

## **“The Walkover (Act Five)”**

An epic in Thirteen Acts, as Dionysus bridges the river Styx.

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(abridged by editor James K Beach\*)

### **PART I – DIGRESSION (the last act) \*\***

#### **Characters in Act Five**

##### **Disembodied Voices**

**Gareth Rothschild**

**Hooded Figure**

**Male Nurse**

**Karen Dashwood**

**Mr Pocket**

**Lawyer Amedus Rouald**

**Leon Blackwell**

**Fehmin Ashton**

**Noel**

**Nimhef**

**Nerak**

### **ACT FIVE – The Bridge on the River Styx**

(Motif: indestructible; cry! havoc!)

#### **Disembodied voice:**

“Gareth and Karen: Black Death, in the times of the Great Plague, all things good were rotten, all people cherished were burned to prevent the sickness from spreading. Black Death spread through all the months: the blistering June when the flies were worst; and the cold December when the moon never thrust— her pretty face into the ungodly. Averil... sweet April, when the blossoms bloomed... Eoforhild, saint Everild, there comes your doom”...

*Three cinema screens light up above the stage, showing a mishmash of Greek war scenes, each screen different yet the effect is monochromatic.*

*The cinema screens go dark.*

**Voice:**

“Amidst his fans from football field, a triumphant match succeeding.  
He has her fast by the arm, their car in the background awaiting.  
They both would wave like kings and queens, royalty descending.  
A kiss, a smile and much (warm) applause in their wake be echoing”.

*Words scrawl across on the cinema screens, with photos and images: “Gareth and Karen, so young and happy/ At a teenage ball from school, perhaps/ Her cheek the plush of primrose; poppy/ They have dressed to match in schnapps”*

*Cinema screens read: “Eoforhild”.*

**Voice:**

“Karen and Gareth forever wedded; if wed in ‘earts be true  
Casually with Leon and Cambridge and all the Cambridge blues  
A laugh instead of a former smile, such emotions accrue  
The spark is naught? The spark is gone!—  
That which glistens (on the petal) is not dew”...

*Cinema screens read: “Saint Everild”.*

**Voice:**

“In the crook of his arm: that is always her place  
No woman has surpassed her yet, O the laughter dimmed?  
The maturity, like autumn faze plashes upon their face  
Wordless and wordlessness upon this silence has brimmed”.

*Cinema screens play appropriate imagery of the following simultaneous dialog, perhaps staggered as in a ‘round’:*

**Nine Voices:**

“The whole of Europe once burned in the fires of the plague: all was dead and rotten. The disease clung to the fruit, like a core that is black. Many lovers in love’s sweet throes had their lovers wrecked. Pathogens coursing in their blood, they all were petty pests. By the time it all were ending, the sickness had its nests. Their very bloods so accustomed to the disease had grown; that those that survived just survived ‘cause they were Beasts now cloned”.

“Such a melancholy time, this great Plague’s parading, so many died, so many lost; so many bereaving. Great love stories of this time we must have existing: of power and throne and godliness and sins some redemption receiving. Averil! Dear, Averil... the April bloom is blooming. Keep some; keep some, Averil inside your bodice threading. Sweet, sweet Averil, what scent is it exuding? Careful, dearest Averil, all pests and knights approaching! Captivate naught his heart, Eoforhild, he has a battle looming. O Averil, may Saint Everild protect your April blooming”...

“He is dead, Averil. Death is his way stealing. Stop it, dear Averil or for eternity you would be weeping”...

“Plague, it is O Averil! To the plague he is succumbing”.

“Boar-battle, O Eoforhild! This Beast to whom you are losing”...

“Kill it, O Saint Everild, pray, kill this transforming Beast—  
For Averil whose heart must break on this blooming April feast”—

“In the Great Plague so many lives were lost, that it came to be known as a Black Death. Black was not for the numbers; equalling an abyss; it was for the manner in which those numbers had come to die”.

“O legions of the dead, ye all who succumbed  
From the ashes of the plague, Burn, now burn  
Sweeter incense has April bloom alighted  
Sweeter smells now that the disease is plighted  
Averil, weep not, not just thine lover has blighted  
So many hordes of able men at the Styx have alighted  
Sing a sad requiem, all ye who have lighted  
All the petty candles and rags, to those that have frightened  
This Great Plague, O Averil!  
Sweet April is in bloom.  
Forget the past, O Averil  
Is that so hard to brew?  
Ye have such reasons great to hate (that which is gone)  
Fear the past, O Averil, thine freedom is in Rue”.

“Averil, forever weeping, still calls to Eoferhild  
That day Saint Everild failed  
To wed her in April spring  
Averil, O Averil, the Black Death will have us all  
Pray, sweet Averil, to some pagan God of Pan  
He is not dead yet, O Averil, his ferryman told me so  
Go run with his two gold coins to Styx  
That he be ferried across”.

### **ACT FIVE - Scene 1**

*Curtains rise.*

*Gareth Rothschild's study in the hermetic polarity: everything is dual; like and unlike are the same; opposites are identical in nature, but different in degrees; extremes meet... All truths are but half-truths; all paradoxes may be reconciled: as above, so below: Juxtaposed; a stone cavern – a seemingly affluent room stripped of furniture save for a table decked in curios; a throne like chair –*

*The curios: an ivory lion its body flexed to pounce; vials of tinkling glass sitting in ornate holders, wrapped in platinum serpents entwined, nay tightly knitted with*

writhing snakes of bronze, rubies in gouged eyes - they bear the vials aloft; papers: intricate drawings and maps of places unknown to the world or marked in code: IN-S-LE; two tall buildings sired in glory summits marked, hand drawn; overleaf: a rectangle, chequered; checkers; a deck of cards, a queen of hearts; a black bound book entitled "of lies", bound.

*Thus is the cornucopia laid?*

GARETH ROTHSCHILD crosses downstage to face the audience and act as if looking into a mirror. On the three cinema screens can be seen: The assumed reflection of Gareth, a HOODED FIGURE, hidden even from itself. Black and black robes. Biliious - which is green - billow in black of the morrow. The reflection stands in the reversed cavern of Gareth's study: a seemingly affluent room containing only a table decked in curios; a throne of a chair. The hooded figure takes off its hood, mirroring Gareth... The hood slips —

*The balance of all things shudders; Gareth backs away and trips over jumbled boxes inside his study. He has been busy packing. This one... the one he has stumbled on topples and vomits out a rack of thick sinister books with black covers and too-faded titles...*

*His reflection jumps to an abyss of a hole created by the hidden trapdoor of his study, lying open at present — the communication between the As Above So would be Below... But it isn't. He does not resurface to the other side as the balance shudders again and the mirror is suddenly dark.*

*The stage goes dark, pitch black and even blacker... before a flashlight is clicked, and a small halo illuminates more sheaves of papers broken from their seals and bindings by a frantic Gareth who is ripping them apart in search of something... One winning page out of so many in this dark place... could be anywhere.*

*On the cinema screens: Shuffling and reshuffling a deck of cards, in haste and frantic panic - wanting to hit on the right card in that instant.*

*The hooded figure creeps onstage and circles Gareth in the shadows. A few of the lethal orange tresses spill out of the hood as the figure alights upon the object of quest. They both do. Gareth's eyes round in horror as the bundle slips from his hand and the flashlight does an unfocused arc of the tall chamber.*

*On the cinema screens: A knave of Hearts above a red-flamed candle. The flame licks the corners of the card and ashes powder down amongst the curios on the table. The screens go dark.*

*Onstage, the scene morphs to that of Act One, Scene 4: the walled-in courtyard of a dream. Gareth climbs over a crumbling wall and disappears over to the other side; the illusion of the dream... and then stands at the threshold of a bleached and aged door of a crumbling manor, riddle with ivy, poison.*

*He is dressed as a Black doctor from the ages of the Plague. The door is marked with a red cross (blood?) as warning. His eyes through the holes of his beak-shaped*

*mask are hesitant to enter. He takes off the mask, despite the warning of the cross, and pushes open the door...*

*Stage goes dark.*

*Across the cinema screens, a panorama: Gareth is in his study, the Above. He rounds up all the boxes, sealing them with a fevered frenzy, throwing them pell-mell through the trapdoor into the Below. He has stripped the Above of almost everything curiously academic, as he goes over to his study table and punches in a combination to his safe. It has barely opened when Gareth grabs two revolvers, stuffing them in his pockets, swinging the safe door shut with a swing of the foot.*

*Almost the next second, in a lightening flash, he has dropped Below, the trapdoor resealing itself in his wake. Leaving not a trace of its existence... As the knave of Hearts is fully consumed, his ashes swept inside a mortar leaving not a trace of where they fell amongst the curios.*

*He comes out into his sloping garden, running...*

*It is some confusion...*

*Gareth running down an alleyway with two cars gunning after him. He zigzags into a narrower alley... somehow he is then checking in his rear-view mirror as he is driving: two cars behind him, first discreetly and then indiscreetly; he rams his foot on the accelerator and drives on. Both the cars stop and their drivers jump out, clear assassins as they load their guns and run after him in the zigzagging narrower alley... He pushes on faster as one of the cars has almost drawn level with him and swerves — one of the assassin poises his revolver, ready to shoot as the other tries to stop him: a heated argument and physical drama that ends with a shot. Gareth stumbles, the bullet lodged in his left thigh; he holds out his hands to break his fall... his foot now desperate on the brake pedal trying to control the damage of the swerve but it is too little and too late as the car rams into a tree and bursts into flames... But he recuperates, almost like a par excellence marksman and whips his own revolver in a flash, shooting the assassin who shot him, in the neck. Despite an injured thigh he ducks to avoid the partner's shot. And then, ready and skilled, he fires again.*

*He knows he has killed them both, as he is lying on that deserted alley, haunted by a ghost, maybe, while profusely losing blood.*

*The cinema screens shudder as he storms in, throwing some hidden door ajar, shouting in vehemence and fury as the hooded figure looks up.*

*Then:*

*The film morphs into live-action onstage:*

*Gareth grabs the figure by the hood and the orange hair, placing his revolver at the forehead. The figure is equally quick as it slides a dagger out of the sleeve and stabs it on his side, just below his rib.*

*Gareth breaths heavily, his revolver still poised: he perhaps held the gaze for a second too long, for he withdraws the revolver and tosses it against the opposite wall. Perhaps the pact was mutual, for after a painful twist of the knife, the robed figure withdraws it, glistening in fresh blood.*

*He turns to leave, but on an afterthought looks back, saying something accusatory or in warning, jabbing his finger: shouting - he does not overstay his welcome.*

*The robed figure readjusts its hood, the orange hair disappearing in the folds as it grabs the dripping knife and puts it inside a mortar, washing it clean with the steady stream of a liquid poured off one of the ornate vials. As the blood and the liquid meet, a smoke as of hell arises.*

*The stage goes dark.*

*On cinema screens: Gareth clutches his chest with paroxysmal pain on his way down a flight of marble stairs pouring out of a colonnade of Doric columns. He drops to his knees, subjugated by the pain. The paralysis turns him almost to stone, for he cannot move... slowly passing away, he is aware of this little detail: he cannot move —*

*Next he is lying unconscious beside the charred remains of his burned car, a knot of people slowly gathering around him before the arrival of an ambulance, with paramedics rushing with stretchers and resuscitating essentials. As he is rushed to the hospital... a blur of blaring sirens...*

*He is lying unconscious in the zigzagging narrow alleyway: bleeding profusely so much that he has passed out, his breathing shallow, his revolver lying beside him. The alley is deserted and no charred remains of the car or marble colonnade are visible for miles at either end...*

*Cinema screens go dark.*

*Onstage: a hospital room, where Gareth lies in bed, suffering. After a long moment, a MALE NURSE enters.*

**Male Nurse:**

*“Mr. Rothschild, you have a visitor. A- Miss Karen Dashwood”...*

*His eyes fly open, his condition as near dying as is scientifically possible to discern.*

*KAREN DASHWOOD enters, her eyes caked thick with tears, already in black, perhaps only by coincidence. The nurse leaves, closing the door behind him.*

**Karen:** *(words cannot describe the sounds she utters)*

*“Argh Ohm”.*

**Gareth:**

*“I am dying, as you see”.*

*From then on, it is wordless. They look on, uninterrupted and unflinching gazes reproduced in real-time on the cinema screens speaking of many things: love and its parting sadness, and the ensuing accusation in the limbo of the parting: the betrayal.*

*Karen seats herself at the edge of his bed. Perhaps it is the usual way with them, sitting at either side of this wall of Silence, speaking all the unspoken things, without words, waiting for some hidden cue to speak—She puts her hand on his. He turns his face to the other side.*

*He never even betrayed a hint of the agony that seared through with that touch. Perhaps if he had, she would have wept less. Perhaps she would not have withdrawn her hand and clasped them in her lap, desperately looking for some other spectre.*

*She should not have withdrawn that hand, for it caused greater agony than clasping it; a choice of the lesser of the two pains. He clenches his fist, in his age-old manner of restraint and despair. A rare tear leaks down Gareth's eyes.*

*Curtains fall.*

## **ACT FIVE - Scene 2**

*Curtains rise.*

*Rothschild manor: the disused sitting room with very few lights flicked on, only essential enough to light a small copse of sofa and table seating. The rest is the disused shadows of a room that has last held reception of its last surviving owner's death. The door near to the lighted copse creaks open as MR POCKET the housekeeper enters, leading KAREN. She is white-faced and subdued, dressed in black of the fashionable kind, not of disuse; she speaks, her what would perhaps have been matriarchal command returning with the environs of the room.*

**Karen:**

*"I know my way, Mr Pocket. Kindly do not trouble yourself on my account".*

**Mr Pocket:** *(his voice in oily cogs, rusted recently out of disuse)*

*"No trouble. It is my job".*

*Karen seats herself on a sofa, turning a woman's eye to inspect everything, including Mr Pocket.*

**Karen:**

“Are you all up by yourself here... since”?

**Mr Pocket:**

“As you see”.

*The question was thrown to test grounds, and the reply has given her the full measure of the surroundings.*

**Karen:**

“The lawyer would be here soon, I presume”?

**Mr Pocket:**

“He is never late”.

*A doorbell chimes so far away, somewhere in the elephantine mansion. Pocket bows himself out; a phantom of the dark, gone!*

*Karen meanwhile runs a hand over the furniture, unwrapping its white sheet cover rather crudely. She goes over to a hanging by the wall and pulls off the white wrappings to inspect the painting below, perhaps her favourite in the house. It is there no more —*

*Two pair of footsteps and she turns sharply as Mr Pocket leads portly LAWYER AMEDUS ROUALD toward her.*

**Karen:**

“Mr Amedus Rouald”.

**Rouald:**

“Ms Dashwood. It is a pleasure”.

**Karen:**

“You know my name”?

**Rouald:**

“Naturally. Gareth talked of you in all our business meetings together. I think I know you as well as he did”.

**Karen:**

“Not in as much detail as you are implying, I’m sure”.

**Rouald:**

“I think it is safe to say I understand you even more than Gareth did”.

*Mr Pocket leads LEON and FEHMIN inside, quite abruptly, sans a warning doorbell. Fehmin’s hair is pinned back with a simple clip: deep black and ebony purple in this light. She acknowledges Karen with a nod as Rouald turns to her and Leon.*

**Rouald:**

“Ah, Leon Blackwell”!

*They clasp hands*

“And”—

*His eyes alight on Fehmin and he is arrested for a moment, perhaps calculating; his hand stays stretched and frozen midway, intended for a handshake.*

*Fehmin reaches out and clasps the lawyer’s hand.*

**Fehmin:**

“Fehmin Ashton”.

**Rouald:**

“Like so. When he... told me you were his friend’s... *woman*... I must say, I did not understand. So naturally nothing made sense”.

*She freezes in the handshake and withdraws her hand. He, unnaturally courteous points to an empty sofa.*

“Please sit”.

*He pauses before continuing.*

“Family history of ancient age has gone rusty; but this is hardly ancient history”.

*He turns to his folder and takes out three copies of the official document of the will, handing one to the each of them; while extracting a copy for himself. He clears his throat.*

“The will, as you see, is very straight forward. It is one of the shortest of wills that I ever handled. He leaves”—

**Fehmin:**

“One of the shortest of wills that you ever handled”?

**Rouald:**

“Yes”.

**Fehmin:**

“Then you are not the family’s lawyer”?

*A heartbeat of death silence*

**Rouald:**

“And what gives you that impression”?

**Fehmin:**

“You would have otherwise remarked something like, ‘One of the only Rothschild to leave such a brief will’ and remarked upon the family history. And truly, if you were the Rothschild’s lawyer, you could possibly not have handled such a lot of wills in your career to recall them all and pick out one as the ‘shortest you ever handled’. Or upon my mentioning you would have been quicker with the affirmative rather than just asking me what gave me the impression. But by far what betrayed you the most was the infinitesimal silence”.

*The lawyer stares at Fehmin until she breaks her gaze.*

“I am sorry — but are you”?

**Rouald:**

“No, I am not”.

**Fehmin:**

“Shouldn’t the Rothschild lawyer be handling the will”?

**Rouald:**

“Yes. And he is... with the major part of the will that concerns the family”.

**Fehmin:**

“So well this could hardly be the shortest will you ever handled when this is just a minor portion of it”.

*He stands before her, a lawyer stumped. He can only stare.*

“Unless, Gareth made two separate wills and not one”.

**Rouald:**

“I cannot answer that”.

**Fehmin:**

“Meaning, yes”.

**Rouald:**

“I didn’t frame it that poorly this time, Miss Ashton. But if that is what you want to believe, then by all means do”.

**Fehmin:**

“By all means”—

*Leon puts his hand over Fehmin’s clasped ones on her lap. Very politely. As politely as he must do it... to appease Karen —*

**Leon:**

“Fem, stop. Please”—

*There is a moment of restrained silence, as she withdraws her hands. She is very surprised to have been so mistaken in her assumption, but why yes. He couldn’t*

*care less about the will... She sits back now as the lawyer clears his throat, brandishing paper-livery.*

*Fixing spectacles to his nose, he begins:*

**Rouald:** *(reading the will)*

“I, Gareth Rothschild, son of Ezra Rothschild, hereby bequeath to my friend Leon Blackwell; son of Adam Blackwell; hereafter referred to as Leon in this document, and my cousin Fehmin Ashton; daughter of Emma Ashton nee Rothschild: the Rothschild manor and its heirlooms and estate walks that they should find me here always. Leon’s assets remain his to bequeath in the event that he might find it necessary to do so or in the event of his dying, however, Fehmin Ashton may only transfer her assets in the name of another member of the family should she find it necessary to do so or in the event of her dying”.

*He pauses, relishing the effect, as Leon is caught in disbelief, and Fehmin is staring into some dark space in some nether corner. Karen had taken her head in her hands as this all was being read out: disappointed? One would never know if she was, or if it truly were her place to be. Leon, on her behalf, perhaps, or thinking that he is doing this on her behalf, speaks up.*

**Leon:**

“But there has been some mistake, surely. He couldn’t have left Fehmin everything...”

*Rouald scrutinizes him over his spectacles.*

**Rouald:**

“Hold your horses, Mr Blackwell. Hold them yet. Though, if you would allow me to say, he passed on what was his to the next in line by blood. Generous, yes, considering how she would not have gotten anything considering the circumstance of the Diaspora... But why impossible”?

*Leon has no reply to this. Rouald carries on with the reading of the will.*

“To Karen Dashwood, daughter of Godfrey Dashwood; hereafter referred to as Karen in the Document I wish to leave the stipend allocated to the matriarch femme de Rothschild”—

*Karen gets up suddenly but the lawyer finishes the paragraph anyway.*

“Karen, use it well for you and I both know what is well enough to be spent on. But use it, you must”.

**Karen:**

“He leaves me money”.

**Rouald:**

“Oh yes. And it is a lot of money, if I might add. For it has been adding up since Gareth’s father allocated his wife’s old stipend for you some time after you started... the relationship with his son. Gareth was merely passing it on”.

**Karen:**

“I don’t want it”.

**Rouald:**

“Yes. But take it, for you will need it. Even if you burn it away in charity without any return”.

**Karen:**

“I don’t— want it”...

**Rouald:**

“I have seen, rare as it may be, many clients throw away their legacies in a heat of emotion they almost always regret”—

*She bursts without warning, abrupt, and with tears:*

**Karen:**

“I AM NOT GARETH’S WIDOW. I am not your client either”.

*Equally without warning she breaks into a crying spell, tears and sobs and for a split second all of them watch her cry, before Leon goes over and puts an arm around her, standing over her as she sobs into his shirt.*

**Leon:**

“This sitting is finished, Mr Rouald”.

**Rouald:**

“Yes, it most certainly is. I would need your signatures when you have read the contents of the document for yourself and are ready to bind or retract yourself from it. Give me a call. Oh— I almost forgot, but since it loosely forms part of the will, I think sharing it right now would be most crucial. At least that is what Gareth thought”.

*The lawyer takes a sealed envelope from his folder which is sealed in an old-fashioned nevertheless chic manner of wax seals bearing the House crest. He turns to Karen.*

“He left this for you, Miss Dashwood”.

*Karen, though not crying anymore, refuses to look at the attorney or take the envelope from him. Leon holds out his hand to take it, but Fehmin forestalls his hand, a move that earns her an impressed look from the lawyer as he puts the envelope on a table near Karen.*

**Rouald:**

“If I may... why did that silence betray me”?

**Fehmin:**

“You had not decided a contingency plan with Gareth in the event that you were asked. It was clear that you decided to test grounds on your own instinct. That’s all”.

*He cannot believe it, he cannot take his eyes off those light champagne-brown ones, gurgling a bit like a bottle disturbed, as they do, according to Leon, when she smiles.*

“Though... if I may... when did Gareth draw this will”?

**Rouald:**

“I beg your pardon”.

**Fehmin:**

“I think you understood me the first time. It is not mentioned on the document, quite understandably. But among other reasons, I am curious because he uses my mother’s name when addressing my parentage and not my father’s, as he ought. By my calculation, it is a little impossible”.

*He is stumped, but he is reassured that at least to this, he has an answer ready.*

**Rouald:**

“I am afraid I have explicit instructions to not disclose that information. Though, it is not unheard of in these rich families for someone to be drawing a premature will that ends up taking effect because the perpetrator dies even prematurely”.

*She bows in acknowledgement.*

*The lawyer prepares to leave, some parting words and ending lines forming.*

“Miss Ashton, never play a Dionysian game with an Apollonian mind. Particularly when Dionysus is walking over the river Styx. It is disrespectful to both Apollo and Dionysus and you run into the danger of certain losing”.

*He walks out, closing the door after him, and with a snap —*

*All the meagre lights in the room like a dream interrupted, go off with a pop.*

*Curtains fall.*

### **ACT FIVE - Scene 3**

*Curtains rise.*

*Enormous upstage mirrors reflect most of the audience. From the wings: whispers: “which room?” and “none can say for sure”. House lights dim and three characters are reflected in separate mirrors. The dimly lit full-length reflections: NOEL, NIMHEF, NERAK. (These characters will need to be either prerecorded and projected into the mirrors, or played as actual reflections by body doubles of Leon, Fehmin, and Karen, with necessary voice overs and lipsynching by the actors.) These reflections change in size and proportion throughout this scene, enlarging or diminishing as the dialog guides these distortions.*

**Noel:**

“Fehmin”...?

**Nimhef:**

“Here”.

**Nerak:**

“Leon? Are you there”?

**Noel:**

“Here. Are you okay”?

**Nerak:**

“Yes”.

*LEON BLACKWELL and FEHMIN ASHTON enter from opposite wings of the stage and stand near their reflections, unaware at first that they are perhaps in two places simultaneously. A hot hassle breaks out between them and their reflections come together in one mirror to spar.*

**Leon:**

“Nimhef, what the hell was all that about? Is it possible for you to not give a display of your superior intellect”?

**Fehmin:**

“What are you talking about, Noel? Why are you saying that? What have I done”?

**Leon:**

“Oh, you have done nothing, my Queen. Nothing at all, to incriminate you”—

**Fehmin:**

“Stop. I will not be spoken to in this manner. You have hurt me”.

**Leon:**

“Hurt you, because I love you, so yes, my Queen. Punish me for it, I command you. That attorney could have killed you. I saw murder in his eyes”—

**Fehmin:**

“—oh, that’s what you saw? Well, I saw lies”—

**Leon:**

“—what were you trying to prove with that Scotland Yard demeanour of yours? That you can spot”—

*KAREN DASHWOOD enters, finding her place near the mirror with Nerak reflected. Nimhef and Leon hug and kiss then part and move into their respective mirrors.*

**Fehmin:**

“—loopholes. I was trying to show you”—

**Nerak:**

“Leon”?

**Noel:**

“Yes, my sweet”?

*They cordially interrupt their heated argument and then carry on as the whispering from the wings intensifies.*

**Leon:**

“—loopholes? But surely your superior intellect failed, my Queen? Don’t you see? I care not for it all. I am not going to accept all this and it can burn and rot. All the money. Everything. Everything ingrate, Nimhef. He leaves you his entire possessions and you are sitting there pointing loopholes”—

**Nimhef:**

“I am afraid yes. And I will continue to be. After all, Gareth and I had bad blood between ourselves for a reason. I hope you appreciate now”—

**Noel:**

“I appreciate his hatred for you”—

**Karen:**

“Noel, I don’t like this place at all. May we leave, please”?

**Leon:**

“Soon we will”—

*He is interrupted, as Nerak speaks. With her words, the squabble vanishes in the background. The entire squabble, the whispers and all layers of sound stripped.*

**Nerak:**

“Gareth locked his study, did you know”?

**Noel:**

“He did what”?

**Nerak:**

“He locked his study. It was the only part of the house that defined him, really. There is a combination which asks for a password and there are only three chances to try. On the third wrong guess the study would detonate itself from the inside... and any attempts to force it through would also cause it to detonate... And”...

**Noel:**  
“And”?

**Nerak:**  
“On the door... in his writing... are the words... Veritos... Veritum... I forget”...

**Nimhef:**  
“Veritas vos liberabit”.

**Nerak:**  
“That’s right”.

**Noel:**  
“What does it mean”?

**Nimhef:**  
“The truth shall set you free”.

*Silence is weighed in a balance and found wanting.*

**Nerak:**  
“Do you know any word, Leon? Anything Gareth would have kept as his password”?

**Noel:**  
“I will have to think... Has anyone tried anything as yet”?

**Nerak:**  
“I don’t know... But I’m... He never left anyone anything personal that means— I must be going”.

*And the widow has started to weep. Bitterly and ceaselessly, in a flow. Weeping...*

**Nimhef:**  
“Karen? Any news of your brother Mark”?

**Nerak:**  
“No. No news”.

*The widow is as yet weeping and weeping away.*

**Noel:**  
“It is almost a month since he went missing. And the search Gareth ordered”?

**Nerak:**

“Will be aborted, now that he is dead”.

**Noel:**

“Maybe we can pay to keep it going”?

**Nerak:**

“It is not about the money, Leon. It was never about the money”.

*There she is her constant weeping in bitter desolation, joined by the ticking of some clock, somewhere. Loudly ticking each and every second...*

**Noel:**

“Do you want me to drive you? I remember he always used to. I just want you to know that nothing has changed and that I would always be there”.

**Nerak:**

“I don’t doubt it. But Leon... Don’t delude yourself any further. Everything has changed”.

*Pause*

“Goodbye”.

**Noel:**

“Karen”?

*No reply.*

“Karen. Karen, answer me please”.

*Without betraying another footstep or the creak of a door, Karen has exited the stage. The widow’s weeping fades and disappears too. Just the dull ticking off the clock somewhere now chimes the hour.*

**Fehmin:**

“Noel? Where are you”?

**Voice:** *(like oiled cogwheels gone rusty with disuse)*

“He is not here”.

**Fehmin:**

“What”...?

*She panics, the poor baby. His Queen. His sweet. Is so scared, the darling. It is funny.*

“Noel, no. Please don’t leave me”—

**Leon:**

“Heh”?

**Fehmin:**

“Noel. Oh, Noel”.

*She sobs with relief.*

“I was so scared. Leon, there is someone”—

**Leon:**

“Hef, listen. I went to Hterag’s study. Somebody has already tried the password once. And then I tried it”...

**Nimhef:**

“Did it work”?

**Leon:**

“No. But there is another way inside. A trapdoor. But it only opens one way... as in, you can jump from up above to down below... but not from the bottom back up... There is a door... That opens into the back garden from the study below... I went inside it just now”...

**Fehmin:**

“And you found something”?

**Leon:**

“Yes...”

But Hef... Why didn’t I get it right”?

**Fehmin:**

“What did you put”?

**Leon:**

“Nerak”.

*Faint hissing and the ticking gets louder, as if even the non-elemental deems it fit to mock.*

**Nimhef:**

“Noel... that was akin to spending Apollonian gold on Dionysian wine.

Noel...

Let’s get out of here. Please”.

**Leon:**

“Why”?

**Fehmin:**

“I don’t like it here”.

**Leon:**

“It’s alright, my love. Hold on. There is no need to be scared”—

**Fehmin:**

“Noel, I am not scared. I am”—

**Leon:**

“Shh...hush. Hef, listen”.

*Whispering from the wings: “Noel, Noel’s widow and the Nimhef... only... three people in a room since the lawyer left: Noel, Nimhef and Nerak— n and n and n, for not, never and nevertheless”.*

*Lights on the actors go dark and they freeze into a contorted pose while their reflections can be seen moving erratically in the mirrors, becoming pixilated blips until they too go dark.*

*Curtains fall.*

*End of Act 5. Conclusion of Part 1: Digression.*

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\*Definition of “abridged by editor James K Beach”: concision of sentences, shortening of dialog exchanges, shortening or deletion of scenes, explication of plot points, adding necessary adaptations for the stage. To obtain unaltered versions of Acts I-V please contact *Wood Coin Magazine*, or seek out playwright Mutahira Moqueet on social media.

\*\*This is the last act to be serialized in *Wood Coin*. To obtain drafts of Parts Two and Three (Acts VI-XIII) please seek out the writer on social media.