

REBECCA. The book, John.

JOHN. The book.

*As the room melts into the darkness of a dream,  
Rebecca stands and walks away.*

REBECCA. When the world gets too dark.

JOHN. Too dark to bear.

REBECCA. The words, John. There's light in them.

JOHN. Yes. Light.

REBECCA. There's life in them.

JOHN. Yes. Life.

REBECCA. Good night, John.

JOHN. *(Now quoting Hamlet.)* Good night,

REBECCA. Good night,

JOHN. Sweet prince.

REBECCA. Dear John.

JOHN. And may flights of angels

REBECCA. sing thee to thy—

*Then Rebecca is gone. She was never there.*

JOHN. Rest.

*John, so alone, looks out to us as the scene reveals its true location:  
The Globe Theatre at night, John standing midstage alone but  
for a candle.*

*He wears all black. Mourning.*

*He twists a sprig of rosemary in his fingers.*

HENRY. John.

*Henry walks on, carefully carrying a lantern...*

John. It's midnight, you shouldn't be here.

JOHN. What?

HENRY. I said you shouldn't be here. Come with me. Come home.

JOHN. There is no home without her. There is no *where* to go.

HENRY. I know it feels that way. I know it does. But you can come with me.

JOHN. Why?

HENRY. Because this is the hardest thing you'll ever go through and I won't have you go through it alone. Elizabeth insists you come and eat with us. Come and eat.

JOHN. I have never thought food as useless as I do now.

*Pause.*

HENRY. Then we'll both starve.

*Onstage.*

*In the dark.*

*Henry sits down next to John on the empty stage.*

*Pause.*

When my first boy died, only months old, I couldn't imagine a loving God that would have any part in such a thing. And I told Him so in my prayers, silent because I know I'd be the one in the ground if anyone heard what I thought of God and His taking and taking and taking. Then I realized the great weight of every grieving father's prayers that must hit God every night, and must sound so much like my own. Sons who lost fathers, husbands without wives, mothers—oh God the mothers. All that grief on God's ear constantly.

Then I felt bad for God.

Which made me laugh.

Which made me feel alive again. Funny how that worked out didn't it.

JOHN. That's a good story. Why do we bother?

HENRY. With what?

JOHN. With stories. Dramas. Especially the dramas. Isn't that ridiculous? Grown men dressing up as kings and, even more ridiculously, *queens*. And the people come to see it. And they laugh. But they also weep. They weep with us. Why do they do it?

HENRY. Because stories are real in their own way.

JOHN. No. Real life keeps going on and on, and the villains aren't caught and the endings aren't right, and it's rough seas and dark days and we sit here in this *barr* playing fictions for willing dreamers. We tell it over and over and over again. And I sit through it and it's false and it's hot air and I need it. When I have nothing left to say I need it. When I hurt so much I can't breathe, when I've got a horse for a heart

and it won't stop running and pounding and running me down, I need it...

HENRY. John—

JOHN. Am I goddess? I look to fairies and false kings instead of holy people. Does that a heathen make?

HENRY. No. Of course not, no.

JOHN. I cannot breathe without her, I cannot breathe at home or in the street or in the yard where she now lies, I cannot breathe in this world but here. Here I am come. And I am lulled into meaning. And that is greatest fiction of all. *Meaning anything. (Then with great ferocity.) And God and His angels mock us every ending we play but the tragic ones, for if they aren't tragedies yet, they will soon enough be.*

*Beat.*

Story's a forged life. Life's a tempest of loss. Why do we bother with any of it?

HENRY. To feel again.

JOHN. I feel enough.

HENRY. I said to feel *again*. That's the miracle of it. The fairies aren't real but the feeling is. And it comes to us here, player and grounding alike, again and again *here*. Your favorite story just ended? Come back tomorrow, we'll play it again. Don't like the story you're in? A different one starts in an hour. Come here, come again, feel here, feel again.

History walks here, love is lived here, loss is met and wept for and understood and survived here and not the first time but *every* time. We play love's first look and life's last here every day. And you will see yourself in it, or your fear, or your future before the play's end. And you will test your heart against trouble and joy, and every time you'll feel a flicker or a fountain of feeling that reminds you that, yes, you are yet living. And that is more than God gives you in his ample silence. And then it ends. And we players stand up. And we look at the gathered crowd. And we bow. Because the story was told well enough, and it's time for another.

*They look at each other.*

*They look at us right now... or the vacant seats in the Globe Theatre.*

*And John thinks of Rebecca and out softly comes... Romeo*

and Juliet, Act 2, Scene 2.

JOHN. "It is my lady, O, it is my love, O that she knew she were..."  
*And John weeps. Henry lets him, perhaps holds him, perhaps weeps too.*

HENRY. Mourn her, honor her, but do not join her yet.  
*John breathes, nods.*

JOHN. She spoke to me. About the book. She insists  
HENRY. Well. She was always wiser than you were.

*A careful smile between them.*  
*Alice emerges from the dark, in mourning too. Sick with sorrow.*

JOHN. Ali. What are you doing here, what brings you?

ALICE. I don't know. I couldn't think of anywhere else to be...  
*John runs to her, grabbing her in a desperate, huge hug.*  
*They hug and hug and hug.*  
*Blackout.*

**Transition from One...**

*A fruit seller walks through town...*

FRUIT SELLER. Apples! Pears! Figs and nuts! All the freshest apples, pears, figs, and nuts!  
*The fruit seller walks off.*