



TRIPTYCH

Cally Phillips

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**Three plays
By Cally Phillips**

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The plays

Love is an Urban Myth (first performed 1999)

When Time Stands Still (first performed 2002)

The Other Side of the Mountain (first performed 2003)

All three plays were performed over the weekend 29th/30th March 2003 at Brigend Theatre Dumfries.

What is a triptych?

A set of three associated artistic, literary, or musical works intended to be appreciated together.

LOVE IS AN URBAN MYTH

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

The stage is empty apart from a few paintings on the wall representing an art gallery. Dave (mid 40s) stands looking at the paintings. After a moment Sarah (mid 30s) enters. She looks around nervously then spots Dave at the other side of the stage. She speaks, somewhat inconclusively to his back.

SARAH: "They were careless people Tom and Daisy."

Dave turns round to reply

DAVE: "Protect and survive."

There is a moment of recognition. It's awkward. They look each other up and down.

SARAH: You came.

DAVE: You called.

Dave goes to kiss Sarah on the cheek but she extends her hand instead. They shake hands Awkwardly. There is a sense of the rehearsed in the ensuing conversation, though also an uncertainty that perhaps the past is not remembered. It's certainly not resolved. It's testing the water – and Dave begins.

DAVE: Things you can't believe

SARAH: That chocolate is a substitute for sex.

DAVE: That right and wrong exist.

SARAH: That men and women think differently.(pause) Things you can believe

DAVE: That God is dead.

SARAH: That Elvis is alive and well.

DAVE: And living in Bootle. (pause) Urban myths volume one.

SARAH: That stories have to have a beginning, a middle and an end.

DAVE: That the moment before the end is resolution.

SARAH: That it's possible to live happily ever after.

DAVE: That there is an ever after.(pause) That life reflects art.

SARAH: That art reflects life.

DAVE: That you can die with dignity.

SARAH: That animals have animal rights.

DAVE: That humans have human rights.

SARAH: That rights exist.

DAVE: That you can protect and survive.

Pause. Dave and Sarah appear to be more settled with each other now.

SARAH: Urban myths volume two. That you can make lifestyle choices.

DAVE: That fate exists.

SARAH: That Hamlet didn't know what he was doing.

DAVE: That Virginia Woolf did.

SARAH: That Jane Austen was a Romantic.

DAVE: That Walter Scott was a Romantic.(pause) That Byron was.

SARAH: Was what?

DAVE: Just was.

They laugh. Intimacy established. The pace of delivery now picks up. They rattle off the lines like well rehearsed phrases.

DAVE: That words are all you need.

SARAH: That a picture paints a thousand words.

DAVE: That love is all you need.

SARAH: That a single red rose says more than a thousand words.

DAVE: That only the good die young.

Long pause which breaks the rhythm. It appears that ritual is over and conversation may start. Dave and Sarah feel more comfortable now. The audience probably less so.

SARAH: Do you remember.. it used to be called Kim's game - at parties. Parties where you had to wear patent shoes and not blow out the host's candles, and not be sick on the floor - and not get carried away. And I always wondered who the hell this Kim was?

DAVE: Do you remember? (pause) Do you remember? The ants?

SARAH: Ants?

DAVE: You remember? The ants. The floor. Crossing the floor.

SARAH: Oh yes. The ants. Of course I remember the ants.

DAVE: How we spent three hours once, just watching ants.

SARAH: I remember. Wondering if we were part of their grand scheme - if perhaps we were the ants and they were the one's who'd got it right -until you decided that we had the power of life or death over them so we had to be superior. You poured hot water over them I recall.

DAVE: Where did I get hot water from?

SARAH: I don't remember that. And however many ants you poured water over, all you did was bend the line slightly, there were still thousands more ants moving along the path, with a purpose. More of a purpose than sitting watching and deciding who would live and who would die.

DAVE: Yes. It was the final straw for God that.

SARAH: Yes. And that night- well, later in the evening, before... before bed... well, before we settled down... Or was it another night?

DAVE: Wasn't it the first night?

SARAH: Well, some night. It doesn't matter which night.

DAVE: Doesn't it?

SARAH: I don't think so. Not now. Not after all these years. Anyway. That night.

DAVE: Whichever night.

SARAH: Yes. We played the Underground game. Of course you'd lived in London most of your life and I'd only been there six times or so, so it wasn't really fair.

They look around, seeking somewhere to sit. The gallery is minimalist and has no chairs. Dave points to the floor.

DAVE: Do you mind? For old times sake.

Sarah shakes her head. They sit on the floor cross legged, side by side.

DAVE: If I go on the Piccadilly line from Cockfosters to Earl's Court which stops do I go past?

SARAH: Which stop on the District line comes after Dagenham Heathway?

DAVE: You can't remember?

SARAH: Dagenham East.

DAVE: No. The game. The Piccadilly Line? (pause) Turnham Green? On the Piccadilly line. Remember?

SARAH: I remember playing the game. The frustration. I've been on the Piccadilly line a million times since then, and every time I count off the stations..(laughs) Turnham Green.

DAVE: The argument?

SARAH: Oh yes. The argument. I remember the argument. About whether Turnham Green comes before or after Stamford Brook.

DAVE: No. The argument was about whether it stops at Stamford Brook on the Piccadilly Line. Or just the District Line.

SARAH: And it seemed to matter.

DAVE: It mattered because I knew I was right and I had no way to prove it to you.

SARAH: Except take me there.

DAVE: Yes. Except take you there.

Pause.

SARAH: I waited there for you once.

DAVE: What? At Turnham Green?

SARAH: Yes. Stupid I know. But I thought.. maybe you were thinking.. and maybe you'd be there. On the platform. You know?(pause) But you weren't.

DAVE: I never took you to Turnham Green. I'm sorry.

SARAH: It's in the past now. It doesn't matter.

DAVE: Did it matter once?

SARAH: I don't know.(pause) Only when you couldn't take me there I suppose.

DAVE: But urban myths. They were the best game?

SARAH: Yes. You were obsessed with urban myths.

DAVE: If you can see into the myths of time and tell me which seed will flourish, which will fail.

SARAH: And with quotes and misquotes.

DAVE: Mythquotes.

SARAH: Yes.(pause) And we had a future. Together. Or apart. A future anyway.

(pause) Didn't we? Not like now.

DAVE: Now we have a past.

SARAH: And that's better than a future, because it's more certain. Or is it?

DAVE: Urban myths volume three.

SARAH: I can't believe you can still remember all these.

DAVE: I can still remember everything. Can't you?

SARAH: I don't know. I spent so much time trying not to remember it all. Wanting to... oh I don't know.

It's getting too serious. Dave changes tack to lighten the situation. He goes back to the familiar routine.

DAVE: That you saw the Loch Ness Monster.

SARAH: That you could fly.

A long pause during which they look at each other with the awkwardness of a past intimacy.

DAVE: Do you remember the chocolate game?

SARAH: You're joking. I could never forget that.

DAVE: Me neither. But tell me again.

SARAH: Tell you. Tell you what?

DAVE: The rules.

SARAH: Not the rules. The game. It was the game that was interesting.

DAVE: Montelimar.

SARAH: Montelimar. Poor old Montelimar.

DAVE: Tell me.

SARAH: Why?

DAVE: I just want to hear you say it again. To remember.

Sarah rattles off as if to a well remembered formula.

SARAH: Poor old Montelimar always gets left till last. We've all been Montelimar once in our lives when it came to picking sides. And that's why it sticks in your throat.

There is a sense of deeper emotion in Dave's response. It's less scientific. More personal.

DAVE: You used to throw it away rather than eat it. But throw it away at the beginning so it wasn't left till last.

SARAH: Wasn't it just like pouring water on the ants?

DAVE: But chocolates don't have feelings.

SARAH: Ants don't have feelings we could recognise. Not emotions. Not human emotions. But surely in a sense everything has feelings because we put the feelings in there. It's our feelings. Montelimar is a good example of that.

DAVE: Montelimar is a trope.

SARAH: You didn't know what a trope was.

DAVE: I do now.

SARAH: What?

DAVE: Oh. You know. (pause) It signifies something.

SARAH: It signifies an urban myth?

DAVE: It explains the human condition. That you get thrown on the scrap heap at the beginning of your life, to save the feelings of the people who would otherwise not pick you till last.

SARAH: There you are. Montelimar. An explanation of the human condition.

DAVE: The rules of the game in a chocolate box.(pause)Urban myths volume five. That you don't have to throw a six to start.

SARAH: That there's as many ladders as snakes.

DAVE: That you have a choice.

SARAH: That fate decides.(pause) It's lucky we didn't know about chaos theory then.

DAVE: We were living proof of chaos theory then.

SARAH: Do you know about chaos theory now?

DAVE: Do you? (pause) So - the chocolate game. Remember the rules? *(he recites the rules as if rote learned in school.)* The rules.I buy a box of chocolates. You buy a box of chocolates. A different one. Like Milk Tray and All Gold. We each take the legend of our box...

SARAH: Legend. I love the word legend. It makes it so much more exciting. Like a quest.

DAVE: We have to guess which chocolate is which in the other one's box. Each time I guess right you get one of the one's you like from your box and I get the one I correctly identified. When I'm wrong, you still get one, and I don't. We go on playing till there's only Montelimar left.

SARAH: That was how we knew we were right for each other. We could play the game and only eat the chocolates we liked, as long as we could correctly identify them, right down to Montelimar.

Because we had completely opposite tastes. Me soft centre, you nuts. You toffees, me soft caramel, you for the praline and me for the ...

DAVE: Montelimar was the sticking point. It always is.

SARAH: Have you ever met anyone who will choose Montelimar?(pause) I actually quite like it, but not enough to choose it over an orange or a strawberry cream.(pause) Do you not like it?

DAVE: I think it tastes stale.

SARAH: That's because it gets left till last.

DAVE: But you throw it out first so that it doesn't get left till last. Because you feel sorry for it.

(pause) How can you feel sorry for a chocolate?

SARAH: I feel sorry for me, not the chocolate. Because being confronted with Montelimar at the end of a box of chocolates is like looking at the fat kid who never got picked - and who wants to be thinking of fat kids when you've just waded through a box of chocolates?

DAVE: Ah. Proof positive for your argument that there is feeling in everything. It's our feeling, in there. In everything. But then, throwing it away - doesn't that..?

SARAH: Oh yes, there's guilt in it too. What one really wishes is that you could find someone who would eat the Montelimar, not as a first choice - that would be too sacrificial, or too weird. No. Someone who would just eat it discreetly as a third or fourth choice. Making no fuss. Just eating it.

DAVE: Then something else would be last.

SARAH: Yes, but isn't it your dream to save the orange cream till last? Well, in your case it would be the hazelnut whirl. Don't you see? That's real trust. That I could trust you enough to know you'd leave me the orange cream, and that you trusted me enough to leave the hazelnut whirl till last. That has to be the ultimate. So why didn't it work?

DAVE: Because there's more to life than chocolate compatibility.

SARAH: What, like arranged marriages and two point four children and a dog and a volvo?

DAVE: Mmm?

SARAH: Agreeing? Or thinking about chocolate?(pause)You couldn't really play the same game with orange and lemon slices. Or even with York fruits. Well you could, but not with half the enjoyment.

DAVE: Or with Bendicks Bitterments. Or Cadbury's Chocolate Orange.

SARAH: Don't be absurd.

DAVE: Or even with Thorntons or the Belgian chocolate which is so expensive that you pick out individual ones in advance - no Montelimar there. That's for rich people you see - they don't have to confront sad fat kid. They don't have to face feelings. They just do it for the oral gratification.

SARAH: And what's so wrong with belgian chocolates? Oh I get it. It's the politics of Chocolate. Is it? A class thing?

DAVE: No. A religion thing. It's guilt again. Guilt and power and snakes and ladders and that terrifying lifestyle CHOICE which is only for the rich. Or the illusion of it, which is what belgian chocolates buys. Because even the rich can't die with dignity. Even euthanasia isn't really dignified. Illegal. Like drug taking. Imagine the last act you take being a criminal one. You've never so much as got a parking ticket in your whole life and you have to commit a criminal act just to die with dignity. Dogs have more dignity in death than humans. They are allowed to be put down. We aren't. Being rich as Croeses doesn't stop the guilt. Money can buy happiness but it can't buy dignity - permanence - all those really important things.

SARAH: On your soapbox again? Even now?

DAVE: No. Just remembering the...

SARAH: Good old days?

DAVE: Some of them were good. In a strange way.

SARAH: A very strange way.

DAVE: Well. We had each other.

SARAH: Did we?

DAVE: Sort of.

SARAH: We thought we did. For a time.

There is an uncomfortable silence during which both look from the floor to the paintings on opposite walls. Then, inevitably their eyes meet again. They can't ignore it.

DAVE: Let's go back to our Milk Tray or our Quality street -

SARAH: The wrappers give the game away a bit - everyone recognises the wrappers, from years of having them at Christmas time. No. You need the kind of box of chocolates that comes in half pounds and that has two layers

DAVE: So you get another chance if you get it wrong?

SARAH: Of course. And the kind that is a treat. (there is genuine uncertainty in her voice) Because it's about having a treat as well isn't it? It isn't about just stuffing your face with chocolate. It's about expiation of guilt, and trust and believing the urban myth that things will get better, that they are better for a short time - that we are perfect - that we were made for each other - that we love each other. That we love each other enough to sacrifice the last orange cream, but only if you sacrifice the last hazelnut whirl. And it is a myth - because you know you'd never do it. You don't like orange cream. Diametrically opposed tastes. It would have to be an act of cruelty for you to eat my orange cream. But you would be punished too. Punished twice because you'd have to sacrifice your hazelnut whirl. And if you ate mine first you'd have to watch me eating yours. Unless you could do some quick sleight of hand or mind, some fancy talking to get me to sacrifice my right to revenge -to eating your hazelnut whirl. That was why it could never work. You'd eat my orange cream - even though you didn't like it, just because you knew you had the power to make me sacrifice my right to your hazelnut whirl. That I'd still let you have it. That you'd got one over on me. That was why it didn't work.

DAVE: If, and I'm not saying I did. Or not more than once. Or only as a joke. But if I did do that. If I did knowingly eat your orange cream. Or even your strawberry cream, pretending to mistake it for, I don't know, a caramel heart. If I did do that, have you never considered that I did it to prove a point? To get a response. To make you stand up to me. To empower you. You can't complain about being stepped on if you lie down and say "walk on me". Chivalry's as dead as God you know and the rules are more maleable than that. Couldn't I have been trying to teach you something, trying to open your mind, to free you.. isn't that love rather than cruelty?

SARAH: But I didn't want to be free from you. I wanted to have one thing certain in my life. That you would always let me save the orange cream till last.

DAVE: Life isn't a box of chocolates you know.

SARAH: That's a bowl of cherries.

DAVE: No, in the late twentieth century it's a box of chocolates. And it is. It is.

SARAH: Is what?

DAVE: Is a box of chocolates. From the orange cream and the hazelnut whirl right down to the montelimar. That's exactly what life is. A box of chocolates. Where being single allows you to eat all your favou rites but then you have to eat the ones you don't like too, not to be wasteful. So you don't buy a box for yourself because it reminds you of the times you shared a box. Shared two boxes. Played the game. Loved. Had a relationship.

SARAH: So is that what we're doing now?

DAVE: What? Playing the game?

SARAH: Having a relationship? Sharing a box of chocolates.

DAVE: But this is a nostalgia box. Isn't it?

SARAH: I wonder. Anyway. It's not nostalgia as such because it's back to basic trust. To "will you let me have the orange cream?" To "will I dare to leave the orange cream till last?" To "do we have a future?"

DAVE: How about playing the game blindfold?

SARAH: That would be a different game.

DAVE: Sometimes we see most clearly with our eyes closed.

Sarah stands up. There is no response to this statement and she's had enough of playing games. She isn't happy.

SARAH: So...

She is distracted by the box of chocolates Dave is stuffing back into his bag. He's read the signs wrong and now he's trying to conceal his faux pas.

SARAH: What's that?

DAVE: What's what?

SARAH: In your bag? What is it? (pause) I don't believe it. (pause) You brought a box of chocolates.

DAVE: In case you remembered. (pause) I did promise.

SARAH: It was fifteen years ago.

BLACKOUT

SCENE TWO

A Prison in West Africa - fifteen years earlier. In the dim light we make out the figures of Sarah and Dave. Younger, obviously but still clearly recognisable. They are bound and blindfolded and sit, close together, tied to opposite sides of a washhand basin, but apparantly unaware of each other's presence. Dave sits silently, stoically upright, ears straining for any sound. Sarah is obviously uncomfortable and troubled by flies landing on her face, she blows them off repeatedly. This small noise is evidence to Dave that he is not alone, and it's also becoming intensely irritating to him.

DAVE: For Chrissakes stop that.

SARAH: Sorry. (pause) Are you..?

DAVE: English?

SARAH: A prisoner too?

DAVE: You think I'm your captor?

Silence for a moment.

SARAH: I don't... I didn't... I can't see.

DAVE: That'll be the blindfold.

Sarah begins to cry quietly.

DAVE: Look. Don't (pause) Sorry. (pause) For saying look. (pause) For making a bad joke. (pause) Are you about eighteen, Dark brown hair, blue eyes, about five foot five, wearing a light blue tee shirt and..

SARAH: How do you..?

DAVE: You were sitting next to me on the plane. (pause) I'm the guy with the light grey cheap suit. No earring. Bad taste

in ties? (he effects a strained laugh) Hardly an appealing lonely hearts ad is it? I should say, six foot, professional, GSOH..

SARAH: GSOH?

DAVE: Good sense of humour. (pause) Which I suspect we're going to need here.

SARAH: Where are we?

DAVE: I don't know. Smells like..yes.. I think it's a bathroom. Not a very sanitary bathroom.

SARAH: Are you blindfolded too?

DAVE: Yes. And tied to what appears to be the stem of the wash hand basin. Kind of ironic I suppose.

SARAH: I think I'm tied on the same thing.

She squirms around a bit and their bodies meet.

SARAH: We're quite close.

DAVE: Maybe I could undo your blindfold.

SARAH: How? Can you move your hands?

DAVE: With my mouth. (pause) If you want me to try?

SARAH: I suppose so. (pause) You don't think they..?

DAVE: It's a risk. But do you want to stay here blindfold?

SARAH: No.

DAVE: If you're scared, you could undo mine first.

SARAH: No. It's all right. You do it. I'm not sure I can..it's so dark.

DAVE: Are you ready?

SARAH: Yes.

There is an uncomfortably long silence

DAVE: Well give me something. I can't feel where you are.. you have to make some noise.

SARAH: What sort of..?

Dave has by this time located her, and with his mouth begins to feel up her body, towards her face.

The action is strangely intimate and Sarah is obviously embarrassed.

DAVE: Sorry.

SARAH: It's okay.

DAVE: I can't... should I stop?

SARAH: No.

DAVE: What's..?

SARAH: My right cheek.

DAVE: Your skin is amazingly soft.

SARAH: That's my ear.

DAVE: Oh. Sorry. Here it..

He fumbles his way, lips against her cheeks until he locates her ear and then she turns her head

and he begins to bite at the knot of the blindfold. There is quite a struggle and Dave's voice is muffled as his mouth is full of blindfold.

DAVE: Work with me here.. oh, there it is. Can you see?

SARAH: Not very well. There's no light on..and the windows are shuttered.

DAVE: What can you see?

SARAH: It is a bathroom. (pause) And you.

DAVE: What?

SARAH: I can see you. (pause) Thank you.

DAVE: Will you return the compliment?

SARAH: I can't undo my hands. (pause) Oh.. okay. I'll try.

She shuffles over to him and brushes against his cheek as her lips seek the knot on the blindfold.

DAVE: I know. I need a shave. Never a razor around when you need one.

He continues talking as Sarah struggles to release the blindfold.

DAVE: Or perhaps you like the designer stubble look? With the GSOH? You realise of course I'm trying to put you at your ease. (pause) Silly really. I mean we've just been hijacked and kidnapped and

I think I can put you at your ease. (pause) How are you doing?

Sarah mumbles something incomprehensible then...

SARAH: There. It's loose. (pause) Is that it?

Dave wiggles his way out of the blindfold. The two look at each other in the gloom. They stare long and hard in each others eyes before British reserve once more takes hold and they look away. There is a long silence.

SARAH: Why are we here?

DAVE: Do you mean why are we here as in we is you and me and here is this bathroom, Or do you mean we as in mankind, here as in existant in this spatial and temporal..?

SARAH: I mean.. I was on a flight out to start my gap year VSO, so no one would want to kidnap me.. so they must have wanted to kidnap you and I got caught up in it.

DAVE: Oh. (pause) I see. You want someone to blame.

SARAH: I want a reason.

DAVE: It's an accident?

SARAH: What?

DAVE: If it's an accident, which I think it is, then there isn't a reason, which I think there isn't. At any rate, no one has any more reason to kidnap me than to kidnap you. (pause) But of course it isn't really an accident. In that someone, to whit the kidnappers, have some reason to kidnap someone, some grievance, some cause.. Wrong place at wrong time syndrome.

SARAH: Oh great.

DAVE: Look. I'd like to be able to give you a clear, simple explanation. But this is Africa. There are no clear simple explanations here.

SARAH: But.. someone will save us?

Dave laughs.

DAVE: Save us? This isn't a western you know. No jailbreaks here.

SARAH: So what do we do?

DAVE: Wait.

SARAH: What for?

DAVE: For something to happen (pause) Which inevitably it will. At some point.

SARAH: But I mean. It is a mistake? Isn't it?...I mean. Kidnapping us. I mean. There can't be a ransom or anything, can there?

DAVE: Well I don't own anything of any value. You're not famous are you?

SARAH: No.(pause) How long do you think we'll have to wait?

DAVE: Don't know. I guess they plan on feeding us. Once a day or so. Keep us alive. Or they'd have killed us..

Sarah gulps, begins to shake.

DAVE: Sorry. Don't. I didn't mean.. don't worry. I'm sure they'll let us go, unharmed, And very soon. As you said, what advantage is there in kidnapping us. (pause) Look, I'm Dave. Sorry.. can't shake hands. (pause)

He attempts to inject some humour into the situation.

DAVE: I don't usually brush cheeks with girls I don't know.

SARAH: Sarah.

DAVE: Okay Sarah. Let's see if we can get the hands untied..

SARAH: Do you think..? I mean.. if they come..? We don't want to..?

DAVE: Okay. You've got a point. Maybe blindfold's is enough for now. (pause) Are you cold?

SARAH: A bit. You?

DAVE: Mmm. I didn't think to pack a jumper.

He moves over to her, their bodies touch and they look in each others eyes.

DAVE: You've got beautiful eyes Sarah.

SARAH: Shh. (pause) I think someone's coming.

BLACKOUT

SCENE 3

A West African Prison - some time later. As the dim lights come up we see Sarah, curled up on a rough bed in foetal position. Dave squats on the floor in the middle of the room, watching her.

DAVE: (whispers) Sarah? (pause) Sarah?

SARAH: Mmm?

DAVE: Are you awake?

SARAH: Of course. You don't think I could sleep..?

DAVE: No. Of course. (pause) Listen. Are you cold?

SARAH: I don't know. (pause) Yes...I think so. (pause) I wasn't really.. I was thinking..

DAVE: Don't do that.

SARAH: What?

DAVE: Think. (pause) Just, well, it'll be easier to getthrough this if we don't do too much thinking. (pause) Are you cold?

Sarah shivers.

SARAH: Yes. It's probably shock. Cause I'm frightened.

DAVE: It's probably because it's bloody freezing in here and you've only got a tee shirt on. (pause) Do you want me to come up beside you. Warm you up? (pause) Just.. you know..

SARAH: Yes.

Dave crosses the room. We see that his feet are manacled and his hands still tied together. He sits on the bed beside Sarah, their bodies touching.

DAVE: Better?

SARAH: A bit. (pause) I'm still frightened.

DAVE: Me too.

SARAH: Really?

DAVE: Of course. I'm an engineer. Not a superhero. Of course you probably didn't notice that in all the excitement. (weak laugh) Shall I hold you?

SARAH: How..?

Dave lifts up his arms and puts them round Sarah's neck. His arms just stretch round her body, holding her close.

DAVE: Like that. (pause) All right? (pause) Warmer?

SARAH: Yes. (pause) Thanks Dave. Do you think..?

DAVE: I said don't do that. Look. What we need to do is to take our minds off thinking.

Their faces are very close together. For a moment it looks like he might kiss her.

DAVE: Don't worry. I'm not going to.. I mean.. oh, you know.. What book were you reading?

SARAH: When?

DAVE: On the plane.

SARAH: Fitzgerald. The Great Gatsby.

DAVE: Oh. Good?

SARAH: Mmm. "They were careless people Tom and Daisy"

DAVE: What?

SARAH: "They were careless people, Tom and Daisy." Tom and Daisy are characters in it. It's set in twenties America. You know. Prohibition. And..#

DAVE: And Gatsby. Is he great?

SARAH: He was played by Robert Redford in the film.

DAVE: That's pretty great I suppose.

SARAH: Yes. But it's ironic really. I mean. It's about the American dream going sour.. sort of.

DAVE: So. You're a literature buff?

SARAH: No. I'm.. I was.. I'm meant to be going to University next year. To study English.

DAVE: And that includes American literature?

SARAH: Yes. I think so. (pause) It was on the reading list.

DAVE: Which university?

SARAH: Does it matter?

DAVE: Doesn't it? (pause) It's not Oxford, or Cambridge, or somewhere is it? I'm not holed up with the next Brain of Britain am I?

SARAH: No.

DAVE: So which one?

SARAH: I don't want to think about it..I mean, we probably won't..

DAVE: Of course we will. Next year you'll be punting down the Cam, or up the Cam or doing whatever they do at your university, or you'll be late for a lecture, on Irony in Fitzgerald's Great Gatsby, and just for an instant you'll have a memory, a flashback. It won't even seem like a real memory, it'll just be a thought - a moment's pause before you dismiss it, and you'll think of me and here, and then it'll slip away. Like a dream.

SARAH: I don't think so.

DAVE: No. You probably won't remember meat all.

He shifts about a bit. They are still holding on to each other, very close.

DAVE: Sorry, cramp. (pause) Are you warmer now?

SARAH: Yes.

DAVE: You probably won't want to remember a night spent with an unshaven engineer in a room in the middle of nowhere in West Africa. Not exactly an experience to write home about I admit.

He removes his arms from round her, shuffles to the other side of the small bed.

DAVE: Although of course you might want to dramatise it. You know. Make it into something more exotic. To tell your friends.(He laughs) I don't mind if you paint me as Robert Redford. If you want to.. no.. maybe not..

A pause in which we realise the falseness of their previous intimacy and they resume the cautious inexperience of two people thrown together in adversity.

DAVE: I'm reading something highly ironic too as it happens. And I hope we get out of here soon because I'm desperate to see the wow ending.

SARAH: What is it?

DAVE: "Protect and Survive."

SARAH: What?

DAVE: Protect and Survive. It's a Home Office leaflet. Telling you how to survive a Nuclear attack. It's a blast. (laughs) And highly ironic. I think. Are you tired?

SARAH: Yes.

DAVE: D'you want me to... to let you sleep..?

He begins to rise from the bed.

SARAH: No. I mean.. I don't think I'll sleep. You can stay here.

He settles down beside her again.

SARAH: But it won't only be one night will it?

DAVE: I don't know. (pause) I doubt it. So. You can't sleep and we can't think. And we haven't got our books to read. Which is lucky since we haven't got the use of our hands to read with. But it was a coup over the blindfold's eh? And getting out of that stinking bathroom.

SARAH: They don't care if we see them. (pause) That isn't necessarily good is it?

DAVE: What do you mean?

SARAH: I mean. It could mean they're going to kill us. If they don't care that we see them.

DAVE: They aren't going to kill us.

SARAH: How do you know?

DAVE: They won't. You saw the guy. He's not going to kill us. He was falling over himself apologising for having had to kidnap us at all. And he thought he'd done us a real favour. (puts on a pidgin English voice) "You wife. You wife all right?" Now THAT was ironic.

SARAH: What?

DAVE: That we'd sat together for over six hours on a plane, not speaking a word. Oh, all right, you slept on my shoulder and slobbered on it a bit..

SARAH: I didn't..

DAVE: Only joking. Of course you were most restrained. Most British. Every time your head was about to hit my shoulder, every time I thought you were actually going to touch me, your inbuilt British instinctive properness jerked it back up again..Anyway. Six hours of that and normally we would have left the aeroplane, at the airport, you would have gone one way, I would have gone the other and we'd never have known anything about each other. You'd never have been exposed to my GSOH and I'd soon have forgotten about your beautiful, beautiful blue eyes. You know. In a year or so. I'd have got over it. But now. Just because of a quirk of fate. Just because, well, because of nothing. An accident. The freak timing of who stood where in a queue in an airport terminal and we, because we sat in K26 and K27 respectively, are now man and wife. At least in the eyes of Aboo.

SARAH: Aboo?

DAVE: He's called Aboo.

SARAH: How do you know?

DAVE: I heard one of them calling him it.

SARAH: Oh. Are you sure?

DAVE: Does it matter?

SARAH: Doesn't it?

DAVE: We should play a game.

SARAH: What?

DAVE: To pass the time. A game. To stop you thinking. And to stop me talking about your beautiful eyes and embarrassing you. Unless you want to exchange life histories which I believe is traditional in hostage situations. (pause) No? I thought not. I mean. It's not like we're man and wife, is it? We don't have to get to know each other. Not the real each other. We don't have to be... intimate... Tell each other things. It'll only be so embarrassing next week when I meet you in a bar.. and you've told me.. or I've told you.. So. A game. You choose.

SARAH: I... I don't know any games. (pause) Do you mean like I spy?

DAVE: Not the most perfect choice of games in a room this size.

SARAH: Well.. I don't.. I mean.. I don't like games much. (pause) Did you ever play that game Kim's game?

DAVE: No. I don't think so. What's that?

SARAH: It's a game you used to have to play at parties. Kim's game - at parties. When you were a kid. The kind of parties where you had to wear patent shoes and not blow out the host's candles, and not be sick on the floor - and not get carried away. And I always wondered who the hell this Kim was? (pause) I hated parties.

DAVE: And what was it?

SARAH: What?

DAVE: What was Kim's game?

SARAH: Oh some stupid thing where they put lots of things on a tray and you had to look at it, and then they took the tray away and you had to remember the things and then they brought the tray back with one thing missing and you had to guess which thing.

DAVE: Sounds like a gas. (pause) I never went to parties.

SARAH: You were lucky.

DAVE: Well, Sarah. Let's find a better game to play. Not a Kim's game. We'll invent a game. And in days to come generations of snotty nosed little kids will play it at parties and wonder who the hell Sarah was and why the game was named after her. Or we could play the Underground Game .

SARAH: What's that?

DAVE: The Underground Game? You know the London underground?

SARAH: Yes.

DAVE: Do you live in London? Oh, you don't have to answer that. Too personal. We'll take your yes to mean that you are relatively familiar with the London Underground and it's colour coding of lines. Okay. The game is this. I name a Destination, or two points - a departure and an arrivals point. And you have to tell me which stops you go through to get from A to B. Understand?

SARAH: I think so. (pause) But I don't think I know the Underground that well.

DAVE: You know the Central Line? The red one?

SARAH: Yes.

DAVE: Okay. I'll give you this for free. The Central line going West to East is: Ealing Broadway, West Acton, North Acton, East Acton, White City, Shepherd's Bush, Holland Park, Notting Hill Gate, Queensway, Lancaster Gate, Marble Arch, Bond Street, Oxford Circus, Tottenham Court Road, Holborn, Chancery Lane, St. Pauls, Bank, Liverpool Street, Bethnal Green, Mile End, Stratford, Leyton, Leytonstone, Snaresbrook, South Woodford, Woodford, Buckhurst Hill, Loughton, Debden and.. oh I can't remember after that. Something like Theydon Bois and Epping I think. Anyway, I could say to you - you're going from Tottenham Court Road to Stratford and you'd say: Holborn, Chancery Lane, St Pauls, Bank, Liverpool Street, Bethnal Green And Mile End.

SARAH: All right. How about the District Line. That's the green one isn't it?

DAVE: Correct.

SARAH: Okay. Tell me the stops on the District Line between Embankment and..

DAVE: Westminster, St. James Park, Victoria, Sloane Square, South Kensington, Gloucester Road, Earls Court, where the line splits and if you take the Paddington Line..

SARAH: Okay. Okay. How do you know them all?

DAVE: How do you know I've got them all right? I could just be making it up. No. That wouldn't be playing the game, would it? (pause) So how do I know them? Because I wonder what it's like to be

blind and travel on the tube. And how would you know which stop to get off. So. Against the remote but frightening possibility of early glaucoma or acid sprayed in the eyes I have embarked upon a programme of study every time I go on the tube. Instead of carefully avoiding the eye of every other passenger on the train, I make sure I'm sitting near to the map and learn off some of the stations. Then sometimes I shut my eyes and test myself to see how well I'm doing.

SARAH: Really?

DAVE: Yes. Really. Of course there is an additional problem.

SARAH: What?

DAVE: The train often stops between stations. So you have to listen out to work out whether people are getting on and off, whether doors are opening. And by the time you get to Turnham Green late at night you can't always tell.

SARAH: I thought the trains didn't stop at Turnham Green late at night.

DAVE: No. That's Stamford Brook. Or do you mean on the Piccadilly Line? (pause) You're a dark horse. You know more than you let on.

SARAH: Not really. I just...

DAVE: Don't tell me. Remember the bar.

SARAH: What bar?

DAVE: The one we'll meet up in, next week, or the week after. The one where I'll embarrass you by introducing you as "my wife" to some colleague or other. (pause) And you'll embarrass me by slapping me very hard round the face, which I'll deserve. Or by ignoring me totally. Which I won't deserve. That bar.

SARAH: Oh. That bar.(yawns) What's it called?

DAVE: That's my girl. I think you'll sleep now. (pause) Don't worry. I'll be right here. (pause) Good night.

SARAH: Goodnight.

DAVE: See you in the morning.

SARAH: Mmm.

She settles down, nestling up to him. There is a moment where he looks at her innocent face, peaceful in sleep. He kisses her softly on the forehead.

DAVE: Sweet dreams Sarah.

BLACKOUT

SCENE 4

A prison cell, some weeks later. Sarah sits alone on the floor reading a pamphlet. Her hands are only loosely tied. There is quite a length of rope between them. The door opens and Dave enters, clean-shaven.

DAVE: I'm so glad they let me have a shave at last - the beard was becoming really annoying.

SARAH: I thought it quite suited you.

DAVE: It didn't quite suit me. But thanks. You're better than a mirror - you lie.

SARAH: And look. Books. They brought our books. I've been reading it - Protect and Survive.

DAVE: What do you think?

SARAH: I don't think it's a problem we'll have to face.

DAVE: Come on Sarah. Why would Aboo let me have a shave if..?.

SARAH: No. I mean nuclear holocaust. I just can't see it.

DAVE: Oh. Well. It's a point of view.

SARAH: You think there will be?

DAVE: I may have lost the optimism of youth. But I certainly think that Protect and Survive is the urban myth to end all urban myths.

SARAH: It is a bit crass - listen - (reads) Action on Attack Warning number sixteen " have you sent the children to the fall-out room." (laughs) Like there's fifteen things you'd do before...

DAVE: Good pictures though eh?

He picks up the other book.

DAVE: And The Great Gatsby. Joy unbounded.

He rubs his wrists thoughtfully.

DAVE: And hands which can turn pages. (pause) Things are looking up Daisy.

She looks up from the pamphlet which has been absorbing her attention.

SARAH: What?

DAVE: Daisy. Isn't that what she's called in the book? "They were careless people Tom And Daisy"?

SARAH: Oh. Yes. But I don't think I qualify as Daisy - the girl with the golden hair.. whose voice smelled of money.

DAVE: I'll be the judge of that. (he studies the book closely) It's not much of a book is it? I mean sizewise. I thought great literature was all in weighty tomes. (pause) But there you are. Never a weighty tome around when you want one. Well, this should keep us going for an hour or two. Then we can have a discussion group. About the relative values of Protect and survive and the Great Gatsby. Their influence on late twentieth century culture. Their status as urban myths. Come on. Let's have a quick round of urban myths.

SARAH: What for?

DAVE: To celebrate.

SARAH: Celebrate what?

DAVE: The books. My smooth chin. The fact that it's a Friday, or Wednesday, or some day. I don't have a clue what day it is. Do you?

SARAH: No.

DAVE: Come on. Let's play.

Sarah buries her head in Protect and Survive

SARAH: Not now.

DAVE: But we're at volume seven.

SARAH: No.

DAVE: We are.

She looks up at him sternly.

SARAH: I mean no I don't want to play.

Embarrassed by her show of strength she looks away.

DAVE: And I don't want to sit here thinking about how beautiful your eyes are and how lovely the curve of your neck is and how much I want to kiss you and how hard you would hit me if I tried, but we can't always have what we want..

Sarah looks up in surprise.

SARAH: What?

DAVE: I know. We said we weren't going to be personal. So that when we met again In that bar.. I remember we laid down ground rules. Play the game, Stick it out. Put up with it. But that was twelve weeks ago Sarah. We're still here. Things change.

SARAH: What's changed?

DAVE: Well. The chocolate game for one.

SARAH: What do you mean?

DAVE: I mean. When we started the chocolate game, I thought it was just another game. Something to take our minds off things. It was so ludicrous. Buying imaginary boxes of chocolates. Remembering what ones are in which brand. Writing down the legend. Deciding which to eat first. Montelimar. It was just a game.

SARAH: It still is. More's the pity. I'd kill for Montelimar now. Even Montelimar. Just something sweet.

DAVE: That's exactly it. The craving for something sweet. (pause) No. That's a lie. It's more than that. It's the fact that we've grown - you know - together. There's a bond. There has to be. Compatibility. You know. Chocolate wise. It has to count for something.

SARAH: It's only chocolates. (pause) Not even real chocolates.

DAVE: So, humour me for a bit will you?

He gets out a piece of grubby paper on which is written some names of chocolates.

DAVE: Milk Tray. Begin.

SARAH: Favourites or eating order?

DAVE: Favourites.

SARAH: Orange cream.

DAVE: Hazelnut whirl.

SARAH: Strawberry cream.

DAVE: Praline.

SARAH: Coffee Cream.

DAVE: Truffle.

SARAH: Fudge.

DAVE: Hazelnut in Caramel.

SARAH: Caramel chew.

DAVE: Soft Caramel.

SARAH: Turkish Delight.

DAVE: Turkish Delight. You see. We got right to the end before we had one in common. Turkish Delight. In preference to Montelimar. Right to the end. Don't tell me it doesn't mean something. Now - let's play the game. You pick first.

SARAH: Caramel Chew.

DAVE: Truffle.

SARAH: Coffee Cream.

DAVE: Hazelnut in caramel.

SARAH: Fudge.

DAVE: Soft caramel.

SARAH: Come on. I know you're going to do it. I know you are. (pause) I'm not going to fall for it. Strawberry Cream.

DAVE: What do you mean you know I'm going to do it? Why should I do it? I could pick Montelimar right now. Or I could pick Orange cream. How do you..?

SARAH: I know. I just know. Go on.

DAVE: Turkish Delight. There. Happy now.

SARAH: Damn. You've left me with Montelimar.

DAVE: Not necessarily. You could pick Praline now. Or hazelnut whirl. You could have revenge.

SARAH: And risk my orange cream. Are you mad?

DAVE: Go on then. Pick. Play the game.

SARAH: Orange cream.

DAVE: Had you on the run eh? (pause) What's the matter? Don't you trust me?

SARAH: Of course I trust you. But...

DAVE: Montelimar.

SARAH: What's the point of that? That's no real sacrifice. That's..? What'm I left with?

DAVE: Praline or Hazelnut whirl. See. I trust you.

SARAH: There's no choice then is there. I can't pick hazelnut whirl. I'll have to pick Praline. (pause) But I don't like Praline.

DAVE: So pick Hazelnut whirl.

SARAH: No.

DAVE: Then Praline it is?

SARAH: No. You have them both. (she turns away) I just don't like them.

DAVE: You see. It's not just about favourites is it? We've got a relationship going here. You care about me having the chocolate I like best. You want me to have Hazelnut whirl and Praline, even if you don't totally trust me with your Orange cream.

SARAH: You could have let me have Turkish Delight.

DAVE: I was testing you. You see. But I paid for it. I ate the Montelimar. And risked my two favourites to do it. (pause) You have to admit. It's a relationship. Of sorts.

SARAH: Well of course we have a relationship. You couldn't be holed up with someone for weeks on end and not form some kind of a relationship.

DAVE: Aboo?

SARAH: Pardon?

DAVE: Would you say you have a relationship with Aboo?

SARAH: No. Yes. Well not really. But it hardly counts. I mean he lets us out to the toilet twice a day. He gives us food once a day. But it's not.. it hardly gives grounds for establishing a relationship.

DAVE: But you got him to give us the books. And your bag.

SARAH: Without most of its contents. Giving us a book each, a notepad and pen and some tissues hardly constitutes great..

DAVE: But we have made progress with him. Blindfold. No blindfold. Hands tied hard, Hands tied loosely. Extra blankets. Shaving. Tampons..

SARAH: You'd do as much for anyone. If we had a relationship with him he'd have told us why we're here and when we're getting out.. and what's going on.

DAVE: So you admit. We have a relationship which is over and above the ordinary, given the circumstances.

SARAH: I don't think I can comment. There's nothing to compare it with.

DAVE: Okay. Let's imagine we had just met casually. Had just got talking on the plane. Stranger things do happen eh? And I said my name was Dave and I was an Engineer, on contract work for twelve months and you said you were Sarah, a gap year student, English teaching VSO. And you agreed to meet up with me for a drink in a week or so. Once you'd settled in. And we met up. And we had a drink. And you drank beer. And I drank beer. The same beer.

DAVE: But that's not unusual because there isn't much choice in this back of beyond place

which laughingly calls itself a bar, but rents rooms by the hour. Of course you don't know that. And I don't tell you. It's not like I intend to take them up on the offer. And I said "Do you want another beer?" and you said "no" because you aren't used to drinking alcohol and you didn't want to give me the wrong impression, or get into a potentially dodgy situation, given that you've never really been for drinks with a man who picked you up on a plane before. And you've seen desperate white men being led upstairs by unattractive native women, and you're beginning to wonder what sort of man would suggest to meet you in this particular bar. So you said you'd have a Pepsi and I said "that's lucky because they don't sell Coke here" and you said you were pleased because you didn't drink Coke on principle and I said "what principle is that?" and you said something about it being because the Coca Cola foundation funded American troops..

SARAH: Is that true?

DAVE: Yes. You see. You are much more politically aware in my story.

SARAH: Go on then.

DAVE: Well, by then you've probably decided you ought to be getting back, And we've only talked about inconsequential things like the plumbing and that you're missing your family a bit, even your annoying kid brother, and that you hope to go to University, But you think it'll be strange fitting back in after a year in Africa... Do you see what I'm getting at?

SARAH: Not really.

DAVE: That if we'd met like that. And had a drink. And even if I'd been really out to impress, and walked you home, and bought you flowers, and chocolates and consequently got another date. Somewhere more upmarket. Dinner perhaps. And even if we'd met up every couple of weeks so that by now we'd have met six or seven times... we wouldn't know half what we know about each other now. Even despite the rules of not being personal. It's happened.

SARAH: But what do you think you know about me? That I like soft centred chocolates. That I'm frightened. That...

DAVE: Where we are now in our relationship is intimate. Intensely intimate, even though it happened without either of us choosing it, or particularly wanting it. It's like a vindication for arranged marriages. You see, even if you'd fancied me on the plane and we'd begun a torrid affair immediately we touched down, we still wouldn't know as much about each other as we do now, having spent day and night literally bound together in this place, facing everything and nothing together.

SARAH: I think you're being superficial. (pause) There's plenty about me you don't know. Important things.

DAVE: Like what? That you've got a boyfriend back home. That he wanted you to... But you didn't want to... that you're still a virgin? Those sort of things?

SARAH: I don't see whether me being a virgin or not is any of your business.

DAVE: None of it's any of my business. Except that I care about you.

SARAH: Don't be stupid.

DAVE: I do. (pause) Enough to eat Montelimar for you. (pause) Enough to ask Aboo to let you go instead of me.

SARAH: Aboo said he's going to let you go?

DAVE: No. But if he did, I'd ask him to let you go instead.

SARAH: You wouldn't. (pause) I wouldn't expect you to. (pause) I wouldn't want you to.

DAVE: Of course you would. You wouldn't want to stay here on your own.

SARAH: There's no point talking about it. It isn't going to happen.

DAVE: But all we can do here is talk. And think. And communicate. And relate. Tell the truth. Or lies. Urban myths. Whatever makes it easier. I'm starting to think that the truth might...

SARAH: So what is the truth?

DAVE: That I... That this place is special. Not like anything else. It's outside all that.

SARAH: Normal rules don't apply?

DAVE: I'm not saying that.

SARAH: What are you saying?

DAVE: I don't want to say it.

SARAH: What?

DAVE: You won't believe it. Maybe I don't believe it. If I say it, it'll be said and we both will spend hours trying to rationalise it, making ourselves not believe it. If it remains unsaid, I can just keep it as a secret uncomfortable truth.

SARAH: God this is too intense for me. Let's play bloody urban myths.

DAVE: Urban myths volume seven. Ummm. That beauty is only skin deep.

BLACKOUT

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE

The prison, several weeks later. Dave and Sarah are still there, as before, except that they seem more comfortable in each others presence.

DAVE: Have you ever thought that when you're on a journey, you know, between A and B, whether A is Turnham Green and B is Earl's Court or A is London and B is West Africa, whatever, that you only exist as a memory for the people you've just left and as an expectation for the people you're about to meet, but really you only exist for yourself.

SARAH: What about the other people you're travelling with?

DAVE: Oh. You exist as a physical body of course. But the great British reserve means that you don't really exist. I mean. Did I really exist for you before we were thrown in here together? If you can remember that far back.

SARAH: No. I s'pose not.

DAVE: You see. It's like that here, with us. We exist here in our own unique temporal and spatial entity. We exist only for and with each other.

SARAH: And Aboo?

DAVE: He is the link with the outside world I suppose. But he's not a real link is he? He's like Godot. Or God. Maybe he doesn't really exist. Eh? And when he shuts the door, that tiny link with reality is lost. It's very freeing don't you think?

SARAH: It's frightening.

DAVE: I've been in worse prisons.

SARAH: What do you mean?

DAVE: Don't you know your Hamlet? "There's nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so"

SARAH: Do you believe that?

DAVE: Would you argue with Shakespeare? (pause) The bard. Is that what they teach you at University these days? Subversion. No wonder the country's in the state it's in.

SARAH: Be serious. And I haven't been to University yet, remember. I haven't been anywhere yet. (pause) What do you mean? About prisons.

DAVE: I mean that of course I want to get out of here, get on with my life. But I'm afraid we may never meet in that bar now. And right now, I'd rather stay here with you, in prison, than risk you slapping my face, or ignoring me in some crummy bar in what we might call freedom. You see, I've built up a whole new life in here. A life which you're part of. A future. And I'm frightened it only exists as long as we stay here. That once we get out, I may never introduce you as my wife to my colleagues and you may never slap my face. I'm afraid that we'll stand next to each other on the platform at Turnham Green underground station, some time in the future, two or three years from now, and we'll never speak. That you'll barely recognise me, that I'll be like a half remembered dream, or the missing lines in a poem. Upsetting the rhythm of your life. We'll never eat chocolates together. Real chocolates. Or share a bottle of Retsina on a Greek island on holiday, or make love on the beach in the sunset. All the things I dream of doing when we get out. All the things that seem real in here will fade away... and...

SARAH: Don't think so much. (pause) Dave. You told me that. Remember. (pause) Your rules. (pause) Come on. Urban myths. Come on. Volume eight.

DAVE: That enough is as good as a feast.

SARAH: That you get what you deserve.

DAVE: That you deserve what you get.

SARAH: That you can't have your cake and eat it.

DAVE: I hate that. You're wrong. It's that you can't eat your cake and have it. It doesn't make sense the other way round. (pause) That you can't eat your cake and have it. Well that's true.

SARAH: So I'm right?

DAVE: It doesn't count. It's an error, not an urban myth.

SARAH: Excuse me, King of semantics. (pause) Okay. That love is all you need.

DAVE: We had that in volume two.

SARAH: Well I'm getting tired. And tired of this game.

DAVE: Come on. Keep playing. You have to keep playing the game. Okay. Here's one to get you going. That love is an urban myth.

SARAH: You think so?

DAVE: You want me to think so?

SARAH: I don't want you to think anything. (pause) Except what you think. Do you?

DAVE: Do I think love is an urban myth? Do I? Am I Fitzgerald or Byron? Realist, Romantic or Cynic? Or all of the above? Let me see...I did have a Literary bent you know. Before Engineering bought my body and soul. Let me see...

SARAH: Love is pain. Love is torture. Love is crying out and wanting to hurt and...

DAVE: And you have real life experience of this?

SARAH: I know its more Wuthering Heights than The Great Gatsby.

DAVE: I repeat. You have real life experience of this?

SARAH: It's not all like love poems. I know that.

She challenges him.

SARAH: Love at first sight is an urban myth.

DAVE: Do you know that? Or do you just believe it?

SARAH: I know it.

DAVE: I wish I had your wisdom. How do you know it?

SARAH: It's never happened to me.

DAVE: Yet.

SARAH: I just don't believe it. It's too cosy. It's too Mills and Boon. It's too..

DAVE: Inconvenient. Leaves too little choice. Means there are forces greater than your cynicism.

SARAH: I'm not cynical.

DAVE: About love you are.

SARAH: So tell me. (pause) No go on. You're the expert. You tell me about love. (pause) What can you really tell me about love? It's all chat up lines to you isn't it? Tell me you don't think love is an urban myth. You think everything else is. Go on. Tell me.

DAVE: I will tell you. I'll tell you something you don't want to hear. I'll tell you that I didn't believe in love at first sight. Then I saw this girl.

SARAH: That's a line. You know it's just a line.

DAVE: I know that love hurts. I know that. From experience. I also know it's only for the brave. Or foolhardy. And I know that love is about vulnerability. About trust. It's like the chocolate game. And I know that you don't know what I'm talking about, and you won't believe anything I say. And I'm in danger therefore of making a very big fool of myself. But that I probably will do it anyway. And that...

He leans over and kisses her. She responds. The kiss over, they look at each other. Recognition. Relief. Suspicion. Resolution.

DAVE: I said I splendidly loved you.

SARAH: What?

DAVE: I said I splendidly loved you. It's a line from a poem.

SARAH: The longer you spend in your refuge the less danger to your lives.

DAVE: What?

SARAH: It's a line from Protect and Survive.

DAVE: Oh. Very funny. Here I am, spilling my guts out.. and you..

Sarah reaches over and kisses him.

DAVE: You've got about a hundred years to stop that.

SARAH: Shut up Dave.

BLACKOUT

SCENE TWO

The prison cell. Later. Dave and Sarah are reclining on the bed, post coitus. Dave mimes a cigarette. Blows imaginary smoke rings.

SARAH: Can you do that?

DAVE: What?

SARAH: Blow smoke rings?

DAVE: I could. If I had a cigarette. (pause) I don't smoke. Though that's breaking the rules isn't it?

SARAH: What rules?

DAVE: Personal questions.

Sarah laughs.

SARAH: Still, even after what we've just done.. you still think the rules apply?

DAVE: Protect and survive.

He takes a pull on the imaginary cigarette.

SARAH: Can I have one of them?

Dave hands her an imaginary cigarette.

DAVE: It's my last one!

SARAH: Why thank you.

Dave lies on his back, arms behind his head.

DAVE: "I had a dream which was not all a dream."

SARAH: Pardon?

DAVE: It's Byron. I wish I could remember the whole thing. I keep going through it in my head and I can never remember the whole thing. Only the odd line, bit by bit.

SARAH: How come you know so much poetry?

DAVE: (laughs) So little poetry. I wasn't always an engineer you know. I studied literature. I've read books, seen films..

SARAH: Learned poems off by heart?

DAVE: Don't think I don't know what you're doing. Trying to get me to break the rules.

SARAH: Aren't rules made to be broken?

DAVE: Only the rules of physics.

Pause

SARAH: Well how about bending them a bit?

DAVE: The laws of physics? That doesn't sound like a good idea. And anyway, I think it's been done before.

SARAH: Come on. It's a bit late to be scared of giving yourself away. Of hiding things. We're beyond that now, surely?

There is a moment's awkward pause, then Dave expels a huge puff of breath and begins to talk as if a dam has finally burst.

DAVE: Ruperts. That's what we used to call lads at school who were into poetry. After Rupert Brooke - you know - "If I should die" and all that. "Breathless we flung us on the windy hill." "I said I splendidly loved you." Of course we usually called them Rupert as we were flushing their heads down the toilet. Fifteen year old boys are not pleasant things.(he laughs) But then.. when adolescence really kicks in. At sixteen.. you realised that the best way to.. well.. you know... get.. a girl, was to spout poetry. So off I went down the library and took out a book of poetry, by Rupert Brooke, him being the only poet I'd paid any attention to - apart from Wilfred Owen, but I didn't think that the writer of "bent double, coughing like hags" was likely to be able to help me much. So I got out this book by Rupert Brooke. And started to commit some of the poems to memory.

SARAH: And did it work?

DAVE: Well, as you can see, I've grown out of the habit. Almost.

He notices that Sarah is staring at him. He dries. Appears uncomfortable.

DAVE: What? You want more? (pause) Okay. More. More poetry. More life history. To satiate your gluttony for knowledge. Well. After Rupert Brooke I moved onto the Romantics of course. As you do. Byron, Shelley, Keats. Never Wordsworth. Wordsworth wasn't and Byron was.

SARAH: Wasn't what?

DAVE: What, not taking notes? Well keep up all the same. A Romantic. Wordsworth wasn't, Byron was. It's a view. A literary stance. Speaking of which - how about this - Gatsby as a trope of Rupert Brooke. the boy with the golden hair and the golden future, destroyed by his love for an unattainable woman.

SARAH: That's not a trope.

DAVE: Sure? So what is a trope? Give me your best shot.

She thinks for a while. Gives up.

SARAH: I know. I just can't tell you. I can't put it into words.

DAVE: I know exactly how you feel. Here's me, finally fallen in love with a girl who might be impressed by my poetic machismo, and all I can offer her are unconnected lines from Romantics and war poets, Protect and Survive, a half baked theory that urban myths might actually be cultural tropes and an uneasy feeling that Fitzgerald actually had some very deep point to get across underneath all that superficiality.

SARAH: And are you sure you are in love with me? (pause) It's not just all of this?

DAVE: Of course it's all of this. And of course I'm in love with you. All of this is just part of it. It doesn't really matter. It's the catalyst. The background. The setting and the scenery. I mean, I would have fallen in love with you.. given the opportunity.. anywhere. But..

SARAH: And after this?

DAVE: What do you mean?

SARAH: I mean what's going to happen after this. Once we get out. When we get back to reality.

DAVE: We'll live happily ever after won't we?

SARAH: Urban myth volume two.

DAVE: We'll grow old and grey sharing boxes of chocolates together..

SARAH: We'll have to go back to the lives we had before. And..

DAVE: And I'll take you to Turnham Green.

SARAH: Nothing's ever going to be the same is it?

DAVE: Nothing ever is.

SARAH: I love you Dave.

DAVE: That's all right then.

SARAH: Is it?

DAVE: Yeah.

They are about to kiss when the door opens. Aboo enters. He wears a balaclava, fatigues and gloves. He carries a gun. He uses the barrel of the gun to separate them. He pushes Dave.

ABOO: You. Go now.

DAVE: I had a shave earlier.

ABOO: Go. Now.

DAVE: I'll be back soon Sarah. Don't worry.

SARAH: Dave.

Aboo puts a blindfold round Dave and pushes him from the room. Sarah calls out after him.

SARAH: Dave. Dave..

She collapses on the floor crying.

SARAH: Dave. Don't leave me.

As he is bundled out, Dave struggles both physically and for something to say.

DAVE: Sarah.. don't worry.. don't.. Remember "I said I splendidly loved you!"

BLACKOUT

SCENE 3

The present. The Art Gallery. Sarah gets up. Moves towards a picture on the fourth wall. Looks out to the audience.

SARAH: Why didn't you tell me you were married. In prison.

Dave stands behind her, close but not quite touching.

DAVE: It would have made a difference.

He places his hands on her shoulders. She shrugs them off.

SARAH: Of course.

DAVE: That's why. We needed to get through. Sixteen weeks. Four months.

She turns to him.

SARAH: Sixteen weeks and one day for you. Seventeen weeks and three days for me.

DAVE: So I owe you nine days.

SARAH: You owed me the truth.. What was all that about trust?

DAVE: It was irrelevant.

SARAH: A game?

DAVE: No. Not trust. My wife. I would... if...

SARAH: What? Would have waited? You didn't. Would have told me? You wouldn't. I thought I'd been in hell, those nine days I was on my own. But when I finally came out, I realised the hell was just beginning.

DAVE: How did you find out? About my wife?

SARAH: I went to a bar. Our bar. The one you talked about. Oh, but you were long gone. Back to Blighty. The loving arms of your wife. And children? Nuclear fallout action checklist item twenty eight. Have you checked your survival kit?

DAVE: No. No children. Not then. And I had to go. My company..

SARAH: I know. Pulled out of Africa. Too commercially complex. Leave the aid agencies to get on with it. To do the dirty work. Leave eighteen year old girls to clear up the engineers mess.

DAVE: You didn't stay?

SARAH: Of course I stayed.

DAVE: But your family?

SARAH: They didn't know. Then. I told them there had been postal problems. They knew I was going to be in a remote situation. They didn't expect to hear from me regularly.. and the kidnapping never made the nine o'clock news did it? Hushed up in the spirit of "we don't negotiate with terrorists".

DAVE: You were very brave.

SARAH: I was terrified.

DAVE: So was I.

SARAH: You were a man. An adult. You even had the manual. Protect and Survive. (laughs) No wonder you liked urban myths so much. You are one.

DAVE: That's not fair.

SARAH: I came here to be fair did I? Toshake the hand of the man I lost... sorry... gave my virginity to. You can't lose virginity. I remember you were most insistent on that. Two mutually consenting adults... but casually forgetting to give me all the facts. Feeding me lies along with fictional chocolates.

DAVE: So what did you come here for? To slap my face? Missed the opportunity in the bar? Come for revenge? Go on then.

SARAH: It's fifteen years ago Dave. I'm all slapped out.

DAVE: So why come?

SARAH: To find out.

DAVE: Find out what?

SARAH: The truth. No more bloody myths Dave. Closure. Resolution. The truth. No more underground game or chocolate game or bits of poetry. Just the truth.

DAVE: You know the truth.

SARAH: I want to hear you say it.

DAVE: Urban myths volume one that stories have to have a beginning, middle and an end. Do you want the end?

SARAH: We had the end fifteen years ago. I want the truth.

DAVE: I loved you. (pause) I did. I had determined that when we got out I was going to leave my wife, marry you, and try for happy ever after.

SARAH: That resolution disappeared with the rain!

DAVE: I couldn't find you. I tried. I tried everything. But I didn't even know your second name. My company... the foreign office... they all clammed up on me (pause) I thought you might be dead. It was hell.

SARAH: "I said I splendidly loved you" You forgot the most important bit.

DAVE: What bit?

SARAH: The bit that came right after. "I said I splendidly loved you. It's not true." I learned it by heart. Trying to make sense of it all. Of you. Of me. Of us. Funny that with your near photographic memory you could only ever remember the bits of the poem that were designed to turn my head, or melt my heart, or open my legs.

DAVE: It doesn't suit you.

SARAH: What?

DAVE: Bitterness. Cynicism.

SARAH: When I told you that love was pain, I remember you saying "and you have real life experience of this?" Well you certainly took care of that.

DAVE: I didn't mean to hurt you.

SARAH: The only time someone says I don't mean to hurt you is when they know

DAVE: I thought you said you didn't believe in love at first sight.

SARAH: I don't.

DAVE: So when did you fall in love with me?

SARAH: Did I? Fall in love? The way I remember it now, I was a frightened, vulnerable teenager kidnapped in West Africa. Stuck in a room... thinking my life was about to come to a brutal end. I reached out. You were there. Was that love?

DAVE: But after. You fell in love after. You must have done to feel so much anger after all this time.

SARAH: I'm angry because I trusted you and you left me. You made me dependent on you and then you walked out on me.

DAVE: I didn't have a choice Sarah. Did I? What was I to do? Beat Aboo over the head and ride back in, western style, guns blazing, pull you up onto the back of my saddle and ride off..

SARAH: You said once you'd ask him to let me go instead of you.

DAVE: You said you didn't want me to.

SARAH: I was eighteen and..

DAVE: ...and in love? (pause) I did ask him. You think I didn't ask him? I begged him. On my knees. Literally on my knees. You must believe me (pause) I had no choice.

SARAH: It doesn't matter now.

DAVE: Do you know when I fell in love with you? (pause) When I first felt your soft skin with my lips. Before I even saw your face. How about that? Love before first sight. I knew then, I knew that I would get through the whole ordeal, that the best thing I would ever do in my life would be to get you through it, to come out the other side together, stronger. I would have done anything...

SARAH: You were a married man.

As Dave reaches out to kiss Sarah, a gallery warden in uniform walks past. The moment is broken and Sarah pulls away from him. He tries to lighten the situation as the figure passes by.

DAVE: Godot? God? Or Gatsby?

A pause as Sarah looks Dave straight in the eye. He reaches out to kiss her again... she pulls away.

SARAH: You can't repeat the past.

DAVE: Why of course you can.

SARAH: That was Fitzgerald's contribution to urban mythology.

DAVE: What about the last line of the book? The very last line. "We beat on, boats against the current, borne ceaselessly into the past."

SARAH: You don't believe that. I don't believe that. You'll have to do better than that.

DAVE: Who'd credit it? An Engineer. Teaching English to a University graduate.

SARAH: I didn't go to University.

DAVE: What?

SARAH: It seemed so pointless after.. after Africa. What happened. Not you and me. The whole thing. Kidnap. Famine. Hell.

DAVE: So what did..?

SARAH: What have I done with my life? I thought we had a rule. Not to get personal. Intimate but not personal.

DAVE: You are right. It's time for truth now. (laughs) You won't believe it. I'm a teacher. English. To foreign students. Not much time for poetry but I do my best. See, Gatsby turned out all right at the end!

Long, awkward pause.

DAVE: So. Are we going to open the chocolates?

SARAH: What have you brought?

DAVE: Woolworth's Belgian Chocolates. I thought you might appreciate the subtle irony.

SARAH: Not Milk Tray?

DAVE: The Lady loves..

SARAH: Milk Tray were your favourite.

DAVE: I haven't touched them since. I've bought the odd box from time to time over the years. But I've never managed to actually eat them. I tried throwing Montelimar out before I began a couple of times, but I couldn't.. knowing you weren't.. it wasn't the same. A real box of chocolates. Without you. When my reality was you and an imaginary box of chocolates. It seemed like a lie, to our memory. We were we then, weren't we . You and me. Us?

SARAH: We hid under the table and painted the windows white. We passed our last four minutes together - it's just that time got it wrong and every minute lasted a month.

DAVE: You survived. (pause) Even if I didn't do a very good job of protecting. And Gatsby did turn out all right at the end?

SARAH: Gatsby ended up dead in a swimming pool.

This is awkward. Dave is losing ground. But suddenly he thinks he's 'got it'. He holds the box out to Sarah.

DAVE: Does he like hazelnut whirl or orange cream?

SARAH: Who?

DAVE: Your husband. You are married?

Sarah avoids the question - issues a return challenge instead.

SARAH: Does your wife like Montelimar?

Dave is pulled up short. This is a new Sarah. He's out of his depth.

DAVE: That was uncalled for. (pause) She doesn't.. she didn't like chocolates. She was always a weight watcher.

SARAH: So that's why you had to find someone to share a box with.

She takes 'Protect and Survive' out of her bag. Hands it to Dave.

SARAH: You left this behind.

Dave takes it from her, surprised and holds it tenderly as if it evokes happy memories.

DAVE: You kept it?

He thumbs through it.

DAVE: (reading) After a nuclear attack, there will be a short period before fall-out starts to descend.

(pause) Use this time to do essential tasks.

He flicks through some more.

DAVE: Check that you have got your survival kit at hand for the fall- out room.

Sarah has begun to leave. Dave looks up, tries to engage with her, to make her stay.

DAVE: Still the Coca Cola kid?

SARAH: Pepsi.(pause) You know why.

He nods. She crosses. Kisses him on the cheek. He can't leave it at this. He has to know the truth.

DAVE: Are you? Married?

SARAH: Eight years ago.

DAVE: Children?

SARAH: Two. boys.

DAVE: Happy?

SARAH: Isn't that another urban myth?

DAVE: We're even then. Careless people? Tom and Daisy?

SARAH: I don't think so.

She takes a copy of The Great Gatsby out of her bag and hands it to him.

SARAH: They were Nick's characters. Not ours.

DAVE: What about Fitzgerald?

Sarah shakes her head. Looks at her watch.

SARAH: I really have to go.

Dave does nothing to physically prevent her, but his tone implores her to stay.

DAVE: What about us? Sarah? The Green light? The past? The future?..

She's gone. He flicks through the copy of The Great Gatsby, as if hoping for inspiration. A business card drops out. He looks at it, smiles, kisses it.

DAVE: (reads) Sarah Scott.. High Road Chiswick.. hmmm.. nearest tube station - Turnham Green.

He sees the irony. Flicks through the book and stops at a passage.

DAVE: (reading from the book) I'm going to fix everything just the way it was before. She'll see.

He puts the card in the book and closes it.

BLACKOUT

SCENE 4

An impersonal hotel room, some time later. Dave stands alone. Sarah enters and Dave helps her with her coat. She gives him a box of chocolates and sits on the side of the bed. Dave stands some way apart from her.

DAVE: I didn't think you'd come. After the last time.

SARAH: An inappropriate display of intimacy in a public place.

DAVE: What?

SARAH: It was hardly the right...

DAVE: And this is?

SARAH: Do you have to ask? Just look around. You. Me. A room. A box of chocolates.

DAVE: I.. I didn't.. I thought...

SARAH: It's hardly the seedy bar you promised me in West Africa. Do they rent the rooms by the hour here, or only overnight?

DAVE: Why did you come?

SARAH: Why did you ask me?

DAVE: A last ditch attempt. A return to our private reality. To better times. I don't like endings. Especially before the end.

SARAH: And when is the end?

DAVE: Maybe we had the end. Long ago. In which case this is a new beginning. I don't know. I just.. Sarah. You know...

SARAH: What this is leading to? I think so. What chocolates have you brought?

DAVE: I have brought you a box of chocolates. The Platonic box of chocolates if that won't give you altogether the wrong idea. As a result of a ceaseless quest over fifteen long years of hardship and self-restraint. Fifteen years which have changed me from a confident, forward looking young man with his whole life ahead of him, a man understanding love for the first time.. to a middle aged man with nothing to look forward to but more crises, more grey hair, or less hair of any colour, sleepless nights and an inability to recognise the face looking back at me from the mirror as the same man who loved you fifteen years ago. Who racked his brain for the right thing to say, or not to say. Whose slender confidence is shattered by the fact that these fifteen years seem to have passed you by, to have left you unchanged. The same beautiful eyes, the same soft, soft skin, the same... well.. Anyway. My quest is over. I present to you, with all my heart. Truly. With all my heart. The culmination of all our dreams in that West African prison cell where "there was a thunder on the deep" and "I came because you called". I humbly lay down at your feet the ultimate box of chocolates. Play the game as you will. This is for the past. The future. And that moment outside time which is the present. For us. Here. In this room. That other room, but older, wiser, better. The waking up after the dream. Nirvana. I give you, Black Magic. All I ask is that we honestly play the game one more time. To see if the years have made a cheat of what I believed was the love of my life. If it's true that sometimes we see most clearly with our eyes closed. What happens now is totally up to you.

SARAH: I'll play. But you begin.

DAVE: Favourites? Or eating order?

SARAH: Favourites. For old times sake. And things can change.

DAVE: Okay. Favourites. Hazelnut cluster

SARAH: Lemon Dream. They never had names like lemon dream in those days did they?

DAVE: I told you it was the ultimate box. Chocolate Brazil.

SARAH: Raspberry Roulade. I ask you. You'd think..

DAVE: Yes. It's a much harder sell than I remember it too. Especially since one's already bought the box by the time you read the legend.

SARAH: It's appropriate though, isn't it? The harder sell. The box once tried before but somehow still out of reach. More exquisite. Different. But still the object of desire. Still the perfection waiting

to be experienced. Still the lure of the ultimate trust.

DAVE: Nut Swirl.

SARAH: Orange Cream. I never thought I'd see the day when Orange cream was relegated to third on the list.

DAVE: Hazelnut in caramel.

SARAH: Coffee Cream.

DAVE: Continental Truffle.

SARAH: Caramel.

DAVE: Which leaves me with a choice between - let's see. A pure ingot of exquisite dark chocolate made with fine West African cocoa beans. Or Toffee and Mallow. A variation on Montelimar if ever I saw one.

SARAH: West African cocoa beans.

DAVE: Yes. It's a sign isn't it?

SARAH: I mean. You'd have to choose the West African cocoa beans.

DAVE: I guess so. So the game's clear isn't it. We have no point of conflict till we come to the pure ingot of West African cocoa beans. That'll be the telling time. Come on. You go first.

He sits very close to her on the bed. She looks deep into his eyes.

SARAH: I can't do this.

DAVE: Go on. Take a chocolate.

SARAH: I don't mean the chocolates. I mean this.

DAVE: What?

SARAH: You know. You know what this is about.

DAVE: It's about chocolate.

SARAH: It's about cheating.

DAVE: It's about love. About finishing something we had taken from us half way through. About..

Sarah dives into the box of chocolates.

SARAH: Orange cream.

She holds it up for confirmation. He nods. She tastes it.

SARAH: Oh. It's delicious.

DAVE: I left my wife five years ago.

He takes a chocolate from the box.

DAVE: Chocolate Brazil.

Sarah nods. Dave eats the chocolate. As she point to another one he continues.

DAVE: Caramel? (pause) You trust me?

She nods her head. But it may just be with the equisiteness of the chocolate.

DAVE: Continental Truffle.

SARAH: Coffee Cream. I left Eric too.

DAVE: Eric? Who's Eric?

SARAH: My husband. I left him.

DAVE: You never said.

SARAH: I was obeying the rules. Nothing personal.

DAVEL: Those rules have changed. I told you. It's truth now. Hazelnut in caramel.

SARAH: You're leaving the Hazelnut Cluster?

DAVE: I trust you.

SARAH: Raspberry Roulade.

DAVE: See. You trust me too. Lemon Dream plays Hazelnut Cluster.

SARAH: We're not at the end yet.

Dave picks a chocolate from the box and throws it across the room. It's the toffee mallow.

DAVE: Toffee Mallow. Montelimar by any other name..

SARAH: Get behind me sad fat kid. (pause) It's time. (pause) For truth. It's your turn.

DAVE: I had my turn. Toffee Mallow. (pause) You didn't expect me to eat it? Have you no heart?
Sarah laughs.

SARAH: Okay. My turn. My choice. The Hazelnut cluster. The lemon dream. Or the pure ingot of exquisite dark chocolate made with fine West African cocoa beans. Reality. Fantasy or the past?

DAVE: Your choice. It always was. It still is.

SARAH: I remember at school. My first year at school. Could even have been the first day. The day I walked proudly down the tunnel away from my mother, wearing my new school hat and my new school blazer. The first day. Or one day. Some day before I saw the boys playing who could pee highest in the toilets. A day before that. A day when I still thought the world was beautiful and unspoiled. One day. The teacher brought out a replica of a cocoa bean. It was gigantic. Bigger than the biggest Easter egg I'd ever seen. A West African cocoa bean. That was the moment. The defining moment. I expect somewhere, deep down it was holding that cocoa bean that led me to all this. To VSO, to K26, to Aboo and the prison cell and urban myths and you..

DAVE: So what's stopping you?

SARAH: Going back? Gatsby. Rupert Brooke. Ants. Everything.

DAVE: You know... we know... despite fate, and urban myths, and fifteen years and... and misquoted poetry... and lives which have been lived and loved and wasted... you know... the truth.

SARAH: The truth?

DAVE: The truth is Lemon dream. And Hazelnut cluster. You and me. Fused in the ultimate truth. In what was meant to be. The last chocolate. Come on. Have the Lemon Dream.

Sarah picks up the lemon dream. Savours it.

SARAH: All the times we played the game. All the games we played. Everything there was nothing compared to this. It's so... so...

Dave takes her in his arms and kisses her.

DAVE: So real?

SARAH: It's freedom. The taste of freedom.

She picks the hazelnut cluster from the box and gives it to Dave. He eats it, all the while looking deep into her eyes.

DAVE: So what now? Where do we go..?

SARAH: How can we go anywhere? From here?

DAVE: I want you. I want us. I want to..

Sarah gets up from the bed. She crosses to the chair where her coat is hung. She begins to put it on.

DAVE: Sarah. Sarah? What...?

SARAH: I can't Dave. I just can't.

DAVE: But. We've no ties. No husbands. No wives. No.. We've a past. A future..

She crosses to the door.

DAVE: Sarah. Don't.. we haven't finished. There's still the...

SARAH: Pure ingot of exquisite dark chocolate made with fine West African cocoa beans? (pause)
Well how could I resist. Just once.

She comes back into the room, takes off her coat and throws it back on the chair. She puts her arms round Dave and kisses him.

SARAH: Once more. For old time's sake.

Dave takes the chocolate from the box, puts it in his mouth, half sticking out for Sarah to take. She takes the offered half and they are close again, reminiscent of that first closeness in the darkened prison cell. But this time it's light. They sit, gazing at each other, savouring the chocolate. Then, eventually they kiss. A long lingering kiss finally broken by Dave.

DAVE: There's another layer underneath.

Sarah laughs.

SARAH: Isn't there always. (pause) Do you want to play blindfolded?

DAVE: I feel like I've just taken the blindfold off Sarah.

SARAH: What happened to "sometimes we see most clearly with our eyes closed?"

DAVE: It's an urban myth.

SARAH: And love?

DAVE: Love?

SARAH: Love. Come on Dave. The game's not over yet. Careless people, remember.

Sarah takes the paper from the box to reveal the bottom layer. She picks up a chocolate, shows it clearly to Dave then slowly, sensuously, puts it in her mouth.

DAVE: What are you doing? What...

Sarah takes another chocolate - shows it and puts it in her mouth along with the first.

DAVE: Okay, what's your point? Hazelnut cluster and Brazil nut..

She takes another chocolate

DAVE: And.. Nut swirl. What..?

SARAH: Protect and survive Dave.

She offers him the box.

DAVE: What do I take? What do you want me to take? Which one..?

SARAH: Is this a middle, an end, or a beginning? (pause) Resolution? Closure? Or a new volume of urban myths? (pause) Try the lemon dream. Go on. Try it.

He takes the lemon dream. Savours it. And surprised, finds that he sort of likes it.

DAVE: Will you stay till the end of the box?

SARAH: And what do we do when the box is empty?

DAVE: I'll take you to Turnham Green.

She thinks for a moment.

SARAH: You take the Piccadilly Line and I'll take the District line - and I'll meet you there.

DAVE: I'll wait for you. (pause) The Piccadilly line's faster. (pause) Which platform shall I wait on?

SARAH: It doesn't matter. (pause) We'll just find a bar and go for a beer.

But they are clearly going nowhere. They settle down in each others arms.

DAVE: Sarah. What can I do to tell you how much I love you. I don't know what to do? What can I..?

She turns to him - lighthearted.

SARAH: Just throw chocolate!

They kiss.

CURTAIN.

WHEN TIME STANDS STILL

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

The living area of "The Hab" on Mars 2020. The Hab is the podule which serves as home for Martian astronauts. Centre stage is a round table with four chairs. Sofa's are placed right and left. Two doors are positioned at an angle USL and USR. The room is quite featureless apart from the furniture. Nothing to suggest the comforts of home. Utilitarian, functional.

Dominating the back wall are two red LCD displays. One gives Earth Time and the other Mars Time. Only the Mars time clock is running as the curtain rises. It reads 14.35 - 36 - 37..

A claxon sounds. The Martian clock skips back 37 minutes. Both clocks synchronise at 14.00 and then begin to count in sync.

A man enters from the door USL. This is MATTI. He is young, blonde, Norwegian. He gives the clocks a cursory glance, yawns and stretches.

He sits down at the table.

From the door USR enters ARMSTRONG, older, dark haired, American but without much of an accent. He is followed by ELAINE (British), his wife, short dark hair in her thirties.

All wear basic spacewear for indoors.

Armstrong and Elaine sit at the table beside Matti who by now is pulling on some space overwear.

ARMSTRONG: What're you doing?

MATTI: Going out to find Leon.

ARMSTRONG: No.

MATTI: What?

ARMSTRONG: I said no.

MATTI: I heard what you said - I just don't get why you said it. We've wasted enough time as it is.

ARMSTRONG: You don't go. I'll go. I know where he is.

MATTI: Where he was.

ARMSTRONG: He'll most likely still be there, or thereabouts.

MATTI: Why should he still be there? You last saw him at one fifteen. It was a twenty minute rove back, then the stopped time, twenty minutes for you to get back - fifteen or so added for taking off and putting on of kit - that's about ninety minutes unaccounted for. Ninety minutes out on the surface of Mars in a malfunctioning rover - alone. It's certain death.

ELAINE: You don't know his rover's malfunctioned.

MATTI: So why'd he not follow Armstrong back?

ARMSTRONG: He'll have taken a sed with him. So we don't have to count the stopped time.

MATTI: Thirty seven minutes. We've wasted thirty seven minutes following procedure. I should have gone out there as soon as you came back.

ELAINE: You can't just ignore the clock.

ARMSTRONG: He'll be fine. He'll just have stopped time where he was. Less than an hour - and he'll have one twenty oxygen so...

MATTI: But the oxygen supply doesn't stop with time. It runs on Mars time. Consciousness stops. Breathing doesn't.

Elaine seems concerned.

ELAINE: He's right.

Armstrong remains calm.

ARMSTRONG: Leon will be fine. I'm onto it. I'll take extra oxygen with me just in case, and tools. We'll be back in no time. Leon, and me.

MATTI: I still think I should go. If the rover's stuffed I can fix it quickest.

ARMSTRONG: We have to stick with protocol. You can't go. We can't have both engineers out of the hab at the same time. You know that Matti.

MATTI: Don't quote rules at me Armstrong. I know them backwards. One Scotty and one Spock on every mission. Always work in pairs. A pair is a Scotty and a Spock. Not two Scotty's and not two Spocks. But nothing said that Spock's get to boss Scotty's around. And rules are made to be broken. In emergencies anyway.

ARMSTRONG: This isn't an emergency. (pause) Not yet.

MATTI: And when does it become an emergency?

ELAINE: Technically when he's been missing for over two hours.

MATTI: So if you don't find him straight off, by the time you get back it will be an emergency.

ARMSTRONG: Not given the stopped time factor.

MATTI: Which surely has to be overridden in this instance.

ARMSTRONG: You can't just play around with time Matti.

MATTI: Not even when Leon's life is on the line?

ARMSTRONG: Stop being so melodramatic. I'll find him. I know where he is. Just stay calm. It's in control.

Armstrong prepares to leave the hab. He kisses Elaine, pats Matti on the shoulder.

ARMSTRONG: As soon as I'm out there, I'll pick up some wave contact.

ELAINE: Take care.

MATTI: And hurry it up.

Armstrong exits.

Elaine crosses upstage to the wall mounted microwave.

ELAINE: Drink?

MATTI: Bar opening early? (pause) What wouldn't I give for a cold beer right now.

ELAINE: Tea or coffee?

MATTI: It all tastes like recycled water anyway - whatever.

ELAINE: You bicker like a pair of kids.

MATTI: You'd think you'd get used to it. After eight months. Recycled water. But it still tastes... recycled... what do you mean, like a pair of kids?

ELAINE: Like a pair of kids. Bickering. Always at each other. Is it some macho pride thing?

Matti shrugs his shoulders.

MATTI: No. It's a Scotty/ Spock thing. He thinks he's Captain Kirk and I know he isn't. That's all.

He grins.

MATTI: But I love him really. (pause) I love you both. I've got nothing against Spocks. But I hope he brings my Scotty mate back in one piece. And soon. Leon's a good man. He doesn't deserve..

Elaine brings over two mugs. Sits down beside Matti again.

ELAINE: Nothing's happened. Stop overdramatising. And you don't even like Leon.

MATTI: What?

ELAINE: You don't get on with him. You've told me often enough.

MATTI: Well. He's...difficult.. but hey, I wouldn't want anything to happen to him.

ELAINE: I'm not suggesting you do. You need to get things back in proportion Matti. Stop being so on

edge. Trust Armstrong. He knows what he's doing.

MATTI: The thought of dying.. alone... out there...

ELAINE: Come on. He'll be fine. Storm in a Martian teacup.

MATTI: I have a really bad feeling about this..

ELAINE: You've had a really bad feeling about a lot of things recently.. stress getting to you?

MATTI: No.

He sounds unconvincing.

ELAINE: So what's eating you? (pause) I mean, what's really eating you? You've been like a bear with a sore head for days now.

MATTI: I've got a lot on my mind.

ELAINE: So. Share it.

Matti sips his tea. Pulls a face which says "recycled water" but then continues to drink.

MATTI: You don't want to know.

ELAINE: Try me.

MATTI: It's time.

ELAINE: Time for what?

MATTI: No. I mean time itself. The whole time issue. Stopping time. The arbitrary rules. I don't believe in them any more. I don't want to play along with it.

ELAINE: You're not making any sense Matti.

MATTI: I said you didn't want to know.

ELAINE: Close proximity anxiety? I know we can be hard to put up with, but if there's a problem..

MATTI: This isn't one of these problems that can be talked over according to the rulebook. It's about the rulebook.

ELAINE: Armstrong's doing the best he can. He'll get Leon back. If..

MATTI: I know. (pause) It's nothing to do with you and Armstrong. You. Or Armstrong. It's... It's a Scotty thing.

ELAINE: Matti. Eight months ago, I thought I knew you. Thought we all knew each other well. But six months in space travelling to Mars changed all that.

MATTI: What do you mean?

ELAINE: Six months in space changed everything.

MATTI: You can say that again.

ELAINE: We left earth one way, and arrived here.. well, different. A new challenge. New people. Ready to face the unknown, but untested.

MATTI: Should have given us the "for better or worse" speech eh?

ELAINE: Living with the unknown, reacting to it and relying on each other to carry on dealing with it...that's when you start learning about people. About yourself.

MATTI: Yeah.

ELAINE: And now, the last two months, here, on Mars, working together, living together - facing up to the reality of the constantly changing unknown...yet, I feel I hardly know you at all. I don't know what makes you tick any more. And...

MATTI: And?

ELAINE: Come on, you can't just pull the "it's a Scotty" stunt on me. This is ME. Tell me what's wrong. We have to share. Be open. It's the only way to survive.

He reflects for a moment.

MATTI: If I tell you it'll change everything. Nothing will be the same. And I can't do that to you.

ELAINE: Nothing ever is the same. Ever. Things change. Fundamental laws of physics eh? I picked up that much in six months of you banging on about Einstein and quantum reality. So nothing will be the same. So what? Just tell me.

There is another uncomfortable pause.

MATTI: Armstrong. (laughs) No wonder he got picked eh? How could he not? His life was mapped out from day one. Born on the day man first walked on the moon. "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind" Named after the most famous astronaut, the most famous man of all time.

ELAINE: Apart from Jesus?

MATTI: Or Hitler... or the Beatles.. you know what I mean.

ELAINE: I never know what you mean.

MATTI: His trajectory was clearer than a Martian landing.

ELAINE: So , what about Armstrong?

MATTI: He's my best friend. All right? (pause) I remember the first day I met him. At NASA. I was in awe of him. Of course. Everyone was. But he was so casual. So... normal... he put me at my ease. Me, just any old trainee, just nobody, not worth the effort but he... (pause) They used to take the piss. Said I'd imprinted on him. Had a father complex. Whatever. But we... hit it off you know... first thing I'd never met anyone so... so committed to Mars. Never.

ELAINE: And you're telling me something I don't know? I married him remember. Don't you think he had that effect on me?

MATTI: He had, he has, an affect on everyone. I know that. That's not my point.

ELAINE: Yes, what exactly is your point?

Pause.

MATTI: Doesn't it strike you as strange?

ELAINE: Lots of things strike me as strange. Strange is the norm for Mars isn't it? You don't exactly sit here, looking out on a red sky and think "wow" life's really normal. Not even after all this time.

But- apart from stating the obvious - what's your point?

MATTI: The time thing. The reasons behind it.

ELAINE: You've lost me.

MATTI: Okay. Lecture on time for the unobservant. You agree that time is relative. You can't disagree with that.

Elaine gives him a weary look, like this is a pet subject she'd rather not go into again.

ELAINE: Of course I can't. Wouldn't presume to disagree with God Einstein.

MATTI: If you're going to be like that...

ELAINE: No. Go on. Just... well, get on with it.

MATTI: Got something better to do.. with your time?

ELAINE: Always got something to do. Not necessarily something better. But something important. Science. Research.

MATTI: So. Time is relative. But man's body clock is fixed. Within margins. The body clock is a regular thing. Upset, we will lose sleep, concentration, ability to function properly. Very quickly, and with disasterous results. Yes?

ELAINE: Mmm. That's what the book says.

MATTI: Yes. The book says. Nasa decrees. Earth time and man's body clock, works on a twenty four hour cycle. More or less. Mars time works on a twenty four hour and thirty seven minute cycle. Just thirty seven minutes difference a day. But that thirty seven minutes is crucial. Right?

ELAINE: Right.

MATTI: So Nasa sets their finest brains to work out how they could bring Martian explorers into line with Earth time, avoiding all the unpleasant consequences of a life lived at a progressive thirty seven minutes out of step. And their conclusion?

ELAINE: We know the conclusion. Stop time. (pause) The sed. (pause) Is this about Leon?

MATTI: It's about Leon, it's about me, and you and Armstrong. It's about lies and freedom.

ELAINE: I don't get it.

MATTI: Stopping time. For thirty seven minutes a day. Think about it.

ELAINE: Is this another of your conspiracy theories?

MATTI: You can't actually stop time. What with it being relative.

ELAINE: I suppose...

MATTI: So what do you do? You stop the experience of time. Give the boys a pill. Easy. A fast working, accurate sedative which lasts exactly thirty seven minutes and keeps us all in step, all working like clockwork. (pause) Don't you feel you're being cheated?

ELAINE: What of?

MATTI: Thirty seven minutes a day. Cheated. Of that time.

ELAINE: I'd never thought of it.

MATTI: Well think about it. Now. Please.

ELAINE: If you thought about all the things you have to swallow, change and put up with, you'd never make it into the hab in the first place.

There is a short pause.

ELAINE: I don't see the problem.

MATTI: The problem is it's bollocks.

ELAINE: Yeah? How'd you work that out.

MATTI: What happens when we take a sed?

ELAINE: Thirty seven minutes of peace. Nothing. Sleep. Nothing.

MATTI: But the clock keeps ticking.

He points at the LCD displays.

MATTI: Time keeps moving on, and we lose thirty seven minutes of our lives. Every day. You add that up in a three year mission that's thirty eight thousand nine hundred and sixty one minutes over three years. That's six hundred and forty nine hours point three five. That's twenty seven days. Nearly a month out of three years. For nothing.

ELAINE: You can see why we need to keep in step then.

MATTI: Yeah, but we're only out of synch with Earth time. (pause) And we're not on Earth.

ELAINE: Obviously.

MATTI: So why do Earth rules still apply?

ELAINE: You know why. It's in the manual.

MATTI: The problem is that the human body clock isn't run by Nasa. It works to the circadian rhythm.. our sleep/wake pattern is actually 24 point 8 hours long. So our body clock is more or less perfectly in tune with Martian time - closer than Earth time. So - no problem. There's no reason..

ELAINE: There have to be other factors..

MATTI: Oh there are other factors all right. Nothing to do with our welfare though. For example, are they paying us for that lost month? Are we paid by the life we live here on Mars, or by Earth time?

ELAINE: Does it really matter? You're bitching over a month's salary when you're on the trip of a lifetime?

MATTI: No. It's not the money. It's just an example. Of control. They are controlling us. Keeping us

playing by Earth rules. Even out here.

ELAINE: And your solution?

MATTI: There's no problem for us to keep living on Mars time. After all, the length of year is different, the seasons are different. We're here. We can adjust to that. Live in harmony with Mars. But they won't have it. They want to keep us on Earth time. Keep us under control. It's got nothing to do with our body clocks, or melatonin levels. The choice of time period is, and always has been, an arbitrary one, no less a convention than the designation of number is. This time thing.. it's to do with them being able to keep tabs on us.

ELAINE: Hmmm? But they have to do it that way. How could we keep in proper contact if we were spiralling out of their time frame? No one would ever know who was where or what was what. It's simpler this way.

MATTI: But we have asynchronous contact anyway. Think about it. We send out a message. It has a forty minute delay.

ELAINE: That's why we send the messages out just before timestop. Then we wake up and only have to wait forty minutes for a response.

MATTI: But we still wait forty minutes. And really the whole exchange takes about an hour and a half. If it's all out of sync anyway, why didn't they just plot in another time frame?

ELAINE: In any scientific situation you have to factor in margins of error.

MATTI: My point is why they are "factoring in" these margins of error? They believe that you can only make sense of the world by trying to trap it within a hierarchical system. Them at the top. Us underneath. (pause) I think you'll find it's got more to do with keeping us under Earth rules than anything else.

ELAINE: It's not worth losing sleep over. Why are you making such hard work..?

MATTI: I've been testing it.

ELAINE: What do you mean?

MATTI: I don't stop time.

ELAINE: What?

MATTI: I've stopped taking the seds. I'm having my thirty seven minutes. And look. The Martian sky hasn't crumbled. The Earth is still turning. We're all still here. No one is any the wiser.

ELAINE: You can't do that.

MATTI: I am doing it.

ELAINE: Armstrong will go ballistic.

MATTI: You're not going to tell him.

ELAINE: Of course I am.

MATTI: Elaine. Don't. Think about it. It's an experiement. In freedom. Try it. Just once. Try it with me once and then, if you have to, then tell him. But give it a go. Once. That's all.

A bell sounds.

ELAINE: That's Armstrong and Leon back now. See. He told you it would be all right.

Matti catches Elaine by the arm as she moves towards the door.

MATTI: I'm serious Elaine. I want you to do it. With me.

ELAINE: You want me to break a basic rule. For no good reason?

MATTI:I've a good reason all right. Just one I can't tell you here.

ELAINE: You... you didn't get Leon in on this did you?

There is a silence.

MATTI: No. Of course not..

Pause while they look at each other.

MATTI: Come on. I wouldn't.. That's not.. that's not why he's out there.. It's not down to me..

ELAINE: Okay. Okay. But you're not getting me in on your crazy schemes either. You should know me better than that.

MATTI: I know you. The empirical scientist. Struggling to deal with the dichotomy of the classical against the obvious. Remember your Schrodinger - "There is a tendency to forget that all science is bound up with human culture in general" Come with me. Test it. Test the limits.

ELAINE: Sell out to chaos theory?

MATTI: Just accept that science is an open system, embedded in society. Explore a new environment with me - a new dimension. Just once. (pause) Please?

She shakes her head.

The door opens. Armstrong enters. He looks weary.

MATTI: Leon?

Armstrong shakes his head.

ELAINE: What? He wasn't there?

ARMSTRONG: He was there. He wasn't alive.

MATTI: What?

ARMSTRONG: He ran out of oxygen.

He crashes down into a chair.

ARMSTRONG: You were right. His breathing went on of course and he... I thought I'd get there in time. I was sure...

MATTI: Bloody hell. He asphyxiated because we had to wait forty minutes to please...

ELAINE: (to Armstrong) Don't blame yourself. We had to follow procedure.

She is visibly shaken none the less. She sits down heavily. Takes some deep breaths.

MATTI: And procedure is more important than Leon's life. (pause) This is out of control.

Matti punches a wall. Looks like he's about to throw a punch at Armstrong. Who intercepts him. Calmly.

ELAINE: Hey, there's no point losing it at Armstrong.

Armstrong continues to calm Matti. Takes him to a seat and sits him down.

ARMSTRONG: Okay. It's okay. I let you down. But we have to deal with this now.

Matti sits, like a child in shock.

MATTI: Why... why didn't you... why didn't we do something?

ARMSTRONG: I did do something. I did everything I could. By the time I got there he'd gone into respiratory failure...

He squats down in front of Matti who is sitting head in hands.

ARMSTRONG: I did everything I could.

MATTI: But.. the time..

ARMSTRONG: It was a bad call. But we can't just break the rules to suit ourselves. It's a bad situation. I know that. But we have to deal with it. It's our job.

MATTI: And.. the body..?

ARMSTRONG: I buried him.. with full honours.

MATTI: Didn't bring him back here..?

ARMSTRONG: What would be the point?

MATTI: He... I... it...

ARMSTRONG: Leon knew that hard decisions would have to be made. We all know that. This is

appalling. Of course it is. But it's a reality check. Danger is out there and we have to pay attention. Mars isn't a friendly place. Not yet. That's why we're here.

ELAINE: We should do something... to mark...

Armstrong crosses to a cupboard, gets out a bottle of spirits.

ARMSTRONG: Matti?

Matti looks at the bottle.

MATTI: That's emergency rations.

Armstrong pours out three large shots and takes one to Elaine, then one to Matti.

ARMSTRONG: Drink it.

He holds up his glass.

ARMSTRONG: Leon. One of the best.

ELAINE: The best.

She sips at her drink, thoughtfully. Matti downs his drink in a one-er.

MATTI: So what now?

ARMSTRONG: I'll file an emergency report.

He exits. Elaine crosses to Matti. Puts her arm round him.

ELAINE: Go get some rest.

He shakes his head.

MATTI: I don't take any pleasure in it you know.

ELAINE: In what? Leon's death? Of course not.

MATTI: In being proved right.

BLACKOUT

SCENE 2

Living area in the Hab. The Martian clock is still ticking - reading 14.36. Matti sits alone in the semi darkness. The empty bottle of spirits sits beside him. The claxon sounds as the Martian clock hits 14.37. It resets to 14.00 and the Earth and Martian clock begin to tick in unison. Matti watches them turn to 14.01...

Armstrong enters. He is too concerned with the matter in hand to notice that Matti is already sitting at the table, wide awake. He flips up the lightswitch.

MATTI: And then there were three.

Armstrong reacts to seeing Matti there.

ARMSTRONG: He knew the risks Matti.

MATTI: Is that supposed to make me feel better?

ARMSTRONG: Nothing can make any of us feel better. But life goes on.

MATTI: Yeah. Doesn't it just. Time just tick - ticking on and on. Relentlessly.

He looks at the clocks.

MATTI: So now we wait. Another forty minutes. For instructions. From the masters.

ARMSTRONG: We'll have to recalibrate, reorganise to be able to work experiments with three..

MATTI: We are the experiment. Look at us. Like hamsters in a cage. Waiting to be told what to do.

ARMSTRONG: Matti. We all knew the score. All signed up to the risks. It's been pretty plain sailing so far. What did you expect?

MATTI: I didn't expect Leon to die needlessly.

ARMSTRONG: You should always expect death here Matti. Needless or not. Death is a huge part of the equation. And we have to move to procedures for survival with three. That means letting them

tell us what's best now. Not taking any more chances. No risks. We've just lost our margin for error.

MATTI: We've just lost our last bit of independence. Now they'll totally control us.

ARMSTRONG: It's a bad situation Matti. Don't make it worse.

MATTI: Leon's dead. How could it be worse?

ARMSTRONG: They could pull us out.

MATTI: You're joking?

Armstrong shakes his head.

MATTI: Abort?

ARMSTRONG: They're working on a small window here. They have to decide soon, or..

MATTI: Or we'll be on an unsafe trajectory.

ARMSTRONG: A less stable trajectory.

Matti laughs.

MATTI: Rule book terminology. (pause) But I mean, what's the point. Bringing us all this way just to haul us back with the first problem. I'm not going back. Not now.

ARMSTRONG: Then let's get positive. We can still make it work. But we have to pull together. Face up to the uncomfortable realities.

MATTI: Which are?

ARMSTRONG: Time has just become more valuable.

Matti laughs. He realises Armstrong can't possibly get the joke and pulls back.

MATTI: Sorry. And can we make it? Just the three of us?

ARMSTRONG: You know the answer to that.

Pause

MATTI: I know the technical answer. I'm talking reality.

ARMSTRONG: Two people are all that's needed for survival. A pair.

MATTI: Two's company eh? And three is an awkward number?

ARMSTRONG: Three is a bonus.

MATTI: And I'm the only Scotty left. So you can't afford to lose me?

ARMSTRONG: That's right. You are indispensable. How does that feel?

Before Matti has a chance to answer, Elaine enters. Matti turns to her.

MATTI: Guess what, Armstrong's just told me I'm indispensable!

ELAINE: No one's indispensable.

Her tone is light - the following conversation has a banter quality about it.

MATTI: Thanks for the vote of confidence.

ELAINE: Desirable - but not indispensable - don't start getting above yourself.

Matti turns to Armstrong.

MATTI: Hey. You will tell me won't you?

ARMSTRONG: Tell you what?

MATTI: If the power starts going to my head.

Armstrong laughs.

ELAINE (to Armstrong) Have we heard back yet?

ARMSTRONG: Not yet. I'll go through in a moment.

MATTI: You did use all your powers of persuasion to get them to let us stay? Tell them it's all hunky dory and we can do it and all that.

ARMSTRONG: That's what I told them. (pause) Is it true?

MATTI: Course it is.

There is a pause for reflection.

MATTI: Hey, they're not gonna let something like this jeopardise their multi billion dollar expedition. Come on. We're talking universal capitalism here. Pressure's on, but they're not gonna haul us home for this. No way.

ARMSTRONG: They are sympathetic, but they expect us to deliver. All of us. They want to know we're up to it. Otherwise, it's safer for them to bring us back.

MATTI: That's crazy.

ELAINE: Come on. If they've got to have egg on their face, don't you think they'll pick the option which is least egg? It's only human nature.

MATTI: You think?

ELAINE: Heroic failure's not an option. It's not the race for the South Pole.

MATTI: You're telling me.

ARMSTRONG: We have to present a united front. They've got a relief crew waiting to launch.

MATTI: What for?

ARMSTRONG: Trauma. They have a procedure guideline for sending out new blood and replacing anyone here who's been over-exposed, in any way.

MATTI: Suddenly I don't feel so indispensable any more. (pause) What happens now?

ARMSTRONG: I told them I would take twenty four hours to assess our situation and get back to them. Which includes offering both of you the option..

Matti stands up, turns from Armstrong.

MATTI: I don't even want to hear it. I didn't spend four years training and six months in a box hurtling through space feeling sick as a dog to get pulled back home the first time something goes wrong.

(pause) Or are you looking for a scapegoat?

ARMSTRONG: Of course not. But if you feel you need back up... or...

MATTI: We're fine as it is.

ARMSTRONG: Elaine?

ELAINE: Do you have to ask me?

ARMSTRONG: Of course I have to ask you.

Elaine looks at Matti. There is a pause where we wonder if she just might be considering saying something...

ELAINE: I say we stay as we are. Stick to the original plan.

ARMSTRONG: Good. But we all have to play by the rules now. Without deviance.

Matti exchanges a glance with Elaine

MATTI: Meaning?

ARMSTRONG: Meaning that this is important. We're under scrutiny. If we make the wrong decision here the implications will be far reaching.

He gets up.

ARMSTRONG: I'll go and give them our answer. And Matti...

MATTI: Yes?

ARMSTRONG: Have some strong coffee and pull it together.

He exits.

Elaine goes to make some coffee.

MATTI: I don't need it.

ELAINE: Whatever.

MATTI: I mean it. I'm not drunk. Just angry.

ELAINE: Still, can't hurt eh? (pause) Angry with who? Armstrong?

MATTI: Armstrong, Leon, you, myself. (pause) Did you tell him?

She shakes her head.

ELAINE: D'you think we'd still be sitting here if I had?

She brings across the coffee - sits down beside Matti.

MATTI: Thanks.

ELAINE: I didn't do it for you.

MATTI: Thanks anyway.

ELAINE: If they blow the rest of their millions sending out a relief crew now, we might as well kiss goodbye to Martian exploration for good. Not just for the next ten years, or our lifetimes, but for once and all. Economic reality. They're pushed as it is, and they won't take the chance.

MATTI: So it's all a pose then, the concern, the offering us the chance to bail out?

ELAINE: Decisions are made at a much higher level than consideration of our personal circumstances. You know that.

MATTI: And why don't you sound disenchanted by that? The good of society against the will of the individual. I didn't have you down for one of them.

ELAINE: It's not us and them Matti. It's reality.

MATTI: Socially constructed reality.

ELAINE: Meaning?

MATTI: We can measure time, but it doesn't give us a guarantee that we understand what time is.

ELAINE: You have to let this go. It's not getting us anywhere..

MATTI: You think? This is important Elaine. Time and reality are linked. Social constructions tell us that reality is embedded in the flow of time. But it isn't. We're living in a sort of collective schizophrenia - a dichotomy between time felt and time understood.

ELAINE: You read too much.

MATTI: You read too little. (pause.) I'm not pissing around here. I'm doing my bit for science.

Testing Einstein - practically, proving that time isn't objective or absolute but that every observer has his own time, which varies according to his speed and vantage point.

ELAINE: This is all thought experiment stuff.

MATTI: Like the laws of nature? Or science?

ELAINE: It's not the same.

MATTI: We can't recognise our own cultural myths, because we take them for granted. And time is a cultural myth. Like the laws of science.

ELAINE: It's not the same.

MATTI: Look. We can't measure past, present or future, but we still measure time. We construct clock time. To make ourselves feel more comfortable. It's all an illusion.

ELAINE: In theoretical physics maybe but..

MATTI: In real life too. Wake up Elaine. Don't just be a scientist. Do science. (pause) Do you believe in God?

ELAINE: No.

MATTI: Do you believe in the second law of thermodynamics?

ELAINE: It's a meaningless question.

MATTI: Do you believe in the second law of thermodynamics?

ELAINE: Of course. You have to.

MATTI: Why?

ELAINE: It's a scientific law.

MATTI: Ah. Scientific laws. (pause) Why do you think they are called laws? Just so that good little citizens will respond to them the way we've been trained to respond to laws. By obeying them. Not by questioning their existence. That's the kind of derivative science that kept Newtonians in power.

ELAINE: And what's so wrong with Newton?

MATTI: I won't have it. I don't believe in the second law of thermodynamics and I won't buy into the *ceteris parabis* myth. I'm a real scientist Elaine. I want to discover. Find out new things, experiment. Respond to the world and change it rather than accept or understand it. And I want you to come on the journey with me.

ELAINE: No. (pause) You know I won't.

MATTI: Why? Frightened? Too much to lose? (pause) What's to lose? We're here. We're not going back. This is our one big chance. Don't blow it.

ELAINE: Matti, it's not funny any more.. it's getting wearing.. it's a serious situation now and we've got to..

MATTI: Got to get back in our cages. Well I won't. He crosses to her, kneels down beside her, the sense of an intimacy which is unexpected..

MATTI: Come with me. You know you want to.

She stands up.

ELAINE: I can't.

They stand apart.

MATTI: Elaine.

ELAINE: What?

MATTI: You do know.. don't you?

ELAINE: Know what?

MATTI: All this aside. What.. what I feel about you?

The moment is broken as Armstrong re-enters the room. Elaine affects normality, but we can see she is rattled.

ELAINE: (To Armstrong) Well?

Matti joins in

MATTI: Well?

Armstrong gives them the thumbs up.

ARMSTRONG: They've stood down the relief crew. They saw the sense.

MATTI: And what did they say about Leon?

ARMSTRONG: What could they say?

MATTI: I don't know. Something. Gone but not forgotten.

ARMSTRONG: Of course they were devastated.

MATTI: I bet they were. Won't look good will it?

ARMSTRONG: They were devastated. But they are also concerned about us.

MATTI: Life goes on.

ARMSTRONG: Yes Matti. Life does go on. Hold that thought. Death is an inevitable part of life and life goes on. And our life.. here.. only goes on as long as we accept..

MATTI: Yeah, yeah. I hear you. (pause) Sorry Armstrong... I'm just...

ARMSTRONG: We've all been affected by it Matti. But we have to get on with the task in hand. We can't be seen to crack now.

MATTI: I know.

ARMSTRONG: If either of you needs to talk about this.. we can sit and talk.

MATTI: No.

ELAINE: I'm okay.

MATTI: Yeah. Elaine's fed up with talking. Well, with me talking anyway. Aren't you?

ELAINE: I never..

MATTI: Joking! Come on you pair. We've got to get on with it, so let's get on with it. Anyone for recycled water flavour beverage?

Armstrong and Elaine both nod.

BLACKOUT

SCENE 3

The Hab. It is late at night. Armstrong and Elaine are lying on the sofa together. Music is playing softly in the background. You could almost forget that this isn't any old living room on Earth - apart from the clocks on the wall, relentlessly ticking out Martian and Earth time in their eerie red LCD glow.

ARMSTRONG: What's he doing?

ELAINE: Looking at the sky.

ARMSTRONG: Why?

ELAINE: I don't know.. maybe.. feeling lonely.

ARMSTRONG: Lonely? (pause) Homesick?

ELAINE: No. I don't think so. Lonely.

ARMSTRONG: I don't understand.

ELAINE: I know. (pause) It doesn't matter. (pause) He'll be back in soon.

ARMSTRONG: He's not wasting oxygen..?

ELAINE: No. He's inside. Just looking through the window. He's really struggling you know. About Leon. It's really affected him.

ARMSTRONG: We have to carry on as normal. We can't allow things to slide. This is the time we have to really keep it together. (pause) He'll get over it. He just needs to keep his mind on the job.

ELAINE: Maybe. You don't think it's something more than that?

ARMSTRONG: Like what?

There is a pause.

ELAINE: Oh, nothing.. just..

They settle down together again.

ARMSTRONG: He's a good man Elaine. You don't need to worry about him. I picked him myself. He'll be fine. He's a bit idealistic perhaps.. at times.. but then.. he's young.. he'll..

She seems to have stopped listening.

ARMSTRONG: What.. what's on your mind?

ELAINE: Oh, I was just thinking.. remembering.. it's funny. To be up here, thinking about the past.. down there. Another world. (pause) I used to wonder.. when I was a little girl.. ever so little, about five or six.. after I gave up wondering about infinity... I used to wonder what it would be like to look up at the night sky from the surface of another planet. It was the start of a journey I suppose.

ARMSTRONG: We all wondered that. (pause) We've seen it now. It's not so different. Not worth losing sleep over.

ELAINE: No? (pause) Does familiarity breed contempt with everything for you?

Armstrong sits up, taken aback.

ARMSTRONG: Sorry?

ELAINE: Nothing.

ARMSTRONG: Hey, it sounded like something. You got a problem we should talk through?

She shrugs him off.

ELAINE: I'm just tired. It's been a long day.

He crosses to the music, which has gone off, to change the CD.

ARMSTRONG: Your choice.

ELAINE: I've heard them all too many times. Nothing. Silence. Let's have a bit of that.

He switches off the machine. Crosses back to her. You can sense that he's treading on eggshells.

He begins to massage her temples.

ARMSTRONG: Well, you made it.

ELAINE: Pardon?

ARMSTRONG: Your journey. Was it worth it?

ELAINE: Is it worth it?.. I'm still on it. (pause) We're still on it. (pause) Together?

Before he has a chance to answer, Matti enters.

MATTI: Oh. Sorry. Didn't mean to disturb you.

They break apart.

ARMSTRONG: No. Don't worry. Please. Sit down.. we were just..

ELAINE: Just talking.

Matti looks like he's out of place.

MATTI: Yeah, well, I think I'll just..

Matti gestures that he's going to turn in.

ELAINE: Don't you want a coffee?

MATTI: I'd love a coffee. I'd even cross the street to buy one from Starbucks. If you've found a way to make that stuff taste like real coffee..

ELAINE: It's all in the mind. Believe. (pause then to Armstrong) D'you want one?

ARMSTRONG: Uh, no. It'll keep me awake.

Elaine crosses to make the coffee, and Matti addresses Armstrong. It's clear they are on totally different wavelengths.

MATTI: Do you miss the rain?

ARMSTRONG: What?

MATTI: The rain? I used to hate it on Earth. The rain. And Starbucks. Now I miss the rain. I'd give anything to stand out in it, let it soak me to the skin. And Starbucks... well, we're only left with a fuller understanding of the irony of the brand name.

Elaine brings across the coffee to the sofa Matti has slumped on. Then returns to sit on the arm of the sofa Armstrong is seated on.

ARMSTRONG: What irony?

MATTI: Come on. Star... bucks... it's what this whole thing's about isn't it?

ARMSTRONG: You've lost me.

ELAINE: Metaphor was never your strong suit, was it?

ARMSTRONG: Never had much need for it.

MATTI: Just think about where this is all going. About what we will achieve. In the long term. The results of terraforming Mars.

ARMSTRONG: Well, you'll be able to stand in the rain!

MATTI: Good point. But what will I be looking at?

Pause.

MATTI: I just stood there, tonight. Looking out. On a vast, empty nothingness and I realised that if we're successful, we'll turn this place into something far far worse than the mess there is back on Earth.

ELAINE: How'd you figure that out?

MATTI: Not so much building the brave new world as the building site that is the brave new world. Imagine. In five, or ten, or twenty years time, if everything goes to plan, you'll look out here, or somewhere like here, and all you'll see will be chemical plants and brick works and... it'll be like some hideous building site. Like going on holiday to a place which looks great in the brochure, but you get there and it's still unfinished. Rubbish and industrial noise everywhere. A real home from home.

ARMSTRONG: You can't have progress without making a bit of mess. And it's not like it's exactly beautiful as it is, is it?

MATTI: You don't think? (paus) It's unformed. Untainted. And we.. we and those who come after us, are going to stamp Earth's motto on it. "Live to litter." (pause) And why? Who are we doing it for? Who will it benefit?

ARMSTRONG: That's not really our concern.

MATTI: But it is our concern. What kind of world are we building if it doesn't change the moral balance somehow? Make people reconsider. What's the point if we're just building an extension to an overcrowded, bloated, corrupt society?

ARMSTRONG: There are more pressing things at the moment than the state of the planet in twenty or fifty years time.

MATTI: You think?

ARMSTRONG: We're not responsible for the fate of humanity. We're not architects. Or philosophers. Their time will come. We just have to do our jobs. Now. Focus on the task in hand. Science.

MATTI: And when they do come? Isn't it our responsibility to make sure they can see that things are different here? There's been too many scientists without consciences..

Armstrong looks at the clocks. They read 04.00. He yawns.

ARMSTRONG: I have to go to bed. I'm far too old for this late night coffee shop rhetoric. It's four a.m, our adrenaline levels are at their lowest.. (pause)...And I'm on the earliest shift checking the experiment data.

He turns to Elaine.

ARMSTRONG: Coming?

ELAINE: In a minute. I'll just finish this.

Armstrong leans over and kisses her.

ARMSTRONG: Okay.

He crosses to Matti. Gives him an affectionate punch on the arm.

ARMSTRONG: We all get like this sometimes, Matti. Pay no attention.

MATTI: Like what?

ARMSTRONG: Maudlin. Lonely. (pause) You'll feel better in the morning. (pause) And you know.. I don't miss the rain. Not at all. I'm from California.

He exits.

Matti jumps up.

MATTI: He makes me so mad sometimes.

ELAINE: What's he done now?

MATTI: It's not what he's done. It's what he stands for. And what he stands for seems to be taking over who he is.

ELAINE: Wow. That's pot calling kettle.

MATTI: Maybe so. But I stand for freedom, not for the status quo.

ELAINE: Give him a break Matti. He's a lot on his shoulders at the moment. (pause, then under her breath) We all have.

MATTI: He's like a religious zealot. He can't accept the possibility of a challenge to his system.

ELAINE: It's not "his" system. It's science. He didn't create it. They're not his rules..

MATTI: And you're becoming like him.

ELAINE: Don't be silly.

MATTI: It drives me mad. He'll use quantum theory to help him. We had to use it to get us here for goodness sake. But he won't give it any greater credibility. Won't see it as a challenge that has to be met.

ELAINE: Why do you see everything in terms of competition? Challenges? Why can't you just...

She runs out of words. There is a pause.

Matti crosses to Elaine. Sits down beside her.

MATTI: I'm sorry. I don't mean to take it out on you. I just get so frustrated... it's... just..

She puts her arm round him.

ELAINE: It's okay. I understand.

MATTI: Do you? Do you really?

They look at each other for too long without saying anything.

ELAINE: Sometimes it's better without words, no?

He nods.

MATTI: Sometimes I..

She gestures him to keep quiet. She gets up. Kisses him on the cheek.

ELAINE: I have to go to bed now.

MATTI: Yeah. Yeah. You go. I'll be... I'll be fine.

Elaine exits.

Matti sits there, alone with his thoughts.

BLACKOUT

SCENE 4

The living area of the Hab. Coming up to 14.00 on the Earth clock. Matti and Elaine are alone. Their sedatives are right in front of them on the table.

MATTI: Once. Just once.

ELAINE: No.

MATTI: I'll do a deal with you. Do it with me once, and I'll stop doing it. I'll play by the rules. Okay?

She weakens.

ELAINE: Hmm?

MATTI: Come on. I have things to say to you. Things I need to say outside of time.

ELAINE: What things?

MATTI: Things I don't want to count in the real world. But things I have to say.

ELAINE: Will they be in English or Double Dutch?

MATTI: Look. Everything's changed now. Since.. since Leon. I feel like I'm sneaking around, getting in between you two. I can't talk to you, we never get a chance to be alone together.

ELAINE: What about now?

MATTI: Five minutes here, five minutes there. I've got something really important to say, and I just need to say it, so please... just once.

ELAINE: And then we can go back to normal?

MATTI: Sure.

ELAINE: Whatever normal is.

MATTI: I'll make normal whatever you want it to be.

ELAINE: Promise?

MATTI: Promise.

Armstrong enters before Elaine has a chance to answer.

ARMSTRONG: Come on - time-stop in less than two.

MATTI: Sure.

Armstrong keeps passing on through. Matti crosses to "his" door and passes Elaine as she crosses to hers.

MATTI: Okay?

She doesn't reply before all have exited. The claxon sounds. The clocks keep ticking. Matti re-enters from his door stage left. Elaine enters from hers, stage right. Matti and Elaine look at each other.

MATTI: See. The world didn't keep turning. Nothing's changed.

She stands uncomfortably.

MATTI: Sit down. Relax. (pause) I'll make a cup of coffee if you like.

She reaches out to stop him.

ELAINE: No. (pause) So what was it?

MATTI: What was what?

ELAINE: What you had to say to me?

He moves alongside her, trying to reassure.

MATTI: Hey. No rush. We've got thirty seven minutes.

ELAINE: This doesn't feel right.

MATTI: Elaine. This is freedom. This is us, in control of our lives. For once.

ELAINE: It just feels..

MATTI: Normal?

She doesn't answer.

MATTI: Admit it. It just feels normal. Unless you think about it. So don't think. Just go with the flow.

ELAINE: I'm not sure I recognise this laid back version of you.

MATTI: I'm free. I'm in control. This is the real me. (pause) And the real you?

ELAINE: Who knows?

She still seems a bit nervous.

MATTI: Come on. It's fine. Armstrong will never know.

ELAINE: What did you want to tell me?

MATTI: Oh. So many things. Don't worry about them all now. Just enjoy the moment.

He hands her a cup of tea.

MATTI: When I'm here, I feel like.. like I'm waking up to the truth. It's all that keeps me sane, I swear, knowing I have here to..

ELAINE: Escape to?

MATTI: Yeah. Not really escape though. Just to... to be.

ELAINE: I suppose I can empathise with that. We all need somewhere to go... alone. (pause) So why'd you want me here too?

MATTI: I don't want to be alone. I just want...

ELAINE: Don't.

MATTI: Elaine. What happens here doesn't count, right? We're standing outside of time. Anything we do here gets wiped right out of existence. Never happened. Can't happen. This dream. Nothing more.

ELAINE: You say. I remain to be convinced.

MATTI: Okay. If I murdered you now, or you me, what would happen? (pause) When the claxon sounds, we'd have to conclude that you, or me, died in our sleep.

ELAINE: But murder would still have been committed.

MATTI: In our world. Not in theirs.

ELAINE: This is exactly why they don't want us to do this.

MATTI: Why's that exactly?

ELAINE: It brings up too many problems. Like time travel. Going back and killing your grandmother...

MATTI: Not according to Reichenbach's Direction of Time theory.

ELAINE: What?

MATTI: The universe of our experience contains open causal chains, but it's perfectly possible for there to be a universe of closed causal chains - and in a closed causal chain you could travel back to the past, meet your grandmother as a young girl, marry her and become your own grandfather.

ELAINE: That's ridiculous.

MATTI: Speaks the voice of fear.

ELAINE: Speaks the voice of reason.

MATTI: Time isn't always a thread that links past and present you know. It can be something totally different. It all depends on your cultural experience. And here, we are creating our own culture. Our own rules. Or lack of them.

ELAINE: You can't just make up your own rules. To life.

MATTI: Why not?

ELAINE: You just can't. It's not possible.

MATTI: It's what we all do, all the time. People just don't have the bottle, or the wit, to admit to it.

ELAINE: I think we'll have to agree to differ on that point.

MATTI: Hey. Relax, I said. We've stepped outside time now. Outside of restrictions. Impositions. Limits. just freedom. You and me.

They sit looking at each other for a long moment.

ELAINE: Okay. And so?

MATTI: It's like, you know that moment when you've pulled free from the Earth's gravity and you realise you're no longer bounded by it.

ELAINE: The point in time when you feel sick to the stomach.

MATTI: Yeah, physically sick maybe, but mentally, free, exhilarated.

ELAINE: Yes.

MATTI: Then, you enter Mars atmosphere, Martian gravity, Martian time, Martian space, and you're still free, in a way. Still looking at the Earth and realising you've made that giant leap. Realising, you are no longer an Earth bound creature. You have all sorts of possibilities. You've achieved something everyone on the planet wants to do. They dream, but...we've done it.

ELAINE: I suppose.

MATTI: But then, you get tied into Mars. Earth's gravity exerts its pull. Mission control. Recycled water. All the rules and regulations and doing things the right way. And slowly but surely the impositions start weighing down on you till you don't feel so free any more.

ELAINE: No one's free. In that way. No one. (pause) We didn't do this for freedom.

MATTI: I did.

ELAINE: Well it's no surprise you're disappointed then.

MATTI: But I'm not disappointed. Not here. Outside time. Here is total freedom. For thirty seven minutes a day you can be what you want to be, who you want to be, live - be - exist fully. Fully experience the meaning of relativity - that we each see time through our own perspective. Live history through our own unique creation of it. Here anything can happen and nothing means anything except what you make it.

ELAINE: I'm still not totally sold on it.

MATTI: It's like falling in love.

ELAINE: How?

MATTI: Totally.

There is another long pause. We seem to have reached the end of the line conversationally.

ELAINE: Another cup of...

He waves her away.

MATTI: No. Thanks.

She crosses to the kettle.

ELAINE: Mind if I do?

He laughs.

MATTI: It's your choice. This is your freedom too.

ELAINE: Oh really. I thought it was Matti-land. Not freedom for all. But maybe that's just my perspective.

MATTI: Are you taking the piss?

ELAINE: Maybe.

MATTI: Well don't.

ELAINE: Why not? Come on chilled Matti..

MATTI: Don't spoil it. Please.

She rejoins him. Sits next to him.

ELAINE: Sorry. I was only joking.. So, come on, sell me the benefits of freedom.

Matti reaches over and kisses Elaine. The kiss is held long enough for us to realise she's responded.

MATTI: If I do this.. it hasn't happened. It happens now, but it's like a dream. It's not real. By any definition of their reality, it can't have happened.

ELAINE: Okay. Say it never happened? Then what's the point..?

MATTI: Look. In time, you're married to Armstrong and he's my best friend and I love you and you can't love me back. Because that's the way the world is. That's even the way Mars is. But here, outside time.

He reaches to kiss her again. She resists.

ELAINE: Don't.

MATTI: Why?

ELAINE: You know why.

MATTI: Don't you want to?

ELAINE: Of course I want to.. but..

MATTI: This is beyond but's Elaine. You don't bring but or guilt or betrayal here, because this isn't happening. The clock will literally go back and wipe out this moment of

ELAINE: So why doesn't that stop me feeling guilty?

MATTI: Have you ever lain beside Armstrong and dreamed of making love to another man? (pause)
She shakes her head.

MATTI: Come on. Tell the truth. I know you have. We all do it.

ELAINE: But it's just a dream.

MATTI: Sure. And do you feel guilty then?

ELAINE: No. Maybe. No.

MATTI: Because you know it's just a dream. Just your subconscious giving you freedom's you can't take in the conscious world. (pause) Well this is the same. This is the manifestation of the subconscious world. For thirty seven minutes a day.

ELAINE: I'm not sure about that.

MATTI: You can't feel any guiltier of kissing me now than you did if you dreamed of kissing me.
(pause) Have you ever dreamed of kissing me?

ELAINE: Have you got odds on yourself?

MATTI: Avoiding the issue won't get you out of it here you know.

ELAINE: I'm not avoiding the issue. I'm not even sure what the issue is. Typical Matti. Clear as mud.
They look at each other.

MATTI: I've dreamed of kissing you. Of making love to you. Of being with you... you know I have.
He begins to kiss her again.

ELAINE: Stop. Don't.

Her protestations seem somewhat weaker, and she doesn't exactly push him off. After the kiss she speaks.

ELAINE: Armstrong is right there, in the next room.

MATTI: In one sense maybe. In another sense he's in another world. Not even another world. Further away. Another time. Another existence. He exists and we don't.

ELAINE: You know that's not true.

MATTI: If you'd taken the sed, you could be dreaming all this right now, and when you woke up, nothing would have changed. This is just the same.

ELAINE: No it isn't.

MATTI: It is.

They kiss again.

MATTI: I kiss you now, and when the claxon sounds, nothing will have changed. I will never have kissed you. Except in my dreams.

ELAINE: So I'm just a manifestation of your dream?

MATTI: No. Just imagine we're sharing the same dream.

ELAINE: You know it's not like that. Dreams don't have consequences. They aren't real.

MATTI: No more is this.

ELAINE: It's wrong.

MATTI: Right and wrong reside in time. We don't need them here.

ELAINE: You can't escape right and wrong. Actions have consequences..

MATTI: This will never come into the real world, you know that. I love you here, outside of time. I won't deny that. I will deny it back there. In reality. So don't be so worried.

ELAINE: This.. this jeopardises everything we've worked for. How... how can you just sit there calmly and..

MATTI: What is this? This standing outside time, or this you and me- together?

ELAINE: There's no future to it. There's no point.

MATTI: No future, no past.. that's precisely the point.

ELAINE: I'm married to Armstrong. I love him. He loves me. We're a team. I fought everything to get to come on this mission with him, I can't let him down.

MATTI: Can you let yourself down? Your true self?

ELAINE: What do you mean?

MATTI: You knew that Armstrong would be on this mission. Years ago. When you chose to fall in love with him. You could have fallen in love with me, or with any of the other candidates. But no way would you be here if you'd married me. Only by marrying Armstrong would you get here. You knew that. You know that.

ELAINE: That's a mean thing to say.

MATTI: That's part of your love. You know it is. I know it is. He knows it is. No one's saying you don't love him. But you have to look at why you love him. And part of it is self interest.

ELAINE: Everything's partly self interest.

MATTI: Not true love. True love is altruistic. Something you can't help. Something you do, or fall into, no matter what the consequences will be. (pause) I love you Elaine.

There is a long pause.

ELAINE: Don't.

MATTI: I can't help it.

ELAINE: You have to help it. We have to help it. We can't..

MATTI: I can control it. Restrict it. And I do. You know I do. When I have to. But here, now, out of time, there's no need. Is there? Here we can say what we really mean and there's no consequences, because ultimately there's no action. No traceable action.

ELAINE: We'd never be able to keep it like that.

MATTI: Of course we could. There's no other way. It's this or nothing. And I've had enough of nothing.

ELAINE: There's too much to lose. Too much at stake.

MATTI: Everything and nothing. Just admit that conventional science doesn't have all the answers for once. Take a risk. Just once.

ELAINE: I..

Matti looks at the clock.

MATTI: We've got twenty four minutes. You can't go back now. You can't take the sed and stop time. You're out of synch. You've made the choice. Made half of it. We've got twenty four minutes of freedom left. What're you going to do with them?

ELAINE: What're we going to do with them?

MATTI: Well, we could carry on arguing the finer points of guilt and judgement, or (pause) We could do what we really want to do.

ELAINE: Which is?

MATTI: Don't play games Elaine.

ELAINE: You mean this isn't all a game?

MATTI: You know that. You know I'm serious.

ELAINE: Oh yes. Matti. Always the serious one.

MATTI: And Elaine. Always avoiding. Always stepping aside. Why's that then? Why do you always avoid the issue. Avoid facing up to the truth. To what you really feel.

ELAINE: I don't.

MATTI: Yes you do.

There is a silence.

MATTI: The only reason not to do this, is that you don't love me. And I know you do. You know you do. It's a feeling beyond time. Beyond social convention or control. Just face up to it..

She looks at the clocks. Looks at the sofa. Looks at Matti. She takes Matti by the hand, pulls him up from his seat. They begin to kiss as we...

BLACKOUT

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE

Matti's bedroom. A bunk, a chair, a bookcase. Nothing very personal - utilitarian, like the rest of the Hab. Two clocks - one Earth time reading 14.58 and one Martian time - reading 02.18. It is several weeks later.

Matti lies on his bed. It's hard to tell whether he's awake or asleep. The claxon sounds as the Earth clock hits 14.00 and stops. The Martian clock keeps ticking. Matti lies motionless. A minute passes. The door opens. Elaine enters. She crosses to the bed, leans over and kisses Matti. He sits up. They embrace.

MATTI: I thought I was dreaming.

ELAINE: You have to be asleep to dream.

MATTI: Not necessarily.

They kiss.

MATTI: Welcome to the dreamtime.

ELAINE: The what?

MATTI: The dreamtime (pause) You don't know about the dreamtime?

She shakes her head.

ELAINE: Never came up in my study of geobiochemistry. Funnily enough.

MATTI: Whereas I benefitted from a far broader education.

ELAINE: Obviously. (pause) Well?

MATTI: Well what?

ELAINE: Are you going to enlighten me?

MATTI: I live to serve. Hmm. Where to begin?

ELAINE: It's a problem with your cyclical system isn't it. Knowing where to begin.

MATTI: Not really. You just start anywhere. You pick a point, which is all you can be certain of anyway, and you just go from there. Cyclical systems don't rely on history, but that doesn't mean you can't talk about events outside the now. It just means they are just as real. Like the dreamtime. The Australian Aborigines believe that the dreaming exists independently of the linear time of ordinary life. It's as much a dimension of reality as a period of time.

ELAINE: So?

MATTI: The dreamtime displaces events in time so that things that happened in the past have an immediacy which makes them part of the present. You live the dreamtime. Like us. Here.

ELAINE: Then a concept of time is purposeless to them?

MATTI: Yes. The purpose lies in the dreaming, which is essentially infinite and timeless. For them,

the dreamtime has never ceased to exist, and from the viewpoint of the present, it's as much a feature of the future as it is of the past.

ELAINE: They see infinity as part of the present?

MATTI: Essentially.

There is a pause.

ELAINE: How do you know all this?

MATTI: I studied anthropology.

ELAINE: Really, I never knew that.

MATTI: Ah, you see, I still have hidden depths.

Elaine breaks from Matti. Stands up and begins wandering (perhaps more like pacing) round the small room.

ELAINE: I wonder why we spend so much of our time - out of time - talking about time?

MATTI: Maybe it's only from this perspective we can see it clearly. We're not touched by it so...

ELAINE: But we are touched by it. The Martian clock is still turning. Time is still passing in Martian time. And it's ticking down till Earth time starts up again. We're not cheating time, or at least we're only cheating Earth time. (pause) You shouldn't do that by the way.

MATTI: Do what?

ELAINE: Leave your clock set to real Martian time.

MATTI: Why not?

ELAINE: What if Armstrong sees it?

MATTI: Come on. Armstrong wouldn't break the rule - going into another member's private quarters without invitation...It's part of my experiment anyway. (pause) Did you know the Inuit have no word for time?

ELAINE: I knew they had about twenty words for snow.

Matti signals for her to come back and join him on the bed. She does so.

MATTI: You see - we construct our world according to our needs.

They kiss.

MATTI: What is the purpose of a clock?

ELAINE: To tell the time?

MATTI: The purpose of a clock is to sidestep mental distortions, and to record, objectively, the time.

ELAINE: I thought you said time wasn't objective.

MATTI: It isn't. I deny the purpose of the clock. I'm just trying to show you how time and reality are related.

ELAINE: I don't know why you're still so keen to convince me. I'm here aren't I?

MATTI: If you can chop up time into three parts: past, present and future then the present - the now - is supposed to be the fleeting moment of true reality.

Elaine begins to kiss him again.

ELAINE: Doesn't sound so bad.

But Matti is on a roll now...

MATTI: But it's Newton. It's impoverished science. It's science corrupted by religion. Remember Einstein. The distinction between past, present and future is only an illusion. Einstein and the Aborigines totally concur on this point.

ELAINE: So the dreamtime is a quantum phenomena?

MATTI: If you want to put it like that.

ELAINE: Well I'm not really bothered.. I'd rather...

But Matti's missing the signals.

MATTI: Past, present and future are just convenient linguistic devices but they have no physical significance.

ELAINE: And physical significance is important.

She plays with his hair.

MATTI: Our past is just another world.

ELAINE: Stop trying to justify. I'm here. We're here. Isn't that enough?

MATTI: Don't you see. One part of our present is another world. It's living quantum time.

ELAINE: What do you mean?

MATTI: The quantum concept accepts that the activities with which time is filled affect the very way time is experienced. We are in the middle of an incredible experiment.

ELAINE: Which no one will ever know about.

MATTI: One day maybe...

ELAINE: You said...

MATTI: Okay. Don't stress. You and me. That's the most important thing here. That's my reality. I don't give a damn about the time experiment as long as we can keep doing this. That's the really important thing.

ELAINE: So it all comes down to sex in the end? In this case sex might be defined as quantum sex.

MATTI: I hadn't thought of that.

ELAINE: But sex all the same.

MATTI: Only it's not sex is it. It's love. That's the point. Love, like time, is a non concrete concept. Something we create metaphors for because we know that however hard we try, we'll never be able to define it. We create the definition by creating the act.

ELAINE: And our love? Define that?

He thinks for a moment.

MATTI: Well, it's different from different perspectives.

ELAINE: For example?

MATTI: Here, out of time, it's an infinite, complete thing. It has no need of metaphor, of points of reference because there is no past and no future to link it to. It's like the dreamtime.

ELAINE: And in time?

MATTI: In time? Hmm. In time I suppose it's the classic love triangle. (pause) If you want to impose cultural norms onto it. Personally I don't. I prefer it this way.

ELAINE: The classic love triangle? Explain.

MATTI: Hmm. Triangles. You know, I used to think it all came down to triangles in the end. (pause) That was before I discovered sex of course. (pause) When I was young... I've never told anyone this before.. when I was about eight or nine, I became obsessed with triangles. Sounds stupid, I know.

ELAINE: No. I was the same with infinity. Used to sit for hours trying to count up to it. Tell me about triangles.

MATTI: It used to really annoy me that they always had to add up to a hundred and eighty degrees. The smug look on my maths teachers face as he told me "Every triangle adds up to one hundred and eight degrees" and I determined to prove him right. I hated "universal laws" even then you see.

ELAINE: And?

MATTI: And I did it. Nine years old and I discovered non- Euclidean geometry. All by myself. Worked it all out, and took the proof to my teacher. Proud as punch I was as I drew it all out on the board.

ELAINE: Great. What did he say?

MATTI: (pause) He told me some French guy had discovered this some hundred years before.

ELAINE: He never.

MATTI: He did. Delighted in it. Deflating small kids was his speciality.

ELAINE: How mean.

MATTI: It didn't matter. I knew the value of discovery. I knew I'd worked it out for myself, found it to be true, for myself, so what some French guy did or didn't do had no relevance to me. That's when I first realised what matters is one's own discovery, from one's own perspective.

ELAINE: A stage in your journey?

MATTI: Don't give me that progression nonsense - it was a point. This is a point. Moments. That's all. No progression. No beginning. No end. Just moments.

ELAINE: So what about the classic love triangle?

MATTI: Cultural patterns. Creation of metaphoric truths..Classic love triangles. They come up time and again. The Greeks.

ELAINE: Seems the Greeks have a lot to answer for. Pythagorus again?

MATTI: I wish. At least Pythagorus is fairly straightforward. (pause) Ares - or Mars and you would know him, fell in love with Aphrodite, but she was married to Hephaestos. (pause) The gods lived out of time you know, in a way. Immortality. Meant they spent all their time mucking about with mortals and bickering amongst themselves.

ELAINE: And how did it end?

MATTI: It's a cyclical system.

ELAINE: How did it end?

MATTI: Well, Ares got a kicking I suppose. But only cause Zeus was dirty on him for...

ELAINE: Another example?

MATTI: You must know the Arthurian myth?

ELAINE: Vanessa Redgrave and Franco Nero having it off behind Richard Harris' back. The "one brief shining moment that was known as Camelot" Yes. It rings a bell. (pause) I didn't take you down for a musical buff.

MATTI: It wasn't just an affair. It represents the impossibility of courtly love. Chivalry exposed as myth through the relationship of the love triangle.

ELAINE: Less theory, more story please.

MATTI: Um, okay. Lancelot loved Guinevere - he was supposed to. She was his queen. Courtly love. And he loved Arthur. His king and his best friend. Chivalric code. Lancelot was a pure and virtuous knight and he couldn't obey both sets of rules.

ELAINE: So ultimately he had to choose?

MATTI: In a love triangle a choice is always made, yes. By someone. But by following the rules of the society, the myth which created the situation in the first place. It's all culturally relative. Not real.

ELAINE: So what's the point?

MATTI: Ah. That's the big question isn't it? What's the role of myth in society. Myths fill the gaps between knowledge and fear. They give people a way to understand the uncontrollable aspects of life.

ELAINE: So people try to understand myths in order to know how to behave in society.

MATTI: But we don't need myth any more. Not in a quantum world. Myth and classical science both just hold us back from a proper exploration of the quantum universe.

ELAINE: How about Casablanca? When Rick says he's getting on the plane and Elsa goes with Laslo - he tricks her into it. I've never understood the ending there. Is Rick finally being honourable, or does

he know he can't compete with Laslo? Does he know it's a fantasy that has to end?

MATTI: I don't know. Don't ask me. I don't watch black and white movies.

ELAINE: But it's the question that has to be asked really isn't it? Where is this going to end?

MATTI: It's outside time. It's not going to end.

ELAINE: Every other example of a love triangle you've come up with ends badly. For everyone concerned. What makes you think this will be different?

MATTI: Because this isn't a love triangle. Not here, not outside time. We're in non-Euclidean geometry if you like.

ELAINE: And in time?

MATTI: In time, it doesn't exist.

ELAINE: That's very convenient. Do you stop loving me when the clock strikes two?

MATTI: No. But...

ELAINE: Then? How do you explain it? Make sense of it to me.

MATTI: It's a different me, and a different you, in a different world. A different time scheme. A world of probability .. a parallel world.. like another version of the story. And in that version, we're not having an affair.

ELAINE: But we ARE having an affair.

MATTI: But Armstrong will never know that.

ELAINE: And that's what it comes down to is it? Ultimately? All your sophistry comes down to the flawed moral premise that what he doesn't know won't hurt him? That we're not cheating on him till he finds out. That we're not doing anything wrong till we get caught? Is that it?

MATTI: No. (pause) Yes. (pause) I don't know. (pause) Why are you so concerned with endings?

ELAINE: Because in my experience.. from my perspective, they are inevitable.

MATTI: There doesn't have to be a problem. Does there? As long as we keep it here, out of time.

ELAINE: There's a problem.

MATTI: We have thirty seven minutes a day to be alone. Together. How many people get that in their ordinary lives?

ELAINE: I said, there's a problem.

MATTI: Most people are so busy getting on with work, building careers, washing, cleaning, bringing up children, sleeping, that they never spend half that time with their life partner. (pause) What problem?

ELAINE: I've fallen in love with you.

MATTI: And the problem?

ELAINE: That I know that actions have consequences.

MATTI: Do you?

ELAINE: It's not the time to get sidetracked into a philosophical discussion about epistemology.

MATTI: No. Do you.. love me. Really?

ELAINE: I think so. (pause) What are we going to do?

Matti makes it clear what's on his mind...She pushes him off.

ELAINE: No. I'm serious.

MATTI: Me too.

She pushes him off again.

MATTI: Umm. I don't know. Do we have to do anything?

ELAINE: This wasn't meant to happen.

MATTI: That's love for you. (pause) What do you mean? Not meant to happen?

ELAINE: Like you said, it was an experiment. I didn't think it would end like this..

MATTI: It hasn't ended.. endings don't exist. Just change. But what do you mean - an experiment? Is that all I am to you?

She shakes her head.

ELAINE: It doesn't matter anyway now.

MATTI: It matters to me.

ELAINE: Alright. Say it was an experiment on my part. Me looking to change my perspective on the world. The sort of thing you've been encouraging me to do isn't it? Step outside of it. Make a change.

Well. I did it. And look where it's got me. (pause) And what's the next change going to be?

MATTI: Who knows? The probabilities are infinite. But you do love me? Really love me?

She ignores the question, she's in a totally different place.

ELAINE: But the likelihood is we'll all end up unhappy.

MATTI: No. Why?

ELAINE: We'll get caught.

MATTI: That's never going to happen. (pause) How is that going to happen? (pause) Are you going to tell Armstrong?

ELAINE: No.

MATTI: And I'm not going to tell him. And he'd never break the rules so he'd never stop taking his sed, so he'll never know.

ELAINE: He'll guess.

MATTI: He won't. (pause) Are you looking for a way out?

There is a very long pause.

ELAINE: There isn't a way out. But. We've got to stop this.

MATTI: Do you want to stop it?

ELAINE: No of course. But it's gone too far.

MATTI: Well if it's gone too far there's no point trying to go back is there? So now what?

ELAINE: Oh. I don't know.

MATTI: We just have to be careful. To protect him.

ELAINE: Him? Protect him?

MATTI: Him. Us. All of us.

ELAINE: Isn't that a bit patronising?

MATTI: Men like Armstrong have to be protected from the truth. That's why they choose to follow rules. He's a brave man Armstrong, within the bounds of convention, but he'd never dare to step outside them and see reality. That's not his style. (pause) You know I'm right.

ELAINE: He's my husband.

MATTI: He doesn't love you like I do. I know that. You know that. And it's not because he doesn't want to, or can't be bothered. It's because he can't go beyond understanding. He can't leave his classical linear world and explore. He can travel as far as you like through space but he can't step outside of time.

ELAINE: Will you shut up about time for once. This isn't about time, it's about reality. Life. Our lives. The mess we're making of them.

He looks at the Earth clock. It reads 14.35

MATTI: We... damn, there's no time left. Tomorrow.

She gets up.

ELAINE: I'm not doing this again. I can't.

MATTI: You don't mean it.

ELAINE: I do.

MATTI: Elaine... you... we... can't just leave it like this... I can't...

She leaves the room.

Matti lies back down on his bed. Watching the Earth clock hit 14.37, the magic number, then reset to 14.00 and begin to tick again. The Martian clock keeps ticking, regardless.

MATTI: Who invented time anyway? Some bloody scientist?

BLACKOUT

SCENE TWO

Matti's bedroom. Some days later. Matti and Elaine lie, entwined on the bed - fast asleep. The Martian clock runs at about 03.16. The Earth clock is at 14.36.. 14.37 - resets itself to 14.00 but no claxon sounds. The clocks tick on.

The door opens. Matti and Elaine sleep on. Armstrong enters. He stands for a moment watching Matti and Elaine. He can't believe his eyes. He sits down, waiting for them to stir. It seems to take an age.

Elaine is the first to rouse. She opens her eyes to look straight into Armstrong's pained eyes.

ARMSTRONG: You weren't in your room.

ELAINE: I..

Matti wakes.

MATTI: Armstrong? What are you...?

ARMSTRONG: My question I think.

MATTI: The claxon. I didn't hear it.

ARMSTRONG: It failed. Someone sloppy on procedure?

MATTI: Uhh, I... It's not what you think...

ELAINE: We were talking. I took my sed in here and...

ARMSTRONG: You know the rules.

ELAINE: I know, but...

ARMSTRONG: Fuck the rules. What's going on?

MATTI: Not what you think. Calm down.

ARMSTRONG: I am calm. This is me calm. I am angry, but calm. Calm, but not stupid. Tell me what is going on.

MATTI: So we broke the rules. Took sed together instead of maintaining strict isolation. Don't tell me you and Elaine have never done it.

Armstrong looks shocked.

ARMSTRONG: Never.

He pulls a sed pack out of his pocket.

ARMSTRONG: (to Elaine) And this? Your sed pack. Untouched. For a month.

ELAINE: No. It's got the wrong dates on it. I...

ARMSTRONG: Like I said. Calm, angry, but not stupid. I want to know what's been going on.

MATTI: What do you think's been going on?

ELAINE: Don't... Matti. Don't push him..

MATTI: Okay. Okay. We've been trying an experiment. Working to Martian time. See - the clock.. (he yawns) And its three o'clock in the morning for me right now. (pause) t's no biggie...

ARMSTRONG: You've flouted all the rules and you think it's no big deal?

MATTI: Well, what are the sanctions? Throw us in the brighthouse? Forty days hard labour. Come on Armstrong, it's just an experiment. It had no adverse affects. Look. Did it?

ARMSTRONG: You don't call this an adverse effect?

MATTI: I call this a mountain being made out of a molehill. I'm sorry. Okay. Sorry I talked her into it, and sorry we did it and we won't do it again.

ARMSTRONG: How long's it been going on?

Elaine and Matti look at each other. There is the uncomfortable feeling that he's not talking about breaking sed rules, but about the affair. They're getting in too deep and no time to synchronise their stories.

MATTI: Me, several months. Her, just this last..

ARMSTRONG: I said don't take me for a fool. This is you being caught Matti. This is me calling you out. This is where you stop relying on your charm and stop bugging everyone about and start telling me - when did you begin having an affair with MY wife.

There is a long, heavy, uncomfortable pause.

MATTI: I won't lie to you Armstrong. I love Elaine. (pause) You know that. You've always known that.

ARMSTRONG: I'm not talking about love. I'm talking about an affair. The most fundamental breach of trust between man and woman. The oldest tale in the book... the...

He storms out of the bedroom, turning before he goes. His pain and anger are palpable.

ARMSTRONG: This isn't over.

Armstrong exits. Matti and Elaine look at each other. Shocked.

MATTI: Bugger.

ELAINE: The end? The end you said wouldn't happen. It just happened. Or don't you see it that way from your perspective? Here we are, in time, and it's happening. What now?

MATTI: You'd better go to him. I'll take the blame. It's my fault. You say.. say whatever it takes..

ELAINE: I'll tell him the truth. I owe him that at last.

MATTI: And what the hell's the truth? Whose truth?

ELAINE: Give up on the quantum theory Matti. Parallel lines don't meet. It's a basic mathematical rule - but they just have. And what do we do, in a collision of two presents?

MATTI: You... you should go to him.

ELAINE: I'm going. (she kisses him) In case you still need convincing. This is what an end is like. Do you believe now?

She exits.

He sits for a moment, contemplating.

MATTI: No. No I bloody don't. It's a point in the narrative. It's not an end. It's not my end. It's not the end. It's just a moment. A moment in a time I don't believe in.

BLACKOUT

SCENETHREE

The Hab living quarters. Armstrong and Elaine sit on a sofa.

ARMSTRONG: How did it begin?

ELAINE: We never meant to hurt you.

ARMSTRONG: How did it begin?

ELAINE: I do still love you.

ARMSTRONG: And him?

ELAINE: It's different.

ARMSTRONG: Actions have consequences.

ELAINE: I know. It's... he... there isn't any excuse. I know that.

ARMSTRONG: So tell me how did it begin?

ELAINE: You don't want to go into all this.

ARMSTRONG: How do you know what I want or don't want? (pause) I want to know. Everything. (pause) People think there's nothing worse than betrayal. People on the outside of a situation.

ELAINE: I'm sorry.

ARMSTRONG: But the worst thing is not knowing. Being ignorant.

ELAINE: I'm sorry.

ARMSTRONG: Stop saying you're bloody sorry. It's too late for that.

There is a long pause.

ELAINE: So what do you want me... ?

ARMSTRONG: I can live with the fact that you've had an affair. I don't have any choice in that. But.. I have to understand. I have to know all the facts. You owe me that much respect.

ELAINE: It's not like that. Love's not about rules and truths and facts...

ARMSTRONG: Forgive me. When we married, there were rules and speeches about truths and... did they mean nothing to you?

ELAINE: Of course they did. But they aren't about us. They're about society. A cultural norm. Rules made up by people to order a chaotic existence. With Matti.. well rules don't really apply... it was all some kind of chaos. There isn't a beginning with Matti... he doesn't believe in all that... he....

ARMSTRONG: He's very convincing... talked you into bed with quantum mumbo jumbo eh? Made you forget about beginnings and endings and reality and loyalty.

ELAINE: It started with time. If you must know.

ARMSTRONG: With time?

ELAINE: Yes. He was doing a time experiment.

Armstrong laughs sourly.

ELAINE: He questions everything. Like a good scientist should. Reassesses everything, does practical experiment. Takes nothing for granted.

ARMSTRONG: Plays outside the rules.

ELAINE: If you like. But you can't find out new..

ARMSTRONG: Our job isn't to question time. To stand outside the rules. Our job is to set up conditions for terraforming. If we're lucky, find life or signs of life. To be rigorous, careful, meticulous and follow all the known guidelines. It's up to others to interpret what we find, not for us to start making it up as we go along. That's not science.

ELAINE; What about Gallileo? Keppler? They questioned...

ARMSTRONG: I don't care about Matti's notions of science. I care about you. And me. And what he's done to us. What you've both done to us.

There is a long pause.

ELAINE: A couple of months. At first just talking. But..

ARMSTRONG: One thing leads to another. Irresistable was he? Or was I not up to scratch any more?

ELAINE: It's got nothing to do with you and me. It was... something.. something not real.. like a dream.. something out of time..

ARMSTRONG: It was an affair. Don't dress it up. (pause) It was a common or garden affair, like millions that go on every day down on earth. Nothing special. Except that it's the first affair on Mars.

Setting a precedent in the brave new world eh? But that's all nothing. It doesn't matter. (pause) Do you know what's the worst thing? (pause) I thought our relationship was something out of the ordinary, and you pair, with your common little affair, you make me feel ordinary. Here we are, on Mars. The chosen few. The golden people. The heroes of the whole world. And I feel ordinary. Ordinary anger, ordinary grief, ordinary betrayal. You've taken everything that was special and important about me and my life, our life, and you've cheapened it. Turned it into nothing.

There is a long pause.

ELAINE: I'm sorry. I'm truly, really sorry. We never meant... Can I do anything? Say anything?

Pause

ARMSTRONG: Was Leon part of this time experiment?

ELAINE: What?

ARMSTRONG: Did Matti rope Leon in on this?

ELAINE: I don't think so.

ARMSTRONG: You sure? You sure you weren't just a substitute when Leon... because if Leon was messing around with time like Matti's been then maybe that's why...

ELAINE: No. No. He didn't. He wouldn't. It wasn't... he didn't start it till after then.. (pause)

Armstrong. I know you're angry. But don't blame Matti for...

ARMSTRONG: I'm just trying to point out that his agenda may not be what it seems.

ELAINE: Look. I'm sorry. I'm sorry I had an affair.. I'm sorry..

ARMSTRONG: That you fell in love with him? You are in love with him aren't you?

There is a moment's silence.

ELAINE: Can you forgive me? (pause) Can we get over this? (pause) We can get over this you know. If you want to. (pause) We have to get over this Armstrong. We're stuck here in the Hab and we have to deal with this. Get over it. Move on. Together.

She crosses to him, puts her arms round him.

ELAINE: I love you.

He takes her arms away from him, slowly. Looks at her, carefully.

ARMSTRONG: But you're in love with him. That may be acceptable in your quantum ju ju, but it doesn't wash with me.

Another long pause.

ELAINE: In time we...

ARMSTRONG: I thought you'd given up believing in that.

She rises.

ELAINE: Okay. What do you want? What do you want me to do?

ARMSTRONG: It's what I wanted you not to do. But it's too late now. Just go.

She doesn't move.

ARMSTRONG: Go! (shouted)

She begins to leave the room. His voice is still like thunder.

ARMSTRONG: I want to talk to him.

Lights down briefly then up again as Matti enters.

MATTI: Armstrong. I am so...

ARMSTRONG: Save it. (pause) Sit down.

Matti sits down. An uncomfortable pause.

ARMSTRONG: The explanation? Not excuses. Explanation.

MATTI: I... it... what do you want me to say?

ARMSTRONG: It seems there's two issues here which have to be dealt with. One, that you have flagrantly breached regulations and put yourself and other crew members in jeopardy because of it. and two, that you've been having an affair with my wife. Start with whichever one you like.

MATTI: Me and Elaine. That was totally down to me. My fault. No excuses. It's over. It won't...

ARMSTRONG: Do you love her?

MATTI: Yes.

ARMSTRONG: Then it isn't over. (pause) But it is something we'll have to deal with. However. It's personal. It doesn't surprise me that you started with the personal. It's your weakness. The inability to put personal aside and deal with the larger issues. (pause) It nearly cost you your place on this trip. Do you know that? (pause) If I hadn't spoken up for you, you wouldn't... And how do you repay me? By making a fool of me. (pause) And I'm talking about the sed now.

MATTI: That. That was a calculated risk. Okay I shouldn't have involved Elaine. I let my feelings for her cloud my judgement. I just wanted some time alone with her. But otherwise... seriously Armstrong. Can't you see? The whole time thing. It's rules for the sake of rules. I don't believe it.

ARMSTRONG: It doesn't matter what you believe.

MATTI: You can't believe it.

ARMSTRONG: It's beyond belief.

MATTI: They don't believe it. They've just done it because they have to have rules, control, a semblance of something...

ARMSTRONG: Life is about following rules, Matti.

MATTI: If we'd all gone along with the rules of classical science we'd not be here in the first place. It's ridiculous.

ARMSTRONG: And what exactly have you achieved by refusing to work to the time frame given us?

MATTI: A sense of reality which is separate from that imposed by society.

ARMSTRONG: There's only three of us in here. It's hardly oppressive society writ large.

MATTI: I didn't just do this to suit myself, Armstrong. I do believe in it. It's science. Practical, experimental science.

ARMSTRONG: And what have you proved?

MATTI: That reality is revealed only through the active construction in which we participate.

ARMSTRONG: And for that you had to have an affair with my wife? (pause) Was it worth it?

MATTI: It didn't.. it wouldn't have hurt anyone... if I hadn't.. if Elaine... if we hadn't been caught.

ARMSTRONG: Was it worth it Matti?

MATTI: I was testing the very existence of reality.

ARMSTRONG: You smug little shit. Even now you think you're smarter than all this.. standing outside time, like some kind of untouchable, immortal being.

MATTI: No. It's...

ARMSTRONG: But your experiment failed. Because even then, now, what you've done has impacted on society. Your actions will have consequences. The experiment fails. You fail.

There is a silence while they both consider the impact of this statement.

ARMSTRONG: Whatever your personal beliefs about reality are, they're inconsequential when you are part of a team. We are a small team, a small society, but we have to work together, to accept the same rules. It doesn't matter how those rules were set up, it's not for the engine to question the machine maker.

MATTI: Time is a construct, it carries an ethical responsibility.

ARMSTRONG: Who are you to lecture me on ethics? (pause) I am not jeopardising this entire mission, the entire future of mankind on Mars, for your personal whims.

MATTI: Me and Elaine, that could have happened, that would have happened anywhere. It's just one of those things. The experiment..

ARMSTRONG: It wouldn't have happened if it hadn't been given the chance. The space to grow. The time..

MATTI: So what now?

ARMSTRONG: We abort.

MATTI: No.

ARMSTRONG: Yes.

MATTI: No. We can't. It's.. There's another two and a half years for Christ's sake. We have to find a way to work it out.

ARMSTRONG: We can't "work this out." This is life Matti. Not an experiment.

MATTI: So what? You're going to tell them that because I slept with your wife, you won't work with me any more, spit the dummy, fuck the programme, and go home? How will that look?

ARMSTRONG: I don't care how things look. I care how they are.

MATTI: Please Armstrong. Please. We can get over this. We can work it out. We have to.

ARMSTRONG: Do we?

MATTI: This is bigger than us. Don't you see? We have to think bigger. If man's going to live on Mars, make a new frontier on Mars, it has to be on new terms. Real pioneering. Not just setting up another version of Earth here. It has to be different. (pause) I was trying to make it different.

ARMSTRONG: Good job of it you've made too. Only three people on the planet and already you've established lies, betrayal, deceit and imposition of personal will over the good of all as your "ethical" system.

MATTI: So I fucked up. So I'm human. But don't let that jeopardise the whole thing..

ARMSTRONG: You are not in a strong bargaining position Matti. You need to learn. I will give you practical science. I'm going to teach you, once and for all that actions have consequences. I'm going to tell them that you have broken protocol and that your behaviour, because of constant abuse of the stoptime, has become irrational and dangerous to the mission.

MATTI: You won't. (pause) You know that's not true. (pause) You can't. Come on Armstrong. You're a bigger man than that.

ARMSTRONG: It's what I believe to be true. You have jeopardised the success of the mission.

MATTI: This is outrageous. You can't be... come on. Think about this. Rationally. (pause) There is no danger staying here. We can settle down into our rhythms and work on, complete the brick building project, finish the life experiments, complete the fuel plant installation... just go on. (pause) If we go back, now, we're out of the proper trajectory paths... they'll never let us do it.

ARMSTRONG: I am leader of this mission. They'll do what I say.

MATTI: They won't do it. They won't allow it. They'd rather leave us here to rot than have everyone see...

ARMSTRONG: Do you care to bet on it? Betting.. probability.. that's what your science is hot on isn't it?

MATTI: Was there a back up plan? That I didn't know about? If things went...?

ARMSTRONG: There were all kinds of backup plans. For space radiation, for insanity... for every eventuality.

MATTI: For infidelity?

ARMSTRONG: No. Not for infidelity. Just for breaching protocol.

MATTI: I just want us to see the mission out. Do our jobs.

ARMSTRONG: Telling them will be me doing my job.

MATTI: Do you really want to be that small a man... jeopardising the hopes of all mankind just because.. (pause) You're bigger than that. I know you are. We all know you are. We all respect you, everyone respects you as a man who always makes the right choices for the right reasons.

ARMSTRONG: You may have sweet talked my wife into bed, but you'll not sway me as easily. I am the captain of this mission and I will liase with mission control to decide what happens. Pulling rank has never been my style, you know that, but you've left me no choice. We're going home.

BLACKOUT

SCENE FOUR

The Hab living quarters. Some time later. Matti and Elaine sit opposite each other at the table in silence. Enter Armstrong.

ARMSTRONG: Going home.

Matti jumps up.

MATTI: No.

ARMSTRONG: I've spoken to mission control. The decision is to go home.

There is a long, uncomfortable silence.

ARMSTRONG: It's an untenable position. I had to make a judgement. Actions have consequences.

MATTI: You can't do this...

ARMSTRONG: I have done it.

MATTI: I'm not going.

ARMSTRONG: And you?

Elaine stands up.

ELAINE: You put me in an impossible situation.

ARMSTRONG: I haven't put you anywhere. You did this all by yourselves. (pause) How does this work into your probability theory Matti?

MATTI: I can't believe you're doing this. I can't believe you're jeopardising the whole..

ARMSTRONG: Let's put this down to me proving that time is irreversible. You can't go back. Only forward.

MATTI: How will they sell this to the public at large? They won't want to face up to failure.

ARMSTRONG: They won't be facing up to failure. They can make up any story they like. Tell the world anything they like. They made that quite clear to me.

MATTI: Exactly. We're just pawns in their game and if we don't play it out, we're dead meat.

ARMSTRONG: Did you expect them to care? About us. Come on, even you aren't that naive. As soon as you start messing around with the rules and put yourself outside society, you can't expect its protection.

MATTI: We're not leaving and that's that.

ARMSTRONG: I thought that's what you'd say. Which is why I'm leaving. Me. Alone.

ELAINE: You can't. It's suicide.

ARMSTRONG: I am. It's not. I have every chance of a successful re- entry.. with the amount of fuel on board, more chance than with three.. With two we could just about..

ELAINE: And leave Matti here alone? That's impossible.

MATTI: Come on Armstrong. We're a team. It's all stay or all go. You know that. It always has been.

ARMSTRONG: You should be pleased. YOU advocate the creation of individual realities. Am I the only one not to be allowed to make choices in your brave new Martian world?

Elaine crosses to Armstrong, takes hold of him.

ELAINE: You can't go. I won't let you.

ARMSTRONG: I think you gave up any rights with regard to me when you slept with him.

ELAINE: Don't let that... come on, you can't risk everything because of...

ARMSTRONG: I can do exactly what I want. And I'm going home. You can come with me.. or stay here.

He exits.

MATTI: He's bluffing.

ELAINE: He's not. He'll go.

MATTI: Do you think he even spoke to them?

ELAINE: No. They'd never let him do this. It's suicide.

MATTI: Not necessarily. It is just technically possible. And if anyone could bring it off, he could.

(pause) He's a brave man.

ELAINE: This is one hell of a consequence for an action that never happened, wouldn't you say?

MATTI: This is a random occurrence. Human behaviour. Emotion. You can't factor it in. Whatever rules and restrictions you impose, human nature is always the joker in the pack. The unpredictable in the equation. (pause) He'll calm down. Don't worry about it. Just give him time to think it out.

Offstage there is a loud noise.

ELAINE: He's opened the outside chamber.

There is a ringing of alarms.

ELAINE: What..?

MATTI: He's going to do it... bloody hell, he's actually going to do it.

Elaine rushes from the room. Matti sits and watches the clocks go round.

Elaine comes back.

ELAINE: He's gone. We have to go after him.

MATTI: No.

ELAINE: What?

MATTI: No. (pause) We have to respect his wishes. His choice. He's made it.

ELAINE: But he's killing himself.

MATTI: He's not daft. He will have worked out the statistics, the probabilities, the trajectories. If anyone can make it, he will. He'll be a hero. That's what's most important to him. That's who he is. His choice was be a hero or be a jilted husband. He couldn't be the latter. He IS a hero. That's who he is.

ELAINE: And us? What does it make us?

MATTI: It makes us, here, alone... free.

ELAINE: It doesn't feel like freedom from where I'm standing.

MATTI: Remember mission objectives. "Finding any example of life on Mars would teach us something fundamental about life itself" We are going one step further. We can do better than that. WE can change our fundamental natures. Mars is a second chance. A new frontier.

ELAINE: New rules apply?

MATTI: No rules apply. (pause)m Not yet.

ELAINE: Till they send people out after us.

MATTI:,Till then. But by then, who knows what we might have discovered. This is a new world. Our

new world. A society not based on myth. Or understanding. A quantum society of indeterminacy.

He takes the Earth clock from the wall.

MATTI: WE are the first Martians.

He takes the Mars clock from the wall and we blackout as he is about to throw them both on the floor.

CURTAIN.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MOUNTAIN

JEN. (Benevolence.)

A Chinese Mountain in the remote Chungnanshan range. Empty stage. Two men enter. XAVIER is 28. Blonde. Looks more like a surfer than a mountaineer. JAMES is 35. He is clearly a career mountaineer.

The men do not speak but begin unpacking their rucksacs and preparing to put up their tent. This should take quite some time.

As they go through the actions a screen on the back wall projects shadow imagery. Two men putting up a tent. The shadows are not in time with the men, a few steps ahead - sense of action in another world.

The specific actions must be performed with a ritualistic feel. A sense that there is no need for conversation because the action is beyond that. And tiredness should also be a factor. Intense fatigue.

We hear their thoughts projected - as if spoken by the shadows.

XAVIER: Jen. Shu. Chung.

JAMES: Thirty pounds. Six thousand calories a day. Four thousand in emergency rations held back.

XAVIER: Chung. Ching. Hsin.

JAMES: Two days to the summit. Allow a week the other side..

XAVIER: Hsin. Ying. Yi.

JAMES: No more than ten days. Max.

XAVIER: Chih.

JAMES: Supply depot six. Margin for error. Calculate at..

All elements for the tent are now laid out on the ground and the shadow tent fully erected. The silence is broken. Our first "live" speech as Xavier turns to James.

XAVIER: Your understanding of benevolence?

BLACKOUT as they enter the tent.

SHU. (Finding out other's desires.)

Inside the tent. The two men engaged upon separate tasks. Whatever the space of the stage the feeling should be cramped within the tent.

JAMES is fitting together a pressure cooker while XAVIER is cutting vegetables. But Xavier seems more interested in his book than the vegetables.

JAMES: That was the last supply dump. Just as well.

XAVIER: The benevolent find joy in the mountains.

JAMES: So why did all the natives turn tail and run at supply depot three?

XAVIER: Ancestor worship.

JAMES: What?

XAVIER: Rituals.

JAMES: Ju ju.

XAVIER: Not to them.

There is a pause as they continue with their tasks. They talk sporadically, but more to themselves than to each other.

JAMES: You can't cook at this altitude without a pressure cooker.

XAVIER: (reading) Is there a single word which can be used as a guide throughout one's life? It is perhaps "shu".

JAMES: The first choice made. Fuel. Way above the treeline. We carry what we... (he zones into Xavier's comment) what's "shu"?

XAVIER: Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire.

JAMES: Ah.

XAVIER: Fuel? Is it a problem?

JAMES: We have to get over the other side by.. (he begins to make calculations) four days from now. Back to the treeline. Or we'll be burning books... (pause) Joking!

XAVIER: It weighs a ton that pressure cooker. I'd have dumped it..

JAMES: You'd have been eating cold food by now. And the calorific implications..

XAVIER: Okay. Point taken. You know your stuff.

JAMES: I should do.

Pause.

XAVIER: Was it like this in the Himalayas?

JAMES: HimAlayas.

XAVIER: What?

JAMES: The stress is on the first A.

XAVIER: Oh.

JAMES: Thought those things mattered to you. Words. Sounds. All that.

XAVIER: Ah. Yes. Men of wealth make gifts of money while benevolent men make gifts of words.

JAMES: And I make a gift of food. Get that down your neck. He passes some food to Xavier.

There is a moment's pause.

JAMES: And, No.

XAVIER: No what?

JAMES: No this isn't like my last HimAlayas trip.

XAVIER: Nothing like it?

JAMES: No.

XAVIER: Why? (pause) I mean, why not?

JAMES: Is an apple like an orange?

Xavier laughs.

XAVIER: You're beginning to get the idea of Chinese philosophy James.

JAMES: Wish I could say the same for your cooking, Xavier.

XAVIER: Mai Li does the cooking at home.. I never get near the cook pot. If it's not her it's her mother..

JAMES: So what does Confucius he say about the benevolent man?

XAVIER: A benevolent man is sure to possess courage, but a courageous man does not necessarily possess benevolence.

JAMES: It's riddles not philosophy.

XAVIER: No. The problem is translation, not meaning.

JAMES: What?

XAVIER: There's rarely any literal translation. From Chinese to English. So... benevolence. It's not really it. Jen. Doesn't really mean benevolence..it's.. just.. Jen.

JAMES: Ah. (pause) That helps.

XAVIER: It's like Dao.

JAMES: What?

XAVIER: Dao. The Way.

JAMES: I thought the way was my concern. And yours was the means.

Xavier laughs.

XAVIER: Dao. It's the way and the means. Dao is indefinable. It's everything.

JAMES: That's handy then.

XAVIER: What?

JAMES: Not exactly specific is it?

XAVIER: That's the point. Dao is why we're here after all.

JAMES: Does it matter where we are if it's non-specific.

There is a pause.

JAMES: I'm kidding you.

XAVIER: (reading) Dao is forever nameless. No term can be applied to Dao because all terms are specific and it is beyond specificity.

JAMES: Just as well I've got a map then. Your book of five thousand characters's not up to much is it!

XAVIER: You could think of the Dao De Ching as a map for the soul.

JAMES: God help the soul then.

XAVIER: Ah. There's no god. Not in Daoism. It's not a religion. In its pure form. It's a philosophy.

JAMES: Philosophy. The one thing more baffling than religion. At least religion gives you faith for the bits that don't make sense.... and you wondered why I don't think this is like my last Himalaya's trip. Discussing philosophy at high altitude wasn't our priority. Strangely enough.

XAVIER: I've never understood the "because it's there" syndrome.

JAMES: Me either.

XAVIER: So why do you do it?

JAMES: Stick to the simple questions, eh?

XAVIER: No. Seriously. Why do you do this? What's the motivation?

JAMES: Result from effort.

XAVIER: What?

JAMES: Money.

XAVIER: No way. No way would anyone but a masochist go through all this just for money.

JAMES: Can I point out we've hardly started.

XAVIER: Yeah. And I've had enough of the climbing already. If it wasn't for..

JAMES: For the hope of succeeding where others have failed..

XAVIER: For going where other people have never been. Finding out things they think are impossible. Turning legend into history.

They chew on their food for a bit.

JAMES: I climbed my first mountain when I was seven years old. Buchaille Etive Mor. In Glencoe. Scotland.

XAVIER: Why?

JAMES: Because my dad took me. Instead of Christmas. He wasn't big on celebrations my old man.

XAVIER: And how was it?

JAMES: Amazing. (pause) Cold. Icy. Frozen. Terrifying. But... freedom.

XAVIER: Better than turkey and all the trimmings.

JAMES: You kidding me? He bought me an ice axe. I hate to think the uses it might have been put to if we hadn't got the hell out of the house over the "festive" season.

Silence again for a time.

XAVIER: So climbing became an escape?

JAMES: Not an escape. A reason for living. Climbed Mont Blanc when I was twelve. Now THAT was a serious rush.

XAVIER: But which bit?.. I mean. Most of it's just hard work and grit and determination and pushing on when you just don't want to...

JAMES: You don't need to tell me. (pause) Have you ever stood on a high summit?

XAVIER: No.

JAMES: Then you wait. You'll see. It's beyond words.

Pause.

XAVIER: The words of daily life are powerless to describe the really important levels of experience. One must transcend all these to gain true freedom.

JAMES: That's the sort of thing, I guess.

XAVIER: That's Chuang Tzu, not me by the way.

JAMES: Chuang Tzu?

XAVIER: One of the ancient texts. (pause) Is there any more of that... that... whatever that meal was?

JAMES: It's nameless. Like the Dao.

They laugh. James hands Xavier some more food. He eats it, yawning.

XAVIER: I'm wrecked.

JAMES: It should get easier.

XAVIER: We're still going up aren't we?

JAMES: I don't mean the altitude. I mean the weight. This dump has lightened us by twenty pounds each at least.

XAVIER: Tell you what. Even if there are the most incredible things to eat over there, I'm not carrying them back over. I'll wait for my beansprouts and noodles.

He shivers.

XAVIER: Frozen.

They finish the food and begin to get into their sleeping bags.

JAMES: So why did they all leg it?

XAVIER: Didn't you have the same problem in the Himalaya's?

JAMES: You're kidding. They've a positively cosmopolitan outlook there these days. Tourism, litter and the mighty dollar. Depressing really.

XAVIER: Hmm. Well this is rural China. To people in this area, Beijing might just as well be Heaven. To the earliest Chinese, these mountains were the home of the most powerful heavenly and earthly spirits. Nothing's changed much. Communism, Capitalism, hasn't really touched them here. Ancestor worship - that's their reality.

JAMES: And what is it?

XAVIER: What? Ancestor worship?

JAMES: Yeah.

XAVIER: They believe you have two souls.

JAMES: That's two more than I believe in.

XAVIER: You've got to appreciate that Chinese and Western belief systems are different at the most fundamental level. Identity for example.

JAMES: What about it?

XAVIER: To you or me it's about being an individual. For the Chinese, an individual is a person without a context. All identity is tied up with relationships for them. Familial relationships being the most important.

JAMES: They obviously never had a family like mine.

Pause. They settle down into the sleeping bags. It seems like they are going to sleep, then both speak at the same time.

JAMES: So how did they take to you becoming a member of the family?

XAVIER: It's bloody freezing up here.

Another pause.

XAVIER: Suspicious at first. Especially the blue eyes. And they still find my "accent" hard to bear. But once we were married, they accepted me. They have to. It's the culture. Our relationship goes along in accordance with thousands of years of ritual.

Pause.

JAMES: It's gonna get much colder than this. You'll be glad this tent's so small soon.

XAVIER: Can't we keep the heating on for a bit?

JAMES: 'Fraid not. (pause) People trying to reach paradise don't stop just because the road is hard.

XAVIER: What?

JAMES: Read it in your book. When you were out taking a slash.

XAVIER: I knew you were more interested than you let on.

JAMES: When in Rome. Thought I should read some of the books so that I could pick which one to burn first.

XAVIER: We're not burning my books. However cold it gets.

JAMES: You know them all off by heart anyway don't you?

XAVIER: You're joking. You could never know them by heart.

JAMES: Yeah. But the gist of them. You could tell them in your sleep. (pause) You do tell them in your sleep.

XAVIER: What d'you mean?

JAMES: Well, either that or you have some really strange fantasy life. (pause) Monkey King?

XAVIER: What?

JAMES: Last night. You were going on about Monkey King.

XAVIER: What about him?

JAMES: I don't know it sounded like gobbledgook to me.

Pause as they settle into their sleeping bags.

JAMES: Gonna tell me a bed-time story then. About Monkey King?

XAVIER: Stop taking the piss.

JAMES: Na. Really. Tell me. Something to pass the time.

XAVIER: Okay. Monkey King.

As he speaks the lights dim and we get a projected image of a shadow puppet of Monkey King on the back wall against the background of a huge mountain.

XAVIER: Monkey King is a really old Chinese story. Nothing like as old as what we're looking for of course, but who knows how far back its roots are.

JAMES: Hey. Story, not lecture.

XAVIER: Sorry. So Monkey King is really the story of a journey to the west.

JAMES: Like us.

XAVIER: Hmm. Not exactly. Anyway, Monkey King is rebellious and smart. He can transform into seventy two different images, and using the clouds as a vehicle he can travel a hundred and eighty thousand miles in a single somersault.

The shadow Monkey King does a huge somersault across the screen.

He is then confronted by a warrior with a trident.

XAVIER: Monkey King has many adventures - he claims to be king in defiance of the authority of heaven.

More warriors come into the picture. Fight.

XAVIER: He is only subdued after many a battle, with the help of all the god warriors. He is commanded to be burned in the furnace where his Daoist master Shang Lao Jun refines his pills of immortality.

Monkey King and Daoist master.

XAVIER: But instead of killing him, the fire and smoke gave him a pair of firey golden crystal eyes which can see through people...

JAMES: (sleepily) Your everyday action superhero..

BLACKOUT

CHUNG (To do one's best.)

At the summit of the mountain. Projected on the backwall is a mountain scene. The pressure cooker is boiling some water for tea. James and Xavier stand looking out over the vista. It's high, and so their speech comes laboriously. Disconnected conversation.

JAMES: Weird.

XAVIER: What?

JAMES: The summit.

XAVIER: /Turning back

JAMES: /The goal.

XAVIER: is/

JAMES: /Then turning back.

XAVIER: The Dao/

JAMES: /And here.

XAVIER: Beginning and end./

JAMES: /The goal is

XAVIER: Just points on the road./

JAMES: The other side of the mountain.

XAVIER: It's the journey itself that matters. (pause) It'll be worth it.

JAMES: I hope so. (pause) What exactly are we looking for again?

XAVIER: What?

JAMES: Well, I...

XAVIER: Lao Tzu. Remember him?

They are getting their breath back. James begins to pour the tea.

JAMES: Tell me again. (pause) Sorry. I have to confess. I never really listened beyond "the Shanghai bank are funding the expedition" and "no one's ever attempted it before". That was enough to get me here. But..

XAVIER: But you need something else to get you down the other side of the mountain?

JAMES: It'd help.

They sit down. James hands Xavier the tea. The back wall image changes and there is a projection of Lao Tzu flying across the sky above the mountain.

XAVIER: It's said that Lao Tzu was born in a village in the province of Henan in six hundred and four B.C. For a while he was the archivist in Luoyang - which was the capital at that time - then later he retreated into solitude and died in his village in five seventeen B.C.

JAMES: And he wrote this Dao De Ching thing?

XAVIER: Maybe. Nothing is certain about Lao Tzu. Not even that he existed. It's said "he lived without leaving any traces, engaged in activities that were not recorded for preservation"

JAMES: But you know different?

XAVIER: Yes.

JAMES: How?

XAVIER: You really want to know?

JAMES: Yeah. (pause) The short version!

XAVIER: Okay. In the olden days they wrote things on bamboo strips. Tied them together. And sometimes the ties worked loose and things got lost. Or put out of place. And I've been looking at bamboo strips for years now..

Images project on the screen - pages and pages of Chinese characters.

JAMES: And you think mountaineering is a crazy way to spend a life.

XAVIER: (laughs) Yeah. Doesn't sound too exciting does it. But.. (pause) Lao Tzu means "old man" and for generations people have assumed he never actually existed. That it's just a title for a fictional man. But that's because of Confucius and... sorry... the short version. Okay. Well I've found evidence that he DID exist. That's why we're here.

JAMES: Why here though?

XAVIER: Legend has it that Lao Tzu disappeared into the Chungnan mountains. It's said that he met the Keeper of the Pass who asked if he'd write his beliefs. He did this- Dao De Ching - and then was never heard of again. But I. I have found evidence in the Spring and Autumn Annals that... well, the detail doesn't matter. Suffice it to say that when we get to the other side I'm confident we'll be able to prove Lao Tzu existed.

JAMES: So you'll turn Chinese history on its head in one fell swoop?

XAVIER: Something like that.

JAMES: And how well will that go down with the authorities?

XAVIER: The more freedom you have to choose your path, the harder the journey is.

JAMES: It'll either be bunting and banners or a frog march to Beijing Airport.

XAVIER: Twenty years ago there might have been a problem. Nowadays. Global capitalism and all that. Look at the Terracotta warriors. Imagine the commercial possibilities once it's proven that the founder of Daoism was a real man. It'd be like the Turin Shroud...

JAMES: I thought that was a fake?

XAVIER: Yeah. Well. It'll be like..like nothing that's ever been discovered..

JAMES: So you'll go down in the history books.

XAVIER: That's not the point. I'm not doing it for that. That would be against Dao.

JAMES: So why are you doing it?

XAVIER: Why are WE doing it.

JAMES: Hey. I'm just the packhorse. No glory for me. I'm just Sherpa Tensing..

XAVIER: To put service before the reward you get for it, is that not the exaltation of virtue?

JAMES: Yeah. Right.

XAVIER: Chung.

JAMES: Sorry?

XAVIER: Chung. To do one's best.

JAMES: What?

XAVIER: The Virtues. Chung and Shu make Jen.

JAMES: Oh. The benevolent man again. (pause) Isn't it a bit dodgy though?

XAVIER: What?

JAMES: Playing with another culture's history?

XAVIER: I'm not playing. "The past is a guide for the present"

JAMES: Lao Tzu?

XAVIER: Chairman Mao. Even Mao understood the significance of history. Ancestor worship makes the Chinese have great respect for the past.

JAMES: Mmm. Just occurs to me that turning legend into history could have some unwelcome side effects.

XAVIER: But they don't see time in the same way as we do. The Chinese relationship with past and present is quite different.

JAMES: Okay. I'll bow to your superior knowledge. (looks around) We should be moving on now though.

XAVIER: Yeah?

JAMES: Yeah. On to the other side of the mountain.

They begin to pack up the pressure cooker.

BLACKOUT

CHING (Reverence.)

The other side of the mountain. In the distance the monastery. Inside the tent Xavier's excitement is palpable.

XAVIER: I can't believe it. I mean. We've seen it..

JAMES: We don't know what we've seen till we get there surely. (yawns) Go to sleep.

XAVIER: How can you think about sleeping when we're on the threshold of such an incredible discovery.

JAMES: (sarcastically) Hmm. Let me think? Maybe because I don't know how incredible a discovery it is.

XAVIER: It's going to wipe the floor with Anyang.

JAMES: Really? That's nice.

XAVIER: No. Come on James. You're not going to spoil this for me. This is really important..

JAMES: I would have hated to see you as a kid at Christmas.

XAVIER: You have to understand what we're doing here.

James sits up. He can see he's going to get no peace.

JAMES: Okay. Okay. I give in. Tell me.

XAVIER: What?

JAMES: Tell me what it is you think I need to know. Explain the Dao De Ching to me and then we can get some sleep.

XAVIER: Everything comes from nothing. This is Nu wa. And everything returns to nothing. This is Dao. People lose Dao when they try to find it. They confuse existence with non-existence. All we can do is cultivate De. True De leads to Dao.

JAMES: And you taught college classes in this?

XAVIER: Yes.

JAMES: Well, just back up a minute can you. Break it into bite sized pieces please.

XAVIER: Okay. Dao. You know that. It's the way.

JAMES: The way that is nameless and unknowable.

XAVIER: Yes.

JAMES: And De?

XAVIER: De is virtue. You cultivate virtue in order to achieve the Dao.

JAMES: But if you try too hard you miss the point?

XAVIER: That's right.

JAMES: Okay. But what about all the non-existence stuff?

XAVIER: Wu wei.

JAMES: What?

XAVIER: Wu wei. It means... well, doing nothing.

JAMES: Doing nothing?

XAVIER: Yes. Well, more like swimming with the stream. Not going against nature. Trying too hard - knowledge - is against nature, whereas wisdom doesn't rely on knowledge but on a right spirit, a cultivation of virtue. Knowledge studies others, wisdom is self-known.

JAMES: But existence. What about the existence stuff? Does any of this matter if we don't actually exist?

XAVIER: In Daoism, whatever exists cannot be real, for whatever exists suffers from the limitations of the specific. And reality is beyond that.

There is a pause.

JAMES: So why are you getting so excited about what's down there if neither we nor it exist.

XAVIER: Of course we exist. Corporeally. It's just that...name is the guest of reality.

JAMES: Hey. Don't bother. I'm just taking the piss. I get it - really.

XAVIER: I can't expect you to understand. I'm sorry. It's just... here I am... about to make the biggest discovery of my life and..

JAMES: And I'm taking the piss out of it?

XAVIER: No. It's just... it would be nice to have someone to share it with. Don't worry. (pause)

Those who follow different ways never have anything helpful to say to one another.

JAMES: Do you believe that?

XAVIER: It's Dao De Ching. It represents the conflict between Daoism and Confucianism.

JAMES: I thought it was all the same thing?

XAVIER: No. It's like... um... like Romanticism and neo-classicism.

JAMES: Come again?

XAVIER: Like- rural and urban.

JAMES: Oh. I see. Which is which?

XAVIER: Daoism is following nature. Confucianism is much more concerned with man's place in society. And China has been Confucian for centuries. Daoists have always been on the fringes.

JAMES: Rural ways always are, aren't they. Simple question of numbers. More people want to go shopping than climb mountains... jolly good thing really! Imagine mountains filled with shoppers...

There is a pause.

XAVIER: I just want... tomorrow... it's... ching.

JAMES: Yeah. What is ching then? I've got Dao and De, what about the ching thing?

XAVIER: Ching is reverence.

JAMES: Reverence?

XAVIER: Ching is like a kind of timeless thing. Reverence to a thing.. like I said, it's impossible to translate most of these ideas. They just aren't western.

JAMES: You just want to make sure you're spiritually prepared for the journey ahead?

XAVIER: Yeah. I guess so. How..?

JAMES: Come on. I know all about preparation for a journey. Not just practical. Mountaineers know something about the spiritual too. You can't stand on the top of a mountain like we did back there and not connect to the spiritual part of life.

XAVIER: I knew you didn't just do it for the money!

JAMES: So what do we do?

XAVIER: What?

JAMES: To prepare ourselves. Ching. What do you want to do?

Xavier picks up a book.

XAVIER: "To attack a task from the wrong end can do nothing but harm." It's Confucius, but it makes the point. We don't DO anything. We've just got to make sure that we are ready for it.

JAMES: I'm ready for it. Or I will be. After a good night's sleep.

XAVIER: Yes. Sleep. Think. Dream. Whatever.

JAMES: I'm still bothered by the reality thing though.

XAVIER: What?

JAMES: Can't you explain it. I don't want to wake up with busy brain at three a.m. It's too cold for that.

XAVIER: Zhuang Zi. Have you heard of him?

JAMES: Not so's you'd notice.

XAVIER: Sure you have. You must have.

JAMES: Tell me.

On the back wall, behind this conversation is played out a shadow puppet show of Zhuang Zi and the butterfly.

XAVIER: Zhuang Zi was a philosopher. A follower of Lao Tzu. One night he dreamed he was a butterfly. In the dream he didn't know that he was Zhuang Zi. Suddenly he woke up and there was no doubt that he was in fact Zhuang Zi. But it was unclear to him - am I Zhuang Zi dreaming I am a butterfly or am I a butterfly who dreams he is Zhuang Zi?

JAMES: Chicken and egg.

XAVIER: All things are relative.

JAMES: You can say that again.

He turns over to sleep.

JAMES: And if I spend the night dreaming I'm a butterfly now, I hold you personally responsible. *He settles down in his sleeping bag. Xavier focuses his reading light onto his book and keeps reading. He quietly runs over the virtues to himself like a mantra as he reads:*

XAVIER: Jen. Shu. Chung. Ching. (pause) Wu wei. Nu wa. (pause) United with the Dao, the individual is indifferent to the values of the world.

BLACKOUT

HSIN (Reliability/ Trustworthiness of word.)

In the tent. The back wall projects a picture of a dragon. Xavier and James are cooking.

XAVIER: Dragons have always played a major role in Chinese cosmology.

JAMES: Yeah?

XAVIER: Yes. The birth of a great sage was preceded by the appearance of dragons and phoenixes.

JAMES: And it is true.

XAVIER: What?

JAMES: Well. Here. Today. Haven't we just witnessed the birth of a new great sage?

XAVIER: I don't..[get you]

JAMES: Xavier Pascal. Doesn't sound quite right does it? Xavier Pascal Li. That's a bit better, but it's not up there with Lao Tzu or Confucius is it?

Xavier ignores James teasing.

XAVIER: But it was incredible wasn't it? So colourful. After all these centuries. Like it had been painted yesterday

JAMES: Yeah. Yeah, it was amazing. Pretty fierce looking too.

XAVIER: No. That's where you're wrong. In China the dragon is a good natured, benign creature. It's a symbol of natural male vigour.

JAMES: Oh.

XAVIER: There are lots of kinds of dragon symbols of course. Heaven dragons, spirit dragons, earth dragons. But that dragon.. that dragon.. that's a dragon which guards treasure. That's why.. as soon as I saw it.. I knew. And the phoenix..

Image on the backscreen changes - phoenix joins the dragon.

JAMES: Yeah. What about the phoenix. Rising from the ashes?

XAVIER: No. The Phoenix has quite a different symbolism in Chinese mythology. The Phoenix was the deciding factor. It's a symbol that the land is ruled by a just man.

JAMES: Lao Tzu?

XAVIER: Yes. Lao Tzu. (pause) It's just incredible. I mean. Even though I thought I was right. Even though I believed. Proof. Well, proof seems to change everything.

JAMES: I wish it would change the weather. The wind's really picking up now.

XAVIER: The feng huang - that's the Phoenix.. was originally a god of the winds.

JAMES: It would be. (pause) We should really be thinking of moving on in the morning.

XAVIER: You're kidding me.

JAMES: 'Fraid not.

XAVIER: I have to.. I mean.. there's still so much.. I need to look at it all again. I need it here, inside me.. to take it with me..

JAMES: It's an incredible discovery, for sure. But you need to eat as well. A storm's coming and we need to get back to a food depot before it really sets in. We've been here two days longer than..

XAVIER: Yes. But days. Food. What do they mean when you're..

JAMES: And that's why you brought me with you.

XAVIER: Why?

JAMES: Getting to this side of the mountain wasn't the issue really, was it? Getting you back over. That's the real job.

XAVIER: What do you mean?

JAMES: I mean, there's a time for harsh reality. We can't just hang around here "experiencing" it all. Taking your time now can cost you your life later on. We're on a tight window and it's not me

controlling the choice budget. (pause) And it's not like you're not coming back. This isn't the end.

XAVIER: What do you mean?

JAMES: Well, surely now, the door's open. This will be your life now won't it? Back and forth over this mountain. Till you get someone to pay you to stay. (pause) What will Mai Li's family think about that eh?

XAVIER: Mai Li will love it. She'd have come with us. If it hadn't been for Jiao.

JAMES: Jiao?

XAVIER: My son.

JAMES: You've got a son?

XAVIER: Yeah. He's great. Four months old. I'll have missed so much when I get back. He'll be sitting and..

JAMES: I can't believe you never told me you had a son.

XAVIER: Well... it never really came up. And you?

JAMES: Me what?

XAVIER: Do you have kids?

JAMES: He travels fastest who travels alone. (pause) Divorced.

XAVIER: Oh. Sorry.

JAMES: Don't be. You know they say women become like their mothers. Well in my case there was a horrible mistake. She became like MY mother. And she was definitely NOT a benign dragon.

Xavier laughs.

XAVIER: Tomorrow. First thing. Just one last look. Please. To fix it in my mind.

JAMES: We're packing up at first light. If we take it steady we should make it to the last food dump before night... if the wind holds back..

XAVIER: Half an hour. I'll get up early. We'll take it faster than steady. Anything.. I just have to see it again. I've seen it and I believe it less than I did before. Now it's real it seems less real than it did when I dreamed about it.

JAMES: Yeah, well that's all your stuff about reality being beyond specificity or whatever isn't it?

XAVIER: We could let the I-Ching decide?

JAMES: You what?

XAVIER: The I-Ching. The Hexagons. You ask them questions. They give you answers.

JAMES: You are kidding?

XAVIER: Well. Not totally. I know, we'll play a variation. With the books. Pick any passage at random from a a book and see what it tells us.

JAMES: Whatever it tells us, we're going back tomorrow.

XAVIER: Okay. All right. Enough. (pause) But play anyway. (pause) Got anything better to do? Five course meal to eat?

He hands James a book. James thumbs through it. The back wall projects a picture of the I Ching Hexagon.

XAVIER: No. You can't choose. You just pick. At random.

James opens a page, points finger at a point on the page.

JAMES: Okay. No path is solitary.

XAVIER: Meaning?

JAMES: We all tread across other people's beginnings and endings. We have a responsibility to each other. Isn't that your hsin? Trustworthiness. Reliability. I'm not going to let you sacrifice yourself, or me, to a dream. We're going back. Six o'clock tomorrow morning, we're on our way. If not THE way,

it's our way.

XAVIER: All right. But I'll be up at four. I'll be back by five thirty.

Xavier picks from a book.

XAVIER: Life is constant flux, nothing is fixed.

James picks.

JAMES: To understand Destiny is to know that certain things in life come under its sway..

Xavier picks. It's becoming a duel of words.

XAVIER: Faced with what is right, to leave it undone shows a lack of courage.

JAMES: Make it your guiding principle to do your best for others and to be trustworthy in what you say.

XAVIER: He does not die in vain who dies the day he is told about the Dao.

JAMES: The world is only a hotel in which one stays for a while. Whether the stay is long or short does not make much difference. (pause) What have you done to me?

XAVIER: What?

JAMES: I'm beginning to think I understand this stuff. That's scary.

XAVIER: That's Dao. You're learning without even knowing it.

James picks again.

JAMES: The advice of a friend which opens one's eyes to fatal error and restores one on the path of rectitude is a priceless gift.

Xavier picks.

XAVIER: Maybe so but (he reads) A man will meet his end doing what he enjoys. If he enjoys doing good he will meet a good death, if evil an evil one.

JAMES: Just remember, this isn't all a game, Xavier. People do die. We can die.

XAVIER: How do I know that loving life is not a delusion? How do I know that in hating death I am not like a man who, having left home in his youth, has forgotten the way back.

JAMES: Yeah. Words. Pretty words. Pretty thoughts. But not real. Just remember. Sometime here we might have to deal with things we'd rather not.

XAVIER: Okay. If it'll make you feel better. I WILL listen to you. I WILL take your advice. We WILL leave at six tomorrow. Don't worry. But don't nag me about it. Don't try to scare me, or pull rank on me, or... you can't possibly understand what this means to me...

JAMES: I think I can.

XAVIER: Some things in life are just more important than the petty considerations of life and death.

JAMES: Spoken by a man who isn't facing death.

XAVIER: Ah. Come on. Let's stop this. We're tired. We're hungry. That's my fault I know. I'm sorry. We'll leave tomorrow and we'll play it your way.

JAMES: It's what you're paying me for. (pause)

XAVIER: (mocking) What? I'm paying you?

JAMES: (laughs) Yeah, right.

XAVIER: So. Is this a good act or a selfish one?

James gets into his sleeping bag.

JAMES: This is a good act AND a selfish one. (pause) Be back by five thirty.

James settles down and Xavier prepares to leave the tent.

BLACKOUT

YING (Courage.)

Later. In the tent. Realising that the journey is far from over. Bad weather has set in.

JAMES: This is the moment of destiny.

XAVIER: What?

JAMES: There comes a point, after the choices - good or bad - or as a result of the choices, when choice is no more and destiny takes over. this is that point.

XAVIER: Do you believe in destiny?

JAMES: My beliefs are irrelevant now. I can accept destiny or I can deny destiny but destiny will prevail. And this is when you need courage. You don't need courage to make choices, any fool can make choices. You need courage to face destiny. (pause) I want you to know that this is a serious situation.

XAVIER: How long do you think we'll be stuck in here?

JAMES: Who can say?

XAVIER: Yeah. But with your experience?

JAMES: My experience says we'll be stuck here a lot longer than we want to..

XAVIER: And what can we do..?

JAMES: Wu wei. We can't do anything. Choice is gone.

XAVIER: But what a place it was, eh?

JAMES: Yes. Pretty impressive.

XAVIER: I could have stayed there..

JAMES: And that's half the problem..

XAVIER: What? You're saying we stayed too long?

JAMES: Maybe.

XAVIER: It was the whole point of the journey. We couldn't just take a couple of photographs and head back over the hill. It's not just a panoramic picture.. it's.. it's..it's everything I ever dreamed of. Everything I ever hoped I could find.

JAMES: Sure. And like anything worth having. It comes at a price. (pause) We just don't know what the price is yet.

XAVIER: So how come, if you could look at the sky when we were down there and say there was a storm coming.. how come you can't tell when the storm will be over, now?

JAMES: It doesn't work like that. Nature. You should know. Nature's unpredictability. Isn't that part of Daoism. An acceptance of the authority of nature?

XAVIER: I guess. But.. wouldn't it have just been better the stay down there then? Wait out the storm there?

JAMES: And that is the sixty four thousand dollar question. That's where we decide whether or not to blame me for this whole situation. Did I make a bad judgement call? Did I do the right thing?

XAVIER: I didn't mean that.

JAMES: I did.

XAVIER: Well. There's no point going into that now, is there. I trust you. You did what you thought was best. But.. I just wish I was still down there. Still in the moment.

JAMES: Ah, but that's the thing about moment's isn't it?

XAVIER: What?

JAMES: They don't last. By definition.

Long pause

XAVIER: This one seems to be taking its time.

JAMES: Yeah. You're right. We should do something to take our minds off it. Pretend we have choices. Make active decisions.

XAVIER: So perhaps not debate freewill and determinism?

JAMES: Has your sense of humour always been so warped, Monkey King? The further one goes, the less one knows.

XAVIER: I'm starving. Are you sure you measured out the rations properly?

JAMES: 'Fraid so. You have to take your mind off your stomach.

XAVIER: It's hard. I can't think of anything but my stomach at the moment.

JAMES: Truthful words are not beautiful. Beautiful words are not truthful.

XAVIER: That's true all right. Okay. Let's raise the game. Talk about higher things than stomachs.

(pause) Wow, that's really getting noisy out there.

James nods in assent.

XAVIER: Have you ever.. been in anything like this before?

JAMES: Storms. Yes.

XAVIER: So it's not that serious then?

JAMES: The others weren't that serious. We can't tell about this one yet, can we?

A loud clap of thunder.

XAVIER: I can't believe we've just got a thin bit of.. of.. of whatever this material is.. between us and the elements.

JAMES: We're safe enough in here.

XAVIER: You sure?

JAMES: Yeah. Just don't try going outside.

Another clap of thunder.

The Thunder God appears on the back projection screen.

JAMES: Boy. That's some storm.

XAVIER: The Thunder God.

JAMES: What?

XAVIER: The Thunder God.

He's beginning to burble, he's really frightened.

XAVIER: Thunder is the sound of fire.. and it's the laughter of heaven.

JAMES: Could have fooled me.

XAVIER: And Thunder is the anger of the god of heaven. When thunder rolls one should sit, fully clothed, wearing a hat and taking care not to be flippant.

JAMES: You're kidding me?

Xavier pulls on his hat.

JAMES: You are kidding me?

Xavier hands him a hat.

XAVIER: Do you think this is a time to be flippant?

JAMES: I think it's a time to keep control.

XAVIER: Control of what? We've lost control. You said so. No choice, only destiny. (he begins to pick up pace in his speech) Thunder travels about in a chariot drawn by the spirits of the dead..

JAMES: Come on, Xavier. It's just an electrical storm.

XAVIER: What if..?

JAMES: What if what?

XAVIER: What if it *is* the gods? What if we've angered them by finding the site. By looking on the reality. We.. we shouldn't...

James roots around in a bag. Pulls out a chocolate bar.

JAMES: Here. Take this.

XAVIER: What? What is..

JAMES: Chocolate. There's no gods. It's just your blood sugar levels going through the floor. Don't worry. Just hang on. We'll be fine.

XAVIER: I. I've never... I can see him... I've never.. never felt like this...

On the back screen the thunder god is joined by a warrior on a horse.

XAVIER: Can't you see him?

JAMES: See who?

XAVIER: The warrior on horseback. The Thunder God..

JAMES: Lie down. You'll be fine. Just breathe deeply.. come on.. you're hallucinating.. it happens to the best of us. I remember on Everest...

XAVIER: We shouldn't have come. You don't understand..

JAMES: I do. Believe me Xavier. This I do understand. This I do have experience of. Just try and sleep.

He gets Xavier to lie down.

JAMES: It'll work out. You're frightened. It's scary the first time.. it's not real..

XAVIER: He's looking at me. He's looking me in the eye. He says he's Death. He says..

James leans over Xavier.

JAMES: It's me. It's okay. Go to sleep. Ying. Courage. You'll make it. We both will. Just sleep.

Xavier begins a mantra like chant.

XAVIER: Ying. Ying. Jen. Shu. Chung. Ching.Hsin. Ying.. Ying... what's after Ying. Ying.. Hsin. Ying..

JAMES: Ying. Yi. Chih.

XAVIER: Chih. Chih. Jen. Shu.. I can't.. I can't remember.. I can't focus..

James takes Xavier in his arms in the sleeping bag.

JAMES: I'll do it with you. I'll do it for you. Just listen. Jen. Shu.Chung. Ching.

Xavier drifts off. James carries on, quieter, like rocking a child to sleep.

JAMES: Hsin. Ying. Yi. Chih.

BLACKOUT

YI. (Morality.)

In the tent. Several days later. Xavier and James are in their sleeping bags.

XAVIER: There must be something we can do?

JAMES: Wu wei.

XAVIER: No. Not philosophy. Something real. Something practical.

JAMES: There's nothing. Only wait.

XAVIER: But we can't keep waiting. We've... we've nearly no food left. The depot...

JAMES: As soon as the weather lifts we could be out of here and at the depot in half a day.

XAVIER: Can we not just try and get there..?

JAMES: We could try. We couldn't make it.

XAVIER: We have to do something.

JAMES: Tell stories.

XAVIER: What?

JAMES: Just tell stories. Take your mind off it. What's Yi?

XAVIER: Yi?

JAMES: Yes. Hsin. Ying. Yi. I spend enough time saying them all, I should have an idea what they mean.

XAVIER: Yi. It's morality.

JAMES: Figures. And Chih?

XAVIER: Chih? Wisdom.

JAMES: Ah. So. Tell me a story about Yi.

XAVIER: What is past is beyond help. What is yet to come is not yet lost.

JAMES: Sounds like a reasonable philosophical statment.

XAVIER: Yes. But. These things.. they... I don't really...

JAMES: You don't believe in them any more.

XAVIER: What do you mean, any more?

JAMES: I got the idea it meant something to you. Daoism.

XAVIER: Yes. I... it... I don't know any more... I can't... (he quotes) A man of benevolence never worries. A man of wisdom is never in two minds. A man of courage is never afraid. (pause) I'm worried. Beyond endurance. If I was only in two minds I'd feel in control. And I'm afraid all the time.

JAMES: And you're right to be afraid. Fear is part of your survival mechanism. Helps you to focus. To make the right decisions.

XAVIER: I can't make any decisions. My mind feels... fractured... I can't focus. I can't... I can't see Mai Li... in my mind's eye. I can't picture Jiao. And I can't remember what it was like.. at the other side of the mountain.

JAMES: We're at the other side of the mountain. You can't remember home.

XAVIER: And Dao is returning. Death is one's original home. And I'm frightened.

JAMES: Tell me about the immortals.

XAVIER: The immortals?

JAMES: Yeah. No point thinking about life and death now. Let's look at the alternative. Immortality. Daoists believe in that don't they?

XAVIER: Daoists do. Some of them.

JAMES: So tell me.

Background brings up a mountain scene. A shadow play goes on over Xavier's story.

XAVIER: If I can remember. There are eight Daoist immortals.

JAMES: Names?

XAVIER: I. I can't remember their names..

His voice sounds panicky.

JAMES: Never mind. Name is the guest of reality remember. I have no desire to be a guest. Just tell me what you can remember.

XAVIER: They live in the Kunlunshan. There's eight of them.

JAMES: And what do they do?

XAVIER: I don't want to tell you. I can't tell you. I'm tired. I'm going to sleep.

He lies down. Lights dim as the shadow puppets carry on in the background. Xavier tells the story (but it is his voice recorded, not live which recounts it as he sleeps)

XAVIER: The most famous of the eight immortals is Lu Dongbin. One night he met a man named Han Zhongli, who started to heat a pot of wine for him. Lu fell asleep and dreamed that he was promoted to high office and enjoyed good fortune for fifty years. But then his luck ran out, he was disgraced and his family ruined. When Lu woke up, he saw that Han Zhongli still had not finished heating the wine and that in fact only a few minutes had passed. As a result of his dream he became convinced of the vanity of worldly ambition and followed Han Zhongli into the mountains to seek the Dao. He eventually became an immortal. He carries a sword. There are eight immortals. Their names are Li Xuan, Zhongli Quan, Lu Dongbin, Han Xiang, Cao Guojun, Zhang GuoLan Caihe and He Xiang. They live in the Kunlun mountains. They travel on clouds. They understand Dao. They practice De. They are Dao. They are immortal.

Xavier sits up. The puppets disappear.

XAVIER: I was dreaming.

JAMES: Yes.

XAVIER: And the storm?

JAMES: Still raging.

XAVIER: My dream was... is there any food?

JAMES: No. No food.

XAVIER: Shit. What can we do? I'm starving. Really starving.

JAMES: Yes. Try not to think about it.

XAVIER: We're starving to death. What else can we think about?

JAMES: You have to try and keep rational.

XAVIER: How? How do we hold it together?

JAMES: We just do.

XAVIER: You're so calm. How can you be so calm. Don't you want to live?

JAMES: I have lived.

XAVIER: And we can get out of this? Right?

There is a long pause.

JAMES: No. We can't. Not now.

XAVIER: What?

JAMES: We can't. We're too weak. It's over. We have to face it.

XAVIER: I can't. I don't want to..

JAMES: There's no choice left. This is a place beyond choices. When all that is left is Death. When you have no choice but to look into the face of Death.

XAVIER: I don't want to. I have to live.

JAMES: In this place beyond choices yet there is one last choice. How to face Destiny. Your last choice is to face Death as a fool or a wise man.

Puppets move across the backscreen. Heads of puppets. Clowns and warriors mingling together.

XAVIER: Face death as a fool or a wise man... face... death.. fool... wise man... fool.. face.. death. Can't choose... won't choose... can't... face..

JAMES: I remember at the beginning, you read out to me from the Dao. The manner of death is key to the personality and worth of the dead man. Remember this.

XAVIER: Death is to return to one's original house. I don't fear death. I'm not afraid of that. I'm afraid of not living.

JAMES: We have to face it. This is where we are.

XAVIER: When I think about this. About death. I can't..It's the loss of life... it's the last times... it's doing everything, no matter how small, for the last time. It's unbearable. And all the things you have done for the last time already, without realising it. All the things that are lost forever. (pause) How do we do it? (pause) How do you do it? (pause) How can I do it?

JAMES: It's just because one has no use for life that one is wiser than the man who values life.

XAVIER: I'm not wise. I can't face this.

JAMES: You don't have a choice. It's facing you. Whichever way you look, you're facing it. Even when you shut your eyes, you're facing it. It's happening. It's real. It's all that's left.

XAVIER: It makes my life so pointless. We discovered... We proved... and now... no one will ever know.

JAMES: It doesn't matter. Whether they know. It happened.

XAVIER: Of course it matters. Nothing else matters. I failed.

JAMES: You haven't failed. You succeeded. You stood there. You saw it. You were right.

XAVIER: But no one will ever know.

JAMES: You've forgotten the Dao. Doesn't it mean anything to you now?

XAVIER: No.

JAMES: That's the failure. He who lives out his days has had a long life.

XAVIER: Not long enough. I'm twenty eight. I've got a wife. A child.

JAMES: A belief system?

XAVIER: Belief means nothing now. Only life.

He begins to clamber out of his sleeping bag.

XAVIER: I'm going on. I'm not staying here to die. I'm going out to find the food.

JAMES: Don't be crazy. You wouldn't get fifteen yards.

Xavier sinks back into his bag.

JAMES: We're too weak now, even if the storm did stop.

He reads from the book

JAMES: Difficult things in the world must needs have their beginnings in the easy. Big things must have their beginnings in the small.

XAVIER: What are you doing?

JAMES: Giving you back your beliefs. You can't abandon everything that gave you a purpose now.

XAVIER: Look where my purpose got me...got us... I'm sorry.

JAMES: The only purpose a man can have and the only worthwhile thing a man can do is become as good a man as possible. This is something that has to be pursued for its own sake and with complete indifference to success or failure.

XAVIER: Confucius.

JAMES: Stick with it. Come on. Stick with it Xavier.

XAVIER: James... I... I'm so sorry.

JAMES: What for?

XAVIER: For getting you into this. For bringing you hear. For being so bad at dying.. If I could do anything..

JAMES: There's nothing to be done. (pause) Except. One thing.

XAVIER: What? I'll do it.

JAMES: Call me Jim. I hate being called James.

XAVIER: Why didn't you say?

JAMES: Didn't seem important then.

XAVIER: And now.

JAMES: The last time someone says my name, I want him to say Jim. (pause) Those last times. They do get you.

XAVIER: I don't want to say it for the last time.

JAMES: We don't have any choice. Over beginnings or endings. (laughs) Or much in between.

XAVIER: You are a good man, Jim. A truly good man. A complete man.

JAMES: Life and death are capricious. He has not died in vain who dies the day he is told about the Dao. You told me about Dao.

XAVIER: You were closer to Dao than me, before we ever met.

JAMES: Don't give up on it. A man will meet his end doing what he enjoys. The benevolent find joy in the mountains. We've had a hell of a journey. We've been to the other side of the mountain. Not many people can say that..

As we go to blackout Xavier calls out

XAVIER: It's not over.

BLACKOUT

CHIH. (Wisdom.)

In the tent. Acceptance of destiny is all that is left. To die well.

XAVIER: I. I wanted to leave something behind.

JAMES: What for?

XAVIER: To prove..

JAMES: Would things have been different if Lao Tzu had never lived?

XAVIER: Would things have been different if we had never lived?

JAMES: Would it matter to anyone?

XAVIER: How will anyone ever know that we lived?

JAMES: Does it matter?

XAVIER: No one will know. That we did it. We might as well never have done it.

JAMES: Accepting destiny is wisdom. Wisdom was what you sought. Wasn't it? Or are we just trophy hunters like all the rest? Die well Xavier. It's the only choice left.

XAVIER: We saw the other side..

JAMES: We did.

XAVIER: We stood where he stood.

JAMES: We did. And now we're going somewhere else. Another journey.

He holds Xavier in his sleeping bag. They begin to chant together.

JAMES/XAVIER: Jen. Shu. Chung. Chih

The lights are going down. From either side of the stage enter a man in Beijing Opera costume.

The men's voices become weaker.

XAVIER: Hsin

JAMES: Ying. Yi. Chih.

The Beijing Opera figures stand and look at the scene. A shadow puppet play comes on the back projection. In the shadows two black caped figures take the two sleeping bags out of the tent and carry them away.

The stage is black and we can just make out that the sleeping bags are still.

The Beijing Opera figures leave the stage.

BLACKOUT

CURTAIN

ABOUT

What is a triptych?

A set of three associated artistic, literary, or musical works intended to be appreciated together.

Maybe even after reading these plays it will not be clear to the reader what they have in common. The reason I have titled them a triptych rather than a trilogy should give some indication. They are not three parts of the same thing, they are not even three parts of the same theme. But between the plays some ideas are explored, reflected and bounced around. They are plays of life and love and the meaning of life. Of the games that people play to give themselves security and identity. Most of all they are three views on beginnings, middles and endings in life. They seek to show that life isn't a linear narrative and that a 'dramatic' journey doesn't have to be structured that way either. That we can engage with theatre in a different way, a way that is more like the way we experience our day to day reality. They are all set in small spaces, as much as anything to focus the audience on the relationships. And to show that some of the most important things that happen to us can happen in small spaces and in the moments of our relationships that we don't even pay attention to.

The inspirations for these three plays are not immediately obvious and should be explained:

Love is an Urban Myth stemmed in one part at least from the hostages Brian Keenan and John McCarthy. I wondered what it would be like if you were kidnapped but instead of being two men, it was a man and a woman. How would the relationship develop? It's also about the endurance of love. About how life changes your perspective on love. And how we never know where the beginning or the end of anything really is. It's also a tribute to several of my own 'significant' relationships.

When Time Stands Still was inspired by The Arthurian love triangle. As a teenager I tried to write a play about this subject from the perspective of Lancelot on the night before his final battle with Arthur. I realised I knew little about love and so couldn't really complete the task. I didn't realise how little I knew about dramatic structure at that point. It was about the time I was studying 'Look Back in Anger' and so when I finally came to write this play, I thought that a kitchen sink quality would suit. I found it entertaining to think of a kitchen sink drama set on Mars. The power of theatre! It's domestic, it's wordy and this is intentional. I want Matti to be someone we have just too much of. Imagine the stifling nature of being stuck in a small space with this guy for any length of time.

The Other Side of the Mountain was originally inspired by the Scott of the Antarctic story. I tried several times to write a play which looked at the madness that must have come over them as they lay, knowing they were dying, without food and with no hope. However, I always stalled because I knew I was writing a story I had no right to. That all I could come up with was an interpretation and I might be dishonest to the truth and/or offend living relatives. Finally I completely re-set the story. But the themes are the same. It's men facing death with no hope. And seeing what meaning their lives have in that context.

ABOUT THE WRITER

Cally Phillips had her first play *'We Wove a Web in Childhood'* performed in 1993. The anniversary edition will be published in August 2013.

Other performed plays

Down the Line

Men in White Suits

One to One with William Buckland

The Truth About Hats

Life's a Pizza

Chasing Waves

Unperformed work

Benito Boccanegra's Big Break

Come Back Molly Maguire

Bond is Back...

Powerplay

She has also written, directed and produced a wide range of 'flexible' scripts and Boalian inspired theatre pieces, working with a variety of drama groups with learning disability and mental health labels.

Cally has also published several novels:

A Week with No Labels

Another World is Possible

Brand Loyalty

The Threads of Time

and two collections of short stories in Scots

Voices in Ma Heid and ***It Wisnae Me***

She is currently adapting some of her plays into novel form. She contributes regularly to McStorytellers and Reading Between the Lines review collective. She is a member of Free Range Scottish Publishers collective.

(titles in bold are available as ebooks/paperbacks)

[For more work by Cally Phillips](#) see her website.

Cally Phillips work is currently distributed via [Amazon](#) and [Kobo](#) sites.