

Signs and Wonders

(A Delirium for a Wounded World)

by Fengar Gael

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*“Come to the edge, he said;
They said, we are afraid.
Come to the edge, he said;
They came,
He pushed them and they flew.”*

Guillaume Apollinaire

CHARACTERS: (three men and four women)

MINERVA BELLWETHER, a medical scribe from London, England

MORRIS HENDERSON, a professor and member of the Society for Sobriety

CAMILLE KEARNS, a lawyer and member of the Society for Sobriety

NADINE SUMMERS, a manicurist and member of the Society for Sobriety

HARLAN REDHILL, a carpenter and member of the Society for Sobriety

ARCHIBALD (ARCHER) SWAIN, an ophthalmologist

HILARY HOROWITZ, a journalist for The Wichita Eagle

TIME:

Midsummer in the near future.

PLACE:

Lebanon, Kansas: a stylized set represents a meeting room, hospital corridors, and the periphery of a crater.

SCENE 1

(Lebanon, Kansas: in a dimly lit room, a Society for Sobriety meeting is being held. The members' chairs are positioned in a semi-circle. Sitting ramrod straight in the center is MINERVA BELLWETHER who speaks with a refined British accent; slouched on either side are CAMILLE KEARNS, NADINE SUMMERS, HARLAN REDHILL and MORRIS HENDERSON who turns to address MINERVA.)

MORRIS

Before we end the meeting, would our new member like to introduce herself?

MINERVA

Since you're referring to me, my name is Minerva, and I'm *not* an alcoholic! I'm here because a judge ordered me to attend your meetings in lieu of going to jail. Truth be told, I occasionally drink which made me forget you Yanks drive on the right, so I crashed head on into a lorry driven by an off duty officer who escaped without a scratch. Naturally, I claimed full responsibility, and as I explained to the judge, I rarely drink and only to mitigate the stress of being a medical scribe to a surly American doctor. I realize my collision seems banal after the tragedies inflicted by a pernicious asteroid, and I speak from experience since I face its victims every day. I suppose I should explain that I'm a volunteer medical scribe. That means I'm assigned doctors to follow with my laptop so I can record their encounters with patients and track their charts and prescriptions. That leaves the doctors free to interact with human beings instead of screens. Sorry, I'm rambling, but that's what you do here, isn't it? I'm told everything said in these meetings is as sacrosanct as the confessional.

MORRIS

Yes, that's true. The Society for Sobriety is modeled after Alcoholics Anonymous, but we're not religious, and we have ten steps instead of twelve; however, we do have rules. For example, no one talks for more than five minutes, though with so few members left, I think we can dispense with that one.

(NADINE raises her hand.)

NADINE

Yeah, let her speak. She's a new face, and I wanna know what's going on in these makeshift clinics. My sister said the blast knocked her out of bed and now she's dizzy and deaf as a post.

(CAMILLE nods in agreement as NADINE sips coffee, and MINERVA drinks from her water bottle.)

CAMILLE

I have two clients in the hospital and one might not make it.

HARLAN

I've been hired to help make coffins.

MORRIS

So we've agreed to make an exception for Minerva. *(to Minerva)* Talk as long as you like.

MINERVA

You'll get bored with me soon enough; I'm supposed to attend ten meetings.

HARLAN

Well, we have them every day -- same time, same place.

CAMILLE

Same people -- which is why you're a breath of fresh air.

NADINE

So your name's Minerva? Isn't that a witch's name...?

MINERVA

I'm from a long line of Minervas, but we're named for the daughter of Jupiter who's the goddess of wisdom, magic, and medicine.

CAMILLE

That's a lot to live up to.

MINERVA

And all I can do is touch a keyboard and make words appear.

(MINERVA draws a slip of paper from her purse.)

MINERVA

Someone has to sign the court voucher to prove I've attended.

MORRIS

That would be me. I'm the group leader, Morris Henderson.

NADINE

So stick around, sweetheart, spill your guts.

MINERVA

Well, since you insist.

(As MINERVA continues speaking, she slips off her jacket to reveal hospital scrubs.)

MINERVA

I've had a challenging week trying to accustom myself to an American ophthalmologist, especially one who knows far less about pharmaceutical palliatives.

SCENE 2

(MINERVA approaches ARCHER SWAIN who stands in the hospital, wearing a white physician's coat.)

MINERVA

Doctor, I wonder if...

ARCHER

What is it now?

MINERVA

Well, it's just that I don't think...

ARCHER

Speak up!

MINERVA

Are you certain you want to keep prescribing hydrocodones? In my opinion the burns on virtually every patient in that ward require Abstral or Sublimaze -- they're more potent.

ARCHER

Too potent, they'll risk becoming addicted.

MINERVA

What difference does it make if they're not going to live past the week?

ARCHER

And you know this how...?

MINERVA

Instinct and experience. All those patients were too close to the impact. They're blind, deaf, severely burned; their organs failing, their heartbeats erratic, and they're profoundly depressed. I'm sure your anesthetist will agree that all we can do is ease their pain.

ARCHER

All right, fine, I'll prescribe some form of fentanyl, but let's not forget who's the doctor here.

MINERVA

Of course.

ARCHER

I don't appreciate your constantly questioning me. It's one thing to contradict me in private, but don't make suggestions in front of the patients -- I won't tolerate it!

MINERVA

Sorry, I don't mean to be presumptuous, but at Saint Albans I worked in an urgent care clinic...

ARCHER

Good for you! But I came here to perform surgeries, not deal with retinas burned beyond saving, and patients who belong in hospice.

MINERVA

But these patients aren't just suffering for themselves, they're mourning all they've lost. They're crying out to be recognized, to be called by their names, to stop feeling so utterly bewildered, abandoned, and...

(MINERVA sniffs, then turns aside.)

ARCHER

Are you all right?

(MINERVA draws a tissue from a pocket to blot her tears.)

ARCHER

You can't be breaking down like that. It's highly unprofessional and we don't want our patients feeling sorry for you instead of themselves.

MINERVA

No, of course not, I...I don't know what came over me.

ARCHER

Look, we're all exhausted; we're dealing with unprecedented devastation. It forces us to be dispassionate, to put on mental suits of armor; to exhibit our wounds shows an emotional lack of control -- an intellectual incontinence.

MINERVA

Yes, I...I'm sorry...

ARCHER

So no more tears.

MINERVA

Right, Doctor, message received, but are you aware that you hardly ever speak to the patients? Since they can't see, a few kind words would help.

ARCHER

Not if they can't hear them.

MINERVA

But we don't really know what they hear or sense, and it's obvious that most of them think they've died and gone to hell.

ARCHER

Fine, then you be in charge of kind words.

MINERVA

Not just words, we should touch them -- a squeeze of the arm, a pat on the shoulder.

ARCHER

(he sighs) Look, I don't know what they're teaching scribes in England, but in the United States doctors are treated with respect and scribes only speak when they're spoken to, so if you'd like to be reassigned, I totally understand. We're obviously not compatible.

MINERVA

Well, I may not be an obsequious American, but I've never felt that incompatibility was sufficient reason to end a professional relationship. Surely you know how much I admire you. With your robotic equipment destroyed, I wondered if you could rely on your manual skills, but you have! You've reached back and reclaimed them, and honestly, there's nothing more satisfying than seeing the faces of your patients after you've removed their cataracts. You lift their fogs and they want to kiss you, embrace you; they're transfixed with joy.

(MIRANDA blots more tears.)

MINERVA

Sorry, I...I just don't understand you.

ARCHER

There's nothing to understand. Before this, the only corneal flash burns I treated were fools abusing sunlamps and a golfer struck by lightning. Now how many surgeries have I performed?

MINERVA

Hundreds, I've stopped counting.

ARCHER

You could probably perform the operation yourself by now.

MINERVA

Not in this heat, and my hands aren't as steady as yours.

ARCHER

It's hard to feel functional in high heat and it's getting worse. This asteroid is just another sign.

MINERVA

A sign of what?

ARCHER

Isn't it obvious? The Great Extinction's well on it's way -- what with viral pandemics, meltdowns in Antarctica, rampant fires, rising oceans, but I assume you know this, or are you one of those girls obsessed with social media and realities of your own making.

MINERVA

No, I'm a well informed *woman* who aspires to having real feelings for real people. (*mumbling*) I thought that was obvious.

ARCHER

Just try not to invest those feelings in the wrong people.

MINERVA

Is that what happened to you?

ARCHER

Let's just say the only things I have faith in lately are God and my skills as a surgeon.

MINERVA

Well, you should, you're a genius; I never tire of watching.

ARCHER

You say that and yet you question me constantly.

MINERVA

Only because I'm well versed in the world of drugs. We should've made a good team.

ARCHER

If you're so smart, why aren't you a nurse instead of a scribe?

MINERVA

Truth be told, I could've been a doctor. I aspired to being a cardiologist, but when my fiancé was diagnosed with a brain tumor, I dropped out of med school to support him. He lived to marry someone else, and I never finished my degree, but I'm not sorry.

ARCHER

Really? Most people would've felt bitter and betrayed.

MINERVA

I did at first, but not being a doctor has given me more time to write and read novels, newspapers, and medical journals. In fact, I'm so well informed, I'm sure I'd make a competent diagnostician. Not only that, I've scribed for many doctors practicing a variety of specialties, so I know more than I ever would if I'd stayed at Cambridge. And whether you've noticed or not, my spellings perfect, I've tightened your syntax, and enriched your vocabulary, so you see, being well read has its advantages.

ARCHER

I don't appreciate your enriching my vocabulary so please refrain from doing it in the future. *(pause)* Now you mentioned that you write -- what sort of writing?

MINERVA

I'm working on a memoir. I'm calling it Case by Case: the Curious Chronicles of a Medical Scribe.

ARCHER

I hope you haven't turned me or my patients into grist for your mill. We all have a right to privacy despite our insidious surveillance society.

MINERVA

Not to worry, I've even turned myself into a mere shadow attached to the light of the physicians I follow.

ARCHER

Yes, well, I'm sure your memoir will be fascinating, but it strikes me as a waste of talent. You're still a scribe when you could've been a doctor.

MINERVA

But I love being a scribe.

ARCHER

Even when you wind up working with someone like me? Is that why you drink?

MINERVA

What...?

ARCHER

Weren't you arrested for driving under the influence?

MINERVA

How...? How did you know?

ARCHER

The police called; apparently, you gave my name as a reference.

MINERVA

Oh, dear, I...I'm sorry. (*mumbling*) God, how embarrassing.

ARCHER

You're lucky. Kansas laws are tough, even first offenders get jail time; however, since you're serving survivors, the judge gave you a break, though I assume you'll have to attend meetings.

MINERVA

Starting tomorrow.

ARCHER

Good, though "Beware the company of drunkards for they will come to poverty and slumber clothe them in rags." Proverbs, Chapter Twenty-three.

MINERVA

Yes, well, trust me, Doctor, I'm *not* an alcoholic. The bartender was concocting asteroid rage cocktails and I made the mistake of drinking Osiris with a twist.

ARCHER

They should stop naming asteroids after the Greeks; it dignifies them and they're nothing but flying rocks.

MINERVA

Actually, Osiris was Egyptian.

ARCHER

There you go again -- correcting me.

MINERVA

Would you prefer living in ignorance?

ARCHER

You're incorrigible!

MINERVA

Sorry, but in case you're interested, Osiris isn't just a common asteroid; it's a minor planet and the name of one of NASA's exploratory spacecrafts. The problem is our planetary defense system failed and a chunk of Osiris flew off and landed here -- at least that's the latest theory. I'm told the crater it made is quite daunting.

ARCHER

I haven't seen it.

MINERVA

Neither have I, but I heard that guards are being posted around the periphery until they build a fence to keep people from falling over the edge.

ARCHER

Falling or jumping...?

(A knock is heard and HILARY HOROWITZ enters with a camera strapped around her neck.)

HILARY

Excuse me, I didn't meant to interrupt. Would you mind if I take your picture?

MINERVA

No.

ARCHER

Yes!

(The camera light flashes.)

ARCHER

I said yes! I mind!

HILARY

Sorry about that. (*tapping*) There we go -- deleted! I didn't mean to intrude. I'm Hilary Horowitz from The Wichita Eagle reporting on the effects of the asteroid: The Impact of the Impact. I just need a few minutes of your time; I'm focusing on doctors and survivors.

ARCHER

Well, I'm the doctor and Minerva's a scribe.

HILARY

And your name is...?

ARCHER

Archer Swain from Massachusetts General. Now I'm afraid I'm done for the day and need a good night's sleep, so I don't have time to chat.

HILARY

Then may I interview you tomorrow...?

ARCHER

We'll see.

(ARCHER marches off.)

MINERVA

Sorry, Archie can be a bit prickly, but I can stay.

HILARY

Great! I hope you don't mind if I record our conversation.

(HILARY draws forth and activates a recording device.)

HILARY

Let's start with your name.

MINERVA

Minerva Bellwether.

HILARY

When did you arrive?

MINERVA

Three days ago, just in time to witness the circus: firetrucks, ambulances, helicopters beaming lights, dozens of news vans and cruisers driving in circles. By the time I came, the first responders had arrived, followed by a triage team who divided the victims into the salvageable and the doomed. The doomed but still living were given potent palliatives, and the rest are at the mercy of what resources we have.

HILARY

God, how awful.

MINERVA

It's as if a nuclear bomb exploded. The blast waves vaporized towns and cities as far away as Lincoln.

(HILARY grasps her smartphone from her pocket and swipes the screen.)

HILARY

I've downloaded NASA's satellite photos if you want to look. A geophysicist I interviewed estimates Osiris to have been the size of Yankee Stadium, traveling at thirty thousand miles an hour. (*pointing*) That black abyss is the crater it formed from the impact.

(Pause as MINERVA scrolls through the photographs.)

HILARY

Astronomers have been tracking it for months assuming it would explode and turn to dust before it reached the Earth. Apparently Osiris is the worst impact since the asteroid that wiped out the dinosaurs.

MINERVA

At least it landed in Kansas; imagine if it hit New York or Chicago.

HILARY

So why are you here? You're obviously English.

MINERVA

I'm from Saint Albans, north of London. I was in Omaha visiting my sister who married a Yank. When the call came for volunteers, I extended my stay.

(HILARY swipes through more pictures on her phone.)

HILARY

Here's a longer distance view. You can see how it crashed smack in the middle of the country. After ripping a hole, it created a fault line that extended for miles and literally split us two.

MINERVA

(staring at Hilary's screen) So now you Kansans can choose sides: liberals can live on the left and conservatives on the right -- one side blue, the other side red.

HILARY

One side wise, the other side willfully ignorant.

MINERVA

Is one side thin and the other side fat?

HILARY

Yeah, and one side's saints and the other side's sinners.

MINERVA

If one's side's dry and the other side's drinkers, which are you?

HILARY

I indulge on occasion, so let's finish this conversation at the only bar in town that stays open till midnight.

MINEVRA

Great, though truth be told, I'm not supposed to drink or drive. I'm not a sot, but I collided with the local law and was ordered to abstain, though if you're driving, I don't see the harm.

(Lights flicker, then fade to black as screams are heard.)

MINERVA

Oh, damn!

(MINERVA draws a flashlight from her pocket.)

HILARY

Does this happen often?

MINERVA

A dozen times a day and it terrifies our patients who think they've been struck blind again. Now follow me.

(MINERVA snaps on her flashlight and leads HILARY away in darkness as the screams fade to sobs.)

SCENE 3

(Lights reveal the Society for Sobriety MEMBERS continuing their meeting with MINERVA returned to her seat.)

NADINE

So Minerva, honey, did you get wasted?

CAMILLE

Jesus, Nadine...

NADINE

Sorry, sweetheart, I didn't mean to pry. *(pause)* So is this reporter going to write about you?

MINERVA

I doubt it. She also interviewed people in the bar, and she plans to film the crater.

HARLAN

Folks say there's a stinky steam coming out of it.

NADINE

I heard if you get close enough, you'll see the bitch from the ditch. She crawls up from the swamp on the bottom, and she's lean and mean, part human with fish scales and bat wings -- our own homegrown horror show, ha, ha!

HARLAN

Minerva thinks you're pulling her leg.

MINERVA

Oh, I can be gullible.

MORRIS

It may not be intentional, but it sounds as if this creature's related to the asteroid's namesake, Osiris. He was a Nile River deity, and his sister, Isis, is often depicted with wings and scales on her torso.

CAMILLE

Morris teaches at Cloud County College; he's our human Encyclopedia.

MINERVA

You teach history...?

MORRIS

Comparative religions.

MINERVA

Are students still religious?

MORRIS

More than ever, only their Bibles are their phones, their prophets from Silicon Valley, and their gods can be seen on their selfies. That said, Osiris has managed to hold their attention. That's because he's the Gatekeeper of the Underworld.

MINERVA

You must appreciate the astronomers who named the planets after pagan deities.

MORRIS

Yes, though I don't expect to meet up with one. In fact, I predict the "bitch from the ditch" will turn out to be a student prank.

NADINE

My neighbor's seen her and he was stone sober.

CAMILLE

We'll know the truth when she's arrested.

NADINE

Or shot! The guards are armed. I know 'cause my ex Calvin's been recruited with a hundred other guys. They stand around the rim, but there's plenty of gaps between 'em for the looky loos to get through -- especially at night when there's only a handful on duty.

MINERVA

I'd like to see it for myself.

HARLAN

Yeah, me too.

NADINE

You want to risk joining the jumpers...?

HARLAN

(to Minerva) She means take a header off the edge. Some folks take a dive like there's some kind of magnet pulling 'em down.

MINERVA

Are you suggesting that the crater evokes suicidal behavior?

HARLAN

Yeah, though it's easy to slip or trip, but nobody comes back. My cousin, Lyle, the tree hugger, says it's Mother Earth's revenge for all the shit she's had to take from our bombs and pollution. He claims she lives inside and feeds off human sacrifices.

MINERVA

Oh, dear.

HARLAN

Oh, yeah, she takes anybody -- kids, old folks, and everyone in between.

NADINE

And don't forget dogs, cats and rats.

MINERVA

I can't believe what I'm hearing. I was told the Society for Sobriety was a secular group, so I assumed you weren't religious much less pagans.

MORRIS

Oh, we're all pagans, my dear; we all worship false idols of one kind or another. In this country it's mostly money, but these Earth Mother rumors are based to some degree on the Gaia hypothesis which claims all elements -- living and dead -- are part of a sentient female force that has the power to sustain life. For the Egyptians, Isis was the Divine Earth Mother and I rather like the idea of her wanting revenge for all the damage she's endured -- of abuse spawning abuse.

MINERVA

But is it true that people are actually jumping?

CAMILLE

Yes.

HARLAN

Yep.

NADINE

Oh, yeah.

MORRIS

Apparently.

CAMILLE

Who knows what to believe? A client of mine has relatives in Dallas who think the asteroid's a hoax. It's made the news in every state and country, yet they think it's a conspiracy gone viral.

MINERVA

But to think that people are intentionally leaping to oblivion...

NADINE

Calvin says folks are making little altars along the edge, leaving flowers and pictures where their loved ones were last seen.

HARLAN

I heard that yesterday one of the guards went missing. They said he was depressed and hey, I get it. I mean, haven't you ever wanted to check out?

CAMILLE

Sure.

NADINE

Oh, yeah.

HARLAN

(to Minerva) What about you?

MINERVA

I've fantasized about walking away from everything, just taking off with no forwarding address, but that's not a real vanishing act. I wouldn't completely disappear.

MORRIS

Every year more people die of suicide than from wars, murders, or malaria.

CAMILLE

(to Minerva) See? Isn't Morris a fount of information?

MORRIS

Oh, I'm an expert on suicide. My choice of poison was gin martinis -- not very original and too slow acting, so it seems the crater provides a quick alternative. It's certainly preferable to slashing veins or drinking Drano. Now coming to Kansas will have a whole new meaning that doesn't involve a yellow brick road, ha, ha!

NADINE

Ha, ha!

HARLAN

I've never been depressed enough to off myself.

CAMILLE

That's obvious since you're still here, but what if you had degenerative dementia? What if you couldn't recognize your own face in the mirror much less dress, drive, or play fantasy football?

NADINE

He'd dive down head first.

HARLAN

Yeah, maybe.

CAMILLE

And let's not forget the practical side of the crater: It saves funeral costs -- no need for coffins.

NADINE

Unless you hit bottom and survived. Then you'd meet the Earth Goddess, whats-her-face.

MORRIS

Isis! But you'd have to get past the Gatekeeper.

MINERVA

Is there a password?

MORRIS

No, but according to the legend, Osiris would weigh your heart on a scale. If it balanced with a long white feather, you could enter.

MINERVA

You mean I'd have to be light hearted...?

MORRIS

No, you'd have to be morally pure and generous. The weight of a person's heart had to do with the weight of their sins.

NADINE

Ha! I'd never get through.

HARLAN

Me neither, so screw the Underworld. Who wants to go there anyway?

MORRIS

As I recall, Isis and Osiris weren't your typical family. Isis was the sister of Osiris, but also his wife, so they had an incestuous relationship.

NADINE

Oh, Jesus, and they named an asteroid after him?

CAMILLE

Well, aren't most of us from dysfunctional families?

NADINE

Yeah. *(to Minerva)* What about you? Is that why you drink?

MINERVA

I told you I don't drink! I sip -- mostly wine, and my family's quite functional, thank you.

NADINE

So you're married...?

MINERVA

No, I was referring to my parents and sisters.

NADINE

So are you divorced?

MINERVA

No, not that it's any of your business.

NADINE

Sorry, but hey, I'm divorced and living alone's a bitch. I think I should get a dog, get me out of the house for something beside these meetings.

(MINERVA'S phone pings, and she pulls it from her pocket to read a text.)

HARLAN

We don't allow phones in here.

MINERVA

Sorry, it's a text from Hilary, the reporter. She wants to meet later tonight. I hope it's all right if I share your theories with her.

CAMILLE

Sure, they're not personal.

HARLAN

Yeah, feel free. So we'll see you tomorrow...?

MINERVA

You really meet every day...?

NADINE

Yeah, cause we get cravings every day.

HARLAN

Same time, same place.

CAMILLE

Same people.

NADINE

Same people!

(CAMILLE stands to leave, followed by the OTHERS.)

MORRIS

Turn off the lights, Harlan!

(Harlan turns off the lights.)

SCENE 4

(Evening at the crater where a choral humming swells then fades as the shadow of a winged CREATURE flutters past then disappears. HILARY and MINERVA enter wielding flashlights, approaching the crater's rim as steam rises from the core.)

HILARY

Hey, check out these freaky fungi.

(HILARY picks up a mushroom and sniffs it.)

MINERVA

Drop it! Sorry to snap, but it could be poisonous.

(HILARY drops the mushroom, then squats to take pictures and scan the crater.)

HILARY

I really need to come in daylight to get a better sense of its magnitude. My editor calls Osiris a pockmark on the face of flourishing fields, but to me it's a cosmic prick that raped the innocent state of Kansas. It's weird 'cause we've never felt targeted like the big cities, and yet it landed right here in the heart of the heartland. *(pause, she sighs)* For my article, I need aerial perspectives, some wide angled drone shots, but for now I'll take your picture instead. Stand still!

(HILARY aims her camera as MINERVA poses stiffly.)

HILARY

How 'bout a smile?

(MINERVA smiles as HILARY snaps, taps, then scrolls, checking a series of photos.)

HILARY

Very nice. I'll name it "The Scribe of Saint Albans." So do you think Swain will let me interview him?

MINERVA

Yes, he'll pretend to resist, but will love seeing his name in the paper.

HILARY

He's good looking and single. I googled the resumes of the volunteer doctors. It turns out he was raised right here in Kansas. His father's deceased but his mother lives in Osborne. He got a scholarship to Columbia and wound up at Mass General. So is he seeing anyone?

MINERVA

I suspect he abstains, but you can ask.

HILARY

Don't you find him attractive?

MINERVA

No! He's an ocular surgeon with eyes that look but don't see. That doesn't mean he isn't brilliant; he's just a cranky, supercilious creep.

HILARY

Which explains why he's single. Are you?

MINERVA

Yes.

HILARY

I'm divorced from an Adonis who turned out to be a wimp while I turned out to be a swinger.

MINERVA

Really? A swinger from Wichita...?

HILARY

Oh, you'd be surprised. Are you interested?

MINERVA

Sorry, but my social circle's tamer than yours.

HILARY

Then you need to meet more people.

MINERVA

Oh, the ones I know keep me busy enough.

HILARY

So you play by the rules?

MINERVA

Frankly, I'm too busy working.

HILARY

Oh, my dear Minerva, you shouldn't be hoarding your gorgeous self. Our bodies, our lives, are meant for spending, for pleasure.

MINERVA

I've had my share of pleasure; it just didn't last.

HILARY

So get over it; life is fleeting. *(pause, she sighs)* Look at us, standing by a crater on this tiny dust mite of a planet, spinning in one of billions of galaxies in a universe headed for extinction.

MINERVA

Not any time soon I hope.

HILARY

Someday in the future, every word we ever wrote, everyone we ever loved will go poof -- as if nothing mattered, as if our lives were an utter waste, so I say *carpe diem!*

MINERVA

But what if there's something more? Don't you wonder?

HILARY

Not really, I'm an atheist.

MINERVA

Well, so am I, and though I don't believe in God, after seeing so much suffering, I can't help but hope that there's some spiritual dimension that's not accessible until we die or become enlightened.

HILARY

Or high! (*pause, sniffing*) Christ, that steam stinks!

MINERVA

Some people think it's gaseous vapors from the Earth Mother's bowels -- from all the people she's devoured. According to some of the locals, there's an ancient goddess spirit living in the crater's core. She's angry at all the abuse she's endured, so she's demanding human sacrifices.

HILARY

Ha, ha! So it's payback time; I like that.

MINERVA

Should we pitch something down there for her?

HILARY

Sure, I have some cough drops she can suck on.

MINERVA

I have a Mars bar.

(HILARY tosses her cough drops and MINERVA pitches a Mars bar into the crater. Seconds later, tingling sounds are heard, followed by a choral humming.)

MINERVA

Shhhh, do you hear that...? It sounds like it's coming from inside.

HILARY

Yeah...

MINERVA

It's like a chorus humming.

(The humming intensifies as the shadow of a winged CREATURE sweeps into view and HILARY snaps a picture as it vanishes.)

MINERVA

Bloody hell!

HILARY

Jesus! What was that?!

MINERVA

Did you get a picture?

HILARY

I think so.

(HILARY taps her camera as MINERVA peeks over her shoulder, staring at the image.)

HILARY

Damn! It's all shadows.

MINERVA

I wonder where it came from?

HILARY

I don't know, but what if what we saw wasn't really there? I mean, it could've been a projection -- some tech wonk's idea of a joke.

MINERVA

Well, it's effective; my heart's still pounding.

HILARY

I'll come back with better equipment, but before we leave, I want to get a peek inside, get some sense of the crater's depth.

(HILARY creeps closer to the edge, squats and points her flashlight down towards the hollow.)

HILARY

Holy shit...

MINERVA

What...? What do you see?

HILARY

Faces! Hundreds of faces; they're staring up with glassy eyes. Oh, god...

MINERVA

What?

HILARY

They're all the same; how can they all be the same...?

MINERVA

The same face...?

HILARY

Yeah, and it's yours: multiple Minervas, hundreds of Minervas....

MINERVA

Hilary, move back! You're hallucinating!

(HILARY scoots back then a thud is heard.)

HILARY

Oh, shit! I dropped my flashlight!

MINERVA

Where...?

HILARY

I don't know; I heard it roll...

MINERVA

Don't move! I'll find it!

(MINERVA focuses her flashlight.)

MINERVA

Could it have fallen into the crater?

(MINERVA aims her flashlight, sweeping the ground.)

MINERVA

Damn! I still can't see... *(turning to Hilary)* Hilary...? Where are you? Hilary? Hilary!!

(MINERVA frantically aims her flashlight in circles.)

MINERVA

Hey, where are you?! This isn't funny! Hilary?! Hilary!!? Oh, God, oh, no, this can't be happening... Hilaryyyyyy!!!!

(The sound of loud fluttering wings is heard as the shadowy CREATURE flies by.)

MINERVA

Oh, god, help! Heeeelllllpppp!

(MINERVA flees into the darkening night.)

SCENE 5

(A week later, bright lights reveal the Society for Sobriety MEMBERS reconvened with MINERVA among them.)

HARLAN

My name's Harlan and I'm an alcoholic with six years and four months stone sober.

CAMILLE

My name's Camille, and I'm an alcoholic with two years, three months, and twelve days of sobriety.

MORRIS

I'm Morris with seven years and twenty-two days of sobriety.

NADINE

I'm Nadine and I've been sober for five months and two days. I'm working towards a blue chip and the steps that help me tolerate my money grubbing slut of a sister.

MINERVA

I'm Minerva and I'm *not* an alcoholic! My presence here is a continuation of court ordered meetings, though I've skipped a few days because of the constant badgering by police and reporters who think I had something to do with Hilary's disappearance.

NADINE

Hang in there, hon. If you ever need a lawyer, Camille here has a great rep.

CAMILLE

I'm not that kind of lawyer.

MINERVA

Yesterday my passport was confiscated, and they've involved the FBI. Apparently, Hilary was a very popular journalist with a global following and the granddaughter of a former governor.

HARLAN

So the cops are really grilling you, huh?

MINERVA

They keep asking if I pushed her. Now why on earth would I do that?! They even drove me back to the crater to relive every ghastly minute.

HARLAN

You sure she didn't just run off so folks would think she's dead?

MINERVA

Yes, I'm sure; I'd have heard her footsteps on the gravel, and where would she go without her car?

NADINE

Is it true you saw the goddess...?

MINERVA

No, what we saw was someone who appeared to be a slender female with wings. I suggested to the police that she might have pushed Hilary. *(she sighs)* They even asked me to draw a sketch which looked like an angel which made them even more convinced I was lying.

CAMILLE

At least you can defend yourself in that book you're writing.

MINERVA

I intend to do just that!

NADINE

Will we be in it?

MINERVA

Yes, but not to worry; I won't use your names.

HARLAN

I don't care as long as you make us as smart and good lookin' as you, ha, ha!

NADINE

(mumbling to Camille) Not smart enough to stop drinking.

MINERVA

I heard that and as I said, I only drink on occasion; I'm...

MINERVA

...*not* an alcoholic.

NADINE

...*not* an alcoholic.

NADINE

Yeah, yeah, so you say. At least you're not like those snooty New Yorkers who call us a flyover state.

HARLAN

Yeah, like we're not worth a piss-stop.

CAMILLE

The trouble is you haven't lived here; you don't really know us well enough to write anything authentic.

MORRIS

Write whatever you want, Minerva. Unfettered freedom of speech is the cornerstone of our democracy -- even if you're rude, crude, and morally offensive -- which you're not. I'm not religious, but I worship that freedom. *(to Camille)* I thought you did too.

CAMILLE

I'm just saying that our lives belong to us; the story of Kansas belongs to Kansans, and what happens here in this room is nobody's goddamn business.

MINERVA

Of course, I respect that, and I seriously doubt that anyone will ever read much less publish my work. Besides, I've fictionalized our meetings so we're a group of survivalists.

HARLAN

Yeah, we're survivors all right!

NADINE

Some folks think Kansans were targeted, and my friend, Lucille, claims it's 'cause we're touched by divine grace. "Divine grace" were her exact words. I'm no holy roller, but I know what she meant.

MINERVA

She might have meant that Osiris brought out the side of you that cares more about each other than yourselves.

NADINE

Yeah, maybe.

MORRIS

That's right...

MORRIS

...that's why we're already starting to rebuild, replant, and await the next catastrophe.

CAMILLE

And while we wait, that shit ugly crater is here to remind us how vulnerable we are.

MINERVA

Vulnerable, but beautiful. I've been here long enough to appreciate your long horizons, the farms and animals, the acres of corn and wheat fields, and all the heroic Americans I've met. I'm even grateful to that teetotaler judge for making me attend your meetings.

HARLAN

Oh, yeah?

MINERVA

You've enriched my life, my perspective. In fact, you're nothing like I thought you'd be.

CAMILLE

Which is what exactly...?

MINERVA

Insufferable. Some of my fellow Brits in recovery act as if denying themselves turned them into models of saintly perfection. My point is that I've enjoyed these meetings, and it's going to be painful when my Visa expires and I have to leave.

CAMILLE

Then stay, apply to become a citizen.

MORRIS

(pause) I find it amusing that the papers call you "The Scribe from Saint Albans." It makes you sound like a cloistered nun wielding a quill on foolscap.

CAMILLE

A nun who's amassed quite a following.

NADINE
No shit.

HARLAN
How many?

CAMILLE
Over a thousand and growing.

HARLAN
Impressive.

NADINE
Whoa...

CAMILLE
Her followers think she's an oracle, that she's been chosen to speak for our apocalyptic times.

MINERVA
Oh, God no, I wouldn't presume. I'm only defending myself, but some people think I have a psychic connection to the cult of Isis which is totally bonkers. Truth be told, I'm from a family of skeptics. We Bellwethers go back to the Enlightenment, the Age of Reason. I can't help it if people think I'm delusional but I wish they'd stop sending threatening texts and calling me appalling names -- it's unnerving.

(MINERVA sniffs, suppressing tears.)

MINERVA
Sorry, I...I don't know why I'm so sensitive lately...

CAMILLE
You know, Minerva, maybe what you saw was the DTs.

NADINE
She means delirium tremens.

MINERVA
I know what D T means, and that's rubbish!

NADINE
Not to me, I saw snakes, black snakes slithering up my arms.

MORRIS
I had recurrent dreams of being chased by an army of midgets wielding pokers. The midgets resembled my students, then just before they caught up with me, I'd wake up in a sweat with my heart racing.

CAMILLE

Lucky me, I never moved past the shakes, but one day a client noticed and said he didn't want a booze hound for a lawyer. Then he dropped me like a hot pot.

MINERVA

At least you haven't been accused of murder. *(she sighs)* If only there'd been surveillance cameras! *(she sighs)* I feel so...exposed.

NADINE

But you're still working, right?

MINERVA

Yes, but I'm being watched, and isn't it ironic how if someone suspects you've been drinking when you haven't, you start acting as if you have! Oh, god, how I hate what my life has become!

(Lights dim as MINERVA sheds her shirt to reveal hospital scrubs.)

SCENE 6

(MINERVA enters a hospital corridor to confront ARCHER.)

MINERVA

Please, Doctor Swain, stop staring at me when you think I can't see you, and stop sniffing my breath when I'm nearby. I'm totally sober and wouldn't think of coming to work after drinking anything stronger than tea!

ARCHER

I'm not staring, not consciously anyway, and I'm not sniffing your breath, only your... shampoo. *(pause)* Frankly, I'm concerned about you -- after the trauma of what you've experienced.

MINERVA

I'm fine, just sick to death of trying to defend myself.

ARCHER

The police have been questioning me as well -- about your character.

MINERVA

Oh, super.

ARCHER

I said you were always well groomed, punctual, and competent.

MINERVA

(mumbling) Competent...

ARCHER

I also mentioned that you've been innovative, that you've set up a room for our blind patients to interact with each other and play audio books. I added that you're sensitive and affectionate, and often moved to tears by our worst cases, so it's highly unlikely that you would intentionally harm anyone.

MINERVA

Thanks. *(pause)* I keep telling them that Hilary must've slipped, that she jump. In fact, she was looking forward to interviewing you.

ARCHER

It sounds like she simply lost her footing, and hadn't she been drinking...?

MINERVA

So what? This place could drive anyone to drink -- except you of course. Look, she had a couple martinis, but she wasn't tipsy or slurring her words.

ARCHER

(pause) There's a team of potholers who plan to reach the crater's base, so maybe they'll find her remains.

MINERVA

Poor Hilary. *(pause, she sighs)* I keep trying to imagine what it's like down there: a netherworld of corpses being devoured by carnivorous plants and albino bats.

ARCHER

Or bones buried in dust as in Genesis: "From dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return."

MINERVA

In my memoir, I described the crater as a beastly maw with a greedy, insatiable hunger that needs to gobble up everyone who comes too close. They can only save themselves by tossing sacrificial gifts to the goddess at the core. Hilary only gave up some cough drops. Perhaps they weren't enough.

ARCHER

I'm planning to visit the crater and see for myself. The pastor at my church said it was exactly how he imagined the Valley of the Shadow of Death: a great yawning abyss -- infinitely deep, dark, and lonely.

MINERVA

So that struck your fancy, did it? That made you want to risk being wiped off the face of the earth?!

ARCHER

Oh, I'm too cautious to let that happen. My pastor also posited a theory that those who succumbed to suicide were already vulnerable -- consumed by guilt for committing sins that are an abomination unto the Lord as sighted in Proverbs, Chapter Six.

MINERVA

Oh, really? And which sins are those?

ARCHER

Pride, sloth, greed, gluttony, hatred, idolatry, drunkenness, and wrongful thoughts, words, and deeds.

MINERVA

Wrongful thoughts...? Well, I succumb to those every day, don't you?

ARCHER

Sometimes, but if I may be candid...?

MINERVA

Oh, please.

ARCHER

(pause) I'm beginning to realize that being here has given my life purpose. Like everyone else, I thought of Osiris as yet another assault to endure -- worse than the pandemic and global warming because it literally punctured and scarred the planet, but lately I'm feeling grateful. Treating its victims has made my own problems seem trivial, and yet I've never slept so deeply or felt so eager to come to work.

MINERVA

(pause) So you're saying that you find this ghastly catastrophe stimulating...?

ARCHER

Invigorating, exhilarating! What if it's a divine manifestation -- even a miracle? And thanks to your inspiration, I've started my own memoir -- through the eyes of an eye surgeon.

MINERVA

How very ambitious of you; I'm sure it will be a best seller.

ARCHER

Oh, no, I'm only writing for myself. It's my personal history, including ideas for eye transplants using stem cells to regenerate microscopic nerves. Recalling the past has made me realize my father was a climate catastrophist long before it was popular. His primary fear was the oceans, that tsunamis would rise up and engulf both coasts, so he packed up the family and drove from California to Kansas -- from Oakland to Osborne.

MINERVA

So it's true you have roots here.

ARCHER

Yes, but they're twisted. My father wasn't around much which was fine because he was mean, miserly, and usually reeked of whiskey. On the the bright side, my mother was a pediatrician who supported my sister and me until we could support ourselves.

MINERVA

You have a sister...?

ARCHER

Maureen went to Northwestern, and became a medic in the army. She was stationed in Afghanistan until she passed away from a resistant form of malaria.

MINERVA

Oh, I...I'm sorry.

ARCHER

I tried to talk her into leaving the army, and though I pray we'll be reunited in the afterlife, I'm still torn between feelings of sorrow and anger -- at foreign policies that keep the world at war. My pastor claims I'm to blame for the asteroid -- not just me of course, but all embittered Americans. He thinks God made manifest our collective rage, turned it into a giant stone, then hurled it against the country -- further dividing a divided nation.

MINERVA

So you think you're at fault for the fault lines?! Ha! Trust me, seeing the crater will give you another perspective.

ARCHER

Maybe.

MINERVA

You really must see it and soon. After all, you deal with the damage it's inflicted on your patients, so you should observe the damage inflicted on the country -- the planet. Please let me know when you go; I...I'd like to tag along.

ARCHER

Aren't you afraid of encountering that creature you saw?

MINERVA

No, especially if she doesn't exist. Hilary thought she might be a filmed projection; one of the Society members thinks she's a student prank; and the police psychiatrist thinks she's a hallucination caused by toxins -- from spores on the fungal growths along the edge. They look like harmless mushrooms, but some conspiracy freaks think they came with the asteroid and are carrying pathogens that will turn us all into zombies.

ARCHER

Good lord. (*pause*) So are you still being interrogated?

MINERVA

Yes, but I've already told them everything, and it's stressful to keep reliving it.

ARCHER

Stressful enough to make you drink?

MINERVA

Yes, but I'm *not* a sot! Honestly, by Kansas standards most everyone in England would be labeled alcoholics. Sometimes I wish this whole experience was a nightmare; then there'd be no asteroid, no crater, no police, no patients...

ARCHER

No doctors.

MINERVA

No judge!

ARCHER

No meetings. Are you still attending them?

MINERVA

Oh, yes, we're quite a jolly group, open to all sorts of outrageous theories.

ARCHER

Do you think they'll dissuade you from drinking?

MINERVA

No, because like Jesus I enjoy the occasional glass of wine. Drinking makes me happier, more sociable, and reduces the stress I endure from encountering people terrified of losing their sight. Drinking also helps me tolerate your holier-than-thou attitude towards drinking!

ARCHER

I see, then I'll attempt to be less judgmental. Now let's get back to work, shall we?

(ARCHER departs followed by MINERVA.)

SCENE 7

(Wing fluttering sounds are heard as the humming swells and the shadowy CREATURE crosses the sky. Meanwhile the Sobriety MEMBERS continue their meeting with MINERVA in attendance.)

CAMILLE

It sounds like Archie's warming up to you.

NADINE

He's sniffing her shampoo; he's falling for her.

MINERVA

Oh, God no, it's nothing like that.

NADINE

Honey, it's always like that. When you and Archie check out the crater, you'll have plenty of looky-loos for company. Calvin says there's even a food truck nearby, and soon they'll be selling souvenirs. Some of the guards are quitting 'cause they're getting headaches from the stinky steam, and what's it called when you lose your balance?

CAMILLE

Vertigo...?

MINERVA

Vertigo.

MORRIS

Vertigo.

NADINE

Yeah, and Cal says most days it stinks like sewage and rotten eggs.

MORRIS

It could be the corpses decomposing, turning into human compost.

NADINE

Yuuuck.

HARLAN

Oh, Jesus...

CAMILLE

That's depressing...

MORRIS

But if you think about all those bodies,...

CAMILLE

No thanks.

MORRIS

...the warmer temperatures....

CAMILLE

Enough Morris!

MORRIS

All right, but what's wrong with giving yourself back to the Earth that's nurtured you all these years? It's not an original idea: Diogenes the Stoic left a will requesting that his body be flung over the city walls to feed the hungry beasts. It was his way of repaying the creatures he'd been feasting on all his life.

CAMILLE

Good for Diogenes.

MORRIS

I'm serious: if we added some straw, wood chips, and alfalfa, the toxins from the corpses would be neutralized and turned into acres of fluffy soil. That way the crater could become an eco-burial site.

NADINE

There you go again, Morris, always seeing the up side, ha, ha!

MINERVA

But since Osiris and Isis are Egyptian deities, wouldn't they prefer the bodies be wrapped and stacked like mummies?

MORRIS

Very likely, ha! (*to Minerva*) If you go back to the crater, let me know. In fact, since we're here now, why wait? Why don't we all go?

CAMILLE

Why, Morris, aren't you full of surprises!

NADINE

Yeah.

HARLAN

There's room in my van; we can ride together or you can follow me.

(Pause as THEY contemplate this.)

NADINE

Okay, why not? I mean, we're all stone sober and we're not jumpers, are we?

HARLAN

Nope.

CAMILLE

No.

CAMILLE

But it's a bad idea. Addicts of any kind shouldn't put themselves in precarious positions; we're too fragile, too impulsive.

HARLAN

Bullshit.

NADINE

Speak for yourself.

MORRIS

We won't get too close.

NADINE

(to Minerva) Hey, sweetheart, you don't look so hot. What's wrong?

CAMILLE

She's scared, that's what's wrong.

NADINE

No, she's not, are you, hon?

MINERVA

Actually, I am a little. I mean, I need to see the crater again -- to give me a different perspective, but there's another reason...

NADINE

(pause) What...?

MINERVA

I...I haven't told a soul, but...*(she sighs)*

NADINE

Speak up! That's what we're here for.

MINERVA

(pause) It's the crater itself; it's haunting me, invading my dreams as if it wants to tell me its secrets.

(As MINERVA continues, the distant humming is heard.)

MINERVA

I know it sounds crazy, but it's as if something sentient is communicating. The dream always starts as if I'm looking down from a distance. I can see the Earth is full of hollows, some blue and others black, but the crater's the blackest, and it pulls me down until I'm inside, surrounded by mud walls. I'm looking for Hilary, calling her name, so I venture deeper, and that's when I see them: the dead clinging to the walls, their eyes raised in agony. But they're not screaming; they're humming hymns. Then when I'm finally near the bottom, I see a reeking, ravenous all consuming vortex, spinning like a beastly blender with settings from bone grinding, marrow mincing to blood sucking, soul murdering. *(she shudders)* Then I wake up sweating, my heart racing.

(The music fades as MINERVA takes a deep drink from her water bottle.)

MINERVA

And yet I also feel a sadness, a sympathy. I've never felt this way before -- this strange obsession with something so huge, so mythic...

CAMILLE

It's an obscenity -- a dump site.

MORRIS

A graveyard, but also a reminder, an awakening. My students are drawn to the idea of the asteroid being cosmic revenge for our shameful treatment of the planet.

MINERVA

But what if the crater it left behind contains something that wants to be known, that wants to be shown respect by our sacrificing something of our own -- not candy or cough drops but something truly precious.

MORRIS

I hope you're not serious, but if you are, the only thing I have of any value is my watch -- a vintage Omega.

CAMILLE

(flaunting her wrist) I'm wearing a Cartier.

NADINE

These are real pearl earrings. *(to Minerva)* What about you?

MINERVA

I have a gold plated Montblanc pen that belonged to my Great Aunt Clara.

HARLAN

All I've got is a key ring that's silver plated.

MORRIS

Look, let's not worry about tossing our treasures. Let's pile into Harlan's van and drive close enough to see what the fuss is about. Then we'll drive back here and go home.

HARLAN

I'm game, what the hell?

NADINE

Yeah, sounds good.

CAMILLE

Sorry, count me out. I need to go home to prepare for a meeting with a client.

NADINE

(mumbling) Yeah, right.

MORRIS

Please come, we'll need a lawyer to verify our observations.

CAMILLE

Hah! What you need is a witness to your disappointment when the crater turns out to be nothing but a shit ugly pit.

MORRIS

Then you have nothing to fear, do you?

NADINE

Come on, Camille, don't be such a wuss.

CAMILLE

I'll only go if Minerva joins us.

MINERVA

I'd really rather not; I'm not sure I'm ready yet...

NADINE

Honey, I'll hold your hand.

CAMILLE

And I'll hold the other.

MORRIS

You can stay in the van if you want.

MINERVA

(pause, she sighs) Oh, all right, but nobody has to hold my hand.

MORRIS

Good, that's settled, let's go! Harlan, the lights!

(THEY depart; HARLAN turns out the lights.)

SCENE 8

(Dim lights reveal the crater where a fluttering is heard and a shadow is seen then vanishes. The SOBRIETY MEMBERS enter with MORRIS, CAMILLE, MINERVA and HARLAN wielding flashlights.)

MINERVA

Watch out for potholes.

NADINE

No guards, no looky-loos, where the hell is everybody?

(Pause as THEY look around in silence.)

MINERVA

Everything is full of mystery here. Can you feel it?

NADINE

Oh, yeah.

HARLAN

Yep.

CAMILLE

Not really.

NADINE

Calvin says there's been gurus coming 'round, praying away the negative vibes. *(pause)*

HARLAN

Jeeze, it's hot.

(NADINE and MINERVA take sips from their water bottles as a distant humming is heard.)

NADINE

The steam's making my skin clammy.

HARLAN

Yeah, mine too.

CAMILLE

Okay, now we've been here, done that, let's get the hell out!

MINERVA

Wait! Shhhhh, listen! Can you hear them?

CAMILLE

Hear what...?

HARLAN

What...?

MINERVA

The chorus, they're humming.

NADINE

No.

CAMILLE

No.

HARLAN

Nope.

(A single SOPRANO is heard trilling above the hum.)

MINERVA

(pause) Oh! Her voice, her lovely voice...

(As the trilling continues, clouds of steam rise from the crater, affecting perceptions.)

MINERVA

She's telling me she wants something from us, but something truly precious. She wants our secrets.

NADINE

What...?

MINERVA

She wants us to confess, to sacrifice our secrets. *(pause)* Please, somebody say something.

(The humming continues as the SOCIETY MEMBERS start to speak their thoughts.)

NADINE

My secret's no secret.

CAMILLE

I cheat on my taxes.

HARLAN

I poisoned my neighbor's dog.

NADINE

Jesus, Harlan...

HARLAN

He was a skinny runt driving everyone nuts, barking all day and night. *(to Minerva)* Your turn.

MINERVA

I confess to rage waves of vengeance towards my former fiancé.

NADINE

I confess to hating my sister who got herself educated so she could teach, find a decent guy, a three bedroom house and kids who aren't batshit crazy. She knows how I feel and won't even let me give her a manicure -- that's what I do. Yeah, I hold the soft pampered hands of the rich enough to pay to have their nails painted.

CAMILLE

Like a whore, I let a wealthy client paw me till I wanted to scream, flee the scene, and down three gin and tonics!

MORRIS

A woefully under-qualified female colleague garnered a tenure track position at Princeton with a salary that made me physically ill.

MINERVA

After I was dumped, I plotted nefarious schemes including gas, poison, and the hiring of a trained assassin.

NADINE

No shit...?

MINERVA

I was drinking heavily then, and one day I sent naked pictures of us to his wife and ruined his marriage.

NADINE

I'm one of two sisters a year apart. My mom said I was born to loaf and Nicky born to luck till she fell off a balcony and broke her hip, both legs and took six months to recover while I celebrated with a bourbon bender. She still walks with a limp.

CAMILLE

I'm always thinking I'm the smartest, richest bitch in the room, but not smart enough to keep from getting pregnant and giving birth to a fetal alcohol baby who died two days later.

MORRIS

(pause) My turn? *(he sighs)* The cruel irony of being asked to organize my colleague's farewell fete inspired me to spike the punch with enough tequila to kill a bull elephant. I kept refilling her glass until she collapsed in an unseemly heap -- all of which I filmed for posterity, ha!

HARLAN

I keep lying to you guys about staying sober 'cause what the hell? What's another lie?

MINERVA

I never managed to actually murder him, but the intention was there and it's intention that matters, right?

NADINE

I confess to the sin of laziness -- that's sloth, right?

CAMILLE

Right, and I confess to the sin of greed.

MORRIS

To the sin of pride.

MINERVA

To the sin of wrath! So despite being perceived as the kindly scribe of Saint Albans, I often feel as hollow and heartless as you with your big black hole echoing these words. So have we saved ourselves? Have we sufficiently sacrificed our secrets, confessed our deadly sins and made ourselves worthy of your blessing?

(The humming escalates as the SOCIETY MEMBERS are slowly drawn into the steaming crater. MINERVA attempts to grasp them, but spins uncontrollably until SHE falls in a heap as lights black out. Moments later, the SOCIETY MEMBERS surround her, focusing their flashlights.)

CAMILLE

Hey, Minerva! Wake up!

NADINE

Rise and shine, sweetheart.

HARLAN

Give her some water.

MINERVA

Nadine...? Harlan...? You...You're alive...?

NADINE

Alive and kickin'!

MINERVA

But I...I saw...

NADINE

Honey, you passed out.

MORRIS

Take a deep breath and try to stand.

(NADINE and MORRIS help steady MINERVA.)

MINERVA

You were saved because you sacrificed your secrets: *(to Nadine)* your sister's fall; *(to Morris)* Your drunken colleague; *(to Camille)* your dead baby...

CAMILLE

Shut up!

NADINE

Button it!

HARLAN

Put a sock in it!

MORRIS

She's delirious.

She's raving!

CAMILLE

(A shot is heard.)

NADINE
Jesus! What the hell!?

CAMILLE
What was that?!

NADINE
Sounds like a gunshot.

HARLAN
Could be a car backfiring.

CAMILLE
Let's get the hell out of here!

MORRIS
Come on, follow me!

(MORRIS grasps MINEVRA'S hand and the SOCIETY MEMBERS flee as lights dim, wings flap, and the shadowy winged CREATURE flies by.)

SCENE 9

(A day later, lights illuminate a bright room where a masked hospital ORDERLY enters pushing a gurney holding a corpse covered with a sheet. MINERVA and ARCHER follow. The ORDERLY pulls down the sheet, then steps aside.)

ARCHER
They haven't identified her yet except to say she's an adolescent female. I'm supposed to ask you if she looks familiar?

MINERVA
No, I...I don't think so, but she could've been disguised -- wearing a mask and cape that she spread to look like wings.

ARCHER
It's hard to tell her ethnic origins, but she appears to be Hispanic.

MINERVA

But couldn't she also be a light skinned African...?

ARCHER

I suppose...

MINERVA

Or possibly part Asian or Middle Eastern.

ARCHER

Maybe.

MINERVA

Or even a Swede with a tan...? Either something's wrong with my eyes or her face keeps morphing to fit whatever ethnicity I'm thinking of. *(she sighs)* Does it really matter?

ARCHER

Not to our Lord: "Be not afraid of those who kill the body for the body is not the soul."
Matthew, Chapter Ten. *(to the orderly)* You can leave now.

(The ORDERLY covers the corpse and wheels the gurney from the room as MINERVA dabs her eyes with a tissue.)

MINERVA

Sorry, but to see someone so young, so vulnerable... *(pause)* Will the trigger happy guard be charged?

ARCHER

I imagine. While most people tend to avoid danger, she's been dancing around the crater wreaking havoc. Why I wonder?

MINERVA

The fearlessness of youth, that feeling of invincibility, or perhaps she aspired to being the next viral phenom.

ARCHER

No one's claimed her yet. The police are putting up posters and there's speculation that there are other pranksters. *(he sighs)* All that energy and to what purpose? Why are some people so reckless, so depraved, they allow themselves to become instruments of the Devil.

MINERVA

Is that what you think of her -- that she's an instrument of the devil?

ARCHER

If she's conspiring or actually pushing innocent people to leap to their deaths, then yes.

MINERVA

So you really believe in the Devil?

ARCHER

Given our catastrophic times, some of us cling to our faith, and yes, I believe people can be possessed by the dark forces mentioned in 1 Timothy, chapter 4 verse 1: "Some will be led astray, paying heed to deceitful spirits and the doctrines of demons." *(pause)* Now I suppose you'll be writing about this in your memoir, calling me a religious fanatic.

MINERVA

Not at all. Since I tend to fictionalize, I've taken the liberty of making you a profligate gambler and lecher who seduces innocent nurses. You're still a skilled surgeon, but when you examine this girl, you'll discover she has shark's teeth and neon pink pupils. That's because she's an alien from a parallel dimension who fell through an opening caused by the asteroid.

ARCHER

Well, I'm afraid she's definitely one of us. The first doctor who examined her noticed needle marks and her sclera were jaundiced so she probably has a diseased liver and pancreas -- the effects of opioids. We'll know after the autopsy.

MINERVA

Once the news gets out there'll be lots of disappointed people. Even I'm sorry the mythic goddess turned turn out to be human.

ARCHER

So you were hoping for a spiritual enigma..?

MINERVA

I suppose I was -- fancy that?! It seems I haven't let my belief in science destroy my emotional response to life's many mysteries.

ARCHER

Yet you think people of faith are superstitious fools.

MINERVA

Let's just say it amazes me that you find no contradiction between attending Church and accepting the science that allows you to perform such delicate operations.

ARCHER

Please don't assume I take the contents of the Bible literally. I realize that much of its poetry is intended as metaphor.

MINERVA

Yes, of course, and truth be told, sometimes we heretics envy you. I mean, what if we're wrong and you're the ones keeping the world from spinning off its axis?

ARCHER

My pastor thinks so. He's always asking us to pray for the planet as if it's one of his sick parishioners. It's usually last on his list, but it strikes me that it should be the first.

MINERVA

Have you ever had doubts?

ARCHER

Yes. *(pause)* My faith failed to console me when my father deserted us, when my sister died, and when my fiancée left me for a podiatrist. I recovered, but when Osiris landed, I succumbed to a sense of futility, seeing it as an apocalyptic sign -- the end times as explained in the Book of Revelations. Then somehow the Lord beckoned me back to Him with the constant compulsion to work -- and I confess your own presence has become another sort of sign, a godsend.

MINERVA

Me a godsend...!? Ha, ha!

ARCHER

A blessing, a breath of fresh air, a wondrous ray of sunshine.

(Pause as MINERVA dabs a teary eye.)

ARCHER

Are you sure you're all right?

MINERVA

Yes, yes, I'm fine; I'm just not used to seeing you smile. *(pause)* I suppose I should mention that I heard the gun shot. I was there last night with some Society members.

ARCHER

Did you see...?

MINERVA

No, but apparently I was affected by the toxins in the steam. I'm told I was raving all sorts of rubbish, but at least the police have another suspect, and now they'll have to return my passport.

ARCHER

You're not planning to leave, are you? Don't you have more meetings to attend?

MINERVA

Yes, though the judge can't keep me from going home, and I'm sure you'll find someone to take my place. In fact, we scribes are already being replaced by more efficient robotics computers.

ARCHER

Efficient maybe but not benevolent, not...independent.

MINERVA

Not arrogant.

ARCHER

Not you. *(pause)* Just now when you described me in your memoir, I thought it might be better to be that lecher, to live a life shaped by your imagination instead of the one I've been trapped in.

MINERVA

Oh, god, no, you're much better off in your own life, but why do you feel trapped?

ARCHER

I suppose because I inherited a strict puritanism. Since I became a doctor, all I've ever done is work from dawn to dusk. It's not that I mind; I prefer to work, but I don't meet people socially. In Boston, even when I went on dates or with friends to concerts and restaurants, a part of me couldn't wait to go home, then back to work. It's as if I'm drawn to a kind of social inertia. No wonder I'm still alone, ha! *(pause)* Don't you find it interesting that we were both engaged and abandoned?

MINERVA

Not really, it's the oldest cliché in the book, and perhaps we're lucky and they would've made us miserable.

ARCHER

Maybe.

MINERVA

My ex was too competitive. After we split, I realized he was never happy for me -- I mean on the rare occasions I did exceptionally well on tests or finished running marathons, there was no sense of celebration, so now I feel I've escaped. I may be alone, but I'm not unhappy.

ARCHER

I am. I thought I wouldn't mind being alone; the idea of being a dedicated doctor seated at my desk at night, my computer glowing, my reputation growing, but I don't sleep well.

MINERVA

Neither do I.

ARCHER

Does drinking help?

MINERVA

Sometimes.

ARCHER

I pray.

MINERVA

Praying puts you to sleep?

ARCHER

It keeps the prevailing doom and gloom from paralyzing me. Since we're living in a world of wounds, we have to do something. *(pause)* Were you serious about coming to the crater with me -- even though you've just been.

MINERVA

Yes! Absolutely!

ARCHER

Good. *(pause)* I think you're the bravest woman I've ever known.

MINERVA

Oh, no! Hilary was the brave one. I tiptoed, kept my distance, but Hilary walked straight to the edge. I might have saved her if only I'd been closer, quicker to respond -- to grasp her arm and pull her back. *(pause)* When she was looking into its depths, she saw hundreds of faces staring up at her. She said they all looked like me; then she dropped her flashlight and moments later she was gone. I keep wondering why all the faces looked like me.

ARCHER

I suspect Hilary saw you reflected in the souls of those who had fallen -- the living reflected in the dead. Galatians, Chapter Three: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for God sees himself reflected in each of us as we see ourselves in each other."

MINERVA

All I know is that mine was the last face she saw...

ARCHER

In that case she saw a kind face, a beautiful face, a face I've learned to cherish.

(MINERVA takes a deep breath, attempting to suppress her startled response.)

ARCHER

I...I didn't mean to upset you. Can I get you some water? A cup of tea? I suppose you'd prefer a drink.

MINERVA

As a matter of fact, a drink would help.

ARCHER

Go ahead then, drink up, and you can stop pretending that there's water in that bottle you're carrying. What's in it? Vodka...?

MINERVA

No.

ARCHER

Then prove it; let me taste...

MINERVA

No! *(pause, she sighs)* How did you...?

ARCHER

Deductive reasoning: I notice you imbibe after stressful operations, though at least you wait till the end of our shift. Then after you drink, you seem more relaxed, and sometimes you're emotional and...weepy.

MINERVA

Yes, well, drinking helps me cope. You should try it sometime.

ARCHER

I think you should take the rest of the day off.

MINERVA

Fine. I'll return to my memoir now that there's a new plot twist.

ARCHER

And you can drink all you want and think it doesn't affect your work.

MINERVA

It doesn't!

ARCHER

Not yet, but even you admit your hands aren't steady enough to perform an operation.

MINERVA

Steady enough to scribe!

ARCHER

I notice lately you have dark circles under your eyes, and you claim to suffer from headaches.

MINERVA

I do; it's the stress.

ARCHER

And there's something else: I looked over your resume and noticed you moved frequently from doctor to doctor.

MINERVA

So what? I'm young; I'm restless.

ARCHER

Were you ever caught drinking and asked to leave?

MINERVA

No! Never! My records clean and I have great references!

ARCHER

That's because you're clever.

MINERVA

And you're a sanctimonious prick!

(MINERVA starts to leave.)

ARCHER

Wait! Don't leave! I...I want you to stay.

MINERVA

Why? Why on earth would you want a lush like me to stay?

ARCHER

I don't know, I suspect you've bewitched me. Isn't Minerva a witch's name?

MINERVA

Sorry, but I'm a mere mortal whose life hasn't worked out as planned, so I escape through reading, writing, and vodka, but rarely in excess. I'm saving that for later when I wind up in a trailer with a dozen mangy cats.

ARCHER

Not if I can help it -- if you'll let me.

MINERVA

I'm not a charity case!

(MINERVA starts to leave again, but ARCHER grasps her arm.)

ARCHER

Don't go! Please.

MINERVA

Let go of me!

(ARCHER releases Minerva.)

ARCHER

Sorry, forgive me, but please stay -- just a minute. *(pause)* It's true, I...I don't approve of you, yet every morning I can't wait to see you. You're smart, sensitive, so bright you light up every room we enter, and you've helped me remember to appreciate what I can do, so I...I'm grateful, and I want to help you in return.

MINERVA

But I don't...

ARCHER

Let me finish! When we started working together and despite your tears, you seemed so confident, so invincible, that at first I was relieved to notice your... Well...

MINERVA

What...? My weakness? My warts!? Oh, super! So my drinking's made you like me more!?

ARCHER

It's deplorable, and yet it gave you a vulnerable quality that somehow touched what's left of my heart, and made me want to...

MINERVA

What?! Rescue me...? Am I a maiden in distress and you're my prince?

ARCHER

Aren't we all in distress?

MINERVA

Oh, right, let's not forget "The Great Extinction," our death by plagues, fires and floods!

ARCHER

Look, I'm nobody's prince, but why not let me be a...a friend?

MINERVA

Ha, ha! Oh, Doctor Swain, I don't know what to say; I'm completely flummoxed!

ARCHER

Well, you could start by calling me Archer. Go on, please try, just say "Archer."

(Pause as THEY stare at each other.)

MINERVA

(mumbling) Archer. *(louder)* Archer. Archie, ha, ha!

ARCHER

That's better. Come home with me, Minerva; come to my house in Osborne, and I'll cook dinner.

MINERVA

Oh, I don't think so.

ARCHER

After dinner, I'll drive you back to your motel.

MINERVA

That's kind of you, but I...

ARCHER

I'll even serve wine!

MINERVA

But you don't drink.

ARCHER

No, but my mother kept some bottles of chardonnay for guests. *(pause)* She recently moved to Omaha and left the house to me. I was going to sell it, but since so many of my patients need continued care, I'm thinking I might stay.

MINERVA

What about your patients in Boston?

ARCHER

They have other options -- not to mention state of the art robotics that threaten to render surgeons like me obsolete. Besides, I don't relish returning to the gridlocked traffic and hospital politics. *(pause)* Please say you'll come to dinner.

MINERVA

(pause) You'll drive me back later...?

ARCHER

Yes, of course. *(pause)* Why are you looking at me like that?

MINERVA

Because I'm thinking you're not the real Archer Swain. You're a substitute, an avatar Archer who's taken over and is going through the motions of being friendly.

ARCHER

I feel that myself at times, so let's hurry before the old Archer returns, ha, ha!

(MINERVA follows ARCHER as the lights flicker then black out.)

SCENE 10

(MINERVA rejoins the SOCIETY MEMBERS in which the preceding has been recounted.)

CAMILLE

Your Doctor Swain obviously thinks you're a functioning alcoholic.

MORRIS

She is.

MINERVA

Oh, rubbish!

CAMILLE

Trust me, anyone who carries a water bottle full of vodka has a problem.

NADINE

So did Archie serve the wine?

MINERVA

Yes.

NADINE

And did you...?

MINERVA

Yes, I had a glass.

CAMILLE

Only one...?

MINERVA

All right, two.

CAMILLE

Only two...?

MINERVA

Okay, three, but only three!

CAMILLE

But he didn't join...?

MINERVA

No!

NADINE

What's his place like?

MINERVA

It's a classic white clapboard with a peaked roof and cranberry red shutters. It's furnished with his mother's antiques and Persian rugs. On the way there, we passed streets where there was nothing but squares of charred earth that once held houses where people lived and loved...

MORRIS

And died in flashes of fire and light.

NADINE

Yeah, we've seen plenty of streets like that.

MINERVA

They always make me aware of the fragility of life, of people being snuffed out without warning, leaving nothing -- not a trace. I told Archer he was lucky that his home was spared, and he said that God and his guardian angels had protected him.

MORRIS

So he believes in divine intervention, that he was singled out for salvation?

MINERVA

Yes, I think he does.

CAMILLE

So does he think meeting you was preordained, part of God's plan?

MINERVA

Possibly...

NADINE

So long as he treats her nice.

MINERVA

He's been a perfect gentleman. At dinner we chatted about his patients, new treatments, the state of the nation, and his collection of glass eyes. He has at least fifty in every color -- he gave me one.

(MINERVA draws a glass eye from her pocket and hands it to NADINE.)

MINERVA

Here.

NADINE

Oh, geeze...

(NADINE quickly passes the eye to HARLAN.)

NADINE

Sorry, but it's creepy.

HARLAN

My Uncle Ned had one -- from an accident in the army.

(HARLAN passes the eye to CAMILLE who hands it to MORRIS who returns it to MINERVA.)

MINERVA

Archer said I could keep it as a memento of our time together.

CAMILLE

I hope you don't talk about us the way you talk to us about him.

MINERVA

Oh, god, no. Here I'm shamelessly indiscreet.

NADINE

Hey, we like hearing you talk.

MINERVA

Well, I wasn't going to mention it, but something happened on the drive back to my motel.

NADINE

We're all ears.

MINERVA

We decided to take a detour.

MORRIS

You went back to the crater...?

(MINERVA nods.)

NADINE
Figures...

HARLAN
I knew it.

MINERVA
We parked then walked to where the army engineers were starting to build a fence which upset me, so Archer said...

MINERVA
...you want benches.

ARCHER'S VOICE
You want benches...

ARCHER
...instead of fences?

(Lights dim to evening as MINERVA leaves her seat.)

SCENE 11

(MINERVA joins ARCHER who is standing by the crater.)

ARCHER
So you want people to sit comfortably while observing the desolation...?

MINERVA
While contemplating the cosmic forces, all the wonders of the universe! And there should be a paved pathway so they can stroll around the circumference or ride their bikes -- Archer! Step back! You're making me nervous.

(ARCHER steps back.)

ARCHER
The crater looks exactly as I imagined -- an ugly, odious deathtrap. I can't comprehend why anyone would want to throw themselves down there.

MINERVA
Apparently some were careless; others depressed; and the rest assumed to be drunk or drugged. You can see where the mourners left their shrines of flowers and pictures. I suppose someday there'll be a granite memorial with all the names of the deceased.

ARCHER
And a stone carver on hand to keep adding new ones. *(pause)* Some of my patients believe the crater's an omen -- a celestial warning that our planet's more vulnerable than we know, that we need to take better care or we're doomed.

MINERVA

The fault lines dividing the state may require the building of bridges. Bridges are symbolic, so they might inspire a social revolution, with people sharing their resources, even sacrificing themselves to fill the crater's ravenous belly.

ARCHER

You don't mean sacrificing their lives...?

MINERVA

Only after they've ended! They'd have to be willing for their corpses be turned into compost. That way they'd be giving back to the Earth that gave so much to them. So Archer, would you be willing?

ARCHER

I'd have to think about it, but I'd want a Christian funeral. According to Proverbs: "The way of the godly leads to life not death." It's referring to the only life that matters -- that of our immortal souls.

MINERVA

Yes, but here we have to deal with bodies that become corpses, and it would take a lot to fill the crater. According to the potholders, it's much deeper than it is wide, and the only signs of life are maggots, nematodes, and the microbial bacteria they feed on.

ARCHER

Were you hoping they'd find your friend..?

MINERVA

No, and I was told there wasn't even a footprint -- step back, damnit!

(MINERVA grasps ARCHER'S arm, pulling him back.)

MINERVA

For God's sake Archer! You scared the hell out of me! I...I don't want to lose you.

ARCHER

Ha! That's the nicest thing you've ever said to me. *(pause)* I just wanted to get a sense of its depth.

MINERVA

That's what Hilary said! *(she sighs)* I need a drink...

(MINERVA uncaps her water bottle.)

ARCHER

Must you?

MINERVA

Yes, I must!

(MINERVA takes a long swig and recaps the bottle.)

MINERVA

Listen, Archer, my visa expires soon, so I'll have to schedule a flight home.

ARCHER

Can't you request an extension? I'd be happy to explain that you're needed indefinitely -- especially since I'm thinking of starting a clinic right here in Lebanon. If you stay, you could help me.

MINERVA

Well, thanks for the vote of confidence, but I have parents who miss me, not to mention a social life and prospects for a steady job.

ARCHER

If you stay, you'll have a job, and you'll be near your sister and the Sobriety members. Haven't they become friends?

MINERVA

Well, yes, but I'd always feel like a foreigner here. My roots are in Merry Ole Saint Albans -- home sweet home.

ARCHER

But are any of us truly at home? According to Philippians, "Our true citizenship is in the Kingdom of Heaven."

MINERVA

Fine, but I'm still living on planet Earth.

ARCHER

Have you thought about our patients? Won't you miss them?

MINERVA

Yes, of course.

ARCHER

And what about me? What can I say to keep you here...?

MINERVA

Oh, Archer...

ARCHER

How can you leave us...? *(pause)* Why are you smiling?

MINERVA

I...I'm just wondering what happened to that "mental suit of armor."

ARCHER

It gone, all that's left is a pile of scraps. *(pause)* Let's get married.

MINERVA

What...?

ARCHER

Then you can stay here as long as you like.

MINERVA

That's absurd! I can't marry a man who's a religious zealot, who thinks I'm a sot, and who I haven't even kissed!

ARCHER

Then let's remedy that last part. God knows I've imagined it a thousand times. Have you...?

MINERVA

Imagined it...? Well, I...I may have had...feelings...

ARCHER

Then let's -- even if it's just this once.

MINERVA

(pause) Well,...all right, just this once.

(ARCHER moves towards MINERVA, draws her close, and THEY kiss gently, then passionately, then step apart.)

ARCHER

(pause, he sighs) Thank you, Minerva, you've given me a precious moment to remember and cherish for the rest of my life, and I...I'm grateful.

MINERVA

So am I. *(pause, she sighs)* So much has happened lately; I feel I could divide my life into before Osiris and after Osiris.

ARCHER

I feel the same, though I assumed “after Osiris” would be unrelenting misery, but instead...

MINERVA

Yes...?

ARCHER

Instead I acquired a scribe, though I may never understand her.

MINERVA

She doesn't always understand herself -- or anyone else for that matter. *(pause)* I'm never quite sure my perceptions can be trusted, never mind my feelings. I keep wondering if I'll wake up and find out Kansas was just a dream.

ARCHER

Or a vodka fueled delirium...? Sorry, but trust me, Kansas is a real place in real time where a real person cares about you, but maybe you'd prefer that Kansas wasn't real. *(pause)* You don't know what you want, do you?

MINERVA

(she sighs) No, not really.

ARCHER

Then I'll pray for you, for guidance. Jeremiah, Chapter Twenty-nine: “For I know the plans I have for you, plans for your welfare, to give you a future full of hope.”

MINERVA

Well, thank Jeremiah for me. *(pause)* You realize you've turned the Bible into an app that delivers a verse for every occasion. So tell me, Archer, do you have an app for trust, for an end to loneliness, hunger, and an implacable thirst?

ARCHER

“If you believe, then all things are possible.” Timothy, Chapter Four.

MINERVA

But what if you don't believe? Is there an app for faith?

ARCHER

Faith is a gift, but it can be acquired, and sometimes it's lost and found again, and expressed in many ways. You do that when you're interacting with our patients, stroking their backs, whispering kind words. It's the soft tone of your voice; somehow it releases a tenderness in me -- not just for our patients but for everyone in Kansas, in the country, in the world. You may not be religious, yet you're committed to a life of giving, of relieving human suffering.

MINERVA

You're the one who relieves the suffering; I'm only a witness, a scribe.

ARCHER

A scribe who interacts, who speaks and touches. Jesus, Buddha, and all the prophets of Israel knew that piety meant nothing unless it inspired action. *(pause)* Please Minerva, don't leave us.

(MINERVA sighs and moves towards the crater's edge.)

MINERVA

Oh, Archer, I feel so conflicted. Being here has meant the world to me, and I do have feelings for you, but...

ARCHER

What...? You love England more?

MINERVA

It's not that.

ARCHER

You love vodka more?

(A choral humming is heard as MINERVA moves even closer to the crater's edge.)

MINERVA

Shhhh, listen! Can you hear them?

ARCHER

No.

MINERVA

They're like a chorus humming. It's as if they're letting me know the Goddess is still there, she's still alive and needy. I know you believe in your own god and think mine is a delusion, but I sense a presence, a female presence that wants us to sacrifice something, though today all I have is your glass eye.

ARCHER

It's yours now, and I can give you another, but maybe what she really wants is this!

(ARCHER snatches the bottle from MINERVA'S hand and MINERVA snatches it back!)

MINERVA

Bloody hell! What do you think you're doing?!

ARCHER

Giving her a taste of your medicine! What if she wants what you want? What if that's why she only makes herself visible to you?

MINERVA

Hah?! You think she's a sot like me?

ARCHER

Possibly.

MINERVA

Oh, rubbish! You can't see her because of the log in your eye.

ARCHER

The what...?

MINERVA

Matthew, Chapter Seven: "How can you see a speck in my eye when there is a log in your own."

ARCHER

You're quoting Matthew!?

MINERVA

There's a Bible in my motel room.

ARCHER

And you're *reading* it...?

MINERVA

My point is you can't see what I see because you're blinded by your preconceptions of what spiritual beings should look like, but I know what I saw was real.

ARCHER

But you only saw a shadow.

MINERVA

Because that's all I was allowed to see. Maybe she's vain; maybe she knows she comes from a swampy bottom where centuries of pollutants have turned her into a Darwinian nightmare. That might explain why she's so mean and hungry.

ARCHER

And maybe she's thirsty too, so why don't you give her a dose of your medicine? Go ahead, I dare you.

MINERVA

(pause) All right then.

(MINERVA flings the water bottle into the crater and shouts into the void.)

MINERVA

Here! Take that! It's a tempting curative for those of us who suffer from shyness, sorrows, fears and failures of every kind -- oh, no! *(whispering)* Oh, Archer, she's surfacing, I can sense something rising; something that smells musky, like a...a rutting animal, and there's something fruity...

(ARCHER sniffs.)

ARCHER

Pears...?

MINERVA

Pears!

(The SHADOWY CREATURE appears looming as MINERVA shudders.)

MINERVA

Can't you see her?

ARCHER

No.

MINERVA

Open your eyes! She's huge, with scales, wings, but her face -- she has a human face that looks like -- Hilary...?

ARCHER

Shhh, you're hallucinating. Now take a deep breath.

MINERVA

No, no, she wants us, Archer! She wants us to sacrifice ourselves, but don't worry, I won't let that happen.

(ARCHER freezes in time as the SHADOW of the CREATURE begins to engulf him.) .

MINERVA

No! Leave him alone! Take me instead! Please, please, take me!

(Lights flicker and the CHORUS hums shrilly as the CREATURE'S SHADOW engulfs MIRANDA who screams, spins, then falls to the ground as ARCHER drops to his knees by her side.)

ARCHER

Minerva...? Oh, my dear Minerva...

(ARCHER pulls out his phone and taps the keys.)

ARCHER

Hello! We need an ambulance on the northeast side of the crater. Hurry! Please hurry!

(ARCHER bends over to embrace MINERVA as the sound of an approaching siren is heard and lights dim to black.)

SCENE 12

(Months later in a brightly lit room where the Society for Sobriety MEMBERS are meeting with MINERVA in attendance.)

My name's Harlan.

HARLAN

My name's Nadine.

NADINE

I'm Camille.

CAMILLE

I'm Morris.

MORRIS

My name's Minerva and I'm an alcoholic who's lost count of my months of sobriety.

MINERVA

Hang in there, hon.

NADINE

One day at a time.

MORRIS

One hour.

CAMILLE

One minute.

HARLAN

How's your your memoir coming along?

MORRIS

Oh, it's a veritable tome.

MINERVA

Will it include your stay at the rehab?

CAMILLE

MINERVA

Maybe. *(pause)* I still miss drinking. Without vodka and whatever was coming off those mushrooms, I'd never have opened the doors to dimensions that the teetotalers of the world will never know.

CAMILLE

Because they're not real, they're delusions.

NADINE

(mumbling) Don't be such a bitch.

MORRIS

How close are you to being finished?

MINERVA

Months, maybe years, but I've skipped to the last chapter that takes place in the future when we all visit the crater ten years from now.

NADINE

Forget it, hon.

CAMILLE

No thanks, count me out.

MINERVA

By then there'll be an elevator that takes tourists to the bottom where the vortex is.

NADINE

So they can get sucked under...?

MINERVA

No, not if you get past Osiris. If your heart's the right weight, he'll give you a feather that permits you to pass through the center of the vortex, isn't that right, Morris?

(MINERVA pulls a long white feather from her pocket.)

MINERVA

The feather will look like this and once you arrive on the other side, you're wherever you really want to be.

NADINE

Great! Then I'm on a beach in Hawaii. I'm sitting under a striped umbrella with my sister 'cause we're finally friends again, and maybe I've got a date 'cause I'm gorgeous.

HARLAN

I'm in Vegas surrounded by showgirls and I'm winning at craps, ha, ha!

NADINE

What about you Camille?

CAMILLE

Can we be like we were?

MINERVA

Maybe.

CAMILLE

Then I see myself in Colorado. I've been skiing in Aspen with my cousins and my date is Randy McRae. We're staying in a lodge made of logs with a huge roaring fireplace. At night we sit talking for hours drinking hot chocolate, then later Randy and I sneak upstairs.

MINERVA

And Morris, where will you be?

MORRIS

I'm tenured and reconciled with Armando. We're on vacation, on the deck of a cruise ship sailing around the world. There's dancing on board, and a well equipped bar, but the drinks don't make us drunk because we're not who we became.

NADINE

What about you, sweetie, where's your future place?

MINERVA

Well, since Archer talked me into finishing my education, I'm a doctor and we're working together at a clinic surrounded by acres of wheat fields as far as our eyes can see.

MORRIS

It sounds like you want to be where you already are.

MINERVA

That's right, Morris, I'm in Kansas -- Kansas!

(MINERVA smiles as the chorus hums and lights dim to a starry night.)

END OF PLAY

