

# Sunken Garden

*A Film-Opera*

*by Michel van der Aa and David Mitchell*

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## Scene 1

ZENNA: So this is the cradle where  
you nurture your universes.

TOBY: I do what I can with what's to hand.  
Begged and borrowed, duct-tape and prayers...

ZENNA: The James and Zenna Briggs Foundation sees  
No point in stipends for celebrities.  
We prefer to offer help to  
Not-yet-established artists.

TOBY: I'm curious, Mrs Briggs, how I came  
To the attention of your Foundation.

ZENNA: My husband's agent is well-connected  
With the underground art scene.

TOBY: Connected all the way down  
to my basement flat, it seems.  
How is the Briggs Foundation funded,  
may I ask?

ZENNA: I don't pretend to understand  
My husband's monetary alchemy,  
investment vehicles, un-hedged funds.  
My role is to sniff out up-and-coming  
genius: the Jasper Johnses of tomorrow.  
So tell me what you're working on.

TOBY: An art-house documentary, I call it.  
Three months ago an ordinary man  
named Simon Vines went out for a walk -  
not far from here - and never came home.  
A minor story, come and gone. So why  
this vanishing enslaves my curiosity, I  
Cannot say. Yet the harder I push  
Simon Vines away, the more doggedly  
He hounds me. He hounds me.  
I want to follow Simon Vines's story  
To its end; locate him and discover  
Why he disengaged from life. A theme  
both ancient and modern. Needing

to start somewhere I recorded interviews with friends of Vines.

ZENNA: "A Portrait of a Missing Man." The friends of Simon Vines were willing to cooperate?

TOBY: Willing, desperate and grateful. Let me Show you the story so far...

ALLY: Yeah, My name's Ally, Ally Hewitt, and me and Simon, we met in college. There was a big bunch of us actually, he was living with his mate Sadaqat at the time and my friend Trish had this old clapped out VW that we'd all go away on the weekends in. It was good, good times. Me and Simon weren't an item, not back then anyway, but we stayed in touch, and we ended up working in the very same retail park. One thing led to another, and a... and then... Something happened, I mean stuff happens, in any relationship, good stuff, bad stuff... and a piece of... rather...rather bad stuff... Happened to us.

RITA WALES: Is it going? Oh I thought you'd say 'Action!', Tony. Well, if it's rolling, my name is Rita Wales, and I'm Simon's landlady, at least I was, but I haven't seen hide nor hair of him since the June, no it was the evening of June 21<sup>st</sup> to be exact. I remember Simon came down the stairs and I happened to meet him in the hall. And he said something like *I'm off to get some fresh air*, and I said *Quite right too*, because he'd been cooped up in his room the live-long day doing his computering. And he never came back. Not that night, nor the next day, nor the night after that. The next day I went to the police and they gave it all *oh well he'll be back in 48 hours love, or he's probably gone on holiday with his friends*, and I said, *You don't understand he hasn't got any friends*.

ALLY: We took this minibreak to Venice - you know it was one of these last minute, cheap flights, real make-or-break kind of thing. Well it broke. We just kept bickering about these little things, except there never really little, are they?

RITA: Well, his heart had been put through the shredder by the Madam he was with previous to coming here, wasn't it? Elly or Ally or somesuch. Poor kid. I've got a gift for sensing these things. He had zero social life. Just tap-tap-tapping away, morning noon and night. I said to him, *Simon, come on get up Get back in the saddle, there's plenty more fish in the sea. And he, do you know what he said to me, He said I daren't be tied to anyone. It ends in tears. Now I think that's the trouble with people these days, know what I mean, you need those ties, even if they get messy and*

awkward sometimes. Ties of the flesh, - computer ties don't count, cause you can just switch the machine off when the going gets tough

SADAQAT: My name is Sadaqat Daastani. I am a resident here in the Five-Star Dawkins Psychiatric Hotel, where service is second to none. Nice camera... Is that a Zeiss lens

Since my very first day at school, where the teacher made me sit next to a gawky boy named Simon Vines. I was a freshly-imported, non-verbal Pakistani. I liked to play chess. Ah chess yes, my only talent was chess, and it did not earn me much popularity. Would you care for a game of chess, Toby Kramer?

*"A child need not be very clever to learn that "Later, dear" means 'never'."* Simon was my friend, all the way through our school years. and he met Ally. yes of course first choice university We both opted for the same first-choice university, and we both got in. And *no*, we both preferred girls. You met Ally. Uncomplicated times, back before my Revelation.

About the Ones....the ones at the *very* top of the food chain, the *Soul Eaters!* The Ones that leave messages in graffiti. The Ones who stare at you from coaches, pretending to be tourists. Which in a way is what they are. The Vegetarians, that is. The Carnivores they are not merely tourists.

RITA WALES: I mean sometimes I thought Simon hadn't eaten, so I used to take him his supper up on a tray, I'd knock on his door and say, *Room Service!* You've got to do what you can for people, haven't you? Did I mention I'm a mum, yes I'm a mother. My Robert's he settled in Florida of all places, married a beautician, if you please. Annette. Twice, they've visited: *twice*, in seven blinkin' years. No kids, which sets the alarm bells ringing doesn't it. She's one of those career women if you know what I mean

SADAQAT: *Unanchored!* 'Unanchored in Reality' that was Simon's gentle phrase. My father, he just wanted me hidden away. *"So how is Sadaqat these days, Mr Daastani? An eye-doctor, wasn't it?"* *"Very well, thank you, but he has decided to become a fully fledged sectioned lunatic instead of going into ophthalmology as planned."* Bad blood, you see, it's harder to marry off my sisters. By the way, do you have a card? A business card? I collect them.

After Ally you mean? No. He hid under his stone. Yes. One girl Simon met. In a therapy class I attended here Her name was Amber. A sticky resin. I saw Simon and her talk, outside.

SADAQAT: Whereabouts? Simon has no whereabouts. A Carnivore took him. They are drawn to institutions like this one. We are their salmon farm. They visit you when you are sleeping. Doctor Marinus, she's the psychiatrist. She's an other. Oh or are you just playing with me? Is this 'film project' the worm on the hook? Do you plan to reel me in?

ZENNA: What a gaoler, what a gaol,  
The human mind can be.

TOBY: Simon Vines was his bridge to reality.  
With Vines now gone the bridge is gone.

ZENNA: A bizarre psychosis: races of immortals,  
The harvesting of souls! Your early steps  
in search of Vines hold the promise of...  
A truly Homeric journey. Your video-cubist  
Project must see the light of day.  
I speak for the Briggs Foundation, and  
We declare that Toby Kramer is an artist  
of precocity and a lucid vision; a zeitgeist  
Surfer, truly. Naturally, I came prepared:  
This contains  
A bank draft, commensurate to your needs.

TOBY: I'm gobsmacked, Mrs Briggs - I  
Hardly dare believe I'm awake.

ZENNA: Expect me by the year's end.  
We'll review the progress then.

TOBY: "An Ascendant Jupiter over the autumn equinox  
Will bring a billionaire's bored wife to your door.  
She bears a cheque fat enough to cover your most  
clamorous debts, buy a trolley-full of gear, and  
Fund your first creation." I'll bet a state-of-the-art  
editing suite there's more where this came from.  
*"I'm gobsmacked, Mrs Briggs: I hardly dare believe..."*  
That one who holds the purse-strings can be as mad  
As a sack of cats. Toby Kramer, you lucky  
bastard - so lights... Action... Glory!

## **Scene 2**

TOBY: The shortest day, the darkest

One, the iciest one.

ZENNA: I wanted to drop by before  
You went home for Christmas.

TOBY: Art is my home: this film. Dad lives - "lives" -  
in Omaha: my mother died, some time ago.

LAW: Were you very young  
when she left this world?

TOBY: Time's not so much a healer, as a halfway-  
Decent anaesthetician. I miss Mum, sure, but  
I've got a stack of memories: video, too.  
Her final gift was a Sony Camcorder.  
I filmed her funeral. And that's how I coped.  
Captured in a viewfinder, Grief and Fear  
Are defanged. The most bruiseable heart  
Becomes an impassionate eye - Vision, itself...  
Ah, this sounds unhinged.

ZENNA: It sounds very hinged, indeed, dear Toby.  
So how goes the work?  
Did you locate your muse and subject  
Simon Vines?

TOBY: Not yet. My leads led down dead-ends,  
Until I recalled that Sadaqat the Schizophrenic  
Mentioned a girl, a girl called Amber.  
Simon met her at the hospital. Online,  
I tracked down Amber Jacquemain,  
a student of art history, here in the city.  
I emailed, but no reply: went to her college,  
Asked around, but here's the thing:  
No-one has seen her since September.

ZENNA: A girl. One wondered when a girl  
Might rear her irresistible head.  
But one's heart goes out to the parents.  
They must be half-insane with worry.

PORTIA: I'm Portia Jacquemain, owner of Portia Jacquemain Gallery  
here on Denmark Street where we're hosting a retrospective of Prudence  
Hanson's ground-breaking career. We're calling the show 'The Cat Crapped

and Crept Out Again' which captures perfectly Prudence's use of *object trouvee* from building-site skips and wheelybins, and peoples...

So you're Amber's friend too, yes? A friend or a "friend"? I *do* have a soft-spot for video artists. Bill Viola - do you know Bill? - whenever Bill's in Venice, we always ....

A project on my daughter's so-called Life? Wouldn't Prudence Hanson make a better subject? Until December 8<sup>th</sup> we're hosting a spectacular retroshteptif- retroshpecktiff-, oh *fuck*, a retroff-

"Amber Isn't Missing." She's just... gone off somewhere. She has *form*, Toby. Form. Aged fifteen she went off with a DJ, whereabouts unknown for three days. Aged sixteen, the owner of a Tuscan stud-farm twice her age, married. Who's next? So you can see why I am not exactly running to Interpol about Amber's latest... little Escapade. The moment her account's running low she'll come waltzing back in with a "Wonga's running low Mummy." I *mean*, Toby. She left her blessed iPhone here before she vamoosed, with all her precious apps and ring-tones and God-knows-what-on it.

"Simon Vines"... Nope, Never heard of him. Oh No - the singer from Duran Duran? No, that was Slmon le Bong, on the yacht.

"Happy"? She bloody well ought to be! Fat allowance off her father, a spanking new Audi runabout, and a flat between the palace and the park!

ZENNA: Adding two and two together, Vines ran away with Amber. Yet here, two and Two do not make four: Vines went in June; Amber, three months later. Why the delay? Why elope? Vines was single; and Amber's not a girl to care about parental disapproval.

TOBY: There's something else. Using your money, I hired a consultant to locate them. He found no trace: no card transactions, no online activity, no tickets bought. Nothing. He returned most of his fee, Saying *It's as if they ceased to exist*.

ZENNA: Well! Your art-house documentary *is* in uncharted waters. Perhaps you wish to...

TOBY: ...to quit? Not a chance.

One breakthrough I can boast of -  
I left Portia Jacquemain's Gallery  
With Amber's iPhone in my pocket.  
Artists must create their luck.

TOBY: Vines' name did not appear: the emails  
were the student froth you might expect.  
But Amber had a fondness for shooting  
video clips: I edited this sequence...

AMBER: I have these dreams... An iron door, where  
there is no door. Through the keyhole, you  
see this sunken garden. Your mind sort of...  
Leaves, from here  
And through you swoop, like Alice, butterflying  
among big flowers, and trees, speaking all  
at once. What I did, my... Bad Mistake, it  
never happened and never will. I am innocent.  
The only shadow is knowing the dream must  
End. I'm slipping out of mirrors.  
Backstreets of waking and sleeping.

ZENNA: One's at a loss to know how to start...  
This girl's a shattered vase. Who,  
Or what, is "Marinus"?

TOBY: A psychiatrist at Dawkins Hospital. She treats  
Sadaqat Dastaani; and treated Amber.  
Though why she's "A Lie", I couldn't say.  
She won't return my calls. Mrs Briggs,  
I know my film has undergone  
A lot of changes, but I need to know if-

ZENNA: The Bruce and Zenna Foundation knows  
that Art is an ever-evolving thing, spurred by  
Changes of mind. Our faith in you remains –  
– Unbroken.

TOBY: Thank you. The key is near now,  
very near. I just know.

I didn't breathe a word, Amber, how it has changed  
Now I've met you and walked your mind.  
She didn't need to know, why I'm travelling  
To where you are, and who I do it for.



Why I follow your fading footprints, back  
Through the last ten weeks, until we find  
Each other. Amber. Those other men you  
Went with, they couldn't understand you,  
not like me. They ate your body, spitting  
Out your heart. Never heard you at dusk;  
And I glimpsed you, Amber, slipping out of mirrors;  
Backstreets of waking and sleeping.

### **Scene 3**

- ZENNA: "March comes in like a lion, and leaves  
Like a lamb." No sign of the lamb today.
- TOBY: Mrs Briggs, I wasn't expecting you... so soon.
- ZENNA: Three whole months since last we spoke.  
Have you no calendars down here?  
The Foundation trusts your long-awaited  
masterwork is ready for unveiling?
- TOBY: Yes – it's changed its spots, its skin.  
Some profound and new developments...
- ZENNA: The two lost sheep you have found, at least,  
To show for your time and our money?
- TOBY: What I found is this: reason to doubt  
that Simon and Amber disappeared  
Of their own free will. Reason to suppose that  
Some... Agency, or some *one*... took them.  
*Something* took them.
- ZENNA: That's quite a claim.  
How did the police respond?
- TOBY: The police would be a monumental waste  
Of time! To join the police you have to have  
your imagination surgically removed.
- ZENNA: It's true, the law requires evidence an  
Abduction has taken place, and witnesses,  
Before it acts. So where's *your* proof?
- TOBY: A week ago, at an anti-social hour,

A witness approached me...

SADAQAT: It says 'Made in Japan' but it means 'Made in China' really. Who conducts the vast container ships that head out of Shanghai and Guang-jo? Simon said, 'A central maritime computer.' Yes, dear Simon, but who conducts the central maritime computer?' Simon said, 'Global capitalism'. I miss Simon's jokes.

In my nightmare, I woke up in Korea, North – South – North - North Korea. They put a radio into my tooth, my wisdom tooth, and when I woke up for real, the radio was still there. You know sometimes I think I can hear Kim Il-Jung, but the funny thing is he only speaks Korean. Your number? On your card.

To warn you – Simon ignored my warning, Simon got taken. The girl, Amber, she got taken too. You've fallen for Amber too, right? You big fat liar. I'm more doped than the entire Tour de France squad, yet I even noticed her. Simon definitely did. She had it, she had it too. The dream, the dream about the garden. She drew it in her art therapy class. Have *you* had it yet? Have you had the dream yet.

If you're *very* lucky, you *might* get away. You could try. She might, she might have another chicken to hand, ready to roast. She might even spare herself the bother of even hunting you down. But no probably not. Because Carnivores they live for the hunt. They live for the hunt, and I think she's got you down as the third course of her meal.

Equinoxes. Solstices. The corners of the year. That's when they're taken! Simon: midsummer's day. Amber: the autumn Equinox. See? That's when they're gone!

Doctor Marinus, she's not one of us. She's From another place. It's in her eyes.

ZENNA: I ask for proof of abduction –  
You give me this poor man's ramblings!

TOBY: Remember Amber's messages:  
*Marinus is a Lie*. That shrink is hiding  
Something. Why else refuse to meet?

ZENNA: One imagines she encounters insanity  
enough in the course of her working day.

TOBY: But the *patterns*! The garden dream; the chain

of acquaintance; the timings of the vanishings!  
Next week is the equinox: what if another one gets  
Taken? You want that on your conscience?

ZENNA: On rare occasions, the James and Zenna Briggs  
Foundation makes mistakes. You, alas, are one.  
Forthwith we wash our hands of you.

TOBY: No no *no* – you *must* give me money –  
This exposé *must* be filmed – and in 3D! –  
My film will alter history! How life and death  
Are seen! An invisible war is going on, around  
us every day, but the public will only believe  
The truth if it's shot in 3D. This is your *duty*!

ZENNA: ‘You must *give me money*’? ‘*This is your duty*’?  
Sanity knows the shouter from the echo, Mr Kramer.  
You no longer know – *you* need psychiatric help.  
A bitter disappointment.

#### **Scene 4**

Simon Vines walks through an urban wasteland, encountering the graffito  
‘Drowning is Survival’ during his wanderings...

#### **Scene 5**

SIMON: Mind the gap. Mind the gap. Mind the gap...  
*Ally - Ally? Get me Ally. I need to speak to Ally.*  
A little flat in a not-too-dodgy neighbourhood.  
Then I see the blustery light of morning.  
Your preferred network is not available.  
Sadaqat. How have you been this week?  
*Ally, Ally, Ally, something awful's happened.*  
“Doctor, doctor, I keep forgetting things.”  
“I see. When did this begin? “When did what begin?”  
*I daren't be tied to anyone. It ends in tears.*  
Forgotten your PIN and password? [Click here.](#)  
If only I'd woken up. If only I'd woken up.

TOBY: Simon Vines?  
Can you hear me, Simon?

MARINUS Hard to say; he's engraven on the air...

“We are such stuff as dreams are made of.”

TOBY: You - Doctor Iris Marinus -  
You - made this - this...

MARINUS: I'm Marinus, as charged, Tobias Kramer.  
But no, this garden's not my handiwork.  
Enchanting for a brief sojourn, but  
You would not want to live here.

TOBY: Marinus is a lie!  
What did you do with Amber?

MARINUS: How sure you are of your facts.  
Do you come here often?

TOBY: I dreamt this place; Amber is here;  
Sadaqat warned me about you.

MARINUS: Sadaqat is a curious one, but not  
all-knowing; and wrong about Marinus.

TOBY: *You* tell me, then! Am I dead,  
or dreaming, insane or what?

MARINUS: Insane? No, though you drifted rudderlessly  
close to those rocks. A dream? Not this time:  
That is your corporeal self you have on.  
Death? If Life be Day and Death be Night,  
then that electricity you call the Soul must  
cross the Dusk that lies between. Where  
We stand was built inside the Dusk.  
I'd make more sense in Sanskrit; or  
Better yet, Tibetan. I don't suppose-

TOBY: Amber, I found you,  
I've come for you, I -

AMBER: Backstreets of waking and sleeping  
*“The newspaper said ‘Hey what you doin’ in bed?’  
I said ‘We’re only tryin’ to get us some sleep.’”*  
Mummy, the wonga is running low. Clubbing her  
to death would have been kinder. *“With a taste  
of your lips – I’m on a ride – You’re toxic –”*  
SEND MESSAGE? She didn't just steal *him!*

The bitch stole our future life!  
Some nights I dream I'm her.  
MESSAGE SENT to STELLA.

MARINUS: She's been here three months less than Vines,  
So she's still more coherent. And Vines, at least, can  
Still recall - fragmentedly - his life and self. But  
Soon they'll join the others.

TOBY: There are others before Vines?  
Before these two? Where?

MARINUS: You've heard the moths, the hundreds of moths.  
Ghosts without memories of who they were.

TOBY: What do you gain from their suffering?

MARINUS: Tobias Kramer, *think*: were I the Lord of Darkness,  
Why indulge you with this jolly tête-a-tête?

TOBY: If not you,  
Then who?

MARINUS: If not now, then when? Where's  
Your sense of hospitality?

## **Scene 6**

ZENNA: Toby Kramer I invited here, but  
Trespassers will be prosecuted.

MARINUS: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we  
forgive those who trespass against us."

TOBY Mrs Briggs - how did you come here?  
Wait, you dreamt the garden too?

MARINUS: Our good host built this place - invented it.  
That fetching portal leads from her mind.

TOBY: Mrs Briggs - what should I believe?

ZENNA: At this late stage, believe what you wish.

MARINUS: This pleasant sunken garden is an infernal engine.  
It cures mortality - her own, that is. This miracle  
of occultic-engineering comes with just one catch -  
They always do. Infernal engines don't run on air.  
They run on human souls. One per quarter,  
Like your power bill. Hence her guests.

TOBY: Then I demand -

ZENNA: *"I demand"*? Nine years in an orphanage for half-castes;  
A white gentleman who took me into 'Service'  
In his fetid bed; where trauma woke my latent Gift -  
I cracked his mind like bone. Stones and hisses -  
*Chakra-Witch, Chakra-Witch* - along the Madras Road.  
I begged under an effigy of Sainted Zenna, until  
by chance a Chakra-Healer passed and saw my  
Open Eye, ablaze; six years in my Mistress's house;  
Lowly chattel of the Righteous World... Until one  
Torrid noon Truth led me to the Shaded Way.  
It served me well. An English chaplain from New Delhi  
was suasioned to adopt this curious half-breed:  
thence Oxford, and marriage to wealthy James Briggs  
who died so young. I, a poor widow, withdrew  
from the world, to build my Garden in the Dusk:  
from bricks and trials and countless errors...  
So many guests, so troublesome to procure,  
so easily torn, like moths. Until one madrigal morning,  
I looked upon my Work and saw that it was good.  
Your "I demand" is a mosquito, to be..... !

MARINUS: Do you never look upon your Work and  
Consider your victims' unlived lives?  
You preach euthanasia, yet  
Own shares in the clinic.

ZENNA: Humanity is seven needy billion,  
Mewling, spawning, gobbling, befouling  
overcrowded nests. *One* - per season  
Is all I take. You eat more animals in a week.

MARINUS: You lack the right. Your prey - these moths -  
They cannot even die. This engine must be  
dismantled. And since you raised the topic,  
I'm a vegetarian.

ZENNA: My right is the right of the Shaded Way;  
The right of Life to outfox Death.  
How dare *you* deny *my* rights?  
“This engine must be dismantled”? By what force?

MARINUS: My right is the right of the healer to treat  
a disease. What force? Why, I’ll huff  
and I’ll puff and I’ll blow your house down.

ZENNA: Destroy the walls encircling my garden, and  
Dusk would drown us all. You wouldn’t dare.

MARINUS: I dare. I dare. But here’s a proposition: allow  
Simon, Amber and Tobias here to choose  
Between life back in the world, or death,  
and what’s beyond. Then forsake this  
Sunken Garden, and never build another.

ZENNA: And as compensation for my lost life  
everlasting, I receive... What?

MARINUS: Live out the term of your natural life.  
Refuse my proposition and we all die this hour.

ZENNA We have a deal. But Marinus,  
Make no mistake: I damn you.

MARINUS: Make no mistake: that was done,  
A long, long time ago.

## **Scene 7**

SIMON: Emily was seven months old. Ally’s friend  
had a hen-night in a posh hotel in the middle  
of nowhere, a Friday. *Go*, I said. *Do ya good.*  
*Me and Emily’ll be just fine.* Our daughter  
was sleeping through til six a.m., Little Angel.  
So off Ally went and I fed Emily,  
Smelt her neck. You know that lovely smell  
they have? Washed her, changed her,  
watched her fall asleep...  
Guy at work’d lent me Tarkovsky’s  
*Solaris*: I put it on, opened a beer. A knacker  
week it had been, the fire was crackling, *Solaris*  
impenetrable, so I nodded off. Next thing,

I'm on the sofa. Clock says eight: 8 pm, I think  
At first, then I see the blustery light of morning.  
Ran upstairs. As still as her doll but colder,  
was our daughter. My daughter.  
The coroner said I wasn't to blame.  
Ally said the same, much later. My conscience  
never agreed. Months, I hobbled through...  
Every kid I saw, every pushchair, a thumb-tack  
Of pain, every smiling parent on TV, a nail.  
Until one night I dreamt this garden where I'd never  
Been a Dad. Here I'm not guilty of anything.  
Christ, I remember! Emily!

ZENNA: Of cancer of the conscience,  
*I* healed *him*. Memories are painful, are they not?  
I know you hurt, incurably. That's why I chose you.  
Give me your pain, Toby. Spill it... ...Now.

TOBY My mother was dying at home in bed. The pain -  
*"You'd not let a dog suffer like this"*  
She said she'd asked my father, but his principles  
Forbade him. His principles? His cowardice! So  
I gave her the bottle of Izunolethe. She could  
Hardly swallow, nor sit up without my help. One  
by one by one – pill, water; pill, water; pill, water.  
She drifted away... That smudged quarter hour  
between night and day. Pill, water; pill, water;  
pill, water. She drifted away...  
I kept vigil for her final breath...  
Then, incredibly, I fell asleep... and woke when  
Father came. *"What have you done? What have  
You done?"* The doctor suspected, but Father  
Paid him off, then told me he never wished to see  
My face again, and that's one promise he's actually  
kept. I'd do it again – what choice would I have?  
But it's cursed me all the same.

ZENNA: Stay in this garden, dear Toby, and your act,  
your guilt, your pain, will have never – even – *existed*.

MARINUS: At what price to him? With what gain to you?  
You lock his grief; you cloud his mind; Toby!  
Were your mother here, would she advise  
Oblivion? Or urge you back to life?



TOBY                    Life. I choose the world.  
But what about Amber?

AMBER:                I met him at his private view, my ovaries screamed  
*Him!* Ten days later, his newly-exed – an actress –  
was blubbing down the phone: *Take care of him...  
Be happy if I can't.* We were, I was. Summer kissed  
us long and hard, I dreamed our future lives, our  
children's names and faces. Autumn was torching  
trees when Stella came a-calling. Stella whom  
I'd known for years, Stella never much luck  
with men... til now... Three months later, they got  
engaged. "*They're made for each other,*" I told  
our friends, "*I wish them joy.*"  
Bull-shit! Fervently I prayed to the god of twists  
and turns, who heard. Oh yes, she heard. Guess  
who I saw, one dark night, climb into a taxi? Him  
and his ex, the actress.

AMBER:                Stella the inconsolable, Stella who didn't die  
but never wakes, hooked up to pumps and  
God knows what. Five dark years  
I numbed my guilt, whatever way I could... Until  
one night I found this place, where messages  
are never sent. I am innocent, neversent, innocent...

MARINUS/ALL:      We are born already bound by a contract  
With Life, signed nine months before by a  
Woman and a man we never met. This  
Contract's terms are non-negotiable.  
Here is Clause One:  
*You Will Suffer.* In stabs, in private and public,  
Incessantly. Suffering from those faults  
We nourish fondly; Suffering from twisted plots;  
Unfriendly cards, So what to do?  
  
Attack suffering's hydra-headed causes?  
Grit one's teeth, surrender the keys to snarky nihilism?  
Select an opiate to deaden the pain at a loanshark cost?  
*Endure the Unendurable?* Unless  
we count the last resort of tearing up

Life's contract, by pills or gun-shot or however  
Strikes you as the most painless way...

Why soldier on, then, us contractual slaves?  
Because Clause Two reads, *You May Hope*.  
Hope the hydras run out of heads; hope  
Endurance triumphs; hope for friendlier cards;  
Hope that suffering is fractured by Change;  
Hope for a stranger's kindness, for clarity,  
For in-jokes gotten, for shards of sun on waves,  
and love - love's a good one - listen:  
The most painless way to die is to live.

MARINUS: They have chosen, life or death,  
Day or Night. Let them leave.

TOBY: Who chose which way?

ZENNA None of my concern, nor  
yours. One can guess.

TOBY: And am I free to leave?

ZENNA: So keen, you were, to visit us.  
I had in mind a leisurely sojourn...

MARINUS: We have a deal! He goes back.  
You follow; I switch off the lights.

ZENNA: Hurry, hurry, *hurry*: you hurried me  
Before – coercing my consent.  
A lady has the right, to change her mind.

MARINUS Abide by our agreement:  
or else it's war - you understand?

ZENNA: Oh, I understand  
perfectly: it's *War*.

## **Scene 8**

TOBY: Marinus, what's wrong?  
Why is it darker? What's that noise?

ZENNA: She spent herself. The Righteous Arts

Are so very frail. That thunder is the Dusk,  
Breaching the garden walls, dissolving  
All it touches. Don't fret: we have a minute  
maybe two. Pity you left your camera behind...

TOBY: Marinus! How do I get back?

ZENNA: No walls means no gate *in* the wall.  
You die here. So does she. As for me,  
Well, I have a surprise announcement.  
This fine figure of a woman is not my body  
but my mind, projected through a  
matching screen. My true corporeal self  
Lies safe and sound in your studio, Kramer,  
Awaiting my return. I mustn't keep it.  
You wrecked this sunken garden, yes,  
but soon I'll make a new one. So here's  
Here's a dying thought for you: *I Die In Vain*.

TOBY: What graffiti...?  
"Drowning is Survival"? Which means what?  
There's nowhere here to drow—

MARINUS: Go now - the Dusk won't wait -

TOBY: You can't stay - we can both go through -

MARINUS: Your mind and my mind in her body?  
Won't work. I'm an utter pig to live with.

TOBY: But, when that darkness comes?

MARINUS: If I die, perhaps it's time - if not, not; but  
*Quick Tobias! Run run - GO GO!*

## **Scene 9**

TOBY (in ZENNA's body):  
Time's gone by - days, weeks, months.  
It is still what it is - I am still what I am.  
Toby Kramer in a tucked-in body.  
What pronoun are you, or we - He? She?  
The truth is not admissible at the Court of the Sane.  
Youth is gone; my gender's switched;  
My old life's obsolete. I own the wealth

of Zenna Briggs, which not a hundred lives.  
Could dent. On this new, old face is written  
Life's Third Clause: *It Must End And Shall*.  
Let these words prise open every  
January dawn, usher in my finite  
Springs. See them dazzle in the shards  
of broken sun on waves; hear them, in  
Unexpected songs; re-read them in brave  
and muddy garden, especially at dusk.

PORTIA: I was on the phone to the garage when the police turned up. Our cleaners had hired some No-Speaky-English-Asylum-Seeker who had *actually mistaken* our Prudence Hanson's exhibition for rubbish - genuine rubbish - and had stuffed it into the wheelybin that morning before I got in to work, but by which time the refuse van had come and gone. Prudence Hanson originals, heading straight to Landfill! So my first thought when I saw the police was *Glory Hallelujah, PC Plod is finally learning to treat contemporary arts with due respect*. But the policeman said, 'Are you the mother of Amber Jacquemain?' and I said Yes, and he said, 'Then I'm very sorry, but I have bad news.'

PORTIA: Amber was nine, or ten. Her father had left. For the second time. Just as we were due to go on holiday to Ireland, but I thought, *Damn me if we are going to go into mourning for that toe-rag*, so we took the West Cork ferry anyway. You know how rainy Ireland is? We had scorching weather, not a drop for ten days. We had this kite, a big bright red thing. On our last afternoon we were flying it on Long Strand, and either me or Amber dropped the spooly thing, and the wind took the kite and the spooly thing just ran away across the beach, over the sand. Well we ran after it, but the funny thing was that the spooly thing bounced away at exactly the speed that we ran, like it was playing a game with us. At the time we just couldn't stop laughing, and it was sort of thrilling, too. Finally Amber sort of... Dived and caught it. Well, it was like she'd won Wimbledon!

SIMON: The first time's always the worst: for me, it was like, "Simon Vines, what *do* you think you're doing?" and then animal terror and my body's like, "No - effing - way am I getting out of that plane!" And Ally, Jerry our instructor, he actually had to boot me out of the airplane, literally. Then I was out, falling and there's this shrieking like, like you know when the bad guys get dragged off into hell in that film GHOST, you know that film? Right, the airplane's spinning away, and that shrieking, it's coming out of me! Then all of a sudden your mind's back, like "Hello Mind, Welcome Home"... And you're falling through the big blue cloudy space, like... the sky's one vast eye, eyeballing you, and... the... Truth is, I don't know if Emily'd still be alive if, if I'd

not slept that night: or if she'd've died anyway. That's, y'know... Unknowable. – and – I'm going to live with that. No choice. Well, there is one choice, but, I, I've ruled that out. "The Living are the Dead on Holiday", my mate Sadaqat says, and a short holiday it is, too, more of a mini-break, so... I'm going to see this through to the end. Anyway you're falling, falling, still falling, and you look down over this patchwork and see the fields, the towns, the rivers, the roads, the factories, hospitals, houses – and it's all... Laid out, pristinely below, and you think, Look at this, look at this.. massive, cruel, beautiful, unjust, miraculous... World-Machine. Look at it. And you think, "I'm part of this."