

Adaptation

Chapter 1 of Mac Wellman's *Annie Salem*

C. Scott Ananian

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[A solitary speaker on an empty black stage.]

JACK SCAN: Jack Scan's the name. I used to go walking in the woods a lot.

[Patterned light falls on stage suggesting a forest. A house looms in the distance, crazy-tilted from normal.]

At that time there were only a dozen or so houses on the street, as it traversed the wide scrubland—abandoned farms mainly—curving round the various gorges that filigreed the Anger River valley. I was probably more acquainted with the woods in those days than anyone else. That's because most of the people I knew were more interested in people, or National Geographic nature; not, certainly, in a lot of second-growth forest on the steep edges of a lot of irrelevant ravines. Me, I was not so interested in people.

I know a lot of what I'm going to relate here doesn't make any sense, and doesn't sound right. It wasn't a great deal more believable when I lived it a few years back, at the age of fifteen, growing up the only way I knew how, chaotically. School?

[A parade of scholars enters, in military precision. They line up in the mud, looking out of place in the forest. They are clearly vying to see who can come up with the most disgusting tie. They hum the school song, which has the same melody as the national anthem of the czars.]

Well, school was school and that was the most you could say about it. Through most of high school I applied myself with little enthusiasm to study and my grades showed it. *[The scholars leave.]* I had few friends,

either at school or in the local neighborhood, because they were at different social levels and so cancelled each other out. The funnest thing to do was to go down to the dump and shoot rats.

[A rat ambles across the stage, looking suspiciously like one of the schoolboys, and is gone.]

But I still haven't got to the subject of my story, which is the prettiest girl in town, Annie Salem. . .

[Lights up on a lovely girl, standing somewhat bashfully in the light. An angel chorus hums quietly.]

. . . and how one summer's night we lay down on the dewgrass, under the murmuration of peepers. . . *[The sound effects suddenly stop and the light on Annie goes out.]* But I am getting ahead of myself and only the river was there as my witness, so I'd better tell the thing right. If I am able to. Because it all began another time, late one night, I don't remember why, but I went down by the dump, which by the way was squeezed onto a promontory hugged by one long loop of the river, Anger River.

[The set darkens to night. We hear noises, noises like speech, only goofy. The dump glows green in the darkness. Vines and maples surrounding. The sky's purpled up, the moon's a wicked sliver with one wisp of lead-grey cloud slicing through. Jack is on a huge mound of slag. On the other side: a whole bunch of people dressed in tall pointy hats, walking in a slow ring around a bonfire.]

[A noise. Jack freezes and crouches low.]

TALL HAT: *[Chewing out a small pointy hat.]* Fxd blurble snarl snik trible yaddle yoo dunit.

SMALL HAT: *[Protesting, gesticulating, pointing to the sky.]* Blurble blurble gwerfi conaw arx ait ghsa jkwl quil nodunit. . .

TALL HAT: *[Cutting off the small hat.]* Vorx.

OTHER HAT: *[Consulting with the tall one.]* Fligh poopimuch barble yootinkit?

[All the pointy hats grumble in union. Twelve of them form a double row, seated. The small hat looks more frightened.]

SMALL HAT: *[In increasing desperation]* Boject blabble blurple blendi ghanti arx ghsa quil nodunit gwerfi!

[Jack Scan creeps down the hill towards us, and as he does so the light fades on the pointy hats, leaving them in silhouette.]

JACK SCAN: I got it after a while—Shorty had done something awful. Stole something or murdered someone. Wonder who? One thing worries me still. They are not speaking any language I ever heard. Sure's not American. So I made myself real small and snuck off through the poison ivy down to the bank of the river. There's one spot I like in particular because that's where the monkeys come out to play in the moonlight. Big blue monkeys with eyes like butterflies.

[As he speaks, monkeys begin to creep on-stage amongst the shadows of the pointy hats.]

Not many people know that monkeys live in the semi-wilds on Northern Ohio, but then this is a region of no particular interest and a lot of things happen here there's no particular accounting for.

[The monkeys cavort on stage, splashing around in the shallows, and skimming over the water so fast it looks like they're flying. They leap and hoot, having a helluva time.]

[Jack watches as the pointy hats gradually leave the stage, perhaps scared off by the monkeys, perhaps not. Then the monkeys quiet down and leave. Alone in the center of the stage is a brilliant gold object we had not previously seen: something like a cross between a jew's harp and a shoe horn. Strange tracks are in the dirt. A pointy hats stands upright alone. The planet Mars burns in the sky, looking a lot closer than it ought.]

[Jack takes the shiny thing, and puts it in his pocket, reverently.]

JACK SCAN: I made up my mind to give the thingumabob to Annie the next time I saw her. But I had two miles of woods to cross in the dark, a ton of homework, and a lot else, before I'd see her. That was sure. And

even though I was used to unusual events one thing had me flummoxed. Couldn't be the Klan. The Klan had been scared off these parts decades ago. Maybe it was the Posse Comitatus. The Invisible College of Hermes Trismegistus. The Knights of Columbus. Or some other patriotic and alien outfit. For sure it couldn't be the Klan.

When I slipped over the fence into the backyard, the dog growled and took some convincing it was me. Come to think of it Mom and Pop looked at me a little strange too.