

Undone

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Strange Shadows

Strange Shadows
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1. white fire

1.1 white fire

On a dark and empty stage, two people are kneeling facing each other, a young woman and an older man.

CORA

32 years is a very long time. A long distance between us.

ANTON

It's a damned long time. A long empty time.

CORA

Not that empty, come on, ANTON, you were wild, you got around, you set the odd theatre on fire—

ANTON

Empty. I knew nothing. I still know nothing. But now it's me that's on fire, white fire, inside me, unbearable, all the time.

CORA

It sounds rather unpleasant.

ANTON

I am alive, CORA. Because of you. Before, I was dead.

CORA

And will be dead again, of course, before not too long, old man.

ANTON

Cruel.

CORA

Desperate. You overwhelm me. I am desperate. When I look at you, just catch sight of you, anywhere, across the room, across the street, my skin stings, it buzzes, I vibrate, I really do.

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ANTON

You do?

CORA

I do. And I want you. Right there and then, without any further ado whatsoever.

ANTON

Gosh.

CORA

Yes, gosh, also golly and gee whiz. Mind you, you're probably past it, aren't you, a terrible disappointment, I expect.

ANTON

Yes, probably. But don't count on it.

CORA

And then there's your wife.

ANTON

My wife is dead.

CORA

Yes. Nonetheless.

ANTON

And then there is your, er—

CORA

Poet. My poet. My beautiful poet.

ANTON

What we seem to have, what the god has given us, where we actually are, is a quandary.

CORA

A conundrum.

ANTON

An impasse.

CORA

An impossibility.

ANTON

And so, Miss Beautiful, Miss Tingling Skin, Miss Green Eyes and Great Hair and Feet That Don't Touch The Ground—

White fire

CORA

They do!

ANTON

Only just—

CORA

The ballet classes—

ANTON

Right. Anyway, anyway: what the fuck are we going to do?

CORA

Yes. That does sum up the problem. Yes.

a pause—a long pause —they kiss

ANTON

So what are we going to do?

CORA

Do we have to do anything?

ANTON

We might.

CORA

I don't know. What do you think?

ANTON

I think I want you to want me more than you want your bloody poet.

CORA

It's not a question of more. More has nothing to do with it.

Enter, surprisingly, a character from another period. A PLAYER from an early seventeenth-century travelling group of PLAYERS.

PLAYER

I think you'll find child, she had everything to do with it?

CORA: What?

Blackout. Exit ANTON.

1.2

nova

It is quiet. We are in complete darkness. Then starlight (myriad pin-pricks of light) lights up the ceiling above both stage and audience.

We are IN the night sky.

Suddenly the noise of rushing winds surround us—it is exciting and scary and modulates to a sound that is on the edge between noise and music.

There is a sudden huge burst of music/sound as—absolutely simultaneously—a big screen pulls us into images re-creating the explosion of Tycho Brahe’s supernova. It is 1572; the year of the supernova and the year of JOHN DONNE’s birth.

Out of the darkness a reverberating male voice shouts:

VOICE

More!

Immediately, we switch into full light. CORA is still sitting centre stage. There is Jacobean music—the PLAYERS arrive—noise, colour, light—bodies tumbling, leaping, somersaulting, onto the stage.

The stage is marked out with the concentric circles of the spheres and the PLAYERS take up places around the circle. There is a big wicker hamper of “character” props (materials, hats, masks, jester sticks, DONNE’s hat for example) Amidst the hurly burly of juggling, leaping, dancing around, they pull out these props and, with childlike glee they throw them cheerfully into a heap. The final item is a football sized “world.” It is placed with mock reverence and seriousness dead centre of the stage. The PLAYERS call for silence and shush each other. Two or three of them make minute adjustments to get it dead centre—standing back and looking, the way people do when they’re trying to hang a picture straight on the wall.

One of the PLAYERS steps forwards. She becomes ANNE MORE, DONNE’s wife, though we don’t know this yet. As she speaks, the other PLAYERS act out her words. As they will do, NB, in all the subsequent monologues from this layer of the play.

White fire

ANNE

Ah, let me tell you, what the world was like. Imagine an angel, singing, one high note, sustained, impossible, containing everything. That is what made the universe move; that angel, and another, and another, in perfect circles, surrounding us. And, surrounding all that, is God, holding the whole thing in his mind, in his love; his image of himself.

Right in the middle, under the moon, is us. This precious dangerous package, volatile, violent, full of change, subject to death. But, in that central sphere of change, fuelled by sin, that was where it all happened. Outside the moon, nothing changed; outside the moon, there are no stories. Under the moon, there is room for wonder. Discovery. Danger. Here love is tested, burning, violent; here poems catch fire. Here you can be: outrageous.

So there it is: look at it. The world, the wooden O, the circumstantial circus. But that's not all of it. That circle, with its dangerous grace, is not all there is down here. Oh, no, no. The real world is: your mind. That globe between your ears. There, believe me, is the place to be.

CORA becomes CONSTANCE and joins her.

CONSTANCE

Mother, is that you? You're supposed to be dead.

ANNE

You're supposed to be asleep, my dear CONSTANCE. What's the difference?

CONSTANCE

I'm asleep? This is a dream?

ANNE smiles, lovingly, embraces her, and steps back, becomes simply a PLAYER. The PLAYER from the previous scene steps forward, and addresses CONSTANCE.

PLAYER

There was one man who above all could navigate that inner arena, that little universe. He could hold the whole thing in his head. All of it. In the circus of his mind the stars did their vertiginous dance, the sea-discoverers crossed the planet, kings and commoners bickered and exploded, and out of it all he made: love. That is what he did. He made love. And put it into unprintable poetry.

Another PLAYER turns into the POET: big hat, black cloak, ego personi-

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fied. Mischievous, arrogant, full of himself, very very intelligent, very very witty. Dangerous.

The PLAYERS scatter and reform around him like starlings, chatter, chatter. He stalks about the stage, acting as the PLAYER suggests.

PLAYER

When he was alive, he was in turn a student, a soldier, a lawyer, a scholar, a courtier, a lover of women, a lover of one woman, before he became famous as, of all things, a preacher.

And, all the time, he was writing poems. Secret, beautiful, scandalous poems. Which passed from hand to hand, never printed, shown only to a few friends, and then to friends of friends: an underground poet, wild and dangerous, saying the unsayable, writing the unprintable.

And then he died.

The POET ascends to heaven, smiling beatifically, wickedly, possibly flapping his hands (ironically) to indicate wings.

The PLAYERS in a circle watch him ascend in awe and wonder, mouths open.

PLAYER

And then someone, who knows who, collected the scattered poems, and had them printed.

PLAYERS act the circulation of the book, the shock and horror. One of them gives a copy to CONSTANCE, who reads it.

Blackout.

1.3 forbidding mourning

CONSTANCE

(Very excited: to ANNE) Listen!

VOICE OF DONNE

When thou sigh'st, thou sigh'st not wind,
But sigh'st my soul away;

White fire

When thou weep'st, unkindly kind,
My life's blood doth decay.
It cannot be
That thou lov'st me as thou say'st,
If in thine my life thou waste,
That art the best of me.

CONSTANCE

This is really really beautiful.

ANNE

Yes, it is, isn't it?

CONSTANCE

Listen, mother, listen

VOICE OF DONNE

Let not thy divining heart
Forethink me any ill.
Destiny may take thy part
And may thy fears fulfil;
But think that we
Are but turned aside to sleep

They who one another keep
Alive, ne'er parted be.

CONSTANCE

(She is crying; she is deeply moved) He wrote that for you, mother, didn't he?

ANNE

Yes, he did.

CONSTANCE

I have never ever read anything as beautiful as that.

ANNE

(Simply) Yes.

CONSTANCE goes on reading. ANNE rejoins the PLAYERS.

1.4. such a witty sinner

The PLAYERS encircle CONSTANCE: they are Courtiers, cynical, bawdy, foppish, elegant.

FOP 1

My dear, we loved him, of course we did; he was amazing. He was such a witty sinner.

FOP 2

His blasphemies were so elegant, his lust so intelligent, such range he had, such audacity.

FOP 1

And then he had the incredible gall to join the church, and use that complicated mind of his to write those bizarre tortuous brilliant sermons; he made that fatuous king feel clever just by allowing him a glimpse of his wonderful mind.

FOP 2

And all the time the poems were still circulating, you know, from hand to hand: brilliant, dirty, blasphemous, wonderful. I used to stand there at St Paul's Cross, one of his poems running in my mind, and his voice ringing in my ears—God! he knew how to work an audience, treated 'em like he treated women, you know, made them feel so intelligent that he could do whatever he wanted with them—he made a career out of blasphemy!

FOP 1

Two careers, darling, one in the church, and one in bed!

CONSTANCE

(Tightly) My father never blasphemed.

FOP 1

Oh come, child, have you read his poems?

CONSTANCE

Don't patronise me, of course I've read his poems.

FOP 2

Insolent, very insolent, for a vicar's daughter. Tell us this then: what did he mean by this little gem:

White fire

VOICE OF DONNE

We die and rise the same, and thus do prove
Mysterious, by this love.

CONSTANCE

(Stressed) He's comparing having sex, making love and then being ready to make love again, to the resurrection of Jesus.

FOP 2

Yes, he is, isn't he? Tell me then, vicar's daughter, if that's not blasphemy what is it?

CONSTANCE

I—don't—know.

They exit, laughing, leaving her in pieces.

Blackout.

1.5. I think I'm going a little mad

Lights up. Time shift.

Enter ANTON. CONSTANCE becomes CORA again.

CORA

I think I'm going a little mad. It's very nice.

ANTON

Is it?

CORA

Nice and strange and weird and full of meaning, is what it feels like. Grief, too, a lot of grief.

ANTON

You are very, very beautiful.

CORA

Thank you. I think I am writing a play, in my head, or else my head is writing a play all on its own.

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ANTON

Am I in it?

CORA

Yes. No. Not yet.

ANTON

Is he in it?

CORA

Oh yes. Oh yes.

Blackout. Exit ANTON.

1.6 please help me

Lights up. Time shift.

CORA becomes CONSTANCE again. She is reading the book, and crying.

Enter the ACADEMIC. He attempts to walk past her.

CONSTANCE

Please help me.

ACADEMIC

Who, me?

CONSTANCE

Yes please (*longing*).

ACADEMIC

What do you want? (*nervously*).

CONSTANCE

Are you a teacher?

ACADEMIC

Er, yes, I suppose. I am a scholar; but I do teach.

CONSTANCE

Poetry? The poems of JOHN DONNE?

White fire

ACADEMIC

Well, I have published quite extensively on DONNE's paradoxical art—

CONSTANCE

Wonderful! You are just the person to help me!

PLAYERS sit round in a seminar circle, look up expectantly.

ACADEMIC

Er, what is it you wish to know?

CONSTANCE

Listen:

VOICE OF DONNE

So she a mother's rich stile doth prefer,
And at the bridegroom's wish'd approach doth lie,
Like an appointed lamb, when tenderly
The priest comes on his knees to embowel her

CONSTANCE

Embowel means disembowel, doesn't it?

ACADEMIC

It's ambiguous (*rather evasive*).

CONSTANCE

He's talking about a priest about to gut an animal sacrifice, isn't he?

ACADEMIC

Well, on one level, yes, certainly.

CONSTANCE

On one level! And on another level, he's talking about a woman, a bride, and the bridegroom coming to bed to make love to her, isn't he?

ACADEMIC

Well, yes.

CONSTANCE

But that's perverted! It's a sick fantasy!

ACADEMIC

Well you must understand that this is a mock epithalamion, the function of the image is essentially parodic—

CONSTANCE

It is essentially disgusting, that's what it is. And, listen to this:

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VOICE OF DONNE

Hope not for mind in women; at their best
Sweetness and wit, they are but mummy, possessed.

CONSTANCE

That's about women, isn't it. All women. Isn't it?

ACADEMIC

Er, yes, I suppose so.

CONSTANCE

And mummy, what is mummy?

ACADEMIC

Well, it was thought that Egyptian mummies, you know, mummified
corpses, when ground to a powder, were medicinal.

CONSTANCE

And possessed means possessed, right?

ACADEMIC

Definitely.

CONSTANCE

So he's saying, is he, that all women, once you've had sex with them, how-
ever intelligent, however sweet, are as much use as mummified corpses.

ACADEMIC

Well there is an implication that sexual intercourse has medicinal val-
ue.

CONSTANCE

I can't bear it. How could he write that? Medicinal value? It betrays eve-
rything. Everything.

She is crying.

Sinks to her knees. Head in hands. Grief.

1.7 my constant star

CONSTANCE is talking to one of the PLAYERS; as she speaks the PLAYERS act out what she says.

CONSTANCE

My star, he called me, my constant star; constant in inconstancy, changing amid the changeless, out there beyond the moon.

I hadn't the slightest idea of what he was talking about, but it sounded wonderful. Eventually, once I started to get an education—and he made very sure I got an education, so that he could talk to me—I figured it out. In the old universe, the beautiful dance, change only happened beneath the orbit of the moon. Outside that, everything was permanent, unchanging, eternal, a pattern in the mind of God. Then, one day, in 1572, a star exploded. Shock; consternation; despair. How can there be an explosion in the mind of God, out there beyond the moon? In that year, my father was born. The year when the changeless changed.

In 1604, a year after I was born, lo and behold, another explosion, in Serpentarius. He saw it himself, everyone in the world could see it, except me, of course, I was too little, though God knows he pointed it out to me enough, or so he said. And so for him I was of his kind, a child of the new star, that little flame of doubt in all that celestial certainty, the spark of novelty in the mind of God.

1.8 the good morrow

VOICE OF DONNE

And now good morrow to our waking souls.

CONSTANCE

Soul waking? That was what love was, for you two?

ANNE

And a new morning. The first sunlight, the day's springtime, life begins.

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CONSTANCE

But was it true?

ANNE

True? True? All poems are true. Even bad ones. This was one of his best.

Listen

VOICE OF DONNE

For love all love of other sights controls
And makes this little room an everywhere.
Let sea discoverers to new worlds have gone
Let maps to other, worlds on worlds have shown
We have our little world; each hath one, and is one.

CONSTANCE

Boasting; he's boasting, isn't he.

ANNE

Boasting?

CONSTANCE

Yes, my dear mother, yes, he is. He made a disastrous mistake in marrying you, he ruined both of you, and so he boasts about it. Listen: listen to the false logic, the big lie:

VOICE OF DONNE

My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears

CONSTANCE

True—

VOICE OF DONNE

And true plain hearts do in the faces rest

CONSTANCE

Ok, true enough, yes, but then:

VOICE OF DONNE

Where can we find two better hemispheres
Without sharp north, without declining West

CONSTANCE

No, no that's just silly. It's not true.

ANNE

Dearest, it's a poem.

White fire

CONSTANCE

Poems mustn't deceive. Listen, listen:

VOICE OF DONNE

Whatever dies was not mixed equally

CONSTANCE

All right, we'll allow that, but what about what comes next:

VOICE OF DONNE

If our two loves be one, or thou and I

Love so alike, that none do slacken, none can die.

CONSTANCE

There, see! Now he is lying. It's not true. It's not literally true, obviously, because you did die, didn't you. And it's not spiritually true, it's not a religious truth, it's just something he wants to believe in but doesn't really; it's a lie. Sophistry. Casuistry. Lies.

ANNE

Yes.

CONSTANCE

What do you mean, yes? You're supposed to disagree! Here you are, the subject of this wonderful poem, and I've just damaged it, and all you can say is yes!

ANNE

Yes, dear, my dear *CONSTANCE*, yes. Because what you say is true. Do you think we didn't know that? Do you think as he spun his silver webs of logic, that he didn't know how thin they were? He was, you know, rather intelligent.

CONSTANCE

Yes, yes he was.

ANNE

So that's the point. A poem can be a beautiful lie. A poet can hold truth in his hand, like a golden bird, and not constrain it; can let it go, can let it fly and sing.

CONSTANCE

More pretty words. You died, mother, you died, your love did not make that not happen.

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ANNE

Do you think for one moment he didn't know that? It was a poem, girl, a poem. Is a flower true?

CONSTANCE

Flowers don't say anything.

ANNE

Yes, they do. They say: I am going to die. That's why they are beautiful. And his poem is saying: this is not true. And that's why it is beautiful.

CONSTANCE is not convinced; she goes back to reading the book.

1.9 pleasure is pleasure

FOP 1

You're still here, child. Why are you so miserable? You're a nice looking woman, when you're not snivelling: come and join us.

CONSTANCE

Leave me alone.

FOP 2

Perhaps you have your father's blood in you: do you like—pleasure?

CONSTANCE

What do you mean?

FOP 2

Sport? Wit? The game of life?

CONSTANCE

Go away.

FOP 1

I think you do, child: I think I can see him in you, trying to get out. Come and join us: be your father's daughter. No-one was cleverer than he was, or quicker with a cruel joke; he had a mind like a rapier, and as for the sport, there was no stopping him. He ate women up, you know: that devouring intellect of his, no-one could resist him. He seduced us all, and

White fire

laughed, and moved on. His cynicism was bottomless, his lust voracious, his mind incomparable.

CONSTANCE

No, no, no.

FOP 2

Stop struggling, child: it's a game. It's all a game: religion, desire, beauty, power: all a game. He knew that; good God, he *taught* us that. Just stop struggling, pleasure is pleasant, and it's in your blood...

The FOPS surround her, become grotesque: the lighting suggests nightmare.

Blackout.

1.10 going even madder

Lights up. Time shift.

CONSTANCE becomes CORA again. Enter ANTON.

CORA

I think I'm going even madder. It feels dangerous.

ANTON

The play still writing itself is it, CORA?

CORA

It is, ANTON. It is.

ANTON

Have I made my entrance yet?

CORA

Have you read his poetry then?

ANTON

Whose?

CORA

You know whose. My poet's poetry, who else?

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ANTON

No, no I have not. I walked past a big display in the bookshop yesterday, his new book, whatever it's called, and I just kept on walking. Is it good, is it as good as they say?

CORA

It's as good as it could be, really. Better, sometimes.

ANTON

What's it about?

CORA

Love and death. Love, and death.

ANTON

And you? Is it about you?

CORA

Of course.

ANTON

And how does that feel?

CORA

It feels like being known. It feels like being loved. It feels like: love.

Blackout.

1.11 the emperor of ideas

Lights up. Time shift.

CORA becomes CONSTANCE again.

CONSTANCE

I looked after him you know Mother—through that long last illness. Mother? Mother? Where are you?

She looks around her. JAMES suddenly appears—out of nowhere, out of darkness.

White fire

CONSTANCE

Who are you?

KING JAMES

JAMES, my name is JAMES. I am the king of the castle. I am the emperor of ideas. I wrote the bible, you know.

CONSTANCE

You didn't!

KING JAMES

And everyone who contradicted me, in any way, child, died. Quite remarkable, really, alive one day, put a foot wrong, dead. I noticed that. I believe it's called the divine right of kings. Anyway, yes, I wrote the bible. Didn't I?

CONSTANCE

Well, yes, if you say so.

KING JAMES

Exactly; if I say so, it is. I noticed that. Divine right of kings. What fun it was. I remember, my spies told me, Sir Walter Raleigh had said bad things about me.

CONSTANCE

Bad things?

KING JAMES

Said I was an idiot. That was bad, about as bad as could be, really. So I said to him, in front of everyone, I hear, Sir Walter, you have spoken rather rawly about me. How they laughed! I am very witty, you know. And he laughed, too, after a while. Such laughter. They stretched their faces, to laugh. Then I had his head cut off.

CONSTANCE

Tell me about my father.

KING JAMES

Yes, *DONNE*, that was his name, wasn't it. Wrote some wicked poems, my spies told me. Wicked dirty blasphemous poems, they said. Then seduced a noble lady, *ANNE MORE*, way above his station, and, you know what, he married her. Wicked, that was. So I thought he should become a vicar. That was a good thought, wasn't it? Of course it was, I thought it. And, you know what, he did, too. Well, people usually did what I said. Or died.

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Sometimes both. Did I tell you I wrote the bible?

CONSTANCE tries to protest; he silences her with a look.

I made him come and preach to me. Oh, he was good. Complicated, but good. You had to be very clever, to understand him. I understood every single word. The bits I did understand were quite frightening, but I wasn't frightened, because death, I have found, does what I tell him. And, if he comes for me, I will tell him, go away. And then I will have his head cut off. And that will be that.

CONSTANCE tries to protest; he silences her again with a gesture.

Yes, quite frightening. He knew a lot of words, some of them terrible and terrifying. Very witty, too, they said, but I couldn't see it, so they were wrong. And then, just like that, he died, and that was the end of him, and his wit, and his words. And his wicked poems. Whereas I, as you can plainly see, am still here, with my bible.

Good night.

He leaves. CONSTANCE is rigid with fear. Behind her there is a small hub-bub, as the props for the next scene are set up by the PLAYERS. She is so shocked by her encounter with JAMES that she doesn't seem to notice.

1.12 have you brought the buns?

There are two men and a woman sitting at a table—deep in dispute, waving their arms around. It is a table with tea things on it.

WOMAN

(Very shrill Oxbridge voice) Have you brought the buns?

CONSTANCE turns—surprised.

CONSTANCE

What buns?

WOMAN

Buns. I distinctly ordered buns.

White fire

CONSTANCE

(Flustered) No—erm—no—I didn't realise...

WOMAN

Hopeless. Hopeless. First lesson of scholarship—bring buns!

CONSTANCE takes out little notebook and starts to make a note.

WOMAN

Well, sit here. Sit here!

CONSTANCE sits. They look at each other—the two men still miming a dispute—waving their arms around—beginning to thump the table a little. We hear them muttering but can't distinguish words. Quite clownlike and silly and exaggerated.

WOMAN

Just ignore them. They'll never agree. They don't want to agree. What would be the point of that eh? End of scholarship as we know it, that would be. Whereas you and me *(conspiratorially)* you and me...

MAN 1

(Breaks in) I told you she wouldn't bring buns. I did tell you. What are we going to eat?

CONSTANCE

(Gesturing at laden table) Well, there are plenty of things here.

MAN 2

You only know that if you're looking at them. If you close your eyes they may not be there at all.

CONSTANCE

But I AM looking at them—

MAN 1

But you'll close your eyes sooner or later—and then what? Then what?

CONSTANCE

(Changing subject) I didn't come here to eat—I came to... er I came to...

WOMAN

Aren't you that girl—that DONNE child—

CONSTANCE

Yes. *(In a rush, gaining confidence)* I came to find out what you know about my father.

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MAN 1

When did you last see him? (*giggles helplessly as if he's made a really good joke—the others stare*).

MAN 2

Well you've come to the right place—I know everything there is to know about your father.

He gets up on the table, takes a hardbacked book out of his pocket, opens it, clears his throat and starts to read: he reads with great feeling, drama, exaggerated delivery. As he gets under way, the POET appears from under the table (where he has been concealed by a long table cloth), and, unseen by the two men and the woman, but seen by CONSTANCE, he strikes poses and gestures to accompany the following reading.

DONNE, JOHN, biographical details, see early life, later years, life, marriage, middle years, military life. Character, see personality, circulation of work amongst friends, disapproval of. See decadence, failure, licentious, roughness. Major groups of works, see divine poems, elegies, epigrams, epithalamia, first anniversary, metempsychosis, second anniversary, sermons, songs and sonnets (misspelled tsk tsk) verse letters. Themes, see change, death, friendship, hate poems, inconstancy, love, religion.

CONSTANCE

Stop! Stop it at once! My father never wrote hate poems. He never hated anyone. How dare you!

MAN 2

Well I'm afraid you're wrong. It says it here. Page 143-146 in fact. (He brandishes the book and taps it authoritatively) And that, child, THAT is scholarship.

CONSTANCE

But it's nonsense. It's a lie. I won't have it.

WOMAN

Well, we didn't have any buns, but we remained gentlemanly.

Exeunt the woman and the two men. CONSTANCE is left alone.

1.13 heads or tails?

KING JAMES appears—perhaps out of a curtain—peeping around it—almost the panto villain—but more truly menacing. He is behind CONSTANCE and she doesn't notice him till he makes a noise.

KING JAMES

Psssst! psssssssssssssssssst!

CONSTANCE

(Turning round startled) What are you doing here?

KING JAMES

Aha! You need to ask? Bad. Very bad.

CONSTANCE

What do you mean?

KING JAMES

Mean. Yes that's it. Mean. I could tell you some very mean stories if I chose. I will. I will tell you. Stories to frighten a silly girl like you. True stories. Shall I tell you what I do to people like you who need to ask? Shall I?

CONSTANCE is silent. Confused.

KING JAMES

(He makes a sudden movement and takes a coin from behind CONSTANCE's ear. She shrinks from his touch—he plays with her a little. She is a rabbit caught in the headlights)

Heads or tails?

CONSTANCE

Pardon?

KING JAMES

Heads or tails? Heads or tails? It's a game.

CONSTANCE

Is it?

KING JAMES

Yes. My game.

He tosses the coin and catches it and flips it onto his arm and tries to entice CONSTANCE into seeing which way it has come down. She doesn't

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know whether to play or not. Frightened.

Don't you want to know my game? Come on ask me—what's your game then—what's your game?

CONSTANCE

(Reluctantly) What's your game?

KING JAMES

(Suddenly shouts—violent, no longer smooth) If you're going to play with me, do it properly. Ask properly!

CONSTANCE hesitates

KING JAMES

NOW!

CONSTANCE

What is your game?

KING JAMES

Heads you lose. Tails I win! That's my game!!!

He laughs and whirls away.

1.14 sound bite

CONSTANCE

Mother? Can you hear me? *(pause)* His sermons were extraordinary you know. So many people—

The WOMAN appears out of the darkness—she is in a suit—a man's modern suit. She carries a briefcase. She is in a hurry. She is the same woman academic from the tea party scene.

WOMAN

Hey you—you—over here *(she beckons CONSTANCE urgently)*.

CONSTANCE

Who are you?

White fire

WOMAN

My card—my card—(*hands her a card*) I am researching a little paper my dear—yes—yes—a note—a query—a minute but penetrating little sound bite to please my friends and irritate my enemies ... not that I have many friends you understand—not in my line of business.

CONSTANCE

(*Puzzled*) A sound bite?

WOMAN

Yes yes—well perhaps—er perhaps—not to put too fine a point on it—not so much a bite—more a sort of nibble.

CONSTANCE

(*Wondering what on earth is going on*) A nibble?

WOMAN

Yes, yes, you must have heard of nibbles? The mainstay of all academic gatherings. “Bring some nibbles!” they cry. So I do.

CONSTANCE

And what is your line of business exactly?

WOMAN

Ah yes—good question—not so much a line—and, come to think of it—not so much a business—busy-ness—yes—of course—always busy—busy busy—oh yes. Now... (*she starts to rummage in pockets and the briefcase*) I had it here somewhere—I know it’s here... It is. It must be...

CONSTANCE

Look. What on earth is going on?

WOMAN

(*Turning conspiratorial*) I know who you are.

CONSTANCE

Pardon?

WOMAN

Oh yes. I’ve had my eye on you. My gaze. Oh yes. You’ll do nicely I think. Very nicely indeed.

CONSTANCE

(*Feeling threatened now*) What do you mean?

WOMAN

Don’t come the young innocent with me. I know, you know.

Undone

CONSTANCE

What? What are you talking about?

WOMAN

Come on now—spill the beans.

CONSTANCE

Beans?

WOMAN

Out with it. Cough up. I'll pay you. (*Tosses a coin on the floor casually.*)

CONSTANCE

What. Do. You. Want?

WOMAN

Names. Dates. Places. Names. (*She starts to leave.*) I'll be back. You won't escape. (*This is said trivially as a middle class party cliché*) Exits.

CONSTANCE bends down to pick up the coin. KING JAMES appears and puts his foot lightly but firmly on her hand which is on the floor, stopping her. She looks up.

KING JAMES

Mine. I think.

He holds out his hand for the coin. She gives it to him. He tosses it and catches it and puts it in his purse without looking at the result.

Heads I win. I think. (*A significant pause.*) Ah yes. Names. Dates. Places. Names. Ah yes. You won't escape. They never escape.

He leaves. CONSTANCE is left frozen in place.

Blackout.

1.15 I'll think about it

Lights up. Time shift.

CONSTANCE returns to being CORA again.

White fire

CORA

I'll think about it.

ANTON

I can't sleep, CORA. I can't eat. I'm not concentrating on the part. The director is really pissed off with me.

CORA

I said I'll think about it.

ANTON

But I need an answer!

CORA

Look. ANTON. Stop putting pressure on me, will you?

ANTON

But—

CORA

Enough!

ANTON

But you don't un—

CORA

I do. I really do. And believe me. This isn't helping.

1.16 I've seen you before

ANTON is frozen in place from the previous scene. Enter ANNA. He does not hear what's said here or react in any way.

CORA

I've seen you before, haven't I?

ANNA

Yes, and no, and maybe.

CORA

I know, I know where! There's a photograph, in his dressing room!

Undone

ANNA

Yes. I'm his luck, his talisman, always have been.

CORA

Do you think I'll take that away? Break his talent? Unmake the magic?

ANNA

Who knows, it's a funny thing, magic.

CORA

You were happy together, weren't you?

ANNA

Do you think you can sum up a life? One word, two words, a book, a dictionary? Things look different, once you know how it's going to turn out, you know. You're in a play that has no ending, aren't you; I know how my play turned out.

CORA

And how did it turn out?

ANNA

Well, I died, obviously. And painfully, as it happens. Nothing abnormal there. There are no happy endings, you knew that, didn't you?

CORA

How do you feel about me?

ANNA

Well, my dear, I don't really have any feelings, as such, you know, feelings are something I've rather abandoned, along with the flesh, the world, the devil.

CORA

What do you mean, the devil, there's no such thing, that's a nasty fairy tale.

ANNA

Don't count on it, my dear. Don't count on anything too much, but definitely don't count on that.

Blackout.

1.17 beans

Lights up on CONSTANCE. Talking to a mother who isn't there.

CONSTANCE

Marriage? Marriage was out of the question for a while. After you died, someone had to take care of him and the little ones—

She breaks off as the woman academic rushes in again. The woman spots her and points at her and calls with a shrill, "I can see you across the quad" voice.

WOMAN

Beans!

CONSTANCE

Beans?

WOMAN

Yes—come on child—spill them.

CONSTANCE

Look, who exactly ARE you?

WOMAN

I'm merely a jobbing scholar—anxious to get on with my career. I'm simply looking for a handy niche in the Metaphysical market.

CONSTANCE

The Metaphysical market? You mean like Market Cross when everyone's gone home? You want a niche? To set up a stall?

WOMAN

In a manner of speaking—that's exactly what I want. A job. An appointment. Any tin-pot university will do—just so long as it pays me a salary.

CONSTANCE

Oh yes, now I'm beginning to understand. You need employment. You need a living. But what's that got to do with beans? Are you going to sell beans?

WOMAN

Well that depends on whether you give them to me or not.

CONSTANCE

But I don't have any beans.

WOMAN

(Exasperated) Look—don't come the young innocent with me. I want the juicy bits.

CONSTANCE

Juicy beans? Are you mad. Am I?

Woman looks at her watch, gasps, laughs, rushes off. CONSTANCE has been buffeted by a whirlwind. Attempts to regain her composure—speaking again to her absent mother or perhaps herself. It is a cry for help.

CONSTANCE

I knew him and I did not know him. I remember his laughter. Oh how I remember his laughter. Mother, are you there? Please come back!

1.18 we can state with certainty

BRUNO enters in response to her call. He picks up the globe and plays with it. In his hands it is very light.

GIORDANO BRUNO

We can state with certainty that the universe is all centre, or that the centre of the universe is everywhere and the circumference nowhere.

CONSTANCE

Can we?

GIORDANO BRUNO

Well I can—in fact I do—often—or, rather, it would be often—if I were still in time—which, being seriously dead of course, I am not.

CONSTANCE

Excuse me, who are you?

GIORDANO BRUNO

An excellent question—I often ask it myself—or it would be often if...

White fire

CONSTANCE

Yes yes, I know, you're seriously dead.

GIORDANO BRUNO

Exactly.

CONSTANCE

What do you mean? Seriously dead?

GIORDANO BRUNO

You don't want to know that my dear.

CONSTANCE

Yes I do. Please don't patronise me.

GIORDANO BRUNO

No no you misunderstand me—the nature of my death is not the sort of thing that anyone would want to know. I used to be GIORDANO BRUNO—a heretic that even your class A heretics (the true eccentrics) thought beyond—well—beyond, I suppose. And, actually, to speak more precisely, it was the nature of my death that was serious. Being dead is neither here nor there.

CONSTANCE

Neither here nor there? What do you mean?

GIORDANO BRUNO

Exactly what I say of course. I am neither here nor there.

CONSTANCE

But you appear to be here.

GIORDANO BRUNO

Ah no—like the centre of the universe I am everywhere.

CONSTANCE

Everywhere?

GIORDANO BRUNO

And nowhere.

CONSTANCE

Am I mad or are you?

GIORDANO BRUNO

Is there a difference?

Undone

CONSTANCE

What do you mean?

GIORDANO BRUNO

If I am everywhere, is there a you or a me for us to choose between?

CONSTANCE

But we're having this conversation—you—me—the two of us.

GIORDANO BRUNO

Are we?

CONSTANCE

I don't understand.

GIORDANO BRUNO

Oh, if it's understanding you want, you should see my friend KEPLER.

He hands her the globe and leaves. She is left standing in a contemplative fashion, turning the globe around in her hands—not reverential, but thoughtful and with hope arising. She has been cheered up by this meeting, though she doesn't know quite why

Some of the PLAYERS return—childlike and quite irritating. They snatch the globe from her and start playing throw and catch—throwing it over her head. She tries to get it back from them—they have disturbed her moment of reverie. She is angry. After some difficulty, she manages to reclaim the globe, and with it, some power.

1.19 look, it's my dream

CONSTANCE

(To PLAYERS) Look, it's my dream. You'll do what I tell you. Get on with the story. Now! (She stamps her foot). Give us the scene where my father meets JOHANNES KEPLER.

PLAYER

Hmmmm. No point getting arsy with us sweetheart. You want us to do the show? You'd better sort him out.

White fire

CONSTANCE

Sort who out?

PLAYER

HIM! The Boss. The guvnor. The guy who owns this bunch of travelling artistes.

CONSTANCE

What's he got to do with it? It's MY dream. MY show.

PLAYER

Well, dearie, that's not what HE thinks. Let me know when you've got it sorted. (*Flounces off.*)

King JAMES is sitting downstage. He is tossing coins and muttering to himself. CONSTANCE approaches him.

CONSTANCE

Ahem. Excuse me.

JAMES looks around pointedly in other directions—as if she is invisible.

CONSTANCE

Excuse me—are you the manager of this troupe of PLAYERS ?

KING JAMES

I'm the owner manager. I. AM.

CONSTANCE

Good. Well, let me tell you, this is MY dream, and as such, even owner managers are under my instructions. And I'm instructing you to tell your PLAYERS...

KING JAMES

Artistes, actually.

CONSTANCE

To tell your artistes that the show must go on.

KING JAMES

If, by "show", you are referring to this (*he picks up a sheaf of papers and waves them around in front of her*)... THIS... well, you can think again. Out of the question.

CONSTANCE

What do you mean?

Undone

KING JAMES

Out of the question. Out of order. Out of bounds. Out.

CONSTANCE

But why? It's a special scene—my father meeting the famous JOHANNES KEPLER—talking about telescopes and galaxies and...

KING JAMES

My point exactly. Out of the question.

CONSTANCE

(Sarcastic or innocent?) Which question is that exactly?

KING JAMES

Any question. Any question whatsoever. We do not ask questions in my show. And you can forget about KEPLER. His mother was a witch, you know. The fools couldn't prove it. You know what we do with women—I mean witches—don't you? DON'T YOU?

At this point, he turns back into the menacing figure he has been previously. He calls in the PLAYERS, who taunt and tease and try to catch and hold her. It is her nightmare at its most intense. Then something weird and magical happens—a repeat of the sound that was part noise and part music, before the appearance of the nova on screen. Then blackout and a repeat of the exploding star on the screen. Then blackout and a small significant silence, before lights up on . . .

1.20 WOOF

KEPLER is a small yappy dog, quite endearing. Also a mystic, and a universal mathematical genius. He is slightly autistic; if something doesn't fit, he looks startled, for a moment, then ignores it.

KEPLER

Woof.

CONSTANCE

I beg your pardon?

White fire

KEPLER

Woof. I said: woof.

CONSTANCE

Who are you?

KEPLER

I am the emperor's astronomer. I am also the emperor's poodle! Ha! Woof!

KEPLER! Good dog!

CONSTANCE

You are quite strange.

KEPLER

I have a fascinating personality! And fascinating illnesses, which I can talk about in very great detail, for instance, my bowels—

CONSTANCE

Please, stop!

KEPLER

Stop? Woof?

CONSTANCE

Please tell me about my father. Please: I am desperate to learn about my father.

KEPLER

Ah. The Doctor of Divinity. He came to see me, you know. All the way to the little town of Lintz in Austria, just to see me! Woof!

CONSTANCE

Why did he do that?

KEPLER

Ah! A secret!

CONSTANCE

Tell me; please tell me.

KEPLER

He was very long, you know.

CONSTANCE

Long?

KEPLER

Long and thin. Long face, long fingers, big eyes, looked a long way inside

Undone

you. Woof. Made me nervous. So I talked a lot. A lot! Woof woof!

CONSTANCE

What did you talk about?

KEPLER

They got the universe backwards, you know. Grrr. Backwards. Upside down. I put it right.

CONSTANCE

Backwards?

KEPLER

Grrr. They put Hell in the middle, under the earth. Quite wrong. God on the outside. Stupid. I put it right.

CONSTANCE

You put it right?

KEPLER

The sun is at the centre. The sun is God. The sun rules the planets, and makes them move. Everything moves round the sun, is moved by the sun. God is in the middle, governing everything, where He should be, and Hell, ah, ooooooooooh (*howls*): Hell is on the outside. Cold, so cold, out there, and so unbelievably vast. There is such a lot of hell. (*Whine.*)

CONSTANCE

You told him all that?

KEPLER

Yes. And he smiled. Smiled! Woof woof! He was strange. So I told him about my book.

CONSTANCE

De Harmonice Mundi?

KEPLER

Yap! Yap! (*startled*). Yes! You know Latin?

CONSTANCE

Of course.

KEPLER

(*Hastily, nervously:*) My book. Yes. It began with my star, my new star. The 1604 nova in Serpentarius. KEPLER'S nova.

White fire

CONSTANCE

My star too.

KEPLER

Woof? (*Uncertain, hastens on*). Change, where nothing changes. Chaos. The little stitch, coming loose, you pull, and the universe unravels. That little star. My star.

CONSTANCE

And mine.

KEPLER

So I put it back together, all of it, the right way round. If the universe is full of change, then what are the laws of change? Ah! The laws of change! Yes! All my life I looked for that. A way to read the mind of God. I found it. I told him. It's all there in my book: the meaning of everything. The fundamental language of God. Two days I talked to him. Two days! Woof!

CONSTANCE

What is the language of God?

KEPLER

Harmony. Proportion. Number. Mathematics. That is the language of God; that is the basis of the universe, of music, of art, of poetry: harmony, divine harmony.

CONSTANCE

Of poetry?

KEPLER

Yes, yes! Woof! Elegant harmonious numbers are the language of poetry!

CONSTANCE

Oh dear.

KEPLER

That's what he said! Oh dear! And he gave me a long look. So I shut up, and drank wine. Then I said would he please explain his long looks and his oh dear and his irony, his irony. Yap. Yap!

So he did.

During this speech KEPLER becomes DONNE, for the words that are said by DONNE. Elegant, elongated, ironic; a dandy who has become a priest. The accent changes from German to aristocratic English, se-

rious, ironic.

KEPLER

My dear friend, he said.

My dear friend! Woof!

What you have made, he said, is beautiful, perhaps the most beautiful thing I have ever seen a man create. You have created a majestic clock—

Yes, yes, woof, I said, a clockwork clock, excellent!—

of dazzling elegance, of luminous complexity; sir, you are a genius. A world genius.

Woof!

But, sir, with the greatest possible respect, this is not God.

Querulous whine querying this.

No, sir, it is not God. It is true that God is not to be found in the old, beautiful universe, with its angels and epicycles, its crystal spheres; that is gone, forever, killed by a new star. Your star, sir, the nova in Serpentarius. KEPLER'S NOVA.

Yes! Woof!

But, sir, God is not to be found in your clockwork, either. The clock is not the clock maker. God is not to be found in harmony, in constancy, because, my dear sir, that is the creation, not the creator.

Where then can we find him? Why, sir, we find him in the very inconstancy that we fear and seek to explain away! God is change itself, protean, various, not to be confined; His is the majesty of the inexplicable, the fire of the new star.

Just so are we: created in his image, inconstant, startling, our minds like wildfire, magnificent, all that dance of change.

And, sir, my dear sir, if we look deeply into that nova, that novelty, that wonderful dance of change, seaspray and candlelight, life's variety, what do we find? Beyond the play of numbers, we find God's love. Our love. Love. *Ecce omnia nova facio.* Behold, God says, I make all things new.

CONSTANCE

Father, oh father. (*Weeps*).

KEPLER

Woof?

2. no darkness

Undone

2.1 it's all about interpretation

CORA/CONSTANCE is now CLARA. We are in a psychanalyst's room.

CLARA

But what does all this stuff about the seventeenth century symbolise, that's what I want to know. Death and KING JAMES and all that, and these weird academics that keep popping up all over the place. I mean it's obvious why they're there, I'm a seventeenth century specialist, after all. So, to address the problem, what do these characters mean? That's what I need to think about, isn't it?

ANALYST

Is it, CLARA?

CLARA

Well of course it is, Doctor, I don't know what they taught you in shrink school, but it's all about interpretation, for Christ's sake.

ANALYST

Oh, him.

CLARA

Look, stop that, that's just a silly trick, picking on my harmless blasphemies, and, and—

ANALYST

Interpreting them?

CLARA

Yes. No! Look, the dreams, I need my dreams analysed, I want to know why I have these dreams, this nightly theatre, inside my head, these beautiful obsessions, I want to know. That's why I'm here.

Undone

ANALYST

Is it, CLARA?

CLARA

Yes, yes, of course, yes. That's what I need to get better. To be free. To write again. Oh, God, to write again, to find the singing voice. To express myself, to open the heart, to be me, to be me, Doctor, I am only me when I write. Only then am I alive.

ANALYST

What are you now?

CLARA

What?

ANALYST

What are you now? You're not writing now. What are you?

CLARA

I'm a female academic with a serious deadline for a book, which I'm ignoring, because I am also someone who writes poems, and can't. So I spend my days not working on my book and, instead, not writing my poems. I have too much time, Doctor, too much time on my soft decaying hands.

ANALYST

On your what?

CLARA

On my hands, doctor, I have time on my hands, it's a common expression.

ANALYST

It is not.

Blackout.

No darkness

2.2 well?

CLARA becomes CORA. ANALYST becomes ANTON.

ANTON

Well?

CORA

Yes. I am, thank you.

ANTON

You know that's not what I mean.

CORA

Oh, ANTON. Please. Don't let's have this conversation again. Please?

ANTON

CORA, I need to know. I am a walking ghost. I am burning up.

CORA

You're over dramatising.

ANTON

I'm an actor.

CORA

That could be the problem.

ANTON

You're being childish.

CORA

And you're not endearing yourself to me.

ANTON

What can I do?

CORA

You could try reading some poetry. Some of his poetry?

pause

CORA

He is my inspiration, ANTON. He has been so for as long as I can remember. He holds the world in place. He balances the planets. He lets me hear the dreams of people I will never ever meet. He takes me to the dark places. He fills my head with unheard-of melodies, with wild and courtly

Undone

rhythms, with dancing bears—

ANTON

Now who's over-dramatising?

Exits

2.3 psst

Enter the OTHER

OTHER

Psst. Pssst.

CORA

What? What now?

OTHER

I've got an idea.

CORA

Have you?

OTHER

Yes. Do you want to hear it?

CORA

Do I have a choice?

OTHER

There's always a choice.

CORA

No there isn't.

OTHER

Yes there is. Not always the obvious one. Not always the one you'd like.

CORA

Alright. Go ahead. Tell me your idea.

OTHER

Later.

No darkness

CORA

What?

OTHER

I'll catch you later?

CORA

When?

OTHER

You'll see. Bye for now.

Exits

CORA

Wait!!

Blackout.

2.4 stand still

Lights up. Time shift to early seventeenth century.

CORA becomes CONSTANCE again.

ALLEYNE

Stand still, you ever-moving spheres of heaven,
That time may cease, and midnight never come;
Fair Nature's eye, rise, rise again, and make
Perpetual day; or let this hour be but
A year, a month, a week, a natural day,
That Faustus may repent and save his soul!

CONSTANCE

Applauds. But you never did repent, did you, Edward, my dearest.

ALLEYNE

Ah, darling, are you here? My mouse, my pug, my pretty child, my heart.

Kisses her hands.

Undone

CONSTANCE

Answer the question, old rogue: did you repent?

ALLEYNE

God knows I tried. Spent money like water, trying to be respectable. Left the theatre, left it far behind—

CONSTANCE

But it never left you, did it, my poor player, my sweetheart?

ALLEYNE

No, of course not. And he knew it. He didn't like me, at the end, did he? With all that money, I wasn't good enough for you.

CONSTANCE

He loved you, you know that.

ALLEYNE

He hated me.

CONSTANCE

He was a complicated man.

ALLEYNE

God rest his strange soul.

CONSTANCE

He wanted security for me; he wanted me to be safe and comfortable.

ALLEYNE

So, I paid for that. The income of four, er, places of entertainment, I settled on you; for life.

CONSTANCE

Yes, it was wonderful, I'd never had my own brothel before.

ALLEYNE

The Mermaid was not a brothel!

CONSTANCE

Yes it was.

ALLEYNE

Well, not all the time. Anyway, it paid; and paid well. You were secure, and still are; and now you have your little vicar.

CONSTANCE

My nice little vicar.

No darkness

ALLEYNE

Is he?

CONSTANCE

Oh yes, he is—nice. And I am safe. I've had enough tall men with big bad wonderful voices, no more giants for me. I am safe and sound and happy, and I miss you only sometimes. But listen: listen. I want to know. You can tell me now. He is dead, and so are you, and I am safe with my little vicar, but I want to know: what was he like, when you knew him, those years ago, before I was born? What was he like?

ALLEYNE

I can tell you, of course I can: do you really want me to?

CONSTANCE

Yes. Yes I do. Tell me.

ALLEYNE

I'm a Player. I can show you.

He becomes the young DONNE.

CONSTANCE

Oh! Father!

ALLEYNE/DONNE

No, darling, I am not your father, not yet. I have not met your mother, I have not found my soul.

Blackout

2.5 Have you seen Clara?

Lights up. Time shift.

PROFESSOR

Ah. Have you seen CLARA? I want to speak to her.

WOMAN

CLARA?

Undone

PROFESSOR

CLARA. Dr Wilkinson? Our newest, somewhat wayward, colleague?

WOMAN

Oh, CLARA.

PROFESSOR

Well. Have you seen her?

WOMAN

Have you tried the library? She's often in the library.

PROFESSOR

It's Tuesday. My research day is Friday. I don't leave the Department on a Tuesday.

WOMAN

Oh.

PROFESSOR

If you happen to see her, if she happens to appear, tell her to come to my office.

Blackout.

2.6 are you going to marry him?

Lights up on CORA and the OTHER.

OTHER

So are you going to marry ANTON?

CORA

Why does anyone marry anyone?

OTHER

Are you avoiding the question?

CORA

That depends who's asking it.

No darkness

OTHER

Who do you think I am, CORA?

CORA

I think you're someone who asks too many questions.

OTHER

Coming from you? Don't you think that's a bit rich?

CORA

Well, I am a bit rich. Just a bit.

pause

OTHER

So are you going to marry him?

CORA

Don't think I haven't asked myself that.

OTHER

So tell me?

CORA

Why do you want to know?

OTHER

Because you want to tell me.

CORA

Do I?

OTHER

You do.

CORA

Go away now please.

OTHER

I can't go away.

CORA

What do you mean?

OTHER

I can't go away. I am always here.

CORA

Who are you?

OTHER

Work it out. Dear CORA, work it out.

Blackout.

2.7 the voice

Lights up. Time shift.

ALLEYNE

So why did you marry me, if he disapproved? You adored him, you always did what he wanted, whatever that was, that complicated man.

CONSTANCE

Oh, for the money, obviously. I wanted to be safe. I was a poor man's daughter, you know. And: I wanted the danger, too.

ALLEYNE

Danger, what danger?

CONSTANCE

From you, old man, old actor: you were dangerous, you were my dangerous game. You, and your brothel, and your money, and your wife whom you loved, and your big dangerous voice.

ALLEYNE

I never ever raised my voice to you; never.

CONSTANCE

No, not that, of course not that. It was when I was a child, and you were a friend of his, you and those other strange fluent men, and I would hear you, downstairs. (*The PLAYERS act this out*). Drinking and talking, laughter, a hubbub, dangerous. Then ANNE would come up to bed, and then it would get louder, and more laughter, and then there would be a silence, and you would recite a speech, from one of your roles. Your voice would come up the stairs, like a bell, like a trumpet, like a violin. And we were—all the children were—just, simply, astonished, bundled together in that dark bedroom, at the music, the poetry, the valour, the velvet, the strangeness

No darkness

of your voice. How else would we get to the theatre? It was like heaven.
Only dangerous. And I married it. And was happy.
Blackout.

2.8 analyst

Lights up. Time shift.

CLARA

So, obviously, I want to go to bed with my father.

ANALYST

You do? Really?

CLARA

Well, not consciously, obviously, but that's what the whole thing's about,
isn't it?

ANALYST

It is?

CLARA

Well, obviously. Alleyne's my father, that old actor, and DONNE's my
father, the Poet—

ANALYST

And preacher—

CLARA

And, preacher, yes, and ANTON's my father, another old actor, and there
you have it, I have for my sins—

ANALYST

Your sins?

CLARA

Yes, it's a common phrase or saying, doctor, where was I, yes, I have for
my sins a father who just happens to be a poet, an actor, a dramatist,
universally revered for the purity of his voice—

Undone

ANALYST

A preacher, you might say—

CLARA

You might, you might, not to mention a bloody Pulitzer prize-winner—

ANALYST

Bloody...

CLARA

Yes, bloody, want to make something of it, doctor?

ANALYST

Not yet.

CLARA

Whenever you're ready, I'm up for it, where was I, yes, and so, as well as haunting my imaginative life, crawling all over my creativity like a damn great saintly bat, he's now starring in my dreams, messing up my memories, insinuating himself into my sex life, even, there's no freedom, no freedom, doctor, none. Wherever I go in my life, there he is, spinning his webs, the spider love, with his sticky silk, his ties that bind, his kindness.

ANALYST

Transubstantiating all.

CLARA

I beg your pardon?

ANALYST

The *DONNE* image, you just used it: the spider love, that transubstantiates all.

CLARA

Yes, I did. I like *DONNE*. I've read a lot of *DONNE*. I'm a grownup. I can handle it. So, you want to make something of that?

ANALYST

Not yet.

CLARA

Any time, doctor, any time. Anyway. Now that I know I want to go to bed with my father, does that mean I'm cured? Because I bloody well, I damn well don't feel cured.

No darkness

ANALYST

You feel damned, perhaps?

CLARA

Look it's a common figure of speech, a simple expletive, a commonplace bleeding—oh damn—oh for god's sake—

ANALYST

Yes.

CLARA

Pardon?

ANALYST

Yes. For God's sake.

Blackout

2.9 John Donne undone

Lights up on seventeenth century.

ANNE

He could have been anything, you know, soldier, poet, politician, statesman. He was all those things, and none of them. Call us what you will, he said, we are made so by love.

CONSTANCE

He lost all of that possibility. He gave all that up.

ANNE

For me.

CONSTANCE

For you.

ANNE

For love.

CONSTANCE

It was a gamble, wasn't it. He bet everything that your uncle would for-

Undone

give him, and then his fortune would have been made.

ANNE

He never gambled. He was utterly whole hearted, can't you see? Whole hearted, and many minded. He never did just one thing. He was never just one person. He was everything, all sorts of men, and he chose to become everything for me. He gave it all up, he gained everything. Our little house in the middle of nowhere was — everywhere. He undid himself: John Donne, Anne Donne, undone. Because of that undoing, because he was undone, he was no longer John Donne; he could be anything. Eventually, because of that, he became everything. A part of mankind. Every man's death diminishes me, he said. And then, at last, God's music; he became, at last, God's music.

Blackout.

2.10 she's amazing

Lights up. Time shift.

PROFESSOR

Are you waiting for Dr Wilkinson?

STUDENT

CLARA? Yes.

PROFESSOR

Have you been waiting long?

STUDENT

A while.

PROFESSOR

Does she know you're waiting?

STUDENT

I don't know

PROFESSOR

What do you mean you don't know? Do you have an appointment?

STUDENT

Well yes. She's my dissertation supervisor.

PROFESSOR

Ah. Does she usually keep you waiting?

STUDENT

Sometimes. I don't mind. She's amazing.

PROFESSOR

What do you mean?

STUDENT

She's amazing. She makes you think. When you're having a supervision with her, you *become more intelligent*. It's very strange.

PROFESSOR

When she turns up, if she decides to come this way, tell her I have things to say to her. Tell her there isn't much time left.

Blackout.

2.11 his sermons were extraordinary

Lights up. Time shift.

CONSTANCE

His sermons were extraordinary, you know. So many people. So many skilful words. So much intensity. They loved him. But then again, felt held in love, by this clever, Godly man who they thought knew everything about them.

VOICE OF DONNE

True instruction is making love to the congregation, and to every soul in it.

CONSTANCE

(Paying attention to the voice) Yes, yes. *(She laughs)* And you did. *(Attention back to addressee)* They thought he made them up then and there—in the pulpit. The truth is, that they were so carefully brought to life, so

Undone

tenderly caressed, re-visited, re-membered that they seemed spontaneous. But we knew. He would embrace those delicate words and persuade them to power till he knew the truth would reveal itself. And only then was he content. Oh yes. He knew how to make love.

VOICE OF DONNE

The best evidence that man is at peace, and in favour with God, is that he can rejoice... The Essence of God is to do good; and when he does that, he is said to rejoice... to have something to do, to do it, and then to rejoice in having done it, to embrace a calling, to perform the duties of that calling, to joy and rest in the peaceful testimony of having done so; this is Christianly done, Christ did it. Angelically done. Angels do it. Godly done. God does it.

2.12 there were the letters

ANNE

There were the letters of course.

CONSTANCE

The letters? What letters?

ANNE

Our letters. Our very own letters. Our marriage of true minds letters.

CONSTANCE

Where are they?

ANNE

Gone. Burned.

CONSTANCE

An accident? A fire?

ANNE

A fire yes. An accident no. After you were born, after the supernova, when we were absolutely sure, we decided to burn our beautiful letters.

No darkness

CONSTANCE

Why?

ANNE

Because they were us. They were who we had become. We had written ourselves into certainty, into fidelity, and into the happiness of our conjoined life.

We allowed the truth to speak itself entirely and understood the absolute kindness of honesty.

We were content.

2.13 marriage

CONSTANCE

Marriage? Marriage was out of the question for a while. I was fourteen years old when mother died. Someone had to take care of him and the little ones. At first I did it because it was my duty. I was content. But as the years passed it became my joy. My ecstasy. My life well lived.

My skies were filled with changing light. His changing light, unpredictable as weather. And all of it, all of it, big, extravagant. More.

It was hard for us, him and me, when I did marry. He turned a little moody. Tried to pretend he was happy for me. Relieved my future was secure. I tried to pretend I was happy too. But we both knew. This was a necessary, sensible thing to do. But the sky was the darker for a while.

Blackout.

2.14 in the country

Lights up. Time shift.

PROFESSOR

Have you told CLARA I want to see her?

SECRETARY

I've left messages. I've done my best. She's not here.

PROFESSOR

Well, where is she?

SECRETARY

Her father said she was doing a reading somewhere.

PROFESSOR

A what?

SECRETARY

A reading. The new book of poems. A literary festival. In the country somewhere.

PROFESSOR

In the country? On a Tuesday? In the middle of term?

SECRETARY

She's rearranged her classes.

PROFESSOR

Well when is she coming back?

SECRETARY

He didn't know. She's got a first year tutorial group on Thursday. And the last of the John Donne seminars. She hasn't rearranged those.

PROFESSOR

Call her on her mobile and tell her she's to come to my office as soon as she's back.

SECRETARY

She doesn't have a mobile.

Blackout.

2.15 it was the moment

Lights up. Time shift.

ANNE

It was the moment that he first touched my cheek that I knew.

CONSTANCE

What did you know?

ANNE

I knew it all. Past, future. All of it.

CONSTANCE

What do you mean?

ANNE

We were standing by the Thames, watching a small cargo boat. He was on my left hand side, close enough for comfort. My cousin Lucy was standing on the far side of him, laughing and chattering like a starling at twilight. Then for a tiny moment, everything was suddenly still and silent. We were out of time. Eclipsed. Just a moment and then we were back again. Then I felt it. At first I thought it was a welcome breeze hovering against my face, soft as a butterfly alighting on an upturned dandelion. But suddenly I knew it was his hand, gentle as maybe. One small, kind, gesture that turned my face towards him and my world upside down.

CONSTANCE

Did he speak? Did you?

ANNE

No. No words then. No need for words.

CONSTANCE

And you knew it all?

ANNE

Yes. In one sharp instant, one intake of breath. I saw the life at home as it had been, the life with him as it would be. I knew that I was giving away my security, my father's blessing, my comfortable life. I saw the poverty, the imprisonment, the dying babies, the making love. All of it. And . . .

CONSTANCE

And?

ANNE

And I was filled to overflowing with unimagined joy. A voice inside me singing. This. This now. This is all.

2.16 he killed you

CONSTANCE

He killed you. He killed you with his making love. Twelve children, three born dead, the last one died with you. That was his making love.

ANNE

Oh, dear heart, dear love, my CONSTANCE, you just don't know. He was my ardent faithful lover, for all our life together. The bed was our empire, our secret, our discovery, our greatest joy. We made love and made babies and loved each other and loved them all, you first of all, my beautiful CONSTANCE.

CONSTANCE

It killed you. It took you away.

ANNE

People die. Didn't you know that? He knew that, better than anyone. He knew about love, better than anyone. The great love poet was my lover, he wrote about me, he wrote me, I was his poem, again and again. We made love and made babies in the constant presence of death, the ring master, the orchestrator of our joy. To make love in death's shadow, can you imagine that?

CONSTANCE

He was terrified of death. All those morbid sonnets. He was obsessed.

ANNE

No. No! Listen to me, child. He was the bravest man I ever met. He met death face to face, talked him down, laughed at him. Could you do that? He went out there to the lonely place where death resides, faced him,

No darkness

armed with his lovely mind, and sent him packing.

CONSTANCE

If he was so brave, why did he leave the Catholic church? He was afraid of the fire.

ANNE

No, he wasn't afraid of the fire, not at all. He longed for it, actually, well, part of him did. It was the direct road to God, you see, through the fire. Well, he grew out of that, and wrote a book about it; but he found a different fire, a different route to God. He made fire out of words: he spoke, and men's hearts burned for God.

He knew more divinity than anyone I know. He studied, he read, he devoured knowledge, he was voracious, in that as in everything. He always wanted more. And, at the end of all that study, what did he find? Divinity, he said, is love and wonder. Nothing else. Love, and wonder.

Blackout.

2.17 no more extensions

Lights up. Time shift.

CONSTANCE becomes CLARA.

PROFESSOR

CLARA, you have three weeks. That's all.

CLARA

Yes, I know.

PROFESSOR

I was on the phone to Oliver at RKP, just before this meeting. (CLARA isn't paying attention. She is far away.) RKP is your publisher, my dear.

CLARA

Yes, I know.

PROFESSOR

And he said, three weeks. No more extensions. If he doesn't have the manu-

Undone

script of your *DONNE* book, complete, in three weeks, he can't guarantee to get it back from the readers in time to confirm a publication date that will count for the next Research Assessment Exercise.

CLARA

Yes.

PROFESSOR

And the next RAE is crucial, you do know that, don't you, my dear?

CLARA

Yes, I do.

PROFESSOR

Because if we don't get grade 5, then, CLARA, as surely as winter follows autumn, we will be dead. Dead in the water. In fact, we will be worse than dead: we will be fucked.

CLARA

DONNE had a daughter, you know. Did you know?

PROFESSOR

He had too many daughters, I believe.

CLARA

Perhaps. But one we know a little about: *CONSTANCE*, the eldest.

PROFESSOR

Is this relevant?

CLARA

I think so, yes. She married Alleyne, you know? Edward *ALLEYNE*, the great actor? She was 20; he was three times her age. He died within four years.

PROFESSOR

Are you going to finish your book in three weeks? Or not?

CLARA

Have you read my latest book of poems?

PROFESSOR

No, not yet. Poems don't count, you know.

CLARA

So I've heard.

No darkness

PROFESSOR

The English Department does not need poems. It needs scholarship. It needs your *DONNE* book. And if it doesn't get it, then I am afraid you are finished at this University.

CLARA

Finished?

PROFESSOR

Finished.

Blackout.

2.18 I looked after him

Lights up. Time shift.

CONSTANCE

I looked after him you know—through that long last illness. There were servants in my husband's big house of course. Doctors coming and going. Visitors every day. People wanting things. Wanting him. Till they could see that there was no point. That their man was as good as gone. No use to them.

But us, him and me, we still had plenty of time. I sat close by his bed all day every day and most nights I lay beside him, watching him, listening for the stopping of breath, dreading that moment. I must have slept, but like a cat, or a mother, listening. Waiting for any possible change. Fearful. Fearful of the grief. Fearful it would be too much to bear.

He was a long time leaving me. We didn't talk much. Didn't need to. We had had years of talking.

In the mornings, when he was most alert and most in pain, I would read to him, distracting him a little from the body's suffering. I don't know how much he heard. But it pleased me to do so. A small gift of love.

Ah love. How can I begin to describe the love we knew? That brilliant mind so patient with a little girl, so generous in his praise, and a teacher,

a teacher always. And in the years after mother's death, through all his anguish and joy and hopes and doubting, through all his searching, endlessly searching, searching for the truth, I tried to return to him what he had given to me; a quiet and embracing understanding that asked very little and gave without question.

2.19 death be not proud

DEATH

Oh yes, I knew him. Doctor DONNE. My friend the Doctor. And he knew me. We were lovers, really, in a way. He spent half his life chasing me, calling me names, studying me, loving me, fearing me, I was very important to him. And the other half, chasing the little death, my little brother, with all those women; and then with one woman, what was her name?

CONSTANCE

My mother.

DEATH

Yes, mother, a lot of them are called that, I find. Anyway he chased the little death with her, too, and they gave me five children to eat, which I did, very nice, and then I ate her, and then I ate the Doctor too.

CONSTANCE

You are a monster.

DEATH

You think so? Funny what people think. Gluttonous, he called me. That's true, I suppose, I eat everyone.

CONSTANCE

He didn't love you. He feared you terribly.

DEATH

You don't know much about love, do you? He did, my friend the Doctor, he was an expert on love. And on me. Two sides of the same coin, you

No darkness

see, Freud was right. My hand is on everything and anyone you love, you know, do you know that? You don't really love unless you see me standing behind your lover, waiting patiently. When you embrace your lover, and your lover embraces you, I hold both of you in my arms. He knew that, my friend the Doctor.

CONSTANCE

What do you think of his poems?

DEATH

Wonderful. He was a wonderful poet. What was that one, about me, death be not something, I love that one, one of my favourites, that is.

CONSTANCE

Death be not proud. Listen.

VOICE OF DONNE

Death be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so.
For those whom thou thinkst thou dost overthrow
Die not, poor death, nor yet canst thou kill me.

DEATH

Yes, that's it, that's the way it goes. Hilarious, isn't it? Such a humorous
POET.

CONSTANCE

Listen to the next bit

VOICE OF DONNE

From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be
Much pleasure, then from thee much more must flow

DEATH

Such a joker, my friend the Doctor. 'Pleasure'! I love it!

CONSTANCE

Are you saying the poem is a lie?

DEATH

Well of course, all poems are lies, though I wasn't saying that; I'm saying this poem is a joke, to make you wake up, so that you can love.

CONSTANCE

What do you mean, wake up?

Undone

DEATH

I was quoting the Doctor. He said, in one of his hilarious sermons, he said: no-one sleeps, on the way to the gallows. And, do you know, that's true. I've often noticed that.

CONSTANCE

What is love?

DEATH

Ah, my bright twin. You don't know yet, do you? You will.

CONSTANCE

Tell me, tell me.

DEATH

Equality.

CONSTANCE

What are you talking about?

DEATH

Listen:

VOICE OF DONNE

And into that gate they shall enter, and in that house they shall dwell, where there will be no cloud nor sun, no darkness nor dazzling, but one equal light, no noise nor silence, but one equal music, no fears nor hopes, but one equal possession, no foes nor friends, but one equal communion and identity, no ends nor beginnings, but one equal eternity.

CONSTANCE

He was talking about Heaven.

DEATH

Yes. He was talking about love.

2.20 beyond the sun and moon

CONSTANCE is left alone on stage.

On screen there is the face of DONNE—a close up of the face of the effigy

No darkness

taken specially for the play and photoshopped to be awesomely beautiful and mysterious; highlighting the smile.

CONSTANCE

Looking up at the screen—it is the first time any actor has acknowledged its presence. She gestures towards the night sky.

Out there, beyond the sun and moon, beyond the niceties of place and time, there is a shifting star, where I (who am not I) will meet a you not you.

In that everywhere and nowhere, this world too full of language will seem a distantly remembered dream. In the dazzling uncertainty, we will wait for duality to arise once more. We will wait in Love.

As the DONNE voice speaks the sonnet, the picture on the screen presents DONNE's face morphing from (1) the engraving of him in his shroud—the frontispiece to Death's Duel to (2) the painting of him in 1620 to (3) the painting of him in 1616—reversed left to right to (4) the engraving of him in 1591. There is a sense of falling backwards through time.

CONSTANCE moves dreamily around the discarded props on stage—picks them up tenderly, buries her face in them, smelling faded odours, holding soft fabrics to her face, caressing the past.

THE VOICE OF DONNE

This is my play's last scene, here heavens appoint
My pilgrimage's last mile; and my race
Idly yet quickly run, hath this last pace,
My span's last inch, my minute's latest point,
And gluttonous death will instantly unjoynt
My body, and soul, and I shall sleep a space,

As the sonnet unfolds, CONSTANCE begins to pack things away in the hamper, and sometimes holds them up and re-enacts a little cameo scene from earlier in the play, puppetry without the puppets. She smiles as she does so; playful.

But my ever-waking part shall see that face
Whose fear already shakes my every joint;
Then, as my soul to heaven, her first seat, takes flight,
And earth-born body in the earth shall dwell,
So, fall my sins, that all may have their right,
To where they're bred, and would press me to hell.

Undone

Impute me righteous, thus purged of evil,
For thus I leave the world...

It should be clear from the intonation that the line is unfinished. Language and life have run out of time. CONSTANCE is holding the globe that is a balloon. On the word "world" she bursts it with a sudden sharp gesture and a pin. Simultaneous blackout.

2.21 what do you want from me?

Lights up. Time shift.

CORA

What do you want from me?

OTHER

I want an answer, CORA.

CORA

What gives you the right?

OTHER

The right?

CORA

To expect an answer.

pause

CORA

Well?

OTHER

You don't get it do you?

CORA

No. No I don't.

OTHER

Look. It's very simple. You need to talk. I'm making it easy for you.

No darkness

CORA

Is that it?

OTHER

That's it.

CORA

But who are you?

OTHER

I am not.

CORA

What?

OTHER

I am not.

CORA

Yes I heard you. What do you mean?

OTHER

Ah, dear CORA. I don't mean. I am.

CORA

But you just said "I am not"

OTHER

Yes.

CORA

But that doesn't make sense.

OTHER

Ah. Good.

CORA

Good?

Undone

OTHER

Yes. Go ahead dear CORA. Go ahead and speak to someone who doesn't make sense.

Exits.

2.22 it is time

Enter ANTON

CORA

Goodbye, ANTON; it is time.

ANTON

Time for what? I can't bear it. Time for what?

CORA

Time for you to look forward; when you look at me, you are looking back.

ANTON

What? You are the only future I can imagine, or want, or entertain.

CORA

You are my past, my love, and I am yours; we must go forward, separately, alone.

ANTON

You are killing me.

CORA

Yes, I am. I have to; and you have to do the same to me.

She turns away; becomes CONSTANCE. ANTON becomes ALLEYNE.

CONSTANCE

But you knew, didn't you, old actor, my reprobate, didn't you?

ALLEYNE

Did I, my dearest?

No darkness

CONSTANCE

Yes, of course; all those death scenes, Tamburlaine, Macbeth, Lear, you'd played them all.

ALLEYNE

I had, I had.

CONSTANCE

So you could encounter darkness as a bride, and hug it in your arms.

He bows, like a great actor taking a solo curtain call.

And you too, father, stranger, poet, lover (ALLEYNE becomes DONNE) you faced the pain and journeyed through; questing, curious, insatiable to the end, to beyond the end.

CONSTANCE becomes CLARA.

CLARA

Stranger, angel, homeward, now. Poet, teacher, father, friend. All my lovers, now: goodbye.

Look kindly upon my emptiness, my vagaries, my wild desires, my wandering thoughts. I see my deaths in you, you are where I will be, you have been where I will go, the pain, the fear, the hope, the transformation.

Look back at me, Eurydice, across that gap of time, look back and lose me, let me go, give me freedom from your music, loose me from your voice. So that you can go on into whatever destiny, singing as you go; and I will be your muse no longer, I will instead be: me.

Father, lover, husband, poet; actor, preacher, doctor, friend; all of you, all, leave me now.

And that small safe universe, exploded by a star, blown into impermanence, gone, gone. Here I am in the shattered present, fragments of sermons, broken china, lying around me. Gone, gone.

And a new morning. Daylight: ordinary, quotidian, beautiful. How precious, now, more fragile than a dream, more piercing, revelatory, full of uncertain promise.

Goodbye, shadows. Welcome, sweet day, sweet tomorrow.

It is good to be awake. It is good to wake up.

Blackout.

Undone

2.23 what brings you here?

Lights up. Time shift.

CORA

What brings you here?

DEATH

I am always here, you surely knew that.

CORA

You belong in the other play, the other dream.

DEATH

I belong everywhere, I am in all the dreams. Learn to live with me, why don't you, you'll feel better.

CORA

You frighten me.

DEATH

Obviously. As if you had something to lose. How strange you are.

CORA

You will eat me up.

DEATH

Naturally.

CORA

All of me.

DEATH

Inevitably.

CORA

There will be nothing left.

DEATH

Frankly, there's not a lot to begin with, is there?

CORA

What do you mean?

DEATH

I do get around, you know; I do have a large number of acquaintances—