

METAPHYSIQUE
D' EPHEMERA

A PLAY OF MEMORY AND DESPAIR
INSPIRED BY JOSEPH CORNELL

METAPHYSIQUE D'EPHEMERA

by Christopher Shipman

Shipman's play of memory and despair inspired by Joseph Cornell utilizes experimental poetry rather than conventional dialogue and stage direction. Some traces of conventional stage direction and dialogue do remain.

PROLOGUE:

Enter a BIRD in parenthesis:(

(puff up your chest

project

its feathery

language

behind which a

spotlight speaks in

dim flashes:))

Children,

born into this

(terrible novelty of

light)

there is no preliminary speech

becoming being become

suddenly other

(matter for mourning)

light soars

through your semblance of memory

of what the womb was

a theater for

(the bird in

parenthesis pecks the

air you are breathing)

assembled

by the sounds of arms of glued on

feathers

a light in the dark

becomes

the light in the dark

(the light in

parenthesis shines to

startle your heart)

that eventually gets away
with everything
your vulgar remedies
your theories of living
 (the bird bends its
 beak out of its
 parenthesis)
momentarily

SCENE 1

Enter THE UNSEEN CHORUS OF THIS DARK THEATER

Dearest Cat Prince
tell this story
until it never happened
tell this story
until children sing
its name
through the hide and seek trees
tell this story
until children tell it
back to you
tell this story
until this story is
all
on the house

a curtain closes

SCENE 2

Enter THE CURTAIN:

 (opening slow
 a surgery of

slowness a show and

tell

you things)

of course the curtain is a character

yes the bird's big song swallows your

small voice

and no that rabbit is shoving his fake

head through

the light in the dark he is just a man

in a suit

but you haven't grown up enough and

you

haven't met him yet and

by the way

(the curtain can't

speak so

the curtain doesn't)

but there is an audience so there is a

curtain

so it must open

and close

so this audience grows a fake shadow

when

the curtain closes

but way way WAY before this the

curtain opens so

this audience sees there is a

telescope on stage so

there must be a sky

(the curtain can't

see so

the curtain doesn't)

and there is also a Prince, so?

so Enter THE CAT PRINCE

and so what

if he traces constellations

so the audience doesn't have to

(the curtain can't

point a telescope so

the curtain doesn't

so

the Prince points)

he uses the wrong end of the telescope

and remember children

audience

children

of the audience

the curtain can't speak so

the curtain doesn't so

the Prince speaks for the curtain

and even though he doesn't speak

to you

the Prince says when a prince

traces a feminine shape in stars

a fat ballerina is born

standing in a skinny box

the curtain can't trace shapes so

the curtain doesn't

but look

three ballerinas are dancing in front

of him

(no they are not)

the curtain pays no attention

so the Prince closes

his telescope

so the Prince closes

his curtain

so the Prince closes
his voice

Exit The Cat Prince

SCENE 3

Enter the BIRD:

(replace puffed chest with slumped shoulders and be happy)

I am not the stork; I memorize my
singing lines- like so:

O memory, the traveler prince is blind

O memory, the traveler prince can see.

I was singing that. Did you hear?

My voice is metallic italics!

I can tell you everything you already
know- like so:

The prince puts away childish things

(a light shines and

you are afraid of it)

he flings his telescope into a well

and wipes his face.

Laid back on his bed, he reads an
atlas; he smokes.

(O memory, the

traveler prince can

find

Did you hear it that

time?

Like a prince

drifting off like a

telescope

clunks echoes

falling down a

wishing well like so:
what the traveler
prince can't see.)

ANOTHER PROLOGUE

Enter THE CAT PRINCE:

Let's try this again.
There once was
a tiny kingdom
on the eastern seaboard.
There once was
a Prince
scrambling on the floor
like an egg.
He is flinging away this
book this feeling this
box he frantically opens
and closes
at pauses
in prologues.
Shhh, listen, now he is
really doing something, he is
whispering.

SCENE 4

Enter THE THEATER:

Lights brighten
and dim.
Curtains close
and open.
And sometimes a disembodied voice
rises.

So enter the BIRD in parenthesis:(

Unseen.)

The bird's big song
swallows the voice
a Rabbit sticks a pointy ear through
curtains to hear.

The audience laughs,
listens,
then

recedes
to wherever it never came from.

The curtain is a character you come to
like
when the bird's big song swallows your
voice.

And your heart, its 8mm projector,
projects
smaller hearts,
square images
of Coney Island's mind
and dialogue:
Go ahead, play "Nature Boy" under your
breath
as the curtain slowly opens,

reveal THE CAT PRINCE(look through him)

looking through his telescope
toward the sky.

(Revel, Revel, Revel!)

When you fully open he is startled
by your presence.

He is the biggest heart in your
collection

of smaller hearts.

(Don't you like that?

Pay no attention.)

Enter THE RABBIT crawling onto the world.

The Prince traces constellations
of Ballerinas

(with his smelly
finger.)

At each shape traced a fat Ballerina
exits a tall
skinny box.

(remember this
even if
the Prince doesn't)

He does not acknowledge
the dim light you see bouncing around
the Ballerinas because
the Prince pays no attention
to other characters.

(So now)

"Nature Boy" fades out

and a low song is heard from a bird
becoming
slightly illuminated
upon the air.

As the song begins Ballerinas begin
brushing their hair.

(The bird bends its
beak out of its
parenthesis)

momentarily

The Prince puts his cat mask on his

cat face.

The Prince is ready to face what's
rehearsed.

The Prince says he has a story that
tells stories.

He tells you secrets that tell secrets
that tell

you to tell the Rabbit to crawl closer
to hear.

SCENE 5

BIRD (PROJECTION):

O memory, the traveler prince is blind

O memory, the traveler prince can see.

Enter THE CAT PRINCE: (did he ever exit?)

PRINCE:

(The Bird does not
approve of this
message)

There was once a tiny kingdom on the
eastern seaboard of a mystical country
that, although tiny, boomed with life.

The kingdom was peopled with magicians,
stars of the ballet and the silver
screen, carnival-crews, vaudevillians,
and performers of every kind. It was a
place of electric light, fantastic
rides, nights of thrills and pure joy.
Even the exotic animals strolled
freely through the streets, happy as
businessmen with lost briefcases.

Lions roared, elephants stomped, and
the birds, the birds sung such
beautiful songs that the stars,
although billions of miles away,
appeared so close to the people that
it seemed they could climb a low
ladder to observe the kingdom from
above, perched on a single star which
they loved enough to make this very
act possible. Indeed, nothing, it
seemed, was impossible.

But as years passed, as years must,
the kingdom was met with misfortune.
When the kingdom was finally forgotten,
it slowly began to decay. The animals
were caged and shipped off, the penny
arcades were abandoned, the street and
sideshow performers closed-up shop and
moved on, and ballet itself seemed to
dance off into the dark distance,
without even a glittering of twinkling
toes trailing behind it.

Finally, only your young Cat Prince
remained amidst his deserted streets,
begging the stars to emboss in light
the golden age of his abandoned
kingdom. Some days he walked through
the ruins picking up forgotten objects
that once belonged to a vaudeville
performer or a ballerina; on other
days he happened upon a child's
stuffed animal or windup toy and,
gazing upon it, hoped to bring the
people of his kingdom back.

As more years passed the Prince seldom
left his palace, preferring to live
solely in his memory, but that too was
slowly decaying, and he would have to
discover the secret to keeping his
kingdom beautiful and booming with
life before it was too late.

(turn the Prince
toward
the crumpled coats
in your dark laps)

Is there nothing more up your sleeve?
Tell me.

Tell me what you want from me.

Enter YOUR BIGGEST SMALLER HEART'S PROJECTION:

(been here all along)

What appears to be snow piles up
until the Rabbit is no longer visible.

A bird flaps snowy wings in broad
strokes.

Ballerinas please return
to your respective boxes.
Sorrow fades out.

BIRD:

While such dark songs must be sung
far above trees windows are hung.

PRINCE:

Snow
no one here but me strange
it must say
a secret!

a secret!
a forgotten secret!
I can't remember it. (o, how sad)A
secret nonetheless!
I can't think where
it's hidden.
What have I done with it? This secret
What is it?
It might be a memory. A dream. A
mess
to clean up.
Up! That's a good place to start.
A memorable dream shushed up in a
secret star!
No. No.
That can't be right. I have to think
like the night if I want to find, fish
out,
detect without a doubt where a tiny
light
has gone blind.
A bright light under my bed!
A crown upon my head!
Something in a box!
A thought? Or two? A door? A trapdoor?
A song?
The thought of a song falling through
a trapdoor!
Festooned in feathers! That's fair!
(O my, he's so happy it's okay to hate him!) peck, peck, peck me
out of my parenthesis
No. No. It must be here.

SCENE 6

PROJECTION:

I am the projection
and the bird.
Dear children, dear
audience, dearest
children of
the audience,
when a bright light is trapped
a bird's wing flaps just so you know
the Cat Prince is being
stuffed and being stuffed
in a cage and put
on a shelf.

You are angry about the Prince's
current failure.

Sing out like the menace you are!

But in this scene the Prince
finds a box of burned clouds
dead

at the edges,

and on another stage in the fake
distance

a ballerina exits a box on top of the
world,

dances awkwardly.

(No character pays
attention.

Not even

you.

because she is not
really there.)

PRINCE:

A trick! A magic trick!

PROJECTION:

The Ballerina falls to the floor.

A puff of pink snow erupts
from under
her dress.

PRINCE:

I'm starting to feel sick. Was it all
a trick?

Just

a silly trick

without any magic?

PROJECTION:

What ballerina starts
twitching?

PRINCE:

No! There is a secret and I
will find it!

It's giving me
the twitches!

Projection:

What ballerina twitches back to life,
drags her twitching body back
inside her box, leaving
a trail of snow behind her?

(O memory, the
traveler prince is
blind)

(O memory, the
traveler prince can

see)
(squawk and squawk
and squawk)

PROJECTION:
Turn toward the nearest Prince and
whisper:
(See a trail of snow.

PRINCE:
This must be a hint. The way to bend
my body into the cold, forested night
of a secret shut tight.

PROJECTION:
The Prince falls to his hands
and knees, crawling along
the trail of snow
you imagined.
But when the Prince brushes back the
snow,
he stops
unknowingly,
just
in front of
The Rabbit!
(Remember your heart?
Remember the
projection of
your biggest
smaller hearts?
Don't pretend
like you
don't own your own

memory, too. You
can stop this
beating against
hollow bones, like
any old fool.)

PRINCE:

I have discovered the secret!

(Oh, how in awe he is
of his
discovery!)

My last lost telescope
has been built behind my eyes alone,
so

I could discover this box, this
mother of the night, this
lover of lost things!

This secret. This. I have discovered
it.

RABBIT:

What?

(I shouldn't have to
tell you this
at this point, but
the Prince is
startled
because your biggest
smaller heart
projected
The Rabbit.)

What have you discovered?

PROJECTION:

The Rabbit peers over at the Prince's
box
that the Prince slams shut.

PRINCE:

It's a secret.

RABBIT:

You can't tell me? O please, tell me
what is in your box.

PRINCE:

I did tell you. It's a secret.

RABBIT:

What is it?

PRINCE:

A secret!

RABBIT:

What is it? What is it?

PRINCE:

A secret! A secret!

RABBIT:

Tell me what it is! Tell me! Tell me!
Tell me!

PRINCE:

A secret! A secret! A secret!

(Light the dark light
the dark light the
dark)

PROJECTION:

The Rabbit snaps

his fingers.

RABBIT:

Aw, I see. Now, I see.

(Project The Prince
tilting
his head
in confusion.)

PRINCE:

You do?

RABBIT:

I believe so. It's a secret.

PRINCE:

Yes! Precisely!

RABBIT:

What exactly do you see?

PRINCE:

Well, that we shall have to discover,
won't we.

After all, you haven't even told me
what you think
the secret looks like.

RABBIT:
What it looks like?

PRINCE:
Yes, what it looks like.
Does it look like a dream,
or a memory, or just
a plain old, every day,
folded-up-in-your-pocket
secret?

RABBIT:
Oh, um, a dream, I think.

PRINCE:
We must be sure!

RABBIT:
Yes, we must be sure!

PRINCE:
Does it look like the inside of an ear?
Or
the inside of a brain? Or
the inside of a heart? Or
just the inside of a box?

RABBIT:
Oh, yes, well, it's kind of...

PROJECTION:

The Prince stomps
loudly on the top
of the world.

PRINCE:

You must know the answer! Have you
never
discovered a secret before?
I have discovered many things.
Secrets, continents, love,
snake bites, snowmen, bad dreams,
kisses, candy, caves,
flowers in boxes, lockets...

RABBIT:

Okay, okay, you've been around the
block.

PRINCE:

So?

RABBIT:

Um...the inside of an ear! Yes!

PRINCE:

Okay, an ear, an ear...
What color is it?
Is it blue or red or orange or yellow
or...

RABBIT:

Yellow! Definitely yellow! Yellow all
over!

PRINCE:

Yellow.

Yellow all over.

Does it have a shadow?

RABBIT:

Yes!

(Like your projected
heart, The Prince
is weakened
by the answers
he receives,
or the questions
he asks.)

PRINCE:

What sort of sounds does it make? Any

noises

escaping from that secret?

Does it bump in the night? Does it

scratch

at the door? Does it

whimper when hungry

for more?

For more movement inside its box?

RABBIT:

It squeaks!

Yes, it's very squeaky, and

slippery!

Yes! Yes, I've got it! I've got it!

PRINCE:

What? What have you discovered?

RABBIT:

It's a rubber duck!

An inside-of-an-ear-shaped,
squeaky, slippery, yellow-all-over
rubber duck!

Like a rubber duck lost forever in
blue-blinded waves
on a family vacation
to Coney Island!

PRINCE:

No! No! Absolutely not! No! That is
not it at all!

RABBIT:

No?

PRINCE:

No, not lost, not forever!
And Coney Island?
There is no such thing as a Coney. I
have seen
everything.
Never once have I met a creature
called a Coney.
And an island?
No!
Not yet. Now is the time of a tree
surrounded by icy waves.
The blue-blinded waves you speak of.
There

you are on to something,
but here,
now we are here inside this box, in
which
we are climbing that tree
forever. We are.
We are racing up a snow-covered pine
in late winter like
white spiders. We are
giant white spiders racing up a tree
in the always and always of late
winter.
And we are
getting to know the night. And we are
so cold, cold like loneliness, but we
are
together and happy because we are
spiraling around the tree's fat trunk
toward the top, and we are
up, up, up there where we can see
the night never closes our eyes, and
we are
loving the ballerinas dancing from
star to star, and we are
watching their innocent feet miss a
single step, and we are
watching them fall floating forever to
the forever
of the island beneath us
that, now,
was always there.
And below us the thousand thrills
twinkle atop the boardwalk,
the mermaids wink at iron steamboats,

then flop onto the beach
to the land without shadows.

(Narrioch)

(Narrioch)

(Narrioch)

And in the distance
rollercoasters
fly forever dreaming
into the night.

(We'll take a trip up
to the moon

For that is the

place for a lark

So meet me down at

Luna, Lena

Down at Luna Park)

O, Luna, forever a trip
to the moon.

O Luna, we'll forever
be there soon!

RABBIT:

How funny.

You almost even convinced me
this time.

But, no.

No, I'm afraid not.

Not forever.

You are there and gone.

(Project the Prince

paying

no attention.)

PRINCE:

Then the streetcars, the woodcarvers,
the flute players and drummers, the
thrills, the rides, the giant elephant

RABBIT:

The Elephantine Colossus? The whore
house?

PRINCE:

Those beauties sunbathing, the elegant
architecture and pristine white towers

RABBIT:

Relatively speaking.

PRINCE:

The movie theaters, the ice rink, the
freak shows, Bamboula, Doc. Hastings!
Those
jungle comedians, that dashing,
handle-bar-mustached, one-armed lion
tamer, Captain Bonavita! O gorgeous
Marie Dressler! O popcorn and peanuts

RABBIT:

Popcorn
and peanuts?
Is this
the extent of your dream's fallacy?
Popcorn
and peanuts?

PRINCE:

The gondolas, the canals, I see...

RABBIT:

Imitation, make-believe.

PRINCE:

Brimming with rushing water, dim
caverns...

RABBIT:

What of the leaky roof? What of the
dripping tar?

PRINCE:

The waves illuminated, those million
electric lights...

RABBIT:

Quite a novelty for the time, sure,
but what of the bucket of hot pitch
kicked over?
What when the light bulbs burst?
What of the fire?

PRINCE:

Yes, the fire-eaters...
(Abandonment.
Imagine it all.)

RABBIT:

No, not eating fire, the fighting?
What of the firefight?
Not unlike the flames that swallowed
you?

PRINCE:

The thousand men...the six-story
building blazing...

RABBIT:

No, a game for an audience long dead,
a bought ticket,
all pretend.
Listen to how you lose
when you choose to forget what flames
at your memory's end.

(Abandonment.
Imagine it all.)

PRINCE:

No, I am content there.

RABBIT:

But you are here now.

PRINCE:

I am content with a ballerina in a box
because inside this box with me
forever, she is
happy to stand in the memory of her
dance.

RABBIT:

No, not forever. You are here. We
are
Here!
And time has gone off galloping in the
distance of past landmarks.
And in your memory's darkest corner is

Hell's Gate,
where flames envelope your dream in
chaos
and the island burns like strips of
drift wood
that clunk together at the shore of
its smoldering mess.
Your captain strove to save his big
cats
with only encroaching flames to light
his way
and only that once majestic lion, the
Black Prince, escaped
into the city streets, where the aging
onlookers
demanded him shot down, where you
stand now,
where the dream
must be
abandoned.

PRINCE:

I would do anything for her
to let me love her stillness.
For in this box we are always.
In this box we are looking sideways.
In this box we are crooked crying out.
In this box we are saving drowning
sailors.
In this box we are objects of memory.

RABBIT:

All this gets us nowhere.

PRINCE:

Which is a town like any other. And
all the salesgirls, the worldly men,
the mermaids, the lions, the clowns,
the ballerinas, the very light in
their eyes,
goes home safe at the end of the night
I assure myself of their reality by
pleading for their lives,
for in this box they go on breathing
for as long as I like.

RABBIT:

I suppose there is no talking you out
of this box.
Perhaps I
can give you a chance
to learn the last secret.
You? You know the way? Tell me,
tell me what I must do!
I'll do anything! Tell me the secret
to learn the last secret!

RABBIT:

We'll play a little game.

PRINCE:

Yes, a game! That's it! I'm sure to
win!

RABBIT:

Listen closely to the rules, for they
are few,
but very important to you.
If you can get your Ballerina

to truly love you, to become
an object
of your love, to stand still
in the locked-room of your memory, to
breathe
only in your box
of airy dreams, then you
will live always inside the light
of your golden age
forever.

PRINCE:

O, I am sure to win! Yes, O, what a
lucky night I've stumbled on, this
last longed for secret hidden in the
snow outside my home all along!

RABBIT:

Wait! That is not it, not it at all!
You have this one last chance
to convince her of the beauty you
boast of,
for she has to believe beyond the long
day
that she belongs in your box.
What do you say?

PRINCE:

Yes, yes of course.

RABBIT:

And if you fail?

PRINCE:

Fail?

RABBIT:

She will be forever lost to you, and
you will be faced
with the fact of here and now,
with the constant hopping
of the hare.

PRINCE:

I will play your game.
I will perform
for her namesake is beauty
so her pink shoes point
toward eternity
where all the stars
are wishes come true.
I will play.

PROJECTION:

The Rabbit reveals his female face.

Exit THE LIGHT

SCENE 7

(Project a dimness
of light. See
The Rabbit spin a
Ballerina
dancing
around the world
The Prince is behind
his telescope
to see.)

RABBIT:

This has all always only
gotten you nowhere,
which is no town of its own,
but a dying world
on which you play a game
that is
almost over
where it begins.
The stage is yours.

PROJECTION:

The Prince walks slowly toward you,
bows, lifts
his arms to the air,
and looks up.

PRINCE:

Stars. I see stars.
Kind of a funny phrase,
when you think about it.
I see stars.
Isn't that what we say
when we're hit on the head?

When we're cartoons?
When we're looking at the frying pan
in another person's hand?
We never say birds.
When yellow birds chirp circles
round our swollen brains
we just stand there silent, dazed.
But stars.
Stars are different than birds
in this way. We feel
the need to sound out the words
in the just-hit-on-the-head midst
of misty eyes.
I see stars.

RABBIT:

Any of the heavenly bodies, except the
moon, appearing as fixed luminous
points in the sky at night.

PRINCE:

And even if we don't say a thing
there is someone in a corner
somewhere
saying it for you.

RABBIT:

In accordance with astronomy, any of
the large, self-luminous, heavenly
bodies, as the sun, Polaris, etc.

PRINCE:

But when I say I see
the stars

I don't mean
the perfectly pointed cut-outs of sky
from the cartoon universe.
When I say I see
the stars
I mean the perfectly pointed cut-outs
of sky
when you raise your arms
through the universe
and decide to prove, for yourself,
whether or not
you are a cartoon.

RABBIT:
Any heavenly body.

PRINCE:
You all seem pretty non-drawn. You
all seem
to be breathing.

Rabbit:

Quick, hold your breath!

(The Ballerina holds)

(her breath.)

(The Rabbit studies)

(his watch.)

Better get on with it!

(Project the Prince)

(snapping his smelly
fingers)

(and the Ballerina)

(gasping)

(for breath.)

PRINCE: (cont'd)

I will show and tell you the world of
light I've listened in on!

RABBIT:

A heavenly body, esp. a planet,
considered as influencing humankind
and events.

PRINCE:

When I say, I see, I mean to say I see
stars.

When I say I see
anything

I mean to say I see
stars.

But again, what a funny phrase.

What a strange saying.

What a weird way of coming back
to where we started.

RABBIT:

A person's destiny, fortune,
temperament, etc., regarded as
influenced and determined by the stars

BALLERINA:

Where are we? What are we looking at?

RABBIT:

A conventionalized figure usually
having five or six points radiating
from or disposed about a center, or
this figure used as an ornament, award,

badge, mark of excellence, etc.: as in,
The movie was awarded three stars. Or,
as in jewelry, a gem having the star
cut, or the asterism in a crystal or a
gemstone— as in a star sapphire, or a
crystal or a gemstone having such
asterism, or as in printing, an
asterisk.

Or here, on the ground
looking up
at nothing.

PRINCE:

No! We are there, peering over
the side of a boat!
At a constellated crab
eating a dictionary!

RABBIT:

Strange, because maybe you are,
and maybe you aren't
looking at anything.
Time, you know. Tricky.

PRINCE:

But I can pay tribute.

RABBIT:

A person who is celebrated or
distinguished in some art, profession,
or other field. Or a prominent actor,
singer, or the like, esp. one who
plays the leading role in a
performance.

PRINCE:

If you please!

RABBIT:

Well, get on with it!

(Project the Prince
pointing toward you
as if you
were a ballerina.)

PRINCE:

One time, when my mother said
I love you, I leapt
from the beach into the sun.
When I fell I floated further down
Coney Island
than winter could lay white across her
face.

RABBIT:

Dutch for rabbit.

PRINCE:

What?

RABBIT:

Dutch.

PRINCE:

Dutch, what? What Dutch?

RABBIT:

Coney. Dutch. For. Rabbit.

(The Prince pays
no attention.

Are you sure
about this? Do you
really want him
to win?)

PRINCE:

When I fell I floated further down
Coney Island
than winter could lay white across her
face.

I memorized her name
in ten different centuries.

But I couldn't speak for all the stars
in my mouth.

So, I spoke a language
I do not speak.

I see the past
constellated
in what I see.

RABBIT:

No.

The past is falling on you
like snow.

and snow must be made of bones—
each flake dust, someone's once more
denied attempt to soar off this world.

(Project the Rabbit.

Oh, how did he hop
into the Ballerina's

ear
and disappear
momentarily?)

Where do you wish to fly? To what star

I ask you because you have gone.

I ask you because you have fallen
more times than he has stood.

(It's okay, the
Rabbit is
visible again.
Which is
faster?)

A cat or a rabbit?)

All you say is a misunderstood prayer.

If there's a point, a meeting between
you and the dark, it's joined only
by your palm collecting snow.

You are

the sashay of old jukebox songs
while your ballerina sleeps
the black boring night through,
your dreams of her still
as the locked rooms inside
your head.

PRINCE:

No! The night is alive in the streets.

And the dancing! So much magic!

I stood with my sleeveless arms raised
to the stars, and shivered for the
distance

between us and them.

She disappeared to appear here.

RABBIT:

But the boardwalk is constellated
yellow
with chalk outlines of her former
selves'
shadows.
Tell her.

PRINCE:

Every star adds light to the sky's
black absence.
And I am anchored to a fleet of icy
ships,
searching only for you
through the broken blackbird
of night.
And you are always on a nearby beach
dancing silent as the Atlantic of
stars
that carrousel above Coney Island.
What say you to a dance in my
imagination?

BALLERINA:

But where are my babies? Where did
they go?

RABBIT:

Playing in a yard of broken bottles.

BALLERINA:

With the far away stars in their eyes?

PRINCE:

No! Not broken. Not bottles. Not far
away.

Right where you stand!

Building a bridge of wishes
with eye lashes and Christmas lights
when night falls on its head.

(stars said hope for
stars said pray to
said resurrection!
said o please!)

RABBIT:

Stuffed above his trashcan's muddy rim
white plastic bags dance
like ghosts of murdered ballerinas
desperate to scar the night
for having so many twinkling toes.

BALLERINA:

Have I grown so old? So cold?

RABBIT:

Stars the ugly gold of old broke-down
cars.

Stars faded as cardboard stars on old
movie sets.

Stars that constellate the dark smell
of used tires, grease, tools:
the trunked memory of a life lived
past abandon—
all prying open in the damp basement
of his brain.

PRINCE:

No!

RABBIT:

Stars that scare off cats.
Stars that clap dead hands.
Stars that bust pumpkins
stars never cared to carve.

PRINCE:

No! Stars that build us a home.
Stars that disappear inside our bones
when we're born.

RABBIT:

Leaving nights blacker!

PRINCE:

But light is always flying back there!
(The Ballerina falls
to the floor.)

PRINCE: (cont'd)

See!
All look upon the Sleeping Ballerina!

BALLERINA:

I am your desire to be nothing more
than a prince.
I am the story stars tell to bed the
sun.
I am an angel pretending to be a flock
of birds.
I am the house you grew up in.

I am strolling for treasure on Coney
Island.

I am your dreams dwelling like white
mice in the attic.

I am lights with no trains attached.

I am the only ghost that haunts you.

I am the anniversary of lovers lost on
an island.

I am the time machine they build to go
home.

I am you upside down stranded on a
star.

I am nothing if not what you are.

RABBIT:

Stars, like theaters on fire.

(The Rabbit
is hopping
toward you.)

When ballerinas run for their lives
he crowns them all

by turning their skin transparent.

He is a child pushing a toy truck
down the crowded streets of his memory

But a toy Ballerina follows all the
way,

whispering,

(he never wanted me
he never wanted me
he never wanted me
he never wanted me
he never wanted me)

But before sleep tonight, the purple
shadow of a prince

prances across the clouds of your
bruised prayers.
He makes night wrinkle your face;
he puts a cloudy wind in your breath
to sail the ships where he stowed
memory,
then expects you to see through dirt;
to become a gathering of ghosts, to
ruin light.
He'll light his dreams of you by a
cheap lamp.
This friend of mine
has been looking into the light
for a long time.

BIRD:

How long is the light,

RABBIT:

I ask him.

He answers by looking
as long as light will let him be.

BIRD:

It's there,

RABBIT:

he says, then stares directly at its
dull bulb
as if that faint hue has everything
to do with this darkness,
or his blame,
or that it bears the names of both.

PRINCE:

Stare at it as long as you can,

RABBIT:

he whispers lightly

BIRD:

and looks away.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Exceedingly active within the poetry community in New Orleans, LA, **Christopher Shipman** teaches High School English and creative writing. He enjoys varying conceptual styles.

ISSN 2328-3262 (print)

ISSN 2328-3270 (online)

© 2014

Infinity's Kitchen is published in print and online at infinityskitchen.com. Direct inquiries to editor@infinityskitchen.com or 512 Cathedral Street, Suite 1, Baltimore, Maryland 21201. Infinity's Kitchen accepts submissions of verse, prose, image, performance and multimedia. For complete guidelines and to submit online, visit infinityskitchen.com.