

# THE OPERA MONKEY



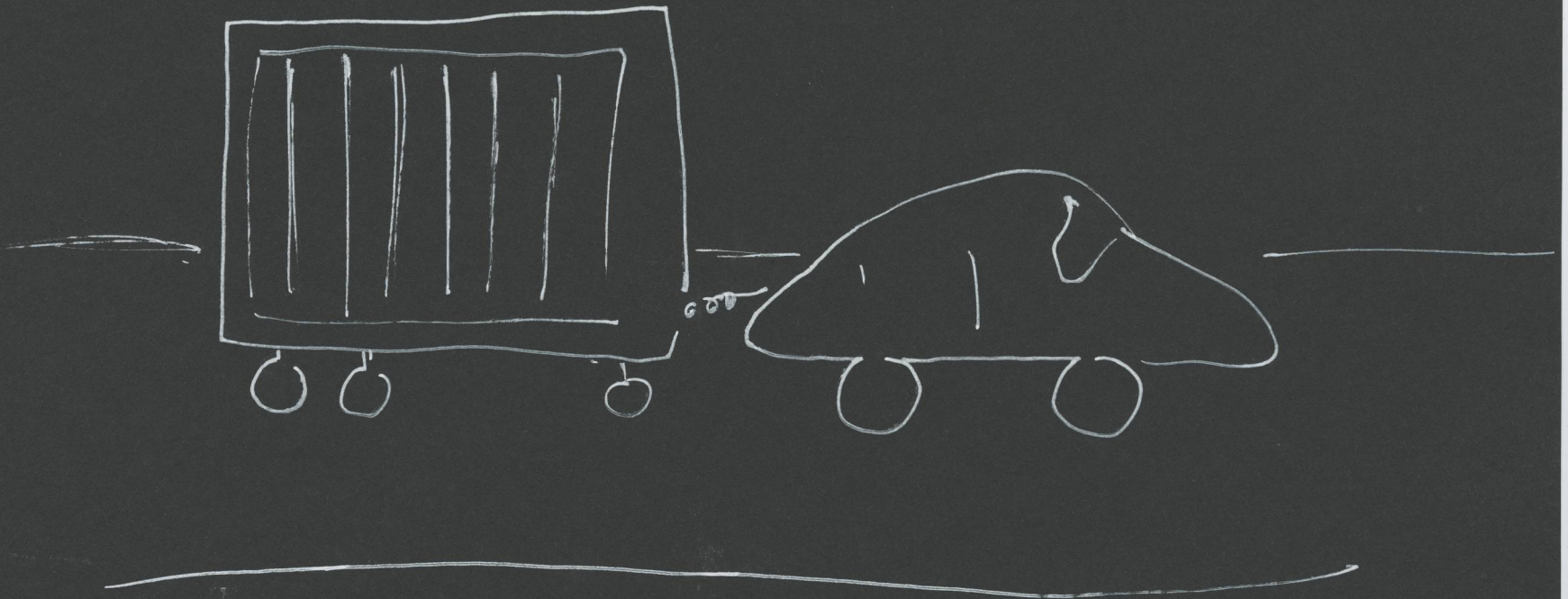
THE OPERA MONKEY WAS A WORLD-FAMOUS MONKEY. SHE WAS ALSO  
A WORLD-FAMOUS OPERA SINGER.



HER DULCET TONES WERE VERY DULCET. SHE WAS SUCH A COMMANDING  
PRESENCE ONSTAGE THAT NO ONE EVEN NOTICED SHE WAS A MONKEY.  
ARTS CRITICS ADORED HER; AUDIENCES GASPED IN OPERA HOUSE  
LOBBIES AT THE MERE MENTION OF HER NAME.



AFTER EACH PERFORMANCE (A GOOD BIT AFTER WHEN THERE  
AUTOGRAPHS TO BE SIGNED) THE STAGE MANAGER WOULD  
TAKE THE OPERA MONKEY TO HER HOME AT THE ZOO.



THE O.M. SHARED A CAGE WITH A SEA LION NAMED GERALD.  
"HOW DID IT GO?" GERALD ASKED ON A MUGGY SUMMER NIGHT.  
HIS QUESTION WAS MET WITH A WINK, THEN A BLINK, AND THEN  
THEY WERE BOTH FAST ASLEEP, SHE HANGING FROM A TREE  
BRANCH AND HE LYING LIKE A SPREAD EAGLE ON AN ARTI-  
-FICIAL, MINIATURE GLACIER.



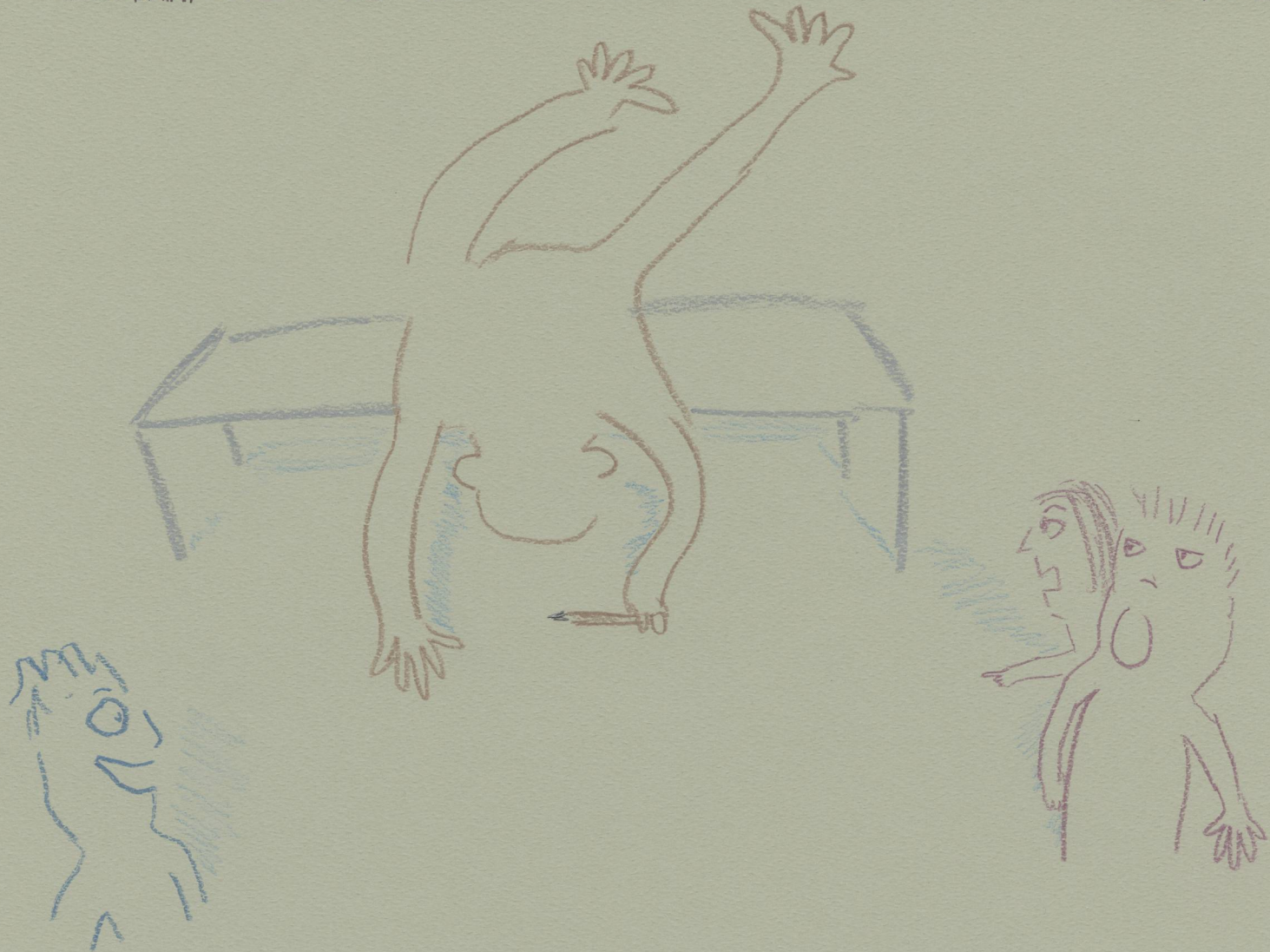
MORNING CAME AND THE OPERA MONKEY DUNKED HER FACE IN GERALD'S POOL TO WASH OFF WHAT WAS LEFT OF HER STAGE MAKEUP. THEN SHE PUT ON HEADPHONES AND BEGAN BOBBING HER HEAD TO IMAGINARY MUSIC. THIS CONTINUED UNTIL A CROWD FORMED OUTSIDE HER CAGE.



SHE MADE A SURPRISED FACE AND SANG A HIGH OPERA NOTE. THE HEADPHONES FELL INTO GERALD'S POOL. GERALD CLAPPED HIS SEA LION APPROVAL AS THE CROWD LAUGHED. THIS ROUTINE WAS REPEATED MANY TIMES THROUGHOUT THE ZOO'S HOURS. THE ZOO VISITORS KNEW THIS MONKEY AS THE OPERA MONKEY, BUT IT NEVER OCCURRED TO THEM THAT SHE ACTUALLY SANG IN THE OPERA.



THAT NIGHT SHE RETURNED TO THE OPERA HOUSE. SHE WAS RESPLENDENT. IN FACT SHE HAD NEVER SANG BETTER. WHILE SIGNING AUTOGRAPHS WITH HER AUTOGRAPH PENCIL, THE OPERA MONKEY NOTICED AN OPERAGOER EYEING THE PENCIL. "IS THAT A PENCIL? I HAVEN'T SEEN ONE OF THOSE IN AGES, CAN I BUY IT FROM YOU?" THE OPERAGOER PULLED OUT A COUPLE SMALL BILLS. THEN, OUT OF SURPRISE, THE OPERA MONKEY DROPPED THE PENCIL ON THE FLOOR AND REACHED DOWN TO PICK IT UP. THE OTHER AUTOGRAPH COLLECTORS HAD NEVER SEEN THEIR DARLING IN AN OFF-GUARD MOMENT.





THIS WAS WHERE THINGS STARTED GOING WRONG. THE NEXT NIGHT AT THE OPERA, THERE WAS A VERITABLE RIOT WHEN A SEA LION CAME ONSTAGE. THE PLAYBILL DIDN'T MENTION AN UNDERSTUDY... WHY WAS THE OPERA MONKEY'S STARRING ROLE USURPED BY A SEA LION? IT WAS GERALD. GERALD SANG JUST LIKE THE OPERA MONKEY.



TIME TO COME CLEAN... HI, MY NAME IS YERT SHUSTY. I AM A PUPPETEER. IN MY LEFT HAND I OPERATE THE OPERA MONKEY. IN MY RIGHT HAND I OPERATE GERALD THE SEA LION. BY DAY I WORK MAINTENANCE AT THE ZOO. BY NIGHT I AM A STAGE TECHNICIAN AT THE OPERA HOUSE.



THAT'S NOT WHERE IT ENDS. IT TURNS OUT THAT THERE REALLY WAS AN OPERA MONKEY AND A GERALD THE SEA LION AND THEY FOUND OUT ABOUT ME. I GOT A LETTER, HANDWRITTEN BY THE REAL OPERA MONKEY.

DEAR SIR OR MADAM,

IT HAS COME TO OUR ATTENTION THAT A) WE ARE THE SUBJECTS OF YOUR PAPER-THIN SATIRE OR B) YOU ARE PERPETRATING A FRAUD. MY BUSINESS PARTNER AND I ARE ENTERPRISING LITTLE BEASTS AND WE DO SO RESENT YOU MOCKING OUR LEGITIMATE CLAIM TO ARTISTIC GLORY. THE MOST OFFENSIVE PART IS HOW YOU MAKE US SEEM TO BE FISH OUT OF WATER, AS IF WE DO NOT DESERVE THE ACCOLADES AND AUTOGRAPH REQUESTS. KINDLY CEASE AND DESIST OR WE WILL SERVE YOU.

THE OPERA MONKEY & GERALD H. SEA LION, ESQ.

SO I CEASED AND DESISTED. ON A TECHNICALITY, I ACTUALLY CONTINUED. MY MONKEY PUPPET WAS NOW CALLED GERALD AND MY SEA LION WAS NOW NAMED THE OPERA MONKEY. THEIR ANIMAL IDENTITIES WERE NOT SWITCHED.



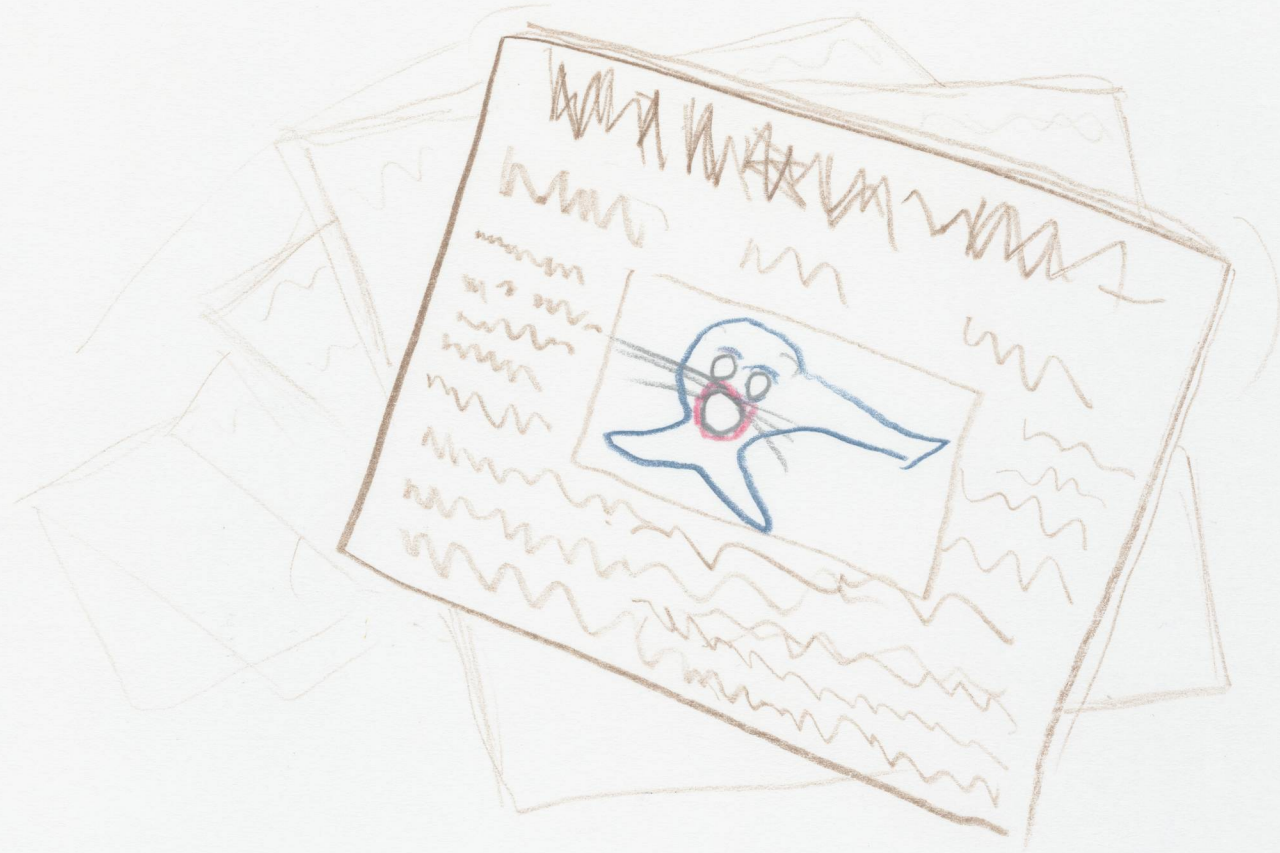
THERE WAS A NEAR-MUTINY AT THE OPERA HOUSE. THE LESSER PLAYERS WERE HORRIFIED TO LEARN THAT THEIR COLLEAGUE WAS NOT THE REAL OPERA MONKEY BUT A PUPPETEER'S ~~RE~~ LEFT HAND. IT WAS AN HONOR TO PERFORM WITH A BONA FIDE MASTER, BUT PLAYING AGAINST A PUPPET WAS MORE THAN MOST COULD BEAR. THE LAST STRAW WAS WHEN GERALD (HE OF MY PUPPETEER'S RIGHT HAND FAME) BECAME THE NEW ALLEGED OPERA MONKEY.



THE GERALD OPERA MONKEY BOTHERED THE MAKEUP ARTIST BACKSTAGE BECAUSE HIS WHISKERS WOULD POKE AND TICKLE EVERYONE'S EYES, EVEN HIS OWN SOMEHOW. IT WAS HARD ENOUGH MAKING A SEA LION LOOK LIKE AN OPERA DIVA, AND ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE WITH ONE'S EYEBALLS BEING TICKLED.



RELUCTANTLY, BUT NOT FOR ANY LACK OF THEIR REVIEWEE'S TALENT,  
CRITICS FAWNED OVER THIS NEW INCARNATION OF THE OPERA MONKEY.  
YOU WOULDN'T KNOW THEIR FRUSTRATION FROM THE REVIEWS BUT THEY  
WERE TIRED OF BEING FED LINES BY OPERA HOUSE MANAGEMENT.



AT THE ZOO GERALD THE OPERA MONKEY (WHO WAS CLEARLY A SEA LION) AND THE  
GLACIER-BOUND OPERA MONKEY CONTINUED THE ROUTINE: GERRY THE O.M. WOULD  
PUT ON HEADPHONES, BOB HIS HEAD AND THEN SHRIEK A VIRTUOSIC A ABOVE  
HIGH C. THE HEADPHONES WOULD FALL IN THE WATER AS THE  
REAL (ALBEITFAKE) O.M. CLAPPED.





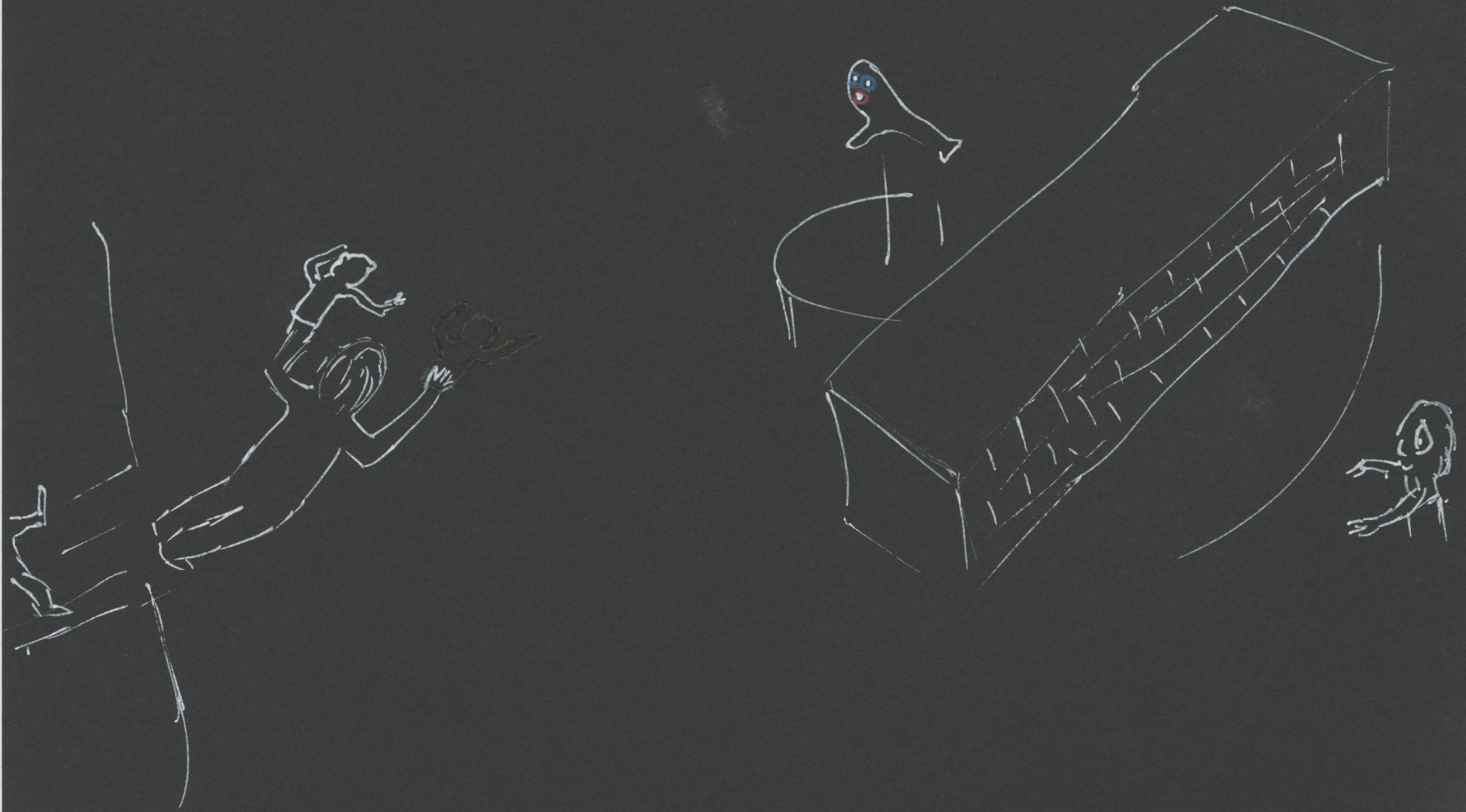
SOME MONTHS LATER, THE OPERA COMPANY WAS TOURING ROME AND PERFORMED AT THE COLOSSEUM. THE GERALD VERSION OF THE PUPPET VERSION OF THE OPERA MONKEY WAS PORTRAYING A CHARACTER WHO, IN HER DARKEST MOMENTS FOLLOWING A ROMANCE GONE AFOUL, JUMPED TO HER DEATH IN THE RIVER SEINE. THERE WAS A TRAMPOLINE ~~BE~~ BEHIND THE SET PIECES. GERALD JUMPED, READY TO HAVE AN EASY FALL INTO A TRAMPOLINE, AFTER WHICH ~~HE~~ HE COULD THEN ENJOY THE ADRENALINE THAT FOLLOWS ANY JOB WELL DONE.



BUT THE TRAMPOLINE MADE HIM BOUNCE BACK UP, TO THE HORROR AND DELIGHT OF THE AUDIENCE. AND HE BOUNCED AGAIN. AND AGAIN. AND AGAIN. THE OPERAGOERS WERE HYSTERICAL; THERE WAS A RIOT, EVEN BY THE MILD STANDARDS OF LIVE THEATRE. REFRESHMENT STANDS WERE LOOTED.



THE OPERA MONKEY (MY PUPPET VERSION, WHO WAS NOW PLAYING THE PART OF GERALD THE SEA LION) WAS SEEN JUST OFFSTAGE IN THE WINGS. A BRAIN SURGEON IN THE FIRST ROW SHOUTED, "IT'S THE OPERA MONKEY!" THE STAGE MANAGER PUSHED HER (ME?) ONSTAGE TO TAKE A BOW. EVERYONE THOUGHT IT WAS OPERA MAGIC; THE SEA LION IN HEAVY MAKEUP CURRENTLY BOUNCING UP AND DOWN MUST NOW BE A PROP, ALLOWING THE OPERA MONKEY TO COME OUT TO SOAK IN THE ADULATION SHE IN EVERY WAY DESERVED.



THE REAL OPERA MONKEY HAPPENED TO BE THE BRAIN SURGEON'S DATE, AND SHE JUMPED ONSTAGE. "I'M THE REAL OPERA MONKEY. THIS IS A PUPPET, SHAME ON YOU, YERT SHUSTY! I WAS BOOED, AND NOT FOR THE LAST TIME. THE STAGE MANAGER GRABBED FLOWERS OUT OF MY OPERA MONKEY'S FELT HAND - THESE WERE INTENDED FOR GERALD AS THE OPERA MONKEY - AND GAVE THEM TO THE REAL OPERA MONKEY, WHO OF COURSE HAD NOT SUNG A NOTE, UNLESS YOU COUNT THE OUT-OF-TUNE HUMMING WE COULD ALL HEAR THROUGHOUT THE EVENING.



THE REAL GERALD H. SEA LION, ESQ. SEA-LIONED HIS WAY ONSTAGE TO SHOW SUPPORT FOR HIS PARTNER. MEANWHILE MY GERALD AS THE OPERA MONKEY AS THE HEROINE WAS STILL BOUNCING. IN AN IRONIC TWIST, THE LESS BRIGHT MEMBERS OF THE AUDIENCE THOUGHT THE REAL GERALD WAS THE REAL OPERA MONKEY AND THAT HE WAS UNMASKING THE VERY LAST IMPOSTOR.



THE FOUR OF US (MY OPERA MONKEY, ME, THE REAL OPERA MONKEY AND THE REAL GERALD)  
JOINED MY RIGHT HAND GERALD ON THE TRAMPOLINE AND WE BOUNCED UP AND DOWN ON  
THE RIVER SEINE.



THE STAGE MANAGER CAME OUT AND THREW HER HEADSET VIOLENTLY TO THE FLOOR. THEN THE SIX OF US UNLEASHED A GUTTURAL B# ABOVE HIGH C. EVERY CRITIC IN THE AUDIENCE DIED AT THAT MOMENT IN A FIT OF EUPHORIA. AND THAT IS WHY YOU'VE NEVER HEARD OF ME, MY PUPPETS, OR THEIR COINCIDENTALLY REAL DOPPELGÄNGERS.



FIN.

