

Yggdrasil

A Journal Of The Poetic Arts

December 2017

VOL XXV, Issue 12, Number 296

Editor: Klaus J. Gerken

European Editor: Mois Benarroch

Contributing Editor: Jack R. Wesdorp

*Previous Associate Editors: Igal Koshevoy; Evan Light; Pedro Sena; Oswald Le Winter;
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ISSN 1480-6401

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Vox Temenos Set

Brick wall (Back of stage)		
#5 Bathroom and toilet, shower stall	Hallway	#6 – Roche (Mrs. Rohan) Bed, table, 2 chairs
#3 Locked room		#4 – Bristle Bed, bookcase
#1 – Pinch Bed, bookcase	Door	#2 – Nutbar Mattress
Street		

Audience

[All stage directions from audience point of view, stage directions in brackets, character motivations in parentheses.]

Set

A decrepit wooden tenement with six rooms and a narrow central hall looking downstage to a brick wall deadend. There are no visible doors to the rooms except for #5, last one on the left, no front door, no windows, no walls, to afford the audience a view into the interior. Doors and windows are suggested by 2x4 frames and the actors' pantomime. Two windows flank the front door on the left, #2 on the right, #3 is completely empty with a chain and padlock across the jambs. #3 is the ultimate way out. #5 shows a shower stall with a toilet behind it and a sink against the back wall. The sequence is #1 left front, #2 right front, #3 left center, #4 right centre, #5 left rear, #6 right rear. Each room is numbered on a jamb so the audience can see that. Between #5 and #6, so at the extreme back of the hall, is a narrow alcove about 5 feet wide. One dim-lit light bulb on a frayed cord hangs from the ceiling between #5 and #6. In front of the building is a stoop of sorts where the occupants can congregate; we can infer that is the street. There are no visible walls between the rooms but the furnishings are so laid out that the walls seem obvious. #1 has a bookcase far stage left [see notes for contents], a single bed against the dividing wall with #3, one chair by the window. #2 across the hall has a similar bookcase against far stage right wall, a mattress on the floor against the dividing wall with #4, a table and one chair at the window [see notes for bookcase contents]. #4 has a single bed against the outside wall and a kid's school desk centered in the room, plus one chair, an easel, and a trashcan with various long-handled implements. #6, in the back on the right, has a double bed centered with its

headboard at the alleywall. There's a dresser against the far back wall, a table in the extreme right rear corner, and 3 chairs. It's very crowded in there. The dresser is gimmicked to fall apart when it's finally tossed into the street. There are no decorations anywhere; just peeling paint. We're in some urban hell, apparently now. Even so, an aura of the sacred suffuses this temenos. Sure, look it up, I'll wait. Handlettered on cardboard, pinned to the outside door, is a sign "Room to Let, See #6." Don't blink.

Characters

Pinch, who lives in #1, is a man of many hats, which he wears at will with decisive authority. He's a problem solver par excellence. A master thief who collects items, not for resale (he doesn't need the money) nor for the sake of accumulation, but for specific purposes. So to facilitate some necessary event. He's interested in other people's collections and will sometimes augment them if he finds some niche that's lacking. He's had many names throughout art history: Prometheus, Charon, Pontifex, King, Kaiser, Czar, general, police, fireman. His number is 343. He's essentially a hermit, loves Roche (in #6), has known her for 20 years, always supported her in her need, has never encroached on her private space, stands at the crossroads of passage with a lamp held high.

Nutbar lives across the hall in #2. He eats, sleeps and breathes numbers—measurement in all its forms, so weights, meters and bounds. His province is progressions: arithmetic, geometric, and logarithmic. He has an intuitive capability for connecting the dots; in the real world, he works for the city charting bus routes and does consulting work for cartographic companies; e.g., he can visualize a municipality in Mercator projection. Of course the city pays him a pittance but that doesn't matter, since his needs are minimal. He's in the same league as Pythagoras, Euclid, Boole, Fermat and Ferguson. Like Archimedes, he can fit the math to the hardware. Nutbar has recently started eating at a local fast food joint, where he's become aware of a counter girl named BarB, that she needs a place to live, hence the "Room to Let" sign out front. No, he didn't tell Roche who actually still lives in #6 but somehow he knew that #6 will be available, that having BarB living in #6 would be very good for them all in the Temenos. Nutbar can see the light in there. He's a good man who loves the universe more than himself. Consider him as gravity or superconductivity, or fusion at ambient. His numbers are zero and infinity.

Bristle, who lives in #4, is a street sweeper, a scavenger. She sorts through the debris of people's lives and, in serendipitous fashion, is able to stitch together a useful something out of very little. For instance, a crazy quilt from rugs or a saucepan from a hubcap. Currently she's sewing a baby blanket out of some old knitted scarves. Bristle is a very good artist, can adapt the most mundane found objects to her purpose. She sculpted the willendorf venus from a chunk of soapstone using a fireiron; the winged ball and crosier are hers—all mounted on old broomsticks. She keeps the

true vision, paints by an inner light that only she can see; witness the progression on her easel. Creation is a divinely mysterious faculty. Its number is Pi.

Roche (Mrs. Rohan) has been marking time in the precinct for 20 years. #6 is crammed with the dregs of her life. Two kids, she's not seen them, nor her husband, nor any of her friends; it seems a long time ago since she came to roost in the terminus that we call church, temple, cathedral, basilica. She's obviously had a tough life. Just about to turn 40, she looks twice her age. Up against the wall, but not imprisoned.

Roche rarely looks back; she's not going there. Her eyes are in a future place. Even in such mean circumstances, she's got plans. We can call her resilience, endurance, altruism, fruition, completion, square-jawed in the face of trauma without a trace of bitter. We'd like her as a neighbor. Her number is 3. My dear, we love you.

BarB has been on her own since she turned 15, working in restaurant kitchens, bussing tables, then waitressing for tips, tending bar, and recently behind the counter just down the street with a real salary. For the last 5 years, she's been sleeping on couches in back rooms, back seats, in a broom closet, sometimes a hotel with a shower. Nowadays she's living out of a suitcase and needs a room real bad. A frugal sort, she's managed a pretty good bank account for one so young. She and Roche have a lot in common: quite competent, personable, nebulous plans, no current liaisons, certainly not for lack of opportunity, eyes on the future, and yet the two women seem to be marking time, waiting for something. BarB has no obvious agenda, her act is intuitive across the abyss in a single leap of faith. Her number is 2. Perfect. Barbie and Nutbar together: Their numbers are 14, 6, 17.

Scratch is the only one who dresses the part, spiffy creased trousers, tuxedo and tails, a top hat, immaculate shoes, a daddy warbucks type, that's his camouflage, but note that little scarlet tongue of a kerchief peeking from his vest pocket. He looks like what we'd imagine a tycoon looks like. He makes and breaks the rules at will, knowing none dare question his authority out there where you are all sitting. He's a bankster who trades in money futures; according to the constitution, it's your money, but no matter. He's a slum landlord who can prove he owns the building you live in; he'll hold you hostage to your meager possessions. He can throw you out; he owns Hollywood; newspapers; radio stations, TV—get it? He also needs us; without us he's nothing; so it's an uneasy co-dependency. His number is 31. We hate him.

The Temenos itself is a moveable fane not beholden to either time or place. It can exist in the most august or mundane spheres as and when needed. It affords a frame of reference by which we measure the universe. It endows Earth with the magnificat. This holds true for all life; everything, animal or plant, has a line back to the source of stuff; the rock shines with self-

awareness. Everything moves, sings and resonates. Cast your eyes up or down or out or inwards, the way home is always! there. Thus the Temenos also speaks in a uniquely personal manner. When you hear it, pay attention. Remember. Pass it on. Be as one.

Scene I

[It seems to be about noon. BarB enters from SR carrying a suitcase and backpack. Looks down the alley, passes by in front, takes a quick look into the other alley, stands CS facing the entrance, scans the sky, shrugs, takes the sign off the door, faces audience, shows sign.]

B: (slight tight-lipped smile) When you're adrift, even a mudhole can be a welcome port. Let it be this one. [Enters hall, knocks on #6. Roche has been sitting at her table, back to the hall, apparently deep in thought. She flinches at the sound, puts right hand over mouth, left over eyes.]

B: [Knocks again] Mrs. Rohan? [R straightens up at that female voice, opens door. They size each other up, achieve immediate rapport.]

R: Yes? (tentative smiles on both)

B: [extends sign] It's about this. (R gazes in wonder)

R: I thought you were here to collect the rent. But you're different.

B: [B sets suitcase down]

R: Where'd you get that?

B: It was pinned to the front door.

R: [Looks down the hall, beckons] But how'd you know my name?

B: (Somewhat surprised) Newt told me.

R: Who's that? [They stand in the room]

B: Newton. Said he lives here. Tall gangly guy. Kinda sweet...

R: (The light of understanding flicks on, she takes the sign) Ah, you mean Nutbar, that's what we call him. Now I get it.

B: (slightly confused, quizzical) Am I intruding? You seem surprised.

R: Well, yes. Your boyfriend is intuitive.

B: Oh geez, he didn't tell you?

R: Nope, but he's right to have done it.

B: (tentatively) So... the room is for rent?

R: (thinks it over, nods) Yes. Yes, it is. Let's talk. [They sit, B parks her backpack on the table.]

B: Sooo (long drawn out) Just what kind of pistachio is Mr. Bar?

R: Nutbar showed up two years ago, hauling just a mattress on the floor. Next day he brought a carton of excellent German milk chocolate, fruities, nutsies, almond paste marzipan, I could go on. He was willing to share but I'm pretty sure that's all he ate.

B: Binged on it till it's gone, eh?

R: [nods] No proof, mind you. But I figure he'd made overtures to his god-be-smitten.

B: And she blew him off.

R: He ate weird after that. Slight tremor to his voice after that.

B: That was two years ago?

R: It takes two years to get over it. [Short cognitive silence.]

B: What kinda guy is he then?

R: Oh, definitely your kind. (faraway looks)

B: Anorexia.

R: Almost certainly. Took him a year to get past it ... to the point that he's eating right.

B: He eats not healthy but better than most, salads, sausage, potatoes.

R: You know this?

B: I'm behind the counter at Mcdoggies.

R: Convenient.

B: Five minutes down the street. Corner of Bowery and Acropolis. (shrug of recognition)
That's the ad spiel they've ingrained into us. Sooo, again, what mannerism is wonderbar?

R: Your kind. I'm sure of it.

B: So say you, how you know? (deliberately) In detail.

R: The window of opportunity for boy girl ballet pas de deux is usually pretty tight. His is wide open, you've noticed him, he really really wants you to come live here, you're carrying a suitcase, ergo, ispo facto, I rest my case. Here's the proof. [R taps For Rent sign on the table] Willing to rent my room out. From under me, without a hi di ho. Oh I bet he's got a backup plan.

B: He's like that? Able to grasp multiple solutions?

R: [looks carefully at B from several different angles] Nutbar is a numbers nut. Arithmetic, solid geometry, tensors ... tensaurus whatchamacallit calculus. Steady job with the city; good catch for you. It's the deep end. Jump.

B: Er, um, I'm so confoozed. You do want to rent this room?

R: Yes, indeed, indubitably.

B: Ahah, to me?

R: For sure. We all do. Everyone agrees that Nutbar needs a girlfriend sister lover wife.

B: (carefully) Everyone?

R: Including Pinch and Bristle, who live in #1 and #4, you'll meet them soon enough, and of course Mr. Scratch, who owns this place, you'll meet him sure enough. Maybe better that we hide you from him.

B: Whuh, Scratch.

R: Everytime he shows up he demands 50 dollaroutchies. From each of us. He's about due.
[B looks around, R follows her gaze]

R: It's not much. I've been here 20 years stagnating in the dregs of my past. Time's for moving on.

[Freeze tableau, strike large gong softly with fuzzy mallet continuo]

B: [comes to a decision, nods, retrieves wallet from backpack, hands several bills to Roche] Here. Deal. Hold off on Scratch. I'm on my lunch break and need to get back to my stand.

R: Leave your suitcase, help me move this dresser. [R drops bills on table, they set the dresser in the hall, facing the front door]

R: Fear not. We're honourable. Go do doggies. I (emphatically) have an appointment with the Nutbar. [mutual grins] [B takes a small shoulder bag from pack, puts wallet in bag, strikes a pose]

B: Done. [B heads out the door, exits SR. R slides suitcase under bed, sets backpack under table, moves one chair into hall, circumambulates the room, waves goodbye, closes bedroom door, sets the chair in front of the dresser, sits on chair facing front door, with rent sign, lights down, scrim down, go to scene II.]

Scene II

[R as before, on chair facing audience, back of hall lit by a single bulb, rest of interior dark, front of house bathed in moonlight] [scrim up, R deep in thought, comes awake, takes chair and sign to sidewalk, retrieves another chair from #2, sets it up to her left just beside the front door, takes her seat, awaits developments] [Pinch enters from SL, takes in the scene with appreciation]

P: How moonlight becomes the bloom on the Roche. Hi there, booful. [he adopts the other chair]

R: I'll take that as a compliment.

P: Truly, Roche, you are beautiful. Beauty is timeless.

R: Hey, I've looked in the mirror. Moonlight is kind. You were always a romantic.

P: Something's up. What's this? [While they examine the sign, Bristle enters from SR, pushing her cart, quizzical glance at Roche, brings cart into #4, lights a candle, sits at easel]

P: [Points at sign] Are we renting out #3? I don't think Scratch is gonna go for that.

R: Not #3. #6.

P: (considers this). Uh huh. You planning on checking out?

R: Not so far as I know. (secret smile) [Pinch takes the sign]

P: Says here see you in #6. [closer look] Thumbtack hole. Was this posted somewhere?

R: Right there on the door jamb.

P: Is Scratch tossing you out?

R: Nope.

P: Not me, not you, not Scratchie, that leaves ...

Br: [from behind her easel] Not me!

P: Ahah! Nutbar. I am confoozed. Have I got all the information? Something's definitely out of kilter. Out with it.

R: Nutbar has a new girlfriend.

P: Excellent. Damn well about time.

Br: Did I hear Nutbar and girlfriend in the same sentence?

R: The real deal.

P: Explain yourself.

Br: [stands in hall doorway] Yes, explain himself.

R: (waxes conspiratorial) It's like this. It's light out of darkness. It's really very good all round.

Br: Hoy. You've met her?

R: I have. Surprise knocked the stuffing right off my scarecrow.

[P starts counting on his fingers] Girlfriend, your room for rent, surprise. So...

Br: [Stands behind R] So ... our very own Nutbar took it upon himself to rent out your room?

P: Without telling you. Apparently. Am I still missing some crucial bit here?

R: Probably all true. [Br nods agreement]

P: Shall we convene an inquisition? No? [Both women shake their heads vigorously, No]

R: I will of course ask him about this sign. But gently.

Br: He could easily have taken another nosedive. Nutbar end fuitlooloops gagagoogog.

P: Agreed. [to R] How do you know? Met her you say?

R: Very nice. Intuitive, trustworthy, quick on the uptake. [R hands each one a \$50] From our new tenant.

P: Quick, she says.

Br: Accepted. For Mr. Scratch, I presume?

P: Good job, huh?

R: Behind the cash box at McDoggies. Pretty good for around here. Go eat there; get yourself an eyeful. [N appears briefly extreme SR, sees them, twigs to the undercurrent, hides in the alley]

P: [to R] And you're copacetic with this?

Br: I see you've moved your dresser into the hall.

P: Um, a done deal?

R: All's well. Money has changed hands. I'll manage.

P: We can make accommodations.

R: Pinch, Bristle, thank you both, but I expect to have a seat front and center. This place needs some life. I'll be watching. Wouldn't miss this for anything.

Br: [nudges P] And you're sitting on the hot seat. Roche needs the chair.

P: Quite right. Let the confabulation proceed. [Br returns to her easel, and Pinch goes into #1, lights two candles in his window, reclines on his bed] [R whistles, N skulks from the alley with a bag of peanut butter cups, he's tongue-tied, obviously distraught] [R turns the chairs to face each other; she points at him peremptorily.]

R: [to the audience] Cups seem right for affairs of the heart.

R: Are you hungry?

N: Just back from McDoggies.

R: Food in the face of trauma.

N: ...

R: [she sets the cardboard sign on their knees as a table. He dumps the candy on it, makes two piles. He starts counting and re-arranging his pile] Anxiety? [She peels one and hands it to him]

N: It's all about numbers. How they describe all this stuff. So I can see how it works, and how long this marvellous stuff lasts. Can I get near it, will she like me—gotta do something, anything.

R: Calm down, have another.

N: Mrs. Rohan, I can rent you a room in a nice hotel, far better than where you are now. I didn't know what else to do. Did I do something crazy?

R: [taps the sign] This has changed your life. Also your lady love. Also mine. Amazing how so on the same page we are. It's win-win-win all around. We each get what we need. [N stares at her befuddled]

R: Boy gets girl, girl captivates boy, mother Rohan makes room and then moves on. Isn't that right?

N: (troubled, tight-lipped) Most people don't really want to know about their own death. [They play checkers with the candy cups]

R: (insinuating) So you do know.

N: I didn't say that. [N jumps one of her pieces and eats it]

R: (triumphant) It's enough that I know that you know. [Double jump, she finishes off two of his pieces] [N more uncomfortable, studies the board, hazards a move]

N: Trust is a virtue. [she moves]

R: (kindly) Two years of living in the same house with you. You've earned it. We know that. You're really good crunching years, months, weeks, days, hours, minutes, seconds, now? [he capitulates]

N: Soon. [she eats one more, shoves the pile back to his side] [celeste arpeggiato]

R: How?

N: I know when but not how.

R: You're sure?

N: (nods assent)

R: I see your quandary.

N: Time is fluid during terminal moments. The destination doesn't matter all that much compared to the journey getting there. I envy you. You've negotiated time. [They reorganize the candy into one line]

R: It's always intriguing talking with you. Sometime I think I almost get it. As for sticking me in a hotel, definitely not. You and Miz B are definitely gonna get it on during my watch.

[N mulls this over]

N: Am I missing anything? [in #1, Pinch snorts]

R: (broad grin) The best part of all is that the sign worked. We're c-c-c-committed (fake stutter). [R hands him the last \$50] To ward off Mr. Top Hat next time he shows up. Courtesy of BarB.

[A light flicks on above N's head, he sits up.]

N: You mean?

R: Mcdoggies closes at 10. I expect your eyeful to arrive home pretty soon. There's that *soon* again.

Br: [From inside #4] She's doing 12-hour shifts. Give her a break. A little longer won't kill you.]

N: You know that computes over and beyond the call of hormones and pheromones. [R knocks a hole through the peanut butter cups line]

R: Once more into the breach.

N: What time is it?

P: [from #1] Time to dream. Now's a good time to fade into the woodwork and let the women do all the ritual necessities. [N goes into #2, comes back out, nabs candy, retires]
[Pinch takes the 2 candles from his window, walks them across to N.]

P: Here. Put these in your window, she'll get it. Absolutely.

R: Two cups left. Oh! Here she comes. Everybody fade out. Hum dum de doo dahdye. Hi there.

B: My feet gonna get flat. I keep doing twelves. He knows? All's well?

R: All's well. He knows.

B: I need a shower. Is there any hot water? How's that work? Up to my neck, huh?

R: (affects a southern drawl) Oh honey, you're way into the deep end. (switches back) Pay attention, because you'll look back on these moments as a major move in your life. Your deck just got reshuffled big time. I'm honored to be witness to it.

B: (muses) Deep end. Hot water (notices the candles), two cups, welcome come hither.

R: All that and he's probably burning them to see whose goes out first.

B: He can do that, eh?

R: We believe he can. Worth it.

B: Water. Ablutions.

R: Clean towel's over the potty. Use his soap? Here's a bar. Don't perfume. [B bows deeply to R with all due formal grace]

B: As you say. Thank you. [B enters, drops her shoes at #2, strips while walking down the hall, enters #5, we hear the squeak of the facet, then shower patter]
[N comes out into the hall, steps on B's shoes by accident, picks them up with wonder, smells them, walks out to R, shows them off, shrugs what would you do?]

R: Nutbar, don't be obtuse. Follow her, chase her a little. That's your girl in there. She's cleaning it up for you.

N: The tide turns. Water splatters. Lustral from the font. [He takes B's shoes to #6, opens the door, kneels down, slips them inside, turns to the bathroom door]

N: May I get in there with you. Please. [B leaves the shower, draws him in, removes his clothing and then while they're giggling in the shower, P and Br join R outside, lay their hands on her shoulders]

R: Once around the block for auld lang syne? Maybe a stop at the Purgatory and a nightcap at the Perdition. Onwards, troops. [R picks up the For Rent sign, takes N's chair, puts it back in #2, takes the two candles and brings them to #6, sets them on the table, blows a kiss into #6, hides the sign between the dresser and the wall, tests the chain on #3, P sets her chair inside the hall, and all three exit SL humming some snatches from Die Walküre]

[Scrim down]

Scene III

[Roche comes from the bathroom with a filled laundry bag, sets it in the hall, goes back in to tackle the toilet with a bucket and brush. Br comes from #4 with some bedlinens, adds them to the bag. Nutbar and BarB are getting dressed in #6]

Br: [to R] Here's mine. Want me to run them round the corner to the laundromat?

R: That's all the whites. [Br takes the bag out the front door, exits SL] [N and B come out of #6, enter #2, where he proceeds to take her biometrics with a soft tape measure, 36-24-36, head band, height, cubit, etc., making notations on a clip board. B is quite accommodating.] [P leaves #1 with a pillow in hand, walks to the back, sets the pillow on the dresser, opens a drawer and starts to peruse the contents.] [R finishes in the bathroom, comes out, sets the bucket in the hall, puts her hand on P's shoulder. Both have their backs to the audience.]

P: Here, Roche, I brought you a pillow. Do you have any pillowcases in here?

R: Middle right drawer. [He finds that, unfolds it, slips it onto the pillow]

P: Very nice percale. Did you do the embroidery? [He holds it to the light so the audience can see]

R: They were a wedding present. Haven't used them much. You're looking at the dregs of my life. You're the only one who shows any interest. It seems a long time. [He puts the pillow down, removes a tissue-wrapped cup from the top drawer.]

P: Royal Dalton. Made for the King of Sweden. Note the gold leaf rim. Only one?

R: John took his with him when he left me. That's how I knew he'd not be coming back. Haven't sipped from this one since.

P: [nods with understanding, replaces the cup, closes drawer]

P: Don't you have any bedding or blankets for yourself?

R: Might not need 'em. [R looks doubtfully at the dresser]

R: All stuff that I once thought important. Marriage licence, kids' birth certificates, awards from a wall somewhere, mostly I don't remember what all's in here. One of these drawers doesn't even open. [She kicks the lower left drawer.]

P: We collect. It's the bower bird syndrome. We pile it up, hoard it to impress someone. When there's no one there it becomes a dragon's hoard. Snuffle snuffle paw paw pretty glint then we forget. [He puts his arm around her waist with obvious familiarity.] Come, let's talk about the future. [He grabs a chair from #6, she takes the hall chair, they go sit on the sidewalk outside.] [Br re-enters from SL, retrieves her chair from #4, joins them.]

Br: [Knocks on #2 in passing] Hey you two, house meeting. [N makes some brief calculations on his abacus, then N and B bring a final chair from #1 and #2, they all sit in a semi-circle facing front from L to R: P, R, Br, B and N. B and N sit very close together]

R: [to B] I believe that went well? [B nods vigorously, N just smiles]

B: Warm water washes a lot of baggage down the drain.

P: (pontificates) Ego te absolvo.

Br: So speaketh the highly mitred.

R: Whatever works around here.

B: So how does that work? Is the shower included in the rent?

R: [to B] On the other side of that back brick wall is a bakery. The ovens heat the water as it pipes through the wall. So it's no altruistic gesture on the part of old Scratch who owns the entire block. Merely grandfathered in.

N: Also a laundry; that generates heat.

P: And the city incinerator.

B: Charming.

P: If Scratch is anything, he's efficient. Slick.

Br: Lowest common denominator.

N: He does connect the dots very well. Two birds with one stone. Efficient.

B: I gather you all don't like him?

P: Tarantula in a tuxedo.

Br: Batwing bastard in a top hat.

R: A sleezeball in creased trousers. He could make money at Auschwitz. [B nudges N, inquiringly]

N: I wouldn't use like and Scratch in the same sentence. A thoroughly despicable sort who shakes down the neighborhood. It's fallen from grace into deep disrepair. The brass hinges on the vault at his bank are hot. Need I say more?

B: Enough. Not a good way to start the day.

Br: [taking her cue] Agreed. In any case, we're ready for him. Let's talk about something more pleasant. [to B] How's about you? Who are you?

B: Me? I'm a nobody.

N: Not true. You're very much a somebody to me. Go on. Spread it around. Tell them what you told me. They'll find out anyway. There are no secrets here. We don't lock up. But we do watch. [Two strikes on a rack of tubular brass chimes, with a brass hammer, first on the lowest note, then the highest]

B: Well, alright then. So it's very strange that I can't remember my own childhood. Nor my mother or father. I'm not even sure exactly how old I am.

N: [interjects] Twenty-two.

P: What *do* you remember?

B: Just walking down a road.

P: From where?

B: Some big place.

Br: [prompts] ...to?

B: To here. (thinks it over) Well, to around here. I got hungry and they let me work for meals down at the Crotch. You know, downslope from the Effluvium Hill.

P: Do you dream about getting there? Any recurrent dreams?

B: Sometimes there's a round door. Not a hobbit hole. Round but unfriendly.

P: You're escaping.

B: Maybe. But not running, just walking away from there.

Br: There. Where?

B: (shakes head) Somewhere.

Br: Any colours in these dreams?

B: Red.

Br: Not surprising. And now?

B: Blue. Light blue.

[P and Br exchange significant looks. They've connected the dots.]

N: [Puts his arm round B's shoulders] Continue.

B: At the Crotch they called me BarBabe. It got pretty hairy with the clientele.

P: A rough crowd, then, still now. Criminals.

B: Yes. I walked out of there when my couch caught fire. I moved uphill to the Bent Elbow. A lot of drinking and carousing but the regulars were more genteel slightly. They called me BarB.

P: "B" for what?

B: Don't know. B to be, to be I am. It was a step up. They let me tend bar. Guys hit on me all the time, me being out front and all, but ...

Br: But?

B: The owner thought he could own me too, and when I refused him I became BarBitch pretty quick. I got an offer to come work at the Armpit. Another marginal step up. The Pit, despite its name, is a nice joint. We served meals to fairly well-to-do people. They'd bring their kids. I liked that.

Br: You like kids? [N pricks up his ears]

B: Sure. Probably. [to N] Yes?

N: [moves closer to her] Say when.

P: How come you left the Pit?

B: Oh, the usual. Unwelcome attention. Offers of marriage, threats of doom.

Br: And now you're at McDoggies.

B: Yep. They trust me with the cash box. I can tell a Croesus from a zinc.

N: They weigh different. Shekels, doubloons, thalers, ducats, they all register different on the Achimedes scale. Useful.

P: Nowadays it's paper. Soon it will be stuff you wouldn't recognize as a medium of exchange.

Br: [to B] Think you'll stay there long at McDee's?

B: It's really convenient, right around the corner from here. I'm actually saving money.

P: Saving for what?

B: Something. Somewhere.

R: [Breaks her silence] Somewhere. I'm amazed how similar we are, you and me. It's almost like you're a younger version of me.

P: Like the apostolic succession. Lay your hand on her, Roche, and bless her, you've that right. [All stand, push their chairs back, take their stations, P before #1's window, Br in the doorway, N before #2's window. R and B face each other.]

P: I believe there's exactly enough time for this. Not so?

N: [nods agreement]

P: [To R] Roche, my dear, you get one chance at this. Do it right and make it count.

R: [demonstrates] [to B] Like this, arms up and forward, not raised in submission. Palms out, fingers splayed, congruent. [B copies her]

R: Now. Close your eyes and follow my lead. [R moves her hands about at random. B follows her motions exactly in mirror image until R is satisfied that they are on the same wavelength]

R: We agree. Open your eyes. [the three witnesses nod that they understand the implications of the ceremony] [R puts her right hand on B's head, palm down, in blessing. B bows her head slightly, receptive, on an equal footing]

R: [to B] Take it. Take it all. Take it far. Add to it and pass it on. [B shudders, then straightens up, eye to eye]

B: I will. To the best of my ability. [smiles all round, relief that it's been negotiated]

Br: The traverse is complete. [R passes her hands in front of B's belly]

R: Hey. You're knocked up?

B: I thought so. [N's eyes go wide, a bit slack-jawed at this revelation] [single strike on a piano, middle C, B strings detuned to fatten the sound]

P: First time in, way to go, kid. Congrats. Kudos Copernicus. [Br looks SL, brushes by P, looks into the wings, an alarm clock goes off in #1, Br returns]

Br: He's coming, clear for action.

B: What should I do?

Br: Off to work. Look good. [They return the chairs to their rooms. N and B linger in the doorway. He presses her ardently against the doorjamb. Kiss, a brief fondle, he goes inside, she leaves by SR. As she's walking away, S enters from SL, eyes her appreciatively, follows her to SR, watches, returns to door, sniffs at the doorjamb. S shrugs, backs away from the doorjamb, casts about for a spoor]

S: Confusion. I smell collusion. [he follows B's initial trail, first to SR, looks down the alley, then to SL, likewise, then back to the front door]

S: You were inside. [He takes a box of kitchen matches from his hat, strikes one, tosses it at the doorjamb, grunts with satisfaction. Inside #1, P dons his fireman's helmet. In #2, N rummages through his collection and finds a ruler, works the abacus. In #4, Br chooses a spear from her armorium, stands at her door on guard. In #6, R pretends to be busy with the bucket and brush. S strikes another match and tosses it through #1's window] [sound of nails being ripped from a board] [P steps on the match, snuffing it out, grabs his fire extinguisher, stands guard at #1's

door. S backs up, takes a flying leap through the front door, lands on his feet, raps on #1's door with an ornate ring on his right forefinger]

S: (peremptory) Open up in there! Rent's due. [P feigns elderly distress, shuffles his feet, S leers in satisfaction, then backs off in surprise as P confronts him with obvious delight]

P: Aha, hi Scrootch, pillaged any villages lately? [P offers a \$50 bill, S takes it by sheer force of habit. P's demeanour changes. Henceforth, he leads. At the moment that the bill changes hands, he says]

P: Raped any babes? [S flinches]

P: How's tricks? [S attempts to rally with another match, tosses it at P, who puts it out with the fire extinguisher]

P: Do your worst. We've taken your measure. You'll not burn us out. [S goes to #2, P follows him. S raps twice, N opens, bill at the ready, hands it over, acts super polite]

N: Care to come in, sir? Examine the vermin? (to P, conversationally) Pinch, we're at Terminus Temenos, might as well let it all hang out. Won't make no difference from here on. [S strikes another match, tries to toss it on N's mattress, N blocks it, P douses it, N tries to take S's measure with the tailor's tape]

N: [to S] Wood or bronze? We can sell you a used model cheap. [S snarls, backs away to #3, tests the chain, finds it secure, turns to N and sneers...]

S: Why don't you get a proper bed? Rotten fleabag. [P and N hoot in derision]

P: You said it, you own it. Why not call the board of health. Want me to call them for you? Be glad to point out the other violations. Could get expensive. [S grits his teeth, approaches #4 where Br meets him at the door.]

Br: Ah Mr. Skank. How's the tycoon business? Didn't bring your crown, did you? Your mistook. [She drops a \$50 bill on the floor between them. He's seriously conflicted, wants the money but won't bow down to pick it up.]

Br: What? Don't like honest dirt? Wanna smell it? Someone worked hard for it. Fifty dollars' worth of time. Here's a helping hand. [N picks it up, tenders it to S, who takes it and indeed runs it under his nose. S recoils. They herd him towards the back, he looks to the bathroom, lurches into the shower stall, retreats in horror.]

R: [Comes out of #6, sets her money on the dresser.] Hello Mr. Hesitant, sex and love are not the same. [to P, N and Br] Allow me. I've a few words of comfort for this batwing bastard.

- S: (blusters) What's all this furniture in the hall? I'm cleaning out the roaches. [S makes as if to burn the dresser. P grabs him by the left arm, yanks S's hand with the match box into the bucket. Smoke hisses from the bucket, S shrieks as if burned]
- R: [To S] Don't like the taste of your own medicine? Come here my darling. [R clasps S in a close embrace, extends his left arm akimbo, does several dance turns to the center of the hall between #3 and #4. There she rebuffs him.]
- P: (cautious) Roche, careful, he's cornered.
- R: It's alright, I've nothing to lose. Let me do it. [to S] Your cock is cold, your balls are bitter, no woman will have you willingly. [S grabs her by the throat, tries to bash her face in. P and N drag him off. Br knocks the top hat from his head with her spear. N kicks it to P, P kicks it into #1] [S sags, visibly deflated]
- R: [to S] And as for your vaunted money, everytime I handed you your protection racket rake-off, I gave you your own money. My welfare checks came from your city, I cashed them at your bank, gave it back to you full circle, infinity hates you. Asshole.
- P: [to S] Hey Scrunch, how's the war going? To hell with your municipal fire ordinance.
- Br: Three times. Three times you asked for money. Three times we handed it over. By your own hand, little man, and you can't give it back. We're not having it. Game's over.
- N: Game's gone to hell. We're closed. [they give S the bum's rush out the front door. Br stands four square between the doorjamb, S tries one last lunge.]
- Br: Don't even think it, little man. I'll split your carcass, you'll be gutter crap. Dogs will piss on you. [S turns to the audience, raises his arms in an all-embracing gesture, roars his defiance, shambles off SL.]

[Scrim down.]

Scene IV

[On the PA an immense door opens, massive wind blows through the deeps] [only the central hall is lit from overhead floodlamps past tight barndoors so that the 6 rooms remain dark. It's dim in the hall with a hint of infrared.] [Roche sits before her dresser. The bare bulb is gone. In its place is a screw-in socket to accommodate an extension cord to a toaster that's on the inverted bucket before her. We can see the red glow every time she pushes the switch. On the dresser top behind her is a riot of candles, tiered, all sizes, so she is backlit. She wears a white terrycloth bathrobe with gold ribbon trim, over a white knee-length slip. Her grey hair is a wild woman's halo. She's at the end of her tenure. Tired. Grim. Mechanically cycling the toaster.]

[Scrim up]

[P sticks his head out of #1]

P: Hey Roche, whatcha doing?

R: (wicked grin) Driving up his electric bill.

P: May I join in? Let's confabulate. [he brings his chair, sits by the bathroom door. They take turns with the toaster]

P: [points to toaster] Is this yours?

R: First dahomey we acquired. It was in the bottom drawer.

P: How'd you get that unstuck?

R: Bristle has a cane with a hook. We pushed the dresser, tipped it back so I could hook the end under it. Hooked the drawer and drew it out. Simple.

P: Non-standard tool use. I love it. There're usually multiple solutions to problems. Find anything interesting in there?

R: John's carpentry kit. All useful stuff. I'd forgot. [Bristle comes out with her chair, sets it beside R, looks deep in R's eyes]

Br: How's it going in there?

R: I'm cold. I feel emptied out.

P: No surprise there. Dancing close to a devil like Scratch will suck it right out of you.

Br: Took me a lifetime to recover when I did that. Some of them are mental vampires. They want your life force. It's more common than you might think. Governments are full of 'em.

P: Churches, boardrooms.

Br: Mostly they hide in plain sight and seem really attractive.

R: Is there a defence?

P: Ignore 'em. They hate that.

Br: Usually they'll go elsewhere. Seek easier prey.

P: Sometimes, rarely, you'll have to confront it. If so, do that right away. Because they'll be back.

Br: You maligned Scratch's manhood. He'll definitely exact vengeance.

P: But Roche, my dear, it's not your fight. We'll do that. We've been at it a long time.

R: Sorry, didn't mean...

Br: No need. We know him. He knows us. The ancient game plays again and again, without him we have no frame of reference. Without us, he's nothing.

P: Look at it this way. If you were the last man on Earth with all the wealth and power, would that do you any good?

R: No, of course not.

P: Greed for whatever is a comparative game. It's jealousy. It's about vanity. Ultimately it's about poor self-image. Dictators project their own shortcomings onto their minions.

Br: Fear not. We'll handle him. Far better that you get down with what's really important to you. Right now. [R shudders, leans forward. P takes the toaster off the bucket, flips the bucket over in case she vomits.]

R: [leans back] It's just dry heaves. [P lays his arm around R's shoulder. She rests her head on him]

R: (reminisces) It seems so long ago when I arrived here and jammed all my worldly bejezzus into that little room. I'd no idea it would take 20 years. [B and N stand witness in the doorway of #6. R knows they're there, just a quick glance]

R: Pinch, I never thanked you for loving me then. And you, Bristle, for sharing him.

Br: We spread it around among the sister kin.

R: But for you two I'd have been dead pretty soon.

P: Look at what you've done. Hanging on made it possible for them to find each other. The B is with child. But for you this would not have happened.

Br: The window of opportunity is concise and you'd damn well better grab it when it presents itself.

P: All passages offer new options. [N shows his wrist, points to an imaginary watch, mouths 5 minutes, shows 5 fingers. P understands.]

P: Roche? What do you want us to do with your effects?

R: (shrugs) Doesn't matter. Give it away. It will come back.

Br: Documents?

R: Two envelopes. Birth certificates. Photographs. Diaries. Get 'em to my kids. Anything you want, Newt, name it. [N goes to one knee before her. Kisses her hand.]

N: You've already given me my beloved. No mother can do more. [He bows deep, draws back to B's side]

R: How's with you, B, my younger self? What shall it be?

B: Your bathrobe. I'll wear the mantle. [on PA, the grinding of a huge rock rolling away] [The chain across #3 shimmers in UV light. P gets his keys from #1, unlocks the chain.] [dim lilac light suffuses #3]

R: I'm going. I'm not sure I can stand for it.

Br: We'll get you there.

R: Where am I to go?

P: Home. Everyone goes home. There will be food and drink. A welcoming hearth. Put your feet up. Take a load off.

Br: Last words?

R: (cackles) Frig Newton. [R pitches forward. P and Br catch her, raise her up.]

P: Just three steps. Once through the door, it's much easier. [They lead her through. The robe slips from her shoulders. B catches it and puts it on. Through the door, R straightens, walks next to P, hand in hand] [bright lilac light pours from the wings into #3]

P: [to Br] I'll take her as far as the crossing. Watch the door. Keep the light on. [Br takes a candle from the dresser, now an altar, stands in the doorway of #3 to light his return.] [N stands mute, transfixed] [B, with a faraway look, intones ...]

B: Access to the field. Into the defile. Through the woods. On to the height. Bye, Mom. [P returns, locks the chain] [lights dim, scrim down] [snuff and remove candles, leave candleholders, exit stage, scrim up]

[P, Br, B, N on chairs, paired before front door, leave doorway clear, fifth chair centered with its back to audience]

Br: [to B] Is it real yet?

B: Some of it. Last night was a revelation.

N: (fingers bathrobe) You wear it well.

P: It becomes you. [short silence]

Br: Pinch and I have done some digging. Perhaps we can fill in the gaps. Wanna here about it?

B: Sure. All of it. Where am I at?

P: The trail is cobwebby and confused. No surprise there. Fortunately, there is a source book that records every transaction. We've been there sorting through a lot of dross to get at the truth. We who warden the Temenos can do that. Indeed, it's our obligation. At terminus, only the truth shall suffice.

Br: We suspected when you told us about the round door. We thought, aha, a bank vault.

P: After that tidbit it became much easier.

P: So be it. Forty years ago, Sibyl Roche and John Rohan worked at the Urbana Bank. As tellers and bookkeepers. John was smitten with her, she likewise with him, marriage proposal, accepted, rings exchanged, documents filed, okay so far? [nods of agreement, N slips his hand into B's]

Br: They decided to hold off on kids, intending to accumulate a nest egg first. It was slow going. Some cups, linens for a bed, towels, a broom. John moonlighted in construction with second-hand tools. Sibyl busied tables. That went on for a year. Right?

P: They made a good pair, considered themselves lucky together. One day, the bank's owner made John a proposition: would he take on an auditing position at the Mida's mint? Oversee irregularities in the purity of the gold. All expenses paid, a handsome bonus up front, carte blanche authority at the site, absolute secrecy required. John jumped at the chance. A godsend career, so he thought.

Br: He did not confide in Sibyl. Packed up his personal stuff, stepped into a waiting carriage and disappeared into the night, never to be seen again.

P: Two weeks later the banker dragged Sibyl into the vault and raped her so viciously that she henceforth hated men. Why are we not surprised.

Br: Nine months later she delivered you, Bee. The MO then repeated. Through the round door, another attack, a second child. B, you have a sibling, but we don't know who, what or where.

[B and N regard each other curiously]

P: Sibyl bided her time, laid plans, embezzled a fortune which the banker never missed. After all, she kept the books. But she feared for her life. And for her kids. It was obvious to her by now that John was dead. His cup never returned. Sibyl bought forged documents. Paid the headmaster at the Corinth Creche a serious pile of loot to care for her daughter. We don't know whether she provided for the other, or where. And lest you think that it's you, Nutbar, it's not so. We know who you are and where you're from. You're with the right girl. [obvious relief by B and N]

P: Roche fled to Cefalu, climbed a rock, cried out in her desperation. Whence we heard and took her into the sanctuary here. Fifteen years passed. Sometimes we run interference for her. Bee grew up to nubile stature. Mother and daughter shared the same dreams but were unable to compare notes.

Br: The banker did pursue her. But as Roche aged visibly he lost interest. So long as she paid him as do we all that sufficed. Not so with Roche's daughter. [To B] Do you see why you fled the Creche and turned away from your shared memories?

B: And why I've been so standoffish with men in general.

Br: Just so. ...And the epiphany?

N: You mean Mr. Scratch?

P: That's right. He's a feral animal. He's looking with his nose, wants to chase your ass through the woods. You, B. Fortunately he's never seen your face. Nor did Roche recognize her own daughter all grown up. You two are indeed lucky together because we can confuse Mr. Bankster by screwing with the pheromones. [P and Br grin at that one]

P: Probably. We can maybe make him think you're not what you seem to be. Rather than desirable, maybe you can be dessicated and dead. [to B] Wanna talk to your mom? We can do that now and here. Later, depending on where you decide to go, might not be so easy. Let us prove to you that death can be full of life. Yes? [B nods, P sets the telephone from his room on the empty chair]

P: Here, hang on to the twisted pair of wires [hands them the phone wire]. Roche's number is 21-3-0, you're 21-2-0. [he lifts the handset, jiggles the cradle, dial tone audible on the PA, he dials, it rings, R answers]

P: Roche, can you hear me?

R: (faraway, EQ rolloff top and bottom) Hi Pinch, yes I can.

P: Here, talk to Bee. Make it quick. We're gonna lose this connection pretty soon.

B: Mom? Where are you?

R: I'm home. Just as I imagined it. The meadow is full of flowers, the peach tree is in bloom, I just planted a pomegranate.

B: How'd you get there? I lost sight of you heading up.

R: Always take a good look around. I could see our valley. So I caught a ride on a water droplet. Surfed it downstream to our pool. Got off before the Falls.

B: And you're comfortable?

R: Very much so. He had it all ready. Smoke from the chimney, pie in the oven, down comforter on the bed. Nice sunny bedroom. B, my dear, we're congenial together. How's about you?

B: We're good. Moving soon. I'm pregnant. We've got plans.

R: So do we. Boredom is not an issue. We're building a future.

B: So are we. [crackle on the line]

R: Keep your eye slightly above the horizon. Good fortune attend you. [more ominous crackle, a rumble of thunder, P grabs the phone]

P: Roche! We're up against it. This sanctuary is coming down. I assure you that we're on it. B and Nutty are made for each other. We, they, somehow. I'll send word how it turns out. Probably the pool, or the Falls, Roche ... [the line goes down]

P: All right, this is it. He's coming. I'll throw some distraction at him.

B: What should I do?

P: Leave the robe, we'll pack it. Go to work as usual.

B: Should I tell them, they owe me two weeks' wages.

P: Don't tell them anything. Scratch owns Dogs and Hogs. Don't give 'em any warning. Put some travel food in a bag. Do as you see fit. Leave right now, right now. [P exits SL, B exits SR]

Br: [to N] Okay, from here on, we're on a really tight schedule! Grab your personal stuff, what you'll want to take. Nothing heavy.

[N takes 2 chairs back into #2, wraps the metronome in his pillow, wraps the abacus in a blanket] [Br picks up the chair and phone, set them in #1, goes into #4, slips a liner into one of the trash cans, drops in a large knife, several house painters' brushes, wraps her mirror in a pillowcase, rolls the can to the dresser in the hall, lays the mirror on the dresser, starts rummaging through the bottom drawer.]

Br: Nuts! You want these tools? Carpentry stuff. Nice saw.

N: Yes! All his tools. [she puts them in the can, he gives her the metronome, she set the abacus on the mirror, continues packing the can: metronome, shoes, B's backpack, bed linens]

Br: Search the room. Toss the mattress, pull the bed from the wall, look behind the headboard.

N: What am I looking for?

Br: Roche absconded with a pile of loot. Some of it is surely still here. Some sort of flat package. [Br dumps B's suitcase contents into the can]

Br: Mostly clothes. Hey! Got any threads you wanna bring?

N: I'll wear 'em. [he goes back into #2, grabs his slide rule and some notebooks, pants, shirt]

N: Take these. [he goes back to searching #6] [overhead lights flicker in the hall]

Br: Yeah, yeah, I'm on it. Towels. Where's her robe? [The can fills up, she scrunches it down]

Br: Blankets from the bed!

N: Checked everywhere. Nothing. No holes in the walls. [Outside Scratch enters from SL, he wears a blue serge pinstripe suit, no hat, wild-haired, delegates two volunteers from the audience]

S: You and you. I'll pay you \$50 each to carry that dresser out and heave it into the gutter. [as the transaction changes hands, P slips into #1 via the window]

Br: Crap? He's here. [she lays the mirror and abacus in the can, claps on the lid]

Br: Get in the shower stall and shut up. [she rolls the can into the bathroom to block him in, goes to #4, grabs her spear] [the 2 goons take the dresser, candlesticks fall to shambles. As they're passing #1, Pinch lunges out, opens the top drawer, rescues the cup] [they toss the dresser onto the sidewalk where it falls apart, S laughs with satisfaction, leaves SL, rubbing his hands, the 2 ruffians return to their audience seats. Br rolls the can out, she and N survey the damage. P brings out the cup and a bottle of Haig and Haig, sets them on a chair, B returns from SR with several wrapped sandwiches, sets them on the other chair. Then they examine the dresser.]

Br: Has to be in here. We looked all over #6. [the sound of heavy blows and the shifting of foundation walls]

N: Sounds like they're trying to break through the back wall.

B: Did you pack my robe?

Br: Here's some pics, wedding photos. That's Sibyl, geez, whatta honey. And that must be John Rohan. No wonder he chased her long and hard.

P: Documents. Aha, birth certificates. Here's yours, B. Beatrix Amelia Rohan. B.A.R. You think Mama knew something. Oh, here's what I've been wondering about. Benedict Urban Rohan. You've got a younger brother, B. Probably you should try to find him. He'd like to know.

N: [to B] Is the food all you brought?

B: I could have snatched the cash box, but there's heavy baggage that goes along with that. I walked away from it. We don't need it. [Br puts the folders in the can, then starts pulling drawers from the wreckage (top)]

Br: Get the other trash can [she empties the remaining contents into the can]

Br: Nope. Could we be wrong?

P: Take it apart. [Br pulls the top off the dresser, the sides fall completely apart]

Br: Nope. Oh, wait a minute. Let's have your wonderbar.

P: I see. [he gets it] Pry open the bottom. It's shallower than the others. [a thin veneer peels away]

Br: And there it is. I knew it. Let's see what she stashed. You open it, B, it's yours. [B unclips a large manilla envelope. Looks inside, hands it to N]

N: One two three many, geez, big bills, a lot.

P: There's your nest egg, kids.

Br: B, you were right. You didn't need it. Your mama's proud of you.

P: I'll send word. I'll tell her. [P opens the can, slides the envelope in, sets the food parcels on top, latches the lid. Then he sets the bottle and cup on the can] [More sounds of the back wall getting mauled by heavy machinery]

P: [to B and N] Time to go. You've gotta decide right now.

N: There are options?

Br: There's always multiple solutions. Right now you're down to only two.

B: Name them. Where? How? [On the PA the shrieking of a tortured dog, a brick falls from the back wall, crashes into the candlesticks below, more rumbles of thunder]

P: [to audience] The terminus gives up its ancient racial memory, lightning strikes the tower.

Br: [to B and N] You've seen the portal open and close. You know that it works. The sanctuary offers escape ... [to B] and you know something about that.

B: Can we ...?

Br: You can. But we won't allow it.

B: But...

P: Roche planted a pomegranate tree. They're building their own unique universe. After what they're been through, they need the time and space to heal themselves.

Br: They've had enough of the likes of us. [indicates audience with the sweep of her hand] Give them that. Don't interfere. [on the PA, shattering glass, another brick topples down, more machinery]

B: Then to our own ...?

Br: You could. We're going out that way. But we don't advise it.

P: The hard fact is that paradise becomes boring. You could live well ...But you'd not be able to interact with your own kind. [points at audience]

Br: It's like looking through a one-way glass. You could do just very little, at great expense of thought and energy. Not good.

N: Mass and energy relate in asymptotic fashion. I got it. [P and Br nod]

P: You do. I thought you would. [several more bricks fall down, helicopter sounds, heavy blows on an anvil, excited birds on a common roost, distant siren wail]

P: Besides, we're going a lot farther than mere paradise. We can't take you. Ours is to serve here, to prepare the way. To offer knowledge, to point at completion.

B: Time stretches thin.

Br: Can you feel it?

B: [to N] Out. That way. [B points at audience]

N: Incarnation is to accrue knowledge. Experience. Perhaps wisdom. It's a long row to hoe.

Br: [embraces him, a quick kiss] We believe you'll do well. [P pours the last of the bottle into the cup]

P: A stirrup cup then, before you dare the world. [Faint fanfare, the Berlioz Tuba Mirum... many bricks, much chaotic human chatter, marching feet, dragon belch]

P: We share alike with thee. [They drink, B, N, Br, P]

N: Excellent. How old is this?

P: Haig & Haig, 1898. They knew what it's about. Last whiff of mercy goes to you (hands the cup to B, she secretes it into the can.)

B: My obligation. I'll remember. [P and Br bow, watch them leave, hauling the can between them, up the aisle, into the back of the audience]

N: [Shouts back] Any last advice?

P: Hard northwest. Out the ghetto, past Golgotha. If you think you're being shadowed, enter the left eye of the skull. Though he indwells it, he dare not follow you into it. He fears the labyrinth of his own mind. Eventually he'll turn away and seek easier prey. There's no shortage of such. (snorts in derision)

Br: [waves] Within infinity there's sanctuary for all! We'll meet again. B! your daughter loves you. Be well. (sotto voce) God speed. [bows to the earth] [persistent hammer blows, more bricks, a pile of accumulant trash, syrofoam, plastic bags, splatter sounds, several pop bottles with red water, a groan of despair en chorus, bass drum, sabre rattle, lights flicker, strobe flash]

P: Time's up. He comes to destroy us. Be gone. [P takes the bottle, returns it to #1, Br takes the two chairs, sets them upended on the desk in #2, they enter #4]

P: Only girl in the world, where are we going next? [Br turns the easel so the audience can see it. It's a cliff, ridged as a rough skin, 2 eyes, some spavined trees on top, one of them a skewed cross, lurid light in the back scrim, birds overhead]

Br: Here. That's what it looks like. It seems to be primordial. Don't know where.

P: Ah! I know. Seen it many times, not so craggy now as then. We'll go there and rest a while. The view is good. Abundance, prosperity. We can do a lot in preparation for now and soon. [Lilac light pours from SL into #3, Br retrieves some clothing from the second can outside.]

Br: Some red herring, pheromones to confutatus. (leers) Enjoy, Scratch,

P: He'll go berserk, wants it, can't get it, dare not follow, trapped by his own device. [Br gets a spear and the Willendorp staff from #4, P unlocks the chain, takes the spear, Br rubs the clothing on the doorjamb, discards them on a debris pile.]

P: I've always loved you.

Br: And I with thee. [They leave, into the light, side by side, leaving the chain and padlock hanging] [S enters from SL, dressed in scarlet and black, short horns on his forehead, carries a big wrecking bar]

S: Now we'll see what's what. [sniffs the outer doorjamb, turns in confusion several times, bares his teeth at the audience, follows the spoor inside, sniffs the doorjamb of #3, tests the padlock, smashes the chain several times against the doorjamb, S pokes at the clothing, goes back to #3, bashes the doorjamb with the crowbar, grabs the lock, steps through far as the chain allows, cries out in pain as if burned by the lock, retreats to the hall, drops the chain, descends into guttural growls and bestial noises, makes a quick search of the rooms, finds the cardboard sign, realizes he's been had good and proper. He throws the sign on the debris pile, smashes at it in his fury, red light descends down the brick wall as he pounds it with the iron bar. Then he goes to #3, pries off the lintel, kicks down the jamb, we can catch just a few snatches of his ranting] ... never come back through here ... fire ... brimstone ... boiling oil ... blood in the gutters ... evil destroys itself ... all interspersed with incoherent grunts and gasps [then he destroys the front door] ...die! ... lightning bolts ... be blind unto me ... (maniacal laughter) [red strobe flashes, thunder, grinding stones] [turns to audience] beware of me, revere me, give yourselves, give me your sons

[threatens them with the wrecking bar, stalks off stage SL, sound of crowbar hitting the floor offstage]

[Curtain]

HF

Oct. 25, 2017

ANNEX

Bristle's collection (#4)

Brooms of all kinds, mops, brush and dustpan, buckets, 2 trash cans on a cart, whisks, paint brushes, shepherds crook, blindman's canes, a crozier, staff with Venus Finial, a spear, javelin, forked staff, rods, copper busbar, shilelach, golf club, baseball bat, tree branch, plastic bags, pens, pencils, paint palette, easel, wooden spoons, fishing pole, pitchfork.

Nutbar's collection (#2)

Abacus, tape measure, tailor's tape, meter stick, yardstick, rulers, metronome, Rubic's cube, table of Pythagoras, geometric templates, calipers, magnetic compass, dreamcatcher (from Pinch), blackboard and chalk, pens, pencils, paper, books, glass ball, clipboards, T square, trisquare, steel square, origami.

Pinch's collection (#1)

Hats: Fireman's helmet, crown, Kaiser Wilhelm helmet with spike, mitre, police officer's cap with visor, several lock sets, big ring with keys, rotary dial telephone, fire extinguisher, candelabrum, crucifix, shepherd's crook, alarm clock, Haig & Haig pinch bottle.

Post Scriptum

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