

Entrances

Entrances

Deirdre Burton and Tom Davis

Strange Shadows

Strange Shadows
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for the actors in *Strange Shadows*,
with love and gratitude

dramatis personae:

Heather (actor)

Geoffrey (impresario)

Thomas (new arrival)

Anjuli (P.A.)

Neil (actor)

David (actor)

Caroline (actor)

Jennifer (actor)

Polly (actor)

Annabel (actor)

Claire (actor)

Naomi (actor)

Adrian (actor)

1. HEATHER

The stage is almost bare (except for a big wicker hamper whose lid is open and from which all sorts of colourful things are flowing out). The P.A. (ANJULI) enters, clipboard in hand, and the lights go up. She looks up towards the lighting box, and acknowledges the lighting guys with a wave, shields her eyes against the glare, and looks towards the back row balcony of the auditorium, to check that the director (GEOFFREY) is in place. She gestures thumbs up, and exits shuffling papers. She is busy. A small shy female (HEATHER) enters, and moves uncertainly to centre front, peering unseeing through the footlights.

HEATHER

Hello? Is there anyone there?

GEOFFREY

(Large voice from a balcony at the back of the auditorium) There's always someone there. Don't doubt that for a moment, darling.

HEATHER

Oh. Thank you.

She shuffles her papers and looks at them.

GEOFFREY

Well, begin.

HEATHER

Begin? Begin what?

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GEOFFREY

Tell us your previous experience, darling, give us a glimpse of your fascinating personality.

HEATHER

Er...

GEOFFREY

Tell us what part you last played!

HEATHER

Oh. Well. I was Othello.

GEOFFREY

OTHELLO???

HEATHER

Yes. By William Shakespeare.

GEOFFREY

I know who wrote Othello, darling!

HEATHER

It was very painful.

GEOFFREY

I can imagine.

HEATHER

So now I would like to try something more – restful. Something peaceful and – pure.

GEOFFREY

Pure? You want – pure?

HEATHER

Yes. I want to be an eagle.

GEOFFREY

An *eagle*?

HEATHER

Yes. Eagles are very pure. And peaceful.

GEOFFREY

Pray tell me, child, how you propose to audition as an eagle?

HEATHER

Well I have a little eagle song. I thought I'd sing it for you.

HEATHER

GEOFFREY

By all means (*heavily sarcastic*). Do give us your eagle. Your peaceful eagle. You have our total attention. Take it, darling, from the top.

HEATHER

From the top?

She turns her papers upside down, looks at them for inspiration. Turns them back up again. Brings out a pitch pipe or a penny whistle or something and gives herself a note, then launches into the pure eagle song, which is surprisingly big. So, suddenly, is she.

During the song, THOMAS enters, is amazed, and sits behind her to listen.

the long view
the wide wind
beyond beyond
I will carry you
the long view
the endless sky
beyond beyond
I will offer you
this fearless insubstantial dance
this far flung wind and carefree while
this feckless fray and reckless chance
to surf the ocean peaks in style
to land where life's complexities are few
this summer sun
this morning dew
this given moment pure and true
like galaxies, we come we go, Love
like shooting stars, consumed by fire
though planets spin their charted course, Love
like galaxies we come we go
we come we go, we come we go, of course, Love.

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She finishes the song and immediately snaps back into her shy self. Embarrassed, she rushes off. Apologising. Scuttling. THOMAS goes after her.

2. Actors

As she exits, ANJULI the P.A. enters.

GEOFFREY

Who the fuck was that?

ANJULI

Gosh. Golly gosh. I'm ever so sorry. She sort of crept in before I could stop her. Before I could get them all organised. Well, to be honest, I didn't actually notice her. Till she was singing, I mean. Then I did.

GEOFFREY

Don't apologise darling—go after her—get her back here. I want to see more.

ANJULI begins to rush off. Hesitates, turns back.

ANJULI

The rest of them are outside.

GEOFFREY

There are others?

ANJULI

Oh, yes. Gosh yes. There are a lot more.

GEOFFREY

Oh God. An afternoon full of actors. What did I do, to get this job?

ANJULI

You slept with a very wealthy woman.

GEOFFREY

Silence! That was a rhetorical question!

ANJULI

Sorry. Sorry. Shall I let them in?

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GEOFFREY

If you must.

She opens the door to let them in, then rushes off after HEATHER.

The actors flood on to the stage, occupying all of it, chattering, rehearsing, air kissing, doing stretches and vocal exercises, gambols, huge odd rhetorical gestures: bedlam.

They are a brightly coloured chattering bunch of excited, almost child-like people. They have done the audition rounds. They know each other. They have shared experiences, histories, entanglements and so on.

GEOFFREY

OK, darlings...

ANNABEL

Shh shh!!!! He wants starlings !!!

They all immediately go into a group of starlings, making a huge din.

ANJULI

(rushing back in) What are you doing? Be quiet—People, people, we need some order here.

HEATHER slips in quietly and tentatively joins the actors. THOMAS follows and is clearly a bit lost amidst the tumult.

ANJULI

(to GEOFFREY) Sorry. Sorry.

GEOFFREY

Just get them organised, will you?

ANJULI

Yes. Sorry. Yes.

ANJULI starts bustling among them writing down names, getting them sorted.

Freeze, except for

JENNIFER

We have to talk.

ADRIAN

What, here?

JENNIFER

Why not? You never call me, you don't answer my texts, you don't even

Actors

look me in the eye, for heaven's sake, we need to talk.

ADRIAN

OK, talk.

JENNIFER

(Pause) Do you think it will rain?

Unfreeze. More bustle and play amongst the actors

Freeze, except for

POLLY

So what did you say?

DAVID

I said "try the speech again, darling, but this time without your skirt caught up in the back of your knickers."

POLLY

And what did she say?

Unfreeze

3. NEIL

GEOFFREY

(From the balcony) Is this an audition, by any remote chance?

ANJULI

Oh yes, right. Sorry. Right.

NEIL

I'm ready. More than ready.

ANJULI

Oh good. And you are offering... *(looks through papers)*

NEIL

The Tempest.

ANJULI

Right. You mean Prospero? Ariel? Caliban?

NEIL

No. I mean *The Tempest.*

ANJULI

Right. Good. Jolly good. Go ahead.

NEIL steps forward centre stage. GEOFFREY is still in the balcony.

GEOFFREY

Yes?

NEIL

I'd like to offer a discussion of creative disharmony in *The Tempest.*

GEOFFREY

You'd like to offer what?

NEIL

Creative disharmony. In *The Tempest.* By William Shakespeare.

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GEOFFREY

I know who wrote *The Tempest*! What on earth are you talking about?

NEIL

The Tempest, you see, is an autosubversive text.

GEOFFREY

Are you mad?

NEIL

(*Ignores him*) I attempted to explain this to the director in a production of the play, in which I had the honour of playing Caliban. He disagreed. My proposition, you see, was that while Prospero's revels were ending, those of Caliban and Ariel, their wild revelry, was just beginning. Like this.

In what follows NEIL plays all the parts, but may also recruit various actors to join in.

He stamps out a beat with his foot. "Ban, ban, ca-Caliban. Ban, ban, ca-Caliban." Engages the other actors, who join in enthusiastically: a wild dance emerges.

ANJULI clearly want to join in, but holds herself back. THOMAS is amazed. Tentatively, and away from the group, he tries a few steps.

NEIL AS CALIBAN

'Ban, 'Ban, Ca-Caliban, Has a new master: get a new man. *The actors pick it up and run with it.*

NEIL AS CALIBAN

(*High and wild*) Freedom, hey-day! Hey-day, freedom! Freedom, hey-day, freedom! (*Female voices take this up on top of the basic beat.*)

NEIL AS NEIL

Ariel is like an eagle, a harpy:

NEIL AS ARIEL

Merrily, merrily, shall I live now. *HEATHER takes it up and soars with it.*

NEIL cuts them off.

NEIL TO GEOFFREY

So that was all very creative. Unfortunately the director disagreed. He felt that Shakespeare was civilisation itself, and that Prospero was the hero.

NEIL AS THE DIRECTOR

No, no, stop, stop, Shakespeare lived the life of art, he makes the world

Neil

make sense, he is delicate. (*As director NEIL grabs some actors and leads them in an affected courtly dance.*)

NEIL TO GEOFFREY

So I explained to him that I fundamentally disagreed with his position.

NEIL TO DIRECTOR

WANKER!

NEIL TO GEOFFREY

And we discussed it.

NEIL AS THE DIRECTOR

BARBARIAN!

NEIL TO DIRECTOR

DICKLESS IDIOT!

NEIL AS THE DIRECTOR

MONSTER! MORON! DESECRATOR!

NEIL TO DIRECTOR

PETULANT POSTURING PISS-ARTIST!

NEIL TO GEOFFREY

And then he tried to strangle me. (*Acts it.*) Prospero was distressed.

NEIL AS PROSPERO

Dear boy, don't you think you're being a little intemperate?

NEIL AS THE DIRECTOR

Piss off, Gandalf, I'm going to kill him!

NEIL TO GEOFFREY

So I was forced to deck him. (*Acts it.*) At this point MIRANDA, who was apparently more than a friend of the director's, became involved in the argument

NEIL AS MIRANDA

(*Screams*) darling, has he hurt you?

NEIL TO GEOFFREY

Unfortunately ARIEL was also more than a friend of the Director's

NEIL AS ARIEL

(*Screams: very camp*) sweetheart, are you all right?

NEIL AS MIRANDA

Sweetheart?

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NEIL AS ARIEL

Darling?

NEIL TO GEOFFREY

So they had their own creative disharmony

NEIL AS ARIEL

Bitch!

NEIL AS MIRANDA

Faggot!

NEIL TO GEOFFREY

And it was all getting really very nicely carnivalesque, when, lo and behold, in came Shakespeare himself:

NEIL AS SHAKESPEARE

(Strong Warwickshire accent) excuse me, lads, but what the fuck are you playing at?

NEIL AS DIRECTOR

(Staggering to his feet) Oh, thank God you're here, this man is ruining, absolutely ruining my play!

NEIL AS SHAKESPEARE

It's my fucking play, you big soft get, and you're the one who's ruining it!

NEIL TO GEOFFREY

Shakespeare delivers a neat uppercut, knocks him out. *(Acts it.)* Then he spoke to me. Yes, to me. Thusly:

NEIL AS SHAKESPEARE

Come on, lad, let's go and get pissed. I like a good clown. Now, when Robert Armin did that part—

NEIL turns to GEOFFREY and the audience with a final flourish:

NEIL

(BBC announcer voice) and that, ladies and gentlemen, is the storm in a teacup *Tempest*.

The actors react enthusiastically.

NEIL falls back into their company. ANJULI starts trying to organise them again.

Freeze, except for:

4. Actors

ADRIAN

That's it, that's what you want to know, will it rain?

JENNIFER

No of course not, idiot, I just want to have a conversation with you.

Unfreeze. The actors start chattering and interacting again. ANJULI is trying to control them and beginning to flap a little.

Freeze, except for

ANJULI

How did it go?

NAOMI

I quit.

ANJULI

You quit? The big part? The part to die for? The opportunity of a ...

NAOMI

Yes. Don't say it.

ANJULI

Oh shit.

NAOMI

That's putting it mildly dear. Does he know yet?

ANJULI

Well I don't think so. We didn't receive any papers. You only went two days ago. When did you quit?

NAOMI

About half an hour after I got there.

ANJULI

Why? Why so soon?

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Freeze, except for

POLLY
37 times?

CLAIRE
Yes.

POLLY
In one night?

CLAIRE
Yes.

POLLY
37 times?

Unfreeze

GEOFFREY
OK, darlings

ANNABEL
Sshh! Sshh! He wants Daleks!

They all start moving and speaking as Daleks. GEOFFREY storms down the stairs and joins them on stage.

GEOFFREY
Enough! Silence! Who? Is? Next?

ANJULI indicates DAVID. He steps forward.

5. DAVID

GEOFFREY

Well? What parts have you played recently?

DAVID

I have been the romantic lead in a Hollywood movie.

GEOFFREY

(Looks at him suspiciously) the title of which would be?

DAVID

Ah, well, it never quite got to the title stage.

GEOFFREY

The producer?

DAVID

Ah, well it never quite got to the producer stage either.

GEOFFREY

So tell me, pray, what stage did it get to?

DAVID

Well, it was a great idea. My mother liked it.

GEOFFREY

I see. And I suppose you are going to give us a taste of it now?

DAVID

Well yes. It's my big part.

GEOFFREY

I see. Go ahead dear boy. In your own time, naturally.

DAVID

Can I have someone to play opposite? Please?

GEOFFREY

Opposite?

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DAVID

Yes. You know. A... a female lead? Perhaps? If it's not too much to ask?

Several of the actresses start preening themselves, and making it obvious that they'd be more than willing to play opposite him. GEOFFREY gestures to ANJULI to go ahead and choose someone. She nervously tries to put herself forward (in mime), but then gets professional again and chooses an actress—apparently at random. She chooses ANNABEL. Largely because she hasn't been showing much interest. The other would-bes are clearly put out by this.

DAVID

Oh. Oh. Thank you. Thank you so much.

ANNABEL

(A bit hearty and very unromantic. Chewing gum and disinterested) no worries mate. What's the deal?

He takes her hand beautifully, and shyly whispers in her ear. She is clearly completely entranced. She takes a step backwards and does a re-assessment of him. Slowly takes out the chewing gum. Melts herself into the softly acquiescent romantic heroine.

DAVID starts to address his performance towards GEOFFREY, who indicates that DAVID should perform towards the guys in the lighting box. DAVID misunderstands, and peers into the auditorium as if there's no one there. He looks back at GEOFFREY, who again indicates the guys in the lighting box. DAVID understands, and proceeds.

DAVID

I knew. I knew from the very first moment. And so did you. Didn't you. Didn't you?

ANNABEL

(Nods, smiles into his eyes, touches his arm.)

DAVID

That evening by the river...

ANNABEL

The fireside.

DAVID

What?

David

ANNABEL

Trust me. The fireside.

DAVID

Really?

ANNABEL

Yeah. Yeah. (*Nods—temporarily back in her hearty personality.*)

DAVID

Oh. OK. But I've got this big speech coming up about the sympathetic forces of nature.

ANNABEL

Oh yeah. Yeah yeah. Mists clearing, sparkling light on dappled water, spring flowers opening... or were you planning on going autumnal?

DAVID

No. No—definitely spring.

ANNABEL

Not baby ducklings surely?

DAVID

No, no. It's too soon for that. We'd need to get to know each other first.

ANNABEL

The fireside. Good way to get to know each other. Believe me. Very wet, the river. Very damp. (She starts to sound a bit bunged up—sneezes a little) and, in my experience (she looks at him in a very sexy way) muddy.

DAVID

Muddy?

ANNABEL

Yes. (*She brushes mud off her clothes.*) If you're keen on doing spring that is. Of course you could try midsummer...

DAVID

(*Very enthusiastic*) oh yes! Yes, please. It's my birthday in June. You could help me celebrate. By the river.

ANNABEL

Insects.

DAVID

What?

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ANNABEL

Insects. Midges. Horseflies. Mosquitoes.

DAVID

And what are they a metaphor for?

ANNABEL

They're bloody literal they are. They bite, I itch. They land on me, I come up in red lumps.

DAVID

Winter?

ANNABEL

Frost on the ground. Not a good way to ... get to know someone.

DAVID

I would like to... get to know you.

ANNABEL

Come and sit by the fire.

They move to an imaginary fireplace.

DAVID

Now what?

ANNABEL

Take it from the top...

DAVID

Stares into the imaginary fire for inspiration... begins as the romantic lead... but... something else takes over.

Darling, I knew from the very first moment. Here by your fire, your hearth, your welcoming hearth.

We looked into each others' eyes (*they do*) and there was—there was—there was—

ANNABEL

A meeting. A meeting of—

DAVID

Yes. A meeting—that's it. That's it!!

He turns to the assembled actors. He is ecstatic. They don't get it—neither do we. Does ANNABEL? Maybe.

David

DAVID
THAT'S IT!

He turns away from them and to no-one in particular. Inward. Beautiful. Awestruck and awesome. There is suddenly an intense spotlight centre stage. He speaks to it.

DAVID
Here, by the warmth of your fire, I melt. I cease to be me. I am consumed. I am no more.

On your fire I throw all my stories. All my poems. All my plays. All those attempts to be me. I simply surrender.

Nowhere to turn to. No-one to search for. Nothing left to lose.

Nowhere else. No-one else. Nothing else. Elseness has left the building.

A prolonged silence. The actors know that something numinous has happened, but they are not sure what exactly. DAVID comes out of his trance with a start. There is tentative appreciation from the actors. He is a little embarrassed. He looks over to ANNABEL, who remains enigmatic.

6. Actors

Freeze, except for

NEIL

I bloody didn't.

POLLY

You bloody did.

NEIL

Didn't.

POLLY

Did.

NEIL

I don't remember promising anything.

POLLY

You so did.

NEIL

I don't remember!

Unfreeze. Actorly business, then freeze again except for

CLAIRE

Don't mess with me, sunshine.

DAVID

Pardon?

CLAIRE

You heard.

DAVID

Well yes, but I think perhaps you've got it wrong.

CLAIRE

Don't come the young innocent with me. I know your game. I wasn't

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born in a cornflakes packet.

DAVID

What?

CLAIRE

Yeah—it's a weird script, isn't it?

DAVID

Oh. Oh—you were acting. I thought—I thought you meant, I mean...

CLAIRE

Don't mess with me, sunshine.

Unfreeze. Actorly business, then freeze again except for

ADRIAN

Look. What we need to do, is to talk properly.

JENNIFER

Yes. That's what I want too. When?

ADRIAN

I'll call you.

Everyone unfreezes.

7. Caroline

CAROLINE steps forward, keen to do her bit.

GEOFFREY

Yes, young lady, what do you do?

CAROLINE

Tricks.

GEOFFREY

Really? Tell me more.

CAROLINE

No, magic tricks.

GEOFFREY

Ah. And what are you offering us today, my dear?

CAROLINE

My vanishing trick. Brought the house down in Milton Keynes, I did.

GEOFFREY

(Profoundly unimpressed) Milton Keynes?

CAROLINE

A small company, you won't have heard of them.

GEOFFREY

I think you'll find, my dear, that I know everyone in the business. Everyone and everything.

CAROLINE

Whatever. That's all behind me now. I'm heading for the big time. That's what you offer, isn't it? The big time?

GEOFFREY

I think we can say that. Yes. Show us what you can do. Give us your disappearing act.

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CAROLINE

Vanishing. I don't do disappearing. I vanish. Different class of trick altogether. I have standards.

GEOFFREY

So be it, darling. As you wish.

Caroline steps forward. She alters. She becomes magical. She is magic itself.

CAROLINE

(To the audience) watch. Just watch.

She plays the audience a little with gestures—then goes very very still. Then moves again.

CAROLINE

There. Shall I do it again? If you want to see how it's done, look very very carefully.

She goes very very very still again. There is a substantial pause—then appreciation from fellow actors—gasps of delight—a satisfied bow from Caroline.

CAROLINE

It takes years of practice to do that you know. Years and years. And, of course, a certain... a certain... sang froid. It's scary at first. The vanishing I mean. Not a problem leaving. No, that's always easy. But the thing is, you see, you never know quite where you're going to vanish to. And although, obviously, the whole point of the trick is to come back as quickly as you went, there's always that possibility, that cold feeling in the pit of your stomach, that this time... this time... you won't get back. You'll be there for ever... trapped in the other place. And the other place? Which other place? Well, who can say? All memory traces are erased by the speed of the return journey, you see. It may well be that I go somewhere completely different each time. But I prefer not to think about that.

(She peers up at the guys in the lighting box and then turns to GEOFFREY.)

Of course you're not getting the full effect. I usually play to a live audience. It's part of the magic to have people who stay while I go. I can't tell from here what's happening up there. Maybe they've vanished too.

I think that's the most I can do today. There's always the danger that I

Caroline

might not come back. And then where would I be?

Freeze, except for:

8. Actors

NAOMI

You were late.

DAVID

Sorry.

NAOMI

You're always sorry.

DAVID

Yes. Sorry.

NAOMI

You're always late. Have you no sense of time?

DAVID

No. Sorry. Sorry.

Unfreeze. Actors busy. Freeze, except for

NEIL

37 times?

DAVID

Yes.

NEIL

In one night?

DAVID

Yes.

NEIL

37 times?

Unfreeze.

9. THOMAS

ANJULI and GEOFFREY are deep in sotto voce discussion. THOMAS tries to get her attention.

THOMAS

Hallo? excuse me?

ANJULI

Yes?

THOMAS

Can I have one?

ANJULI

Pardon?

THOMAS

Me. Can I have one? An audition? Please.

ANJULI

Where have you come from? Who sent you?

THOMAS

No-one sent me. I just heard about them. It, I mean. Well. Him actually.

ANJULI

Ah. Him. You want to audition for him. The big guy.

THOMAS

Yes.

ANJULI

What experience do you have?

THOMAS

Not a lot. Not a great deal. Nothing to speak of. Well none. Actually.

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ANJULI

None? Where have you been?

THOMAS

I haven't.

ANJULI

Haven't? Haven't been? Not at all?

THOMAS

Not ever.

ANJULI

This is highly irregular. I don't have a protocol. Are you certain? Are you sure?

THOMAS

I'm sort of sure. I think. Can you help me?

ANJULI

Well something has to be done. Are you on the books?

THOMAS

The books?

Freeze, except for:

10. Actors

ANNABEL

You must remember.

POLLY

Well I sort of do.

ANNABEL

Sort of? Our big moment?

POLLY

Well it was sort of medium sized. Wasn't it?

Unfreeze. Actorly business. Freeze, except for

CAROLINE

37 times, apparently.

NAOMI

You're joking.

Unfreeze. Actorly business. Freeze, except for

ADRIAN

But you know I love you.

CLAIRE

OK, you love me. But when are you going to tell your wife?

Unfreeze.

11. JENNIFER

JENNIFER steps forward. Her hair is held in a tight bun. She is wearing her spectacles.

GEOFFREY

Ah! And you are?

JENNIFER

JENNIFER.

GEOFFREY

Ah. May I call you Jenny?

JENNIFER

You can. But my name is JENNIFER.

GEOFFREY

Ah. And what is your audition piece, my dear?

JENNIFER

I'm a librarian. An archivist.

GEOFFREY

Ah. And in which of our great dramas would that be?

JENNIFER

No. No. I really am a librarian. An archivist.

GEOFFREY

Then why are you here? This is a theatre. We are doing auditions. For actors. For parts.

JENNIFER

I don't know why I'm here. Something made me. There was a—a—

GEOFFREY

An inexplicable mystery? A magnetic impulse? An inner yearning?

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JENNIFER

Well no, actually. There was a phone call.

GEOFFREY

A phone call?

JENNIFER

In a handbag.

GEOFFREY gestures wearily to the actors, who dutifully chorus:

ACTORS TOGETHER

A Handbag?

JENNIFER looks puzzled. DAVID steps forward.

DAVID

Perhaps I can assist? May I?

She nods. He leads her centre stage, and lets down her hair. He removes her spectacles, and by that action she is transformed, no longer a librarian: she is radiantly beautiful.

GEOFFREY

Oh dear God. Not that old Hollywood cliché, darlings. I really think we might—

ANJULI

Shh!

JENNIFER ignores him and speaks to the audience. At first we think it is the Hollywood cliché, but quite rapidly something else takes over. She has extraordinary dignity.

JENNIFER

I am the girl next door. The childhood companion. The tomboy you took for granted. Your best mate. The one who watches from the sidelines as you fall in love with someone else. As you fall away from me. As childhood fades. Too fast. Too final.

She puts on the spectacles again. Ties back her hair.

Lost for words without you, I find them in books. My dreams turn to meaningless dust. I am covered in the dust of deleted days.

Until... Until the moment when, on an unexceptional afternoon, a phone rings. No caller. No message. But nonetheless a call. I get up. I leave the books, the precious books, open on the desk. I walk out of the library onto

Jennifer

the street, and follow wherever my footsteps lead. They lead me ... here.

She takes off the spectacles again—turns to look at the actors—turns round again quite slowly

Here I can be whatever your play needs me to be. Princess, witch, daughter, sister, lover, mother, romantic heroine, wicked stepmother, grocer's daughter, goddess, angel. Anyone you choose. I am a clean slate. In a state of grace. Full of grace. But me? Ah no. You can't catch me. I am free as a butterfly. Free as a kingfisher. Light as a leaf on the linden bough. I take my bow.

She bows to the audience. She bows to the actors. she bows to GEOFFREY, who, for once, is silent; lost for words.

Actorly business, then Freeze, except for:

12. Actors

ADRIAN

But you know how I feel about you.

NAOMI

How precisely am I supposed to know?

ADRIAN

Because I told you.

NAOMI

Tell me again.

ADRIAN

What?

NAOMI

Tell me again.

ADRIAN

Why?

Actorly business, then Freeze, except for

NEIL

Well can you introduce me to her then?

DAVID

Who?

NEIL

You know, the 37 times girl.

DAVID

You want me to introduce you?

NEIL

Yes.

DAVID

Well I might. If...

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NEIL

If what?

DAVID

How badly do you want a part in this show?

NEIL

Why do you ask?

DAVID

If you walk out, I'll give you her mobile number.

NEIL

No chance!

Unfreeze.

13. POLLY

POLLY sidles up to GEOFFREY and ANJULI, looking very demure.

GEOFFREY

So: what have you done recently?

POLLY

Oh, quite a lot.

GEOFFREY

Such as?

POLLY

Well, I was Al Capone.

GEOFFREY

Really?

POLLY

Yes. Don't call me Scarface.

GEOFFREY

Wouldn't dream of it.

POLLY

Good.

GEOFFREY

And, what else?

POLLY

Margaret Thatcher.

GEOFFREY

You're joking.

POLLY

I never, ever, joke. Or change my mind. The lady is not for turning.
Clear?

Entrances

GEOFFREY

Yes. Sorry.

POLLY

You should be. Even, maybe, you will be.

GEOFFREY

Who are you? Have I heard of you?

POLLY

Sweetheart, you have lived with me, all your life, and all your lives before that. I am the *femme fatale*, the death woman, the one who eats you up, and spits you out.

GEOFFREY

That sounds... rather enticing.

POLLY

Yes, maybe, if you like a bit of... rough. If where you like to walk is on the wild side. If what you want is, the edge.

GEOFFREY

Edge?

POLLY

Yes. Hanging on. With your finger tips. Over the big... drop.

GEOFFREY

And where would I fall, darling, tell me, what would I fall into?

POLLY

Love. Nothing but love. Love like a sauna, like dry ice, like... monetarism.

GEOFFREY

Like... what?

POLLY

Oh, yes, the love of the grocer's daughter. Love that robs you of your... livelihood. Would you like me to read a part

GEOFFREY

Yes, please, yes, would you?

POLLY

I would. How about Salome, who danced and got a severed head as a reward? Delilah, who cut Samson's hair and took away his manhood? Eve,

Polly

who betrayed the human race? Cleopatra, who betrayed Mark Anthony?
I specialise in dangerous ladies...

GEOFFREY

Oh, yes, yes.

POLLY

All of them? OK, no problem.

In the following she interacts with the actors, in a seductive dance.

POLLY

My bounty is as boundless as the sea,
My love as deep; the more I give to thee,
The more I have, for both are infinite.

But you need to be a bit tidier, sweetheart, don't you think? You need a little haircut, maybe? We don't want to look like a hippy, do we, precious?
I do like boys. I like to take away their toys.

When I dance, a thing I have noticed is, men tend to lose their heads.

What's my secret? Oh, it's what I eat. I only eat... forbidden fruit. Delicious, my dearest, quite delicious, no taste like it, forbidden fruit. Quite delightful, darling, you'll really like it. Would you like some? I might let you taste my fruit, maybe, if you are good, if you let me dance for you, if you get your hair cut.

I do like boys, I like to take away their toys.

Think on me,
That am with Phoebus' amorous pinches black,
And wrinkled deep in time.

The stroke of death is as a lover's pinch, which hurts, and is desired. Did you know that? Not many people know that. My lovers tend to find that one out, though, when they have eaten my fruit, when I have taken their toys away. Disconcerting for them, poor dears, to find their strength has ebbed away, to find their head on a silver plate, but no more than I deserve, I'm sure, I'm sure you'll agree.

I am the grocer's daughter after all. And the Queen of the Nile. And the mother and the mistress and the murderer of all mankind.

There is a stunned silence. Then she bounces around playfully and roars with laughter. Everyone laughs with relief. Lots of actorly kiss-

Entrances

ings and hugs.

POLLY

Just don't call me Scarface, darlings!

Actorly business. Freeze, except for:

14. Actors

NAOMI

Why don't we go away together?

NEIL

What?

NAOMI

Why don't we go away? You and me?

NEIL

When?

NAOMI

Soon?

NEIL

I'm very busy.

NAOMI

When?

NEIL

Soon. Soonish.

Unfreeze. Actorly business. Freeze, except for

CAROLINE

I'm French, you know.

DAVID

Oh dear.

Unfreeze. Actorly business. Freeze, except for

HEATHER

And do you know about love?

THOMAS

Love?

Entrances

HEATHER

Love.

Unfreeze.

15. ANNABEL

ANNABEL steps forward.

GEOFFREY

Ah Miss Smith, we meet again.

ANNABEL

We do, GEOFFREY, we do.

GEOFFREY

And what boards have you been treading recently?

ANNABEL

Come on GEOFFREY, you've read the reviews. Don't mess with me.

GEOFFREY

Well yes. Yes, Jolly good. Jolly well done.

ANNABEL

Thank you.

GEOFFREY

And what brings you to audition for our humble little company? Have you fallen out with your agent?

ANNABEL

No GEOFFREY. My agent, like everyone else adores me. I'm here because of *(she gestures meaningfully towards the lighting box)* Him.

GEOFFREY

Oh right. Oh yes. Well, do please go ahead, darling. Give us whatever it is you care to.

ANNABEL

Thank you GEOFFREY. Thank you. I shall offer, if I may, Petrarch's Laura...

She steps centre stage, and immediately we see why she is a star. She

Entrances

is completely transformed as she take the part.

ANNABEL

Love. I can tell you about love.

I was standing by the entrance to the little chapel of Our Lady. It was Good Friday. April the 6th, 1327. The Cathedral of Sainte Claire was full of the great and the good, and the not so great and the not so good, of Avignon. I was waiting for the chapel to empty. I wanted to speak with Her in private. Two years of marriage and three miscarriages. I needed her blessing.

Suddenly I felt, like intense heat on the side of my face, a gaze from across the nave. I felt my head drawn to meet it, like iron to a lode stone.

And there he stood. A stranger. He was as much a part of me as my own blood and bones. I tried to smile. So did he. But we didn't. A single moment, and a lifetime passed.

Pause

We never met again. I went back to my life. A sweet life. A contented, fortunate life. There was nothing else to be done now, other than duty. And duty was a floating blossom, blown on the breath of spirit. I cherished my husband. I ran a good household. Our Lady answered my prayers. I cared for my nine children. I tended the sick. I fed the hungry. I sang appropriate songs. I spun and wove a cloth of gold.

I went the Cathedral whenever I could. Each time I stood in the same place, at the entrance to the Lady Chapel, and closed my eyes, and gave thanks. In simple gratitude for the certainty, the utter purity, of that single moment.

Pause. She ages before our eyes.

I want nothing. I am complete. It is finished.

It is 21 years to the day since our glancing dazzling encounter, and now, at last, I am free to go on my way. The plague will take me as it has taken so many others in this weeping, stricken city.

I am nobody special doing nothing special. Ending my days here. Just like all the others. But I do not weep. There is no need. No call to do so.

I have known the astonishing simplicity of the perfect fit. I have understood the effortless grace of finding myself in the right place, at the right

Annabel

time, with the right attitude of mind. Of finding myself outside myself.
In you – the known and unknown. In everything.

*The actors are in awe. They manage to applaud, but it is not casual or
polite. It is heartfelt, sensitive.*

Freeze, except for:

16. Actors

JENNIFER

Why?

NEIL

Why not?

JENNIFER

That's not an answer.

NEIL

Why not?

JENNIFER

You're hiding something from me.

NEIL

Yes.

JENNIFER

You're supposed to say you're not!

NEIL

Why?

Unfreeze. Actorly business. Freeze, except for

HEATHER

All that there is, is love. Nothing else is, but love. Love is the force that fires the stars, that drives our lives from seed to sepulchre, from edge to edge, from end to end.

THOMAS

I love you.

Unfreeze.

17. Claire

CLAIRE walks up to GEOFFREY, like the young John Travolta.

GEOFFREY

Well, darling, (*rather bored now*) and what can you offer me that no-one else has?

CLAIRE

Shaddap.

He starts to protest. She looks at him. He shuts up.

She looks at and commands the audience.

Once, a while ago, I was Taliesin, the singer, the king wizard, Merlin's master, the dangerous one. I wove a silver thread through Arthur's court, stirring it up, mixing it, making life interesting for all. Oh, and I invented poetry. Yes, just like that. Well, obviously there were bards, before me, bearded dickheads, they were, whinnying away and pawing their stupid harps. Jesus, it was boring. So one day I stood up and said, "I can sing." "Ho ho ho," they said, tedious gits. "It takes years to be a bard," they said, "hee hee hee." So I said, "Give me a high C." "Ooo, a high C, he wants," they said, and I said, "Yes, I do," and pulled one out of the air, like this, (*she gestures; an electric note arises*) and then I sang to them:

(this is a cross between Robert Johnson and Little Richard.)

Ooh, baby don't you want to go?

Ooh, baby don't you want to go?

Back to the land of California, to my sweet home Chicago.

Entrances

Now one and one is two, two and two is four
I'm heavy loaded baby, I'm booked, I gotta go
Cryin' baby, honey don't you want to go?
Back to the land of California, to my sweet home Chi-
cago.

So they tried to make me illegal. Ahead of my time, I was. But that did it: poetry, out of the bag, loose in the world, you see, running around messing with people's minds.

I am Taliesin. I go out, I go in. I drank from the cauldron of Ceridwen, and became a death surfer, flying through lives, tasting the incarnations, like honey and salt, like nightshade wine.

Or so they say. They make up stories, to explain me, you see. I am sick of fiction. What is it, but a dream within a dream? I think it is better to wake up. I wake people up.

Pulls another note out of the air. Sings Mozart (this is Emma Kirkby, full blast, out of nowhere).

Exultate, jubilate!

There, that woke you up, didn't it.

Ceridwen was a witch. Very nasty piece of work, she was. And she had a pimply son. Her plan was, to make him immortal, God knows why. So she brewed up this revolting potion, wing of bat, eye of newt, all that kind of stuff, an ounce of spit from the mouth of the only virgin in Wales, you know the sort of thing. Put it on the fire to cook, went off to have a refreshing cup of something unpleasant, and I happened by. Dipped my finger in the mixture. Ow! It was hot! Sucked my finger, and bingo, I woke up.

I could hear the thoughts of the field mice, rustling through the dry leaf hideaways; the high clear mind of a goshawk, proud and mad; I could tell what the pimply youth was thinking, too, what a cesspit that was.

But I could see the way the world worked, hear the mind harmonies, the dream discords, that make the whole thing sing, I could tune in to the world tune, and, by God, I could sing it too.

This is good, I thought, I can go places with this, and just then the witch came in and let out a piercing shriek. So off I went, and she came after, lickety split, both of us shape shifting like crazy, another little talent I found I had. It's great being awake, you should try it. I was a cat, khaaah,

Claire

and she was a wolf; I was a swift, skreeek, and she was an eagle; I was a dolphin, leaping for joy, and she was a shark, arrowing after.

She chased me through life after life, until I grew into my power, and then I ate her for breakfast. And here I am.

And now it is time for me to take flesh again, and to go—who knows where?

She steps back. The others give her a wide berth. Then she snaps out of role—or, of course, into another one.

18. Actors

CLAIRE

Do you think it will rain, then?

ADRIAN

What?

Freeze, except for

POLLY

I am plastic, fantastic. My ideas are so elastic.

ANNABEL

Oh I know. I know.

Freeze, except for

THOMAS

Do you love? Could you love me?

HEATHER

I walk the fields of heaven, that golden grass, that diamond sky.

THOMAS

Do you?

GEOFFREY

Well now, I think that's just about everyone, isn't it. I think we might call it a day. Thank you all for turning up. We shall be...

ANJULI

Erm, excuse me, but we haven't finished.

GEOFFREY

Oh God. Don't tell me there are more. I've had enough for today.

NAOMI steps forward. Waits to be acknowledged.

Entrances

ANJULI

I really think you should see this one.

GEOFFREY

Very well. Very well. And what is it you do, dear? A little something to wake us all up perhaps, I should be so lucky?

Naomi takes the clipboard from ANJULI and indicates something on it. GEOFFREY sighs. He is not at all prepared for what's to come. NAOMI steps centre stage.

19. Naomi

NAOMI

I really love to dance. I truly do. Whatever I'm doing, wherever I am, I can hear the music inside my head, and the music moves me, and I dance. Gets on people's nerves a bit, but I don't care. It is joy, you see. Joy.

So there I was, doing the housework, dusting a bit, hearing the music, feeling the dance inside me, going with it, life was great, when it happened. Everything changed.

What was it like? I still think to myself, what was it like? It was like... as if all the music I ever heard, or imagined, the music of the sun, the music of the universe, all of it, happened at once. Inside me. Exploded, in one instant, starting here, (*lower belly*) and flooded me throughout, to the tips of my fingers (*arms go up and wide*) and the ends of my hair.

Aaaaaaaaah!!! (*triumphant pose*).

Well, it was quite something. So I staggered a bit, and picked myself up, and wondered what in God's name was going on, and found that there was a man behind me. Just an ordinary man, quite normal, I thought, at first, though he did, kind of, glow a bit. And he said to me, "blessed art thou amongst women." And glowed a bit more.

"I beg your pardon," I said.

"Blessed art thou amongst women. That's what it says here. That's what I'm supposed to tell you."

"Oh. Right. And what exactly does that mean?"

"You're pregnant," he said.

"I most certainly am not," I said, "how dare you, and stop glowing, I said.

"I'm a virgin," I said.

"Yes, I know," he said. "Still, you're pregnant."

“Listen,” I said, “sunshine”, I said, and actually he did look a lot like sunshine, “let me set you straight about something; I don’t know where, or how, or *if* you learned the facts of life, but the science of biology teaches us, beyond any doubt at all, that virgins don’t get pregnant. If virgins can get pregnant,” I said, “anything can happen. Anything at all.”

“Yes,” he said. “Yes. Exactly”. And went on glowing.

“Look. If I’m pregnant, who, pray, is daddy? It takes two, you know.”

He said nothing. He just pointed upwards.

“There’s no-one up there,” I said, “this is a bungalow!” But he just went on pointing.

Light dawned. “You don’t mean... Him?” “Yes,” he said. “Him. Blessed art thou amongst women. See?”

“Listen,” I said. “No-one, but no-one, is going to believe that. That’s the oldest trick in the book. If I were pregnant, which I don’t believe for a moment”, I said, though I did. Actually, I did. My inside was full of light. I knew. I knew, and I was known. Deep within. I felt him. It was the most wonderful, wonderful, thing. Where was I? Yes, I said to him, “even if I were pregnant, if I were to say God did it, they’d say to me, ‘right, sure, absolutely’, they’d say; ‘and he’s going to be the Messiah’, they’d say, ‘isn’t he, and save us all and bring in universal peace, they’d say’. Sarcastically”.

“Ah,” he said, “I was just coming to that.”

She holds her stomach, like a pregnant woman, and smiles, joy all over her face. She looks down at herself, smiling, pure happiness.

Then gradually her shoulders slump, and her head and arms hang down. When she comes up again, she is utterly devastated. There is anger, despair, grief, desolation, all those emotions, but she has been through them all and come out in an empty space.

She looks up.

Why? Why? Why did you do this? There was no need, no fairness, no meaning at all to it. He was nice, you know; a really nice young man. He practiced kindness, helped the sick, told us to be kind to each other. He was the only truly good person I have ever met, and he came out from inside me, he was for a time part of me, my son, my son.

I thought he was yours, you know, I really did, I believed it. I thought he

Naomi

was special, and I was special, I bought the whole package. You said my womb was blest, and I believed it. And now he is dying slowly in awful pain, and it is you who are doing it, it is you, it is you.

You are unbelievable.

You are killing your own son. My son. And everyone, without exception, you are killing us all. All. Every last dying baby, every atom of anguish in the world, the whole damned butcher's bill, is down to your account.

It is you who ought to be up there, you bastard; you.

And do you know what? He spoke to me. For the first time. Do you know what he said? When I said, "it ought to be you up there on that cross"? He said:

"It is. It always is."

Everyone is shell shocked. Everyone is still. GEOFFREY is stunned. Immoveable. ADRIAN comes forward.

20. ADRIAN

ADRIAN

Hello, my friend.

GEOFFREY

I am not your friend, darling, I am a theatrical impresario.

ADRIAN

You have more friends than you realise.

GEOFFREY

What on earth are you talking about?

ADRIAN

Not about earth, that's true, how beautifully you put it.

GEOFFREY

Look. Wait a minute. Stop right now. You're an actor. You're auditioning. Let's get this straight—

ADRIAN

Straight. I love it. Such a beautiful metaphor. How straight shall we make it?

GEOFFREY

Be quiet! Tell me what parts you've played!

ADRIAN

Oh, this and that, mostly this, some that. Puck, you know, various gnomes, Tiresias, a rabbit, once—

GEOFFREY

A rabbit?

ADRIAN

Yes, Hamlet the rabbit. Who speaks the truth. Because, you see, I do.

Entrances

GEOFFREY

We don't want the truth here, young man, you are an actor!

ADRIAN

Oh we do, we really do. You, particularly, actually, don't you?

GEOFFREY

What the hell are you talking about?

ADRIAN

Ah, hell, yes, not a nice place to be, is it? And, before you guess, mostly nowadays I play psychoanalysts. I shrink heads. If they're too large, that is.

GEOFFREY

Ah, ah, that's what all this is about! Well, let me tell you something. This psycho mind stuff, this therapy business, do you know what it is?

ADRIAN

What? Tell me, straight away: what is it?

GEOFFREY

ABSOLUTE NONSENSE! That's what it is. ABSOLUTE BLOODY NONSENSE!

ADRIAN

You are a poet.

GEOFFREY

What? What?

ADRIAN

A poet. That is just... perfect. We embody the absolute nonsense, the utter non sense, of your inner mind. Of your heart's blood. That's just purely perfectly what we do. We show you the otherness inside you, the wounded strangeness, the upside down and bloodstained sense of it. You are a poet. Darling.

GEOFFREY

Don't call me that! I call people that!

ADRIAN

No, beloved, I won't call you "that." And, listen. One thing. She did love you, you know. She just had a strange way of showing it.

GEOFFREY

What? Who? What?

Adrian

ADRIAN

You know who. You need to let her go. She didn't choose to leave you. Her death was not what she chose, though it was what she needed to do. Let her go now, where she needs to go; then you will be able to love.

GEOFFREY splutters, tries to speak, is rendered completely inarticulate, then, suddenly, completely, breaks down into tears. Falls to his knees.

ADRIAN comes across, kneels with him, and holds him.

ADRIAN

Beloved.

GEOFFREY

How did you know? How did you do that?

ADRIAN

I don't know. I do it by not knowing how I do it. It's done, isn't it?

GEOFFREY

Yes. Yes. It's done. I feel... amazing.

ADRIAN

Yes. That's because you are. Brother, friend, dear friend, it's because you are.

They embrace.

ADRIAN

Now it's time for you to be an impresario again. But not for long. Just for a little while. Then you will become something else.

GEOFFREY

Something else? What?

ADRIAN

Something like the colour of the sun.

21. Actors

ADRIAN rejoins the actors. They don't know whether to applaud or not. Was he just acting? Was GEOFFREY?

GEOFFREY calls for silence. ANJULI assists him. He steps up to make an announcement. ANJULI exits.

GEOFFREY

Well, darlings, I have to say, I'm quite impressed. You are all—not that bad. Not bad at all. I've been in consultation with the man, (*tapping on ear piece and indicating the lighting box*) and he says, and I agree with him, that you all qualify. There will be a part for you all in the forthcoming production. Welcome, my dears, to full employment! For a while, at any rate.

Actors rejoice. ANJULI bustles in with tray of drinks in paper cups.

ANJULI

Don't forget the traditional celebration toast.

GEOFFREY

The what? Oh, yes, right. Of course.

The actors all take a drink, and wait for the toast.

ANJULI

(*To Thomas*) not you. Definitely not you.

THOMAS

Oh. (*Looks a little hurt.*) What is it?

ANJULI

Lethe water. From where the white cypress grows. (*She is acquiring stature, authority, strangeness.*)

ANJULI

Now, actors. All together, please: raise your glasses. I give you the traditional toast: to Aletheia. To the truth. To not forgetting.

Entrances

ALL

Aletheia! *They drink.*

*Immediately, their faces are wiped of emotion, knowledge, personality.
They become blank slates.*

THOMAS

What's happened to them? *(Goes up to HEATHER. She stares ahead, not reacting.)* What's in that drink?

ANJULI

With authority. Wait and see. *(To GEOFFREY.)* Here. This time, you too.

GEOFFREY

Me? Really? Are you sure?

ANJULI

Yes. He says so. *(They both look at the lighting box, GEOFFREY nervously.)*

GEOFFREY

Oh. Goodness. What do I do?

ANJULI

What part do you want?

GEOFFREY

Oh. I don't know. Er, I just don't know. I...

ANJULI

Yes: you do. You know. Speak.

GEOFFREY

You mean I have to audition? Like an actor?

ANJULI

Yes. Get on with it, time's nearly up.

GEOFFREY

Oh.

22. GEOFFREY

GEOFFREY steps forward, uncertain, then with growing certainty.

GEOFFREY

It's funny, what comes into your mind, when you're not thinking. Not thinking, not bullying actors, not worrying about budgets, not doing anything much; the mind produces some strange ideas.

Have you ever thought, the world has two languages? And each of these languages, is love? No, well, I thought not. But I have.

Think about the flow of circumstance, the ducking and diving, the endless chat of this and that, winding like a river, a dazzling river; detail, instance, the roughness of surfaces, the blueness of morning, a feather that tickles the skin, the eye of a blackbird. The language of this particularity is poetry, isn't it, chattering, dancing, the wordplay that makes the play of things make sense.

And then underneath, down there deep in the scheme of things, there's the language that makes it all work, the dark design, the patterning. So beautiful, don't you think, the intricate simplicity, underlying, organising, orderly. And the language of that, of course, is number.

So there you are, you see, it's quite simple, really, two languages, number and poetry, two different ways that love shapes the world, in its deep meaning that moves and shakes it, and in its surface dance, that shimmers, that moves, that is shaken.

And I think the best life, really, would be the life lived according to that love, don't you, embracing both, bringing them together, as love does in its wonderful, constant, endless invention of all that there is.

But if that's too difficult to manage I'll quite happily go on bullying the actors.

Entrances

ANJULI

What part would you like?

GEOFFREY

Well, really, you know, what I'd like to be is a chartered accountant. Who writes poetry in his spare time, quietly. Balancing the books, you see. Is that possible?

ANJULI

(Looks at the lighting box, nods, and looks at him) yes. It's possible. Here, take the last drink.

GEOFFREY

To Aletheia!

He drinks, goes blank. ANJULI organises the exit of all except THOMAS, who watches, unobtrusively.

23. ANJULI

*ANJULI leads GEOFFREY and the actors off stage. THOMAS remains.
She returns.*

THOMAS

Who are you?

ANJULI

Watch this. Pretend there's an audience out there.

She addresses the audience.

I do adore being the P.A. It's such fun, darlings. You get to see all sorts. No, you do. Especially working for the big guy. He spotted me, you know. At a charity do. I'd only gone along to please Henry. Henry? Oh he's my fiancé. In the city, actually. Something or other in the city. Not sure what, actually, but gosh, as he says, when I think to ask, which isn't all that often, actually, I don't really need to know do I? No need to bother my pretty little head.

She turns to THOMAS.

ANJULI

All right?

THOMAS

Are you acting too? Is that a script? An audition?

ANJULI

Who are you?

THOMAS

What?

ANJULI

Is that a script? Are you acting too? Watch this.

Entrances

Have you met my fiancée? Her name is ANJULI. Jolly nice girl. I'm a lucky chap. Her father knew my father. Her aunt married into the Belgian aristocracy I believe. Yes, she has some little job somewhere. Not sure what exactly. A pastime. An amusement. Nothing terribly important. Nothing to speak of.

She turns to Thomas.

THOMAS

Don't you have a part? Who are you?

ANJULI

Parts? Don't talk to me about parts, Sunny Jim. Seen them all. Done them all. Been them all. Actors, actresses, directors, producers, gaffers, best boys. Oh, I did like being best boy. Gave it my all. Camera man, parking lot attendant. Anything you've ever seen on the credits. Every last bleeding, heart breaking item.

So much noise. Signifying?... signifying?... Well, not a lot, actually.

And now, sweet silence. For a little while. Soon, soon, they'll be back, chattering, wounded, exultant, despairing. I watch them come, I watch them go, I see their parts, their posturings, their wisdom, their ignorance.

I spin, I weave, I cut the thread.

And, you know what? I envy them, I do, I do. As they flow through their roles, their anxieties, triumphs, their deaths, their expectations, only not knowing that all they need is not to know, I envy them.

They go out there into those painful places, the shabby theatres, the tatty parts they play, and I stay here, time after time, and long to drink oblivion again, and dive into the world once more.

But he won't let me (*indicating lighting box*). "When can I go?" I say. "In the fullness of time," he says. Only then: in the fullness of time. And so I wait, filling in time, waiting for it to be full. Or full enough.

24. ANJULI, THOMAS

THOMAS

But who are you?

ANJULI

Oh, me. I am a gateway. A possibility.

THOMAS

Was it you? In the hospital? Calling me away. Calling me here.

ANJULI

Yes.

THOMAS

Oh, the song. The eagle song. It was—it was—

ANJULI

Yes.

THOMAS

Who are you? When they drink that weird drink, do they drink to you?

ANJULI

No, no. they drink a medicine, that makes them forget themselves. But they do it in order to have yet another attempt at remembering who they really are. So, they drink to Aletheia: to unforgetting.

THOMAS

(Bewildered) what? What?

ANJULI

You could say, I am a midwife. I help people to forget themselves, so that they can remember who they are.

THOMAS

(Remembering ADRIAN) I do it by not knowing how I do it?

Entrances

ANJULI
Exactly!

THOMAS
(*Remembering DAVID*) I simply surrender. Nowhere else. No-one else. Nothing else. Elseness has left the building.

ANJULI
I do believe you've got it!

THOMAS
(*Recalling Claire*) what is it but a dream within a dream? I think it is time to wake up.

ANJULI
OK, enough. you'll do.

THOMAS
What do you want from me?

ANJULI
You go back.

THOMAS
Back? With them?

He starts to follow the actors.

ANJULI
No. No dear friend. That way. (*Indicates a different direction*) you've got an appointment with a hospital bed. They are waiting, you know. Longing for you to show some sign of coming back to life. To welcome you back to what they think of as home.

THOMAS
Do I drink the medicine?

ANJULI
Oh no. You need to remember. You need to let them know.

THOMAS
Let them know what? Let who know what? I don't understand.

ANJULI
You will. Give it time. You will.

THOMAS
Will I see you again? Will I see them again? (*Points at where actors have*

Anjuli, Thomas

exited.)

ANJULI

Oh yes, certainly; nothing is more certain than that. And, who knows, maybe next time round you'll have the honour of playing Caliban.

THOMAS

Caliban?

ANJULI

Yes. Here. Try it. You'll need an audition piece one day.

She hands him a page of text from her clipboard. Thomas takes the page and studies it. He walks downstage and addresses the audience, initially reading the part, and then simply performing it. As he reads, he experiences revelation.

THOMAS

Be not afeard: the isle is full of noises,
Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight, and hurt not.
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
Will hum about mine ears; and sometimes voices,
That, if I then had wak'd after long sleep,
Will make me sleep again: and then, in dreaming,
The clouds methought would open and show riches
Ready to drop upon me; that, when I wak'd,
I cried to dream again.

He turns to her, with a 'was that OK?' look. She smiles and nods, but as he makes to go after the actors she firmly directs him in the opposite direction.

25. NEIL

Thomas exits. ANJULI is left on stage. She is looking after him in a dreamy sort of way. Suddenly, behind her, and to her amazement, NEIL enters.

NEIL

Behind you!

ANJULI

Oh! What on earth are you doing here?

NEIL

I quit.

ANJULI

Oh no you didn't.

NEIL

Oh yes I did.

ANJULI

Oh no you didn't. Not the panto job.

NEIL

They're all panto jobs, aren't they? Yes, I flounced out.

ANJULI

Oh, that's awful.

NEIL

It was. A complete waste of my talents. Unspeakably awful. So here I am again. What else can you offer me? I am, so to speak, free.

ANJULI

Well, as it happens, we have a position of responsibility going

Entrances

NEIL

Responsibility! I don't do responsibility! I'm an actor!

ANJULI

You might like this one: we want someone to run the show.

NEIL

The show? You mean the whole show? Hiring and firing, bullying the actors, being really overbearing and obnoxious?

ANJULI

You got it.

NEIL

Sounds very attractive. However, I fear I am not worthy.

ANJULI

Look, it's just a part.

NEIL

Yes, but doesn't the whole structure of the universe depend on it? One mistake and time goes out of joint and that means the end of life as we know it?

ANJULI

Yeah yeah, all that. Look, it's a part. Get on with it.

NEIL

Do I get to sleep with the extremely wealthy woman?

ANJULI

Is that a rhetorical question?

NEIL

Would I ask rhetorical questions?

ANJULI

She's optional.

NEIL

Well, OK, if you really think I'm up to it, I accept. (*Turns into GEOFFREY.*)
You're fired.

ANJULI

What?

NEIL

Sacked, darling. The old heave ho. I don't need a P.A. Make tracks.

Neil

ANJULI

(With increasing joy, amazement) you really mean it?

NEIL

I really mean it. Here *(hands her the magic drink)*.

ANJULI

To Aletheia!

She holds up the cup in a toast; before she actually drinks, blackout.