

SPIRALLING
Sample Dialogue

by Judith Pratt



Member

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542 N. Taylor Place

Ithaca, NY 14850

607-273-26621

judith@judithpratt.com

CHARACTERS

MEREDITH BAILEY: A lecturer in anthropology, between 55 and 65. Cranky.

JILL ALTSCHULER: A graduate student in anthropology, around 25. Determinedly cheerful.

EMMA PETTIGREW LITCHFIELD: Ageless. In 1910 she left Boston and traveled among the islands of the Pacific.

MASKS

In making the masks, the designer should look at masks from many tribes and cultures; then create a style that is internally coherent without belonging to any known group. The masks should not look anything like people of Western European ancestry.

The masks come from a tribe called the DUAHMUEIAPUE (DOO - AH - MOO - EE - AH - PWAY). I made them up.

Kadrihi (kuh-DREE-ee) Young, beautiful, with smooth round cheeks, big eyes, lush lips. Love, seduction, submission.

Ajalaa (ajuh-LAA) Mature, motherly, pained, martyred.

Chamaaganh (chuh-MAH-guhnuh; guttural "g") An old woman, wise and full of rage

Other Duahmueiapue names:

Gemensai: Gemen-SIGH

Tiyunpiri: Tee-YUN-piri

SETTING

Today, in a small university in a decaying rustbelt city.

The stage represents a Pacific island, a labyrinth, and a grubby office in the college.

ACT ONE

November. A grubby office. Metal furniture, scattered papers. JILL is fooling with a computer. MEREDITH enters, wet, in winter coat and a hurry.

JILL

There you are.

MEREDITH

Traffic was hopeless, worse all the time, hard to believe, I know. And those damn weathermen were wrong again.

JILL

I got you coffee.

MEREDITH
continuing

This is not snow, it's sleet.

JILL

It's on your desk.

MEREDITH

I've stopped drinking coffee.

JILL

Again?

MEREDITH

Is the slide show ready?

JILL

Just a few more minutes.

MEREDITH

You're telling me it's broken. Again.

JILL

Network is down. I'll get it fixed by class time, no problem.

MEREDITH

How the hell can you lecture about artifacts when you can't even see pictures. I'll have to redo the whole damn thing.

JILL

Don't worry. It'll be ready.

MEREDITH

Moronic managers on money-saving missions. Don't replace anything until it disintegrates into its component atoms. Then "express concern" about poor teaching evaluations and lousy staff morale. (*She slams around.*)

JILL

November sucks.

MEREDITH

Sucked dry. Sucked into the void.

JILL

You could check out that box while I finish this.

MEREDITH

What box?

JILL

The one that looks like it came from Indiana Jones.

MEREDITH

It's not a box, it's a crate.

JILL

You could check out that crate.

MEREDITH

Where did it come from?

JILL

Indiana Jones.

MEREDITH

Very funny.

JILL

It was here when I got in. Didn't someone deliver it yesterday afternoon?

MEREDITH

I was at the library. And I locked this door. I always lock the door.

JILL

I asked all around. No one in the office knows anything about it. Or the mail room.

MERIDETH

Probably some inane bureaucratic muddle.

JILL

Maybe I should call security, I mean, you never know

MEREDITH

I have a lecture to rewrite. I don't need them bumbling around in here scratching themselves and shining their flashlights on it.

JILL

That's very classist of you.

MEREDITH

I should never have told you about sixties politics.

JILL

Meredith, I think we should deal with this. I mean, it could be a bomb, or --

MEREDITH

Or some arcane poison.

JILL

Meredith . . .

MEREDITH

enjoying her arcane humor

Maybe the stuff Medea put on that bimbo's nightgown.

JILL

I'll just call security. (*She punches numbers.*) We'll feel better if I do.

MEREDITH

Rummaging in her desk

Will we now.

JILL

Hello? This is Jill Altschuler, in Anthropology. We seem to have this mysterious box A-L-T-S-C-H-U-L-E-R. . . . Room 31B. . . . I don't know, that's the thing, no one signed for it or To Meredith Bailey, Department of Anthropology, but Meredith, what are you . . . ? (*MEREDITH has found a big screwdriver and is prying up the lid of the box.*) No, excuse me, it's just--look, I'll have to call you back. Don't do that. That's insane. Meredith. Shit.

A struggle, during which MEREDITH manages to get the lid off the crate despite JILL'S efforts.

MEREDITH

Are we dead yet?

JILL

We have to get out of here.

MEREDITH

What's the incubation period for bubonic plague?

JILL

at the door, terrified

Come ON.

MEREDITH

Don't be ridiculous.

JILL

Meredith. Please.

JILL hesitates, then runs. MEREDITH unpacks. As she does, EMMA enters into the island space, looking at her journal.

MEREDITH

Look at this packing material. Wood shavings. Excelsior.

MEREDITH lifts out the Kadrihi mask.

EMMA

Kadrihi was the most beautiful. Her skin was as smooth and dark as the river; her breasts as full and round as the honeyfruit.

MEREDITH

Look at this, Jill. Jill? Hmf. No guts.

MEREDITH lifts out the Ajalaa mask.

EMMA

Ajalaa had more children than any other woman, and she loved them all. Whenever a child was orphaned or its parents walked off, Ajalaa would always take that child to her fire.

MEREDITH
to herself

... can't be authentic.

MEREDITH lifts out the Chamaaganh mask. She looks at this one much longer than the other two.

EMMA

Chamaaganh was older than anyone could remember. When people's crops withered, or when they quarreled, they always came to Chamaaganh for counsel.

MEREDITH

...can they?

EMMA

One day, the people came to her and said "That foolish Kanuchuuo has let Death into the world." So Chamaaganh went searching for Death.

MEREDITH puts down the mask, rummages in the box.

MEREDITH

No note. (*Looks at the box, picks at the label.*) Bellamy Pettigrew, Miskatonic Hall.

As EMMA talks, MEREDITH picks up the packing material, shut the box, exits.