



# Triple Fable

story-play in one act

*by* Eddie Kohler

12 September 1997

first performing version

19 October 1997



*for Tara Perry*

*dedicated to Bienvenido Rosa  
and Christine Williams*

## NOTES

*Triple Fable* was first presented in MIT Kresge Little Theater as part of MIT Dramashop's student-written, student-directed One Acts, November 6–8, 1997. The production was directed by Monica Gomi; lighting design was by C. Scott Ananian; the stage manager was Julie Park. The cast was as follows:

KATE	Elizabeth Stoehr
ADAM	Peter A. Shulman
MAX	Paul Konigsberg
ANNA	Adriane Stebbins
KARL	Nicholas Hahn
CHRISTINA	Geeta Dayal

I want to send my love and appreciation to all those involved in the production.

Janet Sonenberg was an important influence on this script.

## CAST

in order of appearance

KATE

ADAM

MAX

ANNA

KARL

CHRISTINA

# I

(Dark stage. A lived-in chair and lamp down right are barely visible. Silence for ten seconds.

KATE is heard walking toward the stage with a measured pace. She appears, walks to the chair, sits down, beat, turns on the light, looks at the audience.

*(Pause)*

KATE: (to audience) Adam was a student temping for the summer as a receptionist. He answered the phones: you'd hear his voice when you called, but you'd never want anything from *him*, so he'd redirect your call. He was a good receptionist: the rude people and the nice people got redirected just the same. He had moved to the city six years ago. Before that he lived in rural Pennsylvania, farm country, rolling and silent and empty. Here, he's a little lost, lost and alone.

Oh, you might as well just look for yourselves.

*(Light on ADAM)*

ADAM: (to audience) I grew up near the Kuerners' farm. Andrew Wyeth painted the Kuerners.

There's this one picture, it's of Karl Kuerner. He's in a room that used to be for hanging meat, so there are these hooks on the ceiling. They're rude and strong and angular, and you can *feel* the blood on them, you can almost *taste* it. One of them is over Karl's head and he's just—*smiling*

That's Karl Kuerner. (*beat*)

KATE: Every day Adam walks to work, because his bicycle was stolen and he doesn't want a new one;

ADAM: I really liked the old one. Now it just doesn't seem right.

KATE: So he walks and most days he walks the same way. That way is past a park, and a block of auto repair shops, and a place that sells Indian spices (which you should remember), and a laundromat, and right past the laundromat there's a little bench—

*(Light on MAX on the bench)*

MAX: Yeah, and I'm here.

KATE: Max is nineteen and he knows how to *take* that whole bench like it's an extension of himself.

*(MAX smiles)*

KATE: Adam sees Max. Why? Because he's always there. And he has something Adam doesn't, which is a *place*. And there's his skin, which is rich grey-brown and smooth like bedsheets.

So this is how our story begins.

(*Morning light. ADAM walks past the bench*)

ADAM: Hey.

(MAX looks the other way.)

*Blackout*

## 2

(*Light on ADAM*)

ADAM: (*to audience*) When I was sixteen my mother sent me out to Kuerners' to work. She said they were getting old; I didn't believe it, Karl was real strong even then. But I never really asked her why.

So I spent a lot of time that summer with Karl and Anna, his wife. At first I was out in the fields with Karl. He'd look at me while I worked and mumble under his breath, but he mumbled all the time, so I tried to ignore it. Then he started being real tired in the mornings. When I asked why, he'd say he worked late last night just cause he felt like it. But then I'd catch him staring at me with cold hate in his eyes.

It turned out he'd been going out at night and doing everything over, everything I'd touched. But he never *said* that. Neither of us *said* anything. He'd just stare. That was when I asked if maybe Anna needed me around the house.

(*Light on ANNA*)

ANNA: Well, little Adam, I'm busy here. You want to help, you have to help really.

ADAM: Mrs. Kuerner, I—

ANNA: There's nobody in my way, Adam. You got? Never.

ADAM: No, Mrs. Kuerner. I'll stay out of the way.

ANNA: (*to audience*) That girl just doesn't know what to do with him. I don't know why but she needs him out of the house and what the hell. It's nice to have a body around.

ADAM: (*to audience*) It turned out Mom was seeing a man from Exton who came up weekdays, so the school year was cool but she needed to get rid of me during the summer. I never did much during the summer. I don't know why she didn't just tell me.

ANNA: (*kneeling*) Adam! Adam! Get over here!

ADAM: (*running over*) Yeah, coming!

ANNA: Bring a bucket, Adam! Quick!

(ADAM goes back a few steps for a bucket)

ADAM: You OK, Mrs. Kuerner?

ANNA: It's this damn spring, something wrong with the goddamn spring.

ADAM: (*to audience*) The spring was just a tiny little stream of water; they ran it into a tub in the barn extension and used it for the livestock and to drink.

ANNA: Give me the bucket.

ADAM: What's wrong?

ANNA: Look at the goddamn water, Adam, you can't see what's wrong?

(*Light on KATE*)

KATE: The water was red as blood and punky. It smelled like yesterday, old and used and no good for anything anymore. They bailed it out of the tub, first Anna then Adam; then they moved the bathtub and Anna opened up the valve, and the spring spilled red all over the floor and drained away.

ANNA: Just some dead thing in the water, it'll flush out I guess. Lord knows how long it'll take.

(ADAM and ANNA sit at a table and eat. KARL passes through)

KATE: Karl didn't come home that night until pretty late, and he went straight upstairs when he came.

ADAM: What's wrong with Mr. Kuerner?

ANNA: Oh probably the water.

ADAM: How's he know about the water?

ANNA: Karl knows the problems around here.

(*Pause.*)

*Blackout except for KATE*

### 3

KATE: Cambridge, please.

Reimplementation Technologies.

Reimplementation Technologies?

Oh, the main number.

936-5524, thank you very much. (*dials*)

(*Light on ADAM at a desk*)

ADAM: Hello, Reimplementation Technologies.

KATE: Good morning, I'm looking for Deepinder Vijayendran?

ADAM: Okay, I'll transfer you right there.

KATE: Oh thank you.

(*Light off KATE*)

ADAM: Hello, Reimplementation Technologies.

I'm sorry?

I'm sorry, you must have the wrong number. Thank you, ma'am.

Hello, Reimplementation Technologies.

Sir, if....

I understand that it's....

Sir....

Yes.

Yes.

That is a very difficult position, sir.

Yes.

Well, I can try to transfer you again....

Yes, sir, but Suu-yi is the only person handling that product.

I could transfer you to her supervisor, um... (*shuffles papers*) Jonathon Weiss.

All right, sir.

No, thank you.

(*beat*)

Hello, Reimplementation Technologies.

Yes, it is.

One moment; I'll transfer you to sales.

Hello, Reimplementation Technologies.

Excuse me, sir, could you repeat that?

Greg Raines?

Oh, Greg *Laines*. One moment and I'll transfer you.

(*Pause. Light on ANNA*)

Hello, Reimplementation Technologies.

(*Pause*)

Hello, Reimplem—

ANNA: (*overlapping*) Hello, is Adam Ericksson there.

ADAM: (*pause*) Excuse me?

ANNA: Is Adam Ericksson there.

ADAM: (*beat*) This is he.

ANNA: Adam, this is Anna Kuerner.

ADAM: Mrs. Kuerner—? How are you?

ANNA: Karl is in the hospital. I thought you should know.

ADAM: Oh my god. (*Pause*)

ANNA: He calls for you. (*beat*) Why?

ADAM: I— (*beat*) I don't know.

ANNA: Well. I'll have to ask him then. (*Pause*)

ADAM: Anna, are you all right?

ANNA: I'm fine. Well, I should go.

ADAM: Oh, Mrs. Kuerner, I'm sorry—

ANNA: (*overlapping*) Your mother gave me the number; I just thought you should know.

ADAM: Well, thank you for thinking of me. And—send my best to Karl.

ANNA: I will. (*hangs up*)

ADAM: Is there anything I can—

(*Lights off ANNA. Beat*)

ADAM: Hello, Reimplementation Technologies?  
(*Blackout*)

## 4

(*Light on KATE and MAX standing down center.*)

KATE: (*to audience*) This is a park in the south, down by the river. It's about four in the afternoon. (*beat*)

It's hot and it's humid. And it's hazy, so the whole big sky is just a glowing gray-white. It's quiet too.

MAX: (*to audience*) I've been outside all day. (*beat*)

KATE: (*pointing offstage*) Vinson is on the hill with a gun. Will is standing there, by his car.

(*Pause.*)

CHRISTINA *enters up left and sees MAX*)

CHRISTINA: Max!

(*MAX smiles, turns, steps toward CHRISTINA. Immediate blackout. Gunshot. MAX falls in the darkness*)

## 5

(*Light on ADAM*)

ADAM: I couldn't stop thinking about the red water. There was something wrong with it, something wrong with Karl. Anna wouldn't talk about it. Dinner was tense and then I went home.

At three in the morning I still couldn't sleep. I wanted to see the water again,

to touch it. I didn't believe it was real any more.

So I got out of bed and went down to the barn extension in my pajamas.

I could feel the pajamas rubbing against my skin, my hair in the breeze, my feet sinking a little into the dirt and brushing dew off the grass. The moon was full and bright blue-white and low in the sky. I felt like every step I took was permanent: tomorrow Karl would see the footprints in the grass and read them like they were neon signs.

The water was still running. It looked black in the moonlight, black like poison, black like an open doorway.

The smell was almost suffocating. During the day I hadn't even noticed it, with Anna there and the smells of animals and summer, but at night it was so strong, a flood carrying me away. It was *physical* above all, musty and old and living. It took over my body and my hair all stood on end.

I....

(*Light on KATE*)

I had a hard-on and my pajamas were sticking to my skin with sweat and smell. Everything was so physical and real, it never was before, I had to touch it all because it all had something to tell me....

(*Pause. KARL enters*)

KATE: (*to audience*) When Karl came in, Adam was feeling the water go down his throat. Karl just stood in the doorway and stared without smiling, threatening just because of who he was. He didn't say anything, and eventually they left together.

(*Blackout except for KATE*)

## 6

KATE: Karl Kuerner is 70 now, old enough to tell age from death—which is hard. Now he feels like death. His insides are working stranger and slower, like an old stone mill. A stone mill is glorious at work, grinding stones heavy as elephants spinning around smooth as you like; but then the water slows to a

trickle and the grinding stones stop, and nothing can make them move again. Now he's in the hospital with cancer of the pancreas. He is very drugged and he sleeps all the time.

(*Light on KARL awake in a hospital bed*)

When he's not asleep he talks to Anna or writes in his farm notebook. There's no animals to take care of in the hospital, so he just passes the time in it. Eventually he'll give it to someone.

Every couple of hours a nurse comes in doing the managed-care rounds. She says, (*to KARL*) "Hi Mr. Kuerner how are you feeling please fill out this card for your next meal?"

KARL: (*grunts dismissively to audience*)

KATE: (*to audience*) Karl doesn't bother to have sympathy for the nurses. (*beat*)

Whenever Karl's asleep, he dreams. They're drug-dreams, full of color and motion and strangeness, but they always settle into a pattern Karl knows. A very old pattern. (*she notices KARL moving*) Oh—

(*KARL is getting out of his bed, a difficult process. KATE stops and watches him. KARL walks down center*)

KARL: I grew up in Berlin, long time ago. I was a member of Hitler Youth with everyone else. Mama took us out to Switzerland when the war started, and we stayed there; I married Anna back in Berlin in forty-six, but we left, everything was so broken down, and came here.

I was not a farmer in Berlin. I partied—well, I had a good time. What a city before the war! Everything new: new colors, new smells and sounds. New people.

When I came to America, though, no more cities. No, never. I had enough.

(*Pause*)

There was a man in Berlin then, called Adam. Adam Schachtner. A young man, not much to look at—but it was strange—at parties, at meetings, always he was there. And I always saw him. Never talked, just saw. Stared. Still I don't know why.

And now I dream him.

It was a riot night. Everyone was outside, running and yelling. At midnight someone set a building on fire. They must have used gasoline, the whole thing exploded at once. Everyone ran away but me, I stayed and looked at the fire.

Then I heard this screaming. A cat, trapped in the building, and it shot out the

front door like a bullet and ran right past me—I can smell the smoke—and then somehow it's in Adam Schachtner's arms, crying, and Adam is staring at me. (*beat*)

When I came back after the war, Adam was dead. Killed in a bombing while taking a bath. Anna saw him, and she told me:

(*Light on ANNA upstage*)

ANNA: Small and starved and thin, black with smoke, and the bathwater red with blood.

(*Pause. Light off ANNA*)

KARL: Well, that is not something you forget, but in America there is not much you can remember. So I did not remember.

(*sudden pain*)

But now! Why do I see him *now*! Why has he come back *now* when it's *my* turn to die!

(*Pause. KARL's mouth works.*

*He grunts, gestures, turns and walks back to the bed. Blackout)*

## 7

(*Spotlight on MAX*)

MAX: The gunshot was too soft. Then I heard it again, louder.

Bang!—Bang!—Bang!—Bang! Like bells on Sunday. The last thing I heard.

Christina.

My face in the dirt.

(*Pause*)

Then yesterday, I woke up.

Because I'm not fucking done. This is my life. My— (*beat*) And I'm not done. I want to be everywhere, now. To see it all. And I can. I can see you. And hear you, and touch you, and taste you, and smell you.

That's almost enough.

(MAX turns away. Light off MAX. Light on CHRISTINA. She is looking down and almost crying. Long pause.

KATE walks in. Pause)

KATE: (gently) Christina.

(Pause. CHRISTINA shakes her head, runs off left. KATE watches her leave, then walks off right.

Blackout)

## 8

(Light on ADAM asleep in the bed and ANNA on the phone.

ADAM's phone rings twice. He wakes abruptly and answers)

ADAM: Hello.

ANNA: Hello, Adam?

ADAM: Yeah.

ANNA: This is Anna Kuerner.

ADAM: Oh! Hi, Mrs. Kuerner. What's—

ANNA: Adam, Karl is dead.

ADAM: Oh, no—

ANNA: He left you something.

ADAM: (beat) What?

ANNA: He left you something, little Adam, a book. His almanac. He told me you should take it so I'm sending it to you.

ADAM: You don't have to—

ANNA: You'll get it pretty soon. (beat)

Well, that's it.

ADAM: Anna, I—I.... (beat. He is almost crying with frustration)

ANNA: (*gently*) Adam, I can't talk now. Understand that.

ADAM: (*beat*) I understand.

ANNA: (*beat*) Goodbye.

(ANNA hangs up. *Blackout*)

## 9

(*Light on KATE standing down right wearing a green change apron*)

KATE: There's a man who hawks papers at the corner of Mass Ave and River Street. It's ten in the morning, and he's there today. He's been doing this for forty years.

(ADAM enters up left)

KATE: (*holding up some papers and shouting, singsong*) Chraaaaanicle! Getcher Chronicle out today! Cambridge Chraaaaanicle! Aaahts and Ennatainment! August calendah! Globe's heah and the Herald! Globe and the Herald and the Chraaaaanicle!

ADAM: (*to KATE*) One Chronicle, please?

KATE: Sevenny-five cents.

(ADAM holds out a dollar bill. KATE makes change)

Outofadollah, you enjoy it, sir. (*beat*)

(*to audience*)

It reads "Two Sought in Death of Cambridge Teen" and the picture's of a girl and Max, Max from the bench, Max who's dead now, caught in crossfire. The article blurs and Adam needs to sit down but there's nowhere to sit, so he starts to cry.

(*Pause.*

MAX crosses the stage, once looking at ADAM. ADAM stares back, shocked. *Blackout except for ADAM*)

## I O

ADAM: (*from very far away*) That night. The night....

(*Pause*)

The next day, the day after the red water, I went back to Kuerners to work. There was a note on the door from Anna; it said they were sick, to come back tomorrow.

I went to the barn extension. The faucet that carried the spring water was—someone had smashed it off with a two-by-four.

I went home and heard my mother in bed with Benny, whose licence plate read “2HOT4U”.

I walked fifteen miles.

(*Pause*)

## I I

(ADAM walks to his desk)

ADAM: Hello, Reimplementation Technologies?

Hello?

Hello?

(hangs up)

Hello, Reimplementation Technologies?

(sharply)

No, he's— (*beat*)

(small, apologetic)

He's at a meeting, sorry.

Yes.

Goodbye.

(*Long pause. Light on MAX*)

Hello, Reimplementation Technologies?

(*Pause*)

(*very small voice*)

Hello?

(*Pause*)

MAX: Is Adam Ericksson there?

(*Pause*)

ADAM: This is he.

(*Pause.*)

MAX *hangs up. Blackout*)

## I 2

(*Light on CHRISTINA on the bench. ADAM crosses to the bench and sits down. Pause.*)

(*Flash of light*)

CHRISTINA: Yes, I'm Christina Olson, Max Rosa was my boyfriend and he was shot to death, just *stop looking at me!*

ADAM: I'm sorry, I—

CHRISTINA: (*sobbing*) Oh, Jesus Christ, everybody's fucking sorry, do you think I give a shit? We were in love! We were so in love, goddamn it, we were *different people*, we were *better people*, and now I'm *alone!* I'm alone and I'm so *fucked up!* I cry all the time, I can't eat anything, my family makes me puke! They're all so fucking sorry! And Mom thinks she *understands!*

She understands *shit!* No one fucking understands *shit!* Yeah, you think I want your fucking *money?* I want *Max* and he's *dead* and it's *your fault!*

(*Pause*)

Oh, Christ, no one used to know who I was. And I wanted people to know! I wanted the whole fucking city to know!...

(*small voice*)

Don't look at me, please don't look at me, when you look I know he's gone.  
Just don't fucking say a word. Let me through. Let me cry, goddamn it, and  
don't look at me.

(*Pause. Flash of light. CHRISTINA is composed: none of this actually happened. Pause*)

ADAM: I'm sorr— (*beat*)

(*CHRISTINA stares wildly at ADAM, stands up, exits. ADAM puts his head between his knees. Pause.*)

*Footsteps from offstage. MAX enters, crosses to the bench, sits down. ADAM lifts his head. Beat)*

ADAM: Uh— (*beat*)

(*small voice*)

Hey.

MAX: (*beat*) Hey what?

(*Blackout*)

## I 3

(*Spotlight on KARL center stage*)

KARL: Adam.

I am dying and it's taking some time. I think all the time, about a lot of things.  
One thing is this person who he reminds me of you. So.

I want to give you advice.

Don't expect too much. This "dying wise man" is for crap. But now that I am  
dying I think I understand who you are.

I think you are scared of everything. You have nothing to be scared of. I am  
not scary, now that I am dying, but also I never was. Anna is not scary. Your  
mother is not scary.

You are so scared that you don't talk to anyone. Maybe someday you learn to  
talk without saying anything. Or maybe you never talk at all, ever. Which is

worse?

I have lived through frightening times, Adam, and you have it lucky. Always remember that. Always remember that.

(*Blackout*)

## I 4

(*Light on MAX and ADAM on the bench. Pause*)

MAX: They shot me.

ADAM: I—I read about it.

MAX: Do you want to know how it feels?

ADAM: (*beat*) Yes.

MAX: Like...like I was sucked through the hole. The hole in my body. I can still feel it.

ADAM: (*beat. Puts his head down*) Shit.

MAX: Shit *what*? You're still alive!

(ADAM says nothing)

You can see me.

ADAM: Yes.

MAX: You're the only one.

(*Pause*)

ADAM: What do you want?

(MAX sneers and turns away. *Pause*)

MAX: I live right there, you know. (*points*) The yellow house.

ADAM: (*small voice*) I walk past it.

MAX: (*points again*) Christina lives there.

(*Pause*)

Do you want to know how it feels?

ADAM: No.

MAX: It feels— (*beat*)

I feel light. Like air. And cold.

(*Pause*)

ADAM: A wind in winter.

MAX: Yeah.

(*Pause*)

Why did you always say Hey?

ADAM: I don't know. (*beat*) Because you were so beautiful.

MAX: Really?

ADAM: God, yes. And you belonged here. I don't. (*beat*) I hope you don't mind.

MAX: Oh, fuck it. No.

(*Pause*)

Everyone belongs here.

ADAM: That's not true.

MAX: Yeah, it is. Everyone.

(*Pause. MAX looks off stage left, stands up, and turns away*)

ADAM: What?

(CHRISTINA enters, walks to the bench, and sits down, facing straight ahead.)

(*Pause. ADAM looks to MAX. Pause*)

ADAM: (*gently, to CHRISTINA*) Hey.

CHRISTINA: (*beat*) Hey.

(CHRISTINA settles back into the bench, openly crying. MAX turns around and looks down.  
*Blackout*)

I 5

(*Light on KATE in her chair. Pause; she smiles at the audience.*)

*(She stands)*

KATE: I needed some asafoetida, so I decided to go to the Indian spice store, do you remember it? I love spices! Their smells and colors and tastes, but their variety, too, and what they *mean*, because every spice, like everything in this world, means something. Fennel in your keyhole will help you sleep at night; basil grows best on the brains of murdered men. But rosemary helps the memory: it's a symbol of fidelity and love and friendship. I always wear a locket full of rosemary. Always.

Oh! Asafoetida treats flatulence.

*(Bright, full stage light. ADAM is on the bench, MAX and CHRISTINA and ANNA and KARL are upstage. All are watching KATE)*

When I got to the store, there was a boy—a man?—sitting on the bench in front. He looked at me with empty eyes, and suddenly *I knew who he was*. Not just his name: *everything*. Where he had grown up, when he had cried, what he thought and what he felt. I knew about Karl and Anna and Max. Who he was, all of it—the whole network of his life!

So I just stopped and stared, and tried to decide who I was going to tell and how I was going to tell it.

*(Pause)*

ADAM: *(to audience)* I was sitting on Max's bench and this woman crossed the street in front of me. We looked at each other, casually, I thought, but she just stopped, almost in mid-stride, and stared and stared. A smile covered her whole body like daybreak.

Then she wobbled and her eyes rolled back in her head and she fell to the ground like a stone. (*KATE does this. During the next speech, she stands quietly and walks off stage left*)

Her head hit a corner somewhere, and when I ran over to help, already she was lying in a pool of red water, the smile still on her face.

*(ANNA, KARL, CHRISTINA, MAX, and ADAM gather around the place where KATE fell. Fade to black except for KATE's lamp. Silence for ten seconds.)*

*KATE is heard walking toward the stage with a measured pace, exactly as the beginning. She appears, walks to the chair, beat, smiles at the audience, turns out the light.*

*Blackout)*