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)
EDVIN (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?

EDVIN

Hello!

CORNELIA

Forgive me, please...

EDVIN

Come down here where I can see you.

CORNELIA

I didn’t mean to disturb you --

EDVIN

--you’ve already accomplished that feat.....

(CORNELIA is standing in front of him. EDVIN 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.

EDVIN

(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?

EDVIN

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

CORNELIA

You are preparing to play King Lear?

EDVIN

(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.

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.

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.

A moment please.

Miss Cornelia Lamb?

CORNELIA
(looking up shocked)

Mr. Forrest?

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.

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.

Yes.

CORNELIA

Perhaps even rude.

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

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.
I know not what to say.

Almost happy.

We're in his play at last.

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

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

Oh, look upon me, sir....

And hold your hands in benediction o'er me.

And hold your hands in benediction o'er me.

You must not kneel.

You must not kneel.

"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.
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.

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.)

Ahhhhhh... 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.)

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.

(ENDWIN 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 expecting ....guests.

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

My work is here.

Are you unwilling to return?

I think you are unwilling to look at his condition.

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

You are his daughter.

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

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

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

I am not his Orpheus.

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

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

So you came the first time for yourself?

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

Did I lie?

You knew exactly what you were doing.

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.

Why did you run?

CORNELIA
My work was done.

---and not return?

CORNELIA
Some things are better left alone, 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.)
“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 interess'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.

CORNEILIA

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 me ....out 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.)

“So, 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)
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.

To England?

CORNELIA

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

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.

And you?

CORNELIA

You see who I am.

EDWIN

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.

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)

“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