

SHAMAN – A Two Act Play

Copyright Kyi May Kaung

Note: This play was praised by Edward Albee, and was a Pew Finalist Script in 1996, under its former title Flashback. It was also a winner of the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts Award when it was only a one paragraph concept. It has had readings and a staged reading in the Washington, D.C. area directed, cast and produced by Peggy Fleming.

List of Major Characters:

Kaythee – A woman from the Third World

Dr. Bradford Doak – a white psychiatrist

Lady Golden Words – died of a broken heart

The Great Unifier

The Trusted Minister

Little Miss Flute

The White Horse Spirit

Tattooed Warrior Immune to Bullets

The Leper King

Strong – A Muslim

The Little Ones

The Expert, a Caucasian

Carl Carpetbagger

Sonia – Carl's secretary

Kaythee's Father

&

Dr. Robert Kronstadt

This play and the incidents and characters contained in it are entirely fictional. Any resemblance to persons living or dead is entirely coincidental.

ACT ONE

Scene 1. Prologue – A Village in Burma

Scene 2. Predictions

Scene 3. Jackpot

Scene 4. Good Fortune

Scene 5. One Nine Hundred

Scene 6. Darkness

ACT TWO

Scene 1. Psychiatric facility – Kronstadt and Doak

Scene 2. Psychiatric facility – Doak and Kaythee

Scene 3. Boy meets Girl

Scene 4. Tiger

Scene 5. Them

Scene 6. Strong

Scene 7. Integration/Farewell

Epilogue: Bradford

Production notes.

ACT ONE

Prologue – A Village in Burma

Curtain closed. Burmese music of flutes, drums and bamboo xylophones. THE EXPERT, dressed in a gauzy dress and flip-flops, with a camera and a carryall bag slung over her shoulder is preparing to expound. Music fades out.

THE EXPERT (*notebook and pen in hand*): Um. Animism is a subculture in Burma. I haven't

been in this village long. Um. It's very hard to get a visa to come and study here.

Twelve months my visa was in the works. All my books and stuff are stored in four different places in America. Talk of academic gypsies! I lost one full time job, hopped from temp to temp, waiting. At last *Sighs*

Could only come finally because they want greenbacks, and now – *Aside*. The worst things in this country are the government and the toilets. Why, you'd think such a refined people would have septic tanks – after all they had wonderful hydraulic engineering since the eleventh century. Look at their canals! But no, they must have open pits sprinkled with lime in the countryside. *Lowering her voice and looking backwards over her shoulder*, Try as I might I can never really, really understand these people – but –

Recovering and growing louder, this counterculture of spirit worship is so different from the prevailing Theravada Buddhism, I just jumped at the chance to come here. Ah! Here she comes, the shaman.

KAYTHEE, ordinary looking, dressed in a T-shirt with an ethnic jacket over it and a sarong (wrap skirt) enters, sashaying a little as she walks, holding an enameled bowl filled with bunches of bananas and a green coconut with “rat tail” intact decorated with dangling red and white ribbons. She sets the bowl down in the middle of the stage. She is about thirty and moderately attractive.

EXPERT: Now Miss Kaythee, would you please explain for our audience here what this is?

KAYTHEE: *Ignoring the question and staring off into space.* He came and slept with you last night, you know –

EXPERT: *Talking down.* Now who was that exactly, Kaythee, perhaps you’d like to explain –

KAYTHEE: *With a wild look in her eye.* The Old Grandfather.

EXPERT: *Prompting.* You don’t have a human lover?

KAYTHEE: *Eagerly, almost orgasmic.* Oh, No! Miss Mannings. He hasn’t come to me in the night for so long, but last night it was just, oh!

EXPERT: *Suspiciously.* But how do you know he was here? From what I know you sleep all by yourself in your bamboo hut.

KAYTHEE: *As if she’s talking to a fool.* Every night I stretch the golden yellow satin bedspread on the spare bed in my room real tight. This morning it was all rumped. There was even something sticky on it, like glue.

EXPERT: *Disgusted. Changes the subject.* But you really must tell us what the bananas and the coconut are for. And the significance of the ribbons?

KAYTHEE: *Angrily.* They won't come unless they're ready and you treat them right. You have to treat them right. See! Spirits of the Stage. You must help me!

She kneels down to the right of the bowl, and bows down on the floor until her forehead touches it. She seems to be mumbling something. Curtain rises.

EXPERT: *Walking away into the wings.* Ah! What she means is the spirits need to be propitiated. And properly so. You know how suspicious actors, for instance, get. Break a leg, that sort of thing. *Exits.*

Suddenly it seems as if KAYTHEE is no longer KAYTHEE. She loosens her sarong, spreads it out, shakes it, to put air in. Then she reties it in a knot in front like a man. She squats on the floor, stage left, takes a corn husk cheroot out of her jacket pocket, lights it and starts to puff away at it.

The music strikes up and soon becomes frenzied. She starts to dance in a strange contorted manner, her elbows all angles. You can't tell if she's a man or a woman. The music rises to a crescendo, she writhes on the floor and falls over exhausted.

EXPERT: *Shouting, running to her from off stage.* Oh my God! Oh God! Why did I ever come to this fucking village? Fucking country. *Slapping her cheeks.* Kaythee, wake up! Wake up, Kaythee. Please! Somebody get a doctor!

(End of sample)