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## **Cast of Characters**

THE TALE CARRIER (THE DOG)

FOX

RABBIT

MONKEY

GOOSE

HOG (also plays imaginary/mirrored Lion)

GOAT

ALLIGATOR (the actor playing Hog)

HOG #2 (the actor also playing Goose)

SINGER

## **Production Notes**

All performers except for Rabbit will perform as a music ensemble as well. The ensemble, dominated by percussion, (tombak, conga, kalimba, cowbells, tom tom, daf, etc.) and perhaps one or two string instruments.

No more than one keyboard instrument is advisable. The actors perform in mask, but only a modified, suggestive mask is necessary, leaving most of the face revealed. Only the Lion(s) would have a full head-covering mask. In the original production the lion masks were oversized Indian stylized lion masks with manes.

The center of the stage is held by the sliding doors which open into the Lion's cave.

Around the performing area, set up symmetrically, eight small benches or "pods" which represent the living space of the different animals in their town (Though they should be designed for sitting standing and dancing on).

The characters in this theatre parable are people, not animals. The animal represents perhaps a certain type of character: something essential about them. Therefore use of animal mask—or animal head-dress and costume features can be heightened. Tails are allowed. The 2 lions, the main one, and his reflection, should preferably have grand Asian or African-style lion masks. Clothing for the basic costume can be something neutral. The combination of these elements should be conducive to dance and ritualized movement.

## Acknowledgments

*Lion Tale* was first produced by the Prince Georges Children's Theatre, summer touring show, June 24–August 5, 2002 for fifty performances, with the following cast and staff:

|                                   |                         |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| DOG .....                         | Ameerah LeGrande        |
| GOOSE / 2nd HOG .....             | LaPortia Roscoe         |
| GOAT / 2ND LION.....              | Brian Stepowany         |
| HOG / ALLIGATOR / LION .....      | Charles Martin          |
| MONKEY .....                      | Joy Harris              |
| FOX .....                         | Dominique Colding       |
| RABBIT .....                      | Miguel Jarquin-Moreland |
| PERCUSSION .....                  | Nabeen Singha           |
| Director .....                    | Joe Martin              |
| Musical Director .....            | Chris Patton            |
| Scenic Design .....               | Mike Stepowany          |
| Producer .....                    | Cecil Thompson          |
| Choreographer, Costumer .....     | Christel Stevens        |
| African Dance choreographer ..... | Daniel Ssunna           |
| Movement Consultant.....          | Irina Tsikurishvilli    |
| Company Manager .....             | Greg Marzullo           |

# LION TALE

by Joe Martin

BASED ON AN AFRICAN AMERICAN TALE AND  
A PERSIAN VERSION BY JALÂLUDDÎN RUMI

## Prologue, Introduction

*(Percussion, rhythm.)*

*(THE TALE CARRIER (DOG) and SINGER step forward and begin singing:)*

### **TALE CARRIER (DOG) and SINGER.**

We are *[name of your company]*

And we're here to tell the Lion Tale

Tale of the Lion (Mighty Lion)

Tale of the Lion (Mighty Lion)

Tale of the Rabbit (Trickster Rabbit)

Tale of the Rabbit (Trickster Rabbit)

*(They break into a wild dance, gospel rhythms or African rhythms.)*

*(Percussion only.)*

*(The animals freeze on their "pods.")*

*(The TALE CARRIER/DOG steps forward.)*

\* \* \*

## **1: The Mission**

### **TALE CARRIER (DOG).**

Now, this tale is about the reason why

Trickster Rabbit doesn't have to work no more.

This is how it came about.

### **ALL.**

THIS TALE IS FROM MISSOURI

BUT THIS ALL HAPPENED IN AFRICA!

**INDIVIDUAL ANIMALS.**

This took place in the savanna and the wilderness

This took place in the village

This took place in the forest

This took place in the town

**TALE CARRIER.**

In those old days folks all lived in settlements and such  
and they were pretty good neighbors  
and believed in having a good time.

Things were going along fairly well  
until a big lion—the boss of the woods he called himself  
moved into the settlement where the folks—  
Rabbit and Fox and Goat and Hog and Monkey—  
and Goose and Alligator and all the other folks lived

That lion was not about doing productive stuff

All he did was hang out—

AND DESTROY PIGS AND GOATS AND MONKEYS AND  
THINGS

till it looked like after a while he was going to  
ruin the whole neighborhood and everyone in it.

*(A roar. Screams. Drums.)*

*(The ANIMALS flee from left to right and freeze.)*

*(A roar. Screams. Drums.)*

*(The ANIMALS flee from right to left and freeze.)*

*(So far, the LION is imaginary.)*

\* \* \*

**FOX.**

Brothers, sisters. It's time we had a meeting!

**TALE CARRIER.**

There was a lot of tension

so they had lots of arguments.

*(The ANIMALS all argue vociferously.)*

**FOX.**

Look, we got to come to some decisions here.  
We've got to tell Lion that we just can't stand it anymore.

**MONKEY.**

If he keeps doing as he's been doing  
there won't be anyone left around here anymore.

**GOOSE.**

Except him!

**ALL.**

That lion's killing us—  
He's got to stop this destruction—  
He's got to stop eating period  
that's the problem—

**HOG.**

Aw, now listen  
it's not right to starve anybody to death.  
People've got to eat.

*(They all look at HOG. A silence.)*

Well, am I right? Hunh? Hunh?

**FOX.**

Hog has a point. That is the natural order.

**MONKEY.**

But it's hoo hoo hee hee hideous!  
We're the ones he hoo hoo hee hee eats!

**FOX.**

Well, he's got to learn to conduct himself in an orderly fashion.

**GOAT.**

That's be-e-est. That's be-e-est. Oorderly.

**FOX.**

If we're going to make that sort of sacrifice,  
what're we going to ask of him?

**GOOSE.**

He has got to stay in his house and behave himself.

**FOX.**

And if he won't?

**HOG.**

Then we'll be forced to call the law on him  
and maybe put him in jail. Hunh? Hunh?

*(Agreement. Applause.)*

**FOX.**

Well, ladies and gentlemen.  
We have gotten this part of the matter settled.  
The next question is:  
who's going to carry the news to Lion.

**GOAT.**

That Lion is a bad man to fool with.

*(They all argue.)*

**MONKEY.**

Listen, everybody is scared of him.

**DOG.**

You know, I wouldn't mind going to Lion's house  
and telling him what the folks here have to say  
But you know I'm behind in my corn planting  
and I just don't have the time.

**FOX.**

My friends, I am more than willing to go myself  
but I've got to go and dig a well  
before all my stock perish due to thirst.  
It's a dry year.

**GOOSE.**

I got to get to my field and cut down that grass.

**MONKEY.**

I've been laid up with my back ache two weeks now  
and the kids are all home 'cause it's summer break.

**FOX.**

Why don't you take them to see some theatre.

**MONKEY.**

Theatre! They don't want to see theatre  
they just want to hang around and eat and drink soda.

**HOG.**

Me, I've got to go and root up my garden  
in case we ever get that rain.

**FOX.**

It seems like we've all got real important business  
in this wilderness/settlement/village/town.

*(RABBIT jumps into the middle.)*

**RABBIT.**

By golly folks.  
If you're all scared of him, I'm not!

**TALE CARRIER.**

Rabbit was a good man  
good hearted and a good neighbor  
But he sure did know a lot of cursing and bad words.  
Right then, Rabbit started swearing and cursing.

*(RABBIT inaudibly swears and curses.)*

*(He jumps up and down, and gestures emphatically.)*

\* \* \*

**TALE CARRIER.**

I said Rabbit was a good man  
but you could never rightly call Rabbit  
a good Christian man,  
or a good Muslim/Buddhist/Jewish/Hindu man  
but in those days things were different  
from what they are now.  
He was also called Trickster by his mother.

**RABBIT.**

Folks—a man's just a man  
and he isn't anymore than anybody else.  
I'm as good as Lion.  
I don't care if you're all scared of him.

I'm not. I'll take him the news myself.

**THE OTHERS.** (*Cutting each other off:*)

Heck, Rabbit, you know you have more sense than that.—

Lion is two, three times bigger than you.—

He'll eat you up and won't know he's had a mouthful.—

Aren't you scared?

**RABBIT.**

Scared. Who, me?

Bless your souls, folks. I thought you knew

I wasn't scared of anything or anybody.

And just to prove it to you

I'm going down there and telling that old mangy Lion fella

just exactly what we're going to do for him

and just exactly what we aren't.

And if he doesn't like it he can lump it.

You wait for me here, folks, and I'll show you.

*(RABBIT tucks his pants in his red-top boots pulls his white duck-cloth cap to one side of his head. He produces a cigar and puts it in the corner of his mouth and begins walking.)*

\* \* \*

**TALE CARRIER.**

Rabbit sauntered off to Lion's house like he was going to a picnic.

Rabbit walked down the road mighty and biggity.

\* \* \*

*(Traveling sequence: As long as the other animals can see him he keeps this pose but then he gets out of eyeshot and his demeanor changes. He rubs the cigar out and pockets it. He combs his hair, straightens his hat, and walks with more humility. He begins to have trouble stopping his legs from shaking. He comes to Lion's door, becomes penitent, approaches the door on his knees. He knocks on the doors. Three knocks. His legs shake. His hands shake.)*

**RABBIT.**

Mister Lion?...Mister Lion?...*(He loses his voice:)* ...Mister...

*(The doors fly open.)*

*(LION stands in his circular cave door.)*

**LION.**

WHO IS IT AND WHAT DO YOU WANT!

**RABBIT.**

This is just me. Rabbit, Mister Lion.

The...folks had a meeting,

and they had a meeting

and they had a meeting

and they sent me down here to tell you—

to explain to you what they have decided—

decided that you are big boss of the whole world

it isn't right for you to have to go out and get your own meals.

And—and they told me to tell you that—

that if you'll stay in the house all the time

and not go out foraging for food

they will send you someone—something—to eat every day.

Right here. And that's just exactly

what they told me to tell you, Mister Lion.

**LION.**

WELL I HAVE TO HAVE FRESH MEAT EVERY SINGLE DAY.

IF THEY'LL DO THAT I'LL STAY IN THE HOUSE.

BUT IF THEY DON'T I'M GOING TO DESTROY EVERYBODY.

**RABBIT.**

Yessir, Mr. Lion, sir. They will do that for sure.

They are going to feed out good, too

because I, Rabbit, am going to see to that myself.

*(RABBIT runs off.)*

*(LION backs into the doors of his cave. They slam shut.)*

\* \* \*

**2. Rabbit Returns**

*(RABBIT, out of sight of LION, knocks the dust off of his boots, pulls the cap down so it is aslant on the side of his head, replaces his cigar in his mouth, and swaggers back into the others.)*

**THE ANIMALS.**

Did you see him?—

Did you see Mr. Lion?—

What did he say?—

**RABBIT.**

Did I see him? Did I see him?

Well, I went down there in order to see him, didn't I?

That was the whole point, wasn't it?

Of course I've seen him!

**MONKEY.**

Oh ho ho Lord, Rabbit, man! You did it?

**GOAT.**

What did you tell him?

**HOG.**

Were you scared?

*(RABBIT takes off his hat and throws it down on the ground. He stomps on it.)*

**RABBIT.**

Scared! SCARED!

What in the name of Pete kind of foolishness are you talking about now?

Listen my friends. I'm a man.

A MAN, M-A-N, MAN! I TELL YOU!

And being as I'm a man

I'm not scared of nothing or nobody.

and that means Mr. Lion and all the rest!

**THE ANIMALS.**

Tell us what happened—Tell us about it!—Tell us!

*(He gestures for them to sit.)*

**RABBIT.**

Well, when I went down to old Lion's house  
I knocked on the door, and when he opened it  
I went on in and sat down by the fire.  
And I told him we had a meeting and we decided  
that he was raising too much disturbance in the neighborhood.  
And I told him we decided he'd have to stay in his house  
and he'd have to behave himself  
or else we would beat his liver out  
and the Lord himself only knows what else.  
The I told him we didn't want to see anybody suffer and starve,  
so we would see to feeding him  
but he'd have to just take what we want to give him  
and be satisfied with it  
or else he could just lump it!

**THE ANIMALS.**

Man, Rabbit—Are you kidding—You sure are brave—  
Or you sure are crazy—You are something else—

**RABBIT.**

I'm just a man, folks.

*(He picks up his hat, dusts it off, and sets it sideways on his head.)*

Just a man doing my job, that's all.  
Old Lion, he pitched and he cursed and he roared  
but that didn't scare me.  
And when he saw that I meant business  
he said he'd do just what the folks wanted him to do.

*(The ANIMALS are all abuzz.)*

**FOX.**

Well, that's all very good. It's all very fine.  
But now we've got the next step.  
We've got to decide who's going to be the first  
to go and feed Mister Lion.

**MONKEY. (To HOG:)**

You go first!

**HOG.** *(To GOOSE:)*

You go first!

**GOOSE.** *(To GOAT:)*

You go first. You go first!

**GOAT.**

Me? *(To MONKEY:)* No, no. You go first...!

**MONKEY.** *(To DOG:)*

You're the one that's going.

I'm sick of your stories!

*(This continues until it builds into a fight.)*

**RABBIT.**

I know what to do. Let's draw straws  
and the one who gets the short one feeds the Lion.

*(He quickly holds out straws to the rest of the group.)*

*(They draw. GOOSE draws the short one. He shakes and bats his wings.)*

**GOOSE.** *(Does a ritualized dance in a circle. Drums.)*

N-a-a, nah! Na-a-a, nah!

N-a-a, nah! Na-a-a-, nah!

**RABBIT.** *(Dances with him:)*

Ye-h, yeh! Ye-h, yeh!

Ye-h, yeh! Ye-h, yeh!

Go on down there and feed Mister Lion  
like you agreed to do.

\* \* \*

*(GOOSE goes to Lion's house, led by DOG and FOX.)*

*(He presents himself.)*

*(LION eats him up.)*

\* \* \*

**TALE CARRIER.**

And so it went.

The next feeding time, Hog drew the short straw.

\* \* \*

**HOG.** *(Drums. He does a ritual dance of protest in a circle.)*

W-a-i-i-t! W-a-i-i-t!

W-a-i-i-t! W-a-i-i-t!

**RABBIT.** *(Joins in:)*

No way! No Way!

No Way! No Way!

You go on down there and feed Mister Lion like you agreed to or else we'll beat you half to death and drag you there.

*(HOG goes to the house of LION and presents himself.)*

*(LION eats him up.)*

\* \* \*

**TALE CARRIER.**

And so it went and it went.

an animal had gone every day  
day after day.

And one day at feeding time Fox  
was examining Rabbit closer than usual.

**FOX.**

Are you always going to be the official straw holder here, Rabbit?

How did you get to preside over these proceedings?

How come you're the handler of the straws.

**RABBIT.**

I'm the negotiator with Mr. Lion, aren't I?

I'm the point man.

**ALLIGATOR.**

Since you're always holding out the straws with two hands  
you can't ever pull one out yourself.

**FOX.**

Seems like its time to rotate the position.

**RABBIT.**

But this is my job.

**FOX.**

Fair is fair.

*(FOX takes the straws.)*

Now everybody pull a straw.

*(They do.)*

**ALLIGATOR.**

Looks like Rabbit got the short end of the stick this time!  
It's time, brother Rabbit. It's time to go on down.

**RABBIT. (Aside:)**

Dear God. I've sure got my business in a twist now!

*(Pause. As he appeals to the ANIMALS, one by one they look away from him.)*

My friends. It sure looks as if my time has come.  
We have had a heap of fun and frolics together,  
but that's all behind us now.  
And now I must go and feed the belly of the old Lion.  
I have been a good friend to you all  
or so I like to think,  
and a good neighbor too, here in our  
wilderness/settlement/forest/village/town

I visited the sick and fed the hungry  
and always helped to bury the dead.  
But now it looks like my brief time is done  
and I want you all to pray for me and promise me  
that when your time comes  
that you'll all meet me in the Promised Land  
where nobody goes but the pure in heart.  
Goodbye, my friends. Goodbye, everybody.

*(He strikes a mournful pose and makes off down the road to the Lion's house.)*

*(The OTHER ANIMALS, all turn their heads one by one to look.)*

---

\* \* \*

*(THE TALE CARRIER (DOG) sings, joined by FOX with harmony:)*

**TALE CARRIER and FOX.**

Am I born to die,  
to lay this body down?

Am I born to die,  
to lay this body down?

Is there a reason why  
for all my trials Lord?

Am I born to die  
to lay this body down?

*(The others join the singing.)*

\* \* \*

**TALE CARRIER.**

Rabbit walked mighty slow.  
He thought it might be his last walk.  
Then he thought it might be better to take his time with it.  
He decided that, even if old Lion had to wait for his dinner,  
he could look over his farm one last time.

As soon as that thought came to him  
he took off through the woods to his house.  
When he got there he went all around and around.  
He went to where he was born  
then he went to the hog lot and the garden  
and he said goodbye to everything.  
Then he went up to the well for a last drink of water.  
He looked over in that ancient and deep well  
and saw his own face looking up at him from the bottom.  
He saw his own face looking up at him from the bottom.  
He saw his own face...  
And an idea came to him.

*(RABBIT slaps his thigh, and dances around the well.)*

\* \* \*

*(Song: TALE CARRIER and all women cast members.)*

**TALE CARRIER and WOMEN.**

Sometimes when you stop and think  
Then you get an idea.  
Sometimes when you stop and think  
Then you get an idea  
It comes in a flash, comes in a jolt  
comes on the tip of a lightning bolt  
Sometimes it hits you in a blink  
and you get an idea!

\* \* \*

**3: The Lion and the Well**

*(RABBIT arrives at Lion's house.)*

**RABBIT.** *(Trembling:)*

U-r-r-r Mister Lion, your dinner is here!

*(The door flies open.)*

*LION emerges wearing a gold chain. He pulls out a gold watch.)*

**LION.**

WELL, LOOK AT YOU.

IT'S MIGHTY LITTLE DINNER YOU BROUGHT ME  
AND HERE IT IS WAY AFTER ONE O'CLOCK!

*(He shows RABBIT his teeth.)*

**LION.**

You are late!

I'm the one who tears the oxen limb from limb  
It's I who pulls the raging elephant down by his ears!  
What is this! Some half-wit hare thinks he can mess with me?

**RABBIT.**

Yessir, Mister Lion, sir. I just couldn't get here any sooner.  
I'm very sorry Mr. Lion if I am not enough for your dinner.  
See, something happened on the way here.  
I had a friend coming with me, another Rabbit bigger than me.  
But when we got to the border of the woods

something happened...

**LION.**

Something happened to my meat!

**RABBIT.**

If I'm not worthy of your mercy you can beat me!

**LION.**

Why should I beat you, WHEN I'M GOING TO EAT YOU!

**RABBIT.**

On the road a lion attacked us, your humble slaves  
So I said to him: "We are the servants of the king of beasts  
servants of his kingdom and farm."

And he says: "King! Who is this king!

How dare you talk of a fool like that in my presence!

I'm going to tear you and your so-called king to pieces.

NOW YOU DIE!"

So I said: "Let me go to say farewell to my king one more time  
and let him know that now he has got to deal with you!"

He says: "Leave your friend with me as hostage  
or according to the law I've set down—you die right here."

My friend was so big and fat and round

that he could have made three of me if you put him on a plate.

But from now on, our way is barred by that lion.

This is the bitter truth! You can't hope for your rations now.

That lion's going to take your place

unless someone gets him out of the way!

**LION.**

COME ON FOR CHRISAKE! SHOW ME WHERE HE IS.

LET ME AT HIM!

\* \* \*

**TALE CARRIER.** (*Chanting:*)

And so they set off running  
running to the well

And so they set off running  
running to the well

It was a trap

So our tale will tell!

It was a trap!  
So our tale will tell!

*(Repeat with ensemble.)*

\* \* \*

*(At the well, they stop. RABBIT makes a move to look in, but draws back.)*

**RABBIT.**

That Lion fella lives right in there.  
I'm scared to my boots to look in.  
You look first, my great King.

**LION.**

Let me look!

*(He looks down into the well.)*

There he is! WHERE'S MY MEAT!

*(RABBIT looks into the well.)*

**RABBIT.**

Look! He's's bigger than you are!

**LION.**

Quiet! Look. There's your friend. He's got him down there!  
WHO ARE YOU?

**VOICE / ENSEMBLE.** *(From the well:)*

WHO ARE YOU?

**LION.**

WHO ARE YOU, I SAY?

**VOICE / ENSEMBLE.**

WHO ARE YOU I SAY?

**RABBIT.**

Did you hear him? You hear him mocking you like that?  
Are you going to take that from him?  
If he'd just come up here, I'd whip him myself.

**LION.**

WHO-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O!

**VOICE / ENSEMBLE.**

WHO-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O!

**LION.**

Stand back, Rabbit. I'M GOING IN AFTER HIM!

*(LION leaps into the well. A splash and a crash.)*

*(A silence.)*

*(RABBIT shuts the lid over the well.)*

*(He cocks his cap on one side of his head.)*

*(Music and percussion.)*

*(He dances on the lid of the well.)*

\* \* \*

*(New rhythm. Percussion only. Rap.)*

**TALE CARRIER (DOG).**

Do you want to hear a moral?

'Fore our story even ends?

Do you want to hear a moral?

'Fore we start again?

When you see something nasty

In someone else

Check and see

It might just be yourself.

When you see a bad attitude

In somebody else

Take a look

And make sure it's not yourself.

*(The ANIMALS jump on their pods.)*

*(Repeat, ensemble.)*

Do you want to hear a moral... *(etc.)*

\* \* \*

**SCENE 4: The Rabbit is Crowned King**

*(The ANIMALS are collecting around, and arguing about who is going to be next.)*

**HOG #2.**

My brother Hog has already gone. It can't be my turn.

**MONKEY.**

No one from the river has gone yet! It's time for an alligator to go.

**ALLIGATOR.**

Try and make me! Try! Try! You go Fox!

**FOX.**

If I go, who's going to provide any leadership around here.

**MONKEY.**

Look. Whoo whoo whoo's that!

*(They all turn and look at RABBIT and freeze in terror.)*

**FOX.**

It's a ghost!

**RABBIT.**

Un-hunhh.

**FOX.**

Didn't the lion eat you up?

**RABBIT.**

Eat who up? Me? No way.

I wasn't aiming to be eaten up by any lion or anybody else for that matter.

**THE OTHERS.** *(Cutting one another off:)*

But what did he say?—What did he do?—

Oh my God, don't tell me that Lion's going to come here now.—

He's going to come back here and let us have it!—

**RABBIT.** *(Laughs:)*

There isn't any use in being afraid as long as you got a man like me with you.

When I said I was a real man,

I mean I'm a man and I can prove it.

## **THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!**

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