**1.Outside**

*As the audience approach, the Advocate is waving a wine bottle around, drunk, shouting obscenities at them. A car pulls up and Aggie is ejected, pillows thrown out after her. She is high on drugs, disorientated. The car speeds off.*

Advocate (*going to help her*): Where the fuck did you come from?

Aggie: I followed the lightning flash. I swear, one minute I’m in a field full of tents. And then I’m - it was like, like riding on a cloud. And the cloud started to fall and I fell with it. But where -

Advocate: You’re in the Northern Quarter.

Aggie: God. I thought I’d left the second world and entered the third. It felt like I’d gone past the morning star. It’s a long fucking way. And now I’m in this place and it’s just – earth. I didn’t think it’d be so gloomy.

Advocate: Earth. Ha. Did you know it’s the densest and heaviest of the spheres that roam in space?

Aggie: Doesn’t the sun ever come out? Wait. Over there. There’s a gap in the clouds now.

 Hey. Did you hear that, those noises?

Advocate: Can’t hear fuck all.

Aggie: Who lives there?

Advocate: Why don’t you go and find out?

Aggie: It sounds like a – listen to that. Complaints. Can you hear what they’re talking about? Suffering. Prison. Oh now there’s…Cries of joy, and shots and boomings. I can see – lightning flashes. And bells ringing. Fires lit and thousands of voices. They’re singing praise. To heaven.

Advocate: Go on then, go. And when you come back, let me know if they’ve got anything to really complain about.

Aggie: The cloud’s falling, the air’s growing close. I feel like I’m - choking. It’s all just – smoke and water. Dragging me down. I’m so heavy. But I can see it all now.

 Falling.

*Aggie lies down on the pillows and falls asleep.*

*The Glazier appears to help her up and leads her to the main door*

**2.Outside the main door of the café**

Aggie: This place has changed since I were last here.

Glazier: It’s been looked after, that’s why. Watered and manured.

Aggie: What you talking about?

Glazier: It is flowering. If you look carefully, you’ll see.

Aggie: Is someone living there?

Glazier: Someone, yes. I can’t remember who.

Aggie: Whoever it is they’re waiting for me to go in. They’re trapped. Waiting for me to free them.

 Shall we go?

*They go inside. Audience follow.*

**3.Inside**

*Aggie and the Glazier go down the stairs. They encounter the Officer who is sitting in a bath. Classical music is playing. He seems confused, a little distressed. He has a quill in his hand and is trying to snap it.*

Aggie: Please don’t. *She tries to take the quill*.

Officer: Why won’t you let me?

Aggie: You’ll break it.

*(To the Glazier)* You can go now. I know what to do now. We’ll meet later.

*(To the Officer)* You’re a prisoner. I’ve come to set you free.

Officer: What took you so long?

Aggie: But you have to want it. Do you want it?

Officer: It’s so hard, sitting here. But if I’m free then I suffer even more. At least it’s safe here. If I could see you every day, I’d stay.

Aggie: What do you see?

Officer: I see you. You’re a - child of God.

Aggie: So are you.

Officer: I can’t get past this block.

Aggie: You’re a writer. It’s your duty to find the light. Let me help you. *She hands him words, shaped like fish.*  Why don’t you start with this one?

Officer: Can you read it to me?

Aggie: You have to read it for yourself. Here’s another one. Go on, try. Why don’t you write them down?

*The Officer reads the words and transcribes them with his quill. He does this slowly and with patience, but he is still despairing.*

Aggie: I get it. Life’s a bastard. Is that how you feel?

Officer: Life hasn’t been fair to me.

Aggie: Fair?

*Voices of Mother and Father heard off, from the café counter. Aggie and the Officer are drawn towards them.*

**4. The kitchen**

*The Mother sits at the table, sewing shirts. The Father stands nearby.*

Father (*offering the Mother a silk scarf)*:

 Don’t you want it?

Mother: There’s no point. Not when I’m dying.

Father: So you believe the doctor?

Mother: I believe what I hear inside.

Father: You think of the children first. You always have.

Mother: They’ve been my life.

Father: I’m so sorry, Kristina. For everything. Will you forgive me?

Mother: Oh, love. I’m sorry too. We’ve driven each other mad, haven’t we? Why? Why did we keep on doing that? [*She hands him the shirts*.] Right. Here’s the boys’ clothes. Make sure they change them twice a week, on Wednesday and Sunday. And make sure they get washed. All over, mind.

Father: I’ve got to get to work. I’ll be late.

Mother: Can you get Alfred for me first?

Father: Can’t you see him? He’s here.

Mother: It must be my eyes. Or maybe it’s just getting dark.

*She turns on the light.*

 Alfred.

*Father leaves.*

 Who’s that girl with you?

Officer: It’s Aggie.

Mother: Aggie? You know what they say about her, don’t you? She’s a daughter of the gods. Apparently she’s come to earth to see what it’s like to be a human being. Load of rubbish if you ask me. She can’t be a goddess. She looks like a druggie.

 Alfred. There’s something I need to say to you, before I die.

Officer: Mother?

Mother: Don’t keep thinking life has been cruel to you.

Officer: It has, though, hasn’t it?

Mother: What, because you were wrongly punished? For stealing that coin that slipped down the back of the sofa.

Officer: It’s coloured my whole life.

Mother: Go to the cupboard.

Officer: Oh. You know about -

Mother: Treasure Island.

Officer: Please. Don’t.

Mother: You let your brother take the punishment for it. You tore it up and hid it.

Officer: You know, I don’t understand how that cupboard is still there. We’ve moved house since then. And it’s ten years since you died.

Mother: You’re always asking questions. Stop. It ruins everything.

(To Aggie): Here. You look like a nice girl. You can have my scarf.

Aggie: I can’t do that.

Mother: It’s no use to me. I never go out any more.

Officer: You can’t. That was a present from Dad.

Father (*from off*): Are you lending my present to that girl?

Mother: Don’t be mean spirited.

Father: Who are you calling mean spirited?

Mother: What is it with life? Whenever you try to be kind to someone, you hurt someone else. I’m sick of it.

*Mother turns the light off.*

Aggie: I feel sorry for them.

Officer: Do you?

Aggie: It’s bloody hard, sometimes, isn’t it? Life. Still, there’s always love though. Come and see.

**5.Outside the stage door**

*The Stage Door Keeper sits by the door, knitting. The Bill Poster is also there, fishing. There is a small green tree near the door and a blue flower in bloom.*

Aggie: You’re not still working on that scarf?

Stage Door Keeper: Twenty-six years isn’t that long.

Aggie: He never came back, did he? Your lover.

SDK: He had to leave. He couldn’t help it.

Aggie (*to Bill Poster*): Didn’t she used to be a dancer here once?

Bill Poster: She was the star. But when he left - it’s like he took her dance with him.

Aggie: Everyone’s always complaining.

BP: I don’t complain. Not now I’ve got my fishing rod. When I was a boy I used to dream about it. Now that I’m fifty four -

Aggie: Fifty years. For that?

BP: It’s a green fishing rod.

Aggie (*to the SDK*): Give me the scarf, then I can sit and watch people. But you’ll need to stand here and tell me who they are.

*Aggie takes the scarf and sits down beside the door.*

SDK: The show closes today. They’ll find out if they’re being kept on or not.

Aggie: What happens to those who aren’t?

SDK: You’ll see.

*The Singer exits through the door, crying. She stops for a moment and leans her head against the wall, bereft, then runs out.*

Aggie: Poor thing.

SDK: This one’s happy, though. Look.

*The Officer enters through the door in a top hat, carrying a bouquet.*

SDK: He’s going to marry Victoria.

Officer (*downstage, singing*): Victoria!

SDK: She’ll be here in a minute.

Officer: Everything’s ready. The taxi’s outside, the champagne’s been chilled. Ladies, can I kiss you?

*He kisses first Aggie then the SDK on the cheek.*

 Victoria!

Female voice off: On my way!

Officer: I’ll wait.

*Aggie approaches the Officer*

Aggie: Don’t you know me?

Officer: I only know one woman. Victoria. I’ve walked around and waited here for seven years. See the floor? You can see where my feet have left a mark on the path. She’ll be mine soon. Victoria! [*he gets no response*]. She’ll be getting dressed.

(*to the Bill Poster*) I see you’ve got a fishing rod. Everyone here’s mad about fishing. Or fish, I should say. How much did that cost?

BP: It was pricey.

Officer *(singing*): Victoria!

*He goes to the tree and shakes it.*

Look- it’s coming into leaf again. That’s the eighth time now. Victoria! She’ll be doing her hair now.

*(To Aggie)* Please, let me go up and see my bride.

SDK: No one’s allowed on to the stage.

Officer: Seven years I’ve been here, waiting. Seven times three hundred and sixty five is…two thousand five hundred and fifty five! (*Points at the door*) I’ve stared at that door two thousand five hundred and fifty five times, without discovering where it leads to. I don’t know if there’s anyone inside. If anyone lives there.

SDK: I don’t know. I’ve never seen it opened.

Officer: Victoria! Tell me. She can’t have - There’s no other way out is there?

SDK: There’s no other way out.

Officer: Good. Then I won’t have missed her.

*The chorus come out, run through the space and exit*

Officer: She has to be here soon. That flower, see that one. The blue one. I haven’t seen that since I was a child. Do you think they might be dying out? It reminds me of a - when I was a boy we had a picnic once. I wanted to pick one but I didn’t see the bee hidden in the petals. I reached out to pick the flower and - it stung me, the bee. I cried, and they put earth on it to draw out the poison. I remember we had wild strawberries from the garden for tea. Looks like it’s getting dark already. (*To the Bill Poster*) Where are you going?

BP: Home for tea.

Officer: Tea? What, now? Look. Can I use your phone? I need to call the café.

Aggie: What do you want to do that for?

Officer: I need to get that glazier to put in a second pane on all the windows. It’ll be winter soon. I’m so cold.

*Officer exits.*

Aggie: Who’s Miss Victoria?

SDK: The girl he’s in love with.

Aggie: You’re right. He doesn’t care, does he, what she is to others? It’s what she is to him that counts.

*The lights dim*

SDK: It’s getting dark quickly today.

Aggie: A year’s like a minute to the gods.

SDK: But to humans a minute can feel like a year.

*Officer re-enters. He looks older. The roses he was holding have withered.*

Officer: Hasn’t she come yet?

SDK: No.

Officer: She’ll come. She’ll come. But maybe I should cancel the lunch, as it’s already evening. Yes. I’ll do that.

*Officer exits again.*

SDK: Can I have my scarf back now?

Aggie: No, it’s alright. I’ll do your job for a bit. I want to learn about people. Life. To find out if it’s as hard as they say.

SDK: You can’t fall asleep on the job, though. Day or night.

Aggie: Not at night?

SDK: Well, you can doze a bit. If you can. There are security guards on the stage and they change over every three hours.

Aggie: Not sleep? That’s inhuman.

SDK: You might think so. But I’m glad of it. Other people envy me my job.

Aggie: Are you kidding me?

SDK: The worse thing isn’t the long hours and the drudgery and the cold and the draughts and the damp. The worse thing is being everyone’s confidante. They talk to me. Why? That scarf. It hides thirty years of sorrows. Mine. And others’.

Aggie: It’s bloody uncomfortable. There’s like a burning feeling. Nettles or something.

 SDK: When it gets too much give me a shout and I’ll take over.

Aggie: If you can put up with it, I can.

SDK: We’ll see about that. Be kind to them, won’t you?

*SDK exits.*

*Scene change: signalling the passing of time. The tree is now bare of leaves and the flower almost withered. Brown foliage indicating autumn. Enter the Officer. He has aged visibly, hair grey now. The flowers he holds are completely dead.*

Officer: Summer’s gone, autumn’s round the corner. But autumn’s like spring to me and then it’ll be time for the theatre to open again. And then she’ll come. (*To Aggie*) Do you mind if I sit down for a while?

Aggie: Sure. Sit. I can stand.

Officer [*sits*]: Things would be so much better if only I could sleep. This door. It doesn’t give me any peace. What’s behind it? There must be something. (*Music comes from behind it*) Ah! They’ve started rehearsing. (*A light flashes on and off*) That light. Light and dark.

Aggie: Day and night. It’s like someone wants to make time go faster. To shorten your wait.

*The Bill Poster enters*

Officer: How was the fishing?

BP: Good. It was a good summer. The rod was good, but not like I’d imagined.

Office: ‘Not like I’d imagined’. Is anything ever like we imagine? The anticipation is always better than the reality.

BP: Isn’t she here yet?

Officer: She’ll be here soon. Do you know what’s behind that door?

BP: No. I’ve never seen it open.

Officer: Maybe I should call a locksmith?

Aggie: What was wrong with your fishing rod?

BP: There wasn’t anything wrong with it. It just wasn’t like I imagined.

Aggie: What did you imagine?

BP: It’s hard to say. I didn’t enjoy it like I thought I would.

Aggie: That’s a shame. Tell me more.

BP: Are you sure? Everyone comes to you with their worries. But if you could just listen for a few minutes.

Aggie: Happy to. Come on.

*They exit. The tree turns green. The Officer enters, he is old with white hair. He carries the stems of flowers. The Ballet Dancer walks past.*

Officer: Do you know if Victoria has gone yet?

Ballet Dancer: Not yet, no.

Officer: Then I’ll wait. She’ll come soon, won’t she?

Ballet Dancer: I’m sure she will.

Officer: Don’t go now. The locksmith’s on his way. Soon we’ll be able to see what’s behind this door.

Ballet Dancer: That’s interesting. You know about the café, too, the one that keeps growing?

Officer: Course I know it. I’ve been trapped there.

Ballet Dancer: That was you?

*Singer enters.*

Officer: Has Victoria gone yet?

Singer: No. She never leaves.

Officer: It’s because she loves me so much. Don’t go yet. The locksmith’s coming to open the door.

Singer: To open the door? Wow. There’s just something I need to ask the Stage Door Keeper.

*Prompter enters*

Officer: Has Victoria gone?

Prompter: Not as far as I know.

Officer: You see! I told you she was waiting for me. You mustn’t go before the door is opened.

Prompter: Which door?

Officer: Is there another door?

Prompter: Oh, that one. Yes, I’ll stay for that. I must just have a word with the Stage Door Keeper.

*The Glazier arrives.*

Officer: Are you the locksmith?

Glazier: No, the locksmith’s busy I’m afraid. But I can do it just as well.

Officer: Right. Do you have a diamond?

Glazier: Course I have! Who ever heard of a glazier without a diamond?

Officer: Come on then!

*The chorus enters and crowds round*

Officer: Come on everyone, come and see. This is – what a momentous occasion this is. (*The Officer is overcome with emotion)*. I can’t quite -

*Enter Policeman, armed, shouting*

Policeman: Stop! You can’t open this door.

Officer: Oh God. Why is it, whenever you try to do something big, something meaningful –

 Well. I’m not going to stop there. We’ll get legal advice. I’ll find a lawyer.

**6. Solicitor’s Office**

*There are legal documents pinned to the walls.*

Advocate: Let me take that scarf. It looks fit for burning.

Aggie: No. I haven’t finished it yet. I know it’s rancid but everyone’s sorrows are caught up in it, all the things that make them sad and miserable. And I want to gather yours up too. All the stories you’ve been told about crime and imprisonment and –

Advocate: Your scarf won’t be big enough. Look. You can see all the pain pinned to the walls, can’t you? All these stories. No one is ever happy when they come here. See how black my hands are? That’s all their malice, their grief. They spit it all over me. My clothes stink of other people’s crimes.

I’ve just taken on a murder case. But do you know what’s worse? Divorce. When you think about how they started off, full of love and hope and then you get pages and pages of accusations and complaints. They fell out about a green salad. They fell out about a single word. It’s so trivial. But the pain. No wonder women don’t look twice at me. Look! I’ve got all the grief of the city papered onto these walls.

Aggie: I’m sorry.

Advocate: So am I. I don’t understand what people live on. They borrow. Of course we all have to borrow. They live from day to day and muddle through until they die. They’re always in debt. Who’ll pay in the end? Tell me that. (*To the Officer*) What do you want?

Officer: I just want to know if Victoria has left.

Advocate: Definitely not. Why are you pointing at my cupboard?

Officer: That door. It’s just like –

Advocate: Oh no! No, no , no.

*Bells start ringing.*

Officer: Is there a funeral?

Advocate: No, it’s a degree ceremony. I must go. I’m to be made Doctor of Laws. Do you want to come and be awarded a degree? Doctor of Philosophy, maybe?

Officer: Why not?

Advocate: Off you go and get ready.

*The Officer exits. The scene changes to become that of a degree conferment. Members of the chorus step forward and are given a scroll. The Advocate steps forward but is refused.*

Aggie: I’ve washed the scarf, it’s all clean. Didn’t you get your degree?

Advocate: I wasn’t good enough.

Aggie: Why? Because you do legal aid? Because you get people off, even if they’re guilty?

Advocate: Don’t criticise them. I’ll always defend them.

Aggie: I don’t get why they hurt each other.

Advocate: They don’t know any better.

Aggie: We could make them better. You and me. Together.

Advocate: They don’t want to be made better.

Aggie: You know what I see? In this mirror. The world is the right way round. Normally it’s so -distorted.

Advocate: What made it like that?

Aggie: When the copy was made.

Advocate: I always thought it was wrong, that copy. The original is so much better. It’s depressing, isn’t it, when you think about it? None of us can see.

Aggie: Come on. Let me play for you.

*Aggie plays. Voices are heard from off.*

**7. Cave**

Advocate: What can you hear?

Aggie: What can *you* hear?

Advocate: The rain.

Aggie: No. I think they’re tears. What else?

Advocate: A lot of sighing.

Aggie: Life’s fucking miserable.

Advocate: Love. That’s the cause. It’s the best and the worst of things.

Aggie: I’d like to try it.

Advocate: With me?

Aggie: Yes, with you. You know about all the hazards – the rocks and reefs. We’d never get shipwrecked.

Advocate: But I don’t have any money.

Aggie: It doesn’t matter. Not if we love each other.

Advocate: But I hate things that you might love.

Aggie: Then we’ll have to compromise.

Advocate: What if we get sick of each other?

Aggie: We’ll have a baby.

Advocate: You’re sure you want me? Poor? Ugly. A failure?

Aggie: I do.

Advocate: Let’s do it then.

**8. A small room**

*Kristin is pasting the windows shut.*

Aggie: I can’t breathe.

Kristin: I’ve got to paste them to keep the draughts out. There’s only one little crack left now.

Advocate: That’s right, Kristin. Draughts waste money.

Aggie: What are you pasting with?

Kristin: Love letters.

Aggie: God. It’s like you’re pasting my mouth shut.

Advocate: Is the baby asleep?

Aggie: Yes, at last.

Advocate: All that crying scares the clients away.

Aggie: What can we do about it?

Advocate: Nothing.

Aggie: We need to find a bigger place.

Advocate: We don’t have any money.

Aggie: I have to open the window. It’s stifling in here.

Advocate: Then the heat will escape and we’ll freeze.

Aggie: It’s horrible in here. Let me at least scrub the floor.

Advocate: You haven’t the strength and neither have I. Kristin needs to paste the whole house tight, every crack in the ceiling, the floors, the walls.

Aggie: I expected poverty. But not dirt.

Advocate: Poverty’s always dirty.

Aggie: All this. It’s worse than I dreamed it would be.

Advocate: It’s not so bad. At least we have enough to eat.

Aggie: Cabbage.

Advocate: There’s nothing wrong with cabbage. It’s healthy and cheap.

Aggie: I hate it.

Advocate: Why didn’t you say so before?

Aggie: Because I loved you. I wanted to – make a sacrifice for you.

Advocate: Then I should give up cabbage for you. It has to be mutual.

Aggie: Then what will we eat? Fish? You hate fish.

Advocate: And it’s expensive.

Aggie: See. It’s so much harder than I thought.

Advocate: And the baby. He was supposed to bring us together, but he just makes things worse.

Aggie: I’m stuck in here with no view. The baby cries all the time so I can’t sleep. All I can hear is the neighbours arguing through the wall. I feel like I’m dying!

Advocate: My poor flower. No light, no air.

Aggie: And you say there are people worse off than us?

Advocate: Some people envy me.

Aggie: I could put up with it if I could just have a few beautiful things around me.

Advocate: You mean flowers. But they’re so expensive. We could buy kilos of potatoes for that.

Aggie: I’d go without food if I could only have flowers.

Advocate: There is a kind of beauty that doesn’t cost anything.

Aggie: What?

Advocate: If I tell you, you’ll be angry.

Aggie: We agreed we wouldn’t get angry.

Advocate: We did agree. Everything will be all right, Aggie, as long as we don’t speak to each other angrily.

Aggie: We won’t do that. Come on, tell me. About the beauty.

Advocate: If the home is kept in an orderly way – if the chairs are straight, say and the curtains aren’t missing any hooks – well, there’s a sort of beauty in that, isn’t there? It doesn’t cost anything.

Aggie: There’s no need for that tone of voice.

Advocate: I didn’t.

Aggie: You did. God. I could really hate you after this.

Advocate: No. Let’s not hate each other. I promise not to mention your untidiness again. Even though it makes me unhappy.

Aggie: And I’ll carry on eating cabbage. Even though that makes me unhappy.

Advocate: It’s funny. What makes one happy tortures the other.

Aggie: Marriage is so hard.

Advocate: See?

Aggie: I just feel so – sorry for people. Look, why don’t we try to make it work? We know what our problems are.

Advocate: Yes. We’re intelligent people. We can manage it.

Aggie: We can just smile, can’t we, when things don’t go right?

Advocate: I saw something in the paper yesterday. Where is the paper, by the way?

Aggie: I’m sorry. I put it in the compost with the vegetable peelings.

Advocate: For God’s sake!

Aggie: Remember. We agreed we can smile about things. There was an article in it. It upset me.

Advocate: Which I happened to think was interesting. No, it’s fine. I’ll smile. I’ll smile til you see my teeth. I’ll hide it when I’m annoyed and say yes to everything and be a hypocrite. So you’ve thrown my newspaper away. I see. (*He straightens a chair, angrily*.) Now I’m tidying things again and you’ll be angry. This is impossible!

Aggie: I know.

Advocate: But we have to stay together. Because of the baby.

Aggie: Yes, for the baby. Oh! We need to stay together.

Advocate: I’ve got to get to work. All my clients, all desperate to stay out of prison.

Aggie: Poor people. And this pasting.

*The Advocate goes to the door and starts playing nervously with the latch.*

Aggie: Don’t make the bolt squeak. It’s like you’re squeezing my heart.

Advocate (*continues*) Squeezing.

Aggie: Don’t!

Advocate: Squeezing.

Aggie: Stop!

*The Officer enters and adjusts the bolt.*

Officer: Here, let me.

Advocate: Of course. You’re a Doctor now, after all.

Officer: Yes! The world’s my oyster. I could have fame, celebrity.

Advocate: But what will you live on?

Officer: Live on?

Advocate: You need a home, clothes. Food.

Officer: It always works out. If you find someone to love you.

Advocate: Maybe so. Kristin! Keep pasting. Paste til they can’t breathe any more.

*Advocate exits. Kristin continues pasting.*

Kristin: Til they can’t breathe.

Officer: Will you come away with me?

Aggie: Alright. But where?

Officer: The sea! It’s always sunny there. And there’s singing and dancing, and parties!

Aggie: Yes. I want to go there.

Officer: Come on then.

*The Advocate comes back in.*

Advocate: Look, hairpins all over the floor.

Officer: *He’s* seen the hairpins too.

Advocate: See this one? Two prongs on the same pin. Two, but one. If I straighten it, it’s one continuous pin. If I bend it, it’s two but still one. What happens if I snap it? Now there are two. Two!

*He throws the pieces away.*

Officer: But you have to pull the prongs apart to break it. If they get closer, it holds.

Advocate: And if they are parallel they never meet.

Officer: Perfect. And impossible.

Advocate: Like a bolt that fastens when it’s open. And when I shut this door, Aggie, I open a way out for you .

*Advocate exits. The Officer looks at Aggie*

Officer: Shall we go?

**9. Quarantine Station, Foulstrand**

Officer: We’re in the wrong place. This *is* Fairhaven, right?

QM: No. That’s the other side. This is Foulstrand.

Officer: It’s not like heaven at all. It’s like – hell. Who lives here?

QM: Sick people. The healthy ones are over there. On the other side.

Officer: So only poor people live here?

QM: No these are the rich ones. Rich people who have stuffed themselves with too much rich food and red wine. Everyone has some grief or other.

Officer: Oh. Grief. Yes.

QM: Aren’t you from the theatre? The one who’s always waiting?

Officer: That’s me.

QM: Have you got the door open yet?

Officer: We’re still appealing. The Bill Poster is out with his fishing rod, so that’s slowed down the evidence. And the glazier has put in more windows, which means the café has doubled in height. It’s a good growing season. Plenty of rain. And hot too.

QM: Not as hot as here.

Officer: How hot are the furnaces here?

QM: A hundred and thirty degrees. Any less than that and we won’t kill off the cholera.

Officer: There’s cholera here?

QM: You didn’t know?

Officer: Of course I know. But I sometimes forget what I know.

QM: I wish I could forget.

*Poet enters, looking at the sky, holding a bucket of mud.*

Officer: Who’s that?

QM: A poet in need of a mud bath.

Officer: Mud? But to write doesn’t he need light – and air?

QM: No. He lives in the ether. So he craves mud. It hardens the skin, you see, then he can’t feel the sting of rejection.

*Poet sits nearby, writing and observing the action.*

Officer: We’ve got visitors.

*He and She enter in a boat, embracing closely.*

Officer: Look at that. Perfect happiness. Young love.

He (*singing*): When I was a child I was lonely here. Same groves and bays, sky and sea. But not now I’m with my bride, my love. My sun, my life.

Officer: It’s Victoria!

QM: Is it?

Officer: That’s his Victoria. And I’ve got mine, who no one ever sees. Quick! Raise the Quarantine flag.

*QM waves a yellow flag. He and She recoil when they notice the quarantine station.*

QM: I know. It isn’t pleasant but everyone has to pass through here. Everyone who’s infected.

Poet: How can you do that to two people in love?

*He and She come ashore.*

He: What have we done wrong?

QM: You don’t need to have done anything wrong. Life itself is toxic.

She: But we’ve only just found happiness.

He: How long do we have to stay?

QM: Forty days and nights.

He: You’re saying we have to live here? In this desert?

Poet: Don’t worry. Love will see you through.

QM: I need to light the furnace now, to purify the air.

She: My dress isn’t colourfast.

QM: It’ll turn white, and so will everything else. Your roses –

He: Oh no. And your beautiful face.

She (*to the Officer*): I suppose you’re happy now?

Officer: Not at all. Seeing you so happy did make me feel down but I’ve got a PhD now. I’m somebody. In the autumn I’ll go back to school to learn what I learned as a child. What’s two times two? How many times does two go into four? The same questions on and on, til I get my pension and I can sit and do the crossword and wait for meals. Until they carry me off in a coffin.

And Victoria. Who I loved and wanted to be happy and now she is happy and that makes me – so miserable.

She: Do you think it makes me happy to see you suffer? Maybe you’ll feel better if I’m trapped here for forty days and nights?

Officer: Yes, and no. I can’t be happy while you suffer. Oh!

He (*to the Officer*): And how can I be happy now I realise what I’ve done to you?

Officer: I’m sorry for all of us.

**10. A Ballroom by the Sea, Fairhaven**

Aggie: This is more like it. Fairheaven. We’ve arrived. Look. It’s like a festival. Everyone parties all the time.

Officer: Parties can be miserable sometimes. See that girl? She’s been sitting there three hours and no one wants to dance with her.

*Mother enters*

Mother: Why don’t you come inside like I told you?

Girl: Because no one will dance with me. Because I’m ugly. I don’t need you to remind me, thanks very much.

*Girl starts to play piano/musical instrument. Music from the ballroom increases in volume, drowning out the girl’s playing. She stops playing and begins to cry. She stands staring into the distance as the set changes. Three school benches with schoolboys sitting on them. The Officer is one of them, looking worried.*

*Enter Schoolmaster.*

Schoolmaster (*to the Officer*): You boy! Tell me what is two times two?

*Officer sits in his seat, searching for the answer*

SM: Stand up when you’re spoken to!

Officer: Two times two? I think that’s – twenty two.

SM: You haven’t done your homework, have you?

Officer: I have. But – I don’t know why. I just can’t say it.

SM: Don’t give me excuses! You know it but you can’t say it! Shall I help you?

*SM pulls the Officer’s hair. The Officer squeals in pain*

Officer: Stop! Don’t!

SM: A big boy like you. You’ve no ambition.

Officer: Yes, I am a big boy. Much bigger than they are. I’m a – Doctor – aren’t I? A Doctor of Philosophy. Why am I sitting here with them?

SM: You are. But you must grow up. You know that don’t you?

Officer: That’s right. I need to grow up. Two times two is – two. And I can prove that by analogy, the highest form of proof. One times one is one, so two times two must be two. What applies to one must apply to the other.

SM: Your proof is logical. But the answer is wrong.

Officer: If it obeys the law of logic it can’t be wrong. One into one goes once, so two into two goes twice.

SM: Quite correct, according to your analogy. But then, how much is one times three?

Officer: Three.

SM: Then two times three must also be three.

Officer: That can’t be right. It can’t. Unless – No. I’m not sophisticated enough yet.

SM: Not by a long way.

Officer: How long do I have to sit here, then?

SM: How long? Do you think time and space exist? Suppose time does exist. Then you should be able to say what time it is. What is time?

Officer: Time. (*He thinks*) I don’t know. But I know it IS. So I can know how much two times two is without being able to explain why. Can you tell me what time is?

SM: Of course.

Officer: Go on then.

SM: Time? Let me see. (*He ponders*) While we talk, time flies. So time is something that flies while I talk.

Schoolboy (*stands up*): You’re talking now, and while you talk I fly. So I am time.

*Schoolboy runs out*

SM: That’s logical. A correct answer.

Officer: But then logic must be crazy. He can’t actually BE time.

SM: That’s also logical. And correct.

Officer: Then logic is madness.

SM: If logic is madness, then the world is mad. And why should I sit here teaching you insanities?

Officer: You can’t teach, you old fool.

SM: Don’t be insolent.

Officer: I’m an Officer, an Officer. And I don’t understand why I’m sitting here being told off like a schoolboy.

*The Quarantine Master rushes in.*

QM: The quarantine’s starting.

Officer: Oh it’s you. This man is making me learn my times tables, even though I’ve got a PhD.

QM: Well why don’t you leave?

Officer: Leave? I can’t do that.

SM: I should think not. Just you try!

Officer: Can’t you save me?

QM: Come! Come and dance. We have to dance before the plague breaks out.

*QM and Officer leave. The Schoolmaster continues with his lesson.*

Aggie: This is meant to be paradise. But isn’t anyone here happy?

Officer: Yes, these two newlyweds here. Listen.

*The Husband and Wife enter*

Husband: I feel so happy I could die.

Wife: Die? Why?

Husband: Because bound up in all my happiness there’s a sadness that eats away at me, that this can’t last forever. Thinking about that destroys my happiness.

Wife: Let’s die together, now.

Husband: Die? Why not? Happiness terrifies me.

*They go out together, holding hands.*

Aggie: People are so fucked up sometimes.

*The Blind Man enters, led in by someone else*

Officer: Look at this man. Everyone envies him. He owns all this, all the beaches, the forests, the woods and everything in it – the fish, the game, the birds. He’s the landlord of all these people.

Aggie: Does he complain too?

Officer: Of course. He’s blind.

Aggie: *He’s* the one they want to be?

Officer: He’s come to see off the ship. His son is on it.

Blind Man: I can’t see, but I can hear. I hear how the anchor digs into the sea bed in the same way as you might draw the hook from a fish. My son, my only child, is going abroad. I can only be with him in my thoughts. I can hear the cable screech and there’s something fluttering like wet clothes on a line. Handkerchiefs, maybe. I can hear sobs, people crying. Once I asked a child why the sea was salt. Her father was a sailor and she said: ‘The sea is salt because sailors cry so much’. I asked why they cry and she answered ‘because they’re always having to go away. That’s why they dry their handkerchiefs up on the mast.’ I asked her why people cry when they’re sad. And she said: ‘because their eyes have to be washed so they can see more clearly.’

Aggie (*to Officer*): What does that flag mean?

Officer: It means yes. That’s the Captain’s ‘yes’ in red, like blood drawn on the blue cloth of heaven.

Aggie: What does ‘no’ look like then?

Officer: Blue. Like blood in the veins.

Blind Man: Meeting and parting, parting and meeting. That’s life. I met his mother and she went away. I kept our son. Now he’s leaving.

Aggie: He’ll come back though, surely?

Blind Man: Who’s that? I’ve heard that voice before. In my dreams, when I was young and the summer holidays had just started. And again, just after my son was born. Whenever life smiled on me, I heard that voice.

*The Advocate enters, goes over to the Blind Man and whispers something.*

Blind Man: Oh. I see.

Advocate: That’s exactly what she’s like.

*Advocate goes to Aggie.*

Advocate (*to Aggie*): You might have seen nearly everything there is to see. But you haven’t experienced the worst thing yet.

Aggie: What’s that?

Advocate: Repetition. Being stuck in endless cycles. Go back! Learn your lesson again. Come on.

Aggie: Where to?

Advocate: Back to your responsibilities.

Aggie: What responsibilities?

Advocate: Everything you used to hate. Cooking cabbage and cleaning a dirty house.

Aggie: You mean I have to go back to it?

Advocate: Life is all about repetition. We’re trapped in it. Look at the teacher. Come on. Let’s go home.

Aggie: I’d rather kill myself.

Advocate: Oh you can’t do that. That would be a mortal sin.

Aggie: Being human sucks.

Everyone: Told you so.

Aggie: I’m staying here. Compared to life with you, this is paradise. But I need to know what’s behind the door. I want to see it opened!

Advocate: Then you have to retrace your steps, and go back the way you came. Like I said, it’s all repetition.

Aggie [*to the Poet*]: You. You can come with me.

**11. Cave**

Poet: Where have you brought me?

Aggie: Far from the madding crowd. To the edge of the world. This is where the gods listen to the complaints of humans.

Poet: How do they do that?

Aggie: See how the cave is shaped like a shell? You know how when were little, you used to pick up a shell and hear your heart beating and the thoughts whisper in your brain? If you heard all that in a small shell, imagine what you can hear now.

Poet: All I can hear is the wind.

Aggie: It’s saying we were blown down to earth to live in dirty streets and city smoke. The gods - they must see the earth isn’t clean. People aren’t good. They get by, surviving not living. You know what they say: that we’re born from dust and to dust we must return? We weren’t given wings to fly, we were given feet that attract dust.

Poet: That sounds familiar somehow.

Aggie: Sssh! Listen to the voices of the winds. They’re saying they carry the complaints of humans. Do you hear us in the chimneys on autumn evenings, in the gaps in the window when the rain hammers on the roof? On winter nights in snowy forests? And in the gales at sea, in the sails and the rigging? It was human voices that taught us these sad sounds. In war zones and hospitals and especially wherever babies are delivered. The pain of being born.

Poet: I’ve heard that before somewhere.

Aggie: Sssh, now! Here’s the voice of the waves. They’re saying they rock the winds to sleep. Like tongues of fire, quenching, burning, cleansing. Rocking the winds to sleep. Look what the sea’s washed up, the ships’ remains. Can you see their names: Justice. The Golden Peace? Hope. And there’s a life jacket. Do you think the Captain saved himself and let the crew drown?

Poet: Justice. That’s the ship that sailed from Fairhaven. It had the blind man’s son on it.

Aggie: The Blind Man? Fairhaven? I must have dreamed it. And the quarantine, and the degree ceremony, and the solicitor’s office, the theatre. Victoria. The castle. Oh, the Officer. I dreamed all of it.

Poet: I wrote it.

Aggie: You? You wrote it. Then you know what poetry is.

Poet: I know what dreaming is. What’s poetry?

Aggie: Not real. But bigger than reality. Like a waking dream.

Poet: People think us writers are just playing around the whole time.

Aggie: Probably just as well. Otherwise everyone would lie around the whole time and no one would have invented things we need. Tools, for instance.

Poet: That’s easy for you to say. You came from nowhere, from the clouds.

Aggie: You’re right. I’ve been here too long. Now I’m stuck in the mud like you are, like everyone. I’m not free to fly any more. I can’t hear their voices any more. Help me, gods! I’m stuck here.

Poet: Are you leaving us soon?

Aggie: Once I’ve burned off the dust. It won’t wash off in the sea. Why?

Poet: I’ve got a favour to ask you.

Aggie: What kind of favour?

Poet: I’ve got a – a petition. Written from human beings to the Creator of the World. Written by a dreamer.

Aggie: You want me to - ? Can you say it out loud?

Poet: Of course.

Aggie: Go on then.

Poet: It’d be better if you did it.

Aggie: All right. But how will I -?

Poet: Telepathy.

Aggie [*reads aloud as though remembering*]

Why does it hurt to give birth? Why do babies cry? Why do we complain when the dawn comes? Why doesn’t life make us smile? The gift of life is meant to be joy itself.

Why are we born like animals when we’re the children of gods? Our spirit is always hungry for something else. But I shouldn’t go on. I shouldn’t question our maker. No one’s been able to solve the riddle of life.

Life. It’s like a pilgrimage over sharp stones. Where the track is easiest, we’re forbidden to follow it. When you pick a flower, it’s already someone else’s. If the road is blocked by a field and have to carry on, you trample on other people’s crops. Then, to get even, people stamp on yours. Every joy you have makes someone else miserable, so grief follows grief until you die.

Poet: I don’t know how to find the words. Will you find a way to say it?

Aggie: Okay. I’ll try.

Poet: What’s that over there? You see it floating? It’s a buoy.

Aggie: The waves are getting bigger.

Poet: See that? It’s a ship. On that reef there.

Aggie: What ship?

Poet: I think it’s the ghost ship.

Aggie: The crew. They’re waving. Do you think we’re going to die?

Crew (*singing*): Christ have mercy on our souls.

Aggie: Who’s that going out to them?

Poet: Is he walking on the water? Only one person can do that.

Crew: Christ the Lord!

Aggie: Is that him?

Poet: It is! It’s the one who was crucified.

Aggie: What for?

Poet: He wanted to set humans free.

Aggie: I can’t remember. Who crucified him exactly?

Poet: The whole world.

Aggie: That’s mad.

Poet: Here’s the storm. The waves and the - It’s gone all dark. The crew are jumping in, overboard. They’re crying because they know they’re going to die. They cried when they were born and now they’re crying in death.

Aggie: It doesn’t look like a ship.

Poet: No. Actually it’s not. It’s a house. With trees around it. And a tower – like a telephone tower, with wires reaching up so we can communicate with the gods.

Aggie: We’ve got prayers. We don’t need wires.

Poet: No. It isn’t a house, or a telephone tower. It’s a -

Aggie: What?

Poet: I can see a field covered in snow, a training ground. There’s a church on a hill and the sun is shining and there’s a shadow on the ground from the spire. And now – solidiers. They’re marching on the church, climbing the spire and – oh they’ve reached the cross. Here’s a cloud passing over. It’s blotting everything out. Now. Now everything’s gone.

**12. The Theatre. Outside the Stage Door**

Aggie: Are they here yet?

Stage Door Keeper: The dignitaries? No.

Aggie: We need them. We’re going to open the door.

SDK: So?

Aggie: It’s important. Some people think it’s the answer to the mystery of existence and the Universe. Go on. Go and round them up - the Judge, and the academics. And don’t forget the glazier, too, with his diamond - otherwise we’ll never open it.

Officer: Victoria!

SDK: She’ll be down in a minute.

Officer: That’s good. The taxi’s waiting, the table is booked, the champagne is chilled. Can I kiss you, please? (*he kisses the SDK*). Victoria!

Woman’s voice: I’m here!

Poet: Do you get the feeling you’ve seen this before?

Aggie: Yeah.

Poet: Maybe I dreamt it?

Aggie: Maybe you wrote it?

Poet: Yeah, maybe I did write it.

Aggie: Then you know what poetry is.

Poet: I know what a dream is.

Aggie: Is this déjà vu? I feel like we’ve had this conversation before.

Poet: You’ll soon work out what’s real.

Aggie: Or a dream.

Poet: Or poetry.

*Enter the Judge and the expert witnesses - Deans of Theology, Philosophy, Science and Law.*

Judge: We’re here to decide on this question of the door. (*To the Dean of Theology*) You’re the Dean of Theology. What do *you* think?

Dean of Theology: The door hides dangerous truths. Quite simply, it shouldn’t be opened.

Dean of Science: Come now. Truth is never dangerous. Science is the proof of that.

Dean of Philosophy: Truth? What’s truth? Philosophy asks that very question. It’s not a science. It’s the science of sciences. The knowing of knowledge.

Dean of Law: I put it to you that truth is something that can be proven beyond reasonable doubt. (*To the Judge*) What’s your opinion, milord?

Judge: Opinion? I’m appointed not to have an opinion. I did have some once but they were refuted. Opinions always are. But truth - Truth is irrelevant here. Perhaps we should open the door now, even if does hide dangerous truths?

Theology: I am the way the truth and the light.

Philosophy: I think therefore I am.

Law: Prove it! Prove it!

All: The door is open!

Judge: What’s behind it?

*Glazier steps forward and opens door, peers round it.*

Glazier: I can’t see anything.

Judge: Professors. What’s behind the door?

Theology: Nothing. Nothing! That’s it! That’s the answer to the question of existence. In the beginning God created heaven and earth. From nothing.

Philosophy: Nothing will come of nothing.

Science: Look behind it! Nothing. That’s proof that there’s nothing there. That’s the end of it.

Law: You (*to Aggie*). You’ve betrayed us. This is a conspiracy to deceive. I demand a trial.

Judge: Tell us what your motive was for opening the door.

Aggie: If I told you, you wouldn’t believe me.

All: She won’t testify.

Judge: Sentence her, then.

Aggie: I *have* testified.

Judge: Listen, she’s testifying.

Advocate (*takes Aggie’s arm*): Have you forgotten your duties?

Aggie: God, no.

Advocate: And your baby?

Aggie: What baby?

Advocate: Your baby’s crying for you. Don’t you get it? A human being is suffering for you.

Aggie: I feel so torn. It hurts.

Advocate: That’s how life is.

Poet: You’re telling me. I fucked up everything just to follow my vocation. I dropped out. My father never got over it, he died bitter and miserable. Even though it was my truth, it upset everyone. I still feel that pain. Conscience, I suppose. It nags at me that I’ve done the wrong thing.

Aggie: Come with me.

Advocate: You can’t. Your child!

Aggie: Goodbye.

**13.Outside**

Aggie: It’s time for me to leave. I’m going to just disappear into the ether. Death. That thing everyone’s afraid of.

Poet: Fear of the unknown.

Aggie: But *you* know. Have you always had doubts?

Poet: Sometimes I’ve felt sure but then the certainty faded, like a dream you wake up from.

Aggie: It isn’t easy being alive, is it?

Poet: You get it now, then?

Aggie: I think I do.

Poet: You still aren’t going to tell me where you came from?

Aggie: You wouldn’t believe me if I told you.

Poet: Try me.

Aggie: I came because I wanted to find something.

Poet: What?

*Aggie goes to the Poet and whispers in his ear*

Poet (*agreeing*): That’s my dream, right there.

Aggie: I’ve suffered while I was here. I’ve felt your pain. I’ve felt everyone’s. Now it’s time to go. It’s all ready – the altar, candles.

Poet: Tell me what you suffered.

Aggie: Words wouldn’t do it justice. I think that’s the worst thing about suffering.

Poet: Before you go - I’d like to know. What was the worst thing?

 Aggie: Just - being alive. Not seeing things well enough, or hearing properly. My thoughts got in the way all the time. But now - I should get rid of all this dust on my feet.

*Stage Door Keeper enters and hands Aggie her scarf*

SDK: Will you take my scarf with you?

*Officer enters and hands her the dead flowers.*

Officer: And my roses. They’re just thorns now.

*The Bill Poster, Glazier, Advocate, School Master and Blind Man enter.*

Bill Poster: You’re not taking my fishing rod.

Glazier: My diamond that opened the door. Take that too. Good luck.

Advocate: The big case I’m working on.

School Master: You can take my lesson plans.

Blind Man: My hands have been my eyes.

Poet: When you die, isn’t your whole life meant to flash past your eyes?

Aggie: It’s not like I’m dying.

Poet: What then? You can’t go back to how you were. Not after this.

*Kristin enters with strips of paper.*

Kristin: I’m pasting, I’m pasting til there’s nothing left to paste.

Poet: You’d paste up the cracks in heaven if you could.

Kristin: Aren’t there any windows in here for me to paste?

Poet: No.

Kristin: I’ll go then.

Aggie:

 Goodbye. This is the end. Goodbye, my poet. You dreamer. You know how to live well, soaring through the sky, plunging now and then into mud and shaking it from your feet.

When it’s time to go you feel – loss. Sadness at leaving and regret for what you’ve done and more for what you didn’t do. You feel torn – you want to stay and you want to go.

Goodbye. Tell people I won’t forget them. Where I’m going – I’ll tell the gods what it is to be alive. Because I – I’m sorry.

 Goodbye.

*Aggie leaves*