

100

was originally produced by **theimaginarybody** and received its world premiere at the Smirnoff Underbelly on 1 August 2002 during the Edinburgh Festival. The production transferred to Soho Theatre, London, on 3 February 2003, with the following cast:

Matt Boatright-Simon ALEX
 Matthieu Leloup KETU
 Tanya Munday SOPHIE
 Claire Porter NIA
 Lawrence Werber GUIDE

Neil Monaghan co-writer
 Christopher Heilmann director and co-writer
 Diene Petherle producer and co-writer
 Adam Crosthwaite lighting designer
 Soutra Gilmour set designer
 Annemarie Woods costume designer
 Matthieu Leloup movement work
 Steve King associate producer
 Hannele Brown associate producer

John Hickman web designers
 and Thomas Gurney photographer
 Nevil Mountford corporate design
 Christoph Stolberg

Although the play was originally performed by a cast of five, it could be played by a larger cast.

Within the 'memory scenes' the performers help to act out episodes from each other's lives, transforming into characters and objects as necessary.

Void

The lights fade up from black. We are in a seemingly vast space, largely empty and without recognisable dimensions. Light floods in from an unknown source. This is the Void, an otherworldly place, perhaps outside time and space. The stage area contains four, apparently randomly placed, boxes.

After a few seconds we become aware of movement.

KETU appears, like a shadow in the outermost edge of the space. Apparently in his mid to late thirties, his movements have something distinctly animal about them. He is clearly confused and disorientated.

Then SOPHIE appears, a woman in her late twenties / early thirties. She, too, is disorientated.

The two try independently to make sense of their new environment.

KETU discovers SOPHIE. He stares at her.

She returns his gaze for a moment.

ALEX runs onstage. He is a young man, self-assured and brash, with a childlike quality that makes him attractive and likable.

All three look at each other.

~~Ketu~~ GUIDE
 1... 2...

ALEX turns and looks around, trying to work out where he is.

~~Ketu~~ GUIDE
 3...

SOPHIE looks at KETU.

4.

Don't look at Sophie
 Sophie looks at Ketu
 Ketu looks at Sophie

Sophie (to ALEX)

What's he doing?

Alex

At a guess . . . counting.

Sophie

Counting what?

Alex (looks around)

The seats?

Ketu

5.

Alex

Apparently not.

KETU is confused. Lost in thought for a moment.

(To KETU, helpfully.) 6?

KETU wheels around, seeing ALEX for the first time.

Ketu

What?

Alex

Nothing. Just . . . joining in.

KETU looks at ALEX as if it is ALEX that is mad. KETU examines one of the boxes. ALEX looks around again.

Sophie (a realisation)

I've been here before.

Alex

Oh?

Sophie

I think so yes. This . . . sensation . . . it's familiar.

Alex

Where exactly is here?

Sophie

I . . . I don't know.

SOPHIE tries to think.

Ketu

7.

Sophie

I wish he'd stop that!

Ketu

8.

Just then KETU comes up to SOPHIE. He looks at her closely.

Sophie

Hello.

KETU flinches and rubs his neck. KETU is confused by the sensation.

What's wrong?

Ketu

What?

Sophie

With your neck?

Ketu (offended)

There's nothing wrong with my neck . . . you don't like my neck . . . you don't have to look at it!

The two part. SOPHIE slowly reaches for the top of her head.

Sophie

I have a cut . . . here.

She traces her hand along the extensive incision.

Alex

What?

Sophie (not wishing to pursue the thought)

Nothing . . . it doesn't matter!

KETU comes to a realisation, he sniffs the air.

Ketu

There is no smell.

They all look at their surroundings.

Alex

This isn't right. This is not right at all.

They all look at each other.

Just then a voice is heard from the darkness.

Guide

Good . . . this is very encouraging. Very encouraging.

The others are startled. KETU dashes and hides behind a box. A figure enters the space. He appears to be a man in his fifties. As we shall see, he is something of a chameleon. He is able to change his physical and vocal characteristics with remarkable speed. He is the GUIDE. Though at times he appears more of a jester or a clown. Unlike the others, he appears to belong to this place.

I'm sorry to have left you alone all this time . . . there's a bit of a backlog. Well, backlog's the wrong word really . . . since time doesn't exactly . . .

Alex

Who the hell are you?

Guide

I'm coming to that . . .

The GUIDE takes centre stage.

If I could have your attention for a moment . . . I have a short presentation.

Alex

Look this is very interesting but . . . !

The GUIDE suddenly changes tone and physical character. He appears more sinister.

Guide

You have something better to do? Eh? Somewhere more important to be?!

ALEX is chastened. Clearly he doesn't.

Good . . . then I shall begin.

A beat.

Welcome . . . to death.

Silence.

Welcome. You will shortly be embarking on your transit. This can be a disorientating experience but we shall do all we can to make your final journey a safe and pleasant one. Please listen carefully to the instructions and follow them . . . (*Darkly.*) to the letter!

You are to select one memory from your life. You will then record your selection with the camera provided.

He points towards the 'magical' camera, an invisible device.

As the memory is captured the mechanism will flash.

There is a sudden flash. The others blink and look away for a moment.

At this time all other memory data will be deleted. If these criteria are met within the allotted timeframe, you will be united with your selected memory for living and reliving throughout eternity. Thank you for your attention.

They all look at him astonished. The GUIDE then remembers something.

Oh, and I encourage you to decide quickly . . . as the next group will be here very soon.

Silence.

So. Are we clear?

Alex

Clear?

Guide

Mmm . . . I thought I was clear. And rather good as a matter of fact . . . (*He preens.*) Combining an authoritative tone with an approachability that would put the listener at ease. Didn't you think?

Alex (*coldly*)

Where's the door?

Guide

The what?

Alex

Where's the fucking door?!!

Guide (*laughs in his face*)

Do you have any idea how absurd it is to threaten me?

Alex

I'm not dead.

Guide

So certain . . . Ever been dead before?

Sophie (*tentatively*)

I have . . . briefly.

ALEX looks at SOPHIE.

Alex

And?

A pause. SOPHIE *nods to indicate that the GUIDE is right.*

Oh my God.

Sophie (*to the GUIDE*)

So who are you then . . . 'Death' himself?

Guide

If it helps you . . . then yes.

SOPHIE *looks unimpressed.*

What? You expected a scythe?

KETU *is fascinated. He approaches the GUIDE and examines him from several angles.*

Ketu

God? Are you God?

Guide (*smiles*)

Well, that's very flattering but . . .

Ketu

The devil?

Guide

No . . .

Ketu

The wood spirit?

Guide

No, really . . . these concepts are not helpful.

Ketu (*he thinks*)

Please . . . I have so many questions . . . There's so much I need to know . . .

Guide

No! (*To all.*) This point is the culmination of your being. It's a unique opportunity that I urge you not to squander. Please . . . concentrate on the task.

A beat.

Alex

But . . . I don't even know what happened to me. (*To SOPHIE.*) Do you?

Sophie

Yes. But I'd . . . rather not discuss it!

Alex

I'm sorry?

Sophie

I can't claim to be versed in the etiquette of this place, but I'm sure it must be impolite to discuss the manner of one's demise.

Guide (*impatiently*)

Your memory please.

Alex

Oh my god . . .

Guide

What is it?

Alex

Nia . . . My girlfriend . . . I had plans . . .

Guide (loud)

Plans?! There are no more plans . . . all you have is what you did!

The GUIDE turns to KETU.

Did you have someone? Friends . . . family?

Ketu

Of course I did!

Guide (to SOPHIE)

And you?

Sophie (unwilling to be drawn on this)

I . . . I knew lots of people.

Guide (to all)

If you have someone that is really important to you . . . then choose a memory with them. (To ALEX.) If you choose to remember her, you will always be together.

Alex

What if I choose something else?

Guide

Then she will not have existed to you. (Very serious.) Be sure this is the most important memory of your life.

Pause.

Alex

Of course I'm sure . . .

The lights slowly change.

Alex's memory

In a corridor of light that is reminiscent of a road, ALEX and two of the other performers get into position for the start of a motorbike race.

Alex

A race . . . there was a race. The biggest race of my life.

From the off, the voice of a mumbling FRENCH COMMENTATOR announces the starting line-up.

French Commentator (off)

Les concurrents sont sur la piste de départ, le favoris l'anglais est aujourd'hui en concurrence avec Gomez pour le titre...

Meanwhile the three racers adjust bootstraps and helmets.

Alex

And Nia's in the stands, cheering me on . . .

ALEX waves at somebody in the stands.

To my left, I see Gomez.

GOMEZ, ALEX's arch-rival, snarls at him.

The voice of the mumbling FRENCH COMMENTATOR counts down to the start of the race, reaching fever pitch.

French Commentator (off)

Cinq, quatre, trois, deux, un, et c'est parti!!!!

Alex

I wrench the throttle . . . go, go, go . . .

The performers jostle for position.

Second gear, third gear. Everything blurs. Ahead of me the heat turns the track to liquid. Pure acceleration! Everything around me disappears!

One rider falls behind and disappears.

Yeah, downshift, left turn ahead . . . turn left.

They turn left.

I'm moving up the pack. Right turn ahead . . . turn right. They all turn to the right. Then another right. GOMEZ catches up with ALEX.

Someone catches up with me, I recognise the green and yellow helmet. It's Gomez!

The voice of the mumbling French commentator describes GOMEZ catching up with ALEX and overtaking him.

French Commentator (off)

Gomez est en train de rattraper l'anglais, oui, il le reprend dans le virage!! C'est extraordinaire ce qui se passe ici!!!

Meanwhile GOMEZ overtakes ALEX and disappears.

Alex

The long straight . . . accelerate!

Spectators at the roadside wave at ALEX.

. . . open up the throttle and fly! 120 . . . 130 . . . 140 miles per hour.

Suddenly NIA appears on stage, an attractive woman in her thirties. She gets on the bike with ALEX.

I feel her arms around me. She holds me so tight. That's odd.

Another right turn. GOMEZ appears again, in front of him.

Gotta catch Gomez!

The voice of the mumbling FRENCH COMMENTATOR describes the ensuing battle for the lead.

French Commentator (off)

Mais l'anglais reprend l'avantage!, oui, il le rattrape après la ligne droite . . . Gomez n'est plus qu'à quelques mètres, il le rattrape!!!

Meanwhile ALEX is almost catching up with GOMEZ.

Nia

Alex . . . please . . .

Alex

Not now baby.

NIA slides off the bike. She talks directly to him.

Nia

Alex, this never happened.

Alex

I can win this!

GOMEZ overtakes and disappears. Lighting change.

Void

Nia

This isn't real! It was just a game . . . a game we used to play. You never raced.

Alex

The bike . . .

Nia

It was your job. Monday to Friday? 9 to 5?

Alex

I was . . . a motorbike courier.

Nia

A courier . . . with a hell of an imagination. (*To the others.*) Sometimes, when we rode through London, we'd see other bikers and pretend we were in a race. (*To ALEX.*) And you and your mate Gomez used to play at being arch-rivals.

Alex

It was real to me.

Nia

So, what about me?

Alex

You were on the bike.

Nia (flatly)

Oh joy! I get to sit on the back of your bike for all eternity.

Alex *(he suddenly thinks)*

What the hell am I doing? I don't have to have this row!
No . . . I'm in control here . . . this is my mind!

(To the group.) Apart from which if I'm going to live a moment with her for all eternity . . . I'm sure as hell not going to pick a row!

He circles NIA, looking at her in detail.

This is crazy. Look at you . . . crystal clear in my mind . . . it's like you're really here.

Nia

I am really here.

Ketu *(making the connection)*

Four seats, four people.

ALEX backs off swiftly, startled and horrified.

Alex

No . . . not you . . . not you too!

NIA and ALEX embrace.

Nia

I've had the speech.

ALEX stares at her horrified. He rails against the GUIDE.

There was no warning! We should have had a warning!

Guide

I'm sorry to have to say this, but frankly you're wasting your time. Your chosen memory please.

Alex *(angry)*

Fine! When I was seventeen I had a really satisfying bowel movement!!

Guide *(shouts)*

You want to spend eternity taking a shit . . . that's fine with me. But I don't recommend it!! Believe me, I am trying to help!

Sophie

How are we supposed to know? It's so difficult . . . all those years . . . to pick out one single moment?

Guide

I appreciate your difficulty . . . but you must try.

Nia

What if we choose wrongly?

Guide

All decisions are final.

~~Ketu~~ *Alex*

And if we don't decide?

A beat.

Guide *(darkly)*

It's . . . not an option you want to consider. There is nothing in your experience that could come close to the suffering you'd endure. *(Smiles.)* So . . .

Silence.

No one? I'm surprised. I often get people who know straight away. As if they'd thought about it at length during their lives.

He happens to look at SOPHIE.

Sophie

Why are you looking at me?

Guide

Am I?

Sophie

You know what happened to me.

Guide

I assure you I don't. And I don't need to know.

Sophie *(reassured)*

Alright. *(Thinks.)* I suppose I did . . . have the chance to reflect.

She takes a moment.
I think I'm ready.

The lights slowly change.

Sophie's memory

Sophie

I was twelve years old. My mother had guests for the evening. I was to make an appearance and I wanted to look my best.

I went into my mother's bedroom.

SOPHIE opens the bedroom door. During this the other performers create a mirror. SOPHIE approaches the mirror.

I looked at the carefully arranged tools she used to maintain her perfection.

She picks up powder.

Her powder, in a round tin, with a pattern of Bougainvillea.

As she powders her face, another performer becomes her mirror image, copying all her actions.

Her hairbrush, its handle inlaid with ivory.

She brushes her hair.

I made my lips the same deep red as my mother's.

She puts on the lipstick.

The mirror image suddenly becomes Sophie's MOTHER. The mirror disappears.

Mother

Sophie . . . what are you doing?

Sophie (surprised)

I was just . . .

Mother

What have you got on your face?

Sophie

I wanted to . . . look my best.

Mother (patiently)

Come on . . . everyone's asking where you are.

Sophie

Mother . . . tell me how I look?

Mother

How do you look? You look . . . lovely.

Sophie

Lovely? Not beautiful?

Mother (smiles)

Come downstairs.

The MOTHER disappears.

Sophie (narration)

I knew then I was not beautiful. Not beautiful.

Lighting change. The camera has failed to flash.

Void

Ketu

It didn't flash!

Sophie

I'm still here. (*Panicky.*) Why? I made my choice.

Nia

Why didn't it flash?

Sophie

I want to go. I want to get out of here!

Guide

Why did you choose that particular memory?

~~Ketu~~

Yes, why choose something so painful?

~~Sophie~~

Because . . . at that moment . . . I knew who I was.

~~Guide~~

Did you? Really?

~~Sophie~~

If I couldn't be beautiful I could be strong. It was a complete turning point. I decided there and then to make a success of my life no matter what.

The GUIDE weighs this up. He is not overly impressed.

~~Sophie~~

What? (*Angry.*) Who are you to judge me? Who do you think you are?!

~~Nia~~

Yes, who are you?

~~Guide~~

That . . . is a very good question. (*Brightly to the group.*) Now if you'd all like to think a little harder . . . I really don't want us to miss our deadline . . . (*Laughing to himself.*) Deadline!

~~Alex~~

What if we never had our greatest memory? What if there was s'posed to be some incredibly momentous event out there in the future . . . only . . .

ALEX stops. He is beginning to remember something.

~~Nia~~

Alex?

~~Alex~~ (*in a cold sweat*)

All this time . . . I've been thinking it was the bike . . . some stupid accident. (*A beat.*) Smoke . . . It was the smoke!

~~Nia~~ (*realising*)

We were in bed, asleep.

~~Alex~~

I was dreaming that I couldn't breathe, that I was coughing. I couldn't wake up. Couldn't move at all.

~~Nia~~

A fire!

~~Alex~~

We were only staying there one night. We weren't even going to stop . . . only we were so tired!

Slight pause.

~~Guide~~

I know what you're thinking . . . what a pointless waste of precious young life. But you must understand, how you got here is irrelevant. You won't remember it after today anyway.

A pause.

~~Ketu~~

9, 10, 11 . . .

The GUIDE approaches KETU.

~~Guide~~

What are you doing?

~~Ketu~~

It helps me to think.

The GUIDE is fascinated by this.

~~Ketu~~

In my village I was known for my study. I observed things. Why did this flower have four leaves and this one ten? Why five fingers on a hand and not six?

~~Guide~~

Intriguing.

~~Ketu~~

You don't count?

~~Guide~~

I'm a little out of practice. 16, 17, 18 . . .

*2000 Dance
2000 Dance
16 17 18*

Alex

Oh don't you start!

Guide (*deliberately trying to annoy ALEX*)

Time is short! 19, 20 . . .

KETU stands and speaks.

Ketu

I have decided.

Guide

Yes!

Ketu

It is so obvious. My great revelation.

The lights slowly change.

Ketu's memory

Ketu

In the beginning the world was flat, like a plate.

The other performers transform into rainforest trees. As KETU paddles on his canoe, the trees move towards him. Once they reach him, each in turn transforms into another traveller on a canoe. On hearing the sound of a monkey, they shoot it with a blowpipe.

Life in my village was not easy, but the forest always provided.

The other performers engage in rural activities thus establishing the countryside.

I often found myself musing on the nature of things. Why, when I throw a stone into the river – (*He throws a stone.*) – are the ripples always circular? Why do birds choose to fly in such regular patterns?

And then one day I asked myself . . . why does the sun go down over one edge . . . and come back up on the other?

A sudden thought struck me. I took my spear and planted it in the damp earth. (*He plants the spear.*) I marked the spot where the sun's shadow fell . . . and then I waited.

KETU follows the course of the sun's shadow over a day.

As the day wore on I saw an unmistakable pattern appearing.

He picks up the spear and draws it on the ground.

An arc of 180 degrees.

So many patterns, so many questions – I had to find the answers. I decided to see the elders.

KETU rushes back to the village. The performers now take on the role of a group of ELDERS chatting.

Why does the sun go down over one edge . . . and come back up on the other?

The ELDERS deliberate.

Elder

Ketu . . . Why is it that your family is hungry and all you bring home is food for thought?!

The ELDERS continue chatting. KETU leaves. The performers transform into a house, with kids playing outside.

Son

Hi daddy!

Ketu

Go inside, children.

They enter the house.

Wife

Dinner's ready!

The house transforms into a table.

Son

I'm so hungry!

They eat. The children throw an orange back and forth. KETU watches, inspired by the arc of the orange.

Wife

Children, stop it!

Ketu (to WIFE)

No, wait . . . (To KIDS.) Go on.

Wife

Ketu?

The kids joyfully throw the orange back and forth. KETU catches it at the height of its arc.

Ketu

You see this pattern?

He holds the orange up high.

(Grandly.) The world is round . . . like an orange! And the sun rotates around it!

Lighting change. The camera has failed to flash.

Void

Alex

Is this a joke?

Ketu

What is wrong with it?

Guide

Nothing.

Ketu

But . . . this is madness. Such a discovery . . . it changes everything.

Alex

This thing . . . whatever it is . . . it cannot be working.

Ketu

Or else it is as stupid as those fools in my village. (To SOPHIE.) Tell me . . . do you believe the sun rotates around the earth?

Sophie (laughs)

Me? Well no.

Ketu

No? (Incredulous.) You think the Earth is flat?

Sophie

Of course I don't. The sun is at the centre . . . everyone knows that. The Moon orbits the Earth, The Earth and the other planets orbit the sun.

Ketu

The Earth orbits the sun?

Sophie

Of course. (Stating the obvious.) And the Earth rotates once a day . . . ?

Ketu (cannot fathom this)

Impossible. The speed . . . we'd fly off into space.

SOPHIE laughs. ALEX approaches.

Alex

You been up a tree all your life?

Ketu

What? (To the group.) Do you all believe the Earth is round?

Alex (in confirmation)

Like an orange.

Ketu

But . . . (He laughs.) This is wonderful! I knew I was right. I was the only one in my village who knew the truth.

He looks at the GUIDE.

How can I have a greater memory than that?

Guide

You really think your discovery was so important.

Ketu

Yes. My people are wise but they are too attached to the old ways. I always believed there was a greater world than the one we saw. Fabulous places beyond the forest . . . where all my questions would be answered.

The GUIDE is unimpressed with this.

But I was right!

Guide

I'd try again if I were you.

Ketu

But . . .

Guide (with a sense of menace)

22, 23, 24 . . . anyone else?

KETU backs off.

Nia

Alex . . . Are you going to choose a memory of me?

Alex

Of course.

Nia

No hesitation?

ALEX looks slightly confused.

Haven't you thought about what you're losing? If I don't choose say . . . the time I finally beat my big sister at Chess . . . then I lose her forever. And my family, friends . . . everything I did.

Sophie

What about all the things I did alone? If I'm not there to remember them, they might as well never have happened.

Guide

I really must urge you to decide. Eternity won't wait forever you know.

The GUIDE allows himself a wry smile.

Sophie

You think this is easy?

Guide

I never said it was easy.

They stare at each other.

Nia (to ALEX)

I know! If we could think of a moment . . . something fantastic that we both shared.

ALEX is unable to concentrate.

Guide

35, 36, 37 . . .

ALEX shoots the GUIDE an angry look.

Nia (intervening)

I have an idea. The day we met.

Alex

(Recalls.) Yes . . . of course!

Nia (excited)

Let's try. Yes?

ALEX nods.

The park. By the swings. I was babysitting my best friend's kid.

Alex

And I was there with my nephew.

The lights slowly change.

Alex and Nia's memory

The park. NIA pushes a child on a swing, while ALEX plays ball with a boy.

Alex

I thought . . . she looks . . . interesting. But she's got a kid.

The children's movement freezes. NIA approaches ALEX.

Nia (to ALEX)

And I knew you were thinking that.

Alex (to NIA) How?

Nia (to ALEX)

'Cos of the way you looked at me . . . and . . . 'cos I was thinking the same thing.

The children 'come to life' again. NIA returns to the swing.

Alex

I started to run all these scenarios . . . she's a frustrated mother . . . her husband died for his country . . . or he's so boring she's looking for someone else.

Nia

And I thought . . . what's he doing . . . looking at me like that? What's his wife going to think?

Alex

Some guy walks up . . . I think . . . OK here we go . . . this'll be good ole hubby.

The children's movement freezes again. One of the performers crosses the stage.

Nia (to ALEX)

I didn't even see him.

Alex (to NIA)

He walked on past.

The children 'come to life' again.

Nia

I'm thinking . . . if I'm out with my friend's child maybe he's babysitting too.

Alex

And I'm trying to devise a way to show he's not mine. I try deliberately forgetting his name. (*Calls.*) Hey Tony . . . er . . . Timothy . . .

Nia

OK so it's not his child . . . but that doesn't make him single.

The children go into a sandbox.

And the kids start playing together.

Alex

Perfect!

Nia

Jenny, don't get dirty . . . your mother'll be here any minute now!

She gives ALEX a quick sideways glance.

Alex

Ah hah.

(*Calls to the child.*) Thomas play nice with the little girl. You're a gentleman remember?

He smiles at NIA, who smiles back.

She's definitely smiling at me . . . might as well show her I'm not wearing a ring.

ALEX puts his hand up near his face.

Nia

What's wrong with his face? Is he picking his nose?

She looks away.

Alex

That did the trick. She's gone all bashful on me.

Nia

OK . . . let's play this nice and cool. Let him come and talk to me.

Alex

Maybe I should let her introduce herself. This is the twenty-first century after all.

They both wait. Nothing happens.

Meanwhile the children have a great time playing together.

Nia

Now what?

Alex

Don't tell me I was wrong.

Nia

He's not waiting for me is he?

Suddenly the GIRL throws sand on the BOY's head. The BOY cries.

ALEX and NIA go into the sandbox.

Nia

Jenny, be nice to the little boy!

Alex

Thomas, it's all right. Come on, let's build a castle.

Nia

Yes, a castle! Look Jenny.

ALEX and NIA sit on the floor with the kids and start to build a sandcastle.

The kids leave unnoticed.

ALEX and NIA look up and find each other's eyes.

And at that moment.

Alex

I knew.

Nia

I knew.

Alex

I'd met 'the one'.

Nia

I was in for a wicked shag!

Lighting change.

Void

Alex

What?

Nia

What?

Alex

You were only thinking about sex.

Nia

Well, yes . . .

Alex

But . . .

Nia

Oh come on Alex . . . you were too . . . admit it. You couldn't possibly have known I was 'the one'.

Alex

Why not?

Nia

Because . . . People don't just know.

Alex (irritated)

Well there's no way I'm picking this memory, if you just saw me as a good shag.

Nia

Alex . . .

Cut to 41

ALEX turns away. KETU approaches him.

Ketu

Your truth is not her truth. It was the same between me and my people!

When I told them of my great discovery . . . They could not see my intentions . . . that, at last, we could achieve great things. Instead they turned on me.

Sophie

I achieved great things . . . of course . . . why didn't I think of this before?

Guide

Go on.

Sophie

Oh, where to begin . . . let me see . . . yes.

The lights slowly change.

Sophie's memory

Sophie

I was twenty-one . . . It was my first day in a new job and I felt myself at the start of a great adventure.

SOPHIE enters the office. She is greeted by her boss MR GRAY.

Mr Gray

Sophie, bright and early I see, excellent. Go and see Jerry.

The office appears. Three desks: one downstage left (JERRY's), one further up stage and to the right (PHIL's) and one upstage centre (MR GRAY's). SOPHIE joins JERRY.

Sophie

It was a little daunting at first.

Jerry (at lightning speed)

If you're sent a B.Y.30, you input the data into one of these cells, unless it's marked 'current imperative' in which case it goes in here, but you must remember to create a separate hard copy, send a purchase order to accounts payable and cc it to me. Clear?

During this JERRY has put his hand on SOPHIE's shoulder in a suggestive way. She moves away from him.

Sophie

Crystal.

Then MR GRAY presses his intercom button.

Mr Gray

Phil. I could do with those Tokyo figures as soon as you have them.

Phil

Sure.

Mr Gray

And if you'd grab me a coffee I'd appreciate it.

Phil

Hey Jerry . . . two coffees please.

Jerry (to SOPHIE)

Three coffees please, love. Thanks.

The office dissolves.

Sophie (narrates)

Those first days were tough, but I was determined. I followed my mother's advice. Meet the right people, shake the right hands, laugh in the right places and always be ready to make your move.

My chance came at the staff Christmas party.

The party appears. Champagne is popped. A bar area appears downstage left and PHIL has made it his home. He cheerfully sings a line from 'Jingle Bells'.

JERRY and another colleague, LUCY, are onstage right.
The atmosphere is a little stilted at this point.

Lucy

Well . . . what a year.

Jerry

Yes indeed . . . it's certainly been a year.

SOPHIE joins them. She smiles.

We were just saying how it's been a . . . year.

Sophie

Yes . . . absolutely.

They all smile awkwardly. The action moves over to the bar area.

Just then the MR GRAY shows up.

Phil

Ah, Mr Gray, can I get you a Christmas drink.

Mr Gray

Er, large single malt scotch please.

Phil (to the barman)

Two large single malts please.

Mr Gray

Thank you.

Phil

My pleasure. Actually I've been looking for an opportunity to float a couple of ideas in front of you. The thing is I think I've figured a way to . . .

SOPHIE approaches.

Sophie

Sorry . . . I didn't mean to interrupt.

Mr Gray

Sophie! No, not at all, join us please.

Sophie

I just wanted to say . . . I heard your speech at the WGB conference. It was . . . truly inspiring.

Mr Gray (pleased)

Really?

The action at the bar freezes. The focus switches to LUCY and JERRY. They are now a bit drunk and flirt with each other.

Jerry (telling a joke)

And he says . . . as long as it's not with citrus fruit!

Lucy

Citrus fruit!

They laugh.

Action returns to the bar area.

Sophie

. . . Truly inspiring.

Mr Gray (grins)

Thank you. Can I get you a drink?

Sophie

Yes, orange juice, please.

Mr Gray

Orange juice? (He orders.) Orange juice.

SOPHIE smiles. PHIL, who has been trying to catch MR GRAY's attention, gets the message.

Phil

Perhaps we can . . . continue our chat later.

Mr Gray (not interested)

Mmm.

Sophie (to PHIL as he goes)

Merry Christmas.

Phil (darkly)

Happy New Year!

SOPHIE joins MR GRAY at the bar.

Sophie

And your point about foregrounding ethical responsibility as a marketing tool really struck me. In fact I've been

putting in some extra hours devising ways to maximise implementation on that front.

Mr Gray (laughs)
Excellent!

The party dissolves.

Sophie (narrates)

From there it all went very quickly. Three months later I was being welcomed to the ranks of middle management.

The office appears once again. SOPHIE now occupies PHIL's old desk. PHIL is sat at the downstage desk with Jerry.

Phil (to Jerry)

I've got this whole plan . . . major strategy rethink . . . here's what I figured . . .

MR GRAY presses the button of the intercom.

Mr Gray

Sophie would you come into my office. I've got a couple of ideas I'd like to run by you?

SOPHIE gets up, then stops to think.

Sophie

Phil, two coffees please . . . in Mr Gray's office.

Phil (bitter)

Sure.

The office dissolves.

Sophie (narrates)

The following years marked a period of rapid growth. I was responsible for much of the company's streamlining. With an aggressive package of acquisitions we are now more strongly placed in the market than ever before. And tonight I am delighted to accept your award of Manager Of The Year!

The office has transformed into a conference centre. The other performers applaud. A PHOTOGRAPHER gets into position to take SOPHIE's photo.

Photographer

Smile!

Lighting change. The camera has failed to flash.

Void

Sophie

But . . . My success . . . Everything I'd achieved.

Guide

Were you happy?

Sophie

Oh please, I thought here at least we'd be beyond such simplistic thinking.

The GUIDE gives her a searching stare.

I made sacrifices. I didn't want a family . . . or a lover . . . not until I'd achieved my goal.

~~Ketu~~ *Nia*

What was your goal?

Sophie

Respect.

Nia

From whom?

Sophie

Everyone.

Guide

No one in particular?

The GUIDE's manner has become that of a barrister conducting a cross-examination.

I put it to you . . . You worked day and night . . . you rejected the advances of any men who came near you. You had no hobbies, or home life. Who were you trying to impress?

Sophie

You want me to say my mother.

Guide

Yes I do . . . and you have . . . thank you.

Sophie

But . . .

Alex

Is he right?

Sophie

My mother helped me to see what was important in life. Work hard when you're young . . . get somewhere and then enjoy your success.

Ketu

So what went wrong?

Sophie

Nothing.

Guide

Really . . . so what about . . . this?

He sticks his finger into the top of her head, where the scar is. SOPHIE leaps away from him.

Sophie

How dare you!!

Guide

I'm sorry . . . but this really isn't a time for self-delusion!

Sophie

It was my life . . . I did with it what I felt best.

Guide

Any regrets?

SOPHIE is upset and angry.

Sophie

I was a success . . . I had money and power . . . I have nothing to be ashamed of.

Guide

That's not what I asked.

Sophie

I achieved more than anyone I knew.

Guide

So what have you got? Where is it?!

SOPHIE is fit to burst.

Sophie

I . . . It wasn't my fault.

Guide

What wasn't?

Sophie

My illness! It wasn't my fault. Why couldn't it have struck at some tramp . . . some non-achiever . . . why me?

They told me how much time I had . . . It was pitifully short . . . (*Beginning to crack.*) I could feel my mind . . . rotting! Within a month I was a useless . . . disgusting . . . bed-bound wretch!

They came at first . . . my so-called friends . . . when they thought I could still be useful to them . . . But when they found out there was no hope . . . the visits stopped . . . just like that.

My mother kept coming of course . . . She told me how impressed she was . . . with all that I'd achieved . . . and how bravely I was dealing with my own death.

SOPHIE breaks down.

What have I achieved?

Guide (sympathetic)

Please . . . You must understand I'm only trying to help.

Sophie

'One day' . . . I always said to myself . . . 'One day I'll be able to sit back and enjoy all this'. But I couldn't stop. Even when I knew I was ill I couldn't stop working.

Pause.

Nia

In all that time, there must be a special moment . . . something you want to remember?

Sophie

It must be so easy for the two of you. I bet you have a million tender memories.

Alex

We're still here, aren't we?

Ketu

You don't have to impress us.

SOPHIE *thinks*.

Do you know why birds can fly? Because they let themselves be taken by the wind.

SOPHIE *hesitates*.

Sophie

Well . . . there was this time . . .

Guide

Yes.

Sophie

It's probably not important.

Ketu

Go on.

Sophie

It was strange . . . strange . . .

The lights slowly change.

Sophie's memory

Sophie

It was the beginning of a week like any other week.

The performers create a busy tube train.

Voice

Wind the closing doors.

SOPHIE *jumps on the tube. The tube starts.*

Sophie

Another week of early mornings and late nights.

Voice

The next station is Bank. On arrival the first set of doors will not open. Passengers in the first carriage please move to the rear. Please mind the gap between the train and the platform.

Doors open, passengers burst out and transform into the office.

PHIL and JERRY are at their desks. LUCY approaches JERRY, noticing he has something unusual on his monitor.

Phil

Jerry . . . send it over . . . send it over.

Jerry

OK, but you didn't get it from me, alright?

Phil

Yeah, yeah.

Lucy

Oh that is utterly gross.

JERRY hits the send key.

Phil

Oh whoa . . . (He clicks his mouse.) Enlarge . . . enlarge.

Lucy

You two are crazy . . . she'll be here in a minute.

Phil *Alice*
Uh huh. (Laughs.) I gotta cc this to everyone.

SOPHIE arrives at her desk. She now occupies the top desk, centre stage.

Sophie
Good morning.

All

Morning.

SOPHIE picks up on the atmosphere in the office.

Sophie
What's going on?

A beat.

Phil *Alice*
Jerry, I told you to stop sending me junk like this while I'm trying to work.

LUCY giggles. The office dissolves.

Sophie
Just an ordinary day. I worked late, got back on the tube and went home.

SOPHIE enters her flat. She presses the button on her answer-phone.

Mother's Voice
Sophie dear, it's mum. I know this is terribly short notice but the Smiths have invited us to dinner on Tuesday.

During this message a cat meows. She picks it up.

Sophie
Hi Stanley!

Mother's Voice
Young Ned'll be there too. He's doing so well these days, you really should . . .

SOPHIE clicks off the message and cuddles the cat.

Sophie
Good night.

The other performers create the bed. SOPHIE goes to bed.

Sophie (narrates)
That night I found I couldn't sleep. And I don't mean it took me a long time to sleep . . . I stared at the ceiling all night.

The next night was the same. I looked out of my window only to see other people staring out of their windows back at me.

Two other insomniacs appear.

London became the city that never sleeps!

And that was when I noticed . . . people had started to forget the names of things.

The other performers create the tube. SOPHIE gets on the tube.

Voice
Mind the . . . Mind the . . .

Passenger
Gap?

Voice
Mind the gap.

The office.

Sophie
I seem to have run out of . . .

Phil *Alice*
Paper?

Sophie
No.

Jerry *Alice*
Paperclips?

Sophie
No!

Lucy
What then?

Sophie (struggles)
Staples.

Jerry
What?

Sophie
Staples . . . you know . . . for stapling er . . .

Phil
Paper?

The two look at each other, this is scary.

The office transforms into the bed.

Sophie
And as darkness fell once more we dreaded the night.
(*frustrated*) We tried everything . . . (*These actions are acted out.*) Hot milky drinks. That didn't work. So we tried exercise. That didn't work! We even tried counting sheep.

As they begin to count sheep, in different languages, they walk and gradually arrive in the office.

And because we had not slept we gradually lost a sense of words and then a sense of meaning altogether. The whole city had amnesia.

The office. SOPHIE looks at her colleagues.

Sophie
Who are these people? (*Trying to focus.*) Work, I'm at work.

All examine their desks.

What is my work?

Gradually the office dissolves. They can't make sense of the office equipment – it all becomes foreign to them.

What's this thing for?

The performers discover each other.

(*To colleague.*) Who are you? (*Turning to another colleague.*) Who are you?

In this moment it was as if all our successes had been wiped out, all our failures forgotten. Everything and everyone was . . . (*She searches for the right word.*) new.

The camera flashes. Blackout.

Void

A pause. SOPHIE has disappeared. The group look around trying to see where she has gone.

Alex
What happened?

Ketu
Where did she go?

Guide
She selected her memory.

A slight pause.

Ketu
Strange . . .

Alex
It's more than strange, it doesn't make any sense. If the whole of London suddenly suffered amnesia, we'd have heard about it.

Nia (smiles teasingly)
Maybe you did, only the amnesia got you?

Alex

Seriously, it can't have happened.

Nia

Unless it only happened in her head. Her illness, remember?

~~Ketu~~

~~The scarf~~

Alex

But if it was all in her mind, why did the camera flash?

~~Ketu~~

~~Alex~~
There is some subtle magic to this thing. Why that particular memory?

Guide

Why do you think?

Ketu (realising)

~~Alex~~
The memory . . . it helped her make an important discovery . . .

Nia

It was real to her!

Alex

What about my race then? It was real to me!

~~Ketu~~

~~Nia~~
She actually lived through her memory. Yours was just a dream.

Alex

And who are you to judge?!

Ketu

No! (He walks up to ALEX.) The camera . . . it's in here!

He touches ALEX's chest.

All look at each other.

Silence.

But . . . what about my great discovery?

Nia

How come that left you here?

Ketu

Yes. (He thinks.) Science . . . truth . . . fact . . . maybe these things mean nothing on their own . . . it is how we each act on them.

Guide

What do you mean?

Ketu

It's not what you think, it's what you do with it . . . That's what matters.

The others look at him.

(To himself.) What was I to do with my new knowledge?

The lights slowly change.

Ketu's memory

Ketu

The Earth is round like an orange . . .

The performers are now villagers. Ketu approaches two men who are scything crops.

The Earth is round . . . like an orange.

The reapers laugh with him. KETU moves on. He finds a woman pounding flour.

The Earth is round like an orange!

The woman gives him a frightened look. KETU moves on. He finds another villager engaged in chores.

The Earth is round like an orange!

The villager gets up and threatens KETU.

Suddenly all villagers point spears at him.

KETU is arrested and shackled to a wooden frame.

An ELDER comes to talk to him.

Elder

Ketu . . . You must not say these things.

Ketu

It is the truth!

Elder

Our laws are there for a reason. You are terrifying people!

Ketu

Why should they fear the truth?!

Elder

It is sedition! And you will admit it. You have until sunrise!

The ELDER leaves.

Ketu's WIFE enters.

Wife

Ketu . . . I beg you . . . you must give up what you have said. They will kill or banish you.

Ketu

But it is the truth.

Wife

What does it matter? Think of me . . . and your children.

Ketu

How can you love me if I am not true to myself?

Wife

Be true to yourself. In your own mind. Just . . . reject what you have said in public.

Ketu

I . . .

The WIFE leaves as the ELDER appears again.

Elder

Ketu . . . it's time . . . what have you to say for yourself.

A slight pause.

The WIFE appears again.

Ketu (in turmoil)

The Earth . . . is flat, like a plate!

He drops the orange.

A celebration erupts.

Elder

Welcome back!

Ketu (narrates)

The village erupted in celebration. The 'bad spirits' had been banished from my mind. It seemed to me that to persist with my ideas, would cost me too much. I resolved to convince myself of the lie. But it would not be easy.

The performers are once again paddling their canoes, as in KETU's previous memory.

Hunter 1 (watching the sunrise)

Ah! The sun is waking up.

KETU looks at him.

Ketu

Why do you think the sun is such a shape?

The HUNTERS are puzzled and intrigued.

And yet the Earth is flat?

Hunter 1

I don't know . . . it just is. (*Joking, to other HUNTER.*)

Why are the fishes in the water?

Hunter 2

(*Laughing.*) And the monkeys in the trees?

The HUNTERS disappear.

Ketu (narrates)

My knowledge obsessed me. I needed to share it with others . . . but they were all too frightened.

The WIFE appears.

Tell me, why are they so blind? The sun, the earth . . . it is so obvious.

Wife

Stop talking like this!

Ketu

But . . .

Wife

Ketu! (*Cautiously.*) Your brother is coming with the children.

The BROTHER appears with the two children. They run to KETU.

Son

Daddy, tell us the orange story.

Wife

No! It's not a nice story.

KETU looks at his wife.

Ketu

Will you deny them the truth?

Wife

To save them from danger? Yes!

Ketu

Ignorance is far more dangerous.

Wife

Ketu, tell a different story.

Ketu

This is my home.

Daughter

The orange . . . tell us about the orange.

The BROTHER stands watching. He looks intimidating. KETU weighs up his options.

Ketu

In the beginning the Earth was round, like an orange.

The BROTHER looks at the WIFE.

Ketu

But then a foolish ignorant god, who was not looking where he was going, trod on it and squashed it . . . flat!

Wife

Come on, children.

The WIFE and BROTHER leave with the children.

(*Narration.*) I knew then I could never live on a flat Earth. To be ridiculed and threatened and rejected. Pretending to be someone I am not.

Meanwhile, the other performers create a tree.

I will sacrifice myself. But on my own terms. Not to darkness and ignorance . . . But to truth and its pursuit . . . for my children.

KETU approaches the tree and attaches a rope to one of its branches.

And suddenly . . . I see it all. A moment of utter clarity. Our Earth, a perfect, beautiful orb . . . and before me . . . lies the universe.

He hangs himself.

The camera flashes.

Lighting change.

Void

KETU has disappeared.

Guide

Magnificent! I knew he'd come up with something interesting!

Nia

How can we compete with that? I never made any great discoveries . . . or huge sacrifices. (*To the GUIDE*.) Are we being judged . . . on what we achieved, what we learnt?

The GUIDE looks at her and shrugs.

Alex (*recalling the GUIDE*)

All we have is what we did.

Nia

We did nothing! Where are our moments of greatness?! Our truly significant discoveries?!

Guide

Things would be a little impractical if we were all towering geniuses. (*Pushing ALEX*.) Besides, how would the world survive without its fools? We always need someone to make fun of. 75, 76, 77 . . .

Alex (*fighting back*)

Hey, I'm doing the best I can, alright?!

A slight pause.

Nia (*a sudden thought*)

That's right!

The other two turn to look at her.

Why does it matter . . . that our memories aren't earth-shattering? (*Realising*.) The things that were really important to me weren't like that . . . They were . . . tiny . . . almost insignificant. Things no one else ever saw.

Alex

Like what?

Nia

Remember the time we had that totally pointless row in the middle of Regent's Park? Suddenly we both realised how stupid we were being . . . and then I felt your hand, so warm . . . and we just hugged.

Alex

Is that enough for you? Would you want to live eternity in that moment?

Guide

Be thankful you have even that!

Alex

What?

Guide (*mysteriously*)

Nothing.

Alex (*to SOPHIE*)

Won't we get bored of it?

Guide

It doesn't work like that. As I understand it, it's a sort of loop . . . new to you every time.

Nia (*to ALEX*)

So what are we going to do?

Guide

Choose . . . you must choose quickly!

Alex

Why so quickly?

Guide

Because . . . it all decays! All your precious memories . . . everything you are . . . everything you think you are . . . you cannot hang on to it . . . it fades . . . until there is just a vague smudge of what you were.

Choose, while it is still real to you!

They look at the GUIDE who appears very anxious.

ALEX looks at NIA.

Alex

I never took the time to think about us.

Nia

What's there to think about . . . it's a feeling. Alex . . .

She concentrates on the thought.

When I met you I thought you were a sexy guy . . . and maybe you'd . . . (*Quoting him.*) 'be the one'. I never actually decided you were the love of my life. (*She smiles.*) But it seems you were.

ALEX smiles.

Alex

I don't know what to choose. There are just too many things . . .

Nia

I know! I remember my favourite Sunday.

Alex

You have a favourite Sunday?

Nia

It was the day after the carnival.

Alex

Yes, of course . . . (*Recalling.*) I'd got very drunk . . .

Nia

Margaritas at that Salsa club . . . Shall I choose for us?

Alex

Am I going to be spending eternity with a hangover?

Nia

You were OK.

Alex (*warmly*)

OK. (*Affirmatively.*) OK, let's do it!

The lights slowly change.

Nia's memory

Nia

I remember . . . It was a Sunday afternoon in my bedroom. I was sharing with that ageing socialist and his hippy wife at the time.

ALEX lies down.

Alex

Yeah, and waiting up from the kitchen there's a smell of that awful mung bean broth they insist on making.

NIA lies down.

Nia

I open my eyes . . . it's bright out . . . we haven't left the bed all day.

Pause. A ticking clock. The atmosphere is very lazy.

Nia

Hey you . . . don't I get any of the bed? (*She pushes ALEX to the side.*)

Alex

It's not my fault, this thing was built for midgets.

Pause. A ticking clock.

Nia

What do you want to do today?

Alex (*enjoying being in bed*)

I'm already doing it.

NIA gets up and crosses the room.

Nia

Yes . . .

NIA opens a window. We hear birdsong outside. NIA breathes in the fresh air, before returning to ALEX.

Let's do absolutely nothing.

NIA drops into ALEX's lap.

Alex

Good.

Nia

Good.

A pause. The clock ticks, birds sing.

(Narrates.) And somewhere in the haze of that utterly lazy afternoon . . . it was all there.

Sound of heartbeat.

I can feel your heartbeat . . . and my own.

Second heartbeat joins the first.

(Narrates.) And then you said it so quietly . . . as if I wasn't meant to hear . . . Like it's a thought you'd accidentally said aloud.

Alex (whispers)

I love you.

Nia

I love you.

Sound of heartbeat.

The camera flashes. Blackout.

Void

When the lights return, NIA has vanished.

Alex

Where is she?

Guide

Where do you think?

Alex

I was supposed to go too!

Guide

Then why didn't you?

Alex

I . . . I don't know, I wanted to!

The GUIDE looks at him.

That Sunday . . . I hardly remember it.

Guide

Then choose another moment with her!

ALEX is in torment.

You said when you met her she was 'the one'.

Alex

She was! I wanted her to be. I wanted to feel completely overwhelmed!

Guide

But you didn't?

ALEX struggles with the thought.

Be honest . . . for both our sakes.

Alex

It was good, great sometimes!

Guide

But?

Alex

I just can't think of a moment that *really* . . .

Guide (interrupts)

Then choose a moment with somebody else . . . quickly. (*He looks around anxiously.*) 86,87,88 . . .

ALEX struggles.

Any moment at all!

Alex

I had a lot of good moments! OK moments! . . . Why isn't OK good enough for you?!

Guide

Why doesn't the camera flash? Eh?! Because it is connected to your gut! Apparently OK isn't good enough! For you.

Alex

That's not true!

Silence.

What are my pathetic memories to you?

Silence.

I wanted to . . . to race bikes . . .

Silence.

Guide

Why do you think I'm still here?

Alex

I don't understand.

Guide

No . . . but I'm rather afraid you will . . . and all too soon. (*Panicky.*) Please pick something, think on it. *Want it!*

Alex

I can't! I . . .

He looks at the GUIDE beginning to realise.

You . . . You couldn't choose either.

The GUIDE turns away.

All this time I thought you were some kind of angel of death . . . but you're just like me.

The GUIDE, for once, is lost for words.

Is this what happens . . . if you don't choose?

Guide

This and worse . . . Without thoughts and recollections to accompany you . . . to help you know yourself . . . you're nothing!

I listened to your stories as I've listened to thousands of others . . . hoping in some way they would remind me. That some faint image of my life would return . . . something I could cling to. A second chance to decide.

From the moment I saw you there was something familiar about you. I had a feeling your memory could be the one.

(*Shouts.*) Choose!

Alex

I'm trying . . .

Guide

96 . . .

Alex

No . . .

Guide

Don't stay in the void . . . 97!

Alex (*he struggles to grasp an image*)

I can't see!

Guide

98!

Alex

Nothing! Nothing's good enough!

Guide

99!

ALEX looks at the GUIDE. The final moments slip away.

ALEX is lost.

(*Smiles.*) Time's up.

The GUIDE leaves the stage. ALEX is left on his own.

Guide (*off*)

Sorry to have kept you all waiting . . . there's been a bit of a backlog . . . well backlog's the wrong word really . . . since time doesn't exactly . . .

A pause.

(*Off.*) Welcome . . . to death!

ALEX looks around himself.

The End.