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**Stone Soup
by Paul Thain**

Lights up on the Village.

Cicadas pulse in the heat as the rich and poor of many nations go about their daily tasks - some sow seeds, others plough, some march, some squat in dust slapping chapattis, one argues with a telephone, another reads a computer print-out, and a young mother sits apart nursing her starving child. All this is performed through mime using minimal props. We also hear improvised snatches of different languages, real and imaginary. Build the picture until ...

... a NEWSBOY weaves through them, shouting

NEWSBOY

(Off) Man Murders Future! Read all about it! Man Murders Future! Read all about it!

He rushes off. An Old Woman - SOPHIA - enters. Magic charms hang from her rainbow dress and she holds an exquisitely carved Staff

NEWSBOY

(Off) Man Murders Future ! Read all about it! Man Murders Future!

SOPHIA marks a circle & begins a ritual dance, singing and chanting a forgotten language. As she finishes ...

SOPHIA

Closer ... come closer. What's wrong? Don't you like my little dance? What? Not even my wonderful beautiful voice? Why do you skulk in the shadows ? Surely you are not afraid of an old woman ? All of you - stop. Stop what you're doing and listen. Listen to my story and soon you will share my dreams.

SHAMIR

We have no time for dreams, woman. We must work.

SOPHIA

Work ? Work for what ? More work ? No, no - wait, wait ! Are you all so blind ? Look at me. Look into my eyes - I am a Shaman, a Trickster, a Priest of Paradise ... enter my world, and I promise I will feed your soul.

CAMILLA

Not me soul needs feeding, darling, it's me belly.

VILLAGERS laugh

SOPHIA

To feed one, my dear, you must feed both. See ? See how I draw the magic circle ? So come, come closer, gather round and hear my story. It is an ancient tale heavy with hope and full of fun. It begins when old Mother Earth takes on human form and visits the world of-

SHAMIR

Listen, you old hag - haven't I told you ! We haven't time for stupid stories ! We must work ! We have to work !

SOPHIA

Work, work, all the time work - are you man or beast ? Very well, as you wish. Only before I leave please allow me to share your hospitality. I haven't eaten for three days.

AHMED

Three days ? Some poor wretches here haven't eaten for three weeks !

DOREEN

That's right, times are hard, so push off - we've nothing for you!

MAKOMO

Away with you, woman, leave us - sell your sugared words in another village.

SOPHIA

All I want is a little food.

HANNAH

I tell you, we have nothing.

KAUSU

These are dark days ...

MAKOMO

... dying days ...

KAUSU

Days of plague and famine.

HANNAH

Rain burns.

SHAMIR

Fish choke.

AHMED

Rivers run to dust.

CAMILLA

Crops fail.

HANNAH

Children starve.

SHAMIR

Soon this will be a Village of ghosts.

SOPHIA

Stinking sons of Satan ! You refuse an old woman? Would you see me starve ? Have you no shame? Very well, rot in hell, for all I care ! Hunger hardens your miserable hearts, I shall just have to settle for soup.

HANNAH

Soup ? You have soup and you dare beg from us?

SOPHIA

Not beg, I never beg, I share. Always I share. Ah, but enough, enough - if things are so bad, we should not quarrel. You and I, we must be friends. We must help one another, yes ? So I forgive you. Yes, I forgive you, I forgive you all. And perhaps ... perhaps I even still share my soup - my delicious, wonderful soup. Yes, why not ? Suddenly I feel good - I will share it, all of it, I will make soup for us all.

HANNAH

All of us ? You can feed us all ?

SOPHIA

Have I not said ? Now please - close your silly mouths or instead you will be eating flies! In this world all things are possible. Bring me a big enough pot and I will feed the entire Village.

AHMED

... everyone ?

HANNAH

You feed everyone ?

SOPHIA

Are you gone deaf ? Everyone, even the poor. I even feed the poor, so why are you all waiting ? Quickly, quickly! How can I cook without a pot ?

A CRASH of thunder as SOPHIA raises her Staff

SOPHIA

A pot ! A pot ! I need a pot ! A great, big cooking pot!

More Thunder. Lights flash silver and gold as SOPHIA spins the Staff high above her head

SOPHIA

Makomo - it is you! I choose you ! Now run ! Run for your people! Run for the hungry! Run for the weak!

MAKOMO runs - circling SOPHIA as if attached to her Staff by an invisible thread

SOPHIA

... run ... run ... faster and faster ...

His running becomes stylised - slow-motion - his breathing deep and heavy

SOPHIA

... faster, faster ... faster and faster ...

Light & Sound Pictures ...

MAKOMO runs through an ancient Tropical Jungle - a strange cacophony of animal & bird cries

SOPHIA

Africa ! The true Eden ! Cradle of humanity ! Mother to us all! Run, Makomo! North ! Run North !
Follow the Star and run like the wind!

The tropical jungle leads to the City, aching with choking traffic and screaming sirens

SOPHIA

Hear the hate, see the pain, feel the anger burn your brain. Let the concrete pound your feet, so that soon we all can eat!

From the dark we hear the NEWSBOY

NEWSBOY

Read all about it ! Man Murders Future ! Read all about it!

SOPHIA

A pot, a pot, I need a pot, a great, big cooking pot!

MAKOMO finally stops, rings an imaginary DOORBELL - ding dong!

He waits, head lowered, panting hard. SOPHIA observes from the shadows.

HENRY NORTH, fifties, English, answers the imaginary door.

HENRY

Makomo ! My dear fellow, what a splendid surprise ! How nice to see you!

MAKOMO

... please ... please, Mr North.

HENRY

Steady on, old chap, whatever is it?

MAKOMO

I beg you, we need ... we need to borrow the pot.

HENRY

Pot, pot ? What pot ?

MAKOMO

The cooking pot, the giant cooking pot.

HENRY

The giant cooking pot ? But you've nothing to put in it. You can't possibly need one that big !

MAKOMO

A woman, an old woman ... she promise to feed us all, everyone, the entire Village.

HENRY

Everyone ?

MAKOMO

Everyone. Even the poor. She even promises to feed the poor.

HENRY

Good lord ...

MAKOMO

Isn't it wonderful ?

HENRY

Fantastic.

MAKOMO

But as you very much know, Henry, our pot, it is extremely small.

HENRY

Ah, yes, right, I see the problem. Yes, well, you'd better come in then.

HENRY closes an imaginary door as clock tinkles the eleventh hour

HENRY

The whole Village, eh ? That's certainly a turn up!

We hear MARTHA NORTH, forties, American, off

MARTHA

(off) Henry !

HENRY

God's sake - quickly, wipe your feet.

MARTHA

(off) Henry, who is it ?

HENRY

It's all right, darling - only Makomo. Quick, quick - the pot's through there.

As they tip-toe off, MARTHA approaches

MARTHA

Makomo! My dear - how nice of you to visit us !

They embrace

MAKOMO

Mrs North ...

MARTHA

Mmm ... aren't you a darling ? Isn't he a darling, darling ?

HENRY

Yes, darling.

MARTHA

So what have you brought us today, hm ? Something real special, I bet ?

MAKOMO

Mrs North -

MARTHA

Something real scrumptious and tasty, hm ?

MAKOMO

Mrs North -

MARTHA

God, am I hungry ! I could die for a hamburger ! Or maybe a steak, some succulent, tender -

MAKOMO

Mrs North -

MARTHA

... or perhaps even a nice, juicy -

MAKOMO

Mrs North, please, this is not why I am here.

HENRY

Darling, he hasn't brought any food, he's here to -

MARTHA

Hasn't brought food ?

HENRY

He's here to borrow the -

MARTHA

What do you mean - he hasn't brought food ? Goddam, he owes us!

MAKOMO

Mrs North, forgive me, but I can bring you no more food. Please understand we cannot even feed ourselves.

MARTHA

You think we don't have problems ? You think we don't have plenty hungry and homeless ? A deal's a deal, Makomo, and you people owe us a whole heap of money. So either you pay with food, or I send in the boys to kick ass, starting with yours. Okay ? Savvy ?

HENRY

I think what my wife actually means -

MARTHA

Henry ...

HENRY

Yes, darling ?

MARTHA

Shut it.

HENRY

But darling, surely there's no need to be quite so -

MARTHA

I said shut it. Makomo - hey, come on, why so sad ? These are hard times for all of us. Do you realise, I personally, myself personally - I have not eaten a bite since breakfast?

HENRY

But darling, that's what I'm trying to tell you - we're all going to have soup.

MARTHA

... soup ?

HENRY

Isn't it marvellous ?

MARTHA

I don't want goddam soup ! I want hamburger!

HENRY & MAKOMO start to tiptoe away ...

MARTHA

... hamburger with french fries and onion and pickle and where the hell do you think you're going ?

HENRY

To, er ... to help Makomo with the pot, dearest.

MARTHA

The hell you are.

HENRY

Darling, be reasonable - no pot, no soup.

MARTHA

Got it in one, Henry. Seems like we have ourselves a monopoly situation here. So tell me, Makomo - what's in it for us?

MAKOMO

You will have a share of the soup.

MARTHA

Sure we will - so how big a share ?

MAKOMO

A fair share - the same as everyone else.

MARTHA

The same ? The same as everyone else ? Now what kind of commie crap is that, Makomo ? Everyone else don't have a cooking-pot, do they ?

MAKOMO

You would profit from starving people?

MARTHA

Hey, easy - let's not get sentimental here. This is honest-to-goodness fair-trade. You prefer we insult you with charity ? Hey, come on - don't you think I feel bad about this ? Normally you could have it, course you could, no question, but times are hard, these are hard times.

HENRY

We're all up against it, old chum. Believe me, it's dog eat dog. And after all it is our pot, and as much as we'd like to oblige, we all have to recognise -

MARTHA

Henry ?

HENRY

Yes, darling ?

MARTHA

Shut it.

HENRY

Yes, darling.

MARTHA

So Makomo - what's the deal, hm ? Exactly how big a fair share?

An angry DRUMBEAT builds to climax

Blackout

In Black, more DRUMBEATS & African CRIES of celebration

Lights rise on the Village where a pile of wood is being assembled

MAKOMO returns with the giant COOKING POT carried by several excited Villagers. SOPHIA greets them ...

SOPHIA

Well done, Makomo, this is a fine pot. With such a pot I can feed us all.

MAKOMO

Woman, this soup had better be good. They bargained hard, I had to sell my children's future.

SOPHIA

My soup, it is the food of the gods ! I promise with their blessing your children will be giants ! But first we must have fire !

The VILLAGERS surround the POT with kindling. CAMILLA & DOREEN approach, carrying wood ...

SOPHIA

More wood, more wood, bring me more wood !

CAMILLA

All right, all right ...

DOREEN

Hold your horses ...

CAMILLA

Keep your hair on.

DOREEN

It don't grow on trees ...

CAMILLA

Not anymore.

DOREEN

We've trudged ten miles of sand carrying this lot.

CAMILLA

Five miles there ...

DOREEN

... five miles back.

SOPHIA

More wood ! More wood!

DOREEN

Each day further to fetch ...

CAMILLA

Each day harder to find.

SOPHIA

Burn ! Burn ! I want it hotter than hell!

DOREEN

So when's this soup going to be ready, then ?

SOPHIA

Patience my friends, soon you will have your reward.

VILLAGERS

Bloop, bloop, bloop ... bloop, bloop, bloop, bloop .. bloop, bloop ... bloop ... bloop, bloop...

As the water boils & bubbles, the VILLAGERS provide an orchestrated refrain of appropriate sound effects - a recurring set-piece, silly & fun

...

SOPHIA

See how it boils and bubbles, already the miracle begins.

VILLAGERS

... bloop, bloop, bloop, bloop...

SOPHIA

I use an ancient recipe - fire, water, earth, and air.

DOREEN

Earth ?

SOPHIA

Quite right, my dear. How stupid of me ! I use no earth! How can even I make stone soup without earth?

CAMILLA

What soup ?

MAKOMO

Stone soup ?

SOPHIA

Stone soup, my favourite.

HANNAH

You mean soup ... soup made with ... with stones?

SOPHIA

Of course with stones. How else can I make stone soup?

CAMILLA

A nutter, a stark, raving nutter.

SOPHIA

It is delicious, I promise you will love it.

SHAMIR

Crazy, crazy bitch - the sun has boiled your brain.

SOPHIA

I swear to you, stone soup, it is the finest food in the world !

HANNAH

Stupid, stupid woman - how can you be so cruel ? I am starving, my children are starving, you promise ... you promise us all food, and because you promise me, I promise my children.

AHMED

You expect us to feed them stones ?

SOPHIA

Children , all children, they love my soup.

DOREEN

Silly old cow.

SOPHIA

My soup will nourish their hearts and feast their souls.

MAKOMO

You would give a starving child a stone ?

HANNAH

It is all too sad.

AHMED

I tell you, the spirits have sent her to mock our misery.

CAMILLA

Dear oh dear, I like a nice drop of soup, an all.

HANNAH

What fools we are.

MAKOMO

Woman, you are my last hope.

SOPHIA

Then believe. These are days of miracle and wonder. Even as I speak a new world is struggling to be born. My friends, it is a new beginning, the birth of a new age. So please, a little trust, hm ? Bring me a stone ... all of you, bring me a nice, round, juicy stone. Why do you stand like lost sheep? I need stones. How can I cook stone soup without stones ? Please, a few stones ? What have you to lose?

AHMED picks up a stone, hands it to SOPHIA

AHMED

Very well. Here, woman - here is my stone.

SOPHIA

And very nice too.

AHMED

So now let me see you eat it.

SOPHIA

Eat it ?

AHMED

That's right - eat it.

SOPHIA

You are a wise man, you have chosen well. This is a good stone, a very good stone. This kind, you know, it is particularly succulent.

AHMED

Then eat it.

SOPHIA

(sniffing) Mmmm ... smell. So full of flavour, yes ? Almost like truffle.

AHMED

So eat it.

SOPHIA

No, no, no - it would not be right.

AHMED

You crazy woman - I want to see you eat it !

SOPHIA

But my dear friend, remember - always I prefer to share.

AHMED

Eat it ! Eat it ! Eat it I say ! Eat it, damn you!

SOPHIA

All right, all right - no need to bite off my head. I will eat the stone, relax, no problem. Only first .. . first, of course, it must be cooked...

She drops the stone into the pot

CHILD

(as it falls into the pot)... plop ...

SOPHIA

Excellent. Now, who is to be next ? That's right, children, don't be shy.

The CHILDREN pick up stones and rush to the pot

CHILDREN

... mine, mine ... take mine, take mine ...

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