard work. Plain and simple. And those who haven’t got it in them, well, what can anyone do? They just haven’t got it.

*To his DAUGHTER.*
Be still! You’re driving me nuts already!!

*To the audience.*
But you know, I never forget that I do it all for my *(he can’t remember)* ... let’s see, all for my...it’s all for the, uh...the family. Yes, that’s what it’s all for. Family is the most important thing, isn’t it? One’s own family, I mean – not anyone else’s for god’s sake. When I get home at midnight seven days a week, in the moments before sleep, I realize that ... um... I realize... what was I -? Oh yes, that the family is what really matters.

*A SERVANT enters.*

SERVANT
Sir?

MIDAS
Yes, what is it?

*SILENUS enters, drunk and holding a wine bottle in a brown paper bag.*

SERVANT
This man’s been making trouble in the town. We believe he is a vagrant, sir, of the worst, most drunken kind.
SILENUS
Hello, King!

SERVANT
What should we do?

SILENUS
Nice place!

SERVANT
Execute him?

MIDAS
No need, no need. In my day, I’ve certainly been three sheets to the wind.

SILENUS
Three sheets to the - ? What - ? What are you talking about, King? I’m all rummed up! Let me tell you something. You know what?

MIDAS
No, what?

SILENUS
Let me tell you –

MIDAS
Yes?

SILENUS
Let me tell you something.

MIDAS
Yes, all right.

SILENUS
I’ve been all over the world.

MIDAS
Oh, have you?

SILENUS
Yes. I – I’m lost now. But I have been – all over the place.
MIDAS
mmm. How nice for you.

SILENUS
You listening? Well, let me tell you there is a country beyond this one, where...uh...

MIDAS
How very fascinating. Well, if you will excuse me –

SILENUS
No. listen. I strayed from the crowd, and I’m lost now, but there is a country –

MIDAS
Asia?

SILENUS
Further.

MIDAS
Africa?

SILENUS
No. Further. Over the ocean. I’ve been there.

MIDAS
Oh?

SILENUS
King, I tell ya, it’s like a dream, a dream. I. Am. Telling. You. That in this place the people...they see each other. And in this place they live without desire of any kind and so time? There is no time – just the blue sky above and the pretty moon at night and they got the meadows under their feet with yellow flowers and –

MIDAS
Well, thank you, this has been most entertaining, but –

SILENUS
And the people live forever.

MIDAS
What?
Midas’s DAUGHTER begins to skip rope.

SILENUS
They live forever. They never die.

MIDAS
What is it, some herb they have, some.....

SILENUS
Oh, no. No no no.

MIDAS
Something in the air? Something we could distill? I have shipping fleets you know to bring it –

SILENUS
No, no. it’s –

MIDAS
Yes?

SILENUS
Is that your daughter?

MIDAS
What? Yes. (to her) go on, get out of here! Be still for once in your life!! (to him) Go on, go on.

She retreats for good.

SILENUS
You’re rich indeed.

MIDAS
Go on. What is it? What is this secret to eternal life?

SILENUS (pointing to his head)
It’s here.

MIDAS
Some formula, you have it? The formula?

SILENUS
No, no. It’s here (pointing to Midas’s head).

   MIDAS
   What?

   SILENUS
   And here (pointing to Midas’s heart).

   MIDAS
   Oh, that. The ‘inner life.’ What uselessness. All right then. Off you go. You may sleep in the cabana.

   SILENUS
   Thank you. (He falls drunkenly, facedown)

   MIDAS
   Oh for god’s sake.

   ONE
   Night fell, but when the rosy-fingered dawn came back again –

   BACCHUS (entering drunkenly)
   Midas?

   MIDAS
   Good lord! Who’s there?

   BACCHUS
   It’s Bacchus. I hear you have a follower of mine.

   MIDAS
   A follower?

   BACHHUS
   Yes, Silenus. He wandered from our group as we passed close to town and I hear he is with you.

   MIDAS
   Oh, the fellow in the cabana? Yes, take him, he’s all yours.

   SILENUS rises and exits.

   BACCHUS
I’m grateful that you didn’t turn him away, Midas, that you took care of him in his condition. And I’d like to present you with a gift.

MIDAS
A gift?

BACCHUS
Some ability. A minor miracle. Something to do at parties?

MIDAS
Anything?

SILENUS appears with BACCHUS.

BACCHUS
Anything at all.

MIDAS
You promise?

BACCHUS
Yes, of course.

MIDAS
Then grant me that everything I touch, everything I put my hand to, will turn to solid gold.

_Long pause._

BACCHUS
That’s a really, really bad idea.

MIDAS
What do you mean it’s a bad idea? It’s a brilliant idea!

BACCHUS
Think about it, Midas.

MIDAS
No, you think about it! You gave your oath. We had a deal for god’s sake. Now follow through!

BACCHUS
All right then.
BACCHUS and SILENUS exit.

ONE
And from that moment on, everything he touched turned to solid gold.

MIDAS
Wait a minute, wait a minute, let me think where to begin.....

MIDAS picks up a large seashell. It is gold. He becomes giddy. He walks around. From now on, each of his steps is accompanied by the ring of little finger cymbals.

ONE
He went out walking and with every step, the gravel under his feet turned to golden nuggets. Delighted, he put his hand to branches of trees and to flowers and he had gold branches and flowers. All day long he experimented, almost insane with happiness, that the whole of the world could become his personal treasure. Late at night, he stumbled back into the courtyard, laden with precious gold.

DAUGHTER (entering and running toward him)
Papa!

MIDAS
NO!

It’s too late. She jumps into his arms and turns to gold. BACCHUS reenters.
Take it away. (pause) Bacchus (pause) take it away.

BACCHUS
I can’t.

MIDAS
Yes you can. You must. Take it away now.

BACCHUS
I’m sorry.

MIDAS
No, take it away, now!

BACCHUS
There is one way, Midas.

MIDAS
What? What is it?

BACCHUS
Walk as far as the ends of the earth. Look for a pool of water that reflects the stars at night. Wash your hands in it and there is a chance that everything will be restored.

MIDAS slowly walks away, his steps accompanied by the ringing cymbals. He reaches behind his desk and picks up his daughter’s jump rope. It has turned to gold.

THREE
Was that too sad for you?

ONE
A little.

TWO
All right then, here’s another. (transition) There once was a king named Ceyx who had as his queen Alcyone, daughter of Aeolus, master of the winds. These two adored each other and lived in a monotony of happiness. But nothing in this world is safe.

ALCYONE
It isn’t true.

CEYX
It is.

TWO
One day Alcyone had heard that Ceyx had ordered his ship to be made ready for a sea voyage, to visit a far-off oracle.

ALCYONE
How can you leave me alone? I’ll pine in your absence. Overland, it’s a long and arduous trip, but I’d still prefer that to a voyage by the sea – which I fear, for my father’s winds are wild and savage. You think as his son-in-law you may get some special treatment. Not so!
Now I am petrified, surely – if you die my life is over and I shall be cursed with every reluctant breath I draw.

CEYX
My love, I hate to choose between my journey and you but how can I live this way? Stranded on shore, afraid, domesticated, a kind of lap dog?
ALCYONE
Take me with you at least, and we’ll meet the storms together, which I fear much less than to be left a widow.

CEYX
In two months’ time, I’ll be back.

ALCYONE
No. I fear your won’t. I know you won’t.

CEYX
In two months’ time. For that short time, you can be brave and endure the trial of waiting.

TWO
She was hardly consoled, but she saw she could not hold out any longer in the face of his resolve. She allowed herself to be soothed and consented to his going.

SAILORS enter with oars.
There were no more details left to be checked, no last-minute changes to make, and the men, arranged on their benches, were ready to row and go. He boarded and gave the sign. And then he turned to wave at her. She waved at him while the ribbon of black water widened between the ship and shore. She gazed at him until he was no longer distinguishable. She gazed still at the empty and desolate blue and then went to her empty bedroom to lie on the huge and vacant bed and give herself over to weeping.

CEYX
The vessel cleared the harbor and caught the freshening wind which set the rigging to singing and slapping against the spars. I ordered the rowers to ship their oars and the sailors to set the yards and make sail. Our ship ran before the wind. We made satisfactory progress all that day and had reached a point of no return, with as much blue water astern as remained ahead.

TWO
But the sun was sinking in the West, the water, everywhere blue until now, began to be flecked with the whitecapped waves sailors dislike.

Enter POSEIDON and his henchmen.
The weather was worse with every moment for the winds were on the loose.

The storm begins. POSEIDON and henchmen attack CEYX and sailors.

CEYX
Reef the sails! Bail the water! Secure the spars!
TWO
But Poseidon and his Henchman had arrived. The rest was one enormous green catastrophe.

*The storm escalates. The men wrestle.*

TWO
The men have lost their belief in their captain, their courage, their nautical skill, and even their will to live as they wait for the end. One weeps and groans aloud. Another, no braver, is silent, dumbstruck. One calls on the gods for mercy. Another curses his fate. And one says one word,

CEYX
Alcyone,

TWO
Again and again,

CEYX
Alcyone, my treasure, Alcyone.

TWO
And this is the end of the world.

*APHRODITE enters above the sky.*

CEYX
O Gods, hear my modest prayer: that my body may wash ashore at her feet where she may with gentle hands prepare it to be buried.

*CEYX sinks below the water.*

TWO
Nothing left but the slow parade led by Hermes to the Underworld.

*Everyone but ALCYONE exits. She stirs in her sleep and begins to count, covering her eyes, like a child who counts to a certain number, hoping that when she reaches it her wish will be granted.*

ALCYONE
One two three four, fifteen sixteen seventeen eighteen, ninety-eight ninety-nine, one hundred ...

*She uncovers her eyes and looks toward the horizon, then covers her eyes and begins again. APHRODITE enters and watches from the sky. She summons IRIS to watch.*

One two three four, fifteen sixteen seventeen eighteen, ninety-eight ninety-nine, one hundred ...
She uncovers her eyes and looks toward the horizon. She then begins again and continues under the following lines.

APHRODITE
Look at her, Iris, she’s moved her vigil down to the shore and now she’s sleeping there.

ALCYONE
...ninety-eight, ninety-nine, one hundred. Ceyx? Come home. I’m nearer now, I’m sleeping on the shore. It’s not so far until you see me.

She begins to count again, quietly.

APHRODITE
This can’t go on forever. Go to the house of sleep and ask him to arrange a nighttime visitation, a dream that might show our Alcyone the sorry truth.

IRIS departs. ALCYONE falls asleep. As the narrator speaks, SLEEP enters, wrapped in a blanket, with eyeshades. APHRODITE slowly drops white letter Z’s from the sky.

THREE
Far off in remotest Campania, beyond where the Cimmerians live in their gloomy caves, is a deeper and even darker grotto, the home of Sleep. In this place the sun never can, even at midday, penetrate with the faintest beams. In that cloudy twilight no rooster dares disturb the silence with his rude crowing, no dog or nervous goose gives voice to challenge the passing stranger. Not even branches sigh in occasional passing breezes, but an almost total silence fills the air.

SLEEP snores. IRIS creeps in carrying an alarm clock.

IRIS
Hello?

THREE
Into this strange and breathless place, Iris the rainbow intrudes.

IRIS
O Somnolent One? Somnolent One? Wake up!

SLEEP
Wha---?

IRIS
Mildest of all the gods, soother of souls, and healer of wearied and pain-wracked bodies and minds –

SLEEP (Wakes up)
Iris! What do you want?

IRIS
Devise, if you can, some form to resemble King Ceyx and send it down in a dream to his wife, the Queen Alcyone. Let her know that news of the wreck of his ship and the death of the husband she loves so well. Sleep (she yawns) do this for us – can you?

She yawns and falls asleep with him for a moment, but luckily her alarm goes off, startling them both. She runs away.

Farewell!

SLEEP (calling)
Morpheus! Mor-phe-us! Come and change your shape to that of King Ceyx. Go to his wife and tell her (yawning) ... tell her he is dead.

Morpheus enters as CEYX. SLEEP sees him.

That’s good. That’s very good. Now go!

SLEEP stumbles away. CEYX, shrouded, approaches ALCYONE. She stirs.

ALCYONE
Sir, you seem like a seafaring man, can you tell me,
Where is my husband, Ceyx? Have you seen him on the sea? When is he coming home? His ship is strong and unmistakable. Have you seen him? (pause) Sir?

CEYX (dropping his shroud)
Do you not know me? Has death undone me so?

ALCYONE
No!

CEYX
Look at me, I charge you – look at me.

ALCYONE
No, I won’t. I won’t!

CEYX
Look at me, and know your husband's ghost. Your prayers have done no good, for I am gone, beyond all help or hope forever.

ALCYONE
Go away!

CEYX
I am not some bearer of tales, but the man himself to whom it happened. Look at me, my little bird.

ALCYONE
I told you. I knew it would happen and I begged you not to go. I knew the day you sailed I had lost you forever. The ship, my hopes, and my life grew smaller all at the same time. You should have allowed me to come –

CEYX
Little bird –

ALCYONE
This is no good, no good – that I should be living and you be elsewhere or nowhere? I’m drowning now in the air, I’m wrecked here on the land where the currents are just as cold and cruel.

CEYX
Get up from your bed and put on your mourning clothes.

He begins to go.

ALCYONE
Wait for me! Come back! Where are you going?
Wait and I’ll go with you as wives are supposed to go with their husbands.

He is gone. She is handed a lantern.

Ceyx! Come back! Where are you? Come back! He was here. Where is he? Where is he?

TWO
All that night she searched along the shore for her drowned, dreamed husband. But she found nothing, not even footprints, only wave after wave of black water. When morning came she narrowed her eyes to the horizon, and remembered how she had looked on that other day.

HERMES enters carrying CEYX and places him in the water.

She remembered his last kiss, the way he turned to the ship, could not bear it, and turned again to her.

ALCYONE
What is that out there? Oh, it is a man. Alas, poor sailor, for your wife and ...

She sees that it is CEYX.

TWO
The gods are not altogether unkind. Some prayers are answered.
ALCYONE
Ceyx, is this how you return to me?

TWO
She began to run to him; but as she ran, crying, a strange thing happened.

ALCYONE moves slowly toward CEYX, transforming. The sound of waves and seabirds crying comes up.

By the time she reached him, she was a bird. She tried to kiss him with her bill, and by some trick of the ocean’s heaving, it seemed that his head reached up to hers in response. You ask, How could he have felt her kiss?

APHRODITE
But better ask, How could the gods not have felt it? Seen this, and not had compassion?

TWO
For the dead body was changing, restored to life, and renewed as another seabird. Together they still fly, just over the water’s surface.

ONE
When you see a miracle like that, how can you deny the existence of the gods?

THREE
Believe it or not, there are some that do. There was a man called Erysichthon, who scorned the gods and declined to sacrifice on their altars or do them honor. Nothing was sacred to him – he only looked for the usefulness of things. One day he found himself in a grove sacred to Ceres.

ERYSICHTHON
Cut it down.

MAN
Sir, that tree is centuries old –

ERYSICHTHON
We need the wood, cut it down.

MAN
Sir, this is a sacred grove; and this tree is beloved by Ceres.

CERES enters and watches.

ERYSICHTHON
It’s only a tree that the goddess likes, but say it was the goddess herself, I’d cut it down just the same.

MAN
Sir, please –

ERYSICHTHON *(shoving him away)*
Get off me!

THREE
And he tore the tree down.

*Sound of tree falling.*

TREE SPIRIT
Sir.

ERYSICHTHON
Who’s that?

TREE SPIRIT
I am the tree itself speaking. My pangs of death are eased by one thing.

ERYSICHTHON
And what might that be?

TREE SPIRIT
That you will never get away with this.

ERYSICHTHON
Oh, now I’m really frightened.

*He laughs and goes home to sleep.*

THREE
But the goddess Ceres heard the cry of her tree, and her mind immediately began to move upon torments that she might inflict.

CERES
Oread!

OREAD
Yes?
CERES
There is a place in far-off Scythia. Nothing grows there, no wheat, no grass, no trees. There you will find, huddling together, Cold, Fear, and gaunt Hunger. Tell Hunger I command her to visit this brute and establish a home for herself in his belly. I give him to her as a toy.

OREAD
I will.

THREE
Oread flew off to the Caucasus, a bleak and nightmarish region. There, in a field of stones, crouched Hunger,

HUNGER enters.

Pulling from between the rocks, with her teeth and filthy fingernails, some tiny bits of moss. Her hair hung down in lank and matted locks. Her eyes were sunken and circled, her lips were slack and cracked. The vaults of her ribs stuck out, as did every bone in her body. One could count the knobs of her spine.

OREAD
Hunger?

HUNGER turns to face her, and OREAD is struck with sudden, terrible hunger pains.

Ceres commands – or rather permits you –

HUNGER
Yes?

OREAD (backing up starving as HUNGER crawls toward her)
To go to –

HUNGER
Yes?

OREAD
To go to Erysichthon and...and never to leave him until he is finished.

Runs off.

HUNGER
Gladly.

THREE
Hunger crawled through the air to the house of the victim. As she flew overhead, fields withered and men starved. The birds scattered from her path, too weak to fly. It is night when she arrives at
Erysichthon’s home and curdles through the halls until she finds him sleeping in his room. She wraps cadaverous arms around him in an embrace as strong as love, but quite the opposite of love. She breathes her spirit into his spirit. And he begins to dream.

ERYSICHTHON (with HUNGER clinging to his back)
Pastries, cheese, grapes...

THREE
He wakes.

ERYSICHTHON
Bring me something to eat! Anything! I’m starving!

HUNGER continues to cling to his back.

THREE
But he can’t wait to be served. He begins to eat everything in sight: meal after meal after meal after meal. But he can’t shake this hunger.

ERYSICHTHON
More! I need more! More to eat!

THREE
Baked shrimp and marshmallows, salami and ice cream, liver and doughnuts, everything in every possible combination. Even as he eats he is planning other menus and complaining of his hunger, so he calls out for more.

ERYSICHTHON
It isn’t enough! It isn’t enough!

THREE
His gorging empties the larder and storerooms, the warehouses and barns of the city. His hunger is unabated. What is left to sell?

ERYSICHTHON
Mother?

MOTHER (entering)
My son?

ERYSICHTHON
Come with me.
MOTHER is delighted, goes to fetch her purse. The BUYER enters with an oar, eating an apple.

THREE
Now this part is true, though you may not believe it: His hunger led him to sell his poor, his darling mother.

BUYER
She doesn’t look so strong.

ERYSICHTHON
She is, she is. We’ve had her forever.

BUYER
I can’t give you much...

ERYSICHTHON
Just give – just whatever – just give it to me –

BUYER
All right then.

He tosses him a coin.

THREE
With the few coins he received, he ran home to eat. Riding in a boat behind her new master, Erysichthon’s mother leaned over the hull and prayed to someone she once knew.

MOTHER
Poseidon, if you remember me, come and save me now.

POSEIDON enters.

THREE
From the briny deep, Poseidon heard her prayer, pulled her into the water, and changed her back into the little girl who used to play along his shores. The salty water licked the years away, until she emerged: the one who gave him praise in childhood, shouting as she ran among the waves. This is the kind of sweet, unbidden praise the gods adore and do not forget.

BUYER(notices MOTHER is gone and sees the little girl)
Hey! Hey you, little girl! Listen up! Where is the old woman who was here a moment ago? Did she dive overboard and swim up to shore?
MOTHER (as a child)
Sir, I swear by the god of the sea that no one except myself has come to this shore. I swear it!

THREE
To this day, at every hour, somewhere in the world, you can still catch a glimpse of that child playing by the shore.

MOTHER exits with POSEIDON, and BUYER leaves as well.
But let us return to our king. It was not enough. The money she earned for him was not enough for his needs. The emptiness within him was unappeasable. You’ve seen such men yourself, I’m sure.

ERYSICHTHON
I need more! I must have more!

ONE
The godless are always hungry.

ERYSICHTHON
MORE!

TWO
Always yelling at waitresses.

ERYSICHTHON
I WANT MORE!

THREE
There can be only one end to such a man.

CERES comes toward ERYSICHTHON with a silver tray holding a plate, a large fork and knife, and a rosebud in a vase. She sets it down.

THREE
He will destroy himself.

He goes to the tray, takes off his shoe, places his own foot on the plate, and raises the knife.

CERES
Bon appétit.

ONE
You’ve heard of Orpheus, the greatest musician of all time, and his bride Eurydice? His was the unluckiest of wedding days.
The sound of wedding bells. ORPHEUS and EURYDICE move toward each other. But as she approaches, EURYDICE steps on a snake. We hear a loud hissing, and the joyful wedding bells become funereal. The scene changes to one of mourning, as the dead EURYDICE is carried away by HERMES. HADES and PERSEPHONE appear in the Underworld.

ONE
Orpheus, the widower bridegroom, mourned her in the upper world but his grief was limitless. Inconsolable, desperate, he left the warmth and sweetness of our air, he dared to descend to the River Styx and crossed it to the Underworld.

Through that dim domain, with all its shimmering, buried ghosts, he passed, until he arrived at its melancholy heart and found its king, lying with Persephone. He knelt before them, drowning in his grief.

ORPHEUS
I don’t know what power love has down here, but I have heard that he has some, for he brought you two together. If that is true – that passion moved you once – then listen to me:
I’ve tried to master this grief and I can’t. I understand we all come here in the end. My bride Eurydice will soon enough be your citizen in the ripeness of her years. I am asking for a loan, not a gift. If you deny me, one thing is certain: I want you to keep me here as well.

ONE
As Orpheus spoke, the pale phantoms began to weep. Tantalus was no longer thirsty, and Sisyphus sat on his rock to listen.

HADES
Orpheus, turn around. (calling) Eurydice.

EURYDICE enters.

Your song has moved us, Orpheus, and you may have her on one condition. As you ascend and leave this place, she will not walk beside you; but she will be following. You must not, until you pass our gates, turn around to look at her. If you look at her before you reach the sunlight, she is ours. Forever.

ORPHEUS
I understand.

HADES
Hermes will accompany you. Remember, hesitation or doubt and our gift must be returned. A simple enough condition?

ONE
It ought to have been. The singer led the way, ascending the sloping path through the murk.

ORPHEUS walks, followed by EURYDICE and then HERMES.
A long way they traveled, almost all the way. But you know what happened: Concerned for her, or not quite believing that it wasn’t a cruel delusion, a dream, or a mirage, he turned.

*ORPHEUS turns around; as he does, HERMES lifts EURYDICE and pulls her away as she and ORPHEUS reach for each other.*

EURYDICE

Farewell.

ONE

That was his last sight of her. But he saw it again and again.

*ORPHEUS, EURYDICE, and HERMES reassemble in their original positions. They walk forward, ORPHEUS turns; as he does, HERMES lifts EURYDICE and pulls her away as she and ORPHEUS reach for each other.*

EURYDICE

Farewell.

ONE

Is this story a story of love and how it always goes away?

They continue to repeat their action. Each time, EURYDICE is a little closer to ORPHEUS when he turns.

EURYDICE

Farewell.

ONE

Is this a story of how time can move only in one direction?

The action repeats.

EURYDICE

Farewell.

ONE

Is this the story of an artist, and the loss that comes from sudden self-consciousness or impatience?

The action repeats.

EURYDICE

Farewell.
Music transition. EROS enters. He is winged, blindfolded, and carrying a golden arrow. Through the following he will come forward and lie down to sleep.

THREE
Who is this?

TWO
This is Eros, god of love.

THREE
Why does he have wings?

TWO
So he can move quickly from body to body.

ONE
He makes us transparent.

THREE
Make us what?

ONE
Transparent in our love. Foolish to others. Exposed.

THREE
Why is he blind?

TWO
He is always pictured blind, but he really isn’t.

THREE
Because in love we are so ignorant and so compulsive?

TWO
There’s that.

THREE
What else?

TWO
He is blind to show how he takes away our ordinary vision, our mistaken vision, that depends on the appearance of things.

Throughout the following, PSYCHE enters carrying a candelabra. She makes her way downstage very slowly and quietly.

THREE
Who's this?

ONE
Her name is Psyche.

THREE
Psyche? Her name is Psyche?

TWO
Yes.

THREE
What's she doing here?

ONE
She's married to the god, but she's never seen him.

THREE
Why is that?

ONE
He forbids it.

THREE
How did they meet?

TWO
Psyche was so beautiful, the goddess Aphrodite hated her. She sent her son to punish her, but he fell in love instead.

THREE
Does she know that he is a god?

ONE
No. She suspects he is a monster.
PSYCHE is startled by something. She looks over her shoulder, then continues.

THREE
Why does she suspect he is a monster?

TWO
Her jealous sisters told her so.

THREE
And she listened to them?

TWO
Unfortunately, yes.

THREE
So now she’s coming to see him as he sleeps?

ONE
Yes.

THREE
To make certain.

TWO
Yes.

THREE
With her eyes.

ONE
Yes. she’s very young. It happens all the time.

THREE
She doesn’t trust what she has felt herself?

TWO
Not with the radical trust we need.

PSYCHE approaches the sleeping EROS and holds the candelabra over him, looking. This happens in silence.

THREE

Page
What does the word ‘Psyche’ mean?

ONE
In Greek it means ‘the soul.’

Wax from the candles falls on EROS. He wakes suddenly and turns abruptly toward PSYCHE. They stare at each other a long moment. Then, in one motion, she extinguishes the candelabra. She and EROS separate.

THREE
What’s going to happen to her now?

TWO
She’s going to suffer.

THREE
And?

ONE
She’s going to suffer.

THREE
And?

ONE/TWO
She’s going to suffer.

THREE
What does she have to do?

TWO
She is given horrible and lonely tasks by Aphrodite.

THREE
Such as?

TWO
Sorting thousands of little seeds one from the other.

THREE
How did she manage?
ONE
Some little insects help her.

THREE
Like in fairy tales?

ONE
Like in all the fairy tales.

THREE
What else?

TWO
She had to go down to the Underworld, fetch various things.

THREE
Wasn't she afraid?

ONE
She was petrified, but she did it all the same.

THREE
Wasn't it hopeless?

TWO
It was hopeless, but she did it all the same.

THREE
What did Love do in the meantime?

TWO
He healed his little wound. It hurt him so much when she looked at him like that. The wax from the candle fell on him and burnt him.

THREE
How does it end?

ONE
She finishes her tasks and Zeus declares enough’s enough.

THREE
He overrides Love’s mother?

EROS and PSYCHE look at each other. They begin to move toward each other.
TWO
Yes. And further, he gives Psyche a special potion and she becomes immortal. Then he declares that their marriage will last forever.

THREE
Does it?

ONE
Of course.

THREE
So it has a happy ending?

ONE
It has a very happy ending.

THREE
Almost none of these stories have completely happy endings.

TWO
This is different.

THREE
Why is that?

ERO S and PSYCHE kiss.

ONE
It’s just inevitable.

TWO
The soul wanders in the dark, until it finds love. And so, wherever our love goes, there we find our soul.

THREE
It always happens?

TWO
If we’re lucky.

ONE
And if we let ourselves be blind.

THREE
Instead of watching out?

ONE
Instead of always watching out.

_Music transition._

TWO
One night, Zeus, the lord of the heavens, and Hermes, his son, came down to earth to see what people were really like. They disguised themselves as two old beggars, stinking and poor, ragged and filthy. They knocked on a thousand doors.

ZEUS and HERMES enter. Both adopt supplicating poses.

ZEUS
Hello, do you any spare -?

OFFSTAGE VOICE
Get out of here! Get out! I work hard for my money!

TWO
And a thousand doors were slammed on them.

_They knock again._

HERMES
Hello, we’re tired, we live on the street, and we hoped that you might –

OFFSTAGE VOICE
I’m sorry, I’m ... um...sooo sorry. Sorry.

_Door slams._

TWO
At last they came to a little hut on the outskirts of town.

HERMES
Why bother knocking here? We’ve knocked on houses of all kinds, the homes of people with plenty to spare. Whoever lives here obviously has nothing.
ZEUS
Let’s give it a try all the same. We’ve come all this way.

*He knocks.*

HERMES
This is hopeless. Let’s just go ho---

BAUCIS (*entering*)
Poor strangers! Philemon, there are guests at our door!

ZEUS
Hello. We are strangers to these parts. We’ve lost our way and –

PHILEMON (*entering*)
Baucis, why are you standing there! We must bring our guests inside.

ZEUS
Do you know us?

PHILEMON
Of course.

HERMES
You do?

PHILEMON
Yes –

HERMES
Then who are we

PHILEMON
Why, you are children of God. Come in, come in.

THREE
The two immortals, satisfied that their disguises had not been seen through, entered the house, lowering their heads to fit through the door.

BAUCIS
No, don’t sit on the floor! Sit on chairs, as quality people do.

ONE
Philemon ran to get another chair.

TWO
And Baucis fetched two pieces of cloth to pad them so the strangers might rest easy.

THREE
She stirred the coals in the hearth and fanned the fire to cook them a meal.

ONE
Philemon set out the embroidered cloth that they saved for feast days.

TWO
Baucis saw that one of the legs of the chair was short and she propped it up with a shard of a pot.

THREE
Philemon set out a plate of olives, green ones and black, and a saucer of cherry plums.

ONE
Then there was cabbage and some roasted eggs...

TWO
For dessert there were nuts, figs, dates, and plums.

THREE
And a basket of ripe apples.

ONE
At last, with a show of modest pride, they brought out a bit of honey-comb for sweetness.

TWO
Philemon poured wine from a bottle, but as he filled the glasses of the guests, he saw that the bottle remained full.

ONE, TWO, THREE
And then they knew.

BAUCIS
Oh, mercy! Mercy!

She runs with her husband to kneel in front of the gods.

PHILEMON
You are divine and we’ve served you such a simple meal. Baucis, go and kill the goose!

ZEUS
Let it live. We are gods and we thank you. You’ve done enough, more than your nasty neighbors thought to do.

THREE
Suddenly, everything was changing. The poor little house, their simple cottage, was becoming grander and grander, a glittering marble-columned temple. The straw and reeds of the thatched roof metamorphosed into gold, and the gates with elaborate carvings sprang up, as ground gave way to marble paving stones.

HERMES
Old man, old woman, ask of us what you will. We shall grant whatever request you make of us.

BAUCIS and PHILEMON whisper to each other.

BAUCIS
Having spent all our lives together, we ask that you allow us to die at the same moment.

PHILEMON
I’d hate to see my wife’s grave, or have her weep at mine.

TWO
The gods granted their wish. Arrived at a very old age together, the two stood at what had been their modest doorway and now was a grandiose façade.

ONE
And Baucis noticed her husband was beginning to put forth leaves, and he saw that she, too, was producing leaves and bark. They were turning into trees. They stood there, held each other, and called, before the bark closed over their mouths,

PHILEMON and BAUCIS
Farewell.

THREE
Walking down the street at night, when you’re all alone, you can still hear, stirring in the intermingled branches of the trees above, the ardent prayer of Baucis and Philemon. They whisper:

COMPANY
Let me die the moment the my love dies.
ONE
They whisper:
COMPANY
Let me not outlive my capacity to love.

TWO
They whisper:
COMPANY
Let me die still loving, and so, never die.

The three siblings reset the attic to the condition it was in the beginning, leaving the book behind. As they begin to exit, MIDAS enters. Each of his steps is accompanied by the ring of little finger cymbals. He stares at them in desperation for their help. The three siblings together go to the book, pick it up, and thumbs through quickly to see if they might have missed any portion of his story. No luck. As they begin to close the book, TWO discovers a blue piece of fabric tucked away in the spine of the book. As she pulls the fabric, it grows longer and more full. It is almost a magical moment as this fabric has not been present in the book throughout the entire afternoon. She rushes the blue fabric over to Midas and he washes his hands. He begins to walk around, this time without the finger cymbal accompanying him. He is now restored to his original state. He looks up and his DAUGHTER enters, restored to life. They move toward each other. She tries two times to embrace him, but he starts away, frightened. The third time, she succeeds. They kneel together.

Blackout.