

Like A Mother

by

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ACTORS

A trans man in his early thirties.

A cis woman in her seventies.

RULES

1

Beat < Moment < Pause < Silence
(These should be considered lines in and of themselves.)

2

Shouting should be treated like swearing in PG-13 movies.

3

No crying unless specified.

SET

The set is a long wooden bench set against a back wall, close to the apron. Behind the wall should be between two thirds and three quarters of the stage.

Unless specified otherwise, scene changes should be marked by changes in lighting. Whether these are gradual or sudden may be decided on a case by case basis by the creative team.

1. ZOE

GEORGE is driving home with ZOE in the front seat next to him.

ZOE

No, look — You're getting caught up in the unfairness of it all. That isn't the point.

GEORGE

Of course it's the point. He's doomed for no reason.

ZOE

Who isn't?

GEORGE

Well, okay, but not like that.

ZOE

He knows it from the start! He's in his teens and the Oracle at Delphi looks him up and down and says, "Yeah, Apollo says you're gonna kill your dad and marry your mom. Next." And that's it!

GEORGE

But why? What did he—

ZOE

Because fuck you is why! Because I'm Apollo and I said so.

GEORGE

Well that's not fair.

ZOE

Life's not fair, kid! Arachne is a better weaver than Athena, still gets turned into a spider.

GEORGE

Yeah, and that sucks.

ZOE

Well so does being poor, and working on a farm to survive, and having a 1 in 3 chance of your baby dying. Ancient Greece generally sucked, Georgie, I don't know what to tell you.

GEORGE

Well but—

ZOE

It wasn't all Socrates and nude wrestling like in the movies.

GEORGE

And that was just- What movies? Whatever- They were just fine with it sucking?

ZOE

What are you gonna do, invent the combine harvester through sheer force of will? You take what the Gods give you and you thank them for not making it worse.

GEORGE

So... what? He should've killed his father and married his mother and just gotten it over with?

ZOE

No, that wouldn't have helped. He didn't know his parents were his parents, so all he would have done is killed the guy who raised him on top of killing his father. No, see, you're looking for a right answer as if there's a version of Oedipus that lives happily ever after, but there's not. He's fucked. We're fucked. And it's him trying to fight that that undoes him.

GEORGE

But if he's f- fated to be undone, how is that his-

ZOE

-fault? You see? This is why I say we don't get the Greeks these days. Everything now is Catholic morality or else it's Jung. Everyone's the way they are because of some easily-labelled trauma, or divine justice. Either way, it's got to be *someone's* fault. And the Greeks say, "No actually, he didn't deserve this, and there was never a way out of it. It was always gonna end the same way. He's on borrowed time, like the rest of us. Borrowed everything. And when someone is letting you stay in their guest house for free, you don't bring in your own decorator."

GEORGE

Right, so the truth isn't worth finding out. That's the whole point of my version! Truth the betrayer, who promises so much and delivers so little.

ZOE

Oy, leventi mou¹. He betrays himself. He promises- Truth can't promise anything, it's not alive.

GEORGE

I don't think I need to explain the concept of metaphor to you, mother.

ZOE

But Truth isn't a metaphor, sweetheart. Or- I mean- The Truth just is. That's the whole point of it. Think about it: If you're an ancient Greek watching this play, you know Oedipus is fucked as soon as they say his name. It's like you go to a Batman movie and two minutes in little Bruce Wayne says, "I just love having two living parents!" But that's the point: the truth is just there. It's not *the truth* that's the problem. It's searching for the truth when you don't really want it, that's when the gods get mad; when you treat the truth as negotiable. Oedipus is a dog chasing cars, and Oedipus Rex is what happens when he finally catches one, and finds out they're not so tasty as they look.

George chuckles.

GEORGE

Oedipus REX? Like a dog named Rex, and it's short for Oedipus Rex?

ZOE

Eh, 6 out of 10.

GEORGE

Okay fine, so what was he supposed to do?

ZOE

You're not listening to me: There's no way out, that's what "doomed" means.

GEORGE

And the moral is just, "Good luck!"...?

ZOE

Now you're getting it.

GEORGE

So what's the point?

ZOE

Of what? Life?

GEORGE

The play. Who's it for?

ZOE

Who's it- It's for you! The person who thinks everything has to fucking mean something!

A pause.

ZOE

But I liked it!

George snorts.

GEORGE

Little late for that.

ZOE

(laughing)

No, come on, you know you're a great writer. There's, what, five other people who got into this program?

GEORGE

That's a cop out.

ZOE

I'm not saying it couldn't use a tune-up, but that's what readings are for. And in general I thought it was really excellent.

GEORGE

Please. You're my mother, you have to say that.

ZOE

That's insulting! Not only do I have more integrity than that, I can promise you mothers don't have to be nice. Trust me.

George grunts.

ZOE

It's good, Georgie. It's just not- Look, if this were just a brand new play called, I dunno, "The Politician", and they didn't have silly Greek names and there was-

GEORGE

We have silly Greek names.

ZOE

No, we have Greek names. I mean silly as in unusual. Have you ever met a Polynices? Did you go to college with a lot of Jocastas? No. Whereas Zoe is just a name that happens to be Greek.

GEORGE

What about Yorgos?

ZOE

Nobody ever called you Yorgos but my father. And my brother, doing an impression of my father. For all intents and purposes, your name is George.

He grunts.

ZOE

Anyway, like I said, if this were just some family drama, little less incest – excellent. Here's your Masters. You write great dialogue, you know that. But when you say 'after Sophocles', you've fucked yourself. Because I'm me, so now my expectations have leapt from "entertaining HBO miniseries" to "a new take on a species-defining work of drama".

A moment.

ZOE

I know, I'm sorry. And it's genetic, too.

GEORGE

So what do I do?

ZOE

About your genes? Too late for that, sweetheart.

GEORGE

No, with-

ZOE

You're stuck with me. I'm in there. Can't chop of your mama like you did your boobies.

GEORGE

The play, mother.

A beat.

ZOE

Look, honey, what do you want it to be? Is it a greek tragedy, or is it a modern play?

GEORGE

It's both.

ZOE

It can't be both.

(MORE)

ZOE (CONT'D)

You're either- Ah, this is what I was gonna say: Right now, you're adapting Freud, not Sophocles. And that's fine! But if you were really trying to adapt Sophocles... Not so much.

A silence.

GEORGE

(eventually)

Okay. Fix it, then.

ZOE

(chuckling)

How should I do that?

GEORGE

Well if you know I'm failing I assume you know why.

ZOE

You're taking this personally.

GEORGE

I'm taking it literally. How do I fix it?

ZOE

Eyes on the road.

A moment.

ZOE

I don't know the answer. But I believe you can find one.

George snorts.

GEORGE

Great.

ZOE

Look, all I can tell you is how I see it. It's... Okay. You think it's not his fault.

GEORGE

Oedipus? Well, yeah, that's the tragedy.

ZOE

Right: no. So there's one problem for you: The tragedy is not fate. Fate is what it is. The tragedy is that he finds out. And that is his fault. Heraclitus: Ethos anthropos daimon.² Character is destiny.

GEORGE

No it's- We're back to truth the betrayer.

ZOE

And like I said, the truth can't betray you on its own. It isn't alive. It's not gonna ring the doorbell and introduce itself. You have to look for it.

GEORGE

So he shouldn't have looked?

ZOE

Would you stop with the fucking "should"s? He did what he did because he was who he was. You can't get what you asked for and then give it back.

GEORGE

But he didn't know!

ZOE

But he needed to know. He needed to test the limits, he needed to find out what was behind every door. "This door you might not open, and you did-". You did. You are betrayed, betrayed by that slight thing, your curiosity. And that's hubris. He - Joe Campbell used to say this - Oedipus's great hubris is his disregard for poetry. He thinks he's done with the riddle because he figures out the answer. But life's not math, it's poetry.

GEORGE

Who said this? Joe Camel? What?

ZOE

No, Joe Campbell. No? The Hero With a Thousand Faces?

GEORGE

Wait, you mean Joseph Campbell? Joe?

ZOE

He was my teacher, we all called him Joe. You didn't know that?

GEORGE

No. That's cool as hell.

ZOE

Joe was amazing. He invited me to travel with him once, on a trip to Greece. Something about masks. I couldn't go, though. Your father needed me here while he got his PhD.

A moment.

ZOE

But anyway, yes, Math, Poetry. The finite and the infinite. The answerable questions and the unanswerable ones. Oedipus tries to live a life that adds up, that has a right answer, and that's a kind of hubris, trying to control what you aren't allowed to. But it's also humanity. It's what built The Pyramids, what filled the Library at Alexandria. Gotta know. Gotta know. Gotta know. But truth is like fire, right? Gotta keep it under control or it'll fuck up your whole life.

GEORGE

So you should take-I'm talking about the moral here, different "should"-You're supposed to... No, what are you supposed to do?

ZOE

You're supposed to weep! And wail! And beat your breast, or- No, breast.

GEORGE

Yes, mother, I still have a breast.

ZOE

Okay! Ooh, does that mean I have three breasts? Like Total Recall?

A beat.

ZOE

Sorry. But yes, breast-beating. Catharsis, which was much more physical for the greeks, this mass expulsion of emotion.

A beat.

ZOE

Look, all tragedies are- all human stories are metaphors for the same truth - Things End. The illusion will be ripped away. We build ourselves these beautiful fantasies, and then we get to choose: remain in the illusion, watching the shadows on the wall, or learn the truth, and stare into the fire. Oedipus mistakes his power for strength: he has the power to *find* the truth, but that doesn't mean he has the strength to learn from it, to take the beating it gives.

A beat.

ZOE

And then he tries to un-learn the truth, to un-see the fire so the shadows look like reality again. But he can't. Truth transcends metaphor, and blindness... doesn't. And he thinks, if only I could have left it alone, if only I hadn't picked at it. But that's another illusion because character is fate. This is who he is, so it is what will happen, so it is what did happen.

A beat.

ZOE

Look, it's the second law of thermodynamics, right? Time only moves in one direction for us mortals. "You will kill your father and marry your mother. Good luck."

A moment.

GEORGE

Jesus. That got fucking bleak.

2010's chill-hop begins to fade in.
Zoe shrugs.

ZOE

How else would you weep?

She lies down on the bench,
stretching her legs over his lap,
and becomes IRENE.

2. IRENE

IRENE

Honestly, I'm surprised you haven't heard of it.

GEORGE

I mean I probably have, just remind me.

IRENE

Basically it's this exercise where you repeat things back to each other.

GEORGE

Next you're gonna tell me it was invented by Meisner.

IRENE

What?

GEORGE

When you said you were gonna tell me about "The Meisner Repetition Exercise", I kinda figured it would be an exercise using repetition that Meisner came up with.

IRENE

You're such a dick.

GEORGE

(grinning)

I know, right?

IRENE

(sitting up)

Anyway, as I was saying... You repeat- Like literally how was I supposed to explain- whatever, shut up. You look at each other for a long time, and then someone says something they notice about the other person. And they repeat it. So, like, "Your hand's over your face." "My hand's over my face." "Your hand's over your face." Over and over until someone notices a change. And then it changes, uh... Oh, and it can be physical or, like, a judgement. Well not a judgement like judging, but a judgement like, uh, "You're afraid." "I'm afraid." "You're afraid."

GEORGE

Oh, so it's basically like that mirroring exercise where you're supposed to get so into it you don't know who's leading?

IRENE

Uh... yeah? Kinda? No. Like, you're doing the same kind of, like, intense empathizing but it's more like a conversation than a mirror. You're not becoming one person, you're connecting with them, you're- Here, get up.

She gets up.

GEORGE

But I'm comfy.

IRENE

Come on!

GEORGE

Can't we do it sitting down?

IRENE

Ugh, fine, Lazy. At least turn.

George swings one leg over the bench and sits in profile. Irene sits again, also over the bench.

IRENE

Okay so, basically, the rule is, any time you feel yourself losing grip of things, you just focus entirely on the other person, trying to notice something new about them.

GEORGE

I always forget how annoying this method stuff is.

IRENE

Just do it, would you?

GEORGE

Hmm.

IRENE

OK, we're just gonna sit and look at each other for a little while, just connecting.

George cannot look Irene in the eyes for longer than a few seconds before laughing.

GEORGE

Sorry, it's-

IRENE

No, it's hard. It's awkward. Cory's always talking about - he's the teacher - how much you have to break down your walls just to get to this place. That's how it goes. You just gotta lock in, you know? Cuz you're laughing at the discomfort, and the discomfort is about you, not me, right?

GEORGE

I guess.

IRENE

Well you didn't laugh cuz I was uncomfortable, did you?

GEORGE

I mean I'm not uncomfortable, though. I just think it's dumb.

IRENE

Oh. Why?

GEORGE

I dunno, it just doesn't- Can I not just, like, imagine? Is that not what acting is? Using your imagination?

(as Laurence Olivier)

"My dear boy, why don't you just act?" You know?

IRENE

Okay, but Laurence Olivier was being a dick.

GEORGE

Oh, right, whereas Meisner remains our unproblematic fave.

IRENE

Oh, forget it.

George grins.

GEORGE

Winner!

She lies back on the bench. He swings his leg over and faces front again.

A silence, still underscored by the chill-hop.

George takes a big hit on a vape pen, then passes it to Irene. She declines.

IRENE

That's actually something I... I'm quitting weed.

George chuckles, then looks up.

GEORGE

What?

IRENE

(sitting up)

I'm quitting weed. I have to.

GEORGE

What, like, you got a job that tests or something?

IRENE

No, I just- I think it's making me more depressed.

GEORGE

Oh. How do you know?

IRENE

I just- My therapist says it's not good for bipolar.

GEORGE

They all say that. Just like the doctors who don't think you should be using Adderall. It just means they don't know what it's like.

IRENE

Maybe.

GEORGE

God, they're all so happy to tell you to stop doing the thing that makes it less miserable to be alive. You know, because from their perspective you're not a finished project until they've fixed you. And that means making you into a McMansion housewife with a white picket fence and a golden retriever and 2.5 kids and, oh, just a small glass of wine with dinner or I'll feel it in the morning. Well, "Must be fucking nice," is all I can say.

Irene is looking off into the distance.

GEORGE

Are you really quitting?

IRENE

I have to. I'm tired all the time, I'm either miserable or I'm numbed out, I'm...

A silence.

GEORGE

You can just say it's me.

IRENE

For fuck's sake.

GEORGE

Please, Irene. It's fine.

IRENE

It's not you, it's-

GEORGE

It's pretty clearly-

IRENE

Would you let me finish my own fucking sentences?

A beat.

IRENE

It's not you, it's- It's *this* you. This us. This fucking thing where we just tell each other over and over again that everything is fucked in every conceivable way, that we'll never be normal or happy or anything but... anything but this. It's a self-fulfilling prophecy, George, we're dying. We're dying in each other's arms and that's-

GEORGE

Romantic?

IRENE

Dude, come on, this isn't a joke! Will you listen to me? You know I love you, George, I've loved you since 5th grade - no homo.

A pre-transition in-joke; they both smirk.

IRENE

But seriously, I have. I do. You're so confident, so stable, so- No, I know, it's not- You're not stable, like, emotionally maybe. But you know who you are. You've known the whole time. That was crazy to me. And I've clung to you because I guess I thought you might rub off on me, or something, but- And you did. And I get it now. I know how you're so sure all the time. And I don't want it. George, there's got to be more to life than just knowing how shitty it is.

George snorts.

GEORGE

Does there?

IRENE

Yes! There has to be, because I can't live like this any-

GEORGE

Please. You're just done with me.

Irene lets out a frustrated groan.

IRENE

This is why you couldn't do the Meisner exercise, you're already both sides of every conversation.

GEORGE

Am I wrong? Are you not breaking up with me?

IRENE

I'm breaking up with weed. You are not-

GEORGE

Well what's the difference, Irene? It's making you depressed, it's making you tired, it's holding you back, it's- It's me! I'M WEED.

IRENE

Would you- You're gonna wake up the whole fucking dorm.

GEORGE

Ha. Weed. Right, like what grows up between the paving slabs. Pull it out when it gets too long. Unsightly.

A silence.

IRENE

Okay.

GEORGE

What?

IRENE

It's not the weed. Actually, I'm going to keep smoking it without you.

GEORGE

What?

IRENE

Yep, with my real friends. This is what you want, isn't it? You want a villain. Fine: I hate you, George. I have spent over a decade being your best friend for no reason other than because I was afraid you'd kill yourself. I'm that pathetic, and you're that unlovable.

A moment.

GEORGE

I know you're being facetious but, like, how else am I supposed to feel about this?

IRENE

Christ, I dunno, you've been an actor; take the note. There's a difference between "you can't act" and "you're not getting it", right? Why can't you-

GEORGE

Because this is what I'm LIKE, Reen! I'm not playing a fucking CHARACTER. I'M ME, and I'm FUCKING CRAZY.

IRENE

I know, I-

GEORGE

I'm overbearing, and miserable, and exhausting, and defensive, and fearful...

IRENE

I know.

GEORGE

...and if any of that's news to you, well I don't know where you've been.

IRENE

It's not news. I've been here. Where have you been that you actually think I would-

GEORGE

I've been the only place I ever am, the inside of my own fucking brain.

IRENE

You don't think I know that? I do. I just can't believe it's the only option. For you or me.

GEORGE

You say you know, and yet you're still doing this to me.

IRENE

I'm-...

She sighs.

He sits on the bench, stares at the ground.

A moment. She watches him sadly.

GEORGE

No, I get it.

(MORE)

GEORGE (CONT'D)

You just took longer to get where everyone always gets, where I've been since fucking puberty: "There's no helping George. Put in all this effort, and meanwhile he just stays the same. Why should I keep trying?" Trust me, I get it.

A silence.

IRENE

(eventually, small)

You really think so little of me.

GEORGE

I thought very highly of you a few minutes ago.

A beat.

GEORGE

I'd leave me too if I could.

IRENE

I'm not going anywhere.

He looks up, barely smiling.

GEORGE

Please. No need to draw it out, drifting away over weeks and months, a last-minute paper due tomorrow, every tomorrow. The old tricks don't work on me anymore, so you can just... Clean break.

A moment.

Irene stands, and slides on her shoes.

IRENE

Okay.

George clenches his jaw and watches her leave.

George fixes his gaze on the floor, and controls his breathing.

A long silence. The chill-hop fades out into the sounds of a hospital.

3. DOCTOR

A doctor enters, with a stethoscope around their neck.

DOCTOR
Mr Heldt?

George looks up.

GEORGE
George. Hi. How is she?

The doctor sits next to George.

DOCTOR
I'm afraid...

George nods slightly, then sighs heavily.

DOCTOR
...the cancer is spreading through her brain.
We're monitoring her closely but, as I'm sure
you know-

GEORGE
(with a sad smile)
There's no way back.

DOCTOR
I- Yes. I'm so sorry.

A moment.

DOCTOR
I know it can be hard to be alone with this
kind of news. Is there someone I can call for
you?

GEORGE
I had my top surgery in this hospital.

DOCTOR
I'm sorry?

GEORGE
I'm trans, I...

He makes a "chopped off my boobs"
motion.

DOCTOR
Oh, I see. I wouldn't have known.

A beat.

GEORGE

She came with me. Just her. I guess that's my long way of answering your question.

He looks up, smiling.

GEORGE

No, there's nobody to call.

A moment.

GEORGE

How do you do that?

DOCTOR

Sorry?

GEORGE

Telling people this kind of news.

DOCTOR

Oh. Well, it's hard.

GEORGE

Yeah, I know it's hard; how do you do it anyway?

The doctor thinks briefly, shrugs.

DOCTOR

Same as anything, I suppose. Just gotta do it.

A moment.

GEORGE

Yeah.

A silence.

DOCTOR

Would you like to see her? You can now.

GEORGE

I will in a bit. Same room, right?

DOCTOR

Yeah.

GEORGE

Thanks.

Lights fade on the doctor. The soundscape fades to a silence.

4. ZOE (2)

ZOE
(eventually)
Christ, what a waste.

GEORGE
What?

George turns to see lights up on
Zoe, wearing a scarf in place of
the stethoscope.

ZOE
I raise you all by myself for five years and
you still turn out like your father.

George rolls his eyes, sighs, looks
at the ground and says nothing.

Zoe gingerly sits down next to him.

ZOE
(eventually)
You gonna think your way out of it?

GEORGE
Out of what?

ZOE
Whatever the fuck it is this time, how should
I know?

A moment.

ZOE
You know, that's what killed him. Thinking.
Thinking he had the right of way.

George accidentally laughs.

GEORGE
Jesus.

ZOE
Oh, screw you, he'd have laughed at that.

A lighter moment.

ZOE
But see? We can laugh about him now, huh?
Almost like things can change even when you
don't think they ever will.

GEORGE

Thank you, Mother Goose.

ZOE

Can I be Aesop, instead?

A moment. Zoe looks at George's face. He continues to look at the ground. Zoe pouts.

ZOE

What's wrong, Gorgeous?

GEORGE

Same as always. Stuck.

A beat.

GEORGE

I found a typo.

ZOE

In what?

GEORGE

My application.

ZOE

Oy. Which one? Yale?

GEORGE

All of them the same. A period that should be a comma. Because of course I did. Probably some change I started making, then abandoned.

ZOE

Hey, it's a Master's in Creative Writing, not Copy Editing. I'm sure you're not the first person to make a typo. Maybe they'll take it as proof of your scatterbrained genius.

GEORGE

(not listening)

Why did I think this would be the easy part? Adulthood. Like, that's what you get for being a weirdo nerd in school, you blossom or whatever. The things that made it hard for you to be a normal kid become a head-start on being a grown-up.

ZOE

Oh, for Christ's sake, George, it's a comma.

GEORGE

But here I am, more than a decade after school, and what am I doing? Applying to grad school. So I can go back to the only time in my life when I knew who I was. I mean I was miserable, but at least-

ZOE

At least you don't hate yourself anymore.

GEORGE

Christ. I'm gonna spend the rest of my days in my mother's house surrounded by books I should have read in a town full of people I should know the names of.

A beat. Zoe does not respond.

GEORGE

Who says I don't hate myself?

A beat.

GEORGE

I hate myself the same, I'm just self-aware now. Which, let me tell you, is just so useful. Tens of thousands of dollars of therapy later, and all I know is- It's still just me. It's like- I'm just alone with it. And I know everyone is. And I know nobody can pull me out of this but me. I know that: it's my brain, it's my job. There's no pill - or, well, I'm taking the pills already... there's no magic pill, there's no- it's literally just willpower. And what if I just don't have- What if I can't do it?

A beat.

Zoe sits down next to him. She cups his face in her hands and kisses his forehead. She looks him in the eyes.

ZOE

I know you're gonna be fine.

George smiles weakly, then turns away from her and returns to his downward position looking at the floor.

ZOE

And I know, I'm annoying. I'm sorry. But you are.

GEORGE

You're my mother. And you don't know. You can't know.

ZOE

(with a smile)

I know, but... It's a different kind of knowing. I dunno. I just know. Sorry.

George nods slightly, eyes fixed on the ground.

She strokes his shoulder a few times.

5. BRIDGET

We hear rain on a tin roof, as the actress puts on a pair of dark glasses and becomes Bridget. She has a "low-class" British or Irish accent.(Newcastle/Liverpool/North Dublin/East London etc.) ³

A silence.

BRIDGET

(eventually)

Good day for ducks.

GEORGE

Hm? Oh, yeah.

He smiles politely. A moment.

BRIDGET

Sometimes wish I were one, you know. A duck.

A beat.

BRIDGET

Kind of a quiet majesty to a duck, don't you think?

George makes a noise in the affirmative.

A silence.

BRIDGET

Bridget, by the way.

GEORGE

Oh, uh-

(sticking out a hand)

George.

George finally looks at Bridget,
and realizes she is blind.

GEORGE

Oh. Uh-

BRIDGET

Were you trying to shake my hand?

GEORGE

Uh- Yeah. Sorry.

BRIDGET

That's all right. Here.

She sticks out a hand and he shakes
it.

BRIDGET

There we are.

A moment.

BRIDGET

It's my fault, you know. Didn't bring an
umbrella today.

GEORGE

I- Mm.

A beat.

BRIDGET

Not into superstition, then?

GEORGE

No, I'm- I like science. I'm a realist.

BRIDGET

Oh, now that's a shame.

GEORGE

You think so?

BRIDGET

Oh, yes. "Realism is the realm of cowards," my
father always said. "Girls, you can take a
loan from a realist," he said, "But for God's
sakes marry a dreamer."

A beat.

BRIDGET

Oh, but don't mistake it, love, I don't mean to call you names.

George chuckles.

GEORGE

Don't worry, I'm hard to offend.

Bridget smiles. A beat.

GEORGE

Did you?

BRIDGET

You know, I- Oh, sorry, love.

GEORGE

No, I was just wondering: did you? Marry a dreamer, I mean.

BRIDGET

Sure! Neil hardly did anything but dream.

GEORGE

Oh. Is he not with us any longer?

BRIDGET

Not with me, that's for sure. Dreamed his way right into the arms of some tart at his office.

GEORGE

Oh. Sorry.

BRIDGET

Eh, don't be. In retrospect, shouldn't have taken marriage advice from a man my granny used to call The Devil, but-

GEORGE

His own mom called him that?

BRIDGET

No, pet, hers. His was dead by the time I was born. But still, he died at home, with my mother looking after him, so it worked out all right in the end didn't it?

George snorts.

GEORGE

Or something.

Bridget smiles.

BRIDGET

Or something.

They chuckle.

A silence.

BRIDGET

Y'know I feel I ought to say, I don't think you really are a realist.

GEORGE

(amused)

No?

BRIDGET

Don't think anyone is, not really. It's scared you are. And that's all right, you're young. It's better than doing it later.

GEORGE

Doing what?

BRIDGET

Getting scared. You do it now you won't need to do it later. I only got to it when he left, was a fuckin' nightmare. My son was thirteen by then and I tell you, you don't want to be scared for the first time in your life and in charge of a whole bloody teenager.

GEORGE

Huh. I bet.

A moment.

BRIDGET

Yep, you're the right age to be scared. Fifty-five was too old.

A moment.

GEORGE

What were you scared of?

BRIDGET

Only one thing to be scared of, love. Death. Loneliness.

A beat.

GEORGE

That's two things.

BRIDGET

Oh, you get old like me, they're the same. Losing.

(MORE)

BRIDGET (CONT'D)

Parents, teachers, where you always meant to travel. Then friends – too young – and the people on your walls as a kid. Like lovely David Cassidy, a few years back. You ever see *The Partridge Family*? No, you wouldn't have, would you? It'd seem very old-fashioned to your generation, I think, but he was the teenage son on that show, and he was absolutely gorgeous. Oh, I loved him something terrible, all my girlfriends did.

A moment.

BRIDGET

Oh, this is a good one. There's one time, me and my girlfriends pooled all our pocket money and booked the room next to him where he was staying in London. Spent the whole night banging on the walls, slipping notes under the door. Not that he responded, of course.

A moment.

GEORGE

You sure it was his room?

Bridget's loud, sudden laughter surprises even her.

BRIDGET

And some poor man on a business trip from Scunthorpe just trying to get some sleep! Oh, that's priceless. Never occurred to any of us.

A silence, peppered with barely-audible chuckles from Bridget.

BRIDGET

(eventually)

So where you off to on this beautiful day, hm?

GEORGE

Oh, I'm just out for a walk. Or I was, and then I ducked in here when it started coming down.

BRIDGET

Oh, so you live around here?

GEORGE

Mhmm.

BRIDGET

On your own?

GEORGE

Yeah, studio apartment.

Bridget nods. A beat.

BRIDGET

You gonna stay here all day, then?

GEORGE

I dunno. It's one of those things where I keep thinking I'll leave when it slows down, but it hasn't yet. So yeah, I guess so.

BRIDGET

You know the trick, don't you?

GEORGE

To what? Not getting wet? I assume it's not going out into the rain, isn't it?

BRIDGET

Well it's rain, love, you're getting wet no question. The trick is not to stop, that way you get it over with. The sooner you get home, the sooner you can strip off and have a nice hot bath.

The sound of a bus approaching.

BRIDGET

Does your generation still have baths?

GEORGE

(smirking)

I'll have to ask at the next meeting.

The bus stops, exhaling as it lowers to the curb.

BRIDGET

(getting up)

You're funny, aren't ya? Anyhoo, this is me, I think. Is it the 31?

GEORGE

Yes.

BRIDGET

Perfect. Was nice to meet you, George.

GEORGE

You too.

BRIDGET

And good luck with the rain. Don't wait all day!

George smiles and begins to wave before realizing she can't see, and returns to staring at the ground.

6. GREGORA

The actress' body shifts with the lighting. She takes off the glasses and claps her hands together. Now she is GREGORA, an acting teacher with a heavy Russian accent.

GREGORA

Okay. Who will go next?

She turns to George.

GREGORA

Georgina. Good. You go.

Hesitantly, George stands. He centers himself.

GEORGE

*O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!
The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye,
tongue, sword;
Th'expectancy and rose of the fair-*

GREGORA

(interrupting)

Okay. Okay. Is not good. Is, uh-

She thinks.

GREGORA

You have never been in love.

George says nothing, but glances indignantly at the rest of the acting class.

GREGORA

Okay, this is yes. You are young, is OK. So, tell me: Ophelia has been abandoned, yes?

GEORGE

And she's angry about it.

GREGORA

You are angry.

GEORGE

Of course. He's let himself go crazy just to get out of taking responsibility.

GREGORA

But you are not Ophelia.

GEORGE

Well, no. But-

GREGORA

Ophelia is not you.

GEORGE

Okay. But I'm acting.

GREGORA

New question, then: is this you play Ophelia, or is it Ophelia, played by you? You understand?

GEORGE

I mean, Ophelia is a person and so am I. What difference is there?

GREGORA

Pah. Does Shakespeare write you? No. He writes Ophelia, therefore she is more interesting than you. Is OK. More than me, also. OK.

GEORGE

So I'm supposed to play a role that has nothing to do with me?

A beat.

GREGORA

What role is this?

GEORGE

Ophelia, apparently.

GREGORA

Ah! So every person who is not you, they have nothing to do with you? You must be very lonely girl, Georgina.

GEORGE

Well you're saying-

GREGORA

All of your friends at school, they are all exactly same as you? All is different is there is fat one, there is pretty one- Otherwise same, yes?

GEORGE

Well, no, obviously, but- Like, you're saying I'm supposed to play a role without putting myself into her shoes.

GREGORA

Shoes? No. Yes, correct. Why? Because Ophelia is not her shoes.

GEORGE

Well how-

GREGORA

Shut up! If you let me, I tell you. You talk and talk and talk, you fill too much with talking. If everything is you, no space for Ophelia. Listen.

A moment.

GREGORA

How do you know her? You climb inside of her. Ha-ha, yes, I know how this sounds. But this is how, both inside one- But also we know that if both are inside at once is crazy, is hearing voices. This is crazy American method acting, you playing serial killer so you need to kill someone. Stupid. You do not need-

She thinks.

GREGORA

You become her, that is you again. No. You get inside her. Your eyes; her head. Now you see, but she think. Yes?

A beat. George agrees with a shrug and a shake of his head.

GREGORA

OK. Come, try again. Imagine, first. Take time. Time. Close your eyes, then open when starting. OK.

A moment.

GEORGE

O, what a n-

GREGORA

No. No, it's okay. You do not imagine. We will try again next week. Marina, you-

GEORGE

Wait, I can-

GREGORA

What? Why? What will be different? You become new person in last ten seconds? No: you don't imagine, so is no point.

A beat.

GEORGE

(with more energy)

O, what a noble mind is here-

Gregora claps her hands together again.

GREGORA

Okay! One more time. Listen. Eyes closed, you follow. Okay. Breathe.

They breathe. A moment.

GREGORA

You are Ophelia. Mother is dead, father is, ah- vacuum.

GEORGE

(without opening his eyes)

Vacuous.

GREGORA

Okay. Father is vacuous. All it means is he has empty head, yes? Brother knows what he wants, but is easy want. Not for you- For you, hard. You have, ah, not wanting... longing. You are poet, artist, you are a mind. Yes? This you share only with Hamlet. Hamlet also is a mind.

So we imagine: He is only one like you in whole palace, you are in love, and then vacuous father tells you must not be with him any more. You have just told Hamlet that you have to leave him, but he knows this is not from you. He must know your father and king are watching, yes? He asks where is your father: he knows. And still, surprise, he tells you "go away!" Once he is writing you love poems, and now he is sending you to be a nun. Once he loves you, once you are joined, now he hates you, you are totality alone. All alone. Now: how does she feel? Do not tell. Breathe. And when you feel, you start.

A long silence. Slowly, a soft, barely blue spotlight illuminates George as the rest of the stage fades back into darkness.

OPHELIA
(eventually, opening her eyes)

O,

She breathes in to begin.

George sighs as he loses focus, and the light returns.

He sits on the bench, tired.

7. ZOE (3)

Zoe enters with a casserole dish.

ZOE
Christ. That...

George turns his head.

ZOE
...was fucking exhausting.

He smiles, turns back. As she continues talking, she walks across the stage behind him and off the other side.

ZOE
You'd think sitting around doing nothing for a week would be easy, huh? All this food they've made for us, it's supposed to help, and yet every time someone comes round with another fucking casserole dish all I can think is, "Oh God, more sad smiles and small talk."

She enters again, without the dish.

ZOE
This is why my mother wanted me to marry a Catholic. We're repressed alcoholics, but a wake is a fucking breeze compared to this mishegas.

She sits.

ZOE
Hear that? I guess he left me his Yiddish.

He forces a chuckle, not looking at her. A moment.

ZOE

"Just make sure you don't put it through the dishwasher, it'll ruin the finish." Oh wow, so not only do I get to eat your bland fucking noodle kugel, I get to hand-wash your fucking dish afterwards. Just what I need the week of my husband's funeral, more fucking dishes. Say, Miriam, you ever heard of this new thing called **TUPPERWARE**?!

A moment.

ZOE

God, and her fucking story about working with him- I read her stupid book, you know. Cuz I read all the books he worked on. And I'll tell you, kid, the greatest editor in the fucking world couldn't have made that manuscript anything worthwhile. Useless emo undergraduate drivel. Thought she was Sylvia Plath, and she wasn't even Ted Hughes.

A beat.

ZOE

What a cliché-mongering waste of a publishing deal. Well, your father at least made it into the kind of worthless that makes money. So we'll be okay, you and I.

A beat.

ZOE

Something he could do that I never could, make stupid people feel smart. So I guess she's right that she'd be nowhere without him.

A beat.

ZOE

And why is it these idiots think I want to hear their fucking stories about him? I've got my own stories. I don't want yours! It's like adding pictures to my photo album. "Hm, when did I take *that* picture? Oh, right, Miriam took that picture." Fucking Miriam.

A pause.

ZOE

(with a smirk)

He might've been. Can't ask him...

A moment.

ZOE

I haven't slipped up once today, you know.
Tense-wise. Getting better at that. Always did
find grammar a comfort.

She grins. He does not react.

ZOE

Are you worried about school? I'm sure your
teachers will be forgiving, sweetie, you don't
need to-

George suddenly buries his head in
her lap and begins to sob. She is
surprised, but quick to comfort
him.

ZOE

Okay. Okay. It's okay. I know. I know.

George attempts to control his
breathing, wipes his eyes. His head
is still in her lap.

A silence.

ZOE

You hungry?

George shakes his head.

ZOE

I think we should eat. I'll go make- I'll go
warm up some of that bitch's kugel. It's
actually pretty good, I just hate her.

George laughs, snuffles, sits up,
wipes his face.

Zoe kisses the top of his head.

ZOE

We'll be okay. You and I. And him, too, I
guess. We'll make it. We'll just- We'll make
it. I know it.

She stands, and walks downstage.

8. IRENE (2)

As she walks to the front of the stage, the actress' body shifts again. Now she is Veronica Lake, Simone Signoret – a femme fatale of the deepest shade.

Out of a back pocket she pulls a box of pencils.

Looking out above the audience, she begins "smoking" an unsharpened pencil, eraser-out. She puts the box back in her pocket.

Eventually, he looks up.

Irene? GEORGE

No response.

Irene! GEORGE

She smiles without turning.

You're here. GEORGE

She says nothing.

How have you been? GEORGE

What does it matter? IRENE

Are you angry with me? GEORGE

Never. IRENE

Are you lying? GEORGE

She says nothing. A silence.

I won't beg. GEORGE
 (eventually)

IRENE

Who asked you to beg?

GEORGE

OK but that's the implication. I'm meant to come prostrate myself in front of you, "Oh, I was wrong, I needed to change, now that I have please take me back."

IRENE

I mean, you did need to change.

GEORGE

We all need to change.

IRENE

Not like you did.

She takes a drag. A beat.

GEORGE

I just- If I- Won't this always be there?

She smiles.

IRENE

...Where?

GEORGE

Don't be- In the atmosphere of it all. In the air. There will always be this... frisson.

IRENE

That's not the word you mean.

GEORGE

You don't know.

She smiles, takes another drag. He stands, walks over to her.

Without looking at him, she takes the open box of pencils from her pocket and offers him one.

GEORGE

(declining)

Thanks.

She puts them back. A beat.

GEORGE

I just mean, won't there always be this imbalance? Because you could always just... give up on me. Again.

IRENE

You could do the same to me. That's how this works.

GEORGE

Right, but I wouldn't.

IRENE

Right, because you're a fucking loser.

George chuckles. Irene does not.

IRENE

You could be, you know, not a loser.

GEORGE

How?

She shrugs.

IRENE

Try? Is being a loser that much more ingrained than being a woman was?

GEORGE

Well, but I wasn't a woman. I *am* a loser.

Again, George chuckles and Irene does not.

Silence, George pacing slowly, occasionally stopping, while Irene stays still.

GEORGE

(eventually)

I'm glad you're here. I've missed you.

She turns her head to look at him, chuckles slightly.

GEORGE

What?

IRENE

No, just seems unlikely.

GEORGE

That I've missed you?

IRENE

That you'd tell me.

She smirks, faces front again.

A beat.

GEORGE
Go fuck yourself.

Irene laughs.

IRENE
That was fast.

GEORGE
Well you're not being fair.

She snorts with derision.

GEORGE
God, why am I trying to-

He sits.

GEORGE
You know, you give me all this shit for not trying, and you-

IRENE
Why are you still here?

GEORGE
I said, I wanted to see you.

Irene says nothing.

GEORGE
I did! Do you know how many times I've almost reached out to you in the last few years?

IRENE
So what changed?

GEORGE
I don't know! Does it matter? I thought it was me, but- Christ, I really thought this would be- I was right not to reach out to you. Honestly, I'm glad you're not still-

IRENE
(matter-of-fact, almost childish)
When are you gonna kill yourself?

A moment.

GEORGE
What?

She turns herself towards him,
begins to get closer.

IRENE
(more sternly)
Kill yourself. When are you going to kill
yourself, George?

Silence. She bends down and looks
him in his face. He finally looks
her in the eyes. This is not Irene.

9. YORGOS

YORGOS
You said you'd kill yourself once she was
dead.

George averts his gaze, faces
forward. Yorgos straddles the bench
and continues to watch him from the
side. Their voice is laced with an
odd type of compassion.

YORGOS
You said you'd kill yourself once she was
dead.

A beat.

YORGOS
(kindly)
Say it.

GEORGE
I said I'd kill myself.

Yorgos waits.

GEORGE
Once she was dead.

YORGOS
You said-

GEORGE
I said I'd kill myself once she was dead

A beat.

YORGOS
Like Alexander McQueen.

GEORGE
Like Alexander McQueen.

Yorgos chuckles.

YORGOS
McQueen. As if.

George stares forwards.

YORGOS
And now... You're afraid.

GEORGE
(nodding)
I'm afraid.

YORGOS
You're afraid.

GEORGE
I'm afraid.

YORGOS
You're a coward.

GEORGE
I'm afr- I'm a coward.

YORGOS
You're a coward.

GEORGE
I'm a coward.

YORGOS
Coward.

GEORGE
(overlapping)
But I'm doing my best.

YORGOS
Your best!

GEORGE
I'm doing my best.

YORGOS
You're doing your best.

GEORGE
My best.

YORGOS
This is your best.

GEORGE
My best. I'm doing-

YORGOS
Well it's not enough.

A beat.

GEORGE
It's not enough.

YORGOS
Clearly. It's not enough.

GEORGE
It's not enough.

YORGOS
It's not enough.

A beat.

GEORGE
What a waste.

YORGOS
Mm. A waste.

GEORGE
A waste. What... What a waste!

YORGOS
A noble mind.

GEORGE
A waste.

A moment.

YORGOS
Give up, won't you?

A beat.

YORGOS
You know this isn't changing. This is it.
Forever.

A beat. George's voice gets softer
and softer as he continues to choke
out his responses.

GEORGE
Forever.

YORGOS
Forever.

GEORGE
I'll never find it.

YORGOS
If it's even there to find.

GEORGE
I'll never be content.

YORGOS
No. Never happy.

GEORGE
Never.

YORGOS
Forever.

George says nothing, just stares
forward, barely nodding.

Yorgos stares at George a little
longer.

They leave.

Now George is alone.

Silence.

He lies down on the bench, stares
up.

Silence.

George is alone.

He is alone.

Alone.

Silence.

10. LEVENTIS

Eventually, finally, we begin to hear birdsong, and a light wind rustling through leaves. The light slowly fades from the harsh expressionistic white of his mind to the warm light of a Summer afternoon.

Finally, a knocking.

An older voice rings out:

LEV
George? George?

The sound of the front door opening.

Lev, supported by a cane, enters.

LEV
Yo-Yo? You here?

George does not stir. Lev spots him.

LEV
There you are. Almost didn't see you in all this mess.

A moment.

LEV
I don't even get a hi?

GEORGE
(not moving)
Hi.

LEV
Boy.

George sits up quizzically.

GEORGE
What are you doing here?

LEV
Nice to see you, too. We're driving down to
Florida, made a detour for you.

GEORGE
Where's Val?

LEV
She's seeing a friend of ours in town, I
dropped her off. She sends her love.

George stands, with effort. They
take each other in.

LEV
You got so old.

GEORGE
You got so old.

They both smile. Lev chuckles.

LEV
That joke was cuter when it didn't feel so
true.

GEORGE
Tell me about it.

LEV
Ha. No need to rush it, kid. It'll come.

A moment. George sits.

GEORGE
Death has made me old. I was young before all
this. Death took my youth when it took my
mother.

Lev fails to stifle a laugh. George
looks up angrily, then softens.

LEV

Sorry. Just... boy! You're really in it, huh?

GEORGE

I guess. Feels like the only place to be right now.

LEV

No, I get it. It's not, though.

A silence. Lev looks around.

LEV

So is the mess in tribute to my sister or have you just not moved any of her stuff for the last three months?

GEORGE

Both. Neither.

LEV

Well can I help?

A beat.

LEV

You'll have to do most of the lifting, of course. But I can be here for moral support, maybe help with labeling, agree with your decisions on what to keep and not keep, that kinda thing.

GEORGE

Won't you have to go?

LEV

Eventually. There's time to start, at least. Sometimes you just need a little push to start the car, you know.

GEORGE

God, you really are her brother. Father Goose.

LEV

I'd prefer Aesop, but whatever.

George looks around the room.

GEORGE

Like, where do I even start?

LEV

Does it matter?

GEORGE

Well- Yeah okay I guess it doesn't.

He doesn't move. A beat.

LEV

That one.

GEORGE

What?

Lev points offstage.

LEV

I choose that box. Under her desk over there.
Start with that.

George hesitates.

GEORGE

Okay.

George walks offstage and comes
back with a filing box.

GEORGE

I'm pretty sure I know what's in here.

LEV

What?

GEORGE

It's, like, my childhood. Shit I drew, or
made, or like a poem I wrote or whatever.
Report cards, maybe. She kept everything.

He puts the box down on the bench,
takes the lid off, and cocks his
head.

Out of the box he takes a grecian
mask of tragedy.

LEV

Hey, I know him.

GEORGE

Wrong box, I guess.

LEV

Are the others in there?

GEORGE

Yep, two more.

LEV

Not all of them, then. I mean what am I saying, I have some of them myself...

George takes the next mask out, holds it up.

GEORGE

Where are they from?

LEV

You haven't seen these before?

GEORGE

Don't think so.

LEV

Hm. They were our mother's. You met her, didn't you?

GEORGE

A few times, I think, but I was super young. I remember the German accent. And I remember thinking she had really thin skin.

LEV

My mother?

GEORGE

No, I mean literally. Like I could see the veins and whatever.

LEV

Ah!

GEORGE

Yeah I was too young to make anything of her, like, psychologically.

LEV

That makes more sense. Because Mama was a lot of things but thin-skinned she was not.

George takes out the last mask.

GEORGE

Anyway, no, Mom didn't really talk about that stuff. Where'd Oma get them?

LEV

The masks? I dunno. I think she might have gotten them in Greece, actually, visiting Papu's family. Don't they say anything on the inside?

George looks.

GEORGE

Nope. Oh, there's a number. 31.

LEV

Mm. Yeah, don't know. But they took pride of place in the house, for sure. They had a whole wall, each with their own hook and everything. He used to use them when he got a little tipsy. Broke her favorite laundry basket one time cuz he was standing on it to be Teiresias.

GEORGE

She had a favorite laundry basket?

LEV

Well, after the fact it was. He said he'd get her another, but it was from Germany and the store was closed. It became one of her little jokes. Jabs.

GEORGE

Did he love the classics? I don't remember him much before the stroke. Is that why Mom got into them?

LEV

Wow, Zo really told you nothing about them, huh? Hm. Anyway, no, he barely knew anything about the classics. He was just greek, so he felt- He could've said anything with drama and the neighbors would have been impressed: "Wow, such a beautiful language," you know. A natural tragedian.

A beat.

LEV

We used to play with them, Zo and I. I remember once I broke one while we were playing with it. I was so scared, but she just- She gathered up all the pieces and placed them in a pile under where the mask was hanging, and she took out the nail and dropped it nearby. And when Mama and Papu came back they just thought it had fallen off the wall on its own.

GEORGE

Damn, Mom.

LEV

Mm. Never saw her do anything like that again, though I'm sure she did. She was a great liar when she had to be, your mom. Oh, but look, she's changed the string for new elastic, so she must have used them for something.

GEORGE

Probably in one of her classes.

LEV

Mm.

A pause.

LEV

Good life, I think.

GEORGE

Hm?

LEV

Your mom. I think it was a good life. Generally. Dead husband notwithstanding.

GEORGE

Ending's not great either, though, is it?

LEV

Depends where you put it.

GEORGE

What? Put it? There's only one place it goes. *THE* End. The real one.

LEV

I dunno about "real". Certainly it's the last one.

GEORGE

It's the only one that is an end on its own. Every other end we make up for ourselves, we build arcs out of history and say "here's where it started", "here's where it ends". "Happily ever after." Shadows on the wall of Plato's cave. But that's not real, we can't know anything is over, or starting, or- Death is the only promise that can't be broken.

A beat. Lev has a slight smile.

GEORGE

Am I wrong? It's the realest thing there is, the only thing the mind can't reshape. It all ends in tragedy.

He stares at the mask he is holding
in his lap.

A long moment.

LEV

You know what makes a tragedy a tragedy? The
beauty. The loss. Something beautiful is lost.
The shadows on the wall, they're not lies.
They're illusions, but that doesn't make them-
They're something beautiful we make, we made.
"A lovely light." And, yes, of course the
truth is true, but so is beauty.

A moment.

LEV

The truth is the sun, Yorgos. Stare right into
the sun and you'll go blind. But see the world
that truth illuminates... It's- Flowers...
Flowers die, Yo-Yo. And then they grow again.

A silence.

GEORGE

(eventually)

Those are different flowers.

LEV

What?

GEORGE

They don't grow again, they're different
flowers.

George looks up, smirking.

LEV

(smiling)

You're such a little brat.

They laugh.

A beat.

LEV

They're the children, anyway.

GEORGE

What? Who?

LEV

The new flowers. They're the children of the
dead ones.

A moment.

LEV

You've only just begun to believe in Death.
It's still mostly something that happens to
other people. That's good, you're young.
But... Real? Life and death, real and
imagined, they're the same. Both in the other,
cross-contaminating like- Here, lookit...

He picks up a mask.

LEV

Which side of the mask is real?

GEORGE

The painted one. The one you use.

LEV

You use both sides.

GEORGE

Okay, but you put the painted side out.

LEV

(slyly)

...And isn't that always the way?

GEORGE

Christ, it's like she's in the room.

LEV

(slylier)

...Isn't she?

GEORGE

(laughing)

Stop it! You're the worst.

LEV

And we're related.

GEORGE

Don't remind me.

They smile. A peaceful moment.

LEV

(eventually)

It's okay not to know what is and isn't- What
is and isn't. You're not supposed to know. You
never know. Until you know. And even then, who
knows? You know?

George chuckles, shakes his head almost imperceptibly, looks down at his feet.

Lev watches him with a smile.
Another moment.

A low, insistent, ancient drumbeat begins in the distance and gets gradually closer.

Each actor is now holding a mask in their lap. Accompanied by a slow but dramatic lighting shift, each puts on their mask.

- Lev picks up the Messenger's mask, holding it in front of his face. He pulls the mask onto his face and the elastic over his head.

- George is drawn down into the Oedipus mask, lowering his face into it before pulling the elastic over his head.

11. OEDIPUS + MESSENGER

They stand at either end of the bench, facing outwards and exuding a religious kind of clarity. However, what begins as oratory gradually becomes conversation. ⁴

MESSENGER

Who is it that you fear?

OEDIPUS

Old man, I fear Meropé,
wife of Polybus.

MESSENGER

Why should you fear a woman?

OEDIPUS

There is a prophecy.

MESSENGER

And is this future meant
for just the Gods to know?

OEDIPUS

It can be spoken.

(MORE)

OEDIPUS (CONT'D)

At Delphi I was told
the gods had willed that I
must be my father's death
and my mother, his wife,
my children's mother, too.
Therefore for all these years
I've had to stay away.

MESSENGER

This was the fear which drove
you from Corinthian soil?

OEDIPUS

Of course, old man. I did
not wish to kill my father.

MESSENGER

Well then, I knew it not
but I have come to free
you from this fear of yours
with news from Corinth.

Oedipus turns to the Messenger. His
performance becomes less stilted,
more realistic. Throughout the next
section, he gradually gets closer
to the messenger.

OEDIPUS

What?
You would not want for thanks
were you to do so.

MESSENGER

Child,
I wish you knew it sooner:
All of your fears are empty.

OEDIPUS

What? How?

MESSENGER

Polybus was
no kin to you in blood.

OEDIPUS

My father, Polybus,
is not my father? What?

MESSENGER

No more than I myself,
or just so much as I.

OEDIPUS

How can I be as much
the son of one who isn't
anything to me as
one who was my father?

MESSENGER

Young one, you were begat
by neither he nor I.

OEDIPUS

Why did he call me son?

MESSENGER

He took you from these hands.

OEDIPUS

Why take another's child?

MESSENGER

He could not have his own.

OEDIPUS

And was I found or bought?

MESSENGER

Found, on Cithaeron's slopes,
among the jagged stones.

OEDIPUS

What were you doing there?

MESSENGER

I had a mountain flock.

OEDIPUS

A shepherd, not a king.

MESSENGER

(turning his head to him)
I saved your life.

Oedipus is now a few paces from The
Messenger.

OEDIPUS

Who left me on the rocks?
My mother or my father?

MESSENGER

You'd have to ask that of
the man who gave me you.

OEDIPUS

You yourself found me not?

MESSENGER

Not I, another shepherd.

OEDIPUS

Who was he? Do you know?

MESSENGER

I know his master's name.
Laius.

OEDIPUS

The old king?

MESSENGER

Yes,
he was the old king's shepherd.

OEDIPUS

And does the man still live?

MESSENGER

I'm not from here.

OEDIPUS

Does anybody know
this man of which he speaks?
It's time the honest truth
was found out once for all.
Jocasta, for your part,
is he the man you called?

The Messenger does not say
anything. Oedipus picks up
Jocasta's mask and holds it up for
her.

OEDIPUS

Jocasta?

ZOE

Where am I?

12. ZOE (4)

A beat. It is the middle of the
night.

George takes off his mask.

GEORGE

Hey, Mom, are you okay?

ZOE

Mama?

George stares back at her, stunned.

ZOE
Mama, are you there?

He takes off Zoe's mask, helps her to sit down on the bench, sits down with her.

She looks him in the eyes.

ZOE
(smiling)
Hi Mama!

A long moment.

Finally, George smiles. ⁵

GEORGE
Okay, Zo-Zo. I think it's bedtime. Let's clean up here.

Behind the bench, the wall opens slowly from the center. Behind it, slightly off-center, is a single bed, newly made. On one side of it is a night-table with a lamp, a pair of reading glasses, a glass of water, and a book. On the other side, a single wooden chair.

As it opens, George puts all three masks in the box, closes it, and leaves it on the other end of the bench with Lev's cane. He returns to his mother.

GEORGE
Okay! Let's go.

He holds out an arm. She stands and leans on it, showing her physical age.

They walk to the bed, and he opens the night-table to get her nightgown.

George helps Zoe get undressed to her underwear, and into her nightgown. There is some awkwardness, but neither one is silent:

- Him - An "okay", an "oops" when something gets stuck, a "there we go" when the shirt comes off etc.

- Her - Childish noises, like someone who's been allowed to stay up way past their bedtime.

ZOE

Mama?

GEORGE

What is it, sweetie?

ZOE

I think my favorite color is green.

GEORGE

Oh yeah? Why's that?

ZOE

Well my favorite used to be blue but I really like yellow too and I couldn't decide and then in school we were doing painting, and we learned that blue and yellow make green so now I like green best.

GEORGE

That's a good reason.

They sit down on the bed. He begins to brush her hair.

ZOE

Mama?

GEORGE

Yes, Zoe?

ZOE

What's your favorite color?

GEORGE

Hmmm... Good question. I think my favorite color is...

(in a silly demon voice)

BLACK!

Zoe giggles squealingly.

A moment.

ZOE

Mama?

GEORGE

Yes, my love?

ZOE

How do you make black?

GEORGE

However you want. You mix everything up together, eventually it'll turn black. You can't get it wrong.

ZOE

Hm.

A beat.

ZOE

I don't like being wrong.

GEORGE

Me neither. I don't think anyone does.

A moment.

ZOE

Will Daddy be here in the morning?

A beat.

GEORGE

I don't know, sweetheart. I hope so. I'm making pancakes.

ZOE

Yay! Pancakes!

A moment.

ZOE

Mama?

GEORGE

All right, my little Socrates, that's enough questions. I know you're just trying to stay up later.

ZOE

What? No I'm not! I just wanted- I want to know-

GEORGE

Come on. You've had a long day, it's time to sleep.

Zoe pouts.

GEORGE

I know, baby, but it's bedtime.

ZOE

Why is it bedtime?

GEORGE

Because- Uhp! Nice try, kiddo. Come on, you're tired, I can tell.

He helps her up, then pulls back the blanket.

She gets into bed.

GEORGE

(tucking her in)

There you go. Clean sheets, too. Doesn't that feel nice?

ZOE

(already drifting off)

I guess...

GEORGE

(smiling)

Mhmm. All right, give me a kiss good night.

He sits on the chair, leans over, and presents his cheek. She kisses it, her eyes closed.

ZOE

Good night, Mama. I love you.

GEORGE

I love you, too, Zo-Zo. Good night.

A moment. He kisses her forehead, watches her and strokes her cheek.

She opens her eyes, takes his hand from her cheek and holds it between hers, kisses it.

She meets his gaze, a smile on her face.

ZOE

My sweet boy.

A moment. Then, the lights fade.

ENDNOTES

1. λεβέντη μου - Male term of endearment meaning "My dear." ↩
2. Ηθος Ανθρώπου Δαιμων - Heraclitus, Fragment 114 ↩
3. You should change the locations in her story - London and Scunthorpe - to fit with the accent you choose.
4. While the mask scene is not in pentameter, I still recommend Peter Hall's *Shakespeare's Advice to the Players* or John Barton's *Playing Shakespeare* as guides for how to speak verse in a way that keeps the meter while also feeling natural and un-robotic.
5. George's accent does not change in this last scene, even though Zoe's mother was German. ↩