

MOTHLIGHT LITERARY PRESENTS

AFTERGLOW



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MOTHLIGHT

LITERARY
MAGAZINE

PRESENTS

AFTERGLOW

1.0

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FOREWORD

MOTHLIGHT PRESENTS: AFTERGLOW 1.0

Our team is beyond excited to finally be able to share the very first issue of the Mothlight Presents: Afterglow journey. Bringing this issue to life has been an immensely rewarding experience, one made possible only through the continuous support of our contributors, readers, and the wider literary and theatrical community of vibrant Montreal.

As the first magazine at Concordia to publish playwrights, Mothlight remains committed to creating a space for voices to be heard, to experiment and challenge - but most of all, to linger much like the afterglow itself. This particular issue features the work of five remarkable playwrights, each of which offer a distinct and compelling vision in the field of dramaturgy.

The plays collected here vary in tone, form, and genre, yet they are united by their emotional resonance and theatrical ambition. These are the kind of works that stay with us long after reading and remind us of the power of theatre to capture what remains after a moment has passed. Theatre, as a form, is sustained by those willing to experiment and to speak honestly, and we hope Mothlight continues to be a home for that work.


The deepest gratitude is extended to our editorial team, whose countless hours in reading, discussing, and refining submissions have led to this incredible result. Their thoughtful care and close collaboration with each playwright have been the very thing to shape this issue into what it is now. This publication would not exist without their commitment.

A special thank you goes to our graphic designer, Ana Farias de Sousa, whose creative vision and direction gave Afterglow its visual identity and atmosphere. Her work has transformed this issue into a cohesive artistic experience, one whose design and text exist in conversation with one another.

Finally, thank you for reading and for supporting Mothlight Literary Magazine. We hope you feel the care, dedication, and passion that went into these pages, and we wish you a meaningful time with the plays that follow.

ARGIRO MAVRAKI, EDITOR - IN - CHIEF

PLAYWRIGHTS



**DEAR SATAN
(I'M JOKING)
BY SOPHIE DUFRESNE**

ILLUSTRATION: VISUALLYYS / LÉANE KLINKOW

Dear Satan (I'm joking),

A Play in One Act

by

Sophie Dufresne

*Content Warning:

This play contains themes of
mental illness,
institutionalization,
suicidal ideation, family
estrangement, drugs and
death.

Character List

PATIENT X (she/her): An inpatient at a psychiatric hospital who has been diagnosed with NPD and APD.

THERAPIST (he/him): A psychologist who has been assigned PATIENT X's case.

JASON (he/him): PATIENT X's 32-year-old estranged son. He resents PATIENT X and is not sure whether he is willing to make amends with her.

THE HUSBAND (he/him): JASON's husband. They've been married seven years, but X wasn't invited to the wedding.

Act 1

Scene 1

THERAPIST's office.

The stage is illuminated by a cold, white stage light that clearly lights up the room and the characters' faces. PATIENT X is sitting on an old, worn-down couch that is lining the far-left wall of the stage. Her THERAPIST, who is holding a notepad in one hand and a pen in the other, is sitting behind his desk. X is wearing a plain white gown and slippers, but she carries herself like she is wearing a fur coat and high heels. There is one door visible to the audience located at the very front of the stage—just to the right of THERAPIST's desk.

PATIENT X: As I've told you several times, my son is incredibly smart and very, very

handsome. I always say he gets his brains from his father and his looks from me - not that I'm not intelligent myself, but men need to be reassured that their sons have some of their traits too. *(Beat.)* You know how men are.

THERAPIST *does not react. He simply writes something in his notebook.*

PATIENT X *readjusts her gown slightly as she tries to make herself more comfortable. Her eyes dart quickly across the room, and she raises her voice slightly as though she were giving an important speech at an awards ceremony.*

PATIENT X: My son, the intelligent boy he is, asked me to bring him to the art museum last week. I took time off work to go with him because—

X's voice starts quivering.

PATIENT X: -nothing is more important than watching your son grow up.

X's eyes appear to well up in tears and she turns her head away from THERAPIST. (Beat.) X clears her throat, and when she faces THERAPIST again, a large smile is plastered across her face as she continues her story with a confident tone.

PATIENT X: Anyway, you will never guess what he did!

THERAPIST (*nonchalantly*): What did he do?

PATIENT X: He gave me a guided tour of the museum! He's only seven years old and he's already so smart!

THERAPIST: Okay. You often talk about your son, but you've never mentioned his father. Is he still in the picture?

PATIENT X *glares at* THERAPIST.

PATIENT X: I don't see why that would matter.

THERAPIST *writes something in his notebook and swiftly changes gears.* THERAPIST: Tell me more about your son, then. When was the last time you spoke to him?

X, *jumping at the opportunity to talk more about her son; over the bitterness she showed a few seconds ago:* Why, I saw him just yesterday! We went to get ice cream. His favourite flavour is mint chocolate chip, just like his father. He told me about his day at school and all about his little crush and her big green beautiful eyes and her laugh that sounds like spring—his words. He's very

creative, my son. He must have got it from me. After we finished our ice cream, we went to the park and he went on the swings, but he didn't want me to push him because he's a big boy now. He ended up falling down and scraping his knee, so we went home, and I took care of him before putting him to bed. We watched a movie first though, then I put him to bed.

THERAPIST, *taking notes*: How do you perceive the relationship you have with your son?

X, *scoffing*: Well, isn't it obvious? I'm the best mother in the world!

THERAPIST: And how do you think your son perceives his relationship with you?

X, *slightly taken aback*: Why, I'm sure he perceives his relationship with me to be

absolutely magnificent! I'm a flawless mother,
as I've told you!

THERAPIST: Does that reflect your relationship
with your mother?

X, stunned: Excuse me??

THERAPIST, *professionally*: Was
your relationship with your mother
"absolutely magnificent" as well?

X, *standing up*: I'd like to leave now.

THERAPIST, *looking at the clock over X's head*:
We still have 40 minutes left to our session.
As you know, the door is locked for your
safety.

X *walks towards the door* as THERAPIST
continues talking.

THERAPIST, *quickly, yet still professionally and patiently*: We don't need to talk about your parents yet if you don't want to. I'm interested in knowing more about your home life though, / so if-

X, *putting one hand on the doorknob and looking back towards* THERAPIST: You can't make me stay here. I know my rights. (X *turns back towards the door*) I'm-

As X looks at the door, she catches a glimpse of her reflection in the mirror for the first time that day. She touches her face in horror, then looks at her hospital gown in sadness. She turns towards THERAPIST and lifts her head to hide her emotions. She calmly walks toward the couch and sits back down.

X, *her voice slightly quieter than before:*

He's only seven, but he's very smart for his age.

THERAPIST, *with a gentler tone:* Can you tell me what year it is?

X: Well, yeah, I'm not an idiot.

THERAPIST *nods.*

X: It's ... 2022.

THERAPIST: And what year was your son born?

X, *softly, looking down and sinking back into the couch:* 1990.

The stage lights are gradually turned off.

Scene 2

Five months later.

The stage is illuminated with a slightly softer white light.

JASON *is seated at a table for two in the Visiting Area. A worker brings in PATIENT X and promptly exits.*

PATIENT X (*heavily medicated*): Jason.

JASON *nods in greeting.*

PATIENT X *sits across from JASON.*

PATIENT X: So what brings you here today?

JASON *laughs.*

JASON: One week on meds and you're already walking and talking like a zombie.

PATIENT X *tries to react violently but only manages to pound weakly against the table with her fist.*

JASON: They told me they had to put you on meds cuz you were acting psychotic. Not sure about the specifics. Listen, I don't really care what happens to you, but I— Well, you know. I wouldn't want you to be treated unprofessionally or anything.

X: Unprofessional is an understatement! My "therapist" is anything but a therapist. He bullies me! He calls me crazy and tries to make me think I'm losing my mind. I haven't lost it yet, but these meds... they're making me a bit slow.

JASON: Why were you really put on the meds?
Lights out.

THERAPIST's office, 1 week earlier.

The stage is illuminated with a cold, white light.

THERAPIST: I'm not a psychiatrist, so I can't prescribe you medication, but I've referred you to a few in the past five months. How do you like your latest one, Dr. Yen?

PATIENT X: I've decided not to take the medication she claims I need.

THERAPIST: Why is that?

PATIENT X: Well, I took them for about a week, but I didn't like the way they made me feel. I felt like I was dreaming, but also drowning, and every time I spoke, instead of hearing my own voice, I heard a distant, unfamiliar echo I couldn't quite understand.

I never knew if I was speaking loud enough,
but I knew the drugs were killing me.

THERAPIST: I'll ask Dr. Yen to either lower
the dose or get you on something less strong.

X: No. No medication. I want to feel like I'm
still alive even though this place doesn't
want me to be.

THERAPIST: Now why would you say that? Have
you been experiencing suicidal ideation?

X laughs half-heartedly.

X: Don't pretend you don't know
what I'm talking about, *doctor*.
If I have to spend the rest of my
life in here,
I might as well die.

To never see the sky again, to never see my
son...

If he can't forgive me, no one can.

To you, I'm just another case study,

"Voluntary admission," but

tricked by my own son,

the same one I ruined by giving

him my genes.

To me, I'm still a person, even though I have
no voice.

While you check the boxes in your DSM-5,

Diagnose me with APD, NPD,

I sit here wondering what's next.

Schizophrenia?

Might as well tell you now,

doctor,

I've been hearing things.

A voice in my head telling me

I don't belong here.

For the whispers in the hallways
say security will soon be
increased.

Workers want more walls between us
and them,

Always "them" versus "us,"

Villainizing, othering the ones you claim to
help.

You know I'm not delusional, doctor.

You know I'm not insane.

Every week for a month, I
told you

I saw my son yesterday.

Hoping some day, it would be
true.

Hoping some day, he forgives me.

Hoping some day, I can feel normal again.

Tell me, *doctor*,

why did you become a
psychologist?

Did you really think you
could help people like me?

I hear the way you talk in
hallways.

You white coats think the insane are deaf
too.

You're all the same; you can't help me.

The nature of your work won't allow it.

Protect society from people like me,

But don't you dare pretend you're helping me.

Lights out.

Visiting Area, present day.

*The stage is illuminated with a slightly
softer white light.*

JASON: Yeah, I can see why he'd think you're insane after that.

X: I've been rotting in here for five months, Jason! Of course I'm starting to lose my mind a little. So would you. Please. Please get me out of here. I don't want to die in this place. It's draining the life out of me.

JASON: You know I never tricked you into anything. We both agreed this place could help you. I'm just not sure if you're trying to get better. Your fantasies were always better than reality, weren't they?

X: My fantasies? What fantasies? I don't know what you're talking about.

JASON: And there's the wall you always put up instead of admitting someone is right. I would hate to be your psychologist.

JASON *gets up.*

JASON: I don't know if these meds will help you or not, but I hope something eventually does. I'll come back when you make some progress.

X: No! Wait—

JASON *exists*.

X: Fuck. What the fuck is wrong with me? Why can't I just... No, it's not my fault. It's his fault for putting me here. I don't deserve this. Nothing is wrong with me. I was the perfect mother. Right? Right. Right!

A worker enters the stage and silently motions to X that it's time for her to go back to her room. She nods and exits the stage alongside them.

Lights out.

Scene 3

JASON's apartment.

The stage is illuminated with a comfortable, yellow-ish light. JASON and his husband are seated at the dinner table.

JASON's mind appears elsewhere, causing his husband to break the silence.

THE HUSBAND: How's your mother?

JASON *clenches his napkin.*

JASON: Not good. But I don't think I care, really.

THE HUSBAND, *gently*: So why did you visit her?

JASON, *feigning nonchalance*: I was curious.

THE HUSBAND, *inquisitive*: Curious? Last time you went to see her, you said you never wanted to speak to her again.

JASON, *slightly dejected*: Yeah, I know. I was curious to see if she had changed her mind about her stubbornness.

THE HUSBAND: And did she?

JASON, *surprised and frustrated; volume slowly increasing*: Nope. She's still as clueless about what she did wrong as ever.

THE HUSBAND, *compassionately*: Don't you think your mother deserves some patience?

JASON, *frustrated*: Deserves? She doesn't deserve anything after what she's done!

(Beat.)

THE HUSBAND, *attempting to bring JASON's anger levels down*: I hear ya. *(Beat.)* But you seemed worried last week when her therapist called you.

JASON, *hiding his concern*: Yeah. He said that she kept asking to see me "one last time."

THE HUSBAND, *encouragingly*: What do you think she meant by that?

JASON *shrugs. (Beat.)*

JASON: I didn't ask about it. She just asked "what brought me here" like she even forgot

she said that. *(Beat.)* But she seemed...
different this time.

(Beat.) THE HUSBAND *continues eating while*
JASON *stares at his napkin.*

JASON: You know, I wasn't expecting this
psychiatric hospital to look like it's stuck
in the 70's or something.

THE HUSBAND: How do you mean?

JASON, *increasingly heated*: I mean, really?
Force feeding meds to someone who is
unstable but not delusional? I mean, I don't
think she believes in the lies she tells
people, and her therapist should know that
if he's paying attention to her. *(Beat.)*
She doesn't deserve royal treatment, but she

at least deserves to be treated like a human. (*Beat.*) I mean... you know what I mean.

THE HUSBAND, *cautiously*: You mean you don't think she deserves respect from you, but she deserves respect from other people.

JASON, *slightly smiling*: Yeah. (*Beat.*)

JASON, *somberly*: You know, they're like two steps away from diagnosing her with hysteria.

THE HUSBAND *coughs to stifle a laughter.*

THE HUSBAND: I don't think that's a thing they diagnose women with anymore.

JASON: Honestly, you'd be surprised. I did a little digging and... they don't call it *hysteria* anymore, but there are a bunch of

disorders that women are disproportionately diagnosed with compared to men...

THE HUSBAND, *mouth full*: -hm? R-h-y?

JASON: Yeah, really. And they just so happen to share a lot of traits with what was once called hysteria.

THE HUSBAND *nods*.

THE HUSBAND: Do you know what your mother was diagnosed with?

JASON: Of course not, they're not allowed to tell me that.

(Beat.)

JASON: But I'm so used to her lying all the time, I don't know if I would believe her even if she were telling the truth.

(Beat.)

JASON: I want to think her therapist is trying his best to help her, but I'm not sure if she wants to change.

(Beat.)

JASON: I mean sure, the whole institution seems really outdated, but they want to help her, right?

THE HUSBAND: You did a lot of research before suggesting it. Knowing you, you wouldn't have suggested a hospital you didn't feel 100% about.

JASON *nods.*

THE HUSBAND: You might want to be careful with the tone you take with her though. I know how you can get when you're around her, and I don't think being condescending with her is going to help her.

JASON: Yeah, I know. I just get angry when I see her. Seeing her face reminds me of all the times she told me she'd try to be a better person and then turned around and mocked me. I see her and immediately wonder why I'm even trying to help the person who caused me so much pain. You know?

THE HUSBAND *nods*.

THE HUSBAND: I know, but I think helping her could be healing for you.

JASON: Healing? I don't think so. There's nothing I can do anymore. At this point,

it's on her to acknowledge the fucked up
shit she's done.

THE HUSBAND: Ideally, yes, she would apologize
on her own without needing someone to probe
her, but if you show her some more compassion
next time you see her, maybe seeing some
humanity reflected back at her will encourage
her to open up to you.

JASON *grunts. (Beat.)*

JASON: Maybe.

THE HUSBAND: It's worth a shot, no?

JASON: Yeah. Gotta have sympathy for the
devil... or whatever The Rolling Stones
said.

JASON *grins and* THE HUSBAND *rolls his eyes and
chuckles.*

Lights out.

Scene 4

PATIENT X *is pacing in her room, which is illuminated by cold, bright lights on the sidelines of Stage Left.*

The room's only furniture is a single bed on one side of the room.

PATIENT X, *muttering to herself:* I'm not crazy. I don't deserve to be here.

PATIENT X *sits on the edge of her bed.*

PATIENT X: Honestly, if I stay here any longer, I risk losing it completely.

PATIENT X *laughs weakly.*

PATIENT X: I'm already starting to talk to myself; that's a bad fucking sign.

(Beat.)

PATIENT X *stares at the wall as though deep in thought.*

PATIENT X: I know I lie a lot, but I don't believe in the lies I tell everyone... I may look like I'm mostly lying to myself, and maybe I am, but I'm not gullible enough to believe in those lies.

(Beat.)

PATIENT X *looks down at her hands.*

PATIENT X: Lying is just my way of dealing with the shit cards I've been dealt since birth. I know I can't blame all of my fucked up life choices on my addict parents and dead brother, but I wish I could. I wish I could sincerely find a reason for my cruelty, but I know I won't find what I'm looking for

here. These sterile walls are mirrors of my own emptiness. Am I really cruel or am I just honest? Are my lies rooted in honesty? I want to tell the truth, I want to believe in the lies I tell people to make myself seem like the best mother in the world because that's all I wanted to be. A better parent than my own parents. The truth is bad parenting is generational, and I'm a product of generations of bad parenting. I hope my son realizes this before deciding to have kids of his own. Or adopting or... whatever. I'm not crazy. I never was crazy. My life was crazy and my mind is trying to make sense of it all. But I don't belong in this asylum. I belong with my family. Don't I deserve to be with my family?

PATIENT X *stands up.*

PATIENT X: How can I make amends with someone who sees me as the devil? I never meant to pull him into my downward spirals, but the words always come out wrong whenever I try to explain myself. I wish I could tell him how I feel, but I'm not good with words. The words I say aren't always the words I mean. I really do regret what happened the first time he visited me.

Five months earlier.

The stage is illuminated with a slightly softer white light.

JASON is seated at a table for two in the Visiting Area.

A worker brings in PATIENT X and promptly exits.

X, *sitting down in a poised manner*: Finally, a visitor!

JASON *glares at X briefly before responding*.

JASON: You've been here one week, calm down.

X: Has it really just been a week? I feel like I've been here for months, I hate this place! *(Beat.)* You're all grown up now.

JASON: No shit.

(Beat.)

X: You know, I don't deserve to be in an insane asylum.

JASON: I'm sure you're getting the treatment you deserve.

X: That's not true! You aren't hearing me out!

JASON: I wrote you a letter. The day after I visited you last week. Right before I brought you here. Can I read it to you first?

X: Okay. But when you're done, we're going to talk about getting me out of here.

JASON pulls out a letter from his tote bag.

X: Haven't I told you that purse makes you look gay? How are you gay anyway / if you're married to a-

JASON, raising his voice to cut her off: It's a tote bag, not a purse, but yeah, that's the point. And please don't. Anyway, please just let me read this.

X makes a zipper motion in front of her lips.

JASON notices she kinda looks like Harley Quinn in this moment.

JASON: I initially didn't intend on ever letting you read this. It was just like a coping mechanism or an anger release thing, I guess. But I think I now want you to know how I felt when you failed to give me closure...

X opens her mouth to say something.

JASON: You said you'd let me finish.

X frowns but stays silent.

JASON, *reading*: Dear Satan (I'm joking),
I wish you knew how much pain you've caused me throughout my life,
even in the years that have passed since I've cut you off.

I wish you knew I blame you for everything wrong with me,

like my faults can be placed on a slashed umbilical cord

or on 50% of my genetic material.

I wish you knew what guilt feels like.

You never did feel anything but denial and
misdirected frustration.

Do I get my anger issues from you?

I know I sometimes get defensive, but never to
the extent you do.

You live in your own little world where you
are queen

and everyone else is either your servant or
the scum of the Earth.

If you died tomorrow,

the funeral I wouldn't attend would be empty
with the ghost of your family.

But aren't you already dead if no one cares to
utter your name?

I sometimes wonder if I've misjudged you,

but every conversation between us ends with me
remembering

why I've cut all ties with you.

I just wish I didn't have phantom limb syndrome.

JASON *folds the paper back into his tote bag and looks anywhere but in X's direction.*

X, *quietly*: Will you help me get out of here? This place is horrible. You're my son, you need to help me.

Present Day

PATIENT X *is back in her room on the sidelines of Stage Left.*

PATIENT X: I'm not gonna think about this anymore. Thinking leads to regretting, and I have enough regrets already. And anyway, that

was five months ago, and tomorrow is a new day, so let's hope Jason has a change of heart and gets me out of here.

Scene 5

A month later.

The stage is bare besides a coffin on the edge of Stage Right. JASON, dressed in black, is holding a single red rose with both hands and is almost looking through the coffin from the sidelines of Stage Right.

JASON: I'm not sure why I brought this. The dead don't need flowers.

(Beat.)

JASON appears to be collecting his thoughts.

JASON: You know, I used to actively hate you. I used to wish death and torment upon you. I never believed in hell, but I used to wish I did so I would know where you would end up once you died. I really wanted you to suffer for what you put me through.

(Beat.)

JASON: I used to think your death would bring me peace, but that was a naive, almost romanticized version of death. Actual death is painfully devoid of vindication. *(Beat.)* I hated fighting with you. It's all we ever did, but I always hoped you'd come around before it was too late. Now, I'll never get the closure I desperately wanted- *needed* from you.

(Beat.)

JASON: I just wish I could enter a warm café and have the conversation I always wanted to have with you.

The lights on the stage gradually turn on to show the scene he is describing. The actors on the stage are silent and the figure representing JASON is always facing away from the audience and is wearing a pulled up hoodie.

JASON: I walk into Tim Hortons and you're already sitting there, sipping your extra hot black coffee. You would like it better if there were sugar in it, but you always insisted on drinking it black. You ask me what I wanted to talk about and there isn't a hint of condescension in your voice. I start by apologizing for cutting you off. For never visiting. For never giving you the benefit of the doubt.

JASON: I then confront you about everything I've tried to in the past, but I know now, you will finally listen. I remind you how you were never there for me. How you never accepted me for being gay, and that I am happily married now, and it's your own damn fault you weren't invited to the wedding. I tell you, I always pretended that I never cared about you, but the truth is, I never forgave you. That anger has been brewing inside me my entire life and is threatening to boil over. I tell you that you should have sought help on your own, and I'm sorry it had to come to this. To me bringing you to the psych ward and telling you I would only agree to make amends with you if you stayed here for a while because you were being manic and threatening everyone around you.

JASON: I tell you I've always wanted to ask you why. Why you couldn't- *wouldn't* accept me.

JASON: And there it is. The look on your face that I've always searched for: a look of recognition. You finally snap out of your delusional fantasy and wake up to reality. You stand up to face me and reach for my hand as though to shake it, but you change your mind at the last second and hug me instead. We stay there for a while and I'm not sure what happens after. We become a normal family? I eventually introduce you to my husband? We spend Christmas together? You become the grandmother to my eventual adopted children? What is normal? I've never had normal.

*The lights on the stage gradually turn off
as the two figures hug, leaving only
a spotlight on JASON for his last seven
sentences.*

Lights off.

Curtain.



THE DEADLINE

JEANNE POTVIN

ILLUSTRATION: VISUALLY / CASSANDRA SINCE

THE DEADLINE

A Play in One Act

By

Jeanne Potvin

Cast of Characters

Death

Mr. Thistlewood

Scene

MR. THISTLEWOOD'S apartment in the city

Time

1950

SETTING:

A living room. A lit-up fireplace upstage. Near it, two armchairs facing each other CS, separated by a small wooden table. A cooling tea kettle and two empty cups, neatly placed on top. A coat hanger by the door, stage left. Two lamps. A telephone, somewhere.

AT RISE:

MR. THISTLEWOOD is sitting in one of the chairs. He is asleep. A short power outage shuts down the lights with an electric buzz. The lights come back on quickly, and the radio starts to play on its own. Old jazz music fills the room, waking up MR. THISTLEWOOD. He gasps and takes a moment to catch his breath. He rubs his face with his hands. He looks at the radio, puzzled, and stands up to go turn it off. Three knocks at the door. The light from the lamp flickers in rhythm with each knock, MR. THISTLEWOOD hesitates, then walks slowly

to the door—three more
knocks.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Yes. Yes.

(He opens the
door. There
stands DEATH, a
briefcase in one
hand and a
letter in the
other.

DEATH

(smiling)

Mr. Thistlewood?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Himself.

DEATH

Hi! I got your letter. I'm... I'm not too late,
am I? Well— (she chuckles) well, technically
I'm early, but—

MR. THISTLEWOOD

My letter?

DEATH

Yes. Um... I hope you'll forgive my delay. I had
some business in the neighborhood. There was a
car accident on the corner of Saint-Charles
and Clairmont Street. I had to go take care of

it. You know how it is. The work just doesn't stop.

(DEATH hands him the letter. He looks at it, then at DEATH. A look of shock on his face. He takes a step backward. DEATH's smile falters.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Oh— Hello. You're here. Excuse me, I wasn't sure you'd be coming anymore. I'm honored you've accepted my invitation.

DEATH

It's my pleasure! I was surprised to receive it.

(He offers a handshake.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Johan Thistlewood.

(DEATH takes his hand.)

DEATH

I am Death.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Yes. It's good to put a face to the name.

DEATH

Can I come in?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Yes! Sorry, of course. It must be cold outside at this time of night.

(He hands the letter back to her. She folds it neatly in her pocket. He holds the door open for her as she enters and waits for her to step inside before discreetly locking it behind him. DEATH notices this but doesn't point it out.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

May I take your coat?

DEATH

Certainly. Thank you.

(He gently,
carefully, takes the
coat from her
shoulders before
hanging it on the
coat hanger.)

DEATH

You have a very nice home, Mr. Thistlewood.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Thank you. I hope you didn't have too much trouble with the... You said a car accident, eh?

DEATH

Oh yes, lots of damaged property, lots of paperwork to fill out. It was a whole ordeal. But don't worry, I took care of it. Everything should be in order.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Good, good. Please, make yourself at home. Would you like some tea? I made us a kettle a little while ago.

DEATH

Tea would be lovely.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

You can sit here if you want.

DEATH

Thank you.

(She sits down. He picks up the kettle and pours red tea into both cups. They smile timidly at each other.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

There we are.

(MR. THISTLEWOOD and DEATH both take their respective cups. MR. THISTLEWOOD raises his to his lips. He burns himself and jumps slightly in his chair.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Still hot.

(He glances at DEATH and notices that she is staring motionless at her cup. He hesitates.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Do you not drink tea?

DEATH

No, I do.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Then maybe it's not to your taste? This is rosehip. Not everybody enjoys it. I can get you a cup of coffee if you'd prefer.

DEATH

No, no, that's not it! It's just that— When people want to meet me, it's often for nefarious reasons. "Please make me immortal", "Please kill my wife." You know? A lot of people try to kill me on sight. Unsuccessfully, of course, but still, very unpleasant, so I rarely come out for friendly visits anymore. But no one ever just invited me for a cup of tea.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Oh. It's not poisoned, if that's what you're worried about.

DEATH

If you say so, I'll take your word for it.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

I can assure you: 'Nothing but good things in this tea. (He leans forward, as if sharing a secret.) It's very rich in vitamin C.

DEATH

Alright.

(She tastes the tea with a hint of anticipation. Her eyes widen at the taste.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Good? (DEATH nods as she drinks the tea.) I took a special liking to rosehip tea recently. They say that Vikings used to drink it to fortify their bodies before raids during the Dark Ages. Sounds a bit ridiculous if you ask me, but it's certainly good for you in any case.

DEATH

Thank you. It's very nice.

(DEATH drinks the whole cup in one go, seemingly satisfied.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

I hope you don't mind me saying this, but I— I expected someone... older?

DEATH

Really? How come?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

'Suppose I don't know.

DEATH

Oh, but I am old, yes. Older than you.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Ah?

DEATH

Oh, am I making you uncomfortable? I can change form if you'd like. I just thought that this would be appropriate for tea.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

No, no, no... No.

DEATH

Are you sure?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

No need at all. Don't bother yourself on my account. You are my guest; you don't have to do anything to make me comfortable.

DEATH

That's very thoughtful of you.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Of course.

(slight beat)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

So, tell me. How did you get my message?

DEATH

Your letter?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Yes. Was it the pagan ritual?

DEATH

No, I picked it up in the cemetery mailbox. It was addressed to me, so...

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Huh. I didn't think that one would work. I tried so many ways to get in contact with you, you know.

DEATH

You did a pagan ritual?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

I tried. Maybe it was a silly idea. The pig blood was difficult to wash off my floors. Oh, but don't worry, I bought the blood at the butcher's. I couldn't bring myself to buy a pig to kill.

DEATH

Really?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

I also snuck into a hospital and tried to find a dying patient who would deliver the message for me. They must have thought I was crazy. A man they've never seen before, begging them to speak to Death on his behalf. They called the nurses, and I was thrown out.

DEATH

I admire your tenacity.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Hah, well, I tried so many different things. I was hoping that at least one of them would work.

DEATH

I actually received your message more than once. I was a little confused, though. I came across the second one while doing a delivery in a crematorium.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Oh right. I'm not proud of that one. I broke in and slipped a letter into the box of a soon-to-be cremated corpse. You know, so that

the letter would burn with the body and somehow get to you? I don't really know what I was thinking. I was grasping at straws at that point.

DEATH

Well, I got it. Funny trick, isn't it? I didn't even know you could reach me that way. Lucky you!

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Lucky me!

(they laugh)

DEATH

Thank you.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

For what?

DEATH

For inviting me to tea. No one has ever invited me to tea before.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

That's a shame.

DEATH

But...

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Yes?

DEATH

Excuse me if I'm wrong, but—

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Would you like some cake, as well? It goes well with the tea.

DEATH

No, thank you.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Do you like music? I can put on the radio.

DEATH

Mr. Thistlewood.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Yes?

DEATH

What can I do for you?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

What do you mean?

DEATH

You're fidgeting a bit.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Am I? I don't think I am.

DEATH

You didn't go through all that effort just for the sake of conversation, no?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Well I—

DEATH

There's no need to be embarrassed. Go on. You can ask me.

(He speaks in a
guilty tone.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

It makes me look sort of rude when you put it
that way.

DEATH

Oh no, I didn't mean that— I thought you
wanted— It just seemed as if you had something
to tell me. Don't you?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

I do.

DEATH

Ah.

(beat)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

I didn't want to ask straight away. I hope I
didn't offend you.

DEATH

You didn't, it's quite alright.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Oh good. That's good—

(The phone rings.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Excuse me for a moment.

DEATH

Of course.

(He goes to answer the phone. DEATH looks around the room to pass the time. She pours herself more tea. MR. THISTLEWOOD speaks softly into the receiver.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Yes?

(He stays quiet throughout most of the call. Letting out a few "good"s and "all right"s from time to time in a strange tone. He ends the call with a "thank you" and hangs up. He turns around, smiles apologetically, and walks back to his chair. He sits.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Sorry. It was important.

DEATH

No worries.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Where were we?

DEATH

Right. So. What is this all about, hm? What can I do for you, Mr. Thistlewood?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Straight to business?

(beat)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Well, in that case, would you mind if I asked you a question?

DEATH

You want to ask me a question?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Yes.

(beat)

DEATH

Go on.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Do I need to make an offering?

DEATH

A what?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

You know, an offering in exchange for answering my question?

DEATH

What would I do with an offering?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

But I thought there were rules to follow when dealing with— with people like you.

DEATH

You don't have to, but if it makes you feel better, I'll consider this tea as your "offering". Though I can't guarantee you an answer.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

It's fair enough, I suppose.

DEATH

Go ahead.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

These last few months, my health has been... in decline.

DEATH

I see.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

It's my heart. (He taps his chest.) Cardiac sarcoma. Every morning, I wake up feeling a little worse than before. It's like something is tightening in my chest. I'm not even 60 years old, and I'm already struggling to leave my house. And— and I was wondering if—

DEATH

Sorry. Just have to stop you right there.

(beat)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Yes?

DEATH

If your question is whether or not I can make an exception, I can't. I can't just turn a blind eye. I'm sorry, I really am, but if your time comes, it's my job to come collect you—

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Oh, no, not at all. That's not what I wanted to ask you.

(beat)

DEATH

It's not?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

No, I was wondering if it was possible for you to tell me *when* our final meeting is scheduled. I've been told I have about 6 months left, but it doesn't feel like I'll last that much longer. I just— I'd like to know how much time I have left.

DEATH

You mean when you...

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Yes?

DEATH

That's it?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

That's it.

(Beat. DEATH lets out an awkward laugh.)

DEATH

I don't know if I should.

(MR. THISTLEWOOD deflates.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Ah. I understand. It's a lot to ask, isn't it?

(beat)

DEATH

Ah, why not?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Really?

DEATH

Well, it wouldn't hurt. And you've been so kind as to invite me to join you for tea.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

I'll be honest, I expected a "no."

DEATH

Well, I don't know, people always try everything to avoid me altogether, no one ever actually took the time to ask me that question before.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

I reckon they're scared of you.

(beat)

DEATH

They are?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Yes?

DEATH

Is it something I did?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Oh no— well— no. I'm sure you're perfectly lovely. I suppose it's just the idea of the end; being separated from their loved ones. People try to avoid that, in general.

DEATH

Oh.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Don't people usually struggle when you come to get them?

DEATH

Most of them are just confused about what's happening. A little woozy; the shock of being dead, perhaps. I only spend maybe less than a minute with each of them, and they're usually not much for conversation. I quite like people, so I often think it's a shame, really.

(beat)

DEATH

But I just... it happens to everyone. Since the dawn of time. I just thought everyone had gotten a little more used to the idea by now. No one told me.

(beat)

DEATH

But that doesn't matter. You wanted to know the time of your death.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Yes.

DEATH

Let me have a look at my schedule. If your date is due soon, it should be rather easy to find.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

That's very kind of you.

(She opens her
briefcase and pulls
out a small book.)

DEATH

There.

(She opens the book
and flips the
pages.)

DEATH

Alright. (She mumbles for a little while.)
"Johan Thistlewood", there we go. We are
scheduled to meet... in three days. At 3:58 PM,
in Pine Gardens.

(MR. THISTLEWOOD
jumps at the news.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

In three days?

DEATH

Yes.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

That soon?

DEATH

Are you alright?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Three days.

DEATH

Yes. That's all you have, I'm afraid.

(beat)

DEATH

Do you want me to leave?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

No. Please, don't. I just need a moment. (He chuckles sadly.) I had a hunch. That's why I contacted you, but— but I thought— A month? Maybe two?

DEATH

You knew you were going to die someday, didn't you?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

I know. I know.

DEATH

Oh— Do you have regrets? Is that it? How much do you think you can do in three days? You're on a tight schedule, but I'm sure you can—

MR. THISTLEWOOD

No, no, that's not it. I—

(beat)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

I suppose I lived a good life. All things considered.

(beat)

DEATH

Can I ask how it went? I'm... I'm always curious to know.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

I was a journalist. For many years. I traveled. I loved. I had good, honest friends. I buried my parents and my wife in a nice, sunny place. I was a good son, I think, and a good husband. I retired, a bit early, given my health, but comfortably. I suppose that's everything a man can aspire to. I had a— I had birds. In my later years: Mourning doves. I gave them away because I couldn't take care of them anymore.

(Beat. He smiles.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

I'm sorry. I'm rambling. But I— I was happy. I think. Or at least, satisfied.

(DEATH smiles back.)

DEATH

That sounds nice.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

It was.

(beat)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

(frowning)

Do I end up in limbo if I have unfinished business?

DEATH

(puzzled)

Limbo?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

The in-between. Like purgatory?

DEATH

There's no in-between. You make a beeline to the final stop.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Oh. Good to know.

DEATH

I just think it's unfortunate if you die with regrets. I hate to see people sad when I come around.

(beat)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Is it painful? Passing away?

DEATH

I've never had any complaints.

(MR. THISTLEWOOD
sighs with relief.)

DEATH

It'll go by in a second. I'm excellent at my job, you know. Best in the business.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Good to hear.

DEATH

Glad to have put your worries to rest. Now, was there anything else you—

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Wait a minute.

(beat)

DEATH

Yes?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Did you say Pine Gardens?

DEATH

Pardon?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

You said we were supposed to meet in three days. In Pine Gardens. The city park, Pine Gardens?

DEATH

Yes, I think. It— it was Pine Gardens. Why? Is there a problem?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

It is not my intention to question your competence, but do you think there is a possibility of a small oversight on your part? I wouldn't want you to go to the wrong address. I suspect that would be quite a lot of paperwork.

DEATH

Why would I go to the wrong address?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Can you look again?

(DEATH opens her
book once more.)

DEATH

No, see? Deadline: October 22nd, 3:58 PM, Pine Gardens, Levi Street. There's no mistake. If it's written in my schedule, that's where you're going to be.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

But it's just— then, I don't understand.

DEATH

Me neither, frankly. Is there something I can help with?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

I don't want to bother you with this.

DEATH

Not at all. If there's a problem, I must be the first to know. It's a part of my job to make sure that things run smoothly for you.

(beat)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Well, it's— it's just that I have no plan or reason at all to be in Pine Gardens, much less die there. I haven't gone for at least twenty years, and I had planned to keep it that way. I even have enough reason never to be in the Gardens at all. You see, it— it doesn't make sense that you would find me there at all.

DEATH

Oh, but there's no need to worry about that. It's the same for everyone. When the time comes, you will receive a visitor, or you will suddenly be overcome by the irresistible need to take a walk. Eventually, something will

lead you to Pine Gardens, and I'll meet you there to collect you. For all we know, *something* or *someone* could already be on its way to you. It's not too unusual. I've picked up people in all kinds of places.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

You don't understand. I'm *sure* I won't be there.

DEATH

What makes you say that?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

It's a bit embarrassing.

(beat)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

I was engaged many years ago. Before my wife. My first fiancée broke off our engagement near the park's fountain.

DEATH

Oh.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Back then, she told me she fell in love with someone else, and that she didn't want to see me anymore. I moved on, but to this day, I never went back to the gardens. 'Brings up unpleasant feelings. I wouldn't be caught dead there.

DEATH

Well.

(she pauses)

DEATH

But— Hm. No, but you see, people *always* have a reason for dying in a certain place. Even if it's by accident. And I have nothing to do with it, by the way; I just pick people up where they're supposed to be, and I send them on their way.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Like a taxi driver?

DEATH

I consider myself more of a delivery person.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Regardless, I'm certain I'm not supposed to be in *that* place.

DEATH

Maybe you'll simply get lost that day? It happens, you know.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

I've lived in this city since I was a child. I could walk around with my eyes closed and know exactly where I was if I really wanted to.

DEATH

Could Pine Gardens perhaps be close to your old workplace, then? Or a loved one's house?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

It isn't. The Gardens are on the other side of town. Plus, I barely go outside anymore, so there is absolutely no chance that I find myself there by accident, you understand?

DEATH

And you hate the place.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Yes.

DEATH

So, no chance that you'd get the urge to go on your own volition, either?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

None.

DEATH

Huh. That *is* a little strange.

(DEATH sips her tea thoughtfully. Beat. She looks at him gravely.)

DEATH

Do you have any enemies?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

No. (worried) Do you think someone would drag me there against my will?

DEATH

I hope not, that would be terrible.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

I thought I would die of heart failure. (He frowns.) Please tell me I'm not going to be kidnapped and murdered.

DEATH

Do you think it's a possibility? Oh, I do love a good murder mystery.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Well, I don't know! I would rather avoid that, if possible.

DEATH

Right. Yes. Of course.

(beat)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Wait, do you not know?

DEATH

Say what?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Do you not know how I die?

DEATH

Oh. No.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

But— how come?

DEATH

I don't know where the packages come from. I just do the shipping.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Oh, that... that makes sense. I think?

DEATH

Who knows? Maybe you'll get kidnapped and *then* die of heart failure.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

I'm surprised. I thought you were in control of all of this.

DEATH

Not like you think I am.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Well, that makes things more difficult, then.

(beat)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Who does have that information, then?

DEATH

That would be my Boss, I suppose.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Your Boss?

DEATH

Yes. Oh! Have you received any letters lately? Maybe one of them contains an invitation or an appointment happening somewhere around the Gardens. That's usually how every detective story begins. With a letter.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

I— Wait, I have, actually. This morning. I forgot to open them. I put them in here.

(He reaches over for the small table and opens a tiny drawer, unnoticed before.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD
takes out a small

pile of letters and
hands a few over to
DEATH.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Here.

DEATH

Oh, are you sure?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Yes, yes, don't worry about it. (He reads.)
Bills, bills.

(They go through the
pile of letters.

DEATH hands him a
letter.)

DEATH

From the bank?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Probably not.

(MR. THISTLEWOOD
finds a letter and
rips it open. He
reads.)

DEATH

Did you find something?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

No. It's the hospital. A bit late.

DEATH

What do they say?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

They want me to come in for some more tests. A week from now. (chuckling) I'm afraid that'll be difficult, now. They never did have the best timing.

(MR. THISTLEWOOD
rips the letter in
two.)

Beat. He almost
whispers.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

It's a shame. I always wanted to die in my sleep. You know, peacefully. Surrounded by people I love. I might be all alone in these gardens, for all I know.

DEATH

I know it's not much consolation, but I'll be there.

(Beat. They continue
to open the letters.
DEATH finds a red
envelope.)

DEATH

"Thomas Marlowe." Is this of interest?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Thomas? Let me see.

(He takes the
letter.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

It's from one of my good friends!

DEATH

Open it!

(He opens the letter
and reads it,
muttering the words
to himself. As he
reads, his
expression changes
to a warm, sincere
smile.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

He'll be in town very soon! He lives on the other side of Mount Agnes, it's a few days away, so he must already be on the train! I think we might have our answer. Thomas always liked Pine Gardens. He might ask me to meet him there when he arrives. It's near the train station. You were right. (beat) It's been so long since I've seen him. It's a relief, at least I'll be in good company for my final hour. (chuckling) Good old Thomas. He still owes me 400\$—

(His expression
changes.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Thomas wouldn't kill me, would he? It's— it's just 400\$.

DEATH

No. He wouldn't.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

What makes you say?

(Beat. DEATH turns
away from him,
slightly.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

No.

DEATH

I already had the pleasure of meeting Mr.
Marlowe. Yesterday. Officially.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Oh, no.

DEATH

In a train wreck. Horrible accident. It's all
over the news. I assumed you knew.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

It's all right.

(beat)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

He was a good man, that one. How did he seem
to you? How was he?

DEATH

Well, he was, you know, *dead*, but all things
considered, he seemed to take it fairly well.
He kept muttering that he owed money to a
friend before I sent him off. Must have been
you.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Ah, that's just like him. If you happen to see him again, tell him not to worry about it, will you?

DEATH

You—

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Yes?

DEATH

In all honesty, I thought you would be mad at me.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Hm? Oh, no, no, not at all! It's not your fault, is it? You're just doing your job. "Don't shoot the messenger", and all that. I wouldn't want to wish for a slowdown in the labor market of the afterlife. 'Would be terrible for business, I imagine.

(DEATH sighs,
relieved.)

DEATH

Probably, yes. Let's avoid that.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

I hope he'll be alright.

DEATH

I'm sure he will be. Wherever he might be.

(beat)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

What do you mean by that?

DEATH

I just mean that, wherever he is, I'm sure he'll adapt just fine.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Do you not *know* that?

DEATH

I don't.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

But you're— you're *Death*. I thought— How can you not know these things?

DEATH

Oh, it's a funny story, really. When I got this job, I remember it being very dark. And then I just walked into a room, and there was the contract for the position on the table. The details of the people's aftermath were probably written in there somewhere, but it was a really long contract, so I sort of only read the first half about the requirements of the job and the general rules, you know, but then my eyes started to hurt, and I just skimmed through until the end.

(beat)

DEATH

I probably shouldn't have done that. I never saw that contract again.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

That's a bad habit.

DEATH

I know. But I really wanted this job. And as long as I meet the main requirements of the position, it's alright, though, isn't it?

(beat)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

In any case, if Thomas isn't the reason for my going to Pine Gardens, I still have no idea why I would go there.

DEATH

Right, right. Can you not think of anyone else who could even remotely dislike you? Or rather, who would just want to invite you there for a friendly chat?

(MR. THISTLEWOOD
shakes his head.
DEATH looks at her
schedule once again.
She frowns.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

You are sure you can trust what's written in your uh- schedule?

DEATH

I'm sure. I've made countless deliveries in the past, and I follow it to the letter. It's never been wrong before.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

So, you're not- you're not *in charge*, are you?

DEATH

I'm not. You seem disappointed.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Then, do you think— earlier, you said your “Boss” was at the head of all this operation, no?

DEATH

I'd say so, yes.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

(He points to the sky.)

Could you ask them? A question or two? If I have to die in Pine Gardens, I'd rather there be a good reason. Can you make an appointment?

(Beat. Lights flicker.)

DEATH

My— my Boss?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Do you think you could call them to make sure?

DEATH

I'd love to, but I can't.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

You can't?

DEATH

I've been out on the field for so long that I don't remember the last time I met with someone from the office. I'm not sure who I'm supposed to speak with to ask a policy question.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Then who do you call when you have an emergency?

DEATH

I never had a problem before, so I've never had to. I'm very good at my job, you know.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Is there no receptionist? Or something of the sort?

DEATH

I'm not sure.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Didn't they tell you *anything*?

DEATH

They did. The contract said, "Show up at the appropriate time, collect the package—" That's you. "Fill out the paperwork, then immediately move on to your next appointment." And, you know. "Keep the uniform clean." And I do just that. Piece of cake.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

But still, it must be difficult doing it all by yourself. I can't imagine how many people could die in a day.

DEATH

I suppose it's a lot of deliveries.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

They mustn't be very cheerful company, either. Dying comes with grief and sorrow. And such.

DEATH

Well, yes, people cry a lot, but you know, it's part of the job description. I knew the deal.

(beat)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

You ever thought about doing anything else?

DEATH

Not really, no.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Well, what did you do before this job?

DEATH

It's been so long I can't quite remember.

(beat)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

You're not alone out there, are you?

DEATH

No, of course not. Someone wrote the contract, you know? It didn't write itself. *Someone* hired me. It's only logical that there would be someone above me. So, I'm not... alone.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

And you think that's your Boss?

DEATH

Must be.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

And you're certain they never make mistakes? You never see them, correct? And you don't question any of these rules?

(Beat. DEATH seems taken aback. She is about to speak, but MR. THISTLEWOOD cuts her off.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

You know.

DEATH

Yes?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

We could always reschedule in a different place, eh? It would avoid the paperwork and the confusion with your superior if this is indeed a mistake, and if it happens to be the right place, it would prevent me from dying in an... unsavory environment. Everybody wins!

(beat)

DEATH

Mr. Thistlewood. You know very well I can't do that.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

But why not? We can only delay it a day later.

DEATH

I'm not going to do that.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

But think of—

DEATH

I have a schedule to uphold. And your appointment is set for *three days* from now.

It's not my place to change that. The problem is not the paperwork. I think I'd get fired, actually.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Right. Right. We don't want that.

DEATH

Haha, no, we don't.

(beat)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

(casually)

Then, what if I just don't show up?

(Beat. Lights
flicker once.)

DEATH

Excuse me?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

What if I don't show up at Pine Gardens?

DEATH

What?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

What if, let's say, I do indeed begin walking to the Gardens and that, at the last second, I decide to go left instead of right? What would happen?

DEATH

That's not possible in the first place.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Right. Silly of me to ask.

(awkward beat)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

But humor me for a moment. What if I just decided to sleep in that day? Would I *not* die? Or would I just die at home? Hypothetically.

DEATH

Even hypothetically, it's not like you could—

(beat)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Ah ha! There are no rules for this kind of situation, are there? Why is that?

DEATH

No, of course, there are. It's just that it never happened before. Since the beginning of time, everything and everyone has been perfectly on time. Perfectly recorded.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

But still, what if I just choose not to come? Has no one ever missed a meeting with you?

DEATH

You can't. As I said, something will take you there.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Well, now I'll be on the lookout for it.

(lights flicker
again)

DEATH

Wait, no, no. You can't just not show up. You can't not show up, It-it's your deadline! Everybody gets one and- Please, I don't want to get in trouble.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

If I don't come to Pine Gardens, the fault is entirely on me, see? I'm sure you won't face any repercussions. And it's not as if you would *never* come to pick me up. A day or two late wouldn't be so bad, would it?

DEATH

Mr. Thistlewood!

(Lights flicker more intensely. The fire roars in the background.)

DEATH

I- If you don't come, I'll be forced to hunt you down and drag you there myself.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

There is no need for threats. I'm just giving us options.

DEATH

I'm not supposed to allow "options"!

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Very good. If you won't reschedule, I'll simply have to find a high enough bridge first thing in the morning tomorrow and jump off it.

(slight beat)

DEATH

You wouldn't.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

I'm not dying in these blasted Gardens.

DEATH

You wouldn't.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

I very well would. Or I could get a prescription for a large dose of morphine. I heard it's a pleasant way to go.

DEATH

Please stop!

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Or a gun. It's quick. I could get one tonight if I tried hard enough.

(DEATH rises from her seat in a panic.

The telephone rings. Both look at the phone, then at each other.

Beat. DEATH sits back down, and MR. THISTLEWOOD gets up to answer the phone. He picks up the receiver.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Yes?

(He glances at DEATH, who is nervously drinking her tea. He goes back to the phone call. He speaks gravely.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Lenny. Calm down.

(The rest of the call is shorter than the last. MR. THISTLEWOOD mutters a few "yes"s before hanging up.

He slowly walks back to the chair. He sits back down.

Beat.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

I went too far.

(DEATH suddenly hiccups. She seems to be on the verge of crying. MR. THISTLEWOOD takes out a handkerchief from his pocket.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

The— There. Please stop crying.

DEATH

I'm not crying!

(She takes the handkerchief and dabs at the corner of her eyes. She stands up and puts her schedule back in her briefcase.)

DEATH

I should go.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Please don't. I'm sorry. I apologize. I acted like a boar.

DEATH

I really shouldn't—

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Please stay. I was insensitive. I don't want us to part on sour terms. Surely you can stay for one more cup of tea. I enjoy your company.

(beat)

DEATH

Alright.

(She sits and puts the briefcase back down)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

I don't even really want to die later. It's just that the idea of dying in this place disgusts me. I hope you understand.

DEATH

We still don't know why, yet. Maybe it'll be for a good reason?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Maybe it'll be for a terrible reason.

(Beat.

DEATH clears her
throat.)

DEATH

Was everything all right? (*She hints at the phone.*) It sounded important.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Oh yes! Nothing too serious. My friend Lenny is having a rough time at work and whatnot.

DEATH

I thought you were retired.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Hm? Now, yes, but I keep in contact with my colleagues in the field. There's nothing wrong with helping out every once in a while.

DEATH

I suppose not.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

What about you, eh?

DEATH

What about me?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

After you're done with all your work, or if you ever find someone to replace you, have you ever thought about settling down? You can't keep doing this forever. Do you have a retirement plan?

DEATH

Oh, I don't think I can settle down.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Why not?

DEATH

You know, all this "Circle of Life" business. 'Got to keep the wheel turning. And the Boss would probably have my head on a pike if I ever chose to retire.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Really?

DEATH

Well, not literally! Of course! Just, I assume that— you know— they need me to do the job and— anyway, I don't think I can settle down in the first place. Don't think it's in my nature. If I stop moving or miss a deadline, there would be terrible consequences, apparently.

(beat)

DEATH

Or so I heard.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

What kind of consequences?

DEATH

Well, the kind that are probably very— um.
Definitive.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

But you're not sure?

DEATH

No, and thank God for that. I wouldn't want to
find out!

(She laughs awkwardly.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

And when uh— when you signed your contract, it
didn't specify that?

DEATH

No, not explicitly.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Explicitly?

DEATH

I remember it said, "Failure to comply with
these rules will result in immediate
termination and terrible consequences." First
line of the document. I mean, I would expect
it, anyway. Probably a bad idea to meddle with
the recipe of *Life*.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Consequences for you, or for...?

DEATH

It didn't say.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Aren't you a bit nervous about all that?
That's a lot on your shoulders.

DEATH

A little. But I've fulfilled every duty that was expected of me, and I've never made any mistakes, so as long as I keep doing my job, I have nothing to worry about! I just need to, you know, to keep doing that until, yes, I suppose— the end of time.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

When do you get a vacation?

DEATH

I guess I don't.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Doesn't seem very fair to you, if you ask me.

DEATH

(She smiles.)

Don't start, Mr. Thistlewood. You won't get me to slack off so easily. I'm glad I was trusted with such an important job.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Right, so if someone doesn't show up—

DEATH

They will show up.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Right.

(DEATH speaks a little faster than she should. She begins to sip her tea again.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

You're worried.

DEATH

I'm not worried. Why should I be worried?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

It's all right. You can tell me about it if you want. You know I would never want to cause you trouble. Never.

DEATH

I'm quite all right, thank you.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Good.

(Silence. A hesitant silence.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

But suppose—

DEATH

No.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Just as a hypothetical. For fun.

DEATH

I'd rather not.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Suppose it's *just* you. What if there were no Boss? What if you were the one making the decisions all along? Wouldn't that be grand?

DEATH

I don't believe that's the case.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

You say you don't believe. That means you can't be certain?

DEATH

Well, I'm not putting my job on the line to find out!

MR. THISTLEWOOD

I'm sorry. I don't mean to upset you. I'm just wondering—

DEATH

I'm not upset. I'm— I'm operating a system that worked out for me and everyone else since the very beginning. If I start taking liberties with my responsibilities, I might disturb the natural order of things. Are you not *scared* of that at all?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Not necessarily taking liberties, but let's say... loopholes. Have you ever found any? You read an old contract *once*, a long time ago. You haven't heard any news from anyone or anything since?

DEATH

No.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

How do we know these rules still stand?

DEATH

I'm sure I would have been made aware if the terms and conditions had been updated...

MR. THISTLEWOOD

What's the worst that could happen if you tried something new?

DEATH

I don't know.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

What's the best that could happen?

DEATH

I don't know, alright?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

The nature of Life is *change*, isn't it?

(She picks up her cup and quickly starts sipping her tea again.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

I reckon you could be God, if you wanted.

(DEATH chokes on her tea, a little.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Oh, sorry, are you alright?

(DEATH coughs.)

DEATH

I don't want to be God.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

That's fine. I just like to think—

DEATH

I'm not going to change your deadline, and I'd like to stop talking about this, now, please.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

My apologies. I'll stop.

DEATH

Thank you.

(beat)

DEATH

I'm— Er— I don't think I should have told you. About Pine Gardens.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

I know I've upset you, but you can trust me, you know.

DEATH

That's not what I mean.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

What do you mean, then?

DEATH

I—

MR. THISTLEWOOD

You're starting to realize it, aren't you?

DEATH

(meekly)

What?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

You've never told anyone about the time of their death before. So, nothing could ever happen. Before now.

(beat)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

I do have a choice, don't I?

DEATH

No! You don't! (She begins to look frantically around her, as if afraid that someone might hear them.) Why are you— you *just* told me you didn't care about dying later!

MR. THISTLEWOOD

You're scared.

DEATH

I have no reason to be scared.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

But you're lying to me!

DEATH

No one has the choice, Mr. Thistlewood!

MR. THISTLEWOOD

It's too late, you told me.

(He looks at the
briefcase, then at
DEATH.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

It's burned into my mind. Even if I try, I can't just forget about it, now.

DEATH

Can't you just go anyway?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

I don't think so.

DEATH

I don't want to get fired.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Don't worry, you're still "Death"; you didn't make a mistake. Your contract said, "Failure to comply with these rules will result in immediate termination and terrible consequences", right? You haven't been terminated.

DEATH

We don't know what "terminated" means. I might have already been fired 20 minutes ago, for all we know.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

No terrible consequences, then. If your Boss does indeed exist, they evidently decided your actions weren't a breach of contract. (He looks around the room.) We both seem to be quite fine. Fire is not raining from the sky. Plague hasn't taken the city. Do you feel anything different? I don't.

(beat)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

And that means you haven't broken a rule.

DEATH

Maybe it's delayed.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

And it means I have the choice.

(beat)

DEATH

(trying to appear
threatening)

Careful.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Or what? If *you're* so convinced that I *have* to die in Pine Gardens, then you can't take my life tonight, can't you? You need to respect your precious schedule. You backed yourself into a corner, I'm afraid.

(He looks at the
briefcase again.
More intensely this
time.)

DEATH

Wait.

(Both reach for the
briefcase at the
same time. DEATH
snatches it away,
first, but MR.
THISTLEWOOD grabs
her wrist.)

DEATH

Let go of me!

MR. THISTLEWOOD

I'm sorry, I need to see your schedule.

DEATH

Stop it.

(He squeezes her
wrist tighter.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Please.

(The lamp lights
flicker. MR.
THISTLEWOOD rips the
briefcase from
DEATH's grasp and
opens it in a hurry.
He takes the
schedule out, but as
he touches it, he
suddenly seems to be
electrocuted by an
invisible force. His
grip weakens, and he
seems to see things
all around him.)

DEATH

Stop. It.

(MR. THISTLEWOOD
screams as he lets
go of the schedule

book and backs away,
fumbling, hiding his
eyes with his hands.

He stumbles and
falls into his
chair, going into a
state of shock.

DEATH snaps her
fingers, and the
fire settles. She
dusts off her
clothes, irritated.)

DEATH

Really, is there a need to be so *rude*? Why
does it always end up the same—

(She stops when she
sees MR. THISTLEWOOD
struggling to
breathe. DEATH sighs
and walks over to
him. She helps him
sit up and taps him
lightly on the back
as he coughs.)

DEATH

Breathe. Come on, now.

(He catches his
breath. Long beat.)

DEATH

This isn't about you, is it?

(The phone rings once.

Beat.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

What do you mean?

(It rings again.)

DEATH

You have a daughter, right?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

I don't know what—

DEATH

I think her name was Daisy?

(ring)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

How do you know that?

(ring)

DEATH

I did meet your wife, you know. When I came to collect her. She wouldn't stop talking about Daisy. So, I remembered her name.

(It rings again.)

DEATH

You're not answering the phone?

(It rings again. It stops.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Please don't take my child.

DEATH

You've been trying to keep me distracted all evening. I assume it must have something to do with her. So, is she sick? Is that what this is all about? You know I can't—

MR. THISTLEWOOD

I want to make a deal.

(DEATH sighs.)

DEATH

We are not making a deal.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Daisy is a lovely child.

DEATH

I'm sure she is.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

She shouldn't die. She doesn't deserve it.

DEATH

Everybody dies eventually.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

It's not fair.

DEATH

If there's one fair thing in this world, it's this.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

If you give her more time, I'll come quietly. I won't give you trouble.

(beat)

DEATH

Why don't you tell me what's wrong, exactly?

(He doesn't answer.
She walks back to
the other chair and
sits down.)

DEATH

You might as well, since your goal is to keep
me busy, anyway.

(Beat. He breathes
heavily.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

She's expecting. The doctors told her she
wouldn't survive the birth. There— there were
going to be complications with the...

(beat)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Anyway. I begged her to terminate the
pregnancy. She refused. I told her I wouldn't
let her kill herself as long as I lived. (He
coughs.) And then I said even harsher things
about... the baby. I hurt her. Deeply. She
started crying and said she never wanted to
see me again. I haven't spoken to her in
months, but Lenny, her husband, calls me
regularly. To check up on me and inform me
about the progress of the pregnancy. He tried
to talk her out of it too, but even *he*
couldn't convince her. He still stayed by her
side through it all. I don't think Daisy knows

that he talks to me. He forgave me for saying those things to her. He told me he understood. He— he's a good man.

(beat)

DEATH

I assume it was him, on the phone. It's happening right now, isn't it? The birth.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

As we speak. Which is why I hope you will forgive me for this.

(He locks eyes with DEATH and speaks with difficulty but with conviction.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

I cannot let you leave this room until the baby is born. You will not visit my family tonight. Even if I have to chain you up and lock you in here to make sure of it.

(long beat)

DEATH

Right.

(DEATH sips her tea calmly.)

DEATH

And after tonight? You'd let me go? Or did you not think that far ahead?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

I'm prepared to keep you here for as long as it takes.

DEATH

Me? With locks and chains? In your condition? That was your plan?

(She sighs.)

DEATH

And here I thought you had invited me for tea.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

I don't want this to be difficult.

DEATH

It really doesn't have to be.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

If you take her from me, I'll run. I'll spare no expense; I'll never stop moving. Mark my words. You will never find me.

DEATH

I am Death. I always find you. No matter where you go.

(He doesn't answer.

The phone rings
again.)

DEATH

I assume it's for you.

(ring)

DEATH

Well, go on.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Do not move from this chair.

(MR. THISTLEWOOD
grunts and clutches
his chest as he gets
up and walks to the
phone without
looking away from
DEATH. He answers.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Lenny? How is she? She— (beat) A— a boy? Is he
healthy? How is she?! She's alright? She's all
right. Right. (He looks at DEATH.) She— she
wants to talk to me? Are you sure? Hello?
Daisy? Daisy, are you all right, my darling?
How are you feeling? Are you—

(Long beat. He
listens to her.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

(tearfully)

Yes. Yes. I would love to meet him. Three
days? When you're out of the hospital? Where?
Ah—

(He turns to look at
DEATH. Beat. He
turns back to the
phone.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Sorry. Alright. Yes, I know where it is.

(He turns to DEATH
once more.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Yes. I'll be there, I'll see you then. (beat)
I love you.

(He stays on the
phone for a few
seconds before
hanging up. DEATH
sips from her cup.)

DEATH

Hm. There's always a reason.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

She wants me to meet her son.

DEATH

In Pine Gardens. I heard.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Good. (He sighs in relief.) Thank you for
cooperating.

DEATH

What?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

I'll go. I won't try anything.

(beat)

DEATH

I didn't spare her.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Thank you.

DEATH

If you think I gave in to whatever *demand* you have—

MR. THISTLEWOOD

I understand if you're not allowed to outright say it—

DEATH

She wasn't meant to die tonight!

(beat)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

What do you mean?

DEATH

She was meant to take you to the Gardens first. I'm not scheduled to meet with her anytime soon.

(Beat. DEATH
grimaces.)

DEATH

I probably shouldn't have told you that either.

(She mumbles to
herself, irritated,
before getting up.)

DEATH

Well. Since you won't be keeping me any longer, I'd better be on my way. My work isn't finished for the night.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Lenny told me the doctors said her surviving was a miracle. She's healthy enough to be discharged in two days.

DEATH

I don't do miracles. It's not my department.

MR. THISTLEWOOD

If you say so.

(Beat. She grabs her coat and puts it on.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Will I be able to see my daughter and my grandson before I die?

(beat)

DEATH

At what time do you meet?

MR. THISTLEWOOD

3:45 in the afternoon.

(DEATH sighs.)

DEATH

Your time is at 3:58. Make it quick.

(She heads for the door.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

I'll see you soon, then?

DEATH

Three days.

(She unlocks the
door and opens it.)

MR. THISTLEWOOD

Thank you.

(Beat. DEATH quickly
looks to the
ceiling, as if to
make sure no one is
watching.)

DEATH

Don't be late.

(She exits.)

The fire crackles
and pops before
going out entirely.)

(BLACKOUT.)

THE END

THE SYSTEM

BY KATIE COOKE



ILLUSTRATION: VISUALLYS AI TEAM
WINTER-SPRING 2023 WITH MIDJOURNEYE

THE SYSTEM

A Play in One Act

by

Katie Cooke

Cast of Characters

Seventy-Two: A person in their early twenties. They wear the colour yellow in the scenes where they appear.

Sixty: A person in their late fifties. They wear the colour red in the scenes they appear, a bit more on the casual side.

Nine: A person in their early thirties. They wear blue clothes, always business casual.

AI-3: Seventy-Two's assigned robot. Always dressed in greyscale. AI-3 is more human than robot; the only thing differentiating them from a normal human is a blinking light attached to their neck.

Scene

An office, a park, and Seventy-Two's
bedroom.

Time

A time in the future

ACT 1

Scene 1

SETTING: We are in an office setting.
Three rows
 of long tables, on each table,
multiple
 computers are set up. There is
a person
 sitting in front of each
computer,
 typing. All of these people
wear
 grey clothing, and their hair
is cut short. SEVENTY-TWO,
SIXTY and NINE are the only
characters dressed in colour.

AT RISE: SEVENTY-TWO sits in the middle
row,
 closest to the audience. NINE
sits in
 the third row, three from the
back. SIXTY sits in the first
row, one away from the front.
They type for a short time.
They are interrupted by a bell.
Everyone exits stage left when
the bell rings except for
SEVENTY-TWO and NINE. They sit
quietly in their chairs for a
beat.

SEVENTY-TWO

Why'd you ask to meet?

NINE

I'm intrigued, that's all.

SEVENTY-TWO

By what?

NINE

I saw you.

SEVENTY-TWO

When did you see me?

NINE

The other day, with Sixty.

SEVENTY-TWO

There are lots of Sixtys, be more specific.

NINE

Class One, Rank C, Sixty.

SEVENTY-TWO

Right. Yeah, we went to purchase essentials.

NINE

You did. I saw you.

SEVENTY-TWO

What did you see?

NINE

There was a storm that day, a lot of puddles.

SEVENTY-TWO

Yes.

NINE

Sixty dropped their jacket into one. It was stained.

SEVENTY-TWO

They had to buy a new one.

NINE

They smiled.

SEVENTY-TWO

What are you saying?

NINE

You didn't report them.

SEVENTY-TWO

You didn't either.

NINE

No.

SEVENTY-TWO

What do you want?

NINE

It's intriguing, that's all.

(NINE exits, SEVENTY-TWO remains seated.)

(Spotlight on SEVENTY-TWO, they appear anxious, running their hands through their hair, nervously tapping their foot. SEVENTY-TWO stands, begins pacing. The lights fade out over the scene.)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT 1

Scene 2

SETTING: A room, various pieces of furniture spread around. A bed, a vanity, a nightstand, a lamp. Everything in the room is in greyscale. The only colour in the room is the yellow clothing peeking out of the open closet.

AT RISE: AI-3 stands next to the bed, dormant. SEVENTY-TWO enters the room, and AI-3 comes alive, as though waking from a long nap. They watch SEVENTY-TWO pace the room, curious. SEVENTY-TWO flops onto their bed.

AI-3

Daily Emotion Report?

SEVENTY-TWO

Yeah. Initiate test.

(The light on AI-3's neck turns red.)

AI-3

Did anything happen today?

SEVENTY-TWO

Nothing besides the usual.

AI-3

Specify.

SEVENTY-TWO

(SEVENTY-TWO sighs heavily.)

I walked to work in the morning, I sat at my cubicle, I filed reports for the department, and there was nothing unusual.

AI-3

You met with Nine today.

SEVENTY-TWO

That's not a designated question.

AI-3

You didn't include it in your description of today.

SEVENTY-TWO

Was I meant to?

AI-3

You met with Nine.

SEVENTY-TWO

Yes.

AI-3

Anything of interest?

SEVENTY-TWO

It was... intriguing.

AI-3

Specify.

SEVENTY-TWO

They wanted to talk about work; they've never talked about work with me before.

AI-3

And you'd describe this as intriguing?

SEVENTY-TWO

I suppose.

AI-3

Very well, continue test?

SEVENTY-TWO

Yes.

AI-3

Did you express any emotion?

SEVENTY-TWO

No.

AI-3

Did you see anyone express emotion?

SEVENTY-TWO

No.

AI-3

Should someone betray the system, what would you do?

SEVENTY-TWO

I would report them to the Department for Consideration.

AI-3

Your thoughts on the system?

SEVENTY-TWO

We are better together, when we are one.

AI-3

Test concluded. Your results will be sent to the Department for consideration. You are free to return to your daily activities.

(SPOTLIGHT comes on over SEVENTY-TWO, who lies on the bed and rolls over to face the audience. The lights fade out.)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT 1

Scene 3

SETTING: A park bench midday. The bench sits in the middle of the stage, next to it a lamppost. Bright lighting from overhead and a sky backdrop gives the illusion of daytime.

AT RISE: SIXTY is seated on the park bench staring up and into the sky wearing a baggy red dress, SEVENTY-TWO enters wearing grey shoes and an oversized yellow rain jacket. SEVENTY-TWO takes a seat next to them on the bench.

SEVENTY-TWO
Nine saw.

SIXTY
What?

SEVENTY-TWO
Us, that day.

SIXTY
During the storm?

SEVENTY-TWO
You smiled.

SIXTY

You saw that?

SEVENTY-TWO

Nine saw it too.

SIXTY

You didn't report me?

SEVENTY-TWO

No.

SIXTY

Why?

SEVENTY-TWO

I don't know.

SIXTY

You've been lying in your report.

SEVENTY-TWO

I'm not lying.

SIXTY

You didn't report me.

SEVENTY-TWO

I could have been seeing things.

SIXTY

You know you weren't. Nine saw me too.

SEVENTY-TWO

Yeah.

SIXTY

Do you remember the Before?

SEVENTY-TWO

The Before?

SIXTY

Yeah. Before the grey, before we couldn't smile.

SEVENTY-TWO

No. I don't remember. My mom... Twelve, I think they might have mentioned it.

SIXTY

Twelve?

SEVENTY-TWO

They lived in the Before. They told me there were other colours too, that we could wear anything.

SIXTY

Yes. That's true.

SEVENTY-TWO

What was that like?

SIXTY

It was free.

SEVENTY-TWO

Would you go back, if you could? To the Before?

SIXTY

I think I would.

SEVENTY-TWO

Twelve, they wanted to go back to the
Before too.

SIXTY

Where are they now?

SEVENTY-TWO

Gone.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT 1

SCENE 4

SETTING: SEVENTY-TWO's bedroom, everything is in greyscale save for the yellow clothing strewn across the floor.

AT RISE: The lights focus on SEVENTY-TWO, who is sitting on the bed facing the audience. Slowly, they widen to reveal AI-3, who stands to their left.

AI-3

Would you like to complete the daily emotion report?

SEVENTY-TWO

Initiate test.

(The light on AI-3's neck turns red.)

AI-3

Did anything happen today?

SEVENTY-TWO

I went to the park with Sixty.

AI-3

What did you talk about?

(SEVENTY-TWO hesitates.)

SEVENTY-TWO

Can you... pause the test.

(AI-3's light turns white.)

We talked about my mother, Twelve.

AI-3

Who?

SEVENTY-TWO

You would know them as Class Two, Rank D, Twelve.

AI-3

I see.

SEVENTY-TWO

We talked about the Before.

AI-3

The Before? I am unfamiliar with this term.

SEVENTY-TWO

It's supposed to mean before this, before the Department, before the system.

AI-3

And why would you talk about this?

SEVENTY-TWO

I think because they miss it.

AI-3

They are feeling.

SEVENTY-TWO

No! No, they were remembering.

AI-3

I see.

SEVENTY-TWO

I don't really remember the Before, I was too young. Six I think? It doesn't really matter, my age. I'm not old enough to remember what it was like then. Or why it's worth remembering.

AI-3

I was not assigned to you at that time.

SEVENTY-TWO

No, you would have been assigned to mother.

AI-3

I do not remember.

SEVENTY-TWO

I didn't think you would. They've likely wiped your memory.

AI-3

Why would the Department do such a thing?

SEVENTY-TWO

Because they betrayed the system.

AI-3

Betrayed it?

SEVENTY-TWO

Yes, it doesn't really matter now. They're gone. Resume the test.

AI-3

Very well.

(AI-3's light blinks red.)

Did you express any emotion?

SEVENTY-TWO

No.

AI-3

Did you see anyone express emotion?

SEVENTY-TWO

No.

AI-3

Should someone betray the system, what would you do?

SEVENTY-TWO

I would report them to the Department for Consideration.

AI-3

Your thoughts on the system?

SEVENTY-TWO

We are better together, when we are one.

AI-3

Test concluded. Your results will be sent to the Department for consideration. You

are free to return to your daily
activities.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT 1

SCENE 5

SETTING: The office setting.

AT RISE: SEVENTY-TWO, SIXTY, and NINE are seated at their desks, typing. The bell rings. SEVENTY-TWO and NINE stand with the others, planning on exiting the stage. SIXTY remains seated.

SIXTY

Wait.

(The others hesitate but keep walking,
SEVENTY-TWO and NINE freeze.)

SIXTY

Seventy-Two, Nine, I require your assistance. Something is wrong with one of the files, and it needs to be sent out today.

(The others exit the stage.)

SEVENTY-TWO

Which file do you need help with?

SIXTY

I lied.

SEVENTY-TWO

What? Why?

SIXTY

I needed to speak with you both.

NINE

About what?

SIXTY

You know.

NINE

(To SEVENTY-TWO)

You told them? About our conversation?

SEVENTY-TWO

Of course I did.

NINE

You shouldn't have.

SEVENTY-TWO

What does it matter?

NINE

We should report each other to the department.

SIXTY

What's the point? You already saw me smile, and you did nothing.

NINE

I should have.

SIXTY

And yet you didn't.

SEVENTY-TWO

We're all at fault.

NINE

We're not.

SEVENTY-TWO

We're all lying on our screening.

NINE

I never lied.

SEVENTY-TWO

What would you call it then?

NINE

Self-preservation.

SIXTY

Seventy-Two told me you talked. You're interested.

NINE

What is it exactly that you think I'm interested in?

SIXTY

In showing emotion.

NINE

I'm not.

SIXTY

You must be, you said nothing.

NINE

Don't be so casual about breaking the law.

SIXTY

I didn't ask for this. I never wanted the system, or the reports. Shouldn't I be

allowed to have what I want? To feel what I want to feel?

NINE

None of us had a choice. We all would have preferred to stay in the Before.

SIXTY

Then you want to show emotion.

NINE

Fine, I'll concede. Your blatant display of emotion was interesting, but I should have reported you. It was a momentary lapse in judgement.

SIXTY

It wasn't a lapse in judgement. Surely you have thought about rebelling.

SEVENTY-TWO

Sixty...

NINE

What could the three of us do, what could we possibly change?

SIXTY

We could try.

NINE

You've seen what happens to the others who don't follow the Department's sanctions. They're taken away. We never hear from them again.

SEVENTY-TWO

Sixty, what you're saying, it's dangerous.

SIXTY

Everything is dangerous now.

NINE

Throw your life away then, but leave me out of it.

SIXTY

Fine. Seventy-Two?

SEVENTY-TWO

Nine is right.

SIXTY

You're both cowards.

NINE

No, we're logical.

SEVENTY-TWO

Is the way we live now really so horrible?

SIXTY

If you remembered the Before, the way your mother did, then you'd feel differently.

SEVENTY-TWO

That's not fair.

SIXTY

Go back to being sheep, I won't.

(SIXTY exits.)

NINE

(To SEVENTY-TWO)

You told Sixty about our conversation.

SEVENTY-TWO

I was confused.

NINE

What could you have possibly been confused about?

SEVENTY-TWO

You didn't report either of us; I don't know what I expected. I thought we could all break the rules together. I was wrong.

(A beat.)

I won't mention this to anyone else. I won't mention it again.

NINE

See that you don't.

(NINE exits, SEVENTY-TWO takes a seat in one of the desk chairs, head in their hands.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT 1

SCENE 6

SETTING: SEVENTY-TWO's bedroom.
Everything is in greyscale. The closet is closed.

AT RISE: AI-3 stands next to the bed. SEVENTY-TWO enters, throws their shoes off, throws their yellow jacket on the floor. They undress until they are only in grey undergarments. Frustrated, they pick up their things and stuff it in the closet. They look at AI-3.

SEVENTY-TWO

Hi Three.

AI-3

Welcome back Seventy-Two.

SEVENTY-TWO

Did you... have you received an update from the Department?

AI-3

An update? Pertaining to what?

SEVENTY-TWO

To me, I suppose.

AI-3

The Department would have no need to send an update unless one of the Systems laws had been broken.

SEVENTY-TWO

And none of the laws have been broken.

AI-3

(Hesitantly)

None of the laws have been broken. Unless you have done something...

SEVENTY-TWO

No, no, I was just wondering.

AI-3

Why were you wondering?

SEVENTY-TWO

Innocent curiosity.

AI-3

Of course.

(A beat.)

You know you can tell me anything.

SEVENTY-TWO

Three, will this... will this be included in the report?

AI-3

As we are not conducting the report at this moment, I am not required to include this conversation.

SEVENTY-TWO

Right, sorry.

AI-3

Are you hiding something?

SEVENTY-TWO

Why would I do that?

AI-3

Lately you seem off.

SEVENTY-TWO

Don't worry about it. Work has just been busy.

AI-3

I'm worried about you; you can tell me things.

SEVENTY-TWO

You're a robot Three. Let's just get to the report.

AI-3

All right- Commence Daily Emotion Report.

SEVENTY-TWO

Initiate test.

(AI-3's light blinks red.)

AI-3

Did anything happen today?

SEVENTY-TWO

I spoke with Nine and Sixty after work.

AI-3

About what?

SEVENTY-TWO

A report that needed to be filed.

AI-3

Were you able to file the report?

SEVENTY-TWO

Yes.

AI-3

Seventy-Two, are you certain that this conversation was about a report?

SEVENTY-TWO

Yes. I'm certain.

AI-3

Very well, continue test?

SEVENTY-TWO

Yes.

AI-3

Did you express any emotion?

SEVENTY-TWO

No.

AI-3

Did you see anyone express emotion?

SEVENTY-TWO

No.

AI-3

Should someone betray the system, what would you do?

SEVENTY-TWO

I would report them to the Department for Consideration.

AI-3

Your thoughts on the system?

SEVENTY-TWO

We are better together, when we are one.

AI-3

Test concluded. Your results will be sent to the Department for consideration. You are free to return to your daily activities.

(AI-3 resumes standing next to the bed. Spotlight over both SEVENTY-TWO and AI-3. The light fades until only SEVENTY-TWO is left in the light. They rest their head in their hands, conflicted.)

(END OF SCENE)

(Nine returns to their seat and begins typing again, SEVENTY-TWO glances at SIXTY a final time before returning to their work. Lights focus on SIXTY, emotions flit across their face, like they are testing them out after a long time.)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT 1

SCENE 8

SETTING: The park. Birds
 chirping, a sunny day.

AT RISE: SEVENTY-TWO is sitting
 on the park bench,
 staring up at the sky.
 NINE enters and sits on
 the park bench next to
 them. They don't
 acknowledge each other
 for a beat.

NINE

We have to do something.

SEVENTY-TWO

Do what, exactly?

NINE

Sixty is showing emotion.

SEVENTY-TWO

They said they were done following the Department's rules. They're doing what they want to.

NINE

How many others do you think have noticed by now?

SEVENTY-TWO

What?

NINE

The smiles, the frowns, I've seen them too. When will the others start to notice?

SEVENTY-TWO

They won't. Sixty's been careful.

NINE

They haven't. If we've noticed, who else has? What if someone is going home tonight to tell their AI about Sixty smiling?

SEVENTY-TWO

It doesn't concern us.

NINE

It will, when the Department investigates.

SEVENTY-TWO

We'll say we didn't see anything.

NINE

Don't you understand? They'll know what we've done.

SEVENTY-TWO

We haven't done anything.

NINE

That's the point. We haven't done anything.
Which means we're just as guilty as Sixty.

SEVENTY-TWO

Why does any of this matter?

NINE

I'm looking out for you.

SEVENTY-TWO

I didn't ask for that.

NINE

Fine. You can make your own choices, but
I'm not willing to die for Sixty's
mistakes.

(NINE exits. SEVENTY-TWO looks back
up at
the sky.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT 1

SCENE 9

SETTING: SEVENTY-TWO's bedroom,
in greyscale. Yellow
clothes strewn across
the floor.

AT RISE: AI-3 is picking up the
clothes on the floor and
folding them into neat
piles. SEVENTY-TWO
enters, and begins
rifling through their
cabinet for clothes,
throwing them on the
floor. AI-3 stops
folding laundry to watch
them.

SEVENTY-TWO
Could you... Three, commence the test.

AI-3
Daily Emotion Report?

SEVENTY-TWO
Initiate.

(AI-3's red light blinks on.)

AI-3
Did anything happen today?

SEVENTY-TWO
No, I completed...

(There is a long pause)

Three, am I a bad person?

AI-3

This answer does not fit the test parameters.

SEVENTY-TWO

Sorry, could you cancel the test? We can restart it in a moment.

AI-3

Very well. Test cancelled.

(AI-3's light blinks white. AI-3 and SEVENTY-TWO sit on the bed next to each other.)

SEVENTY-TWO

If I... if I kept something to myself, something important, would that make me a better person?

AI-3

This question doesn't make sense.

SEVENTY-TWO

Something happened today, and if I kept it to myself, I'd be risking my life, but if I say something then I'll be risking theirs.

AI-3

If it risks your life, logically, it would be best to reveal the information.

SEVENTY-TWO

I'd be betraying them.

AI-3

Did others see?

SEVENTY-TWO

What?

AI-3

What they did. Did others see?

SEVENTY-TWO

I... yes, multiple people.

AI-3

Would they report it? Would they be less willing to hide the truth?

SEVENTY-TWO

I think so.

AI-3

What should you do?

SEVENTY-TWO

Report it to the Department for Consideration.

AI-3

If you say nothing, you'll both be punished.

SEVENTY-TWO

But...

AI-3

They made their choice; now you must make yours.

SEVENTY-TWO

(Hesitantly.)

Okay. Okay. Initiate test.

(AI-3's light blinks red.)

AI-3

Did something happen today?

SEVENTY-TWO

Sixty, Class One, Rank C, Sixty. They showed emotion. They smiled.

AI-3

What effect did this have on you?

SEVENTY-TWO

It was strange.

AI-3

In what way?

SEVENTY-TWO

Disruptive. Troublesome. Unexpected.

AI-3

Why do you mention it?

SEVENTY-TWO

(Struggling to speak.)

I want...

AI-3

(Encouraging.)

Seventy-Two.

SEVENTY-TWO

It is a breach of the Systems protocols. Rule Fifty, members of the system will not show emotion at any time or in any circumstance.

AI-3

Breach in protocol has been noted; it will be reported to the Department. Continue report?

SEVENTY-TWO

Yes.

AI-3

Did you express any emotion?

SEVENTY-TWO

No.

AI-3

Did you see anyone express emotion?

SEVENTY-TWO

Yes.

AI-3

Should someone betray the system, what would you do?

SEVENTY-TWO

I would report them to the Department for Consideration.

AI-3

Your thoughts on the system?

SEVENTY-TWO

We are better together, when we are one.

AI-3

Test concluded. Your results will be sent to the Department for consideration. You are free to return to your daily activities.

(Spotlight on SEVENTY-TWO, they are conflicted.)

SEVENTY-TWO
Oh God, oh God, oh God.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT 1

SCENE 10

SETTING: The office setting.

AT RISE: SEVENTY-TWO enters and takes their seat. SIXTY is missing from their desk. SEVENTY-TWO watches the empty spot, and then begins typing on their computer. NINE approaches them and places a hand on their shoulder.

 NINE
You did what you had to.

(NINE exits.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT 1

SCENE 11

SETTING: SEVENTY-TWO's bedroom, in greyscale. There is a large mess of yellow clothes and other items all over the room.

AT RISE: SEVENTY-TWO is curled up on top of the bed. AI-3 hesitates, and then comes to sit next to them. AI-3 settles a hand on their shoulder, and rubs comforting circles.

AI-3

The time is 23:50. You must complete your Daily Emotion Report. Failure to do so will result in a Report to the Department.

SEVENTY-TWO

Do you think Sixty would have gone anyway? If I hadn't said anything?

AI-3

Yes. They would have. Nothing could be done.

SEVENTY-TWO

I should be punished too.

AI-3

You are not at fault.

SEVENTY-TWO

Sixty was my friend.

(They sit for a beat).

Initiate Test.

AI-3

Are you sure?

SEVENTY-TWO

Yes. Initiate Test.

(AI-3's light blinks red.)

AI-3

Did anything happen today?

SEVENTY-TWO

Sixty was taken by the Department. All because...

(SEVENTY-TWO chokes on a sob and
tries to
hold it back.)

Because they smiled. They had a beautiful
smile.

AI-3

You are showing emotion.

SEVENTY-TWO

I miss them. I think I'm always going to
miss them.

(A beat. SEVENTY-TWO allows
themselves to feel emotion.)

It doesn't matter anymore! They took away my mother, they took away Sixty. Just take me away too. Then I can feel again.

AI-3

Seventy-Two...

SEVENTY-TWO

Continue Test.

AI-3

Don't do this.

SEVENTY-TWO

Continue Test.

(AI-3's light blinks white.)

AI-3

Did you express any emotion?

SEVENTY-TWO

Yes.

AI-3

Did you see anyone express emotion?

SEVENTY-TWO

Yes.

AI-3

Should someone betray the system, what would you do?

SEVENTY-TWO

I wouldn't do anything.

AI-3

Your thoughts on the system?

SEVENTY-TWO

We aren't better together. We're ghosts.
We're robots. We're husks.

AI-3

Test concluded...

(Silence. SEVENTY-TWO curls up
on their bed and begins to cry.
The lights fade out over both
of them.)

(END OF PLAY.)

SPIRIT AT BIRTH BY TSHIMANGA MBAYI

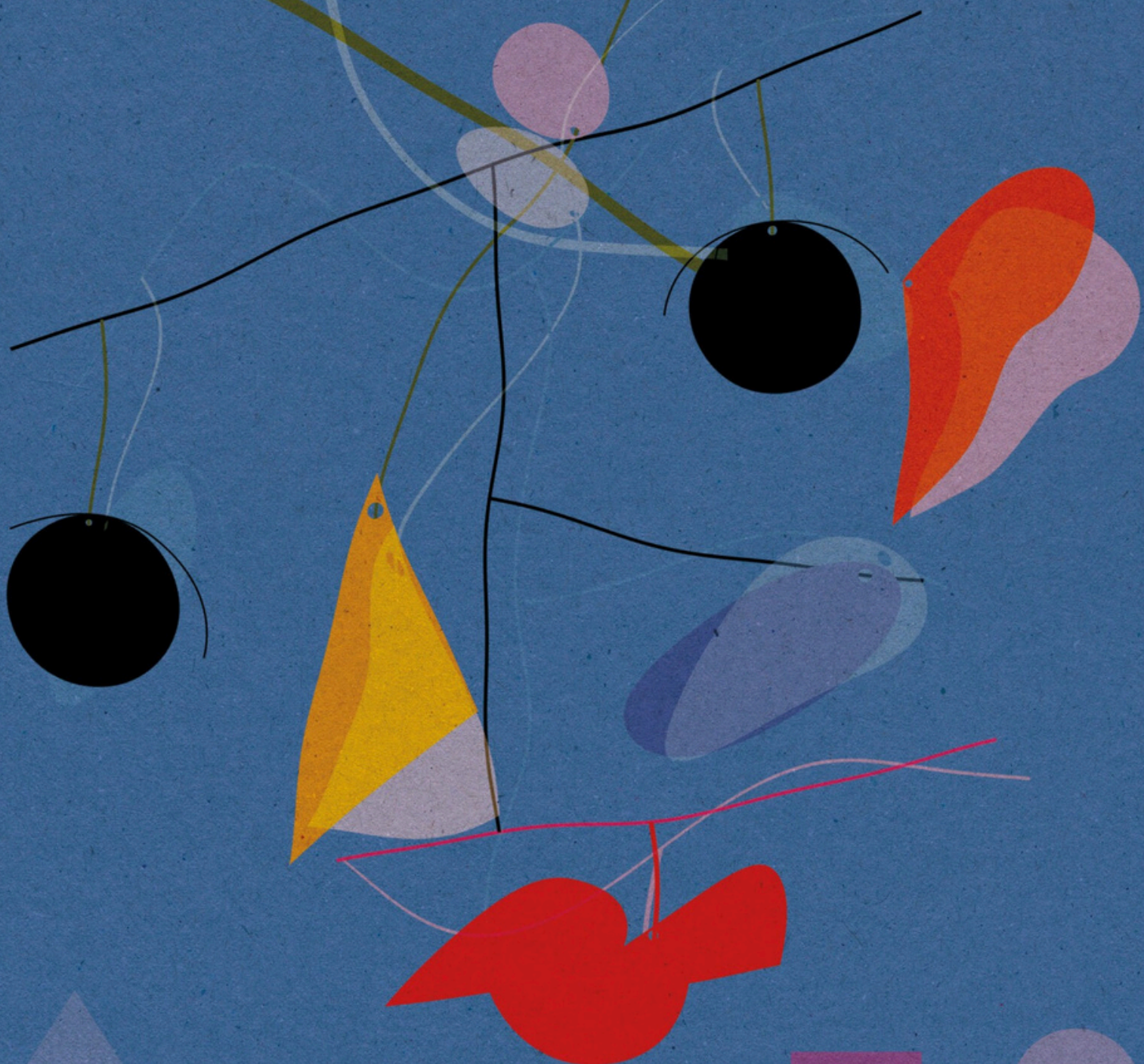


ILLUSTRATION: VISUALLY / CHAIMAE KHOULDY

SPIRIT AT BIRTH

A Play in Two Acts

by

Tshimanga Mbayi

*Content Warning:
Sexually explicit
language, religious
trauma, mentions of
self-harm, & blood

Cast of Characters

Nsomi: nineteen, first born to the leading family of New Day Church.

Pastor Daniel: mid 60s, spiritual leader and Father of the growing Christian congregation, New Day Church.

Scene

A church in the hub of a city.

Time

An alternate timeline, in the near distant future.

ACT I: THE RUPTURE

"To Be Held by the Femme Island /
To Be Known by the Trans Body" - Kama
La Mackerel

Scene I

SETTING:

We are in the small church of New Day. There are several wooden pews filled with families. At the front of the church is a raised wooden podium facing the pews. The churchgoers must raise their heads to see the pastor. Behind the podium is a large stained-glass window of the crucifixion of Jesus. Small beams of light shining through the window cast colourful shadows on the podium, red being the most poignant. Otherwise, the church is relatively dark, and the ceilings are low. It feels unusually claustrophobic.

AT RISE:

NSOMI is sitting in the aisle seat. Next to NSOMI is their mother. She has her arm around NSOMI's shoulder. They all watch PASTOR DANIEL as he delivers his sermon.

PASTOR DANIEL

And God sent his only begotten Son, to lay his body on the cross and bleed for our sins. What does that mean?

(Beat)

It means in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ we must rebuke all satanic influences that are infecting our children with sin! It means it is our duty to show the Lord that he has not sacrificed himself in vain. It means we must continue to uphold the natural order bestowed to us by our God!

(PASTOR DANIEL looks into the faces of his congregation, searching their eyes as he continues)

If you aren't following me yet, follow me now as I say God does not make mistakes! Do not allow your children to alter the greatness of God's creation. Are people listening to me?

(Murmurs of
agreeance from the
church. PASTOR
DANIEL raises his
voice)

I said, are there people listening?
(Several cheers and
'amens')

When Jesus broke bread with his disciples he
said, 'Do this in remembrance of me'. And so,
as you come here to receive the blood and the
body of Christ, remember Him and His mission
unto us. Give Him thanks, ask for His
forgiveness and beg for His mercy.

(Slow gospel music
begins to play as
PASTOR DANIEL begins
handing out the
Eucharist. In the
congregation, some
people put their
head down in prayer,
others stand with
their hands raised
to the sky. Many
grip their children
and pray like
there's no tomorrow.
NSOMI absently
flattens out the
wrinkles of

their skirt as they approach the altar. Standing in front of PASTOR DANIEL, NSOMI looks everywhere but at him as NSOMI holds out their hands in front of him. He places the blood and body of Christ in NSOMI's hands and NSOMI takes it and turns center stage facing the audience, spotlight on NSOMI.)

NSOMI

Father God... I never know what to say to You. Every day, Dad sits us down for prayer meetings and he says, "everyone close your eyes and pray to our father God almighty" and I sit there and..

(Beat. PASTOR DANIEL begins to pray aloud, just above a whisper.)

I can't seem to get anything to come through. When I was nine, I used to wait. I would think-I would hope, I would hope that something would happen. Like a bright light would burn through me and suddenly all of

God's love would smother me and I'd scream and I would finally be real.

(Beat)

But it never happened. I would sit there quietly, hoping no one noticed. And then one day Dad saw me sitting with my eyes open.

(Chuckles, shaking
their head)

I was watching ants crawl across the carpet, like what was I even doing?

(Beat)

He slapped me. It took me by such surprise I almost thought it was God's hand reaching unto me. But then I tasted the blood on my lip, and I realized what had happened. He didn't even say anything, he just looked at me with those big eyes of his. Eyes that I recognize less but see in the mirror more and more every day.

(Beat)

So, then I started pretending to pray. Eyes closed because I had learnt my lesson. I would tell God about my day. I'd say, "If Mama hasn't come out of her room in four days, would I know that she was dead?" I'd wait to hear if God would say something. Anything to me. Tell me she is not dead. But all I'd hear is Dad's desperate prayers, rebuking the sins of sloth from his house.

(PASTOR DANIEL is
now praying loudly
and fervently,
occasionally

shouting or speaking
in tongues.)

It's distracting. How can anyone focus with all that noise? It's much harder when we're at church, like this. It feels like everyone is watching me.

(Silence. Everyone
in the church begins
to stare at NSOMI.)

Like they all know my secrets and they're just waiting for the right moment to yell it from the rooftops. Some aunties grab my chin, twist my face side to side, examining me like a stray dog. All just to say,

(NSOMI curls lips
upward)

"Hm. The pastor's child is very dark. A proper girl should be scrubbing her face!" And another auntie will add in all seriousness, "At least you have your hair done. Now you look like a girl." Still, I'll sigh in relief because I've escaped but then I pick my skin until it bleeds and find strands of my hair in my fists. Some uncles—who are also ushers by the way—follow me with their eyes, silently, but I can hear their heartbeat in their dicks.

(Beat)

Is it ok that I say that, God? Because it's not like anyone can actually hear me, right? Otherwise, He-You-would save me from this. Right?

(Silence. NSOMI
turns to look back

at the people in the pews and they look away, returning to silent prayer. PASTOR DANIEL is the only one still watching. NSOMI faces the audience again.)

I keep having that dream. The one where I am standing in front of the mirror and I see my face, but it isn't really mine. My jaw is sharper, I guess.

(Beat)

I look at my body- it's mine but... not really? My shoulders are wider, my arms more muscular but the callouses on my hands are the same, so are the dotted scars on my stomach. But my chest.

(Beat. NSOMI looks down at their chest and begins to frown very deeply.)

My chest is flat and for a moment, I'm, I'm... happy? And just, just as I realize that that's what I'm feeling, I start to bleed. I bleed like I've been cut open-at first, it's like slow droplets. I watch as the first drop falls on the carpet, which feels like it takes forever. But then it does and suddenly Dad is there and he's screaming. I can tell he is... but it's like he's screaming underwater. And... he's not screaming because I'm about to bleed

to death. No, no. He's screaming because I'm getting blood all over his carpet. But when I look at the carpet it's made of paper, thin fragile paper with illegible words. Then the bleeding gets worse-like gushing and it has clots, kind of like my period and I just watch it drip onto the carpet until it absorbs so much it becomes so black I realize I'm looking at the back of my eyelids and I'm sleeping.

(Beat)

Was sleeping.

(NSOMI sighs,
looking at the blood
and body of Christ
in their hands, then
at the audience.
NSOMI and the
congregation's
voices intermingle
to say)

Body of Christ, save me.
Blood of Christ, inebriate me.
Within your wounds hide me.
At the hour of my death, call me
and bid me come to you.

(Beat. Congregation goes
silent. NSOMI whispers)

Amen.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

Scene II

SETTING: New Day Church, youth bible study "room". It's less of a room and more of a curtain drawn in the far back of the church. There is a singular foldable chair in the middle of the "room". The colours from the glass-stained windows can be seen just beneath the curtain, creating colourful shadows on the floors.

AT RISE: NSOMI holds a bible in their hands. They run their finger across the page and then begin to read aloud.

NSOMI

So, for my bible self-study this week, I stumbled across this verse, "The things which God has prepared for those who love Him... God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God." (1 Cor. 2.9-10)

(Beat)

It made me think of this quote I heard once. I wish I could remember where. It was something like, "spirit manifests as aesthetic". At first, I didn't quite understand. Actually, I'm not even sure I understand now. But it made me feel... something, the same something this verse makes me feel.

(Beat. NSOMI raises their head and stares at the audience.)

Have you ever felt words strike you with such brutal force it molds into the beating of your heart and sits like rocks in your throat? Or, better yet, have you had words light up a dark room in the palace of your mind? A room covered in cobwebs and smelling like dirty socks. The light is so bright and damn near fluorescent that, yes, it pains you but only a little. Words that give you words for other words and when you don't have the words for something it feels like exactly that, like some...thing.

(Beat)

If you've been told your whole life to believe something, what would it take for you to start believing something else? What would it take from you?

(Beat. Clutches their dress shirt where their heart is.)

When I was younger-around that age when you start to understand that there have been too many yesterdays for everything to have happened yesterday-my dad put me in ballet. All I can really remember is the pink-pink skirts, pink walls, pink skins, pink, pink, pink. I hated how pink looked on me. I also hated ballet, but I desperately needed to be good at it and that was enough for me to like it. And then my dad took me out because I was too muscular. It just didn't look right, he said, I looked like a boy in a skirt. Or something like that.

(Chuckles)

I have this theory that memories grow and take shape to the point where they exist as entities of their own. Like imaginary friends.

(Glances to their side)

I can feel it, you know. It's like this memory exists outside of me now. And I can feel it, sometimes it bubbles on my skin like an itch,

(Begins picking at the skin of their nail beds in one hand)

this searching, burning itch to be...someone.

(Beat. The picking stops and NSOMI stares at the audience.)

Is that my spirit searching? Searching for the deep things of God, I mean? How would I know

that what it finds is of God? What does it even mean to be of God? Because many times I am in this church and nothing really feels like it is of God. Yes, this is a church but where is God here? I don't feel You in the walls, or in the pews, much less in the eyes of the people that come here. And I damn well don't even sense a smidgen of You when I'm with my Dad. He loves to claim all these grandiose things about himself and his divine relationship with God, but I think... I think I've begun to see him for who he truly is. I've never met anyone that justifies their wrongdoings with the (air quotes) "word of God" more than this man. And he's a man, a human just like everyone else.

(Beat)

I wonder what he finds, when his spirit goes searching. Does his spirit find it in beating his wife? Does his spirit find it in taking money from his suffering and struggling community for his church to (air quotes) "prosper"?

(Laughs dryly)

But I digress. There's another verse that lives in my head, it's been replaying over and over lately, but only specific parts. "Flesh gives birth to flesh; the Spirit gives birth to spirit... The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from nor where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." John 3, verse 3.

(Beat)

I'm going to be honest, most of my life I've thought that the bible was a sham. My dad drilled these books and stories and chapters into me like clockwork, but they never felt real. Or like they made any fucking sense because You have a habit of contradicting Yourself. But now, I read this one and the other one and I don't know... Something makes sense now. These verses feel like they're about me in ways that feel right but should be wrong. My mom named me Nsomi because it means free. Sometime during my ballet arc, she'd say, 'You're always going with the wind, Nsomi. How will we keep up with you?' and she'd smile and maybe tickle me.

(Chuckles)

Even when they enrolled me in ballet, the teachers would always find me trying to do my own thing. And the memory that lives outside me, the spirit that is manifesting, its searching for this freedom. It's searching for the parts of me within that yearn to be birthed and blown into the wind, where it can be held in the deep things of God.

(Presses their hand
to their chest,
whispers)

Within your wounds hide me.
Amen.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

Scene III

SETTING: We sit in the
darkness of New Day
Church. There is a
confessional booth
that has no walls,
facing the audience.

AT RISE: NSOMI enters, draped
in red velvet,
holding a burning
candle. The fragile
light of the candle
gently illuminates
their pathway as they
make their way into
the confessional
booth. Parts of their
face are shadowy;
others golden from
the candle's glow.
NSOMI stands in the
confession booth,
looking down at the
candle.

NSOMI

Forgive me, God, for I am sin.

(Abruptly looks up
to face the audience
and cocks their head
to the side)

I've never understood the point of confession.
If God sees all then should You not know
everything already? It's a bit overindulgent-

sadistic even-don't you think? Watch Your sinning subjects' every move and then make them tell You everything on their knees, begging for undeserved mercy.

(Smirks)

I guess I can see the fun in that.

(Beat. They say this matter-of-factly)

So fine, I confess. I cannot sleep because Uzima is all that I can think about. I confess. I cannot breathe because she is all that I can smell. I confess. I did not innocently invite her to my bible self-study, and I hope she can confess that she knew that too.

(Looks back down at the candle contemplatively. The dancing flame surfaces their memories.)

We have known each other for years now. The pastor's first born and the choir director's treasured last born. We're bound to be thrown around in conversation.

(Beat)

The voice of a falling angel, I said to her once.

(Defensively)

She didn't take that very well though, but I meant it in the most sincere way. An angel falling from grace is still an angel and more

than anything it's a real one because its feeling real things.

(A voice begins to sing and echo around the church.)

Her voice is guttural. And earthly. Some of the notes she hits—I'm only ever listening for her voice when she's on that stage—those notes sound like sand being blown in the wind right at my skin. I've hardly ever looked at her when she sings, it felt safer to close my eyes or to look at my feet. I don't know what—or who—gave me the courage to glance up at her that day, only for our gazes to collide. It shocked her just as much because her voice hitched and more sand pinched my skin.

(The singing stops abruptly.)

At the end of that service, her name just kept playing in my head over and over again with that look in her eyes when they met mine. So, I made my way to where the choir gathered and I waited. Not too far from the door so I watched everyone slowly trickle out. It was so stupid because every other person is like "Nsomi, don't you have a bible study group to lead?" or "Wow, the next generation of this church..." Which, also, that last one always slips off people's tongues differently. Most times I can't tell if it's a future they want to see.

(Looks at the audience, takes a breath)

I decided fuck it, let me just go in there. She wasn't alone, not yet. Her sister was still there, going on about her Christian entrepreneur program or whatever but Uzima looked at me so sharply, I froze. I don't even remember what she said to her sister that made her go away but suddenly it was just me and her. She was still wearing her white gown. We stared at each other for a while. It was strange and uncomfortable but neither of us looked away.

(Two beats)

Suddenly, I said, "Come to my bible self-study Wednesday night. I want you to sing for me."

(Chuckles and kisses their teeth)

She took her gown off in front of me—in a strangely casual way—and my eyes rested on the curves of her boobs in her tank top. Then she put her blouse on, smiling really cheekily—almost to herself—before walking away without saying a word. My eyes followed her silently, and I wondered if she could feel my heartbeat.

(Three beats)

When I think about that night, it doesn't feel real. It felt otherworldly. Like the moment we set foot into this place, a portal opened and dropped us somewhere else. Somewhere heavenly.

(Beat)

I confess, she is not the first girl I kissed.
Or the second or the third. I preemptively
confess, she will not be the last.

(Sets the candle
down by their feet
and rubs their face
and then their
fingers through
their hair. One by
one, candles are
being lit behind the
confessional booth
in the church. The
walls of the
confessional booth
begin to close in on
Nsomi in very slow
increments. It is
unnoticeable, at
first. A voice
begins to sing
again, very softly
at a medium pitch.)

When I asked her to sing for me, I watched her
throat as she swallowed and took a breath. And
when she sang, she sang to me, and I could
hear the whipping wind in her wings as she
fell.

(Beat)

She asked me what the verse was that I was
studying today and I read her this, 1 John
2:16-17, "For all that is in the world—the
lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and

the pride of life—is not of the Father but is from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.”

(NSOMI begins to pace, long lengths at first, from wall to wall. The walls are still closing in, still very slowly. The voice gets slightly louder.)

We argued about this one for a while. Are we not of the world, since we are nothing but flesh and eyes? Eyes that see and flesh that sins. ‘What is the will of God? Who decides His will? If God created the world, then is loving the world not loving what God created?’ That last one got her. I said it to her lips—she has a beauty mark in her bottom lip—I kept wondering what it would taste like.

(Stops pacing and looks to the audience.)

She asked me if I loved her. It caught me off guard because the first thing I wanted to say is I don’t even know you. But then I held on to that thought and used my eyes that see. The dimple near her cheek when she smiled really big. The purple tones of her skin underneath the candlelight. The blue-green rim around the red sand dunes of her irises. Staring for so

long, a shiver went up my spine, and I wondered if that's what the holy spirit felt like.

(Beat)

Or love.

(The candles in the church begin to burn brighter, some of them lighting surrounding fabrics on fire. The voice goes to a higher pitch)

When we kissed, I felt the earth shatter beneath my feet and the skies break open above our heads. She tasted like cherry lip balm, smelt like moisturizing hair oils and grass. She gasped when I touched her between her legs but then held my hand there when I reflexively pulled back. Her moan in my ear felt like sand again.

(The walls are visibly closing in faster. NSOMI notices this but stands their ground defiantly. The flames begin to get bigger.)

When I put my fingers in and around her, she asked me again if I loved her. All I could say is,

(Beat)

"Delight yourself in me, Uzima, and I will give you the desires of your heart. I will use every ounce of my freedom to serve you in love."

(Looks up to the ceiling, bites their lip and then clenches their teeth. The voice drops a pitch, singing in a low, guttural tone.)

I delighted in watching her shake, the way her eyes rolled to the back of her head, the shimmer of holy water on her forehead. I was delivering her. And in doing so she delivered me. Staring into each other's eyes, we were transported to the depth of the world inside us. There, in the dark pools of her irises, dilating as she came for me, I saw myself. And I saw God.

(The walls freeze. A bright golden light shines from the ceiling onto NSOMI as they stare at the audience)

Body of Christ, save me.
Blood of Christ, inebriate me.
Within your wounds hide me.
At the hour of my death, call me
and bid me come to you.

(The light dims, the walls resume closing in, slowly. NSOMI whispers)

Amen.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF ACT)

ACT II: THE RAPTURE

Scene I

SETTING: We are once again in the small church of New Day, although some things feel amiss. It is mostly dark, a few candles lit cast their shadows on the walls. A deep red light shines onto the wooden podium. The rest of the church is candlelit. A thunderstorm is brewing. The sound of strong winds slaps the windows.

AT RISE: PASTOR DANIEL steps up to the podium. The congregation, dressed in all black, rise to their feet.

PASTOR DANIEL

You may be seated.

(The congregation
sits.)

Ladies and gentlemen of this church, I have had a premonition. God has revealed things to

me! In his divine calling, He has declared me as a prophet. I am the presence of God and through His glory bestowed upon me a message and the authority to spread it. He has shunned a light on the wickedness within you all. He has shown me the darkness that lies between the legs and in the hearts of my so-called congregation. If you have not opened your eyes yet to see, signs of divine intervention are everywhere! Lakes of blood in Sudan, famine all over the world like we have never seen before, economies collapsing like the walls of Jericho. Bread is becoming a luxury, and this is through the fault of your sin! Through fault of the desires of flesh, through fault of lack of faith in me, in our Lord God and the miracles He has done through me.

(Beat)

Look to the person on your left. And now look to your right.

(The members of the congregation hesitantly glance at one another.)

If this person was the reason for your descent to hell, are you prepared to do what it takes to prevent that from happening?

(Rumble of thunder)

If this person has been secretly plotting and infecting you with sin, what are you prepared to do?

(Beat. The congregation shifts)

uncomfortably in
their seats.)

Matthew 18, verse 8: "And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire."

(Staring intently
into the eyes of the
congregation.)

And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire."

(Murmurs of
agreement and
'amens' from the
congregation. A
flash of lightning
outside.)

Some of you may have heard about the acts of sin committed by my...offspring, whom I shall not even name. Let me make myself clear, that child has brought generations worth of shame onto this family and to this church! That is no child of mine and God has told me it is better to enter the gates of heaven childless, than with child in the pits of hell.

(A cracked sob
echoes in the
church. PASTOR
DANIEL side glances
at the congregation)

and shakes his
head.)

Many of you are suffering from your attachment to sin and sinners. God has instructed me to deliver you all from this madness, in preparation for the return of Jesus Christ. He will not care about the sensitivity of your heart; He will not care about the pain of cutting off your foot in the name of retribution! Can I get an amen?

(A few 'amens' are
said reluctantly)

ARE YOU PEOPLE LISTENING? Have your demons infected you so that you are not able to affirm the word of God?

(A few more 'amens',
this time slightly
louder. A clap of
thunder startles the
congregation. The
rain begins and it
crackles against the
roof of the church.)

Submit yourselves, then, to me, the prophet, to God, the most high, and allow me to deliver you from that which keeps you sinning! Come forward, and I shall anoint you, sanctify you to enter the kingdom of God.

(PASTOR DANIEL moves
from behind the
podium and stands
with his arms open,
head to the sky. No

one moves at first.
People look
hesitantly at one
another and then at
PASTOR DANIEL.
Another flash of
lightning and clap
of thunder prompts a
few to get up and
reluctantly make
their way to him.
When the first
person lines up in
front of PASTOR
DANIEL, he firmly
pushes them on their
chest, causing them
to stumble
backwards. PASTOR
DANIEL grips their
head to keep them
from falling and
yells before pushing
them to the ground)

You are blessed.

(Some people in the
congregation see
this and leave the
church quietly,
afraid. The sound of
the doors swinging
open and banging
from the winds of

the thunderstorm
send papers flying
across the floor.)

You can run but the divine power of our Lord
will find you wherever you go! You can run,
but as the bible says, unless one is born
again, he cannot see the kingdom of God!

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

Scene II

SETTING:

The church has visibly less churchgoers and many of the pews are askew. At the front of the church, next to the raised podium is a closed casket. Light is shining through the stained-glass window of the crucifixion of Jesus, illuminating the casket in mostly purples and blues.

AT RISE:

NSOMI's mother is kneeling at the casket, crying and praying silently. The casket slowly opens, an arm pushing it open from inside. Once fully open, NSOMI sits up and looks around, confused. They are wearing all white. Slowly, they get out of the casket and reach to comfort their mother. She does not register NSOMI's presence, as if they were not there at all but she

begins to cry harder
and louder. NSOMI
looks at the
congregation, no one
acknowledges their
presence. They turn
to face the audience.

NSOMI

I attended my own funeral
It waited for me at my door
I stepped into it not knowing
That it was
My own funeral
Mama cried and wept
And wailed and sobbed
Like waves collapsing and crashing
She is loud and rushing
And proud and thrashing
And then

(NSOMI's mother's
crying stops, though
she occasionally
hiccups and rubs her
hand on her chest.
She remains kneeled
at the casket.)

She is quiet
She is still
The ripples of her cries
Have gently transformed into
Wrinkles that smile
Sadly.

(Turns around to
face the
congregation)

I did not die. Yet it feels as though I have.

(The congregation
prays louder, many
yelling, some
speaking in tongues.
Some begin to pace
back and forth from
the front of the
church to the back.
Some are crying,
wailing, begging for
the Lord's mercy.)

I DID NOT DIE. I DID NOT DIE.

(NSOMI runs up to
the casket and
pushes it over.
Their mother's head
rests on the floor,
praying
incoherently. Still
not looking at
NSOMI. No
acknowledgment from
the congregation.)

I AM HERE. I AM HERE. I AM HERE.

(NSOMI screams, hard
and long and
guttural. They
scream until they
are out of breath

and fall to their
knees. BLACKOUT.
Three beats. The
lights slowly gleam
on NSOMI who is now
standing.)

I had a really weird dream last night. I woke up in my childhood bedroom. It was one of those dreams where it kind of feels like you're inhabiting someone else's body but there was this feeling-like a grip on my shoulder-that was telling me that this was my body. I got up, looked around my room. There were plants growing through the cracks in the walls and floors. Thick vines. Tall weeds. Then it started to feel more like I was in corn fields than in my room. Corn fields that I'd seen before. Can't remember where.

(Beat)

And then I got the sick, heavy feeling that I was being followed. Followed by death and decay. And it's coming fast so I start to run but running in my dreams is

(Chuckles)

...pointless. It felt like the fields were blowing past me, but my legs were moving disjointedly, like I was sinking into the marshy ground beneath my feet. Someone kept yelling. It was loud enough for me to hear their voice.

(Beat)

My voice. Suddenly, I stopped. And I knew they were right behind me, when they said to me, "What are you scared of?"

(Three beats)

And I turned around, staring into a direct reflection of the body I was in. It was me.

(They close their eyes and raise their head)

At the hour of my death, call me and bid me come to you.

(A clap of thunder erupts, it leaves behind the hum of a bass, as if a song is beginning to play in the distance. The purple blue lights flash intermittently.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

Scene III

SETTING:

The church of New Day is not what it used to be. The few pews that remain are lined up against the wall. There are various lamps around the church that look as if they were found at a furniture junk store. Plants are set up in several corners. At the center of the church is a bathtub, big enough for one person to lay in. It is filled with water. There is a foldable chair near the bathtub. The glass-stained window of Jesus has been graffitied to say: JESUS WAS GAY. ASK JUDAS.

AT RISE:

In the pews lined up against the wall, people sit there. On one there is a queer couple making out. On another, some friends laughing together, snuggled in each other's arms. People

are dispersed in the
rest of the church,
some are dancing,
some are smoking,
most are generally
having a good time.
Everyone is wearing
white. NSOMI enters
the church, wearing
all white, a joint in
their hand.

NSOMI

God, you know what they don't tell you about
being born again, is it hurts. Like hell.

(Takes a pull of
their joint)

After my...encounter with Uzima, the itch that
used to live outside me, living and breathing,
took over my body and its been bubbling
beneath my skin. It's been loud and hot and
and demanding. Demanding change. Seeking
change so fervently, I think it's growing
bigger than my body. Yesterday was one of the
worst days. I woke up sweltering-in the middle
of winter-even with my fan blowing on the
highest setting. I thought, hey, maybe moving
into a basement beneath a fast-food restaurant
was a terrible idea. They're cooking me alive
along with their fake meat. But even when I
went outside in nothing but shorts and a tank
stop in the falling snow, the sweltering itch
persisted, and I stood there for a while. Long
enough for someone to come up to me and ask me

if I was ok. I had said yes but they knew that wasn't true. When I went back in, I got into my shower and stood under a pathetic stream of droplets that can't even qualify as water pressure. When I stepped out, I looked in the mirror and I swear I could see my skin peeling. And not peeling like a sunburn but peeling like I could see my flesh beneath. Red, pulsating and oozing pus.

(Takes a pull of
their joint and
begins to pace,
whispering to
themselves)

Flesh gives birth to flesh, Spirit gives birth to spirit...

(Aloud, to the
audience)

Uzima and her family stopped coming to the church shortly after that night. I suspect they saw the marks I left on her neck and I equally suspect that she is not a good liar. I stopped by their house, when I finally had the courage to look her in the face again but it was empty. Like they just picked everything up and disappeared without a trace. Well, the trace they left behind was what they told everyone about me. I'd tell You what happened when my dad found out but I suspect You already know and it isn't exactly a compelling story to tell. But after he kicked me out and I no longer had the shackles of this church chained to me, that itch, that itch that I now

know to be my Spirit is ready to be born into something else.

(Turns to grab the chair near the bathtub and drags it to the center of the church, facing the audience)

When the church found out that my dad was using offering money to invest in political (air quotes) "endeavors", it felt much like a reckoning. Mind you, the political endeavors were investing in the companies that have been poisoning us in the water and air. His reason was that God instructed him to do so, for the sake and future of his church. The way people showed up to his house when the news really got out, the mob was only missing pitchforks and torches. And they had every right. I was surprised that they didn't completely burn this church down. A lot of things were taken, reclaimed if you will, but here it is still standing.

(They look around the church in their seat)

After all this time I still find myself coming back here. When I found out the underground scene took over this place, hosting raves until the early hours of the morning, it felt like that was the only logical thing that could have happened here. The first party I came to here really shook me up.

(The lights dim,
purples and blues
begin to flash
intermittently.
Faint bass begins to
thrum.)

It was really surreal walking into this place and no one knew me. Hell, barely anyone even glanced at me. I strolled in wearing the least amount of clothes I had ever worn in here. At first, I felt exposed. Like too much was being seen. By You. It felt like too much was being seen by God and then I remembered that I never felt You within these walls and that soothed me. When I reached the dance floor, my Spirit took over. It shivered through me the same way it did the night I kissed Uzima. Except this time, it moved me in ways I didn't have to think about. I danced until my muscles cramped, until I was drenched in the holy water of my sweat. At some point I stopped, I let my heavy breathing slow me down and I looked up at the ceiling.

(Gets up and looks
at the ceiling. A
golden light shines
on them)

There. At that moment, I felt it. I felt God's love, and it didn't pierce me like I had always expected it to. It caressed my cheek and gently squeezed my heart. In the stillness of that moment, I felt a breeze.

(Smiles. Looks back
at the audience)

I am cracking out of this shell that I once
knew as my body. Making room for something, or
rather, someone new. And in doing so, I found
it. The Kingdom of God.

(Walks over to the
bathtub. They take
one last pull of
their joint and blow
the smoke into the
air before putting
it out in the water.
They put one foot in
the bathtub, and
then the other. They
slowly lower
themselves into the
bathtub, breathing
deeply. They stop
when they are
seated, the water
reaching their
chest)

Luke 17, verse 21. Nor will they say "See
here!", "see there!" For indeed, the kingdom
of God is within you.

(The lights dim as
they lower their
heads into the
water.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF PLAY)

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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SOPHIE DUFRESNE

Sophie Dufresne (he/they) studies creative writing at Concordia University in Tio'tia:ke/Montreal, Canada. He fell in love with poetry after reading "Hope" by Emily Dickinson in sixth grade and is now interested in the way form informs content (or is it the other way around?). He is currently the copy editor of The Encore Poetry Project, a local literary and arts initiative. He has been published by LBRNTH, Ahoy, The Encore Poetry Project (before joining it), Frozen Sea, and others.

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JEANNE POTVIN

Jeanne Potvin started reading at a very young age, having a curiosity for stories that eventually inspired her to write her own pieces. She started with prose, winning school contest prizes under ten years old, and eventually gravitated toward dialogue and playwriting after earning her diploma in Professional Theatre at Dawson College in 2023. In her works, she enjoys exploring the unanswered questions of life and death using dark humor and cheeky characters as vehicles for her often bittersweet endings.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

KATIE COOKE

Katie Cooke is a Montreal-based playwright and author who recently completed her English Masters with Concordia University. She enjoys writing work in the fantasy and dystopian genres and focuses on queer and feminist themes in her work.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

TSHIMANGA MBAYI

Tshimanga (he/they) is a Black, Queer, immigrant, and multidisciplinary artist based in Tiohtià:ke (Montreal). He explores his Black Queer experiences in the diaspora through writing, where he employs various themes, such as spirituality vs religion, absurdity, surrealism, and magical realism. He is currently pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Creative Writing at Concordia University.

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