

LUNACY

by

Sandra Perlman

Sandra Perlman
429 Carthage Ave.
Kent OH 44240
(330) 620-2756
Email: perl@sperlman.com
Web: www.sperlman.com

LUNACY

by
Sandra Perlman

SYNOPSIS

2m, 1 w.

LUNACY is an imaginative twist on Shakespeare's classic KING LEAR. The plot intertwines three love stories: a husband's love for his wife, a daughter's love for her father, and an actor's love of his craft.

The year is 1827; the place, a theater in Philadelphia where young Shakespearean actor Edwin Forrest is rehearsing for his role as King Lear. His loud, over-the-top emoting is interrupted by a young Quaker woman, Cornelia Lamb, whom the arrogant Edwin mistakenly assumes is the newspaper reporter he is expecting to interview him. But Cornelia's purpose is far different. She knows that the promising actor has been preparing for his role as Lear by visiting the Stillwell Asylum for the Criminally Insane. Cornelia implores Edwin to come with her to the Friends Asylum where he can meet the perfect Lear - her father Benjamin. Lamb is now imprisoned in a madness that allows him to speak only in the words of the play his wife was reading before her untimely death. Cornelia, who runs the Quaker asylum, implores Edwin, who knows every word of the script, to leave his rehearsal and follow her to the Asylum..

If Edwin follows Cornelia will he unlock Benjamin's madness or imprison his own dream of perfection?

CHARACTERS

CORNELIA LAMB: a Quaker woman who supervises Friends Asylum

EDWIN FORREST: the rising young Shakespearean actor

BENJAMIN LAMB: Cornelia's father who believes he is King Lear

TIME

Spring, Summer and Winter, 1827

PLACE

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

Two acts/Seven scenes

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.

EDWIN

(Rehearsing LEAR Act. 4. Sc. 6)

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

(Pause)

Oh, come now Edwin. Again.

(Pause)

"Pray do not mock me:
I am a very foolish fond old man.
Pray, do not mock me:
I am a very fond foolish old...
No, no.

(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?

(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)

No. No. No. No. No!

(Loudly and emphatically)

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

(A loud noise in the theatre)

(MORE)

EDWIN (cont'd)
Just who the hell is out there.

(*SILENCE. Going back to his rehearsal.*)
"I fear I am not in my perfect mind."

CORNELIA
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
--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.*)

Oh, dear lady, welcome.

(*He bows grandly and theatrically.*)

CORNELIA
I am looking for Mr. Forrest.

EDWIN
(*Sarcastically*)
Of course you are. C'est moi. Now shall we get on with it.

CORNELIA
I'm sorry, I am speaking to Mr. Edwin Forrest? The Shakespearean actor?

EDWIN
Yes, yes, yes, I am Mr. Edwin Forrest.

CORNELIA
You are preparing to play King Lear?

EDWIN
(*Irritated*)
Exactly! Isn't that why you are here?

CORNELIA

How could you know that?

EDWIN

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

(Kisses her hand)

CORNELIA

I am speechless.

EDWIN

Good! You need not speak a word, until you are ready of course. Now sit.

*(CORNELIA stands frozen as
EDWIN holds out a chair)*

Here.

CORNELIA

There?

EDWIN

Of course.

CORNELIA

On the stage?

EDWIN

Yes, yes, yes, please, sit here in my chair.

CORNELIA

I am perfectly content to stand.

EDWIN

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

CORNELIA

I do not mean to cause you any inconvenience --

EDWIN

---inconvenience? Absolutely not. It's always an honor and a privilege to talk my work, and of course, me.

CORNELIA

Well, that's... exceedingly generous of you Mr....

EDWIN

Please call me Edwin.

CORNELIA

Edwin.

EDWIN

What exactly is it you would most like to know about me Miss..

CORNELIA

Lamb.

EDWIN

Lamb. Delicious.

CORNELIA

Cornelia Lamb.

EDWIN

Oh, how delightful.

CORNELIA

Actually, I came here to talk to you about my father.

EDWIN

Really?

CORNELIA

Benjamin Lamb.

EDWIN

Have I made his acquaintance?

CORNELIA

I don't believe you have yet to meet him. But that is my hope.

EDWIN

He is an admirer of my work?

CORNELIA

He is a school teacher. Was a school teacher.

EDWIN

An educated man makes the best audience.

CORNELIA

He was headmaster at our Quaker school and taught Shakespeare to our young students for years.

EDWIN

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

CORNELIA

That's very generous but...

EDWIN

Please, no thanks, it's the least I could do. I shall pen a letter at once to assure you and your father the best seats in the house. Your name again?

CORNELIA

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

EDWIN

I'm told these tickets may be very dear to come by.

CORNELIA

My father doesn't want to go to the theater to see you play King Lear.

EDWIN

And why not?

CORNELIA

Because he believes he is King Lear.

EDWIN

(Laughing at her seriousness)

Oh, how clever. I do love a good sense of humor.

CORNELIA

I wish it were otherwise, but it is true.

EDWIN

Well, Miss....

CORNELIA

Lamb.

EDWIN

Miss Lamb, we all imagine we're someone sometimes, don't we?

CORNELIA

I don't think you understand.

EDWIN

When I was very young I thought 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 in the same day.

CORNELIA

Do most actors usually go to asylums?

EDWIN

I am not most actors.

CORNELIA

But you went to Stillwell?

EDWIN

I hope that nothing about how I prepare for my roles upon the stage is usual. Stillwell was....interesting.

CORNELIA

Did you find what you were looking for?

EDWIN

I was simply there to observe the madness of those imprisoned.

CORNELIA

So you only went to the asylum for your work?

EDWIN

Of course. Everything I do is about my work, Miss? What did you say your name was?

CORNELIA

Cornelia Lamb.

EDWIN

Miss Lamb. Believe me, Stillwell is not for the faint of heart.

CORNELIA

And what did you learn about madness Mr. Forrest.

EDWIN

I learned that -- why aren't you taking any notes Miss Lamb?

CORNELIA

Notes?

EDWIN

Writing down what I am saying. exactly.

CORNELIA

Exactly why would I be writing down what you are saying?

EDWIN

To remember my every word, of course. Certainly the readers of the Philadelphia Gazette deserve nothing less than the exact truth of what I, Edwin Forrest, say about acting, madness, Lear....one must be accurate.

CORNELIA

Every word?

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, Mr. Forrest, I can not say that I believe mimicking the pain of a madman on the stage by anyone is very responsible.

EDWIN

I do not mimic.

CORNELIA

Whatever you may choose to call it. It is not real pain..

EDWIN

I call it acting and the truth of my profession will be revealed to you when you see me transformed into King Lear as he has never seen him on a stage before. You're not writing any of this down.

CORNELIA

No.

EDWIN

(STOPPING as if catching the joke.)

Oh, you are clever, playing coy with me Miss Lamb. Trying to catch the King 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

I am not a journalist.

EDWIN

You don't write for the Gazette?

CORNELIA

I don't even read it.

EDWIN

Then why have you come here interrupting my rehearsal in the guise of someone else.

CORNELIA

I never said I was anyone else, Mr. Forrest - you did.

EDWIN

(In full "LEAR")

*"Hear, Nature, hear; dear goddess, hear!
Suspend thy purpose...that [you] may feel*

(MORE)

EDWIN (cont'd)

*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 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 to get 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 every intruder who wanted one strain off my head I would be as bald as the Bard himself.

CORNELIA

I really do not want your picture or a lock of your hair.

EDWIN

(Very loudly interrupting her)

*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!*

*(EDWIN covers his eyes and then
looks out to see her still
standing)*

*....avoid my sight! Avoid....what did you think of my Lear?
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.*

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

The Quaker religion has never encouraged the theatre as a diversion.

EDWIN

By God almighty, our theater is not a diversion. We bring our audience to tears. Real tears.

CORNELIA

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

EDWIN

Of course our suffering is real. I suffer as one with my characters. That is art, my lady. What say you to that!

CORNELIA

I say madness is more than just being loud!
(Starts to leave.)

EDWIN

Did you really come all the way 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, a headmaster and a scholar most respected in our Quaker community. Then my mother took ill, her copy of Lear beside her bed still opened and unfinished when she fell to the floor dead.

EDWIN

I am truly sorry for your tragedy. But what does this have to do with me?

CORNELIA

It broke my father open.

EDWIN

But Miss --

CORNELIA

(Interrupting)

Please. Let me finish.

(Pause.)

(MORE)

CORNELIA (cont'd)

My father had always proclaimed it was my mother's great love for him and her Quaker faith that forged a moral man out of a quick-tempered angry young boy. She had saved him from a life of misery and sorrow. Without her he seemed lost. His spirit as broken as the spine on her beloved Shakespeare. Those last words she was reading became more alive to him than anything we tried to say. Those people in that play became his family, more flesh and blood than we could hope to be, He was Lear. But who was I? (Pause) Today my father spends his days writing the words to that play on his asylum walls and his nights talking to no one but the family in that book. They are his world now, and we are simply strangers struggling to keep him alive.

EDWIN

But surely you --

CORNELIA

(Suddenly seizing on Edwin's script.)

Do you really know every word in this play Mr. Forrest?

EDWIN

Of course I do, Miss Lamb. 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

My skills are those of an actor. Your father is in an asylum.

CORNELIA

My father is in this play.

EDWIN

You said he was a scholar.

CORNELIA

His madness has taken that man away and left only the perfect Lear in his place. I am truly helpless. But you are not.

EDWIN

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

CORNELIA

My carriage is waiting outside. Come with me and you may judge his perfection for yourself.

EDWIN

I am sorry for your loss.

CORNELIA

You could lead him back to me.

EDWIN

I open at the Bowery Theatre in New York in a month.

CORNELIA

(Enticing him.)

You would face to face with Lear. The words on his walls.
Lear in his very soul.

EDWIN

There are no bars between you and the inmates.

CORNELIA

There are no inmates at Friends Asylum.

EDWIN

Are you fearless or simply foolish?

CORNELIA

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

EDWIN

And you?

CORNELIA

It is our duty to provide them with a place to accomplish
that change so that they may be one with the Lord again.

EDWIN

Do you beg for all of your patients with the same passion?

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.

CORNELIA

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

EDWIN

I touch people with my words.

CORNELIA

It's is only a few miles from here. You know the words. You
can speak to him.

EDWIN

It is impossible.

CORNELIA

You can lead him out of his darkness.

EDWIN

We are strangers.

CORNELIA

No! That book makes him your friend. Perhaps his only friend.

EDWIN

But surely Miss Lamb --

CORNELIA

In God's name, man, 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 them everything I have - everything I am -- everything I do is for them. I am nothing without my audience and if I have done my job very well, they give me their applause.

CORNELIA

Well I shall not be one of them.

EDWIN

You have never seen me perform.

CORNELIA

And you have never seen my father.

EDWIN

I cannot come with you.

CORNELIA

You will not come is what you mean.

EDWIN

My own father died of consumption when I was only a boy of thirteen. I saw him take his last breath. Held his hand. I was not afraid of death then and I am not afraid of it now.

CORNELIA

My father is not dead, Mr. Forrest.

EDWIN

Unlike you I do not believe lunacy is living.

(Picks up her bag and begins to leave.)

CORNELIA

You may not fear death, but I believe you choose not to see someone who is what you only dream of becoming.

EDWIN

And what is worse than death, Miss Lamb?

CORNELIA

Failure, Mr. Forrest. I am sorry I interrupted your rehearsal.

*(CORNELIA turns and starts out.
EDWIN is back in character.)*

EDWIN

*Better thou
Hadst not been born than not to have pleased me
better.*

CORNELIA

You are an irritating man.

EDWIN

Pray do not mock me!

CORNELIA

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.

EDWIN

And to deal plainly....

CORNELIA

It really is all just for nothing.

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

EDWIN

*(Shouting.)
I fear I am not in my perfect mind!"*

END OF SCENE

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 very involved.

EDWIN

(Rising to greet her.)

Miss Lamb.

CORNELIA

A moment please.

EDWIN

Miss Cornelia Lamb?

CORNELIA

(looking up shocked)

Mr. Forrest?

EDWIN

Yes. It is I.

CORNELIA

A moment then.

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

EDWIN

It is so good to see you again.

CORNELIA

What are you doing here?

EDWIN

Isn't it obvious.

CORNELIA

No.

EDWIN

I am here to see your father.

CORNELIA

I don't think so.

(She starts to leave.)

EDWIN

As you requested....

(CORNELIA walks out and is heard giving orders to someone. EDWIN waits cooling his heels and temper until she returns.)

EDWIN

Miss Lamb, please, stop and speak with me.

CORNELIA

Yes.

EDWIN

I am here.

CORNELIA

I am not blind.

EDWIN

Has something changed since we spoke?

CORNELIA

My mind.

(Starts to walk off.)

Phillip, be sure to move those linens....

EDWIN

I have come to see your father. Is he still alive?

CORNELIA

"Lunacy is not living." To quote the great Shakespearean actor Edwin Forrest,

EDWIN

But he still lives?

CORNELIA

Yes, he lives.

EDWIN

Then bring me to him.

CORNELIA

No.

EDWIN

You cannot just say "No", Miss Lamb.

CORNELIA

Then I will say, "It is not possible, Mr. Forrest."

EDWIN

I am sorry if I questioned my ability at our last encounter.

CORNELIA

You dismissed me.

EDWIN

I thought you were someone else.

CORNELIA

You defamed our work.

EDWIN

I misunderstood.

CORNELIA

You maligned our treatment.

EDWIN

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

CORNELIA

Condition?

EDWIN

His illness.

CORNELIA

Madness, is what you called it.

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. But none of that changes that three days ago I asked you to come and your answer was NO>

EDWIN

(Gently)

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

CORNELIA

Just like that?

EDWIN

(The ACTOR speaks grandly)

Time changes all things. Even the human heart.

CORNELIA

Really.

EDWIN

(CORNELIA is unmoved.)

Surely Quakers do forgive?

(Pause.)

CORNELIA

Of course we teach forgiveness for all God's creatures.

EDWIN

Even actors?

CORNELIA

God moves in mysterious ways.

EDWIN

Then all is forgiven.

CORNELIA

Why are you here?

EDWIN

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 one of those men?

CORNELIA

No.

EDWIN

When you came to the theatre you were quite eager for me to help your father. As I remember our encounter, you practically ordered me here.

CORNELIA

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

EDWIN

(Gently)

Please, I just want to know if your father is alive and if he still believes he is Lear? Is he one of those men in the garden?

CORNELIA

He is alive, and he is still Lear. But he is not one of those men.

EDWIN

Then I may still be of some service.

CORNELIA

You went to Stillwell to become the perfect Lear and I gave you the opportunity to fulfill your ambition. You said no but I am still here and so is he. It was a small request from me for a great reward for you -- and your behavior was atrocious.

EDWIN

I apologize Miss Lamb.

CORNELIA

Is this acting as well?

EDWIN

I admit I was abrupt with you.

CORNELIA

Yes.

EDWIN

Perhaps even rude.

CORNELIA

Agreed.

EDWIN

But the truth is that I thought you were someone else.

CORNELIA

A reporter who could do more for your career than I?

EDWIN

*(EDWIN tries to appeal to
CORNELIA who remains unmoved)*

I am contrite. (Pause) Truly. (Pause) Embarrassed. (Pause) Completely. (BEAT) Oh, for the love of God, Shall I grovel at your feet? Tear my clothes? Beg forgiveness on my knees. what do you want me to say!

CORNELIA

Continue.

EDWIN

I am not used to women breaking into my rehearsal, asking me to drop everything and follow them to some Asylum so that I may play all the characters in their father's fantasy of *King Lear in the hope* that I may bring him back to sanity and a daughter I had scarcely met moments before and for whom the word NO had never been invented.

CORNELIA

Is this you being contrite?

EDWIN

Miss Lamb, please. I have made a very great 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)

CORNELIA

No!

EDWIN

I am a man of reputation and if I choose to plead my case to the Superintendent of this Asylum I am sure he will be more amenable to my request than you are.

CORNELIA

I don't think so.

EDWIN

This is nonsense. Where is the Superintendent's office?
(*Gathering his things together to leave.*)

CORNELIA

I am the Superintendent of Friends Asylum, Mr. Forrest,
(*BEAT*)
Shall I send for your carriage?

EDWIN

You never mentioned you ran the Asylum.

CORNELIA

You never asked. In fact, once you found out I was not the reporter from the Gazette but an ordinary woman who was not even a fan of your work -- you were not interested in me at all. And that is the truth.

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.

(Beat)

EDWIN

You have every right to be angry with me.

CORNELIA

I do not need your permission to be angry.

EDWIN

You are a Quaker.

CORNELIA

Do not take the word Friends lightly.

EDWIN

We both can agree that our relationship has not started off well but surely your Friends would offer even the rudest actor a second chance?

CORNELIA

When I first 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, I knew nothing of the stage at all. But I had grown up with a deep and abiding love of Shakespeare and all to spoke to me about this man Forrest, assured me he was one of the finest actors of our time. Perhaps of any time. I was curious. And desperate. 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 assured me that you knew every word in his play. Then I had hope for the first time since his illness. I believed that you could answer Benjamin's words with the only words he seemed to understand. You could be in his world where he seemed so terribly alone. That is when I allowed myself to hope that your talent - and your humanity - might 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. Strangers clamor for some little piece of me, a token to take home with them. My work is never completely finished.

(Pause.)

I admit I was surprised and disappointed that you knew nothing of Edwin Forrest and yet there you were, asking me to do something even the greatest actor in the world would find daunting.

(MORE)

EDWIN (cont'd)

I may have appeared difficult, perhaps to the point of rudeness in my refusal, but I am here and it is my sincerest wish that you will allow me to meet your Lear so we may come to know one another. If I may serve him, I promise I will give you the truth.

CORNELIA

(BEAT)

Today he took a fearsome turn for the worse. Though I think he is of no danger to anyone but himself, I cannot be perfectly sure of his behavior. He shouts orders from his bed, writes Shakespeare's words all over his walls in a frenzied feast, eats nothing, will not leave his room and answers "Yes, No, Yes, No, Yes" to questions no one else hears but him. I know in my heart he remembers I am his daughter, but I have no idea what name he calls me in his head. *(interrupting herself)* Why are you really here!

EDWIN

You are a wise woman, Miss Lamb. You knew I would be curious when you told me of "The Perfect Lear". I believe you knew I would come before I ever knew it myself.

CORNELIA

(Finally)

I will take your visit as a blessing from God.

EDWIN

Thank you. And God. Now when can I see him.

CORNELIA

He's there.

EDWIN

In front of us.

CORNELIA

Yes. That is his room.

*(EDWIN starts to move when
there is a frightful sound)*

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, 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 scribbled, some of appears to be written in food or perhaps even human blood.

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 too far. BENJAMIN, feeling their presence, bolts up from his bed.

NOTE: even though BENJAMIN is speaking LEAR, it with a perfect ease that comes from inhabiting Lear's soul.

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...

(Goes to the wall in search of text. Coming back to EDWIN and CORNELIA)

(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.....

*(Again he goes to the wall in
search of text.)*

You are a spirit, when did you die?

EDWIN

Act VII. Lear has just awakened.

BENJAMIN

You are a spirit, when did you die?

EDWIN

He awakens to see his beloved daughter Cordelia.

BENJAMIN

You are a spirit, when did you die?

CORNELIA

What should I say?

EDWIN

I believe you need to say Cordelia's next line from his daughter Cordelia when they are finally reunited.

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 tries to speak the
words.)*

Speak.

CORNELIA

Sir, do you know me?

EDWIN

Again, with force and conviction.

CORNELIA

Sir, do you know me?

BENJAMIN

*(BENJAMIN calms down,
immediately responding to
her.)*

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

CORNELIA

(Into reality again.)

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

BENJAMIN

*(BENJAMIN recoils in
confusion.)*

No, No, No!

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

EDWIN

(Whispers.)

"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. Continue.

"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
To be my child Cordelia?"*

CORNELIA

Cornelia.

BENJAMIN

(Agitated again)

No, no, no, no!

EDWIN

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

CORNELIA

Again.

EDWIN

*(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.

BENJAMIN

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

Yes, no, yes, no, yes, no.....

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 biscuits.

EDWIN

I think so. Yes, I can pick the scene that will move him out but you must follow carefully.

*(Now rising to his own
challenge)*

I know I can. 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 too think. Just act and believe.

*(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 whispers to
CORNELIA.)*

Now. Your line. Cordelia?

CORNELIA

Will it please your Highness walk?

BENJAMIN

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.)

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

(Now totally into the scene.)

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. Biscuits and tea. How wonderful this all is. How perfectly wonderful!

(CORNELIA runs out.)

SCENE ENDS

Scene 4 - The Garden

CROSSFADE to the Courtyard. BENJAMIN, quite the KING now, is sizing EDWIN up.

BENJAMIN

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

How now! what art thou?

EDWIN

(Aside)

All right old man I know where you are,

(As KENT)

A man, sir.

BENJAMIN

What dost thou profess? what wouldst thou with us?

EDWIN

(aside)

Let's see. "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....

EDWIN

(Aside)

Now we'll see if you can follow me. Act. 1, scene 4.

(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

What was that miserable section....Ah, Right. 3, 6.

*(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....

EDWIN

Yes!

BENJAMIN

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

EDWIN

Yes. 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.*

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

Let's see how you handle the fool scene.

BENJAMIN

Fool?

EDWIN

*Dost thou know the difference, my boy, between a bitter fool
and a sweet fool?*

BENJAMIN

No, lad, teach me.

EDWIN

*That lord that counseled thee
To give away thy land,
Come place him here by me,
Do thou for him stand.
The sweet and bitter fool
Will presently appear -
The one in motley here,
The other found out there.*

BENJAMIN

Dost thou call me fool, boy?

EDWIN

*All thy other titles thou has give away. That thou wast born
with.*

BENJAMIN

(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

(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

*(Unbelievably in awe of
BENJAMIN's performance.)*

(Aside)

Dear God....

(FOOL)

*Fool O nuncle, court holy-water in a dry house is better than
this rain-water out o' door. Good nuncle, in, and ask thy
daughters' blessing: here's a night pities neither wise man
nor fool.*

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

BENJAMIN

(Now quite in a 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.)*

Edwin. Edwin? What is happening? 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

Afternoon. Ten days have passed. EDWIN is sleeping in his LEAR robes 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

Mr. Forrest!

EDWIN

I'm sleeping. I was up half the night rehearsing.
*(He rolls away from the sound
across the stage.)*

CORNELIA

Please.

EDWIN

Go away and leave me in peace!

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

(Under his breath.)

Liar.

CORNELIA

I didn't mean to interrupt you.

EDWIN

Of course you did.

(Pulling his LEAR robe around him.)

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 dear Lord.

CORNELIA

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

Here.

EDWIN

(Waving her away.)

I'm fine. Cold water does not kill.

CORNELIA

Have you eaten?

EDWIN

(From the haze.)

I remember eating a very good dinner once. Roast potatoes and a sucking pig so sweet -- But surely, Miss Lamb, you did not come all this way to ask about a suckling pig.

CORNELIA

I've brought you food. No pig, I'm afraid, but biscuits still warm and the jam comes straight from our garden.

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

EDWIN

How thoughtful.

(EDWIN starts eating them hungrily.)

Perfection. You never cease to amaze me, Miss Lamb.

CORNELIA

Please call me Cornelia.

EDWIN

(Pause) Do you ever sleep?

CORNELIA

Oh, I didn't make these. I have absolutely no talent in the kitchen. I thought about bringing you some eggs, but was afraid they would have arrived quite scrambled.

EDWIN

Thank you. This is heavenly.

(EDWIN is eating hungrily.)

CORNELIA

No, it is I who really must thank you.

EDWIN

I think we should not fight over gratitude.

CORNELIA

(Entering slowly)

Your visit has done Benjamin a world of good.

EDWIN

That is good news.

CORNELIA

(Pause)

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.

EDWIN

Always difficult.

CORNELIA

(Pause) And grateful. *(BEAT)*

EDWIN

I am delighted for you. And your gifts.

CORNELIA

He looks for you everywhere, Edwin.

EDWIN

Me?

CORNELIA

None of us know what to answer so you must understand why I am here to ask you to return one more time.

(silence)

(MORE)

CORNELIA (cont'd)
You must understand --
(EDWIN turns away.)

EDWIN
I really should go and change my clothes. It has been a lovely visit.

CORNELIA
(*resolutely*)
I have no other appointments.

EDWIN
It may be a long time.

CORNELIA
Do what you need to do.

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

CORNELIA
I'm not afraid.

EDWIN
Surely you have other things to do!

(*BEAT. CORNELIA seems frozen.*)

CORNELIA
I'll wait.

EDWIN
Very well then.
(*EDWIN begins to walk off.*)

CORNELIA
You just left and never came back. No note. Nothing in ten days. I had no idea when to expect your return.

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
You didn't hear me at all.

EDWIN
I heard you when we first met. You said one visit. I believe I have fulfilled that request.

CORNELIA

Certainly you realize how much more work there is to do.

EDWIN

My work is here.

CORNELIA

Are you unwilling to return?

EDWIN

I think you are unwilling to look at his condition.

CORNELIA

I am fully aware of his condition. I am the Superintendant 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

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.

CORNELIA

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

EDWIN

I am done. Will you not take that as my answer.

CORNELIA

So you came the first time for yourself?

EDWIN

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

CORNELIA

Did I lie?

EDWIN

You knew exactly what you were doing.

CORNELIA

Did I lie?

EDWIN

No.

CORNELIA

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

EDWIN

Perhaps too well.

CORNELIA

You saw something in his eyes, didn't you? Something you didn't tell me.

EDWIN

I saw a place just as you described it. Only more so. I did what you asked. He left his room. He ate his food. What more can you ask of me?

CORNELIA

He has changed. But not for the better. He eats and walks but he is as silent as a corpse.

EDWIN

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

CORNELIA

He looks for you, Edwin.

EDWIN

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

CORNELIA

You were closer to him than anyone has been. You saw something.

EDWIN

No.

CORNELIA

He said something to you?

EDWIN

Only Shakespeare's words.

CORNELIA

Something happened.

EDWIN

Nothing.

CORNELIA

When you two were in the garden he must have revealed something to you alone. What did you see?

EDWIN

I saw a man who called himself Lear and nothing more.

CORNELIA

Why did you run?

EDWIN

My work was done.

CORNELIA

---and not return?

EDWIN

Some things are better left alone, Cornelia.

CORNELIA

What are you afraid of?

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 he feel asleep in your arms. Miss Lamb, what more do you want from me. Life does not answer all our demands, no matter how worthy they may seem.

CORNELIA

Leave it to you to try to teach a Quaker about sacrifice.

EDWIN

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

CORNELIA

What did you see when you looked into my father's eyes?

EDWIN

I saw the perfect Lear.

CORNELIA

Good, then when you come back and we shall resume where you left him.

EDWIN

You are not listening, Cornelia! Benjamin's Lear must end this play on his terms, not yours. When Lear dies, Benjamin dies with him.

CORNELIA

Then give me this one last day and I promise you will never see me again. That should be more than enough reason to come back to the Asylum --

EDWIN

You are not listening.

CORNELIA

I hear your words.

EDWIN

Your father wants me to take him to the end of the play, Cornelia.

CORNELIA

It may not end so badly as you think? He is not Shakespeare.

EDWIN

It is a tragedy.

CORNELIA

Benjamin is no actor.

EDWIN

His tragedy.

CORNELIA

You may be wrong.

EDWIN

And if I am right?

CORNELIA

This isn't theater.

EDWIN

No, it is not theater. If he dies he will not rise up again.

CORNELIA

Only God writes the ending to life.

EDWIN

You asked me to tell you what I saw in his eyes.

CORNELIA

You are not God.

EDWIN

I am telling you the truth.

CORNELIA

There must be another choice.

EDWIN

I cannot lead a man to his death.

CORNELIA

You are not God!

EDWIN

I will never return to Friends Asylum. Ever.

CORNELIA

*(As close as she can to cursing
him.)*

Then shame on you Edwin Forrest! Shame on you and your damn theater!

*(CORNELIA walks out on Edward
who is left to sink slowly
back onto his throne alone)*

SCENE ENDS

Scene 6 - The Waiting room at Friends' asylum

Two weeks later.

CORNELIA sleeps on the long bench. She is completely disheveled and tosses and turns talking to herself in her sleep.

EDWIN comes in and watches her a few moments more, then knocks, startling CORNELIA awake. As she rises 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 and wildness.

EDWIN

Miss Lamb. Miss Lamb!

CORNELIA

Father! Is something wrong? Is Benjamin all right?

EDWIN

(Gently shaking her as she talks and tosses in her sleep.)

Cornelia? You were asleep.

CORNELIA

Is Benjamin all right.....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, Mr. Forrest, but even Quakers can look into the mirror...

(There is a commotion and the voice of BENJAMIN booms out in a banshee's wail.)

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

(Beat. Walking to the window.)

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 hear 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.

CORNELIA

Did you come because you think this can go well?

EDWIN

For him or for you? I'm not sure they are the same.

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 tosses the book to
the floor.)*

EDWIN

*(Picking up the tattered
volume.)*

You have marked all of Cordelia's words.

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 now. 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. "Patience and silence." And I would answer, "When
does that come father?" And he would simply smile and tell me
it would 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)

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.

EDWIN

(As GLOUCESTER)

I shall, my Lord.

BENJAMIN

Give me the map there.

(EDWIN comes to him and holds out the imaginary map. BENJAMIN eagerly spreads it out on the floor)

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

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

Tell me, my daughters....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.*)

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

(*Going in circles....*)

CORNELIA

Edwin?

EDWIN

You must not fail him now.

CORNELIA

The words. Tell me the words.

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

*(Seeing she needs help. As
KENT)*

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

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

(No response.)

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.
I will not swear these are my hands...."
To see another thus. I know not what to say.
I know not what to say.....I know....
I will not swear these are my hands: let's see;
I feel this pin prick. 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.

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....

EDWIN

A King....

BENJAMIN

*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

T'was adultery sire.

BENJAMIN

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

O, let me kiss that hand!

BENJAMIN

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: see how yond justice rails upon a simple thief. Hark, in thine ear: change places, and, handy-dandy, which is the justice, which is the thief?"

*(BENJAMIN sits down and puts
his bare feet out in the air
in his pantomime.)*

"Now, now, now, now, : pull off my boots:"

*(EDWIN stands a moment not
moving.)*

Pull off my boots!

*(EDWIN takes up the pantomime
and begins to pull at the
air.)*

....harder.....harder.....so:

(MORE)

BENJAMIN (cont'd)
(*BENJAMIN kicks EDWIN and
laughs.*)

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

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.*

CORNELIA

I'm lost. Where is he going now? I can't remember anything.
Help me, Edwin.

EDWIN

It's time.

CORNELIA

No! It can't be.

EDWIN

You asked me to come back here to help lead him where he
wants to go. Cornelia, he wants to go now.

CORNELIA

Not yet.

EDWIN

That was why you came to me.

CORNELIA

I am not ready.

EDWIN

He wants to finish this play Cornelia. He wants your
blessing.

CORNELIA

Oh, Lord, I am not ready.

EDWIN

You are the strongest woman I have ever known. You came to me
with an open heart and trusted his life to me. To us. And now
I tell you with all the love and pain in my own heart, let
him go. Please. Let him finish the play he hears.

CORNELIA

(*BEAT.*)

Continue.

EDWIN

Now?

CORNELIA

Now!

EDWIN

Upon such sacrifices, my Cordelia,...

BENJAMIN

.....upon such sacrifices, my Cordelia....

EDWIN

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

CORNELIA

*....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)*

*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.

*(She takes a moment. Looks at
the man who used to be her
father, and lays down.)*

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! Pray you, undo this button: thank you, sir. Do
you see this? Look on her, look, her lips,
Look there, look there.*

*(HE dies. CORNELIA collapses in
EDWIN's arms.)*

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.*

*(Repeat as necessary on the
cross.)*

*"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.*

BLACKOUT

Scene 7 - 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 has his back to the door. He sits fatigued removing his make-up and muttering his lines to himself.

EDWIN

*"Pray do not mock me:
I am a very foolish fond old man.
And to deal plainly,
I fear I am not in my perfect mind."
(There is a knock at the door)
(theatrically) Just a moment, please!*

CORNELIA

*(coming into the room
breathlessly)*

Forgive me.

EDWIN

Cornelia!

CORNELIA

I simply could not wait to tell you how wonderful this evening has been for me.

EDWIN

You saw the performance?

CORNELIA

Tonight. Here in this theatre. My first King Lear. You were brilliant.

EDWIN

I am speechless. (Awkwardly) Please, take sit.

CORNELIA

I cannot sit. My heart is beating so loudly you must hear it across the room. I am overcome with emotion.

EDWIN

Then it pleased you.

CORNELIA

Beyond my wildest expectations.

EDWIN

I don't know what to say.

CORNELIA

But I fear you have ruined me forever. How shall I ever be so content to read my Shakespeare alone in my room.

EDWIN

(Very quiet)

Then I am truly humbled.

CORNELIA

This is your dressing room?

EDWIN

Yes.

CORNELIA

It is so --

EDWIN

Small.

CORNELIA

I expected something much grander for a king.

EDWIN

It is very dangerous to think of yourself as a King offstage - especially in the theatre. You were truly pleased?

CORNELIA

I was transfixed all the way through until the play's very last words:

(closing her eyes and transfixed.)

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

EDWIN

(Edwin applauds)

Bravo.

CORNELIA

Oh, no, this is nothing but mimicry. You made those words come alive. My cheeks are still moist from the tears shed at your death.

EDWIN

I believe that is the greatest review I have ever received, though of course I never read them.

CORNELIA

It was like losing my father all over again. I saw Benjamin there on that stage and he lived once again for me completely.

EDWIN

You saw Benjamin on that stage?

CORNELIA

I had no idea a play could cause such empathy within the human soul.

EDWIN

Your father?

CORNELIA

Forgive me, Edwin. I was wrong about your theater. It is a noble cause to tell these stories for a greater purpose. To move people to a deeper sense of humanity. I bless you and your theatre for that.

EDWIN

You are the only one who knows how insignificant my Lear must be when you have .

CORNELIA

No, no, all around me were moved by your words. I was moved by your

EDWIN

You and I have seen the perfect Lear. I fear what you saw tonight was merely Lear's shadow.

CORNELIA

But Edwin, tonight you gave my father back to me. You must believe that. You were Lear tonight and in your words I was not alone. 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.

CORNELIA

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, actually. 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

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 completely sure of anything in this life.

CORNELIA

(Cheeky)

Not even in the theater.

EDWIN

No, not even in the theatre.

(silence)

CORNELIA

I really must go.

EDWIN

So soon?

CORNELIA

It's beginning to snow and I've kept my friends waiting long enough.

EDWIN

Then of course you must go with all God's speed.

CORNELIA

With all God's speed.

(CORNELIA turns to leave and stops)

Thank you, Mister Forrest.

(Quickly leaves the room.)

EDWIN

(To himself)

Thank you Cornelia Lamb.

EDWIN turns and sits back down at his make-up table and looks straight into his mirror and rehearses.

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 continues rehearsing into tnto the blackness.)

*"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."*

*"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."*

END OF PLAY