

LUNACY

By

Sandra Perlman

SYNOPSIS

The year is 1827 and the rising young Shakespearean actor Edwin Forrest is preparing to play King Lear when a young woman interrupts him with a proposal: Meet the perfect Lear - her father. If Edwin follows this stranger is it an act of kindness - lunacy - or an actor's dream come true. What is the price of perfection?

CAST LIST

2 m. 1 w.

CORNELIA LAMB.....a Quaker woman who supervises Friends Asylum

EDWIN FORREST.....the rising young Shakespearean actor, twenty-one years old, who is preparing for his production of King Lear

BENJAMIN LAMB.....Cornelia's father, a former schoolteacher, now a patient at Friends Asylum, who believes he is King Lear.

TIME

Fall and Winter, 1827

PLACE

Walnut Street Theatre/ Friends Asylum, Philadelphia /Bowery Theatre, NYC

Two acts/Seven scenes

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REPRESENTATION

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ACT ONE

Scene One - The Walnut Street Theater

EDWIN stands on an empty stage. There is a bound copy of Shakespeare's King Lear brightly illuminated on a stand. It is FORREST's prompt book. He is only twenty-one but is already a cocky veteran of the stage. He wears the robes of a King and is very theatrical, preening and delighting in his every move and the sound of his own voice. His self-critical remarks may also include improvised comments.

EDWIN

(Rehearsing LEAR Act. 4. Sc. 6)

"Pray do not mock me:
I am a very foolish....foolish... fond."

Oh, Christ!

(Pause as he tries to remember his lines.)

Come now Edwin. Again.

(Pause)

"Pray do not mock me:
I am a very foolish fond old man.

Oh, bloody Hell.

Pray, do not mock me:
I am a very fond... foolish...old...

Oh, what, what is it?

(Enunciating each word)

"I am a very foolish fond old man. Ah.
Fourscore and upward....

(There is a rustling in the darkness. EDWIN stops, peers out into audience.)

Hello? Hello?

(Back to rehearsal)

"Fourscore and upward... not an hour more nor less;
And to deal plainly,
I fear I am not in my perfect mind."

(Annoyed with his performance)

Oh, God! what!

(Loudly and emphatically)

"AND TO DEAL PLAINLY,
I fear I am not in my perfect mind."

(A loud noise in the theatre)

Just who the hell is out there.

(MORE)

EDWIN (cont'd)
(*SILENCE. EDWIN looks repeatedly into the darkness and seeing nothing, goes back to his rehearsal.*)

"I fear I am not in my perfect mind."

CORNELIA
(*Calling from the back of the theatre.*)

Hello?

EDWIN

Hello!

CORNELIA

Forgive me, please.

EDWIN

Come down here where I can see you.

CORNELIA

I didn't mean to disturb you --

EDWIN

--well you've already accomplished that feat.....

(*CORNELIA is standing in front of him. EDWIN mistakenly thinks she is the journalist he expects to interview him and bows theatrically at her feet.)*

Dear lady, welcome.

CORNELIA

I am looking for Edwin Forrest.

EDWIN

(*Sarcastically*)

Of course you are. *C'est moi*. Now let's get on with it.

CORNELIA

I'm sorry. Edwin Forrest, the Shakespearean actor?

EDWIN

Yes, yes, yes, please, that is my name. Now let us move this little meeting along so I can get back to my rehearsal.

CORNELIA

You are preparing to play King Lear?

EDWIN

Exactly. That's why you're here.

CORNELIA

Exactly. But how could you know that?

EDWIN

Remember, I am Edwin Forrest. The reason you are here. I am eager to speak with you.

CORNELIA

I am speechless.

EDWIN

Good! You need not say a word, until you are ready of course.
(EDWIN takes his chair and sets it in the middle of the stage with a grand flourish.)

Sit!

CORNELIA

There? On the stage?

EDWIN

Yes, yes, yes, please, sit here on the stage.

CORNELIA

I am quite prepared to stand.

EDWIN

I can assure you the chair is quite comfortable. A King's chair to be sure, but certainly fit for a lady.

CORNELIA

I do not mean any inconvenience to you.

EDWIN

No inconvenience. It's always an honor and a privilege to talk about... my work.

CORNELIA

Well, that's... very...generous of you.

EDWIN

(Posing on his desk.)

So, what is it you would like to know about me?

CORNELIA

Actually, I wanted to talk to you about my father.

EDWIN

Your father?

CORNELIA

Benjamin.

EDWIN

Of course. Is he a fan of the theatre too?

CORNELIA

He is a school teacher...I mean he was a teacher....a headmaster. He taught Shakespeare for years.

EDWIN

Oh, dear lady, please, say no more. It would be my honor to have you both attend the opening night of my debut as Lear on the New York stage.

CORNELIA

That's very generous but...

EDWIN

Please, it's the least I could do. I will see to it myself that you receive the best seats in the house.

CORNELIA

Actually, Mr. Forrest, that won't be necessary.

EDWIN

I'm told tickets may be very dear.

CORNELIA

My father doesn't want to go to the theater to see you because he is King Lear.

EDWIN

(Laughing at her seriousness)

Ah, yes, well, we ALL imagine we're someone else, don't we. When I was very young I imagined I was Romeo and went around all day seeking the perfect Juliet. And just a few weeks ago, when I was doing some research at the "*Stillwell Asylum for the Criminally Insane*", I met two George Washingtons and one Jesus Christ.

CORNELIA

Do actors usually go to asylums?

EDWIN

Well, I cannot speak for others, but I hope that nothing about how I prepare for my roles upon the stage is usual.

CORNELIA

Did you find what you were looking for there?

EDWIN

What an odd question. I wasn't looking for anything. I was simply there to observe the madmen, Miss ...

CORNELIA

So you only went there for your work?

EDWIN

Of course. Everything I do is about my work. I'm sorry. What did you say your name was?

CORNELIA

Lamb. Cornelia Lamb. And what did you learn about madness?

EDWIN

Yes, Miss Lamb...why aren't you taking any notes?

CORNELIA

Notes? Why would I take notes?

EDWIN

To remember my every word, of course. Certainly the readers of the Gazette deserve nothing less than the exact truth of what I say.

CORNELIA

I wouldn't know.

EDWIN

(Condescendingly)

You must agree it is our first responsibility to give our public what they want? And they want the truth.

CORNELIA

To tell you the truth, I can not say that I believe mimicking the pain of a madman is very responsible.

EDWIN

I do not mimic the pain.

CORNELIA

Whatever you may choose to call it.

EDWIN

I choose to call it acting and the truth of my profession will be revealed to you when you see that I.....

*(STOPPING himself as if
catching the joke.)*

Oh, you are playing coy with me Miss Lamb. You are clever....trying to bait me for a few delicious quotes for your paper. I knew I was in for a run when they told me they were sending their first female journalist.

CORNELIA

But I am not a journalist.

EDWIN

You're not a journalist?

CORNELIA

No. Never.

EDWIN

Then who are you?

CORNELIA

I am Cornelia Lamb.

EDWIN

And you don't write for the Gazette?

CORNELIA

I don't even read it.

EDWIN

Then why are you interrupting my rehearsal in the guise of someone else.

CORNELIA

I never said I was anyone else, you did.

EDWIN

(In full "LEAR" a la 1,4)

*"Hear, Nature, hear; dear goddess, hear!
Suspend thy purpose...that [you] may feel
How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child. Away, away!*

(CORNELIA doesn't move.)

What more do you want from me? A trinket? Some souvenir perhaps, because if that is what will satisfy you, take this.

(EDWIN holds out a portrait of himself but CORNELIA doesn't move.)

I'm told it's very good likeness of me as Hamlet. Some women wait in long lines around the theater for such a souvenir but you may take it as my gift and go.

(CORNELIA doesn't move)

What is it? You want more? a lock of my hair perhaps, but no, I will not cut it, even for you, for if I gave one strand to every intruder who asked for one I would be as bald as the Bard himself.

CORNELIA

I really do not want your picture of you or a lock of your hair, Edwin Forrest -

(QUAKERS tend to use first and last names with strangers.)

EDWIN

*(Very loudly interrupting her
with his performance.)*

*Come not between the dragon and his wrath!
I loved her most, and thought to set my rest
On her kind nursery. Hence, and avoid my sight!*

CORNELIA

When I was standing in the back of the theatre listening to you before....

EDWIN

(Interrupting)- so you were listening, trying to catch a bit of the King, eh? Well, no matter, you shall have to wait like all the others.

(Pause)

So, what did you think?

CORNELIA

I would not say the Lear I heard was the Lear I had imagined.

EDWIN

Oh, really, and now you a critic too. May I ask just who you think has played him better?

CORNELIA

I cannot answer.

EDWIN

Ah, yes, my point exactly, because you will never see another Lear like mine.

CORNELIA

Because I have never seen anyone play Lear.

EDWIN

No one?

CORNELIA

Quakers have never encouraged the theatre as a diversion.

EDWIN

The theatre is not a diversion. We bring people to tears. Real tears.

CORNELIA

You bring people to tears for characters who are not real when real suffering is all around them.

EDWIN

Of course our suffering is real. I suffer as one with my characters. That is real art.

CORNELIA

Then I will tell you this -- madness is more than just being loud. That is real life.

EDWIN

Did you really come here in the middle of the day to tell me how to play Lear?

CORNELIA

No. I came to tell you about my father, Benjamin Lamb, who is the perfect King Lear.

EDWIN

I thought you said your father was....a teacher.

CORNELIA

Up until three months ago he was a teacher, and a scholar most respected in our Quaker community. Then my mother died quite suddenly. It broke him.

EDWIN

I am truly sorry for your tragedy but --

CORNELIA

(Interrupting)

Let me finish. Please.

(Pause.)

My father always exclaimed it was my mother's great love for him and her beloved Quaker faith that forged a moral man out of a quick-tempered angry young boy and saved him from a life of misery and sorrow. Now my mother is gone and my father spends his days writing the words to this play on the walls of his room and his nights talking to no one but the people in this book.

(Suddenly seizing on Edwin's script.)

Do you really know every word in this play?

EDWIN

Of course I do.

(Taking the book from her)

I play the script I'm given. That is my job and I do my job well.

CORNELIA

Then If you came with me to Friend's asylum, you could speak to Benjamin wherever he began?

EDWIN

I can only speak with the characters in this play.

CORNELIA

Benjamin is the character in this play. His madness has taken my father away and left only the perfect Lear in his place.

EDWIN

Come, come Miss Lamb. The perfect Lear? Surely you don't really mean that.

CORNELIA

My carriage is waiting outside. Come with me and see him for yourself.

EDWIN

I have no time. I open at the Bowery Theatre in New York in a month. I must work.

CORNELIA

(Enticing him.)

You would be right there with him face to face in the same room. The script on his walls.

EDWIN

There are no bars between you and the inmates?

CORNELIA

There are no inmates. Friends Asylum is not a prison.

EDWIN

Are you fearless or simply foolish?

CORNELIA

We do not think of our loved ones as criminals, but souls waiting to become whole again.

EDWIN

That all sounds very noble I'm sure.

CORNELIA

Surely you must believe it is each person's moral duty to serve the Lord by helping one another.

EDWIN

I serve the Lord by using my talents on the stage, not behind it.

CORNELIA

No matter how lost someone may appear, there is still the light of God within them, waiting to be touched. You could be that man.

EDWIN

No! I cannot help you.

CORNELIA

(overlapping.)

You can help him. You know the words. You can speak to him.

EDWIN

But we are strangers.

CORNELIA

No! That book makes him your friend. You may be the only person who can lead him out of his darkness.

(Letting down her defenses.)

I need you.

EDWIN

Unlike you and your community, I do not believe that lunacy is living.

CORNELIA

In God's name, have you no compassion?

EDWIN

I have spent more than half my life showing compassion for my audiences. My God given gift to them is my performance. I give everything I have - everything I am -- for them -- and if I have done my job very well, they give me their applause.

CORNELIA

Well, I shall not be one of them.

(Picks up her bag to leave.)

EDWIN

You have never seen me perform.

CORNELIA

You have never seen my father. (pause) I believe you are afraid to see someone who can be what you only dream of.

EDWIN

(Into his play.)

Better thou

Hadst not been born than not to have pleased me better.

(CORNELIA and EDWIN overlap as she alternately leaves and comes back to chide him.)

CORNELIA

You are an irritating man Mr. Forrest.

EDWIN

Pray do not mock me!

CORNELIA

I am sorry I interrupted your rehearsal. I was wrong to think you could help me.

EDWIN

I am a very foolish fond old man.

CORNELIA

I've never had much use for your precious theater and now I see why. It really is all just for nothing.

EDWIN

And to deal plainly....

CORNELIA

Good day, Edwin Forrest.

(CORNELIA goes into the blackness and leaves EDWIN standing alone on the stage.)

EDWIN

(Shouting.)

I fear I am not in my perfect mind!"

(Laughing)

(Into the blackness of the scene change we hear the voice of FOREST rehearsing his lines.)

*"Pray, do not mock me:
I am a very foolish fond old man.
Fourscore and upward....
... not an hour more nor less;
And to deal plainly,
I fear I am not in my perfect mind."*

Scene Two - The Waiting room at Friends' Asylum just outside of Philadelphia.

Three days later. Edward sits dramatically waiting on the bench in his theatrical cape and hat. CORNELIA enters and crosses on her way to somewhere else.

EDWIN

(Rising to greet her.)

Miss Lamb.

CORNELIA

Oh! Edwin Forrest.

EDWIN

Yes....Miss Lamb it's good to see you.

(CORNELIA leaves EDWIN standing speechless until she returns a few moments later when he continues where he left off.)

....Miss Lamb, it's so good to see you.

CORNELIA

What are you doing here?

EDWIN

Isn't it obvious. I am here to see your father.

CORNELIA

I don't think so.

(She leaves. He waits cooling his heels until she returns.)

EDWIN

Miss Lamb, please, has something changed?

CORNELIA

My mind. Good day, Edwin.

EDWIN

You cannot say "No" Cornelia.

(CORNELIA re-enters)

CORNELIA

Then I will say, "It is not possible, Edwin."
(CORNELIA starts to write in her ledger book, paying no attention to EDWIN standing there.)

EDWIN

Is your father still alive?

CORNELIA

I believe, to quote you exactly, "Lunacy is not living".

EDWIN

I merely questioned my ability to help.

CORNELIA

You dismissed me!

EDWIN

I did not see how I could contribute anything to his condition.

CORNELIA

Madness.

EDWIN

You are so direct.

CORNELIA

I will assume that is a compliment.

EDWIN

It is a fact.

CORNELIA

No, his madness is a fact. His life is a fact. His work is a fact.

EDWIN

The fact is, Miss Lamb, that I have reconsidered my decision.

CORNELIA

And the fact is that three days ago I asked you to come and your answer was "NO".

EDWIN

That was three days ago.

(The ACTOR speaks grandly)

Time changes all things. Even the human heart.

(As EDWIN he sees she is paying no attention to him.)

Quakers do forgive?

(MORE)

EDWIN (cont'd)

*(Pause. She continues working
on her books.)*

I saw several old men in the garden when I came through. I was wondering if one of them was your father.

CORNELIA

His name is Benjamin.

EDWIN

Is Benjamin nearby?

CORNELIA

Your change of heart does not effect my change of mind.

EDWIN

I don't understand. When you came to the theatre you were so eager for me to meet him, you practically ordered me here.

CORNELIA

(Mimicking him.)

"Time changes all things," to quote you exactly.

EDWIN

Please, I just wanted to know if your father is alive and if he still believes he is Lear?

CORNELIA

He is alive, and he is still Lear.

EDWIN

Then I may still be of some service.

CORNELIA

Service? You went to Stillwell to become the perfect Lear. I gave you the opportunity to fulfill your ambition and you said "No". It was a small request from me for a great reward for you and your behavior was atrocious.

EDWIN

Miss Lamb, I apologize. I was upset. You must forgive me. I thought you were someone else.

CORNELIA

Someone who could do something for your career.

EDWIN

I am contrite. (Pause) Truly. (Pause) Embarrassed. (Pause) Completely. (BEAT)

(Now exploding.)

Oh, for the love of God, what do you want me to say! I am not used to women barging into my rehearsal, asking me to drop everything and follow them to some Asylum-

CORNELIA

- Friends Asylum -

EDWIN

-- Friends Asylum - to play all the characters in their father's fantasy of *King Lear*, to bring him back to a daughter I had scarcely met moments before. What do you want me to say?

CORNELIA

So Edwin, this is this you being contrite?

EDWIN

Cornelia, please. I have made this effort to come all this way from Philadelphia at my own expense and time - at the very least you could allow me to meet him. (Pause) Miss Lamb I am a man of great influence and if I choose to plead my case to the Superintendent of this Asylum I am sure he will allow me to ...

CORNELIA

--No!

EDWIN

Oh, this is nonsense! I am sure the Superintendent will be more amenable to my request than you are.
(*Gathering his things together to leave.*)

CORNELIA

Edwin, I am the Superintendent of Friends Asylum.
(*BEAT*)
I will send for your carriage?
(*She begins to leave.*)

EDWIN

You never mentioned you ran the Asylum.

CORNELIA

I don't believe you ever asked. In fact, once you found out I was not the reporter from the Gazette but merely an ordinary woman who was not even a fan of your work -- you were not interested in me at all.

EDWIN

(*Surrender*)
I can honestly state that you are no ordinary woman.

CORNELIA

You threw me out.

EDWIN

You insulted my profession.

CORNELIA

And still you are here.

(CORNELIA leaves the room)

EDWIN

You have every right to be angry with me. But perhaps we can both agree that our relationship until this moment seems to be built on one misstep after the other. Surely such Friends would offer even the rudest actor a second chance?

CORNELIA

(Taking the first step towards him again.)

When I heard there was a Shakespearean actor named Edwin Forrest who had been going to Stillwell Prison to watch the madmen, I was curious. I admit I knew nothing of your history on the stage, but everyone assured me you were one of the finest actors of our time. I confess that when I came to see you at the theatre, I was not completely sure of what you could do to help - until you said you knew every word in his play. You could answer Benjamin's words with the only words he seemed to understand. You could be in his world. That is when I allowed myself to hope that your talent - and your humanity - might prove the bridge to bring my father back to himself. But no matter what reasons I gave you to come here, you said "No." So now I must ask you what has changed?

EDWIN

(Gently.)

I have a mother and three sisters who all depend on me, and strangers in my life who clamor for some little piece of me.

(Pause.)

I admit to being somewhat difficult then, perhaps to the point of rudeness in my refusal. I was surprised and disappointed that you knew nothing of my work, and yet there you were, asking me to do something even the greatest actor in the world would find daunting. I honestly do not know if I can help your father. But I sincerely hope Miss Lamb, that you will allow me to meet your Lear now, so we may come to know one another.

CORNELIA

(BEAT)

Today he took a fearsome turn. Though I think he is no danger to anyone but himself, I cannot be perfectly sure of his behavior. He shouts orders from his bed, continues to write Shakespeare's words on his walls, eats nothing, will not leave his room and answers "Yes, No, Yes, No, Yes" to questions no one else hears. I know in his heart he remembers I am his daughter, but I have no idea what name he calls me in his head. At this point I *(interrupting herself)* Why are you here?

EDWIN

I am curious. You knew I would be curious when you told me of "The Perfect Lear". (Pause) I am here.

CORNELIA

(Finally)

I will take your visit as a blessing.

EDWIN

Thank you.

CORNELIA

He's just across the hall.

(EDWIN starts across the room.)

You should know that my father was always a gentleman, immaculate to the point of vanity. No matter what you are about to see in there, Edwin, I must believe he is still that gentleman.

(CROSS FADE)

END OF SCENE

Scene 3 - BENJAMIN's asylum room.

The walls of Benjamin's room are covered with the text of Shakespeare's LEAR. Some of it is like wallpaper, some of the text is written in what appears to be human blood. It seems to be written in sequence.

BENJAMIN as a man who was once a scholar, a schoolteacher and a pillar of the Quaker community is now submerged in the anger and betrayal of a former King. He is in a ratty nightshirt that is soiled, torn and tattered by several imagined storms. EDWIN is horrified and is at once aware that he has stepped in to a world he could never have imagined. BENJAMIN, feeling their presence, bolts up from his bed and starts for EDWIN who recoils.

NOTE: even though BENJAMIN is speaking LEAR, it is not as terrifying for him, as when he disconnected from his character in the text. In sheer madness he is terrifying.

BENJAMIN

(Act. 1, Sc. 4)

*Darkness and devils!
Saddle my horses, call my train together
Degenerate bastard! I'll not trouble thee.
Yet have I left a daughter.*

EDWIN

Dear God.....

CORNELIA

Father, you have to eat....

BENJAMIN

(interrupting)

No...no...no...

(Act IV, sc. 7)

*"You do me wrong to take me out o'th grave:
Thou art a soul in bliss; but I am bound
Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears
Do scald like molten lead."*

CORNELIA

Father, please...

BENJAMIN

No. No. No. No. No.....

You are a spirit, I know, when did you die?

EDWIN

(Checking the wall.)

Act VII. Lear has just awakened.

BENJAMIN

You are a spirit, I know, when did you die?

EDWIN

He awakens to see his beloved daughter Cordelia.

BENJAMIN

You are a spirit, I know, when did you die?

CORNELIA

What should I say?

BENJAMIN

No.

EDWIN

He wants Cordelia's next line.

CORNELIA

I don't know it.

EDWIN

(Reassuring her.)

Don't be afraid.

CORNELIA

Help me.

EDWIN

The line he wants you to say is quite simple: "*Sir, do you know me?*"

CORNELIA

Sir, do you know me?

BENJAMIN

*(BENJAMIN calms down,
immediately responding to her
now in his play.)*

"You are a spirit, I know. When did you die?"

CORNELIA

(Into reality again.)

I am not dead, father. I am your only child...Cornelia
Lamb....

BENJAMIN

*(BENJAMIN recoils in confusion.
She does not answer in the
play)*

No, No, No!

"You are a spirit, I know. Where did you die?"

EDWIN

(Whispers to CORNELIA)

"Still, still far wide. "

Say it!

CORNELIA

(As CORDELIA.)

Still, still far wide!

EDWIN

*(To assure CORNELIA that the
next line is his, he places
his fingers to his lips as in
the mode of the DOCTOR, goes
to LEAR to deliver the next
line.)*

He's scarce awake. Let him alone awhile.

BENJAMIN

Where have I been? Where am I?

Fair daylight?

I am mightily abused.

CORNELIA

(Under LEAR's speech)

Look how calm he is now.

BENJAMIN

I should ev'n die with pity,

To see another thus.

I know not what to say.

CORNELIA

Content.

BENJAMIN

I know not what to say.

CORNELIA

Almost happy.

EDWIN

(Under LEAR's speech)

We're in his play at last.

BENJAMIN

(Returning to CORNELIA)

*I will not swear these are my hands: let's see;
I feel this pin prick. Would I were assured
Of my condition."*

EDWIN

Trust me.

"O, look upon me, sir...."

CORNELIA

Oh, look upon me, sir...."

EDWIN

And hold your hands in benediction o'er me.

CORNELIA

And hold your hands in benediction o'er me.

EDWIN

You must not kneel.

CORNELIA

You must not kneel.

BENJAMIN

(Responding to CORNELIA)

"Pray do not mock me:

*I am a very foolish fond old man,
fourscore and upward, not an hour more or less;
And, to deal plainly,*

I fear I am not in my perfect mind.

Methinks I should know you and know this man,

Yet, I am doubtful; for I am mainly ignorant

What place this is, and all the skill I have

Remembers not these garments, nor I know not

Where I did lodge last night. Do not laugh at me,

For, as I am a man, I think this lady

*(BENJAMIN seems to stare at
CORNELIA in recognition.)*

To be my child Cordelia?"

CORNELIA

*(Trying once again to correct
him)*

Cornelia.

BENJAMIN

(Agitated again)

No, no, no, no!

EDWIN

Please, Cornelia, you must say the words he wants to hear.

*(Pause - then whispering
intently to her)*

And so I am. I am.

CORNELIA

And so I am. I am....I am.

*(BENJAMIN is visibly moved by
CORNELIA's answer. He moves to
her and speaks directly to her
drying her tears.)*

BENJAMIN

"Be your tears wet? Yes, faith. I pray, weep not.

*(BENJAMIN brushes her cheek
with his hand tenderly. Then
abruptly he changes his
demeanor and goes to EDWIN
starting in a new place.)*

Am I in France?

EDWIN

(Trying to find his place)

Am ...I ...

BENJAMIN

Am...I...in...France?

EDWIN

*(Reassuring him, as KENT,
responds.)*

In your own Kingdom, sir.

*(Elated at EDWIN's response,
BENJAMIN goes over to the
plate of biscuits and starts
eating hungrily.)*

CORNELIA

Merciful heavens, Edwin, look, he is actually eating again.

EDWIN

He is a most amazing man.

CORNELIA

This is what I have prayed for.

EDWIN

I have never imagined anyone like him.

CORNELIA

Do you think you can coax him out of his room. He hasn't been outdoors in so long. It would be wonderful for him to walk in the sunlight again and I could bring more food.

EDWIN

I think so.

(Thinking over the play.)

Yes!

(Now rising to his own challenge)

I will speak the Doctor's line and when I finish you will say: "Will it please your highness walk? And I will offer my arm..

CORNELIA

Will it please....

EDWIN

Will it please your highness walk.

They are Cordelia's words but I will offer him my arm. Then we must all leave this room as one. You behind us. Is that clear?

CORNELIA

I think so.

EDWIN

There is no time to think. Just act.

(Going over to BENJAMIN who is enjoying his biscuit. Now acting as the DOCTOR.)

*Be comforted, good madam: the great rage.
You see, is kill'd in him: and yet it is danger
To make him even o'er the time he has lost.
Desire him to go in; trouble him no more
Till further settling.*

*(BENJAMIN listens carefully.
EDWIN then prompts CORNELIA.)*

Now. Your line.

CORNELIA

Will it please your Highness walk?

BENJAMIN

(Considering the line.)

Will it please your Highness....

(BENJAMIN gets up.)

Will it please your Highness....

(EDWIN takes off his cape and places it around BENJAMIN's shoulders. BENJAMIN changes into a pose of regal authority wearing this coat.)

CORNELIA

Will it please your Highness walk?

(BENJAMIN puts his arm out. EDWIN takes his arm and then turns back and stuffs some biscuit into the pocket of EDWIN's cape.)

BENJAMIN

(To CORNELIA)

You must bear with me.

Pray you now, forget and forgive, I am old and foolish.

(BENJAMIN starts to walk out. They disappear and CORNELIA is momentarily on the stage alone gathering up the food.)

CORNELIA

Biscuits and hot tea. This is wonderful, perfectly wonderful!

(CORNELIA runs out.)

SCENE ENDS

Scene 4 - The Garden

CROSSFADE to the Courtyard. BENJAMIN, quite the KING now, is sizing EDWIN up. He settles in comfortably on a bench.

BENJAMIN

(Act. 1, Sc. 4 between LEAR and KENT)

How now! what art thou?

EDWIN

(Aside)

All right old man.

(As KENT)

A man, sir.

BENJAMIN

What dost thou profess? what wouldst thou with us?

EDWIN

(aside)

Let's see where he is. "I do profess to be no less than I seem..." Ah, that's it.

(As KENT)

I do profess to be no less than I seem; to serve him truly that will put me in trust: to love him that is honest; to converse with him that is wise, and says little; to fear judgment; to fight when I cannot choose; and to... I can keep honest counsel, ride, run, mar a curious tale in telling it, and deliver a plain message bluntly: that which ordinary men are fit for, I am qualified in; and the best of me is diligence.

BENJAMIN

(Because he is happy to have a friend in KENT/EDWIN, he kicks up his heels in a Hee-Haw and whinny)

Hee-haw, hee-haw....hee-haw.

EDWIN

(Aside)

All right. Now let's see if you can follow me.

(As FOOL Act. 1, Sc. 4)

Sirrah, I'll teach thee a speech.

BENJAMIN

(Finding his place in his mind.)

Ahhhhhhh.....Do.

EDWIN

*Mark it, Nuncle:
Have more than thou showest,
Speak less than thou knowest,
Lend less than thou owest,
Ride more than thou goest.
Learn more than thou trowest,
Set less than thou throwest,
Leave thy drink and thy whore,
And keep in-a-door,
And thou shalt have more
Than two tens to a score."*

BENJAMIN

(Repeating the FOOL's line and enjoying the lesson.)

*....And thou shalt have more
Than two tens to a score." And thou shalt have more
Than two tens to a score."*

EDWIN

Oh, what was that miserable section.... Yes.

*(As LEAR making some noise
stumbling for the line.)*

Poor Tom, thy horn is dry.

BENJAMIN

*Poor Tom, thy horn is dry.....thy horn is dry....
(In anger.)*

*Then let them anatomize Regan; see what
breeds about her heart.
Is there any cause in nature
that makes these hard hearts.*

EDWIN

How perfect.

BENJAMIN

*You, sir, I
entertain for one of my hundred; only I do not like
the fashion of your garments: you will say they are
Persian attire; but let them be changed.
(BENJAMIN takes off EDWIN's
cape and hands it back.)*

EDWIN

Now, good my lord, lie here and rest awhile.

BENJAMIN

*Make no noise, make no noise; draw the
curtains: so, so, so.....We'll go to supper
'i the morning.....*

EDWIN

He is a king....

BENJAMIN

*(Angrily answering him back now
as LEAR)*

*Ay, every inch a king:
When I do stare, see how the subject quakes.
I pardon that man's life. What was the cause?*

EDWIN

'Twas adultery sire.

BENJAMIN

(Shocked)

Adultery?

EDWIN

Adultery.

BENJAMIN

*Thou shalt not die: die for adultery! No:
The wren goes to't, and the small gilded fly
Does lecher in my sight.
Let copulation thrive;*

EDWIN

(Taking his hand.)

Oh, let me kiss that hand!

BENJAMIN

(Considering his hand.)

Let me wipe it first: it smells of mortality.

EDWIN

Dost thou know me?

BENJAMIN

(Pause)

*What, are mad? A man may see how this world goes with no
eyes. Look with thine ears: Now, now, now, now:*

*(BENJAMIN sits down and puts
his feet out in the air in
his pantomime. He is solemn,
resigned and ready to die.)*

BENJAMIN

Pull off my boots.

(EDWIN stands a moment not moving)

Pull off my boots!

(EDWIN is now motionless as BENJAMIN becomes more insistent.)

Pull off my boots.

(EDWIN does not move and BENJAMIN pulls off his slippers and throws them at EDWIN's feet.)

(Now very lost.)

*Doth any here know me? ...Doth any here know me?
Who is it that can tell me who I am?*

EDWIN

"Lear's shadow."

BENJAMIN

*(BENJAMIN begins his rage. He is not being allowed to finish his play.)
(ACT 3, Sc. 2)*

*Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow! You cataracts
and hurricanoes, spout
Till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd the cocks! ...
And thou, all-shaking thunder, smite flat the thick rotundity
o' the world! Crack nature's moulds, all germens spill at
once, That make ingrateful man!*

EDWIN

(Aside. Realizing that BENJAMIN is now in control)

Dear God....

(CORNELIA enters during the next speech carrying a tray of food and is horrified.)

CORNELIA

Edwin. Edwin? What is happening?

BENJAMIN

*(Now quite in a frightening
rage.)*

*Rumble thy bellyful! Spit, fire! spout, rain! ...
...here I stand, your slave, A poor, infirm, weak, and
despised old man:*

CORNELIA

*(Overlapping BENJAMIN's
monologue.)*

Please make him stop. You must make him stop.

BENJAMIN

*O! O! 'tis foul! ...
No, I will be the pattern of all patience;
I will say nothing.*

*(BENJAMIN grows completely
silent then drops in a faint.)*

CORNELIA

Father? Father.....please.....Edwin?

EDWIN

Lord, forgive me. I had no right. I had no right at all to
come.

*(EDWIN runs out leaving
CORNELIA rocking her father in
her arms.)*

END OF ACT ONE

INTERMISSION

ACT TWO

Scene 1 - Walnut street theatre and the garden at Friends' Asylum.

It is important that we see BENJAMIN wandering around looking for EDWIN in the garden at Friends' Asylum. Then BENJAMIN sits dejected on the bench and becomes very still and dejected waiting.

Afternoon. Ten days have passed. EDWIN is sleeping on the stage, his script by his side. He is unkempt.

CORNELIA appears at the foot of the stage. She is holding a basket of food.

CORNELIA

Edwin. Edwin Forrest.

EDWIN

(Dramatically)

I'm sleeping. I was up half the night rehearsing. Go away and leave me in peace...

(He turns away from the voice across the stage.)

CORNELIA

Edwin....

EDWIN

(EDWIN stops, recognizing the voice.)

Miss Lamb?

(Jumps up and pulls his robes around him)

I wasn't expectingguests.

CORNELIA

(Entering the stage.)

You look well.

EDWIN

Liar.

CORNELIA

I didn't mean to interrupt you.

EDWIN

Of course you did.

*(Trying to straighten himself
up.)*

Forgive me for not dressing.

CORNELIA

I should have sent word I was coming.

EDWIN

But you didn't... and now you are here.

*(Goes to the bowl and douses
his face with water.)*

Ahhhh. Oh. It's cold.

CORNELIA

*(Trying to find him something
to dry his face.)*

Here.

EDWIN

(Waving her away.)

I'm fine.

CORNELIA

Have you eaten?

EDWIN

(From the haze.)

I remember eating a very good dinner once. Now surely Miss Lamb, you did not come all this way to ask about my eating habits.

CORNELIA

Here, I've brought you food. Biscuits and jam.

*(Taking a tablecloth, food and
utensils out of her basket as
she takes over his space.)*

EDWIN

You and your biscuits. How thoughtful.

CORNELIA

The jam comes straight from the strawberries in our garden.

EDWIN

*(EDWIN starts eating them
hungrily.)*

Perfection. You never cease to amaze me. (Pause) Do you ever sleep?

CORNELIA

Oh, I didn't make these. I have no talent for baking. I did think about bringing some fresh eggs too, but I'm afraid they would have arrived scrambled.

EDWIN

Thank you. This is heavenly.

(EDWIN is eating hungrily.)

CORNELIA

No, it is I who should thank you.

EDWIN

I think we should not fight over gratitude.

CORNELIA

(Entering slowly)

Your visit has done Benjamin a world of good. He's been eating. And he even goes outside on a good day. But I do wish he would let us give him a new nightshirt.

EDWIN

Well, we men grow fond of our old clothes.

CORNELIA

I suppose I should be patient. (Pause) And grateful. (BEAT) He looks for you Edwin. Everywhere. So you must understand why I'm here to ask you to come back.

(There is a palpable silence.)

EDWIN

I hate to leave you so quickly, Cornelia, but I really should go to my room and change my clothes.

(She doesn't move.)

I may be a long time.

CORNELIA

I have no other appointments.

EDWIN

It wouldn't be proper for me to leave you here alone in the theater.

CORNELIA

I'm not afraid. Do what you need to do. I'll wait.

EDWIN

Surely you have other things to do!

(BEAT. CORNELIA seems frozen.)

Very well then ---

(EDWIN starts to leave.)

CORNELIA

You just left and never came back. No note. Nothing in ten days.

EDWIN

I am not coming back. (Beat) I know how worried you were about him not eating properly or that he wasn't leaving his room and I am truly happy to hear of his progress. Your Friends Asylum is a remarkable place.

CORNELIA

Certainly you realize there is more work to do.

EDWIN

I have my own work to do here.

CORNELIA

Why are you unwilling to return?

EDWIN

I think you are unwilling to truthfully look at his condition.

CORNELIA

You were the one who ran away. Not I. I am fully aware of his condition. I am the Superintendent of Friends Asylum.

EDWIN

You are his daughter.

CORNELIA

I understand what he needs. But only you can give it to him.

EDWIN

I played the fool to your father's King. I left him nearly dead in your arms. What more would you ask of me?

CORNELIA

(Picking up his script)

I asked the great Edwin Forrest to lead him out of his play, not just out of his room.

EDWIN

I am not his Orpheus. I am done.

CORNELIA

So you did come for yourself?

EDWIN

You were the one who dangled the perfect Lear before me.

CORNELIA

It brought you there, Edwin.... and it worked.

EDWIN

Yes, it worked. Perhaps too well.

CORNELIA

You saw something, didn't you?

EDWIN

I saw a place just as you described it.

CORNELIA

Everything has changed Edwin.

EDWIN

You said he was better.

CORNELIA

Benjamin eats and walks but he will not speak.

EDWIN

To you?

CORNELIA

To anyone. He is as silent as a corpse.

EDWIN

Read the words of the play to him. You have the text.

CORNELIA

He waits for you. He looks for you everyday.

EDWIN

He looks for the words to the play. It makes no difference who says them.

CORNELIA

No. You were close to him, Edwin. Closer than anyone has been. You saw something.

EDWIN

No.

CORNELIA

He said something to you?

EDWIN

Shakespeare's words. You were there.

CORNELIA

Something happened. Something more you are not telling me. When I left you alone with him he must have revealed something more or you wouldn't have run off like that.

EDWIN

I saw a man who called himself Lear. Nothing more.

CORNELIA

What made you run?

EDWIN

I am a coward. There you have it. In Stillwell there were bars between myself and those men.

(She stands looking at him.)

CORNELIA

The truth.

EDWIN

What? He ate his biscuits....he went outside into the sunlight you held him in your arms. Miss Lamb, what more do you want from me. Life does not answer all of our demands, no matter how worthy they may seem.

CORNELIA

Oh, don't spout that at me. Leave it to you to try to teach a Quaker about sacrifice.

EDWIN

What do you imagine? That he is back home, clean shaven and reading from his bible and that you are restored to the dream of a family that is gone forever.

CORNELIA

I saw your face. What did you see when you looked into my father's eyes?

EDWIN

I saw the perfect Lear. A man so completely his part that Benjamin's Lear must end this play on his terms, not yours.

CORNELIA

Then come back and we shall --

EDWIN

You are not listening! When Lear dies, Benjamin dies and he will not rise again. You asked what I saw? I saw Lear and this Lear like Shakespeare's King is dying. This is not a play, Cornelia. I am sorry. Truly. I cannot lead a man to his death. I will not return to the Asylum. Never.

CORNELIA

(As close as she can to cursing him.)

Then shame on you Edwin Forrest! Shame on you.

(MORE)

CORNELIA (cont'd)
(*CORNELIA walks out on Edward who is left alone. Into the darkness of the scene change we hear the mournful wailing of BENJAMIN.*)

SCENE ENDS

Scene 2 - The Garden at Friends' Asylum.

Seven days later.

BENJAMIN continues wailing.

CORNELIA comes into the garden. She is completely disheveled and stands totally exhausted. BENJAMIN can be heard raging in his room.

BENJAMIN

Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life, And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more, Never, never, never, never, never!

CORNELIA slowly collapses and placing her head on the bench, she falls asleep tossing, turning and talking to herself in her fitful sleep.

EDWIN comes in and watches her a few moments more, then gently kneels beside her touching her arm to awaken her. As she raises her head up, EDWIN is shocked at how she has changed since he last saw her. Her pristine dress and hair are a mass of wrinkles.

EDWIN

Miss Lamb. Miss Lamb!

CORNELIA

(Beginning to awake but not seeing EDWIN at first.)

Father! Is Benjamin all right

(Coming fully awake.)

Edwin? Is that you?

EDWIN

Yes. I didn't mean to frighten you.

CORNELIA

I think I see Edwin Forrest standing in front of me but I know that can not be possible. "Never." So I must still be sleeping and dreaming too.

EDWIN

You are not dreaming, Cornelia. I am here. Again.

CORNELIA

Well, I must look like a nightmare.

(CORNELIA tries to pull herself together.)

EDWIN

You look fine.

CORNELIA

Liar!

EDWIN

...a little tired perhaps.

CORNELIA

Perhaps? You are a very good actor, Edwin, but even Quakers can look into the mirror.

(BENJAMIN booms out in a banshee's wail. Edwin is taken aback by the plaintive pain in BENJAMIN's voice.)

BENJAMIN (O.S.)

How, howl, howl, howl!....O, you are men of stones....

CORNELIA

As you see, my father has regained his voice.

BENJAMIN O. S.

Nothing: I have sworn; I am firm....I AM FIRM....O vassal! Miscreant!....On thy allegiance, hear me!

CORNELIA

He'll stop soon. He always does.

BENJAMIN O. S.

Look there, look there!....that Face of hers again....again....again....

CORNELIA

Most days he simply shouts until he falls back to sleep exhausted. Though not in his bed. No, he tore that to pieces last week during a thunder storm.

(CORNELIA appears to wobble and EDWIN catches her)

EDWIN

When was the last time you had anything to eat? Or slept in a bed?

CORNELIA

Come now, Edwin, you didn't really come all this way to ask such questions of my health.

EDWIN

I did not expect to come at all. I turned back twice. But I could not stop thinking about what you said.

CORNELIA

I believe I begged and pleaded and shouted, though I can't remember everything except that you said "No".

BENJAMIN

Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life....have life....you see me here, you gods, a poor old man....

CORNELIA

Have you ever wondered how the leaf knows exactly when it is the right moment to fall? Or is just too tired to hang on.

EDWIN

I am sorry I did not come back sooner.

BENJAMIN

*You heavens give me the patience that I need.....
You think I'll weep. No, I will not weep.*

CORNELIA

Tell me Mr. Forrest, in your work do you know when the play is going well, or must you wait to read your critics?

EDWIN

Critics! That is the last thing I would do.

BENJAMIN

Oh, fool, I shall go mad.

EDWIN

When I am in the middle of a play I must listen to everything and everyone around me to know how I must speak and when. But if I want to know how the play is going, I must still my heart enough to listen to the spaces in between the words. The silence tells me when it is going badly. Or if it is going well.

CORNELIA

Did you come because you think this can go well?

EDWIN

No.

CORNELIA

You said you turned back twice. Why?

EDWIN

Honestly?

CORNELIA

Honestly.

EDWIN

I believe I may be able to lead him out of the play, but I don't know if I will lead him back to you.

CORNELIA

(BEAT)

I have grown to hate this play as much as he loves it. Take it with you when you leave.

(CORNELIA throws him the book.)

EDWIN

(Looking at the tattered book.)

You have marked all of Cordelia's lines.

CORNELIA

And committed them to memory. Which has not been easy. But then, sleeping has been less so.

EDWIN

You will do fine.

CORNELIA

What if I lose my place?

EDWIN

I will whisper the words in your ear.

CORNELIA

What if he will not believe me?

EDWIN

He needs to believe you.

CORNELIA

And if he will not speak to me?

EDWIN

If this is his time, he will not be silent.

CORNELIA

I long for silence. I hated it when I was young. When I was a child I couldn't stand sitting on those benches waiting for someone to speak. Every time we went to meeting I wanted to testify whether the Lord had come to me or not. *(Pause)* "Patience," my father would say gently touching me lightly on the cheek.

(MORE)

CORNELIA (cont'd)

Patience and silence." And I would answer, "When does that come father?" And he would simply smile and tell me "It will come, someday, just be patient."

(Pause)

How will you know where to start?

EDWIN

He will tell us where he wants to start. Cornelia, you will not be alone. We will be there, together.

CORNELIA

I am sorry you never got to know him when he was just Benjamin. You would have liked him. Everyone did.

BENJAMIN (O.S.)

(Screaming and raving)

Give me that map. Give me that map. Give me that map. Where is my map.

EDWIN

(Looking over to CORNELIA)

There, he's started. Are you ready?

CORNELIA

God speed.

EDWIN

Attend the Lords of France and Burgundy, Gloucester.

BENJAMIN

(Repeating.)

Attend the Lords of France and Burgundy, Gloucester.

(BENJAMIN enters and repeats the line now in perfect LEAR command)

Attend the Lords of France and Burgundy, Gloucester.

EDWIN

(As GLOUCESTER)

I shall, my Lord.

BENJAMIN

Give me the map there.

(BENJAMIN takes the book.)

*Give me the map there. Know that we have divided
In three our kingdom: and 'tis our fast intent
To shake all cares and business from our age;
Conferring them on younger strengths, while we
Unburdhen'd crawl toward death....crawl toward
death....that... that future strife
May be prevented now.*

*And here are to be answer'd.here are to be answer'd.....
Tell me, my daughters,*

(MORE)

BENJAMIN (cont'd)

(Approaching CORNELIA now and looking straight into her eyes.)

Tell me, my daughters....my daughter. My daughter.

(CORNELIA stands facing him, frozen.)

EDWIN

"Now, our joy....

(BENJAMIN remains silent. EDWIN repeats the line, now stronger.)

"Now, our joy...

BENJAMIN

"Now, our joy,
Although the last, not least, to whose young love
The vines of France and milk of Burgundy
Strive to be interest'd, what can you say to draw
A third more opulent than your sisters? Speak.

(CORNELIA stands speechless. BENJAMIN continues to repeat the word.)

Speak....Speak....Speak....Speak....Speak....

(Going in circles....)

CORNELIA

I can't do this.

EDWIN

You must not fail him now.

CORNELIA

The line.

EDWIN

"Nothing, my lord."

CORNELIA

"Nothing, my lord."

BENJAMIN

(Stops and listens.)

"Nothing!"

CORNELIA

(There is a long pause.)

"Nothing."

BENJAMIN

"Nothing will come of nothing: speak again."

CORNELIA

"Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
My heart into my mouth:"
I love your majesty....(Pause)
I love your majesty
According to my bond; nor more nor less."

BENJAMIN

(Pleased and animated.)

"How, how Cordelia! Mend your speech a little,
Lest it may mar your fortunes."

CORNELIA

(Makes the transition from
memory to meaning)

"Good my lord.....
You have begot me, bred me, loved me. I
Return those duties back as right fit,
Obey you, love you, and most honor you.

EDWIN

Good my liege,--

BENJAMIN

Peace, Kent!
Come not between the dragon and his wrath. I loved her most,
and thought to set my rest On her kind nursery. ...

EDWIN

Royal Lear,
Whom I have ever honour'd as my king, Loved as my father, as
my master follow'd, As my great patron thought on in my
prayers,--

BENJAMIN

(Giving his order.)

The bow is bent and drawn, make from the shaft.

(No response. He bullies EDWIN
who is momentarily stunned.)

The bow is bent and drawn, make from the shaft.
The bow is bent and drawn, make from the shaft.

(to Edwin)

"You do me wrong to take meout o' the grave:
Thou art a soul in bliss; but I am bound
Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears
Do scald like molten lead."

EDWIN

(CORNELIA is quiet.)

Cornelia?

CORNELIA

Yes.

EDWIN

Do you know where you are?

CORNELIA

I do.

EDWIN

Then speak to him.

CORNELIA

"Sir, do you know me?"

BENJAMIN

"You are a spirit, I know: when did you die?"

EDWIN

*(Going to CORNELIA)**"He's scarce awake: let him alone awhile."*

BENJAMIN

*"Where have I been? Where am I? Fair day-light
I am mightily abused. I should e'en die....with pity,
To see another thus. I know not what to say.
... Would I were assured
Of my condition!"*

CORNELIA

*"O, look upon me, sire,
And hold your hands in benediction o'er me."*

BENJAMIN

*I fear I am not in my perfect mind....**(Confused)*

*"Methinks I should know you and know this man:
Yet I am doubtful; for I am mainly ignorant
What place this is, and all the skill I have
Remembers not these garments, nor I know not
Where I did lodge last night. Do not laugh at me;
For, as I am a man, I think this lady
To be my child..."*

CORNELIA

And so I am, I am. (pause) I am.

BENJAMIN

*Be your tears wet? Yes, faith. I pray, weep not....weep not.
(Skipping to another section.)*

*You must bear with me. Pray you now, forget and forgive:
I am old and foolish....old and foolish....
(Coming to his end.)*

*When we are born, we cry that we are come
To this great stage of fools.
I will die bravely...."*

CORNELIA

No!

BENJAMIN

No?
*He that parts us shall bring a brand from Heaven...
Wipe thine eyes.....
The good years shall devour them.....Wipe thine eyes.
(pause)*

*Upon such sacrifices, my Cordelia, the gods themselves
throw incense ere they shall make us weep.*

*(BENJAMIN is quiet. CORNELIA is
confused.)*

CORNELIA

I'm lost. Where is he going now? I can't remember anything.

EDWIN

(Gently and firmly)

It's time.

CORNELIA

No! It can't be. Not yet.

EDWIN

He wants to finish this play Cornelia. He wants your blessing. Please, let him go. Let him finish the play he hears.

CORNELIA

*(BEAT. Exhalation in
resignation.)*

Continue.

EDWIN

*We are not the first
Who with best meaning....*

CORNELIA

*(Picking up the cue from
EDWIN.)*

*....have incurred the worst.
For thee, oppressed King, am I cast down.*

BENJAMIN

*(Looking at EDWIN as if he
knows and is grateful and
walks over to CORNELIA and
takes her hand gently like the
old father from her story,
brushing her cheek, then
taking her into his arms.)*

No, no, no.

*Come, let's away to prison:
We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage;
When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down
And ask of thee forgiveness: so we'll live,
And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too,
Who loses and who wins, who's in, who's out;
And take upon the mystery of things
As if we were God's spies: and we'll wear out,
In a walled prison, packs and sects of great ones
That ebb and flow by the moon.*

EDWIN

Cornelia, this is the time. You must lie down and close your eyes.

*(CORNELIA is locked in
BENJAMIN's embrace.)*

Lie down and close your eyes.

*(CORNELIA looks at the man who
used to be her father, and
lays down as he watches her.)*

BENJAMIN

*Howl, howl, howl, howl! O, you are men of stones:
Had I your tongues and eyes, I'd use them so
That heaven's vault should crack. She's gone forever!
I know when one is dead and when one lives;
She's dead as earth. Lend me a looking-glass;
If that her breath will mist or stain the stone
Why, then she lives.....
This feather stirs; she lives. If it be so,
It is a chance which does redeem all sorrows
That ever I have felt.*

EDWIN

Oh my good master.

BENJAMIN

Prithee away.

Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life, And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more, Never, never, never, never, never!

(To EDWIN. Who gently undoes the shirt and EDWIN takes his arm in gratitude.)

Pray you, undo this button: thank you, sir.

(Now BENJAMIN is looking out to the white light of impending death and reunion with his beloved wife.)

Do you see this? Look on her, look, her lips, Look there, look there.

(HE dies falling over CORNELIA's outstretched body. CORNELIA is still and then she rises up and takes BENJAMIN in her arms, rocking him gently as she weeps.)

EDWIN

*"The weight of this sad time we must obey.
Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.
The oldest hath borne most: we that are young
Shall never see so much, nor live so long.*

(EDWIN finishes his speech and there is the cross fade as the sound of the final "applause" drowns out the scene change.)

SCENE ENDS

Scene 3 - EDWIN's dressing room backstage at the Bowery theatre in New York City.

A few months later.

EDWIN has been performing LEAR to sold-out audiences. It is the rave of the city.

EDWIN sits exhausted with his head in his hands.

CORNELIA appears at the door. She is flushed with excitement. Her face beams with tears and pleasure.

CORNELIA

-- Excuse me for barging in but I simply could not wait to tell you how wonderful this evening has been for me.

EDWIN

Cornelia?

(EDWIN crosses to her and they embrace as old, dear friends.)

You saw the performance?

CORNELIA

(Breathlessly)

My first King Lear. You were brilliant. My first Shakespeare. It was so moving, truly my heart is beating so loudly you must hear it across the room. It pleased me beyond my wildest expectations. I shall never be so content to only read my plays alone again.

EDWIN

(Very quiet)

Miss Lamb, thank you. I'm sorry. Please have a seat.

CORNELIA

This is your dressing room? I expected something much grander for a king.

EDWIN

It is very dangerous to think of yourself as a King offstage.

CORNELIA

Oh, Edwin I was transfixed all the way through until the play's last words:

*"We that are young
Shall never see so much, nor live so long."*

EDWIN

I am in awe of your response.

CORNELIA

My cheeks are still moist from the tears at your death.

EDWIN

You wept at my death?

CORNELIA

It was like losing my own father all over again. I saw him completely.

EDWIN

Completely?

CORNELIA

I had no idea a play could cause such empathy as I witnessed tonight. Your theatre is indeed, a noble cause to tell these stories for a greater purpose. And I bless you for that.

EDWIN

I believe that is the greatest review I have ever received, though, of course, I never read them. But Cornelia, you are the only one who knows how insignificant my performance was.

CORNELIA

Insignificant? No. Everyone around me was moved by your performance.

EDWIN

You and I have seen the perfect Lear. What you saw tonight was merely his shadow.

CORNELIA

But Edwin, you gave him back to me. You must believe that. And now I know I can come back here to your theatre any night and be with him again. That is your greatest gift to him and to me.

EDWIN

I fear I am the one who is now speechless.
*(There is an awkward silence
and space between them.)*

CORNELIA

Well, I should not keep you. You must be tired.

EDWIN

Please. A moment more. (Pause) How long will you be in New York.

CORNELIA

Actually, I am on my way to England.

EDWIN

To England?

CORNELIA

London. The boat sails at the end of the week.

EDWIN

So soon?

CORNELIA

My first ocean voyage. I am excited and terrified. (Pause)
There's really nothing more to keep me here. We have a
wonderful hospital there and I need to continue my work.

EDWIN

Of course, you must continue your work.

CORNELIA

And you?

EDWIN

*(Pointing to his small dressing
room)*

You see who I am.

CORNELIA

But surely, you will perform in London sometime?

EDWIN

Hardly! Well, perhaps one day. No one can ever be certain of
anything in this life.

CORNELIA

(Cheeky. She offers her hand.)

Not even in the theater.

EDWIN

No, not even in the theatre.

*(LAUGHTER, then an awkward
silence.)*

CORNELIA

I really must go.

EDWIN

Of course.

*(Gently, he kisses her hand
farewell.)*

God Speed Cornelia Lamb.

CORNELIA

God Speed. Edwin Forrest. God speed.

(CORNELIA turns to leave and stops)

Thank you.

(Quickly leaves the room.)

EDWIN turns and sits back down at his table and looks straight ahead into an unseen audience.

EDWIN

(Absolutely naturally without "actorly" artifice)

EDWIN

*"You do me wrong to take me out o' th grave:
Thou art a soul in bliss; but I am bound
Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears
Do scald like molten lead."*

(As the lights go down, EDWIN shakes his head in discontent and falls quiet into the blackness.)

END OF PLAY (6-21-07)