



Sample Pages from Mummu

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MUMMU

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT BY
Kirk Shimano



Mummu

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Cast of Characters

4 Any Gender

Mummu: Mesopotamian deity of engineering serving as tonight's emcee. Charismatic, if a bit domineering.

Reed: Plucked from a swamp, a simple scrap of vegetation that yearns for more.

Feather: Removed from a noble ibis and its associated lineage. Never misses a chance to let others know their place.

Cow parts: The large intestines of a cow, happily producing gas as they fester.

Casting Note

The characters in this play are either eternal beings or inanimate objects. As such, they are appropriate for any gender, race, age, or other human characteristics.

Pronunciation Guide

Mummu: MUH-moo

Ibis: EYE-buhs

Cyperaceae: sye-pur-AY-see-ee

Thoth: THOATH

Marduk: MAHR-dook

Lugalbanda: loo-gall-BAHN-dah

Uruk: OO-ruck

Gilgamesh: GIL-guh-meh

Ningursu: NIN-gir-soo

Ninurta: NIN-ur-tah

Enlil: EN-lil

Anzu: AHN-zoo

MUMMU: Hello, everyone. Thank you for joining me today at <insert name of venue here>. I am Mummu. You might be wondering why I am addressing you directly. Maybe you think it is because the presenters of this piece couldn't think of a better way to introduce me, but that is incorrect. The true reason why I am addressing you is that I am an ancient Mesopotamian deity and talking directly to the audience is something that I can do. What? You don't believe that is something that I can do? My apologies, I did not know I was in the presence of so many scholars of late antiquity. I would have worn my good pants. But I am not here merely to put you in your place. I bring you a story. A brief story – it happens in the space of a breath. Allow me to illustrate.

MUMMU looks around for something. They find a small object – like one of those beanbags or something – and hefts it in their hand.

The story begins.

MUMMU drops the object to the floor.

The story ends. Thus it comes.

MUMMU holds the object in the air once more.

..and...

MUMMU drops the object with a thud.

... thus it goes. I could tell you exactly what happens and we could be done right now, but you're expecting a one-act play and not a five second experience. I quite like the one-act format, as ten minute plays often end just as they're starting to get interesting and a bad full-length play can really ruin your evening. I mean, just because I exist on an eternal plane doesn't mean I have time for bad theatre.

But I digress. While the time of this story may be short, the emotional landscape it occupies is much greater. Let me begin by introducing you to our characters. There are three of them. The first is a reed.

REED enters eagerly, bending in the wind.

REED: Woooosh.

MUMMU: The reed is a simple plant – really a blade of grass with slightly higher ambitions. Perhaps this is a member of the Cyperaceae family. If our story was to take place in another part

of the world, the same role might be played by a branch of an oak tree. But we are not in another part of the world.

REED: Hi everybody!

MUMMU: This one happens to be a real people pleaser. Our second character is the large intestine of a cow.

COW PARTS hops in, squishing like a bag of wet garbage.

COW PARTS: Squish.

MUMMU: You might have been expecting it to say “moo.”

COW PARTS: Gurgle.

MUMMU: Because we have been taught that this is the sound that a cow makes – “moo.”

COW PARTS: Burple.

MUMMU: But this is not the part of the cow that says “moo.” This is the large intestine. It is located within the cow’s ass.

COW PARTS: Because where else would I be?

MUMMU: This is where the final bacterial processing of sustenance occurs.

COW PARTS: (to REED) You look familiar. Have I digested you before?

REED: Not that I recall, but maybe we’ll get the chance to work together real soon!

MUMMU: And finally, we have a feather.

FEATHER floats in, looking down upon everyone around them.

FEATHER: Salutations.

MUMMU: No one talks like that.

FEATHER: I just did.

MUMMU: This feather comes from an ibis.

FEATHER: A bird with a proud and noble legacy. For the Egyptians –

MUMMU: You will get your time later.

FEATHER: But I think the audience would like to know –

MUMMU: Thank you, Feather. We will get to that. (*to the audience*) So there is the cast of our story: a feather, a reed, and a portion of a cow's intestine.

COW PARTS: (*expelling gas*) Phhhbbrrrrt.

MUMMU: There's also a divine storm bird with the power to create and destroy universes at their whim, but they're going to stay offstage. Sorry.

Our story begins when these three companions first meet. Not companions, really. What is the word I'm looking for? Coworkers. One sunny morning –

FEATHER clears their throat quite dramatically.

MUMMU: – there was a dedicated –

FEATHER: Excuse me but I think I may be able to present this more directly, as I was there.

REED: So was I!

COW PARTS: Same.

FEATHER: Yes, but it was truly my tragedy.

MUMMU: (*to FEATHER*) If I let you tell this part of the story will you shut up?

FEATHER: Yes.

MUMMU: Then your story, if you please.

FEATHER: Thank you. The ibis has been revered as a sacred symbol, particularly in the late period of Ancient Egypt where we were associated with the god Thoth.

MUMMU: Is this relevant to the story?

FEATHER: You must see the peak before you can appreciate the valley.

MUMMU: Whatever.

FEATHER: An ibis was the first bird that Noah released from the Ark. We are legendary for our bravery during hurricanes. This was the legacy of which I was a part... until that day.

MUMMU: Finally, we arrive.

FEATHER: My place was indoors – an honoured member of the household. I remember how pleased I was that it was a balmy day, a cool breeze wafting through the front door when... *BOOM*

All was pain. My world collapsed and I was falling, falling... Where I used to be connected, there was now a stub. Where I used to be a part of the whole, I was now orphaned, alone. I was no longer ibis. I was just...

REED: I was nearby, where the river met the soil and became marsh. There were many of us standing at attention, swaying in that same cool breeze. Maybe it was prideful of me but I always thought I might be destined for greater things, somehow. Not because there was something special about me, but because I wanted to be special, and that can make a difference. Maybe I was daydreaming because I saw no one approach when... *BOOM*

The pain. Oh the pain. All of my life had been built from the ground upwards but today I was in the air unmoored, detached. Where there used to be the security of earth there was now only air.

COW PARTS: I was sitting in the corner, slowly going rancid.

FEATHER: Ew.

COW PARTS: It's quite pleasant, actually. Relaxing into softness. Befriending the flies. He reached his hand towards me and pulled sinew. I wasn't using it for anything so I didn't mind. Wasn't too bad, actually.

FEATHER: How can you say that? It must have been too traumatic. You're already repressing the details.

COW PARTS: Oh yeah, maybe.

FEATHER: This has been the most devastating event of my entire existence.

COW PARTS: I dunno, for me it was just, you know, kinda okay.

REED: It was traumatic for me, too.

FEATHER: Except not as traumatic as it was for me.

REED: Are you sure? Because I would say –

FEATHER: My lineage has been well established. I had a future but you... are you going to force me to be blunt?

REED: I'm afraid I won't understand otherwise.

FEATHER: You were just one stick among many, as likely as anything to dry up forgotten and alone. How could it possibly be as traumatic for you when you had so little to lose?

REED: Oh yeah? And what makes you the expert on everything?

FEATHER: Tell me I'm wrong.

REED: I did have something to lose. I had a dream, and now I've lost it. I wanted to attend the tablet-house, where the scribes are trained in their profession.

FEATHER: Wouldn't being a scribe be a bit above your capacity? Don't you need a higher capacity for language? And opposable thumbs?

REED: I wouldn't be a scribe, of course. I would be a stylus. I wanted to become the tool of the scribe, carving meaning into clay. It's all I ever thought about, really. Because what you said wasn't wrong. Most reeds dry up. I wouldn't even say that they are "forgotten" because that would imply that someone knew them to begin with. But to be part of the tablet-house...

I'm sure many would find it dull. Taxes on this much grain. A transaction for that many goods. These are not the records that move the universe. And yet, they do their part to encourage the world from entropy to order. And their effect lasts. I used to think about that a lot out in the marsh. Whether that would give my life meaning. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to contradict you. But I just hope you understand my situation's more complicated than it might seem, at first.

COW PARTS: Maybe you can still do that boring tax stuff after we're done here.

REED: Yes, that would be my hope as well, I... *(REED absentmindedly scratches their head. Suddenly shocked, they start running their hands through their hair in panic.)* Oh no! No no no no.

FEATHER: Calm down. It looks like you're all there. Physically, at least.

REED: No you don't understand. I've been shaved to a sharp point.

COW PARTS: Must be part of the plan for... whatever this is.

REED: But a scribe's stylus is rounded and wedged. If I've been shaved to a point, then I never... there's no chance of...

MUMMU: And that was when the man took the reed that he had so carefully selected and wound the remnants of the cow tightly

around it. He brought forth the fallen feather and bound it, bringing the items together as one.

FEATHER and REED sit close together, with COW PARTS embracing them in a sweaty bear hug.

And thus was made... AN ARROW.

MUMMU reaches into their pocket and pulls out a magnificent, splendid arrow, reminding the audience of the majesty of one of humanity's greatest creations. The FEATHER, REED, and COW PARTS sway as one.

I sense you're not as impressed by this as you should be. Most authorities have identified three important events in the early history of man: the development of a shared verbal language, the taming of fire, and the invention of the bow and arrow.

The human being has never been the fastest or the strongest. What would the primitive human do if their only option was to pound other beasts into submission? They would die, that's what they would do. And many of them did. But those who learned to snipe from afar, to hide like a frightened puppy, and rely on, well... (*indicating the FEATHER, REED, and COW PARTS*) ... on them. They are the ones who survived to become your ancestors. So you should be thankful to them. And also to me, of course. Just because.

COW PARTS: It kind of smells here.

FEATHER: You kind of smell here.

COW PARTS: (*sniffing herself*) Oh yeah, you're right.

FEATHER: This is not how it is supposed to be.

COW PARTS: You're telling me!

FEATHER: I was part of a noble lineage. Icon of Thoth, God of the Equilibrium, He Who Balances.

COW PARTS: I had some really great plans to release some more gas.

FEATHER: There could be no deeper tragedy.

COW PARTS: I miss my friends, the flies.

REED: I'm never going to... no, you know what? Wallowing won't get us anywhere.

COW PARTS: Wallowing is sorta my specialty.

REED: We're all going to have to find new specialties now. We can sit here and gripe about what we've lost, or we can forget about the past and find a way to move forward.

FEATHER: Don't presume to tell me what to do.

REED: Sorry, that's not what I meant. But we have to stick together! Because we are stuck together. You don't have to like it. It wouldn't be my first choice, either. To be honest, I've always seen myself as something of a pacifist. But, you know, maybe sometimes an arrow is what is needed. I had to give up one dream, but maybe... maybe I can find something else. Maybe the best we can do is try and help out whoever it is that brought us together.

COW PARTS: Hey, speaking of which, who did bring us together?

MUMMU: And that brings us to the rest of their adventure! The man who had crafted these into an arrow was no ordinary individual. The specifics change depending on who you ask, for according to the Babylonians, it was Marduk, patron deity of the city of Babylon.

REED, FEATHER, AND COW PARTS: Ooooooo.

MUMMU: God of water, vegetation, judgment, and magic.

REED, FEATHER, AND COW PARTS: Ahhhhhhh.

MUMMU: In the Sumerian version of the story, it was Lugalbanda, third king of the city of Uruk, father of Gilgamesh.

REED, FEATHER, AND COW PARTS: Wooooooooow.

MUMMU: Sometimes the hero is Ningursu. Sometimes it is Ninurta. All of them are impressive. None of them are in this play. But the point is that our band wasn't just brought together for shooting squirrels. They had a much higher purpose.

REED: I knew it!

MUMMU: But first, they needed to learn to work together.

REED: *(overlapping)* Yay!

FEATHER: *(overlapping)* Ugh.

COW PARTS: Burp.

MUMMU: (*producing the magnificent arrow once more*) The hero took our newly bound allies to the training grounds to test their readiness for battle.

REED: If we're warriors now, then people are depending on us to protect them.

FEATHER: You're not a warrior, you're a tool.

REED: Yes, but, a warrior is only as good as his tools. Or at least, that's what they said about scribes. Well, the reeds said that, anyway. Because they were likely to be the tools. Do you know anything about how archery works?

COW PARTS: Relax, I'm sure it's the archer who does all of the difficult parts. Here he comes now.

MUMMU: The archer picked up the arrow and examined it – the body of the reed was solid and straight. The feather of the ibis was long and full. And the tissue surrounding them was tight and strong. The archer tested the weight of it and was satisfied.

REED: Please don't let me mess it up. Please don't let me mess it up.

COW PARTS: I don't get it. What do you think could go wrong?

REED: That's exactly the problem! I've never done this before! I have no idea what could go wrong!

FEATHER: What do you care? I thought you were the pacifist scribe here.

REED: Yes, but, I don't know. Things have changed. Maybe I was wrong. Maybe I should have been thinking about how the universe is moved. Maybe we are meant to be in the company of heroes. Provided I don't mess it all up.

MUMMU: The archer took the arrow and drew the string back.

REED: Please don't let me mess it up.

MUMMU: He squinted, ever so slightly.

REED: Please don't let me mess it up.

MUMMU: And then let the arrow... fly.

REED, FEATHER, and COW PARTS duck down, then extend themselves upwards, letting their arms float as if on the surface of a gentle pool. They are awash in awe.

REED: My job was to slice through the air. I did not mess it up.

FEATHER: My job was to steer us true. For an instant, all trauma was forgotten as I, for the first time in my existence, realized what it was to soar. (*suddenly realizing what they have admitted*) Oh but I mean of course I was used to soaring all of the time because as part of the long and noble tradition of this ibis, I, like... it's complicated, okay?

COW PARTS: My job was to – okay, I just have to say, this was SO MUCH COOLER THAN I EXPECTED. I mean, I'm not usually the type to get excited over, you know, things. I tend to like things okay. I know there are some who are so attached to the way things used to be and there are some who dream of the way things can be. But me? I'm happy with the way things are. Whatever they are. It's a better way to live.

And seeing how my natural state is to be literally rotting on the floor, you wouldn't think that being tied to two strangers and then launched through the air would really be, you know, "my kind of thing." But the instant the archer let go...

I've never been fast. I've never been light. I could have spent my entire existence on the ground and have been totally satisfied. But you know, maybe sometimes you can aim for being more than just satisfied. Maybe sometimes, you ought to try to fly.

MUMMU: The archer reclaimed the arrow and pulled the string once more.

REED: Swoosh.

COW PARTS: Hold!

FEATHER: Steer...

They clap their hands in unison.

REED, COW PARTS, AND FEATHER: Strike!

MUMMU: And again, they were gathered and launched.

REED: Swoosh.

COW PARTS: Hold!

FEATHER: Steer...

They clap their hands in unison.

REED, COW PARTS, AND FEATHER: Strike!

MUMMU: A slight adjustment to the angle of the feather. A tightening of the bonds. And then again.

REED: I'm so sorry, feather.

FEATHER: What? Why?

REED: I see now what you had lost.

COW PARTS: Wheeeeeeeeeeeeeee!

REED: To sway in a cool breeze is one thing, but to float atop it is entirely another. I'm glad I get to share this with you.

FEATHER: Yes. You know it really wasn't...

REED: Wasn't what?

FEATHER: Forget it. I'm not thinking about the past. Upon reflection, I must admit – this is the most important contribution I've ever been able to make, anywhere.

COW PARTS: Woo hoo!

MUMMU: And with that they were prepared to at last accept their quest – the defeat of Anzu. There's a bit of backstory you need but let's get through this as quickly as possible...

MUMMU takes a deep breath, preparing to barrel through the exposition at hyper speed.

So there was this thing called the Tablet of Destiny that contained everything that ever happened and everything that ever will happen so whoever was in control of it had the power of the universe and everything within it and for some reason Enlil, who was the god of everything, thought that protecting this Tablet of Destiny was a job he could delegate and so when a magical lion bird named Anzu appeared out of nowhere, Enlil said "Sure, you can watch this tablet which gives anyone the power to be master of the universe as long as you don't steal them" until of course the bird stole the tablet and flew to the top of a huge mountain and Enlil was like "Hey, someone needs to get that tablet back" but then no one wanted to because the magical lion bird was now an omnipotent magical lion bird with the ability to turn gods into clay just by thinking about them but only one hero was brave enough to take on Anzu with nothing but a quiver full of arrows.

MUMMU takes a deep breath and resumes a normal speaking pace.

So that's where we are now: there's a giant lion bird with a magic tablet that grants all of the power in the universe and some dude is trying to take it down with an arrow. And guess which arrow that is?

REED, FEATHER, and COW PARTS step back as if looking at a very large, very intimidating monster in front of them.

COW PARTS: Whoa...

REED: It's okay. It should be just like we practiced, right? Except instead of a target we're aiming for a bird.

COW PARTS: A gigantic bird.

FEATHER: That also shoots lightning.

REED: *(to FEATHER)* You've been practicing your whole life for this. All of those hours in the air were preparing you for this. We're relying on you to guide us true. I believe in you.

FEATHER: I don't need a pep talk from you. I have everything entirely under control.

REED: Good! That's great to hear. *(to COW PARTS)* And I know none of us would have anticipated that you would be a flier, but look how easy it was for you! Are you ready for this?

COW PARTS: YES!

REED: And me, when I was in the marsh, I thought I was working to grow straight and strong so that I might be picked for a higher calling. I see it now. I was waiting for a hero to come. And he's here... even though I'm a little confused what his name is. But I can feel that it all comes together right now. Are we a team or not? *(sticks a hand out)*

COW PARTS: Team! *(puts a hand on top of REED's)*

FEATHER: A team. *(reaches out a hand)*

REED: The archer is ready. Here we goooo! One, two, three, TEAM!

REED, FEATHER, and COW PARTS link arms and walk offstage, together.

MUMMU: Anzu surveyed its domain from the perch of eternity. In the midst of emitting electricity and generally being all omnipotent, it barely noticed a small, human sized archer carefully taking aim...



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