

WHO MARRIED STAR HUSBANDS

*an operetta*

*composed by* Shuying Li

*libretto by* Kenzie Allen

## ROLES

OLDER SISTER, *a soprano*

## FIGURES MENTIONED

YOUNGER SISTER, *soprano*  
STAR WITH SORE EYES *and*  
STAR WITH SHINING EYES, *baritone(s)*

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### NOTES:

This piece is based on the Mi'kmaq legend of The Women Who Married Star Husbands, and was originally written to be composed by Shuying Li for the Vocabalypse Opera From Scratch workshop in Nova Scotia in 2014.

- orange can potentially be cut in a condensed version
- blue can potentially be spoken word in a condensed version

E'E (LEGACY)

*with a meditative quality*

E'e

E'e [*longer*]

E'e

*[perhaps some more space, musically, here]*

I can only tell you  
the story.  
This is our way.

The man I met was not a man at all.  
Our way is fraught—  
our path lingers

When I was a girl, Mother told me  
Don't trust that man! You'll regret  
desire. *Don't listen to him*  
*with the sweetest tongue*

Take to the river, with your sorrow.  
*I can tell you, maple and birch bark*

*I tell you the earth moves*  
*beneath*  
I tell you

all I can tell you

...

THEY ARE HAPPY, THESE TWO WOMEN

*brightly*

E'e, the men went out  
each morning  
with their swiftness  
of purpose.

We did not know what could be  
lost. With our white, white  
skins, with our sharp eyes,  
believing  
power lay in us.

The men went out each morning,  
and today, we went too, too deep  
in the wood.

*[Younger Sister mimes building a fire.  
Older sister mimes looking around  
for danger. They settle in  
with their hands toward the fire and  
tilt their eyes toward the night sky.]*

NOW IT IS NIGHT. (INTERLUDE)

*slower, perhaps as though moving through water, or witnessing reflections on the water's surface*  
(anything not indicated to be another character is Older Sister)

Look to the Sky World  
and what shines there  
like eyes.

*(music -- deeper in the water now, developing/building in intensity toward the stated question,  
which one would you have)*

Younger Sister (YS): Which would you have?  
Lying beside you in morning  
like a husband?

I choose the shiniest,  
*the brightest*, that one there— [*points*]  
Mother told me—

YS: (*interrupting*) I choose! I choose!  
*(breathlessly)* Look!  
I choose— (*trails off, staring at the sky*)

Which would you have  
watching over you?

YS: The *red* one, the little star.  
I *choose*...  
*(points)* ... that one there.

*(music, silence between the sisters.)*

YS: Yours is ugly!

Ah, Little Sister, it is only  
a wish.  
*(she turns toward the audience)*  
*A husband could be*

anything, if only  
he be kind.

*[They fall silent, then go to sleep, with Younger Sister still shaking her head and making sounds, like “pfft” and “hmp” and “ugly” and Older Sister staring at the sky like it might rescue her.]*

*[Star With Shining Eyes sings toward Older Sister (the audience) in the period before the sisters wake]*

### STAR WITH SHINING EYES

*(Star with Shining Eyes might be more romantic, and, **methodical**, but, also passionate and moving.)*

SHINING EYES sings:

Beloved!  
Lovely Weasel Woman,  
who called me husband,  
I am here to adore you.

The river breaks  
and we on its banks must  
choose a path. Where we go  
could be years  
of ecstasy, we could be  
a legend  
of the best desire.

*(groggy at first, then, sudden, spiking, bright realization, oh my gosh, there is a man here! could be very short, like a sudden rolled sound on the piano after a few dreamy notes)*

*[Younger Sister stirs and kicks, and knocks over the dish of medicine for Sore Eyes. Older Sister  
knocks over the dish of Shining Eyes' red ochre,  
and they all confront each other.]*

*(So, Shining Eyes must "leave" the stage after his aria, to be replaced by "Sore Eyes" as the  
baritone comes in and acts as an old man. After that, the baritone leaves the stage and sings  
remaining parts from offstage.)*

## STAR WITH SORE EYES

*[Star with Sore Eyes might be more dumpy and plodding (with a secret steel backbone), and/or sing in an old man style voice, could be more spoken-sung]*

*(Sore Eyes is more like the old man who wants a young wife to take care of him / please him.)*

SORE EYES sings:

Oh little bird!

My sweet young thing

who will care for me

who will dance

at my request. *(savor this last word, give us shivers)*

I am joy! I am Star

with Sore Eyes, I need

my little bird *(very important line for us to hear, the little bird line)*

to care

for me.

BY TALKING IN THE NIGHT (INTERLUDE + TEXT)

*Older Sister turns to the audience and explains (sings):*

Yes, we had called down the stars  
By Talking In The Night,  
they were to be  
our husbands.

Mother told me, Don't trust that man

but he was  
beautiful...

They tried to make us happy.  
They hunted and we prepared  
for their return, the men  
we called.

SHINING EYES (*booming*):  
Do not lift the stone  
beside the fire!

*(as though continuing a narration, as in, he has spoken and she finishes the dialogue tag)*

--they said to us, and the star men  
went out into the morning...

and we tried  
to obey.

*(she turns to the audience again, as in a theatrical aside, as in telling them a secret)*

I want to believe  
he will be kind to me.

I want to be in love.

WORLD ABOVE THE SKY (SIPEKNK)

*very dramatic? They are suddenly realizing they are above the earth! They look down, down, down, down... (oh no!)*

*Older Sister is narrating, with interjections by the other characters – so, Older Sister is speaking more to the audience (until indicated), while the other characters are more in the moment of the scene and speaking to her / each other.*

SHINING EYES:  
Do not lift the stone!

they said, but she could *smell* Sore Eyes  
long after he had gone. She said,

YS:  
Sister!

she told me,

YS:  
We do not know  
what they are!

The stars  
could be merciless,  
could ask for more  
and more.

YS:  
They could outlive us!  
(...)  
What are they hiding?

*[Younger Sister circles the stone beside the fire, nudging it with her foot, crouching to look at it.  
Older Sister knows she is about to lift the stone.]*

(to YS)  
Don't!  
*(but YS is lifting the stone now)*  
Don't! Please--

YS:  
I am *not--*  
*(as she is lifting the stone)*  
a little  
bird!!

*(this might be a musical climax / reaction, as described in the notes for this section, Younger Sister's anger, rebellion, and the discovery of the world below them!)*

The sky world!

They have stolen us  
away to the heavens!

Oh, Sister!

*(Older Sister goes to look, but with an expression on her face that is slightly tinged with regret. The music turns regretful, too, indicates a coming-down, and the decision to remain quiet about what they have found.)*

Hush! *(use only what you need for this text)*

Hush, Sister,  
say nothing.

*(Younger Sister bites back a sob.)*

Hush.

*(turning outward toward the audience again)*

We had called them  
husbands, after all.

We had climbed to the sky  
in the night  
by our own voices.

## WE HAVE NOT BEEN CRYING

*The Women Who Married Star Husbands have now realized their mistake. They miss their mothers. They miss their homes in the wigwams, they miss their families and their tribe. They wonder what to do now.*

*(Older Sister is back to narrating again, the time after the men have returned.)*

We have not been crying! We have not--! *(repeat only as needed)*

(...)

But they saw our faces.

And Sister begged forgiveness.

This was not our home.

They promised to return us.

We only need  
to close our eyes.

Listen for the waters you know.

Listen for the chickadee.

Do not open your eyes.

Listen until the voice  
of your beloved fades  
into night. Shining Eyes...  
eclipsed by morning.

## THESE TWO WOMEN CANNOT GET DOWN

*The Star Men take pity on the women (who have been crying indeed). They release the women. Perhaps the majority of this piece, musically, might be focused on this, then progressing to the women agreeing to go to sleep and listen for the Chickadee, the Red Squirrel, and finally, the Striped Squirrel (but the audience only anticipates hearing the striped squirrel, since Younger Sister opens her eyes too early, and----OH NO WE ARE IN A TREE).*

This part may have to be cut, or pared down, or just be represented in a musical interlude, because we could easily do a whole 10-minute aria just on this material! This section could also very much touch upon the current state of women in the world (interaction b/w women and men, “these two women cannot get down” seems to represent quite a lot as far as that goes).

## E'E (LEGACY)

*a reprise of sorts*

E'e

E'e (longer)

Here the waters,  
here the bird song  
wakes me  
almost as tender.

(...)

Who will be  
kind  
to me?

Who will love me now?

*... (music? Perhaps the anxiety, the regret, and then, swelling, a kind of decision, a climbing, a strength.)*

But I will be  
kind, to all  
I meet.

I will be the one  
with Shining Eyes.

I will be the sweetness, E'e.  
I will be  
the river

and the years.