

STARS

A concept album for the stage

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Final rehearsal draft

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Pre-show

Music: Space is the Place by Sun Ra. Audience are ideally seated in-the-round or horseshoe to accentuate the storytelling feel. Set not yet fully revealed.

Opening ritual

A suggested ritual, feel free to experiment: on house clearance there is silence, haze, a mystical, starry feeling. Enter one male followed by one female performer. He is dressed in robes and hat that resonate with the culture of Dogon, Mali, as do all the visual elements of the show. He whirs a bullroar over his head, the humming sound represents the voice of the sacred star, Sirius B / Po Tolo, signifying the arrival of the Nommo. The female performer represents the Nommo – an African androgynous anthro-amphibian space traveler. She is dressed in costume / headdress / mask inspired by Dogon culture. The two walk slowly, ritualistically into the ominous dimly lit space. Arriving centre stage, they turn full circle with the bullroar. Whirring subsides and the two performers are still, facing each other. Lights go black and hand drawn animation of the Nommo story is projected with voice over and creative captions (artistic surtitles) below. The animation in the play connects in some way all to, Maryam / Mary, whom we meet later. The animation are Maryam / Mary's drawings, they are what she sees or imagines or even dreams, whether or not we see her in a particular scene. All words spoken in the play are creatively captioned, either embedded into the animations or projected on the set during spoken text, all to support access for people who are D/deaf or hearing impaired (especially as music plays throughout the show). Audio-description is also available on headsets and touch-tours are offered for people who are blind or visually impaired. Relaxed performances are also offered at specific performances. All efforts are made to make sure the production is inclusive to all.

Nommo animation / voice over:

(Both performers, calling, slow, in sync) Nommo... Nommo...

Once we were two

When two was one

Space duo, in solo

We Nommo

Both female and male,

Of land and of sea,

From Po Tolo

Comes Nommo

Of Sirius: B.

Beings of twin

Fish-like-body-persons

With feet and fins

Scales and skin

Rainbow chameleons

Ancestral aliens

This is a tale of tails...

Scene – Funeral / New Dawn

During the animation / voice over the two performers remove their costumes (used again at the end of the show) in the darkness. At the end of the animation up-beat music e.g. Hudson Mohawke's Scudd Books kicks in, contrasting the scene. Female performer is now revealed as Mrs, our protagonist, a Black (or Black mixed heritage) woman of around 80 years old, from South-East London. Male performer is her son, a DJ in his thirties. Mrs and DJ son are dressed for a funeral. DJ son is holding an urn, he hands it to Mrs. They embrace, sadly. Mrs watches DJ son walking away. He enters his radio studio, raised, upstage left or right. He prepares to play a dance music radio set (mixing live) throughout the show, no pause. Suggestion of the London council-flat kitchen of an elderly lady is revealed. Significant items: fridge, washing machine, radio, kitchen table perhaps a 60s lampshade that looks a little like a space-ship hovers, two chairs. However, set is non-naturalistic. The play is magic in its realism e.g. all props come from inside the fridge. Mrs enters, places the urn on the table, looks at it, a determined look.

Scene – Flash forward to GP

A flash-forward in time. Scudd Books cuts out immediately as we find Mrs sitting in the chair of the GP's surgery, down centre stage. She faces the audience. Perotation 6 by Floating Points plays. Female performer plays Mrs and the GP (and all characters except DJ son). Mrs is over 80 years old and speaks with a South East London / cockney accent of her time, which is more precise and clipped than the cockney accent of today. Although she is Black, her voice is like any white Londoner of her time. GP is in her 30s, white English RP. All live spoken text is projected in creative captions, displayed from the DJ's radio studio.

MRS: Me husband died

And it's taken my whole life

But Dr,

I've never had one

And I want one

Before I die.

I want to know what it's like.

What is wrong with me?

GP: Anorgasmia

MRS: She said.

Ain't that a flower?

GP: Also known as 'Coughlan's Syndrome'.

MRS: Nice Irish name.

GP: An inability to orgasm. Sometimes because of lack of adequate stimulation, sometimes it's caused by trauma: fight, flight, freeze. Sometimes -

MRS: - Sometimes, I feel I almost might, when I have a forbidden thought... and then I... sneeze. Do you think it's connected?

GP: I really don't know about that Mrs...

MRS: Could there be a cure?

GP: Have you ever tried... self-help?

MRS: I had a lavender bath and candles.

GP: I mean, perhaps with an electrical device? Not in the bath of course, that would be dangerous. Was there anything else Mrs... We are passed our ten

minutes and you are well past menopause so perhaps you'd like to find a hobby instead? And I'd like you to book in for a dementia test - it's just a precaution...

MRS: Dementia?

Hobby!

Electrical device?!

I need to find a *cure*.

My orgasm has got to be out there

Somewhere!

Scene – Kitchen

Back to the present. Mrs is back in the kitchen looking at the urn on the table as before. There is also a goldfish bowl filled with water (the goldfish is not real), a radio, an ashtray, a packet of cigarettes, a lighter, The Mirror newspaper, reading glasses, a half-eaten sandwich and a mug of tea on the table. Mrs sits. Turns on the radio. Nibbles the sandwich, sips tea, listens to DJ Son speaking softly, unassuming, through the mic. Mrs proudly mouths his tag line (below) 'taking you through the night, sci-fi style. Frequencies open'.

DJ Son: This is Michael Manners the original AfroCelt on NTX.

MRS: That's my boy...

DJ Son: Show's dedicated to Terry Manners. Taking you through the night, sci-fi style. Frequencies open...

(DJ Son plays West G Cafeteria by the Space Dimension Controller. Mrs listens, takes out a cigarette, clocks it is the last one in the box, lights it, watching the urn).

MRS: *(Quoting Mr, her dead husband)* "What now Mrs?" What now... *(Music underscores. Mrs sits, takes her reading glasses, opens The Mirror newspaper and reads her horoscope)*. 'Planetary activity in Leo, and today's new moon marks the start of a personal adventure – even at the onset of Winter. Despite the fact a pursuit of yours turned out to be a flight of fancy, you should accept an invitation from afar, without hesitation. Keep doors open. Breathe new air. Throw caution to the wind'.

(To the fish in the goldfish bowl). Well cat, what do we make of that? (Mrs listens in her mind to cat, the fish, who she hears saying "time to give up smoking". Cat's text is also captioned and there could be fish animation here). Agreed. (Mrs draws deep on her last cigarette. Stubs it out. Takes a deep breath, she might cough. Sips tea. Pauses at a newspaper article).

'Government plans to send refugees into space.

First came Brexit, now - Spexit: Space exit'

(Imagining) Immigrants on Mars...

Asylum on Saturn...

Aliens meet the aliens...

(Reading an advert next to the article) 'Whether you are a migrant, exile or adventurous expat, you can apply for Project Spexit in partnership with the Virgin Space Travel Programme. Budget planet relocation (one way) or luxury space holiday (return). Terms and conditions... apply online now!'

Wow.

'www.' ...

(Disappointed as she is not online).

Don't no one use pen and paper anymore...

DJ Son: This is Space Dimension Controller with 'West G Cafeteria'.

Mrs: Cat food! How rude, I am forgetting myself.

(She gets fish food from the fridge which stores all props, empties the container of fish flakes - only a few are left, feels guilty for neglecting 'Cat').

Whatchu lookin at me like that for? Shops shut. You'll have to wait 'til morning... *(Mrs hears 'cat' suggesting "how about a sprinkling of the old man?" The fish's lines are also captioned. Mrs reacts shocked). I can't do that! (She hears 'Cat' saying "well he ate fish didn't he?").*

You're not wrong about that, Cat.

Mr probably polished off several of your relatives,

Beer battered with vinegar and chips,

Licking his lips,

Pissed *(picking up the urn, impersonating Mr. Here and throughout, the performer embodies the action described, act out the memories, keep it live).*

Staggering back to manhandle his Mrs every Friday, Saturday, any day, any night

So -

DJ Son and Mrs: (*simultaneously without awareness of each other*): - what goes around...

DJ Son: comes around.

(*Music. Mrs empties the ashes from the urn into the goldfish bowl. The fish gobbles the ashes. Mrs laughs*).

DJ Son: *Fight*. This track is one of mine on Native City. Memories of my old man, Terry.

(*Mrs hears her son, shame. Then to the audience, her confessors*).

MRS: What must you think of me?

(*Justifying herself*) Sixty years of 'honour and obey'

I was a zombie, a slave,

The *living* dead, that was me.

He don't feel nothing now do he?

He don't feel nothing at all.

So nothing's changed there.

There's not a husband, a father

Only a jailer.

But I've served my time in this space.

I've known my place.

(*Mrs starts saying the line along with the music, enjoying the freedom*)

Yeah I've served my time in this space,

I've known my place.

What *now*?

DJ Son: *Travlin'* by Norm Talley...

Sound of doorbell. Animation projected: through a spyhole, on the landing of the council block, we see a girl, around 11 years old, of African descent, ringing the doorbell, desperate to use the toilet and Mrs letting her in.

Animation could become abstract to convey time passing, the moon (symbolising Mrs' husband) disappears. The sun (symbolising the girl) rises.

Quick change into Mrs' comfy in-door clothes.

Scene – Mrs and Maryam become friends

Another doorbell. Mrs is brighter, comfy clothes, slippers, now smoking a vape. The girl is at the door. Female performer plays Mrs, the girl and all the characters (except the DJ Son). Girl is polite, confident, innocent, matter-of-fact, she speaks RP English but as a second language, perhaps the faintest memory of somewhere in Africa.

MRS: Hello again little friend.

GIRL: I brought you chocolates, for my birthday (*hands a box of Celebrations chocolates*).

MRS: It's not my birthday.

GIRL: I know, that's why I said it, *my* birthday.

MRS: Oh, happy birthday. Aren't you the one supposed to be getting presents?

GIRL: I got lots of presents. I got... holiday.

MRS: Oh... going anywhere nice?

GIRL: Been already. Came back for big school starting. Was saving Celebrations but Mum said I should give them to you to say thank you.

MRS: What for?

GIRL: Yesterday's toilet.

MRS: Oh right. No need to thank me, just being neighbourly but... come in and have a Celebration anyway.

(They go inside. Mrs goes over to the table with the girl, who is scared of the fish).

MRS: Make yourself at home. He's all right, he don't bite. If my furry friend Feena was still alive she'd likely have a scratch but this cat's safe in his bowl.

(Girl looks confused. Mrs empties a few of the chocolates on the table).

MRS: *(Referring to the chocolates)* What's your favourite?

GIRL: Number 3: Galaxy. Number 2: Milky Way. Number 1: Mars. I love planets and stars.

MRS: You wanna apply for that Spexit.

GIRL: Doing a project for school. And when I grow up I am going be a space woman.

MRS: Oooh a little Lieutenant Uhura. I always felt a bit like her when I worked at British Telecom. *(Like Uhura)* "Hailing frequencies open Captain".

GIRL: What?

MRS: *Star Trek*.

GIRL: No, *Star Trek* is not real. I am going to be real, like Mae Jemison.

MRS: Who?

GIRL: First black woman up there. But I will be first from my country. (*She points up*)

MRS: (*Like E.T.*) "Phone home"...

GIRL: Huh?

MRS: *E.T.*

GIRL: I don't know what you are talking about.

MRS: (*Like Tom Hanks in Apollo 13*) "Houston, we have a problem".

GIRL: I know. I need more science.

MRS: You better have a Mars then. I'll put the kettle on.

(*To the audience*) And that's how it started.

We finished off the Celebrations

Every afternoon after school

While she worked on her stars project.

Then she'd have a pee and I'd a vape and a cup of tea.

(*Short animation as Mrs picks up Maryam's stars project book and flicks through the pages. We briefly see fragments of Mary's drawings, writing, diagrams...*)

"What are you doing in there Mary?..."

She said she liked the quiet,

She says she liked my toilet,

The woolly loo-roll holder - she reads astronomy.

Feeling sorry for the grieving old lady

She'd fetch me *The Mirror*, daily.

GIRL: But *Metro* is free?

MRS: Sometimes you gotta pay for quality Mary.

Her name ain't even Mary,

Her name is Maryam

But no one at school can say it right

And Mary sounds less Muslim.

She went to Catholic school see,

The primary attached to my parish

And since that soldier got his head chopped off in Woolwich

It is easier to be a Mary than a Maryam.

(Mrs says the rosary several times throughout the play).

Hail Mary, full of grace

The Lord is with thee

Blessed art thee amongst women

And blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus

DJ Son: Here's Rhythm is Rhythm with *Strings of Life...*

Scene – Memories of church and children

MRS: I got born again for ten minutes

Searching for “the final frontier”

When Mr was having his affair with Venus

(calling towards flat in the opposite block) from over there!

I was lonely and they give you free chicken on a Sunday.

But Venus eventually had enough of his drinking n’ pissing in the bed so he came back and shat in ours instead

And I went back to mass.

I dunno,

Maybe I needed to believe leaving him was a sin,

Maybe I’m scared of it:

Freedom.

And being Catholic is much more straight-forward than being a happy clappy,

All those dancing socks-in-sandals -

You know where you stand when you’re in Rome

(Mrs re-plays her time in a born-again, mainly white, evangelical Christian church. Goes into the audience).

I could just never fall in the

Evangelical hall,

I’ve never been very good at being ecstatic.

I look around one revival

And it’s like they’re all having seizures,

Trembling, heaving and talking in tongues:

“MymamamasgottaSuzukimypapasgottaHondamypapasgottaSuzukimymama
sgottaHondaaiiwannaHyundaiwannaHyundaiwannaHyundai...”

But I don't go nowhere

I'm just stood there

And no matter how hard the Preacher push-push-pushes (*attempting to 'slay' someone 'in-the-spirit,' she reaches towards a carefully chosen audience member*) my head

I just can't let go of my bones.

(*Returning to the stage / on the bus*).

When it's all over I have chips and curry sauce on the bus back to Woolwich.

My kind of communion.

Chris, always waits for me to leave the service

Pretends he's going the same way,

He's one of those hippy holys...

CHRIS: Jesus got me off heroin - hallelujah.

MRS: Praise the Lord.

Church was full of unhappy wives and people with addictions,

Chris gets me talking on the bus about unlikely attractions

How he likes -

CHRIS: older women and there's nothing against it in The Bible, Old Testament or New...

MRS: And as I dunked my chips in the curry sauce I confessed to him that I -
sometimes feel drawn to women and my husband's my biggest regret.

He went silent.

I hadn't a clue it was me Chris had a crush on.

Not very Christ like

I was fucking-forty-four he could have been my son!

(*Wistful*) But my son hadn't yet come

I imagined him to be waiting on a star...

And when by some miracle at forty-six I managed to hatch one good egg

(*picking up the radio*)

And my little boy finally arrived! (*Clutching the radio to her chest*)

And I squeeEEEEEEze him close to my breast for 18 years until he says -

DJ Son: (*Suffocated*) I can't bear it anymore mum.

MRS: And he leaves me.

To study music at Uni and then spinning his discs around the world...

(*Quoting Spock, as if saying goodbye*) "Live long and prosper" son.

He's got his own radio show now (*she pauses to listen then speaks into the radio as if her son is tiny*). Done all right for yourself haven't you my little Mikey...

DJ Son: No one calls me 'Mikey', Mum. (*Quoting his business card*) Michael

Manners: Music Producer. DJ. Broadcaster.

MRS: And I think -

(*Sudden rage, directed at her son*) Weren't it me that ripped

To arse-hole from fanny squeezing your big head out of me

Then clawed my way through the menopause with you screeeeeamng at me?

Weren't it me that worked day *and* night shifts all them years
to put music in your fingers and ears?

Weren't it me that stood in the way of you and Mr's fist

So you wouldn't know what you had missed?

- I can call you what I like you arrogant little shit!

And then I caught my thought.

Mother Mary forgive me.

"Yes of course: Michael.

Cuppa tea?

Where's my manners?

I forget".

Yeah, he's done all right for himself Michael, considering...

Where was I? –

DJ Son: *Lunar*... track's by Acre.

MRS: Back to the bus with Chris

Who's half the man my son's grown up to be.

Prick goes and tells someone giving him 'spiritual counseling'

That he's got an obsession for some kind of... (*whisper*) lesbian.

'Course it goes around the congregation like a bush fire.

They haul me in to an 'emergency house meeting' (*acting out the memory*)

I have to take a shift off

Semi-detached in Greenwich

Ornate iron-gate, original tiling,

I think to myself, now that's a lot of tithing.

They sit me down at the big oak kitchen table,

And without so much as a "howdy-do" or a "Hallelu"

Pull down the velux (*pronounced veloo*) blinds announcing -

(*Playing Church elders*)

CHURCH ELDER 1: Your body is a temple and you haven't kept it clean.

CHURCH ELDER 2: That is why your husband treats you –

MRS: the way he did.

CHURCH ELDER 3: That's why he turns to other women and drink.

MRS: The born-again said -

CHURCH ELDER 1: your womb has an omen, Satan has a hold.

CHURCH ELDER 2: That is why you cannot conceive.

CHURCH ELDER 3: Believe-believe-believe.

MRS: And they try to squeeze the

CHURCH ELDER 1: deemon of lesbianism out-out-out!!!

MRS: of me. Declaring it -

CHURCH ELDER 1: entered in through horoscopes,

CHURCH ELDER 2: sci-fi films

CHURCH ELDER 3: and pagans in your *African* ancestry.

MRS: Out comes a saucepan (*re-playing with the goldfish bowl*)

'LeCruset' (*pronounced le-cru-zay*) no less

A big heavy orange one

Very middle class

All place their white hands on my black head, shoulders, breasts

and press-press-press

And there's me, leaning over the saucepan,

And there's them, expecting the

CHURCH ELDER 1: EVIL SPIRIT

MRS: to come out in my vomit

But all I can manage is a little bit of spit.

(*Ironic*) Such a disappointment (*returns the goldfish bowl*).

Never felt quite right with the Evangelicals after that.

And then when Mr finally pulls his penis out of Venus

And they all go

CHURCH ELDER 1: Praise be! Our prayers have been answered.

MRS: And I get pregnant with my son and the elders call another house meeting

CHURCH ELDER 2: Just in case there's another demon.

MRS: And then that Freddie Mercury from Queen dies

And the Leader stands up in the Sunday celebration and says

CHURCH ELDER 1: Mercury got what he deserved, AIDS, the curse -

MRS: I says no.

Enough!

None of this sounds like gentle Jesus or Mother Mary to me

And I love *Bohemian Rhapsody*,

Now Freddie could take you to outer space...

(Bohemian Rhapsody mixes in momentarily with animation from Maryam / Mary's stars book. Mrs flicks through the book, enjoying the music, Mercury's voice rings out "Mama...").

Scene – Mary and Mrs observe the neighbours

Mrs and the girl watch the neighbours from the window. DJ Son mixes in Moondance.

MRS: Mary changed my night to day.

This flat is the deck of the Starship Enterprise.

(Quoting 'Star Trek') 'It's life' Maryam, 'but not as we know it'.

DJ Son: *Moondance* on Tribe.

MRS: We're watching the whole constellation of the council estate.

We survey 'neighbour planets' over kitchen plates.

(Animation of planets / people described below).

She talks me through it all while I have a vape.

MARY: The universe accelerates.

MRS: But looks like our estate is going backwards... Look at him, on his phone by the railing, raging *(impersonating the young blood from the estate)* "it's the system, it's the system"...

(A game, naming the neighbours after planets):

MARY: Jupiter. Hot-head. Full of gas. Could have been a star... Look, Neptune is going out. Only after sunset you see him... dark rings around his eyes.

MRS: Probably working shifts. And look who's coming across the playground.

MARY: Saturn.

MRS: Stunning.

MARY: Big rings in her ears.

MRS: Afro-centric Empress *(Mrs calls)* yes my sister! Saturn!

SATURN: Greetings Auntie!

MRS: *Auntie?* *(Mrs is disappointed, realizing how old she appears).*

MARY: Look, sitting on the bench, Uranus!

MRS: Don't be rude.

MARY: Mrs your jokes are older than you. Uranus looks like his face flipped over. And see, Pluto coming home with her shopping. Pluto's not a real planet. She's a dwarf.

MRS: Don't call her that. She's your height and you wouldn't like it. Gets laughed at but gets on with it. *(Calls out to the woman of short stature passing, with her thumb up)*. Respect! *(The woman looks up)*

PLUTO *(a little cynically)*: Hi.

MRS: And look who it ain't *(kisses her teeth)*.

MARY: Venus? She is really hot *(Mrs grunts)*. And he is really cold, my favourite.

MRS: Where?

MARY: The homeless man in big winter coat and bright red face. All year round.

MRS: *(singing from Bowie's Life on Mars)*

'Oh man, wonder if he'll ever know

He's in the best-selling show

(Calling out of the window) Is there life on Mars?!

(Mary is laughing and applauding).

MRS: *(To the radio)* Let's have a bit of Bowie Mikey!

Those were the days. Just never thought I'd outlive him.

MARY: Your husband?

MRS: No. David Bowie! South London's finest.

MARY: Stormzy is much better!

MRS: (*like Stormzy*) "You're getting way to big for your boots".

(*They laugh*).

MRS: No... I always knew I'd outlive Mr. He was weak.

MARY: But he loved you?

MRS: He might have done. He just didn't know how. Love is what you do, innit?

DJ Son: I'm playing this one on a promise. Here's *Falling Rizlas* from Actress...

(*They listen to the gentle music for a moment*).

MRS: Who am I then?

MARY: Earth.

MRS: Me? Planet Earth? No.

MARY: Yes. You are.

MRS: Why?

MARY: Because, you are mostly blue and covered in clouds.

MRS: Oh.

MARY: And Mr, he is like the moon, always following you around, even though he is dead.

MRS: Blimey.

MARY: And Mrs you are not a healthy planet (*pointing to the vape*). This is not good for you. I read it in *Metro*.

MRS: Heavens. (*Slightly aggressive*) Anything else Dr Spock?

MARY: (*A joke*) Dr *who*?

MRS: Ha! (*Conceding defeat to Mary*). You win. (*Puts her vape away, in the fridge*).

(*Sadly admitting*) I'm not exactly... 'Mother' Earth then.

MARY: Sorry (*i.e. no you're not 'Mother' Earth*).

MRS: It's all right. You're probably right. But you little one are the sun, brightening up my day.

(*A sad pause*).

MARY: (*Sadly, disclosing*) If I am the sun

Maybe that is why

I burn.

If I am the sun,

Maybe that is why
If you looked at me
You would close your eyes...
Perhaps I will build a rocket
For my school project
So I can fly closer
To myself
And then I will keep on flying
(Line sung like acoustic version of Jamila Woods song) Way up.
After myself
To a little star in the dark
'Po Tolo' / Home
From where the 'Nommos' come...
DJ Son: *Bouramsy* from Lil Silva.

Nommo story part 1 – animation interlude

Animation. Mary is recounting the story of the Nommo to Mrs, while she is drawing them for her stars school project. We see the drawings. Text in voice over / subtitles.

MRS: So, the story goes...

MARY: The Nommos

Were migrants from across the cosmos

Sailing the sky to planet Earth.

Descendants from a star that you and I cannot see -

MRS: With naked eyes at least -

MARY: Sirius B.

And for thousands of years,

Sirius A we could see

But Sirius B was known only

To the Dogon of Mali.

MRS: Cousins to the Pharaohs?

MARY: Who knows.

The Dogon call Sirius B, 'Po Tolo'.

'Po'?

MRS: - star?

MARY: Tolo - the tiniest white seed you can scatter in a field...

The white scientists could not see this star.

MRS: Nor could the Dogon, it's too small, too far.

MARY: But their fathers were told of Po Tolo

By?

MRS: - the Nimmos!

MARY: (*Correcting Mrs*) The *Nommos*!

MARY: Ancestor aliens sailing to Africa in a spaceship from Sirius B.

MRS: Seriously?

MARY: They say Sirius B orbits Sirius A every half of a century...

And Dogon paint all they know of the cosmos from the Nommos

On the walls of houses,

Celebrating with rituals, sculptures, dances!

MARY: Dogon art exhibits in New York-London-Paris

MRS: Making Picasso a modernist and careers for anthropologists.

MARY: And then one day

Through a big telescope

MRS: Old blue eyes said

(*impersonating an English scholar*) "Indeed

Sirius has a B that cannot - *nakedly* - be seen"

And he took a photo,

MARY: In 1970.

MRS: European scholars –

(*Mrs as the scholars*)

SCHOLAR 1: What a wonder!

The star really is very, very, dense

Just as that remote tribe said

And it is as white as snow...

But how could these old black Africans know?

SCHOLAR 2: Their cave paintings reveal the vastness of the universe!

Before *us* they knew of Jupiter's moons!

And the rings of Saturn - they could see!

And Sirius B *does* orbit Sirius A every fifty years *precisely*.

SCHOLAR 3: They knew that the planets revolve around the sun

And that the earth was born from a big BIG bang.

While we were still drawing maps of the earth as flat

And believed the horizon was the end of it.

When we were still too scared to set sail,

For fear our boats would fall off into hell,

When we still believed the sun revolved around *us*

SCHOLAR 2: And the dark creatures of the earth were wicked primitive savages.

SCHOLAR 1: While we were burning witches and heretics

MRS: It seems these Africans were intergalactic!

MARY: The Dogon knew all about Sirius

MRS: how-could-that be?...

MARY: We told you! We were told by?...

MRS: (*Getting it right this time*) the Nommos!

Extraterrestrial Afro-hermaphrodite anthro-amphibian migrants!

MARY: Both male and

MRS: female.

MARY: Of land and

MRS: of sea.

MARY: Like humans and

MRS: fish!

MARY: With feet and

MRS: fins!

MARY: Scales and

MRS: skin.

MARY: Ancestor aliens!

Rainbow chameleons!

MRS: This is a tale of tails...

DJ Son: Toumani Diabate: *Salaman*.

Scene – Maryam’s revelation

MRS: She said

MARY: it burnt

MRS: Like no temperature you could touch,

When she was cut,

In the Summer holidays.

Her eyes clenched shut.

Hands pressing her head, shoulders, legs...

MARY: It was so painful.

MRS: Shameful.

But she insisted -

MARY: they did it because they love me.

MRS: Her parents.

That’s why she wouldn’t - (*grabbing her mobile phone*)

“Let me phone the police! I should call social services!”

MARY: No! Please Mrs, don’t say, they might take me away...

MRS: And I know its selfish but

I was afraid they might take her from me too...

So “it’s our little secret”.

Why she liked to use my toilet.

Why it took her 15 minutes to pee.

Why it -

MARY: (*through pain*) stings.

MRS: And she transports herself -

MARY: to the stars!

(A monologue from Mary, sitting on the toilet, clutching a book called STARS by Andrew King, reciting what she has learnt to distract herself from excruciating pain).

MARY: ‘Every atom of your body

Was once part of a star’.

Part of a star...

Part of a star...

An atom is smallest matter

That 'cannot be cut.'¹

Cannot be cut.

Can never be cut

To the stars you must return,

Maryam,

To the stars you must return...

MRS: So that was why she shuffled her feet across the estate

Why she wouldn't drink

Why she was losing weight

No matter how many Galaxys she ate.

She said (*recovering from the pain momentarily*).

MARY: When you look into the stars you look into the past...

But you can't change it.

MRS: If I could,

I would...

(DJ Son rewinds the track and plays forward again with Bouramsy over Nommo animation interlude 2).

Nommo story part 2 – animation interlude

Text is in voice over / captions as with part 1.

MARY: But,

Just like Earth and moon are partners in destiny

Just like Sirius B is one part only of a shining binary

With Sirius A -

MRS: The Dog Star - man's brightest friend

This starry story also has a companion:

MARY: The Dogon *also* believe in one God,

In the sky

MRS: sounds familiar

MARY: Amma,

¹ From Andrew King's, *STARS: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 1 and 29.

Who wanted the Earth as His celestial...(*hesitating, shy of the subject*)

MRS: (sexual) partner

MARY: But he could not... (*hesitating*)

MRS: 'mount her'

MARY: Because her... (*hesitating*)

MRS: 'mountain' was too big

(*Aside just for the adult audience*) It got in the way, he couldn't get it in.

MARY: The willful single mother Earth gave birth

To a jackal, a devil instead!

MRS: Whom Amma rejects as he could not possibly be the father.

MARY: The devil / jackal runs around bringing the world into disorder.

So Amma created the Nommo as messengers, saviours of the world!

But even though the Nommo are

MRS: transmitters of all the Dogon know,

MARY: To the people, Nommo look... (*hesitating*)

MRS: troubling,

As doubling androgynes,

Their bodies ugly and fishy with excessively fleshy differing...

MARY: So Dogon believe to stop the world from all this disorder

MRS: Brought to the world by the reckless devil-jackal son of un-mountable
mother,

MARY: A boy must be made to look like a boy and a girl must be made to look
like a girl and we must look like Nommo -

MRS: - no more!

A duel of duals has ensued since then

Repeated the world over

In religions, traditions, medicine.

Justified

With knives,

Scalpels, razor blades and needles in hand

To make a woman a woman

MARY: and a man no less than a man...

MRS: This is an old tale of tails...

MARY: But, once we were two

MRS: When two was one

MARY: And some of us want to go home.

(End animation).

DJ Son: - Here's *Bright Star*, the Sunset Remix.

(Track plays).

Scene - Why?

MRS: Why?...

MARY: Tradition.

MRS: Yes but why?

Tradition.

Later she said:

MARY: Mrs I asked my mum, about that thing.

MRS: Did you? What did she say?

MARY: She said English people don't understand and I should never talk about it. I'm not talking about it, OK Mrs?

MRS: OK.

MARY: She said it happened to my brother too, when he was 13, but I was younger and braver. I got bigger party, I got new dress and Elsa dolly from *Frozen* you know "*let it go, let it go...*" OK I am too old but still everybody happy, everybody give us money - much more than my brother!

MRS: That's different Mary, what they cut off the boys ain't the same.

Mary: It's not true. My mum said, little girls have a bit, little boys have a bit, both gets cut, because if we didn't, boys grow into girls and girls grow into boys and no one knows who is who.

MRS: It don't grow into a willy Mary...

MARY: *(Upset)* And then I ask why they close me, why I cannot pee why it hurt so much Mum?... *(Recovering)* She says it happen to her too, and to my grandmother and to every lady body I know in my family since the beginning of time. She say it make us clean and calm. Pure and perfect girl for marriage.

MRS: Mary it's not right.

MARY: But my mum said!

MRS: Mary what you got, what you *had*, down there, no one is supposed to touch unless you want them to, and when they do it's supposed to feel... (*Mrs isn't sure how it's supposed to feel*)

MARY: It's supposed to feel?...

MRS: Nice.

MARY: Nice? (*i.e. is that all?*)

MRS: (*Realising the inadequacy of 'nice'*) Like the best thing in the whole world!

MARY: What is the best thing in the whole world?

MRS: I dunno. Ice cream. It's supposed to feel like ice cream in the Summer down there. It won't make much difference to your brother Mary, except he'll probably never get his winkle caught in his zipper.

MARY: I don't understand.

MRS: Neither do I.

MARY: It is supposed to feel nice? It just *hurts*...

(*Pause*).

You feel nice? With Mr?

MRS: You can't ask me that!

MARY: Why you ask me questions then?! I am not a girl any more Mrs. I know things now.

MRS: I don't feel nothing, he's dead.

MARY: No, before he went to heaven?... What was it like, on your wedding night?

MRS: He's not in heaven Mary, there's not a hell big enough for him and it was never like ice cream. I only married him because I thought I had to after what happened in the fridge.

MARY: Fridge?

MRS: This ain't about me Maryam. You and me dear, it is not the same.

MARY: Why?

MRS: Because you're just a child and I'm an old girl. I'm a soft old bourbon in the bottom of the biscuit tin. I've had my chance at happiness you ain't!

MARY: (*Defensive, angry*) I have happy chances, lots of them. You are making me sad! I am going be a space woman. Like Nommo! My Mum and Dad love me. They're not like you and Mr! This our culture. If I didn't get cut no husband would want me. And what will happen to me if no one will want

me in this far away country where no one says hello, how is your mother, father, sister, brother?... My family love me... It's just... (*Terrible pain*)
Owwwwwwwww... I have to pee.

MRS: She shoved past me and then left straight after that. (*Mrs gets her vape. Smokes a little*). Didn't stop for chocolate or a chat. Came back the next day but wouldn't cross my doorstep. Holds that doll from *Frozen* in a shiney green dress. Thrust it in my face -

MARY: (*with doll*) Look!

MRS: "*Let it go, let it go...*" You coming in?

MARY: Underneath – LOOK!

MRS: What is it?

MARY: Nothing. Nothing there. Just like me. I am pretty.

MRS: You are pretty Mary.

You need to pee? Come inside -

MARY: - NO! Mum says (*recalling her Mother*) "Maryam come. Why only *you* goes to her house? Hm? You know people in this country always doing funny funny things to children. I see it on TV every day. Maybe she is a paedo. Maybe she is a witch. Stay away from that old woman. OK? Come here (*cuddles her daughter/self*). Good girl".

MARY: Maybe I am cut but you are cut too Mrs. Cut off and covered in scars. But I am going to the stars. I am being a space woman, the first woman from my country and I don't need this dirty thing. My mother and my father they brought me here, they (*quoting her father*) "sacrificed everything and provide everything". I don't need anything. And when I grow up I will provide them.

MRS: That's right. That's right. Look come inside and let's -

MARY: No, no, no! There is nothing for me inside. There is nothing for you! Just a cigarette that is not a cigarette, a cat that is really a fish, science that is fiction, *The Mirror* with no reflection – just made up stars and a son who hides inside the radio to keep away from YOU! Sorry. Sorry. You should go outside Mrs, instead of watching it from the window. Mum says I am not allowed to come anymore.

MRS: And she starts to cry and she starts to pee and she shuffles away, across the estate.

What about your school project? Mary! Maryam! Your book! (*waving the stars school project book which has been left behind*).

She didn't look back.

I watched out from my window after school but I couldn't see her for days. So I done like she said. I go outside (*acting out the memory*) knock on their door. (*Pause*). Nothing. Look through the letter box and... a black hole... Like they were never there. And ever since that night, I been having this recurring dream...

DJ Son: *3am...* from Bearcubs...

Scene – Eclipse

(*Animation of the dream, with music and DJ Son's voice / over, captions*).

DJ SON'S VOICE: The cold moon passes in front of the sun.

We all stand in the playground with cardboard glasses on.

All the neighbours look up at the sky,

But you are looking at the neighbours,

Searching the crowd, for her.

Some cry, some cheer, some shiver with fear.

The birds fall silent,

And we all feel bitterly cold.

It starts to rain

And when we go back up to the flat,

The door is open,

The radio is white noise,

And the fish is floating in the bowl...

And you know...

You *know*...

(*Quoting the film Blade Runner*): 'All those moments will be lost in time.

Like tears in rain.

Time to die...'

(*End animation / voice over*).

MARY: Gravity is a grave,

MRS: she'd say...

MARY: It can only go one way... No matter how hard we pray...

Scene – Call Michael

MRS: (*Distressed*) I couldn't go back to mass after that. I had no stomach for praying to a virgin. I had no stomach for tradition, religion. I had no stomach for any of it. I want to leave this flat, this planet. (*Mrs gets her phone, music shifts, 'Elegant and Never Tiring by Lorenzo Senny*). I phone my Mikey in the middle of the night, crying, "I've had enough, 'beam me up', I wanna go to the stars, with Mary". He thought I meant that euthanasia clinic in Switzerland. (*Crying, distraught*) "No, no you don't understand, Mary came to me, Mary revealed it all, and she made me think about everything I've denied in my life and then she just disappeared as if she was never there, as if she was just a story in *The Mirror* and then last night I had a dream about an eclipse and I heard your voice and now I think she might be dead and she was my sun my son, she was my reason for getting up in the morning. Michael, Michael *listen*: at the centre of the whole constellation, there's a bright little girl, there's no future without her but no one can stand to face her... We close our eyes. This is your mother, 'signing off, signing off...' (*Beat. Recovers composure*) That brought him home for Christmas (*DJ SON comes down from his studio, sits with his Mum*). Got cover for his radio show and bought me (*Mrs unwraps the gift from DJ Son, delighted*) an 'Ipad'! Spends boxing-day teaching me how to use it.

DJ Son: You can look up your stars. Even does crosswords.

MRS: Ohhh... And do you think I can send one of them 'emails' on this?

DJ Son: It's a whole universe in there Mum.

MRS: Our first Mr-less-Christmas. Watched old clips from *Star Trek!*

Now I can apply for that Spexit. (*Quoting her horoscope*). 'The start of a personal adventure'. That's what my stars said.

DJ Son: Live long and prosper Mum.

(*DJ Son returns to his radio studio*).

MRS: Mary will be up there! Betcha!

DJ Son: That was *Elegant and Never Tiring* by Lorenzo Senni... Time to *Chase the Devil*. (*After lyrics "Lucifer son of the morning, I'm gonna chase you out of Earth!" DJ Son says...*) The Upsetters... and Max Romeo.

Scene – Mrs' biography

Mrs speaks during the opening dub section of the track. She searches on her ipad.

MRS: Project Spexit / *Virgin* Space Travel Programme. Application (*Like Richard Branson*). 'So, first off, tell us a bit about yourself...'

(Listens to music, rocking, smoking her vape, thinking about what to write on the application. She speaks after the lyrics, "I'm gonna put on a iron shirt and chase Satan out of earth, I'm gonna put on an iron shirt and chase the devil out of earth, I'm gonna send him to outer space, to find another race, I'm gonna send him to outer space, to find another race..." track switches to dub version from here).

MRS: During the war I was born, 1944

Throwaway baby of a runaway English wife and a black American GI

But a Jamaican mum and Irish dad rescue me

From a children's home.

Black and white Catholics doing the Lambeth Walk

Mum and Dad were the talk of Southwark.

They always wanted a baby

And didn't mind the controversy.

I was three when they got me

And me mum said I was frozen,

Staring off into space

Whatever they did to me in that place it was no home.

But eventually I learnt to look at adults again

Dreamt of becoming our school's first brown nun,

I could never imagine growing up to marry a man

And that was all that was expected of you back then.

I loved needlework and I was good at Latin,

Weren't I qualified?

But Mum said -

MRS' MUM (*Jamaican, gentle*): Why on earth you want to be a nun – be a nurse like me, that's close enough.

But Dad said -

MRS' DAD: (*Irish, soft*) Sure we need money coming in if we we're ever gonna build that house in the Blue Mountains.

MRS: So just before I'm due to start nursing training

Dad gets me a Summer job in the sandwich factory

Where he drives deliveries with his drinking buddy,

MRS' DAD: That joker, Terry.

MRS: I'm appointed as 'top filling mixer'.

No production line for me

And packaged sandwiches were the future

In 1960.

(*She gets up, steps into her memory*).

Then one hot day, it's egg mayonnaise

So I go into the big fridge

To collect a bucket of eggs

And in comes Terry.

Pulls the big fridge door shut

Says,

TERRY (*white, cockney, jack-the-lad*): "Cwor it's hot. Wanna help me cool off?"

(*Music changes to Mourn by Corbin*)

MRS: I'm frozen to the spot.

Could have been a nurse,

Could have been a nun.

16 years young.

I come out staring into a bucket of eggs

Shivering, bleeding, can't feel me legs

Ashamed.

Two weeks late.

Pregnant.

So Terry asks Dad for me hand

Dad buys a bottle of whiskey

Mum kissed me

I sew a yellow dress

And up we all went down the registry office.

And since that day everybody just called me 'Mrs'

Terry Manners.

MR: Mind your manners Mrs!

MRS: He'd say.

As long as you mind yours Mr!

I'd reply.

And he gets us this council flat all the way over in Woolwich -

(*an aside*) Might as well have moved to fucking France.

He carries me across the threshold and I giggle.

MR: I hope my Mrs ain't frigid.

MRS: I never laugh at that particular crack.

But I do learn to smile again,

Even learn to like him,

He was happy-go-lucky,

Says:

MR: I could love you, if you let me.

MRS: Gives up deliveries and starts painting and decorating (*referring to the flat*)

Getting everything ready for our new baby.

Says he was -

MR: a good man really.

Not a lot of other white blokes would -

MRS: want me.

MR: And we look good together, don't we?

Milk and tea,

our baby will be the sugar.

You should take it nice and easy...

MRS: But our baby was born as still as a Sunday morning

And from that day

Terry never stops drinking

And I never stop thinking about Gabrielle

My angel,

And what she could have been,

And what she was doing now,
Above the clouds with Jesus...

Never did do that nursing training...
My dear old mum nursed me until
I went back to work at the sandwich factory
And all the girls gave me fags and made me sweet tea
“So, so, sorry...”
I hardly let Terry touch me after that
I only had to look at him and he froze.
I’d stay up late to avoid it
Watch the box (*an aside*) any old shit...
Years went by with Terry down the pub
And me sitting on the sofa,
Stroking the cats and staring at the sci-fis on the silver screen...

And one day the Evangelicals come knocking at the door
CHURCH ELDER 1: Come to a Sunday Celebration?
MRS: Thought, why not, what am I stuck in here for?
And I finally got pregnant with Michael
And Mr finally left me alone.
Years of affairs but I didn’t care.
Got meself a nice desk job at British Telecom -
‘Hailing frequencies open captain’.
Life was the girls at BT, my son and science fiction.
No worries, no plans, no expectations...
But when Michael left home I was stricken with grief again.
Couldn’t get up for work anymore and they packed me in
I was due for retiring...

Scene – Shahana

DJ Son plays Jonzon Crew’s version of Space is the Place.

MRS: I know.
There’s something missing.

Forgive me father for I have sinned

It's been years since my last confession.

(Excited confession) 1984:

Before the Evangelicals came to my door, before Michael was born...

I never imagined anyone could want me,

Love me,

Make love to me...

Until one day

A lady in a launderette offers me fabric softener with

Two drops of her own pressed lavender

And a smile that says -

(Shahana is a British-South-Asian musician from Lancashire, rich Blackburn or Accrington accent, nomad, free spirit, laid back)

SHAHANA: I handle delicates with care.

MRS: And somewhere between slow soak and fast spin

Everything feels washable and new.

(In the laundrette now. Animation of washing machines, soap suds and space...)

The launderette was my sanctuary,

That's one place Mr would never follow me.

The men who did come in with their black bin bags

Always look a little found out

SHAHANA: Huddled over their smalls

Hoping no one sees their white streaks and brown skids,

Ashamed of their own fluids...

MRS: Shahana was as easy as her name and the Lancashire rain.

She saw me watching her and asks

SHAHANA: Want a bit?

MRS: Oh, sorry for staring I just...

SHAHANA: Wondered if it makes a difference? It does, it really does.

MRS: And that's how it starts.

SHAHANA: Have some lavender for your smalls.

MRS: Oh no, it's my husband's jumpers and me cat blankets!

SHAHANA: Aw shame, well let's make them all the fluffier shall we?...

MRS: We'd mostly meet on my morning off, a Monday...

Oh hello, Shahana... how are you?

SHAHANA: Shattered.

MRS: She'd been singing at some world-festival or other

While I spent the weekend smiling at spillages on his shirts

Throwing bras in the yellow basket without a care in the world.

She said she finds

SHAHANA: the launderette relaxing. Watching the washing go round and round.

MRS: Earth turning around the sun.

SHAHANA: And the heat in here is better than the leisure centre sauna and you don't have to deal with all the blokes asking about your tattoos.

MRS: Shahana's got a lot of tattoos and piercings, purple streaks and a couple of teeth missing.

She looks like a pirate, and just as brave

And I only got one invitation.

She wanted to show me her van

SHAHANA: Correction: classic converted UPS delivery truck. Pine cabin inside - I did it all up meself.

MRS: And I turned no more than 90 degrees before she kissed me, Unfolded me

And stretched me out, like a clean sheet.

And I couldn't believe this was happening to me, 'Life begins at 40'.

There was so much water...

I never knew there could be so much water...

Like she was the force conducting the tides

And not the moon,

Not the moon at all...

And she rowed across my belly

(acting out all of this)

Like a pirate on the sea

She smuggled me.

I looked up from the deep

And on an on blindly
She crossed the ocean
Swelling inside me
Until she reached her island in the sun
And arched her back
And threw back her head
And sang out a YESSSSSSSSSS!
And crashed like waves upon my chest
Sshhhhhhhhaaaaaaaaannnaaaaaaahhh...
So that is what it is like,
I'd seen it in films but...
That is what it's like,
When it's real,
It is *so powerful*.
No wonder they keep trying to stop women from having them.
And me, I was just terrified of what it might do to me,
That if I exploded like her supernova
I'd never be able to put meself back together!

SHAHANA: Come on Mrs, your turn.

MRS: No. Shahana. Just, hold me.

And she did. Gently. And I wanted nothing more.

SHAHANA: Correction: you don't feel you *deserve* anything more. You need to go home tonight, lock the bathroom door, light some candles and have a hot bath with lavender oil, lay back, let it all go and love yourself first Mrs. No one else has a chance unless you do.

MRS: I'll give it a try...

SHAHANA: (Quoting *Star Wars*) 'Try not. Do, or do not'.

MRS (*finishing the quote, their little joke*): 'There is no try'.

Bye (*kisses Shahana goodbye*).

But I went home to Mr instead

And said:

"It's time we got a washing machine".

And I weren't being mean.

I just knew it was all over as soon as it began

Because when I looked up, Shahana was closing her eyes
and mine were open wide.

Hail Mary, Full of Grace

The Lord is with thee

Blessed art thee amongst women...

Mondays especially I'd miss her

So instead of the launderette I'd visit the convent and sit with old the nuns

(momentarily sitting with the nuns in the convent)

And wonder if they'd ever had one,

And wonder what my life could have been

If I had a nun's habit instead of a smoking one,

And been married to gentle Jesus instead of Mr Terry Manners.

Who died on the toilet,

Cradling an empty bottle of whiskey,

Like a baby.

(Mrs action conveys the end of the online application).

DJ Son: Here's another one of mine, a remix of Jamila Woods, *Way Up*...

Shahana / Maryam's song

(Shahana sings an acapella version of Way Up by Jamila Woods, at one of her gigs, strumming a guitar. She sings in her own accent, she is easy with it).

I'm an alien from inner space

They can read my mind all in my face

No one knows I'd rather spend my days

Alone on my pillow

I don't care what they say

I've been waiting here for so long

Call me by my name

They keep telling me I'm wrong

We are not the same

I don't belong here

I don't belong here

(Cut to)

I wanna go

To my own private planet I've been dreaming of

Little moon in my head I be moving on

Up and away, I'm way up

Up and away,

(Now Maryam / Mary is singing, simply, as if for a school assembly, animation is projected of her going into space, inspired by the lyrics below)

Just cos I'm born here

Don't mean I'm from here

I'm ready to run

And rocket to sun

I'm way up

I'm way up

I'm an alien from inner space

They can't read my mind all in my face

No one knows I'd rather spend my days

Alone on my pillow

Earth's getting old

So colour me gone

I'm ready to run

And rocket to sun

And it ain't so bad

So don't look so sad

Just cos I'm born here

Don't mean I'm from here

(now Mrs sings, gently to herself, in her kitchen)

*Just cos I'm born here
Don't mean I'm from here
I'm ready to run
And rocket to sun
I'm way up
I'm way up²*

DJ Son: Going back up with Sun Ra...

Scene - Mrs does the crossword

Time has passed. Mrs wears her glasses, does the crossword, listening to music, smoking her vape, a cloud of smoke, writing / searching on the ipad – but not necessarily naturalistically. The crossword can be played out in the space.

MRS: 7 down

'Nerve ending of female pleasure. The Latin for shame'.

P space space E space space space.

(Looks on the ipad for the answer, scanning her findings, reflected in the animation)

'As big as a phallus, on the inside:

The clitoris.

Twice as sensitive as the head of a penis

The only organ in the entire human body

Designed purely and only

For pleasure'.

I been Googling.

(Mrs Googles 'cut clitoris' on the ipad. She follows a film on Youtube).

'200 million women and girls all over the world

Clipped, cut, sliced, sewn up,

Some left only with a hole the width of a matchstick

And on their wedding night, the groom takes a knife and...'

² Lyrics and music by Jamila Woods, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fGVW5T7R2U0> accessed 11/06/18.

YouTube.

(Overwhelmed).

(Resumes crossword).

Seven down

P space space E space space space.

'The nerve ending of female pleasure'

(Thinks) 'Pudenda'

'The Latin for shame'.

(Mrs suddenly thinks she hears Mary in the toilet. Switches off the radio. No music. Silence for the only moment in the play).

MRS: Mary??

Maryam you in there?...

You out there?...

(Silence. Mrs, a little afraid, turns on the radio again to fill the space).

MRS: Eclipse, significance:

'Secrets, omens... Hidden emotions...'

'Something missing'.

'Turmoil, repressed'.

'Fear of failure,

Fear of success'.

Eclipse, science:

'A cosmic coincidence'.

What are the chances?

That I'd get invited to lunch, by Maxi.

DJ Son: *Sunday Morning* by Seven Davies Junior...

Scene – Maxi³

MRS: Maxi was younger than me, we used to work at BT.

We'd have such a laugh back then, but I retired and we drifted apart.

But recently Maxi got married to my butcher, Barry.

³ Thank you to Valentino Vecchietti for consultation on this scene.

He's always decent to me.

Extra chipolatas since Mr died.

Started to feel there was a little bit of hope.

Company and cut-price pork chops,

They live above the shop.

One January Saturday when they were closing up,

Maxi invites me up for Sunday lunch.

(Maxi is in her 50s and young with it, black, bold, full of life, power and joy).

MAXI: Barry will be off dangling his maggots in the canal and I can't be bothered to do a roast just for meself. Come up and see me.

MRS: I bought a nice bottle of wine and a box of Quality Streets.

We chatted for hours.

Maxi said Barry the butcher was good to her: *(The women are tipsy.)*

MAXI: I got him trained! Now he's a damn good lover!

MRS: I confided in Maxi on the sofa:

I took no pleasure in Mister what so ever

He might as well have been rubbing sand paper

He paid more attention to cutting in and decorating than he ever did to me.

MAXI: Poor you. Me and Barry lift off every Saturday night after *Britain's Got Talent!*

MRS: I knew. Everybody knew. You could hear it half way up the high street.

MAXI: It's 'cos of my SUPER-POWER!

MRS: Your what?

MAXI: Shall I tell you a story?

MRS: Go on then.

MAXI: You sitting comfortable? When I was born, a Dr, named Money, stood at the end my mother's hospital bed and said *(Maxi plays Dr Money, upper-class, cold, arrogant, English surgeon):*

DR MONEY: I'm afraid your 'daughter' has ambiguous genitalia. But we'll perform simple surgery, a quick cliterodectomy to cosmetically correct the clit-

MAXI'S MUM *(who is from Jamaica):* - but wait!

DR MONEY: It is far too big to be a normal clitoris.

MAXI'S MUM: Well if I had given birth to a son who was hung like a donkey would we still be having this conversation Dr Money? No, I don't think so.

MAXI: And you know what he said?

DR MONEY: It is deformed! If *that* was hanging off of your face you'd have a job...

MAXI: You'd have job?!

(Maxi, outraged, goes off on one, fast, rapping along to the music).

A nose job

A face-lift

A tummy-tuck

A cellulite suck

Botox pump

Breast implant

Buttock enhancement

Wax

Sack back and crack

Bum-hole bleach

Designer vagina

Vagina tightener

Labia reduction

Hymen restoration

Circumcision

Snip-excision

Clitordectomy

Infibulation

Any old genital mutilation

On or off the NHS

What's the difference?!

(Beat. Back to the scene with Maxi's Mum. Dr on the attack).

DR MONEY: Do you want her to have an abnormal life? How will she ever get a husband, be a *normal* wife - this child will grow up confused!

MAXI'S MUM: Rewind, rewind, selector, come again... *(DJ Son rewinds the vinyl)*

Let me get this straight...

You wanna take my baby,

Guess what them would have looked like,

If them didn't look like what them do

Make them look like something that them don't

So it easier for you to know what box to tick on what form?⁴

I think you is the one that's confused Dr Money!

You can change the boxes on that form in your hand,

But you nah change my baby.

Put your scalpel back in your pocket.

The Lord makes no mistake!

I shall call her: 'Maxi'.

And if she favour a boy, she can call himself Maxi same way. No problem.

MAXI (*as herself*): They call me 'intersex' and I say too right I am into-sex!

Heheyyyy!

I'm a Black Panther!

I got a super-power bigger than the King of Wakanda! (*Doing the 'Wakanda' greeting, larger than life now*).

You can keep your vibranium!

I don't need no vibrator!

My body is natural and my orgasms are out of this wooooooooooooooooorld

STAR!!!

(*DJ plays Cosmic Slop by Funkadelic. Pause to take it all in*).

MRS: Wow... Inter-sex...

MAXI: There's millions of us all over the planet. It's as common as being a red-head, but it's not connected, otherwise nuff Irish people would be hermaphrodites innit? (*Laughs gently to herself at the thought*). Seriously though, you never really know what's going with people inside, or down below. And I am one of the lucky ones. Cos most intersexys be much worse off than me. I read all about it in *TO THIS DAY!* Magazine. Operating on people with no permission! Drs lying to us, hiding us, humiliating us, shaming us. Secret surgeries, making out we got Cancer, forcing us to be one way or another. Worldwide! It's a (*quoting*) 'Gendercide!'⁵ Drs ain't supposed to play God, Dr's ain't supposed to lie! Drs ain't supposed to decide which bits of my privates look right to their eye! And get this, when I was eleven yeah, the Drs wanted to operate on me AGAIN, but my Mum says -

⁴ Paraphrased from an interview with Jim Costich, in *Intersexion*, dir. Grant Lahood, 2011 accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QQdOp3COfSs> accessed 01/06/18.

⁵ Intersex activist Hida Vilorio and others termed the phrase, 'gendercide'. See <https://hidaviloria.com/quoted-in-exc-washington-post-intersex-rights-movement-article/> accessed 22/02/19.

MAXI'S MUM: They been messing with black women bodies since slavery days!

Chain and bit, speculum and whip. Anyone try touch you and we'll sue!

MAXI: And I got the balls to do it! Two, still on the inside doing just fine. Yes!

MRS: Bloody hell Maxi, you never said...

MAXI: No one talked about it back-in-the-day. But I found this online action group. First off Barry didn't want me to get involved. Didn't want everyone knowing. I said *(to Barry, really going for him)* I'm not exactly going on Loose Women Baz, its only a website! But he says: *(Barry is slow, kind, lumbering, cockney)*

BARRY: Let's just keep our sex life 'tween you and me, we only just got married Maxi.

MAXI: It ain't about sex Barry, it's about *(precisely quoting something she has read)* 'bodily integrity'.

BARRY: Eh?

MAXI: Anyway, he's come around now.

MRS: Has he?

MAXI: He's much more open-minded since I found him his G.

MRS: His what?

MAXI: His G spot. I found it.

MRS: Did you? Where?

MAXI: Up there *(simple gesture toward her bum)*.

MRS: *(Half laugh half scream in horror)* No! No! no!

MAXI *(gleefully)* Yes! Yes yes Mrs! Every man's got a G Spot up his bum. Just most men are just too proud to let you at it, or too scared it might hurt, but when they do – wooooooooooooooh! *(Singing)* "Free your behind and your mind will follow!" It ain't me you can hear screaming down the high street Mrs, it's Barry hahaaaa! He is so happy... *(Maxi is proud of herself)*.

MRS: Really, Barry, up his bum? I'll never be able to look at his chipolatas the same way again. *(Pause for thought)*. Why the good Lord in his infinite wisdom chose to put a 'G Spot' in a man's bum hole I will never know.

MAXI: Same reason he blessed us with a clitoris! You should count yourself lucky you got one! Have a holiday!

MRS: *(Drifting for a moment)*. Yeah... *(Snapping back)*. Can't be that much of a sin then can it Maxi? Enjoying your... self.

MAXI: What you on about Mrs? I never understood your thing for religion. Priests, Rabbis, urologists, gynaecologists - they're all the same to me. They just wanna control you! They wanna cut off my beautiful big clit! But you wanna see us on a Saturday after *Britain's Got Talent!* (Beat). This chicken's dry. You having that stuffing?

DJ Son: That was *Cosmic Slop* by Funkadelic. And here's Lyman, taking us down *Joy Road*...

MRS: As Maxi tucks into the remains of my plate I contemplate all it means for me...

MRS: My mind wanders to all the hours I spent with the Evangelicals... Trying not to sneeze... Praying for the missionaries smuggling Bibles into Communist China. I wondered if there were any ladies left in Beijing, toddling along on their tiny little feet, stumps, two inches wide. Men found their tangled toes attractive apparently, even under rotting bandages. (*Exhaling in disgust, distress*). I wondered if anyone in China ever prayed for me.

Pray for me...

MAXI (*who has been watching Mrs*): You all right old girl?

MRS: Sorry, where's my manners, I am forgetting myself. Whatchusay?

MAXI: You're drifting off a lot lately. You OK?...

MRS: I don't think so Maxi. I don't think I am...

DJ Son: *Perotation*, Floating Points.

Scene – The GP

MRS: Me husband died

And it's taken my whole life

But Dr,

I've never had one

And I want one

Before I die...

My orgasm has got to be out there

Somewhere!

I know you all think I'm loosing it

That I'm some kind of a... space cadet

And you might just be right about that!

So one last job for you Dr:
I'll be needing a medical certificate
To prove I am fit for travel.
I'm going away.

Scene – The Plan

Mrs is hurriedly packing whilst reading from Mary's stars project book, as if it is an instruction manual. Mrs' speech is directed at Cat. Fragments of animation drawn from the project book are projected as Mrs is trying to piece together her plan. The animation could be fragments that we have seen throughout the play, running through the scene and then climax at the end.

MRS: Cat: there is three things they don't tell you about space travel. One:
(*Mary reappears to Mrs, spirit like*)

MARY: It is extremely painful.

MRS: Up there

Your body is a blissful skin bag of sinews and bones

Floating freeeeeeee

But when you land home

The force

Is like a car crash -

I'm not talking whiplash

I mean every part of you feels crushed

And you can spend the rest of your life killing pain.

MARY: Gravity is a grave.

No one is supposed to know.

MRS: Disabled astronauts ain't the poster NASA wants to sell ya!

But that don't bother me... we're only able-bodied *temporarily*

Cos the other thing they don't tell you about travelling to space is...

When you're up there, the orgasms are out of this world!

Hahahahahahaha...

(*Mrs hears Cat in her head, "what?"*)

I know Cat, that could be an 'alternative fact'

But it is one I am prepared to believe

Cos think about it
Where else do all the orgasms go?
All that energy!
All that power!
Must go somewhere?!
“The Earth moved!”
“I saw stars!” - “Shooting stars!”
Ain’t that what people say?
“Yes! Yes! Yes!”
There’s nothing down here for likes of me and
The likes of Mary...
(*Remembering Shahana*) ‘Love yourself first Mrs... There is no try.’
And Maxi’s right an’ all -
I need a holiday!
One way.
A mission,
To have a ‘*petit mor*’ before I die!
To come and go!
Perhaps sometimes to climax you gotta go that far!
And I ain’t bothered about the pain landing back cos I plan to stay in space.
I seen enough saucers flying past my head to last me a life-time down here
Give me one last pleasure
For all my trauma,
Let me fly!!!
‘Spexit’.
(*Sound of an email pinging in an inbox. Mrs is so excited!*) THE REPLY!
(*Reading the email optimistically*) ‘Dear Mrs Manners,
We regret to inform you that you are ineligible for the government’s ‘Spexit’:
relocation space flight. Priority is given to migrants, refugees from majority
Muslim countries and those still awaiting compensation from the Windrush
Generation.
Charming!
And to Trump it all:
‘We know that this will come as a further disappointment but the *Virgin* Luxury
Space Holiday Travel Programme is only eligible for those aged under 25.’

(Pause. Disappointment. Perhaps a puff on her vape)

MARY: You missed number three!

(Mrs looks in Mary's stars book again).

MRS: The third thing they don't tell you about space travel is...

MARY: There is more technology in a modern day washing machine than the Sputnik that took the rocket dog to heaven

All on his own in 1957.

MRS: HAIL MARY!

I got a washing machine

and a fridge!

(Mrs ends packing by putting the urn in the fridge. Entering a trance like state, wide eyes, music gets louder, building to the climax!)

One small step

For a woman.

I'll boldly go

To *inner* space.

I shall

Shut

My

Eyes.

Tight.

I'll take the Gs

Dare

To forget myself

And remember

Who I am!⁶

I will be afraid

No more. NO MORE!

My name is NORMA MONAGHAN but you can call me NOMMO!

My name is Norma Monaghan and I am coming HOME OHHHHHHH - YES!!!

MAY THE FORCE BE WITH *ME!*

MAY THE FORCE BE WITH YOU!

MAY THE FORCE BE WITH US AAAAAAAAALL!

⁶ Thank you to Sue Mayo for this line!

MY SUN! MY SON! HAIL FREQUENCIES OPEN!

(Mrs shuts her eyes. Dances wildly, as if she is inside a super fast washing machine cycle, until the end of the track which stops suddenly. Black out. Breathing into the silence for three beats. DJ Son plays Scudd Books, the track from the opening. Mirror ball? Club night / star lights).

DJ Son: Thanks for listening. But remember, this is just the beginning. See you on the dance floor down at *(whichever theatre / venue we are playing in)* 'til 2am. Night's called STARS – a celebration of pleasure. Open to all. Entry is free.

A community chorus of women and non-gender conforming technicians in jump suits burst on stage, transforming the space, collectively constructing the rocket, somehow. Alternatively the construction could combine projected animation and or Motion Capture, with the help of the audience. The women dress Mrs / Norma Monaghan in the Nommo costume and mask from the opening. She takes the goldfish bowl, now a space helmet, and gets into the rocket. During this the concluding credits of the show are projected, animated in Maryam / Mary's handwriting. The show transforms into a club night – a celebration of pleasure.

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