

## A CONTEMPORARY VERSION OF THE AFRICAN FOLK TALE

### “The Ape, the Snake and the Lion”

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#### OUR STORY

Myron, a young teenage boy, lives with his Mom in a poor, run-down neighborhood in a small city. She is a single mother; the boy's father died shortly after he was born. Myron and his mother live in poverty. His mother works as a maid, and earns very little; they often don't have enough to eat. Myron decides to help his mother out by becoming a street seller. His mom agrees to let him do it, but is worried that he's going to get involved with the wrong kinds of people. She warns him to stay away from “street people” while making his rounds. Myron promises his mother he will be careful. He fills his back pack with things like t-shirts, socks, household items, Chicklits, candy bars, chips, etc., and starts going around to local beauty shops, cafes, parks, bus stops, etc. to sell his stuff. He does well. He has good prices and earns a lot. He is able to help his mom with expenses and even makes enough so that his mother can tithe to the church.

But suddenly, everyone in the neighborhood falls on hard times. It turns out there is a real estate developer who is trying to gentrify the neighborhood. To get rid of the poor people, he raises the rents dramatically, forcing some folks to leave the neighborhood, and others to become homeless. Those few who are able to stay are so strapped for money that they stop buying things. Myron's business dries up and soon, he and his mother are hungry again. His mother is struggling to make the rent, which has gone up like everyone else's. Myron decides to try to find a job. He fills his backpack with his few remaining goods, and heads out in the city to find a job, hoping to sell a few things on the street along the way.

While he ventures into the city, he runs into a homeless man living in his car. (Ape.) The man is distraught and doesn't know what to do. The police have told him he has to move his car or they will confiscate it. But the car has a flat tire. The young man reaches into his backpack and pulls out a tube of glue. He uses it to patch the man's tire. They get the tire fixed and the man is able to move his car and keep his “home.” The man thanks him profusely and offers to repay him if he ever gets the chance.

Myron continues on his way. He runs into a mentally ill person sitting in the curb, half naked, howling with rage and pain. (Lyon.) Myron asks him what is wrong. The man tells him he is cold. Myron opens his backpack and gives the man a t-shirt and a pair of socks. The beggar stops howling and thanks him and says he would like to help Myron in return if he could.

Myron continues on his way. He runs into a beggar who is panhandling and not having any luck. (Snake.) He's hungry and hasn't eaten in two days. Myron gives him the last bag of Fritos and a candy bar out of his backpack. The beggar thanks him and promises to help him in return if ever given the chance.

Myron, who hasn't found a job, and hasn't sold anything all day (in fact, he has given away almost everything that he has), heads back home. Along the way he runs into a finely dressed man who has a bloody nose. He asks the man if he needs help. The man reveals that he tripped on the cracked sidewalk in this lousy, no-good dump of a neighborhood, and fell down. He complains that he is getting blood

all over his good suit. Myron reaches in his backpack and pulls out a mini purse-sized packet of Kleenex. He gives the man the Kleenex. The man snatches it and wipes his nose with it, then walks away without even saying thank you.

Myron returns home to find his mother distraught. She has received a notice for having fallen behind in the rent. She is ordered to pay her rent in full immediately, or show up to court to face eviction in the morning. Myron reveals that he had no luck finding a job that day. Moreover, his backpack is empty from having given away everything he had.

His mother puts on her coat and tells Myron to follow her. They walk to a nice neighborhood far away from their neighborhood. They come to a big house with a fancy door. His mother knocks on the door and the rich man, who had the bloody nose, and whom Myron had helped earlier, answers. When he sees them on the doorstep, he immediately slams the door. The mother pleads with the man through the door to not evict them, but the man refuses to respond. Myron and his mother leave and walk home in the dark.

The next day, the mother and Myron appear in court to answer the eviction notice. In the courtroom are the beggar, the homeless man and the mentally ill man, all of whom have been charged with vagrancy. When they are all called before the magistrate for vagrancy, it is revealed that they had all been evicted from their homes by the rich man. They have nowhere else to live but the street. They are given stiff fines. When the magistrate calls Myron's mother to stand before him, the Magistrate reveals that in addition to being evicted, her son Myron is also being fined for selling items on the street without a license. He was seen yesterday selling glue, t-shirts, socks, Fritos and candy bars out of his backpack. When Myron asks who has made this accusation, it is revealed that the rich man had filed a complaint. The beggar, homeless man and the mentally ill man ask to testify about this charge, and tell the judge that Myron didn't sell them these things; he had given them, freely. Moreover, the beggar saw Myron extend kindness to the rich man by giving him Kleenex for his bloody nose. The magistrate disregards their testimony; after all, they are street people and are not to be trusted. The magistrate tells them to sit down and states that the charges against Myron will proceed.

With that, the mother reveals that she has not been able to pay rent because her son's father has not paid child support. Myron is shocked to hear this; he had been told that his father was dead. His mother reveals that his father is very much alive; and in fact, that his father is the rich man, who has brought these charges against Myron. He abandoned them right after Myron was born. The Magistrate summons the rich man to the bench. When asked if this is true, he denies it. But Myron's mom presents the magistrate with the NDA signed by the man wherein he admits to fathering a child with the mom, who once worked as his maid. The mother presents bank records proving that the rich man has failed to provide the child support promised in the contract. The rich man can't hide; he is exposed.

The magistrate orders the rich man to pay the full amount of child support owed over the years. The rich man says he can't do that; the amount owed is too much. If he is forced to pay it will stop his latest business venture, which is the "neighborhood redevelopment," i.e., gentrification project. He needs the money to start and complete it. The magistrate is unmoved. Myron and his mother are awarded the full payment in court. As a final gesture, the magistrate drops the charges against the beggar, homeless man and mentally ill man, dismisses their fines and vacates their previous eviction notices, restoring them to their homes.

## SILENT MOVIE VERSION

### CAST OF CHARACTERS

Myron, a 12-year old boy - *countertenor*

His mom, a single mother, who works as a maid - *lyric soprano*

A homeless man - *bass-baritone*

A mentally ill man - *tenor*

A beggar - *contralto*

A rich man - *dramatic baritone*

A magistrate - *dramatic mezzo-soprano*

Misc. people (cops, buyers, homeless people, courtroom lawyer, etc.)

### PLACE

A poor, run-down neighborhood in a small city somewhere in the US

Libretto Outline	Score Outline
<b>Scene 1. The curtain rises on:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Myron, with his head in the refrigerator, which is empty, except for ½ a stick of margarine</li><li>• He takes the margarine, then searches the cupboards, but they, too, are empty</li><li>• He grabs a spoon, sits at the table and starts to eat the margarine like ice cream.</li><li>• Mom enters, then stops suddenly when she sees Myron eating the margarine</li><li>• She snatches the margarine away from him, in horror.</li><li>• She ransacks the cupboards looking for food but they are empty.</li><li>• She plops into a chair at the table and eats the margarine with a spoon, like ice cream.</li><li>• They finish eating the stick of margarine; Myron licks the wax paper it was wrapped in.</li><li>• Myron jumps up from the table, snatches a transistor radio on the counter and runs out of the house.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Music (no dialogue) accompanying Myron's search for food – tone: somewhat sad, but sweet and curious</li><li>• Mother enters in with a fast-talking <i>recit (dry)</i> – tone: frustrated, surprised, perhaps embarrassed</li><li>• <i>Recit</i> melds into a <i>short aria</i> by the mother about their plight – tone: warm but sad</li><li>• Original curious music abruptly returns accompanying Myron's exit – tone: faster and more dynamic</li></ul>

### Scene 2.

- Myron sells the transistor radio to someone on the street.
- He pockets the cash, then darts into a bodega.
- He charges out of the bodega with a bag full of stuff and runs home
- Myron dumps the bag of stuff on the table, revealing chicklets, chips, candy, etc.
- Myron and his mom share a bag of chips
- Mom fetches an old rucksack. She stuffs the rucksack with Myron's stuff
- Myron charges out of the house with his rucksack

- Music accompanying dialogue between Myron and buyer – tone: cunning
- This musical style continues as we wait for Myron to come out the store, run home, and dump the bag of items on the table – tone: still cunning, but more eager
- *Duet* between the mother and son, musically expanding on the mother's *aria* from SCENE 1 – tone: motivated

### Scene 3. (Musical sequence: selling)

- Myron hawks items on the street and sells his stuff, pocketing the cash
- Myron darts into the bodega
- Myron darts out of the bodega with two bags of stuff
- Myron runs home
- Myron empties the bag; in one are supplies to sell; in the other, a cooked chicken
- Myron and his mother sit at the table and devour the cooked chicken
  
- Myron leaves the house with his rucksack
- Myron hawks more items on the street and sells more stuff, pocketing more cash
- Myron enters the bodega
- Myron exits the bodega with three bags of stuff
- Myron heads for home; once there:
- Myron empties the bags; in one are supplies to sell; in the other, ribs, salad and cake
- Myron and his mother sit at the table and leisurely enjoy this bigger, better dinner
  
- Myron leaves the house with his rucksack
- Myron hawks items on the street but no one buys
- He hawks some more; still no one buys

- Despite the sad circumstances, this will be a fun musical sequence—postmodern, regarding the eclecticism of musical styles depending on who Myron interacts with (not stylistic clichés, but rather an introduction of *leitmotifs*). There will be interesting dialogue (*accompanied recit*) here and there between Myron and the buyers, the clerk, and his mother (though the exchange with his mother will be more extended, bringing back earlier motifs) – tone: coercive, smooth, resolute

**Scene 3. (Musical sequence: selling) – cont.**

- When it's dark, he heads for home; he passes the bodega. It has a "closed" sign.
- He and his mother eat a bag of chips from his rucksack for dinner.

**Scene 4.**

- In the morning, Myron circles help wanted ads in the newspaper.
- Myron leaves the house again with the newspaper and his rucksack
- He arrives at a store with a "closed" sign. He double checks the address in the newspaper ad—he's in the right place—then crosses the ad off his list
- Myron heads for the next place on his list
- He walks through city, now filled with homeless people.
- He stumbles upon a homeless man, living in his car, who is arguing with a police officer
- The police officer orders the man to move his car, but the car has a flat tire
- The police officer barks orders into his walky-talky
- The homeless man falls to his knees and begs the policeman to stop
- The policeman kicks him away, then starts writing a ticket.
- Myron lifts the homeless man, who is now weeping, off the ground
- The homeless man shows Myron the flat tire
- Myron opens his rucksack and pulls out a tube of glue
- Myron glues the hole in the tire, then pumps up with air from the pump in the trunk
- The man hugs Myron, kissing him on both cheeks, then jumps in the car and drives off.
- The cop finishes writing a ticket, but when he looks up, the car is gone.
- The cop pockets his ticket and leaves

- Myron has an *aria* describing his plans for the day – tone: determined, motivated
- The *aria* melds to just music, musically dramatizing the moment he reaches the closed bodega until he encounters the homeless man
- *Recit* dialogue between the homeless man and the police officer – aggressive (police officer), helpless (homeless man)
- Warm music accompanying the actions of Myron helping the homeless man
- Dramatic music for "the escape"
- Ends with a short *recit (dry)* by the cop – tone: confused, angry, comedic

### Scene 5.

- Myron continues on his way, passing more homeless people in the street
- He arrives at a store with a “closed” sign. He double checks the address in the newspaper—he’s in the right place again—then crosses the ad off his list
- He consults his list for the next place, then continues walking
- He meets a mentally ill man, half naked, sitting on the curb, howling in pain
- Myron tries to comfort the man, who is also shivering from the cold
- Myron opens his rucksack, pulls out a T-shirt and a pair of socks.
- He helps the man to dress himself by putting on the shirt and the socks.
- The man grabs Myron’s hand and squeezes it.

- Similar thematic material from the beginning of SCENE 4, but different mood – tone: more anxious, less hopeful
- Myron has a short *recit (dry)* expressing his frustration
- Mentally ill man has a *short aria* – tone: disjunct, confusing, nonsensical
- *Aria* interrupted by *recit* dialogue between the mentally ill man and Myron
- Meld back into a *short duet*, similar musical material from the mentally ill man’s *aria*, but this time it’s more lyrical and coherent

### Scene 6.

- Myron continues on his way
- Next, he meets a beggar who holds out his hand asking for money
- Myron opens his rucksack and places a bag of chips and a candy bar in his hand
- The beggar gives Myron a fist bump then devours the chips and candy hungrily

- Music only accompanying actions with similar thematic material from the beginning of SCENE 4 and SCENE 5, but different mood from both – tone: sweet

### Scene 7.

- It is getting dark, so Myron turns around and heads for home
- In front of the bodega he finds a finely dressed man with a bloody nose
- The man kicks the sidewalk in fury
- Myron approaches the man, who immediately backs away and waves him off.
- Myron reaches into his rucksack and pulls out of small packet of Kleenex
- Myron holds out the Kleenex to the man
- The man snatches the Kleenex, wipes the blood from his face, then walks away

- Uneasy music
- Very short musical exchange (*recit accompanied*) between the finely-dressed man and Myron – tone: dismissive (finely-dressed man); naïve (Myron)

### Scene 8.

- Myron returns home to find his mother with her head down on the table, weeping
- She holds up an eviction notice.
- Myron plops his rucksack on the table
- His mother opens the rucksack, looking for food, but it's empty
- His mother puts on her coat, takes Myron by the hand, and exits the house

- *Duet* between mother and Myron – tone: sad and frustrating, but tender
- Meld into instrumental music – tone: desperate and curious

### Scene 9.

- Myron and his Mom walk through the city, lined with homeless people on the street
- They enter a nice neighborhood where there are no homeless people
- They arrive at a big house with a fancy door.
- The mother marches up to the door and knocks.
- The rich man, whom Myron had helped earlier, opens the door.
- The rich man slams the door when he sees them.
- The mother pleads with the man through the door but the man doesn't respond.
- Myron and his mother leave and walk back home in the dark.

- Music accompanying their travels to the big house – tone: uneasy, helpless
- Mother sings *small aria* – tone: dramatic, defeated, and discouraged

### Scene 10.

- The next day, Myron and his mother enter a courtroom, with the eviction notice.
- The beggar, homeless man and mentally ill man are there, too, each holding a ticket.
- The rich man is there with his lawyer; they are eating croissants and drinking triple lattes
- The judge points at the beggar, homeless and mentally ill men to stand before him
- They shuffle to the judge's stand and hand him their tickets
- The judge marks each ticket, then hits his gavel
- The beggar pleads with the judge, pulling out his pockets to show they are empty
- The mentally ill and homeless men do the same

- Ensemble piece between the judge, beggar, homeless man, mentally ill man, rich man, rich man's lawyer, Myron, and his mother – architecture and tone: fast-paced, dramatic, and an amalgamation of musical themes associated with each person with various side conversations/interactions, culminating with Myron's mother producing the paternity document
- Judge sings *aria* with a few interactions by the rich man – tone: bold, commanding, dramatic,
- Ensemble piece between the homeless man, the mentally ill man, the beggar, Myron, and his mother – tone: disbelieve, relief, and hope

### Scene 10. – cont.

- The judge waves to a cop to take the men away
- The cop puts handcuffs on the three men and shoves them on to a holding bench
- The judge points to Myron's mother to stand before him, which she does
- The judge takes her eviction notice, makes a note on it
- The mother tries to talk, but the judge hits the gavel to shut her up, then points to her seat
- Myron's mom returns to her seat
- The judge points to Myron to stand before him
- Myron turns to his mother in confusion; the judge hits the gavel
- Myron approaches the bench; the judge hands him a ticket.
- Myron looks at the ticket with confusion. He starts to object, but the judge hits the gavel
- Myron points to the beggar, mentally ill and homeless men on the bench
- They stand up and try to talk, but the judge pounds his gavel many times to shut them up.
- Myron opens his pockets to show the judge they are empty
- The judge waves to a cop to take Myron away
- The cop puts handcuffs on Myron and shoves him on the bench with the other three men
- Myron's mother jumps up and points to the rich man
- The rich man waves her away, dismissing her
- The judge calls the rich man to the stand
- The rich man's lawyer jumps up to object; the judge points for him to sit down; he does
- The rich man stands before the judge.
- The judge leans over, points to Myron's mom; the rich man shakes his head no
- The mother opens her purse, pulls out a legal document and waves it at the judge
- The rich man's lawyer jumps up to object. The judge points for him to sit down



### Scene 10. – cont.

- The judge motions to Myron's mother to approach the bench; she does
- The judge takes her papers and reviews them.
- He holds them up to the rich man
- The rich man turns to his lawyer, who jumps up to object
- The judge hits the gavel for him to sit down and shut up once and for all
- The rich man turns to Myron's mom, he reaches out and tries to take her hand
- Myron's mom recoils from him.
- Myron's mom points to Myron, who stands up
- The rich man refuses to look at Myron
- Myron shuffles over to the rich man; the rich man turns away from him
- Myron points at the rich man; his mother shakes her head yes
- The judge takes the mother's contract, writes on it and hits the gavel
- The judge orders the cop to fetch the rich man
- The cop puts handcuffs on the rich man and shoves him on the bench
- The judge points to the beggar, mentally ill and homeless men to approach the bench
- They stand before the judge.
- The judge points to the cop to remove everyone's handcuffs, which he does
- The judge collects everyone's tickets and Myron's eviction notice, crumbles them into a ball and pitches them in the garbage can
- The cop leads the rich man out in handcuffs
- Myron, his mom and the three men hug in celebration and leave the courtroom victorious