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John Yau

THE NEWLY RENOVATED OPERA HOUSE ON GILLIGAN'S
ISLAND

Between the hastily sketched chalk curtains a backdrop of blue cliffs and avalanche mist rising toward a quarter moon. The old, bearded shepherd, who is famous for his reenactments of the early torments of bruised tots, stands up and points to the baloney stains on his shirt, each word forming like a soap bubble on the craters of his huge, cracked, blue lips. A bamboo sewing machine monitors the smell of rotten food trapped beneath the snow. Sound of a train compartment window being opened, accompanied by a foreign, possibly threatening language, gutturals mixed with sand and glass. Guided by pulleys, four ebony sticks roll two purple cabbages painted like salesmen's bruised brains down the aisle of the third class coach. A murderous scream is heard in the balcony causing the audience to turn away from the stage, which a moment later is illuminated by red searchlights. A piece of slightly charred, synthetic material, mostly white, floats to the floor. A woman, who is a weathered, wooden tower, gazes at the horizon, while the sounds of lovesick whales become increasingly louder. At first she appears diffident, but it is soon quite obvious that she has spent the past few hours sobbing into a damp hanky, which she occasionally wrings out with machine-like efficiency. A man limps onto the stage and squints up at the creaking tower. He begins a lengthy monolog of scabrous insults mixed with detailed comments about animal infidelity and the recent invasion of earth by creatures who resemble child movie stars. When he finishes, he falls to his knees and fishes two jade green marbles from his vest pocket. For the first time the woman notices him and says: You little punctured zygote. How dare you fondle your sprockets in my presence. Heed my warning or you will end your days drooling over yourself and your tarnished brood of loved ones. You will live long enough to see your grandchildren dwelling among ants, smaller than the ones that come to feed them bits of meat held between shiny black pincers.

Kneeling amidst the cool winds undulating across the stage, the man pays no attention to the woman's lava of accusations, its

bubbles of ochre bombast. There are other bursts to consider, particularly since his distinctive, undersized nose has started bleeding, and he finds it impossible to staunch the apparently endless cascade. A pool of brownish liquid forms a small lake, where two women in yellow Easter bonnets are drowning. In the illuminated distance, which is separated from the lake by a stone wall built during the reign of a toothless tyrant, three slightly overweight, garrulous policemen are riding silver bicycles. The middle one is carrying a leather bag shaped like a child's head and finds it difficult to maintain his balance. I want to doze while time continues flowing through this planetary circuit I've been saddled with, its butter dish of blinking dreams. My own thoughts are surrounded by embroidered throwaway pillows, and I am little more than a kite string of withered, peony petals somersaulting across a kitchen counter. The sky mangled corpse of a doodlebug clings tenaciously to the storm window. The word "stupendous" is carefully printed in turquoise lipstick on the refrigerator's yellow enamel door. An empty quinine bottle spins across the counter and stops before reaching the stainless steel sink.

The sand shifts its vertical and horizontal parameters, the music of its grinding spheres broadcasting dented pulses to the scaly creatures hibernating on the irregularly arranged lower shelves. Two tents flatten into a tablecloth of stars once seen floating in the Southern hemisphere. A spotted brown-and-blue mongrel begins dancing on its hind legs around the town's last fountain, its disheveled pyramids of poisoned birds. Sheila has been told that a bright red tornado has carried off all the camels lined up at the Connecticut Taxi Stand, and now fears that she will never be able to find Aunt Jane, who vanished while walking from the hotel to the curio shop in search of old engravings of blind Japanese men to put above her bed. A loudspeaker begins broadcasting a slightly hoarse, porcelain-layered voice, which tells the crowd gathered by their windows that there is an iron bridge in the old city that will lead them to various forms of modern transportation, and that all the drivers and engineers will guarantee their passengers the lifelong supply of rejuvenation pills they will need after completing their reentry forms. As a final gesture of both disdain and gratitude, Sheila turns around and begins pulling up her black silk dress and adjusting her pale blue nylon stockings, while licking her lips with an abnormally large, purple tongue, which is the most visible result of her having devoured two dozen grape lolly-

pops for breakfast. A huge wooden door closes. Mice scurry back into their holes and flies finally settle near drying food stains. The bald man behind the gray metal desk goes to the filing cabinet and pulls a jar of earthworms out of the bottom drawer. He turns and opens the closet and begins examining a mound of raincoats, each of which is made from a different colored plastic. A large, rubber hand descends from the hologram of a rainbow, which is rising out of the file cabinet's top drawer, and begins making corrections. The movements are simultaneously deft and mannered. Flames are engulfing the curtains and spreading towards the backdrop of windows and wooden shutters. The young, well-dressed man, who has been sitting in a leather chair on one side of the stage, crashes to the floor, clearly a stiff. Smoke fills the school cafeteria. Children scream and run in every direction, both disturbed and amused by the sight of their teachers being rapidly and painlessly transformed into the tarnished and chipped tourist items their parents inspect at garage sales. A horde of beggars has crawled over to the dead man and is skimming through his pockets. The leader is whistling a familiar tune that no one in the audience can name. A brand new column of crimson sunlight is being lowered through a convoy of threatening clouds. A faint breeze tingles the air, its fleshy remnants.