

**Anna Bella Eema**

A ghost story for three bodies  
with three voices

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### **A note on the style.**

This play is written for three actresses sitting in three chairs.

The action of the play is rooted in the story the actresses tell, and the way in which they tell it. In performance, the spoken word may suddenly shift into a sung aria, while the rhythms of an ambient soundscape can transform into the voice of an important character.

This shape-shifting sound world is essential to the movement of this piece. Sound moves about in this play as actors move about in others, and the progression and transformation of melodies and rhythms helps support the shifting points of view from which this story is told.

### **The Actresses.**

Actress # 1: A thick woman. Sturdy. Like Miss Amelia in Carson McCuller's Ballad of the Sad Cafe. She has stayed put, like a tree, for most of her life. She has a strong, deep voice: her roots reach deep into the earth, searching for the water that might bring her back to life.

Actress #2: Impish. Eyes that sparkle and a voice that reaches toward the sky: it loops, stretches and rockets. She is ready to blaze on out of here.

Actress #3: Also Impish. Sometimes she seems like Actress #2's twin sister. Until we glimpse her mischievous, supernatural soul.

### **A note on sources.**

Some of the text in this play was inspired by/excerpted from the book "WILD ANIMALS I HAVE KNOWN" by Ernest Thompson Seton.

Certain aspects of the oratory style were greatly influenced by Cecil Michael's "ROUND TRIP TO HELL IN A FLYING SAUCER." Thanks to Mr. Michael for his unabashed belief in the supernatural and his ardent need to profess his belief in words.

Many thanks to the MacDowell Colony, which gave me the time and space I needed to finish the first draft of this play, the Minnesota State Arts Board, which helped fund my residency at MacDowell, and to the Playwrights' Center, New Dramatists, and Nautilus Music Theater for helping me develop this play.

*Three actresses sit in three chairs, facing the audience. The actress sitting in the middle, Actress Number One, sits a little closer to the audience than two and three, so the three women form a triangle.*

*Each actress has an old, rusty TV tray in front of them. Each TV tray is carefully set with kitchen tools, books, tape recorders, glass bottles and other random objects.*

*As the audience gathers, the actresses are "tuning up": finding sounds in the objects on the trays, setting the objects in the correct places, warming up their voices. Eventually, the actresses sing a round, a prelude to the play.*

### ONE, TWO, THREE

Mud Girl, Mud Girl  
Six little fingers and Six long toes  
See the mud girl  
Climb up the trellis  
To peer in the window  
Munching on a Rose  
Mud Girl, munch

*Actress ONE looks the audience in the eye, and begins to speak.*

### ONE

My name is Irene and I have been alive here in this trailer home for as long as I can remember. When you are alive in one space for such a long time the things that you remember mix with the things that are happening now, and the things that you dream about. What I mean is, sometimes the things that are happening are equal to the things that are not happening. So as I speak to you please do not ask me to come clear on such points as "happened" "did not happen" "is happening"

"will happen." They are all simmering in one pot. Here on the electric radar range inside this trailer home.

You can see I am a thick woman. Look at my wrist. One time someone tried to poke a stick through this wrist, in order to pin it to the ground. They poked and poked and poked but the stick would not go through. The scar is long gone, as you can see. This kind of thickness goes for the rest of my body too. Look at my ankle. Look at my waist.

Here is the time line of my life: Birth. Learn to talk. Learn to read a little. Learn to love. Learn to walk (yes, very late). Father is leaving. Learn to watch my mother smash bottles. I am gaining weight. Go to school. Math. Learn how to not get made fun of. Camping out with the kids in the trailer park. Learn how not to love too much. Pull the thick braids of the rich girls. He is smiling at me. Darkness and Breathing in dust. Mother, I feel a bird fluttering. I am having a baby. Look at her beautiful teeth! I am 15 and then now I am 25.

*ONE considers the audience.*

Here we are.

I was visited by a werewolf once. The werewolf said to me: "The life of a wild animal always has a tragic end." He took out his fangs (Fake fangs! I exclaimed), laid them on the table, threw his knapsack over his shoulder and left. Here are the fangs.

*She takes out a pair of fake fangs and places them on her tray.*

I want to tell you the story of my girl, and the time she made her own girl out of the plain mud right here in this trailer park, and how my girl's girl helped me face certain forces slouching closer and closer to this trailer home, and how this chain of events lead to my girl to becoming the girl she is today.

ONE

Right now I am taking you to the pull -out couch. This is how we sleep here in the trailer home. There is a small bedroom over on the other side of the home, off the kitchen. But you cannot see the TV so well from there. At night, me and my daughter pull out the pull-out couch and get in to watch TV. When we get in, the pull-out couch squeaks like so.

*TWO does a startlingly good imitation of a pull out couch squeaking.*

We try not to move too much so we can hear what the TV has to say. Once we fall asleep, I hear my daughter say:

ONE, TWO, THREE (*A dissonant trio*)

You are so thick, mother!  
So like a tree thick rings  
circle round your heart  
I cannot feel you breathe  
you are so thick, mother  
mother do you breathe?

*THREE makes the noise of TV Static.*

ONE

I pop awake and she's asleep and I see the TV hissing at me so I turn it off.

*THREE stops*

She is breathing heavy on the pull out couch and grinding her teeth. I know I'll never get to sleep so I walk to the window and open it. The full moon is out. I look at it and think about how I never really tried to get out of the trailer park. This was the trailer park I grew up in. Some people call these mobile homes. In order to make it mobile you need wheels and I don't have wheels. You will

notice that my mobile home sets upon eight regular cinder blocks, with extra plywood covering for protection.

This is what my daughter is like in the mornings: Impish. She lies in the bed like she's talking in her sleep: the same creepy spells over and over.

TWO

*(sings)*

Who Shot the La La  
I don't know  
Who Shot the La La  
I don't know  
Who Shot the La La  
I don't know  
I think it was a 44.

ONE

When I do get her up, she bounces on the pull-out couch like it was a motel room bed.

*THREE makes bed spring noises.*

ONE

Get down.

TWO

No!

ONE

Your feet are dirty.

TWO

It's exercise.

ONE

You shouldn't grind your teeth.

TWO

My teeth are STRONG!

ONE

The good days are when she stops and the bad days are when her head bursts into flames while she laughs and leaps laughs and leaps, throwing the fireballs in my eyes and turning the trailer home into a regular smoke-house.

I was visited by a social worker once and I lied and said we left the ribs in the oven for too long. She said "Ribs belong on a grill, ma'am." I thanked her politely for the tip and she didn't come back.

This is what I think about the world.

*TWO and THREE back her up: this is ONE's aria.*

I don't much like it. Some people take to flying off to foreign lands, find the one perfect spot in the hopes that they might find themselves. Me, I keep the circumference of my life small. I lick stamps for a living. My girl gets home schooled. I have many books.

*Pause in aria as all three women dump out large sacks filled with books.*

I have many books and I lick stamps for a living. The same thing over and over. Some people call this monotonous. These are the same people who spend their time flying off to foreign lands. I think of them sometimes as I lick. Like this.

*ONE begins to lick stamps and stick them on a piece of paper as she speaks.*

I wonder what kind of person would fly off to Peru? I wonder if he has a wrinkle in his brow and pains in the hinge of his jaw. I wonder if he likes his "apartment." He lives in an "apartment" with a wrinkle in his brow. He knows if he can get apart from his "apartment" he will become complete. Even though his apartment is quite nice. He thinks of his nice apartment as he squeezes into the small, hot seat of the airplane. On his way to Peru.

I wonder what kind of person would sail to Alaska. A person with a heart two degrees hotter than normal body heat: 100 degrees point 6. One day my girl will sail to Alaska.

I wonder what kind of person would take a train to Indianapolis.

*All music stops.*

I draw a blank.

These are the things I think of as I lick: the peculiarities of 2-footed creatures that plod upright upon this earth outside the circumference of this trailer park. I spy them with my hawk's eye high -

*ONE shows us her eye.*

I have many things to say.

On the day my little girl made a girl, the temperature was 91 degrees at sunrise. The trailer home felt like the inside of a wolf's mouth. My girl skipped her bed-jumping, brushed her white teeth and started talking something like this:

## TWO

*(sings)*

The hens have been disappearing for over a month now, mother  
And the trailer homes too.  
The air is as thick as your skin these days,  
the machines so loud I can't play jacks or even hopscotch.  
It's all coming to an end, mother  
I can feel it in the back of my throat  
Is there anywhere we can go mother?  
In or out or up?  
Is there anything we can make mother?  
From a broomstick or a cup?  
The hens are disappearing mother  
the coon, the owl, the fox  
The hens have disappeared mother  
wake up, wake up, wake up!

## ONE

My mouth is sealed shut, perhaps from the glue of the stamps, perhaps from the knowledge that it is best not to respond to such foolishness. She is stomping on the floor. She is waving post-marked letters before my eyes. She is dancing a queer dance to get my attention. She is breaking a glass.

She went out the door.

*ONE holds up a broken glass.*

This is the glass she broke on the morning my girl made a girl. I did not go to the window. But I could hear her hoary spell.

*TWO and THREE whisper "Who Shot the La La " under the following speech.*

I tried to stick to my job but she was loud. I was hot. She was singing and singing and singing. My heart is beating twice the number of its normal beats. What more does she want me to do? I am not a lady with an airplane or even a fancy pair of shoes. I am well-read enough that I can teach her the things that need to be taught.

I know the things I shelter her from are out there, I know it, but I am a kind woman, a good woman, a mother with many things to say. I am offering you all I have, I have read you every book I own. I am feeding you straight from the vein now, I feed you what is left of my soul. Do you want to destroy me? She wants to destroy me. How can I ever teach you the things that need to be taught? I want to destroy you and leave you and never come back!

*The whispering stops.*

When she came back inside, she had another girl with her.

TWO

*(Out of breath.)*

Mother! Mother, its a girl!

ONE

I felt I could not look at this second poor girl, but I did. I noticed she had mud on her fingernails. Then I noticed she had mud rubbed into the crook in her arm. Then I noticed she had mud pressed into the hollow of her collar bone. And in the creases of her face as she smiled.

She is smiling at me.

She was a filthy little thing. She crossed to my table and sat down as though it was her own table

That is the table I use for licking stamps. That is the table I use for licking stamps.

TWO

Maybe she will eat.

*TWO places an apple on her table.*

TWO

Eat.

ONE

She would not eat.

TWO

Maybe she will write.

*TWO places pen and paper on the table.*

TWO

Write.

ONE

She would not write.

TWO

Maybe she is deaf. HELLO!

*THREE cringes, covering her ears.*

ONE

She could hear.

TWO

WHERE-DO-YOU-COME-FROM!

ONE

My girl started yelling.

TWO

WHERE-DID-YOU-COME-FROM! WHERE-DID-YOU-COME-FROM!

ONE

And she took my girl's face in one of her hands and drew my girl's face to her face.

And she took my face in one of her hands, and drew my face to her face. We were face to face to face. The new girl was the only one breathing.

END OF EXCERPT