

Once on This Island Synopsis

In the opening number, "We Dance," the peasants describe their world: their lives are ruled by powerful gods, and their island is ruled by the wealthy "grands hommes." They explain that the peasants and the grands hommes belong to "two different worlds, never meant to meet."

In "One Small Girl," they begin the tale of Ti Moune, a peasant girl from their side of the island, who fell in love with a grand homme after being "chosen by the gods for a magical fate." They describe how she was saved from a flood by the gods when she was a child and raised by loving adoptive parents. At the end of the song, Ti Moune has turned into a beautiful young woman.

In "Waiting for Life," Ti Moune, who is now working in the hot fields, yearns for an undefined future, which she feels she has been promised by the gods. She reminds them that they have singled her out and tells them not to forget her. A grand homme dressed in white, drives past her and she decides he will someday carry her off to a new life.

Agwe, the God of Water, starts by creating a night of "Rain," and causes the young grand homme, Daniel, to crash his car on a dark road. Ti Moune discovers him. Cradling the injured Daniel in her arms, Ti Moune realizes that the gods have answered her prayer.

Despite the objections of the peasants, Ti Moune cares for Daniel. As her father, Tonton Julian, goes off in search of Daniel's family, Ti Moune's mother, Mama Euralie, observes that Ti Moune has become obsessed with this boy. Tonton Julian discovers Daniel's family, who live behind the guarded gates of a fine hotel on the other side of the island. Meanwhile, the peasants fear Ti Moune's folly will bring the wrath of the gods down upon them. They "Pray" to ward off evil as a terrible storm rises.

Inside her hut, Ti Moune pledges her love to Daniel in the song, "Forever Yours." She imagines him handsome and well. Suddenly, Papa Ge, the sly Demon of Death, appears to claim Daniel. Ti Moune promises to give up her own life and soul if Papa Ge will only spare Daniel. He gleefully agrees to her bargain.

Tonton Julian leads Daniel's family to him, and they carry him off in a stretcher. Ti Moune insists on following Daniel. Although her parents plead with her to remain with them, they finally allow her to leave with their blessing.

Ti Moune's journey begins as the storytellers enter, dressed as colorful birds, trees, frogs and breezes. They introduce Asaka, the formidable Mother of the Earth, who promises Ti Moune that "Mama Will Provide" all the things she is likely to need on her way.

Ti Moune enters Daniel's room, where he lies in bed, still feverish from his injuries. She convinces him that she has come to heal him, and he agrees to let her stay the night. As Ti Moune lies down beside him, the Goddess of Love, Erzulie, appears to preside over them in "The Human Heart."

In "Pray – Reprise," the storytellers become gossips, commenting on the unlikely union of a grand homme and a peasant girl, as Daniel and Ti Moune fall deeply in love. The gossips insist Ti Moune may be Daniel's mistress, but will never become his wife.

On a starlit evening, Ti Moune tells Daniel of her dreams for their future. He replies she is different from "Some Girls" he has known and says, "some girls you marry, some you love." As he sings, another girl

dresses before a mirror, her elegant movements and clothes in contrast to Ti Moune's simplicity and earthiness.

At the Hotel Beauhomme, a ball is held and the grand hommes eagerly wait for a glimpse of Ti Moune. She arrives, dressed beautifully but simply. Daniel introduces Ti Moune to Andrea Devereaux, the girl we saw dressing for the ball. At Andrea's request, Ti Moune dances, enchanting everyone at the ball. As Ti Moune celebrates her triumphant performance, Andrea asks her to perform at her wedding, explaining it is she who will be marrying Daniel.

Daniel tells Ti Moune he was promised to Andrea as a child and, "this is how things are done." Ti Moune is in shock, and Daniel bluntly tells her they could never have married.

Desolate and alone, Ti Moune hears critical voices from the past echoing in her head. Papa Ge appears and reminds her of her promise, reprising "Forever Yours." He says that, instead of surrendering her own soul, she can choose to kill Daniel and have her own life back. Reminding her of Daniel's betrayal, he gives her a knife.

Ti Moune is thrown out of the Hotel Beauhomme. She waits, not eating or sleeping, until Daniel and Andrea pass by her after their wedding, tossing coins to the peasants. She calls out to Daniel, and he pauses by her side for a moment before moving on. She curls up in despair and, from her hand, falls the coin Daniel has pressed into it.

Mama Euralie begins a lament for Ti Moune, "Part of Us." The storytellers enact Ti Moune's death. She is passed gently from one god to the next until Asaka at last takes Ti Moune to her breast and lays her to rest in the earth.

Ti Moune is resurrected from the earth as a beautiful tree, one which will shelter peasants and grand hommes alike for years to come. The storytellers tell the little girl how Daniel's young son encountered a beautiful peasant girl in the tree, and the spirit of Ti Moune set them free to love one another. This is "Why We Tell the Story." They sing to the little girl, "For out of what we live and we believe, our lives become the stories that we weave."

As the little girl picks up the thread of the story and begins to tell it, the storytellers resume their places around the fire. The stars come out as the lights fade on them.