

THE YELLOW BELLY PONDEROSA PROJECT 2013

By Flagstaff Arts and Leadership Academy's 2012-13 Advanced Creative Writing

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CHARACTERS

STORYTELLER	Jesse	Jeremy	Matt V.	Matthew C.
ANIMALS	Cast	Cast	Cast	Cast
FOX	Takalay	Peri	Grace	Naomi
RAVEN	Meilani	Jazlee	Marley	Tiago
THREE ELDERS	Ashlyn Emma T. Ragdoll	Sunday Alex Sean	Rebecca Audrie Oceana	Roxie Lynn Megan
SHERMAN	Haley	Talia	Dylan	Nathaniel
GOSHAWK	Grace	Bre	Alex	Bryce
MOUNTAIN LION	Jesse	Jeremy	Matt V.	Roxie
THREE NEWCOMERS	Grace Ash Ashley	Bre Amy Sunday	Alex Aimee Audrie	Bryce Lynn Nathaniel
WOLF	Emma T.	Alex	Dylan	Megan
BEAR	Ragdoll	Sean	Oceana	Matthew C.
WOODPECKER	Ash	Amy	Aimee	Lynn
LIZARD	Ashley	Emma A.	Audrie	Bryce
BEETLE	Grace	Bre	Alex	Nathaniel
ELDRIAN	Ashlyn	Sunday	Rebecca	Roxie

(Drumming. The play opens on a festival, celebrating the autumnal equinox; the end of harvest, the turning of the sun. A dance occurs, in which all characters are on stage. The animals gather around the STORYTELLER, a tree aged in time and wisdom.)

STORYTELLER

Welcome children. I am the Storyteller. I have come to tell you a great tale.

AN ANIMAL

Trees know stories?

STORYTELLER

Trees have practiced the art of storytelling for many years, young one. We have told stories of great warriors and fierce battles and terrifying creatures. We Yellow Belly Ponderosa Pines have been around for many years, seen many things, and we have remembered.

ANOTHER ANIMAL

I'm three years old. How old are you?

STORYTELLER

I was born in 1676 – one hundred years before the United States was even a country! The forest back then was very different than the forest you see today. It was spacious, with clumps of huge beautiful pine trees all around. And many different animals lived there.

ANOTHER ANIMAL

That's how it was supposed to be, right? Not like now ... with all the trees growing so close together

STORYTELLER

Yes. And it was a time when life was renewed every few years.

AN ANIMAL

Because of fire?

STORYTELLER

Yes. During storms in the summer, lightning would strike the ground and start surface fires that would burn across the forest floor and renew the soil. These fires burned up dead pine needles, grasses, small shrubs, and young trees like I used to be! But I was one of the young ones who made it through. And as I grew older, taller, and stronger, my bark grew extra thick in order to protect me from surface fires.

ANIMAL

Your bark is amazing. It has large yellow plates; they look like something on a gladiator's shield.

ANIMAL

And it smells like vanilla.

STORYTELLER

The ways of the forest have changed. Animals are bustling and fro as if there is nothing more important. No one wants to hear the stories of the trees anymore.

ANIMAL

Why do you want to tell us a story?

STORYTELLER

Stories have power. A story can heal. Do you believe me?

ANOTHER ANIMAL

We would like to hear a story, Great Yellow Belly Ponderosa Tree!

ANOTHER ANIMAL

Yes, please tell us!

(The ANIMALS mumble in agreement and settle themselves at STORYTELLER'S feet.)

STORYTELLER

Our story begins here with Raven and Fox.

RAVEN

Come on, Fox! We have to get the firewood before the sun goes down. Night begins to fall so early this time of year. We can't get lost in it!

FOX

I still want to play! Let's pretend we're on the ocean and this is my ship and this is my sword ...

AN ANIMAL

Those are heroes? They're so young ... like me.

STORYTELLER

Hero is not an age. It is a willingness. Hero is ordinary creatures put in extraordinary positions.

FOX

Wait! Look! The sky is falling.

RAVEN

Ha-ha! Oh Fox, it's just the first snow. It's beautiful, is it not?

FOX

It tastes like...like peace.

RAVEN

Peace? How can the snow taste like peace? How do you know what peace tastes like?

FOX

Go ahead, taste it. You can just feel it. It's everywhere. Everything is so still; it's as if our voices get lost in the air. *(beat)* Wait...Raven, it stopped snowing.

RAVEN

What? No, Fox, look! The branches of the trees are thicker, they're blocking out the sky!

FOX

Where are we, Raven?

RAVEN

I don't know, Fox. Everything seems darker here. Even the trees are darker.

FOX

And the trees are so young and thin. There are so many of them. The trees seem sad.

RAVEN

These trees are strangers to us, Fox.

FOX

I don't feel safe here. The air is heavy.

RAVEN

Look at that tree. I can almost see its tears.

FOX

We should go back, Raven. I feel anxious.

RAVEN

The trees...

FOX

We have to go, Raven!

RAVEN

They look so sad.

FOX

Do you know where we are? The path is gone. I think we're lost.

RAVEN

I think the trees are lost too, Fox.

STORYTELLER

Nothing is lost when we are lost together.

ANIMAL

What happened to the poor forest?

STORYTELLER

Once, this forest was a place of happiness. Everyone and everything lived in harmony. The trees all danced in the wind to the same song and the water pumped through the ground and was the heartbeat of the earth beneath us. But over time, the forests grew thick and our heart started beating unevenly. The cycle was broken and the forest became very unhealthy and needed help.

(The THREE ELDERS enter.)

ANIMAL

Did Fox and Raven find their way home?

STORYTELLER

Fox and Raven did find their way home. Three Elders from high on Dook'o'oosłíid, the San Francisco Peaks, decided what must be done. They met with Fox and Raven.

RAVEN

We went past the village into where the forest is sick.

FOX

We were just playing. I love playing in the forest.

ELDER 2

And we love for you to play there. The forest is a place of great imagination.

RAVEN

I wasn't playing. I was doing science experiments.

ELDER 2

Raven, we love that you want to know more. The forest is also a place of ecological knowledge.

ELDER 1

Yes. You two brave souls have been chosen from here in our community on Dook'o'oosłíid. It is not only a sacred place, the Colorado Plateau has the largest ponderosa pine forest on the planet.

ELDER 3

You must journey into the world to find the answer to healing. The forest is overcrowded – the trees must be thinned. Restoration of the forest must be completed. It must happen now.

RAVEN

What is restoration?

ELDER 3

Should a crown fire happen, great destruction will result.

RAVEN

What's a crown fire?

ELDER 2

And the smoke that goes into the communities far far away from the forest.

ELDER 1

Not just the fire, but all that happens after ...

ELDER 2

Great flooding ...

ELDER 3

Mud in our drinking water ...

ELDER 1

The damage to the earth ...

ELDER 3

The mountain watersheds affect all of us.

RAVEN

What is a watershed?

ELDER 3

You are full of questions, Young Raven. You will learn of all we speak of ... on your journey.

ELDER 2

We have chosen you, Raven, for your wisdom and humility. Fox, you were selected for your cunning and wit.

ELDER 1

We must take care of all we have been given: the forest, fresh air, water ... we serve as stewards of all we have been granted.

ELDER 3

Your task is no small one: You are to bring back tokens of the four elements, Air, Fire, Water, and Earth. When you bring the four elements together then harmony will return, balance will be restored.

ELDER 1

Upon you, Fox and Raven, we bestow the gift of courage. Here, in the land of small spring, Arizona, you will face many struggles.

ELDER 3

The blistering heat of the desert that will boil your blood ...

ELDER 2

The freezing cold of the mountains will sink deeply into your bones ...

ELDER 1

You will travel through monsoons ...

ELDER 3

And against the wind ...

ELDER 2

You will travel on the charred earth ...

ELDER 1

And on the horizon that holds up the sky

ELDER 3

You will watch the earth stumble through a broken cycle as you try to find your way.

ELDER 2

Your journey will not be easy.

ELDER 1

The creatures you meet along the way will help you. Listen to their words. Heed their advice.

ELDER 3

What say you young ones?

FOX

We can't? We're not big enough. We're just two critters of the earth.

ELDER 2

The warrior's approach is to say yes to life. Say yay to it all.

FOX

Yay.

RAVEN

Fox?

FOX

Yay. I have no idea what's ahead of us, Raven. This is a journey we must go on. This is the great leap into the unknown.

ELDER 1

What say you young one?

RAVEN

I am full of doubt. How can I heal the land? I recognize how small I am in the universe. Yet my heart says yay.

ELDER 1

Take these with you. Our harvest was great this year.

FOX

Pinon. My favorite!

ELDER 2

There is much protein and pinon keep your hunger at bay.

ELDER 1

This food will help to sustain you on your journey.

ELDER 3

Now go. Go with your heart. Bring back the tokens of the four elements.

ELDER 2

Be brave.

ELDER 1

Be bright.

ELDER 3

Be bold.

THE THREE ELDERS

Our hope rests with you.

(FOX and RAVEN in a clearing in the forest. The two slowly walk around, FOX brushes her paw on some ferns, enjoying the papery texture. RAVEN studies the sky with a critical stare, not enjoying the backdrop as much as FOX.)

FOX

I can't believe they chose us to go. Out of everyone. You I understand, but me?

RAVEN

Enjoy it, Fox. The Elders know where we belong and that is here.

(A few more moments of this, until a startled scream breaks the pleasant silence. FOX and RAVEN almost immediately wrinkle their noses. FOX gags, whereas RAVEN quickly covers his nose and mouth with his hand/wing. Another scream breaks out, this time mixed with agony and disgust. FOX continues to gag some more, but a little harder this time. RAVEN starts to gag, too, but not as much as FOX.)

FOX

Raven, what is that!? Ugh, what is that awful stench! I can't breathe like this!

(FOX starts to cough.)

RAVEN

I- I think it's... a skunk! *(An animal runs away, coughing and wheezing.)* Yes. It must be a skunk. I've only heard of these creatures; never have I seen one before, *(lets out a small cough)* let alone smell one!

(SKUNK appears, looking over his shoulder, not noticing FOX and RAVEN. FOX coughs, causing SKUNK to jump and scream.)

SKUNK

Who- who're you?

RAVEN

(Says in a nervous voice, not wanting to get sprayed.) I'm Raven, and this is my companion, Fox.

SKUNK

Wh-what do you want!?

RAVEN

Well, we want nothing from you.

FOX

Raven! This poor creature is obviously upset and you're not helping. *(Turning back to SHERMAN.)* Sorry, Raven doesn't mean to be rude, he can sometimes lack social skills.

RAVEN

I do not.

FOX

(Coughs awkwardly.) Anyway, we're looking for a way down the mountain. We need to journey to Flagstaff and beyond and we, well *I (RAVEN scoffs and rolls his eyes.)* was wondering if we're going the right way?

SKUNK

You mean you're looking for a way off of Dook'o'oosliid? I've never been down from the mountain before ... But my parents showed me a path leading south of here, once. I can show you the way if you want.

FOX

That would be wonderful.

(SKUNK takes the lead and the three walk in silence, until RAVEN speaks quietly to FOX.)

RAVEN

Just because sometimes I'm shy and stumble over my words ...

FOX

Skunk seems a little standoffish. Come on Raven! Go up to him, ask him a few questions, make him feel welcome.

RAVEN

Well, all right ... *(Walks up to SKUNK.)* Hi ... skunk... you surely have a name other than skunk, don't you?

SKUNK

Everyone calls me Sherman...

RAVEN

Sherman? *(Beat.)* I like it. Sherman.

SHERMAN

Really? *(He says with a weak smile.)*

RAVEN

It's a splendid name. *(RAVEN looks back at FOX, who is smiling giving him a thumbs up.)*

SHERMAN

Thank you. I spend a lot of time out here alone, so I know what it means to be shy.

RAVEN

What do you do out here alone?

SHERMAN

Sometimes, I write poetry.

RAVEN

I thought you looked creative.

SHERMAN

It's my white stripe, isn't it? So, where exactly are you going?

RAVEN

We're on a mission to find the tokens of the elements so the land can be healed. But we're not sure where they are.

SHERMAN

Hmmm ... I'm up all night and speak with the Moon and she told me of one in the southern land. He might be able to help you. He's called the collared lizard. He has quite a story, I've heard.

RAVEN

How would collared lizard be able to help Fox and I?

SHERMAN

He might hold one of those tokens you're looking for.
(RAVEN's head shoots up.)

RAVEN

Really? Where does he live?

SHERMAN

In the desert, where the land is hot and dry. That's what the Moon told me.

RAVEN

Collared Lizard ... Thank you, Sherman. *(FOX walks up, smiling broadly.)*

FOX

Thank you, Sherman. See, Raven! That wasn't so hard! *(Says this with a mouthful of berries.)*

SHERMAN

Being with you two reminds me that there is a time to be alone and a time to be with others. Well, here is the path you need! The trail is a bit rocky, but it's the only one that leads out of the forest.

RAVEN

Will you leave us with a poem of yours?

SHERMAN

Would you like to hear one?

FOX & RAVEN

Very much!

SHERMAN

Here is one:

We live in mysteries far to great to understand.
How the Northern Goshawk will wait an hour for its prey.
How wolves detect smells from a mile away.
How the hummingbird, the tiniest bird in the world,
Remembers every flower it visits.
Your journey like the rabbit will go in leaps and bounds.
Look to her; she has what you seek.
You can hear the songs of the Ponderosa Pine
And the sacred place you now leave.
Tread lightly, protect, and learn the
Great learnings of this sweet earth.

RAVEN

That is beautiful.

FOX

Thanks a lot Sherman!

RAVEN

I hope our paths one day cross again.

SHERMAN

When we love and express our true selves, we will attract those who share our path and repel those who don't. Stay warm, friends. Winter is coming early this year.

(FOX and RAVEN walk down the path, waving back at SHERMAN, who is waving and smiling back. They jump over bushes and rocks, and avoid walking into the cramped trees. FOX eagerly takes lead of the trek, keeping a few paces farther than RAVEN.)

FOX

What do you think Sherman meant about the rabbit?

RAVEN

Well, rabbits are alert and aware of their surroundings. Maybe we should be.

FOX

Perhaps. Ah, it will be nice to meet with Sherman again! I'm proud of you, Raven, you're... really...
(FOX takes a sudden pause, which causes an absent-minded RAVEN to bump into her.)

RAVEN

Fox! What's gotten into-

FOX

Hush! *(She ducks into a bush and motions RAVEN to join her.)* Who is that?
(She jabs a finger over to an entering GOSHAWK, a proud looking hawk. GOSHAWK does not notice the two. Instead, he walks with an attentive gleam in his eyes, as if seeking out something in particular. RAVEN peers over FOX'S back and grows an increasingly horrified expression. He claws his fingers into FOX's back.)

RAVEN

(In a hushed, panicked voice.) Oh... oh no.

FOX

Raven, what is it? You're hurting me!

RAVEN

SHH!

(The GOSHAWK snaps his attention to the bush where the duo is hiding. He peers suspiciously at it. RAVEN smacks a hand over his mouth before covering FOX'S mouth with his other hand. The GOSHAWK is about to investigate before a stick snaps from off stage. He immediately exits. RAVEN releases his grip and pushes himself away from the bush, collapsing onto the ground. He's shaking and panting. FOX follows and hunches over him, confused.)

FOX

... Would you please explain all that?

RAVEN

It isn't safe here. *(He sits up.)* We need to leave. Right now. Find a place to hide.

(He stands up and takes FOX'S hands, lifting her off the ground. He doesn't let go as he makes way off stage before FOX rips away from him.)

FOX

Now you wait just a minute! Who was that?

RAVEN

(RAVEN grabs FOX'S hand again in attempt to pull her off stage. RAVEN is growing more frantic by the second.) I don't know *who* it was, but I sure know *what* it was. Now, come on!

FOX

Raven, hold on!

I don't want to!...

(The two have a brief power struggle before RAVEN gives up and shoves FOX away. FOX falls to the floor. She looks up at RAVEN with a mixture of confusion and hurt. RAVEN puts hands to cheeks and shakes his head in dismay. He's about to reach down to help FOX up and apologize profusely before the sound of a snapping twig comes from off stage. RAVEN jumps back from the noise and FOX. He's about to say something to FOX before another twig snaps. He can only look at FOX and barely croak ...)

RAVEN

Fox, let's get out of here.

FOX

Raven! RAVEN!

(A third snapping twig is heard. GOSHAWK is scouring the forest floor. FOX moves herself over to the opposite side of the tree shielding any view GOSHAWK may have. FOX clears out her voice before bellowing out in an exaggeration of RAVENS'S voice.)

FOX

I say! You there, with the overstuffed feathers!

(GOSHAWK immediately snaps into attention. RAVEN sits, completely mortified. FOX is fighting hard to contain her giggling.)

GOSHAWK

What is this?! Whoever dares speaks to me in such a manner?

RAVEN

Fox stop joking around. I think this animal is not so friendly as Sherman.

FOX

What are you, a funny-looking goose or a funky chicken? I'm sitting right here!

(GOSHAWK whips his focus straight into RAVEN. Petrified, RAVEN only gives a meek smile and hand wave.)

GOSHAWK

You ...

RAVEN

(squeaking) Greetings ...

(While still out of sight of GOSHAWK, FOX shoves RAVEN who ends up right in front of GOSHAWK'S feet. GOSHAWK stares down at RAVEN, a dark, seething gleam in his eyes. RAVEN clammers up into a sitting position, his horrified gaze never leaving GOSHAWK'S. RAVEN attempts to inch away from the predator, only to have GOSHAWK follow him step by step. Even FOX can feel the tension between the two as her expectant smile begins to waver.)

GOSHAWK

(Placing an emphasis on almost every word.) So, it was you with the mockery...

RAVEN

N-no. I-I-I d-didn't m-mean it ...

GOSHAWK

What do you wish for?

RAVEN

N-nothing. Please, please, just let me go. I-It'll n-never happen a-again.

(GOSHAWK continues to glare down at his prey, before his expression softens and he sighs.)

GOSHAWK

Child, I am a native animal here. The changing forest made it more and more difficult for my species to exist. We are fewer today than we were before. And you should respect your elders.

RAVEN

I'm so sorry to hear that.

GOSHAWK

Thank you. Now, you shall come with me. *(He reaches down and grabs RAVEN with an iron grip. RAVEN gives out a yelp in pain.)* You will serve well as my prey.

RAVEN

A skunk told me you can wait up to an hour for your prey.

GOSHAWK

Indeed I can. Come along, then. *(He begins to drag a squirming RAVEN while FOX looks on in horror.)*
The least I can do is treat you as such.

RAVEN

No! Please! Fox, help me! I'm so sorry, Fox! Please, help me!
(He and GOSHAWK exit. FOX is frozen to the tree, jaw dropped and eyes wide open ...)

FOX

... oops. *(Exits.)*
(Light, the glow of a crackling fire on a chill winter's evening, falls upon the stage, revealing RAVEN and GOSHAWK standing to stage right as though they've just exited the biting cold and entered a warm and welcoming abode. Upon the stage a table is set with a two teacups waiting to be filled. On the wall, a rabbit with necklace. GOSHAWK presses a hand to RAVEN'S back and guides him to the table as he speaks, any hint of menacing intent is absent from his voice.)

GOSHAWK

Isn't this a beautiful nest. It has a wonderful clearing to hunt prey. A long time ago they were chopping down so many old growth trees to build houses and the railroad that it became difficult to find a suitable one. Come now, please, have a seat.

(GOSHAWK pulls out a chair and gestures for Raven to sit, which he proceeds to do so, exuding anxiety all the while as GOSHAWK pushes in his chair for him.)

Now then, I'll fetch some tea to drive away the cold.

(He promptly walks offstage, his footsteps receding as he does so, RAVEN watching his departure all the while before he quickly stands and runs for the door, straining to open it to no avail. He stops when GOSHAWK'S approach can be heard, causing RAVEN to dash back to his seat, scooting back in just before GOSHAWK re-enters, now holding a piping kettle. He fills their cups before taking his seat, looking at RAVEN expectantly.)

RAVEN

... Yes?

GOSHAWK

I've always felt that it is proper to thank an animal when they have been courteous enough to provide a beverage.

RAVEN

Oh! Yes, thank you.

(RAVEN proceeds to lift his tea from the table and blows upon it, and raises it to his lips, but stops just short of drinking from the cup, instead, he lifts his gaze to GOSHAWK.)

GOSHAWK

Well, why don't you tell me something about yourself?
(RAVEN looks up, his face twisted in incredulity.)

RAVEN

Why do you want to know about me?... Aren't you just going to eat me?

GOSHAWK

Indeed, but that does not mean we cannot have a polite talk beforehand, hmm?

RAVEN

I suppose.

GOSHAWK

Jolly good! Now then, why don't you tell me what you were doing at the forest's edge, and do be detailed, I wish to include your tale in my memoirs.

RAVEN

Well, it's difficult to explain, but... Oh, why don't you just eat me!?

GOSHAWK

Goodness, you're not a very good sport are you? Honestly, you're right up there with the gloomiest guests I've ever been in the company of. There was *Rabbit* ...

(GOSHAWK gestures toward the Rabbit head mounted on the wall as RAVEN begins to drink his tea. Around the Rabbit's neck is a necklace – the Air Token.)

RAVEN

Sherman!

GOSHAWK

I beg your pardon?

RAVEN

Nothing. Please continue.

GOSHAWK

She was always afraid, she always brought into the world that which she feared. I was close to letting her go, but she had that lovely Token of Air.

(Upon hearing this, RAVEN spits out his tea, blowing it all over the table, causing a look of incredible annoyance to cross GOSHAWK'S countenance. A moment of silence passes between the two, when GOSHAWK finally speaks up once more.)

Well... It would seem we have not only a solemn guest, but a messy one as well. I'll get a towel to clean up.

(GOSHAWK stands.)

And please, do stay put.

(With that he heads offstage once more. When he finally leaves RAVEN rushes over to the fireplace and hesitates, goes for the Air Token, but that act is interrupted by FOX's entrance.)

FOX

Raven!

(Seeing this, RAVEN'S mouth falls open, an expression of utter shock crossing his face.)

RAVEN

Fox...?

FOX

There you are! I've been looking everywhere for you!

RAVEN

Fox, you can't be here!

FOX

I am here.

RAVEN

Listen! Goshawk is really smart and it would be wise for you to leave. Now.

GOSHWAK

(From offstage.) Are you speaking with someone?

RAVEN

No! Just talking to myself. *(Sotto voce:)* He's coming back! You need to hide, right now!

FOX

What are you... Hey!

(RAVEN ushers FOX underneath the table, shushing her every time she tries to speak. By the time GOSHAWK returns with a towel, FOX is concealed and RAVEN has retaken his seat.)

GOSHAWK

Do you find that you talk to yourself often?

RAVEN

Oh yes, it calms me.

GOSHAWK

That makes sense I suppose. I find I'm my own best company.

(He begins to wipe down the table as RAVEN nervously glances beneath it. When he is finished, GOSHAWK retakes his seat and sips at his tea.)

Now, then where were we? Oh yes, in what manner should I eat you?

(RAVEN keeps silent, avoiding GOSHAWK'S stare.)

Oh come now, I'm trying to be nice and you're being awfully rude in ignoring me. It's winter and I'm quite famished, on the brink of starving in-fact, so would you be so kind as to-

FOX

Wait, wait, wait, are you planning on eating Raven?

(GOSHAWK springs up from his chair, looking every which way.)

GOSHAWK

Who said that?!

FOX

I said that.

(FOX slinks out from underneath the table as RAVEN groans and facepalms with an audible smack.)

GOSHAWK

Ah! Fortune favors me this day! I've already caught one meal and then another tasty morsel stumbles into my abode!

FOX

I don't know about Raven, but I don't plan on being eaten.

GOSHAWK

Well, I don't see how you'll be able to avoid it now, you've wandered into the lion's den, as it were.

FOX

That might be the case, but you are far from being a lion. I've heard about you, Mr. Goshawk.

GOSHAWK

(Puffing himself out with self-importance.) Have you now?

FOX

I sure have. Everyone says you're a *proper* gentleman.

GOSHAWK

Oh, who am I to refute that claim? But why are you pointing this out? Flattery will get you nowhere.

FOX

Oh I know, I just thought that a gentleman, such as yourself, would offer his prey a chance to defend herself, and I haven't been given that chance just yet, Mr. Goshawk.

GOSHAWK

I ... Suppose that is fair. How would you care to do so then? Would you prefer a fight with swords?

FOX

Sounds like fun but I want to make a bet.

GOSHAWK

In that case, do express the terms, and do so quickly. My stomach aches and my claws wish to be exercised.

FOX

Mmm... if you win... *(grins widely)* you can eat both of us.

GOSHAWK

And I'm guessing that if you succeed, I shall be forced to release you and your companion.

RAVEN

Yes. And we want the necklace around Rabbit's neck.

FOX

The Air Token? Raven, it was our destiny to come here.

GOSHAWK

Such interest you have in this Token of Air. I agree to your terms. What shall the challenge be then?

FOX

Hmm... I bet that I can guess your dad's name in three tries.

GOSHAWK

Hmph, that does not seem like much of a challenge. My father was widely known. Think of something else. And please, do hurry, I hunger, and your friend looks most distressed.

(FOX considers this once more. RAVEN'S facepalm evolves into a headdress.)

FOX

That's it! Mr. Goshawk, if one of us can make you laugh, really laugh, they will be the winner!

(RAVEN perks up at this, looking quizzically at FOX.)

GOSHAWK

I haven't laughed since I was a wee goshawk. This might prove impossible for you.

FOX

We accept this great challenge.

RAVEN

Yes we do!

FOX

Okay, shall I begin?

RAVEN

Go ahead Fox.

GOSHAWK

Splendid.

(FOX strides over to GOSHAWK'S side before clearing his throat.)

FOX

You'll find this funny, Mr. Goshawk. How do you catch a unique goshawk?

GOSHAWK

I do not know.

FOX

Unique up on it. How do you catch a tame goshawk?

GOSHAWK

Again. I am at a loss.

FOX

The tame way, unique up on it.

GOSHAWK

How rude. I resent that so-called joke.

FOX

Ouch. Your turn Raven.

RAVEN

Okay. I got this. What would occur if one were to apply catterwallens to a bandersnatch?
(FOX's face contorts into one of sheer confusion.)

GOSHAWK

I have no idea.

RAVEN

Said bandersnatch would be compelled to persue a noblewoman's bracegirdle!
*(GOSHAWK and RAVEN break out into raucous laughter as FOX stands there dumbfounded.
RAVEN braces himself against GOSHAWK as he wipes away tears of mirth. The laughter slowly fades.)*

FOX

I didn't find that funny at all.

RAVEN

Well, Fox, Mr. Goshawk's sense of humor is very ... refined.

GOSHAWK

Truly, Raven, you understand what is humorous. I haven't heard that laugh since my youth. Oh. I thank you for this release.

FOX

Well, I'd say that we won our bet.

GOSHAWK

I suppose... And seeing how I am a gentleman at heart I am obligated to send you both on your way, but I suggest you go ... now.
(RAVEN grabs the Air Token)

RAVEN

Our first token. The Elders will be proud. It has a message
Green plants absorb carbon dioxide
And release needed oxygen that we share
Forests are known as earth's lungs outside
Never take me for granted for I am air.
Mr. Goshawk, thank you for this worthy challenge.
(FOX grabs RAVEN by the arm and pulls him towards the front door as GOSHAWK calls after them.)

GOSHAWK

I won't soon be forgetting this!
(After they have gone, GOSHAWK sits back down to finish his tea.)
The poor fox have no sense of humor.

STORYTELLER

They wandered next into the Winter realm and searched for the Spring of Knowledge. The Winter on the base of Dook'o'osliid was cold and desolate and they had almost lost all hope.... but finally they found The Spring and filled a vial with its water. This was the second of their four goals: the Water Token. This, too, held a message:

(FOX and RAVEN, who are standing and talking. They have just come from the Spring of Knowledge, and RAVEN is holding a vial filled with its water.)

RAVEN

I am water come from rain and the snow.
Drop by drop channeled into southwestern dreams
What we do on the land affects water flow
and quality for those downstream.

FOX

Can it really be done? It feels like we only left home yesterday.

RAVEN

It's done. We have water from the Spring of Knowledge ... Fox?

FOX

I don't like that look Raven, why do you sound so troubled?

RAVEN

I must drink this water.

FOX

You can't.

RAVEN

I have to.

FOX

You don't know what it will do.

RAVEN

I know. I just have to.

(While saying this, he uncorks the bottle and pours a few drops into his mouth and swallows re-stops the vial, leaving most of the liquid still there. He does this quickly so that FOX does not have time to stop him, and he carefully hands the vial to FOX, and stands for a moment with a strange expression, silent.)

FOX

What have you done...

(RAVEN'S eyes widen. He opens and closes his mouth as if to speak, and then he falls backwards. Just as he is falling, though, MOUNTAIN LION steps from behind him, with drama, with intention, catching him and laying him down gently, then standing again to address FOX.)

MOUNTAIN LION

Come quickly. Follow me.

FOX

What are you talking about? I can't leave him. Raven!

MOUNTAIN LION

You have to come with me if you want to save him. There is only one way to wake him from this dream. If you move him, he will be no longer, and if you leave him too long, he will be lost. You have to come with me.

FOX

I can't leave him unprotected. It's snowing. He'll freeze!

MOUNTAIN LION

There are customs. There are rituals. We must act now.

FOX

Rituals? What rituals?

MOUNTAIN LION

He should not have done that. It wasn't for him. But it's done, and now you must save him.

FOX

I don't even know who you are.

MOUNTAIN LION

I am Mountain Lion. My home is here in the high elevation forest and in rimrock canyons and in mountainous desert areas. Now follow me. We have to be quick or he'll freeze.

FOX

I will go with you Mountain Lion. Raven, be well.

(They walk to the other side of the stage, creating a division down the middle of the stage between the dreamworld and reality. The focus leaves them, and they stand still, disengaged from the audience. On RAVEN'S side of the stage, a projection starts playing, choppy and strobing and sporadic like an old film-reel projector. Images of trees. Healthy, in equilibrium. RAVEN sits up, facing away from the audience, cross-legged, and watching his dream. A gentle hum resonates from the dream. Back to MOUNTAIN LION and FOX.)

FOX

What is happening to him?

MOUNTAIN LION

He is dreaming. His dreams will show him what was, what is, and what will be, and the essence of all beings, and their souls, and why they are, and he will gain wisdom.

FOX

But there's more, isn't there?

MOUNTAIN LION

All things have a price. The water from the Spring of Knowledge has sent him into the vision, but he must taste the fruits of the earth to wake up again. You must find him the cure.

FOX

But, Mountain Lion, why me?

(Back to RAVEN: A human silhouette. The sound of trains - distant but growing - he is transfixed, can do nothing but watch the dream. Images flash. The trees. Man. The trees. Man. The trees. Man. Then men, plural, many. A multitude of silhouettes. The sound of a train. Back to MOUNTAIN LION and FOX.)

MOUNTAIN LION

There is no one else. The two of you have become linked by your quest.

FOX

Tell me what I have to do.

MOUNTAIN LION

To this, like all things, there is a story.

FOX

Please, tell me.

MOUNTAIN LION

A long time ago, wolf was visited by a dream that sent him to protect the Tree of Wisdom. You see, for everything there is an opposite. For the Spring of Knowledge, it's opposite is the Tree of Wisdom.

FOX

But what does this have to do with Raven? How will this help him?

MOUNTAIN LION

Fox, he must eat of this fruit. Wolf went to the tree and its spirit told him of the power and danger it held in its fruit. So he made a promise to the spirit. He would defend the fruit and in return the spirit would love the intellect and instinct of the wolf.

FOX

I understand.

(RETURN to RAVEN: Many people. The trees falling. Smoke, construction, exploitation. the sound grows louder, constantly increasing, constantly moving forward. Growth, expansion, trees overgrazing. Return to FOX and MOUNTAIN LION.)

MOUNTAIN LION

The wolf and the spirit do not know one thing: The fruit that they protect is the cure for your friend. He has lost all ties to the world, and will dream forever, but its power will bring him back. The two opposite forces will return him to balance.

FOX

So all we have to do is explain that to the Wolf?

MOUNTAIN LION

I'm afraid that it's not that simple.

FOX

Of course it is. Wolf can't deny us after hearing why we need it.

MOUNTAIN LION

All these years, these eternities of protecting the fruit have changed Wolf's mind. He is jealous and protective now. He lacks trust for those in the world.

FOX

Then you've taken me all this way for nothing?

MOUNTAIN LION

It wouldn't be much of a story if it was easy. You have to use your wits.

FOX

But what if I can't?

MOUNTAIN LION

Then your friend is lost.

FOX

Will you help me?

MOUNTAIN LION

This is your story. You must face it alone and prove yourself.

FOX

And if I fail? Then you'll be responsible, and he'll be gone. How can you live with that?

MOUNTAIN LION

This is your trial. I cannot face it for you.

FOX

Then I will face it alone in order to help Raven...

(Return to RAVEN: Desolation. Trees grow back - too thick, too close. The struggle. Not enough sunlight. Not enough water. Not enough space. Wolf enters the dark side of the stage inconspicuously during this sequence. Choked. Too close. Not enough Space. Back to FOX and MOUNTAIN LION, but the dream does not fade this time. Both scenes move in unison.)

MOUNTAIN LION

I can go no farther. Be brave young one. *(MT. LION exits.)*

FOX

I have to use my wits ... Let me think...

(While she is thinking, the spark, and then fire. Human figures recoiling, running, organizing, regrouping, organizing).

The answer has to be in his story. *(The NEWCOMERS converge on the fire.)*

STORYTELLER

Once upon a time, the Newcomers started to come in larger numbers and they cut down the biggest trees, Yellow Bellies like me, to make places to live in. They also brought in sheep and cattle which ate the small plants and meadow grasses, disrupting the soils and creating bare earth. Without these understory plants the surface fires could no longer burn and the forest trees began to grow in the open spaces.

NEWCOMER #1

Intawanta.

NEWCOMER #2

Seleg a mantuna fest Oberlin.

NEWCOMER #3

Sonunta. Ynicomm ineed da nurbe.

NEWCOMER #1

Seyah. Ontee wash commin.

NEWCOMER #2

Akem ti so.

(The NEWCOMERS close in on the fire and open out again, and the fire is gone. Skeletons in its wake. The bones of the young trees. More rise up in their place.)

STORYTELLER

The First Peoples understood the importance of fire. They would set their own surface fires. These fires helped keep the forest from getting too crowded with trees and made it easier to hunt animals. Fire was part of the harmony of the earth – it helped the life cycles of plants and animals. But the Newcomers fought and put out almost all of the fires that started because they were afraid their structures would burn down and they thought fire in the forests was bad.

NEWCOMER #3

Hitay. If rifle enooga noe rome mite.

NEWCOMER #1

Kind golom mise twine nife.

NEWCOMER #2

Gread.

FOX

You can't do this. The fires must burn. Who are you? Who are you?

NEWCOMER #1

Elopee. Elopee.

FOX

I don't understand you. My name is Fox. I am Fox.

NEWCOMER #2

Oox.

FOX

Fox. These surface fires must burn. The forest must maintain balance. Otherwise great crown fires will come. *(Points to fire.)* The forest cannot become too crowded; otherwise it cannot support the surface fires that it needs to stay healthy.

NEWCOMER #3

Olaka. So olaka.

FOX

Yes. Yes. Olaka. It must burn.

NEWCOMER #1

No. Itall a ma gone once ocre.

(NEWCOMER # 1 sits FOX down. A movement piece. A dance of settlement. There is fear of the known and unknown and connect and disconnect from the land. And there is home. WOLF'S voice is heard before we can see him. The NEWCOMERS scatter.)

FOX

I must tell my community of this. This is a piece on the path to healing.

(By the fact that WOLF is unseen, his voice is endowed with a certain sense of mystery and danger. It booms with a certain bravado which is increased by his sense of purpose.)

WOLF

Who is there?

FOX

I am Fox, child of the earth.

WOLF

What do you wish?

FOX

I've been sent to meet with you this dawn, Wolf.

(WOLF enters now, exuding an air of tension and a slight confusion. He circles FOX distrustfully. Speaking with the halting air of someone who has not used words in sometime.)

WOLF

Who sent you?

FOX

The Moon.

WOLF

Yes. She told me you would come as a test.

FOX

You've been out here alone a long time.

WOLF

Yes. Except for the humans who tear through this way. I have felt anger for those who have taken so much, with no sorrow for what they do. It is as if there are two wolves inside me; one is good and does no harm. He lives in harmony with all around him. But...the other wolf...! The littlest thing will anger him. He wishes to fight everyone, all of the time, for no reason. It is hard to live with these two wolves inside me, for both of them try to dominate my spirit.

FOX

Which one wins?

WOLF

The one I feed.

FOX

But why do you stay here?

WOLF

Because of the promise I made.

FOX

You should always keep promises. What did you promise?

WOLF

That I would protect the fruit on this tree. Forever.

FOX

Forever?

WOLF

As long as I live.

FOX

That's a big promise.

WOLF

Indeed. It must be kept.

FOX

I think I shouldn't ask what is there.

WOLF

You shouldn't. The temptation would be too great. In the right hands, what is here holds power. In the wrong hands, it could be ... dangerous.

FOX

And you can never leave, not for even a second?

WOLF

Never. My life was such that there was a separation between being alone and being with my family, my pack. Now, that balance is gone.

FOX

That's such a lonely life though. There must be so many things you never did ... Things you could *still* do...

WOLF

Every moment, I long to be with my family. The spirit of this tree chose to bestow me with love. That love sustains me but it does not fill my heart.

FOX

You wish to see them.

WOLF

Oh yes. To share stories with them.

FOX

To share stories of your divergent paths. That could take a long time.

WOLF

Oh yes. It could. A story is forever. A story suspends time.

FOX

Do you remember where your pack is?

WOLF

I do.

FOX

What if someone could keep watch for you, just for a little while?

WOLF

That's not possible.

FOX

Wolf, I will guard the fruit.

WOLF

I have to keep my word.

FOX

I would keep your place. I could honor your promise.

WOLF

(With a flash of violence in his tone.) You're trying to trick me!

FOX

I'll give you my word that...that I won't let anything pass through here, and so nothing will be harmed by the fruit. And, and the Sun and the Moon will help me. They are my friends.

WOLF

Perhaps then you were meant to come here. The Sun keeps watch when I must sleep and the Moon keeps me company throughout the night. The Sun now arises. I will sleep on your idea and give you the answer when I awake.

FOX

Are you sure you don't have an answer now?

(WOLF looks for a long moment at FOX, making decisions, then finally comes to a conclusion.)

WOLF

That we of the forest work together – that is of great importance. And I will sleep on this. I will search for guidance in my dreams.

(WOLF goes to sleep, leaning against the tree.)

(Return to RAVEN: The succession of trees. Invasive plants. A campfire.)

RAVEN (voiceover)

Someone has left a fire.

(A spark breaks the darkness of the vision, the spark catches and erupts into a tremendous pyre that engulfs the single tree. The fire catches to another tree that appears and another after that. Forming the perfect crown fire. It burns itself out. Leaving us with the spare skeletons of the trees.)

(FOX waits a minute, knows what he must do and walks slowly toward the tree. WOLF stirs. FOX continues. WOLF stirs. FOX continues and picks the tree. He hides the fruit in his fur and replaces it on the tree with a pinecone. WOLF awakens.)

WOLF

What are you doing so close to the tree?

FOX

I am drawn to its wisdom.

WOLF

Stand over there and do not approach until I have awoken.

FOX

O-o-okay. It was a moment of weakness.

(WOLF goes back to sleep and MOUNTAIN LION enters.)

MOUNTAIN LION

Well done, young one. I will take the fruit to Raven. I must be quick, there's no time for you to follow. Stay here, and tell Wolf all that has happened.

FOX

I feel bad for tricking him.

MOUNTAIN LION

You've done no such thing. Wolf knows that the fruit holds power in the right hands.

FOX

But how will I find my way back to Raven? I don't know the path.

MOUNTAIN LION

That's part of the challenge. You have to sacrifice. You have to have faith to save your friend.

FOX

I don't have any choice, do I?

MOUNTAIN LION

You could try to find him without me.

FOX

I wouldn't though would I?

MOUNTAIN LION

You wouldn't.

FOX

I don't like it at all.

(FOX thrusts the fruit into MOUNTAIN LION'S hand.)

Go. Quickly.

STORYTELLER

Mountain Lion flew through the Forest of *Kinláni*, Flagstaff, to get the fruit to Raven. Fox stayed back awaiting Wolf's awakening. Raven was having visions of devastating crown fires and the flash floods that follow them. He was seeing invasive species overtaking the land, animals overgrazing, and how he, too, had become so separated from the land.

(Drums. Confused state, fog is still clearing, MOUNTAIN LION finds RAVEN and squeezes the fruit into his mouth. RAVEN slowly reawakens from the dream realm. He is groggy but aware of where he is. He sits up rubbing his head.)

RAVEN

What have I done? Fox? I'm so sorry that I... If only you knew the things I had seen, so terrifying. It's all gone, it's all... Fox?

(RAVEN notices the small thing FOX left behind to protect him (a small token of the air) he picks it up, and studies it.)

The Air and Water tokens are still in my possession. ...What have I done... I drank the water. She said not to. But I did.

(Holds the small object tightly in his wing and leaps up.)

I mustn't linger though. I have to find Fox.

(Meanwhile, far away from RAVEN, FOX continues her search.)

FOX

I have to find Raven. This forest is so strange, so new to me. I can't tell from North to South, East to West! Raven was so good at that. If he was here he could just fly up to the trees and ask. But I can't I'm just a silly little Fox with a silly little head.

BEAR

Silly, yes. Little, no.

FOX

Who was that?

BEAR

(chuckling) I would reveal myself, but I fear my appearance would scare you off.

FOX

Oh no-no-no I don't mind. Show yourself.

(BEAR enters a massive figure saunters over towards FOX. Her ears flattened down on her head in a frightened unease but she holds her ground.)

BEAR

I am from the Earth. I am from the smell of the dirt and the stickiness of sap. I am the forgotten child of the dew and the rain, glistening down from leaf to leaf in gentle droplets. I am made of the sound of rustling wind and the taste of warm, slow honey. The moss made my thick fur. The rocks are my razor claws and my jagged teeth. The bark formed my skin, and the fallen dew drops created my eyes. I am the child of the Earth. I sense your distress and I wish to help.

FOX

I'm not distressed I'm just a little ...

BEAR

You've only circled my den for the seventh time.

FOX

I... I'm searching for Raven, perhaps you've seen him Mr. Bear?

BEAR

A raven? I'm afraid not my child. I keep watch over the skies and the earth and if a raven has been here I would have seen him. But come, we shall look for him together.

FOX

That would be nice. I've been apart from my friend for a very long time.

BEAR

And why is that young Fox?

FOX

He drank water from the Spring of Knowledge.

BEAR

I see.

(Still in search for FOX, RAVEN calls out her name from time to time, circling around trees, looking in bushes. There's a noticeable rustling in a berry bush.)

RAVEN

That's got to be Fox! She loves berries. (*Rushes over to the bush, digs through branches.*) Fox! Dear Fox! How I have searched and... You're not Fox.

WOODPECKER

Me? A fox? Goodness no, either your eyes aren't working or there's something my mother never told me about. Sorry to disappoint. I am Woodpecker.

RAVEN

No. It's not a disappointment. I just saw the berry bushes move and I thought...

WOODPECKER

That I was your friend?

RAVEN

Yeah... actually, can you help me? She's about this tall, got bright, orange hair ... Have you seen her around?

WOODPECKER

Mmh. Can't say I have.

RAVEN

Oh... That's all right. I best be on my way now.

WOODPECKER

Now hold on, just because I haven't seen her doesn't mean I can't help. I can see fairly well, you know, and this is my basic territory. Come now, we'll fly together to find your little furry skinned friend.

RAVEN

I have chosen to walk. That's how Fox goes on this earth.

WOODPECKER

Defeats the idea of efficiency, but all right.
(*BEAR and FOX continue their search.*)

BEAR

The Spring of Knowledge It makes me think. Water is much: it is cultural, it is spiritual, it is scientific. Here: water is life. When he sees you once more, he'll have much to say.

FOX

He'll have much to say? He'll have much to say?! I will have much to say. (*grumbles*) I'll give him a piece of my little Fox mind.

BEAR

Ah, so you're angry with him for leaving you.

FOX

Of course I am. He didn't think. Whatever was in that water was more important than me, and that hurts Mr. Bear.

BEAR

But Fox, he is young. Though it seems like he knows all, he truly doesn't. Why, I remember back in my younger years as a cub! I caused my mother and sisters much grief. I'd climb to the highest, most breakable limbs of trees, just to get a glimpse at the horizon. Mother nearly fainted but I was just curious. As was Raven.

(Back to WOODPECKER and RAVEN.)

WOODPECKER

So... You ever going to tell me what happened?

RAVEN

It's a long story.

WOODPECKER

So is the way I woke up this morning, but that doesn't mean I don't have enough time to tell it.

RAVEN

I did something wrong, Woodpecker.

WOODPECKER

And that is?...

RAVEN

I did something I wasn't supposed to, and because of that we are separated. Fox must be very scared right now, and it's all my fault.

WOODPECKER

I wouldn't think Fox would be scared. Definitely angry, but not scared?

RAVEN

Angry? Why would Fox be angry with me?

WOODPECKER

If you really need to ask me that, you'll never get it.

RAVEN

Please, explain it to me. I want to know.

WOODPECKER

Oh, Raven, you have far too much earth in you for me to make much sense.

RAVEN

But I am a child of the skies, of the air, as you are, Woodpecker.

WOODPECKER

You say that, yet you choose not to fly. Face it, you are just as stubborn as the pebbles beneath your black feet. The element of air is an ageless element, as are the rest, wise and gifted they are, but Wind has the ability to appear as a child. Constantly moving and susceptible to change. A very whimsical spirit, just as your Fox.

RAVEN

You know nothing of Fox.

WOODPECKER

I know enough to ruffle your feathers. Therefore I know all that is needed. Raven, you must look past what you know and what you seek to know in order to understand.

RAVEN

Woodpecker I-

WOODPECKER

It is what we don't fully understand that propels us forward. That is why you must have faith in your Fox. Though you may not always understand her, or how you are to find her, you must follow what you know deep within.

(BEAR and FOX continue on, patches of sunlight are starting to appear more. Actors bring on pieces of cloth. A river.)

FOX

Must we cross here?

BEAR

I believe we must. This river is part of our watershed. There is also water under the ground that we can't see. Without these water sources, our forests become sick and we would not have clean water to drink ourselves.

The river keeps coming,
like memories of the land
through which it flows, singing.
Water journeys much like you.

FOX

The Elders spoke of watershed.

BEAR

Watersheds bring much needed water from the high land. Since the forest has grown dense and thick, trees use more of the water and there is less in the streams, underground and for us to drink. At the same time, we need healthy forests to hold the soil in place and maintain a balanced water system that we use for many purposes.

FOX

Let's cross, Mr. Bear?

BEAR

Indeed. *(They cross.)*

FOX

It's cold. I'm freezing.

BEAR

The snow is melting up on the mountain. Yes. The season of Spring has arrived. *(They are across.)*

FOX

When I was with Mountain Lion that night, he told me that Raven and I were ... *connected* by our quest.

BEAR

(Smiling down.) Mountain Lion is correct. You and Raven have a connection that will last long after the end of your quest, it will be there for life. In fact, I have a link with a silly, little friend. A child of the skies. Her name's...

(Just then WOODPECKER and RAVEN step out into the clearing, WOODPECKER notices BEAR and FOX right away.)

WOODPECKER

BEAR!

RAVEN

(Nearly jumps out of his skin.) Where?!

BEAR

Woodpecker! *(She flies over to him and enthusiastically flings herself into his awaiting arms, when they hug she nearly disappears in his massive body.)* How have you been? Fox, I'd like you to meet Woodpecker. When we were your age, we would go on adventures together.

WOODPECKER

Oh the trouble we'd get ourselves into! *(Beat.)* It was worth it in the end.

BEAR

Here is where I shall leave you, Fox. There is much you must discuss.

WOODPECKER

And to hear. You must listen to each other.

BEAR

To see clear skies, one must wipe away the clouds.

WOODPECKER

Be open hearted, let faith grow, and never again will you ever be lost from one another.

(The two mentors exit recapping on their grand adventures. FOX and RAVEN give each other a simple look, and quickly embrace.)

RAVEN

Fox, I am so sorry!

FOX

I know. It's ok.

RAVEN

I couldn't help myself, the knowledge was so enticing! But afterwards! The guilt was simply too much, I couldn't stop worrying about you and... Wait... did you say it was ok?

FOX

Yes. You didn't think it through. I was worried too, if only you knew how sickly you looked.

RAVEN

You saved me, didn't you?

FOX

Let's continue on, we can talk on the way.

(The two characters continue on in the spring realm. Sunlight leaves golden streaks through the branches and pine needles of trees and the trees themselves become further apart, there are vast spaces filled with greening grasses and flowers. There are lively shades of green and strange tints of red, from the cinders in the area, all about. FOX spots a patch of berry bushes and jumps up and down excitedly, licking her lips.)

RAVEN

I'm really hungry. Let me have some pinon.

FOX

I ate it all.

RAVEN

All of it?

FOX

It's so delicious and I was hungry.

RAVEN

I thought you had gained some weight. Well, here is a berry bush! Let's stop to eat. Some berries will do us good!

(FOX flings the berries into her mouth, smiles, and then nods at RAVEN. They gather a pile of berries and sit down on the soft grass, taking the time to enjoy their feast.)

FOX

The berries... They taste like the sun.

RAVEN

The sun? But Fox, you've never tasted the sun. You couldn't possibly know what that tastes like.

FOX

Oh Raven, I taste the sun every day.

(Playfully she throws her head back and sticks her tongue in the air. The sunlight glitters around her and she giggles. RAVEN tilts his head to the side curiously and then tries it.)

See? Isn't it wonderful?

RAVEN

I still can't taste it.

FOX

Ugh! Raven...

RAVEN

(Smirking.) But they are good.

(FOX looks around, obviously relieved to be in RAVEN'S company, she smiles. RAVEN smiles back, he stops, remembering the Token of Air. He brings it out to show FOX.)

RAVEN

We have the Air Token and the Water Token. We must journey on to find the other two.

FOX

This realm is so beautiful. Since we left home we have not found a more perfect place.

(RAVEN smiles at that, but then looks down as his new knowledge begins to haunt him.)

RAVEN

Fox, there's something I need to tell you... The visions I was given from the water... The trees were missing and so was the soil. The air was thick and the Sun was hidden behind it. The elements were missing and the Moon stared down at our lands in spite. There were also these furless, featherless, gangly animals and strange beasts.

FOX

I, too, had visions of strange beings. They were disconnected from the earth. Now though, now we are here.

RAVEN

Fox, that's just ignorance.

FOX

In this moment, we are safe. We have each other again. We have our entire quest to look to. If these strange, hairless, gangly animals do show up we'll deal with it then, together. Come let's journey on.

(Beat. Dusk is beginning to fall over the forest. RAVEN and FOX notice a log begin to glow. A flash of flames erupts from a log, and an image of a face appears. The fire dwindles, and COLLARED LIZARD seeps out from under a log, while RAVEN and FOX watch him. Strange noises overlap. COLLARED LIZARD speaks with a voice of an old sage, a forgotten voice.)

RAVEN

The Sun grows hotter. And now the trees have given way to sandstone and spires.

COLLARED LIZARD

Why hello there, old friends.

FOX

Friends?

RAVEN

Do we know you?

COLLARED LIZARD

Well out here in the desert, if we're not friends we're enemies. Are we friends, old friends?

(COLLARED LIZARD meanders and chuckles as he recalls his past life.)

RAVEN

Oh yes.

FOX

How do the creatures in the desert survive? There is so little here. It's hot here. I'm tired.

COLLARED LIZARD

So little, and so much. The desert is like a living being... The roots like veins, pumping water like the blood of the Earth. There is so much here, little Fox.

RAVEN

We've come to the desert in search of the Token of Fire. Do you know where that might be found.

COLLARED LIZARD

Fire? Yes. I lived up there – in the stars. The sun and I would hunt and run around together. Then dragonfly came and the sun grew jealous. He cast us down to earth and he rises everyday to remind me of the friendship we once had but grew apart.

FOX

That's a journey greater than ours.

COLLARED LIZARD

There is no greater fire than that of the sun, and when we came, we brought the sun to the land. We became one with the fire. The purity that fire brings ... it requires the greatest of responsibility.

FOX

Can you bring us to fire now?

COLLARED LIZARD

To be one with fire? That is a challenge no fox or raven could endure alone.

RAVEN

Will you help us? We cannot go home without the four tokens.

COLLARED LIZARD

I tell you now old friends, if there was no such thing as destiny, I would not be here and neither would you. *(Beat.)* I will help you the best I can. And you must help me.

FOX

How can we help you?

COLLARED LIZARD

Tell me a story.

RAVEN

A story will help you?

COLLARED LIZARD

Let me tell you, my old friend the sun can bring a heat so great that you barely know what to do with it. And when you sit there and a storyteller weaves their tale, you forget how hot it is. You forget about time. All there is is the story. I have the memory of every story every one who has passed this way has told me. I will add your story to theirs.

FOX

I understand.

(FOX dances the dance of the NEWCOMERS. He gets RAVEN to join in where needed.)

COLLARED LIZARD

Yes. With practice, you will be wonderful storytellers. Like that beetle.

RAVEN

That's just a cute little beetle. That beetle is a storyteller?

COLLARED LIZARD

Oh, yes, yes, yes. She has a story that must be told. She's going to take us where we need to go. Here, eat.

FOX

What are they?

COLLARED LIZARD

Pinon nuts. They will protect you.

RAVEN

We had some when our journey began, but Fox ate them all.

FOX

What will they protect us from?

COLLARED LIZARD

Where we're going. You want the Fire Token?

FOX & RAVEN

Yes.

COLLARED LIZARD

Rub the belly of that beetle. In her belly, she holds the story.

(FOX and RAVEN tentatively place their hands on the BEETLE.)

FOX

It's moving. It's growing. There is life.

RAVEN

The sun's rays, they are growing hotter.

FOX

I can't think. I can't move. I'm afraid.

COLLARED LIZARD

Use your fear energy. Listen to the beetle.

VOICES

The storm ... the great fire ... the flood ... No animals ... No trees ...

BEETLE

There on the mountain ... Do you see it?

RAVEN

That is our home. It's on fire.

BEETLE

The smoke will be here soon. This is the vision of things to come if things do not change. You've come here to learn the need for restoration. Restoring the forest to make it healthy again. Thinning the forest – cutting down trees so they are fewer. Making Yellow Belly Ponderosas abundant again. Setting controlled surface fires that cause pinecone seeds to be released so the next generation can begin. After these surface fires, native plants thrive, thicker and healthier. Restoration must happen now. You must tell this story to those you know.

FOX

I must save our home.

RAVEN

Fox. No!
(Several actors bring fabric on and FOX enters the fire.)

FOX

I can stop this.

RAVEN

Fox. Take my hand. This is only a vision. We must begin our journey home to tell our community all that we have seen.

FOX

I want to stop this, Raven.

RAVEN

I know, Fox. I know.

FOX

I can't feel my flesh.

RAVEN

Fox, take hold of my hand.
(RAVEN holds out his hand, not wanting to get near the fire.)

FOX

I can't.

RAVEN

Leap. It's not as far as you think.

FOX

Yay.

RAVEN

That's right. Yay. *(FOX takes RAVEN'S hand. There is a struggle.)*

COLLARED LIZARD

Now you have the story. You see?

RAVEN

Fox, are you okay?

FOX

I'm okay.

COLLARED LIZARD

Now go into the belly of the beetle.

(RAVEN puts his hand in the belly of the BEETLE. There is the Fire Token.)

FOX

The Fire Token. *(Reads:)*

Creative or destructive I can be both
Jumping from crown to crown ahead of the ground
Or burn only the surface litter and undergrowth
I am fire - respect me so new life can be found

COLLARED LIZARD

You earned it. I told you it wouldn't be easy.

FOX

That was intense.

COLLARED LIZARD

The Schultz Fire – do you remember that crown fire?

RAVEN

Oh, yes. It burned so much of our friends' habitat. It was started by a campfire.

FOX

And the floods that followed. The fire took away everything that would normally hold moisture.

COLLARED LIZARD

It also baked the soil to the point where it shed water, rather than absorb it. Years of flooding that animals must be careful about. That was a terrible fire. But the surface fires and controlled burns set by those educated in the ways of the forest– those are designed to help.

FOX

I understand.

COLLARED LIZARD

Now go. Your story continues.

(The STORYTELLER enters. There is smoke on the horizon.)

STORYTELLER

They are about to return to the place they call home. They were very frightened, by the vision of this fire, leaping orange and yellow flames and searing heat and all the white smoke billowing up to the sky, spreading over the land. They journeyed from the sand of the desert back to the rich forests, thick with the autumn aspens, gold-leaved and tinged with sunlight.

(FOX and RAVEN stumble into the aspen trees, trees undergoing the autumn transformation from green to a brilliant hue of orange. They look at first as though they are in a hurry and looking for the fire which they observed from the safety of the desert. Their expressions change to appear as if they're in awe and completely amazed.)

FOX

We are close to home, yet we are lacking something.

RAVEN

And what is that, Fox?

FOX

The tokens Raven. We have only collected three out of the four. We have the pendant of Air, the vial of Water and it's knowledge, and a tail of pure flames... But the fourth... Raven we have nothing from earth.

RAVEN

Fox-

FOX

How are we to restore balance without the fourth? We have failed.

RAVEN

No, Fox, we haven't. We're not home yet. Calm down. We are doing fine.

(They gaze at the leaves for a moment, and then look at each other. Suddenly, a HUMMINGBIRD runs from one side of the stage to the other, behind them. His movements are barely a green-blue blur, however, and FOX and RAVEN take a few seconds to register themselves from the shock and entrance of another character. FOX hears it while RAVEN continues to look at the leaves on the trees.)

FOX

Raven?

RAVEN

Yes, Fox?

FOX

We are not alone in this place.

RAVEN

Yes, the trees do seem very lively.

FOX

No, Raven, there is another here.

RAVEN

What do you mean?

FOX

I--

(FOX looks upstage at HUMMINGBIRD running again. RAVEN sees it, too.)

RAVEN

Look! It's a child of the sky!

FOX

Yes, Raven!

(FOX quiets RAVEN, and they wait for about a minute for the HUMMINGBIRD to enter. They are extremely silent, in the fear that they will scare the delicate HUMMINGBIRD away. There are various audible buzzing noises. They can hear the HUMMINGBIRD, but never see him. After a while of waiting, HUMMINGBIRD enters. His name is ELDRIAN.)

ELDRIAN

Hello!?! Awh, hello! Welcome, travelers, welcome here, to my home! This forest, this forest is my home! It is sacred. It is refuge. These changing leaves have brought many new creatures, of every size and shape, I see.

(FOX and RAVEN continue to stare at ELDRIAN. FOX turns to RAVEN with wide eyes and whispers.)

RAVEN

I've never seen this hummingbird.

(FOX turns to ELDRIAN. He swallows.)

ELDRIAN

Do not be afraid, my child. I have seen many like you, The Fox Of The Earth.
(ELDRIAN turns to RAVEN.)

And you, child, you are the black-feathered creature of the sky, the Raven.

RAVEN

How do you know this?

ELDRIAN

I have seen many like you in the days that this forest saw glory, health, beauty. I have been under many shining moons and heard many strange whispers from inside the forest leaves.

FOX

What is your name?

ELDRIAN

Eldrian. It is ancient, as old as the earth itself, and means “the wise see-er”. *(Beat.)* Your feathers match the color of the soot that clouded this forest, like the stormy skies, the summer monsoon.

RAVEN

You mean... Fire? There was fire... here!?! In this place! *(Beat.)*

ELDRIAN

Yes. But calm yourself, now. It was very long ago, long before you both were breathing the air of these woods. The fire existed inside the beauty of this place. It swallowed everything whole, like a starving wolf with hunger buried deep in his eyes.

RAVEN

When did this happen?

ELDRIAN

Very long ago. Before your time.

FOX

Do not let our age fool you, wise one, we too know of the scars of tragedy.

ELDRIAN

I am not fooled, child, for youth does not always mean ignorance. Even in your childish years, you can still harvest all the knowledge your minds can contain. What brings you to this forest, young ones?

RAVEN

Our journey towards home.

FOX

We saw the vision of the fire spreading through the hills, a warning, consuming the only place that we had ever known before we left.

ELDRIAN

Ah, a fate similar to my own.

RAVEN

Wait, your fate? What do you mean? After the fire, how can a place so beautiful and full of life such as this even exist?

ELDRIAN

The aspens were the first to return. They grow healthy with the passing of years.

RAVEN

But once everything was lost, how could these things return in the way they do?

ELDRIAN

Aspen trees are rooted, underneath the ground, inside the rhythms of the dirt. They are connected through the soil and have been since the dawn of their time. If you press your ear to the tree, you can listen to its heartbeat. All is connected. And you speak of home, young ones... This is ALL of our home.

FOX

I don't understand, Eldrian. Anywhere can be your home?

ELDRIAN

Everyone, everyone inhabiting this Earth has his or her responsibilities, young one. We all must care for each other, and ourselves. The forest: It is our home, our life. I can see you have the tokens of Fire, Water, and Air. You have yet to learn the lesson of your Earth.

RAVEN

How do we learn? How do we earn this token?

ELDRIAN

Breathe in the air around you. Feel the dirt beneath your feet, smell the sun, taste the moon, hear the cracks and snaps of the twigs underfoot in the forest. You see, child, Earth is knowledge. Earth is what you are. It is the place you know, and what you call home.

RAVEN

Eldrian, we need this token of the Earth. We must have the knowledge.

ELDRIAN

There is no "trinket" for you to take to your people. The Earth is all around you: drink the nectar, cherish the flowers, collect the petals and save them, respect and protect native plants and animals. We all have a role to play. Healing begins when everyone and everything comes together, like the roots of the Aspen. I have no Token to give you, I have only what you already know in your hearts.

FOX

But, Eldrian, we can't go home without the token of Earth!

ELDRIAN

Children, you must listen to the rhythms of your own heartbeat and the country of your soul, and only then will you be able to surrender to your fates and your beliefs and who you are. I cannot give it to you.

(The scene changes to the original scene of the ceremony. RAVEN, FOX, and the ELDERS.)

ELDER #2

It has been a long while since the two of you left us. We Elders have watched for you through fall, through winter, spring, summer and now another autumn. We welcome your return. Have you found what you were searching for?

FOX & RAVEN

(Together, in unison and harmony) We have.

ELDER #3

(With the ancient box in hand) Come now, children. Let us see the tokens you have brought.

(FOX and RAVEN look at each other and reveal the tokens they had collected. The ELDERS smile and holds up each one for all to see. announcing each individual token. After the Token of Fire is displayed he looks down at the children expectantly, assuming they had the fourth. They stare back at him and he realizes.)

ELDER #1

But children, do you not have the Earth Token?

FOX

Well... we have it, but we don't... You see, we weren't exactly given it ...

RAVEN

Wait, Fox. We do have it.

FOX

Raven, what do you mean?

(RAVEN steps forward plucking one of his black feathers off, he holds it up for all to see.)

RAVEN

I have the qualities of earth. I hold wisdom and understanding. I know of things real, I offer my reality, my stubbornness. I offer earth. Scientists, Forest Managers and Traditional Ecological Knowledge will help us care for the forest and our land. Communities and individuals will help too. Everyone working together.

(FOX is happy. She dances over to RAVEN's side, mimicking what he had just done, by plucking out a few of her bright, orange hairs and holding them high up for the others.)

FOX

And I ... I too have many qualities. For I am a Child of the Earth. I was born within it, I dance upon it every day. I am the ever-changing seasons, I am of the earth's very poetry. I am of life. I offer earth.

(They both turn towards one another. RAVEN holds onto his feather as FOX takes her hair and weaves it into the black feather, making it look like a writing quill caught aflame. They hold it up over their heads as if presenting a trophy.)

FOX & RAVEN

(In unison.) Together we give unto you the fourth token ... that of the earth.

(Back to STORYTELLER and the ANIMALS. In the next monologue the previous characters perform the actions as the tree narrates them.)

STORYTELLER

The Elders smiled in approval and in awe at the wisdom of the two young creatures. They gathered around and watched as young Raven and Fox placed all four tokens in the sacred box of balance. Together, they buried it underneath one of the younger trees and watched its beauty unfold.

ANIMAL

Wow. That is an amazing story!

ANIMAL

Great Tree? Whatever happened to Fox and Raven?

STORYTELLER

Ah, the tale of young Raven and Fox became well known as did the other adventures they embarked on as they grew older. For, you see, Bear and Mountain Lion were right. Raven and Fox's friendship lasted long after their original journey. But, of course, that was a long time ago. Those two passed into legend and now I am here to tell it.

ANIMAL

That tree, the one that they buried the tokens under... it must be filled with great magic!

STORYTELLER

Why, yes, I suppose it must, young one.

ANIMAL

Do you know where we could find it? I would like to see a part of the legend for myself.

STORYTELLER

Children, you have already found him! For I was that young tree they had buried the box of balance under.

ANIMALS

What?! Woah! Sweet.

STORYTELLER

Yes, children. And now I still stand here, reminding all of the young forest folk of the need for balance, to honor their struggles. Large scale restoration is needed just as large scale changes were made. I stand with my brothers and sisters in the Kaibab, the Coconino, the Apache-Sitgreaves and the Tonto. These four forests through great efforts are becoming healthy once again. And now I'm afraid our time has passed. Why, you'll completely miss out on your festival!

ANIMAL

The autumnal equinox!

ANIMAL

Oh gosh, I'd nearly forgotten!

STORYTELLER

Go now children! Go back to your festival, to your village, and tell the story of Raven and Fox and the Great Yellow Belly Ponderosa! Let our legends never be forgotten!

(... And there is a Friendship Dance/Celebration of Life between the cast and the audience.)