

ACT TWO

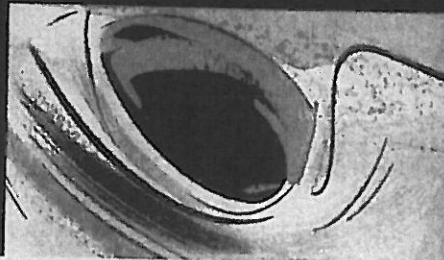
LONGMAN

LONGMAN LITERATURE

EQUUS

PETER SHAFFER

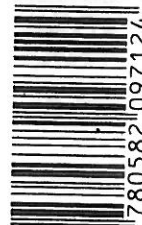
Teenager Alan Strang, fought over by a religious mother and an atheist father, finds release in horses. Then something drives him to blind the horses with a spike. Why? While treating the boy, a psychiatrist discovers his own life is paradoxically in the witness box. A savage, passionate play which pinpoints the modern human spiritual quest.



Series editor
Roy Blatchford



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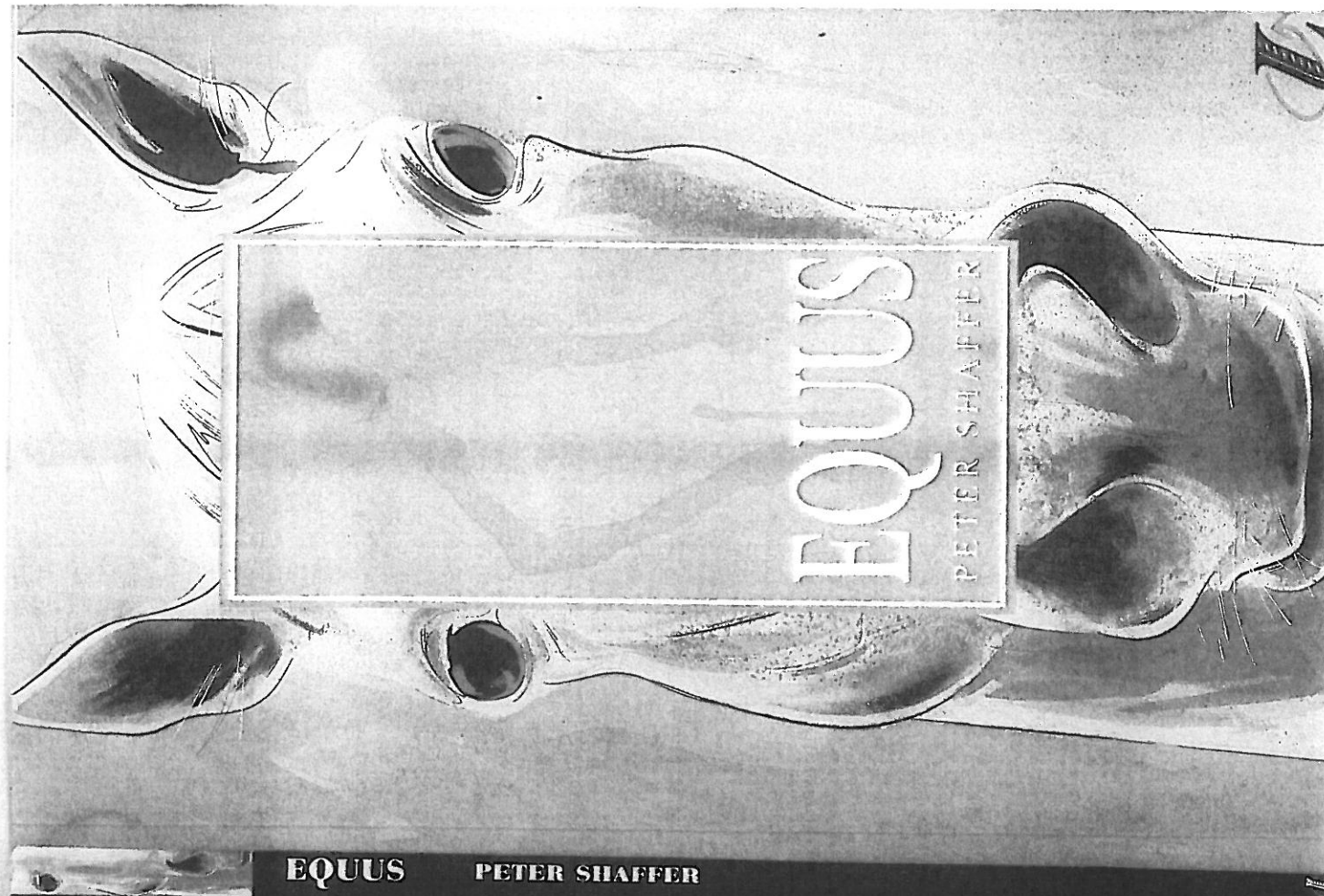
IAN POLLOCK

EQUUS

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Act Two

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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 one is the most alarming yet. It asks questions I've avoided all my professional life.

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ACT TWO SCENE TWENTY-TWO

(*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 uncomfortable 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 anyone else.* Yet if I don't know - if I can never know that - then what am I doing here? I don't mean clinically doing or socially doing - I mean *fundamentally!* These questions, these Whys, are fundamental - yet they have no place in a consulting room. So then, do I? . . . This is the feeling more and more with me - No Place. Displacement. . . . 'Account for me,' says staring Equus. 'First account for Me! . . . ' I fancy this is more than 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 hopelessly 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!

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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 hesitates. Then:

DORA 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.

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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, all right! 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. All right, 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. All right, 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.

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 pencil. 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 turns, sharply.

DYSART 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.

Hester 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 it 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 relationships 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, at least, you *know*.

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 enough. That simply has to be enough for you, surely?

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.

HESTER 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, Hester. Jealous of Alan Strang.

HESTER 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 Peleponnese, 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 instinctual 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 centaurs trampling the soil of Argos — and outside my window he is trying to *become one*, in a Hampshire field! . . . I watch that

woman knitting, night after night – a woman I haven't kissed in six years – and he stands in the dark for an hour, sucking the sweat off his God's hairy cheek! (*pause*) Then in the morning, I put away my books on the cultural shelf, close up the Kodachrome snaps of Mount Olympus, touch my reproduction statue of Dionysus for luck – and go off to hospital to treat him for insanity. Do you see?

HESTER The boy's in pain, Martin. That's all I see. In the end . . . I'm sorry.

He looks at her. Alan gets up from his bench and stealthily places an envelope in the left-hand entrance of the square, then goes back and sits with his back to the audience, as if watching television.

Hester rises.

HESTER That stare of his. Have you thought it might not be accusing you at all?

DYSART What then?

HESTER Claiming you.

DYSART For what?

HESTER (*mischievously*) A new God.

Pause.

DYSART Too conventional, for him. Finding a religion in Psychiatry is really for very ordinary patients.

She laughs.

HESTER Maybe he just wants a new Dad. Or is that too conventional too? . . . Since you're questioning your profession anyway, perhaps you ought to try it and see.

DYSART (*amused*) I'll talk to you.

HESTER Goodbye.

She smiles, and leaves him.

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Dysart becomes aware of the letter lying on the floor. He picks it up, opens and reads it.

ALAN (*speaking stiffly, as Dysart reads*) 'It is all true, what I said after you tapped the pencil. I'm sorry if I said different. Post Scriptum: I know why I'm in here.'

Pause.

DYSART (*calling, joyfully*) Nurse! Nurse comes in.

NURSE Yes, Doctor?

DYSART (*trying to conceal his pleasure*) Good evening!

NURSE You're in late tonight.

DYSART Yes! . . . Tell me, is the Strang boy in bed yet?

NURSE Oh, no, Doctor. He's bound to be upstairs looking at television. He always watches to the last possible moment.

He doesn't like going to his room at all.

DYSART You mean he's still having nightmares?

NURSE He had a bad one last night.

DYSART Would you ask him to come down here, please?

NURSE (*faint surprise*) Now?

DYSART I'd like a word with him.

NURSE (*puzzled*) Very good, Doctor.

DYSART If he's not back in his room by lights out, tell Night Nurse not to worry. I'll see he gets back to bed all right.

And would you phone my home and tell my wife I may be in late?

NURSE Yes, Doctor.

DYSART Ask him to come straight away, please.

Nurse goes to the bench, taps Alan on the shoulder, whispers her message in his ear, and returns to her place. Alan stands up and pauses for a second – then steps into the square.

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He stands in the doorway, depressed.

DYSART Hallo.

ALAN Hallo.

DYSART I got your letter. Thank you. (*pause*) Also the Post Scriptum.

ALAN (*defensively*) That's the right word. My mum told me. It's Latin for 'After-writing'.

DYSART How are you feeling?

ALAN All right.

DYSART I'm sorry I didn't see you today.

ALAN You were fed up with me.

DYSART Yes. (*pause*) Can I make it up to you now?

ALAN What d'you mean?

DYSART I thought we'd have a session.

ALAN (*startled*) Now?

DYSART Yes! At dead of night! . . . Better than going to sleep, isn't it?

The boy flinches.

ALAN — look. Everything I say has a trick or a catch. Everything I do is a trick or a catch. That's all I know to do. But they work — and you know that. Trust me.

Pause.

ALAN You got another trick, then?

DYSART Yes.

ALAN A truth drug?

DYSART If you like.

ALAN What's it do?

DYSART Make it easier for you to talk.

ALAN Like you can't help yourself?

DYSART That's right. Like you have to speak the truth at all costs. And all of it.

Pause.

ALAN (*stily*) Comes in a needle, doesn't it?

DYSART No.

ALAN Where is it?

DYSART (*indicating his pocket*) In here. . .

ALAN Let's see. /

Dysart solemnly takes a bottle of pills out of his pocket.

DYSART There.

ALAN (*suspicious*) That really it?

DYSART It is . . . Do you want to try it?

ALAN No.

DYSART I think you do.

ALAN I don't. Not at all.

DYSART Afterwards you'd sleep. You'd have no bad dreams all night. Probably many nights, from then on. . . .
Pause.

ALAN How long's it take to work?

DYSART It's instant. Like coffee.

ALAN (*half believing*) It isn't!

DYSART I promise you . . . Well?

ALAN Can I have a fag?

DYSART Pill first. Do you want some water?

ALAN No.

Dysart shakes one out on to his palm. Alan hesitates for a second — then takes it and swallows it.

DYSART Then you can chase it down with this. Sit down.

He offers him a cigarette, and lights it for him.

ALAN (*nervous*) What happens now?

DYSART We wait for it to work.

ALAN What'll I feel first?

DYSART Nothing much. After a minute, about a hundred green snakes should come out of that cupboard singing the Halle-lujah Chorus.

ALAN (*amused*) I'm serious!

DYSART (*earnestly*) You'll feel nothing. Nothing's going to happen now but what you want to happen. You're not going to say anything to me but what you want to say. Just relax. Lie back and finish your fag.

Alan stares at him. Then accepts the situation, and lies back.

DYSART Good boy.

ALAN I bet this room's heard some funny things.

DYSART It certainly has.

ALAN I like it.

DYSART This room?

ALAN Don't you?

DYSART Well, there's not much to like, is there?

ALAN How long am I going to be in here?

DYSART It's hard to say. I quite see you want to leave.

ALAN No.

DYSART You don't?

ALAN Where would I go?

DYSART Home....

The boy looks at him. Dysart crosses and sits on the rail upstage, his feet on the bench. A pause.

Actually, I'd like to leave this room and never see it again in my life.

ALAN (*surprise*) Why?

DYSART I've been in it too long.

ALAN Where would you go?

DYSART Somewhere.

ALAN Secret?

DYSART Yes. There's a sea - a great sea - I love... It's where the Gods used to go to bathe.

ALAN What Gods?

DYSART The old ones. Before they died.

ALAN Gods don't die.

DYSART Yes, they do.

Pause.

There's a village I spent one night in, where I'd like to live. It's all white.

ALAN How would you Nosey Parker, though? You wouldn't have a room for it any more.

DYSART I wouldn't mind. I don't actually enjoy being a Nosey Parker, you know.

ALAN Then why do it?

DYSART Because you're unhappy.

ALAN So are you.

Dysart looks at him sharply. Alan sits up in alarm.

Oooh, I didn't mean that!

DYSART Didn't you?

ALAN Here - is that how it works? Things just slip out, not feeling anything?

DYSART That's right.

ALAN But it's so quick!

DYSART I told you: it's instant.

ALAN (*delighted*) It's wicked, isn't it? I mean, you can say anything under it.

DYSART Yes.

ALAN Ask me a question.

DYSART Tell me about Jill.

Pause. The boy turns away.

ALAN There's nothing to tell.

DYSART Nothing?

ALAN No.

DYSART Well, for example - is she pretty? You've never described her.

ALAN She's all right.

DYSART What colour hair?

ALAN Dunno.

DYSART Is it long or short?

ALAN Dunno.

DYSART (*lightly*) You must know that.

ALAN I don't remember. I don't!

Dysart rises and comes down to him. He takes the cigarette out of his hand.

DYSART (*firmly*) Lie back... Now listen. You have to do this. And now. You are going to tell me everything that happened with this girl. And not just *tell* me - *show* me. Act it out, if you like - even more than you did when I tapped the pencil.

I want you to feel free to do absolutely anything in this room. The pill will help you. I will help you... Now, where does she live?

A long pause.

ALAN (*tight*) Near the stables. About a mile.

Dysart steps down out of the square as Jill enters it. He sits again on the downstage bench.

The light grows warmer.

JILL It's called The China Pantry.
She comes down and sits casually on the rail. Her manner is open and lightly provocative. During these scenes Alan acts directly with her, and never looks over at Dysart when he replies to him.

When Daddy disappeared, she was left without a bean. She had to earn her own living. I must say she did jolly well, considering she was never trained in business.

DYSART What do you mean, 'disappeared'?

ALAN (*to Dysart*) He ran off. No one ever saw him again.

JILL Just left a note on her dressing table saying 'Sorry. I've had it.' Just like that. She never got over it. It turned her right off men. All my dates have to be sort of secret. I mean, she knows about them, but I can't ever bring anyone back home. She's so rude to them.

ALAN (*to Dysart*) She was always looking.

DYSART At you?

ALAN (*to Dysart*) Saying stupid things.

She jumps off the bench.

JILL You've got super eyes.

ALAN (*to Dysart*) Anyway, she was the one who had them.

She sits next to him. Embarrassed, the boy tries to move away as far as he can.

JILL There was an article in the paper last week saying what points about boys fascinate girls. They said Number One is bottoms. I think it's eyes every time... They fascinate you too, don't they?

ALAN Me?

JILL (*sly*) Or is it only horse's eyes?

ALAN (*startled*) What d'you mean?

JILL I saw you staring into Nugget's eyes yesterday for ages. I spied on you through the door!

ALAN (*holy*) There must have been something in it!

JILL You're a real Man of Mystery, aren't you?
ALAN (*to Dysart*) Sometimes, it was like she knew.

DYSART Did you ever hint?

ALAN (*to Dysart*) Course not!

JILL I love horses' eyes. The way you can see yourself in them. D'you find them sexy?

ALAN (*outraged*) What?!

JILL Horses.

ALAN Don't be daft!

He springs up, and away from her.

JILL Girls do. I mean, they go through a period when they pat them and kiss them a lot. I know I did. I suppose it's just a substitute, really.

ALAN (*to Dysart*) That kind of thing, all the time. Until one night...

DYSART Yes? What?

ALAN (*to Dysart: defensively*) She did it! Not me. It was her idea, the whole thing!... She got me into it!

DYSART What are you saying? 'One night': go on from there.

A pause.

ALAN (*to Dysart*) Saturday night. We were just closing up.

JILL How would you like to take me out?

ALAN What?

JILL (*coolly*) How would you like to take me out tonight?

ALAN I've got to go home.

JILL What for?

He tries to escape upstage.

ALAN They expect me.

JILL Ring up and say you're going out.

ALAN I can't.

JILL Why?

ALAN They expect me.

JILL Look. Either we go out together and have some fun, or you go back to your boring home, *as usual*, and I go back to mine. That's the situation, isn't it?

ALAN Well... where would we go?

JILL The pictures! There's a skinflick over in Winchester! I've never seen one, have you?

ALAN No.

JILL Wouldn't you like to? I would. All those heavy Swedes, panting at each other! ... What d'you say?

ALAN (*grinning*) Yeh! ...

JILL Good! ...

He turns away.

DYSART Go on, please.

He steps off the square.

ALAN (*to Dysart*) I'm tired now!

DYSART Come on now. You can't stop there.

He storms round the circle to Dysart, and faces him directly.

ALAN I'm tired! I want to go to bed!

DYSART (*sharply*) Well, you can't. I want to hear about the film.

ALAN (*hostile*) Hear what? ... *What?* ... It was bloody awful!

The actors playing horses come swiftly on to the square, dressed in sports coats or raincoats. They move the benches to be parallel with the audience, and sit on them - staring out front.

DYSART Why?

ALAN Nosey Parker!

DYSART Why?

ALAN *Because!* ... Well - we went into the Cinema!

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A burst of rock music, instantly fading down. Lights darken.

Alan re-enters the square. Jill rises and together they grope their way to the downstage bench, as if in a dark auditorium.

ALAN (*to Dysart*) The whole place was full of men. Jill was the only girl.

They push by a patron seated at the end, and sit side by side, staring up at the invisible screen, located above the heads of the main audience.

A spotlight hits the boy's face.

We sat down and the film came on. It was daft. Nothing happened for ages. There was this girl Brita, who was sixteen. She went to stay in this house, where there was an older boy. He kept giving her looks, but she ignored him completely. In the end she took a shower. She went into the bathroom and took off all her clothes. The lot. Very slowly. ... What she didn't know was the boy was looking through the door all the time. ... (*he starts to become excited*) It was fantastic! The water fell on her breasts, bouncing down her. ...

Frank steps into the square furtively from the back, hat in hand, and stands looking about for a place.

DYSART Was that the first time you'd seen a girl naked?

ALAN (*to Dysart*) Yes! You couldn't see everything, though. ... (*looking about him*) All round me they were all looking. All the men - staring up like they were in church. Like they were a sort of congregation. And then - (*he sees his father*) Ah! At the same instant Frank sees him.

FRANK Alan!

ALAN God!

JILL What is it?

ALAN Dad!

JILL Where?

ALAN At the back! He saw me!

JILL You sure?

ALAN Yes!

FRANK (*calling*) Alan!

ALAN Oh God!

He tries to hide his face in the girl's shoulder. His father comes down the aisle towards him.

FRANK Alan! You can hear me! Don't pretend!

PATRONS Ssssh!

FRANK (*approaching the row of seats*) Do I have to come and fetch you out? ... Do I? ...

Cries of 'Ssssh!' and 'Shut up!'

Do I, Alan?

ALAN (*through gritted teeth*) Oh fuck!

He gets up as the noise increases. Jill gets up too and follows him.

DYSART You went?

ALAN (*to Dysart*) What else could I do? He kept shouting.

Everyone was saying Shut up!

They go out, right, through the group of Patrons - who rise protesting as they pass, quickly replace the benches and leave the square.

Dysart enters it.

30

Light brightens from the cinema, but remains cold: streets at night.

The three walk round the circle downstage in a line: Frank leading, wearing his hat. He halts in the middle of the left rail, and stands staring straight ahead of him, rigid with embarrassment. Alan is very agitated.

ALAN (*to Dysart*) We went into the street, all three of us. It was weird. We just stood there by the bus stop - like we were three people in a queue, and we didn't know each other. Dad was all white and sweaty. He didn't look at us at all. It must have gone on for about five minutes. I tried to speak. I said - (*to his father*) I - I - I've never been there before. Honest... Never... (*to Dysart*) He didn't seem to hear. Jill tried.

JILL It's true, Mr Strang. It wasn't Alan's idea to go there. It was mine.

ALAN (*to Dysart*) He just went on staring, straight ahead. It was awful.

JILL I'm not shocked by films like that. I think they're just silly.

ALAN (*to Dysart*) The bus wouldn't come. We just stood and stood... Then suddenly he spoke. *Frank takes off his hat.*

FRANK (*stiffly*) I'd like you to know something. Both of you. I came here tonight to see the Manager. He asked me to call on him for business purposes. I happen to be a printer, Miss. A picture house needs posters. That's entirely why I'm here. To discuss posters. While I was waiting I happened to glance in, that's all. I can only say I'm going to complain to the council. I had no idea they showed films like this. I'm certainly going to refuse my services.

JILL (*kindly*) Yes, of course.

FRANK So long as that's understood.

ALAN (*to Dysart*) Then the bus came along.

FRANK Come along, now Alan.

He moves away downstage.

ALAN No.

FRANK (*turning*) No fuss, please. Say Goodnight to the young lady.

ALAN (*timid but firm*) No. I'm stopping here... I've got to see her home... It's proper.

Pause.

FRANK (*as dignified as possible*) Very well. I'll see you when you choose to return. Very well then... Yes...

He walks back to his original seat, next to his wife. He stares across the square at his son - who stares back at him. Then, slowly, he sits.

ALAN (*to Dysart*) And he got in, and we didn't. He sat down and looked at me through the glass. And I saw...

DYSART (*soft*) What?

ALAN (*to Dysart*) His face. It was scared.

DYSART Of you?

ALAN (*to Dysart*) It was terrible. We had to walk home. Four miles. I got the shakes.

DYSART You were scared too?

ALAN (*to Dysart*) It was like a hole had been drilled in my tummy. A hole - right here. And the air was getting in!

He starts to walk upstage, round the circle.

The girl stays still.

JILL (*aware of other people looking*) Alan...

ALAN (*to Dysart*) People kept turning round in the street to look.

JILL Alan!

ALAN (*to Dysart*) I kept seeing him, just as he drove off. Scared of me.... And me scared of *him*... I kept thinking - all those airs he put on!... 'Receive my meaning. Improve your mind!'... All those nights he said he'd be in late. 'Keep my supper hot, Dora!' 'Your poor father: he works so hard!'... Bugger! Old bugger!... Filthy old bugger!

He stops, clenching his fists.

JILL Hey! Wait for me!

She runs after him. He waits.

What are you thinking about?

ALAN Nothing.

JILL Mind my own beeswax?

She laughs.

ALAN (*to Dysart*) And suddenly she began to laugh.

JILL I'm sorry. But it's pretty funny, when you think of it.

ALAN (*bewildered*) What?

JILL Catching him like that! I mean, it's terrible - but it's very funny.

ALAN Yeh!

He turns from her.

JILL No, wait!... I'm sorry. I know you're upset. But it's not the end of the world, is it? I mean, what was he doing? Only what we were. Watching a silly film. It's a case of like father like son, I'd say!... I mean, when that girl was taking a shower, you were pretty interested, weren't you?

He turns round and looks at her.

We keep saying old people are square. Then when they suddenly aren't - we don't like it!

DYSART What did you think about that?

ALAN (*to Dysart*) I don't know. I kept looking at all the people in the street. They were mostly men coming out of pubs. I suddenly thought - *they all do it! All of them!*... They're not just Dads - they're people with pricks!... And Dad - he's not just Dad either. He's a man with a prick too. You know, I'd never thought about it.

Pause.

We went into the country.

He walks again. Jill follows. They turn the corner and come downstage, right.

We kept walking. I just thought about Dad, and how he was nothing special - just a poor old sod on his own.
He stops.

(*to Jill: realising it*) Poor old sod!

JILL That's right!

ALAN (*grappling with it*) I mean, what else has he got?... He's got mum, of course, but well - she - she - she - she -

JILL She doesn't give him anything?

ALAN That's right. I bet you... She doesn't give him anything. That's right... That's really right!... She likes Ladies and Gentlemen. Do you understand what I mean?

JILL (*mischievously*) Ladies and gentlemen aren't naked?

ALAN That's right! Never!... *Never!* That would be disgusting! She'd have to put bowler hats on them!... Jodhpurs!

She laughs.

DYSART Was that the first time you ever thought anything like that about your mother?... I mean, that she was unfair to your dad?

ALAN (*to Dysart*) Absolutely!

DYSART How did you feel?

ALAN (*to Dysart*) Sorry. I mean for him. Poor old sod, that's what I felt - he's just like me! He hates ladies and gents just like me! Posh things - and la-di-da. He goes off by himself at night, and does his own secret thing which no one'll know about, just like me! There's no difference - he's just the

same as me — just the same! —
He stops in distress, then bolts back a little upstage.
 Christ!

DYSART (*sternly*) Go on.
 ALAN (*to Dysart*) I can't.
 DYSART Of course you can. You're doing wonderfully.
 ALAN (*to Dysart*) No, please. *Don't make me!*
 DYSART (*firm*) Don't think: just answer. You were happy at that second, weren't you? When you realised about your dad. How lots of people have secrets, not just you?
 ALAN (*to Dysart*) Yes.
 DYSART You felt sort of free, didn't you? I mean, free to do anything?
 ALAN (*to Dysart, looking at Jill*) Yes!
 DYSART What was she doing?
 ALAN (*to Dysart*) Holding my hand.
 DYSART And that was good?
 ALAN (*to Dysart*) Oh, yes!
 DYSART Remember what you thought. *As if it's happening to you now. This very moment...* What's in your head?
 ALAN (*to Dysart*) Her eyes. *She's* the one with eyes!... I keep looking at them, because I really want —
 DYSART To look at her breasts?
 ALAN (*to Dysart*) Yes.
 DYSART Like in the film.
 ALAN (*to Dysart*) Yes... Then she starts to scratch my hand.
 JILL You're really very nice, you know that?
 ALAN (*to Dysart*) Moving her nails on the back. Her face so warm. Her eyes.
 DYSART You want her very much?
 ALAN (*to Dysart*) Yes...
 JILL I love your eyes.
She kisses him.
 (*whispering*) Let's go!
 ALAN Where?
 JILL I know a place. It's right near here.

ALAN Where?
 JILL Surprise!... Come on!
She darts away round the circle, across the stage and up the left side.
 Come on!
 ALAN (*to Dysart*) She runs ahead. I follow. And then — and then —!
He halts.
 DYSART What?
 ALAN (*to Dysart*) I see what she means.
 DYSART What?... Where are you?... Where has she taken you?
 ALAN (*to Jill*) *The Stables?*
 JILL Of course!

32

Chorus makes a warning hum.

The horses-actors enter, and ceremonially put on their masks — first raising them high above their heads. Nugget stands in the central tunnel.

ALAN (*recoiling*) No!
 JILL Where else? They're perfect!
 ALAN No!
He turns his head from her.
 JILL Or do you want to go home now and face your dad?
 ALAN No!
 JILL Then come on!
He edges nervously past the horse standing at the left, which turns its neck and even moves a challenging step after him.
 ALAN Why not your place?
 JILL I can't. Mother doesn't like me bringing back boys. I told you... Anyway, the Barn's better.
 ALAN No!
 JILL All that straw. It's cosy.
 ALAN No.

JILL *Why not?*

ALAN Them!

JILL Dalton will be in bed . . . What's the matter? . . . Don't you want to?

ALAN (*aching to*) Yes!

JILL So?

ALAN (*desperate*) Them! . . . Them! . . .

JILL *Who?*

ALAN (*low*) Horses.

JILL Horses? . . . You're really dotty, aren't you? . . . What do you mean?

He starts shaking.

Oh, you're freezing . . . Let's get under the straw. You'll be warm there.

ALAN (*pulling away*) No!

JILL What on earth's the matter with you? . . . Silence. *He won't look at her.*

Look, if the sight of horses offends you, my lord, we can just shut the door. You won't have to see them. All right?

DYSART What door is that? In the barn?

ALAN (*to Dysart*) Yes.

DYSART So what do you do? You go in?

ALAN (*to Dysart*) Yes.

33

A rich light falls.

Furtively Alan enters the square from the top end, and Jill follows. The horses on the circle retire out of sight on either side. Nugget retreats up the tunnel and stands where he can just be glimpsed in the dimness.

DYSART Into the Temple? The Holy of Holies?

ALAN (*to Dysart: desperate*) What else can I do? . . . I can't say! I can't tell her . . . (*to Jill*) Shut it tight.

JILL All right . . . You're crazy.

ALAN Lock it.

JILL Lock?

ALAN Yes.

JILL It's just an old door. What's the matter with you? They're in their boxes. They can't get out . . . Are you all right?

ALAN Why?

JILL You look weird.

ALAN *Lock it!*

JILL Ssssh! D'you want to wake up Dalton? . . . Stay there, idiot.

She mimes locking a heavy door, upstage.

DYSART Describe the barn, please.

ALAN (*walking round it: to Dysart*) Large room. Straw everywhere. Some tools . . . (*as if picking it up off the rail where he left. it in Act One*) A hoof pick! . . .

He 'drops' it hastily, and dashes away from the spot.

DYSART *Go on.*

ALAN (*to Dysart*) At the end this big door. Behind it—

DYSART Horses.

ALAN (*to Dysart*) Yes.

DYSART How many?

ALAN (*to Dysart*) Six.

DYSART Jill closes the door so you can't see them?

ALAN (*to Dysart*) Yes.

DYSART And then? . . . What happens now? . . . Come on, Alan. Show me.

JILL See, it's all shut. There's just us . . . Let's sit down. Come on.

They sit together on the same bench, left.

Hallo.

ALAN (*quickly*) Hallo.

She kisses him lightly. He responds. Suddenly a faint trampling of hooves, off-stage, makes him jump up.

JILL What is it?

He turns his head upstage, listening.

Relax. There's no one there. Come here.

She touches his hand. He turns to her again.

You're very gentle. I love that . . .

ALAN So are you . . . I mean . . .

He kisses her spontaneously. The hooves trample again, harder. He breaks away from her abruptly towards the upstage corner.

JILL (rising) What is it?

ALAN Nothing!

She moves towards him. He turns and moves past her. He is clearly distressed. She contemplates him for a moment.

JILL (gently) Take your sweater off.

ALAN What?

JILL I will, if you will.

He stares at her. A pause.

She lifts her sweater over her head: he watches - then unzips his. They each remove their shoes, their socks, and their jeans. Then they look at each other diagonally across the square, in which the light is gently increasing.

ALAN You're . . . You're very . . .

JILL So are you. . . (pause) Come here.

He goes to her. She comes to him. They meet in the middle, and hold each other, and embrace.

ALAN (to Dysart) She put her mouth in mine. It was lovely! Oh, it was lovely!

They burst into giggles. He lays her gently on the floor in the centre of the square, and bends over her eagerly.

Suddenly the noise of Equus fills the place. Hooves smash on wood.

Alan straightens up, rigid. He stares straight ahead of him over the prone body of the girl.

DYSART Yes, what happened then, Alan?

ALAN (to Dysart: brutally) I put it in her!

DYSART Yes?

ALAN (to Dysart) I put it in her.

DYSART You did?

ALAN (to Dysart) Yes!

DYSART Was it easy?

ALAN (to Dysart) Yes.

DYSART Describe it.

ALAN (to Dysart) I told you.

DYSART More exactly.

ALAN (to Dysart) I put it in her!

DYSART Did you?

ALAN (to Dysart) All the way!

DYSART Did you, Alan?

ALAN (to Dysart) All the way. I shoved it. I put it in her all the way.

DYSART Did you?

ALAN (to Dysart) Yes!

DYSART Did you?

ALAN (to Dysart) Yes! . . . Yes!

DYSART Give me the TRUTH! . . . Did you? . . . Honestly?

ALAN (to Dysart) Fuck off!

He collapses, lying upstage on his face. Jill lies on her back motionless, her head downstage, her arms extended behind her. A pause.

DYSART (gently) What was it? You couldn't? Though you wanted to very much?

ALAN (to Dysart) I couldn't . . . see her.

DYSART What do you mean?

ALAN (to Dysart) Only Him. Every time I kissed her - He was in the way.

DYSART Who?

Alan turns on his back.

ALAN (to Dysart) You know who! . . . When I touched her, I felt Him. Under me . . . His side, waiting for my hand . . . His flanks . . . I refused him. I looked. I looked right at her . . . and I couldn't do it. When I shut my eyes, I saw Him at once. The streaks on his belly . . . (with more desperation) I couldn't feel her flesh at all! I wanted the foam off his neck.

His sweaty hide. Not flesh. Hide! Horse-hide! . . . Then I couldn't even kiss her.

Jill sits up.

JILL What is it?

ALAN (dodging her hand) No!

He scrambles up and crouches in the corner against the rails, like a little beast in a cage.

JILL Alan!

ALAN Stop it!

Jill gets up.

JILL It's all right... It's all right... Don't worry about it. It often happens - honest... There's nothing wrong. I don't mind, you know... I don't at all.

He dashes past her downstage.

ALAN, look at me... Alan?... Alan!

He collapses again by the rail.

ALAN Get out!...

JILL What?

ALAN (soft) Out!

JILL There's nothing wrong: believe me! It's very common.

ALAN *Get out!*

He snatches up the invisible pick.

GET OUT!

JILL Put that down!

ALAN Leave me alone!

JILL Put that down, Alan. It's very dangerous. Go on, please - drop it.

He 'drops' it, and turns from her.

ALAN You ever tell anyone. Just you tell...

JILL Who do you think I am?... I'm your friend - Alan...

She goes towards him.

Listen: you don't have to do anything. Try to realize that.

Nothing at all. Why don't we just lie here together in the straw. And talk.

ALAN (low) Please...

JILL Just talk.

ALAN *Please!*

JILL All right, I'm going... Let me put my clothes on first.

She dresses, hastily.

ALAN You tell anyone!... Just tell and see...

JILL *Oh, stop it!*... I wish you could believe me. It's not in

the least important.

Pause.

Anyway, I won't say anything. You know that. You know I won't....

Pause. He stands with his back to her.

Goodnight, then, Alan... I wish - I really wish -

He turns on her, hissing. His face is distorted - possessed. In horrified alarm she turns - fumbles the door open - leaves the barn - shuts the door hard behind her, and dashes up the tunnel out of sight, past the barely visible figure of Nugget.

34

Alan stands alone, and naked.

A faint humming and drumming. The boy looks about him in growing terror.

DYSART What?

ALAN (to Dysart) He was there. Through the door. The door was shut, but he was there!... He'd seen everything. I could hear him. He was laughing.

DYSART Laughing?

ALAN (to Dysart) Mocking!... Mocking!...

Standing downstage he stares up towards the tunnel. A great silence weighs on the square.

(to the silence: terrified) Friend... Equus the Kind... The Merciful!... *Forgive me!*...

Silence.

It wasn't me. Not really me. *Me!*... Forgive me!... Take me back again! Please!... PLEASE!

He kneels on the downstage lip of the square, still facing the door, huddling in fear.

I'll never do it again. I swear... I swear!...

Silence.

(in a moan) *Please!!!*...

DYSART And He? What does He say?

ALAN (*to Dysart: whispering*) 'Mine!... You're mine!... I am yours and you are mine!'... Then I see his eyes. They are rolling!

Nugget begins to advance slowly, with relentless hooves, down the central tunnel.

'I see you. I see you. Always! Everywhere! Forever!'

DYSART Kiss anyone and I will see?

ALAN (*to Dysart*) Yes!

DYSART Lie with anyone and I will see?

ALAN (*to Dysart*) Yes!

DYSART And you will fail! Forever and ever you will fail! You will see ME — and you will FAIL!

The boy turns round, hugging himself in pain. From the sides two more horses converge with Nugget on the rails. Their hooves stamp angrily. The equus Noise is heard more terribly.

The Lord thy God is a Jealous God. He sees you. He sees you forever and ever, Alan. He sees you!... *He sees you!*

ALAN (*in terror*) Eyes!... White eyes — never closed! Eyes like flames — coming — coming!... God seest! God seest!... NO!... *Pause. He steadies himself. The stage begins to blacken.*

(quieter) No more. No more, Equus.

He gets up. He goes to the bench. He takes up the invisible pick. He moves slowly upstage towards Nugget, concealing the weapon behind his naked back, in the growing darkness. He stretches out his hand and fondles Nugget's mask.

(gently) Equus... Noble Equus... Faithful and True...

Godslave... Thou — God — Seest — NOTHING!

He stabs out Nugget's eyes. The horse stamps in agony. A great screaming begins to fill the theatre, growing ever louder. Alan dashes at the other two horses and blinds them too, stabbing over the rails. Their metal hooves join in the stamping.

Relentlessly, as this happens, three more horses appear in cones of light: not naturalistic animals like the first three, but dreadful creatures out of nightmare. Their eyes flare — their nostrils flare — their mouths flare. They are archetypal images — judging, punishing, pitiless. They do

not halt at the rail, but invade the square. As they trample at him, the boy leaps desperately at them, jumping high and naked in the dark, slashing at their heads with arms upraised.

The screams increase. The other horses follow into the square. The whole place is filled with cannoning, blinded horses — and the boy dodging among them, avoiding their slashing hooves as best he can. Finally they plunge off into darkness and away out of sight. The noise dies abruptly, and all we hear is Alan yelling in hysteria as he collapses on the ground — stabbing at his own eyes with the invisible pick.

ALAN Find me!... Find me!... Find me!... Find me!...

KILL ME!... KILL ME!...

35

The light changes quickly back to brightness.

Dysart enters swiftly, hurls a blanket on the left bench, and rushes over to Alan. The boy is having convulsions on the floor. Dysart grabs his hands, forces them from his eyes, scoops him up in his arms and carries him over to the bench. Alan hurls his arms round Dysart and clings to him, gasping and kicking his legs in a dreadful frenzy.

Dysart lays him down and presses his head back on the bench. He keeps talking — urgently talking — soothing the agony as he can.

DYSART Here... Here... Sssh... Sssh... Sssh... Calm now... Lie back. Just lie back! Now breathe in deep. Very deep. In... Out... In... Out... That's it... In. Out... In... Out...

The boy's breath is drawn into his body with a harsh rasping sound, which slowly grows less. Dysart pats the blanket over him.

Keep it going... That's a good boy... Very good boy...

It's all over now, Alan. It's all over. He'll go away now.

You'll never see him again, I promise. You'll have no more

bad dreams. No more awful nights. Think of that!... You

are going to be well. I'm going to make you well, I promise

you... You'll be here for a while, but I'll be here too, so it

won't be so bad. Just trust me...

He stands upright. The boy lies still.

Sleep now. Have a good long sleep. You've earned it... Sleep. Just sleep... I'm going to make you well.

He steps backwards into the centre of the square. The light brightens some more.

A pause.

DYSART I'm lying to you, Alan. He won't really go that easily. Just clop away from you like a nice old nag. Oh, no! When Equus leaves - if he leaves at all - it will be with your intestines in his teeth. And I don't stock replacements... If you knew anything, you'd get up this minute and run from me fast as you could.

Hesther speaks from her place.

HESTHER The boy's in pain, Martin.

DYSART Yes.

HESTHER And you can take it away.

DYSART Yes.

HESTHER Then that has to be enough for you, surely?... In the end!

DYSART (*crying out*) *All right! I'll take it away!* He'll be delivered from madness. *What then?* He'll feel himself acceptable! *What then?* Do you think feelings like his can be simply re-attached, like plasters? Stuck on to other objects we select? *Look at him!*... My desire might be to make this boy an ardent husband - a caring citizen - a worshipper of abstract and unifying God. My achievement, however, is more likely to make a ghost!... Let me tell you exactly what I'm going to do to him!

He steps out of the square and walks round the upstage end of it, storming at the audience.

I'll heal the rash on his body. I'll erase the welts cut into his mind by flying manes. When that's done, I'll set him on a nice mini-scooter and send him pattering off into the Normal world where animals are treated *properly*: made extinct, or put into servitude, or tethered all their lives in dim light, just to feed it! I'll give him the good Normal world where we're tethered beside them - blinking our nights away in a

non-stop drench of cathode-ray over our shrivelling heads! I'll take away his Field of Ha Ha, and give him Normal places for his ecstasy - multi-lane highways driven through the guts of cities, extinguishing Place altogether, *even the idea of Place!* He'll trot on his metal pony tamely through the concrete evening - and one thing I promise you: he will never touch hide again! With any luck his private parts will come to feel as plastic to him as the products of the factory to which he will almost certainly be sent. Who knows? He may even come to find sex funny. Smirky funny. Bit of grunt funny. Trampled and furtive and entirely in control. Hopefully, he'll feel nothing at his fork but Approved Flesh. *I doubt, however, with much passion!*... Passion, you see, can be destroyed by a doctor. It cannot be created.

He addresses Alan directly, in farewell.

You won't gallop any more, Alan. Horses will be quite safe. You'll save your pennies every week, till you can change that scooter in for a car, and put the odd fifty p on the gee-gees, quite forgetting that they were ever anything more to you than bearers of little profits and little losses. You will, however, be without pain. More or less completely without pain.

Pause.

He speaks directly to the theatre, standing by the motionless body of Alan Strang, under the blanket.

And now for me it never stops: that voice of Equus out of the cave - 'Why Me?... Why Me?... Account for Me!'... All right - I surrender! I say it!... In an ultimate sense I cannot know what I do in this place - yet I do ultimate things. Essentially I cannot know what I do - yet I do essential things. Irreversible, terminal things. I stand in the dark with a pick in my hand, striking at heads!

He moves away from Alan, back to the downstage bench, and finally sits.

I need - more desperately than my children need me - a way of seeing in the dark. What way is this?... *What dark is this?*... I cannot call it ordained of God: I can't get that far.

EQUUS

I will however pay it so much homage. There is now, in my mouth, this sharp chain. And it never comes out.

A long pause.

Dysart sits staring.

Blackout

□ Glossary: reading the text

Author's notes on the play

- xxii** **Chorus** organised band of singers or dancers, especially in Greek tragedy representing interested spectators and employed to explain the actions, express sympathy with characters and draw morals.
- xxiii** **blinkers** leather screens on a horse's bridle preventing it from seeing sideways.
- mimetically** by copying or imitation.

Act I, scenes 1 to 7

- 3** **schizophrenic** person suffering from a mental disease marked by disconnection between thoughts, feelings and actions.
- catatonia** state of inertia. Catatonic schizophrenia is a kind of mental illness in which the sufferer can stay in a state of absolute immobility for a long time.
- bench** in the British judicial system this is the magistrate's or judge's seat in a court. Hesther is probably a magistrate. A magistrate is usually an unpaid layperson appointed to try minor offences.
- Polynesian** inhabitant of islands in the central and west Pacific including Hawaii and New Zealand.
- 4** **Spanish fly** dried beetle formerly used in medicine and thought to have aphrodisiac qualities.
- 6** **Doublemint** brand of chewing gum.
- Martini** popular vermouth drink. This and the Doublemint gum are both featured in advertising jingles which were well known at the time that this play was first produced. Alan's repetition of these