



KINFABULA

Kinfabula

Kinfabula premiered at James Watrous Gallery April 15, 2022. The play—allegedly of mythic origin—has been rewritten countless times and will be rewritten again today. The iteration before you was recorded by Borealis.

Characters

Artist.
Guest.

Scene

A queer little room; domestic and dreamlike.

Time

Relative; possibly, "*the future*"

PROLOGUE

ARTIST: Thanks for coming over. I haven't had a visitor in so long.

GUEST: I know what you mean. I feel like it's always been COVID.

ARTIST: I'd make you some tea, but I don't seem to have a kettle anymore...

GUEST: It's all good, I'm keeping my mask on anyway. How have you been holding up lately?

ARTIST: I was foolish to think I could write a play with so many ghosts around me.

GUEST: ...you can see *ghosts*?!

(end of prologue)

ACT ONE

ARTIST: Our myths have consequences, you know? Take this wallpaper, for example. Ever heard of the mural *Lumberjack Fight on the Flambeau River*? Yeah, I hadn't either. Some guy named... Jim? James? Yeah, James. James painted it in a post office in the 1930s. That's what's all over these walls. Notice the hands? I mean, there are a *lot* of hands. At first, it seems like the mural is valorizing workers, or maybe documenting local lore. But whose lore? Aren't there people missing from this scene? And honestly—can I say this kinda thing around here?—it's also kind of *queer*, you know?

GUEST: So it's *fabulous* but it's complicated. Does that explain the pink pedestals?

ARTIST: Pedestals are pedestals, no matter which color you paint them.

GUEST: I wonder what all these books are about?

ARTIST: Why don't you pick one up and find out for yourself? Some say that books are a connection to the rest of the world—a window in the shape of a story.

GUEST: Some call them tree corpses.

ARTIST: Are we talking about the wallpaper again?

GUEST: Shouldn't you know?

ARTIST: What do you mean?

GUEST: Didn't you design this set? Didn't you write this script?

ARTIST: Oh. Me? No, no, no.

GUEST: It says right here in the script that you're the artist. Right here—your lines are labeled *artist* and mine are labeled *guest*. I know for sure that I'm a guest, so that checks out, and that means that you... well, you made all of this!

ARTIST: I most certainly did not!

GUEST: Are you sure?

ARTIST: I can assure you that the artist is not present.

GUEST: Maybe you've been working on this so long that you can't remember anymore. Maybe you relied

on so many people to pull all of this together that you've forgotten your role in all of it or why you're here in the first place. Maybe you got lost somewhere off stage and are afraid to pick up your own lines.

ARTIST: Hey, I hate to disappoint you, but the artist ain't me.

GUEST: Well... If you didn't write this, and I didn't write this, who did?

(end of act one)

ACT TWO

ARTIST: Okay... I've given it some more thought and... What if I *am* the artist?

GUEST: Are you fessin' up?

ARTIST: Well, no. Not exactly. What if I... what if we! What if *we* wrote the rest of this together?

GUEST: That's a pretty big jump to go from "*I'm not the author*" to "*maybe I'm the author*" to "*we're writing this together.*"

ARTIST: Well, we might as well acknowledge that we're both here now and probably have stories to share, right?

GUEST: I just showed up here, so you might have to fill in some blanks for me.

ARTIST: The isolation we've each experienced lately has us noticing the other absences hidden all around us. Or how 'bout this: if we're not wondering about who's absent, cuz we never forgot them or they *are* us, maybe the pandemic has us thinking about who we want to be in good relation with. Who we wanna be in solidarity with, you know? In a lot of ways, we've been alienated from each other, and I'm talking *long before COVID*. It's got me wondering who my kin are. If kinship is something real or if it's a myth

we tell ourselves to get by. Or maybe I tell myself that kinship is a myth because I don't want to believe my own responsibility in keeping the friendships that I need to survive. Maybe I don't wanna admit to the pain when solidarity frays around the edges and shows us something eroded underneath. Maybe kinship is like grief and follows us around wherever we go—or maybe kinship only exists as long as we each maintain it. Maybe kinship is mutual care and responsibility. Maybe it *has* to be mutual. Maybe kinship is impossible when there's a hero involved. Maybe kinship is a fundamentally unheroic kind of story.

GUEST: Hmm, I think I'm following you now. Maybe kin tell common stories? Maybe our caring isn't mutual when we believe different stories.

ARTIST: And maybe myths help us imagine ourselves into a future we might actually want. Maybe our urge for speculative imagining is an urge to care better. What if we told stories that helped us commit to each other?

GUEST: Our bodies and our bonds may be rendered invisible, but they are our most meaningful tools for knowledge and the sacred.

ARTIST: Damn, that's good. Did you write that or did I?

(end of act two)

ACT THREE

ARTIST: Wait a second... Didn't I read somewhere that this play is set in the future? If this is supposed to be the future, I would have expected it to look more _____.

GUEST: Maybe! Maybe the set is incidental because time is relative? Consider this: if our perception of time, our shared myths, and our forms of social organization influence each other, then maybe our futures are determined by how we *relate* to one another and the more-than-human world *today*, rather than the specific props around us. Maybe our futures are about the *social* technologies we practice, like communal meals, mutual aid networks, and _____.

ARTIST: I tend to think imagining ourselves into the future means picking up the scattered pieces of our present and making something new with them.

GUEST: And there are a lot of scattered pieces, aren't there? Our people are facing challenges like _____. And I've gotta tell you, these challenges can feel real overwhelming. But at *this* moment? I think that practicing kinship means practicing how we wanna care, resist, and organize towards a future we really want. It means opposing the capitalist settler state and reforms that don't really address the root causes of these challenges we face.

ARTIST: This really comes down to specifics, doesn't it? Who is the "we" in our stories? Who do we want the "we" to be? And who has the power to decide? I'm still trying to figure out how to repair harm and build futures at the same time. Maybe repairing harm *is* building a future. Maybe real imagination recognizes the ways we've hurt each other and actually tries to do something about it. Maybe building a future means rethinking what a family even is, you know? Like... what is a family meant to reproduce? Maybe a family is a kind of affinity group whose purpose is to _____. Oh boy, listen to us. This got kinda preachy, didn't it?

GUEST: Sometimes the preachy thing needs to be preached.

ARTIST: But isn't this all just a bit... literal? Isn't art supposed to be a little more mysterious? More fantastical? More _____?

GUEST: Artists aren't magical beings living in another universe. Then again, they also can't expect the minutiae of their every tangled thought to be easily understood through their art. Or maybe they can, but not exactly as they choose? Yeah, that's it! Maybe artists, their art, and even the gallery they show in are all bound up together, but they're afraid of what that complicity means so they protect themselves in abstractions, hiding the details of what they're learning or unlearning.

ARTIST: Maybe abstractions are evidence of artists collaborating with their surroundings in order to make sense of the world. Maybe abstractions are signifiers of something very real, but are marked and coded in such a way that only our kin will perceive and elaborate upon them.

GUEST: Huh, so you're saying that kinship is a kind of co-authorship. That means *Kinfabula* isn't the final presentation of the private ideas of one artist, but an invitation to *co-author* this moment so that we can

_____!

ARTIST: Yes! Totally! And... I mean, co-authorship is cool and all, but... aren't art galleries more about observation and contemplation? What if I was looking forward to sharing a kind of *thoughtful silence* between us today, where words don't need to be spoken to understand each other?

GUEST: Then maybe we shouldn't have filled *Act Three* with so many words, huh? Jokes aside, we're gonna make some kinda meaning out of this whether we say the words out loud or not. We're always making meaning out of what we experience—*including* the audience and *including* the silence. Maybe we need to share our ideas out loud so that we can build liberatory myths and not perpetuate dangerous ones.

ARTIST: I want to believe that! But what if I'm already heartbroken, and worried that nothing will come out quite right?

GUEST: Yeah. That's real. And... As far as saying the right thing... Isn't that what rewrites are for? It's okay to say what we feel and evolve our thinking with each new interaction. We can change the words every time we run this play. You and me? We can change this story right now.

—end of play (but not really the end)—

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Actors and future directors are invited not only to fill in the blanks of the script provided in the pages prior, but to revise entire passages to fit your current understanding of kinship as a liberatory myth capable of co-structuring the futures we want to inhabit together.

Note that stage directions have been intentionally omitted. Given the likelihood of script revisions, changing contexts, a range of online or offline venues, and a diversity of dis/abilities among actors, this openness is meant to support self determination in each iteration of the play. Jot down your own setting descriptions, stage directions, and other notes. Perform *Kinfabula* with a stranger or with your favorite people.

Improvising even single lines in the middle of an otherwise scripted play can prove difficult for actors with to-do lists, algebra II homework, or doctor's bills weighing on their minds. Consider the following exercises as you warm up to writing about themes and acting out scenes that are meaningful and relevant to your lives.

ACTIVITY: BOOK LINES

Pick up a book and flip to any page. Read the first sentence that catches your attention (or the second or third, as you fancy). Or revel in a favorite song and pick out a lyric that moves you. How does the line build upon or dispute your notions of community? What else does the line bring up for you?

Write down the sentence that caught your attention. Rearrange the words. Add in your own. Delete a few words and leave the blank spaces on the page. Cross out the whole sentence and write your response to it. Replace generalizations with words that reflect your specific circumstance. Build on or challenge the supposed knowledge in front of you, and try to give credit whenever sourcing directly from other documents.

ACTIVITY: SOLARPUNK FUTURES

Check out *Solarpunk Futures*, a storytelling game for imagining pathways to a desirable world from the perspective of a utopian future. The game's structure of *backcasting* asks players to "remember" how their Ancestors used certain Tools and Values to overcome real-world Challenges—as if the events already happened. Play this game or use the game's deck of cards as inspiration for stories that move us towards collective care. (*Free downloads of Solarpunk Futures can be found at thefuture.wtf*)

In this spirit, make a poem by repeatedly completing the phrase *I remember...*

I remember when the police were abolished and our community became safer

I remember when we organized around ensuring that everyone has access to medicine and rest

I remember _____

I remember _____

I remember _____

BE IN COMMUNITY

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