

Act One

1

Darkness. Dim light up on the square. In a spotlight stands Alan Strang, a lean boy of seventeen, in sweater and jeans. In front of him, the horse Nugget. Alan's pose represents a contour of great tenderness: his head is pressed against the shoulder of the horse, his hands stretching up to fondle its head. The horse in turn nuzzles his neck. The flame of a cigarette lighter jumps in the dark. Lights come up slowly on the circle. On the left bench, downstage, Martin Dysart, smoking. A man in his mid-forties.

DYSART

With one particular horse, called Nugget, he embraces. The animal digs its sweaty brow into his cheek, and they stand in the dark for an hour - like a necking couple. And of all nonsensical things - I keep thinking about the horse! Not the boy: the horse. I keep seeing that huge head kissing him with its chained mouth. Nudging through the metal some desire absolutely irrelevant to filling its belly or propagating its own kind. What desire could that be? Not to stay a horse any longer? Not to remain reined up for ever in those particular genetic strings? Is it possible, at certain moments we cannot imagine, a horse can add its sufferings together - the non-stop jerks and jabs that are its daily life - and turn them into grief? What use is grief to a horse?

Alan leads Nugget out of the square and they disappear together up the tunnel, the horse's hooves scraping delicately on the wood. Dysart rises, and addresses both the large audience in the theatre and the smaller one on stage.

You see, I'm lost. What use, I should be asking, are questions like these to an overworked psychiatrist in a provincial hospital? They're worse than useless: they are, in fact, subversive.

He enters the square. The light grows brighter.

The thing is, I'm desperate. You see, I'm wearing that horse's head myself. That's the feeling. ~~All reined up in old language and old assumptions, straining to jump clean hoofed on to a whole new track of being I only suspect is there.~~ In a way, it has nothing to do with this boy. The doubts have been there for years, ~~piling up steadily in this dreary place.~~ I'm sorry. I'm not making much sense. Let me start properly: in order. It began one Monday last month, with Hesther's visit.

2

The light gets warmer. He sits. Nurse enters the square.

NURSE

Mrs. Salomon to see you, Doctor.

Nurse leaves and crosses to where Hesther sits.

DYSART

Some days I blame Hesther. She brought him to me. But of course that's nonsense. If it hadn't been him, it would have been the next patient, or the next.

Hesther enters the square: a woman in her mid-forties.

HESTHER

Hello, Martin.

Dysart rises and kisses her on the cheek.

DYSART

Madam Chairman! Welcome to the torture chamber!

HESTHER

It's good of you to see me right away.

DYSART

You're a welcome relief. Take a couch.

HESTHER

It's been a day?

DYSART

No - just a fifteen year old schizophrenic, and a girl of eight thrashed into catatonia by her father. Normal, really... You're in a state.

HESTHER

Martin, this is the most shocking case I ever tried.

DYSART

So you said on the phone.

HESTHER

I mean it. My bench wanted to send the boy to prison. For life, if they could manage it. It took me two hours solid arguing to get him sent to you instead.

DYSART

Me?

HESTHER

I mean, to hospital.

DYSART

Now look, Hesther. Before you say anything else, I can take no more patients at the moment. I can't even cope with the ones I have.

HESTHER

You must.

DYSART

Why?

HESTHER

Because most people are going to be disgusted by the whole thing. Including doctors.

DYSART

May I remind you I share this room with two highly competent psychiatrists?

HESTHER

They'll be as shocked as the public.

DYSART

That's an absolutely unwarrantable statement.

HESTHER

Oh, they'll be cool and exact. And underneath they'll be revolted, just like my bench. Please, Martin. It's vital. You're this boy's only chance.

DYSART

Why? What's he done? Dosed some little girl's Pepsi with Spanish Fly? What could possibly throw your bench into two hour convulsions?

HESTHER

He blinded six horses with a metal spike.

A long pause.

DYSART

Blinded?

HESTHER

Yes.

DYSART

All at once, or over a period?

HESTHER

All on the same night.

DYSART

Where?

HESTHER

In a riding stable near Winchester. He worked there at weekends.

DYSART

How old?

HESTHER

Seventeen.

DYSART

What did he say in Court?

HESTHER

Nothing. He just sang.

DYSART

Sang?

HESTHER

Any time anyone asked him anything.

Pause.

Please take him, Martin. It's the last favor I'll ever ask you.

DYSART

No, it's not.

HESTHER

No, it's not - and he's probably abominable. All I know is, he needs you badly. Because there really is nobody within a hundred miles of your desk who can handle him. And perhaps understand what this is about. Also...

DYSART

What?

HESTHER

There's something very special about him.

DYSART

In what way?

~~HESTHER~~

~~Vibrations.~~

~~DYSART~~

~~You and your vibrations.~~

HESTHER

~~They're quite startling. You'll see.~~

DYSART

When does he get here?

HESTHER

Tomorrow morning.

Pause.

DYSART

Can you come in and see me on Friday?

HESTHER

Bless you!

~~DYSART~~

~~If you come after work I can give you a drink. Will 6.30 be alright?~~

HESTHER

You're a dear. You really are.

~~DYSART~~

~~Famous for it.~~

~~HESTHER~~

~~Goodbye.~~

DYSART

By the way, what's his name?

HESTHER

Alan Strang.

She leaves and returns to her seat.

DYSART

(To audience) What did I expect of him? Very little, I promise you. One more dented little face. One more adolescent freak. The usual unusual. One great thing about being in the adjustment business: you're never short of customers.

Nurse comes down the tunnel, followed by Alan. She enters the square.

NURSE

Alan Strang, Doctor.

The boy comes in.

DYSART

Hello. My name's Martin Dysart. I'm pleased to meet you.

He puts out his hand. Alan does not respond in any way.

That'll be all, Nurse, thank you.

3

Nurse goes out and back to her place. Dysart sits, opening a file.

So: did you have a good journey? I hope they gave you lunch at least.

Alan stands staring at him.

DYSART

Won't you sit down?

Pause. He does not. Dysart consults his file.

Is this your full name? Alan Strang?

Silence.

And you're seventeen. Is that right?

ALAN

(Singing low) Double your pleasure
Double your fun
With Doublemint, Doublemint
Doublemint gum.

DYSART

(Unperturbed) Now, let's see. You work in an electrical shop during the week. You live with your parents, and your father's a printer. What sort of things does he print?

ALAN

(Singing louder) Double your pleasure

Double your fun
With Doublemint, Doublemint
Doublemint gum.

DYSART

I mean does he do leaflets and calendars? Things like that?

The boy approaches him, hostile.

ALAN

(Singing) Try the taste of Martini
The most beautiful drink in the world.
It's the right one -The bright one -
That's Martini!

DYSART

I wish you'd sit down, if you're going to sing. Don't you think you'd be more comfortable?

Pause.

ALAN

(Singing) There's only one T in Typhoo!
In packets and in teabags too.
Any way you make it, you'll find it's true:
There's only one T in Typhoo!

DYSART

(Appreciatively) Now that's a good song. I like it better than the other two. Can I hear that one again?

Alan starts away from him, and sits on the upstage bench.

ALAN

(Singing) Double your pleasure
Double your fun
With Doublemint, Doublemint
Doublemint gum.

DYSART

(Smiling) You know I was wrong. I really do think that one's better. It's got such a catchy tune. Please do that one again.

Silence. The boy glares at him.

I'm going to put you in a private bedroom for a little while. They're rather more pleasant than being in a ward. Will you please come and see me tomorrow? *(He rises)* By the way, which parent is it who won't allow you to watch television? Mother or father? Or is it both? *(Calling out of the door)* Nurse!

Alan stares at him. Nurse comes in.

NURSE

Yes, Doctor?

DYSART

Take Strang here to Number Three, will you?

NURSE

Very good, Doctor.

DYSART

(To Alan) You'll like that room. It's nice.

The boy sits staring at Dysart. Dysart returns the stare.

NURSE

Come along, young man. This way... I said this way, please.

Reluctantly Alan rises and goes to Nurse, passing dangerously close to Dysart, and out through the left door. Dysart looks after him, fascinated.

4

Nurse and patient move on to the circle, and walk downstage to the bench where the doctor first sat, which is to serve also as Alan's bed.

NURSE

Well now: isn't this nice? You're lucky to be in here, you know, rather than the ward. That ward's a noisy old place.

ALAN

(Singing) Let's go where you wanna go - Texaco!

NURSE

(Contemplating him) I hope you're not going to make a nuisance of yourself. You'll have a much better time of it here, you know, if you behave yourself.

ALAN

Fuck off.

Nurse leaves him, and goes back to her place. Alan lies down.

5

Dysart stands in the middle of the square and addresses the audience. He is agitated.

DYSART

That night, I had this very explicit dream. In it I'm a chief priest in Homeric Greece. I'm wearing a wide gold mask, all noble and bearded, like the so-called Mask of Agamemnon found at Mycenae. I'm standing by a thick round stone and holding a sharp knife. The sacrifice is a herd of children: about five hundred boys and girls. I can see them stretching away in a long queue, right across the plain of Argos. I know it's Argos because of the red soil. On either side of me stand two assistant priests, wearing masks as well: lumpy, pop-eyed masks. They are enormously strong, these other priests, and absolutely tireless. As each child steps forward, they grab it from behind and throw it over the stone. Then, with a surgical skill which amazes even me, I fit in the knife and slice elegantly down to the navel, just like a seamstress following a pattern. I part the flaps, sever the inner tubes, yank them out and throw them hot and steaming on to the floor. The other two then study the pattern they make, as if they were reading hieroglyphics. It's obvious to me that I'm tops as chief priest. It's this unique talent for carving that has got me where I am. The only thing is, unknown to them, I've started to feel distinctly nauseous. And with each victim, it's getting worse. My face is going green behind the mask. I know that if ever those two assistants so much as glimpse my distress - and the implied doubt that this repetitive and smelly work is doing any social good at all - I will be the next across the stone. And then, of course - the damn mask begins to slip. The priests both turn and look at it - it slips some more - they see the green sweat running down my face - their gold

pop-eyes suddenly fill up with blood - they tear the knife out of my hand... and I wake up.

6

Hesther enters the square. Light grows warmer.

HESTHER

That's the most indulgent thing I ever heard.

DYSART

It's just professional menopause. Everyone gets it sooner or later. Except you.

HESTHER

Oh, of course. I feel totally fit to be a magistrate all the time.

DYSART

No, you don't - but then that's you feeling unworthy to fill a job. I feel the job is unworthy to fill me.

HESTHER

Do you seriously?

DYSART

Do you know it's his face I saw on every victim across the stone?

HESTHER

Strang?

DYSART

He has the strangest stare I ever met.

HESTHER

Yes.

DYSART

It's exactly like being accused. Violently accused. But what of?... *(Pause)* It took him two more days of commercials, and then he snapped. Just like that - I suspect it has something to do with his nightmares.

*Nurse walks briskly round the circle, a blanket over her arm,
a clipboard of notes in her hand.*

HESTHER

He has nightmares?

DYSART

Bad ones.

NURSE

We had to give him a sedative or two, Doctor. Last night it was exactly the same.

DYSART

(To Nurse) What does he do? Call out?

NURSE

(To desk) A lot of screaming, Doctor.

DYSART

(To Nurse) Screaming?

NURSE

One word in particular.

DYSART

(To Nurse) You mean a special word?

NURSE

Over and over again... *(Consulting clipboard)* It sounds like 'Ek'.

HESTHER

Ek?

NURSE

Yes, Doctor. Ek... 'Ek!' he goes. 'Ek!'

HESTER

How weird.

Nurse stops at Alan's bed. He is sitting up. She puts the blanket over him,

and returns to her place.

DYSART

And then he burst in - just like that - without knocking or anything.

ALAN

(Jumping up) Dad!

HESTHER

What?

DYSART

The answer to a question I'd asked him two days before.

HESTHER

Dad what?

ALAN

Who hates television.

He lies downstage on the circle, as if watching television.

HESTHER

You mean his dad forbids him to watch?

DYSART

Yes.

ALAN

It's a dangerous drug.

HESTHER

Oh, really!

Frank stands up and enters downstage on the circle. A man in his fifties.

FRANK

(To Alan) It may not look like that, but that's what it is. Absolutely fatal mentally.

Dora follows him on. She is also middle-aged.

DORA

That's a little extreme, dear, isn't it?

FRANK

You sit in front of that thing long enough, you'll become stupid for life – like most of the population. *(To Alan)* The thing is, it's a swiz. It seems to be offering you something, but actually it's taking something away. Your intelligence and your concentration, every minute you watch it. That's a true swiz, do you see?

Seated on the floor, Alan shrugs.

I don't want to sound like a spoilsport, but there really is no substitute for reading. What's the matter: don't you like it?

ALAN

It's alright.

FRANK

~~I know you think it's none of my beeswax, but it really is, you know...~~ You the son of a printer, and never opening a book! If all the world was like you, I'd be out of a job, if you receive my meaning.

DORA

All the same, times change, Frank.

FRANK

(Reasonably) They change if you let them change, Dora. Please return that set in the morning.

ALAN

(Crying out) NO!

~~DORA~~

~~Frank! No!~~

~~FRANK~~

~~I'm sorry, Dora, but I'm not having that thing in the house a moment longer. I told you I didn't want it to begin with.~~

DORA

But, dear, everyone watches television these days!

FRANK

Yes, and what do they watch? Mindless violence! Mindless jokes! Every five minutes some laughing idiot selling you something you don't want.

He leaves the scene and sits again in his place.

DORA

(Looking after Frank) Really, dear, you are very extreme!

She leaves the scene too, and again sits beside her husband.

HESTHER

The wife's an ex-school teacher, isn't she?

DYSART

Yes. The boy's proud of that. We got into it this afternoon.

ALAN

(Belligerently, standing up) She knows more than you.

Hesther crosses and sits by Dysart. During the following, the boy walks round the circle, speaking to Dysart but not looking at him. Dysart replies in the same manner.

DYSART

(To Alan) Does she?

ALAN

I bet I do too. I bet I know more history than you.

DYSART

(To Alan) Well, I bet you don't.

ALAN

Alright: who was the Hammer of the Scots?

DYSART

(To Alan) I don't know: who?

ALAN

King Edward the First. Who never smiled again?

DYSART

(To Alan) I don't know: who?

ALAN

You don't know anything, do you? It was Henry the First. I know all the Kings.

DYSART

(To Alan) And who's your favorite?

ALAN

John.

DYSART

(To Alan) Why?

ALAN

Because he put out the eyes of that smarty little -

Pause.

(Sensing he has said something wrong) Well, he didn't really.

HESTHER

Oh dear.

~~ALAN~~

~~He was prevented!~~

DYSART

Something odder was to follow.

ALAN

Who said 'Religion is the opium of the people'?

HESTHER

Good Lord!

Alan giggles.

DYSART

The odd thing was, he said it with a sort of guilty snigger. The sentence is obviously associated with some kind of tension.

HESTHER

What did you say?

DYSART

I gave him the right answer, *(To Alan)* Karl Marx.

ALAN

No.

DYSART

(To Alan) Then who?

ALAN

Mind your own beeswax.

DYSART

It's probably his dad. He may say it to provoke his wife.

HESTHER

And you mean she's religious?

DYSART

I shall find out on Sunday.

HESTHER

What do you mean?

DYSART

(Getting up) I want to have a look at his home, so I invited myself over. If there's any tension over religion, it should be evident on a Sabbath evening! ...I'll let you know.

He kisses her cheek and they part, both leaving the square. Hesther sits in her place again; Dysart walks round the circle, and greets Dora who stands waiting for him downstage.

7

(Shaking hands) Mrs Strang.

DORA

Mr Strang's still at the Press, I'm afraid. He should be home in a minute.

DYSART

Perhaps you and I could have a little talk before he comes in.

DORA

Certainly. ~~Won't you come into the living room?~~

She leads the way into the square. She is very nervous.

Please.

She motions him to sit, then holds her hands tightly together.

DYSART

Mrs Strang, have you any idea how this thing could have occurred?

DORA

I can't imagine, Doctor. It's all so unbelievable! ...Alan's always been such a gentle boy. He loves animals! Especially horses.

DYSART

Especially?

DORA

Yes. He even has a photograph of one up in his bedroom. A beautiful white one, looking over a gate. His father gave it to him a few years ago, off a calendar he'd printed - and he's never taken it down... And when he was seven or eight, I used to have to read him the same book over and over, all about a horse.

DYSART

Really?

DORA

Yes: it was called Prince, and no one could ride him.

Alan calls from his bed, not looking at his mother.

ALAN

(Excited, younger voice) Why not?... Why not?... Say it! In his voice!

DORA

He loved the idea of animals talking.

DYSART

Did he?

ALAN

Say it! Say it! Use his voice!

DORA

(Proud voice) 'Because I am faithful!'

Alan giggles.

'My name is Prince, and I'm a Prince among horses! Only my young Master can ride me! Anyone else - I'll throw off!'

Alan giggles louder.

And then I remember I used to tell him a funny thing about falling off horses. Did you know that when Christian cavalry first appeared in the New World, the pagans thought horse and rider was one person?

DYSART

Really?

ALAN

(Sitting up, amazed) One person?

DORA

Actually, they thought it must be a god.

ALAN

A god!

DORA

It was only when one rider fell off, they realized the truth.

DYSART

That's fascinating. I never heard that before... Can you remember anything else like that you may have told him about horses?

DORA

Well, not really. They're in the Bible, of course. 'He saith among the trumpets, Ha, ha.'

DYSART

Ha, ha?

DORA

The Book of Job. Such a noble passage. You know - *(quoting)* 'Hast thou given the horse strength?'

ALAN

(Responding) 'Hast thou clothed his neck with thunder?'

DORA

(To Alan) 'The glory of his nostrils is terrible!'

ALAN

'He swallows the ground with fierceness and rage!'

DORA

'He saith among the trumpets -'

ALAN

(Trumpeting) 'Ha! Ha!'

DORA

(To Dysart) Isn't that splendid?

DYSART

It certainly is.

ALAN

(Trumpeting) Ha! Ha!

DORA

And then, of course, we saw an awful lot of Westerns on the television. ~~He couldn't have enough of those.~~

~~DYSART~~

~~But surely you don't have a set, do you? I understood Mr Strang doesn't approve.~~

DORA

(Conspiratorially) I used to let him slip off in the afternoons to a friend next door.

DYSART

(Smiling) You mean without his father's knowledge?

DORA

What the eye does not see, the heart does not grieve over, does it? ~~Anyway, Westerns are harmless enough, surely?~~

Frank stands up and enters the square. Alan lies back under the blanket.

(To Frank) Oh, hello dear. This is Dr Dysart.

FRANK

(Shaking hands) How d'you do?

DYSART

How d'you do?

DORA

I was just telling the Doctor, Alan's always adored horses.

FRANK

(Tight) We assumed he did.

DORA

You know he did, dear. Look how he liked that photograph you gave him.

~~FRANK~~

~~(Startled) What about it?~~

~~DORA~~

~~Nothing dear. Just that he pestered you to have it as soon as he saw it. Do you remember?~~ (To Dysart) We've always been a horsey family. At least my side of it has. My grandfather used to ride every morning, all dressed up in bowler hat and jodhpurs! He used to look splendid. Indulging in equitation, he called it.

Frank moves away from them and sits wearily.

ALAN

(Trying the word) Equitation...

DORA

I remember I told him how that came from *equus*, the Latin word for horse.

ALAN

(Savoring it) Equus!

DORA

I always wanted the boy to ride himself. He'd have so enjoyed it.

DYSART

But surely he did?

DORA

No.

DYSART

Never?

DORA

He didn't care for it.

DYSART

But he must have had to at the stables? I mean, it would be part of the job.

~~DORA~~

~~You'd have thought so, but no. He absolutely wouldn't, would he, dear?~~

FRANK

(Dryly) It seems he was perfectly happy raking out manure.

~~DYSART~~

~~Did he ever give a reason for this?~~

DORA

~~No. I must say~~ we both thought it most peculiar, but he wouldn't discuss it. I mean, you'd have thought he'd be longing to get out in the air after being cooped up all week in that dreadful shop.

FRANK

Dear, have you offered the doctor a cup of tea?

DORA

Oh dear, no, I haven't! ...And you must be dying for one.

~~DYSART~~

~~That would be nice.~~

~~DORA~~

~~Of course it would... Excuse me...~~

She goes out - but lingers on the circle, eavesdropping near the right door. Alan stretches out under his blanket and sleeps. Frank gets up.

FRANK

My wife has romantic ideas, if you receive my meaning.

DYSART

About her family?

FRANK

She thinks she married beneath her. I daresay she did. I don't understand these things myself.

DYSART

Mr Strang, I'm fascinated by the fact that Alan wouldn't ride.

FRANK

Yes, well that's him. He's always been a weird kid, I have to be honest. Can you imagine spending your weekends like that - just cleaning out stalls - with all the things that he could have been doing in the way of Further Education?

DYSART

Except he's hardly a scholar.

FRANK

How do we know? He's never really tried. His mother indulged him. She doesn't care if he can hardly write his own name. Just as long as he's happy, she says...

Dora wrings her hands in anguish. Frank sits again.

DYSART

Would you say she was closer to him than you are?

FRANK

They've always been thick as thieves. I can't say I entirely approve - especially when I hear her whispering that Bible to him hour after hour, up there in his room.

DYSART

Your wife is religious?

FRANK

Some might say excessively so. Mind you, that's her business. But when it comes to dosing it down the boy's throat - well, frankly, he's my son as well as hers.

DYSART

And you're non-religious, I take it?

FRANK

I'm an atheist, and I don't mind admitting it. If you want my opinion, it's the Bible that's responsible for all this.

DYSART

Why?

FRANK

Well, look at it yourself. A boy spends night after night having this stuff read into him: an innocent man tortured to death - thorns driven into his head - nails into his hands - a spear jammed through his ribs. It can mark anyone for life, that kind of thing. I'm not joking. The boy was absolutely fascinated by all that. He was always mooning over religious pictures. I mean real kinky ones. *(Pause)* Religion - it's our only real problem in this house, but it's insuperable.

Unable to stand any more, Dora comes in again.

DORA

(Pleasantly) You must excuse my husband, Doctor. This one subject is something of an obsession with him, isn't it, dear? You must admit.

FRANK

Call it what you like. All that stuff to me is just bad sex.

DYSART

(Calmly) Mr Strang, exactly how informed do you judge your son to be about sex?

FRANK

(Tight) I don't know.

DYSART

You didn't actually instruct him yourself?

FRANK

Not in so many words, no.

DYSART

Did you, Mrs Strang?

DORA

Well, I spoke a little, yes. I had to. I've been a teacher, Doctor, and I know what happens if you don't. They find out through magazines and dirty books.

DYSART

What sort of thing did you tell him? I'm sorry if this is embarrassing.

DORA

I told him the biological facts. But I also told him what I believed. That sex is not just a biological matter, but spiritual as well. That if God willed, he would fall in love one day. And after that, if he was lucky, he might come to know a higher love still... I simply... don't understand... Alan!

She breaks down in sobs. Her husband gets up and goes to her.

FRANK

(Embarrassed) There now. There now, Dora. Come on!

DORA

(With sudden desperation) Alright - laugh! Laugh, as usual!

FRANK

(Kindly) No one's laughing, Dora.

She glares at him. He puts his arms round her shoulders.

No one's laughing, are they Doctor?

Tenderly, he leads his wife out of the square, and they resume their places on the bench. Lights grow much dimmer.

8

A strange noise begins. Alan begins to murmur from his bed. He is having a bad nightmare, moving his hands and body as if frantically straining to tug something back. Dysart leaves the square as the boy's cries increase.

ALAN

EK! EK! EK!

Cries of Ek! on tape fill the theatre, from all around. Dysart reaches the foot of Alan's bed as the boy gives a terrible cry -

EK!

- and wakes up. The sounds snap off. Alan and the Doctor stare at each other. Then abruptly Dysart leaves the area and re-enters the square.

9

Lights grow brighter. Dysart sits on his bench, left, and opens his file. Alan gets out of bed, leaves his blanket, and comes in. He looks truculent.

DYSART

Hello. How are you this morning?

Alan stares at him.

Come on: sit down.

Alan crosses the stage and sits on the bench, opposite.

Sorry if I gave you a start last night. I was collecting some papers from my office, and I thought I'd look in on you. Do you dream often?

ALAN

Do you?

DYSART

It's my job to ask the questions. Yours to answer them.

ALAN

Says who?

DYSART

Says me. Do you dream often?

ALAN

Do you?

DYSART

Look - Alan.

ALAN

I'll answer if you answer. In turns.

Pause.

DYSART

Very well. Only we have to speak the truth.

ALAN

(Mocking) Very well.

DYSART

So. Do you dream often?

ALAN

Yes. Do you?

DYSART

Yes. Do you have a special dream?

ALAN

No. Do you?

DYSART

Yes. What was your dream about last night?

ALAN

Can't remember. What's yours about?

DYSART

I said the truth.

ALAN

That is the truth. What's yours about? The special one.

DYSART

Carving up children.

Alan smiles.

My turn!

ALAN

What?

DYSART

What is your first memory of a horse?

ALAN

What d'you mean?

DYSART

The first time one entered your life, in any way.

ALAN

Can't remember.

DYSART

Are you sure?

ALAN

Yes.

DYSART

You have no recollection of the first time you noticed a horse?

ALAN

I told you. Now it's my turn. Are you married?

DYSART

(Controlling himself) I am.

ALAN

Is she a doctor too?

DYSART

It's my turn.

ALAN

Yes, well what?

DYSART

What is Ek?

Pause.

You shouted it out last night in your sleep. I thought you might like to talk about it.

ALAN

(Singing) Double Diamond works wonders,
Works wonders, works wonders!

DYSART

Come on, now. You can do better than that.

ALAN

(Singing louder) Double Diamond works wonders,
Works wonders for you!

DYSART

Alright. ~~Good morning.~~

~~ALAN~~

~~What d'you mean?~~

~~DYSART~~

We're finished for today.

ALAN

But I've only had ten minutes.

DYSART

Too bad.

He picks up a file and studies it. Alan lingers.

~~Didn't you hear me? I said, Good morning.~~

ALAN

That's not fair!

DYSART

No?

ALAN

(Savagely) The Government pays you to see me. I know. I heard downstairs.

DYSART

Well, go back there and hear some more.

ALAN

~~That's not fair!~~

He springs up clenching his fists in a sudden violent rage.

You're a - you're a - You're a swiz! ...A damn swiz! ...Fucking swiz!

DYSART

Do I have to call Nurse?

ALAN

She puts a finger on me, I'll bash her!

DYSART

She'll bash you much harder, I can assure you. Now go away.

He reads his file. Alan stays where he is, emptily clenching his hands. He turns away. A faint hum starts from the Chorus.

ALAN

(Sullenly) On a beach...

10

He steps out of the square, upstage, and begins to walk round the circle. Warm light glows on it.

DYSART

What?

ALAN

Where I saw a horse. Swizzy.

Lazily he kicks at the sand, and throws stones at the sea.

DYSART

How old were you?

ALAN

How should I know? ...Six.

DYSART

Well, go on. What were you doing there?

ALAN

Digging.

He throws himself on the ground, downstage centre of the circle, and starts scuffing with his hands.

DYSART

A sandcastle?

ALAN

Well, what else?

DYSART

(Warningly) And?

ALAN

Suddenly I heard this noise. Coming up behind me.

A young Horseman issues in slow motion out of the tunnel. He carries a riding crop with which he is urging on his invisible horse, down the right side of the circle. The hum increases.

DYSART

What noise?

ALAN

Hooves. Splashing.

DYSART

Splashing?

ALAN

The tide was out and he was galloping.

DYSART

Who was?

ALAN

This fellow. He was on a big horse - urging him on. I thought he hadn't seen me. I called out: Hey!

HORSEMAN

(Looking down on him) That's a terrific castle!

ALAN

What's his name?

HORSEMAN

Trojan. You can stroke him, if you like. He won't mind.

Shyly Alan stretches up on tip-toe, and pats an invisible shoulder.

(Amused) You can hardly reach down there. Would you like to come up?

Alan nods, eyes wide.

Alright. Come round this side. You always mount a horse from the left. I'll give you a lift. Okay.?

Alan goes round on the other side.

Here we go, now. Upsadaisy!

Alan set his foot on the Horseman's thigh, and is lifted by him up on to his shoulders. The hum from the Chorus becomes exultant. Then stops.

Now all you do is hold onto his mane.

He holds up the crop, and Alan grips on to it.

Tight now. And grip with your knees. All set? ...Come on, then, Trojan. Let's go!

The Horseman walks slowly upstage round the circle, with Alan's legs tight round his neck.

DYSART

How was it? Was it wonderful?

Alan rides in silence.

HORSEMAN

Do you want to go faster?

ALAN

Yes!

HORSEMAN

All you have to do is say 'Come on, Trojan - bear me away!' Say it, then!

ALAN

Bear me away!

The Horseman starts to run with Alan round the circle.

DYSART

You went fast?

ALAN

Yes!

DYSART

Weren't you frightened?

ALAN

No!

HORSEMAN

Come on now, Trojan! Bear us away! Hold on! Come on now!

He runs faster. Alan begins to laugh. Then suddenly, as they reach again the right downstage corner, Frank and Dora stand up in alarm.

DORA

Alan!

FRANK

Alan!

Frank runs round after them. Dora follows behind.

FRANK

Hey, you! You!

HORSEMAN

Whoa, boy! ...Whoa!

He reins the horse round, and wheels to face the parents. This all goes fast.

~~FRANK~~

~~What do you imagine you are doing?~~

~~HORSEMAN~~

~~(Ironic) 'Imagine'?~~

FRANK

What is my son doing up there?

~~HORSEMAN~~

~~Water skiing!~~

Dora joins them, breathless.

DORA

Is he alright, Frank? He's not hurt?

FRANK

Don't you think you should ask permission before doing a stupid thing like that?

HORSEMAN

What's stupid?

ALAN

It's lovely, dad!

DORA

Alan, come down here!

HORSEMAN

The boy's perfectly safe. Please don't be hysterical.

FRANK

Come down here, Alan. You heard what your mother said.

ALAN

No.

FRANK

Right this moment.

He pulls Alan from the Horseman's shoulders. The boy shrieks, and falls to the ground.

HORSEMAN

Watch it!

DORA

Frank!

She runs to her son, and kneels. The Horseman skitters.

FRANK

You're a public menace, d'you know that? How dare you pick up children and put them on dangerous animals.

HORSEMAN

Dangerous?

FRANK

~~Of course dangerous.~~ Look at his eyes. They're rolling.

DORA

Frank, leave it!

HORSEMAN

Come on, Trojan!

He urges his horse straight at them, then wheels it and gallops off round the right side of the circle and away up the tunnel, out of sight. The parents cry out, as they are covered with sand and water. Frank runs after him, and round the left side of the circle, with his wife following after.

ALAN

~~Splash, splash, splash!~~ All three of us got covered with water! Dad got absolutely soaked!

FRANK

(Shouting after the Horseman) Hooligan! Filthy hooligan!

ALAN

I wanted to laugh!

FRANK

Upper class riff-raff! That's all they are, people who go riding! That's what they want - trample on ordinary people!

~~DORA~~

~~Don't be absurd, Frank... (Amused) Look at you. You're covered!~~

~~FRANK~~

~~Not as much as you. There's sand all over your hair!~~

~~*She starts to laugh more. He tries to brush the sand out of her hair.*~~

~~What are you laughing at? It's not funny. It's not funny at all, Dora!~~

~~*She goes off, right, still laughing. Alan edges into the square, still on the ground. Frank returns to his place on the beach, sulky. Abrupt silence.*~~

ALAN

And that's all I remember.

DYSART

~~And a lot, too.~~ Thank you... You know, I've never been on a horse in my life.

ALAN

(Not looking at him) Nor me.

DYSART

You mean, after that?

ALAN

Yes.

DYSART

But you must have done at the stables?

ALAN

No.

DYSART

~~Never?~~

ALAN

~~No.~~

DYSART

~~How come?~~

ALAN

~~I didn't care to.~~

DYSART

Did it have anything to do with falling off like that, all those years ago?

ALAN

(Tight) I just didn't care to, that's all.

DYSART

Do you think of that scene often?

ALAN

I suppose.

DYSART

Why, do you think?

ALAN

'Cos it's funny.

DYSART

Is that all?

ALAN

My turn... I told you a secret: now you tell me one.

DYSART

Alright. I have patients who've got things to tell me, only they're ashamed to say them to my face. What do you think I do about that?

ALAN

What?

DYSART

I give them this little tape recorder.

He takes a small tape recorder and microphone from his pocket. They go off to another room, and send me the tape through Nurse.

They don't have to listen to it with me.

ALAN

That's stupid.

DYSART

All you do is press this button, and speak into this. It's very simple. Anyway, your time's up for today. I'll see you tomorrow.

ALAN

(Getting up) Maybe.

DYSART

Maybe?

ALAN

If I feel like it.

He is about to go out. Then suddenly he returns to Dysart and takes the machine from him.

It's stupid.

He leaves the square and goes back to his bed.

11

DORA

(Calling out) Doctor!

Dora re-enters and comes straight on to the square from the right. She wears an overcoat, and is nervously carrying a shopping bag.

DYSART

That same evening, his mother appeared.

DORA

Hello, Doctor.

DYSART

Mrs Strang!

DORA

~~I've been shopping in the neighborhood. I thought I might just look in.~~

~~DYSART~~

Did you want to see Alan?

DORA

(Uncomfortably) No, no... Not just at the moment. Actually, it's more you I wanted to see.

~~DYSART~~

~~Yes?~~

DORA

You see, there's something Mr Strang and I thought you ought to know. ~~We discussed it, and it might just be important.~~

DYSART

Well, come and sit down.

DORA

I can't stay more than a moment. I'm late as it is. Mr Strang will be wanting his dinner.

DYSART

Ah. (*Encouragingly*) So, what was it you wanted to tell me?

She sits on the upstage bench.

DORA

Well, do you remember that photograph I mentioned to you. The one Mr Strang gave Alan to decorate his bedroom a few years ago?

DYSART

Yes. A horse looking over a gate, wasn't it?

DORA

That's right. Well, actually, it took the place of another kind of picture altogether.

DYSART

What kind?

DORA

It was a reproduction of Our Lord on his way to Calvary. Alan found it in Reeds Art Shop, and fell absolutely in love with it. He insisted on buying it with his pocket money, and hanging it at the foot of his bed where he could see it last thing at night. My husband was very displeased.

DYSART

Because it was religious?

DORA

In all fairness I must admit it was a little extreme. The Christ was loaded down with chains, and the centurions were really laying on the stripes. It certainly would not have been my choice, but I don't believe in interfering too much with children, so I said nothing.

DYSART

But Mr Strang did?

DORA

He stood it for a while, but one day we had one of our tiffs about religion, and he went straight upstairs, tore it off the boy's wall and threw it in the dustbin. Alan went hysterical. He cried for days without stopping - and he was not a crier, you know.

DYSART

But he recovered when he was given the photograph of the horse in its place?

DORA

He certainly seemed to. At least, he hung it in exactly the same position, and we had no more of that awful weeping.

DYSART

~~Thank you, Mrs Strang. That is interesting...~~ Exactly how long ago was that? Can you remember?

DORA

It must be five years ago, Doctor. Alan would have been about twelve. How is he, by the way?

DYSART

Bearing up.

She rises.

DORA

Please give him my love.

DYSART

You can see him any time you want, you know.

~~DORA~~

~~Perhaps if I could come one afternoon without Mr Strang. He and Alan don't exactly get on at the moment, as you can imagine.~~

~~DYSART~~

~~Whatever you decide, Mrs Strang... Oh, one thing.~~

DORA

Yes?

DYSART

Could you describe that photograph of the horse in a little more detail for me? I presume it's still in his bedroom?

DORA

Oh, yes. It's a most remarkable picture, really. You very rarely see a horse taken from that angle - absolutely head on. That's what makes it so interesting.

DYSART

Why? What does it look like?

DORA

Well, it's most extraordinary. It comes out all eyes.

DYSART

Staring straight at you?

DORA

Yes, that's right...

An uncomfortable pause.

I'll come and see him one day very soon, Doctor. Goodbye.

She leaves, and resumes her place by her husband.

DYSART

(To audience) It was then - that moment - I felt real alarm. What was it? The shadow of a giant head across my desk? ...At any rate, the feeling got worse with the stable-owner's visit.

12

Dalton comes in to the square: heavy-set: mid-fifties.

DALTON

Dr Dysart?

DYSART

Mr Dalton. It's very good of you to come.

DALTON

It is, actually. In my opinion the boy should be in prison. Not in a hospital at the tax-payers' expense.

DYSART

Please sit down.

Dalton sits.

This must have been a terrible experience for you.

DALTON

Terrible? I don't think I'll ever get over it. Jill's had a nervous breakdown.

DYSART

Jill?

DALTON

The girl who worked for me. Of course, she feels responsible in a way. Being the one who introduced him in the first place.

DYSART

He was introduced to the stable by a girl?

DALTON

Jill Mason. He met her somewhere, and asked for a job. She told him to come and see me. I wish to Christ she never had.

DYSART

But when he first appeared he didn't seem in any way peculiar?

DALTON

No, he was good. He'd spend hours with the horses cleaning and grooming them, way over the call of duty. I thought he was a real find.

DYSART

Apparently, during the whole time he worked for you, he never actually rode.

DALTON

That's true.

DYSART

Wasn't that peculiar?

DALTON

Very... If he didn't.

DYSART

What do you mean?

Dalton rises.

DALTON

Because on and off, that whole year, I had the feeling the horses were being taken out at night.

DYSART

At night?

DALTON

There were just odd things I noticed. I mean too often one or other of them would be sweaty first thing in the morning, when it wasn't sick. Very sweaty, too. And its stall wouldn't be near as mucky as it should be if it had been in all night. I never paid it much mind at the time. It was only when I realized I'd been hiring a loony, I came to wonder if he hadn't been riding all the time, behind our backs.

~~DYSART~~

~~But wouldn't you have noticed if things had been disturbed?~~

~~DALTON~~

~~Nothing ever was. Still, he's a neat worker. That wouldn't prove anything.~~

DYSART

Aren't the stables locked at night?

DALTON

Yes.

DYSART

And someone sleeps on the premises?

DALTON

Me and my son.

~~DYSART~~

~~Two people?~~

~~DALTON~~

I'm sorry, Doctor. It's obviously just my fancy. I tell you, this thing has shaken me so bad, I'm liable to believe anything. If there's nothing else, I'll be going.

DYSART

Look: even if you were right, why should anyone do that? Why would any boy prefer to ride by himself at night, when he could go off with others during the day.

DALTON

Are you asking me? He's a loony, isn't he?

Dalton leaves the square and sits again in his place. Dysart watches him go.

ALAN

It was sexy.

DYSART

His tape arrived that evening.

13

Alan is sitting on his bed holding the tape-recorder. Nurse approaches briskly, takes the machine from him - gives it to Dysart in the square - and leaves again, resuming her seat. Dysart switches on the tape.

ALAN

That's what you want to know, isn't it? Alright: it was. I'm talking about the beach. That time when I was a kid. What I told you about...

Pause. He is in great emotional difficulty. Dysart sits on the left bench listening, file in hand. Alan rises and stands directly behind him, but on the circle, as if recording the ensuing speech. He never, of course, looks directly at the Doctor.

I was pushed forward on the horse. There was sweat on my legs from his neck. All that power going any way you wanted... His sides were all warm, and the smell... Then suddenly I was on the ground, where Dad pulled me. I could have bashed him...

Pause.

Something else. When the horse first appeared, I looked up into his mouth. It was huge. There was this chain in it. The fellow pulled it, and cream dripped out. I said 'Does it hurt?' And he said - the horse said - said -

He stops, in anguish. Dysart makes a note in his file.

(Desperately) It was always the same, after that. Every time I heard one clop by, I had to run and see. Up a country lane or anywhere. They sort of pulled me. I couldn't take my eyes off them. Just to watch their skins. The way their necks twist, and sweat shines in the folds... *(Pause)* I can't remember when it started. Mum reading to me about Prince who no one could ride, except one boy. Or the white horse in Revelations. 'He that sat upon him was called Faithful and True. His eyes were as flames of fire, and he had a name written that no man knew but himself... Words like reins. Stirrup. Flanks... 'Dashing his spurs against his charger's flanks!'... Even the words made me feel... Years, I never told anyone. Mum wouldn't understand. She likes 'Equitation'. Bowler hats and jodhpurs! 'My grandfather dressed for the horse,' she says. What does that mean? The horse isn't dressed. It's the most naked thing you ever saw! More than a dog or a cat or

anything. Even the most broken down old nag has got its life! To put a bowler on it is filthy! ...No one understands! Except cowboys. They do. I wish I was a cowboy. They're free. They just swing up and then it's miles of grass... I bet all cowboys are orphans! I bet they are!

NURSE

Mr Strang to see you, Doctor.

DYSART

(In surprise) Mr Strang? Show him up, please.

ALAN

(Mimicking his mother) 'God sees you, Alan. God's got eyes everywhere -'

He stops abruptly.

I'm not doing any more!... I hate this!... ~~You can whistle for anymore. I've had it!~~

*He returns angrily to his bed, throwing the blanket over him.
Dysart switches off the tape.*

14

*Frank Strang comes into the square, his hat in his hand.
He is nervous and embarrassed.*

DYSART

(Welcoming) Hello, Mr Strang.

FRANK

I was just passing. I hope it's not too late.

DYSART

Of course not. I'm delighted to see you.

FRANK

My wife doesn't know I'm here. I'd be grateful to you if you didn't enlighten her, if you receive my meaning.

DYSART

Everything that happens in this room is confidential, Mr Strang.

FRANK

I hope so...

DYSART

(Gently) Do you have something to tell me?

FRANK

As a matter of fact I have. Yes.

DYSART

Your wife told me about the photograph.

FRANK

I know, it's not that! It's about that, but it's - worse... I wanted to tell you the other night, but I couldn't in front of Dora. Maybe I should have. It might show her where all that stuff leads to, she drills into the boy behind my back.

DYSART

What kind of thing is it?

FRANK

Something I witnessed.

DYSART

Where?

FRANK

At home. About eighteen months ago.

DYSART

Go on.

FRANK

It was late. I'd gone upstairs to fetch something. The boy had been in bed hours, or so I thought.

DYSART

Go on.

FRANK

As I came along the passage I saw the door of his bedroom was ajar. I'm sure he didn't know it was. From inside I heard the sound of this chanting.

DYSART

Chanting?

FRANK

Like the Bible. One of those lists his mother's always reading to him.

DYSART

What kind of list?

FRANK

Those Begats. So-and-so begat, you know. Genealogy.

DYSART

Can you remember what Alan's list sounded like?

FRANK

The first word I heard was...

ALAN

(Rising and chanting) Prince!

DYSART

Prince?

FRANK

Prince begat Prance. That sort of nonsense.

Alan moves slowly to the centre of the circle, downstage.

ALAN

And Prance begat Prankus! And Prankus begat Flankus!

FRANK

I looked through the door, and he was standing in the moonlight in his pajamas, right in front of that big photograph.

DYSART

The horse with the huge eyes?

FRANK

Right.

ALAN

Flankus begat Spankus. And Spankus begat Spunkus the Great, who lived three score years!

FRANK

It was all like that. I can't remember the exact names, of course. Then suddenly he knelt down.

DYSART

In front of the photograph?

FRANK

Yes. Right there at the foot of his bed.

ALAN

(Kneeling) And Legwus begat Neckwus. And Neckwus begat Fleckwus, the King of Spit. And Fleckwus spoke out of his chinkle-chankle!

He bows himself to the ground.

DYSART

What?

FRANK

I'm sure that was the word. I've never forgotten it. Chinkle-chankle.

Alan raises his head and extends his hands up in glory.

ALAN

And he said 'Behold - I give you Equus, my only begotten son!'

DYSART

Equus?

FRANK

Yes. No doubt of that. He repeated that word several times. 'Equus my only begotten son.'

ALAN

(Reverently) Ek... wus!

DYSART

(Suddenly understanding: almost 'aside') Ek... Ek...

FRANK

(Embarrassed) And then...

DYSART

Yes: what?

FRANK

He took a piece of string out of his pocket. Made up into a noose. And put it in his mouth.

Alan bridles himself with invisible string, and pulls it back.

And then with his other hand he picked up a coat hanger. A wooden coat hanger, and - and -

DYSART

Began to beat himself?

Alan, in mime, begins to thrash himself, increasing the strokes in speed and viciousness. Pause.

FRANK

You see why I couldn't tell his mother... Religion. Religion's at the bottom of all this!

DYSART

What did you do?

FRANK

Nothing. I coughed - and went back downstairs.

The boy starts guiltily - tears the string from his mouth - and scrambles back to bed.

DYSART

Did you ever speak to him about it later? Even obliquely?

FRANK

(Unhappily) I can't speak of things like that, Doctor. It's not in my nature.

DYSART

(Kindly) No. I see that.

FRANK

But I thought you ought to know. So I came.

DYSART

(Warmly) Yes. I'm very grateful to you. ~~Thank you.~~

~~Pause.~~

~~FRANK~~

~~Well, that's it...~~

~~DYSART~~

Is there anything else?

FRANK

(Even more embarrassed) There is actually. One thing.

DYSART

What's that?

FRANK

On the night that he did it - that awful thing in the stable -

DYSART

Yes?

FRANK

That very night, he was out with a girl.

DYSART

How d'you know that?

FRANK

I just know.

DYSART

(Puzzled) Did he tell you?

FRANK

I can't say any more.

DYSART

I don't quite understand.

FRANK

Everything said in here is confidential, you said.

DYSART

Absolutely.

FRANK

Then ask him. Ask him about taking a girl out, that very night he did it...
(Abruptly) Goodbye, Doctor.

He goes. Dysart looks after him. Frank resumes his seat.

15

Alan gets up and enters the square.

DYSART

(Pleasantly) What did you do last night?

ALAN

Watched television.

Any good?

DYSART

Alright.

ALAN

Thanks for the tape. It was excellent.

DYSART

I'm not making any more.

ALAN

One thing I didn't quite understand. You began to say something about the horse on the beach talking to you.

DYSART

That's stupid. Horses don't talk.

ALAN

~~So I believe.~~

~~DYSART~~

~~I don't know what you mean.~~

~~ALAN~~

~~Never mind.~~ Tell me something else. Who introduced you to the stable to begin with?

DYSART

Pause.

Someone I met.

ALAN

Where?

DYSART

Bryson's.

ALAN

DYSART

The shop where you worked?

ALAN

Yes.

DYSART

That's a funny place for you to be. ~~Whose idea was that?~~

ALAN

~~Dad.~~

~~DYSART~~

~~I'd thought he'd have wanted you to work with him.~~

I loved it.

DYSART

Really?

ALAN

(Sarcastic) Why not? You get to spend every minute with electrical things. It's fun.

Nurse, Dalton and the actors playing horses call out to him as Customers, seated where they are. Their voices are aggressive and demanding. There is a constant background mumbling, made up of trade names, out of which can clearly be distinguished the italicized words, which are shouted out.

CUSTOMER

Philco! I want to buy a hot-plate. I'm told the Philco is a good make!

ALAN

I think it is, madam.

CUSTOMER

Remington ladies' shavers?

ALAN

I'm not sure, madam.

Robex tableware?

CUSTOMER

Croydex?

CUSTOMER

Voletex?

CUSTOMER

Pifco automatic toothbrushes?

CUSTOMER

I'll find out, sir.

ALAN

Beautiflor!

CUSTOMER

Windolene!

CUSTOMER

I want a Philco transistor radio!

CUSTOMER

This isn't a Remington! I wanted a Remington!

CUSTOMER

~~Sorry.~~

~~ALAN~~

~~Are you a dealer for Hoover?~~

~~CUSTOMER~~

~~Sorry.~~

~~ALAN~~

~~I wanted the heat retaining Pifco!~~

~~CUSTOMER~~

~~ALAN~~

~~Sorry!~~

*Jill comes into the square: a girl in her early twenties, pretty and middle class.
She wears a sweater and jeans. The mumbling stops.*

JILL

Hello.

ALAN

You work at Dalton's stables. I've seen you.

During the following, he mimes putting away a pile of boxes on a shelf in the shop.

JILL

I've seen you too, haven't I? You're the boy who's always staring into the yard around lunch-time.

ALAN

Me?

~~JILL~~

~~You're there most days.~~

~~ALAN~~

~~Not me.~~

JILL

(Amused) Of course it's you. Mr Dalton was only saying the other day: 'Who's that boy keeps staring in at the door?' Are you looking for a job or something?

ALAN

(Eagerly) Is there one?

JILL

Can you ride?

ALAN

No... No... I don't want to.

She looks at him curiously.

Please.

JILL

Come up on Saturday. I'll introduce you to Mr Dalton.

She leaves the square.

DYSART

When was this? About a year ago?

ALAN

I suppose.

Briskly he moves the three benches to form three stalls in the stable.

16

Rich light falls on the square. An exultant humming from the Chorus. Tramping is heard. Three actors playing horses rise from their places. Together they unhook three horse masks from the ladders to left and right, put them on with rigid timing, and walk with swaying horse-motion into the square. Their metal hooves stamp on the wood. Their masks turn and toss high above their heads - as they will do sporadically throughout all horse scenes - making the steel gleam in the light. For a moment they seem to converge on the boy as he stands in the middle of the stable, but then they swiftly turn and take up positions as if tethered by the head, with their invisible rumps towards him, one by each bench.

Alan is sunk in this glowing world of horses. Lost in wonder, he starts almost involuntarily to kneel on the floor in reverence - but is sharply interrupted by the cheery voice of Dalton, coming into the stable, followed by Jill. The boy straightens up guiltily.

DALTON

First thing to learn is drill. Learn it and keep to it. I want this place neat, dry and clean at all times. After you've mucked out, Jill will show you some grooming. What we call strapping a horse.

JILL

I think Trooper's got a stone.

DALTON

Yes? Let's see.

*He crosses to the horse by the left bench, who is balancing one hoof on its tip.
He picks up the hoof.*

You're right. *(To Alan)* See this? This V here. It's what's called a frog. Sort of shock-absorber. Once you pierce that, it takes ages to heal - so you want to watch for it. You clean it out with this. What we call a hoof-pick.

He takes from his pocket an invisible pick.

Mind how you go with it. It's very sharp. Use it like this.

He quickly takes the stone out.

See?

Alan nods, fascinated.

~~You'll soon get the hang of it.~~ Jill will look after you. What she doesn't know about stables, isn't worth knowing.

JILL

(Pleased) Oh yes, I'm sure!

DALTON

(Handing Alan the pick) ~~Careful how you go with that.~~ The main rule is, anything you don't know: ask. Never pretend you know something when you don't.
(Smiling) Actually, the main rule is: enjoy yourself. Alright?

ALAN

Yes, sir.

DALTON

Good lad. See you later.

He nods to them cheerfully, and leaves the square. Alan clearly puts the invisible hoof-pick on the rail, downstage left.

JILL

Alright, let's start on some grooming.

They approach Nugget, who is standing to the right. She pats him. Alan sits and watches her.

This is Nugget. He's my favorite. He's as gentle as a baby, aren't you? But terribly fast if you want him to be.

During the following, she mimes both the actions and the objects, which she picks up from the right bench.

~~Now this is the dandy, and we start with that.~~ You always groom the same way: from the ears downward. Don't be afraid to do it hard. The harder you do it, the more the horse loves it. Push it right through the coat: like this.

The boy watches in fascination as she brushes the invisible body of Nugget. Now and then the horse mask moves very slightly in pleasure.

~~Down towards the tail and right through the coat.~~ See how he loves it? I'm giving you a lovely massage, boy, aren't I? ... You try.

She hands him the brush. Gingerly he rises and approaches Nugget. Embarrassed and excited, he copies her movements, inexpertly.

Keep it nice and easy. Never rush. Down towards the tail and right through the coat. That's it. You've got a feel for it. I can tell. ...It's going to be nice teaching you. See you later.

She leaves the square and resumes her place. Alan is left alone with the horses. They all stamp. He approaches Nugget again, and touches the horse's shoulder. The mask turns sharply in his direction. The boy pauses, then moves his hand gently over the outline of the neck and back. The mask is re-assured. It stares ahead unmoving. Then Alan lifts his palm to his face and smells it deeply, closing his eyes.

Dysart rises from his bench, and begins to walk slowly upstage round the circle.

DYSART

Was that good? Touching them.

Alan gives a faint groan.

ALAN

Mmm.

~~DYSART~~

~~It must have been marvelous, being near them at last... Stroking them... Making them fresh and glossy... Tell me...~~

Silence. Alan begins to brush Nugget.

How about the girl? Did you like her?

ALAN

(Tight) Alright.

DYSART

Just alright?

Alan changes his position, moving round Nugget's rump so that his back is to the audience. He brushes harder. Dysart comes downstage around the circle, and finally back to his bench.

Was she friendly?

ALAN

Yes.

DYSART

Or stand-offish?

ALAN

Yes.

DYSART

Well which?

ALAN

What?

DYSART

Which was she?

Alan brushes harder.

Did you take her out? ~~Come on now: tell me. Did, you have a date with her?~~

ALAN

What?

DYSART

(Sitting) Tell me if you did.

The boy suddenly explodes in one of his rages.

ALAN

(Yelling) TELL ME!

All the masks toss at the noise.

DYSART

What?

ALAN

Tell me, tell me, tell me, tell me!

*Alan storms out of the square, and downstage to where Dysart sits. He is raging.
During the ensuing, the horses leave by all three openings.*

On and on, sitting there! Nosey Parker! That's all you are! Just like Dad. Answer this. Answer that. Never stop!

He marches round the circle and back into the square. Dysart rises and enters it from the other side.

Lights brighten.

DYSART

I'm sorry.

Alan slams about what is now the office again, replacing the benches to their usual position.

ALAN

Alright, it's my turn now. You tell me! Answer me!

DYSART

We're not playing that game now.

ALAN

We're playing what I say.

DYSART

Alright. What do you want to know?

He sits.

ALAN

Do you have dates?

DYSART

I told you. I'm married.

Alan approaches him, very hostile.

ALAN

I know. Her name's Margaret, she's a dentist! You see, I found out! What made you go with her? Did you use to bite her hands when she did you in the chair?

The boy sits next to him, close.

DYSART

That's not very funny.

~~ALAN~~

~~Do you have girls behind her back?~~

~~DYSART~~

~~No.~~

ALAN

~~Then what?~~ Do you fuck her?

DYSART

That's enough now.

He rises and moves away.

ALAN

Come on, tell me! ~~Tell me, tell me!~~

~~DYSART~~

~~I said that's enough now.~~

Alan rises too and walks around him.

ALAN

I bet you don't. I bet you never touch her. Come on, tell me. You've got no kids, have you? Is that because you don't fuck?

DYSART

(Sharp) Go to your room. Go on: ~~quick march.~~

Pause. Alan moves away from him, insolently takes up a packet of Dysart's cigarettes from the bench, and extracts one.

Give me those cigarettes.

The boy puts one in his mouth.

(Exploding) Alan, give them to me!

Reluctantly Alan shoves the cigarette back in the packet, turns and hands it to him.

Now go!

Alan bolts out of the square, and back to his bed.

Brilliant! Absolutely brilliant!

Dysart sits. Hesther enters the square. Light grows warmer.

18

~~HESTHER~~

~~Now stop it.~~

DYSART

Do I embarrass you?

~~HESTHER~~

~~I suspect you're about to.~~

Pause.

DYSART

My wife doesn't understand me, Your Honor.

HESTHER

Do you understand her?

DYSART

No. Obviously I never did.

Pause.

We suited each other admirably. We were brisk in our wooing, brisk in our wedding, brisk in our disappointment. We turned from each other briskly into our separate surgeries.

HESTHER

You don't have children, do you?

DYSART

No. Instead she sits beside our glazed brick fireplace, knitting things for orphans, and I sit opposite, turning the pages of art books on Ancient Greece.

HESTHER

Martin.

DYSART

She finds all that repulsive. All my wife has ever taken from the Mediterranean - from that whole vast intuitive culture - are four bottles of Chianti to make into lamps, and two china condiment donkeys labelled Sally and Peppy.

Pause.

(More intimately) I wish there was one person in my life I could show. One instinctive, absolutely unbrisk person I could take to Greece, and stand in front of certain shrines and sacred streams and say 'Look! Life is only comprehensible through a thousand local Gods. And not just the old dead ones with names like Zeus - no, but living Geniuses of Place and Person! I'd say to them - 'Worship as many as you can see - and more will appear!'... If I had a son, I bet you he'd come out exactly like his mother. Utterly worshipless. Would you like a drink?

HESTHER

No, thanks. Actually, I've got to be going. As usual...

DYSART

You never stop, do you?

HESTHER

Do you?

DYSART

This boy, with his stare. He's trying to save himself through me.

HESTHER

I'd say so.

DYSART

What am I trying to do to him?

HESTHER
Restore him, surely?

DYSART
To what?

HESTHER
A normal life.

DYSART
Normal?

HESTHER
It still means something.

DYSART
Does it?

HESTHER
~~Of course.~~

DYSART
~~You mean a normal boy has one head: a normal head has two ears?~~

~~HEATHER~~
~~You know I don't.~~

~~DYSART~~
~~Then what else?~~

HESTHER
You know what I mean by a normal smile in a child's eyes, and one that isn't - even if I can't exactly define it. Don't you?

DYSART
Yes.

HESTHER

Then we have a duty to that, surely? Both of us. ~~Thank you for what you're doing.~~
You're going through a rotten patch at the moment. I'm sorry... I suppose one of
the few things one can do is simply hold onto priorities.

DYSART

Like what?

HESTHER

Oh - children before grown-ups. Things like that.

~~DYSART~~

~~You're really quite splendid.~~

~~HESTHER~~

~~Famous for it.~~ Goodnight.

She leaves him.

19

Alan rises and enters the square. He is subdued.

DYSART

Good afternoon.

ALAN

Afternoon.

DYSART

I'm sorry about yesterday.

ALAN

It was stupid.

DYSART

It was.

ALAN

What I said, I mean.

DYSART

How are you sleeping?

Alan shrugs.

You're not feeling well, are you?

ALAN

Alright.

DYSART

Would you like to play a game? It could make you feel better.

ALAN

What kind?

DYSART

It's called Blink. You have to fix your eyes on something: say, that little stain over there on the wall - and I tap this pen on the desk. The first time I tap it, you close your eyes. The next time you open them. And so on. ~~Close, open, close, open, till I say stop.~~

ALAN

How can that make you feel better?

DYSART

It relaxes you. You'll feel as though you're talking to me in your sleep.

ALAN

It's stupid.

DYSART

You don't have to do it, if you don't want to.

ALAN

I didn't say I didn't want to.

DYSART

Sit down and start watching that stain. Try and keep your mind as blank as possible.

~~ALAN~~

~~That's not difficult.~~

DYSART

~~Ssh. Stop talking...~~ On the first tap, close. On the second, open. Are you ready?

Alan nods. Dysart taps his pen on the wooden rail. Alan shuts his eyes. Dysart taps again. Alan opens them. The taps are evenly spaced. After four of them the sound cuts out, and is replaced by a louder, metallic sound, on tape. Dysart talks through this, to the audience - the light changes to cold - while the boy sits in front of him, staring at the wall, opening and shutting his eyes.

The Normal is the good smile in a child's eyes - alright. It is also the dead stare in a million adults. The Normal is the indispensable, murderous God of Health, and I am his Priest. I have honestly assisted children in this room. I have talked away terrors and relieved many agonies. But also - beyond question - I have cut from them parts of individuality repugnant to this God, ~~in both his aspects. Parts sacred to rarer and more wonderful Gods.~~ And at what length... Sacrifices to Zeus took at the most, surely, sixty seconds each. Sacrifices to the Normal can take as long as sixty months.

The natural sound of the pencil resumes. Light changes back.

(To Alan) Now your eyes are feeling heavy. You want to sleep, don't you? Sleep.

The pencil stops. Alan's eyes remain shut and his head has sunk on his chest.

Can you hear me?

ALAN

Mmm.

~~DYSART~~

~~You can speak normally. Say Yes, if you can.~~

~~ALAN~~

~~Yes.~~

~~DYSART~~

~~Now, Alan, you're going to answer questions I'm going to ask you. Do you understand?~~

~~ALAN~~

~~Yes.~~

DYSART

Good. Now I want you to think back in time. You are on that beach you told me about. The tide has gone out, and you're making sandcastles. Above you, staring down at you, is that great horse's head, and the cream dropping from it. Can you see that?

ALAN

Yes.

DYSART

You ask him a question. 'Does the chain hurt?'

ALAN

Yes.

DYSART

Do you ask him aloud?

ALAN

No.

DYSART

And what does the horse say back?

ALAN

'Yes.'

DYSART

Then what do you say?

ALAN

'I'll take it out for you.'

DYSART

And he says?

ALAN

'It never comes out. They have me in chains.'

DYSART

Like Jesus?

ALAN

Yes!

DYSART

Only his name isn't Jesus, is it?

ALAN

No.

DYSART

What is it?

ALAN

No one knows but him and me.

DYSART

You can tell me, Alan. Name him.

ALAN

Equus.

DYSART

Thank you. Does he live in all horses or just some?

ALAN

All.

DYSART

Good. Now: you leave the beach. You're in your bedroom at home. You're twelve years old. You're in front of the picture. You're looking at Equus from the foot of your bed. Would you like to kneel down?

ALAN

Yes.

DYSART

(Encouragingly) Go on, then.

Alan kneels.

Now tell me. Why is Equus in chains?

ALAN

For the sins of the world.

DYSART

What does he say to you?

ALAN

'I see you.' 'I will save you.'

DYSART

How?

ALAN

'Bear you away. Two shall be one.'

DYSART

Horse and rider shall be one beast?

ALAN

One person!

DYSART

Go on.

ALAN

'And my chinkle-chankle shall be in thy hand.'

DYSART

Chinkle-chankle? That's his mouth chain?

ALAN

Yes.

DYSART

Good. You can get up... Come on.

Alan rises.

Now: think of the stable. What is the stable? His Temple?

ALAN

Yes.

~~DYSART~~

~~Where you wash him? Where you tend him, and brush him?~~

~~ALAN~~

~~Yes.~~

DYSART

And there he spoke to you, didn't he?

ALAN

Yes.

~~DYSART~~

~~What did he say? 'Ride me?' 'Mount me, and ride me forth at night'?~~

~~ALAN~~

~~Yes.~~

DYSART

And you obeyed?

ALAN

Yes.

~~DYSART~~

~~How did you learn? By watching others?~~

~~ALAN~~

~~Yes.~~

DYSART

It must have been difficult. But Equus showed you the way, didn't he?

ALAN

He showed me nothing!

DYSART

But you managed? You mastered him?

ALAN

Had to!

DYSART

And then you rode in secret?

ALAN

Yes.

DYSART

How often?

ALAN

Every three weeks. More, people would notice.

DYSART

On a particular horse?

ALAN

No.

~~DYSART~~

~~How did you get into the stable?~~

~~ALAN~~

~~Stole a key. Had it copied at Bryson's.~~

DYSART

~~Clever boy.~~

~~Alan smiles.~~

Then you'd slip out of the house?

ALAN

Midnight! On the stroke!

DYSART

How far's the stable?

ALAN

Two miles.

Pause.

DYSART

Let's do it! Let's go riding!... Now!

He stands up, and pushes in his bench.

You are there now, in front of the stable door.

Alan turns upstage.

~~That key's in your hand. Go and open it.~~

Alan moves upstage, and mimes opening the door. Soft light on the circle. Humming from the Chorus: the Equus Noise. The horse actors enter, raise high their masks, and put them on all together. They stand around the circle - Nugget in the mouth of the tunnel.

DYSART

Quietly as possible. Dalton may still be awake. Sssh... Quietly... Good. Now go in.

Alan steps secretly out of the square through the central opening on to the circle, now glowing with a warm light. He looks about him. The horses stamp uneasily: their masks turn towards him.

You are on the inside now. All the horses are staring at you. Can you see them?

ALAN

(Excited) Yes!

DYSART

Which one are you going to take?

ALAN

Nugget.

Alan reaches up and mimes leading Nugget carefully round the circle downstage with a rope, past all the horses on the right.

DYSART

Then?

ALAN

Chinkle-chankle.

He mimes picking up the bridle and bit.

He doesn't like it so late, but he takes it for my sake. He bends for me. He stretches forth his neck to it.

Nugget bends his head down. Alan first ritually puts the bit into his own mouth, then crosses, and transfers it into Nugget's. He reaches up and buckles on the bridle. Then he leads him by the invisible reins, across the front of the stage and up round the left side of the circle. Nugget follows obediently.

DYSART

No saddle?

ALAN

Never.

DYSART

Go on.

ALAN

Walk down the path behind. He's quiet. Always is, this bit. Meek and mild legs. At least till the field. Then there's trouble.

The horse jerks back. The mask tosses.

DYSART

What kind?

ALAN

Won't go in.

DYSART

Why not?

ALAN

It's his place of Ha Ha.

DYSART

What?

ALAN

HA HA.

DYSART

Make him go into it.

ALAN

(Whispering fiercely) Come on!... Come on!...

He drags the horse into the square as Dysart steps out of it.

21

Nugget comes to a halt staring diagonally down what is now the field. The Equus noise dies away. The boy looks about him.

DYSART

(From the circle) Is it a big field?

ALAN

Huge!

DYSART

What's it like?

ALAN

Full of mist. Nettles on your feet.

DYSART

(Going back to his bench) You take your shoes off?

ALAN

Everything.

DYSART

All your clothes?

ALAN

Yes.

He mimes undressing completely in front of the horse. When he is finished, and obviously quite naked, he throws out his arms and shows himself fully to his God, bowing his head before Nugget.

DYSART

Where do you leave them?

ALAN

Tree hole near the gate. No one could find them.

He walks upstage and crouches by the bench, stuffing the invisible clothes beneath it. Dysart sits again on the left bench, downstage beyond the circle.

DYSART

How does it feel now?

ALAN

(Holds himself) Burns.

DYSART

Go on. Now what?

ALAN

The Manbit... The stick for my mouth.

He reaches again under the bench and draws out an invisible stick.

DYSART

Your mouth?

ALAN

To bite on.

DYSART

Is it always the same stick?

ALAN

Course. Sacred stick.

DYSART

And now what? ...What do you do now?

Pause. He rises and approaches Nugget.

ALAN

Touch him!

DYSART

Where?

ALAN

(In wonder) All over. Everywhere. Belly. Ribs. His flank is cool. His nostrils open for me. His eyes shine. They can see in the dark... Eyes!

Suddenly he dashes in distress to the farthest corner of the square.

DYSART

Go on! Then?

ALAN

Give sugar.

DYSART

A lump of sugar?

ALAN

His Last Supper.

DYSART

Last before what?

ALAN

Ha Ha.

He kneels before the horse, palms upward and joined together.

DYSART

Do you say anything when you give it to him?

ALAN

(Offering it) Take my sins. Eat them for my sake... He always does.

Nugget bows the mask into Alan's palm, then takes a step back to eat.

DYSART

You can get up on him now?

ALAN

Yes!

DYSART

Do it, then. Mount him.

Alan, lying before Nugget, stretches out on the square. He grasps the top of the thin metal pole embedded in the wood. He whispers his God's name ceremonially.

ALAN

Equus! ...Equus! ...Equus!

He pulls the pole upright. The actor playing Nugget leans forward and grabs it. At the same instant all the other horses lean forward around the circle, each placing a gloved hand on the rail. Alan rises and walks right back to the upstage corner, left.

Take me!

He runs and jumps high on to Nugget's back.

(Crying out) Ah!

DYSART

What is it?

ALAN

Hurts!

DYSART

Hurts?

ALAN

Knives in his skin! Little knives - all inside my legs.

Nugget mimes restiveness.

ALAN

Equus the Godslave, Faithful and True. Into my hands he commends himself - naked in his chinkle-chankle. He wants to go so badly.

DYSART

Go, then. Leave me behind. Now you are alone with Equus.

Alan stiffens his body.

ALAN

(Ritually) Equus - son of Fleckwus - son of Neckwus - Walk.

A hum from the Chorus. Very slowly the horses standing on the circle begin to turn the square by gently pushing the wooden rail. Alan and his mount start to revolve. The effect, immediately, is of a statue being slowly turned round on a

plinth. During the ride however the speed increases, and the light decreases until it is only a fierce spotlight on horse and rider, with the overspill glinting on the other masks leaning in towards them.

Only I can ride him. He lets me turn him this way and that. His neck comes out of my body. It lifts in the dark. Equus, my Godslave! ...Now the King commands you. Tonight, we ride against them all.

DYSART

Who's all?

ALAN

My foes and His.

DYSART

Who are your foes?

ALAN

The Hosts of Hoover. The Hosts of Philco. The Hosts of Pifco. The House of Remington and all its tribe!

DYSART

Who are His foes?

ALAN

The Hosts of Jodhpur. The Hosts of Bowler. All those who show him off for their vanity. Come on, Equus. Let's get them!... Trot! Stead-y! Stead-y! Stead-y! Cowboys are watching! They know who we are. Bowing low unto us! Come on now - show them! Canter! . . . *Canter!*

He whips Nugget.

And Equus the Mighty rose against All! His enemies scatter, his enemies fall!
TURN! Trample them, trample them, Trample them, trample them, TURN!
TURN!! TURN!!!

The Equus noise increases in volume.

My flanks! My hooves! Mane on my legs, on my flanks, like whips! Feel me on you! I want to be in you! I want to *be* you!... Bear me away! Make us One Person!

He rides Equus frantically.

One Person! One Person! One Person! One Person!

He rises up on the horse's back, and calls like a trumpet.

Ha-HA!h Ha-HA!h Ha-HA!

The trumpet turns to great cries.

HA-HA! HA-HA! HA-HA! HA-HA! HA! ...HA! ...HAAAAA!

He twists like a flame. Silence. Slowly the boy drops off the horse's back on to the ground. He lowers his head and kisses Nugget's hoof. Finally he flings back his head and cries up to him:

AMEN!

Nugget snorts, once. Blackout

Act Two

22

Darkness. Lights come slowly up on Alan kneeling in the night at the hooves of Nugget. Slowly he gets up, climbing lovingly up the body of the horse until he can stand and kiss it. Dysart sits on the downstage bench where he began Act One.

DYSART

With one particular horse, called Nugget, he embraces. He showed me how he stands with it afterwards in the night, one hand on its chest, one on its neck, like a frozen tango dancer, inhaling its cold sweet breath. 'Have you noticed,' he said, 'about horses: how they'll stand one hoof on its end, like those girls in the ballet?'

Alan leads Nugget out of the square. Dysart rises. The horse walks away up the tunnel and disappears. The boy comes downstage and sits on the bench Dysart

has vacated. Dysart crosses downstage and moves slowly up round the circle, until he reaches the central entrance to the square.

Now he's gone off to rest, leaving me alone with Equus. I can hear the creature's voice. He raises his matted head. He opens his great square teeth, and says - (*mocking*) 'Why?... Why Me?... Why - ultimately - Me?... Do you really imagine you can account for Me? Totally, infallibly, inevitably account for Me?...

He enters the square.

Of course I've stared at such images before. Or been stared at by them, whichever way you look at it. And weirdly often now with me the feeling is that they are staring at us - that in some quite palpable way they precede us. (Pause) A child is born into a world of phenomena all equal in their power to enslave. Suddenly one strikes. Why? Moments snap together like magnets, forging a chain of shackles. Why? I can trace them. I can even, with time, pull them apart again. But why at the start they were ever magnetized at all - just those particular moments of experience and no others - I don't know. And if I can never know that - then what am I doing here? I don't mean clinically doing or socially doing - I mean fundamentally! ~~These questions, these Whys, are fundamental - yet they have no place in a consulting room.~~ 'Account for me,' says staring Equus. 'First account for Me!' ...I fancy this is more than menopause.

Nurse rushes in.

NURSE

Doctor! There's a terrible scene with the Strang boy. His mother came to visit him, and I gave her the tray to take in. He threw it at her. She's saying the most dreadful things.

Alan springs up, down left. Dora springs up, down right. They face each other across the bottom end of the stage. It is observable that at the start of this Act Frank is not sitting beside his wife on their bench. It is hopefully not observable that he is placed among the audience upstage, in the gloom, by the central tunnel.

DORA

Don't you dare! Don't you dare!

DYSART

Is she still there?

NURSE

Yes!

He quickly leaves the square, followed by the Nurse. Dora moves towards her son.

DORA

Don't you look at me like that! I'm not a doctor, you know, who'll take anything. Don't you dare give me that stare, young man!

She slaps his face. Dysart joins them.

DYSART

Mrs Strang!

DORA

I know your stares. They don't work on me!

DYSART

(To her) Leave this room.

DORA

What did you say?

DYSART

I tell you to leave here at once.

Dora hesitates. Then:

DORA

Goodbye, Alan.

She walks past her son, and round into the square. Dysart follows her. Both are very upset. Alan returns to his bench and Nurse to her place.

23

Lights up on the square.

DYSART

I must ask you never to come here again.

DORA

Do you think I want to?

DYSART

Can't you see the boy is highly distressed?

DORA

(Exploding) And me? What about me?... What do you think I am? I'm a parent, of course - so it doesn't count. That's a dirty word in here, isn't it, 'parent'?

DYSART

You know that's not true.

DORA

Oh, I know. Whatever happens, we did it. Alan's just a little victim. *(Savagely)* What do you have to do in this world to get any sympathy - blind animals?

DYSART

Sit down, Mrs Strang.

DORA

(Ignoring him: more and more urgently) Look, Doctor: you don't have to live with this. Alan is one patient to you: one out of many. He's my son. I lie awake every night thinking about it. Frank lies there beside me. I can hear him. Neither of us sleeps all night. You come to us and say Who forbids television? who does what behind whose back? - ~~as if we're criminals. Let me tell you something. We're not criminals. We've done nothing wrong. We loved Alan. We gave him the best love we could. Alright, we quarrel sometimes - all parents quarrel - we always make it up. My husband is a good man. He's an upright man, religion or no religion. He cares for his home, for the world, and for his boy. Alan had love and care and treats, and as much fun as any boy in the world.~~ I know about loveless homes: I was a teacher. Our home wasn't loveless. I know about privacy too - not invading a child's privacy. Alright, Frank may be at fault there - he digs into him too much - but nothing in excess. He's not a bully... *(Gravely)* No, doctor. Whatever's happened has happened because of Alan. Alan is himself. Every soul is itself. If you added up everything we ever did to him, from his first day on earth to this,

you wouldn't find why he did this terrible thing - because that's him: not just all of our things added up. Do you understand what I'm saying? I want you to understand, because I lie awake and awake thinking it out, and I want you to know that I deny it absolutely what he's doing now, staring at me, attacking me for what he's done, for what he is! You've got your words, and I've got mine. You call it a complex, I suppose. But if you knew God, Doctor, you would know about the Devil. You'd know the Devil isn't made by what mummy says and daddy says. The Devil's there. It's an old-fashioned word, but a true thing... I'll go. What I did in there was inexcusable. I only know he was my little Alan, and then the Devil came.

She leaves the square, and resumes her place. Dysart watches her go, then leaves himself by the opposite entrance, and approaches Alan.

24

Seated on his bench, the boy glares at him.

DYSART

I thought you liked your mother.

Silence.

She doesn't know anything, you know. I haven't told her what you told me. ~~You do know that, don't you?~~

ALAN

It was lies anyway.

DYSART

What?

ALAN

You and your pencil. Just a con trick, that's all.

DYSART

What do you mean?

ALAN

Made me say a lot of lies.

~~DYSART~~

~~Did it? Like what?~~

ALAN

~~All of it. Everything I said. Lot of lies.~~

Pause.

DYSART

I see.

ALAN

You ought to be locked up. Your bloody tricks.

DYSART

I thought you liked tricks.

ALAN

It'll be the drug next. I know.

Dysart turns, sharply.

DYSART

What drug?

ALAN

I've heard. I'm not ignorant. I know what you get up to in here. Shove needles in people, pump them full of truth drug, so they can't help saying things. That's next, isn't it?

Pause. He glares at him. Dysart leaves abruptly, and returns to the square.

25

Hesther comes in simultaneously from the other side.

DYSART

(Agitated) He actually thinks they exist! And of course he wants one.

HESTHER

It doesn't sound like that to me.

DYSART

Why mention them otherwise? He wants a way to speak. To finally tell me what happened in that stable. ~~Tape's too isolated, and hypnosis is a trick. At least that's the pretence.~~

HESTHER

Does he still say that today?

DYSART

I haven't seen him. I cancelled his appointment this morning, and let him stew in his own anxiety. Now I am almost tempted to play a real trick on him.

HESTHER

Like what?

DYSART

The old placebo.

HESTHER

You mean a harmless pill?

~~DYSART~~

~~Full of alleged Truth Drug. Probably an aspirin.~~

~~HESTHER~~

~~But he'd deny it afterwards. Same thing all over.~~

DYSART

~~No. Because~~ he's ready to abreact.

~~HESTHER~~

~~Abreact?~~

~~DYSART~~

Live it all again. He won't be able to deny it after that.

HESTHER

Can you get him to do that?

DYSART

I think so. He's nearly done it already. Under all that glowering, he trusts me. Do you realize that?

HESTHER

(Warmly) I'm sure he does.

DYSART

Poor fool.

HESTHER

Don't start that again.

Pause.

DYSART

(Quietly) Can you think of anything worse one can do to anybody than take away their worship?

HESTHER

Worship isn't destructive, Martin. I know that.

DYSART

I don't. I only know it's the core of his life. What else has he got? He can hardly read. He knows no physics or engineering to make the world real for him. No paintings to show him how others have enjoyed it. No music except television jingles. No history except tales from a desperate mother. No friends. Not one kid to give him a joke, or make him know himself more moderately. He's a modern citizen for whom society doesn't exist. He lives one hour every three weeks - howling in a mist. And after the service kneels to a slave who stands over him obviously and unthrowably his master. With my body I thee worship! ...Many men have less vital relationships with their wives.

Pause.

HESTHER

All the same, they don't usually blind their wives, do they?

~~DYSART~~

~~Oh, come on!~~

~~HESTHER~~

~~Well, do they?~~

DYSART

(Sarcastically) You mean he's dangerous? A violent, dangerous madman who's going to run round the country doing it again and again?

HESTHER

I mean he's in pain, Martin. He's been in pain for most of his life.

~~DYSART~~

~~Possibly.~~

HESTHER

And you can take it away.

DYSART

~~Still possibly.~~

HESTHER

~~Then that's enough.~~ That simply has to be enough for you, surely?

DYSART

No!

HESTHER

Why not?

DYSART

Because it's his.

HESTHER

I don't understand.

DYSART

His pain. His own. He made it.

Pause.

(Earnestly) Look... to go through life and call it yours - your life - you first have to get your own pain. Pain that's unique to you. You can't just dip into the common bin and say 'That's enough!'... He's done that. Alright, he's sick. He's full of misery and fear. He was dangerous, and could be again, though I doubt it. But that boy has known a passion more ferocious than I have felt in any second of my life. And let me tell you something: I envy it.

HESTHER

You can't.

DYSART

(Vehemently) Don't you see? That's the Accusation! That's what his stare has been saying to me all this time. 'At least I galloped! When did you?'... *(Simply)* I'm jealous, Hesther. Jealous of Alan Strang.

HESTHER

That's absurd.

DYSART

Is it?... I go on about my wife. That smug woman by the fire. Have you thought of the fellow on the other side of it? The finicky, critical husband looking through his art books on mythical Greece. What worship has he ever known? Real worship! ~~Without worship you shrink, it's as brutal as that...~~ I imply that we can't have children: but actually, it's only me. I had myself tested behind her back. ~~The lowest sperm count you could find.~~ And I never told her. That's all I need - her sympathy mixed with resentment... I tell everyone Margaret's the puritan, I'm the pagan. Some pagan! Such wild returns I make to the womb of civilization. ~~Three weeks a year in the Peloponnese, every bed booked in advance, every meal paid for by vouchers!~~ I sit looking at pages of centaurs trampling the soil of Argos - and outside my window he is trying to become one, in a Hampshire field! ...~~I watch that woman knitting, night after night - a woman I haven't kissed in six years -~~ and he stands in the dark for an hour, sucking the sweat off his God's hairy cheek! *(Pause)* Then in the morning, I put away my books on the cultural shelf, touch my reproduction statue of Dionysus for luck - and go off to hospital to treat him for insanity. Do you see?

HESTHER

~~The boy's in pain, Martin. That's all I see.~~

He looks at her. Alan gets up from his bench and stealthily places an envelope in the left-hand entrance of the square, then goes back and sits with his back to the audience, as if watching television. Hesther rises.

~~In the end... I'm sorry.~~

She leaves him.

26

Dysart becomes aware of the letter lying on the floor. He picks it up, opens and reads it.

ALAN

(Speaking stiffly, as Dysart reads) 'It is all true, what I said after you tapped the pencil. I'm sorry if I said different. Post Scriptum: I know why I'm in here.'

Pause.

DYSART

(Calling, joyfully) NURSE!

Nurse comes in.

NURSE

Yes, Doctor?

DYSART

(Trying to conceal his pleasure) Good evening!

NURSE

You're in late tonight.

DYSART

Yes! ...Tell me, is the Strang boy in bed yet?

NURSE

Oh, no, Doctor. He's bound to be upstairs looking at television. He always watches to the last possible moment. He doesn't like going to his room at all.

DYSART

You mean he's still having nightmares?

NURSE

He had a bad one last night.

DYSART

Would you ask him to come down here, please?

NURSE

(Faint surprise) Now?

DYSART

I'd like a word with him.

NURSE

(Puzzled) Very good, Doctor.

Nurse goes to the bench, taps Alan on the shoulder, whispers her message in his ear, and returns to her place. Alan stands up and pauses for a second - then steps into the square.

27

He stands in the doorway, depressed.

DYSART

Hello.

ALAN

Hello.

DYSART

I got your letter. Thank you. *(Pause)* Also the Post Scriptum.

ALAN

(Defensively) That's the right word. My mum told me. It's Latin for 'After-writing'.

DYSART

How are you feeling?

ALAN

Alright.

DYSART

I'm sorry I didn't see you today.

~~ALAN~~

~~You were fed up with me.~~

~~DYSART~~

~~Yes. (Pause)~~ Can I make it up to you now?

ALAN

What d'you mean?

DYSART

I thought we'd have a session.

ALAN

(Startled) Now?

DYSART

Yes! At dead of night! ...Better than going to sleep, isn't it?

~~The boy flinches.~~

Alan - look. Everything I say has a trick or a catch. Everything I do is a trick or a catch. That's all I know to do. But they work - and you know that. Trust me.

Pause.

ALAN

You got another trick, then?

DYSART

Yes.

ALAN

A truth drug?

DYSART

If you like.

ALAN

What's it do?

DYSART

Make it easier for you to talk.

ALAN

Like you can't help yourself?

DYSART

That's right. Like you have to speak the truth at all costs. And all of it.

Pause.

~~ALAN~~

~~(Slyly) Comes in a needle, doesn't it?~~

~~DYSART~~

~~No.~~

ALAN

Where is it?

~~DYSART~~

~~(Indicating his pocket) In here.~~

~~ALAN~~

~~Let's see.~~

Dysart solemnly takes a bottle of pills out of his pocket.

DYSART

There.

ALAN

(Suspicious) That really it?

DYSART

It is... ~~Do you want to try it?~~

~~ALAN~~

No.

~~DYSART~~

~~I think you do.~~

~~ALAN~~

~~I don't. Not at all.~~

~~DYSART~~

Afterwards you'd sleep. You'd have no bad dreams all night. Probably many nights, from then on...

Pause.

ALAN

How long's it take to work?

DYSART

It's instant. Like coffee.

ALAN

(Half believing) It isn't!

DYSART

I promise you... Well?

ALAN

Can I have a smoke?

DYSART

Pill first. Do you want some water?

ALAN

No.

Dysart shakes one out on to his palm. Alan hesitates for a second - then takes it and swallows it. Dysart offers him a cigarette, and lights it for him.

ALAN

(Nervous) What happens now?

DYSART

We wait for it to work.

ALAN

What'll I feel first?

DYSART

Nothing much. After a minute, about a hundred green snakes should come out of that cupboard singing the Hallelujah Chorus.

ALAN

(Annoyed) I'm serious!

DYSART

Nothing's going to happen now but what you want to happen. Just relax.

Alan stares at him. Then accepts the situation, and lies back.

ALAN

I bet this room's heard some funny things.

DYSART

It certainly has.

ALAN

How long am I going to be in here?

DYSART

It's hard to say. I see you want to leave.

ALAN

No.

DYSART

You don't?

ALAN

Where would I go?

DYSART

Home...

The boy looks at him. Dysart crosses and sits on the rail upstage, his feet on the bench. A pause.

Actually, I'd like to leave this room and never see it again in my life.

ALAN

(Surprise) Why?

DYSART

I've been in it too long.

ALAN

Where would you go?

DYSART

Somewhere.

ALAN

Secret?

DYSART

Yes. There's a sea - a great sea - I love... It's where the Gods used to go to bathe.

ALAN

What Gods?

DYSART

The old ones. Before they died.

ALAN

Gods don't die.

DYSART

Yes, they do.

Pause.

ALAN

How would you Nosey Parker, though? You wouldn't have a room for it any more.

DYSART

I wouldn't mind. I don't actually enjoy being a Nosey Parker, you know.

ALAN

Then why do it?

DYSART

Because you're unhappy.

ALAN

So are you.

Dysart looks at him sharply. Alan sits up in alarm.

Oooh, I didn't mean that!

DYSART

Didn't you?

ALAN

Here - is that how it works? Things just slip out, not feeling anything?

DYSART

That's right.

ALAN

But it's so quick!

DYSART

I told you: it's instant.

ALAN

(Delighted) It's wicked, isn't it? I mean, you can say anything under it.

DYSART

Yes.

ALAN

Ask me a question.

DYSART

Tell me about Jill.

Pause. The boy turns away.

ALAN

There's nothing to tell.

DYSART

Nothing?

ALAN

No.

DYSART

Well, for example - is she pretty? You've never described her.

ALAN

She's alright.

DYSART

What color hair?

ALAN

Dunno.

DYSART

Is it long or short?

ALAN

Dunno.

DYSART

(Lightly) You must know that.

ALAN

I don't remember. I don't!

Dysart rises and comes down to him. He takes the cigarette out of his hand.

DYSART

(Firmly) Lie back... Now listen. You are going to tell me everything that happened with this girl. And not just tell me - show me. Act it out, if you like - ~~even more than you did when I tapped the pencil. I want you to feel free to do absolutely anything in this room.~~ The pill will help you. I will help you... Now, where does she live?

A long pause.

ALAN

(Tight) Near the stables. About a mile.

Dysart steps down out of the square as Jill enters it. He sits again on the downstage bench.

28

The light grows warmer. She comes down and sits casually on the rail. Her manner is open and lightly provocative. During these scenes Alan acts directly with her, and never looks over at Dysart when he replies to him.

JILL

There was an article in the paper last week saying what points about boys fascinate girls. They said Number One is bottoms. I think it's eyes every time... They fascinate you too, don't they?

ALAN

Me?

JILL

(Sly) Or is it only horse's eyes?

ALAN

(Startled) What d'you mean?

JILL

I saw you staring into Nugget's eyes yesterday for ages. I spied on you through the door!

ALAN

(Hotly) There must have been something in it!

JILL

You're a real Man of Mystery, aren't you?

ALAN

(To Dysart) Sometimes, it was like she knew.

JILL

I love horses' eyes. The way you can see yourself in them. D'you find them sexy?

ALAN

(Outraged) What?!

JILL

Horses.

ALAN

Don't be stupid!

He springs up, and away from her.

JILL

Girls do. I mean, they go through a period when they pat them and kiss them a lot. I know I did. I suppose it's just a substitute, really.

ALAN

(To Dysart) That kind of thing, all the time. Until one night...

DYSART

Yes? What?

ALAN

She did it! Not me. It was her idea, the whole thing!

DYSART

What are you saying?

A pause.

ALAN

(To Dysart) Saturday night. We were just closing up.

JILL

How would you like to take me out?

ALAN

What?

JILL

(Coolly) How would you like to take me out tonight?

ALAN

I've got to go home.

JILL

What for?

He tries to escape upstage.

ALAN

They expect me.

JILL

Ring up and say you're going out.

ALAN

I can't.

JILL

Why?

ALAN

They expect me.

JILL

Look. Either we go out together and have some fun, or you go back to your boring home, as usual, and I go back to mine. That's the situation, isn't it?

ALAN

Well... where would we go?

JILL

The pictures! There's a skinflick over in Winchester! I've never seen one, have you?

ALAN

No.

JILL

Wouldn't you like to? I would. All those heavy Swedes, panting at each other!... What d'you say?

ALAN

(Grinning) Yeah...

JILL

Good!

He turns away.

~~DYSART~~

~~Go on, please.~~

~~*He steps off the square.*~~

~~ALAN~~

~~(To Dysart) I'm tired now!~~

DYSART

Come on now. You can't stop there.

He storms round the circle to Dysart, and faces him directly.

ALAN

I'm tired! I want to go to bed!

DYSART

(Sharply) Well, you can't. I want to hear about the film.

ALAN

Nosey Parker!

The actors playing horses come swiftly on to the square, dressed in sports coats or raincoats. They move the benches to be parallel with the audience, and sit on them - staring out front. Alan re-enters the square. Jill rises and together they grope their way to the downstage bench, as if in a dark auditorium.

(To Dysart) The whole place was full of men. Jill was the only girl.

They push by a patron seated at the end, and sit side by side, staring up at the invisible screen, located above the heads of the main audience. A spotlight hits the boy's face.

We sat down and the film came on. There was this girl Brita, who was sixteen. She went to stay in this house, where there was an older boy. In the end she took a shower. She went into the bathroom and took off all her clothes. Very slowly... What she didn't know was the boy was looking through the door all the time. *(He starts to become excited)* It was fantastic! The water fell on her breasts, bouncing down her...

Frank steps into the square furtively from the back, hat in hand, and stands looking about for a place.

DYSART

Was that the first time you'd seen a girl naked?

ALAN

(To Dysart) Yes! *(Looking about him)* All round me they were all looking. All the men - staring up like they were in church. Like they were a sort of congregation. And then - *(He sees his father)* Ah!

At the same instant Frank sees him.

FRANK
Alan!

ALAN
God!

JILL
What is it?

ALAN
Dad!

JILL
Where?

ALAN
At the back! He saw me!

JILL
You sure?

ALAN
Yes!

FRANK
(Calling) Alan!

ALAN
Oh God!

He tries to hide his face in the girl's shoulder. His father comes down the aisle towards him.

FRANK
Alan! You can hear me! Don't pretend!

PATRONS
Ssssh!

FRANK

(Approaching the row of seats) Do I have to come and fetch you out?... Do I?

Cries of 'Sssh!' and 'Shut up!'

Do I, Alan?

ALAN

(Through gritted teeth) Oh fuck!

He gets up as the noise increases. Jill gets up too and follows him.

DYSART

You went?

ALAN

(To Dysart) What else could I do?

They go out, right, through the group of Patrons - who rise protesting as they pass, quickly replace the benches and leave the square. Dysart enters it.

30

Light brightens from the cinema, but remains cold: streets at night. The three walk round the circle downstage in a line: Frank leading, wearing his hat. He halts in the middle of the left rail, and stands staring straight ahead of him, rigid with embarrassment. Alan is very agitated.

(To Dysart) We went into the street, all three of us. He didn't look at us at all. ~~It must have gone on for about five minutes.~~ I tried to speak. I said - *(To his father)* I - I - I've never been there before. Honest... Never... *(To Dysart)* He didn't seem to hear. Jill tried.

JILL

It's true, Mr Strang. It wasn't Alan's idea to go there. It was mine.

ALAN

(To Dysart) He just went on staring, straight ahead. It was awful.

JILL

I'm not shocked by films like that. I think they're just silly.

ALAN

(To Dysart) The bus wouldn't come. We just stood and stood... Then suddenly he spoke.

Frank takes off his hat.

FRANK

(Stiffly) I'd like you to know something. Both of you. I came here tonight to see the Manager. He asked me to call on him for business purposes. I happen to be a printer, Miss. A picture house needs posters. While I was waiting I happened to glance in, that's all. ~~I can only say I'm going to complain to the council.~~ I had no idea they showed films like this. I'm certainly going to refuse my services.

JILL

(Kindly) Yes, of course.

FRANK

So long as that's understood.

ALAN

(To Dysart) Then the bus came along.

FRANK

Come along, now Alan.

He moves away downstage.

ALAN

No.

FRANK

(Turning) No fuss, please. Say Goodnight to the young lady.

ALAN

(Timid but firm) No. I'm stopping here... I've got to see her home... It's proper.

Pause.

FRANK

(As dignified as possible) Very well. I'll see you when you choose to return. Very well then... Yes...

He walks back to his original seat, next to his wife. He stares across the square at his son - who stares back at him. Then, slowly, he sits.

ALAN

(To Dysart) And he got in, and we didn't. He sat down and looked at me through the glass. And I saw...

DYSART

(Soft) What?

ALAN

(To Dysart) His face. It was scared.

DYSART

Of you?

ALAN

(To Dysart) It was terrible. We had to walk home. Four miles.

DYSART

You were scared too?

ALAN

(To Dysart) It was like a hole had been drilled in my tummy. A hole - right here. And the air was getting in!

He starts to walk upstage, round the circle.

31

The girl stays still.

I kept seeing him, just as he drove off. Scared of me... I kept thinking - all those airs he put on! 'Receive my meaning. Improve your mind!' ...All those

nights he said he'd be in late. 'Keep my supper hot, Dora!' 'Your poor father: he works so hard!'

He stops, clenching his fists.

JILL

Hey! Wait for me!

She runs after him. He waits.

What are you thinking about?

ALAN

Nothing.

JILL

Mind my own beeswax?

She laughs.

ALAN

(To Dysart) And suddenly she began to laugh.

JILL

It's pretty funny, when you think of it.

ALAN

(Bewildered) What?

JILL

Catching him like that! ...I'm sorry. I know you're upset. But it's not the end of the world, is it? I mean, what was he doing? Only what we were. Watching a silly film.

He turns round and looks at her.

We keep saying old people are square. Then when they suddenly aren't - we don't like it!

DYSART

What did you think about that?

ALAN

(To Dysart) I don't know. I kept looking at all the people in the street. I suddenly thought - they all do it! All of them! They're not just Dads - they're people with pricks! ...And Dad - he's not just Dad either. He's a man with a prick too. I'd never thought about it.

Pause.

We went into the country.

He walks again. Jill follows. They turn the corner and come downstage, right.

We kept walking. I just thought about Dad, and how he was nothing special.

He stops.

(Grappling with it) I mean, what else has he got? He's got mum, of course, but well - she - she - she -

JILL

She doesn't give him anything?

DYSART

Was that the first time you ever thought anything like that about your mother? ...I mean, that she was unfair to your dad?

ALAN

(To Dysart) Absolutely!

DYSART

How did you feel?

ALAN

Sorry. I mean for him. He goes off by himself at night, and does his own secret thing which no one'll know about, just like me! There's no difference - he's just the same as me - just the same!

He stops in distress, then bolts back a little upstage.

Christ!

DYSART

(Sternly) Go on.

ALAN

(To Dysart) I can't.

DYSART

You were happy at that second, weren't you? When you realized about your dad. How lots of people have secrets, not just you?

ALAN

(To Dysart) Yes.

DYSART

You felt sort of free, didn't you? I mean, free to do anything?

ALAN

(To Dysart, looking at Jill) Yes!

DYSART

What was she doing?

ALAN

(To Dysart) Holding my hand.

DYSART

And that was good?

ALAN

(To Dysart) Oh, yes!

DYSART

Remember what you thought. As if it's happening to you now. This very moment... What's in your head?

ALAN

(To Dysart) Her eyes. She's the one with eyes!... I keep looking at them, because I really want -

DYSART

To look at her breasts?

ALAN

(To Dysart) Yes.

DYSART

Like in the film.

~~ALAN~~

~~(To Dysart) Yes... Then she starts to scratch my hand.~~

~~JILL~~

~~You're really very nice, you know that?~~

~~ALAN~~

~~(To Dysart) Moving her nails on the back. Her face so warm. Her eyes.~~

~~DYSART~~

You want her very much?

ALAN

(To Dysart) Yes!

JILL

I love your eyes.

She kisses him.

(Whispering) Let's go!

ALAN

Where?

JILL

I know a place. It's right near here.

ALAN

Where?

JILL

Surprise! Come on!

She darts away round the circle, across the stage and up the left side.

~~Come on!~~

ALAN

(To Dysart) She runs ahead. I follow. And then - and then -!

He halts.

DYSART

What?

ALAN

(To Dysart) I see what she means.

DYSART

What? ...Where are you? ...Where has she taken you?

ALAN

(To Jill) The stables?

JILL

Of course!

32

Chorus makes a warning hum. The horses-actors enter, and ceremonially put on their masks - first raising them high above their heads. Nugget stands in the central tunnel.

ALAN

(Recoiling) No!

JILL

Where else? They're perfect!

ALAN

No!

He turns his head from her.

JILL

Or do you want to go home now and face your dad?

ALAN

No!

JILL

Then come on!

He edges nervously past the horse standing at the left, which turns its neck and even moves a challenging step after him.

ALAN

Why not your place?

JILL

Mother doesn't like me bringing back boys... Anyway, the barn's better.

ALAN

No!

JILL

All that straw. It's cosy.

ALAN

No.

JILL

Why not?

ALAN

Them!

~~JILL~~

~~Dalton will be in bed. What's the matter? ... Don't you want to?~~

~~ALAN~~

~~(Aching to) Yes!~~

~~JILL~~

~~So?~~

~~ALAN~~

~~(Desperate) Them! Them!~~

JILL

Who?

ALAN

(Low) Horses.

JILL

Horses? What do you mean?

He starts shaking.

Oh, you're freezing... Let's get under the straw. You'll be warm there.

ALAN

(Pulling away) No!

JILL

What on earth's the matter with you?

Silence. He won't look at her.

Look, if the sight of horses offends you, my lord, we can just shut the door. You won't have to see them. Alright?

DYSART

What door is that? In the barn?

ALAN

(To Dysart) Yes.

DYSART

So what do you do? You go in?

ALAN

(To Dysart) Yes.

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A rich light falls. Furtively Alan enters the square from the top end, and Jill follows. The horses on the circle retire out of sight on either side. Nugget retreats up the tunnel and stands where he can just be glimpsed in the dimness.

DYSART

Into the Temple?

ALAN

(To Dysart: desperate) What else can I do? I can't tell her... (To Jill) Lock it.

JILL

It's just an old door. What's the matter with you?

ALAN

Lock it!

JILL

Ssssh! D'you want to wake up Dalton? ...Stay there, idiot.

She mimes locking a heavy door, upstage.

DYSART

Describe the barn, please.

ALAN

(Walking round it: to Dysart) Large room. Straw everywhere. Some tools... (as if picking it up off the rail where he left it in Act One) A hoof pick!

He 'drops' it hastily, and dashes away from the spot.

At the end this big door. Behind it -

DYSART

Horses.

ALAN

(To Dysart) Yes.

DYSART

How many?

ALAN

(To Dysart) Six.

DYSART

And then? What happens now? ...Come on, Alan. Show me.

JILL

See, it's all shut. There's just us...

They sit together on the same bench, left.

Hello.

ALAN

(Quickly) Hello.

She kisses him lightly. He responds. Suddenly a faint trampling of hooves, offstage, makes him jump up.

JILL

What is it?

He turns his head upstage, listening.

Relax. There's no one there. Come here.

She touches his hand. He turns to her again.

You're very gentle. I love that...

He kisses her spontaneously. The hooves trample again, harder. He breaks away from her abruptly towards the upstage corner.

JILL

(Rising) What is it?

ALAN

Nothing!

She moves towards him. He turns and moves past her. He is clearly distressed. She contemplates him for a moment.

JILL

(Gently) Take your sweater off.

ALAN

What?

JILL

I will, if you will.

He stares at her. A pause. She lifts her sweater over her head: he watches - then unzips his. They each remove their shoes, their socks, and their jeans. Then they look at each other diagonally across the square, in which the light is gently increasing.

ALAN

You're... You're very...

JILL

So are you... *(Pause)* Come here.

He goes to her. She comes to him. They meet in the middle, and hold each other, and embrace.

ALAN

(To Dysart) She put her mouth in mine.

They burst into giggles. He lays her gently on the floor in the centre of the square, and bends over her eagerly. Suddenly the noise of Equus fills the place. Hooves smash on wood. Alan straightens up, rigid. He stares straight ahead of him over the prone body of the girl.

DYSART

Yes, what happened then, Alan?

ALAN

(To Dysart: brutally) I put it in her!

DYSART

You did?

ALAN

Yes!

DYSART

Describe it.

ALAN

I told you.

DYSART

More exactly.

ALAN

I put it in her!

DYSART

Did you, Alan?

ALAN

Yes! Yes!

DYSART

Give me the truth! Did you?... Honestly?

ALAN

Fuck off!

He collapses, lying upstage on his face. Jill lies on her back motionless, her head downstage, her arms extended behind her. A pause.

DYSART

(Gently) What was it? You couldn't? Though you wanted to very much?

ALAN

I couldn't... see her.

DYSART

What do you mean?

ALAN

Only Him. Every time I kissed her - He was in the way.

DYSART

Who?

Alan turns on his back.

ALAN

You know who! ...When I touched her, I felt Him. Under me... His side, waiting for my hand... His flanks... I refused him. I looked. I looked right at her... and I couldn't do it. When I shut my eyes, I saw Him at once. The streaks on his belly... *(With more desperation)* I couldn't feel her flesh at all! I wanted the foam off his neck. His sweaty hide. Not flesh. Hide! Horsehide! ...Then I couldn't even kiss her.

Jill sits up.

JILL

What is it?

ALAN

(Dodging her hand) No!

He scrambles up and crouches in the corner against the rails, like a little beast in a cage.

JILL

Alan!

ALAN

Stop it!

Jill gets up.

JILL

It's alright... It's alright... Don't worry about it. It often happens - honest... There's nothing wrong.

He dashes past her downstage.

Alan, look at me... Alan?... Alan!

He collapses again by the rail.

ALAN

Get out!

JILL

What?

ALAN

(Soft) Out!

He snatches up the invisible pick.

Get out!

JILL

Put that down!

ALAN

Leave me alone!

JILL

Put that down, Alan. It's very dangerous. Go on, please - drop it.

He 'drops' it, and turns from her.

Listen: you don't have to do anything. Try to realize that. Nothing at all. Why don't we just lie here together in the straw. And talk.

ALAN

(Low) Please...

JILL

Just talk.

ALAN

Please!

JILL

Alright, I'm going... Let me put my clothes on first.

She dresses, hastily.

Goodnight, then, Alan... I wish - I really wish -

He turns on her, hissing. His face is distorted - possessed. In horrified alarm she turns - Jumbles the door open - leaves the barn - shuts the door hard behind her, and dashes up the tunnel out of sight, past the barely visible figure of Nugget.

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Alan stands alone, and naked. A faint humming and drumming. The boy looks about him in growing terror.

DYSART

What?

ALAN

(To Dysart) He was there. Through the door. The door was shut, but he was there! He'd seen everything. I could hear him. He was laughing.

DYSART

Laughing?

ALAN

(To Dysart) Mocking!

Standing downstage he stares up towards the tunnel. A great silence weighs on the square.

(To the silence) Friend... Equus the Kind... The Merciful! Forgive me! It wasn't me. Not really me. Me! ...Forgive me! ...Take me back again! Please! PLEASE!

He kneels on the downstage lip of the square, still facing the door, huddling in fear.

I'll never do it again. I swear... I swear!

Silence.

(In a moan) Please!

DYSART

And He? What does He say?

ALAN

(To Dysart: whispering) 'Mine! You're mine! ...I am yours and you are mine!'... Then I see his eyes. They are rolling!

Nugget begins to advance slowly, with relentless hooves, down the central tunnel.

'I see you. I see you. Always! Everywhere! Forever!'

DYSART

Kiss anyone and I will see?

ALAN

Yes!

DYSART

Lie with anyone and I will see?

ALAN

Yes!

DYSART

And you will fail! Forever and ever you will fail! You will see *me* - and you will fail!

The boy turns round, hugging himself in pain. From the sides two more horses converge with Nugget on the rails. Their hooves stamp angrily. The equus Noise is heard more terribly.

ALAN

(In terror) Eyes! White eyes - never closed! Eyes like flames - coming - coming! ...God seest! God seest! ...NO!

Pause. He steadies himself. The stage begins to blacken.

(Quieter) No more. No more, Equus.

He gets up. He goes to the bench. He takes up the invisible pick. He moves slowly upstage towards Nugget, concealing the weapon behind his naked back, in the growing darkness. He stretches out his hand and fondles Nugget's mask.

(Gently) Equus... Noble Equus... Faithful and True... Godslave... Thou-God-Seest-NOTHING!

He stabs out Nugget's eyes. The horse stamps in agony. A great screaming begins to fill the theatre, growing ever louder. Alan dashes at the other two horses and blinds them too, stabbing over the rails. Their metal hooves join in the stamping.

Relentlessly, as this happens, three more horses appear in cones of light: not naturalistic animals like the first three, but dreadful creatures out of nightmare.

Their eyes flare - their nostrils flare - their mouths flare. They are archetypal images - judging, punishing, pitiless. They do not halt at the rail, but invade the square. As they trample at him, the boy leaps desperately at them, jumping high and naked in the dark, slashing at their heads with arms upraised. The screams increase. The other horses follow into the square. The whole place is filled with cannoning, blinded horses - and the boy dodging among them, avoiding their slashing hooves as best he can. Finally they plunge off into darkness and away out of sight. The noise dies abruptly, and all we hear is Alan yelling in hysteria as he collapses on the ground - stabbing at his own eyes with the invisible pick.

ALAN

Find me! Find me! Find me! ...KILL ME! ...KILL ME!

35

The light changes quickly back to brightness. Dysart enters swiftly, hurls a blanket on the left bench, and rushes over to Alan. The boy is having convulsions on the floor. Dysart grabs his hands, forces them from his eyes, scoops him up in his arms and carries him over to the bench. Alan hurls his arms round Dysart and clings to him, gasping and kicking his legs in a dreadful frenzy. Dysart lays him down and presses his head back on the bench. He keeps talking - urgently talking - soothing the agony as he can.

DYSART

Here... Here... Ssssh... Lie back.

The boy's breath is drawn into his body with a harsh rasping sound, which slowly grows less. Dysart puts the blanket over him.

It's all over now, Alan. You'll never see him again, I promise.

He stands upright. The boy lies still.

Sleep now. Have a good long sleep. You've earned it... I'm going to make you well.

He steps backwards into the centre of the square. The light brightens some more. A pause.

DYSART

I'm lying to you, Alan. He won't really go that easily. When Equus leaves - if he leaves at all - it will be with your intestines in his teeth.

Hesther speaks from her place.

HESTHER

The boy's in pain, Martin.

DYSART

Yes.

HESTHER

And you can take it away.

DYSART

Yes.

HESTHER

Then that has to be enough for you, surely?

DYSART

(Crying out) Alright! I'll take it away! He'll be delivered from madness. What then? He'll feel himself acceptable! What then? Let me tell you exactly what I'm going to do to him!

He steps out of the square and walks round the upstage end of it, storming at the audience.

I'll heal the rash on his body. I'll erase the welts cut into his mind by flying manes. When that's done, I'll set him on a nice mini-scooter and send him puttering off into the Normal world where animals are treated properly: made extinct, or put into servitude, or tethered all their lives in dim light, just to feed it! I'll give him the good Normal world where we're tethered beside them - blinking our nights away in a non-stop drench of cathode-ray over our shriveling heads! I'll take away his Field of Ha Ha, and give him Normal places for his ecstasy - multi-lane highways driven through the guts of cities, extinguishing Place altogether, even the idea of Place!

He'll trot on his metal pony tamely through the concrete evening - and one thing I promise you: he will never touch hide again! ~~With any luck his private parts will come to feel as plastic to him as the products of the factory to which he will almost certainly be sent.~~ Who knows? He may even come to find sex funny. Smirky funny. Bit of grunt funny. Trampled and furtive and entirely in control. Hopefully, he'll feel nothing at his fork but Approved Flesh. I doubt, however, with much passion! ...Passion, you see, can be destroyed by a doctor. It cannot be created.

He addresses Alan directly, in farewell.

You won't gallop any more, Alan. Horses will be quite safe. You'll save your pennies every week, till you can change that scooter in for a car, quite forgetting that they were ever anything more to you than bearers of little profits and little losses. You will, however, be without pain. More or less completely without pain.

Pause.

He speaks directly to the theatre, standing by the motionless body of Alan Strang, under the blanket.

And now for me it never stops: that voice of Equus out of the cave - 'Why Me? Why Me? Account for Me!' Alright - I surrender! I say it! In an ultimate sense I cannot know what I do in this place - yet I do ultimate things. Essentially I cannot know what I do - yet I do essential things. Irreversible, terminal things. I stand in the dark with a pick in my hand, striking at heads!

He moves away from Alan, back to the downstage bench, and finally sits.

I need - more desperately than my children need me - a way of seeing in the dark. What way is this? What dark is this? I cannot call it ordained of God: I can't get that far. I will however pay it so much homage. There is now, in my mouth, this sharp chain. And it never comes out.

A long pause. Dysart sits staring. Blackout.