

Some Specimen  
&  
Critical Essay: The Secret Life of Some Specimen

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## **Abstract**

The following thesis submission contains a full-length play *Some Specimen* written for the stage. It also contains a critical essay entitled ‘The Secret Life of Some Specimen.’ In this essay I argue for the importance of the concepts of dramatic secrecy and the stage-image in the development of the script. I outline some of the challenges faced while writing the script and discuss the theoretical and practical implications of those challenges for the writer.

The play *Some Specimen* is set in a research facility in Antarctica. When two research scientists discover a creature buried deep in the icecap, their world and their personal histories get turned upside down.

Taking the isolation of the two central characters as its starting point, the play will confront the question of man’s relationship to its own extinction. This is both a personal extinction and the question of the possibility of extinction as a species.

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# Critical Essay: The Secret Life of Some Specimen

by Shane Ward

## 1.1 Introduction: That Fragile, Fluctuating Centre

We must believe in a sense of life renewed by the theatre, a sense of life in which man fearlessly makes himself master of what does not yet exist, and brings it into being. [...] Furthermore, when we speak the word “life”, it must be understood we are not referring to life as we know it from its surface of fact, but to that fragile, fluctuating centre which forms never reach.” (Artaud 1958, p. 13)

The above quote from Artaud’s ‘The Theatre and Its Double’ points to the challenge that I hope to address in this essay. The essay will focus on the workings of dramatic secrecy as encountered during the writing of my thesis play, *Some Specimen*. I want to argue that through a proper understanding of the dramatic secret we can begin to envisage a methodology of renewing the theatre with the sort of life that Artaud challenges us to engage.

I intend to argue for the primacy of the stage-image as a fundamental unit of theatre, and to suggest that it is through exploring the limit territories of the stage-image that certain dramatic possibilities can be effectively realised. I intend to explain how the original fusion of two distinct stage-images informed the development and crafting of my script. I will outline how that original fusion of images laid the foundation for the dramatic challenges encountered during the writing of the play and how it continually conditioned my mode of access to the play’s realm of non-knowledge and its play of secrecy.

To make this clear I will talk about the origin of the play idea, outline some of the challenges and concerns I encountered while developing the script and conclude by comparing the final draft to the source that it emerged from.

I will comment on the development of some issues of stage-space, time, plot and character in my script and hope to show how my understanding of the play evolved organically and, through a stuttering process of development, attained its final shape in a quite unpredictable, yet necessary way. The process of writing has taught me that it is often through listening to the needs of the script itself, rather than enforcing the whims of your pre-conceived ideas, that success is achieved. In this respect I will also

argue that the maintenance of certain ambiguities and complexities within the script is not a concealment by the writer from the audience, but rather a care taken towards the dramatic secret within the script that, in some respect, remains hidden from the writer as well.

## SECTION 1: Some Specimen's Vision of Reality

### 2.1 Source Stage-Images: Antarctic Exploration

It is useful to start by relating the inspiration for the play. *Some Specimen* began with a marriage of two initially unrelated sources, or what I call stage-images. The first of these sources was an article I read about Antarctic exploration. Russian scientists were attempting to obtain water samples from Lake Vostok; a lake located four kilometers under the Antarctic ice sheet. The image had an immediate and far-reaching pull on my imagination. To start with, there was the physical fact of a hole four kilometers deep. The scale of that fact created a kind of gravity within the development of my idea and immediately suggested the idea of a long, protracted fall. The poignancy of a protracted fall, one so long it was necessary to come to terms with the fact that you were falling, began to create a certain mood within the development of the idea. Already themes of loss and mortality were present.

I was also struck by the image of a lake frozen under the ice. It suggested a subconscious, seething Petri dish of hidden possibility. It also suggested desire and had an erotic quality. My imagination was already searching to come to terms with an unknown and volatile symbolic landscape.

Added to this, the physical landscape of Antarctica invaded my imagination, a vast monochrome landscape, clean as a sheet. The space offered itself as a metaphor for thought itself, suggesting a simplification of life to basic needs and terms. The apparent impossibility of life in the place was already implanted in my mind, along with the heroic history of exploration, and the pathos and urgency of the environmental crisis.

The beginnings of a theatrical world were present, one constituted of certain resonances and meanings that would continue to inform the development of the play and set out the parameters of the piece. In this sense I was setting out with a spatial ideology, one that Steve Waters attributes to Naturalism. He describes how in Naturalism environment “shapes the story as much as character does. (Waters 2010, p. 59)”

This spatial ideology was very important in the development of 'Some Specimen' and the space of Antarctica and the specific affects of isolation, extreme weather conditions, etc. that Antarctica exerts on the characters Boylan and Cook would become a hugely important agency within the development of the script. David Edgar points out how important remaining attuned to this spatial logic can be for the writer when he says that "the writer who pays no attention to space is writing in the dark. (Edgar 2009, p. 181)."

However, *Some Specimen* was not a piece of Naturalist theatre. Part of the reason for this was the second stage-image at the centre of the play.

## **2.2 Source Stage-Images: The Birth**

The second, initially unrelated source was less tangible and easily explicable. It came directly from my imagination, yet the force of its influence felt no less external and un-authored. I had a dream about a young woman giving birth to an old woman. Initially, I did not quite know what to make of this and experienced an odd alienation from the image. André Breton describes these types of images that have "an extreme degree of immediate absurdity" as being "as strange to you as they are to anyone else," and he says that "naturally you are wary of them (Breton 1969, p. 24)." The image sat in my subconscious, snarling at me, daring me to make sense of it.

It was when I figured out that these two source images were key to each other that the idea for the play began to achieve a degree of coherence in my mind.

Seamus Heaney describes the how a writer's technique "involves a definition of [...the writer's] stance towards life, a definition of his own reality. (Heaney 1980, p. 47)." Already, in the marriage of these two images at the source of my play I was placing myself in an odd relation between two pillars of literary technique. I was attempting to marry both Naturalistic and Surrealist visions of reality. However, I did not see this as a difficulty but rather a natural and accurate description of reality; a reaction against that realist/anti-realist dualism that is so ingrained in the modern imagination.

An example of a writer who proceeds with similar disregard for the realist/anti-realist dualism is Federico Garcia Lorca, a particularly interesting example being his play

*Blood Wedding* (Lorca 1996). Lorca's play is able to shift quite naturally from the grounded and tangible realities of the ordinary people into the high poetic symbolism of the moon speech. This fluidity of the natural and the surreal is not jarring, but rather a representation of how he believes the ordinary and everyday is always already suffused with the extraordinary. It was within this theatrical tradition that I saw *Some Specimen* developing.

The image of the young woman giving birth to the older woman suggested to me the theme of the feminine and specifically, the inexplicable secret of the feminine within a male context. I was struck by the violence of the image, which was a hyperbolic version of the shock and violence of birth itself, and it also made a link in my mind between the experience of birth and the experience of death. This is an old theme, one which I was hoping to invert. In a vague sense I thought the play would be a reversal of George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* (Shaw 2000); a feminine force disassembling the modes of protection established in a patriarchal world against the forces of nature. This was less an overt theme than a quality suggested to me by the source image and, perhaps more important than this gender question, was the simple, brutal and visceral nature of the image and how it suggested the physical pain of living and pointed towards the mystery at the heart of animal life.

How this image would emerge within the play itself would change over time and it became the source of the character of Veba. Veba's character did not replicate the brutal image directly, but, I hope, retained much of the essential force and potency of that image, while responding to the functional demands of the character's role within the world of the play.

### **2.3 Initiating Dramatic Secrecy**

What I would like to highlight about these two images and their particular and peculiar qualities is how, in some sense, I was not in control of the forces while they were gathering together in the shape of an idea. I was not setting out from a sober and considered origin but was already thrust into a field of forces that were offering up strange complexities and ambiguities. A mood was offered to me, themes were offered to me and characters were offered to me (after all, there is a very limited cast of characters that can feasibly be present in Antarctica). This is of central importance

to the argument of this essay and it is, I believe, the reason why a concept of dramatic secrecy became of utmost importance to my understanding of the development of my script.

It is here necessary to explain my usage of the term dramatic secrecy. This idea developed from a reading of Jacques Derrida's 'Literature in Secret' (Derrida 2008). In this essay Derrida argues that the secret is "an enigmatic 'not meaning (to say),' of a not-meaning-to-say-such-and-such a secret, of a not-meaning-to-say-what-I-mean-to-say—or of not meaning at all, no way. (Derrida 2008, p. 131)." This playful description of the secret disrupts our idea of a secret as withheld information. Instead, it describes an attitude of care towards that which is indefinable at the source of meaning. This idea is very close to the description Artaud gives of life in the quote I began the essay with, as a "fragile, fluctuating centre which forms never reach (Artaud 1958, p.13)."

This is not simply a conceptual analysis of meaning but is also a practical reality to be considered while constructing the script. Little techniques of stage secrecy can be very effective at drawing the audience into the play. They establish an unusual intimacy, one of a shared covenant, a secret held between the play and the audience.

One simple example of how I played with this during the writing of the play occurs in Act 3 Scene 1. While Veba masturbates Cook in an effort to extract seed to impregnate her eggs, she whispers something into Cook's ear. Only Cook hears what she says and the audience are left both in and out of the loop. They are included in the scene, and the meaning they draw from it is their own, however the precise content of Veba's whisper is left undefined. It is a vibrant element that exceeds even the writer's comprehension of the event. This technique is in evidence in Shakespeare's *A Winter's Tale* (Shakespeare 1963) when the little boy Mamillius whispers into his mother Hermione's ear his own winter's tale. The audience never find out exactly what Mamillius says, yet we feel that what the boy whispered into his mother's ear might be somehow a microcosm of the play that is about to unfold.

This is only one example of how dramatic secrecy functions and the idea is not limited to those overt strategies. It is however a clear example of the sense of the term that I wish to evoke. It is the mode by which the meaning of the play recedes from

both author and audience and, by doing so, keeps the internal tension and dynamism of the play active.

#### **2.4 Retaining Dramatic Secrecy: Being Faithful to Ambiguity**

The beginnings of the play described above attempt to describe a force field of energies and inspirations from which the project is initiated. It is the ‘big bang’ of the play, a secret source that you grapple with as a writer while you search for coherence and meaning. However, in the attempt to create coherence, you must also retain care for the idea that germinated the project. I found myself often over-eager to directly explain the strange ideas I was engaging with. For example, in the first draft of the play, just after Boylan found the baby in the ice, his speech at the start of Act 2 Scene 1 ended,

“This might not be scientific, but you hold an impossible thing, you hold it and feel it shift in your hands and you ask... what need is this?”

I cut this line on second reading because I felt it was too direct an attempt to articulate a concept. The line was an attempt by the character to express his conceptual grappling with the unknown. However, the direct articulation of this idea felt somehow unfaithful and it was only by utilising modes of evasion in his language that the idea could be faithfully expressed. The speech in its final draft ended,

“There you are now little one. What do you make of all this? Confused as the rest of us I'd say. That's Cook. Isn't he funny looking? He thinks you don't exist.”

In a sense, both lines express a similar source inspiration and carry out a similar function; both attempt to articulate the character’s incomprehension of this impossible event that has happened to him. However, the second line, by evading direct conceptualisation and giving life and tension to the expression, somehow maintains the secret and the dramatic drive of the scene. The idea quivers between Boylan and Cook, in the oddness and evasion of Boylan and in the incongruous and intimate image of Boylan talking to a possibly imaginary baby. The tension of the scene is not punctured by one of the character’s attempting to accurately articulate what is happening to them.

Strategies of secrecy in writing become not merely a means of sparking interest in the work but a necessary method of remaining faithful to the meaning and affect of the idea itself.

#### **2.4 Balancing the ‘Naturalistic’ and the ‘Surreal’**

It was clear as I began writing the play that one of the major challenges I faced would be retaining the balance of tangibility and strangeness. If I was to successfully walk the line between Naturalism and Surrealism I would have to achieve a precarious balance between these two qualities in my writing.

Firstly, I needed strong, identifiable characters and a complex and developed central relationship. I also felt that pacing the shifts in the play, from the ‘real’ to the ‘unreal’ would be very important. This meant that I would have to be very sensitive in my choices on plotting and character and keep a clear eye on maintaining this balance. I wanted to firmly establish the ‘reality’ of the play and slowly introduce more and more strange and unexpected elements. My intention was that the audience would be lured slowly into an increasingly weird universe but that by the final scene, when Boylan and Cook eat Veba’s egg, the audience would feel as if they had got there by a natural and necessary progression. I hoped that the outwardly surreal image would feel as if it emerged from the necessary reality of the play. I was aware from the beginning that the success of the play would hinge on how well I achieved the ‘reality’ of this ‘surreal’ image.

## **SECTION 2: Decisions of Space and Time in Some Specimen**

### **3.1 The First Draft: Losing my Way in the Story**

With the idea of the play firmly established, the writing of the first draft happened quite quickly. I had two characters; Boylan, the older scientist who had been working in the lab on his own, and Cook, the younger, newly arrived assistant. The age difference between the characters initiated a certain amount of dramatic tension; questions of generational difference, paternity etc. were immediately present. By beginning with Cook's arrival I knew that a lot of the energy of the play would come from how Cook upset Boylan's universe. The play would emerge simply by letting the relationship of the two characters develop, thicken, reach a point of major conflict and re-settle. However the clarity of this journey became somewhat clouded in the first draft by the draw of the external forces in the characters' world.

As a writer I found myself fascinated by the machine in the middle of the room, the winch that had been altered to facilitate exploration of the hole in the ice-sheet. When I began writing the first draft, this machine had more definition and specificity in my imagination than either of the two characters. As such, it, and the three kilometre hole it hovered over, dominated the beginning of the play. The focus of the first scene became the revelation of the hole and I feel the characters themselves disappeared somewhere behind the artifice. It was only in later drafts when my understanding of the characters increased that I allowed their stories develop more fully.

This was a tendency I found repeated again and again in my first draft. The excitement of the artifice, the originality and strangeness of the twists and turns that were happening in the world of the play, repeatedly fogged my vision of the characters, their arcs and the dramatic content of the struggles they were having. It became clear on reading the first-draft of the play that the process of re-drafting would require that I uncover the depths of the characters and the moments of dramatic tension between them, depths that hadn't been fully explored the first time round.

This was also made quite clear during the workshop process in February; the unusual setting and the odd relationship to the unknown that the play initiated interested the readers. However, the workshop revealed a certain lack of empathy towards the characters. This would have to be established by creating a clearer understanding of

their motivations. For example, in the first draft the death of Rosie was not explained, and as such, the retreat of Boylan from the world was less comprehensible.

The workshop process taught me that it is by focusing on the less extreme elements of the script that the most valuable insights into your draft can be gained. A reader, like a writer, will be drawn to the more eye-catching aspects of the writing and yet it is the subtle insight that is most important when reviewing a first-draft, accessing those more muted rhythms that get missed in the first full flurry of creativity.

### **3.2 Fundamental Decisions Regarding Stage-Time and Space**

An early and important decision I made in the play was to maintain a consistency of stage time and space. The setting of a research facility, surrounded by thousands of kilometres of unforgiving barren ice-sheet, offered the possibility of a very pressurised and claustrophobic setting. I felt that the best strategy to utilise this potentiality was to tell the story in as close to real-time as possible and to situate the play in a fixed space. The complexity and strangeness of the plot would be grounded by an apparently tangible space and a simple use of stage-time.

Waters points out that the real-time unfolding of a play can accentuate a sense of solidity of place (Waters 2010, p. 69). It was with this in mind that I chose to tell the play in real time, using scene changes to lurch the story forward in time when necessary. Scene changes and their relationship to the development of the plot became one of the most important tools available to me for telling the story. An important example of this is the break between Act 3 Scene 1 and Act 3 Scene 2. The play lurches forward two weeks, having a huge effect on the characters. After the high emotion of Boylan and Cook's fight and the exit of Veba at the end of Act 3 Scene 1, we are shifted into a place of inertia, the two characters starving to death with no means of escape. As well as developing the plot, this shift in time allowed me shift dramatic tone and gave me an opportunity to explore a different aspect of both the characters. This allowed me to address questions of mortality, legacy and survival in the final scene that would otherwise have been impossible.

Many of the scene shifts present in the first draft remained unchanged into the last. This was because they were of fundamental importance to the deep structure of the story. Changing these shifts in time would have meant telling the story in a radically

different way. The only major change I made was to remove a scene from the first Act of draft 1, compressing two scenes into one and having the exploration of the hole begin at the end of Scene 1 rather than Scene 2. This change was made in order to speed up the action of the play and tighten the plot.

The choice of a fixed set was also a strategic attempt to sustain the pressure and claustrophobia of the action. The lab changes from the beginning of the play to the end, Veba's introduction causing a mess and chaos, filling the space with nests, dead penguins and eggs. However the play remains in the one location throughout. I liked the idea of moving from order to chaos within this simple space and it being the action of the play that alters the dramatic space rather than the writer's choice to shift location. The lab at the end of the play is a radically altered world to the one Cook walks into at the beginning, and the effect of this is made stronger by the play's staying put.

### **3.3 Suggested Spaces**

It became a challenge to tell this scale of a story within such an enclosed space. The needs of the story felt as if they chafed against my choice to enforce a spatial inertia. Repeatedly during the writing of the script, I was forced to draw heavily on suggested dramatic spaces to enliven the onstage space. Much of the action occurs offstage in three distinct locations, down the hole, back in Ireland via Skype, and out on the ice sheet. These three spaces repeatedly inform and change the space of the lab and gave the play a resonance and a scale that feels larger than the claustrophobic setting.

The mechanics of relating information from these spaces began to accentuate a major theme in the play: the unreliability of communication. Both the exchanges between Cook and Boylan, while Boylan was submerged down the hole, and between Elaine and the lab via Skype, began to suggest a world where the failure to communicate was a potent aspect of the drama. I noticed how the technical difficulty to communicate between these spaces mirrored the emotional difficulty of communicating for the characters and I began to heighten this effect. For example, when Cook professes his feelings to Elaine in Act 2 Scene 2, the Skype feed freezes. We do not know how much Elaine heard and neither does Cook. When he talks to her in Act 1 Scene 3, a hyperactive dog in the background makes communication almost impossible. Also,

the play ends with an aborted communication. After Boylan falls down the hole with Veba and Cook is left alone listening to the recording made by Boylan, a recording which is intended for Elaine, Cook chooses to stop the recording mid-flow just when Boylan is about to express what may have been a redeeming insight. This act of violence on Cook's behalf is a natural extension of a play that is defined by the failure and difficulty of communication.

Another important influence on the development of the play was the development of the huge Antarctic Storm growing outside. This helped isolate and trap the characters and gave me control over what happened within the space. It also would serve an important symbolic function within the play, attaining layers of significance beyond the merely physical. An equivalent of this is the cataclysm occurring in the outside world in Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* (Beckett 1958). In both plays, the external world exerts a huge pressure on the tentative calm of the space that the characters inhabit. I found this useful in creating an atmosphere of impermanence and intransience.

These examples show how the functional demands of telling the story begin to develop and enrich the meaning of the play. By making simple decisions regarding the staging of the piece, the content of the idea began to reveal hidden depths and potentialities.

## **SECTION 3: Development of Plot and Character in Some Specimen**

### **4.1 Plot Development**

The first draft of the play provided a few specific challenges regarding plot development, specifically in maintaining the balance between dramatic action and character development. The discovery of the baby in the ice-sheet was inevitably going to be a central turning point in the play; a moment when the balance of the characters' world was suddenly thrown into turmoil and upset. However, as the event was of such an extreme nature, I felt it was necessary to firmly establish and develop the relationship between Boylan and Cook by the time this event occurs.

At first this provided quite a challenge and I felt that the play was unbalanced by the entry of the baby. However, by complicating the relationship between the two characters and introducing the third force of Dr. Elaine Hansen, Boylan's ex-wife, I was able to introduce a dramatic friction that would be sustained through the beginning of the play and find resolution at the end of the play. The discovery of this strand of the plot shifted the focus subtly away from Veba and onto Boylan and Cook. The initial muscle of the play, two men trying to come to terms with the unknown, shifted towards, two men coming to terms with each other within the territory of the unknown.

This evolution in the plot of the play allowed me shift the focus of the play into more complex and emotionally rich territories. It also made the character's relationship with Veba more complex and interesting. Initially, they related to her merely as scientists, struggling to figure out what she was and what they should do with her. However, by grounding the play more in the relationship between Boylan and Cook and focusing more on the personal histories of the two characters, Veba started to assume a more rewarding function within the plot of the play. She served as a catalyst for the upheaval and reimagining of the two scientists lives.

This allowed me to avoid the kind of plot that Aristotle describes as episodic, this being a plot in which "the sequence of episodes is neither necessary or probable (Aristotle 1996, p. 16)." In the first draft of the play the characters felt somewhat adrift upon a series of events, but by exploring the impact of these upheavals within

the context of an emotional history, the plot began to feel as if it were being driven by an internal emotional necessity.

#### **4.2 Plot and Character**

With this in mind much of the development of the play began to be directed by the necessity of thickening the relationship between Cook and Boylan. For example, in an early draft, Boylan's decision to leave the lab and walk through the storm to try and get help, at the end of Act 2 Scene 1, was a purely logical choice on Boylan's behalf. It served my plotting functions quite well, as I wanted to isolate Cook with Veba and this was impossible unless Boylan left. However, Boylan's decision to leave felt flat and arbitrary until the final draft when I linked Boylan's decision to leave with the reveal of Cook's betrayal of Boylan. This gave the shift in plot an emotional necessity and developed the heart of the play far more successfully.

Again, this is an example of a recurring necessity to interweave the personal and intimate stories of Boylan and Cook deeper into the events they were caught up in. This is specific to the process of writing *Some Specimen* and I think in future plays it will be possible to develop these strands at the same time, however, much of this was to do with the mode of access I had to the story. The strength of the story's draw on me was the ferment of ideas that I described in Section 1. However, part of the challenge of writing the play was having the patience to allow the characters teach me about themselves and to allow the human drama catch up with the development of the stage-images.

#### **4.3 The Non-Human Character**

Developing the character of Veba proved to be a significant challenge while I was writing the script but also one that is of interest to the central argument of this essay.

As I explained earlier, the idea for her character came from a strange dreamlike image, a young woman giving birth to an older woman, and I felt it very important to retain that uncanny aspect of her nature. However, I was also aware of the importance of not turning her into a flat cipher. It was important that she have a series of motivations of her own, not human motivations but rather some other drive, one that

would compete with and upset the human world of Boylan and Cook beyond all recognition.

The key to answering this question came in the form of a nature documentary. I knew from the outset that Veba represented natural desires and drives, however, I was unable to find a coherent way of articulating what this meant until I heard about a type of Arctic moth. This moth lives as a caterpillar for decades, emerging every year for a period of only a few days. It eats as much as possible, then burrows back into the tundra and re-freezes. It thaws out the following summer, continuing this process for up to thirty years. Eventually, after thirty years of waiting, it has enough energy to metamorphose into a moth. After emerging from its cocoon it has one day to reproduce, lay eggs and die.

Similar to the two other source stage-images that influenced the play, this image articulated a series of forces in my mind, forces that would be worked out through the figure of Veba. Waters explains in *The Secret Life of Plays* that we “infer a character’s inner life from the sum of their external actions (Waters 2010, p. 96).” However, if the inner life of the character that you are trying to portray is of such a strange and alternative nature, then the challenge becomes very different. I found that she was too human in my first draft and as such, merely came across as a simplified and weak human character. It was when I stopped trying to suggest an interior and committed fully to the external needs and desires of the animal side of Veba’s nature that I started to achieve a satisfactory representation of the kinds of forces I was hoping to portray.

This rejection of interiority provided a moment of real relief and liberation to my understanding of the character and how it functioned in the play. It also served to create a contrast between Veba and the other characters, whose interior world was developed heavily.

This technique of rejecting interiority is visible in some of Beckett’s work. In his *Quad* play, the four characters act on purely mathematical instructions, moving around four quadrants of a square. Beckett was attempting to strip away psychological motivation in the play and express something outside of human motivation. Although a much more refined and pure attempt, Beckett’s *Quad* is an attempt to achieve a similar rejection of the presumption of interiority. The simple discovery I made while

writing *Some Specimen* was, if you are writing a non-human character it is necessary to write in a totally different fashion.

I was once again actualising the vision of reality laid out in the project that I described in Section 1. By fully embracing the dramatic secrecy of Veba's meaning and by refusing to overly clarify or explain her nature, I was able to remain faithful to the dramatic energy that inspired her in the first place. This meant that her language would be clipped and elusive, that she would speak in phrases or through repetitions and mimicry and that her motivations would be of a fundamentally different order than most naturalistic characters.

## **5.1 Conclusion: Evolutions of the Secret**

The word that is spoken on this stage exists, or fails to exist, only in relation to the tensions it creates on that stage within the given stage circumstances. (Brook 1968, p. 42)

Brook is describing here, in *The Empty Space*, a ‘reality’ created on the stage for the purposes specific to that stage. This recreation of reality along different dramatic principles was the project of *Some Specimen* and its success, or lack of success, depends on how well achieved this new reality is.

Much of the writing of the play involved the straightforward practical working out of issues such as plot and character development, challenges which I have outlined above. The experience of writing and re-writing a piece of this length can often feel like a protracted exercise in problem solving, particularly when applying notes from workshops and tutorials/dramaturgical advice. The danger of this craft is that the play will lose its spark, the original alchemical mixture that gave the idea life in the first place. It is this danger of drifting on the flow of ‘fixing the play’, the desire to ‘make it good,’ that necessitates a clear relation to original secret of the play throughout the writing process and I want to return to this idea here.

There is no doubt that there are easier plays to write than *Some Specimen*. A lot of my early choices caused difficulties that, at times, made me long that I had written something with less surreal elements. However, I like to think that the difficulties I faced in dealing with the play are no more than the difficulties faced by any theatrical project that embraces an element of risk.

The play in its final state is, I believe, a good example of the difficulties and rewards of writing a play that attempts to collapse the Naturalistic and Surrealist forms of theatre. The play attempts to engage with a reality that shifts and alters in response the internal necessity of the stage-images and the drive of the dramatic action. This provides the play with its own form of reality, one that is given its spark from a hidden tension at the heart of the play, the dramatic secret that functions at all stages in the script and will continue to function after my input as a writer has been exhausted.

Considering this view of the play, it is interesting to consider its success in relation to one of the themes the play tackles. The play is intended to be an oblique and creative response to ‘the environmental problem’ we face as a society today. It would be

possible to have written a play directly laying out the various positions surrounding the issue, to give the play a moral sentiment and to use the play to make a ‘point’ about the environmental issues we face today. However, this would not be in keeping with the theatrical vision I have attempted to outline in this essay, as that would require a level of artistic simplicity that would be at odds with the importance of the issue. The theatre is an attempt to articulate a vision of life and it is by retaining the complexity of the life of the play and remaining faithful to the needs of the play that any insight into the content of the play is achieved. What *Some Specimen* has to say about the fate of man, who is wrapped up in a ferment of desire and faced with the prospect that we have destroyed the very thing that sustains us, is located in the workings of the play itself, how it shifts and evades any definition of it. The process of writing demanded that I remain faithful and sensitive to the dramatic secret as it evolved and emerged.

# **Some Specimen**

**by Shane Ward**

## **Cast of Characters**

**Prof. Boylan: 50 years old, Professor of Ecology**

**Charlie Cook: 27 years old, Postdoctoral research**

**Dr. Elaine Hansen**

**Veba: A creature**

## **Setting**

A tiny, run-down experimental ecology lab in Antarctica. The lab is both the research facility and living quarters of the scientists. On one side of the room, a winch hovers over a hole that has been drilled three kilometres deep into the ice. The opening of the hole is narrow, not more than five foot wide. A makeshift harness has been attached to the winch. A lid covers the hole and an operations point overlooks it. The other part of the lab is a bare living quarters. A crude bunk bed has been constructed and there is a desktop computer with a large screen, a table, chairs and basic cooking equipment. The space is an exercise of controlled chaos; full of research papers, food, equipment etc. There is a door at the back of the lab that opens out onto the Antarctic icecap.

## **Time**

Present Day

# ACT I

## Scene 1

*The door opens. Enter BOYLAN in snow gear, ski mask, thick gloves, huge coat with wrap-over hood etc. He rushes awkwardly about the room, checking everything is in order. He starts to sneeze (a nervous tic, high pitched). He composes himself and takes out a bottle of whiskey and three glasses, placing them on the table.*

*He rushes back to the door. He goes out the door, closing it behind him. There is the sound of a Skype call coming from the computer in the living space. It rings out unanswered.*

*Enter BOYLAN and COOK, snow blowing from behind them. BOYLAN is carrying a heavy crate. COOK follows, taking off his ski mask.*

**COOK**

Careful...

*BOYLAN drops crate heavily, then takes off ski mask.*

**BOYLAN**

The door! Close over the door!

*COOK shuts the door.*

**BOYLAN**

Who designed these things! Nowhere to get a decent grasp... There's nothing breakable in it?

**COOK**

Just some personal items...

**BOYLAN**

A little rattle will hardly...

**COOK**

...some equipment, some electronics.

*BOYLAN stifles a few sneezes. COOK is taking the space in. BOYLAN is watching COOK's response carefully. They start to take off their gear.*

**BOYLAN**

(fussing over Cook's mask and gloves)

Let me take those.

**COOK**

So this is it?

**BOYLAN**

It's not what you were expecting?

**COOK**

No, it's... it's... I'm taken aback.

*COOK takes off his coat and doesn't know where to put it.*

**BOYLAN**

Over here. The coat - over here.

**COOK**

Coming straight from the American lab, it's quite a difference. They have all the new equipment. The greenhouses. The canteen. Beyers did warn me this would be more... primitive.

**BOYLAN**

Beyers! The rush on him. What's his problem?

**COOK**

There's a storm on the way he said.

**BOYLAN**

He's always being chased by a bloody blizzard of some sort. It's Antarctica, of course a storm's on the way. We haven't spoken in weeks and the man can't stop for a few words...

**COOK**

He was in quite a rush to get back to their base...

**BOYLAN**

I keep saying to the University, you cannot depend on the likes of Beyers.

**COOK**

He seems all right.

**BOYLAN**

Of course he's all right, he's American. Yanks are always unbearably all right.

**COOK**

(seeing the covered opening)

Is that it?

(pause)

**COOK**

You wouldn't think... Three kilometers?

**BOYLAN**

Thereabouts. Straight into the icecap.

*COOK starts to walk towards it. BOYLAN starts sneezing again.*

**COOK**

Are you sick?

*BOYLAN waves at him to indicate he's fine.*

**BOYLAN**

Sometimes comes on me... with the nerves.

(pointing to the crate)

Take the other side before I drop it again. You'll have the top bunk.

*They carry the crate to the living quarters.*

I haven't had an assistant before and with space tight, I thought I'd build a bunk bed. Awkward enough bit of construction mind. You'd be amazed how hard it is to stop the whole thing from collapsing. Do you toss and turn much?

**COOK**

I...

**BOYLAN**

Maybe if you keep the tossing and turning to a minimum.

(dropping the crate at the bunk.)

What do you make of that for handiwork, ha? Safe as houses.

*BOYLAN slaps the bunk beds, which sway ominously.*

**COOK**

(reading a carving in the side of the bed)

'Welcome Cook.'

**BOYLAN**

You see I carved that on the side of it. 'Welcome Cook.' You see... 'Welcome Cook.' I don't know what I was thinking.

*BOYLAN starts sneezing again.*

**COOK**

Professor, I want to say now, right at the outset, that I intend to work extremely hard during my stay here. I'm not sure if my reference mentioned work ethic specifically but I can assure you...

**BOYLAN**

Enough. Interview is long over. You're in Antarctica now. You're not going to get replaced unless you die of hypothermia.

*COOK laughs. Pause.*

It could happen.

**COOK**

No. I know.

**BOYLAN**

You'll want a drink.

**COOK**

Something warm maybe.

**BOYLAN**

Something strong. I've a glass out for Beyers as well. Shame. Too busy being hunted by his blizzard.

**COOK**

It's going to be a mega-storm, he said.

**BOYLAN**

Did he?

(shakes head)

'Mega-storm.'

**COOK**

Are we safe here?

**BOYLAN**

Safe? We're hunkered down in the most vicious landscape on earth. Minus forty degrees... you spit and it freezes before it hits the ground. If something goes wrong... We're not safe, no. However... consolation is at hand.

(picking up the bottle of whiskey)

Lantern Spivits.

**COOK**

I'm sorry?

**BOYLAN**

Lantern spivits. My research budget has seven hundred and eighty four euro set aside for Lantern Spivits.

**COOK**

Are they something to do with the research? I studied everything the university provided me with.

**BOYLAN**

Seven hundred and eighty four euro is the price of thirty four bottles of Irish whiskey. The accountants in the University presume Lantern Spivits are essential to my work. Little do they know how right they are.

**COOK**

Isn't that a misuse of funding?

**BOYLAN**

A little luxury...

**COOK**

No, of course. If you think it's appropriate.

**BOYLAN**

Sit down, don't stand on ceremony here.

**COOK**

I don't drink whiskey really.

**BOYLAN**

Who knew Antarctica would be the place you'd learn.

*BOYLAN pours COOK and himself a drink.*

**COOK**

I'm still a little giddy with all this. I left Dublin early Sunday morning and on Monday we flew in from Chile across the Drake Passage and I saw the mountains of King George Island. I had read about them. But seeing them... The last wilderness. I wanted to let out a great roar. I didn't of course.

**BOYLAN**

Ice?

**COOK**

Sorry?

**BOYLAN**

I'm taking my whiskey with ice recently. I think it's the most significant change that living in Antarctica has made to me.

**COOK**

Whatever way you drink it.

**BOYLAN**

You might regret that.

**COOK**

After a short stop over, we took a tiny, single propeller plane to the main continent. There it was... Antarctica. Stretching endlessly, glowing white. As if the earth had been shushed. Simple.

(taking the glass)

Even though the plane's engine was roaring in my ear, everything felt quite quiet. I didn't know it was still possible to feel like an explorer.

**BOYLAN**

Explorer? The continent is crawling with people. Be careful you don't get bundled over by every CEO and stock trader who wants to channel the spirit of Ernest Shackleton. Don't turn into one of them pricks. Bloody... finding yourself. Slainte.

*They drink. COOK starts coughing.*

**BOYLAN**

Smooth, isn't it?

**COOK**

Kicks.

**BOYLAN**

Nice to have someone to share it with.  
(pause)

**COOK**

Beyers was telling me all about his project.

**BOYLAN**

I don't doubt that. 'The Lake of Eternal Night'.

**COOK**

He's told you about it? A lake hidden 4km under the ice-cap, completely isolated from the earth's atmosphere for twenty-five million years... Truly incredible. Anyone would kill to be the first to get a look at those water samples.

**BOYLAN**

The man hasn't the slightest notion what he's looking for.

**COOK**

Wouldn't it be something though? A totally pure and detached ecosystem. Last night he talked for hours about the possibilities. He posited whole new organisms that may have evolved independently from the rest of the planet. Studying it will be require a new way of seeing. That's what he said, 'way of seeing'. We hit it off quite well actually. What do you think they'll uncover?

**BOYLAN**

A petri-dish of doctorates.

**COOK**

As an ecologist you must be excited?

**BOYLAN**

As an ecologist, I'm terrified of the mess they'll make.  
(pause)

**COOK**

We've met before.

**BOYLAN**

Have we?

**COOK**

At the Ecology Ball two years ago. You were there with Dr. Hansen, who I know of course.

**BOYLAN**

Elaine. She gave you a glowing recommendation.

**COOK**

You're still in touch?

(pause)

I mean, I heard that you were... You know how people talk.

**BOYLAN**

I don't, no.

**COOK**

I heard you were separated...

(pause)

She sang a song that night at karaoke. She had the most perfect voice. What was that song?

**BOYLAN**

I don't remember you.

**COOK**

We were introduced.

(pause)

It's great to be here.

**BOYLAN**

What brought you here Cook?

**COOK**

I'm sorry?

**BOYLAN**

Why study Ecology? You could be doing all sorts of things... What brings you to the end of the earth?

**COOK**

Why would I do anything else? The environment is sexy. Global warming, threatened eco-systems, biodiversity. A few years now and I'll be giving breathless reports on sea levels to national audiences, people hanging on my every word. What a privilege to being doing something of such importance.

**BOYLAN**

You should have become an economist.

**COOK**

Everyone in the university speaks highly of you, Professor Boylan.

**BOYLAN**

'The environment is sexy'. I'll remember that.

(pause)

'She's Always a Woman.'

**COOK**

I'm sorry?

*BOYLAN pours another drink.*

**BOYLAN**

The song Elaine sang. I wonder who she's singing that for now.

*BOYLAN offers a toast.*

To Antarctica?

**COOK**

Antarctica.

*They clink glasses and drink.*

**BOYLAN**

We wouldn't be here without Beyers. I suppose he didn't tell you that.

**COOK**

He didn't mention it.

**BOYLAN**

Funny that... His team came here initially, yours truly in tow. Three kilometers we drilled searching for his lake, three kilometers punctured straight into the icecap before we copped on to the blunder. We missed. No lake. Nothing. Nada. And off Beyers went, drilling somewhere else, pissing away more millions. Good luck to him.

**COOK**

Why did you stay behind?

**BOYLAN**

We didn't do all that for nothing. It's a question of responsibility. After the man showed so little concern about this place, forgive me if I don't get excited in his 'Lake of Eternal Night.' What do you think of him calling it that?

(pause)

**COOK**

I wasn't going to say anything, but I think it a touch unscientific...

**BOYLAN**

Finally, someone with a titter of wit.

**COOK**

Too... American. You can just hear the National Geographic documentary narration...

(American accent)

"Hidden from the light for twenty-five million years... An alien world all of its own..."

**BOYLAN**

Save us. I have a mad notion about this Cook... now this is important.

*COOK takes out a notepad and pen.*

There are two types of scientist in this world. The first are those who really, desperately want to be scientists, and the second are those that need to be scientists...

*BOYLAN notices COOK taking notes and starts sneezing.*

**COOK**

I'm sorry. Is it okay?

**BOYLAN**

Of course... yes... fine.

(nodding assent)

Watch out now for those that want to be a success. They'll be vicious. They'll barge through you and anyone or anything that gets in their way. Others... and ask yourself which one are you... others have to be scientists out of some need. Nothing else but the question... nothing else.

**COOK**

That's me. I'm one of those scientists.

(pause)

**BOYLAN**

Would you like to see it?

**COOK**

Absolutely. Wait. See what?

**BOYLAN**

The hole in the ice sheet. What's keeping us? Will I open it up?

**COOK**

Right now?

*COOK pours them another drink.*

**BOYLAN**

It's why we're here isn't it?

**COOK**

It certainly is.

**BOYLAN**

Why wait any longer? You'll find out soon enough.  
(raising another toast)  
To ecology.

**COOK**

Ecology.

*They drink.*

I feel quite funny.

**BOYLAN**

(walking towards the control area)  
The important thing to remember about this hole is that never - under no circumstances - should you ever fall in. I calculated it once.

**COOK**

What?

**BOYLAN**

How long it would take to hit the bottom.

**COOK**

I'm sure.

*The two come to the hole covering. COOK has the bottle of whiskey still in his hand.*

**COOK**

Where is the lid controlled from? Is there a lever or a button - a control point?

**BOYLAN**

A button - go back to the Americans if you want a button.

*BOYLAN reaches down and grabs a handle at one side of the lid. With an effort he opens it.*

**COOK**

That's it?

**BOYLAN**

That... that is a vital element of the delicate balance of the world. It tells us the story of everything. It passes beyond our lives, beyond the lifespan of our countries, of our religions, of our languages, of our species. Millions of years.

**COOK**

It really is just a hole isn't it? I don't know what I was expecting but...

**BOYLAN**

Just a hole I suppose.

**COOK**

How long?

**BOYLAN**

How long for what?

**COOK**

Before you hit the bottom.

**BOYLAN**

Almost exactly one minute.

**COOK**

A minute? That's a long time to be falling.

**BOYLAN**

You could fit the length of nine Eiffel towers in there, end to end, and still have room for the Spire in Dublin to fit neatly on top.

**COOK**

Drink to that!

(slugging straight from the bottle)

Want some?

*COOK takes the bottle to BOYLAN. As he does so, COOK wobbles, teetering on the edge.*

**BOYLAN**

You know I can do fantastic things for your career? I mightn't look it now. But my name holds some weight - I still have a deal of influence and reputation.

**COOK**

No, I wouldn't ask it of you.

**BOYLAN**

I'm not saying I can promise you anything.

**COOK**

Really... the honour is all... and if there is anything I can do for you...

**BOYLAN**

Listen, I'm not saying that you need my help, you're your own man.

**COOK**

Symbiotic... like intestinal bacteria.

**BOYLAN**

But if I can... what we're doing here will ask some sacrifices, has already I'm sure...

**COOK**

One minute to fall three kilometers? Extraordinary.

**BOYLAN**

And you'll need to trust me...

**COOK**

What would run through your head?

**BOYLAN**

The research we'll be doing is unorthodox.

**COOK**

I wouldn't expect anything less...

**BOYLAN**

It's very unorthodox.

**COOK**

I thrive on unorthodox. Lets drink to unorthodox.

*COOK leans over the hole.*

**COOK**

To unorthodox! I thought it would echo.

*COOK slugs the whiskey from the bottle.*

I think I'm going to be sick.

**BOYLAN**

Well, not in there, for Christ sake.

*COOK stands up and wobbles and BOYLAN goes over to the controls.*

I'm tired of the distance these machines have given us. Science is about trying to understand the world - our world. I've been staring at these bloody

machines... Imprisoned in blips and beeps. Impotent. I have to go down. You mightn't feel it like I do Cook, but I remember what it was like before these screens grabbed a hold and squeezed the life out of us.

**COOK**

The nausea has abated.

**BOYLAN**

I'm going down. All I've needed is a second person to control from above. You're here now. What have they told you about me? Washed up? Dinosaur? You step out of the fray and the world starts to write you off and rip lumps from your carcass. But I'll surprise them yet. Give them a kick they don't expect. We are going to get back to the heart of things Cook.

*BOYLAN is playing with the controls. The winch starts to move up and down.*

**COOK**

Look at that.

**BOYLAN**

Would you describe yourself as a capable man?

**COOK**

I've always been top of my class.

**BOYLAN**

And you can follow instructions... It's just us here. You understand that? No emergency crews, no support. You understand that responsibility?

**COOK**

I am honoured... and accept the responsibility in earnest.

**BOYLAN**

You're a good lad. A bit full of yourself...

**COOK**

A bit...?

**BOYLAN**

No you are. No harm in that. I trust someone who hasn't the guile to be humble. Come here.

*COOK walks over to the winch, into which BOYLAN is now strapping himself.*

We won't go far today. I'll be talking you through this every step of the way. Today's just to test the water. Pull that strap there, will you?

*COOK pulls the strap, tightening BOYLAN in.*

**COOK**

Do you mind my asking Professor...?

**BOYLAN**

Delighted Cook, always ready to share the knowledge of thirty-one years of research in the field.

**COOK**

Well. You're... What are you doing?

**BOYLAN**

Research. And the strap behind there, if you could pass it through my legs.

**COOK**

(following Boylan's instruction)

You see I haven't been familiarised with the...

**BOYLAN**

My headlamp. I've left it on the desk there.

**COOK**

I presumed that we'd...

**BOYLAN**

You're going to learn on your feet. Just listen to me. You can do that can't you?

**COOK**

Yes, but...

**BOYLAN**

Good. You see that lever there? You do? Listen carefully now. I don't want to go hurtling towards my death.

**COOK**

That's a possibility?

**BOYLAN**

You're a bright lad. When you push the lever up, the winch lowers me down... Do you have that? Do you have that?

**COOK**

Into the hole.

**BOYLAN**

Yes. Into the ice sheet. So lever up and...

**COOK**

You go down...

**BOYLAN**

And if you pull the lever down... If you pull the lever down?

**COOK**

Professor Boylan comes up?

**BOYLAN**

The Irish education system is working wonders.

**COOK**

I wonder should we... have a look at some data you've compiled or...

**BOYLAN**

Now this is important, I'll be talking to you through this headpiece.

**COOK**

...or we could work through a series of risk scenarios and assess...

*BOYLAN switches the headpiece and his voice comes through an intercom at the control desk.*

**BOYLAN**

Cook, I'll be talking to you through this headpiece.

*COOK jumps away from the intercom in surprise.*

And you can talk to me by pressing the red button down and speaking into the microphone.

**COOK**

(loudly)  
Hello!

**BOYLAN**

There's no need to shout. Do you see red numbers on the panel to the left of the lever?

**COOK**

Yes.

**BOYLAN**

That number is my depth in meters. We won't go far today. This is only a test. A couple of hundred meters maybe.

**COOK**

A couple of hundred meters! Professor Boylan I'm not sure...

**BOYLAN**

Of course you're not sure, that's the point. The blaze of science has burnt on the fuel of 'not sure'. Every experiment ever made worth making has started with scientists exclaiming, I'm not sure! Cook?

**COOK**

Yes.

**BOYLAN**

I'm not sure.

(pause)

It feels... I feel alive.

(pause)

Will you say a prayer with me?

**COOK**

I'm not religious.

**BOYLAN**

It's not all about you Cook. It's the first time in a long time I've felt the need myself.

*BOYLAN blesses himself.*

To whom it may concern. Look after and protect this simple man who wants only to know. Amen.

(pause)

**COOK**

What now?

**BOYLAN**

Push the lever.

**COOK**

Now?

**BOYLAN**

Now.

**COOK**

Right now?

**BOYLAN**

Now!

*COOK pulls the lever down and BOYLAN lifts up into the air.*

**BOYLAN**

Ah Jesus Cook! You pulled down. Up! Up!

**COOK**

Sorry!

**BOYLAN**

It's not rocket...

*COOK pushes the lever up and BOYLAN disappears down the hole. After a few moments... [speech through intercom in italics]*

**BOYLAN**

*Cook?*

*COOK jolts the lever downwards, the winch shuddering. COOK stops. Silence. COOK presses the button.*

**COOK**

Professor Boylan?

**BOYLAN**

*Cook...*

**COOK**

Yes?

**BOYLAN**

*If we could have a small bit more subtlety...*

**COOK**

Sorry.

**BOYLAN**

*Stop saying sorry Cook. What's my depth?*

**COOK**

(without pushing button)

Ten meters.

**BOYLAN**

*Cook?*

**COOK**

(pushing the button)

Ten. Ten meters.

**BOYLAN**

*Good. Now listen. I want you to take me three hundred and twenty meters down. Do you know how high the Eiffel tower is Cook?*

(pause)

**BOYLAN**

*Do you know how high the Eiffel tower is?*

**COOK**

Is it three hundred and twenty meters Professor?

**BOYLAN**

*How's the head Cook?*

**COOK**

A little light.

**BOYLAN**

*So is mine. Let me know as I pass every fifty meter mark.*

*COOK pushes the lever up.*

**COOK**

The man's insane.

**BOYLAN**

*It's so dark. I can see the light of the opening, just... disappearing. Nothing but a dot now.*

*COOK taps on one of the dials. It starts smoking.*

**COOK**

Sm... Smoke. Smoke!

(pressing the button)

The control panel is smoking Professor.

**BOYLAN**

*It does that. Overheating. There's a little fan next to it to cool it down.*

**COOK**

You've got to be joking.

*COOK switches on a little hand-fan that's gaff-tapped above the panel.*

A health and safety officer would have a field day with that.

(pressing button)

Fifty meters.

**BOYLAN**

*So they talk, do they? And what do they have to talk about. Separated. What does that mean? They know nothing about our life... Who was talking about us Cook?*

**COOK**

(pressing the button)

This might not be the best moment to discuss this Professor.

**BOYLAN**

*Were they in Paris on our our honeymoon with us, crammed into those busy narrow streets, our hearts racing, thinking we'd be washed away, thinking we'd lose each other. Did they climb the Eiffel tower like two eejit tourists... me afraid all those steps would harm the... her marching on. Nothing for it but to get to the top.*

**COOK**

(pressing the button)

A hundred meters.

**BOYLAN**

*Knew her limits she said, the child would be fine.*

**COOK**

Child?

**BOYLAN**

*We were exhausted when we reached the top. She looked stunning... all fierce and flushed. Let them talk if they want to... I remember... I remember her face as she looked out at the city, younger than mine, but such depth... That quivering private history, baffling me... I did try to understand her...*

(sneezes)

**COOK**

Elaine never said anything about a child.

**BOYLAN**

*You go only as deep into the ice, scratch that far beneath the skin, and the entire mess of it is the twitch of a leg. I can feel all those years pressing about me.*

**COOK**

(pressing the button)

Is it moving too fast Professor?

**BOYLAN**

*It hardly feels like I'm moving at all.*

**COOK**

A hundred and fifty meters.

**BOYLAN**

*I feel like a young man again. Weightless...*

**COOK**

I think you should re-surface Professor.

**BOYLAN**

*Knowing the name of things Cook. That's why I became an ecologist. When I was a child I'd drag my mother around the garden asking her the names of everything I saw, the flowers, the trees, the different types of grass, the types of stone, the insects, everything.*

**COOK**

Two hundred meters.

**BOYLAN**

*It's so dark. It's so completely dark.*

(pause)

*Cook?*

**COOK**

Yes Professor?

**BOYLAN**

*Stop. Stop. Please...*

*COOK pulls the lever back to level.*

**BOYLAN**

*How far are we?*

**COOK**

Two hundred and twenty meters Professor.

**BOYLAN**

*Perhaps... perhaps we'll leave the Eiffel tower for another day. Take me back up.*

*Blackout.*

## Scene 2

*Four days later. BOYLAN is gone. COOK has a bucket on his head and is trying to set up a tent in the middle of the floor.*

*COOK is failing to get the tent up. BOYLAN comes in through the door from outside. A storm is starting, wind and snow blowing.*

### **BOYLAN**

Beyer's storm is here!

(he shuts the door.)

The bastard American was right for once in his life. Should have been a meteorologist not an ecologist. The satellite dish is draped over the side of the building, hanging there, banging in the wind like a wilted flower. The wind ripped the brackets straight up and bent the steel...

(knocking on the side of the bucket)

You're making progress.

### **COOK**

(taking off the bucket)

It's too hard!

### **BOYLAN**

(pretending he's in a blizzard)

What's that? The wind. No idea what you're saying. Total white out. If we don't get the tent up we'll die for sure!

*COOK puts the bucket back on. BOYLAN starts spinning him around.*

That's what you've to work in. Your sight all bleached out, a roaring wind that leaves you as good as deaf. Just touch, instinct to save you from the storm. Your life depends on it, maybe my life too. Difficult, no doubt. But if you stick at it, trust me... I promise we're going to achieve...

*BOYLAN lets COOK go. COOK staggers and gropes in the wrong direction.*

...we're going to achieve great things. Where did I put that report?

*COOK staggers on.*

The connections will be down. The signal might come and go but we can't depend on it, so if you have anyone who you need to get word back to, it will have to wait...

(no response)

Cook?

(walks over to Cook)

Cook, the connections are down, we aren't able to contact home. Will you have people worrying about you?

*COOK shakes his head.*

**BOYLAN**

No one?

*COOK shakes his head again. BOYLAN turns COOK in the direction of the tent.*

That way... Strange, isn't it? To be cut off like that. No notion where you are, what way you're facing. That's a snowstorm on the icecap. Only worse. Your hands are numb, it's a struggle to stand even. Some of the Russians, tough boys the Russians, they used to keep big lumps of butter in their pocket. They'd take it out in a storm and swallow huge chunks so the fat lined the inside of their veins. Careful!

*COOK bumps into something then turns, saying something to BOYLAN made inaudible by the bucket.*

At your right foot.

*COOK finds the tent and starts working on it again.*

It's a different feeling you get down the hole. That dark's different. A thousand meters under the ice, vast tons of frozen world sitting on your shoulders. It's the stillness that crushes you. In your mind you might be under the stairs at home. But your eyes know. What gets them is the absence of light. They strain, like lungs gasping for air, sucking at the dark.

*COOK says something inaudible.*

That's exactly it Cook. That's what you think at first. Now, with what we're finding, we know for sure that something is happening. The ice is hollowing, releasing, no, consuming is the correct word, it's consuming a store of itself... You feel like you're in the belly of a living creature. I have a mad notion about it, as you can imagine. I'm thinking of calling it 'environmental amnesia.'

*The tent pops up.*

Kudos!

*COOK crawls into the tent.*

Well done Cook! As fierce as things get, that little tent might shelter a man's life. You've saved us. Maybe prolonged is better? Yes. You've prolonged us.

*Bucket gets spat out of the tent. COOK zips the tent behind him.*

**COOK**

What do you mean us? Pitch your own tent.

**BOYLAN**

Fair enough. But if you're carrying the tent that means I've got the food and fuel supplies.

(pause)

*Tent unzips. COOK sticks his head out.*

**COOK**

It'll be cosy in here, just the two of us.

**BOYLAN**

Better than being flayed to the bone by the wind.

**COOK**

When you put it like that...

**BOYLAN**

(giving the tent a shake)

That's not an easy job in fairness.

**COOK**

It is good, isn't it? Just don't...

**BOYLAN**

(still shaking the tent)

No, you've it right. You should be proud of...

*Tent collapses.*

(pause)

**COOK**

What was that about amnesia?

**BOYLAN**

'Environmental amnesia.' A little notion I've had. Lets say that the break up in the density of the ice is similar to the loss of memory. All that information stored in the ice, mineral deposits, climatic data, it's all being eroded by the process of break-up. Inner amnesia. My notion is that the earth is forgetting itself. Wiping the slate clean.

**COOK**

Amnesia? Does that mean it's provoked by a trauma.

**BOYLAN**

Of course. Us.

*The lights flicker. Pause.*

**COOK**

That the generator?

*BOYLAN loses balance.*

**COOK**

Professor? Are you okay?

**BOYLAN**

The submersions are taking their toll.

**COOK**

You're doing too much, too quickly. For four days now you've been spending longer underground than above it. Hours and hours in a tiny dark chute you can hardly move in. If you carry on like this you'll burn out, go mad or worse...

**BOYLAN**

Necessary work. The one constant is that I have too little time.

**COOK**

Let me do a submersion.

**BOYLAN**

You...?

**COOK**

It makes sense. We divide the work in half. The research will be more thorough if we diversify the observation and it'll relieve the strain on you.

**BOYLAN**

Maybe...

**COOK**

I'm able for it. I'm ready. You talk about the things you're seeing, how the textures and tempers in the ice alter subtly meter to meter. You say it's changed your understanding of a lifetime's work. I want to see with that clarity.

**BOYLAN**

Do you know where the report from the last submersion is?

**COOK**

You'll think about it?

**BOYLAN**

Yes. Yes. We'll see. I'm sure I left it on the table.

*COOK walks over to the boxes of files by the winch.*

**COOK**

I think you'll like this. I've finished systematising the research papers. I think I arrived in the nick of time, they were in real chaos.

(pointing to different stacks of papers)

Sonar readings. Supply receipts. Data analysis. These things need to be kept separate. There needs to be some sort of order.

**BOYLAN**

That's a powerful job.

(clapping Cook on the back.)

Earning your keep. So where's the latest report? I left it on the table over there.

**COOK**

Now, with the new system it's easier than ever to find it. There's a folder especially for current research, green labels for submersion reports and all the most recent files are right on the... As the newest it should be... right... The beauty of the system is... the ease... of...

**BOYLAN**

Well where is it?

**COOK**

I... Well that's a puzzle.

**BOYLAN**

It'll turn up.

**COOK**

It shouldn't need to turn up. It should be there.

**BOYLAN**

How long did you spend at this?

**COOK**

It doesn't make sense.

**BOYLAN**

Don't worry about it. I wanted to check the depth we found the ice pockets at. It'll shake a few people to hear there's inconsistency in the ice at the depths we were inspecting...

**COOK**

I specifically remember putting a green label on it...

**BOYLAN**

Cook. It doesn't matter.

**COOK**

Look, a progress report from the initial drilling... What's that doing there?

**BOYLAN**

You've gone back that far?

**COOK**

I'm trying to get up to speed.

**BOYLAN**

I didn't realise...

**COOK**

Should I have told you?

**BOYLAN**

No. No.

*The lights flicker again. They stabilise.*

**BOYLAN**

I should look about that maybe.

**COOK**

Something I wanted to talk to you about Professor... On a lot of the papers there's information... of a personal nature.

(pause)

Notes written in the margins.

*BOYLAN starts sneezing.*

I thought they were working notes initially, that they might be relevant. So I scanned through a few of them.

**BOYLAN**

It might be best if you...

**COOK**

And there were little sketches...?

**BOYLAN**

I didn't expect anyone would be going through them.

**COOK**

For example, this one... I filed it as a sonar reading from two thousand four hundred meters, it has a red label... There's a drawing. Two figures lying together in the middle of... my guess is it's a forest? Those could be trees or...

**BOYLAN**

Let me see that.

*BOYLAN grabs the paper.*

**COOK**

In places the pencil has jabbed right through the paper.

**BOYLAN**

You couldn't have lost this instead? When you're out here, you forget there might be others who'll be rooting through your work.

**COOK**

The reason I bring it up is, well how do you classify them.

**BOYLAN**

What?

**COOK**

I didn't want to just blot it out. It hardly constitutes research data but I thought the notes might be transferred somewhere more appropriate?

*The lights flicker.*

Is it of some sentimental value?

**BOYLAN**

Has there ever been a person Cook, someone that you felt something immoderate for?

**COOK**

I'm sorry?

(pause)

I don't see what that has to do with the research.

**BOYLAN**

No one gets to your age with out this kind of thing. It's no secret. Shouldn't be anything to stop us talking about it. Two adults... Some girl maybe?

**COOK**

No. Not really.

**BOYLAN**

Some lad?

**COOK**

No.

**BOYLAN**

That's strange surely.

**COOK**

Is it?

**BOYLAN**

From what I hear.

**COOK**

Surely there's more pressing...

**BOYLAN**

While working on the notes, I find my mind drifts and without thinking I'll be scribbling something in the margins, thoughts that rush right out to the surface with complete clarity.

*BOYLAN walks over to the hole.*

The months I've spent here I could feel something like a tug. I've been plagued by feelings, memories I thought long dealt with... I think it's what's studying us...

(pause)

Since you've arrived you haven't found yourself drawn to certain memories?

(pause)

Perhaps it's different if you're... never mind.

*BOYLAN folds the sheet up and puts it in his pocket.*

**COOK**

Have I done something wrong?

**BOYLAN**

We need to press on... more observation...

**COOK**

There is something. Since I've arrived, I can't stop thinking about it. The way you're describing...

**BOYLAN**

Yes?

**COOK**

It's what happened with this woman. You know? I suppose, yes, she was someone I felt something, what did you call it... immoderate for. But it was complicated. There were circumstances.

**BOYLAN**

There tends to be.

**COOK**

After a long time waiting... you know how it is... pining... finally, well we... we kissed. And now there were even more circumstances. She agreed to meet so we could discuss it. I went to meet her at the... where she worked. It was raining and I'm carrying an umbrella. A big one that's spring loaded, you press a button and fump, it shoots open. I peer in her window and there she is,

surrounded by her work. Elbow deep in thought. She's so passionate about what she does. To be honest, telling you this is uncomfortable.

**BOYLAN**

Hearing it is uncomfortable, but go on.

**COOK**

Well, I thought, this is it now Charlie, be a man. I rap on the window and she comes out. Perhaps I should have just kissed her there and then...

**BOYLAN**

No.

**COOK**

No?

**BOYLAN**

That would be insane. Leave that stuff for the movies.

**COOK**

Well I didn't.

**BOYLAN**

Thanks be to Jesus...

**COOK**

As I say, I didn't. Small talk. But then she says... "I'm sorry about the other night." Sorry? She says we must be careful not to let this affect our friendship.

**BOYLAN**

Balls!

**COOK**

She asks me what I think. "I... I... I don't see why it should... I, I really like..." "So," she says, "that's sorted, lets just leave it at that."

**BOYLAN**

That was it?

**COOK**

We went for coffee.

**BOYLAN**

Christ, coffee.

**COOK**

One cup of measly coffee. After, I walk her back to her office. The sun is out now, glaring. We get to her office and she leans in and hugs me. Hugs me! That was the final straw, a humiliation too far. "Is this not strange?" I blurt out, "It doesn't feel right that we should pretend nothing happened."

**BOYLAN**

Good boy.

**COOK**

It is at this exact moment that I press the button on my umbrella and fump, it shoots open. "It was just a kiss," she says. All I can do is stare at my inappropriately open umbrella, cursing it. "We're probably never going to kiss again," she says.

**BOYLAN**

What did you say?

**COOK**

We shouldn't be limited by social constraints.

**BOYLAN**

Agh!

**COOK**

Are you okay?

**BOYLAN**

Go on! Go on!

**COOK**

"I'm going inside," she says. "We should be open-minded" I say. And she walks off and I'm left there clutching an open umbrella, the sun shining, having never told her what I felt at all.

(pause)

**BOYLAN**

Did you give the umbrella a good beating?

**COOK**

I gave it a thrashing off a bloody lamppost it won't soon forget.

(They laugh. Silence.)

I've been thinking about it a lot since I arrived. Every time I let my mind rest.

**BOYLAN**

You do? Are you sure?

**COOK**

Positive.

**BOYLAN**

It's early yet but the sparks, the seeds of a little notion are developing... It's drawing something from us Cook.

*Sound of a skype call coming through. They both turn in surprise.*

**COOK**

It's...

**BOYLAN**

It's working...

**COOK**

It's working...

**BOYLAN**

Who'd be ringing?

*BOYLAN doesn't make to answer the call.*

**COOK**

We better answer it.

*COOK looks at the screen. His face lights up.*

**COOK**

It's...

*COOK answers the call.*

Elaine! Elaine? Elaine, can you hear me?

*A garbled voice comes through, dropping in and out, impossible to decipher aside from one or two words...*

The connection... Elaine! Can you see me?

(waving energetically)

Hello! I'm in Antarctica - helloo!

(to Boylan)

Can't we do anything about the signal? It's Dr. Hansen. You can see her... It's so good to see you Elaine.

*Garbled response.*

She doesn't hear a word.

*BOYLAN comes over to the computer and looks into the screen, standing awkwardly beside COOK.*

**BOYLAN**

She's blue.

**COOK**

It's the signal.

*BOYLAN walks away, COOK waving again.*

**COOK**

Hello! Yes? Damn it, what is it?

*The connection falls out.*

No! Come on! It... It's gone completely.

**BOYLAN**

(to himself)

We need to get back to the research.

**COOK**

I can't believe it. Her call comes through just like that... She's changed her hair hasn't she? It's shorter I think. Hard to tell with the picture, but there was definitely something different about her. How long have I been away? Two weeks. I really wanted to talk to her.

(pause)

**BOYLAN**

How come?

**COOK**

Sorry?

**BOYLAN**

What do you have to talk to her about?

(pause)

**COOK**

Her project.

**BOYLAN**

What project?

**COOK**

Sorry?

**BOYLAN**

What project?

**COOK**

Her research project.

**BOYLAN**

What research project?

**COOK**

Have you not been told? She's organising a team. It's a study of the seabed of the West coast of Ireland following the migration of the Angel shark. I've applied to be a part of it.

**BOYLAN**

You're already doing research.

**COOK**

For after this.

**BOYLAN**

Angel Shark? So she's secured funding? Good, I'm happy for her.

**COOK**

Over three and a half million.

**BOYLAN**

Three and a half million!

**COOK**

Isn't that fantastic? Private investors. She needs more of course.

**BOYLAN**

When we met first she was still a student. She used to blush and shake every time she'd ask a question. Angel Shark!

(pause)

We have to push on. Further exploration at further depths. Analysis is premature. More facts. Another submersion.

**COOK**

This might be an opportunity for my first submersion?

**BOYLAN**

Nonsense.

**COOK**

What do you mean nonsense?

**BOYLAN**

It wouldn't be smart.

**COOK**

But you keep saying yourself that it's taking a toll...

**BOYLAN**

What if something happened to you? I'm responsible for your safety.

**COOK**

No you're not...

**BOYLAN**

I am! I am. You want something... You need to wait.

**COOK**

I have been waiting.

**BOYLAN**

No you haven't, you only think that. Besides we've a system going. You operate everything much better than I would.

*BOYLAN pulls back the hatch of the hole.*

**COOK**

A trained chimp could do my job. I'm sitting here doing nothing.

**BOYLAN**

You think you're ready? You think you want it? Want what? We're clinging onto a thin slice of butter, melting ice, bubbling rock and magma beneath our feet, and an infinite cold empty space above our heads. Fourteen million kilometers of ice sheet about us. We're clinging on and it's spinning, shaking us off like a wet dog. You are helping. That's your role. And that's a vital part. You don't need a submersion to be a key, an irreplaceable part of the research. You're learning. If you could see...

**COOK**

You don't think I'm up to it.

**BOYLAN**

You're irreplaceable. Without you... At some stage maybe... but you shouldn't feel you have to. Temperance. Caution. That's how we proceed. Breathe that. Isn't it bracing? Cold ice air - like years passing. You want to light a fire under me, Cook. I know. Don't worry, you already have. We'll get started with more exploration, further depths...

*Blackout.*

### Scene 3

*10 days later. COOK is doing squats near the control panel.*

**BOYLAN**

*(over intercom)*

*The ice-crystals are up to a meter-long. I've never seen anything like it. They're like long swords of light... Veins and seams in the flesh of the ice... Frozen in this poetry for millions of years.*

*(sound of a pick hitting ice)*

*Sure enough though, signs of break-up. Degeneration in the ice all the way down. They said it was impossible. Impossible my hole.*

*COOK starts to run on the spot.*

**COOK**

I have a lot of qualities really. Work-ethic. Devotion. A healthy body. An alert mind. I've always put great store in maintaining myself to the very optimum, keeping up to date with all the current ideas, maintaining a strong sense of physical well-being.

*COOK pauses and inspects his body, his stomach, his muscles.*

**BOYLAN**

*(pick hitting ice)*

*There are... ah, come off you bastard... that's it... look now, crumbling away. The chunks off ice are loose, stressed from shifts in the icecap. Consistency like that at this depth is... it's troubling. Do you hear me Cook? Lad, this is the evidence, it couldn't be clearer now, something is happening to the ice...*

**COOK**

Emotionally? Well, a work-in-progress. But I've made no really big gambles. Haven't lost heavily if that's a... Well maybe I have put on a little weight. Do you know the kind of lifestyle we have here? Whiskey, protein mix. All the Antarctic creatures are a little rumbly, seal-puppy fat. Stretching. Stretching is key.

*COOK starts stretching elaborately.*

**BOYLAN**

*It's constant they said... the Antarctic ice will never break-up. Never!*

*(pick hitting ice)*

*Keep the balance in check they said. Some fools they'll look now.*

**COOK**

Get up, walk the length of the room. Sit down. Eat. Walk the length of the room. Sit down. Work at the computer. Not a life... Two weeks! Two weeks of storm, keeping vigil over...

**BOYLAN**

*Eating away...*

*(pick hitting ice)*

*Creeping from the inside out.*

*(pick hitting ice)*

*Hollowing out, right under our feet. If I could just... agh, would you look at that.*

**COOK**

I feel I'd have a lot to contribute. And I have experience. Field research in Antarctica has taught me certain virtues. The necessary operational procedure of a lever. The passing of time. Waiting. I count myself as something of an expert at waiting.

**BOYLAN**

*Cook, if you could see the things I'm seeing.*

**COOK**

But I can't, can I? I'm not ready to be submerged yet. To see what you see. Fracture, degeneration, cavities. I wonder do they want to know? Would it not be a kindness to leave them forget.

**BOYLAN**

*There's black sediment in the ice. The surface is peppered with it. It suggests... I'm not sure.*

**COOK**

Material? Plant life?

**BOYLAN**

*Is it plant life?*

**COOK**

That's what I said.

**BOYLAN**

*It can't be.*

**COOK**

Volcanic activity maybe?

**BOYLAN**

*Unless there was... volcanic activity maybe. I'm going to take some samples.*

**COOK**

All in all I think my personal virtues match my academic. And I feel myself a strong candidate for the research position. I humbly submit the qualities you see before you and suggest that you couldn't go wrong with me on your team Elaine. Or in your bed.

*COOK starts doing squats again.*

**COOK**

Professor Boylan? Well...

(pause)

I don't think he has a real commitment to my future. Talent? Did he say that?

Why then, does he hold me back?

**BOYLAN**

*Cook?*

(pause)

*Cook? It's unsettling to be down here and not get an answer.*

(pause)

*Cook, stop playing with yourself and answer me. Cook?*

(pause)

*Cook?*

**COOK**

(moving quickly to the intercom)

I'm here. I'm here.

**BOYLAN**

*I'm down here on my own.*

**COOK**

I'm here.

(pause)

**BOYLAN**

*I want to see if I can find more traces of this sediment further down.*

**COOK**

How much further?

**BOYLAN**

*Fifty meters.*

**COOK**

To two thousand four hundred meters?

**BOYLAN**

*Thank you.*

*COOK pulls the lever up.*

**COOK**

Professor, aren't you getting worried. Still no let up in the storm.

(no answer)

**COOK**

It's been what, thirteen days? It feels longer. It could be longer. I don't trust any of the equipment here. Everything is breaking. The snow is building up against the walls. It feels like we could be buried. I'm starting to worry... I know the research is important... I believe in the research. But what if we get left out here all alone. What if we're stuck here? Professor, do you not think we should be focusing our efforts on making contact?

(realising he wasn't pressing the button)

Oh balls, the button.

(pressing the button)

Professor...

**BOYLAN**

*Stop the winch! Cook, stop the winch!*

*COOK stops lowering the winch.*

**COOK**

Professor?

(pause)

**BOYLAN**

*What height are we?*

**COOK**

Two thousand, three hundred and eighty four meters. Professor what do you see?

(silence)

Professor?

**BOYLAN**

*Give me a moment.*

(pause)

*Cook, if you could see this.*

**COOK**

See what?

**BOYLAN**

*The side of the hole has completely given way to an enormous cavity. I can't even tell you how deep it goes, the light of the headlamp only reaches so far and dwindles out. The cavity just swallows it.*

**COOK**

Another opening?

**BOYLAN**

*Drop me another two meters, there's a base to the cavity. Drop me down Cook.*

(pause)

**BOYLAN**

*Come on Cook I said drop me down. Two meters should do it.*

**COOK**

Why?

**BOYLAN**

*Why do you think? So I can step out onto the base of the cavity.*

**COOK**

You can't be thinking of walking into it.

**BOYLAN**

*Why not?*

**COOK**

It can't be stable!

**BOYLAN**

*This isn't the time for a hissy fit. All you have to do is drop me down. Drop me down Cook or I'll jump.*

(pause)

*This is the doorstep of a totally new place, somewhere no one has ever been before. I'm not going to turn away. We pause, even for a second, we hesitate, and the jackals, the parasites will be here, they'll deck everything out in their tape. They'll place it into the hands of all the others. They'll take this away from me. I'm here, now. We can't pause. Not for a moment.*

**COOK**

Did you not say temperance, caution? Of course, the rules are different for you than me.

**BOYLAN**

*I've been waiting for this my whole life.*

*COOK pulls the lever down slightly.*

*That's it. That's the boy. I'm detaching.*

(pause)

*No fear. Courage now Boylan.*

(sound of sneezing)

*It's bigger than... shining a light into... it opens out into something... I don't know how far this cave expands. We're looking at a large environment here.*

(long pause)

**COOK**

Professor?

**BOYLAN**

*The floor of the opening is smooth. There are tall pillars of ice, like bones, skeleton limbs, reaching far, far up, disappearing into the darkness... Can't see the top. I need to go further, see where this ends.*

**COOK**

You'll be out of contact.

*A call comes through on the Skype.*

**COOK**

Professor there's a call... the signal has come back... wait there. Please don't do any more exploration until I get back. I need to... wait there and I'll let them know we need assistance... don't do anything.

*COOK runs over to answer the Skype call.*

**BOYLAN**

*There's the sound of... it's water. I can hear it running... must be fresh water melt. Running water! There's running water! This will show them... One last kick! The air is still clear and astonishing Cook!*

**COOK**

(shouting in vain)  
Stop...! Insufferable man.

*COOK answers the call.*

Elaine...?

**DR. HANSEN**

*Charlie, why haven't we been able to contact you?*

**COOK**

The communications were knocked out by the storm.

**DR. HANSEN**

(sounds of barking in the background)  
*Get down Meno! Down! He chews the carpet under the couch. He just sticks his head right in there and chews away unless you drag him out by the hind legs.*

**COOK**

It's so good to see you.

**DR. HANSEN**

*Meno! Meno! Stop that! Sorry, what was that Charlie?*

**COOK**

I haven't talked to anyone but Boylan... The storm hit the night I arrived.

**DR. HANSEN**

*Yes, we've been following that. We expected the weather system would work itself out by now... Meno! Take your nose out of there.*

**BOYLAN**

(the signal breaking up, sounds of crackle on the intercom [...])  
*You should [...] this Cook. The place is [...] emptying out. Spouts of water flowing down great holes. It's extrao[...]*

**DR. HANSEN**

*Charlie, is that Boylan in the background? Can he hear me? Boylan, what are you lurking back there for?*

**COOK**

He can't hear you.

**DR. HANSEN**

*Are you sure?*

**COOK**

Certain. The storm can't continue much longer, can it?

**DR. HANSEN**

*They don't know yet. Just brave it out. Besides, you shouldn't be there much longer.*

**COOK**

My stay is set for six months.

**DR. HANSEN**

*We'll see... Can you believe, Boylan's funding application is an increase on last year? Of course, if he gets a penny of it, it will torpedo my work. Meno. Meno! He's acting up because I'm not paying him any attention. Who's a good boy? Who's a good boy? Whistle to him Charlie, see if he notices.*

**COOK**

I don't want to whistle to the dog.

**DR. HANSEN**

*Say hello Charlie.*

**COOK**

Being here has changed me...

**DR. HANSEN**

*Oh, go on, whistle to him...*

**COOK**

...made me see things in a new...

**DR. HANSEN**

*Just a quick whistle. Go on...*

*COOK whistles.*

No. He doesn't seem to notice actually.

**BOYLAN**

*[...] Cook, there's [...] I can hear it. What is that?*

**COOK**

I don't know whether I want to go home. It's hard to imagine.

**DR. HANSEN**

*I don't really have time for this Charlie. The people I have arriving for drinks this evening! Two members of the board, a producer of wildlife documentaries and a representative from Shell - they're on the cusp of committing more funding, I'm sure of it. Sometimes it feels my career is parceled out in canapes.*

*(barking)*

*Down! Down! I swear, one mention of canapes and he goes wild. Don't you! Addicted to canapes, my little man...*

**COOK**

You feel so cut off out here.

*(more barking)*

Can you hear me?

**DR. HANSEN**

*You know if they commit to more funding, I might be able to offer you a full-time position.*

**COOK**

Full-time...?

**DR. HANSEN**

*(low voice)*

*Do you have enough details yet to make your report? We'll need hard evidence for the board to prove it's pointless to continue funding Boylan's project.*

**BOYLAN**

*[...] there's [...] raised up and surrounded by a circle of deep water. It's shimmering like a blue crystal [...]*

**COOK**

He's taken to calling me his protégé.

**DR. HANSEN**

*Protégé! What have you done? He doesn't warm to anybody. The silences, the huffs, the sullen dramas, I've been through it all.*

**COOK**

I don't want to hear about your life together.

**DR. HANSEN**

*Oh, grow up Charlie, I wouldn't tell you anyway.*

**COOK**

Isn't there some way that you both can get funding. This is his life.

**DR. HANSEN**

*You have simple instructions... You were supposed to get the report to me within a week. It's been two...*

**COOK**

The communications were down.

**DR. HANSEN**

*As I told you going out, you'll be an active part of my research team. What does Boylan have you doing, shuffling papers?*

**BOYLAN**

*What [...] I don't [...] I think I hear something [...]*

**COOK**

Professor...?

**DR. HANSEN**

*Is he there?*

**COOK**

No... What will he do when he finds out?

**DR. HANSEN**

*Charlie, I get so excited when I think about us diving off the coast of Ireland. How are you at sea diving... You can learn anyhow... everyone learns. Do you know I can hold my breathe under the water for almost two minutes. I learnt while on placement in Galapagos... This is a favour to me Charlie. I'll appreciate it.*

(pause)

**COOK**

Write whatever you want and sign my name to it... if you think it will help.

**DR. HANSEN**

*Perfect... Don't feel sorry for Boylan. You know nothing about him.*

**COOK**

I've been thinking about the last day. The day before I left.

**DR. HANSEN**

*I've got to go now Charlie. Don't get too comfortable there. You'll be home before...*

*DR. HANSEN starts breaking up.*

*... there are things...*

*The call cuts out.*

(pause)

**BOYLAN**

*My [...] is that [...] I do hear something... something... Is that in my head.... I don't... there's something down here.*

(pause)

*On the raised section... Cook there's... Cook, if something happens to me [...]*

**COOK**

Nothing's going to happen to you! Don't you dare do that to me...

**BOYLAN**

*[...] What is that? [...] I'm going closer [...] what is...*

*The sound of a baby crying over the intercom.*

**COOK**

What the hell is that?

**BOYLAN**

*That sounds like...*

**COOK**

What the hell is that noise?

**BOYLAN**

*There's something in here with me. It's in the cave with me.*

**COOK**

That sounds like a child bawling.

**BOYLAN**

*I swear. Can you hear that Cook? Is there something wrong with me? ... Cook? Am I still alive or what has happened to me...?*

*COOK runs over to the intercom and presses the button.*

**COOK**

Professor, stop playing around.

**BOYLAN**

*Cook... Cook, can you hear that?*

**COOK**

Yes I can hear it, you're not fooling...

**BOYLAN**

*It's on the raised part of the cave, surrounded by a pool of water. [...] it's moving. I don't think the cave is stable. What's it doing down here?*

**COOK**

You need to get back to the winch Professor...

**BOYLAN**

*I can't just leave it! [...] poor thing. It can't... it can't even move its head. It isn't safe for it here... I have to get it out [...]*

*BOYLAN cuts out.*

**COOK**

Don't move anything. Professor? Professor?

*Sounds of crackle on intercom.*

*Blackout.*

## ACT 2

### Scene 1

*BOYLAN and COOK are in the main space. BOYLAN is holding the baby and COOK is preparing the table for it. COOK is wearing protective gloves and clothing.*

**BOYLAN**

I wrapped it up in my shirt and carried it with me. It spewed up... I think the shake of the winch unsettled its tummy.

(pause)

That soft cheek... Those thin lips gawping for air. Eyes darting, wanting for something to take care of it. Birth and death. Both take the air right out of the room. There you are now, little one. What do you make of all this? Confused as the rest of us I'd say. That's Cook. Isn't he funny looking? He thinks you don't exist.

*COOK has the table prepared for research.*

**COOK**

Table is prepped, Professor. Can I look at it?

**BOYLAN**

You can see her from there.

**COOK**

I'd like to hold it.

**BOYLAN**

I'm not sure if you should... well, be careful.

*BOYLAN hands COOK the baby. BOYLAN disinfects his hands and puts on gloves.*

**BOYLAN**

You've never held a baby before...

**COOK**

How can you tell?

**BOYLAN**

A hunch.

**COOK**

I never understood why everyone melts and fawns over them.

**BOYLAN**

You haven't had one of your own. First time I held my little girl I thought I would break her; that she would snap like a twig in my fingers. A whole life. A childhood. A woman. I was barely able for it.

**COOK**

You've never talked about your daughter.

**BOYLAN**

Rosie? Haven't I? When I found it, soaked up to my chest in water, I thought...  
That's familiar what's looking out at you.

**COOK**

Professor... you're pale. Do you need to sit down?

**BOYLAN**

I'm fine.

**COOK**

I'll lie it on the table...

*COOK places the baby on the table.*

**BOYLAN**

For a start, it is a she.

**COOK**

She?

**BOYLAN**

She. The perfect form of a newborn girl.

*COOK inspects the baby closely.*

**COOK**

No. Not exactly.

**BOYLAN**

With my own eyes, a little girl.

**COOK**

It's missing something.

**BOYLAN**

A bright flowery dress and a bow for her hair.

**COOK**

It has no bellybutton.  
(pause)

**BOYLAN**

Listen to its heartbeat.

*COOK puts his ear to its chest.*

**COOK**

It's... That can't be right.

**BOYLAN**

Humming away four or five beats a second. By rights its heart should explode.

**COOK**

What is it?

*COOK stands back from the table.*

**BOYLAN**

Where to start... a basic test for responsivity. Get me a piece of ice and a lighter...

*COOK goes to fetch ice and lighter.*

A list of working hypotheses Cook... come on, ideas.

**COOK**

Well, first, rule out the obvious... It's a baby.

**BOYLAN**

A baby. What could be simpler?

**COOK**

But it can't be.

**BOYLAN**

Can't it? Second hypothesis.

**COOK**

It's a hallucination.

**BOYLAN**

With wispy brown hair.

*COOK hands BOYLAN the ice and a lighter.*

**BOYLAN**

Third hypothesis.

**COOK**

Third...? I don't know... a... an unknown manifestation.

*BOYLAN clicks on the lighter.*

**COOK**

Professor?

**BOYLAN**

Test one. Sensitivity to heat.

**COOK**

Is that safe?

**BOYLAN**

I won't bring it too close to her skin.

*BOYLAN brings the lighter down to the baby.*

Now little one, let us know when you feel the warmth.

**COOK**

Nothing.

**BOYLAN**

A little closer... She doesn't feel a thing.

**COOK**

You're burning her!

*BOYLAN pulls the lighter back.*

**BOYLAN**

No response. No crying, no pulling away...

**COOK**

It isn't human.

**BOYLAN**

It changes physically. Look, a burn mark along its outer thigh, running from the hip to the knee.

**COOK**

A hallucination shouldn't burn...

**BOYLAN**

Now sensitivity to cold...

*BOYLAN places the ice cube against the baby's skin*

The cold provokes no response either. But, the ice cube melts in response to the skin. The skin responds to external stimuli and external stimuli respond to it...

(pause)

It's a physical entity.

(pause)

**BOYLAN**

Get me a scalpel and the medical kit.

*COOK goes to get the kit.*

**BOYLAN**

Little one... if you bleed I promise I'll look after you.

*BOYLAN notices his fingers are wet.*

And some tissue Cook, quickly. She's wet the table...

(pause)

My mother used to swear she'd seen an angel washed up on the beach in Enniscrone. It was soaked and shivering and its great wings trailed behind it on the sand. What did she do in the face of such a miracle? She ran away. The devil himself was an angel, she said. You never know where you stand with them.

*COOK brings tissue, medical kit and scalpel to BOYLAN.*

Clean her up Cook. The snot on her nose as well.

**COOK**

What a mess.

*BOYLAN picks up the scalpel.*

**BOYLAN**

I'll just make the smallest cut. She won't even notice. Along the arm perhaps. Or maybe just a tiny nick on the palm of her hand.

**COOK**

Your hand is shaking.

(pause)

Do you want me to make the cut?

**BOYLAN**

No. Hold her.

*BOYLAN makes a cut on the baby's arm.*

Ah!

*The baby starts crying.*

**BOYLAN**

She moved! I told you to hold her!

**COOK**

I was holding her!

**BOYLAN**

Stem the blood.

**COOK**

Shush. There, there, it's okay.

**BOYLAN**

Stop the bleeding.

**COOK**

I'm trying.

**BOYLAN**

All I asked you to do was stop her from moving...

**COOK**

You're the one with the scalpel in your hand.

**BOYLAN**

It was a simple instruction... a little nick.

**COOK**

You've cut deep into her arm...

**BOYLAN**

Nothing should go wrong...

**COOK**

Well it did... Shhh! It's ok! Stop squirming. Can you give me a hand Professor?

**BOYLAN**

What?

**COOK**

Keep her still. I need to get the bandage tight.

**BOYLAN**

If you had held her in the first place.

*BOYLAN holds her down while COOK tightens the bandage. Crying stops.*

**COOK**

That's it. There, that's better. Nice and tight.

(pause)

Look, she has your finger.

(pause)

Do you think it's hungry?

**COOK**

(pause)

I'll get some powdered milk.

*COOK starts to prepare some powdered milk.*

You see how quickly she's growing? Her hair is nearly three times the length it was when you found her. We don't have a bottle. It could drink from a beaker maybe? We don't even know if it will drink powdered milk.

**BOYLAN**

Do you think she looks like me Cook? I think she's more like her mother, but she's got the Boylan nose that's for sure. God help her.

(pause)

What are you standing there for? The child needs something to eat.

**COOK**

That's not your daughter Professor.

**BOYLAN**

You think I don't know this isn't my Rosie.

**COOK**

You're crying.

**BOYLAN**

Every scientist in the world will want to probe and poke, won't they? X-rays, cat-scans, MRI. Swabbing and grafting samples off until there's nothing left.

**COOK**

We won't let them. It's our discovery, isn't it? Well... yours. But mine as well.

(pause)

When the communications are back up, we send a message to the university, tell them we've discovered something big. We drip them details but hold back until... a huge event. The Great Unveiling. Professors Boylan and Cook's incredible discovery.

**BOYLAN**

I have no interest in that.

**COOK**

Better again. You'll have more mystique as the recalcitrant genius. Who is he? What drives him? What demons lie beneath that gruff exterior?

**BOYLAN**

Nonsense.

**COOK**

He reveals all in one heart-wrenching interview... 'Boylan's Journey.'

**BOYLAN**

No poxy interviews! You don't know what they'll do to her.

**COOK**

We'll protect her.

**BOYLAN**

What if we can't... I'm not letting her slip away again.

**COOK**

Again?

**BOYLAN**

You want to hold her, protect her, let her heal you.  
(pause)

**COOK**

The hole is studying us, you said. What did you mean by that? You need to tell me if you're hiding something from me professor.

**BOYLAN**

It's nothing...

**COOK**

I'm trying to understand what this is, but if you're holding back...

**BOYLAN**

It's nothing.

**COOK**

Did something happen to your daughter?

**BOYLAN**

What?

**COOK**

Something happened to Rosie didn't it? You said it looks like her... It might mean something.

**BOYLAN**

I was confused for a minute is all. She okay, isn't she?

**COOK**

Burnt... Cut... Maybe they were right about you.

**BOYLAN**

Who?

**COOK**

The thing is... The board might change their mind now. If you play your cards right, we might get more funding... bring in sponsorship even. The Heinz ice baby.

*Sound of crying from the baby.*

She doesn't like the sound of that.

**BOYLAN**

What do you mean the board might change their mind?

**COOK**

I'm saying this will change things. Look at the greedy eyes on her. Give her here.

*BOYLAN hands the baby to COOK.*

Dr. Hansen's project was in competition with this... you know how funding allocation is limited. And they may have been swaying in her favour. But now...

*COOK starts to feed the baby.*

**BOYLAN**

The board have always supported me.

**COOK**

Look at her eat! No problem to her. She's a little fatty.

**BOYLAN**

They'd never withdraw my funding.

**COOK**

It's important that you heed my advice on these matters Professor. I know what I'm talking about. How we handle this will be of huge importance.

**BOYLAN**

They've always been loyal to me in the past.

**COOK**

Ah! It just bit me!

**BOYLAN**

Why would the board change their mind so suddenly?

**COOK**

I swear I feel as if I've held her before. She's got the greenest eyes.

**BOYLAN**

Green? They're blue.

**COOK**

They're green. I'm looking at them.

*BOYLAN looks over COOK's shoulder into the baby's eyes.*

**BOYLAN**

You see green?

**COOK**

I'm looking at green eyes. The whole world will want to hear about you, won't they?

**BOYLAN**

Just now. I saw my daughter. Gathering about me. Just now Rosie felt as if she was back. Clear and warm as if she was five days old.

**COOK**

Did you not know Elaine was trying to undercut you Professor?

(to baby)

Hoo-chi-coo. Hoo-tha-boy. I think I'm starting to see the appeal of them.

**BOYLAN**

Elaine...?

**COOK**

She asked me to submit a report... about your progress here. It'll be easy for me to change that, don't worry. All I have to do is talk to the board. Explain things.

**BOYLAN**

Elaine has always backed me...

**COOK**

She told me this project was a waste of funds... she didn't seem to trust you... Perhaps she has her reasons?

**BOYLAN**

What did you say?

(shouting)

Are you challenging me?

*The baby starts crying. BOYLAN freezes. Pause.*

*BOYLAN goes to the opposite side of the room; he starts to dress in external gear.*

**COOK**

What are you doing?

**BOYLAN**

I'm going to go and get help.

**COOK**

You won't survive five minutes outside.

**BOYLAN**

I'll take the ski-doo, I might make it as far as the American camp.

**COOK**

(laughing)

That's suicide.

**BOYLAN**

I've done that trip so many times I know it blind.

**COOK**

You'll have to. It's a total whiteout out there.

**BOYLAN**

I have to try.

(pause)

You're holding her right already.

**COOK**

You're not thinking straight. Look at the situation we're in.

**BOYLAN**

She does look just like her. I am thinking. I'm thinking this is my chance not to fail her. I'm not the right person to look after her. I'm not up to it. But I can make it across the ice sheet. I can do that. She is beautiful isn't she? A creature like that... she's in safe hands. Do you know, I thought I saw myself standing up in you. Thought I recognised the glint.

**COOK**

You're going to just leave me here?

**BOYLAN**

If anything were to happen to you Cook, I wouldn't forgive myself. I've brought you out here, dragged you into the depths of nowhere, cut off by the storm. Now...

*BOYLAN slides the door open. The storm is raging outside.*

**COOK**

(shouting)

I'm supposed to stay here and wait?

**BOYLAN**

(shouting)

I'll bring help...

**COOK**

(shouting)

There's nothing of you in me...

*Pause.*

**BOYLAN**

(shouting)

You won't notice me gone.

*BOYLAN exits and slams the door shut.*

*Silence.*

*COOK sizes up the baby. He turns and looks back to the door.*

*He places the baby down on the bed. Covers it with a blanket. He starts to put on his gear. Stops. He walks back to the baby. Looks back at the door. Silence.*

*He gets a bottle of whiskey and a glass and sits down at the table. He pours himself a drink. He drinks it. Silence. The baby makes a noise. He pours himself another drink.*

*He drinks.*

*Blackout.*

## Scene 2

*COOK has passed out in his chair. The baby is gone from the bed. There is laughing from the toilet, a roll of tissue paper flies through the air from the toilet into the main space. More laughing. COOK wakes up with a start. He is very drunk.*

*He attempts to pour himself more whiskey but the bottle is empty.*

**COOK**

Where are we? Boylan! That - bastard drank my... and then he walked...  
(burps)  
Oh, that doesn't taste right.

*Sound of shower turning on.*

Where was I... Walking out in that... No... Madness. Where was I? I'm here.

*COOK tries to pour himself a drink from the empty bottle.*

Still?

*Laughing from the bathroom.*

How is it, anybody gets anything done. You run about putting order on things and puff...

*Research papers flung in from the bathroom.*

Puff. What's to stop me from sitting down, wherever I happen to be... which is here... established fact. And refusing, refusing! to go anywhere. Career. Ambition. Sure, arm me with all the little tricks, little suffocations, to get along. Smile, be polite, wag your tail. Don't worry. You're lucky. The major kinks in the life have been worked out... long ago. The storm's outside. Shhh! Didn't you know? The walls are bending very slowly. They're hunched. And now we're talking about that, what about this hollow, booming ache inside you? Surprise! The lie is... the great flamingo pink lie of it all is... What is it? I had it a second ago. Wait, no, wait, I wrote it down...

(Picking up a piece of paper he'd been writing on)

"Invites to the grand unveiling of Cook and Boylan's most magnificent Heinz Ice Baby. Dignitaries and people of noted excellence and importance... with a scientific... and humanitarian... and philanthropic bent. The Dean of University College Dublin. The President of Ireland. The Taoiseach. My mother." We're going to need a longer list than that.

*Looking about the papers again.*

Ah! Yes the lie is...

*Sound of flushing.*

**COOK**

Boylan?

*COOK starts walking towards the bathroom. Stopped by the sound of a call coming through on Skype.*

**COOK**

I'll get it. What's this again? Right, right... right.

**DR. HANSEN**

*Cook? Boylan? Who's there...? The signal is... we're worried about you... Charlie...?*

**COOK**

(smiling into the camera)

Cheese.

**DR. HANSEN**

*Charlie is that you?*

**COOK**

Hang on a second; I'll get him for you. No, only joking, it's me.

**DR. HANSEN**

*Is Boylan nearby?*

**COOK**

No. Gone.

**DR. HANSEN**

*What's that? You're breaking up slightly Charlie. You've gone all fuzzy.*

**COOK**

That's how I really am.

**DR. HANSEN**

(whispering)

*I submitted your report and the board has met.*

**COOK**

The report. The report. The report. What did I end up saying in the end?

**DR. HANSEN**

*That Boylan's research has hit a dead end...*

**COOK**

Yes.

**DR. HANSEN**

*There'll be no discoveries that merit the money being spent on it...*

**COOK**

Sure...

**DR. HANSEN**

*And that any further efforts would be wasted.*

**COOK**

Wap! Out of the park. Bye, bye Boylan.

**DR. HANSEN**

*You threw some doubts on his sanity as well... I was married to the man, maybe I got a little carried away. Don't worry, no more funds will be sunk down his hole in Antarctica.*

**COOK**

Wait till you hear what we found down there...

**DR. HANSEN**

*It doesn't matter. The funding is withdrawn. You're set to come home the second the storm peters out.*

**COOK**

What is the diagnosis there doctor?

**DR. HANSEN**

*We know that you're caught up in something really big at the minute. The truth is, we don't really understand what's sustaining the storm. You need to stick tight. We don't know what's happening. All over the world things are out of kilter. There's snow in Dublin, almost a foot of it in July. People are uneasy. Nobody is saying anything but people are uneasy.*

(pause)

*Stick tight till it passes. I won't forget this Charlie. There's a position waiting for you on the research team.*

**COOK**

Elaine, I'm developing something akin to a passion for you.

**DR. HANSEN**

*Are you drunk?*

**COOK**

You're a beautiful woman Elaine.

**DR. HANSEN**

*Charlie, we talked about this... Under the circumstances...*

**COOK**

The circumstances...

**DR. HANSEN**

*Yes.*

**COOK**

The damned circumstances.

**DR. HANSEN**

*I told you not to drink with him. Are you two getting along? I know he can be difficult.*

**COOK**

We were getting along fine and then he just ups and runs off, leaving me with the baby.

(suddenly realising something)

The baby!

*COOK goes to check where he left the baby.*

**DR. HANSEN**

*Sorry. I don't think I understood you there.*

**COOK**

I'm sure it's about somewhere.

**DR. HANSEN**

*Baby?*

**COOK**

The discovery. Didn't I tell you? It will change everything. You're looking at the next great hero of scientific exploration. Half Ernest Shackleton, half Marie Curie. That doesn't sound right.

**DR. HANSEN**

*Is everything alright? I'm starting to worry.*

**COOK**

It will change everything. Alter the way we understand the world around us. Rupture the fabric of decent society. Change the moral and social...

*Child makes loud farting noise with its tongue from the toilet.*

There's something in the toilet.

**DR. HANSEN**

*Boylan. You know you're starting to sound like him. Call him. I'd like to inform him about the funding decision personally.*

*COOK walks to the toilet.*

**COOK**

Hello there. Do you know where the baby's gone?

*Rasping noise.*

That's not very nice. You shouldn't be in the shower you know. All those papers are very important.

*Some papers are thrown out at COOK. He retreats back to the computer.*

Update. New state of affairs. There's no baby.

**DR. HANSEN**

*I know there's no baby.*

**COOK**

But there is a small girl, about six or so, she's standing in the shower surrounded by all the research papers. She's destroying them all with water. It's quite a mess actually.

**DR. HANSEN**

*Listen to me carefully...*

**COOK**

She threw something at me.

**DR. HANSEN**

*Sober up!*

**COOK**

I'd like to get to know you Elaine. Do you remember singing that song... you have an amazing voice. I wish I could remember that song, what's it face... Boylan knew what it was called... He's knows a lot about you... I want to know more about you...

**DR. HANSEN**

*Charlie, you didn't tell him anything misleading about us did you?*

**COOK**

Did you love him? I never thought of it before but, you must have. If you would only sing that song again how does it go...

*(tries to sing the song, making up the words)*

What took Boylan all the way out here I'll never know.

*(pause)*

Elaine?

*(pause)*

I'd had something to tell you... It was important. I can't remember what it was...

**DR. HANSEN**

*I'll try and get through later...*

**COOK**

Oh! Wait!

**DR. HANSEN**

*What?*

**COOK**

The lie, you see they tell you that it's all figured out. But you still get spit out shivering and scared. But that's not the lie... No you think that's the lie. The lie is that's there's anything wrong with being scared. The lie is that they're saving us. I don't want to be saved. I should have kissed you Elaine. Straight away, I don't care if that's what they do in the movies, it would have been wicked. Elaine... Elaine... She's frozen.

*Re-calls.*

Elaine. You're back. When did you drop out?

**DR. HANSEN**

I've got to go Charlie.

**COOK**

Will you come to the grand unveiling? The president is going to be there. I can introduce you to mother.

**DR. HANSEN**

Goodbye.

*Sound of call ending.*

*COOK swaggers back over and picks up another bottle of whiskey, pouring another drink.*

**COOK**

She'll come.

*Sounds mimicking a skype call from the bathroom. COOK drinks the glass of whiskey.*

No.

*COOK collapses.*

*Blackout.*

### Scene 3

*Sound of munching and eating. VEBA is wearing BOYLAN's shirt. She looks like a young woman and is eating greedily. A massive pile of empty food packaging surrounds her.*

*VEBA lets out a fantastic burp. She wipes her mouth with some of the research papers she's been flinging about.*

*COOK wakes up and groans. He is very hung-over.*

*VEBA is holding a bar of chocolate.*

**VEBA**

Good... What it?

**COOK**

A bar of chocolate... I'm sorry, I have to... Oh God!

*COOK runs to the bathroom and vomits. VEBA picks up empty bottle.*

**VEBA**

(reading)

'Irish whiskey with distinctive smooth flavour. Smoooooth.'

*Sounds of retching from bathroom.*

'Enjoy responsibly.'

*VEBA takes a sip of whiskey then sprays it out. COOK re-enters.*

**COOK**

Sorry... I... I must have eaten something that upset my stomach.

(fixing his hair)

I probably don't look the best. You must have come with Boylan? To tell the truth, I was afraid he wouldn't make it through the storm.

(shouting)

Boylan! He should have woken me up.

**VEBA**

Bouy-lan?

**COOK**

Boylan. Professor Boylan?

**VEBA**

Bouylan.

**COOK**

Yes, Boylan.

**VEBA**

Yes, Boylan.

*Long pause. COOK studies VEBA while she starts to gather empty wrappers, old bits of research papers. She is nesting.*

**COOK**

There's something about you that's familiar. I can't place it... have we met before? At the university maybe?

*VEBA throws research papers in the air. She jumps up on the table.*

Be careful...

(pause)

That's a nasty mark on your leg... is it... it looks like a burn. How did you hurt it?

*COOK comes close to VEBA.*

Would it be alright if I have a closer look... is that alright?

**VEBA**

(finding another bar of chocolate)

Chocolate.

*VEBA devours the chocolate. COOK places his hand on her leg.*

**COOK**

A burn along the thigh, the hip to the knee...

(pause)

You don't flinch. Is it sore when I touch it?

**VEBA**

Sore.

(showing arm)

Sore. Deep there...

*COOK takes her arm in his hands.*

**COOK**

You've grown.

**VEBA**

You like to touch.

**COOK**

I'm just checking... I'm an ecologist.

**VEBA**

You do. Can tell...

**COOK**

Do you remember how you got here? Where you came from?

**VEBA**

Dark first. Water. Hands. More light. More light. More light. Uh. Here then.

**COOK**

Do you have a name?

**VEBA**

(thinks, then shakes head)

You?

**COOK**

Charlie.

(holding out his hand to shake)

Charlie Cook, nice to meet you.

*VEBA takes COOK's hand, smells it, then puts the knuckles of his hand in her mouth and starts to suck them.*

**COOK**

I... that's... yes.

**VEBA**

Charlie. Yes. Taste that.

**COOK**

I've been here too long...

**VEBA**

Taste you. Under kitchen table, drawing animals on wood.

**COOK**

You taste me...?

**VEBA**

You small... Animals with crayons. Bottom of table. Who that?

(pointing)

That there...? Straight, yellow hair. Long fingers. Big mole on chin.

**COOK**

My mother....

**VEBA**

Scary looking. Taste skin. Bitter... The smells of dinner... octopus on bottom of table, crayon dust crumbling, falling, eyes stinging.

(laughing)

**COOK**

I was four. I can see it. I can see her stirring the pot at the cooker, scowling into it.

**VEBA**

(as Charlie's mother)

"Charlie! Come down for dinner."

**COOK**

That's her voice... I'm right here.

**VEBA**

I'm right here. Why are you sad?

**COOK**

Father died. It's just the two of us. She's making dinner but I refused to eat for days after...

**VEBA**

"Charlie! Pet... stop hiding from me." Sun beam, drips of sauce slide down... plop. Crawl out... run... run into garden. "Charlie, wait, come back here. This has to stop!"

*VEBA gathers more papers into the pile.*

**COOK**

I didn't know why but I just couldn't eat.

**VEBA**

All that memory. So heavy. You carry all that?

**COOK**

I remember it.

**VEBA**

All that. Died. How?

**COOK**

He drowned. He was walking on a frozen lake in Wicklow. Everyone was out walking on it; people had driven across it in cars even. He just happened to stray onto a weak spot and the ice gave way and swallowed him.

**VEBA**

Gave way and swallowed him.

**COOK**

I see him butting his shoulder against the bottom of the ice. Blue light filtering through, fading into the murk of the lake water.

**VEBA**

You see...?

**COOK**

That's how I picture it.

**VEBA**

You sad still.

**COOK**

That was a long time ago. I never knew him really.

**VEBA**

Never knew him really. Sad still. All that taste. Too heavy. How you get about?

(pause)

Make stuff... Gather. Gather. Gather...

*VEBA drags sheets off the bed and onto the nest.*

**COOK**

How much did you eat?

**VEBA**

All that... Full now. All that eating, feeling nice and full! Char-lee Cook... I want name.

**COOK**

A name?

**VEBA**

Nice to have...

**COOK**

You'll need a name I suppose. Beyers was searching for Victoria Lake when they came here. Maybe Victoria?

**VEBA**

Victoria.

**COOK**

Forget it, too British. Something else.

**VEBA**

Veey-a

**COOK**

A queen's name is good though. That bit of glamour. Cleopatra. Grainne. Sheba?

**VEBA**  
Vey-ba

**COOK**  
Veba?

**VEBA**  
Veba. Veba. Veba. Veba. Veba.

**COOK**  
Alright, enough...

**VEBA**  
Veba.

**COOK**  
I thinks it suits you.

**VEBA**  
What happens after?

**COOK**  
After what?

**VEBA**  
After.

**COOK**  
Your name goes too, slowly. People who remember you use it. But then they forget too, and the name is gone.

**VEBA**  
Sad.

**COOK**  
Maybe it is.

**VEBA**  
Lonely. Sound first. A little. Then no sound.

*VEBA is pouring water on bits of paper.*

Must get ready. Your hand's shaking... You want water?

**COOK**  
My mouth is so dry.

*VEBA pours water into COOK's mouth.*

Thank you. Boylan warned me I shouldn't try to drink like him.

**VEBA**

Boylan. Where...

**COOK**

The lunatic went out in the storm.

**VEBA**

Out? Come back.

**COOK**

I don't know. I... It's so far to the American camp. He knew the route so well though. He might have... What I said hurt him before he left.

(pause)

I told him something I shouldn't have.

**VEBA**

Boylan.

**COOK**

He's gone.

**VEBA**

I get.

**COOK**

Wait... Where are you going?

**VEBA**

Get.

**COOK**

You'll freeze. Veba. Veba!

*VEBA opens the door and walks out into the freezing snowstorm. COOK stumbles to the door.*

**COOK**

Come back! You won't find him! Veba!

*COOK pulls the door shut. Pause. COOK decides to put back on his external gear, but just as he starts, there is a bang on the door from outside. COOK opens the door.*

Get in! Quickly.

**VEBA**

You not want get?

**COOK**

Get in!

**VEBA**

Sheet. Sheets of ice, thrashing about.

**COOK**

The cold and wind doesn't affect you at all. Do you not feel the cold? Cold?  
(pretends to shiver)

Brrrrr?

**VEBA**

(shaking)

Brrrrr.

**COOK**

No, not like that. You shouldn't be able to go out like that...

**VEBA**

Angry out... Air scouring, harassed, peeled back rock, slushing around. Clouds  
swellin, twistin. Something angry. But feel life, a trace of it. But so little. Far  
off. Far, far off.

**COOK**

Could he be still walking...

**VEBA**

Most empty. Nothing much. But feel. Animals on wood, crayon, crumbling  
under the kitchen table.

**COOK**

I don't understand.

**VEBA**

Animal you draw on table. Show you.

*VEBA takes paper, pen, makes a few marks.*

Eat it maybe. Maybe taste good. Taste really good I say. Yes. Good for eating.  
(showing him the drawing of a penguin.)

Look. Look.

*COOK looks at the picture she drew. He starts laughing in recognition.*

You see? Far off. Life still.

**COOK**

Yes. I see.

**VEBA**

Good?

**COOK**

I've never eaten one.

**VEBA**

I say they good.

**COOK**

(holding out his hand)

Do it again. What you did, when you tasted my skin.

*VEBA laughs.*

**VEBA**

You strange.

**COOK**

I want you to do it again.

**VEBA**

You like it.

**COOK**

Yes.

*VEBA pushes his sleeve back and licks Cook's elbow. She pulls away in disgust.*

**COOK**

What? What do you see?

**VEBA**

Noooo!

**COOK**

What?

**VEBA**

Disgusting!

**COOK**

I...

**VEBA**

Hurt yourself. Green eyes. Brown hair. Dark legs.  
(making grunting noise)

**COOK**

Wait, hold on a second...

**VEBA**

On wood, dark wood desk, sweat, sweat. Heat, tumble, full of whiskey, hands on legs, her hair stuck in your teeth... she like fall from the sky, feet pointing up.

**COOK**

That's private...

**VEBA**

She fumbling in shorts, breathing... puts her hand...

**COOK**

Stop!

**VEBA**

El-aine. El-aine. El-ai-ine. Elaine. "Quiet Charlie, don't talk." "Never thought thi..is would... ugh." "Shhh Charlie, you'll spoil it...." Her lips all red... wine stains. El-laine.

*VEBA starts laughing again and making sounds of disgust.*

**VEBA**

Seed?

**COOK**

Ah.

**VEBA**

Seed for baby...

**COOK**

I wonder are the communications back up. Yes, I should go check to see if...

**VEBA**

Red. You all red.

**COOK**

No I'm not.

*VEBA laughing.*

**VEBA**

Beetroot!

**COOK**

It's close in here. Isn't it close. There's a odd smell too, kind of musty.

*VEBA starts mimicking COOK.*

**VEBA**

'Elaine, I'm developing something akin to a passion for you.'

**COOK**

What did you say?

(pause)

What did you say?

**VEBA**

'I'd like to get to know you Elaine.'

**COOK**

Oh no...

**VEBA**

'Do you remember singing that song... you have an amazing voice.'

**COOK**

No, no, no, no, no, no... What did I say to her?

*VEBA starts mimicking BOYLAN trying to sing.*

**COOK**

Was I singing? I was wasn't I? What the hell was I singing for?!

**VEBA**

'Did you love him? I never thought of it before but, you must have.' 'I've got to go Charlie.'

**COOK**

Ah Jesus...

*VEBA starts singing again.*

**COOK**

Enough with the singing.

**VEBA**

'I don't want to be saved. I should have kissed you Elaine.'

**COOK**

Enough Veba, be quiet.

**VEBA**

You're silly...

**COOK**

I'll write her an email, explain myself. It was the drink. No... I shouldn't acknowledge it happened... Maybe it's better that I make a clean break and never speak to her again...

*VEBA cramps up with pain.*

**VEBA**

Feel funny.

**COOK**

Will I never tire of humiliating myself.

*VEBA retches a little.*

**COOK**

What's wrong? You ate a lot, didn't you. I mean, how much did you eat? The air has gone really funny in here. You ought to exercise a little restraint from time to time. It's looks like you've eaten... where's the rest?

**VEBA**

There's none.

**COOK**

None? Nonsense, there's a store with enough for months and months for two people.

**VEBA**

Gone.

**COOK**

You couldn't have...

**VEBA**

Feel seeping. Big.

**COOK**

(going over to the empty food pile)  
It can't be. Not everything...

**VEBA**

Everything...  
(breathing heavy)  
Inside squeezing. Wanting out.

**COOK**

Everything! How... there's no food left! What am I going to eat? What sort of animal are you.

**VEBA**

Starting to leak. I'm leaking. Is it bad when you leak?

**COOK**

I'll starve to death!

**VEBA**

I've just eaten. I want to talk more about the leaking.

**COOK**

How did you eat this much? Do you realise what you've done? Veba?

*VEBA goes to COOK at starts pulling up his shirt.*

What are you doing? Stop. Stop that. Leave me... Agh. Agh!

*VEBA gets his shirt up and buries her head deep in his armpit.*

I... Take your head out of there. Veba. Veba what are you doing?

*VEBA bites COOK and he pushes her away.*

Agh! You bit me.

*VEBA is starting to breathe really heavily.*

What's wrong? I don't know how to make you better if you don't tell me what's wrong.

*VEBA retches violently. She starts coughing reaching into her throat. She vomits the end of a thread. COOK initially keeps a distance.*

That's... I'm not sure that's supposed to happen. Are you...? Christ.

*VEBA starts pulling the thread out, which is dripping and coiling it. She gives COOK the end of it to hold.*

*VEBA starts to coil it around her nest.*

*Blackout.*

## ACT 3

### Scene 1

*VEBA is lying in the nest, moaning in pain, the sheets about her are soaked in blood. Her skin is coming out in rashes and her hair is longer.*

**VEBA**

Water!

(breathing heavily)

Water... Hurting... Haa... haaa... Hot! Hurting!

*COOK comes running with a pot of water.*

**COOK**

Coming!

**VEBA**

Water...!

*COOK trips and spills the water. VEBA groans.*

**COOK**

This is what happens if you rush around...

**VEBA**

Scratch eyes... Get... water!

**COOK**

And the place a mess... tripping over things... you lose a sense of order and...

*VEBA growls at COOK.*

Yes... quite right... water... patience now... patience...

*COOK comes back in with the pot full again.*

**COOK**

I'm on my way. It's coming. Here. Here now.

*VEBA drinks and rubs water on her skin.*

Isn't that better? There. Calm now. Cool yourself and everything will be...

*COOK touches her skin and pulls his hand away immediately.*

Red hot.

**VEBA**

Hurting.

**COOK**

Let's try and keep calm...

**VEBA**

What?

**COOK**

My theory is... and it's just a theory. First, we need to rule out all alternative...

*VEBA growls*

I think you're giving birth.

**VEBA**

Help...

**COOK**

It's not really my area of expertise.

**VEBA**

Hurt!

**COOK**

I've heard it can be an uncomfortable process.

**VEBA**

Tearing in two.

**COOK**

I can imagine. What we need to do is stay calm. Come up with some kind of strategy...

**VEBA**

Torn open. Pushin! Pushin!

**COOK**

That's it. That's the trick.

**VEBA**

Look at. Tell me what happening.

**COOK**

Maybe more water...

**VEBA**

What happening?

**COOK**

I'm only an ecologist.

**VEBA**  
Tell!

**COOK**  
Oh God...

*COOK looks under the sheets.*

**VEBA**  
Pushin!

*COOK staggers back in shock.*

What?

**COOK**  
I think I need to sit down.

*COOK sits down on the ground with his back to VEBA.*

No everything is fine. Totally ordinary. The top is sticking right out. Smooth white globe top on it.

**VEBA**  
Up! Up! Help!

**COOK**  
No, I think I'll stay right here actually.

*Groans of pain from VEBA.*

Isn't that the strangest thing, and I thought I was getting a handle of things.

*The door slides open and BOYLAN staggers in through the snow.*

**VEBA**  
(Intake of a huge breathe)  
Help...

*BOYLAN shuts the door.*

**COOK**  
Professor Boylan?

**BOYLAN**  
(looking around at the mess)  
You're taking good care of the place.

**COOK**  
I was sure you were gone.

**BOYLAN**

The skidoo got stuck.... jammed in all that fresh snow. Swallowed... The storm... Never, never seen anything like it. Found shelter in a crevice, pitched a tent. Huddled there for hours. Thought I'd die there. I could feel something... something drawing me back.

(pause)

The air in here is rotten.

*Sounds of pain from VEBA.*

The baby. Where is it?

**COOK**

It...

**VEBA**

Charlie!

**COOK**

Things have taken a turn.

**VEBA**

Squeeze, squeeze! Blow out... Blow!

*COOK shows BOYLAN towards VEBA.*

'Where are you hiding Charlie?', 'Charlie!'

*VEBA growls.*

Are you?! Are you?! Are you Char-lee?!

**BOYLAN**

The same creature as before?

**COOK**

There's a burn mark on her leg.

*VEBA brings her hands down under the sheets and takes out an egg.*

**VEBA**

Take.

**BOYLAN**

That... that looks like an egg.

**COOK**

It is an egg.

**VEBA**

Take!

**COOK**

She wants us to help her.

**BOYLAN**

Is she dangerous?

**COOK**

She wasn't. Now, I'm not so sure.

**BOYLAN**

Go on then, help her.

**COOK**

I don't want to get involved. I'll only do something wrong.

**BOYLAN**

How far away is home now Cook? I can't even picture that squabble.

**COOK**

I want to go back. I want to be bored, horribly bored and never have anything interesting happen to me.

**VEBA**

Take. Take it!

*BOYLAN walks towards her.*

**BOYLAN**

Remember me? I'm who found you. Remember. I could fit you in my two hands.

*VEBA growls then convulses in pain.*

Careful. Careful now. Let me take that. You're in no fit state.

*BOYLAN takes the egg from VEBA and places it in down safely.*

**BOYLAN**

(to Veba)

You'll be grand. Just breathe, relax. This is... normal.

**VEBA**

Alive?

**BOYLAN**

You're scared is all, and that's only right.

*Groans from VEBA.*

**BOYLAN**

Let it out. It's good. Nothing prepares you. I've seen this Cook. Well, something like this at least. Read every book there was to read on the matter. Thought it would be like doing field research. Good, that's it. Relax.

**VEBA**

It?

**BOYLAN**

(getting water and dabbing Veba)

Fine. A healthy egg by the looks of things. You're burning up. Cook, come here dab water on her. There's another on the way.

**COOK**

(Taking the cloth off Boylan)

How are you so calm?

**BOYLAN**

I wasn't when Rosie was born, I'll tell you that. Falling in and out of the room, queasy, excited. Elaine more worried for me than herself. She was born on the changing of the nurses' shifts, all the nurses just finishing work stayed on to see her born.

*More groans from VEBA.*

That's alright. Let it out. You're nearly there. When the time came there must have been fifteen people in the room, doctors and nurses... and even my mother-in-law, I was glad of her for once, a full welcoming party. The little performer. What promise... Here comes the next one.

*VEBA lets out a final fantastic groan and then relaxes. BOYLAN takes the egg to the other basket.*

It's over. Rest. Rest and you can see your eggs in a little while. They're the world's now.

**COOK**

Congratulations Veba! Veba?

**BOYLAN**

You listen carefully and you can hear them falling. It changes everything. We're looking at a species now. A continuity. However it happened.

*BOYLAN looks at COOK.*

**COOK**

Veba? She's exhausted.

**BOYLAN**

Is there anything else I need to know Cook?

**COOK**

Anything... Yes.

**BOYLAN**

Damn it Cook, what have you done?

**COOK**

It wasn't me. I couldn't have. Look for yourself.

*COOK leads BOYLAN to the empty food cartons in a pile.*

She's eaten the entire food supply. All of it. I couldn't possibly... not if I was to eat straight for a month.

**BOYLAN**

Everything?

**COOK**

There's not a bite left.

**BOYLAN**

Why didn't you stop her?

**COOK**

I was asleep.

**BOYLAN**

Asleep!

**COOK**

I don't know, I'm not trained for this kind of thing. I'm an ecologist.

**BOYLAN**

You can't always expect others to fix your mess...

**COOK**

My mess?

**BOYLAN**

There's a spare store of food in the generator room. Did she get at that?

**COOK**

I... I don't know...

**BOYLAN**

I'll check on it. Honestly Cook...  
(pause)

**BOYLAN**

Is there anything else?

**COOK**

What?

**BOYLAN**

I mean. I'm asking you, did you... you know?

**COOK**

Do what?

**BOYLAN**

Be honest, it makes quite a difference to how we approach this situation.

**COOK**

I don't understand.

**BOYLAN**

There aren't too many suspects for the identity of the father.

**COOK**

Hold on a...

**BOYLAN**

I'm not judging you... no damn it, I am. This is going beyond contaminating the research...

**COOK**

You think...

**BOYLAN**

Hold onto some sense of professional ethics and keep your lad under wraps.

**COOK**

I didn't do anything. We didn't...

**BOYLAN**

You didn't?

**COOK**

No!

**BOYLAN**

Are you sure?

**COOK**

Certain!

**BOYLAN**

She's just given birth... she had to have...

**COOK**

No she hasn't. She just... laid them.

**BOYLAN**

Maybe she was already pregnant when she emerged.

**COOK**

I can't believe you'd think that... it's unthinkable...

**BOYLAN**

Nothing is unthinkable.

**COOK**

I'm insulted. And me holding everything together while you abandoned us.

**BOYLAN**

Good job you made of that.

*VEBA is sitting up.*

Some species fertilize their eggs after they've been laid.

**COOK**

You just sit back now Veba and relax.

**VEBA**

Better. Turn.

**COOK**

She says to turn them the other way around. They won't grow right like that.

**BOYLAN**

Did she?

**COOK**

You didn't hear?

**BOYLAN**

Not all of it.

*COOK and BOYLAN both turn an egg each.*

**VEBA**

Soft... with them. They tender touch. Need careful handling.

**BOYLAN**

They're safe, it's fine.

**COOK**

What?

**BOYLAN**

She's worried they're going to fall.

**COOK**

I didn't hear that.

*VEBA walks over to them.*

**VEBA**

Two? Which of you?

**COOK**

What - what does she mean by that?

**BOYLAN**

You shouldn't be standing. Yes, I recognise you. Do you remember?

**VEBA**

Voice. Boom and that.

*BOYLAN leans down and inspects the scar on VEBA's leg.*

**BOYLAN**

It hurts?

*VEBA takes a strand of BOYLAN's hair, placing it in her mouth.*

**BOYLAN**

What...?

*VEBA starts whistling to herself.*

**BOYLAN**

My wife... my ex-wife used to sing that tune to our daughter in the cot.

**VEBA**

"Sleep now little one. It's all over now."

**BOYLAN**

What are you?

**VEBA**

(laughing)  
Veba.

**BOYLAN**

She's beautiful, isn't she? And so familiar.

*VEBA laughs...*

**COOK**

I think she can understand...

**BOYLAN**

Shhh!

(listens to Veba)

Where have you gone to?

**VEBA**

Home. The three of us. A life together. 'I'll make a garden.'

**BOYLAN**

That's her. Elaine. That's her voice. What did she know about gardening?

**VEBA**

'I'll learn. We'll be happy if we get away from the city.'

**BOYLAN**

She was so young. It seemed impossible to her we wouldn't be happy. And to me.

**VEBA**

Who she?

**BOYLAN**

My wife.

**VEBA**

Surrounded by books. Scribbling. Green eyes. Brown hair... dark legs?

**BOYLAN**

You'd hardly realise this Cook, but back then... Elaine...

*BOYLAN sneezes.*

**COOK**

Professor...

**BOYLAN**

It is something... strike you dumb. No future. No past. Idiot enthusiastic. Just how her hair frizzed wild when she argued a point. Just that. That's enough. It seemed so complete. And even when fate rears its snarling face... that sensitivity, that impossible thing - to feel, even briefly, open and clear and total.

**VEBA**

(as Elaine)

'Charlie, you didn't tell him anything misleading about us did you?'

**COOK**

Veba.

*VEBA starts laughing.*

**COOK**

It's impossible to know where she gets all this from really. And how she confuses them. I think she's mixing it all up, the two of us being here, you know?

**VEBA**

'You know you're starting to sound like him.'

**COOK**

We don't know what any of it means. Nonsense. Complete... What is she talking about? Veba, what are you talking about?

**VEBA**

'Brendan, where have you gone? You seem to think about nothing but your work. I need attention.'

**BOYLAN**

Don't...

**COOK**

We shouldn't read any sense into it.

**BOYLAN**

That's her voice.

**COOK**

Mental tricks...

**BOYLAN**

There isn't...

**VEBA**

...you're starting to sound like him.'

**COOK**

Best to ignore...

**BOYLAN**

There isn't a note off in her voice.

**VEBA**

'Charlie, I know you find me attractive.'

**COOK**

It's astonishing isn't it? How she comes up with these things...

**BOYLAN**

Why is she talking to you like that in her voice?

**COOK**

Veba, you need to lie down.

**VEBA**

'Charlie, we talked about this... Under the circumstances...'

*VEBA starts whistling again and returns her attention to her eggs. Pause.*

**BOYLAN**

We need to eat. We'll lose our grip if we don't eat. I'll check on the food store. And the generator, I know you wouldn't think of that. Just stand there with a stupid look on your face when the lights and heat cut out. What then...

**COOK**

Boylan...

**BOYLAN**

With any luck she hasn't got to it while you've been dozing. Keep an eye on her. Make sure she doesn't do anything else that might get us killed. For Christ sake, can I trust you to do that even?

*Exit BOYLAN.*

**VEBA**

'I can't forgive you for what you've done...'

**COOK**

It's not my fault they lost each other. That's time's fault. Muddling everything up. He had a child with her but that doesn't...

*VEBA touches the back of his neck with her hand and COOK shivers.*

I do feel something special for her... You know. You've seen it in me. One of the rare real things. Raw, uncontrollable, animal... hankering.

*VEBA starts to whisper in COOK's ear.*

It isn't like that.

*VEBA unzips COOK's trousers.*

**COOK**

I can't... there's more to it than that.

*VEBA puts her hand down COOK's trousers.*

Stop.

**VEBA**

Touch me? Make quicker...

**COOK**

This isn't a good idea.

**VEBA**

Do it yourself?

**COOK**

I... no.

**VEBA**

I do this?

**COOK**

Oh God!

**VEBA**

Very simple. No problem.

**COOK**

I... ugh.

*VEBA starts to whisper in his ear again.*

**COOK**

I don't want to hear. I don't... Don't say it's like that! It isn't just... It isn't!

*VEBA sticks her tongue in his ear. COOK ejaculates.*

**COOK**

I'm sorry. I couldn't stop myself.

**VEBA**

Still! Don't spill.

**COOK**

What?

**VEBA**

Careful. Charlee Seed.

*VEBA immediately loses interest in COOK and focuses on the semen in her hand.*

**VEBA**

Little stuff. Some more.

*VEBA gathers some off the floor. She takes it over to the eggs.*

**COOK**

I feel sick.

**VEBA**

Little stuff, big eggs. Need for eggs...

*Enter BOYLAN through the outside door. VEBA starts spreading the semen on the two eggs.*

**BOYLAN**

She's only gone and eaten the supplies out there too!

*COOK is fixing his trousers.*

You've only eaten every bit of food that we have! What are we meant to do?

(pause)

Has something happened in here?

**COOK**

Nothing.

**VEBA**

Younger... taller. Small sample. Not doing again. No! No!

(pause)

**COOK**

She just, sort of, pounced on me.

**BOYLAN**

This is a new low.

**COOK**

It wasn't like that.

**BOYLAN**

Don't tell me what it was like.

(to Veba)

What are we meant to do now you've eaten everything? Did you hear me?

**VEBA**

More.

**BOYLAN**

Where? We're in the middle of a storm, almost a hundred miles from the nearest encampment... which we have no way of getting to. What are we meant to do?!

**COOK**

Don't shout at her.

**VEBA**

"Control your temper."

**BOYLAN**

What temper?!

**COOK**

If you hadn't run out on me this wouldn't have happened.

**VEBA**

"I wish you wouldn't shout."

**BOYLAN**

Do you see anything else of me you want as yours? My job, my wife...

**VEBA**

"Look at Rosie? Do you not see that she's frightened."

**BOYLAN**

You came out here looking to bleed me dry of everything I know... mine me of everything and make it your own. Then sweep back and sleep with wife.

**COOK**

Your ex-wife. I didn't want to come here.

**BOYLAN**

Don't want a career? Make a name for yourself. Hopeless. You don't have it. You're a climber. A wannabee. No wonder she wouldn't have you. You need to be more than a child to hold her attention. She adored me. You're nothing but a quiff on legs in her eyes.

**COOK**

She wanted something different, not some washed up old man.

**BOYLAN**

You poisonous little shit.

**COOK**

She's finished with you. Everyone's finished with you.

**BOYLAN**

What would you know about that? We shared a life together...

**COOK**

And all the time Elaine is trying to destroy your career. How's that for adoration.

**BOYLAN**

She would never.

**COOK**

Turns out the woman you love despises you.

*BOYLAN grabs COOK and starts wrestling with him.*

**VEBA**

"You're never here are you. Always work. Hiding. What are you hiding from?" "I'm still attractive amn't I?" "Although my body isn't once what it was..."

**COOK**

You've gone mad!

**BOYLAN**

I'll break you...

**COOK**

Get off!

*COOK throws BOYLAN back on the ground. BOYLAN starts sneezing wildly.*

**COOK**

How did it come to this? Hiding on the bottom of the world and the woman you loved silently cutting your throat. You must have done something awful.

**VEBA**

'Dada, look, shoes are muddy.'

**BOYLAN**

It wasn't my fault. I only took my eyes off her a moment. It wasn't my fault.

*Silence except for VEBA humming.*

**BOYLAN**

I was reading on the front step, Rosie was on the lawn, picking flowers... decapitating them. She was two. You wouldn't think those tiny steps could carry her any distance at all. Every few minutes she would dump a handful of flower heads at my feet.

**VEBA**

'Shoes. Muddy.'

**BOYLAN**

She was obsessed with keeping her shoes clean. I was engrossed in my book and didn't notice her. I only took my eyes off her a minute. Only a minute. I thought of the road first. I always had a terror of cars roaring past. Maybe if I had thought of the river... She must have been trying to wash the mud from her shoes.

*VEBA is humming still.*

(pause)

**COOK**

I didn't know.

**BOYLAN**

She's accusing me.

**COOK**

She's not saying anything.

**BOYLAN**

Accusing me, can I not have peace here even? Get away from me.

**VEBA**

Bouy-lun.

**BOYLAN**

It wasn't my fault.

**COOK**

No one is saying it is.

**BOYLAN**

She is.

**COOK**

She's not saying anything.

**BOYLAN**

Do you not hear her? Do you not hear her saying that I'm to blame, that Rosie died because of my...

**VEBA**

Ne-glect.

**BOYLAN**

Don't you dare!

**COOK**

She doesn't know what she's talking about. She wasn't there.

**VEBA**  
Ne-glect.

**COOK**  
Veba be quiet!

*VEBA starts laughing.*

**BOYLAN**  
Shut her up Cook.

**COOK**  
Veba stop.

*VEBA is in hysterics.*

Stop! She doesn't know what she's doing.

**BOYLAN**  
I won't be mocked... Shut her up.

**COOK**  
Stop Veba!

**BOYLAN**  
I should have saved her. I should have saved her.

**COOK**  
Leave him alone.

**VEBA**  
"You're afraid to love."

(pause)

**VEBA**  
I get food. Across ice. Things living. I feel. My eggs eat when hatch. Eat plenty.

*VEBA goes to the door.*

**BOYLAN**  
What did you feel just now? My life. You stole that from me, something that you've no right to.

**VEBA**  
Didn't feel.

*VEBA pulls open the door, snow and wind. She shuts the door.*

**COOK**

Boylan. She's going.  
(pause)

**BOYLAN**

If I could change everything. Anything... All she wanted was to clean the mud from her shoes.

*Blackout.*

## Scene 2

*Two weeks later. BOYLAN is beside the computer. He is moving through a recording he has made. The two characters are starving to death.*

**BOYLAN**

(recording)

...Leave all my papers with Darling in the university, he is to be instructed...

(live)

Christ, who cares!

*BOYLAN fast-forwards the recording.*

(recording)

...and you see fit to go behind my back! Enlist some pip-squeak fan boy to do your dirty work. After all I've done! What was all that for? All those years? Who got you the job! Who? Cut-throat... It's always been your...

*BOYLAN stops the recording.*

(recording)

...and the lift in your voice. Free wheeling. I've spent so many days without speaking since we... I'm a class of secret since you. That's not what I have to say. It's important that we... account... for what happened. Fairly. Is it? Maybe it's be better to...

*BOYLAN presses fast-forward again. Then play. On the recording BOYLAN is sitting in silence staring straight into the camera.*

*BOYLAN watches himself in silence.*

*Enter COOK from outside with a bucket of ice.*

**COOK**

Still poring over your message?

(pause)

You'll get a chance to say what you need to say in person. I'm sure there's a little break in the sky out there. Not clear, just not quite so black...

(pause)

A little line of grey... I thought.

*COOK brings the ice to the pot and starts melting it. He breaks it and stirs it, then, leaves it to melt.*

**COOK**

Do you know I dreamt last night that I melted one of the ice pieces and found a fish inside. Wouldn't that be something? A big hunk of prehistoric salmon. Freezer packed for us.

**BOYLAN**

I'd prefer steak.  
(pause)

**COOK**

Two weeks without food and you're still picky. Why not? Some bullock tottered and tipped over into a glacier. Fry it up and eat it off the bone. Ice-cap ribs, flame grilled. I shouldn't joke.

*BOYLAN starts coughing.*

*COOK brings him a glass of water.*

**COOK**

Help will come, if we wait.

**BOYLAN**

No pity now.

**COOK**

The storm will pass.

**BOYLAN**

Keep fooling yourself.

**COOK**

If it's okay with you I'm going to keep living.  
(pause)

**BOYLAN**

Things left undone?

**COOK**

A life left undone.  
(pause)

Dying? What's that when you haven't started living? I refuse to think about it. Something far off, remote. I'll get around to thinking about it at my own convenience.

(pause)

I wasn't allowed see my father's body when they found him. Would have been all bloated I'd say. Not a sight for a child. He was an organ donor. They caught him brain dead, but the blood still circulating. They took out his insides, tore him up for bits and pieces. I used to see him in strangers on the street, the eyes of my father staring out at me. Thought the green eyed girl in the shop looked hung-over because she had my father's well-worn liver. I hope his heart went to a woman. He would have got a kick out of that... Do you think fate ever brought them all together in the same room? All the stuff, grafted onto new creatures, gathered up under a bus stop maybe. The kidneys and the bone marrow yearning for each other. I hope they did. Because what we buried was

a hollow drum of drying skin. I wish I could have seen the body. Even if it was stuffed with sawdust.

**BOYLAN**

It doesn't help to see the body.

**COOK**

My mother went to such lengths to hide everything from me. As if she could pretend that the death hadn't happened. I just wanted to understand.

**BOYLAN**

We don't wish the same things for those that we love as we strive for ourselves. For others, you want things to be better than they are, for ourselves, we want things to be true.

(pause)

**COOK**

So here it is. Uninvited. A strange tremble in my heart. Are you happy? Is that better? I'll pass... Fine. I can bear that. I can bear knowing that. But it doesn't account or excuse the trembling. That... that is something different. If I had noticed this earlier I might have done things different. What's wrong with us?

(pause)

Professor, I want to tell you... About all the things I said...

*BOYLAN sneezes.*

I want to...

**BOYLAN**

Leave it. There's no need for all of that...

*Long silence.*

**COOK**

We need to talk about Veba.

**BOYLAN**

She's long gone.

**COOK**

Exactly.

**BOYLAN**

And she's not coming back.

**COOK**

That's what I want to talk about... It's the eggs.

**BOYLAN**

What about them?

**COOK**

Don't tell me you haven't thought about this? We're starving.  
(pause)

**BOYLAN**

No...

**COOK**

Why not?

*They both look at the eggs.*

**COOK**

I'm not done yet. This can't be the portion of life that's mine.

**BOYLAN**

That might be the only two of these things that exist.

**COOK**

What choice do we have?

**BOYLAN**

You know it's wrong.

**COOK**

Why? Because you say it is? I don't care about right or wrong. I don't care about science or people tut-tutting from a high ground. Either a creature wants to grasp what life is possible for it, or it has stopped being a thing worthy of living at all... I'm taking what's owed to me.

**BOYLAN**

What's owed to you? Nothings owed to you.

**COOK**

You want to stop me?

(pause)

Because you couldn't. Even if you wanted to.

**BOYLAN**

Do it then.

(pause)

You're convinced. Well aren't you? There's no discussion to be had... You're not for changing.

**COOK**

I'm not.

**BOYLAN**

I know you're not.

(pause)  
What's stopping you?

**COOK**  
Don't rush me.

**BOYLAN**  
All of it, every minute and turn was for you... you... Charlie Cook, you have to fill your belly, have your share. No qualms or any call for conscience on the matter.

**COOK**  
I need to eat.

**BOYLAN**  
Get stuck in. I can see the slabber in your chops. Get to it.

**COOK**  
Don't mock me.

**BOYLAN**  
I'm a hundred per cent serious Cook. I promise you.

**COOK**  
Can I?

**BOYLAN**  
What?

**COOK**  
I'm asking you...

**BOYLAN**  
You want my approval?  
(pause)  
Cook, this is your choice. I... I can't tell you what's right. I've never known myself.

*COOK stands up and walks towards the egg.*

But if you are going to do it puncture the bottom carefully and catch it in a cup. We can't have it look like we destroyed it.

**COOK**  
Why?

**BOYLAN**  
In case she comes back.

**COOK**

She isn't coming back.

**BOYLAN**

She won't. But if she did.

*COOK takes a spoon and a cup. He starts tapping the bottom of the egg with the spoon.*

Just the smallest crack.

**COOK**

I know what I'm doing.

**BOYLAN**

You're going to spill it everywhere if you do it like that.

**COOK**

I thought you didn't want me to do it.

**BOYLAN**

If you're going to do it, better that you do it right. One sharp jab on the very bottom.

**COOK**

Since when are you an expert at this too?

**BOYLAN**

It stands to sense that if you keep tap tapping away at the thing the bottom will fall out, and you're going to licking yolk off the floor.

**COOK**

Do you want to do it?

(pause)

It's just struck me. I'm the father of these things.

*COOK punctures the bottom of the egg and the yolk pours into the cup. It starts to overflow.*

**BOYLAN**

Don't spill it!

*COOK catches the rest of the egg with a second container. He brings it over to BOYLAN.*

How does it look?

**COOK**

Cloudy. There are thick pieces. It catches the light funny, reflects back colours. Not like any egg that I've ever seen. Should I, should I cook it?

**BOYLAN**

No, you'll lose the good of it. Just... drink it raw.

**COOK**

There's enough for two.

**BOYLAN**

Well?

**COOK**

Will you drink it with me?

(pause)

**BOYLAN**

Give it here.

*COOK hands BOYLAN the cup. He sniffs it. Disgust.*

It reeks.

**COOK**

I'm scared Boylan.

(pause)

**BOYLAN**

I'd like to raise a toast.

*BOYLAN lifts the cup in the air. COOK does likewise.*

To us. To humanity. To our unerring capacity for laying waste to the world while searching for impossible horizons. To destroying what we love. Good health.

**COOK**

Good health.

(pause)

**BOYLAN**

God help us.

*BOYLAN knocks back his cup and immediately starts retching and groaning, trying to keep down the egg. COOK is about to drink it but changes his mind at the last second.*

*BOYLAN trying to get air.*

**COOK**

What's it like? Is it awful?

*BOYLAN gets control.*

**BOYLAN**

The thickness of it! It sort of sticks to the inside of your throat!

(pause)

Are you not having yours?

*COOK drinks his. Retches.*

(silence)

**BOYLAN**

I feel close to you now Cook.

(pause)

A young man, all vicious with future. I couldn't help but be wary. But it's clear you've... you should know that I wish everything for you. I do, with the slight jealous passion that's more proper to a father than a rival. Is that... I don't want you to feel uncomfortable. But I do now. Does that unnerve you? What harm to say it... I don't expect you to feel anything back... There's no expectation... just prattle. I suppose we shouldn't put a name on the species of relation we find ourselves in. But there's that.

**COOK**

I think we should eat the other egg... We'll eat it. We should eat the other egg as well. Shouldn't we? We may as well. It would be a waste not to. We've come this far. It makes no sense to leave it...

*Enter VEBA dragging two dead penguins. She's the same character, though she has aged into an old woman.*

*VEBA shuts the door.*

**COOK**

Is it you?

*Pause, VEBA drags the penguins over to the eggs.*

(to Boylan)

She's back. It's her. She's still wearing your shirt... What's that she got? She's clobbered those to death. She's brought meat Boylan.

(to Veba)

It's you isn't it. You said you'd come back. We didn't know it would take so long.

*VEBA picks up a knife.*

**COOK**

It's us. Do you not remember? We gave you our food? Well, you took it really.

**BOYLAN**

(to Cook)

She can't understand you.

**COOK**

Do you not remember us? Veba?

*VEBA looks at them. Then she returns to one of the penguins, cutting at it.*

(to Boylan)

She does remember.

(to Veba)

We're glad that you're back. We thought that perhaps...

*She throws a lump of penguin meat at them. Pause. A second piece. COOK falls to knees and starts eating the piece of meat like an animal. BOYLAN doesn't eat. VEBA comes over to him.*

(pause)

**BOYLAN**

I feel ill. Dying maybe.

*VEBA takes the meat back. She lays a penguin under either egg.*

**COOK**

She's acting strange. Do you think she knows?

(to Veba)

You've been away a long time. How did you get those?

*VEBA mimes killing penguins in a few short, efficient, violent squawks and movements.*

(to Boylan)

What'll we do if she finds out?

**BOYLAN**

Distract her.

*BOYLAN goes to the hole, pulls the cover open.*

**COOK**

(to Veba)

Thank you for the meat.

*VEBA is smelling the hollow egg. Tapping it.*

**COOK**

Tell us about your adventures. You walked through the storm. What was it like?

*VEBA turns to him, staring at him. She starts cutting up the penguins again.*

**COOK**

Do you know, I was thinking about before. About when we talked first. Do you remember? You said you felt sorry for the name. You remember. When you picked a name for yourself. Veba?

*VEBA looks at him. Then continues inspecting the egg.*

I've had so long to think, while you were away. We've had nothing else to do but think... What is worth saving? Extinction is creeping in. What'll linger... And I've been thinking about that. What you said... You were right about that. Do you remember? Perhaps you don't. You said that it was sad that your name will stay on when you're gone. We've done that. We've named you. There's a name. Veba. Isn't that something? You like it don't you? Think of all those names thrashing around after we're gone.

*VEBA turns away and starts hitting the egg heavier.*

**BOYLAN**

We said a minute. Didn't we? A minute, thereabouts.

**COOK**

Veba. Cook. Boylan. Charlie. Elaine. Rosie. Mother. Science. Do you hear them? They're bound to linger a while... Nature. God.

*VEBA puts her hand through the egg. She lets a silent scream.*

**BOYLAN**

Cook! Get away from her.

*VEBA picks up the knife and makes for Cook.*

**BOYLAN**

Stop! It was me. It ate it. He tried to stop me. Leave Cook alone. It was me who destroyed your egg.

**COOK**

Professor?

**BOYLAN**

You shouldn't have left me with it. You should have known not to trust me.

*VEBA walks slowly towards Boylan. She grabs him. They grapple and fall into the hole.*

**COOK**

Professor!

*COOK runs to the edge of the hole.*

*Long silence*

*The recording of BOYLAN, in which he has been completely silent, starts speaking.*

**BOYLAN**

The truth is... I don't know why I came here. And since Cook arrived I've started to feel more alone. Isn't it funny? I didn't before then. I'm convinced I could have potted away like that forever. He's not a bad kid. Arrogant, hard headed. Like me. The place has been tough on him...

*Silence.*

We were happy once... Weren't we? I'm sure of it. I remember... There were gorgeous days, days worth living, days that might have been enough. Enough? Could it be? It might. I remember the three of us... Rosie... she was still bubbling away in your belly. All future... We were looking out across Paris from the tower... Will you remember? What if you don't remember... You will! You have to! Rosie was still a thought, a tickle of pure potential... before any... before... You remember? You were looking out at the city with this queer look on your face. I didn't know what it was at first, what you were thinking.... but just now... you see, just now I think I've it figured, with Rosie growing in you, you were thinking that....

*COOK turns off the recording.*

*He walks over to the egg.*

*Long silence.*

*The egg starts to hatch.*

**The End**

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