

ACT TWO

SCENE 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. It's calling me out of the black cave of the Psyche. I shove in my dim little torch, and there he stands—waiting for me. 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? . . . Poor Doctor Dysart!" (*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. Meaningless, but unsettling

. . . In either case, this particular one, this huge implacable head, is the most alarming yet. It asks questions I've avoided all my professional life. (*Pause.*) A child is born into a world of phenomena all equal in their power to enslave. It sniffs—it sucks—it strokes its eyes over the whole uncountable range. 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 nor does anybody else.* Yet *if* I don't know—if I can never know that—what am I doing here? I don't mean clinically doing, or socially doing:— I mean *fundamentally!* These Whys, these questions are fundamental—yet they have no place in a consulting room. So then do I? . . . This is the feeling more and more. Displacement . . . Relentless displacement . . . “Account for me” says staring Equus. “First account for Me!” . . . This is more than professional menopause. (*NURSE rushes in.*)

NURSE. Doctor! . . . 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. (*She hesitates. Then:*) 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.*)

SCENE 23

Lights up on the square.

DYSART. I must ask you never to come here again.

DORA. Do you think I want to? Do you think I want to?

DYSART. Mrs. Strang, what on earth has got into you? Can't you see the boy is highly distressed?

DORA. (*Ironic.*) Really?

DYSART. Of course! He's at a most delicate stage of treatment. He's totally exposed. Ashamed. Everything you can imagine!

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. I know, alright! I've heard it all my life. It's *our* fault. Whatever happens, *we* did it. Alan's just a little victim. He's really done nothing at all! (*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! (*Pause: calmer.*) 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.)

SCENE 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 pen. 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. *(He turns, sharply.)* 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.)*

DYSART. Alan, do you know why you're here?

ALAN. So you can give me truth drugs. *(He glares at him. DYSART leaves abruptly, and returns to the square.)*

SCENE 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. Of course he does. 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. (*Sitting.*) 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 if after that, because he'll have shown me. Not just told me—but acted it out in front of me.

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 realise that?

HESTHER. (*Warmly.*) I'm sure he does.

DYSART. Poor bloody 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?

DYSART. Yes, that word again!

HESTHER. Aren't you being a little extreme?

DYSART. Extremity's the point.

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? Think about him. 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 with their wives. (*Pause.*)

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

DYSART. Oh, come on!

HESTER. 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?

HESTER. I mean he's in pain, Martin. He's been in pain for most of his life. That much is obvious even to me.

DYSART. Possibly.

HESTER. *Possibly?! . . .* That cut-off little figure you just described must have been in pain for years.

DYSART. (*Doggedly.*) Possibly.

HESTER. And you can take it away.

DYSART. Still—possibly.

HESTER. Then that's all you need to know. That should be enough for you.

DYSART. No.

HESTER. Why not?

DYSART. Because it's his.

HESTER. 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. All right, 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 shrank my *own* life. No one can do it for you. I settled for being pallid and provincial, out of my own eternal timidity. The old story of bluster, and do bugger-all . . . 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 Mediterranean, every bed booked in advance, every meal paid for by vouchers; cautious jaunts in hired Fiats, suitcase crammed with Kao-Pectate! Such a fantastic surrender to the primitive! And I use that word endlessly: "*primitive.*" "Oh, the primitive world," I say. "What instinctive truths were lost with it!" And while I sit there, baiting a poor unimaginative woman with the *word* that freaky boy tries to conjure the *reality!* I sit looking at pages of

