

URANUS

(a play about waste)

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CHARACTERS (4 Women, 3 Men)

William Herschel

Age: 42

Astronomer, Inventor, Composer, Musician.

German expatriate living in England.

A tireless ball of obsession and romance.

Boy 1

Age: 22

Backpacking adventurer and recent college graduate (school of business).

Playful, tenacious, lost. Tends to be the leader.

Boy 2

Age: 22

Backpacking adventurer and recent college graduate (undeclared major).

Playful, sensitive, lost. Thinks with his stomach.

Caroline Herschel

Age: 22

William's younger sister, primary assistant and caretaker. A budding astronomer.

Quiet, intelligent and strong.

A member of The Chorus: she can traverse between the Boys' world and her own.

She is the only character who speaks to Gaea.

Alexander Herschel

Played by a woman.

Age: 22

Middle brother. Mischievous and prolific. A skilled clockmaker, a musician.

A member of The Chorus: he can traverse between the Boys' world and his own.

Dietrich Herschel

Played by a woman.

Age: 22

Youngest brother. Headstrong and eager to please. A budding entomologist, a musician.

A member of The Chorus: he can traverse between the Boys' world and his own.

Gaea

Age: perhaps billions of years old.

Perhaps Mother Earth.

Derelict.

SETTING

Piles of discarded things form a ring separating the audience from the performance. This ring can be broken, items taken off and added, it can be puppeteered, it can breathe. It is also where Gaea lives and wanders.

The back of the Herschel home and the garden where most of the Herschel scenes take place are represented and visible throughout. Through a window: a desk where Caroline sits. On the desk: star charts, Flamsteed's catalogue (*Historia Coelestis Britannica*), a candle and a ticking clock.

The Boys' scenes may take place everywhere.

NOTES

The Chorus plays all additional characters except where specified.

At the height of his astronomical obsession, the historical William Herschel spent all night sweeping the skies and all day making telescopes. Therefore, the character of William Herschel should never leave the stage.

Suggested sound cues are indicated in italics (but a designer can just go to town).

URANUS is intended to be a green theater production. In keeping with its theme, this play should be performed in a found space, and all production elements recycled or repurposed. Lighting should be efficient.

Home is where one starts from. As we grow older
The world becomes stranger, the pattern more complicated
Of dead and living. Not the intense moment
Isolated, with no before and after,
But a lifetime burning in every moment
And not the lifetime of one man only
But of old stones that cannot be deciphered.

-T.S. Elliot

If we indulge a fanciful imagination and build worlds of our own, we must not wonder at our going wide from the path of truth and nature.

-William Herschel (1738-1822)

1.

*A man is looking up at the sky through a small cardboard tube that is really a telescope.
His siblings stand before him and speak to us.*

CAROLINE

This is William Herschel.

DIETRICH

Astronomer!

ALEXANDER

Inventor!

DIETRICH

Musician!

ALEXANDER

Madman!

DIETRICH

Pioneer!

ALEXANDER

Maniac!

DIETRICH

Devisor of telescopes!

ALEXANDER

Doubler of the universe!

DIETRICH

The King's patron!

ALEXANDER

The King's knight!

ALEXANDER & DIETRICH

The Father of Modern Astronomy!

CAROLINE

Not yet.

It's March, 1781. We're in our backyard.

SOUND: CRICKETS

Last night, he discovered what he thinks is a comet.

We are outside, under the night sky: the backyard garden of William Herschel's home in Bath, England, 1781.

WILLIAM

How do I look? It's my best suit, do you like it? And you can almost see the stars in my shoes (it's true what they will say about patent leather!). I still have my brown hair, this confounded cowlick... I've nicked the chin with my razor, but clean-shaven nonetheless, does it look--? You must know that from this moment I will also be relying on your eyes, as I have only one (*indicating the telescope*), magnificent though it may be. But the hair—is it--?

He turns to the mirror but discovers his siblings.

Oh! My family! Eyes, hands and heart.

My sister, Caroline! The broom with which I sweep the heavens; my quiet angel, dearest Lina, beside me in everything I do!

My brothers, Alexander and young Dietrich! Devoted, insatiable men. They are renowned performers in Bath, players of drama and disguise!

DIETRICH

(Actually I'm a naturalist.)

ALEXANDER

(And I make clocks.)

WILLIAM

My siblings! Eyes, hands and heart!

By wretched open Postwagons, by rag-tag ships and nauseating horseback, they traveled here to Bath, weeks of endless suffering, to join me, to be my assistants, my caretakers, my secretaries! We are from Germany, you see.

ALEXANDER & DIETRICH

Hanover

WILLIAM

Always *heim* but never *heimweh*

ALEXANDER & DIETRICH

Ever home but never homesick

CAROLINE

Poor mother: to lose father to dropsy and then each of us to England within so few years.

WILLIAM & ALEXANDER & DIETRICH

Poor *father*.

WILLIAM

Oh yes! We have a band! We're really good! Teethed with reeds and mouthpieces we were, toy organs for baby grands, PLAY, my dear ones, play! Ladies and Gentlemen, the Herschel Family Band!

CAROLINE, ALEXANDER and DIETRICH pick up instruments (or cardboard tubes that are really instruments, or nothing at all) and play (or sing) a lively tune.

SOUND: A LIVELY TUNE

WILLIAM accompanies on his “oboe”, but quickly gets distracted, and looks up. The music slows and softens, to underscore.

I found her, you see. Last night. She appeared to me, like a messenger sent by the gods, in a moment of what can only be described as *revelation*. She smiled, from just a stretch across the room (though of course we were many thousand kilometers away). I asked her to dance but she turned from me, the crowds becoming overcast. She left only her glow for me to find. *And I found it.*

Prospero says: “and by my prescience/ I find my zenith doth depend upon/ A most auspicious star.”

Tonight is my destiny, you see! Here we are this evening, you and I, she and me, about to kindle a connection. This huge, vast ocean of darkness besprinkled by twinkling worlds (you can connect the dots and they form pictures of the gods!) and here I am with my trousers buckled and my feet rooted to the earth but my eyes my lips my fingertips are actually *UP THERE!*

WILLIAM lifts himself into the air on the shoulders of Caroline.

I’m floating, you see! Flying!

The process of discovery! *I have become the sky!*

2.

SOUND: TOILET FLUSHING

Boy 1, 22-yrs-old, comes hurtling into the space holding a diploma that is really a telescope. An overloaded pack is strapped to his back. He sees the audience, and the unknown. He gathers his confidence. He enters the space.

He loses his confidence. He looks back at where he came, at the past. He recognizes the emptiness of existence. He is lost. He slumps down to the ground, nearly defeated.

SOUND: TOILET FLUSHING

Just at that moment, another Boy enters through the doorway, himself 22-yrs-old, holding a diploma that is really a telescope and strapped to an equally large backpack. This other Boy sees the audience, gathers his confidence, and enters the space.

Boy 2 sees Boy 1. He taps his head. At first, they circle each other, unsure, afraid. Then they see themselves in the other. Cautiously, they extend hands, and shake.

Immediately:

SOUND: BOYS’ THEME

Their handshake turns into an elaborate secret handshake. They are now bonded for life.

BOY 1

There were once two boys

BOY 2

Who, in another story, packed everything they had ever owned onto their backs, and metamorphosed into turtles

BOYS (*presenting their packs*)

Tah-dah!!

BOY 1

And who, just now, before your very eyes, changed again, into other beings...

BOY 2

Travelers!

BOY 1

Adventurers!

BOY 2

Eaters of the Where

BOY 1

The What

BOY 2

And the Who

BOY 1

They are lost boys, and this is their story.

BOY 2

Pretend it's the future. We're in the future.

BOY 1

How far?

BOY 2

Not too far.

BOY 1

Enough.

BOY 2

Just enough so things can happen that don't normally happen in the present.

BOY 1

Things like... adventures in space!

BOY 2

In the future we'll be able to have adventures in space!

BOY 1

Right!

BOY 2

Our Boys decide where to go.

BOYS

Pin the tail on the where!

Pin the tail on the where!

Pin the tail on the where!

Boy gropes around with his hands a bit until they run into Boy's butt.

BOY 1

My butt!

BOY 2

Your butt!

BOY 1

My ass!

BOY 2

Your ass!

BOY 1

My anus!

BOY 2

Your anus!

CAROLINE/ ALEXANDER/ DIETRICH (*whispered*)

Uranus...

Beat.

BOY 2

But it is not to Uranus the Boys intend to go. They end up there, by accident

BOY 1

By some freak effect of nature, by a change in the alignment of the planets

BOY 2

By fate, by luck, *by purpose*.

BOY 1

Pretend we're in a train station.

SOUND: TRAIN STATION

BOY 2

Here's Our Boys in a train station.

BOY 1 (*as loudspeaker*)

Bamberg

Baldwinsville

Pittsburgh

Port Elizabeth

Sheboygan

Skaneateles

Toga

Tempe

Waterford

Thessaloniki

BOYS

Damn!

BOY 2

Here's Our Boys in a train station, running for their train!

SOUND: RUNNING

BOY 1

Pretend we just missed it.

Frustrated exhale. They watch the train pass by.

BOY 2

Excuse me sir, when's the next train to Thessaloniki?

BOY 1 (*as Greek Station Attendant*)

Thessaloniki? Eíkosi dýo.

BOY 2

What's e-cozy dio?

BOY 1 (*as Greek Station Attendant*)

Uh, twenty-two.

BOY 2

What's 22?

BOY 1 (*as Greek Station Attendant*)

10 o'clock.

BOY 2

AM?

BOY 1 (*as Greek Station Attendant*)
PM.

BOY 2
10 o'clock PM?!

BOY 1 (*as Greek Station Attendant*)
Ney.

BOY 2
Great. What are we going to do for 13 hours?!

BOY 1 (*as Greek Station Attendant*)
There is a café. And...
(*as Boy*) Pretend I pick up a pamphlet about a Vintage Train Exhibit.
There's a Vintage Train Exhibit!

BOY 2
Sounds terribly exciting,

BOY 1
Let's get some yogurt.
But as they make their way to the café, Our Boys take a wrong turn...

BOY 2
I thought *dexiá strofi* meant "turn left"... Where the heck are we? And where is everyone else?

SOUND: VINTAGE TRAIN EXHIBIT

Throughout the following, the ticking of Caroline's clock becomes louder and louder, as she falls asleep at her desk, while cataloguing.

Alexander and Dietrich watch the Boys from afar.

BOY 1
There is no one around. An empty, dimly-lit platform, clearly out of use for some time.

BOY 2
Hey look, a Vintage Train. This must be the Vintage Train Exhibit.

BOY 1
Pretend Our Boys are standing in front of a dusty old line of rail cars. It would probably look contemporary to you, but to Our Boys of the future, it leaves much to be desired. It looks ancient, rusty. The last, lonely train of its kind.

BOY 2
There is a rope partition in front of an open door leading into one of the cars. There's a light on inside.

BOY 1
It seems to be calling to us... something about it is calling to us. Let's check it out.

They “go inside.”

BOY 2

Pretend I’m reading a sign: “Passenger Train. Circa 2005.”

BOY 1

Wow. That was like fifty years ago.

BOY 2

“All about the interactive experience train and what life was like in transit for People of Past.” Crappy translation.

BOY 1

Ah.

And then we go inside, and... it’s pretty boring. Just a big empty train car with a bunch of historical pictures mounted on the walls and old suitcases and stuff.

BOY 2

Let’s find the café, man. I’m hungry.

BOY 1

BUT THEN...

*Alexander and Dietrich talk over Caroline, who has fallen asleep. The ticking clock has become quite loud by now.
The Boys are frozen.*

They brothers stop the clock. They sing the orchestration to Holst’s “Uranus, The Magician” a capella beneath the following scene. The storytelling and movement of the scene is choreographed to the Holst, making it a dance.

BOY 1

...Just as Our Boys are about to step out of the stupid Vintage Train Exhibit, the stupid Vintage Train Exhibit begins to MOVE.

BOY 2

What the...?

BOY 1

We’re *moving*!

BOY 2

Before Our Boys have a chance to think about what is happening, the old creaky train exhibit is speeding forward through a dark tunnel at rapid speed. Our Boys are glued to their seats, cheeks flapping like dogs out the car window.

BOY 1

Faster and faster and faster and faster and faster and faster and faster and FASTER!

BOY 2

The tunnel is long and jet-black.
But there, light at the end!

BOY 1

BAM! Daylight! Free of the tunnel, the train is whipping through a barren field Where are we?!

BOY 2

Looks like Russia... or... Africa... or...

BOY 1

Dude! The tracks are ending! The TRACKS ARE ENDING!!

BOY 2

A few hundred meters ahead and fast approaching, the tracks end as they hit the wide blue ocean.

BOY 1

I didn't even write a will! Jack Hrkach, if you hear this, you can have all my books, the half bottle of Stoli in my room, and my entire collection of ninja turtles!

BOY 2

Wait! Wait! Pretend at the last second the train turns into a plane!

BOY 1

Our Boys are not on a train, but a plane!

BOY 2

On this evening, on accident and by purpose, the Athens Vintage Train Exhibit sprouts wings, directing its mysterious route to the supernatural. It develops an anti-gravity chamber, ignites secret rocket boosters, points its nose upward, and heads on a direct route toward the third largest planet in our solar system.

BOY 1

A *space* plane!

BOY 2

Exploding through earth's atmosphere, they forget their confusion for a moment as the awesome galaxy stretches out in front of their very eyes.

The Boys admire the universe. The Brothers admire the Boys.

Caroline wakes up, disoriented. She looks through the telescope, to orient herself.

CAROLINE

Mercury.

BOYS & ALEXANDER & DIETRICH

Mercury!

CAROLINE

In Greek: Hermes.

*Alexander & Dietrich impersonate Mercury.
The Boys improvise as they orbit them.*

CAROLINE
Venus.

BOYS & ALEXANDER & DIETRICH
Venus!

CAROLINE
In Greek: Aphrodite.

*Alexander & Dietrich impersonate Venus.
The Boys improvise as they orbit them.*

CAROLINE
Mars!

BOYS & ALEXANDER & DIETRICH
Mars!

CAROLINE
In Greek: Ares!

*The Boys and Brothers charge each other, fighting. Alexander scoops up Caroline, as if a war prize, dragging her into the game.
The war pauses for a moment.*

BOY 1
Space is...endless... Space is...indescribable. I can't even describe it to you. I won't even describe it, it's indescribable.

CAROLINE
Apollo—The Sun!

Perhaps they shade their eyes, as a group.

BOY 2
The sun is as bright and hot as you can imagine, but still the plane flies on!

Now they are all playing together, full out. They fly from one planet to the next, dancing and making silly representations of each.

CAROLINE
Jupiter!

ALL
Jupiter!

BOY 1
In Greek: Zeus!

DIETRICH
Saturn!

ALL
Saturn!

ALEXANDER
In Greek: Cronos!

BOY 2
And then...

ALL
URANUS!

Blackout.

3.

Perhaps, if you screw up your eyes, the ring of rubbish surrounding the playing space makes the skyline of a small world. Gaea exists among these piles. In fact, it isn't rubbish at all, but the billions of precious artifacts that Gaea has saved throughout the entire history of the universe. Each item is a memory, carefully placed.

Gaea is very small, and ancient. She looks just like the piles around her; we could easily mistake her for trash. In fact, we do mistake her for trash; she's been sitting in one of the piles since the beginning of the play, sleeping, or thinking, or dead. But now she moves. She is looking for something.

She sees the audience. Whether she actually sees us or merely imagines us is under debate. She speaks:

GAEA

Out of the dust I am the oldest story in the book.

Not me, entirely, but me before; me when I was not a me, me when I was more than a long-neglected plot upon which all things have occurred; me when I was *is*.

She picks up an object (perhaps old wooden music box).

This is me, too.

From chaos I was created to create. It was he, he who is also a part of me (like all others and like none), I created him, to be mine, to be me, beside me, above me, on top of me, my husband and my firstborn son. Heaven himself. And we created... So. Much. Together. Everything, really. Really, everything. He was my child, and husband, and neither, and me. How could we know then, so long ago, that beautiful things decay?

It was *he* who made power a thing of the powerful, ascribed fear to the father. But I am mother first and foremost, before all else (as I am before all else), and I can do no greater work than to beget and protect. He must be king, and so he must. And I must be forever mother, and so I must.

I watch men climb mountains, silently pray them to remember who they are, who is below them, that once they reach the heavens they can go no further and only down, now. Blow up the mountaintop and replace it with themselves, but then where does the mountain go? Where do *I* go?

I was looking for something...

She continues searching.

Where are they?

4.

Caroline is asleep at her desk, on top of her clock.

WILLIAM

Lina? Lina! CAROLINE!

Caroline awakens, disoriented, as if from a dream.

She notices that the clock has stopped. She starts it ticking again.

CAROLINE

I'm in here, William.

WILLIAM

It's the most important day of my existence and you're nodding off?!

CAROLINE

It's four in the morning.

WILLIAM

No, it is five! She gave me the slip at midnight, wicked angel, but I was ill-prepared. Tonight, I shall be steeled, I shall be fortified!

O, futuro, c'e solo lei, solo noi. A presto, domani sarà il mio oggi. O, futuro, futuro, futuro! Vengo!

CAROLINE

You haven't slept a wink.

WILLIAM

Discovery! Such is the life of discovery! Come.

He tosses his telescope into a trash can.

We're building another telescope.

5.

SOUND: GRAND CHORUS SOUNDTRACK

BOY 1

The space plane does not slow down. We're expecting it to slow down, to reveal the upside-down rings and clouds and satellites of the planet's extremities in cinematic slow motion with a grand chorus soundtrack of exaltation...but it doesn't. The plane goes hurdling into the rocky icy peaks and everything is destroyed and nothing is spared.

SOUND: EXPLOSION

The boys sit, dejected. Their story appears to be over.

BOY 2

Everything, that is, except Our Boys!

The Boys spring to life, and perform their elaborate secret handshake.

SOUND: BOYS THEME

BOY 1

How their bodies and packs managed to survive demolition and remain virtually unscathed is... indescribable. I can't even describe it to you.

BOY 2

But here we are. An unknown world.

BOY 1

The first things: Panic,

BOYS

Ahhh!!!

BOY 2

Bewilderment,

BOYS

Huh???

BOY 1

The Call of Nature,

BOY 2

I really need to find a little boys' room.

BOY 1

And a sign:

They indicate a huge sign in front of them:

BOYS
URANUS. NO DUMPING.

BOY 2
(beat) Crap.

BOY 1
The next things: Hunger.

*SOUND: THE ENORMOUS SOUND OF HUNGER.
The Boys react accordingly, clutching their tummies.*

BOY 2
Got anything to eat?

BOY 1
I think I have some toothpaste somewhere...

BOY 2 *(sarcasm)*
Delicious.

BOY 1
We look around.

*They look through their diplomas that are really telescopes.
Alexander watches them from afar.*

BOY 2
Uranus is like...well, it looks a lot like...Have you ever had your head stuck inside a trash can? It looks like that. Except...more. Miles and miles and miles of more.

BOY 1
Yes! Pretend in the future, all the garbage dumps on Earth filled up, and all the important people didn't know what to do, so

BOY 2
So they started sending all their garbage to Uranus!

BOY 1
And now it's this big planet made of garbage!

BOY 2
Yes!

They look at each other. They gag and pinch their noses.

BOY 2 *(to audience)*

Remember when you mix all different color paints together and all the individual colors get cancelled out and make the color of puke? The same on Uranus, with smells. Except instead of the *color* of puke? The smell of it.

BOY 1
You hungry now?

Pause.

BOY 2
Sooo. What happens on a planet made of garbage?

BOY 1
Uhh.
Pretend... Um.
Pretend...

BOY 2
Pretend we... uh...

BOY 1
There are *people!* Pretend there are *people* on Uranus!

BOY 2
Yeah!

BOY 1
Suddenly this guy appears out of nowhere.

SOUND: THE JOHN

BOY 2 (*as The John*)
Hello!

BOY 1
Whoa. Uh... Hi.

BOY 2 (*as The John*)
Welcome to Uranus! Population 2 million, according to the latest statistics!

BOY 1
Thanks. Um. Who are you?

BOY 2 (*as The John*)
They call me The John.

BOY 1
The John?

BOY 2 (*as The John*)

Those who assume significant positions on Uranus are given definite articles to wear with their names. We find it to be a very useful system. My surname is John, but my position is The Greeter, and some know me as The Guide. Therefore I am called—

SOUND: THE JOHN

ALEXANDER (*taking over as The John*)
--The John!

The Boys pause for a moment, at the presence of a new playmate. But only for a moment.

BOY 2
Nice to meet you, “The John.” I am called “The Boy.” He is known as “The Boy.” We are “The Boys.”

BOY 1
We’re from Earth.

THE JOHN (*from now on played by Alexander*)
I am so very pleased to meet you! You both look strong, and healthy. I am sure you will fit right in here. Come with me!

BOY 1
Where are we going?

THE JOHN
To The City, of course! I am here to acclimate you to our world. There’s no better place to access Uranus than at its center!

The John starts off.
SOUND: THE ENORMOUS SOUND OF HUNGER

BOY 2
They’ve got to have food in a city. Right?

BOY 1
Only one way to find out.

BOY 2
Hey, take some stuff out of my pack. Little things, front pocket.

BOY 1
What for?

BOY 2
I think I read this somewhere.

He begins dropping items as if breadcrumbs.

BOY 1

Are you crazy? The sign said “No Dumping.”

BOY 2

It’ll help us find our way back!

Resigned, they follow The John, dropping items every few feet.

6.

SOUND: ROOSTER

Daytime.

William is constructing a much larger telescope. He sits among scraps of cardboard, polishing a mirror. Caroline makes adjustments to the “stand” of the telescope (which may or may not be herself).

WILLIAM

To make a telescope

Requires reflection.

You begin with a mirror: a mix of amalgamated metal that’s melted and molten and poured into a mold made of horse dung. When it cools, it’s heavy and unfinished, more rock than crystal; you won’t be able to see your face.

So you need a grinder, to grind. And you grind, filing it down, smoothing the surface. It’s the hard part, you’ll sweat for it. A man-made hand-sanded operation of pure nature. Elemental. Barbaric.

Then you can be gentle. A polishing cloth, to polish. That’s the nice part, the subtle part. You polish and polish and polish until time disappears and there is only polishing now, only you and the cloth and the metal and the promise of what’s-to-come. And then, like the sun in spring gently nudging metamorphic conclusions in caterpillars and flowers, you begin to see your face.

He looks at his reflection.

Our father Isaac was a passionate man, a musician. He raised us in his image. “If Leopold Mozart could do it, so can I!” When I began my first composition, he said to me, “Music is for the future. It is for other ears, another time. Never write music about regret. If it is sad, let it be sad for the people of the future who will never get to experience the beauty of, say, this particular tree. If it is for this tree, write about the leaves it is soon to birth, the seeds it will spread: the orchards of the future! And if it is for love, write about your lives together fifty years from now.”

CAROLINE

How disappointed he would be to know you no longer compose.

WILLIAM

Dammit, Lina, have you read Hamlet or have you not?! “The apparel oft proclaims the man!” Does this look like the hat of an *oboist* to you?!

CAROLINE (*under her breath*)

It’s the same hat you’ve had for five yea--

WILLIAM

Nno! It looks like the hat of an *astronomer*! As-tron-o-mer! A pox on your music! I didn't discover a comet with my oboe, now did I?! No I did not!

CAROLINE

Drink your tea.

He does, gulping it all down in one breath.

Slightly calmed, he continues his work, and his speech to the audience.

WILLIAM

To make a telescope requires reflection, *but only for a moment.*

Mirrors of course are illusions, tricks of the eye. Everything is reversed. Your left hand looks like your right, your right hand looks like your left, and you can never really see all of you at once.

Sometimes (and here's a secret) I think the mirror is waiting for me; that somehow light travels in reverse on the other side, and performs my actions a moment before I do them. For a hesitation, a hair, a comma of time, I am the future reflected! And sometimes I imagine that if I grind the other side of the mirror, the solid, impenetrable side, a passageway will open... There will soon be a man in England named Charles Dodgson who will write a story about a girl in a blue dress who travels through a mirror and enters the world on the other side. Extraordinary!

Caroline marches a larger cardboard tube (that is really a telescope) toward William, singing pomp.

William adds the mirror ceremoniously. The telescope is roughly finished. They take turns peering through it.

WILLIAM

Oh! It's magnificent! Alexander! Dietrich! Come look! Where have they run off to?

CAROLINE

I can see Venus!

WILLIAM

Looking at a star through a telescope is actually looking at it in the past, did you know that? The star appearing on the horizon, for instance, the second one to the right... perhaps it existed a thousand years ago, and we are only just seeing it now. Possibilities are endless.

CAROLINE

It could be from the *future*!

WILLIAM

Why not? Possibilities are as layered as light!

CAROLINE & WILLIAM

What a telescope!

CAROLINE

It's so handsome, William.

WILLIAM

It's so BIG, Lina! Wait'll Watson sees it!

CAROLINE

Should I write to him?

WILLIAM

Not yet, not yet! First we find her tail, then we tell the world!

CAROLINE

How soon, do you think, until the sky--

WILLIAM

Tonight, Lina! Tonight is the night!

CAROLINE

Good. Why don't you sleep, until then.

WILLIAM (*indicating the scraps on the ground*)

Why don't you clean this up?

CAROLINE

What shall I do with the old telescopes?

WILLIAM

Just throw them away.

I'll be inside. I've a serenade to write.

He is dancing off with his newest creation.

CAROLINE

You better take off your hat, then.

WILLIAM

singing

CAROLINE

You need to sleep!

WILLIAM

And you, dear sister, need to *sweep*!

Caroline sweeps up the mess.

Gaea is seen, searching.

Caroline stops, and watches her.

GAEA

They were very small, as I remember them...

Easy to hold, easy to abandon...

7.

SOUND: BOYS THEME

BOY 2

Our Boys follow The John down winding roads, past precious little towns and suburbs.

Pointing out town signs.

BOY 1

Poopé

BOY 2

Booté

BOY 1

Arsé

Boy stops in his tracks.

BOY 2

I ran out of toiletries.

BOY 1

Drop something else.

BOY 2

Like what?

BOY 1

I don't know, something small. Just use anything. We have to find our way back. I for one would rather not spend the rest of my twenties prancing about Uranus.

Boy grabs items from his pack and they begin walking again, catching up to The John, dropping bigger things every few feet.

BOY 2

Sphincterville

BOY 1

Fecalton Gap

BOY 2

Prostaterson

And then...

THE JOHN
Colonopolis!

SOUND: COLONOPOLIS, a grand tour with music.

BOY 1
Colonopolis!

BOY 2
Colonopolis!

THE JOHN
City of the Future! Come on Boys, let's go!

*Dietrich and Caroline join the game.
The Siblings pretend various city folk throughout this number. They sing:*

CITY FOLK
*You're in Uranus!
Land of Invention!
We're pioneers
Of Ural Retention!*

BOY 2
A city, urban sprawl!

BOY 1
But look! The streets are paved with the multi-colored plastic of little girls' costume jewelry.

BOY 2
A building built of broken umbrellas!

BOY 1
A building built of bottled water bottles!

BOY 2
A skyscraper of diapers.

BOY 1
A high rise of plastic bags!

BOY 2
Dirty diapers.

BOY 1
Structures held together by the scrapings of peanut butter left in the bottom of the jar.

BOY 2
Where are the restaurants?

BOY 1

A bridge made of ripped photographs-- over a river of glittering trinkets, empty perfume bottles and rejected wedding rings.

BOY 2

Where are the vending machines?

BOY 1

Automobiles of old refrigerator boxes with milk crate seats and bubble wrap tires, running purely on flat soda and curdled milk.

BOY 2

Where are the hot dog stands?!

Excuse me, The John, where can we get something to eat?

THE JOHN

Uranus is a land of creativity! We have some of the most innovative citizens in the universe. Nothing new is ever made, but everything used is useful. We've built an entire civilization by reutilizing your rubbish.

MINERS (*singing*)

You're in Uranus!

Land of Invention!

We're pioneers

Of Uranal Retention!

BOY 1

Are they just breaking apart computers?

THE JOHN

They're mining. Most Earthian technological apparatuses have precious metals within them. You'd be surprised how much gold is in a cellular phone. Our economy thrives as a result. You see, everything is useful, because everything has something precious deep within it.

MINER JOHN

Hello, The John!

THE JOHN

Hello John!

BOY 1

His name is John as well?

THE JOHN

Most Uranians have uncomplicated names. Our private lives are quite simple, because our professional lives are so extraordinary.

BOY 2

Is there a toilet nearby, I've had to go since Mercury...

THE JOHN

Ever heard of “one man’s trash is another man’s treasure?” Here we live by that creed. You’d be surprised what you can do with the springs from an old mattress, fingernails, or the little tags that hold bread bags together. When nothing is wasted, the world is a scavenger hunt and everyone is an artist!

BOY 1

A school!

CHILDREN (*singing*)

You’re in Uranus!

Land of Invention!

We’re pioneers

Of Uranal Retention!

TEACHER (*played by Boy 1*)

Very good, class! Now if you would please take out your found text assignments. Who would like to go first? (*hands go up*) Lou, John, and then Lou-Lou.

KID 1

I found this in my Dad’s basement. “A long time ago in a galaxy far away it is a period of civil.”

Applause.

KID 2

I mesmerized mine. “I have a dream that one day…” That’s it.

Applause.

KID 3

Mine’s really short. “It was the best of times, it was the worst of Tim.”

Applause.

BOY 1

The teacher looks as young as the students! Everyone is so beautiful here.

THE JOHN

We’ve learned how to make our world sustainable. Our weather is controlled. Every day is sunny and sixty-five degrees. If it were any hotter, for instance, things might melt and cause a real problem. And there’s no need for rain when you’re not growing anything new. There’s no violence, because no one wastes anything, including useful fellow citizens. You see, we have achieved essential equilibrium!

BOY 2

How about some essential eats. I’ll take street meat at this point.

THE JOHN

There’s one more place I’d like to show you, Boys.

BOY 1

Lead on, The John.

The Boys, Alexander and Dietrich exit. Caroline immediately returns to her desk.

8.

SOUND: CRICKETS

Night.

William is simultaneously writing a song out loud, meticulously adjusting his new telescope, scanning the skies and speaking to us.

WILLIAM

Music (hum)

You might not know much about comets.

I know everything about comets.

Adjust

Comets are elliptic, like eggs. They carry water and life. And like a mother, their moment in the spotlight is fleeting.

Music (lyrics about "Futura my love")

Though their hearts are made of stone and ice, they are dainty creatures really, soft and breakable.

Adjust

She takes her time circling the sun; small, petite steps, humming to herself and swishing her hair... It may be years before she returns to the place she started from. And eventually after so many orbits, travel becomes too much for her delicate nature, and she evaporates away.

Music, Adjust

But of course most significant, most characteristic, and most beautiful is her *tail*.

Ripples of solar dust, ribbons of luminescence: the stunning conclusion. She is but another lump of rock in the sky without her rear end!

Scan, Adjust, Looking through telescope

Her tail, *my* tail, is playing a game of hide-and-go-seek at the moment. She's coy, and demure. She shows me her face, and hides her tail instead behind the oriental fan.

Silly thing. She knows how to press my buttons.

Glancing around.

But I think, my dear Futura, by now it would not be unseemly to allow me to catch a glimpse... no one is looking, after all. It's just the two of us... juuust the two of us...

A Choir Boy enters, played by Dietrich.

CHOIR BOY

Oi.

Oi!

I've come for my lesson.

WILLIAM

Your what?

CHOIR BOY

My lesson. My harpsichord lesson.

Pause. They look at each other.

WILLIAM

Haven't you heard?
About my comet?
I found a comet.

CHOIR BOY

Oh yes. That's really great. Congratulations.

Pause. They look at each other.

WILLIAM

Fine. Sit down. Over there.

A lesson. William can't help but search the heavens while he teaches. Unfortunately the sky is overcast.

SOUND: DISTANT THUNDER

The beginning of the next scene continues to the soundtrack of the lesson.

9.

Gaea appears. Perhaps she finds a music box with a little ballerina inside, and opens it.

GAEA

This is not what I am looking for, but isn't she beautiful?!

They were beautiful. Everything, really, really, everything.

My *sons*. My second-born. Three and one, as we were two and one. Three visions of us from three perfect eyes. And we were so much older then, so much wiser now, sometimes.

My second-born sons. Perfect, strong, and visionary.

But He began to fear, He, saw them differently, wanted them differently, wanted more but different. He, always on top of me, nearly seamless, we, had so many more bloomings. The children came, all of them, many, and I discovered my gift: I could make things *bloom*, so many, many things bloom.

But he could not see past his expectations. They were the most powerful of creatures, and I was proud and He was ugly. They did not look as we did, to Him, and He was scared. He slipped them, each one, into a bag, and tossed them someplace deep, in a hole, in the earth that was me, and wasn't... I wasn't... I... Couldn't. I...

There was nothing I could do.

CAROLINE

Mother

GAEA

No, not I, not ME.

But *they*...

She begins searching again.

CAROLINE

Mother

GAEA

A mother's dream: my children back inside me, returned to me, returning home.

But never to be born: a mother's nightmare.

Re-wombed.

Rewound.

Rewind.

She disappears.

Caroline remains watching the place where Gaea was, as if waiting for an animal to reappear.

10.

SOUND: LABORATORY

A high-tech lab facility. The John leads the Boys through a series of security measures, such as codes and retinal scans and big heavy doors.

Once inside, the other Siblings play scientists, and perhaps the Boys toss them items from their packs that are really lab equipment (which are then discarded at the end of the scene).

THE JOHN

Welcome to Uranal Laboratory! This is where, as you might say, the "magic happens."

BOY 2

Ok, I need food and a toilet. Stat.

THE JOHN

We've got teams of scientists working round the clock to produce the most sophisticated pharmaceuticals and technologies, all from the scavenges of Earth's debris! They are the ones responsible for creating and maintaining our unique ecosystem and way of life.

LOUS

You're in Uranus

Land of Invention

We're pioneers

Of Uranal Retention

THE JOHN

Hello, Lou!

LOU

Hello, The John!

THE JOHN

Lou is the genius behind Regularly Liquitary Dietary Supplements.

BOYS

Regularly Liquil--

LOU

It was simple, really. Once we discovered that nicotine from old cigarette butts could be used as a base to squelch hunger cravings, the rest was cake. A few vitamins later, and voila! No need to eat.

THE JOHN

Moving on.

BOY 1

Wait wait wait. *No need to eat?* You don't *eat* here?

THE JOHN

My dear boy, food is the ultimate source of waste, is it not? Digestion is a filthy process, not to mention the mountain of rot we'd have to deal with in compost. The sorting and cleaning would be endless. There'd be disease, malnutrition, gluttony... imagine the crime!

LOU

I remember one sad case, in the early days before we perfected the Supplements. A little boy named Johnny was caught masticating in his bedroom. His own mother had to pry him off. For weeks, they say, his hand still held the form of the carrot.

BOY 2

Let me get this straight. There is no *food* on Uranus?!?!

BOY 1

And if there's no food, they must not be able to...

BOY 2

"Uranus: No Dumping." Got it.

The John has moved on.

THE JOHN

The Lou!

THE LOU

Greetings, The John!

THE JOHN

The Lou is our senior scientist. He used to be known as The Man Who Stopped the Rain, after he single-handedly invented our state-of-the-art weather control system. And most recently, it was *his* team that made this, our greatest break through.

THE LOU

Have a look in the microscope!

The Boys do so.

Those are live human cells; blood cells, skin cells, all different kinds. Notice anything unusual about their movement?

BOY 1

They're not moving.

THE LOU

Exactly! And they never will.

SOUND: HEAVENLY NOISES

BOY 2

Are they dead?

THE LOU

Quite the opposite. They're very much alive, in a state of suspended animation, still working away at making the body do what it does best. And they will continue to do so, *indefinitely*.

THE JOHN

They will never die, *and neither will we*.

Beat.

BOY 1

What.

THE JOHN, THE LOU & LOU

"We must use only what we have, for that is enough."

THE JOHN

We had to find a way to make that truism a reality, in every way. Including within ourselves.

BOY 2

You don't eat food, you don't go to the bathroom, *and you live forever?!*

THE JOHN

Essentially. Yes. Isn't it extraordinary what science can accomplish when the brain is able to use its entire self, without letting anything go?!

BOY 1

This is all very fascinating, but I think we...need to...go home...

BOY 2

Yeah! Thanks for the, uh, visit, could you point us back the way we came?

THE JOHN

Oh.

You can't leave.

BOY 2

What do you mean we can't leave?

THE JOHN

No one leaves Uranus. Can you imagine how our society would have survived if we allowed every strong and healthy passerby to go away? It would be such a waste.

BOY 1

What are you talking about...

THE JOHN

You are useful. You must be used. Once we have decided the department where best to utilize your full potential, you will be put to work.

BOY 2

This is insane.

THE JOHN

Did you think I was just giving you a free tour? My job is to acclimate you to your new home-- your new *freedom*.

The Boys look at each other.

BOYS

Pretend we run away.

SOUND: RUN AWAY!

A crazy comical chase ensues.

William enters in the middle of the chaos, handing items to the siblings as they pass, indicating that playtime is over and he needs their assistance.

The Boys barely manage to escape. The scene shifts immediately.

11.

SOUND: CRICKETS

Late at night.

William is wrapped in a blanket standing at the telescope, looking through it, as he has been for many hours. The siblings are also wrapped in blankets, showing more signs of shivers than William. Caroline is inside, at her desk and at the ready. Alexander is working on Caroline's clock, bored and tired. Dietrich examines the sky, equally bored.

DIETRICH

It's about time for fireflies.

ALEXANDER

No, not yet.

DIETRICH

It's about time for butterflies.

ALEXANDER

Nope, too cold.

DIETRICH

Then why are there crickets?

ALEXANDER

There shouldn't be. It's for dramatic effect.

WILLIAM (*calling to Caroline*)

7 degrees, 24 minutes. Nothing.

DIETRICH

Ugh, I'm sick of winter!

ALEXANDER

It'll be spring soon.

DIETRICH

When?

ALEXANDER

Another week or two.

DIETRICH

You always say that.

ALEXANDER

Study the dead ones until then.

WILLIAM (*calling to Caroline*)

7 degrees, 25 minutes. *Nichts*.

Dietrich starts dancing like a bug.

DIETRICH

Alex. Alex. What am I?

ALEXANDER

A butterfly.

DIETRICH

Ohh!

WILLIAM (*calling to Caroline*)
Lina, *kommen außerhalb*.

Caroline comes outside.
Dietrich does another dance.

DIETRICH
What am I now?

ALEXANDER
The second ending to Mozart's fifth.

DIETRICH
Ohh! You always guess it!

CAROLINE
Whistles, to get his attention

WILLIAM
Lina, I'm ravenous. Read me something?

ALEXANDER
Would you like to hear a riddle?

DIETRICH
Okay.

ALEXANDER
Myself is made of time, and therefore I am relative. I have two hands, a face and many other machines, a complex pattern of numbers and rhythm. I run at 180 million miles per second, because my limbs are made of light. I am currently 22, and due for a rewinding.

DIETRICH
A clock!

ALEXANDER
Nope! Yours truly, Johann Alexander Herschel!

DIETRICH
Ohh!

Caroline reads from a book of Shakespeare while spoon-feeding William.

CAROLINE
Is it thy will thy image should keep open
My heavy eyelids to the weary night?

WILLIAM (*to audience*)

This is Shakespeare.

CAROLINE

Dost thou desire my slumbers should be broken
While shadows like to thee do mock my sight?
Is it thy spirit that thou send'st from thee
So far from home into my deeds to pry,
To find out shames and idle hours in me,
The scope and tenor of thy jealousy?

WILLIAM

Nothing through the 460 mirror, hand me the 932. And the Schnapps.

Alexander and Caroline lift the mirror out of the telescope, replace it with another. Caroline never stops reading.

CAROLINE

O no, thy love, though much, is not so great;
It is my love that keeps mine eye awake,
Mine own true love that doth my rest defeat,
To play watchman ever for thy sake.
For thee watch I, whilst--

WILLIAM grabs the book from Caroline, throws it off somewhere.

WILLIAM

Nothing.

Here I am, alive again at 3am, drunk and disappointed.

Don't look at me like that. She stood me up, that's what she's done. Night after night, a sentry at the reflector, playing watchman for thy sake.

My face feels fat.

Too many stupid clouds. I wish I could make a telescope long enough to go all the way through the clouds. Stupid clouds.

Hey. Hey. Dywanna know something? In the future --

Sir William Watson (played by Alexander) enters.

WATSON

William? William!

CAROLINE

It's Watson, William.

WILLIAM

William Watson, M.D., F.R.S, future knight of the realm, future Mayor of Bath

WATSON

I say, Herschel!

WILLIAM

Watson, my old new friend.

WATSON
William!

WILLIAM
William! We're both named William. Isn't that extraordinary.

WATSON
I thought I'd drop by.

WILLIAM
At 3am.

WATSON
I figured you'd be up and at it. I was right. Caroline, Dietrich.

CAROLINE & DIETRICH (*asleep*)
Dr. Watson.

WATSON
Look at this garden. Forgive me, dear Caroline, but it's a regular wilderness out here. I shall write to Linnaeus: "Imagine," I'll say, "Imagine, Carl: our Homemade Herschel has a garden to match his manic mind!"

WILLIAM
Schnapps?

WATSON
Is it true, Herschel? A comet?

WILLIAM
See for yourself. Take a little peek. Be my guest. Stick your eye in the little peephole. But heads-up, she's well covered tonight, so you won't see *nichts*.

Watson looks in the telescope.

WATSON
Hm. Not much clarity.

WILLIAM
No, no, not much clarity.

WATSON
Well that's awfully too bad, William. I had hoped to catch a glimpse. Everyone's been talking about it. You're becoming quite a personality at the society, what with your double stars, your Moon-men, and now this.

Watson continues to blab on quietly, while looking and adjusting the telescope.

*Where * is indicated, William speaks over Watson, paying more attention to the reflection in his bottle of booze.*

At some point, Caroline lifts Dietrich onto her back and carries him inside to bed.

You've even got a name in London, you know. I happened to wander into a shop on Bank Street the other day and your name came up in conversation between some philosophical gentleman buying a steak pie and the owner. "That Hermstel fellow" (no one seems to be able to pronounce it correctly!) "That Hermstel fellow discovered a comet. Oh yes, an extraordinary musician, and now an astronomer. He lives in Bath. * Is that so? Indeed. A fitting home, I think: turning into a regular Roman god himself!" I of course mentioned that I knew you, spent many evenings in your garden, "minding the heavens," as you say, or lending a hand with the polishing, and they were most impressed. Had myself a pint on the house, thanks for that one, haha!

WILLIAM *(over Watson)*

I wonder why we look up at all, when we can see the stars in the river, or the Roman Baths, my shoes... In the future, that's how my son will watch the transit of Venus, by looking at a canvas, at the shadows the planet makes as it passes across the sun. Something like that.

WATSON *(looking through the telescope)*

Oh!

WILLIAM

Somehow, the future reflected.

WATSON

Oh my...

WILLIAM

What? Is it--

William glances at the now cloudless sky, then rushes to the telescope, nudging Watson out of the way. Caroline is beside him, at the ready.

THERE SHE IS!

WATSON

It's unlike any comet I've ever seen!

WILLIAM *(to Caroline, who writes)*

Constellation Taurus, just east of the Zeta stars.

WATSON

Are you certain it's a comet? Where's its tail?

WILLIAM

Futura, mi amor!

CAROLINE

We haven't found its tail. I agree; it doesn't look like a comet. But what else could it be?

WATSON

What else indeed...

I must write my father at once. He must write to Maskelyne, to Banks. The King must hear of this! You'll take the coach to London. You'll need to be presentable, make a good showing. The telescope, can it travel? Oh, perhaps they'll come here... A new suit, then, new dress. An early spring cleaning of the work rooms. And we'll need to do something about this garden!

WILLIAM

Yes yes, now go away.

WATSON

What?!

WILLIAM

Come back tomorrow, or... Just go.

William retrieves the serenade that he's been writing.

WATSON

Well! An eccentric one indeed. A mad genius. Still, a genius all the same. Goodnight, dear Caroline.

Caroline is equally distracted.

Watson exits, becoming Alexander again.

Inspired, William sings his serenade through the telescope, so that it amplifies.

12.

SOUND: BOYS' THEME

BOY 2

A narrow escape!

BOY 1

Our boys steal away...

BOY 2

Always running!

BOY 1

Down the roads, down the paths, into the countryside, endless barren fields, a vast wilderness of less-useable trash.

BOY 2

I'm hungry.

BOY 1

Only the open land, the open sky, and Our Boys.

BOY 2
Pretend my pack is filled with snacks!

BOY 1
It's not.

Boy 2 imagines that each item he drops is a delicious morsel of food.

BOY 2
Mm, chicken nugget!

BOY 1 (*looking up*)
Look, you can see the rings. And the moons!

BOY 2
Chocolate chip cookie!

BOY 1
The moons of Uranus. Oberon, Titania...

BOY 2
Ooo, happy hour mini cheeseburger!

BOY 1
Are you done?

*They are all out of things to drop. Their backpacks are much lighter, and much less full than they were at the beginning.
They look around.*

BOY 2
We're lost.

BOY 1
Mhm.

BOY 2
It's getting dark.

BOY 1
Mmhm.

SOUND: WIND

Hey, pretend there's a telephone booth, a bright red one like in the olden days, except this one is faded and crusty. Pretend it's just sitting there, in the middle of the field.

BOY 2
A telephone booth! I've never seen one of those in real life!

The Boys make their way to the “telephone booth”. They both squeeze inside, and lift the receiver.

Hello?
Hello?
Anybody there?

BOY 1 (*takes the receiver*)
Mom? Can you hear me? Hi! I’m here on Uranus, and it’s ugly and rotten and stinks like the devil, what are you up to?
Listen, Ma, we’re lost. Can you do me a favor and Google Uranus online or someth—
Ma? Mom?! (*hangs up*)
Nothing.

Silence. Wind.
SOUND: THE ENORMOUS SOUND OF HUNGER
The Boys clutch their stomachs.

BOY 2
What do we do now?

BOY 1
Let’s keep walking.

They walk.
They stop.

BOY 2
I’m bored. This is just a field.

BOY 1
Well. What else is there?

BOY 2
I don’t know.

They walk.
They stop.

A mountain!

BOY 1
A mountain!

BOY 2
Mountains!

BOY 1
Mountains of garbage!

BOY 2
Mountains and mountains and mountains and— (*etc.*)

BOY 1 (*overlapping*)
Mountains and mountains and mountains of *garbage!*

BOY 2
Our Boys climb a mountain!

They climb. It's full of effort.

BOY 1
Through the foothills of scrap Astroturf

BOY 2
Under the steel beam trees

BOY 1
Over boulders of demolished cement, the mossy coverings of insulation

BOY 2
Up the tortuous paths of sheetrock

BOYS
So steep!

BOY 1
And disgusting!

BOY 2
I'm starving!

BOY 1
At least you're not bored.

BOY 2
They get to the top!

BOY 1
The squeak of their shoes as they reach the precipice

BOY 2
The snow-capped mountains of Styrofoam

BOY 1
Look around.

They look around. It's awesome.

BOYS

Wow.

Pointing. Perhaps using their diplomas as telescopes.

BOY 1

That's where we crashed.

BOY 2

That's where we walked.

BOY 1

The lights of Colonopolis, in the distance.

They both see a large expanse below them.

BOYS

An ocean!

SOUND: OCEAN

They listen to the ocean, for a moment.

BOY 2

But it doesn't sound like an ocean.

BOY 1

No.

BOY 2

It's doesn't even look like an ocean.

BOY 1

No.

BOY 2

Because it's not made of water.

BOY 1

Of course not.

BOY 2

It's made of

BOY 1

Plastic.

Beat. The Boy feels jaded.

I'm bored.

Beat.

BOY 2

Look over there! A tiny cottage made of rotten leftovers!

BOY 1

It's getting cold.

BOY 2

Our Boys sneak their way up to this strange little house.
Careful, could be a witch! Don't eat anything!

BOY 1

It's getting really cold.

*Boy 2 gives up pretending. They stand, huddled together.
Meanwhile, in Herschel world:*

WILLIAM

Caroline! We need a bigger telescope!

*William violently throws the current telescope in a garbage can, or similarly discards it, and
rushes off.*

13.

Gaea appears.

GAEA

Children are not food. Children are not to be digested. Children are not supposed to return to the place
they were made. Children come from the stomach, and then you feed theirs. Yes.
I was to create sustenance.

*Caroline watches Gaea.
Gaea sing-songs; it is a fond memory.*

Round and round the piles of wheat
Ketchup and chips, a Cretian fleet,
Crash lands upon the isle of Meat
No matter how much the mother cries, "Eat!"

*She laughs. It turns into:
SOUND: THE ENORMOUS SOUND OF HUNGER
The Boys are shivering.
Caroline watches Gaea.*

GAEA

I was to grow them from the earth and then to feed them from the earth.

Why are they still in the earth? The earth is me. Take them out.

CAROLINE
Mother.

Gaea remembers something, and starts digging.

GAEA
Dig! Yes!
Something about digging! Or...

CAROLINE
Mother.

GAEA
DIG! Must DIG!

CAROLINE
Mother.

GAEA
Where are they?

CAROLINE
Mother. This is the fifth letter I've written to you. I do want to hear how things are going, if you're managing to keep house by yourself, or if you've found help (besides Jacob whom I know is nearly worthless). I wrote a note before we left, reminding you where all the cleaning supplies are, and other things. I tacked it to the door. I thought you'd at least see it on your way back from the market. Or perhaps you haven't left the house?

GAEA
Must dig.
Dig, or
Mine, or
MINE!

*Gaea disappears in her search.
Caroline remains onstage, salvaging various pieces of the discarded telescope.*

14.

BOY 1
Screw it.

Boy takes out an object that is really a box of matches and "strikes" one.

SOUND: MATCH ALIGHTS

The Boys take all the clothes from their packs and “burn” them. They sit around the fire, like cowboys.

SOUND: CAMPFIRE

BOY 2

What did they tell you at graduation?

BOY 1

They said, “Congratulations, son. Now you know everything. Now you won’t make any mistakes. You’re not allowed to ask questions anymore.”

BOY 2

Now what?

BOY 1

It’s time for *job placement*.

BOY 2

First comes taxes.

BOY 1

Next comes marriage.

BOY 2

Then you’ll settle down with a baby carriage.

BOY 1

Mortgage a house, buy a car!

BOY 2

Plan for retirement!

BOY 1

These are the things they tell you.

BOY 2

Or rather, no one tells you, but you’re expected to know it anyways. The TV knows it. The newspaper knows it. The girl you’re buying drinks for knows it.

BOY 1

So why don’t you? Son, I’d like to talk about your *goals for the present*.

BOY 2

Tell me a little about your *intentions for the future*.

BOY 1

And what ever happened to those *plans from the past*?

Quiet. The crackling fire.

*Caroline stops the ticking clock on her desk. She sits near the Boys' fire.
Gradually, every character in the play starts listening and responding to Caroline's story.
Maybe they also sit at the fire (minus Gaea, who always stays in her own world).*

CAROLINE (to the audience, and other characters, but as if to children)

Do you know the story of Gaea and Oranos?

It's a very old story, from Greece.

Once upon a time-- in the very beginning of time, actually-- there was nothing but chaos. And then, there was Gaea, Mother Earth, the first god.

DIETRICH

I thought God was a man?

CAROLINE

Not in this story.

No woman is a mother at first. At first, she was only Gaea.

And then, she began to make things.

She made the Heaven to be her husband. He was called Oranos, URanus, UrAnus.

And everything was perfect, for a time. Husband and wife, heaven and earth... balance and peace.

But then Gaea gave birth to children. They were called the Titans, the Cyclops, the Hundred-headed Ones. She loved them dearly, more than anything, as every mother loves her children. But Oranos hated them. He hated them so much.

GAEA

Why did he hate them?

CAROLINE

I don't know. Maybe he wanted Gaea all to himself. Maybe he wasn't ready for the future, maybe he didn't want to grow up.

He hated them so much he put them in a bag and buried them in a hole in the earth.

BOY 1

But wasn't Gaea the earth?

CAROLINE

Yes.

BOY 1

...

Oh.

WILLIAM

What happened to them?

CAROLINE

Gaea could do nothing on her own. Oranos was now the ruler of the universe. But in secret, Gaea gave one of her sons, Cronos, a sickle (which is a big curved blade). Cronos cut open the bag, setting his siblings free, and they waged war on Oranos.

ALEXANDER

Did they win?

CAROLINE

Yes. They cut off his genitals and threw them into the sea.

DIETRICH & ALEXANDER

Eww!

WILLIAM

It's a stupid old story.

William walks away.

The Boy looks up through his diploma that is really a telescope.

William has stopped, and is also looking up through a small telescope.

So in a way, the Boy and William are looking at each other.

Gaea finds a blue dress. It is precious to her, a memory of when she was young and beautiful.

BOY 1

Wow, look, you can see Earth.

Do you know how, when you look at stars, you're actually looking at them in the past? Well maybe when that Vintage Train Exhibit thing took us here, we went way into the future, like way more than we were pretending to go, and right now we're actually looking at Earth in the past. Like, way in the past. Way before we were even born.

It's trippy, huh.

Boy 2 is snoring. Boy 1 notices this, tosses the diploma on the fire, closes his eyes and immediately snores, too.

WILLIAM

I had a dream this morning.

I was deep underground, close to the center of the earth. It was hot, and I was sweating, as if I had just run a great length. All of a sudden I felt a cold, refreshing breeze hitting my back. I turned around, and in front of me was the entrance to a giant tunnel. I couldn't see the other side of the tunnel... it looked like it went on forever. I stood in front of it, unsure of whether or not to enter. But the breeze was quite nice, and I was quite curious, so I did it, I entered the tunnel.

The lights change. William reenacts his journey.

And then I walked for years, it felt like, through the vortex. Something drove me to continue. I never once turned back.

And when I came out on the other side I found myself in a meadow, all blue. Everything the palest, robins-egg blue; the grass, the clouds, the wind... everything blue. It all looked very soft, like watercolors, melted and unfocused.

Gaea, with the blue dress.

And you were there, standing in the middle of it all, wearing a blue summer dress with a long trail, the tail of which disappeared past the horizon, and no shoes. The wind blew. Your dress blew. Back and forth. You looked so simple and content. Your beauty was in your stillness; your eyes gazing out, somewhere behind me, beyond the meadow, and the rest of your body didn't twitch. You were so focused.

I tried to match your stillness, watching you for a long time, wondering whether you were asleep like me, and dreaming of *my* world at the other end of the tunnel.

But then you spoke to me, and I knew we were here together. You said,

Gaea sings.

GAEA

“You, you lie in my heart
You, you lie in my mind
Your love tears me apart
To you I'll always be kind.
Ya, ya, ya, ya
To you I'll always be kind.”

*Gaea and William waltz from a distance, without seeing each other.
The siblings take up the song in German.*

SILBINGS

“Du, du liegst mir im Herzen
Du, du liegst mir im Sinn
Du, du machst mir viel Schmerzen
Weisst nicht wie gut ich dir bin.
Ja, ja, ja, ja
Weisst nicht wie gut ich dir bin.”

WILLIAM

And, and when in the distance
To you, to you my image appears
Then I'd wish so dearly
That we'll be united—

SOUND: ROOSTER

15.

Daytime.

With gaiety and hurry, William is constructing an even bigger, state-of-the-art telescope. This time, because of its size, Alexander and Caroline assist. Dietrich is seen sitting in the background, catching and cataloging bugs.

*Meanwhile, the siblings sing or play a lively concerto composed by the actual Herschel, to partner William's speech.
The scraps from their building get tossed on top of Dietrich.*

WILLIAM

To make a telescope requires composition.

A simple tube, a cylinder of great length and reach, transforms into a medium, a runway. It must be straight. (The shortest distance between two points, of course.) *It must be straight.* You must take care of linearity; you must maintain alignment. A hollow, straight and delicate form.

And then you create a fingering, a method for digits to spread comfortably around the body; keys, the sensitive parts where, in combination, the music is made; harmonies, scales, notes are discovered. You must make it playable. Its design must desire desire, must call to the fingers to complete its existence. Press here, and the moon becomes clearer. Press here, and Venus rises from the sea in front of you. Press both together, and you will dive so deep, so far into the darkness. Who knows what's at the bottom of the ocean, in the depths of our souls or outer space? But with instruments, *my* instruments, we can come closer.

ALEXANDER

Oh, it's magnificent!

CAROLINE

It's so handsome, William!

WILLIAM

It's so BIG, Lina!

ALEXANDER

Do you think the sky will clear by—

WILLIAM

Tonight, Alex!

WILLIAM & CAROLINE

Tonight is the night!

WILLIAM

Clear out the family room! Light up the fire, make it big, make it dance! Throw in the librettos, toss on the old violas, melt down the music stands! We're telescope builders now!

CAROLINE

But you have lessons lined up every day next week!

WILLIAM

Move the bloody keyboard beside the window, then! The sky waits for no choir boy! You see, my darlings, the future, she is waiting. And by god, we will sweep her off her feet!

The three continue to work, sing and unwittingly toss the refuse of their project onto Dietrich.

16.

DIETRICH

What is my purpose in this story? I'm not a great astronomer; I'm just the guy who looks at bugs. At least Alex can make clocks. I'm just a little thing, unsure of what happens next.
What happens next?

He looks around. No one else seems to be continuing the Boys' story. So he does.

As Our Boys sleep, they do not notice the ragged masses dotting the countryside below them: the poor, filthy castaways, without access to schools or Regular Liquitary Dietary Supplements.

The underworld.

In this place between mountains, this is where the trucks stop. The air is thicker here, the water metallic, strange bastard weeds grow from strange mounds of dirt.

The people here aren't beautiful; they are angry and organized. Like unwanted insects, hovering in piles of rot, they wait, gathering their resources, ready to sting.

Alexander & Caroline silently become the characters Dietrich describes.

They see a foreign light on a nearby precipice: a blaze they have only dreamed of. Silently, they move towards it.

The three of them creep toward the Boys.

SOUND: DOOM INTRO

A band of guerillas surround the sleeping Boys. They speak with bad French accents, maybe. The leader, Le Doublevay-Say, smokes an unlit cigarette.

DIETRICH

Our Boys wake with a start to discover:

TOILE (*hot-headed second-in-command, played by Caroline*)

Don't move. You are surrounded.

BOY 2

Ohcrapohcrapohcrapohcrap!

TOILE

Silence! On your knees, both of you. (*they get up*)

And cover your eyes, like this. (*they do*)

Le Doublevay-Say walks around the Boys, inspecting them head to toe.

LE DOUBLEVAY-SAY

Who are you?

TOILE

Answer!

BOY 2

J-just B-boys. We're j-just b-boys.

LE DOUBLEVAY-SAY
Where have you come from?

BOY 1
Earth! We're from Earth.

LE DOUBLEVAY-SAY
Who started this fire?

BOY 2
I don't know.

TOILE
Who started this fire?!

BOY 1
No idea.

SANISSETTE (*a bad-ass lady-guerilla with amazing legs, played by Dietrich*)
Who started this fire?

BOYS (*peeking through their hands at Sanisette*)
We did.

LE DOUBLEVAY-SAY
How?

BOY 2
With these. (*matches*)

The guerrillas gasp.

TOILE
It cannot be!

DUNNY (*the dim oaf, played by Boy 1*)
They are just boys!

LE DOUBLEVAY-SAY
You are The Planetai?!

BOY 2
...No, we are The Boys.

SANISSETTE
It was foretold long ago that two turtles would come from afar bearing tools upon their backs powerful enough to bring down the Keepers and their world. They would be called The Planetai, The Wanderers, and they would be the keys to our salvation.

LE DOUBLEVAY-SAY

But you are merely Boys.

DUNNY

Oo! Oo! Maybe they are turtles AND boys!

TOILE

Merde! Merde!

DUNNY

The Planetai, how exciting!

SANISSETTE

Le Vay-Say, they have the tools. They made fire.

LE DOUBLEVAY-SAY

Fine. We will take them with us. Toile, Dunny, bind their hands. Sanisette, walk with me.

Toile binds the Boys' hands behind them.

Le Vay-Say throws his cigarette on the ground and starts to walk away. The Boys reacts.

BOY 2

Did he just— dump?!

LE DOUBLEVAY-SAY *(turning to them)*

You will soon find that we, the bowels of society, are not keen on following rules.

Meanwhile, in Herschel-land, the skies are clear.

WILLIAM

The skies are clear...

LE DOUBLEVAY-SAY

You must be hungry. Follow swiftly, and keep quiet.

Dunny "pees" on the "fire". The guerrillas move out.

17.

SOUND: CRICKETS

Night.

WILLIAM

The future...She's here.

SHE'S HERE!!

SOUND: HERSCHEL CONCERTO

Caroline, Alexander and Dietrich enter. A flurry of preparation.

Gaea is searching, and remembering.

GAEA

From chaos I was created to create. But I created them, and they were made to destroy.

CAROLINE

Perhaps you'd like to join us here. I know you think it isn't true, but there are other Germans in England, Mother, honestly. It's not an easy journey. Not at all. But if you wanted it, really wanted to, Mother, we would send for you. Someone will help you slowly onto the ship, and make you comfortable, feed you bread and chamomile tea... And then we'll hire the smoothest carriage we can afford to bring you on the last stretch to Bath and when finally you arrive here, at this house, at our house, Mother, at our house in England, there'll be sausages waiting for you. I promise.

SOUND: KING GEORGE APPEARS

King George enters and stands in front of the telescope. William is startled when he looks through the eyepiece. The record stops. The siblings cower behind a bush, or beneath the telescope, watching the scene.

WILLIAM

Oh! Your Majesty.

KING GEORGE

Willy, you old dog! Another comet, eh?

WILLIAM

Yes. It's my first, but—

KING GEORGE

Comet fomet bomet. A little star with a tail, eh? A little dog star, a little puppy dog star!

WILLIAM

Uh

KING GEORGE

Yet no one in Greenwich seems to think it's a comet.

WILLIAM

There is skepticism, sire, but--

KING GEORGE

Beautiful instrument, this one. Just marvelous. It's so... *German!* Have I seen it before?

WILLIAM

No.

KING GEORGE

No! Of course not. Looks nothing like the, uh, the other one, the one my nieces took such a fancy to.

WILLIAM

The five-foot, with a most excellent speculum of six inches--

King George helps himself to some schnapps.

KING GEORGE

Yes, yes. The kids love it. Played with it several times. They “discovered” Jupiter, and Venus... a Martian spacecraft or two!

WILLIAM

I’m so glad, Majesty.

KING GEORGE (*admiring the schnapps*)

Mm, *Zwetschgenwasser*. *Ist köstlich!*

You know, I’ve never been to Hanover. Is it beautiful?

WILLIAM

Not nearly as much as Bath, sire.

KING GEORGE

Yet much of your family remains.

WILLIAM

It offers me very little.

KING GEORGE

Still, it is your home.

WILLIAM

It is a world of the past.

Beat.

KING GEORGE

SO. What’s to be its name.

WILLIAM

The...uh...the telescope?

KING GEORGE

The *discovery*, my boy! *Your discovery!* What’s its name?

WILLIAM

Name?

KING GEORGE

Well we can’t rightfully call it “comet question mark” in the catalogues and history books, now can we...

WILLIAM

George. Of course. I call it George. The Georgian Sidus.

KING GEORGE

George! What a name. Strong name. After your father, or grandfather no doubt.

WILLIAM

It's for you, sir. It's your name.

KING GEORGE

Well! So it is! How about that?! I'm flattered, Herschel, simply flattered! I'm just flattered and honored and pleased.

WILLIAM

By all means, Your Majesty.

KING GEORGE

The Georgian Star. Nice ring to it, don't you think? And yet, *star*. But it is not a star, for it moves across the heavens.

WILLIAM

No, it is a comet.

KING GEORGE

Perhaps. Or perhaps it is much bigger than that.

WILLIAM

Time will tell.

KING GEORGE

Tell me, son, where are your marvelous brothers and sister? I was hoping you all might play me a tune!

WILLIAM

Well, I--

KING GEORGE

I've heard so much about your father (may he rest in peace), the merry bandsman, the self-made man...

WILLIAM

He was very talented.

KING GEORGE

And the torch has been remarkably carried. Your mother, was she--

WILLIAM

How kind of you to remember our musical talents, majesty. Unfortunately I'm not sure where any of them are at the moment, they could've... gone into town...

KING GEORGE

A brief concert.

WILLIAM

Well...we've been out of practice for so long...

KING GEORGE

An oboe concerto then, sonata on harpsichord, a catch perhaps, a *glee*?!

WILLIAM

Of course, Majesty. It's just that, the sky is quite clear at the moment, you see, and... soon, that will not be the case... Perhaps your majesty could return another day, when we've had time to practice—

KING GEORGE

Nonsense! You're too modest, son, really! You'll need to have a bit more sparkle if you're ever going to become my *Royal Astronomer*...

A double take. The siblings dash to their "instruments."

WILLIAM

What would you like to hear, sire?

KING GEORGE

Hmm...Something your mother used to sing.

They "play" a song from Engelbert Humperdinck's kinder opera Hansel und Gretel:

ALEXANDER/ DIETRICH/CAROLINE/WILLIAM

Ein Männlein steht im Walde

Ganz still und stumm

Es hat von lauter Purpur

Ein Mäntlein um

Sagt, wer mag das Männlein sein

Das da steht im Wald allein

Mit dem purpurroten Mäntlein

SOUND: THUNDER (LOUDER)

The clouds cover overhead. William stops playing, defeated. He blames the telescope. He throws it away, disgusted. He immediately begins work on a mirror for a bigger telescope.

18.

SOUND: DOOM INTRO

CAROLINE

Captives of a band of ruffians, Our Boys trudge across the putrid country for miles and miles, hands bound and mouths dry.

BOY 2

Along the way, the rebels pay no heed to the laws of the land: they throw everything on the ground, without a blink. They spit. They pee. They... *eat apples!* Uhhh.

BOY 1

Finally, they stop, in front of a building made from aluminum foil, cellophane wrap and Styrofoam take-out containers. It says "Museum."

BOY 2

They go inside...

BOY 1

...and behold the most divine sight in the history of ever.

BOY 2

Food?!

BOY 1

A grotto of food, exhibited, encased in glass. Preserved, but looking as fresh as a farmer's market.

BOYS

Total fantasy.

BOY 2

The ice cream isn't melty. The spaghetti could have come out of a Play-Doh machine. The pizza looks like it tastes as good as cartoon pizza looks like it would taste. Ice cold beer. Giant oatmeal-cream cookies. Brimming bowls of Captain Crunch.

BOY 1

Perfect, pristine, sizzling seitan steaks!

BOY 2

FOOD!!

Boy runs forward... and bounces off the glass of a display case.

TOILE

SILENCE!

You will eat when you are authorized to do so!

LE DOUBLEVAY-SAY

Welcome to the Museum of Consumption, our headquarters. I am Le Doublevay-Say. You may speak.

BOY 1

Le Dublevay-Sey, how are you able to, uh... *dump*, so freely?

LE DOUBLEVAY-SAY

You see the wrinkles in our faces? You see the piss stains on our trousers? We are the ones who resisted, and were flushed away. Subversives. We do not believe in the canon of what we call the "Cult of Conservation," those city assholes who manipulate their very cells in exchange for what they call "order." To deny the pleasures of the fresh, the rite of dissipation, is to deny one's very nature. We are made to void, and void we shall!

TOILE
VIVE LA VOID!

LE DOUBLEVAY-SAY
Sanisette, please bring our guests something to eat.

SANISETTE
Oui oui.

Sanisette brings two brimming plates.

BOY 2
A cheeseburger!

BOY 1
Bok choy!

BOY 2
Pickled eggs!

BOY 1
Dikon radishes!

BOY 2
Chocolate cake!

The Boys are about to take a big bite.

LE DOUBLEVAY-SAY
Uh uh uh. You must earn it.

DUNNY
Aww, let them eat cake!

LE DOUBLEVAY-SAY
First they show us how to make fire. Then they eat.

DUNNY
Yeah, make fire! Make fire!

BOY 2
I'll need a stone.

LE DOUBLEVAY-SAY
A stone!

TOILE
A STONE!

Dunny takes an object that is really a stone from the Boy's pack, passes it to Toile, who passes it to the Boy.

BOY 2

And something to burn, some paper, or cloth.

SANISLETTE

A handkerchief.

TOILE

A HANDKERCHIEF!

Dunny takes an object that is really a handkerchief from the Boy's pack, passes it to Toile, who passes it to the Boy.

DUNNY

Oh boy, oh boy!

BOY 1

Our Boys enact the most ancient of rituals... And make fire.

SOUND: RITUAL/ BOYS THEME

Boy strikes the "match" and "lights" the handkerchief.

SOUND: MATCH ALIGHTS

The guerrillas look on with wonder. The "flame" grows and shrinks.

LE DOUBLEVAY-SAY

It's that simple!

Toile, take the tools from them. Sanislette, unveil the plan. We strike tonight.

Toile grabs the matches, Sanislette unveils the plan.

SANISLETTE

There is a forest park, a large piece of land in the center of the city. It is made of *paper*. The trees, bushes, grass... all paper. Old Sunday comics, misprinted memos, used envelopes, scribbled post-it notes, instruction manuals...

TOILE

Unopened letters...

SANISLETTE

Everything.

That's where we're headed.

BOY 1

What for?

LE DOUBLEVAY-SAY

We're going to burn it.

BOYS

Gasp

SANISSETTE

Until now we haven't had the means to burn it. There are no matches, lighters or gasolines on Uranus, you understand. The Keepers destroy anything flammable.

But now you have given us the tools. Our greatest work can finally commence.

SOUND: ROOSTER

LE DOUBLEVAY-SAY

Move out!

TOILE

MOVE OUT!

They move out.

BOY 2

But! But! But!

SANISSETTE (*throwing food away*)

No time. Death is always just around the corner. We must go.

BOY 2

My cheeeeseburgerrrrr....

19.

Daytime.

WILLIAM

To make a telescope

Requires support: wooden beams, metal hooks, giant pulleys... and family.

Speaking this poem (written by my friend Emily Viggiano), the four Herschel children build the supports that will hold the final giant telescope. It is a collaborative, musical event with many inside jokes, tickling, taunting and playing. They finish each other's sentences. We see their history.

CAROLINE

The things I carry with me:

DIETRICH

Entomology. From the Greek, *entomos*, meaning "that which is cut into pieces"

ALEXANDER

Daylight savings time begins in March
Spring ahead, fall behind, spring ahead, fall behind, spring ahead, fall behind

DIETRICH & CAROLINE (*simultaneously with Dietrich's "spring ahead, fall behind..."*)
Im Frühjahr werden die Stühle *vor* das Lokal gestellt, im Herbst kommen sie *zurück* ins Lager.

WILLIAM

The Very Large Telescope, the European Extremely Large Telescope a concept for the Overwhelmingly Large Telescope, and Moore's law. We increase ourselves at amazing intervals.

ALEXANDER

According to superstition, those who dream of clocks will soon go on a journey

CAROLINE

There are so many things I did not ask to know or remember.
They told themselves to me.
Heaped upon each other now like *Liegestuhl*,
like dust. But what do I have that bears saving?

WILLIAM

In the second after I finish speaking

ALL FOUR (*English/German spoken simultaneously*)
four children will be born!

DIETRICH

x equals negative b

ALEXANDER

plus or minus

DIETRICH

the square root of

ALEXANDER

of b squared

DIETRICH

minus $4ac$

DIETRICH & ALEXANDER

all over $2a$.

CAROLINE

Most things exist for the preservation of something essential.
The entire apple's flesh is only a vehicle for the seeds.

WILLIAM

Among those constellations now considered obsolete: Antinous, the youth; Malus, the ship's mast; Solarium, the Sundial; Vespa, the wasp

CAROLINE

Telescopium Herschelii, Herschel's telescope.

Beat

Flowers first crisp brown at the tips.

They die from the outside in,
every day sloughing away anything unnecessary,
saving the center.

I too will begin defining myself as the loss of all that is not me.

Someday I will be myself

(and quite small by then, I imagine.)

Curling in upon myself I will become nothing.

I wrote nine books and I burned them all.

They have formed the supports, perhaps with just their bodies and something representing a mirror. It is clear that a very large telescope is to sit upon it.

A song, or dance, as William, Alexander and Dietrich continue work on the giant telescope.

20.

With more determination, Caroline speaks to Gaea.

GAEA

Where are they?

CAROLINE

I've drawn you a picture of the latest telescope. It's not exactly to scale, but I've added a person standing beside it to give you an idea of how big it actually is. It's... magnificent, Mother. You'd be so proud of him.

GAEA

They're very small, as I remember them. They can fit into my palms. I can cover them up with my fingers, and hide them from Him, if I want. And then, when I want, I can open: and then they are me, and alive, and... Very. Very. Powerful.

CAROLINE

Do you understand this is my art, now? This is what I do. This is *me* now, Mother.

GAEA

Whole life, half life, some life, no life. Whole life, half life...

Perhaps Gaea spies another old music box, grabs it quickly and opens it. Perhaps the last strains of the box's song is heard, dying.

CAROLINE

I'm 22-years-old.

GAEA
All these empty boxes.

CAROLINE
I'm not going to apologize.

She tosses the music box aside.

GAEA
WHERE ARE THEY?!

WILLIAM
Ladies and gentlemen, the Herschel Family... *Telescope Builders!*

21.

LE DOUBLEVAY-SAY
We have arrived. From here on, no one is to speak a word.

BOY 2
Toile breaks a lock and we enter the forest park through a gate on its south side. *Wow.*

BOY 1
Massive, towering trees, canopies and underbrush, all made of *paper*. The architecture of Colonopolis was impressive, but this is just...

BOY 2
Beautiful.

BOY 1
A black and white forest, with little wax paper lakes, and rainbow paths made of construction paper winding through it, lit by Chinese lanterns. The artistry it must have taken to build it, the time...

BOY 2
Like some god's origami.

BOY 1
Silently we walk into the deepest part of the woods. It's late, so the park is deserted, but it's not difficult to imagine the throngs of happy Uranians strolling through it on a Sunday afternoon, hand in hand, calm and content. It must be the planet's most prized possession.

LE DOUBLEVAY-SAY
Toile, a match.

Toile hands him a match. Le Doublevay-Say strikes it, and it blazes.

SOUND: MATCH ALIGHTS

He immediately lights his cigarette, which he has not been able to light in years, probably. He inhales with satisfaction.

Perhaps you are indeed the Planetai.

Le Doublevay-Say leans down to light a paper flower on fire.

BOYS
NO!

LE DOUBLEVAY-SAY
And perhaps you are not.

He lights it.
SOUND: FIRE!

BOY 2
The blaze is immediate. It is already spreading quickly.

SANISSETTE (*yelling*)
The planet dies with us!

TOILE & DUNNY (*yelling*)
The bowels have spoken!

LE DOUBLEVAY-SAY (*yelling*)
This is our movement!

WILLIAM
CAROLINE!

The guerrillas and Boys react to what they hear as a loud sound in the distance. Toile grabs the Boy's remaining diploma that is really a telescope and looks through it.

TOILE
Merde!

Toile hands the telescope to La Vay-Sey

SANISSETTE
What is it?

LE DOUBLEVAY-SAY
The Number Twos!

TOILE
Merde!

BOY 2

Who are the Number Twos?

LE DOUBLEVAY-SAY

The army. Battalions of the Keepers.

DUNNY

Let's get out of here!

SANISSETTE

No! If they're ready to waste their lives, who are we to deny them the pleasure?

LE DOUBLEVAY-SAY

Hold loose, men, and LET. IT. GO!!

The group freezes in a tableau.

22.

SOUND: CRICKETS

Night. THE night.

William and Caroline make final preparations.

WILLIAM

Ladies and gentlemen, tonight is the night! The skies are pellucid, the night is chocolate, we have chased the clouds cowering into a corner with all of our sweeping! Everything is in alignment. The future is coming! Tonight is the night!

The siblings and William reveal a giant cardboard tube that is really a telescope.

William proudly mounts the telescope, taking a step up onto it.

Look. Up.

SOUND: FLYING THROUGH SPACE

William walks up the giant telescope. The music swells. When he reaches the end, he flies.

Herschel is flying through space, past stars and planets.

Lights and sound swirl.

A small, circular greenish-blue light appears in the distance. He turns and flies towards it.

SOUND: GAEA SINGING

A woman's voice is heard, singing the song from William's dream. The light grows bigger and bigger as he gets closer to it. Now it is huge, and blinding.

SOUND: FIRE/ WAR/ DESTRUCTION

William encounters the planet Uranus. The one in the future, the made-up one, the one the Boys are journeying on. There is war, and destruction, and miles and miles and miles of waste. And there is Gaea, the Goddess, scrounging through the trash, muttering to herself.

GAEA

Clearly I am the oldest story in the book.

He is not.

My son who is me tore open the bag in the hole in the earth that is me and stood as his brothers could not and stood to Him his Father and, foaming, whispered my name that is mine and is his and he called to Him his Father and using a weapon made from metal and more, he made Him his Father not a him anymore and then—

Then there was war.

WILLIAM

The future...

No.

No!

William falters, then he falls.

NO!

SOUND: FALLING

He falls back to Earth. The telescope crashes to the ground. The future Uranus disappears. The lights come up, revealing Caroline, who has been trying to get his attention.

CAROLINE

William.

Did you hear me?

WILLIAM

She deceived me.

CAROLINE

Who?

WILLIAM

She doesn't have a tail, Caroline.

CAROLINE

Yes I know. It's incredible. I've just returned from Watson's, he's written the King. Everyone is celebrating.

WILLIAM

She does not have a tail. There is no blue dress, no blue meadow. I am deceived.

"I'll break my staff, bury it certain fathoms in the Earth."

He moves to attack his telescope. Caroline stops him.

CAROLINE
No, William.

WILLIAM
Ill met by moonlight.

CAROLINE
You need some sleep.

WILLIAM
Why must Titania cross her Oberon? We danced together. Now she is... huge. Immoveable. Further away than I could have ever imagined.

CAROLINE
William. *She* is a planet.

WILLIAM
A planet.

CAROLINE
Yes. Maskelyne was right all along. Mr. Lexell triple checked the calculations from St. Petersburg. There's no mistake. The seventh planet from the sun.

WILLIAM
Bella Futura. Scheisse.
Why are you crying, Lina?

CAROLINE
I'm overcome. So many wonderful things. And you, the Father of them all.

GAEA
Urr...
Yrrr....
Yrrrrr...

Caroline watches Gaea throughout the next scene.

23.

The sound of the battle returns.

BOY 1
Quick! While we have a chance!

BOY 2
Which way?

BOY 1
I don't know, that way! Run!

They run. Deafening sounds and blazing flames.

BOY 2 (& DIETRICH)

With the sounds of battle ringing in their ears, and with the blazing fire turning huge and horribly ugly, our boys run away, deeper and deeper into the belly of this burning land of paper trees.

BOY 1

A postcard:

Hi Mom. We're here on Uranus, which is huge and blue. Uranus is a gas planet. By now my feet hurt from running all over Uranus. Have met lots of interesting and exciting people and seeing lots of interesting and exciting things. Wish you were here!

SOUND: THUNDER CLAP. They stop dead in their tracks and look up. It rains.

BOY 2

What's happening? I thought the weather never changed on Uranus?

BOY 1

The planet is coming alive.

ALEXANDER & DIETRICH

Run.

*SOUND: HUGE STORM. The weather is hurricanes and blizzards now.
The Boys are running in dim light, as paper flies past them.*

BOY 2 (& DIETRICH)

The paper trees are disintegrating under the artillery of rain. There is nowhere for our boys to take cover from the impossible storm.

Boy 1 grabs a stray piece of paper.

BOY 1

Look at this! My poems! These are my poems! These are the five poems I wrote in high school! My mom threw them away a long time ago... Wahtdoyoknowaboutthat! I treasured these.

BOY 2 (& DIETRICH)

And now, they are being pummeled with huge heavy paper-mache pieces as the trees topple, and shelter is no longer a desire but life or death, freedom, from this sudden, ridiculous catastrophe. Come on!

Boy 1 grabs another stray piece of paper.

BOY 1 (& ALEXANDER)

It's the first love letter I ever got from a girl! "Do you like me? Circle yes or no." I circled "or!"

BOY 2

A clearing!

BOY 1 & ALEXANDER

Wait! Look!

A painting flies just above the Boy's head.

BOY 2 & DIETRICH

Quick! This way!

BOY 1 (& ALEXANDER)

It's my painting from first grade! We made finger paintings of our families in first grade! Look, that one's my mom.

BOY 2 & DIETRICH

COME ON!

BOY 1

No.

BOY 2

What?!

BOY 1

I'm going back.

BOY 2

Back where?

BOY 1

The way we came. I'm going to find all the things I dropped.

BOY 2

Are you crazy?!

BOY 1

I've abandoned them! My entire history, splayed out all over Uranus!

BOY 2

You'll be stuck. You won't be able to get out. I'm not getting you out. I'm going home.

BOY 1

I can't leave without my life!

BOY 2

My feet are tired, I'm starving... No more running. I'm not going to run anymore. I'm going home.

BOY 1

DON'T!

Boy 2 dumps his pack. It flies away, as if in slow motion.

Fine. Go ahead. Have a nice death.

The Boys trudge away in different directions.

SOUND: Pause

*Gaea is violently digging. She throws things more haphazardly now. Some things break. She does not notice. She is focused on discovery.
Caroline speaks to her.*

CAROLINE

What is it like, when your children move away?
What did you do with all our stuff?
Did you empty the rooms, strip the beds? Are you empty?
Is it very quiet now, or have you made new friends?
Do you miss Father?

GAEA

So many dead in me, buried in me, imprisoned in me, all for power, all for history!
No more history.

CAROLINE

I haven't heard back from you, Mother. Are you coming to visit us or not?

GAEA

Where are they?

CAROLINE

What will you do, stay in an old world while your children are flourishing in another?!

GAEA

They were bright and beautiful! There were two of them, I think. Or was it three?
So powerful, so powerful! Where could they possibly be?

CAROLINE

At least let me know you're alive.

GAEA

No more history.

CAROLINE

Fine.
This is my last letter.
Your loving daughter, Caroline.

SOUND: Un-pause

*Boy 1's pack gets caught in the storm. He's stuck. He has to let it go. It flies away, as if in slow motion. Defeated, he sits, in the same position as Boy 2 in the very beginning of the play.
The Boy is nearly buried under the piles of paper and paste.
Then we hear from a distance:*

BOY 2 & DIETRICH

Where are you?! I can't find you!!

Boy 2 has turned back for the other Boy. He runs in blindly, and stumbles upon him. The Boy digs through the muck.

Boy 2 hoists Boy 1 onto his back and runs toward the clearing.

DIETRICH

Tripping over acres of gooey paste and hardened, cement-like slabs, our boys reach the clearing.

Boy 2 sets Boy 1 down.

ALEXANDER

Pushing plastered piles out of their way, they discover

A hole.

BOYS

A hole!

Beat.

BOY 1

I'm empty.

BOY 2

Me too.

But maybe that's a good place to start.

A decision.

BOY 1

We jump.

They begin to jump, and freeze.

24.

Caroline, alone, picks up the remains of William's broken telescope, fitting a few pieces together, beginning to make her own telescope out of it.

CAROLINE

"The poet Hesiod, the first Greek who tried to explain how things began, wrote,

Earth, the beautiful, rose up,

Broad-bosomed, she that is the steadfast base

Of all things. And fair Earth first bore

The starry Heaven, equal to herself,

To cover her on all sides and to be
A home forever for the blessed gods.”

The Boys, falling down the hole.

BOYS
AHHH!!!

ALEXANDER (& BOYS)

Our Boys tumble and tumble down the endless hole. And on the way, as if by magic, they begin to shrrriiiiiinnnk...

SOUND: SHRINKING

BOY 2 (*helium voice*)
There’s water below us...a stream...or something.

ALEXANDER

Now about the size of a chewed off fingernail, Our Boys fall directly into a tiny rowboat.

In the “rowboat.”

DIETRICH (*as automated theme-park ride loudspeaker voice*)

Welcome to Uranal Canal. Please keep all necessary body parts inside the boat. Do not leave anything behind. Do not look back. You will not be returning.

BOY 2
Somebody wants to get rid of us.

BOY 1
And we’re off.

25.

SOUND: ROOSTER

Dawn.

William is alone, in the same spot.

Watson and his Son enter.

WATSON

Well well, well, William, William, William, William, William, well DONE!

SON (*shaking William’s hand vigorously*)

Congratulations, sir, oh, congratulations!

WATSON

I hope you don't mind the intrusion, William, but my son was just desperate to meet you. I've told him all about you. And of course, considering the headlines...

SON

The first planet since antiquity! Wow!

WILLIAM

Yes.

WATSON (*pointing out a telescope*)

And his telescope—ingenious!

SON

Wow!

WATSON

The Father of Modern Astronomy!

WILLIAM

Is that what they're calling me?

WATSON

You're going to be rich, Herschel. You can finally quit this business with the organ. No more giving finger lessons to incorrigible alter boys, eh?

WILLIAM

No.

WATSON

A petty musician no longer.

SON

I've never seen a Newtonian quite like this!

WATSON

He's a budding amateur, can you tell?

SON

The magnification must be, what, 200?

WILLIAM

227.

SON

Wow.

WATSON

Likes to show off his bookishness. He's just graduated university.

SON

I was studying history, but I really want to be an astronomer.

WILLIAM

Wow.

WATSON

You're an inspiration to him, Herschel.

SON

I heard you made eyepieces with powers up to *fifteen hundred!*

WILLIAM

2,000. Six, soon enough.

SON

Unbelievable!

WILLIAM

That's what they say.

WATSON

Come now.

SON

Well, really sir, what do you expect? Unprecedented lenses, unconventional methods... a comet, with no tail!

WILLIAM

Bedlam it is, then.

WATSON

Come now!

SON

Every genius is deranged. Take Mozart. And you *are* a genius, Mr. Herschel.

WATSON

Second to none!

SON

Tycho Brahe

WATSON

Galileo

SON

Kepler

WATSON

James Gregory

SON
Isaac Newton

WATSON & SON
William Herschel!

WATSON
You're writing history, my boy. You're rewriting the *universe*!

WILLIAM
A stroke of luck.

WATSON
The Father of Modern Astronomy!

SON
A *planet*! And all this time, looking for a bloody tail!

WILLIAM
That's not the point.

WATSON
Son, watch your language.

SON
Haha!

WILLIAM
The *process* of discovery.

SON
Haha! A *tail*!

Son gets absorbed in studying the details of the telescope.

WATSON
Now, about its name.

WILLIAM
What about it.

WATSON
George.

WILLIAM
The Georgium Sidus, actual--

WATSON
Mm. Doesn't sound quite right.

WILLIAM
He's our king.

WATSON
Still. Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, *George*. Do you hear what I mean?

WILLIAM
What would you propose.

WATSON
Some say Herschel.

WILLIAM
No. Who?

WATSON
Your admirers.

WILLIAM
Admirers.

WATSON
They do. They're calling it out in parliament, on either bank, across the continent. I overheard a small child christen her doll William. At first I was flattered, of course, but then she called her other doll Herschel, and made them kiss, and look up at the sky through an old Christmas cracker, and then I knew I must come see you at once. You're a household name, Herschel.

WILLIAM
No. The planet is George. Would you please ask him to stop harassing my instrument?!

WATSON
Bode has suggested Uranus.

Beat.

WILLIAM
Bode.

WATSON
I expect he's throwing parties throughout the streets of Hanover now.

WILLIAM
Suddenly I'm German again.

WATSON
It's all the same King, what's the difference. Think of it: *Uranus*! It's old, it's Greek, it's masculine...

WILLIAM
Sounds like a joke.

WATSON

The sky. The heavens. The original Father!

WILLIAM

Father.

WATSON

It's perfect.

SON

Father, have you really looked at this instrument?! Faultless! It's portable, it's sleek... the controls are so smooth! They have nothing this good in Greenwich. I'll bet you can see straight inside the Baths, eh Herschel? All the ladies bathing?

WILLIAM

Either treat my instrument with respect, or get away from it!

SON

How much does a reflector like this go for?

WATSON

William's grandfather was a simple gardener, and his father was a musician. He cares little for mon—

SON

You must have sold a few by now, to be able to afford such--

WILLIAM

GET OUT! Get out of my house! You insolent offspring, you think this is some toy? You didn't even look through it! Is this the future of astronomy, memorization machines and shiny collectables? This is my house! My telescope! My discovery!

All of this, all of you people, pretending to care, pretending to be civilized, pretending your excrement doesn't smell like the rest of the animals, pretending you were never once children, free from the noise! All of this, this, this *present*, this *Earth*! You disgust me!

The two Watsons exit.

GAEA

Urr...

Yrrr....

Yrrrrr...

26.

BOY 1

Our river voyage takes us to a place of pressure and change. Our small boat comes to rest on a conveyor belt-like contraption, as we are hoisted upward towards... An opening. A way out.

BOYS

The Ejection.

BOY 2

We change again. No longer shrinking, but shedding. Our eyes disappear, our skin disappears, our bones... Nearly all our organs and systems dissolve.

Gaea sings or hums softly; the same tune the Boys sang at the beginning: "There's a wee baby moon..."

BOY 1

In the moments before they were propelled like rubber chickens from a canon and sent hurdling into the black boundless vacancy, Our Boys' ears thought they heard a voice.

BOY 2

Someone far away, or far below, an ancient whisper...

BOY 1

A woman's voice.

BOY 2

But before they had time to ask

BOYS

"Who's there?"

BOY 2

They were nothing but brains and catapulting back towards Earth.

The Boys disappear.

GAEA

Urr...

Yrrr....

Yrrrrr...

The olive doesn't fall far from the tree.

My son who tore from the bag left Him bloody, sent Him running.

And I (who is Him who is him) become proud and angry and alone.

But chronicles are cyclical, after all.

Someone who is not me stands and whispers to my son a prophecy, and my son listens, listens and does, like his father like him, frightened of becoming like Him, swallows—swallows-- *chews?* and-- swallows his firstborns. Devours them.

His wife (who is me) has learned more than me. I was older then, it was a long time ago, and things have changed so! much! I did not know but to hope. But she (my son's wife, who is his, who is me), in the dust of a war, she picks up a stone from me, disguises it well, wraps it in cloth, and *he* swallows *it* instead! Then she did like he did (the he before he), she saved her son (my grandson and me) and sent him away. While my son digested, my grandson, he lived. The youngest, the Shining One, lived.

And my son (who is me), he vomited. And his children (my grandchildren), alive and in accord, stood up as them before them, and then--

Again, there was war.

She looks at herself in a broken mirror.

And I, who is slowly no longer the me of before, I remain mother, but not, anymore.

She continues her search.

27.

Caroline approaches William. William is lightly considering suicide.

CAROLINE

Everything's packed. The men will be here in the morning to move the 20-foot. I've given them strict instructions, and Old Windsor isn't so far.

It's a shame we're leaving this place. Spring's nearly here. See the buds, beginning on the tree? Soon this will be a proper garden again.

WILLIAM

Bury me, Lina.

Beat

CAROLINE

The ground's still frozen.

WILLIAM

Keep me dead in the cellar then, until it warms up.

CAROLINE

No.

WILLIAM

Dust to dust, worm to worms.

CAROLINE

Not yet.

WILLIAM

Why not.

CAROLINE (*shrugs*)

What a waste.

William.

WILLIAM

Yes, Lina.

CAROLINE

I think you should go home.

WILLIAM

No.

CAROLINE

It's been a long time since you were in Hanover.

WILLIAM

I've written to Jacob.

CAROLINE

Not to mother.

WILLIAM

She unders--

CAROLINE

She doesn't understand.

WILLIAM

I have... things to do. The King demands telescopes. Replicas. Maps. Models for his children. Visits nearly every fortnight. I'm a very busy—

CAROLINE

You're forgetting where you came from.

WILLIAM

A pox on the past. Where was Germany when Jupiter was formed?

CAROLINE

I'm not talking about Germany.

WILLIAM

What's Germany but a scrap of land where German people live?

CAROLINE

You left the army to come home. You left home to become a musician.

WILLIAM

I left home to leave Mother. So did you.

CAROLINE

You left music to study the stars. And now you're trying to leave Earth. But she won't let you go.

WILLIAM

What would you have me do?

CAROLINE

Throw it away. The fear, the hopelessness, the future... all that kills what gives you spirit. Get rid of that. Save only the present.

WILLIAM

I'm 42 years old. I'm nearly dead.

CAROLINE

You'll die at 84 in your sleep, and you know it.
Do you remember when you--

WILLIAM

I don't want to remember anything.

CAROLINE

Do you remember when you rescued me? It was August. Jacob was away, and mother was pacified. Even though I knew it was your carriage on the cobblestones outside the door, I imagined you were a knight, and I a common slave girl, like Cinderella, kept to do my evil parents' bidding.

WILLIAM

You were.

CAROLINE

And a knight was coming to rescue me. And you did. And how funny, that you will become one. The journey to England was treacherous, just like it was supposed to be in the storybooks, but much worse in real life, much much worse. I was terrified. But through all the storms and the crashes and the vomit, I looked up at you, and felt at peace.

And through all the storms and the crashes and the vomit, you looked up at the stars, and felt at peace. There, sitting atop that miserable wagon as it rattled through the English countryside, you pointed out the constellations to me, and taught me the English words for them. And so we survived.

WILLIAM (*pointing at the sky, as in the past*)

Lyra, 19 hours, 40 degrees. Tubus Telescopium, 19 hours, -50 degrees.

CAROLINE

You said,

WILLIAM

"Look around, Lina. Everything you had is now gone. But you have your brain, and you have the stars, and you have me."

CAROLINE

You have telescopes, you have the universe, and you have me. You must hold on firmly to the shining thing in front of you, and you must throw the rest away.

Alexander and Dietrich, at the Band Platform, begin singing a song written by John Herschel:

ALEXANDER/ DIETRICH (*singing*)

In the old telescope's tube we sit
As the shades of the past around us flit
His requiem sing we with shout and with din
While the old year goes out and the new one comes in

Caroline kisses William. Caroline joins her brothers, singing. William does not sing along, but enjoys the song, and perhaps conducts to himself.

ALEXANDER/ DIETRICH/ CAROLINE (*singing*)

Merrily, merrily, let us all sing
And make this old telescope rattle and ring

They continue humming beneath the following text.

28.

The Boys are nothing but brains floating in space.

BOY 1

"I'm bored," said the Boy, though of course in his brain state he more or less just thought it.

BOY 2

"Yeah," thought the other Boy, "Me too."

BOY 1

Where do we go from here?

BOY 2

I don't know.

SOUND: CONCLUSION

WILLIAM

I would like to take you on a journey for a moment, into the future.

In the future, the world is a giant sphere of waste.

This is not a metaphor. What I'm saying is true. I've seen it.

Mirrors lay broken beside expectations, and blue-penciled aspirations, and reexamined dreams, and all the good people like my father who died too early of ridiculous incurable diseases and freak accidents, and all of the old women sitting alone in their quick-sand easy chairs waiting for someone to visit, be it friend or death.

Layers upon layers upon layers of *waste*. Non-refundable, unfixable. Total and complete.

You may not think that people would live here, on this wasted earth, but they do. You see, they are forward-thinking, these people of the future. They are, after all, People of the *Future*. And "all that once was" will be replaced with "all that might be". The past: disposable. Our love, our legacies: obsolete. If we are to move forward, they will say, we cannot, by the great god of Entropy, turn back.

And so let it be.

I accept my position as Royal Court Astronomer with exuberance. In several years, I will be knighted. I build more telescopes, discover double stars and comets and clusters and moons and nebulae and infrared light, break through the ancient boundaries of astronomy, chart the uncharted dots of the universe. When I die at 84-years-old, my planet will have circled the sun exactly once. And that, they will say, was fate.

Caroline, at her homemade telescope.

CAROLINE

August 1. I have calculated 100 nebulae today, and this evening I saw an object which I believe will prove tomorrow night to be a comet.

WILLIAM

Oh yes, and I have a son, John. And *he* becomes a great astronomer.

CAROLINE

August 2. Today I calculated 150 nebulae. I fear it will not be clear tonight, it has been raining throughout the whole day, but it seems now to clear up a little.

WILLIAM

And my sister Caroline, in her own right.

CAROLINE

1 o'clock. The object of last night *is a Comet!*

WILLIAM

And time flows, and telescopes get bigger as the world shrinks, and the population booms, and the mountains recede as the slag heaps grow, until one day many years from now, when our imaginations build bombs and rockets, and we fly away from it all.

Gaea has found what she was looking for. Having returned to the very first place we saw her at the beginning, she picks up two small rocks. They are glowing, brilliantly blue-green, intoxicating to look at.

GAEA

Uranium!

WILLIAM

Things are looking up.

GAEA

Begin again.

Blackout.

SOUND: The last strain of a music box. Or maybe an explosion.

End of play.

